

Joyner, ROG; S/Sgt. Oscar H. Thielen Jr., WG; and S/Sgt. William F. Anderson, TG; all evaded for two days with the aid of Czech partisans, but were then captured and spent the rest of the war as POWs. All the crew survived except S/Sgt. Andrew Solock, the ball turret gunner. He perished in the plane crash. The survivors were shocked to learn that he hadn't gotten out. He was last seen by S/Sgt. Anderson sitting near the escape hatch putting on his shoes. (It was common practice for airmen who wore heated flight suits to remove their shoes.) Anderson said he had some difficulty getting out of the tail because the airplane was going out of control. It was surmised that S/Sgt. Solok may have been trapped in the airplane by the same forces. He was buried by the Czechs at Sidonia.⁵⁴

The seven uninjured crew members were put in a prison camp at Bratislava. On the night of September 1, Slovak camp guards took 26 Americans (Note: This number considerably higher than the 12 American air crew members reported evacuated on September 17) to the free territory of the Slovak anti-Nazi rebels near Banska Bystrica. On September 17, two B-17s with P-51 fighter escort flew in and evacuated the Americans gathered there.⁵⁵ Unfortunately none of the Wray crew were among those who were freed and evacuated. Those flown out from the 2nd Bomb Group were, 2nd Lt. Thayne L. Thomas, P; 2nd Lt. Clarence B. Jackson, co-pilot on Lt. Bullock's crew; and S/Sgt. Robert D. Donahue, tail gunner from Lt. Tune's crew. The OSS, that arranged the rescue mission, swore the rescued men to secrecy as to how they were brought out.

1st Lt. Merrill A. Prentice, in number 42-31885, was in the last airplane, in the last squadron of the last group. His navigator was 2nd Lt. Charles H. McVey, whose regular crew was that of 2nd Lt. McCloskey. McVey had met the officer crew members for the first time only a few minutes before take off. He was the only survivor from Prentice's crew. The plane was hit immediately after the attack began. There were hits in the wing and the ammunition box in the nose section started smoking. Prentice immediately yelled "bail out!" over the intercom. McVey went to the nose escape hatch and tried to pull the emergency handle, but the door bound and would not release. Lt. Prentice and copilot 2nd Lt. Theo (NMI) Heath soon joined him and were trying to release the door by the handle. By now the plane was out of control and throwing them around. The motion stress was apparently causing the door to bind. McVey turned and saw bombardier, 2nd Lt. Robert A. Laux, half slumped over the navigator's table. Only minutes before, McVey had helped Laux with his flak suit. Then another burst of shell fire blew the plexiglass nose off the ship. McVey was stunned, but realized he might have to go out the open nose, since the pilots were now trying to kick the hatch door out. The next thing McVey knew he was falling through space. Having been without oxygen for some minutes, he was not fully aware of what he was doing, and had difficulty pulling his rip cord. He did not get his chute deployed until he was fairly close to the ground. He was falling into a clearing, but had time to slideslip the chute into some trees at the edge of the clearing, thinking to avoid any Germans who might be about. Shortly after he landed, a plane which he thought



Burial ceremony for four members of Lt. McCloskey's crew, from plane number 42-31473, "My Baby," - S/Sgt. Schirmer, Sgt Pruitt, S/Sgt. Everett and Sgt. Munden at Nova Bosaca Cemetery, Slovakia, August 29, 1944. (Courtesy of R. Bischoff)

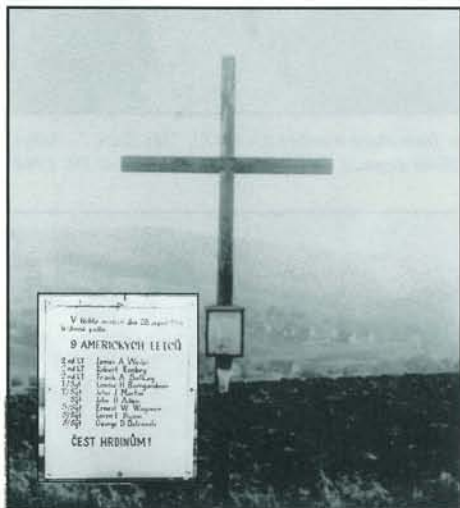


Photos directly above and below are of the exhumation ceremony for S/Sgt. Schirmer, Sgt. Pruitt, S/Sgt. Everett and Sgt. Munden at Nova Bosaca Cemetery, Slovakia, August 29, 1946. Remains of airmen buried in the area were removed in late August and early September, 1946, for reburial at the American Military Cemetery, Saint Avold, France or in the U.S. (Courtesy of R. Bischoff/J. Fleischer/L. Dickinson)





Wreckage of 2nd Lt. James E. Weiler aircraft, no. 42-32048, near Krhov, Moravia. (Courtesy of J. Fleischer/L. Dickinson)



Wooden cross erected at the crash site near Krhov, Moravia, of Lt. Weiler's airplane number 42-32048, with a placard bearing the names of the crew, as it appeared in 1983. (Courtesy of R. Bischoff)

to be his, landed close by and exploded. A few seconds later there was a tremendous explosion that showered debris for hundreds of yards.

McVey landed in a big tree and was hanging about 40 feet above the ground. He pulled his shroud lines and swung back and forth enough to reach a large limb and climb down the tree. The only injury he had sustained in the whole episode was a scratch across his nose that bled profusely. He cleaned the blood off his face and started walking, generally to the south. That night he tried to sleep under a hedgerow, but it started raining so he took refuge under the edge of a haystack in a farmer's backyard. The next morning he ate two raw potatoes from the farmer's garden and a few berries he found along the way.

Later a farmer took him to his cottage where the farmer's wife fixed him a meal of fried bread dough and hot goat's milk. He left, and while walking down a dry creek bed he met the bombardier from his regular crew, F/O Netzley, who had gone down with McCloskey's crew. Shortly they were confronted by three armed Czech soldiers who merely motioned for them to follow. They were taken to Dreitoma and turned over to the Chief of Police at the local police station. They were questioned extensively, especially

about a bomb that had fallen in the back yard of one of the citizens. It happened that the citizen, a lady, had lived in Chicago, and spoke good English. They were able to explain that the bomb was an unfortunate accident.

After dark on August 30 they were taken to Trencin and held in a barracks with six other airman from the Privoser mission. They were told by Czech soldiers that the Russians were driving the Germans out of occupied countries to the south, and the Germans were moving northward and re-occupying Czechoslovakia. The Czechs, though nominally part of the German Army, were ready to flee to the mountains and become partisans. The Americans spent the night at the barracks. Just before noon the next day, Netzley was resting in his bunk when a man in civilian clothes walked into the barracks, pointed a pistol at him and ordered, "Rous mit you." Netzley laughed thinking his confronter was a friendly Czech merely having fun. At that moment a squad of German soldiers marched into the barracks.

Later they learned that the Germans had flown in and occupied the Trencin airport and the civilian was a Gestapo agent. The Germans took seven of the eight Americans in the barracks and marched them through the town to the airport. They missed the eighth crewman who was downstairs in the latrine. He was S/Sgt. Robert D. Donahue, tail gunner, on Lt. Tune's crew. Donahue successfully evaded, returned to Italy and wrote to McVey's wife that McVey was uninjured and was a prisoner.

The seven captives were held at Trencin airport for a day or two, then flown by a tri-motor Fokker to Bratislava. For several days they were forced to pull carts full of bombs to load German bombers. They were then taken by train to Germany and McVey and Netzley eventually ended up at Stalag Luft I at Barth, Germany on the Baltic Sea. Toward the end of the war they were liberated by the Russians advancing from the east.

McVey never saw any other members of Lt. Prentice's crew after he left the airplane.⁵⁶ The plane, number 42-31885, came down over the little village of Vyskovec on the Moravia-Slovakia border. It crashed onto a farmer's house. Eight members of the crew perished in the crash. Tail gunner, Sgt. Robert E. Fitch, bailed out,

but later died of injuries. All nine were buried at Slavacin.⁵⁷

The fourth plane to go down was that of 2nd Lt. James A. Weiler and crew in number 42-32048. There was only one survivor, F/O Irving D. Thompson, the copilot. The missing crew report states only that he was wounded and hospitalized.⁵⁶ The Czechoslovakian sources report that the plane was flying alone at a rather low altitude. It was attacked by 4 F-190s, crashed, and exploded in the vicinity of Krhov. F/O Thompson managed to bailout. The rest perished in the crash and were buried at Slavacin.⁵⁷

2nd Lt. Thayne L. Thomas, pilot of aircraft number 42-38096, "Big Time," was the only survivor of his crew. The airplane was hit over Sanov at an altitude of about 19,500. It burst into flame, exploded, and parts of the disintegrated airplane fell over a wide area. Some of it was still burning the next day. Copilot 2nd Lt. Carl S. Goodman's body was found in part of the wreckage. Tail gunner Sgt. Dudley E. Standridge perished in a portion of the tail found a mile away. Three crewmen either parachuted or were blown from the plane. The parachute of one was on fire and he was killed on impact. Another was dead before impact, the apparent victim of machine gun fire. The Germans collected the remains of the nine victims and they were buried at Slavacin.⁶⁰

"Big Time" was the victim of a rocket volley. One struck near the number two engine, damaged number one, and set the nose compartment and the flight deck ablaze. Despite being in their safety belts, Thomas was slammed against the side cockpit window, and Goodman was thrown half way into the aisle. The blast exposed the nose compartment to Thomas's view. 2nd Lts. William M. McDonough, N, and Richard P. Hartman, B, had been blown to the floor and to the rear of the nose compartment, and equipment was in disarray. The two lieutenants were soon fighting the blaze with fire extinguishers. Flight engineer, T/Sgt. Robert L. Brown had been knocked to the rear and under the platform of his upper turret. Thomas tried to call the rest of the crew. The intercom was dead. McDonough and Hartman were having some success fighting the fire, and had paused to put on their parachutes, as did Brown. Thomas tried the intercom again without success, so he rang the alarm bell signalling preparation for bail out. He doesn't recall hearing it ring. Brown started to the rear to check the crew. Thomas then rang the alarm bell for bail out. Suddenly he felt intense heat and the red flash of fire. His next conscious sensation was the rush of wind against his face and body. He was tumbling through space. He had difficulty opening his chute and was grappling it with both hands when it popped loose. A shroud line knocked his left arm into his face, dazing him and leaving his arm numb.

He saw one parachute falling to earth, deployed, but streaming empty of air. A burning gas tank came hurtling by with a roar. His chute had opened rather close to the ground and he was oscillating widely underneath it. He landed hard during a backswing and banged his head against the ground. Dazed momentarily, he lay there and watched a Luftwaffe fighter make two passes overhead. Fearing that the pilot may be radioing his position, he dragged himself to the

underbrush of nearby trees. His body hurt, his head throbbed and was bleeding from injury at the back, and the calves of both legs were burned. A pair of high-top shoes protected his ankles and freed from burns. He had looked skyward and around him for other crew members, but saw none.

When he did emerge from cover, he saw a farmer and his young daughter watching him. He walked to them and tried to communicate. As he started to leave, the farmer gave him a package of food.⁶¹

The young daughter recalls that she and her father were harvesting hay. They hid the flyer's parachute in the hay and the family took care of his wounds. Thomas gave them some chocolate and inquired about the direction to Ostrava, when told, he started walking in the opposite direction, toward Slovakia. Crews had been briefed that the Slovaks were generally friendly and there was the possibility for an anti-Nazi uprising in Slovakia. One did in fact occur a day and a half later. The farmer and his daughter, and other inhabitants in the area, were interrogated by the Germans about any airmen they had seen. They acknowledged only the nine dead found scattered about by the exploding aircraft. No mention was made of Lt. Thomas.⁶²

Feeling he had to get out of the area, Thomas started walking. He kept to the forest and the ridges, but still ran into people, yet none raised an alarm. On the evening of the second day he came to the Vah river. He had just removed his shoes and part of his clothes and was bundling them for the swim across the river when a young male Czech caught his attention. The young man made Thomas to understand that the bridge just down stream was guarded by the "Deutsche," and he shouldn't chance the swim. Also that the city in the distance was Trenchin, Slovakia. Thomas put his clothes back on, and the young man eventually arranged for sanctuary after Thomas had convinced his benefactors he was an Americhanski. Thomas was given refuge in a brick factory where several families lived.

After three days the host families became uneasy over his presence. Through an English-speaking contact he asked to be put in touch with those who might help him evade and escape, otherwise he would leave on his own. Early on the fourth morning two gendarmes with the underground, took him across the bridge past the German sentries to some Slovakian barracks where he was hidden for the night. The next morning two gendarmes drove him south and east through several German check points, using the ruse that he was a retarded mute being returned to an institution. About noon they arrived in a small city where Thomas was joined by three or four other evaders, one of whom was S/Sgt. Robert D. Donahue.

That night Thomas and Donahue slept at the beautiful country home of an elderly couple who were working with the underground. Sadly, this couple was executed by the Germans shortly thereafter.

The next day their partisan befrienders joined the rear of a small four-or-five car entourage of a Czechoslovakian General. The pompous general stopped in the villages to make speeches to those who had been rounded up to hear him. The

partisans didn't like him and the two Americans didn't learn why until later. As the entourage went from village to village, somehow word spread that their were two American flyers in the party. At the next village, Thomas and Donahue were swarmed by people while the general was left to talk to the mayor. Late in the afternoon they reached the army garrison in Banska Bystrica. They were taken to the partisan headquarters and waited in the foyer while the Czech general paid his respects to the general commanding the partisans. The Czech general emerged, visibly shaken. With the aid of others he was taken away and shortly gun fire was heard from the rear of the garrison. The two Americans were later told that the Czech general had been executed, apparently for collaborating with the Germans.

Thomas and Donahue were greeted warmly, and enthusiastically by the partisan general who arranged for them to draw Czech korunas from the finance center. Later the two were given quarters at the garrison, and had general run of the town.

One day at a cafe they met a Mr. Thomez (or Tomes) an American citizen, now in his forties, who had returned to Czechoslovakia with his parents when he was twelve. Together they went to the partisan headquarters and working through partisan intelligence and British Broadcasting Company communications, they transmitted the names and serial numbers of American and other allied airmen coming into Banska Bystrica. This information was in turn sent to Fifteenth Air Force Headquarters at Bari, Italy.

On Sunday September 17, Thomas and Donahue were walking to an ice cream shop on main street when some fighter planes buzzed the city. At first they thought the planes must be German or Russian. No. They were P-51s! A truck came screeching down the street with men shouting for Americans. Thomas and Donahue jumped in and were hauled to Tri Duby Airport where two B-17s were waiting with engines running. They climbed aboard and the planes took off for Bari.



New monument near Krhov and Bojkovice, Moravia, in memory of Lt. Weiler and crew, August 28, 1994.



German Officer examines wreckage of Lt. Thomas's airplane at crash site near Sanov, Moravia, August 29, 1944.

The rescue was an OSS operation. The incoming flight brought a contingent of OSS personnel including a colonel who replaced a colonel who came out with the return flight. That returning colonel had been the liaison officer with the Russians in the area. Among the twelve American evaders brought out besides Thomas and Donahue was 2nd Lt. Clarence B. Jackson, CP, from Bullock's crew, and Cpl. Paul C.P. Reinhart, shot down September 13 on mission 274 to Bleckhammer. The others included two Australians and Mr. Thomez (Tomes).⁶³ The returnees were sworn to secrecy about the OSS operation at the time. Which explains why returnee statements were so cryptic or non-existent.

Lts. Tune's and Flynn's misgivings about the mission became a haunting reality in those terrible nineteen minutes between 10:41 and 11:00. Shortly after the attack started, their right wingman's airplane disappeared. Shells came tearing into "Tail End Charlie," their airplane, number 42-97159. Particularly terrifying were the clearly visible incendiaries streaming white smoke and fairly dripping with fire. One Me-109 came through the formation not more than 20 or 30 yards away. Lt. Flynn could see the Luftwaffe pilot's face. "Tail End Charlie" received hits that left huge holes in wings, and the number 2 engine on fire. Lt. Tune ordered bailout. Lt. Flynn left his seat and started immediately toward the bomb bay. The next few moments were filled with extreme anxiety and some understandable confusion. As Tune got up to follow Flynn, the aerial engineer, T/Sgt. Thomas C. Coogan, squeezed past Tune to get the bomb bay door crank located next to the pilot's seat. Coogan had had difficulty opening the bomb bay doors. At that moment a shell burst in the cockpit right where Flynn had been seated, wounding Coogan, and knocking both pilots unconscious. Tune was told later by Coogan, that he dragged the two pilots to the bomb bay and pushed them out hoping they would come to in time to open their parachutes.⁶⁴ Coogan stated after liberation that Lt. Loy A. Dickinson, the navigator, helped him get the two pilots out of the airplane.⁶⁵ Lt. Dickinson, who normally would have gone out the nose hatch, but it was reported to have been jammed, has no recollection of events from shortly after the attack started until about 09:00 that evening.⁶⁶

Flynn has a clear recollection that as he left his seat, with Tune close behind, a shell hit the oxygen tanks just back of the flight deck, and there was an explosion and flash fire. Flynn was hit by debris, wasn't burned, but had no feel at the time for the extent of his injuries. When he got to the bomb bay, the doors were not open and the bombs hadn't been salvaged, which was bombardier 2nd Lt. Russell W. Mayrick's responsibility. Flynn went out onto the catwalk in the bomb bay and started stomping on the doors. It was then that he felt like he was about to meet his God. This thought had hardly crossed his mind when the doors began to open, and as soon as they opened enough to get through, he jumped. He didn't know how Lt. Tune got out. Flynn lost consciousness from anoxia, and doesn't recall pulling the rip cord, but it was in plenty of time because he drifted farther north than any other member of the crew.⁶⁷

Lt. Tune came to floating through space on his back with his hands folded across his parachute. His left hand was injured and bloody. He grabbed the rip cord ring in his right hand and pulled hard. He was jerked upright by the blossoming chute and floated down. He recalls seeing two fighters pass underneath him. Fortunately, he landed rather lightly, because he had a leg broken by shrapnel. He threw away the shells to his .45 caliber pistol, so they couldn't be used against him. He then busied himself trying to treat his wounds and fix a splint for his leg. After some period of time he saw some boys who were obviously looking for downed flyers. He waved and whistled to them and they came to his rescue. He gave them his pistol. The boys folded his parachute so they could use it somewhat like a hammock and carried him, in considerable pain, for about a quarter of a mile. They met some men armed with shotguns and an argument ensued, but they were allowed to proceed.⁶⁸ Unknown to Tune at the time, the armed men were two forest guards, one of whom was a fanatic Nazi of Czech origin. He threatened to shoot Tune and the boys. He was prevented from doing so by his son, who was accompanying him. After the war the man was brought before a tribunal and sentenced to 6 years in prison. The threat to the Tune party was part of the charges brought against him.⁶⁹

After the boys had carried Tune another quarter of a mile, a young girl in a red bathing suit came running down to them carrying a cot. Tune was transferred to the cot and carried through the resort town of Luhacovice to a civilian emergency medical service. As they went through the town, bar owners and citizens kept trying to press drinks and food on him, but Tune was in too much pain to accept. A young Czech doctor was waiting to give him emergency medical treatment. The Czech doctor was later joined by a German doctor. After his wounds were treated and a splint applied to his broken leg, Tune was moved to recovery area. During a rather long wait for the Germans to come and pick him up, a woman about his mother's age, and showing great compassion, held his good hand and stroked his brow. After being picked up by German guards, Tune was moved twice, once to what he thought was a school house, and to another hospital, before being taken by ambulance to the hospital at Brno. To his surprise, Flynn, Coogan and other Americans he did not know, were in the ambulance. Tune and Flynn were put in the same room. The next day another American was brought into the room unconscious and he died a couple days later.⁷⁰ (Authors note: The unconscious airmen may have been Lt. Helveston)

Flynn came down amid some trees. Three or four Czechs came to him first, but some Germans soon came and took him to a small building resembling a school house, and laid him on the floor. He was later transported to the jail in Slavcin and kept there for 2 or 3 days, without medical treatment. His wounds became infected. While he was there, two German fighter pilots came in to talk to him. He understood they were highly impressed with the U.S. P-51 fighter. From Slavcin he was taken to the hospital at Brno and put in the same room with Tune. The Austrian doctor who operated on him there, said



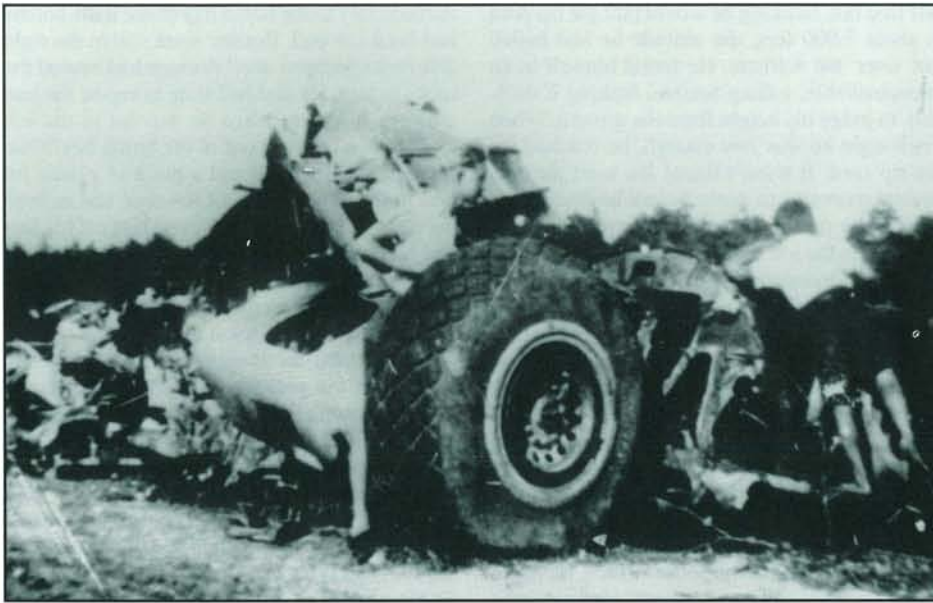
S/Sgt. Joseph E. Sallings and host Czech family he lived with while evading capture for eight months until the war ended. (Courtesy of Jireck Fleischer/L. Dickinson)

he took a piece of metal strap and a bolt out of his back. By the doctor's description, Flynn judged the two pieces to be part of the mounting strap and bolt used to secure an oxygen tank to the side of the airplane. Flynn also had lesser arm and shoulder wounds. Because of the extent of Tune's wounds and the infection in Flynn's, the men were slow to heal. They spent about three months together at the hospital but were separated after leaving Brno. Flynn was taken to a rehab center at Meinegen, Germany for a month, then to Stalag Luft III. He was among those later marched to Moosburg, from which he was subsequently liberated.⁷¹

Tune went through additional hospitalization and rehabilitation in Germany before being taken to Stalag Luft I at Barth. While at a transition camp en route to Barth he met Lt. Harold T. Tomlinson, who had been shot down on the Bleckhammer mission July 7, 1944. They had taken flight training together, had shared the same hut at Amendola, and shared the same room at Barth until liberated.⁷²

Lt. Dickinson was flying with Lt. Tune that day because he had recently been promoted from 2nd Lt. William T. Garland's crew to 20th Squadron Navigator. He has no recollection of what happened during the height of the emergency aboard the airplane or how he got out, but he did so without a scratch. He landed in some bushes close to the house of Frank Baca near Rudimov. The Baca's gave him food and a place to sleep. After breakfast the next morning Dickinson planned to start walking toward Slovakia. He knew that with so many airmen coming down, the Germans would be looking for them. Also, that the word might have spread about where some were. He left and was soon met by two elderly Czech policemen and a younger Czech doctor. He was taken to police headquarters and briefly interrogated. The Czechs had apparently notified the Germans, because they came and took him to their garrison, gave him something to eat, then transported him to Brno. Later he was taken to Germany, interrogated, and sent to Stalag Luft I at Barth, where he remained until liberated.⁷³

Five of the six gunners bailed out, two evaded, and three became POWs. S/Sgt. Joseph E. Sallings, LWG, landed in the forest and was soon found by friendly Czechs, and taken to a small village where he was hidden with the large



Wreckage from Lt. Tune's airplane number 42-97159, "Tail End Charlie," at crash site near Rudice, Moravia, August 29, 1944. (Courtesy of R. Bischoff)



Grave, with B-17 propeller blade, of Lt. Meyrick and Sgt. Marinello, from Lt. Tune's crew, in cemetery at Rudice, Moravia, summer of 1945. (Courtesy of R. Bischoff)

family of the local smith. He lived with the family for eight months under great danger and stress. At that time, aiding and sheltering the enemy was punishable by death of the family and sometimes the whole village. Sallings learned a little bit of the language, and melted in with the family so well that on one occasion he played cards with a German soldier. The village was liberated in May 1945, but Sallings stayed on for another month. In July 1945 he returned to his native Tennessee.⁷⁴

T/Sgt. Robert R. Kirsch, ROG, who was among seven members of his crew wounded in a fighter attack during the Ploesti raid July 9, 1944, landed, uninjured, in a tree. When he got on the ground he saw a man with a club, apparently looking for him, so he ran and got away. He spent the night in the woods near a farm house. The next day he approached a farmer who was plowing a field. The farmer had two little girls with him. The farmer took Kirsch to his house, but seemed very nervous and afraid. The farmer's wife must have gone into the village and reported his presence. The village police chief notified the Germans and they came and took him prisoner. He was taken by four German soldiers in a truck, in which they were transporting the bodies of several airmen, burned beyond recognition. They went to a church where Kirsch spoke for several minutes to the priest. He was then taken to a jail but doesn't know where. He went through interrogation in Frankfurt on September 3 and on September 11 he arrived at Stalag Luft IV. He made the long, hard forced march to the west as the Germans moved the prisoners ahead of the on-coming Russians. On April 26 they crossed the Elbe River to the American side.⁷⁵

Three other gunners, T/Sgt. Coogan; S/Sgt. Joseph P. Owsianik, RWG; and S/Sgt. Donahue, TG, were seen floating in their parachutes behind the burning plane. One, believed to be Sgt. Coogan, (Owsianik was not injured per accounts and Donahue was uninjured and evaded), suffered injuries to a foot and hand. (Per Owsianik, Coogan had shrapnel wounds in both forearms)⁷⁶

Coogan had a little child's shoe as a talisman around his neck. Friendly Czechs took him to the local mayor who phoned for a physician in Slavcin. The doctor came by car, treated his injuries, but because of swelling the doctor was unable to remove a ring from his hand. The doctor took him to his office and shortly the Germans came and marched him to their barracks.⁷⁷ Later he was taken in the same ambulance when Lts. Tune and Flynn were moved to the military hospital in Brno.⁷⁸

S/Sgt. Owsianik came down farther away but was captured before the day was over.

S/Sgt. Donahue landed on a hill near Neusova, uninjured, and ran into the woods.⁷⁹ Donahue lost his shoes during bailout. He landed about 30 yards away from two people working in a field. He waved and they waved back. He picked up his parachute and noticed about 100 people a quarter mile away running toward him. He walked into the nearby woods and started running. He hurriedly hid his parachute and continued running. He came to a dense clump of bushes a few yards off the forest path, and decided to hide. Though the area was searched, Donahue was not found. He stayed hidden for a few hours before moving on.

He had his escape kit with a map, 8 dollars and a small compass. He continued to travel away from Germany. That evening it rained and he took shelter under the side of a hay stack. He slept soundly and awoke at daylight. About noon, while walking along a path in the woods, he unexpectedly came upon two small boys gathering fire wood. They proved friendly and tried to show him the way to go. He hadn't gone far down the path when he met an elderly couple riding in a cart. He managed to make them know he was an American and had parachuted down. The old woman immediately took out a piece of bread and a pear from her pocket and gave them to him. Donahue guessed it was her lunch. He was taken to some official in the village, who searched him for weapons, then took him into his office and fed him. The food was already prepared and hot, leading Donahue to conclude

it was the man's lunch. Shortly, another man came and led Donahue to a house on the outskirts of the village. Once again he was offered food, but could not convince them he had eaten, so he tried to eat and not offend his hosts. He was struck by the kindness and generosity of these people.

Using his map, he tried to get directions for evasion. Then an elderly gentleman walked in, looked at Donahue and exclaimed, "Jesus Christ, an American!" The man had lived in the U.S. for 25 years, just 20 minutes walking time from Donahue's home in Pittsburgh. The man told Donahue that people were going to help him. Just listen to them and they would get him to a safe place. A young girl gave him a pair of shoes, but they were to be returned.

Although Donahue didn't know it at the time, he was taken to Trencin, first to a warehouse and given a pair of work shoes, and then to a military barracks. It was here that he was later joined by Lt. McVey, F/O Netzley, and five other crew members, who, until that time had avoided capture. Their contact was a young, English-speaking, Slovak soldier named Jan Surovec. The next morning after breakfast, Jan told the group they would be getting out of the area. Just before lunch Donahue went to the latrine. When he came back, the place was in a turmoil, and the other Americans were gone. Jan led him to a window and he watched as the Germans marched the seven Americans away. Donahue was then given a Czech soldier's uniform, and with Jan as his guide they walked out of town. He was led to another town, taken to a home, given civilian clothes and a place to sleep. He was awakened in a few hours and led to a car parked on another street. In the back seat was Lt. Thomas. They were driven to Banska Bystrica, which apparently was now a partisan stronghold, because they were wine and dined and given free run of the town. Donahue received numerous invitations to visit homes and to meals.

Later, he became the fortunate beneficiary of the OSS rescue mission arranged through Mr.

Thomez (Tomes). The two B-17s with about a dozen P-51s as escort made the evacuation.⁸⁰

While such an evacuation mission seems unusual viewed in the light of what had happened to the 2nd over Czechoslovakia only a few days earlier, the strategic situation in the area changed dramatically between August 23 and September 5 when Rumania and Bulgaria capitulated. The Germans were preoccupied with extricating their vulnerable forces before the swiftly advancing Russians. The Allies sought to take full advantage of this turn of events by greatly increasing support of the underground forces and using the opportune moments to extricate the downed airmen who were evading or were now freed POWs. Downed air crew evacuations reached a peak in August and September.⁸¹

It is believed that Tune's bombardier, 2nd Lt. Russell W. Meyrick, was killed instantly during the fighter attack. His body was found in part of the wreckage. Sgt. Joseph (NMI) Marinello Jr., did not bail out and is believed to have been injured or killed on the plane.⁸² His body was found by three Czechs from Bojkovice. Other people from near by carried him to their village. They made a coffin for him and he was buried, together with Lt. Meyrick, in the cemetery at Rudice. German military personnel from the Bojkovice garrison were present at the funeral. They fired a three-gun salute in honor of the two fallen airmen, allowed singing, eulogies to be spoken and flowers for the grave.⁸³

1st Lt. William C. Bullock Jr., and crew flying in airplane number 44-6359 on Lt. Tune's right wing, were the next to go down near Kasava. Lt. Bullock and S/Sgt. Joseph M. Laratta, LWG, perished with the airplane. S/Sgt. Maurice E. Nelson, TG, bailed out, but apparently fell to his death when his parachute failed.

For the navigator, 2nd Lt. Albert E. Smith, it was the second time in eleven days that he had been forced to bail out of a stricken airplane. His crew had bailed out of a burning airplane on August 18 over the Adriatic on the Group's final mission to Ploesti. He and six of his crewmates were picked out of the water by a PBY rescue airplane, but the pilot, copilot and left waist gunner were lost. The other waist gunner was still in the hospital recovering from wounds received on a prior mission. The crew this day was made up of the remaining members of his original crew, plus replacements for those lost and wounded. Lt. Smith shared the feelings of others that it was a bad day from the start — being the last squadron in the bomber stream and "We were always low and behind." He faults the Group leader for not getting the Group into a protective formation to start with.⁸⁴

The fighter attack on Bullock's plane was severe and concentrated. The gunners engaged the enemy, but not for long. The right inboard engine caught fire. The intercom, at least to the nose, was inoperative, and Lt. Smith stuck his head up into the astrodome and saw Lt. Bullock gesturing violently with his head and mouthing the words "Get out!" With that, Smith motioned bombardier, 2nd Lt. John C. Quinn, out, went to the nose hatch and pulled the release handle. As he prepared to bail out Smith took a last look at his chest pack chute and thought he had clipped it on up-side-down, so he reversed it, and bailed out. Because of fighters in the area, he let him-

self free fall, thinking he would pull the rip cord at about 7,000 feet, the altitude he had bailed out over the Adriatic. He found himself in an uncontrollable, rolling tumble, making it difficult to judge his height from the ground. When he thought he was low enough, he reached for the rip cord. It wasn't there! He went through several moments of panic before he discovered he had the parachute reversed, and found the rip cord on the left side. Then a secondary panic set in as he wondered whether the harness snaps would hold the reversed chute when it opened. They did.

He was coming down in the trees so crossed his legs, came down between the trees, but didn't get his legs uncrossed in time and sprained his left foot and ankle. His right groin was completely numb to the touch and it stayed that way for about two weeks, but didn't hinder his movement. His parachute was caught in the trees and he couldn't free it so he immediately tried to get out of the area. He hid in some bushes. He heard voices in the woods and a shout. He kept quiet and no one came near. He also heard someone whistling "Yankee Doodle!" He didn't answer and always wondered whether it was from friendly Czechs trying to make contact or a ruse by the Germans to get a response.

Smith evaded capture for eight days, moving generally south and east. He took shelter in an old farm shed one night and got a terrible dose of fleas and suffered numerous irritating bites. When it became convenient, he stripped down and tried to pick the fleas out of his clothes. He was taken prisoner near Piestany, about 30 miles south of Trencin. By that time he was ill with a bad cold and had badly blistered feet from the new GI shoes he got after ditching in the Adriatic. He was finally sent to Stalag Luft I at Barth, where one of the first people he saw was bombardier Lt. Quinn.⁸⁵

Accounts differ as to what happened to the airplane, to pilot Bullock and to tail gunner S/Sgt. Maurice E. Nelson. Some accounts, based on supposition, have the plane exploding, others have it crashing with the three men aboard. According to hearsay accounts, Lt. Bullock was still at the controls, wounded and bleeding profusely, when the last of the of those able to exit, left the airplane. Another account has Lt. Bullock waiting behind the copilot, 2nd Lt. Clarence B. Jackson, to bail out of the bomb bay. A shell exploded in the area, knocking Jackson unconscious and he fell through the open bomb bay doors. Jackson doesn't know what happened to Bullock. Jackson survived, evaded and returned to the Group in late October, 1944. It is known that Lt. Bullock did not survive. His dog tags were shown to Lt. Garland, pilot of plane number 42-107118, at Gestapo Headquarters in Moravska Ostrava, after Garland was captured.

Tail gunner, S/Sgt. Nelson was variously reported to be still in the airplane after others had left, and conversely, he was found unconscious and pushed out the tail escape hatch, and he was seen to bail out but was either in free fall, or his chute didn't deploy. German sources said he bailed out, but his chute failed.

T/Sgt. Joseph H. Morien, UTG, bailed out of the bomb bay just ahead of S/Sgt. Wallace M. Clayton, ROG. Clayton heard copilot Jackson yell over the intercom to bail out. Clayton went

immediately to the bomb bay to see if the bombs had been salvoed. Bombs were still in the right side racks because shell damage had caused the racks to jam. He just had time to report the jam over the intercom when he was hit in the left leg. He was backing out of the bomb bay when the radio set blew up and a piece of plastic hit him in the upper inside of his nose and entered his right eye. The hits knocked him off his feet and he felt like he was going to sleep. Later he realized his oxygen hose had been cut. He was aroused by the lower turret gunner, Sgt. James R. Martin, throwing spent machine gun casings at his feet and motioning him to bail out. He hooked on his parachute, arrived at the bomb bay at the same time as T/Sgt. Morien, and followed him out the bomb bay.⁸⁶

Sgt. James R. Martin, LTG, got out of his turret to go out the waist escape door with Sgt. Morris M. Goldberg, RWG, but the door was jammed. The left waist gunner, S/Sgt. Joseph M. Laratta, was lying on the waist floor. Martin and Goldberg then went to the tail escape hatch and arrived there in time to see S/Sgt. Nelson bail out.⁸⁷

The four enlisted gunners, Clayton, Morien, Martin and Goldberg, were all captured, and eventually taken to Zlin, Czechoslovakia for interrogation. Clayton and Martin, who had his right big toe shot off, were taken to a hospital where they were operated on by two Czech doctors. Some time thereafter a German Luftwaffe colonel came to their room, not for interrogation, but to take them to a base where some of the pilots and planes were based that had attacked the Group. They were taken by car into the woods and to an underground bunker. They talked to some of the pilots who had shot down some of the B-17s and they drank schnapps together. When they asked how many fighters were in the attacking force, they were told over 100, which the Colonel later confirmed. Clayton and Martin stayed one day and night before being put aboard a box car, with other prisoners, and shipped through Vienna, where they were caught in an air raid, to prison camps in Germany.⁸⁸

F/O Duane B. Seaman remembered hearing Axis Sally, the English-speaking Nazi propagandist, on short wave radio that morning before the mission. She said the Germans knew what the target was, and the German Air Force would be waiting for them. The Eighth Air Force was grounded by weather, so the GAF was shuttling airplanes to attack the Fifteenth, and the Americans should be prepared for heavy losses. To Seaman, Sally seemed to be astonishingly accurate many times.

His concerns mounted as the mission progressed because of the erratic pattern of the lead plane. The lead plane would surge forward then ease back as if to pull the formation together, which added to the confusion and weakened formation defenses. As the formation reached the IP, Seaman signalled to his crew chief, T/Sgt. John A. Nigborowicz, to help get his flak suit on. Too late! At that instant, S/Sgt. Timothy J. Reidy, LTG, announced that the friendly escort had arrived, and simultaneously all hell broke loose. In what seemed like a matter of seconds to Seaman, there was a large hole between engines one and two, and flames from burning gas tanks were shooting eight feet in the air. Num-



The Duane B. Seaman crew, 49th Squadron, shot down on Mission 263, August 29, 1944. All survived as POWs. Back L to R: T/Sgt. John A. Nigborowicz, UTG; F/O Robert E. Mickadeit, N; F/O Seaman, P; F/O Ben J. Pastorino, CP; F/O Edward C. Piwowarski. Not shown, S/Sgt. Donald B. Hausler, nose gunner/bomb toggler for mission. Front L to R: S/Sgt. M.L. (IO) Childress, TG; S/Sgt. Howard T. Ware, LWG; T/Sgt. William J. Devlin, ROG; S/Sgt. Timothy J. Reidy, LTG; S/Sgt. Robert C. Pittard, RWG. (Courtesy of D. Seaman)



Crew of Snafuperman, 20th Squadron, shot down on Mission 263, August 29, 1944. Back L to R: S/Sgt. Irving D. Katz, UTG (KIA); Sgt. Russell T. Payne, LWG (KIA); Sgt. Robert C. Hoadley, TG; S/Sgt. Charles E. Griffin, ROG; Sgt. Ralph E. DeWitt, RWG; S/Sgt. Jesse L. Barker, LTG. Front L to R: 2nd Lt. Loy A. Dickinson, N (flew with Lt. Tune as squadron navigator); 2nd Lt. William T. Garland, P; 2nd Lt. Leo A. Zupan, CP; 2nd Lt. Albert E. Novak, B (flew as navigator). Not shown, S/Sgt. William G. Hayett, nose gunner/bomb toggler for mission. (Courtesy of L. Dickinson)

ber three engine was hit, had a runaway propeller, and engine oil was pouring over the wing.⁸⁹ Seaman was flying aircraft number 44-6369 of the 49th Squadron. He dove for the clouds, but the aircraft was burning so badly, he ordered bail out. The plane crashed near Liptal with no one aboard. S/Sgt. Donald B. Hausler, B, was the only one reported to be injured before bailout. Part of the crew was fired on by enemy planes and ground personnel while descending, but escaped injury. S/Sgt. Howard T. Ware, LWG, broke an ankle as he struck the ground. He and S/Sgt. Robert C. Pittard, RWG, T/Sgt. Nigborowicz, were together for three days evading and caring for Ware as best they could. It was impossible to evade successfully with Ware and his broken ankle, so they arranged for Ware to turn himself in. The other two evaded for three more days before they were captured. All the rest of the crew was captured as soon as they landed. The crew was sent to German prison camps and were liberated at the end of the war.⁹⁰

The last plane to be knocked out of the formation was that of 2nd Lt. William T. Garland, in "Snafuperman", number 42-107118. "Snafuperman" survived longer than any of the other 9, only to go down just short of the target and only 5 days after its original crew, under 1st Lt. Charles N. Beecham, had finished 50 missions on August 24. "Snafuperman" was hit and left the formation between the IP and the target. All of the crew bailed out and were interned in German prisoner of war camps except S/Sgt. Irving D. Katz, UTG, and Sgt. Russell I. Payne, LWG. The plane exploded just after pilot Garland, the last man out, left.

Copilot 2nd Lt. Leo A. Zupan was flying the airplane when the attack came. They watched their leader, Lt. Tune on fire and going down. Soon there were only two planes left in the Squadron — theirs and Lt. Bullocks. The two tucked together for protection, then Bullock disappeared and they were alone. Number 1 and 4

engines were on fire and were feathered. The bombs were jettisoned and they were able to catch up with another squadron. Garland knew he wouldn't be able to keep up on two engines after the Group dropped its bombs, and he didn't relish being alone again. He took a chance and unfeathered number 4 engine, thinking he might dive and blow out the fire. He guessed wrong. The fire came back worse than before, and the aluminum on the wing was melting away. It was clear the plane was mortally damaged. The oxygen tanks and the left side of the plane behind the pilot's seat had been blown out. Only the armor plate behind the pilot's seat saved Garland. There were holes through the bomb bay, the radio room and the waist. The radio operator, S/Sgt. Charles E. Griffin, was injured and left waist gunner Payne was fatally wounded. Part of the tail had been blown off and tail gunner, Sgt. Robert C. Hoadley, lost part of his wrist. It was time to leave and Garland ordered everyone out. By the time Garland left the cockpit, only one engine was operating and the plane was flyable only by autopilot.

S/Sgt. Katz was seen by the navigator, 2nd Lt. Albert E. Novak, to bail out of the bomb bay, uninjured, and to safely clear the airplane. Novak immediately followed him out.

S/Sgt. Jesse L. Barker, LTG, left his turret after his guns jammed and the left wing was on fire. He found left waist gunner, Payne, laying on the waist floor, unable to move but conscious. With the help of right waist gunner, Sgt. Ralph E. DeWitt, who had been manning Payne's gun, they restored Payne's oxygen supply. Tail gunner Hoadley arrived from his position and helped Barker move Payne to the waist door. In the meantime, DeWitt had gotten a spare parachute for radio man, Griffin, whose chute had been badly damaged. The men secured a safety strap to the rip cord of Payne's parachute, so his chute could be released when he was pushed out of the waist door. At this point Garland arrived and

ordered the men out of the plane. As Garland lifted the wounded waist gunner to release him out the waist door, Payne opened his eyes momentarily, then went limp in Garland's arms. Garland was of the opinion that Payne died at that instant. A 20mm shell had torn through the opposite side of the airplane, hit Sgt. Payne in the back and entered his stomach while he was firing at attacking fighters.

Garland now sat down in the doorway prepared to roll out. He looked down and saw that his parachute harness wasn't buckled! The slip stream had his legs. He had been without oxygen for some time and thought he couldn't find the strength to roll back into the plane and buckle the chute. He glanced at the wing. The metal was already burned off the outer portion and the Tokyo tanks were burning. That scared enough adrenaline loose, that he found the strength to roll back in, buckle the chute, and jump. One of the crew, floating below, saw the plane blow up just after Garland was seen to be falling away from it.

Sgt. Payne was bailed out in the vicinity of Frankstadt, Czechoslovakia. Czech police showed his dog tags to Sgt. Hoadley that same day and said that Sgt. Payne was dead when he reached the ground. His death was confirmed by a German officer in Frankfurt, Germany two weeks later.⁹¹

Local villagers said that Sgt. Payne was alive when he landed, but bleeding heavily from the stomach and hip areas. He spoke a couple of words. The villagers tried to get him a drink from a nearby spring, but the sergeant died within minutes. German soldiers soon came. They took his ring and dog tags. Sgt. Payne was buried by Pater (Father) Frantisek Mastil in the cemetery at Palkovice, Moravia. In October 1946 his body was exhumed and returned to the U.S.⁹²

A German officer at Gestapo headquarters in Moravska Ostrava showed Lt. Garland S/Sgt. Katz's dog tags and said that the sergeant was

dead, that his chute failed to open. The officer also made loud and disparaging reference to Sgt. Katz being "yiddish," leaving Garland with the opinion that the sergeant had been killed after he landed. A full report was sent to the Adjutant General's Office, and the matter was made a part of S/Sgt. Katz's permanent file.

Civilian eyewitnesses said that T/Sgt. Katz was killed on impact with the ground when his chute failed to open. German soldiers resting in a nearby house ran immediately to the body and stripped it of all clothes and belongings. Sgt. Katz was buried naked near the village of Celadna, Moravia.⁹³

Lt. Zupan had left some cigars and his beer ration on his bunk that morning because he was going on R & R to Rome on his return. Later he wondered who the lucky stiff was that got them.⁹⁴

While the rear of the formation took the main force of the attack, the rest did not escape the fury of the assault. The Luftwaffe's success in destroying the first ten airplanes came quickly, and it had time and munitions left to go after others in the Group. They inflicted severe damage on four airplanes, minor damage on two others, and wounded two men, one seriously. S/Sgt. John A. Lamb, on 1st Lt. Arnold T. Kwiatkowski's crew of the 96th Squadron, in aircraft number 161, had shell fragments in the shoulder and face. The airplane had extensive damage to the tail section. 1st Lt. Henry J. Wallet in plane number 379, leading the second element of the 96th, had his plane severely damaged, including a large hole in the tail. Lt. Col. Cunningham's lead plane, number 043, was among those severely damaged. He was barely able to retain control. Each of the three remaining Squadrons downed at least one of the enemy and claimed one or more probables or damaged enemy aircraft.

Because of poor visibility, Lt. Col. Cunningham made two passes over the target before dropping bombs by PFF. A definite assessment of the bombing results was not possible because of clouds, smoke, and the mixed nature of bombing with that of a B-24 group. Two or three explosions were visible, numerous fires were lit, but it was not possible to determine their origin. An explosion occurred in the marshalling yards next to the refinery. Bombs fell in an industrial area, among residential buildings and in open fields.

Gunners claimed 3 Me-109s and 1 FW-190 destroyed, 4 Me-109 probables and 1 Me-109 and 1 FW-190 damaged. Liberated POW crew members reported several aerial victories that probably were never confirmed.⁹⁵ One of the downed Me-109s crashed, with the pilot still inside, into a barn south of Krhov and burned. A decoration worn by the pilot indicated he was a German Ace with 36 aerial victories on the Western Front.⁹⁶

Besides the 9 airplanes, and 90 crewmen, including 40 dead or dying, that the Group left on Czechoslovakian soil that day, it left a totally unexpected legacy. The tragedy loosed a wellspring of immense good will and near reverence among the Czechoslovakian people in the area for the American airmen, dead and alive, who fell in their midst that morning. That wellspring started flowing with the care for the living and the respect and homage for the dead, and has flowed, unbroken, to this day.

Drahomir Brzobohaty, curator of the Slavcin Museum, described the origins of this bond with the American airmen: "The German border guards at the Moravia-Slovakia border were feverishly searching for killed Americans. Some have robbed the victims of their personal belongings. Other Germans participating in the burial preparations showed themselves to be sadists . . . Copies of several photographs were secretly procured by a photo lab owner in Slavcin. (Author's note: Several bodies of Lt. Thayne Thomase's crew were disfigured and mangled when the airplane exploded. The Germans collected the remains for burial, but left some severed portions behind. The villagers in Sanov gathered up these remains, built a small coffin and buried them with care and respect beneath a tree at the edge of the forest. A simple wooden cross was hung in the tree over the grave. It was later replaced by a metal cross. Today there is a small marker constructed by the villagers over the grave which was blessed by their pastor. The metal cross is now in the Slavcin museum as are two machine guns, engine parts, and cockpit fragments from the airplane, and a silver ring that was removed from a martyr's severed hand.)

On order of the German commander of the Slavcin garrison (his name was Artner, a former school principal in Steier Gratz, Austria) the bodies were collected in the morgue in Slavcin. At first there were 27 of them from the wrecks in Sanov (9 from Lt. Thomas crew), Krhov (9 from Lt. Weiler crew), and Vyskovec (9 from Lt. Prentice crew). The next day they brought one more (from Lt. McCloskey crew).

The internment took place on 31 August 1944. No Czechs were allowed at, or near the grave site, then just outside of the cemetery wall, now incorporated into the enlarged cemetery. But there is a detailed record of the proceedings in the Chronicle of the Catholic Parish in Slavcin, hand written by the then pastor, Rev. Frantisek Manak. Essential parts of his recollections, as dictated in August 1993 to me by the current pastor follow: (Author's note: What followed was a description of the grave digging and mass burial of the 28 Americans, as they were found. The priest was allowed to attend, but was denied his request to perform a funeral service, because, as he was told, the Americans were to be buried as enemy terrorists.)

All ended at 4:00 P.M. Since that time (1944), every last Sunday of August there is a Special Mass said for them in the nearby church. At the end the Germans evened out the soil, covered it with sod and placed there a wooden plaque with a cross and the inscription:

28 Amerikan Fliegern
Abgest. 29. 8. 1944
Beerdigt: 31. 8. 1944"

When the Germans walked away the local people started to bring flowers to the grave. Commander Artner had forbidden it. His order to that effect was announced by the town crier who walked down the streets beating his drum to call attention, and was reading the order throughout the town.

After the war the original plaque was planed smooth and the inscription was replaced in translation to read:

28 American Flyers
Died 29. 8. 1944
Buried 31. 8. 1944"

On September 9, 1945, there was an official burial ceremony for the Americans, attended by a great number of people from Slavcin and the surrounding areas. The following year from September 3 - 5, the bodies were exhumed by American soldiers. The remains of most were transferred to the American Military Cemetery in Saint Avold, France. At the request of several families, the remains of some were taken to cemeteries in the U.S. The parting was a very solemn affair attended by a great many people. There were seven priests, military units and bands, an air salute by four military aircraft, film crews, and others. At the same time, on September 3, the bodies of Lt. Meyrick and Sgt. Marinello were exhumed at Rudice and transferred to Saint Avold. Afterwards, a commission was established to erect a monument to the fallen Americans, in place of the temporary plaque. The plaque was soon destroyed by vandals.⁹⁷

Fulfillment of the monument commission's charge was delayed for almost 50 years as eastern Europe descended into communism behind the Iron Curtain, forcing adherence to the dogma that there was only one liberating nation and only one winner over fascism — communist Russia. But the passion for freedom and the desire to pay homage to the fallen Americans, were never quenched. Those Americans who sacrificed their lives as defenders of liberty came to symbolize fulfillment of the long and fervent yearning for liberation by the people of the area. In August 1994 a permanent, blue granite memorial marker, engraved with the 28 names, was unveiled and dedicated at a ceremony in Slavcin. Five aviators who survived that fateful day attended the ceremony — Bill Tune, Bill Garland, Francis Flynn, Loy Dickinson and Leo Zupan.

A new black granite memorial marker was erected in the cemetery at Rudice next to the bent B-17 propeller blade, and similarly dedicated in honor of Lt. Meyrick and Sgt. Marinello.

The people of Slavcin established a museum documenting and commemorating that day with records, photos, artifacts, war relics and memorabilia. The people even excavated a downed Me-109 that crashed into a swamp, substantially intact, and disappeared into eighteen feet of muck. German attempts to recover it failed. It wasn't until 1990, after a prolonged and severe drought, that excavation became possible. With borrowed farm machinery, a crude excavation was made and the airplane parts and other artifacts are now on display in the museum.⁹⁸

The remnants of the Group flew back to Amendola without further incident, bearing the two wounded and a tale of disbelief for a stunned audience.

The 20th was soon assigned seven new crews to replace those lost over Czechoslovakia. The first crew to face this sobering introduction to combat was that of 2nd Lt. Ralph E. Chambers. They landed, with a new airplane, at Amendola on August 29, while the Group was still in the air on mission 263. The left waist gunner, S/Sgt. Melvin W. McGuire, in his book "Bloody Skies", described the scene. They were met at the hard stand by a man in a hurry, who said "I'm Bernie

³ Richards Missing Crew Report
⁴ Mission Report
⁵ Ibid
⁶ Craven & Cate, 297
⁷ Richards Missing Crew Report
⁸ Mission Report
⁹ Craven & Cate, 403-423
¹⁰ Ibid, 424
¹¹ Mission Report
¹² Craven & Cate, 424
¹³ Mission Report
¹⁴ Craven & Cate, 425
¹⁵ Mission Report
¹⁶ Mission Operations Order, 665
¹⁷ Craven & Cate, 428
¹⁸ Ibid, 429, 430
¹⁹ 429th Squadron History, microfilm reel, A0613 fr. 184-186
²⁰ Craven & Cate, 431
²¹ Ibid
²² Ibid, 297, 298
²³ Richards Missing Crew Report
²⁴ Ibid
²⁵ Mission Report
²⁶ Richards Missing Crew Report
²⁷ Donald L. Stillman, telephone interview, October 10, 1995
²⁸ 26th Squadron History, microfilm fr. 614, 615
²⁹ Richards Missing Crew Report
³⁰ Chester Wilmer, "The Struggle for Europe," (Harper and Brothers, NY, 1952) 440, 441
³¹ Mission Report
³² Ibid
³³ Ibid
³⁴ Ibid
³⁵ Mission Report; 5th Wing Operations Order No. 680, August 28, 1944; Final Strike Assessment Report.
³⁶ William S. Tune, Personal Account, 1994
³⁷ Francis W. Flynn, Personal Account, 1994, Interview March 8, 1995
³⁸ Mission report, Special Mission Narrative
³⁹ Capt. George B. Sweeney, Investigating Officer, "Consolidated Eye-Witness Description," August 30, 1944; Group Intelligence Office Mission Special Narrative Report. (Authors Note: Some key survivors of 20th Squadron have no recollection of lagging, except that it may have occurred inadvertently while absorbed by concern with airplanes in squadrons ahead lagging back into the 20th. The mission reports and the preponderance of personal accounts have the 20th and the two aircraft in the seventh positions in the 429th and 49th Squadrons lagging when the Luftwaffe struck. The reasons vary according to the observer and are inconclusive: the Group was slow to form-up and assemble precluding rendezvous with the 97th Bomb Group; the Group lead flew off and left the trailing 20th Squadron; the Group lead speeded up and slowed down creating accordion-like jam-ups and stretch-outs that adversely effected formation integrity; and unreported mechanical problems and war-weary aircraft contributed to lagging. Given the Luftwaffe plan of attack and timing, the rear of the formation and the 20th Squadron in particular were the most likely targets in any event. Formation leaders and experienced crews knew the potentially dire consequences of lagging and would not knowingly do so except for circumstances beyond their control.)
⁴⁰ Thomas F. Gully, chairman, et al, "The Hour Has Come — The 97th Bomb Group in World War II," (Taylor Publishing Company, Dallas, TX, 1993) p 197
⁴¹ Sweeney, "Consolidated Eye-Witness Description."
⁴² Tune interview, March 8, 1995
⁴³ Maj. Norman E. Annich, Group Intelligence Officer, mission Enemy Evasion Aid Reports., August 29, 1944
⁴⁴ The Fitzpatrick crew account drawn from personal accounts of: Vincent A. Contrada, March 20, 1996; Paul E. Sumner, May 5, 1996 and Charles H. McGhee,

May 1996; all via Loy A. Dickinson
⁴⁵ Robert O. McCloskey, Porterville, CA, personal account, August 10, 1994
⁴⁶ Drahomer Brzobohaty, curator, Slavcin Museum, Maravia, "Summary of Czech and Slovak Eyewitness Accounts." (Translated by Frank Pindak, Mobile, AL) Note: Includes details of GAF attack plan.
⁴⁷ Richards Missing Crew Report
⁴⁸ McCloskey, personal account; Richards Missing Crew Report
⁴⁹ Brzobohaty account
⁵⁰ Ibid
⁵¹ Richards Missing Crew Report
⁵² Ibid
⁵³ Brzobohaty account
⁵⁴ Zdenek Prankraz, Czech native, personal recollections; Loy A. Dickinson interviews of Wray crew survivors, February, March 1996
⁵⁵ Brzobohaty account
⁵⁶ Charles H. McVey, Chattanooga, TN, personal account, August 23, 1994
⁵⁷ Brzobohaty account
⁵⁸ Richards Missing Crew Report
⁵⁹ Brzobohaty account
⁶⁰ Ibid
⁶¹ Thayne L. Thomas, So. Weber, UT, excerpts from autobiography (undated)
⁶² Brzobohaty account
⁶³ Richards Missing Crew Report; 2nd Lt. Thayne L. Thomas-S/Sgt. Robert D. Donahue, joint Escape Statement, September 18, 1944; Thomas autobiography
⁶⁴ William S. Tune, Florence AL, personal account, 1994, and interview March 8, 1995
⁶⁵ Richards Missing Crew Report
⁶⁶ Loy W. Dickinson, Denver, CO, interviews March 7, and April 9, 1995
⁶⁷ Francis W. Flynn, Dunkirk, NY, interviews March 8, and April 8, 1995
⁶⁸ Tune personal account
⁶⁹ Brzobohaty account
⁷⁰ Tune personal account
⁷¹ Flynn personal account, 1994
⁷² Tune personal account
⁷³ Dickinson interview April 9, 1995
⁷⁴ Brzobohaty account
⁷⁵ Robert R. Kirsch personal account via Mojmir Baca, Czech, March 7, 1995
⁷⁶ Richards Missing Crew Report
⁷⁷ Brzobohaty account
⁷⁸ Tune personal account
⁷⁹ Brzobohaty account
⁸⁰ Robert D. Donahue personal account, January 6, 1995; Thayne L. Thomas interview, March 1996, by Loy A. Dickinson.
⁸¹ Craven & Cate, 511, 523
⁸² Richards Missing Crew Report
⁸³ Brzobohaty account
⁸⁴ Richards Missing Crew Report
⁸⁵ Ibid
⁸⁶ Ibid
⁸⁷ Ibid
⁸⁸ Ibid
⁸⁹ Duane B. Seaman interview by Loy A. Dickinson, February 1996
⁹⁰ Ibid
⁹¹ Richards Missing Crew Report; William T. Garland personal account, December 31, 1994, Leo A. Zupan personal account, October 1995
⁹² Michal Sisovsky, Rossbach-Bischoffen, Germany, in letter to William T. Garland, Jan 23, 1996.
⁹³ Ibid
⁹⁴ Zupan personal account
⁹⁵ Mission report
⁹⁶ Brzobohaty account
⁹⁷ Ibid
⁹⁸ Ibid
⁹⁹ Melvin W. McGuire and Robert Hadley, "Bloody Skies," (Yucca Press, 1993) 83-86
¹⁰⁰ Craven & Cate, 436

OPERATION REUNION

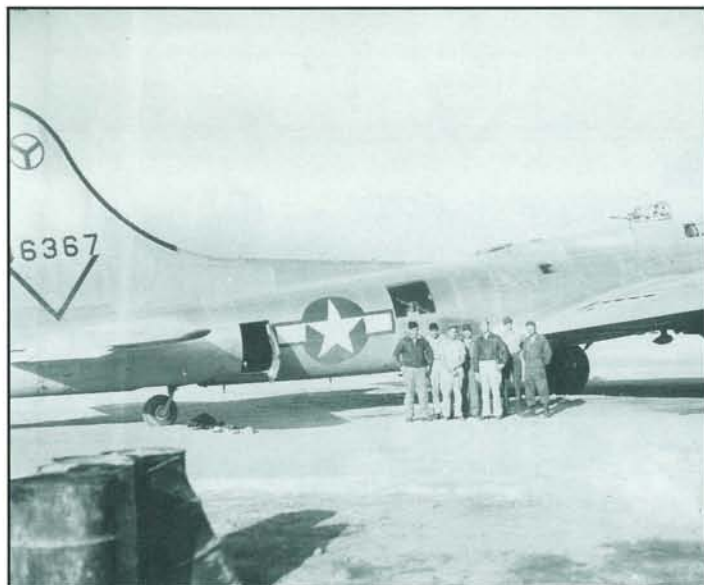
MISSION 264, BUCHAREST, RUMANIA, POW EVACUATION FROM POPESTI AIRDROME, AUGUST 31, 1944 MISSION 265, BUCHAREST, RUMANIA, POW EVACUATION FROM POPESTI AIRDROME, SEPTEMBER 1, 1944 MISSION 267, BUCHAREST, RUMANIA, POW EVACUATION FROM POPESTI AIRDROME, SEPTEMBER 3, 1944

The summer oil campaign had left the Ploesti oil fields largely destroyed, with few oil products or machinery for the Germans to withdraw as they retreated before the on-coming Russians. As the Russians quickly overran Rumania, King Michael arrested the Rumanian dictator, Marshal Ion Antonescu, and dismissed his government, on August 23. That night the King went on the radio from Bucharest and announced "the immediate cessation of hostilities," and acceptance of "an armistice offered by the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the United States." On August 25, Rumania declared war on Germany.¹

More than 1,100 Allied prisoners of war were being held by the Rumanian forces in the vicinity of Bucharest. Most of them were from American air crews shot down during the attacks on the oil resources in the Ploesti complex. Some had been held prisoner since the B-24 low level raid from North Africa August 1, 1943. The POWs had been aided by Rumanian Princess Catharina Caradja. She had used her influence and her own resources to, first, keep the prisoners from being sent to Germany, and second, to help make life more comfortable for them in prison. The princess was a strong anti-communist and some years after the war, she escaped her unfortunate country to spend most of her remaining years in the U.S. She was able to return to Rumania in 1991 after its liberation from the communist yoke.²

Prisoners were held in camps in the Bucharest area. When they heard that Rumania had switched sides, (and the Russians had marched into Bucharest), some persuaded the prison commanders to turn them loose.³ They were ostensibly free, but in the general confusion and with fighting still going on a few miles away, they faced the possibility of being evacuated to Germany, or spending a long time in the hands of the Russians before they could get out.⁴ Italy, the closest Allied control area, was more than 500 miles away, and much of the territory in between was still in the hands of the Germans. No means were available to communicate quickly with Allied authorities. In addition, the Luftwaffe had started retaliatory raids against Bucharest and the surrounding area. Lt. Col. James A. Gunn III emerged as the hero in solving the plight of the freed prisoners.

Lt. Col. Gunn had been shot down August 17 while leading the 454th Bomb Group against the Ploesti oil targets. Not long after he was put in a prison camp, he became the chairman of the "escape committee" which planned digging a tunnel to freedom. The prisoners already had dug through two feet of concrete when Rumania capitulated to the Allies.⁵ Col. Gunn now tried to



Capt. W. Randall Bedgood and crew ready to depart for Popesti Airdrome, Bucharest, Rumania for POW evacuation. Crew included: 1st Lt. H.L. Timian, CP; 2nd Lt. C.W. Schmidt, N; T/Sgt. G.H. Kilson, UTG; S/Sgt. L.S. Smycz, TG; and T/Sgt. A.W. Olish, ROG. (Courtesy of R. Bedgood)



Maj. Richard S. Abbey, 49th Squadron commander and part of his crew with POWs and Rumanian soldiers. Other crew members included 1st Lt. L.V. Koski, copilot and 2nd Lt. J.W. Martin, navigator. (Courtesy of J. Bigham)

arrange the evacuation of all the prisoners in the Bucharest area. The general confusion was both a hindrance and an opportunity. Gunn, in his search for assistance from someone in authority, met with the Rumanian Air Minister who referred him to Prince Carl Cantacuzino. The Prince was not only a Captain in the Rumanian Air Force, but a leading ace credited with 64 victories over Allied planes.⁶

After much discussion, the American Lt. Colonel, and the Rumanian Captain were able to agree that the best solution was for them to fly together to Italy where they could enlist the aid of the Fifteenth Air Force. The only practical aircraft available for this dangerous journey was Capt. Cantacuzino's Me-109. American flags were painted on the fuselage, and the American star insignia on the wings. With Cantacuzino at the controls, Gunn stowed in the radio compartment, and unable to see out, the two took off secretly on the evening of the August 27. It was an audacious mission fraught with potential double jeopardy. The Luftwaffe might well be attracted to a lone fighter, even an Me-109, with American markings. The crude insignias were the only defense the two daredevils had against the anti-aircraft artillery surrounding the Allied air bases, not to mention fighter interceptors. Would the insignia, on one of the most recognizable German fighters, gain them enough benefit of doubt to make known their humanitarian purpose. As they were to learn later, the insignia did just that. The British defensive anti-aircraft batteries tracked them, but held fire when they saw the American markings.

The trip was made without incident and the Prince boldly landed at the colonel's home base at San Giovanni. The flamboyant Rumanian jumped out of the airplane and asked the open-mouthed Americans for a screw driver, saying he had someone inside they might like to see. He removed the fuselage access plate to the radio compartment and the woozy Gunn emerged to the surprise of the men he had lately commanded.⁷

Lt. Col. Gunn told his story to General Sir Harold Maitland Wilson, Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean and to Lt. Gen. Eaker. Immediate plans were made for an evacuation. First, however, the Fifteenth set about fulfilling a promise Gunn had made to officials in Bucharest. The next day, a force of fighters was sent to strafe and destroy the base from which the German bombers were terrorizing the Rumanian capitol.

One of the problems faced by the evacuation planners, was how to move the men by air, with only heavy bombers at their disposal. Immediately, tests were ordered on B-17 and B-24 aircraft to determine which would be the best to use for take off from the short, grass field, Popesti airdrome. Increasing loads of sand bags were placed in the two bombers and test takeoff runs were made at Foggia. As the load was increased, the B-17 was able to takeoff at almost the same distance, while the B-24 takeoff distance increased considerably.

The 2nd Bomb Group, being the oldest bomb group, was given the honor of leading the mission, now called Operation REUNION. The 2nd provided thirty B-17s, and the 97th eight. The planes were quickly modified by installing wooden floors in the bomb bays, and removing most of the guns and other equipment to reduce weight.⁸

On August 29, Capt. Cantacuzino flew a P-51 back to Bucharest. Two very competent American pilots flew two P-51s on his wings until the three arrived at Bucharest, where the captain landed while the escort remained aloft. When the Rumanian pilot determined that everything was safe, he signaled the P-51 pilots who, in turn, broadcast the all-clear to another fighter circling at altitude. This pilot then relayed the message to Bari, Italy, where two B-17s were waiting to take off. These two bombers, with a thirty-two fighter escort, flew to Popesti. Aboard was OSS Colonel George Kraiger with eleven men, mostly OSS people, and communications equipment.⁹

When positive assurances was received from Kraiger, the rescue mission was put in motion. Operations order 683 from 5th Wing, detailed exactly how the mission would be flown. Thirty-six B-17s would fly in three waves of twelve airplanes each to Popesti, land, load twenty men in each plane, and take off as soon as possible. A fourth wave of two airplanes would be equipped with litters to carry ten men each. Each B-17 would carry a stripped-down crew of six — pilot, copilot, navigator, engineer gunner, radio gunner, and tail gunner. The gas load was to be maximum, otherwise every effort would be made to reduce weight.¹⁰

The B-24 Wings were ordered to stand down so that as many fighters as possible would be available to escort the rescue aircraft.

Paragraph 7, of the directive from 5th Wing HQ, provided: "When each wave of B-17s is about thirty miles from Bucharest on penetration, one flight of escorting fighters will leave formation to precede bombers to the airdrome. These fighters will observe signals to inform them of friendly or enemy status of the field. Fighters will return to bombers to relay the signals as follows: Series of small dives and zooms will mean OK to land. Rocking of wings followed by sharp breakaway will mean return to base."

Great care would be taken to protect the lightly armed bombers and their important human cargo. Very specific courses, in and out, were prescribed to keep the formations free from known flak areas. The flight would be made at medium altitude, and aircraft were to stay below the cloud base if possible. The first wave was to start landing at 10:00 A.M., followed by the other three waves at one hour intervals. Fighters would provide adequate cover for the B-17s during landing, loading, and takeoff from Popesti.¹¹

It was a mission that buoyed the spirits of the whole organization and especially those fortunate enough to go. The first wave was off the ground at 6:15 A.M., the second at 7:17, and the third at 8:15. The third and final wave of the



Former POWs preparing to load on Capt. Bedgood's airplane at Popesti Airdrome, Bucharest, Rumania. (Courtesy of R. Bedgood)



Former POWs to be evacuated by Maj. Abbey. A Rumanian soldier stands left front. (Courtesy of J. Bigham)



49th Squadron aircraft number 590, flown by the 20th Squadron crew of 1st Lt. W. T. Gilbert, stayed over at Popesti August 31 because of a damaged wing tip. (Courtesy of R. Bedgood)

twenty-eight airplanes planes was back at Amendola by 4:46 P.M., after delivering the former prisoners at Bari. Two planes had to lay over at Popesti. One blew a tire on landing, and one damaged a wing tip. Both airplanes were repaired and returned the next day.¹²

Lt. Col. W. R. Lovelace, Army Air Force surgeon of the Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota, and Drs. Richard F. Kuhn and Julius Levine, flight surgeons of the 96 and 49th Squadrons respectively, flew to Rumania to examine wounded American aviators to be evacuated. There were 10 litter cases, and 19 others in serious condition due to lack of proper medical attention, food and care.

Kuhn and Levine packed what penicillin they

had in iced jugs and took as much first aid supplies as they could carry. The doctors flew in separate airplanes. After examining the first group of POWs and seeing them off, the two Group doctors went to a hospital at Puchini near Ploesti. Here they found several wounded Americans. Among them was T/Sgt. Peter Tierney, from a B-24 group, who was seriously wounded. The two doctors took turns watching Tierney through the night and giving him regular injections of penicillin. They later moved him to a Russian hospital where conditions were better and where they could observe how the Russians treated their wounded. While at the Russian hospital, Dr. Kuhn met the head of the Rumanian Telephone Company, who offered to call all hos-

pitals in Rumania to locate any American wounded. Dr. Levine stayed at the Russian hospital to serve the wounded there, while Kuhn traveled to other hospitals in Rumania and Bulgaria, and as far into Russia as Odessa, sometimes in the company of Army OSS personnel. He used his access to search for and treat Allied wounded, and to observe and assess hospital operations and patient treatment. Early in his travels, the Russians issued an order restricting travel in the Ploesti area, probably to prevent observation and assessment of bomb damage. The order sometimes delayed, but didn't halt his travel as Kuhn used his status as a doctor on errands of mercy to gain passage. He was stopped at roadblocks and other check points and held until clearance was received, some times from Moscow. The two doctor's work extended beyond the POW evacuation period. Their personal account does not say how long they stayed in Rumania, nor how they returned to Italy.¹³

While preparations were being made for the evacuation, celebrations broke out in Bucharest. The Russian Army brought with them freed Rumanian prisoners. Many American prisoners joined in the celebrations. The Rumanians brought out from their cellars things they had hidden from the Germans, and the Americans were wined and dined by the towns-people to show their friendship.¹⁴

S/Sgt. Edwin F. Field, UTG, 96th Squadron narrates his story of the rescue mission. "We were the first plane to land, (number three position in the lead flight) at Popesti Airdrome. The field was well camouflaged, nothing but grass, no runways. Everything was well organized. The men we were to take out were lined up in groups of twenty. They were so glad to see us that there were tears in their eyes. Before the props stopped turning, they were already getting in the ships. Some of the men still had their flying clothes on, some of them in civilian clothes and shoes.

Most of them had some kind of souvenir, German guns, Rumanian wings, and knives. The thing they feared most was the bombings. They were just across the street from the rail yards we



POW arrival scene at Bari, Italy, September 1, 1944. (Courtesy of R. Bischoff)



Second POW evacuation mission, September 1, 1944, Popesti Airdrome, 2nd Lt. Ralph F. Bischoff, right, and two crew members, left, S/Sgt. Joseph T. Griffin, TG, and center, Cpl. Laverne L. Chambers, UTG. (Courtesy of R. Bischoff)

were bombing, and when the Germans came, they scattered their bombs all through the city trying to get the prisoners and the hospital.

When we landed there, we were surprised to see Rumanian-manned Me-109s flying cover for us along with the P-51s. At first they scared the hell out of us, then we were told they were OK. There were quite a few German planes on the ground there. The Me-109s were in revetments around the field, and there was a DO-217 and an HE-111 in front of the hangar. A Rumanian Lockheed transport took off while we were there.

When we took off from the field, we were so heavily loaded and the field so short that we had to use flaps. We flew at 10,000 feet up there and back. We landed at Bari, and they had a large reception for them. They took a lot of pictures and also recordings of what they had to say. They were sure a happy bunch, but when they told them they were going home, they were the happiest bunch of fellows I had ever seen.¹⁴

John M. McCormick of Orlando, Florida, was a B-24 pilot in the 449th Bomb Group, shot down

by Me-109s over Bucharest on April 4, 1944. He relates the story of the rescue from the viewpoint of one of the rescued. "I was one of the fourteen odd hundred POWs waiting at Popesti Airport at Bucharest on the first day of our rescue evacuation, which I believe was on August 28, 1944. [August 31] Twenty POWs were to be assigned to each plane. My group of twenty were to go with the last plane on the first flight of eighteen B-17s. It is my understanding that three flights of eighteen B-17s were to land at one hour intervals. Unfortunately, the last B-17 to land in the first flight blew a tire and was stuck at the field until a spare tire could be brought back from Foggia. Naturally, I was quite disappointed not to be able to leave with the first flight of B-17s as there was a war going on about thirty-five miles away between the Rumanians and the Germans.

One hour after the first flight of B-17s arrived, the second flight of 17s from the 2nd Bombardment Group flew over the field, accompanied by a flight of P-51 fighter escort. My group hopped on the first plane as it taxied to the end of the runway for immediate take off. The plane was piloted by Lt. Col. Cunningham (CO of the 429th Squadron). On the way back to Bari, Italy, I spoke to Col. Cunningham, and he mentioned that if we got into any trouble on the way home he would have to ditch the airplane into the water because twenty of us had no chutes.

We landed at Bari, Italy airfield, where General Twining gave a speech and we were sent to a receiving area where we were de-loused, sent through a series of three showers, two on which we used strong lye soap, and the last one with Lifeboy soap. We were also given a complete set of khaki clothing, including new GI shoes.

Another thought I had was that the POWs arrived by bus about 6:00 o'clock A.M. the morning we left Rumania. The first we knew that our rescue was about to take place, was that about twelve P-51s buzzed the field about twenty feet off the ground just before we saw the first flight of B-17s from the 2nd Bomb Group. Being a B-24 pilot, I never thought a B-17 Flying Fortress could look so beautiful as it did that day.¹⁶

Sixteen airplanes were sent on the second mission September 1 to Popesti. Fifteen returned

successfully with more freed POWs. As on the previous day, the 306th Fighter Wing provided cover. One airplane had a serious incident and remained at Popesti for ten days. The outer Tokyo tank on the right wing leaked gas fumes that were ignited by an electrical short. The explosion blew the wing tip off. A new wing section had to be brought in from Italy together with two men from a Service Squadron and the airplane's regular ground crew. The damaged wing was dismantled as the air crew awaited the arrival of the replacement. T/Sgt. Don C. May, the aerial engineer from the 429th Squadron stayed in downtown Bucharest while waiting for the maintenance crew and the repair part.

The Rumanians lavished food, drink and hospitality on the crew. One gave May a car for a sightseeing tour of the city. He was beset by attention and a thousand questions, including whether the Americans were going to stay in Bucharest. Many Rumanians asked to be taken back to Italy so they could join the American forces. Sgt. May also witnesses the first signs of Russian harshness. The Russians set up road blocks outside the city and confiscated cars from owners who tried to leave. The Russians also confiscated the best horses. They imposed a curfew and frequently shot those caught out after the curfew. Sgt. May was fired at when he attended a party in a private home and went outside briefly to dispose of some garbage.

After the airplane was repaired, the crew had the ticklish task of attempting the first flight on the return trip without a test hop. There was no replacement Tokyo tank installed, and thus no gasoline, which threw flight control trim out of line. Further, the aileron cables had been newly strung. 2nd Lt. O. L. Printy, the pilot, took off and returned safely to Italy.

T/Sgt. May had been on the first evacuation mission on August 31, in another crew. After the airplane was in the air, he found a freed prisoner lying on the wooden floor in the bomb bay, crying. Sgt. May asked the man if there was anything he could do. The man replied, "No, buddy, you've done your part."

A freed former B-17 pilot was standing between the pilot and copilot seats on the flight deck. After some time Sgt. May asked the man if he didn't want to sit down. "No," the man said. "No matter how long it takes to get to Bari, I'm so glad to be in an airplane again, I'm going to stand up all the way." And he did.¹⁷

The third and final mission was flown successfully on September 3, requiring only three planes to complete the evacuation. Operation REUNION was completed without encounters or losses.¹⁸ Eleven-hundred-forty-one (1,141) happy men were returned to Allied control, eleven of them from the 2nd Bomb Group.¹⁹

Reconstruction work began in Bucharest a week after the Germans gave the city the worst pounding of the war. Many buildings were reduced to rubble and the King's palace was badly smashed. Americans in the city during the attack described the savagery of the Stuka dive bombers as almost beyond imagination. Luftwaffe pilots threw hand grenades into the streets and machine-gunned everyone in sight.²⁰

The evacuation was international news. The freed prisoners were de-loused, treated, outfit-

ted with new clothes, and fattened for the trip home. Word went out to families and anticipation mounted over joyous reunions.

Endnotes:

- ¹ Wilmont 437, 438
- ² Richard W. Britt, "The Princes and the POW," (Gabriel Publishing 1988)
- ³ Time Magazine, September 11, 1944
- ⁴ Craven & Cate 298
- ⁵ The Courier-Journal, Louisville, KY, September 2, 1944
- ⁶ Ibid; Time Magazine: (Cubbins, Note. 7, gives the Prince's name as Constantin Cantacuzene and his aerial victories as 54)
- ⁷ William R. Cubbins, "The War of the Cottontails," (Algonquin Books, 1989) 247-251
- ⁸ McCoid, Group History, August 30, 1944
- ⁹ Cubbins, 252
- ¹⁰ McCoid, Group History, August 30, 1944
- ¹¹ Mission Report
- ¹² Ibid
- ¹³ Richard F. Kuhn personal account, Second Bombardment Association, NEWSLETTER, Vol. 9, No. 1, January 1993, p 3; interview September 8, 1995
- ¹⁴ The Courier-Journal, September 2, 1944
- ¹⁵ McCoid, Group History, August 31, 1944
- ¹⁶ John M. McCormick, letter March 15, 1994
- ¹⁷ Robert P. Canavan, Group History for September, 1944 (AFHRA Maxwell AFB, AL) microfilm reel A0041, fr. 755-757
- ¹⁸ Mission reports
- ¹⁹ Robert P. Canavan, Group History, September 1944; (Accounts of the number of evacuated vary. Craven & Cate reports 1,162 in Vol III, pg 298; Time Magazine, September 11, 1944, reports 1,100 odd, with 50 wounded, 17 on crutches, and 10 on stretchers; and The Courier-Journal by-line of September 1, reports 1,063, including 50 Britishers)
- ²⁰ The Courier-Journal

SEPTEMBER 1944

The Allied prisoners freed by the surrender of Bulgaria did not have the same swift and happy evacuation as those spirited out of Rumania. On September 1, the Russians reached the Danube River on the border between Rumania and Bulgaria. Bulgaria, which had only been at war with the Western Powers, not the Soviet Union, now declared her withdrawal from the war and proclaimed her neutrality. The Russians would have none of this for there were still German troops in Bulgaria and Bulgarian forces were occupying parts of Greece and Yugoslavia. Russian troops marched into Bulgaria and a week later occupied Sofia.¹

When Bulgaria surrendered, the Fifteenth Air Force made immediate plans to rescue 303 American airmen from among the freed prisoners. But the Bulgarians hurriedly shipped the prisoners by rail to Turkey, a neutral country. From there they were sent by train to Aleppo, Syria and from there they were transported by ATC to Cairo. The Fifteenth Air Force was then able to fly them from Cairo to Italy. For the most part the prisoners were in bad shape from abuse, crude medical treatment and inadequate food. A small military party from the Fifteenth, went to Sofia to investigate the atrocities. The Americans filed charges against some Bulgarian officials, but by the time the investigating party left in 1945, it was apparent that the new Bulgarian government would not exert itself to prosecute the cases.²

Among the freed prisoners was 2nd Lt. Patrick J. Meagher, N, one of six survivor POWs



Amendola bachelor officer's quarters. When it rained, it poured. (Group Photo)

from 2nd Lt. Thomas J. Grissom's crew from the 49th Squadron that went down on the ill-fated Sofia mission, January 24, 1944. They were captured near Sofia and sent to a camp at Chouman, Bulgaria, near the Black Sea, about 90 miles north of Turkey. Among the prisoners were crewmen from that first low-level B-24 mission against Ploesti on August 1, 1943 from Libya. When Meagher and others of Grissom's crew arrived, there were fewer than 75 prisoners. That number increased to over 300 — Americans, British, Canadian, South African, Australian, and a few from Serbia — by the time of liberation. Meagher credits Russian General

Rodion Y. Malinovsky, the young hero of the Battle of Stalingrad, with arranging the train to take the prisoners out.³

In addition to completing the POW evacuation from Popesti on September 1 and 3, the Group flew an assortment of 15 tactical and strategic missions in September to eight different countries. Eight of these were interdiction missions to hinder German withdrawal as the Russians advanced westward across the Balkans. Attacks on marshalling yards, railroad bridges and the route of the Orient Express effectively disrupted the retreat.

A mission was flown to the Athens area to

aid two small scale landings of the British in Greece.⁴

GAF strength in the theater was rapidly becoming ineffective, though it could on occasion, put up a very sizeable and dangerous fighter force. Attacks were made on German airdromes and one aircraft assembly plant. The campaign against oil production continued. In a welcome relief from the 12 losses in July, and 15 in August, the Group lost only one crew to enemy action in September.

Bad weather closed in during the last week of September and the heavy bombers stayed on the ground. Rain and wind swept across southern Italy, and the men of the 2nd were busy trying to stay dry, and prepare their quarters for the coming winter weather.

On September 25, Group Commander, Col. Ryan became the 5th Wing Operations Officer. He was succeeded by Col. Paul T. Cullen. (See Appendix 7.)

Enlisted men's clubs were established for each of the squadrons. These, together with the NCO club and the officer's club, provided a social facility for all ranks. The current greatest spare time interest, however, was following the fortunes of the Group softball team, the "Fortress Hellcats." The scrappy "Hellcats" conquered all the Italian area competition, then went to Oran, Algeria, and returned with the North African Theater of Operations, U.S. Army, championship.

MISSION 266, SEPTEMBER 3, 1944

**BELGRADE, YUGOSLAVIA
SAVA RIVER RAILROAD BRIDGE**

The major exit routes for the Germans from the Balkan southeastern front were few in number, were well-defined and crossed the Danube and Tisza rivers. All routes coming from southern Yugoslavia converged on Budapest.⁵ The railroad through Belgrade was one of those principle routes. It crossed the Sava river, a tributary of the Danube, at Belgrade. While 3 Group airplanes were completing the Popesti POW evacuation, 27 bombed the Sava River bridge. Each airplane carried six 1,000-pound bombs, and the bombing was good, making several direct hits on the bridge.⁶

During penetration, about one half hour northeast of Vis Island, the Group encountered flak from a mobile battery. 1st Lt. A. T. Kwiatkowski, 96th Squadron, flying airplane number 389, turned back five minutes before reaching the IP with two engines feathered, four control cables shot out, and more than a hundred flak holes. He made a crash landing at the Vis airfield. An escort of P-38s stayed with the crippled B-17 all the way until it was landed. Three men were slightly injured during the landing, and the bombardier Lt. Johnson, was seriously wounded by flak. He was left at the hospital on Vis, and the rest of the crew flew to base the next day on another airplane.⁷

MISSION 268, SEPTEMBER 4, 1944

**GENOA, ITALY
HARBOR INSTALLATIONS/SUBMARINE PENS**

This was the Group's only mission flown against an Italian target during September. A wide search had been underway since the invasion of



In time the quarters improved. Stone was the construction material of choice. It was plentiful and free and Italian labor was inexpensive. (Group Photo)

Southern France for some of the last German submarines in the Mediterranean. Three were finally located in the harbor at Genoa, and the 5th Wing was sent after them. The target was covered by smoke from previous bombings, but the Group formation of 28 airplanes dropped 329 five hundred-pound bombs into the smoke. Post-mission photos showed the submarines were either sunk or damaged and the harbor unusable. This raid was thought to have eliminated one of the last threats to the communications and supply lines to Southern France and earned the 5th Wing a commendation from Gen. Twining.⁸ The flak was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate, and wounded three men. 1st Lt. Henry J. Wallet, 96th Squadron, elected to land at Rome on the return flight because his navigator, 1st Lt. Theodore J. Reichert, was seriously wounded.⁹

MISSION 269, SEPTEMBER 5, 1944

**BUDAPEST, HUNGARY
SOUTH RAILROAD BRIDGE**

One thousand pound bombs were used again against a rail bridge. One airplane had a malfunction of the bomb racks and jettisoned the big bombs in an open field. Of the twenty-seven others, the first wave bombed to the right, but the second wave was right on target and had many possible direct hits. One man was lightly wounded and one, T/Sgt. James W. Hunter, ROG, 49th Squadron, was seriously wounded by flak, but all planes returned safely.¹⁰

MISSION 270, SEPTEMBER 6, 1944

ORADEA, RUMANIA, MARSHALLING YARDS

MISSION 271, SEPTEMBER 8, 1944

**BROD, YUGOSLAVIA
SOUTH MARSHALLING YARDS**

The bombs covered the entire marshalling yards at Oradea, and coverage was good at Brod. Very little opposition was offered by the enemy,

and all airplanes came back safely, with one man slightly wounded by flak over Brod.¹¹

MISSION 272, SEPTEMBER 10, 1944

VIENNA, AUSTRIA, LOBAU OIL REFINERY

Vienna was reputed to be the second most heavily defended target on the continent. The bombing results were good and several fires were observed. Flak damaged 26 out of the 28 airplanes over the target and wounded five men. Considering the number of aircraft hit by flak, the Group was fortunate that only five were wounded and only one of those, S/Sgt J. E. Dingler, RWG, 49th Squadron, was seriously wounded. Lt. Col Hillhouse, 96th Squadron commander, led the mission.¹²

Special operations were organized early in the war, first by the British, and later by the U.S. The purpose was to establish and maintain contact with and provide support to patriotic elements on the continent who refused to accept defeat. They were a source of sorely needed intelligence and of effective resistance. Special air units were created to drop agents ("Joes," and "Janes"), supplies, weapons, ammunition, rations, medical supplies, and leaflets to these underground and partisan forces. The MAAF had been active in supporting the French underground, partisans in the Balkans, and later the Italian partisans. Most such special units used C-47s, but one, the 885th Bombardment Squadron (H), was equipped with B-24s and was attached to the Fifteenth Air Force.

During the summer of 1944, most of the support went to the French underground — the Maquis and the FFI — and Tito's Yugoslav partisans. The liberation of southern France freed the 885th for other assignments. On the night of September 9-10, the 885th flew its first mission to northern Italy.¹³ The 2nd Bomb Group lost a new crew on that secret supply mission.

2nd Lt. John R. Meyers and crew, in air-

plane number 42-30500, "Miss Charlotte," were assigned to the 96th Squadron by 5th Wing Headquarters on August 17, 1944. The following day the crew was placed on detached service with the 885th Bomb Squadron. Records of the 885th Squadron show that this aircraft departed Maison Blanche, Algeria, at 9:00 P.M., September 9, 1944, on a secret mission to drop supplies to the Italian Partisans. The plane wreckage and the remains of the crew were found August 2, 1945, on Mt. Gran Mioul (or Mt. Gran Miule) near Sestriere, Italy, on the French-Italian border west of Turin. The bodies were later removed to the U.S. Cemetery at Mirandola, Italy. All bodies were eventually returned to the United States, with the exception of 2nd Lt. Ian S. Raeburn, N, and Cpl. Walter M. Bildstein, LWG. They are interred in the Florence American Cemetery, Florence, Italy. Lt. Raeburn's marker reads, "96th BS, 2nd BG." Records of the 2nd Bomb Group show neither the loss of the crew and aircraft, nor transfer from the Group.¹⁴

MISSION 273, SEPTEMBER 12, 1944 **LECHFELD, GERMANY, AIRDROME**

This was a 7:20 round trip to southern Bavaria. Lechfeld was north northeast of Innsbruck, Austria. There was a high concentration of bombs among airdrome installations. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate. Flak damaged eleven airplanes, but fate spared the Group of any wounded. P-51s escorted, and no enemy fighters were encountered.¹⁵

MISSION 274, SEPTEMBER 13, 1944 **BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY** **NORTH OIL REFINERY**

This was the fifth of thirteen trips to Blechhammer. It was always a long, physically exhausting, and emotionally draining mission. The Group had not bombed on the first mission on June 30 because of cloud cover, and had no opposition for the same reason. On the second mission, July 7, four crews were lost. Another one was lost August 7 on the third mission, and on the fourth mission, August 27, the formation came back with damaged aircraft and four seriously wounded men. Take off was at 6:00 A.M. and the return at 2:35 in the afternoon. Two airplanes returned early. The P-38s and P-51s provided good protection from enemy fighters, but once again, the flak took a toll of the bombers. The primary target was mostly obscured by clouds and smoke and only 19 planes in the Group dropped bombs there, without observed results. Seven others selected a target of opportunity, the marshalling yards at Vrutky, Czechoslovakia, and bombed it with good results. S/Sgt. Charles H. Hill, TG, 96th Squadron returned in serious condition from lack of oxygen.

Airplane 42-97490, 429th Squadron, pilot 2nd Lt. Daryle R. Stuckey, was seen to be straggling behind the formation and gradually losing altitude approximately 45 minutes before target time. When it disappeared from sight, all four engines were running, but the plane was in a gradual dive.¹⁶ All of the crew bailed out over Czechoslovakia, four evaded,

and the others, including Stuckey became POWs. Cpl. Paul C. P. Reinhart, RWG, evaded and was the first to return four days later on September 17. He was on his second mission. He stated that the airplane was plagued with multiple engine problems on the way to the target that forced the crew to abandon it. Number 4 engine started to windmill and was shut down. The crew was about 20 minutes behind the formation when number 1 engine cut out, and soon after that number 2 cut out. Lt. Stuckey turned back, and the airplane continued to lose altitude. At 5,000 feet Stuckey gave the bail out order. The crewless airplane crashed but did not burn and the Czech Partisans salvaged the guns and other useful items.

Cpl. Reinhart believes he was the last man out of the airplane. He noticed the chutes of the other crew members some distance away. He landed near Nitra, Slovakia, and evaded for two days. He traveled generally south and east until he was picked up by Czech Partisans. They started to move him to the north. At one holding point he met some other American evaders, including his copilot, 2nd Lt. Henry E. Tennyson. He was taken to Banska Bystrica, stayed over one night and the next day, Sunday, September 17, was taken out by B-17 in the OSS-arranged evacuation.¹⁷

Group observers saw B-17s from another group go down from a collision and explosion and one to crash land. The 97th Bomb Group lost its highest number of airplanes for any one mission over Blechhammer that day and for reasons that remain a mystery. Exhaustive investigation attribute the cause to two possibilities: one, a B-17 straggled back over planes in the second wave and dropped its bombs into that wave, or second, two of the Forts received direct bursts of flak at the moment bombs were released and the blast blew five airplanes out of the sky and damaged another forcing an emergency landing at Vis for repairs.¹⁸ Nine B-17s and twelve B-24s went down this day.

MISSION 275, SEPTEMBER 15, 1944 **ATHENS, GREECE, KALAMAKI AIRDROME**

The 2nd had last invaded the skies over Greece on mission 122, January 11, 1944. Now the British were preparing to make two small-scale landings, one by sea on Kythera on the 16th and another by air on Araxos airfield on the 23rd. These landings were to be followed by some 2,000 troops in mid-October.¹⁹ The bombing mission was to neutralize any enemy forces on the airdrome and make the field untenable for retaliation against the arriving British. Other Fifteenth Air Force units attacked other enemy installations around Athens. While the B-24s were attacking the marshalling yards and the Eleusis and Tatoi airdromes, the B-17s attacked the Kalamaki airdrome and the Salamis submarine base.²⁰

The 2nd was assigned the airplanes and troop areas at Kalamaki. Twenty-seven planes dropped 3,861 twenty-pound fragmentation bombs with good target coverage. The P-51s furnished escort coverage and there were no fighters or flak.²¹

MISSION 276, SEPTEMBER 17, 1944 **BUDAPEST, HUNGARY** **RAKOS MARSHALLING YARDS** **MISSION 277, SEPTEMBER 18, 1944** **SUBOTICA, YUGOSLAVIA** **MARSHALLING YARDS** **MISSION 278, SEPTEMBER 20, 1944** **BUDAPEST, HUNGARY** **SOUTH RAILROAD BRIDGE** **MISSION 279, SEPTEMBER 21, 1944** **DEBRECEN, HUNGARY** **MARSHALLING YARDS**

These missions were part of the numerous interdiction sorties flown by strategic air forces against German escape routes, and to block major through routes at key marshalling yards. The Rakos and Subotica yards were on a main rail line between Belgrade and Budapest. The bombing was very good. The Subotica raid started several fires. There were no fighters and the flak did negligible damage.²²

The entire load of bombs loosed over the Budapest south railroad bridge blanketed the bridge and its approaches on both sides of the river. There were no losses or damage.

On the Debrecen mission 3 airplanes returned early, another bombed Subotica marshalling yards, and 25 made it to the main target. The bombing was fair to good, with some bombs slightly to right of target. Flak was heavy, intense and accurate and damaged 22 of the 25 raiders, 9 of them severely. Airplane 200, commanded by Lt. J. G. Tulley, was so badly damaged that it could not keep up with the Group. While straggling 10 miles behind the formation, it was attacked by two Me-109s near the Yugoslavian border. The two enemy planes attacked as a team, lining up 800 yards out and coming in from six o'clock to within 300 yards. They made four such attacks, then made one attack from three o'clock, closing to 100 yards, before turning away having done little additional damage. Lt. Tulley made an emergency landing at Foggia, because his bombardier, Lt. E.W. Henderson had been badly wounded by the flak.²³

One airplane, 42-97920, 49th Squadron was salvaged after crash landing at the base.²⁴

The Debrecen raid produced one of the great Flying Fortress survival stories of the war.

THE SAGA OF "SWEET PEA"

Of the airplanes damaged by flak, none had a more incredible return odyssey than that of "Sweet Pea." 2nd Lt. Guy M. Miller and crew of the 429th Squadron in aircraft number 42-38078, "Sweet Pea," were approaching the target when an 88mm antiaircraft shell slammed into the plane's mid-section, exploded, and nearly tore the Fortress in two. Huge sections of the waist on both sides instantly disappeared, control cables were cut, electrical and communications systems went powerless and silent, half of the bombs fell out of the bomb bay, the lower turret was jammed with the gunner inside, and the explosion blew deadly debris in all directions. The left waist gunner, S/Sgt. Elmer H.



Budapest South Railroad Bridge across the Danube River, mission 278, September 20, 1944. Bombs blanketed the bridge and approaches. (Courtesy of 2d Bomb Wing Museum)



Left: They brought "Sweet Pea" back. L to R: 2nd Lt. Guy M. Miller, P; 2nd Lt. Thomas M. Rybovich, CP; 1st Lt. Theodore Davich, N; S/Sgt. Robert R. Mullen, toggler; T/Sgt. Gerald E. McGuire, UTG; and Cpl. William F. Steuck, LTG. The pilots did a masterful and delicate job of flying. Lt. Miller controlled headings while Lt. Rybovich held altitude with power settings. Right: "Sweet Pea," number 42-38078, draws a curious and unbelieving crowd. (Group Photo)



Heavy smoke arises from Subotica, Yugoslavia marshalling yards, Mission 277, September 18, 1944. (Group Photo)

Buss, was killed instantly. The tail gunner, S/Sgt. James E Totty, was mortally wounded and died on the airplane despite first aid efforts by the crew. Right waist gunner, S/Sgt. James F. Maguire, had multiple wounds, but his back pack parachute, serving as a flak suit, saved his life. The radio operator, S/Sgt. Anthony Ferrara, was peppered like buckshot with shrapnel fragments in the chest.

The stunned crew started its battle for survival. Lt. Miller and his copilot 2nd Lt. Thomas M. Rybovich struggled for control of the airplane and began assessing what they had left to do it with. Most of the flight control cables were cut and his major control was through use of the engines, which miraculously, were undamaged. Lt. Miller thought about ordering bail out, but decided against that when he learned he had one dead, three wounded, and one stuck in the ball turret. The wounded were gathered in the radio room for first aid. The bombardier/gunner S/Sgt. Robert R. Mullen came back from the nose section and helped Sgt. Gerald E. McGuire, UTG,

bring the mortally wounded S/Sgt. Totty from the tail to the radio room. McGuire did finally succeed in freeing Cpl. William F. Steuck from the ball turret. Later it was learned that the turret gear ring was resting on three safety fingers, and they were all that kept the turret from falling out of the airplane, with Steuck inside. There were still six bombs hung up in the racks and Mullen climbed into the bomb bay and released them one by one with a screw driver.

Against seemingly impossible odds, Lts. Miller and Rybovich now faced the reality of trying to nurse their mangled airplane and its battered crew across several hundred miles of enemy territory and almost 600 miles back to base. Navigator, 2nd Lt. Theodore Davich, plotted a course, and the pilots very gingerly set what was left of "Sweet Pea" on the long trek homeward.

Crew members in other airplanes of the Group, who saw the gaping hole in "Sweet Pea," were certain the airplane could not survive, and expected the two parts to separate any minute.

When these crews returned to base, they reported that 078 would not be able to fly all the way home.

In their book "Bloody Skies," McGuire and Hadley wrote: "Someone noticed plane number 078 from the 429th. It was Sweet Pea, flown by Lts. Guy Miller and T. M. Rybovich. Sweet Pea had taken a direct hit right in the waist as it was dropping bombs. It was flying just ahead and to the right of us when hit. Then it wandered in front of us and back over to our right before the pilots could correct its flight. That's when I had a good look at it. There was a big hole in the waist. It looked like it was mortally hit, but miraculously Sweet Pea stayed in the air. Somehow, the pilots managed to get it under control, and they desperately tried to keep up with the Group. I believed Sweet Pea would never return to the field. Sweet Pea started straggling badly out of the formation. I took a closer look at it from the waist. It looked horrible. From my vantage point it looked like the entire waist had been shot out. I could not believe how a plane in that shape could fly. I don't know how the pilot kept the trim on it. A fifty caliber gun hung from the hole in the waist, dangling by its bungee cords and ammunition guides."²⁵

To everyone's utter amazement the airplane held together long enough — just barely. Over two hours later, "Sweet Pea" appeared on the horizon and Lt. Miller started those last tense moments of the journey. The airplane touched down safely, only then did those remaining, tenuous strands of metal, that held front and rear together, fold, and the rear half of the plane came to rest dragging on the ground.

When surveying the plane on the ground, Lt. Miller said "It was just like a wild dream. I still do not believe it actually happened. Luck was with us all the way. I was more than pleased with the conduct of the crew. Not one of them lost his head, and all did their jobs well. All I can say to them, is thanks from the bottom of my heart."²⁶

Major W. Randall Bedgood was leading the mission. When he looked back to see the damage to 078, he determined that the plane could not possibly return to base, and reported that opinion when he landed. He was amazed later when the engineering officer reported all planes had returned.

M/Sgt. Nilo Abel, the crew chief remembers the return of "Sweet Pea."

"That day I was sweating out the return of 078 which was already two hours late. I talked to some of the other crews as they returned, and they said 078 was coming in but it had been hit. I saw the plane coming in from the east, and I was sure it was 078. I borrowed Captain Moore's jeep and went to the dirt runway where it landed. The plane had broken down to the ground, but still held together. I was the first to reach her, and right after me, the ambulances, medics, doctors, engineering officer, and a lot of curious people.

I talked to Captain (then Lt.) Miller, the pilot, and he told me the only controls he had were aileron, and a little up elevator. A B-17 becomes nose heavy when you retard the throttles, and that's all the controls he had to land 078. He told me he was glad he had four engines running. It was an experience I'm sure he will never forget.

The airplane was then hauled down to the service squadron to be overhauled. They removed the fuselage at the radio room and put on another tail section, thus making it ready to fly. It flew a mission after that, then Group HQ thought it should be retired from missions, so the guns and turrets were removed and they made it into a transport plane. It was then used for errands and whatever came up."²⁷

On June 1, 1945, Capt. William R. Morton departed Amendola in "Sweet Pea," to pick up Gen. Strother for a flight to Casablanca. While on the landing approach at Bari, the entire left wing and the left side of the bomb bay caught fire. A normal landing, with wheels down, was made and the crew safely evacuated the airplane. The fire was so intense, the base fire fighters could not control it, and the airplane was destroyed in a few minutes.²⁸

It was an inexplicable twist of fate that an airplane, which so narrowly escaped destruction by the enemy, should self-destruct.

MISSION 280, SEPTEMBER 22, 1944 **MUNICH, GERMANY, INDUSTRIAL CENTER**

The target for this mission was the Munich Allach BMW plant. When the 2nd arrived, however, the target was pretty well covered with clouds, so the 500-pound bombs were dropped on the industrial center of the city. The Group was at 27,000 to 28,500 feet over the target, but the flak was fierce, and of the 26 planes that reached the target, 22 were damaged. All planes returned to base, but two men were wounded.²⁹

MISSION 281, SEPTEMBER 23, 1944 **BRUX, CZECHOSLOVAKIA** **SYNTHETIC OIL REFINERY**

Brux, in far western Czechoslovakia, was one of the longer missions of the war. The planes left Amendola at 6:49 A.M. and returned at 4:26 P.M., a long day's journey of wary formation flying. The 27 airplanes that reached the bombing point were led by Maj. Lawrence R. Jordan of the 96th Squadron. The target was completely obscured by clouds, so the PFF synchronous bombing method was used. Six to twelve Me-109s were sighted, but were engaged by friendly

fighters and made no passes at the formation. Four pilots landed at Italian airfields to refuel on the way home.³⁰

Endnotes:

¹ Wilmot, 437

² Craven & Cate, 299

³ Patrick J. Meagher, personal account, July 1991, furnished by his sister, Elizabeth M. Meagher, 48 Strong Street, Rochester, NY, 14621.

⁴ Rust, 37

⁵ Craven & Cate, 472

⁶ Mission Report

⁷ 96th Squadron History, microfilm fr. 626

⁸ Mission Report

⁹ Canavan, Group History, Sept 4, "44

¹⁰ Mission Report

¹¹ Ibid

¹² 96th Squadron History, microfilm fr. 626

¹³ Craven & Cate, 493, 494, 506, 515

¹⁴ Richards Missing Crew Report

¹⁵ Mission Report

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Richards Missing Crew Report; Cpl. Paul C. P. Reinhart Escape Statement, Hq. Fifteenth Air Force, September 18, 1944

¹⁸ Thomas F. Gulley, et al, "The Hour Has Come," (The 97th Bomb Group in WW II, Taylor Publishing, Dallas, TX, 1993) 198

¹⁹ Craven & Cate, 474, 475

²⁰ Rust, 37

²¹ Mission Report

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ McGuire & Hadley, 169-171

²⁶ Mission Report

²⁷ Nilo Abel, crew chief, 429th Squadron, "History of 078 — 'Sweet Pea',"

²⁸ William R. Morton, "Friends Bulletin," (Vol 12, No. 4, Winter, 1990, PO Box 1903, Wright/Patterson AFB, OH, 45433)

²⁹ Mission Report

³⁰ Ibid

OCTOBER 1944

The windy, rainy weather continued in "Sunny Italy" through the month of October. The temperature began to drop reminding the men to get busy preparing their living and working quarters for the winter. Weather was a main topic of conversation.¹ In spite of the weather, the Group flew eighteen missions, dropping bombs on targets in five different countries.

A new bombing concept was introduced to harass the foe, who was blessed with the same weather that caused the bomber crews such difficulties. Since the introduction of H2X-equipped (radar) airplanes, the Pathfinder crews had become adept at finding targets covered with clouds, so one or two airplanes could be sent out at a time, despite the weather. Usually taking off in the late afternoon, they arrived over their targets at night and stirred up the air raid warning facilities. Flak did not bother them much, as the Germans mostly fired at the lower altitudes used by British Wellington night bombers. These Pathfinder, soon dubbed "Lone Wolf," missions used minimum resources to produce high nuisance value. They kept defensive units alerted, and roused workers from sleep, while daylight raids did similarly to enemy defense units and forced workers to seek shelter. The combination had an adverse effect on enemy morale and production.

Besides frustration with the rain and muck, poor weather made the Group restive. Everyone felt that each day the bombers were grounded prolonged the war. Non-operational days were heavily devoted to training and efforts were made to keep the bombardiers "hot." Practice missions were flown when possible, and ground school classes were held regularly. A mobile training unit was brought in to train bombardiers, navigators, pilots, and copilots. Bombing accuracy of the Group remained at a high level.

Still, morale remained high. The men were kept entertained by radio broadcasts of the World Series, and when it was over, they turned to Saturday football games. Italian theatrical groups performed at the cave theater, and movies were attended by large audiences every show night. The various rest camps were well attended and 302 men enjoyed that diversion during the month.²

October 3 was the ninth straight day the Group was held on the ground because of weather. The rain continued to fall, and even though the crews were briefed that day for a mission, it was cancelled while they were making their way to the airplanes through the showers.

MISSION 282, OCTOBER 4, 1944

MUNICH, GERMANY

WEST MARSHALLING YARDS

MISSION 283, OCTOBER 4, 1944

CASARSA, ITALY, RAILROAD BRIDGE

The Group did get off the ground on October 4, putting up two missions. "A Force", with 24 airplanes, went to Munich while "B Force," with 14 planes, went to Casarsa. The A Force encountered flak over the target, and south of Salzburg, Austria. Flak at the target knocked down the 429th Squadron leader, 1st Lt. Robert B. Donovan and crew. Two other men were slightly wounded. Col Cullen led this force.

Lt. Donovan and crew in airplane 44-8043, were victims of a burst of flak over Munich just before bombs away. The left wing panel and aileron were blown off, the airplane stood up on the left wing, rolled over onto its back, then fell into a spin. Three crewmen managed to get out — 1st Lt. William M. Daly, N; 1st Lt. Henry (NMI) Safer, B; and Sgt. Robert R. Hindert, ROG — and were captured. This was Lt. Safer's and Sgt. Hindert's 50th mission. The remaining 7 crew members went down with the plane. It is believed they were uninjured and simply could not get out of the spinning airplane. It was one of the imponderable cruelties of war that three of those who fell to their death were also on their 50th mission — copilot 1st Lt. Juan J. Dyer; T/Sgt. Richard O. Pollari, UTG; and S/Sgt. Gerald V. Hamilton, TG. Lt. Donovan was on his 47th mission.³

Lt. Robert Donovan's older brother, Francis, was with the 757th Tank Battalion, in the U.S. Fifth Army in Italy. Francis fought at Cassino, and hauled ammunition from Naples to the Anzio beachhead. Later he took the first American tank through the Brenner Pass to meet up with the 7th Army. The two brothers had spent five days together in August. Brother Francis returned to the U.S. on November 16, 1945, got married,



Part of "The Flying Latrine" crew. Participants in the 1944 summer oil bombing campaign, the Privoser mission and the POW evacuation. L to R: Sgt. Thomas G. Schwarzlose, LTG; S/Sgt. George Leonard, Jr., LWG; 1st Lt. Ralph Q. Hutchens, P; T/Sgt. Ralph P. Jannarone, ROG; S/Sgt. Charles F. Hollenberg, TG; and 2nd Lt. Kenneth A. Lawlor, CP. (Courtesy of C. Hollenberg)

and named his first son Robert, after his brother. Twenty-one years to the day, on November 16, 1966, since his father came home from WW II, son Robert's remains were brought home from Vietnam. Robert was a member of the 101st Airborne Division. He was awarded the Silver Star posthumously.⁴

On their mission to the Casara bridge, one B-Force squadron made two bomb runs and the other three squadrons made three runs over the target to get good coverage with their 1,000-pound bombs. Capt. Shepard, 429th Squadron, led this mission.⁵

MISSION 284, OCTOBER 7, 1944

VIENNA, AUSTRIA, LOBAU OIL REFINERY

MISSION 285, OCTOBER 7, 1944

ERSEKIJVAR, HUNGARY

MARSHALLING YARDS

The weather turned bad and the Group was unable to fly on October 5th and 6th, but was scheduled for another double-mission day to catch up. Twenty-two, of twenty-three airplanes dispatched, bombed the oil refinery with a good pattern. Lt. Kwiatkowski, 96th Squadron, was forced to turn back five minutes from the IP when number 4 supercharger went out. On the way back, the crew selected a railroad junction at Czeleonolk, Hungary, and bombed it with good results.

Eighteen airplanes took off for the second mission of the day. Although the weather was clear at the target, two runs were made before dropping 90 thousand-pound bombs. The area was well covered and several fires were observed in the marshalling yards as the Group left. From their observation point at 19,000 feet, the crews saw a B-17 from another Group that had crash landed east of Vienna. There were two automobiles at the scene.⁶

MISSION 286, OCTOBER 10, 1944

TREVISO, ITALY, EAST AND SOUTH

MARSHALLING YARDS

The 8th and 9th were non-operational because of rain and low clouds. Twenty-seven air-

planes attacked the marshalling yards on the 10th. Three runs were made over the target. One squadron bombed on the first run and the others on the third run. Twelve crews bombed the east yards and fifteen bombed the south yards. The Group was over the target for twenty-seven minutes. This deference to accuracy could be tolerated in the absence of opposition.

One airplane brought back its bombs when the racks wouldn't release.⁷

MISSION 287, OCTOBER 11, 1944

SOUTHERN AUSTRIA, RAILROAD FACILITIES

The Group bombed a rail line as a target of opportunity when both the primary, an Ordnance Plant in Vienna, and the alternate were weathered over.

MISSION 288, OCTOBER 12, 1944

BOLOGNA, ITALY, ENEMY BIVOUAC AREA

The success of the Allied summer ground campaign led to optimistic predictions that the war in Italy was nearing an end. By early September it was hoped that the combined offensive of the British Eighth and American Fifth Armies would secure the destruction of Field Marshall Kesselring's armies and prevent their withdrawal to Germany through the Alpine passes. The Allied Tactical and Desert Air Forces had been heavily devoted to support of the ground campaign. They disrupted the German lines of communication and interdicted most of the Po River bridge crossings behind the German positions. The Eighth Army had advanced up the Adriatic side to a point opposite Bologna. The Allied strategy was for the Fifth Army to break through the center of the German lines at Bologna and fan out to the north to form the left prong of the pincers and catch the German armies trapped against the Po. Mission 298 to the enemy bivouac area near Bologna was in support of this Allied ground strategy. The peak air support operations occurred on October 12, when strategic air combined its efforts with the on-



S/Sgt. A.Z. McKool with his 50 – mission smile. (Courtesy of R. Bedgood)

going campaign of tactical air. Fifteenth Air Force sent 826 bombers to attack ten designated enemy positions. The 2nd made two runs on the bivouac area with 42 airplanes before dropping 6,048 twenty-pound fragmentation bombs.

The Fifth Army Intelligence summary described the air support on October 12 as eminently successful, and that it materially aided the Fifth Army in taking important new positions. The air assault was also credited with raising the morale of the Allied soldiers and having a demoralizing effect on the enemy. Unfortunately the Fifth Army, weakened by withdrawal of forces for the invasion of southern France, was unable to fully exploit the advantages gained by the air strikes and could not take Bologna.

The optimism about an early conclusion to the war in Italy was premature. Resolution of the Allied strategy in favor of invading southern France rather than the Balkans, bad weather, terrain, successful use of ferries and pontoon bridges over the Po and their considerable fighting capabilities, all worked to favor the Germans and enabled them to prolong the Italian war for another seven months.⁸ The 2nd would have occasion to go back to northern Italy several more times during that period.

Some flak was encountered over the target and 2nd Lt. R. G. Williams, 49th Squadron made an emergency landing at Falconera, Italy, with a mortally wounded left waist gunner, Cpl. M. J. Hanchak.⁹

MISSION 289, OCTOBER 13, 1944

BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY

SOUTH OIL REFINERY

MISSION 290, OCTOBER 13, 1944

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

FLORISDORF OIL REFINERY

October 13 was another two-mission day with 24 B-17s of the "Red Force," going to Blechhammer, and 18 of the "Blue Force," to Vienna. Both targets were obscured by clouds, so the bombing was by PFF with unobserved results. Three airplanes on the Blechhammer mission bombed targets of opportunity. Two men were slightly wounded by flak. Two airplanes bombed targets of opportunity on the Vienna mission. One scored a direct hit on a bridge, and the other left three aircraft burning on an unidentified air-drome.¹⁰

MISSION 291, OCTOBER 14, 1944
BRATISLAVA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA
CITY & TARGETS OF OPPORTUNITY

The Blechhammer north oil refinery was rescheduled as the primary target. The Intelligence briefing characterized it as still the highest priority target and it was essential that it be destroyed as soon as possible.¹¹ In September the CCS had ordered the strategic air forces to make the synthetic oil plants their highest priority. Poor weather and competing demands for ground support had limited response to the order. The bomb tonnage directed against oil in September was therefore less than in July and August. This allowed the 150,000 workers, that Albert Speer had mobilized, to repair bomb damage sufficiently to recover part of the lost production. Recovery continued through October and November. While bombing did great damage, it was seldom sufficient to keep plants out of production for more than two or three weeks. It was apparent that to keep plants idle took a sustained effort which could not be maintained during the deteriorating weather conditions.¹² These conditions set the pattern of the campaign against the synthetic oil plants through the end of the year — periodic, but not decisive, raids as weather permitted.

The formation turned back from Blechhammer because of weather and the 36-ship bomber force went foraging for targets of opportunity. Five attacked the marshalling yards at Komaron, Hungary, thirteen attacked Bratislava, eight bombed Borzavar, Hungary, six bombed Papa, Hungary, one attacked a highway bridge in Hungary, and four attacked other targets of opportunity.¹³

MISSION 292, OCTOBER 16, 1944
SALZBURG, AUSTRIA

WEST MARSHALLING YARDS

MISSION 293, OCTOBER 17, 1944

BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY

SOUTH OIL REFINERY

MISSION 294, OCTOBER 20, 1944

BRUX, CZECHOSLOVAKIA

SYNTHETIC OIL REFINERY

All three of these missions were briefed and launched against oil refineries. Mission 292 was to have gone to Brux, Czechoslovakia. For reasons that are not given, the Group did not bomb Brux (although the 97th did on the same date) but turned to the alternate, and bombed the marshalling yards at Salzburg with good results. Twenty-seven airplanes were damaged by flak, and two men were slightly wounded, but all planes returned to base.

Such was not the case the following day when two airplanes from the 96th Squadron collided over the target and went down. 1st Lt. Arnold T. Kwiatkowski and his crew were flying airplane 44-6379 and 2nd Lt. Donald L. Peart and his crew were in airplane 42-107006, "Old Bird." Coming off the target, the squadron was dispersed because of bad weather. The right wing of "Old Bird," collided with Kwiatkowski's airplane. Following the collision, Kwiatkowski's airplane broke in two at the waist door. The tail

section floated away and the front half plummeted straight down and disappeared into the clouds. Tail gunner S/Sgt. Jacob P. Fiebleman was blown out of the tail section. He and the left waist gunner, S/Sgt. Richard J. Radlinger, were the only survivors from Lt. Kwiatkowski's crew.¹⁴

One eyewitness reported that Lt. Peart's plane, "Old Bird," was hit by flak just back of the number 4 engine, the right wing dropped down, and "Old Bird" disappeared from sight. Flak may have been a contributing cause of the collision. Later, Peart was heard to call the leader to ask the Group to slow down so he could keep up. He said he had collided with 379 and one engine was out as a result and another was windmilling. He also asked for help from the escort. The Group did not see 006 again, but at 5:45 P.M. a message was received from 5th Wing HQ that P-38s had escorted the crippled bomber, and had seen nine parachutes leave the airplane over northeast Austria.¹⁵

All nine of Lt. Peart's crew (he had no left waist gunner) bailed out successfully and were captured. T/Sgt. Orrie C. Lee, UTG, in a statement after liberation reported that he had seen T/Sgt. James (NMI) Growney, ROG, in Stalag Luft IV. Sgt. Growney was in another compound. Sgt. Lee was told by American POWs in Growney's compound that Sgt. Growney tried to escape by going over the fence and was shot by German guards. Lee heard later that Sgt. Growney had an arm amputated as a result of the shooting and was in a nearby hospital. He did survive.¹⁶

Airplane number 440, 2nd Lt. Owen D. Massie, Jr., pilot, 20th Squadron landed at Vis Island because of fuel shortage. Shortly after landing, the crew saw a B-24 crash into a mountain on the island. They saw seven chutes, and one man without a chute. The pilot and copilot went down with the plane.¹⁷

Because of cloud cover, 33 airplanes used PFF synchronous bombing over Brux with no observed results. Two airplanes bombed marshalling yards as opportunity targets. Several bombers were slightly damaged by flak, but a primary concern was fuel shortage on the return. Initially, 8 airplanes were reported missing. Later it was learned that 7 had landed at Italian airdromes to the north to refuel. These 7 all returned that evening. The 8th was forced to ditch in the Adriatic.

Airplane 42-39999, of the 49th Squadron, piloted by 1st Lt. E. W. Holtz, had number 1 engine hit by flak over the target. The engine kept running, but could not maintain power. Lt. Holtz descended to 15,000 feet and headed for Italy. Later, number 4 engine quit, then number 1 quit entirely. Now down to only two engines, the airplane continued to lose altitude, and when it reached 6,000 feet, the number 3 engine quit from fuel starvation. By that time the crew was over the Adriatic and thirty miles from the closest landing ground. Lt. Holtz decided to ditch while he still had some power left. Copilot, 2nd Lt. W. R. Myers, was in contact with air-sea rescue so they could pinpoint the crew's location. At 400 feet, the last engine stopped, and Lt. Holtz made a power-out descent to a safe splash-down. The crew split into the dinghies and a short time later Spitfires were circling over them. In about 30 minutes, a Catalina landed, picked them

up, and took them to the Foggia Station Hospital for observation. The Group had taken off at 6:54 A.M. Holtz and crew ditched at about 6:00 P.M., after approximately eleven hours and six minutes of hard combat flying.

The air crews appreciated two days off after the trip to Brux.

MISSION 295, OCTOBER 23, 1944
PILSON, CZECHOSLOVAKIA
SKODA ARMAMENT WORKS

In late September Gen. Spaatz issued a directive to the Eighth and Fifteenth Air Forces, that raised specified ordnance depots, tank assembly plants and truck works to second target priority after the oil offensive. The hope was to deny the German armies needed heavy equipment replacements.¹⁸ Most of the targets were in the Eighth's area of operation. The raid on the Skoda works was, in a small way, complementary to the target priority. It was the largest, undamaged armament plant in German-occupied territory. A variety of essential armaments were manufactured there. The plant employed 28,000 workers, and covered 2,274,000 square yards of which 588,000 were built up. It had supplied German armies in both world wars. The mission produced unknown results after the nine hour and twenty-seven minute round trip. The 33 planes over the target dropped their 1000-pound bombs by PFF, when weather precluded visual bombing. There was no fighter or flak opposition. Continued bad weather prevented follow-up reconnaissance to assess results of the raid.¹⁹ This lengthy mission was the last one flown by massed bombers of the Group in October. Target planners took what advantage they could of the rainy, cloudy weather over bases and targets alike, to schedule Pathfinder nuisance raids.

MISSION 296, OCTOBER 25, 1944
KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA

AIRCRAFT FACTORY - ONE AIRPLANE

MISSION 297, OCTOBER 26, 1944

INNSBRUCK, AUSTRIA

MARSHALLING YARDS - TWO AIRPLANES

MISSION 298, OCTOBER 28, 1944

KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA

AIRCRAFT FACTORY - TWO AIRPLANES

MISSION 299, OCTOBER 28, 1944

MUNICH, GERMANY, WEST

MARSHALLING YARDS - TWO AIRPLANES

The Klagenfurt factory manufactured control surfaces and wing tips for Me-109s. This was an unusual mission in that one plane from each of the six B-17 Groups in the 5th Wing were scheduled to bomb at ten minute intervals, with 500 foot altitude separation. Flying without escort and depending on cloud cover for passive defense, pilots were given the discretion to abandon the mission if the forecasted cloud cover was not available. Col. John Ryan came from 5th Wing Headquarters to fly the first plane from the 2nd. He and his crew were over the target at 10:54 P.M., and dropped thirty-five 100-pound GP bombs from 24,130 feet by PFF. They en-

countered no resistance and were back at the base for a late midnight snack.²⁰

On the next three missions in this series, two crews from each 5th Wing Group were scheduled. On the Innsbruck mission, crews were to bomb at one minute intervals. Capt. Henry J. Wallet and crew from the 96th Squadron, and 1st Lt. R. S. Turner and crew, of the 49th Squadron, flew the mission. The weather over the continent was so heavy, they were able to fly the mission during daylight hours. When they arrived over Innsbruck, however, the weather cleared somewhat, and they bombed by visual means from 27,000 and 28,000 feet. Enemy flak gunners also had visual targets. Both airplanes were damaged, and two men wounded, one, S/ Sgt. Otto Pierce, LWG, on Capt. Wallet's crew was seriously wounded. The target was fairly well covered.²¹

The Wing two-ship Pathfinders returned to Klagenfurt on October 28. Both 2nd Bomb Group crews were from the 20th Squadron. 1st Lt. Isaac C. Pederson and 1st Lt. Rarey and their crews flew this daylight mission. They used radar for bombing. Both planes were slightly damaged by flak, but there were no injuries.²²

Lts. Salmons and R. S. Turner and crews flew the mission to Munich. It was a night raid and the bombing was through the clouds by radar. Some flak came up but the planes returned untouched.

1st Lt. John J. Flynn, navigator, from the 429th Squadron, describes his impressions of a pathfinder night mission: "In the afternoon, I was notified that I was to be one of a crew selected to fly on a single aircraft night combat mission. I felt glad of the opportunity to be on this mission, as due to bad weather, most of us had been sitting on the ground for several days. Also, the novelty of the mission appealed to me. It would be my first night mission, and I was curious to see what the boys in the RAF went through.

As the briefing at Group Operations progressed, I became uneasy. We were briefed for a lot of flak and night fighters. The weather would be in our favor as far as protection from enemy fighters was concerned, but the cumulonimbus clouds we were briefed for, did not appeal to me at all. We could also expect a pretty low ceiling on our return to base. I think most of us were pretty nervous during the briefing. It looked like a rough trip.

Most of the tenseness and nervousness disappeared when we got down to the plane. It was just getting dark when we took off. We circled the field area for about an hour to gain our desired altitude for departure. As we climbed out over the Adriatic we flew into a layer of stratus clouds, and this was one time we welcomed them, since we knew we were safe from enemy fighters as long as we had the protection of the clouds. As we neared the coast of Yugoslavia, we broke out into the clear. We could see several thunderclouds along the coast. It was a pretty sight, although we could not get very enthusiastic about that. The crew made several comments about the brightness of the night and the lowness of the cloud and each of us knew what the others were thinking; our silver ship was sticking out like a sore thumb in the light of the moon.

As we neared the target area, though, a pleasant sight greeted us, there a was layer of clouds at approximately our altitude.

We were soon flying over the tops of the clouds and going down the bomb run sweating out the flak, but none came. We dropped our bombs and rallied off the target. As we flew past Vienna, we could see flak bursting in the air above the clouds, and we saw the glow of searchlights on the clouds. We were on our way home now, and had only the weather to sweat out. We flew through clouds part of the way, and there was considerable turbulence until we broke out at about 2,000 feet.

On the interrogation sheet, this mission looks like a "milk run" — no flak, no fighters, but most of us sweated this one out plenty. I wonder what it would have been like if Mother Nature had not been good to us."²³

The Group spent the last three days of October trying to complete its 300th mission. A single-plane Pathfinder mission would not suffice for this important milestone. The Group took off on the 29th and again on the 30th, found the weather impassable both days, and was forced to return with bombs still in the racks. The weather was worse on October 31 and the month closed with the airplanes completely weather-bound.

In spite of the rainy weather, a new runway was being rushed to completion. The old runway had become rough and very difficult to negotiate on takeoff and landing.²⁴

Endnotes:

¹ Robert P. Canavan, *Group History narrative for October 1944*, (AFHRA Maxwell AFB, AL) microfilm reel No. B0041

² *Ibid*

³ Richards, *Missing Crew Report*.

⁴ Pat (Donovan) Moran, letter, April 10, 1993

⁵ 429th Squadron History, October 1944, (AFHRA Maxwell AFB, AL) microfilm reel No. A0613, fr. 216

⁶ Canavan, *Group History*, October 7, 1944

⁷ *Mission Report*

⁸ Craven & Cate, 448, 453, 454

⁹ *Mission Report*

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² Wilmot, 551, 552

¹³ Canavan *Group History*; *Mission Reports*

¹⁴ Richards *Missing Crew Report*

¹⁵ Canavan, *Group History*

¹⁶ Richards *Missing Crew Report*

¹⁷ *Mission Report*

¹⁸ Craven & Cate, 646-648

¹⁹ *Mission Report*

²⁰ Canavan *Group History*

²¹ *Mission Report*

²² *Ibid*

²³ Canavan *Group History*, October narrative report

²⁴ 20th Squadron History, (AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, AL) microfilm reel No. A0542, fr. 1565-1566

PROPOSALS TO MOVE THE FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE

The fall and winter weather of 1944-45 was believed (at least by AAF planners and personnel) to be one of the worst ever recorded in Europe — shades of September-November 1918 in France. The planners, anticipating the coming bad weather, made many proposals to keep the bomb-

ers of the 8th and 15th Air Forces active over Germany. One proposal was to move the 15th Air Force from southern Italy to southern France where it would have easier access to German targets and would not have to fly over the Alps, where flying conditions were often prohibitive.

Gens. Spaatz and Eaker opposed such a plan on the basis that moving would require too much time and logistical support to provide adequate bases in France. Also pointed out, was the obvious fact that the Fifteenth would not be able to reach vital targets in eastern Germany and Czechoslovakia from French bases. The proposal was dropped, but another proposition was discussed, that of placing a few groups in Russian-controlled Hungary.

Because of opposition, these proposals were abandoned.¹

NOVEMBER 1944

The deteriorating weather forced increased reliance on Pathfinder bombing and the resultant decrease in bombing accuracy. During the last quarter of 1944, the percentage of Eighth Air Force bombs that fell within 1,000 feet of the target was 38, 25, and 25 respectively for each month. The Fifteenth's record was somewhat better at 40, 36 and 36 for the same months. Radar bombing was known to be less accurate than visual bombing, but the loss in accuracy was accepted in preference to no bombing at all during the prolonged periods of bleak winter weather.²

The successes of the Allied summer and fall ground campaigns produced another disturbing phenomena for air crews. As the German armies were pushed back into smaller and smaller perimeters, their artillery, including antiaircraft artillery, became more and more concentrated. This condition, coupled with the German efforts to increase the antiaircraft defenses around vital targets to compensate for the dwindling effectiveness of the Luftwaffe, meant that flak became more deadly than ever.

The month of November started out with better weather and the Group was able to fly missions on the first seven days, although two of them were nuisance raids. Oil targets were of the most importance now and the Group flew 13 missions to refineries and storage facilities during the month.

MISSION 300, NOVEMBER 1, 1944

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

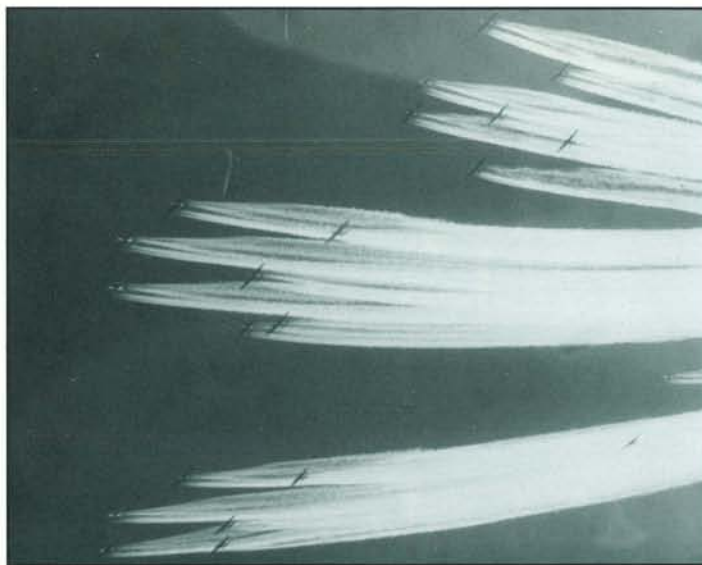
SOUTH ORDNANCE DEPOT

The long-awaited mission 300 came on the first day of the month. Great celebrations took place in the officer's club and all five enlisted clubs. General Twining, along with other high ranking officers, came to help celebrate. Twining also sent the following teletype message:

IT IS A NOTABLE COINCIDENCE THAT THE SECOND BOMBARDMENT GROUP COMPLETED ITS THREE HUNDREDTH MISSION ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE. THE MOST EXCELLENT RECORD OF THE GROUP THROUGH-



49th Squadron B-17G and the snow covered Alps. (Group Photo)



Contrails over Austria. (Courtesy of L. Moore)



Lead crew, mission 300, Nov. 1, 1944, to Vienna. Standing L to R: Maj. W. Randall Bedgood, CP; Col. Paul T. Cullen, Gp. Cmdr. P; Capt. John G. Hofmann, B; 1st Lt. J.S. Merritt, N; Capt. J. C. Whitley, O/TG. Front L to R: Not individually identified, T/Sgt. L.F. Ausmus, UTG; S/Sgt. J.O. Bishop, RWG; S/Sgt. R. M. Mullen III, LWG; T/Sgt. D.A. Hempstead, ROG; and far right, 1st Lt. R.E. Johnson, RN. (Group Photo)



300th mission celebration. Brig. Gen. Lawrence, 5th Wing Commander, addresses the gathering at the officer's club, while Gen. Twining enjoys an after dinner cigar. (Group Photo)

OUT THE NORTH AFRICAN, SICILIAN, AND ITALIAN CAMPAIGNS HAS ESTABLISHED FOR IT AN OUTSTANDING REPUTATION FOR EFFICIENCY AND AGGRESSIVENESS IN COMBAT. MY CONGRATULATIONS ON A SPLENDID ACCOMPLISHMENT.³

Mission 300 was not celebrated by several combat crewmen, however. One, T/Sgt. R. J. Vandling, UTG, 49th Squadron, died aboard the airplane from anoxia, and six men were MIA, having bailed out of airplanes that returned to base. Nine airplanes were damaged by flak, three of them severely.

Thirty-six airplanes were dispatched on this mission, and all of them returned to base, although six had to land at other Italian fields because of gas shortage. The weather en route was very bad, and the Group was somewhat scattered before arriving in the target area. Twenty planes bombed the primary target by PFF, nine planes

from the 96th Squadron became separated in the weather and bombed the marshalling yards at Graz, Austria, and five others bombed rail targets of opportunity.⁴

1st Lt. William C. Donnell was pilot of airplane number 42-97438, 96th Squadron, from which part of the crew bailed out. He explained how this occurred: "Before the IP was reached, the number 3 engine started running roughly and smoking. Shortly afterward the engine got worse, the copilot hit the feathering switch, but it wouldn't feather. The engine was vibrating badly. Pieces of the cylinders flew out and the cowling came off. The prop shaft was red hot, so I gave the command to bail out, and five of the crew members, the navigator, bombardier, upper turret gunner, lower turret gunner, and radio operator did so southeast of Wiener Neustadt. The pilot's inter-com was out but the copilot called the rest of the crew and told them to stay with the plane. Shortly, the prop came off and that eliminated the main mechanical

difficulty. However, without a navigator, we took a heading of about 195 degrees and hit the Italian coast near Brindisi. We turned N.W. [northwest] to Bari, Italy, where we landed due to lack of gas."⁵

Those who bailed out were 2nd Lt. Roy L. Compton, N; 1st Lt. Charles W. Melvin, B; T/Sgt. Jack D. Gruner, UTG; S/Sgt. John J. Meringola, LTG; and T/Sgt. Stanley J. Pociask, ROG. A report of the 2621 Graves Investigation Unit, Budapest, Hungary, October 26, 1945, quotes native eyewitnesses as seeing three parachutes descending from an airplane at very high altitude on November 1, near Marcali, Hungary. Two men landed in a forest area and one landed near a small village. One was captured almost immediately and one who landed in the forest was captured two days later. It was another three weeks before the remains of the second parachutist were discovered in the woods. By then his belongings had disappeared and no parachute was found.

The remains were examined by Dr. Vadja



1st Lt. Thomas M. Rybovich and crew returned from Vienna on the 300th Group mission, November 1, 1944, minus a propeller lost to flak damage and without the bombardier. In the confusion of the emergency, 2nd Lt. Harold B. Ayers, B, bailed out prematurely. He later returned to the Group. Kneeling L to R: Sgt. W.B. Lex, RWG; Sgt. J.L. Staup, UTG; Sgt. E.B. Hawkins, ROG; and 2nd Lt. Donald F. Maine, N. Standing L to R: Sgt. H.F. Gregg, LTG; Sgt. A.G. Blakey, TG; 2nd Lt. P.W. Farwell, CP; and Lt. Rybovich. This airplane, No. 44-6198, "Dollar 98," was later lost to flak on mission 362 to Vienna, February 21, 1945. (Courtesy of R. Bedgood)



Group Exec., Maj. Charles Clapp swears in Paul Strate as a 2nd Lieutenant. Strate flew fifty missions as a T/Sgt. radio operator/gunner. He was born in Hamburg, Germany, and listened to German radio communications during missions to gather intelligence, such as anti-aircraft gun locations. (Group Photo)

Lasalo from the village of Balatonkeresztur and were later buried at Marcali. The remains were disinterred by the Graves Unit and the name "J. J. Meringola," ASN "32425100" was found in seven places on the trousers. The name and serial number matched those of S/Sgt. Meringola, the LTG on Lt. Donnell's crew. The other members of the crew who bailed out became POWs⁶

A very similar emergency happened to 1st Lt. T. M. Rybovich (the copilot who helped bring "Sweet Pea" back to base on September 21) and crew in airplane 44-6198, 429th Squadron, that resulted in premature bailout of the bombardier, 2nd Lt. Harold E. Ayers.

The airplane received a flak hit over the target that caused loss of oil in engines three and four. The propeller on number three engine eventually froze. Concerned about what might happen if the propeller flew off, Lt. Rybovich instructed the navigator, 2nd Lt. D. F. Maine, and bombardier Ayers to leave the nose section, and ordered the rest of the crew to prepare to abandon the airplane if it became necessary.

Lts. Maine and Ayres came to the flight deck. Maine stood behind the pilots and Ayers stood under the upper turret. The frozen propeller was now twisted toward the fuselage at an angle of about 20 degrees. The two pilots decided to leave their seats and stand on the flight deck within reach of the autopilot. With the pilots out of their seats, Lts. Maine and Ayers, neither of whom had on headsets, were forced to the rear in the crowded flight deck area. Lt. Maine motioned Ayers to the rear several times. Seeing the pilots leave their seats and Maine's motioning to the rear, Lt. Ayers went back to the waist, still without a headset and thus not on the intercom. In the meantime the enlisted crew was busily jettisoning equipment to reduce weight. A few minutes after Ayers left the

flight deck, the propeller flew off, and without any order to do so, Lt. Ayers bailed out. The propeller did not damage the airplane, and the crew returned to their positions. Only then did Lt. Rybovich learn that Ayers had bailed out. The enlisted crew members who saw Lt. Ayers bail out could not see if his chute opened because of restricted visibility. The airplane was then over Yugoslavia.⁷ Lt. Ayers was safely evacuated and returned to Italy. Upon his return he stated that he had bailout at 26,000 feet due to lack of oxygen. He remained unconscious for 24 days and remembered nothing from the time he bailed out until he came to in a hospital.⁸

MISSION 301, NOVEMBER 2, 1944 MOOSBIERBAUM, AUSTRIA CHEMICAL WORKS

One crew from each of three squadrons, the 20th, 96th, and 429th, took off for this night mission to bomb the chemical works at Moosbierbaum. The 96th crew had to return early, but the other two were over the target at 8:44 P.M., and dropped twenty 500-pound bombs from 24,500 feet and 28,500 feet by radar, with no observation of the results because of the dense cloud cover.⁹

MISSION 302, NOVEMBER 3, 1944 VIENNA, AUSTRIA SOUTH ORDNANCE DEPOT

This mission was flown by six airplanes taking off at 3 minute intervals beginning at 6:42 A.M. One of the bombers returned early, three bombed the primary target by radar, and the other two bombed the marshalling yards at Graz, Austria, one visually and one by radar. The cloud cover prevented observation of the results.¹⁰

MISSION 303, NOVEMBER 4, 1944

REGENSBURG, GERMANY
WINTERHAFEN OIL STORAGE
MISSION 304, NOVEMBER 5, 1944
VIENNA, AUSTRIA
FLORISDORF OIL REFINERY
MISSION 305, NOVEMBER 6, 1944
MOOSBIERBAUM, AUSTRIA, OIL REFINERY

Thirty-five of the thirty-six aircraft sent to Regensburg reached the target, but were forced to resort to PFF synchronous bombing because of heavy clouds. The flak was inaccurate and there were no injuries or losses.

The Fifteenth Air Force started its November oil bombing with a major force of 500 heavies against the Florisdorf crude oil refinery. They dropped 1,100 tons of bombs. The 2nd attacked the target with 23 planes using radar to bomb through a solid overcast. The flak was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate. Nine airplanes received minor damage, but all crews escaped without injury.

Enemy fighters did make a rare and unusual attack on the Group over western Hungary during the mission. 1st Lt. H. Johnson Jr., 20th Squadron, was out of formation and was attacked by what the crew thought were 9 Me-109s. The enemy aircraft made several passes, singly and in pairs. Lt. Johnson was able to get into formation with a B-24 group and the enemy attacks stopped. On November 11, Lt. Johnson landed at a fighter base, and in conversation with the pilots found they confirmed his suspicion that the attack on the November 4 was by Hurricanes with British markings flown by the enemy. He thought these airplanes were Hurricanes at the time of the attack, but was not certain. The fighter pilots, escorting the mission, remembered the

attack and had tried to intercept the bogus "friendlies," but were unable to do so before they disappeared into the clouds. The fighter pilots confirmed that the Germans were also using captured P-51s the same way.¹¹

A major bomber force returned to the Vienna area November 6 and dropped 403 tons on the Moosbierbaum refinery.¹² The 2nd put 25 airplanes over the target. All bombing was by radar because of the continued solid overcast. Eight airplanes attacked alternates, including six that struck the marshalling yards at Graz, Austria. The bombs were observed to fall across the target. Flak over Moosbierbaum was much the same as the crews had come to expect. Thirteen airplanes were damaged, three of them severely. 1st Lt. B. L. Kreimeyer, 20th Squadron, had three engines on his B-17 start detonating badly thirty minutes before target time. He had to use maximum power and jettison part of his bomb load to stay with the formation. The crew dropped their remaining bombs over Moosbierbaum, however, the 20th Squadron did not. Lt. Kreimeyer stayed with the Squadron as it proceeded to bomb the alternate marshalling yards at Graz. Going over the target at Graz, flak severely damaged the right wing, cut some gas lines and damaged some gas tanks. The number 1 engine had to be feathered and Lt. Kreimeyer made a safe emergency landing at Vis Island, Yugoslavia. The crew, except for the bombardier (no explanation given), flew a 301st Group B-17 back to Amendola that evening. Their airplane had to remain at Vis for repairs.¹³

MISSION 306, NOVEMBER 7, 1944

MIRABOR, YUGOSLAVIA

SOUTH MARSHALLING YARDS

MISSION 307, NOVEMBER 7, 1944

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

FLORISDORF OIL REFINERY

This date marked the 200th Group mission flown from Amendola. The double mission included 28 airplanes sent to Mirabor and 3 Group Pathfinders joined 3 Pathfinders from each of the other five bomb groups of the 5th Wing for the raid on Florisdorf.

Photo reconnaissance showed 900 cars in the yards at Mirabor. The Germans were using the facilities extensively for the retreat from the Balkans. The formation made two runs over the target before releasing the bombs. The effort paid off and bombs fell in the target area and several fires were started. The intense and accurate barrage of flak wounded five crewmen and claimed the life of 2nd Lt. Charles H. Ingles, a copilot in the 96th Squadron. No planes were lost and there were no enemy fighters.

The three Pathfinders attacked Florisdorf using radar and returned safely.¹⁴

MISSION 308, NOVEMBER 11, 1944

SALZBURG, AUSTRIA, MARSHALLING YARDS

Weather preempted operations for three days, then largely nullified the mission to Brux on November 11. Nine planes became separated from the Group in weather, and returned early. The remaining twenty-seven could not locate the target, even after three bomb runs, because of dense cloud cover, so the formation proceeded to bomb the alternate marshalling yards at Salzburg, Austria. The bombing was by PFF through solid clouds.¹⁵

MISSION 309, NOVEMBER 13, 1944

BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY

SOUTH OIL REFINERY

Four airplanes from each of the six 5th Wing groups flew this night intruder mission. The four from the 2nd took off from Amendola at 10:26 P.M. on the 12th, and two returned at 7:15 A.M., on the 13th. Two crews attacked the primary target, Blechhammer, while one attacked Karvina, Poland, and one attacked Gleiwitz, Germany. All of them dropped their bombs by PFF from very high altitudes — 27,000 to 29,200 feet. Explosions and large fires were seen at Blechhammer, but bombing results could not be seen at the alternates.

Two of the attacking airplanes did not return to base because of gas shortage. Airplane 44-8195, flown by 1st Lt. Isaac G. Pederson and crew, 20th Squadron, was ditched in the Adriatic 3 miles south of Manfredonia. Approaching the

primary target on the bomb run at high altitude, the bomb sight became frozen, so the bombardier dropped by PFF even though he could see the lights of the refinery. The bombs strung across the length of the refinery. Pederson believed that two engines were hit by flak over the target because they failed on the trip home. A third engine failed from lack of fuel, and the pilot ordered the crew into their ditching positions. The plane hit the water at 7:18 A.M., and a short time later the crew was picked up by Italian fishing boats, brought to Manfredonia, and then to the base. Two crew members were slightly injured during ditching as was Cpl. George Barrett, a correspondent for *Yank Magazine*, who was along as an observer. Lt. Byron S. Martin, the radar navigator, received moderately severe injuries from the ditching.¹⁶

Airplane 44-8189 was flown by 1st Lt. Sterling G. Trump and crew from the 429th Squadron. This airplane was crash landed at the northwest tip of Lake Lesina (about 25 miles from the base) when it ran out of fuel. None of the crew was hurt in the landing, and they brought the bombsight with them when they returned to the base. Over the target area, the PFF system went out and the crew was unable to pick out the primary target. A large square pattern of lights was seen through the clouds, which they believed to be Gleiwitz, Germany, so they dropped their 10 bombs there from 29,200 feet.

When Lt. Trump and crew were north of Budapest, the tail radar system flashed green indicating an enemy night fighter was approaching. When the pilots dove and turned the airplane, the fighter alert signal disappeared, only to return later. The pursuit lasted until 44-8189 approached the Yugoslavian coast, but the enemy pursuer never came close enough to make the red signal appear.¹⁷ This was Lt. Trumps last mission.

MISSION 310, NOVEMBER 15, 1944

LINZ, AUSTRIA, BENZOL PLANT

Six airplanes each from 5th Wing groups were sent on this bad-weather, daylight mission. One 2nd Bomb Group crew returned early. The other five bombed the target by radar. One crew was



Returned to base with wounded. (Group Photo)



The men who captured the war on film. The Group Photo Section, Amendola. Front L to R: John Petek; Robert Lewis; Edward Johnson; Herbert Morgan; Capt. Paul Collins; Louis Panero; Harold Sells; Robert Munger. Back L to R: Norbut; Vern Sandstrom, McCary; Garwood Walp; James Moore; Lewis Moore; Robert Pugh. (Group Photo)

unable to release all bombs, so dropped five of them on the Kapfenberg, Austria, Steel Works.¹⁸

MISSION 311, NOVEMBER 16, 1944

MUNICH, GERMANY
WEST MARSHALLING YARDS

After several days of bad weather, the entire Group was able to fly again on the 16th, and the marshalling yards were observed to be well hit by PFF. A hole in the clouds provided a view of the bombing results. One airplane dropped bombs on the Brenner Pass railroad line, but could not observe results. Another bombed the marshalling yards at Villach, Austria and observed one hit in the yards.¹⁹

MISSION 312, NOVEMBER 17, 1944

SALZBURG, AUSTRIA, MARSHALLING YARDS

The primary target, Brux, Czechoslovakia was unavailable, so the Group turned to bomb the Salzburg marshalling yards. The formation was using the synchronous bombing method whereby the planes released their bombs simultaneously with those of the lead plane. When the bomb bay doors came open on the bomb run, the bombs in the lead plane released prematurely because of a malfunction. The first, second and third squadrons released their bombs when they saw the bombs fall from the lead plane. The bombs fell into a wooded mountain area 6 to 8 miles south of the target. The fourth squadron of ten airplanes attacked the Villach, Austria marshalling yards with good results.²⁰

MISSION 313, NOVEMBER 18, 1944

VIENNA, AUSTRIA
FLORISDORF OIL REFINERY

Thirty-five airplanes dropped 418 five-hundred pound bombs by PFF with unobserved results.²¹

MISSION 314, NOVEMBER 18, 1944

VISEGRAD, YUGOSLAVIA
TROOP CONCENTRATIONS

Eight bombers each from four groups attacked four targets in Yugoslavia. The 2nd struck troop concentration areas near Visegrad with 160 two-hundred-fifty-pound bombs after making two runs at the target. There was flak, but no injuries or damage was reported.²²

MISSION 315, NOVEMBER 19, 1944

VIENNA, AUSTRIA
WINTERHAFEN OIL REFINERY
MISSION 316, NOVEMBER 19, 1944
FERRARA, ITALY, RAILROAD BRIDGE

The oil refinery was attacked by 22 planes that used PFF synchronous bombing through heavy clouds with no results visible. The flak was heavy, intense and accurate resulting in wounds to five crewmen.

The clouds were so dense, the bridge at

Ferrara could not be located, and the 18 planes returned all of their bombs to base. While a mission was recorded for the Group, crews were not given credit for the aborted six-hour mission.²³

MISSION 317, NOVEMBER 20, 1944

BRNO, CZECHOSLOVAKIA
MARSHALLING YARDS

Blechhammer continued to be a priority target and was the primary one for this mission. Despite prior damage, the south refinery produced approximately 20,000 tons of gasoline per month, and repeated efforts were made to put Blechhammer out of operation. Weather prevented the Group from reaching the target so it turned to the alternate, the marshalling yards at Brno, Czechoslovakia, and thirty-three planes bombed through the clouds by radar. One airplane, that released only half its bomb load over Brno because of a malfunction, dropped the remaining half over a bridge on the way home. One plane bombed Trnava, Czechoslovakia.²⁴

MISSION 318, NOVEMBER 22, 1944

MUNICH, GERMANY
WEST MARSHALLING YARDS &
TARGETS OF OPPORTUNITY

Twenty-six of the thirty-eight planes dispatched bombed the target by radar from altitudes of 28,900 to 30,400 feet. Of the other twelve planes, two returned early, and ten bombed targets of opportunity, mostly rail lines and marshalling yards across Austria.

Airplane 44-6487, 429th Squadron was ditched in the Adriatic when fuel ran out. Capt. David T. Joyce, the pilot, was flying "Tail-end-Charlie," position in the Squadron. They dropped their bombs with the Group from 30,300 feet in bad weather. A few minutes later number 4 oil pressure dropped, and the propeller ran away, but Joyce managed to control it with the feather button. Then the superchargers were lost on both the outboard engines. Joyce could not keep up with the formation. He set the airplane on autopilot and started a gradual descent. By then both outboard engines had been feathered. He took up a heading for an emergency landing at Falconera. In the meantime the crew had jettisoned all the equipment. They made it over the Alps and broke into the clear, only to be attacked by flak from three sources as they flew southward. Joyce dove the airplane to pick up speed and tried evasive action. Flak must have hit the gas tanks, because the fuel pressure dropped quickly to 4 pounds. Joyce managed to get out over the Adriatic, and at 3,500 feet he alerted the crew to ditching. At 1,000 feet the number 2 engine began smoking badly, so both the number 2 and 3 engines were feathered. Joyce lowered half flaps and made, what the crew described as a perfect no-power ditching.

There were a few minor injuries from the ditching. The life rafts had to be released from the outside, but the crew cleared the airplane in 25 seconds. The airplane floated for 55 minutes. German boats came out from shore, but before they could reach the crew, British Spitfires flew over and drove them away. The Spitfires circled the crew for approximately one and a half hours

until an Air-Sea Rescue Walrus arrived. The crew boarded the Walrus, but it couldn't take off with that much load, so started taxiing toward Rimini. Thirty minutes later another Walrus landed. The four crewmen who had been injured in the ditching transferred to the second Walrus, and it took off. The other Walrus still couldn't take off, and continued taxiing toward shore. At 10:00 P.M., they dropped anchor for the night. They resumed taxiing at 6:30 A.M. and at 9:20 a launch from Ancona came along side and took the crew to shore. From there they were flown to Bari arriving at 3:30 P.M.

Corporal Kenneth Hoffman, radio operator on the crew, was on his first mission, and his calmness did much to aid the rescue effort.²⁵

Another suspicious airplane, and possibly a bogus "Friendly", was observed by crews on this mission. A B-24 with a half-solid red tail, and red circle below, flew along with the formation over the Adriatic near the Gulf of Venice. The aircraft acted suspiciously, and finally left the formation on a 270 degree heading and disappeared. This aircraft, or a similar one, had been observed on other missions and crew members became suspicious, although the insignia was similar to that of the 451st Group.²⁶

Following mission 318, the Group was unable to fly a Group formation mission for the rest of the month because of weather, but did put up two 5-plane night intruder missions to bomb the Linz Benzol Plant in Austria.

MISSION 319, NOVEMBER 25, 1944

LINZ, AUSTRIA, BENZOL OIL REFINERY

MISSION 320, NOVEMBER 30, 1944

LINZ, AUSTRIA, BENZOL OIL REFINERY

Five airplanes departed at 11:45 the night of the 24th and returned at 6:45 the morning of the 25th. Four bombed the target by radar and one bombed the marshalling yards at Klagenfurt, Austria. There were no losses and no encounters.

The five planes on the second mission didn't take off until 1:10 A.M., and returned at 7:45 A.M., except that one airplane returned early. The other four bombed the target by PFF without seeing the results. The crews dropped "chaf" to foil enemy antiaircraft artillery radar. Two crews reported tracers being fired at them just after bombs were away. Crews were briefed that the best way to escape an enemy night fighter was to make a diving, skidding turn to the right. They were also warned to watch for night fighters dropping flares to illuminate bombers. Crews were given the discretion to turn back if weather conditions did not provide sufficient protective cover. That night the fighters were either unable or unwilling to engage the bombers, because the crews returned without damage or injury.²⁷

A "LONE WOLF" NIGHT MISSION

A night intruder "Lone Wolf" mission could be a lonely, foreboding experience whose effect is heightened by intentionally flying in bad weather for passive protection. Absent was the comforting presence of a formation and a friendly fighter escort. In their place was the haunting darkness into which a crew could dis-



T/Sgt. Lewis Moore, Group Photo Section, explains intervalometer setting to S/Sgt. H.L. Ryder, 20th Squadron waist gunner, before mission to get bomb strike photos. (Group Photo/L. Moore)

appear, unseen and unreported. Lt. Sterling G. Trump, 429th Squadron, who crash landed out of gas within 25 miles of Amendola returning from Blechhammer the night of November 12-13, gives his impression of a Pathfinder night mission: "On the night of November 12, I took off on what was to be my last mission, and did I pick a honey; a night flight up to that old bugaboo, Blechhammer. I wasn't too worried about it, but the unusualness of a night bombing raid had me stirred up in the same way a football player feels before the kickoff. Finally, take off rolled around, and from then on, up to the target. I was too busy flying to wonder or worry about anything else.

My navigator, Lt. D. E. Maine, and the Mickey operator Lt. L. H. Tope, brought us right up to our IP fine, but then BLOOEY, the Mickey equipment, which had been faltering, just quit on us. As we were trying to find the target, 'Jerry' started in with his searchlights and flares. It was no time for any experimenting on our part, so after half an hour trying to locate Blechhammer, we dropped our bombs on Gleiwitz, a target selected by Lt. John D. Sisson, the bombardier.

After bombs away, it wasn't too hard to get away from the searchlights, however, a new problem showed up. Our night fighter detector gave warning of fighters all the way down from Gleiwitz to the Yugoslavian coast. That detector saved our bacon, I guess, because 'Jerry' was pretty insistent in his search for us.

Around the Yugoslavian coast, something else I had worried about all the way back, really became a fact. Our gas was running very low.

Those minutes we had spent looking for the target had eaten up precious gas. Suddenly, number 2 engine coughed, sputtered, and FINITO. Number 4 followed quickly, and we began to lose altitude. Then, to make the story complete, the other two engines died out. I tried for the fighter strip near Lake Lesina, but I knew we didn't have enough altitude to stretch our glide that far.

I gave the crew instructions for a crash landing, and their reaction was tops. Each one of them acted as if night crash landings were ordinary, everyday, routine affairs. As I came down over what I hoped was a level stretch of ground, the plane whooshed over a highway, scaring twenty years out of some poor peasant who was driving his cart. I don't think I was ten feet above him. The next few seconds were the longest of my life. I kept thinking, 'either way, this will be my last mission.' Anyway, we landed OK, no one was injured and the airplane was in pretty good shape.

Dawn was just breaking, and it brought to an end the longest night of my life."²⁸

A TRAINING MISSION DISAPPEARANCE

Air crew members knew that combat for them could end, generally, in one of several ways — complete the prescribed tour, intact; shot down and evade, or escape and evade; shot down and captured; wounded and incapacitated; and of course as the ultimate victim of combat. But for some, the grim reaper stalked them in seemingly the most innocuous pursuits. This was the case for one crew on November 2, 1944.

Training missions were frequently planned when weather prevented the Group from reaching intended targets. Airplane number 44-6399, 20th Squadron, took off at 9:18 A.M. for an instrument navigational training mission. Aboard was 1st Lt. George (NMI) Reilly, pilot; 1st Lt. Arvin C. Hildebrand, copilot; 1st Lt. Richard J. Glatly, navigator; S/Sgt. Benjamin T. English, engineer; and S/Sgt. Melvin Talley, radio operator. Clearance was given for flight at 10,000 feet. Weather was light rain with seven tenths to ten tenths cloud coverage from 3,000 to 5,000 feet, and variable visibility from 2 to 22 miles. Icing conditions existed between 7,000 and 18,000 feet. Interrogation of other crews flying that day revealed winds of 40 to 50 knots from 240 degrees at 10,000 feet, sufficient to blow aircraft considerably off course, if not corrected for. These crews reported icing conditions from 9,000 to 12,000 feet.

No other information is available as to the fate of this aircraft as it was flying alone, and simply did not return to base. A vain search for the missing aircraft was made by Regional Flying Control.²⁹

In retrospect, weather made November a disappointing operational month. The Group mounted a credible number of 21 missions, but with mostly unknown results. Fourteen were Group formation missions and 7 were Pathfinder intruder missions. Crews had to resort to PFF bombing, without observation of results or strike photos on 15 of the 21 missions. Visual bombing was possible on only 4 missions and 1 mission was aborted entirely because of weather.

Endnotes:

- ¹ Craven & Cate, 668
- ² Ibid 667, 668
- ³ Canavan, *Group History, November 1944*
- ⁴ Mission Report
- ⁵ Mission Report
- ⁶ Richards Missing Crew Report
- ⁷ Mission Report
- ⁸ Richards Missing Crew Report
- ⁹ Mission Report
- ¹⁰ Ibid
- ¹¹ Canavan, *Group History, November 1944*
- ¹² Craven & Cate, 644
- ¹³ Mission Reports
- ¹⁴ Ibid
- ¹⁵ Canavan *Group History for November, 1944*
- ¹⁶ Mission Report
- ¹⁷ Ibid
- ¹⁸ Ibid
- ¹⁹ Mission Report
- ²⁰ Ibid
- ²¹ Ibid
- ²² Ibid
- ²³ Canavan *Group History for November, 1944*
- ²⁴ Mission Reports
- ²⁵ 429th Squadron History, (AFHRA Maxwell AFB, AL) microfilm reel No. A0613, fr. 235
- ²⁶ Canavan *Group History for November, 1944*
- ²⁷ Mission Reports
- ²⁸ 429th Squadron History, microfilm frs. 237-238
- ²⁹ Richards Missing Crew Report

DECEMBER 1944, WINTER PROBLEMS

December 1944 was a very bad month for the Allied armies on the western front. As the combined armies moved confidently across France and drove toward the central part of Germany during 1944, the belief was that the en-



Part of Group Headquarters Staff, Amendola. L to R: Lt. Col. Leo Foote, Group Executive Officer; Lt. Col. Luther M. Bivins, Deputy Group Commander; Col. Paul T. Cullen, Group Commander; and Maj. Louis L. Leibel, Group Adjutant. (Group Photo)



This 20th Squadron airplane crashed December 3, 1944, 12 miles southeast of Amendola when engines 1 and 3 caught fire as aircraft lifted off. Worst injury, a broken arm. The crew not shown: 1st Lt. K. Pilger; P; Lt. Col. Luther Bivins, CP; 2nd Lt. D.H. Johnston, N; 1st Lt. A.K. Benner, B, and S/Sgt. G.D. MacDonald, LWG. Shown, but not in order: S/Sgt. J.W. Kelly, UTG; S/Sgt. B.A. Lennon, LTG; S/Sgt. G.R. Carlton, RWG; S/Sgt. R.R. Taylor, TG; and T/Sgt. J.J. Splitek, ROG. (Group Photo)

emy would soon collapse. Plans were made for a winter offensive to smash into the heart of the Nazi stronghold and end the war as soon as possible. But as Allied armies drew close to the German border, plans for a large-scale counter-offensive had been discussed as early as September at Hitler's headquarters in East Prussia. Hitler had approved the outline of a plan for a thrust through the lightly held Ardennes forest area of Belgium and preparations had been underway for months. Hitler approved the details of the plan in early October. By mid-December, the German forces had been amassed, making extensive use of night movement and taking advantage of bad weather that started November 17. On the morning of December 16, the Germans unleashed a shattering attack against utterly surprised, and hopelessly outnumbered front-line Allied troops. Making deliberate use of a protracted period of bad weather that neutralized Allied superior air power, the Germans broke through the Allied front and by December 24 had pushed a bulge — that gave the battle its famous name — into the Allied sector to within five miles of the Meuse river. Then on December 23 the weather cleared and Allied air forces, long poised for attack, had five days of superb flying weather to bring to bear their full weight on the battle. With valiant fighting, adjustment in forces and the support of superior air power, the Allies ground the German counter-offensive to a halt. But the battle raged on and it wasn't until January 31, 1945, that the bulge was forced back into the original perimeter.¹

Strategic air operations by the Eighth Air Force were necessarily postponed while it was fully committed to tactical interdiction in support of the Battle of the Bulge, even to the extent that the Eighth's 2nd Division was placed at the disposal of the Ninth Air Force for tactical operations.²

Germany's oil targets assigned to the Fifteenth Air Force enjoyed no respite from attack as the two adversaries slugged it out in the Battle of the Bulge. The Fifteenth covered itself with glory during this grim period with one of the most remarkable series of sustained operations in the entire strategic air offensive. The Fifteenth immobilized the chief refineries and rendered inoperative all of the synthetic oil plants on its list. The two

Blechhammers, Odertal, Oswiecim, Brux, and the Austrian installations were heavily attacked with excellent results even when the weather was very adverse and the bombing was blind.³

Thus, the oil campaign emerged as a bright spot during a discouraging and trying time. The 2nd Bomb Group was in the middle of this campaign and flew 15 out of its 19 successful missions, (2 were aborted), to oil targets.

During this period and for the first time in several months, the Luftwaffe made an organized attack on the Group, but no planes were lost to this attack and the 20th Squadron gunners destroyed 1 FW-190, 1 Me-109, and a probable FW-190. Several Me-262 jets were sighted but there were no encounters. Flak continued to be the most troublesome and effective. Thirty-nine aircraft were damaged, nine aircraft were lost, although 4 crews were accounted for and returned to the Group. Flak also claimed the lives of two gunners — one upper turret gunner and one tail gunner — and another tail gunner died from anoxia. Two airplanes crashed on take off with the loss of one complete crew.⁴

THE WEATHER AND BLIND BOMBING

The Group had to rely almost exclusively on the H2X radar system for bombing during December. Sixteen of the 19 missions required use of PFF. Only 3 primary and 1 alternate targets could be bombed visually. The ability to use radar bombing was extremely important to the success of the Fifteenth Air Force winter campaign. Seventy percent of the Fifteenth's missions during the fourth quarter of 1944 had to rely on radar. Without this capability, some of the important targets might have had weeks or even months for recovery and operation.⁵

The Fifteenth used the H2X system somewhat differently than the Eighth Air Force. The Eighth generally assigned two radar-equipped aircraft to each group. The Fifteenth usually divided its groups into two forces, the Red Force and the Blue Force. The Red had four Pathfinders per group and was assigned all the fighter escort. The Blue force was usually smaller, bombed visually as weather permitted, and was sent to targets closer to the Italian bases without fighter escort.⁶

MISSION 321, DECEMBER 2, 1944 BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY NORTH OIL REFINERY

Col. Cullen lead the Group and the 5th Wing on this mission. Of the 41 airplanes that took off, 40 bombed the primary target by PFF. S/Sgt. Joseph D. Lipczynski, UTG, 429th Squadron, was killed by flak. One other gunner in the 20th Squadron was slightly wounded.

Airplane number 44-6456, piloted by 2nd Lt. John J. Hickey, 20th Squadron, was hit by flak over the target. With one engine out and the propeller windmilling, another engine burning, the oxygen system out, the inter-phone and radios out, and control cables cut, Lt. Hickey flew east toward Russian-occupied territory. Ten minutes behind the Russian lines, he crash landed and only one crewman was slightly injured. All sensitive equipment, target maps and navigator's log were destroyed. Only the plane wreckage was left. The crew returned to Bari, Italy, December 10 and to the Group December 11.⁷

This mission was an important footnote to the Saga of "Sweet Pea," aircraft number 078. The airplane had been completely repaired and restored to operational status by the 339th Service Squadron. Its noteworthy mission and incredible return had occurred on mission 279, September 21, 1944 to Debrecen, Hungary. Now it was again ready for combat. Lt. Guy M. Miller of the 429th Squadron, the pilot on the Debrecen mission, insisted on taking "Sweet Pea" on one more mission. In one last test of combat endurance and survivability, "Sweet Pea," was flown to Blechhammer and safely returned. After that mission, all the combat paraphernalia was removed, and "Sweet Pea" was retired from combat and reserved for administrative and cargo service.⁸

MISSION 322, DECEMBER 3, 1944 VIENNA, AUSTRIA SOUTHEAST GOODS SECTION MISSION 323, DECEMBER 3, 1944 LINZ, AUSTRIA, INDUSTRIAL AREA

On this two-mission day, twenty-three of the twenty-eight airplanes sent to Vienna reached the

target and dropped their bombs by PFF. The Group also dropped three propaganda leaflet bombs. Airplane 44-6632, 20th Squadron, pilot, 1st Lt. K. Pilger, took off with the Group at 6:36 A.M., but crashed and burned twelve miles southeast of the field when engines 1 and 2 caught fire as the plane left the runway. 1st Lt. A. K. Benner, B, 2nd Lt. D. H. Johnston, N, and S/Sgt. G. D. McDonald, LWG, were slightly injured in the crash. Newly arrived 49th Squadron Commander, Lt. Col. Luther Bivins, was the co-pilot.⁹

The second mission on this date was a bad weather, "Lone Wolf," (intruder) raid. Two of the four airplanes returned early after an 8:08 A.M. take off. The other two dropped their bombs over the target by PFF, but airplane 44-8381, pilot 1st Lt. William G. Pepperman, 96th Squadron, did not return. All of the crew bailed out successfully, were captured, and became POWs. S/Sgt. Alva L. Flowers, LWG, substituting in the crew from the 20th Squadron, suffered a broken leg and was treated at a German army hospital near Linz. Two other crewmen were reported to have slight injuries. The survivors did not state why they were forced to abandon the airplane.¹⁰

MISSION 324, DECEMBER 6, 1944
BROD, YUGOSLAVIA, HIGHWAY BRIDGE
MISSION 325, DECEMBER 6, 1944
ZAGREB, YUGOSLAVIA
EAST MARSHALLING YARDS

Neither of the two missions this day did any damage to the enemy. Twenty-nine airplanes in the Red Force were launched for the Brod mission, but despite being in the air almost six hours, the crews could not penetrate the weather just north of Sarajevo. All airplanes jettisoned their bombs into the Adriatic near Vis Island. While milling around over Sarajevo, the Group was subjected to vicious anti-aircraft fire which damaged 26 planes. One pilot, Lt. B. C. James, made an emergency landing at Vis after two engines were knocked out and another set on fire.

The Blue Force of 14 airplanes sent to Zagreb had a similar experience with the weather. Unable to penetrate the heavy weather, and without Pathfinders, all planes returned to the base with their bomb racks full.¹¹

Airplane number 42-31682, 96th Squadron, crashed after takeoff four miles northeast of the field, for unknown reasons. None of the crew survived. Those killed were; 2nd Lt. Eric J. Zachrisson, P; 2nd Lt. Harold K. Beall, CP; 2nd Lt. Edward E. Quimby Jr., N; F/O John M. Burch, B; T/Sgt. John P. Harlan, UTG; S/Sgt. Thomas S. Barton, LTG; Sgt. Lloyd O. Terry, RWG; S/Sgt. Arthur R. Dixon, LWG; Sgt. Cornelius J. Reilly, TG; and T/Sgt. Daniel P. Soltis, ROG.¹²

MISSION 326, DECEMBER 7, 1944
SALZBURG, AUSTRIA
MAIN MARSHALLING YARDS
MISSION 327, DECEMBER 8, 1944
MOOSBIERBAUM, AUSTRIA
OIL REFINERY

These two missions were "Lone Wolf" raids by 3 airplanes on the 7th and 2 on the 8th. It was

common practice to have all or part of the 5th Wing Groups provide a like number of airplanes for these raids. The 3 airplanes from the 2nd on the Salzburg mission took off at 1:39 A.M. Two bombed the primary target, and one bombed the Klagenfurt, Austria marshalling yards. B-17 number 42-97652 from the 20th Squadron, commanded by 1st Lt. Isaac C. Pederson, failed to return.

Capt. George B. Sweeney, 20th Squadron Intelligence Officer made the following investigation report on December 8 about the disappearance of Lt. Pederson's plane and crew: "B-17 No. 42-97652 was one of three Pathfinder aircraft on a mission to Salzburg Main M/Y, Austria on Dec. 7, 1944. Each aircraft was to bomb the target singly. One of the aircraft bombed the primary target and another bombed the first alternate, Klagenfurt, Austria. It is presumed that B-17 No. 42-97652 bombed the primary target. The one aircraft which bombed the primary and returned to base, reported the flak was slight, inaccurate as to altitude and deflection, and of a heavy type.

At 0515 hours the aircraft that bombed the alternate received a radio message from a B-17 that stated that it had hit a target of opportunity by Pathfinder methods and bombs away was at 0433 hours. The call sign letters from this aircraft, as stated by the radio operator receiving the message were 'XAA', but the radio man could not be positive of this as the reception conditions were poor. The call sign letters of B-17 No. 42-97652 were 'XAX-U'. No bombs away signal was received at the base as coming from B-17 No. 42-97652.

The above information is all that can be gathered pertaining to the missing B-17 No. 42-97652."¹³

All members of the crew bailed out successfully. Four of them evaded and returned, while Pederson and five others were captured. The evaders were 1st Lt. James P. Doty, Mickey navigator; 2nd Lt. Gildo F. M. Phillips, B; T/Sgt. Morris H. Miller, LWG; and T/Sgt. Hubert Y. Simerson, ROG. Doty, Phillips and Miller came out together and gave a joint statement after their return.

Doty said the crew had trouble with the oil pressure and propeller on number 1 engine going to the target. After the bombs were away, the number 1 propeller ran away and sheared the shaft. Then number 4 engine began acting up and Lt. Pederson feathered it. Next, the number 3 propeller ran away and it couldn't be feathered. Lt. Pederson ordered bail out in the vicinity of Maribor, Yugoslavia. Doty was eighth to leave the airplane at approximately 18,000 feet.

Doty landed three miles south of Maribor in a clear area. He hid his chute in the brush and started walking south through a heavily populated area. He walked until he found a shed, buried himself in leaves and slept all day. On the night of December 8, he walked south until he reached the mountains where he hoped to find a path that would lead him through. He slept a while in the open and near dawn he started toward a barn for shelter. He hid when he saw a man coming with a lantern, but was intercepted by a Yugoslav guard, who took him to a house, where he joined T/Sgts. Miller and Simerson, the latter was suffering from a sprained ankle.

Miller had landed in a tree south of Maribor.

He hid his chute and started walking out of a valley. He made contact with friendly Yugoslavian civilians who passed him through several hiding places until he arrived at the Partisan headquarters. Simerson had already been there for about eight hours and Doty arrived about ten minutes later. The following morning they were taken to a shack in the mountains where they remained for three days while the Partisans were fighting three groups of Germans. On December 11, the three traveled further into the mountains. That night Simerson was left in a shack, while Doty and Miller continued travelling until almost dawn to reach another Partisan headquarters. The following day German patrols caused them to backtrack to another Partisan headquarters where they were joined by Lt. Phillips.

Phillips landed in a tree and had to cut his shroud lines to get down. He headed southwest. He eluded some natives and was not noticed by others, and successfully avoided some German patrols. He was spotted by another patrol, but he ran into some woods behind a house in a village and hid in a vineyard, where he stayed until the next afternoon. He stole some radishes and potatoes for food, and while washing them in a stream, an old man approached him. From then on he was put in the hands of the Yugoslav Partisans, and was passed from hiding place to hiding place. At one house, he could see German patrols passing outside in the street. Two days later he was taken to join Doty and Miller. From there the three traveled northwest for two nights to north of Konjice. For the next three days they travelled circuitous routes, and on December 18, the Partisans started a long trek after a battle with the Germans north of the Sava river. On December 21 the party arrived at a Partisan Division Headquarters at Dolenik.

An Anglo-American military mission moved in December 23, and the three airmen joined it for Christmas. The three men left Dolenik on December 28 with a Partisan Division, which later came under fire by the Germans, but again, they escaped. On December 30 they arrived at another military mission headquarters, and on January 5, a C-47 came in and evacuated them back to Bari, Italy.¹⁴ Because of his injury, T/Sgt. Simerson was left with Partisan doctors, and returned later.

Lt. Pederson; 2nd Lt. Robert D. Draper, CP; and T/Sgt. James F. Miller, UTG, all POWs, were together on the crew that ditched November 13 just off shore at Mafredonia, returning from a "Lone Wolf," mission to Blechhammer.

MISSION 328, DECEMBER 9, 1944
REGENSBURG, GERMANY
OIL STORAGE PLANT
PILSEN, CZECHOSLOVAKIA
SKODA ARMAMENT WORKS

Thirty-six crews, four squadrons of 9 airplanes each, were briefed to attack the synthetic oil plant at Brux, Czechoslovakia. Instead, 17 aircraft of the first wave attacked the oil storage plant at Regensburg as an alternate after making two bomb runs. Bombing was by PFF with unknown results. By then two airplanes had returned early because of mechanical problems. One bombed Villach, Austria, by PFF and the

other jettisoned its bombs into the Adriatic. Two others jettisoned their bombs shortly before the first bomb run. One jettisoned in order to keep up with the formation and the other, 1st Lt. S. P. Upsher, of the 20th Squadron, in the second wave, experienced two engine failures.

During the 30 minutes between 11:50 and until just after the bombs were dropped over Regensburg, formation observers saw four Me-262 jet fighters. Three were out of gun range, one whizzed by 100 yards away, but none threatened the formation.

The second wave of 17 planes from the 20th and 429th Squadrons made two runs on the Regensburg target, but did not bomb. They then changed the lead Pathfinder to 1st Lt. Woodruff J. Warren, 20th Squadron, in airplane number 42-97739, for a third run, but the change was made too late to get the bombs away. This wave then proceeded to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia and bombed the Skoda Armament Works by PFF. No flak was experienced at this target, but the formation delayed its turn off the target and encountered intense, accurate flak from the Prague area. The strike on Skoda occurred from 12:50 to 12:55. At 1:30 Lt. Warren called another aircraft in the formation, saying they had one engine feathered and were having trouble with another. Lt. Warren didn't know if he could make it over the Alps. He said they would have to bail out if they couldn't and would have to ditch if they could. The plane was losing altitude and his altitude at the time was 15,000 feet. He then signed off and was heard no more.¹⁵

In a statement after liberation from POW camp, one of the four survivors, S/Sgt. Benjamin J. Sheppard Jr., TG, said he and three others — S/Sgt. Ralph E. Henry, LWG, T/Sgt. Warren (NMI) Anderson, ROG, and 1st Lt. Burke W. Jay, N — all bailed out successfully and survived. The last word that Sheppard heard from Lt. Warren was, "We will never make it over the Alps. We'd better abandon ship." Sheppard believed that Lt. Warren crash landed the airplane after he gave the order to bail out because one of the crew members refused to bail out. After he was captured, S/Sgt. Sheppard was told by a farmer living nearby that Lt. Warren was shot by a German after being captured. This was S/Sgt. Sheppard's and S/Sgt. Henry's 50th missions.

A German document found by an American investigating team after the war, noted the emergency landing of a bomber December 9 near the Austrian-Czechoslovakian border south of Kaplice, Czechoslovakia. It stated that six unknown were dead with the additional notation, "shot while trying to escape." Another German document listed the names of Lt. Warren's crew, showing six members dead. The document does not say how the men died.¹⁶

The fate of the six was more malevolent than the self-serving German reports dared to disclose. In a letter to the Commanding General, Army Air Forces, dated March 2, 1946, Mrs. Meriam N. Sheppard, the mother of S/Sgt. Sheppard, adds further details about the downing of this crew based on information from her son. S/Sgt. Sheppard landed on a mountain side in knee deep snow among the trees. He sought to evade. He was found by friendly natives in the area, taken to a farm house and fed. Later he was captured by the Germans, and as he was



Crash landing site of Lt. Warren's airplane on Austrian-Czechoslovakian border, December 9, 1944, and sites where crew members were slain by ardent Nazis. (Courtesy of K. Affenzeller, Freistadt, Austria)

being trucked to internment, an Austrian guard pointed to his airplane, setting, intact in a field. This was about three days after he bailed out. There was no sign of anyone in or about the airplane. Sheppard was eventually taken to Hamburg, Germany where he met the other three survivors of the crew.

Mrs. Sheppard then calls attention to the latest release of a March of Times news reel report titled "Justice Comes to Germany." The report details the trial of a German by the name of Strauss, [may be Strasser, see below] accused of the murder of Lt. Warren. She goes on to state there were five prisoners in the truck, leaving one crew member yet unaccounted for.¹⁷

Mr. Karl Affenzeller, an Austrian living in Friestadt, Austria, is writing a book about the air war over Austria during WW II. According to Mr. Affenzeller's research, Franz Strasser, Nazi Kreisleiter in Kaplitz (Kaplice), and Captain Karl Lindemeyer, chief of police, murdered five of the downed, captured crew members — Lt. Warren; 1st Lt. Donald L. Hart, CP; 2nd Lt. George D. Mayott, RN; T/Sgt. Frank Pinto Jr., UTG; and S/Sgt. Joseph A. Cox, RWG. Strasser was hanged in December 1945 by Americans, after being found guilty of this atrocity. Capt. Lindemeyer committed suicide in Czechoslovakia after WW II.

2nd Lt. William (NMI) Jolly, B, bailed out of the airplane before the crash landing and descended safely in the vicinity of a place of pilgrimage, Maria Schnee. A few minutes later he was shot by Joseph Witzany, Nazi Ortsgruppenleiter and Volkssturm Chief in the village of Opolz (Tich'a), Czechoslovakia. Affenzeller does not know the fate of Witzany, but conjectures that the murderer possibly fled to Austria after the war. Mr. Affenzeller furnished a rare photo of the downed airplane.¹⁸

Flak, the extra maneuvering in the target areas, and mechanical problems caused other consequences, as the formations tried to reach home base. 1st Lt. D. L. Pierce, 429th Squadron, jettisoned one 500-pound RDX bomb because of loose fusing, while going to Pilsen. The airplane suffered severe flak damage from the Prague batter-

ies. At 4:07 P.M., Lt. Pierce called another airplane in his formation and reported he was at 800 feet and was going to ditch. When last seen, Lt. Pierce's plane, number 44-6501, was at the coast of Yugoslavia, and had one engine feathered. At 4:30 a radio operator in the formation picked up an S.O.S. from 501 stating, "Ditching."

F/O J. E. Skoba, N; 2nd Lt. J. E. McWhirter, B; and Sgt. J. E. Childress, LWG, were slightly injured during the ditching. The crew was picked up by an Air-Sea Rescue launch at 5:50 and taken to Ancona, Italy. They returned to Amendola December 11.

Copilot 2nd Lt. M. D. Porter reported on his return that treatment of the crew at Ancona was quite poor. Upon arrival in Ancona, the crew was taken in one command car to a camp about 16 miles away, put in a tent and left there. No medical treatment was offered, even though three men had some injuries, and all were seasick from the ditching. Three men had lost their shoes and did not receive any footwear until the next day.¹⁹

Four other crews, three from the 429th Squadron and one from the 20th — all on the Pilsen raid — were forced to make emergency landings at Italian bases north of Amendola because of fuel shortages. Three of the four returned that night. One, aircraft number 455, piloted by Lt. Guy M. Miller, from the 429th Squadron, received sufficiently severe flak damage that it had to be left at the emergency base. The crew caught a ride back to base in a B-24.²⁰

MISSION 329, DECEMBER 10, 1944 KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA MARSHALLING YARDS

The Brux oil refinery was rescheduled for December 10, and 32 airplanes departed for the mission only to be recalled because of weather. The last squadron in the Group formation went ahead and bombed the Klagenfurt yards by PFF as a target of opportunity.²¹

Eleven of the remaining twelve missions flown

in December were scheduled against oil targets. On one of the eleven, marshalling yards were bombed as an alternate. Radar bombing had to be used on eight of the eleven missions with unobserved results. The twelfth mission, December 29, was against locomotive repair shops.

MISSION 330, DECEMBER 11, 1944

MOOSBIERBAUM, AUSTRIA, OIL REFINERY
KAPFENBURG, AUSTRIA, TANK WORKS

Sixteen planes bombed the primary target while twelve others bombed Kapfenburg. The defenders put up an effective smoke screen at Moosbierbaum. The bombing formation used radar and two large fires were observed in the target area. The flak was intense and accurate. One pilot was slightly wounded. Visual bombing was used at the alternate Tank Works, and a good percent of the bombs fell in the target area.

The Group lost one airman. 1st Lt. Robert F. Marino, 96th Squadron, made an emergency landing on Vis Island with his tail gunner, Sgt. Dean L. Homer, suffering from anoxia. Sgt. Homer died in the ambulance on Vis Island.²²

Anoxia is an insidious phenomena. As the oxygen deficiency mounts, the ability to detect and cope with it declines. The victim is usually the least able to identify the symptoms. At altitude the period of useful consciousness is measured in minutes. Those crewmen that were isolated — tail gunners and ball turret gunners especially — were particularly vulnerable. Operations orders repeatedly reminded crews to make regular and frequent oxygen checks, and to keep watch on each other. During the winter there was the additional reminder that lower temperatures increased condensation of moisture and freezing in oxygen masks. In the all-absorbing heat of aerial battle, or an in-flight emergency, it was easy to get diverted to other life-and-death mat-

ters. A flak or shell fragment could sever an oxygen supply line or puncture an oxygen mask hose, and go unnoticed until it was too late. The loss of a crewmate to anoxia was a chilling, and conscience-haunting discovery.

MISSION 331, DECEMBER 12, 1944

BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY
SOUTH OIL REFINERY

Photo reconnaissance showed no important destruction to this facility by the December 2 raid. Intelligence stated that the plant could reach maximum production quickly if not seriously damaged or destroyed. That was perhaps too much to ask for a four-ship "Lone Wolf" raid. Then only three of the Group's four planes bombed the primary by PFF without seeing the results. The fourth ship bombed the alternate oil refinery at Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia.

MISSION 332, DECEMBER 16, 1944

BRUX, CZECHOSLOVAKIA
SYNTHETIC OIL REFINERY

Thirty-five of the thirty-eight airplanes sent on this mission reached and bombed the target by radar with no observable results. There was one early return and the other two bombed targets of opportunity.

MISSION 333, DECEMBER 17, 1944

BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY
NORTH OIL REFINERY
MORAVSKA OSTRAVA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA
PRIVOSER OIL REFINERY

Two waves of eighteen airplanes each were sent on this mission. The Mickey operator on the lead airplane in the first wave, Lt. Morton Weinman, was knocked out by flak just before bombs away, so the wave did not bomb. Two other members of the crew were slightly wounded. Lt. Weinman recovered in time for the wave to bomb the alternate at Moravska Ostrava. The second wave bombed Blechhammer as scheduled. Results were not visible at either target.

One Me-109 made four aggressive attacks on a straggling B-17 just past the target. After the fourth pass the fighter dove into the clouds. There was no damage and no claims.

Airplane number 44-6350, pilot 1st Lt. Leonard (NMI) Waldman, 429th Squadron, was lagging behind the formation in the vicinity of Lake Balaton, Hungary, because of trouble with number 3 engine. Lt. Waldman jettisoned 3 of his 500-pound bombs to keep up with the formation. At altitude the troublesome engine lost additional power. Just before bombs away, flak hit number 1 and number 2 engines, severing an oil line to number 1 and causing the propeller to run away. The manifold pressure on number 2 engine dropped to 20 inches, leaving one good engine. Flak also hit the nose and cut the line to the bombardier's interphone so Lt. Waldman salvoed the bombs over the target area. The airplane quickly lost altitude to 15,000 feet. Waldman ordered 2nd Lts. H. J. Kraus, N, and Milton Bloom, B, to the waist



for possible bail out. The runaway propeller on number 1 engine could not be feathered. All excess equipment was jettisoned, including the bombsight and the ball turret. Lt. Waldman leveled off at 15,000 feet and called for fighter protection, but received none. Lt. Kraus gave him a heading to the Russian lines. Lt. Waldman navigated by dead reckoning, above the clouds, until they were safely past the Russian lines, then he took up a heading toward Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Later he let down, picked a landing spot and with the crew in crash-landing positions, he made a good, wheels down landing at Isbiste. The tail wheel tire blew out on landing, but the crew was uninjured.

Lt. Waldman and copilot, 2nd Lt. Clayton L. Stenwedel, met three partisans in a wagon, and people of the town came out to meet the crew. The two pilots were taken to a nearby partisan headquarters. Later, while the partisans guarded the airplane, the rest of the crew was brought to the headquarters. Here they were served wine, and interrogated about the airplane, and to establish their identities. The crew was then divided among the partisans for the night. The next day an attempt to taxi the airplane was unsuccessful. The crew gave their benefactors pistols and extra clothes. In the company of a civilian who wanted to act as their "protector" and guide, the crew went first to another partisan headquarters at Uljma. From there they went by tractor and wagon to a partisan headquarters at Pancevo, where they stayed over night in a hotel. The next morning they were met by a Russian marine, and still in the company of their partisan "protector," they were taken by the marine down the Danube River by barge to Belgrade. The marine made Lt. Waldman retrieve the pistol he had given the "protector." The party went to the American Mission at the Balkan Hotel. Here they were fed and arranged for the Mission to notify Fifteenth Air Force Headquarters of their location and condition of the airplane. That night a partisan guard shot a drunken Russian soldier for being out after curfew. The following night the Russians shot a partisan guarding a jeep across the street from the hotel. On December 26 all of the crew, except the two pilots, returned to Bari by C-47.²³

Two airplanes made emergency landings — one on Vis Island and one at the 325th Fighter Group base — because of engine problems and fuel shortages. Both crews were back at Amendola by December 18.²⁴

In one of its sporadic appearances, the Luftwaffe mustered approximately 150 fighters that concentrated on the 49th Wing in the Blechhammer area. Twenty-four of the Wing's B-24s were shot down.²⁵

MISSION 334, DECEMBER 18, 1944

ODERTAL, GERMANY, OIL REFINERY
MORAVSKA OSTRAVA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA
PRIVOSER OIL REFINERY
OTHER TARGETS OF OPPORTUNITY
IN AUSTRIA

The Group mounted 34 planes in what was intended to be part of a major strike at Odertal. Only 7 managed to attack Odertal. The rest of the

formation attacked a variety of targets in a determined effort to do the best they could with what conditions would allow. Fourteen airplanes bombed the refinery at Moravska Ostrava by Pathfinder. Six covered industrial buildings in the vicinity of Kapfenberg, Austria by visual bombing. One crew dropped bombs at the approach to a railroad bridge east of Graz, Austria, and one bombed the marshalling yards at Feldback, Austria, southeast of Graz. Several fires were observed in the yards. Elements of the Group were attacked by six to ten Me-109s and FW-190s southwest of Moravska Ostrava. 20th Squadron gunners destroyed one Me-109, one FW-190 and probably destroyed one other FW-190. Neither enemy flak nor fighters scored any victories.²⁶

MISSION 335, DECEMBER 19, 1944

BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY
NORTH & SOUTH OIL REFINERIES
MORAVSKA OSTRAVA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA
OIL REFINERY
SOPRON, HUNGARY, MARSHALLING YARDS

Thirty-eight airplanes took part in this mission, but only sixteen were able to strike

the primary target. Six hit Blechhammer South, six struck Moravska Ostrava, while six others bombed the Sopron, Czechoslovakia marshalling yards, all by radar with unobserved results.

Four pilots landed their planes on the Island of Vis because of gas shortages. Two of them crashed on landing, but no one was hurt. 1st Lt. D. E. Hoene, 429th Squadron, was forced to pull off the runway into the mud to avoid another aircraft resulting in severe damage to the airplane. The airplane sunk in mud up to the engines. 1st Lt. A. J. Grossman, also of the 429th, crash landed when all four engines on his plane stopped because of fuel starvation. The airplane overshot the runway into soft mud, sunk up over the wheels, and nosed over. The two airplanes were transferred to the Service Squadron for salvage.

Both crews were taken by transport to Bari and returned to the Group December 20.

Pilot, 1st Lt. Haddon (NMI) Johnson Jr., and his crew, 20th Squadron, were forced to crash land airplane number 44-6532. No one was hurt, and they all returned to Allied control on January 15, 1945. The plane was hit by flak over the Blechhammer South Refinery, that disabled num-



Crippled B-24s sometimes landed at Amendola when they could not reach their bases farther south or when they had wounded aboard. (Group Photo)



Helping with the B-24 wounded. (Group Photo)



Santa comes to the Group. Lts. Carroll and Dee in their house. (Group Photo)

ber 2 engine, punctured the number 4 and the right Tokyo gas tanks, and knocked out the number 4 engine oil cooler. The crew was able to drop their bombs over the target. All papers, maps, flak charts and log were destroyed upon landing behind the Russian lines. F/O Robert B. Pilcher, navigator, reported: "We left the formation at IP plus two minutes. No one bailed out, a crash landing was made. We crashed approximately 35 kms (kilometers) N.W. (northwest) of Bias-Banya, Hungary (Author's note: Believe name was Nagybyanya, later changed to Baia Mare). All members were in their crash positions; pilot and copilot in the cockpit and the rest of the crew in the radio room. There were no injuries.²⁷

MISSION 336, DECEMBER 20, 1944 **REGENSBURG, GERMANY, OIL STORAGE**

The crews were briefed to bomb the familiar Brux synthetic plant, but being unable to do so, thirty bombed at Regensburg, and one bombed a marshalling yard in the vicinity of Spittal, Austria. Three were unable to complete the mission and returned early.

MISSION 337, DECEMBER 25, 1944 **BRUX, CZECHOSLOVAKIA** **SYNTHETIC OIL REFINERY**

Of the twenty-eight airplanes sent out on this Christmas Day mission, twenty-five bombed the target with 71.5 tons of 500-pound RDX bombs. One aborted and two returned early. One of the latter dumped its bombs on a railroad bridge at Klagenfurt, Austria, and observed the bombs straddle the bridge.²⁸

The enemy defenders put up an effective smoke screen and heavy, intense and accurate flak over the Brux refinery. Aircraft number 44-6550, 49th Squadron, piloted by 1st Lt. Will-

iam R. Myers, was hit by flak over the target. The number 1 and 2 propellers ran away and had to be feathered. The airplane lost speed and altitude and Lt. Myers turned out of the formation and salvoed the bombs. The crew nursed the airplane along and administered first aid to S/Sgt. Herbert W. Wendt, TG, who had a flak wound to his right hand. Convinced he couldn't get back to base, Myers ask his navigator, 2nd Lt. Walter R. Stone, the heading to the nearest Russian base. That was Gyongyos, Hungary, but when they arrived there, the base was so well camouflaged, they couldn't find it. They were escorted by Russian fighters to another field in the area, where they landed safely. The Russians treated the wounded, and fed and billeted the crew. It took Lt. Myers three or four days to make contact with Amendola by radio, but adverse weather prevented a repair plane and fighter escort from coming to his aid. The Russians attempted to repair the airplane, without success. They then sent to Debrecen for a new propeller governor from a B-17 stranded there. The plane was repaired, serviced with Russian 95 octane gasoline, and the crew flew back to Amendola on January 16.²⁹

MISSION 338, DECEMBER 26, 1944 **BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY** **SOUTH OIL REFINERY**

Twenty-eight airplanes started for Blechhammer, but early returns reduced those over the target to twenty-two. One of the early returns bombed the Czelldemok, Czechoslovakia marshalling yards, with good results. The main force lead bombardier, Capt. William R. Underhill could not see the Group's specific target, so he resorted to use of an offset aiming point. The bombing results were excellent and several fires were observed. Flak over the target

was as the Group came to expect — heavy, intense, and accurate. One man, other than those in the lead airplane, was slightly wounded, and 20 out of the 22 attacking airplanes were damaged by flak, 13 minor and 7 severe, including the lead plane that had to make a forced, emergency landing. Flak damage to the lead plane, number 42-97715, "Frankie," flown by Maj. George A. Redden, 96th Squadron, caused the lead formation to break up.

In his returnee statement, Capt. Underhill, who kept a diary, gave a detailed account of the crew's emergency, the stay behind Russian lines and their evacuation:

"Soon after we rolled out of the turn at the IP, onto the target the flak began coming up . . . One of the first bursts struck the ship on the right side, wounding 1st Lt. [James O.] McHood, the copilot, slightly, in the right arm. Only seconds later a terrific burst struck the number three engine and again Lt. McHood was hit, this time seriously so . . . Next our A. F. C. E. [autopilot] was shot out and I could only turn the plane by using the secondary clutch. Meanwhile flak was very heavy, intense and accurate. One large burst in front of the plane splintered the plexiglass nose and struck the bombsight making it completely inoperative. The blast knocked me backward. As I regained my position and looked at the target I thought we must be about 20 seconds from the release point, so I counted the seconds off aloud. About this time the No. 1 engine was knocked out and Major Redden was calling for someone to help Lt. McHood.

At the end of the 20 seconds I salvoed the bombs and they cleared alright. The flak was still heavy and right on us. I closed the bomb bay doors, removed my flak suit, and went to the cockpit. Lt. McHood was semi-conscious, so Sgt. Liberto [T/Sgt. Alphonso C. Liberto, UTG], the engineer and I pulled him out and laid him on the catwalk. Sgt. Liberto kept giving the copilot oxygen and helped put a tourniquet on his leg.

I climbed into the copilot's seat while Major Redden tried to feather the windmilling No. 3 prop. Neither of us were able to contact the formation and we had broken off from it and were losing altitude at about 1,000 feet per minute.

. . . The plane was shuddering violently and it looked as though we would have to hit the silk, but Lt. McHood with only one leg could not have stood the jump. . . , Major Redden was finally able to get the engine feathered. The congealed oil had oozed over the cowlings and froze in a heavy tar. When the frozen prop broke loose, red hot, the Major was able to feather it and the plane quit shuddering. With two feathered props and two good engines, we no longer lost altitude. Lt. Azar [2nd Lt. Sol D. Azar], our tail observer [officers were placed in the tail gunner's position of lead airplanes to keep the leader informed about the status of the formation] worked his way up from the tail and climbed into the copilot's seat, while I went down to help Lt. McHood . . . Sgt. Liberto had kept Lt. McHood supplied with oxygen and now we put him on the navigator's pure oxygen. The wound was very bad and beginning to bleed profusely. I put on a new tourniquet and wound it tighter. First I gave him a shot of morphine, cut

away his clothes and sprinkled sulfanilamide powder on the wound. I also gave him two sulfa pills. We moved his head lower and his feet higher and wrapped him up well. Giving him first aid kept me busy and by the time I looked around we were heading east into Poland. [After circling and searching in poor visibility, Maj. Redden made a very successful emergency landing at Rzeszow, Poland, ground looping the airplane in the process to avoid some buildings.]

We climbed out of the plane and were at once surrounded by Polish and Russian soldiers. We then chopped the nose of the plane off and remove Lt. McHood, whom the Russians immediately rushed to a field hospital. The rest of us were taken into the custody of a Russian Major who informed us that we were about 25 miles behind the front lines. We were given supper and then a village woman named Catherine came over to us. She had lived in Pennsylvania and could speak English, Russian and Polish. For several days she was to act as our interpreter. Five of the crew were kept at the Polish lady's home and the other four stayed at the Russian Major's house. We were well fed and the Russians insisted on us drinking very much vodka. We were all very tired and sleepy and the vodka didn't exactly drive away our sleepy feelings.

On December 27, after having breakfast, the Russian Major came up and took us all out to the landing strip in an old Model A Ford truck. The plane was completely shot up, perforated by flak holes from the rudder to the wings and nose. All four props and two engines were completely ruined; the PFF, AFCE, bombsight, gas tanks, control surfaces were all badly shot up . . .

From there we went to the hospital to see Lt. McHood. His leg had been amputated and he looked very bad. We all saw him for a few minutes and left him our cigarettes and candy ration. The x-ray showed his leg to be badly shattered and he had been given three transfusions. The prompt treatment had no doubt saved his life."

After that the crew started a frustrating wait for transportation back to Italy. They were well treated, well fed, over-indulged with vodka and whiskey which they finally learned to politely resist, but had spartan accommodations for the most part. On December 28 they were taken to an auxiliary airport in the area where they expected to meet an evacuation C-47. It didn't arrive until December 30. In the meantime, they were quartered in a crude dug-out, the number of stranded airmen swelled to 30, the weather turned colder, and it snowed.

Capt. Underhill's diary describes their accommodations: "We came on to this airfield and ate again. Then we were brought to our dug-out home. Meanwhile we had met 12 more men, a B-24 crew that had made an emergency landing here. All of us came to our home, it was dug out underground and covered by a long mound of earth. Eight stalls two decks high lined the walls. The stalls were separated by heavy planks and each one was filled with clean straw. A gas drum stove in each end of the 40 foot long hut was our only means of heating the dug-out. At night it was bitter cold and very smoky as there was

no means of ventilation. We had very thin blankets, that had never seen soap and water. This first night we bedded down three to a stall for warmth. There were two orderlies to keep the fire going. One was a young, good-hearted but thick headed kid and the other was a heavily mustached old man of fifty-odd years."

It snowed that night. In the morning, they washed by pouring icy water over their hands from a cup dipped in a tub of water. A barber came and gave them a good but crude shave, and before the day was over, 9 more men from a B-17 crew moved in. On December 30 a C-47 arrived, but could carry only 15 passengers plus the wounded. The three crews decided to flip a coin to decide who got to go. Capt. Underhill flipped for Redden's crew and lost. (Redden had gone to visit McHood.) The C-47 took off on December 31, the crew promising to come back in two or three days. Seventeen men were left behind. The C-47 did bring cases of rations which were welcome. The crew was entertained by the antics of the two orderlies, visited the village, and played checkers using a hand made board, to pass the time. Another C-47 came January 3, but it wasn't for them. It did leave more rations and some playing cards. On January 4 a Russian C-47 came to take them to Poltava but diverted to an alternate 40 miles away when weather closed Poltava. Here they were put up in a small house that had beds with sheets but they spent a cold, shivery night. On the afternoon of January 5, the weather cleared sufficiently for the flight to Poltava. At Poltava, thanks mostly to an infrastructure provided by the U.S. for the Russian shuttle mission operations, the crew returned to the usual amenities of clean clothes, hot showers, GI movies, a comfortable officers club, and even a USO show, the first in the area. Then on January 9 they left Russia in a C-47, and after stops in Tehran, Cairo and Benghazi, Libya, they returned to Italy. In addition to those named in the narrative, the crew included 1st Lt. Chester E. Toton, N; 1st Lt. Morton Weinman, RN (who had survived a flak blast as the lead radar navigator on mission 333 to Blechhammer, December 17); S/Sgt. George R. Merritt, RWG; S/Sgt. James J. Duchek, LWG; and T/Sgt. Charles F. Carey, ROG.

Lt. McHood survived and was returned to the U.S.³⁰

MISSION 339, DECEMBER 27, 1944 **LINZ, AUSTRIA, MARSHALLING YARDS**

The briefed target was Korneuburg, Austria, oil refinery, but sixteen planes bombed the marshalling yards at Linz by Pff. Ten bombers dropped their bombs in southern Czechoslovakia due to an accidental release of bombs by the lead plane. Two aircraft attacked the marshalling yards at Villach, Austria by visual bombing and observed hits on the target.

1st Lt. Owen D. Massie Jr., 20th Squadron, had mechanical failure of two engines, and a third was running rough, on the way to the target. He turned back and jettisoned half of his bomb load, then bombed the marshalling yards at Klagenfurt with the remaining five bombs. Lt. Massie made a safe emergency landing at Iesi Airdrome, Italy.³¹

MISSION 340, DECEMBER 28, 1944 **REGENSBURG, GERMANY, OIL STORAGE**

Twenty-eight planes bombed the primary target visually and strikes were observed in the target area. One crew bombed the Salzburg, Austria marshalling yards.³²

During the twelve day oil campaign the Group lost five airplanes to enemy action. Due to the closeness of Russian-held territory, most of the crews landed behind friendly lines and ultimately return to base.

MISSION 341, DECEMBER 29, 1944 **CASTLEFRANCO/VENETO & UDINE, ITALY** **LOCOMOTIVE REPAIR DEPOTS**

The primary target was to have been the west marshalling yards at Innsbruck, Austria where photo reconnaissance showed 185 wagons (rail cars) in the main yards, and 150 in the west yards. The mission objective was to destroy operating and repair facilities which the enemy was using to dispatch men and material to the Italian front. Weather caused diversion to the alternates at Castlefranco/Veneto and Udine, which were assigned because they served a similar purpose as the primary target.

Of the twenty-eight airplanes that took off, 12 attacked the facilities at Castlefranco/Veneto and 16 those at Udine. The Group took advantage of the opportunity to bomb visually. Photo reconnaissance showed the results to be sufficiently impressive that Gen. Twining sent a congratulatory message to the Group for the "outstanding" job of bombing at both locations. The flak was severe, however, damaging twenty-seven of the twenty-eight airplanes, wounding four men slightly, and taking the life of S/Sgt. James W. Thompson, a tail gunner in the 20th Squadron.³³

The year ended in an atmosphere of gloom and doubt among Allied commanders and strategic planners. The Ardennes offensive had shown that Germany was far from the collapse that had been hoped for. Germany was now battling from behind its own borders with shortened lines of communication. The month-long diversion of the Eighth Air Force bomber command to tactical interdiction had allowed the enemy significant time to recover oil, and war production. There were calls for rethinking Allied air strategy based on a longer war than had been expected.

Even Gen. Arnold had doubts about how effective the air war had been. Allied strategic air forces had blasted factories and cities of the Reich, yet the destruction hadn't yielded the expected effect on the enemy war effort. Arnold asked for a re-evaluation of the estimated effect of the bomb damage. Gen. Spaatz shared these same doubts: "It would seem to me we should get much better and much more decisive results than we are getting now."

As it turned out there was no real reason to recast the strategic air war. The Germans were in much worse condition than was thought at the time. It was true that they had staged a counter-offensive with forces that were supposed to be starved for fuel. The Germans did capture large stores of aban-

doned Allied fuel during the early success of the offensive that helped to prolong the campaign, but they quickly ran out of gasoline and lubricants. The recuperation of the synthetic oil plants during that period was not as great or serious as it seemed at the time, thanks largely to the brilliant campaign of the Fifteenth Air Force at the end of December. On January 8 Gen Eisenhower agreed to release the Eighth's heavy bombers from the land campaign in order to resume attacks on the oil plants in west Germany which were coming back into operation.³⁴

The Group spent its second Christmas at Amendola under much improved conditions than the first. The base had taken on many aspects of a permanent state-side base. The wonderful set of rest camps in Rome, San Spirito, and on the Isle of Capri were great morale boosters. Christmas festivities were dampened somewhat by the mission to Brux and the failure of Lt. William R. Myers and crew to return, although all did later return to Allied control. The dampening was a forceful reminder of what the priorities were in everyone's life at the time. But observances did go on. There was a giant, well-lit tree in front of the officers club. Chaplain Donald E. Paige, (Chaplain Allen had been transferred to Fifth Wing Headquarters), held a special midnight protestant service in the Cave Chapel. A solemn midnight, catholic high mass was held in the Manfredonia cathedral. Christmas dinners were scrumptious by normal mess hall standards.³⁵ The men of the 20th Squadron reported it was the best dinner that had received while overseas. Considering it included turkey, chicken, and all the roast pork they could eat, plus all the traditional trimmings, one can accept their judgement. In the evening there were bingo games in the enlisted men's clubs with the top prize a hundred-dollar war bond.³⁶

Just prior to Christmas, word came down that a selected number of men would be allowed to go to Rome for Christmas day. One man could be selected to represent each unit. Capt. Canavan, the Group Historian at the time, was one who got that privilege. After an early morning takeoff, the group arrived in Rome in time for a Christmas morning service at St. Peters. Capt. Canavan stepped out of St. Peters at noon to find St. Peters square filled with civilians and soldiers from all Allied nations. Members of the Italian royal family were present. He had Christmas dinner at a GI restaurant, went window shopping, and looked with envy at the "gorgeous" 1942 Packards, Oldsmobiles and Plymouths running about. The group was back at Amendola that evening in time for a second Christmas dinner.³⁷

Endnotes:

¹ Craven & Cate, 672-675, 682-685, 6899

² Ibid, 690

³ Ibid, 670

⁴ Canavan Group History narrative for December, 1944

⁵ Craven & Cate, 666

⁶ Ibid, 667

⁷ Mission Report

⁸ Canavan Group History

⁹ Canavan Group History

¹⁰ Richards Missing Crew Report

¹¹ Mission Reports

¹² Richards Missing Crew Report

¹³ Mission Report

¹⁴ Canavan Group History, microfilm reel No. B0042, frs. 1244-1246

¹⁵ Mission Report

¹⁶ Richards Missing Crew Report

¹⁷ Meriam N. Sheppard, letter to CG Army Air Forces, March 2, 1946

¹⁸ Karl Affenzeller, Freistadt, Austria, letter September 10, 1995 to Rudolph C. Koller Jr.

¹⁹ Mission Report

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid, Canavan Group History, December 1944

²³ Canavan Group History, January 1945

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ M/Sgt. Donald J. Smith, Chief of Operations, 2nd Bomb Group Journal, Dec 17, 1944 (Washington National Records Center, Suitland, MD)

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Mission Report, Crew Interrogation

³⁰ Mission Report; Canavan Group History Narrative for December, 1944

³¹ Mission Report

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Craven & Cate, 716-718

³⁵ Canavan Group History Narrative for December 1944

³⁶ 20th Squadron History, microfilm reel No. A0542, fr. 1582

³⁷ Canavan Group History for December 1944

JANUARY 1945

Deliberations continued during the last quarter of 1944 and into early 1945 over the priority role of the strategic air forces. Among the target considerations was the combined production of tanks, trucks, armored vehicles, and ordnance. These had gone largely untouched since November 1 when attention was given to transportation and the demands of the Ardennes campaign. Other major concerns, in addition to oil, were the resurgence of submarine production and possible return of the U-boat menace, and the appearance of increasing numbers of German jet fighters. Uneasiness about the jets led to elevating jet production to co-equal priority status with oil. These latter two threats were expected to grow proportionally to the duration of the war. On January 12, 1945 Gen. Spaatz and RAF Air Marshall Sir Norman Bottomly issued a directive announcing the over-all mission for the strategic air forces: the progressive destruction and dislocation of German military, industrial, and economic systems and the direct support of land and naval forces. Oil continued as a first priority with jet production as a parallel obligation. These directives provided general guidance and theater commanders were authorized to call on heavy bombers for assistance when and as needed. Of course weather was a final determinant of when and which targets could be successfully attacked.¹

January 1945 held promise of better flying weather, and relief from the clouds, rain, and mud, that had caused so much trouble for the Group during the last two months of 1944. The planners hoped that at least twenty-five days in

the month would be good for flying. Such was not the case. Only seven missions were flown, the least of any full month during the war. The Fifteenth heavy bombers operated only eight days during the month, and in strength, only on the last day of the month. Icing conditions over the Alps were a major impediment to operations.²

The first four missions were to rail facilities. It wasn't until January 20th that the Group bombed an oil target again. Photo reconnaissance came back with some rewarding reports on priority oil targets struck during December. Blechhammer North and South, Oswiecim, and Odertal, had been pounded so well by the PFF method of bombing they were rendered inactive. Bombing of these plants had deprived the Germans of 45% of the total gas produced within the Fifteenth's bomber range. The Russian troops were now so close that the Germans abandoned these gigantic synthetic oil plants. Opposition continued to be primarily flak and the passive defense of smoke screens. Enemy fighters were devoted to the support and defense of German ground troops, and the remainder were grounded due primarily to lack of fuel. The Group lost two airplanes during this month of minimal operations.³

MISSION 342, JANUARY 4, 1945

PADUA, ITALY

LOCOMOTIVE REPAIR FACILITIES

VERONA, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS

On this first mission of 1945, seventeen bombers struck the locomotive repair shops while eleven bombed the marshalling yards. An offset aiming point was used at Verona because of some restriction to visibility. Padua was bombed visually, and bombs were in the target area at both facilities.⁴

MISSION 343, JANUARY 8, 1945

LINZ, AUSTRIA, MAIN STATION

KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA

MARSHALLING YARDS

MISSION 344, JANUARY 15, 1945

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

NORTHEAST MARSHALLING YARDS

MISSION 345, JANUARY 19, 1945

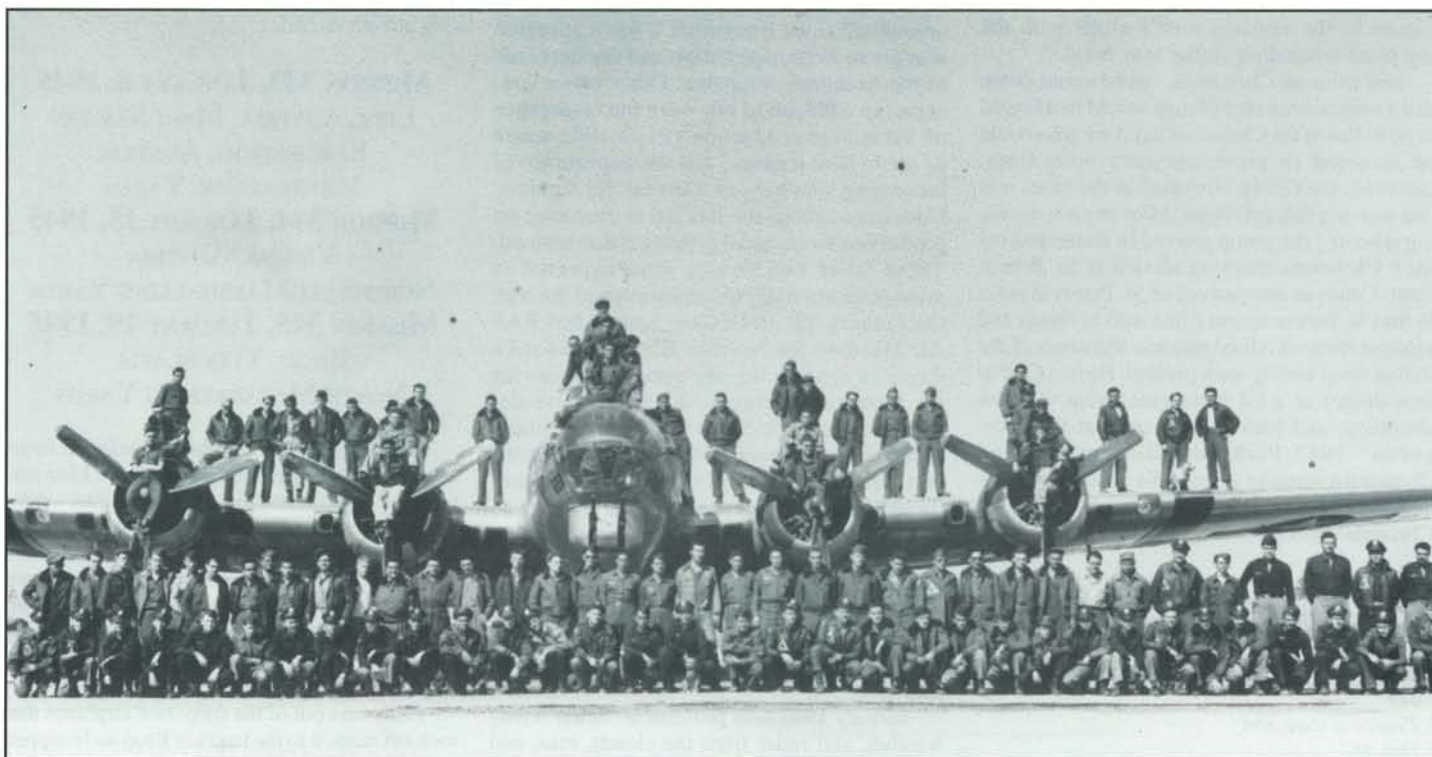
BROD, YUGOSLAVIA

NORTH MARSHALLING YARDS

Both targets were bombed by radar on January 8. Nineteen Fortress attacked the Linz station and eight attacked the Klagenfurt yards. No results observed and no injuries or losses.

Both waves reported excellent Mickey runs at Vienna. Twenty-seven planes took off, two returned early, leaving twenty-five who dropped 287 five-hundred pound bombs on the target. Two men from the 20th Squadron were slightly wounded by flak.

Forty-one out of the forty-two airplanes that took off made it to the target at Brod and dropped their bombs visually with good target coverage. One man from the 49th Squadron was slightly wounded.⁵



96th Squadron flight crews, January 1945. (Group Photo)

MISSION 346, JANUARY 20, 1945
REGENSBURG, GERMANY, OIL STORAGE
ROSENHEIM, GERMANY
MARSHALLING YARDS

The main target at Regensburg was bombed using the PFF synchronous method by 15 airplanes. Because of a bomb rack malfunction at the primary target, ten airplanes proceeded to an alternate at Rosenheim and bombed the marshalling yards visually. They observed hits in the target area. One crew reported they hit a railroad bridge in southeastern Germany. One airplane and crew were lost to flak. 1st Lt. William J. Wittlinger Jr., pilot of airplane number 44-8168, "Flying Home," of the 49th Squadron, was last sighted over the Alps on a heading that would have taken him to Yugoslavia. Returning crewmen reported receiving a radio message from Wittlinger's crew saying they were at 16,000 feet with two engines out and losing altitude at 300 feet per minute. The report said they could possibly get over the Alps.⁶

The airplane crashed after everyone bailed out. German reports show that the entire crew was taken prisoner and confined to prison camps. Later American reports state that the entire crew was repatriated after the war.⁷

MISSION 347, JANUARY 21, 1945
VIENNA, AUSTRIA
SCHWECHAT OIL REFINERY
GRAZ, AUSTRIA, MARSHALLING YARDS

The Group was part of a force of 189 B-17s sent by the Fifteenth Air Force to two oil refineries in the Vienna area.⁸ Of the forty airplanes the Group dispatched, twenty bombed the refinery and fifteen bombed the marshalling yards, both by radar through solid overcast. One crew bombed the marshalling yards, at Klagenfurt, visually, from 15,000 feet and scored hits on the tracks. Among the returning crews, two men were slightly wounded by flak. One airplane did not return.⁹

1st Lt. Alvin L. Notheis, 20th Squadron, in airplane number 44-6606, experienced detonating engines and excessive consumption of fuel on the way to the target. Over the target the airplane received a direct burst of flak aft of the ball turret. Control cables were severed, the oxygen system was inoperative, and the aircraft was low on fuel. After leaving the target, Lt. Notheis determined he did not have enough fuel to return to base, and with no oxygen, and two wounded crewmen, he decided to fly to an emergency field near Debrecen, Hungary. When the aircraft crossed the Russian front line, it was met by six Russian fighters, one of which fired warning shots. The crew held their fire, pilot Notheis rocked the plane's wings, and the Russian fighters left. Uncertain as to his position and the condition of the wounded, Lt. Notheis landed the airplane in an open field in northeastern Hungary, with only slight damage.

Among the Russians who came to the airplane, one was a doctor. The two wounded crewmen were given first aid and subse-

quently taken to a hospital in Mezo Csát, a small town six miles from where the airplane landed. The rest of the crew were taken to the Russian Area Commandant's Headquarters in a requisitioned Hungarian home in Tisza Kesci. Six days later the wounded men joined the crew and they all stayed at the Commandant's headquarters for sixteen days while arrangements were made to repair the airplane. These arrangements required several trips to an airfield at Miskoloz. Finally, Rumanian engineers were brought in to make the repairs. They replaced a broken tail wheel with one taken from a German Heinkel bomber, and the crew flew the airplane to Miskoloz where the airplane could be serviced. The plane was fueled with 750 gallons of gasoline, but the crew stayed at a hotel in Miskoloz for another five days before being allowed to takeoff. They returned to the Group February 18, were sent to Headquarters, Fifteenth Air Force, for interrogation and returned to the Group February 20.

In his returnee statement Lt. Notheis said one needs to keep urging the Russians to fix airplanes where needed and to arrange for repatriation. The Russians like the Americans so much, they try to delay their departure.¹⁰

MISSION 348, JANUARY 31, 1944
MOOSBIERBAUM, AUSTRIA, OIL REFINERY

The Fifteenth mounted a major strike against this vast oil complex. The Group's forty airplanes over the target were among 217 Fortresses and 407 Liberators that converged on Moosbierbaum that day. Weather required bombing by radar.¹¹

On January 10 there was a tragic conclusion to mission 333, December 17 to Blechhammer. Lt. Waldman, in airplane number 44-6350, "Helen Belle," of the 429th Squadron, made a safe emergency, wheels down landing in Yugoslavia when mechanical problems and flak damage forced the airplane down. The crew returned to the Group, except pilot Waldman and copilot 2nd Lt. Clayton L. Stemwedel, who stayed behind to get the airplane repaired and to fly it out. The crew had jettisoned all the readily removable equipment to reduce weight during the emergency. Maintenance personnel were flown in from the 324th Service Group to repair the airplane, but it was still without navigational equipment or a navigator and the radio command set worked on only one channel. It was planned that 44-6350 would fly on the wing of a C-47 to navigate the return trip to Italy.

1st Lt. Leonard B. Kornfeld, navigator on the C-47, described what happened, (the flight departed from Belgrade): "At Belgrade, the weather was better than it had been for the preceding four or five days, with a ceiling of approximately 1,000 feet. . . Lt. Waldman checked the weather forecast at the airport and told us only that it seemed all right, that the ceiling, visibility, etc. in Italy were suitable for landing. I do not know who the forecasting agency was, British or American, and I do not know what information, if any, was given concerning weather conditions en route.

After leaving Belgrade we climbed over the first layer of clouds to 6,000 feet and headed slightly southwest looking for a break in the solid

mass of (clouds) to the west. . . which would enable us to fly a more direct route to Foggia, since neither we nor the B-17 had much of a safety margin where gasoline supply was concerned. (nor, apparently, oxygen supply and equipment to fly over the clouds.) We proceeded on the above mentioned course as far as Uzice (south-southwest of Belgrade), without seeing any breaks to the west, and then turned on a course of 160 degrees. . . where we picked up the river system that went south to Mitrovica, (approximately due south of Belgrade) and the pass to the coast. We attempted to go down under the clouds and fly the river valley, but found that the clouds went clear down to the ground.

Up to this point the weather had been broken and we had been able to see the B-17 at all times and the ground at frequent intervals. But we could see that from here on the clouds were solid and covered the entire field of vision to the east, south and west. They also appeared to go up to well over 20,000 feet. In view of these conditions and before proceeding, Lt. Howard, my pilot, called Lt. Waldman and advised him it looked impossible to go over, under or around the weather and asked him whether he wanted to turn back to Belgrade or attempt to go through it. In both Lt. Howard's and my opinion this was the point of no return. Lt. Waldman elected to continue on and we began a climb on a course of 160 degrees. This was the last time that I, personally, saw the B-17.

We climbed to 11,000 feet and continued on the above course, encountering light snow and icing conditions until I saw the pass . . . through a break in the clouds and advised the pilot to turn west toward the coast on a course of 220 degrees. Lt. Howard saw the B-17 here momentarily, contacted it on the radio, advised of our change of course and saw the B-17 begin its bank to the right. This was the last time that anyone saw or heard from the aircraft.

Between the last mentioned position. . . and where we broke out on the coast (in the Kotor-Bouva area southwest of Titograd) we were in slushy snow and heavy icing conditions for approximately 45 to 50 minutes and were forced to use our de-icers steadily.

From the coast we proceeded to Bari, where Lt. Howard immediately notified Big Fence (air-sea rescue) and Regional Flight Control.¹²

Searches, including one from Belgrade, proved futile. In addition to Lts. Waldman and Stemwedel, passengers on the ill-fated ship were Maj. Roy V. Covington; S/Sgt. Eric G. Page; S/Sgt. Clarence P. Gunnisson; S/Sgt. Arthur J. Brown; and Cpl. Earl J. Freed, all of the 324th Service Group, and an Italian Captain whose name was not recorded.¹³

ITALIAN QUAGMIRE

Very bad weather held the Group on the ground from the 21st until the 31st. Not only did it rain, but the heaviest snow since arriving in Italy, kept the men stoking their stoves to keep their tents and stone huts warm, and shoveling mud to drain the water away. Missions were scheduled most every day, but were cancelled before the crews could make their way through the mud to the airplanes. Even practice missions had to be cancelled.



Undaunted by miserable weather, comedian Joe E. Brown paid a second visit to the Group January 28, 1945. (Courtesy of R. Bedgood)

Sgt. Charles C. Faig, of the 429th Squadron, wrote about the January problems with rain, snow and mud. "Every story coming out of sunny Italy deals, in one fashion, with mud—slippery, slimy, sticky, sworn at mud. The impression given, however, is that mud is the almost exclusive property of our brothers in arms, the Infantry. Believe me, it's not so, for we of the Air Corps have been living and working in the same stuff, and it almost held us up until we rose to fight it.

The incessant rains have turned the picturesque country-side and the airfields into a sea of soft, oozy mud, making perilous going, both on foot and in any form of transportation.

At our base, combat men, now idle as a result of the inclement weather, have joined together with the ground men, working shoulder to shoulder with pick and shovel to drain off the excess water. Most of the workers are volunteers who are gladly giving of their time and efforts so that when good flying weather arrives, the field will be in readiness for the huge Forts to take off with the minimum effort.

The job is a gigantic one, carrying with it plenty of blisters and backaches, but at the same time sharpening the appetites of all concerned. It is needless to say that each one of the workers enjoys a good night's sleep.

The digging out process was inaugurated by Capt. John C. Reardon of Greenfield, Massachusetts, pilot and commanding officer of one of the Fortress squadrons. Capt. Reardon was the first to take hold of a shovel to start the ditching. The Operations Department, headed by Capt. David T. Joyce of Greenwood, South Carolina, and the Engineering Department, headed by Capt. Tye S. Moore of Douglas, Wyoming, are supervising the project.

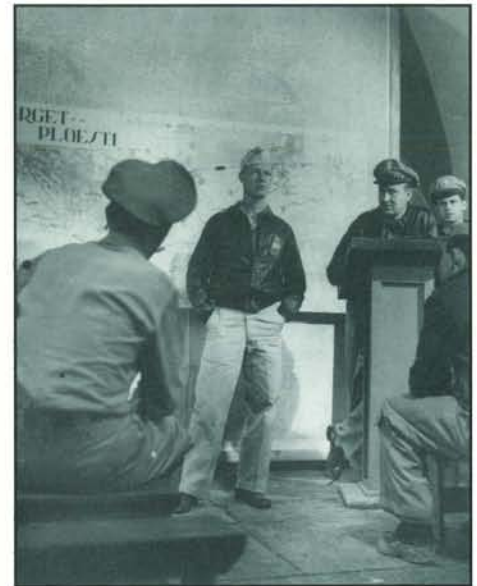
'I just wish some of the people sitting in their

easy chars back home could see this mud that we have to wade through,' said S/Sgt. Jack H. Metcalfe, of Turner, Oregon, as he took time off from his digging to smoke a cigarette. 'Just wait until we get some good flying weather and we will give the newspapers back home plenty to write about,' he continued. Metcalfe is one of the aerial gunners who volunteered in the pick and shovel brigade.

Further down the field, another gunner, S/Sgt. Oscar W. Hansen, of Eau Clair, Wisconsin was laboring feverishly in a pool of mud and water. When approached and asked if he was mad about the whole thing, he replied, 'Mad, what an interesting question. They ask me what I think of it, well I can't be nasty about it, so I'll say it isn't bad. Some of the people I know are wondering what we fellows are doing, for they have been hearing nothing about our exploits recently. Well, right now we are combating the enemy - mud, which is not new over here. Our main object now is to dig a few ditches so we can get our Fortress, "Big Friend," off the ground along with the other planes and get them where they will do the most good. I guess I had better stop chatting now and grab the shovel because I am up to my knees now in this mud and slowly going deeper. Here's mud in your eyes.'

The ditching is being carried on by men working in four hour shifts, and the past few days have seen a noticeable improvement around the revetments, and approaches to the taxi strips. In the meantime, a battalion of aviation engineers is working on the main runway keeping it in first class shape for the operational days to come."¹⁴

Portions of a movie, "Target Ploesti," were shot at the base about the summer campaign against the vast Ploesti oil complex. Several



Shooting scenes for movie, "Target Ploesti," in the briefing room, wearing summer uniforms while a winter gale blew outside. Facing L to R: Lt. Col. Richard S. Abbey; Maj. Broyles; and Maj. W. Randall Bedgood. Other participants included Maj. Norman Annich, Group Intelligence Officer; Maj. Bruce, Group Navigator; and Capt. Oliver, Group Weather Officer. (Courtesy of R. Bedgood)

days were spent reenacting, before the cameras, the briefing for the final mission of that campaign. The would-be actors shivered through the filming in their summer uniforms while a winter storm was raging outside. The temperature in the briefing room was described as refrigerator-like. No one recalls seeing the finished movie and those involved wondered what happened to the film and their brief chance at stardom.¹⁵

Endnotes:

¹ Craven & Cate, 719-721

² Ibid, 723

³ Canavan Group History for January 1945

⁴ Mission Report

⁵ Mission Reports

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Richards Missing Crew Report

⁸ Craven & Cate, 724

⁹ Mission Report

¹⁰ Ibid and Escape narrative, February 18, 1945

¹¹ Mission Report

¹² 1st Lt. Leonard B. Kornfeld, statement of January 14, 1945, Headquarters Fifteenth Air Force

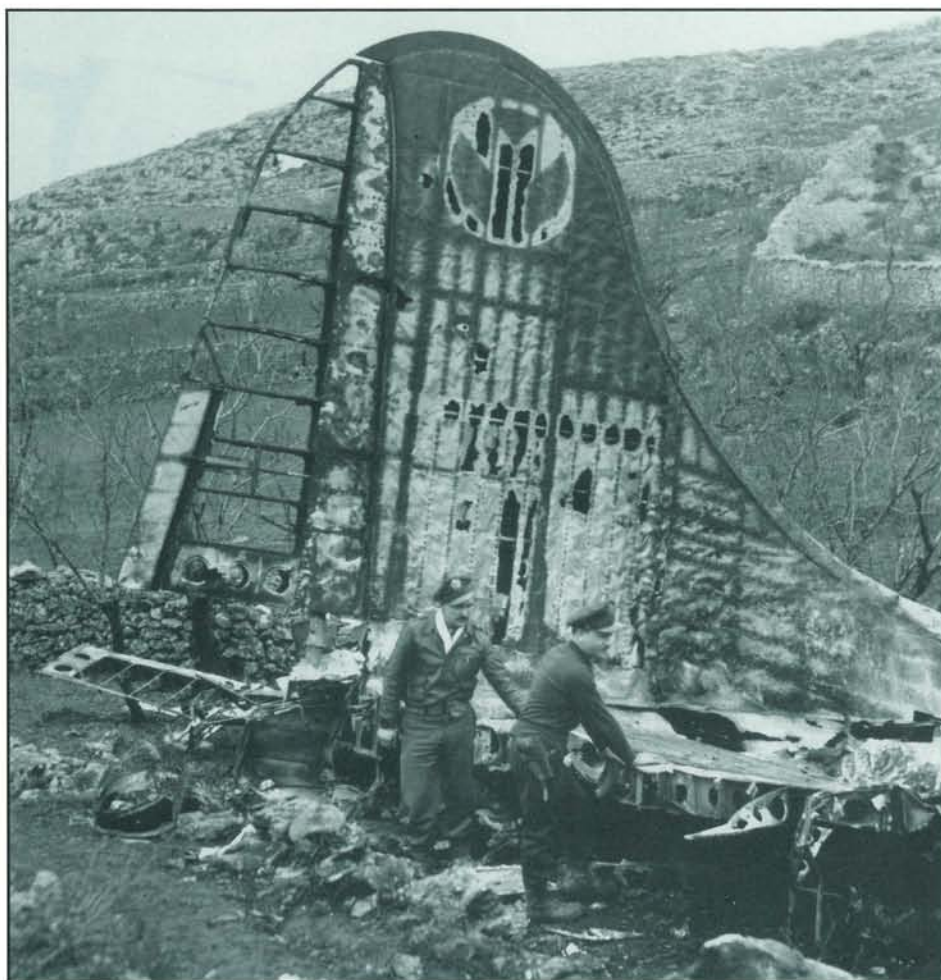
¹³ 2nd Bomb Group Missing Crew Report, January 18, 1945

¹⁴ Canavan Group History Narrative for January, 1945

¹⁵ Ibid

FEBRUARY 1945

The gloom and self-doubt that characterized the mood of top army and air force leaders at the end of December had largely subsided by the end of January. The Bulge had been pushed back and the Allied armies were again driving to the Rhine. The Russian armies had made massive advances on the eastern front. The strategic air campaign had resumed against declining enemy opposition. The Group had had only three nominal encounters with enemy aircraft since November 1, and



Wreckage of training flight accident February 4, 1945, near San Marco, Italy. Killed were Lt. Richard A. Pinner, P; 2nd Lt. Donald W. Waddell, CP; and Cpl. Nelson A. Nickel, UTG. Cpl. John B. Anastasi, ROG, survived with two broken legs and lacerations. (Group Photo)

had not lost an airplane to enemy fighters since the Privoser mission disaster of August 29. But flak was still a formidable weapon that stalked the skies indiscriminately for victims.

The CCS convened on January 30 at Malta, and barely a month after issuance of the Spaatz-Bottomly directive covering strategic operations, the conferees decided to throw the weight of the heavy bombers into the battle in the east. The objective was to prevent German reinforcement of the disintegrating eastern front by blocking and destroying the major transportation centers through which the Germans might send men and material from the west to the east.¹ Targeting by the Fifteenth Air Force soon reflected this shift in emphasis.

The 2nd Bomb Group flew 20 missions during February, only one of which was a "Lone Wolf" mission. The pace quickened as weather permitted, and the Group flew 15 missions during the last 16 days of the month, of which 11 were against rail facilities and bridges. Of the remaining 9 missions, 7 were to oil targets and 2 were against goods and ordnance storage facilities. Enemy flak gunners scored well against the Group. They seriously damaged 49 airplanes and slightly damaged another 26, claimed 4 lives and seriously wounded 10 among returning crews, and cut down five crews from the air. Targets in Austria were struck on 7 of the first 8 missions.²

MISSION 349, FEBRUARY 1, 1945 GRAZ, AUSTRIA, MARSHALLING YARDS

TARGETS OF OPPORTUNITY

The crews were briefed to bomb Moosbierbaum, but due to heavy weather, the 5th Wing leader instructed the Group to turn back and find other targets. As a result, twelve crews returned their bombs to base, twenty-one attacked the Graz marshalling yards, seven bombed the Klagenfurt marshalling yards, one attacked a rail yard near Raten, Austria, and one bombed a rail yard fifteen miles northwest of Maribor, Yugoslavia. None of the bombing results could be seen because of the overcast. Two men were slightly wounded by flak.³

TRAINING FLIGHT ACCIDENT

A training flight, February 4, 1945 ended in an accident which killed three men. The airplane crashed near San Marco, Italy, killing 1st Lt. Richard A. Pinner, pilot; 2nd Lt. Donald W. Waddell, copilot; and Cpl. Nelson A. Nickel, UTG. The other man on the plane, Cpl. John B. Anastasi, ROG, survived and was hospitalized at the 61st Station Hospital with two broken legs, and lacerations above the right eye.⁴

MISSION 350, FEBRUARY 5, 1945 REGENSBURG, GERMANY, OIL STORAGE

Forty-one Group airplanes took off from Amendola. Thirty-seven bombed the targeted oil tanks while two others bombed targets of opportunity. The 2nd was only one of the Fifteenth's groups whose 589 heavy bombers dumped 1,100 tons of explosives on this target and left it severely damaged.⁵

One airplane, number 42-102493, 49th Squadron, pilot 2nd Lt. R. B. Edelen, was destroyed in a taxi accident, and number 44-6678, 429th Squadron, pilot, 1st Lt. Maurice D. Porter, was listed as missing. Porter's crew sent a radio message saying they were losing altitude and trying to make Switzerland. They had lost two engines to flak, and with fuel leaks, were rapidly running low on fuel. Under these bleak conditions, they flew into a snow storm over the Alps, and Porter ordered the crew to bail out. After the bail out, the airplane, still on auto-pilot, flew until it crashed into the Piz Plazer mountains some thirty miles away. Meanwhile, the crew descended into the blinding snow storm. They became separated after reaching the ground and four – Lt. Porter; 2nd Lt. Donald M. Fishback, CP; S/Sgt. Charles E. Smith, UTG; and S/Sgt. Christian L. Fredrickson, LTG – were captured by the enemy and became POWs. S/Sgt. John P. Olinik, togglier, had some scary moments when his chute jammed, but it deployed in time, and he landed safely in the deep snow. About two hours later, he met S/Sgt. Glenn W. Machovec, LWG, and the two spent the night huddled together in Olinik's parachute. The next day the weather cleared and as they were walking, they met T/Sgt. Kenneth L. Hoffman, ROG, and S/Sgt. Arden O. Lannigan, RWG. Later that day they found a cabin with a sign plate on the door that read: "STRAUSSBURGER HUTTEE, GERMANY, 1907." Inside were four clean beds, pictures, maps, several Swastika flags, and a picture of Hitler on the wall. They stayed there for several days until their emergency rations ran out, then started descending the mountain to the southeast, which according to the maps, was toward Switzerland. They tied themselves together at 20-foot intervals for safety. Toward evening, the group chanced upon another cabin which they broke into and found a good food supply. They rested a couple days, stocked up on food and resumed their trip down the mountain. That day they were picked up by Swiss Frontier Guards and were interned. Eventually taken to Berne, Switzerland, they met S/Sgt. Franklin T. Wartman, TG, who had walked out on his own. In a few weeks they were all repatriated, and returned to Foggia on February 25. After a short stay at Foggia, they were sent home.⁶ The body of navigator, F/O John E. Skoba, was found by the Swiss in May, with a crushed skull. It was thought that he may have suffered the fatal injury by falling into a rock, or in a snow slide, because he parachuted, uninjured, with the rest of the crew. F/O Skoba was buried May 24, 1945 in the American cemetery at Munsingen, Switzerland.⁷

MISSION 351, FEBRUARY 7, 1945 VIENNA, AUSTRIA, LOBAU OIL REFINERY

Thirty-seven airplanes out of forty-two reached the target and bombed in two waves.

The first wave had to use an offset aiming point because of an effective smoke screen, and bombing results were not visible. The second wave struck an hour later, was able to bomb visually, and reported hits in the target area. Photo reconnaissance an hour and fifteen minutes later confirmed strike results. The distillation plant was still partially obscured by smoke, but near misses inflicted some damage. One medium-sized oil tank was burning; one of four rectangular buildings was completely destroyed, and an adjacent one appeared to be damaged; in another set of buildings, two out of three were almost completely destroyed, and the third appeared damaged; one oil tank wagon was burning; and in the rail sidings serving the refinery, tracks were damaged, and some rolling stock destroyed.

For the second mission in a row, the 429th Squadron lost an airplane—number 44-6682, and crew piloted by 1st Lt. Dale E. Gold. The plane received a direct hit, or near miss, by flak while on the bomb run. Gold called his squadron leader saying “I have two engines out and am going to feather a third. I think we’ll have to bail out in four minutes. Heading for Russia.”⁸ All of the crew members bailed out near Papa, Hungary, 20 minutes after leaving the formation. All were captured and became POWs except left waist gunner S/Sgt. Albert H. Matula whose chute did not open properly, and he was killed. Surviving crewmates said that Sgt. Matula’s chute didn’t billow until close to the ground and then collapsed. They surmised the chute was full of flak holes or malfunctioned.⁹

2nd Lt. J. E. Weber, 49th Squadron, was forced to make an emergency landing at Falconara Airdrome, on the Adriatic coast south of Ancona, because of fuel shortage. Lt. Weber left the formation after it passed the coast, and was out over the Adriatic. Later he ask for directions to the nearest field and was told he was 30 miles off the coast. At that point engines number 1 and 3 began to sputter, and he ordered the crew to ditching stations. The plane was at 9,000 feet. The crew had trouble getting the ball turret gunner out of the turret. In the meantime the plane descended to 500 feet over the water. At that point the crew sighted land and was given a heading to Falconara. An emergency landing was made half way down the runway, and dragging ball turret guns stopped the airplane. No one was injured, and the crew returned to Amendola two days later.¹⁰

MISSION 352, FEBRUARY 8, 1945

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

SOUTHEAST GOODS SECTION

All 27 airplanes that took off reached this repair and transshipment complex and bombed by radar through the overcast. Col. Richard E. Waugh was slightly wounded by flak.

MISSION 353, FEBRUARY 9, 1945

MOOSBIERBAUM, AUSTRIA, OIL REFINERY

A three-airplane Pathfinder mission was sent out when weather unsuitable for formation flying prevailed. The three crews reached and bombed the target by radar and returned unopposed.¹¹



M/Sgts. Alvan H. Richardson and Bernard B. Cohen, engineers, examine German Heinkel bomber tail wheel installed on Lt. Alvin L. Nothesis' plane number 44-6606, 20th Squadron, by crew, Rumanians, and Russians, after original was lost to combat and emergency landing in Rumania. (Group Photo / W. Greenhalgh)



A tight but ill-fated formation of 429th airplanes. No. 682 (top), with Lt. Dale E. Gold crew, downed by flak over Vienna February 2, 1945; No. 198 (bottom), with Lt. Robert P. Trowbridge crew, downed by flak over Vienna February 21, 1945; and No. 542 (in slot), with Lt. Walter B. Cope crew was forced by flak to make an emergency landing April 1, 1945 in friendly Yugoslav territory. (Group Photo)



Two props feathered, and two props bent, but home at Amendola. (Group Photo)

MISSION 354, FEBRUARY 13, 1945

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

SOUTH ORDNANCE DEPOT

MISSION 355, FEBRUARY 14, 1945

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

SCHWECHAT OIL REFINERY

MISSION 356, FEBRUARY 15, 1945

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

SOUTH STATION FREIGHT YARDS

After the three-day bad weather interlude, the Fifteenth Air Force loosed almost the full weight of its heavy bomber fleet, on February 13, against targets primarily in the Vienna area plus some marshalling yards in western Hungary and other areas of Austria. For the third consecutive mission, all planes from the 2nd that took off arrived over the target. The Group put 42 airplanes over the Vienna South Ordnance Depot but they had to bomb by PFF, using an offset aiming point because of restricted visibility. The 429th Squadron lost another member, when S/Sgt. Paul W. Hampstein was killed by flak. One member of the 20th Squadron was slightly wounded.

The Group mounted two waves of airplanes, approximately one hour apart, to bomb the Schwechat Refinery. The first wave of twenty-five bombed the Refinery through a solid overcast, but the second wave of fourteen attacked the marshalling yards at Graz, Austria with good, visible results. One crewman was slightly wounded, and one crew was lost.

Again, the 429th Squadron lost an airplane and crew. Airplane number 44-6659, "Hells Angel," with 1st Lt. Robert E. Davis and crew, began to lose altitude after coming off the target, but stayed with the formation for some time. The plane then took up a heading of 115 degrees, and was last seen at 15,000 feet with all engines running. The airplane crashed near Modra, Czechoslovakia.¹² The copilot, Lt. Frank S.

Covey, later reported that all crew members bailed out and all landed within ten miles of Dubova, Czechoslovakia. All were captured except left waist gunner, S/Sgt. Richard (NMI) Hearing. He was seen to leave the ship and his chute was seen to open, but the crew never saw or heard of him again. He was later confirmed as KIA.¹³

A Blue Force of 18 left to bomb the Vienna South Station Freight yards on the 15th. Fifteen airplanes bombed the primary target by PFF and three bombed targets of opportunity. All planes and crews returned without serious damage or injury.¹⁴

Vienna had taken a terrible pounding over the last several days. There was wide-spread destruction to rail stations, yards and tracks. In parts of the city all rail lines were blocked. But it was the type of destruction that Germans had the considerable capability to repair.¹⁵ While Vienna could be set aside for a while, the Fifteenth had occasion to send its bombers back before the city was overrun by the Russians.

MISSION 357, FEBRUARY 16, 1945

VIPITENO, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS

BOLZANO AREA, ITALY, RAILROAD

LANDSBURG, GERMANY, AIRDROME

HALL, AUSTRIA, MARSHALLING YARDS

Col. Cullen was away temporarily on duty in England and the U.S., so Col. Ryan returned to the Group and led this mission. The primary target was to have been the airdrome at Lechfeld, Germany, but weather forced selection of alternates and targets of last resort. Thirty-nine aircraft took off, 1 returned early, and 3 aborted, leaving 35 which bombed the four listed targets. Nine struck the Vipiteno yards, 14 dropped their tonnage on the railroad 2 1/2 miles south of Bolzano, 7 attacked the Landsburg airdrome, and the remaining 5 bombed the yards at Hall. All bombing was visual with reportedly good cov-

erage of the targets. The flak was fierce over several of the targets, and the Group brought home a seriously wounded S/Sgt. R. W. Finch, plus nine other lightly wounded airmen. Fortunately, no airplanes were lost.¹⁶

MISSION 358, FEBRUARY 17, 1945

LINZ, AUSTRIA

MAIN STATION MARSHALLING YARDS

MISSION 359, FEBRUARY 18, 1945

LINZ, AUSTRIA, BENZOL PLANT

SALZBURG, AUSTRIA, MARSHALLING YARDS

Col. Ryan again led the mission of 28 airplanes that bombed the Linz yards by radar through heavy cloud cover. The primary target on February 18 was the Benzol plant at Linz, but 14 planes used radar to bomb the Linz industrial area, while 13 aimed their bombs at the Salzburg yards. No results could be observed.¹⁷

The 20th Squadron was happily surprised when airplane 44-6606 arrived at the base. The airplane and crew had been missing since mission 347 to the Schwechat Oil Refinery at Vienna, January 21. Lt. Alvin L. Notheis had landed it, damaged, behind Russian lines. The flak holes were patched, and a replacement tail wheel from a German airplane was attached to the fuselage by means of wooden braces. The plane could only go straight ahead on the ground. Notheis had taken off on a 3,000 foot runway to return to Amendola.¹⁸

MISSION 360, FEBRUARY 19, 1945

KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA

MARSHALLING YARDS

The crews groaned as the target for the day was revealed. It was the old "Flak Nest", the Vienna area. But this time, the Group did not reach Vienna, and the alternate, Klagenfurt marshalling yards, was bombed without opposition from the defenders. Due to strong winds, the Group leader ordered the change in targets. The Group formation was somewhat scattered by the weather, and some crews tagged onto other groups. The 2nd spent almost an hour in the target area making repeated bomb runs, before finally bombing visually with a good pattern of hits in and to the left of the rail yards.¹⁹

MISSION 361, FEBRUARY 20, 1945

VIENNA, AUSTRIA, LOBAU OIL REFINERY

KAPFENBERG, AUSTRIA, STEEL WORKS

For the 2nd Bomb Group, the raid on the Lobau Refinery was the best mission of the winter oil campaign and one of the best missions of the war. The lead bombardier, 1st Lt. William T. Hix, 429th Bomb Squadron, sacrificed his life to achieve these results.

The Silesian and Polish synthetic plants and crude oil refineries had been neutralized by the advance of the Russian armies. The giant synthetic plant at Brux had been immobilized by the combined attacks of a Pathfinder mission from the Fifteenth Air Force on December 25 and a highly successful night raid by the RAF Bomber Command on the night of January 16. This left the complex of crude oil refineries at



1st Lt. William T. Hix, lead bombardier KIA on mission 361 February 20, 1945 to Lobau Oil Refinery, Vienna. Though mortally wounded, Lt. Hix did a masterful job of bombing, then died on the airplane. (Courtesy of R. Bedgood)

Vienna as the most important targets within range of Italy-based bombers. The largest of these plants, Moosbierbaum, was put out of action by two successful attacks in February, and was not expected to resume any operations at least until the latter part of the month.

Thus, the Lobau refinery emerged as the oil target of first priority. Severely damaged by successful aerial blows during the spring and summer of 1944, the usual frantic repair efforts of the Germans succeeded in rehabilitating the plant. With estimated gasoline output of 3,200 tons a month, it was turning out half of the total gasoline production of the Vienna area. Its importance was increasing daily as it became evident that every ton of gasoline from this area would be required by the German army to meet the rapidly developing threat from the Second and Third Ukrainian armies massed on the Hungarian plain and ready to move following the fall of Budapest.

Between 1:02 and 1:26 P.M., on February 20, 50 B-17s of the 2nd and 99th Bombardment Groups dropped 592 x 500-pound general purpose bombs, (148 tons), on the target from altitudes varying from 23,500 to 26,000 feet. Both visual and offset methods of sighting were used.

The strike was unopposed by enemy aircraft. Flak was only moderate, despite the presence of over 300 heavy guns in the Vienna area, indicating that the sustained heavy assaults on Vienna — five major strikes in eight days — had a serious effect on enemy defenses. A smoke screen was in operation, but was not effective. No B-17s were downed, but the 2nd's lead bombardier was lost. Lt. Hix was hit by flak on the bomb run, but he stayed at his bombsight, completed the run, and the Group, following his lead, bombed with great accuracy. The valiant Hix died of his wounds aboard the airplane. One other man was slightly wounded.²⁰

Reconnaissance missions later that day, and again on February 25, showed that the attack was outstandingly successful, resulting in serious damage and partial destruction of the boiler



Contrails leave messages in the sky. Aircraft No. 198, with Lt. Robert P. Trowbridge and crew shot down February 21, 1945 on mission 362, to Vienna. (Group Photo)

house, virtual destruction of the distillation unit pump house, damage to the fractionating tower and ancillary equipment, storage tanks damaged or burned out, and serious damage to tankage and rail sidings. The photo mission on the 25th showed very little, if any, clearing and repair work to the refinery was visible. The conclusion was that the plant was inoperable, and was not expected to resume production for at least two months and possibly longer.²¹

The mission was so successful that the Fifteenth Air Force issued a special booklet on the results, and General Twining sent the following commendation: "The two zero February attack on the Lobau oil refinery by units of your command is one of the most successful bombing performances of recent months. Post raid reconnaissance shows that the plant has been damaged so severely that it will be inoperative for an extended period of time. I extend my congratulations to all personnel responsible for this successful attack."²²

One squadron of six planes bombed the Kapfenburg, Austria, Steel Works. A large building in the timber yard was destroyed, two labor camp huts and other small buildings were damaged, and the boiler house received possible damage from near misses.²³

MISSION 362, FEBRUARY 21, 1945 VIENNA, AUSTRIA CENTRAL YARDS AND SHOPS

Over 500 Fifteenth Air Force bombers made an overwhelming attack on Vienna railways and stations. The city's oil, industry and transportation facilities were nearing total destruction.²⁴ Twenty-six Group airplanes joined the attack and added their 162.5 tons of bombs to the raid. The results were good. Two men were wounded and two airplanes were lost to flak.

The 429th Squadron lost the two airplanes. Pilot 2nd Lt. Robert P. Trowbridge, and crew, in airplane number 44-6198, "Dollar 98," were observed, after bombs away, to have one engine out and losing altitude. The plane was last seen heading toward Russian lines. No further information was available as to what happened to the plane. All the crew, except 2nd Lt. Allen W. Swain, N, survived, were captured and became POWs. Lt. Swain did not survive, but the details of his fate could not be determined.²⁵

Airplane number 44-6689, pilot 1st Lt. Eugene F. Bull, 429th Squadron, received a burst of flak in front of number 4 engine while on the bomb run. A large hole appeared behind number 4 engine, and in the copilot's window. The plane slid off to the left of the formation with number 4 engine burning. The plane was under control but losing altitude rapidly while pieces of the wing were breaking off. Two chutes were seen to open.²⁶

In their joint interrogation statement after returning, the officer crew reported that the first burst of flak which hit between the number 3 and 4 engines, knocked out the gas lines to these engines, and injured Lt. Bull's left shoulder, leaving it numb. Copilot 2nd Lt. Harold E. Frazer, feathered both engines. The next burst of flak took away rudder controls, damaged elevator controls, blew away half of the right aileron, and knocked out the electrical system. Frazer turned out of the formation, engine manifold pressure dropped rapidly, and the airplane began losing altitude fast. The crew took up course toward the Russian lines.

With the intercom inoperative, Lt. Bull sent engineer, Sgt. Lewis E. Fifield, to the nose to get the heading to an emergency field. The navigator, 2nd Lt. John R. Specker, already had a heading for Kecskemet Airdrome, Hungary. Sgt. Fifield was also sent around to see about the condition of the crew and learned that Lt. Bull was the only one injured.

En route, Bull saw some fighters below and to the right. Hoping they were Russian, the crew fired flares and lowered the gear, however, only one main gear wheel came down part way. The fighters proved to be 4 Me-109s and they were quick to spring to the attack. They peppered the flight deck and made a sieve out of parts of the airplane. The chances of reaching the emergency field were now hopeless, and Bull sent Fifield back to order the enlisted crew out, and to join them. In a few minutes the officer crew safely exited the airplane.

All of the enlisted crew fell in German territory, and were captured. T/Sgt. Ted J. Bunnell, TG; S/Sgt. Clyde T. Freestone, RWG; and S/Sgt. John Gillece, LWG, were all wounded on the airplane. T/Sgt. Bunnell was also strafed while in his parachute, seriously wounding his feet. The German captors took away the crew's first aid kits, so they were left with nothing to treat Bunnell and the other wounded men. The men were held for three days without medical attention, even though they begged the Germans for medical treatment. After three days, the three wounded men were taken to a German hospital at Papa, Hungary, where T/Sgt. Bunnell died of his wounds, aggravated by delayed treatment. The rest of the enlisted crew survived as POWs.²⁷

Lt. Frazer bailed out with his boots in his hands. After he landed, uninjured, a Russian officer came riding a horse across a field toward him. The officer fired on Frazer, who began desperately shouting "Americanski". The Russian quit firing and took Frazer to a house which he judged to be a command post. Frazer spent twenty anxious minutes trying to convince the Russians that he was American. They ask if he, "sprechen sie Deutsch?", which he vehemently tried to deny. It wasn't until they brought in Lt. Bull, who had won over his captors with American cigarettes, that the Russians accepted Frazer's identity.

Lt. Specker followed Bull and Frazer out of the airplane. He waited until the airplane had passed over him before pulling his rip cord. The chute didn't come out! He had to tear the pack open and pull the chute out by hand. He saw 2nd Lt. Robert C. Krejsa, B, above him. Both were strafed by the German fighters and shot at from the ground. Specker was wounded in the thigh. He landed very close to the German lines. Unable to walk, he laid on the ground near some bushes for an hour or so. He was picked up by a Russian patrol and taken to a farm house where a field doctor gave him a shot and bandaged his leg. Specker was told that the Russians had picked up two other Americans. He was later taken to a small village by a Russian Lt. Colonel, where another doctor re-banded his leg. Then he was taken by ambulance to where Bull, Frazer and Krejsa were being held.

As Lt. Krejsa came down he could see the empty B-17 still circling and an Me-109 having great sport trying to riddle it out of the sky. His attention was soon diverted when he heard bullets whizzing by and plunking into his parachute. A 20mm shell took a large piece out of one panel and the others were sprinkled with holes. He hit the ground hard and laid still in the mud for about 15 minutes. He was shaken, but uninjured. He got up and started walking east. A Russian patrol picked him up at the point of a machine gun.

They took his ID and led him to a farm house. After they dried his clothes and fed him, the Russians took him to where Bull and Frazer were.

The four officers eventually came together at a Russian colonel's house. The colonel said the Germans maintained a constant fighter patrol along the front lines, waiting for crippled bombers to attack. After a good nights sleep and a hearty breakfast, the group started for Dunavesce, a Russian Headquarters. They arrived too late and were diverted to Kunsezentmilklor. The next morning they were returned to Dunavesce, and taken to what appeared to be a Provost Marshall's office where they were turned over to a female Russian private. She had arranged to billet them with a Hungarian family. They spent the next 19 days there with bad food, lousy beds, no cigarettes, and unable to contact anyone above the private.

Finally they became friendly with a Russian civilian who contacted a Russian colonel. Four days later they were brought into an office, quizzed again about their identification and the type of the airplane they had been flying. On March 11, the four, plus seven other airmen since picked up, were herded into an old Russian truck, given rations, (mainly salami and bread) and brought to Kiskomet. They were again billeted for two nights with a Hungarian family while the Russians tried to find transportation. After another trip by truck and additional delay, the group found the American Military Mission in Debrecen. That night they shared sumptuous American rations, by comparison with recent fare, with American generals. On March 16 they were flown to Naples by C-47, deloused, flown to Bari on the 17th, deloused again, left Lt. Bull at the hospital there and returned to Amendola.²⁸

MISSION 363, FEBRUARY 22, 1945

**IMMENSTADT, GERMANY
MARSHALLING YARDS
REUTTE, AUSTRIA, MARSHALLING YARDS**

The mission was to bomb marshalling yards in the Munich area at Immenstadt and Leutkirch. Atrocious weather largely nullified the effort. The Group put up two waves, a total of 35 airplanes. Only 5 were able to bomb Immenstadt, and 4 attacked the marshalling yards at Reutte, Austria, as a target of opportunity. Low visibility and clouds obscured bombing results. The remaining 26 airplanes returned with their bombs after 8:20 of fruitless flying time.²⁹

MISSION 364, FEBRUARY 23, 1945

WORGL, AUSTRIA, MARSHALLING YARDS

The incessant pounding of the large transportation centers forced the enemy to increase the use of yards in the small cities, and towns. The Group set out to bomb the Amstetten, Austria marshalling yards, but it was unreachable, so the marshalling yards at Worgl, were bombed instead. The Group dropped 158.0 tons of bombs on the target which was partially covered with smoke from previous bombing. One squadron had a good concentration at the choke point, one squadron was over, and two squadrons dropped into the smoke.³⁰

MISSION 365, FEBRUARY 24, 1945

**FERRARA, ITALY, MARSHALLING
YARDS AND RAILROAD BRIDGE**

The Ferrara yards were bombed by 19 airplanes as an alternate when the primary target was protected by weather. Two squadrons had a good concentration of hits on the target, and one squadron's bombs were long. Seven airplanes bombed a railroad bridge on the return flight. The bombs fell around the bridge but there were no direct hits.³¹

MISSION 366, FEBRUARY 25, 1945

**LINZ, AUSTRIA
SOUTH MAIN MARSHALLING YARDS
AMSTETTEN, AUSTRIA
MARSHALLING YARDS**

Linz was on the main rail line between Vienna and Munich. Intelligence reported a high level of activity in the yards. They were 75 percent full of cars believed to contain war material going to the eastern front. The target was obscured by smoke from previous bombing and only one squadron dropped its bombs there. Two squadrons bombed the alternate at Amstetten, with very good concentration of bombs in the yards and at the round house. The flak was heavy, intense and accurate. Four men were wounded, one, T/Sgt. Nicholas Michalyshin, ROG, 96th Squadron, seriously.³²

MISSION 367, FEBRUARY 27, 1945

**AUGSBURG, GERMANY
MARSHALLING YARDS**

Insurmountable weather over the Alps gave Fifteenth heavy bomb units a brief intermission on February 26, but on the 27th, 430 B-17s and B-24s were sent to the Augsburg marshalling yards.³³

Augsburg was a major rail center on the main Vienna-Munich-Rhine Valley line, and was a junction for the Munich-Berlin line. The yards had a through-put capacity of 2,000 wagons daily. Recent reconnaissance showed 920 units in the yards. The Group formation of twenty airplanes was able to bomb visually with excellent results. One large and some minor explosions were observed. One man was slightly wounded, otherwise the Group returned with only nominal damage.³⁴

MISSION 368, FEBRUARY 28, 1945

**VERONA-PERONA, ITALY
RAILROAD BRIDGE
BRESCIA, ITALY, GOODS YARDS
CONIGLIANO, ITALY, MARSHALLING YARDS**

The Germans were moving troops out of Italy, through the Brenner Pass, to the southern Russian front. The objective of the mission was to destroy the Verona-Perona bridge, pile up the traffic and create lucrative targets for both the tactical and strategic air forces. That part of the mission failed. The battle plan was to attack the target with six boxes, or squadrons, each with

its own lead bombing crew. The three lead boxes, from the 49th, 96th and 429th Squadrons, attempted to bomb the railroad bridge with results ranging from fair to poor to terrible. There were only two bombs within 1,000 feet of the designated Mean Point of Impact, (MPI). One box's MPI was 4,500 feet away in open country. The bridge was untouched. Because of smoke in the target area, the other three boxes chose alternate targets.

Two boxes, the 49th Squadron and the other a combination of crews from the 20th and 96th Squadrons, bombed the Brescia Goods Yards with results ranging from terrible to excellent. The 49th's MPI was 6,000 feet away from the designated MPI. The composite squadron put 80% of its bomb within 1,000 feet of the designated MPI, scoring many hits in the goods yards, and destroying many box cars. The 96th Squadron lead crew that produced these excellent results was, Lt. J. E. Smith; P. Lt. Young, N; and Lt. Joseph M. Swift, B.

The remaining box, from the 20th Squadron, bombed Conigiliano marshalling yards, as a last resort target, with excellent results. Ninety percent, (90%) of the bombs were within 1,000 feet of the designated MPI. The lead crew was Lt. C. Wickersham Jr.; P. Lt. H. Gluck, N; Lt. Bloom, RN; and Lt. C. W. Loomis, B.

Col. Ryan led the mission. This was to be his last mission and came very close to being a final mission. The Brenner Pass was the gateway to the vital German lifeline through the Alps, and they defended it vigorously. Antiaircraft artillery was dug in on the mountain sides and could bring to bear withering fire power down the corridors of the mountain passes. Although the bombing altitudes were between 25,000 and 26,000 feet, the flak batteries were much closer than that to the formations. The German defenders tried to disrupt and disorganize the attack by taking out its leader and they almost succeeded.

Col. Ryan's lead plane was blasted by flak on and after the bomb run, which may account, in part, for the poor bombing. The navigator, 1st Lt. Robert M. Hall, and the upper turret gunner, T/Sgt. Donald R. Simon, were killed. The copilot, 2nd Lt. Francis L. Michaelis, and radio gunner, T/Sgt. Richard K. Forst, were seriously wounded. Col. Ryan lost his left forefinger to flak. 1st Lt. William J. Bachardy, the bombardier, was slightly wounded.³⁵ 1st Lt. Benjamin W. Doddridge, 96th Squadron, riding in the tail gunners position, as observer for the Group leader, came forward and took copilot Lt. Michaelis' place for the return trip to an emergency landing at Falconara airdrome, near Ancona, Italy, where the wounded were hospitalized. The four uninjured members of the crew returned to Amendola in another Group airplane.

1st Lt. Luther S. Reams, a navigator in another crew was seriously wounded. Overall, the Group had 7 airplanes severely damaged and 18 sustain minor damage from flak.³⁶

THE LAST MISSION OF "THREE FINGER JACK"

The wound that Col. Ryan received on mission 368 caused him to be known as "Three Fin-

ger Jack", even after he became Air Force Chief of Staff in the early 1970s.

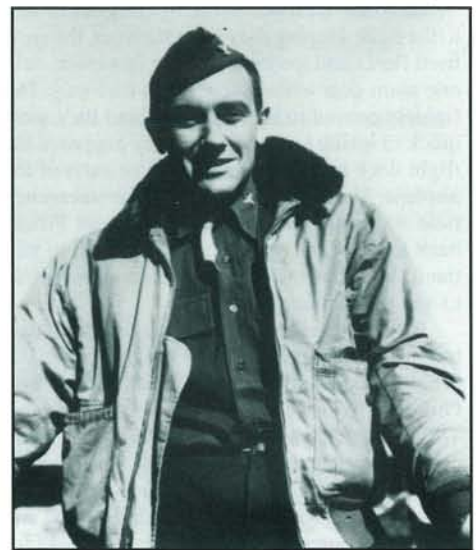
W. Randall Bedgood Jr., was Group Operations Officer at the time, and he remembers the occasion. "Col. Ryan was hit by flak over the target and landed at Ancona, Italy. I flew up to bring him back and delivered him to the Bari airfield where we were met by the doctors. I returned to Amendola.

Somewhere in the neighborhood of fifteen or eighteen days after Ryan was shot down (not literally, plane was shot up), I received a call from him in the hospital at Bari. He told me to fly down in a B-17, then come to the hospital. I flew down with only my engineer, picked up a jeep, and went to the hospital. When I entered Ryan's room, I saw his left hand in a cast. . . . Col. Ryan told me to close the door. Then he asked me to help him dress. I began to help, all the time wondering what was going on. Ryan told me, after he was fully clothed, to go out the door, not stop for anyone, and go straight to the jeep. As he came out, the nurses, doctors, and orderlies tried to stop him. He almost got to the jeep before I did. I drove to the air strip. When I stopped he got out. I turned in the jeep and he beat me to the B-17. When I got to the plane he was sitting in the pilot's seat. This really worried me. Though I knew I could ride the controls if necessary, I could not understand what he was trying to do.

Col. Cullen was still on TDY, and Col. Richard G. Waugh, who took over as Group Commander when Ryan was wounded and hospitalized, was shot down March 16, on mission 379 to the Florisdorf Oil Refinery at Vienna. The sudden loss of the Group Commander, either compelled or gave Ryan the excuse to leave the hospital. [See Appendix 7.]³⁷

I guess the takeoff was about the roughest takeoff I had been in during my flying time in B-17s. We flew to Naples, Rome, the Adriatic, and then to Amendola. The landing was even worse than the takeoff. The 2nd Bomb Group was in charge of the tower that day, and the boys in the tower knew I had taken this plane off and could not resist saying 'Colonel, we have take-off and landing practice after the mission is off the ground, do you want us to set you up for tomorrow? . . .'

When we stopped at our hardstand and they saw Col. Ryan get out of the pilot's seat, one of the tower officers came over and apologized. Ryan said, 'Son, that's all right, Col. Bedgood can fly better than me, right now!' Col. Ryan told me after we were back at base to set up another flight after the mission next day. His take off was a little better and his landing a little smoother. We set up a third flight the next day, and he was very good taking off and landing. When we got back into the jeep to head back to operations, he took an instrument card out of his pocket and asked me to sign it. I said, 'Jack, I'm not an instrument instructor, I can't sign it.' He said, 'I was ordered not to fly a mission when I returned to the Group. They are going to send me back to the States soon. I do not want to go through an instrument course in the U.S. No one in the States will know your status, instrument wise. Please help me.' Needless to say, I could not say no. . . . When we got back to operations, General Lawrence and staff were there with



Colonel John Ryan. (Group Photo)

his orders sending him home. He looked at me and said, 'Thanks'.³⁸

Endnotes:

- ¹ Craven & Cate, 724, 725
- ² Canavan Group History for February 1945
- ³ Mission Report
- ⁴ Canavan Group History
- ⁵ Craven and Cate, 730
- ⁶ 429th Squadron History, February 1945; John P. Olinik personnel account
- ⁷ Stapfer and Kunzle, 65; Aeschbacher Letter
- ⁸ Mission Report
- ⁹ Richards Missing Crew Report
- ¹⁰ Mission Report
- ¹¹ Mission Report
- ¹² 429th Squadron History, microfilm reel A0613, fr. 294.
- ¹³ Richards Missing Crew Report
- ¹⁴ Mission Report
- ¹⁵ Craven & Cate, 730
- ¹⁶ Mission Report
- ¹⁷ Ibid
- ¹⁸ 20th Squadron History, fr. 1600
- ¹⁹ 96th Squadron History, fr. 732
- ²⁰ Canavan Group History for February 1944
- ²¹ Mission Report
- ²² Canavan Group History
- ²³ Mission Report
- ²⁴ Craven & Cate, 731
- ²⁵ Richards Missing Crew Report
- ²⁶ Mission Report
- ²⁷ Richards Missing Crew Report
- ²⁸ Canavan Group History, February 1945, Interrogation Statement, Lt. Eugene F. Bull crew.
- ²⁹ Mission Report
- ³⁰ Ibid
- ³¹ Ibid
- ³² Ibid
- ³³ Craven & Cate, 738
- ³⁴ Mission Report
- ³⁵ Donald J. Smith, Group Journal, Feb. 28, 1945
- ³⁶ Mission Report. Richards Missing Crew Report
- ³⁷ Canavan Group History, February 1945
- ³⁸ Second Bombardment Association NEWSLETTER, June 1994, Vol 10, No. 2, pg. 4,5

MARCH 1945 — ANTICIPATING THE END

The Allies began to realize that after five and a half years of war, the German menace could not last much longer. With the Russian armies poised in the east and the British and Americans

in the west, a final great push from both sides would crush the enemy, and end the terrible conflict, at last.

The need for strategic bombing was coming to an end, as the enemy-controlled area was reduced and true strategic targets became fewer. The Fifteenth Air Force was expending two-thirds of its efforts against transportation targets and a third on the oil campaign. As strategic targets vanished, more attention could be devoted to aiding the Russian and Allied advances. In March, the Russians sent in requests for bombings which would benefit their ground forces and the Fifteenth responded with attacks on marshalling yards, airfields, bridges, and other targets in Hungary, Austria, and Yugoslavia.¹

With continuing good weather, the 2nd was able to fly twenty-one missions in March, 12 to rail facilities, 7 to oil, 1 to an assembly plant and 1 to an airdrome. It was the last month the Group would attack an oil target. The Group lost 11 airplanes, 8 of which were able to reach friendly territory. Only two crews were lost over enemy territory where survivors were captured. Sadly, there were 23 fatalities among the crews that went down, some being the victims of strafing while in their parachutes. As the vaunted Third Reich imploded toward certain collapse, the tactics of its Nazi zealots became more desperate and ruthless. Reported instances of attacks on defenseless airmen in parachutes, at least among those of the 2nd Bomb Group, were rare until the latest stages of the war. For the first time in several months the Luftwaffe made an aggressive appearance, and the Group had its first encounter with the Me-262 jet fighter.

MISSION 369, MARCH 1, 1945
MOOSBIERBAUM, AUSTRIA
OIL REFINERY
MARIBOR, YUGOSLAVIA,
MARSHALLING YARDS

There were 2 aborts out of a force of 42 airplanes that set off for Moosbierbaum, but weather over the target reduced the attacking force to 29, that had to resort to radar bombing. The rest of the formation parceled out their loads at four different targets — 6 at the Maribor, Yugoslavia, locomotive depot; 4 at Knittelfeld, Austria, marshalling yards; 1 at Wildon, Austria railroad; and 1 at Judenburg, Austria, marshalling yards. These latter targets were all attacked visually.² This mission was evidence crews felt free to roam the skies with impunity, where necessary, in search of targets, at least outside the known concentrations of antiaircraft artillery, and on the fringes of enemy territory where the prospects of making it to friendly ground were good.

Capt. William C. Donnell and his crew, 96th Squadron, were flying airplane 44-8814, when it was hit by flak over Moosbierbaum about five seconds before bombs away. The right wing, and number 3 and 4 engines were damaged, and the aileron cables were cut. The crew dropped their bombs, but lost several thousand feet before regaining control of the airplane. Donnell first headed for Russian territory, then decided he would try returning to home base. With great difficulty, the crew nursed the plane back, but before they reached Amendola, the two right

engines quit and they crash landed in a plowed field near the 463rd Group base. The airplane caught fire on landing, which was brought under control. The crew got out safely, but the airplane had to be salvaged.³

MISSION 370, MARCH 2, 1945
LINZ, AUSTRIA, MARSHALLING YARDS

Twenty of the 27 airplanes that reached the target area bombed the marshalling yards by PFF. Six attacked the alternate marshalling yards at St. Polten, Austria, also by PFF, and 1 cut the tracks and hit the roundhouse at Lienz, Austria with its load.⁴

MISSION 371, MARCH 4, 1945
SOPRON, HUNGARY
WEST MARSHALLING YARDS
MISSION 372, MARCH 8, 1945
HEGYESHALOM, HUNGARY
MARSHALLING YARDS,

These two missions were in response to a request from the Russians, whose Ukrainian armies were poised on the Hungarian plains for their drive on Vienna. The Group's formation of 39 airplanes left a good concentration of bombs on the Sopron yards. One airplane bombed a target of opportunity. Forty-one airplanes dumped their bombs at Hegyeshalom, and the results showed the advantage of visual bombing. Reconnaissance showed massive target hits and destruction.⁵

MISSION 373, MARCH 9, 1945
GRAZ, AUSTRIA
FREIGHT YARDS/MAIN STATION

The primary target briefed for this mission was the marshalling yards at Bruck, Austria, but complete cloud cover there caused 27 of the 42 Group airplanes to return their bombs to base. Two boxes — 14 airplanes — went to Graz and bombed the freight yards and main station by radar.⁶

During the afternoon at the base, a dust storm blew through the area reminding everyone that summer was not far away. The 20th Squadron mess hall was being enlarged, which was a much needed improvement. Seating was limited, and men had to wait until others were finished before they could be seated. The 20th lost a fuel truck to fire. This was an inconvenient loss, because the Squadron Engineering Section had only two trucks, and the loss of one doubled refueling time until a replacement was available.⁷

MISSION 374, MARCH 10, 1945
VERONA-PERONA, ITALY
RAILROAD BRIDGE

The Group was sent back to the target it missed badly on February 28 when Col. Ryan almost got blown out of the sky. An earlier attack by other units on February 23 destroyed spans on both tracks, and damaged approaches. Within six days the Germans had made suffi-

cient repairs to reopen one track. In the mission Intelligence briefing crews were told that destruction of the spans on the west track would render the bridge unserviceable.⁸ That is what the Group's nineteen airplanes did. After the reconnaissance reports were in, Maj. Gen. Cannon, Commander, MATAF, sent a congratulatory message to Gen. Twining, that was relayed to the Group through Gen. Lawrence, 5th Wing Commander. Photos of the bridge showed two spans completely destroyed and the rest of the structure severely damaged.⁹

MISSION 375, MARCH 12, 1945
VIENNA, AUSTRIA
FLORISDORF OIL REFINERY

The Fifteenth Air Force seemed determined to make this huge complex unserviceable, unsalvageable, and untenable, in preparation for the Russian advance on Vienna. A bomber stream of 225 B-17s and 522 B-24s dropped 1,667 tons of explosives on this massive facility in the largest single operation yet carried out by Italian-based heavy bombers.¹⁰ The bomber force crews did not have the satisfaction of seeing the results of this huge raid because of 10/10's cloud cover. While the results were satisfactory, it took one more raid to achieve the objective before the Russians moved in. Forty of the 43 airplanes sent out by the Group joined in the assault. The remaining 3 planes each attacked a different target of opportunity, all of them marshalling yards in northern Italy.¹¹

MISSION 376, MARCH 13, 1945
REGENSBURG, GERMANY
MAIN MARSHALLING YARDS

Five main rail lines ran out of Regensburg to Leipzig, Berlin, Munich, Vienna and Frankfurt. This made it a key re-routing point for goods sent east, and west to German front lines. Recent reconnaissance showed 900 cars in the yards. These and adjacent yards had a capacity of 2,100 cars.¹² The Fifteenth launched a force of almost 600 heavy bombers that dropped 1,200 tons of bombs through complete cloud cover over this objective. The yards, which had escaped significant damage, were left severely impaired by the raid.¹³ The 2nd's contribution to this effort was 27 aircraft. One crew bombed Landshut marshalling yards as a target of opportunity.¹⁴

MISSION 377, MARCH 14, 1945
SZONY, HUNGARY, OIL REFINERY

The operations order for this mission was indicative of how fluid the ground campaign in Hungary and Yugoslavia had become. There were no-bomb zones, zones where assigned targets only were to be attacked, and then only after positive identification, and zones where only the designated alternate could be bombed by radar. Bombs were no longer to be jettisoned over Yugoslavia. This was the Group's first mission to Szony, and it dispatched 44 planes in two waves, with 41 reaching the target. The raid produced visible explosions and fires.

The 20th Squadron lost a crew when aircraft number 44-6428, piloted by 2nd Lt. Frederick J. Reed, took a direct blast of flak in the number 2 engine on the way to the target. The airplane burst into flame, fell out of the formation to the right, lost altitude, and after coming up behind the formation briefly, it exploded. Four chutes were counted, one of which was observed to be on fire. Those killed were: F/O Bartley H. Moberg CP; 2nd Lt. Aubrey H. Poindexter, N; S/Sgt. Floyd (NMI) Lechner, LTG; and Cpl. Edward I. Wagner, ROG. The other crew members were returned.¹⁵

One of the survivors was S/Sgt. James E. Hamilton, LWG. The number of missions necessary to complete a combat tour had been reduced from 50 to 35. S/Sgt. Hamilton had 25 missions and was anxious to finish his tour, so he volunteered to fly extra missions. The mission to Szony was his first with Lt. Reed's crew. The burst of flak on the way to the target started a fire in the radio room and quite possibly wounded or killed Cpl. Wagner the radio operator, because Hamilton was the first to report the fire to Lt. Reed. Reed's response was that they should bail out. Hamilton bailed out at 31,000 feet and delayed pulling his rip cord because it was so cold at that altitude. He was captured immediately by Hungarians, who turned him over to the Germans. He was imprisoned at Nuremburg and later transferred to Stalag Luft 7A at Moosburg, where he was when liberated.¹⁶

MISSION 378, MARCH 15, 1945

KOLIN, CZECHOSLOVAKIA

OIL REFINERY

The synthetic oil refinery at Ruhland, Germany, a scant 70 miles south of Berlin, was the leading producer of fuel in Germany at the time.¹⁷ The 5th Wing was ordered to attack it on March 15. One hundred and nine B-17s did attack Ruhland, but the 2nd Bomb Group was unable to bomb because of solid cloud cover and trouble with the radar bombing system. The Group proceeded to the first alternate, Kolin. Twenty-six (26) planes bombed Kolin, 5 attacked Klagenfurt railroad bridge, one dropped bombs at Amstettin marshalling yards, and 6 jettisoned bombs in the Adriatic when one ship accidentally dropped its bombs. The results at Kolin were excellent, those at Klagenfurt not observed and the Amstettin yards were missed. Two reconnaissance missions over Ruhland later in the day showed that virtually all of the vital objectives — pipe, shell, and coking stills, main and second boiler houses, power house, distillation unit, and storage tanks — suffered damage ranging from moderate, to severe, to total destruction. Three men were slightly wounded among returning crews, 8 airplanes had minor flak damage, and 5 severe damage, and 3 planes were lost.¹⁸

1st Lt. John J. Stravers and crew, in airplane 44-6671, 20th Squadron, were hit by two bursts of flak on the bomb run. As the formation rallied right, the airplane took four more direct hits of flak. Aileron controls were shot out, fire erupted back of engine number 1, and the oxygen system quit functioning. Lt. Stravers alerted the crew to possible bailout. He and copilot 1st Lt. Edward F. Shipka were able to set up the

autopilot. Stravers thought he might be able to reach the Russian lines, but the fire in the right wing rapidly increased in intensity, so he ordered the crew to bail out. They were at about 19,000 feet, and all got out safely. Stravers, who was last, had some difficulty. His foot became stuck back of the control stick as the airplane had a tendency to climb. He managed to extricate himself, but when he released the controls, the airplane started a steep, climbing turn to the left. The force of the maneuver pinned Stravers to the airplane. Again he managed to get free and went out through the nose hatch. After his chute opened, he looked up at the airplane and saw only pieces, it having exploded just after he exited. The crew had bailed out over Germany near Muskau. Stravers, being the last out, was about 10 miles farther northeast. He was fired on as he came down, and when he landed, he was surrounded by Russians, who wanted to take him in. He had difficulty making them understand he was an American. After they understood who he was, he was treated very well.

The rest of the crew came down over the German-Russian front. All reported being fired on, except 2nd Lt. John P. Tomsyck, B, by either or both the Germans and the Russians — some of the Russians mistaking them for German pilots or paratroopers. Copilot 1st Lt. Edward F. Shipka, caught his flying boot at the nose hatch as he bailed out. He found himself dangling outside the airplane until the slip stream tore his foot out of the boot. He witnessed the airplane explode shortly before it reached the ground. Shipka could see slit trenches and dugouts below him and realized he was coming down over the front lines. He maneuvered his chute to land in an open lot among some woods. Still, he had a Russian officer fire a machine gun at him, wounding him slightly in the leg, before he could make his identity known.

Right waist gunner S/Sgt. Ralph E. Nussbaum's chute didn't open when he pulled the ripcord. He had to reach in the pack and pull the pilot chute out by hand to get the main chute to deploy.

As T/Sgt. Edward Janoski, UTG, descended he saw a body, motionless on the ground, still in the parachute harness. He assumed it to be that of F/O Paul Stevens, the navigator, who was the first to bail out. Lt. Stravers had seen F/O Stevens bail out and his chute open. He believes he was killed by small arms fire while descending. Janoski later told the Russians where Stephens was and the Russians tried to recover the body at nightfall, but failed. The Russians agreed to give F/O Stephens a military funeral upon recovery of his body.

In general, those who were first apprehended by Russian soldiers usually had their personal items, and equipment taken away from them, and they were treated gruffly. After Russian officers appeared, the personal effects were usually returned, and they were treated exceptionally well, being plied with food and drink and given good accommodations if available.

For the first two days the crew was separated and in the custody of different Russian units. On March 16, six crew members were taken to Maltesch, and on April 17, the remaining three members joined them there. The crew stayed at Maltesch until April 20. They were interrogated

by a Russian Air Force officer, who wanted identity of military units, the target, and other operational information. Stravers was reluctant to give the information, but was told it was necessary to get Moscow clearance for their evacuation. Stravers then gave the information required for that purpose.

The crew was taken from Maltesch by truck to an airdrome near Luben and flown by C-47 to Lwow, Poland. Here they were quartered in a hotel for ten days. There was a total of 48 stranded fliers at the hotel.

On March 30 they were flown to Poltava where they remained until April 24. Three crew members were held at Poltava as witnesses to an automobile accident. The rest of the crew was returned to Italy via Tehran, Cairo and Naples, except that two had to remain in Cairo temporarily for lack of space on the airplane. The other four arrived at Amendola April 29.¹⁹

Also shot down, was the crew of 1st Lt. John W. Collens, 96th Squadron in airplane 44-6443. A piece of flak hit the number 4 engine while they were on the bomb run. The propeller ran away until the shaft finally broke. Number 2 engine had a hole in it and the exhaust collector ring was shot away. There was a hole in the ball turret, the oxygen system in the waist was out, and the VHF radio wasn't working. Collens took up a heading of 100 degrees, passed south of Breslau, and arrived at Lodz, Poland in two hours. Three Russian fighters came up but did not fire at them. The Russian flak batteries did fire on the plane. They stopped firing when the fighters came up and Collens dipped his wings. Collens was then allowed to make a normal landing.

The number 4 engine was still on fire, and the Russians started throwing dirt into the nacelle immediately. The crew put out the fire by throwing on the extinguisher switch from the cockpit. The crew was given a good dinner, and taken to the Savoy Hotel, the best in town, where they stayed until March 18. From Lodz they were taken to Opole for two days, then to Poltava, and later evacuated to Italy.²⁰

The third plane to go down was that of 1st Lt. Phillip Good and crew, 96th Squadron, in 44-6674. They had been hit by flak on the aborted bomb run at Ruhland. With number 1 engine out and number 4 performing poorly, they could not keep up with the formation. They left the formation, turned east, and salvoed their bombs in an open field. Good continued flying east with the intent of going to an emergency field at Lublin, Poland. He ran into lowering weather, and when it finally closed in he was over Kielce, Poland. He circled to find a field, and was fired on until the crew fired flares. With weather deteriorating, Good decided to land wheels down in a field. The airplane was damaged considerably but none of the crew was injured.

The townspeople flocked to the airplane as soon as they learned they were "Americans." The camera and bombsight were left intact, but the guns were dismantled to keep the people from firing them. The crew was taken into Kielce where they met the Commandant of Kielce, a Russian major. The major ordered some of his men to guard the plane. He interrogated the crew sufficiently to get information to send to Moscow. The crew was fed and given a large room



Colonel Richard G. Waugh, interim Group Commander, February 28, 1945 - March 16, 1945. He and his lead crew were shot down March 16, on mission to Vienna, Austria. He made a safe emergency landing in friendly territory, and the crew returned in April. (Group Photo)



B-17G, 44-8820, March 16, 1945 after crash landing in Hungary. Col. Richard G. Waugh standing on the wing. S/Sgt. Anthony J. Calabrese, RWG, lying on wing, with nearly severed right forefinger that was later amputated. (Source Unknown)

with beds. The next day they went back to the airplane. They gathered up the sensitive equipment, fired the radio gun into the air, and the radio operator, T/Sgt. John Cetinich succeeded in notifying Fifteenth Air Force where they were and that the crew was alright. The crew took all the sensitive equipment out of the airplane — bombsight, camera, radio receiver, radio gun, and the Gibson Girl radio —, and removed fuses from the airplane. The Russians drained the oil out of the airplane.

The crew stayed in Kielce until March 18. They were well fed, given clean clothes, shaves, haircuts, and hot baths at a public bath. They were also entertained at a theater. When it came time to leave, their Russian hosts, on the pretext of helping them load their belongings for a truck trip east, succeeded in lifting the bombsight, and one parachute. Most of the other equipment was left in their room.

The crew was hauled for 6 miserable hours in a open truck in the rain to Rozadow, Poland. They were first taken to an enlisted men's mess to eat where the food was poor. Later, a Russian officer took them to an officers mess where the food was much better. Their room that night had six benches and one table. The next day, March 19, they were put in a half-open, railroad box car with two tiers of boards for sleeping, and rode over night to Lwow, Poland. Here they were put in a nice hotel, three beds to a room, two men to a bed. They had the run of the town until March 30, going to plays, one Polish movie, reading, eating, and drinking. On March 30, two C-47s came to take them to Poltava, and from there they returned to Italy.²¹

MISSION 379, MARCH 16, 1945

VIENNA, AUSTRIA FLORISDORF OIL REFINERY

While part of the Fifteenth was going to Ruhland on March 15, and the 2nd had turned to Kolin, most of the remaining Fifteenth heavies were working over the three Vienna refineries — Florisdorf, Moosbierbaum and

Korneuberg. As a result, the refineries were thought to be inoperable, but another mission was ordered on March 16 to confirm their effective demise.²² It would be the 2nd Group's last trip to Florisdorf.

After Col. Ryan was wounded on the February 28, Colonel Richard R. Waugh was named to command the Group temporarily until Col. Cullen returned from TDY to the States. (See Appendix 7.) He was the Group lead for this mission. The Group put up 39 airplanes, there were 2 early returns, and 25 attacked the refinery, setting off several explosions among the clearly visible pock marks of earlier raids. One box bombed the marshalling yards at Amstettin, and another 5 planes bombed the marshalling yards at St. Veit. Five men were lightly wounded by flak.

Col. Waugh in the lead plane number 44-8820, with Maj. Ernest L. Blanton as copilot, received a flak hit in the left wing, after successfully bombing the target. He left the formation, under control, with one and possibly two engines feathered. He sent a message to the Group Ground Radio Station saying he was going to land at Pecs, Hungary. The crew were all still on board when Waugh and Blanton made a crash landing two miles south of Sasd, Hungary, and approximately 20 miles northeast of Pecs. No one was injured in the landing, but S/Sgt. Anthony J. Calabrese, RWG, had his right forefinger almost severed by flak.

The promising treatment beginning immediately following the crash soon deteriorated into a complete dose of frustration with the duplicity, increasing intransigence and the centralized bureaucracy of the Russians. This must have been particularly galling to Maj. Blanton, who was on his 83rd mission, many flown in direct support of the Russian offensives. After his return, Col. Waugh vented his frustration in a report to the Commanding General of the U.S. Military Mission, Moscow: "... In about ten minutes (after the crash) Russian soldiers arrived at the scene and upon learning that one of the

crew needed medical attention, sent for transportation. Staff Sergeant Calabrese, waist gunner ... was taken to a civilian doctor in the village where his finger was amputated. The remainder of the crew was taken to the village on foot where they were fed, quartered, and treated with the greatest courtesy and consideration.

March 17, 1945. Remained at Sasd awaiting transportation to Pecs about thirty or forty kilometers to the south. The navigator, Lt. (Bernard W.) Stark, suffered a broken leg while attempting a Russian Cossack dance.

March 18, 1945. Departed Sasd at 1000. Arrived Pecs at 1300. Conferred briefly with representatives of the Russian Commandant there and continue journey to Bonyhad where we were fed and spent the night. At this time Sgt. Calabrese and Lt. Stark were taken to a hospital in the village and were subsequently removed, or so were informed, to a hospital in Baja. Since that time no further information relative to their status or location has been obtainable.

March 20-27, 1945. Sojourn in Csavoly. Quarters provided consisted of one room approximately 20' x 30', with straw-covered cement floor. No bedding furnished. Fare provided was that furnished their labor gangs. However, in almost all instances, personnel were fed and billeted by the inhabitants of the village who proved most hospitable and glad, not to say anxious, to have one or more American airmen in their homes. The above arrangements were made with the full knowledge and acquiescence of the Russian Authorities.

During this period the Commandant was contacted daily in an effort to learn when the group would be turned over to an American Mission. No definite information could be obtained.

March 28, 1945. Forty-one additional airmen arrived from Pecs bringing the total to eighty-eight officers and men. On making my daily visit to the Russian Commandant I found with him a Russian Lieutenant Colonel, an emissary from the Third Ukrainian Army, who had brought orders for the entire group to go to ODESSA! All



Part of Waugh crew making their tortuous way to Odessa via primitive Russian rail cars. Back L to R: T/Sgt. Edwin C. Wade, Jr., ROG; T/Sgt. Herbert T. Taylor, UTG; 1st Lt. Joseph Swift, B; 2nd Lt. Charles W. Freeman, TG/Observer; Russian doctor; and 1st Lt. Albert A. Pierard, RN. Front L to R: Lisa, Russian nurse; S/Sgt. Francis A. Abbott, LWG. (Courtesy of Edwin Wade)

protests and requests that we be sent to Bucharest were to no avail. Shortly after I met a Junior Russian officer on the street who showed me a pencilled note, dated March 27, 1945, addressed to "Officer in Charge, U.S. Officers and Men," which stated that an American Mission had been established at Debrecen, Hungary under the command of Major General Keys, that they were prepared to fly us back to our bases in Italy and that the Russians would take us to Kecskemet where we would be met and taken over by the Russian authorities. I immediately reported to the Russian Commandant for confirmation of this information, who denied the existence of such a mission, scoffed at the authenticity of the message, and refused to produce either the message or the officer who had shown it to me.

Officers and men were given a physical examination.

March 29, 1945. Departed Csavoly for Baja. . . departed Baja at 1700.

March 30-April 2, 1945. En route. Accommodations consisted of two third-class coaches and three box cars, the latter being double-decked with straw on the floor. Food provided consisted of ample bread, potatoes, sugar, salt, and canned pork, one can per man per day. This was supplement by food given us by the villagers and by individual purchases en route. Water was obtained from wayside wells (treated with halazone).

At Szeged, Hungary where we stopped in the yards I walked on into town hoping to contact by telephone the American Mission at Debrecen. The commandant refused to see me. Later, through the extreme courtesy of a Russian officer, who might better remain anonymous, I was able to contact the Armistice Control Commission in Bucharest and informed them of our situation and that we would reach there about noon April 3.

April 5-10, 1945. Arrive at Banasa Station, Bucharest at 1330. Contacted the Mission and informed them of our location. Detained. We were then met by American officers and taken to a hospital where we were deloused, bathed, clothed, and quartered. Men with dysentery and diarrhea were placed under medical care.

April 4, 1945. The Russian authorities still insisted that the entire group continue to Odessa and at about 2300 sixty officers and men were entrained for Odessa, the remaining twenty-eight having been declared unfit for travel for medical reasons.

April 5-10, 1945. Sojourn in Bucharest. An additional group of twenty-four officers and men were brought in. Despite previous assurance by the Russians that the group would have twenty-four hours advance notice of departure, we were informed at 1200, April 10 that we would depart at 1500 that day. This was later postponed until 0600 the following morning and still later postponed until 1300, departure to be from Ploesti and the American mission to deliver us there by bus.

April 11, 1945. Arrived Ploesti at 1200 and entrained at 1300.

It was learned that absolutely no provision had been made for feeding the group, which consisted of forty-seven officers and men, the five still deemed unfit to travel having remained in Bucharest. After refusing to make the journey without some provision made to ration us, we were given twenty-two cans of corned beef and eleven cans of baked beans. This, together with the emergency rations (5 in 1) for one day furnished us by the American Mission, I deemed sufficient for what we were assured was a two day trip.

At 1845, Flight Officer Roup (not member of crew) having several attacks of vomiting, I telephoned the American Mission to say that I was

leaving him behind and requested them to call for him at once. They agreed to do so.

April 12-15, 1945. Departed Ploesti at 0200. The accommodations (a Russian 'Sleeper' having collapsible wooden shelves and designed for forty-six people for forty-seven airmen, three Russian guards, and two female porters) while superior to those we had enjoyed from Baja to Bucharest, were infested with fleas and bedbugs.

The 'two-day' journey was characterized by seemingly endless and unnecessary delay, and gradually lengthened into five days and nights. Some of the emergency rations were found to be spoiled and unfit for consumption, and hunger finally became a real problem. At the conclusion of the trip many men had not eaten for over thirty hours. The following is an example of our progress during the last stages of the journey, when the food was practically exhausted: . . . (what followed was a timetable showing it took 39:10 to travel the last 110 miles to Odessa.)

April 16-20, 1945. Met by a Russian Lieutenant at 0010 and marched 2 1/2 to 3 miles to camp. Bathed, deloused, etc. Issued candy and cigarette rations, food to supplement the Russian diet, and clothes . . .

April 21, 1945. Preparations are going forward to embark the entire group of one hundred and six (106) on H.M.T. Staffordshire today. Destination — Naples, Italy."²³

Col. Waugh and the first contingent of his crew returned from MIA April 29. Lt. Stark and T/Sgt. Calabrese returned later. It was a drawn out finale to Maj. Blanton's 83rd and last mission. He had flown his first mission January 1, 1944 to Villaorba, Italy landing ground.²⁴

In May 1945, after the end of the war in Europe, Col. Waugh returned to the U.S. and was assigned command duties training crews for the Pacific war. Then in just seven months and two days after his mission to Vienna, he was dead of cancer at the age of 34. He was laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery on October 23, 1945.

MISSION 380, MARCH 19, 1945

LANDSHUT, GERMANY MARSHALLING YARDS

Forty-three airplanes took off and 42 attacked the primary target with a good concentration of bombs. There were no injuries or reported damage.²⁵

MISSION 381, MARCH 20, 1945

WIENER NEUSTADT, AUSTRIA MARSHALLING YARDS ST. POLTEN, AUSTRIA MARSHALLING YARDS & SEVEN TARGETS OF OPPORTUNITY

The crews were briefed to bomb the Vosendorf oil refinery at Vienna, but the usual weather problems caused the bombers to strike many other targets. Twelve (12) hit the Wiener Neustadt marshalling yards, 10 struck the St. Polten marshalling yards, 6 bombed Klagenfurt marshalling yards, 6 others struck targets of last resort, and 7 jettisoned their bombs into the Adriatic.²⁶

MISSION 382, MARCH 21, 1945

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

KAGRAN OIL REFINERY

VILLACH/KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA

MARSHALLING YARDS

This mission was almost a duplicate of the previous day. Twelve dropped bombs at the primary target by radar, 13 bombed Villach marshalling yards also by radar, 6 attacked Klagenfurt marshalling yards, visually, with good results, 3 others attacked individual targets of opportunity, and 8 brought their bombs back. One man was wounded slightly by flak and one came home suffering from anoxia.²⁷

MISSION 383, MARCH 22, 1945

RUHLAND, GERMANY, OIL REFINERY

KLAGENFURT/ZELTWEG, AUSTRIA

MARSHALLING YARDS

When the Fifteenth Air Force sent its 5th Wing B-17s to Ruhland, March 15, (the 2nd attacked the alternate at Kolin, Czechoslovakia), it was the longest mission of the war to that time for the Fifteenth.²⁸ Ruhland was declared to be the number one oil priority target in Europe. Its relative inaccessibility had spared it the attention given other closer oil facilities. Ruhland's production, at the time of the March 15 raid, was estimated at nearly 50,000 tons per month. This represented one quarter of Germany's minimum military requirement for full scale operations of the army and air force of 200,000 tons per month. According to intelligence estimates, if production could be kept below the 50,000 level, the German Army could be immobilized. This objective had already been largely accomplished with respect to the GAF by denial of aviation fuels. The raid on the 15th had inflicted new damage, but had not stopped Ruhland's production. The plant was still 75% active, although production was down to 22,000 tons per month. Germany could be expected to make a supreme effort, with its huge force of conscripted laborers, to restore production, and to use what capability it had in the area to protect this last major source of gasoline from attack.²⁹

The Fifteenth Air Force sent 136 Fortresses of the 5th Wing to Ruhland. For the 2nd Bomb Group, this was an historic mission. It was the Group's longest combat mission of record to that time, its first encounter with enemy jet fighters, and its first aerial victory over a jet fighter. But there are always risks and frequently a price for garnering military firsts.

The Group formation of 27 airplanes, was led by Maj. John C. Reardon, 429th Squadron, with 1st Lt. Forest M. Fouts as the lead bombardier, and 1st Lt. Farley G. Mann, as the lead navigator. Lt. Mann kept the formation on the prescribed course and out of flak going to the target. The favorable winds, as forecasted, had pushed the formation along and the climb had been smooth, so everyone would have enough fuel to get home. All the way to the IP the mission was a study in perfect planning and execution. Then came the first sign of trouble. As the tightly knit formation started on the bomb run, Lt. Fouts called Maj. Reardon over the interphone and announced

that "Jerry" had a smoke screen around the target and he couldn't pick it up. Lt. Mann broke in to suggest they circle, come in from a different heading, and possibly find the target clear. Reardon faced a dilemma. The escort was already screaming about gas shortages. Circling might leave the formation without escort and the flak was beginning to burst in angry black puffs around them. On the other hand, Ruhland was an immensely important target and failure to take it out now meant coming back soon, and perhaps under less favorable circumstances. Reardon opted to circle.

They circled until Mann selected the best heading for the second bomb run. The Germans began punishing them for taking the extra time to find the target. An Me-262 flashed by reminding Reardon they might have to fight off this new foe without the escort. The tracking flak had them bracketed, and evasion had to be suspended while setting up the final bomb run. One burst of flak weakened the main wing spars and damaged the Tokyo tanks. The next one tore through the nose of the airplane showering plexiglass all over, and setting off some of the 50 caliber ammunition. Reardon could look down through a hole between his feet. He could see Mann doubled up in the nose, looking like he had taken a bad hit. To everyone's amazement he hadn't. Fouts wasn't so lucky. He had been partially blinded by glass fragments in his eyes.

Mann's heading selection proved to be correct. The wind had cleared enough of the target for the partially blinded Fouts to glimpse the aiming point and synchronize on the target. The fifteen airplanes that followed his lead put 79% of their bombs within 1,000 feet of the selected MPI — a masterful job of bombing.³⁰ The remaining 12 airplanes were unable to complete an acceptable bomb run, so one box each of 6 planes, bombed the marshalling yards at Klagenfurt and Zeltweg, Austria on the return leg. Bomb hits were seen in the target area at Klagenfurt, but the yards at Zeltweg were missed.³¹ The total force of bombers damaged Ruhland severely.³²

Flak ravaged the formation. Twenty-two out of the Group's 27 airplanes were damaged by flak (10 minor and 12 severely). Four planes failed to return. Flak claimed 3 and the Me-262 jet fighters claimed the other. There were 17 fatalities among the 40 crew members that went down, and the returning planes had 8 wounded aboard. After the Ruhland experience, crews were relieved to have no flak at either Klagenfurt or Zeltweg.³³

Forty Me-262s attacked the fleet of bombers.³⁴ Eight of them concentrated on the 2nd just at target time. Crews witnessing their first encounter with jets were astonished at the speed with which these fighters whizzed past and through the formation. They could be thankful that their strategic oil and counter-air campaigns were completed in time to keep the German jet fighter program from being the aerial menace it might otherwise have become. As it was, the jets blasted one Fortress out of the sky but lost one known destroyed and one probable to Group gunners. 20th Squadron tail gunners, T/Sgt. Warren R. McKane, and S/Sgts. Frederick L. Downs and George D. Glass, Jr. received joint credit for the only Group aerial victory over a jet fighter during the war. Each gunner in succession poured fire into the jet as it passed

through the 20th formation, rear-to-front. The fighter was set afire, spun out of control, and was seen to crash and explode. The Special Narrative Report of the Intelligence Office for March 22, read as follows:

"Enemy Resistance

A. Fighters: Eight Me-262s attacked fourth squadron of this Group at 1255 hours at 51 degrees 40 minutes north, 14 degrees 10 minutes east, at 25,000 feet. Jet aircraft green, yellowish color with red spinners and red dot in black cross insignia on fuselage. Me-262s attacked singly from five to seven o'clock slightly high, firing tracers and 20mm cannons, and closing to within 50 yards. After single passes, aircraft broke off to seventeen o'clock low. Escort then encountered them. One enemy aircraft was destroyed, and one probably destroyed by this Group. One a/c (aircraft) lost to these fighters."³⁵

20th Squadron airplane number 44-6440, flown by F/O Ernest H. Williams and crew, was attacked as it came off the target. Observers variously reported that the airplane took direct hits of 20mm cannon fire between number 1 and 2 engines or between the radio room and the bomb bay. The airplane caught fire, a wing came off, the plane began to roll and exploded before hitting the ground. Only one chute was observed. The sole survivor was S/Sgt. John H. Bryner Jr., (TG). He said both wings were on fire and the plane had started spinning when he bailed out. He did not see any of his crew bail out. He was captured and became a POW.³⁶

Another loss this day was airplane 44-8191, 429th Squadron, flown by 1st Lt. Andrew F. Crane. The plane was observed, with a feathered engine, dropping back after bombs away. When last seen, 191 was under control, heading east, and losing altitude. The Russian call sign was heard over VHF.³⁷ After release from POW captivity, Crane sent a report back to the Group, detailing what happened to the airplane and crew. Flak knocked out the number 1 engine and caused a temporary loss of the number 2 engine with hits to the intake manifold. There was also severe damage to the leading edge of the left wing and the bomb bays. All this occurred on the bomb run. The crew maintained control enough to drop their bombs over the target. Coming off the target, the tail gunner, S/Sgt. Stephan J. Futur, was wounded in the leg, was given first aid and returned to his position. With two engines out, the airplane descended from 24,000 to 10,000 feet, which altitude Crane was able to maintain on two engines at an airspeed of 120 mph. After navigator, 1st Lt. George W. Betchley, calculated it would take 3 1/2 hours to get to Yugoslavia, Crane decided to head for Russia. En route, fire broke out in the number 3 engine and it was feathered. Crane told the crew not to throw out ammunition or flak suits, put on their parachutes, and be prepared to bailout, if things got too hot.

About 20 to 25 miles from the Russian front lines, a fighter appeared and dipped its wing. The crew identified it as an Me-109, but Crane dipped his wing in return and fired a green flare which was the prescribed Russian identification signal. The fighter made a firing pass at the Fortress

and the waist gunner returned fire. The Me-109 reappeared with three other Me-109s, and the battle was on. Twenty (20) mm shell fire went through the wings and set the bomb bay on fire near the top turret. 1st Lt. James S. Barnett, the bombardier called and asked if the plane was still under control. The intercom went out at that point and Lt. Crane was unable to answer. Crane believes that with the plane on fire and no intercom, that 1st Lt. Donald F. Maine, the Mickey operator, T/Sgt. Daniel P. Dunkerley, ROG, S/Sgt. Robert A. Keuchel, RWG, S/Sgt. R. G. DeMatteis, LWG, and S/Sgt. Futur all bailed out based on Crane's last communication.

Now down to one engine, Crane dove the airplane to gain speed and increase evasive action. The fighters closed for the kill. One took up a position a few feet off the tail and was pouring shell fire into the left wing. The top turret gunner, T/Sgt. Donald A. Dorman, sprayed the fighter with his dual fifties, and it disappeared in flames and smoke. The fact that no other gunners were firing on the attacker led Crane to conclude they had either bailed out or were injured or dead.

One of the remaining fighters, realizing that the Fortress didn't have a ball turret, (it was a Pathfinder with a radar dome in place of the turret) made a completely unopposed attack from below and finished off the now defenseless craft. Shell fire came through the cabin floor between the pilot's compartment and the upper turret. The control column was shot in two and shell fire ripped Crane's left thigh, the rudders were shot away and the instrument panel erupted in white smoke. The upper turret was put out of commission and the bomb bay was in flames. With the airplane in flames, virtually no power and no controls, Crane motioned copilot 1st Lt. Paul H. Honke, and T/Sgt. Dorman out. Navigator Lt. Betchley, and bombardier, Lt. Barnett left at that time too. Crane saw the other four leave the airplane. These remaining five crew members bailed out at approximately 3,000 feet and 6 miles from the Russian lines, somewhere north of Breslau, Poland. Crane was strafed, without being hit, by one of the Me-109s, almost as soon as he hit the ground. The fighter made a second pass before Crane could make it to a brook where he submerged himself, and the fighter made one more circle without seeing him and flew away. Crane got out of the water and started to crawl away, (because of his wounded leg), and was fired on three times, convincing him to surrender to some German soldiers.

Lt. Honke was strafed four times while in his parachute. He escaped with only a grazing wound by oscillating his chute. The two pilots were brought together at a German field headquarters. The Germans couldn't find any crew members in the airplane, and asked Lt. Crane if he knew their whereabouts. Lt. Crane was shown the escape picture (which each crew member carried), of Lt. Betchley, and the dog tags of T/Sgts. Dorman, and Dunkerley. Having seen Betchley and Dorman bail out, Lt. Crane assumed they and the other crew members were strafed or were killed trying to get to the Russian lines. Lts. Crane and Honke were the only survivors.³⁸

The loss of T/Sgt. Donald A. Dorman, UTG, on this mission created another of the innumerable vignettes about the unjust vagaries of war.

Heroism is frequently its own reward. Back on November 4, 1944 on the raid to Regensburg, Germany, Sgt. Dorman was flying with the crew of 1st Lt. Wallace R. Braff of the 429th Squadron. Going to the target, they lost power on one engine and had to salvo part of their bombs to keep up with the formation. They managed to go over the target, but only part of the remaining bombs released. The rest were "at all angles in the bomb bay and the spinner on one fuse was spinning." Sgt. Dorman went into the bomb bay and managed to "throw out" the dangerous bomb. He was working without oxygen at 26,000 feet. He passed out and froze both feet. The radio operator, T/Sgt. Frank G. Smith, dragged Dorman into the radio room, restored his oxygen and gave him first aid. Sgt. Dorman had recently been awarded the Silver Star for gallantry on that mission.³⁹

Also, from the 429th Squadron, airplane 44-6697, pilot 1st Lt. John W. Pierik, was hit by flak in the target area. A large hole appeared in the right wing about four or five feet from the wing tip. Two pieces of wing spar could be seen protruding from the hole. The plane pulled out of formation, and was last seen headed due east toward the Russian lines.⁴⁰ Richard H. Benjamin, UTG, in a personal account described what happened to the crew. The airplane was disabled by flak over the target and the crew turned east to the Russian lines. Somewhere enroute they were picked up by what they thought was a Russian fighter escort of P-39s. The P-39s took up positions on each wing and the tail of the B-17. Lt. Pierik's crew opened the bomb bays and fired red flares to signal they were friendly. At some point the P-39s peeled off into the sun, and for some inexplicable reason returned and attacked the B-17. Pierik's crew returned fire. Benjamin's upper turret was hit by 37mm shell fire, the airplane was set afire and began to fill with smoke. With much of the fire in the forward area, Benjamin went back to the waist. When the Russian fighters returned and strafed the cockpit area, Benjamin attempted to go back to the cockpit but there was too much smoke and flame. The six enlisted men bailed out of the stricken plane, and were strafed by the fighters as they descended, but no one was hit. Benjamin watched the airplane continue flying, as if on autopilot, until it disappeared over a hill. He did not see any of the officers bail out, nor did he ever see them later. He feels they were killed or wounded aboard the airplane during the strafing attack. The enlisted crew came down near Salsbrunn, Germany, were captured and liberated at wars end.⁴¹ Review of missing crew reports at the National Archives and inquiries to the Veterans Administration provide no record of what happened to Lt. Pierik; 2nd Lt. Robert W. Steele, CP; 1st Lt. Harold A. Taylor, N; or 2nd Lt. John P. Yatsco, B.⁴² The absence of missing crew reports or claims for death benefits leaves the presumption they survived.

Another Group airplane, number 642, piloted by Lt. Arthur K. Forest, made an emergency landing at a forward Russian base. The crew had gone over the target on the first run, but left the formation before the second run. Forest had to pull extra power to keep up going to the target, and had only fifty gallons of gas in each tank when he left the formation. After they crossed

the Russian lines, the airplane received major damage from two Russian fighters, a P-39 and a Yak-3. The Russian pilots informed the crew later that the "Y" on the fin of the B-17 looked like the German insignia at a distance. The airplane was repaired by the Russians and the crew flew back to Amendola on March 26.⁴³

2nd Lt. William O. Landers and crew, 96th Squadron, in plane number 44-6738, were hit by flak at the IP, and continued in the flak area for about 20 minutes. They came to think the Germans were tracking them as an individual plane. The plane had been hit rather heavily, resulting in multiple engine problems, so the crew turned east toward the Russian lines; they continued to be fired on along the route and as they crossed the front lines. They were met by Russian P-39s and identified themselves as friendly. The P-39s left them at the Oder River, and the crew continued east to Leczyca, Poland where they landed. They were treated royally, but interrogated extensively. The crew stayed at a Russian base where they had complete freedom, but were watched closely in town.

Crew members observed that the Russian base was carrying on considerable military operations. The Russian bombers left at sundown on missions to Berlin, and the Yaks took off at dinner time each day. There were 60 Yaks, 40 P-2 dive bombers and 20 "horizontal bombers" at the base. On March 26, the day the crew was flown to Poltava, 80 single engine Russian dive bombers were brought in. The crew returned to Italy from Poltava.⁴⁴

MISSION 384, MARCH 23, 1945

RUHLAND, GERMANY, OIL REFINERY

Taking advantage of the weather, and wishing to put the refinery out of commission, the Fifteenth sent an even larger force of 157 Fortresses to Ruhland on the 23rd. The previous day the GAF put up approximately 40 jets to challenge the raiders. There was absolutely no air opposition on this second successive mission to Ruhland.⁴⁵

The Group placed twenty-seven B-17s over the target and dropped 253, five-hundred-pound bombs into the smoke-obscured target by visual and offset aiming methods. The flak was still effective. Three men were wounded, 2 slightly and one, 1st Lt. C. Wickersham, seriously. The bomb strike report stated that the raids on Ruhland, and other plants in recent days, left no known gasoline producers in the Fifteenth's area of operation.⁴⁶ The 2nd never went back to Ruhland again.

The 20th Squadron lost one crew and airplane. F/O Arthur L. Ferkin and crew in airplane 44-6452, "Big Stuff," were hit by flak and seen to leave the formation at the target and head toward Russian lines with one propeller windmilling. Ferkin later reported that two engines were knocked out over the target, and they crash landed, wheels up, at Kety, Poland. The crew stayed with the airplane and no one was hurt in the landing except Ferkin who suffered a bruised knee. Ferkin said they wandered around Russia for 60 days while the Russians tried helping them return to Italy. They went from Krakow, to Lwow, to Kiev, and finally to Odessa, where they all boarded an English ship and arrived in Naples May 7.