
6

OPERATIONS: DECEMBER 1943- JANUARY 1944

TURIN, ITALY - MISSION NO. 103 - DECEMBER 1, 1943

Twenty-nine aircraft dropped 248, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Ball Bearing Works at Turin. The target area, at the time, was smoke covered from the bombing of another Group and the planes dropped their bombs into the smoke area. Due to the length of the mission, some planes were forced to land at Corsica for refueling. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate causing damage to 20 planes and slight injury to one man.

Eight to 10 E/A attacked the formation. Each credited with the destruction of an Me-109 were S/Sgt. Harold K. Cox, Tail Gunner and Sgt. Delos I. Johnson, Tail Gunner.

GRIZZANO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 104 - DECEMBER 6, 1943

Bridges and Marshalling Yards were the assigned targets. The bomb load for each aircraft consisted of 12, 500-lb. GP bombs. Weather conditions over the primary and alternate targets prevented any bombing. All planes returned safely to Base.

LAKE ORBESTELLO/MONTE DE CASTRO - MISSION NO. 105 - DECEMBER 8, 1943

Railroad Bridges and Monte De Castro were the assigned target. Thirteen aircraft dropped their bombs with poor results. All bridges were missed. Some bombs fell short, others long and others on the highway. Light flak encountered with no injuries.

LEVANTO/MONEGLIA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 106 - DECEMBER 9, 1943

Fourteen aircraft took off to bomb Railroad Bridges between Levanto and Moneglia. Due to a 10/10 overcast, and not having an alternate target, the planes returned to Base.

Packing of all equipment, for Group Headquarters, was completed for the move on December 10th. The move was to be by C-47 aircraft.

The Group moved from Massicult, Tunisia to a Base (Staz Di Amendola) 12 miles northeast of Foggia. The following is only a general account of the move.

On December 3rd, the bulk of the ground personnel of the 20th and 429th Squadrons, with much of their equipment, and advance units of the 49th and 96th Squadrons, with part of their equipment, left the Massicult Base for Bizerte. They waited two days for transport.

On December 5th, the men and equipment were loaded on LSTs and sailed the same day, arriving at a small port north of Naples, Italy. They unloaded and proceeded to the new Base at Amendola. The first units arrived there December 9th and began setting up camp in a large olive grove.

On December 6th, a small unit comprised of the Group's motor vehicles departed the Massicult Base for Bizerte, crossed the Mediterranean and arrived on Italian soil three days later.

On December 7th, another unit comprised of more of the 49th and 96th ground personnel left the Massicult Base for Bizerte. Then on December 9th, another of the Group's vehicles left Massicult. All went via LSTs and arrived at Taranto, Italy on December 13th.

On December 10th, the air echelon, and key men and equipment necessary for operations, left Massicult in C-47s and C-54s of the 313th Troop Carrier Group and the Group's B-17s. Most of the planes landed at the new Base on the same day, while others landed in Sicily, due to bad weather. All of the transports had arrived at the new Base by the 12th.

I had been attached to Group Headquarters for several months and had the good fortune to fly to Italy. My tent mates, in the 96th, had to endure the rain and mud at Bizerte.

There were two significant accidents to air crews on December 10th. Colonel Herbert E. Rice, Group CO, was Pilot of B-17 #42-25995, "TADLUR," and while taking off, lost one engine and was forced to make an emergency landing several miles from Massicult, in an open field. The plane was lost along with some baggage, but all personnel escaped with only bumps and bruises, except for Sgt. Joseph (NMI) Rosenthal who suffered a brain concussion and two broken left ribs. He was taken to the 58th Station Hospital in Tunis. Sgt. Rosenthal was a member of the RAF on detached service with the Group, doing special radio work.

In the second accident, A/C #42-29617 from the 49th Squadron, piloted by 2nd Lt. Joseph H. Taylor, was demolished. Due to bad weather, Lt. Taylor decided to land at Palermo, and discovered too late that the runway was too short for the heavily loaded plane. He ran into a stone wall at the end of the runway. M/Sgt. William Myer suffered a brain concussion and died instantly. 2nd Lt. Warren Gay, Bombardier, suffered multiple lacerations about the body, and T/Sgt. John H. Wyrba, Radio Operator, suffered a fracture of the left leg. The injured men were hospitalized at the 59th Evacuation Hospital in Palermo.

Sgt. William "Dick" Norman was Mess Sergeant in the 96th Squadron. September 29, 1943. "My crossing to Italy, from Tunis, was really hair raising! I was Mess Sergeant at the time and we were to move the Mess and personnel on three C-47s. Murray Cobb and I waited to go on the third plane to see that all the equipment and personnel were away on the first two planes. I had left Cletus Grady in charge of them. By the time we got the third one ready to go we were way behind the other two and we were on our own.

"The flight was to be about four hours so Cobb and I lay down and went to sleep. When I awoke, I looked at my watch and saw that we had been airborne about three and one-half hours and still over water. I asked the loadmaster, 'What gives,' and he said, 'We're lost.' Great news! It seems that we had gotten into a storm and could not break radio contact to find out where we were. Now that's scary!

"I saw three chutes hanging from the bulkhead and I wondered who would use them, if necessary, since there were four of us back there. Well, I'm still kicking so at least we didn't go down at sea. Finally the pilot found Sicily and we landed at a small field. I know it was too small because I didn't think we were going to get stopped on the short runway before we ran into a brick building, but we did get stopped. About 20 minutes later a crippled B-17 came in, didn't get stopped and ran right through the building.

"We were socked in by the weather for three days. When Cobb and I got to Italy, Grady wanted to kill us. Since he was the ranking non-com, he had to set up the Mess, get supplies and run everything for three days. He learned in a hurry what it was like to be a Mess Sergeant."

M/Sgt. Carl I. Hansen, Crew Chief, 20th Squadron: "On the departure from Tunis to Italy, we had a run-away prop on take-off and the co-pilot, "no name mentioned," pulled back on the throttle to reduce power to the run-away engine, but pulled the wrong throttle and we lost power on No. 3 and No. 4 engines. We attempted to make a wheels-up landing in a field ahead of us but bounced off the top of a small hill and then hit hard in a field and then cart-wheeled to a stop.

"One of the wings broke off and the fuselage broke away right in back of the radio room where I had evacuated to from the engineer's seat in the cockpit. Only one member was hurt when he was thrown out when the fuselage broke apart. The rest received cuts and bruises, and I guess I fared the best of everyone but I ached for days afterward. I am lousy at remembering names and I do not remember any of the names of the crew that were aboard at the time of the accident. We were all reported killed in the crash.

"After two weeks of mending and recuperation, we were assigned a new B-17 and flew over to Foggia. Upon our arrival, Barney flagged us in, but he had no idea we were aboard. When I stepped out he took one look and almost fainted. Then he grabbed me, gave me a big hug and said, 'I thought you were dead.' This was the second time he had made that remark to me. In Pendelton, Oregon I was supposed to have been aboard a B-17 that crashed into a mountain in Oregon. I had been called off the flight at the last minute by Col. Lauer and flew with him to Boise, Idaho. The only survivor of that crash was John Starr from Swampscott, Massachusetts, which borders on my hometown of Lynn, Massachusetts."

On December 12th, a large contingent of ground personnel, and equipment, left Massicut for Bizerte. They loaded aboard LSTs and arrived in the vicinity of Naples on December 15th.

Records of the 96th Squadron show its air echelon departed Massicut on December 10th and the mess personnel leaving the same day by C-47s. All but one B-17 and one C-47 arrived at the Amendola Base the same day while one C-47 and one B-17 landed in Sicily.

On December 12th, the last contingent of the 96th Squadron departed Massicut for Bizerte. This contingent was comprised of six officers and 107 enlisted men with Captain Edward Bergin, Executive Officer, in charge. The contingent spent eight days in the mud and rain at Bizerte. On December 20th, it boarded LST 314 and arrived in Naples on the 23rd. The contingent stayed overnight and left by motor convoy on the 24th. Unable to reach Base, the contingent camped overnight at Avelleno. It arrived on December 25th and proceeded to pitch tents in the same olive grove with the other Squadrons.

The new Base was situated between the towns of Foggia and Mandredonia, a sea coast town on the Adriatic Sea. The Army had taken over a large farm, which consisted of several acres of land including a large olive grove. There was a large farmhouse, which was used by Group Headquarters, several smaller buildings and what appeared to be a small Chapel. This Chapel later became part of the Group's Medical Dispensary.

On the property were some underground caves, which appeared to have been a quarry at one time. Upon first examination, one contained several huge wine casks (empty) and others seemed to have been used to house animals. These were cleaned up and used for briefings, a Chapel, movie theater, and a Group enlisted Men's Club.

ATHENS/KALAMAKI, GREECE - MISSION NO. 107 - DECEMBER 14, 1943

The primary target was the Eleusis Airdrome but due to a solid overcast, the Hassani Airdrome (Kalamaki) was bombed instead. Thirty-one aircraft dropped 93 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs. Several buildings and hangars received direct hits. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, accurate altitude and

deflection. B-17 #42-5050, piloted by 2nd Lt. Walter R. Ward, 96th Squadron, was hit by flak and went down.

Nineteen to 20 E/A, Me-109s and FW-190s, were encountered over and after the target and eight were claimed destroyed. Those making claims were: Each credited for destruction of an Me-109 were S/Sgt. Robert C. Rebstock, Lower Turret, and T/Sgt. William A. Epling, Upper Turret, of the 49th Squadron; S/Sgt. Stanley H. Katz, Right Waist of the 96th Squadron; T/Sgt. Robert H. Bentley, Upper Turret, and Sgt. George R. Harmon, both of the 20th Squadron. Each credited with the destruction of an FW-190 were Sgt. Rex C. Cooper, Tail Gunner 49th Squadron; S/Sgt. Stephen J. Hannon, Lower Turret, and S/Sgt. Anthony J. Sikole, Tail Gunner, 96th Squadron.

In addition to the loss of one crew, four crewmen were wounded: 2nd Lt. Royce Shellabarger, CP, 49th Squadron. Slightly wounded by shattering glass. S/Sgt. Orlander B. Sheffield, RW, 49th Squadron. Slightly wounded by flak. S/Sgt. Merton B. Latshaw, RW, 96th Squadron. Slightly wounded by flak. S/Sgt. Cleo L. Corley, TG, 96th Squadron. Seriously wounded by 20mm cannon fire.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-5050 - 96TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt. Walter R. Ward, 0-798709, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. Clark E. Miller, 0-802770, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Anthony A. Aratari, 0-747155, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Joseph F. Stanford, 0-731767, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Charles J. Wivell, 33210819, U/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Frank (NMI) Naro, 12191291, L/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Joseph L. A. LeBlanc, 11021511, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Clayton H. Kahler, 31166333, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Vincent G. Henke, 33392579, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt. William E. Redmon, 16074688, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Walter R. Ward, Pilot, after return to Allied control: "When the No. 1 engine was hit by flak and the No. 2 engine burst into flames, I gave the order to bail out. I counted the chutes of eight crew members when I bailed out. The plane crashed and burned approximately 20 kms east of Athens and apparently the 10th man had not bailed out. I landed approximately 15 kms east of Athens. I saw no other members of my crew after I landed. I was told that Sgt. Naro had returned to base sometime in March of 1944. A young Greek, who aided me, informed me that the Germans examined the wreckage of my plane, found a body in it and identified it as S/Sgt. Joseph L. A. LeBlanc by his crash bracelet. The Germans left the body lay there for a couple of days. I believe the situation was that no one could touch the body until the proper authorities examined it. In the meantime, according to the young Greek, the civilians in town came out and covered the body with flowers. The young Greek stated he went to various families getting donations to provide a decent burial for the deceased airman and to purchase a tombstone for the grave. I do not know what happened, or transpired, but know there was an undertaking establishment in town which took care of such matters and told that the body was buried somewhere west of Athens."

BOLZANO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 108 - DECEMBER 15, 1943

Twenty-three aircraft dropped 66 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on Railroad Bridges at Bolzano. Smoke obscured the target and results of the bombing could not be determined. Flak was heavy and intense causing injury to four men, two of which were 1st Lt. Alfred H. Bell and 2nd Lt. Joseph Jaffee from the 96th Squadron. There were no losses.

PADUA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 109 - DECEMBER 16, 1943

Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 78 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Padua. Damage was done to rail facilities and a nearby industrial area. No losses.

TOWNS-VICINITY OF INNSBRUCK, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 110 - DECEMBER 19, 1943

The primary target was the Messerschmitt Factory at Innsbruck, Austria. Weather conditions prevented bombing the primary target and a target of opportunity, a town between Halle and Rottenburg and east of Innsbruck, was bombed.

Seventeen aircraft dropped 51 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on this small town east of Innsbruck. Reported results were that some were in the town, with most of them over. The 10 aircraft in the Second Wave randomly salvoed their bombs, just south of Halle, because they were being heavily attacked by enemy fighters and could not keep up with the planes in the first wave.

Thirty to 40 Me-109s, Me-110s, Me-210s, Me-410s, and FW-190s attacked the second wave just before and just after the bomb run. Extreme enemy fighter resistance resulted in the loss of three B-17s and two others were slightly damaged. Aerial bombs and rockets were used in this encounter.

B-17s lost were #42-5247, 20th Squadron; #42-5409, 49th Squadron; and #42-3065, 429th Squadron. Fortress gunners credited with enemy fighters were: Each credited with the destruction of a Me-109 were T/Sgt. Claston D. Campbell, UT; S/Sgt. William H. Evans, RW; Sgt. Jesse C. Hart, RW, 49th Squadron. S/Sgt. Joseph (NMI) Johnson, RW; S/Sgt. Walter Potempa, TG, 20th Squadron; S/Sgt. Lemuel E. Adams, BT; S/Sgt. Robert D. Bensheimer, LW; 2nd Lt. Louis Charbonnet, N; S/Sgt. Anthony R. Mancuso, TG; T/Sgt. James K. Webb, UT, 429th Squadron; and T/Sgt. Andrew A. Bonnell, RW, 96th Squadron. Each receiving credit for destruction of a FW-190 were S/Sgt. Donald D. Swank, RW, and T/Sgt. Robert H. Bentley, UT, 20th Squadron; S/Sgt. Kermit L. Reynolds, RW, 96th Squadron; S/Sgt. John J. Donnelly, UT, 49th Squadron. Receiving joint credit for destruction of a FW-190 went to T/Sgt. Benjamin M. Hughes, UT, and Sgt. Carlo Veneziano, RW, 49th Squadron.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-5409 - "LYDIA PINKHAM" - 429TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt. Robert D. Peterson, 0-680289, P.	(POW)
1st Lt. James H. Bellingham, 0-800313, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Merlin C. Briggs, 0-736764, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. John M. Hardin, 0-674761, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt. George J. Wimer, 13109242, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Colin M. Smith, 39236178, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. George T. Smith, Jr., 19141255, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Leo T. Schumaker, 32361216, L/W.	(POW)
Sgt. Roy K. Snyder, 6945083, T/G.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Allen T. Bennett, 14084462, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of 1st Lt. Robert D. Peterson, Pilot, after liberation: "We were about 30 miles from the Adriatic when we left the formation. Everyone left the burning plane. The engineer and officers exited the nose hatch. The other men used the bomb bay as the rear hatch was too hot from the flames. I believe the plane crashed within 20 miles of Udine.

"I believe one of the other crew members saw Sgt. Bennett on the ground. While I was in the Udine Hospital, the authorities questioned me about the identification tags of Sgt. Bennett. As a security precaution, I disclaimed any knowledge of his identity and thus was unable to learn the story of how Bennett was shot. From actions of the Germans, I would say that they, or the Fascist soldiers, shot

Bennett on the ground. He was not injured, as I understand from other crew members, when he bailed out.”

Statement of S/Sgt. Roy K. Snyder, Tail Gunner, after liberation: “Sgt. Bennett was the first to bail out near Udine. I was the last to talk to Allen before he died. He was shot by German soldiers. The German said he was trying to escape after hitting the ground but he told me he was shot in his chute while coming down. I’ll take his word before any Krauts. Later, a German came to me and said Allen had died around 7:00 p.m., December 19th, 1943.”

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-5427 - 20TH SQUADRON

1st Lt. John C. Williams, 0-799115, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Gail P. Hoffmann, 0-746336, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Milton (NMI) Plattner, 0-736650, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Carlton E. Mills, 0-744398, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt. William K. Shuping, 6561249, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Howard E. Richardson, 34475380, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Ben W. Kizer, 14156516, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Arthur D. Grommont, 19013815, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Robert L. Kennedy, 18192349, T/G.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Theodore T. Young, 12080734, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of S/Sgt. Stanley F. Cwiek, Tail Gunner on B-17 #345, after the mission: “I was flying the tail gun position on A/C #345, in the formation immediately in front of #427's Element. Three to four minutes after target time, we were attacked by approximately 15 Me-109s and FW-190s. Six or seven concentrated their attack on #427. Soon after the attack began, #427 began to lag behind and to the right of the formation. Smoke was coming from the entire right wing. Within a few seconds, the entire wing burst into flames. I would estimate that the ship was 500/600 yards out of the formation. The A/C seemed as if it was on AFCE.

“Very soon, almost instantly, after the right wing burst into flames, the crew began to leave the A/C. I noticed seven chutes. They left the plane in train, in about the same tempo as paratroopers do leaving a plane. It is possible that all members of the crew abandoned the A/C but I only counted seven as my attention was distracted by fighters attacking my Element. #427 made a gradual turning glide to the right, losing altitude slowly and disappeared into an undercast of clouds. The target over which they bailed out was very mountainous, very rough, snow covered.”

Reflections of Gail P. Hoffmann, Co-pilot, May 24, 1991: “I enlisted in the Army on April 8, 1942 by applying for Aviation Cadet Training in the Army Air Corps. I had never been in an aircraft at that time, had only a high school diploma but was angry as hell at the Japs and wanted to fly.

“There was a considerable delay in the military, establishing bases, but at long last, after a tough struggle, I earned my commission as a Second Lieutenant and received my pilot’s wings at Roswell, New Mexico with the class of 43-E. I was scheduled for P-38 Reconnaissance Photography Training at Colorado Springs, but was pulled out at the last minute to fill space for much needed bomber crews in North Africa.

“I was introduced to Lt. John Williams at Ephrata, Washington and became a family member of the crew listed as follows: Lt. John Williams, Pilot; 2nd Lt. Gail P. Hoffmann, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Milton Plattner, Navigator; 2nd Lt. Carlton E. Mills, Bombardier; S/Sgt. Joseph Pysnik, Engineer; S/Sgt. Ben

Kizer, Assistant Engineer; S/Sgt. William T. Melrose, Radio; S/Sgt. Stanley Morozos, Assistant Radio; S/Sgt. Robert L. Kennedy, Tail; and S/Sgt. Howard E. Richardson, Ball Turret.

"We were sent to Rapid City, South Dakota in the middle of 1943 where we equipped and recalibrated a new Fortress for combat. Once again, last minute changes took our ship away from us and we were on our way to North Africa on a Liberty Ship.

"We eventually arrived in late August, 1943, I believe, in Tunis, and we were assigned to the 20th Squadron, 2nd Bomb Group, 12th Air Force, which later became the 15th Air Force.

"Our ship was a war weary derelict, full of holes and decorated with dried blood, but we cleaned her up, patched her wounds and we flew her into combat after naming her "SARAH."

"It was after we moved to Foggia, Italy that we met our nemesis, on December 19, 1943 over Innsbruck, Austria. Our target for the day was the Messerschmitt Aircraft Plant in Augsburg, Austria. We had just scrounged new engines for "SARAH" and were to slow time these engines near the Base. Instead we were sent on the raid with a different aircraft and was positioned "Tail End Charlie" in the coffin corner. Because of guard duty, performed the previous night, Sgt. Pysnik was replaced on this flight by T/Sgt. Bill K. Shuping, Sgt. Melrose was replaced by S/Sgt. Arthur D. Grommont, and Sgt. Morozos was replaced by S/Sgt. Ted R. Young. Sgt. Shuping was the Group Leaders Engineer and was sent on this hell run for his 50th and final mission to go home.

"It was plain to see that the odds were stacked against us this day and it proved out over the Alps. Herman Goering's elite white spinner FW-190s hit us head on and a Me-110 dropped his wheels and locked on our tail, just out of range of our 50s, and lobbed away with rockets. We had no windshield left and our instrument panel was decimated after the first pass. We then took a rocket hit into our No. 3 engine, which set all starboard fuel tanks ablaze. We dropped our red hot bomb load and Lt. Williams ordered a bail-out while he tried to steady the ship with what remaining controls we had left. Lt. Mills went out the bottom hatch with half of one of his legs severed by a 20mm shell below the knee. He somehow managed to survive and was repatriated, I believe, the following June. I snapped Lt. William's chest pack on him and thought he was right behind me as I dove out the bomb bay.

"I spent all of 40 years trying to find out what happened to Lt. Williams and finally located a grave listed by the French Government showing that he was killed on December 19, 1943, and is buried in Row A-40-48 in the Ardennes Cemetery. He was the best and bravest pilot in the U.S. Army Air Corps. S/Sgt. Richardson is still somewhere up there in the Alps and is listed as MIA. The rest of us were fortunate to come home after repatriation.

"Of the original crew, both Sgt. Pysnik and Sgt. Melrose were killed in combat after being assigned to another crew. Sgt. Morozos returned to the States, during the war, due to illness but I was never able to locate him. Lt. Mills and Sgt. Kennedy have both succumbed to cancer. Lt. Plattner stayed in the service after the war but I have lost contact with him. Sgt. Kizer and I keep in touch on a regular basis."

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-3065 - 429TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	Henry S. Vogel, 0-726895, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Harry R. Ludwig, 0-799038, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Paul (NMI) Ireland, 0-796554, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Donald F. Parks, 0-673878, B.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	George O. Solesbery, 38101124, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Donald J. Lewis, 13046106, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Earl E. Bengston, 17100132, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Edward J. Fennessy, 32497334, L/W.	(POW)

S/Sgt. James H. Redick, Jr., 35423764, T/G.
S/Sgt. William W. Boyer, 35564119, R/O.

(KIA)
(POW)

Statement of Captain Henry S. Vogel, Pilot, after repatriation: "We were returning from the target, Innsbruck, Austria. My plane was hit by heavy flak over the target. The two left engines were knocked out, and the left wing burst into flames. At that time the plane was subjected to severe strafing by enemy fighters. Fire broke out in the radio room. The ship, severely injured and under constant attack by enemy fighters, fell out of formation. With only one aileron and horizontal stabilizer left and two engines not functioning, the ship was losing altitude rapidly and almost impossible to control.

"Under those conditions I ordered the crew to bail out and received no answer over the interphone, so I cannot be sure if it was working at the time. I also used the warning bell.

"I was equipped with a seat type parachute and found that the control panel was so far back that I could not get out of the seat with the pack on. Since the co-pilot employed a chest type parachute, I asked him to hold the controls while I removed the harness, got out of my seat and replaced my parachute.

"This circumstance placed me in the area behind the seats. With the wing on fire and an explosion sure to occur, it was necessary to utilize every second of time. Rather than employ maneuvering in a narrow space to let the co-pilot past, I order him, as I fastened on my parachute, to follow me to the bomb bay, our most practical point of exit. As I turned away from him, I saw him swing around in his seat to the left as though to follow me. I immediately crawled through the upper turret and into the bomb bay and jumped without a minutes hesitation to clear the way for the co-pilot whom I presumed was behind me. I blacked out from the shock of the opening of the chute. I recovered consciousness and saw parts of the wing and fuselage fly past. This led me to believe that the plane blew up immediately after I jumped.

"With regard to my co-pilot, I cannot say for certain what happened to him since my last recollection of him is as he turned to follow me out of the cockpit. Since the aircraft was in immediate danger of explosion due to fire, our escape was a matter of seconds, and I never paused on my way out. Lt. Ludwig did not land near me or the survivors, as far as I know, although wreckage of the plane was scattered over a radius of a probably a mile.

"The following men landed safely: Sgts. George Solesbery, Donald Lewis, Edward Fennessy, and Bill Boyer. Sgts. Fennessy, Boyer and Lewis were wounded by enemy fire while still in the aircraft. We landed on a mountain, were captured and taken to a village in the valley. Being dark, I could not learn the name. From there we were taken to Milano. As far as I can guess, the village was about an eight hours motor trip northeast of Milano.

"Regarding other members of the crew: One surviving crewman saw S/Sgt. James H. Redick Jr. in the waist, dead from enemy fire. I have no knowledge of S/Sgt. Earl E. Bengston, 2nd Lt. Donald F. Parks, and 2nd Lt. Paul Ireland."

Sgt. Robert Bensheimer was a combat gunner in the 429th Squadron. December 23, 1993: "Our crew did not fly over but came by boat. Lt. Mike Miller was our Pilot; Lt. Fred Sporer, CP; Lt. William Kemp, Navigator; Lt. Quinn, Bombardier (can't remember his first name); Burton Hanson, UT; Lawrence Meidl, Ball; Russell Chambers, RW; I flew LW; Donald Dotson, TG; and Warren Horst, RO.

"I flew my first mission to Toulon, France on November 23, 1943. Things got tough and we had some casualties. Burton Hanson was killed on a mission to Sofia, Bulgaria on January 10th, 1944. Lt. Kemp was killed while flying with another crew on February 10th, 1944 on a mission to Albano, Italy. Lawrence Meidl was killed while flying with another crew on a mission to Villaorba Italy on March 18th, 1944.

"We had a wild time on a mission to Sofia, Bulgaria. We were jumped by fighters and the Group made a lot of claims. Chambers, Dotson and Horst were credited with probably destroying Me-109s. Chambers was credited with downing an Me-110 but I don't remember the mission.

"Another tough one was on December 19, 1943. We were supposed to go to Augsburg, Austria, but because of the weather we went to an alternate near Innsbruck, Austria. We were heavily attacked by fighters. There were lots of claims and I was credited with downing an Me-109.

"While in Italy, I flew a total of 27 sorties. Three to Southern France, two to Sofia, Bulgaria; many to the Udine area where we always had a tough time with enemy fighters. I flew my last mission in Italy on March 11, 1944 to the Padua Marshalling Yards. The Group lost two B-17s to fighters. One was from the 49th.

"Then, for some reason, I was on a crew that was transferred to the Eighth Air Force in England. That crew was comprised of 1st Lt. Marshall DeKew, P; 1st Lt. Leslie Gallager, CP; 2nd Lt. Samuel Spettner, N; 2nd Lt. Pacher Goodall, B; I was Upper Turret, S/Sgt. John Magyar, BT; S/Sgt. Russell Chambers, RW; S/Sgt. Junior Jackson, LW; S/Sgt. Donald Dotson, TG; and T/Sgt. Levigne, RO. Two of my old crew were still with me.

"I flew nine sorties with the Eighth Air Force, which gave me 50. Six were into Germany, three of which were to Berlin. All I can remember of Berlin were miles and miles of flak. One mission was to Paris. We had engine trouble and couldn't hold formation and returned to base. My last two were to the Pas de Calais area on June 3rd and 4th, which I am sure were to support the invasion of France on the 8th of June 1944."

ELEUSIS, GREECE - MISSION NO. 111 - DECEMBER 20, 1943

Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 81 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Eleusis Airdrome. The area was well covered with direct hits and damaging near misses on hangars, dispersal areas, administration buildings. One single engine and five twin engine aircraft were destroyed and four twin engine aircraft damaged.

Three B-17s were lost to flak; #41-24345, 20th Squadron was hit by flak just after bombs away; #42-5776, 96th Squadron, had a direct hit and crashed; #42-29736, 96th Squadron, was hit and crash landed on a beach on the Island of Corfu. Thirty to 40 enemy aircraft, Me-109s and FW-190s, attacked the formation before, during and after the bomb run. They were very aggressive and made several passes at the formation until chased away by the P-38 escort. Eighteen other B-17s were damaged and five crewmen wounded.

Those wounded were: T/Sgt. Ben (NMI) Jamiot, R/O, 20th Squadron, flak wound, left hand; 2nd Lt. Frank L. Karsh, B, 49th Squadron, flak wound under right eye; 2nd Lt. Arthur A. Krueger, CP, 96th Squadron, flak wound, right side; S/Sgt. Harold K. Cox, TG, 429th Squadron, 20mm flak wound, right thigh; and Sgt. Freeburn Jones, RW, 429th Squadron, 20mm shell wound, right arm and hand.

Fortress gunners claimed 10 E/A destroyed as follows: Each receiving credit for destruction of a Me-109 were T/Sgt. George F. Seimer, UT, and S/Sgt. Charles Alek, LW, 49th Squadron; S/Sgt. Harold Cox, TG; S/Sgt. William C. Bunting, TG; S/Sgt. Horace Mahabirsingh, TG; Sgt. Charlie Martin, LW; Sgt. Freeburn Jones, RW; Sgt. Herman J. LeGrand, LW; and S/Sgt. Ralph W. Truesdale, LT, 429th Squadron. Receiving joint credit for destruction of a Me-109 were S/Sgt. Francis Hollenbeck and S/Sgt. Emile H. Carle, UT, 429th Squadron.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #41-24345 - 20TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt. William A. Slaughter, 0-680320, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. Robert C. Ogletree, 0-800294, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. William J. Nehila, 0-669336, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Clarence B. Lanham, 0-679551, B.	(EVADED)

T/Sgt. William D. Buell, 39242744, U/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Durwood C. Clem, 35372920, L/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Hubert W. J. Isabelle, 11040520, R/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Stanley F. Cwiek, 36159115, L/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Harlow L. Nowell, 31137126, T/G.	(EVADED)
T/Sgt. Belton D. Stamphill, 38198259, R/O.	(EVADED)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Robert C. Ogletree, CP, after evading: "Immediately after bombs away, we were hit by flak which knocked out No. 2 and No. 3 engines and set No. 4 engine on fire. The pilot instructed me to give the bail-out order over the interphone system. As soon as I had given instructions to the crew to bail out, I left the plane through the escape hatch in the nose. For some reason I did not execute a delayed jump, but I believe I pulled the rip cord as soon as I dropped from the plane. Nothing happened during my descent.

"I landed on a barren hillside and while I was getting out of my chute, a Greek shepherd approached me. He appeared very friendly, kissed and shook my hand. This shepherd led me up a hill where a small group of armed Greeks were waiting to cover my escape from a German patrol that was searching for us that had parachuted down. The Germans had sent up a scout plane to aid them in their search for us. It was not long after that until we were gathered in a group and taken to a rendezvous in the mountains where we were guarded that night from searching parties.

"The following morning, we started on our journey with several Greeks accompanying us to act as guards, guides and interpreters. We were escorted in this manner from underground station to underground station. We traveled mostly in the daytime except when we had to cross main roads and railroads. This we did at night and one time we were guided between two German bivouac areas. We walked an average of about eight hours a day for 30 days. At night we were split up and taken into Greek homes. In most villages we encountered Greeks who could speak English and they were all very helpful. It seemed to me that every Greek was ready to give all possible aid. It is my advice to let men of this underground system have complete charge and it is wise to comply with their requests."

Statement of S/Sgt. Stanley Cwiek, TG, after evading: "Just after getting the bail-out order, I sighted three enemy fighters coming in at us at 7:00 o'clock, high. The first two fighters opened fire for a short period and dove past our plane. The third fighter came in, in trail, shooting long bursts. I returned fire and continued shooting as he came in. He sped past us, out of control and went down, and after I bailed, I saw the same enemy fighter in a tight spiral and a little later, I noticed where he crashed.

"The pins on my escape hatch were rusty, had frozen, and I had quite a time getting it open and getting out. I had to force myself through an opening between the door and plane in the slip-stream. I delayed quite a while in pulling the ripcord. My chute opened alright and nothing happened to me on the way down. After landing on the ground, I met several Greeks who were armed. They helped me to hide my chute and started with Sgt. Clem and myself up the side of the mountain.

"There was a German patrol at the foot of the mountain on our trail. The Greeks sent us ahead and stopped to ambush those Germans. We learned they had destroyed the whole patrol.

"After spending a night in a secret hideout, we started our journey by foot and traveled for 31 days. The Greeks furnished us a guide for each step of the journey. At times we were very close to German bivouac areas and had one encounter with a German patrol at night while we were crossing a main railroad. The Greeks covered our retreat by kneeling and firing at the patrol while we ran across fields and forged a swamp. We walked for 12 hours that night as we could hear search parties on our trail.

“The Greeks were very friendly and treated us kindly. They furnished us with guides, food and escorted us from mission to mission until we left the country.”

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-5776 - “EAGER BEAVER” - 96TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	David G. Rohrig, 0-738003, P.	(KIA)
1st Lt.	Adolph F. Dippolito, 0-678194, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	John F. Back, 0-800302, N.	(KIA)
1st Lt.	Lloyd O. Haefs, 0-669280, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	James L. Hiskey, Jr., 34362482, U/T	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Lewis W. Crawford, 34125836, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Walter H. Chesser, 3424169, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Frank (NMI) Horner, 38180270, L/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	John A. Caputo, 15073526, T/G.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	John W. Carson, 13095994, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Arthur A. Krueger, CP on B-17 #779, after the mission: “We hit the I.P. and turned right on the bombing run. We held a straight and level course with a constant speed of 155 mph, indicated, with no evasive action taken. This lasted for about six minutes before bombs away. As the lead Squadron dropped their bombs, I glanced at #776, our Element leader, to see if they were releasing their bombs also. As I looked that way, a burst of flak hit the tail just aft of the waist window, and I was hit by a piece of flak at the same time. I noticed that #776 stayed level for a second or two, then took a nose dive, and I could see no more.”

S/Sgt. John W. Carson was an original member of the crew of F/O George A. Levchak and assigned to the 96th Squadron, August 6, 1943. He was flying the Radio position on “EAGER BEAVER” on December 20, 1943. February 18, 1991: “Some things remain in your mind, buried but triggered by incidents that creep up on you with insidious cruelty. I recall my very first mission as a tail gunner on a B-17. We went somewhere in France to bomb a submarine pen installation. We of course drew fighters and flak, and I am fairly certain that I went blind with fear. Maybe I just closed my eyes and prayed, but whatever, I admit without shame, I was scared witless.

“Things got better as the missions progressed. I learned to keep my eyes open and shiver. I well remember our one confirmed kill. A Me-109 came all around the B-17 from the nose and the right waist gunner nailed him. I got him from the tail and the left waist gunner blew away his rudder. At this point, the pilot pulled up the nose and went over the side. He spilled his chute almost instantly and I had him in my gun sights. I shudder again when I think how close I came to pulling the trigger and gunning him down. It would have been a dreadful mistake, but impulse nearly cost that German fighter pilot his life.

“We crashed at night when returning from our second mission of the day in support of Salerno Beach. On the way in we lost the outer port engine, however the pilot elected to push on with three and finish the mission. On the way home we were approaching the North African coast when we lost the inboard port engine. I believe there was a B-26 field nearby but the pilot, Lt. Patrick Train, made another command decision. He was going to home base. This probably wouldn’t have been so bad but as we were on the final approach, I heard the radio operator state, ‘#449, if you have two engines out, flash your landing lights,’ and at that same moment, Train poured on the coal and pulled up to avoid another B-17 that cut him out of the pattern. In less time than you could tell about it, the radio room was full of crew members. I looked out the window and could see houses that were really close. I stupidly asked Ed Bennett, the radio operator, ‘Are we going to crash?’ and his reply was ‘Yeah, put my flight jacket away,’ and handed me his heavy sheepskin flight jacket. I put it away alright. I wrapped

it around my body and pressed tight against the armor plating on the back of his chair. We went in on a hillside in the dark, and as we tried to exit the radio hatch, at once we could see flames against the dust. Fortunately it was a small fire in the No. 4 engine and we were able to extinguish it. Train and his co-pilot, both six footers, exited via the cockpit windows. I would bet money they could never do it again under normal conditions.

“The initial mission of the 15th Air Force was over Wiener Neustadt. We made the bomb run with some B-24s and everyone was busy. One B-24 crew bailed out and they were right behind us, and a wave of 27 German fighters were making their move on us. We took a hole through a prop blade, lost the induction system on one engine and several holes in the bird. We landed in Sicily for a scheduled refueling stop but could not get out until we had a new engine flown in. The pilot on the crew was a tobacco chewing mad man, Captain Philip Devine. With the engine replaced, he took off to slow time the engine and check it out. Since the local troops wined and dined us, he took about 17 of them for a ride and buzzed the local brothel in the town of Gela. The prop ran away, but no harm done. With the prop repaired, we crewed up and headed for home, low enough to troll for fish.

“Just a few days before my final mission, our formation was jumped by FW-190s. The first pass got the tail gunner by the name of Corley, in the foot. He waited a little too long to announce the arrival of the FW-190s and permitted them to get in the first shots. Not only did they riddle our tail but the whole airplane looked like someone ripped it open with an axe. The right wing tip was gone right up to the aileron and the flight was anything but smooth. Vibration was the name of the day. Our P-38s came in and bailed us out and then we could hear the words of another pilot, ‘I don’t think we are going to make it Dave,’ over and over again while the skipper, Dave Rohrig, grimly held on and took her home. I guarantee you, 20mm cannon shells make mean holes, about two feet long and three to four inches wide!

“Now we come to the last fateful ride, which killed five of the crew and injured five; one the bombardier, Lt. Lloyd Haefs, critically. We were lead crew and the run over Eleusis Airdrom in Athens, Greece was supposedly a milk run. All was well when we entered the IP and Haefs took over the bomb sight. I heard Lt. Rohrig state, ‘How does it look Lloyd?’ and Haefs replied, ‘I’m going to let them go any second now.’ I looked to the rear, out over the vertical stabilizer, and saw the 88s breaking right in line with us and coming up. I turned to open the radio room door to the bomb bay so I could advise them when the bombs were clear and all hell broke lose! I had the door handle in my hand, we had taken nearly a direct hit in the bomb bay. I groped for my mike switch to give a damage appraisal when the rear radio room door hit me in the face. I looked and saw that we were broken in two. I could see the two waist gunners through the dust and confusion, obviously trying to extricate themselves. The B-17 rolled over and dove, engines screaming. I found myself straddling the radio room machine gun with my feet hanging out into the slip stream, and couldn’t seem to help myself. I could see the ground and my thoughts were not pleasant. I tried to faint to spare myself the anxiety of my last few moments and that didn’t seem to work. Then I had the ridiculous thought, ‘It’s going to cut my legs off.’ Then I decided I was going to die so I said a prayer, ‘Please God, I don’t want to go to Hell.’ Then my miracle came for I was able to get up and climb back near where the waist door had been and bailed out. Where I found the strength I’ll never know but it had to be superhuman.

“After prison camp, I sort of lost touch although I did run into Walt Chesser, a M/Sgt., in Japan and we renewed our tales. I had heard from Lt. Haefs, wanting to know what had happened as he was unconscious for about two weeks with serious head injuries. We had lost touch and about eight years ago, I was talking to another ham radio operator and he asked me about the war and POW time. Then he said, ‘The fellow I work with is retiring, he was a POW and bombardier on B-17s.’ I automatically asked his name, he replied, ‘Lloyd Haefs.’ I was flabbergasted and never went to bed until I was able

to call him on the phone. A few years ago Lloyd came through Spokane and looked me up. Prior to the visit we made some tapes, relating to each other what we could remember.”

Lt. Lloyd O. Haefs, Bombardier on “Eager Beaver.” He was on the original crew of 1st Lt. Fred Licence and assigned to the 96th Squadron, July 15, 1943. June 4, 1993: “Since I was rendered unconscious for at least two weeks, I don’t recall much of what happened so I don’t have much to contribute. I have John Carson’s story on tape that I acquired a few years ago.

“About a year later, in a prison camp, I came by accident upon Walt Chesser. He has since died but at that time he related his story to me. He said he was at the waist gun when the fuselage was blown off at the rear door. He was covered with black grime from the burst and had small fragments in his clothing but was not seriously hurt. Diving out through an opening, he deployed his chute and observed others falling. He was excited and didn’t remember how long it took to orient himself and then get out. Upon landing, he found himself with a broken leg. He was sure he broke it when he hit the ground. In just a few minutes he was captured by German soldiers and put in a truck with them. He said they drove slowly over some distance, then finally into some woods at which time he became convinced that would put him against a tree and shoot him. However, they went a short distance and came upon what was left of the “Beaver,” much of it strewn through the trees. He said that the debris was primarily the tail section only and inside it was the body of John Caputo, tail gunner. They then removed the dog tags and he confirmed that the man was John Caputo. He saw no other crewmen at the time. Chesser or Carson were joined by Crawford before they were shipped out to Germany. I must mention too that Walt, before the Germans got him, was approached by members of the Greek underground to help him evade capture but their leader informed him that they were unable to care for wounded and must leave him for the Germans, which they did. It may have been the same group that saved Horner and got him back to Italy. We always called Chesser our Florida ‘Hillbilly’ and he was that. He was a nice man that had fought as a machine gunner in two infantry campaigns in North Africa. He said he joined the AAF because it looked as if he would never get home from the infantry but only had to fly 50 missions with us and then go home. What irony! He went down on his 21st.

“When we had about 10 missions under our belts, the crew was split up. Fred was transferred to the 20th and became their Operations Officer, a fine pilot. Mayfield, Co-pilot, was given his own crew. Dunkelburger and I were made Squadron Navigator and Bombardier. I took over from Captain Olds who went through the African Campaign and finished his tour. The gunners flew lead.

“A few years ago I had written the following of going down in the “Beaver.” - 12/20/43 The Last Flight - After fighting and flying across North Africa in the illustrious 12th Air Force of General James Doolittle, the 2nd Bomb Group found itself packing up to leave its base at Massicault in Tunis. It had come there, in hot pursuit of the Germans, from out of Algerian desert near a nondescript town of Ain M’lila. The Tunisian desert proved to be no less dusty, but at least we had been near the more civilized town of Tunis.

“Now we were to cross the ‘Med’ and settle on one of the Foggia, Italy satellite fields at Amendola. Not long before, these airfields had been occupied by the Luftwaffe who had to withdraw before the on-slaughts, from the air and ground, as they had come from Africa and Sicily.

“It was a major undertaking primarily because we had to cross the water with everything that didn’t fly. Each crew loaded their entire living quarters into the B-17s as well as personal gear, some of which was winter issue that we had worn in Britain and hadn’t worn since. The entire kitchens; tents, ranges, pots, pans and all were put on board. Those with the flues for bread ovens, sticking out the waist windows, looked like over-gunned flying models out of the U.S. Artillery as they trundled down the steel mat on take-off. All else had to go to Bizerte by truck, thence by boat.

"Some flying crews volunteered to cross on boats to assist the ground people in moving the shops, tools, ammo, engines, bomb, etc. My navigator, Vance Dunkelberger, elected to do this and since we normally flew as Squadron Leaders, I was shot down before his ship arrived in Italy. He subsequently finished his missions and went home.

"Most of the imperative equipment arrived and was set up, at least in a temporary fashion that would allow the Group to mount a mission as soon as possible. It seems we had no sooner landed, set up our tents and kitchen then the aircraft were ready to fly again, fully gassed, bombs and ammo aboard.

"The ground people worked like Trojans to accomplish this Herculean task. Not enough credit could ever be given them for all the hard work. We, as the air crew, were spared much of the labor and long hours of planning that made it all fit. I am sure that these soldiers and airmen had the Germans biting their nails who, if they thought for one minute that our move would give them a respite, were sadly mistaken for we found ourselves back in the air with scarcely a break!

"I flew my first mission from Amendola and I can't recall where we went. I do know that I was counting down to the 'fateful 50' and eager to finish my tour and return home, having been married only a short time before joining the Army Air Force.

"We were routed out by the Squadron runner shortly after 5:00 a.m. December 20, 1943, hollering, 'Breakfast call, briefing 0600 hours.' Then repeating it, as if I hadn't heard it the first time! Since Dunk was gone, I was the only one in our tent to answer 'mission call' so rolled out, dressed and stumbled over to the mess tent to find the bacon and eggs greasy as ever, as they were in North Africa.

"One thing nice for us was Amendola's hard surface runway compared to Africa's steel mats. The lack of blinding sand and dust, when the fully loaded ships headed to takeoff, was pure luxury. To rendezvous in clean air rather than 'top out' at 3500 feet before one could see the formation heading out was a big plus, and the engines would operate much longer.

"Briefing called for rendezvous on course toward Athens, Greece, since Eleusis Airdrome was near it. I anticipated perhaps a sight of the ancient city. The day was bright and beautiful as we admired whitecaps on the Adriatic and slowly climbed on course to our bombing altitude of 25,000 feet. G-2 had briefed us for 'heavy, accurate flak' around the Eleusis Airdrome and, with P-38 recon photos, had pin pointed the batteries for us. I made a mental note on one right near my aiming point. The mission was designed to 'post hole' the runways and three of the Squadrons were assigned that task. We, in the 96th, were given the job of destroying the operations buildings which bordered one side.

"As we crossed the I.P., three Squadrons that were to 'post hole' slid into echelon formation, wing-tip to wing-tip under the leadership of Marshall Hanson, Group Bombardier, and took up the run over the field. Dave Rohrig brought the "Eager Beaver" into alignment with the buildings beside the runway. I took over and with the bomb bay doors open, picked my aiming point just short of the flak battery I intended to neutralize. The plan called for 50-foot intervolometer settings and we began our run.

"The indices on the Norden bombsight met and electrically started the 500-lb. bombs falling. John Carson, radio operator, counted them out, one-two-three-four-five. His last bomb and the first flak hit occurred almost simultaneously. The ship seemed to stop in mid-air. The aircraft climbed some, then nosed over and I became aware of the sound of four engines changing pitch as they roared toward the earth with the throttles set as they had been set for the run on the target.

"I have since thought of the events that transpired and at some point they became disoriented, I suppose due to the injuries I received, but my recollection is that I checked on Jimmy Back, my Navigator. He was lying on his back covered with 25-lb. ammo cases and navigational charts from the shelves above his position. His eyes were large from surprise. Finding a chest pack beside me, I snapped it on my harness. I then removed debris from him and gave him his chute. I then made my way to the escape hatch under the cockpit, pulled the hinge-pin on the door and kicked it out. As it flew away, I

looked out to see the formation heading home and remember a forlorn feeling that, 'They're going home and we're going down.' Nevertheless, a sensation of relief flooded through me that, 'I'm going down and the ship isn't burning.' That was one of my main concerns; I hated fire!

"Then I recall speculating if I should delay my jump because we had been under fighter attack as we approached the I.P. and there were always rumors of our men being strafed in their chutes although I had never seen it actually occur. It seemed strange but I decided to pull the handle and let it pull me off the ship.

"The next conscious thought was my awakening very cautiously to see a white ceiling, a small room, a common hospital-type bed, then me lying there in it. Obviously this was a hospital and I was back in the States but how could that be? I was in the aircraft with my comrades fighting off 109s and dropping bombs.

"Some time went by and once again I checked in on reality. Gad! My face hurt like crazy! I gingerly touched my lower face and chin to find a mess. The lip and skin below it was split open to the corners of my mouth. Most of my teeth seemed to be broken or missing as I probed. Also my left cheekbone seemed to be indented and probably broken. It was then that I noted that the front of the garment I wore was blood soaked down to my waist. The blood was crusted and apparently stopped flowing.

"No one was in the room but I could hear whispers but couldn't make out the words. I finally focused on the doorway. Two heads peered around the door jam, one male and one female. They were apparently discussing me in German. I was nonpulsed not knowing where the hell I was! Evidently passing in and out of consciousness for a long time, several days perhaps, until one time, I beheld a bearded, be-mustached, slight fellow in an English Infantry uniform. He sat beside the bed asking me questions, 'Was I alright? Did my head hurt? Could I get out of bed?'

"Since we were told that if captured, the Germans would conduct a sophisticated interrogation in an effort to gain certain information on how many planes were available to us, do you have adequate supplies, and so on? So, as a result I wouldn't say anything for several of his regular visits until I became convinced he was who he said he was, a British Officer, an Infantry Lieutenant, captured with six of his men on the Island of Leros. The mortar shell that caused his injury blew the leg off his Top Sergeant, who was in the room next to mine. I was soon much better oriented by him. His name was Terry Bourke and he had suffered nearly 3,000 German Stuka attacks on the Island of Malta until he and his unit were assigned to take the Island of Leros from an Italian unit that had out-numbered the British, at least three to one. Since the Italians wanted nothing more than to go home, the few men took the island without any casualties. When the Germans tired of the British resistance, they literally overwhelmed Terry's outfit with paratroopers and captured or killed nearly all. I was very impressed to meet such a grizzled veteran and kindly gentleman.

"I asked Terry if he had seen any other Americans in the hospital and he replied there were none. A German dentist took me to his office and examined my broken jaws and teeth. In broken English he informed me that I would get no treatment. I expected no more so wasn't disappointed. The Germans did not accord the Americans the same respect they gave the English so I was reticent to inquire about my crew so as not to bring any attention to them if they had survived.

"When one of the 'talking heads' in my doorway said 'Luftganster' and pointed at me, I got the drift. The Luftwaffe bombing of defenseless small countries made them heroes; Americans bombing them were 'gangsters.'

"Several nights later, the air-raid sirens went off and the sounds of 88mm flak guns were heard. Another raid on the Eleusis Airdrome was in progress, conducted by RAF bombers. After it was over, a captive airman was brought into the hospital with a severely strained leg, so Terry informed me. Dick Townsend was his name, a South African officer.

"A day or two later, a small rotund man mightily resembling 'good old St. Nick' himself came in and introduced himself as a Swiss representative of the International Red Cross. He asked if I smoked. I didn't smoke but told him I might since I was getting tired of looking at the ceiling and waiting for something to happen. He seemed like a nice man. Before leaving, he left some British 'Player' cigarettes and put my nice clean clothes on a chair beside my bed. His wife had washed the blood out of them and I thanked him.

"After he had been gone for some time, the 'Gefrieter,' or sergeant, who sat at my door came in, said something guttural to me, grabbed the clothing and I could hear his steel-cleated boots cracking down the hall.

"Shortly I heard several boots coming back and a sobbing and shrieking girl as well. Two soldiers came in with Maria, a Greek nurse, held between them. She flung herself on the floor and knelt with her arms across my chest finally making me understand they were going to kill her for supplying my clothing so I could make my escape! I made the Germans understand, in broken German and hand motions, that the Red Cross man had brought them back and Maria knew nothing about it. They eventually conceded the point and stomped out, leaving us alone. I was the object of hugs and kisses as she was sure I had saved her life.

"One afternoon I attempted to get out of bed, first dangling my feet, then standing up. I promptly got dizzy as hell and fell to the floor. Lying there I thought, 'Imagine, a guard on my door so I can't escape and I can't even stand up!' We never could see any evidence that the blood I lost had been replenished, which probably had much to do with my light-headedness. According to Terry Bourke, I had not regained consciousness until January 4th, having slept through Christmas and New Years. Being some delirious for several more days would make it somewhere about three weeks since I had been on my feet.

"The days passed slowly and I regained some of my balance although remaining somewhat shaky. On February 7th, my clothes were returned to me and I donned them for the first time. Guards were everywhere surrounding us. All of Terry's men were placed on litters. Terry and I were left to stand. Something was afoot. The doctor came and explained we were being taken to Athens train station to board a "lazerett souk," or hospital train bound for Germany. That sounded alright to us and we left under heavy guards, not one whole man among us.

"I'll always remember the Parthenon, which I identified from pictures in school. The 'hospital train' was another matter. We were brought beside a string of 40 & 8s (box cars) and, unceremoniously, shoved inside one of them. Surveying the dim, musty interior, we realized we were in for another adventure, but that is another story of its own. Six of Terry's men were bad cases as was Townsend who could barely hobble. Neither Terry nor I were steady on our feet and had little idea of the ordeal we faced, but were soon to find out."

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-29736 - "HANGAR QUEEN" - 96TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt. Orville L. Doughty, 0-20620, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Thomas E. Kirwin, 0-745114, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Harry T. Dillon, 0-801182, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Gordon C. Llewellyn, 0-734322, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Seward S. Holloway, 18076495, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Robert C. J. Ciampa, 11087652, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Edmond L. Privensal, 12167469, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Keith L. Jensen, 39535524, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Alfred W. Coe, 12072714, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt. John W. Lenz, 15320193, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Robert A. Brienza, N. on B-17 #233, after the mission: "I heard our tail gunner call and say #736 was having trouble. Ten minutes later, my pilot called and asked me to keep an exact position on #736 and our own aircraft as he believed #736 would have to make a forced landing. We fell behind #736 in order to afford him coverage in case of fighter attack, as #736 had tossed out their ammunition and guns. We kept well on course but kept losing speed and altitude. #736 flew through the clouds while we were at an altitude of 7,500 feet and the position of 39-40N - 25-30E. #736 called and said the ceiling was 3,500 feet. We let down to 3,500 feet but could not see #735. Our position at this time was 39-50N - 19-40E. I then asked the pilot to call #736 and get his navigator's position in order that we could search, as visibility was less than half a mile. We did not get a position report from #736. We then continued to search around Corfu Island at an altitude of 2,800 feet for about 15 minutes.

"I was unable to spot #736 from his last position and we proceeded back to Base."

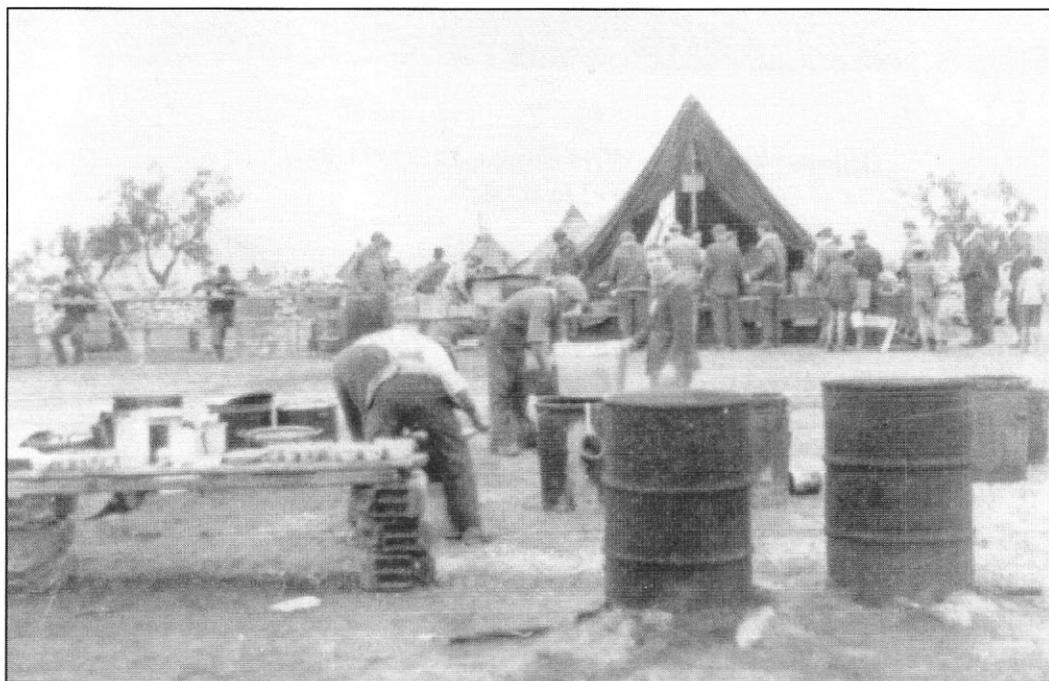
Statement of 2nd Lt. Orville L. Doughty, P, after liberation: "We were at approximately 21,500 feet, just over the target when we were hit by flak. We crash landed on the Island of Corfu. All members were at their assigned crash landing positions. No one was injured in the landing although the bombardier, Lt. Llewellyn, had been wounded in the arm. All crewmen were taken prisoner but all are, or have been, safely home. Lts. Kirwin, Dillon, and Llewellyn were in the same prison camp with me.

"I saw T/Sgt. Holloway at Dulag Luft and then again at Santa Monica, California waiting for a discharge in September, 1945. Sgts. Lenz, Ciampa, Coe, and Privensal were all seen at Camp Lucky Strike and Sgt. Jensen was last seen at Santa Ana Army Air Base, getting a discharge."

UDINE, ITALY - MISSION NO. 112 - DECEMBER 25, 1943

It was Christmas Day and our first Christmas overseas, however, this was war and bombing of the Germans made it business as usual.

The target was the Marshalling Yards at Udine. Twenty-six aircraft, with a bomb load of 12, 500-lb. GP bombs, took off at 0910 hours. A 10/10 cloud cover over the area prevented the bombing of any target and all A/C returned to Base with their bombs. No flak, no encounters, no injuries.



It was a cold overcast day. I

Christmas dinner 12-25-43 - Amendola, Italy - Note Orphan Children
Courtesy - Lloyd Haefs

went down to the Squadron for my Christmas meal. There was turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes; the usual Christmas dinner. We did not have a regular Mess Hall set up as yet so we ate wherever we could find a place to sit. Quite a difference to our last Christmas in Glasgow, Montana! I remember we had large number of Italian children from neighboring areas for dinner, some from an orphanage. What a treat for them! They went home with packages of candy and gifts.

My tent mates rolled in today, a welcome sight! They had a rough time of it in the rain, mud and cold at Bizerte. Thank God I got to fly. I helped them set up a tent and find straw for their mattress covers.



Officers' Tent Area - Olive Grove - Amendola, Italy
Courtesy - Lloyd Haefs

December 26, 1943: A mission was planned to bomb the Marshalling Yards at Verona, Italy. The crews prepared for the mission but it was scrubbed due to poor weather over all of Northern Italy.

I was still quartered in a tent with fellows at Group Headquarters and awakened to find we were experiencing a heavy rain storm. The wind had split the tent and water was leaking on my cot. I still had my shelter half from North Africa so put it, and my raincoat, over my

blankets and went back to sleep. Reading this in my diary reminds me of one of my favorite Bill Mauldin Cartoons. Willie and Joe are sitting in the rain and mud of Italy, beneath a tree devoid of leafs and most branches. Willie turned to Joe and said, "This damn tree leaks." I felt the same way about my tent.

RIMINI, ITALY - MISSION NO. 113 - DECEMBER 28, 1943

The assigned target was the Marshalling Yards at Rimini. Nineteen aircraft dropped 57 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs with strike photos showing that the Yards were missed. Direct hits were made on the tracks to Ravenna, direct hits and near misses on buildings adjacent to the Marecchia River, hits on barracks type buildings causing many fires and some damage to the north end of the Yard. All planes returned safely without incident.

RAVENNA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 115 - DECEMBER 30, 1943

Verona, Italy was the assigned primary target but could not be reached due to the weather. Colonel Herbert E. Rice, Group Commander, then led the 24 aircraft to the alternate. Seven aircraft

dropped their bombs 34 miles northeast of Ravenna, hitting nothing, due to malfunction of bomb racks in Colonel Rice's aircraft. The other 17 went on to bomb Ravenna dropping 51 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards.

Between 20 to 25 Me-109s and FW-190s attacked the Group just before bombing. Three men were wounded and gunners claimed five E/A destroyed and two probably destroyed.

2nd Lt. Hugh V. Quinn, N., 429th Squadron, suffered severe shrapnel wounds in face, arms and chest and some fragments penetrated through the brain and left eye (he recovered). 2nd Lt. Fred (NMI) Sporer, Jr., CP, 429th Squadron, suffered severe wounds on right arm caused by 20mm shell. Sgt. Karl J. Letters, LT, 96th Squadron, suffered a slight wound on the lower left leg.

Receiving credit for enemy fighters were: each credited with the destruction of an Me-109 were Pvt. Glen E. Morrison, LT, 20th Squadron; S/Sgt. Joseph A. Peters, TG, 96th Squadron; S/Sgt. Burton G. Hanson, UT; T/Sgt. Arthur F. Sullivan, LT; and S/Sgt. Lemuel E. Adams, LT, 429th Squadron. Each receiving credit for probable destruction of an Me-109 were S/Sgt. Donald C. Dotson, TG, and 1st Lt. Frederick P. Barton, B, 429th Squadron.

B-17 #42-31458, piloted by Lt. George Levchak, 96th Squadron, was damaged by enemy aircraft gunfire. The No. 2 engine was knocked out and started windmilling. The plane rapidly lost altitude and it appeared that it would be necessary to ditch. The plane was 15 to 20 miles off the coast of Italy. 2nd Lt. Clyde Apple, N (*), and 2nd Lt. Oliver A. Toole, B (*), bailed out. Their parachutes were seen to open and nothing more was heard of them. Lt. Levchak and F/O Beal got the plane under control and returned to Base with the other six men, not injured. (*) Reports show these men as deceased, evidently not rescued.

January 1, 1944, New Year's Day, started with torrential rains and cyclone-type winds. Many tents were either torn or blown down throughout the camp. It was reported that the 96th Orderly Room tent was blown down. Despite the wind and rain, all the Squadrons served hot turkey dinners.

VILLAR PEROSA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 116 - JANUARY 3, 1944

Twenty-two aircraft dropped 66 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the Ball Bearing Works at Villar Perosa. Strike photos showed excellent results with direct hits and damaging near misses on the main factory. Numerous explosions were observed. Flak was moderate to intense and accurate, causing injury to five men: 2nd Lt. Joseph L. Whiton, B, 20th Squadron, flak wound on left thumb; S/Sgt. Robert M. Rand, RO, 429th Squadron, flak wound on upper right eyebrow; PFC Duane J. Booth, LT, 49th Squadron, flak wound on scalp and neck; 2nd Lt. Arch J. Woods, CP, 96th Squadron, severe flak wound through lower right arm; and S/Sgt. Carl D. Coleman, LW, 96th Squadron, flak wound on calf of left leg.

Two to four E/A attacked the formation before and after bombs away. The attacks were very aggressive. This action, and flak, accounted for slight damage to 18 B-17s.

Gunners credited with downing one each Me-109 were S/Sgt. John J. Kilgalen, TG, and S/Sgt. Anthony R. Mancuso, TG, both from the 429th Squadron.

DUPNISTA, BULGARIA - MISSION NO. 117 - JANUARY 4, 1944

The primary target was the Business District of Sofia, Bulgaria. Due to a 10/10 cloud cover over the primary target, 27 aircraft dropped 81 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Dupnista. Strike photos showed a concentration of hits across the Marshalling Yards, probable extensive damage to residential, commercial and other buildings; one explosion in a barracks-type building. There was no flak, and only one to three Me-109s attacked the formation. S/Sgt. Michael A.

Croccia, LW, 96th Squadron was credited with the probable destruction of an Me-109. No injuries, no losses.

MARIBOR, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 118 - JANUARY 7, 1944

The assigned target was the Messerschmitt Factory at Wiener Neustadt. Due to a 10/10 cloud cover over this target, the formation of 22 aircraft dropped 66 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on an Aero-engine factory at Maribor. Visual observations reported a fair percentage of hits. Some direct hits were seen, one large explosion was reported, and scattered hits were seen along the railroad tracks.

No flak was encountered and the P-38 escort took care of enemy fighters. S/Sgt. Edwin D. Jackson, BT, 49th Squadron, suffered from frozen feet. No other injuries.

REGGIO-EMILIA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 119 - JANUARY 8, 1944

Thirty-two aircraft dropped 97 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Aircraft Factory and Marshalling Yards. Photos showed direct hits on the tracks at the NW choke point; direct hits on industrial plants NW of the station with strikes in the yards; one direct hit was observed on an unidentified factory building. No flak, no fighters.

POLA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 120 - JANUARY 9, 1944

The primary target was the Torpedo Works, Oil Refinery and Marshalling Yards at Fiume, Italy. A 10/10 cloud cover prevented the bombing of this target. Twenty-six aircraft then dropped 78 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on Harbor Installations at Pola. There were hits to the east and west of the Port; hits in the city area west and northwest of Fort Costello; direct hits on warehouses, machine shops and merchant vessels. Flak was light with no injuries.

SOFIA, BULGARIA - MISSION NO. 121 - JANUARY 10, 1944

Thirty-nine aircraft dropped 116 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the business district of Sofia. It was reported that Germans had taken over the city, primarily the business district, for their headquarters. Photos showed strings of bombs along the west side of the assigned area that did considerable damage, however, most of the bombs fell in the outlying portions of town. Flak was moderate to intense and accurate.

Enemy fighters, JU-88s and Me-109s, attacked the formation aggressively, coming in as close as 100 yards. T/Sgt. Burton G. Hanson, UT in A/C #42-24366, 429th Squadron, was killed, five wounded, and A/C #42-5811, piloted by 2nd Lt. Thomas E. Finch, 20th Squadron, was lost to enemy fighters. The wounded were: 2nd Lt. John F. Miller, B, 20th Squadron, cuts around eyes from shattered plexiglass shattered by flak; 2nd Lt. John M. Hazlett, B, abrasion of left eyelid from shattered plexiglass, shattered by flak; 2nd Lt. Frederick G. Lahger, B, abrasion of left ear from machine gun bullet; T/Sgt. John D. Vinson, RO, 96th Squadron, severe scalp wound from flak; and S/Sgt. John J. Kilgalen, TG, 429th Squadron, laceration of face, around the eyes by shattered plexiglass. Claims of enemy fighters went to: Each credited with the destruction of a Me-109 were T/Sgt. Combie J. Talley, UT, Sgt. Arlen S. Sterns, TG, Pvt. John R. Roman, LW, 429th Squadron; and a joint claim awarded to Sgt. Hale W. Brown, UT, and Sgt. Hugo O. Borech, LT, 429th Squadron. Each credited with the probable destruction of a Me-109 were S/Sgt. William J. Coyish, RW, Sgt. Billie G. Springer, RW, of the 20th Squadron; S/Sgt. Walter (NMI) Nies, TG, 96th Squadron; S/Sgt. Warren E. Horst, RO, S/Sgt. Russell W. Chambers, RW, S/Sgt. Donald C. Dotson, TG, and S/Sgt. Gordon S. Marshall, LT, 429th Squadron. Credited with the possible destruction of two FW-109s was T/Sgt. Emile H. Carle, UT, 429th Squadron. Credited with the possible destruction of a Ju-88 was Sgt. Floyd M. LeMaster, LT, 429th Squadron. Sgt. Claudio B. Dannenhauer, RW, 20th Squadron, was credited with damaging a Me-109.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-5811 - 20TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt. Thomas E. Finch, 0-737390, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Eugene F. Weller, 0-747747, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Thomas G. Wyatt, 0-683924, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. William C. Golden, 0-668273, B.	(KIA)
Cpl. Joseph (NMI) Pysnik, 32251734, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Robert M. Schumaker, 6683849, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Donald D. Swank, 13123566, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Walter G. Kluttz, 34096353, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Carol F. Gantt, 14125458, T/G.	(KIA)
Cpl. Harold M. Ross, 32448975, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of S/Sgt. Donald D. Swank, after liberation: "It was approximately 12:00 o'clock and at an altitude of 21,000 feet when we were hit over Sofia. The radio operator, ball turret gunner, and myself bailed out the waist door. They followed me out. Harold Ross and I were captured about the same time and taken to Sofia. Robert Schumaker turned up in prison camp about three months later. He had been in the hospital all this time as he had half his foot shot off. As far as I know, all seven other members of the crew were still in the aircraft when it struck the ground.

"To my knowledge, Lt. Finch did not bail out and do not know if he was injured. The last conversation with him was over the interphone to call out fighters when they started to attack. In my opinion he was dead in the cockpit. The ship was on fire and no chutes were seen to come out of it.

"I am almost certain Lt. Weller did not bail out and do not know if he was injured. The last I heard from him was calling out fighters during the fighter attack.

"I do not believe that Lts. Wyatt and Golden bailed out either. The last conversation with Lt. Golden was when he was pulling the pins from the bombs on the way to the target, and from Lt. Wyatt, just before the bomb run. In my opinion, both were killed as we had a furious attack from the front, and heard no more from them.

"S/Sgt. Schumaker told me that Cpl. Pysnik was killed during the fighter attack. He said he was informed by the Bulgarians, while in the hospital, that the upper turret gunner had been riddled in the chest by machine gun bullets.

"S/Sgt. Kluttz did not bail out. He was killed from the first pass that the enemy fighters made on us. He was lying on the floor, dead, when I left the ship.

"I have no knowledge if S/Sgt. Gantt got out. The last conversation from him was as fighters were called out. I assume he went down with the ship, only three chutes were seen."

PIRAEUS, GREECE - MISSION NO. 122 - JANUARY 11, 1944

Twenty aircraft dropped 60 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on Malon Harbor. Four Groups participated: the 99th, 2nd, 97th, and 301st, in that order. As a result of the bombing of the four Groups, there were 26 units of shipping directly hit or damaged. There were direct hits, or near misses, on buildings, rail lines, storage tanks, and installations throughout the Basin. Barrage type flak was moderate to intense, but inaccurate.

Between 20 to 25 E/A attacked the formation, before, during and after the bomb run causing slight damage to two B-17s of the 2nd. There were no claims, no injuries and no losses.

GUIDONIA, ITALY - NON CREDIT MISSIONS - JANUARY 13, 1944

Thirty-four aircraft took off to bomb the Airdrome at Guidonia. The Group took a wrong turn off the I.P. and the formation went to the right of the target. A second run was not made because of the

appearance of enemy fighters. Two aircraft dropped their bombs on what they believed was an airdrome southwest of Guidonia; another thought it bombed the assigned target and a fourth had an accidental release, hitting nothing. There was no flak at the target but two to six E/A were engaged near Rome. Two B-17s received minor damage with no injuries.

General Atkinson, Commanding General of the 5th Wing, ruled this to be a non-mission. Many crewmen were angered by this decision, this being their 50th mission.

MOSTAR, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 123 - JANUARY 14, 1944

Thirty-six aircraft dropped 54 tons of 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the Airdrome at Mostar. Flak was moderate, fairly accurate and damaged 13 B-17s. 2nd Lt. Edwin Nunnery, 96th Squadron, received a serious flak wound to the left thigh. Strike photos showed four E/A destroyed, six damaged, and six others probably destroyed.

CERTALDO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 124 - JANUARY 15, 1944

The first Wave of 19 aircraft dropped 50 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards and Railroad Bridge at Certaldo. The second Wave of 19 aircraft was to drop its bombs on the same target if the first Wave was unsuccessful. Ten aircraft of the second Wave did not bomb this target, however, eight aircraft did. The ten aircraft then bombed the secondary target, dropping 30 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs on Marshalling Yards at Poggibonsi, Italy. One plane dropped its bombs on the Plan Del Lago Airdrome.

Strike photos at Certaldo showed misses of the Bridge and Marshalling Yards. There were concentrations of hits in the residential areas adjacent to the Yards and direct hits on an industrial plant and roadways. Strike photos at Poggibonsi showed hits on tracks and rolling stock; hits on industrial, commercial and residential buildings.

No flak was encountered over the targets but the Group encountered intense and accurate flak 40 miles north-northwest of Terni, resulting in the damage to seven B-17s in the first Wave and 18 in the second Wave. B-17 #42-24364 from the 429th was hit by flak and went down.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-24364 - 429TH SQUADRON

1st Lt. William I. Pederson, 0-794682, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Joseph B. Townsend, 0-802806, CP	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. Kermit J. Buel, 0-747707, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Karl D. Shawaker, 0-676254, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Bernard L. Scalisi, 14063356, U/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Ralph W. Truesdale, 14083944, L/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Anthony P. Brodniak, 34260028, R/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Charles E. Ringler, 35383051, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Horace M. Mahabirsingh, 12157080, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt. John B. Sergakis, 19027607, R/O.	(EVADED)

S/Sgt. Bernard L. Scalisi, Flight Engineer: "Our target was a Marshalling yards in Northern Italy. We left the Foggia Field about 6:00 a.m., attained an altitude of 21,500 feet and were hit by flak over Northern Italy. Our No. 2 engine oil line was broken. Oil covered the ball turret, fire was put out and one engine feathered. We tried staying with the formation, salvoed the bombs to lighten the aircraft - no luck. About 30 minutes later, we ran into flak again. I was hit in the left leg but only felt a light burning sensation. A short while later the No. 1 engine began to run hot, the No. 3 and No. 4 engines were running okay, but we were losing altitude at the rate of 300 feet a minute. At 16,000 feet, we

threw out everything not bolted down. When the aircraft was down to 13,000 feet, Lt. Pederson told me to inform the crew to bail out. The navigator told me to inform the crew to head south. He and the bombardier bailed out and the rest of the crew followed. I landed in a tree about 15 feet up. In about 15 minutes, in what seemed like an unpopulated woods, about 15 men and women appeared with pitchforks, scythes and sickles. They were real hostile, shouting and motioning me to come down. A few made jabs with pitchforks but I was out of reach. My legs were getting numb from the straps which were cutting off blood circulation. Two men came along who appeared to have control of the ones with the farm tools and ordered them back, which they did. I unbuckled one leg strap but all the weight rested on the other one and I had a lot of trouble getting it undone. I then dropped to the ground.

“The two men helped me to stand up as the circulation slowly came back. The crowd came around me and took my heat suit, Mae West, shoes and field jacket. They let me keep my pants, shirt and sweater. They gave me an old suit coat and a pair of hob nailed shoes which were five sizes too large. The two men took me about a mile away and hid me in some thick bushes, then they left me. Some time later, several German soldiers passed about 100 yards from where I was hiding. They called to one another and although I could not understand any of their conversation, I recognized it as German.

“About three hours after they left me, they returned. They told me they had located four others of my crew and were taking me to meet them. I was apprehensive but didn’t have any other choice. My fears were unfounded as about two hours of walking brought me to four other members of my crew. They were Anthony Brodniak, Charles Ringler, Ralph Truesdale, and Mo Mahabirsingh. We decided to separate with Truesdale and Mo going together, Brodniak and myself, Ringler, the oldest, going alone.

“Ringler said he would not try to walk back to our lines but would wait for the Allied troops to come to him. We said our farewells and went our separate ways. The two men who brought us together told us we were on our own, not trust anyone, only seek help from poor farmhouses who were not likely to be Fascists. This we tried to do and almost succeeded.

“The first night we spent in the mountains and almost froze to death. The temperature was down in the teens, leaves on the bushes were frozen solid. We found a depression between some rocks and shivering, huddled together for warmth, but wind and cold was terrible! I dozed with my head in a hole that seemed to have been some animal’s home. During the night our legs lost all feeling. When the sun came up, the wind seemed to die down, and with the sun on our legs, we experienced a burning and prickly sensation. About two hours of this and trying to move our legs, feeling came back. Trying to walk was impossible. Around noon we had enough feeling to walk slowly, and sometime in the afternoon, all feeling returned, although the itching remained.

“The following day, after spending another night in the mountains, we found an empty farmhouse. We scouted it for several hours to make sure no one was coming back. We gathered as much wood, fence posts we could knock down; anything that would burn. The snow covered most of the usable wood. The fire was started after it got dark so as not to attract anyone with the smoke. To start the fire we broke up what little furniture was there, including the mantle over the fireplace. Although we didn’t have any food, we ate snow for water. The fire really picked up our spirits. By morning we had burned everything that would burn, and when I awoke I was in the fireplace with Tony beside me. We left the house as soon as the sun was up. We continued walking south, following the small compass that was in the escape kit with the map, money (which consisted of Swiss Francs and Italian Lira) which I secreted in the inside of the waist band of my khaki pants. I had eaten all the emergency rations which looked and tasted like caramel candy.

“We would stop at the poorest houses. Those wonderful Italians gave us whatever food they could spare, never asking for anything in return. I offered to give them some of the Swiss Francs or Italian Lira, but they refused. I told them I would write a note telling how they helped us and the U.S.

Government would honor this with food, medicine, any kind of help. They declined this offer also. I found out later that anyone helping Allied airmen, soldiers, escapees, would be put to death and their families as well. On the opposite side of these wonderful and sacrificing people, we ran into the other type.

“We wandered aimlessly for a couple of weeks trying to go south but the mountains, rivers and erratic compass was an obstacle. We would set the compass down and set our sights on a mountain in the distance due south. Three-fourths of the way there we would again take a sight and it seems we were always going in the wrong direction. We met up with a group of men by accident. We tried to avoid them but they were suspicious and knew right away that we were Americans or British. They were Italian Fascists who left the Italian army when Mussolini fell from power and was killed. There were about nine of them and we knew we were in deep trouble. They were staying in an abandoned farmhouse and said they would help us contact the underground, but it would take a little time, also that the place was alive with German soldiers looking for deserters and airmen who were shot down. They said the Germans would be back at any time and they had a perfect place to hide us. One of them spoke fairly good broken English. He stayed with relatives in Brooklyn but got homesick, returned to Italy where he was drafted into the Italian Army.

“They locked us in a cellar with only a few candles for light. The fumes were too much so we stayed in the dark. They would let us out, one at a time, to dump the portable toilet which was a five gallon crock. We were locked up at this time for 10 or 12 days. We spent our time sleeping and praying. We were given food around noon and at night. As far as I could tell it was the same food they ate, mostly potato soup and spaghetti. About the 10th day or 12th night, the English speaking one brought us our food and told us they had made arrangements to turn us over to the Germans. He said he did not want to be responsible for what would happen and would leave the cellar door unlocked. We offered him money but he declined saying that he was leaving as soon as the others were asleep. I thanked him and offered to write a note saying he had helped us but he declined the offer. I asked him to tie up the dogs as they were a mean bunch and he said he would.

“Very late that night we eased out of the cellar fearing that someone would hear us or the dogs would start barking; but all was quiet. When we were about 200 yards from the house, we broke into a run. We ran down a road as best we could in the dark for what seemed like 20 miles, but it was only three or four. We would run awhile and walk awhile, never stopping. When daylight came we had put several miles behind us. We found a small cave and hid there, falling asleep from exhaustion.

“When I awoke, I could not move my legs. My groin was frozen up from the running and inactivity while confined. Brodniak fashioned a water container from the map but it was tough bringing water although he did manage some. His legs were stiff but he could walk. After about two days I was able to walk to the stream and drink. We needed food so we struck out looking for something to eat. We found a farmhouse about half a mile away and after observing it for awhile, threw rocks on the roof. When no one came out, we went in and found some bread and three eggs which we grabbed and left. There was an old suit coat laying across a chair, although it was too large, it became part of my wardrobe.

“We walked several miles from this house and ate the eggs raw. They were pretty good with the bread. We spent the next night in a small woods and the next day kept walking and hoped we were heading south. The sun helped more than the compass.

“For the next few days we followed the same pattern for checking for unoccupied houses and swiping what we could. Other times, hunger got the best of us and we would go to houses and ask for food. We were never refused. We were given small amounts of food but in many cases, these poor people could little afford to give us what they did. They refused to take anything we offered.

“We finally came to the city of Viterbo, which was on the road south. We had no papers and came to a bridge leading into the city. It was guarded by two soldiers checking for papers. We hid until nightfall and again approached the bridge. There was one guard but he evidently was bored because a curfew was in affect and only he and his buddies were walking around. When he went to talk to one of them, about a football field away, we crawled up on the dark side in the shadows, on our bellies, and made it across the bridge unseen. After safely across, we stayed in the shadows of a building until morning. When people started to move around, so did we.

“We walked through the town taking the wrong streets on several occasions but finally got to the other side. No one bothered us or gave us a second glance. We stopped at a food stand and bought oranges, bread and nuts. Tony gave the woman one of his Lira notes which was like a ten dollar bill. The woman looked at us kind of funny but didn’t say a word, gave him his change and we walked away expecting her to sound the alarm, but she never did. I still believe that she knew we were not Italians that belonged there.

“We were soon back in the country. About 15 miles south of Viterbo we met some shepherds with a very large flock of sheep. The head man recognized that we were not run of the mill country people. We told him we were American airmen trying to get back to our lines. He said it was too dangerous and could stay with he and his men. We were given a place to sleep in the house and treated very well. The food situation was bad, bad; I can’t emphasize that enough but it was the same as they ate. After about three days I was beginning to get restless to move on.

“A few days later we were visited by some of Hitler’s finest. They were in the market for sheep. Although I moved away from them as far as possible, they continued to look my way from time to time. The head man told the German officer the sheep were not for sale but they rounded up about 25, put them in a truck, gave the shepherd some money and drove away. The next day we thanked the shepherd for our stay and continued on our way.

“One day we came to a medium sized town. I can’t remember the name but it was fairly large by comparison of the others we passed through. There were a lot of German soldiers all over the place. We walked down side streets to avoid being stopped. Most ended in dead ends or back out of town. We weren’t sure of where we were going but the main street seemed to be the only one heading south. We rounded a curve and my heart sank to my toes. We had entered into what looked like a health spa with Germans frolicking in a pool that seemed to be heated. We stopped, got a drink from a flowing pipe, and continued on. We looked like bums and that is exactly what we were. We still hadn’t shaved since we left the base. Also, we had not had a bath in the same period.

“No one bothered us until we were well on the outskirts; then we ran into bad luck. A big, well dressed man, with cane and limp, stopped us. He wanted to know who we were and where we were going. I told him we were French and my companion was a deaf mute. I was hoping he couldn’t speak French. He wasn’t fooled one bit and accused us of being British. To shut him up we shoved him down a small hill and walked briskly away. We didn’t want to run as that would have drawn attention from the few people we passed. We entered a wooded area and picked our way out of town.

“A couple of days later we met two men. They stopped us wanting to talk. After a few words, they knew we were either English or Americans. They said they were in an Italian Tank Battalion. We told them we were Americans trying to get to our side. They said they knew how and if we would take them with us and guaranteed them help, they would show us how. We traveled about four days to the port city of Chevitavicci where we were supposed to steal a boat and cross the water to Corsica or Sardinia. When we arrived, the boat turned out to be a boat 100 feet long, or more. I told them if we were given this ship we couldn’t get it out of the harbor. We thought they were talking about a 20 or 30-foot boat. Also, when we saw the boats and where they were moored we gave this stupid scheme

up. We told them we thought it impossible and if we changed our mind we would come back and find them. We could not wait to shake the dust from that city.

“We found another small cave not far from another small town. We stayed there for a few days and became so bored we didn’t know what to do with ourselves except argue about everything. We decided to go to this small town and buy a bottle of wine. When we arrived there we found a bar that was fairly crowded. I asked for a large glass of wine of the house for two. The bartender gave me a pitcher that looked like a quart. We drank this and it tasted so good we ordered another, and the last I remember, another. Tony and I got into an argument and I was told I was using English very freely. Three men came over and clamped their hands over our mouths and took us outside. They were three Englishmen who were captured at Tobruk, in North Africa. After escaping from a train taking them to Germany, had been wandering behind German lines for almost four years. Like us, they had been locked up by Fascists but always escaped. They took us to their cave, which was about 30 miles from Rome.

“We stayed with them until the middle of March. One night, the man whose property we were hiding on came to us and told us to leave that night as someone had informed on us and Germans planned to come and get us that night. We asked where we could go to be safe and he replied, anywhere but on his property. He told us several Allied soldiers had sought refuge in the Vatican but it was difficult to get in. The place was exceptionally well guarded day and night, but that was our problem. Just get off his property.

“We thanked him for his help and departed for Rome. Grimmer, one of the Englishmen, and Tony went off together and Tom and another Englishman went together, while I went alone. They all could speak Italian except Tony, and I could understand quite a bit and speak some, but not enough to pass as a native. I walked about five miles. It was getting daylight so I hid in some woods and slept. When I awoke, it was midday and I continued on. A little later a car came around a curve and it was too late to jump into a ditch. The car stopped and a German driver asked me how far some place was. I had no idea what town he was talking about, but in my best Italian told him ‘10 kilometers.’ He had an officer in back. I made it a point to be more careful and keep my eyes and ears open.

“Later in the afternoon a bus passed loaded with people. I flagged it and it stopped. I got on and gave the one collecting the money one of my bills. He gave me change and said something I couldn’t understand but didn’t appear very happy. I sat in the first open seat next to a German soldier. He didn’t say anything and I guarantee you I didn’t say anything either! A couple of minutes later I felt a hand on my shoulder and my heart fell to my feet. It was the man I gave money to when I got on the bus. He said something which I did not understand and gave me a handful of change. My guess is that he didn’t have the correct change when he gave me the change the first time.

“We arrived in Rome as the sun was setting and I went to the subway station where we had agreed to meet. It wasn’t far from the Vatican as I recall. I saw none of the others that night. The next morning after people began moving around the street, I mingled with them. I used some of my bus change to buy oranges and bread sold on the streets in little shops. Later on I went back to the subway where I met Tom and his English buddy and a little later, Tony and Grimer showed up. They walked all the way. We walked around the Vatican staying a good distance apart. After several hours we met again in the subway station. There were no trains running and the subway was filled with refugees.

“We decided that the only possibility was on the left side of the entrance to St. Peters. I believe it was called The Gate of Santa Anna and the one on the opposite side, The Gate of Santa Marta. We were told by people in the subway that 7:00 p.m. was curfew and anyone on the streets without proper papers could be shot. We decided that the gate on the west side was our best bet and about 15 or 20 minutes before curfew we would casually walk to the gate and all five of us would climb over it. That would put us in the extra territory where the Vatican workers and families lived. Then it was a matter

of about 300 yards to the main entrance. From the extra territory there was a guard (Italian) but with his ancient gun, there would be no problem. This, the Englishman found out beforehand.

“At about 6:00 p.m., Grimmer, Tony and I started toward the gate looking for Tom and his English buddy. As we passed about 200 feet from this gate we could see a lot of people talking and motioning toward the gate. There was an old man, who looked blind, packing his portable table to leave. Grimmer asked why there was so much activity at the gate and he said two people had tried to climb over a few minutes earlier and were shot by the Germans. We immediately went back to the subway. We discussed what was best to do now that those gates were out.

“The next morning we decided to again walk around the wall and see if we missed anything. We split up and made the rounds. I did not see anyplace where we had a chance. A while later, Tony and Grimmer came back and said they saw a possible place. It was a light pole about 20 feet high and supported by an iron brace attached to the Vatican wall about mid-way up the pole. Grimmer said he thought he could climb the pole, shimmy across the bar, stand on the bar and jump, catching a ledge and pulling himself up far enough to slip his hand into an opening, built this way to fire a rifle through and pull himself up on top of the wall. I said, ‘That’s impossible for me being only 5 foot 3 inches.’ Also the light pole had sharp spikes on it to discourage climbing. Tony said he thought if Grimmer could make it, he could too. Grimmer had a long raincoat that he wore all the time. I told him if, when he made it to the top of the wall, he would lower his raincoat to me, standing on the support bar, I could, with a good jump, make it to the ledge and with his help, could also reach the top. Then we both could help Tony. This we all agreed to do.

“There is a garden next to the abandoned train station. This also had a wall about 10 feet high. About 5:00 p.m., we helped each other over this 10 foot wall and hid there until about midnight. There was a German guard that would pass every 15 minutes so we knew when he was farthest away. Grimmer dropped down, lowering himself from the garden wall and headed for the pole. We could see the pole moving but not him. In about five minutes we heard him give a short whistle. We thought we saw his silhouette on top of the wall. I waited until the guard passed again, hung from the garden wall, let go and landed on my legs and rear end. I ran to the pole and started climbing. When I reached the support bar I felt the pole shaking and looking down, saw Tony climbing the pole. It was shaking like hell! I shimmed across, pulled myself up and had a hard time keeping my balance. I caught the tail of the raincoat and with Grimmer pulling, jumped and caught the ledge opening on the wall and pulled myself up. I knew Tony was right behind me because, before I jumped, I felt his hand on my ankle. We handed the coat down to Tony and he jumped. When he did, the bar broke loose from the wall and fell flush with the post.

“We then faced the problem of getting down on the Vatican side. Again, with the coat, I began descending. After dropping only about five feet, I felt something solid. I moved my legs to both sides and it was still firm. I told them to move to the right and I would see how far this mass would go. I also checked with my hand and found it extended a good distance. Tony and Grimmer then lowered themselves. We reasoned we were on a walkway for guards. I got hold of the rain coat and lowered myself again to see what was below the walkway. Another five feet I felt ground. We got down and inched our way to the street. It was dark but we made our way to a dimly lighted gate where we were halted by a guard. He asked who we were and what we were doing. We told him we were seeking the safety of the Vatican and were American and British soldiers. He brought us to another guard who went away and returned with a non-commissioned officer. He said there was no place in the Vatican and food was scarce. He said we could not stay and began escorting us to the gate out. We began yelling and attracted the attention of one of the Diplomats from one of the Asian countries who happened to be in the vicinity. He ordered the guards to turn us loose after questioning us. He spoke very good English. He told the guards he would be responsible for us. We were brought to the Gendarme barracks where

this Diplomat told the officer in charge to lock us up. The English Ambassador and the American Charge de Affairs would take charge of us in the morning. The British Ambassador's secretary and Mr. Harold Tittman, the American Charge de Affairs to the Vatican, came and interviewed us and promised to return. Mr. Tittman, who was a small man with one leg, brought me some of his clothes. They fit me well.

"On the 5th day they came back and we were released. We were allowed to visit St. Peters, walk in the garden, except in the afternoon when the Pope had exclusive use for his walks, meditations and prayers. We were allowed to visit the museum and see the works of art, painting and sculptures. At 6:00 p.m., we were confined to our room in the Gendarme barracks. The food was light. No breakfast, a bowl of soup and a bun at lunch and a bowl of spaghetti at night. The bun was for both meals. Food was difficult to obtain and though the yellow Vatican colors and cross were displayed on the trucks coming from the north, they were fired upon. I cashed a check with a Bishop for \$100.00 even though I had no checking account. I did have more than enough in a savings account. I still have the canceled check. With that money, I would have children of the Vatican workers go outside and buy whatever they could find eatable.

"On June 6th, after the Allied armies entered Rome, we had a letter written by Mr. Tittman acknowledging that we were American airmen interned in the Vatican and were leaving. We told the guards we would go get some soap and cigarettes from American Supply trucks. They let us out. We saw a Major and told him we were needing transportation back to Naples. He said he didn't have any but to get uniforms from the supply truck and at first chance he would see if he could help us. We went by the supply truck and when he turned, we took off in another direction. We met a Captain in a jeep and asked if he was going towards Naples. He said he was and was so tired that he let me drive. We went to the Provost Marshall's office. He backed us up and received word that we belonged to the 15th Air Force. A plane picked us up and we returned to our base.

"On June 16th, I arrived in New York City. I called home but the line was busy. I called again about 30 minutes later. My Mother answered the phone and said my brother, who was in the Marines, had just arrived in the States, in California, after three years overseas. It was Father's Day."

VILLAORBA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 126 - JANUARY 16, 1944

Thirty-one aircraft dropped 91 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Landing Ground at Villaorba. Photos showed two E/A damaged with possibilities of others. Runways, taxi-strips, were post-holed. There were direct hits in dispersal areas and on a double track line to Udine. No flak, no encounters with E/A.

PRATO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 126 - JANUARY 17, 1944

Thirty-four aircraft dropped 102 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on Marshalling Yards at Prato. There were direct hits on tracks, station, and industrial buildings. There was no flak at the target but some at the front lines causing slight damage to one B-17.

CERTALDO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 127 - JANUARY 18, 1944

Marshalling Yards and Railroad Bridge were the targets at Certaldo. Forty aircraft dropped 120 tons of 500-lb. bombs on the Marshalling Yards. Photos showed that the bridge was missed and there were few hits in the Yards. There were hits and explosions on commercial and residential buildings adjacent to the Yards. No flak, no encounters with E/A.

ROME, ITALY - MISSION NO. 128 - JANUARY 19, 1944

Thirty-six aircraft dropped 51.84 tons of 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the North and South Ciampino Airdromes at Rome. There were some aircraft damaged on the ground, hits on revetments, on rail lines to the field, hangars, commercial buildings, and roadways. There was no flak over the target but the formation received moderate, accurate flak just turning off the I.P. Fourteen B-17s received slight damage and S/Sgt. Charles Wilds, TG, 429th Squadron, received multiple lacerations to the scalp.

ROME, ITALY - MISSION NO. 129 - JANUARY 20, 1944

Thirty-six aircraft returned and dropped 108, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Ciampino Airdromes. Photos showed further post holing of both fields, hits on dispersal areas, building and barracks. No flak, no encounters with E/A.

PORTOCIVITANOVA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 130 - JANUARY 21, 1944

Marshalling Yards at Arezzo, Italy were the primary target but a 10/10 cloud cover forced the formation to bomb a secondary target, Marshalling Yards at Portocivitanova. Photos showed considerable damage to the Yards and roadways. No flak, no encounters with E/A.

STAZ DI CAMPOLEONE - MISSION NO. 131 - JANUARY 22, 1944

In support of the Allied ground troops landing at Anzio, 35 aircraft dropped 105 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the roads and railroad junction at this town. The bombing was judged one of the best jobs of precision bombing by the Group to date. Major Bradford A. Evans, CO of the 96th Squadron, led the Group. Strike photos showed direct hits on converging rail lines, rail junction, bridges, and transformer station. Explosions were seen in the Yards. No encounters with E/A, no flak.

Returning crews could see the landing of Allied troops at Anzio.

SIENA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 132 - JANUARY 23, 1944

Thirty-nine aircraft got over the primary target, which was obscured by clouds. The formation circled, came back over the target, and 25 aircraft dropped 75 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Siena. Results were not known due to clouds.

Thirteen aircraft dropped 39 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on rail lines at a point north of Ancona. Hits were recorded on rail lines and possible hits on a bridge. One aircraft, an early return, dropped three tons of 500-lb. bombs on a rail line north of Pasera. A train was seen to be stopped. No flak, no encounters with E/A.

SOFIA, BULGARIA - MISSION NO. 133 - JANUARY 24, 1944

The primary target was the Marshalling Yards at Sofia. Thirty-seven aircraft got over the target, found it impossible to bomb and proceeded to a secondary target. After going 80 to 100 miles beyond Sofia, the group turned and headed for home base. Heavy cloud formations were encountered along the route. The leader of the First Wave saw a hole in the clouds about 60 to 80 miles north-northeast of Scutari, Albania and attempted to go down through that hole. The leader of the Second Wave was reluctant to do the same, circled, jettisoned its bombs and attempted to climb over the overcast. The First Wave, running low on gas, jettisoned its bombs.

The First Wave, now at 13,000 feet, encountered light to moderate light type flak. From six to 10 E/A attacked the First Wave and 10 to 15 E/A attacked the Second Wave. They were all very aggressive and as a result of this overall action, one man was killed, six were wounded, or injured, one plane was lost to enemy action, one in an accident, and four planes were forced to ditch in the Adriatic Sea due to fuel shortage. 2nd Lt. Glenn N. Hodges, B, 429th Squadron, was instantly killed by a 20mm cannon shell.

Wounded/injured: 2nd Lt. John M. Hazlett, B, 20th Squadron, sprained left knee while ditching; Sgt. Vivian H. Brady, Jr., TG, 20th Squadron, sprained right knee while ditching; S/Sgt. Carlo (NMI) Veneziano, RO, 20th Squadron, severe lacerations to both feet while ditching; 2nd Lt. W. Modene Bigham, B, 96th Squadron, possible cerebral concussion during ditching; 2nd Lt. Anthony J. LeChiusia, B, 49th Squadron, laceration of right thigh from glass shattered by shrapnel from explosion of 20mm cannon shell; and T/Sgt. Israel M. Berkowitz, RO, 429th Squadron, severe wounds on left thigh and left foot caused by shrapnel from 20mm cannon shell.

Five enemy aircraft were claimed destroyed and three probably destroyed. Each credited with the destruction of an Me-109 were S/Sgt. Howard Bessey, LT, and S/Sgt. Armen N. Minasian, TG, 429th Squadron. Joint claims of an Me-109 were awarded to T/Sgt. John D. Egan, LT, and T/Sgt. Joseph Fricke, UT, 96th Squadron; S/Sgt. Richard E. Schneider, TG, 96th Squadron; and S/Sgt. Marcel Gagnon, LW, 429th Squadron; and another to S/Sgt. Charles A. Jones, RW, 96th Squadron; and S/Sgt. William D. Martin, RO, 429th Squadron. Each credited with possible destruction of an Me-109 were Sgt. Martin R. Alexander, RW, 96th Squadron; T/Sgt. Norman D. Graves, UT, and S/Sgt. Bernard F. Devoe, TG, 429th Squadron.

The first plane lost was #42-5836 from the 20th Squadron. It was the victim of another plane's bombs. When all planes jettisoned their bombs, #836 was under another plane. The bombs did not explode but put a big hole in the left wing just outside of No. 1 engine. It was last sighted heading for Italy.

The second aircraft lost was #42-24411 from the 96th Squadron. Observers said that the No. 1 engine was feathered; plane dropped behind the formation after the fighter attack.

Plane #42-29602, 20th Squadron, went down about one mile off the coast of Bari, Italy due to fuel shortage. The plane sank in two to three minutes and the crew was picked up by two boats manned by Italians. The crew was taken to the 26th General Hospital. Four remained in the hospital and six were released. Members of the crew were: 2nd Lt. C. R. Watkins, P; 2nd Lt. E. L. Blanton, CP; 2nd Lt. E. Rubenstein, N; 2nd Lt. J. M. Hazlett, B; T/Sgt. C. E. Geiger, UT; Sgt. J. A. Bristol, LT; Sgt. R. W. Bridges, RW; Sgt. E. A. Eubanks, LW; Sgt. V. H. Brady, TG; and S/Sgt. L. E. Perkins, RO.

Plane #42-29645, 49th Squadron, went down 10 to 15 miles northeast of Bari because of fuel shortage and No. 2 engine runaway. Two life rafts, one half inflated, were lashed together and the crew started toward Bari. There were three vessels in the vicinity, the search lights played on the rafts, but they were never picked up. The plane stayed afloat for about 20 minutes. The crew finally landed some 15 miles south of Bari at 0100 hours the next day and the men started walking toward Bari. They came across a British camp where they were fed and put to bed. The 26th General Hospital sent an ambulance and picked them up. All men were suffering from exposure, one man had frozen feet and another, a slight burn. The crew members were: 2nd Lt. Charles McCrary, P; 1st Lt. D. B. Lucas, CP; 2nd Lt. John Bacsu, N; 2nd Lt. Charles P. Olsen, B; T/Sgt. John J. Donnelly, UT; Sgt. Howard Christenson, LT; S/Sgt. Carlo Veneziano, RW; S/Sgt. C. A. Lee, LW; S/Sgt. D. E. Johnson, TG; and T/Sgt. T. L. Washman, RO.

Plane #42-31463, 96th Squadron, went down 55 miles southeast of Bari from lack of fuel and No. 2 and No. 3 engines had been shot out by enemy fighters. None of the crew were injured, took to their life rafts and were afloat until 1738 hours. They saw a launch, fired flares, and a British Air-Sea-Rescue launch picked them up, took them to a British Hospital at Brindisi where they remained overnight. They returned to Base the next day. This aircraft stayed afloat one and one-half hours. The crew members were: 2nd Lt. Victor A. Brockman, P; 2nd Lt. Benjamin E. Nabers, CP; 2nd Lt. Samuel P. Mayer, N; 2nd Lt. James W. Shea, B; S/Sgt. Archie N. Hartgrave, UT; Sgt. Hayden B. Speede, LT; S/Sgt. Joseph W. Gibson, RW; S/Sgt. William H. Fleming, LW; Sgt. Joseph (NMI) Habif, TG; and S/Sgt. Hilliard S. Parrish, RO.

The fourth plane, #42-29515, 96th Squadron, had to ditch for lack of fuel. It went down about 26 miles north-northeast of Bari and stayed afloat about one and one-half minutes. Two life rafts were inflated and flares were shot up to attract British Air-Sea-Rescue launches which picked the men up at 1810 hours. They were taken to a British Hospital in Bari. The men all suffered from exposure and were released the next day except the navigator, Lt. Phillip Cooper, who had a bruised back. The bombardier, Lt. W. Modene Bigham, was taken to the 26th General Hospital for observation due to a suspected skull fracture. All others returned to Base. The crew members were: 2nd Lt. Robert Willis, P; 2nd Lt. Arthur A. Kruger, CP; 2nd Lt. Phillip L. Cooper, N; 2nd Lt. W. Modene Bigham, B; S/Sgt. Joseph W. Fricke, UT; S/Sgt. Kenneth R. Peters, LT; S/Sgt. Stanley H. Katz, RW; S/Sgt. Charles A. Jones, LW; S/Sgt. Edward E. Schneider, TG; and T/Sgt. John D. Egan, RO.

It was fortunate that the sea was calm this day. It was a great credit to the pilot and co-pilots, for the skillful ditching of their aircraft.

MISSING AIR CREW: A/C #42-5836 - 49TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt. Thomas J. Grissom, 0-51237, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Royce E. Shellabarger, 0-748814, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Patrick J. Meagher, 0-749444, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Norman (NMI) Mirchin, 0-673861, B.	(KIA)
Sgt. Robert L. Drake, 39103456, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. David B. Torrey, 11084882, L/T.	(KIA)
Sgt. Cecil C. Corbin, 33370367, R/W.	(POW)
Sgt. William R. Harkness, 38136876, L/W.	(POW)
Sgt. John A. Murray, 33337425, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. Ernest C. Terry, 15338029, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Thomas J. Grissom, P, after liberation: "Sgt. John Murray never bailed out and I don't know why. I never did see him but other crew members said he came up to the waist door about five minutes before men began jumping. When the men started jumping, Sgt. Murray was not around and they believe he went back to the tail of the plane and crashed with it. Later reports were that he was found in the plane.

"The take-off and flight to the target was more or less routine, however, we did have intermittent trouble with some of the engines, causing a higher than usual fuel consumption. On arriving at the target, we found a high cloud coverage and were unable to bomb. We were led off to a target of opportunity that was clear of weather. After an hour or so of searching, we were all worried about gas and about to return separately when the formation turned around and headed homeward.

"We flew until a hole was found to go through the clouds. I might say this was not to my liking and three of us started to break and continue to Base above the ceiling. However, I happened to glance back at a Group to our rear and saw they were being attacked by several fighters. This caused us to run for the larger formation and we had a short fight with four Me-109s that tried to cut us off.

"After reaching the larger formation we were relatively safe for the moment. During the flight, the leader led us up to a very large cloud and attempting to clear it, climbed very steeply, which caused us to over run the formation somewhat. Seeing that we were being forced into a cloud, I tried to break formation and in doing so, we tried to pass beneath another ship. As we were easing out, someone shouted that there was a ship above us with bomb bay doors open and I immediately began to turn back into formation. Several seconds after changing direction, a bomb struck the wing flat, smashing it almost in two. Another bomb struck the No. 2 engine and propeller, which we had to feather, causing additional drag on that side. The wing at that time was vibrating at a terrifying rate, so after at least a minute flying under those conditions, the co-pilot gave the order to bail out.



T/R - L/R - E. Derderich, R. Drake, E. Terry (*), D. Torrey (*), W. Harkness, J. Murray (*)
 B/R - L/R - T. Grissom, R. Shellabarger, N. Mirchin (*), P. Meagher
 * KIA - 1-24-44 - (Courtesy - Elizabeth Meagher)



Lt. Patrick J. Meagher
 Courtesy - Elizabeth Meagher

“Everyone began to get ready. The bombardier aided the navigator and engineer to open the nose hatch door, which they could not get open. Seeing this avenue of escape was blocked, the three crawled through the cockpit toward the rear of the ship and again the co-pilot gave the command to bail out and the emergency alarm was turned on. After a short interval, I sent the co-pilot on his way. All this time the ship was slowly turning to the left and losing altitude. I could get no response from the wheel, which I forced all the way over trying to lift the damaged wing. After the co-pilot left, I again called for the crew to bail out and waited until I felt sure they had time to reach the waist window and door. I started through the bomb bay and found the co-pilot and bombardier there. They asked me to pull the emergency for the bomb bay doors, which I did, and only one opened. I then climbed over with intentions of holding it open for them to bail out. Just as I got in position and had it open, we felt the wing give way and the ship began to roll. I shouted a warning and dropped clear. The co-pilot dove for the opening. We were probably the last to get out alive. I’m not sure, due to the excitement of the last few seconds, but I believe I saw one chute, partially open, plunge to the ground and another caught on the ship as it struck the ground. It seemed that it slowly rolled over on its back, in a turning dive, striking just a few seconds after the wing disintegrated.

“We have talked it over many times between us and our conclusion is that just those few seconds of hesitation cost those four their lives.”

2nd Lt. Patrick J. Meagher was assigned to the 49th Squadron in September 1943. January 21, 1991: “Our target on the 24th of January was the Marshalling yards at Sofia, Bulgaria. However, on that day, the weather was unfavorable to complete the bombing. We looked for other alternate targets without success. We were running low on fuel, as were some of the other planes, so I don’t think we would have made it back to Foggia #11. In fact, I heard later that some of our planes had to ditch in the Adriatic Sea.

“We had jettisoned our bombs, because of our fuel shortage, over Serbia. We had descended to a lower level and after that we were hit by enemy fighters. Our right wing hit near the No. 2 engine and eventually collapsed, putting the plane into a flat spin. Four of our crew did not survive. The bombardier, Lt. Norman Mirchin; the tail gunner, Sgt. John A Murray; the radio operator, T/Sgt. Ernest C. Terry; and lower turret gunner, S/Sgt. David B. Torrey. We weren’t sure if they bailed out and were killed on the ground, or if they ever did bail out. We asked, but were never allowed to go back and seek information. One of my toughest experiences of the war was trying to explain to their families their M.I.A. status.

“We were captured near Sofia, Bulgaria and sent to Camp Chomer, Bulgaria, near the Black Sea, 90 miles south of Turkey. In our camp were American airmen from the low level raid over the Ploesti Oil Fields; B-24s from Libya. I don’t know the date. There were fewer than 75 men there when we arrived. As time went on, the number increased to over 300: Americans, British, Canadians, South Africans, Australians, plus some from Serbia.

“We were liberated in September, 1944 by the Russian Army under the command of General Malinowsky who was the hero of Stalingrad. He was very young and a very nice fellow. He got a train for us and sent us through Turkey to Aleppo, Syria; a very scenic ride. We were flown to Egypt and then Foggia, Italy. We learned then about the seven planes lost by the 49th on February 24, 1944. For us the war was over.

“I have enjoyed writing this because it brings back many memories. As someone said, ‘I wouldn’t want to go through this again, but wouldn’t sell the experience for any amount of money.’”

Patrick J. Meagher died August 21, 1991. Another brave American laid to rest.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-25411 - 96TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt. Warren E. Lins, 0-672825, P. (POW)
2nd Lt. Eugene K. Ralph, 0-749546, CP. (POW)
2nd Lt. Howard E. Scarborough, 0-749404, N. (POW)
2nd Lt. George H. Crank, Jr., 0-682009, B. (POW)
T/Sgt. Clarence E. Bolt, 20829466, U/T. (POW)
S/Sgt. Robert T. Colihan, 19058863, L/T. (POW)
S/Sgt. Leroy F. Lani, 39901187, R/W. (POW)
S/Sgt. Eldred J. Nelson, 37297965, L/W. (POW)
S/Sgt. Walter (NMI) Nies, 36307545, T/G. (POW) *
T/Sgt. William D. Johnson, 33249441, R/O. (POW)

* Shot and killed by German guard while confined in a Prisoner of War Camp.

Statement of 2nd Lt. James S. Stewart, N, on A/C #42-24993, after the mission: "Just after the fighters, which had been attacking our formation left us, I noticed that a B-17, which was filling out the diamond of the second element of our Squadron, started losing altitude and pulled a little to our left. This was the position which #411 was flying and although I could not see the numbers, believe it was #411.

"At about this time our pilot, Lt. Blomquist, called me on the interphone and said that #411 was calling #390 and asking for the nearest course home. I prepared a course for transmittal, but Lt. Blomquist lost contact with #411 and was never able to give him the heading. This aircraft, believed to be #411, had No. 1 engine feathered."

Statement of 1st Lt. Warren E. Lins after liberation: "We left the formation over the coast of Albania. We chose to crash land on the beach of Albania. Everyone stayed with the plane for landing. All were OK after landing, and the last I saw of the complete crew was at Frankfurt, Germany in February, 1944, and all were OK."

T/Sgt. Clarence E. Bolt, Flight Engineer. December 5, 1991: "I did not agree with the pilot for the action he took. If we had stayed with the Group we might have made it back to base, the worst that could have happened would be to ditch. Also we would have had a better chance if we had bailed out. But, Lins didn't give us any options, and this is my personal opinion.

"I believe the No. 1 engine was feathered due to a hit by fighters or malfunction. We did take some fighter fire and my turret was hit on one side. There was never an order to jettison anything to lighten the load nor to bail out.

"I do know that we were very low on fuel as all the warning lights were red. I did not know about the radio problem. I was in my turret when the decision was made to belly land.

"Before we landed, the bombardier removed one of the guns from his position and fired some rounds into the bombsight, which was destroyed, and the fire blew out the plexiglass nose section. I thought we would crash in the water because of the blown nose.

"After we hit the ground, we all ran from the plane to a gully about 50 yards from the plane. I went back to the plane and attempted to open a fuel drain cock to try to burn the plane. Germans ran up and started firing. I fell to the ground and was captured with the rest of the crew. Colihan, the ball gunner, was hit in the leg by the firing. They flew us to Frankfurt, Germany. The rest is history.

"Walter Nies was shot by a guard as he left his barracks early one morning. The procedure was to lock the barracks at night, but they didn't lock the one Nies was in. He left to go to the latrine because of dysentery. The guard shot without warning. Nies would have understood a warning, he

spoke perfect German. They would not let us bury him for four days. I was in the 87 day forced march.”

SALON DE PROVENCE, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 134 - JANUARY 27, 1944

Thirty-one aircraft dropped 90 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Airfield two miles south of this town. Strike photos showed direct hits on units near a four bay hangar, scattered hits in dispersal areas and installations, post holing across the landing ground and one plane destroyed and four damaged on the ground.

Flak was moderate to intense and fairly accurate causing damage to 11 B-17s. Twenty to 30 enemy fighters attacked the formation damaging three B-17s. There were no losses and no injuries. Fortress gunner claims were: Each credited with the destruction of a Me-109 were 1st Lt. Marshall E. Hannon, B; S/Sgt. Raymond L. Terrell, UT, 20th Squadron; T/Sgt. Turner W. Pickrel, UT, 96th Squadron; and S/Sgt. Ben H. Schmalriede, LW, 429th Squadron. Each credited with the destruction of a FW-190 were T/Sgt. William H. Weller, UT, and Sgt. Floyd A. High, UT, 20th Squadron. Each credited with the possible destruction of a FW-190 were 1st Lt. Paul J. Reese, N, and Sgt. Laverne H. Bensyl, LW, 49th Squadron.

AVIANO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 135 - JANUARY 28, 1944

Thirty-one aircraft dropped 43.2 tons of 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the Airdrome two and one-half miles from Aviano. No E/A were encountered. Flak was moderate to accurate resulting in damage to 12 B-17s and injury to 2nd Lt. William V. Brown, B, 49th Squadron, who suffered a severe wound in the right knee. Strike photos showed one twin engine plane destroyed, one single engine and three twin engine planes damaged. There were many hits on service facilities, hangars, small buildings with explosions and fires in fuel and munitions stores.

RIMINI, ITALY - MISSION NO. 136 - JANUARY 29, 1944

Thirty-seven aircraft dropped 111 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards and Bridge at Rimini. Considerable damage was inflicted on warehouses, tracks, and rolling stock. There were two direct hits on a bridge over the Ausa River and direct hits on approaches to the bridge. There were heavy concentrations of hits throughout the town. No flak and no E/A encountered.

LAVARIANO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 137 - JANUARY 30, 1944

Forty-one aircraft dropped 59 tons of 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the Lavariano Landing Ground. Light to moderate flak was encountered by the Second Wave. Twenty to 25 Me-109s and FW-190s jumped the Second Wave resulting in the death of one man, injuries to two others, and loss of one B-17. Strike photos showed three A/C destroyed and seven damaged on the ground. There were direct hits on buildings, service facilities, and disposal areas.

Sgt. Kermit Carper, RW, 49th Squadron, died of flak wounds. 1st Lt. Frank H. Glass, P, 49th Squadron, suffered a slight eye injury from shattered plexiglass. S/Sgt. Edmund F. Ward, Jr., LW, 49th Squadron, suffered from a wound on his left forearm. Plane #41-24395 was jumped by enemy fighters, left the formation and disappeared. Eight to nine chutes were seen to leave the plane.

Five men claiming fighters were: Each credited with the destruction of a Me-109 were S/Sgt. James H. Patterson, Jr., RO, and S/Sgt. Raymond L. Terrell, UT, 20th Squadron. Credited with the destruction of a FW-190 was S/Sgt. Charles S. Danforth, LT, 20th Squadron. Credited with the possible destruction of a Me-109 was S/Sgt. James M. Legge, LT, 20th Squadron. Credited with the possible destruction of a FW-190 was S/Sgt. Marvin E. Thompson, TG, 20th Squadron.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #41-24395 - 49TH SQUADRON

1st Lt. Joseph H. Taylor, 0-798050, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Lawrence F. Madden, 0-746385, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Alfred E. Snyder, 0-682251, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Warren G. Gay, 0-735191, B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. Robert D. Swan, 35371127, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Harold F. Horton, 33257082, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Robert L. Johnston, 17156151, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Dale K. Cheney, 37472890, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Raymond S. Irwin, 11111192, T/G.	(POW)
Sgt. Vincent J. Pesature, 12066318, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of S/Sgt. Robert M. Garnett, UT on plane #42-5781, after the mission: "I first saw plane #395 when he was well behind and to our left, near an altitude of 18,000 feet, at about 1202 hours. The fighters left us and ganged up on #395 and his left wing was trailing black smoke as if from No. 2 engine. In spite of all this he was gaining on the formation. Then he banked slowly to the left, the smoke increased in volume and he went into a rather steep dive. He went down about 2,000 feet, then came back up to his former level and the smoke seemed to stop. When he got back up, the fighters attacked him again and this time eight parachutes appeared. Black smoke appeared to pour out of the left wing again and the plane spiraled down, losing altitude gradually and passed from my vision."

S/Sgt. Vincent J. Pesature, RO, after liberation: "Our plane went down near Udine. I was able to bail out with four others, and to my knowledge, five did not. S/Sgt. Irwin and Horton were wounded. Sgts. Cheney, Johnston and myself were not.

"1st Lt. Taylor, pilot, did not bail out to my knowledge. Just after bombs away we were hit by a rocket and he yelled, 'Put on your chutes, we are going down.' He told us to get out at once but we didn't. A few minutes later, still under attack, the co-pilot said, 'Stay at your guns.' If the pilot were still alive, I presume he would have given the orders.

"2nd Lt. Madden, co-pilot, did not bail out to my knowledge and I am not sure if he was injured. The last I heard from him, other than to stay at our guns, was when he yelled, 'Get that son-of-a-bitch at one o'clock.' Then a rocket hit in the radio room and the ship went into a dive. The final blast must have got him because the other crew members say the plane went down slowly and he would have had time to get out if not injured.

"I do not believe Lt. Snyder, navigator, and Lt. Gay, bombardier, got out. The last I heard from Lt. Snyder was when he told the pilot we were close to the I.P. I did not hear from him again. The last I heard from Lt. Gay was that the bombs were clear and fighters were attacking. I believe a rocket hit the front of the plane early in the fight.

"I believe that T/Sgt. Swan was killed early. When fighters were called coming in, his guns were silent."

UDINE, ITALY - MISSION NO. 138 - JANUARY 31, 1944

Captain Harold Chrishmon, CO, 20th Squadron, led the Group, dropping 117 tons of 1,000-lb. bombs on the Udine/Campoformido Airdrome, three and one-half miles south of Udine. It reportedly was one of the best precision bombing attacks done by the Group. Strike photos showed destruction of nine planes and four damaged; heavy destruction of buildings, hangars and barracks; destruction of rail lines, and post-holing of runways and landing areas.

The First Wave met no resistance but the Second Wave received flak, slight to moderate in intensity and fairly accurate. From 25 to 30 Me-109s attacked the Second Wave before and after the bomb run. Attacks were aggressive and rockets were used. Flak caused the loss of one B-17 and damage to nine. Five B-17s were damaged by fighters. There were no losses, other than B-17 #42-29608, 96th Squadron, last sighted north-northwest of Pola, Italy.

Gunners receiving credit for enemy aircraft were: Each receiving credit for destruction of a FW-190 were S/Sgt. Robert R. Thornton, UP, Sgt. David A. Harris, RW, 49th Squadron. Each receiving credit for destruction of a Me-109 were Sgt. John J. Kenlein, UT, 40th Squadron; S/Sgt. Cleo L. Corley, TG, S/Sgt. George W. Stasik, RW, and Sgt. Arlin Stearns, TG, 96th Squadron. Receiving credit for the possible destruction of a Me-109 was S/Sgt. Donald F. Center, LW, 49th Squadron.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-20608 - 96TH SQUADRON

1st Lt. Robert F. Kolstad, 0-792717, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. Victor A. Brockman, 0-801504, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. John V. Harrop, 0-811604, N.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. James W. Shea, 0-731750, B.	(EVADED)
T/Sgt. Archie N. Hartgrave, 37120495, U/T.	(EVADED)
Sgt. Hayden B. Speede, 14151378, L/T.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Joseph W. Gibson, 17172678, R/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. William H. Fleming, Jr., 32536723, L/W.	(EVADED)
Sgt. Joseph (NMI) Habif, 12152216, T/G.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Hilliard S. Parrish, 34208080, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of Stephen J. Hannon, LT on B-17 #42-31640, after the mission: "I noticed that #608 was slowly drifting back from his place, which was on our right wing, as we were returning from the target to the coast. As we crossed onto the Adriatic, from the coast, he turned to the left and crossed beneath us. He was about 1,000 feet below us and 600 yards behind. All four engines were on and the plane was under good control. His course, east of ours, took him over the west part of the Estrain Peninsula. Shortly after he got over land, I saw a parachute open. I saw six parachutes altogether, opening at long intervals, all of them over land. Then after the sixth parachute opened, the plane still seemed to be flying, but passing beyond my range of vision. I saw no more."

1st Lt. Victor A. Brockman, CP, after evading: "Our plane crashed at approximately 1305 hours about 10 miles northeast of Pola, Italy in the Adriatic Sea. The wing section behind No. 1 engine was on fire and the propellers on No. 1 and No. 2 were running away. I bailed out at approximately 9,000 feet. None of the crew members were injured prior to bailing out. All of the crew bailed out and all chutes were seen opening. The plane did not explode upon striking the water, but did sink immediately. I saw six other members of the crew on the ground. The plane was about 10 miles from land and no life preserving material could be seen.

"I received information from the Partisans that two members of the plane perished in the sea and one member was made a POW. These members were not identified by name. I believe that Lt. Harrop, Sgt. Hartgrave, Sgt. Fleming and Sgt. Gibson are safe with the Partisans or have already joined their units in Italy. They were safe when I left them and plans were being made for their evacuation. I believe that Sgt. Speede and Sgt. Habif perished in the sea because of reports from Partisan sources and believe that Sgt. Parrish was made a POW."