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Operations: April, 1944

STEYR, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 171 - APRIL 2, 1944

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led thirty-one aircraft and dropped 92.75 tons of 500 lb. incendiary bombs on the Ball Bearing Factory at Steyr. Flak at the target was slight to inaccurate causing injury to two men and slight damage to two aircraft. Strike photos showed the incendiaries starting at the southeast of the plant, through the labor camp and into the residential area. Fifty to 60 enemy fighters were engaged by the escort. Four to six enemy fighters engaged the formation causing the death of one man, injury to one other and damage to two B-17s. One enemy aircraft was claimed.

2nd Lt. Robert H. O'Connor, 0-68328, 20th Squadron, killed instantly by flak. Injured: 2nd Lt. Earl W. Martin, P, 20th Squadron, suffered a slight wound to right hand, caused by flak; 2nd Lt. George J. Jost, CP, 20th Squadron, suffered a moderate wound to left thigh from flak; and 2nd Lt. Willie W. German, CP, 20th Squadron, suffered a face wound caused by shattered plexiglass.

T/Sgt. Joe B. Null, UT, 20th Squadron, credited with destroying one Me-109.

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 172 - APRIL 3, 1944

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 29 aircraft and dropped 85.75 tons of 500 lb. GP bombs on the Tokal Aircraft Components Factory 13 miles southwest of Budapest. Strike photos showed direct hits and near misses on workshops, rolling stock, assembly shops, taxi strip, construction sites and equipment. Twenty-five E/A were seen but no more than three to five made passes before the escort drove them away. One man was injured and two B-17s damaged. Flak at the target was moderate and fairly accurate. En route to the target there was intense and accurate flak over Yugoslavia damaging 15 B-17s.

1st Lt. Byron D. Kelly, Pilot, 20th Squadron, suffered a slight wound of left forearm from shrapnel from a 20mm shell.

T/Sgt. Raymond L. Terrell, Upper Turret, 20th Squadron, was credited for damage to one FW-190.

B-17 #42-31465, 49th Squadron, did not return to Base and the reason was not known. This aircraft was last sighted 38 miles northeast of Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia. An attempt to contact it was unsuccessful.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31456 - 49th SQUADRON.

2nd Lt. Clair A. Carlson, 0-804297, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. Robert M. Jones, 0-747813, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Michael A. Birbiglia, 0-685376, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. John J. Czechowicz, 0-676556, B.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Ralph E. Thacker, 35835922, U/T.	(POW)

Sgt.	Robert E. Slack, 15337891, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Charles E. Sharp, 38148678, R/W.	(POW)
Sgt.	Peter S. Petercsak, 12123562, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Oscar F. Cross, 34037275, T/G.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Charles R. Gray, 39317124, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Czechowicz, after evading: "The navigator was killed instantly when a 20mm shell blew up in the nose of the ship. He was calling out some fighters, high at one o'clock and we were hit. I believe he was hit instantly with 20mm cannon shells, or shrapnel, about the head and face. My chute was peppered with 20mm shrapnel and I took his off, put it on and didn't have time to put mine on him before having to bail out.

"The co-pilot was wounded, above the heart, by the same bullet that killed the navigator. When it was obvious that we would have to abandon the ship, I threw the unconscious co-pilot out, pulling the ripcord and seeing the chute open. After I had been on the ground for a few hours, with Partisans, one of the soldiers brought me the co-pilot's dog tags, telling me that he had died ten minutes after finding him.

"When I asked the Partisans about the rest of the crew, they told me they had been captured by either Germans or Chetniks. Upon arrival in Italy, I learned that my pilot, Lt. Carlson, had returned to Italy."

T/Sgt. Charles R. Gray, RO, on B-17 #42-31465. July 10, 1992: "Our crew departed from the United States by boat as opposed to many that flew their own aircraft overseas. We landed at Oran and found it to be a type of staging area for all kinds of U.S. troops. We were flown to Italy and assigned to the 49th Squadron. We found this to be a B-17 Group, which surprised us because all our training had been in B-24s. After some orientation on B-17s, we flew in combat. Lt. Carlson had three or four missions under his belt before I flew any.

"It was my first mission. We were first hit coming off the target killing our co-pilot and navigator. In the vicinity of Dobro Polji, Yugoslavia, our bullet and flak riddled plane ran out of gas and altitude and the surviving members were forced to parachute into the snow covered mountains less than 1,000 feet below us.

"None of us had ever parachuted before and like paratroopers, trained to jump at low altitudes, we were aware of the hazards of jumping, but staying with the bomber we knew we would surely die when it smashed into the ground. I was the second one out on the right side door and I counted to ten before jerking the ripcord so my chute wouldn't foul on the tail.

"I tumbled in a ball, head over heels and saw the ground getting close, then while head down, the chute brought me to an abrupt, whiplashing stop but still in the slip stream of the bomber. I was swinging in an arc and on one side of my arc my chute would bow in on one side like it was going to spill air. However, while that was a worry, the holes appearing in my canopy, and popping in the thin air, told me that I was the target of someone below.

"In one swing of the arc, I was face down and back the other way I was face up, and as I was going back down again, I crashed into the snow and was knocked unconscious, landing almost flat on my back. The first thing that I was aware of when coming around was that my hands felt like clubs, numb so that I couldn't feel them, nor close them to grasp anything. I undid my jacket and shirt and thrust them into my armpits. This small chore took so long that I didn't think that I would ever get those buttons open, but did, and continued lying there looking up through four feet of snow and watching formations of planes when they passed across my line of sight. It was a cold, lonesome feeling. They

would be in Italy soon, and wondering where I would be in half an hour and where, the time when that half hour was up.

"The ground under me shook to the big anti-aircraft guns that fired continuously as the planes flew over but I didn't see any planes get hit, and then with the planes having passed, the guns were silent and I could hear whistles, shouts and the barking of dogs. Lying there, I knew my shrouds were laying out where they could be seen, so I took my hands out of my armpits and worked the shrouds to the hole and down on top of me. I got my hands into the warmest part of me and stayed prone. After an interval there was a silence except for the wind whistling over the top of the hole.

"When I could bend my fingers, I had difficulty getting up because of the close confines of the hole, not bigger than my 150 pound body. Now I found that my flying boots had been lost, my fur lined cap was gone and the 45 colt wasn't in the shoulder holster. The 45 colt was the least of my concerns as I had never qualified with it. There was a pain in my knee but that was nothing unusual since I had broken it in October of 1941 and it had never gotten back to normal. It hadn't been flexible enough for me to join the Air Corps in July of 1942. I desired going to Air Cadets than take my chances being drafted into the infantry. The Air Corps medical examiner said I wouldn't be drafted with a knee that prevented me from squatting normally, or hopping up and down on it. He said since I had already passed the mental examination I could reapply when my knee was better and make it, if nothing else changed in my physical makeup.

"Now upright and able to see out, I only saw men with guns on some of the ridges, quite a distance away and as I had landed on a rugged peak-like piece of ground and pulled my chute out of sight, none of the searchers had spotted me. The way I felt and with almost all of my body stiff and cold and banging on landing, I didn't feel that I could 'evade.' All our briefings before missions stressed that the first 15 minutes after landing in enemy country usually spelled the difference between capture and escape.

"It was against my better judgement to leave my shelter. The compass in my bailout kit showed Italy was to my right but after getting out of my hole, found that the ground was frozen and icy and I slid on my side some 20 feet on a 60 degree incline down to a fairly level meadow-like area where I could see crisscrossing trails and footprints marking the whole area. I moved rather ponderously because of the inability to feel the contour of the ground with my numb feet. The quilted electric flying suit and oversized flying coveralls were made for less activity. I didn't get very far before I was wringing wet with sweat under my clothes and the cold, frigid air was giving me a sore throat, or at least something had made it sore. Breathing open mouthed didn't help the soreness any.

"There was no cover in which to hide should someone come over a rise or behind any of the jungles of rock and I hadn't gone 50 yards before I was spotted. I tried to get away but when I stepped off the beaten path, I sank up to my hips in a deep drift. Besides that, a burp gun had cut the snow ahead of me by ten feet. I raised my arms and in a few minutes saw my first Germans, the enemy.

"They left me stuck in the snow while they searched, first for the 45 I had lost. Then they lifted me out of the hole and looked through the rest of my clothes for the side arm. One of them spoke English and I told them the gun had been lost when the chute opened. This angered all of them as we heard the 45 was a prized trophy. The cuffed me unmercifully and, unable to stand with my hands clasped on the back of my neck, I was repeatedly knocked flat, picked up and knocked down again. I couldn't feel much of it in the numb places except that it stung moments after they hit me. There wasn't a damned thing I could do about it short of getting killed.

"They took the outer flying coveralls, my watch, a pocket knife, two packs of cigarettes and a lighter. As they searched me they walked on my feet, which were covered only by electric wired socks connected by a plug in my padded inner lining and probably the only reason they were still on my feet.

They seemed to enjoy stabbing me in the stomach and back with the barrels of their burp guns. I thought they would never tire of the sport.

"They had two in front and four behind when we started down the trails. I fell a great number of times because of the footing, not being able to feel the ground, rocks, ice, or snow under foot. With my hands behind my head it was awkward not being able to use my arms for balance or to break my fall. I guess because of the gun disappointment they were so cruel. On the way down, which seemed a long way, on steep covered slopes, one would come up behind me on the inside and shove me off. In whatever position I first landed was the position I maintained to the bottom. Going head first, my head, upper arms and shoulders took the brunt of any obstacles and the snow would be forced into my clothes. Landing feet first, my feet took the brunt of the obstacles as well as my legs and the snow forced up my pant legs. By the time we came on to level ground, my padded electrical suit was a soggy mess.

"Our patrol caught up with another patrol and I saw two of my crew mates and one, a rather strong bodied person, was as soggy as I was. He had been subjected to the same treatment I experienced. The other, a slight person, did not seem to have suffered any indignities other than the capture itself. Our combined groups continued to the lower levels and we were eventually out of the snow. We must have walked five miles before we came to the headquarters of the patrols.

"Inside the orderly room it was much warmer and here we found the other three enlisted men but none of us had seen any officers of the crew that bailed out. We were able to exchange experiences and all felt we had bailed out between 700 and 800 feet and lucky to have no fatalities or serious injuries. Everyone had bumps, bruises and lacerations.

"The interrogation was intimidating and degrading. We were threatened with execution if we didn't tell them information concerning our outfit in Italy. Name, rank and serial number was all they got so the officer said perhaps in the morning we would have other thoughts.

"They locked us in a pig and chicken sty that had never been cleaned out. It was stifling with just a small aperture about half a foot square where we took turns getting fresh air, otherwise breathing through the material of an article of clothing. No one slept or at least got to get any rest. We two soggy ones had to keep moving to keep our circulation stirring. We decided not to talk. We really didn't know anything about the Squadron, Group or Wing. Their spies in Italy probably knew more than we did. We heard that our base sentries captured them frequently in the disguise as natives of the area. They were all Italians recruited by the Germans for that purpose.

"We fully expected to get shot. Our interrogator was visibly angry during the interrogation and for emphasis kept banging his sidearm on the table when we refused to answer him. We stayed there until the sun was quite high before they came for us in an uncovered truck. We were taken 20 to 30 miles to Sarajevo, Yugoslavia.

"The ride was uncomfortable as we had to stand just behind the cab all the way. Four guards, with burp guns, sat on a bench resting their backs against the tail gate. The road vibration aggravated my sore knee and I had to hold it off the truck with all my weight on my right leg, which fortunately had not been injured except for cuts and bruises.

"In Sarajevo, we waited near the tracks at a depot and were the main attraction for several hundred people who were mostly Yugoslavians. They were not a bit hostile as we would come to know the people in Germany, Austria, and Hungary, before we reached a POW camp. We two who had started out in a soggy state were finally beginning to dry out. Our ball gunner fortunately had worn his G.I. shoes under his fur lined flying boots and had not lost them when bailing out. I fell heir to the fur lined boots which were sloppy but better than just the electric socks I was wearing.

"While we waited for several hours for transportation, some of the people offered us food but when the guards accepted it we didn't get anything except scraps the guards threw to us after they had eaten what they wanted. We had not eaten the course black bread they handed us in the pig sty. The

fact that we weren't that hungry yet, the stench and the filthy guard handling the food kept us from eating. Little did we realize in the coming months we would wish we had that bread. Nor did any of us realize this was only the second day of 13 months of the most demoralizing, degrading, inhumane treatment the members of the human race can bring to bear on other members of the human race. Not even animals, the most vicious of them, could contrive such cruelties to one another.

"From where we parachuted and been captured was about 200 miles to Belgrade. It took a week by train, truck, horse drawn wagons, and by foot. We must have walked a quarter of the distance. Often walking along we were so tired, like in a semi-conscious state. We would trip or stumble and be cursed or thumped by the nearest guard. Our rest periods were very short in the walking stages but on conveyances we slept and were easier to guard so we weren't disturbed. My knee would not hurt as much when we had the luxury of riding, but when walking it would swell and be very painful. One time, after a short rest, I didn't get up when ordered until one of the guards pulled the charging bolt on his burp gun. I didn't test him again.

"In all of the week none of us could stomach the food offered, most of it was black bread. It had the texture of wood. The guards carried food in the pockets of their long overcoats. They would remove an onion, a hunk of bread, a hunk of cheese or sausage from their pockets, brush the grime off and then put the food in the mouth and bite on it, take a knife and cut off a chunk and eat what was in their mouth. They would throw something to us but we weren't that hungry yet. We drank all the water we could until we were bloated. The guards never drank from the same wells we did, and found out later they would let us drink from contaminated wells. We didn't know it but in Belgrade the guards would leave us and return to Yugoslavia.

"In a large prison hall we saw our first Americans, other than the six of us, since leaving our base in Italy. There were over 500 crammed in there but there was a stew steaming and some coffee, ersatz, made of burnt barley. It was the most welcome meal I have ever had in my life, as for the first time in my life I was real hungry and for companionship of our own countrymen. There were no guards as the doors were locked behind us.

"There were some officers of Colonel rank, Majors, Captains and a great many Lieutenants. The highest rank was a bird Colonel and he had taken charge and was doing a great job seeing everyone was attended to. The wounded, and not attended since capture, were in one corner being tended to by German aid men. They were some of the nicest Germans I would meet as wounds were wounds, regardless of nationality. The most terrible to behold were men that had been aboard burning bombers. The smell of burns permeated that part of the hall. The cooking area was between the wounded and us, which prevented the stench from coming to us.

"I had limped into the hall so one of the aid men asked if I had been shot. I said I had a bad knee that had been broken in the States and banged up during bail-out. He took me to the aid area, felt around and said there was no break. He put a bandage around it and said to tighten it if it swelled and if I could stand it. I could have stayed in the aid area but could not stand the smell of burnt flesh and the moaning.

"After getting our stomachs full of palatable but plain food for the first time since our capture, my crew mates and I found a place to sprawl, on the bare floor, and compared our captive experience with others. Most had like experiences, but there were many variations of the hostility and cruelty of both civilians and guards. We had our first, restful night's sleep, being able to fully stretch out, and it was warmer than we had been in a week.

"The next morning we were awakened long before dawn and ate as much as we could before the guards came for us. All captives were either Americans, British, or Australians. We left in groups of 12, six captives with a guard. Each non-com over the lesser rank could speak English. All guards from Belgrade to Frankfurt, our next destination, were from the Luftwaffe who had been disabled in combat

and did such duty rather than be discharged. On the whole they were sympathetic as much as could be but would not tolerate liberties that gave an opportunity to escape. At the train station we got on a car and occupied a compartment that would have handled no more than six comfortably. The guards took turns standing in the passageway along one side of the car.

"From Belgrade, to Budapest, to Vienna, to our destination, Frankfurt-Am-Main, was approximately 1,000 miles, and it took us almost three weeks. For the most part it wasn't too bad except for the fear of the civilians that menaced us along the way. Whenever we walked, the guards had us in their midst, their burp guns cocked to protect us, and they had more fellowship for us than the civilians. The hate in the civilians' eyes, voices, and obscene gestures in the direction of their throats and genitals, and then pointing to us, was a terrible thing to see!

"Frankfurt was a mixed blessing. The accommodations and the treatment at this interrogation center would introduce us to further indecencies by the Germans. When we entered, we saw these barracks type buildings and saw a thousand, more or less, prisoners in varying states of dress, all standing, or sprawled, in a line that twined around and around in order that everyone would be in line.

"The barracks had no windows and were soundproofed. Every prisoner spent from days to weeks in a six by six room with a hard bunk, a pail to use for toilet needs and a light that was never turned off. I spent three days, had a cup of water and one slice of woody black bread each day, and every 24 hours the same interrogator came in for a few minutes asking me to sign a sheet or two that had more information about me than I knew myself. It was all true but I didn't sign it and after three days I was released.

"The line we had to pass through, when we entered the camp, was the soup line. With so many captives there, feeding went on constantly, from eight in the morning until five or six in the evening. It took hours to get one meal, a shallow bowl of thin soup with a slice of bread. Then you got back in line for the next meal.

"Our crew had three days of that struggle to stay alive before we, along with others, were marched back to Frankfurt and boarded box cars. No more than 40 persons could have had the room to be comfortable, but the Germans crammed so many in the car that with the wounded and maim being allowed to recline, the rest of us had to stand. Before entering the car, every two prisoners were handed a Red Cross parcel. It contained items that could be eaten as is, and had powdered milk, a small can of soluble coffee, and a pack of cigarettes.

"Most of us were so hungry that all the ready to eat items were consumed leaving only those items that needed water or heating. We found that taking a bit of whole milk, a bit of coffee and a sugar cube, let the saliva in your mouth moisten it, and it could be consumed. We were unable to use cigarettes because of the hazard of fire since the bed of the car was tinder dry straw. We found that by experience and suffered smoke inhalation of burning straw until it dissipated.

"None of us knew we would be en route for three days and two nights before reaching our destination, Stalag 17B at Krems, Austria, a camp for enlisted airmen. With the food gone in an hour or so, it was the last we saw until we got to Stalag 17B. After a few hours, the stench from festering wounds, urine and bowel movements became so overpowering nearly everyone was sick. For me, the lack of water was the utmost. By drinking, one can relieve the hunger pangs.

"We got into Krems on the afternoon of the third day, unloaded and walked up the hill. The first stop was a concentration of buildings a mile from the prison camp where we bathed, had our clothes deloused and heads shaved. Everyone had to strip, hang their clothes on a hook and then enter the waiting room for a shower. There must have been 1,000 there. There was no heat in this huge concrete building. There were windows, barred but no panes, and no heat provided. Everyone that was able to tried to exercise to keep warm. Those unable to, huddled together in shivering groups.

"The soap would hardly lather and the water went off before you could rinse off. Then back to the frigid room to dry, without towels. Being wet, it was so much colder. All the clothes were gassed in less than an airtight area and we had to inhale the fumes. If all the previous ordeal hadn't made you sick, the gas seepage did.

"We were waiting for an hour or more to retrieve our clothes from the gassy area. Most of us couldn't stand the odor and the Germans threw all the clothes into a room, all mixed up, and let us sort until we found our clothing. The gas permeated our clothes for days. Now clothed and hardly clean, we were scheduled for the barber but had to wait until our hair dried. The haircut was more to make us look like idiots. It was a lousy, unbalanced, unblended haircut.

"There were so many of us that the Germans had to open a new compound of barren clapboard barracks. Two men slept together and 16 men lived in an area no more than 10 x 10 feet. For an area that would sleep no more than 75 to 100, we were housed with a total of 300 for almost a year.

"Daily life began at dawn. The whole camp, in each of the six compounds, fell out for roll call. Roll could be completed in 15 minutes or it could take hours, depending on how Fritzie felt. One time, in 20 below temperature, with ankle deep snow, it lasted for three days while Fritzie and his dogs searched for someone they said had escaped.

"Times when Fritzie gave us our Red Cross parcels, life improved until they were consumed. The rest of the time we got a slop bucket of hot water, which each prisoner got a cup of, or it could be barley mush, without cream or sugar, or it could be nothing at all. Dinner was around 5 p.m. and could be a couple of small potatoes per man, some buggy vegetable soup, some dehydrated sauerkraut or hot ersatz barley coffee. We got bread once a day, one slice per man. It tasted like wood and confirmed being at least half sawdust for bulk. We all had ongoing dysentery for unsanitary living conditions.

"At night, from lights out to roll call, the windows and doors were shuttered and guards roamed outside. Rats scurried around on the floor in packs, squealing and fighting.

"It wasn't until the latter part of 1944, after the invasion of France, that the air raids stepped up, both night and day we lived in the air raid trenches. Not because they were bombing us but when bombers were hit they salvo the bombs. Whatever is below gets blasted. If it is clear, some bomber crews will not deliberately salvo their bombs on a village. Since all POW camps were known to the Allies, we felt they would not hit us deliberately, but all does not go as planned at times.

"On the 1st of April, 1945, we were informed that the entire camp would evacuate to the west. We knew the Russians were near and Fritzie was scared of the Russians! None of us had much except what we were wearing to take on evacuation but we weren't hilarious about going on the road. We had been on the road coming here and facing the hazards of the hostile population, no shelter, no food, and walking day and night again had no appeal to any of us. We felt we could survive in camp, but the road was a big question mark.

"On the 8th of April, we rebelled but cocked rifles, burp guns, and biting police dogs changed our minds and we started off on what would be nearly four weeks on the road. The first day, after a cup of mush, we left around 10:00 a.m. and walked until sundown, got no food or water except what we had with us. We slept along the road without shelter. It proved to be a pattern without very little variation, as there was no planned destination or regard for our welfare. Just so the guards would not risk capture by the Russians.

"It didn't take many miles before my knee began protesting the constant strain. I bound it as tight as I could and that seemed to contain some of the swelling. It rained the first day and we laid down wet, slept where we could and got up wet. We walked the second day without any offering of food or water.

"On the third day, Fritzie scrounged some food for us. There were 4,000 of us and a chore to feed. Every 18 men split a loaf of bread which made a thin slice for each. Nothing else. It hadn't rained

during the day but it rained after we stopped for the night. We sucked water from our blankets to try to satisfy our thirst. It wasn't a pleasant taste. Every other day we would get to rest until noon, then walk until sundown and bed down wherever we were. Sometimes there was a barn or a mill where some of us could get under a roof.

"At one of our stops, our tail gunner twisted a chicken's neck off, pulled the bird apart after removing the feathers and stuffed the bloody carcass inside his shirt. Each six of us got a piece, tried to boil it in a can which each of us brought from 17B. It took so long to cook we gave up, ate it more raw than cooked. It was slimy, it gagged me and I had to swallow several times to get it down. At another barn stop, a dozen or so of us found a bin of grain and filled our socks. We cooked it all night and come morning, we ate the mess as it was. It was like rubber. We had no seasoning so it was tasteless. There was about half of it left so we put in our pockets for later.

"We found a profusion of snails along the roads we traveled. We tried to boil them but they got all gooey so we threw them on the coals, cracked them and ate the tiny morsel. There was not much taste without salt and not too substantial unless one ate several dozen. The word came down the line that charcoal would arrest the 'runs' so we chewed on cold embers. It didn't seem to faze the problem.

"One day, about three weeks after departing 17B, we were herded into a forested area. It had been prepared for our coming as it was ringed by an open space where the guards set up guard posts. There was no shelter except to huddle under pine trees. When we first began cutting branches and small trees for leantos, the guards opposed us but the German in command gave us permission. He told us we were waiting for the American Army to reach us and that Germany was Kaput, finished.

"None of us knew if he was lying or how long rescue would take. Nothing changed in our way of trying to stay alive. In the beginning we relieved ourselves in open areas, then wiser heads, and those in better condition, dug some slit trenches. After some of the weak had fallen in, back rests were installed.

"Water was plentiful in the Ens River if you had the strength to walk the half mile to the bank. It was steep, and to slide down, fill your container and get back up without spilling and then get back to your area was hard. I tried it once and damned near drowned but a fellow POW grabbed me. It took me the better part of the day to get back up the incline and I rested a long time before attempting the half mile walk back to camp.

"One morning we woke up and found all the guards gone but one or two. They hadn't gone because they heard the SS were shooting deserters. It was around noon that an advance patrol of an armored division appeared. They were surprised to see us and it was lucky for us the patrol found us as it was their plans to shell the forest. It was suspected the German troops or armored were using it for last ditch resistance. The German guards now traded places with us and walked off with their hands behind their heads. In about an hour I had a 10-in-1 package in hand with my crew mates. I didn't bother to light a fire and ate the cold, but cooked, food out of the cans. I, myself, ate nearly a gallon of meatballs and spaghetti. I had to relieve myself but came back and finished the can. These patrol G.I.s were stared open mouthed as prisoners opened those packs with bayonets and ate with both hands. Many were sick from overeating but came back to repeat the drama over and over again. Such an abundance of food was such a luxury that our stomachs could not retain it.

"Military Police came in to restore order out of chaos, erected kitchens, and aid men administered to the lame and sick. Doses of medicine were given to those with dysentery. It tasted like alcohol, not too distasteful. I got on a sliced peaches kick, didn't want anything else, but they wouldn't stay down too long. That night we had a cot, or sleeping bag, or a bunk mattress and under a tent. At last for us, "The war was over" and this time forever! No one can respect or savor freedom and democracy more than an American who has spent time as a prisoner of war because if death can be

termed the 'supreme sacrifice,' then a prisoner of war runs in second place as it is 'Hell on earth' to any who experienced any part of man's inhumanity to his fellow man."

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 173 - APRIL 4, 1944

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 27 aircraft and dropped 81 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Bucharest Marshalling Yards. Flak was moderate and inaccurate wounding 2nd Lt. Chester S. Jarrell, B, 49th Squadron, who suffered slight injuries to the right cornea caused by shattered glass. Three B-17s were slightly damaged. Bomb strike photos showed hits through the rail lines, explosions in the yards, hits on distillation and lubrication plants, roads and residences.

PLOESTI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 174 - APRIL 5, 1944

Captain William N. Byrd, 429th Squadron Operations Officer, led 28 aircraft and dropped 53.2 tons of 100-lb. incendiary bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Ploesti. B-24s from the 47th and 304th Wings preceded the 2nd Bomb Group over the target. Incendiary bombs were used by other Groups obscuring the results of the 2nd, however, the bombs fell in the designated area and many fires were seen. Flak was intense and accurate, causing severe damage to two aircraft and minor damage to 13 others. There were no injuries to crews. Some enemy aircraft were seen but did not attack the formation.

My diary shows that we moved into our new tent/hut today. Like many others we decided this was going to be a long war and might as well be comfortable. We were tired of the mud and the tents did not give much headroom. Regular tents were the pits, especially in cold, rainy weather. We hired Italian laborers to do the job. They were very proficient and had already done many others so we knew what we were getting. The walls of the 'Tuffa' stone were over seven feet high to accommodate Tom McGurk, a lanky Indiana boy who I judged to be about 6'4" tall. 1st Sgt. McWeeney and I were both 6' so it was ample for us.

Four lodge poles ran from each corner to a peak and the pyramidal tent was stretched over them. We had windows, a door and a tile floor. Our stove was a 55 gal. drum half, open end down. Piping from hydraulic lines from salvaged planes ran from a drop tank behind the hut into the stove. There was a sand box inside the stove on the floor and a drip pan filled with sand. There was a petcock in the line to control the 100 octane fuel. I don't remember what we used for a stovepipe but remember that we needed to clean it out frequently. We were fortunate never to have had a fire accident nor were any of us singed while lighting this contraption. We had electric lights in the tent powered by a generator that provided lighting for all the tents in the Squadron. We had named our original tent 'TURMOIL,' so this became 'TURMOIL VII,' and felt we now had most of the comforts of home.

During the course of our many moves, there were several changes of personnel in our quarters. 1st Sgt. Phillip Reidy, from Massachusetts, a talented artist, transferred to Group Special Services in North Africa. For the good part of 1944, until shipping home, the occupants were 1st Sgt. John J. McWeeney, a red headed Irishman from the Bronx. He assumed the position while in North Africa. He had a great sense of humor and was well respected. He had a wonderful family that took several of us in when we were at Camp Kilmer. T/Sgt. Thomas McGurk, Covington, Indiana, witty, intelligent, well liked by everyone. His wonderful wife, Marceline, would can chickens and send to him, which we all enjoyed. All of the families would send things, which went into our food storage cabinet in the hut, which we all shared. Sgt. Robert Johnson, Seattle, Washington, a nice guy, well liked. S/Sgt. Norman McFarland was a late comer to the tent and I can't remember where he was from but he was friendly, well liked, and had a good sense of humor. Reidy, McGurk, McWeeney and I were from the original cadre of the 363rd Squadron in Spokane, Washington.

Others I have fond memories of are Lt. Carl N. Hutter and Sgt. Herbert Miller, both from Chicago. Carl was our first Adjutant, warm, fair, what one would call "an enlisted man's officer." He transferred to the Far East while in North Africa and we missed him.

Sgt. Miller was quiet, hard working. I never heard a complaint from him. His parents had a delicatessen in Chicago and would send him the most delicious foods, while in the States - which he generously shared. In 1981 my wife, niece Marjorie LeBlanc, and I met Phil Reidy and his wife, Elaine, in Peabody, Massachusetts. He directed us to meet him near an old town meeting hall in Peabody because he felt his home would be too difficult to find. We had a great visit, talked over old times and had lunch together. A few months later, we received a painting from Phil that he had done of the old meeting hall where we met. It hangs in the entry hall of our home today. We kept in touch by letter and telephone and he agreed to do the cover for this book. I had a letter from Elaine that Phil died unexpectedly in his sleep, August 31, 1991, never having the opportunity to do the cover. I felt a great loss!

TREVISO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 175 - APRIL 7, 1944

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 35 aircraft and dropped 105 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Treviso. Flak was moderate to intense and very accurate resulting in the laceration of the left thumb of Captain Septimus B. Hughes, B, 49th Squadron, and causing damage to 20 aircraft. Bomb strike photos showed a good number of hits in the assigned area but a greater number outside the area. A few E/A were sighted during the bomb run but did not attack the formation.

FISCHAMEND MARKET, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 176 - APRIL 8, 1944

Major Joseph S. Cunningham, 429th Squadron CO, led 33 aircraft to bomb the Aircraft Components Factory in this city. They received a recall from 5th wing headquarters due to weather in the target area. Plane #42-32031 crashed on landing due to problems with the landing gear. None of the crew were injured.

FISCHAMEND MARKET, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 177 - APRIL 12, 1944

Major Joseph S. Cunningham led 35 aircraft to bomb the Aircraft Components Factory; the same target as of April 8th. This target is located 13 miles southeast of Vienna. There were 101 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs dropped on the factory area, stores, workshops, rail lines, and residential section. Flak was moderate and inaccurate with no damage to aircraft. Three to four Me-109s made three passes at the formation causing no damage or injuries.

GYOR, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 178 - APRIL 13, 1944

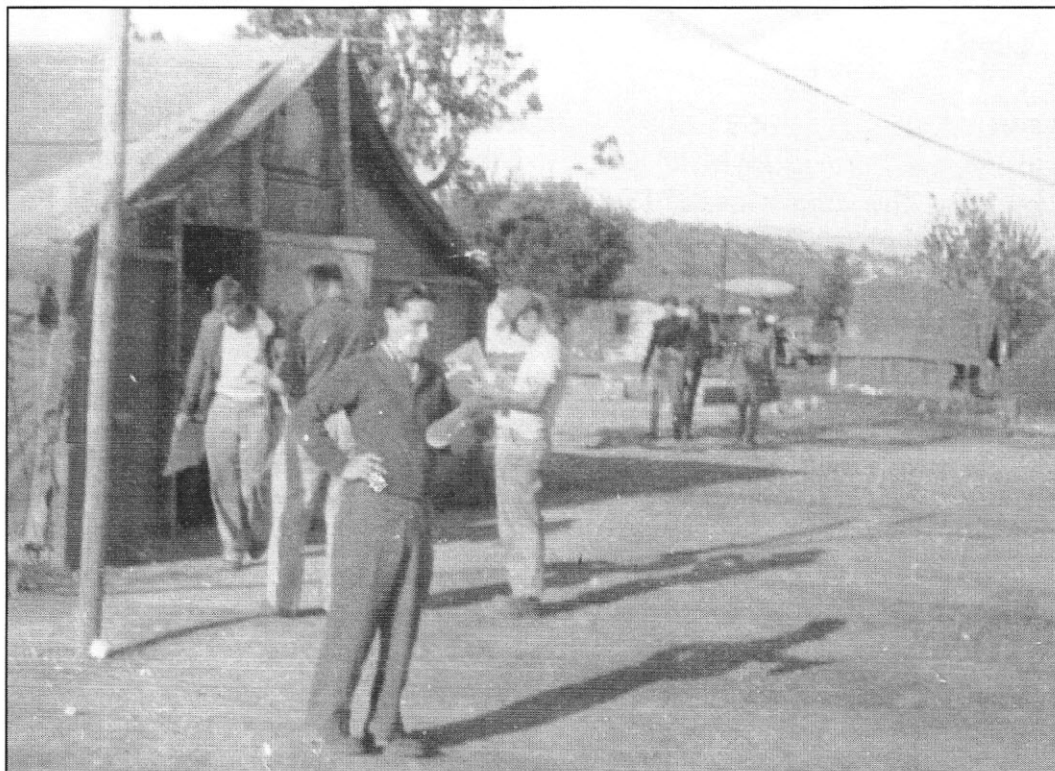
Col. Herbert E. Rice led 35 aircraft and dropped 99 tons of 500-lb. RDX (very high explosive) bombs on the Hungarian Railroad Car and Machinery Works in Gyor. Bomb Strike photos showed direct hits in the assigned area as well as many hits in adjacent stores, component shops, storage buildings and machine shops. Flak was slight and inaccurate causing damage to one B-17. Twenty to 30 Me-109s and FW-190s attacked the formation, first lobbing rockets at the Second Wave, then going under and attacking the First Wave. The P-38 escort came in and drove the attackers off but not before losses of four B-17s and damage to two others. Two E/A were claimed.

Credit for E/A went to S/Sgt. Doris J. Ritchie, TG, 96th Squadron, for one Me-109, and T/Sgt. Mark A. Brazzell, UT, 429th Squadron, for one Me-109.

B-17s lost were #42-31837 and #42-97346 from the 20th Squadron and #42-31506 and #42-32058 from the 96th Squadron.



T/R - L/R - R. Johnson, J. McWeeney, C. Miles (RAF), T. McGurk
 Kneeling - unknown, C. Richards (Courtesy - C. Richards)



Sgt. Herbert Miller - A letter from Sylvia (Courtesy - C. Richards)



96th Squadron Cooks - T/R - L/R - Sudam, Goldstein, Moran, Unknown
B/R - L/R - Kirkendall, Mills, Lillie, Norman
(Courtesy - Howard Fox)

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT - A/C #42-31837 - 20TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt.	Willie W. German, 0-750973, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Elmer F. Gray, 0-751544, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	James H. Andrews, 0-698406, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Robert W. Kaczmarek, 0-694780, B.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Milno H. DeHart, 16020392, U/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Edmund J. Nalewak, 13048274, L/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Frank W. Herron, 35719260, R/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Lyttleton W. Maxwell, 18190052, L/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Jack (NMI) Imhoff, 19805797, T/G.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Earl J. Miller, 13094274, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of 1st Lt. Elmer F. Gray, CP, after liberation: "We were flying #6 in the Squadron formation. I was able to bail out as well as Lt. James Andrews, Lt. Robert Kaczmarek, S/Sgt. Milno DeHart, and Sgt. Jack Imhoff. The navigator, bombardier, engineer, and myself went out the forward escape hatch (bomb bay on fire). The tail gunner fell clear through a break where the tail section parted from the fuselage. The plane struck the ground near Papa, Hungary.

Statement of Sgt. Jack Imhoff, TG, after liberation: "I bailed out with four others. Five did not. The plane crashed about two miles from Papa, Hungary. I believe the pilot, two waist gunners, ball gunner, and radio were in the plane when it crashed. I saw the two waist gunners trying to get out the rear escape hatch and struggling with the emergency release, which seemed to be stuck. The waist gunners had taken Sgt. Nalewak from the ball turret. He had been killed during the first attack."

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-97346 - 20TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt.	Earl W. Martin, 0-747419, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	George J. Jost, 0-737130, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Robert C. Clark, 0-694333, N.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Lowell M. Hamm, 0-754900, B.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Raymond R. Howarth, 11094690, U/T.	(EVADED)
Sgt.	David L. Cuniff, 39613527, L/T.	(EVADED)
Sgt.	Franklin H. Gowans, 14184740, R/W.	(EVADED)
Sgt.	Russell (NMI) Durfee, 32440365, L/W.	(POW)
Sgt.	Frank J. Pyzanowski, 32878885, T/G.	(POW)
Sgt.	Thomas B. Watkins, 35037557, R/O.	(EVADED)

Statement of 2nd Lt. George J. Jost, CP, after evading: "The plane crashed at approximately 1230 hours in Yugoslavia near the border of Hungary. The No. 3 engine was out and the gas tanks in the right wing were on fire. The wing started to buckle. I bailed out at approximately 18,000 feet. The navigator, Lt. Clark and assistant engineer, Sgt. Gowans, received flak wounds and the tail gunner, Sgt. Durfee, was seriously wounded. I counted eight chutes open although a returning crewman reported ten. I was certain, that besides my own chute, the navigator's, bombardier's, assistant engineer's, and assistant radio operator's chutes opened. I did not see the plane crash and did not examine the plane wreckage. By nightfall, I had met up with the navigator, bombardier, engineer and radio operator. We traveled together and made our escape without further casualty. A few days after I returned to our unit, the assistant radio operator reported back and stated that the assistant engineer was still in enemy occupied territory receiving treatment at a hospital and was expecting to return shortly. According to the assistant radio operator, two bodies were found in the wreckage and one waist gunner, Sgt. Pyzanowski, was taken prisoner and shot, but not killed, in an attempt to evade. The assistant radio operator believes that the two bodies found in the plane were those of Sgt. Durfee and Lt. Martin. I received information from the Partisans that our plane crashed, but did not explode, in a small village."

2nd Lt. Earl W. Martin, P. of A/C #42-97346. February 21, 1991: "Members of my crew were 2nd Lt. George J. Jost, co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Robert O'Connor, Navigator (KIA); later, 2nd Lt. Robert C. Clark, Navigator; 2nd Lt. Lowell Hamm, Bombardier; S/Sgt. Raymond Howarth, Upper Turret; Sgt. David Cuniff, Lower Turret; Sgt. Franklin H. Gowans, Right Waist; Sgt. Russell Durfee, left Waist; Sgt. Frank J. Pyzanowski, Tail Gunner; and Sgt. Thomas B. Watkins, Radio Operator.

"I was with the 2nd Bomb Group a very short time in March and April, 1944. Except for the Ploesti mission and my last mission, I do not remember much about the targets and since all my records were lost in a fire in 1955, I have no way at this time to recall. I do know that no missions were easy and that we had opposition on every one.

"On my first combat mission with the 2nd Bomb Group, an experienced pilot went along and occupied the co-pilot seat, so my co-pilot, George Jost, stayed home. So his first mission was my second.

"I don't remember the target on my second mission, but definitely remember what happened after we dropped our bombs and turned away toward home. My Radio Operator, Sgt. Watkins, told me later that he saw a Ju-88 approach from the rear and fire a rocket from a range of about 2,000 yards towards us. The radio compartment had a hatch in the roof, with a free gun which could be fired up and to the rear, so he had a good view in that direction. He saw the rocket approach and pass over the top of the plane. Evidently it exploded just over the cockpit. The navigator, 2nd Lt. Robert H. O'Connor, was killed by a large piece of shrapnel that struck him in the neck. The co-pilot, 2nd Lt. George Jost, was

struck in the left leg by a fairly large piece. I was hit in the hand by a small piece. I think the profile shaped armor plate behind the pilot and co-pilot seats saved us from further damage. I remember very clearly the surprise on George when he was hit. I could not see his face because of the oxygen mask, but he showed surprise and amazement all over. This was his first mission and he was already wounded! The bombardier, 2nd Lt. Lowell Hamm, called and said that O'Connor was hit badly and probably was already dead. We could find no extensive damage to the airplane and continued on in the formation. I told some of the crew to help George and they cut his pants open, then sprinkled sulfa powder on the wound and bandage it. Sulfa was the new miracle drug and this was our first experience with it.

"We continued on toward home, knowing that O'Connor was dead. Since George could not use his left leg, I had to fly the airplane all the way home, which was tiring, but no real problem. When we broke formation for landing, we fired a flare, which was a proper signal that we had casualties on board.

"I landed normally and was rolling down the runway before realizing that the left tire was flat. I had asked the gunners before landing to check the tires because I thought one of them might have been hit. They looked all right. Knowing that another airplane was right behind and already touching down, I kept the speed up as long as I could, but saw I would be unable to get off at the end of the runway. So, before I lost too much speed that I would be able to control it, I pulled off the runway to the left and the other airplane rolled on by. We cut the engines right there and the ambulance, and medics, came screaming up to where we were. They took the dead O'Connor, and George, on stretchers to the hospital. Our second mission was over!

"MY LAST MISSION: The briefing that morning informed me that we were going to Gyor, Hungary, about 75 miles southeast of Vienna, Austria. Gyor was the home of the Gyor Auto Works, which was in the business of manufacturing Messerschmitt airplanes. We were always glad when our target was an airplane manufacturer, since enemy planes were the things that gave us the most trouble.

"The day was April 13, 1944. We were to hit the target and drop our bombs precisely at noon. I think our bombing altitude was 22,000 feet.

"An outstanding feature of the mission was that we were to have fighter cover over the target area. We had not had such luxury before, since the short range of the fighter aircraft, at that time, caused them to turn back before we reached the target area on long missions. Later, long range P-51s stayed with the bombers all the way in and out. We were told that a Group of P-38s had been equipped with long range tanks and would meet us at the target, although they would not be able to escort us all the way. As will be seen, however, this did not help with my unfortunate experience.

"Our take-off and form-up was normal and we headed out over the Adriatic Sea, almost due north to the target. I don't know how many Groups were on the mission, but I think we led and the 97th followed us.

"When we got around to test firing our guns, Cuniff, the ball turret gunner, reported that his guns would not fire. I told him to work on them and see if he could get them fixed. By the time he reported back that he was unable to get them fixed, we were near the Yugoslavian coast and decided to continue the mission. Having a turret out of commission was enough to abort a mission, but my reasoning was that we were close enough to enemy fighter bases that some German aces might be out there waiting for a lonesome B-17 to become separated from the formation and thus be easy prey. My decision was that we would have been better off staying with the Group. In retrospect, we would perhaps been better off if we had turned back. On the other hand, we might have been caught out there by ourselves and shot down in a more difficult situation over the water. I have never lost any sleep over that because you have to make those decisions and, especially in battle, it is sometimes difficult to make the right one.

"We proceeded on to the target which was a 450 mile trip. In a modern airplane that would take less than an hour. With a formation of World War II bombers, it was a trip of about four hours each way considering take-off, form-up, and fly formation all the way.

"We encountered moderate flak, but I don't remember any fighter attacks before we reached the target. As I remember, our turn at the Initial Point and our bomb run were normal. We dropped our bombs and made a left turn, descended a little, then headed for home. That was when we were hit.

"The tail gunner later told me that five, twin-engine fighters (I think from his description that they were Me-410s) approached from directly behind us. They were in trail, which means they were lined up behind one another. The first one, who undoubtedly was the flight leader, hit us with a lot of 20mm cannon fire. The two right engines were knocked out and I could not keep it from pulling to the right, out of formation. The other fighters were firing at us because I could see layers of tracers coming out from underneath and streaming out in front. Among a lot of other thoughts, I remember thinking - well this is it, death is upon me. However, I believe the leader was the only one to hit us. Number four engine was out and George shut it down and feathered the propeller. Number three was still giving us some power at times, in surges, so we kept it running.

"As soon as I was hit, I broke radio silence on the Group frequency. I said, 'Where are those escort fighters?' Almost at the same time a flight of P-38s came by us diving toward our rear. I suppose they were heading to engage the enemy fighters attacking us. I hope they were able to knock them all out of the air but I will never know about that.

"We were falling behind the Group, so I called the leader and told him we were hit and unable to keep up. He immediately began to 'S,' or gently turn to the right and then left so we could fly in a straight line and have a better chance to keep up. I checked my crew by intercom. The bombardier, Lowell Hamm, said the navigator, Robert Clark, was wounded and was helping him. The gunners in back said they were all right. I asked them to check the tail gunner, Frank Pyzanowski, because I knew by the feel of the controls that we had some damage in the tail area. They reported that he was OK. His intercom was out. Actually he was badly hurt and was trying to signal them for help, but they misunderstood.

"I then turned my attention to the condition of the airplane. The right wing was pretty well shot up, with many 20mm holes. At least one shell had blown a basketball size hole in the inboard fuel tank and we could see gasoline sloshing out of it. The aileron was pretty badly shot up, but we still had aileron control since the left one was OK. The two right engines were all shot up and I had little hope of getting help from them. I could not see the back part of the airplane but, from the control response, I knew a lot of damage was there. One of the boys later told me that the skin on the after part of the fuselage looked like a sieve.

"We were falling behind the Group but still had them in sight for about a mile ahead. I was trading altitude for speed by diving slightly. We were getting things organized and I told the crew we would try to get back as far as the Adriatic Sea and with two good engines, we might make it all the way home.

"After about ten minutes, the engineer, Raymond Howarth, tapped me on the shoulder and silently pointed out the right window at the hole in the fuel tank. Looking closely we could see a very light blue flame coming out of the tank. The immediate reaction of everyone in the cockpit was, 'Well, we have had it now.' Orders were that if you had a fire in the wing of a B-17, bail out!!! The danger was the wing might explode, turning the airplane into an instant fireball, an uncontrollable mess from which it would be impossible to bail out.

"The flames were growing and once again, decision time. My decision was that we would stay with the aircraft until we were over Yugoslavia, then bail out. Most of the crew did not agree with that and wanted to bail out as soon as possible. However, I prevailed upon them and we stayed, watching the flames grow stronger and trail off the edge of the wing.

"The reason for wanting to bail out over Yugoslavia, instead of Hungary, was that Yugoslavian Partisans, under Marshall Tito, were very active and our information was they would help us if we could

get in contact with them. Getting back as far as Yugoslavia was complicated by the fact that the navigator, Robert Clark, was wounded and could not function at his expertise. This left the navigation up to a very busy pair of pilots. We estimated our position on a dead reckoning basis and determined when we were probably across. As the situation turned out, these decisions led to happy results for seven of the crew.

"When I finally gave the order to bail out and pushed the button to ring the bail-out bell, the crew mostly left in a hurry. The navigator's chute had been damaged by some of the same ordnance that wounded him, so Hamm had gone to the back of the airplane and obtained one of the spare chutes that we carried. He helped Clark get squared away and they both bailed out from the lower hatch in the nose compartment. I think the rest of them went out through the bomb bay except for the tail gunner, Frank Pyzanowski, who told me later that he had gone out through the side of the tail compartment which had been blown away.

"The parachute packs for the pilots were usually carried under their seats, since they were chest packs and difficult to wear during normal operations. I had asked the engineer, Howarth, to snap mine on the harness, which we always wore and he had done so. When I had time to look down at it he had put it on backwards so that the 'D' ring was on the left instead of the right side where it should have been so I changed it.

"After I determined that everyone was out, as far as I could see, I put the controls on auto-pilot, knowing that it would not hold straight, but would help. Then I pulled the two red buttons on the panel above the glare shield that would explode the charges in the IFF (Identification, Friend or Foe) and in the bomb sight. The purpose was to destroy these two units so the Germans would not get them. They were both super secret devices, although I expect the Germans had samples in their possession. I heard two muffled thumps and knew the destructive system had worked. I then laid my sunglasses on the glare shield, walked back to the catwalk in the bomb bay and stepped out into the thin air. I have been asked many times if I was reluctant to jump. The answer is always an emphatic NO! If the choice is between a burning airplane that might explode and a parachute ride to the ground, no time need be wasted debating the subject.

"For some reason, I fell only a couple of thousand feet before pulling the ripcord. I should have waited until the ground was closer, but once the ripcord is pulled there is no turning back, the parachute will deploy. When I pulled, the ripcord came out but it seemed to me that the chute did not immediately come out of the pack as I expected it too. I was about to tear into the pack, with my bare hands, when the pilot chute popped out and streamed above me, pulling the main chute out. When the main chute opened, it did so with a pop and stopped my rapid descent with a shock. Then I seemed to be dangling over the world and not moving. I looked around for other chutes but did not see any. Of course, some of the men must have still been in the air but I did not see any of them.

"I then became concerned about the airplane. It was making a wide descending circle to the right and as it completed the circle, seemed to be coming right where I was. Hanging there in the parachute, I felt completely helpless for the first time. If the airplane continued as it was going, it looked as though it would come right at me and if it did not hit me it would come close enough that the slip stream would upset my chute. As the airplane came closer, it seemed to gain some lift and passed over me at a space of about 1,000 feet. It was trailing fire half way back from wing to tail.

"Not long afterwards, a flight of four P-38s came by on their way back to Italy. They dipped their wings as they went by. Of course there was nothing they could do for me now. My only hope was that they would be able to report seeing our airplane and we had bailed out.

"When I was down to a lower altitude, I could see that I was going to land close to a little village on the only road that came through the area. I also noticed that two men in brown uniforms came out of the village and aimed rifles up at me. They kept them trained on me as I descended and landed. The

wind was billowing the parachute out and it would not collapse, so I rose to my feet and started to run toward it to collapse the canopy. I heard the clicks of the bolts of their rifles. I stopped in my tracks, realizing they thought I was trying to escape. I stood still with my hands raised and they stood still with their rifles raised. Shortly, a little man came hustling up. He was obviously an officer and he acted as though he had personally captured George Patton. He immediately searched my pockets and took whatever he found, which was not much. He found a little money and most important, my escape kit, with some money in it. These people were members of the Army of Yugoslavia, which was a puppet regime of the Germans. I had no idea who they were. Our briefings told us that the Partisans could be identified by the fact that they would have a red star on their hat or some other place. I looked for a red star on the uniforms of these soldiers, but the only star they had was a small white one on their caps. Not being able to converse with them, I was in a quandary. How could I find out who they were and if friendly? The only Yugoslavian word I knew was Tito, so I asked in a questioning way, 'Tito, Tito?' The little thief of an officer just laughed and said, 'Nix Tito, Pavolich.' I had no idea who Pavolich was and what he said might have been something else that sounded similar.

"I would like to pause in my personal narrative to explain what happened to the rest of the crew. Two others, beside myself, were captured and became prisoners of war. The other seven were able to contact the Tito partisans or the Chetnicks and were finally returned to Italy. Some of the seven were picked up by the Partisans and some by the Chetnicks. These two organizations were not in agreement and sometimes fought each other, but both were fighting the Germans. I think all the crew members were moved by foot power to the coast, then picked up by daring flyers who came in at night and landed on make-shift landing strips, placed in secluded areas where the Germans were not able to get into. Most of them were in transit about two months before they arrived back in Italy.

"Clark, who I thought was badly wounded had received only a flesh wound. He had lost a lot of blood, but recovered quickly and was sent with the rest.

"The last I saw of the airplane, after I was on the ground was when it came over at about 2,000 feet. It was still flying in a circle with flames trailing back past the tail. It headed off to the south and I soon heard it crash several miles away with a loud explosion.

"My captors took me into the little village and locked me in a room in a large building in the center of town. It was probably City Hall or some such structure. They posted a guard on the door and soon brought a plate of food. I did not know what it was but it tasted pretty good. The next guy that came in said, 'Wine, beer?' I didn't want either one, but decided on beer and he brought me a bottle. They then left me alone to eat.

"Shortly thereafter, a little man was ushered into the room. He looked like a farmer, which is what he was. He had lived in the US for sometime and could speak some English, so they had gone out to get him to talk to me. He kindly brought me some milk in a quart mason jar, which I was glad to receive. I did not know then, but that would be the last fresh milk I would drink for more than a year. Obviously they had asked the little man to ask me about where I was from, what my mission was, etc. I declined to answer that line of questioning and that seemed to distress him. I am sure they gave him a hard time later about not getting the information from me. I questioned him about who my captors were and what they were going to do to me. He told me and I could not understand what he was saying. He kept repeating, 'They will treat you good. They will treat you good.' He did not stay long and I never saw him again.

"Not long after he left, Pyzanowski was brought in. He had landed in the next little village two or three miles down the road, had been captured the same as I, and was badly scared. He was glad to see a face he knew.

"After awhile, we heard a disturbance and went to the window. A group of citizens from the third village had brought Russell Durfee, the tail gunner, using a ladder for a stretcher. He was

obviously wounded and they opened the door to let me go see him. His left leg was shattered below the knee where at least one 20mm shell had hit him. He had small specks all over his face and hands from small bits of shrapnel. He was in great pain and I gave him a shot of morphine from the medical kit. Very soon, a man appeared with a big syringe and made like he was going to inject him with it. I protested, not knowing what it was, but he went right ahead and gave him the shot. He indicated he was the local druggist and the shot was tetanus. Of course, all American military people were immunized against tetanus and did not need another shot, but they did not know that and, I suppose, gave such a shot to anyone with a severe wound. I heard later that he had a severe reaction to this medicine. (Note: Whether Durfee and Pyzanowski traded places at their positions is not clear. The Missing Crew Report, prepared by Operations, had Durfee at one of the waist guns and Pyzanowski as the tail gunner.)

"I believe that they left Durfee outside and took me back into the building. At least I was back inside when another disturbance occurred. Looking out the window I saw a group of German soldiers walk by. At that moment, April 13, 1944, at about 2:00 p.m., I knew that I was a prisoner of war of German forces.

"After a day and a half, Durfee was taken to a hospital by the Germans. His left leg was amputated and he was repatriated to the United States in January, 1945.

"Pyzanowski and I were taken to Germany and he was sent to a prison camp. I was taken to Dulag Luft for interrogation for nine days and then sent to the officers' camp, Stalag Luft III."

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31506 - "REBEL GIRL" - 96TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt. Donald W. Applegate, 0-740180, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt. John A. Finn, 0-684856, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Moses A. Rosenbaum, 0-802671, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Frank P. Motola, Jr., 0-681786, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt. William L. Grafton, 14161843, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Elbert W. Pollard, 18004918, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Alfred R. Szafranek, 12207362, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Glen M. Hedrick, 34038612, L/W.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Charles F. Erpelding, 37324030, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Oliver H. Stohldrier, 37393490, R/O.	(POW)

T/Sgt. Oliver H. Stohldrier, RO. February 11, 1991: "I was the radio operator on Donald Applegate's crew. All of my training was on B-24s and we were sent to Oran, Algeria, to a replacement pool where we spent the month of February. About March 5, we were flown to Foggia to the 96th Squadron. According to Don's log, he got two 25-minute transition flights on March 6 and 7 before qualifying as first pilot.

"Although being credited with 16 missions before being shot down, Don's log shows that we flew 18 of the 23 days from March 9 - 31 (twice on March 15) and nine of the 13 days of April (twice on April 8). I remember we had a lot of missions aborted for bad weather, which probably accounts for the discrepancy in missions credited.

"On our last flight, April 13, we were attacked by Me-109s over Gyor, Hungary. I remember this vividly because I was kneeling, with my head in the bomb bay watching the bomb strikes, when a 20mm shell exploded in the radio room puncturing my rear end, and as I found out when I jumped, my parachute, which contrary to procedure, was on the far side of the radio room. Both the waist gunners, S/Sgt. Szafranek and S/Sgt. Hedrick were also wounded; but more seriously than I was but able to jump. Our plane, 'Rebel Gal' or 'Rebel Girl' had the left tail section completely shot off and the No. 3 engine on fire. The pilot could not get the nose down in order to put out the fire and gave the order to bail out.

"Everyone was able to jump except the co-pilot who refused to leave for some reason and we were told by the Hungarians, who captured us, that he had been killed.

"The crew was widely separated but all later ended up in Stalag Luft III, except Sgts. Szafranek and Hedrick, who had been wounded seriously enough to require hospitalization in Budapest. The three surviving officers and three enlisted men were in the Center Compound and T/Sgt. Grafton, in the West Compound.

"I am sure you have plenty of information regarding the conditions and arrangements in Stalag Luft III, including our evacuation in late January 45 to Stalag 7A, in Moosdorf. At Luft III, at least there was one barracks for enlisted men and for the officers' camp. Their function was supposed to be work details, such as Red Cross parcel distribution and to serve as orderlies. S/Sgt. Erpelding worked on parcels occasionally, most of us, including me, never had any kind of duties other than to take care of ourselves, cooking, laundry, cleaning our own area, etc. I suppose the Germans set up the system on the supposition that our officers required what the British called 'batmen,' and what we delicately referred to as 'butt-boys.'

"Over the years I maintained contact with William Grafton who later finished school and went on to a high level position with NASA Huntsville in early solid fuel rocket development. I occasionally heard from our pilot, Don Applegate. After seeing the names of several others in the membership list of POWs, we recently got together and have had three reunions of the five crew members. Of the original men, the ball gunner, Elbert Pollard, stayed in the service and was killed in a B-36 crash in the 50s in the Aleutians. Charles Erpelding died of natural causes and we have been unable to make contact with Moses Rosenbaum and Alfred Szafranek."

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-32058 - 96TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt.	Kendrick U. Reeves, 0-743788, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Patrick L. Kelly, 0-445437, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Thurman L. Comer, 0-695629, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Robert L. Pioli, 0-685019, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Milburn (NMI) Riddle, 37414928, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Marshall W. Feltner, 33539688, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Jarrel L. Clendenin, 35425669, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Cornelius W. Stinson, 32608417, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	John A. Pezel, 15323048, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Roy (NMI) Wohlbreuck, 33572019, R/O.	(POW)

T/Sgt. Milburn Riddle, UT. March 3, 1992: "Our crew was originally in the 483rd Bomb Group. When we landed in North Africa, we became replacements for the operational losses suffered by the 2nd Bomb Group. We had been waiting for the ground personnel who were coming by boat. We were a full crew and ready and willing to join an experienced Group.

"I was only with the 2nd for a very short time when we were shot down on the mission to Gyor, Hungary on the 13th. Our original pilot was Lt. Robert C. Voss, our navigator was Lt. Albert Leggett, and our co-pilot was Lt. William E. Cahill. I learned later that they had been shot down on 4-16-44.

"We were hit by flak over the target and finished off by fighters. All of the crew were able to bail out OK, but S/Sgt. Cornelius Stinson was killed. I was told that he was killed by civilians. I was close but could not know for sure what took place. The civilians were in a killing mood. Smoke from their burning town was billowing as high as you could see. A German officer came in where we were being held that evening and told us that Stinson was seriously wounded and in a hospital. That was the

last I heard of him. It was only in recent years that I heard from Jarrel Clendenin about his death and where he was buried in France.

"I went through night bombings by the R.A.F. in Budapest. We were taken by box car to Stalag Luft III and then, in January, 1945, we were marched in the ice and snow, ahead of the Russians, for a week. We were then loaded in box cars again and taken to Stalag #7A.

"We were liberated by the U.S. 14th Armored Division, and I was sure glad to arrive in new York on June 6, 1945."

S/Sgt. Jarrel A. Clendenin, RW. February 7, 1992: "As planned, we along with other planes, split from the Group heading for Budapest. Plans were that we were to bomb Marshalling Yards at Gyor and then rejoin the Group, which never happened. Just after we split up we ran into a heavy flak bombardment. German fighters, Me-109s and FW-190s, began entering their own flak and attacking. The sky was soon full of chutes and exploding airplanes.

"Our plane was hit by both flak and fighters. I was firing the right waist gun and a Me-109 was coming right at us. I pressed the trigger and nothing happened. I charged my gun only to discover another 109 coming at me. He was so close I could see his face. I had a perfect target but my gun would not work as he dropped his nose to go under our B-17. Only then was I aware that his salvo had blown a part of the right waist fuselage away along with my ammo belt.

"Orders came to bail out and chutes started leaving the plane. Our ball turret gunner, Marshall Feltner, was trying to get out of the lower ball. Feltner was probably the largest man on the crew and could enter the ball turret wearing one combat boot. I got hold of his hand and snaked him out. I now realized that I did not have a chute on and was getting weak from lack of oxygen. I got hold of my chute and got one ring pressed into the snap; left one I believe. I made one last effort and used my weight and pressed the chute against the fuselage, and it fastened.

"By this time I believe all of the rest of the crew had bailed out. Feltner had gone after I got him out of the ball. I jumped, cleared the plane, and pulled my cord, and the chute lazily opened. At this point I could look below and see planes and chutes and 109s and 190s strafing the chutes. I looked above me and saw our B-17 burning and flying level. I was able to glance at it several times while going down and the plane was still burning and flying. By this time I was low enough to enter the strafing zone and began to get strafed by the 109s and 190s, and they were strafing other chutes as they flew by them. I was low enough to see the Hungarian Home Guard attacking the chutes as they landed. I was low enough to start receiving machine gun fire from the ground. I could also see a crewman being attacked with pitchforks and I landed near them. I began freeing myself from my chute and realized I was being targeted by a machine gun mounted on a tripod. I dove in a ditch, which I thought to be an irrigation ditch. When the shooting let up some, I glanced out of the ditch and could see the crewman was subdued and laying on the ground. I could see that it was Cornelius W. Stinson.

"At this point I could see a German officer stopping the gun from firing and start walking toward me. As he came closer, I stood up, hands raised, to surrender. He said, 'For you the war is over.' I was then herded into a group of others that were captured.

"We were taken to a jail in Budapest and eventually to a POW camp, Stalag Luft III. When the Russians got close, we were marched to Stalag VIIA, Moosdorf. We were liberated by Patton's 14th Armored Division and thence to Camp Lucky Strike, France. From there we caught a boat to the U.S."

2nd Lt. Robert L. Pioli, B. November 7, 1991: "Our crew trained in the United States with the 483rd Bomb Group. Our crew was assigned to the 815th Squadron. Coincidentally, the Squadron Insignia was the Red Devil, very similar to the Red Devil of the 96th Squadron.

"We landed on one of the many airfields around Foggia, Italy in March, 1944. I do not recall when we were told to report to the 2nd Bomb Group, 96th Squadron, as a replacement crew. The 2nd was apparently hurting for crews, and B-17s, and we were transferred as replacements. It didn't bother me in the least. I was eager to get on with it. I was finally a member of the 15th Air Force.

"I came into the Group as a cocky young airman who felt he was immortal. It lasted one day! I can still vividly remember my first day with this veteran combat Group. The B-17s were returning from a mission. I saw blood and guts for the first time. I had heard of B-17s exploding in mid-air, and the 'quaint' custom of counting parachutes to determine how many air crewmen managed to leave a stricken B-17. At that moment it hit me hard. 'I'm not going to survive this war.' I really resigned myself to the reality that I would never see home again.

"The 'veteran' crews paid very little attention to us. Outside of a few polite greetings, they wanted to avoid any close friendship, since one or the other of us was certain to go down sooner or later. It was very hard to swallow but it was an accepted fact of life or death.

"The morning briefings before a mission were fascinating in an eerie way, matter of fact and very business like. You would walk into the briefing room expecting the worst, and in the pit of your stomach wondering if this is the day. The curtain covering the huge map would be opened revealing a ribbon from the Base to the target of the day. The longer the ribbon, the longer the mission, and the room would erupt with moans and groans.

"I tended to discount the intelligence reports. They never told me what I wanted to hear. When they said, 'Expect light anti-aircraft fire over the target,' I thought, it is going to be very heavy; when they said heavy, I would think they were wrong again - it surely is going to be light.

"Photographs of the targets were shown to all, and the sighting points for the bombardiers were pointed out. The photographs were, of course, aerial maps and always perplexing to me. They all looked alike. I wouldn't have recognized an aerial map of my hometown. I would always look over at the other bombardiers and wonder if they saw what I saw. They all seemed to be nodding and knowing where we were going.

"We would then ride out to the tarmac to our airplane and wait for the order to get into the ship and prepare for take-off. Meanwhile the knot in your stomach would get tighter and tighter. The mission take-off was both awe inspiring and frightening. It seemed as though every B-17 ever built lined up, with engines revving. When the green light went up, every B-17 seemed to start taxiing in unison. I'm still in awe today when I see documentation of those take-offs. This was the moment when you were all alone with your thoughts. The actual take-off was frightening when you thought what would happen if a bomb laden B-17 would be so unfortunate to crash. You breathed a sigh of relief when you were safely airborne. The sight of hundreds of B-17s seemingly milling around the sky and then orderly lining up in tight formation was something to behold.

"It was exhilarating to be an integral part of such an armada, bombers all around you as far as you could see and in the far distance, our beloved P-38s, and we liked that, for there was no mistaking their unusual fuselage silhouette. However, when we were under attack by German fighters, everything was a split second and gunners had no time for identification. Anything pointing its nose at a bomber was fired on. I wondered about all the time I had spent in Aircraft Identification class.

"My first mission was a tribulation. I do not remember the target, but well remember that as we flew over Yugoslavia, the air suddenly filled with anti-aircraft fire, puffs of black smoke with red centers, all around us. It was frightening to me, but the veterans of our mixed crew laughed and passed it off as a nuisance, not to worry. I looked down and thought, 'Someone down there is firing with deadly intent. That is not a nuisance.' I then began to set up my Norden bombsight, filling in all data necessary for the legendary pin-point bombing. I was all thumbs. The harder I tried, the worse it got, I was so nervous and scared I was barely functional. Nearing the target, we encountered more anti-aircraft fire. Now it

was heavy. The old saying, 'So heavy you could walk on it,' wasn't far from the truth. I was totally messed up and scared. I dropped on the lead bombardier's bombs and hoped nobody noticed my performance. All that training and I knew I was good at my job, but no one was firing at me then. Now under fire, I was so incompetent.

"After one mission, and almost overnight, I was a hardened veteran. I was still perpetually scared, but now I seemed to accept it and kept it under control. Over the target, a rush of adrenalin would give me a high that was nothing I had ever experienced before or since. I didn't realize how hardened and callous I became until one raid I glanced over to our wingman to see if they had dropped their bombs but they were not there. One moment they were there and the next, completely vanished. I was told over the radio they dropped out of formation and exploded. I felt some remorse for the crew, but not what I expected. Ten men just disappeared and I treating it like another day at the office. There was nothing I could do and simply accepted it as an occupational hazard.

"However, the feeling was somewhat different when you watched a B-17 spiraling down out of control and counting the emergency parachutes. You felt that you were in the ship with the crew, urging them out and counting each tumbling body and open chute as a great victory. You practically shouted, 'Come on, get out, get out,' and when the count reached to ten, you were relieved that everyone got out. If the count was less than ten, you felt great sorrow for those who bought it, and going down with the ship, and then the unwelcome guilty feeling of elation that you were spared. I was totally spent and drained after every mission.

"I do vividly recall the mission to Ploesti. Gyor was a personal catastrophe, but Ploesti was spectacularly frightening. I believe the raid was the 15th Air Force's first visit to Ploesti since the earliest, ill-fated, low level raid. They threw everything at us. You could barely make out the other formations through the anti-aircraft fire. It was dark as night. Fighters did not hit our formation but were all over the B-24s. It was a joke among the B-17 crews that when you saw a German fighter, you held up a sign saying, 'We're B-17s, B-24s following us,' then the fighters, fearing the firepower of the B-17 would leave and wait for the B-24s. They seemed to be doing just that on this raid. We left Ploesti with huge columns of smoke filling the sky. It really was a piece of work, but I didn't want to go back to that place.

"I have since received the official report of my last mission. It was interesting to read, the matter of fact, military description of an event that had such an impact on my life. It was a nice, sunny April day. I was hoping and hoping that this mission would be a milk run. Everything looked so peaceful before the bomb run. Then all hell broke loose! I beg to differ with the official report. Instead of 20 to 30 Me-109s, I thought there were 120 to 130. They seemed to be all over the place! Everyone of the crew began to scream obscenities and directions at the same time - 'Bogies at six o'clock, nine o'clock,' and it seemed all around the clock. It was the 4th of July personified, 20mms exploding in front of me and rockets lobbing in from all directions. The plane began to fill with smoke and the pilot spoke the fateful words, 'We're going down, everyone get the hell out.'

"My first thought was, how the hell does one jump out of an airplane? I never considered this possibility. The Air Force in its infinite wisdom never told me, 'If at anytime you are forced to leave the aircraft at 25,000 feet, you first ---.'

"Physically, every nerve in my body was quivering, but mentally I was thinking like a rocket scientist. How odd I thought. I was also a bit relieved. One never is certain how he would react to such a life threatening situation. I crawled to the nose hatch, I couldn't walk as I was shaking like a leaf in a windstorm. The hatch was already open. The navigator left so quickly I never got a glimpse of him. He apparently knew more than I did.

"I looked down at the ground that seemed so many miles away. I thought that diving wasn't the way to go, so I eased myself out as we did when the plane was on the ground. Wrong, the air stream

slammed me against the fuselage. I was forced to climb back in. I knelt and dove out head first. This was also not the way. I pin wheeled head over backside and became air sick. I couldn't stop pin wheeling, but I thought I had better open my chute, because if it didn't open, I would have time to tear it open. I pulled the cord. What a shock, the harness was apparently a little loose, I felt like someone had kicked me in the testicles. I started to oscillate 180 degrees and I was getting sicker. I was like a rag doll not being able to do a thing but hang. A Me-109 circled me and I wished he would shoot me and get me out of my misery.

"In the distance I could see the air battle and hear the bombs exploding. Then I heard snap, crackle, and pop, and I thought, what the hell is going on? Looking down I could make out a group in uniform and could see flashes from rifles. I shouted, 'this isn't fair, you can't do this.' Then the ground hit me. My ankle popped and I lost consciousness. When I revived, a group of civilians were all around me yelling in Hungarian. I would have been a goner if German soldiers hadn't pulled them off. I was thrown in a stake bodied truck. Civilians suddenly mobbed us, spitting, shouting obscenities, and throwing things. The truck suddenly shot out. I'm not sure we didn't hit someone. The Germans thought this was funny.

"As the truck headed off I realized we were headed towards Gyor. Clouds of smoke were visible in the direction we were driving. We drove into Gyor, and right along side what obviously had been our target. There was a brick wall, intact, but beyond the wall was a shambles. Twisted steel and fires, a real mess. To our right was a residential area of sorts and it was completely intact, not a brick out of place. From what we could see, every bomb fell directly on the target. I thought, boy, we really are as good as we think we are. As we drove by I saw a priest kneeling over what obviously was a deceased victim of the bombing. He rose as we passed, shook his fist and yelled at us. Being Roman Catholic, just hours before I celebrated Mass, partook of communion and was blessed by the priest. I knew God and my Church were on my side. How could this Hungarian priest castigate me for doing my sacred duty? It was confusing.

"We were taken into Budapest, crossed the Danube river and stopped at what I believe was the Hotel Metropol. My reaction was, 'How nice of them and for us. They are putting us up in a hotel.' They prodded us through the lobby and into an ornate ballroom. We were given a slice of ersatz bread (the infamous Schwartzed Brot) and at first glance what really looked like an ice cream bar. It wasn't ice cream, it was pure animal fat of some kind. We were expected to spread it on bread. Ugh! Then, lo and behold, who walks in but a Luftwaffe pilot, preening like a peacock and so resplendent in his bemedaled dress uniform. He pompously informed us he personally shot us down and was going to do the same to the rest of the 'Americanish Luft Bandits' as he referred to us. He was the most overbearing individual I ever met. I was covered with vomit, unshaved, dirty and an ankle that was throbbing like your worst toothache. I told him all Americans did not look like me and one day he would get his due. He laughed. We were in the hotel a short time and I never could understand why this brief stop at such a grand hotel.

"We were taken to a civilian jail for the night. Our cells were at one end, the other end housed civilian prisoners. They were not criminals, they were political prisoners. We didn't sleep a wink. They were really working over the civilians. We heard screams and moans all night. I was sure they were coming for us, but they never came.

"The next morning we were taken to what appeared to be a Hungarian military establishment near or in Budapest. I was shoved in a room better suited for brooms. I was alone in inky darkness and expecting the worst. I have no idea how long I was kept in that place. In retrospect I do not think it was more than two days, but seemed an eternity. I was taken out for interrogation at random times. I never saw the out-of-doors, daylight or a clock during this period. Alone, my mind would relive, over and over again, all those pleasant moments of my life.

"An Africa Korps Major, he made sure I was aware of who and what he was, conducted all the interrogation sessions. He repeatedly asked what our Army was going to do at Anzio and of all things, my home address. I kept telling him my name, rank and serial number per the Geneva Convention. I knew this was all we were required to give and nothing more. One time he shoved an official looking document across the table and said, 'Read.' It was entitled Geneva Convention, and this document actually stated name, rank, serial number and HOME ADDRESS! I brazenly shoved it back and shook my head. It was pure instinct, I was so nervous and scared I couldn't talk if I wanted to. He really became agitated, rose and shouted, 'We have ways of making you talk.' I was sure he was going to pull my finger nails out and hoped he wouldn't do anything to my groin area. At one time he said, 'We could shoot you and no one will ever know,' and pointed a luger at my head. I was terror stricken and only shook my head.

"I just in no way gave my home address. I thought with this information he could, and would, turn my parents into sabotage agents (I truly did believe this would happen) and was convinced my Mother would do anything, and everything, if it meant her son's life.

"Almost as soon as it started, his questioning stopped. All this time he never asked me about my military unit. He seemed to know everything about the 2nd Bomb Group, the Wing, and 15th Air Force. He even had the physical layout of the Base down to the arrangements of some of the offices. I was somewhat perplexed, how could he have all this confidential information and not my home address?

"I was removed from solitary and placed in a rather small room with four other POWs. The room was bare except for a pile of straw for sleeping purposes in one corner. We seemed to be singled out and separated from all the others. We could see other POWs exercising in the courtyard below our room and appearing to be fed and reasonably clean. We were deprived of everything except for occasional food. They harassed us daily, bursting through the door, rifle butting us to attention, then an officer would enter, look us over and leave, never saying a word.

"One night the British RAF conducted a raid nearby. We witnessed a movie-like night bombing raid, search lights, anti-aircraft fire, tracers, rockets, heard the bombs exploding. It was a spectacular show and we stood at the window, foolishly cheering them on. It apparently irritated the guards. They opened up with gunfire into our room, which suddenly became full of bullets. We dove into corners trying to get out of the line of fire. They just went pumping round after round into the room. The firing finally stopped and the door slowly opened. The outside lights cast silhouettes of raised rifles into our darkened room and you could hear them crank another round into the chamber. I was convinced that we were going to be executed. This time I was sure I was going to die. Again I was shaking uncontrollably, praying, and coolly thinking — I can't lie here like an animal and die. When they point their rifles at me I'm going to fight with my bare hands! I was ready to do just that when they closed the door and left. It was a miracle that none of us were hit! At first light, the door burst open, rifle butts again, followed by angry officers asking why we had attempted to escape during the night.

"I see it now for what it was - the initial stage of 'brainwashing.' Over a long period I would have been putty in their hands. It was just a taste of what our POWs in Korea and Nam went through. I am convinced that in expert 'PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE' hands I would have done or said anything our captors requested. I thought at the time I was cock-of-the-walk, but in reality, a rather immature high school graduate. Son of formally uneducated parents and away from a warm and loving home for the first time.

"One morning, I was pulled out of the room and back to interrogation. The major informed me my fellow POWs were being sent to a POW camp and did I want to go with them? My home address and I was out of there. I would have given almost anything to get out of that place and away from him, but I shook my head no. He went into his usual propaganda tirade about our common enemies, the Jews

and the Communists and why was I fighting against the Germans? He went at it for sometime and then disgustedly waved me out. I was placed in a box car and I felt a great relief.

"Sitting in the box car, I began to wonder, 'How in the world am I going to let my Mother know I am alive and not divulge my address?' If I thought I was in a quandary it was compounded when an individual wearing an official uniform walked into the car. He passed out POW letter forms and informed me that we could now write home. Now what the hell was I to do? Give them my secret or let my parents wait until the end of the war to find out whether their son was dead or alive? My Mother would never survive this cruel mental torture. I wrote home! I did not want to go back to that room.

"I learned after the war that this letter never reached my Mother. I'm convinced now that if I had refused to write home, the major surely would have hauled my butt out of the car and into that room. I still have a gnawing feeling that I did not conduct myself in a military manner, befitting an Air Force Officer.

"We traveled northward in the box car through Southern Europe. It was both quaint and beautiful country. To one who thought a trip to downtown Niagara Falls was an event, this was *National Geographic* come alive. I faced another aspect of war that was enlightening; the people in these countries were hostile towards us. The Red Cross at one stop refused to give us food. All along the route people made threatening gestures and screamed at us. I thought we were liberators and why didn't they welcome us as such, but war, for any noble cause, is hell for the poor people who live in it. I can now understand their attitude toward us.

"We arrived in Sagan, Germany in early May. I was a mess. My jaw was so sore I could hardly open my mouth. My kidney area ached from the pounding and my ankle was still throbbing. I hadn't washed, brushed my teeth or even taken off my clothes for a month or so. But if I thought I was in tough shape what I was about to witness made me look like Little Boy Blue! As we marched into camp we passed what appeared to be a garbage dump. Out of all this trash came things that did not appear to be human. Pitiful creatures, literally clad in rags. The guards prodded us on and said, 'Ruskies, Ruskies.' No small wonder the Russian POWs went berserk when they were finally liberated.

"I was assigned to the Center compound, Stalag Luft III. Life in a POW compound has been documented in books and films. One who has not experienced this life could never relate to the emotional roller coaster that a POW experiences."

Lt. Pioli was evacuated from Stalag Luft III, January 27, 1945, and marched in the bitter cold for several days, loaded into a box car and shipped to Stalag VIIA, Moosdorf, Germany. He was liberated April 29, 1945, flown to Camp Lucky Strike, France, then transported by boat to the United States, arriving June 4, 1945. After a 60-day leave, he reported to Atlantic City. After 30 days, he received his discharge from the Army Air Corps.

S/Sgt. Michael Nimirowski, Ball Turret Gunner on the crew of 1st Lt. Oliver O. Thigpen. Assigned to the 96th Squadron in January, 1944. February 16, 1991: 'Original members of my crew were 1st Lt. Oliver O. Thigpen, Pilot; 2nd Lt. Harlan C. Wisner, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Thurman W. Comer, Navigator; 2nd Lt. Clarence A. Cowan, Bombardier; T/Sgt. Louis W. Vitali, Upper Turret; myself, Ball Turret; S/Sgt. Harold Finkelstein, Right Waist; S/Sgt. John B. Connors, Left Waist; S/Sgt. George A. Kemp, Tail Gunner; and T/Sgt. Joseph P. O'Connor, Radio Operator.

"My first mission with the 96th was to Albano, Italy, on 10 February. On the 22nd of February, I was scheduled to fly in plane #401, 'Dark Eyes,' but when we got to the flight line we found that the lower ball turret would not operate and we were canceled. Joe O'Connor, our radio operator, was transferred to another plane and made the mission.

"23 February our target was Steyr, Austria, and we were flying in #777, 'GIN MILL.' Overcast clouds kept us from getting to the target and after a flight of 3:30 hours, we returned to base.

"24 February, we were assigned to fly plane #145, 'Gremlin,' so when we got to the flight line we found that it had been grounded. I do not know the reason why.

"25 February, I was assigned to plane #453, 'Yankee Do Dit.' I thought we were going to Klagenfurt, but somewhere along the way they must have changed it to Regensburg. After about 40 minutes in the air we had trouble with No. 2 engine and it had to be feathered. We had to return to our field. Lt. Wisner, our original co-pilot, was flying as co-pilot on another plane and was shot down.

"One memorable mission that I can recall was on 13 April 1944. The mission was to Gyor, Hungary. I was awakened and told that I was going on a mission I was not scheduled for. I was flying with a crew piloted by Lt. Sebian. Our position in the formation was the 1st Group, 1st Squadron, #4 position. Take-off time was 8:00 a.m. and estimated target time was 12:00. We got no flak at the target but were jumped by enemy fighters, which hit the lower Squadron before P-38s came into the battle. I saw four of our bombers go down and counted four chutes from one, five from the second, ten from the third, and none from the fourth. Our original navigator, Lt. Thurman Comer, was flying in #058 and was shot down. I made a note that the second element was flying a poor straggling formation.

"I completed my 50 missions 14 July 1944, with a trip to Budapest. I went on missions to France, Italy, Ploesti, flew the Shuttle to Russia, Sofia, Klagenfurt, Belgrade, Budapest, and Munich to name a few. My original pilot, Lt. Thigpen, suffered a severe wound on a mission to the Atzerdorf Aircraft Factory, Austria and so with the exceptions of Lt. Wisner and Lt. Comer, our crew were pretty lucky. Some of the pilots I flew with were Major Evans, Major Hillhouse, Major Jordan, and Lt. Col. Ryan. My original pilot, Lt. Thigpen, he was the best without question. Put it this way, all the pilots were good; I came back."

PLOESTI, RUMANIA - MISSION NO. 179 - APRIL 15, 1944

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 36 aircraft and dropped 55.9 tons of 100-lb. GP bombs into the cloud covered city. Marshalling Yards were the intended target. No photos were taken due to the cloud cover. Later recon photos showed destruction of storage tanks at a pumping station, destruction of storage tanks and buildings at a refinery, some damage in the yards, and scattered hits in a buildup area. The damage was in the southwest of the city. Ten to 12 E/A were seen with only one making one pass at the formation. Flak at the target was moderate to intense but inaccurate. Moderate, accurate flak was encountered en route, 37 miles southwest of Turnul Severin, Romania. Seventeen B-17s received minor damage. There were no losses and no injuries.

BRASOV, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 180 - APRIL 16, 1944

Lt. Col. Donald H. Ainsworth, Group Operations Officer, led 29 aircraft to bomb the Aircraft Factory at Brasov. The Group got within 135 miles of Brasov when forced to turn back due to a cloud front. Several attempts to penetrate the front were made without success. Twenty-one aircraft dropped 100-lb. fragmentation bombs in the Adriatic Sea while eight others returned their bombs to Base. One early return dropped its bombs on a rail line 67 miles north, northeast of Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Nine to 12 E/A were seen but did not attack. No flak was encountered.

B-17 #42-97581, piloted by 2nd Lt. Robert C. Voss, 96th Squadron, was reported missing, and last seen at approximately 38 miles north-northwest of Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-97581 - 96TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt. Robert C. Voss, 0-689417, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt. William E. Cahill, 0-759350, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. Albert N. Leggett, 0-702937, N.	(EVADED)
T/Sgt. Edward C. Ross, Jr., 33271946, TOG.	(EVADED)

T/Sgt.	Otis C. Carpenter, Jr., 34598995, U/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Robert F. Vaillancourt, 39121922, L/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Anthony S. Gruchawka, 12146079, L/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	James J. Henry, 39283581, T/G.	(EVADED)
T/Sgt.	John D. Vinson, 13136009, R/O.	(EVADED)

This was a nine-man crew.

Statement of T/Sgt. John D. Vinson, 26 April 1944, after evading and return to Allied control: "Before arriving at the target, No. 3 engine went out due to a mechanical failure. The engine was feathered and since the pilot could not keep up, he decided to return. While passing over the Romanian border, we were hit by flak and the electrical system of No. 1 engine was shot out. The plane was losing altitude and the pilot gave the order to bail out. Everyone bailed out successfully. I bailed out at 9,500 feet and landed east of Nicolae. I saw the pilot captured by the Germans. Myself and the other crew members were evacuated together."

BELGRADE, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 181 - APRIL 17, 1944

Major Charles H. Hillhouse, 96th Squadron Commanding Officer, led 32 aircraft and dropped 96 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Belgrade. Strike photos showed the bombing to be fairly accurate with hits on railroad sidings, tracks, rolling stock, warehouses, and a locomotive depot. Flak was intense and accurate resulting in damage to 18 aircraft and injury to S/Sgt. Floyd W. Dalton, R/W, 96th Squadron, who received a moderately severe wound in the right elbow.

Flying from the same airfield at Amendola, Italy, occupied by the 2nd and 97th Bomb Groups, was the 150th Squadron of the British Royal Air Force. During that time, my tent mates and I had the opportunity to meet some of the RAF crewmen. They received a ration of whiskey, which we did not. Two of our good RAF friends, Sgt. Charles Miles, from Liverpool, England, and Sgt. Bill McInerny, from Canada, did not drink so we traded some of our PX rations for their whiskey. Needless to say, there were occasions when we had some happy parties! I found Charles Miles in 1991 because the Mayor of Liverpool was kind enough to post an inquiry for me, in the Liverpool newspaper.

Charles Miles, June 10, 1991: "I volunteered for aircrew service in the R.A.F. when I was 17-1/2 (all aircrews were volunteers) and after physical and written exams lasting three days, I was accepted and then sent home to wait call-up at age of 18. In due time, I was training as a navigator. I was due to complete my training in Canada, but 'shipping' was difficult in those days, so there was a back-log and, of course, being young and impetuous, when my C.O. suggested Air Gunnery, where I would be trained in England, I accepted. Six weeks (July '41) I was a Sgt. air gunner, and ready to take on the Luftwaffe all by myself. Such is youth!

"The R.A.F., unlike the U.S.A.A.F. (as it was then), assembled us into 'crews,' so that we flew, where possible, with the same guys for the full tour of ops (missions). I met my crew at O.T.U. (Operational Training Unit) at a base, believe it or not, Moreton-in-the-Marsh, near a lovely Cotswald market town of the same name. From that base we finished training by simulating operational conditions, bombing, gunnery, navigational exercises, etc. My crew (we trained in Wellingtons) were: PILOT: Sgt. John F. Crombie (Royal Australian Air Force). NAVIGATOR: Flt. Lt. 'Bill' Owens (R.A.F.). BOMB AIMMER: Sgt. Ted Officer (Royal Australian Air Force). RADIO OP.: Sgt. Frank Moss (Royal Australian Air Force), KIA in 1944. AIR GUNNER: Sgt. Charles Miles (R.A.F.).

"You will see that the pilot is lower in rank than the navigator. This was quite normal in the R.A.F., where sometimes the Tail Gunner would be the equivalent of a Captain, while the pilot was a Sergeant. We didn't think anything of it! The Pilot was the boss, or first, among equals.

"In time, after passing out of O.T.U., we flew to North Africa to Koirouan, in Tunisia, where we had a few easy missions. Then Foggia was captured and we were sent there in November 1943. As you know, the capture of Foggia, with all the air bases, made a tremendous difference in our respective Air Forces' ability to bomb strategic targets in Southern and South-eastern Europe.

"While you fellows went out by day, and believe me we know how tough that was, our job was to reinforce your efforts by night. My log was lost in a house flood (burst pipes), but memory tells me that we bombed, always from 10,000 feet or lower (the Wellingtons couldn't go any higher with a full load of 9 x 500-lb. H.E.), Sofia, Budapest, Bucharest, Ploesti, Freursbrunn (Vienna), Genoa, Verona, Malfalcone, Marshalling Yards in various parts of Yugoslavia, Leghorn (Livorno), and we gave assistance to advancing armies. We also took part in mine laying activities on the River Danube. The danger on those trips was that the mines - long cylinders with a small parachute - had to be dropped from exactly 200 feet, otherwise they would split open or sink without arming correctly.

"I was in the 150 Squadron and there were five other Wellington Squadrons, 37, 40, 70, 104, and 142 as well as ours. There were three Squadrons of Liberators (B-24s), 178 of the R.A.F. and 31 and 34 of the South African Air Force. The operations lasted from April to October 1944, and 12 aircraft (six of each type) were lost but caused wide dislocation of shipping. We laid 1,381 mines, mainly 1,000-lb. AMK V type. We made 18 attacks. Main area of attacks: Approaches to Belgrade, Budapest, and Bratislava - but a whole river was mined.

"On these missions we had to fly up-moon, through heavy ground fire and searchlights, and having dropped the mine, we had to climb quickly to avoid going into cliffs, hills, etc. on the banks of the river. I might also add that we were all so busy with our various jobs, we felt no sense of danger at all. I was so busy returning fire and trying to shoot out searchlights that it was a surprise to me when the navigator gave us a course for home. I've spoken to many people about this, including some of your gunners, and they all told the same story. It's only after it is all over that you realize what you have done. Perhaps it's just as well, otherwise you wouldn't go in - or would we? We flew one daylight mission assisting the Yugoslavian Partisans in a fire fight with the Germans.

"The Russians over-ran the eastern end of the river and the Allies, under General Patton, took a stranglehold on the western end. There is no doubt that as far as the R.A.F. is concerned, the mining of the Danube was a most successful campaign.

"I finished the war in England as a Warrant Officer, which I say is equivalent to a Top Sergeant in the American forces, and as we were all young, we had to stay in while the older men demobilized ('demobbed') and we took their service jobs. I finished my full-time service, after spells as Rail Transportation Officer in Cambridge, Embarkation Officer at Newport, South Wales, and R.T.O. in London.

"I stayed in the reserves (again a voluntary thing) and was commissioned in the late 1960s. All this entailed was a commitment to serve two weeks at summer camp each year, usually at a base of my own choosing. This was no problem for a school teacher with long summer vacations. I went variously to parachute school, gliding school, navigation school, etc. and got paid for it! My association with the R.A.F. ended in 1966, but as you know, I'm in the Aircrew Association - our local H.Q. is in Llandudno, about three miles away.

"I remember 1st Sgt. John McWeeney very well - a man I respected greatly, and Tom McGurk - a great character. I also remember J. B. Connors from Jackson, Michigan. The Canadian - Bill McInerney - I tried to find again, but to no avail.

CASTELFRANCO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 182 - APRIL 20, 1944

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 24 aircraft to bomb the Marshalling Yards in this town. Arriving at the target area, the Group found a 10/10 cloud cover and returned to Base without bombing. Five to

seven E/A were seen but were chased away by the P-38 escort. Flak at Padua caused minor damage to seven B-17s. There were no casualties.

PLOESTI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 183 - APRIL 21, 1944

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 35 aircraft to bomb the Marshalling Yards in this city. They were called back by 5th Wing Headquarters 50 miles from the Yugoslavian coast due to weather. All aircraft returned their 500-lb. RDX bombs without incident.

WIENER NEUSTADT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 184 - APRIL 23, 1944

Major Charles H. Hillhouse, 96th Squadron Commanding Officer, led 39 aircraft to bomb the Aircraft Factory in this city. Forty-eight miles north of Zagreb, Yugoslavia the Group encountered a cloud layer from 19,000 to 21,000 feet and could not penetrate it after several attempts. All aircraft returned to Base without incident.

2nd Lt. Thomas J. Carroll, Radar Navigator, is reported missing in action this date, while flying as Radar Navigator with another Group.

PLOESTI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 185 - APRIL 24, 1944

Major James Ellis, 20th Squadron Commanding Officer, led 36 aircraft and dropped 106.50 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards in this city. Bomb strike photos showed extensive damage to rolling stock with many explosions occurring, several branch lines cut, and direct hits on highways.

A 40-minute fighter attack started at the I.P. Approximately 20 to 30 E/A, consisting of Me-109s, FW-190s, and DW-520s (French planes) attacked aggressively and caused damage to five B-17s. 2nd Lt. Orehl C. Fields, 429th Squadron Bombardier, suffered wounds to three fingers on left hand caused by 20mm shell.

Flak at the target was both tracking and barrage, which resulted in damage to 28 B-17s and injury to one man. Flak was described as intense and accurate. S/Sgt. Howard S. Williams, 96th Squadron Tail Gunner, suffered a slight wound to the right thumb.

Fortress gunners claims were: Each credited with destruction of a Me-109 were S/Sgt. John C. Clark, LT, 20th Squadron and 2nd Lt. Edwin R. Bentley, N, 96th Squadron. Credited with destruction of a DW-520 was S/Sgt. Leslie H. Wolfe, TG, 96th Squadron. Each credited with possible destruction of a Me-109 were Cpl. Thomas J. Russell, TG, Sgt. Grady M. Roberts, RW, and Sgt. Edwin E. Taylor, of the 20th Squadron. T/Sgt. Thomas J. O'Connor, UT, 429th Squadron, was credited with damage to a Me-109.

VICENZA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 186 - APRIL 25, 1944

At 0645 hours, crews were briefed to bomb the Werk I of the Aircraft Factory at Wiener Neustadt, Austria. The mission was scrubbed and crews briefed to bomb the Marshalling Yards at Vicenza. Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 32 aircraft to within 20 miles of Ancona before running into a cloud cover that could not be penetrated, after an attempt of one hour. The Group then returned its load of bombs to Base.

PIOMBINO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 187 - APRIL 28, 1944

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 36 aircraft and dropped 108 tons of 500-lb. bombs on this west coast town. It was reported that marine traffic had increased carrying supplies to German troops at the Anzio Beachhead. Strike photos showed hits near power houses, direct hits on Refractory Material Stores Buildings of the Steel Works and Tin Plate Mills, and hits in the water, possibly damaged a 'F' boat.

Flak at the target was light and inaccurate causing slight damage to two B-17s. Ten to 15 E/A were sighted in the vicinity of Ancona, with six making one pass at the formation before being engaged by the P-51 escort. There was no damage to the B-17s and no injuries by either flak or E/A.

TOULON, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 188 - APRIL 29, 1944

Colonel Herbert E. Rice led 35 aircraft to bomb submarines in dry-dock at Toulon. There were 105 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs dropped into a very effective smoke screen at the target. Strike photos indicated that none of the assigned dry-docks were hit, however, bombs extended through barracks, repair shops and possibly into dry-docks at the north end of the Basin. Flak was intense but fairly inaccurate with ten aircraft receiving minor damage. Six to nine Me-109s made one ineffective pass at the last Squadron of the Second Wave before being driven off by the P-51 escort. No damage was inflicted and there were no injuries.

REGGIO EMILIA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 189 - APRIL 30, 1944

Lt. Col. Donald H. Ainsworth, Group Operations Officer, led 35 aircraft and dropped 50.28 tons of 20-lb. incendiary bombs on the Airdrome at Reggio Emilia. The 2nd Bomb Group followed the 97th Bomb Group in bombing this target. Strike photos showed that not one bomb of the 2nd fell in the assigned area but 40% fell in the south half of the landing area and the remainder were south and southeast of the airdrome. Combined efforts of the 2nd and 97th showed destruction of 11 single engine, one twin engine, and damage to one multi-engine aircraft plus considerable damage to residences, barracks, and other structures. There was neither flak nor fighter resistance and all aircraft returned safely to Base.