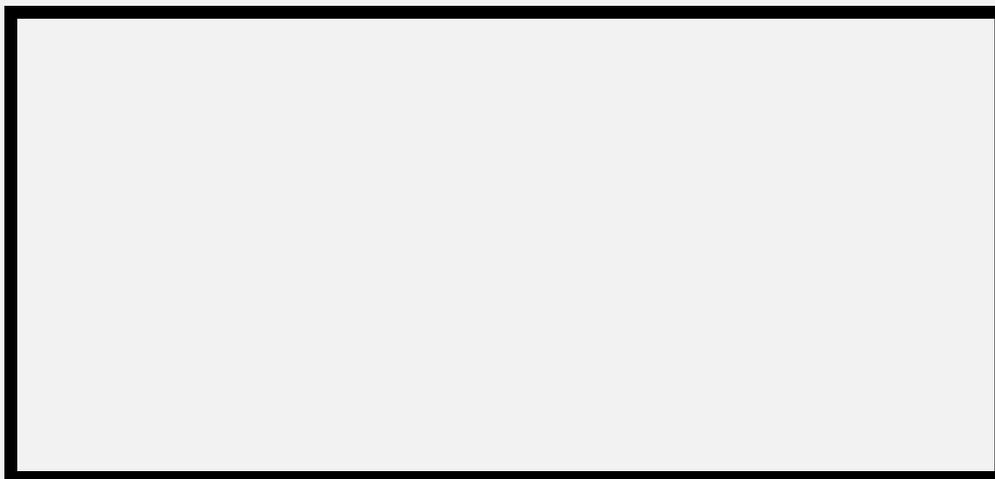


# The Second Was First



The lives and times of the men of the Second Bombardment Group (Heavy) during World War II. Training, deployment, the missions, missing air crews, personal stories, escape narratives, and reflections of the author during combat with the 12th and 15th Air Forces in North Africa and Italy, 1942-1945.

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*Cover photograph:* “Tail Crazy,” A B-17 of the 49th Squadron. A 20mm cannon was installed in the tail, replacing one 50 caliber machine gun. It was an attempt to offset the 20mm cannons in the enemy aircraft. (Picture furnished by Charles Hollenberg, Tail Gunner, 49th Squadron.)

*Back cover photograph:* Formation of B-17s of the 2nd Bombardment Group over Italy on the way to the target.

*Description of emblems on cover (top left clockwise):* 20th Bomb Squadron: Approved June 12, 1924. A pirate standing on an aerial bomb and hurling a hand grenade; 429th Bomb Squadron: Approved May 12, 1930. A Yellow quatrefoil bordered with red and Indian head in black war paint with three red feathers attached to scalp lock. Indian’s arms are holding a drawn bow and arrow in black; 96th Bomb Squadron: Approved March 4, 1924 from World War I emblem. A red devil with a white aerial bomb against a black triangle with white edges; 2nd Bombardment Group: Libertatem Defendimus; 49th Bomb Squadron: Approved March 3, 1924 from World War I emblem. Wolf’s head against an orange disc edged with gray.

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## *Table of Contents*

GLOSSARY OF TERMS .....	III
FOREWORD .....	IV
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	VI
ROLL OF HONOR .....	VIII
WORLD WAR II CAMPAIGNS .....	XI
PRE-WORLD WAR II - 1918/1941 .....	1
ORGANIZATION AND TRAINING .....	3
MOVE TO COMBAT .....	16
OPERATIONS: APRIL/JUNE, 1943 .....	33
OPERATIONS:JULY/NOVEMBER 1943 .....	58
OPERATIONS:DECEMBER 1943- JANUARY 1944 .....	101
OPERATIONS: FEBRUARY 1944 .....	138
OPERATIONS: MARCH, 1944 .....	215
OPERATIONS: APRIL, 1944 .....	238
OPERATIONS: MAY/JUNE 1944 .....	268
OPERATIONS: JULY, 1944 .....	289
OPERATIONS: AUGUST, 1944 .....	317
OPERATIONS: SEPTEMBER, 1944 .....	360
OPERATIONS: OCTOBER, 1944 .....	374
OPERATIONS: NOVEMBER, 1944 .....	395
OPERATIONS: DECEMBER, 1944 .....	412
OPERATIONS:JANUARY/FEBRUARY, 1945 .....	447
OPERATIONS: MARCH, 1945 .....	480
OPERATIONS: APRIL/MAY/JUNE,1945 .....	505
THE FINAL CHAPTER .....	511
INDEX .....	514

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

A/C	Aircraft	Ma	Macchi - Italian aircraft
AFCE	Automatic Flight Control	Me	Messerschmitt - German aircraft
B	Bombardier (BOMB)	MIA	Missing in action
B/T	Ball Turret - gunner	Mickey	Radar (operator)
CO	Commanding Officer	N	Navigator (Nav)
C/P	Co-pilot (CP)	OD	Officer of the day
C/Q	Charge of quarters	OSS	Office of Strategic Services
DED	Dead - deceased	P	Pilot
E	Engineer-upper turret	PDI	Pilot directional indicator
E/A	Enemy aircraft	PFF	Pathfinder Force (Radar)
ETA	Estimated time of arrival	RDX	Very high explosives (bombs)
EUS	Evacuated to the United States	POW	Prisoner of war
FFI	French Forces of the Interior-resistance fighters	RAF	Royal Air Force
Frag	Fragmentation bombs	R/O	Radio Operator - gunner
Flak	German anti-aircraft fire	RR	Railroad
FW	Focke Wulf - German aircraft	RTD	Returned
GP	General purpose bombs	R&R	Rest and Rehabilitation
H.I.A.	Heavy, intense, accurate (anti-aircraft fire)	R/W	Right waist-gunner
I.A.S.	Indicated air speed	SOP	Standard operating procedure
IFF	Identification - friend-foe	T/G	Tail gunner
I.P.	Initial Point of bombing run	TOG	Togglier
KIA	Killed in action	USO	United Service Organization
KMS	Kilometers	U/T	Upper turret gunner (engineer)
L/T	Lower turret-gunner (ball)	VHF	Very high frequency
L/W	Left waist-gunner	USAF	United States Army Air Force

# FOREWORD

This is the story of the men of the Second Bombardment Group (Heavy) during their training and combat in North Africa and Italy during World War II. Their aircraft was the famous B-17 “Flying Fortress,” designed and built by the Boeing Aircraft Company in Seattle, Washington. The B-17 was one of the two heavy bombers of the Air Corps flying combat missions in the European Theater of Operations. The B-24 was the other bomber in use at that time. Eventually the B-29 was put into service but only saw action in the Pacific.

The B-17 was a remarkable sturdy aircraft, one that could withstand heavy punishment and still bring her crews home. But unlike the modern aircraft of today, it was not pressurized and the men were required to wear heavy clothing to protect themselves from below zero temperatures and also wear uncomfortable oxygen masks at high altitudes. Many were the times when men lost their oxygen systems and died from lack of oxygen. Anoxia and frost bite were common.

This story could well apply to any of the four B-17 Groups that first served in North Africa as part of the 12th Air Force, and then in Italy with the 15th Air Force. The 97th and 301st Bomb Groups had already seen action over the European Continent; flying from bases in England. They had been ordered to North Africa after the invasion of North Africa. The 99th Bomb Group was the next to arrive, from the United States, and soon after, the 2nd Bomb Group arrived, also from the United States.

Living conditions in North Africa were terrible. Malaria, dysentery, sand storms and the terrible heat took a toll on both ground personnel and the air crews. There was a shortage of everything; food, supplies, equipment, etc. Badly damaged planes became “Hangar Queens,” stripped to keep other planes in the air. There were no hangars, all work was done in the open. Airstrips were dirt, and eventually a steel matting was laid down on some airstrips.

Walt Clausen, a bomb loader in the Ordnance Section of the 96th Squadron, describes the conditions best in his book, *G. I. Journey*. “Seemingly left unsung, however, have been the battle efforts of the many thousands who, collectively, formed the Mediterranean Bomber Command. Their contributions will long be remembered by those former ground crew members, who, toiling doggedly by day through the broiling desert heat and braving by night the nerve shattering blasts of cascading German bombs, were, nevertheless, profoundly determined that nothing short of judgement day itself would prevent them from keeping the planes in the air. Without the whole hearted cooperation of all of the ground echelon, not a ship would have left the runways to spread over the enemy’s battlements its cargo of destruction and death.

“The glamour of the air action -- if glamour is to be found in the vicious air battle -- lays siege to and holds fast, the imagination. Fiery slugs spewing their angry song along the high sky-trail leave little to be desired in the makeup of any tale. Living each day on the brink of eternity, the combat crew drew strength from the boldness of their decisions, which sustained them during their fighting hours.

“Things were different for those on the ground. War to a weary mechanic meant the overhaul of a balky motor through a sleepless, enemy filled night. Combat seemed to those in Communications dreary, unending hours receiving and passing on the thousand and one directives so necessary to the successful completion of the following dawn’s mission. To men of the Ordnance Section, battle against the enemy meant a nightly, back-breaking effort, manhandling an enormous amount of bomb tonnage from dispersal area to the open-belly doors of the ever hungry Flying Forts. The sweating bunch in the Armament shack viewed its slow passing through the broken sights and burned out barrels of the numerous battle ruined machine guns. To the cooks trapped in the bake-oven heat in the confines of the Squadron’s mess, the great tumultuous upheaval appeared as a never-ending procession of grimy, unwashed air personnel waiting out endless miles of winding chow lines. War to the Medical

Department, ensconced in its quarters of canvas, meant the repair of broken bodies, the restoration of a shattered faith. Too often, to the men in Operations, the true meaning of discord between nations was most fully realized by the dispatching to the nearest kin the pitifully small pile of belongings so poignantly stacked alongside an empty bunk, yes, the tornadic winds of aerial warfare beat strongly upon all in the Group.”

The move to Italy was a most welcome change. Food, supplies and equipment became more readily available. Two more B-17 Groups, the 463rd and the 483rd, were added to the 5th Wing, and with the addition of fifteen B-24 Groups, the 15th Air Force became part of a great striking force. Seven Fighter Groups eventually flew fighter escort.

Living conditions also improved. Although tents were the living quarters, many men eventually made improvements by adding “Tuffa” block walls with the tent as a cover. Doors, windows, flooring and make-shift stoves were added for greater comfort. The eventual building of permanent offices, mess halls and recreation halls made life more liveable.

The weather presented problems. Winters were long. Rains, snow, windstorms, and the mud made conditions, especially on the line, extremely difficult. Nights and days were still long, tasks were still the same. For the flight crews, the missions became longer, the flak increased in intensity, and the enemy fighters were being encountered in greater numbers. Most missions were still over water, the Alps, and other mountainous regions of the Balkans making emergency landing virtually impossible. Weather forced many missions to be aborted, some of a very long range, which was just as exhausting to crews had the mission been completed.

So, this book is dedicated to all those men of the 2nd Bombardment Group, both the living and the dead, who shared the good times, the bad times, the laughter and the tears. Bless them all! Bless them all!

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# ROLL OF HONOR

**T**hese brave young men gave their lives to prevent oppression of others. They were the cream of America's youth. May their names, and deeds, never be forgotten.

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Orville W. Reilly, Jr.	Ellsworth L. Simpson, Jr.	Lloyd O. Terry	John T. Westmorland
Jacob V. Reiss	Louis H. Simpson	Herbert D. Thomas	Dwight C. Wheeler
Raymond E. Ressler	Willie P. Skeffington	Thaddeus G. Thomas	John W. Wick
Jack (NMI) Reznick	John E. Skoba	Guy A. Thompson	Fred O. Wickham
Charles J. Rheinheimer	Robert K. Slocum	Harold (NMI) Thompson	Donald D. Wickland
Owen E. Rice, Jr.	Chester A. Smith	James W. Thompson	Charles W. Willett
Howard E. Richardson	Clair J. Smith	Scott R. Thompson	Ernest H. Williams
Leroy P. Rigney	Clarence F. Smith	Walter S. Thompson, Jr.	John C. Williams
David A. Robins	Paul H. Smith	Maurice A. Tilbey	John D. Williams, Jr.
Louis A. Rodriguez	Alfred E. Snyder	Teddy V. Tomasik	John N. Wilson, Jr.
Maynard T. Rogers	Adam F. Sokolowski	Oliver A. Toole	Raymond L. Wilson
Robert H. Rogers	Daniel P. Soltis	David B. Torrey	Thomas W. Wilson
David G. Rohrig	Clarence W. Southern	James E. Totty	Joseph S. Wojcik
Oscar (NMI) Rome	Hayden B. Speede	Walter P. Tront	Robert S. Wolfe
Raphel (NMI) Rose	Kenneth W. Spinning, Jr.	Donald R. Turner	Robert C. Wolfe
Donald S. Rosenow	Edward R. Spriggs	Fred S. Turnquist	Earl C. Wollenwebber
Melvin L. Rowe	Jack (NMI) Stacy	Bruce S. Upton	Harold (NMI) Wolquitt
Richard E. Rozzelle	Dudley E. Standridge	Frank W. Upton	Richard S. Wood
Erwin (NMI) Rubenstein	William J. Staugas	Leo H. Valentine	Charles L. Woods
Roy R. Rule	Robert W. Steele	Charles T. Valys	Robert E. Woods
William A. Runyon	Marvin J. Steinfeld	R. J. Vandling	Henry T. Wright
John F. Ryan	George F. Steinheuser	John P. Vandy	Thomas G. Wyatt
William I. Ryan, Jr.	Clayton L. Stemwedel	William J. Vavrik	John P. Yatsco
Joseph D. Samora	Paul (NMI) Stephens	Peter A. Victor	Chester R. Yeager
Furman M. Scheiderman	Hugh A. Stevenson	Donald W. Waddell	Eric J. Zachrison
Harold (NMI) Schirmer	Charles M. Stewart	Clifton O. Wade	Raymond L. Zeiter, Jr.
Eugene R. Schojan	Robert C. Stewart	Edward I. Wagner	Thomas A. Zelasko
Ivan L. Schraeder	Cornelius W. Stinson	Ernest W. Wagoner	Warren C. Ziegler

There was a painstaking search to make this Roll of Honor as accurate as possible. Should the reader have some authoritative addition, or correction, a reply would be appreciated, both for the author and the history records of the current 2nd Bombardment Association Group/Wing.

# WORLD WAR II CAMPAIGNS

## AMERICAN THEATER:

Submarine Patrol: December 8, 1941 - May 28, 1942

## EUROPEAN THEATER:

Air Combat - EAME Theater	December 1941 - May 11, 1945
Tunisian	November 12, 1943 - May 11, 1943
Sicilian	May 14, 1943 - August 17, 1943
Naples-Foggia	August 18, 1943 - January 21, 1943
Rome-Arno	January 22, 1944 - September 9, 1944
North Appennines	September 10, 1944 - April 4, 1945
Po Valley	April 5, 1945 - May 8, 1945
Air Offensive Europe	July 4, 1942 - June 5, 1944
Southern France	August 15, 1944 - September 14, 1944
Central Europe	March 22, 1945 - May 11, 1945
Northern France	July 25, 1944 - September 14, 1944
Anzio	January 22, 1944 - May 24, 1944
Normandy	June 6, 1944 - July 24, 1944
Rhineland	September 15, 1944 - March 21, 1945

## DISTINGUISHED UNIT CITATIONS

Steyr, Austria	- February 24, 1944 - WDGO June 6, 1944
Regensburg, Germany	- February 25, 1944 - WDGO October 9, 1945

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# 1

## PRE-WORLD WAR II - 1918/1941

The history of the 2nd Bombardment Group (H) traces its origin to 10 September 1918, when, the First Day Bombardment Group was organized at Amanty, France. The 11th, 20th, 96th and 166th Aero Squadrons were assigned to the organization at this time. The 96th Squadron, equipped with French built Breguet bombers, had operated independently before it became part of the First Day Bombardment Group. The other Squadrons were being equipped with the DeHaviland (DH-4) aircraft.

The Group entered combat on 12 September 1918, attacking enemy troop concentrations to interfere with the enemy's reinforcements and supplies to the front during the Allied offensive at St. Mihiel. At the opening of the St. Mihiel offensive, however, only the 11th, 20th and the 96th Squadrons were ready for combat. The 96th Squadron, by virtue of experience, did the most effective work at the beginning of that campaign. The Group also took part in the Meuse-Argonne offensive, attacking behind enemy lines, and conducting bombing operations that helped to protect Allied ground forces by diverting German pursuit planes from the battle lines. The Group participated in one of the great bombing raids on 9 October when 353 Allied planes (including 200 bombers), under the command of William Mitchell, struck a concentration point where German troops were preparing for a counter attack against the Allied offensive in the Meuse-Argonne area. The Group also participated in the Lorraine offensive and campaign honors were given the Group for those three campaigns.

During the period from September 1918 to November, the Group dropped a total of 194,340 pounds of bombs and received many commendations. In November, soon after the Armistice had been signed, the 1st Day Bombardment Group was demobilized in France. The 11th, 20th and 96th Squadrons returned to the United States, 2 May 1919.

The 49th Aero Squadron, not a part of the 1st Day Bombardment Group, arrived in England 1 February 1918, moved to France 2 July 1918 and flew the Spad XIII in combat. The unit returned to the United States on 22 March 1919 and was demobilized.

On 18 September 1919, Headquarters Detachment, 1st Day Bombardment Group (which may or may not be related to the wartime Group) was organized at Ellington Field, Texas. One week later, the unit and its assigned Squadrons, the 11th, 20th, 96th and 166th, moved to Kelly Field, Texas. Headquarters Detachment, 1st Day Bombardment Group was redesignated Headquarters Detachment, 2nd Group (Bombardment) 31 March 1921. After almost three years at Kelly Field, the organization moved to Langley Field, Virginia on 30 June 1922, and approximately six months later it was redesignated 2nd Bombardment Group Headquarters. On 8 April 1924, the 1st Day Bombardment Group Headquarters, which had been demobilized in France in November 1918, was reconstituted and consolidated with the 2nd Bombardment Group Headquarters. As a result, the consolidated unit, which was designated the 2nd Bombardment Group, Headquarters, could trace its history back to the organization of the World War I Group in September 1918.

The organization spent more than 20 years at Langley Field, Virginia. Little is known of its activities in the 1920's and early 1930's but in the 1930's, the Group participated in Air Corps exercises, cross country flights, good will missions to South America and other such activities of a similar nature. In March 1936, it dropped food supplies to communities in Pennsylvania, which were isolated by heavy floods. In that operation, 30 aircraft dropped 8,000 tons of supplies.

Long distance flights were made as early as 1937, using B-10 aircraft. Nine of the Group's planes participated in the Panama flight of 4-12 February. That mission, reported to be one of the first instances in which land based planes flew in formation for a long distance over water, representing a round trip of 4,216 miles.

On 4 March 1937, the Group received the first B-17 delivered to the United States Army. During the next few years, the Group made successful pioneering flights using that type aircraft. Two such missions were a goodwill tour of Argentina by six aircraft in February 1938, and a flight to Columbia by three B-17s in August 1938. During GHQ maneuvers in May 1938, interception of the Italian liner, Rex, 725 miles at sea, by three of the Group's B-17s was hailed as a feat, but brought loud complaints from the United States Navy. Lt. Curtis LeMay, 49th Squadron, was a navigator on that flight.

Another "first" for the Group occurred in August 1938 when the Group was assigned the first B-15, reported to be the only one delivered to the United States Army. The B-15 was flown almost exclusively by Major Caleb V. Haynes, Commanding Officer of the 49th Squadron, and engaged in several outstanding missions. One, flown at the request of the American Red Cross, in which medical supplies were carried to Chile, where an earthquake had caused wide devastation.

The 11th Bombardment Squadron was transferred from the Group 3 June 1937. The 20th Squadron remained with the Group as well as the 96th Squadron. The 166th and the 49th Squadron were consolidated 16 October 1936 as the 49th Bombardment Squadron and was then redesignated as the 49th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) 6 December 1939.

The 429th Squadron was attached to the 2nd Bombardment Group (H) December 1940.

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# 2

## ORGANIZATION AND TRAINING

The 2nd Bombardment Group (H) was stationed at Langley Field, Virginia when war was declared. The Squadrons were the 20th, 49th, 96th and 429th. The 20th Squadron was assigned to Mitchell Field, New York on 8 December 1941, flying anti-submarine patrol until 24 January 1942. It returned to Langley Field, flew anti-submarine patrol on the East Coast until 28 October 1942.

The 49th Squadron was transferred to Newfoundland Air Base on 13 December 1941 but the air echelon, en route to Newfoundland, arrived at Mitchell Field 1 December 1941, then diverted to the West Coast on 8 December 1941. It operated from Geiger Field, Spokane, Washington with the 12th Reconnaissance Squadron until the echelon was dissolved in late 1941. It was then stationed at Agentia, Newfoundland from 16 January to June 1942, returning to Langley Field 24 June 1942 until 28 October 1942.

The 96th Squadron remained at Langley Field, Virginia flying anti-submarine patrols from 8 December 1941 until 28 October 1942.

The 429th Squadron was attached to the 2nd Bombardment Group (H) in December 1940 and assigned 25 February 1942 and attached to Newfoundland Base Command 3 September 1941 until 29 October 1942 flying anti-submarine patrols.

Effective 29 October, the 2nd Bombardment Group (H) was transferred, without personnel and equipment, to Ephrata, Washington. The 304th Bombardment Group (H), now stationed at Ephrata, Washington, was transferred to Langley Field, Virginia without personnel and equipment. In this exchange, each unit inherited the personnel of the other.

It was constituted as the 304th Bombardment Group (Heavy) on 28 January 1942 and activated 15 July 1942 at Salt Lake City AAB, Utah, and assigned to the 2nd Air Force. The Group was stationed at Geiger Field, Washington on 15 September 1942. Here it received a cadre of personnel from the 34th Bombardment Group (H), stationed at Geiger Field. The cadre then moved to a small Air Base at Ephrata, Washington. Squadrons of the 304th Bombardment Group (H) were the 361st, 362nd, 363rd, and 421st. Headquarters and the four Squadrons began receiving personnel. Each Squadron, initially, received two B-17s for training of the air crews.

My term of service in the military began early in the morning on February 14, 1942 when a group of young men from Jefferson County gathered at the Induction Headquarters in Steubenville, Ohio, a small town of about 32,000 located on the Ohio River in the southeastern part of the state. We were taken by Greyhound bus to Fort Hayes in Columbus, Ohio. There we were sworn to uphold the Constitution of the United States, poked, prodded, injected with who knows what serums and received our blue barracks bag and G.I. clothes. I now belonged to Uncle Sam.

Within three days, I was on a train with a multitude of other bewildered G.I.s headed for Sheppard Field, near Wichita Falls, Texas. I had never been further from home than Washington, D.C.

I received my basic training there and then entered the Air Corps Technical School for Airplane Mechanics. I graduated from school on the 16th of July 1942.

Three days later, I was in San Diego, California. The train ride was something not to write home about. The cars were coaches and we got the shock of our lives when we entered the "dining car." It was a box car lined with garbage cans filled with hot water and "C" ration cans. As you passed through the line, you received one hot can and one cold can. I don't remember what all the contents of the hot cans were, but the cold cans held a biscuit, had candy, cheese, and a powdered drink. It runs in my mind we had two meals a day.

We arrived in San Diego and were taken to the Consolidated Aircraft Co., builder of the B-24. Here we were given a familiarization course on maintenance of the B-24. The food here, prepared by civilian cooks, was excellent. I graduated from that school on August 21, 1942. I had aspirations of becoming a flight engineer but failed the eye examination. I had been wearing glasses for three years but thought my sight was good enough to fly. In retrospect, having seen all the trauma of flight crews, I suppose I should consider myself fortunate.

I then boarded a train for the Replacement Depot at Salt Lake City AAB. We slept in a large hangar, on cots, and the only thing I remember of that town was the hangar and the Mormon Temple.

In a few days I was off again by train for Geiger Field, in Spokane, Washington, and assigned to the 18th Bombardment Squadron, 34th Bombardment Group (H), a B-24 Group. The Group at this time was temporarily in Arizona or New Mexico so I was in limbo for a few days until it returned. When it did, the Group had been assigned B-17s.

My Army status made an about face at this time. No sooner had the Squadron returned when I was called into Squadron S-1 and confronted by a crusty old Army Sgt., named Timko. I wondered what had prompted this confrontation with some misgivings. He had my service record in front of him. He said, "I see that you have had typing before. How many words a minute?" My reply was, "75." His next question was, "We are in need of typists because we have a cadre going out in a few weeks. Would you like to work in Squadron Headquarters or on the line as a mechanic?" Naturally I jumped at the chance. In a few weeks I was in the cadre of the 363rd Squadron, 304th Bombardment Group (H) and on the way to Ephrata, Washington. It was the luckiest switch that a person could have had.

Living conditions at Ephrata were primitive. There were a few wooden huts, which the cadre members grabbed immediately. Headquarters and the mess hall were in a combined frame building and the tent area was more than a mile from the flight line. The weather was foggy, cold and rainy most of the time. Ephrata was a town of less than 100 people and the nearest sizable town, Wenatchee, was 50 miles away.

When the transition occurred, the 361st became the 20th, the 362nd became the 49th, the 363rd became the 96th and the 421st became the 429th. This period in Ephrata was spent acquiring the full complement of ground and flying personnel. Each Squadron's ground echelon was learning to work together and the flight crews were getting additional flying hours. Having a limited number of planes also presented the problem of the crews getting enough flying time.

The next move for the 2nd Bomb Group began on the 27th and 28th of November 1942. Due to the fact that the four Squadrons were to be stationed at separate bases, movements of personnel were on different dates. Headquarters and the 20th Squadron moved by train to Great Falls, Montana AAB on 27 November, arriving on the 28th. The 49th Squadron moved by train to Lewiston, Montana on 27 November, arriving on the 28th. The 96th Squadron moved by train to Glasgow, Montana on the 28th of November, arriving the 29th. The 429th Squadron moved by train to Cut Bank, Montana on the 28th of November, arriving on the 29th.

The Satellite airfields at Cut Bank, Lewiston and Glasgow were new and the facilities were a world of difference over those at Ephrata. Large comfortable barracks, mess hall, offices, recreation and rest room facilities were a morale booster for the men.

The 96th Squadron *Red Devil News* editor wrote of Christmas Day, 1942: Dear Mom and Pop: If you have a son serving in the Air Force at Glasgow airfield, maybe you would like to know how he spent Christmas.

Day didn't exactly dawn over the barracks, because it was a bit foggy, but warm; fog is unusual here. It was more like Michigan weather, one private from there said.

But long before dawn, the Mess Hall at the field was lit and bustling with activity. In case you don't know, Lt. Alexander J. Tyborski, Mess Officer, and Staff Sergeant Howard T. Fox, Mess Sergeant, run things here.

Back in the kitchen, Mom, is a battery of stoves and probably you would have trouble getting any of them in any room in the house. There are scores of other ovens and gadgets that you can see in any first class restaurant. But don't let anyone tell you that they don't have K.P. anymore. We saw this bunch peeling spuds.

Along about 1:00 in the afternoon things reached a fever pitch. Huge trays came out to the steam tables, folks lined up, and serving started. Probably you have an idea it was like the last war—everything ladled out in a couple of tin dishes. Tain't so because every soldier had plenty of crockery plus a coffee mug that would dwarf Dad's old fashioned shaving mug. You move along the line and you see a tile front for the steam table just like a big cafeteria.

And the food? Well we printed the menu last week in the *News*. There was literally everything from soup to nuts and everything in between. Some of the soldiers had guests for the meal and I can tell you they got a big kick out of it, especially the women.

The long mess tables with their planks scoured white, were all covered. Overhead, red Christmas streamers and bells waved. At one side was a Montana pine Christmas tree decorated, and a fireplace made from decorative paper. From the fireplace hung a red stocking, with the letters, U.S. Army.

"Poncho," the Mess Hall mascot, who'd never seen anything the like, had made a few tentative scratches at the fireplace. This "Poncho," by the way, is quite a character. He came from south of the border and Sgt. Fox, with some stops in between, brought him to the frozen north. "Poncho" is all Army: all the way across the kitchen he can spot a civilian and he challenges him with sharp barks as quickly as an M.P. would an interloper on the field. But he soon becomes friends. He isn't the only mascot on the field.

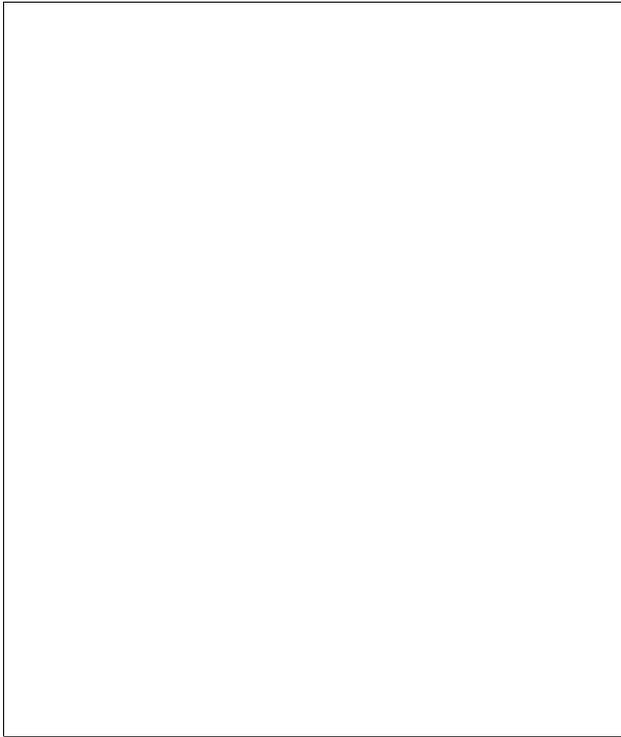
Speaking of the guard squadron, those men who were at their posts and couldn't have dinner in the Hall, had it taken to them.

"I've seen a lot of Army feeds but never one like this," Sgt. Fox commented.

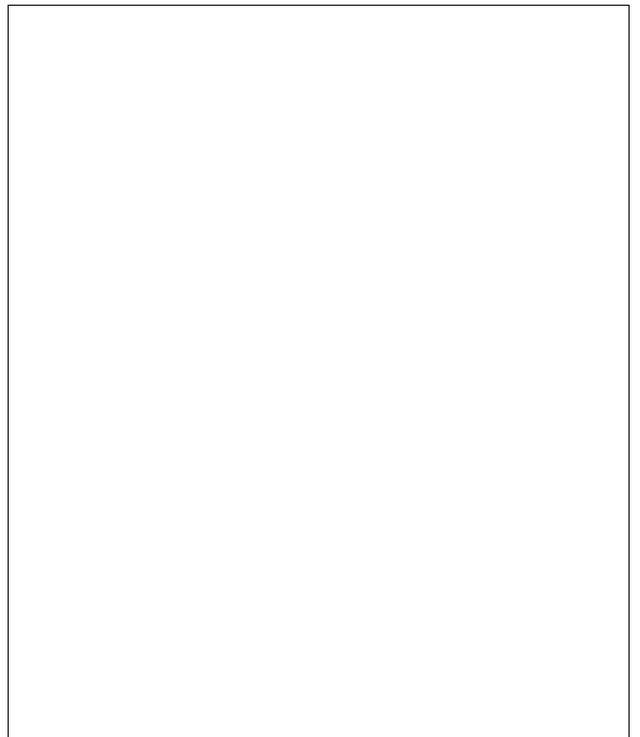
Before the meal began, Chaplain Ira B. Allen, said grace and I think everybody there had many things to be thankful for.

"And those cooks, what a job," said the Sergeant. "Give them a big hand." Every soldier we talked to echoed the sentiment. We saw why in the golden-brown pies and soft rolls, in parsley potatoes and candied yams, in piles of white and dark meat. This gang is proud of their cooks and, in the Army, a good cook is treasured even above your pay.

"Well, that's the way Christmas was out here. We know your boy would have liked to be home, but as one told us, "this was the best thing to it."



1st Sgts Reidy and Timko  
Geiger Field, Spokane, WA  
(Courtesy - C. Richards)



Major Charles Clapp, 2nd BG Executive Officer  
Major Marion Caruthers  
96th Squadron CO  
(Courtesy - M. Caruthers)



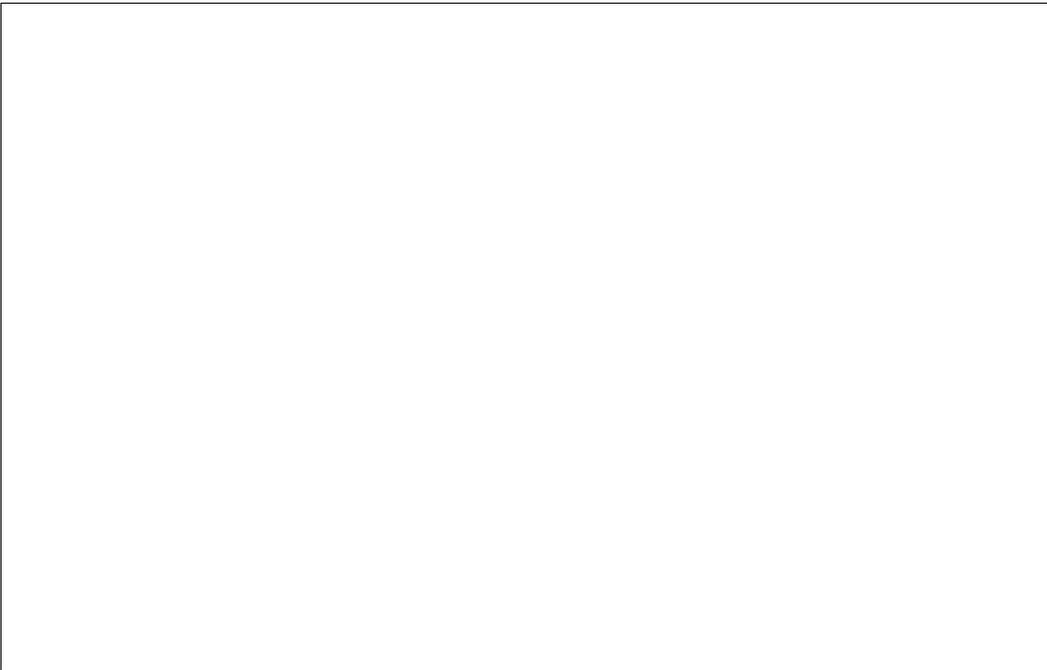
L/R - Sgts Bennett, Saulnier, Casey, McFaull - Ephrata, WA (Courtesy - C. Richards)



L/R - Sgts Jillson, Podany, Richards - Ephrata, WA (Courtesy - C. Richards)



T/R - L/R Dennis, Willock, Rix, Gathercole  
B/R- L/R Ferree, Dumas, White, Long - Glasgow, MT  
(Courtesy - C. Gathercole)



Lts Gathercole and Train - Spokane, WA 1942  
(Courtesy - C. Gathercole)

The Squadron then went into its next phase of training. Each Squadron received five B-17 aircraft for training the crews in formation flying, gunnery, and bombing practice. Three plane formations were used mainly for this phase. Flying conditions were extremely difficult due to the weather which sometimes reached 35 degrees below zero. Glasgow reported one instance of 48 below zero. Ground crews and ordnance personnel experienced great difficulty keeping the aircraft, guns, bomb racks and all other equipment prepared for flying. The transportation section experienced the same difficulty keeping its vehicles in operation.

The Group suffered its first loss of a crew on December 30, 1942. A B-17 from the 20th Squadron crashed and burned in the Bull Mountains south of Musselshell, Montana. The aircraft was on a training flight from the Great Falls Air Base. There were no witnesses to the crash but some people from the town of Melstone had seen the aircraft low and south of Melstone and later, while flying over Melstone, seemed to be in trouble. They later saw smoke to the southeast and immediately started to search for the wreckage.

First arrivals on the scene found the bomber in flames, which started a brush fire, and rescuers could only put out the brush fire. All members of the crew were killed: 1st Lt. Edward T. Layfield, Pilot; 2nd Lt. Gerald K. Beem, Co-pilot; Major Orville A. Ralston, Group Intelligence Officer; 2nd Lt. Lewis J. Newland; 2nd Lt. Chester A. Knight; S/Sgt. Frederick T. Brown; S/Sgt. Hulon B. Dutton; S/Sgt. Charles T. Valys; T/Sgt. Wallace H. Hanson; Cpl. Fred E. Murray; Cpl. Hobart L. Hall; and Pvt. Jacob V. Reiss.

Major Ralston was a veteran of World War I, having served in the Army Air Corps. He was officially credited with six German planes on one flight for which he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. He had unofficial credit for six others.

Very high winds, causing much snow to blow along the fields, were present in the middle of January 1943, and practice flying, especially long cross-country flights, had to be curtailed considerably. This condition was the direct cause of another accident on January 15, 1943, in which 2nd Lt. Richard F. Eggers, pilot of aircraft #42-5410, 429th Squadron, was involved. Lt. Eggers tried to land at Cut Bank but couldn't see to land. He then flew to Great Falls and tried to land at the Army Air Base. The visibility was poor and in an attempt to land, his plane hit a high tension wire, which cut off approximately five feet from the vertical stabilizer. Number one engine was damaged by the wire tangling with the propeller and heat loosened many rivets in the wing section. Lt. Eggers regained control of the aircraft and resumed flight. He then flew to Gore Field, Montana, south of Great Falls and landed safely there.

An amusing incident is related by Lt. Gathercole of the 96th Squadron. On his crew were 2nd Lt. Patrick Train, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Paul Rix, Navigator; 2nd Lt. Lester Long, Bombardier; T/Sgt. James Willock, Engineer; T/Sgt. Joseph Potvin, Radio Operator; S/Sgt. Howard Woods, Assistant Engineer; S/Sgt. Mike Zahn, Assistant Radio Operator; and Aerial Gunners, S/Sgt. Norman Ferree and S/Sgt. Eugene Lehman.

January 31, 1991: "The B-17F which eventually, through a weird and comical set of circumstances, evolved into the infamous "Gatherburd," began its star crossed existence as a training aircraft adorned with nothing more than the Air Corps Identification Number. A number that I have long since forgotten. It was merely one of perhaps a half dozen assigned to the 96th Squadron when we moved to Glasgow, Montana for concentrated pre-combat training with emphasis on three ship formation flying, high altitude flying, and air to ground gunnery practice.

"It's a given fact that each and every aircraft, beginning with the Wright Flyer, has its own personality. Sometimes the pairing of the plane and pilot results in a torrid love affair, another pilot might rate the plane a real dog - most often, until you draw your very own combat ship from the supply

depot. Training aircraft were the street walkers of Army Aviation, to be used, occasionally abused, and discarded when they served their purpose.

“Somewhere in the early days of their short relationship, Captain H. P. Hall and “Gatherburd” to-be developed a major personality conflict. Nothing of a fatal nature, just a series of minor things, mostly in the area of maintenance or performance. I cannot testify whether Captain Hall gave a direct order to the maintenance crew, or whether they took seriously a remark or name thrown in jest. What is known, that after many unscheduled repair sessions, the ship returned to the flight line emblazoned with, by the standards of those most gentle times, the marginally vulgar name of “TURD BURD.”

“Some time later, ol’ “TURD BURD,” whether flown by Captain Hall and his crew, I don’t recall, was part of a flight of 96th Squadron’s B-17s, along with similar units from Cut Bank and Lewiston, ordered to assemble at Great Falls for some joint operation with the 20th (HdQRS.) Squadron. One of the featured attractions of the day was an open house and review of the Group’s aircraft, which stretched for an impressive length along the flight line, by high ranking East Based and 2nd Bomb Group Officers and Great Falls community leaders headed by the Mayor, his wife and 18 year old daughter.

“Fate’s fickle finger ordained that the exploits of the 8th Air Force and its planes, “CHATTANOOGA CHOO CHOO,” “MEMPHIS BELLE,” etc. were much in the news at that time and much on the public’s mind. Since few, if any of the training aircraft could boast a name, the Mayors daughter was particularly thrilled when she, and the review, came upon the 96th’s “TURD BURD.” “How cute,” she exclaimed, spelling it out, “TURD BIRD!” Embarrassed, she broke off the vocalizing of what she had just spelled and joined the inspection party as they hurriedly sped down the runway to where less adorned B-17s awaited them.

“It can be assumed that orders were soon cut and on their way through channels to get that “expletives deleted” name off that “expletives deleted” aircraft. But “through channels” takes time, like maybe a week, since the infringement on good taste and manners wasn’t exactly a war time top priority message.

“The next day, with our aircraft back at Glasgow, we fell back into our regular training routine. Shortly thereafter I found myself in command of “TURD BURD” flying the left wing of Captain Doug Metcalf, with Lt. Long and his crew holding down the right wing slot on three ship “V” formation, en route to a high altitude practice bombing mission somewhere in the Dakotas. My crew consisted of those mentioned earlier.

“There are, or at least then, few flying activities duller than high altitude practice bombing. To combat the boredom of these obviously necessary missions, our flight had long since adopted the practice of buzzing the countryside in a 3-ship “V” formation en route to and from whatever bombing range we were scheduled to hit. This game of “Aerial Chicken” had few rules and what rules we had sure as hell weren’t committed to any book of Hoyle and were in direct violation of Air Corps regulations too numerous to mention. Basically, the routine consisted of Metcalf trying to shake, or drive, Lt. Long and I off his wing and out of formation, while Long and I concentrated our efforts to hang close on Doug’s wings until he gave a “Wave Off” in order for him to escape some obstruction looming close ahead. In these rare cases, Metcalf lost. More often, it was me or Dick who would be forced out of our tight wing slot and thus declared “loser.” Looking back from nearly half a century, having not killed ourselves, and crews, with those crazy stunts, made us all winners.

“When we got into combat, it became evident that the other flights in the 96th Squadron must have sharpened their skills with similar games for our formations were almost always tight and sharp. It is more than good luck and coincidence that the 96th never lost an aircraft to enemy fighters during the time we original pilots were with the outfit. The enemy chose to hit some of the other Squadrons whose loose formations invited attack. I like to think of this record as an award, or reward, for our eager participation in this rule-breaking game.

“On this particular day our three ship “V” was cavorting over the Dakota landscape, whether going or coming from the bomb range, I no longer recall. The terrain was relatively smooth and rolling, the air smooth. No gullies wide enough for Metcalf to duck down into, a favorite trick of his, and brush off the wingmen, or conversely, for the two of us to hold Doug in long enough to get a “wave off” from him. Just cruising along, nice and tight, props clearing the sagebrush by maybe ten feet. A great day to be alive, to be a part of a smart flying flight and the pilot of a wonderful crew. Life was Greeeat!

“Reveling at the long chain of events which found me in this happy situation and concentrating on hanging close on Doug’s left wing, we were all taken by surprise when Metcalf flushed a large covey of quail out of the sagebrush and the covey broke to the left into our path. Taken by surprise and with no room to attempt an avoidance maneuver that close to the ground, I had no choice but to plow straight ahead into a frantic cloud of quail. “TURD BURD” was taking strikes in every area. The waist gunners were even reporting that several quail had flown in the gun ports, fluttering around in the fuselage before flying out again. To that point no damage had been done to the aircraft that a wash down to remove a collection of blood and feathers wouldn’t have corrected. But I was not to be so lucky. One little feathered rascal got caught in the prop wash of No. 2, left inboard, engine. The added thrust and velocity of the air stream turned the quail into a missile which entered the air scoop and severely damaged the air cooler for the engine. This damage immediately manifested itself on the appropriate cockpit instruments and we shut down and feathered the propeller of that engine.

“This incident dampened our enthusiasm for our “game” and the spirits of the entire flight of three were not raised by the thought that only ten days earlier, Doug Metcalf, in an earlier game, had hit a pheasant which had required some minor metal repair work done to the leading edge of the wing of his aircraft. The incident had more or less been “laughed off” by those in command, but I think the whole flight knew the second incident would not be handled so leniently.

“After returning to Glasgow, walking into operations, Metcalf, as Flight Commander, felt he was the responsible officer and offered to stand with me in discussing this latest incident with Buck Caruthers, the 96th Squadron Commander. Due to Doug’s recent encounter with the pheasant, I suggested that the flight, as a whole, disclaim any responsibility for this episode and leave it to me to face Buck with some cockamania explanation which might appeal to his sense of humor.

“The next day I failed on both accounts with an explanation, which memory tells me, went something like this: “Sir, early on in the mission I became separated from the rest of the flight and went on to the target area by myself, at an altitude of 25,000 feet. Suddenly, close at hand and dead ahead, I saw a gaggle of eagles -- must have been a dozen of them. Anyway, Sir, I’d never seen more than a pair of eagles together ever before and never at an altitude even approaching 25,000 feet! I know this is hard to believe Sir!” I was throwing out a lot of “Sirs” about this time, “but I became so engrossed at the sight of all those eagles at such an unheard of height that before I knew it I had flown right in among them. Sir, there were eagles hitting the ship everywhere and one of them hit the air cooler and knocked it out, Sir.”

“Buck allowed as how it was an imaginative story but unfortunately for me, there was enough of a bird left to identify it as a Hungarian partridge and as an old Nebraska farm boy he knew for damned sure that no such bird was seen over 50 feet above the ground! He then meted out my sentence: I was personally “GROUNDED” for 30 days and my crew would be taken from me for that period as there appeared to be a suspicion that, under me, they hadn’t, until then, been properly trained. I could live with the grounding but losing my crew really hurt and was unjustified, as Caruthers later admitted and made up to me the best he could.

“Upon hearing of his harsh penalty handed me, Doug Metcalf again offered to accept the blame as flight leader and to go through a formal hearing in hopes of getting my crew back and grounding lifted, as the air unit was about to start moving overseas with the soon-to-be combat aircraft, which the ground crews would be traveling by train and boat to join the air group overseas later. My view was

that there had been a determination “higher up” that an example would be made and I was “IT” and that anything Doug would do would only hurt him and probably not help me. I did ask that he try and get me one of the spare aircraft to fly and catch up with the Group when my grounding was over so that I wouldn’t have to travel by boat with the ground unit.

“Whoever and however it was accomplished, I was given #42-5778 with which to join the air group, a minor adventure in its own right.

“But I digress. The military wheels had been grinding, not too slowly, for once the embarrassment of the Great Falls episode had brought forth an edict from on high to change the name of the damned plane, forthwith. This happened to coincide with the ship being in the hangar for oil cooler repairs needed because of the bird strike. It thus came to pass that one B-17 went into the Glasgow hangar as “TURD BURD” and came out as “GATHERBURD.” And as the town drunk was reported to have said as he was being ridden out of town on a rail, “if it were not for the honor of the occasion, I would just as soon walk!” Me too.

“I was given an aircraft to fly to North Africa, a B-17 #42-5778. I turned the ship over to the Reserve Aircraft Depot at Marrakech, Morocco. On the flight with me were 2nd Lt. Roy S. Kline, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Kemp Martin, Navigator; M/Sgt. Bernard Cohen and S/Sgt. Robert Fillingame, crew chiefs from the 20th Squadron; 2nd Lt. Robert H. Oliver; 1st Lt. Hubert C. Robbins; M/Sgt. George F. Seimor; and Sgt. Albert J. Aboud. I do not recall what their status was in the Group.

“Although my grounding was long past due, my crew had not been returned to me and I flew my first dozen missions as a fill-in pilot with whatever crew was shorthanded, but mostly with Lt. Delbert Resta in his #42-5261, named if my memory serves me, “INVITCUS,” or maybe it was “EXCELSIOR,” something noble and uplifting. When I asked Major Caruthers for a plane of my own and the return of my crew, he gave me the former but chose to keep my first crew as the lead (his) crew. However he gave me permission, and strong support, in recruiting a combat crew of a multitude of ground crewmen who were volunteering for combat crew status. From that pool of talent I was able to develop a truly great enlisted crew, with almost every specialty covered by two men: Flight Engineer/Aircraft Maintenance; Radio Man/ex B-25 Flight Engineer; Waist Gunner/ex B-25 Radio Man; Ball Turret/Armaments. A great bunch of guys and probably more in tune with my personality -- but my heart always rode with my first crew.

“The officers came from replacement crews in keeping with a Squadron policy of spreading those newcomers with experienced crews for a few missions before starting them on their own. A wise policy that kept our losses low. Two outstanding officers I recall were Lt. Fred Licence who flew Co-pilot for me for quite a few missions. After completion of my tour, Fred went on to become a Flight Commander and was shot down after the Group moved to Foggia. The best of my navigators was Captain Harold Annex who transferred to the 96th from an ATC Squadron. I only had him for perhaps 15 missions and he was uncanny. I nicknamed him “Ouijaboard.”

“Pat Train, once broken loose from co-pilot status, not only shared command of the “EAGER BEAVER,” with Major Caruthers, but he also became the Squadron’s Flight Operations Officer, where he served with ability and distinction. If Pat owed me anything, which is debatable, he amply repaid me by “walking” my promotion to Captain through Wing Headquarters, while acting as Commanding Officer during Caruthers’ absence.

“To this day, Doug Metcalf, has the respect and friendly regards of ‘GATHURBURD/GATHERCOLE.’”

The flight crews of the three Satellite Squadrons left their stations, February 1, 1943, and proceeded to the Great Falls Air Base. The air echelon then departed for Kearney AAB, Nebraska, February 2, 1943.

The air echelon received new B-17s at Kearney and went through the fourth phase of training prior to going overseas. This phase of training lasted about six weeks. Several days were spent in processing of the crews regarding wills, allotments, equipment, physical condition, etc. The planes were "test hopped," compasses "swung," drift meters aligned and air speed indicators were calibrated. Pilots were required to take rigorous instrument checks both in Link Trainers and in the air.

The first Gulf trip for the Group came on February 13th. The destination was Mobile, Alabama. One Squadron, the 429th, flew to Salina, Kansas and was briefed on the Gulf mission. The night was bitterly cold, and by morning at taxi-time, only two pilots were able to start their engines. Take-off was delayed until eleven o'clock and all plans were able to take off. By the time the Squadron reached Laurel, Mississippi, Major Neal, who was leading had feathered one engine and was having trouble with another. He was forced to land at Laurel Army Air Base. The rest of the Squadron also landed.

When the planes had been parked, it was discovered that about three feet of Captain Mitrovi's vertical stabilizer was missing. He had been flying along side the formation and had dived underneath, coming up close, too close, to Lt. Olsen's props and barely averted a serious collision.

Those ships that were able to proceed left two days later for Mobile. They landed, refueled, took off again with instructions to fly south, climb to 20,000 feet, test bomb racks and guns. They were instructed to fly due east to Fort Myers, Florida and then land at Orlando, Florida to join the rest of the 2nd Bomb Group.

The night of February 18, 1943 will long be remembered by members of the Group. Twenty-eight ships of the group took off from Orlando, late at night, and by next morning it was discovered that the planes had landed in 18 different states. Lt. Olsen and one other ship had been the only two to return to Kearney. Thunder storms in the southern States and fog over Kansas and Nebraska were the direct causes of many being unable to find Kearney. The 429th lost two aircraft and one complete crew.

Lt. Ned D. Knapus, in B-17 #42-29585, crashed while attempting to land in foggy weather. Lt. Knapus, thinking he was landing at Salina, Kansas was actually over the airport at Hutchensen, Kansas, which had an elevation of 300 feet higher than that at Salina. He crashed in the landing pattern, killing the entire crew. The crew of nine were:

1st Lt. Ned D. Knapus, 0-727225, P.

2nd Lt. Bruce S. Upson, 0-729930, CP.

2nd Lt. Raymond L. Zeiter, Jr., 0-730319, N.

2nd Lt. Carl T. Miller, 0-731087, B.

T/Sgt. Bernard (NMI) Budimirovich, 32200170, R/O.

T/Sgt. Earl C. Wollenwebber, 15075882, F/E.

S/Sgt. Walter E. Bybee, 6792661, T/G.

S/Sgt. Max W. McArthur, 19100466, W/G.

Pvt. James A. Farrell, 36303696, W/G.

That same morning, aircraft #42-29582, piloted by Lt. Kenneth Spinning, in flying about trying to locate Kearney, exhausted his gas supply and was forced to make an emergency landing in a muddy cornfield three miles south of Braymer, Missouri at 7:30 a.m.

Lt. Spinning, flying low, circled Braymer four or five times and then headed south, following a graveled road. The B-17 barely missed a farmhouse sitting close to the road on top of a hill. Just past the house, Lt. Spinning attempted to land the plane on the road. One wing tip caught on a fence post along a cornfield and pulled the plane to the left, into the cornfield where it skidded about 200 yards on its belly before coming to a stop. About 100 yards of heavy woven wire and barbed wire were torn down and fence posts snapped off.

The plane was heavily damaged but wholly intact. "Skippy," the crew's mascot, was standing near where one of the fence posts went through the cabin, but was not injured. Some of the men said there wasn't even a bump when the plane landed.

In addition to Lt. Spinning, the rest of the crew were: 2nd Lt. Douglas L. McCarter, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Raymond T. Bernier, Navigator; 2nd Lt. Raymond C. L'Amoreaux, Bombardier; T/Sgt. Robert L. Picking, Engineer; T/Sgt. Sidney A. Cohan, Radio Operator; S/Sgt. Clarence P. Morrison, Assistant Engineer; S/Sgt. Wilbur F. Peterson, Assistant Radio Operator; S/Sgt. Hinton M. Waters; and S/Sgt. Everett E. Eye, Gunners.

S/Sgt. Ray Keller, Communications Section, 20th Squadron, April 10, 1993: "I completed my radio course at Scott Field and was shipped to Ephrata where I was assigned to the 361st Squadron. Being a radio operator, I flew a lot of hours as a fill-in radio operator, so I was on flight pay for a while at Great Falls, Montana. When the position of Group Communication Chief became available, our Group Commanding Officer, Colonel Ford Lauer, said I'm it. I did fly with him some, but that is a long story in itself, so from then on, until October 1945, I was in Group Headquarters.

"I am sure that everyone in the military had a favorite air base while in the service. Mine was Great Falls, Montana, especially after leaving Ephrata where we lived in tents. Great Falls was like going to Heaven! Great Falls was a city of intrigue. In addition to our Base, 'Up on the Hill,' at the other end of town was Gore Field, home of the 7th Ferrying Command. All planes from the Bell plant in Buffalo, that were destined for the Russians, came to Gore Field for pick-up, mostly P-39s and P-63s.

"Both the Germans and Russians must have had their spies in town. If you got a pass for town, the Orderly Room told you to be careful of what you said to strangers. If Gore would be closed in due to fog, they would land at our Base. Our love for the Russians was not so great, so one time a P-39, with Red Star markings, landed at our Base and someone stripped many things from the plane. This got us a trip to Base Security and a good chewing out.

"Christmas Day, 1942, really stands out in my mind. While delivering a B-17 from the Seattle plant to the 2nd Bomb Group, Boeing pilots by error, landed at Gore. The people at Gore burned up the telephone lines all day trying to get someone from the 2nd to come get their plane as they were expecting the arrival of planes from Bell and had no room for a B-17. Tony Fuscaldo was the OD for the day and tried all day to get someone capable of flying it out. He finally contacted Colonel Lauer but could not find anyone else but a radio operator, namely me. Tony called me and told me to check out a parachute and that a Jeep would pick me up to go with Colonel Lauer and fly the plane back. I remember starting the two right engines and working the flaps on take-off and landing, otherwise he flew the plane single handed. We circled Great Falls and I can still picture what a beautiful sight it was. Our trip back was normal and landed without a problem. If I recall correctly, the Colonel restricted everyone to Base over the incident. I remember writing to my folks back home in Fort Recovery, Ohio how I spent Christmas Day. Being an old farm boy I wrote, 'Nine month's ago behind a plow and now in the seat of a B-17. How are we going to win this war?'

"I can say this, many of the ground personnel would have loved to have been a part of the aerial action, and some were. Shortly after our arrival in Italy, from North Africa, someone saw a memo come out of the 5th Wing stating that they wanted volunteer gunners. Five other men and myself went to Foggia and took the 6-4 examination. I believe we all passed, at least I know I did. Well, our head honcho got wind of this 'unauthorized trip' so we all got called up to the 2nd power of command and threatened with AWOL and reduction in rank. I acted as a sort of spokesman for the group and said that we would then go to Wing and be re-assigned and go to flying. He said to forget about what had happened and go back to work; that we were people too valuable to replace.

"Being in Group, I often heard the remark from combat crews, 'the ground crews seem so aloof to us.' Agreed. With percentage of KIA and POW losses there was no way we wanted to become attached to them. Early on, we learned this loss was hard to endure. I myself was indoctrinated to this early in North Africa. Our first KIA was a close friend from Scott Field, Theodore Ramsey, radio operator in the 20th Squadron. He got a 30 cal. through his leg on a mission over Tunisia in early May.

He was sent to a British hospital where gangrene set in and he died of his wounds; I hope this incident is recorded somewhere in our 2nd Bomb Group history as I have heard he was not listed as our first casualty, and I say he was. Theodore was the first to congratulate me when I went to Group and how lucky I was. He remarked to me that he probably would be the first one killed, and he was.”

The air echelon left Kearney, Nebraska in early March, 1943 and proceeded to Morrison Field, West Palm Beach, Florida where it received its orders, information and equipment for over water flight. Meanwhile the ground echelons remained at their respective stations.

Headquarters, the 20th and 49th Squadrons, departed by rail, March 13, 1943, for Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, arriving March 17th. The 96th and 429th Squadrons departed their stations by rail, March 14, 1943. Cars of the 429th Squadron were joined with those of the 96th at Chicago, Illinois and arrived at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, March 18th.

All personnel were immediately restricted to the camp until overseas equipment had been issued, including gas resistant clothing, gas masks, small arms, rifles, mosquito nets and shelter halves (half a pup tent). Twelve hour passes were then issued and many of the personnel, living in the area, had the opportunity to visit their homes. Personnel living west of the Mississippi River had been issued six-day furloughs prior to leaving Montana. Those living east of the Mississippi had been promised a six-day furlough upon movement to the east coast. Upon the restriction to only a 12-hour pass, those that had been promised a six-day furlough were denied that privilege and were unable to get home before shipping out. There were many unhappy men in the Group over this restriction.

The shipment of the various Squadrons, and individual personnel, came at mixed intervals, different times, different convoys and different ports. It would be many weeks before the Group was together as a unit.

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# 3

## MOVE TO COMBAT

**T**here was no attempt for the air crews to fly overseas as a Group. The aircraft departed as soon as prepared. Lt. Gathercole, 96th Squadron, was the last to depart. His plane carried men from other units and Headquarters. The route most followed on the transatlantic flight was Waller Field, Trinidad; Belem, Brazil; Natal, Brazil; Ascension Island; Dakar, French North Africa; and finally, Marrakech, Morocco. Some flew directly from Natal to Dakar. All planes had arrived at Marrakech by April 16, 1943.

The group stayed at Marrakech for one month during which time planes flew every day the weather permitted. Flights were of high altitude formation. Lt. Col. Joseph H. Thomas, a former Eighth Air Force officer, was in charge of preparing the men for combat. Close formation flying was stressed. Before the month was over, Lt. Col. Thomas was satisfied that the Group was ready for combat.

On April 20, 1943, Colonel Lauer was replaced by Lt. Col. Joseph H. Thomas as Commanding Officer of the 2nd Bombardment Group (H).

M/Sgt. Bernard "Barney" Cohen was the Line Chief of all aircraft maintenance for the 20th Squadron and was one of the original cadre from the 34th Bombardment Group. He flew to North Africa with Lt. Gathercole. February 12, 1993: "I believe we were the only Group leaving Morrison Field at the time. I had one of my engineers, S/Sgt. Fillingame, with me and I remember M/Sgt. Orebaugh and M/Sgt. Daniel Queeney from the 96th on another. I believe another of my men, S/Sgt. Carl Hansen, was on another plane. We were to go along to do whatever maintenance was needed on the flight to North Africa.

"I remember one engine change on one ship in Marrakech, North Africa. At Marrakech we lived in four man tents and heard that we would have to sleep in 'pup' tents at our first Base. Hansen, Fillingame and myself 'moonlight requisitioned' two, four man tents before we left and we put one on the ship I was on, piloted by Lt. Gathercole, and the other piloted by Captain Triggs. Lt. Gathercole never knew it was aboard, but somehow Captain Triggs found out about the tent on his ship. He got cold feet and took the tent back to the tent area. He suggested we take ours back but we said, 'no way.' We were the only ones for a few months who did not have to hole up in a 'pup' tent. The Group Executive Officer heard about the tent and threatened to take it away from us. We talked him out of it, besides, he knew he would appear as a 'horses ass' if he did."

T/Sgt. Warren Lee Anderson, Flight Engineer on the crew of 1st Lt. Richard P. Long, A/C #42-29619, "ROAD HOG." T/Sgt. Anderson died December 24, 1989 at the age of 69. His brother, Robert, a Navy veteran of World War II, submitted this information. April 6, 1991: "Lee, as he was known in 1943, kept a record of his missions and I compiled the complete record after many interviews with him. I find that most veterans have almost total recall of what went on -- the good, the bad and the humor. He was proud of the Group and extremely loyal. He also was a member of the current 2nd Bomb Group Association while living."

From the War Diary, 1943: "Arrived Morrison Field, West Palm Beach, Florida, March 14, 1943. Left with our plane, 'ROAD HOG,' with Squadron after a delay of seven hours due to adverse weather. The take-off and trip was uneventful. We did take the plane to 17,000 feet to avoid squalls.

"Arrived Borinquen Field, Puerto Rico at 1400 hours. Splendid airfield. Beautiful concrete runways. Fueled up, took a gyro compass reading, processing and took off at 0800 hours.

"Arrived at Atkinson Field, Georgetown, British Guiana in late afternoon. We received orders to proceed to secret airstrip, description follows: In order to reach field that is hacked out of deep jungle, very dense, we were obliged to follow the -- River for 20 minutes until we sighted a small island. We altered our course 5 degrees and told to proceed on course for 15 minutes. The field was a beautiful sight to behold. There was - - - feet of concrete runway, cleverly camouflaged. Ten feet on either side of the runway dense jungle, foreboding and sweltering. Several guys wandered 40-50 feet inside this jungle and were lost for hours. The jungle itself is awesome to see. Everything is damp and dripping and it seems to rain every 20 minutes. It looked very prehistoric. We were grounded there three days due to the frequent downpours. Another engineer - from another B-17 - and I had some live target practice. Some natives told us about a boa constrictor that had killed a native girl the day before near the airstrip. They had discovered the reptile again. They led us through the dense jungle, not far from the airstrip, to what they called a 'baby boa.' We emptied our automatics into the creature and it finally died. The natives immediately commenced skinning it. The snake was well over eleven feet long and didn't seem like a 'baby boa.'

"After a three day delay, we finally took off at 0800. Pitot tubes were not removed from a B-26 and crashed on take-off. Ship was total loss. Most of the crew survived. Pilot was killed, two others seriously injured and rest badly shaken up.

"Arrived Belem, Brazil in late afternoon. Blew tail wheel in landing. Met Campbell of the 99th Bomb Group whose plane had cracked up. We took off at 0800 hours the next morning.

"Arrived Natal, Brazil. Landed at 1500 hours. I met Sherman Seiman, Lt. in supply, that I went to school with. It was good to see an old friend. We got our 50 hour inspection. We were delayed one day due to sabotage. Iron filings were found in one of the plane's 37 gallon oil tanks. All planes had to be examined, hence the delay. We took off at 2300.

"Arrived at Dakar, Africa after a mighty long hop over the ocean. Lt. Long decided to fly 'as the crow flies.' From Natal, Brazil to Dakar, Africa is 2,000 miles. Some of the Group decided to hit Ascension Island, then to Dakar. We gassed up in Dakar, and for 75 cents in American money, and an old Tee shirt, natives washed down 'ROAD HOG.' The natives gathered around in groups and jabbered about the 50 cal. guns and size of our planes. A French policeman finally dispersed the crowd, after shaking down the natives for most of the 75 cents, as they did not get his permission before washing the plane. The natives were tall with intelligent faces. We took off early the next morning.

"We arrived in Marrakech, French Morocco at 1400 hours, March 22, 1943. Flew altitude formation missions for three weeks, every day. This was tough on pilots. Perfect formation must be maintained at high altitude and pilot must keep the plane against the wing of the ship next to him in spite of down drafts and prop wash. This is a very vital phase of our training for combat and was stressed very strongly as this type of formation depended on the success, or failure, of the mission. Shortly we were to find out just how important."

2nd Lt. Stanley M. Korell was a member of the 49th Squadron and Navigator on the crew of 1st Lt. Otis Kimberling. Their aircraft was #42-29623 which they named "SCRAGGY BOYS." 1993: From Diary: "I had only said good-bye to my darling wife four hours ago at the Dixie Hotel, and now we were pointed at the west end of the Morrison Field runway completely and heavily loaded, ready for our last take-off in the good old United States. In the next few minutes we would be on our way overseas to combat, or whatever was to come.

“Kim, our pilot, ran up the engines, set the superchargers and checked each engine carefully for it was going to take all the power we could get to lift this load in the air. Slowly the ship swung around and headed straight for the runway, then the four engines roared as four lions. There were seconds of hesitation and down the lighted strip we flashed and finally in the air as the last few feet of the runway passed under us.

“As we passed Palm Beach and the field before going on course, the tension and excitement of the take-off eased away, and for a moment, all of the wonderful things that those United States had given me, a home, wife, education and all, passed before me. Kim called over the interphone, ‘What’s the course?’ and quickly my eyes flashed to the map. I replied with a heading and we were on our way to Waller Field, Trinidad, which was our first stop.

“Now Waller Field is some 14 hours by air from Morrison, and we really hadn’t determined just how many hours we could stay in the air, with the overloaded ship we were flying, on our test flights in the States. So we were keeping an extremely close check on our fuel consumption, with the intention of landing at Borinquin Field, Puerto Rico if we were running short of gas.

“Darkness surrounded us for the first six hours out and nothing was visible below us. We were crossing the unceasing stretch of white capped water, the Caribbean Sea. My celestial navigation had been working out well during those dark hours and it showed we were on course and maintaining a fairly good speed considering our load and very light head wind. Then as the darkness was slipping away and the gray dawn of the approaching sunrise shown on the water below us, we could see the eastern point of the island of Haiti on our right and it gave us a feeling that we were again safe in the hands of mother nature.

“As the morning unfolded below us, the sky became cloudier and the air rougher, but as we passed abeam of Borinquin Field, we decided we could make it to Trinidad if the winds did not become stronger and bad weather didn’t set in.

“Everything was going along fine for the next three quarters of an hour. We were ducking between the towering cumulus clouds of this tropical region and I was getting a little rest after the long grueling hours before dawn. Then out of nowhere a huge cloud came before us that we couldn’t duck, so into the side of it we went. Well, for the next four or five minutes we didn’t know whether we were coming or going. One minute we were going almost straight up and the next almost straight down, and everyone was holding on and praying we would come out of it right side up, and we eventually did. The air current in these clouds have enormous force and have been known to tear an aircraft completely apart, so we considered ourselves fortunate to come out of it as well as we did.

“After the shaking up we had received and with what might lay ahead, we decided to turn back to Borinquin Field, only an hour away, to refuel and check the weather from there on into Trinidad. While Kim and Zeke, our Co-pilot, went to the operations building to check the weather, the rest of us laid under the shade of the wings to rest and enjoy the cool breezes as the serviceman refueled and checked the ship from nose to tail.

“Less than an hour later we were again winging our way to Waller Field, Trinidad. Kim had talked to an A.T.C. pilot who had just flown north from Trinidad a few hours earlier and said that the weather was okay all the way in, but advised us to stay down low over the water and under the clouds. We did just that and landed at Waller Field late that afternoon without incident.

“Trinidad, especially the part around the field, was the first real jungle country we had seen. The field itself, is situated almost in the center of the island but a little to the north. There are 4,000-foot mountain ranges on the north and south sides of the field and because of the limited visibility and rain squalls, you have to approach it from either east or west in order to make a safe approach. The hills and valley between are covered with dense jungle growth and for the most part not penetrated by foot. One ship had crashed only a mile from the field, in the jungle, and it took six hours to reach it on foot. During the three days we spent there, waiting for repairs on the plane, it rained at least six hours

a day and remained overcast the rest of the time. Our last day there we all took a vote and decided to name our ship "SCRAGGY BOYS," which probably was the name best fitted for both the crew and the ship.

"Next morning, after an early rising and briefing, we were off on the next leg of our journey, headed for Belem, Brazil. There were rain showers even then over the field, but we soon climbed above them out over the water and into blue sky. Planning our flight in order to take every advantage of weather and possibility of an emergency landing, we plotted a course to take us just off the shore of the jungle covered Guianas, across the gaping mouth of the Amazon River and into Belem, Brazil's northernmost part. Too, we were flying over Devils Island, part of French Guiana and considered hostile territory and to be avoided at all costs.

"The morning passed without incident. We had flown above an overcast, occasionally spotting the sea below us in a hole in the clouds. We were half way then, but ahead we could see towering cumulus and cobweb stratus only to be seen in a true tropical front. We would have our work cut out to penetrate this weather and hold our course into Belem. These fronts are made of the weirdest looking cloud formations that you could imagine. It reminded me of a spook movie.

"During the next hour and a half we were buffeted and tossed by heavy turbulence, on instruments because of the heavy rain squalls, and above all, our fuel consumption had increased through it all. Remembering the advantages gained on the first leg of our flight by getting down tight on the water, Kim spotted a hole and we dropped from 8,000 feet to within 500 feet of the water. Rain showers were frequent but the tension was off and we were all once again relaxed. Soon we were over the 100-mile wide mouth of the Amazon River. The water below was muddy and full of floating debris. It was far from being an appealing sight, especially after a long, hard day of flying.

"I called Zeke and told him that in two minutes we would be crossing the Equator and to have everyone christened. They had a good time throwing water from the thermos bottles over each other but completely forgot about me being alone in the nose of the ship, so remained un-christened. The nose of the ship was completely crammed with baggage and mail. I had only enough room to sit down and have access to my navigational instruments. The bombardier stayed up on the flight deck during the whole trip. Forty-five minutes later we were circling Belem, wheels down and ready to land. This particular field had always been a Pan American Airlines base but didn't have the improved run-ways that Waller Field had, but Kim made a good landing and we taxied into the spot designated for us.

"We were pretty weary and were more than glad to be shown to our quarters for the over-night stay, and best of all a shower bath next to our rooms, with cold and hot (well warm anyway) running water. A wonderful shower and some clean clothes put us in a mood for food and lots of it.

"It was our first encounter with native cooking along with some native fruits and beverages. Maybe we were just hungry or else their cooking is as good or better than our own.

"Anyway, it was really delicious. Beside the meal itself, we polished off two bowls of bananas, oranges and avocados, all fresh local fruit and very good. The outstanding lesson I learned was the native drink of Brazil is not coffee, of which they grow more than any other country, but chocolate served at almost every meal we ate while in Brazil. After dinner we made preparations for an early morning take-off, called it a day, and went to bed.

"From Belem to Natal is rather a dull and uninteresting routine trip. We flew directly out to the coastline and then onto a course directly into Natal. As on the other flights down the South American coast, the weather was rough and we passed through many rain showers, but generally it was by far the best weather we had flown in. About 200 miles out of Natal, I turned on the radio compass and picked up the Natal radio beam. It indicated that I was directly on course and headed straight to destination, so I gave Kim an E.T.A. and for the rest of the trip, laid down and took a nap. When I awoke we had crossed the coast and were over land. My E.T.A. was about five minutes to go and there ahead I could

see the glistening white Natal airport. Minutes later we landed without even having to circle the field. We let down on course directly onto the runway.

“We felt pretty good because we knew we would be able to rest here a couple of days and get the ship in perfect shape again for the Atlantic crossing to Africa. The P.X. was really swell here. It sold good Swiss watches at unbelievably low prices and Brazilian boots for four dollars a pair. Some of the fellows bought watches and we all bought boots. Later, they called the boys that wore those boots to combat, ‘Natal Jockeys.’

“For the next two days, Red Harris and the boys worked the ship into perfect shape, installing new spark plugs, cleaning and inspecting every part of the ship. While they were busy on the ship, Kim and I were figuring and wondering if we could stretch the fuel long enough to make the long hop from Natal to Dakar. We checked and rechecked our fuel consumption up to then and checked the time it was taking the ships ahead of us to make the crossing. Every time we figured it, we came out just short of making Dakar. We could go by way of Ascension Island and make it in two hops. We were still undecided as to whether or not we would try to make Dakar.

“Then came the night we were to take off. We went to the Dakar briefing, were given the weather and the winds. Carefully we applied the winds and the time it would take. We were still 15 minutes short. We figured it wasn’t worth the chance just to gain one day’s flying so we decided to go by way of tiny Ascension Island. We had spent most of the night planning and figuring so we had only a couple of hours sleep before the scheduled 3:00 a.m. take-off for Ascension.

“We were all pretty sleepy that morning as we climbed into the ship for our flight to Africa. We finally got off, just a few minutes under the 7:00 a.m. deadline for Ascension Island take-offs, and soared out into the blue. As far as navigation goes on this flight, it was going to have to be pretty darn accurate, because the island is only four miles wide and that’s pretty small at the end of a 1,400-mile trip. It was a case of it had to be on the nose or else. The whole trip is over water so all I could use was dead reckoning for my course and celestial sun lines for my ground speeds.

“The weather turned out to be really swell. We flew the entire flight, up to within 100 miles of the island at 9,000 feet over a layer of clouds which at times became solid overcast. It was really beautiful weather for this kind of trip. My celestial sun lines worked out beautifully the whole trip and I was hoping my dead reckoning had too. If it hadn’t I could always check it by radio and come in on it if I had to. Thirty miles before my E.T.A. was to come up, I asked Kim to spot a hole in the undercast and get down below it. We did and ended up about 1,000 feet above the water with rain showers all around us and visibility down to about five miles. Now I knew my navigation had to be good with the visibility that low.

“Minutes flew by and I was keeping a sharp lookout, both left and right, for fear that we might pass within a mile or two and miss it. Then with my E.T.A. but five minutes from being up, the greatest and most pleasant surprise of my life took place. There straight ahead of us, not to the left and not to the right, what looked like a huge rock jutting high out of the water, lay Ascension Island. Almost before I could believe it, Kim had spotted the runway, called the tower, and we were on our final approach to land without having to make hardly a degree’s turn from course.

“The runway here at Ascension is probably the oddest one in the world and yet it is no doubt one of the greatest pieces of engineering I have seen. It is literally carved through the mountains and has such a slope to it at the eastern end that we almost had to use full power to pull the plane back to the parking area. It is really a desolate island. There are only ten white civilians, English, and about 50 Negro slaves, besides the British and American troops, probably a thousand of them. The food is pretty bad and sometimes scarce if their supply ship would be torpedoed on the way. In emergencies, they can get plenty of good fish by getting a permit from the British government and hiring a boat.

“We were scheduled to take off the next morning for Dakar, but supercharger trouble forced us to stay over another day and night. The next morning we took off for Dakar, even though our Co-pilot,

'Zeke' Tyler, was feeling pretty sick from what turned out to be a malaria fever. We figured we could not leave him on that terrible island, and we couldn't have stayed there with him for ten days, so we took him along, planning to put him in a hospital in Dakar.

"The trip was uneventful. The weather was pretty good but the visibility was bad because of haze and dust so we didn't see anything until we were at Dakar and almost over the runway before we realized we were there. Dakar was the first airfield to have a steel mat runway and it almost scared us to death with the noise it made when we landed. The first thing we did was get 'Zeke' to the infirmary and the next day they took him in town to the hospital and found he had malaria and would be there for ten days. We felt bad because they wouldn't let us wait for him but we did make them promise that he would have first priority on transportation to catch up to us wherever we went.

"Next day they assigned us an Air Transport Command Co-pilot so we took off on what turned out to be the last leg of our flight. Our destination was Marrakech, French Morocco, the flight being entirely across the desert. It was a boring trip over hundreds of miles of desert wasteland and rocky hills. The excitement of this flight came at the very end. We were supposed to go through a pass between two, 13,000-foot mountains at whose feet Marrakech lies. It so happened that the pass was completely weathered in when we got there so we made a circle and climbed to 17,000 feet and went through the weather. For about 15 minutes we were in hail, ice, snow and rain and when we broke out we were right over Marrakech airfield. We let down and landed as directed. As we landed we noticed a great many of the ships of our Group were parked on the field and we decided that at last we had caught up with them for the first time since we left the States. It was a good feeling to see 'Pappy Haynes,' our CO, again and all the boys in the Squadron. And too, it would give 'Zeke' a chance to catch up with us.

"We talked to 'Pappy' Haynes and he told us we would have some high altitude bombing training before we went up front into actual combat.

"Marrakech airfield was an old French air base we had taken over at the beginning of the North African campaign and had quite a few permanent buildings, hangars, etc. We had a good P.X. set-up, and our camp was six rows of pyramidal tents set up in an olive orchard, and it was shady and cool. It was really a nice set-up.

"The missions were short but tiring. Most of the fellows hadn't too much formation flying back in the States and it had been a long time since they flew any at all, so it was pretty ragged the first few flights we made. The missions were primarily for the bombardier and pilots but we navigators rode along anyway. It was good training and we surely needed it before moving up front."

1st. Lt. Edwin Speed, was the Navigator on the crew of Captain Harvey P. Hall, 96th Squadron. January 2, 1991: "Our initial crew was formed at Sebring B-17 Combat Training School in August, 1942. Our pilot was Captain Harvey P. Hall, a transfer from the Canadian AF; co-pilot unknown and bombardier, 2nd Lt. Sidney Gerstenhaber. We were eventually transferred to Geiger Field, WA, where we picked up a new co-pilot, 2nd Lt. Allen Roessig. Our enlisted crew assignment was also completed at this time. They were T/Sgt. Wesley F. Adams, Engineer; T/Sgt. Harold E. Humphrey, Radio; S/Sgt. Robert B. Hecker, Assistant Engineer; S/Sgt. Harold E. Fry, Assistant Radio; and Waist Gunners S/Sgt. Captain B. Williams and Sgt. Michael J. Kamanek.

"We flew in the winter snow in Glasgow and so expected to go to Alaska. In late February 1943 we departed for Kearney, Nebraska where we picked up our new B-17s. Our plane was #42-5777 which we named "GIN MILL."

"Our next move was to Morrison Field, Florida where we received our orders for overseas. We flew "GIN MILL" from Morrison to Trinidad, spent one night and next day departed for Belem, Brazil. The following day it was on to Natal, Brazil where we spent several days checking our plane for a long overseas hop. We next landed on Ascension Island in the South Atlantic, about 1,900 nautical miles

and proceeded the following day to Dakar, French West Africa. A day later we landed at Marrakech, Morocco.

“We vigorously trained for wing take-off and assembly maneuvers, wing formation, cross country and bomb run procedures. We then moved to our first base at Chateau Dun.

“Before the Germans were defeated in North Africa, we had bombed troop concentrations, the harbors at Tunis, Bizerte, airports at Tunis, harbors and airfields in Sicily, Sardinia and Italy. “GIN MILL” led the Wing during the invasion of Sicily and the first bombing of the Marshalling yards in Rome. We were shot up every time we flew a mission but none of us were seriously wounded. “GIN MILL” was well patched up after approximately 300 combat hours.

“Months before, each officer had been promoted one grade. After completing our 50 missions, three aborted, the entire crew was relieved from combat missions and returned separately to the United States.

“In a few months I was assigned as the Base Operations Officer, Navigation, at San Marcos Navigation School, Texas and promoted to Captain.”

Captain Clarence W. Godecke, Jr., was a First Pilot in the 20th Squadron. April 1, 1991: “A/C #42-29604 was the B-17 aircraft that my crew and I picked up at Kearney, Nebraska some time in March, or possibly late February, 1943, and was later named ‘THUNDER MUG.’ How it got its name is kind of interesting. While stationed at Great Falls AAB, Montana during the winter of 42/43, we met some girls that were employed by the War Department as code workers at the U.S. Point of Entry at Gore Field, outside of Great Falls. Now those were real sharp girls, graduates of Eastern Finishing schools, and we corresponded with some of them after we left. In fact, my navigator married one of them and another eventually became my wife. Anyway, they knew about the plane, etc. and we got a letter from one of them, all in poetic verse and I remember the last lines as being, ‘What could be nicer on the side of a B-17 than a picture of an old fashioned latrine?’ I don’t recall where the painting, etc. was done but there didn’t seem to be any lack of talent in the area around the air base.

“I took my transition training at Geiger Field, Spokane, Washington, then went to Ephrata with the 361st Squadron when the 304th Bomb Group was organized and later redesignated as the 2nd Bombardment Group.

“We flew to North Africa by way of Belem, Ascension Island, Dakar and Morocco. I flew all my missions in ‘THUNDER MUG’ and I had reports that it had gone at least a hundred and was then flying as a courier in some area or other.

“I flew a total of 50 missions. At that time there were no double credit missions. There were targets in North Africa, Sicily, France, and Italy with lots of fighters and terrible flak. I later went to the Eighth Air Force, in England, where I commanded a Squadron of the 96th Bombardment Group.”

M/Sgt. Carl I. Hansen, Crew Chief, 20th Squadron. October 1, 1991: “There is one story I would like to relate before I joined the 34th Bomb Group at Geiger Field, WN. It has lived in my memory for almost 50 years.

“In August of 1941 I was assigned the duty of Flight Engineer for a three-man flight at Wright-Patterson Field in Dayton, Ohio, to test flight the first production B-24 built at Willow Run. I had previous experience as Flight Engineer on Liberators at Wendover Field in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts. We were assigned to a 30-day evaluation of its flight characteristics. The last phase was maximum altitude in which we attained an altitude of approximately, 32,000 feet. Without warning the aircraft rolled over on its back and went into a steep dive and slow spin. After falling approximately 15,000 feet, we managed to bring it back to level flight and after a very erratic flight back to home base, made a successful landing, very gently. Needless to say, that aircraft never flew

again as thousands of rivets had popped, the wings were wrinkled, twisted, and the tail was askew. This is an encounter that you don't forget very easily.

"After joining the original cadre at Geiger Field, I met Barney Cohen and we became very close friends and stayed together until the end of the war in Europe.

"Barney, Bob Fillingame and myself were the only ground personnel, from the 20th Squadron, assigned as Flight Engineers and maintenance crew to fly overseas with the Group. I was assigned to Colonel Lauer's crew and we departed Morrison Field for the first leg of our trip to Belem, Brazil. Just before the point of no return, we lost No. 1 engine due to lack of oil and a short time later, No. 3 engine quit for the same reason. At that point we headed west toward Trinidad as it was the closest field to us. As we were approaching Trinidad, over territory covered by jungle, No. 2 engine started to lose oil pressure and we jettisoned as much cargo and personal belongings as possible to lighten our load. The airport in Trinidad was a very welcome sight and as we rolled down the runway, No. 2 engine quit. Upon examination, we found that all three engines, built by Studebaker, were out of oil due to defective piston rings. No 4 engine, built by Pratt & Whitney, was in top condition.

"While we were waiting for new engines to arrive, we were told not to fraternize with the natives as they were not too friendly. One particular day, while in the barracks, we heard a lot of yelling and saw what appeared to be about 100 natives in a big circle, yelling and dancing around. We thought, this is it, they're coming to get us. Then we saw a figure, in uniform, right in the middle of the group and it turned out to be Lt. 'Snuffy' Simmons, our navigator, a former tobacco auctioneer from South Carolina, who was entertaining them with his auctioneer's chant. We found out, after, that they were very friendly and helpful. They helped us unload the three engines when they arrived on a C-54 cargo plane.

"Upon landing at Ascension, we all decided to go for a swim. On our way to the lava beach we were stopped by a member of the ground crew who told us to go to the mess hall and get a chunk of beef and throw it into the water before we went in. We did as he suggested and the meat disappeared in seconds -- Piranha!

"Then off to the Gold Coast where I purchased a ruby for 50 cents which turned out to be worth \$100 when appraised.

"From Dakar to Casablanca where we laid over for three days, then on to Marrakech where I joined up with Barney and Fillingame. Then on to Chateau Dun, Ain MiLila and eventually Tunis. While in Tunis, Barney, Phil and myself, along with others, were awarded the Bronze Star for our efforts for bringing the aircraft overseas.

"Barney and I established a very close relationship from the first time I met him and we bunked together in the same barracks, tents and whatever until I left for Italy. Barney, Fillingame, Ray Richards and Hansen were called the 'Four Musketeers.'

"One thing I want to clear up regarding the 'moonlight requisitioning' of two tents in North Africa. This was established from a speeding truck loaded with tents along a lonely highway, by crawling out on the hood of a jeep and pulling two tents from the tail gate of the truck. A foolhardy operation, but well worth the comfort we enjoyed later by living in much larger quarters."

The movement of the ground echelon of the Group was badly split during the move to North Africa. Headquarters, the 20th, 49th and 103 men of the 96th Squadron departed Camp Kilmer, New Jersey on April 1, 1943 and boarded the troop transport, S.S. Monterey, at the port of Brooklyn, NY. The ship departed April 2nd, arriving at Casablanca, Morocco on April 12th. The Group bivouacked on the southern heights of Casablanca, at Camp Don B. Passage, gathering supplies and awaiting orders. April 18th, the men boarded a "40 & 8" train and departed for Naverin, Algeria, arriving there April 25th.

Another contingent of the 96th, one officer and three enlisted men, boarded a Liberty Ship, William S. Mosely, and left New York on April 1st, in a 40 ship convoy, arriving at Casablanca on April 19th. An old cargo ship, the Robin Adair, with one officer and three enlisted men of the 96th, left Hampton Roads, Virginia on April 1st, sailed unescorted to Bermuda, arriving on April 14th. There it took on the cargo of a damaged ship, missed one convoy due to engine trouble, and finally left Bermuda on May 1st in a large convoy, arriving at Casablanca, May 16th.

April 2nd, 11 officers and 15 enlisted men left by rail for Hampton Roads, Virginia. April 3rd they were quartered at Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia, leaving there April 7th. The officers boarded the United Fruit Company, "Metapan," at Newport News and sailed, unescorted, to New York Harbor. April 14th they left New York in a convoy of about 60 vessels and proceeded, via Bermuda, to Casablanca, arriving there on May 4th. The 15 men of the detachment were split up, three men to a ship, among five Liberty Ships, the Matthew T. Goldsborough, the Champ Clark, the Halstead, the Kelly, and the John Page. They proceeded from Hampton Roads to New York, leaving there April 14th, in the same convoy as the "Metapan." This convoy arrived in Casablanca on May 4th. The Liberty Ship William S. Telghman, with one officer and three enlisted men of the 96th, left New York for the second time in this convoy.

April 15th, one officer and 19 enlisted men of the 96th Squadron departed Camp Kilmer and arrived at Staten Island. They boarded the S.S. Mariposa which sailed at 0800 hours on April 16th, proceeded unescorted, and arrived at Casablanca, April 24th, and then proceeded to Camp Don B. Passage. I was in the contingent of 19 enlisted men.

The trip was uneventful although I had some misgivings about going unescorted, after hearing of the German sub packs and reading of the huge losses in shipping. We were told that the ship was too fast for a sub, even on the surface, and by maneuvering, we would be difficult to torpedo. Sailing into the harbor at Casablanca, I could see signs of the shelling by our Navy. The Jean Bart, a French battleship, or cruiser, had taken a real beating by our Navy. We marched to Camp Don B. Passage. Some of our outfit was still there.

The ground echelon of the 429th did not leave Camp Kilmer as a unit and no member went with the contingent that left April 1st. With the second contingent there were eight officers, who were in charge of 125 men of the 96th Squadron. This contingent left on the Tank Landing Craft (LST) # 358 on April 24th. The route took them via Bermuda and landed at Port Lyauty, French Morocco, April 30th. From there they went to Camp Don B. Passage where they remained with the third and fourth contingents.

The third contingent of 62 men, under the command of Captain William M. Hall, left April 12th on the Edward Rutledge and arrived at Camp Don B. Passage, May 5th.

The fourth contingent left New York harbor on April 16th with some men of the 96th, on the S.S. Mariposa, arriving April 24th, and also went to Camp Don B. Passage.

Several officers and men were assigned as cargo-security personnel on various ships and went across at various times. An interesting experience happened to a small group of the 429th personnel on the ship S.S. Luckenback. Lt. Henry A. Zremski, S/Sgt. Donald V. Ring, S/Sgt. James E. Mahoney, and Cpl. Albert Gerstein were sent for cargo-security on March 21st and were quartered at Camp Patrick Henry. On March 25th they were sent to Newport News and boarded the ship. About 3:00 p.m. the ship cast off and soon thereafter was rammed by two Navy barges. The ship wandered around in the bay, correcting its compass and then proceeded for New York in a total blackout. Around 11:30 p.m. there was a collision with another ship and the men rushed to the deck. They saw another ship in flames, debris in the water and there was a series of explosions. The men rushed to their lifeboat stations. S/Sgt. Mahoney was in one life boat which, when lowering away, found the life lines fouled and several men started to cut the ropes. S/Sgt. Mahoney, and others, dropped into the water to get out of the way of those trying to cut the ropes. When the boat was free, and in the water, the men in the

water got into the lifeboat. A Coast Guard vessel eventually picked up the men and they were taken to the Norfolk Naval Station. S/Sgt. Mahoney had a cut over one eye, which was treated, and the men were given dry clothing. They then were returned to Patrick Henry and were re-equipped, having lost all their equipment in the wreck. Three weeks later they were assigned to another vessel which made a successful crossing.

S/Sgt. William G. Covell, 96th Squadron Communications Section. January 19, 1993: "The convoy which left New York on April 5th consisted of about 36 LSTs, 15 other ships and a destroyer escort. Among the 'other' ships was an oil tanker, a couple of sea going tugs, a converted yacht and several decrepit, rust bucket freighters. The escort, six destroyers, waited outside the harbor entrance.

"Past the headlands, the convoy and the escort took up a southern heading and began to get into formation -- five parallel columns of nine to ten ships per column. The escorts took up their stations around the convoy -- ahead, behind and on either side. Overhead a Navy blimp patrolled, looking for any sub that might be waiting for an easy target coming out of the harbor. The blimp stayed with us for only a couple of hours.

"The LSTs headed up the formation, plowing with their blunt noses, rolling and pitching. Our LST, #358, was in the center of the column, four or five back. I heard that the convoy commander was on our ship, which may have explained its position.

"Lunch time came and I lined up for some of the good Navy chow. Surprise! Lunch consisted of cold baked beans, sliced bologna (we called it horse cock), bread, butter, coffee or milk. The sea air had given me a hearty appetite so I filled my tray anyway.

"The enlisted men's mess was down from the galley which meant that once you got your food, you had to go down some steps to a landing, make a turn and go down more steps to reach the lower deck. Now going down the stairs with both hands full can be tricky anytime but to really make it interesting, slop some baked beans and coffee on the steps to make them slippery, continually tilt the entire stairway back and forth, crowd the stairs with people all holding a tray of food in one hand and a hot cup of coffee in the other and you have some idea of the difficulty I faced getting to the mess area!

"The dining room area for the enlisted men had wood topped tables with benches along each side, all bolted to the steel deck. Two tables near the exit had large GI cans lashed to one end for garbage. There was a raised strip around the edge of each table to keep cups, trays and eating utensils from sliding off. I found it took some doing even to keep my tray and cup in front of me! I had to eat with one hand and hold onto my tray with the other.

"The dining room was warm and stuffy -- not exactly the best atmosphere for people who were feeling seasick! One of the pleasures of our first days at sea was to be at a table trying to eat and have the man next to you, or across from you, suddenly barf in his tray! And, if that didn't do it, when you went to dump your tray in the garbage can, you might have to wait while someone in the line ahead of you throws up in the garbage can. Just the smell in the place was enough to do you in! A man could go into the dining room feeling fairly well and come out sick as a dog!

"The first day at sea a duty roster was made up which assigned each Army man to some duty while the ship was underway. This was to keep us busy but some jobs actually helped out. Many of the sailors were straight out of bootcamp or a Navy technical school and had practically no sea time. As a result, the ship was short handed.

"My assignment was to stand watch at one of the 40mm gun tubs in the superstructure back of the bridge. Digulielmo also drew a gun watch, on one of the 20mm guns near the bow. I don't remember what duty Zezula got but Baxter was assigned to the galley, which was just fine with him as he wasn't bothered by sea sickness and ate with a good appetite for the entire trip.

"Supper time came and although I wasn't feeling very chipper, I went to chow. I had heard that you were less likely to get sea sick if you kept your stomach full. It didn't help a great deal to find the

menu hadn't changed since lunch -- still beans and bologna. Even the men who were feeling OK didn't take kindly to this treatment, especially since we could see that the sailors (who ate separately) were getting better chow.

"That evening I started pulling gun watch. I believe we stood four on and eight off. For the rest of the time I was on board, except when we were in port in Bermuda, that was my schedule -- just like one of the crew. Somehow the schedule rotated so that I stood watch at different times each day. This wasn't bad duty -- all I had to do was be at, or near, my position during watch hours.

"A couple of times during the voyage, the Navy conducted gunnery practice and the gun crews took turns firing at a balloon released from the ship's fantail. This was exciting -- the guns made a lot of noise, especially the 5 inch gun on the fantail, and I could hear how the 20mm and 40mm guns sounded in action. As far as I remember, the balloon always drifted out of range without a scratch.

"It took the convoy four days to reach Bermuda -- just an overnight run for a fast cruise ship today. But there were reasons we were so slow. First, the LSTs were not fast ships. Top speed was about 10 knots and in a convoy all ships travel at the speed of the slowest. The average speed of the convoy was about 5 knots. Second, the convoy did not go in a straight line but was constantly zigzagging which increased the distance traveled. Third, all the LSTs were new, with new crews, and both crews and ships in a shake down phase. Problems kept cropping up. A common breakdown was the electric steering.

"One of the stations manned by the Army personnel was in a small compartment below the water line in the stern of the ship, where there was a wheel for manually steering the LST. Two Army men and one sailor were on there 24 hours a day while the ship was underway, ready to take over if the electric steering quit. Talk about seasick alley!

"We didn't know we were going to Bermuda until we got there, and we didn't know we were going to Africa until we arrived there! The trip to Bermuda was rough and stormy all the way. I got really seasick the second day out and stayed sick until we got into port. As soon as the ships passed inside the breakwater, the rolling stopped and everyone who was seasick immediately got well. It is amazing how a person can be so sick that he thinks he is dying one minute and when the ship gets into quiet water and steadies, he is as good as new!

"We were in port in Bermuda for two days, giving us time to relax and get over the affects of three and a half days at sea. My name came up for leave but I passed up the chance and Bill went in my place. There was no watch standing for Army personnel while in port and I slept with my clothes off for a change. Those first days at sea, I slept fully dressed except for my shoes with the thought in mind that if we were torpedoed, I would not have to find my clothes and get dressed. After Bermuda, I decided that it was better to sleep in comfort and damn the torpedoes. After all, there wasn't a whole lot I could do about it if we did get hit!

"The morning of April 11 all the ships in the convoy upped anchor and, one after another, headed out to sea. The destroyers went first and began shepherding the LSTs and other ships into formation as the convoy took a southeast heading. Several hours later, a small forest of masts showed on the horizon. This turned out to be a convoy of about 50 LSIs (Landing Ship, Infantry). They fell into position behind the ships in our convoy. I think we picked up a few more escorts but, in any case, we continued on our way. Now the convoy contained approximately 100 ships, plus eight or ten destroyers. A nice fat target for any subs that happened to come along!

"The first four or five days out of Bermuda were more of the same -- rough water, stormy weather, wind and cloudy skies. The LSTs rolled and pitched worse than ever. The LSIs really took a beating. We could look back at them following along behind and watch as individual ships would rise on the crest of a wave so that the entire ship was in view and then drop into a trough that hid everything but the top of the mast.

“During this period of rough weather, I had two experiences that I remember quite well -- one was unusual, the other frightening. First, I stood watch on the ship just like one of the crew and second, I nearly fell overboard -- probably came as close to losing my life at any time during the war.

“I think it was the first or second night out of Bermuda that I stood watch for the Navy. I was on the midnight to four gun watch in the 40mm gun tub back of the bridge with a couple of GIs when a Navy officer came by and asked if one of us would volunteer to stand watch on the bridge. Of course, we were already standing our gun watch but he explained that he meant standing watch for the Navy. None of the men said anything so I thought, ‘what the hell, I’m going to be out here until four a.m. anyway, I might as well try something different.’ So, I said, ‘OK sir, I’ll give you a hand’ and followed the officer to the bridge. On the way, he told me that the sailor who was supposed to be on watch was too seasick to get out of his bunk and there was no one to take his place.

“On the LST, the bridge is a rectangular affair that stretches across the front of the superstructure. On either side and extending beyond the side of the ship is a small platform called the bridge wing. When you stand on one of those platforms, you can see along side of the ship, all the way forward to the bow and all the way back to the stern. This is where the ship’s officer stands when the LST is coming alongside a dock or another ship, and giving order for steering or power.

“The floor of the bridge wing was a steel grating and, standing there I could look straight down at the waves coursing along side the ship. The officer led me out onto the starboard wing (right side of the ship) and said this would be my station. He asked me if I had ever seen a torpedo track. I said ‘No. Except in the movies, where they show a line of bubbles coming through the water.’ He said that was good enough. Then he said, ‘Stand here and keep watch for anything that looks like a torpedo track and if you see one, yell out, torpedo on the starboard side.’

“It was a miserable night! Low storm clouds were driving across the sky. There were no stars nor moon. The only light came from the phosphorescence of the breaking waves. A strong wind from the bow carried spray along the deck where I was standing and kept misting over my glasses. The LST was rolling even more than usual and the bridge wing was alternately lifted high above the sea until most of the ship’s side was out of the water and then dropped until it seemed the wave tops would touch the grating under my feet. If I leaned against the rail and held on, I would be staring at the sky one moment and looking down at the ocean the next. When I stared hard at a spot directly across from the ship, I could see a dark shadow where the LST in the next column was churning along. In the dark, I could see the white crests of the waves, at the farthest, maybe 50 to 100 feet. I couldn’t help but thinking that if I did happen to spot a torpedo coming and did call out a warning, it would not make a particle of difference.

“The spray coming back on the wind kept fogging my glasses but when I got out my handkerchief to clean them off, the salt water just smeared them. I was soon chilled to the bone in spite of having long johns on under my wool OD uniform and heavy GI overcoat. My hands, feet and ears were freezing and there was no place on the platform where I could get out of the wind. Every so often, one of the officers from the bridge would come over to take a look around and see if I was still there. Finally the watch ended and a sailor showed up to relieve me. I stumbled down to the warm troop compartment, crawled into my bunk, wrapped up in blankets and finally got warm. Right then and there, I decided that the ship would have to be sinking before I would volunteer to help the Navy again! And then I would have to think about it for awhile!

“My close call came about a night or two later. I had held off being seasick for three or four days by staying in my bunk when I could, and not eating much. I was on one of my early morning watches - twelve to four or four to eight. I was huddled down in the gun tub, cold and miserable and feeling worse with every roll of the ship. Finally, I knew I couldn’t put off being sick much longer so I climbed over the edge of the gun tub and headed for the rail. Now the problem was that the gun tub was on top of the superstructure and to get to the rail I had to go down to the main deck. To get to the

main deck I had to climb down a steel ladder on the side of the superstructure. From the bottom of the ladder to the rail at the edge of the main deck was a distance of about eight feet.

“It was another dark and stormy night. The LST was rolling and pitching for all it was worth. I got to the edge of the superstructure, turned around and started down the ladder. I remember that on the way down, I would be laying on the ladder when the ship rolled one way and hanging from the ladder when it rolled the other way. I got to the bottom, already starting to retch, let go and headed for the rail just as the ship took a big roll the same way. The deck tilted and I went skittering towards the edge of the deck. I put out my arms to catch the rail which I couldn’t see but hoped was there. It was there, of course, but instead of a solid metal pipe, which would have hit me across the chest, that section of the rail was made up of wire cable (which could be removed when the ship was in port) and the cable was slack. The top caught me at about my belt buckle and suddenly I found myself doing a balancing act, halfway over the rail. For what seemed like a year, I hung there, feet thrashing on one side, and arms waving on the other. Somehow I got my feet down on the deck and my hands on the cable and then I was OK. It was close for a few minutes. I just leaned there and looked down at the waves tossing and swirling along side of the ship. If I had gone over, no one would have known for hours. Even if I had called out loud enough to be heard (and there was no one nearby to hear), I would have been gone in the dark and the only hope would have been if one of the ships coming along behind would have heard me or seen me in the water and could have thrown me a line.

“I was wearing a kopeck life jacket over my overcoat but my clothes and shoes would have weighted me down in a short time. The convoy would not, and could not, stop for one man. But I probably would not have been missed until the next day. One thing, the close call scared me so much I was over being seasick and after a few minutes, I climbed slowly, and with great care, back to the open tub where I sat quietly for the rest of the watch.

“As the convoy worked its way south and east, the weather got warmer and better. Something else improved greatly and that was the food. While we were in port in Bermuda, some of the NCOs had gone to the officers and complained about the chow. Our officers talked to the Navy officers and worked out a deal. We had some of our cooks and bakers with us and one of them, who had been a baker in civilian life, was good at baking pies, cakes and bread. The arrangement was for our cooks and bakers to help the Navy cooks and for all of us to eat together. This worked out well for the Navy too because they were getting more (maybe better) cooks plus now we all had fresh bread, pies and cakes.

“With the improved weather, we stayed on deck more when we weren’t on watch. Some of the guys took sun baths, some played cards and the rest just lounged on deck. One day, someone got the idea of shaving his head and soon there were men walking around with heads that looked like billiard balls. I should mention that as soon as we left Bermuda, fresh water was only available at the drinking fountains and for an hour, morning and evening, at wash basins. We had to shower with salt water, using a special soap, but you never seemed to get clean and the salt water left you feeling grungy.

“One morning, one of our destroyers picked up something it didn’t like and started dropping depth charges. The ocean churned again and again and I could feel the vibration and hear the rumble of the explosions. All the ships went to general quarters and all the crews watched, ready to run or fight. But whatever triggered the attack was gone. Another time I was in my bunk when I heard a lot of running on the deck, klaxons hooting and men shouting. I hurried up to the main deck and saw the LST next to us on the port side, coming straight for the side of our ship. The other ship was churning up the water as she went hard a-stern and our ship was turning as fast as she could to starboard.

“Ocean going ships, even the size of our LST, don’t stop on a dime or turn quickly and for a while it looked like the two ships were ‘agoin to bump.’ But both Captains had soon enough time and the ships only came close. This was another case of steering breakdown. There had been a change of course for zigzag but the ship along side of us had not been able to turn and put us right in front of her.

“All the way across the Atlantic, we had been under water restrictions although there were big tanks on the main deck which we were told were full of fresh water. Supposedly water was needed where we were going and we could not use it. The irony of the whole thing was that when we arrived off the coast of Africa, the channel leading to the port was so shallow that the fresh water in the big tanks had to be pumped overboard to reduce the ship’s draft. While this was being done, fresh water was being turned on all over the ship and we hurried to take showers, shave and use all the water we could.

“April 29, 1943 was a cloudy, grey morning. When I came on deck, the convoy was barely moving and off to the east I could see a low smudge that was the coast of Africa. All the LSIs and the other ships were gone, with just the LSTs and a couple of escorts left behind. In a short while, a small boat came alongside and two men came aboard -- a European and an Arab in baggy pants and a fez. I overheard one of the sailors say they were pilots.

“In any case, speed was increased and we headed for the shoreline. There must have been pilots or maybe the LSTs followed the leader but soon all the ships were strung out in a line and headed up a winding river to Port Lyauty. This was an unusual sight for we were in a flat, delta area with only low bushes along the shore, and looking ahead or behind, the line of ships appeared to be winding across dry land. About ten miles up the river, we came to Port Lyauty and tied up to some docks. The voyage ‘overseas’ was over.”

Sgt. William R. “Dick” Norman, 96th Squadron. First Cook and Mess Sergeant. September 25, 1993: “We were at Camp Kilmer about a week after moving by rail from Glasgow, Montana. About 100 non-coms of the 96th were called out to fill out a large ocean liner, leaving with a large convoy to where no one knew. We loaded April 1, 1943 (April Fool’s Day) with just our two barracks bags and WWI 30-06 rifle. We were put on A deck in a smoking room and it took most of the night to get settled. I don’t remember getting underway but by sun-up we could see nothing but ships all around us and water.

“Of the mess department there was myself, Cletus Grady, Murray Cobb, Paul Anderson, Frank Mills, and I think, William D. Davis. That is all I can remember. There were also non-coms from Group Headquarters and the other Squadrons. I remember M/Sgt. Morrill Saulnier and M/Sgt. Bennett. I will never forget how Bennett tried to get us to fall out after we were billeted in tents in North Africa. He would go up and down the tent rows yelling, ‘Fall out men, God damn it men, fall out, please fall out men, oh hell!’ He had a southern drawl that was so profound you could almost cut it with a knife.

“Back to the crossing. We were fed twice daily and it took most of our time just getting down to the galley, eating, back to the top and getting in line again. The Sgt. from transportation spent most of his time in his bunk, seasick.

“We zigged and zagged so much that we had no sense of direction for several days but ten days out we noticed a distinct change in the weather temperature. In a couple more days we were told we were going to North Africa and given a book on how to conduct ourselves toward the civilians, especially women.

“There was a lot of crap shooting and cards but I didn’t get involved. My greatest concerns were getting something to eat and sack time. I was one of the fortunate ones who wasn’t seasick. We had one incident where one of our Master Sergeants put down a Major in our Group. We had been trying to keep clean shaven but the only water in the heads was salt water. Now if you ever shaved using salt water you had quite an experience. Well, we all decided to grow beards rather than end up with chapped and sore faces. We were quite a motley looking bunch after a few days and one time the Major came through one evening and he ordered everyone to be clean shaven by morning. Well, by the next morning, when the Major showed up in our quarters this Master Sergeant had told us to trim

our beards as best we could. When the Major exploded, our Sergeant informed him of the section in the Soldiers Handbook that pertained to well trimmed beards and the major had to back down.

“We arrived at Casablanca on April 12th. The first civilian we saw was an Arab, bare except for wearing a GI barracks bag tied around his waist with a hole for each leg. We unloaded in full OD dress, including overcoat, gas mask and 30-06 rifle under command of one of our Lieutenants. He led us in close order drill and after a short time, was threatened with mayhem if we weren’t allowed to shed our overcoats. It was about two or three miles to our bivouac area and six man tents. Our barracks bags were dumped in a pile, from six by six trucks, and it took most of the first day to find our bags and blankets and get a place to sack out in a tent. Then it rained! We spent the first night digging a ditch around the tent to keep the water from running through the tent and soaking our clothing and blankets.

“Shortly after we were loaded on 40 & 8 railroad cars for a trip across Algiers that lasted five or six days and nights. After the first day we ate cold ‘C’ rations. The cooks who were supposed to heat them in GI garbage cans of water on a field stove, caught the rail car floor on fire and dumped the water, cans and stove on the floor to put out the fire, so we ended up eating the ‘C’ rations cold for the rest of the trip.

“We were so crowded for space on the train that some of us moved to a car loaded with light poles. We moved them around so that we could put our blankets in cracks between poles and slept that way. We put our gas masks on about two or three nights since we were traveling through tunnels in mountains. The coal burning steam engines filled the tunnels with so much smoke we couldn’t breathe. You can imagine what we looked like when we got to our first camp after six days of no washing, shaving and so on.

“We arrived at Chateau Dun about evening time and I don’t remember our being so tired before, or since. I recall a black trucking outfit near us and one of them said, ‘You all better get a hole dug.’ Well we didn’t take his advice and just piled down to sleep. About midnight we were rudely awakened by an air raid. I don’t remember much about the rest of the night but we spent the next day digging holes.

“Our air crews were on the field but had flown no missions as yet. Their time had been spent in practice. We one hundred were now expected to keep them going. We of the mess had no equipment but finally managed to borrow and steal enough to half-way feed everyone. We even scrounged from the British for some of our rations for some time. They had good beer which we traded Vienna sausage for. Cobb was a good scrounger. Along with a guy from Headquarters; I think his name was Burney, from Georgia, we took a six by six to a big Quartermaster dump, manned by an all black outfit. I recall Burney managed to get his hands on a fifth of booze and while feeding a guard most of the booze, we hauled away a truck load of kitchen equipment and supplies. I know we had more than double what we were supposed to have because when I left Italy to come home on R&R, in 1945, I had to sign for 13 field kitchens and we were only authorized to have six.

“Well all good things had to come to an end. Fox, and the rest of the outfit caught up with us with supplies and regulations. Up until then we fed and then took off. Now we were back in Uncle Sam’s Air Corp.”

Sgt. Keisling Lane was a member of the 20th Squadron and Mess Sergeant while in North Africa. February 28, 1991: “When I went overseas I sailed on the S.S. Mariposa which had been a cruise ship and it still had its civilian cooks. I had to take a crew down to the kitchen as helpers. My job was to make sure they all went to work and I had to stay with them all day. It wasn’t a bad deal for us as we ate good along with the crew. Most everybody got two meals a day but we ate three because that was what the ship’s crews had.

“I had been a cook in civilian life. I was working in a yacht club in Clearwater Beach that had been turned into an officers club for Air Force officers at Drew and McDill Fields, near Tampa. I was

trying to get into the Navy and was having a problem so I told a draft board to send me to the Army. General Tinker, from Tampa, was a member of the yacht club and he had one of the officers ask me if I wanted to be a cook in the Air Force as he was being sent to Pearl Harbor. The officer said it might be arranged that I could go also. I wasn't sure if this was true or not, so I declined.

"Anyway, I was sent to Camp Blanding here in Florida and was to go to Cook and Bakers School. After a few weeks and no orders, I was put in the Medics and sent to Salt Lake City. From there I was sent to Ephrata, Washington and attached to the 2nd Bomb Group, 20th Squadron. This is where I met Doc Ihle, the Squadron's Flight Surgeon. I suppose they thought the medics needed a cook in the hospital.

"It wasn't long before I learned that my lack of education would keep me from being a Medical Technician and asked Doc Ihle if I could arrange a transfer into the mess hall where I could help with something I knew about. The transfer was soon made and I was always grateful to him for that.

"So I met the Mess Sergeant, an older man, but he had an assistant who impressed me very much. As soon as I was transferred to the kitchen I learned that the older Mess Sergeant was to leave as soon as we were trained. The assistant Mess Sergeant would then take over. I was sure then, and after 50 years of kitchen work, he was one of the finest chefs I have ever known. I think his last job had been in a gambling resort in Nevada, or somewhere else in the west. The many things that happened in the next three years could make a book! I think we drove him nuts, along with the food and equipment we had to work with. He was a real professional chef and had no business in a situation like this.

"I got the Mess Sergeant's job when we were in Tunis. It wasn't that I was better than he was. We had no training as soldiers. He and I never went through Basic Training. I would certainly hope that the Armed Services do a better job than they did back in those days."

My stay at Camp Don B. Passage proved interesting to some degree. The camp was just across a road from a large cemetery where some of our soldiers, killed during the invasion, were buried. The graves were well kept and aligned as you see them in Veteran cemeteries today. It was a large cemetery, French I believe. Things were pretty dull during this period. Outside of some limited office work, guard duty and occasional trips into Casablanca, there wasn't much to do.

The last of our men finally arrived and on the 24th of May, four officers and 108 enlisted men loaded on 40 & 8 box cars to join the main force of the Group at Chateau Dun Du Rhumel. I was fortunate to miss that trip because T/Sgt. John J. McWeeney and I were selected to drive the Orderly Room jeep in the large motor convoy. We had just received our complement of all types of vehicles and were to take them to our first base.

We departed camp May 25th and arrived at Chateau Dun on May 30th. Our trip, about 1,050 miles, took us through Fez and Ou'dja, Morocco; Orleansville and L'azhe, Algeria where there were bivouac areas outside these towns. There we were supplied with water and gasoline. We slept on the ground. "C" rations were our staple food although we did buy some fruit along the way. One day we bummed some bread from a GI bakery.

We were wary of the Arabs as we drove through the many towns. We were pulling a trailer loaded with supplies and personnel possessions and had it covered with a tarp. As we went through a town, Mac and I would take turns getting on the trailer, with our rifle, to keep anyone from reaching into the trailer to steal whatever they could grab.

S/Sgt. James C. Charlson was a member of the 96th Communication section. May 25, 1992: "We had left Camp Don B. Passage, and were traveling by rail, 40 & 8, to our first base camp at Chateau Dun Du Rhumel. It was a several day ride and accommodations were lacking. Aside from monotony and discomfort of the trip, one personal story stands out in my mind.

“At one stop, near a small station, most of the men rushed to either the right or left ditch and proceeded to empty both bowels and bladders. Not having a demanding urge, I waited until the rush was over, then decided to walk a few blocks to the station and perform my duties in a civilized manner. On entering the station I proceeded to the rest room and was confronted with what appeared to be urinals with raised foot prints. I resolutely planted my feet on the raised footprints and started urinating when I heard the door open and expected company. I had the company in the form of a French woman of young middle age who stepped on the raised footprints in the reverse of my stance, raised her dress, pulled down her panties and proceeded with her duties. She had a full view of my shortcomings but only smiled (that hurt). But being in the midst of voiding my bladder I could not stop, so she had a long view of a short subject. When rushing back to the train, I noticed in my confusion that I had slightly wet the front of my trousers. When my colleges pointed this out, I blamed it on a faulty drinking water spigot. I never went into a station rest room again.”

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## OPERATIONS: APRIL/JUNE, 1943

**A**pril 23, 1943 the air echelon arrived at a field near Naverine, Algeria and the first units of the ground echelon arrived on the 25th. The Group immediately set up for combat operations. Due to unfavorable field conditions, the Group received orders on the 26th of April to move to an airfield at Chateau Dun Du Rhumel, Algeria. The morning of the 27th found the Group on its way to the new Base. It then proceeded to set up to begin operations as part of the 12th Air Force.

### **TERRANOVA, SARDINIA - MISSION NO. 1 - APRIL 28, 1943**

Eighteen aircraft, each loaded with 12, 500-lb. GP bombs, took off to bomb Shipping Installations at Terranova. Due to unfavorable weather conditions in the target area, the Group returned to Base with the bombs.

2nd Lt. Robert F. Amos, 20th Squadron, was the Co-pilot on the crew of 1st Lt. Clyde H. Knaggs. Prior to the flight overseas, Lt. Amos was displaced from his crew and was left at Great Falls, supposedly to deploy with the ground echelon. Captain Joseph Triggs, Commanding Officer of the 20th Squadron, took over as pilot of Lt. Knaggs' aircraft, bumping Lt. Amos. On short notice, he was ordered to Kearney, Nebraska and assigned to fly as Co-pilot on A/C #42-5151, piloted by 1st Lt. Delbert Resta of the 96th Squadron. He deployed without any overseas pilotage experience. The following is an account of many missions of Lt. Amos.

"Our aircraft was #42-29613 and crew consisted of 1st Lt. Clyde H. Knaggs, pilot; 2nd Lt. Robert F. Amos, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Wade O. Douglas, Navigator; 2nd Lt. Richard W. Howes, Bombardier; T/Sgt. Everett L. Phelps, Engineer; S/Sgt. John J. Phelan, Assistant Engineer; T/Sgt. Paul L. Vezetinski, Radio; S/Sgt. Edward L. Dembecki, Assistant Radio; S/Sgt. Paul A. Simmons and S/Sgt. Louis N. Feierstein, Gunners.

"April 28th our target was shipping and harbor at Terranova, Sardinia. Colonel Thomas led. We followed the 301st Bomb Group. For some reason the Group turned away from the target and we followed. When we decided to bomb our gas was too low, visibility was poor and the target difficult to see. Returned without bombing. I felt quite anxious but don't feel that combat will be too difficult. Crew needs to smooth out and Clyde and I will have formation problems to solve. Clyde did most of the flying. 301st attacked by three fighters.

"May 3rd, target, Shipping at Bizerte, Tunisia. Flying in the Colonel Thomas Squadron. Weather poor. Colonel tried to go through overcast which proved to be 4,000 feet. Group broke up. Dembecki, ball turret, reported one ship missed our tail by feet. Came out in clear and joined formation with Captain Caruthers, 96th CO, and returned to Base. Colonel led approximately ten ships to

partially overcast target. Flak intense and accurate. Ships hit hard. Selling had radio operator wounded. Group hit overcast coming home. Captain Bentley crash landed. Lost ship, crew OK. 99th lost seven planes and at least two to weather.

“May 5th, target LaGoulette, Tunisia, shipping. We flew Colonel’s Wing and followed the 97th Bomb Group. Our attack took us over land, out to sea, back over target and back over land coming home. Very heavy flak over target each time. Colonel Thomas did a very good evasive action. Bombing successful. Three fighters came up but did not attack. We had holes in No. 1 engine and stabilizer. Mackenzie had flak frag come through nose and struck his nose gun. Possibly saved his life. Bigham’s windshield was broken. No losses or casualties.

“May 9th, target town of Palermo, Sicily (Mother’s Day). Very rough mission. We were fourth heavy Group over target. Flew No. 3 off Colonel Thomas. Flak intense and accurate. Bombing good. 97 P-38 escort, no fighters got to us. Flak hit Feierstein’s (waist gun) oxygen hose - passed out. Phelps took care of him. Thompson had three engines shot out. Landed in water about ten miles from small Axis held island. Selling damaged stabilizer attempting to drop life raft. We had 45 flak holes. Bigham hit hard. Tail gunner injured. Lt. Seng fatally injured. Our tent’s first casualty.

“At critique, Colonel Thomas criticized air discipline. Formation must stay together regardless of who goes down. Thompson and crew, prisoners of war today. “WOIKIN GOIL,” first loss.

“May 14, target Civitavecchia, Italy, 40 miles north of Rome. Captain Triggs, 20th CO, led. We bombed in trail and last Squadron over the target. Flak slight but accurate. Gunners called out some fighters but no attacks. Large explosion along docks reported by Dick Howes. Bombing was good. Turn away from target was violent. Simmons, tail gunner, reported terrific explosion when 50 miles from target. No damage, no losses.

“May 18, target Messina, Italy. General Doolittle led. I flew with Triggs. We ran into an overcast and tried to go through. Had to go on instruments. I took over at 12,000 ft. and flew out of overcast with only one ship in Squadron. Headrick tried to rendezvous and assemble Group, but no success. After four hours of flying returned to base, Doolittle very displeased about being sent out in such weather conditions. (Years later I met General Doolittle at an Explorers Club meeting. He was in his 80s but remembered the mission. He said when he got back he ‘fired’ the 12th Air Force officer for a forecast that indicated we could not get to the target).

“May 24, Terranova, Sardinia, shipping. We were ‘Tail End Charlie.’ Moderate flak over target, very accurate but we had no hits. Our bombs hit large vessel in harbor. Bombing as a whole was good. Dick made his own bomb run. Jacobson flew as Navigator. First time in a B-17 and first mission. P-38 escort, altitude 22,000 feet, led 301st Bomb Group. We crossed Northern Sardinia, bombed target and then flew out to sea.

“May 26, Comiso Airdrome, Sicily. Encountered very heavy flak over target and fighters, Me-109s. They made numerous close passes. One came within 100 yards and was shot down. Simmons received half credit for it. We returned intact. Phelps put two, 50 cal. shells in our horizontal stabilizer. We had two flak holes. Brass broke Clyde’s windshield. Group claimed three enemy fighters. One ball turret gunner killed and one upper turret gunner critically injured. Aerial bombs dropped by fighters scored several hits.

“May 31st, Marshalling Yards, Foggia, Italy. Devine led our element. Fighters dropped aerial bombs on us going into target. Crossed coast north of Naples. Saw Isle of Capri and Mt. Vesuvius. Over Italy about one hour. Attacked by fighters on bombing run. No damage. Covered target. Heavy attack by Macchi 202 and Me-109s away from target. They concentrated close attacks from two and three o’clock. On deck, coming home, surprise attack by fighters off Sicily. Gunners out of position. Vezetinski had gun apart. Fighters dropped aerial bombs and scored hits. Attack lasted 15 minutes. Simmons reported bullets hitting the water behind our tail. Total fighters, 20 to 30. Flying time, eight hours.

“June 15, Le Spezia, Italy. Bomb load 2/2000#. We tacked onto the 99th Bomb Group. Target was three Italian battleships. Melcher led our Squadron. Clyde feeling bad and I flew most of the mission. Saw one sub. Bombing run was poor. Dick messed up and had to salvo. Flak very intense. One hole in vertical stabilizer. Reports say two ships burning and numerous near misses. No fighters. Returned low on gas.

“June 11, Pantelleria Island. 12/500# bombs. Four heavy Groups took western end of the Island and did barrage bombing, attempting to cover entire northwest end of Island to assist invasion forces. We were to cover part of town. Target was already covered by bombs and shell fire. We took area more inland. Altitude 12,000 feet. Large explosions in town as we approached. The sky and sea were a mass of military activity. Naval vessels littered the area. Barges were approaching the shore. The island surrendered 15 minutes after the bombing. Fighters attacked the 97th Bomb Group. First Axis stronghold said to surrender from our air activity. More bombs dropped by poundage and time than any other spot in the world. Poor weather.

“June 21, Railroad Yard, Naples, Italy. 16/300# bombs. First operation from Ain M’Lila. Headrick led. Lead Squadron carried incendiaries. Echelon by elements at I.P. at Isle of Capri. Bombing run took us directly over Mt. Vesuvius. Flak heavy, not accurate on us. Captain Bentley, with Co-pilot Williams, leading the 429th was hit hard and went down. Four of his Squadron went down and gave cover from attacking fighters. He turned toward an island and made a water landing. Flak hit wing, radio compartment and tail. Co-pilot seat was empty. Remaining four ships attacked by fighters off Sicily, no damage. Information received says most of Bentley’s crew are prisoners of war.

“June 24, Messina, Sicily. 16/300# bombs. Clyde and I led Squadron. Held good position. Group was third over target. Bombed the city. Flak at target (box pattern) intense and accurate. Bombed in echelon of elements, our formation off target was good. Me-109 made a mid-air collision between No. 3 and No. 4 engines of Captain Hinsey’s ship. Tore wing off. Plane began to spin, broke in two aft of radio compartment. Fighters were numerous and made numerous passes on crippled ship ahead of us. We had one rear attack. Group had three men injured. Tail-end-Charlie of our Squadron turned back at coast, attacked but made it to Tunis. I came home with a 103 fever and was confined to the hospital.

“July 4, Catania Airdrome, Sicily. We started as Deputy Commander, feathered an engine and turned back. The Group encountered opposition of every type. Pasero turned back at coast with two bad engines and landed at GoGo, near Malta. Laich and Yeager-Jacobson-Leighty set on fire by either aerial bombs or 20mm shell fire. Flames coming out of wing vents and radio compartment. Five seen to abandon ship, four chutes opened. Enemy fighters followed first chute down but made no passes. Upper turret was in operation until ship crashed. Two fighters were seen to go down. Wing came off, broke aft of radio compartment, crashed in ocean and exploded. Underwood shot up and landed at Malta, no injuries. A.P. correspondent interviewed Bigham’s crew. They were shot up fairly badly.

“July 5, Gerbini Airdrome #6, Sicily. Triggs led. We were Deputy Commander. Triggs flew AFCE (auto pilot). Led good mission. Picked up P-38 escort at coast and Spitfire escort over Malta. I flew bomb run. Dick observed several planes on the field. Just as frags were gone, flak came through window in nose and broke two hydraulic lines in front of me. Glass cut Wade Douglas’ leg and chewed up his map. Several fighters made passes at second Squadron. We flew ship #146, ‘NINO DIABLO.’

“July 6, Gerbini Airdrome #6, Sicily. Mission much the same as before. P-38s gave close escort. Bombing good. Flak low and inaccurate. Throttle cable of No. 1 broke and assumed automatic setting. Dembecki saw three parachutes on bomb run, origin unknown. P-38s had a big dog fight behind us. Simmons observed a P-38 go down and several enemy craft. One P-38 came under our formation for protection until he got to Malta. Feathered No. 1 to land.

“July 10, Gerbini Airdrome #9, Sicily. Invasion started. Intense activity along Sicilian coast. Towns and beaches under shell fire. Hundreds of landing craft along beaches from tip of island. Large convoy heading back to Africa already at 8:30. We were up at 3:45. Headrick leading. Entire crew had G.I.s. At the I.P. No. 1 and No. 3 engines began to act up. Clyde had to use steel helmet for nature call. Dick used his bombsight bag. Part of crew had empty ammo boxes. Dembecki couldn't wait, left turret and urinated on waist floor. This urgency occurred just off the target. Engines got us home okay. Flak, fair accuracy. Colonel Thomas' 50th.

“July 14, Marshalling Yards, Messina, Sicily. Headrick led. Had some bombs in the water but covered target well. Observed explosions on bomb run and terrific explosion after turn away from target. Flak moderate, fairly accurate. McIntyre, leading element of 96th behind us, had a direct hit by flak. He got away from target and tried to turn to sea, his two wing men followed. They observed direct hit near radio compartment and numerous holes in right wing. Plane on fire, nine men bailed out. Plane disintegrated. McIntyre (P), Bentley (CP), Morrow (B) and Greathouse (N).

“July 16, San Giovanni Ferry, Italy. Stoeger led good mission. We flew No. 2 with Horn as Navigator. Flew around Sicily and came in from north. No. 2 oil pressure read 40 psi all the way. Flak intense, accurate. Leader ahead of us feathered an engine but went to target. We passed under them just before bombs away. Received big holes in bomb bay, several in wings, tail, oil lines on No. 2 hit and gas tank punctured. Feathered engine and came home on three. Altitude across Italy never less than 19,000 feet.

“July 19, Marshalling Yards, Rome, Italy. My first trip as first pilot. My crew: Thomas Cochran, Co-pilot; Albert Dowsing, Navigator; William Golden, Bombardier; Sgts Crowley, upper turret, Williams, radio, Charles DeVito, ball turret; Moore, right waist; Clepper, left waist; and Meadows, tail. I really sweated! Our plane, #082, 'ZELMA.' Given instructions not to miss target nor have any bombs long or short. The Vatican City was not to be hit at any cost. Flew on Stoeger's left wing. Flak was moderate, inaccurate. Several fighters came up but made no passes. Came home low on fuel. My landing and take-off were terrible. Sky was littered with aircraft. Photos showed no hits in Vatican and negligible damage outside target area. Leaflets dropped on city two hours before target warning people of raid. First bombing of Rome. Were second Group over.

“August 19, Foggia, Italy, 12/500# bombs. Two waves. Our Group first over target. Target was a portion of town and transformer station. Bombing excellent. Flak intense and accurate. Fighters waited for us off target. Pasero, leading our second element, was attacked by fighters. Immediately John Bradley's ship started down followed by Pasero. Both planes crashed over land. Remaining ship was from 49th, hit hard and finally went down just off the coast. Rozzelle was leading second Squadron behind Stoeger. Heavily attacked by fighters. Aerial bombs set 'PRECISION' on fire and exploded in the water. 'BIG JEFF' was set afire. AFCE was set and five chutes appeared. Headrick feathered engine and jeopardized formation by moving under lead aircraft. We missed a near collision. Knaggs lost both windshields by brass. His life raft caught fire and had to be pulled. Caught on stabilizer and he had to pull out of formation. I followed him part way to Palermo. Could not contact him. Simmons had a flak wound. Knaggs landed without hydraulic pressure and a badly battered tail. I rejoined formation. My gunners got one fighter. We had a dozen flak holes. Group confirmed 28 fighters.

“September 2, Railroad Bridges, Trento, Italy. Headrick led. Selling fell out and we led second element. Trento in most northern part of Italy and only ships with Tokyo tanks flew. Bomb load 8/500#, gas - 2,600 gallons. Intercepted by six fighters at coast, one made two very close passes. Over land more than two hours. Target lay between two mountains, country very beautiful. Low mountains, green. The higher Alps, sharp, rugged, snow capped. Forty miles from Swiss border. Target well covered, bridge over river knocked down. B-17 followed formation half way past Sardinia, then seemingly turned back to Italy. Logged 8:45 hours.

“September 6. Tonight Clyde and I started in #884 to the 99th to fly night formation. Supercharger induction line broke. Feathered engine and landed. Took off in #082. Got on ground just as air raid started. Jerries attacked Bizerte and lost seven planes, only dropped two bombs. One of our aircraft was fired on until he dropped flares, color of the day. We took off after air raid and flew night formation. Got to bed at 2:00 a.m.

“September 8. We stood by at the 99th all day. Had two briefings on secret mission. We had engines running and ready for take-off when mission was canceled at 6:00 p.m. Started to take off and had a flat tire. Headrick brought us home.

“September 14, roads near Battipaglia, Italy. American 5th Army has now established beachhead below Salerno (est. three divisions). British 8th Army coming across from Foggia attempting to pinch off Germans. German forces have been strengthened and driving 5th Army back to sea. Our target was to cut road and hinder Germans’ supply and reinforcement lines. 16/300# bomb load. I flew Lt. Robins crew in #947. Stoeger led at 15,000 feet. Group missed target. Heavy crosswind at field and I made two passes, then made a terrible landing. B-26 came in on belly with feathered engine, burned. Crew okay.

“September 15, roads near Battipaglia, Italy. 16/300# bomb load. Headrick led. Had to go back after same target. 5th Army situation desperate. Enemy attempting to dive bomb landing craft shot down. Our altitude, 12,000 feet, no opposition. Hit target. Very late mission and landed after dark. Pattern was a madhouse, made fair landing. Train, 96th, had two engines feathered and bellied in on a field after dark. None injured.

“September 28, Bologna, Italy. Bomb load 12/500#. Two waves, Stoeger led the first wave. Weather bad, overcast and rain. Tacked on to 96th Squadron. Missed weather, got to target but it was overcast. Turned back. Two fighters came up, one made eight attacks on the formation, peeling off at 11:00 o’clock and coming up at our belly. No claims, no hits, no injuries, no flak. Heavy rains over North Africa and field muddy. Made a perfect landing and got to revetment okay. This was Dick’s 50th mission.

“October 1, Airdrome and Messerschmitt Factory, Augsburg, Germany. 10/500# bomb load. My 49th. Target was first into Germany, northwest of Munich. Had two waves but only 19 ships. Provisions were made to stop in Sardinia coming back. Going out, ships kept turning back until only 12 were left. Had P-38s to Corsica. One was shot down by a Me-109. Pilot bailed out. Over coast we had very close attacks. Group got as far as the Alps and turned back due to the weather. We brought our bombs back. Four ships in Colonel Rice’s wave bombed Bologna.

“October 5, Marshalling Yards, Bologna, Italy. 12/500# bomb load. Two waves. Captain Robinson and Colonel Melcher led waves. Major Triggs led our Squadron. Selling let McAlpine lead element and we had to work all the way. After hitting land, about 30 fighters attacked our second wave. Bombing was excellent. Flak, moderate, intense, accurate. We had a few holes. One of the 49th planes (Fitzpatrick) feathered an engine after bombs away and two others were smoking. He fell back and was attacked by fighters. Called for help and Robinson slowed down but he couldn’t catch up. Fighters forced him to abandon ship, 10 chutes opened. They shot down two fighters. Selling overran our formation and we followed. Got back in formation and he overran again. We stayed. Knaggs hit propwash and fell out, forcing us out. Formation nearly collided with us. Selling, at same time tried to pass us and observers said my nose missed his tail by only two feet. I felt propwash. I took Squadron lead and stayed until Corsica. Knaggs feathered an engine over land and another over water. I took his wing and followed him down. He unfeathered No. 2 and I escorted him to Corsica. Everyone okay. Two ships landed at Terranova with wounded men. Fighters used head on tactics and lots of aerial bombs. We had one close attack. Cosgrove landed in Sardinia with Knaggs. We came home on ARCE. One sergeant in Fitzpatrick’s crew had orders to go home awaiting him after mission. Wife had a child, developed uremic poisoning and not expected to live.

“Today was my last. I don’t know how I feel. I haven’t decided yet. It wasn’t a happy ending. A year’s service, 50 missions against the enemy, six months overseas and nothing to show for it. Still not promoted.

“Note: My promotion to 1st Lieutenant, dated 27 September 1943, arrived at Group after I departed for the United States.”

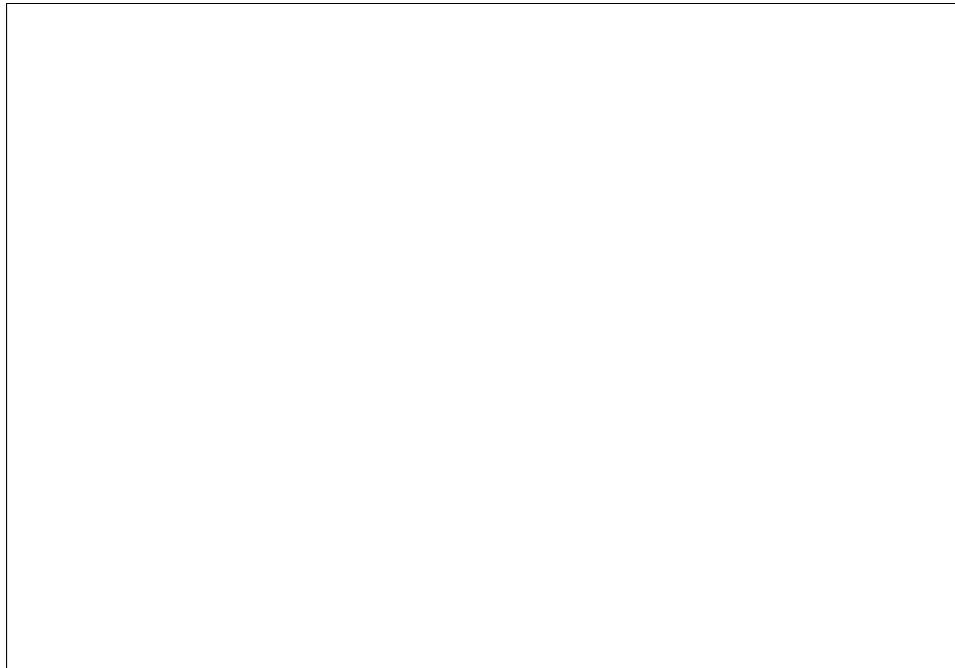
Captain Roscoe H. Johnson, Jr. was a first pilot in the 49th Squadron. November 25, 1990: “The crew that I took overseas were 2nd Lt. Elias Dahir, Co-pilot; 1st Lt. George L. Johnson, Navigator; 1st Lt. William W. Holland, Bombardier; T/Sgt. Clifford Harris, Flight Engineer; T/Sgt. Donald A. Steussey, Radio Operator; S/Sgt. Arthur E. Hutchins, Assistant Flight Engineer; S/Sgt. Julius L. Lamonica, Assistant Radio Operator; Aerial Gunners S/Sgt. Robert S. King and M/Sgt. Harold M. Jonson.



L/R - Clyde Knaggs, Richard Howes, Robert Amos, Wade Douglas and “Flak”  
(Courtesy - R. Amos)



Colonel Ford Lauer (center) and staff - (Photo Section)



Major Richard Headrick - Colonel Joseph Thomas, 2nd BG CO,  
20 April/September 3 1943  
Colonel Herbert Rice, 2nd BG CO, 3 September/8 July 1943  
(Courtesy - Richard Headrick)



American Graves - Casablanca Cemetery, North Africa (Courtesy - M. Moran)



T/R - L/R unknown, T. Ashe, G. McLauchlan, H. Hauser, H. Annex, G. Llewellyn  
B/R - L/R K. Jensen, F. Licence, C. Gathercole, J. Jones  
(Courtesy - Gathercole)

“We named our plane ‘WILEY WITCH.’ The name was misspelled at Morrison Field by the painter. He thought we were naming it after Wiley Post whom we all admired, but who we had in mind was the heroine of a very risqué poem, *Kathusala*, who was a wily witch, a dirty whore, etc. You get the idea? Our crew was a very informal bunch and we decided against using the name of any living person such as wife, sweetheart, (unlucky?), (unfair?). This ditty was quite popular at the time so we chose her. It was a fortunate selection as we came to call the ship the ‘WITCH,’ and she became a real person. Never let us down, 53 missions, 300 plus combat hours, no turn-backs and never missed a mission. I understand she flew about 30 more missions, ran out of gas (not her fault) and ditched.

“When we left her she had 197 flak or bullet holes in her fair body and one prop was one inch shorter than the others as a piece of flak took off an inch of one blade and the crew chief, Burliegh Craig, couldn’t find a replacement so cut off one inch from the other blades to balance. We used it this way for several missions.

“We only had one casualty, the ball turret gunner, wounded when an armor piercing round went through the ball. We had the usual number of near hits to the crew.

“The ‘WITCH’ was the only plane we flew. The ‘WITCH’ had her portrait on one side. She had a Betty Grable body, a skimpy bathing suit (red) and was astraddle a broom. Very pretty. She knew she was pretty and always smiled when the crew would pat her curvaceous shape.

“I recall some other names - Major Haynes’, ‘A Merry Can,” Bob O’Neill’s, ‘Peg O’ My Heart,’ ‘Forty-Niner.’

“My tour ended in late 43 and we were rotated home.”

Captain Douglas T. Metcalf was a First Pilot and Flight Commander in the 96th Squadron. March 1, 1991: “My crew came to me piecemeal. The Navigator, 1st Lt. Edmund J. Mroz and Bombardier 1st Lt. Herbert McDaniel, were with me in B-17 transition in Sebring, Florida in August and September, 1942, and with me at Salt lake City and Geiger Field, Spokane, Washington. They were permanently assigned, with the rest of the crew, at Ephrata, Washington about November 1942.

“The rest of the crew were 2nd Lt. Ben Turner, Co-Pilot; T/Sgt. Walter L. Sikora, Engineer; T/Sgt. Joseph O. Potvin, Radio; S/Sgt. Mike O. Zahn, Lower Turret; S/Sgt. Howard R. Woods, Left Waist; S/Sgt. Chester P. Bartoszewicz, Right Waist; and Sgt. Charles F. Love, Tail Gunner and Armorer.

“We were assigned plane #42-29639, February 3rd or 4th at Kearney, Nebraska, which we named ‘SKYWORM.’ We left Morrison Field in March 1943 via Trinidad, Belem, Natal, Ascension Island, Dakar and Marrakech where we awaited the rest of the Group.

“All but two of my missions were flown in #639. My last mission in #639 was Group mission No. 53, August 6, 1943, to bomb a highway bridge at Messina, Sicily. Two other planes I flew, while #639 was being repaired, were #873 on June 10th to Pantelleria and #779 on June 30th to Messina.

“I was picked to return to the States with three other Flight Leaders who had the most missions in B-17 Groups. Never knew why but it was about that time that the A-Bomb Group was formed. No. 639 was one of the five aircraft lost by the 96th Squadron on the Group’s 150th mission to Steyr, Austria, February 24, 1943. #639 lasted one year, three weeks in service of the 96th.”

### **BIZERTE AND FERRYVILLE, TUNISIA - MISSION NO. 2 - MAY 3, 1943**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 13 dropped 39 tons of 500 lb. GP bombs. Fourteen were early returns due to weather. Hits were observed on jetties, buildings, hangars and workshops at Bizerte. Flak was moderate to intense. Five A/C were damaged by flak. Weather, poor. T/Sgt. Theodore F. Ramsey, Radio Operator of A/C #42-29602, 20th Squadron, wounded by flak in two places on the right leg. T/Sgt. Ramsey stayed at his post, trying to clear a jammed gun until Captain Richard

Headrick rendered first aid. Upon landing, T/Sgt. Ramsey was immediately taken to a hospital, but died on May 11, 1943.

Captain Jack Bentley, A/C #42-29580, hit a high tension wire, damaging the right wing aileron. Crash landed in field, No. 1 engine caught fire and extinguished by the crew. No crew members were injured.

S/Sgt. Chester C. Sumner, Ball Turret Gunner on the crew of Captain Donald Stoeger, 20th Squadron. April 18, 1991: "In addition to Captain Stoeger were 1st Lt. Walter C. Laich, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Ray U. Shipley, Navigator; 2nd Lt. Charles H. Leighty, Bombardier; T/Sgt. George D. Nesbit, Engineer; S/Sgt. Byrle L. Spillers, Assistant Engineer; S/Sgt. Joseph E. Liney, Radio; S/Sgt. Frederick B. Crutchfield, Tail Gunner; and S/Sgt. Leland Waldie, Gunner.

"Our original radio operator in the States developed an ear problem and was replaced by S/Sgt. Liney. S/Sgt. Crutchfield was wounded on his second mission and did not fly with us again.

"Lt. Laich was replaced by Lt. Robbins. Lt. Laich was lost while flying as First Pilot on July 4th on a mission to Catania, Sicily. If I remember correctly, Lt. Leighty developed pneumonia before he flew a mission and was replaced by Lt. Avery Brunson. Lt. Leighty was lost on the same mission to Catania, flying with Lt. Laich.

"Our second mission was to Bizerte, Tunisia and as we approached the target, we could see the sky ahead of us was covered with flak. From the amount of smoke puffs we could see, we knew we were in for a rough time. Pete Krutchfield, our tail gunner, was hit over the target and radioed he had been hit. T/Sgt. Nesbit, our Engineer, crawled back to the tail position with an emergency oxygen bottle. He found Pete, covered with blood. He had been hit in the right cheek by a piece of shrapnel. Nesbit gave him a morphine shot and bandaged as best he could. Arriving back at base, Pete was removed from the tail and taken to a British hospital in the area.

"Pete recovered from his wounds, had plastic surgery, returned to fly again and complete his missions. He did not fly with our crew again as most of us had finished our missions before he came back.

"On three trips to the Messina Straits, we encountered tremendous amounts of flak. On the first two trips, we approached from the west and bombed the city and harbor with great success. The third trip we approached from the south, right up the Strait between Italy and Sicily. We got flak from both Italy and Sicily as we flew to the target, Messina. We received a large amount of holes, but nothing serious. On a trip to Foggia, we approached from the west and ran into a great number of fighters, and after bombing, ran into fighters again on the way back. We received a hit in our right wing. We were happy to get back! My last mission was September 14, 1943."

Major Rudolph C. Koller, Jr. was the Group Navigator and flew to North Africa with Colonel Ford J. Lauer, Group Commanding Officer. Their aircraft, #42-29595, was named "TADLER." "THRU ALL DANGER LET US RIDE," by Colonel Lauer. January 2, 1991: "Soon after the Group moved from Marrakech to Chateau Dun, the Group Bombardier and I encouraged the new Group Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. Joe Thomas, to make a survey flight of the available bombing and gunnery ranges in Algeria, south of Chateau Dun, about 50-60 miles. Reason - to check out condition of the ranges and see how usable they were.

"We had not done any formation bombing while in the states and, while waiting at Marrakech, had flown only two formation bombing missions. Each aircraft dropped two, 100 lb. Training bombs. We wanted to plan some more bombing training.

"Joe Thomas agreed. On the off chance that the ranges were usable, we loaded up 10/100 lb. Practice bombs, flew to the vicinity of the practice range, searched for the range and finally found it about 4 kms off the main plot. We made several low passes to make sure the range was clear. Then up to 18,000 feet and made a four bomb drop with 100 feet intervalometer setting. Then around again

and dropped another four at minimum intervalometer setting. We observed both patterns. With the bombs left we made a low altitude run, 1,000 feet with intervalometer setting at 25 feet. We had never bombed at low altitude and wanted to see the results. Pretty good! From this last drop we skimmed back to Chateau Dun.

“On May 3, 1943, the Group was scheduled against the docks at Bizerte, Tunisia. Can’t remember the size of our formation, probably 36 aircraft. The briefing went OK. Take-off on schedule. The 97th, 99th and 301st were also flying against targets in adjacent areas in and around Bizerte. All Groups were scheduled over their targets within 15 minutes of each other.

“While we were en route, the weather began to cloud up. As we approached the target from an IP just north of Tunis, the overcast at 20,000 was getting heavier. When we dropped our bombs we had 5/10's cloud undercast. We had fighter attacks before and after the target and moderate flak over the target. The fighter attacks were heavier on withdrawal and I concentrated on firing the navigator’s 50 cal. gun. I had given Joe Thomas a heading off the target back to Base. For about 15 minutes after the target, I was busy with my gun. When the fighters gave up, I looked at my compass - OK, the correct heading but much to my surprise we had about 9/10's undercast, couldn’t see a thing on the ground. The last ground fix I had was at Bizerte. We were cruising at about 20,000 feet on a heading, hopefully back to Base. I couldn’t see the ground long enough to get a good drift reading on my driftmeter. I could only hold a drift target three or four seconds. What I did get was a drift indication of left drift, but how much? I had no idea. My best reference was our speed out, but in the last hour, at least, the weather had changed drastically. I used the reverse of my ground speed as the return speed and indicated a five degree left drift on the return. I made no course correction.

“There was a 25 watt radio range at Chateau Dun airfield but it had been out for the past day or so, and when it was working you could pick it up at about 30 to 40 miles out. The radio was no help this day! When I reached the ETA for Base we still had 9/10's undercast, couldn’t see a thing. I quickly went through a best known position computation. This involved an inputted 10 degrees left drift, 15 mph faster than estimated and 15 mph slower than estimated. Distance, target to Base was 240 miles. We had left the target 1 hour 30 minutes previously. I projected this calculation on the map which allowed me to compute a circle inside of which I had a 90 percent probability of being within. While I was doing this, Joe Thomas called and said he was over a large opening in the clouds and could see the ground. I replied, ‘Let’s go down and get some bearings but no lower than 3,000 feet.’ Why? The Atlas Mountains in that area reached 2,000 feet. So here we went, the lead aircraft with others in tow, in a tight circle down from now 13,000 feet to 3,000 feet. We were in the clear and I could see the mountains to the south and immediately knew we were north of the Atlas range. So, once we were under the undercast, I gave Joe a north 360 degree heading. Minutes later we passed over a good sized Algerian town and Joe said, ‘That’s Setif.’ I said, ‘I don’t think so.’ Setif was about 20 miles west of the Base. We went around again, now at 2,000 feet and a good look at the town. Not Setif! This town had no center town square and Setif did. I looked at my position circle and the town of Batna popped out at me. I said, ‘I think it’s Batna, stay on a 360 degree heading.’ The bombardier said, ‘This looks familiar.’ I replied, ‘Yes, this looks just like the area near the bombing range. If I am correct we will cross a railroad in about two minutes.’ While this was going on, I had taken several drifts and obtained a good fix on the wind. I had noted the time we descended and when we leveled off and when we had first sighted what I thought to be Batna. All this gave me ground speed from the target. We crossed a railroad and I called Joe Thomas and said, ‘We are OK, about 30 miles south of Base, take up a heading of 335 degrees and we will be there in ten minutes.’ Then I prayed - was that really Batna? In ten minutes and 22 seconds we passed to the left of Chateau Dun and there was the airfield on our left wing. It had begun to rain slightly and the ceiling had us down to 1,500 feet. We proceeded to land, had to get down quickly because if the rain got any heavier, we would have trouble landing on

the dirt runways. All but one of the 36 aircraft landed. As we found out later, one of our aircraft got separated, climbed back above the soup and tacked onto the 99th Bomb Group that just happened along.

“Previous experience, flying in the States in 1942, taught me how to work a fix from an unsure position to a sure position. The only drawback to this maneuver was the 2,300 plus mountain range in the south. Anyway, I considered myself damn lucky. Joe Thomas said, ‘Glad you got us back.’

“The 97th Group, which had left before us, still hadn’t returned and the rain was picking up. Much to my surprise, we, the 2nd Bomb Group, were the only Group on the ground. All other Groups had experienced similar weather difficulties. The 25 watt range was finally back on the air at dusk but reception was poor to bad. The local anti-aircraft units turned on their searchlights vertical in hopes of giving some aircraft something to work with. Finally, around 8:00 p.m., most of the units made it down someplace. The 5th Wing had aircraft on the ground at every available airfield in the vicinity. Some aircraft flew over the Mediterranean and either ditched or bailed out. I can’t remember how many aircraft the 5th Wing lost due to unpredictable weather. Somehow or other the figure four comes to my mind, but I can’t say for sure. I know several aircraft were stuck in the mud and couldn’t be moved until the ground dried out. Our lost aircraft hit a high tension wire and crash landed in a field. No one was injured.

“As I look back, I credit my flying experience in the States, our earlier trip to the bomb range and, I guess, some pretty good navigation on my part, plus what I call, ‘dumb luck’ that got us back safely to Base.

“For all this I was awarded the DFC.”

T/Sgt. Lee W. Anderson, 96th Squadron, continued: “arrived Chateau Dun, April 23, along with plenty of rain and taffy-like mud. I took inspection and unloaded. Had a couple of weeks of combat maneuvers. Oxygen mask didn’t fit so got another. Rumor, combat soon. Plane held up well, hope it continues.

“1st mission: May 3, 1943. Bizerte, Tunisia. Naval Base. Bomb load, 12/500#, propaganda leaflets. Flak: H.I.A. (Heavy, intense, accurate). Machine shop hit. One plane hit in No. 2 engine. One radio man and tail gunner hit. Our plane, HOLES!

“3rd mission: May 6th. Trapani, Sicily, Airfields and Shipping. 50 B-17s and P-38 escort. Flak heavy but inaccurate. Maintained good formation. Hit by 35 Me-109s. Seven Me-109s shot down, one P-38 lost.

“4th mission: May 9th. VERY ROUGH MISSION! Palermo, Sicily, Shipping. Flak: H.I.A. Flew at 28,000 feet. One hundred B-17s and 96 P-38 escort. 12/500# bombs. Intelligence gave orders to lay eggs on highest steeple in town. We blew it up, it was an ammo dump. Debris shot 10,000 feet in air. Plenty of German fighters. Our intercooler was shot out. Lost one B-17 west of Palermo. One navigator killed, one tail gunner seriously wounded, two waist gunners slightly wounded.

“10th mission: May 25th. ROUGH MISSION! Messina, Sicily. Flak: H.I.A. I saw two B-17s go down in flames. Engaged enemy fighters for 20 minutes. Our leader, a Colonel, had plenty of guys really mad! Took us twice (stupidly) on our bomb run with a 180 degree turn right through the flak!

“11th mission: ROUGH MISSION! Airfield, Comiso, Sicily. Flak: H.I.A. A Me-109 came at me head on. All his guns were firing and he looked like a Christmas tree all lit up. He was pumping 20mms at me and I ducked. When I looked up he was gone. We engaged FW-190s for 20 minutes and shot down two. In our Group we lost one top turret gunner. A top turret gunner was wounded, the first injured in our Squadron. Earl Kuck was injured and his plane was shot up bad.

“14th mission: May 31st. ROUGH MISSION! RR and Marshalling Yards, Foggia, Italy. Flak: H.I.A. We made our run on target with excellent results. Usually we relax on our way back when we are pretty close to our Base but today we got a surprise. We ‘flew the deck,’ back keeping about 50 feet above the water which eliminates watching, except from above for us. We had taken off our

oxygen masks and relaxed, having a smoke. The navigator had gone aft to the toilet when suddenly the waist gunner opened up with his gun. We wondered what the crazy guy was firing at. Between the waist gunners there suddenly appeared a cloud of smoke. I thought one of the ammo cans or oxygen bottles had exploded and started to investigate. Suddenly, Lt. Long yelled, 'Hey Andy, get in your turret, there's a shit house full of fighters coming in on us!' The smoke I had seen was from a 20mm shell that had entered through the navigator's plexiglass nose. He was lucky. Running back from the toilet he saw where the shell had entered and all he could do was point at the hole where his head would have been and he turned white. Another shell had dug along the floor, peppered Lt. Long's instrument panel and knocked out our electrical system. Another knocked out our No. 1 engine. A fragment stopped about a foot from Lt. Prieve's foot after plowing through the floor. It was the elite Herman Goering squadron and all the noses were painted a bright yellow. I guess their intelligence had phoned ahead, after our bomb run, so they jumped us from a Sicilian base.

"We clung to the deck, as close as we could, while the Germans dropped 100# demolition bombs in front of us hoping we would fly into water spouts and crash. They sure caught us napping that day! Lt. Long was so excited and mad that he started firing his 45 cal. out of the nose at an incoming FW-190. We were only about 20 miles off the coast and fairly close to home base when they jumped us.

"Miraculously we lost no B-17s. We were all shot up but finally made it back to Base; the Germans chasing us almost to Base. We shot down seven FW-190s, and from that day on, we never relaxed our vigilance until close to our field. The mission itself was successful for we really clobbered the railroad yards.

"15th mission: June 5th. La Spezia, Italy. Battleships in the harbor. Each plane carried 2-2000 lb. Bombs. One intercepting fighter shot down. On the way back we were again intercepted by 35 FW-190s who dropped 100# bombs ahead of us as we flew 'the deck.' We shot down seven of their fighters.

"22nd mission: June 21st. Naples, Italy. Flak: H.I.A. Encountered 30 Me-109s. One B-17 lost.

"23rd mission: June 25th. Messina, Sicily. Two B-17s shot down in flames.

"25th mission: June 28th. Leghorn, Italy, Shipping. This mission represented a long hop for us. One of Italy's most northern ports. Had narrow escape. 97th Bomb Group came in a little late over the target and their bombs missed us by inches and seconds.

"27th mission: July 4th. Catania, Sicily. ROUGH MISSION. LOTS OF FIGHTERS! Hottest mission to date. Seventy-five fighters attacked us, also dropped aerial bombs. Thirty Spitfires engaged them. Our squadron (96th) got a few by air action. I got one, hit another but it disappeared before I could determine the damage - or kill. The Spitfires broke off the attack almost immediately and just simply disappeared. Norm Ferree, a cowboy from Wyoming, in our Squadron, was killed by a piece of flak. Up until the time he was killed, he thought he bore a charmed life and was not afraid. He had participated in many rodeos and had about every bone in his body broken. He had been shot, stabbed and beaten up and said, 'Nothing's going to happen to me.' It was a big blow to our Squadron and plenty of guys did some serious thinking and praying from then on.

"July 7th. We went to Constantine for a few days leave. Let off steam. Prostitutes had mattresses strapped to their backs. Dirty pictures being sold. We took a truck. 'Moonlight requisitioned' cement, etc. and a piano during a German air raid, to build a NCO clubhouse. Big guy from ground crew played the piano in the back of the truck and we all sang, *Dirtie Gertie From Bizerte*.

"31st mission: July 13th. Milo Airdrome, Trapani, Sicily. Flak: H.I.A. Had plenty of fighters. We were shot up bad. Many narrow escapes from flak. Our plane full of holes.

“32nd mission: July 15th. Naples, Italy. Flak: H.I.A. Our Group shot up bad, also our plane again. Lots of enemy fighters. The 96th lost a ship yesterday on a mission to Messina. Crew of Lt. McIntyre. Phil Zimmerman on crew.

“38th mission: August 4th. Naples, Italy. Flak: H.I.A. They shot at us with 100# rockets! Engaged by 75 fighters. Lost two aircraft, one from the 96th and other from the 429th. Sea Rescue, ‘LITTLE FANNIE,’ saved four officers and three enlisted men from 96th.

“43rd mission: August 19th. Foggia, Italy. ROUGH MISSION! Flak: H.I.A. Fifty German fighters. Group lost five B-17s. We in the 96th had two men injured.

“46th mission: August 27th. Salmona, Italy. No flak over target. We lost Captain Koch and his crew on the way to target. Flak got them. They were just ahead of us and went down in flames. They caught the flak just crossing coast. Smiley hit in the arm, very slight wound. No. 3 engine shot out. Some fighters.

“51st mission: September 7th. Foggia, Italy. Flak: H.I.A. Engaged 30 fighters. I got a possible. Smiley and Shearin, two possibles. No. 2 engine shot out of #006, ‘BETSEY I.’

“52nd mission: September 9th. Canello Highway Bridges, Italy. VERY LITTLE FLAK. NO FIGHTERS. Flew #411, ‘WHAT A TOMATO.’ FINISH!! LAST MISSION!”

### **LA GOULETTE, SICILY - MISSION NO. 3 - MAY 5, 1943**

Target, Merchant Shipping. Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 294 500 lb. GP bombs. Hits on Naval and merchant shipping. Hits on possible ammunition boats, barracks and oil storage. Large fires observed. Five Me-109s engaged. One E/A probably destroyed. Flak: light, moderate, accurate.

Captain George A. Robinson, First Pilot, 49th Squadron. June 1, 1991: “Our crew, along with the rest of the Group, picked up our B-17, #42-5781, in Kearney, Nebraska and received more training there. Just prior to flying to North Africa, we flew to a depot at Oklahoma City for modification. The 49th insignia was a slaving wolf and while there we ran into an ex-Disney cartoonist. He painted, on the nose, the Big Bad Wolf chasing the Three Little Pigs, with Hitler, Hirohito and Mussolini faces, looking over their shoulder and faces in terror.

“My crew consisted of 2nd Lt. Robert G. Flett, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Lionel Klaus, Bombardier; 2nd Lt. Edwin A. Young, Navigator; T/Sgt. Ernest V. Teora, Radio; T/Sgt. Dennie L. Lauer, Engineer; S/Sgt. John R. McGrane, Assistant Engineer; T/Sgt. Kenneth A. Kincaid, Assistant Radio; and S/Sgt. Jack L. Barcalow and S/Sgt. Thomas G. Peters, Aerial Gunners.

“I flew my 50 missions as did the rest of my crew. My first was on 5 May and my last was 5 October, 1943. Many of my missions were to Sicily in preparation for the invasion of that island. There were missions to Rome, Naples, and Foggia where we encountered many fighters. We always had flak. I had two missions to Southern France. Our crew was not shot down or excessively shot up. Like most combat, it was long periods of boredom, interspersed with short period of fear.

“I lost track of all but one of my crew while living in Rio, 1945-49, while flying for Pan Am.”

### **TRAPANI, SICILY - MISSION NO. 4 - MAY 6, 1943**

Target, Merchant Shipping and Harbor. Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 427 300 lb. GP bombs on shipping, harbor, docks, railroad yards and oil storage. Many fires started with some visible from 30 miles. Flak: moderate, mostly inaccurate.

### **PALERMO, SICILY - MISSION NO. 5 - MAY 9, 1943**

Thirty-two aircraft dropped 360, 500-lb. GP bombs and 16, 300-lb. bombs into the town of Palermo. Fires and explosions were seen and an ammunition ship, or tanker, exploded. Flak was intense and accurate resulting in damage to 25 B-17s. B-17 #42-29614, 20th Squadron, crashed in the water about 55 miles west of Trapani, Sicily. B-17 #42-28651, piloted by 1st Lt. Delbert Resta, 96th

Squadron, made an emergency landing at Bone, Algeria due to flak damage. 2nd Lt. Harold W. Seng, 20th Squadron, was mortally wounded by flak. S/Sgt. Frederick Crutchfield received a serious head injury from flak. 2nd Lt. John Karpinal and S/Sgt. Stanley J. Mikula were slightly injured by flak.

Twenty-one attacks were made by German and Italian fighters with no claims made.

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT - A/C #42-29614 - "WOIKIN GOIL" - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Guy A. Thompson, 0-728938, P.	(DED)
1st Lt.	Willard M. Parker, 0-791487, CP.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Charles R. Justi, Jr., 0-791598, N.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Lawrence H. Kinnaird, 0-730793, B.	(DED)
S/Sgt.	Rubin R. Lighte, 12060882, U/T.	(DED)
S/Sgt.	Ellsworth L. Simpson, Jr., 13012198, L/T.	(DED)
T/Sgt.	Robert E. Meehan, 16092894, R/W.	(DED)
S/Sgt.	William I. Ryan, Jr. 11061979, L/W.	(DED)
S/Sgt.	John J. Switzer, Jr., 12098226, T/G.	(DED)
S/Sgt.	Harold R. Edwards, 35400452, R/O.	(DED)

This A/C was reported to have crashed in the water at approximately 38-05N - 11-55E at 1255 hours. No. 3 and No. 4 engines were out and No. 1 engine smoking. Lt. Richard Headrick reported that he, Lt. Selling, and two other A/C followed the plane down. Ten life vests were seen in the water. Lt. Headrick attempted to drop a life raft which hit the tail and was destroyed. He also dropped his emergency radio which also bounced off the tail. Lt. Selling dropped one life raft which hit the tail, fouled the controls and nearly caused him to crash. Another attempt to drop a raft was made and was seen to open near the swimmers. They radioed for Air-Sea-Rescue but were forced to leave the area due to gas shortage.

A Navy investigation reported that currents in that area would not drift toward a small island eight miles distant but would drift toward the northern coast of Sicily, 35 miles distant. With water temperatures at 61-63 degrees, men would not remain alive long enough to reach the northern coast of Sicily. In addition, none of these men had been reported as prisoners of war, or interned, and that during a 12-month period which had elapsed, there had been no report that any member of this aircraft had contacted a relative, or friend, and during the month of May, 1943, Allied air and Naval craft had destroyed many enemy ships in the Mediterranean, some of which were possibly carrying captures or survivors picked up at sea.

Lt. Stanley M. Korell, 49th Squadron, War Diary continued: "May 9th, 1943. This was to be our third start. Minor difficulties had grounded us on our first two trips. It was an all out Mother's Day attack on the city of Palermo, Sicily. We were to level the town. It was noted as the worst flak area in this Theater, and possibly the world. It was a good thing it was our first raid because when we saw the wall of black puffs of flak, we thought it was noting unusual and didn't get too worried. Just before bombs went away, a piece came through the window above our heads and showered glass on Mitch and myself but the splinter missed us and lodged in the ship. About ten fighters came up but none attacked us directly. Lt. Thompson's ship went down from flak and all the crew was seen to get out after it landed in the water. Our first raid was over. We picked up seven flak holes.

"May 13th, target Cagliari, Sardinia, docks and city. 1,000 lb. bombs wrecked the city. Fighters came up but P-38 escort took care of them. Saw a Me-109 spin at 10,000 feet and get away from P-38. Dodged flak pretty good.

“May 20th, target Grosseto A/D, Italy, near Rome. Had 500 pounders, wiped out hangar line, other Squadrons used frags. Considered one of the most accurate precision bombing raids of the war. Knocked out 68 planes on the ground. Flak inaccurate and no E/A.

“May 25th, target Messina Railroad Yards. Our second try at this target. We were second Group over. Flak was worst since Palermo. Picked up a few holes. Lt. Valentine nearly shot down by fighters after flak got one engine. Three men injured in his ship.

“May 30th, target Pomigliano Aircraft Engine Factory, near Naples. Mitch is sick and can't go so I dropped the bombs. Really was a thrill to do it! Flak not accurate. Didn't notice much anyway. Too busy getting the bombs away. Everything worked fine. No E/A.

“May 31st, Foggia Railroad Yards, Italy. Almost on eastern coast. Flew almost across Italy and back. Fighters jumped us as we hit coast and attacked all the way to the target. Flak pretty rough over target. Could feel ship lurch from bursts beneath us. Fighters attacked after target all the way to coast. Bombs fell good.

“June 5th, target of opportunity, three battleships in La Spezia Harbor. Too many of our ships over target at same time. Bombs were fair. Did quite a little damage. Was the longest over-water raid of the war and several other firsts. Flak from ships was pretty rough. They can put it up there! No fighters. Carried 2000 pounders.

“June 21st, target Naples Railroad Yards. Carrying incendiaries. They damn near hit our ship when they floated out from the lead of our Squadron. We missed flak but 429th lost Captain Bentley over target. Bombs fair.

“July 4th, target Catania, Sicily. Major Haynes turned back and two ships followed him. We found Group after a screwed up deal. Flak was worst we have had in a long time, lots of holes. Fighters attacked in droves, around 75. Lt. Laich's ship, 20th Squadron, caught fire and went down. Six bailed out. Sure a rough mission!

“July 5th, Gerbini A/D #6, Sicily. Flak still rough. P-38s took care of most fighters although some got through to us. Our ball turret gunner shot one down.

“July 6th, Gerbini A/D again. Bombs were good. One waist gunner knocked down by a piece of flak that tore a hole through the side of the ship and waist window. Two fighters came so close to us we could see the pilots but they did not fire. Must have misjudged or something. They came out of the sun and we didn't see them until they were on us.

“July 19th, Rome Railroad Yards. We were about the 10th ship to bomb it. Bombing had to be good. Didn't want to bomb churches. It should have been rough but flak was terribly inaccurate. Bombs hit good. Only six fighters encountered. Had a scare, lost No. 1 engine on the run and it could have been rough but we got out okay.

“August 4th, target Naples. All out and we were last ship over target. Ten Me-109s attacked our ship while on bomb run. Tracers and 20mm's were streaming by our nose. We were terribly afraid! The first attack knocked out elevator and controls, all of the radio, hit the tail gunner and injured him. Put a big hole in the vertical stabilizer and a huge hole through the wing spar, small holes in two fuel tanks and other wing. By all rights we never should have stayed in the air. We fought them for 45 minutes before and after bombs away. Two ships from Group went down, one from flak and one from a 20mm in gas line. Something beside the ship brought us back this day! Our ship will be out for repairs for over a week.

“August 19th, target Foggia Power Station. Target completely demolished. Flak pretty rough. Fighters by the droves. Group lost five ships, one of our Squadron, four from 20th.

“September 19th - October 3rd. Transferred into special service with 5th Wing flying with Allied Commandos but never got to fly. Promoted to 1st Lieutenant.

“October 5th, target Bologna Marshalling Yards. Fighters on us for over an hour. Flak terribly accurate. Lost one ship from our Squadron, Lt. Fitzpatrick. FINI FOR ME!”

**BO RIZZO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 6 - MAY 10, 1943**

Twenty-one aircraft dropped 2,942, 20-lb. Fragmentation bombs on this airdrome resulting in several fires observed among planes on field and buildings. Flak was heavy, slight, inaccurate. No losses, no injuries.

**MARSALA, SICILY - MISSION NO. 7 - MAY 11, 1943**

Twenty-three aircraft dropped 138, 1,000-lb. demolition bombs on harbor installations. One ship observed on fire. Smoke visible 100 miles away. Hits on warehouse and dock area. Flak light and inaccurate. No injuries, no losses.

**CAGLIARI, SARDINIA - MISSION NO. 8 - MAY 13, 1943**

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 56, 2,000-lb. demolition bombs on the harbor and town. Area was left burning with fires seen from 100 miles. One ship in harbor exploded. Flak light. One E/A was seen, no claims, no losses.

**CIVITAVECCHIA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 9 - MAY 14, 1943**

Twenty-three aircraft dropped 276, 500-lb. demolition bombs on harbor and shipping. Entire area was well covered. Fires still burning and explosions occurring after leaving target. Flak light, no losses.

**MESSINA, SICILY - MISSION NO. 10 - MAY 18, 1943**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off. Five A/C returned early. Bomb load per ship, 12, 500-lb. demolition bombs. Bad weather and icing conditions prevented Group from reaching target. Gen. James Doolittle flew with Major Haynes.

**GROSETTO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 11 - MAY 20, 1943**

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 1,842, 20-lb. fragmentation bombs and 150, 500-lb. demolition bombs on the Airdrome at Grosseto. Fires and smoke were visible for 50 miles. Probably 10 to 35 aircraft, on ground, destroyed. Flak slight, inaccurate. No losses.

**SCIACCA, SICILY - MISSION NO. 12 - MAY 21, 1943**

Twenty-five aircraft dropped 3,600, 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the Airdrome at Sciacca. The Airdrome was fairly well covered. No encounters, little flak, no losses.

**TERRANOVA, SICILY - MISSION NO. 13 - MAY 24, 1943**

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 336, 500-lb. GP (general purpose) bombs on installations and shipping. One ship in harbor seen to blow up. Warehouses and ammunition dumps blown up. Fires visible for 50 miles. Light flak, no encounters, no losses.

**MESSINA, SICILY - MISSION NO. 14 - MAY 25, 1943**

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 324, 500-lb. GP bombs on rail installations. Target area well covered with fires seen for 50 miles. Flak heavy. One A/C damaged. Four enemy aircraft encountered. No claims, no losses.

**COMISO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 15 - MAY 26, 1943**

Twenty-three aircraft dropped 114, 500-lb. GP bombs and 1,584, 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the Airdrome at Comiso. Target area well covered, fires seen at 20,000 feet. Heavy flak and

fighters encountered. S/Sgt. Joseph Myers, 12081411, 429th Squadron, killed by enemy aircraft fire. Three crewmen wounded. Three E/A were claimed destroyed and three damaged.

S/Sgt. Joseph Brager, 20th Squadron airplane mechanic, died of burns about the face and hands while servicing an aircraft of the 20th Squadron.

### **LEGHORN, ITALY - MISSION NO. 16 - MAY 28, 1943**

Twenty-six aircraft dropped 312, 500-lb. GP bombs on harbor installations. Target area well covered with large fires and heavy black smoke visible for 90 miles. Flak heavy and six E/A encountered. Three E/A were claimed as damaged. No injuries, no losses.

### **NAPLES, ITALY - MISSION NO. 17, 1943**

Thirty-four aircraft dropped 404, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Pomogliano Aircraft Factory. Target area well covered with fires visible at 23,600 feet. Flak heavy and 12 E/A encountered. There were no claims, no injuries, no losses.

### **FOGGIA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 18 - MAY 31, 1943**

Twenty-six aircraft dropped 312, 500 GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards. Target area well covered with fires visible at 20,000 feet. Flak heavy. En route to target the Group was jumped by enemy fighters and again leaving the target. The latter fighters dropped aerial bombs. Gunners claimed two E/A probably destroyed. Seven B-17s were slightly damaged. No injuries, no losses.

No mission was assigned for June 1st. A Wellington bomber, designed as a transport, flew in from Gibraltar carrying Sir Winston Churchill, Gen. Marshall, Gen. Arnold, Sir Archibald Wavell, Sir Anthony Eden, and two, unidentified French Generals. General Doolittle and General Spaatz met the plane.

### **LA SPEZIA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 19 - JUNE 5, 1943**

Thirty-one aircraft arrived over the harbor to bomb three battleships in the harbor. Thirty aircraft dropped 60, 2,000-lb. bombs from an altitude of 23,000/26,000 feet. One A/C returned its bombs due to a bomb bay door malfunction. Strike photos showed probable hits and near misses on the ships. Flak was heavy and two E/A encountered. No claims, injuries, no losses.

Major Joseph P. Gerace, Navigator, joined the 429th Squadron in May, 1943. October 18, 1991: "After a long span of years, it is difficult to remember who you flew with, when and what missions, but some instances stand out, not necessarily because they were important or of any earth shaking significance.

"One time while returning to Tunis after a milk run over Italy. Everything was quiet and we were in that semi-comatose state, waiting for the time and miles to pass so we could land, debrief and hit the sack. All of a sudden the lead navigator opened fire with his 50 caliber. Naturally we all came awake and looked to see what he was shooting at. The sky was a clear Mediterranean blue. There were no fighters visible. After two or three minutes, the firing ceased. It turned out that 'Satch' Humphries, the lead navigator, looked up suddenly, saw a fighter a good way out at his 10 o'clock position and opened up on it. The 'fighter' turned out to be a speck of dirt swinging on the end of a cobweb. We didn't razz 'Satch' too much as it could as well been one of us seeing things that weren't there.

"On another occasion, halfway to the target (I think we were going to LaSpezia), I noticed that my gold ring, which had belonged to my father, was missing. I didn't think too much about it. It was probably back at the base. I was using an empty 50 cal. cartridge box for a seat (we went first class in those days). As we came up on the I.P., they sky was beginning to blacken with flak. We didn't worry about the bursts you could see; it was the ones you didn't see that hurt.

“Once past the I.P., if there were no fighters in the area, I would usually step over to the driftmeter, crank it around, pick up the bomb bay doors and follow the bombs for as long as they were visible. This time, as I left my cartridge seat and started to operate the driftmeter, a piece of shrapnel came through the bottom of the plane, hit the cartridge box and tore it up. I swung my head around to see what was happening and another piece of shrapnel demolished the outside lens housing on the driftmeter. I didn’t discover that until I tried to look through it again. It is funny how the mind works. I immediately attributed the two facts that I did not have the ring on my finger.

“Later that day I found the ring in my back pocket. After that, I never flew without the ring securely on my finger. That’s superstition for you. I went on to finish my missions in December 1943.”

### **PANTELLERIA ISLAND - MISSIONS 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 - JUNE 7 - 11, 1943**

Mission 20 was to destroy the town of Pantelleria. Twenty-one aircraft dropped 251, 500-lb. GP bombs on the town. The target was well covered. Flak was heavy and two E/A were encountered. There were no claims, no injuries, no losses.

Mission 21 was to bomb gun installations. Twenty-six aircraft dropped 149, 1,000-lb. GP bombs from 16,250/17,800 feet. The target was well covered. Flak was light and there were no encounters with E/A.

Mission 22 was to again bomb gun positions. Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 168, 1,000-lb. GP bombs from 16,000/17,000 feet. The target area was covered. Flak was slight, heavy, inaccurate as to altitude and deflection. No injuries, no losses.

Mission 23 was to bomb gun position #9. Thirty-six aircraft dropped 395, 500-lb. GP bombs on the target from 15,500/17,000 feet. No direct hits were observed. Bombs covered general target area. Flak was slight, heavy, inaccurate. No injuries, no losses.

Mission 24 was to bomb gun position #10. This was the second mission on this date. Thirty-seven aircraft dropped 432, 500-lb. GP bombs from 13,860/15,200 feet. The target area was well covered with direct hits. Flak was slight to moderate, light and heavy, both accurate to altitude, poor to fair to deflection. No injuries, no losses.

Mission 25 was to bomb the town of Pantelleria. Twenty-five aircraft dropped 293, 500-lb. GP bombs from 9,000/11,000 feet. The target was well covered, large explosion observed in eastern part of town. Black smoke and flames visible from 40 miles. Flak was slight, heavy and light, accurate to altitude, inaccurate to deflection. No injuries, no losses.

Crews reported seeing landing craft and escorting Naval vessels approaching the Island. They also noticed, as they turned off the target, the white cross of surrender being placed on the airfield on the Island. This was a historical first for the Air Corps; the total destruction of an Axis stronghold due to Allied aerial action.

### **PALERMO, SICILY - MISSION NO. 26 - JUNE 12, 1943**

Eighteen aircraft dropped 2,574 fragmentation bombs on the Bocco Di Falco Airdrome. The target area was well covered with fire and black smoke seen from 250 miles at 18,000 feet. Flak was moderate to intense, heavy, accurate to altitude and deflection resulting in damage to ten B-17s. Some enemy aircraft made passes at the rear of the formation with P-38s of the 14th Fighter Group engaging them. There were no claims, no injuries, no losses.

### **CASTELVETRANO, SICILY - MISSION NO. 27 - JUNE 15, 1943**

Twenty-six aircraft dropped 96, 300-lb. GP bombs and 2,880, 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the Airdrome in this city. Direct hits were observed on runways and the dispersal area was well covered. Several large planes were observed on fire, one on the runway and others in dispersal areas.

Flak was slight, heavy, poor to altitude and deflection. There were no injuries and no losses. The First Fighter Group provided cover.

On June 17, 1943, the Group moved from Chateau Dun to Ain M'Lila, a distance of about 30 miles. The truck movement was started at about 0800 hours and was completed by 1800 hours. The air crews flew their planes to the new base. The bivouac area was located at the southwest edge of Ain M'Lila in a grassy, level pasture which made an ideal campground. The landing ground was about two miles to the southwest. Many of the engineering and Armament personnel had their quarters on the line near their aircraft.

### **NAPLES, ITALY - MISSION NO. 28 - JUNE 21, 1943**

Twenty-nine aircraft dropped 84, 500-lb. incendiary clusters and 382, 300-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards. The target area was well covered with fires seen in the target area. Flak was intense, heavy, accurate to altitude and deflection. Plane #42-29605, piloted by Captain Jack L. Bentley, 429th Squadron, was hit by flak and then attacked by fighters. It was last seen heading in the direction of the Island of Ischia.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT - A/C #42-29605 - "HONEY BUN" - 429TH SQUADRON**

Captain Jack L. Bentley, 0-23880, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt. John D. Williams, Jr., CP.	(KIA)
Captain Charles W. Grooms, 0-353848, N.	(POW)
1st Lt. James H. Heaberg, 0-661625, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Norman C. Moore, 16044316, U/T.	(POW)
T/Sgt. George F. Immonen, 612972, L/T.	(POW)
Sgt. Roy D. Musser, 13045838, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Harold Marlow, 31468691, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Walter S. Thompson, Jr. 32385433, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. Urban M. Heinen, 37614462, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 1st Lt. Burton Thorman, Navigator on B-17 #42-29579 after the mission: "At 1335 hours, Captain Bentley left the bomb run and started into a steep glide. We went through a heavy flak belt and a fighter got on his tail just after leaving the coast and fired for approximately 15 seconds, dead astern. Captain O'Connor moved our aircraft into position and we covered the E/A with concentrated firepower. I saw a hole in the left elevator of Captain Bentley's aircraft. The A/C seemed under control. Captain Bentley headed for Ischia Island, east and a little south at approximately 90 degrees heading, at 1350 hours. I noticed that the No. 3 engine was out. Captain Bentley went from 22,000 feet to 4,000 feet in 15 minutes. His steep glide flattened out as he headed for Ischia Island. We left Captain Bentley at about 4,000 or 5,000 feet. I noticed bursts coming from Ischia Island. This was at 8,000 feet."

Statement of Captain Marion Caruthers, Pilot of B-17 #42-5776, Commanding Officer of the 96th Squadron: "I was just above Captain Bentley's element at an altitude of 23,000 feet when Captain Bentley started going down. I followed down with Captain Bentley's element. I was further back and above his element. In observing Captain Bentley's aircraft, it seemed like the gas tanks on the right side were hit because he was trailing white and black smoke. Fighters were on his aircraft on the way down. His aircraft did not seem to be out of control. I last saw him at about 8,000 feet heading for Ischia Island. I am reasonably sure that Captain Bentley landed at Ischia Island and couldn't have possibly made Naples."

Statement of Sgt. Roy D. Musser, July 1, 1944, after return to Allied control: "After coming off the target the airplane was hit by heavy flak which destroyed No. 3 and No. 4 engines. It was then attacked by a Ma-202 fighter which destroyed No. 2 engine. The airplane then crashed off the Island of Ischia.

"Captain Bentley was last seen by me 3 June 1943, in Naples being taken to prison camp. 2nd Lt. Williams was killed by flak. Captain Grooms was wounded in the right leg and seen going to American Officers Camp 27 August 1943, and now a POW. 1st Lt. Heaberg, last seen 21 July 1943, in hospital, suffering with a wound in left hand. Now a POW. T/Sgt. Moore last seen 21 July 1943 in hospital, suffering from a wound in left thigh. Now returned to duty. T/Sgt. Heinen, last seen 11 March 1944, recaptured by the Germans. Believed to be a POW. Not injured in crash. T/Sgt. Immonen, unknown. S/Sgt. Marlow, last seen 11 November 1943, in prison camp. Believed to be recaptured and taken to Germany. S/Sgt. died of wounds 21 June 1943 in hospital in Ischia. Grave not known. I was a waist gunner and wounded by shrapnel in the left arm and shoulder.

"When the plane crashed we all climbed into a dinghy, except the co-pilot who was dead, and went down with the airplane. We paddled to shore and two rescue boats came out and all but T/Sgt. Heinen, T/Sgt. Immonen and Captain Bentley were taken to a hospital on the Island of Ischia. They were confined in a cell in Ischia. S/Sgt. Marlow, Lt. Heaberg, Captain Grooms, T/Sgt. Moore and myself were given tetanus shots. Medical treatment was fair.

"The following morning all but S/Sgt. Thompson, who had died, were taken to Naples to a Naval Hospital where T/Sgt. Moore and myself were put in the same room. We remained there for two days. Captain Grooms, Lt. Heaberg, T/Sgt. Moore, S/Sgt. Marlow and myself were taken to an Air Corps quarantine camp for 15 days. We were well treated and I departed 21 July 1943 for a prison camp at Capua. We were fed one meal a day but Red Cross parcels were available, one per person per week.

"On 21 August 1943 I was taken to camp No. 65, arriving 29 August 1943 at Cervigliano. I remained there until 14 September 1943 when the Italians opened the gates and about 2,000 prisoners were released. Captain J. R. Derek Miller, a British medical officer in command, instructed the men to head southwest and remain in the mountains for four or five days and not try to pass the lines as he was certain Allied forces would overtake them. T/Sgt. Heinen, T/Sgt. Immonen, myself, T/Sgt. Shafron, 99th Bomb Group, Sgt. Delbert Grantham, 99th Bomb Group, Sgt. Ernest English from a B-26 Group, arrived at (not legible) 15 October 1943, living in the hills until 8 November 1943 when we moved into a home of a friendly Italian family.

"Previously, on 22 September 1943, a party of German soldiers searched the area, capturing over 30 soldiers. Sgt. English departed one night in the middle of October and was not seen again.

"On 11 March 1944, Sgts Heinen, Grantham, Shafron, an infantry soldier and two others were captured by a German officer and noncom and observed walking down the side of a road. I was then required to hide in the caves as the Germans were threatening to kill everyone, as well as those harboring them.

"I remained in the caves until 25 June 1944 when we learned that the Allied forces had taken (not legible) about 10 miles away. On 26 June I met a party of partisans and so found we were in Allied territory. Allied forces were unprepared to handle evaders so we were put into a south bound vehicle to Pescara and then through a repatriation organization by truck to Foggia, Italy."

1st Lt. James H. Heaberg, Navigator on A/C #42-29605. February 11, 1993: "We were rescued from the sea by an Italian Naval vessel and taken to the Island of Ischia for an overnight stay. Next day I was taken to the Italian Naval Hospital at Caserta for recovery of my wounds. I remained there until late September when I was evacuated to the German Interrogation Center at Frankfurt, Germany. After

seven days of solitary confinement and interrogation, I was sent to Stalag Luft III in Poland, Grooms and Bentley were both there.

“I remained there at Stalag Luft III until late January 1945 when the Germans evacuated the entire camp to escape the advancing Russians. We wound up near the town of Moosdorf, northwest of Munich, where we were imprisoned until liberated on 29 April 1945 by the American 14th Armored Division. It was a huge camp, over 100,000 POWs of all nationalities. After liberation, I was evacuated to the United States in early June 1945.

“I remained in the Air Force for 30 years and retired as a full Colonel. As for the rest of my crew, Bentley, Grooms, and Musser are dead. I have no record of the others.”

### **MESSINA, SICILY - MISSION NO. 29 - JUNE 25, 1943**

Thirty-nine aircraft dropped 14, 2,000-lb. GP bombs and 512, 500-lb. GP bombs on the town. Flak was heavy, intense, accurate as to altitude and deflection. The target area was well covered.

Approximately 30 enemy fighters attacked the formation while over the target and off the coast of Trapani. These attacks came from all angles. B-17 #611 was attacked by an Me-109 and the top turret gunner opened fire, using 100 rounds or more. The E/A never swerved from course and crashed into B-17 #615, clipping off the wing of the bomber. The E/A exploded upon colliding and the E/A and bomber went down together. Major Haynes, Pilot of #611, states, “E/A rolled over slightly just before the collision and I could see the pilot of the E/A and I believe my top turret gunner killed him.”

B-17 #579 was heavily attacked resulting in injuries to 1st Lt. Burton Thorman, 2nd Lt. Richard R. Morrow, Captain Roderic O’Connor, and 1st Lt. Harry F. Kinyon. One other E/A was claimed destroyed and the probable destruction of three others.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-29615 - 49TH SQUADRON**

Captain Albert D. Hinsey, 0-1699416, P.	(KIA)
1st Lt. Jack J. Evans, 0-728845, CP.	(KIA)
1st Lt. Walter C. Hopp, 0-791592, N.	(KIA)
1st Lt. Jacob W. Hershey, 0-728843, B.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Urban B. Lavoie, 11069929, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Frederick W. Radefeld, 37209041, L/T.	(KIA)
Sgt. Harold (NMI) Thompson, 32077106, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Jess W. Post, 18116760, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Leo H. Valentine, 19060513, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. Jack K. Hildt, 15075965, R/O.	(KIA)

Observers report that an enemy Me-109 collided with this B-17, clipping off the wing of the bomber and exploding. Both aircraft went down together and crashed. One parachute was seen to come from the B-17.

1st Lt. Burton B. Thorman was a member of the 429th Squadron and Navigator on the crew of 1st Lt. Joseph Mitrovi. January 17, 1992: “Our plane, #579, was named ‘BABY’ over my objections, because the pilot, Joe Mitrovi, called his girl friend that. Despite the un-war-name, #579 flew well into 1944. I heard a successor crew had to ditch in the Adriatic near a small island and the crew walked ashore. As far as I know, she never lost a crew. Several of us earned Purple Hearts, and no terribly wounded personnel flew in her.

“No. 579 was one of the planes assigned to the Group when we got to Kearney, Nebraska. She lost her virginity on a cross country flight when Mitrovi wanted to switch flight formation with a wing man and came up too soon, losing six inches of vertical stabilizer on the wing man’s prop. She flew

to Laurel, Mississippi, then on to Mobile Air Depot, Alabama. Two weeks were spent there getting repairs.

“Her next big event was the long hop from Natal, Brazil to Ascension Island, en route to North Africa. Two hours out of Natal, one engine started losing oil pressure, so back to Natal. Another engine developed a problem before we made landfall. Two superchargers had to be replaced, sent down from the States, which kept us in Brazil for three weeks.

“After about five missions, Rod O’Connor replaced Mitrovi as pilot of our crew and by early June, Rod became Squadron Commanding Officer and I became Squadron Navigator, so #579 was usually in the lead position. We had the usual engine problems and I figure in 50 missions, I came back seven times with an engine out and once with two engines out. On that occasion, with Captain Kutschera as Pilot, #579 lost No. 1 engine before we left the Italian coast, north of Rome, and lost No. 4 shortly after we left the coast, and it was back to Tunisia with the 429th Squadron trailing us.

“No. 579 was cannibalized and sat sadly without engines for weeks. On one occasion, with one engine out, #579 was landed by O’Connor with a tire flattened by flak.

“The most worrisome engine loss occurred shortly after O’Connor took over the crew, when we lost No. 2 on take-off. While the Group was forming up we managed to get No. 2 started again and Darrell Jones, the Flight Engineer, said we could keep it going if we used a richer mixture. The crew was all for joining the formation and Dick Morrow, the Bombardier, went back and re-connected the arming wires on the bombs, which we had previously cut if we had to salvo. The target was near Naples and as we left the target area, there went No. 2 engine. But there was a new problem; running on rich had run our fuel supply down and the nearest airfields were in Sicily, enemy territory. Doing some quick calculations, I figured we could make it to Bizerte, which had just been liberated and at least we could ditch close to the coast of Tunisia. Darrell and I kept working the fuel consumption all the way to Bizerte and we landed with red lights flashing to show empty fuel tanks.

“There was nothing operational on the field but a lot of wrecked Jerry planes. An engineering officer came up and asked us what was going on. He was in charge of cleaning up to get the airfield operational. We told him our problems and asked if he could get us 1,400 gallons of 100 octane fuel, at which he blanched and asked if we could get back to Algeria on any less. He left and after a while came back with a 55 gallon drum and about 100, five gallon cans, all of which the whole crew poured into the tanks by hand. The biggest hazard was slipping when the composition soles on our shoes came in contact with the spillage. However, we had enough to get back to Ain M’Lila.

“The invasion of Sicily took place on July 10th, 1943, and in the weeks before that the 2nd Bomb Group, and other Groups, had been ‘softening up’ the place. It was in this period I was accused of being allergic to flak. I was wounded the first time on June 25th, over Messina. Messina is the closest point to the Italian mainland and an important Ferry link to Italy. It was a strategic point to the Germans who were probably expecting an invasion of Sicily. Thus, it was heavily defended by flak batteries.

“Our Pilot was Rod O’Connor, who recently became Commanding Officer of the 429th Squadron, and we were in the lead position. We were met by a hornets nest of Me-109s and were almost relieved to get into the flak zone to get relief from the fighters. With less than 30 seconds from bombs away, a burst of flak sent steel fragments into the nose of the plane and caught me in the shoulder, and the pilot and co-pilot were sprayed with windshield chips. Most seriously wounded was Dick Morrow who caught a fragment in his elbow that wrecked his humerus bone and earned him a disability discharge. Dick was on his knees, almost in a ball, and the impact knocked him backwards, away from the bombsight. I could see the indices coming together but couldn’t reach over him to reach the trigger, so I reached down and flipped Dick up to his operating position. He was able to trigger and it was bombs away immediately.

“Directly out of the flak zone, our Me-109 ‘friends’ were back and Dick and I joined our gunners with our nose guns. After the fracas was over we had a chance to tend to Dick who was in considerable pain from his ‘funny bone’ wound. I was bleeding but not in extreme. Both of us were ultimately awarded the Silver Star and the Purple Heart.

“My Silver Star was pinned on by General Doolittle in a ceremony in Tunis where a couple of others, from the Group, got awards.

“I was wounded again on July 6, 1943 while we were bombing the Gerbini airdrome and again it was flak. Ironically, flak vests were delivered to the Squadron on the day that I flew my 50th mission, the day before Thanksgiving, 1943.

“That last mission was rather memorable to me for another reason. The target that day was to bomb the sub pens at Toulon, France. Major Kutschera, Squadron CO, was to lead the second element of 18, with Colonel Rice, Group CO, leading the whole formation of 36. We were to fly north to Massicault, Tunisia and then turn west until reaching the Initial Point and then turn north for the run in. There was a heavy cloud cover at 20,000 feet and about 20 miles from the IP, Walt called me to be ready to tell him when to turn because he was having a hard time keeping the lead element in sight. I had a good ground speed check and had him turn north. Lt. Barron, the Bombardier, was having trouble seeing anything but clouds until the last minute when we had a break, lined up and dropped. Turning south, heading for home, Walt called me to verify his recollection that we were to be the last ones over the target and who were those B-17s heading into the target area, too far away to read the markings? Meanwhile we were looking for the first element that was supposed to be ahead of us, or on the ground as we came over the Base.

“We landed and were climbing out of our planes when the first element came over the field with lots of red flares for emergency landings. Colonel Rice came raging over to us, demanding to know where we had gone and accusing us of desertion in the face of the enemy. When we advised him we had bombed the target he was livid because, ‘No one could see the target.’ I explained to him that we were much lower and that we got a break in the clouds long enough to drop. Fortunately our cameras captured the target with the bombs striking. It appeared that Colonel Rice had made two runs over the target and then went looking for a target of opportunity, at which time they ran into enemy fighters.

“Two weeks later I was assigned to Headquarters, 15th AF as an Assistant Operations Officer, moving with them from Tunis to Bari, Italy in time for the surprise attack, by German bombers, on Bari Harbor with Allied shipping catching hell.”

June 26, 1943. The Arabs were really creating a problem in the area, especially down on the line where Engineering and Armament personnel have their tents. Last night, I was CQ (Charge of Quarters). It was a boring job but at least I had a good place where I could write letters to my family. It was about midnight when sounds of gunfire erupted in the direction of the flight line. There was no sounding of an air raid alarm nor anti-aircraft fire so had no idea of what was happening. I thought of saboteurs but heard no explosions nor could see any fires in the direction of the flight line. I immediately notified the OD (Officer of the Day) and he took off in the direction of the shooting. Within a short period of time, a truck pulled up to the tent, two fellows got out, went to the rear of the truck and pulled out the body of a dead Arab. They proceeded to haul the body into the tent and threw a tarp over him. They informed me that one of the fellows had been awakened by the sound of his tent ripping, sounded the alarm to the others in the tent. They jumped out of bed, grabbed their firearms, rushed out of the tent and saw some figures fleeing across the field. They opened up with rifles, pistols and machine guns. They dropped one, and this was the one they brought to the tent. After all the excitement was over, I went back to my letter writing but it was an eerie feeling having that body in the tent. I was told later that another body was found later, out in the field, and another wounded Arab

was found in town. The following story is not related to this incident, but is typical of what was happening in this area with the Arabs.

M/Sgt. Robert D. Fillingame was a Crew Chief in the 20th Squadron. January 2, 1991: "There are so many stories that I could tell since I joined the 2nd Bomb Group but that would take a whole book so I will tell of one in North Africa.

"At Ain M'Lila, Algeria a situation showed up with the natives around there. They were the best at stealing that you would ever see. It got to the point that our guards couldn't control them at night. We had no Personnel Tent at the time and the parachutes and the like were left in the planes. Now those Arabs found it out and would try to slip in there at night and steal one of those parachutes. Now that silk canopy was priceless and worth a pile of money. That silk was the best you could find. Well, we took an old waist gun from an old fuselage, a 30 cal. machine gun, and mounted it on the back of a jeep, between the two seats in the back and the man who operated it would fire over the driver's head.

"Well, we would take that thing at night and patrol the area around there where the planes were, and if we saw one of those Arabs around there we then took after him, firing as we went.

"The situation got to the point that they were stealing clothes from the tents, and this actually happened to me. I had three barracks bags, blue draw string bags, and I took them and put them under my bunk so that I was sleeping directly on top of them. Well, I woke up one morning and I looked at the tent and there was a slit all the way down one side. The first thing I thought about was my clothes. Well, they had slit the tent during the night and got all my clothes and I didn't know anything about it. So I had to go to Supply and get another batch of clothes.

"We had a Catholic Chaplain in the outfit who said they weren't about to get his stuff. What he did was take his communion and other paraphernalia and all he used for Masses and he put it in his tent, by his head, and turned his bunk away from the door. He got one of those jungle type knives, machete, and laid it top of everything, right by his bed where he could grab it. Well, he woke up one morning and they had cleaned him out, his Mass material, machete, everything else, his clothes and all. They did leave him his mattress and bunk. So it goes to show that when they took a notion to steal, they did a good job of it."

#### **LEGHORN, ITALY - MISSION NO. 30 - JUNE 28, 1943**

Twenty-three aircraft dropped 368, 300-lb. GP bombs on the city. The target area was well covered. A large explosion, belching black smoke, was observed from 20,000 feet. Flak was heavy to slight, inaccurate to altitude and deflection. One E/A was encountered. No claims, no injuries, no losses.

#### **PALERMO, SICILY - MISSION NO. 31 - JUNE 30, 1943**

Twenty-one aircraft dropped 252, 500-lb. GP bombs on the town. Flak was encountered over the target with no injuries, no losses. No E/A encounters.

# 5

## OPERATIONS: JULY/NOVEMBER 1943

### **C**HILIVANI, SARDINIA - MISSION NO. 32 - JULY 3, 1943

Nineteen aircraft dropped 2,736, 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the Landing Ground at Chilivani. The target was well covered with 50 percent of the frags in the area. Flak was slight with the light flak coming from a destroyer off Cape Caccia. No injuries, no losses.

### **CATANIA, SICILY - MISSION NO. 33 - JULY 4, 1943**

Twenty-two aircraft dropped 3,168, 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the Heavy Bomber Airdrome three miles west of Catania. The target area was well covered. Fires were observed over target from 22,000 feet. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense. Fifty to 75 enemy aircraft attacked aggressively for one-half hour, just after the target. Some dropped aerial bombs. B-17 #42-29607, piloted by 1st Lt. Walter C. Laich, was apparently struck by aerial bombs, set afire and crashed.

S/Sgt. Norman Ferree, T/G, 96th Squadron, died of wounds from flak.

Receiving credit for destruction of Me-109s were: S/Sgt. Stanley J. Mikula, S/Sgt. John J. Hopkins, and T/Sgt. Eph F. King of the 20th Squadron; S/Sgt. Otis Wharton, S/Sgt. Rudolph E. Shields, T/Sgt. Bernard E. Doone, S/Sgt. William T. Brady, S/Sgt. Eugene R. Lehman, T/Sgt. Lee W. Anderson, and Sgt. Gilbert A. Kopenhefer of the 96th Squadron and Sgt. Wilbur Peterson and S/Sgt. John F. Kortright of the 429th Squadron.

Receiving a joint claim for destruction of an Me-109 were S/Sgt. William R. Carney, Jr. and T/Sgt. Randy W. Quinn of the 20th Squadron.

Credited with the destruction of a Ma-202 was S/Sgt. Chester C. Sumner, 20th Squadron.

Credited with destruction of FW-190s were S/Sgt. Robert T. Dennis, T/Sgt. Edward H. Curtis and S/Sgt. Edward J. Dumas of the 96th Squadron.

Credited with possible destruction of a Me-109 was S/Sgt. William J. Shearin, Jr., 96th Squadron and a joint claim of possible destruction of a Me-109 went to S/Sgt. Robert S. King and S/Sgt. Thomas F. McCaffery, 429th Squadron.

B-17 #42-3066, 96th Squadron, landed at Malta with No. 3 engine out.

B-17 #42-5427, 20th Squadron, heavily attacked by E/A made an emergency landing at Malta. Gunners claimed two E/A.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-29607 - "STORMY WEATHER" - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt. Walter C. Laich, 0-791454, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Chester R. Yeager, 0-729948, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Samuel Jacobson, 0-670744, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Charles H. Leighty, 0-729743, B.	(KIA)

T/Sgt.	Calton B. Grissom, Jr. 18046308, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Eugene R. Schojan, 12029342, L/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Alexander Morrison, 39007416, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Harry C. Massey, 12081729, L/W.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Jack (NMI) Stacy, 18039870, T/B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Franklin D. Crawford, 17015967, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of 2nd Lt. James I. MacKenzie, Bombardier on B-17 #42-29523, after the mission: "I first noticed plane #42-29607 on fire, and after it left the formation and had taken up a position to my left, slightly behind me. My altitude was about 18,000 feet. Flame was coming from behind No. 3 engine near the fuselage and trailing edge of the right wing. I could see the pilot, co-pilot, top turret gunner and two waist gunners were at their positions. The top turret gunner kept working the turret until I lost sight of #607. I saw five or six men go from the waist door. Two men hit the vertical stabilizer. The first man hitting the stabilizer got his chute open. I did not see the other man's chute open as he appeared unconscious in his fall. I followed the plane by sight for about five minutes. It started an angle, or diving glide, then the nose dropped and about halfway to the water, the plane broke into pieces near the radio room. I believe I saw five chutes open."

#### **GERBINI, SICILY - MISSION NO. 34 - JULY 5, 1943**

Twenty-four aircraft dropped 3,456, 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the Satellite #6 Airdrome at Gerbini. The target area was well covered with fires observed in the area for 40 miles from 22,000 feet. Flak was light to moderate. Accuracy, fair to good to altitude and deflection. Two E/A were destroyed. No injuries, no losses.

#### **GERBINI, SICILY - MISSION NO. 35 - JULY 6, 1943**

Twenty-five aircraft dropped 400, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Satellite #6 Airdrome at Gerbini. Flak was heavy, moderate, fair to good to altitude and deflection. The target area was fairly well covered. B-17 #342, piloted by 1st Lt. Newton Blackford made a crash landing at Montoalu. 1st Lt. Burton Thorman, 429th Squadron, was seriously wounded by flak.

#### **GERBINI, SICILY - MISSION NO. 36 - JULY 7, 1943**

Twenty aircraft dropped 320, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Satellite #6 Airdrome at Gerbini. Weather over the target was 9/10's at 9,000 feet and results could not be determined. Flak was heavy, slight to moderate and good to altitude, poor to deflection. No injuries, no losses. B-17 #082, piloted by Lt. Clarence Godecke, made an emergency landing at New Solomons due to shortage of gas and low oil pressure.

#### **GERBINI, SICILY - MISSION NO. 37 - JULY 8, 1943**

Eighteen aircraft dropped 288, 300-lb. GP bombs on the Satellite #4 and #6 Airdromes at Gerbini. The targets were well covered. Flak was heavy, slight to moderate, poor to deflection and altitude.

B-17 #42-3083, piloted by 2nd Lt. Roy Kline, 429th Squadron, did not reach the target and is missing. No other losses, no injuries.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-3083 - 429TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt.	Roy S. Kline, 0-662802, P	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Patrick J. Maher, 0-730551, CP	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Edwin G. Kocher, 0-664898, N	(RESCUED)

2nd Lt. Raymond W. Grace, 0-731954, B	(DED)
T/Sgt. Henry T. Wright, 16048625, U/T	(DED)
S/Sgt. John H. Brown, 32270028, L/T	(DED)
S/Sgt. Donald I. Kenyon, 12082241, R/W	(DED)
S/Sgt. Donald S. Rosenow, 16052096, L/W	(DED)
S/Sgt. Richard J. Brusio, 31078668, T/G	(DED)
T/Sgt. Leo M. Cawdry, Jr., 17040314, R/O	(DED)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Edwin G. Kocher after rescue: "I was the Navigator of B-17 #42-3083. The plane was lagging - couldn't put out to maintain position. Pilot called me and said, "If we can't catch up before hitting the coast of Sicily, we will turn back." We turned back approximately at the coast of Sicily at 1210 hours, 18,000 feet, on reciprocal course. All four engines were running. Nothing for a few minutes then a couple of Me-109s attacked us. I started firing at one on our left wing when a bullet must have hit the ball and socket of my gun, putting it out of commission. The next thing I noticed, No. 2 and 4 engines were feathered and we were losing altitude to 15,000 feet. I was wearing my steel helmet over my headset and didn't hear the "abandon ship" order. I saw a small amount of blood dripping from the upper turret and saw the bombardier go back. I thought he was going back to take over the top turret guns. When my gun was repaired, I resumed firing at the E/A. When I looked around again, I then noticed the escape hatch was open and the co-pilot going out. I hooked my parachute to the harness, which I was wearing, and jumped through the nose hatch, pulling my rip cord at once. Everything worked fine as I kicked my legs to straighten my shroud lines. I could see drifting chutes above me, with the E/A fighters circling around, but not firing at the chutes. I think I saw four chutes above me and a like number below. I think I was the last to leave the plane. I pulled my shroud lines, attempting to drift toward the fellows in the water.

"I was approximately 200 yards from the plane which had one wing sticking out of the water. When I struck the water, I swam toward the plane. I called to the others asking if they had a raft. Their reply was, "There is no raft." Upon reaching the plane, I found the raft with a large hole burned in one side. I opened the carbon dioxide bottle and it filled the good half of the raft. There were no paddles, so upon hearing Grace answer my call, I tied a piece of string around my neck and shoulder, from the raft, and swam to Lt. Grace. He passed out as I reached him and I pulled him aboard the raft. One-half hour later, a P-51, which I believe was attached to a Fighter Group at Telergma, was circling us. I tried artificial resuscitation on Lt. Grace and continued to work on him, calling to others of my crew, but heard no answer. Lt. Grace did not regain consciousness. I worked on him all Thursday night and by the next morning, Friday, July 9th, I could feel no pulse and his teeth were set. I let the air out of his vest and let him into the water. Friday, a north wind arose and the sea became very rough, waves reaching a height of 30 feet. I drifted until about 2100 hours Saturday night, July 10th, when I was picked up by a British destroyer and was told we would reach Malta in about three or four hours.

"In my opinion, the plane crashed at 36-12N - 13-32E."

### **BISCARI, SICILY - MISSION NO. 38 - JULY 9, 1943**

Twenty-six aircraft dropped 307, 500-lb. GP bombs on the San Pietro Airdrome at Biscari. Fifty percent of the bombs were reported in the target area. No injuries, no losses.

### **GERBINI, SICILY - MISSION NO. 39 - JULY 10, 1943**

The invasion of Sicily began today. Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 26 dropped 302, 500-lb. bombs on the Satellite #9 Airdrome. One A/C dropped ten bombs in the water due to a malfunction and the other two bombs dropped on the target. Flak was heavy, slight, poor to deflection, good to

altitude. All bombs were reported in the target area. Seven E/A attacked the formation. There were no claims, no injuries, no losses. One B-17 was an early return.

#### **CATANIA, SICILY - MISSION NO. 40 - JULY 11, 1943**

The assigned target was the South Marshalling Yards at Catania. Twenty-six aircraft dropped 312, 500-lb. GP bombs on two targets. Three Squadrons bombed the South Yards and the fourth Squadron could not see the target due to fire and smoke so picked the Northern Yards, hitting the south end of the Northern Yards. The results of the bombing could not be determined due to the fire and smoke. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, fair to good as to altitude and deflection. Fourteen B-17s were damaged by flak. The formation was attacked by six Me-109s and Re-2001s. One Re-2001 was destroyed. No injuries, no losses.

#### **MESSINA, SICILY - MISSION NO. 41 - JULY 12, 1943**

Two railroad bridges were the target for this mission. Nineteen aircraft dropped 228, 500-lb. GP bombs from an altitude of 21,000/24,500 feet. It was believed that the bridges were destroyed. The entire area was covered by dust and accurate results were not known. Flak was heavy, intense, accurate as to altitude and deflection. 2nd Lt. Raymond Erpelding, Navigator, slightly injured by flak.

#### **TRAPANI, SICILY - MISSION NO. 42 - JULY 13, 1943**

Seventeen aircraft dropped 204, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Milo Airdrome at Trapani. All bombs were reported in the target area with post holes dug in the field. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, fair to good to deflection. Six Me-109s attacked with one gunner getting credit for destruction of one E/A.

#### **MESSINA, SICILY - MISSION NO. 43 - JULY 14, 1943**

Twenty-five aircraft dropped 276, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Railroad Yards at Messina. The target area was well covered. Flak was heavy, intense, accurate. B-17 #42-29583, piloted by 1st Lt. Vincent J. McIntyre was hit by flak and went down. Nine chutes were seen.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-29583 - "60-50" - 96TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt. Vincent J. McIntyre, 0-791314, P.	(DED)
2nd Lt. Richard M. Bentley, 0-730343, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Wayne M. Greathouse, 0-664884, N.	(DED)
2nd Lt. Vernon D. Morrow, 0-730605, B.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Otis W. Wharton, 37188611, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. James D. Kingsland, 12024924, L/T.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Jacob M. Hauber 17040777, R/W.	(DED)
Sgt. Casimir C. Manka, 33346371, L/W.	(DED)
S/Sgt. George H. Tucker, 37175260, T/G	(POW)
T/Sgt. Phillip E. Zimmerman, 17034035, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 1st Lt. Harold L. Chrismon, after the mission: "In turning off the target I noticed #583 throwing what looked to be gasoline vapors. I could see his left wing was shot full of holes, also two or three holes in his right wing. The right side of the fuselage was without any holes. No. 583 seemed to be under control all this time. He was letting down about two or three hundred feet a minute and flying about 140 miles an hour. Smoke was coming out of his radio room. I saw his ball turret cranked up and smoke seemed to die down, and then billowed out of the radio room. I tried to contact #583 by radio and saw the pilot look my way but did not acknowledge my call. No. 583 turned out to

sea a way. I followed his plane and thought he was trying to make Malta. They kicked all emergency doors out and I saw the tail gunner jump first, then three from the waist, then two from the nose. Then the plane started to dive to the left as it left my view..”

Statement of S/Sgt. George H. Tucker, July 9, 1944, after liberation: “We bombed Messina, Sicily. Our plane was hit hard by flak. We flew along the coast for about 40 miles. The order came to bail out. I counted 10 chutes in the air and then our plane crashed into the sea, all afire. Four of my buddies, and myself, swam for four hours and were captured by the Italians about six miles out to sea. The five of us were J. D. Kingsland, O. W. Wharton, P. E. Zimmerman, R. M. Bentley, and G. H. Tucker. I have never heard from the others on the crew and supposed they were drowned.”

### **NAPLES, ITALY - MISSION NO. 44 - JULY 15, 1943**

Eighteen aircraft dropped 212, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Naples. All bombs were reported in the target area. Flak was heavy, intense, good to altitude and deflection. There was flak from two ships in the harbor. Eleven B-17s were slightly damaged from flak. Eight E/A attacked the formation. T/Sgt. Tandy Guinn, R/WG, was credited with a Me-109 and S/Sgt. Merlin S. McCloud was credited with a Ma-202. Captain Triggs, in #146, landed at Bizerte to hospitalize three wounded airmen. One gunner, on #427, piloted by Lt. R. F. Underwood, was slightly wounded by 20mm cannon fire.

### **SAN GIOVANNI, ITALY - MISSION NO. 45 - JULY 16, 1943**

Twenty-six aircraft dropped 312, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Ferry Terminus and town of San Giovanni. Fifty percent of the bombs were in the target area with the others in a built-up area left of the target. Flak was heavy, intense, accurate, resulting in slight damage to 21 B-17s.

B-17 #42-3342, 429th Squadron, crashed shortly after take-off killing all ten men. The crew were: 1st Lt. Newton S. Blackford, P; 2nd Lt. George W. Poittrast, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Robert Istre, Navigator; 2nd Lt. Kenneth S. Kinnes, Bombardier; T/Sgt. Paul Pittman, Upper Turret; S/Sgt. Harold G. Neilson, Lower Turret; Sgt. Leroy Collins, Waist Gunner; S/Sgt. Robert Harrington, Waist Gunner; S/Sgt. Reginald S. Honour, Tail Gunner; and T/Sgt. William N. George, Radio Operator.

Sgt. Wechtenhiser and Pvt. Archie Ellis, 96th Squadron, witnessed the crash of this aircraft: “We were traveling toward Ain M’Lila in the 96th Squadron ambulance, when we noticed a plane from our Group, which was taking off, flying towards us at what seemed to be a very much reduced speed. We also noticed that the outside engine on the pilot’s left, and to our right, was not running. Plane seemed to be traveling very slowly, with its tail low. Sensing trouble, we stopped the ambulance and got out to see what the trouble was. The plane started to turn to the pilot’s left, at an altitude which we estimate of not over 200 feet. The left wing continued to go down and strike the ground. The wrecked plane was immediately enveloped in flames, which was followed immediately by a terrific explosion. Pieces of wreckage were scattered over an area of about 100 yards, or more. We were about 200 yards from the crash. Not having a watch, we estimate the time of the crash at 0900 hours, or a few minutes before.”

At Ain M’Lila, our tent area was close enough to the airstrip to see the planes take off.

This particular morning, I had just left my tent as they were taking off, and as I did so many times, stopped to watch. Several were already in the air when I noticed one plane, just above a small hill some distance from the field, seemingly “mushing” along, nose up, tail down. I thought to myself, “This plane is in trouble.” Suddenly the plane made a turn to the left, the left wing dipped down and then the plane seemed to slide down and disappear from my sight behind the hills some miles from the field. Suddenly there was a huge billow of black smoke, and shortly thereafter, a tremendous explosion.

When I arrived at the scene, it was a sight of total destruction. The area was blackened from the fire and explosion of the bombs. The only recognizable parts of the plane were four mangled engines. It was hard to believe that only a short time before this had been a plane carrying a crew of ten, brave young men.

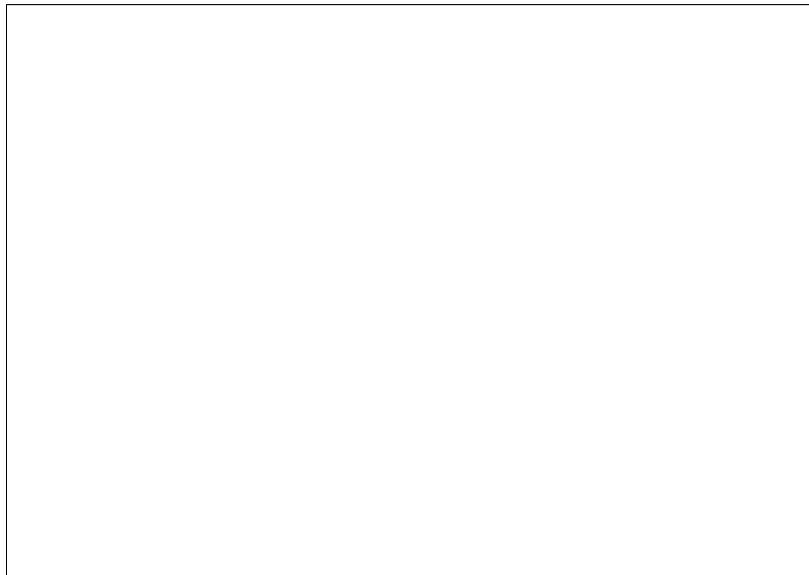
**NAPLES, ITALY -MISSION NO. 46 - JULY 17, 1943**

Twenty-six aircraft dropped 312, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Naples. All bombs were in the target area and large fires were visible from 20,000 feet. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, accuracy fair to good, resulting in slight damage to 11 aircraft. No injuries, no losses.

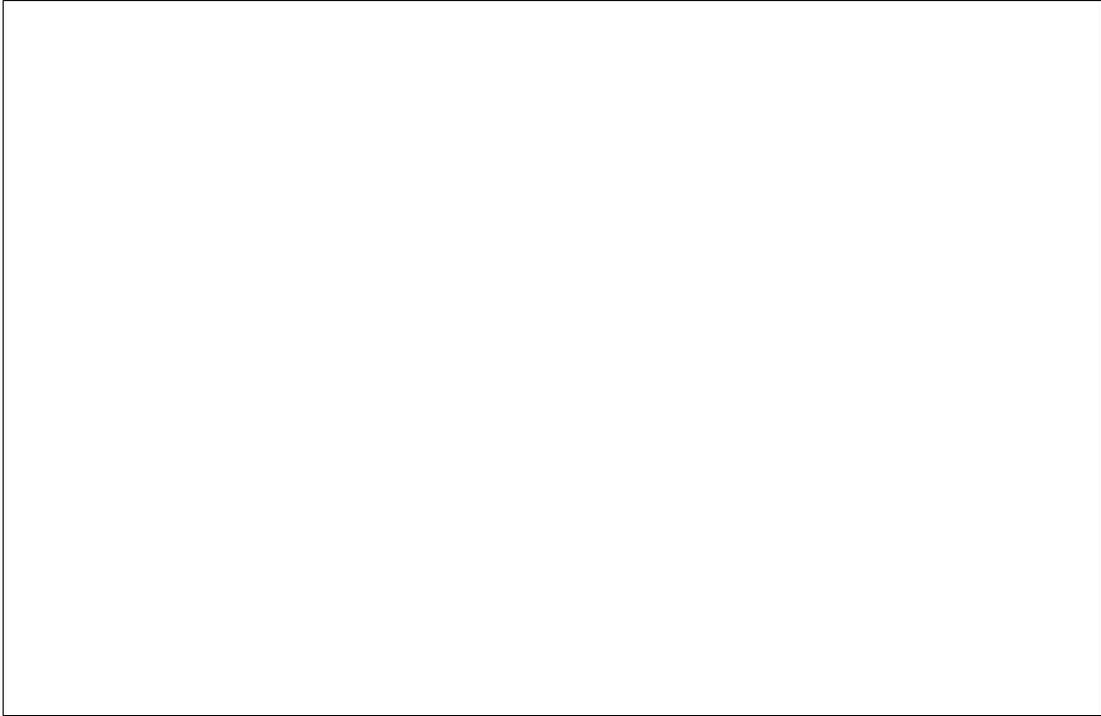
**ROME, ITALY - MISSION NO. 47 - JULY 19, 1943**

This was a history making day. The first Allied bombing of Rome. Target, the Marshalling Yards (South Lorenzo). Thirty-eight aircraft dropped 458, 500-lb. GP bombs with all reported in the target area.

Six E/A attacked the formation after leaving the target. One E/A was claimed as probably destroyed. There were no injuries and no losses. Leaflets were dropped prior to the mission to warn civilians of the attack.



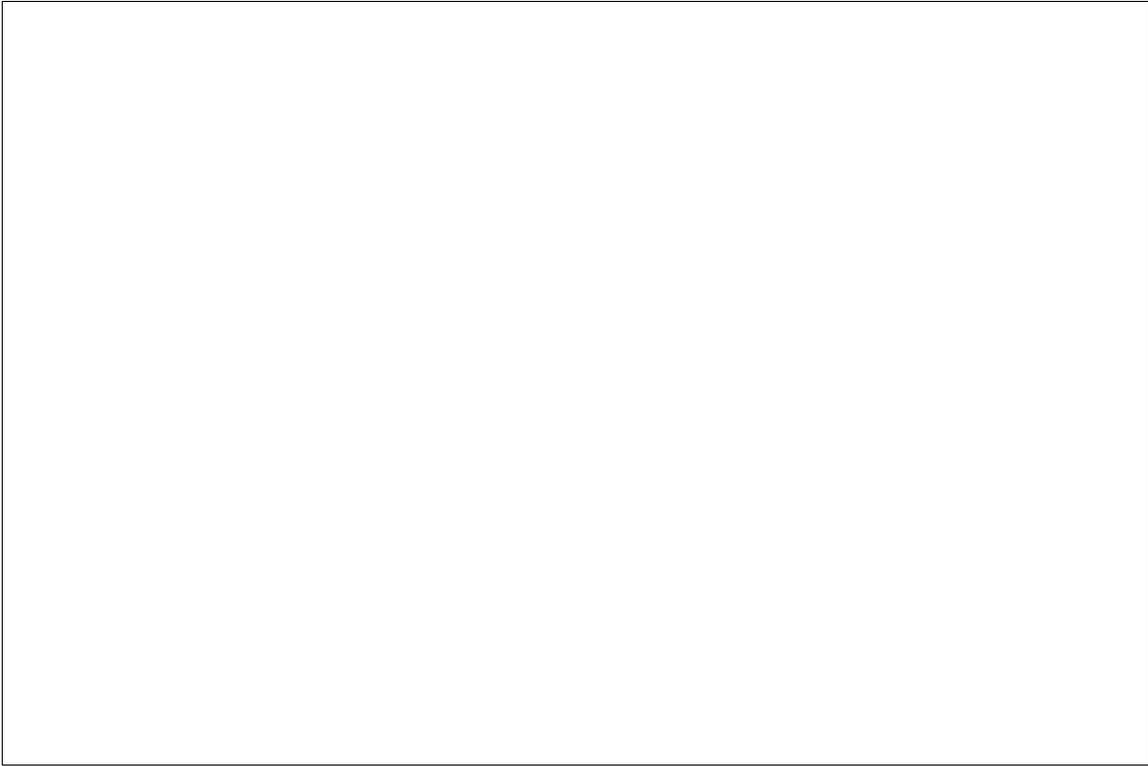
Wheels up - no flaps - plane and crew unknown - North Africa  
(Courtesy - C. Richards)



A/C #42-3342 - July 16, 1943 - Crashed on take-off - exploded - all killed  
(Courtesy -C. Richards)



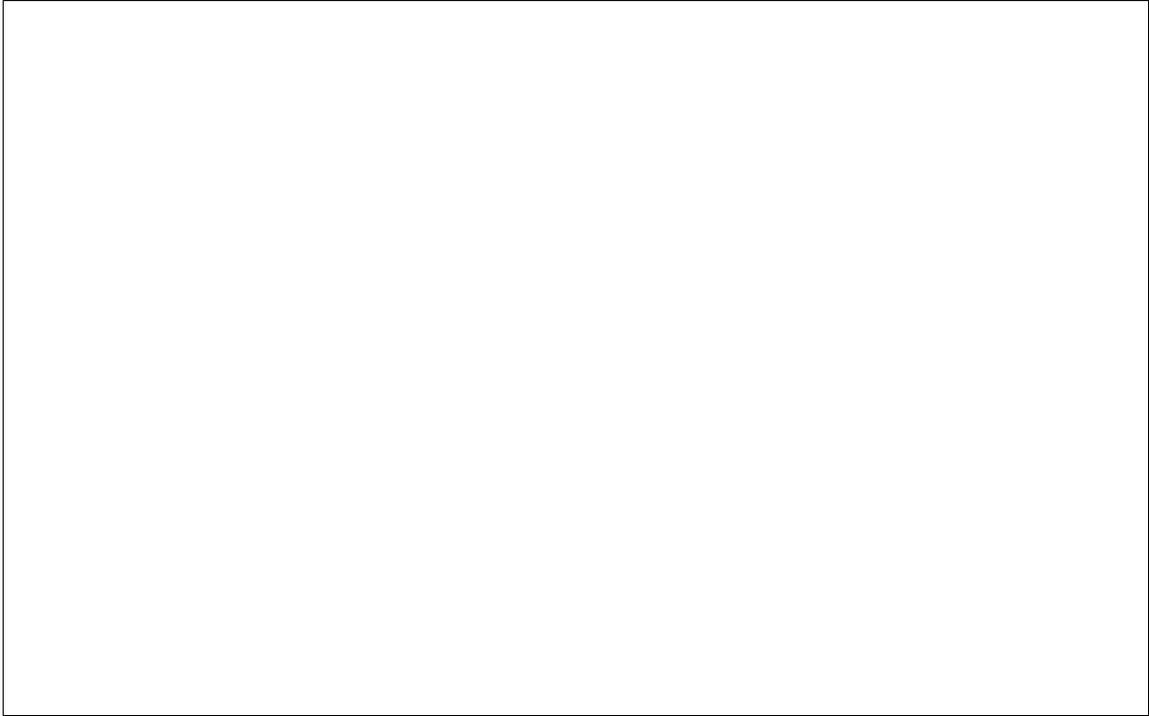
96th Enlisted Men's Club - Thomas McGurk in doorway - North Africa  
(Courtesy - C. Richards)



96th - Howard Fox, background, Raphel Chappie with steer Hamburger on the hoof for dinner.  
North Africa (Courtesy - H. Fox)



96th - Moving to Massicult - Hurry up and wait (Courtesy - C. Richards)



96th - And the band played on - Massicult, North Africa (Courtesy - C. Richards)



96th Squadron Officers Club - Massicult, North Africa - (Courtesy - Lloyd Haefs)



Top Row - L/R - D. Mayfield, W. Bigham, J. Krannichfeld,  
V. Dunkelberger, C. Gabbert, and L. Meek  
Bottom Row - L/R - J. Clemons, S. Ayo, R. Johnson,  
and W. Payne - Massicult, North Africa  
(Courtesy - Lloyd Haefs)

### **GROSETTO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 48 - JULY 21, 1943**

Nineteen aircraft dropped 156, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Airdrome at Grossetto. Results of the mission were doubtful due to heavy cloud coverage over the target. Seven A/C returned their bombs because they could not see the target. Flak was heavy, slight, poor. No losses and no injuries.

### **LAVERANO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 49 - JULY 23, 1943**

Thirty-one aircraft dropped 102 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Landing Ground located one and one-quarter miles west of Laverano. Photos showed at least 40 single engine A/C on the field and destruction, or damage, to 36. Many fires were seen in hangars and other buildings. The 301st Bomb Group accompanied the 2nd on the raid. There was no flak, but the formation was heavily attacked, resulting in the death of two men and injury to six; all from the 429th Squadron.

Twenty to 30 E/A attacked the formation between Gallipoli and Cape Trento. Sgt. George Hopper, L/TG, was instantly killed from 20mm cannon fire. Sgt. Joseph S. Wojcik, L/TG, died from numerous shrapnel wounds at 2300 hours, July 23, 1943. Sgt. Everett E. Eye suffered a compound fracture of the left elbow. S/Sgt. Raymond D. Foster suffered wounds in left knee. S/Sgt. Gene T. Pilgrim wounded in the right buttocks. T/Sgt. Henry R. Petroski wounded in the left buttocks, and T/Sgt. William J. Mayers wounded in right knee and right arm. E/A claims were: Each credited with destruction of an Me-109 were S/Sgt. Leland Waldie, T/G; S/Sgt. Byrle L. Spillers, T/G; Sgt. Edward F. Teague, L/T; S/Sgt. Gene T. Pilgrim, T/G; S/Sgt. George R. Roberts, L/T; and S/Sgt. Albert L. Nash, T/G. Credited with the destruction of a Ma-202 was S/Sgt. Orville A. Walton. A joint claim for a Ma-202 went to S/Sgt. Conrad G. Adams, L/T, and Sgt. Buster Andeel, L/T. A joint claim for destruction

of a Me-109 went to 1st Lt. Milton Y. Ashley, N, and Sgt. William E. Brousseau, R/W. Credited with destruction of a Re-2001 was 2nd Lt. Edward H. Lombard, N. Credit for the destruction of a FW-190 went to T/Sgt. George W. Hess, L/W. Credited with the possible destruction of one each Me-190 were T/Sgt. Robert H. Eaton, U/T; S/Sgt. Howard W. Eddleman, T/G; and S/Sgt. Stanley L. Palmer, T/G. Credit for the damage to a Me-109 went to Victor (NMI) Garcia, L/T, and credited for damage to a FW-190 was S/Sgt. Arthur (NMI) Schiffer, L/W.

### **FOGGIA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 50 - JULY 27, 1943**

Twenty-nine aircraft, each loaded with 12, 500-lb. GP bombs, took off to bomb the Nicole Landing Ground at Foggia. There was a 9/10 overcast from 3,000 to 25,000 feet and the planes returned to Base. No flak and no encounters with E/A.

### **GROTTAGLIE, ITALY - MISSION NO. 51 - JULY 30, 1943**

Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 324, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Airdrome at Grottaglie. The target was well covered with several fires reported. Flak was slight, heavy, accuracy poor. S/Sgt. George R. Roberts L/T, 429th Squadron was slightly wounded by flak. There were no encounters with E/A.

On July 31, 1943, all the ground personnel departed Ain M'Lila, Algeria between 0200 and 0500 hours, by truck convoy, and arrived at Massicult, Tunisia between 1600 and 1900 hours. The air echelon departed Ain M'Lila, August 1 and arrived at Massicult the same day.

The 96th Squadron history recorded that the entire ground echelon had their tents down, waiting for trucks to come on July 28th, but they did not arrive. The men slept out in the open this night. Service trucks finally arrived on the 29th and the Squadron trucks were loaded, ready for the trek to Tunisia. When all the trucks were loaded and lined up in formation, they had to wait until the small hours of the 30th before starting out. No one had much sleep, and it was cold and damp riding on top of the luggage.

The trip was long, the road had many curves and the steep mountains slowed the movement of the convoy. Arriving at Massicult about 1700 hours, the men were tired and hungry. Tents were not pitched this night and the men slept out in the open. The following day was spent pitching the personal tents and getting setup for operations.

### **NAPLES, ITALY - MISSION NO. 52 - AUGUST 4, 1943**

Forty aircraft dropped 480, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Lorenzo Marshalling Yards. Flak was heavy, intense and accurate resulting in the loss of A/C #42-29594, 429th Squadron.

Approximately 30 fighters attacked the formation causing the loss of A/C #42-5873 after it had initially been damaged by flak. Three Me-109s and one Re-2001 were claimed destroyed and eight Me-109s and one FW-190 were probably destroyed by Fortress gunners.

1st. Lt. O'Neill, S/Sgt. Bonovich, and S/Sgt. Konieczny, all of the 49th Squadron, received injuries.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT - A/C #42-5873 - 96TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt. Harold L. Chrismon, 0-663853, P.	(RESCUED)
2nd Lt. Robert L. Kurz, 0-734104, CP.	(RESCUED)
2nd Lt. Ronald E. Beck, 0-735970, N.	(RESCUED)
2nd Lt. William B. Mahood, 0-733338, B.	(RESCUED)
T/Sgt. Bernard E. Doone, 13040591, U/T.	(RESCUED)
S/Sgt. John B. Haffner, 16093775, L/T.	(RESCUED)

S/Sgt. Rudolph E. Shields, 33120022, R/W.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Herbert D. Borders, 19075432, L/W.	(DED)
S/Sgt. William T. Brady, 17127147, T/G.	(DED)
T/Sgt. Wells A. Macoy, 31085779, R/O.	(RESCUED)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Ronald E. Beck, after his rescue: “Our bombs were away when we received a hit by flak immediately after coming off the target. It apparently was just forward of the bomb bay doors and probably hit our oxygen bottles because there was a loud explosion, and it blew things around in the nose. There were holes in various pieces of my navigational equipment. Shortly after that I heard Lt. Chrismon talk over the interphone to the waist gunner as to how bad the fire was in the No. 1 engine. There were a lot of fighters coming at us from all directions. My gun was useless, as the engineer had taken the extractor from it to be used on the top gun as he had broken its extractor while test firing. I heard Lt. Chrismon call out over the interphone to prepare to bail out, and I immediately took off my oxygen mask. I crawled back and released the escape hatch door and had to kick it out. Then I looked out and saw two opened parachutes about 2,000 feet back and below us. Lt. Mahood told me that Lt. Chrismon was putting on his chute, so I bailed out head first. I waited intentionally to pull the ripcord as I wanted to get to a lower altitude quickly. There were enemy fighters in the vicinity. I was about 1,000 feet above the water when I pulled the ripcord. It gave me an abrupt jerk and my head popped back. I think I blacked out for a few seconds, then realized that the chute had opened all right. I looked around for the plane and it was in a wide circling descent. I was swinging back and forth and saw one chute a half mile away and above me. I also clocked the time when the plane hit the water, and it was six minutes and 20 seconds after 2 o’clock. Just before it hit the water, all of the left wing and part of the fuselage was burning strongly, and there was a loud crash when it hit the water and big billows of smoke.

“Shortly after that, about 1407, I hit the water. I had tried to unfasten the straps, but, because I was watching the plane and trying to spot other chutes, hadn’t allowed enough time for it. The chute fell in the water behind me and I was clear of the shroud lines. I went four or five feet under and came up immediately. I then unfastened my leg and shoulder straps and pulled the two cords of my life vest. It inflated all right, and the strap around my waist and crotch was broken, probably when I jumped, and it would just dangle on the surface. I had to hold it down with one hand and paddle with the other. Finally I made a rigging to strap it down with my belt and it helped quite a bit.

“I tore open my jungle kit, which was on my parachute harness, took out my machete, matches, D-rations and compass and put them in my pants and jacket pockets. Then I started swimming in an easterly direction. I had been swimming about five minutes when I heard a splash, turned and saw a big fish about five feet from me. I pulled out my machete, waved it in the air, kicked my feet and yelled. The shark left only to return with another one. I waved my machete again, thrashed about in the water and they left. I didn’t see anymore sharks until the next night.

“I had been swimming for about six hours, calling at 20 minute intervals to see if anyone was in hearing distance and had laid back to rest a little. I heard two voices, not far away, so I called and started swimming towards them. After an hour and a half, or so, I caught up with Lt. Mahood and Sgt. Doone, and within five minutes, Sgt. Haffner appeared. We tied ourselves together and started paddling east. We seemed to be caught in a S.W. current and our paddling was doing us no good and decided we should save our strength.

“We spent the night resting and the next morning started swimming towards Italy. We didn’t make much progress. The compass which we tried to use would stick and wasn’t of much use. By evening we were pretty tired and about sundown, we saw a B-26 with British markings on it fly close by without seeing us. It circled in the distance for about 30 minutes and then circled in our direction and spotted us. He dropped four life rafts and some articles. Only two of the rafts were usable and four

of us got into the two rafts. Lt. Mahood, previous to the B-26's arrival, had been holding me up and I hardly remember what was happening. I was almost out of my head. The raft with Sgt. Doone and I in it tipped over once and we had a hard time getting in it again. We arranged ourselves as comfortably as possible but the valve was leaking and there was a small hole in the raft. We had to hold a hand on the valve and one in the hole and pump it occasionally. Shortly after sunrise the next morning, we saw three men coming towards us in a raft and they turned out to be Lts. Chrismon and Kurz and Sgt. Macoy. We tied the three rafts together.

“Several hours later, I heard planes overhead. I was not taking much in and didn't know what was going on until a PBY landed and picked us up. They took us aboard the PBY, undressed us, and flew us back to Bizerte, where they took us to the 56th Station Hospital. The following evening they took us back to the 96th Squadron Base.”

Statement of T/Sgt. Wells A. Macoy, R/O, after his rescue: “My earphones had pulled loose, just after bombs away, and the first I knew the ship was in trouble was when the engineer came out and grabbed his parachute. I had been busy shooting at enemy fighters. I didn't have a heated suit so I had on all my winter flying clothes and a heavy sweater, my flying coveralls, OD pants, and heavy shirt with heavy underwear. I wasn't wearing my parachute (chest pack) and as a result, when I started to put my harness on, I couldn't strap it. I ran out to the emergency waist door and started to take off my winter flying jacket. Just then, Lt. Chrismon and Lt. Kurz came out and they got one strap around my leg buckled. That was the only one fastened but it was the only choice I had. I jumped right after Lt. Kurz. I jumped out feet first and pulled the ripcord after about five seconds. I had a little trouble finding and pulling the ripcord. The parachute opened immediately and there was no jerk at all. I grabbed something, probably a shoulder strap, and pulled myself up on the seat and had a feeling of relief, because I hadn't expected to make it. I started shedding my clothes until two, Me-109s started circling me. I laid still and they did no shooting. I hit the water flat on my back and it didn't hurt and I didn't sink at all. I didn't unstrap my one strap before hitting the water and so I slid out of it without unstrapping it. Then I took off my shoes, winter coat and pants, coveralls and OD pants. I didn't have my Mae West of course. On the way down I had seen the plane crash and at that time I thought I was going to land on it. As it turned out, I was about a fourth of a mile from it. At first, I lost direction but then spotted a yellow life raft, which must have been blown from the plane. I slowly swam over to it on my back. It was only half inflated and I found there was a hole in the other half. I climbed into it, looked around and heard Lt. Chrismon calling. I tried to paddle toward him and we finally got together. While he was swimming toward me, he got the other raft from the plane but it was ready to sink and he got a couple of cans of water from it.

“After awhile we heard Lt. Kurz whistling and we paddled over to him and pulled him into the raft. Lt. Chrismon and I took turns holding our finger over a hole in the side of the raft and had to jump off at intervals to blow it up again by mouth. After awhile we found some chocolate bars and a pump. Sharks bothered us all night.

“The next day we tried to paddle east but didn't make much headway. Nothing happened until evening when a B-25 showed up. We attracted his attention with our flares but Me-109s scared it away.

“The next night wasn't too bad and the following morning I saw a black spot in the distance with two little bumps in it. We thought it best to investigate and pulled toward it. When we got close we recognized Lt. Mahood first. After we had been together awhile, a British plane showed up. A little later, five P-38s appeared, and the PBY which rescued us. They took us to Bizerte to the 56th Base Hospital. Next day we returned to the 96th.”

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-29594 - “LITTLE BUTCH” - 429TH SQUADRON**  
Captain William H. Mayer, 0-406284, P. (POW)

2nd Lt. Paul W. Wernich, 0-729939, CP.	(KIA)
1st Lt. Aldo (NMI) Angiolini, 0-726971, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Elmo F. McClain, 0-666289, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Joseph D. Samora, 39242886, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Clifton O. Wade, 37803450, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Edward C. Lamont, 13032533, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Harry Lavine, 32289282, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Albert L. Nash, 31077925, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt. William E. Doebele, 35318768, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of Captain Bradford A. Evans, P, and 2nd Lt. John C. Goodfellow, Co-pilot, 429th Squadron, after the mission: “Immediately after bombs away, we noticed a direct hit on Captain Mayer’s plane, which seemed to strike in the radio room and bomb bay. Partitions between life raft compartment and radio hatch were blown off leaving a hole three to four feet square. Immediately after, A/C #594 went into a 30 degree dive from the level, then straight down. We continued to turn and our view was concluded by our wing.”

Statement of Captain William H. Mayer after liberation: “We were hit directly over the target just after release of bombs. I bailed out and Lt. Elmo F. McClain bailed out also from the bombardier’s escape hatch. Lt. McClain said that Lt. Angiolini also went out the hatch after I had given orders to bail out.

“At a hospital in Naples, I saw Lt. Angiolini dead. It was believed that he was killed upon hitting the ground, or by the enemy. I believe that S/Sgt. Lamont, S/Sgt. Wade, and S/Sgt. Lavine were killed by a burst of flak in the plane.

“2nd Lt. Paul Wernich, Co-pilot, was slumped forward in his seat and believed dead. A report stated that T/Sgt. Samora was found dead, in Naples and believed to have died while parachuting down, or after hitting the ground. I heard that T/Sgt. Doebele’s body was found in Naples and he died from flak wounds.

“S/Sgt. Albert E. Nash was captured by the Germans in Naples. He was liberated in April, 1945, and is now in the United States.”

### **MESSINA, SICILY - MISSION NO. 53 - AUGUST 6, 1943**

Twenty-six aircraft dropped 306, 500-lb. GP bombs on Railway Bridges at Messina. No. 837 returned six bombs that failed to release. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, fair to good as to altitude and deflection. The target was well covered. There was slight damage to some aircraft. No losses, no injuries.

### **MESSINA, SICILY - MISSION NO. 54 - AUGUST 9, 1943**

The intended target was a Highway Bridge north of Messina. Twenty-six aircraft dropped 312, 500-lb. GP bombs through a 8/10 to 10/10 cloud cover without successfully destroying the target. Flak was heavy, moderate, with fair accuracy resulting in slight damage to some aircraft. No losses, no injuries.

Lt. Dahir, pilot of A/C #617, hit an irrigation ditch at the south end of the field, damaging the landing gear, circled the field and made a “wheels up” crash landing with no injuries to the crew.

### **ROME, ITALY - MISSION NO. 55 - AUGUST 13, 1943**

Thirty-eight aircraft dropped 456, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Lorenzo Marshalling Yards. Bombs were in the target area with some fires seen. Heavy smoke around the city limited visibility. Flak was heavy, slight to moderate, good as to altitude, poor to deflection. No losses, no injuries.

B-24s from Groups located at Benghasi landed at this base after bombing a target at Wiener Neustadt. After refueling, they returned to their base.

August 14, 1943. The USO Tour, conducted by Bob Hope, was seen by the troops in this area. Of most interest to the men was the beautiful, talented Frances Langford.

August 15, 1943. The Officers Club of the 96th Squadron opened. It was named the "60-50" after Lt. McIntyre's plane in honor of Lt. McIntyre and his crew, who were the first crew lost by the 96th Squadron.

August 17, 1943. Axis forces on the Island of Sicily surrendered.

### **MARSEILLE, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 56 - AUGUST 17, 1943**

This was the Group's first mission to France. Forty-nine aircraft dropped 69 tons of 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the Istre LeTube and Group I Airdromes. Seventy-eight E/A were destroyed, 20 damaged, 40 gliders destroyed and 16 damaged at the LeTube Field. There were direct hits on hangars, service facilities and other buildings with many fires started. At the Group I Airdrome, direct hits were made on installations, many fires started and four E/A destroyed.

Flak was moderate to intense and fairly accurate damaging fourteen B-17s and causing the loss of B-17 #42-30388 of the 429th Squadron. This aircraft was hit by flak about five minutes before bombs away, caught fire and disintegrated in the air.

S/Sgt. Arthur (NMI) Schiffer, LWG, in A/C #42-3096, was wounded by flak.

Approximately six E/A attacked the formation. S/Sgt. Stanley L. Palmer, T/G, 429th Squadron was credited with destruction of a Me-109.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-30388 - "DANNY BOY" - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Carroll L. Fisher, 0-795935, P.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Henry W. Kinnen, 0-743032, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Henry M. Ochocki, 0-798860, N.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Orville H. Taylor, 0-669393, B.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Henry R. Petroski, 35335037, U/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Donald R. Turner, 39020070, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Warren C. Ziegler, 13125326, R/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Edward J. Kasper, 16125080, L/W	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Harry S. Barratt, 33252009, T/G.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Dominic L. Karcich, 37349353, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of 1st Lt. Henry W. Kinnen after liberation: "It was at about 1400 hours and at 21,000 feet when we left the formation, approximately 100 miles south of Marseille, near the Rhone Valley, I bailed out and all but three others bailed out also. They were S/Sgt. Karcich, S/Sgt. Zeigler, and Sgt. Turner.

"Lts. Ochocki and Taylor went out the front hatch. T/Sgt Petroski and I went out the nose hatch. 1st Lt. Fisher went out the still open bomb bay. S/Sgt. Barratt bailed out the tail hatch. Sgt. Kasper went out the waist gun port.

“I have reason to believe that we came down near a small village in the Avignon area with the name of Eygaliers, or name very similar. I was once afforded a brief glance at my POW file card and remembered the odd name of the village, particularly since I had never been sure before, just where we had come down. It was listed as the place of my capture.

“I did not see any of our crew members after landing until I saw T/Sgt. Petroski. He and I were in a German Army Hospital at Arles, France together. He had a badly twisted knee and front teeth knocked loose. I had two bad flak wounds on the left knee, badly sprained back, and not able to walk. I was captured within ten minutes after landing by Luftwaffe troopers. I saw Sgt. Kasper in the hands of the Germans, not injured, en route to the hospital. T/Sgt. Petroski said he saw Lt. Fisher, Lt. Ochocki, Lt. Taylor, and S/Sgt. Barratt on the ground and they were going to try to evade. T/Sgt. Petroski was helpless on the ground and could not join them.

“Sgt. Kasper was a POW and liberated in late April, 1945. I talked several times with him and T/Sgt. Petroski at Camp Lucky Strike in May, 1945 while waiting processing to return to the United States. It was from Sgt. Kasper that I learned of the fate of the other three men that went down with the ship.

“Sgt. Turner, S/Sgt. Ziegler, and S/Sgt. Karcich did not bail out to my knowledge. Sgt. Kasper said the three men were at the waist door. The jettison control was jammed and evidently they waited too long in taking the alternate escape out the waist gun port. They were still trying to force the jammed waist hatch when Sgt. Kasper went out the waist gun port. Lt. Fisher gave ample bail-out time over the interphone. Sgt. Kasper said that the gun mount had been an obstacle but he was able to clear it in jumping. The ship had already begun to roll when I bailed out and they were probably pinned by the force of the spinning plane.”

In a letter from Henry Petroski in August, 1998, he stated that Lt. Fisher, Lt. Ochocki, Lt. Taylor and S/Sgt. Barratt escaped through France and that S/Sgt. Barratt returned to finish his missions. The Missing Air Crew Report did not reflect their evading and also said the name of their ship was “DANNY BOY,” not “SUNNY BOY” as earlier reported.

### **FOGGIA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 57 - AUGUST 19, 1943**

Forty-two aircraft dropped 504, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Electric Sub Station and Marshalling Yards. The bombing was reported as successful. The target was well covered with large explosions seen at the transformer station. Smoke and dust covered the target area.

Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, accurate to altitude and deflection resulting in fatal facial injuries to Sgt. Buster Andeel, 20th Squadron and slight injuries to the following: From the 20th Squadron were 1st Lt. D. S. Hornbeck, S/Sgt. F. G. Thometz, and S/Sgt. P. A. Simmons. Slightly wounded from the 49th Squadron were S/Sgt. W. E. Dempsey, T/Sgt. F. Gibson, and S/Sgt. W. H. Plunkett. Slightly wounded from the 96th Squadron was 2nd Lt. L. E. Dixon.

Thirty-five to 50 enemy aircraft attacked the formation firing machine guns, 20mm cannons and dropping aerial bombs. Five aircraft were lost to flak and enemy aircraft action. Those lost were #42-30502, 20th Squadron, piloted by 2nd Lt. John Bradley; #42-5837, piloted by 1st Lt. Bernard B. Pasero, 20th Squadron; #42-20467, piloted by 1st Lt. Richard E. Rozzelle, 20th Squadron; #42-29523, piloted by 2nd Lt. Herbert D. Thomas, 20th Squadron; and #42-29760, piloted by 1st Lt. John T. Carter, 49th Squadron.

Credited with destruction of Me-109s: S/Sgt. Thomas F. McCaffrey, S/Sgt. Joseph J. Mahan, T/Sgt. Clyde A. Dent, S/Sgt. Willis H. Plunkett, S/Sgt. Frank S. Konieczny, S/Sgt. Gene C. Anderson, T/Sgt. Robert J. Harrison, S/Sgt. John R. McGrane, with a joint claim with T/Sgt. Dennie L. Lauer, S/Sgt. Frank Culligan, S/Sgt. Charles DeVito with a joint claim with S/Sgt. John H. Clepper, S/Sgt. Robert W. Tunstall, S/Sgt. Maxon O. Case, T/Sgt. Fred L. Green, S/Sgt. Wallis L. Higgins, 2nd Lt.

John J. Barron, S/Sgt. Francis A. Clark. S/Sgt. William K. Guilfoil was credited with destruction of a FW-190. S/Sgt. Captain B. Williams was credited with destruction of a Me-210. Sgt. Felix A. Dalessio was credited with possible destruction of a Me-109 and S/Sgt. Richard C. Latshaw was credited with possible destruction of a FW-190.

B-17s #42-29595, piloted by 1st Lt. A. L. Nelson and #42-229613, piloted by Captain C. H. Knaggs, made an emergency landing at Bocco Di Falco, Airdrome, Palermo, Sicily due to injuries to crewmen on both ships.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-29760 - 49TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	John T. Carter, 0-793394, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Robert H. Quesnal, 0-738025, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	William J. Galligan, 0-797116, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Charles A. Jacobson, 0-734700, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Michael R. Tegge, 35326779, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	David F. Shea, 31128439, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Harry R. Swartwood, 15103235, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Russell (NMI) Hayes, 39828075, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Emmitt L. Adams, 18037333, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Walter G. Frei, 19127334, R/O.	(POW)

This A/C was reported to have been last seen about 30 miles from the Italian coast with the No. 3 engine on fire and descending rapidly. Seven chutes were reportedly seen opening before crashing in the water.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-30502 - 20TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt.	John (NMI) Bradley, 0-730356, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	James D. McPhee, 0-743192, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Robert E. Lee, 0-801137, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	William A. Peters, 0-735339, B.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Albert S. Kirby, 33093704, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Eugene P. O'Brien, 37374817, L/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	John T. Westmorland, 38208443, R/W.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	James J. Bradley, 12095706, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Thomas G. Hausler, 12149119, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Maynard T. Rogers, 37361638, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of T/Sgt. James J. Bradley, March 13, 1944, after liberation: "My ship was hit by flak and attacked by enemy fighters. I was hit in the knee by 20mm cannon fire and went to the radio room and saw the radio operator on the floor. The ball turret gunner had fired a few bursts and then stopped firing. I also saw the right waist gunner go down. I then bailed out at 13,000 feet. The plane was badly shot up but the engines were still running. The pilot and co-pilot had been shot and the plane was out of control. I was the only one of the crew that left the ship. The others went down with it.

"The Italians told me that the ship had burst into flames upon striking the ground. I believe that the Italians had a list of the crew casualties as I was shown a list containing the names of the two crew members that I recognized, the radio operator, T/Sgt. Maynard T. Rogers, and the belly gunner, S/Sgt. Albert S. Kirby.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-29523 - "PRECIOUS" - 20TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt.	Herbert D. Thomas, 0-729921, P.	(KIA)
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2nd Lt. Herbert J. Schachschneider, 0-742939, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt. John E. Eberle, 0-797228, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Jack C. Green, 0-735864, B.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Stanley J. Mikula, 37316204, U/T.	(KIA)
Sgt. Robert I. Beasley, 18054330, L/T.	(KIA)
Sgt. William E. Brousseau, 11964008, R/W.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. Eph F. King, Jr., 18089206, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. John J. Hopkins, 12037861, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. Thomas W. Wilson, 16051666, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of T/Sgt. Thomas C. Monroe, U/TG, on B-17 #403, after the mission: “Approximately five miles off Licosa Point, a Ma-202 came in between 8 and 9 o’clock and took up the same course as #523. It was then that I observed the E/A drop aerial bombs. He was no nearer than 40 feet above #523. It looked as if the cockpit of the E/A was directly over the wing of the bomber. The length of time that he remained above #523 was probably a minute, during which he dropped between 12 and 15 aerial bombs. The bombs looked like they were about the same size as our 20-lb. frag bombs, perhaps a little larger, and they exploded with a red flash with white smoke. Aerial bombs looked like they were dropping in trail, with approximately 10 to 15 feet between bombs. Since bombs were seen to drop on both sides of the A/C, it looked like the bombs were carried in racks attached to the A/C’s wings.

“The upper turret gunner was busy firing at an E/A coming in at 6 o’clock and evidently didn’t notice the E/A above him. The reason I didn’t fire on the E/A was due to the fact that it was so close to #523 that I was afraid of hitting #523.

“Almost instantly #523 started to slip out of the formation and when it reached a point of approximately 15 miles off Licosa Point, it started to circle and dive. At that time the crew began to bail out. I counted nine chutes open. The A/C struck the water at approximately the same location as the crew.

“We were flying at 12,000 feet. I saw an E/A go down, circle the crew in the water and then pull away. I did not see any E/A fire at the men as they were floating down.”

Statement of 2nd Lt. John E. Eberle after liberation: “We left the formation near Naples, Italy. I bailed out and am unable to remember clearly how many other members bailed out. One, S/Sgt. Stanley Mikula, bailed out over water with 20mm fragment wounds in his head. The other man, Lt. Schachschneider, was captured and later liberated along with myself. I never saw nor heard from any other member of the crew after I bailed out.”

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-20467 - “BIG JEFF” - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt. Richard E. Rozzelle, 0-661969, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Robert G. Kingsbury, 0-737697, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Alexander G. Mayberry, 0-798842, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Carmel F. Parsons, 0-732964, B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. Sebastian S. Hernandez, 38143402, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Robert E. Woods, 12162792, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. John E. Adams, 31159087, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. William E. Groot, 31190291, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Arthur P. Panini, 12127162, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. Earl H. Bjorklund, 31144713, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of Sgt. Bill Shuping, U/TG on B-17 #595, after the mission: “When I first noticed #467 on fire, it was coming from the underside of No. 3 engine, and it appeared to be a supercharger. The flames appeared to spread to the fuselage. Shortly after that, it veered to the left about 10 degrees and then straightened out. Then it peeled off on a long, gliding bank, then I counted five parachutes coming out. Then the plane fell off on a long diving bank. There were two enemy fighters followed it down for two or three minutes but they did not fire. I saw it hit the water with a big splash, skip, burst into flames. Seemed to smoke for five to ten minutes and sink.”

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-5837 - “C-BATT” - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Bernard B. Pasero, 0-729363, P.	(POW) *
2nd Lt.	Donald H. Porter, 0-675282, CP.	(POW)
1st Lt.	Kemp F. Martin, 0-411265, N.	(POW) *
1st Lt.	Kelly H. Erwin, 0-727627, B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Robert H. Eaton, 19059340, U/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	James J. Herzing, 31375241, L/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Charles M. Stewart, 33937720, R/W.	(DED) **
S/Sgt.	Edgar N. MacDonald, 12088301, L/W.	(POW) ***
Sgt.	Raymond J. Farrell, 19059551, T/G.	(POW)
Sgt.	Harold O. Lee, 18061417, R/O.	(POW)
*	Escaped	
**	Died of wounds in enemy hospital	
***	Rescued by American Forces while in Italian Hospital	

Statement of 1st Lt. Bernard B. Pasero after escaping and return to Allied control: “It was about 1200 hours when we lost two engines over the target and fell behind the formation. All the crew bailed out.

“Lt. Kelly Erwin, Bombardier, was killed instantly upon impact with the ground due to either failure or malfunction of his backpack parachute. Information was given to me by Italian police, who informed me that Lt. Erwin was given a Catholic burial near Frigento or Avellino, Italy. The day following the accident, Lt. Erwin’s steel helmet was taken to the jail where all the survivors, except Sgt. Neil MacDonald, were being held. Italian police asked me to examine the parachute and other personal equipment that had been worn by the crew in order to identify Lt. Erwin’s equipment.

“The steel helmet worn by Lt. Erwin was not dented nor mis-shaped in any way that indicated that the parachute did fail to break the fall. Witnesses informed members of my crew that the parachute sort of oscillated while descending.

“As I landed about 30 miles from the place the other crew members landed, I did not see Sgt. Stewart. However, after talking to other crew members, that did talk to Sgt. Stewart on the day of the accident, the following should be a fair sequence of events.

“When we were attacked by the fighters, Sgt. Stewart was badly hit below the knees. Sgt. Stewart was thrown forward against the ball turret. Shortly after that, our elevator controls were severed and I rang the abandon aircraft alarm due to the fact that the interphone had been put out of commission by gunfire. Sgt. MacDonald had been hit in both legs by machine gun fire at this time, but managed to assist Sgt. Stewart to the main exit.

“After reaching the ground, Sgt. Stewart was taken to a civilian doctor who informed Sgt. MacDonald that Sgt. Stewart’s leg had to be amputated and that everything had been done to save his life, but he had passed away that morning. Sgt. MacDonald had a talk with Sgt. Stewart shortly before he passed away.

“From the information supplied by Sgt. MacDonald and other crew members, I believe Sgt. Stewart died from loss of blood while descending in his parachute.

“All the crew members, but the two deceased, have been returned to the United States after having spent from November 43 to VE day in German prisons, except Captain Martin (escaped and returned with me), and Sgt. Neil MacDonald who was in a civilian hospital near Salerno and was rescued by our ground forces early after the landings.

“While in custody, I met Sgt. James J. Bradley who was the lone survivor of Lt. Bradley’s crew. He informed me that they left my wing shortly after leaving the target and were hit badly by fighters when the aircraft was set on fire. He bailed out before any signal, or alarm, was given by the pilot. He stated that the aircraft was burning badly and had been damaged by anti-aircraft fire. At the time I met Sgt. Bradley, he was suffering from injuries caused by the accident. If I recall correctly, he suffered a broken leg upon impact with the ground.”

S/Sgt. Neil MacDonald, L/W on the crew of Lt. Bernard Pasero: April 2, 1992. “Your letter immediately brought back memories of the war years, and the times, both good and bad, with the 2nd Bomb Group. I can recall many of the missions as if they were yesterday.

“I had been one of the original crew members on the crew of Lt. Holger A. Selling. I trained with him and the others at Ephrata, Great Falls, Mt. Home, and other bases in the Northwest. After several combat sorties with Lt. Selling, I was transferred to Captain Ben Pasero’s when he became commander of “C-Batt” and formed his own crew. If my memory serves me correctly, we were based at Massicutt, Tunisia, North Africa. I can’t recall how many missions I had with Lt. Selling.

“August 19, 1943 was my 36th combat mission and I was flying with Captain Pasero on B-17 #42-5837. We were the lead aircraft of the second element of the 20th Squadron.

“It was the roughest bomb run, that I can recall, of all my missions. The flak was thick and the sky black with puffs of smoke from the exploding ack-ack. I can still hear the oomph-oomph of the flak as it exploded near us. This day, the 2nd Bomb Group was really getting hit, and very hard! It was moments after “bombs away” that our B-17 took a close hit, after which everything started to happen! No. 2 engine failed and then No. 4 engine failed. I recall a plane off to our right going down in flames. We began to lose formation fast because of the loss of No. 2 and No. 4 engines.

“As we left the formation and lost altitude, the fighters jumped us. Me-109s were all around like flies on honey. Taking hits from fighters, we lost No. 3 engine. This was it!

“The alarm bell sounded and everyone abandoned ship. Everyone got out of the plane but we lost two brave crewmen from the engagement. The parachute of Lt. Kelly Erwin, our Bombardier, did not open, and Sgt. Charles Stewart died from leg wounds. He survived until he reached the hospital and died while on the operating table.

“Let’s go back to the moments after the Me-109s jumped us. I was flying waist gunner. The sky was full of “Bandits,” Me-109s everywhere, coming at us from all angles. I could hear the bullets hitting all around us. I was hit in the right shoulder and fell to the floor of the plane. I got up and continued to fire my 50 caliber. At the same time, the other waist gunner and myself were hit in the legs. I took a hit in my heel and also a bad hit in my right leg, just above the ankle. Sgt. Stewart’s leg was shot off but hanging by flesh only. He somehow managed to bail out of the plane okay.

“Upon reaching the ground, I was surrounded by many civilians who fought over my parachute and flight boots. After arriving at the hospital, I was taken care of and my wounds cleaned and dressed. I remained in the hospital approximately 37 days and was liberated by the 45th Infantry Division when they liberated the town.

“After many weeks in evacuation hospitals, I finally arrived back at the 2nd Bomb Group and was assigned orders to go back to the States. While waiting for my orders to be cut, I learned that my Dad was looking for me.

“He was a Merchant Marine First Officer, decided to go over and look for me, and managed to ship on a boat for the Mediterranean area. Before he left, he received a telegram from my Mother that I had been taken a POW.

He decided that it was too late to stay home, so he sailed. The destination of the ship was Italy and when he landed, tried to locate the Group I had been in. The Red Cross said the Group had moved back to Africa. Actually, some of the Group was in Foggia but most of the ground forces were still in North Africa. My Dad went to North Africa and met a Captain who was in the 96th Squadron. The Captain returned to Italy, told me of my Dad, and I obtained permission to go to North Africa. Upon arriving there, I could not find my Dad but found the Captain who knew where my Dad was.

“We went to Naval Intelligence and found the location of the ship, anchored just off-shore. We received permission to go aboard. The Captain called my Father and said he had someone to visit him. “When Neil came up,” said Chief MacDonald, “I would have fallen overboard if there hadn’t been someone behind me.” It was then he found that I had been seriously wounded but well enough to leave the hospital.

“I stayed aboard that night, the Air Force Captain, 96th Squadron Executive Officer, had orders cut so I could accompany my Father home on the freighter without going back to my unit. My combat days were over and I would have been sent home later anyway.”

1st Lt. Robert G. Kingsbury was a first pilot assigned to the 20th Squadron. The loss of his aircraft in the Mediterranean was first published in 1953. April 23, 1994. “In May 1943, Rapid City, South Dakota, they handed me the keys to a stalwart B-17, assigned me a crew and we began intensive training. By July 1943, the crew was a solid precision team. B-17 #0467 was assigned to me in Rapid City and we promptly named her “BIG JEFF.” It had a grand total of 11 hours on it. We were notified we were to ferry her to England.

“On the 10-hour flight from Newfoundland to Ayr, Scotland, Alexander Mayberry, our good natured but deadly serious navigator from Pittsburgh, proved his stuff. “BIG JEFF,” roared out of Gander in a flight of 50, B-17s and B-24s, a sight I will never forget! Six of these ten hours we fought through a pea soup fog but Mayberry got us there, and guided us blind onto the Ayr airstrip. One of those B-17s never made it.

“We weren’t in Scotland very long. Eight days later we flew to Casablanca and then on to a base near Tunis, a small town called Massicault. We were assigned to the 20th Bomb Squadron. The crew worked like beavers under the punishing North African sun, stripping the de-icers and installing new engines, preparing “BIG JEFF” for combat.

“Our damned third mission was a mess from beginning to end. The briefing officer informed us that intelligence estimated that 350-400 twin engine and single engine fighters were in the area now that Italy was in German hands. They were concentrated at air strips around Foggia and Salerno. That was bad enough but then the brass came up with another brainstorm. The P-38s assigned to cover us were to escort us to the IP and then leave us and do low level strafing of the airfields. Our escort was outnumbered 20 to 1 as it was. The officer informed us we would have to get home as best we could.

“At dawn we swallowed a hurried breakfast, at 4 A.M., had our last minute briefing and were airborne. “BIG Jeff” was in the first wave, flying in the fourth position behind the leader in our six-bomber flight. The P-38s were with us until the IP and then took off to their strafing. We reached the target, dropped our bombs smack on the power station and started home without escort.

“Suddenly all hell broke loose. We spotted a swarm of black dots coming up from the Salerno area. They spread out as they approached, six, eight, a dozen German fighters to a bomber. They knocked us down like ducks in a shooting gallery. It was murder plain and simple!

“BIG JEFF” never had a chance. No other B-17 could have withstood the deadly cannon fire from those Me-109s and rocket throwing Ju-88s. Smoke filled the cockpit and behind me, 20mm

shrapnel shredded through the bomb bay. Farther aft, the crew clung to their 50s, slamming steel at the fighters. Over the intercom, Panini, our tail gunner screamed, "I got one, I got one."

"Suddenly No. 1 engine caught fire. I glanced at the control panel and saw the rpm indicator slam over to "danger." The oil lines had severed and the prop was running wild. Tried feathering the engine but it wouldn't stop. An instant later we lost No. 2 engine. The crazy props were tearing the engines and mounts to pieces. All at once, we took a rocket hit amidship.

"There was a cry again from Panini, "Got another, I got ----." The words trailed off ominously. I called but got no answer, his guns were silent. Still our remaining 50s thundered. But I knew it was hopeless. "This is it," I said to myself, "This is the end and only my third mission."

"I pressed the alarm button three times, "abandon ship" and set her on automatic pilot. I broke radio silence, "This is No. 4, flight leader, am going down." Even as I spoke, I saw him, a mile ahead and a thousand feet above us, heel over and plummet into the void.

"The next instant I was yanking the forward escape hatch open and counting as Al Mayberry stepped through the hatch, then T/Sgt. Sabastian Hernandez, the finest crew chief a captain ever had. He forced a grin and said, "See you Captain." He never did. Parsons was the next, he waved a silent good-bye and dropped from sight. Then Rozzelle, new to us on the mission. They were all to die before sunset.

"Only I remained in the forward compartment. "BIG JEFF" was in a glide. Guns continued to bark intermittently from the rear and I hoped to God the others were dropping through the rear escape hatch.

"Tears streamed from my face, some from the acrid smoke that filled the cabin, some from my heart. I checked my gear; my escape kit strapped to my back, the oxygen mask strung to a bail-out bottle and my chute. I stepped into the void, counted to ten and pulled the ripcord. There was a rib-cracking jolt as the chute billowed. I counted 15, perhaps 18 chutes, from the three B-17s ditched from our flight of six. To the south the battle was still in full fury.

"I strained to pick out the other chutes, spot Parsons, Mayberry and others. They had drifted far to the south and were merely specks against the cloudless sky. As I hung there, watching the water coming up, I saw "BIG JEFF" gliding in tightening circles. She circled three times over the water, then a hundred feet above the water, she flipped over on her back and exploded. "BIG JEFF" simply disintegrated.

"Suddenly a couple of homecoming Me-109s headed my way. I thought they were going to shoot me. I clutched my shroud lines and tried to maneuver out of the way. In a second they were past, not 50 feet from me, so close that I could see one of the pilots, a sarcastic grin on his face.

"A thousand feet above the water, I remembered my GI shoes. I doubled over, removed one and then the other, tied the laces, hung them around my neck. A second later I was in the water. I released my harness, abandoned my chute, inflated my Mae West. Hitting the water, I tried to get my bearings. To the east rose the mountains of Italy, perhaps 20 miles away. As I lifted my arm to swim, I glanced at my waterproof watch. It was 12:50.

"As I swam, my waterlogged shoes nearly strangled me. I slipped them from my neck and released them. I wiggled out of my flight pants, keeping only my undershorts and waterproof escape kit, with its knife, candy bars and matches with a flare. Then I began swimming.

"I headed shoreward, hoping to avoid capture, figuring to beach and make my way to a rendezvous where, the briefing officer announced, a PT boat would attempt to pick up survivors. Every few minutes, during those first few hours, I stopped and yelled. I screamed until seawater swelled my throat shut, until I became dizzy and nauseous. Never once was there an answer.

"I pressed forward, forcing one arm ahead of the other. It seemed I had swum for hours but when I looked at my watch, it was only mid-afternoon, and the shore appeared no closer. The merciless sun burned my face and shoulders black, until they were ringed with blisters. Only once did I rest. The

shore was there somewhere and I knew I had to make it or die in the attempt. That one rest cost me my food supply. Just as I tore open my escape kit, a wave drenched it and ruined the candy, matches and flare.

“As the night settled I was still going. Swimming had become automatic. I was numb, cold, almost hysterical, and half conscious. I had been in the water eight hours, wanted to sleep, wanted to sink and be done with it. Every time I dozed, I sank like a rock. All night long a strange phosphorescence played around me. Off in the distance I occasionally heard a slap, as some huge fish surfaced.

“Sometime during the night a Very pistol flared on the horizon. A submarine I thought. Perhaps one of ours searching for survivors. Most likely it was German. At that moment I would have welcomed capture. The sub, if that was what it was, was miles away.

“Dawn found me still swimming. It had been 18 hours since my ditching. Suddenly I saw a small sail on the horizon. My heart pounding, spirit rising, I stopped and shouted. I churned the water, bolt upright, paddled in a circle. Then I saw the sail, the protruding dorsal fin of a giant shark! The fin crested fully three feet above the water, or so it seemed, and not more than a hundred feet away.

“Terrified, I reached for my escape gear and rummaged for the jackknife. I opened the biggest blade, clutched the knife and waited. Nothing happened. The monster shark had halted too. Frantically, the knife clutched between my teeth, I struck out for shore. The shark followed, no closer, no more distant than before. Then as I looked up from a stroke, there appeared two sails! Another shark had joined the first. Terrified, I clutched the knife harder. Just then a wave smacked me full in the face. My arm slipped, twisted and the knife bored into my thigh. It was a superficial wound but blood was coloring the water. Horrified, I recalled stories about how blood maddened the smallest sharks to frenzied killers. I tried to stop the blood but it continued flowing. The sharks took no heed, following in perfect unison. When I stopped, they stopped. What was a period of about 20 minutes seemed like a lifetime. Suddenly they were gone.

“Toward noon, I heard the drone of an airplane. I stopped, treaded water, bobbed up and down, trying to hold myself as high out of the water as possible. A mile to the south, and not more than 20 feet above the waves, hovered a huge, three-engine seaplane. It was heading in my direction. I waved, screamed, vaulting and bobbing against the water. The plane was so close that I could see the insignia, the Britisher’s huge bulls eye. With a shattering roar, the plane passed directly over me. Its slipstream lashed up waves, choking my frenzied shouting. Sick at heart and exhausted, I cried piteously. My last hope was a distant drone.

“Now it was 3 P.M., 27 hours since I abandoned “BIG JEFF.” My heart pounded like a clubbed fist, my legs refused to move. I kept stroking feebly. I was slowly dying of exhaustion. Every immersion of my face in the brine was a searing hurt where the blisters were festered and inflamed. My eyes were nearly frozen shut, but the shore loomed, now larger and blacker against the sea.

“Toward dusk, now 7 P.M. by my watch, I made out lights through the hazy mist. I knew I could go no farther. My feet, like concrete posts, pulled me down. My arms were dead things, and weak as rubber. Suddenly my feet sank and I went under. And then I touched something hard, slippery and solid. I couldn’t believe it, not land, solid ground after 31 hours.

“Half an hour later I staggered ashore. I don’t know what happened after that. When I came to, I was in an Italian fisherman’s house, a great blur of a woman was forcing egg nogs down my swollen throat. I told them I was an American, they understood, and the crowded room echoed with friendliness.

“The joy was short lived. Minutes later an Italian soldier burst into the room and I was taken prisoner, but I was alive! I was taken to an Italian hospital and treated. Upon release, I was taken prisoner of the Germans and spent the rest of the war in Stalag Luft III, 80 miles southwest of Berlin.

“But, I will never forget those 31 terrible hours in the Mediterranean.”

### **AVERSA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 58 - AUGUST 21, 1943**

Thirty-three aircraft dropped 396, 500-lb. GP bombs on Marshalling Yards and Installations at Aversa. Hits on Target #1 were at the north end of the Marshalling Yards along tracks and on stores depot, starting two fires. About five A/C placed direct hits in Marshalling Yards, target #1A. About half the Group overran the target, some dropping their bombs on the outskirts of Naples. Flak at Target #1 was heavy, slight to moderate, good altitude, poor deflection. There was slight damage to some A/C but no injuries.

### **FOGGIA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 59 - AUGUST 25, 1943**

Thirty-four aircraft dropped 3,169, 20-lb. fragmentation bombs and 10, 500-lb. delayed action bombs on the No. 7 Satellite Airfield at Foggia. The target was fairly well covered. Flak was heavy, slight to moderate, good altitude, poor deflection. Four B-17s were slightly damaged by flak. Four to six E/A attacked the formation. No losses, no injuries. One Me-109 was destroyed, a joint claim going to S/Sgt. George P. Durkee and S/Sgt. Clayton H. Kahler, 96th Squadron.

### **CAPUA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 60 - AUGUST 26, 1943**

Brig. General Atkinson reported at briefing that a "Hostile P-38" had shot down one of our bombers, 80 miles at sea. Not far from the 2nd Bomb Group field.

Nineteen aircraft dropped 238, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Airdrome hangars at Capua. The north third of the hangars were well covered with several fires observed. Flak was heavy, slight to moderate, poor deflection and altitude. No injuries, no losses.

Six to 12 E/A made one pass at the formation. No injuries, no losses, no claims. General Atkinson flew the mission.

### **SALMONA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 61 - AUGUST 27, 1943**

Seventeen aircraft dropped 51 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on Railroad Installations at Salmona. Direct hits were made on stores buildings, emitting black smoke. Several B-17s were slightly damaged. S/Sgt. Paul A. Smiley and S/Sgt. Robert T. Dennis, 96th Squadron, were slightly wounded.

A/C #42-30456, piloted by Captain William P. Koch, 96th Squadron, was hit by flak over Anzio and went down.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-30456 - "CACTUS CLIPPER" - 96TH SQUADRON**

Captain William P. Koch, 0-403376, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Charles A. Shuck, 0-733738, CP.	(POW)
Captain Frank W. Upton, 0-419276, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Walter H. Henderson, 0-728482, B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. James F. Conway, 12044126, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Reed T. Chism, 39391170, L/T.	(KIA)
Sgt. Felix A. Dalessio, 32352692, R/W.	(KIA)
Sgt. James M. McDonald, 31126652, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Edgar M. Stuart, 16065363, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Raymond E. Ressler, 12044126, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of S/Sgt. Andrew T. McMurdo, L/TG, after the mission: "We were flying in a tight formation and had just crossed the coast of Italy, directly over the town of Anzio when I saw A/C #456, that had been flying on our left wing, pass in front of our aircraft and slightly below us. I noticed that their left wing was off and I saw the shadow of the wing pass over our left wing. While I was looking at #456, I saw a terrific explosion in the vicinity of the radio room and debris flew toward our rear.

Then the fuselage folded like a knife near the position of the ball turret. After the wreckage had dropped, what I judge to be approximately 5,000 feet, I saw one parachute open, then when it fell another 5,000 feet, I saw one more parachute open out. The wing that was knocked off fell in the ocean at approximately 0-2 in target chart No. 138-NA and the other wreckage struck the ground at approximately N-0-35 and the bombs exploded. The man in the first parachute drifted out to sea. The second chute landed on the beach.”

S/Sgt. Robert T. Dennis was a member of the 96th Squadron on the crew of Major Marion F. Caruthers. April 6, 1991: “I joined the outfit at Geiger Field, Washington, and was assigned to the crew of Lt. Gathercole and trained with him at Ephrata and Glasgow. Captain Caruthers (later Major) took over the crew and flew to Kearney, Nebraska, and then by train to Salina, Kansas, where we picked up A/C #42-5776. We named it “EAGER BEAVER.” The crew was sorry to lose Lt. Gathercole but Captain Caruthers was a fine pilot with nerves of steel.

“We flew our first mission from Chateau Dun. I flew my 50 missions, 48 of them in “EAGER BEAVER” and two in “CACTUS CLIPPER.” It was later crashed by Lt. Train.

“I believe we bombed Foggia, Italy three times as Goering had a squadron of his “Yellow Nose” FW-190 pilots stationed there and they were giving us trouble. It was decided to knock them out. We hit them one time with 20-lb. frag bombs.

“The day I was wounded in the left arm, August 27, 1943, we had heavy flak and fighters. I got credit for a FW-190. I also shot down an Italian fighter but didn’t get it confirmed. I wasn’t wounded bad. Dr. Lavine put on some sulfa powder, bandaged it and I flew the next day.

“S/Sgt. Norman Ferree, our tail gunner, was killed on July 4, 1943, on the Group’s 33rd mission which was to Catania, Sicily. I finished my 50th mission on September 10, 1943, and returned to the States in October, 1943. I was awarded the Air Medal with 10 clusters and four battle stars to my European Campaign Medal.”

“I stayed in the Air Force, retiring in September, 1964 as a Master Sergeant. I had 9,000 hours as a Flight Engineer, 345 hours in the Korean War.”

1st Lt. Edmund A. J. Mroz was a member of the 96th Squadron and Navigator on B-17 #42-29639, piloted by Captain Douglas T. Metcalf. March 26, 1991: “SKYWORM” was the plane I signed-up for at Kearney, Nebraska. Early in April, 1944, I learned it had been shot down on its 110th mission over Steyr, Austria, the day that the 49th Squadron lost its entire Squadron and the 96th lost five of its aircraft. Flight officer Levchak, the Aircraft Commander of one of our first replacement crews, informed me of that in the dining car of a train in the Midwest. He told me that the day before, he had visited the mother of Lt. Charles Shuck in Louisville, Kentucky. She had just received a letter, that day, from her son, from a POW camp. He informed her that the Italians had fished him out of the Mediterranean as the sole survivor in the B-17 he was shot down in, with two broken legs.

“That had to be a miracle! Major “Buck” Caruthers was leading the 2nd Bomb Group that day in #496, “DINA-MITE,” the fourth of four Groups briefed to bomb a munitions factory at Salmona, in central Italy. That happened to be Friday, 27 August 1943. I happened to be his lead Navigator that day. My head was at the driftmeter, getting a drift reading as we crossed the shoreline at Anzio. We were hit by flak at that instant, and Captain “Willie” Koch’s B-17, flying in the deputy lead position, on our right wing, was reported to have had his left wing blown off. We were at 22,000 feet altitude. That is why I call Chuck Shuck’s survival a miracle.!

“Captain Metcalf, “SKYWORM’S” Airplane Commander and “B” Flight Leader, was sent back to the USA having completed 40 missions, my 41st, on Friday, 6 August 1943, over Messina, Sicily, as the leader of the 96th Squadron formation.

“On Monday, 9 August 1943, “SKYWORM” returned to Messina with General James Doolittle and the freshly appointed Major Caruthers in the pilot’s seats, on my 42nd mission, to hit the Germans trying to escape from Sicily to the toe of Italy.

“I happened to be the very first member of the 2nd Bomb Group, in World War II, to have completed 50 bombing missions on Sunday, 5 September 1943. The target was the Viterbo Airfield, northeast of Rome. The target was covered by clouds, as was the alternate target. The other squadrons were able to bomb the Viterbo Airfield through the clouds. The 96th Squadron bombed Civitavecchia, which I found through a break in the clouds. We had blown an arsenal 15,000 feet in the air on 14 May 1943. That evening, I took over as 96th Duty Officer, when we heard the Germans come over and we watched the fireworks display over Bizerte on the horizon.

“On the train that I ran into F/O Levchak, I was returning to Peyote, Texas, after having attended the USAAF Intelligence School at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. After having first integrated freshly graduated navigators into 56 replacement crews each six weeks, then I was given the job of coordinating flying training with ground school, first with B-17 replacement crews and then B-29 replacement crews, destined for the Far East.

“After having responded to a TWX from General H. H. Arnold for intelligence officers having a knowledge of French or German, willing to take hazardous missions alone or in small company, I was accepted and transferred to Washington, D.C., in late August 1944, into the U.S. Office of Strategic Services. There I attended two schools and was shipped aboard the H.M.S. Aquitania to Greenock, Scotland. I was short stopped in London in the SI Branch of OSS as the Technical Reports Officer dealing with German secret weapons developments. I stayed there until 8 June 1945, when I was transferred to Wiesbaden-Biebrich, Germany.

“The last Sunday of the month, at breakfast in the mess hall at Bierbrich, I was tapped on the shoulder by Major Richard F. Kuhn, formerly the 96th Squadron flight surgeon. That morning, Doc Kuhn and I were sent by G-2 of the 12th Army Group, General Sibert, to East Germany, to a place where the Soviets were to take over the next day, to move out about a million dollars worth of German Naval Research equipment that Doc Kuhn learned about while on a medical intelligence trip with former Luftwaffe physicians.

“Doc and I ended up spending about a week together, with the Doc acting as Commanding Officer of the US 102nd Division, and I, acting as his Chief of Staff. The following Sunday, I tangled with a Lt. Col., a West Pointer, in Kassal. The following day, I heard an upper classman at West Point, of that Lt. Col. chew him out for half an hour over the telephone, thinking he would be busted down to his permanent rank of Second Lieutenant.

“A couple of days later, at ten hours notice, I was kicked out of Germany, persona non grata, at Wiesbaden-Bierbich. Three weeks later, in London, I learned that I had to return to Germany to face a court-martial. Lt. Col. Bowman of OSS/London arranged my return to Germany via Paris, where I spent the weekend. The day I returned to Germany, I was put in a hotel in Wiesbaden. That night I heard shooting downstairs, pulled on my trousers, took my Colt 32 out of my shoulder holster, and was prepared to shoot werewolves. It was VJ Day!

“The paper work caught up with me finally in a day or two. That Col. in Kassal had his adjutant prefer charges against me after I had chewed out the Lt. Col. in his officers club in front of his subordinate officers. I was still only a Captain. As I returned to Kassal with the investigating officer to confront the Lt. Col., Major Kuhn was flown from Caserta to Wiesbaden to convince me that I should agree to take punishment under the 104th Articles of War, in place of trial by court-martial.

“Because I figured that it would take about half a year before the court-martial would take place and the war was already over, I took the choice, and have kicked myself in the pants ever since. A General Brown, who had taken over for General Eisenhower as the Commanding General of the US Forces in the European Theater as he was visiting the States, wrote me that all was forgiven in view

of my exemplary record, but to remember in the future I should have first obeyed a superior officer's order, and then have questioned it.

"Ironies of Fate. "Willie" Koch may well have saved my life, before sun-up, on the day he was killed. He blew the head off a snake with his 45, which I was about to step on, as I was talking to someone to the right of me as we were walking to the briefing tent.

"George Olds was the regular Bombardier on "Willie" Koch's crew and was recovering from an appendectomy. Doc Kuhn sent George from the "60-50" Club to the station hospital the evening of 21 August 1943 to have his appendix out. Lt. Walter Henderson took George's place with Captain Koch's crew. He had been Bill Propper's Bombardier. Doc Kuhn thus saved George's life twice. First by diagnosing his appendicitis, then hospitalizing him."

#### **TERNI, ITALY - MISSION NO. 62 - AUGUST 28, 1943**

Nineteen aircraft dropped 228, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Terni. The target was well covered with some bombs landing in the town area adjacent to the Marshalling Yards. Flak was heavy, moderate, good altitude, poor deflection. One B-17 was slightly damaged. No injuries, no losses.

#### **VITERBO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 63 - AUGUST 30, 1943**

Fifteen aircraft dropped 2,160, 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the Landing Ground at Viterbo. The results were described as "almost picture perfect" with fires observed to start in A/C area. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, fair to good altitude, good deflection. Ten to 20 E/A attacked the formation, some dropping aerial bombs. Ten A/C were slightly damaged by flak and one severely damaged by flak. No injuries, no losses.

S/Sgt. George L. Ross, L/TG, was credited with downing an Me-109.

#### **PISA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 64 - AUGUST 31, 1943**

Thirty-eight aircraft dropped 456, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Reggio Aircraft Factory at Pisa. The target area was well covered with many direct hits and damaging near misses. Flak was heavy, slight, poor to altitude and deflection. B-17s #109 and #670 landed in Sicily. Two E/A attacked these planes. S/Sgt. John Kennedy, LWG on #109, was credited with the destruction of a Re-2001. No injuries, no losses.

#### **TRENTO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 65 - SEPTEMBER 2, 1943**

Nineteen aircraft dropped 152, 500-lb. bombs on a Highway Bridge at Trento. The target area was well covered, direct hits observed on highway. Other direct hits on adjoining bridge over River Aidge. Both bridges down. Flak was heavy, slight, fair to altitude and deflection. Two B-17s were slightly damaged by flak. Four to six E/A attacked the formation. No injuries, no losses.

#### **TERRACINA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 66 - SEPTEMBER 4, 1943**

The assigned target was Capua, Italy. Due to cloud coverage over the primary target, nineteen aircraft dropped 304, 500-lb. GP bombs on the town of Terracina and Landing Ground, three miles west of town. Bombing was described as "accurate hits" on target. There was no flak. Six Me-109s were seen but did not attack. No injuries, no losses.

#### **VITERBO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 67 - SEPTEMBER 5, 1943**

Thirty-four aircraft got over the target but because of heavy cloud cover, only 12 aircraft dropped 95, 500-lb. GP bombs on the target with unobserved results. Five aircraft dropped 50, 500-lb.

GP bombs on the town of Civitavecchia with all bombs observed to hit in the city. Seventeen planes did not bomb.

Flak at Viterbo was heavy, slight, fair to good altitude and deflection. Two B-17s were slightly damaged. Flak at Civitavecchia was heavy, slight, good altitude, poor deflection. Two E/A made one pass at the formation. No injuries, no losses.

#### **VILLA LITERNO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 68 - SEPTEMBER 6, 1943**

The assigned target was the Landing Ground at Capodichino but a 10/10 cloud cover prevented the 28 aircraft from dropping their bombs. Nine aircraft found a hole in the clouds over the Villa Literno Marshalling Yards, 12 miles from Naples, and dropped 144, 300-lb. bombs that appeared to be directly on target. No flak, no injuries, no losses.

#### **FOGGIA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 69 - SEPTEMBER 7, 1943**

Thirty-one aircraft dropped 4,464, 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the Satellite #2 Airdrome at Foggia. The landing and disposal areas at the Landing Ground were well covered and it was considered a successful mission. Flak was heavy, intense, accurate to altitude and deflection. Fifteen B-17s were slightly damaged by flak. Seriously wounded by flak were S/Sgt. F. G. Thometz and S/Sgt. L. W. Shively. Slightly wounded by flak were Captain L. G. Abelhof, 2nd Lt. B. J. Lewis, and 2nd Lt. Francis Perrett.

Fifteen to 20 E/A attacked the formation, and fortress gunners' claims were: one each Me-109 to S/Sgt. John H. Clepper, L/W; S/Sgt. James D. Crowley, U/T; S/Sgt. Donald C. Hamann, U/T; S/Sgt. Joseph J. Mahan, T/G; S/Sgt. William D. Martin, T/G; S/Sgt. Troy E. Moore, R/W; and S/Sgt. Harold A. Thomas, L/T. S/Sgt. Joseph M. Roche, L/T, was credited with destruction of a FW-190. There were no B-17s lost.

#### **FRASCATI, ITALY - MISSION NO. 70 - SEPTEMBER 8, 1943**

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 336, 500-lb. GP bombs on the town of Frascati. The target area was well covered and the whole town was smoking. Flak was heavy, intense, accurate to altitude and deflection. Eighteen B-17s were slightly damaged.

Fifteen to 20 E/A attacked the formation, and fortress gunners' claims were: one each Me-109 to T/Sgt. Stanley J. Austin, U/T; T/Sgt. Joseph A. Chilek, R/O; S/Sgt. Donald G. Flicek, L/T; S/Sgt. William K. Guilfoil, T/G; S/Sgt. Joseph R. Hunt, R/W; S/Sgt. Homer H. Hutcheson, L/T; 2nd Lt. Oattie B. Jackson, N; S/Sgt. Robert S. King, T/G; S/Sgt. Merton B. Latshaw, R/W; S/Sgt. Thomas F. Reich, T/G; S/Sgt. Willis I. Sheldon, L/W; and S/Sgt. Monroe O. Sheldon, T/G. S/Sgt. Robert G. Moody, T/G, was credited with a Re-2001 and S/Sgt. Merlin S. McCloud, T/G, was credited with a Ma-202. Slightly wounded were 2nd Lt. W. Kopra and S/Sgt. H. W. Eddleman of the 20th Squadron.

Today, General Eisenhower announced the surrender of Italy to the Allies.

#### **CANCELLO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 71 - SEPTEMBER 9, 1943**

This mission was to support the Allied landings at Salerno. Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 324, 500-lb. GP bombs on Highway Bridges at Canello. There were near misses on Bridge #1, and direct hits on tracks to the south side. Bridge #2 received direct hits and Bridge 2A was thought to have received direct hits. No flak, no injuries, no losses.

#### **VINCHIATURE, ITALY - MISSION NO. 72 - SEPTEMBER 10, 1943**

Thirty-five aircraft, each with a bomb load of 12, 500-lb. GP bombs, were to bomb Bridges at Vinchiature. Due to a cloud cover over the target, 16 aircraft dropped 45 tons of bombs in the vicinity

of Botono, nine miles west of the principal target. Several bridges had possible direct hits. One aircraft dropped its bombs on a bridge over the Tiber River. The bombs missed the bridge but fell on the highway to the north. Nineteen aircraft did not bomb. No flak, no injuries, no losses.

The 6626th Ordnance Section was formed. Up to this time, each squadron had its own ordnance section. The 6626th camp was set up a few hundred yards from the 429th bivouac area. In command was 1st Lt. Raymond Siegrist, and the section had a strength of four officers and 110 enlisted men.

#### **BENEVENTO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 73 - SEPTEMBER 12, 1943**

Nineteen aircraft dropped 228, 500-lb. GP bombs on Highway Bridges at Benevento in support of the ground troops. Targets were reported to be well covered with several direct hits observed. There was no flak at the target but at 5/8's of a mile from Capua, heavy, slight to moderate flak was encountered resulting in slight damage to five B-17s. There were no losses, no injuries, and no encounters with E/A.

#### **BATTAPAGLIA/EBOLI, ITALY - MISSION NO. 74 - SEPTEMBER 14, 1943**

The mission was to bomb Highway Intersections, Troop Concentrations and Bridges along the highway from the eastern edge of the city of Battapaglia to the west edge of Eboli. Germans were reported retreating in this area. Forty-one aircraft dropped 1,556, 100-lb. GP bombs with reports of success in these assigned areas. No flak, no losses.

#### **BATTAPAGLIA/EBOLI, ITALY - MISSION NO. 75 - SEPTEMBER 15, 1943**

The mission again was to bomb the Highway between Battapaglia and Eboli. Thirty-nine aircraft dropped 608, 300-lb. GP bombs on the target. The mission was judged successful with the area well covered. Flak was heavy, moderate, good altitude and poor deflection.

B-17 #449, piloted by Lt. Patrick Train, 96th Squadron, crashed landed 15 miles from base with no injuries to crew.

#### **CASERTA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 76 - SEPTEMBER 16, 1943**

Thirty-eight aircraft dropped 144, 250-lb. GP bombs and 448, 300-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Caserta. Strike photos showed the main rail line east of Rome/Aversa Junctions cut by direct hits. There was extensive damage to freight yards and rolling stock with five tank cars exploding, starting fires. There was no damage to the overpass but the south approach was cratered. No flak was encountered over the target but flak north of the Capua Airdrome was heavy, moderate to intense, good altitude and deflection.

Plane #133 made an emergency landing at Boco di Falco Airdrome. No injuries, no losses.

#### **VITERBO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 77 - SEPTEMBER 18, 1944**

Thirty-four aircraft dropped 108, 500-lb. incendiary bombs and 950, 100-lb. GP bombs on the Airdrome at Viterbo. The target area was well covered with several fires reported in dispersal area. Flak was heavy, slight to moderate, good altitude, poor deflection. Two B-17s were slightly damaged. No injuries, no losses.

#### **BOLOGNA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 78 - SEPTEMBER 25, 1943**

Thirty-six aircraft dropped 432, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Bologna. The target area was well covered. No flak was encountered over the target but the Group received heavy, intense flak with good altitude, poor deflection over Pecembino, Italy.

B-17 #42-30109, piloted by Lt. Harry Abel, 49th Squadron, was forced to ditch in the Mediterranean off Bizerte. S/Sgt. James A. Jesse, Jr. received a compound fracture of his left leg during landing. All of the crew were rescued.

### **BOLOGNA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 79 - SEPTEMBER 28, 1943**

Thirty-five aircraft took off, each with a bomb load of 12, 500-lb. GP bombs to bomb the Marshalling Yards at Bologna. A 10/10 cloud cover prevented bombing of the target. No flak, and no encounters with E/A.

### **BOLOGNA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 80 - OCTOBER 1, 1943**

Sixteen aircraft equipped with Tokyo tanks, each with a bomb load of 10, 500-lb. GP bombs, took off to bomb the Messerschmitt Factory at Augsburg, Germany. Four A/C were early returns. Because of adverse weather over the Alps, the planes turned back 30 miles north of Verona, Italy. They then proceeded to Bologna and three aircraft dropped 30, 500-lb. GP bombs on Marshalling Yards in that city. Hits were observed on warehouses to the right of the Marshalling Yards. Five to seven E/A attacked the formation for approximately 15 minutes. No claims were made, no injuries, no losses.

### **PISA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 81A - OCTOBER 4, 1943**

On the second mission of the day, twenty-two other aircraft dropped 246, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Northwest Marshalling Yards in Pisa. Sixty B-17s of the 2nd, 97th, 99th, and 301st Bomb Groups participated in this attack and dropped 146 tons of 300-lb. GP bombs and 300 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the target. Combined strike photos showed direct hits on rail lines, cutting the Spezia line; heavy hits in the Marshalling Yards proper; direct hits on 400 ft. warehouse; direct hits on industrial groups causing large fires and explosions; direct hit on train causing a tremendous explosion, which was believed to be a munitions train; and direct hits on highway to Spezia.

Flak was heavy, moderate, fair to good for altitude and deflection. No injuries, no losses.

### **BOLOGNA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 82 - OCTOBER 5, 1943**

Thirty-two aircraft dropped 382, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Western Section of the Marshalling Yards at Bologna. The target area was well covered with direct hits and a large explosion was observed. Flak was heavy, intense, good to deflection and altitude resulting in the loss of B-17 #42-29907, piloted by 2nd Lt. Fitzpatrick, 49th Squadron.

The Group was attacked by 25 to 30 E/A resulting in claims of eight E/A destroyed. Twenty B-17s were damaged in this action and eight men wounded. Three from the 96th Squadron were S/Sgt. Merton Latshaw, S/Sgt. Frank Horner, and S/Sgt. Franklin W. Fitzgerald.

Receiving credit for one each Me-109 were: S/Sgt. Eugene H. Checkmain, R/W; S/Sgt. Cleo L. Corley, T/G; S/Sgt. Franklin W. Fitzgerald, L/W; 2nd Lt. James F. Harbin, B; S/Sgt. Harold H. Hauser, R/W; and T/Sgt Allen C. Moore, U/T. Joint credit for one Me-109 went to S/Sgt. William F. Callahan, L/T, and Sgt. William H. Evans, R/W. Joint claim for one FW-190 went to 2nd Lt. L. E. Dixon and T/Sgt. James L. Hickey, U/T. Other records show eight Me-109s and one FW-190 destroyed and four Me-109s probably destroyed, without names being listed.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-29907 - 49TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt. Earl W. Fitzpatrick, 0-795036, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. John W. Carlson, 0-674463, CP.	(RET)
2nd Lt. Thomas F. Berschig, 0-797246, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Robert D. McCain, 0-732873, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Stanley J. Austin, 37256308, U/T.	(RET)

S/Sgt. Homer H. Hutcheson, 14138383, L/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt. Joseph R. Hunt, 39523857, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Willis I. Sheldon, 37123872, L/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. William K. Guilfoil, 16101069, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. Joseph A. Chilek, 33349232, R/O.	(POW)

Casualty Information Statement of 1st Lt. Earl W. Fitzpatrick, 1 October 1944, after return to Allied control: "1st Lt. John W. Carlson, last seen by me December 1, 1943, at which time he was still at liberty. 2nd Lt. Thomas F. Berschig, wounded October 5, 1943, POW. 2nd Lt. Robert D. McCain, beaten by Fascists upon reaching ground October 5, 1943, POW. T/Sgt. Joseph A. Chilek, wounded October 5, 1943, POW. T/Sgt. Stanley J. Austin, last seen by me December 1, 1943, at which time he was still at liberty. S/Sgt. Joseph R. Hunt, wounded October 5, 1943, POW. S/Sgt. Homer H. Hutcheson, last seen by me on December 1, 1943, still at liberty. S/Sgt. William K. Guilfoil, killed by machine gun fire at his place in the plane. Examined by Italian MD, reported as such."

Note: No documents show just how many members of this crew were POWs, but does show that nine men eventually returned to Allied control. There were many airmen shot down behind enemy lines, in Northern Italy, that avoided capture and made their way back to the Allied lines. (RET) indicates RETURNED.

Statement of S/Sgt. Willis I. Sheldon and 1st Lt. Earl W. Fitzpatrick, October 7, 1944, one year and two days after being shot down: "On bombing mission to Marshalling Yards at Bologna on 5 October 1943, the plane received two direct hits by flak. No. 2 engine ran away and was feathered, then No. 4 did the same. No. 1 began to lose oil and caught fire and was feathered and No. 2 was brought back in. No. 3 caught fire and was feathered so No. 4 had to be brought in again. The plane was now flying with two runaway engines.

"About ten fighters attacked us about this time doing considerable damage to the plane so the order was given to bail out.

"All the crew, except one who was killed in the plane, landed near Pescia, Italy. Five of the crew members managed to get together but four others were taken prisoner immediately as they were wounded. One of these had been beaten by a local Fascist on landing so he had to be taken to a hospital.

"The party lived together about two months then had to split up as the Germans came into the area and began a search. One man went off with a British ex-POW. Two others left together and heard they had been captured.

"We stayed together and walked to (- - -), taking six days. We were taken in by an Italian farmer, in this village, who looked after us for ten months.

"On 24 May 1944, the Germans and Fascists began to search the area so we were taken into the hills. We built a small shelter and made this our home until the area was overrun by Allied troops. The family fed and looked after us while in the shelter."

### **MESTRE, ITALY - MISSION NO. 83 - OCTOBER 6, 1943**

Thirteen aircraft, equipped with Tokyo tanks, took off and nine aircraft dropped 108, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Mestre. The bombing was unsuccessful as the bombs fell to the left of the assigned area. No flak, no E/A, no losses.

The planes had to land at the airfield at Djeida, Tunisia because of heavy rains and muddy field at home base.

### **ATHENS, GREECE - MISSION NO. 84 - OCTOBER 9, 1943**

Nineteen aircraft took off and 14 aircraft dropped 167, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Eleusis Airdrome. Five A/C were early returns. The target area was well covered with some bombs over. Flak was heavy, slight to intense, poor to deflection, poor to good altitude. One B-17 was damaged by flak.

Ten to 15 E/A attacked the rear of the formation. Fortress gunners claiming one Me-109 each were: S/Sgt. Armen N. Minasian, T/G; S/Sgt. Conrad G. Adams, L/T; S/Sgt. Thomas E. Finnegan, T/G; and S/Sgt. Walter C. Beltzer, R/W. A joint claim of a FW-190 went to S/Sgt. Jack L. Barcalow, U/T, and T/Sgt. Dennie L. Lauer, R/W. There were no injuries.

#### **ARGOS, GREECE - MISSION NO. 84A - OCTOBER 9, 1943**

Fifteen aircraft dropped 180, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Airdrome at Argos. The target area was well covered with four to five E/A seen burning on the ground. Flak was heavy, slight to moderate, fair to good for altitude and deflection. Six B-17s were slightly damaged. All A/C of this mission landed at Gerbini A/D, Sicily to refuel. No losses, no injuries.

#### **ARAXAS, GREECE - MISSION NO. 85 - OCTOBER 10, 1943**

Seventeen aircraft bombed the Araxas Airdrome with the successful bombing of runways, barracks, and revetments. No injuries, no losses.

#### **TERNI, ITALY - MISSION NO. 86 - OCTOBER 14, 1943**

Nineteen aircraft dropped 228, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Terni. A number of fires were started and one large explosion was observed. There was no flak. The formation was attacked by 10 to 15 E/A consisting of Me-109s, FW-190s, Re-2001s, and one Me-202. The attacks were aggressive, coming as close as 150 yards.

B-17 #42-29581, piloted by 2nd Lt. Robert T. McCarty, was lost due to enemy fighter action. Slightly wounded were S/Sgt. Franklin G. Thometz and Pvt. Kester D. Matheny of the 429th Squadron.

Two Me-109s were destroyed with credit going to S/Sgt. Robert L. Thompson, T/G, and S/Sgt. Thomas A. Zelasko, L/T.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT - A/C #42-29581 - "SUGARPUSS" - 429TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt. Robert T. McCarty, 0-730660, P.	(DED)
2nd Lt. Frederick G. Borgard, 0-736466, CP.	(DED)
2nd Lt. Richard B. Warner, 0-676187, N.	(DED)
2nd Lt. Leonard J. Elero, 0-739413, B.	(DED)
T/Sgt. James D. Wallace, 35457407, U/T.	(DED)
Sgt. William J. Cuba, 33248986, L/T.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Steve E. Szabo, 36325883, R/W.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Joseph E. Fales, 11110360, L/W.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Floyd N. Hileman, 13106029, T/G.	(DED)
T/Sgt. Norman T. Benster, 39253129, R/O.	(DED)

Statement of S/Sgt. Roy T. Lantz in B-17 #42-30133, 429th Squadron, after the mission: "I first saw plane #42-29581 when it was going under ours. I guess it was less than 100 feet below us when it passed and assumed a position about 4:30 o'clock, 500 to 600 yards to our rear. He flew straight and level for about two minutes and then apparently started to come back under our plane for protection from fighters. At this time, No. 3 engine was smoking badly, but not on fire, nor was it feathered. The smoke was white. On the way over to our plane, two fighters attacked #581, in trail from 8 o'clock high. No. 3 engine caught fire then, at which time the plane went into a vertical dive and soon thereafter completely disintegrated. I estimate the plane was about 2,000 feet below us when it went

to pieces. I think I saw four or five parachutes open, none on fire. They opened about the time the plane went to pieces. Later, I saw four or five spots on the water that looked like parachutes. I saw the fragments of the plane hit the water. The fighters made no more attacks after they started down.”

### **BASHI, ITALY - MISSION NO. 87 - OCTOBER 20, 1943**

Thirty-two aircraft dropped 192 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs on Railroad Bridges at Bashi. Cameras recorded the area well covered with direct hits. No flak, no E/A encounters.

### **ALBINIA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 88 - OCTOBER 21, 1943**

The assigned target was a Railroad Bridge six miles north of Orvieto. Due to a 10/10 cloud cover, 28 aircraft dropped 168, 1,000-lb. GP bombs on two bridges west of Albinia. One of the bridges was believed to have received a direct hit. Flak was received from one battery. No injuries, no losses.

### **WIENER NEUSTADT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 89 - OCTOBER 24, 1943**

Forty-two aircraft, each with a bomb load of 12, 500-lb. GP bombs took off on the previous day to land at bases in Italy and Sicily in preparation for the long flight to Wiener Neustadt.

Only 22 aircraft got over the target and a 10/10 cloud cover prevented bombing of the assigned target. Five B-17s dropped 60, 500-lb. GP bombs in the vicinity of the target area with unobserved results. One B-17 dropped 12, 500-lb. GP bombs on railroad tracks and bridges at Friedburg, Austria. Fourteen aircraft failed to take off from their base in Sicily due to poor gassing facilities. The mission was considered unsuccessful and the planes returned to their base on the 25th. No injuries, no losses.

### **GENOA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 90 - OCTOBER 29, 1943**

The primary target for this date was the Ball Bearing Works at Turin, Italy. Due to a cloud cover over the target, the Marshalling Yards at Genoa were bombed by 28 aircraft that dropped 345, 300-lb. GP bombs. Some hits were observed though cloud cover around the target hindering bombing and observation of results. Flak over the target was very heavy, good altitude, poor deflection.

B-17 #42-30398, piloted by 1st Lt. George R. Howell, was hit by flak just after dropping its bombs. The plane caught fire and disintegrated in mid-air.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-30398 - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt. George R. Howell, 0-793775, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Edward E. Gray, 0-672346, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. John W. Cashore, 0-797262, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Bernard J. Lewis, 0-738707, B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. Paul B. Cassingham, 38128441, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Francis X. Hughes, 3245746, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Leland L. Dishong, 35417348, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Byron R. Drury, 33270793, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Robert L. Thompson, 3544688, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Robert H. Bryson, 12088306, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of S/Sgt. Francis X. Hughes, after liberation: “About 30 seconds after dropping our bombs, our plane was hit by two bursts of flak. One burst hit in the radio room and the other hit at the tail wheel. As soon as our plane was hit, the pilot told us to bail out. I was flying in the ball turret position. I was watching the bombs go to the target when we were hit. After getting out of the turret and getting on my chute, I saw the front of the plane was broken off at the radio room and I bailed out through this opening.

“I did a delayed jump of about eight or ten thousand feet. At that time I also saw that the plane had broken off at the tail wheel, leaving only the waist of the plane floating.

“I landed in the water of Genoa Harbor and was shot in the shoulder while in the water, was given first aid and then taken to a hospital. After around ten days, in a private room, I was moved out and met Sgt. Thompson who told me Lt. Cashore had just left for prison camp.

“During this time, I did not see, nor hear, of any of the rest of those not mentioned above.”

### **TURIN, ITALY - MISSION NO. 91 - OCTOBER 31, 1943**

The scheduled mission was the Ball Bearing Factory at Turin. At 0830 hours the planes took off, each with a bomb load of 12, 500-lb. GP bombs. Due to a 10/10 cloud cover over Turin, the formation split up. Some bombed the Imperia Marshalling Yards while others bombed Porto Maurizio, Italy with unobserved results. Due to rains and muddy field, the planes were forced to land at Djaida.

### **WIENER NEUSTADT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 92 - NOVEMBER 2, 1943**

Fifteen aircraft dropped 90, 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the Messerschmitt Factory at Wiener Neustadt. The target was well covered with several large fires seen. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense and accurate.

Eighty to 100 FW-190s, Me-109s, Me-110s, Ju-87s, and Ju-88s attacked the formation starting about 10 minutes before reaching the target and continuing the attack after the bomb run. Flak and fighter opposition resulted in the death of S/Sgt. Joe D. Nickolson, R/W, 20th Squadron, and the loss of two B-17s. B-17 #42-30133, piloted by 1st Lt. Richard F. Eggers and #42-3341, piloted by 2nd Lt. Lester L. Gillan, both of the 429th Squadron were shot down by enemy fighters. Fortress gunners' claims were: Each credited with the destruction of an Me-109 were S/Sgt. Thomas J. Ashe, L/T; S/Sgt. Robert W. Bosely, U/T; S/Sgt. Clair I. Carl, T/G; S/Sgt. Fred W. Counts, L/W; 2nd Lt. Charles E. Dehler, N; T/Sgt. James L. DeNight, U/T; S/Sgt. Charles C. Gervin, T/G; S/Sgt. Frederick R. Glor, L/W; S/Sgt. James F. Hallinan, T/G; 2nd Lt. Leonard X. Landsburg, B; 2nd Lt. John F. Miller, B; T/Sgt. Edward E. Nowak, L/T; Sgt. James H. Redick, Jr., T/G; and S/Sgt. Howard E. Richardson. Joint credit for destruction of an FW-190 went to T/Sgt. Clarence W. Mello, R/O, and T/Sgt. George F. Seimer, U/T. Credit for destruction of two FW-190s went to S/Sgt. Cleo L. Corley, T/G; and two FW-190s to 2nd Lt. L. E. Dixon, B. Credit for destruction of one each FW-190 went to S/Sgt. Walter E. Dempsey, R/W; S/Sgt. Jack C. Jones, T/G; T/Sgt. Russell Leonard, U/T; and T/Sgt. George A. McLaughlan, U/T. Credit for destruction of a Ju-88 went to T/Sgt. James L. DeNight, U/T. Credit for possible destruction of a Me-109 went to S/Sgt. John F. Ryan, L/W.

### **MISSING AIR CREW: A/C #42-30133 - “RAGGEDY ANN” - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Richard F. Eggers, 0-661820, P.	(POW)
F/O	Donald E. Elder, T-120776, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	William C. Thompson, 0-741872, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Charles E. Major, 0-669360, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Chester S. Ehredt, 13083502, U/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Malcom R. Mathews, 12090848, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Marion M. Benbrook, 16041090, L/W.	(POW)
Sgt.	George J. Brand, 19070965, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Thomas A. Zelasko, 36512947, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Claude T. Roper, 14077762, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of F/O Donald E. Elder, Co-pilot, after liberation: “I bailed out just off the target with seven others. To my knowledge, Sgt. George Brand and S/Sgt. Tommy Zelasko were still in the plane

when it hit the ground. S/Sgt. Zelasko was hit in the shoulder and chest. Sgt. Brand was hit in the chest. I saw the rest of the crew at Frankfurt, Germany, at Dulag Luft. T/Sgt. Ehredt had a head injury. The other three officers were with me at the same camp, Stalag Luft I, Barth Germany.

“While at Dulug Luft, Frankfurt, a German Sergeant asked me how many men were killed in our crew. I told him none. He informed me that two men were killed and showed me their identification tags and told me they were buried in some small town close to where the plane crashed, by the name of Walbach. I asked him what kind of burial they had and he said it was not a military one but they did get a decent burial.

“I was on the loose until November 4th and when captured, I estimate that I was approximately 30 miles south of Wiener Neustadt. The gendarme responsible for the capture took me to a little village (can't remember name). Here he showed me the dog tags of the two boys that he reported killed, also showed me a pair of baby shoes that belonged to Sgt. Zelasko and were always tied to the “Y” of the ball turret on our ship. The same day he took me to Vienna and on the way, drove up on a small hilltop which had a few houses on it. This was only a short distance from the town where he took me after capture. He stopped at one of the farmhouses to get information from them about our ship that crashed in their field, a short way from their house. I was not allowed to leave the automobile, and the weather was cloudy and foggy. Through the fog, to the best of my ability and memory, I thought I could distinguish what looked like the tail and part of a wing with one engine on it, not over 500 yards from the house and buildings.”

1st Lt. Richard F. Eggers, pilot of A/C #42-30133, August 9, 1990: “My crew in Cut Bank, Montana were 1st Lt. M. V. Beckstrand, Co-pilot; 1st Lt. James Heaberg, Bombardier; 1st Lt. James McGehearty, Navigator; T/Sgt. Alfred Sereni, Engineer; S/Sgt. Olen “Woody” Wood, Ball Turret; T/Sgt. Paul Strate, Radio; Two Macs, S/Sgt. Lloyd MacNickol and S/Sgt. John McDonald, Waist Gunners; and “Joisy” Joe “Mo” Mahan, Tail Gunner.

“When we flew overseas, Robert Neal was made temporary CO and flew my plane until we arrived in North Africa where he was re-assigned to a fighter squadron. Captain Jack Bentley was our CO. He was not assigned an airplane and was sent by boat along with my Co-pilot, Lt. Beckstrand. I believe that the Operation Order 126, from Morrison Field, is incorrect as to the plane we flew. I recall it was #42-5782 and not #42-5178. We flew “HIGH TENSION” for about 20 missions before it was retired from combat because of mechanical problems. I flew a plane called “RAGGEDY ANN” until it was shot down.

“When we were stationed at Cut Bank, we were returning from a cross country flight when one of those “Chinook” windstorms came across Montana from the Rockies and all the airports were showing zero visibility. We decided to try to get to Great Falls. On final approach, with 90 miles west winds and very low visibility, we were blown east of the airport and flew through high tension wires feeding a copper mine in that area. We later landed at a restricted Air Force Base in the same area. When we picked up our new aircraft in Kearney, Nebraska, we decided to name it “HIGH TENSION.”

“Our first mission was to Bizerte, a port city which Rommel's troops were using to evacuate from North Africa. Our later missions included railroad yards, industrial centers, airfields, troop support in Sicily, Sardinia, Italy, France and even one mission in Greece.

“For me, Wiener Neustadt was special. A first attempt to hit it was made the end of October, 1943. The range was too great to fly out of our base in Tunisia, so we flew to an advance base in Italy the day before. Unfortunately, heavy rains had made the advance base a mud hole and it was impossible to get a fully loaded plane off the ground. We returned to our base in Tunisia until the ground dried out.

“On the second attempt, we flew to the advance base on November 1st and took off for Austria on the 2nd. The weather was beautiful and the trip to the target was as planned. We even had fighter

escort until they reached their return range limitation and returned to their base to refuel and meet us on the way back. Up until this mission, we had encountered very little fighter opposition; our chief concern was German flak. Our target this day was an Me-109 factory and they sent up what looked like every 109 they made since the war began! They also had German pilots instead of Italians, which made a big difference.

“The fighter attack began about the time we turned on our bomb run. As we approached the target, I noticed that the squadron ahead had lost a plane and we were under heavy attack. My plane was hit shortly after we turned off the target. I had lost one engine when my elevator and rudder controls went bad and I could not stay in formation. This made me a sitting duck for the German fighters. Realizing that the plane could not survive, I ordered the crew to bail out. I estimate my altitude was around 15,000 feet. After the navigator, bombardier, co-pilot, and gunners had gone and the engineer in the upper turret seemed to be dead, I prepared to leave myself. As I reached for the parachute pack strapped to the back of my seat, the twin fifties in the upper turret started firing again. Evidently my engineer had been knocked out when his plexiglass turret was shattered and came to, not knowing the rest of the crew had gone. He grabbed his guns and began firing again. I reached back, grabbed his flying suit and motioned him to get out. I grabbed my chest pack, clamped it to the body straps and started to drop through the trap door in the floor behind the navigator’s compartment in the nose. As soon as I let go of the controls, the plane started to do a “wing over” to go into a spin. So I returned to the controls and managed to get the plane level again. I decided there was no choice but to get out and let the plane go. I cut the power off, dropped to the exit and bailed out. In the movies, you bail out, count to three and pull the ripcord. That’s what I did and it worked. I must have passed out from lack of oxygen. The next thing I remember was approaching the ground in a hurry.

“The chute caught in a tree and I was hanging a few feet from the ground as safe as a baby in a cradle. I found a reception committee of two armed soldiers and two civilians approaching. Errol Flynn I am not and accepted their invitation to lunch in a nearby town. I met some of my crew members there and learned that my tail gunner and waist gunner had been killed. My crew that day was Don Elder, Co-pilot; Bill Thompson, Navigator; Charles Major, Bombardier; C. S. Ehredt, M. M. Benbrook, M. R. Mathews, C. T. Roper, Tommy Zelasko (KIA) and G. J. Brand (KIA). This was my 50th mission.

“Later that day we were moved to a larger town where we were questioned by a German officer and confined in a local jail with crews of several other B-17s. The next day we were driven to Vienna, then by train to Frankfurt. After a couple of weeks of interrogation, we were sent by train to Stalag Luft I, outside of Barth, Germany. We remained there until the area was overrun by the Russian Army.”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-3341 - “LADY BE GOOD” - 429TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt. Lester L. Gillan, 0-730452, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Frank D. Counihan, 0-735058, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Peter H. Diglio, 0-800646, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Merideth D. Fink, 0-735300, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Louis C. Hazay, 31167401, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Claude H. Denton, 34348857, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Henry F. Reedy, 35350463, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Anthony J. DeLatte, 18134212, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Howard L. Rees, 20247716, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Joseph R. Hagerman, 19123924, R/O.	(KIA)

No statements were available in this report.

November 4 through November 6, 1943 was spent in moving to higher ground due to heavy swamping of the present camp site.

### **GENOA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 93 - NOVEMBER 9, 1943**

The assigned target was the Marshalling Yards at Bolzano. Due to a 10/10 cloud cover over the target, 24 aircraft dropped 288, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Ansaldo Steel Works, Dock Area, and Marshalling Yards at Genoa. Flak was heavy and intense resulting in damage to 22 aircraft. No injuries, no losses.

A/C #42-23156, piloted by 2nd Lt. Richard C. Flournoy, 49th Squadron, crashed on take-off at the start of the mission due to mechanical failure. No one was injured.

### **BOLZANO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 94 - NOVEMBER 10, 1943**

The target was the Marshalling Yards at Bolzano. Twenty-four aircraft took off but only eight got over the target and dropped 24 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs. The other planes got lost in heavy clouds and returned to base. Photos showed extensive damage to locomotive sheds, rolling stock, buildings and approach to a railroad bridge.

Flak was intense and fairly accurate resulting in the loss of A/C #42-29646, which was seen to crash off Cape Corse, Corsica. This A/C was piloted by Captain Kenneth Spinning.

Five to ten E/A attacked the formation resulting in the loss of A/C #42-29609 piloted by 1st Lt. Raymond J. Wika, 20th Squadron. His aircraft was attacked by fighters and was seen to blow up. One FW-190 was destroyed by S/Sgt. Thomas Moriarity, LT, 96th Squadron.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-29646 - "PEG O'MY HEART" - 49TH SQUADRON**

Captain Kenneth W. Spinning, Jr. 0-791350, P.	(DED)
2nd Lt. Jesse B. Crecelius, 0-731835, CP.	(DED)
2nd Lt. George (NMI) Carlson, 0-731262, N.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Scott R. Thompson, 34162771, B.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Ray L. Nichols, 18083473, U/T.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Wesley W. Knox, 19066511, L/T.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Harold W. Fohey, 17121960, R/W.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Joseph G. Clyburne, 13965859, L/W.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Walter P. Tront, 16065366, T/G.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Anthony A. Pankratz, 36241424, R/O.	(DED)

Statement of S/Sgt. Edward E. Nowak, L/TG, on B-17 #42-30319, after the mission: "I first noticed plane #646 when the tail gunner called our pilot and said that plane #646 had feathered No. 3 engine and was dropping behind. We were over land at the time, about 40 miles from the sea shore. I kept my eyes on him seeing as we were over land and apt to be jumped by fighters. As we got out to sea, #646 kept dropping farther behind. Our pilot called the tail gunner and asked how far he was and the tail gunner's reply was "Quite a ways," so our pilot circled and we put #646 in front of us. I heard him call the navigator to give him the shortest course to land so he could call #646 and give him the information. The pilot called me and asked if I could see #646 and I told him they were directly below us and losing altitude. As I was watching, #646 was getting closer and closer to the water. I knew he had feathered No. 3 engine but as I looked at the plane, I noticed all four engines were running. He must have unfeathered it. Next thing I saw him do was get very close to the water. I kept wondering what he was going to do and then I saw him crash into the sea. He brought the tail down first and then the nose just dropped. The plane sank instantly. The pilot of my plane, Major Richard T. Headrick, circled around the crashed plane and said to count the men in the water. I counted nine

and am positive of the number. We circled again and the pilot told the crew to drop life rafts, which we did. One raft turned bottom up and the other looked half inflated. At this time, the men in the water were scattering all around, there were three men in one place and about 200 feet away was another one, and about 300 feet were the rest. I saw one man swim for the raft. It was the one half inflated. Then the pilot told us to drop the two big rafts we had. We dropped one but it never inflated so on the next circle we dropped the other one and this one inflated and was floating. I saw one man swim for it but the water was very rough and kept pushing away from him. We were running low on gas so we headed for the nearest field. There we refueled and took on more life rafts. We came back to where #646 had crashed and where we dropped the rafts. After spending some time searching, we could not see them or the rafts. The pilot decided we should return to the field where we refueled and continued the search the following morning.

“The next day we started out at nine o’clock to search for the life rafts and the men in the sea. When we reached the spot, there was a raft floating in the sea. The pilot told us to drop a smoke bomb near the raft as we came close to it. As he did, I dropped a bomb about 20 feet from the raft. The navigator took a bearing and I think they radioed it to Air-Sea-Rescue Station. As we left the location, we saw a boat on the way. We landed at the field, refueled and took off for Africa and our home base.”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-29609 - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt. Raymond J. Wika, 0-741954, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Jeremiah F. Corcoran, 0-798978, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. Leonard C. McCully, 0-678382, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Wallace B. Baldwin, 0-735242, B.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Merlin S. McCloud, 37282837, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Clarence L. Berlin, 19149873, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Merle E. Canfield, 36303908, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Luke H. Barga, 35474222, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Mack H. Kidd, 18124025, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. Jack (NMI) Reznick, 12156500, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of Captain Jeremiah Corcoran, CP of A/C #42-29609, after return to Allied control: “Our aircraft left the formation over Brescia, Italy. Other crew members bailing out were the pilot, bombardier, and engineer. The pilot bailed out north of Brescia and was captured by Germans. The bombardier and I bailed out north of Brescia, met on the ground and escaped to Switzerland. The engineer was taken prisoner.

“The aircraft struck the ground 10 miles north of Brescia. I don’t believe any members of the crew were in the aircraft according to Italian civilians. The ship came down in four sections. I attended the burial of the rest of the crew and believe the graves could best be located by contacting either the priest of Senora Benevenuto in San Giovanni, Provence Palarono, Brescia.”

Statement of 1st Lt. Wallace Baldwin, B of A/C #42-29609, after return to Allied control: “I bailed out in addition to the Pilot, Lt. Wika; Co-pilot, Lt. Corcoran; and Engineer, S/Sgt. McCloud. Information regarding the other crew members is as follows: 2nd Lt. McCully did not bail out. I last saw him in the plane and told him to put on his parachute. He was thrown out of the plane while poised over the escape hatch. The airplane went into a spin while he did not have his parachute on. Lt. McCully was buried by a Catholic priest. Lt. Corcoran attended the funeral of Lt. McCully, Sgts. Canfield, Barga, Reznick, Kidd, and Berlin.

“S/Sgt. Merlin McCloud bailed out over Lake Isso. To my knowledge he was not injured in the aircraft. Corcoran claims that McCloud bailed out before he did. We believed he had been taken prisoner. He had flown 49 missions.

“S/Sgt. Merle Canfield was killed. He did not bail out. S/Sgt. Luke H. Barga was killed. He did not bail out. T/Sgt. Jack Reznick did not bail out. He was killed in the aircraft by machine gun fire from attacking fighters. S/Sgt. Mack H. Kidd did not bail out. Do not know how he died. Presume he could not get out of the plane.”

Although Lt. Baldwin did not give a disposition regarding S/Sgt. Clarence Berlin, other documents show that he was killed and buried with the other deceased crew members.

November 13, 1943. We went into Tunis tonight to see a movie. Someone swiped the windshield off our Jeep. It was a cold, windy ride back to camp!

### **ISTRES LE TUBE, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 95 - NOVEMBER 16, 1943**

Nineteen aircraft dropped 114 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Istres LeTube Airdrome. General Atkinson, 5th Wing Commander, flew Co-pilot with Colonel Herbert E. Rice. Photos showed the bombing very successful. Several aircraft were damaged by flak and resulted in the injury to Lt. Clarence Kurz, group Bombardier. No losses.

### **ELEUSIS, GREECE - MISSION NO. 96 - NOVEMBER 16, 1943**

Twenty-five aircraft dropped 3,600, 20-lb. incendiary bombs on the Eleusis airdrome. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, good altitude, fair to good deflection. The target area was well covered. Seventeen B-17s were damaged by flak and B-17 #42-5397, piloted by 1st Lt. Richard Flournoy, 49th Squadron, was lost due to flak. Lt. Nemor Warr, 96th Squadron, was slightly wounded by flak.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-5397 - 49TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt. Richard C. Flournoy, 0-737394, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. Joseph F. Cotton, 0-682986, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. James M. Wagner, 0-678697, N.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. Ernest C. Schorheim, 0-739111, B.	(EVADED)
T/Sgt. Russell R. Leonard, 12137923, U/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Robert B. Steele, 39611928, L/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Edward E. Nowak, 36348021, R/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Frederick R. Glor, 32142683, L/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Thomas F. Reich, 32512021, T/G.	(EVADED)
T/Sgt. Jack Farley, 38131074, R/O.	(EVADED)

T/Sgt. Frederick R. Glor, WG on the crew of A/C #42-5397. March 23, 1993: “We crash landed on the Island of Corfu and a woman, about 21 years old, came to me and motioned for me to follow her. We came to a small river and she motioned me to take off my flying suit and boots, which she took, rolled rocks in them and sunk them in the river. She then guided me to a sheep and goat herder’s hut in the mountains.

“It took the Germans about 15-20 minutes to find our plane. The only thing they got out of it was the high test gasoline, which they used for their jeeps and trucks.

“The next night I was taken to a village called Leftkimi on the south end of Corfu and into a small hotel where I was hidden for 30 days. They fed me and nursed me. I caught malaria and ran a high temperature. One night, one of the men came in with a straight razor. I knew it wasn’t to shave me. They had planned to cut me in the mouth so that I would bleed. This was supposed to lower my

temperature. I told them I did not want this and they later came with a pan of leeches which they put on my groin, under my arms, and on my neck. This did help, I guess.

“During this time, two German officers came and wanted to stay there during a bad storm. They stayed in a room next to mine. They wanted wine, women and food. They also asked if any American flyers were shot down there. They were told no. I cannot say enough about these Greek fighters. They took a great chance of being caught for hiding us.

“One night they got the whole crew together and said we were being moved to the mainland. We were given civilian clothes and taken by donkey cart down to the city of Corfu. During this trip, we came upon a German officer and soldiers who were cutting up a tree blocking the road. I happened to be in the first cart with our pilot. We were told not to say a word, let the driver talk. The driver told the Germans to get the tree out of the road so that he could take his olives to town. A German came around the back of the cart, looking us over. I looked at him and shrugged my shoulders and they let us go. Five carts did this and they never got wise to what we were doing.

“That night, a Greek rowed us to the mainland. There were boats patrolling the waters between the mainland and island but all five boats made it through.

“Before we made it to the mainland, we passed a German airfield where there were Me-109s and FW-190s. Joe Cotton wanted to try to grab one of these and make his escape. Flournoy told him we had better stick together. Joe had been a fighter pilot so did have experience.

“When we got to the mainland, we joined a large band of Greek fighters led by two OSS British Commandos, a Captain Phillips and Captain Eon. These two men were the most daring and courageous men I have ever met.

“For four months we went from village to village hiding out. I must tell one humorous story. While at a large camp in the mountains, I came across a toothbrush that was in a cup in a room where the women of the camp cooked the little food we had. I decided to brush my teeth. Using this, I did several times during our stay, telling no one of my find. Years later, at a reunion in Sacramento, California, I found that I was not the only one to find that toothbrush.

“Sometime we were awakened by guards telling us the Germans were coming. We would leave very quickly and climb the mountains and passes, crossing roads at night. We traveled through Greece, Albania and up to Yugoslavia, near Marshall Tito’s Headquarters and then back. Our heated shoes wore out and our clothes were in shreds. Finally a British plane dropped us British uniforms, hobnail shoes, food, ammunition and explosives.

“I have to tell about a trip we made. Captain Phillips asked for three men to help on a trip to northern Greece. So Ernest Skorheim, Bob Steele, our ball gunner, and myself offered to go. We traveled by night, laid low during the day, until we came to bridges on one of the main roads going south. That second night, Captain Phillips and Captain Eon set charges, came and got us and we walked until daylight and hid again during the day, then made it back again the following night. Yes, we blew the bridges.

“We received nothing for this. However, before we left Greece we were offered commissions to stay and help Captains Phillips and Eon. I was the only one who was married and all I wanted was to get home and see my loved ones.

“They finally took us down to the coast one night, and with pre-arranged signals, we boarded an Italian sub-chaser that took us to Bari, Italy where we landed in the 22nd General Hospital. All of us had different things wrong with us. Malaria, frost bitten feet, jaundice. Joe Cotton got kicked in the ribs by a mule, etc. I finally made it home on Mothers Day, 1944, a day I will never forget!

“There is a sequel to this. I swore that I would go back there some day and thank these people. Forty-four years later I did. I met the people on the Island of Corfu. I went to the site where the plane had crashed. I also met the woman who first met me when the plane crashed. She is about 70 now. When the interpreter told her who I was, she couldn’t believe it and neither could I. What a joyous

reunion! I can't say enough about these people. They were threatened with execution if they didn't turn us over but that did not scare them one bit. God bless them!"

2nd Lt. Ernest C. Skorheim, Bombardier on the crew of A/C #42-5397. March 25, 1992: "I was the Bombardier on Richard Flournoy's crew and we were assigned to the 49th Squadron. Our first plane was unnamed but the second assigned to us was "THE STRIPPED ASS BURD," which we crashed on take-off and put out of commission. The crash was due to flap failure. We had a close one there!

"The next mission, the crews 32nd and my 33rd, we were on a mission to Eleusis Airdrome on 18 November 1943. We were shot up over the target and were able to glide, on one engine, to the Island of Corfu where we landed with only minor injuries.

"Twenty minutes after the landing, the German soldiers were at the plane looking for the crew. They were told we had stolen a boat and headed for Italy, when in fact we were hidden. Some were hidden in a church and others, as I and two others, were hidden in a small shed that had been used to store things and also as a drying shed for tobacco. We were all in mis-matched civilian clothes at this time. The underground had taken our flying gear and gave us civilian clothes as soon as we got out of the airplane.

"We spent about three days in hiding and then escorted to the village of Lefkimi and divided amongst the villagers. I hid with a wheelmaker and his wife (two wheel carts, hand drawn). The shop was on the first floor, living quarters on the second floor, and an open hearth, for cooking, on the third floor. I was on the third floor for most of my stay with them. His name was Joseph Montegego and Tina was his wife. She was the boss.

"I had been bitten many times the nights I spent in the small shed on the hill, as others of the crew, and came down with malaria. I wasn't doing so well without medication, so, they used the old method of blood-letting leeches, hot cups of vinegar rags on the openings. That didn't improve things a bit, so they got a chemical and gave me a shot in the buttocks and that did the trick. I was also given 12 quinine pills and told to take two a day until gone. In about a week, I was decent again. Meals consisted of bean soup, corn bread, tea, no sugar. That was rare as hens teeth.

"Things were going pretty well until one of the Italians got word that an American was being hidden in the village. Thank goodness the underground got word of it too and hustled the entire crew into the hills again. We all lived in a small shed that only six could lie down in at one time. We were there two weeks and then walked up north, one night and a day, to the shortest point to cross the mainland to Albania. We left the Island about 7:30 at night and arrived in Albania at about 9:30 the next morning. Everyone but the oarsman laid flat in the boat so we wouldn't be detected by the German patrol.

"Nine days later, after landing in Albania and walking through some rugged country, we arrived at the headquarters of the Greek resistance forces, "LAM" I think they were called. There were two resistance forces and each fighting the Germans and killing the leftover Italians that were around, plus trying to take over command of all in Greece. Killing each other!

"After the first day there, we were separated and put in with different resistance groups. Several times we were to be taken to Albania for an aircraft pickup, a rendezvous with other resistance groups who were to take us to Yugoslavia and Michilovich's resistance group and air lifted to Britain. After about six attempts that failed because of the political situation in the country, we were finally loaded on a 60-foot Italian fishing boat and taken to Bari, Italy. We were taken to an Army Hospital there for medical checkup, and medication; a stay of about two weeks. Then to the Group in Foggia for orders, pay and flight to New York via C-54.

"All of the members had malaria and a few other things but nothing real serious. I've had about 25 re-occurrences of malaria since 1943. Nothing in the last 20 years, thank God.

“I spent 23 years in S.A.C., B-29s, 50s, 47s, and B-52s, Radar Navigator. Retired at Beal AFB, California, 1964.”

#### **TOULON, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 97 - NOVEMBER 22, 1943**

The mission was to bomb the Naval Base at Toulon. At 0925 hours, 39 A/C took off, each plane carrying 12, 500-lb. GP bombs. Due to weather conditions, the planes did not reach the target. No E/A were encountered.

#### **TOULON, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 98 - NOVEMBER 24, 1943**

The mission was to return and bomb the Naval Base at Toulon. Thirty-six aircraft took off, each carrying 12, 500-lb. GP bombs. The first wave of 15 A/C did not bomb the primary target due to cloud cover and bombed the Antheor Viaduct near St. Raphael, France. The second wave of 16 A/C were below the cloud cover and did bomb the primary target. Excellent precision bombing was reported on this target. Several direct hits were reported on the secondary target. Five A/C were early returns.

Between 10 and 15 enemy fighters were encountered by the first wave near the Antheor Viaduct and flak damaged several of the B-17s. Sgt. George R. Hawk, LWG, was credited with the destruction of one Me-109. S/Sgt. John H. Chisholm, LWG, 20th Squadron, was slightly wounded by flak.

#### **RECCO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 99 - NOVEMBER 26, 1943**

At 0835 hours, 32 aircraft took off, each carrying 12, 500-lb. GP bombs, to bomb the Viaduct at Recco. Two A/C were early returns. The target area was well covered with several direct hits reported. Blue flashes were noted as the bombs hit the target, possibly due to electrically charged wires over the viaduct. No injuries, no losses.

#### **VERGATO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 100 - NOVEMBER 27, 1943**

Two bridges across the Reno River were the mission for today. One bridge was approximately 25 miles southwest of Bologna and the second, approximately 30 miles southwest of Bologna. Twenty-eight aircraft took off with ten as early returns due to weather. Ten aircraft dropped 30 tons of bombs on the bridge 25 miles from Bologna, and eight aircraft dropped 18 tons of bombs in the vicinity of the second bridge. Neither bridge was destroyed. Bombs destroyed tracks, buildings, and damaged highways. There was no flak, no injuries, no losses.

#### **FIANO ROMERO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 101 - NOVEMBER 29, 1943**

Thirty aircraft, each with a bomb load of 38, 100-lb. GP bombs, took off to bomb the Fiano Romero Landing Ground, just north of Rome. Upon reaching the target, the Group found a 10/10 cloud cover and, not having an alternate target assigned, returned to base with the bombs. No encounters, no injuries, no losses.

#### **MARSELLIE, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 102 - NOVEMBER 30, 1943**

Thirty-one aircraft, each with a load of 12, 500-lb. GP bombs, took off to bomb the Submarine Pens at Marsellie. At 1210 hours, the formation received word from 5th Wing Headquarters to return to base due to poor weather conditions over the target. All planes returned safely to base.

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# 6

## OPERATIONS: DECEMBER 1943- JANUARY 1944

### **T**URIN, ITALY - MISSION NO. 103 - DECEMBER 1, 1943

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The primary target was the Eleusis Airdrome but due to a solid overcast, the Hassani Airdrome (Kalamaki) was bombed instead. Thirty-one aircraft dropped 93 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs. Several buildings and hangars received direct hits. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, accurate altitude and deflection. B-17 #42-5050, piloted by 2nd Lt. Walter R. Ward, 96th Squadron, was hit by flak and went down.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I believe one of the other crew members saw Sgt. Bennett on the ground. While I was in the Udine Hospital, the authorities questioned me about the identification tags of Sgt. Bennett. As a security precaution, I disclaimed any knowledge of his identity and thus was unable to learn the story of how Bennett was shot. From actions of the Germans, I would say that they, or the Fascist soldiers, shot Bennett on the ground. He was not injured, as I understand from other crew members, when he bailed out."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I was introduced to Lt. John Williams at Ephrata, Washington and became a family member of the crew listed as follows: Lt. John Williams, Pilot; 2nd Lt. Gail P. Hoffmann, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Milton Plattner, Navigator; 2nd Lt. Carlton E. Mills, Bombardier; S/Sgt. Joseph Pysnik, Engineer; S/Sgt. Ben Kizer, Assistant Engineer; S/Sgt. William T. Melrose, Radio; S/Sgt. Stanley Morozos, Assistant Radio; S/Sgt. Robert L. Kennedy, Tail; and S/Sgt. Howard E. Richardson, Ball Turret.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1st Lt.	Henry S. Vogel, 0-726895, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Harry R. Ludwig, 0-799038, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Paul (NMI) Ireland, 0-796554, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Donald F. Parks, 0-673878, B.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	George O. Solesbery, 38101124, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Donald J. Lewis, 13046106, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Earl E. Bengston, 17100132, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Edward J. Fennessy, 32497334, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	James H. Redick, Jr., 35423764, T/G.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	William W. Boyer, 35564119, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of Captain Henry S. Vogel, Pilot, after repatriation: “We were returning from the target, Innsbruck, Austria. My plane was hit by heavy flak over the target. The two left engines were knocked out, and the left wing burst into flames. At that time the plane was subjected to severe strafing

by enemy fighters. Fire broke out in the radio room. The ship, severely injured and under constant attack by enemy fighters, fell out of formation. With only one aileron and horizontal stabilizer left and two engines not functioning, the ship was losing altitude rapidly and almost impossible to control.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2nd Lt. William A. Slaughter, 0-680320, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. Robert C. Ogletree, 0-800294, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. William J. Nehila, 0-669336, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Clarence B. Lanham, 0-679551, B.	(EVADED)
T/Sgt. William D. Buell, 39242744, U/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Durwood C. Clem, 35372920, L/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Hubert W. J. Isabelle, 11040520, R/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Stanley F. Cwiek, 36159115, L/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Harlow L. Nowell, 31137126, T/G.	(EVADED)
T/Sgt. Belton D. Stamphill, 38198259, R/O.	(EVADED)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1st Lt. David G. Rohrig, 0-738003, P.	(KIA)
1st Lt. Adolph F. Dippolito, 0-678194, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. John F. Back, 0-800302, N.	(KIA)
1st Lt. Lloyd O. Haefs, 0-669280, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt. James L. Hiskey, Jr., 34362482, U/T	(KIA)

S/Sgt. Lewis W. Crawford, 34125836, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Walter H. Chesser, 3424169, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Frank (NMI) Horner, 38180270, L/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. John A. Caputo, 15073526, T/G.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. John W. Carson, 13095994, R/O.	(POW)

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

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

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

“We crashed at night when returning from our second mission of the day in support of Salerno Beach. On the way in we lost the outer port engine, however the pilot elected to push on with three and finish the mission. On the way home we were approaching the North African coast when we lost the inboard port engine. I believe there was a B-26 field nearby but the pilot, Lt. Patrick Train, made another command decision. He was going to home base. This probably wouldn’t have been so bad but as we were on the final approach, I heard the radio operator state, ‘#449, if you have two engines out, flash your landing lights,’ and at that same moment, Train poured on the coal and pulled up to avoid another B-17 that cut him out of the pattern. In less time than you could tell about it, the radio room was full of crew members. I looked out the window and could see houses that were really close. I stupidly asked Ed Bennett, the radio operator, ‘Are we going to crash?’ and his reply was ‘Yeah, put my flight jacket away,’ and handed me his heavy sheepskin flight jacket. I put it away alright. I wrapped it around my body and pressed tight against the armor plating on the back of his chair. We went in on a hillside in the dark, and as we tried to exit the radio hatch, at once we could see flames against the dust. Fortunately it was a small fire in the No. 4 engine and we were able to extinguish it. Train and his co-pilot, both six footers, exited via the cockpit windows. I would bet money they could never do it again under normal conditions.

“The initial mission of the 15th Air Force was over Wiener Neustadt. We made the bomb run with some B-24s and everyone was busy. One B-24 crew bailed out and they were right behind us, and a wave of 27 German fighters were making their move on us. We took a hole through a prop blade, lost the induction system on one engine and several holes in the bird. We landed in Sicily for a scheduled

refueling stop but could not get out until we had a new engine flown in. The pilot on the crew was a tobacco chewing mad man, Captain Philip Devine. With the engine replaced, he took off to slow time the engine and check it out. Since the local troops wined and dined us, he took about 17 of them for a ride and buzzed the local brothel in the town of Gela. The prop ran away, but no harm done. With the prop repaired, we crewed up and headed for home, low enough to troll for fish.

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

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

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

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

“About a year later, in a prison camp, I came by accident upon Walt Chesser. He has since died but at that time he related his story to me. He said he was at the waist gun when the fuselage was blown off at the rear door. He was covered with black grime from the burst and had small fragments in his clothing but was not seriously hurt. Diving out through an opening, he deployed his chute and observed

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I have since thought of the events that transpired and at some point they became disoriented, I suppose due to the injuries I received, but my recollection is that I checked on Jimmy Back, my Navigator. He was lying on his back covered with 25-lb. ammo cases and navigational charts from the shelves above his position. His eyes were large from surprise. Finding a chest pack beside me, I snapped it on my harness. I then removed debris from him and gave him his chute. I then made my way to the escape hatch under the cockpit, pulled the hinge-pin on the door and kicked it out. As it flew away, I looked out to see the formation heading home and remember a forlorn feeling that, ‘They’re going home and we’re going down.’ Nevertheless, a sensation of relief flooded through me that, ‘I’m going down and the ship isn’t burning.’ That was one of my main concerns; I hated fire!

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

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

“Some time went by and once again I checked in on reality. Gad! My face hurt like crazy! I gingerly touched my lower face and chin to find a mess. The lip and skin below it was split open to

the corners of my mouth. Most of my teeth seemed to be broken or missing as I probed. Also my left cheekbone seemed to be indented and probably broken. It was then that I noted that the front of the garment I wore was blood soaked down to my waist. The blood was crusted and apparently stopped flowing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Shortly I heard several boots coming back and a sobbing and shrieking girl as well. Two soldiers came in with Maria, a Greek nurse, held between them. She flung herself on the floor and knelt with her arms across my chest finally making me understand they were going to kill her for supplying my clothing so I could make my escape! I made the Germans understand, in broken German and hand motions, that the Red Cross man had brought them back and Maria knew nothing about it. They

eventually conceded the point and stomped out, leaving us alone. I was the object of hugs and kisses as she was sure I had saved her life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

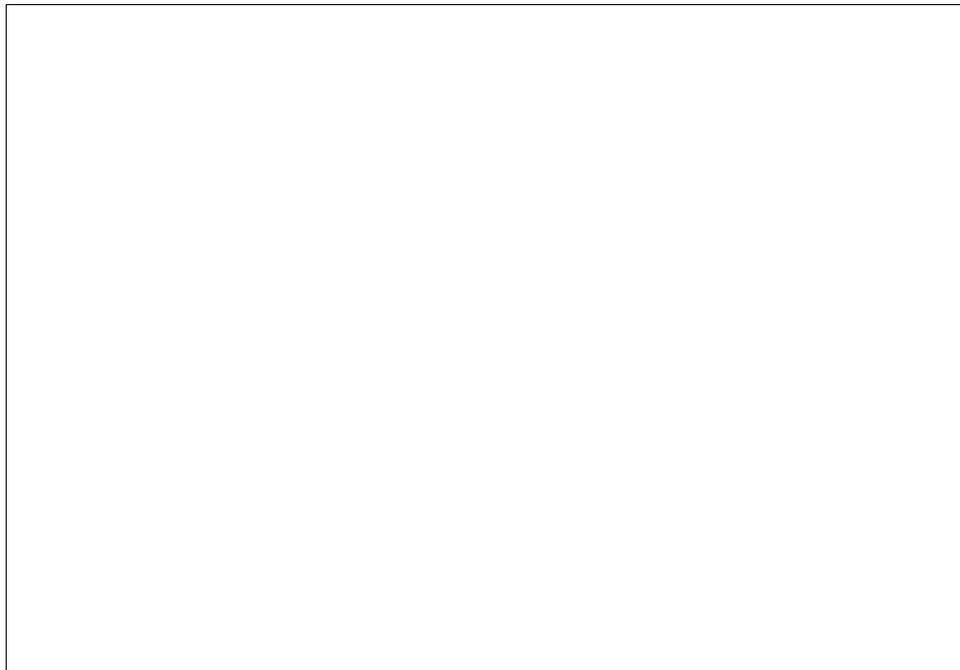
Statement of 2nd Lt. Orville L. Doughty, P, after liberation: “We were at approximately 21,500 feet, just over the target when we were hit by flak. We crash landed on the Island of Corfu. All members were at their assigned crash landing positions. No one was injured in the landing although the bombardier,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

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

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

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

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

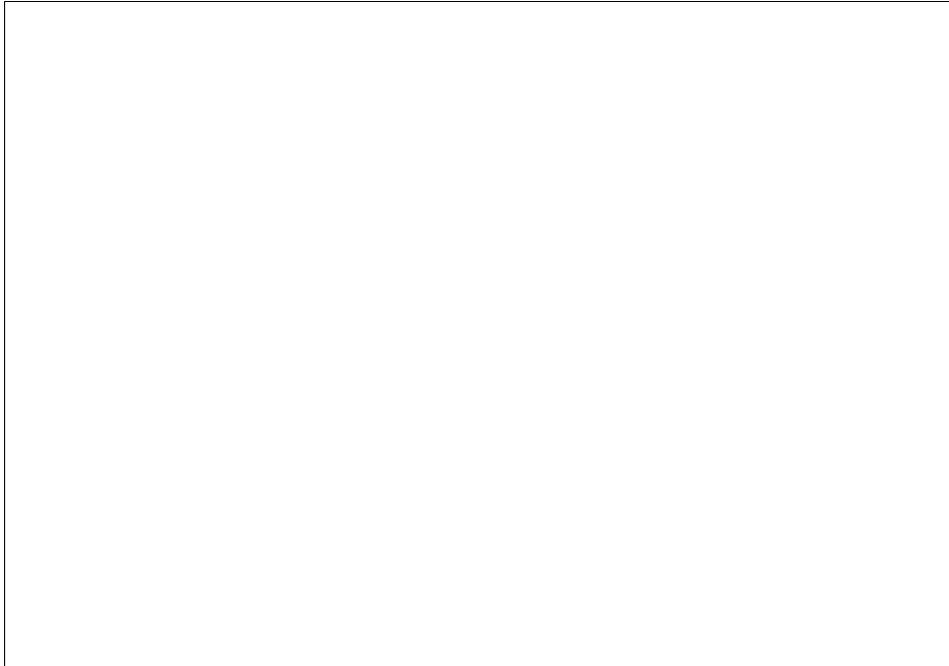


It was a cold overcast day. I went down to the Squadron for my

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Verona, Italy was the assigned primary target but could not be reached due to the weather. Colonel Herbert E. Rice, Group Commander, then led the 24 aircraft to the alternate. Seven aircraft dropped their bombs 34 miles northeast of Ravenna, hitting nothing, due to malfunction of bomb racks in Colonel Rice's aircraft. The other 17 went on to bomb Ravenna dropping 51 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The primary target was the Business District of Sofia, Bulgaria. Due to a 10/10 cloud cover over the primary target, 27 aircraft dropped 81 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Dupnista. Strike photos showed a concentration of hits across the Marshalling Yards, probable extensive damage to residential, commercial and other buildings; one explosion in a barracks-type building. There was no flak, and only one to three Me-109s attacked the formation. S/Sgt. Michael A. Crocchia, LW, 96th Squadron was credited with the probable destruction of an Me-109. No injuries, no losses.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cpl. Harold M. Ross, 32448975, R/O.

(POW)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thirty-four aircraft took off to bomb the Airdrome at Guidonia. The Group took a wrong turn off the I.P. and the formation went to the right of the target. A second run was not made because of the appearance of enemy fighters. Two aircraft dropped their bombs on what they believed was an airdrome southwest of Guidonia; another thought it bombed the assigned target and a fourth had an accidental release, hitting nothing. There was no flak at the target but two to six E/A were engaged near Rome. Two B-17s received minor damage with no injuries.

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

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

Thirty-six aircraft dropped 54 tons of 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the Airdrome at Mostar. Flak was moderate, fairly accurate and damaged 13 B-17s. 2nd Lt. Edwin Nunnery, 96th Squadron,

received a serious flak wound to the left thigh. Strike photos showed four E/A destroyed, six damaged, and six others probably destroyed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

S/Sgt. Bernard L. Scalisi, Flight Engineer: "Our target was a Marshalling yards in Northern Italy. We left the Foggia Field about 6:00 a.m., attained an altitude of 21,500 feet and were hit by flak over Northern Italy. Our No. 2 engine oil line was broken. Oil covered the ball turret, fire was put out and one engine feathered. We tried staying with the formation, salvoed the bombs to lighten the aircraft - no luck. About 30 minutes later, we ran into flak again. I was hit in the left leg but only felt a light burning sensation. A short while later the No. 1 engine began to run hot, the No. 3 and No. 4 engines were running okay, but we were losing altitude at the rate of 300 feet a minute. At 16,000 feet, we threw out everything not bolted down. When the aircraft was down to 13,000 feet, Lt. Pederson told me to inform the crew to bail out. The navigator told me to inform the crew to head south. He and the bombardier bailed out and the rest of the crew followed. I landed in a tree about 15 feet up. In about 15 minutes, in what seemed like an unpopulated woods, about 15 men and women appeared with pitchforks, scythes and sickles. They were real hostile, shouting and motioning me to come down. A few made jabs with pitchforks but I was out of reach. My legs were getting numb from the straps which were cutting off blood circulation. Two men came along who appeared to have control of the ones with the farm tools and ordered them back, which they did. I unbuckled one leg strap but all the weight rested on the other one and I had a lot of trouble getting it undone. I then dropped to the ground.

"The two men helped me to stand up as the circulation slowly came back. The crowd came around me and took my heat suit, Mae West, shoes and field jacket. They let me keep my pants, shirt

and sweater. They gave me an old suit coat and a pair of hob nailed shoes which were five sizes too large. The two men took me about a mile away and hid me in some thick bushes, then they left me. Some time later, several German soldiers passed about 100 yards from where I was hiding. They called to one another and although I could not understand any of their conversation, I recognized it as German.

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

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

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

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

“We would stop at the poorest houses. Those wonderful Italians gave us whatever food they could spare, never asking for anything in return. I offered to give them some of the Swiss Francs or Italian Lira, but they refused. I told them I would write a note telling how they helped us and the U.S. Government would honor this with food, medicine, any kind of help. They declined this offer also. I found out later that anyone helping Allied airmen, soldiers, escapees, would be put to death and their families as well. On the opposite side of these wonderful and sacrificing people, we ran into the other type.

“We wandered aimlessly for a couple of weeks trying to go south but the mountains, rivers and erratic compass was an obstacle. We would set the compass down and set our sights on a mountain in the distance due south. Three-fourths of the way there we would again take a sight and it seems we were always going in the wrong direction. We met up with a group of men by accident. We tried to avoid them but they were suspicious and knew right away that we were Americans or British. They were Italian Fascists who left the Italian army when Mussolini fell from power and was killed. There were about nine of them and we knew we were in deep trouble. They were staying in an abandoned farmhouse and said they would help us contact the underground, but it would take a little time, also that

the place was alive with German soldiers looking for deserters and airmen who were shot down. They said the Germans would be back at any time and they had a perfect place to hide us. One of them spoke fairly good broken English. He stayed with relatives in Brooklyn but got homesick, returned to Italy where he was drafted into the Italian Army.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“We stayed with them until the middle of March. One night, the man whose property we were hiding on came to us and told us to leave that night as someone had informed on us and Germans

planned to come and get us that night. We asked where we could go to be safe and he replied, anywhere but on his property. He told us several Allied soldiers had sought refuge in the Vatican but it was difficult to get in. The place was exceptionally well guarded day and night, but that was our problem. Just get off his property.

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

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

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

“We decided that the only possibility was on the left side of the entrance to St. Peters. I believe it was called The Gate of Santa Anna and the one on the opposite side, The Gate of Santa Marta. We were told by people in the subway that 7:00 p.m. was curfew and anyone on the streets without proper papers could be shot. We decided that the gate on the west side was our best bet and about 15 or 20 minutes before curfew we would casually walk to the gate and all five of us would climb over it. That would put us in the extra territory where the Vatican workers and families lived. Then it was a matter of about 300 yards to the main entrance. From the extra territory there was a guard (Italian) but with his ancient gun, there would be no problem. This, the Englishman found out beforehand.

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

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

could make it, he could too. Grimmer had a long raincoat that he wore all the time. I told him if, when he made it to the top of the wall, he would lower his raincoat to me, standing on the support bar, I could, with a good jump, make it to the ledge and with his help, could also reach the top. Then we both could help Tony. This we all agreed to do.

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

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

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

“On June 6th, after the Allied armies entered Rome, we had a letter written by Mr. Tittman acknowledging that we were American airmen interned in the Vatican and were leaving. We told the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The first plane lost was #42-5836 from the 20th Squadron. It was the victim of another plane's bombs. When all planes jettisoned their bombs, #836 was under another plane. The bombs did not

explode but put a big hole in the left wing just outside of No. 1 engine. It was last sighted heading for Italy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2nd Lt. Thomas J. Grissom, 0-51237, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Royce E. Shellabarger, 0-748814, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Patrick J. Meagher, 0-749444, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Norman (NMI) Mirchin, 0-673861, B.	(KIA)

Sgt.	Robert L. Drake, 39103456, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	David B. Torrey, 11084882, L/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Cecil C. Corbin, 33370367, R/W.	(POW)
Sgt.	William R. Harkness, 38136876, L/W.	(POW)
Sgt.	John A. Murray, 33337425, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Ernest C. Terry, 15338029, R/O.	(KIA)

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

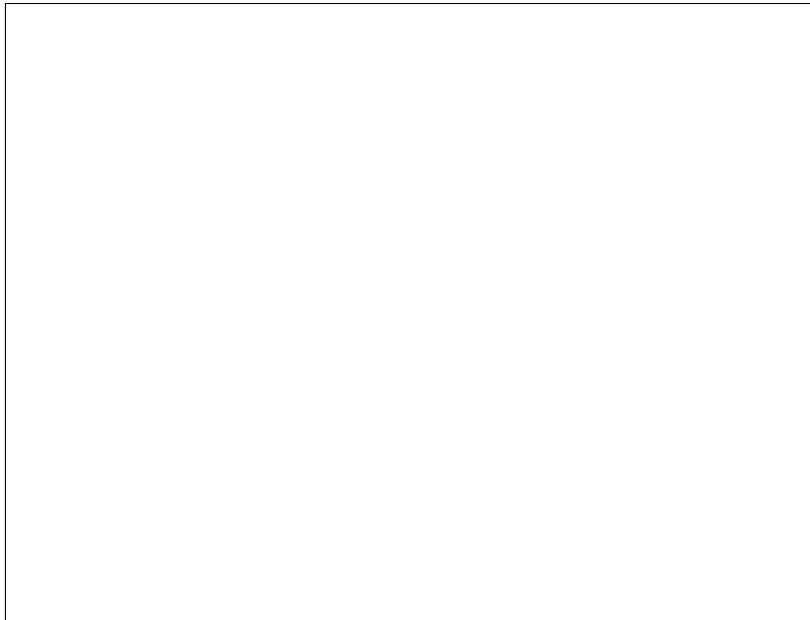
“The take-off and flight to the target was more or less routine, however, we did have intermittent trouble with some of the engines, causing a higher than usual fuel consumption. On arriving at the target, we found a high cloud coverage and were unable to bomb. We were led off to a target of opportunity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

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

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



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



Lt. Patrick J. Meagher  
Courtesy - Elizabeth Meagher

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Walter Nies was shot by a guard as he left his barracks early one morning. The procedure was to lock the barracks at night, but they didn’t lock the one Nies was in. He left to go to the latrine because of dysentery. The guard shot without warning. Nies would have understood a warning, he spoke perfect German. They would not let us bury him for four days. I was in the 87 day forced march.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1st Lt. Joseph H. Taylor, 0-798050, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Lawrence F. Madden, 0-746385, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Alfred E. Snyder, 0-682251, N.	(KIA)

2nd Lt.	Warren G. Gay, 0-735191, B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Robert D. Swan, 35371127, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Harold F. Horton, 33257082, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Robert L. Johnston, 17156151, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Dale K. Cheney, 37472890, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Raymond S. Irwin, 11111192, T/G.	(POW)
Sgt.	Vincent J. Pesature, 12066318, R/O.	(POW)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# 7

## OPERATIONS: FEBRUARY 1944

### **B**UDAPEST, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 139 - FEBRUARY 2, 1944

Captain Joseph Bigham, CO, 49th Squadron, led 38 aircraft to bomb the Tokal Aircraft Factory at Budapest. The formation was recalled by 5th Wing after reaching a point 15 miles south, southeast of Split, Yugoslavia because of weather.

### **TOULON, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 140 - FEBRUARY 4, 1944**

Major Bradford A. Evans, CO, 96th Squadron, led 30 aircraft and dropped 90 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Toulon Harbor area. There was a moderate amount of accurate flak. Between 20 to 30 enemy fighters started their attack at bombing time and continued for about 20 minutes. These attacks, along with the flak accounted for the loss of one life, one injury and loss of one B-17.

Killed was Sgt. Charles J. Rheinheimer, TG, 49th Squadron, by 20mm shell fragment. 2nd Lt. Dale Wilkinson, B, 96th Squadron, suffered a moderate flak wound, right cheek. B-17 #42-29903, 49th Squadron, was last seen approximately 55 miles southwest of Toulon and was the victim of enemy fighters.

Photos showed a direct hit on a merchant vessel; direct hits on rolling stock and buildings; some direct hits on a battleship hull; direct hits on a dock and other installations. Fortress gunners claims were: Each credited with the destruction of a Me-109 were S/Sgt. Clyde A. Bridges, LW, 49th Squadron and T/Sgt. William C. Payne, LT, 96th Squadron. Each credited with the destruction of a FW-190 were T/Sgt. Adolph (NMI) Sevruck, UT, 96th Squadron and T/Sgt. Emile H. Carle, UT, 429th Squadron. Each credited with the possible destruction of a FW-190 were Sgt. Andrew W. Warga, LT, 20th Squadron and T/Sgt. Herman (NMI) Sussman, UT, 96th Squadron.

Terrific headwinds were encountered en route and only four A/C got back to Base. One A/C went to Ajaccio and the remainder landed at Chisonaccia, Corsica to refuel.

### **MISSING AIRCRAFT REPORT: A/C #42-29903 - "HIGH TENSION II" - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Rutherford G. Bingham, 0-724375, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Dabney H. Lea, 0-799413, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Lawrence T. Armstrong, 0-683890, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Hamilton M. Lamb, 0-681544, B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Corbin M. Doolittle, 12138213, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Robert K. Slocum, 35539779, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Frederick M. Lemon, Jr., 19174381, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Max (NMI) Copp, 17091979, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Rex D. Power, 14124924, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	John M. Lawry, 18051017, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of S/Sgt. John J. Kilgalen, TG on B-17 #684, after the mission: "I first noticed #903 when it was going towards France. The plane was at approximately 10,000 feet. It seemed to be in a long glide and I saw five or six parachutes, which looked like they came out of the waist or tail. I observed that the chutes came down in the water. Then E/A attacked us and I lost sight of #903."

#### **ALBANO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 141 - FEBRUARY 10, 1944**

Thirty-six aircraft dropped 106 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the town of Albano. Photos showed hits in the eastern section of town; heavy concentrations of hits on buildings near main highway; one severe explosion in buildings at southeast section of town. This mission was in support of troops at Anzio. Flak, both heavy and light type, was intense and accurate due to the low bombing altitude necessary to get under an undercast. Casualties included: Sgt. George R. Appleton, TG, 49th Squadron, instantly killed, flak wound to neck; 2nd Lt. John E. Sullivan, B, 20th Squadron, severe flak wounds head, cheek, hands; S/Sgt. Alva L. Flowers, TG, 20th Squadron, severe flak wounds right hip; 1st Lt. Charles T. Kirkpatrick, P, 49th Squadron, severe flak wound and plexiglass cuts; 2nd Lt. David W. Baris, N, 49th Squadron, severe flak wound left leg and compound fracture of medial-condyle of tibia; 1st Lt. John F. Adams, N, 429th Squadron, laceration on right wrist from flak; and S/Sgt. Albert E. Smith, UT, 429th Squadron, abrasion left leg from flak.

Two planes were lost. #42-31422, 20th Squadron, disintegrated in the air about four miles south of Albano. Major Robert J. Lundell had just joined the Squadron and was flying his first mission.

Plane #42-5773, 429th Squadron, had two engines feathered and the right wing was on fire when it left the formation. On the 19th, word was received that a U.S. Naval patrol craft had found the bodies of Sgts. Scott, Groover and Carter. The bodies of the other seven members of the crew are still missing.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-5773 - "SCRUBBY OL' GOAT - 429TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt. Raymond W. Bosmans, 0-739713, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Paul E. Horne, 0-804665, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. George R. Carney, 0-738614, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. William R. Kemp, 0-679543, B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. Duane H. Nolder, 13107310, U/T.	(KIA)
Sgt. Raymond P. Scott, 19066460, L/T.	(KIA)
Sgt. Leon D. Able, 32473062, R/W.	(KIA)
Sgt. Robert T. Groover, 39326552, L/W.	(KIA)
Sgt. Frank N. Perry, 18128849, T/G.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Cary E. Carter, 39560467, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of 1st Lt. James Long, P of B-17 #129, after the mission: "At approximately five minutes after bombs away, I noticed that the right wing of #773 was on fire at the rear of it, in the vicinity of the No. 4 engine. Soon afterwards he called me and asked if it was still burning. As #773 pulled out of the formation, he said he was going to head for the nearest land. At that time we were north-northwest of Anzio, about 11 miles. At this time #773 had two good engines and No. 2 had been feathered on the bomb run. This was the last I saw of #773 and the plane was under control and about 10,000 feet. The flames did not seem to get any larger than at the beginning, which was about a six-inch flame coming from the slots aft of the wing."

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT - A/C #42-31422 - 20TH SQUADRON**

Captain Fred R. Licence, 0-795059, P.	(KIA)
Major Robert J. Lundell, 0-396532, CP.	(KIA)

2nd Lt.	George A. Hackett, 0-693820, N.	(POW)
1st Lt.	Walter D. Walling, 0-732287, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Robert H. Bentley, 38209975, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Elton C. Collins, 34266218, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	William A. Bruner, 38465887, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Earl A. Bryant, 38371096, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Harry C. Dalls, Jr., 39462540, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Robert R. Dubberly, 14014839, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of S/Sgt. John B. McMullin, TG on B-17 #42-29628, after the mission: “Aircraft #42-31422 was flying ahead of us in the first element of the lead Squadron. Our pilot told us over the interphone that #422 was leaving the formation with an engine on fire. When I first spotted #422, only the No. 4 engine was on fire but almost instantly No. 3 caught fire too. The entire right wing seemed suddenly to burst into flames in a few seconds. A portion of the wing broke off carrying No. 4 with it. The nose of the aircraft dropped and the ship made a violent roll and began to break up. I was especially interested to see if any chutes left the aircraft and paid little attention to the various pieces as they burned and fell to earth. I saw only two chutes open. Both appeared to open 5,000 to 6,000 feet below our altitude as we were at about 12,000 feet.”

Statement of 1st Lt. George A. Hackett, N, after liberation: “I was unconscious from injuries when Lt. Walling pushed me out of the plane. I have no knowledge of any others of the crew. Lt. Walling was in the same prison camp, Stalag Luft I, Barth Germany.”

S/Sgt. Robert H. Bentley, Flight Engineer, was on the original crew of Lt. Thomas Finch when assigned to the 20th Squadron. September 30, 1991: “We were given a brand new B-17 at Grand Island, Nebraska and we named her “WILDFIRE.” We flew her to North Africa but while we were waiting for a crew assignment in Casablanca, Group took it away and assigned it to some other crew. We never saw nor heard of it again. Another bucket of bolts we flew was “READY TEDDY-THE LAST OF ITSABITCHIS.” They probably scrapped it for parts. I recall returning from one mission over Athens, Greece with over 100 holes in the plane.

“The mission of 2-10-44 to Albano, Italy would have been my 46th had it been completed. Our pilot was Capt. Licence, Squadron Commander; co-pilot was Major Lundell. He was not a member of the Squadron, but was a training officer from Rapid City, South Dakota, and had brought some replacements from the States. He wanted to fly a combat mission while in Italy. He picked the wrong “MILK RUN.”

“I don’t recall any of the other crew members except Lt. Walling. We were hit by ground fire (of all things, tanks) and our plane exploded in mid-air. To the best of my knowledge, Lts. Walling and Hackett, and myself, were the only survivors. I ran into Walling at Camp Lucky Strike after liberation from prison camp and he said that Lt. Hackett survived but badly hurt and doubted if he made it back to the States.

“I always wondered about my original crew. Lt. Finch, my pilot, and Harold Ross were shot down on January 10, 1944 on a mission to Sofia, Bulgaria. I have had contact with Donald Swank and he told me that Lt. Finch was killed and Walter Kluttz, the other waste gunner, was killed because he saw him when he was hit. Donald Swank died September 18, 1991. I sure would like to know what happened to the rest of the crew.”

## **CECCHINA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 142 - FEBRUARY 12, 1944**

Major Donald Ainsworth, Group Operations Officer, led 20 aircraft to bomb the town of Cecchina, a town south of Albano. The Group was recalled by 5th Wing because of weather.

#### **VERONA, ITALY/MODENA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 143 - FEBRUARY 14, 1944**

Major Walter Kutschera, CO 429th Squadron, led 35 aircraft to bomb Marshalling Yards at Verona. Due to 10/10 cloud cover, only five dropped their bombs in that vicinity. Six others tried to hit railroad bridges and 24 bombed Marshalling Yards at Modena. Flak at Modena was moderate and fairly accurate causing slight damage to seven B-17s. Strike photos at Modena showed hits through tracks, rolling stock, warehouses and all lines in the central section; direct hits and near misses on industrial buildings, steel works and factory areas. No injuries and no losses.

#### **CASSINO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 144 - FEBRUARY 15, 1944**

The target was the Monte Cassino Monastery with all Groups of the 5th Wing participating. Major Bradford Evans, CO 96th Squadron, led 36 aircraft of the Group and dropped 108 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs. Strike photos showed direct hits in the east and west halves. One severe explosion occurred in the east wing. There were several direct hits on small buildings in the courtyard and direct hits on approach roads. No injuries, no losses. Leaflets were dropped prior to bombing, warning the people in the Monastery of the impending bombing. Later, the Allies learned that the Germans had never occupied the Monastery.

#### **STAZ DI CAMPOLEONE, ITALY - MISSION NO. 145 - FEBRUARY 17, 1944**

Thirty-six aircraft dropped 51.84 tons of 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the town of Staz Di Campoleone. This bombing was in support of the troops at Anzio. Seven enemy aircraft were seen, none attacking the Group. Flak was moderate to intense causing the loss of B-17 #42-38067, 49th Squadron, and slightly damaging 18 B-17s. Observers stated that the plane was hit by flak and on fire. Five chutes were seen.

Strike photos showed strings of hits from southwest of the railroad junction extending through it and to the northwest. There were hits on vehicles, equipment and installations.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-38067 - "MAIDIN USA" - 49TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Adrian D. Cooper, 0-792433, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Edgar A. Davidson, 0-739739, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	John L. Gill, 0-732717, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Fred S. Turnquist, 0-774951, B.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	George R. Hawk, 15058822, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Duane J. Booth, 37659151, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Harvey J. Dupuis, 14099673, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Lawrence (NMI) Carastro, 14136149, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Robert C. Rebstock, 15015834, T/G.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Jack B. Griffith, 12045333, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of S/Sgt. Harvey J. Dupuis, after liberation: "I believe we were at about the I.P. when we were hit by flak. I bailed out and Sgt. Carastro bailed out right after me. T/Sgt. Hawk rode the plane down and was taken to a hospital by the Germans. Lt. Turnquist may have bailed out. I was only allowed to look at Lt. Turnquist's body for awhile before being turned away.

“The plane struck the ground between the enemy and our lines. It had not burned but was scattered all over the neighborhood. I was not allowed to look into the other parts. I cannot say whether the rest were in the plane or had attempted to bail out.

“I do not know if Lts. Cooper or Davidson bailed out. I believe they were killed, as we were hit very hard by the flight deck. I was told by T/Sgt. Hawk that he had seen Lt. Gill at Barth prison camp, alive. I don’t believe S/Sgt. Rebstock bailed out. Our first hit was a direct burst in the tail and probably killed him. S/Sgt. Booth was the ball turret, without a chute, and I don’t think he got out. The last conversation I heard from him was something about flak. The last time I talked to S/Sgt. Griffith, to ask about the time, was about 1040. He was not hurt at that time. He probably crashed with the ship. The last time I saw him he was with his parachute and ready to jump. He may have been pinned when the ship went into a spin.”

S/Sgt. Carastro, LW. June 12, 1991: “Our aircraft was named “MAIDIN USA” with a picture, above the name, of a beautiful girl stretched out horizontally, being carried in a diaper by a stork.

“The mission for the day was to the Anzio Beach-head. I believe we were the lead Squadron, the 49th. The bomb run was three minutes. Our bomb bay doors were open and I guess about a minute on the bomb run, when we received a direct hit in the cockpit and another on our right wing. Our pilot, Lt. Cooper, and co-pilot, Lt. Davidson, were killed immediately. The aircraft started falling and spiraling down. The waist door would not open and finally the tail broke off and that is how Harvey (S/Sgt. Dupuis) and I got out. We landed in the front lines and were captured immediately. The first words I heard from the Germans were, “For you the war is over.” So, it was POW for the rest of the war.

“In addition to our pilot and co-pilot, the bombardier, Lt. Turnquist, radio gunner Sgt. Jack Griffith, lower turret gunner S/Sgt. Duane Booth, and tail gunner S/Sgt. Robert Rebstock lost their lives.

“The other four of us, navigator Lt. John Gill, upper turret gunner T/Sgt. George Hawk, right waist gunner S/Sgt. Harvey Dupuis, and I became prisoners of war.”

The code name was “ARGUMENT” but February 20 through February 25, 1944 was commonly called “THE BIG WEEK” in the annals of the United States Air Forces in the European Theater of Operations. Six days of aerial operations had been planned for the Eighth Air Force, operating from Bases in England, and the Fifteenth Air Force, operating from Bases in Italy. The object of this operation was to smash aircraft factories, air fields and the Luftwaffe in the air.

The Allied concern was the presence of the German Air Force over the beaches during the coming invasion. It was a major concern that a strong concentration of enemy fighters and bombers would be disastrous to the landing operations.

It was unfortunate that, during this period, the Allied Forces at Anzio were in danger of being pushed off the beaches. All available aircraft, fighters, medium bombers, and heavy bomber in the Italian Theater, were being called upon to bomb German troop concentrations, rail lines, Marshalling Yards, bridges, towns and airfields throughout all of German held Italy. The Fifteenth Air Force’s number one priority was to support the ground troops in Italy.

Weather was a continuing problem at this time both in England and Italy. It was determined that both Air Forces must have good weather for at least three days to accomplish their appointed missions. The Fifteenth, in addition to the weather, had the Adriatic Sea and those ominous Alps to cross. Many of the B-17s were older models and did not have the fuel range necessary to get to some targets. Some had been fitted with Tokyo tanks and those were used for the long missions. As a result, it was not possible to assemble as large a striking force as the planners desired. To compensate for this,

shorter range diversionary strikes were planned, hopefully, to draw enemy fighters away from the long range strikes. The Germans were not fooled by these tactics.

The month of January had been a good flying month for the 2nd Bomb Group; 23 missions in 31 days. February was a different story. From the 1st through the 19th, due to poor weather, only six missions had been flown.

#### **REGENSBURG, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 146 - FEBRUARY 20, 1944**

Twenty-nine aircraft took off led by Captain Harold Chrismon, CO 20th Squadron, to bomb the Messerschmitt Aircraft Factory at Regensburg. All planes returned at 1127 hours due to a solid overcast off the Italian coast, north of Lake Lesina. B-24s bombed the Anzio Beach-head German troop concentrations.

#### **FEBRUARY 21, 1944**

A briefing was held and the assigned target was the Littorio Marshalling Yards in Rome. Crews went to their planes and orders were received canceling the mission due to weather.

#### **OLCHING, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 147 - FEBRUARY 22, 1944**

The combat crews were briefed to bomb the Prufening Plant at Regensburg, Germany on the long range mission. Alternate targets were the Messerschmitt Factory at Augsburg, Austria, Railroad Bridges and Marshalling Yards at Bolzano, Italy or Innsbruck, Austria, or Marshalling Yards at Trento or Padua, Italy.

The Group got over Regensburg but a 10/10 cloud cover prevented bombing. Instead of bombing any of the alternate targets, the Group attacked the small town and Marshalling Yards at Olching, Germany, 11 miles north of Munich. Twenty-one aircraft dropped 42 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs and 12.6 tons of 100-lb. incendiary bombs on the target. Direct hits were recorded on the railroad both to the right and left of a canal probably cutting the line in two places. It was first reported that they had bombed the town of Peterhausen, 19 miles north-northeast of Munich, but it was later reported to have been Olching.

There were no encounters with enemy fighters, but moderate, fairly accurate flak injured three airmen. Those injured were: 2nd Lt. John W. Carney, N, 96th Squadron, laceration to scalp; S/Sgt. Anthony Gruchawka, WG, 96th Squadron, laceration on left leg and right cheek; S/Sgt. Clem R. Pelligrino, WG, 96th Squadron, severe wounds on face and right leg.

One plane was lost but not as a result of enemy action. B-17 #42-38134, 429th Squadron, was last sighted on the way to the target, 66 miles east of Ancona, Italy. Observers saw smoke in the cabin, the aircraft went into a diving spin, disappearing into the clouds. Eight chutes were seen.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-38134 - "BLOW IT OUT YOUR..." 429TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt. Frederick W. Melzer, 0-800382, P.	(DED)
2nd Lt. Arliegh C. Honeycutt, 0-740814, CP.	(DED)
2nd Lt. Ralph N. Gjertsen, 0-739086, N.	(DED)
2nd Lt. Thomas F. Julian, 0-67953, B.	(DED)
T/Sgt. Thurman D. Graves, 35366673, U/T.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Howard (NMI) Bessey, 32733214, L/T.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Clair J. Smith, 365259256, R/W.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Charlie (NMI) Martin, 35449988, L/W.	(DED)
S/Sgt. Bernard F. Devoe, 11110735, T/G.	(DED)
T/Sgt. Israel M. Berkowitz, 13151681, R/O.	(DED)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Clifford E. Magnuson, Pilot of B-17 #527, 429th Squadron, after the mission: "I first noticed that the cockpit on B-17 #134 looked like the windows were frozen over. Ship #134 was flying in the first wave, third squadron, second element, #1 position. About one minute later, I saw flames coming out the side windows. Ship #134 turned to the left in a slight bank and then up into a vertical climb and then fell off, going down in a spin. I saw the emergency radio going out and then I saw eight chutes. Ship #134 disappeared into the clouds. I turned back at 43-40N - 14-50E and let down through the overcast. I was at an altitude of 14,500 feet and let down to 3,000 feet and circled the area for 35 minutes. I directed my radio operator to send calls to Air-Sea-Rescue and Malta was the only station that answered and gave me a fix. I called "Big Fence" and gave them the coordinates."

#### **ZAGREB, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 148 - FEBRUARY 22, 1944**

This was a short range mission briefed to bomb the Airdrome at Graz, Austria. Alternates were Harbor Installations and Shipping at Sibenek, Yugoslavia. Due to a complete overcast at the primary target, Captain Harold Chrismon, CO 20th Squadron, led 17 aircraft and dropped 27 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Airdrome at Zagreb. There was no resistance other than slight flak with no damage nor injury. Visual observation noted that the bombs fell to the west end of the field and did no damage to it. One early return bombed Sibenek and bombs fell to the right of the harbor and town.

B-24s bombed Regensburg, Germany and Sibenek, Yugoslavia. Other B-17 Groups of B-17s bombed Regensburg.

#### **STEYR, AUSTRIA - MISSION 149 - FEBRUARY 23, 1944**

Major Walter F. Kutschera, CO 429th Squadron, led 32 aircraft to bomb the Daimler-Puch Aircraft Components Parts Factory at Steyr, Austria. A 10/10 cloud cover 110 miles north of Foggia forced the Group to turn back.

B-24s and other B-17 Groups got through the weather and bombed Steyr, Austria.

#### **STEYR, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 150 - FEBRUARY 24, 1944**

Major Walter F. Kutschera, CO 429th Squadron, took off with 35 aircraft and 25 got over the target and dropped 75 tons of 500-lb. bombs on the Aircraft Components Parts Factory at Steyr.

The mission was a most disastrous day for the Group, losing 14 aircraft to enemy fighters. Fighters started attacking the Group at 1215 hours about five miles north of Fiume, Italy and continued for one hour. It was estimated that the attacking force consisted of 58 Me-109s, 25 Me-110s, 10 FW-190s, 10 Ju-88s, 6 Me-210s, and 1 Ma-202. They came in as close as 50 yards from all around the clock, singly, in pairs, four, six, and eight abreast. Some twin engine fighters stayed out of range firing rockets, then coming in for the attack. Other single engine fighters dropped aerial bombs. One group of fighters would attack, go out of range, reform and attack again. In the meantime, another group would be attacking so there was always a continuous attack on the Group. The only time the attacks stopped, in force, was when the Group was in the flak over the target, although a few continued to attack. Then the attacks continued. Finally, the P-38 escort arrived and saved the rest of the formation. In addition to the loss of 14 aircraft, nine men were injured, nine other planes were damaged by fighters and five damaged by flak.

The 2nd Bomb Group was the last of three B-17 Groups to go over the target. B-24s were to have been a part of the striking force, 10 minutes behind the 2nd Bomb Group. Group did not arrive. Consequently, the 2nd Bomb Group took the brunt of the enemy attack.

The 429th Squadron was the only Squadron not to lose an aircraft, probably because it led the Group. The 20th Squadron lost two planes, the 49th lost all seven of its aircraft, and the 96th lost five. Due to the fierce and continuous attacks, it is not known where all the losses occurred.

Plane #42-37970, 20th Squadron, had its vertical stabilizer shot off as the formation was turning on the I.P., dropped its bombs and was on fire. Seven chutes were seen.

Plane #42-31425, 20th Squadron, pulled out of the formation just after bombs away. Three men jumped and their chutes opened. The plane continued on, evidently on AFCE, for 22 minutes and crashed into the mountains 10 miles south of Klagenfurt, Austria. No other chutes were seen.

The exact time and place where six of the planes from the 49th Squadron went down were not known. They were #42-31859, #42-31419, #42-31873, #41-24618, #42-29638, and #42-31870. From interrogation and careful study of navigators' logs, this formation was in the most exposed position and attacked repeatedly. The E/A seemed to single out one after another until all were shot down. The seventh plane, #41-24571, was badly shot up, particularly in the tail, No. 3 engine was feathered, the right wing on fire. It pulled out to the left and was never seen again.

Plane #42-31390, 96th Squadron, was in the formation until six or seven minutes before bombs away. It burst into flames between No. 3 and No. 4 engines, pulled off to the right, went into a dive. Three to four chutes were seen.

Plane #42-31666, 96th Squadron, was seen to be in trouble five minutes before bombs away. Both wings were on fire near the fuselage. It left the formation, went up about 100 feet, then into a steep dive. Two or possibly three men were seen to bail out.

Plane #42-31459, 96th Squadron, was on the bomb run when it left the formation with No. 2 engine on fire. Men started to bail out and as many as seven chutes were seen to open. It continued on course for about eight minutes, then crashed into the mountains.

Plane #42-31640, 96th Squadron, had the right wing on fire just before bombs away. The landing gear was dropped, nosed up, then went into a vertical dive. It appeared to blow up about 1,000 feet above the ground. Four parachutes were seen to leave the plane.

Plane #42-29639, 96th Squadron, was attacked by a fighter while on the bomb run. No. 2 engine caught fire, peeled off to the left, nosed up slightly and went down. Three to four men were reported to leave the plane.

The wounded were: T/Sgt. Joe B. Null, UT, 20th Squadron, wounds on right leg; T/Sgt. William E. Davis, RO, 20th Squadron, wounds to right leg and thigh; S/Sgt. Howard H. Armstrong, TG, 20th Squadron, compound fracture of upper arm; Sgt. Russell Evanson, LW, 20th Squadron, wound to right knee, possible fracture; T/Sgt. Julius H. Bridges, RO, 96th Squadron, wounds to right thigh and left knee; T/Sgt. Turner W. Pickrel, Jr., UT, 96th Squadron, lacerations to right cheek from shattered plexiglass; T/Sgt. Edward Hart, UT, 429th Squadron, wound on left leg; S/Sgt. John Coffey, LT, 20th Squadron, severe wounds near right eye and penetrating wound in left eye resulting in loss of left eye through surgical operation; and S/Sgt. Julius Karp, RW, 20th Squadron, wounds to left leg and thigh.

Fortress gunners claimed the following enemy aircraft: Each credited with the destruction of a Me-109 were: Sgt. William W. Howard, LT; Sgt. Marion J. Maddox, TG; S/Sgt. Dwight E. Heatwole, LT, 20th Squadron; S/Sgt. Kenneth C. Cook, RW and S/Sgt. Michael A. Croccia, LW, 96th Squadron. Each credited with the destruction of a FW-190 were: Clair I. Carl, TG, 20th Squadron; T/Sgt. Robert D. Centers, RO, 96th Squadron, and S/Sgt. Nicholas A. Cannata, RW, 429th Squadron. Credited with the destruction of a Ju-88 was S/Sgt. Anthony R. Mancuso, TG, 429th Squadron. Each credited with the probable destruction of a Me-109 were: Sgt. Horace B. Maddux, TG, 20th Squadron; T/Sgt. Raymond C. Bringolf, UT, S/Sgt. Robert R. Cary, TG, S/Sgt. Henry (NMI) Macias, LW, 96th Squadron. Each credited with the probable destruction of a FW-190 were: 2nd Lt. Harry S. LaSalle, N, and S/Sgt. Thomas M. Moriarity, LT, 96th Squadron. Credited with the probable destruction of a Ju-88 was S/Sgt. Cantello H. Strickland, RW, 20th Squadron. Credited with the damage to a Me-109 was S/Sgt. Edmond C. Conway, LT, 96th Squadron, and for the damage to a FW-190 was 2nd Lt. Phillip L. Cooper, N, 429th Squadron.

Strike photos showed direct hits and near misses on the Component Parts Plant, the Machine and Assembly Building, the Foundry Building; direct hits on the Arms Shop Building, the small Arms Building, the Power House and northwest section of the Automatic Machine Shop Building and other buildings in that area probably damaged by direct hits or near misses.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-37970 - 20TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt. Paul A. Foust, 0-745880, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. John M. Coppinger, 0-680367, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Reginald W. Kurtz, 0-790257, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Kendall E. Mork, 0-669417, B.	(POW)
S/Sgt. John C. Clark, 33279680, U/T.	(POW) *
Sgt. Silvio L. Riccio, 11118028, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Darial G. Hammond, 35444973, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Chester A. Harvey, 35405177, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Otha G. Beene, 18165821, T/G.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Cornelius J. O'Leary, 31157535, R/O.	(POW)

\* Died during forced march in Germany, 1945.

Statement of 2nd Lt. John M. Coppinger, CP, after liberation: "I bailed out as did Lts. Mork and Kurtz, and Sgts. Harvey, Riccio, Hammond, Beene, Clark, and O'Leary. I don't know about Lt. Foust. He was preparing to follow me. He said, "I'll be right with you." I don't know if he was wounded but did not seem to be. The navigator, Lt. Kurtz, said to me on the ground that parts of the plane fell around him as he dropped to the ground in his chute. He had the impression that the ship had blown up before Lt. Foust could bail out. My supposition is that he died in the explosion of the ship.

"S/Sgt. John C. Clark was able to bail out and was injured in the left shoulder. He said to me, "I'll see you on the ground, John." I was told that he was a prisoner in Stalag Luft IV and died of malnutrition and pneumonia during a forced march in Germany in the winter of 1944/45. This source was a Sgt. Henry."

Sgt. Silvio Riccio, Ball Turret Gunner. October 20, 1990: "I had enlisted November 24, 1943, took basic training in Miami, Florida. Went to Traux Field, Madison, Wisconsin for radio operator training and then to gunnery training at Kingman, Arizona. I landed up at Moses Lake and then Walla Walla, Washington. When they needed ball turret gunners, I applied for that. Forgot my radio operator training.

"At Walla Walla I was assigned to a crew as a ball turret gunner and assistant radio operator. Our pilot was Lt. Paul Foust; co-pilot, Lt. Coppinger; navigator, Lt. Stetner; bombardier, Lt. Mork; engineer, S/Sgt. John Clark; radio, S/Sgt. Cornelius O'Leary; ball turret, myself; waist gunners, S/Sgt. Chester Harvey and S/Sgt. Darial Hammond; and the other gunner was Sgt. Otha Beene.

"We went overseas on a Liberty Ship in November, 1943, landing in North Africa and then flew to Italy by C-47. We were assigned to the 20th Squadron. We guarded B-17s for awhile and then started flying.

"Some of our missions were to Reggio Emilia A/C Factory and Marshalling Yards, Ciampino/Rome Airdrome, Northern Italy and Anzio. We came in low there and got a lot of flak. We lost our Operations Officer and Squadron Leader on plane #422. We picked up 125 holes in our plane and flak in one of our engines. No injuries. Bombed the Monte Cassino Monastery, Athens, Budapest, Regensburg, and the sub pens at Toulon, France. We were the only Group to hit the sub pens. We had plenty of opposition and that was the first time I saw a German fighter ram a B-17. They both exploded. I was told they were Goering's Yellow Nose Boys. We were 50 feet over the water coming

out. We were running low on gas and had to land on the Island of Corsica. We stayed overnight and came home the next morning in a heavy fog. In those days, I didn't know what our losses were. Too busy watching our own butts! Our Group leader almost got it that day (Major Bradford Evans, 96th CO). He lost an engine on landing and almost got it in landing on the island, which was a fighter base. It was too small for B-17s to be landing on. We sweated out the landing back at our base because it was so foggy. We hit the Monastery at Cassino and Major Evans flew lead that day also.

"On February 24, 1944, we went to Steyr, Austria. We were told our fighter cover would be five minutes before the target. This was to be my 21st mission. We were to have B-24s behind us but we never saw them. As we went inland, the Germans hit us with everything they had and with no let up. I saw the 96th Squadron go down and then it was our turn. They came in, wave after wave, three to five fighters at a time. They were good pilots! They came at us from around the clock. You could have hit them with a rock, they were that close! They knew we were burning, I saw their 20mms flashing. There were Me-109s, FW-190s, and Me-110s, and I know they were throwing everything they had, and more. I was firing short bursts. I had a Me-110 in my ball turret sights and I saw a red flash. It looked like an explosion, then smoke and it dived. I didn't have time to follow it down because there were others. I saw another one smoking and going down. It must have been Beene firing from the tail. The plane was vibrating from everyone firing. Our intercom was out and as I got out of the ball turret it took a hit. As I got out to grab my chute, a 20mm made a hole in front of my face. I snapped my chute on and saw Harvey and Hammond trying to kick the escape hatch open. They couldn't get it open so I bailed out the waist hatch window. I went out after them. I saw the engine was on fire and the tail of the plane was in shreds. It seemed only seconds. The wind blew me away from the plane and I was saying, "Give it time," over and over and my chute never opened. So I grabbed the pilot chute and pulled on it and it finally opened. We went out at about 22,000 feet with the bomb bay doors open.

"I landed in deep snow. I saw the enemy coming with guns and pitchforks, so I lit a cigarette and waited. We were taken by the Gestapo, with other flyers, to Dulag Luft, Frankfurt, Germany. No fun! We were then taken to Stalag Luft VI in East Prussia. Me and nine other guys dug an escape tunnel, a good one, but it was discovered around D-Day, so we quit.

"I have talked to Bob Peterson recently and our stories of life, just prior to, during, and after being at Stalag Luft IV, are so similar there isn't much sense repeating it. It was a tough old War!"

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31425 - 20TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt. Donald L. Smith, 0-742534, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Frank J. Sims, 0-689382, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Joseph (NMI) Dendor, 0-811582, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. William (NMI) McConnell, 0-688549, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Gilbert J. Hepp, 32497623, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Charles S. Danforth, 35579414, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Bert F. Gaines, 13118959, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. William A. Lewis, 14051560, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Harold W. Garlick, 12136611, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. Walter (NMI) Banasiewski, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Joseph Dendor, N, after liberation: "We left the formation about 30 miles south of Steyr, Austria. I met all the crew members, except S/Sgt. Harold Garlick, at Frankfurt, Germany where I was hospitalized for two weeks.

“Conditions were hard to land in the mountains. It is hard for me to remember every detail. The last I heard from S/Sgt. Garlick was when he was calling out enemy fighters, just before the warning bell to bail out. I have no knowledge of his bailing out. The last I knew he was in the tail of the plane. He probably was hit by shells from an enemy fighter at the very last moment, or he was seriously injured in the mountains and could not get down. I landed in the mountains, was seriously injured, and it took me over four hours to get down.

“The enlisted men who flew with me that day were not our regular crew members, as they were assigned guard duty that day.”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-3189 - “LUCY” - 49TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	George J. Verbruggen, 0-799511, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Richard W. Bartell, 0-746274, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Jesse S. Hizenski, 0-811681, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Robert M. Tiffany, 0-746918, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Benedict R. Tieniber, 32439369, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Earl W. Hunt, 15336841, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Paul J. Yanushis, 33356696, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Joe J. Casano, 18137900, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Arthur E. Jobin, 11040589, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Tomas E. Gmitter, 13089393, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of T/Sgt. Benedict R. Tieniber, Engineer, after liberation: “Our plane was crippled, we were out of formation and had wounded aboard. We bailed out near Wels, Austria and I believe our plane crashed near there.

“In a Luftwaffe camp I saw S/Sgt. Jobin with a hand in bandages. S/Sgt. Casano had a leg bandaged and his back was injured, as mine was. Both Casano and Jobin were wounded by enemy fighters. I also saw Lt. Verbruggen and Lt. Bartell. I met the others at another camp in Germany.

“T/Sgt. Gmitter bailed out at about the same time as the rest of the crew. I saw him at a German distribution center and then at Stalag Luft VI. We were together at VI but were separated at Stalag Luft IV and the long march before being repatriated.”

T/Sgt. Tomas Gmitter, Radio Operator. November 19, 1990: “This particular day could be elaborated in more detail, but I cannot see that it would serve any purpose. What more can I say when it was a day of extremes. The attack, the bailout, the 31,000 feet descent by parachute, the capture and anxiety over an unknown future as a prisoner. This day took its toll on me and I suffer from it to this day.

“On February 22, 1944, when the mission to Steyr, Austria (Olching, Germany) was completed, we were advised by the camp physician that we were to be grounded for 72 hours due to exhaustion and strain. I had flown 31 missions by this time, all since the 15th of December, 19 of which were in January.

“On February 24, 1944, earlier than normal, we were awakened for a briefing. Without hesitation, I attended the briefing with the officers, which was customary. Prior to the normal briefing procedure, an officer announced that we were going to Steyr to complete the destruction of an aircraft factory and informed us that no one had returned from the previous Group that attacked the target on February 23rd, and it was likely the same fate be-fall our mission. He further stated that if anyone wanted to leave the room before the briefing, he could feel free to do so without recriminations. No one left the room.

“When the briefing was completed, we made the usual trip to our plane, by truck, but the usual banter was totally absent. The mission proceeded and as we approached the Alps from the south, approximately 200 enemy aircraft formed a straight line behind us - ‘The Luftwaffe’s Last Stand.’ As we crossed the Alps, the enemy systemically peeled off in groups of seven and attacked the last plane in the Group. As this plane was crippled, another group of fighters would finish off the attack on this plane. The former group of fighters proceeded to the next plane. Seeing this we were advised to hold our fire until we were personally attacked. I was in the wing position of the lead plane in our element and observed the attack on all the bombers beside and behind our plane. Before the time for the attack on my aircraft, I had linked my supply of ammunition together with the intent of firing in long bursts. The enemy attacked each plane from the rear, behind the horizontal stabilizer of the tail section. Seeing this, I cut through both stabilizers and managed to destroy two fighters before I bailed out.

“I was strafed twice on the way down and managed to slip my chute to land in a cluster of tall pines. My parachute became entangled in the pines and my feet never hit the ground. After regaining my composure, I mustered enough strength to release my parachute harness and slipped into the snow, minus my shoes, which I lost on the way down. Upon leaving the area, I was observed by a local citizen who directed me to enter a cave-like structure and opening on the other side of the hill, which was a peat mine. I followed him to the other side of the mine and was faced with dozens of people, some members of my Group and members of the local armed forces. We were ordered not to speak to each other and to undress completely as they searched for weapons. We were outdoors and it was extremely cold. I was wearing several pairs of trousers, my blue heated suit, which did not work, and with the removal of each garment, the comment was made that I was not a very big man. Seeing that I carried no weapons they tore from around my neck the chain with the St. Christopher medal and ordered me to dress. We were standing on a road that must have been used to remove the peat from the mine. We were ordered to raise our hands and were walked to the center of the town of Ootnang, Austria. We were taken to what seemed to be a local community center, separated from each other and ordered not to speak to each other. We were individually asked where we came from and our single answer was, the United States. This obviously was not the answer they wanted. We were fed a serving of crepes suzettes with strawberry jam and powdered sugar, hot tea laced with Schnaps and I thought, “Man this is going to be great!” Needless to say, that was the last decent meal I was going to see until I was released from prison camp on April 29, 1945.

“We were taken from Ootnang by 40 & 8 to Frankfurt, Germany for interrogation. After a few days, we were shipped again by 40 & 8 to Kiefheide in East Prussia. From there we were shipped, again by rail, to Hydekrug and from there we were shipped by rail, and coal freighter on the Baltic, to Stettin. From Stettin to a vermin infested camp at Nurnburg. This camp was ordered closed by the Red Cross because it was within yards of the Marshalling Yards and it truly was infested with lice, bedbugs, fleas, etc. Nevertheless, we were confined here until force marched to Moosdorf, Austria, where we were liberated by Patton’s forces on April 29, 1945. Exact dates and Stalag Luft numbers escape me after this long period of time.”

1st Lt. George J. Verbruggen, Pilot of A/C #42-31859. March 10, 1990: “February 24, 1944 started as a routine operational day. It was to be my 42nd combat mission. The target, if I remember correctly, was Steyr, Austria. We were briefed that there would be 110 to 125 enemy fighters in the area. My position in the flight was deputy in the 49th Squadron.

“We took off and formed over the field near Foggia, Italy. As we formed up, I noticed that gas was siphoning out of one tank on the right wing. I knew that if it did not stop, I would not have enough fuel to get back. So, I left the formation and returned to the field and landed. I sent the engineer to check the problem. When he returned, he said the gas cap was not properly seated. We took off again and joined the Squadron.

“The attack on the Squadron started around noon. Being the low Squadron of the Group, the enemy concentrated their attack on us. Their tactics were to hit and clean out the lowest Squadron, as the least amount of fire power could be directed on them. For awhile we seemed to be holding our own, but as we turned to the Initial Point, the enemy got more aggressive. At that point, all hell broke loose! The aircraft was getting more hits; by the voices of the gunners I could tell that the tension was very high. This was hell week and both sides knew it!

“About halfway between the Initial Point and the target, my leader started dropping back. I assumed he was hit and losing power. As I watched him drop down, I looked back and saw that all the aircraft in our Squadron had disappeared. About this time, the outboard engine on the right side was hit and the co-pilot, 2nd Lt. Richard Bartell, feathered the engine. I ordered the bombardier, 2nd Lt. Robert Tiffany, to salvo the bombs, as I increased power in the remaining engines in order to catch the First Squadron of the Second Wave.

“I had no sooner applied power when I lost rudder control, and almost simultaneously, lost the elevator. As soon as I realized I no longer could control the aircraft, I hit the bail-out switch and signaled the co-pilot to leave. I stayed with the aircraft until I made sure that all the crew had bailed out. I left the aircraft through the bomb bay.

“I got a terrific jolt when I pulled the ripcord. It took me almost 20 minutes to come down, however, it seemed like much longer. At about 2,000 feet a small trainer aircraft began circling me. At first I thought he was going to fire at me, but he turned and left as soon as I got close to the ground.

“The Landwache (Landwatch) were waiting for me. I no sooner landed, when they ran up to me, took off my parachute and gave it to a woman that was near to them. She took it and ran to the village nearby. They then took me to the village at the point of a rifle, which was held by a soldier who was on leave. There were plenty of on-lookers and whenever they met, they raised their right arm and said, ‘Heil Hitler.’

“I should have been elated to know that I was on the ground without injury, however, I was depressed with the feeling that I should have gone down with the aircraft instead of being captured. I wasn’t on the ground very long when my body told me that my left testicle was giving me pain. I said nothing to my captors about it. I must have adjusted the strap so that it was directly over the testicle. The adrenalin must have been flowing profusely as I did not feel the pain until on the ground.

“All of the crew got out safely, although I did not know if any of them were injured at the time. I learned this from Ben Tieniber, my engineer on the crew. All of my crew were captured. I do not know what camp they were sent to.

“After going through the interrogation center near Frankfurt-Am-Main, I was sent to Stalag Luft I near Barth, Germany. I was assigned to North Lager One. I do not have any recollection of any other 2nd Bomb Group personnel in the camp other than Bartell, my co-pilot; Tiffany, the bombardier; and Hizinski, the navigator.

“I did escape from Stalag Luft I, but was recaptured three days later. As far as I know, I was the only idiot that thought he could out-fox the Germans. After spending four days in the Stettin City jail and eight days on hard rations, “Bread and Water,” back at prison camp, I learned that in order to escape in a country where one is incarcerated, one needs to know the language and have outside help.

“I was repatriated by the Russians who over-ran our camp on the 1st of May 1945.”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31419 - 49TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt. John P. Vandy, 0-677616, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Wilbert F. Schwerin, 0-691159, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Benjamin A. Clemens, 0-811562, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Loren (NMI) White, 0-751692, B.	(POW)
Sgt. David H. L. Goldstraw, 33373432, U/T.	(POW)

Sgt.	Thomas P. Isbell, 14163560, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Joseph (NMI) Rolek, 37306356, R/W.	(POW)
Sgt.	John J. O'Donnell, 32182033, L/W.	(POW)
Sgt.	John J. R. Kenlein, 32605556, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Henry J. Klinkoski, 35889559, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Loren White, B, after liberation: "All of the crew bailed out with the exception of two. I went out through the forward escape hatch with Lt. Clemens. John Vandy and Wilbert Schwerin did not get out. Schwerin was wounded and I don't know about Vandy. I saw Vandy last in the vicinity of the pilot's compartment. I saw Schwerin on the catwalk, under the pilot's compartment, just before we went out of control. When the plane turned over, I was thrown forward and that was the last I saw of him.

"I saw all the other members of the crew in care of soldiers. This was the night of the 24th. The radio gunner, T/Sgt. Klinkoski, was wounded in the leg."

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31873 - 49TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Joseph J. Pausha, 0-797594, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Victor (NMI) Marturano, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Gerald H. Voska, 0-747112, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Charles P. Olsen, 0-73928, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Paul H. Behm, 15331473, U/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Phil W. Ashook, 39272985, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Ernest A. Henderson, 11097749, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	John D. Martin, 34168113, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	John W. Dunlop, 12157993, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Earl J. Wilkens, 39104948, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of S/Sgt. John W. Dunlop, TG, after liberation: "I bailed out over the Alps from about 21,000 feet. We all bailed out in regular order, from tail to nose. When my chute opened I looked at my watch, which read 12:45. I counted the remaining chutes blossom and we saw each other at Salzburg. The aircraft blew up when it hit the ground. No one was seriously injured.

"Lts. Pausha, Marturano and Voska left Frankfurt, March 1, 1944 for a camp near Barth, Germany. Sgts. Behm, Wilkins, Henderson, Martin, Ashook and myself left Frankfurt on March 1, 1944 for Stalag Luft IV near Memal, Germany, and we arrived there March 5th.

"I last talked to Lt. Olsen about one hour after capture. He had no serious injuries to my knowledge. One of the crew said they saw him in Munich and then heard from him in Frankfurt, at Luftwaffe headquarters, waiting to be shipped to prison camp, February 28, 1944."

2nd Lt. Victor Marturano, co-pilot of A/C #42-31873, February 2, 1990: "February 24, 1944 was my 24th mission. We were awakened at 4:00 a.m. and briefed at 5:00 a.m., which was an indication that we would probably be going deep into Germany.

"On the ride to the flight line Joe asked me if I wanted to fly the left seat to build First Pilot hours, which I did. The mission started out rough. The 49th Squadron was the last Squadron in the attacking force, the most vulnerable in an attack. Our airplane was 'Tail End Charlie.' As I jockeyed for position in the formation, I had to fall away to keep from stalling. The last plane was flying too slow in his climbing turn out over the Adriatic where we always assembled and climbed to altitude to avoid flying over German lines.

“As we crossed the Italian coast, in the area of Udine, we were intercepted by enemy fighters. Our Squadron, being on the tail end, became targets to the ‘Storm Fighter Units,’ FW-190s equipped with 4-centimeter cannons and 3 MK 108 cannons, and well armored plated. They attacked from the rear, flying four abreast, firing their cannons, staying out of range of our 50 cal. guns, then rolling over and split S-ing, exposing their armored underside. We took a hit in No. three engine, which started burning. Joe activated the extinguisher and feathered the engine. Minus one engine we were unable to keep up and became a sitting duck. We jettisoned our bombs. As we jettisoned, a shell exploded near the cockpit, fortunately, Joe and I were wearing flak vests. I took a small piece of shrapnel in the left thigh. I activated the auto pilot, sounded the alarm to abandon ship and gave a verbal command to bail out.

“In a matter of minutes the fighters broke off to attack somewhere else. Apparently, seeing the first chutes come out, they had made their kill and there was more work to be done. As I snapped on my chest pack, I thought I had better check to see if everyone got out. With a portable oxygen bottle I walked back through the bomb bay to the waist. The ball gunner was still in the turret. I picked up the crank, which was used to move the turret when there was no power and pounded on the turret to get the gunner’s attention. The gunner responded by opening the turret hatch. I told him to bail out. As he stepped out of the turret into the waist, a lone FW-190 pulled abreast of our left wing, maybe wanting to get a closer look at the B-17 before it got out of the sky. He hadn’t been fired on as he approached, he must have felt he was safe, we had either bailed out or were dead. Upon seeing the FW-190, the gunner (Sgt. Phil Ashook), swung the left waist gun and fired into the 190, shattering the canopy and killing the pilot. The 190 fell off on its left wing and went into a spin. The gunner snapped on his chest pack and left via the waist door.

“It was decision time for me. Frankly I didn’t want to bail out. I went forward to the pilot’s compartment with a gnawing feeling in my gut. An inner voice was telling me to get out. The No. three engine was smoldering and the windshields were gone; there were holes in the wings and it was a wonder the plane was still flying. I could see a lake in the distance at about 11:00 o’clock. I had the wishful thought that it was Lake Constance. With reluctance, I dropped into the nose section, dangled my feet out of the open hatch, looked down and saw nothing but snow covered peaks. With a prayer, I gave a shove and dropped clear.

“I landed in snow waist deep on a mountain side. I slipped out of my chute and slide down to the timber line. It was cold! All I had on was my uniform shirt and trousers with an electrical suit over my uniform. Without an electrical outlet to plug into there was no warmth. I was somewhere down in the Austrian Alps, friendly territory was Italy to the south and Switzerland to the west, both a long way. While coming down in my chute I hadn’t noticed a town nearby so I was somewhere near nowhere. I worked my way down the mountain side into a valley. Upon reaching the valley floor I found a single track rail line running approximately north to south. What luck, ‘The Iron Compass.’ In the early days of flying, pilots often referred to railroads as an iron compass. I was walking in a southerly direction, just off the track bed with hopes that I might be picked up by some Partisans and with thoughts of how I might manage the cold night.

“My left thigh had commenced throbbing where I had taken a piece of shrapnel. I hadn’t traveled more than half a mile when I heard a rifle shot and the whine of a bullet, someone hollered, ‘Hello.’ I stopped and help up my hands hoping it was friendly Partisans. Four elderly men approached me. Three had rifles and one had a pistol. The man with the pistol held it on me while he felt my body for weapons. The other three rifles were leveled at me. I had left my 45 in its holster draped over the back of my seat. Before bailing out I had looked at it and thought, ‘Heck, if I took it its likely to get me killed.’ I couldn’t hit the broadside of a barn anyway.

“I was escorted to a farmhouse about a mile away and locked in a room with one of the men with a rifle. The man motioned for me to sit in a chair, then he laid his rifle against the wall, sat down

at a small table and pulled a tobacco pouch from his pocket. He commenced rolling cigarettes and cutting them in two with a pocket knife. I motioned to the man that I wanted to slip out of my flying suit, he nodded OK. I slipped out of it and dropped my trousers so I could look at my left thigh. The blood had dried and I could feel a small sliver of steel. I got the guard's attention, pointed to his pocket knife, then my thigh with a probing motion. He handed me the knife and watched as I dug out the piece of shrapnel fragment. Upon seeing this, he knocked on the door until someone opened it. He said something in German and shortly a woman returned with some iodine and bandage and dressed my thigh. The guard asked if he could have the fragment and I nodded my head, yes.

"Late that afternoon, after dark, I was taken to the kitchen where there was a wood burning stove. I was told to sit on the floor where some straw had been placed. After sitting for a period of time I heard the tinkle of sleigh bells and some voices outside. Then the door of the kitchen opened and four members of my crew were escorted into the room, Jack Dunlop, tail gunner, Jerry Voska, navigator, John Martin, waist gunner, and ball turret gunner (Phil Ashook) whose name I don't recall because it was the first time he had flown with me. Needless to say, it was good seeing friendly faces. After a short interval, the lady of the house served us a bowl of potato soup, bread and heated wine, all of it was good. Our captors were simple mountain people and treated us well. Living in the Austrian Alps they weren't exposed to the bombings and horrors of war that the city dwellers were. Airmen shot down over cities were treated roughly and some even lynched by irate civilians.

"About midnight a truck pulled up in the yard and the German army took over. We were loaded on the back of a stake body truck with no protection against the wind. In an attempt to keep warm, we lay on the floor of the truck embracing each other. It seemed like an eternity before arriving at a prison camp where Russian prisoners were being held.

"We were locked in individual cells that measured no more than 4' x 8', with just enough room for a bunk bed with a single blanket and a bucket in the corner for a toilet, which smelled. It was cold! I wrapped the thin blanket around me and paced the floor the remainder of the night.

"At daybreak, a Russian prisoner shoved a cup of hot liquid through an opening. Whatever it was, it didn't taste very good, but it was hot. About mid-morning we were escorted from our cells and again onto the stake body truck and driven to a small town's railroad station, where we boarded a train. Its destination unknown to us. On board the train were a great number of school children, either on a holiday or some school outing. Upon seeing them, I thought we would be some sort of curiosity, but they hardly noticed us. During the trip the train stopped because of an air raid. When the all clear sounded, we continued our journey.

"We arrived at Salzburg, Austria about 3:30 in the afternoon. We were then marched to the local jail four or five blocks from the station. During the march, Jack Dunlop made the suggestion to make a break for it. No way. First we probably would not have gotten 20 feet before being shot. Secondly, if we did manage to get away without being shot, we probably would have frozen to death.

"When we arrived at the jail, we were taken to the second floor where five of us were locked in one large cell. I don't remember if we were fed or not. About nine o'clock, the air raids sounded and all lights went out. It wasn't long before the British Royal Air Force started dropping their blockbusters. The USAF precision bombed during the day and the RAF saturated at night. Fortunately, no bombs fell too close.

"The next morning we were transported to the railroad station where there were a number of other prisoners gathered. I looked to see if the other five members of my crew were in the group. I knew they had gotten out because I had walked through the plane before bailing out. While waiting to board the train, we were surrounded by German civilians muttering what I imagine were obscenities. Then I heard a voice in perfect English, 'Hang the bastards.' It was an unhealthy feeling and it became apparent German civilians were definitely a threat to our reaching a prison camp. Just as we were

boarding the train, a man kicked me in the seat of the pants. This infuriated the guard close by and he threatened the man with a rifle butt.

“Aboard the train, five prisoners and a guard were locked in a compartment. That night as we rolled toward our destination, the young guard in our compartment fell asleep. A prisoner by the name of Powers, gently took the guard’s rifle and placed it in an overhead baggage rack and then woke him up and told him his Lt. had come along, found him asleep, taken his rifle and said he would be shot when we arrived at our destination. The poor kid was scared to death. After letting him sweat awhile, we told him where his rifle was and we all had a good laugh. He was a good Joe and spoke fluent English.

“We arrived in Frankfurt the next morning. The station was gutted from bombing attacks. We were warned to keep a low profile; the citizens of Frankfurt had no love for Allied airmen. We were trucked to the interrogation center where we were allowed to take a shower and given Red Cross parcels containing cigarettes, tooth brush and paste, shaving equipment, underwear, and other valuables. The officers and enlisted men were then separated. I did see Jack Dunlop and John Martin after the war, but never saw the other four enlisted men who were aboard when we were shot down and were in the same camp with Jack and John.

“That night air raid sirens sounded and we were moved from our cells to shelters. The bombs fell and the earth shook. It was far more frightening and lasted much longer than the raid we experienced in Salzburg.

“About 10:00 the next morning, I was escorted to a room where I was interrogated by a German Major. The Major preceded each question with the word, ‘perhaps.’ Such as, ‘Lt., perhaps you were on the way to bomb the ball bearing plant (I don’t recall the name of the town)?’ My reply was, ‘perhaps.’ After a number of perhaps answers, he became angry and threatened to have me shot. Thereafter, my replies to his questions were, my name, rank and serial number. The questions lasted about 20 minutes and I was returned to my cell where I remained until the next day. During the brief stay in Frankfurt, all I can recall getting to eat was black coffee and bread.

“About noon the following day we were loaded onto trucks and driven through the smoldering ruins of Frankfurt to a railroad siding. After a wait of several hours, a train backed onto the siding with a number of box cars. As we were loading, one of the prisoners, kidding a guard, said, ‘In the United States, German prisoners get pullman accommodations.’ The guard’s reply, in his guttural accent was, ‘We didn’t invite you here.’

“The box car had straw on the floor. Once aboard, our belts and shoes were taken from us to discourage any thought of escaping. We were en route for two days, during which time the train stopped a number of times. Either for air raids or to pull off on a siding to let other trains go by. Food was scarce. In the afternoon of the second day, we arrived at the town of Barth, located on a small peninsula on the Baltic Sea, approximately 60 miles south of Sweden. After sorting through the piles of shoes and belts thrown into the box car, we disembarked. We were met by a contingent of guards and guard dogs, which marched us to the northwest outskirts of Barth, to Stalag Luft I, an American Airman Officer’s Camp.

“After entering the enclosed barbed wire compound we were lined up in front of some empty barracks and greeted by the camp commander, who filled us in on camp rules and consequences of any misbehavior or escape attempts. We were then assigned to barracks, called blocks, and rooms. We were issued nine bed slats on which to place a straw filled mattress. There were two roll calls a day, head counts, lining up five deep in front of each block and bed slates were counted regularly for wood could be put to several uses by ingenious prisoners intent on escape.

“I was fortunate. I was assigned to one of the two, four-man rooms in the barracks. The other rooms were much larger and housed 12 prisoners. Our room measured 8' x 12' and consisted of two bunk beds, a table, two chairs, a stove and a window looking west.

“Since food was in short supply in Germany, we did not fare too well nutritionally. The Germans supplied us with limited amounts of potatoes, barley, rutabagas, and dark bread made with potato flour; occasionally coffee from ground up roasted acorns, tea made from rose petals and leaves. On two occasions we received horse meat and flat beer. The horses having been killed nearby in strafing attacks and beer from a bombed brewery. Added to what the Germans furnished were the contents of Red Cross parcels that arrived intermittently. The Red Cross parcels contained KLIM (powdered milk in cans), margarine, spam or corned beef, chocolate D-bars, raisins or dried prunes, a small box of sugar cubes, and occasionally a can of condensed milk. When we first arrived the food was pooled and prepared in a central mess hall until it was burned. After that we prepared our own food in our rooms using utensils made from KLIM cans.

“In each barracks there was a latrine and a shower room, but no hot water. In the winter time we would heat water on our stoves and take sponge baths in the shower where there was a concrete floor. It was cold and we didn’t linger.

“After being in the camp for about a week, I was summoned to the camp administration building where I was cordially greeted by a German Captain. After a brief interrogation, to which my replies were name, rank and serial number, the Captain broke into a laugh. ‘Lieutenant,’ he said, ‘We know all about you. In fact I lived on the third floor of the house your father and mother are now living in at 119 Chestnut St., Montclair, N.J.’ He paused, ‘You don’t believe me do you?’ I shook my head, no. ‘All right, your father’s house is located two houses up from Midland Ave. Looking at your father’s house from the street, the Hamiltons live on the left and the Blooms live on the right and the Ruggers directly across the street. Lt., I lived in Montclair from 1936-1939 while working at the Dover Arsenal in Dover, New Jersey.’ I was astounded while he proceeded to tell me all about myself. When I graduated and where I entered the service, the schools I attended, etc. When he finished, he shook my hand and said we would get together and have a drink in the near future. I never saw him again. I am sure most of the information was gathered from newspaper clippings, but he did know Montclair, the house at 119 Chestnut Street and the neighbors.

“To keep ourselves occupied, besides plotting escapes, there were organized bridge and chess tournament, games, boxing matches, and other self-implemented entertainment. Before the mess hall burned, several plays were put on. ‘Hit the Bottle’ was one I tried out for, a minor part, but didn’t succeed. We were able to keep up with the progress of the war by radio. Where the radio was hidden or where it was obtained is unknown to me. I believe it was made from parts obtained from guards for American cigarettes. The radio was tuned to BBC (British Broadcasting Co.). The news was then disseminated and passed on to each barracks via the written word. The German guards searched the barracks frequently for the radio but never succeeded in finding it.

“Whenever new prisoners arrived, after lock up each night, (barring the doors and closing the window shutters) ‘The Ferrets,’ as we called them, (German personnel who understood English) would crawl underneath the barracks to listen to conversations, hoping to gain information from the questions and answers exchanged between the old and new prisoners on tactics, modifications on aircraft, guns, etc. They were called ferrets because crawl spaces underneath the barracks was practically non-existent so they would literally have to furrow their way in. Being aware of this, anything of classified nature was discussed outside the barracks, usually while walking around the compound. The conversations that took place in the rooms when we expected them of eavesdropping were loud, boisterous and exaggerated.

“Prisoners were always planning escapes. Tunnels were being dug almost constantly from barracks nearest the fences. The dirt taken from the tunnels was disposed of in various ways. We flushed it down the toilets little by little or put it into our pants pockets and let it sift through holes while walking around the compound. In one operation it was stored between ceiling and rafters and the ceiling eventually gave in.

“The nearest thing to a mass escape took place in July, 1944. We had been digging a tunnel on the eastern side of the compound for about a month. It was to break out into a barley field between the camp and the town of Barth. On the night of the escape, three of us who were going, exchanged places with men living in the barracks from which the tunnel had been dug. The tunnel was complete except for a few feet it would take to break the surface in the barley field. The break was scheduled for 11:00 p.m.

“A few minutes before 11:00 the air raid sirens sounded. This was great, it gave us a better chance of getting away undetected. The word came back, ‘surface broken.’ In a matter of minutes one of the men backed out and said the Germans were waiting for us. When the first man came out, flood lights came on and the order to halt was given. We were fortunate that they didn’t open fire.

“In a matter of minutes Germans came rushing into the barracks. I was standing in the hall when they entered and was told to stay put. They brought everyone out of the room from where the tunnel originated and started questioning us. It was a long night! When they found out I was not in the assigned barracks I, along with 17 others, was taken to the ‘Cooler’ (military confinement) where we remained for a week.

“Sometime in March, 1945, a prisoner was shot by a prison guard. The prisoner had inadvertently walked out of the barracks during an air raid alert. It was a senseless shooting.

“During April, 1945, things in Germany were rapidly deteriorating. The Allies were advancing on both fronts. Late in the afternoon of April 29th, the senior British and American officers were called to a conference with the German Kommander. They were told that orders had come to move the whole camp westward. The senior American officer stated that he was not willing to move at all and asked, in that case, what the German attitude would be. The German officer replied that he would not tolerate bloodshed in the camp. If we did not intend to move, he and his men would evacuate themselves and leave us.

“The following morning, April 30th, we fell out for the usual head count. It was reported that the German Major in charge of the North Compound, walked to the senior American officer and handed him his pistol, stating he was the Colonel’s prisoner. The Colonel accepted the pistol and reportedly told the Major to get into civilian clothes and get the hell out before the Russians arrived. With that, the German personnel started leaving with their families. The military started blowing up installations at the nearby flak school along with supply dumps and radio installations.

“It was learned that the Red Cross parcels which we hadn’t been receiving for over a month were stored in the flak school. A contingent of prisoners was assigned the task of bringing them into camp. When they arrived at the school they found civilians helping themselves to the parcels. The civilians were dispersed and the parcels brought into camp. Each prisoner was given three parcels. The next morning, May 1st, when we awakened, white flags replaced the German Swastika.

“About mid-afternoon, a Russian soldier and a woman, riding double on horseback, rode up to the closed gates of the prison camp. Through an interpreter he asked for the man in charge. The senior American officer was summoned. When the Colonel appeared, the Russian asked why the gates were still closed and why the wire fences were still standing. The Colonel tried to explain that it was for safety reasons. There were rumors of S.S. Troopers in the area. The Russian soldier, reportedly pointed his automatic weapon at the Colonel and told him he was liberating the camp and wanted the fences torn down. With reluctance the Colonel gave the order. The soldier and his companion soon rode off and the tearing down of the fences ceased. Later, a Russian patrol arrived and informed us that Hitler was dead.

“The next day the Russians drove some cattle into camp so we could have some fresh meat. That afternoon a few of us ventured into the town of Barth. Red flags and white sheets were hanging from most of the buildings. We noticed that the few German males were either very old, crippled, lame, or blind. The shop windows were empty. The people of the town were standing on their steps,

crying and in terror. The Russians were running wild, drinking, looting, etc. While standing on a corner we observed a Russian tank moving down the street and a young boy, about 12 years old, standing on the curb waving a German swastika. As the tank passed, he spit at it and the gunner of the tank swung his gun around and shot the boy. This was enough for us and we started back to camp.

“On the way back to camp, in the barley field west of camp, near the beach, we came upon the bodies of a man, two women, and a baby in a carriage. We believed it was murder, suicide, and we learned later that it was just that. The Burgomaster had taken his family of wife daughter and granddaughter on a picnic, shot them and then himself, rather than fall into Russian hands.

“On May 3rd, Marshall Rokosovsky, the Commander of the Russian Army arrived and had a discussion with Colonel Zemke. General Rokosovsky reportedly informed Colonel Zemke that he planned to march us to a rail-head, where we would entrain for a trip to Odessa on the Black Sea. From there we were to ship out for a return to American hands. We heard that Colonel Zemke got in touch with General Doolittle at SHEAF Headquarters in Paris and informed him as to what was going on.

“Reportedly, General Doolittle informed the Russian that these men were under his command and he would take them out. Whereupon Rokosovsky said this was now Russian territory and that he would dispose of us as he thought best. General Doolittle then replied that he was coming in to take us out and if forced to come in with bomb bays ready and guns loaded, that’s how he would do it. It took several days to work out the details of the airlift.

“On May 12th we marched to the airport outside of Barth, carrying the few possessions we owned. Mine consisted mostly of cigarettes which I had won shooting craps and playing poker. On the way we passed a labor camp of French, Italian, Polish soldiers and civilians. They were free too. We shouted greetings in Kriegie fragments of German, French, and Italian.

“We passed the concentration camp located on airport property. A few German prisoners, under Russian guard, were burning evil smelling rubbish.

“At the airport we boarded B-17s, 30 to a plane, taking positions in the bomb bay and flight deck. On the way to France we flew over the Ruhr Valley; the cities of Aachen, Cologne, Duren; cities leveled by Allied bombing attacks. Total devastations!

“After landing at Rheims, France we were put on stake body trucks. While waiting for the convoy to pull out and take us to Camp Lucky Strike, French civilians gathered around us wishing us well and asking for cigarettes. I reached in my box and started tossing packs of cigarettes into the crowd. There was a mad scramble for each pack and before the convoy pulled out I had disposed of all my cigarettes. I learned later that I could have sold them for as much as ten dollars a pack.

“That night at Camp Lucky Strike, I went to church services, got down on my knees and thanked God for looking after me and delivering me safely into Allied hands. We were given physicals, issued uniforms, partial pay of \$200.00 and put on diets to build up our system. One day a C-47 landed in a field and General Eisenhower emerged, greeting us and shaking hands as he moved through the crowd. As he shook my hand he asked, ‘Lt. are you getting enough to eat?’ I assured him that I was. On another occasion I was walking down a camp street and I came upon a crap game. I stopped and watched awhile. In time I was asked if I wanted in. I accepted and was handed the dice. My first bet was \$100.00, half of my partial pay. My first roll was ‘Snake Eyes,’ crap. I put down my remaining \$100.00 and rolled ‘Box cars,’ crap again. I was broke and cured of shooting crap.

“In closing I’d like to say that life as a POW in Stalag Luft I was a picnic compared to what POWs held by the Japanese during World War II, and POWs of Korea and Vietnam, suffered in torture and humiliation during those wars.”

2nd Lt. Gerald H. Voska, navigator on B-17 #42-31859. June 4, 1990: “I’m sure that I was on all missions mentioned through February 24, as I was anxious to complete my tour.

“As I remember, the February 24th mission was to have been 47 for me. Of all the missions I was on, number 47 was the most memorable. Joe Pausha was the Operations officer of the 49th Squadron and assigned the positions in the formation on each flight. He had assigned us the tail end position of the last flight, and the 2nd Bomb Group was the last Group position that day. This was not a very desirable place to be. As it turned out, it wouldn't have made any difference because half the Group went down that day and, as expected, we were the first to go.

“As I recall, we had almost reached our target altitude, and had crossed the Italian border into Austria, when we were intercepted by enemy fighters, and in greater numbers than we had ever had before. The attack came from the rear of the formation and our tail gunner, S/Sgt. John Dunlop, calling out the positions as they were coming in on us. Our tail gunner reported hitting one attacker and our lower turret gunner, Sgt. Phil Ashook, another. We were hit several times ourselves with one hit under my feet at the navigation table. At that point I realized that I had been hit in the left leg and bleeding through my electric suit.

“A few minutes later the formation pulled away from us, and the bail-out alarm sounded. At that point everything was automatic with no thought except to put on our parachutes and get out before the thing blows up. My parachute was adjusted too far down from my chest, and when it opened it nearly broke my back. When I looked up at my chute it was full of sizable holes at the peak and then I realized it had taken most of the hit that got me in the leg. There had been, at my feet, under the desk, a piece of sheet iron, my flak vest and chute.

“In floating down from 20,000 feet I only saw one other chute and began to wonder if bombardier Olsen and I had been too hasty. We were coming down in a little valley between two mountains that peaked several thousand feet above the valley floor. The ground below was covered with snow and number of evergreen trees. I came down between the trees and sank into the snow to my hips. My partner came down about 200 yards from me and was caught in a tree. Before I could reach him he had freed himself and was on the snow. It turned out that instead of Olsen it was the other chute carrying Ashook, the lower turret gunner.

“It was mid-afternoon and we decided that we would need to wait until after dark to travel, however, within 20 minutes there were several groups of rifle carrying men coming up. They motioned us to come down and, when we reached a road, we were joined by several other crewmen, thus accounting for everyone except Joe Pausha.

“We were taken to a schoolhouse in a small village, which must have been a lumber village. The villagers searched us and took us to a central room in the building and posted guards at the doors. As evening came we were given some soup and bread and wondered what was in store for us next. We also wondered what had happened to Joe and speculated that probably he had come out after us and was farther down the valley.

“After dark an army truck arrived and we were taken down the mountain to a camp where there were several injured American prisoners. A British medic examined, cleaned and bandaged my wound. We were given a place to sleep.

“The next morning we were taken to a train station, put on a train headed for Salzburg, Austria, picking up more American POWs along the way. By the time we got to Salzburg, our nine had grown to about 30, including Joe Pausha. Thus our crew was all accounted for and we were in reasonably good condition.

“In Salzburg we were locked in the city jail for the night. The following morning, which would have been the 26th, we were given some bread and cheese and taken to the railroad station for transport to the next destination, which turned out to be Frankfurt-Am-Main. Although the distance from Salzburg to Frankfurt is not more than 200 miles, it took the whole day because the railroad system had been bombed in many places, requiring re-routing and changing trains. The number of guards increased to 10 or 12, not for fear of escaping, but to protect us from the populace who appeared to be

extremely hostile. In one instance, when we were being herded down a stairway to board a train at a lower level, an irate middle-aged man attempted to jump the railing to get to our group. He was immediately struck with the butt end of a rifle and he tumbled to the bottom of the stairway. We, and our guards, walked on by leaving him where he had fallen.

“Frankfurt was a receiving and processing center for aviation prisoners. We were given a hot meal and allowed to shower, shave and get cleaned up. We were issued, by the Red Cross, a box containing toilet articles, socks, underwear, hand knitted sweater, in addition to a blue R.A.F. overcoat and sewing kit. We remained in Frankfurt for the rest of the day and got some much needed rest and regular food.

“On February 28th, we were sent on our way to what was to be our permanent camp, Stalag Luft I at Barth. For this journey we were put into box cars in which half the space was for us and the other half for the three to four guards. The floor was covered with straw and the space was tight with 25 men to one half of the 40 & 8 box car. I can’t remember how many car loads of us there were. Our numbers kept increasing, and there were several. Frankfurt to Barth was more than 400 miles, and due to the condition of the railroad system, as I mentioned previously, the trip took three to four days. We were in complete darkness most of the time and were frequently shunted off into sidings for one reason or another. One of the reasons was that the rail yards were the targets for both the R.A.F. and our own bombers. When this happened, the guards locked us in the cars and took off for safe areas, leaving us in the dark. We finally made it to Barth about March 3rd.

“New prisoners arrived at Barth several times a week, and each group was met by those already there in the hope of finding someone they knew with news from home or of the Group they had been attached to. It was no different with our arrival and there were many reunions. There has been a great deal written, movies made, about Stalag life and what I have read, and seen, has been quite accurate. It was an experience that I would not want to go through again, but I’m glad I had it when I was young.

“There were so many stories of attempted escapes, tunnels dug, harassments and punishments that I could go on and on. With six to seven thousand Americans, in their 20s and plenty of time on their hands, there can’t have been an idea that wasn’t considered or acted upon. There was some activity going on in the camp that constantly caused concern, frustration, and uneasiness for our captors, and most of it contrived by the captives. I was always glad that I was one of us rather than one of them.

“Our camp was overrun by the Russians the first part of May, 1945. After about 10 days of negotiations, our planes were allowed to land at a nearby airfield and we were flown to France in stripped down B-17s.

“What our crew experienced was rather ordinary with some others that I have heard about. I kept in touch with Joe Pausha until his death in November, 1989. My contact with my old crew seemed a thing of the past until I received a phone call from Vic Marturano, our co-pilot, from North Carolina as a result of this research, and we are grateful for that. We had lost contact with one another for 45 years.”

S/Sgt. John W. Dunlop, TG on A/C #42-31873, November 2, 1990: “Our truck ground toward the airfield as we digested the news of our briefing of the German installations located at Steyr, Austria. Somehow the briefing had cast a mood over us that seemed to pale to others by comparison, when we suddenly came to a halt with all of us piling out next to our ship. In the darkness, little if any, conversation passed on among us as we busied the final checks and inspection of our stations. There was some last minute shuffling of our crew make-up, as we were about to have a new ball turret gunner, Sgt. Phil Ashook, and bombardier, 2nd Lt. Charles Olsen, join us on this mission. The early morning was busy, yet seemed endless when at last our ship rolled down the airstrip to lift off and join the formation of the Group.

“We were informed that something in excess of a hundred bombers would be participating on this mission. The realization dawned on us that no matter what number of bombers might be involved was of a very small consequence as our bomber was the last ship in the last echelon of the last Group taking part in the entire mission. The colloquialism, ‘TALE END CHARLIE’ had a new real meaning to us.

“A steady drone of the engines and a sterile view of the patchy cloud formations was purely hypnotic. From the tail gun position, one got the distinct impression that there was an awful lot of nothing out there, when off to my left, at approximately 4:00 o’clock appeared a distant speck that more and more began to look like a twin engine Messerschmitt flying parallel to us. Apparently checking our heading, rate of climb, air speed and all other things that would be of interest to German pilots.

“It wasn’t long before the enemy fighters appeared and checked us over a few times, then assembled into a stepped up attack formation and came at us from between 5:00 and 6:00 o’clock high. The attack formation was such that you could see only a single plane at a given time, although you damn well knew that another six or so fighters were stacked up behind the lead ship. Coming in from the sun was another distinct advantage for them as it tended to obscure our vision. The lead ship would cut loose at us then roll off to his left and downward to reassemble for another pass. In the instant the Messerschmitt you were shooting at rolled over, the pilot in the plane immediately behind simply had to lay down on his triggers and spew out everything he had at you. I was positive of at least two hits, but however, this was neither the time nor place to verify a coup. This could best be done by others behind you.

“We were showered by 20mm fire and rocket bursts that looked like old gutter pipes mashing through the air. There were a number of moments when our ship would feel as though it was haltingly making its way flying through a huge vat of bumpy mud. I could see and feel where our ship had taken a number of hits. Our bomber sure had a sickness with the end of our port side wing hit, the number three engine hit, our tail assembly hit as well as other unable to be seen. The sum of these things, in addition to alarm bells and trailing black smoke, sort of told me it was time to leave.

“I turned and latched my chest pack to my harness and crawled back into the waist area. The waist gunners, radio operator and I looked at each other like the entire scene was unreal. Someone thought it best to hang in there with the ship, however, this wasn’t my cup of tea and I jerked the waist door release. It was quite a shock to find the handle in my hand with the door still in place. I welled with fear and anger and charged into the door with both the door and I out into the wild blue younder. It’s a time like this when you start talking to yourself to make a decision that this would be a very poor time to pop the chute.

“Fall free and get out of this mess before pulling the ripcord. While falling I could see others bailing out and our plane veering away and down from the formation. It was very amazing to experience no true sense of falling! Nothing at all like I would have imagined a fall would feel. I estimate that the chute opened after approximately a 3,000-foot fall. It opened like a cannon had gone off and I felt a dull cramping feeling through my guts. After several tries, my feet managed to catch in the shroud lines enabling some adjustments to be made providing a considerably greater degree of comfort. Coming down in the chute was very strange due to the absence of sound, which in itself seemed to create the sound of silence.

“While counting bail-outs from our ship, I noted that one of the late ones to jump seemed to be coming down at a greater rate than the others. I later learned that it was our navigator whose chute had taken a 20mm hit and filled it with holes. Down below there appeared to be nothing but snow, ice and more snow. I spotted a small hamlet ahead and kept a fix on it until I landed on the western slope of the Alps.

“Sitting in the snow, the first thing to come to mind was what my mother was going to say when she learned about this. It was cold and time to get down off the mountain. I slowly worked my way

downward until I came upon some brush and scrub trees. A short rest was discouraged by the cold so I tossed away my 45 pistol, then took my knife, cut two sticks and a section of my chute and again worked my way downward, using the sticks as braking devices to slow or stop my descent as needed. During this progress, a snake-like disturbance was visible in the snow below. It turned out to be Germans, in snow garb, coming to hunt us down. Closer to the foot of the mountain I found the waist gunners, Sgts. Henderson and Martin, in good shape and we then concluded we had to keep moving or freeze. So we circled in a partial arc and cut the trail behind the Germans that were looking for us. It looked like they had come from the small hamlet so we continued to backtrack their trail. Night had come upon us and from our position at the edge of the hamlet, observed a farmhouse which seemed to have an elderly lady and younger women in the farmhouse. There wasn't much choice as whether to freeze or knock on the door. The younger woman answered and we tried to explain that we were Americans that had been shot down and would do no harm. Very fortunately the girl spoke good English. She and the elderly woman were a bit wary but exceptionally calm. Response to where the railroad tracks were located were answered by statements that you will freeze - 'For you the war is over.' Our question session came to an abrupt halt when the German snow troopers entered the house with their dogs and captured us. We were taken about 8:30 p.m. and hastily taken to another location a short distance away. We were held there with others who had been captured earlier. Our engineer, T/Sgt. Paul Behm was found there with a doctor checking out pulled stomach muscles and some others of our crew, that we recognized, as they were herded past the door.

"The local schoolmaster functioned as translator between ourselves and the German soldiers collecting at this location. Each of us seemed to regard the other as somewhat of a curiosity. Later a German Luftwaffe Captain appeared on the scene offering us cigarettes and warm drinks. He barked out a few orders and things hummed. He offered a friendly hand but, behind it all, could see he was of real military bearing. His English was pretty good and in words reminiscent of the farmhouse girl, assured us that for us the war was over. He fully accepted our name, rank and serial number as if he had gone through this before. We learned that he had been shot down in the air battle that noon and jokingly pointed out that our only problem was having landed in his backyard.

"Late that night we were loaded in trucks and taken for a cold, cold ride to a labor camp in the Salzburg, Austria area, where we were locked in cells. The next day we were taken to Munich, Germany and placed aboard a train, in small groups, with our guards and headed for some unknown destination. We ultimately arrived at a German processing center at Wetzler, near Frankfurt, Germany. Here we were thoroughly checked over and interrogated. Certain items of clothing and other personal effects were taken away from us and in turn we were issued POW dog tags, toilet articles and a few other basics. We were segregated according to some design and crowded into box cars for a long journey to POW camps.

"After several days ride, we were taken out of the box cars and learned that we were in East Prussia at Stalag Luft VI, near the village of Hydekrug, in what is Lithuania. The camp had been established for some time and was run in good systematic order. Some of the prisoners dated back to Dunkirk with an oddball collection of British, Aussies, Canadians, New Zealanders, and an increasing number of Americans, coming in on a steady basis.

"We were quartered in large barracks with a stove at each end plus an assortment of water buckets and others for personal needs to carry us through the night. During the day, when we were unlocked, there were fixed established buildings to take care of personal needs. Unfortunately one of our men was shot (S/Sgt. Walter Nies) and killed when he stepped outside, after being unlocked, on his way to wash.

"We became very acquainted with roll calls, tea, black bread, searches, and the same routine over and over again, although not necessarily in that order. From an internal point of view, our camp was extremely well organized with particular credit to a Canadian named Pauls. What was going on

in the outside world was available to us on a nearly daily basis. More often than not, we knew what was going on before our captors did. We were aware of the invasion long in advance of the Germans.

“June, 1944 was extremely eventful both in the East and West. From our vantage point we could see the sky on the horizon light up, accompanied by distant rumbling of artillery, which ultimately turned out to be the Russians advancing towards the West.

“The situation had hardly taken place before we were taken to the port of Memel on the Baltic Sea. At dock was the German battleship, Prince Euan. We were unceremoniously crammed into the hold of an old coal ship and departed for another destination. Crammed is truly a gross statement. Buckets, sweat, and stench was the menu of hours that slowly passed by, your chance of sitting down, in the same spot, were pretty sketchy. Days had passed when the hold was opened up and we found ourselves docked at Stettin, Germany.

“We were hand-cuffed and put in box cars again to head to our next prison camp. Arriving at a station where we were unloaded and hand-cuffed to another prisoner for a march to the prison camp. The German officer in charge of this move was Captain Picard. He was the strutting, raging, screaming, storybook type of Nazi. Young German Marines, which were our guards, were whipped into a frenzy, which we shared, as Picard would rage and fling his arms about. If it had been his objective to depict possible and probable feelings of doom, he certainly was one howling success. He hounded and pressed the guards to strike, poke, jab, and stab at us over the entire march until we arrived at the prison camp area. One of the marines, at my side, with his eyes full of apprehension and fear, slashed at me with his bayonet, cutting my clothing and making a small cut on my side. With two of us hand-cuffed to the other, caused me to drag my buddy, Ballard, along the ground in my efforts to keep clear of any repeat action.

“At the entrance to the camp, the hysteria subsided and we found ourselves back to square one, in mid July 1944, at our new Stalag Luft IV near Grossychow, Pomerania. All was pretty much of the same routine we had previously experienced right through into early January 1945. Then the flashes and rumbles on the horizon were of sufficient cause to take us on another box car ride through Germany. Sounds of sirens and other activity told us that lots were going on and this was confirmed by peeking through cracks in the walls of the box cars. Considerable damage could be seen all through the country. Finally we arrived at Nurnburg, Germany as guests at another prison camp.

“Our new camp proved to be a cut or so different than our other prison camps. Our soups, or stews, had bugs in it. We had vermin, lice, and you could wager your grandmother that any meat found in the food meant that another dead mule had been dragged into camp. We were extremely close to targets being bombed. Many of our nights were spent sitting in shallow trenches holding a bed slat over our heads for protection. Flak shot at the bombers literally rained on us.

“Either late February or early March 1945, we were assembled outside of our barracks with all our possessions, formed into groups and marched through the gates of the camp and marched through the back roads of Germany. We headed southeast and eventually crossed the Danube and turned back just short of Pilsen, Czechoslovakia. We marched in columns, four abreast, and headed southeast of Nurnburg, then south until we arrived at a huge prison camp at Moosdorf, Germany, Stalag VIIA.

“The countryside was beautiful and seemingly untouched by the ravages of war. Even the attitude of the people displayed a marked difference than those in the urban areas. In a sense, our protracted march was not unwelcome as it became very apparent the plus/minus 20 km hikes each day extracted a greater toll on our guards.

“Although the scenic countryside was beautiful, our column was strafed by our own fighters one day, mistaking us for German troop movements. As a result of this happening, from that day on we had an umbrella of our planes overhead all the way to the gates of Moosdorf. It was truly medicine for us and awakening of the truth for our captors. It was countdown to the end.

“There were somewhat of 27,000 prisoners at Moosdorf comprised of Russians, Mongols, Serbs, Croatians, British, French, Arabs, Gurkhas, Senegalese, and Americans. You name the nationality and you would be sure to find it in this group.

“When the end came it was April 29, 1945. We saw tanks and ground forces descending into the camp. Units of the Third and Seventh had arrived and, for us, the war was really over! I never saw so many medics, Chaplains and other people breaking their backs feeding us, being kind to us, helping communicate with loved ones or attempting to cater to whatever crazy wish we expressed. Shortly after all the attention, pills and communications with those at home was history, we were transported to the Regensburg/Schweinfurt local and flown to France, trucked to LaHavre and Camp Lucky Strike. While there we were debriefed, counseled, provided new clothing and equipage to include measured diets to make us sound. We were constantly shown warmth and friendliness. There simply wasn't any such things as bad rumors - all rumors were good.

“At last we boarded a ship and departed LaHavre, France and stopped at Liverpool, England before continuing homeward. I can't say how many days our cruise across the Atlantic lasted, but I can assure you that we sipped egg nogs all the way. After all, I had to pick up 42 pounds that had been lost along the way.”

S/Sgt. Ernest Henderson, RW on B-17 #42-31873. October 25, 1990: “I enlisted in the Army Air Corps on October 2, 1942, and after basic training went to gunnery school at Fort Myers, Florida. Five weeks later I had my gunnery wings and was promoted to Sergeant. I can say that I was sure proud and felt at that time I could almost walk on water. My next stop was at Lowery Field, Colorado to armament school and on to Ephrata, Washington. It was there that I came together with nine of the finest people that I was to know. My crew: Joseph J. Pausha, pilot; Vic Marturano, co-pilot; Gerald A. Voska, navigator; Frank Barron, bombardier; Paul H. Behm, upper turret; myself, ball turret; John D. Martin, left waist; Edward Clancy, right waist; John W. Dunlop, tail gunner; and Earl J. Wilkins, radio operator. We had completed our final training and after furloughs, proceeded to Newport News, Virginia and then by convoy to North Africa. It was there that we were assigned to the 49th Squadron of the 2nd Bomb Group.

“We started flying missions with veteran crews until all of us had combat experience. After a few of this type of missions we came back to being our own crew; flying together as a team.

“Our first plane was ‘WOLF HOLLOW,’ with Uncle Sam as the wolf and the Three Little Pigs were Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo. We went on some long missions out of North Africa, crossing the Mediterranean Sea to targets in Italy and the Balkan countries. After the invasion of Sicily and Italy, we moved to Italy and then were hitting targets in Northern Italy and all the Balkan countries. The worst for me was flying across the Po Valley. I hated the flak and that place was just plain Hell! Once we flew a mission that the flak was so thick we couldn't see the plane ahead of us. We came back to the base so full of holes, we were like a sieve. It was here that we said goodbye to ‘WOLF HOLLOW’ and were issued a new B-17 with closed in waist windows. We liked our new B-17 but it was with mixed feelings that we left our old standby behind.

“On February 23, 1944 we went down to the operations tent to see if we had a mission on the 24th. Listed on the board we were down to fly what we called the ‘COFFIN CORNER.’ The next morning we learned that our target was Steyr, Austria, an aircraft components factory.

“The day came up cold and clear and two of our crew were down sick and went on sick call. They were replaced by Phil Ashook, who took my place in the ball turret. I went to the waist and Lt. Charles P. Olsen went as our bombardier.

“All the planes formed up well and we started north to our target. As we neared the coast of Italy, one of our crew said, ‘Take a good look, I don't think we will see it again.’ It was then we all had a feeling that something was going to happen.

“We test fired our guns and settled down for awhile. As we crossed the coast into enemy territory, we were on the alert for fighters and flak. We were deep into enemy territory when we were hit by a large force of Me-109s and FW-190s. They came at us from all directions. It was then that I wished we had turned back like one of the 96th did. But we were so busy defending ourselves, all of our thoughts were on getting rid of those fighters.

“I looked out the right waist window and counted ten Me-109s coming right at our position in the formation. Nine of them did not make it, the tenth rolled right through and shooting all the way. One Me-109 exploded right off our wing. It was at this point that I heard the pilot say, ‘My God Vic, we have lost our instrument panel’ and smoke filled the cockpit. Our crew heard the abandon ship bell and the pilot telling us to get out. As I turned, I saw Jack Dunlop kicking out the door and he disappeared from my sight. I next left the plane and as I looked back, I counted nine chutes open. I thought we all got out but not sure of the tenth. Thank God, when we got to POW camp, all ten were alive.

“I landed on top of a mountain peak and, about 100 yards on the other side of the peak, Jack Dunlop landed. I was in snow up to my armpits and was starting to get real cold. Using my vocal cords, I quickly got in touch with Dunlop. We had no idea where we were, what country we were in and what direction to go. Being high up in the Alps we knew we had to get to lower ground, or freeze. We slid down the mountain on our butts. It took us a long time and we were starting to get real cold. We finally came to what must have been a logging road with a camp. We came into the camp and, with a calendar on the wall, figured we were in Austria, but not sure. We followed the logging road to a farmhouse. It was here we were introduced to the Home Guard, who were looking for us. The Home Guard was made up of old men and young boys. The young boys wanted to show us how tough they could be. We were taken to a small town where we were put on a flat bed truck to be moved to Salzburg, Austria. Boy, that was a cold ride! By now it was night and the trip was about 20 miles. We were put in separate cells with one thin blanket to keep us warm. I don’t need to tell you, it didn’t work, no sleep. We kept jumping up and down to keep warm.

“The next day they took us to the train station in Salzburg, which had been bombed on other missions. We were not liked by the people, who spit and threw rocks and other stuff at us. Looking up the mountain, I could see the monastery where they made the musical, ‘The Sound of Music.’

“We were put on the train and sent to Frankfurt-Am-Main, Germany. Here we came together again and I found all the rest of the crew had made it. It was here we were interrogated by the Germans. Name, rank and serial number, but they knew more about us than we did ourselves. From here we were separated for good, the officers going to one camp and the enlisted men to another.

“We were sent to Stalag Luft VI and introduced to POW life. POW life in Stalag Luft VI was not too bad. We were warm, had enough to eat and through the Salvation Army, had all sorts of sporting equipment to use. We had softball teams and played different barracks. It was here that we got our first Red Cross parcel, which we were supposed to get each week, but never did.

“Someone bribed the guards, so a radio was made and we were getting BBC news. We really knew what was going on all the time. The news from the Russian front, with the Russians moving so fast, we knew we would be freed or have to move. In July 1945 we got the answer.

“We were put in box cars and moved to the coast. There were so many of us in each box car that we were unable to lay down. Sitting, with our legs stuck under our chin, it took two days to get to our destination, which was a boat used to carry coal. On this boat were five or six levels. We were stacked like cattle, still not having much room to move or stretch out. For once I was lucky. I was one of the last on board and in a position close to the open hatch. I was able to get fresh air and a cool breeze. I was really sorry for those in lower levels, hot, dirty, and the smell was terrible. Eating meals and getting water was out of the question. The guards kept telling us we would be at our next prison camp soon.

“Arriving, we were told to take off our belts and shoes. This was to prevent us from trying to escape. Again loaded in box cars for our trip to Stalag Luft IV. After reaching our destination, we were hand-cuffed by chain links and not given time to put on our shoes or belts. We were forced to run two to three kilometers. The Captain of the German guards was very mean and his men were 15 to 16 years old. They were told that we were American gangsters and were to take nothing from us. They were told to use their bayonets or rifles if we did not keep up. They kept us going by using dogs and they would stick us with bayonets. We were unable to carry our personal belongings and run at the same time. Many of us just dropped our personal items on the roadside.

“It was at Stalag Luft IV that we found out what being a prisoner of war was all about. Our treatment at this camp was one of harassment, intimidation, and just plain mean. We were never allowed to do much without a guard watching. When we arrived at camp, we were stripped and searched everywhere to make sure we didn’t have anything hidden away. One of the guards, who we called ‘Ham Hands,’ was very cruel. He beat some, pushed and kicked others; not many of us got by him. By the way, he got his name by having the biggest hands I have ever seen. Our receiving BBC news came to an end and most of the news we heard were rumors.

“We left Stalag Luft IV on or about Valentine’s Day, 1945, and the rest of our POW life was spent marching. We marched for about 80 days, slept in fields, barns or any place they wanted to put us. Cold, wet and always uncomfortable; not eating, dirty, it made life miserable. I don’t believe there wasn’t one of us that didn’t pray and ask God to take care of us and guide us through this miserable trip. I really believe this experience has made me keep the Lord in my life.

“On May 5th we were liberated by a squad of British soldiers. We knew something was wrong. When we started moving about we found there were no German guards around anywhere. By ten o’clock the British had us started back to Allied lines and freedom, something that most Americans take for granted. We crossed the Elbe River and were flown back to Brussels, Belgium. Here we came under U.S. control again.

“We were transferred to Camp Lucky Strike. When I was taken prisoner I weighted 140/145 pounds. When I was released I tipped the scales at 84 pounds. While at Lucky Strike, we had two very important visitors. One was General Bradley and the other was General Ike, each thanking us for what we had gone through for our country.

“Back in the States we were granted leave for 60 days. I was not allowed to go home until I reached 100 pounds.

“I don’t know if this will ever be read by anyone, but I would not close without saying, to all those who made this trip with me, a very special ‘THANK YOU!’ Without your help and encouragement, I would have given up. A special ‘THANK YOU’ to Phil Walters from Readfield, Maine who carried me on his back for three days as my feet were all blistered and bloody. Again, ‘Thank You and God Bless.’”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #41-24618 - 49TH SQUADRON**

F/O	George P. Durney, T-60096, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	James D. Wise, 0-663821, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Harold E. Larsen, 0-692027, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Bernard M. Martin, Jr., 0-729778, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Claston D. Campbell, 18060868, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	William (NMI) Meiselbar, 35372740, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Jesse C. Hart, 6821740, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Elvyn O. Hollingsworth, 18047222, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Edward J. McCarvel, 33237569, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Charles A. Daughdrill, 18010989, R/O.	(POW)

2nd Lt. James D. Wise, CP on A/C #41-24681. July 5, 1991: I had flown 41 combat sorties before that day, February 24, 1944, when our crew was shot down on the mission to Steyr, Austria.

“Many of our missions were to targets in support of our ground forces; marshalling yards, railroad bridges, road junctions, and beachheads. We hit many airdromes to soften up the German Air Force, aircraft factories and steel works. We flew three missions to Southern France, two missions to Greece, and several missions into Austria. Sofia, Bulgaria was a particularly tough target, always encountering a large enemy fighter force.

“Of course the mission to Steyr was the most memorable one. The sky was clear and there were three Groups of us and we were the rear Group. We were crossing the Alps and it was here that they decided to hit us. I looked up and there were 21 in line abreast coming in at 4:00 o’clock high. There would be one or two B-17s gone in just a minute. After the first pass I don’t know how many of us were left. They would come in, six or eight at a time in criss-crossing waves at our rear. Between 120 to 130 of them.

“Early in the game we got a bad hit in the left wing and lost No. 2 engine. We didn’t have to feather it but lost a lot of power from it. We had to salvo our bombs to keep near the Squadron. The glass above and behind Durney, our first pilot, came through and his head started bleeding. I thought he might be hit bad so I shook him. He shook his head.

“We were both damn busy but I could see one of our planes veer away, on fire, now and then. I couldn’t see too much of the fighting as it was materializing from the rear. Far below, a B-17 was gliding down apparently, OK. Maybe his wheels were down and there were no fighters near him.

“Our plane had holes and strips of streaming metal just this side of the aileron and trailing edge. Jess Hart, who was one of the waist gunners, called and said we had holes in our horizontal stabilizer.

“After this we swung our two wing men into trail, which was per instructions at briefing. At the I.P. on the bomb run we lost one of them. We were #5 Squadron. I didn’t have any idea how #6 Squadron was doing but could make a damn good guess. The flak at the target was welcome.

“It wasn’t long before all the planes behind us were gone. No. 3 engine had lost power and our bomb bay doors wouldn’t come up, causing more drag, and in no time we were dropping back ourselves. I took a quick tally and told Durney I didn’t think we would make it. Thirteen planes had gone down. I called the Group leader and asked, no pleaded with, them to slow down.

“Slim Campbell came down from his top turret and said he was out of ammunition as were two other gunners. The others were running out fast. We were at 19,000 feet and losing altitude fast. Most of the controls were shot out. We had the AFCE set up since the flak began. A 20mm exploded and hit the top turret Slim had just climbed out of.

“In the distance the P-38 escort appeared. “Just five more minutes,” I said. We called them. The flak started after us and we pulled around after the Group. Another pilot told me later they were instructed to leave us.

“The fighters made two more passes. On the first pass they got Durney’s controls and he told me to get his chute. While I was getting it they hit us again and great flames rolled up inside the bomb bay. It was time to go. The navigator told me later that not a bit of glass was left in the nose. He also said that the crew got 11 enemy fighters, which I didn’t doubt.”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-29638 - 49TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt. Frank H. Glass, 0-669701, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Russell L. Little, 0-803520, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. John (NMI) Bacsu, 0-749416, N.	(POW)
1st Lt. Eugene M. Hayes, 0-563264, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Robert M. Garnett, 15082163, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Richard L. Hancock, 11044776, L/T.	(POW)

Cpl.	Donald B. Torpy, 13021464, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Edmund F. Ward, 34306211, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Rex C. Cooper, Jr., 20904544, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Robert M. Rand, 20113061, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of 1st Lt. Frank H. Glass, P, after liberation: “The plane went down approximately 15 to 20 miles east of Salzburg, Austria. I bailed out with six others: Lt. Hayes, Lt. Bacsu, T/Sgt. Garnett, S/Sgt. Ward, Cpl. Torpy, and S/Sgt. Hancock.

“Lt. Little did not bail out. I told him to feather an engine when it was hit and as he leaned forward to do so we received a burst in the cockpit and he fell forward in his seat belt. The cockpit was riddled with 20mm and machine gun fire three times. I believe he was hit hard by the last two bursts. He fell forward and just stayed there the rest of the time. His body was still in the burning, spinning plane when I bailed out.

“I do not believe S/Sgt. Cooper bailed out. Just prior to the loss of the plane, S/Sgt. Cooper called out fighters before they made their initial pass and I could feel the vibrations of the tail guns, at first, before the top turret opened up. The tail of my ship was riddled many times. I could feel the explosions in the tail control surfaces through the rudder and elevator controls and I was told later, by the pilot behind me, that most of my tail was shot off. So I believe that Sgt. Cooper was killed by 20mm or machine gun fire, which was known to riddle the tail.

“T/Sgt. Rand was killed instantly by a rocket exploding in the radio room before I gave the order to bail out. The left waist gunner, Sgt. Ward, heard the rocket explode in the radio room and stepped in to look. There he saw Sgt. Rand’s body. Our formation was under attack by rocket carrying Ju-88s and FW-190s and we had not reached the flak area yet. Sgt. Ward said there was a hole in both sides of the radio room about six feet in diameter.”

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31870 - 49TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt.	Clarence T. Moyer, 0-800389, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Jay L. Monicken, 0-803659, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Robert D. Dodson, 0-811586, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Vincent A. Kepler, 0-679545, B.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Saul M. Tauber, 32613354, U/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Charles B. Ball, 37655772, L/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Carl H. Davis, 37172916, R/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Edward C. Moleti, 31203871, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Marlin E. Eckels, 13094806, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	James H. Jones, 31191805, R/O.	(KIA)

2nd Lt. Jay L. Monicken, CP of A/C #42-31870. April 13, 1990: “We flew a new B-17G over from the States but before we flew our first mission, a Major wanted to fly his last mission in a new plane. It was supposed to be a ‘milk run.’ It was his last mission, also for the plane.

“Having no plane assignment, our crew then flew as replacements. Our navigator, 2nd Lt. John V. Harrop, was shot down over Yugoslavia but the underground repatriated him in May of 1944. Our bombardier, Lt. Robert Gallup, was already in a hospital with flak wounds when this last mission was called. My co-pilot, Don Larson, went to Foggia to visit him while my engineer, S/Sgt. Saul Tauber, flew replacement with Moyer. The rest of the crew I had never met.

“On February 23, as I recall it, the Group was briefed for Steyr, Austria but the recon planes found the target was overcast, so the mission was aborted. We didn’t have radar then. We instead circled over the Tyrrhenian Sea, using up fuel before landing.

“February 24, we were again briefed for Steyr. The old hands said it would be a tough mission, since somehow if the mission was briefed for two days in a row it would be a tough mission. It seems the Nazis were always informed and ready.

“The 2nd Bomb Group was the last Wave over the target. The I.P. was Lambach. We encountered some flak, but nothing serious. Then it seems that the Nazis had everything that could fly, up against us. I thought I even saw Stukas, service ceiling 12,000 feet, up at 24,000 feet. Most of the attacks were from 6:00 o’clock and the worst were the Ju-88s with their 20mm cannon. They stayed out of range and picked us off, one at a time, from the rear.

“Our tail gunner, S/Sgt. Eckels, was dead when a 20mm, I think, got us in the elevators. We went up into a stall, with the engines full power, while Moyer and I tried to push the control column forward with our feet; it was useless, just like pushing on a giant spring. I wanted to control with the auto pilot but Moyer said, ‘No,’ and we fell off in a spin. We tried to stop it with opposite full rudder but it then started to wind the other way. Moyer called ‘MAY DAY’ to abandon. I don’t recall hearing acknowledgments from any of the rest of the crew. As I recall it, Moyer went to the navigator’s compartment while I headed for the bomb bay. The bomb bay doors were open but the bombs, 500 lbs., were still in the shackles.

“The plane was really winding up, so I crawled across the base of the top turret and pulled the salvo ball, but nothing happened. Engineer Tauber was gone. I guess maybe I panicked because I tried to jump between the fore bulkhead and bombs. My chest pack got hung up in the arming vanes of the bombs. That’s all I remember until I woke up, falling free.

“I went to pull the ripcord with my right hand but had my chute on upside down, so I pulled the handle with my left hand but it wouldn’t let loose. I presumed the vanes had bent the soft pin that holds the chute together, so I flipped up the flap and straightened the pin and pulled again. I must have been tumbling because when the chute opened it straightened me out so that my flying boots took off, landing me in my oxfords. My back ached for six months after that.

“An Me-109, I think, was circling me and I thought of stories of airmen being shot in their chutes by fighters but he never angled in on me. He just gunned enough to keep flying speed until I landed on the side of a mountain in snow up to my waist. Then he took off.

“Three men about a half mile away were yelling at me. I was trying to unhook the chute from the harness, but they must have thought I was reaching for a gun because they started shooting, so I dropped down in the snow. When a round kicked up snow next to my elbow, I raised my hands as best I could from a prone position. On the off chance we may have drifted into Switzerland, I asked them if they were Swiss. They assured me they were ‘Hitler.’ I had no major wounds except the back of my hands were lacerated, both my goggles were smashed and the back of my helmet was cut clear across, horizontally.

“They marched me to a farm with a bunkhouse with several British POWs sitting outside, calling ‘good show,’ etc. I was taken into the bunkhouse, made to lie down on a bunk and since I was so exhausted, probably from lack of oxygen, I either passed out or fell asleep. When I woke up, there were two or three women carefully taking apart the panels of my chute.

“Two of the men marched me single file down a path, cleared through the snow, down the side of the mountain. These men were Landwacht people, apparently, for I was not searched, so I tore up my briefing notes and let them blow away and threw away my Masonic ring, as instructed by S-2.

“In the valley, they marched me through a small town, maybe Lambach, and upstairs to an office with all the Nazi trappings, swastikas, Hitler, Goering, etc. I was told to lay on the floor. Late, after sunset, they brought in a Sgt. Ball and I found he was the ball turret gunner on Moyer’s crew. He had been captured across town from where I was captured. He told me that when he got the ‘May Day’ call he rolled the ball with the guns down so he could get out of the hatch and get his chute. He said that the radio operator, T/Sgt. Jones, and waist gunners, Sgt. Davis and Sgt. Moleti, were trying to get

the main loading hatch door opened, but it was jammed. He said he put his shoulder to the door and they pushed him and he went out the hatch. He said he had not seen them afterwards.

“After much phoning, two officers came and we were taken in the back of a four-door Ford, which got stuck. We made an attempt to get out while the officers were digging the car out but we didn’t even get out of the car. The rest of the trip, the officer in the front passenger seat watched us with a pistol in hand. We were then taken to what I think was Linz and into some officer’s quarters where there were about a dozen others that had been captured. When others arrived, we were loaded into trucks and taken to Wels Air Base and into a mess hall where they gave us some soup. We slept there, on the floor of the mess hall that night. There were a lot of prisoners there, some I had not seen since training in the States in the Arnold Provisional Group. It runs in my mind that some were from England, so the mission must have been coordinated from the Eighth and Fifteenth Air forces.

“I had the opportunity to talk to some of the officers in the formation and there was a navigator, 2nd Lt. Harold Larsen, who was just ahead of us and he saw us go up and into a stall and then a spin. He told me it appeared that two men dropped out of the navigator’s hatch, just as we fell over in a spin and may have hit their heads on the ball turret guns that were turned down for escape. He said he saw one parachute open. Some POWs said they saw my engineer, S/Sgt. Saul M. Tauber, dead on the ground, covered by his chute.

“As I recall, the next day we were loaded on a train to Frankfurt-Am-Main for interrogation. There were so many of us that they didn’t have enough solitary confinement rooms and about 20 of us were put into one solitary room overnight.

“From Dulag Luft, we were taken across town to a Red Cross station where we were issued overcoats, underwear, toilet articles, etc. We were permitted to send cards to our parents. The next day we were loaded on box cars and over a period of three or four days, completed our trip from Frankfurt, via Berlin, to Barth and Stalag Luft I.

“My co-pilot, Lt. Larson, arrived with the pilot, Lt. Storm. He had been assigned for a mission on February 25th to Regensburg. He also told me that the waist gunners, Sgt. Honis and McDaniel; radio operator, S/Sgt. Miller; and tail gunner, Sgt. Vaughan, from our original crew were on board with him. As time passed, Larson and I thought our bombardier, Gallup, had recovered from his wounds, finished his missions and gone back to the States. In June or July we saw him being marched into Stalag Luft I, Compound III. Navigator Harrop, on being repatriated, was sent back to the States and was involved in many War Bond drives, eventually got his pilot’s wings and, I believe, stayed in the Air Force until his retirement.”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #41-24571 - “INDIANAPOLIS WAR BIRD” - 49TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt. Harry C. Meyer, 0-799429, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Ralph J. Sneed, 0-745209, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt. John J. McTeague, 0-739044, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Ralph L. Karsh, 0-679540, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Benjamin M. Hughes, 6885542, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Edwin D. Jackson, 15331978, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Webb J. Digh, 34437401, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Lawrence J. Dunn, 31280514, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. John B. McMullin, 12172252, T/G.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Kinnon W. Taylor, 7001234, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Ralph K. Karsh, B on A/C #41-24571, after liberation: “I bailed out with Lt. Meyer, Lt. Sneed, Lt. McTeague, S/Sgt. Dunn, T/Sgt. Hughes, and S/Sgt. Taylor. I think S/Sgt.

McMullin, S/Sgt. Jackson, and S/Sgt. Digh were dead according to other crew members, but I have no definite knowledge of that.

“Lt. McTeague bailed out through the escape hatch in the nose, which later jammed. Both pilot and co-pilot bailed out through the bomb bay. The radio operator bailed out with me. We bailed out at approximately 21,000 feet and landed near the small town of Ampflwang, Austria. The treatment wasn’t bad at all and the food sufficient. Jail was run by a Captain (police) and two policemen who were not very bright.

“Meyer, Sneed, McTeague and myself were in the same jail. We met Sgts. Dunn and Taylor at the airport in Wels, Austria where we were taken for a three-hour ride from the village. Our plane was reported to have hit a farmhouse and exploded. One bomb was still hung up in the racks.”

A German casualty report issued by the German Command at Vocklabruck, Austria, stated that the bodies of Sgts. Digh, McMullin, and Jackson had been recovered and buried in a forest near Moosbach, Austria.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31390 - 96TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Darrel W. Mayfield, 0-742878, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	William M. O’Hare, 0-748460, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Leo W. Zaplatynski, 0-696006, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Edwin W. Nunnery, 0-673924, B.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Wilbur M. Gustafson, 18157570, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Nathan W. Lubowski, 18189816, L/T.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Woodrow N. Lundquist, 37094691, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Mervyn E. Deibel, 32834549, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Ralph E. Johnson, 39905018, T/G.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Richard I. Basehore, 20822941, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of 2nd Lt. William M. O’Hare, CP of A/C #42-31390, after liberation: “I believe that eight of us got out altogether. Lts. Mayfield, Nunnery, Zaplatynski, T/Sgt. Lundquist, S/Sgt. Deibel, S/Sgt. Gustafson, and myself were captured at Wels, Austria. S/Sgt. Basehore and S/Sgt. Johnson believed to have been in the plane when it either exploded or crashed. S/Sgt. Lubowski was the first to have parachuted from the waist.

“T/Sgt. Lundquist helped S/Sgt. Lubowski out the waist door and that was the last seen of him. It is not known if he was injured, but was seen jumping from the plane. There was a lot of lead coming through the plane so it is possible that his chute was hit before jumping.

“I don’t know if S/Sgt. Johnson bailed out. T/Sgt. Lundquist and S/Sgt. Deibel followed S/Sgt. Lubowski out of the waist thinking that S/Sgt. Johnson would follow. He was last seen in the waist ready to leave. S/Sgt. Johnson had come from the tail and S/Sgt. Basehore from the radio room and they were both on the left side of the waist when last seen. I remember that is what Lundquist told me after we were captured.

“When I was captured with Lundquist, I was taken to a building in Wels. In an hour or so a girl about age 12 came into the room, excited, and headed for the officer in charge, with some parts of a bomb sight and an envelope containing one of Sgt. Johnson’s dog tags. I couldn’t understand a word that was said. Whether that girl got the dog tag from Sgt. Johnson’s body is not known.

“I believe that S/Sgt. Basehore bailed out. He was last seen preparing to jump. From hearsay information from other men, I gathered that he had been shot on the ground or just prior, in his chute, by the Germans.”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31666 - “MISS LAID” - 96TH SQUADRON**

Capt.	John W. Thalken, 0-791158, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Richard L. Gower, 0-802608, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Samuel P. Mayer, 0-683848, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	William C. Williams, 0-676901, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Herman (NMI) Sussman, 6932684, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Karl J. Letters, 31078048, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Robert T. Peterson, 16070345, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Thomas H. Bell, 31157197, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Joseph A. Peters, 13008414, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	George O. Dean, 18131001, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Roger C. DeClements, CP of B-17 #42-5777 after the mission. “We were on the bomb run, about five minutes before bombs away and plane #42-31666 was to the right and behind us. There were only one or two other planes in the Squadron at this time. I saw a fighter coming in at 2:00 o’clock, level, which closed to about 500 yards from #666 and he apparently got the pilot and co-pilot with his bursts. No. 666 nosed up momentarily and then went into a steep spiraling dive and that was the last I saw of it.”

S/Sgt. Robert T. Peterson, RW Gunner on B-17 #42-31666. February 15, 1990: “February 24th found me filling in for a crew member that had burned his arm in a tent-stove accident. His name was Oscar Rome and his position that day was to have been the right waist gunner. The plane was a B-17G named “MISS LAID” with the last three numbers of the serial number being #666.

“George Dean, the radio operator, showed up without electrically heated flying gloves and parachute harness. I had extra gloves and a mechanic came up with a harness.

“We formed up and headed north for Steyr, Austria but one plane turned back due to an engine problem. Our element was the second from the rear of the entire formation with the 49th behind in their ‘TAIL END CHARLIE’ position. My pilot was Captain ‘Bill’ Thalken with Lt. Byrne on our left wing and I believe, Lt. Darrel Mayfield on our right wing.

“Before we got to the target we were jumped by loads of eager beaver, almost ‘Kamikaze’ fighters, both Me-109s and FW-190s. Primarily they started at our rear and the bombers and fighters began to go down like clockwork, like the children’s ditty about ‘ten little Indians, and then there were none.’

“We picked up a big hole in our right wing but it didn’t fire up and I figured we would make it to the target. About then, the plane on our right, Mayfield’s, got a flaming explosion in their right wing that threw them up and over us. At this time we were approaching the I.P. and then we lost our left wingman, Lt. Byrne, which left us a single plane about a mile behind the balance of the Group with no hope of catching up.

“Two Me-109s came in to almost our right wingtip and as I raked them with fire, they gave off puffs of smoke and dropped away. It was about this time that our radio man came to the rear of the plane to bail out and the left waist gunner, S/Sgt. Thomas Bell, motioned that he was out of ammo. I think we had two engines out by this time and no intercom working but no fire was visible to me. Tom Bell got his chute and motioned to mine. Joe Peters’, tail gunner, chute had opened so he had to cradle it in his arms to bail out.

“Dean, Bell and I were grouped very close together while coming down and an Me-109 came in and did a roll-over by my feet causing my chute to collapse. As a Christian I didn’t need a fire escape from hell but certainly prayed that Jesus would ‘be with me’ and I feel that he has been with me ever since.

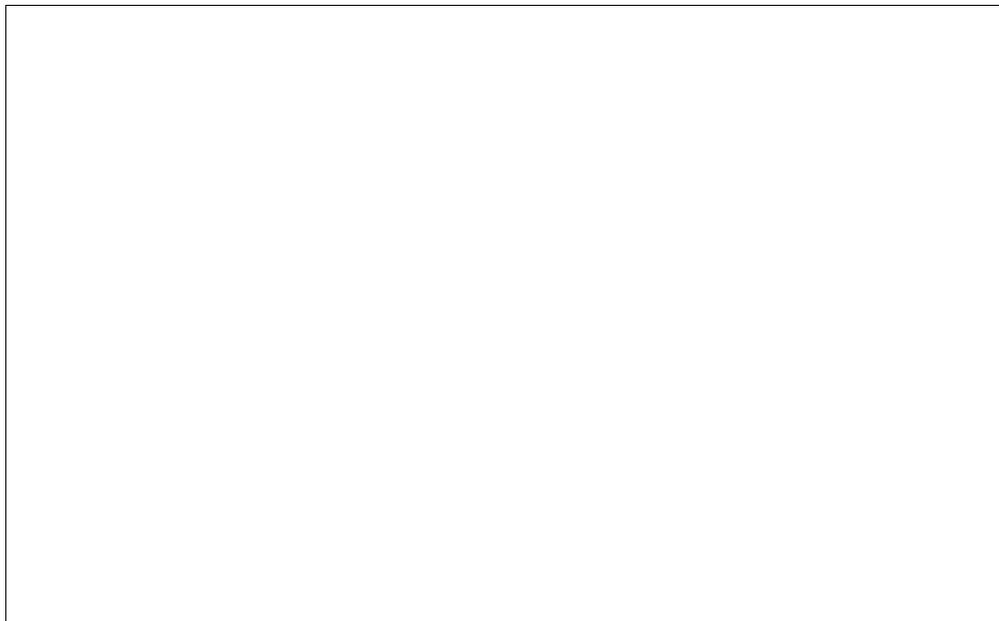
“With three chutes close together, we came down near a small Austrian town that probably was our I.P., and we were met with a small plane that began to circle us all the way down. It was disconcerting to see bomb craters in this small community, some with dirt and bricks thrown back on top of maybe 14 inches of snow.

“As we came down to the ground I thought I would hit some high tension wires so began to slip my chute and had it collapse a second time. I just turned the shroud lines loose and it reopened.

“The three of us got together on the ground, but because of the closeness of the town, that plane and the deep snow, we were soon captured by an Austrian Home Guard Unit along with a Lt. who I first thought to be Lt. Kurtz of the 20th Squadron. However, he was not from Chicago so it may have been Lt. Bartell, the co-pilot that day with Lt. George Verbruggen’s crew. He was from Chicago also so we came into special treatment as ‘flying gangsters from Chicago.’ Whoever it was, was bleeding from hand or arm, but quite composed. I knew that all the NCOs from our plane got out because they all showed up at Stalag Luft VI and knew that Captain Thalken and 1st Lt. Perry Mayer, navigator, got out but have not seen Lts. Williams or Gower since.

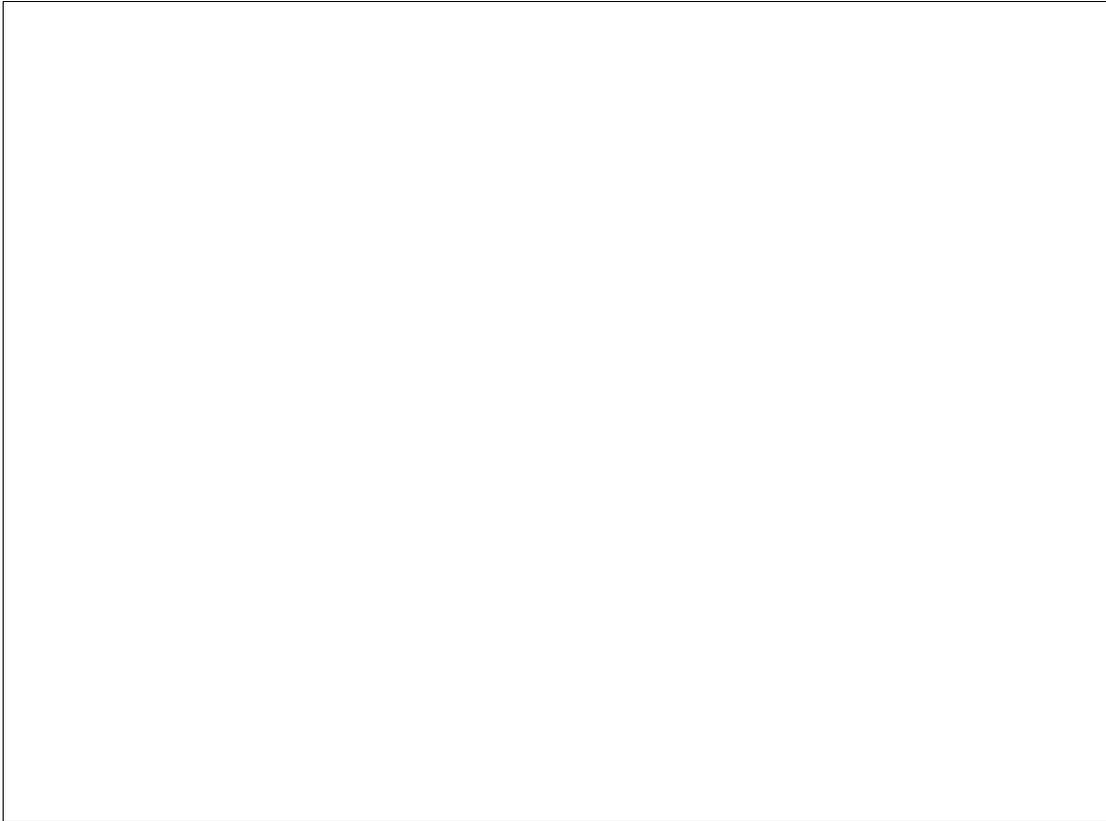
“During our interment at Stalag Luft VI, S/Sgt. Walter Nies of the 96th Squadron, shot down 24 January 1944 over Sofia, Bulgaria, was shot and killed because he left his room early one morning before the guard had left the compound. The guard was removing the 2 x 4s that locked each room.

“Escape was a preoccupation for most and each plan was supposed to be cleared with an ‘escape committee.’ Roy Grandquist was my rep. No escapes were made from Stalag Luft VI alive in spite of ‘Hogan’s Heros.’ The camp was built on sand with an outer fence, then barbed wire, an inner fence, a ‘V’ ditch and a warning wire in front of the ditch. If anyone touched the warning wire, the guards in the tower would shoot and the ditch would collapse in on the tunnels.



Sgts. R. Peterson, O. Beene, W. Lundquist - after liberation  
(Courtesy - R. Peterson)

“In July we were evacuated from Stalag Luft VI by a coal ship named ‘MAUSEREN.’ Before we left they gave us Red Cross parcels from the warehouse - POWs were supposed to get one each



April 26, 1945 - Liberated American POWs by 104th Infantry Division - Crossing Mulde River at Bitterfeld, Germany (Courtesy - R. Peterson)

week, but seldom received them.

“July 18th was the day we made the ‘BAYONET RUN’ to Stalag Luft IV from the train station. They had taken our shoes and belts from us after leaving the boat and boarding a train to take us to the new camp. This action was to prevent an attempt to escape. That day we were hurriedly lined up at the train station and before we could get our shoes and belts on, we were forced to start running to the camp. Many of us were also hand-cuffed to another POW. As we started to run, this red faced German Captain shouted at the young 15-17 year old marines guarding us, that these were the ‘flying gangsters from Chicago’ and they should use their weapons, which were rifles with bayonets. In addition to being hand-cuffed, we were trying to carry our food we had not been able to eat for three days for lack of water. As we stumbled along the road, we could see in the woods on either side, soldiers with machine guns. Word was passed down the line that we were being forced to try to escape and be shot down by the guards in the woods as these young guys and guards, with dogs, kept chasing and jabbing with bayonets.

“The net result was that most of the POWs dropped their supplies and ran the two - three kms as best they could, being hand-cuffed, cramped from the box car and boat ride, and lack of water. Many

were falling down, as my partner did, but most escaped the bayonets. Hundreds were struck or bleeding but I don't believe any were run through. I saw one Luftwaffe guard fall of heat prostration as he tried to make the run. I made the run with all my 'stuff' and picked up 11 lbs. of dried milk in 1-lb. cans and carried all my things in a pair of long johns that were knotted and tied around my neck. They kept us outside the camp for more than a day without water. We couldn't eat the milk, etc., and then we were sent into camp to water, without food.

"Many of the POWs don't want to make any connection to their experiences. I didn't for 40 years. In prison it was not unusual to hear someone start relating his bail-out story and have his friend say, 'I'll listen to your story for a candy bar.' Everyone had his own story: 'I came down in a B-17 tail, no chute.' 'I survived a streamer via evergreens and snow on a mountain slope.' Joe Peters bailed out with his chute like a bundle of laundry. Bob Woodruff, 306th Bomb Group, 8th Air Force, was putting on his harness when the plane blew, came to in the air with one arm in the harness and couldn't get it on so pulled the D-ring and next he knew he was coming to the ground held on by his radio operators wrist watch; his arm survived. Many of the guys became so tired of the stories they became anti-social.

"We were evacuated from Stalag Luft IV on February 6, 1945. Then we were forced marched for about 80 days. It was on this march that John Clark died (20th Squadron, crewman of Lt. Paul A. Foust). As I recall, he was injured on February 24th and showed up at Stalag Luft VI, fully recovered, about a month after his crew. He looked better than most of us. After we marched out of Stalag Luft IV, we went for nine days with only what we carried out of camp. We had snow for water and I was with most of Clark's crew: Beene, Riccio and Hammond. Word was passed through the column that John had died in his sleep. Talking to Byrne's radio operator, T/Sgt. Everett Bauman, last month, he said he was there when John couldn't be revived. An English doctor chewed out a German officer because he died of blood poisoning from a foot infection. Most of us had bloody feet.

"On the long march, we slept where the day ended, barn yards, open fields, swamps, and sometimes in barns with hay and 500 to 600 other guys. We watched as fuel tank farms were bombed, as P-47s strafed along rail yards and as a P-47 bombed a locomotive that unhooked from a train and tried to make a run for it - he didn't make it! Saw submarines and V-2s as well as various other rockets and early jets, but the best thing we saw was an American jeep with an armed American Major who came over the Mulde River at Bitterfield, Germany and took us into the lines of the 104th Infantry Division on April 26th, 1945.

"In two weeks we were in Camp Lucky Strike, which was a hospital tent camp for RAMPs: Recovered-Allied-Military-Personnel, near LaHavre, France. I have the feeling we were drugged there for recovery purposes. It seemed that we would get out of our cots to eat and go back to cot-eat-cot, etc. About the 1st of June, Lundquist, Beene and I got off the cots to get to the cheese sandwich and egg nog line the Red Cross girls had set up. It was rainy and sloppy as we passed through the tent and just as we got our sandwich and egg nog, bullets began to fly through the tent. Naturally we all flattened out on the floor, without spilling egg nog and sandwiches. When the shooting stopped we got up but the guy next to us, on one side, took a slug to the head and lay still. On the other side, a Lt. got shot through the arm. Later on, we found that some blacks got drunk and decided to go into the Red Cross women's tent but a young guard with a carbine stopped them. We had been bombed, strafed and bruised from the Russian front to the American lines but that was a bad day, so we went back to our cots.

"After about three weeks, I hitched a ride to England on a B-17 and stayed there two weeks. I then caught a ship for the STATES! I was discharged at San Antonio, Texas in September of 1945.

"The war made many changes in our lives. We met many men, saw the good times and the bad, and some experiences drew some men so close together that you would have thought they were brothers. Such a brother to me was Technical Sergeant Woodrow "Swede" Lundquist. We first met in North Africa. I had been moved around in various positions until I finally signed up for gunnery and

that is where I met Swede. We hit it off right away and eventually ended up together in the 96th Squadron as replacement gunners with several others. In Italy we were grouped in one tent, felt like stepchildren, with no regular crew. Whenever a gunner was needed to fill in, one or all of us might get that early morning call. Such was the case of that February 24th morning. Swede filled in on the crew of Lt. Darrel Mayfield at the right waist and I on the crew of Captain Thalken, also at the right waist spot. It was ironic that we went down on the same mission, ended up in the same POW camp and the same barracks. We survived together! After the war we kept in touch but Swede had a sort of wanderlust. He never married, never really settled down, went from place to place, job to job and for a time, worked with me in my trucking business. One day in November 1989, I had a call from Swede that he wasn't feeling well and I told him he should check into a Veteran's hospital, which he did. I had another call from him November 22nd and he was in the Veterans Hospital in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He said he was feeling fine and was to check out of the hospital the next day. The next day I received a call from the hospital that Swede had died of a heart attack. He had given my name as a person to notify in case of death. Swede was buried in the Santa Fe National Cemetery, Santa Fe, New Mexico, with full military honors. Another brave American, and Brother, laid to rest."

T/Sgt. Herman Sussman, Flight engineer on A/C #42-31666. March 29, 1992: "I arrived in England with a service squadron in June of 1942 via the Queen Mary as a T/Sgt. (pre-war status). I functioned as an airplane and engine mechanic whose duties were to remove any and all damaged airplanes from runways or fields and repair them or salvage usable parts. Our Material Group was with the invasion forces at Oran, Algeria, and later moved to Tunis.

"I had sought a transfer out of the Material Group and the only outfit I could transfer into, in rank, was a Bomb Squadron. Having worked on B-17s and having met several of the Engineering Officers, I was told to see the Commanding Officer of the 96th Squadron. He told me there were no openings on the ground crew for an airplane and engine mechanic with the T/O at that time, but, he had an opening for a Flight Engineer Gunner. I told him I was well qualified as a mechanic but had no experience in gunnery training. I was told not to worry about not having any training as he would see to it that I would have all the training necessary after the transfer. After being transferred to the 96th Squadron, I received about three hours total in the upper turret mock-up, about 30 minutes of break down of the twin 50 caliber machine guns, one session with an aircraft recognition class, and a couple of flights around the Base to get acquainted with the duties of a flight engineer on take-offs and landings.

"When I first shipped overseas my dog tags had my name, serial number, blood type and religion. After being transferred to the 96th Squadron, I immediately cut off the corner of the tag that had religion printed on it, and as it turned out later, it proved to be a good move on my part.

"On February 23, 1944, the Group was scheduled on a mission to Steyr, Austria (my 34th mission), but the mission was scrubbed. As per usual, after a mission, or on a free day, some of the different crew members would go to town (Foggia or Manfredonia) for something to eat, or whatever. During the late afternoon, while in town eating lunch with several of my crew members, I was surprised when told by the woman who owned the eatery, that we were scheduled to go to Steyr the following morning. After we finished our meal we returned to our base, I immediately sought our CO and told him what we had heard. He made the statement that if a mission was scheduled to Steyr the next morning it was a surprise to him and he would check it out at Headquarters. That was the last time I ever saw our CO. Later that night, crews and briefings were posted. After morning briefing, crew members were told that the mission was to Steyr.

"I was due to fly on ship #42-31666, called 'MISS LAID.' The ship was so new that the name still had not been painted on the nose. Our ship was flying lead ship in the right 'V' of the lead 'V' of the second wave. We were met with light flak during the first part over enemy territory. Suddenly

skies were clear of flak and I knew we were going to be hit by fighters. They came in from the rear knocking out the tail plane in each 'V,' then moving to the next. During the attack, our 'V' was falling farther behind the formation and several times I called to the pilot to bring our 'V' closer to the lead 'V' for mutual protection, but he was unable to do so. During this time planes were being shot down like clay pigeons in a shooting gallery. There were Me-109s, FW-190s, JU-88s, and for the first time, there were some kind of jet fighters (this can be verified by Robert Peterson, waist gunner on my ship).

"The fighters would come swarming in at about 4 o'clock high, make a pass and a plane would be hit and go down. Our plane was hit by two jet fighters making only one pass. The nose section was hit, one engine on fire, and I don't know where else we were hit. The pilot ordered me to go back and check the waist section. Before I could get fully out of the upper turret, he gave the order to bail out. I opened the door to the waist and saw the other gunners getting ready to go. I turned back to the nose hatch when I saw Lt. Mayer was wounded. I helped him on with his chute and shoved him out the nose hatch. The bombardier followed and I went out after him. I saw only one chute when coming down, but was too far away to tell who it was. On landing I was met by a farmer with what happened to be the biggest bore shotgun I have ever seen - more like a cannon than a shotgun. He took me to a small building on his farm, a shed of sorts, where another GI was held, shoved me in and locked the door. I don't remember the other GI's name, he wasn't from the 96th, but we decided to try to escape through a window. We managed to get loose into the fields heading westward for almost 18 hours before being captured by army personnel and then turned over to the Gestapo for questioning.

"The interrogating officer questioning me seemed to be very polite and my answers to all his questions were only my name, rank, and serial number. He was replaced by a higher ranking officer, a Major I believe, and I was vigorously questioned by him. He insisted that I give him information about the Squadron, base, and other pertinent information. He kept asking how I spelled my name. I kept repeating with a double 'N' at the end, and a mistake had been made when my dog tags were repaired. As I am of the Jewish faith, I was really frightened, having heard of atrocities being committed against Jews in Germany.

"I must have convinced him because his attitude changed. I don't know where the Germans got their information, but the interrogator told me more about the 96th and 2nd Bomb Group than I knew. He told me that Peterson was a replacement for Sgt. Rome, who was injured, and that 2nd Lt. S. Perry Mayer was promoted to 1st Lt. on the morning of the 24th, that his first name was Samuel, and other such items. Hell, I had flown with Lt. Mayer on over 15 missions and he was always called Perry.

"After interrogation, I was put in a cell and soon afterwards was shipped via freight cars to Dulag Luft, going by way of Frankfurt. From Frankfurt we went by box car to Stalag Luft VI where I spent five months before being moved again. This time the whole camp was moved via freight cars and then freighters to a Baltic seaport, where we were herded into box cars. This time, however, I was handcuffed to another POW with about 60 or more people to a 40 capacity car. Finally we came to a halt and then came the horror of our run to a new camp, Stalag Luft IV. We were continually prodded by the bayonets of very young Krugs-Marines with guard dogs snapping at our heels.

"We were interned there until the Russians started their offensive and began moving westward. We could hear the cannons and knew something was due to happen. The guards were beginning to get nervous and jumpy and started treating the POWs with a little more kindness, of which there wasn't much to start with. Finally, orders were given to evacuate the camp and a flurry of activity took place with the POWs making knapsacks out of shirts or anything else that could carry their belongings.

"The POWs were separated into several large groups and took off in different directions for a long walk through the German countryside, almost always heading westward to avoid the advancing Russians. We slept in barns, haystacks, open fields, or anyplace we could bed down to rest. Never in any towns or villages. For over three months of traveling, west, south or north, and westward again. We knew we were close to being liberated.

“The German officers had disappeared. The enlisted German guards gave their pistols, or rifles, to some of the POWs. Through translations, or motions, they tried to make it clear that when we were liberated to be sure to tell our liberators that the goons, or guards, hadn’t mistreated us and really weren’t such bad guys. BULL! Surprisingly enough, I don’t think there were any reprisals to the guards by any of the POWs who had the weapons.

“About two days later we walked across a bridge, over a small river, to be greeted by GIs. Our entire group was then taken to Camp Lucky Strike. We were told the rules of the camp, stripped, deloused, showered and given different clothes. The only thing I had remaining from the day I was shot down was my dog tags.

“When I was shot down I weighted 190 pounds and when we were liberated I was below 125 pounds. There were many POWs that were worse off than myself. At the camp we were fed boned turkey, chicken, egg nogs, milk shakes, anything to put weight back on us. We got fat all right, but all in the wrong place. Anyway, shortly afterwards, some of us were pronounced fit, taken to a seaport, loaded on ships and sent to Fort Dix, New Jersey, for further physical examinations. I was finally cleared and given a 15-day leave with orders to report to Miami Beach, Florida for rehabilitation and evaluation.

“Upon the end of the war I re-enlisted in the Air Force with the Military Air Transport Group stationed in South Carolina. All during the time I was a POW, as many others, I lived for one day at a time, forgetting many events, places, times, dates, and happenings. To this day there are many blanks in my memory about those days spent in Stalag Luft VI and IV, the long march around Germany avoiding the Russians and the time spent in Camp Lucky Strike. Quite a bit of the above places, and times, were brought back to my memory by my first time reunion of the 2nd Bomb Group in September, 1991, at Wright Patterson Field, Dayton, Ohio.”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31459 - “LION’S DEN” - 96TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Thadden J. Lyons, 0-1010379, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	John N. Wilson, Jr., 0-684588, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	John E. Devereaux, 0-809554, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Robert C. Gamache, 0-682023, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Merrill (NMI) Fenn, 31167393, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Henry (NMI) Carrizales, 38365980, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Arthur (NMI) Carl, 16144065, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Martin B. Lyons, 17050985, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Joseph P. Gaby, 32518342, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Rowland (NMI) Raymond, 11097876, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of S/Sgt. Joseph P. Gaby, TG on A/C #42-31459, after liberation: “Lt. Gamache and Lt. Devereaux left from the nose, T/Sgt. Fenn from the bomb bay, T/Sgt. Raymond from the waist and I from the tail escape hatch. I believe the pilot, co-pilot, ball gunner and waist gunners were in the plane when it crashed. To my knowledge, the pilot and co-pilot were still in the cockpit.

“I met all other surviving crew members in a German Headquarters except T/Sgt. Raymond, who was shot and stuck in a tree, in his parachute, but he made it OK and is home now.

“While we were waiting to be transferred to a camp, a guard told us that they found our ship and there were five white men and one colored one dead. We were very doubtful that this was our ship because there were only five of us missing. We had a question in our minds about the colored person’s body because one of our crew was a dark skinned person who was Spanish.

“S/Sgt. Carl, S/Sgt. Lyons and S/Sgt. Carrizales were hit by fighters while waiting their turn to bail out. I did not see them after I left the ship. I do not know if they were alive when I bailed out.”

2nd Lt. Robert C. Gamache, B, on A/C #42-31459. March 12, 1990: "My first mission was to Prato, Italy, and I flew 21 missions in all. My regular co-pilot was Kendrick Reeves and he remained at the base on the day we were shot down, to be checked out as first pilot. John Wilson flew as our co-pilot in place of Reeves.

"The history records are wrong on plane #42-31459. Five men got out. I'm one of them. Joe Gaby, my tail gunner, said to me that he saw Carrizales, Carl, and Lyons all cut down by machine gun fire from 109s as they stood by the waist door contemplating whether to bail out or not. I personally saw my pilot, Thadden Lyons, and co-pilot, John Wilson, dead in their seats. The records show that seven chutes were seen to leave the plane but I say that five died in the plane.

"My navigator, 2nd Lt. John Devereaux, and I bailed out after we were sure that the pilot and co-pilot were dead and we were definitely on fire. I was wounded in the neck by flak and received no treatment until Stalag Luft I where Captain Nichols, of England, operated and removed flak fragments. I met Gaby, not wounded; Fenn, flak wound in back of head, and Raymond, very badly wounded with many hits, on the ground in Steyr. So, five of us got out and five did not.

"As I learned over the intercom from Carrizales, we had a large hole in the wing behind No. 3 engine and gas was pouring out in torrents. There is no doubt in my mind that this gas hit the turbochargers or something electrical. We did have two good minutes, after being hit, to get out, but remember, the pilot and co-pilot were dead so that's why the ball turret and waist gunners were by the waist door trying to decide what the hell to do. I personally did not see an Ju-88s, Me-110s, or Me-210s. Just a s---load of Me-109s and FW-190s. I received a full credit for an Me-109 that a tail gunner called out and was coming past. A going away shot from my younger duck hunting days. It is fully documented on my discharge papers.

"Devereaux and I were in Stalag Luft I together. I spent 30 days in the cooler, for digging tunnels, twice. Weighed 100 pounds, from 170, when liberated by the Russians on May 1, 1945. I never knew that the 96th lost five planes that day.

"To me the worst part of the whole God-damned thing was standing in the chow line getting served the slop they called food! The second worst was the WWI tents that could catch fire from the barrel stoves. Then the damned mud! Those weren't the good old days. In those days I was so proud to have graduated in the upper third of my class for bombing accuracy. It hurt to have to salvo bombs off the beach at Manfredonia just to kill some fish for the starving Italians.

"After the war I drank beer with Karl Letters. He was a ball turret gunner in the 96th, MIA, 2-24-44 on Bill Thalken's crew - Stalag Lufts VI and IV. We became friends. He died in 1975. I went to his funeral, a sad thing in that only five people were there. He did have the American flag. For years I used to go out on February 24th and get drunker than a skunk. My wife couldn't understand why. I have knocked it off since.

"I'm a past commander of the Massachusetts Chapter of the American POWs, life member of the D.A.V., Military Order of the Purple Heart, and French American War Veterans.

"God bless all those guys, dead and alive, in particular, the 2nd Bomb Group."

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31640 - "MISS HETTIE" - 96TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt. James B. McCord, 0-729046, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Harlan C. Wisner, 0-686295, CP	(POW)
2nd Lt. Allison W. Lunan, 0-809665, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Donald D. Gilmore, 0-682106, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Homer J. Cooley, 35337819, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Saul (NMI) Zafran, 32435742, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. William C. Payne, 38153019, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Maynard D. Tingle, 37403345, L/W.	(POW)

S/Sgt. Ralph F. Edwards, 37441209, T/G. (POW)  
T/Sgt. James O. Gatewood, 37237087, R/O.\* (KIA)  
\*Died of wounds in Austrian Hospital.

Statement of S/Sgt. William C. Payne, RW, after liberation: “We were attacked by a large force of German fighters as soon as we crossed the Alps. We had no escort. Over an hour later, as we neared Wels, Austria, there had been eight B-17s behind us. The last of the eight, our right wing ship, went down. A fresh formation of 38 FW-190s arrived high on our tails. They split into two formations, dived to our level and attacked our ship from 5:30 to 6:30, level. Everyone from the bomb bay back was hit.

“Our ship was badly shot up, pilot’s controls frozen, and we were on fire. An explosion knocked Tingle and myself down. He was screaming in my ear, “Get your chute on, we are bailing out.” I saw Gatewood staggering towards us, very bloody, one arm dangling. His chute was under his other arm. One of Tingle’s legs was badly torn. I helped him to the waist door, told him to open the door. I snapped Gatewood’s chute on, helped him to the door to get out. Our ship was so full of smoke I could not see the tail. Tingle said, ‘I can’t get the door open.’ I opened the door and was outside the door and outside the plane, hanging on the floor with my feet against the wall board on the inside. Tingle and Gatewood were leaning out the door so I could not get back in, so I dropped.

“The next time I saw Tingle, the Germans were dragging him, on a small sled, across the snow. He was suffering from shock and bleeding profusely. The Germans had thrown away his first aid pack. I gave him a shot of morphine from my pack, bandaged his leg, took him to a farmer’s home, wrapped him in his parachute and he seemed much better.

“We were taken to a road junction where we were met by a German ambulance and it took me in a car to Wels, Austria, where I met T/Sgt. Cooley, Lt. McCord, and Lt. Gilmore. Gilmore said he had seen Gatewood and Edwards in the hospital in Wels. That night they took us to an airfield where we met Lt. Lunan who said he had seen Lt. Wisner and he was OK. So everyone was accounted for except S/Sgt. Zafran who came to Stalag Luft III in July or August, 1944 with news that Tingle and Edwards were alive and Gatewood had died, in the hospital in February, 1944.”

S/Sgt. Ralph F. Edwards, TG on A/C #42-31460. August 2, 1990: “On the morning of February 24, 1944, we left Italy with one of the largest contingents of heavies from the 15th AF ever assembled, up to that time. I heard later in POW camp Stalag 17B, there were more planes lost than reported by the military. This was based on the number of crewmen picked up all over the countryside. We had no idea of all the targets by both the 15th and 8th Air Forces on that day.

“Our Group was last in the formation of the 15th and we were hit very hard by a very large concentration of enemy fighters. A large number of 17s, including our complete formation of five, were shot down sometime before reaching the target area. I cannot accept the reports that only 17 were lost that day by the 15th AF. Too many conflicting reports from airmen later shot down and interned in 17B seemed to verify this. Many of the planes, including ours, never reached the target. Our left wing was hit in the No. 2 engine area and trailed fire completely behind the plane. Our vertical stabilizer and part of our horizontal stabilizer were shot away. At least one shell, estimated to be a 20mm cannon shell, hit the armor plating in front of me and catapulting me by the tail wheel. I received many pieces of shrapnel in both arms, near and in the elbow. My right arm was hit the worst, in elbow and forearm. We did not wear parachute packs, only the harness. Somehow, with both arms bleeding profusely, I managed to get my pack on my chest and snap it on. Then, crawling to the escape hatch, managed to somehow release it, kick it out, then bail out. I passed out and never regained consciousness until I was near the ground.

“I landed in a forest of tall pines and the chute hung in the trees. I was about 30 or 40 feet from the ground. I managed to free myself from the harness and dropped to the ground in about two feet of snow. Two German soldiers and several civilians were waiting for me, picked me up, then carried me to a house nearby. They stripped me bare and cared for my wounds as best they could. The main artery in my right arm was severed and also the nerves. A tourniquet was put on my arm to stop the blood loss. Shortly after, they dressed me again and took me to a hospital. At this hospital, I was to meet up with several of my crew members. They all presumed I was dead. Not old tough Eddie, I assured them! Our bombardier, Lt. Donald Gilmore, had been in the hospital and carried me inside to the emergency room where a group of Catholic Nuns cleaned my wounds and bandaged them. They had sulfa powder for medication and paper bandages, like tissue paper. Then I was taken to a ward where I met four other members of my crew.

“On the second day, our radio operator, James Gatewood, succumbed to his wounds and buried in a cemetery near the hospital. He had been badly wounded and I believe it was Payne and Tingle that got him out of the plane. Three of us were put in an ambulance three days later and transferred to a prison hospital in Linz, Austria. They were S/Sgt. Saul Zafran, lower turret, Lt. Wisner, our co-pilot, and myself. I seem to remember that Lt. Wisner was a replacement in our crew, his first mission with us. The rest were our regular crew.

“We were there for about three weeks and then Lt. Wisner and myself were sent to Frankfurt to an interrogation center. We were put in solitary confinement for three days and nights, in total darkness. We were given a small amount of food, once a day, and allowed to go the latrine two times daily. From there to Stalag 17B in freezing weather. Stalag 17B was at Krems, Austria, about 60 km west of Vienna. It was a camp for enlisted personnel. The other four crew members: Lt. McCord, Lt. Lunan, T/Sgt. Cooley, and T/Sgt. Payne, I never saw them after I was shot down.

“Conditions at 17B were not much better. No heat, no lights, no running water, and a diet of rutabaga soup and black bread. Thank God for the American Red Cross! We received a parcel, once a week, without which we would likely have starved to death.

“I was one of the lucky ones in the first group of POWs to be repatriated. Several doctors came from Switzerland to the camp at Krems and I was one of the few that was chosen to return home. We left Stalag 17B in August 1944 and after traveling over most of Germany by train, was finally taken by ferry boat from Altenkircin, Germany to Tralleborg, Sweden; there exchanged for German POWs. We then went to Goteborg, Sweden where we boarded the M.S. Gripsolm, a Swedish liner, for home, and arriving in the U.S. September 6, 1944.

“We never were sure how many enemy planes we shot down, but in conversations with Tingle, Zafran, and Wisner, we decided on the approximate number of five. I have only had contact with McCord, Cooley and Gilmore since the war. Lt. Gilmore worked for a phone company in Pennsylvania and every year, on February 24th, he would call me and we would chat about our time in the service. He died 10 years ago. Maynard Tingle died January 1, 1990. I saw Cooley and McCord after the war. They came to visit me. Cooley was on his way to California. Have never heard from his since and do not know his whereabouts.

“The information in the mission report on our plane nosing up and then going into a spin is erroneous. It flew in a circle as Lt. McCord had put it on auto pilot before ordering everyone to bail out.”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-29639 - “SKYWORM” - 96TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt. Albert D. Byrne, 0-747207, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Ernest (NMI) Davis, 0-680428, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt. John W. Carney, 0-674144, N.	(POW)
1st Lt. Jay E. Jones, 0-699307, B.	(POW)

T/Sgt.	Adolph (NMI) Sevruck, 31093932, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	William R. Arm, 32246516, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Milan G. Walter, 35331263, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	John D. Stepp, Jr., 38119049, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Leon J. Hyde, 32131092, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Everett J. Bauman, 36069445, R/O.	(POW)

1st Lt. Albert D. Byrne, P, of A/C #42-29639. April 26, 1996: “February 24th has been a rather eventful day for me in several ways. I entered the military service 24 February 1941, and was hanging in a parachute over enemy territory on the day I was eligible to draw longevity pay, 24 February 1944. I was later released from the military on 24 February.

“On that particular day in 1944, all flight crews in the 2nd Bomb Group entered the pre-flight room for a resume of our scheduled mission. We had no realization that this would be the last of the war for many of us.

“As the briefing officer pointed to the map and indicated our target to be deep in enemy territory, I heard several persons breath low exclamations of apprehension. We were asked if we wanted fighter escort to the target or from the target to home base. Most persons requested escort from the target in case we had disabled bombers, which would be easy prey for enemy fighters. I, for one, requested escort to the target, stating that the enemy would be most likely to concentrate their attack against the loaded bombers in order to protect the target. I was later proven to be correct, much to the chagrin of many persons.

“Our pre-flight of the aircraft and take-off were uneventful. After taking our place in the formation, we started climbing to an altitude of 24,000 feet, and headed north toward Steyr, Austria. The snow covered peaks of the Swiss Alps looked beautiful under our left wing. A few hours later I would be wishing I was walking among them in the safety of the neutral nation of Switzerland.

“As we approached the south border of Austria, we could see many formations of enemy fighters paralleling our course but at a higher altitude and a few miles distant. Within a matter of minutes, a call on the intercom stated that the attack had started. They were diving singly and sometimes doubly on the Squadron on our left. We soon saw several bombers going down, some on fire, taking many men to their deaths. As you know, the pilot must remain at the controls until everyone is out of the plane, which means that some of the pilots would go down with the aircraft, especially when a fire enveloped the plane.

“It was a practice of other planes, not under attack, to count the parachutes from a downed bomber and make an official report of the matter. Several estimates of the number of enemy fighters involved were over 100.

“After the Squadron on our left was depleted, the enemy turned their attention to my Squadron, the 96th. Diving on us high from the rear, they would pass over our Squadron at high speed and then also target the 20th Squadron. At least two went down and crew members parachuted out, pulling their ripcords immediately, which caused them to open nearly in front of us. I was concerned about hitting one of the chutes.

“My gunners were reporting that planes in our Squadron were going down and that we were then out of ammunition. The target was immediately ahead with a considerable amount of flak rising. Suddenly I saw the lead plane on my right, flown by Captain Bill Thalken, slowly bank to the right with smoke coming from the wing. His crew was bailing out. I then realized that our time had finally arrived unless I could make it to the anti-aircraft fire over the target. Enemy fighters would never enter the flak area to attack.

“My gunners informed me that four of them were wounded and we had no means of defense. The Number 4 engine was hit and the prop ran away to a high rpm and could not be feathered. A

moment later a thunderous explosion occurred in the cockpit and the co-pilot, Ernie Davis, fell forward against what was left of the instrument panel. The throttles were blown out of my hands and the instrument panel completely destroyed.

“Blood was all over the right side of the cockpit and on the windshield, obscuring my view. I looked at Ernie and as he straightened up I saw a tremendous wound in his right side, his right arm was severed below the shoulder and was hanging by loose skin. The cockpit had a four foot diameter hole in the side, which had apparently been caused by a 20mm cannon shell. Another louder explosion occurred taking the Number 3 engine loose from the nacelle and tilting it at an angle downward. The right wing was torn open, also the gas tank. Fire immediately erupted in that tank and the gunners stated that the flames extended along the fuselage past the tail. I told the engineer, T/Sgt. Adolph Sevruk, to assist the co-pilot out of the seat and out through the bomb bay. I had pulled the salvo cable to open the bomb bay doors and drop the bombs. I then ordered the crew to bail out. The intercom was dead and inoperative but later learned most of the crew was already out of the plane.

“The enemy also had a Ju-88, light twin-engine bomber, firing rockets into the formation and this is what hit Number 3 engine and wing. The plane was attempting to spin to the right and I was desperately holding full left rudder and left aileron to keep it upright for everyone to get out.

“I could not wear a parachute while seated and flying due to space restriction. My chest pack chute was on the floor and I was attempting to locate it with my right hand but keeping the plane upright. I finally hooked my fingers on it under the top turret where it had slid during the aircraft maneuvers. All persons had gone so I had no assistance. I finally strapped my chute to the harness and left my seat; jumping from the bomb bay.

“I felt the rush of cold air and absolute quiet and no aircraft sounds. I delayed opening my chute for about 10,000 feet to get out of the battle area and down to breathable oxygen. I looked downward to see my landing area and to my pleasure it was an open field with a nearby forest. Two German soldiers, with rifles, were running toward me. The chute oscillated considerably and I landed hard and flat on my back in about 18 inches of snow.

“I slipped out of my harness and ran to a nearby small road toward the forest. When out of sight of my pursuers, I made a running jump into a clump of evergreens, hoping not to leave any footprints for them to follow. I then proceeded through the forest for several miles, seeing no one.

“I was following a clear cut path and rounded another clump of evergreens only to face four people; two soldiers and a man and woman. I immediately turned and ran back down the path. I knew the soldiers would start shooting immediately after rounding the turn so I went to the right. The snow immediately went waist deep and I was trapped. I could only dive under it and start tunneling. Within a minute I heard boots crunching as they kicked the snow from my tunnel. I rolled over on my back to see a hand with a large knife blade in it descending towards my chest.

“I grabbed the wrist with both hands and was pulled upright. The civilian man and I struggled for the blade. One soldier stepped forward and pressed a Luger into my stomach. I released the wrist holding the blade and took one step back. I saw the ferocious gleam in the man’s eyes as he swung the blade at my throat. I evaded the blow and shouted to the soldier with the pistol, “You’d better take that blade from him or you will have to shoot me in defense.” I learned later none of them spoke English but he got the message. He took the blade and calmed everyone down. When the soldiers saw I was unarmed, they relaxed somewhat and allowed me to rest for a few minutes.

“I was extremely exhausted from running in deep snow for at least two miles. I did not smoke but always carried a pack of Pall Mall cigarettes in my flight clothes. American cigarettes were worth their weight in gold in Europe during the war and I knew someday they would afford me the power to bargain with someone. I decided now was the time to bargain. I had not been searched so I pulled the pack out and offered a cigarette to each person. Their eyes lit up and they thanked me in German as they each took one. They made no effort to take any of my personal possessions, or the cigarettes, and

became somewhat friendly. One of them gave me a U.S. Air Force Officer's green overseas cap with Captain's bars on it. I donned it and was escorted about three miles to the small town of Sierning.

"Upon entering the room of temporary interment, whom did I see but Bill Thalken. His first words were, "Where did you get my cap?"

"We were held there for a few days then taken to the Luftwaffe Air Base near Linz, Austria and placed in solitary confinement. It was on this move that I assisted in carrying Lt. Perry Mayer on a stretcher. He was badly wounded and needed medical attention. We left him on a lonely railroad platform with the assurance from the guards that he would be taken on the next train to a hospital. I later learned that Lt. Ernie Davis and T/Sgt. Sevruck had landed near each other and Sevruck had put a tourniquet on Ernie's arm, packed it in snow to stop the bleeding and gave him a shot of morphine.

"At the Air Base we were held in solitary confinement several days and then taken to Dulag Luft near Frankfurt. After several days there, we were put into 40 & 8 box cars, with many other prisoners, who were mainly from the 8th Air Force in England.

"Our train stopped in Berlin just as an air raid sounded. The guards hastened to lie down in the ditches along side the track but we were locked inside the box cars. We peered up at the sky through cracks between the boards and saw the vapor trails of the entire 8th Air Force making the first daylight raid on Berlin. We all had the same thoughts in mind. Had we come all this far in the war to be killed by our own comrades? We knew that railroad Marshalling Yards were sometimes primary targets. Judging by the immense size of the air armada, we knew that if the yards were the target, we did not stand a chance to survive. Some of the prisoners almost broke down emotionally and a few prayers were said. To our utmost relief, the planes passed over us and bombed the city. Thus began our experience of almost 1½ years of imprisonment.

"I made two trips to Europe after the war and visited the old prison camp on the Baltic Sea due north of Berlin, at Barth. On the last trip I rented a car in Frankfurt and drove through the so-called Iron Curtain several times. I went to Yugoslavia to Zagreb, which was one of our targets. I also drove to the site of the air base near Foggia. The runway had been removed but the olive grove where we camped was still there; also the underground caverns and the old Church.

"I went to Sierning, Austria where I chanced to meet one of the men who witnessed my capture and first interment. He was very sociable and invited me to his apartment, where he opened his oldest bottle of wine. We talked until midnight with his daughter acting as interpreter. The next day he went with me to show where I had been captured and introduced me to a soldier who had been a prisoner in Russia. After comparing notes with him in our detailed discussion, I must say that I was glad I was an American prisoner in Germany rather than a German prisoner in Russia."

1st Lt. Jay E. Jones, B, on A/C #42-26939. January 30, 1990: "My last mission was on February 24, 1944, and the target was Steyr, Austria. As I recall, we were just about to line up on the I.P. when we were attacked by the Krauts. Some say they were Me-109s with cannons. We were hit in the No. 3 engine. The nose filled with smoke and so Carney and I bailed out at 22,000 feet. T/Sgt. Sevruck tossed Ernie Davis out the bomb bay. He was hit in the right arm, which doctors removed, and he was repatriated after several months.

"Carney and I landed about 100 yards apart. We were rounded up by a young German lad with an old man. As the boy had a large horse pistol, we went into town with them.

"After various interrogations and train rides, we arrived at Stalag Luft I, Barth, Germany. Al Byrne was already there and we remained there for 14 months.

"In retrospect, they treated us as well as could be expected. Horse meat, lots of potatoes and rutabagas were staples. They weren't eating much better. Red Cross packages helped when they arrived, which was seldom.

“After about three days some guys came around to see if we wanted to join a bridge club or play on the softball team. It amazes me how Americans adjust to conditions so quickly. It had been a long time since I recalled these memories, and I can’t get my grandchildren to hear my stories, computers are more exciting. Even my wife has heard the tales too often although she listens if it is not too long.

“The Russians came in half tracks and freed us. We were flown to LaHavre, France. Some fellows went right home, but I went to London for three weeks, having never been there, and then home by boat. Needless to say there are some things left out but it is beginning to bore me after all this time.”

S/Sgt. Milan G. Walter, RW, on A/C #42-29639. Milan Walter was preparing a story of his experiences when he was taken ill and died June 1, 1990 after two major surgeries. His wife, Harriet, felt it was important that some of his experiences be told. February 12, 1991: “It seems after a period of time, over 40 years, others are interested in this part of history, so I am glad to share what I have with them. You see, I am interested in genealogy and know how important it is to get the facts of the real life stories correct.

“He did not talk of his adventures much, only occasionally when asked, so I have bits and pieces here in my mind of what happened. Perhaps this article written when he arrived home and visited his Uncle in Hibbing, Minnesota, and the paper there wrote the article that follows. It tells of his thoughts and feelings at that time.

”From a Minnesota newspaper, August 9, 1945.

Among the many young service men who have lived a lifetime in a few years is S/Sgt. Milan G. Walter of Toledo, Ohio, visiting his Uncle and Aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Walter.

T/R - L/R - A. Byrne, E. Davis, J. Carney, J. Jones  
B/R - L/R - A. Sevruck, J. Stepp, E. Spriggs (\*), E. Bauman, M. Walter, L. Hyde  
\*KIA 3-11-44 - Courtesy - Mrs. Harriet Walter

On an extended furlough after having survived 15 months in a German prison camp, young Walter has gained 30 pounds since his release.

Although extremely reticent and modest, in telling of his experiences, this corner managed to wangle and prod loose some of the highlights of his experiences.

To begin with, Sgt. Walter admits being a member of the 15th Air Force, which was active in three major African and European areas. He wears the Air Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters, Purple Heart, and Presidential Citation.

As an armorer on a Flying Fortress, he participated in 15 missions before being shot down over Steyr, Austria, when his flight was pounced on by 150 Messerschmitts. "They always seemed to know when we were coming," the Sgt. revealed wryly.

Captured in a forest, Walter was taken to Stalag VI prison camp in East Prussia. There his body wasted to 110 pounds on a diet of hot water for breakfast, cabbage water for dinner, and a cupful of potatoes for supper. There were variations in that diet. "Had it not been for the Red Cross packages, we couldn't have made it," he confessed gratefully. For amusement at the prison camp, the boys posted on the bulletin boards the menus of the things they were going to eat when they got home. Many of the boys "passed out" when they read those menus, to the amusement of the originators.

News of the war was obtained through a radio built into a concertina. The guards tried to ferret it out and finally succeeded. As the Russians advanced, the prisoners

were taken to Stalag IV in Pomerania and later, marched 500 miles on a diet of a few ounces of bread a day. Many dropped on the roadside and were left behind.

S/Sgt. Walter was liberated on April 26, 1945, by the 415th American Infantry Division.

“A fellow from your city was in the 415th.”

Bob Allen was visiting at the home of his Uncle, Paul Ayotte, next door to the Walter residence, when Bob and Milan met again. “I’ll say it’s a small world,” mused Sgt. Walter.

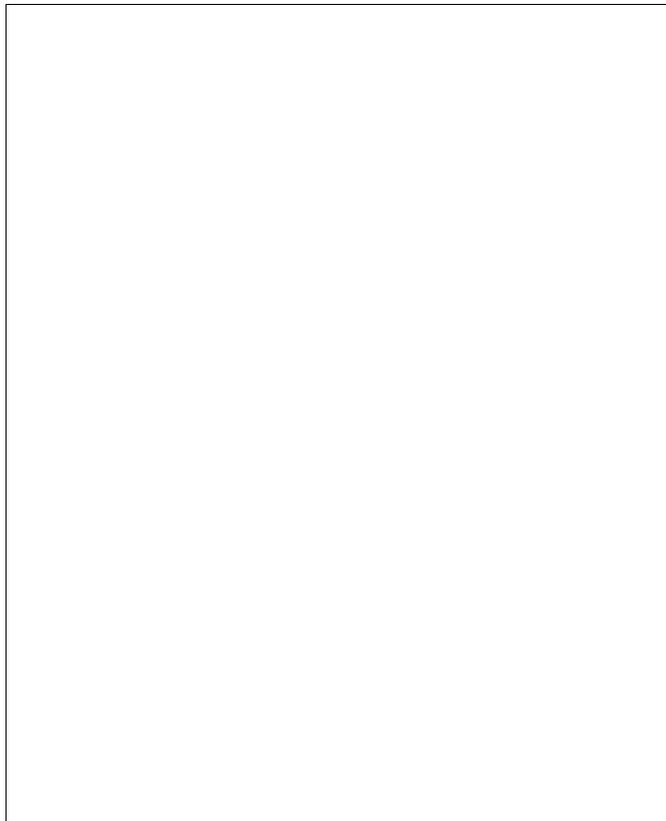
Mrs. Walter continues: “The letter he wrote to his Mom when he was liberated will give you an idea of his feelings. He had not been much of a letter writer recently, but feel this gave a lot of immediate thoughts after his release.”

May 6, 1945

Dear Folks:

Hello everyone, well I finally got a chance to write again. Am in American hands now, safe and sound, was liberated on the 26th of April. It sure was a happy day for us. I never knew how good a G.I. looked. I’m telling you it was a pleasure to see our own uniforms after having to look at those God-damned Krauts. Well I’m okay now and getting good food again.

We (I mean the prisoners) were marched all over the damn country, 52 days of it. In that time, we covered nearly 600 miles, but made it, and right now those bastards are paying through the nose for it. Can’t say where I am but the main thing is I’m coming home, don’t know how soon but we’re on our way. We started out on the march, February 6th, and was awfully cold at the time. We had to sleep in barns and when none was to be had, it was out in the open fields. The Krauts moved us out of the camp cause the Russians were getting too close so we were moved West. Came too far West and into American lines so they ran us East and then Southwest trying to hang onto us, but things were closing in so bad they had to leave us go.



S/Sgt. Milan G. Walter - Courtesy Mrs. Harriet Walter

Just heard officially the war is over. I suppose everyone is happy about it. Just got back from a show, wasn't so good. Wished I could write to everyone, but everything is such a hub bub, so give all the regards to most of them for me till I get there personally. When I get home you better have things prepared because we are going to have a blowout what am!

I hope that everything is running smoothly at home. I spose there have been quite a few changes around the "ole" homestead. Yes, I'm afraid the change of scenery is going to be really something. It has been a long time hasn't it? Maybe it is the long distance from home that makes it seem so much longer. Boy, I have ample things to do when I get home, ye Gods, it will take months, in fact. I intend to take quite a vacation and really have a time before I settle down. One thing Mom, I will never miss another of your meals, in fact, I'm going to make up for lost time when it comes to eating. I never knew how much it meant to eat, and eat good. In fact, I never knew just how much the U.S.A. meant to me. I sure have had enough of this European stuff. I guess one has to take the bitter with the sweet to really appreciate the sweet. Well Mom, Dad, and Sis, I'll sign off for now. Don't worry about me because I'm okay and on my way. See you all soon,  
Your loving Son,  
Sunny

Mrs. Walter continues: "A lot of his stories were of the humorous nature, of how they tried to make the best of a difficult situation. That was the only way to handle it. And being young, the adventuresome, it was a way of dealing with it."

Sincerely,  
Harriet Walter

Major Walter F. Kutschera, Commanding Officer, First Pilot of one of the original crews entering combat in North Africa. September 21, 1990: "Forty-six years have elapsed since the events of February 24, 1944, a day impressed in my memory. Details have faded with time, but I recall many of the overall happenings. This day was important in a personal way for it was my 50th; the final combat effort after a prolonged tour with the 429th Squadron.

"The Squadron had been activated in late 1942, moved overseas in the spring of 1943 and commenced operations in North Africa. My first sortie was the 1st of May. Some crews flew almost every mission and finished the required 50 by early October. The Group Commander, Colonel Rice, designated me as a lead pilot, to take turns with other Squadron Commanders, and Group Headquarters pilots, in flying as Group Leader. Not until February, 1944, was I scheduled for my final mission.

"The day began as usual, with the pre-dawn briefing of the air crews. We were told to expect increasingly determined opposition from enemy fighter aircraft and heavy flak over the target. On the previous day, we had been assigned the same target, at Steyr. The bomber Groups of the 5th Wing, all B-17s, had proceeded en route but cloud formations over the Adriatic Sea became more dense as we flew north, precluding maintenance of a Wing formation and all Groups returned to base. Today we would try again. The weather conditions prevented one B-17 Group from joining us and the B-24 Wings, based to the south of us, were unable to become airborne. This was unfortunate because the strategy was for the B-24s to raid targets in the Balkans and thereby provide a diversion to draw away the enemy fighters from the route to be taken by the B-17s. One B-24 Wing was to follow the 5th Wing to the target but did not appear. Without the B-24s, we had full attention of the German defenders.

“In early 1944, the 15th air Force fighter escort had insufficient range to provide a continuing escort to the bombers on deep penetration. The latter had to rely on the mass firepower of the 50 cal. machine guns concentrated from a tight formation. Straggling aircraft were easily shot down.

“Our vulnerability was increased because of our reduced force. The clouds encountered en route required close formation flying to prevent separation of the Groups. Therefore I placed my Group lead aircraft very close and just below the last aircraft of the preceding Group. Fortunately the first two Group Leaders flew smoothly and precisely, enabling all pilots to hold their positions. With the onset of the enemy attacks, a close formation was my paramount concern. My recollection is that never before did I hold in there so tight and for so long.

“A major requirement of a lead pilot was to fly smoothly with no major changes in altitude or airspeed so that the wing-men could hold their positions. On this day, my whole attention was divided only between the aircraft formation directly ahead and the flight instruments. Guided by the latter, I was able to minimize the difficulty of those pilots who followed. My co-pilot, Bill Cunningham, made changes in the engine power settings as needed. Once the German fighter attacks began, my only source of information about the progress of the air battle around us was from the intercom traffic. The gunners, especially the tail gunner, maintained a disciplined running account and reported each of the bombers shot down behind us. I was apprehensive about our vulnerability when going into Squadron-in-trail for the bombing run, but do not recall any specific losses during this phase. The flak was heavy but little could be done about it. We could not use evasive action. The bombardier needed a stable platform for accurate sighting. Although our aircraft was equipped with the Honeywell autopilot, into which the Norden bombsight could be engaged so that the bombardier could control the flight path on the bomb run, the former functioned in an unreliable manner. I resorted to the PDI, pilot directional indicator, a needle gauge on the instrument panel, which indicated the flight corrections needed by the bombardier to adjust for wind drift. The needle was kept centered by manually flying the aircraft.

“At the end of the bomb run, as the bomb bay doors closed, I began a gradual turn toward our return heading so that the following Squadrons could easily join us by flying a pursuit curve. At this time I caught a glimpse of the air battle ahead. Me-109s were being chased by P-38s, one by one. I am convinced that those of us that survived are indebted to the P-38 pilots. They were not assigned to be our escorts out of the target area, but they heard our radio traffic, indicating we were in deep trouble, and gave us a big assist.

“After landing at our Amendola base, I caught the last command car to headquarters for debriefing. By the time I arrived, there was dismay over the heavy losses we experienced, but there was also consolation that our bombing had been accurate and effective.”

1st Lt. John “Jack” Adams, Lead Navigator on the A/C piloted by Major Walter Kutschera. April 13, 1992: “Typical winter day in Italy, cold and damp. Breakfast and briefing before dawn. I learned of a new city, Steyr, Austria, located on the other side of the Alps, on the Ens River, in the Danube River Valley. Due to the number of rough missions, we were limited in the number of planes that we got in the air from the 2nd Bomb Group. But, as we were to have four Groups in the formation, we knew that somebody thought it was an important target.

“Our Squadron, 429th, was the lead for the 2nd Bomb Group, with Major Kutschera commanding and Major Cunningham as his co-pilot. Bill Boyd, and our crew, in “BABY,” flew deputy lead.

“Off we go, flying into the morning sun. Then north over the Adriatic Sea to just east of Trieste and then north to Steyr. The weather over the Alps was numbing cold, about minus 50 degrees, but the scenery was out of this world! Snow and towering peaks as far as we could see. This was nice while it lasted. Suddenly the sky was filled with small dots that soon proved to be what seemed like the entire German Air Force! If this was not enough distraction, the bombardier became upset, afraid that we

were lost over the Alps and would not find the target. I told him to keep firing at the Germans and I would point out the target to him in plenty of time, as yet I had never been lost on a mission and didn't plan on starting on this day.

"Three things happened as one: The Ens River showed up with the aircraft plant standing out loud and clear, the German planes pulled out, and the flak became so thick you had trouble seeing the plane on your wing.

"We were supposed to be the last Group of the four B-17 Groups - the 97th, 301st, 99th, and 2nd Bomb Groups - plus a wave of the B-24s that were to be a part of the attack. They did not show up. I know we were the first to hit the target, and I believe we were the only Group to hit the target that day. The report says that the 99th Group was lost in the weather. What happened to the others, I don't know.

"We clobbered the plant and turned south for home. The German planes returned, but not for long. Our P-38s met us and chased the Germans away. All but one, from 12 o'clock low, he was coming fast. All at once I saw two P-38s bearing in on him. The German plane pulled into a stall and the pilot bailed out. Not a shot was fired.

"Back over the Alps, across the tip of Yugoslavia, down the Adriatic Sea to our base, Foggia. The 2nd bomb Group lost 14 planes. A trip of seven hours and 20 minutes, or was it a lifetime?

"For this I was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. If anyone should ask what I did for the DFC, you can tell them, "Only what I was trained to do" ... or the truth, I was scared to death."

Note: The Group History shows that the 97th, 301st, followed by the 2nd Bomb Group got to the target in that order. The 325th Fighter Group, P-47s, was to have covered withdrawal but did not appear. A total of 87 B-17s bombed the target at Steyr, dropping 264 tons of bombs. Two other B-17s and three P-38s were lost in this action. Twenty-seven B-17s from the 99th bomb Group became separated from the main force and bombed Fiume, Italy, suffering the loss of one B-17.

2nd. Lt. Roger C. DeClements, CP on the crew of 2nd Lt. William O'Hare, 96th Squadron. February 8, 1991: 'My original crew was 2nd Lt. William M. O'Hare, Pilot; 2nd Lt. Leo W. Zaplatynski, Navigator; 2nd Lt. Woodrow W. Hartsock, Bombardier; S/Sgt. Wilbur Gustafson, U/T; S/Sgt. Nathan W. Lubowski, L/T; Sgt. James J. Henry, R/W; Sgt. Mervyn E. Deibel, L/W; Sgt. Ralph E. Johnson, T/G; and S/Sgt. Richard I. Basehore, R/O.

"February 24, 1944 was a double credit mission so I got credit for my 2nd and 3rd. I was flying as co-pilot on another crew in A/C #777 with Lt. Blomquist, the pilot.

"We went to Styer, Austria and did we take a beating! The flak wasn't too bad but for an hour before we got to the target we were attacked by fighters. About 80 of them.

"Our position was the third Group and we were in the second wave, flying number two position of the second element of the first squadron. There were ten ships behind us and nine of them were shot down by fighters. We were next and if the P-38s hadn't come in, it's a cinch we would have been shot down. I was the co-pilot and since I wasn't flying I just sat and watched the fighters shoot down the planes in number two squadron. In most of the planes, most of the crews parachuted to the ground.

"I saw one fighter come in head on and shoot the pilot and co-pilot and that plane nosed up and dove to the ground. All of my crew except the bombardier, Hartsock, and left waist gunner, James Henry, were in one of the two planes of the number two squadron.

"We flew such a tight formation that when the tail gunner ahead of us shot his guns, the empty shells hit our plane. Some of them broke the front windshields and I thought I was dead and gone when I heard the crash and found my front windshield broken. The fighters also fired rockets from behind. Our plane had very few holes in it.

“My diary shows that S/Sgt. Henry was declared MIA, April 16, 1944, on a mission to Brasov, Romania, flying in Ship #581, the ship we flew over from the States. He evaded and eventually returned with all the crew, with the exception of the pilot who became a POW.

“So, only two of us finished our 50 missions. I later found that O’Hare, Zaplatynski, Gustafson, and Deibel were captured and imprisoned. Sgts. Nathan Lubowski, Ralph Johnson, and Richard Basehore were killed on the mission of February 24th.”

2nd Lt. Woodrow W. Hartsock, B on the crew of Lt. William O’Hare. December 12, 1990: “My part of “BIG WEEK” was very minor. On February 22nd, or 23rd, I flew on a mission to an airfield at Zagreb, Yugoslavia, as the Germans were supposed to be bringing in fighters to that area. It was an easy mission, with little flak, but no fighters and, of course, short. Probably if I had not flown that one I would have been in the one to Steyr, where the Group lost 14 planes.

“I was to Ploesti four times and I imagine it was the first four. They were mostly in April, as I recall. I flew the Russian Shuttle mission. Sgt. Henry was shot down in April, I believe, over Yugoslavia, walked to the coast, was picked up by a C-47 and taken to Bari, Italy. I visited him in May or June. I know O’Hare and Zaplatynski survived. Sgt. Lubowski was killed. I talked to his widow in 1949. I finished my 50 and left Italy July 6, 1944.”

2nd Lt. Clarence “Andy” Cowan, B on the crew of Lt. Oliver Thigpen. October 13, 1990: “My regular crew consisted of 1st Lt. Oliver Thigpen, Pilot; 2nd Lt. Harlan C. Wisner, Co-pilot; 2nd Lts. Thurman Comer, Navigator; myself, Bombardier; Sgts. Vitali, U/T; Michael Nimirowski, L/T; J.B. Connors, R/W; Harold Finkelstein, L/W; George A. Kemp, T/G; and Joseph O’Connor, R/O.

“On the mission to Steyr on February 24th I don’t recall when we were called or anything of the briefing but recall take-off, forming up and heading up the Adriatic. For some reason I was flying with another crew as bombardier. In reviewing the loading list of the mission I see I was assigned to the crew of 2nd Lt. Herman Lavine, flying #405. Thigpen was flying as co-pilot with Lt. Robert Cleesattel with most of the members of our crew.

“Approaching the coast in the Udine area we could see the vapor trails from the German fighters. As we crossed inland, we were hit. They started on the last Squadron. Our tail gunners were reporting planes going down. Approaching the bomb run most of the planes in the second wave had gone down. I looked over at what I believe was #459 as it was hit. It looked like the whole bottom of the right wing erupted and the fuel just dropped out.

“Just as we left the bomb run, I looked up and saw two airplanes with twin booms. I thought, “God they are even using planes with twin booms.” I looked again and saw they were P-38s. At that time everything became quiet. No German fighters were in the area. As I remember, we came back without much incident. After #459 went down, I kept saying to myself, “We are next,” but also saying, “They can’t get us.” One time I remember looking off to my right and saw a 109 come through the formation. I could see the pilot but couldn’t determine if he was dead or alive. I also remember that I don’t think a shot was fired at him.

“I did not fly the Regensburg on the 25th, but did fly the diversionary raid. We were supposed to bomb the aircraft factory at Salzburg, Austria, but due to bad weather we bombed some harbor in Yugoslavia. Our co-pilot, Lt. Harlan Wisner, flew with another crew which was involved in a mid-air collision with another plane from the Group. He became a POW.

“I completed 51 missions with the last one on 13 April 1944 to Gyor, Hungary. In addition to Wisner, Thurman Comer was shot down on the mission to Gyor, Hungary on the 13th. Oliver Thigpen was severely wounded on a mission, May 24th, to Atzerdorf, Austria. Sgts. Vitali, Nimirowski, Connors, and Finkelstein, to my knowledge, completed their missions and returned to the United States.

“After returning to the States I was assigned as an instructor at Medland and San Atgelo, Texas. I resigned my commission in 1947 and enlisted in the Air Force with the rank of Master Sergeant. I served in several overseas stations: in French Morocco, Spain, and twice on Okinawa. I then retired from the Air Force on 31 August 1964.”

T/Sgt. Joseph B. Null, Flight Engineer on the crew of 1st Lt. Henry O’Shea. This crew had been stationed in England with the 327th Squadron, 92nd bomb Group, 8th air Force, prior to transfer to the 2nd Bomb Group. Sgt. Null flew to 12 targets from England. February 20, 1990: “It seems that things were going to be tough for me from the very start. We left Grand Island, Nebraska, to fly to Bangor, Maine. Flying at 8,000 feet we flew into a cloud, hit an updraft that carried us to 23,000 feet with rain, hail, snow, electrical storm, and all instruments haywire. We were in the air 10 hours, off course 200 miles, and only about 200 miles from Grand Island, Nebraska.

“In the 8th air Force we had some tough missions and some “milk runs.” I guess my toughest one was January 11, 1944 over Halberstadt, Germany. We lost 60 aircraft. I know we were knocked out over the target, two engines out and we had to fight our way back by ourselves. Lots of holes in the plane, tail gunner and waist gunner hit. I shot over 1,160 rounds of ammunition. Made an emergency landing in Scotland after losing all but one engine.

“Amendola, Italy, February 20, 1944: At 2:15 our mission aborted.

“On February 22, our primary target was Regensburg, Germany. I remember flying over the Alps which seemed to be just a few hundred feet below us. I saw one of the planes peel off and head for the Swiss border as we were going over the Alps. The weather was so bad we had to hit an alternate target. My notes say Peterhausen, Germany, time 7:15 hours. (Note: amended to Olching, Germany.) I can’t recall whether it was on this mission or later over Regensburg that we ran into German jet aircraft, but anyway, there were about six or eight of them coming in on our Group at 12:00 o’clock high, made one pass with no damage. I don’t remember many fighters jumping us on this mission, but lots of flak.

“On February 23, we flew 1:10 hours - no sortie.

“February 24 was the mission to Steyr, Austria, and it was a pretty good one! They awoke us at 0500 hours, we ate, went to briefing and they told us where we were going. We went to the armory, got our guns, went to the aircraft and got ready for take-off. We had to abort our regular aircraft and pick up another one. Having to rush to catch up with the rest of the Group, I didn’t get a chance to clean my guns on the new plane but they test fired okay over the Adriatic where we assembled with the rest of the Group. We didn’t have fighter escort and were flying rear Group. Well, before we reached the target, we were jumped by two groups of German fighters, mostly Me-109s. One group approached us at 3:00 o’clock high and the other about 9:00 o’clock high. They didn’t come in on us at that position but lined up four or five at a time, on the rear aircraft, coming in and firing from 5:00 o’clock and 6:00 o’clock high and picking off one bomber at a time, starting at the rear of the Group.

“Well, the worst thing happened to me and I’ll never forget it. My guns froze up and I wasn’t able to fire very much. It was really cold that day, about 65 degrees below zero at that altitude. Anyway, all I could do was to call out fighter locations and when I thought they were going to fire, tell the pilot and co-pilot to “KICK IT” and they would do evasive action to dodge bullets. We were trained to do this in the 8th Air Force. Anyway, things were pretty hot! Planes were being shot down right and left. All the time this was going on I was trying to get my guns working and calling out fighter locations. The rest of the crew were doing a lot of shooting and if anyone tells you that you can’t sweat at 65 below, they are crazy, I know. Well, about this time there was a loud explosion in our plane. The cockpit filled with smoke. I felt something hot on my leg. O’Shea said he had lost his oxygen. Mine was okay, so I came out of the upper turret, unplugged my oxygen, and as my hose was

pretty long, I plugged by oxygen into O'Shea's mask and I used the walk-around bottle. I saw the five bottles on the left side of the cockpit had blown, but the other side was okay.

"We dropped our bombs on the target and shortly thereafter, O'Shea said we needed to drop out of formation because of low oxygen. Well, we dropped to approximately 18,000 feet, "expecting the worst," because of "no escort." Luckily two P-38s spotted us and come down to look after us. I guess the good Lord was looking after us that day.

"We made it back to base okay and I wasn't going to mention being hit, but getting out of the plane I couldn't straighten my leg and had to go to the 61st Station Hospital in Foggia.

"Anyway, I heard the next day that O'Shea, and crew, were lost flying the mission to Regensburg, Germany. George Clayton was not one of them, having suffered frost bite on the mission with me and so he had been grounded. I learned one thing on this mission, "NEVER" trust the ground crew or anyone else to clean your guns in combat.

"George Clayton and myself went on to complete our 50 missions, flying for the CO and the lead ship of our Group. Flying with Colonel Rice, who died of a heart attack soon after we reached the States in September 1944; Colonel John D. Ryan, Major Ellis, Colonel Moorman, and Lt. Col. Ainsworth.

"I would like to say that I shot down a Me-109 over Steyr, Austria on April 12, 1944, and that made me feel better about not having to do much the first time over Steyr.

"Well, I don't know if this has helped you much, but I feel better because I have never talked much about my experience over there. I spent 40 years working at General Dynamics, in Forth Worth, and retired in 1987. I saw General Ryan once while working there at G.D. and we talked over old times and the missions we had flown together."

2nd Lt. Richard M. Blomquist was a First Pilot assigned, with crew, to the 96th Bomb Squadron, 1 January 1944. July 1, 1990: "I flew two missions during the period referred to as "BIG WEEK." On 22 February 1944, I flew to Zagreb, Yugoslavia of which I cannot recall any details except it was to be a diversionary raid. The main mission was to go to Regensburg. We were to have bombed an airfield at Graz, Austria to keep fighters away from the main force. Cloud cover prevented bombing Graz so we bombed an airfield at Zagreb as an alternate. My comment in my log book was: "Mission #17, a secondary target." Two days later I can vividly recall the mission to Steyr, Austria. Having been the pilot of the plane and holding formation, there was not a lot of time to see what was going on and, of course, 46 years can effect details as far as memory is concerned.

"We had very aggressive fighters attacking the formation for approximately one hour. Sometimes they even flew through the formation. The tail gunners would have the most vivid recollection, as the enemy fighters that seemed to be the most effective were the twin engine planes firing air-to-air rockets into the formation. The rockets gave them the advantage of staying out of range of the 50 caliber guns and they could pick the bombers off one at a time. If we had not reached the target when we did, do doubt they would have had our plane as well. The plane to which we were flying right wing left the formation and this, I believe, was Lt. Lyons'. As we approached the target, the fighters left us and I can recall only an average amount of flak.

"After dropping our bombs, we turned off the target and saw our fighter cover. This was the most welcome sight, indeed. We felt there was no way we could have returned to base if we had enemy fighters any longer. After seeing the formation on paper, we could only feel that we were very fortunate to be spared. It was evident that we were in plane #777, so we were one of the last two left in the formation. Also, three planes ahead of us were hit and left the formation.

"No crew members were injured on those two missions of "BIG WEEK" nor can I recall any damage to our plane, but our regular bombardier, Lt. Dale Wilkinson, flew as a fill-in the next day to Regensburg, Germany and that plane was shot down (Ed: Involved in mid-air collision). Crew

members of our plane claimed several enemy planes shot down but did not remember what the verification was on planes actually shot down.

“I did go on to complete my 50 missions.”

2nd Lt. James S. “Jeb” Stewart, N. on the crew of Lt. Blomquist. July 9, 1990: “On the Steyr mission, the Germans put up the strongest opposition that I witnessed on my tour. The German fighters pressed the attack into their own flak. The scene is hard to describe — the sky was full of multi-colored flak, the fighters pressing the attack until you could almost touch the attackers - Ju-88s overhead dropping butterfly bombs through the bomber formation. Bombers and fighters exploding and gun fire from both - the sky was simply the scene of an intense battle. It was a little like a 4th of July display, simply magnified many times.

“We were jumped well before the I.P. and fought through the bomb run. They attacked us from about all angles, making head-on attacks. The floor of the nose of our plane was covered with spent shells from the guns of mine and the bombardiers as we fired at the attacking aircraft. I also recall hearing that the Ju-88s were standing off and firing their rockets through the formation.

“By the time we turned off the target, I had logged 19 planes lost to the formation. Obviously some were damaged and managed to return home. During the bomb run, I remember thinking there was no way we were going to make it through this.

“I know that as we pulled off the target, I called the tail gunner for a count and he replied there were only two left behind us. I told him I knew that, but meant, in the boxes behind us. He replied, “There are no other boxes, they have all been shot down.”

“Our original crew from the States were: 2nd Lt. Richard M. Blomquist, P; 2nd Lt. Harper C. Maybee, CP; myself, N; 2nd Lt. Dale E. Wilkinson, B; S/Sgt. Harold A. Troutman, E; S/Sgt. Robert B. Stamps, R/O; and Sgts. Benjamin F. Sheckles, Jr., Carl R. Foster, Ascension Gonzalez, Jr., and Warren D. Oates were gunners. On the mission of the 24th, all of this crew flew the mission with the exception of Lt. Maybee. He was replaced by Lt. Roger DeClements.

“On the following day, Lt. Wilkinson went down with another crew and was a POW. S/Sgt. Gonzalez was shot down while flying with another crew on a mission to Klagenfurt, Austria. All the other members of my original crew flew their 50 missions.

“I probably flew about 20 missions with my original crew and eventually was assigned as the Group navigator. It was while flying as Group Navigator on 6 May 1944 that I was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. It was expected that we would have to bomb by Radar. We were leading the 5th Wing and when we reached the target area were able to set up a visual bomb run which was effective. The rest of the Groups bombed by radar.

“I went on to complete my 50 missions and go home. I remained in the Air Force and retired with the rank of Colonel.”

T/Sgt. Harold A. Troutman, Flight Engineer on the crew of Lt. Richard Blomquist. December 12, 1990: “During the period of “BIG WEEK,” I flew the diversionary raid to Zagreb, Yugoslavia, and then to Steyr, Austria, on February 24, 1944. This mission to Steyr was the most exciting I had flown in all my 50.

“While on the way to the target we were jumped by a large force of enemy fighters of all kinds. They were the most aggressive enemy fighters we had ever encountered and they were determined to stop us at any cost. However, we reached the target after a fight of about an hour during which we encountered very heavy flak as we approached our objective. Several times during the battle we had doubts about seeing our base again because of the aggressiveness of the enemy fighters.

“It runs in my mind that as we came off the target we had two engines disabled and my oxygen system was out of commission. All of the planes behind us were downed. As we came off the target

for home, after dropping our bombs, some P-38s came out of the clouds to our assistance, a sight never so welcome.

“The rest of the mission was uneventful and our home field was a heartening sight as we came in to land. After two days of flying and fighting, we were really exhausted!

“My first mission was to Villaorba, Italy on January 16, 1944. There were eight others to targets in Italy, one to Sofia, Bulgaria, two to Southern France, and one to Budapest, Hungary. The Steyr mission was a double credit.

“After the Steyr and Regensburg missions, the Group needed to get new crews and planes and I did not fly until a mission to Anzio on March 2, 1944. The missions came rapidly after that. I flew three missions to Southern France, two to Ploesti, two to Belgrade, one each to Budapest, Bucharest, Gyor, Fischamend Market, Breslau, Sofia, Wiener Neustadt, Atzendorf, several in Italy, then the Shuttle to Russia. I ended my tour on a mission to Munich, Germany, the Oberpaffenhofen A/D, on June 13, 1944.”

S/Sgt. Robert B. Stamps, R/O on the crew of Lt. Richard Blomquist. August 29, 1990: “I entered the service November 4, 1942, and took my basic training at Cadet Center, San Antonio, Texas. I was assigned to the crew of Lt. Blomquist and arrived overseas on December 19, 1943.

“I flew my first mission January 14, 1944, to Mostar, Yugoslavia. Lt. Lavine was the pilot and Lt. Blomquist was co-pilot. My next three missions were to targets in Italy and then I burned by hand January 23rd and was grounded until February 15th. I flew one more mission to a target in Italy on February 17th and the next was the ill-fated mission to Steyr, Austria on February 24th.

“I flew with my regular crew that day. My recall of what happened so long ago is just not too good. For one thing, I monitored the radio and did not get in on all the intercom conversation.

“I do remember that we picked up enemy fighters before getting to the target, at least 30 minutes or more. Also I remember the fighters were coming in from the rear and that there were probably 14 B-17s behind us to start, and by the time we reached the target we were bringing up the rear, or nearly so. My recollection is that the fighters were first reported at 5 o'clock high, by their vapor trails, and it seemed like some time, five to 15 minutes, before they started their attacks.

“I did not fly the Regensburg mission but flew the diversionary mission to Zara, Yugoslavia on February 25th. I flew the shuttle mission to Russia, my 39th/40th and my 50th/51st to Ploesti on June 23, 1944. I flew with various pilots other than Lt. Blomquist: Lt. Maybee, Lt. Lavine, Lt. Trevathane, Major Cunningham, Lt. Col. Ryan, Lts. Norton, Schlagle, Shuman, Slade, and Sebian. I was discharged September 1, 1945.”

1st Lt. John J. Janicek, CP on the crew of 2nd Lt. Leroy P. Rigney. January 30, 1992: “I was flying as co-pilot with Rigney on the mission to Steyr on February 24th. One thing I will always remember is the horizontal stabilizer being blown off Paul Foust's plane. That picture will stay in my mind as long as I live. I was looking at his plane when it happened.

“I didn't fly the Regensburg mission on the 25th but was on the short range mission to Zara. I didn't regret missing the one to Regensburg!

“The month of March was a busy one for our crew. I flew 11 missions that month, most of them in Italy in support of the ground forces although one was to Toulon, France, another to Fischamend Market, and another to Klagenfurt, Austria. Rigney and the crew went down on the 30th of March on a mission to Sofia. I was sick and Irby was flying with another crew that day.

“I started flying as first pilot not long after Rigney went down. We went back to Steyr on April 2nd and, as I recall, we did not have any losses. I had two trips to Ploesti. Others to Budapest, Hungary; Bucharest, Romania; Fischamend Market, Austria (2nd trip); Brasov, Romania (2); Belgrade, Yugoslavia; Gyor, Hungary; Wiener Neustadt, Austria; Atzendorf, Austria; Bihac, Yugoslavia; several

missions to targets in Italy and finally, three missions to France on May 25, 26 and 27 which were to Lyon, St. Etienne and Avignon.

“The mission to Avignon was my 50th and final mission. I can’t remember who else was on my crew. I know we celebrated after it was over. I left most of my memories in Italy. I did retain my mission log so am able to relate some of my experiences to some extent.”

### **REGENSBURG, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 151 - FEBRUARY 25, 1944**

Colonel Herbert E. Rice led ten long-range planes and dropped 27 tons of GP bombs on the Prufening Aircraft Plant at Regensburg. Due to the tremendous losses of the previous day, the 2nd was only able to provide ten aircraft for the mission. Two Squadrons from the 99th Bomb Group made up the rest of the First Wave with the 301st and 97th Bomb Groups following. The 325th Fighter Group was to provide cover for the withdrawal but was never seen.

Strike photos showed the assigned target, the Final Assembly Shop Building No. 7, was well covered, and with many visible hits on six other buildings. Observers reported that many fires and explosions were visible for many miles from the target.

As on the 24th, the enemy fighter resistance was terrific. It was well that the 2nd was leading the Wing. The brunt of the attack was directed mainly at the other Groups. It was estimated that 100 to 125 enemy fighters participated in the attack and tactics were very similar to the day before. Flak was intense and accurate and the combined resistance resulted in the loss of three B-17s and damage to six others. There were no injuries to returning crews. The 301st Bomb Group lost 11 B-17s in this action.

Plane #42-31416, 20th Squadron, was attacked before the target by three Me-109s, then caught fire and crashed. Four parachutes were seen to open. Plane #42-31679, 49th Squadron and plane #42-38070, 20th Squadron, collided eight minutes after bombs away. Five parachutes were seen to come from #679 and four from #070.

Fortress gunners claims were: Each credited with destruction of a Me-109 were Colonel Elmer J. Rogers, Observer; 1st Lt. Wikko A. Kopra, N; 2nd Lt. Leonard H. Kelly, B, 2nd Bomb Group Headquarters; 2nd Lt. William (NMI) Popoff, B; T/Sgt. Raymond C. Bringolf, UT; S/Sgt. James (NMI) Beranek, TG, 96th Squadron; T/Sgt. Edward M. Hart, UT; T/Sgt. Raymond O. Proto, RO; S/Sgt. Donald (NMI) Malcomson, LT, 429th Squadron. Credited with the probable destruction of a Me-109 was S/Sgt. Cantello H. Strickland, RW, 20th Squadron.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31416 - 20TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt. Lloyd J. Withers, 0-672544, P.	(POW)
Captain Robert E. Arnold, 0-696440, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Clyde J. Hayden, 0-683240, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt. Furman M. Scheiderman, 0-739512, B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. Albert J. Segal, 32378586, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Dwight E. Heatwole, 13118033, L/T.	(KIA)
PFC William B. Buchanan, 38473713, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Robert W. Hiatt, 35662186, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. John F. Ryan, 20434144, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. James J. Verdi, 13514164, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Edward Wronkoski, CP of A/C #42-38066, after the mission: “I saw three Me-109s come in on the nose of #42-31416 from 12:00 o’clock high. The first two attacked and peeled off. The third came boring in and was firing fiercely. He passed over #416, not over ten feet above him. It was then I could see Lt. Withers fighting the fire that was enveloping the cockpit. The aircraft

seemed partially under control. Soon after that, #416 started in a steep dive and after dropping approximately 2,000 feet, it pulled out. We then pulled into his position and I lost sight of the plane.”

Statement of Captain Lloyd J. Withers, after liberation: “Our aircraft left the formation over Moosdorf, Germany. T/Sgt. Verdi, T/Sgt. Segal and I bailed out and the aircraft struck the ground near Moosdorf. The aircraft blew up before it struck the ground. In the rear portion, which was the only part not destroyed by fire, were PFC Buchanan, S/Sgt. Hiatt, and S/Sgt. Ryan, in the waist section and tail, dead. Just after the fighter attack, I observed Captain Arnold, sitting in the cockpit, dead.

“2nd Lt. Scheiderman called me just prior to the attack to tell me we were approaching the target. The Germans gave me a description of a body lying some distance from the aircraft and the description could have been no one else in the crew. He is believed to have been fatally injured by 20mm cannon fire. He is buried in a grave near Moosdorf. All those killed are reported buried near Moosdorf, except Lt. Hayden.

“It is not known if S/Sgt. Heatwole bailed out. It was reported that he was fatally injured. I don’t know if Lt. Hayden bailed out. A German officer reported that he was taken to a German hospital. He is not buried with the rest of the crew.

“T/Sgt. Verdi bailed out. Just after we landed, we were picked up together by a German patrol. He was shot in the stomach by fragments from a 20mm shell. The last I saw him was at Stalag Luft I.”

Note: A German report shows that T/Sgt. Segal was captured and imprisoned. Other reports show he was liberated and returned to the United States.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31679 - 49TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Freeman D. Storm, 0-800962, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Donald J. Larson, 0-754362, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	William J. Cook, 0-671288, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Dale E. Wilkinson, 0-688277, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Andrew A. Bonnell, 33301046, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Stephen J. Hannon, 33303465, L/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	John L. Honis, 33349005, R/W.	(POW)
Sgt.	Richard A. McDaniel, 12172689, L/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Clyde R. Vaughan, 6917287, T/G.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Victor L. Miller, 16507283, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Donald J. Larson, CP, after liberation: “I bailed out and others I know were Lt. Storm, Lt. Wilkinson, Lt. Cook and T/Sgt. Bonnell who bailed out the forward hatch with me. Sgt. Honis and Sgt. Hannon bailed out the rear door. Sgt. Vaughan bailed out the tail section, which was broken off.

“The aircraft struck the ground near Landshut, Germany. Sgt. Miller may still have been in the radio room when the plane struck the ground but have no definite knowledge of that and do not know of his condition. Sgt. Miller may have been injured in some way at the time of the collision. No one saw him after the plane was hit. A few minutes before the collision, the bombardier called all members and they all answered, “OK.”

**MISSION NUMBER 150**

**FIRST WAVE**

**(Squadron 1)**

**490**

**Kutschera**

**584  
Long**

**579  
Byrd**

**(Sq. 3)**

**845  
Miller**

**(Sq. 2)**

**403  
Surratt**

**131  
Gulik**

**619  
Thayer**

**416  
Withers**

**527      070  
Magnuson   O'Shea**

**446  
Marshall**

**789      8066  
Hillman    Watkins**

**613  
Rigney**

**749  
Butler**

**344  
Griffith**

**970\*      425\*  
Foust      Smith**

**SECOND WAVE**

**(Sq. 1)**

**779**

**Trevathane**

**(Sq. 3)**

**233  
Storm**

**069  
Degan**

**(Sq. 2)**

**618\*  
Durney**

**459\*  
Lyons**

**666\*  
Thalken**

**638\*      859\*  
Glass    Verbruggen**

**405  
Lavine**

**777  
Blomquist**

**639\*      390\*  
Byrne    Mayfield**

**870\*  
Moyer**

**640\*  
McCord**

**873\*      419\*  
Pausha    Vandy**

**571\*  
Meyer**

**\* Missing**

“I think Sgt. McDaniel bailed out. I don't know if he was injured before. There was no way of telling after the collision. Someone mentioned that they believed it was Sgt. McDaniel's body they saw being carried away by the Germans.”

2nd Lt. Dale E. Wilkinson was the regular Bombardier on the crew of Lt. Blomquist. He had been wounded on a mission to Toulon, France, on February 4th, recovered and flew the mission to Steyr with his regular crew. On the 25th he flew with Lt. Storm in A/C #42-31679. October 1, 1990: “I was the only one of my crew to fly on the 25th to Regensburg. Our Group had been decimated at Steyr and think that our crew (Lt. Blomquist's) was the only one from the 96th to get back from Steyr.

“In any event, I was awakened at three a.m. and was told that I was to fly with Lt. Storm's crew who needed a bombardier and the Group was patching together anything that could fly. This was to be my 20/21 mission. Two mission credits for this target.

“On the Regensburg raid, we encountered heavy fighter opposition about an hour before the target, about the same as the day before at Steyr. I was concerned at the loose formation while under attack. On one pass, a German fighter flew between our ship and the formation and that is when I first suspected that I was not going to get back home.

“The description of the fighter attacks at Steyr jibes with my memory. At Steyr, we were indeed hit an hour before the target by masses of Me-109s and FW-190s, attacking wing-tip to wing-tip and knocking down a B-17 with every pass. The heaviest attacks seemed to come from the rear of the formation and the B-17s were being picked off from back to front. My memory tells me that when the P-38s met us, our plane was the next to go.

“Regensburg was a repeat of the 24th. We were hit by fighter formations a good hour before the target. We bombed Regensburg, and about 20 minutes en route home, I was firing at an incoming fighter, when I heard, and felt, a loud crash aboard our plane and our nose suddenly climbed up and over and I think a loop. We bailed out and I looked at my watch as I floated down; it was 1:20 p.m. I counted 20 or 30 parachutes above me in a line in which the bomber formation had gone. I learned later, on the ground, that as we climbed to fill the vacant number three slot, the number three plane, which had been hit and was dropping back, chewed our plane in two at the waist. The other crew was incensed, claiming that we climbed into them. The two waist gunners of our crew were killed. (Note: left waist gunner and radio operator.)

“We were gathered together on the ground and subsequently taken to prison camps in Germany. Lt. Storm and I ended up at Stalag Luft I near the town of Barth, Pomerania, about 90 miles north of Berlin, on the Baltic coast. The Eighth Air Force used to use our camp as the turning point on some of their 1,000 plane raids on Berlin. You can imagine what a thrilling sight that was from the ground!

“Stalag Luft I had been a prison camp for British officers. When I got there around mid March, there were 5,000 British, many taken at Dunkirk years earlier. A general build-up of American POWs, however, soon enabled the Americans to outnumber the British and take over most of the camp functions. An American Colonel was the ranking senior officer so he took over as Commanding Officer, much to the chagrin of the Brits.

“Our camp was liberated by the Russians around May 1, 1945, and we were held there until the end of the war, about two weeks. Flown out by stripped down B-17s, we went to Camp Lucky Strike near LaHavre, France, and eventually shipped home in early June 1945.”

Note: The 301st Bomb Group, following the combined formation of the 2nd and 99th Bomb Groups, was heavily attacked by enemy fighters. It suffered the loss of 11 B-17s. B-24s following the B-17 5th Wing were also attacked by enemy fighters. A total of 33 heavy bombers were lost on this target, on this day.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-38070 - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt. Henry M. O’Shea, 074-3073, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Stanley A. Stohl, 0-677610, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Lloyd A. Oster, 0-683301, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. John J. Conlon, 0-673780, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Richard C. Rivers, 39195528, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. DeWight C. Wilson, 6972006, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. John A. Lambert, 32254147, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Floyd W. Anthony, 33289968, L/S.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Elwood R. Newton, 33561968, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Clarence E. Moore, 1221421, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Jennings A. Marshall, P of B-17 #446, after the mission: “B-17 #070 was on the left of B-17 #452, Squadron Lead A/C and B-17 #679 was on my left wing. Then #070 slid back out of position, due to a feathered engine, in a right turn. No. 679 came back up and forward and his left horizontal stabilizer hit the nose of #070. The nose was completely knocked off of #070 and the tail of #679. It was out of control, did a wing-over and went down in a tight spiral. No. 070 lost altitude but seemed under control. Neither plane was burning or smoking. My waist left gunner reported four chutes coming out of #070. I did not see either plane crash but it seems both planes must have crashed due to their condition.”

S/Sgt. DeWight C. Wilson, Ball Turret Gunner on B-17 #42-38070. February 20, 1990: “We joined the 2nd Bomb Group around the 17th of February and flew three missions: 22 February, Olching, Germany; 24 February, Steyr, Austria; and the 25th. I had flown 18 missions with the 8th Air Force in England. I flew some tough missions in England, but, the one you went down on has to be the toughest.

“On the raid to Regensburg, we were hit by flak over the target and lost two engines on the left side. We could not keep up with the formation and kept dropping back. Fighters were all around us, like bees around honey, and there were several damaged FW-190s.

“As we were dropping back, another B-17 flew under us. They looked like they weren’t in any trouble and it almost got by us when we dropped on it, cutting the tail section of the other plane. From what I could make out, the nose of our plane was torn open and the tail gunner of the other plane was in our plane and bailed out from our plane.

“All of the crew bailed out okay and I understand that only four got out of the other aircraft.

“I was not taken prisoner until the following day. At Camp Lucky Strike, after liberation, my pilot, Henry O’Shea, found me and said I was the only one of my crew that he could find. He said the Germans had taken him back to our plane, saw an open chute and thought I had bailed out without one; I always carried an extra chute and oxygen mask. I was with John Lambert in POW camps until the last one.

“On the long march from Stalag Luft IV, my feet gave out and I was unable to walk. I was fortunate in that I was put on a wagon, with others, and pulled by a cow.

“When we got to Moosdorf, Germany, we had no place to stay. Five of us made a home out of boards and blankets and lined it with Red Cross boxes. We lived in that hut until the Americans came and liberated us.

“I have been unable to locate most of my crew so would appreciate any addresses you may have. I did not know the top turret gunner and radio man on the crew this day.”

S/Sgt. Elwood R. Newton, T/G on B-17 #42-38070. January 2, 1991: “My memory has become really dim about those events at that time. I think I may have unconsciously shut them out, and it has been 45 years.

“But I do recall my original crew and my missions with the 92nd Bomb Group in England very well. I was not an original member of Lt. O’Shea’s crew but was assigned as a replacement in England. My original crew in England, Lt. Daier, pilot, was lost on the first Schweinfurt mission in August, 1943, while I was in the hospital with an eye infection.

“I did not see the crash of the planes, but when it occurred I did not wait for the bail-out orders. I was already wearing my chest pack since I had no expectation of making it back. I had no difficulty exiting the tail section. When the collision occurred, I simply jettisoned the escape hatch and fell out. I did not wait for bail-out orders because I had seen other mid-air collisions where both planes blew up. Of course we had been told to make a delayed jump, opening the chute as near the ground as possible to improve chances of escape. I didn’t follow that advise too closely. I suspect I might have

been ten feet out of the slip-stream when I pulled the ripcord. I guess I wanted lots of time to worry if it didn't open.

"I recall my capture extremely well. I came down in a tree and hung there, all tangled up, about six feet off the ground. While I was trying to get loose, a German civilian, with about a one-gauge shotgun, appeared and I capitulated in a hurry. I have never seen a shotgun that big, considering that it was pointed straight at me.

"The eye witness reports on our final mission were not very accurate as to the number of men getting out. I remember that quite a few of us were gathered up by the Germans in an old wood-burning bus. The Germans took us to the scene of our aircraft. As I recall, it seemed fairly intact, broken into possibly two large pieces. I don't recall any specific damage to the nose although there must have been. The Germans didn't exactly give us free rein to sight see. While being shuttled around, picking up various members from both crews, we stopped along a hedge row and picked up one member from the other crew who had not survived. Two of us carried the body into the bus and laid it in the aisle for the rest of the trip. I have no idea which member it was nor what happened to the body.

"I never saw much of my crew after Dulag Luft at Frankfurt. Some of the officers probably went to Stalag Luft I or III, and the enlisted may have gone there as orderlies. I am not certain.

"I was first assigned to Stalag Luft VI and transferred to Stalag Luft IV from there. I was involved in the "bayonet run" from the station to Luft IV. This is the worst treatment I ever received while a guest in Germany. Luckily I missed the 80-day hike from there in favor of the eight day, 40 & 8 box car scenic ride. That ride was to Nurnberg. Although it was a miserable trip, it had to be easier than the march that the others made. Part of Luft III had arrived there before us. From there we took a leisurely march to Luft VIIA at Moosdorf. Most of the guards were elderly and knew that the war was about over. So, we were not ill treated that I can recall. I don't know who liberated us for sure at Moosdorf, but at the time there were rumors that it was part of Patton's Army."

1st Lt. Stanley Stohl, CP on Lt. O'Shea's crew. He had flown 13 missions in England, had been checked out as First Pilot and flown as first pilot with the 327th Squadron, 92nd Bomb Group in England. April 19, 1990: "I went overseas with Mike O'Shea's crew to the 8th Air Force, 92nd Bomb Group, England. I was checked out as First Pilot in England, flew two missions and aborted a third. Given a chance, as per my request, to transfer to Italy with my original crew, I chose to do so. My promotion took a long time to catch up to me and my records show my promotion to 1st Lt. was effective February 2, 1944.

"With respect to mission No. 151 and the 2nd paragraph of the Mission report, all is okay, as far as I know, up to the following sentence: "Number 070 was apparently damaged by enemy action for it was out of control partially." NOT SO AT ALL, and I ought to know because I was flying it at the time. The first part of the sentence is okay in that we lost No. 1 engine to flak early in the bomb run and had to feather the prop. In the 2nd Bomb Group, I recall that the S.O.P. was 155 M.P.H. - I.A.S. for the basic flying speed during bombing missions. Our element leader, to my recollection was also the Group leader that day, was not flying anywhere the indicated air speed as he made the right turn and headed for home. I had all the throttle to the fire wall and was losing ground with respect to our position in the formation. Moving out to the left a bit was done in consideration for the planes I knew were behind us. I never saw plane #679, however, I was fully aware of the collision. Some time later, on the ground, the bombardier/or navigator informed me that the collision caused the No. 2 propeller to fly off and slice through part of the nose section splitting the navigator's table in two.

"As to the partial sentence in the old history - i.e. - "and knocked the nose off #070." NOT SO AT ALL! A few seconds after the collision, Mike O'Shea took over the controls and yelled at me to "get out." I headed for the nose hatch and found the door to be open, and missing, and took a few seconds to glance up at the crawl space toward the nose compartment wondering if Lloyd and John

were still there. I saw no one, however, the nose section was still very much in place. A partial break of some size would have caused significant air movement and I don't recall any "wind" at all. I clipped my chest chute on my harness and went out the nose hatch feet first. On the way down, I was wondering with some concern, if the B-17 making tight left turns, and going down, was going to get any closer to me than it already was. I believe it was our plane and the flying pattern was consistent with both No. 1 and No. 2 engines out of commission.

"I was descending by chute in a very smooth manner, almost no swaying and the only discomfort was a shortness of breath early in the jump. As I neared the ground I wondered if I was going to land on the roof of a house at the edge of a very small town. A slight breeze drifted me away from the town, about 100 yards, and I landed in about one foot of snow, bright sun, and went down on my haunches, stood up and never left my feet. I spotted John Conlon across the road from me. We were descending in unison and landed at almost exactly the same time.

"The small town seemed deserted, no people, no dogs, no movement. The inhabitants were probably peeking out their windows at the "invasion." The situation changed abruptly as I noticed one older man exiting the last house on the other side of the road and getting on a bicycle. He was armed with a rifle or shotgun. I took off my chute and harness, was embarrassed to find my wallet in my pocket, kicked a hole in the snow and ditched that. I started to cross the road toward John. We met about the same time that an older male civilian, at a distance of about 100 yards hollering something in German, probably translated to something like, "Hands Up." A conversation between John and I followed: John: "what should we do?" Me: "Take a look behind you and I will tell you what to do."

"We walked out on the road and at this point a number of armed men had us pretty well surrounded. I dropped my Mae West and throat mike to the ground and they were picked up by a German civilian. An interesting event occurred that I recalled over the years. A young lady, age 20 or so, approached me and in perfect English, no accent, said, "Do you have any knives or guns?" I responded, "No," and that subject was not pursued any further. John and I now formed a two "person" parade as we were escorted down the only road toward the middle of town. There were white picket fences along both sides of the road, houses were set back and apart quite a bit, and I'm sure, productive fields behind them. A lot of activity now, women, children, dogs having a field day, so to speak.

"We entered the only significant building in town and found ourselves in a tavern and eventually in a booth; John and myself and two or three other airmen. At this point in time I do not recall their identities. Of our original crew that went overseas to the 92nd Bomb Group, only Wilson and Lambert were this day the only enlisted members of it. The others, listed in the history of the 2nd Bomb Group, I did not know well. We were approached by a large, rotund barkeep, white apron and handle-bar mustache, right out of Hollywood, and I indicated at a round of beer would be very well appreciated. Seeking payment for same, I indicated that I was without funds. The barkeep muttered something under his breath, probably the equivalent of, "dead beat." Things weren't looking too bad at this point. I was enjoying the very tasty beer with a cigarette and considered myself lucky in that things could have been a lot worse. About this time a German civilian approached me and embarrassed me by handing me my wallet with money and contents intact! A well-dressed man approached us, possibly Gestapo, and indicated we were to get up and get out of the tavern. I was a bit slow and he indicated that the party was over by withdrawing a gun from his pocket.

"All of the above listed events are detailed and accurate, however, the next series of events are a bit hazy in my memory. I wasn't drunk and for the life of me I don't know why. I will give it my best shot, hoping for some conformation.

"Outside the tavern we, about six airmen, boarded an open pickup truck and drove to the site of a downed B-17 that had crashed, but not burned. I believe that it was ours and we were allowed to board it and pick up some personal belongings. From there we went a short distance to another small town and an official (mayor's) office where I gave my name, rank and serial number. There was a lot

of “Heil Hitlerling” going on. Outside once more and into a bus with enclosed trailer behind. The entire rig was loaded with German soldiers, Wehrmacht I believe, plus quite a few American airmen prisoners. The whole rig seemed to be sadly overloaded. A number of stops were made in sequence at such places as crossroads, settlements, etc., and a few German soldiers would get off at each and be replaced by a number of downed airmen getting on. At one point, three others and myself were told to get off the bus and we had the unpleasant task of carrying, using the parachute harness, a dead American back on the bus and laying him on the floor between the seats. Eventually we had two or three deceased aboard plus a number of wounded, not ambulatory.

“At this point I can confirm that O’Shea, Conlon and, of course, myself were accounted for. I believe Oster was there but am not sure of that.

“The bus, with trailer, made the terminal stop at a military base the late afternoon, or early evening, of 2-25-44. I made the assumption that it was a military base, based on the general surroundings plus the presence of some young German officers. The location and name of this base was unknown to me. We were escorted into a large room where, in addition to the guards, a man in a white coat was seated at a table in the front of the room. All wounded prisoners were invited to come forward and have their wounds attended to. The treatment in most cases consisted of the application of what I believe to be a disinfectant and the body area was then covered with paper bandages. My best guess as to the number of American prisoners present would be 30, however, that is only a guess and I could be in considerable error. We spent the night on the floor of a large room after a small ration of food was distributed.

“Early the next morning we found ourselves on a passenger train traveling across Germany. We were advised to keep the shades drawn and not look out. I was seated at a window and managed to peek out a number of times observing some populated areas in considerable state of destruction. We made one stop at a large railway station to transfer trains. On this occasion, while standing on a platform in a group under guard, a German male civilian evidenced his dislike for us by walking through us as if we weren’t there. He bumped into a number of American prisoners causing some discomfort to those of us who were wounded and standing, or crouched, in awkward postures. The guards did nothing and the encounter was brief. It did not appear to be a significant threat, however, I did take note of it. While on the train, a German guard presented me with a paper cup of light beer. I do not know if all the American prisoners were so favored.

“The train pulled into a station and I have reason to believe it was Frankfurt-Am-Main. We were marched some distance to a prison camp and I noticed some parts of the city were in flames and lighting up the sky. About ten of us were herded into a small cell with a small window at the far end. I would guess that the dimensions of this cell to be about 7' x 15'. The guards warned us not to open the window as to do so would draw fire from outside guards. The cell door was closed and I found myself at the door end, and in a somewhat favorable position. The air was too warm and soon became foul, however, I got my face against the door crack and got relief while lying in a prone position on the cell floor.

“The next day, 2-27-44, was interrogation day. It was brief in duration and I spent the night alone in a small cell. Early the next morning we were issued small cardboard suitcases containing some toiletry articles, a change of underwear, a few other clothes, etc., plus some food; possibly a Red Cross parcel.

“We boarded a box car, one of many, and off on the next trip by rail. I would guess that our car contained about 20 American POWs and six or seven German guards. The distribution of space was unequal; the German guards in one half the car and we POWs in the other half, the groups separated by a small wood stove. The trip to Stalag Luft I, Barth, Germany took three days and two nights, arriving late in the afternoon of 3-1-44. The march to camp from the rail yard was not far. We were escorted by camp guards along with guard dogs.

“The physical dimensions of each barracks, number of them in each compound and number of compounds, etc., are not well remembered at this time, however, I can do a fair job with regard to the room. I would guess the dimensions at 16' x 24', having seven triple decker bunks, a long storage cabinet under the windows, a long table centrally located with two benches plus a small stove in one corner of the room. A single door was centrally located on the wall opposite the windows; this door opening to a central hall running the length of the barracks. External window shutters were closed and barred at night, however, small sliding doors were located above the windows to provide night ventilation.

“Since I learned to understand the German language in head counting, each morning and night, the number of prisoners fell into the 150 to 170 range per barracks. On that basis I would have to guess the number of large rooms per barracks at eight, plus four small rooms, two at each end of the building. One of the rooms served as a private quarters for the barracks commander, another was used to house the portable privy and a third, sometimes used as a store where one might buy a variety of items using cigarettes as a medium of exchange. Small gardens were permitted during the growing season and on one occasion I remember paying one pack of cigarettes for one medium size bunch of radishes.

“I would guess I would have survived on German rations alone, should that have been necessary. The food issued was in general of the potatoes, turnips, oatmeal, horse meat, etc. variety plus a daily ration of somewhat sour tasting bread, a small percentage of which was sawdust. When the backlog permitted, we were issued one Red Cross parcel per prisoner per week. Sometimes the period extended to two weeks and occasionally longer. Red Cross parcels ran out about two weeks before we were liberated.

“The daytime latrine was confined to a large multi-hole separate building. A horse drawn honey wagon was frequently used to service this unit. A separate building served as a washroom where one might make an effort to keep clothing clean; cold water only. Another small unit provided cold water taps for general toilet use. Personal showers were provided in a separate compound building and at approximately 10-day intervals. One had to move fast; four or five POWs around one shower head that was just a little better than dripping.

“Our everyday routine was confined to keeping our room and ourselves clean and the mind occupied. The small stove did provide cooking possibilities; my specialty was scalloped potatoes. Fuel was in short supply and consisted of black bricks. I would guess the composition was a mixture of tar and coal dust or something along those lines.

“An adjacent compound provided an open field used for sports activities and the daily morning and evening head count. As I recall, a small library was present in an adjacent compound and I used that facility on a few occasions. I played a lot of contract bridge and chess during my interment. Since almost all of the internees were of some rank, we were not required to work for the Germans.

“Quite a few prisoners were engaged in escape attempts at various times and when favorable conditions existed. By far the primary effort was tunneling under ground in an effort to breach the double barb wire fence surrounding the camp. I understand that the Germans had seismograph type of equipment along the fence lines that did pick up and record the vibrations associated with digging, i.e., tunneling. Since I did not then and do not relish now the idea of becoming a human mole, I did not participate in the effort.

“The last few days of April, 1945 one could hear the distant artillery fire in the East signaling the advance of the Russian offensive that had halted at the Oder River. On or about April 29th, about mid-day, we thought, in error, that the artillery fire was getting much too close. At the sound of a large explosion, most everyone vacated our room at top speed, taking with them an empty tin can, or almost any device that will be useful in digging a personal foxhole.

“I was doing dishes at the time and in a stoical manner I remained at my task. I do not know why I did not move out. A number of explosions followed in sequence signaling the destruction of the

radar equipment associated with the nearby flak school. The late afternoon of 4-29-45, a conference was held between the German Kommandant and the POW senior British and American Officers. The Allied senior officers were informed that orders had been received to move the entire camp westward. Our senior officers declined to cooperate or order the camp to move and the Kommandant decided to evacuate all his guards and staff, almost all; several female secretaries remained, and turned the camp over to us. The formal transfer occurred at approximately 1:00 a.m., April 30, 1945. Early morning of the 30th I found myself in a guard tower taking the place of a German guard. I was given that job because I was part of a special MP company organized in the event of a number contingencies. We tried to keep the more adventurous POWs in the camp; the safest place considering the situation. The female secretaries were taken under the wing of our Chaplain and the German guard dogs, confused and disoriented, were shot. A few German guards remained in camp after the turnover; they just drifted around looking a bit apprehensive.

“First contact with the advancing Russians occurred very late on May 1st or 2nd. The first Russian contact, 1st Lt. Alec Nick Karmyzoff, arrived at our camp, and during the days that followed, a number of other Russian officers visited also.

“The U.S. Army Air Force, using B-17 bombers as passenger planes, in conjunction with the airport near Barth, transported the camp American POWs out of Germany. I left the middle of May and landed at the airport near LaHavre, France, and then on to Camp Lucky Strike in preparation for repatriation. I started the POW period at a body weight of about 150 pounds and returned about 10 pounds lighter. I consider myself lucky with all the negative possibilities associated with the experience, no one, literally put a finger on me.

“Embarked for the States and arrived in Boston, Mass. Harbor on or about June 21, 1945. On that day I can vouch for the safety and arrival of the other three officer crew members, 1st Lt. Henry M. O’Shea, 2nd Lt. Lloyd A. Oster, and 2nd Lt. John J. Conlon. Through lack of contact, I could not vouch for any of the enlisted personnel.”

“Lt. John “Gill” Nelson was a Pilot with the 20th Squadron. February 16, 1993: “I joined the 2nd bomb Group, 20th Squadron, in September 1943 as a co-pilot on the crew of Lt. Lloyd Withers, a disgruntled one at that. I had been one of 15 pilots selected from our single engine class, 43-F, at Aloe Field, Waco, Texas to be assigned to a, just forming, P-51 outfit.

“The timing was poor. We arrived at Meridian, Mississippi to find the P-51s were not on the field. After a few days wait, we were assigned as co-pilots, either to B-24 or B-17 outfits. We weren’t happy! I joined Withers’ crew at Rattlesnake Base, Pyote, Texas, while they were in their second phase. I had five weeks or so of orientation of the B-17 before we were shipped out, via Camp Patrick Henry, in a Liberty Ship convoy that took 25 days to reach Casablanca.

“I flew my first combat mission, the morning after I arrived, with a Captain flying his 50th. I had five missions in before Withers’ crew, who were in training, had their first mission. Lloyd had an 8mm camera which I took on my first mission. I initially looked upon combat as I would an exciting game. I took a picture, although faint, of a 109 coming in at 3 o’clock. He blasted a hole, with his 20mm cannon, in the radio room. The reality of what we were going to be faced with struck home with an impact and I never took another picture. The first mission, one of the fighter trained pilots that came at the same time I did was shot down. He hardly had a chance to unpack. He avoided becoming a POW by being picked up by Greek patriots. He stopped in at Group in May after spending the winter avoiding capture. I can’t remember his name but he was sent home without further combat duty. His adventures, as he related them, would make an interesting story.

“I flew the Steyr and Regensburg missions, February 24th and 25th. I am somewhat hazy about the Steyr mission. I flew in plane #403 as co-pilot with Dewey Surratt as pilot. He flew the next day as my co-pilot on the Regensburg raid. Dewey was another fighter trained pilot. We flew together

several times, trading off on pilot, co-pilot responsibilities. No. 403 was leading the Squadron that day, to Steyr, and our main attention was directed to keeping a tight formation. As most of the action took place behind us, it was more like a normal mission except for the heavy flak. Perhaps the trauma of the next day blotted it out.

“Dewey finished his B-17 tour and transferred directly to Colonel McCorkle’s 31st Fighter Group of P-51s that were just starting to operate in May, 1944. We went over together and were both accepted by the Colonel. The drawback was he wouldn’t give us leave time and I wanted to come home. Dewey didn’t feel the same way I did and joined the Group. I haven’t heard from him since. He was an excellent pilot.

“The Regensburg raid is unforgettable to me. I had nightmares for months over it, and the emotional pain of seeing my good friends, and tent mates, go down in front of me has never left. The fighters were yellow nosed 109s, some say from Goering’s special Group. They came in so close off the left wing that I could see, in that split second, the white scarf and goggles of the pilot whose cannon shot Withers’ plane down. They were less than 75 feet away. They had to have been hit themselves by the engineer’s twin fifties, but these were the B-17s without the nose turret. They were daring to come in that close at that speed.

“The frustration and helplessness as I watched Lloyd’s plane go down was extremely emotional to me. I can now understand how human beings, under tremendous emotional stress, can perform heroic or foolish acts. I actually had the impulse to ram them if they came in again. I remember I struck my fist on the cap of the steering column hard enough to leave an imprint of the nut underneath. Returning to an empty tent and then helping the next day to collect the personal items of my buddies was very difficult.

“I have never heard of any of the fellows again. I knew that four had parachuted from the plane as I asked the tail gunner to count the chutes. I learned through the grapevine that Withers, Verdi, and Segal had survived and were POWs. I also learned that Withers died in an airplane in Alaska after returning to the States.

“Carroll Tucker, the Squadron Navigator, and Gene Sacco, the Squadron Bombardier, both waited several weeks so we could fly our 50th mission together. I believe that was the mission to Turin, Italy, March 29th. I believe that was the mission Ed Wronkoski was shot down. It was no milk run! I had a piece of shrapnel, the size of the last joint in my thumb, that came over my shoulder and lodged in the instrument panel. You knew things were close when particles of the plane’s insulation started to float, like feathers, around the cockpit interior. It was an eerie affect. We led the Squadron that day and Wronkoski, I think, was hit by flak as we were over the target. I know the tail gunner said he lost an engine, that he was dropping back, and was being attacked by fighters. I felt somewhat guilty that the formation couldn’t be slowed down enough for him to catch up.

“An added aspect of combat flying, to me, was the terrible bone chilling coldness that we would suffer. I never possessed a heated flying suit. If we had any, the waist gunners received them. At up to 50 degrees below, after several hours, the plane would become a deep freeze. You would be chilled to the bone until you encountered fighters or flak, and then the adrenalin would start flowing and the coldness seemingly disappear. Then in a few minutes, when action stopped and circumstances returned to normal, you would suddenly realize you were cold again. Your nervous system can have a magical effect on your body.

“Hitting the I.P. and turning on the bomb run and seeing the sky ahead peppered with black smoke left from the exploding ack ack shot at the formation in front also made you forget the cold. It was always a terrifying experience, knowing that you had to hold your heading, sometimes up to 10 to 12 minutes, while flying into those exploding cannon shells.

“Many times, to bolster my own courage and also to prevent panic, keep my mind stable and under my command, I would repeat the 23rd Psalm. On several occasions, and Regensburg was one,

I held the intercom down. You would start to notice the cold soon after the plane jumped slightly upon bomb release and you turned out of the exploding flak. I didn't think my repeating the 23 Psalm was unique; many prayers were offered on the bomb run.

"I have no idea how one might calculate the odds of a person completing their tour at that particular time. I guess someone could research the particular missions that you participated in, and number of lost planes, and come up with a figure. I feel that I was very fortunate to come home, and have for years felt like I was living on "borrowed time." The odds could be as high as 50-60 to 1 when you count the high losses to Steyr, Regensburg, Wiener Neustadt, Gyor, and the abortive mission to Sofia, Bulgaria, when we lost two at the target and four in the Adriatic from lack of fuel. We made that one by dropping our bombs early and threw all guns and gear out of the plane. One of our engines ran out of gas as we taxied in. It was very close! There were a lot of 'May Day' calls on the radio that day, and we were one. I have learned that the Group lost about 58 planes and crews, during my tour from September, 1943 until my last mission on March 29, 1944. That does not include men killed in planes that made it home nor planes so badly damaged that they were never used again. The crews that went down in the Adriatic on the Sofia raid were all saved, which was a miracle in itself.

"I never picked up a regular crew 'per se.' Several times I took fresh crews in from the States for several missions and their pilot flew as co-pilot with an experienced crew. That was the case of the abortive Sofia mission. It was the only time that a crew lined up and each one came forward, shook my hand and thanked me for getting them home."

Captain Harry Miller, Engineering Officer, 49th Squadron. December 26, 1991: "I certainly will never forget the fateful week in February, 1944. True, I was not a combat crew member but it hit me just as hard.

"I was the Engineering Officer of the 49th Squadron. That week, Steyr and Regensburg, left me nothing in the way of airplanes, and our Squadron, with almost no combat crews. One day, NONE of the seven planes we sent out returned. The next day we sent out another seven and only two returned. We, as a Squadron, were out of business. I felt very ashamed at being non-operational.

"We were all shocked! As I drove around to those empty hardstands, I would try to comfort the ground crews that were standing, literally crying, over the lose of their planes. We lost some that we had maintained since first starting out in Africa nine months earlier. One called "ACHING BACK," #638, was very near 100 missions. The crews were essentially the first of many replacement crews so we ground people were not as acquainted with them, as with our original crews that had, by then, finished their tour. We were stunned by the loss of these planes and men, but loss of the old, original planes hit us the hardest. We knew them bolt by bolt and now they had been taken away from us. I think we hated Hitler more that day than at any time during the war.

"Very quickly they began to ship in replacement planes and crews. We were essentially a training Squadron for a few weeks. I flew a number of times checking out the flight engineers and pilots. A number of these crews had been trained in B-24s and were very irate that anyone could be so cruel as to switch them to those old, outdated B-17s. They were in no mood to learn anything about the Fortress and that made our job very difficult. We certainly could hear no slandering remarks about the pride of the Air Force so it was a tense situation for awhile.

"Long before those Liberator boys completed their 50, they were 100% converted and thanked God for the change. They did a good job and we almost forgave them for coming from B-24s."

Sgt. James Robert Harris was the lead parachute Rigger in the 96th Squadron. He was from Ashton, Idaho, and returned there after the war. We met again at a reunion in Seattle, Washington, and then began corresponding by letter and telephone. Naturally we talked of our times in North Africa and Italy. At one reunion in Norfolk, VA, one of the officers from the 96th Squadron recognized him from

those early days. This officer, and his crew, had been shot down, I believe, on the Steyr mission. They all parachuted safely, were taken prisoner, and survived. This officer introduced James as having saved his life, and many others of the 96th that had been shot down and successfully survived a prison camp. James was given a standing ovation and, am sure, was proud, and thankful, that his duties had been instrumental in saving the lives of his comrades.

<b>GROUP FORMATION MISSION NUMBER 151</b>		
	<b>452 Rice</b>	
<b>070* O'Shea</b>		<b>416* Withers</b>
	<b>8066 Watkins</b>	
<b>458 Degan</b>		<b>837 Nelson</b>
	<b>466 Marshall</b>	
<b>679* Storm</b>		<b>527 Magnuson</b>
	<b>490 Frederick</b>	
<b>* Missing</b>		

**ZARA, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 152 - FEBRUARY 25, 1944**

This diversionary mission was planned for the short range bombers to attack the Aircraft Factory at Klagenfurt, Austria. The Group proceeding the 2nd turned back so the Group turned back also, having only nine planes remaining. Eight others had aborted due to mechanical problems. There were 36 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs dropped on shipping and harbor installations with limited results. Strike photos showed some hits on military installations, the residential area, and many fell in the water. Two aircraft that were early returns also dropped their bombs on this target. There was no flak and no encounters with enemy aircraft.

Karl Affenzeller, a historical researcher from the town of Freistadt, Austria furnished the following information regarding a German pilot, Lt. Alfred Hammer, Squadron Leader (Staffelfuher) of 6./JG53 based in Sierning, near Vienna, Austria. Lt. Hammer flew a Me-109 G-6, Serial #440190, Yellow 1. His total number of air victories at the end of WW II were 26.

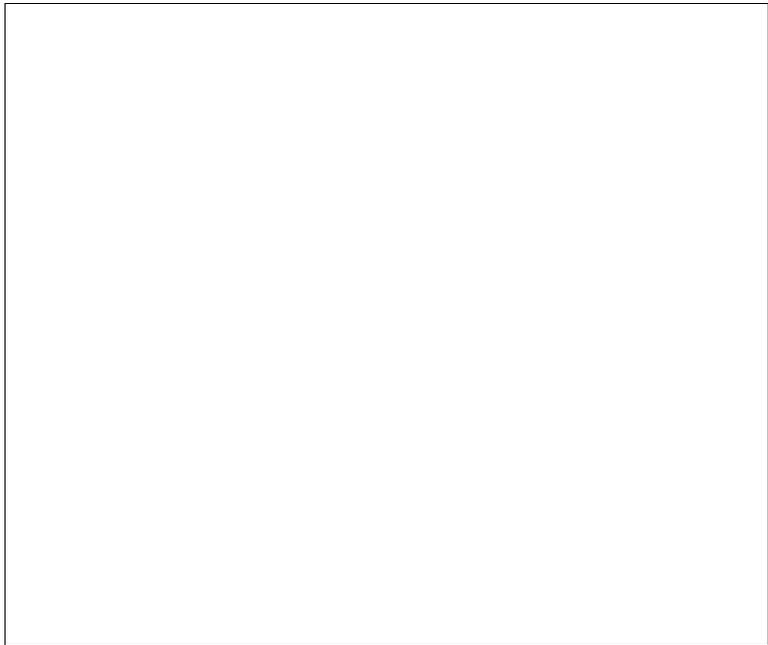
Lt. Hammer reports: "February 24, 1944, shortly after 12:00 o'clock, the II./JG53 was put into alert, after a unit of Fortress-planes had been reported approaching Linz-the raid was again aimed at the factories at Steyr.

“We had again started, after an American bomber unit approaching Linz had been announced. I attacked this unit from a hight of 8.000 meters, and when I was approximately 200 meters behind one of the Pulks I was hit by the defense fire of the Fortress. A detonator exploded inside the cabin in front of my right leg. As a defending action, I turned the plane rapidly downwards and at first I though that my plane was no more steerable so that I had to leave. As a first reaction to that, I dropped the roof of my cabin. Because of my hight I still had enough time for reflection my actions, and so I tried to find out my plane was still steerable. Thus I saw that I could perfectly reduce speed and was still flying at 6.000 meters above the ground. Then I noticed quite a lot of blood poured out of my right leg so that I could not think of continuing the flight. Instead of that I had to find a way of returning safely. My first thought, of course, to fly back to Sierning. But as my right leg began to hurt intensely, I decided to land in Linz. From there I was taken to Wels and hospitalized.

“Meanwhile the aerial battle was extended further southwards, near lake Attersea, Uffz. Schrubba, from the 4th Squadron (4./JG53) was hit by the defense fire of a B-17 and had to parachute although being injured. Yet another loss hit the 4./JG53. Ogefr. Traugott Sturk was hit by the defense fire of a B-24 near Straubing and killed when his plane crashed at Wiesenfelden, around 15 kilometers south of Straubing. The JG53 attacked the enemy planes also over the Alps, and at 1:05 p.m., S/Sgt. Rollwage shot down a B-17 at Gmund, north of lake Millstadin Carinthia. The Stafelfuhrer 5./JG53, Wilhelm Esser, was successful in downing a B-17.

“All in all, the 15th Air Force reported a loss of 16 B-17 and 4 P-38 so that II./JG53 had obviously downed several further planes. In the course of this aerial battle, the group had completely scattered so that the planes returned to Sierning in small groups or single between 1:30 and 2:00 p.m.”

At the conclusion of “ARGUMENT,” the 15th Air Force had suffered the loss of 97 B-17s and B-24s, plus nine fighters. This did not include aircraft that returned so badly damaged that they were not salvageable. The 2nd Bomb Group lost 18 B-17s missing, with crews totaling 180 men. After hostilities had ended, it was found that 47 of these men had lost their lives and many more were wounded. Twenty-eight returning planes had been damaged and 12 returning crewmen had been wounded.



T/R - L/R - H. Troutman - C. Foster - R. Stamps - W. Oates  
- Unknown - A. Gonzalez  
B/R - L/R - R. Blomquist - H. Maybee - J. Stewart - D.  
Wilkinson  
(Courtesy - J. Stewart)

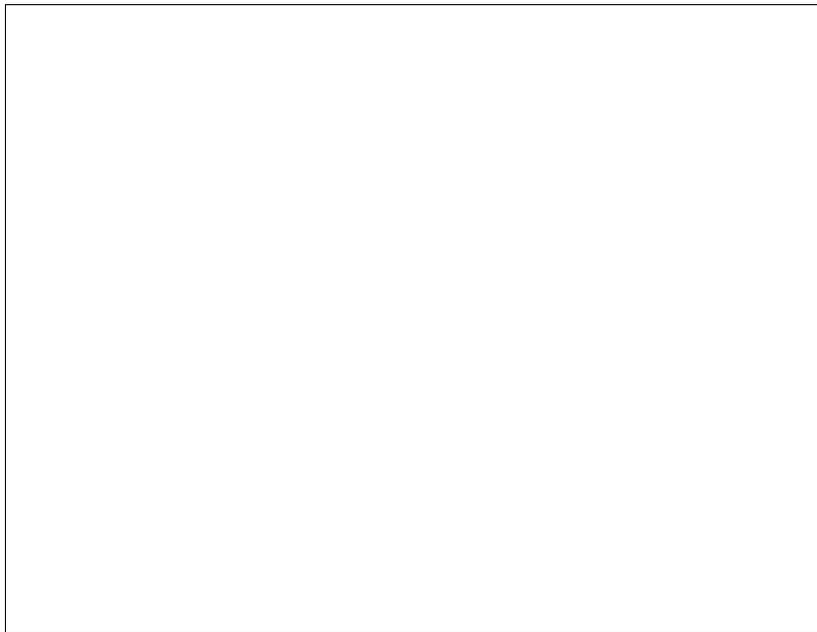
On D-Day, the Allied air forces controlled the air over the invasion beaches. It would be impossible to estimate the number of lives, ships and equipment lost had the German Air Force been able to mount an offensive.



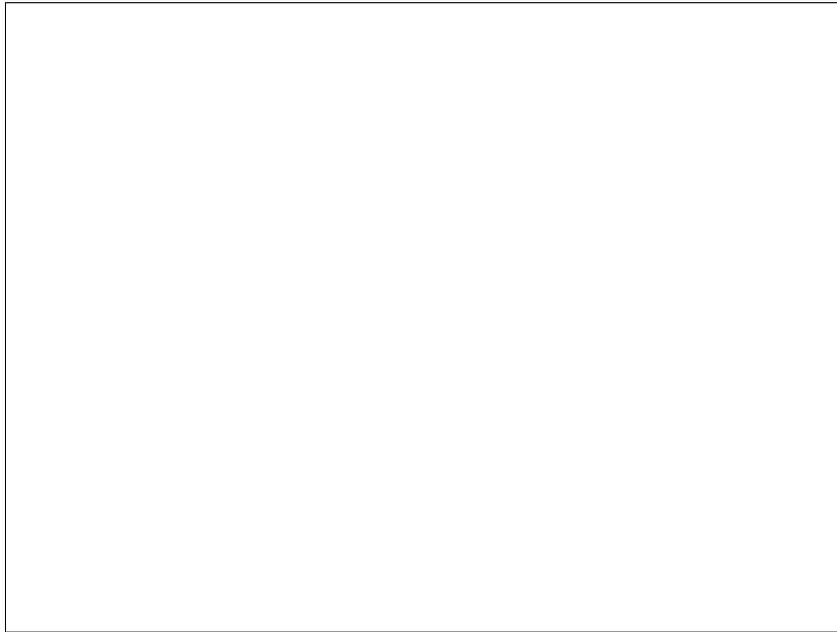
T/R - L/R - P. Foust (\*), J. Coppinger, unknown, K. Mork  
B/R - L/R - J. Clark (\*\*), C. Harvey, C. O'Leary, O. Beene, S. Riccio, D. Hammond  
\* KIA — \*\* Died on Forced march. (Courtesy - R. Peterson)



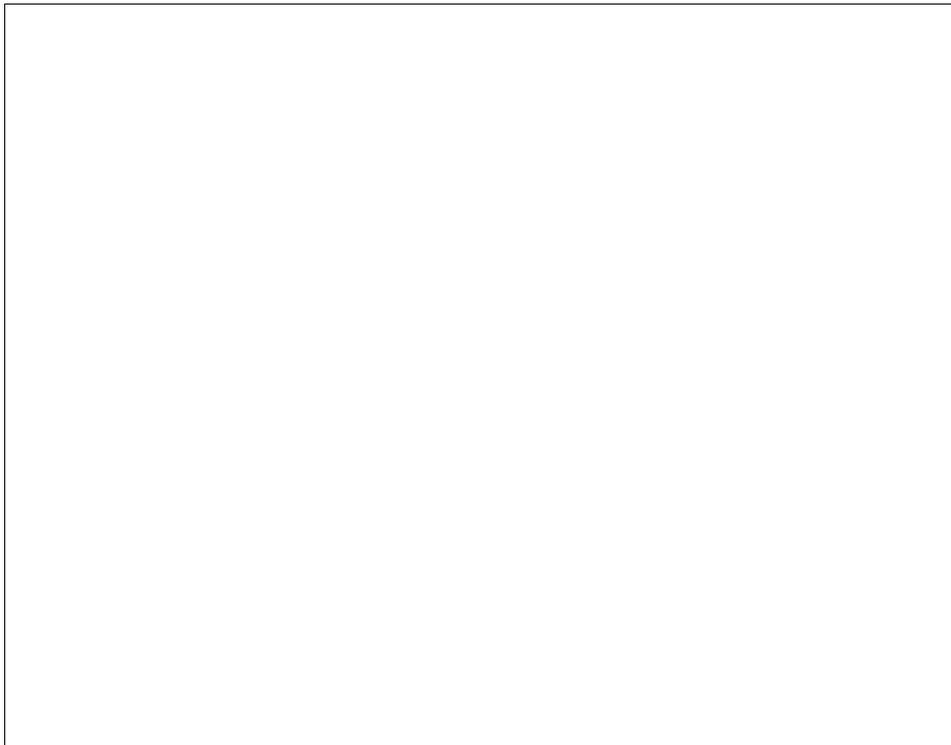
T/R - L/R - L. Lani, W. Nies (\*), J. Vinson, E. Nelson,  
C. Bolt, R. Colihan  
B/R - L/R - E. Nunnery, H. Scarborough, E. Ralph, W. Lins  
\* Killed by German Guard in POW Camp  
(Courtesy - C. Bolt)



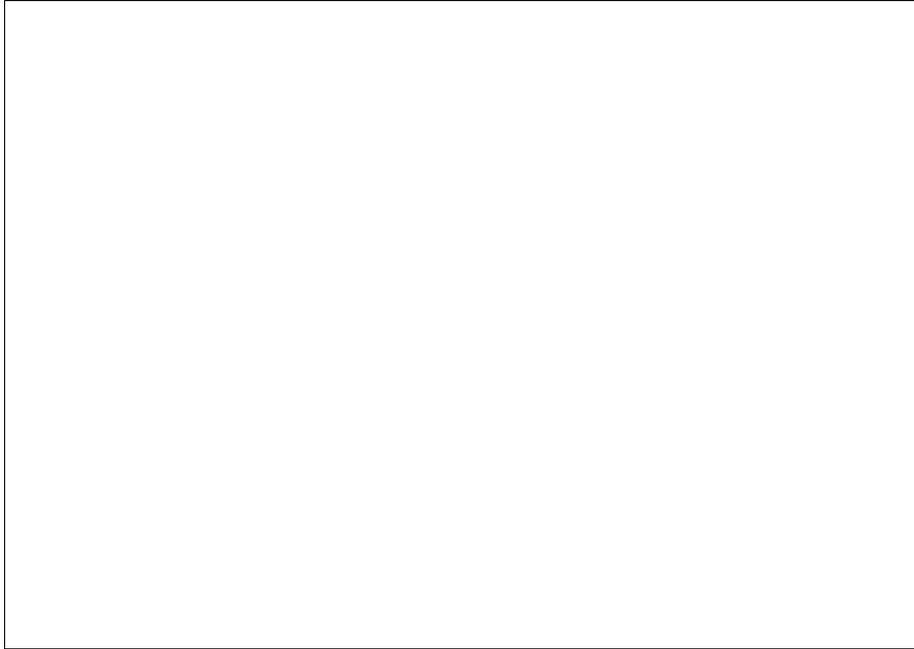
T/R - L/R - T. Comer, O. Thigpen, H. Wisner, C. Cowan  
B/R - L/R - J. O'Connor, L. Vitali, M. Nimirowski, J. Connors,  
H. Finkelstein, G. Kemp - (Courtesy - M. Nimirowski)



S/Sgt. Michael Nimirowski - (Courtesy - M. Nimirowski)



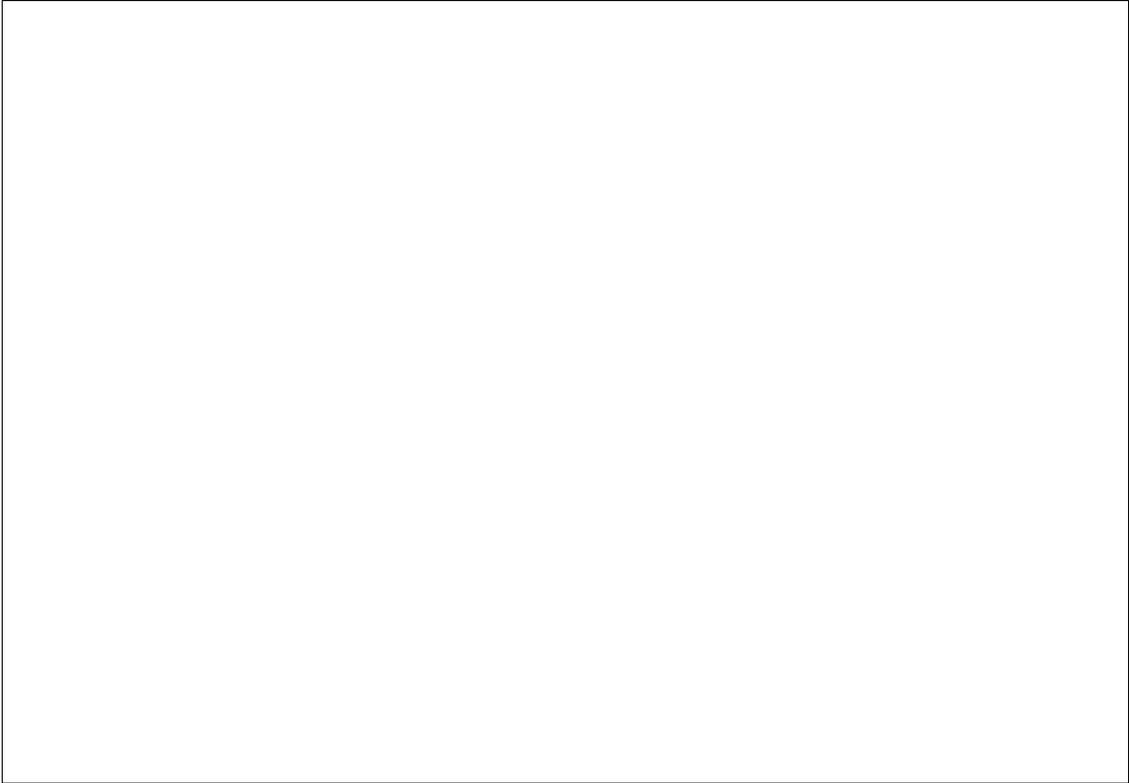
Lt. Clarence A. Cowan - (Courtesy - Clarence A. Cowan)



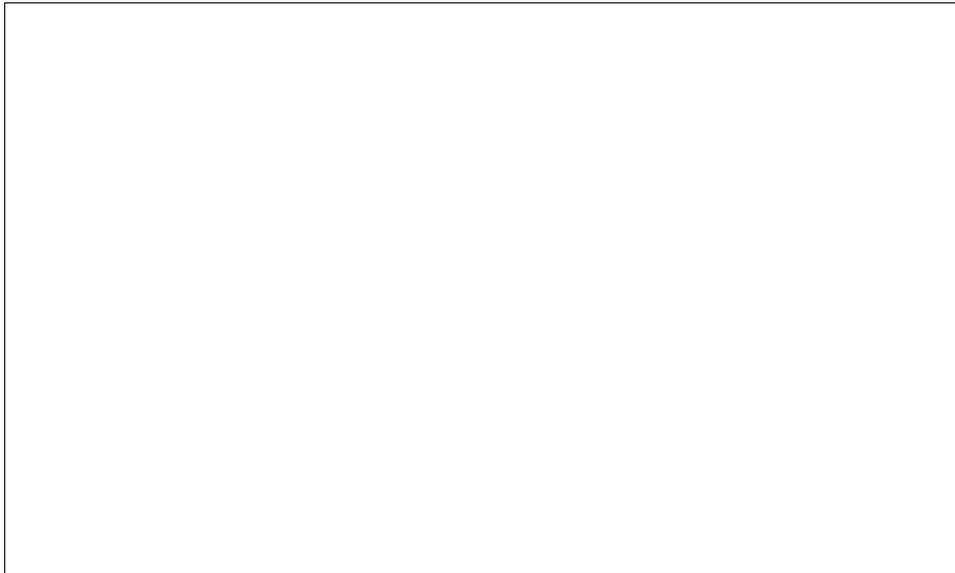
A/C #42-97152 - Missing 3-29-44  
Crew: E. Wronkoski, F. Sanvito, R. Zeugin, N. Stockstill, F. High  
M. LaRouche, G. Lawrence, D. Genter, E. Lipsett, D. Weiss  
(Courtesy - R. Odegaard)



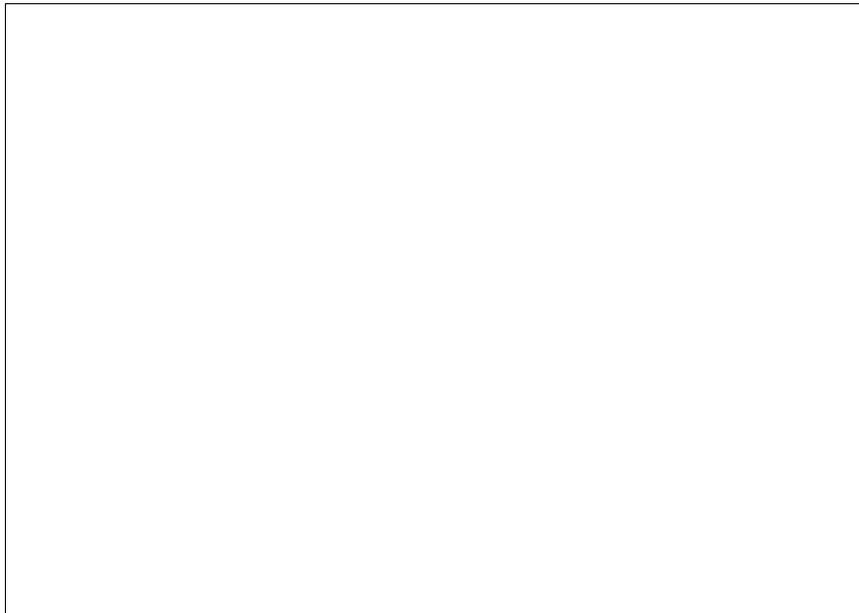
T/R - L/R - H. Cooley, S. Zafran, J. Gatewood (\*), R. Edwards  
B/R - L/R - J. McCord, A. Keller, A. Lunan, D. Gilmore  
\* KIA - (Courtesy - R. Edwards)



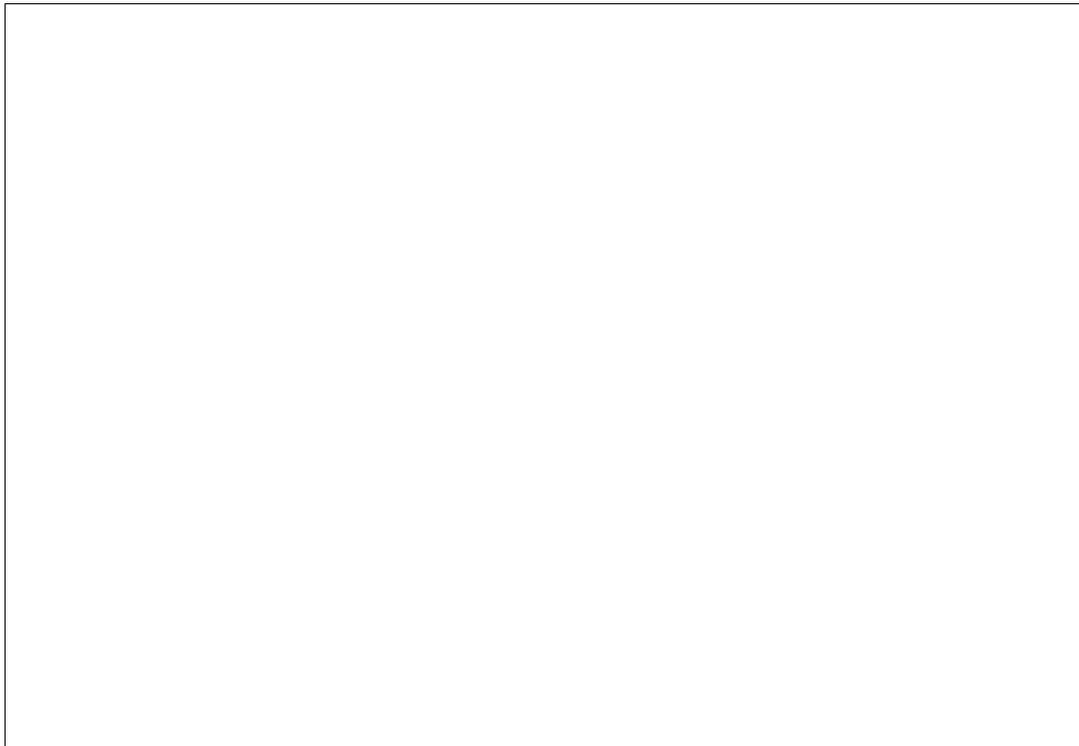
Window - J. Henry; Kneeling - N. Lubowski (\*)  
L/R - R. Johnson (\*), M. Deibel, W. O'Hare, R. Basehore (\*)  
L. Zaplatynski, W. Gustafson, R. DeClements, W. Hartsock  
(\*) KIA (Courtesy - W. Hartsock)



T/R - L/R - R. Irby, L. Rigney (\*), J. Janicek, W. Mitchell (\*)  
B/R - L/R - O. Buechner (\*), W. Corbin (\*), R. Gilbert (\*),  
A. Barrow (\*), M. Maddox (\*)  
(\*) KIA (Courtesy - R. Irby)



T/R - L/R - R. Sykes, F. Hoskins, J. Weaver, D. Scott, H. Kronenberg,  
W. Tucker  
B/R - L/R - R. Cleesattel, C. Dickson, G. Crank  
(Courtesy - H. Kronenberg)



L/R Colonel Richard Abbey - Lt. Col. Bivins - Colonel Paul Cullen, 2nd BG CO, -  
Major Lewis Leibel - 16 March 45/22 May 45 (Photo Section)



# 8

## OPERATIONS: MARCH, 1944

### **A** NZIO BEACH-HEAD, ITALY - MISSION NO. 152 - MARCH 2, 1944

Twenty-one aircraft dropped 30.24 tons of 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on German troop concentrations two miles beyond the bomb line and 7 and one-half miles south-southeast of Albano. Flak was moderate to intense and accurate resulting in the loss of A/C #42-5779, 96th Squadron. Two men were missing from the crew and five were injured during ditching. Fourteen other B-17s were damaged by flak.

2nd Lt. Benjamin E. Nabers drowned while trying to rescue S/Sgt. William E. McNichol, who was also lost. The injured were: 2nd Lt. Robert A. Brienza, N, suffered from exposure and minor back injury; 2nd Lt. Thomas R. Degan, P, laceration of index finger caused by shattered plexiglass; 2nd Lt. William (NMI) Popoff, B, mild flak wound, right arm; S/Sgt. Thomas M. Moriarity, LT, back injury; and Colonel Elmer J. Rogers, Jr., CO, 456th bomb Group, Observer, loss of small toe, left foot, from flak.

Eight surviving men of the crew returned to Base, March 5, 1944. Colonel Rogers, after hospitalization, returned to his command.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-5779 - "LEAKIN' LENA" - 96TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Thomas R. Degan, 0-684497, P.	(RESCUED)
2nd Lt.	Benjamin E. Nabers, Jr., 0-802772, CP.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Robert A. Brienza, 0-672933, N.	(RESCUED)
2nd Lt.	William (NMI) Popoff, 0-688522, B.	(RESCUED)
T/Sgt.	James M. Turner, 12049370, U/T.	(RESCUED)
S/Sgt.	Thomas M. Moriarity, 12169379, L/T.	(RESCUED)
S/Sgt.	William E. McNichol, 33225737, R/W.	(DED)
S/Sgt.	Henry (NMI) Macias, 38953418, L/W.	(RESCUED)
S/Sgt.	Anthony J. Sikole, 35421737, T/G.	(RESCUED)
T/Sgt.	Julius H. Bridges, 398199664, R/O.	(RESCUED)
Colonel	Elmer J. Rogers, Jr., 0-16622, Observer	(RESCUED)

S/Sgt. Thomas M. Moriarty, Ball Turret Gunner on B-17 #42-5779. November 14, 1990: "When I joined up, my name was spelled wrong and I was never able to straighten it out. They slipped in another "I" and so all my records show my name as Moriarity. I would like to describe two of my most memorable missions.

"On February 24, 1944, we took off for Steyr, Austria loaded with 12, 500-lb. bombs. 'Leakin' Lena' led a formation of 17 planes. My pilot was 1st Lt. Talmadge W. Trevathane. All seemed well until jumped by German fighters; 109s, 190s, etc., approximately 100 or more, I guess. We ran a battle

to the target, losing all the 49th Squadron planes and many others from the 96th. We, our wave, went over the target with five ships. Our radio operator, T/Sgt. Julius Bridges, was wounded.

“We came off the target and fighters jumped us again. I believe at this time, two or three from the 20th Squadron went down. After a few minutes, they left, pursued by P-38s that heard of our trouble and came back from the front of the other Groups, to help us. We had very few planes left and all bunched up to get back home.

“We had one engine out. I was credited with a probable and “Cy,” S/Sgt. Macias, got credit for a probable Me-109. I don’t know what the mission report said, but felt we had damaged some others. Our tail gunner, S/Sgt. Walker, should have had some probables, or a kill. This was my 47th mission.

“They finally got me today. We were laying around in our tents waiting to go on that last 50th. Days, hours, minutes went by and after five days since our last mission, on the 6th day, March 2nd, 1944, we climbed aboard ‘LEAKIN’ LENA’ for the final one, 50th. Target: Troop concentrations at the Anzio Beach-head.

“We took off, loaded with frag bombs and headed for Anzio. We went out to sea, turned and flew up the coast to turn into our objective. By this time, we had climbed to 19,500 feet and bombing altitude for this mission. The I.P. came up and bomb bay doors swung open. No evasive action was taken. It seemed like an eternity before the bombs dropped and instantly we were hit by flak, again and again. Two engines were hit and running away, both on the right side. The nose was hit and partially blown away. Colonel Rogers was hit.

“I came out of the ball turret, snapped on my chute and began, with others, to prepare to bail out. Seconds later, the word came to prepare to ditch. We started throwing everything out that was not nailed down. We then began to assemble in the radio room to follow the ditching procedure. The plane was shaking like a jackhammer.

“Colonel Rogers announced that his foot was shot apart. Then things started to happen fast. Word came from the radio operator that the trailing antenna ball had hit the water. We braced ourselves for the crash. We hit very hard and came to a stop at once. Degan and Nabers did a hell of a job! Water was rushing in fast, the dinghy rods were pulled and we started sinking. I was second last one out and water was up to my neck as I stepped out and down to the wing. I found that it wasn’t there and before the undertow pulled me down, I saw Red McNichol standing on the upturned wing. I popped out of the water and made for the dinghy about 20 yards away. We all made it except Red McNichol.

“We saw him in the water about 100 yards away. Ben Nabers said he was a good swimmer and was going after him. It looked like Red was hanging onto a ration box. Nabers was told it was useless to go after him but he went anyway. He got out a ways from the dinghy and seemed to stop to grab something and call out to McNichol but there was no response. We just kept drifting away very fast; the water was rough and cold.

“We began to collect ourselves and make the Colonel comfortable. We started to lay out a marker beacon and got the flare pistol ready, strapped the two dinghies together. We were hoping our ‘May Day’ was heard.

“We could see an island in the distance so for something to do, we started to paddle. We just seemed to bob around in the swells. We scanned the sky and saw some B-24s fly by on the way to the beach-head.

“Suddenly we saw a plane flying low over the water. We got our white scarves off and started waving only to find it was a Me-410. We hugged the bottoms of the dinghies and prayed that he didn’t see us. He flew within 100 yards of us and continued on by.

“Someone then spotted a British ‘Wimpy’ Wellington bomber circling on the horizon. He just kept making circles, larger and larger. By now, almost four hours had gone by. The ‘Wimpy’ finally

made a big swing and we shot up a flare. In seconds he was dropping flares around us and in less than a couple of minutes, a British Air-Sea-Rescue boat was along side of us.

“They pulled us aboard, put us in dry clothes, gave us a big mug of rum. We started a search for the other two members. After awhile we gave up so as to get the Colonel aboard a British destroyer. We then searched some more for our two lost crew members but to no avail.

“The rescue crew took us to the Island of Ponza where we were fed. We were all treated for shock and exposure. I was treated for back injuries. Lt. Brienza also for back and neck injuries. He seemed to be in bad shape and extreme pain. Lt. Popoff and Lt. Degan for injuries also. Colonel Rogers was hospitalized for wounds to his foot. I heard later he lost a toe.

“The next morning we were all taken to the mainland, Naples. Lt. Brienza and myself were taken to a station hospital. Three days later I was released and returned to Base to wait for a ticket home.

“Over the years I often wondered if I wasn’t entitled to the Purple Heart for my injuries. I have received a disability pension. Records of my injury, from the hospitals, probably were never forwarded to my Squadron, or fell in a crack somewhere after I shipped out to the States. It was a tough way to get my 50th.”

Major Alvin H. Nurre was a First Pilot in the 429th Squadron and flew A/C #42-29617 overseas to the Squadron’s first Base in North Africa. October 16, 1990: “I was the Operations Officer for the 363rd Squadron, 304th Bomb Group under our first Commanding Officer, Dick Weitzenfield, at Geiger Field, Spokane, Washington, and then down at Ephrata, Washington. Dick and I selected the flying officers for the 363rd which eventually became the 96th Squadron while still at Ephrata. I was transferred to the 429th Squadron as Operations Officer while at Glasgow, Montana, and then was serving as Operations Officer of the 429th, in Italy during the February 20/25th period.

“I was not scheduled to fly that week. I had completed my 49th mission and was waiting for my promotion to Major before flying my 50th mission and being sent home. I recall that the atmosphere was very somber after the Steyr raid, especially in the 49th, which had lost all seven of their aircraft in the formation, and the 96th, who had lost five. The 20th was fortunate in losing only two. Major Walter Kutschera, Commanding Officer of the 429th, flew Group lead that day and were extremely fortunate that our fighters picked up the Group shortly after coming off the target, saving the Group from further losses.

“I then completed my 50th mission, 2 March, 1944, which was the Group’s 153rd mission. The mission was to bomb German troop concentrations inland from the Anzio Beachhead. At that time the beach-head reportedly was in doubt and all heavy bombers were used to support the ground troops. The flak was heavy. One plane from the 96th was hit by flak and forced to ditch off the coast of Italy. Two lives were lost, one being the co-pilot who attempted to save one of the gunners, unable to reach the life rafts that had been deployed from the plane.

“Shortly after completing my 50th mission, I received my orders to return to the United States. I returned to civilian life in 1946 but remained in the Reserves until I retired in 1979.”

### **ROME, ITALY - MISSION NO. 154 - MARCH 3, 1944**

Nineteen aircraft dropped 56.45 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Littorio Marshalling Yards in Rome. Cameras recorded considerable damage to tracks and rolling stock. Many fires and explosions were reported. No flak, no fighters. Crews were cautioned to avoid bombing religious shrines and cultural centers.

### **BRESLAU, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 155 - MARCH 4, 1944**

Sixteen aircraft took off to bomb the city of Breslau where a German Headquarters and manufacturing industries were located. The Group was called back by 5th Wing Headquarters after a flight of three hours, because of weather.

### **TOULON, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 156 - MARCH 7, 1944**

Twenty aircraft took off to bomb submarine pens at Toulon. None of the planes got to the target, running into weather they could not penetrate. No flak was encountered but the Group was attacked by Me-109s and FW-190s. This action caused severe damage to two B-17 aircraft and severe shrapnel wounds in the shoulder of S/Sgt. William C. Bunting, TG, 429th Squadron. Several planes ran short of fuel and were forced to make emergency landings of fields on Corsica and Sardinia. Fortress gunners claims were: Each credited with a probable destruction of an FW-190 were S/Sgt. William C. Bunting, TG, and S/Sgt. Harold G. Bascomb, RW, 429th Squadron. Credited with probable destruction of a Me-109 was S/Sgt. Francis K. Reilly, LW, 429th Squadron.

### **PADUA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 157 - MARCH 11, 1944**

Twenty aircraft dropped 60 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on Marshalling Yards on the west side of Padua. Confusion over the target resulted in two runs being made on the target. The first time over, the rear half of the Group dropped its bombs while the forward half did not for fear of dropping bombs on another Group on a different axis of attack. The whole Group went over the target a second time and the forward half bombed.

This left the Group at the rear of the Wing bomber formation with no escort, and it was jumped by 30 to 40 Me-109s, Ma-202s, Ju-88s, and FW-190s. The attacks were aggressive with some E/A firing rockets as well as 20 mm cannon. Fighters caused the loss of two B-17s, injury to two men and damage to seven other B-17s.

Photos showed considerable damage in the north yards and direct hits on repair sheds and warehouses. One large explosion was reported. There was no flak over the target but slight inaccurate flak was encountered near Venice that damaged three B-17s.

T/Sgt. Shelbourne M. Cholson, Upper Turret Gunner from the 49th Squadron, suffered a moderately severe scalp laceration from 20mm cannon fire. S/Sgt. John J. Kilgalen, Ball Turret gunner, also from the 49th Squadron, suffered moderately severe lacerations on the left knee from 20mm cannon fire.

B-17 #42-5145, 96th Squadron, and #42-31429, 429th Squadron, are missing.

Fortress gunners claims are: Each credited with destruction of a Me-109 were S/Sgt. Richard L. Luksch, UT, 20th Squadron; S/Sgt. Donald M. Byrd, TG; S/Sgt. Benjamin F. Sheckles, Jr., LW; and a joint claim, S/Sgt. Cleo L. Corley, TG, with S/Sgt. Virgil (NMI) Lazar, LT, 96th Squadron. Credited with the destruction of a FW-190 was T/Sgt. Oscar H. Eberle, UT, 429th Squadron. Credited with the probable destruction of a Me-109 was S/Sgt. Cleo L. Corley, TG, 96th Squadron. Each credited with the probable destruction of a FW-190 were T/Sgt. Robert F. Sykes, UT, and S/Sgt. William L. Tucker, LW, 96th Squadron

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-5145 - 96TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt.	William F. Peters, Jr. 0-803860, P.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Fred W. Penn, 0-751753, CP.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	William J. Staugas, 0-811997, N.	(DED)
T/Sgt.	Raphel (NMI) Rose, 36519831, TOG.	(DED)
T/Sgt.	Turner W. Pickrel, Jr. 33212621, U/T.	(DED)
S/Sgt.	Charles R. Mercier, 11067985, L/T.	(DED)

S/Sgt.	Charles N. Olsen, 39092260, R/W.	(DED)
S/Sgt.	George F. Steinheuser, 12127934, L/W.	(DED)
S/Sgt.	Hans R. Wenzel, 14076777, T/G.	(DED)
T/Sgt.	Edward R. Spriggs, 13102164, R/O.	(DED)

Statement of S/Sgt. Virgil (NMI) Lazar, UT on B-17 #42-24361, after the mission: "I heard the pilot call out over the intercom to keep an eye on #145. It was several minutes before I could see the plane. It passed beneath us going from 9 o'clock to 5 o'clock, losing speed and altitude. I could see a big hole about two feet in diameter between No. 1 and No. 2 engines and fire pouring out behind the hole. I followed it until it was about 1,000 yards behind us and P-47s started to circle it, then the flames flared up three times its normal size. I counted five parachutes, which opened in rapid succession. Then the left wing seemed to crumble and the plane went into a left hand dive. I counted three more chutes, which blossomed above the plane as it was diving down. That was the last I saw."

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31429 - 429TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt.	Joseph F. Senta, 0-680520, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Frank J. Kirkland, 0-680914, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	George (NMI) Lund, 0-674213, N.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	William J. Johnson, 0-679586, B.	(EVADED)
T/Sgt.	Emile H. Carle, 36336075, U/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Floyd M. LeMaster, 37459619, L/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Freeburn R. Jones, 39370139, R/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Herman J. LeGrand, 36413258, L/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Carl V. Anderson, 33302129, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Frank J. Knoble, 13042359, R/O.	(EVADED)

Statement of T/Sgt. Frank J. Knoble, R/O, after evading: "S/Sgt. Anderson bailed out with the rest of the crew northwest of Krim, Yugoslavia. The plane had been badly damaged and our pilot had given the order to bail out. We in the waist were having trouble trying to jettison the waist door and Sgt. Anderson was afraid to go out his escape door for fear we would get the door jettisoned at the time he went out and the door would strike him. So he came forward to go out the waist door after we got it torn off.

"All of the crew had jumped, with the exception of Sgt. Anderson, and the pilot looked from his position in the forward part of the plane and Sgt. Anderson was sitting in the doorway of the waist as if he intended to slide out. Lt. Senta motioned for him to go ahead and he stepped up to nose the ship down a little so that it would crash right away and then he stepped out the nose hatch. He said after his chute opened he looked around and saw Sgt. Anderson's body falling and his chute unopened.

"We were picked up by some Yugoslavia Partisans right after we got down. They told us they had found the body of our comrade, his chute unopened. They told us they buried him that night in an old church cemetery. None of us saw the body, however, one of the members could speak some English and Lt. Senta could speak their language so we could converse with them. We came to the conclusion when Sgt. Anderson sat down in the waist door, the slip stream jerked his legs around and threw his head into the side of the waist door, knocking him out and he did not regain consciousness in time to pull the ripcord. He apparently was as calm as any of us and he talked to us on the interphone in a normal way."

2nd Lt. George (NMI) Lund, N on A/C #42-31429, January 21, 1991: "My first mission with the 429th was on December 9, 1943 and the target was Ferrara, Italy.

“February 20, 1944, after a flight of 2:30 hours, we were called back.

“February 24, 1944, we were to go to Steyr, Austria, but after a flight of one hour, we found that an oxygen cable was caught in the ball turret so we aborted.

“The next day we flew a diversionary mission to Zara while the long range bombers went to Regensburg. As I recall, this mission was uneventful.

“March 11th we went to Padua, Italy. It was my 22nd mission. Our aircraft was a B-17G, #42-31429. After making a second pass at the target, we were hit by rockets, affecting control of the ship, and making it impossible to navigate. It was pointed at Yugoslavia so I told the pilot, Joe Senta, that as soon as we reached the coast of Yugoslavia we should bail out since it was impossible to land there because of the rough terrain.

“Upon reaching the coast, I was the first to bail out. After looking up at the plane and seeing no one bail out, I believed it might be possible that they would make it back home, but then all the parachutes came out.

“I landed in a tree on a farm. Partisan farmers helped me down and assisted with recovering my chute from the tree. They took me to a small frame country Church where I was met by the priest. With the help of a French-English dictionary, we were able to converse. He told me we were in Partisan territory and they would come and take care of me.

“They took me to a lighthouse on the coast and that is where eventually the rest of the crew were assembled. Joe Senta and our co-pilot, Lt. Frank Kirkland, each had a broken leg and others in the crew had minor injuries. The Partisans carried food on their backs, which included flour for their survival.

“We traveled to a different spot each day. I would carry Joe or Frank on my shoulders. One day an American came out of the woods in an olive drab uniform and offered us American cigarettes. He told us we would be taken care of.

“The Yugoslavians were allowed to fish, so it was not uncommon for some fishing boats to be in the waters. Eventually, after five or six days, we sailed to the Island of Vis, in the Adriatic, occupied by the British. We stayed for one night and the Brits came the next night and motored us to Bari, Italy, where we were debriefed and sent back to Foggia.”

Sgt. Harold “Red” Kronenberg was the ball turret gunner on the crew of Lt. Robert F. Cleesattel, 96th Squadron. January 31, 1991: “After completing gunnery training at Las Vegas, Nevada, I was assigned to MacDill Field A.F.B. near Tampa, Florida. Our plane was the Martin bomber, nicknamed the ‘Flying Coffin.’ Because of the enormous number of accidents with this ‘hot’ plane, a saying, ‘One a day in Tampa Bay’ seemed quite appropriate. Needless to say I was quite relieved to be assigned to a B-17 outfit in Dalhart, Texas. I was assigned to Bob Cleesattel’s crew and remained with him for most of my combat military experience, although other crew members changed frequently.

“Eventually we ended up in North Africa. In October, 1943, we were assigned to the 2nd Bomb Group. Soon afterwards we transferred to Manfredonia, near Foggia, Italy. We were located in a grove of olive trees and lived in 16’ x 16’ pyramid tents. Life was rather simple. It was cold so we devised a ‘burner pot’ fueled with 100 octane gas run through hydraulic lines cannibalized from crashed airplanes. This served us quite well to keep us warm, but quite a few fellows walked around with blue ointment on their faces, a testimony to their carelessness to lighting fires.

“The briefings before missions were held in a large, underground cave referred to as the catacombs. This cave also doubled as our theater where movies were shown once or twice a week. Since we were in an occupied country and some native Italians were still hostile, it was difficult to get a pass from camp. One thing that stands out in my mind after all these years, is the extreme poverty of the people there. The very young and the very old would stand in line at the mess tent garbage cans and ask for scraps.

“While I was with the 2nd Bomb Group, I flew 21 missions, mostly as a ball turret gunner. A real ‘milk run’ was the much publicized bombing of the monastery at Monte Cassino. One of our most gratifying missions was when we helped our infantry at Anzio by bombing the ‘Krauts’ with fragmentation bombs from an altitude of 12,000 feet. The flak at that altitude was obviously very accurate and devastating.

“My most memorable mission was when we hit Padua, in the Udine area of Northern Italy. Our fighter escort left us as soon as we hit the Adriatic. Immediately we were jumped by 18 FW-190s. It was easy to count them because they were all in groups of six. They dropped their wing tanks, the only time I saw wing tanks on German fighters, and attacked. After the initial attack, they queued up and attacked again. This was repeated several times. The attacks were well coordinated and made from the tail, which seemed rather strange since we did not yet have many B-17s with the chin turret. If my memory serves me right, we lost two bombers and several badly damaged. The enemy lost six fighters. Eighteen may not sound like many fighters to the 390th, but remember, all 18 were concentrating on only 36 of the heavies. We flew in much smaller numbers in Italy than in England.

“In March, 1944, our crew was sent to England and assigned to the 390th at Framingham. We were exchanged for another crew who were sent to Italy. The purpose we were told was to make a comparison between the different theaters of operation. We were also told by some that we were going from the minor leagues to the big leagues. I thought at the time that if this would be tougher in the 8th Air Force, I certainly would never finish my tour of duty.

“When we got to England, we found that they had just raised the number of missions to 30. In Italy the magic number was 50. I had flown 21 with the 15th and was told I would receive credit for 10.

“I soon learned that things were strikingly different than they were in Africa and Italy. The large number of planes involved required much longer to assemble.

“In Italy, crew members took combat positions as soon as possible after being airborne, because it was common practice for German fighters to attack close to our airfields. We also attempted to assemble while on the way to the target. Test firing of our guns was done over land or not at all, while in England it was always done over the English Channel. While flying from England we did not become seriously alert until we neared the French coast. The missions from England were generally longer in duration and usually saw more enemy fighters, but must remember that there were also many more B-17s involved.

“Our living conditions at Framingham were more civilized. We had Quonset huts equipped with bunks and mattresses made of ‘biscuits.’ The gasoline fueled pots in Italy were replaced by coal burning stoves that proved safer and steadier. No more blue ointment. The bicycles (wheels) were in abundance and the people were friendly. We were always welcomed in the local pubs. Passes were occasionally available allowing us to visit London and Piccadilly Circus. Buzz bombs were plentiful, and on occasion, a German plane showed up. The buzz bombs were non-existent in Italy, but the German planes were seen frequently.

“In Italy there was no prior prediction as to whether we would fly the following day or not. In the 570th Squadron, they had a unique way to tell us the status of the next day’s operations. A red, white or blue flag was flown. The blue flag meant we were definitely flying the next day, the white flag meant we were not flying the next day and the red flag meant alert for a possible mission the next day.

“Like most members of a bomber crew, I vividly recall my last mission, my 41st. The date was June 5, 1944, one day before D-Day. As our plane flew across the channel, hundreds of ships were visible below. They appeared to be half way across the channel and seemed to be of every shape and size. What a beautiful sight!! It was obvious that the long awaited invasion was imminent. I couldn’t help at that moment to reflect that I was finished with my part of fighting the war but the men below were just beginning, and perhaps the success of the mission would be the end of Hitler’s ‘Hotshots.’

“After 46 years it is difficult to remember all the things that took place, but I do remember most of the targets bombed by our crew. Those include most of the capitals. We hit Sofia, Bulgaria; Bucharest, Hungary; Vienna, Austria; Rome, Italy (airfields); Paris, France; and Berlin, Germany on five occasions. Not so easy are the names of our planes our crew flew in. We never named our own plane. I remember flying in ‘Rigor Mortis,’ the plane that almost got cut in two by a German Messerschmitt, and was repaired. While with the 390th, we flew in ‘Clay Pigeon,’ ‘Mister Completely,’ ‘G.I. Wonder,’ and several others.”

T/Sgt. James L. Weaver was the RO on the crew of Lt. Robert F. Cleesattel. January 31, 1991: “This is a reply to your letter through the Veterans Administration Processing Center. You don’t know how good I feel hearing from someone in the 15th A.F. and especially from you because only two weeks ago I was thinking about my time in Italy and wondering how I could get in touch with any of my old crew members. Then I had a wonderful Christmas present! Last Saturday I received a telephone call from Harold Kronenberg. I presume he got my number from you. He had been trying to contact me for over 20 years. His voice sounded the same as it did 46 years ago.

“In addition to Lt. Cleesattel, my original crew were: 2nd Lt. Charles T. Dicksen, Co-Pilot; 2nd Lt. Richard H. Chapman, Navigator; 2nd Lt. George H. Crank, Bombardier; T/Sgt. Robert F. Sykes, Upper Turret; S/Sgt. Harold J. Kronenberg, Ball Turret; S/Sgt. Fred S. Huskins, Waist Gunner; S/Sgt. William L. Tucker, Waist Gunner; and S/Sgt. David C. Scott, Tail Gunner.

“I flew 18 missions with the 2nd Bomb Group after which we were transferred to the 8th A.F. in England and flew 19 missions with the 390th Bomb Group. I did not keep a very detailed diary, but did note each mission in a small book, with basic information such as target, how much flak, how many fighters, results of the bomb run plus other notations.

“During the February 20th to 25th period, I flew one mission to Graz, Austria, then penciled in Zagreb, Yugoslavia. If memory serves me right, I believe the Group went to Graz to pull enemy planes away from Southern Austria (act as decoys) and when we arrived over the Graz area, it was so cloudy that we went to Zagreb. The main thrust of the Group was aimed at aircraft factories in Southern Austria. We felt like sitting ducks on the mission. They told us at briefing how good it would be if the Luftwaffe attacked us. However, the Germans weren’t fooled and did attack the main thrust. We met very light, inaccurate flak, no fighters, and bombing results were unobserved due to overcast over the target. I did not make any notes about losses the rest of the Group may have sustained.

“S/Sgt. David Scott was replaced by Sgt. Jack Tansey while we were in North Africa and Lt. Crank was shot down while flying as a replacement on another crew on 1-24-44. He was replaced by 2nd Lt. Joseph Jaffee. When we were assigned to the 96th, our brand new plane was taken over by another older crew. It was one that had not been painted and we were told we were better off because enemy fighters, for some unknown reason, were concentrating on unpainted planes. It would stick out like a sore thumb and the enemy fighters would want to see what it could do.

“On March 11, 1944, I made my last mission to Padua, Italy. It was a milk run with light flak. We came back to base by way of the Adriatic and more than half way home we were jumped by 50 to 75 FW-190s. They lined up six abreast behind us in 10 or 12 waves, 1,000 yards behind each other. The first wave hit us and immediately knocked down a B-17 on our right and one on the left. We were in the middle of a six-plane formation. The three ships ahead of us had put their throttles to the fire wall. They had B-17G models and we had a slow, old clunker.

“Looking off to the right of our ship I saw our wing man go down. It was in a tight spin, all aflame, then there was a big black puff when it blew up and nothing was left. There were at least eight chutes, one above the other. In the meantime, we were hit by wave after wave of 190s, but the tail gunner and belly gunner kept knocking down the middle planes in each wave. I could hear our pilot

calling for our fighter escort to return. They headed back for home about 10 minutes before we were jumped.

“The three B-17s ahead of us were leaving us behind; we couldn’t keep up. Everywhere I looked 20mm shells were exploding over the wings, tail, fuselage. Yet we never took one small hit. The only damage to our plane was inflicted in the horizontal stabilizer, by the tail gunners and myself trying to hit the fighters in the back. Some of our escort returned and the Luftwaffe broke off the attack.

“I quote from my notebook: ‘Right waist gunner shot hoz. stabilizer, I shot radio antenna off. We got six fighters in 20 minute battle. Ship #145 shot down by fighters. Attempt to wipe out Luftwaffe continues with the 8th AF raiding Berlin.’ Now I don’t know what we were finally credited with but I knew we claimed five kills and one probable.

“One week later, after the March 11th mission, my crew was ordered to the 8th A.F., under some exchange of experience and ideas program. I don’t mind saying that I felt relieved when ordered to the 8th A.F. The way things were going, I knew there was no way we could survive 50 missions in Italy. As a new crew from the States, they broke us up and we flew our first couple of missions with combat experienced crews. One or two of us to each crew. It used to break my heart when crews were shot down with only one or two missions left.

“Did anyone ever talk about a spy in our area? I felt at that time there was a spy or some bad security leak on our base and still feel that way. Consider the following four events that occurred in about four weeks.

“On one mission, we were flying into Northern Italy. We were flying lead ship in the 96th and I was the lead radio operator. I received a recall from ‘Glasshouse,’ our base radio. We were about 30 to 40 minutes from target. I reported it to my pilot and told him the message was suspect because it was sent in plain language. I told him I could challenge the caller and was told to go ahead. I challenged the caller and he failed to answer with a secret letter that changed every half hour. The pilot decided to continue the mission and when we got back to base, found the recall was a fake. Somehow, the enemy had our code name ‘Glasshouse’ and radio frequency, which changed every day.

“Hitler was reported to be at his retreat in the Bavarian Alps and a mission was called to kill him. Two hours into the mission it was called off, the rumor being that he was tipped off we were coming and left the area.

“The Group had a Chapel in one of the wine caves near the farm where we were bivouacked. Another of the caves was fixed up as an NCO clubhouse. Men worked on it for weeks in their spare time. The day before it was to open, Axis Sally spoke over the radio and congratulated the men on their new NCO clubroom and that they were coming down the next night to give us a housewarming on our opening night. Instead they bombed Bari.

“We left the 96th on March 17th on a C-54, stopped at Sicily, Oran and arrived at Casablanca, March 19th. We stayed a while in Casablanca so were allowed to go into town in the evenings for some R & R. While we were there, our tail gunner, Jack Tansey, was attacked in the men’s room of a bar by a big, blonde haired man who kicked, punched and stomped on his stomach until he was unconscious. All this time, the man kept asking him how he escaped from Yugoslavia, who helped him, how did he get across the Adriatic, etc? He kept repeating those questions over and over. As we later found out, one of the crews shot down over the Adriatic made it to Yugoslavia and Milhajlovic’s Raiders helped them escape back to Italy to our base. They had left Italy the same day we did and this German agent mistook our crew for them. It was the policy to rotate a crew home that had been aided in escaping from enemy territory.

“We stayed an extra week in Casablanca until Jack recovered and then went on to England.”

T/Sgt. Oscar H. Eberle, Flight Engineer, 429th Squadron. August 9, 1990: "On the 24th of February, 1944, on the mission to Steyr, Austria, I was flying on the crew of 2nd Lt. J. A. Gulik. As I recall, that was the mission when the 49th lost all their planes they put in the air that day. I think the Germans had everything in the air that could fly. Our escort picked us up as we headed for home. I remember all the cheering. Someone yelled, 'Here come the P-38s.' I thought it was like a cheer at a football game. I think it was about the biggest air battle of the war for the 15th AF. It was the biggest one I was in.

"One of my most memorable missions was to Padua, Italy on March 11, 1944. We went over the target twice and were jumped by German fighters after the second run. There were all kinds and they attacked from all directions, many were firing rockets. Our Squadron lost one plane and one was lost from another Squadron. I was credited with downing a FW-190.

"I completed my 50 missions. Two of them were double credit missions and both were to Steyr. My first mission was on July 29, 1943, and the last on April 2, 1944, to Steyr."

#### **CASSINO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 158 - MARCH 15, 1944.**

Twenty-two aircraft, led by Major Bradford A. Evans, dropped 66 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the town of Cassino in support of the 5th Army. Strike photos showed the area to be well covered. Flak was inaccurate and no E/A were encountered.

#### **SAN GIORGIO - MISSION NO. 159 - MARCH 15, 1944**

Captain Harold Chrismon, Commanding Officer of the 20th Squadron, led 24 aircraft, each with a bomb load of six, 1,000-lb. GP bombs, in support of Allied troops. Due to a 10/10 cloud cover, no bombs were dropped and no credit was given for the mission.

#### **SAN GIORGIO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 160 - MARCH 16, 1944**

Captain Harold Chrismon led 25 aircraft again in an attempt to bomb the town. Once again a 10/10 cloud cover prevented bombing the target even though a second run was made over the target.

#### **FISCHAMEND MARKET, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 161 - MARCH 17, 1944**

Captain William N. Byrd, Operations Officer, 429th Squadron, led 22 aircraft, with a bomb load of six, 1,000-lb. GP bombs, to bomb the Components Factory in this city. The Group got to within 60 miles of the target and ran into a 10/10 cloud cover. The Group circled several times but could not get through.

While circling, the Group was attacked by Me-109s, FW-190s, and Ju-88s. The attacks were aggressive and lasted for 20 minutes. Three men were injured and two planes damaged.

Injured were: Sgt. Eldon M. Stanton, RW, 96th Squadron, multiple lacerations on right ear; Sgt. William C. Hardin, TG, 96th Squadron, frost bite; and S/Sgt. Edgar F. Stevens, RO, 96th Squadron, frost bite of hands.

T/Sgt. Thomas W. Forbes, UT, 96th Squadron, was credited with destruction of a Me-109, and S/Sgt. L. M. Adams, LT, 96th Squadron, was credited with probable destruction of a FW-190.

The 775th Bombardment Squadron, 463rd Bombardment Group (H) was attached to the 2nd Bomb Group effective March 14, 1944. The air echelon had just arrived from the United States and was assigned to duty until its ground echelon arrived and the Base prepared for use. This Squadron was divided among the four Squadrons of the 2nd as follows: Three crews to the 20th, three to the 49th, four to the 96th, and part of another to the 429th. The other three Squadrons of the 463rd Bomb Group were then attached to the other three veteran Groups of the 5th wing.

## **VILLAORBA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 162 - MARCH 18, 1944**

Group Commander Herbert E. Rice led 23 aircraft and dropped 33.12 tons of 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the Landing Ground at Villaorba. The 2nd bombed this target in conjunction with the 99th Bomb Group. P-47s of the 325th Fighter Group were to provide escort but were never seen.

Strike photos showed seven E/A destroyed and six damaged on the ground. There was good coverage on hangars, workshops, service building, construction facilities, and dispersal areas. Since the 99th Bomb Group participated, part of this damage could be credited to it.

Enemy fighters started attacking the formation 33 minutes before the target and then continued after bombs were dropped. They were aggressive and included Me-109s, Me-210s, FW-190s, and Ju-88s. Flak over the target was slight to moderate and very accurate. This combined resistance resulted in the loss of three B-17s, injury to two men and damage to other B-17s. Fortress gunners shot down four enemy planes. The wounded were: Captain Robert A. Davies, CP, 775th Squadron, 463rd Bomb Group, slight flak wound in upper right arm; 2nd Lt. Arthur Taylor, N, 775th Squadron, 463rd Bomb Group, lacerations of right cheek and forehead caused by flak which shattered plexiglass in nose.

B-17 #42-31749, 20th Squadron, was the victim of a rocket from a Ju-88. No one was seen to bail out. B-17 #42-29584, 429th Squadron, was last sighted about 25 miles north of Fiume, Italy being attacked by enemy planes. B-17 #42-24435, 429th Squadron, was last sighted in the same area as #584.

Each credited with destruction of a FW-190 were: S/Sgt. Orvel Buechner, UT, 20th Squadron; S/Sgt. Carl S. Zyzula, LT, 20th Squadron; and S/Sgt. Anthony R. Mancuso, TG, 49th Squadron. Credited with destruction of a Me-109 was S/Sgt. Kenneth Cook, RW, 96th Squadron.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31749 - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Williard O. Butler, Jr. 0-381568, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Robert R. Drake, 0-748377, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Charles A. Evert, 0-811601, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Adam J. Pyzyna, 0-682590, B.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Martin C. Hutchinson, 12171711, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	James L. Hawton, 16161982, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Cantello H. Strickland, 39173361, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Andrew M. McCrossan, 13044526, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Horace B. Maddux, 38367547, T/B.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Paul R. Henderson, 33568093, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of T/Sgt. Raymond L. Terrell, UT, 20th Squadron, after the mission: "When enemy fighters attacked our formation, eight Ju-88s came in from 6 o'clock, level. Four of them attacked our Squadron and the other four attacked No. 3. From a distance of approximately 600 yards, the Ju-88s began firing rockets at the formation. From what I observed, I would say that the enemy fired one rocket at a time and each fighter took turns in a right to left order. I believe the third or fourth rocket sustained a direct hit on the tail section of plane #749 and exploded on contact. The explosion destroyed the left horizontal stabilizer and most of the vertical stabilizer. Plane #749 immediately made a violent nose-up that resembled a chandelle. It then went into a falling leaf spin and I lost sight of it as it fell from my line of vision. I saw no chutes leave the ship."

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-29584 - "SAD SACK" - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Clifford E. Magnuson, 0-745135, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Theodore G. Lauterbach, 0-745120, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Raymond E. Horne, Jr., 0-694373, N.	(POW)*

2nd Lt.	Raymond R. McKee, 0-755031, B.	(POW)*
T/Sgt.	Albert E. Smith, 32299256, U/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Lawrence H. Meidl, 37316870, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Joe E. Ferguson, 34596984, R/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Leo C. Rossi, 13092063, L/W.	(EVADED)
Sgt.	Irle Parker, Jr., 17064887, T/G.	(EVADED)*
Sgt.	Vernon A. Jensen, 16088696, R/O.	(EVADED)*

\* Members of the 463rd Bombardment Group

Statement of 1st Lt. Clifford E. Magnuson, P, after evading: “We left the formation at approximately 10:10 a.m. and at 22,000 feet. Lt. Lauterbach left the plane through the forward hatch as did Lt. Horne, Lt. McKee, and Sgt. Smith. Sgt. Parker went out through the aft tail gunner hatch, Sgt. Jensen out the bomb bay, and Sgt. Rossi through the waist hatch. Sgt. Meidl’s exit is unknown to me. After being disabled, I managed to meet up with six crew members within two weeks of the accident. Lt. Horne, POW in Germany and now released. This I received in a letter from Lt. Horne. Sgt. Meidl was found dead in the vicinity of the aircraft and this information was given to me by Partisan forces. Sgt. Rossi was in a Partisan hospital with a severe arm injury. The underground forces would not let me get in touch with him because of existing conditions.

“This would be about the only knowledge I can give about Sgt. Meidl. This was the first mission I had flown with any member of this crew. It was a mixed crew, some of them on their first mission.

“The mission was going as scheduled. Just before the accident, I heard over the radio that enemy fighters were coming in. They were messing up the Group behind us but didn’t know until the first hit on our plane that they were in on us. None of the guns had fired up until this time. First we were hit on the right wing, the next, in the cockpit, hit the oxygen and hydraulic system, which caused the cockpit to become filled with flames almost instantly. I knew the flames could not be put out so slid out of formation so I could jettison the bomb load without hitting the following aircraft in the formation. When clear, I gave the order to bail out, both verbally and with the alarm bell in the plane. The plane was put on auto-pilot, which kept the plane on a straight course for several minutes after. I was the last to leave the forward end of the plane.

“From other members, who were in the aft end of the ship, they heard the command to bail out. They mentioned that Sgt. Meidl was up out of the ball turret and was the first to the exit hatch, but he seemed to be afraid to jump or could not get the hatch open. Just before Sgt. Parker left the plane he saw Sgt. Meidl and Sgt. Rossi just before the exit hatch and at that time two, what appeared to be 20mm cannon shells hit the aircraft at approximately their position. This is the last information that I could gather about Sgt. Meidl. Later I was guided through a Yugoslavian village, which was close to the vicinity of where the plane and Sgt. Meidl’s body was found. Through broken English, and little knowledge of the foreign tongue, they told me that Sgt. Meidl had been found dead as soon as they reached him. They turned over to me a few personal belongings and identification tags, which I returned to Intelligence Army 15th Air Force Headquarters in Bari, Italy. The location of Sgt. Meidl’s grave was also given at that time.

“Due to conditions in that area where the accident took place, it was hard to find out much information. We were constantly on the move due to movement of enemy forces.”

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-24435 - “YANKEE DO DIT” - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Theodore (NMI) Griffith, 0-662447, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	William S. Doyle, 0-803790, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Walter L. Swan, 0-814439, N.	(POW)*

2nd Lt.	Allen A. Klute, 0-750706, B.	(POW)*
Sgt.	Stephen M. Murinchack, 32384207, U/T.	(KIA)*
S/Sgt.	Howard (NMI) Lamont, 32350647, L/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Nicholas A. Cannata, 32394228, R/W.	(POW)
Sgt.	Howard R. Chandler, 39122330, L/W.	(POW)*
S/Sgt.	Edward A. Greenlaw, 39186542, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Bernard E. McConnell, 37373173, R/O.	(EVADED)

\*Members of the 463rd Bombardment Group

Statement of 2nd Lt. Allen A. Klute, B, after liberation: "I bailed out in an area close to Trieste, Italy. Lt. Swan and Sgt. Chandler bailed out just north of Trieste. Both men broke their ankles and were taken prisoner. Two other Sgts. had been taken prisoner but do not recall their names. The Germans reported that the aircraft struck the ground a few miles north of Trieste and reported finding three bodies, two wearing dog tags of Lt. W. S. Doyle and Lt. Griffith. The other body had no identification. The Germans said the plane was completely destroyed and that they were in the wreckage."

Statement of S/Sgt. Edward A. Greenlaw, TG, after liberation: "We all bailed out with the exception of the pilot, co-pilot, and engineer, about 20 to 30 miles north of Trieste, Italy. Lt. Swan and Lt. Klute left via the nose hatch. McConnell went out the waist door first, then Cannata, then Chandler. I went out the tail hatch. I have no idea how the ball gunner got out but he escaped. I think that Lt. Griffith, Lt. Doyle, and Sgt. Murinchack were still in the aircraft.

"The following theory is based wholly on supposition. The pilot, Lt. Griffith, had been informed that a waist gunner had been hit and his parachute ruined. Although the pilot told the other waist gunner to put an extra chute on the injured man, he had no way of knowing it had been accomplished, nor had any way of getting acknowledgment from the crew that they had heard the bail-out bell as the intercom was out of commission and the passage to the flight deck was barred by fire. Therefore, I believe that the pilot, co-pilot, and engineer may have been attempting to make a crash landing under the impression that one or more of the crew might still be in the waist of the ship.

"As my chute opened, I saw a plane at a very low altitude but still evidently under control and level flight. It was trailing flame and smoke and suddenly it seemed to nose into the ground and burst into flames."

#### **KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 163 - MARCH 19, 1944**

Captain Harold L. Chrismon led 17 aircraft over the target and dropped 51 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Airdrome at Klagenfurt. The original target had been to bomb a ball bearing plant at Steyr, Austria, but a 10/10 cloud cover prevented the Group from penetrating the weather front.

Forty to 50 enemy planes attacked the formation in two waves. One Wave of 25 to 30 made a pass or two at the formation and then left to engage the escorting fighters. The Second Wave of 20 to 25 attacked the Group and continued for 48 minutes, just before the bombs were released. The E/A first lobbed rockets and then came in firing 20mm cannons, went under the formation and attacked again. Six E/A attacked #631, an early return, and then left to follow the other E/A. No. 631 was not hit and made no claims.

The 2nd Bomb Group was the last over the target and not many bomb strikes were visible due to smoke from previous bombings. Some damage was visible to residential areas at the southeast corner of the airdrome. Flak was reported as moderate to intense and accurate. B-17 #42-38100, 96th Squadron, was hit by flak, exploded and went down. One chute was seen.

B-17 #41-24405, 96th Squadron, was hit by fighters and went down. It was reported on fire but under control. Five to six chutes were reported.

B-17 #42-31446, 49th Squadron, was reported hit by rockets. Ten men bailed out.

B-17 #42-38143, 49th Squadron, collided with a plane of the 97th Bomb Group. Both planes crashed in the Bay of Manfredonia. Air-Sea-Rescue was called and found four bodies. They were:

2nd Lt. Frederick (NMI) Lawson, 0-753144, B.

Sgt. Richard (NMI) Goldsmith, 39379395, T/G.

Sgt. Robert (NMI) Bredesen, 16110678, L/W.

S/Sgt. Adam F. Sokolowski, 16143408, R/O.

Fortress gunners receiving credit for enemy aircraft were: Each claimed with destruction of a FW-190 were S/Sgt. William F. Corbin, RW, 20th Squadron; S/Sgt. Richard Gilbert, LT, 20th Squadron; and S/Sgt. William Kelly, TG, 429th Squadron.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31843 - 49TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt. Keith M. Chambers, 0-748530, P. (DED)

F/O Melvin H. Wagner, T-1030, CP. (DED)

2nd Lt. Harold (NMI) Wolquitt, 0-694425, N. (DED)\*

2nd Lt. Frederick (NMI) Lawson, 0-753144, B. (DED)

S/Sgt. James L. Babek, 18191337, U/T. (DED)

Sgt. Albert D. Gricius, 36735934, L/T. (DED)

Sgt. Francis D. Delap, 17130373, R/W. (DED)

Sgt. Robert (NMI) Bredesen, 16111037, L/W. (DED)

Sgt. Richard (NMI) Goldsmith, 39379395, T/G. (DED)

S/Sgt. Adam F. Sokolowski, 16143408, R/O. (DED)

\*Member of the 463rd Bomb Group

Statement of S/Sgt. Richard C. Anderson, TG, 340th Bomb Squadron, 97th Bomb Group, after the mission: "Collision took place at 1035 hours at commencement of last turn. Aircraft #832 was in diamond position at about three minutes before collision, flying at 3,500 to 4,000 feet. Aircraft from 2nd Bomb Group came in and flew on #832's right wing, started to slide underneath him but slid into right wing of #832. Immediately the aircraft from the 2nd Bomb Group broke in half and fell. No. 832 banked off to the left, went down apparently out of control and hit the water. One chute was seen. The accident took place about three miles off shore."

M/Sgt. Earl M. Anderson, crew chief of B-17 #843, stated that B-17 #843 had started down the run-way for take-off, slowed down and returned to its revetment. The pilot asked M/Sgt. Anderson to remove the pitot tube cover, which he did. The pilot then taxied out and took off. This caused an approximate 15-minute delay.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-38100 - 96TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt. Clarence W. Southern, 0-684574, P. (KIA)

Captain Wilson E. Burrill, 0-417182, CP. (POW)\*

2nd Lt. Harry S. LaSalle, 0-811677, N. (POW)

2nd Lt. Nemor Warr, 0-767989, B. (POW)

T/Sgt. Thomas W. Forbes, 34172292, U/T. (EVADED)

S/Sgt. Ascension (NMI) Gonzalez, 18163090, L/T. (EVADED)

Sgt. Walter M. Handy, 13032608, R/W. (POW)

S/Sgt. Carl D. Coleman, 35717126, L/W. (POW)

S/Sgt. James (NMI) Beranek, 35513114, T/G. (POW)  
T/Sgt. Russell W. Phillips, 15048978, R/O. (EVADED)  
\*Member of the 463rd Bombardment Group

Statement of Sgt. Michael Nimirowski, Ball Turret Gunner on B-17 #42-5777, after the mission: “I saw #100 fall out of the formation and slip below and to the right of us, flying level. I saw one chute open a considerable distance below and behind the plane. When I looked up again, I saw the plane nose up and explode. I don’t believe anyone else got out.”

Statement of 2nd Lt. Harry S. LaSalle, Jr., N, after liberation: “We took a direct hit by an 88mm shell knocking out No. 3 and No. 4 engines and the right wing was on fire. After a complete 360-degree turn to the right, Lt. Southern recovered control and held the aircraft straight and level until nine other crew members bailed out. The plane was reported to have blown up.

Six crew members were captured in approximately the same spot and brought to a village police station. Lt. Southern, T/Sgt. Forbes, T/Sgt. Phillips, and S/Sgt. Gonzalez were not brought in. Nothing was learned of the fate of Lt. Southern, except hearsay evidence that the plane blew up before he could leave the plane. After talking to several former Squadron members, both in prison camp and after returning to the States, evidence is fairly certain that Lt. Southern is dead. Forbes, Gonzalez, and Phillips made it back to our lines.”

Statement of T/Sgt. Thomas Forbes, Engineer on B-17 #42-38100, after evading: “I don’t think Lt. Southern bailed out. I told him we got hit back of No. 3 supercharger. I was told later by Partisans that one man was found in the wreckage and I think it was Lt. Southern. The wreckage is just south of Klagenfurt, in the mountains. From where I landed, I could see Klagenfurt and smoke from the ship. It seems he was trying to put the fire out by slipping and diving and the wing broke off when pulling out of the dive.”

S/Sgt. Ascension Gonzalez was the Ball Turret Gunner on the crew of Lt. Blomquist: June 1, 1990: “On the Steyr mission, February 24, 1944, only two Groups got through. The rest got called back. The radio man would come on and say, ‘Group so and so is called back and it won’t be long before we are called back.’ Somewhere close to the target somebody called out ‘Fighters’ and I looked back and it looked like it was horizon to horizon with German fighters coming in on us. We waited for them to attack and someone said, ‘Why don’t they come in?’ Well, the bombardier, Lt. Wilkinson, said, ‘We are flying too good a formation, they don’t want any part of us.’ Well, that didn’t last too long before they jumped us and started picking off planes in the third and fourth Squadrons. They were coming in wing-tip to wing-tip and every pass they made we lost a B-17. By the time we got to the target the flak started to hit us and the fighters fell off. We ended up with only two planes on each wing and they were not from our Squadron. So we got through the bomb run and a group of our fighters picked us up and we made it back to Base okay, but boy, that was a hairy experience and I thought it was going to be the end.

“The next day we had to go to Steyr (Regensburg) again and we were worried about it. But on the taxi-way going to the runway, I don’t know what happened to the plane in back of us, but it spun around and their right wing hit our vertical stabilizer and spun against us. Now I keep telling people that the propeller went through the fuselage of the plane while I was there on the catwalk. When all that noise started happening, I ran away from it toward the center of the plane. One of the waist gunners ran in the direction I was going and fell at the ball turret and I had two choices, to step on him and run over him, or fall on top of him. He tried to get up and I pushed his head down and got as low as I could. After it was all over, when I got up, I saw the propeller sticking through the side of the waist

and all the others were at the escape hatch hollering, 'Got to bail out, got to bail out.' They had pulled the release on the escape hatch but the door didn't open so I reached between them and kicked the door and, of course, the door fell on the ground. A crew chief picked it up and ran off with it. And that was a hairy experience and something I think of a lot.

"Then of course the third one was when I was shot down. Lts. Blomquist, Maybee and Jeb Stewart had to go to North Africa to train on the B-17 that had radar, you know, where you could bomb through the clouds. The radar took my spot on the plane and I was excess baggage. So they transferred me to one crew that was made up of stragglers.

"Then the first mission I flew with them was when I was shot down. We were going to Steyr but the weather turned us back and we hit Klagenfurt, but I didn't know what the target was because I wasn't briefed on it. We had enemy fighters and we took care of them but we got into flak and got a direct hit by an 88 in the right wing behind No. 3 engine. I say a direct hit because I saw only one hole. I had felt this bump, saw the hole and reported it to the pilot and told him it was behind No. 3 supercharger. I told him he better feather the engine. Now either he didn't think it was a good idea or maybe he couldn't because he never feathered it. The gas emptied out of the tank real quick. I turned around looking at the bombing pattern, because it was my job to check out the pattern, when I heard someone holler, 'Fire in the bomb bay.' I turned around and we had a short blue blaze coming out of the wing. I put my guns down, opened the turret, got out and looked in the waist. Everyone was down by the waist hatch. I looked in the radio room and found a fire extinguisher and squirted it a time or two on the fire and it went out. Now I always thought I put the fire out but evidently the gasoline, that had leaked into the bomb bay, burned up and that was when the fire went out. I tried to get to the waist gunner's mike to radio to the pilot that the waist was clear but couldn't find the connections. Evidently he had taken them with him when he jumped. So I went to the escape hatch and just then the tail gunner appeared and I pointed to the escape hatch and out he went and after that, I jumped.

"Now we were told to count to ten before pulling the ripcord so when I left the plane, I counted to three and I said, 'that's a long time since I left the plane,' so I pulled the ripcord. Now I was so high up yet that the fighters were messing up the air and flipping me 15 degrees one way or another so I figured I would slip some air out of my chute. I got hold of some lines and pulled on them and the horizon flipped to 30 degrees so I turned loose of the lines and said to myself, 'I don't care if it takes all day to get down, I'm going to wait on it.'

"Because I was so high, I floated across a river and landed on top of a mountain. That is the first time I looked down on everything; everything was below me! I tried to get down off that mountain and couldn't do it. The snow was frozen and where I landed was on top of a tree. Now I don't know how tall that tree was, but when I kicked a hole in the snow to bury my chute I could look down the trunk. I don't know if that tree was 20 feet tall or 30 feet tall, but it was covered with snow. I buried my chute and I was walking around and hardly leaving any tracks because the snow was frozen. I went through a little dip in the snow, a little shallow place, and sank down to my knees, took a third step and fell all the way down to my waist. Now I don't know where I read the book or heard it but in this book it told you what you should do if you fell into quicksand. It said, you should fall on your back, raise up your legs, straighten them out and roll around on it and that is what I did. Boy, from then I was careful of every place I stepped.

"I couldn't get down off the peak of that mountain! I finally found some hoof tracks, deer, goat or something, and I thought, anywhere they can walk, I can walk and finally I followed them. Finally there was a gentle slope on the side of the mountain and the tracks were going down there, so I followed them. I was slipping and sliding and found that I couldn't do it. On one side of the mountain I found some soft snow and I dug me a hole in the snow and went to sleep. Now I don't know if I slept all night, or all day, or a few minutes, but I heard some noise and it woke me up. I could see these damn civilians following my tracks. I had thought the target we hit was a residential district and I

thought the people were from there. They busted through the snow hollering what sounded like 'Egretski, Egretski' and one of them got hold of me and kissed me on both cheeks and I said to myself, 'This far from home and I ran across one of them.' As it happened, all of them kissed me on the cheeks.

"They got me down off that mountain and took me to their camp where they were bivouacked. They were partisans and the way they had their camp hidden was ingenious. As you were walking down this mountain road, of course one side was down and the other side was up. On the high side was a tree stump and the roots were growing out of the side of the tree and the roots coming out and then going down into the earth. They would step on the roots, climb onto the stump and then step across onto a trail. They would reach back and erase any tracks. The path was on a contour and you had to be right on top of it to see it.

"Well, I stayed with them for three days and one morning we heard this commotion. I was sleeping in this tent with two girl Partisans and we got up on our hands and knees and saw R. W. Phillips and Tom Forbes coming toward me. They were surprised to see me and especially with a girl on either side of me. I warned them that there was no hanky-panky going on because if a girl got pregnant she is going to holler and give the position away. So, if a woman gets pregnant and one man is involved, they shot both of them and if two men were involved and no one admits it, they shoot all three, so there is no hanky-panky.

"We started walking from there and I say we walked 600 miles. It took us three months to get on a plane and go home. At one point we had to cross a big valley and I don't know how big it was but there was 10 miles of us in a line. We had a Battalion of Partisans guarding us. We crossed a railroad track and after we crossed, we started to run and I bet we ran three miles. As we were running we heard this big explosion; they had blown up the tracks. We made it and walked for 27 and a half hours getting across that valley. When finally they stopped, they killed an oxen. One officer from the Partisan Army took out a pistol and shot the oxen three times in the forehead and the oxen didn't even move; just kept chewing on grass. Finally someone came up with a sledge hammer and hit it between the eyes and the oxen fell. They butchered it and made some soup and, boy oh boy that soup looked real good; that big bowl they gave me. It had no salt but I enjoyed it, I enjoyed it immensely!

"Finally we got to a place north of Zagreb and we could hear planes warming up in the morning and a DC-3 came in to pick us up. This field they were going to land in had a big tree in the long direction on the fence line and I said, 'Let's cut it down.' By this time we had a lieutenant with us and he said, 'Good grief no, if they cut that tree down they can see us for miles and miles,' so we taxied down the short part of the field and at the end there was a railroad bed; no tracks, just a bed. The pilot had to brake and spin to the left, and the right wheel went into the mud and sank clear to the top of it and the propeller chewed up a yard of that doggone mud. So we went across the railroad bed and there was a bunch of saplings. We cut the saplings down and put them around the plane to camouflage it. Of course we camouflaged it in the shape of an airplane, you know, the waist, the fuselage and the wings. We scattered the saplings all around it and if anyone would see it would think the trees grew in the shape of an airplane. I told the lieutenant, 'Now nobody knows what we have done.'

"The next day we had 50 teams of oxen out there trying to get us out. Every team had a man, wife and one or two kids. So we hooked up those 50 teams of oxen and tried to pull that plane out but we couldn't do it. The harness, chains between the oxen would break. Finally, we pulled it out with five teams and that night we flew back to Italy.

"Well, we had body lice on us and old Russell Phillips would scratch and scratch and I would poke him in the ribs and tell him not to scratch but he did it anyway. He was one sore guy! When we got back to Foggia, I took a bath and was given a change of clothes and they sent me home. Russell had to stay in the hospital for I don't know how long. He had rings all over him."

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #41-24405 - "DARK EYES" - 96TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Herman S. Lavine, 0-799202, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Arthur L. Hyatt, 0-680640, CP	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	George J. Seamans, 0-688470, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Louis M. Boehm, 0-684394, B.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Michael A. Croccia, 14061930, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Virgil (NMI) Lazar, 15330452, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Oscar (NMI) Rome, 31002077, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Kenneth C. Cook, 35361908, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Robert R. Cary, 32360968, T/G.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Harold E. Hansen, 37294573, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of Sgt. Glen Hedrick, RW on B-17 #41-24408, after the mission: "I was watching fighters coming in and one peeled off to the right. As he got out of range, I looked back for more fighters and saw a B-17 and heard from the conversation on the interphone that it was #41-24405.

"It was about 400 yards out, at 4:00 o'clock, low. I noticed two chutes already in the air. I kept watching and saw four more bail out at regular intervals. As long as I could see it, which was minutes after I saw the last chute come out, the plane was still under control and the rest of the crew would have had plenty of time to bail out."

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31466 - "LITTLE PETE" - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Jennings A. Marshall, 0-799442, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Christopher T. Kelly, 0-749163, CP	(POW)*
2nd Lt.	Charles G. Edmonds, 0-695230, N.	(POW)*
2nd Lt.	Daniel A. Thomas, 0-752960, B.	(POW)*
T/Sgt.	Harold L. Freel, 39352801, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Edward A. DeBrosky, 11089255, L/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Coleman D. Moberly, 15113707, R/W.	(POW)*
S/Sgt.	Ben H. Schmalriede, 38279035, L/W.	(POW)*
Sgt.	Paul F. Johnson, 32491929, T/G.	(EVADED)*
T/Sgt.	Yates K. Rollins, 14100486, R/O.	(POW)

\*Members of the 463rd Bombardment Group

Statement of Sgt. Coleman Moberly, RW, after liberation: "We were attacked by 35-40 German fighters and were forced to bail out due to the accurate marksmanship of the German pilots. There weren't any American fighters to oppose the Luftwaffe, result, 14 months of prison camp.

"Lts. Thomas, Kelly, and Edmonds, Sgt. Schmalriede and myself bailed out. The other five crew members I had never seen before the mission. They were all taken prisoner. I ran into the others at Chile, Austria, and we rode the same train to an interrogation center near Frankfurt, Germany. I last saw them there. We did not know the whereabouts of Sgt. Johnson until we were released from prison and at LaHavre, France. Captain Davis, Operations Officer of the 775th Squadron, was shot down several weeks after we were and told Lt. Thomas that Sgt. Johnson had evaded. The others, whose names I did not know, were sent to other camps."

### **VERONA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 164 - MARCH 22, 1944**

Major Bradford A. Evans, Commanding Officer of the 96th Squadron, led 21 aircraft and dropped 63 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Verona. Flak was intense and accurate causing damage to 13 B-17s. Six to 10 enemy fighters were seen but did not attack the

formation. No injuries, no losses. The target was covered by smoke from the bombing of other Groups. Bombs were dropped into the smoke and several explosions were seen. One early return dropped its bombs on Marshalling Yards at Rimini, Italy scoring hits in the southeast yards.

B-17 #42-29579, 429th Squadron, piloted by 1st Lt. John Cravath, caught fire in the No. 3 engine and was forced to ditch in the Adriatic Sea, 47 miles north of Foggia, Italy. The crew was in the water one hour and then picked up by a British torpedo boat. The crew returned to the Squadron the following day.

#### **STEYR, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 165 - MARCH 23, 1944**

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 23 aircraft to bomb the Walzingerwerk Ball Bearing Factory at Steyr. The formation got to within 41 miles southeast of Klagenfurt, Austria and was recalled by 5th Wing Headquarters due to weather.

#### **STEYR, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 166 - MARCH 24, 1944**

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 22 aircraft to bomb the same target as of the 23rd. Again the Group was recalled about 47 miles southeast of Zagreb, Yugoslavia.

#### **STEYR, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 167 - MARCH 26, 1944**

For the third time in four days, Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 23 aircraft to bomb the same target at Steyr. This time the Group got over the target but a 10/10 overcast prevent the Group from dropping its bombs. "Window" thin metallic strips resembling tinsel were dropped for the first time to confuse the enemy radar system.

#### **VERONA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 168 - MARCH 28, 1944**

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 25 aircraft and dropped 75.25 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Verona. Six to 12 enemy fighters were seen but were taken care of by the escort. Flak was moderate to intense, fairly accurate. Three B-17s were slightly damaged with no injuries. Strike photos recorded hits on lines, sheds and shops.

The 775th Squadron, 463rd Bomb Group personnel, left for their new Base today. They had been attached to the 2nd Bomb Group since March 14, 1944 and suffered many casualties.

#### **TURIN, ITALY - MISSION NO. 169 - MARCH 29, 1944**

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 27 aircraft and dropped 78 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Turin. Six to 10 enemy fighters attacked the formation after bombs away causing the loss of one B-17, one man killed and one man wounded. Strike photos showed a very good concentration of hits and damaging near misses in the yards and adjacent work and repair shops.

T/Sgt. James H. Taylor, UT, 49th Squadron, was instantly killed by a 20mm shell. 2nd Lt. Robert E. Weiss, CP, 96th Squadron, suffered lacerations of the face and left knee caused by shattered plexiglass.

B-17 #42-97152 was hit by flak, straggled and was attacked by enemy fighters. Seven to eight men were reported to have bailed out.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-97152 - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Edward J. Wronkoski, 0-145229, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Francis A. Sanvito, 0-748256, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Richard T. Zeugin, 0-694637, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Norman J. Stockstill, 0-689554, B.	(POW)

S/Sgt.	Floyd A. High, 15324929, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Maurice R. LaRouche, 36519814, L/T.	(EVADED)
Sgt.	George A. Lawrence, 11116092, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Donald F. Genter, 18169171, L/W.	(POW)
Sgt.	Ernest I. Lipsett, 11091223, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Daniel (NMI) Weiss, 1218325, R/O.	(POW)

1st Lt. Edward J. Wronkoski, P. November 25, 1991: "The mission was uneventful all the way to the target. Weather was clear. I was pilot of a 'G' Model B-17, #297152, which was so new to the Group that it had no Group nor Squadron markings. This was my 39th mission. All was well until the bombardier, Lt. Norman Stockstill, announced bombs away. My first thought was that one of the bombs had exploded under the wing, but what actually happened, to the best of my memory, we took flak hits on engines one, three, and four, plus the bomb bay. I was able to feather No. 1 engine, No. 2 was in good working order, but No. 3 and No. 4 could not be feathered and running away with occasional fire at both propellers.

"I really appreciated Col. Ryan slowing the formation down allowing me to hang on to the tail until we reached an area around Cairo, Italy where we were attacked by four Fiat G-55 fighters belonging to the Italian Republican Force (Fascist). Not one crew member, nor fighter pilot, properly identified these aircraft. As I recall, we were attacked from 12 o'clock by two of them and I did not feel that they did any damage, but my other crew members claim we were hit several times by them. One of those pilots was W.O. Iellice, who was shot down that day by Herschel Green, Major, from the 317th Fighter Squadron. I met with W.O. Iellice in 1969 and he confirmed this. The other G-55 was piloted by a Captain Bonet who lives near the Brenner Pass and I had hoped to see him but it did not work out. Incidentally, we never did see any American fighters. After about four passes at us, number four propeller left the airplane and the fires in numbers three and four increased.

"My original intention was to make it to the water, hopefully ditch and be picked up. Due to the nature of the engine fires and weather conditions, I decided to abandon the aircraft. We all got out safely but my co-pilot, 2nd Lt. Francis Sanvito, who struck an open bomb bay door, and was severely injured.

"We were all captured within ten hours except S/Sgt. Maurice LaRouche who was picked up by Partisans and worked with them for several months before he evaded to Morocco and then made his way back to the Bomb Group in Italy.

"The rest of us were interned in Cairo, Italy for one or two nights. Sanvito and S/Sgt. Floyd High stayed in the hospital but the rest of us were sent to Turin, Verona, Dulag Luft near Munich, then sent to various prison camps. I spent one month in solitary confinement in Verona, on bread and water in a 10 x 10 cell with no lights, beds or other facility. I estimate that I lost 60 pounds in those 30 days. I finally ended up in Stalag Luft I and was liberated in May 1945 by the Russians."

T/Sgt. Robert H. Odegaard, Flight Engineer, 20th Squadron. November 10, 1993: "I was on the original crew of 2nd Lt. Francis A. Sanvito. We flew B-17 #42-97152 from the States. Other members of the crew were 2nd Lt. Walter R. Crowl, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Richard T. Zeugin, Navigator; 2nd Lt. Norman Stockstill, bombardier; myself, Flight engineer; S/Sgt. Paul Henderson, Radio; S/Sgt. Andrew M. McCrossan, Waist Gunner; S/Sgt. Robert F. Johnson, Waist Gunner; S/Sgt. Herbert H. Holdeman, Ball Turret; and S/Sgt. William C. Wilson, Tail Gunner.

"S/Sgt. McCrossan and S/Sgt. Henderson had been killed on the raid to Villaorba, Italy. Then Lts. Sanvito, Zeugin, and Stockstill went down on the mission on the 29th, and Lt. Crowl was killed the next day, the 30th, on the raid to Sofia, Bulgaria.

“The four remaining enlisted men missed this mission of the 29th as we had been on guard duty the night before so we were replaced. We eventually completed our missions.

“Francis Sanvito kept in touch with me and in a letter to me, told of his experience on this mission. He died sometime in 1991.”

I had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Mary Sanvito at the 2nd bombardment Reunion in Kansas City, MO, in 1995. She graciously granted me permission to use whatever parts of her husband’s letter that I choose, which follows:

“If you remember that far back, on 29 March 1944, the mission to the Turin railroad yards ended in near disaster for the crew. We were shot down shortly after leaving the target but, miraculously, we all survived. Two of us, Floyd High and myself, wound up in a hospital called Cairo Montonotte, about 50 miles south-southeast of Turin. One of the waist gunners, S/Sgt. Maurice LaRouche, eluded the Germans, worked with the underground for a while, and then eventually made it back. The others, captured by the Germans and interned.

“You also might remember that we usually hit the target at noon, apparently to shake up the Germans while they were having lunch! I think they finally changed lunch to 11:00 a.m. to foil us. Well, about the time all the shooting was going on, a young boy of nine, from Cairo, was going home from school for lunch. Ideal timing. He saw the tail end of the encounter and watched as the parachutes came to earth. In general we all landed about three/four miles from Cairo in the wooded area around the town. The boy also saw our plane coming down to earth, not much further away.

“The next day he wrote in his diary to the effect: ‘Who are these men?’ ‘Where do they come from?’ ‘What’s going to happen to them?’ He marveled at how well fed we were.

“During the 30 days that Floyd and I were in the hospital, a couple of blocks from where he lived, he’d go down and wonder about us.

“Well, this boy made it to the Italian Naval Academy, graduated, was sent to Pensacola to earn his wings, served in the Italian Naval Air Force, retired, and eventually became a 747 pilot flying for Alitalia International Airlines. As such, he has come often to the US. With the help of his contacts he made at Pensacola, he has been able to put the pieces together. My new friend’s name is Giancarlo Garello, now a resident of Rome.

“He has contacted eight of the ten men involved, including Dick and Norm. I was number eight. After making initial contact back in July, he sent me a picture of our plane after it hit the ground. Despite a free fall of 20,000 feet, it landed almost intact.

“I was wounded and unconscious when I landed. An Italian ‘woodfolk’ family found me and brought me to a farmhouse where they gave me their version of first aid, ‘steaming hot packs,’ to clean the wound. Fortunately I was only half conscious so I felt only part of the pain, but I can remember what went on. A teenage boy was the one who carried me to the farm. This boy-turned-pilot located the other boy, was brought to the spot where they found me, and sent me pictures. He located the barber who came to the hospital once a week to give Floyd and me a shave, even though we had no money. He was able to supply enough detail to authenticate these people.”

### **SOFIA, BULGARIA - MISSION NO. 170 - MARCH 30, 1944**

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 31 aircraft and dropped 98 tons of 500-lb. GP and incendiary bombs on the industrial section of Sofia. Flak was moderate, fairly accurate, wounding two men and causing damage to five planes. Three to six enemy fighters attacked the formation. The attacks were from all angles, very aggressive, resulting in the death of one man, wounding of two others and damaging two planes. One enemy aircraft was claimed.

S/Sgt. Raymond Bringolf, UT, 96th Squadron, instantly killed by shrapnel. Wounded: T/Sgt. Robert D. Centers, RO, 96th Squadron, lacerations on right wrist by 20mm shrapnel; S/Sgt. Lavern H.

Bensyl, Waist Gunner, 96th Squadron, lacerations of right cervical area from 20mm shrapnel; 2nd Lt. Henry (NMI) Finley, N, 429th Squadron, fracture of right index finger caused by flak; and T/Sgt. Donald C. Gardner, TG, 429th Squadron, flak wound, right arm.

Strike photos showed bombs in the assigned area causing fires and explosions.

Sgt. Howard S. Williams, TG, 49th Squadron, credited with one Me-109.

Two planes from the 20th Squadron were involved in a mid-air collision. Plane #42-31851 and #42-31683 collided about 35 miles west of Sofia. A sharp right turn was made at the I.P. and plane #851 did not turn wide enough, was apparently caught in the prop wash of another plane, and crashed down on top of #683. Both planes started to disintegrate and went down. One parachute was seen.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31851 - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Fred O. Wickham, 0-726938, P.	(DED)*
2nd Lt.	Walter R. Crowl, 0-757609, CP.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Erwin (NMI) Rubenstein, 0-749743, N.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Orville W. Reilly, Jr., 0-744291, B.	(DED)
T/Sgt.	Richard L. Luksch, 32374868, U/T.	(DED)
Sgt.	Andrew W. Warga, Jr., 12165638, L/T.	(DED)
Sgt.	William B. Marion, 14048476, R/W.	(DED)
Sgt.	Peter F. O'Grady, 31189366, L/W.	(DED)
Sgt.	Tony H. Morrish, 9165048, T/G.	(DED)
S/Sgt.	Homer D. McKee, 19148167, R/O.	(DED)

\*Member of the 463rd Bombardment Group

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31683 - 20TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt.	Leroy P. Rigney, 0-894735, P.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Harold A. Meyer, Jr., 0-806108, CP.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	William E. Mitchell, 0-811745, N.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	William J. Vavrik, 0-690783, B.	(DED)
S/Sgt.	Orvel W. Buechner, 38270647, U/T.	(DED)
S/Sgt.	Richard A. Gilbert, 33368553, L/T.	(DED)
S/Sgt.	William F. Corbin, 35658942, R/W.	(DED)
Sgt.	Alvin G. Barrow, 18114903, L/W.	(DED)
Sgt.	Marion J. Maddox, 34185464, T/G.	(DED)
Sgt.	Peter A. Victor, 32527962, R/O.	(DED)

Information was received from the Bulgarian Ministry of War on 9 February 1945 that two bombers crashed at Kasbarevo on 30 March 1944. The people of that city buried the men in their local cemetery. Identification was not recorded. When the grave was opened later, remains of 20 bodies were found. Only one body was found with any identification and these were the remains of Sgt. Tony H. Morrish. He was the tail gunner on B-17 #42-31851, and evidently the one reported to have come from one of the aircraft.

# 9

## OPERATIONS: APRIL, 1944

### **S**TEYR, 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 way 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 LaBlanc, 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**

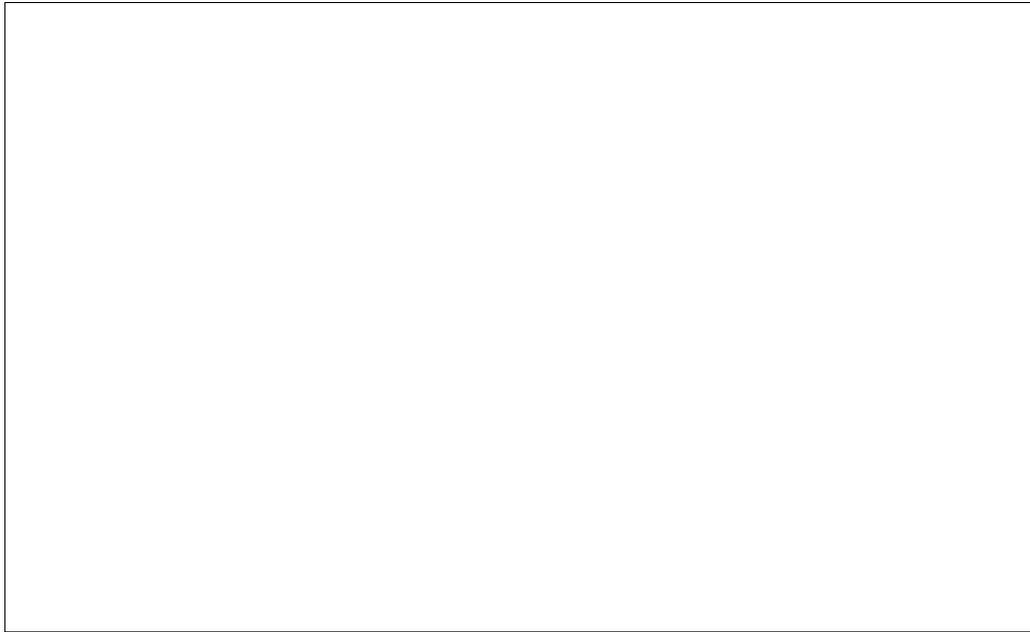
Major Joseph S. Cunningham led 35 aircraft to bomb the Aircraft Components Factory; the same target as of April 8th. This target is located 13 miles southeast of Vienna. There were 101 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs dropped on the factory area, stores, workshops, rail lines, and residential section. Flak was 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**

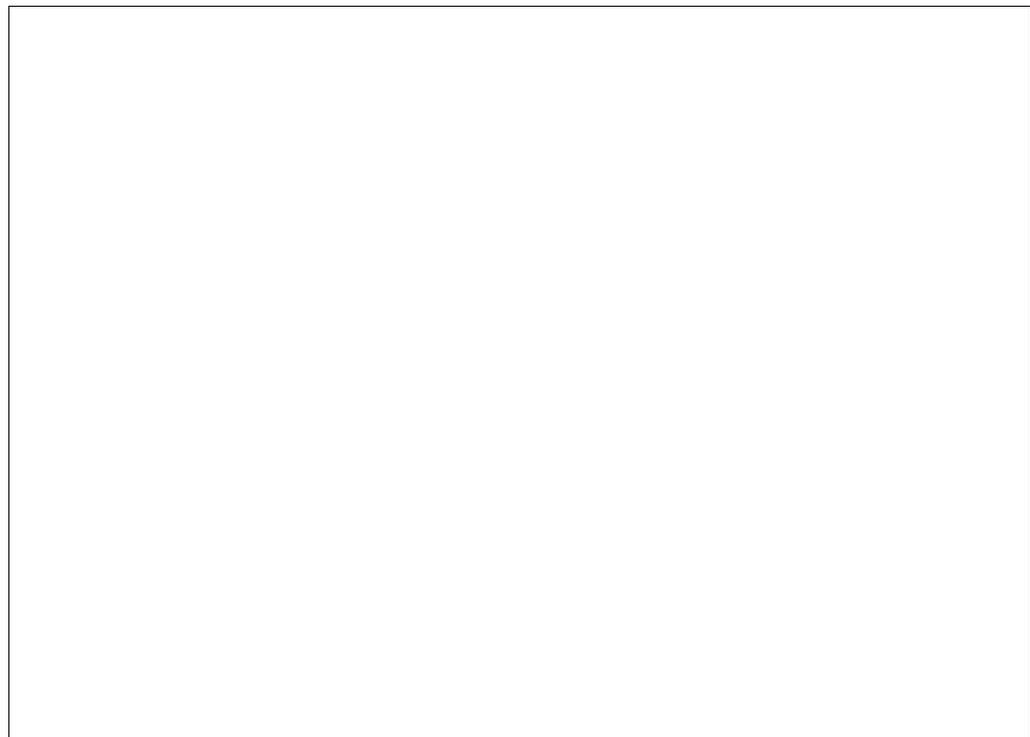
Col. Herbert E. Rice led 35 aircraft and dropped 99 tons of 500-lb. RDX (very high explosive) bombs on the Hungarian Railroad Car and Machinery Works in Gyor. Bomb Strike photos showed direct hits in the assigned area as well as many hits in adjacent stores, component shops, storage buildings and machine 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.

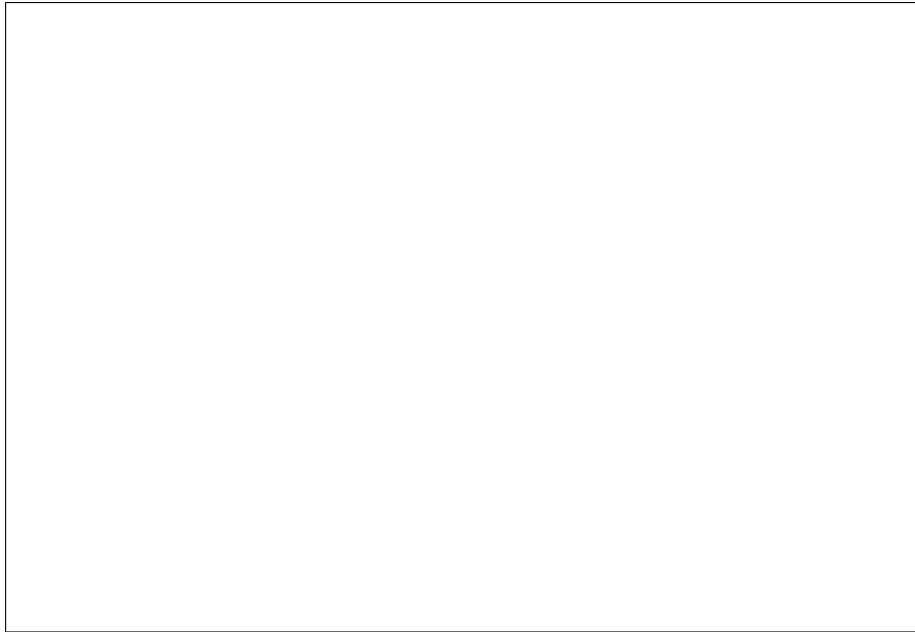
B-17s lost were #42-31837 and #42-97346 from the 20th Squadron and #42-31506 and #42-32058 from the 96th Squadron.



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 come 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 Győr, 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 Turnal 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 McNerny - 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. Orelth 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.

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# 10

## OPERATIONS: MAY/JUNE 1944

**T**he Ordnance Section, formed as a separate unit March 13, 1944, returned to Group and Squadrons May 1, 1944.

### **BOLZANO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 190 - MAY 2, 1944**

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 36 aircraft to bomb Railroad Bridges and Marshalling Yards in Bolzano. Arriving at a point 75 miles east of Bologna, they encountered 10/10 cloud cover and were unable to reach the assigned target, and alternates.

### **PLOESTI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 191 - MAY 4, 1944**

Shortly after take-off, this mission was canceled by orders of 5th Wing Headquarters. Weather reports caused the cancellation to bomb the Pumping Station at Ploesti.

### **PLOESTI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 192 - MAY 5, 1944**

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 36 aircraft and dropped 108 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs by Pathfinder methods. The target was smoke covered and results not known. Flak was intense and accurate causing damage to 33 of the 36 aircraft. Four airmen were injured by flak. Coming off the target, four aircraft dropped out of formation to protect one B-17 having two engines feathered. This formation was jumped by two Me-109s resulting in one Me-109 being shot down. S/Sgt. Howard T. Christenson, LT, and Sgt. Frank J. Ivanich, TG, both of the 20th Squadron, received joint credit for the E/A. All A/C returned.

Wounded: 2nd Lt. Albert J. Ravid, N, 96th Squadron, severe wound, right leg; 2nd Lt. Arthur (NMI) Kotlen, 96th Squadron, severe wound, right inner canthus; 2nd Lt. Robert L. Kehm, CP, 20th Squadron, slight abrasion, left foreleg; and T/Sgt. Rolan S. Farr, UT, 96th Squadron, first degree burns right side of face.

2nd Lt. John F. Adams, 0-754711, Radar Navigator, 49th Squadron, Missing in Action on mission to Ploesti while flying with the 463rd Bomb Group.

### **BRASOV, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 193 - MAY 7, 1944**

Lt. Col. Donald H. Ainsworth led 33 aircraft and dropped their bombs on the Aircraft Factory in Brasov. The target was well covered and only one E/A made one pass at the first plane over the target. Flak at the target varied from slight to intense. One B-17, #42-32022, 96th Squadron, failed to return.

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-32022 - "LONESOME POLECAT" - 96TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt.	Robert E. Weiss, 0-748484, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Neil J. Coady, 0-813328, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Edwin R. Bentley, 0-757793, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	George J. Thomas, 0-755249, B.	(EVADED)
T/Sgt.	Roy T. Ford, 17123636, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Wilbur E. Earl, 16084107, L/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Willard (NMI) Curtis, Jr., 20536316, R/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Leslie H. Wolfe, Jr., 32929248, L/W.	(EVADED)
T/Sgt.	Ivan H. Foster, 12174204, T/G.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Julius H. Entrekin, 34446056, R/O.	(EVADED)

Statement of T/Sgt. Ivan H. Foster, 7 August 1944, after evading: "After the bomb run the engines were hit by flak; three and four were dead, three windmilling and could not be feathered, and the number two engine was tearing itself off the wing. The order was given to bail out and I bailed out at 1,500 feet. I counted nine other chutes in the air besides my own, thus accounting for all crew members. Shortly after landing I contacted six crew members: Weiss, Thomas, Curtis, Entrekin, Wolfe, and Earl. I received information from my helpers that Coady, Bentley, and Ford were captured by the Germans."

2nd Lt. Edwin Richard Bentley, N. War Diary, 1944: "The missions were getting tougher every day. Flak batteries were heavy around the oil fields, refineries and airfields. Enemy fighters were being moved into areas we were bombing and they are excellent flyers.

"Sunday, April 2, 1944, we went to Steyr, Austria. Our pilot was Lt. Doyle, Operations Officer and Bombardier was Lt. Thomas. The flak was heavy but inaccurate. The raid was a complete failure. The enemy cleverly camouflaged at the target. Used smudge pots to produce haze. Bombs were dropped. On the previous raid, there was a 50% loss. Today we lost three out of 33 planes. Today the B-24s caught hell from fighters, rockets and floating bombs. Raid was about 47 degrees N so we got a two mission credit, which made my fifth and sixth.

"Today, April 4, 1944, we hit the Marshalling Yards at Bucharest, Romania. I flew with Lt. Weiss, pilot, and Lt. Thomas, bombardier. This was the first mission that the 15th had pulled on this target. The flak was heavy and accurate. The trip was long and we caught a hell of a lot of flak. We were again credited with two missions, my 7th and 8th.

"April 5, 1944, we went back to Ploesti, Romania to bomb the Marshalling Yards. The flak was HEAVY! I flew with Major Hillhouse and the Squadron bombardier. The raid did a hell of a lot in the attitude of the people on who is winning the war. The flak was thick as hell and our ship was lucky, only six holes. I was sprayed with flak particles, which were extracted at the field hospital. I was credited with my 9th and 10th mission.

"April 12, 1944, we went to Fischamend Market, Austria. My pilot was Lt. Weiss and the bombardier was Lt. Thomas. This raid was on the aircraft components parts plant. The raid was partially successful. Never have I seen so many Wings of bombers before in the air over several targets, all of which were hit hard. B-24s were thick as flies. We were untouched and fighters didn't bother us at all. All planes returned. Two hundred enemy fighters attacked the B-24s. Flak was light. Received the Air Medal with first cluster. Received credit for 11th and 12th mission.

"April 13, 1944, our target was a components factory at Győr, Hungary. My pilot was Lt. Weiss and bombardier was Lt. Thomas. There was no flak. The bombing attack was successful. There were flak guns but the Germans played a trick on us and sent fighters from under, which cost us dearly in

airplanes. Our escort was over us and did not see the enemy. Martin's crew from Dow Field went down today. Reeve's crew went down. Applegate's crew went down. Ross's crew went down. German's crew went down. Sanvito's crew went down. Credited with my 13th and 14th mission.

"April 15, 1944. Ploesti Marshalling Yards. My pilot, Lt. Weiss, bombardier, Lt. Thomas. Flak heavy and accurate. Today's target was a long hard grind back to Ploesti. The mission before of April 5th describes this one except the enemy fighters were thick, although our Squadron wasn't hit. First I saw rockets used. A new kind of harassing flak was used. Credited with missions 15 and 16.

"April 24, 1944, Ploesti, Romania Marshalling Yards. My pilot, Lt. Weiss, and bombardier, Lt. Thomas. Today, as usual, the flak was terrific; heavy intense, accurate. Our plane was hit badly. Had a direct hit in gas tank. Altogether, six holes. The main problem was that German fighters were thick as flies. Their pilots were not experienced so we shot quite a few down. I shot one myself, which was my first. Credited with missions 18 and 19. Received third cluster to Air Medal.

"We were shot down on May 6, 1944, at 1346 o'clock. The target was an aircraft production plant at Brasov, Romania. We lost engines No. 3 and No. 4 near Brasov to flak. We could not maintain altitude to clear the Alps nor did we have enough gasoline to reach the sea. Therefore we bailed out.

"Coady, Ford, and myself were taken captive by the Chetnicks and were told we were being held in protective custody. About midnight we were traded to the Germans for \$30 each. The Germans took us to Sarajevo. After two nights in a dungeon used to house political prisoners, we were taken to an airfield and flown to Belgrade in a Heinkel III. While in flight, we were attacked by two P-51s but due to low level flight, we were not hit.

"I was immediately placed in solitary confinement. For two days I was fed only bread and water. I guess they expected me to weaken for interrogation at the end of that time but I didn't tell them a thing.

"May 11th I was taken out of solitary confinement with three other officers and placed on a train for Vienna. One of our guards, a German Army Corporal, about 65 years of age, had a son that was a POW in south Texas. He read all of his son's letters to us. The day we spent in Vienna was swell. Our guards allowed us to enter a bar where we enjoyed a beer and some cinnamon rolls. It cost us an American quarter, which I happened to have on me.

"On May 13, we reached Stalag Luft III where we stayed until January 26, 1945. Our chief hardship there was the inadequate food we received. On January 28th, the Russian offensive caused the evacuation of the camp. About 10,000 American and British started a forced march to Spornburg. The temperature was between 5 to minus 15 degrees. After arriving in Spornburg, we boarded 40 & 8 box cars. The train reached Nurnburg. There our chief source of nourishment was an unappetizing cabbage soup with bugs in it which we received twice a day. We called it 'Green Death.' I don't know what we would have done without our supply of YMCA equipment and Red Cross parcels.

"On April 4, as the U.S. Army approached, we made another nine-day forced march covering 145 kilometers to Stalag 7A, near Moosdorf. Many prisoners and guards dropped out from exhaustion, but on the way I managed to trade some cigarettes for food and I actually gained weight. One day I ate 18 eggs. During this march, the 9th Air Force fired on our column with a few badly injured.

"April 29th, at 9:00 o'clock, a tank of the 7th Army penetrated our barbed wire encampment. At 9:20, the same day, my father arrived and landed next to the barbed wire in a Piper scout plane. The first person he talked to was a friend that I had joined the Air Corps with. Therefore, he was able to find me in a few minutes, even among the 30,000 prisoners in the camp.

"At 11:00, Dad and I left Moosdorf for his Headquarters at Weimer, Germany. Needless to say, Dad and I had a great time in Weimer, Weisbaden, and Paris for about 10 days."

Lt. Bentley's father, Lt. Col. Ed R. Bentley, was with the 9th Air Force Judge Advocates Office stationed in Weimer, Germany. He had made one hazardous unsuccessful trip, by Jeep, to the prison camp at Nurnburg, only to find that Lt. Bentley had been moved out of the camp two days prior.

2nd Lt. Neil J. Coady, CP of A/C #42-32022, March 4, 1991: "We lost engine No. 3 and No. 4 to flak and could not feather them. We lost altitude steadily on the way to Italy and had to bail out when we neared the mountains of Yugoslavia. When it was time to bail out of the aircraft, I went to the front of the bomb bay and saw some enlisted men at the back end of the bomb bay. I motioned for them to jump but they would not, afraid I guess. So being a dumb hero, I jumped out first to show them it was necessary. If I had waited another three or four minutes, we would all have been picked up by British paid Chetnicks and there would have been no POWs. But you never know.

"T/Sgt. Roy T. Ford followed me and then Lt. Edwin Bentley went third. We landed on one side of the mountain and the rest of the crew landed on the other side of the mountain. Partisans who picked up Ford, Bentley, and I were paid by the Germans. Chetnicks on the other side of the mountain were paid by the British and guided the rest of the crew to a mountain hideout where a C-47 flew them out in a couple of weeks. This is what I remember Bob Weiss telling me several years ago. If his story differs, take his facts as he knows them better than I.

"I had landed in a tree and my chute caught in the top branches. By the time I had pulled the chute out of the tree, a civilian, with an overseas cap with a Red Star on it, pointed a new American Thompson sub-machine gun at me and said something in Yugo that I did not understand, but did understand the gun pointing at my chest. Then he said, 'Pour vous is gare est fini.' And that I understood.

"He marched me down the mountain and I was turned over to the German Field police and later they brought in Ford and Bentley. We were taken by truck to some town and then flown in the bomb bay of a converted He-111, with benches in the bomb bay, to Belgrade for interrogation. We then were taken through Vienna, Austria, through Czechoslovakia and arrived at Sagan, Stalag Luft III a few days later. Bentley and I got the same barracks, but different rooms, and Ford got a different barracks. We had ten men in our room but later was increased to 15. POW condition at Stalag Luft III was pretty good and we received Red Cross parcels.

"Prison life was pretty uneventful until 21 January 1945 when the Germans told us to be ready to march overland toward the West. It was a bitterly cold, snowy afternoon when we all marched out in columns, in our winter coats and hats, all GI stuff provided for us through the International Red Cross. We marched the back roads, all through the day and night, all the next day, and late the second night we stopped in the town of Gottbus. We boarded box cars, with 50 men in a car and moved south to Nurnburg, another camp, Stalag 13-D.

"At Stalag 13-D, in Nurnburg, conditions were poor. After surviving a 40-hour bombing raid on Nurnburg on 3 April 1945, we walked to Moosdorf, Stalag 7A, near Munich and were held there in a camp holding thousands of POWs of all nationalities. At Stalag 7A, conditions were very bad but fortunately General Patton's Tank Army liberated us one day in May, before we really got sick and diseased.

"Ten days later we were flown out on C-47s to Camp Lucky Strike near LaHavre. I then went to a hospital to regain 20 pounds I lost while a POW. We were then sent back to the United States aboard a Liberty Ship troop transport to New Jersey. I then received a 60 day leave and then went back to Atlantic City for assignment to Douglas, Arizona.

"I remained in the service flying B-47 bombers for SAC (Strategic Air Command). I flew C-47s in Korea and held a desk job at 5th Air Force Headquarters in Korea. After more time with SAC, flying bombers, I got to go to Nam and spent one year there in the Inspector General's office. I got to see all the USAF bases in Viet Nam and Thailand. I retired in 1969 with the rank of Lt. Col. My Korea and Viet Nam experiences have shaded out many of the World War II experiences that Bob Weiss keeps reminding me of when we meet. However, overall, I would say that my POW experience was one of my life's most experience in three wars.

“I made an effort to find all of my old WWII crew members four or five years ago and found Bob Weiss, Edwin Bentley, George Thomas, Doug Ford, Ivan Foster, and Willard Curtis. I found that the ball turret gunner, ‘Shorty’ Earl, was killed in a car crash about ten years ago and our tail gunner, Leo Wolfe, was killed in a plane crash after he returned to the United States in World War II.”

#### **BUCHAREST, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 194 - MAY 7, 1944**

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 33 aircraft and dropped 96 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Bucharest. Bomb strike photos showed hits across the southeast end of the freight yards; severe damage and destruction of rolling stock; hits on two locomotive depots, warehouses and shops, a fuel storage tank; and damage to industrial buildings and into the city. Flak was moderate to intense and fairly accurate. There were no injuries to crews. Eight to 10 Me-109s and FW-190s attacked the formation coming off the target and were driven off by the fighter escort.

Sgt. Delbert W. Milleson, LW, 20th Squadron, was credited with destruction of one FW-190 and S/Sgt. Harry J. Forbes, TG, 20th Squadron, was credited with the probable destruction of a FW-190.

#### **WIENER NEUSTADT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 195 - MAY 10, 1944**

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 31 aircraft and dropped 91.50 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Aircraft Assembly Plant, Werk I. A smoke screen prevented observation of the area. Flak was very intense, accurate and heavy, resulting in damage to 31 aircraft and injuries to three men. 2nd Lt. Benjamin H. Butchkoff, B, 96th Squadron, suffered severe compound fracture of the upper right leg; 2nd Lt. Seth L. Griffen, B, 429th Squadron, suffered lacerations of the right arm; and S/Sgt. Jefferson F. Huey, LT, 49th Squadron, suffered a laceration of the forehead.

T/Sgt. Orchard B. Miller, Radio Gunner, 96th Squadron, and S/Sgt. Howard S. Williams, TG, 96th Squadron, were each credited with the destruction of an Me-109. Sgt. Robert O. Butts, Jr., LW, 429th Squadron, was credited with the probable destruction of a Me-109.

2nd Lt. William C. Easterbrook, Radar Navigator, 49th Squadron, was reported MIA while flying with the 463rd Bomb Group. 2nd Lt. Edward Rink, Jr., Radar Navigator, 49th Squadron was reported MIA while flying with another Bomb Group.

#### **CIVITAVECCHIA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 196 - MAY 12, 1944**

Colonel Herbert E. Rice led 34 aircraft to bomb German Headquarters at Massa D’Albe, Italy. Due to 10/10 cloud cover over the assigned target, the Group then dropped its 102 tons of GP bombs on the town and a nearby chemical factory. Each plane carried two, 2,000-lb. and two, 1,000-lb. bombs. Flak caused damage to three B-17s and injury to T/Sgt. John J. Taylor, UT, 429th Squadron, who suffered lacerations to the right cheek, eyebrow, and head.

#### **MASSA D’ALBE, ITALY - MISSION NO. 197 - MAY 12, 1944**

Colonel Herbert E. Rice, for the second time today, led 33 aircraft and dropped 66 tons of 1,000-lb. and 33 tons of 2,000-lb. GP bombs on German Headquarters. It was reported that hits were scored at the tunnel entrance and along roads leading to them. There was no flak and no E/A were encountered.

#### **BOLZANO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 198 - MAY 13, 1944**

Lt. Col. Donald Ainsworth, Group Operations Officer, led 29 aircraft and dropped 84 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs. The assigned target was a Railroad Bridge crossing the Iscaro River. The target was smoke covered from the bombing by a previous Group and assessment was difficult. There was

a large concentration of hits along the track in the Marshalling Yards including a hit on the choke point. A highway bridge, adjacent to the railroad bridge, was knocked out.

En route to the target, the Group was attacked by 20 to 30 Me-109s and FW-190s. They made one pass and inflicted no damage to the Group's planes. Flak at the target was the tracking type and ranged from slight to intense, all heavy. Eleven B-17s received minor damage and three men were injured.

2nd Lt. Stanley G. Hullis, B, 429th Squadron, suffered lacerations on the right hand; Sgt. Eugene H. Crosser, Waist Gunner, 20th Squadron, suffered lacerations to the right thigh, and 2nd Lt. Frederick L. Tompkins, P, 429th Squadron, suffered a slight laceration to the left hand.

#### **FERRARA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 199 - MAY 14, 1944**

Major James G. Ellis, 20th Squadron CO, led 31 aircraft and dropped 93 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Ferrara Marshalling Yards. Two runs were made and reports were that the bombs fell in the assigned area. Flak was slight to moderate with fair accuracy. Fourteen planes were damaged, four severely. There were no losses and no injuries.

#### **BIHAC, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 200 - MAY 17, 1944**

Colonel Herbert E. Rice led 31 aircraft to bomb German Headquarters in this area. A 9/10 cloud cover obscured the target but a "hole" was found and 93 tons of 1,000-lb. bombs were dropped. Results could not be determined due to the cloud cover. No flak and no E/A were encountered.

#### **BELGRADE, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 201 - MAY 18, 1944**

The Marshalling Yards at Ploesti, Romania was the assigned target. Thirty-seven aircraft took off under the leadership of Lt. Col. Donald Ainsworth. A cloud cover prevented penetration to this target and the Group proceeded to Belgrade and dropped 73 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards. Bombing was by PFF and no accurate assessment of damage could be made. One plane tacked on to the 97th Bomb Group and dropped its bombs on Marshalling Yards at Nis, Yugoslavia, and reported good results. Three B-17s bombing Belgrade received minor flak damage.

1st Lt. James Miceli, Radar Navigator, 49th Squadron, was reported MIA while flying with the 463rd Bomb Group in A/C #725 on a mission to Ploesti, Romania.

1st Lt. James Miceli, Radar Navigator, 49th Squadron. April 12, 1944: "I picked up my crew at Avon Park, FL and assigned to the 3rd A.F., 88th Bomb Group, 318th Squadron. Our crew consisted of Pilot, Chuck Crafton; Co-pilot, Roy Cooper; Navigator, Jim Miceli; Bombardier, Jerry Hofmann; Engineer, Don May; Radio, Bill Schilling; Waist Gunners, Mel Moser and Isadore Berman; Tail Gunner, Earl McLish. It was a very good crew and we trained together from December 18, 1943 to January 19, 1944.

"I was assigned for Special Radar Training with the 4th Air Sea Search Attack Squadron at Langley Field, VA. I and our crew finished our training early in March, 1944.

"We flew our B-17 from Langley Field April 28, 1944 to West Palm Beach, FL - Caracas, Venezuela - Belem, Brazil - Natal, Brazil - Dakar, No. Africa - Marrakech, Morocco - and finally to Foggia, Italy, arriving May 9th.

"Unfortunately I did not spend much time with the 2nd Bomb Group. On May 18, 1944, I was awakened at 3:00 a.m. and told that I would be flying with the 463rd Bomb Group as they needed a Mickey navigator. At this period of time, the 49th had a special assignment to furnish Radar Navigators to the other five Groups of the 5th Wing. I was the only one from the 2nd assigned to this crew from the 463rd. I would have preferred going with my own crew but it was determined that the

target was cloud covered and radar would be needed for bombing. The target was Ploesti, covered with overcast skies, plus smoke pots effectively covering the Astro Romano Refinery.

“I was assigned to a crew consisting of Pilot, Rick Marak; Co-pilot, Rich Fontana; Navigator, Dick Buckwalter; Bombardier, Rich Mazar; Mickey Operator, Jim Miceli; Radio, Marv Hinshaw; Waist Gunner, Jim Nystrom; Engineer, Tom Goode.

“We took off at 8:00 a.m. - rendezvoused with the five other Bomb Groups. Because of weather, three Bomb Groups of B-24s were recalled but we continued with our 108 planes. We were leading the flight and dropped our bombs, which later proved to be 80% effective. On our return we were hit with flak, radio compartment caught fire, and the deflected flak hit my right hip, fracturing it on impact. We put out the fire, lost altitude falling out of formation and were attacked by three Me-109s who knocked out two engines, forcing us to abandon the plane. I crawled out and jumped from the bomb bay. I was followed down by a Me-109 who I assumed would use me for target practice, but luckily he just radioed my position to the ground troops. I landed in a wheat field. Landed heavily due to my fractured hip. Captured by four farmers with pitch forks, hustled to a nearby farmhouse. One of the women took pity on my condition and put some salve on my burned face and hands and let me sit down. The Nazi soldiers arrived in ten minutes, took me to the local jail for two hours of interrogation.

“Later, two other crew members arrived and we were kept in a jail cell for the night. We were finally given some ersatz tea and a slice of bread for breakfast. We were trucked to an Army Garrison and surprisingly the people weren't too hostile, lots of yelling and jeering but nothing physical. We met other crew members and discovered they all shared similar experiences and had bailed out successfully. We remained in the Garrison for three weeks and then they separated the officers from the enlisted men. The officers were assigned to an old, three story brick school house in downtown Bucharest, the enlisted men to a camp near the Marshalling Yards. The airmen from the first raid to Ploesti were imprisoned in Timusual, a small town near Bucharest.

“Surviving was the key. We had no amenities such as soap, tooth brush, tooth paste, towels, etc. The toilets were holes in the basement, the food was scarce as well as horrible, but the most disturbing was the lack of freedom and not knowing what was happening in the war.

“Each classroom held 20 to 25 men, beds were a steel frame on the floor filled with straw, infested with lice and bed bugs. The meals were identical each day. Breakfast - one slice sour bread with a cup of ersatz tea. Lunch - watered cabbage of fish head only soup, one slice of bread. Dinner - potato soup, piece of cheese, one slice of bread.

“As we were located in central Bucharest, we suffered almost daily air raids and bombing by the Americans during the day, and the British by night. It was most harrowing! On May 24 we were visited by the Red Cross and received a post card we could send home. The visit did not improve our condition, but they finally advised our families that we were POWs and not Missing In Action. Actually, I was shot down on May 18 and my parents learned I was a POW on July 5. It was a difficult time for our wives and families.

“We did have a friend in Princess Catherine Caradja who provided us with what little reading material we had, some cards and a basketball so we could have some physical activity. I became used to my fractured hip and was able to limp along without too much discomfort. No medical attention was provided.

“On August 23, 1944, the Russians stormed into Bucharest and the Romanians capitulated. The guards disappeared and we were free, but where to go? We raided the warehouse and discovered Red Cross packages which were never delivered to us so we appropriated them and distributed them equally among ourselves. We were bombed by the Nazi Air Force as they were trying to recapture Bucharest. Colonel Gunn, our senior ranking officer, arranged to stow away in a Romanian Me-109, and the pilot, Captain Cantacuzene, flew him to Bari, Italy to advise them of our situation.

“The 2nd Bomb Group was assigned to fly to Bucharest and 39 B-17s were modified to carry men back to Bari, Headquarters of the 15th Air Force. In all they flew three days, taking out 1,116 American POWs.

“We landed in Bari, stripped of our lice infested clothing, which was put in a burning pile, and then we were hosed off, and carefully deloused. What a great feeling! Fresh new clothing, clean body, and freedom!

“We were put back on active duty and I received my long awaited promotion to 1st Lt., awarded the Air Medal and the Purple Heart.

“We were then taken to Naples and boarded the U.S.S. Athos and sailed back to the U.S.A. We arrived back in the States September 9, 1944 at Camp Upham and promptly given a four week furlough. We returned to Fort Dix and given R&R at the Claridge Hotel in Atlantic City.

“Meanwhile back in Foggia, at the 2nd Bomb Group, my original crew were finishing their missions. I was the first to fly a mission and the first to be wounded, shot down and incarcerated.

“Jerry Hofmann finished his missions and was killed in action, volunteering as an observer, in the front lines in Northern Italy. Bill Schilling hit by rocket fire; Chuck Crafton and Don May were wounded but continued to fly; Earl McLish badly wounded. Now 50 years later, I have two artificial hips as a souvenir of my experience. Six of my original crew are still alive and kicking, but not very high!”

#### **RIMINI, ITALY - MISSION NO. 202 - MAY 19, 1944**

Major Charles H. Hillhouse, 96th Squadron CO, led 35 aircraft to bomb Railroad Bridges at Rimini. Dropped were 105 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs. Strike photos showed one direct hit on the edge of one bridge and other possible hits on the north and south railroad bridge and highway bridge. No flak, no E/A encountered.

#### **AVEZZEANO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 203 - MAY 23, 1944**

Major James G. Ellis, 20th Squadron CO, led 36 aircraft to bomb enemy troop concentrations in this area. Several runs were made over the target but heavy cloud cover prevented bombing. Two planes dropped 6 tons of 500-lb. GP Bombs with the 97th Bomb Group and two others dropped 6 tons of bombs on a highway on the eastern edge of Rescina, Italy. No flak, no E/A encountered.

#### **FERENTINO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 204 - MAY 23, 1944**

Major James G. Ellis again led a Group formation of 33 aircraft to bomb the escape route of the German forces at Cassino. The Group flew over the target for 40 minutes trying to find a hole in the clouds without success and returned its bombs to Base. No fighters were encountered but some slight but intense flak was seen to the left of the formation with no damage to aircraft or crews.

#### **ATZGERDORF, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 205 - MAY 24, 1944**

Major James G. Ellis led 32 aircraft and dropped 96 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Aircraft Factory at Atzgerdorf. Bombing was by PFF due to a heavy cloud cover over the target. Flak was moderate to intense with fair accuracy causing damage to 19 planes, two severely, and wounding four crewmen. One Me-109 made one weak pass at the formation.

1st Lt. Oliver O. Thigpen, P, 96th Squadron, suffered a severe wound in left arm; T/Sgt. John J. Taylor, UT, 429th Squadron, suffered lacerations of forehead and cerebral concussion; S/Sgt. Frank C. Pharr, UT, 429th Squadron, suffered lacerations to forehead; and S/Sgt. Arlen J. Sterns, TG, 429th Squadron, suffered lacerations on right hand.

#### **LYON, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 206 - MAY 25, 1944**

Major Charles H. Hillhouse led 36 aircraft with 34 aircraft dropping 99 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Venissieux Marshalling Yards in Lyon. A good concentration of hits inflicted damage to the yards, shops, and rolling stock. No flak was encountered at the target but flak was encountered at landfall, damaging four B-17s with no injuries.

#### **ST. ETIENNE, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 207 - MAY 26, 1944**

Lt. Col. Donald H. Ainsworth, led 34 aircraft to bomb the Marshalling Yards at St. Etienne. There were 100.5 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs dropped and three Squadrons were off target due to a malfunction of the PDI and AFCE in the lead ship. One Squadron's bombs fell in the west end of the yards. Two aircraft jettisoned their bombs and returned early. B-17 #42-39999 left the formation early and was assumed to have landed at a friendly field.

May 27, 1944: Word was received today that B-17 #42-39999, piloted by 2nd Lt. Frederick L. Tompkins, had landed at Corsica. While en route to the target, the plane was suddenly rocked by an explosion, followed by a great sheet of flames that enveloped the cockpit. The pilot gave the signal to abandon the plane after the first few minutes of attempting to combat the blaze. The fire shorted the electrical system and the men in the rear did not hear the signal to jump. The co-pilot, navigator, bombardier, and upper turret gunner had already left the plane when the pilot realized that the remaining men had not received the signal to jump. The pilot then elected to stay with the ship and attempt to save it. He switched on the auto pilot and set to combating the blaze alone. Blinded by smoke, half dazed by lack of oxygen and in danger of exploding ammunition, he first threw out everything movable and then worked until he stifled the flames sufficiently for the radio operator, S/Sgt. Elmer R. Cutsinger, to come forward and aid him. Finally the flames were extinguished, and while the pilot headed for Corsica, the radio operator made temporary repairs to his burned equipment, enabling the pilot to find the field and attempt a landing. He was forced to ground loop the brakeless plane to avoid a 30-foot ditch. Remaining aboard the plane were:

2nd Lt. Frederick L. Tompkins, 0-690408, P.  
S/Sgt. Elmer R. Cutsinger, 38200294, R/O.  
Sgt. Roger C. Framm, 19206441, L/T.  
Sgt. Carl F. Merkle, 19090034, R/W.  
Sgt. Robert O. Butts, Jr., 33553787, L/W.  
Sgt. Joseph A. Jordan, 38341267, T/G.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-39999 - "BATAAN AVENGER" - 49TH SQUADRON - MAY 25, 1944**

2nd Lt. Earl E. Rodenburg, 0-700368, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Fred E. Letz, 0-699203, N.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. Paul H. Smith, 0-696292, B.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Harold L. Bolick, 39268736, U/T.	(EVADED)

Escape statement of S/Sgt. Harold L. Bolick, UT, taken 6 May 1945, after evading: "On the way to the target, near the Fort of Tunda (44-10N - 07-36W) on the French-Italian frontier, source's aircraft received four bursts of flak. Oxygen system was damaged, a fire was started in the bottom of the ship beneath the top turret, the fire being spread by the oxygen system. The gasoline lines burned away, and the gasoline added to the blaze. Men bailed out on the pilot's orders. Aircraft crashed, exploded and burned just over the border into France, near San Martin. Never in enemy hands. (Ed. A/C did not crash.)

"Source's greasy overalls caught a spark on one leg, and the cloth was smoking. After his parachute opened, source beat out the sparks. After landing, source washed his face in the snow to

remove blood and used first aid kit to bandage his head, where an exploding 50-cal. shell had hit him with a fragment. In about four hours, friendly Italians arrived, fed him and took him where he met the navigator, Fred E. Letz. After dark they were taken to the Partisans. They stayed there 11 days, while one of the Partisans went to an American mission in France to get instructions. He brought back by word of mouth from the mission that sources were to stay where they were, as there was no evacuation from Southern France at that time. Sources were transferred (13 hours) on foot to another partisan band where they could sleep in a house and get medical attention. There a doctor removed a bullet fragment from source's head.

"They stayed there three months. The Partisans organized a band of 2,000, took over the town in the valley of Cazzo and held or raided the surrounding country. After the invasion of Southern France, Germans wanted to open a road in full force and full equipment, through the Partisan held area between Northern Italy and Southern France, promising they would go quietly without attacking. The partisans refused. The Germans then attacked. The partisans held the line for four days. The Germans broke through and the Partisans (and source) retreated three days into the mountains. The Germans burned out the valley and opened the road, allowing their trapped units (25,000 men) in Southern France to retreat East. In the fighting, 355 Germans were killed and 100 Italians and 15 French Partisans were killed. All this time, source was one of the Partisans. For three weeks, the Partisans laid low. The frontier was mined, the Germans, patrolling with binoculars, were all around. Source then went to a place where he heard of an English mission. The next day, Lt. Letz followed, being crowded close by a patrol. Source and Lt. Letz stayed with the mission for ten days, then the officer in charge was killed in an auto wreck and two others arrived to run the mission. Several other American and British escapees and evaders joined. After several weeks, another British mission had arrived. Partisans had built up a strength of about 1,500 by this time. The British mission was warned to go up into the mountains as a plane drop had been planned in daylight. They left at midnight. Source wanted some British clothes (he was in civilian clothes) and the British wanted to destroy some radio equipment, so the two of them started up to the dropping ground. Behind them they heard rifle fire, as the Germans advanced and the Partisans resisted. They got to the dropping ground, accomplished their business and went to Fontana, where they were to meet the rest of the mission. Source did not meet Letz again. Fontana was occupied by Republicans and Germans, who caught sight of source and the Captain, and chased them on skis, keeping them moving for two weeks. They then got back to Fontana, as no alternate meeting place had been set up. They found that the mission, a total of 12 British had been captured. The Americans had been sent away just previously. The two went to another mission, picked up a radio operator, and then went to the Captain's mission. Here they formed four Partisan bands and armed 2,000 men. During this time, the Captain was captured and taken to Turin. Source tried to get another officer, in the meantime, 2-1/2 months, running the mission himself. During this time there were three attempts by the Germans and Republicans to cleanup, but the Partisans kept them away.

"A Major arrived. The Partisans stayed quiet, waiting for the big push. When orders arrived from General Mark Clark, the Partisans captured the entire region, from the French frontier to the 5th Army front. Source went to Savona, which was then the Partisan Headquarters of this region. After seven days some Americans arrived. The American advance party in Genoa consisted of two Negro soldiers, who walked to the edge of town and then took a street car. In Savona, a jeep arrived with two Negro soldiers with a white Lt. from an engineering unit. Then Brig. General Collins arrived in a second jeep, and the next day, 200 American soldiers arrived for police work. Source came back through military channels.

Lt. Paul H. Smith was interred in the U.S. Cemetery, Mirandola, Italy. Subject was positively identified by one dog tag found on the body.

In September, 1991, I received a letter from a young French writer, M. Philippe Castellano, who was researching Americans that either crashed or parachuted into his home area of Southern France during World War II. He had seen a recent news article (1991) in a French newspaper about Lt. Rondembourg (Rodenburg) and sent a copy to me. Translation:

#### FORTY-SIX YEARS AGO BREIL YOUTHS RESCUE AMERICAN AVIATOR.

Late August 1944, after several key Allied flights over our border area, woodcutters in the Magli Valley noticed a parachutist landing in the forest.

Mr. Louis Ipert, with two fellow workers (Mr. Louis Roscian and Mr. Philippe Sartore) sought him. After a long search they found him in the area called "le Chucarics." He stated that he was an American officer, Lt. Earl Rondembourg. They then informed him that they were from the French Resistance and he was safe, but he was in an enemy occupied area.

To save him from German patrols, which had been alerted meantime by a collaborating municipal official (the latter tried and convicted after the Liberation), following a long trek of more than three hours to cover their trail, they brought him safely to the "Toina" neighborhood. For several days the German patrols, with dogs, hunted him without success.

At once, Mr. Adrien Rosa, Lieutenant F.F.I., also known as "Marneau," leader of the local resistance; Mr. Andre Rey, county secretary and Mr. Napoleone Cola, head of the municipal housing, are alerted by Mr. Louis Ipert of the presence of the American officer. For two weeks, Lt. Earl Rondembourg remained hidden.

Before his departure for Nice (August 4 or 5, 1944), I.D. papers are drawn for him under the heading "Alps Reserved Zone" by Andre Rey, without which papers, any person stopped by Germans is arrested. On the eve of his departure, Mr. Paul Curti, forestry official, with the vehicle of Mr. Rosa, drives him to the Maglia bridge for Breil with Mr. Rosa biking ahead to scout for enemy patrols. At the Breil crossing, as bad luck would have it, they ran out of gas. Mr. Rosa and Mr. Curti pushed the vehicle to the train station (some 30 meters), passing two German patrols.

At the station, he spent the night in the restaurant cellar guarded by Mrs. Georgette Rosa who was concerned of the continued German patrols. The next morning, around 6:15, Mr. Jacques Belli, PLM Stationmaster and F.F.I. Lieutenant, takes the officer, dressed as a rail worker, with a tool belt, into his van. Once in Nice, Mr. Belli directs the officer to the "Parent Group," 1 Place Messera, where he will join his unit after the Liberation. In conversation with the local Resistant Group, Lieutenant Rondembourg declared that Allied troops would land shortly in Southern France.

Mr. Louis Ipert later received, from American Military Authorities, headed by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the medal of thanks for services rendered to Allied aviators shot down in France during the German occupation. Mr. Louis Roscian, Mr. Philippe Sartore, Mr. Adrian Rosa, Mr. Jacques Belli, are since deceased, but their memory remains alive in the resistance team which for a year and a half accepted enormous responsibilities aggravated by a collaborating municipal government.

Isolated from the rest of France, beginning August 15, 1944, this network continued its action even when the population suffered deportation by German troops on October 29, 1944 and interment in the San Palo camp in Turin from which, during the winter of 1944/45, important intelligence passed underground to France.

2nd Lt. Earl E. Rodenburg, CP. December 13, 1991: "We had an explosion in the plane, which happened with a loud bang, like flak from an 88 going through the top turret. There was fire from cartridges, oxygen, grease, and dirt; the noise of shells exploding, especially the "Vary" pistol shells with their little balls of fire and sulphur. I was flying the B-17 as co-pilot in the 2nd position of the formation, so was looking to my left and ahead, or as we would say, 'across cockpit.' I saw this explosion and thick smoke out of the corner of my eye, coming from the bottom of the top turret and what I thought at the time was a fire in the bomb bay. When I opened the window on my right, the

suction pulled my flak jacket off along with my helmet, oxygen mask and throat mike. It seems to me that the altitude was 19,000/20,000 feet. Airspeed about 160.

“Fred ‘Lonnie’ Tompkins took over the plane when the explosion occurred. I retrieved my chest pack chute and snapped it in place. I made my way to the nose of the plane to see if the three men were all right. I found that Letz and Bolick had already jumped and Smith was looking out the open hatch. I motioned for him to jump, then went back and handed Lonnie his chute from behind the seat and told him to bail out. When I got to the escape hatch, Smith wasn’t there. He had bailed out and I never saw him again. I didn’t know what happened to him until I heard from his Mother after the war.

“Letz and Bolick had jumped a bit before Smith and maybe three to four minutes before me. Letz and Bolick landed in Italy. I landed on the side of a very steep mountain. My chute caught in a sapling and I found myself sitting gently on the ground. Before I could free myself, two young Frenchmen found me. They lived in the area and cut wood to make charcoal. The town where I was rescued by these two youngsters is Breil. These boys contacted the French Underground, the ‘Marqui’ (pronounced ‘Mah-Key’). I was transported from Breil to Nice where I was met by two Marqui and taken back north to the vicinity of Digne. This is in the Base and Maritime Alps and the terrain is very difficult. I spent over three months with these Marqui before being captured by Germans early in August, between the first and 15th. I was held prisoner along with an enlisted man, a Sergeant from Tennessee, who was a gunner on a B-25. We were held in various towns in Southern France for a couple of days before we were handed over to the Luftwaffe and transported up the Rhone River Valley by bus through cities like Marseille, Avignon, Lyon, Dijon, Nancy, Metz, Saarbrücken, to Frankfurt on the Main where I was held in solitary confinement for four or five days.

“I was then sent to Wetzlar where the Red Cross was allowed to give us clothes. They were British uniforms. I was put on a train and taken east across Germany to River Neisse, which we crossed at Golitz, then on to Sagan on the Oder River to Stalag Luft III. I arrived there in September, the 18th or 19th, I remember spending my 25th birthday there on September 21, 1944.

“Between December 25th and January 1st we were assembled and marched out in a heavy snowstorm because the Russians were attacking towards Berlin and would overrun our compound. The first night we were billeted in a pottery plant in Spremberg, then the second day to Golitz. We were put in 40 & 8 box cars and transported across Czechoslovakia to Moosdorf, Stalag 7A, in Bavaria, a small town near Munich, and close to Dachau, the notorious concentration camp. I don’t remember how many days we were in the forced march and on the train, but do remember that those 40 & 8 cars were dirty, drafty, and cold.

“On April 29, 1945 we were liberated by the 7th Army. That Sherman tank, ugly as they are, looked beautiful rolling up the company street! We were repatriated to Camp Lucky Strike at LaHavre, France and transported home on Liberty ships, in convoy, in the North Atlantic. We were 25 days on board and 23 days on the ocean, a rough trip! I arrived home in Malvern, Iowa, on June 14, 1945.”

T/Sgt. Elmer Ray Cutsinger, RO on A/C #42-39999, January 21, 1992: “We flew the southern route, leaving the States on March 18, 1944, and landed in Italy, March 28th. On the 29th we flew to Amendola and were assigned to the 49th Squadron, 2nd Bomb Group.

“My first mission was to Fischamend Market, April 12th, and was credited with a double mission. April 15th we went to Ploesti, Romania to bomb the Marshalling Yards. It was rough and we were credited with another double mission. In all, I went to Ploesti six times and none were easy. On the raid of the 24th of April we had our control cables shot away by Me-109s and the right aileron was mangled. Then on the 9th of July we lost No. 4 engine and had a flak hole in the right Tokyo tank.

“I went to Southern France four times and I would say that my most exciting mission came on May 26, 1944 on a mission to St. Etienne, France. We were flying #999, “BATAAN AVENGER” and my first sign of trouble was a loud cracking sound in my headset. We were on fire! Then the intercom

went completely dead! I started forward with my chest pack parachute on but couldn't get through the narrow cat-walk, in the bomb bay, so went back to my radio room and took it off. The plywood, ¾ " thick door at either end of the bomb bay had kept me from hearing the explosion or fire. When I opened the second door I was met by a wall of flames and numerous 50-cal. shells exploding. I found a fire extinguisher in the radio compartment and emptied it into the fire with little or no affect. I went back to the waist and found two more. I emptied both to no avail.

"About this time the two waist gunners, ball turret gunner, and tail gunner wanted to bail out. I made one more trip forward and found that the fire was dying down, so went back to the rear of my radio compartment and waved both forearms in the horizontal position like an umpire signaling a runner safe at home plate. They stayed put and I went through the smouldering furnace to see if any help was needed. Tommy was alone in the cockpit but could not see out. We found some rags and I scrubbed vigorously for 20 minutes until we could see out. Tommy dumped the unarmed bombs in the ocean, then headed for the Island of Corsica.

'I was in the co-pilot's seat when we touched down and got a shower of hydraulic fluid when we hit the brakes. This small civilian airport couldn't accommodate larger planes so we rolled past the runway and out into an open field. Directly ahead of us, a farmer was plowing with a team of horses. 'Tailspin Tommy' came through like the ace we knew him to be. His right hand moved to the throttles so fast I couldn't see it and he cut No. 1, 2, and 3 engines while operating No. 4 to the maximum. He plowed furrows three feet deep when he spun around in a perfectly controlled ground loop. We missed the farmer too. A full case of ammo punched through the skin of the plane due to the centrifugal force. I wasn't scared any part of the time until I looked back - then my knees were really weak and shaken.

"Tommy always did a superb job of evasive action, changing altitude, etc., when the flak started getting too close. He always thought the B-17 would barrel roll very nicely, but we all objected, so he never tried it. We called him 'Tailspin Tommy' Tompkins after a 1938 comic strip character.

"I found out later that Lt. Earl Rodenburg, co-pilot, parachuted into France and was picked up by the French Underground. Lt. Fred Letz and S/Sgt. Harold Bolick parachuted into Italy, and Lt. Paul Smith was killed when he opened his chute too early and it was caught on the ball turret guns and it was shredded.

"My last mission (50-51) was to an airdrome at Memmingen, Germany. We saw no flak nor fighters but another Group lost half their planes to fighters. One of our planes turned back and never got to Base (landed in Switzerland). Our old plane, #490, came back early on three engines. We ran out of oxygen and low on gas."

T/Sgt. Cutsinger was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions aboard his aircraft. S/Sgt. Bolick was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions with the British and Italian Partisans. For saving his plane and the remaining members of his crew, Lt. Tompkins was awarded the Silver Star.

#### **AVIGNON, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 208 - MAY 27, 1944**

Colonel Herbert E. Rice led 33 aircraft to the target, dropping 97 tons of 500 GP bombs. Three Squadrons missed the target due to failure of PDI and AFCE. Two Squadrons had a few bombs in the target area.

Two enemy aircraft made half-hearted attacks. Some flak en-route caused minor damage to two aircraft and minor injury to T/Sgt. Harry Kornetsky, RO, 96th Squadron.

#### **WOLLERSDORF, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 209 - MAY 29, 1944**

Major James G. Ellis led 28 aircraft and dropped 53.5 tons of 100-lb. incendiary bombs on the Wollersdorf Airdrome. The target was well covered and many fires were seen. Flak was moderate to intense causing slight damage to ten B-17s.

## **SHUTTLE MISSION TO RUSSIA - MISSIONS 210, 211, 212 - JUNE 2 TO 11, 1944**

### **DEBRECZEN, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 210, JUNE 2, 1944**

Colonel Herbert E. Rice led 33 aircraft and bombed the Marshalling Yards at Debreczen. A good coverage was reported. The Group then proceeded to a Landing Field at Mirgorod, Russia. Some flak was encountered over Yugoslavia and at the German/Russian lines. All planes landed safely. The 97th, 99th, and 301st Bomb Groups also participated in the Shuttle Operation.

Lt. Col. John Ryan and Lt. Kelly, Group Bombardier, met the crews on their arrival with a Russian Colonel and woman interpreter. Interrogations were held. This was the first face-to-face meeting with the Russian Allies and there was much curiosity aroused. Quarters assigned to the crews were neat and orderly and all went smoothly.

An emergency appendectomy was performed on Lt. Johnson, 96th Squadron, by Major Beal, Group Surgeon.

June 3, 1944: Non-operational. The operation section was set up in a tent shared with S-2 and S-3. M/Sgt. Donald Smith, S/Sgt. Joseph Wilder, S/Sgt. George Schmeelk, and Sgt. Robert Stout began the preparation of operations data.

June 4, 1944: Non-operational. Representatives from British, American, and Russian newspapers arrived at the Group Base. Eddie Gilmore, of the Associated Press remarked that this visit to Russia was the biggest single event of the war.

June 5, 1944: Non-operational. Orders were received that the Group would return to Italy the following day. Bags were packed and loaded on the aircraft. Briefings were held and then orders came through canceling the operation. Personal luggage was removed from the planes and an operation was planned for the following day.

### **GALATZ, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 211 - JUNE 6, 1944**

Colonel Herbert E. Rice led 28 aircraft to bomb the Airdrome at Galatz. There was one early return and 27 aircraft dropped their bombs on the target. Strike photos showed the bombs were well concentrated on the Airdrome. Some fighters were seen in the area with no encounters. There were 104 B-17s and an escort of 42 P-51s participating in this raid from the Russian Bases, with no losses.

Everyone in the Group was excited by the news of the Allied Invasion on the beaches at Normandy. It was reported that the operation today was to hold German fighters from the invasion landing areas.

June 7, 1944: Non-operational.

June 8, 1944: Many officers accompanied Russian officers on tours of viewing Russian fighter planes. The Group was notified there would be no operation on the 9th. The men were beginning to get bored at the inactivity.

June 9, 1944: The weather officer reported that two weather fronts made missions to intended targets impossible. Some men of the Group visited Poltava where Colonel Lauer, former CO of the 2nd, escorted them around the town of Poltava. Once a population of 300,000, it had been badly demolished by the retreating Germans.

June 10, 1944: Another non-operational day. Many of the men visited a local military hospital and found many English speaking Russian soldiers. A bomb load was announced for the following day and that the Group was going home. This would be the last night in Russia.

### **FOCSANI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 212 - JUNE 11, 1944**

After a wake-up call at 0415 hours, and another breakfast of C-rations, the crews went to their planes. Shortly after take-off, Lt. Col. Ainsworth, in ship #615, developed engine trouble and returned to the field. On board were Captain Simmons and Captain Hippard.

Colonel Rice led the remaining aircraft to bomb the Focsani Airdrome. The 2nd led the 5th Wing to the target. The bombing appeared to be good over the assigned area and a dense blanket of smoke covered the target. Flak was not accurate or intense. Enemy fighters attacked some of the following Groups but there were no encounters with the 2nd. P-51 fighters flew escort for the wing. At about 1400 hours the Group was down at home Base. The first U.S. Air Force Task Force to Russia was history.

Captain Harry Miller, Engineering Officer, 429th Squadron. December 26, 1991: "In reading some publications about the Shuttle Mission to Russia, I found another variance with my memory. I, at the time, was Engineering Officer of the 429th, and flew as ordered, with Colonel Cunningham, CO of the 429th, on the Shuttle. I did not fly on the mission from Mirgorod and the return to Mirgorod, the day of the invasion, but recall asking the crews, on their return, where they bombed. This was, of course, after they told us the second front had landed in Normandy. Incidentally, they had this only from monitoring British radio. The reply I got was Dresden, Germany, in order to confuse the Germans or divert some fighters away from the landing. The account I read said the mission was to Galatz, Romania because Stalin wanted to soon follow up on his drive westward to take the Balkan countries west of the rail center. I flew back with the same crew and the navigator told me we were bombing a Marshalling Yard near Ploesti. When you compare the distance to Dresden and to Galatz on a map, it shows the Romanian target closer to Poltava and I feel certain the mission was gone from the base too long to have gone to Galatz.

"Nobody had to tell me we were under ack-ack fire from both Germans and Russians as we flew over the front lines. We also had flak from both targets, so in two missions we were under fire six times total. We were not hit by fighters on the two missions but did see some Me-109s taking off from a dirt field. After they were up to about 10,000 feet, they turned tail and went back. I assume that the P-51s and P-38s we had with us were too much for them. I flew a mission out of North Africa as a stow-away but it was not as much fun as the Russian deal.

"There were several good stories coming out of my experience in Russia but I will only mention one in this writing. We had to change an engine on one plane after the D-Day mission that really taught me something about the Russians. We had orders from the highest command to be friendly with the Russians and fully explain all we knew about the B-17 to any Russian pilot that might express interest. In keeping with these orders, locally I was ordered to use five Russian mechanics to do the engine change. Naturally I was taken aback by such an unsuspecting order. Fortunately, one of the four crew chiefs I had with us spoke Polish and some Russian. He was able to communicate very well with those five Ruskies that reported to me that day.

"Those Ruskies worked like hell! They laughed and joked constantly. They were extremely careful about everything. I think all the careless ones had already been shot. On our planes there were aluminum lock nuts that were not supposed to be used but once and then thrown away when taken off. The hardest part of my Polish speaking crew chief was to keep the Ruskies from reusing those Pal nuts. They would not waste anything. They did not strip any threads or lose a single nut or bolt. They changed the engine in almost as little time as my prize engine change crew in Italy. I was impressed and they left us with a good feeling about the Russian G.I.s. No one can say they are dumb and lazy."

Captain Robert M. Hippard, 96th Squadron Engineering Officer. March 18, 1992: "Harry Miller and I were assigned to the 49th Squadron as Engineering Officers at Ephrata, Washington in November 1942. I was Harry's assistant. In September, 1943, at our base near Massicault, Tunisia, I was transferred to the 96th as Engineering Officer when Lt. Lester M. Peters was made Group Engineering Officer. Harry, Fred Allen, 96th Armament Officer, and I were transferred to the 301st

Bomb Group and came home together in July, 1945 when the 2nd Bomb Group remained in Italy as part of the Occupation Forces.

“Of course I have memories and recollections of people and happenings during the entire period. Some not so good, but for the most part, very pleasant as well as plenty of laughs! Although it seems almost unreal after 47-50 years and try to remember everything in detail, I do remember things pretty well: Going to North Africa on the SS Monterey in convoy; the train ride from Casablanca to Chateau Dun, Algeria; the several moves in North Africa and the final move to Foggia-Manfredonia; the dreary winters of 1944/45; the hard work and long hours put in by the guys in the Engineering Section, ‘down on the line,’ and trying to get planes ready for another ‘maximum effort’ the next day; the comradeship and great spirit of cooperation by almost everyone; the occasional holidays and trips; the stay in Russia as well as the flights going and coming. I was flying with the Group Operations Officer, Lt. Col. Don Ainsworth, and we lost an engine on the return flight and had to go back to Poltava for repairs. Then we flew back to Italy by way of Tehran and Cairo a few days later.

“I well remember watching take-offs and landings and sweating out the returning planes on almost every mission, but I cannot remember dates, places, names and numbers of losses. I did not keep a diary for which I am sorry.”

Lt. Eugene Armstrong, N, 49th Squadron. January 13, 1993: “Our crew had been in England and then transferred to the 15th in Italy. Although we were billeted and named a crew, we did little flying together in Italy. I flew most of my missions with other crews and don’t remember a single name. I think I flew a milk run to Bihac, Yugoslavia the day after arriving and thought what a welcome relief from the 8th Air Force. In late May, 1944, I was invited to go on what turned out to be the ‘Russian Caper.’ We landed at a town in the Ukraine called Mirgorod, which is within 50 miles of the city of Poltava. There were three bases that the 15th occupied during the nearly two weeks we were in Russia; Poltava, Mirgorod, and Piryaton (?). My crew did not make the mission. I cannot remember the crew I flew with. We carried in the B-17s the ground crews for the fighter maintenance (P-51s) and as I remember, keeping them on oxygen at 20,000 to 25,000 feet was no small trick.

“This Russian Caper was kept a deep secret for almost a month before it was revealed to the navigators, at about three days before take-off. The participants in this mission were restricted to the Base for the rest of the month. The primary goal of the mission, as we were eventually told, was to bomb the German synthetic oil refineries in Poland that could not be reached from either England or Italy and return. But these targets were within easy reach of bases in Russia. Intelligence reported that the Germans had moved 1,500 plus fighters from the western defenses to the target area in Poland. We had, at most, two Groups of P-51 fighters for our defense. It was a mission impossible!

“We were summoned for a 3:00 a.m. briefing on June 6th. We proceeded from the briefing to the airplanes, which were loaded full of 500 pounders (Russian women loaded bombs by hand) and full tanks of gas. This was more than one should have suffered through since the runway was short and a very tall smokestack existed at the end. The targets were about 400 nautical miles from our base. Due to a mechanical malfunction, we did not fly the mission.

“At the briefing, after the mission, we were told that the mission had been successfully accomplished. The invasion of Normandy was taking place and that no German fighters were in evidence. I wonder if Hitler’s reluctance to release his reserves to Rommel to defend Normandy had anything to do with this Caper?”

T/Sgt. Arthur J. Smith, 49th Squadron, RO on the crew of 2nd Lt. James H. Twibell. January 15, 1993: “My tenure with the 2nd Bomb Group was quite short. I arrived in Italy March 4, 1944, flew my first mission March 18, my last was June 26, and I left for the States July 7th.

“My tour of missions, while not boring by any means, were uneventful. Unfortunately I remember the sad things, particularly of other crew members we went to Italy with. In particular, there was one fellow who had not flown yet and we, who already had five or six missions, kidded him about it. His philosophy was, ‘As long as I don’t fly, I’m here.’ Finally he flew his first mission, and was shot down over Yugoslavia. Then there was another good friend who finished at about the same time I did, came home on the same ship, went home on our 30 day leave, then on the way back to duty he was killed in a train wreck near Terre Haute in August 1944.

“I recall an incident which was not nearly as tragic, at least in the sad sense. I don’t remember the nature of the target, although I seem to recall large oil tanks, but it was directly on the shore line of Southern France. We had three missions to France in a matter of three or four days; Lyon, St. Etienne, and Avignon. I’m guessing the latter. Anyway, our bombardier had been selected to fly in the lead aircraft. As was custom, hand held cameras were issued to radio operators throughout the formation, and I later found out that for some unaccountable, illogical, terrible reason, my photos were the only clear ones of the bomb strikes. There on the wall, in all its clarity, was the photo of virtually all the bombs landing in the water! Fortunately, I don’t believe our bombardier found out who took the pictures. My diary notes contain the words, ‘I think it was a pretty lousy job.’

“I was on the Shuttle to Russia. We were supposed to be on the mission flown from there (I think it was on D-Day) but in taxiing for take-off, the aircraft went off the taxi-way into a quagmire of mud. The rest of the aircraft were long gone by the time we were towed out, so that scrubbed that one for us.

“Since we were going to Russia for an extended period, we had to pack other clothing in a barracks bag. Unfortunately, my barracks bag and I never met in Russia. So, with only my clothes on my back, there was a touch of inconvenience for ten days. I lost my wallet, but more important, I lost my A-2 jacket with the same eagle painted on the back as was painted on our aircraft. Now that was a heart-breaking loss!

“I separated in October 1945, and returned home to New Hampshire. About three months later, I received a package which was postmarked New York. It contained my wallet, with all my papers and pictures in it, but no money, and definitely not my A-2 jacket.”

2nd Lt. Richard L. Irby, 20th Squadron, Bombardier. August 10, 1992: “Our crew from the States were 2nd Lt. Leroy P. Rigney, Pilot; 2nd Lt. John J. Janicek, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. William E. Mitchell, Navigator; myself, Bombardier; T/Sgt. Orvel W. Buechner, Engineer; S/Sgt. Richard A. Gilbert, Lower Turret; S/Sgt. William F. Corbin, Right Waist; S/Sgt. Alvin G. Barrow, Left Waist; Sgt. Marion J. Maddox, Tail Gunner; and Sgt. Peter A. Victor, Radio Operator. All of these men, with the exception of Lt. Janicek and myself, were involved in a mid-air collision with another ship from the 20th Squadron on March 30, 1944, and were all killed. I was flying as Squadron bombardier that day and Lt. Janicek was ill. I never did know the particulars of that crash. Lt. Rigney was my pilot from Ephrata, Washington, Walla Walla, Washington, and Avon Park, Florida and overseas. I flew eight combat missions with them. It was a terrible loss for me.

“I did fly the missions to Steyr, Regensburg, and the Shuttle to Russia. These stand out in my mind more vividly than many others.

“If I recall correctly, we started out last in the last position, in our element, on the Steyr and Regensburg missions and as a plane was lost we moved up in the number three position on the return home. Our losses over these targets were terrible! I believe those were my sixth and seventh missions.

“Captain Robert E. Arnold, killed on the Regensburg raid, was with our training Group at Ephrata, Walla Walla, and Avon Park. He arrived in Foggia after we did and was scheduled to replace Captain Chrismon as CO of the 20th Squadron. He was not scheduled to fly on the Regensburg run but asked to replace Lt. Withers’ co-pilot in order to gain experience. He was a fine man and a fine officer.

The irony of the story is that the man he replaced, and another officer, took a Jeep ride into Foggia and the Jeep overturned. He was killed but no one else was injured.

“As I said before, I flew the Shuttle Mission to Russia and have a few reflections on that trip, not so much of the missions, but of the Russian Army. In Mirgorod, everyone got water from the well in the middle of the street. About 5 p.m. one day a lady, with a bucket in her hand, approached the well. When a guard yelled, ‘Stoy,’ she took one more step and he blew the top of her head off. Two men with a two-wheeled cart picked up the body and carried it away. Nothing was said by anyone.

“When we landed at Mirgorod we were told to take everything from the plane that we would need. Colonel Rice needed papers on board so myself and three other officers returned to the plane for them. The guards would not let us enter but called for their commander who arrived with a new set of guards to let us go to the plane. Their orders are never changed, only the guards. From the time of Peter the Great, their mentality has not changed. I do not believe we can ever trust this nation.

“My last mission was as Group Bombardier to Ploesti. Lt. Col. Jack Ryan was our pilot and George Cross was navigator. It was my sixth trip to Ploesti.”

Meanwhile back at the Base at Amendola, the news that Rome had been taken on June 4th and the invasion of Normandy on the 6th was met with great excitement by men of the 2nd.

#### **OBERPFAFFENHOFFEN, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 213 - JUNE 13, 1944**

Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 75 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on Airdrome Installations and Dispersal Areas. The target was well covered with only a few bombs falling short. Flak was intense and accurate. Eight to 12 E/A attacked the formation and one Me-109 was destroyed. There were no losses and no casualties.

#### **BUDAPEST, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 214 - JUNE 14, 1944**

Twenty-six aircraft dropped 65 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Koolaz & Fante Oil Refineries. The target was covered by smoke from previous bombings and the Group dropped its bombs into the smoke. Flak was moderate to intense, fair to good, barrage type. Thirteen aircraft received minor damage, four badly damaged.

Ten E/A attacked the formation resulting in the loss of B-17 #42-31527, 49th Squadron. Ten chutes were seen to open. One E/A was destroyed.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31527 - “BROWN NOSE” - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Charles M. Britton, 0-745605, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Charles R. White, 0-687778, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	John J. Cook, 0-752980, N.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Grethel C. Fields, 0-685466, B.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Witt W. Bencal, 32580141, U/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Walter E. Ramsey, 36726402, L/T.	(EVADED)
Sgt.	Gordon P. Keifer, 36298475, R/W.	(POW)
Sgt.	Edward J. Jacobs, 32797045, L/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Timothy D. O’Brien, 18017073, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Joseph G. Leinart, 14121364, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of S/Sgt. Walter M. Greer, LWG on B-17 #006, after the mission: “At approximately 1209 hours, plane #527 was attacked by 12 Ju-88s and set No. 2 engine on fire. The plane lagged, lost altitude fairly fast and all ten men bailed out. Fire spread rapidly and plane went into a spiral, the left wing came off and exploded at about 4,000 to 5,000 feet. I took pictures with a K-20 camera; one as the plane was lagging and on fire, two as men were bailing out, and a third as plane exploded.”

Statement of 1st Lt. Charles M. Britton, after evading and returning to the United States: "We left the formation about six miles S.E. of Nabjaluka, Yugoslavia. All ten men bailed out. The navigator and bombardier went out the nose hatch, pilot and co-pilot and engineer bailed out the bomb bay, radio, lower turret gunner, right and left waist gunners out the main hatch, and tail gunner out the tail hatch. None were injured and all have since returned to the United States and are on inactive duty."

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 215 - JUNE 16, 1944**

Major Charles H. Hillhouse led 29 aircraft to bomb the Florisdorf Oil Refinery at Vienna. Three planes were early returns and only 17 aircraft dropped 42.8 tons of 250-lb. GP bombs into a cloud covered target. Results could not be determined. Flak was moderate, fair and heavy, barrage and tracking type, resulting in damage to 15 aircraft. B-17 #42-38089 is missing as a result of flak and last sighted at 46-00N - 17-00E. Eight to 12 E/A attacked the rear Squadron north of Lake Balaton. B-17 #665, 429th Squadron, was hit by fighters, starting a fire in the radio room. Crew dropped its bombs, extinguished the blaze and returned safely to Base.

2nd Lt. William M. Daly, N, 429th Squadron, was slightly wounded. Sgt. Benjamin O. Clark, 49th Squadron, was credited with the possible destruction of a Me-109.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-38089 - 49TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Shelby F. Vaughan, 0-804883, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Lawrence J. Fitzsimmons, 0-813685, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Charles L. Snure, 0-712928, N.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Paul N. Newman, 0-726797, B.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Frank L. Maglaty, 31280196, U/T.	(EVADED)
Sgt.	Ollie S. Davis, 33454805, L/T.	(EVADED)
Sgt.	Joseph E. Sallings, 34491635, R/W.	(EVADED)
Sgt.	Paul E. Horner, 33166503, L/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Louis (NMI) Schwartz, 35303424, T/G.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	John B. Cockshott, 35092297, R/O.	(EVADED)

Statement of S/Sgt. Charles Hollenberg, TG on B-17 #053, after the mission: "At approximately 1150 hours, #089 was losing altitude, No. 2 engine throwing oil and No. 4 engine feathered. No. 089 was straggling and we lost sight of him. I believe our escort was covering him."

Statement of S/Sgt. Joseph E. Sallings after evading: "We did not bail out but crash landed safely 100 kms east of Zagreb. We had no casualties. I returned safely to Italy."

#### **PARMA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 216 - JUNE 22, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off to bomb Marshalling Yards in Parma. The majority of the bombs fell in the assigned area. No injuries, no losses.

#### **PLOESTI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 217, JUNE 23, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft led by Major James Ellis, took off to bomb the Dacia Romano Oil Refinery at Ploesti. Due to a heavy smoke screen over the target, 26 aircraft dropped their bombs on the city. No results were obtainable. Flak was intense, fair to good, heavy, both tracking and barrage type. Four to eight Me-109s attacked the formation and one E/A claimed as damaged. No injuries, no losses.

### **SETE, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 218 - JUNE 25, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 76 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Oil Storage Plant at Sete. The target was well covered. No E/A fighters, no injuries, no losses.

### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 219 - JUNE 26, 1944**

The Schwechat Oil Refinery was effectively bombed on this date. The bombs of one Squadron fell out of the target area but bombs of the other three Squadrons were in the assigned area. Flak was inaccurate and the Group suffered no injuries and no losses.

Russia Shuttle bombers of the 8th Air Force landed at nearby fields in Italy.

### **BUDAPEST, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 220 - JUNE 27, 1944**

Thirty-eight aircraft took off to bomb the Marshalling Yards in Budapest. Arriving over the target, the Group found it to be cloud covered and some bombed the center of Budapest by PFF. One Squadron bombed the northeast part of Budapest visually and another Squadron bombed the assigned target visually. Flak caused the loss of B-17 #42-32053, which was hit over the target, went into a dive, then a spin, caught fire and exploded. Two chutes were seen. Sgt. Eugene F. Fawls, LWG, 96th Squadron, was killed by flak.

The formation was vigorously attacked by E/A before and after the bomb run resulting in damage to three B-17s with no losses. S/Sgt. Farrow Beacham, LT; T/Sgt. Bennie P. Showmaker, LW, and S/Sgt. Howard S. Williams, TG, were each credited with destruction of an Me-109. A joint claim of a Me-109 went to S/Sgt. Nelson T. Main, LW, and S/Sgt. Carlo Veneziano, TG.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-32053 - 49TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Richard A. Korb, 0-751354, P.	(KIA)
1st Lt.	Alf L. Larsen, 0-813919, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Casimir L. Blaska, 0-707372, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	James E. Fleming, 0-671411, B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Malcom N. Treadway, 14156502, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	William C. Bair, 33325510, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Thaddeus G. Thomas, 13013527, R/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Henry (NMI) Rappe, 36328316, L/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Thaddeus T. Krent, 36765305, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Burl K. Kessel, 16075803, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of Malcom N. Treadway, UT, after liberation: We were hit by flak and I was blown out of the plane. I believe all the enlisted men and co-pilot bailed out. T/Sgt. Kessel was wounded, and captured and was in the same prison camp with me. The plane crashed about 30 miles S.W. of Budapest, near a small village. After capture, soldiers took me to the wreckage and I saw the body of Lt. Korb, still at the controls and the bodies of Lts. Fleming and Blaska, in the nose section. I saw Lt. Larsen as he passed me going into the bomb bay when I discovered the fire in the bomb bay about three minutes after the target. Hungarian soldiers told me his chute caught on fire and burned on the way down. This is only hearsay information. Sgt. Kessel saw the other enlisted men bail out.”

### **BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 221 - JUNE 30, 1944**

Major Charles H. Hillhouse led 28 aircraft to bomb the North Oil Refinery at Blechhammer. After reaching Lake Balaton, a 10/10 cloud cover could not be penetrated. The Group was forced to turn back and dropped its 12, 500-lb. GP bombs in the Adriatic Sea.

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# 11

## OPERATIONS: JULY, 1944

### **G**YOR, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 222 - JULY 2, 1944

The primary target was the Almas Fazito Oil Storage and Refinery only to find it cloud covered. The formation changed course and bombed Marshalling Yards and Installations at Gyor. The target was well covered with explosions seen. An early return bombed the town of Vulcover, Hungary with poor results.

### **ARAD, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 223 - JULY 3, 1944**

Twenty-five aircraft dropped 75 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Car Repair and Car Shop at Arad. Photos showed the area to be well covered. Flak was heavy, slight intensity and with fair accuracy.

A/C #42-37162, 49th Squadron, developed engine trouble and was forced to ditch in the Adriatic Sea. All crew members were picked up by a U.S. Navy Patrol Boat. The crew are:

1st Lt. James H. Twibell, 0-677331, P.  
2nd Lt. A. B. Drais, 0-808805, CP.  
2nd Lt. Robert E. Unger, 0-692335, N.  
2nd Lt. Albert E. Gregor, 0-688347, B.  
T/Sgt. Leo C. Smith, 39288597, U/T.  
S/Sgt. Bernard T. Foy, 38128812, L/T.  
S/Sgt. Stanley A. Groom, 12173668, R/W. Slightly injured.  
S/Sgt. William T. Edwards, 15336153, L/W. Slightly injured.  
S/Sgt. William L. Cooper, 15335485, T/G. Slightly injured.  
T/Sgt. Walter R. Lisowski, 15374407, R/O. Slightly injured.

S/Sgt. William L. Cooper, TG. January 4, 1993: "On July 3, 1944, we were in a formation over the Adriatic and headed for a Balkan country. The Group spread out and we test fired our guns. Shortly after, the Group tightened up. As we did, we noticed smoke coming from No. 2 engine. Whether we were hit by a stray bullet, or some other reason, we were in trouble.

"We turned around and headed back to our Base. The engine was feathered but the smoke was becoming worse. Jim made the decision to ditch. The six of us enlisted men grouped in the radio room. We hit the water hard but we were lucky, no break ups, and no explosion. Luck and Twibell's ability as a good steady pilot. After a short struggle with the left dinghy, we were finally afloat. The right side had no trouble. The plane nosed over and went down. We were all OK except for a few cuts and

bruises. Again we were lucky. The water was smooth as a table top and we started to sing and row for shore. We were in sight of land.

“About this time we noticed a column of smoke in the distance. It was a U.S. Navy Patrol Boat headed for Yugoslavia. They picked us up and we spent the night in a small coastal town. The next day they took us back to Italy. Our crew, even though we were separated during our final mission, all made it to the end.”

#### **BRASOV, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 224 - JULY 4, 1944**

Twenty-four aircraft dropped 72 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Photogen Oil Refinery in Brasov. Results were not obtainable due to smoke over the target from other Groups' bombs. The bombs went into the smoke area. No injuries, no losses. Around 9:00 or 10:00 p.m., about every gun in camp opened up in a traditional celebration of the 4th. It was a miracle that no one was injured by falling lead.

#### **MONTPELLIER, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 225 - JULY 5, 1944**

Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 81 tons of 1,000 GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards in this city. The target was well covered. Flak was light to moderate, accurate and heavy. No E/A were encountered and there were no injuries nor losses.

#### **VERONA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 226 - JULY 6, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 84 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Verona. The target was well covered with only a few bombs short. Flak was heavy, medium to intense, and inaccurate. Three to four E/A attacked the formation before being engaged by the escort. B-17 #42-31848 was the rear A/C of this formation and was seen to go down and explode. Three or four chutes were reported seen.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31848 - 429TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt.	William A. Runyon, 0-807520, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Raymond G. Haug, 0-819518, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	William L. McIlhargie, 0-708512, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Curtis A. Pfaff, 0-749741, B.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	George B. Miller, 34689062, U/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Louis A. Rodriguez, 32221177, L/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Clarence R. Goulet, 31173113, R/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Charles J. Brower-Anchor, 12027423, L/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Clarence F. Smith, 33585103, T/G.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Paul (NMI) Alexo, Jr., 33187230, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 1st Lt. William L. McIlhargie, after liberation: “I was blown out of the plane, unconscious. I came to the following Saturday afternoon and have no knowledge of the others. I saw Sgt. Alexo, the radio man, last. He had a flak wound in his leg and it didn't look good. There wasn't time to give him first aid. I had just arrived there for that reason, then the ship blew up and that is all I remember. The last conversation I had with Lt. Runyon was to ask permission to go back and give first aid to the radio operator.”

Statement of S/Sgt. Paul Alexo, Jr., RO, after liberation: “I was blown out of the plane with two others when the plane blew up. S/Sgt. Smith had received a 20mm wound in his chest and was blown out. He died on the ground. I saw him in the hospital, dead. Lt. Runyon did not get out. Sgt. Goulet

was killed by a 20mm shell and was last seen lying on the floor of the plane. Sgt. Brower-Anchor was killed by a 20mm shell in his back and was lying on the floor, dead. S/Sgt. Miller was last seen at his guns when the ship exploded.”

#### **BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 227 - JULY 7, 1944**

Major Charles H. Hillhouse led 33 aircraft and 24 got over the target. Twenty-three aircraft dropped 68 tons of 500-lb. BP bombs into the smoke filled target. The smoke prevented observation of results. Flak was intense to moderate, accurate and heavy resulting in slight damage to eight B-17s and loss of #42-38123, 20th Squadron.

Me-109s and FW-190s attacked the formation, firing rockets and 20mm cannon. B-17 #42-97351, 20th Squadron, was shot down at 1000 hours. B-17 #42-97183, 96th Squadron, was last seen at 1028 hours. B-17 #42-31470, 429th Squadron, was last seen at 1005 hours.

Two Me-109s were destroyed with claims going to S/Sgt. Thomas J. Russell, TG, 20th Squadron and S/Sgt. Chrisgos C. Bezdaris, TG, 429th Squadron. S/Sgt. George H. Kilson, UT, 49th Squadron, was credited with the probable destruction of a FW-190.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-38213 - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	William (NMI) Nabinger, 0-691537, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Owen E. Rice, Jr., 0-816585, CP.	(KIA)
F/O	Ralph T. Mooney, T-816585, N.	(KIA)
1st Lt.	Howard (NMI) Freidman, 0-695486, B.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	James O. Jarrell, 14654256, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Frank R. Bossi, 13002064, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Herb E. Helstrom, 19097042, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Charles L. Woods, 18194968, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Dwight C. Wheeler, 37515432, T/G.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Wesley (NMI) Frinsco, 13056611, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of S/Sgt. Anderson Frank, Jr., TG on B-17 #692, 96th Squadron, at interrogation: “I first noticed B-17 #213 at 1054 hours. It suffered a direct hit in the cockpit section, blowing off the nose. The damaged aircraft went into a stall and straight down. I believe flak at the target was the cause.”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-97351 - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Harold T. Tomlinson, 0-809894, P.	(POW)
1st Lt.	Reese N. Burks, 0-819106, CP.	(POW)*
1st Lt.	Frank P. Fleming, 0-680396, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Michael R. Miller, 0-690593, B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Martino (NMI) Cardone, 12038797, U/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Philip J. McQuaid, 31292340, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Henry W. Garnett, 18089166, R/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Robert S. Wolfe, 35633814, L/W.	(KIA)
Cpl.	Joseph B. Cash, Jr., 36831437, T/G.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Henry F. O’Neill, 32533888, R/O.	(KIA)

\*Died in prison camp

Statement of Captain Harold T. Tomlinson, P, after liberation: “Our aircraft hit the ground 1-1/2 miles north of the Danube River near Győr, Hungary. Five of the crew bailed out over Győr. Five of

the crew were killed by enemy gunfire. Lt. Burks died in POW camp. I was told he died of spinal meningitis. Lt. Miller was never seen after bailing out. I know he bailed out because I saw him do so. My last contact with Lt. Burks, prior to bailing out, was when he helped me put on my parachute and said, 'Get ready to jump.' I last saw him in a POW detention house on July 8, 1944. The first I knew of his death was after returning home and contacting his family.

"I had no conversation with Lt. Miller prior to bailing out. I never heard of him again. Whether his chute did not open, strafed by enemy fighters, or killed by civilians, I do not know. He was not in our prisoner group the first night of our capture. We did discuss the possibility of his landing in the Danube, which was very wide at this point.

"Lt. Fleming was not injured in the air. His chute had burned on one corner and he had cracked ribs upon landing. He could not walk and was captured immediately. We all stayed together (Burks, Cardone, Fleming, myself) the first night of capture and moved to a hospital in Budapest the next day. He was in the Budapest hospital until generally recovered and then moved to Stalag Luft III.

"S/Sgt. O'Neill did not respond to the interphone after the first attack. The engineer was knocked out of position in the second attack and his guns destroyed. He saw the body of O'Neill on the floor of the plane prior to bailing out. The enemy recovered the body from the plane. We were taken to the scene of the crash. T/Sgt. Cardone could speak Italian and used as an interpreter. It is believed that O'Neill was killed in the second attack.

"It is believed that S/Sgt. McQuaid, BT, was killed when enemy shells and rockets hit the rear of the plane, also killing the tail gunner. The waist gunners reported on the interphone as to extensive tail damage so do know the interphone was working. Then came the second and third attack and he never reported after the first attack. His body was recovered from the plane and identified by Cardone.

"S/Sgt. Garnett, RW, was killed by enemy gunfire and rockets. Cardone looked back, prior to salvaging bombs, and saw the waist gunners and radio operator lying on the floor of the plane. Ship was on fire from the rockets and number of bullets that hit our plane. His body was recovered and identified by Cardone.

"Sgt. Wolfe was last seen lying on the floor by Sgt. Cardone. On the first night of our capture, we discussed events and determined he had been killed by enemy gunfire.

"Just prior to the first attack, Cpl. Cash was warned to keep a sharp lookout for enemy fighters. After the first attack there was no response on the interphone from the tail position. Waist gunners reported him dead and guns inoperative. Later information, from other planes in the Group, indicated that the entire burst of gunfire in the first attack seemed to be centered in the tail area. The body of Cpl. Cash was recovered and identified by Sgt. Cardone. It was his first mission."

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-97183 - 96TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Ira B. Corpening, 0-755284, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	John F. Kellog, 0-751345, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	William D. Devoe, 0-749819, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Robert F. Gallup, 0-739423, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Norton D. Skinner, 16169858, U/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Shields G. Stultz, 13120896, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Paul E. Brau, 37033438, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	William J. Leszczynski, 11113656, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Samuel L. Strode, 17159203, T/G.	(EVADED)
T/Sgt.	Virgil R. Stuart, 37501688, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of T/Sgt. Norton D. Skinner, UT, after evading: "All the crew bailed out over N.W. Sloviaka, about the same place. The only other crew member I saw later was Sam Strode. I understand the plane struck the ground near Japlonika.

"Sam Strode and I were in the same camp together in Bratislavia. He landed pretty hard but otherwise seemed to be OK. Claude Davis, Frank Soltis, George Winberg, Neal Cobb and others, whose names I do not remember, left the country with me. There were a few fellows leaving camp with us but never heard from again. They must have been caught by Germans."

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31470 - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Driscoll B. Horton, 0-690082, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Peter B. Beers, 0-759402, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Robert E. McAdam, 0-720687, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	John N. Schmittener, 0-695138, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	William P. Hurley, 39279332, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Floyd A. Ticknor, 17034056, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Raymond T. Murphy, 33675286, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	James D. Osborne, 38449421, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Vincent J. Sodaro, 32804649, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Robert C. Stewart, 13087773, T/G.	(POW)*

\*Died in prison camp

Statement of Robert R. Hindert, RW, on B-17 42-107066, at interrogation: "At 1015 hours, plane #470 feathered No. 2 engine and dropped down approximately 300 feet and 500 feet to the right. Approximately ten minutes later, I noticed that No. 4 engine was smoking. This engine was feathered and #470 made a 180-degree turn to the left and headed home. I did not see any fighters attack this plane."

Statement of 1st Lt. John W. Schmittener, B, after liberation: "I was the eighth man out of the ship. The pilot and co-pilot bailed out later. As far as I know, all men were all right except Sgt. Stewart who died in transient prison camp, at Wetzler, Germany, from an infection. He was not wounded on the plane. The last time I saw him he was expecting to stay at Dulag Luft, Wetzler, as a mess helper. He had dysentery but seemed cured.

"We had been flying on engines 3 and 4 for about half an hour, lightening the ship, but still losing altitude. We headed for Yugoslavia. I was helping at pilotage, to avoid flak batteries. We caught some flak in the Graz area and No. 4 engine ran away. The pilot gave orders to bail out and the gunners, navigator, and myself obeyed. We landed near St. Michael, Austria, and all were captured. The searchers seemed to be old men and school children. Sgt. Murphy had a broken leg, which was not set properly for weeks. I had a back injury that paralyzed me temporarily. Sgt. Stewart had dysentery and a town doctor gave him some medicine that did not help.

"A few days later the eight of us were taken to a Luftwaffe camp in Graz. A few days later we were taken to Cherrusal for interrogation. Here we were separated and T/Sgt. Hurley and myself were kept after the rest were taken to Dulag Luft. We were kept in solitary confinement for more than a week and then sent to Wetzler. Here I saw all the men except the pilot and co-pilot, whom I later heard had evaded. They were all OK except Sgt. Hurley who had been taken to a hospital. At this time I was able to walk. When I left camp, the gunners, including Sgt. Stewart, were all right. This was the last I heard of them and did not learn of Sgt. Stewart's death until my return home in July, 1945.

Escape statement of 1st Lt. Peter B. Beers, CP, August 27, 1944: "Our plane was hit by three Me-109s about 30 minutes before target. No. 1 and No. 2 engines were shot out and the pilot headed for home. In the vicinity of Budapest, No. 3 engine was badly hit by flak and the aircraft was losing altitude. The navigator told the pilot to head SW and he and the bombardier bailed out just north of Lake Balaton. The pilot flew in the direction of Marcali and Nagy Kanizsas in Hungary, then into Yugoslavia. He had to turn north to avoid flak at Maribor. Finally it became necessary to bail out and I did so just south of Graz, Austria.

"When I landed I was seen by some Austrian farmers who immediately went for the Gestapo. I then started walking south and by using escape kit aids, continued to walk for five days and four nights with practically no rest or sleep. When I came over the Yugoslavia border, I was picked up by civilians who took me to the Partisans in the vicinity of Maribor. I arrived at this mission about two weeks after I was shot down. I was then guided through Oelje and westward, across the Savo River, to Litizia, thence to an Allied mission at Nova Mesto. Later, I was taken to an airstrip at Staro Tuck where I was evacuated."

2nd Lt. Charles N. Beecham, and his crew, were assigned to the 20th Squadron. April 1, 1991: "We left Tampa on the 10th of March 1944 and went to Savannah, GA to pick up a brand new B-17G, #2107118. When I took delivery on the 12th, after a short acceptance flight, it had only nine hours on it. We left Homestead Field, FL, where we received our sealed orders, not to be opened until two days out. Everyone knew we were going to North Africa three minutes after wheels up.

"In Trinidad I received such a sunburn, while checking out the plane, that I was in the hospital three days while the crew had a good time swimming and living the good life. We flew the southern route, ending up in Marrakech with no further problems. After a few days checking out the aircraft, we then departed on the final destination, Tunis. We took off on this leg at night and then first climbed up through the Atlas Pass. It was a clear night but no moon and there were absolutely no lights on the ground. Although I knew I was high enough to go through the Pass, it was so turbulent that I kept thinking that there must be a mountain ahead that I had not accounted for. I was really scared and had to call on all my cadet instrument experience to keep from getting vertigo.

"After three days in Tunis we received orders to proceed to Foggia, Italy. At Foggia, we were directed to land at Foggia Main Field. It was hard to figure out which field was Foggia Main as there were several air fields in the area. Also, all the B-17s and B-24s were returning from a mission about that time and the whole air was a mass of confusion. We were on the ground about an hour and were assigned to the 2nd Bomb Group and given instructions to proceed to the airfield with double runways at Amendola, about 10 miles east. This field was shared by the 2nd and 97th Bomb Groups and an RAF Night Bomber Squadron. The runways were steel mats connected like a crossword puzzle. There were no buildings on the field with the exception of a control tower on each side and small huts at each parking space; just two runways, taxi strips and parking revetments for each B-17. A 'follow me' jeep directed me to a revetment in the 20th Squadron area. We unloaded our belongings from old #118 and I met the 20th Squadron Maintenance Officer who proceeded to 'buy' the aircraft from me. You see, I owned all its equipment, records and documents for the trip from the factory to the 2nd.

"We checked in at 20th Squadron Headquarters and met the Squadron Commander, Lt. Col. James Ellis, the older brother of my 43-G classmate, Leland C. Ellis. We then went with him to the Group Commander's tent, Colonel Herbert E. Rice, a grizzled old soldier who liked to play the saxophone. Then Vaughn, Babin, Seyfried and I went to Squadron supply and were issued a standard pyramidal tent designed for eight men in double decker bunks, so each man had one side. We unpacked after the tent was erected and got ready for the evening meal at the Officer's Club.

"The morning of 5 April 1944 came early! Too early for us as we didn't sleep well on the first night. I heard this Jeep driving through the area, stopping and yelling at each tent. When it got close

to us I thought, 'Surely they wouldn't use us this soon!' When the Jeep got to our tent, the driver yelled, 'Lt. Beecham, briefing at 0500!' It was 0330 at the time. The driver also said that Lt. Vaughn was not scheduled to fly. I was to fly co-pilot for an experienced pilot who would command my aircraft and crew. After shaving and dressing we made our way to the club for breakfast. We then got into trucks for the trip to the 2nd Bomb Group Operations area. We arrived there a little before 0500. Officers were given the mission briefing and airmen were given a specialized briefing in another area. Most everyone felt the need to take another run to the latrine after hearing the news that the target was the Oil Refineries at Ploesti, Romania!

"Captain Ernie Blanton had already completed 50 missions with the 2nd Bomb Group, gone home on leave and now was back to fly some more. He was to be my Aircraft Commander for this mission. We would be flying old #118 and would be leading the 2nd element (right side of the Group lead element) of seven aircraft. The 2nd Bomb Group would be second over the target and we would be at 26,000 feet at the target. Our briefing consisted of location and number of anti-aircraft batteries en route to and at the target and number of enemy fighters en route and at the target. We were given escape kits consisting of maps, printed on silk, a dictionary with words for the area and escape routes if shot down. The total flight time for the mission was ten hours which included two hours for formation and climb over Italy before heading to the target.

"We got on our crew truck, after everyone had his turn at the latrine, and the trip to Amendola was a lot of excitement. When we got to old #118's parking revetment we found she had been painted with the Group and Squadron insignia: A 'Y' (5th Bomb Wing) inside a Circle (2nd BG), painted on the vertical stabilizer and on the upper surfaces of the horizontal stabilizers. Two 24"-wide black stripes were painted on the upper and lower surface of the wings just outboard of the No. 1 and No. 4 engines. The 20th Squadron symbol was on the upper top of the vertical stabilizer and painted yellow. We put our gear on board and gave the aircraft a 'walk around' inspection. Each crew member had his own area of responsibility on the inspection. Old #118 was loaded with six, 500-lb. bombs, three on each side of the bomb bay catwalk.

"Old #118's heating system went out, as all B-17 heating systems seemed to do, about an hour after we took delivery of her. This meant we all had to dress for 'COLD WEATHER.' On that morning, I put on 'Long Johns,' wool pants and wool flying suit. I wore my leather A-2 jacket, but put my fur lined jacket aboard. I wore my fur lined boots over my high top shoes and had heavy gloves on. I wore a leather fur lined cap with a long bill until we reached 10,000 feet and at that time we switched to a leather helmet with ear phones. We then put on our oxygen masks. The gunners all wore fur lined suits with the exception of Kephart, our ball turret gunner, who wore an electric suite due to the cramped quarters in the ball turret. Even with my heavy clothing, my toes, knees, and fingers froze on every mission. We all had throat mikes for ease of communication during the flight. My mike button was on the pilot's wheel. The B-17 did not have a sanitation system with the exception of 'relief tubes,' which were plastic funnels connected to tubes to the outside slip stream. One was located in the forward nose, two in the bomb bay and one in the rear of the aircraft. The rule was that you would do 'number two' before take-off or hold it until you got back.

"Captain William Byrd, Operations Officer from the 429th Squadron, was flying lead that day so he was the first to take off. He was followed by the other ships in his lead element. We, the 20th Squadron, were in the second element. The B-17s flying off Amendola's twin runways presented a particular hazard for each other as both Groups were flying in very much the same airspace. On at least three occasions, before we arrived, there were mid-air collisions with the resultant loss of aircraft and crews. Shortly after we departed on course, and were over the Adriatic Sea, the order was given to spread out so all gunners could test their guns. When all this was done, we started our gradual climb to Ploesti. There were two Groups of fighters for protection to the target and two Groups covered our withdrawal.

“We crossed the coast at Dubrovnik and followed a course that took us just north of Krusevak prior to reaching Romania. There were several anti-aircraft guns near the coast so I experienced my first taste of war. The experience is much like watching a fireworks display, only you are right in the middle of the action. I had to watch myself to keep from getting hypnotized watching the bursts. My job as co-pilot was to keep an eye on the engine instruments. Most of the flak was of the barrage type, i.e., they would set their fuses at a certain altitude and hope that we would run into it. A direct hit by an 88mm shell would destroy a B-17. Even without a direct hit a lot of damage was done running through the air full of flying junk. As I would find out later, there were very few missions in which my aircraft didn't receive some damage from flak. We were bothered by intermittent flak all the way to the target. A few enemy fighters were sighted and they would cruise up and down the formation, just out of range, looking for a loose formation or stragglers. Then they would jump on that loose formation or stragglers. Ernie kept calling for our formation to come in close, but the 2nd did get a few passes, just to keep us honest. It was then I found out what a noisy bunch of guys I had on my crew plus an awful lot of shooting.

“It didn't take any smarts to tell where Ploesti was. The Axis was prepared to defend it to the death. Our I.P. was Trigouiste, about five miles west of Ploesti. The air was full of flak, you could almost walk on it. As we were about 26,000 feet, we were in better shape than the Groups following us. As I recall, we did not lose any aircraft on this trip but many sustained flak damage. I could see planes going down from other Groups. All bombardiers were instructed to 'Drop' on the lead bombardier's drop, that way, all the bombs would land on the same spot.

“We turned left off the target and there was some general disorder as our formation was ragged. Some of our aircraft had engines shot out and were having trouble keeping up with the formation. The enemy fighters jumped us before we could get out of the target area. During this action, my gunners were shooting at everything and there was a lot of excited conversation. There was one enemy fighter shot down and my crew was credited with one half, shared with another crew that claimed the same plane. Captain Byrd finally got all the Group together in a tight formation and we were relatively free of fighter attacks on the way home. The enemy spent all their time attacking wounded B-24s and B-17s from other Groups. It was reported that there were some 25 B-17s lost by the Wing this day.

“Getting all the B-17s back on the ground in an orderly fashion is, if anything, a little more complicated than getting them off, especially if there are casualties or severe damage to the aircraft. Today was no exception as there were both severely wounded and damaged planes in the Group. Each Squadron had a Flight Surgeon, Medics, and a 'Meat Wagon' standing by for the return of the Group. Captain Lyman Ihle was the Flight Surgeon for the 20th Squadron and we all got to know him real well in the next few months. If there were casualties on board, you would signal the ground with a flare gun. The Medics would follow the B-17 to the end of the runway or revetment. After we got on the ground, we surveyed the damage to old #118, 17 flak holes in the wings and fuselage but the self sealing fuel tanks did a good job and very little gas was lost, but I couldn't help but wish that it would take a few days to fix. The Ground Crew Chief, M/Sgt. Steven assured me that the plane would be ready by the next morning. I would also find that these ground crew members could work miracles in patching holes, and as time went on, old #118 would look like a patch work quilt. Captain Blanton complemented me and my crew on how they conducted themselves in combat and said he would recommend that we go without supervision on the next mission. We then got on our crew trucks for our trip to headquarters for debriefing. When we arrived there the first thing they did was give us a shot of whiskey if we wanted it. We were then assigned a debriefing officer who asked for information on flak guns, where and how accurate. The same questions were asked on the number and type of fighter aircraft en route and location of airfields if we could see them. The navigator had the responsibility of giving all intelligence information on ground activity, unusual movements, guns, and where not shown

on flight maps, etc. We then went to the Red Cross coffee wagon for doughnuts and coffee served by the Red Cross girls, then back to our tent to get ready for evening chow.

“We didn’t have ice so all drinks, beer and other, were served at room temperature. We found that the veteran crews would take a case of beer on each mission; at 30 below the beer got pretty cold. There was a lot of talk about Ploesti and our hope was that the cameras would show that we wiped the place out, but no, we would go back several more times. We went back to the tent and went to bed but none of us could sleep for awhile. We talked about every phase of the flight and Lou Vaughn (co-pilot), was sorry that he had 50 missions to go compared to Seyfried, Babin and my 48.

“A little about fear. According to the newspapers, it seemed that from 60 to 100 planes were lost by the 15th each time they flew a big mission. So I was programmed to accept a lot of losses each time I flew but never accepted the fact that I might be one of the losses. So, after my first combat mission, it seemed we had fewer losses than I expected. I found that my biggest fear was that I might be branded a coward. The shame would be unbearable and I would rather kill myself than be branded a coward. I developed this fear of having to abort a mission. I would do most anything to keep from it. I certainly was no hero but vowed never to be branded a coward. This fear probably led to the closest call we had during my 50 missions.

“It was on our seventh combat sortie and our third trip to Ploesti. We had completed missions to Treviso, Gyor, Belgrade, and Castlefranco with no more nor no less severity than our first mission. We were working good as a crew and I had developed a small reputation as a good formation pilot. It was the morning of April 24 and our target was the Marshalling Yards at Ploesti. The 2nd BG was scheduled to fly in the third Group position (97th, 301st, 2nd, and 99th Groups), but as I recall, we were further up in the formation, possibly second. I was flying number two (right wing) in the second flight (20th Squadron.). This position near the front of the entire bomber formation saved our lives.

“We arrived at old #118 and gave it the usual walk-around inspection. I noted that each member of the crew had scrounged some armor plate from old wrecked German tanks to sit on while under flak attack but had no idea how much they weighed. I made a remark to Whitaker that he should get a piece of armor plate for his old pilot’s seat. We put our case of beer aboard and got ready for take-off.

“We lined up for take-off, gave it full power for what seemed like a normal take-off. A moment later, the control tower, call sign, ‘Darn Thing,’ called me and asked me to check my engine instruments. This I did and reported everything was normal. They said we sounded strange as we passed the tower so I had the waist gunners visually check the condition of all four engines to which they reported all OK. We then went about the business of forming up with the Group and heading east for Ploesti. As we were crossing the Adriatic, Seyfried had to have the first of two BM’s he would be noted for during our tour of duty. There was a curtain between the nose and the upper deck where the pilots are. We had removed the curtain so that we could visually check on the condition in the nose. On this day I wished that we had not removed the curtain, as I had to watch him go through the entire procedure of taking an emergency crap. What he did was take his flak helmet and put two or three unfolded maps in it. He then removed his heavy flight clothes, and then in the bumpy air, finally got the job done. Then he folded the whole mess up, opened the navigator’s hatch and threw it out. The next thing I heard was, ‘Holy S---t, what the hell was that?’ Kephart, my ball turret gunner, got the whole package and a lot of it froze on contact! He had to run the turret through a few times to scrape it off! It wasn’t funny, especially for Kephart.

“There was one thing about old #118 that was a paradox. I had to pull more power than the other B-17s in order to maintain the same indicated airspeed. What was strange was that I got better fuel economy than the others where I should be using a proportionate amount of more fuel. On this day, at about 15,000 feet, we noted that we couldn’t get any more than about 15 inches of manifold pressure on the right, inboard engine (No. 3), even with the supercharger on. It was then we realized that the noise heard by the control tower was a blown manifold. It had gotten worse as we climbed to

altitude and now was of no more value than a feathered engine. We were most of the way through Yugoslavia and had already been attacked by enemy fighters; I certainly didn't want to turn around and abort the mission as we would be sitting ducks for the Luftwaffe. I pulled out of formation, told Babin to salvo our bombs to lighten our load. I then returned to the formation and pulling more power, stayed with them to the target. We then made the bomb run even though we didn't have anything to drop, and I wished Seyfried had waited a little longer on his BM. Flak was as heavy as I have ever seen it and fighters were waiting for us. The turn off the target was sharp and the B-17s of the 2nd BG started to pull away. I dropped down under our formation and this provided some amount of protection by the other planes of the Group but they all were leaving us gradually behind. We got a pass from a Me-109 and he put a 20mm shell in our outboard (No. 4) engine. We had a brief fire until Lou feathered it. I increased the supercharger controls on No. 1 and No. 2 engines until they were in the RED LINE area. RED LINE means that the engine is not expected to last more than five minutes at that setting. I was having a lot of control problems with power only on one side and was faced with more passes from German fighters. Lou reached over and pulled the power back to within limits and I realized what a stupid mistake I had made.

"I kept falling back and pulled up under each succeeding Bomb Group and my gunners did a good job of fighting back. I gave the order to throw out the armor plate. The guys had a rough time as they had to disconnect their oxygen masks to carry the plates to the bomb bay for dropping. We then threw out all other stuff that wasn't connected to the plane. We were not too far from the Adriatic when we ran out of top cover by the B-24 Groups. We were alone about half way across Yugoslavia. We were a little more than an hour behind our Group and they had already reported us as lost. We were lucky we made it home and that no one was killed. There was one casualty in that Kephart's suit shorted out and he had some burns and damn near froze to death in the flimsy flight suit. Matt Roberts and Charlie Nelson, waist gunners, claimed one Me-109 shot down and got verification from other B-17 crews that they had. When we got on the ground we counted 167 flak and 50 cal. holes in the aircraft.

"Our briefing lasted about an hour and a half, and Col. Ellis wanted to know why I hadn't returned when the tower asked me to check my engines. You can imagine how I would have felt if I had returned and found nothing wrong with the aircraft. I didn't tell anyone I had dropped my bombs before we got to the target and to this day, I believe they dropped in a canyon in the Transylvania Alps. No damage except to mountain goats.

"The next few days were spent waiting for old #118 to get repaired. I decided we needed a good name for the old bird so asked for suggestions. I got mostly raunchy names with nude girls in strange positions near the gun ports or antennas. I told the boys I didn't do nudes as I never learned how. We finally decided on a cute little guy in a comic strip, which was appearing in the *Army Times* newspapers. 'PRIVATE SNAFU' (Situation Normal, All Fouled Up), a little guy who was always in trouble. Pvt. SNAFU had dreamed he had turned into superman and for several episodes, turned into a guy who could do anything, for good of course. His name was 'SNAFUPERMAN!' SNAFUPERMAN was shown with his flowing cape about to drop a bomb on the bad guys and SNAFUPERMAN was painted, in rather large letters, on each side of the nose.

"A few other things of note happened about that time. There was a severe thunderstorm one evening that blew our tent and most of our belongings away. We decided not to keep the tent and each of us purchased a share of someone else's deluxe stone house. They guy I bought from was leaving for the States. I also bought this guy's Italian motorcycle. The only other guy in my new home was Lt. Bob Vander Mullen, a bombardier from Detroit, Michigan. Bob owned a German motorcycle. We became the closest of friends and rode our motorcycles every free minute we had. Bob at the time was the Lead Bombardier of the 20th Squadron.

“The missions started piling up. Many of those missions were short and when we got back to base, Vander Mullen and I would take off on our bikes. Then on the first of June, we were briefed on a mission somewhere in Yugoslavia. After an hour delay on the flight line, we were recalled due to weather. Vander Mullen and I decided we would go to a little town on the spur of Italy, Viesta. When we got back to base around 1600 hours we found we were in deep trouble. We had not signed out nor asked permission to leave! Of course we had never signed out before but that was another story. What happened, while we were gone, the Group had been briefed for ‘Operation Frantic,’ the first Shuttle Mission to Russia. The mission was to be flown the next day. After what seemed like a solid hour of chewing from Colonel Ellis, we were escorted to Colonel Rice’s office where we were treated to some more of the same to a lesser degree. He then proceeded to brief us on the mission. First we had to go to Squadron Supply and get brand new uniforms, cause we didn’t want the Russkies to think we were a bunch of slobs. This would be my second mission as Squadron Leader and Vander Mullen would fly with me as the Lead Bombardier. The 20th would fly slot position in the diamond formation. Our target was the Marshalling Yards at Debreczen, Hungary and then proceed to Mirgorod, in the Russian Ukraine.

“There were 170 B-17s and 70 P-51 escorts on the trip to Russia. Although neither flak nor German fighters were encountered over the target, one B-17 exploded in the air (from another Group); our only loss that day. There was some confusion when we got to Mirgorod as the field was hard to recognize. The Air Base was about five miles from the town, where we billeted in a former T.B. Hospital near the downtown area. It did not have indoor facilities. The Russkies had built outdoor latrines that were about eight feet above the ground. You climbed steps to the top and then there were two rows, back to back, of open toilets with no privacy curtains nor fences. Each one of these facilities could handle about 50 guys at one time. There were women on duty all the time to mop and otherwise keep the place clean, even when we were taking care of important things. There was a river nearby and that was where the women did their washing of clothing and personal bathing. In the morning we would sit up on our latrines and watch these big women bathe. We felt like yelling, ‘Put it on! Put it on!’

“The people were very nice to us and we had a great time with our Russian dictionaries, trying to converse with them. For a few days we were able to fraternize with the Russkie Air Force people. They had men and women housed in the same barracks and there were several women pilots, not bad looking at all. Then on about the third day, the Russians gave the order, no more fraternization. We had to stay on our side of the river. They were very serious about this and stationed guards on the bridges. I didn’t trust these guards as they seemed like they were idiots. They spent a lot of time shooting at things on the bridge.

“We were glad when we finally got the word on our first mission to be flown out of Russia. It was on the 6th of June. It was the day of operation ‘OVERLORD’ and it was probably planned to create a diversion to keep the enemy aircraft away from the Allies landing on the coast of France. Our target was the Railroad Yards at Galatz, Romania. We returned to Mirgorod without a loss.

“We sat around until the 11th of June and it was pretty dull with no place to go. I think our people finally got disgusted with the Russkies and said, ‘To hell with it, we’re going home!’ We loaded all the equipment and ground support people and headed for home by way of the north airdrome at Focsani, Romania. I had five extra people on board ‘SNAFUPERMAN.’ We had lost only one aircraft and that was at Mirgorod on take-off. One plane taxied into a covered bomb crater and sank into the ground.

“On the 27th of June, I flew a mission, which I will remember as my most important contribution of the war effort! It was against the Farenvaros Marshalling Yards on the edge of Budapest, Hungary. On this day I was leading the 20th Squadron element and we were the fourth Squadron in the Group’s formation of 28 B-17s. The 2nd Bomb Group was the last Group in the 15th

AF effort of that day. In other words, I was leading the last seven aircraft of several hundred launched. The lead Group was to go over the target at 26,000 feet, which put me at about 19,000 feet at the target time.

“We encountered a few flak guns over Yugoslavia but they were not accurate. The closer we got to Budapest we could see a solid deck of clouds with bases at about 17,000 feet and tops about 19,000 to 20,000 feet. Our standard procedure was to go to an alternate if the primary target could not be visibly bombed. My problem, as we got closer to the cloud deck, was that me and my seven B-17s were not going to clear the tops of the deck. When I got into the clouds I was scared to climb at a higher rate for fear that I would bump into the planes above me. Also, clouds are not a good place to be when flying formation and there were some who did not have the experience under instrument conditions. I then made a decision to make a slow descent, thinking that we would break out soon and then catch the other planes on the other side of the cloud deck. We broke out at about 17,000 feet and held a steady course for the I.P. for the bomb run. No sooner than we broke out, Babin gave me a course correction and then activated the PDI and told me to hold the altitude steady and follow the PDI. The Ack Ack batteries started firing at us but they had their fuses set for a higher altitude and were exploding above us. Babin opened the bomb bay doors and started the cameras. Bombs away, seven loads dropped at once and we hit the target area! It was then we noticed that our bombs were the only ones dropped. The rest of the AF went to an alternate target. I couldn't help but fear that the other guys were above us circling the target to drop a load right on top of us. I asked Seyfried for a heading off the target and we headed for home.

“We then noticed there were a whole bunch of Me-109s and FW-190s right under us getting ready to do us no good. All of our guns started shooting at them and the air was full of gun smoke and gunpowder. I pulled up to the base of the clouds and called for the other guys to get in tight. I figured that the Luftwaffe pilots didn't have much more experience in instruments than we did and wouldn't want to climb into the clouds on a gunnery pass. A few of them tried but came out of the clouds in unusual attitudes, certainly not ready to fire at us. Our next fear was that we would run out of cloud cover before those guys ran out of gas. They finally turned back and we breathed a sigh of relief.

“Our course took us just south of Lake Balaton. There were several ACK ACK batteries on the north shore so we were clear of them, and I thought clear of flak until we reached Yugoslavia. Seyfried called and said there may be some flak batteries near the town of Foldvar, which was just ahead, so suggested I start about 45 degrees to the left to miss it. I started the turn immediately and it was the luckiest moment of our lives. Those guys had been tracking us and had fired five rounds of tracking ACK ACK, which if we hadn't turned, would have walked right through our formation at 17,000 feet. Then it became a game of 'Cat and Mouse.' I turned to our original heading and sure enough, they put five rounds where we would have been. I next turned another 45 degrees to the right and this time they fired five rounds way over to the left, on the first heading we had turned to. By this time, we were out of range.

“As we resumed our course for home, we were joined by several stragglers from other Groups who were ahead of us and had gone to an alternate. They were shot up pretty bad and needed a formation to join. Included were two B-24s and a P-38 who had an engine shot out. All in all I had seven extra planes when we got back to Amendola. General Beverly and Colonel Rice sat in on our debriefing. They were elated when our bomb strike film was processed and showed that we got our bombs on the primary target! The only Squadron in the 15th AF to hit the Primary Target on the 27th of June 1944. Of course seven B-17s could not knock it out, but set them back a day or two in the war effort. Colonel Rice told me he was putting me in for the Distinguished Flying Cross.

“My next mission gave me just about all the thrills I would ever want in the war! It was to the Oil Refineries at Blechhammer, Germany on the 7th of July. To get there we had to go between Vienna and Budapest, then known as 'FLAK ALLEY.' We would come out very much the same route. The

enemy fighter jocks in that area were the very best the Axis could put up. We were fortunate that our own P-51s, with the new drop tanks, could make it all the way to the target with us.

“Our Group made it through ‘FLAK ALLEY’ in pretty good shape and we didn’t have any passes from the fighters because of the P-51s. As we approached the target, the flak got as bad as I had ever seen it! The number five man in my formation got a direct hit in the nose, and blew it off, with all four officers, at the wing root. Whitaker reported that there was only one guy that got out, the radio operator, but he hit the vertical stabilizer on the tail. Of course he was killed instantly. Whitaker said it stayed level for just a moment and then did a wing over and spun in. No other chutes were seen. The co-pilot of number three element (49th Squadron, lead aircraft) was mortally wounded and his body fluids covered the pilot and engineer, but they got the plane home.

“As we came off the target we were hit by several Me-109s and FW-190s, and I could see Vander Mullen up in the nose firing away with his twin 50-cal. guns in our ‘Chin Turret.’ He reminded me of a guy standing up and driving a wagon team and yelling as he fired. Something came through the center of our windshield and took out our magnetic compass. It was either a 20mm shell or a piece of flak. It banged around in the cabin and punctured several of our low pressure oxygen bottles. They let out a SPEE..YOW!, as in beans, only louder. The whole cabin filled with a condensation from the ruptured tanks. At first it looked like smoke and I thought we were on fire! I checked all the instruments and found that we were still running on all four engines. I then started checking both arms and legs as I had been told you didn’t feel it if you lose one. I was afraid to look at the co-pilot as I just knew that he and Nicolosi had been wiped out. I finally took a peek to my right and there he was, checking every part of his body and finally, in a shaky voice asked, ‘You all right Beech?’ Then Nicolosi came forward to see how both of us were doing and then made a report to the rest of the crew that we were still OK up front.

“There was a heck of a lot of firing by the boys in the back. Charles Nelson, right waist gunner, was so intent on tracking a fighter, making a side pass, that he walked about ten rounds through the tail of our wing man. The pilot asked which side we were on? We were lucky he didn’t kill someone.

“Our only casualty was Tommy Russell, tail gunner. He had been firing away at fighters making a tail pass and then his guns jammed. He had to get out of his seat and crawl forward to get to his guns. While he was working on them, a 20mm shell exploded right where his head would have been if he were still firing his guns. A piece of it went through his flak helmet and grazed his skull. He was knocked out for some time before Matt Roberts started checking him out. The whole tail canopy was blown out plus a part of the rudder. But, the old plane still flew good. Matt pulled him forward and administered first aid and he was conscious by the time we got home. He had to be in the infirmary for a while. A short time later we lost all oil pressure in No. two engine and had to feather it. It seems one flak battery had knocked a hole in our oil tank. It was that kind of day. Even today, the word Blechhammer scares me to death.

“The last of my missions seemed to go pretty fast. Then my final mission on August 28, 1944. Vander Mullen flew my last mission with me even after he had finished his final mission on August 24. So, he wound up credited with 52 missions.

“Old #118, ‘SNAFUPERMAN’ went down on August 29, on a mission to the Privoser Oil Refineries in Czechoslovakia. The 20th Squadron lost all seven of their aircraft to enemy fighters.

“Colonel Simon told Vander Mullen and me that he could find us a job if we wanted to stay, but we decided we would rather go home. We got orders to go to a replacement depot in Naples to await boat transportation to the States. One evening I was called out and given the DFC and informed that I would be flown home by C-47. I guess they had one extra seat and the DFC was one way of deciding who got the seat. That meant leaving all the members of the crew and that evening all the enlisted men came to me and said they would like to fly with me again if I ever got another combat

assignment. Vander Mullen and I had our own private party that night. He gave me his Bombardier's Wings and I gave him my Pilot's Wings.

"I met Vander Mullen one time after that. He came through Andarko in 1949 with his new bride on the back of his motorcycle. I was on leave after returning from the Berlin airlift. He was getting ready to go to Korea as a bombardier on a B-50. He was killed on a B-50 take-off accident a few weeks after that. I still treasure his Wings."

Note: Charles Beecham is a renowned artist and his painting of a four plane element of the 20th Squadron, over the target at Budapest, hangs in the Daedacian Room of the Tinker Air Force Base Officer's Club. He also designed the 2nd Bombardment Group monument and sculpt the bronze eagle on the monument. This monument is in the Memorial Garden of the U.S.A.F. Museum at Wright-Patterson Field, Dayton, Ohio.

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 228 - JULY 8, 1944**

Twenty-seven aircraft, loaded with 500-lb. GP bombs, dropped their bombs on the Vosendorf Oil Refinery in Vienna. A heavy smoke screen over the target limited observation. A good pattern of bombs was observed in the target area. Flak was heavy and intense. Twenty-five B-17s received some flak damage and five crewmen were injured. There were no losses.

#### **PLOESTI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 229 - JULY 9, 1944**

Colonel John D. Ryan led 28 aircraft and 26 dropped their load of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Xenia Oil Refinery in this city. Two aircraft had engines out; jettisoned their bombs. Flak was moderate to intense resulting in injury to nine men and damage to 22 aircraft. The target was well covered and several fires were seen. Six Me-109s attacked and 1st Lt. George McAllister, 20th Squadron was credited with destruction of one Me-109, and a joint claim of one Me-109 went to 2nd Lt. G. W. Schuster, N, and S/Sgt. J. M. Butler, U/T, both of the 20th Squadron.

#### **VERONA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 230 - JULY 13, 1944**

Major James G. Ellis led 27 aircraft to bomb the Latesana Railroad Bridge at Verona. The target was cloud covered and the Group dropped its bombs on the Marshalling Yards. Bombing was described as only fair. Flak was slight, intense, inaccurate heavy type but resulting in the death of S/Sgt. Chester A. Smith, LW, 96th Squadron.

#### **BUDAPEST, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 231 - JULY 14, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft, with a bomb load of six, 1,000-lb. GP bombs, took off to bomb the Fanto Oil Refinery in Budapest. Eighty-one tons of bombs were dropped on the target and several fires and explosions were observed. One plane was an early return. No injuries, no losses.

#### **PLOESTI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 232 - JULY 15, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 84 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs. The target was cloud covered and bombing was by PFF. Results were unobtainable due to clouds. Flak was intense, accurate and heavy resulting in damage to 11 B-17s and injury to eight men.

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 233 - JULY 16, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off to bomb the Winterhafen Oil Refinery in Vienna. Twenty-six aircraft dropped 86 tons of 200-lb. bombs by PFF due to clouds over the target and results were not known.

Flak was intense, accurate, heavy of the barrage and tracking type. Two B-17s were lost as a result of flak. B-17 #42-102932, 96th Squadron, suffered a direct hit and two to three chutes were seen.

#42-38025, 49th Squadron, suffered a direct hit over the target with one chute seen to open. Nineteen aircraft suffered minor damage.

2nd Lt. D. L. Stillman, B, 96th Squadron, and Sgt. John M. Deiter, RO, 429th Squadron, were slightly wounded.

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-38025 - "WINGED FURY" - 49TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Robert R. O'Brien, 0-806136, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Norwine O. Ostgulan, 0-693577, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Robert G. Morlan, 0-785696, N.	(KIA)
1st Lt.	Earl L. Jorgensen, 0-752336, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	James H. Kelly, 32481674, U/T.	(DED)* (POW)
S/Sgt.	James R. Frampton, 12080465, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Robert A. Squires, 35580434, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Faye W. Bryner, 19171257, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Henry P. Wagner, 16009758, T/G.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Robert C. Winters, 16169652, R/O.	(POW)

\*Disappeared while on forced march from POW camp.

Statement of Captain Earl L. Jorgensen, B, after liberation: "We were flying Squadron lead. We left the Group less than a minute after bombs away. As far as I know, all bailed out safely except Lt. O'Brien and Lt. Morlan. After informing Lt. O'Brien of 'bombs away,' he acknowledged, and then we were hit. I have heard that he was hit in the cockpit and killed instantly, but that is only hearsay. This was in a letter from one of the crew. As soon as the ship was hit, it went into a dive and the co-pilot made it to the nose hatch but the pilot never made an appearance.

"Lt. Morlan was knocked unconscious while the ship was in a slow spin. When the ship was hit, I was knocked off the bombardier's chair and yelled that I had been hit. He reached for a first aid kit and then the ship went into a spin. Lt. Morlan and I rolled around in the nose not unlike being in a revolving barrel. When we came out of the spin, Lt. Morlan was lying on his back by the escape hatch. He was unconscious and I was lying in the bombardier's chair. I shouted to Lt. Morlan and attempted to crawl to him but because of my broken leg, and the ship had sharply slanted, I could not reach him. After a short while, I was forced to bail out through the broken nose. I left the ship at about 4,000 feet. I watched the ship to the ground. Lt. Morlan never got out."

S/Sgt. Henry P. Wagner, TG on B-17 #42-38205. April 8, 1992: "Your welcome note and information arrived today. The fact that Lt. Jorgensen made it out of the aircraft made my day! All these years I have been under the impression that the nose and pilot never got out. I didn't see him get out. Red Ostgulan told me while we were in jail in Vienna, that a direct hit in the nose wiped out the men in it plus O'Brien. Simultaneously a second burst in the bomb bay started a fire in that area. So at that point we were burning in two places, No. 3 engine and mid-ship.

"As for Kelly, if memory serves me correctly, I last saw him at the end of March, 1945. He, like many others was in sad shape and marching along a back road, or trail, on the east side of the Elbe River. I do not remember the exact spot. I feel that somewhere along the march he just gave up, like so many others on the march, and was buried in some unmarked grave. My time with the 2nd was short lived. This was my first and last mission."

S/Sgt. Robert C. Winters, RO on A/C #42-38205. April 28, 1992: "I was not a regular member of this crew and don't remember if it was a make-up crew or if the members had been together for some time. I had been transferred from the 301st Bomb Group, to the 2nd, after my pilot had been shot down

and the bombardier killed. I had been in the 2nd about three months and only flew as a standby radio operator.

“I first met my crew on the day of the mission. I had flown one other time with Lt. O’Brien. We had another mission together, which was scrubbed before take-off. It was a mission to Ploesti with a brand new crew. We were both happy that it was canceled!

“On the day of the mission there was the usual early morning wake-up call, breakfast and briefing. I went to the radio operators’ briefing and got the usual things needed; distress calls, and other frequencies to be used, bomb strikes, etc.

“We were flying in the No. 2 spot and deputy lead. We took off about 7:00 a.m. and all was going well. We were over the I.P. at about 1040 and started our bomb run. I was standing in the radio room with my 50 when I heard the bombs away. I was about to sit down and record or send out the ‘bombs away’ when we got hit. I don’t know if we got hit in the nose, as from the radio room there is no way to tell. However, I do know we took a direct hit in the No. 3 engine and it was burning. I was knocked to the floor, but seemed unhurt. I pushed the two IFF buttons and put on my chute, which was on top of the radio, and hooked it to my harness. At this time I knew it was time to leave or die. I checked the ball turret on my way out and it appeared the gunners had bailed out. No one remained in the waist and the tail appeared clear. I swung out the hatch and opened my chute. Don’t look down to see if your chute opens, as I did, and it hit me in the face. From my chute I could watch the aircraft until it exploded. I had no idea of what altitude it blew up. I landed in a soft field and unhooked my harness. About this time many farmers appeared with pitchforks, and then four German soldiers arrived, held them at gun point and I was taken to a local jail. A little later, Lt. Ostgulan was brought in. He had blood on the side of his head. The Germans saw I had been hit on the head and they cleaned both our wounds. The Lt. and I were taken to some officer’s home and treated nicely (wine), and at lunch time the Lt. went with officers to the officers mess while I went to another mess hall where I met Sgt. Frampton.

“We stayed together until they marched us out of Stalag Luft IV in February 1945. All but Sgt. Kelly stayed together. I got sick on the march and was sent to another camp and then sent to a POW hospital. The American doctor said there was no need to put me in the hospital but the German doctor insisted, as I had pneumonia. I stayed there for about two weeks and was sent to convalescent barracks, all British troops, a great bunch of guys.

“About two days before the Russians arrived, the Germans said they were leaving and the Americans and British should go with them to the American lines at the Elbe River. We decided to stay and wait for the Russians. That was the biggest mistake of our lives! When the Russians arrived one night, all hell broke loose. We thought we were at last free and would be going home. It didn’t turn out that way. The Russians moved us to better quarters in nice brick barracks. Then had three guards on our door everyday. We were allowed out less time than the Germans gave us. I saw them shoot several people (Germans, English and an American). I don’t know the reason. As for food, we were allowed to go to farms and ask. If the farmer refused, he would be shot by a Russian guard. Finally three guys escaped to the American lines at the Elbe. Within three days, there were American trucks with a Lt., Sgt. and three other enlisted men with food and cigarettes. The Russians took us to the Elbe as they would not allow an American in to take the Americans and British out. Over at last! Our treatment by the Russian Allies was far worse than we ever received from the Germans.

“I know nothing of Sgt. Kelly. I did receive two inquiries from the Government but could give no information.”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-102932 - 96TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt. John N. Harrington, 0-1169141, P. (POW)  
2nd Lt. Lawrence L. Jenkins, 0-819531, CP. (POW)

1st Lt.	Henry E. Sievers, Jr., 0-712685, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Arthur E. Cox, 0-746988, B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Louis (NMI) Kanner, 32329384, U/T.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	James K. Roche, 11117296, L/T.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Randolph M. Steelman, 32793174, R/W.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Robert E. Boulware, 38406415, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Owen L. Bruce, 37346386, T/G.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Raymond J. Vos, 19163299, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of S/Sgt. Joseph H. Belevich, TG on B-17 #715, after the mission: "I saw the whole nose section blown off #932 by a direct flak hit. The front part floated up and then down. Flames were coming out of No. 3 engine and the bomb bay. The plane turned to the left, apparently under control, then went down in a sliding dive. The chin turret was barely hanging on. This was the last I saw of #932. I did not see any chutes. This was just south of the target area at 1045 hours from 22,000 feet."

I corresponded with Lawrence Jenkins in early 1991, and received his story of that fateful day and the subsequent incarceration in prison, hospitals, and prison camps. His complete story had been published in *HOME BY CHRISTMAS*, by Martin Bowman, Patrick Stevens Limited.

Lt. Jenkins suffered flash burns to both eyes from exploding oxygen bottles but managed to find his chute and fasten it on. In leaving his seat, he found both legs broken. He dragged himself from his seat, managed to crawl up to the bomb bay, and fell into it. Weak from loss of blood and lack of oxygen, he felt that this was the end. He felt a hand on his shoulder and pointed to the emergency release for the bomb bay doors. They opened, he fell out, pulled the rip cord and lost consciousness.

He came to while being dragged through a field, heard voices, was grabbed and again lost consciousness. Coming to in a German first aid station, he was told that his legs would need to be amputated. The suffering was terrible and felt he did not care. The Germans picked him up, carrying him in his parachute to a nearby truck and transported him to a hospital. A wound was found in his left arm, believed to have come from ground fire while parachuting. He was given a shot, lost consciousness and did not awaken for three days.

Lt. Jenkins remained in this hospital until October 18th, legs bandaged in paper bandages and legs supported by metal trays. His legs were so badly swollen that casts could not be used.

His first operation was to have a pin through his foot and he was not sedated. He was put to sleep for the second operation. The doctor who was to perform the next operation, had a mental breakdown and was removed from the hospital. His wife and 15 year old daughter were killed in a bombing raid.

In September he was scheduled for repatriation but the continual bombings, in and around the Vienna area, prevented the Germans from getting him out. Instead, he spent the winter at Krems, Austria. From the hospital he was carried from bus to bus and finally a train. His possessions were a pair of pajamas, four slices of black bread and some cheese.

At Krems he was placed on a cart, awaiting transportation to a POW camp. It was cold, started to snow, and he wondered if he would live through the night. Early the next morning, he was picked up and taken to Stalag 7B.

Lawrence was put in a room with a Romanian who was very ill. Frenchmen would bring water and what little food was available. An American flying suit was given to him to keep warm. The Gestapo came for it and Lawrence tore the zipper so they let him keep it. He was eventually moved to another room with five Americans and several other nationalities. The room kept changing as men died or became well. He remained there until May 10, 1945.

His treatment all this time was a horror story. The bones would not heal. Food was so poor that no calcium would form. Holes were cut in both legs and holes were drilled through the bone to let marrow grow. One drill broke off and was difficult to remove. New casts were made to support the bones. They were strips of plaster held tight by the knee bone. He could feel the bones moving around while standing. The pain was excruciating while attempting to stand and it took weeks of work before being able to stand for a few minutes. It took a month to break the knee joints loose by use of weights and moving them back and forth for eight hours a day. He now could walk with crutches for a short distance at a time. He received his first letter from his parents in February, 1945.

One day he managed to reach an open door and the fresh air nearly knocked him down. He couldn't believe the room was so stinking from all kinds of infection.

The war was coming closer and big guns could be heard firing into Vienna. American fighter planes became very active in the area and one flew over them one day and waggled his wings as he flew by. They knew the Americans were aware of the camp.

Lawrence said that the Germans moved all of the Americans out of the camp except those who could not walk. The Russians became very active around their camp and the Germans reinforced their positions with 88mm cannons. The Americans felt they were in a no man's land and would hide as the Germans and Russians fired back and forth. There was neither food nor water and the men were hungry, thirsty, dirty, tired, and many were becoming ill.

The Germans finally retreated and the Russians came into the camp, cut the barbed wire and many prisoners took off in the direction of Krems. Lawrence and 11 other Americans remained in camp, uncertain of what would happen. Lawrence said, "I made it to the guard shack and broke everything that was breakable. This was my revenge." The Russians gave them food, wine or vodka, and they got stinko!

One morning two American ambulances arrived and they were given some bread and told they must move quickly to the American lines, 40 miles away. Devastation along the way was terrible! They were stopped several times by Russians, searched and made to drink toasts to them. They finally arrived at Linz and were forced to attempt to cross three different bridges before the Russians permitted them to cross.

Lawrence remained in the hospital in Linz for two weeks, his first real food being a hamburger and a glass of milk, which would not stay down. He was moved to an airstrip near Munich and flown to Rheims, France. There he started receiving food four to five times a day, as he could only eat small amounts at a time.

Lawrence arrived at Percy Jones Hospital in June, 1945. One leg was in a cast and the other treated by a brace. His eyes had recovered from the burns. He was promoted to Captain and discharged from the hospital July 21, 1947. His desire to become an airline pilot was not possible due to the extent of his injuries. He eventually went to school and pursued a career in electronics.

His powerful story was dramatized on an Army Radio Show from Percy Jones Hospital in January, 1946, when he was chosen, "Man of the Week" at age 21. He earned his pilot's wings at the age of 19.

Captain Jenkins found that S/Sgt. Raymond J. Vos was the man who aided him from his aircraft. In 1984, Jenkins was instrumental in obtaining the Purple Heart for Vos, who also had been wounded, but it had not been reported. Then in 1987, he was responsible for obtaining the Distinguished Flying Cross for Vos, for saving his life.

#### **MEMMINGEN, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 234 - JULY 18, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off at 0555 hours and 23 aircraft dropped 63 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Airdrome at Memmingen. Four aircraft returned early with one dropping 12, 500-lb. bombs on a railroad bridge at Letessen, Italy. The primary target was well covered. There was no flak.

Two Me-109s were seen but did not attack. B-17 #42-31889, 429th Squadron, was reported missing. This aircraft was having trouble keeping up with the formation, was seen to jettison its bombs and head due west, under control.

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31889 - "MAMMY YOKUM III" - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Millard F. Pedigo, 0-751029, P.	(INTERNEDED)*
2nd Lt.	Francis E. Barratt, 0-818810, CP.	(INTERNEDED)
Capt.	Mark O. Glasgow, 0-419271, N.	(INTERNEDED)
1st Lt.	Sidney (NMI) Hurwitz, 0-681756, B.	(INTERNEDED)*
T/Sgt.	William T. Poplowski, 32626560, U/T.	(INTERNEDED)*
Sgt.	Angelo (NMI) Martucci, 31140783, L/T.	(INTERNEDED)
S/Sgt.	Paul L. Johnson, 14083736, R/W.	(INTERNEDED)
S/Sgt.	Samuel (NMI) Byer, 36328701, L/W.	(INTERNEDED)
S/Sgt.	Eugene (NMI) Eisner, 12193582, T/G.	(INTERNEDED)*
T/Sgt.	William E. Aeschbacher, 35396652, R/O.	(INTERNEDED)

\*Known to have escaped from Switzerland

Statement of S/Sgt. Eugene Eisner, after escape: "Sam Byer made an attempt to escape but was caught and put in prison. I last saw him November 15, 1944. Lt. Hurwitz evaded from Switzerland sometime in November 1944. He returned to the 429th Squadron, 2nd Bomb Group at Foggia, Italy sometime in the latter part of November 1944, went to Naples where he boarded a boat for the States. It was aboard this boat that I met him. We left Naples December 10, 1944, arriving in New York, December 23rd.

"I was told that all the officers and T/Sgt. Bill Poplowski had escaped but am not sure of the others and not sure about all the officers."

T/Sgt. William E. "Bud" Aeschbacher, RO. July 31, 1991: "I first was with the 21st Anti-Submarine Squadron in Gulfport, Mississippi, and in October 1943 the Squadron moved to Ephrata, Washington, and became the nucleus of the 483rd Bombardment Group in B-17s. I was assigned to the 817th Squadron and flew as radio operator with the CO, William Lanford, and Operations Officer, Captain Lowery, to McDill Field, Tampa, Florida, where we began our overseas training. The CO made our Squadron insignia Li'l Abner characters - thus our plane was named 'MAMMY YOKUM.'

"March 1, 1944, we left Tampa with our ship, 'MAMMY YOKUM,' for Africa and arrived there March 22nd. After landing in North Africa, we heard that some crews were to be transferred. Our crew had a quick meeting and volunteered, figuring that it would be better to fly with an outfit who were used to combat and aircraft repair, as the 483rd BG were all as 'green' as we were. Four planes were sent to the 2nd Bomb Group at Amendola, one plane to a Squadron. We were assigned to the 429th.

"My first mission was on April 4th to Steyr, Austria, the second to Bucharest, Romania, and the third to Ploesti, Romania. Nine were easy missions. I went to Ploesti five times, Southern France four times. I flew the Shuttle Mission to Russia.

"I flew my first five sorties in 'MAMMY YOKUM,' A/C #42-32031, and on the 5th, April 8th, we belly landed with a full load of bombs and walked away with no injuries to the crew. We did not get credit for the mission.

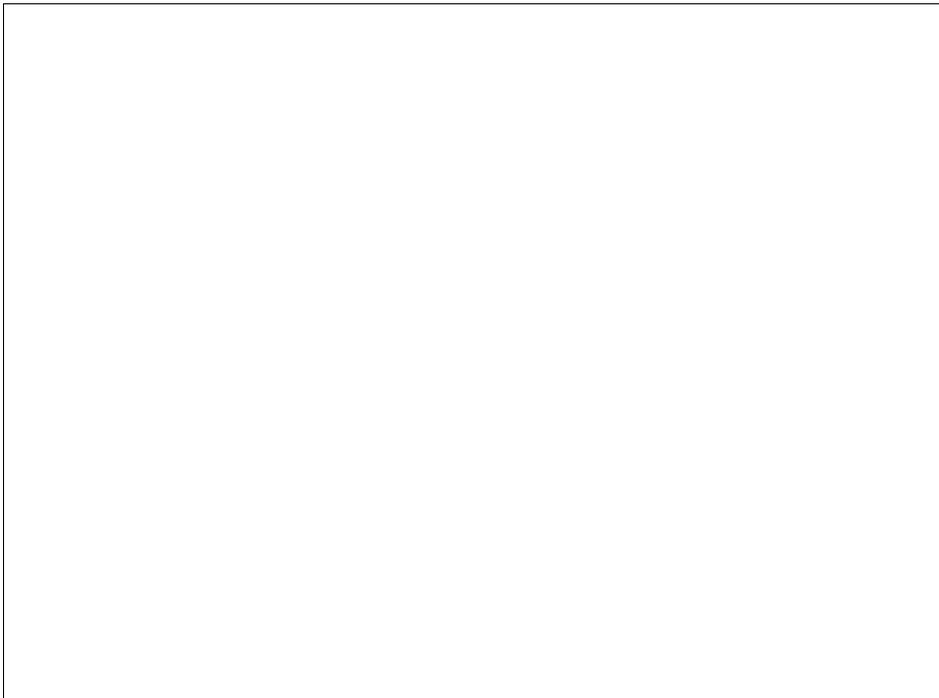
"We were assigned to A/C #42-38078. Some called it 'SWEET PEA' but we called it 'MAMMY YOKUM II.' I then flew my 8th mission in her and on my 46th mission, July 15th, to

Ploesti, we blew an engine and she went in for repair. It was with great interest that I heard later of her terrible damage on the mission to Debreczen, Hungary.

“July 18, 1944, we were assigned to #42-31889 for a mission to the airfield at Memmingen, Germany. We had engine trouble, engines were running hot. Over Innsbruck we salvoed our bombs and headed for home. No. 3 engine started vibrating badly and it couldn’t be feathered. The other engines were running hotter and we knew we couldn’t get home so our pilot headed for Switzerland. Swiss fighters found us in their airspace and escorted us to an airfield at Dubendorf. I later heard that my old outfit, the 483rd, lost 14 planes on that raid.

“We were first placed in an Enlisted Men’s Camp in Adelboden and the officers in Davos. During the peak of our raids over Germany, so many planes headed for Switzerland that another EM’s camp was opened in Wengen, high up in the mountains. It was a ski resort with little, or no, access other than by train. I was the 1st Sergeant of the camp. We were housed in three hotels and had over 300 men.

“I took part in planning escapes. Once the Allies were at the southern border of Switzerland, our escapes were made easier. When we were repatriated, in February 1945, our shipping orders showed 211 EM and 3 Officers. Three Germans were released for each American.



“Just recently I obtained a copy of our interrogation report, by the Swiss, and in it was a statement that they had found sand in our oil. No wonder the engines were running hot. I also received a Swiss damage report that 79 flak holes and other damage was found to the aircraft. #42-31889 was eventually scrapped, the fuselage cut in half behind the wings.”

T/Sgt. William E. Aeschbacher - Interned - Switzerland 7-18-44  
(Courtesy - William Aeschbacher)

S / S g t .  
Wilbert “Bud”  
Knecht was a Waist  
Gunner on the crew  
of Lt. Robert Kravet.  
April 4, 1994: “I see

by the date of this letter that nearly 49 years have passed since I was assigned to the 96th Squadron of the 2nd Bomb Group. I did keep a diary, against orders at that time, which has helped greatly in recounting some of the following story.

“Our crew was originally assigned to the 8th Air Force and we were assigned to a base at Grafton Underwood. My first mission was on March 16, 1944 to Augsburg, Germany, and then to Oberpfaffenhofen, Germany, then next to Frankfurt, Germany. On this mission we got lost from the Squadron, in the clouds, and when we finally found the Squadron, a tail gunner thought we were a Me-210 and emptied his ammo box at us from 1,500 yards. Our next mission was to Berlin and we were in flak for over one and one-half hours. No. 5 was to Munster, Germany, and this was the first time we had fighter escort, which was the RAF. No. 6 was on the ‘rocket coast’ in the Pas de Calais area. The

flak was as bad as Berlin and two Forts blew up damn close by. We had hits in the ball turret and bomb bay. We had two more missions, one to Dijon, France and the other to Tours, France. We had flown eight missions and when assigned to the 15th in Italy, we got credit with two for one, so then we had 16 under our belts.

“We left the 8th Air Force on April 4, 1944, spent four days in London and left England on April 18th. After stops in Casablanca, Algiers, Bizerte, Tunis, Catania, Bari, Foggia, and finally Amendola on April 24, 1944, then assigned to the 96th Squadron. HOME AT LAST!

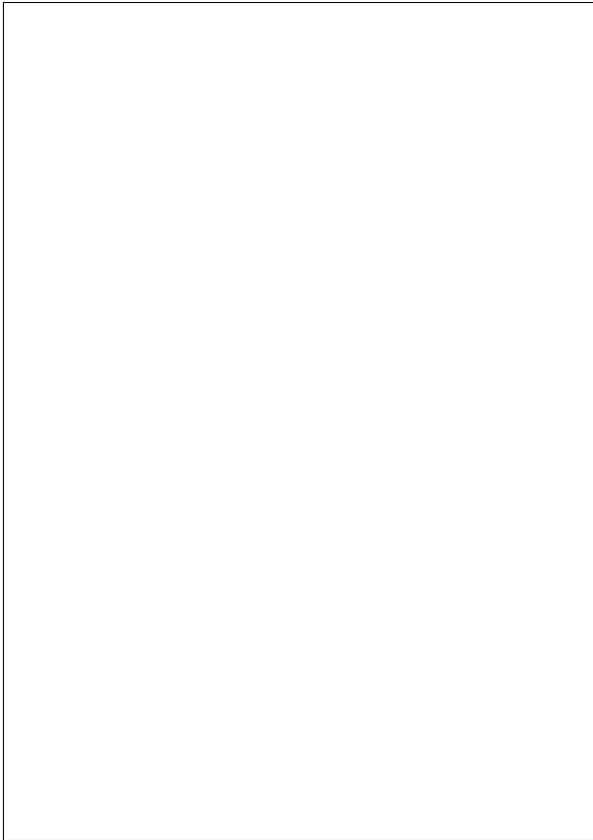
“While in training in the States, I met a fellow named Jarvel Hawk and while in Salt Lake City, waiting for assignment, I borrowed \$20.00 from him right before payday. Then they shipped us out before payday. I told him I would keep in touch, then our crew was sent to England. On the first day in the 96th, I was going to the mess hall and the first guy I ran into was Jarvel Hawk. I paid him and told him if he ever felt nervous on a mission, I’d hold his wallet for him ‘til he got back. He was a hard guy to beat in a card game.

“I flew my first mission with the 96th on April 30th to Reggio Amilio, Italy. The next target was Ploesti. The flak was very heavy and I saw two Forts go down and saw an enemy plane attacking four stragglers.

“Our 4th mission in Italy (23 credited) was to Wiener Neustadt and we ran into 12

Me-109s. One Fort blew up. Every time we turned we were hit. Had 30 flak holes that day.

“May 13 we went to Bolzano, Italy to hit a couple of bridges. As usual we flew over water as far as we could but as soon as we turned in over the coast we ran into flak. Right after that, two groups of enemy fighters came up and behind, one group high and the other group lined up four abreast at seven o’clock, level. They looked like they were parked on our left stabilizer. They were 109s with yellow nose spinners. These were the only ones that attacked us. They would come in four at a time, break off and dive, then go back and get in line again. Right before they broke off, the next bunch



T/R-L/R - A. Martucci, E. Eisner, S. Byer  
B/R-L/R - W. Poplowski, P. Johnson  
Interned - Switzerland 7-18-44  
(Courtesy - William Aeschbacher)

would start in. I was at the left waist and would follow them down after they broke off 'till they were out of range, then swing up in time to pick up the next bunch. After the third bunch, as I was swinging up to pick up the next bunch, out of the corner of my eye, I saw one of them roll over and start back up underneath us. I gave him my undivided attention. He came up within 200 yards of us, never fired a gun, fell over on his back and went into a dive. I alerted our tail gunner to keep an eye out for one hitting the ground and he confirmed it. A bunch of P-51s came in high and tore into the group that had been watching the show, and tore them up something fierce. The group that had been attacking us hit the deck and got out of there. During the damage check, the tail gunner said that the left horizontal stabilizer and elevator looked like a 20mm hit it. I took a quick look and saw that I had hit it twice. There was a group of four and a group of three spaced about the same distance apart as the barrels on a turret. I told the pilot it looked like it would hold if he could fly it, and he said it was flying all right for him so we went on and finished the mission.

“When we landed, the Engineering Officer asked me where the ball turret gunner was and I convinced him that the ball turret couldn't do it so he asked where the top turret man was so I told him that the top turret man couldn't do it and confessed to my indiscretion. He accepted that explanation and began tearing me up one side and down the other. Our pilot outranked the Engineering officer and he got out of the plane and saw what was going on and joined in the conversation and politely gave the Engineering officer a lesson in how to really 'ream Anus' while patting me on the back. Needless to say, I didn't get credit for my 109.

“A couple of days later, one of our officers told us that the high group of 109s were a graduating class of cadets watching how the 'Abbyville Kids' did it.

“Another mission I remember well was on June 14th to an oil refinery at Budapest. Ran into heavy flak over the target and then ran into eight Me-410s about 15 minutes before leaving the enemy coast on the way home. They made one pass at our Squadron and got a Fort on our wing. The Fort's outboard gas tank was burning and it almost rammed us before he pulled away. All ten men got out before it exploded. Before we ever hit the target, three men bailed out. I got shots at three of the 410s and knocked the hell out of the last one's left engine. Last we saw of it, its engine was still smoking. A P-51, in pursuit, called back and said one Me-410 'hit the dirt.' I tried to get credit for it but they gave it to a bombardier who, one of his crew told me later, was asleep at the time. We got 23 holes that day and three ships in our Squadron had engines feathered.

“Another mission, my 37th, we went to Marshalling Yards at Verona, Italy, July 6, 1944. Ran into heavy flak over the target. Saw P-51s knock down two enemy fighters. Right after we left the target, a Fort peeled off and started down. Two men got out before it exploded. Four chutes opened in the middle of the explosion but weren't seen after that.

“July 18th we went to bomb an airfield at Memmingen, Germany. Weather was bad and everyone was recalled except our Group and the 483rd Group. We were both supposed to hit the same target but we screwed up and flew around over the ocean for an hour. The 483rd went onto Munich, an alternate, and out of 27 planes, only 12 got back. Meanwhile we flew around and found our target while the bandits that hit the 483rd were either refueling or landing to refuel. About a week later we were told that we had destroyed 200 plus planes. We had been briefed to expect 100 planes there. I don't know for sure if the 483rd losses were correct but this is what we were told later. When we left the target, a jet came at our group at 9 o'clock, a little high. I was at the left waist and he was far out when he turned into us. When he turned to us, he must have hit the throttle because black smoke poured out all the time he was visible. Then he came through us twice as fast as the other bandits. I got off a good burst but knew I was too late. He fired what seemed to be a burst of four rockets that looked like small flak shells going off the other side of the formation. He kept going toward another Group that was way out to our right and we lost sight of him. This plane looked like a stubby piece of stove pipe. It was single engine. On 'Wings' Discovery Channel, I saw the one that took off and

landed on a skid type runner that looked like the one I saw. Believe me, I wasn't the only one that saw it. As a result of all the flying around over the ocean, before going to the target, everyone was low on gas. Two of our planes had to throw out everything but the engines to get back, and two others didn't make it back. Later, one came in after refueling up the coast and the other wasn't heard from.

"July 27th, my 47th mission, we went to Budapest. We were in the lead ship today. No enemy fighters but the flak was fairly heavy and damned accurate. Two ships had to feather an engine and another had to feather two. A tail gunner in our wing ship got hit nine times, mostly in face and legs. Lost an eye, and ankle shot up pretty bad. A bunch of others wounded. We hit the target right in the middle. Major Jordan was our pilot. We were hit three times and needed a new wing tank.

"August 12th, Savona, Italy, my 50th. Target was hit better than I had ever seen it. Bombs seemed to pile up on one another. No flak at the target. Off to our right, about a mile, another Group was catching plenty of flak. One got a direct hit and blew up. Just after we left the coast a B-24 came across our course with two inboard engines on fire and heading for Corsica. One of our planes came back on three. No enemy fighters were seen. A lovely was to finish up! FINITO!"

#### **MUNICH, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 235 - JULY 19, 1944**

Major Richard Abbey, CO of the 49th Squadron, led 28 aircraft to bomb the Milbertshoven Ordnance Depot at Munich. Twenty-seven aircraft dropped their bombs on this target with results described as poor. One aircraft, an early return, dropped its bombs on oil storage tanks at Trieste, Italy with fires and explosions reported. Flak at the primary target was intense, accurate, and heavy. No injuries, no losses.

#### **MEMMINGEN, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 236 - JULY 20, 1944**

At 0700 hours, 28 aircraft took off with a load of fragmentation bombs and at 1100 hours dropped their bombs on the Airdrome at Memmingen. A good pattern was reported across the target area. Flak was light and there were no encounters with E/A.

#### **BRUX, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 237 - JULY 21, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off to bomb the Synthetic Oil Refinery at Brux. Only 19 aircraft dropped 46.875 tons of 250-lb. GP bombs, by PFF, into a smoke filled target. Results were not known. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate. There were seven early returns. One B-17 dropped 20, 250-lb. bombs on the harbor at Pola, Italy with good results.

Twelve to 20 Me-109s and FW-190s aggressively attacked the formation before the target. B-17s #42-31789, 20th Squadron, and #42-107101, 96th Squadron, were lost. 2nd Lt. Paul E. Sumner, B, 49th Squadron, was seriously wounded. S/Sgt. Walter G. Carley, TG, 20th Squadron and Cpl. Gilmer Hawkins, TG, 429th Squadron, were slightly wounded.

S/Sgt. Walter Lastowski, BT, 49th Squadron, was credited with destruction of one Me-109. S/Sgt. Walter G. Carley, TG, 20th Squadron, Cpl. William M. Spruce, RW, 429th Squadron, and Sgt. Joseph Kaliszczik, TG, 429th Squadron, were each credited with possible destruction of an Me-109. Sgt. Joseph Kaliszczik was also credited with damage to a Me-109.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31789 - 20TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt.	John R. MacKenzie, 0-808858, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Richard E. Dunkelberger, 0-819006, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Loren C. Rice, 0-717695, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Wylie T. Hartsfield, 0-683130, B.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Reese (NMI) Stevensen, 14098428, U/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Frank A. Rapley, 14067046, L/T.	(KIA)

Sgt.	Donald D. Wickland, 36740109, R/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Billy B. Owen, 17074213, L/W.	(POW)
Sgt.	Clair H. Lane, 33570593, T/G.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	George H. Suratt, 14161101, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of Sgt. Billy Owen, LW, after liberation: "I bailed out with four others. The radio operator, Suratt, followed me out the waist door. The aircraft struck the ground directly below me when I opened my chute. I saw Lt. Rice and Sgt. Stevensen the day after we were forced down. Sgt. Stevensen was in bad shape. Lt. Rice had a broken arm. I was with Sgt. Suratt and Lt. Hartsfield until July 30 at a transient camp not far from Frankfurt, Germany.

"Sgt. Wickland was hit in the side by a bullet, probably 20mm. I last saw him on the floor of the plane. I felt the plane swerve sharply, swerved around and saw him hit. He immediately fell to the floor and did not move."

Statement of 2nd Lt. Loren C. Rice, N, after liberation: "I bailed out about 20 kms south of Wels, Austria and the plane crashed near there. When we were picked up by two Germans, the engineer and myself were injured and the other three were alright.

"I believe the personnel at the hospital in Wels know about where the bodies of those killed are buried. A doctor by the name of Hartlinger was in charge of the engineer and myself while we were hospitalized there and seemed to know what happened.

"I do not believe that Lt. MacKenzie, Lt. Dunkelberger, and Sgts. Lane, Wickland, and Rapley were able to bail out of the aircraft. I believe the enlisted men were killed by enemy gunfire and Lts. MacKenzie and Dunkelberger were trapped in the falling plane. The last communication with them was just before the fighter attack. I was told by two Germans that they were buried at the scene of the crash."

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-107101 - 49TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	James E. Wagner, 0-420563, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	David A. Robins, 0-819614, CP.	(KIA)
1st Lt.	James J. Shea, 0-619734, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Herbert N. Johnson, 0-703387, B.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	James P. Lutterbach, 35722248, U/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Willis L. Mehl, 39120010, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Nicholas R. Gross, 13127766, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	John B. Black, Jr., 6580067, L/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	William E. Long, 20726215, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	John W. Wick, 12093607, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of T/Sgt. T. B. Sullivan, RO on A/C #999, after the mission: "I saw fighters attack #101. It received a hit in the right wing and began losing gasoline. It then peeled off to the left and headed back. That was the last I saw of #101. I did not see any chutes."

#### **PLOESTI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 238 - JULY 22, 1944**

Twenty-three aircraft dropped 60 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the Romano-American Refinery at Ploesti. A very effective smoke screen covered the area and bombing was done by PFF. Flak was heavy, slight to moderate resulting in damage to 12 aircraft. 2nd Lt. Fredric M. Rosemore, N, 96th Squadron, and S/Sgt. William D. Brown, RW, 20th Squadron, were slightly wounded by flak.

B-17 #42-31452 was seen to jettison its bombs and turn off just before the I.P, and is missing. No encounters with E/A.

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31452 - "FIFTY PACKIN' MAMA" - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Norman D. Austin, 0-811309, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	John M. Holt, 0-822441, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	George N. Mullen, 0-713212, N.	(POW)
F/O	Frederick C. Decker, T-125065, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Doyle C. Carson, 34504800, U/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Kenneth P. Baldwin, 35874291, L/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Alfred T. Pinter, 6269354, R/W.	(POW)
Sgt.	Ray F. Wylie, 35583129, L/W.	(POW)
Sgt.	Hubert R. Cagle, 34084707, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Carl C. Jones, Jr. 15057267, R/O.	(KIA)

1st Lt. Norman D. Austin, P of A/C #42-31485. April 8, 1992: "I enlisted August 8, 1942, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Had basic training in Coast Artillery at Camp Callan, California.

"Aviation Cadet, December 1942 to August 30, 1943. Graduated as pilot at George Field, Illinois. Assigned to Chanute Field, Illinois for transition training in B-17s. Transferred to Salt Lake City. Assigned a crew of nine men. Sent to Alexandria Air Base, Louisiana for three months training as a bomber crew. Transferred to Grand Island, Nebraska, a staging area to fly overseas. Due to lack of aircraft, we were sent to Langley Field, Virginia, to train navigators.

"In May of 1944, part of my crew and parts of two other crews were flown on C-54s by way of Newfoundland, Azores, North Africa, and Italy.

"I was assigned to the 20th Squadron, 2nd Bomb Group, as a replacement along with part of my original crew. My co-pilot, Lt. Owen E. Rice, Jr., was shot down over Blechhammer, Germany July 7, 1944. He was on a pick-up crew. A report came back that they had a direct burst of flak in the tail, the plane rolled over on its back and no one got out. S/Sgt. George H. Suratt was on a pick-up crew that was shot down on a mission to Brux, Czechoslovakia on July 21, 1944. I found out through the Red Cross that S/Sgt. Suratt survived and became a POW.

"Sgt. Doyle Carson was the only member of my original crew to be with me on the day we were shot down. I flew 27 missions over Southern France, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Northern Italy, and Romania.

"July 22, 1944 on the mission to the Ploesti oil fields, I had engine failure short of the target. We dropped out of formation and fighters set the plane on fire. We all bailed out just before the plane exploded. One crew member, T/Sgt. Carl C. Jones, failed to open his chute. Our aircraft was #42-31452 and named 'FIFTY PACKIN' MAMA.'

"The rest of us were taken prisoner by Romanians. We were prisoners in a schoolhouse in Bucharest until Romania capitulated to the Russians, August 23, 1944. Col. James Dunn, our camp CO, was flown to Bari, Italy in an Me-109 by a Romanian fighter pilot. He contacted 15th Air Force and arrangements were made to have 1,500 POWs flown out of Romania in B-17s the first part of September, 1944.

"I returned to the United States in October 1944 and was assigned as a Flight Instructor at Marfa, Texas Advanced Flight School from January through April 1945. I was then transferred to Romulas, Michigan, A.T.C. and was checked out in C-54s. I then flew freight and hospital planes until released from duty on October 3, 1945."

2nd Lt. John M. Holt, CP, on A/C #42-31452. May 15, 1992: "I had been in the Group less than a month when I went on the mission to Ploesti, which ended up in the old school building near downtown Bucharest. Since that was my only mission in actual combat, it hardly gives me a large chunk of tall tales to talk about my adventures against the enemy. Experience in the prison camp in Bucharest has been well reported already, and it was, at least as it affected me, nothing as rigorous as comrades that went down in Germany had to face. I will say, that in several flights I have made across the Atlantic in the post war years, I've several times thought of the relatively primitive navigational system we had in 1944, when we flew that shiny, new B-17 from Savannah across the ocean to the Mediterranean via Gander, the Azores, Marrakech, and Tunis before heading for Amendola. I'm glad we had decent weather for the flight and didn't know how vast were the risks we were facing, even apart from the risk of enemy action, that didn't materialize as we flew over.

"In the immediate post war years, I finished my university degree, proceeded to seminary and was at length ordained as a priest in the Episcopal Church. After publishing my book on *Patriarchs of Israel* in 1964, I received a letter from a Greek Orthodox priest in Bucharest about my book, and the following correspondence developed the information that the church had, since the war, taken over the building and was using it for educational purposes again, a gratifying bit of news.

"The first time I went back to Italy after the war, it was gratifying to see a country rebuilt and prospering as it was then, in the early 1960s. On checking in at my hotel in Foggia, I went to a travel agent, recommended by the concierge, to arrange for a car and driver to go out the next day and visit the sites of our old landing strip and 'housing' area midway between Foggia and Manfredonia. When the agent recognized that I was a veteran returning to play, 'Twelve O'Clock High,' he explained that our old air strip was now a regular base of the Italian Air Force and not open to visitors. However, the driver could take me to the other area nearby without difficulty. I could recognize the area without hesitation, once we got there; even the modern road made the same turn to the left just before going over the hill and down into Manfredonia. Not a trace of the structures, even the stone ones, that were there in 1944. A couple of tears formed at the memory of others of the Group that had died on 22 July 1944 and the many other missions, and the understanding young man noticed it. 'Molti, Amici Morti?' he asked, 'Si pooci,' I answered. Though it was well before he was born, he was compassionate enough to nod agreeably and remark, 'Si, Triste, molta, triste.'

"In a way, those three years in the Air Force are the only glamorous things I have ever done, since in those days aviation still had much of the cachet of the daring adventurers about it, before becoming the every day thing air travel (and war) are in the contemporary world. I'm grateful for the experience it gave me in completing the bonding with other adults and people from different backgrounds I hadn't had before the war and, of course, I'm glad that I came out of it alive and whole."

#### **LINZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 239 - JULY 25, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off to bomb the Herman Goering Tank Works at Linz. One aircraft was an early return. Due to a malfunction in the lead plane, the bombs were dropped between the I.P. and the target. All planes had dropped on the lead ship. Flak was reported as heavy, slight to moderate, and inaccurate. There were no injuries and no losses.

In November, 1995, I received a letter from Karl Affenzeller, an Austrian researcher of Allied aircraft losses in Austria. Karl wrote, regarding this mission: "More than 100 heavy bombs were dropped by the 2nd Bomb Group 15 kilometers from my domicile (Freistat). At that time I was only nine years old. Nevertheless, I still remember that day quite well because my mother took my brother and me for the very first time to a spacious air raid shelter situated next to our house, inside we were quite secure, although we heard the thunderous crash of the bombs falling even there.

“Several days later I have been in the Pregarten-Hagenberg area. I noticed the destruction after the bombing and have been deeply impressed by the report of the surviving people. By my research, many inhabitants from Hagenberg, Veichter, and Pregarten have been asking me how all that could happen and why the Americans dropped bombs on us? There were no industrial plants and no military bases. One woman and one child was killed.”

Austrian Frau Berta Bauer wrote: “I was born on 27th January 1923 and my name was Berta Kurz before I have been married. In the year 1944, I used to live with my parents at Klingerwehr, near Pregarten. This small village is situated in a beautiful quiet romantic valley. My parents possessed a small farm house with two milk cows, two pigs and a lot of chickens. Naturally I always had to help them working.

“On 25th July 1944 at six o’clock in the morning, I went down to the cow barn to milk and feed the animals. Afterwards I intended to go to the near forest to collect blueberries, but my mother wanted me to procure food for the chickens before. So I went to Pregarten with our handcart for shopping.

“About 11:00 a.m. - I had just left the shop and was on my way home - the siren began to scream. So I turned and went back to the shop, since no one was supposed to be in the street during an air raid. Just after a few minutes I saw the enemy bombers coming against the blue sky. They could be well seen. First I was not frightened, but suddenly the ground began to tremble, window panes clattered, and heavy detonations were to be heard in between from bombs from the direction of Hagenberg. Black clouds of dust and smoke rose from there, and they soon covered the sunlight, it got dark like in the evening. Everything had come too fast, hardly anyone found time to take shelter. The warning had come much too late.

“Finally the detonations ended and I wanted to get home fast. I took several by-ways to reach my parent’s home. There was still the noise of plane engines above me, but the rest was silence around me. There was not a single bird singing and no people around. I was deeply worried about my parents and their house. Luckily there was no one killed or injured in my family. The air pressure had broken all window panes and pushed in all doors. The roof was heavily damaged. Our neighbors’ home was nothing but a pile of rubble, Mrs. Karlinger was dead. Mr. Karlinger was staying with us for a while until he moved away from the area. Quite many of the houses that were damaged were not repaired before the end of the war.”

#### **WIENER NEUDORF, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 240 - JULY 26, 1944**

Colonel John D. Ryan led 28 aircraft to bomb the Aircraft Factory in this city. An excellent smoke screen covered the city and the Group made two passes over the city before dropping its bombs into the smoke. Damage could not be determined. Flak was intense, accurate and heavy, resulting in injury to four men. There were no losses.

#### **BUDAPEST, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 241 - JULY 27, 1944**

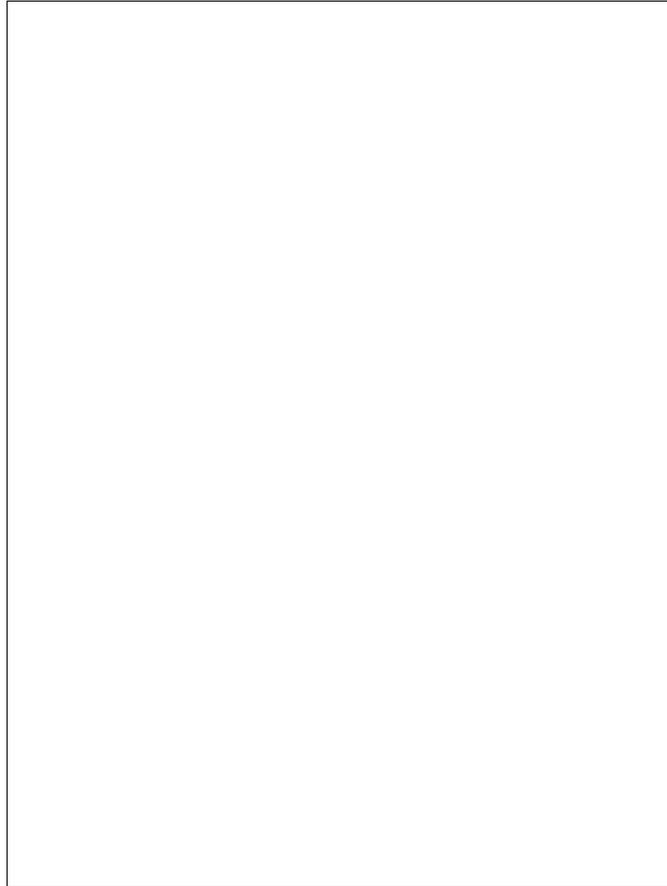
Major Lawrence Jordan, CO of the 96th Squadron, led 26 aircraft, each with a load of two, 2,000-lb. GP bombs. The target was the Manfred Weiss Armament Works. Most bombs were in the target area with some short and some over. Flak was moderate to intense and accurate. Twenty-two aircraft were damaged by flak and five men wounded.

#### **PLOESTI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 242 - JULY 28, 1944**

Twenty-four aircraft dropped 70.5 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Astro-Romano Oil Refinery. There was a smoke screen over the target and the bombs were dropped into the smoke. Results were not obtainable but smoke from fires could be seen for miles. No losses.

**PLOESTI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 243 - JULY 31, 1944**

Twenty-six aircraft dropped 78 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Xenia Oil Refinery. The target was covered by a smoke screen and bombing was by PFF. Results were not obtainable. Flak was heavy and accurate resulting in the wounding of four men and damage to several aircraft. No losses.



Frau Berta Bauer

# 12

## OPERATIONS: AUGUST, 1944

### **P**ORTES LES VALENCES, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 244 - AUGUST 2, 1944

Lt. Col. James Ellis, 20th Squadron CO, led 28 aircraft to bomb the Marshalling Yards in this city. Reports were that only 20% of the bombs were in the target area. No flak and no E/A were encountered.

### **FRIEDRICHSHOFFEN, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 245 - AUGUST 3, 1944**

The Ober Radweach Chemical works, in this city, was the assigned target. Twenty-eight aircraft took off with one early return. Twenty-seven aircraft got over the target with only 13 dropping 26 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs. The First Wave missed the target by 1,500 to 2,000 feet due to malfunction of bomb racks in the lead airplane. Flak was heavy, slight, and inaccurate. Thirteen aircraft, the Second Wave, bombed a target of opportunity, a highway bridge at 45-38N - 13-34E, with a few hits on the bridge and several near misses.

B-17 #42-31655, 429th Squadron, reported missing. Believed headed for Switzerland.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31655 - "WANITA" - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	James E. Heintz, 0-813569, P.	(INTERNEDED)
2nd Lt.	George W. Eilers, 0-761907, CP.	(INTERNEDED)
2nd Lt.	James F. Mahon, 0-717677, N.	(INTERNEDED)*
2nd Lt.	Jacob T. Blumer, 0-757959, B.	(INTERNEDED)
T/Sgt.	James H. Howard, 14004671, U/T.	(INTERNEDED)*
S/Sgt.	Morris Seifert, 15169679, L/T.	(INTERNEDED)
T/Sgt.	Edwin A. Hayes, 14002465, R/W.	(INTERNEDED)
S/Sgt.	Richard C. Mason, 32773217, L/W.	(INTERNEDED)
S/Sgt.	Joseph Ferreira, 11032607, T/G.	(INTERNEDED)
S/Sgt.	Peter G. Pierce, Jr., 18213806, R/O.	(INTERNEDED)*

\*Escaped from Switzerland

Statement of Captain James E. Heintz, P, after repatriation: "We were approximately 75 miles from Lake Constance when we left the formation. All members were in the aircraft when we landed at Dubendorf, Switzerland. I have seen S/Sgt. Seifert, in December 1945, at Traux Field, Wisconsin, uninjured and in good health. Lt. Eilers was last seen at Davos, Switzerland about the middle of October 1944 at which time he attempted to escape. He was captured and imprisoned in a prison camp around the middle of October. This came from Lt. Jacob Blumer who was also imprisoned at Veuwolemoos. I last saw T/Sgt. James Howard in Dubendorf on October 4, 1944. The enlisted men

were sent to Adelboden and officers were sent to Davos. I found later that he had escaped and later apprehended by Swiss police.”

Statement of S/Sgt. Richard Mason, LW, after repatriation: “Lt. Eilers, Lt. Blumer, T/Sgt. Hayes, and I were repatriated together from Switzerland on 17 February 1945 at Geneva. Information I had regarding T/Sgt. James Howard was that he had successfully escaped on his second attempt, was returned to the 429th Squadron, then shipped to the States.”

Escape statement of 2nd Lt. James F. Mahon, N, 4 January 1945. Source stated that an engine was hit and could not be feathered. Prop was vibrating and pilot feared wing would fall off, so decided to go to Switzerland. Salvoed bombs in German territory, crash landed at Dubendorf. Landing gear was washed out. Source not allowed to inspect ship.

Source sent to Davos and stayed there five months. Source made two attempts to escape and put in prison where he received poor treatment. On 29 December, source, using a forged pass, managed to reach Zurich where he contacted the American Consul. Source was sent to Berne, stayed overnight then taken to Munsingon. He stayed there overnight and again brought to Berne. He was then brought to the border and led across by a FFI guide. This guide brought source to Annecy, then to Lyon, then to Naples for two nights, and then to Bari on 3 January 1945.

Escape statement of S/Sgt. Peter G. Pierce, RO, after escape. Source stated they were given first aid and taken to the officers barracks for interrogation. Stayed overnight and sent to Chaumont, near Neuchstol, where source spent a 21-day quarantine. Source was then taken to Adelboden, stayed for one month and then taken to Wengun. He stayed here for three months, managed to get a forged pass and got to Berne by train. The next day he went to the American Air Force Attache Officer, stayed three days, and brought by moving van to a rendezvous point where he met a woman contact. She took source to Vevey and stayed four days. Source was then taken by cab to a Polish guide who walked source through swamps and across the border. He stayed here overnight in a hotel and was taken to Annecy by truck. Stayed overnight and then to Lyon. Was flown to Naples and then to Bari, arriving here 31 December 1944.

#### **LE POUZIN, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 246 - AUGUST 6, 1944**

Lt. Col. Charles H. Hillhouse led 27 aircraft to bomb Oil Storage Tanks in this city. Strike photos showed a fairly good coverage. Light, inaccurate flak. No injuries, no losses.

#### **BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 247 - AUGUST 7, 1944**

Twenty-six aircraft dropped 67.5 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the South Oil Plant in this city. Due to heavy smoke covering the target, bombing was by PFF. Results were not known. Flak was moderate to intense, accurate and very heavy resulting in the loss of B-17 #44-6176, 49th Squadron. Eight Me-109s were seen with one making a single pass at a B-17 with no damage done.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6176 - 49TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Dwight F. Hastings, 0-819095, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Kenneth A. Durtschi, 0-706150, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	James A. Shaw, 0-712924, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Dominic A. Siani, Jr., 0-755166, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Julius (NMI) Karp, 12152818, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Howard J. Kidney, 36542158, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	John C. Case, 38343521, R/W.	(POW)

S/Sgt.	James E. Devlin, 33578618, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Nicanor N. Reyes, 32636356, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Harold S. Barth, 33758700, R/O.	(POW)

S/Sgt. John C. Case, RW. April 19, 1992: "I read your letter with interest. Seeing the names of the crew triggered a lot of memories.

"Sgt. Devlin was new to the crew. We dropped our regular gunner for a photographer, who turned out to be Devlin. Kidney was killed while still in his chute coming down, or immediately thereafter. The Germans brought me his chute, Mae West, and flying boots. His Mae West was stitched from left to right with bullet holes and lots of blood. We checked as best we could after liberation but neither the Red Cross nor Germans had any record of him.

"As for my personal story - well, I am happy to be here alive and in reasonably good health. There were so many that did not make it."

1st Lt. Dwight F. Hastings, P. October 23, 1994: "We were a mixed crew on that mission of 7 August 1944 to Blechhammer. I had checked out as a 1st pilot after about 12 missions, and inherited individuals from other crews, sometimes flying with newly arrived crew members until their pilots checked out for combat.

"That morning as I briefed the crew, and we boarded the B-17, I remember Sgt. Howard Kidney, the ball turret gunner, telling me he certainly was going to walk out of Germany if he were shot down because he believed his wife was expecting their first child momentarily. He had his GI boots and his 45 along, and I reminded him of the strong recommendation of our CO to not take handguns on missions because of the evidence that captured airmen who did so were killed by their own guns. That day, my very good friend and bunkmate, Dominic Siani, had managed to fly with my crew as bombardier on what I believe was his 50th mission.

"We were leading the #4 Squadron on that mission and everything went smoothly to the target area. As the #4 Squadron leader, our position within the six Squadron formation placed us right in the middle of the Group as viewed from the ground, and we heard all five of the 88 anti-aircraft shell bursts (they were fired in clips of five shells), which rocked our plane as we were on the bomb run. Right after "bombs away," we were trying to evaluate our damage as smoke was being reported by crew members in the rear of the aircraft. When I looked back along the trailing edge of the left wing, I saw a frightening hole fairly close to the fuselage with what looked like a very large blow-torch like flame reaching back several feet. Because on a previous mission, when leading the high Squadron, I had witnessed a similar fire on the right wing of the deputy lead plane and that plane had exploded within 10 to 15 seconds, I immediately ordered the crew to bail out, and dumped the stick forward to try and pick up speed to get out of the formation and to drag the fire back to delay any explosion as long as possible. I remember trying to set the automatic pilot so we all could get out with a minimum of complications, and found it had been shot out, so then trimmed the controls as best I could to try to keep it in a dive while I left. The crew responded to my order to bail out with reasonable haste. When I felt that I was ready to go, I looked back to see my good friend, Dominic Siani, looking up through the hatch to see how I was doing. I motioned for him to go out, and swung down to go myself. As I left my seat, I saw no movement anywhere within the plane, and with all doors open I could see it was empty. Knowing we were about 25,000 feet, and without oxygen after falling out of the escape hatch, I waited to get away from the plane and down to where more oxygen would be available before opening my chest type chute and, of course, when I pulled the ripcord I became vertically upright with a tremendous jerk. Soon after the chute opened I saw the plane going away, but then I was rocked by what must have been the concussion from the plane exploding. I then discovered there was a big hole in my chute (probably made by shrapnel from the plane) that I hoped would not get any bigger.

Another distraction was finding that a German fighter (possibly a Me-109) was swinging toward me in a manner that could lead to strafing me, but then he kept on turning and I saw the fighter was on fire and slowly spiraling toward the ground.

“I landed in a freshly plowed field, with more impact than I had been led to expect, on my feet, rear and back. The chute was so flat on the ground when I stood up I suspect I was momentarily dazed by the impact. Looking around me, and finding nothing to hide behind, I saw a farmer waving a pitchfork at me from perhaps 200 yards distance, obviously wondering if I was friend or foe. Looking clockwise 90 degrees, a man with a long rifle was perhaps 300 yards away and running toward me. Clockwise, another 90 degrees, was a motorcycle policeman bouncing across the field waving a pistol, and to complete the circle, a 1936 Ford sedan loaded down with soldiers was rapidly approaching. Realizing it would take a minute or so for them to reach me, and having a very strong urge to urinate, I let fly.

“The SS Troopers arrived first and surrounded me with four or five Tommy guns at the ready. The SS contingent consisted of a Captain, Lieutenant, and five enlisted men. All the others arrived about the same time, and a serious argument ensued between the civilians and the SS Captain, and from the hatred in the eyes of the civilians I was hoping the Captain would win. During this confusion, I looked around to see the long rifle was being pointed between my eyes from a distance of perhaps three or four feet, and I thought my time had arrived as I stared at the man with the rifle. The Captain must have seen what was going on about the same time I did for he actually kicked the rifle out of the man’s hands and confiscated it, kicked him away from the group, and I was obviously going to be his prisoner; and recognized as being an officer I was to be taken alive. As things settled down, the Captain had a very large enlisted man show me, by example, what I was to do - stripping off my clothes one by one and making sure I was not armed or had anything hidden. They then let me put my clothes back on, and put me in the back seat of the Ford with the Lieutenant and drove toward town.

“While riding into town the Lieutenant tried to carry on a conversation with me in his terrible broken English. He had “admired” me, which I didn’t understand at all at first, and asked why? He said I had not flinched when the long rifle was being aimed at me, and respected me for the way I behaved. He wanted to know if I had been a Boy Scout in America. He got the question across by sketching a Boy Scout insignia on a piece of paper, and when I confirmed it he said he had been a Boy Scout, and that he was “Russ.” I later learned that in those areas between Germany and Russia, there were probably many former Russians serving in the German Army, especially the SS.

“After a relatively short drive, the Ford engine conked out in the middle of a village, and it seemed like the whole town turned out to surround the car and calls of “Americanisch Swine” and “Americanisch Gangster.” There were many shaking pitchforks and fists at me, and the veins stood out in the foreheads - convincing me that there were very strong feelings being expressed, and it was to my advantage to have been picked up by the SS Captain and his men. A couple of the enlisted men were working feverishly on the engine for what seemed like a very long time, and the demonstration continued. I then had a very strange experience. I noticed that a woman about my mother’s age was smiling, and then I realized I was smiling also, and something about this woman’s actions seemed to change the whole tone of the crowd. I didn’t hear the “Gangster” and “Swine” anymore. The engine started, and we went on to what may have been the next town where I was relegated to a chair in the center portion of what was probably a town hall meeting room.

“After waiting in the town hall meeting room for an hour or so, there was a commotion at the door, and apparently a little arguing. Then the Lieutenant brought me a large pork sandwich which he said the lady in the village, where the car broke down, had made for me. He added that I looked like her son who is in the German Army and she knew I must be hungry. I’m not sure that I had ever enjoyed a sandwich more than that one!

“Soon after that another commotion at the door brought in Dominic Siani. He had landed about two miles on the opposite side of town and had been forced to walk, with a gun in his back, on a sprained ankle, to this town hall. He was ghostly white and in obvious pain. It was good to see each other, even though they didn’t want us to talk to each other.

“About the middle of the afternoon, a Wehrmacht Captain and some men arrived to pick Dom and me up and take over our detention - driving to a permanent Army Base, probably a half hour away. This German Army Captain must have had some serious disease with high temperatures in his life for he had no hair on his head. He had a black patch over one eye, and with his short stocky stature and high voice, Hollywood would have paid a mint for his services in propaganda films during the war. I carried Dom on my back whenever possible because his foot hurt so badly. The Captain transported us in a three wheeled “truck” with covered cargo area behind a motorcycle front. He sat up front with the driver and a soldier sat back by the tail gate to guard us. The Captain told us not to talk, but we found the guard did not care so we talked quietly during the trip. I remember being impressed by the beautiful and peaceful surroundings as we passed through the villages and countryside.

“After arriving at the Army Base, we were taken to the Captain’s office where he announced for us “the war is over,” and then leaning back in his chair he looked at me and said, “Ah Sonny Boy!” When neither of us reacted - not knowing what he was referring to, he gave his Aide instructions and the Aide returned with a German magazine which might have been the quality of our *Time* magazine. On the back cover were four cartoons and the title was “Sonny Boy.” The first picture was a young American boy, perhaps age six, with a bow and arrow killing dogs and cats - learning to kill. In the second cartoon the boy, now age eight, had a sword in his hand and was destroying statues and cultural stuff - learning destruction. In the third, now perhaps age ten, with a burning torch in his hand running gleefully away from burning buildings and homes. In the last cartoon, at perhaps age 12, he is shown with USAAF pilot wings after having received all the destructive training to qualify him. My reaction was an immediate “BULL SHIT.” The Captain didn’t know how to handle that reaction because he obviously didn’t know what it meant. He repeated my “BULL SHIT” over and over again with all sorts of inflections trying to find something similar in his language, and Dom and I got to laughing over the episode. He was still repeating “BULL SHIT” as we were taken back to our cells by a couple of soldiers.

“Not much later, I was taken from my cell to Dom so I could carry him to another transport. This time it was a German Air Force transport to take us to a Luftwaffe Base. We were put into separate cells for the night, and later that evening they brought me a rather large bowl of boiled potatoes with skins on. I ate the whole thing much to the amazement of my handlers. I later learned that the Germans didn’t eat the skins because of predominant practice at the time of using human manure.

“Ever since my first meeting with Dom at the town hall, we had been trying to get a doctor to examine his ankle. Dom and I were taken to the Base Headquarters building the next morning and there we got a doctor to examine and tape Dom’s ankle, and we gave up one dog tag so they could send it to Geneva to identify us as POWs. I believe it was that night that Dom and I were put into a truck and taken, under guard, to the railroad station in Breslau (now Wroclaw) where we were put into a third-class compartment and started the trip to Frankfurt Am Main. We discovered other captured American airmen on board, none from our crew, and many more guards. We pulled out of the station late in the evening and it seems we arrived in Frankfurt about dusk the next evening.

“As we approached the main Frankfurt Railroad Station, we saw nothing but destruction on each side of the train - rubble in most cases to make it impossible to see where one block ended and another began. The station itself had no glass windows remaining - just a shell of a station. As we were taken off to the platform and assembled as a group of about 12 prisoners, and as many guards, we could see a crowd starting to gather, and hatred seemed to be building. We were thankful we had guards to insure our safety at this point. They hurried us out of the station and into a tram (street car) that delivered us

to Dulag Luft, the Luftwaffe Interrogation Center outside Frankfurt. We were separated and placed in solitary confinement units. A German officer with a Red Cross band on his arm came to interrogate me, telling me he wanted information to send to Geneva and implying he needed other information to confirm my accurate identification. He wanted a lot more information about my military position, alternate target, etc. I stuck with our guidance from our Army that had instructed under the Geneva Convention all I was to provide was my name, rank, and serial number. He went away implying that I would have to give more information than that.

“Our food in solitary was ersatz coffee and a piece of dark bread in the morning, a very weak potato soup with a piece of dark bread with a little ersatz jam at noon, and a repeat of the noon meal in the evening. I was allowed to go down the hall to the bathroom once in the morning and once a night. This was not an automatic allowance as I had to ask for it each time. The room may have been 5 feet x 10 feet. The door was very thick with a small peep hole, or window, so the guard could look in but the hall was too dark for me to see anything from inside looking out. There was a small window, perhaps 15" x 12" which seemed to be shuttered and locked from the outside. It was open my first day or so, but then the rest of my 12 nights and 11 days it was closed. The bed consisted of a wooden frame with about five slats holding a flat, straw mattress - very thin, hard and uncomfortable. I remember buttoning the collar of my shirt tight at the neck to try to keep as warm as possible at night. There generally was no heat in the room. I discovered there were fleas in the room that caused the inside of my collar to be spotted with red from the bites.

“The second day I was there a guard came and took me to the office of the official interrogator, a very sharp appearing 1st Lieutenant with impeccable English with a distinct English accent. He tried to convince me that he needed more than my name, rank and serial number in order to convince the Gestapo that I really was simply a US Army pilot and not a spy to be turned over to the Gestapo. I told him I could not believe that because it was very clear, under the circumstances of my capture, what brought me to Germany. He sent me back to my cell “to think about it.” The next day I was taken down again to his office, and he tried again to get me to give more information. This time he said, “Do you think we don’t know you were leading the 49th Bomb Squadron of the 2nd Bomb Group, and that your CO is Major Richard Abbey and .....” correct on all counts! He obviously was trying to further confirm this information. Hoping not to make my surprise too obvious, I said if he though he knew all about me I didn’t know why he bothered with this interrogation. He got mad, yelled for the guard to take me back so I “could rot in my cell until I was ready to talk.” I believe it was the same day that I passed Dom leaving the latrine as I was going in and passed the comment that someone on our crew had talked.

“The food didn’t get any better and I was subjected to no further interrogation during the rest of my stay at Dulag Luft. On the 12th day of solitary confinement, my door burst open and the interrogator who had sent me back to rot in my cell came in with an implied surprise at finding me in solitary. He said he had just returned from leave and had left instructions for my release to go to prison camp.”

#### **GYOR, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 248 - AUGUST 9, 1944**

Twenty-four aircraft dropped 71.75 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Airdrome and Assembly Plant at Győr. Two runs were made on the target. Bombs of the First Wave were in the target area while bombs of the Second Wave fell to the left. Flak was moderate, accurate, and heavy. There were no losses and no casualties.

#### **SAVONA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 249 - AUGUST 12, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 79.5 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on German Gun Positions in the Savona area with good results. No flak, no enemy fighters.

**GENOA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 250 - AUGUST 13, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 84 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on Gun Positions in the Genoa area. Bombs were reported to have hit the assigned area. The Second Squadron made two runs over the target. Flak was slight to moderate lightly wounding one bombardier.

**TOULON, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 251 - AUGUST 14, 1944**

For the third consecutive day Gun Positions were attacked in preparation for the Allied landings in Southern France. Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 54 tons of 2,000-lb. GP bombs on gun positions in the Toulon area. Flak was moderate, heavy, and accurate. No losses, no injuries.

**ST. TROPEZ, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 252 - AUGUST 15, 1944**

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 23 aircraft and dropped 41.5 tons of bombs on Beach Head No. 201 in support of the invasion of Southern France. The bombing was done by PFF due to a heavy cloud cover and results were not observed. No flak, no fighters.

**ST. VALIER, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 253 - AUGUST 16, 1944**

Twenty-nine aircraft, each with a bomb load of two, 2,000-lb. GP bombs, dropped their bombs on the St. Valier Railroad Bridge. Crews reported a large concentration of hits around the bridge. There were no encounters with enemy aircraft.

**PLOESTI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 254 - AUGUST 19, 1944**

Twenty-five aircraft dropped 50 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Romano-American Oil Refinery at Ploesti. There was an ineffective smoke screen over the target. The target was reported to have been well covered with numerous fires seen. Flak over the target was heavy, moderate to intense, causing the loss of one B-17, #44-6275, 20th Squadron. This was the last of the Group's 13 missions against Ploesti.

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6275 - 20TH SQUADRON**

F/O	Robert H. Rogers, P,	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Howard I. Season, CP.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Albert E. Smith, N.	(RET)
1st Lt.	William E. Chalcraft, B.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Willis M. Church, U/T.	(RET)
Sgt.	Samuel C. Woods, L/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Charles J. Armstrong, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	John J. Bradley, L/W.	(DED)
S/Sgt.	Raymond C. Roe, T/G.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Owen E. Park, Jr., R/O.	(RET)

Joint statement of seven surviving crew members after rescue: "We are the crew members of B-17 #44-6275, which developed a fire in No. four engine (believed caused by flak) at approximately 1329 hours as we were returning to home base following the mission. This was at a spot about 75 miles from Trieste, Italy and around an altitude of 15,000 feet. The pilot put the plane in a steep dive in an effort to put out the fire, but to no avail. At about 12,000 feet, we noticed there was a big hole burned through the right wing. At that time we all bailed out; ten chutes opening. None of the crew was suffering from injuries. The aircraft hit the water and exploded. Three B-17s with red tails circled us and dropped dinghies (one man dinghies), which were in good condition except for one which had two small holes in it. A B-26 circled us and dropped a seven-man dinghy which had the Co2 bottles torn

from it when it was dropped. We tried to blow this dinghy up by mouth but were unable to complete the job as the PBY that picked us up came by at that time. Three of our crew members are still missing as yet: F/O Robert H. Rogers, pilot; 2nd Lt. Howard Season, co-pilot, and S/Sgt. John J. Bradley, left waist gunner. When we returned to the Italian mainland, a pilot of a PBY told us he had seen two bodies, face down, with parachutes attached, floating in the water and they would soon be picked up. These may be two of the three members of our crew.”

2nd Lt. Albert E. Smith, N. July 25, 1992: “We were shipped by boat from Norfolk, Virginia about mid-May 1944 to Oran, North Africa. After about a week we left, by boat, for Naples, Italy. After a railroad box car trip to Foggia, we were taken by truck to the 2nd Bomb Group camp. I will never forget the greeting when we signed in. “Boy are we glad to see you. We have been losing a lot of navigators lately.” True to their word, my first mission, on June 1, was with another crew to the Vienna area. Then for the next month or so, I would fly with my crew and then another crew. For awhile I had twice as many missions as my own crew. I flew with 13/14 other crews. Everyone of them was shot down before I was, except for the crew on my first mission. That was their last mission (50). Also I do not know about the crew I flew with on August 28, the day before I was shot down. I began to think of myself as a jinx. I was on my 37th mission and 25th time over the target when I was shot down in Czechoslovakia. This does not count the early returns caused by engine failure, and a trip to Linz, Austria for which the Group got no credit because of fouling up on the bombing run and dropping most of the bombs before we got to the target.

“I always said I would like to make a parachute jump but I sure picked a heck of a place to do it. On August 18, 1944, I flew with my co-pilot, Howard Season, with another crew. My pilot, Bill Bullock, and bombardier, John Quinn, flew in another ship. Our enlisted crew were all at rest camp. I kicked the night before because Howie and I couldn’t fly with Bill and Johnny but it didn’t do any good. The pilot I flew with (I don’t remember his name) was a former co-pilot, flying his first mission as a pilot.

“I didn’t feel so good flying and for the first time I got air sick on a combat mission. While in training as an Air Cadet, I had trouble with air sickness a few times. It was just before we started the bomb run. We picked up some flak but didn’t think we were hit very badly. We came off the target O.K. and started for home, and everything was O.K. when just about halfway across the Adriatic things happened in a hurry. I had been thinking, “Well another mission over. Every time I had been to Ploesti something always happened, but I guess this is going to be uneventful.

“All of a sudden I saw fire coming from our No. 4 (right outboard) engine. I yelled over the interphone and at the same time some of the men in the waist saw it. The pilot pulled away from the formation and put the plane in a dive trying to put the fire out. The fire was too well started though and it only made it worse. We thought, at first, we might have time to ditch but it was too dangerous as the ship might blow up at any minute. There was a huge hole in the wing where it had burned through, and other parts of the wing were beginning to melt. The pilot yelled, “Abandon ship” so out we tumbled. I was near the escape hatch, which is back of the navigator’s compartment. At these words, I yanked the emergency handle to knock the door pins out. As soon as I pulled it, the door flew out and immediately, I went out too. At that time we were a little above 7,000 feet altitude.

“I had a chest pack parachute. Right after I went out I pulled the ripcord, except nothing happened. I immediately looked at my chute and saw I had pulled the carrying handle instead of the ripcord. I then pulled the ripcord, which was beside the handle on the right side of the pack. The chute still didn’t open. Then I noticed I had my left arm across the top of my chute and the spring snaps couldn’t open. I removed my arm, hit the side of the chute with my hand and the chute opened. This sounds like a long time but all this happened in a matter of seconds. In retrospect, pulling on the strap instead of the ripcord may have saved my life. The bomb bay doors had been opened so the crew could

bail out. I did not think I was really clear of the plane when I pulled the carrying handle. If it had been the ripcord, the chute may well have caught on the bomb bay doors or some other part of the plane and taken me down with it.

“While floating down, I noticed, for an instant, the plane going down with the whole right wing burning fiercely. Later, some of the other fellows said the wing fell off before the ship hit the water. It exploded when it hit. I saw it just before it hit and smoke right afterwards, but I didn’t see it hit the sea. When we thought we might have to bail out, I had removed my heavy flying boots, and it is a good thing that I did. While swinging downward, I was unbuttoning a couple of buttons on my coverall legs and taking off my shoes and socks (I only got one sock off before I hit). Just before I hit the water I tried to loosen my chute leg straps (unbuckle them) but my struggling with my shoes had sort of tightened them up and I couldn’t loosen them.

“When I hit, I was floating backwards in the chute. I didn’t get my chute turned so I could drift facing forward, as we had been told in the minimum training we received on this. I also did not get both leg straps and chest strap unbuckled so I could slide out of the harness just as I hit the water, according to standard procedure. I think landing backwards helped save my life. My feet hit the water and I fell backwards. I unfastened my left leg strap because my right one was still tight. I then unfastened my chest strap. This loosened my right leg and I unbuckled it in a hurry. The wind was strong enough to billow up part of my chute and blew me along the water all this time. If I had been facing forward, I could have been pulled along the water face down and probably drowned. All crew members got out of the plane but three evidently drowned after they hit the water, before or after they got out of their chutes. They were my pilot, my co-pilot Howard Season, and a waist gunner. I understand two bodies were seen floating in their chutes and a boat was to go out and pick up the bodies. I never had confirmation of this or which crew members they were.

“When I got out of my harness I pulled the cords of my Mae West life jacket to inflate it and it didn’t work! Boy, that scared me! Here I had all my heavy flying clothes on me and nothing to hold me up. I immediately loosened the strap that held the Mae West on me so I could get out of my clothes. I guess I blew it up a little by mouth before this; I don’t remember. I found out that the valves on my life jacket were open, rather than closed, when I pulled the cords to inflate it. So, all the air immediately went out. When I realized this, I blew it up partially by mouth and twisted the valves shut. I struggled out of the heavy flying jacket I had on and started on my coveralls. All this time I was swallowing half the sea and was underwater two thirds of the time. I jerked and struggled and finally, after half drowning, got my coveralls, electric suit and suntan uniform off, together with my gun. When I had all this on and it was pulling me under, I really thought I was going to drown, but I gasped for air when I could. Half the time I gasped for air a wave would come along and I’d get a mouthful of sea water.

“After I stripped down to my undershorts, I tried to blow up my Mae West more and sort of regained my breath. In retrospect, I should have left my suntan uniform on for sun protection, but since I had so little flotation from the life jacket, I was desperate to get rid of all possible weight. All this time, three B-17s of the Group that followed us, were circling the area. They called the Air-Sea-Rescue who got a “fix” on them. They continued to circle and dropped a couple of one-man life rafts. We had a couple of these one-man rafts in the waist of the plane but the waist gunners didn’t think to grab them. These rafts fell pretty far from me. In the meantime I had ripped open the packet of sea marker on my Mae West and that turned the sea a yellowish green for yards around. This helps locate you. I would drift out of it but it wasn’t hard to keep in it.

“After awhile I heard some yelling and I yelled back. Then I saw a raft with one fellow in it and one hanging to the side. The raft was one the Fort dropped. I finally got over to them and by then I was pretty well pooped, as I hardly had breath to completely blow up my Mae West. After I got to the raft and hung on a minute, I felt a lot better. We switched around so that every man could lie in the raft

while the other two hung on. With the kit that contained the raft was also a can of sea marker, two hand paddles, a can of drinking water and some wooden plugs to stop leaks in the raft. As the raft had two holes in it, we used the latter. Still we had to blow up the raft, by mouth, every five minutes or so.

“All this time the Forts were circling us, but soon they had to pull off and head for base, as they were getting low on gas. Soon after they left, however, a B-25 came out and started circling us. He dropped a large life raft, supplies and a lot of stuff. We saw the raft quite a ways away and started toward it. All the stuff sank, or at least we couldn't see it.

“While we were struggling toward the large raft, we saw a PBY Catalina, Air-Sea-Rescue amphibian airplane circling and dropping a smoke bomb. While it was going around to land, I reached the large life raft, turned it right side up and searched for the Co2 cylinder. It had been jerked out and was gone. It was a sad feeling because although we saw the Cat above us, we weren't too sure he saw us or when he would pick us up.

“I blew the two seats up partially and started on the rest of it when the Cat landed not a hundred feet from us. They tossed us some ropes and pulled us to the ship. They pulled us on board, gave us towels to wipe dry and blankets to wrap around us. The rescue squad used a knife to puncture the life raft compartments so it would sink. Another Cat picked up the other crew members. After we took off, we flew around another three hours looking for a fighter pilot who had gone down, but we evidently never found him. There were bunks on the Cat and the four of us who were picked up, slept most of the time. The fourth man was evidently alone in the water. He was not with the three of us in the one-man raft.

“When we got back to Foggia Main airfield, about 6:30, we had to practically land in a lake. They had a terrible rain here and everything was flooded, including the runway. We got out and got in an ambulance, which brought us to the hospital. To get there we came through water up to the hubcaps. When we got to the hospital, they filled out some forms and put us in a ward for observation for 24 hours or so.

“The Cat that picked us up picked up the bombardier, ball turret gunner, and one waist gunner. Another Cat landed a little ways off and picked up the engineer, radio operator, and tail gunner. It also found two bodies that it left for a launch, that was coming out to pick up.

“In the hospital I saw the other three. The tail gunner said he was the last out of the waist, and the engineer said he was the last out of the nose, so everybody got out of the ship. The two bodies that were found had their chutes attached. They must have been knocked unconscious or else tangled up in their harness and drowned.

“We don't know what made the fire break out. It happened in an instant. We thought a piece of flak might have hit the gas tanks and the gas finally dripped down to the super chargers and ignited. When I got back to my Squadron, I heard later that it might have been one of our own planes that shot us down. It was a normal procedure that once you hit the coast of Yugoslavia, on the way home, that all machine guns would be torn down and cleaned. I heard that a burst of fire from the plane behind on the right went into our outboard engine and set us on fire. If this is so, it must have been when they were tearing down the guns for cleaning.

“We went down at 1:30 p.m. and were picked up at 3:30 p.m. The water was pretty warm and that is what saved us. If it had been cold we might not have been here. As it was I got pretty chilled at one time.

“On the morning of August 18, at the hospital, the Army Public Relations people, or whatever they were called at that time, had the seven of us that were picked up, the B-25 pilot who circled us and a cameraman he carried, and the pilots of the Cats assemble for a newsreel release. They had our radio man tell what happened to us. The B-25 cameraman had taken movies and photos the day before while we were in the water. It was an Army take for release to the Movietone Newsreel Company. However, I never saw it nor heard of anyone who did.”

## **OSWIECIM, POLAND - MISSION NO. 255 - AUGUST 20, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 24 dropped 60 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Synthetic Oil and Rubber Works in this city. There was an effective smoke screen over the target but the bombs were reported in the smoke covered area. Results were not known. Flak was moderate to fair, good, and heavy. B-17 #42-102908 was lagging and the formation slowed in order for it to catch up. It continued to lag and two Me-109s were reported to be attacking it and finally it passed out of sight.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-102908 - "SILVER STREAK" - 96TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Robert N. Lambert, 0-816238, P.	(POW)
1st Lt.	Don M. Facer, 0-819887, CP.	(POW)
1st Lt.	Kenneth D. Erickson, 0-713513, N.	(POW)
1st Lt.	Thomas M. Wilson, 0-762856, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	James I. Lang, 35698179, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	James R. Kirk, 36580844, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Raymond E. Flood, 38143475, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Charles Robinson, 32797174, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Charles Nargiso, Jr., 32786873, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Robert T. Larson, 36650627, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 1st Lt. Don M. Facer, CP, after liberation: "We left the formation about 10 minutes from the target. We all bailed out successfully about 30 miles from Budapest, Hungary. I have no knowledge of the others, on how leaving the plane, only that they went out the bomb bay or waist door. All members were in good health when last seen. Lt. Lambert broke his ankle when he struck the ground but he was mended and walking normally when last seen. Lt. Erickson had a flak wound in the thigh but it had also healed when last seen. All the others were in good health but mighty hungry at times."

T/Sgt. James I. Lang, Flight Engineer. July 22, 1992: "We made our bomb run, dropped our bombs, and were leaving the target. Just as we were turning off, No. 2 engine was hit by flak and feathered. We pulled out of the formation to get out of the way of everyone. I think Lt. Lambert could better tell what happened next as he called for a heading from the navigator to cut short our assembly point after heading for home. I went to the front and rear of the plane to assess damage for Lt. Lambert. Knowing there was a long haul ahead to get back, we had thoughts of getting rid of weight later on.

"About 30 minutes later, three FW-190s were spotted at 9:00 o'clock level, about 1,000 yards out. They followed us for awhile. I think we were over Czechoslovakia at the time. They stayed out for a few minutes to plan an attack or see if our fighters, we had called for, had located us. Then they came in, one at a time, one right behind the other, in single file, to about 50 to 100 yards and broke

away at rear, and down. Half of the time my guns could not fire because of the cut-off switch on the turret. They knew what they were doing by staying at 7:00 o'clock level. During the attack, a cannon shell ripped a hole about one and one-half foot wide up the back of No. 3 engine, knocking No. 3 out completely. That must have been when Lt. Erickson was hit in the back of the knee area. The fighters made only one pass.

Most of us, that saw the planes, agree that they were FW-190s. After they left, Lt. Lambert asked for a check on all men, and the plane's condition. I first went to the nose because of the report that Lt. Erickson was hurt, then to the rest of the plane, clear to the tail to check on Sgt. Nargiso. He reported he was hit from cannon fragments. He showed me his back, and his flying jacket was full of small holes. It looked like moths had been in it. He wasn't in any real danger, so I left him at his guns.

"In reporting to Lt. Lambert, he said he was having trouble with the controls. I told him that all the fibering was gone off the rudder, elevator, and aileron controls. We asked if we should start throwing out weight, and Lt. Lambert said no. He could not control the plane, we were losing power and prepare to jump. When we left the plane we were on the border of Czechoslovakia and Hungary. We landed near Balassagyarmet, Hungary.

"Glad to hear Sgt. Popp say that he saw #908 crash land in a field. Always wondered what happened to a fine plane. After reading Sgt. Higgen's report, it seemed to me that the plane he watched, off the target, was not our plane. Lt. Lambert's statement is correct, down to the last sighting of the enlisted men. The party on the ground was not what you would write home about! Lt. Facer mentioned Lt. Lambert's ankle on landing, after bailing out. His ankle was also hurt in the States on leaving for overseas. He got on the plane, to fly to Europe, on crutches because he said, "It's my crew and we go together."

"Some of our crew kept in contact after the war, especially Lambert, Larson, Facer, Kirk, Waring, and myself. Lost contact with Torske, Harris, Flood, and Robinson. I saw Lt. Facer at



T/R-L/R - W. Torske, D. Facer, R. Lambert, Harris  
B/R-L/R - Waring, J. Lang, C. Nargiso, J. Kirk, R. Larson  
Front - C Robinson (Courtesy - James Lang)



Captain Hofmann (\*), Major Bedgood, Captain Merritt, L. Johnson  
(\* ) KIA - Italian Front (Group Photo)

LaHavre, France on my way home. Saw Lt. Torske at LaHavre in a chow line. Last time I was with Torske he was in a hospital in Foggia, Italy as late as August, 1944. After getting out of the hospital, recovering from wounds over Vienna, Austria, Torske returned to duty later. In December 1944, he was shot down over Linz, Austria. Lt. Torske was our bombardier from State side until he was wounded and replaced by Lt. Wilson.”

#### **ODERTAL, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 256 - AUGUST 22, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off, led by Lt. Col. John Ryan, and 27 dropped 580, 200-lb. GP bombs on the Oil Refinery at Odertal. Bombs were believed in the target area. A partially effective smoke screen obscured results. One plane bombed Marshalling Yards at 52-23N - 17-40E. Some bombs were reported to have hit in the Yards. Flak at the primary target was heavy, intense and accurate. T/Sgt. C.C. Popp, 429th Squadron, was slightly wounded.

Four to eight Me-109s and FW-190s were encountered at 47-10N - 17-10E. A joint claim of one FW-190 was given to T/Sgt. Howard E. Ferro and S/Sgt. Charles H. Hill, both of the 96th Squadron. A joint claim for the probable destruction of one Me-109 went to T/Sgt. Austin S. Knighton and S/Sgt. Joseph E. Karel, both of the 96th Squadron. The claim of probable damage of one FW-190 went to S/Sgt. John A. Lamb, also of the 96th Squadron.

B-17s #44-8103 and #42-38069 of the 96th Squadron are missing. Both aircraft were believed hit by flak, lagged behind the formation, and were shot down by enemy fighters.

## **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-8103 - 96TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt.	Kay R. Cutler, 0-763962, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	George M. Welde, 0-714801, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Fredric M. Rosemore, 0-723172, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Donald L. Stillman, 0-762831, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	William B. Richmond, 13048090, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	John (NMI) DeSoto, Jr., 38440127, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Howard C. Hannah, 11052257, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Gerald L. Kinchloe, 37564611, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Raymond J. Morton, 34813265, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Joseph E. Greskamp, 36716688, R/O.	(POW)

A German report recorded the capture of this crew. Lts. Cutler, Welde, and Stillman were transferred to Stalag Luft III. Sgts. Richmond, Greskamp, and Hannah were transferred to Stalag Luft IV. Lt. Rosemore and Sgts. DeSoto, Morton, and Kinchloe were hospitalized due to injuries suffered in the downing of their aircraft.

1st Lt. Donald L. Stillman, Bombardier. April 19, 1992: "I flew the majority of my missions with Roger, by count, 18 of the 23 sorties I flew before being shot down. My first mission was the Marshalling Yards at Parma, Italy on June 21, 1944. We got three flak holes in the nose and two in the top turret. The 49th lost a ship. The next day we went to Ploesti and I found out what heavy flak was! We were attacked by five enemy fighters and a piece of flak jammed our bomb bay doors open but we made a good landing with the doors open.

"Things really got tough on July 7, 1944. We went to bomb Oil Refineries at Blechhammer, Germany. We were attacked by 20 to 25 Me-109s and five were claimed by our gunners, but we lost four B-17s and one P-51. We went to Ploesti again on July 9th and 15th. Flak had not diminished a bit! We picked up some holes but did not have any losses.

"July 16th we went to Vienna, Austria. I was nicked on the finger by a piece of flak. The flak was intense and we had over 100 holes in our aircraft. The Group lost two B-17s.

"July 18th we flew a long range mission to bomb an Airdrome at Memmingen, Germany. We came home with four minutes of fuel remaining, having tossed out everything not nailed down, to lighten our aircraft. We heard that the 429th lost a ship that couldn't make it back to base so they went to Switzerland. Also heard that most of the crew were on their 49th or 50th mission. What a break!

"July 21st we aborted a mission to Brux, Czechoslovakia and the wheels came up on landing. The chin turret was pushed in, ball turret crushed, and all props were bent. The Group lost two aircraft. July 26th we went to Wiener Neudorf, Austria, ten miles south of Vienna. Target was an Aircraft Factory. We did a 360 degrees over the target at 27,000 feet. The flak was heavy, intense and accurate. We had several wounded.

"July 28th our target was the Standard-Astra Oil Refinery at Ploesti. The flak was heavy, intense and accurate, and we picked up six holes. Smoke from the bombing was up to 16,000 feet and could be seen from a distance of 225 miles. August 3rd we were off to Friedrichshafen, Germany. It was reported that this place was making fuel for jets and buzz bombs. The 429th lost another plane that landed in Switzerland.

"We went back to Blechhammer on August 7th. Target was the South Synthetic Oil Refineries. Smoke from the bombing rose to 10,000 feet. The 49th lost a B-17.

"August 22nd was the fateful day for me. I had been to rest camp on the Isle of Capri and two days later was tagged to go on a mission to bomb the Oil Refineries at Odertal, Germany. I was assigned to the crew of 2nd Lt. Kay R. Cutler as a fill-in for his regular bombardier. He was in the hospital with a face full of plexiglass from the mission on the day before. We were flying #44-8103.

We lost No. 2 engine to flak over the target, fell behind the Group and were jumped by four Me-109s. The plane went down near Gelse, Hungary. Our crew claimed one Me-109 destroyed. I bailed out at 16,000 feet and was captured. I was eventually imprisoned at Stalag Luft III. All the crew parachuted safely; some with serious injuries, but imprisoned. Ironically, my own crew went on to finish their missions and they arrived in New York the day after my folks learned that I was a POW. They also learned in the letter from General Twining, telling of my being Missing In Action. This also happened to be my 42nd mission.

“The nine months I spent as a guest of the Third Reich was an entirely different experience. Like many persons, I probably felt that my six visits to Ploesti were the most meaningful as far as making a real contribution to the war effort. They certainly ranked at the top of the “Fright Meter” with everyone I knew.

“My own crew was a very tight knit group. I am the only officer still alive along with the tail gunner and two waist gunners. We have visited each other many times and communicate frequently. (Note: Donald Stillman was the original Bombardier on the crew of Roger C. Thompson.)

2nd Lt. Fredric M. Rosemore, Navigator on B-17 #44-8103. March 23, 1992: “We had been in the same general area on the 20th and were badly shot up. Our regular bombardier, F/O Dave Eiseman, had facial wounds with plexiglass and Lt. Stillman was his substitute. On the 20th we barely made it back. On our final approach to “Darn Thing” we had a windmilling prop and the entire engine fell off the airplane.

“The day we were shot down we were hit by fighters on the way to the target and sustained only slight damage. Over the target we were severely damaged by flak. One engine was knocked out and another so badly damaged that it was windmilling. We could not maintain altitude nor keep up with the Group. In order to keep sufficient altitude to get over the mountains, we had to lighten the plane, as we had done so many times before. This meant jettisoning everything; ball turret, 50 cal. waist guns, etc. We saved very little ammo. We thought once again that we could make it back to Italy and our airport, “Darn Thing.”

“We made it back to southern Hungary and were jumped by four German fighters. From out of nowhere a lone P-51 came to our rescue. He shot down a German fighter and then he was shot down by the remaining German planes. Our top turret gunner, “Wink” Richmond, shot down one of the German fighters. Our ammo was now gone. We flew for about five minutes, which seemed like an eternity, taking all the punishment dealt out by the fighter planes. When flames started along the wing, our pilot rang the bell to bail out. We were all badly shot up, and with great effort we left the aircraft. We all parachuted safely, were captured, and imprisoned in prison camps in Germany.

“In 1991, five of us met, after 47 years, at the 2nd Bomb Group reunion in Dayton, Ohio. What a special event!”

S/Sgt. Howard C. Hannah, RW on #44-8103. March 26, 1992: “We were hit over the target by flak and lost an engine. We were later hit by fighters and our plane was badly shot up and went down.

“On the way back we were losing altitude badly and needed to lighten the load to get over the mountains. Lt. Cutler told us to throw everything out except the top turret and tail guns and hold a small amount of ammo. I had gotten rid of half of my ammo but was going to save my gun. While I was helping get rid of the ball turret, I saw one of the other gunners get rid of my gun.

“We were being attacked by fighters and I was looking to see which way one plane was coming so I could hide behind my armor plate. That worked on most passes. That was because they came in from the side and tail. I think it was a 20mm that got me. I only got some stuff in my right arm. I thought it had gone in and out but a later x-ray showed a lot of little specks. I had two specks taken out at different times after the war.

“I thought it was a 109 that made the first pass that got Morton and a second engine. Then I thought they made three more passes. Then they made one more pass as Morton was by the tail wheel. The wheel must have saved him as holes were going all around him. On one pass I saw Greskamp go down like he was done for. He said when he got hit he passed out. I believe the reason that three of the crew were hit was because they were on the left side of the armor plate. When one of them asked if I was going to use my flak vest, I said no because I thought we would have to jump. I didn’t want it to get in my way. I guess that the flak vests did save the lives of Morton, Greskamp, DeSoto, and Kinchloe.

“I do not remember DeSoto and Kinchloe getting out. I checked on Morton as he had blood on his face. I asked him if he could get out and he said, “Yes.” I was surprised to see Greskamp get up and run to the door. I just missed a plane as I jumped out. My chute opened and he went right under me. A P-51 was on his tail and it could be that Richmond was also shooting at him. He blew up right off our right wing.

“I could only count seven chutes while in the air. I thought Richmond and the pilots were going to try to make it back to base, but then I saw the plane go down. After I hit the ground, a guy punched me and said, “Russian?” The whole town was there. I asked a farmer to hide me - he thought that was a joke. He said the soldiers would come for me. Two did, on bicycles, and then they got a wagon and a kid to drive it. After awhile we picked up DeSoto who was hurt quite badly. A German Doc came to the wagon to check him. He was not out of it and was talking to me. They took me to a hospital but I don’t remember if DeSoto was taken there but I thought he must have been. They showed me a fellow from another plane that was in bad shape. His whole face was black and blue. I understand it was from a beating. They gave me a tetanus shot in the chest there and then Greskamp, Stillman, and I were sent to a Hungarian Cadet Base.

“They kept us there for a few days. They had a Polish doctor take care of us there. Then we were taken to Budapest where we were put in cells, one to a cell. It was a week before they talked to us. The jail looked like Sing Sing and was loaded with bugs. Whenever they got done interrogating 25 gunners, they would ship you out to a POW camp.

“It took about four or five days to get to the prison camp. We had nine or ten guards and one could talk to us in English. He said that two of the guards were fighter pilots that had been hurt in plane crashes.

“Life at Stalag Luft IV was not too bad. Not enough food. Around February 4th or 5th, we were moved out. While we got some bread and part of a Red Cross package, we got no other food from the Germans for another week, in the group that I was in. For the first week it was more of a case of staggering than marching. Guys were passing out in great numbers and Dr. Leslie Caplan was trying to take care of them. I was in the group column “C” that ended up at Altengrabow.

“At Altengrabow I came down with a very bad case of dysentery. I didn’t want to go on sick call as no one seemed to return from sick call. Richmond said I didn’t have a choice. I was taken to the horse stable (dispensary) where I was given charcoal pills. These pills did the job. While I was in the dispensary, the rest of column “C” was moved out. There were about 50 Americans and British remaining in the dispensary and we were left behind. About 20 of the ones that had been moved out tried to escape and were caught and returned to Altengrabow. Then the Germans captured a bridgehead over the river north of Magdeburg and moved another 150, or so, G.I.s in. Some of these were injured by American shells.

“The French doctor that was taking care of us told us that the Germans had moved about 500 Jewish women in from Hungary. This was about two weeks before the war was over. The German guards wanted to get them to a gas chamber but a German doctor, and other doctors, were trying to save them. What happened to them I do not know.

“About a week before we were released, some American OSS bailed out into our camp to take it over. The German officers turned the camp over to the highest ranking Allied officer who was a Russian Colonel. It made no difference to us. We spent most of the time fighting body lice, which we got on the way to this camp.

“A few days later, American trucks came into camp and took the Americans and English out. Each truck had two German guards in it and when we arrived in the American lines, these guards turned themselves in.

“As a final word - to me, some of the great men of the war were the section leaders in those camps and above all was Doctor Leslie Caplan.”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-38069 - “BIG TWIDGET” - 96TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Charles M. Duncan, 0-758321, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Harold (NMI) Bogie, 0-819746, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Merle A. Clark, 0-712999, N.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Robert P. Cazier, 38438747, TOG.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Warren V. Van Denplas, Jr., 32740444, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Regino Rodriguez, Jr., 34546205, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Samuel P. Wentzel, Jr., 33618113, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Teddy V. Tomasik, 32824296, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Charles W. Willett, 34669724, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Joseph Levine, 32020046, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 1st Lt. Charles M. Duncan, P, after liberation: “Nine of the crew bailed out. Lt. Bogie and Lt. Clark went out the nose hatch. T/Sgt. Van Denplas, T/Sgt. Levine, S/Sgt. Rodriguez, and S/Sgt. Wentzel went out the escape hatch in the rear of the plane. I went out the bomb bay. T/Sgt. Cazier bailed out in the general area of Savar, Hungary. I saw him last at a prison camp at Budapest. He left for prison camp in northeast Germany with Sgts. Rodriguez, Van Denplas, and Levine. These men could possibly give you some information about him. I have had no word from him, or his family, since liberation. I supposed he was liberated and was home.

“S/Sgt. Tomasik bailed out about ten miles from Savar, Hungary. T/Sgt. Van Denplas helped him out of the plane. Civilians that picked up other enlisted men showed them his ration card and seemed to be trying to tell them his chute did not open.

“S/Sgt. Willett was killed instantly by a direct hit in the tail. This information came from T/Sgt. Van Denplas.”

T/Sgt. William A. Parsons was the radio operator on the crew of Lt. Lester Brasfield, 96th Squadron. August 14, 1992: “My combat tour of duty started on May 14, 1944 and lasted until September 8, 1944. Lt. Brasfield finished his missions before I did. Captain Hal Wallet was a superb pilot that got me through my final missions. The performance of Les was perfect, he did not shun the tough missions, but insisted that the airplane be capable of formation flying. On the occasion that the plane was not in combat condition, he would abort the mission because if a defective plane was in the Group, it would be targeted for extinction by enemy fighters. The final score for our crew was: Our bombardier was shot down by fighters over Blechhammer while flying with another crew and survived as a POW. A waist gunner was killed by flak while flying with another crew. Our tail gunner was sprayed by flak and lost an eye while flying with another crew, and seven of us got round trips.

“Greater Silesia lay along the border between Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Germany established many synthetic oil refineries in the area to process coal into liquid fuels to support their war

effort. It lay south of Breslau (now Wroclaw) and was an out of range, safe haven for fighter bases that could contribute to the defense of Berlin from raids by the 8th Air Force.

“The assignment to attack the synthetic oil industry, in Silesia, was given to the 15th Air Force. These missions involved climbing to oxygen mask levels immediately after mustering so as to get safely over the Austrian Alps. This was followed by a cold, medium range trip to targets which involved perilous exposure to enemy fighters in addition to the tremendous flak batteries around the targets. Because of the high altitude conditions, support by bomber escort fighters was thin, particularly in the distant target areas, and on the return trip German fighters stationed in Austria would frequently intercept returning bomber formations so as to harvest any stragglers from the formations. There was little prospect for wounded bombers to escape by using the tactic of “hitting the deck” because they needed the altitude to get over the Austrian Alps that blocked the route to Italy. Such was the Group’s Mission No. 256, to Odertal, Germany on August 22, 1944.

“Odertal is difficult to locate on the map these days because it lies in the area that was ceded to Poland, by Germany, after the war. The Polish renamed the towns and so Odertal disappeared in the Polish garble. I believe that Odertal was located about 25 miles south of the present Polish city of Opole. The mission was a long haul for B-17s and definitely in the area that was not my favorite place to go.

“The orderly came at 3:00 a.m. enthusiastically blowing his police whistle. The enlisted crew tumbled out, dressed, then went to the mess hall for an unappetizing breakfast; greenish powdered eggs, slimy-lumpy oatmeal, chip beef and white gravy over toast, etc. After breakfast the crew collected their personal carry-on items for the mission (pistol, knife, pictures, favorite hat, etc.). The mechanical crew boarded the trucks to take them to the flight line to pre-flight the plane and the radio man walked to Headquarters for the mission briefing.

“The briefing officer informed us that the target of the day was a synthetic oil plant at Odertal, Germany in the Silesia area. The bomb load was 250-lb. demolition bombs.

“Following the briefing, we radio men picked up a few packets of propaganda leaflets that were supplied by a British Sergeant stationed in the tent in front of Headquarters. The briefed crews boarded trucks going to the flight line where they joined the mechanical crews. Our assigned plane was a silvery beauty that had just been flown from the States.

“We boarded the plane and the engines started at about 7:00 a.m. The bombers crawled onto the taxi strip and lined up for take-off. At the signal for take-off, the engines were pushed to full throttle and the bomb laden, gas laden bombers, shuddered, shook, moaned and groaned as they rolled down the runway in their struggle to get airborne. It was always a tense moment for the flight crews because an engine malfunction could result in a spectacular event at the end of the runway.

“Once airborne, the planes went over the Adriatic for mustering into formation. After mustering, the Group turned north and proceeded to climb to get over the Austrian Alps. When reaching 8,000 feet, the formation spread and the gunners test fired their guns with short bursts. Shortly thereafter, the flight engineer came back to remove the safety pins from the bombs, and removed the lanyards that stabilized walks across the catwalk in the bomb bay. Soon thereafter, the navigator called on the intercom and advised us that the plane had reached 10,000 feet and the crew was to put on their oxygen masks.

“The bombers reached the target area after a long, cold trip. The Group lined up for the bomb run and headed for a black cloud of flak bursts. Over the target the flak was intense and accurate. As we came out of the barrage, two planes in our Squadron had to feather damaged engines. The damaged planes struggled to keep up with the formation but tended to fall behind. One of the wounded birds elected to leave the formation and try to return to base solo. Later, it was intercepted by fighters and went down.

“As the formation approached the foothills to the Alps, the remaining straggler was about 1,200 yards behind the formation, trying valiantly to keep up on three engines. Four Me-109s appeared and circled the formation. After inspection, they apparently concluded that there was no other easy prey, so they assembled and attacked the straggler. I watched eagerly, expecting to witness a bomber fight for its life! To my astonishment, parachutes commenced to pour out of the bomber. I counted seven but there were probably more because the fighters seemed to be satisfied that it was a complete evacuation.

“The fighters made a fake pass at the straggler without firing. Three of the fighters peeled off and one commenced a sudden pass at the formation. When the fighter came in range, the gunners of the formation responded with a thunderous barrage of heavy machine gun fire. The fighter was caught in a cone of fire that caused immediate disintegration of the plane, pieces of the plane flying off into the slipstream.

“The pilot opened his canopy and attempted a roll-over and dive-out, but he merely slumped over the side as the gunners continued to fire. There was no parachute; the pilot most certainly had no use for one. The straggler bomber, #069, which we had ferried overseas, flew into the horizon on automatic pilot.

“As we approached the Adriatic, pilot Brasfield called Knighton, the flight engineer, and asked him to check that the Tokyo tanks had been completely transferred to the main tanks. Brasfield expressed concern that his gas readings were uncomfortable since we were over 300 miles from the base. Knighton reported that the transfer of gasoline was complete.

“Shortly thereafter, Brasfield called our crew and ordered us to throw overboard any loose objects on board, stating that he considered the gas situation to be critical. Items such as ammunition and flak jackets were jettisoned. Ward, a waist gunner, called Brasfield and asked if the ball turret should be dropped. Brasfield replied, “Yes.” Ward borrowed Knighton’s pliers and proceeded to remove the bolts holding the ball turret. The ball turret dropped and a roar of air blew into the waist of the bomber. The dropping of the ball relieved the bomber of about 1,000 pounds of weight.

“We arrived at base with barely enough gas to taxi us to the parking stall. At 8 hours and 45 minutes, this was the third longest mission on my Flight Log.

“The mission was another outstanding performance by our pilot, Brasfield. He alertly monitored the status of the plane and courageously implemented counter-measures early enough in the flight to keep the crew from getting a bath in the Adriatic.”

#### **WIENER NEUDORF, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 257 - AUGUST 23, 1944**

Twenty-seven aircraft took off under the command of Lt. Col. J. S. Cunningham, CO, 429th Squadron, and 22 aircraft dropped 250, 500-lb. M76 bombs on the Engine Factory in this city. A 7/10 cloud cover, and smoke, prevented observation of results although the bombs were believed in the target area. One B-17 dropped its bombs on Marshalling Yards at Nagyanuzsa, Austria and four were early returns. Flak was heavy, moderate and accurate resulting in injury to S/Sgt. C. Keaton, LT, 49th Squadron.

#### **PARDUBICE, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 258 - AUGUST 24, 1944**

Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 51.3 tons of 100-lb. GP bombs on the Airdrome and Installations at Pardubice. Two runs were made over the target. No flak was encountered. Three enemy A/C attacked the third Squadron as it made a second run over the target. T/Sgt. M. J. Cotton, UT, 49th Squadron, was seriously wounded, and S/Sgt. E. E. Sellers, TG, 49th Squadron was slightly wounded.

Four gunners of the 49th Squadron received a joint claim for the destruction of one FW-190. They were: S/Sgt. C. E. Keaton, S/Sgt. Lloyd C. Miller, S/Sgt. Robert J. Capper, and S/Sgt. George J. Radje.

#### **BRNO, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 259 - AUGUST 25, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 25 aircraft bombed the Brno/Lisen Aircraft Factory at Brno. One aircraft bombed a town at 47-28N - 19-30R and two others were early returns. A total of 75 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs were dropped on the respective targets. A good concentration of hits on the primary target were reported, some over. Flak at the primary was heavy, slight and inaccurate.

#### **VENZONE, ITALY - MISSION NO. 260 - AUGUST 26, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 27 aircraft dropped 81 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Viaduct and Bridge at Venzone. The bomb pattern covered both Viaduct and Bridge in the target area. No flak, no fighters.

#### **BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 261 - AUGUST 27, 1944**

Major Richard Abbey, CO 49th Squadron, led 27 aircraft and dropped 78 tons of 500-lb. bombs on the North Oil Plant at Blechhammer. The target area was covered with some bombs to the right of the target. Flak was intense, heavy, and accurate resulting in serious injury to S/Sgt. John C. Dempsey, R/G; S/Sgt. Merrill C. Hicks, Jr., L/T; T/Sgt. J. L. White, T/G; and 2nd Lt. G. T. Georges, B., all from the 96th Squadron.

#### **MOOSBIERBAUM, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 262 - AUGUST 28, 1944**

Twenty-five aircraft dropped 73.5 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery. A good pattern was reported in the target area. Flak was heavy, moderate, and accurate resulting in injury to three men of the 49th Squadron: S/Sgt. Elmer Barfield, Jr., R/W; Sgt. J. J. Hudson, R/O; and 2nd Lt. W. J. Wittlinger, CP. T/Sgt. Marino P. Malatesta, U/T, 429th Squadron, died of a heart attack.

#### **MORAVSKA OSTRAVA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 263 - AUGUST 29, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 18 dropped 26.5 tons of 300-lb. GP bombs and 22.875 tons of 250-lb. GP bombs on the Privoser Oil Refinery. Bombing was by PFF and the area was reported well covered. One aircraft, #161, jettisoned 20, 300-lb. GP bombs at 42-19N - 10-30E due to inoperative bomb racks damaged by flak over the primary target. Flak was heavy, slight, and inaccurate causing slight damage to only two B-17s.

It was a disastrous day for the Group, losing nine B-17s on the way to the target. It was the second greatest, one day, aircraft loss for the Group but one with the greatest loss of life. Forty of the young men, out of a total of 90 shot down, lost their lives on the mission. Fifty to 70 Me-109s and FW-190s attacked the formation starting at approximately 1041 hours and continuing to approximately 1100 hours in the vicinity of the I.P. This action resulted in the loss of all seven planes of the 20th Squadron, one from the 49th Squadron, and the ninth from the 429th Squadron.

The enemy was extremely aggressive, making numerous passes, coming through the formation firing rockets, then 20mm cannons and machine guns. Attacks were made in line, four to ten abreast, staggered up. It was reported that the E/A, while in the distance before forming for the attack, assumed the position usually flown by the P-51 escort, which led the gunners to believe they were the friendly escort.

In addition to the losses, S/Sgt. John A. Lamb, T/G 96th Squadron, was seriously wounded by 20mm gunfire and Sgt. Gilmer Hawkins, T/G 429th Squadron, was slightly wounded by 20mm gunfire. Fortress gunners making claims were: Each credited with destruction of a Me-109 were Sgt. M. S. Leppo, LT, and S/Sgt. A. J. Webber, RW, of the 429th Squadron; credited with destruction of a FW-190 was T/Sgt. John C. Speight, RW, 96th Squadron; each credited with possible destruction of a Me-109 were T/Sgt. Ruben A. Felix, UT, 96th Squadron, and Sgt. Gilmer Hawkins, LW, 429th Squadron; a joint claim of a Me-109 went to Sgt. Raymond C. Kuhrt, LW, and S/Sgt. Vincente J. Martinez (MIA),

LT, 429th Squadron; credited with damage to a Me-109 was S/Sgt. Z. A. McKool, LT, 429th squadron; each credited with damage to a FW-190 were S/Sgt. Thomas E. Dingler, RW, 49th Squadron, and S/Sgt. Thane S. Garrison, LW, 96th Squadron.

In addition to the losses of the 2nd Bomb Group, a B-24 from the 737th Squadron, 454th Bomb Group, had straggled far behind its Group and had sought protection with the 2nd. It was also shot down resulting in the death of one man and capture of nine others.

In the final analysis of losses for the 2nd: Nine B-17s were lost, 40 crewmen were killed, 46 crewmen were captured, and four crewmen evaded capture.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31885 - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Merrill A. Prentice, 0-664239, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Theo (NMI) Heath, 0-812259, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Charles H. McVey, 0-722926, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Robert A. Laux, 0-694467, B.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Herbert S. Goldstein, 32535166, U/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Frank J. Balcerzak, 35229450, L/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Leroy E. Johnson, 37658774, R/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Claude A. Petrey, 39518514, L/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Robert E. Fitch, 16113685, T/G.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Kenneth W. Ellis, 34671862, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Charles H. McVey, N., after liberation: "It was around 1040 a.m. and we were around 24,000 feet. Our ship was the last in the formation of our formation, the last in the Wing that day. At that time our formation was attacked by about 90 planes and our plane was immediately hit by 20mm flak. There were some hits on the wing section. I could see my ammo box smoking. About two or three seconds after the flak hit us, the pilot, on the interphone, yelled, "Bail out." I tried to pull the emergency handle on the escape hatch. By then, both pilots were trying to open the same with the regular handle. Out of the corner of my eye I could see the bombardier slump over my table. He must have been injured, or dazed, or he would have been directly behind me ready to jump. The pilot and co-pilot were kicking the escape door to open it and then another burst of flak took most of the nose away. I was pretty stunned but realized that I might get out through the blown nose, so I half turned to bail out that way. The next thing I knew, I was falling through space and opened my chute barely in time to land upright. All this time we were at the hatch, the ship was completely out of control and throwing us around.

"I have no knowledge of any of the others in the crew other than the pilot and co-pilot attempting to open the nose hatch, and don't believe Lt. Laux bailed out because he apparently was wounded. I had helped him with his flak suit a short time before we were hit. There was a lot of blood on my coveralls which proved, since he was fairly close to me, that it might have been his blood."

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-38096 - 20TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt.	Thayne L. Thomas, 0-760685, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Carl S. Goodman, 0-768069, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	William M. McDonough, 0-719978, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Richard P. Hartman, 0-772173, B.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Robert L. Brown, 17153889, U/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Robert J. Flahive, 39212329, L/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Jerome (NMI) Bauman, 19151738, R/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	James J. Johnson, 35807258, L/W.	(KIA)

Sgt. Dudley E. Standridge, 6283357, T/G. (KIA)  
Sgt. William R. Mays, 39294274, R/O. (KIA)

A casualty statement was submitted by Lt. Thayne Thomas noting that he returned to Allied lines September 18, 1944, and that the status of his crew was unknown. He reported seeing one man going down, parachute was open, but not filled. Identity unknown.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-32048 - 20TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt. James A. Weiler, 0-757348, P. (KIA)  
F/O Irving D. Thompson, T-61736, CP. (POW)\*  
2nd Lt. Robert L. Embry, Jr., 0-2057882, N. (KIA)  
2nd Lt. Frank L. Sulkey, 0-761265, B. (KIA)  
T/Sgt. Lonnie H. Bumgardner, 34303666, U/T. (KIA)  
S/Sgt. Ernest W. Wagoner, 35892365, L/T. (KIA)  
Sgt. John H. Adair, 18073665, R/W. (KIA)  
Sgt. Loren E. Byam, 16131456, L/W. (KIA)  
Sgt. George D. Dalcanale, 16138204, T/G. (KIA)  
S/Sgt. John J. Martin, 6974501, R/O. (KIA)

\*Wounded in enemy hospital. No further information given.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-107118 - "SNAFUPERMAN" - 20TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt. William T. Garland, 0-760614, P. (POW)  
2nd Lt. Leo A. Zupan, 0-762508, CP. (POW)  
2nd Lt. Albert E. Novak, 0-768889, N. (POW)  
S/Sgt. William C. Hayett, 16006113, TOG. (POW)  
S/Sgt. Irving D. Katz, 16026642, U/T. (KIA)  
S/Sgt. Jesse L. Barker, 16041653, L/T. (POW)  
Sgt. Ralph E. DeWitt, 16077033, R/W. (POW)  
Sgt. Russell I. Payne, 33732813, L/W. (KIA)  
Sgt. Robert C. Hoadley, 39125408, T/G. (POW)  
S/Sgt. Charles E. Griffin, 12120038, R/O. (POW)

Statement of 2nd Lt. William T. Garland, after liberation: "It was around 1130 hours and we were hit and left the formation between the IP and the target. I bailed out and all members of my crew bailed out and were interned in German prison camps with the exception of two men, S/Sgt. Irving Katz and S/Sgt. Russell Payne. My aircraft exploded in the air.

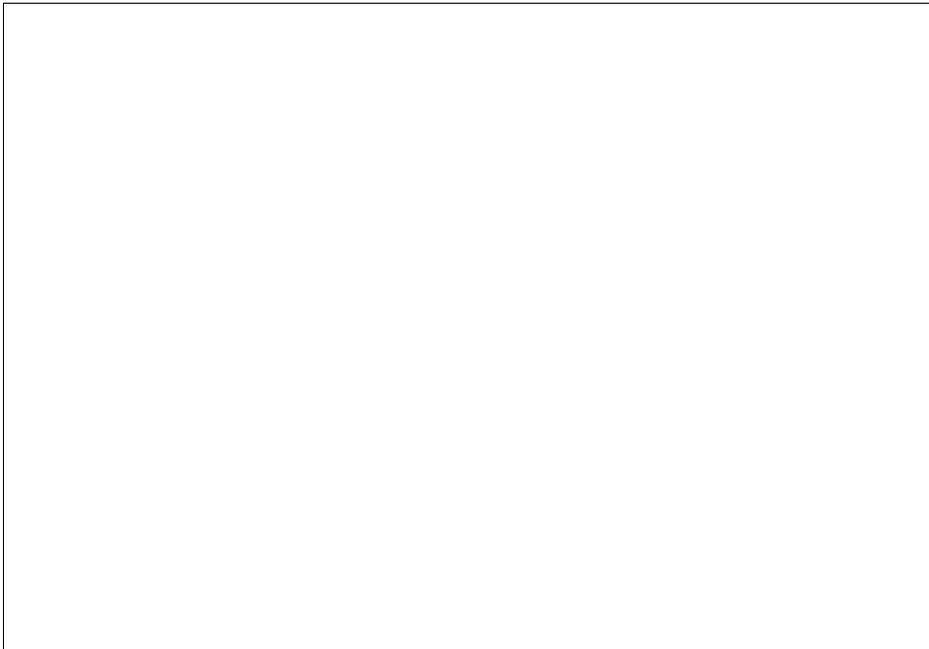
"S/Sgt. Katz was known to have bailed out near Frenstat, Czechoslovakia. He was instructed to abandon the plane and jumped through the bomb bay just before the bombardier. A German officer, at Gestapo headquarters, in Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia, showed me his dog tags and told me that he was dead, that his chute had failed to open. He also made an issue of the fact that he was Jewish. A full report of this was sent to the Adjutant General's Office, who informed me, by return mail, that this information had been made a matter of permanent record in S/Sgt. Katz's file. Personal opinion, based on attitude and words of the German officer, that S/Sgt. Katz was killed, after landing, due to his religion.

"S/Sgt. Payne was unconscious when I bailed him out, using the emergency ripcord strap. It was in the vicinity of Frenstat, Czechoslovakia. He was injured with a 20mm wound through the stomach. Czech police showed his dog tags to Sgt. R. C. Hoadley in a Czech hospital on the same day we were shot down, and he was told that Sgt. Payne was dead when he reached the ground. The fact that he was dead was verified about two weeks later by a German officer at Frankfurt, Germany.

“A statement of fact is that he opened his eyes, then suddenly went limp in my arms as I was bailing him out and I think, he died in that instant. A 20mm shell had entered from the opposite side of the plane, hit Sgt. Payne in the back and entered his stomach while he was firing at attacking planes.”

Statement of S/Sgt. Jesse L. Barker, LT., after liberation: “I was able to bail out but have no knowledge of the co-pilot, navigator, bombardier, and upper turret gunner. The right waist gunner went from the waist door just before me. The pilot was the last to leave.

“Our Squadron was attacked from the tail, just about the Initial Point. Our communication system was destroyed almost immediately and No. 2 engine caught fire. We were unable to converse



with the front of the ship. I left the ball turret when my guns hopelessly jammed and the left wing afire. I found the left waist gunner lying on the floor unable to move, but conscious. With the help of the right waist gunner, who had been manning his guns, restored oxygen to the wounded gunner. The tail gunner and radio man were also wounded but were able to help themselves. The tail gunner helped me get the left waist gunner to the waist door after the right waist gunner

T/R-L/R - I. Katz (\*), R. Payne (\*), R. Hoadley,  
C. Griffin, R. DeWitt, J. Barker  
B/R-L/R - L. Dickinson, W. Garland, L. Zupan, A. Novak  
\*KIA - 8-29-44 (Courtesy - Loy Dickinson)

had secured a spare chute for the radio operator whose chute had been badly damaged. We secured the safety strap to the ripcord of the injured gunner. When the pilot came back to the waist, the right waist gunner had jumped. The pilot had each of us jump and then released the body of the left waist gunner. Then the pilot bailed. I failed to mention that the pilot had dived the plane to put out the flame but to no avail.

“All members of the crew were captured and the bodies of the left waist gunner and upper turret gunner were recovered.”

2nd Lt. Leo A. Zupan, CP of #42-107118. September 7, 1995: “My recollection of August 29, 1944. Tomorrow is the big day. We make the milk run to bomb the Privoser Oil and Refinery Yards at Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia and when we return we get our first few days of leave in Rome. We have been flying tough missions to places like the Ploesti Oil Refineries in Romania, the southern

invasion of France, Blechhammer, Gyor, etc. In less than two months we will have completed one half of our 50-mission tour.

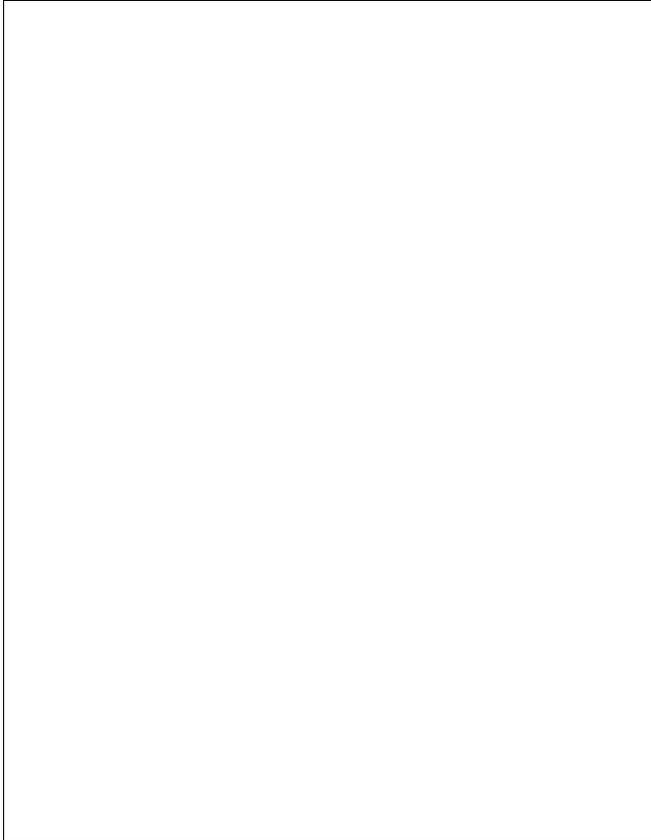
“August 29 arrives. Before leaving our tent that morning, I placed my cigars and beer ration on my cot, because late that afternoon we are heading for a little good life in Rome.

“We arrive at the flight line about 5:15 a.m., go to our lockers and get our flying gear, pre-flight the plane and brief the crew on the mission. Bill Garland, flying as pilot; I’m co-pilot, Albert Novak, bombardier; Loy Dickinson, our navigator, is flying in the lead plane as Squadron navigator; S/Sgt. William Hayett is flying as nose gunner in Loy’s position; S/Sgt. Irving Katz, engineer and upper turret gunner; S/Sgt. Charles Griffin, radio operator; S/Sgt. Jesse Barker, lower turret; Sgt. Russell Payne, left waist; Sgt. Ralph DeWitt, right waist; and Sgt. Robert Hoadley, tail gunner.

“A few minutes before 6:00 a.m., we start engines. At 6:00 a.m. the lead plane starts down the runway, the others follow at about ten second intervals. As we are climbing, we form our seven planes into squadron formation and then the four squadrons form a box formation which has proven to be the best defensive formation.

“As we are climbing, Sgt. Katz opens the K-rations and we eat some crackers and cheese, because powdered eggs at 4:00 a.m. are not very appetizing. So we get a little nourishment before we reach 10,000 feet and have to put on our oxygen masks. We head north over the Adriatic and will climb to 26,000 feet. Flying a tight formation is hard work. In order to stay alert we fly 15 to 20 minutes and then trade off flying the wing of the lead aircraft. We are at altitude now and getting close to the target. About 11:00 a.m. the message came over the intercom that we are about 10 minutes from the I.P. We all put our flak vest and metal helmets on for a little more protection to our vital parts over the bomb run. I had been watching a twin engine plane about two miles out to our right of the formation. Novak opened the bomb bay doors, I was flying at the time. All of a sudden there was a burst of small flak exploding in front of us. I thought it might be from mobile flak guns. About that time the tail gunner calls in FIGHTERS! Then our radio and intercom went dead. Fighters were screaming past us. Our lead plane, flown by William Tune and Francis Flynn, was aflame and going straight down. They must have been hit by 20mm cannon because the left wing and fuselage area exploded into a ball of fire. At the same time our number one engine was on fire. The Group was pulling away. I pushed the throttles forward to try to keep up. Bill told Novak to close the bomb bay doors, then they hit our number two supercharger. The engine was useless. Bill had feathered number one engine. At the same time a hit the size of a basketball was made in the left aileron. The fire in number one persisted. We put the plane in a dive for about 5,000 feet and leveled out. We thought we had the fire out. Two fighters stayed with us, pass after pass, then the fire started up again on number one engine and it spread into the wing. All of a sudden the control cables were severed and the plane could not be controlled manually. Bill switched on automatic pilot and we were fighting it with the knobs. Bill told Novak to open the bomb bay doors and get rid of the bombs. Novak put on a walk around oxygen bottle and got the doors open and dropped the bombs. They were unarmed and one stayed with the plane. The bombs were never armed until target time. We weren’t trained to raise havoc with the countryside from stray bombs. Only bomb the enemy war facilities. One Me-109 fighter attacked from one o’clock, guns firing. He was so close I could see the pilot’s face. Then he

zoomed over our bomber. To this day I don't see how he missed us. We were going down, we had one good engine, number four on the right. Our air speed was about 105 miles per hour. Bill locked the auto pilot into a spiraling glide. Then we were hit with a 20mm shell on the left side of the cockpit putting about an 18" hole in the body and right through the oxygen tanks. Acid smoke filled the cockpit and the plane shuddered and shook like a wounded animal. We were lucky, 12" forward would have taken Bill's and my head off. Well, that was enough, the left wing was burning so bad the wing ribs were exposed. I hollered to Bill, "Lets get the hell out of here!" Bill went to the back of the plane to get the boys out. I pulled Sgt. Katz's leg and pointed to the bomb bay. He went out followed by Sgt. Hayett and Lt. Novak. As I got up to leave, I checked the altimeter and we were at 18,000 feet. I bailed out the bomb bay, pulled the ripcord at about 3,500 feet. A few minutes later I was a guest of the Third Reich. I heard later that our tail gunner opened his chute early and watched our plane blow up. Sgt. Russell Payne was killed in the battle and Sgt. Katz was killed. According to the Germans his parachute failed. Later there were many Purple Hearts issued for that fateful day. I wonder who the lucky guy was that got my beer and cigars?"



Lt. Loy A. Dickinson - POW 8-29-44  
(Courtesy - Loy A. Dickinson)

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-97159 - "TAIL END CHARLIE" - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	William S. Tune, 0-810970, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Francis W. Flynn, 0-686351, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Loy A. Dickinson, 0-721919, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Russell W. Meyrick, 0-746593, B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Thomas C. Coogan, 6250322, U/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Joseph (NMI) Marinello, Jr., 32984201, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Joseph P. Owsianik, 32775462, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Joseph E. Sallings, 34491635, L/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Robert D. Donahue, 33163119, T/G.	(EVADED)
T/Sgt.	Robert R. Kirsch, 33039143, R/O.	(POW)

Casualty Report, August 4, 1945, from 2nd Lt. Francis W. Flynn: "Sgt. Joseph (NMI) Marinello, Jr.: Place of death was 29 August 1944, Rudimov, Czechoslovakia. B-17 knocked down by German

fighters. I believe that Sgt. Marinello failed to bail out because he was hit by attacking fighters. His body was found in the plane after it had crashed. S/Sgt. Joseph E. Sallings, a fellow crew member, saw the crashed plane and the graves of Sgt. Marinello and Lt. Meyrick. He has photos of both in his possession. The place of burial was a small village called Rudice.

“2nd Lt. Russell W. Meyrick, B: I believe Lt. Meyrick was killed instantly by 20mm shells from German fighters, since he did not open the bomb bay doors or bail out when hit. His body was found in the plane when it crashed.”

T/Sgt. Thomas C. Coogan, UT, after liberation: “All told, eight of us bailed out. I have no knowledge of any members of the crew except Lts. Flynn and Tune. Both of them were injured and helped from the plane by Lt. Dickinson and myself. Saw both of them the following day and three of us were in the hospital in Prague. I saw Sgts. Owsianik and Kirsch in prison camp in March 1945 and both in good condition.”

2nd Lt. Loy A. Dickinson, N. July 21, 1992: “One responsibility of the Squadron Navigator is to record the significant times and events en route, in the navigator’s log. If my log ever turned up it would be missing at least one entry - “Bailed out at 21,000 feet, 11:00 a.m., 8/29/44. Bombardier: Meyrick, fatal.”

“We would learn later that all seven of our Squadron and a total of nine of the 28 planes of our B-17 Group were shot down by Messerschmitts. German fighter planes prudently chose unprotected bomber Groups for attack. Our fighter cover picked us up over the Adriatic Sea and took us as far as southern Czechoslovakia. A second Group was to take us to the target and part way back. The third Group would meet us and bring us back to friendly skies. The second Group was late.

“The Germans knew this and we were almost sitting ducks as we headed north from Bratislava, near Vienna, toward Ostrava, which was our target on the Polish-Czech border. Five of the bombers crashed in the Slavicin area, which is where I came down in a plowed field. Incidentally, to the question, “Were you afraid to jump?” The answer is that you never even think about it. Things happened too fast. I had no injuries, not even a scratch. I was the only one in the crew that did not receive a Purple Heart.

“My Czech benefactor, Mojmir Baca, lived with his parents, a brother and sister, in a small isolated farmhouse less than a mile from where I landed. Mojmir found me in the woods not long after I landed. He communicated to me that he would come back for me after dark. That evening he took me to his house and hid me in a loft. I was a curiosity to several locals who had to climb to the loft to see me. As I recall, only one visitor could speak any English and he wanted to know about “GANGSTERS” in Chicago.

“The following day I decided that I should leave. Being unarmed and not knowing the language does not give you any advantage. I walked into the village of Slavicin and was met by a doctor and an elderly policeman. They took me to the Police building, which is now the local Communist Party Headquarters. Later I was transferred to the custody of the Wehrmacht who took me by train to Vienna and later to Wiesbaden, near Frankfurt. Here I was held in solitary confinement for seven days and interrogation. Later I was transferred, by train, to Stalag Luft I, at Barth, Germany. This was my address until VE Day.

“In 1991, Midge and I decided to take our golf clubs with us when we went to a Rotary International Convention. This changed when we had a letter from Mojmir in which he said, “It has been 40 years when you involuntarily visit Czechoslovakia, this year you volunteer come.” The last week in May we drove from Frankfurt to Nurnberg and crossed the Czech border. It is an eerie feeling going behind the Iron Curtain into a Communist controlled country. Young, uniformed guards carried machine guns.

“Our friend Mojmir met us in Brno and took us to meet their oldest daughter Marcellus; her husband, Jan Turcinek, and their two children. Jan’s father, Dr. Turcinek, now 78, was the same doctor I met in the village of Slavicin on August 30, 1944. We then drove east from Brno to Vicnov where we witnessed a colorful festival and then on to Lahavovice, famous as a major spa. There we met Mojmir’s No. 2 daughter, Elishka, and husband Miraslav Papousek. We then went to the home of Mojmir and met a third daughter, Hanna, and husband, Stanislav Vaculin, and their fourth daughter, Mirka, who was single. Hanna was the biggest help because she spoke some English.

“One morning, Mojmir drove us into Slavicin to pick up his English speaking friend, Joseph Stehlik. Joe flew with the Czech RAF Squadron and the last year and a half against the Germans. He was one of 22 Czech pilots sent to Russia to fight against the Germans. He was the most openly contemptuous of the Russians of any Czech we met.

“Joe was our interpreter as we drove around the countryside where Five American planes had crashed on that morning in August. They were near villages named Rudice, Bojkovic, Krhov, Komna, and Samov. Two of the bodies that were found had no parachutes. My parachute brought me down in a field near Rudimov. The distance from the airplane crash must have been two miles. He also stopped at the Baca house where I slept.

“Later on, Mojmir took us to a flower shop where we purchased some flowers. We drove up the hill to a cemetery where we placed the flowers at the grave of 28 American flyers who were killed in the action that day. The enormity of it all hit me that day. The people of this little town never knew the war in personal terms, any other time, except on that day and they memorialized it and lived with it ever since.

“During our visit, Mojmir presented me with a plaque which is made from B-17 fragments, the only one of which I can identify is a 50 caliber machine gun bullet. There was an inscription on the back which read, ‘National freedom is not deserved by those who do not respect the sacrifices with which this freedom is purchased. For you silent brothers, for you whose lives have been taken, for you flyers, this is the memory of this war day 29-8-44. They have fallen so that we may live.’”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31473 - “MY BABY” - 20TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt.	Robert O. McCloskey, 0-765023, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Harold W. Helveston, Jr., 0-767547, CP.	(KIA)
F/O	William P. Netzley, T-3374, N.	(POW)
Sgt.	John J. Curran, 17142883, TOG.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	James A. Jones, 38508391, U/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Luther L. Durette, 15364269, L/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Charles A. Munden, 38529009, R/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Harold (NMI) Schirmer, 35454927, L/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Elmer J. Pruitt, Jr., 36878553, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Edwin R. Everett, 13171748, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Robert O. McCloskey, P., after liberation: “We were flying #6 in the Squadron formation and were at about 26,000 feet altitude. The time was around 1150. I bailed out and when I gave the bail out order, in the nose, the nose gunner went first, then the bombardier through the nose hatch, then the engineer, co-pilot, and myself. I was unable to check the rear because of the flames in the bomb bay.

“Lt. Helveston was flying as my co-pilot in the absence of my regular co-pilot. He bailed out just before I did approximately 70 miles north of Vienna, over southern Czechoslovakia. The last I talked with him in the plane was when I asked him to get on the controls and help me. The last I saw him was on August 30, 1944 when we were taken to Brunn hospital by the Germans. The hospital was

for German soldiers. We were the only POWs there. Lt. Helveston was unconscious at this time. On August 31, the German doctors told me that Lt. Helveston had died that morning. He was buried there at Brunn. The doctors said that the cause of death was a skull fracture at the base of the spine.

“Regarding Sgt. Schirmer; I believe he bailed out in the same area as the rest of the crew. I had no conversation with him prior to giving the bail-out signal. The Czech natives in this area showed his dog tags to Sgt. Jones, and said they buried him in a grave with Sgt. Pruitt and one unknown body. They said his chute was partially burned. The Czech natives showed him the dog tags of Sgt. Pruitt also.

“The last personal contact I had with Sgt. Everett was when he told me he had forgotten his dog tags. He may have been the unidentified body buried with Sgts. Schirmer and Pruitt. His chute was also partially burned. I cannot speculate on Sgt. Durette and Munden. Sgt. Curran said that on August 30th he saw the dog tags of Sgt. Durette in the possession of German guards but had no knowledge of Sgt. Munden.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6359 - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	William C. Bullock, Jr., 0-813654, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Clarence B. Jackson, 0-820754, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Albert E. Smith, 0-712927, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	John C. Quinn, 0-551058, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Joseph H. Morien, 36418953, U/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	James R. Martin, 39131325, L/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Morris Goldberg, 33794395, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Joseph M. Laratta, 12186371, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Maurice E. Nelson, 37564252, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Wallace M. Clayton, 18124393, R/O.	(POW)

2nd Lt. Albert E. Smith, N. July 25, 1992: “On this day I flew with my regular crew plus replacements that had been necessary. These were two waist gunners and co-pilot. We lost our first waist gunner when we carried a cameraman instead and he flew with another crew and was shot down by fighters over Southern Germany. Our second waist gunner had been wounded over the Vienna area and was still in the hospital. Our co-pilot was lost in the Adriatic, as mentioned before. That day we were flying on the right wing of the Squadron lead ship as second in command. We had flown a couple of previous missions where we were Squadron lead and I was Squadron navigator.

“That day was a very bad day from the very start. The 20th Squadron was the #4 Squadron that day, or “Tail End Charlie,” in our usual diamond shaped formation for the four Squadrons. For some reason our Squadron could never catch up with the rest of the 2nd Bomb Group and get in formation. We were always low and behind. In addition, that was the 2nd Bomb’s turn to be the last Group of the Wing over the target. This meant that the 20th Squadron was really “Tail End Charlie.”

“Other than the Squadron’s position, the mission continued normally. Part of the way to the target our fighter escort joined us and flew with us. A little before we reached the area over Trencin, Czechoslovakia, as I recall, the fighter escort left us to go ahead and clear the area of fighters. This was standard procedure. However, on this mission the German fighters used this tactic to their advantage. They evidently were aware of this procedure and waited south of the target. After our fighters left, they attacked our Group. This was about 10:30 a.m. and we were at about 22,000 feet altitude. I learned at our 2nd Bomb Group reunion in Dayton, Ohio, in September 1991, there were 89 Me-109s that attacked our Group plus FW-190s. After we were captured, a German Colonel told Wally Clayton, our radio operator, Joe Morien, engineer, and Jim Martin, ball turret operator, that there were 125 fighters that attacked us and they lost 25 of them.

“The attack was severe and concentrated. For most of us, it didn’t last more than 20-25 minutes before we were shot down. The entire 20th Squadron plus two other ships were shot down, I found out later. I also heard later, I think it was from the 2nd Bomb Group airmen that were shot down later, about October and came to prison camp, that the Lt. Col. who was leading our Group that day received a medal for getting the rest of the Group back to base. I always thought he should have been court martialed for not getting our Group in protective formation to start with.

“On our ship we were all firing at attacking fighters. Then I noticed that our right inboard engine, as I recall, was on fire. We had lost our ship’s intercom system. It evidently had been shot out. I stuck my head up in the navigator’s astrodome, which is a short ways in front of the pilot’s windshield, and looked at my pilot. He was gesturing violently with his head and mouthing the words to “Get out.” With that I motioned to the bombardier, took off my flak suit, pulled the escape hatch handle to release the door, and bailed out.

“On missions we always wore our parachute harness but the chest pack was detachable and we didn’t put it on until we got near the target or were attacked by fighters. We wore both parachute and flak suit going over the target or any point that had flak guns.

“Just before I bailed out, I looked at my chest pack chute and thought I had clipped it to the harness upside down, so I took it off and reversed it. After I bailed out I did not pull the ripcord. I knew at that altitude (22,000 feet plus) the air was rare and fighters were still attacking. I didn’t want to be a target for them while swinging down in a chute. I let myself free-fall. I thought I would fall until I was about the same altitude that I bailed out over the Adriatic (7,000 feet plus) before I pulled the ripcord. While free-falling, however, I was tumbling over and over. I had no idea how to stop this, which shows the lack of training we had on parachutes. On the way down, as I tumbled, I tried to judge how high I was above the ground. I only seemed to get a quick glimpse on each of my rotations. Finally I thought I was close enough and reached for the ripcord.

“It wasn’t there! I looked at my chest pack and saw the ripcord on the left side of the pack instead of the right. In the heat of the battle I had reversed the chute when I should not have. I momentarily wondered if when I pulled the ripcord, if the clips to my harness would hold or if the chute would be ripped and I would fall to the mountains below. However, I immediately pulled the ripcord and the clips held.

“When the chute opened I felt like I was on the end of a “crack the whip line.” There was a violent jerk as the chute snapped me upright. After it opened I saw that I was still much higher than I thought I was. I believe it was around 12,000 feet. So I had fallen about two miles of 10,000 feet.

“The ride down was beautiful! It was absolutely quiet and you had a wonderful view of the countryside. You had no sensation of falling until you got close to the ground. I was over the Carpathian Mountains north or northeast of Trencin. Since then I have thought sport parachuting would be fun but family responsibilities and the cost held me back.

“I was coming down in a forested area. One thing I did remember from our parachute training was that you should cross your legs when coming down through trees. This I did. I missed the main part of the tree but did not get my feet uncrossed before I hit the ground. Although I did not realize it at the time, I badly sprained my left foot and ankle that took the full force of my landing. Later I found that my right groin was entirely numb, the same effect you have as when you have novocain at the dentist’s office. It didn’t affect any movement but there was no sensation when I touched the skin. This lasted two or three weeks or so. This evidently happened from the shock of the parachute opening. I quickly got out of my chute harness. The parachute was hung up in the tree branches so I couldn’t gather it in to hide it. So I took off to get away from the area as quickly as possible.

“After a ways, I stopped to remove my heavy flying boots and hid them under some tree roots along a little drainage way - it was hardly enough to call a creek. Then I found a heavy patch of bushes and crawled into the center to hide.

“Later I heard noises of people in the woods and a shout, which I guessed was someone finding my parachute. I stayed quiet and no one came near me. One thing I always wondered about was a person that I heard. He was whistling “Yankee Doodle!” I have always wondered if it was a trick of the Germans or if it was some local trying to contact me. I never responded to the whistle.

“I escaped immediate capture and during the next eight days I evaded and hiked south and west. In one old farm shed, where I took refuge one night to sleep, I got a terrible dose of fleas. I was bitten all over. I got away from there and completely stripped down to try to pick them out of my clothing. I don’t think I ever got them all. I was finally taken prisoner near Piestany, about 30 miles south of Trencin. I might have covered 50 miles during that period. By that time I was sick with a bad cold and badly blistered feet from the new GI shoes I got after I went down in the Adriatic.

“After I came down, and for days after that, I wondered if I had misinterpreted my pilot’s signal to bail out. When I was floating down I never noticed any other chutes. I kept wondering if my crew was back in Italy wondering why I had bailed out.

“I was taken by train to Vienna and then on to Frankfurt, Germany. Just outside of Frankfurt was the POW Interrogation Center. There the first thing they did was to decontaminate my clothes. So at least I got rid of the fleas. We were in solitary confinement there but it didn’t bother me since I think I slept about 18 hours a day. After three or four days of interrogation, a bunch of us were sent to a Stalag Luft near Wetzler, Germany. There I finally got a shower. We were there several days until they got a trainload of POWs assembled and shipped us to Stalag Luft I, at Barth, north of Berlin on the Baltic Sea. One of the first faces I saw was my bombardier, Johnny Quinn. He told me he thought everyone bailed out. This was the first conversation I had that the plane went down. However, I had assumed this earlier, because at the Interrogation Center they showed me a complete listing of all my crew members, including my name.

“Stalag Luft I was an officer’s POW camp run by the German Luftwaffe. It contained both American and British POWs. We had no physical mistreatment like some of our enlisted crew had. Food at times was the main problem. We received food parcels from the Red Cross.

“On the night of April 30, 1945, the Germans pulled out and headed west to get away from the Russians, who were advancing. The Russians came to our camp the next night, May 1st. The next day, as I recall, the Russians told us to be ready in the next few hours to abandon camp and walk east toward Poland. We were all busy assembling back packs, etc. However, luckily, our American commanders talked them out of this. We stayed in camp until the 8th Air Force B-17s came May 12-14 and flew us out. I flew out on May 13th, Sunday, to a camp near Reims, France. Then late the next day we were taken to Camp Lucky Strike, near St. Valery, France. We stayed there about a month until we went to LaHavre where we loaded on a Navy transport, manned by the Coast Guard, and sailed into Boston, MA. We were given two months leave. About a month after my leave, I was discharged at San Antonio, Texas, at the same place where I took my preflight training.

“In looking back on the war-time period, it is still hard to believe how young many of us were. I went through all my training, flew my missions, and had my 20th birthday in prison camp in October 1944. We had 20 men in our prison barracks room and the “old man,” as we sometimes joked, was all of 27. Our crew was as follows: Pilot, 1st Lt. William C. Bullock - KIA, blew up with plane according to co-pilot; Co-pilot, 2nd Lt. Clarence C. Jackson - Evaded, got back to Italy in late October 1944; Navigator, 2nd Lt. Albert E. Smith - POW; Bombardier, 2nd Lt. John C. Quinn - POW; Engineer/Top Turret, T/Sgt. Joseph H. Morien - POW, shot down one enemy fighter and one probably shot down; Radio Operator, T/Sgt. Wallace M. Clayton - POW, wounded; Ball Turret, Sgt. James R. Martin - POW, wounded - shot down two enemy fighters; Right Waist, Sgt. Morris Goldberg - POW, I saw him at Camp Lucky Strike after liberation and I think he said he shot down at least one fighter; Left Waist, S/Sgt. Joseph M. Laratta - KIA; and Tail Gunner, S/Sgt. Maurice E. Nelson - KIA.

“When I got back home, I learned the Government had sent names and addresses of all the crew member’s families to each of the others. The families corresponded during all that time we were POWs, exchanging information. That is the way I learned about Lt. Jackson evading and getting back to Italy, and his comment about Bill Bullock blowing up with the plane.”

T/Sgt. Wallace M. Clayton, RO. December 10, 1993: “I still have memories of that fateful day of August 29, 1944.

“I feel that the German Air Force were, so to speak, waiting for us. We had a slight cloud coverage over us when all of a sudden the German fighters were through the clouds and swarmed all over us, like bees around honey. There were fighters all around us; Me-109s and FW-190s. The Me-109s had cannons in the nose and were chewing us up. The attack was so fast and quick we had little chance to fight back.

“Just about the same time the fighters hit us, our co-pilot yelled over the intercom, “bail out, bail out, salvo bombs.” As radio operator, I was responsible to make sure all the bombs were out so I immediately went into the bomb bay and saw the bombs in the right rack had jammed as fighters hit the right bomb bay door. Just about the same time I yelled, “Right bomb bay door jammed,” I was hit in the left leg and was backing out of the bomb bay when all of a sudden something hit the radio set which blew up and a piece of plastic from the radio hit me in the upper inside of my nose, then moving into my right eye. The impact was so great it knocked me off my feet. I was stretched out on the floor and felt I was about to fall asleep. I later realized that my oxygen hose had a cut in it. Just about that time, I felt something hitting me on the feet so I opened my eyes and saw that Jimmy Martin, the lower ball gunner, was throwing spent machine gun shells at me and motioning for me to bail out.

“I crawled over to my chute, which was lying on the floor under my radio table, hooked it to my chest and walked into the bomb bay about the same time Whitey Morien came out of the upper turret and we both faced each other. I gave Whitey a nod to jump and right after he jumped, I followed.

“While I was floating down to the ground there were many civilians running to where I would land. I hit the ground and an elderly lady, dressed in what looked like a white cotton dress, grabbed me in her arms, held me tightly, and sounded like she was giving me instructions.

“Soon after landing, a small truck came up and I was gently handled and placed in the truck. People then started to give me food such as bread, meat, and water. I saw Whitey Morien had landed not far from me and we were put together for a short time. Whitey advised me that the navigator, bombardier, and co-pilot had all bailed out. He said that when he came out of the upper turret, he saw Bill, our pilot, still in his seat and completely soaked with blood from his shoulder all the way past his hip onto the left leg from waist to floor. Whitey and I were the last ones out alive. As I was floating down I continued looking at my plane still flying straight and level with our pilot Bill, still aboard.

“Our left waist gunner, Joseph Laratta, was killed by enemy fire and was caught at the waist door. It seems he tried to bail out but the door was jammed. He had replaced our regular gunner, Jack Norwine, who was in the hospital having been previously hit by flak in the left arm.

“Maurice Nelson, our tail gunner, left his tail position to bail out the escape hatch in the tail but he couldn’t get there, probably due to lack of oxygen. Our right waist gunner, Morris Goldberg, went to the waist escape hatch to bail out. He saw Nelson lying there with his chute on but not conscious. So Goldberg grabbed him and pushed him out of the plane and quickly also bailed out. This can be verified as Jimmy Martin told me he saw two persons come out of the escape hatch right before he came out of the ball turret and only one chute opened and that was Goldberg’s. Then was when he started to throw machine gun shells at me to get his attention to bail out.

“Morris Goldberg, Jimmy Martin (who by the way had his left big toe shot off), Whitey Morien, and myself were taken to Zlin, Czechoslovakia for interrogation. I was badly wounded in the right leg and right eye. Jimmy Martin and I were taken to a hospital. Two Czech doctors operated on Jimmy

and I. On the operating table I was unconscious but came to while the doctor was cutting dead flesh around my leg, and I thought he was cutting around my leg to get to the bone to cut my leg off. I later regained consciousness and saw my two feet at the end of the table so realized I still had my leg. As I was being unstrapped from the operating table the Czech doctor was lighting a Lucky Strike cigarette. Just as he got it lit, I reached up, took it from his hand and inhaled deeply. The doctor laughed and asked me if he could have my Air Corps Wing so I unpinned it and gave it to him. The doctor also operated on Jimmy Martin and cut off his big toe.

“I believe I was in a Catholic hospital as Nuns came to the room where Jimmy and I were lying in bed. They changed the dressings on our wounds.

“Now, a strange thing happened. A German Colonel with the German Luftwaffe came through our room and I told him all I could give was my name, rank, and serial number. In perfect English he assured me he was not interested to interrogate me but wanted Jimmy and me to come with him to the German Air Base which shot down our whole Squadron. We were driven in a car to the Airdrome and driven through woods, came to where trees seemed to part and we went underground. We talked to the German boys who had shot us down. Some spoke broken English. We drank schnapps together and I asked some of them how many planes had attacked our Squadron. Two of them said over 100 German aircraft, Me-109s and FW-190s, and later on the Colonel verified this as factual.

“Jimmy and I spent one day and night there and in the a.m. were driven to a railroad and loaded on cattle cars that had some other American POWs. We traveled to Vienna, where upon arrival an air raid was in progress. Marshalling Yards were being bombed. We had to leave the cars and were marched to an air raid shelter near the Vienna Opera House. Civilians tried to attack us but just got pushed out into the street shouting, “Luftgangsters.” I really had thought, while in college, that I would try and visit the well known opera houses in Europe, but I never thought that one day I would be lying in the gutter of the famous Vienna Opera House during an air raid.

“There is so much more to tell. So many things happened from the day I was shot down until I was liberated at Bad Soden, Germany, 25 miles north of Frankfurt, Germany on March 31, 1945. I truly must have had a guardian angel looking after me.

“I kept a diary from the time I boarded a Liberty ship at Newport News until I was shot down. Luckily I got my diary back because men were not supposed to keep one. I recorded all my missions, giving dates, targets and things that happened to my fellow crewmen.”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6369 - 20TH SQUADRON**

F/O	Duane B. Seaman, T-61734, P.	(POW)
F/O	Ben J. Pastorino, T-62452, CP.	(POW)
F/O	Robert E. Mickadeit, T-2603, N.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Donald B. Hausler, 15130915, TOG.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	John A. Nighborowicz, 33252499, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Timothy J. Reidy, 32034292, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Robert C. Pittard, 13118452, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Howard T. Ware, 34058797, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	M. L. Childress, 18126215 T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	William J. Devlin, 31228846, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of S/Sgt. Robert C. Pittard, after liberation. “I was able to bail out as well as the rest of the crew. Pastorino was the last to leave through the nose escape door. Devlin bailed out from the bomb bay. S/Sgt. Ware broke an ankle from the jump. I don’t know the condition of Pastorino and Devlin. T/Sgt. Nighborowicz, S/Sgt. Ware, and I were together for three days, during which we cared for Ware as best we could. Impossible to evade enemy with Ware so we arranged for him to turn in. Nighborowicz and I evaded for three more days, then captured. My leg and knee were hurt badly but

did not keep me from walking. Other crew members were picked up as soon as they hit the ground. We were fired at from enemy planes and ground personnel.”

S/Sgt. Timothy J. Reidy, LTG. January 8, 1991: “I volunteered for the Army in 1941 and was assigned to an Infantry unit. Finding that it was not my “cup of tea,” I decided to transfer to the Air Corps, spending my last part of the war in a German prison camp.

“I wrangled a transfer out of the Infantry Training Center at Camp Croft, S.C., to an Army Air Base at Kessler Field, Mississippi.

“I wanted in the worst way to get into the flying, fighting end of the war, so I volunteered for aerial gunnery school at Kingman, Arizona. After completing the program there, I was assigned to the 49th Squadron as a ball turret gunner.

“My luck ran out on my 20th mission to a synthetic fuel plant in Czechoslovakia. We were “Tail End Charlie” in our Squadron and over the target a flock of enemy fighters approached from the rear. Some of our gunners thought it was our P-51 escort but it was German Me-109s. It didn’t take long for the enemy fighters to hose our B-17 with cannon and machine gun fire, which ruptured our fuel line, setting us on fire. The pilot gave the order to “bail out” and we all got out safely, with only one man suffering a broken ankle.

“After landing in a Czech field, I was approached by a truck loaded with German soldiers. One soldier, a little guy who didn’t seem to be all there, ran over and placed the muzzle of a rifle at my head. The other soldiers, who were uniformed rather shabby for Germans, laughed at their comrade and took me in charge, making the comment, “For you the war is over.” They brought me to a local jail and a young civilian girl tried to pry information from me but I didn’t bite, only telling my name, rank, and serial number.

“I was transferred to a POW “propaganda camp” in Germany with good food, clean quarters, etc., while interrogators tried to pry information from me. I figured I’d hold out as long as I could until they turned to torture, but it never came to that. I was out of that camp only to a very grim one of about 8,000 British and 2,000 American air crew prisoners.

“The camp was near Peenemunde on the Baltic coast. We could see V-1 and V-2 rockets taking off, but really didn’t know what they were. I am not bitter but do not remember my captors fondly. They were a brutal bunch, no doubt about it. Their treatment of the Russians on the other side of the wire, from our wire, was inhuman. We did what we could to help the Russians, throwing such food and clothing as we could spare. The Germans were stingy in the distribution of Red Cross parcels for the British and American prisoners, issuing only one parcel per week for every two prisoners. They could have given each prisoner one per week; they had enough of them. When the German attack in the Ardennes was going well, the guards became arrogant and abusive. When the news came of President Roosevelt’s death, the elated Germans predicted the fortunes of war would change in their favor.

“As the American and British armies pressed into Germany in the west and the Russians drove from the east, the captors moved us to keep the airmen from being liberated. We were taken on a forced march through Germany for 90 days, beginning in February. We were exposed to rain, snow, and cold; sleeping in sheds, abandoned buildings and often on the ground.

“When the German collapse came, we were in a small town in Germany. The British Royal Dragoon Guards, an armored unit, liberated us on May 10, 1945. We were shown every consideration by them. They really laid on a big smorgasbord for us! I never saw so much food in my life.

“But I never really believed this ordeal was over until I was sitting on my bunk at Fort Dix, New Jersey after being repatriated, and heard Gene Autry singing, *Back In The Saddle Again* on the radio.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-97915 - 429TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt. John F. Fitzpatrick, 0-761067, P. (POW)

2nd Lt. Charles H. McGhee, 0-704812, CP. (POW)

2nd Lt.	Richard M. Hausler, 0-717431, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Paul E. Sumner, 0-768194, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Eugene J. Moriarity, 31128421, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Vincent J. Martinez, 38351864, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	John A. Molitor, 16114611, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Vincent A. Contrada, 33631109, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	James J. DeLutes, Jr., 33514502, T/G.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Eugene F. Black, 35504813, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 1st Lt. Charles E. Crafton, P of B-17 #858, 429th Squadron, after the mission: “B-17 #915 called at 1230 hours stating that he was approximately 35 miles northeast of Lake Balaton and was calling for escort for protection. I did not see any fighters attack #915 but only heard them give his position.”

2nd Lt. Paul E. Sumner, B, November 24, 1993: “I joined the 2nd bomb Group in June or July of 1944. We went over as a replacement crew. Our original crew flew together, except for our co-pilot, Lt. James Harris. I understand that he was wounded later, 16 October 1944, on a mission to Brux, Czechoslovakia. We usually flew with our first pilot, George Eilers, as a second pilot. We didn’t get to fly many missions together.

“Our radio man was a young fellow, George Deiter, and the first man wounded on our crew. As I recall, he had a flak wound above the knee, which was not too serious. Then I was wounded and spent two weeks in the hospital. Our belly gunner, Sgt. Walter Lastowski, shot down the Me-109 that got me. T/Sgt. Clifford Popp was wounded 22 August 1944 on a mission to Odertal, Germany. Our engineer, T/Sgt. Marino Malatesta, died on a mission, 8 August 1944, to Moosbierbaum, Austria. Our navigator, Lt. Richard Hausler, called for an oxygen check off the target. Malatesta did not respond and Hausler found him, still in the top turret unconscious. We got him into the nose. I couldn’t see any wounds so thought that his oxygen had been cut off. We worked on him all the way home, but to no avail. I never did get the final report as to the cause of his death.

“I was wounded on 21 July and got out of the hospital 3 August, and that was the day our original pilot, George Eilers, went down on a mission to Friedrichshafen, Germany. They made it to Switzerland and were interned. I understand that Sgt. Robert Mullen was flying on #078, “SWEET PEA,” 21 September to Debreczen, when they were so badly shot up with two dead and two wounded. I also heard that S/Sgt. William Spruce was flying as togglelier on 13 September to Blechhammer, Germany when they were shot down and successfully evaded and returned to Base. Then, of course, Lt. Richard Hausler and I went down on 29 August on the Privoser Oil Refinery raid. This is quite a story for one crew!

“The day I was wounded we were bombing a target at Brux, Czechoslovakia. It was my ninth mission. We were hit hard by Me-109s. Among other hits, we took three cannon shells. One exploded in the bomb bay, one smashed the right aileron, and the third came through the astrodome and got me. We still had our original crew except the co-pilot, Lt. Harris. Eilers was flying co-pilot and a little 1st Lt. was in command. The plane was a mess! It was shattered! This guy went to pieces and told the crew to put a chute on me, throw me out and abandon the airplane. Eilers got him out of the cockpit and had Marino Malatesta take his place to help control the plane. Between the two, they got the plane back to Foggia. Eilers went down and I heard later that this 1st Lt. was given the DFC for getting the plane back.

“The way I remember it, the day we went down, it must have been 10:30 a.m. We were hit by a bunch of Me-109s. They were coming in from 6:00 o’clock and the tail gunner thought they were our escort of 51s showing up a little late. We were eventually, as I recall, down to one engine. We turned back and were escorted by a couple of 51s until we crashed.

“Lt. John Fitzpatrick, the pilot, was unable to maintain altitude and rather than risk bailing out in clouds, we stayed with the plane. We finally broke out of the clouds at a low level and Lt. Fitzpatrick made a perfect crash landing in open country. While the rest of the crew were captured immediately, I managed to evade capture for a few days and worked my way toward Budapest.

“I was captured near a town called Papa and taken to the city of Szekesfehervar, Hungary. This was pretty far removed from the war and had never had the problem of a captured enemy. A trial was held and they decided to hang me. I’ll never know if they intended to carry out the order because that afternoon, a German Intelligence officer, in civilian clothes, arrived and threw his weight around, then took me to Budapest where I was placed in a civilian prison. From there I went to Stalag Luft III.

“Of all the experiences I had as a POW, two stand out in my mind. One was the interrogation at Budapest, a couple of weeks after I was captured. It was the same officer that saved me from hanging. He was pleasant and pulled out a pack of Camels, inviting me to help myself, then began questioning me.

“I gave him my name, rank, and serial number. He smiled and proceeded to tell me where and when I graduated from high school and where I taught school before the war. Each time I responded with name, rank, and serial number, he would tell me more about myself, even giving the name of my senior officers at the base and told me who had been promoted. If he intended to impress me, he certainly succeeded. I hope our intelligence was as good as theirs.

“The other experience was when I was first captured and taken to Papa. There was a small garrison there and I was put in a small room in a barracks. I had been traveling several days without sleep, food, or water, but now the game was up and the adrenaline ceased to flow and I just lay down on my cot and passed out.

“It couldn’t have been more than 10 minutes when someone was shaking me awake. It was a young Hungarian soldier who could speak English. He was about 18 and very excited. “I’m Joe Szabo and the cook’s helper. My uncle lives in New York, do you know him?” It took a few seconds to collect my wits. I figured I may as well see how far this would go so I jumped up, grabbed the guy’s hand and said, “Gosh yes, I do happen to know your Uncle.” The kid was really excited so I told him to get me some food and we would talk about his Uncle. He left and I fell asleep.

“Someone shook me awake again. It was Joe with no food but he had another young soldier, excited as Joe. Joe said, “He has an Uncle in Cincinnati.” I said, “I know both your Uncles, get me some food.” This happened a third time, no food, same story. I told them to get me some food and I would tell of their relatives. The guard apparently was getting tired of these comings and goings because the next time it was only Joe with food and water. I was so grateful and told him what a great guy his Uncle was, and he believed every word.”

1st Lt. Donald E. Kemendo was the co-pilot on the crew of 1st Lt. Henry J. Wallet, when assigned to the 96th Squadron, July 3, 1944. June 10, 1993: “My first mission was to Verona, Italy, July 13th and my 50/51st mission was to Brux, Czechoslovakia, October 20, 1944. My itinerary included the following missions: six in Italy; four to Budapest, Hungary; five to Vienna, Austria (and vicinity); four to Munich, Germany (and vicinity); two rescue missions to Bucharest, Romania; two to Ploesti, Romania; one to Valences, France; four to Blechhammer, Germany; one to Osweicim, Poland; one to Belgrade, Yugoslavia; and four to Czechoslovakia (two to Brux and one each to Pardubice and Moravska Ostrava).

“Shortly after being assigned to the 96th, Hal (Wallet) and myself started flying co-pilot with experienced crews. My first two missions were easy. The third to Vienna was scary. As we neared the target area, fighters attacked the Group ahead. Saw one B-17 and two fighters go down. Over the target our Squadron lost the plane flying #4 position - nose severely damaged! Anti-aircraft gunners were tracking us. Several burst near our plane and we could hear the shrapnel striking. Sounded like

we were in a tin barn and buckets of gravel were being thrown at us. This was to be a familiar sight and sound in the future.

“As we neared the target, a B-17 in the Group ahead, climbed straight up, stalled and spun earthward. Our pilot said this was one of his most scariest missions. At debriefing we heard that we had lost another bomber.

“A few days later I was assigned as a co-pilot on two missions to Ploesti. Had heard that Ploesti was one of the most heavily defended targets in the European Theater. On one mission, long before we reached the target, I could see a black cloud of smoke, which indicated that a Bomb Group was over the target. Winds dispersed the smoke, then the black cloud would appear again when another Bomb Group was making a run. While the Group ahead of us was over the target, one of the bombers got a direct hit and exploded. Then it was our turn. The anti-aircraft gunners launched an intense barrage of flak and continued to do so while we were making our run. As with all intense barrages, the explosions created moderate air turbulence. We knew the shell bursts were close when that happened.

“There was a shortage of pilots in our Squadron. After my second Ploesti mission, the Squadron CO wanted me to be a first pilot. Was both surprised and unprepared for that responsibility. However, after a check ride and three or four take-offs and landings, I was pronounced a pilot.

“Before my first mission as a pilot, I wanted to know more about the B-17, so I made a visit to flight operations to review operating manuals. While there, one of our Squadron bombers returned early from a mission. It had aborted with a mechanical problem. This was the B-17 I was to fly the next day. I voiced some concern to the crew chief, but he assured me that it was all right.

“The mission was a long, over-water flight to Valances, France, August 2nd. The plane did alright until we reached higher altitude. One or more of the engines was under-powered and we couldn't keep up with the formation, even with full power. After a short time, the flight engineer tapped me on the shoulder and told me to look at the engines. The cylinders were white hot and I was afraid they would explode. We immediately opened the cowl flaps, to cool the cylinders, and dropped our bombs into the sea. We were over water, west of Italy. Thanks to the observant flight engineer, we were able to complete the mission.

“Missions to Blechhammer were always scary. The target was well defended by flak and fighters. On one mission I saw a lone B-17 flying toward the target. It was ahead and below us slightly. As I looked, a spot of fire appeared out of each engine. The plane seemed to stop and just hang there; then exploded into a large ball of fire. We flew through a black cloud of smoke that was left. That was an eerie feeling.

“High altitude flying was both tiring and hazardous. The thin air made close formation more difficult. There was delayed action in response to throttle settings. The pilot had to continually adjust power settings to keep the proper position in the formation. Oxygen regulators would malfunction at times. Another reason for maintaining communications with the crew. My regulator malfunctioned one time. Just as I was about to lose consciousness, I flipped the regulator to MAX oxygen. That quickly revived me.

“The weather was ideal for flying and we had a mission scheduled almost every day. On August 29, our Group went on a mission to Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia. The 96th Was flying the high position, to the right and behind the lead squadron. Hal Wallet was flying #4 position, below and behind our Squadron leader. I was flying #6, off Hal's left wing. Don't remember the positions of the other Squadrons, however, I believe the 20th was flying the rear and low position in the Group.

“My gunners said a large formation of P-51s was approaching. That didn't seem right because I had never heard, nor seen, P-51s approach in such a threatening manner. They knew we were skittish about any planes approaching our formation, so they would keep a comfortable distance away. I scanned forward and to each side. Didn't see any B-17 formations nor P-51s. Something was wrong, we were alone!

“A few seconds later, the area was saturated with cannon bursts and tracers. Fighters started attacking our Squadron. I took the controls from the co-pilot. My duty at that time was to keep our plane in close formation so that our Squadron could maintain maximum defense. I could see the fighters coming directly at us from 3:00 o’clock. All of a sudden a big hole appeared in the rudder of Hal’s bomber. He momentarily lost control, but recovered soon enough to stay in the formation. Surprised that he could keep the plane in the air.

“The gunners were saying that the entire rear Squadron (#4) had been shot down. Also, one from the lead Squadron and one from the #3 Squadron. A total of nine bombers were shot down in the most devastating fighter attack I have ever experienced. Finally the fighters broke off the attack. Probably because they were out of ammunition and P-51s finally began to appear. Our Group bombed the target, encountering scattered, ineffective flak. The 96th returned to Base fully intact with multiple holes in our bombers. Our Group was crippled after this mission. I doubt if we had 28 crews available for a combat mission.

“Our next mission, August 31, was an unusual and pleasant surprise. During the early morning briefing, we were told that we would be going to Bucharest, Romania to bring home some POWs. I listened carefully to what the briefing officer said about where we would land. It was a small, grassy field built for fighters. We were to have close fighter protection, so we didn’t need all our gunners. Our crew was reduced from ten to six.

“Had to land the plane slower than usual, which was easy to do because it was so lightly loaded. We were on the ground long enough to load 20 G.I.s in each bomber. They were put in the bomb bay, in which was installed a wooden floor, and in the waist section. For take-off on this short field, we were told to push our throttles to full power and hold for a few seconds. There was an officer on the ground that gave the signal to release the brakes and start rolling. Was a relief to get airborne with a comfortable margin of real estate remaining.

“Our most uncomfortable moment happened when we landed at Bari, Italy. Just as we were about to land, a pilot taxiing next to the runway blew a large cloud of dust across the runway. Had to make an unexpected blind landing because I couldn’t see the ground. Fortunately we landed and rolled straight through the cloud of dust. A Colonel came up and congratulated me after I parked. I was just thankful that I got through safely with our crew and POWs.

“Since I was a spare pilot, I never was assigned to any particular crew. I probably flew with almost every crew in the 96th. I do remember flying with crews of Hal Wallet and 2nd Lt. Arnold Kwiatkowski. These were both experienced combat crews when I flew with them.

“Had a mishap on a mission with Arnold’s crew. We had just finished our bomb run and I called each member to check their condition. Couldn’t get an answer from the radio operator, Sgt. Charles F. Carey, so I called for help from one of the gunners close by. The ball turret gunner, Sgt. Raymond Bonneau, responded. Bonneau connected him up to another source of oxygen and revived Carey. Carey had a headache for a couple of days afterward.

“I thought Bonneau deserved a medal for saving Carey’s life. Wrote a letter to Headquarters requesting a Soldier’s Medal. Headquarters said they couldn’t issue the medal because Bonneau vacated his position in a combat area.

“Seems as if I was flying all the time. I lost 20 pounds from my initial 160 pounds halfway through my tour. The best morale builders were letters from home. My wife and I kept the post office busy. For piece of mind I read a small Bible the Red Cross included in a packet for service men going overseas. Also went to Chapel service whenever I could; usually with 2nd Lt. Edward C. Buettner, co-pilot on Arnold Kwiatkowski’s crew. Another co-pilot that occasionally flew with me carried a large Bible. He would always do his duties during a mission, but when he wasn’t handling the controls, he would read the Bible.

“My last mission to Blechhammer was October 13th. Had a replacement crew with me. We were still climbing to a higher altitude when I noticed a lowering of oil pressure in No. 2 engine. Feathered the prop, hoping there would be enough oil to use the engine again, if there was an emergency. Didn’t want to stress the three engines, so dumped all the bombs.

“After the bomb run, the Group went into a slight dive and increased speed. This was a normal procedure; get out of the flak as soon as possible. We were left behind so I decided to use the idle engine. Had the co-pilot unfeather the prop. Immediately had a runaway prop because all the oil pressure had gone. What a helpless feeling! Then we heard there were unfriendly fighters in the area. The runaway prop acted like an air brake, and we trailed farther behind. My poor judgement had gotten us in trouble.

“I had heard of all kinds of disasters with runaway props. Just before complete panic struck, I remembered that the primer pumped gasoline into the oil system. Had the co-pilot operate the primer plunger. In a few seconds the prop feathered and I pushed the throttles forward on the other three engines. In the meantime, the Group leader reduced speed. In a few minutes we caught up and tucked our bomber into the formation.

“My last mission was to Brux, Czechoslovakia, October 20th. This was to be a nine and one-half hour mission, one of the longer ones. Had another replacement crew going on their first mission. The pilot of the crew was flying co-pilot. The mission was relatively easy. Had one minor mishap before arriving at the target. Was checking the crew by intercom, then looked over at the co-pilot. He was leaning forward with his head hanging down. Tried to call him but he didn’t answer. Called the flight engineer for help. He found the oxygen hose was kinked. The co-pilot revived but he was a little woozy. Didn’t want to take a chance on his condition so piloted the plane the rest of the mission.

“What a memorable day that was for me! Praise the Lord! I had finished! Several of the fellows I had flown with came to the tent to congratulate me. That was 49 years ago. Often wonder what happened to those that were left; those who were shot down, those that were injured. Maybe this book will provide some answers.

“I didn’t consider my experience noteworthy. However, most of us did finish without the trauma of being shot down, injured or becoming a POW. Perhaps my experience in the 2nd Bomb Group was typical.

“Special consideration goes to those I served with and the ground crews. The ground crews worked under considerable tension. Many nights they worked all night to prepare the bombers for the next day. It was a time of uncertainty. A time I will always remember.”

T/Sgt. John C. Speight, RO on the crew of Lt. Virgil F. Murray. May 18, 1991: “29 August was a memorable day for me. My notes were very brief at the time, so my reference is that the mission was to the Privoser Oil Refinery, Czechoslovakia, and that we were credited with two sorties, which indicated it was a difficult target/mission. I also wrote that we were attacked by 100 FW-190s and Me-109s and that I shot down my first, and only, fighter; an FW-190. That day was memorable also, because I twisted a knee during evasive action and a cartilage was damaged, resulting in a ballooned knee for several days.

“Our pilot was Lt. Virgil F. Murray and our crew name was “Virgil’s Virgins,” alluding to our not having been in combat before. We didn’t always fly together, though it seemed to be a pattern that the engineer and radio operator usually flew with the pilot. However, one was assigned wherever his skill was needed, so we finished our mission requirements at different times. I was assigned as a Squadron lead radio operator and because I passed R and R, I completed my missions first. Virgil became a Squadron Leader and finished his missions shortly thereafter. The others that weren’t injured or killed, finished at different times but within a short time of one another.

“On 31 August and 1 September 1944, several 2nd Bomb Group crews, including ours, were assigned to a mission involving most, if not all, of the B-17 Groups of the 5th Wing (Note: 2nd and 97th Bomb Groups only) to Bucharest, Romania to assist in the evacuation of Allied POWs that had been held by the Germans. We carried a crew of six, 50 cal. ammo for guns but no bombs and a minimum of material and equipment in the plane to allow for 20 to 25 POWs per airplane.

“Concerning our crew, I have located or confirmed the status of our original crew, although three of them did not end up in the 2nd Bomb Group. Those three positions were never permanently filled after our assignment to the 2nd, except perhaps the tail gunner who flew with us until being injured and subsequently being returned to the States because of the injury. Mostly, Operations assigned us whomever was available to fill out the crew. I am still in contact with four members of the 2nd Bomb Group crew, but can't say whether they were on the 29th mission, although I think Virgil Murray should have been. Our engineer, Richard H. Ferro, who was later KIA on his 49th mission, should have been with me that day, but I can't confirm that. Donald E. Crutcher was our ball turret gunner. Einard A. Saatela was our co-pilot and he got his crew along the way. Charles H. Hill, our replacement tail gunner, was injured soon thereafter and was sent home.

“My first mission was to Vienna, Austria on 16 June and my last was to Budapest, Hungary on 17 September 1944. The rest of my time was in indoctrination, practice flights, etc. before combat, and instructing new radio operators and other non-combat duties after I completed my missions.”

#### **BUCHAREST, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 264 - AUGUST 31, 1944**

Operation “REUNION:” Orders had been received from 5th Wing some days previously to prepare aircraft for a secret mission. The bomb bays had the racks removed and flooring installed in the bomb bay. August 30th, orders were received that 30 aircraft from the 2nd Bomb Group and eight aircraft from the 97th Bomb Group were to proceed to Popesti Airdrome to evacuate Allied POWs.

Thirty-two A/C were to accommodate 20 rescued personnel and two A/C were to accommodate ten litter cases. Each would carry a crew of six: Pilot, Co-pilot, Navigator, Engineer, Radio Operator, and Tail Gunner.

A/C were to be divided into three Waves of 12 A/C each and a Fourth Wave of two litter A/C dispatched at one hour intervals. The 306th Fighter Wing was to provide escort of each Wave during penetration and withdrawal. Upon approach of within 30 miles of Bucharest, one flight of fighters was to leave the formation and precede the bombers to receive signals as to friendly or enemy status of the field. Fighters to return to bombers and relay signals to proceed or return to base. Route in and out to be strictly adhered to in order to avoid known flak batteries. A/C to land, load and take-off as quickly as possible.

On 31 August 1944, 30 aircraft took off: First Wave, 0615; Second Wave, 0717; third Wave, 0815. A/C unloaded rescued airmen at Bari, Italy. First Wave, 1540; Second Wave, 1608; Third Wave, 1700. Two A/C remained at Popesti.

1st Lt. Charles E. Crafton, First Pilot in the 429th Squadron. July 7, 1994: “We departed the States and flew the southern route: Trinidad, Belem, Natal, Dakar, Marrakech, El Ouina, Gioia, Foggia Main, Amendola. Our aircraft was a B-17 FA, #42-97726, a Mickey ship. The crew consisted of 2nd Lt. Juan J. Dyer, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. James J. Miceli, Radar Navigator; 2nd Lt. John G. Hofmann, Bombardier; S/Sgt. John C. May, Engineer; S/Sgt. William M. Schilling, Radio Operator; and Frank Rensheimer, Radar Mechanic. I don't remember that Cpl. Rensheimer flew a mission with me. My other crew members, Sgts. Isadore Berman, Mel Moser, Earl E. McLish, and Gerald Hamilton came by boat.

“Lt. Dyer and Sgt. Hamilton were shot down and killed on a raid to Munich, Germany on the 4th of October 1944. Lt. Miceli was shot down and taken POW on the 18th of May 1944 while flying as Radar Navigator on a mission to Ploesti. He was flying with a crew from the 463rd Bomb Group.

S/Sgt. Isadore Berman was shot down on 10 August 1944 while flying with another crew. He was taken prisoner by the Germans.

“Captain John “Jerry” Hofmann, my bombardier, completed his missions and then volunteered to go to the front lines in Italy as an observer. I believe there was a volunteer program at this time to exchange ground and flying officers in order that each service could experience the life of the other. Jerry lost his life 24 April 1945 in the front lines of Northern Italy. I had flown my last mission in late September and tried to get Jerry to come home with me. It was a tragic loss! Other crew members were also wounded but for some strange reason I must have led a charmed life.

“I would think that one of my most memorable missions was the rescue operation to Bucharest, Romania the 31st of August. We knew on the 30th that something big was in the wind. The crews had been on the alert status since 1600 hours and we couldn’t find out the reason. We did know we were loaded to the maximum gas load and special racks installed in the bomb bay, making a platform for which we could not figure the use.

“On the 31st we had an early briefing and the answer to all the secrecy was the - MASS EVACUATION OF POWs FROM BUCHAREST, ROMANIA! Besides myself, my crew consisted of 2nd Lt. James C. Harris, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Arnold Witoff, Navigator; T/Sgt. Donald C. May, Engineer; S/Sgt. Earl E. McLish, Tail Gunner; and T/Sgt. William M. Schilling, Radio Operator.

“The flight consisted of 38 B-17s, two of which were litter planes, to take off in three waves at one hour intervals. We were to form in two, six-ship boxes and proceed on course to the coast of Yugoslavia, where we were to meet our escort. Each Wave picked up 16 P-51s and P-38s, which escorted us to the Popesti Airdrome just a few miles southwest of Bucharest, where we landed, upon the all clear signal of two yellow flares fired from the ground.

“I was flying deputy lead in the Second Wave and we were to land at 1100 hours. While we circled the field, to the left we could see a line of men formed on the ground in groups of about 20, waiting for us. All the ships landed safely. We taxied up to the men and they began waving and shouting in their joy to see us.

The crewmen, some held prisoner for over a year, were dressed in motley uniforms of all descriptions. Some sported German helmets, German and Romanian officer’s uniforms, long and wicked looking knives, fancy belts, scarfs, colorful pants and shirts. Some had long beards but apparently all were in good health. One sergeant, for some unknown reason, had lugged a complete German machine gun with him and another was carrying two, unopened boxes of German hand grenades.

“Romanian cigarettes, which they had purchased in prison camp canteens, were thrown to the ground, or given to curious soldiers, and cases of American cigarettes were opened and eagerly smoked by the airmen. Twenty airmen were loaded in each B-17 and started to taxi again being on the ground for 18 minutes.

“Popesti Airdrome itself was a fighter field roughly square and with a decided hill in the center, sloping down on all sides. Enemy fighters of all kinds covered the fields, some in perfect condition and others a little worse for wear due to previous strafings.

“Our Second Wave unloaded at Bari, Italy, where the minute we stopped, the evacuated men were swept into a whirl of excited news photographers, war correspondents, high ranking officers, and surprised bystanders. Of the first American airmen to land, the first 670 were in excellent condition, 50 were on crutches, and 10 were litter cases.

“Our Wave, the second, encountered enemy opposition on the way up and our escort shot down two Me-109s. After that we learned one P-51 had been lost from the escort of one of the other Waves.

“Of the two days of operations, Thursday and Friday, August 31 and September 1, only two accidents occurred. One of the planes in the First Wave, on the first day, blew a tire while taxiing, but the tire was changed and the ship flew back the next day. On the second day, the outer Tokyo tank on

the right wing of one of the planes exploded, blowing the tip of the wing off. It was repaired and the crew flew it back in ten days.

“Among those brought back on the first day was my own navigator, Lt. James Miceli. He had acquired a Radar Navigator’s rating and we flew a “Mickey” ship across. Both Miceli and the plane went down on their first raid over Ploesti, 18 May 1944.

On the second day, they brought out another member of my crew, S/Sgt. Isadore Berman, shot down over Ploesti on 10 August 1944. All in all, I would say that my participation in this “Reunion” mission had been one of the outstanding highlights of my time overseas. It was especially gratifying to me to know that the missing members of my crew were saved.”

S/Sgt. Paul Langley, 96th Squadron, flew most of his missions as a Waist Gunner on the crew of Captain Roger C. Thompson. March 15, 1993: “I was fortunate to finish my missions but some were rough and I remember them clearly. I kept a diary, although we weren’t supposed to, and some of the following information is taken from it.

“July 13, 1944 we went to bomb the Marshalling Yards at Verona, Italy. A rookie waist gunner had his head blown off by flak.

“July 15th we went to bomb oil fields at Ploesti. We had to clean our ammunition to fire our guns. The ack ack was so bad that Sgt. Miller looked up and said over the interphone, “Oh Lord, don’t let this happen to us!” We got a crew check from the pilot and all were OK. It was the same plane that the rookie got killed in, #508.

“One day in August we were on our way back from Bari and passed a G.I. with badly worn out shoes and a heated flight suit, cut off at the knees. He looked like a bum, very sun tanned and looking like he had spent many miles on the road. We stopped our 6x6 and asked him to get in because we realized he had been shot down over enemy territory and was walking home. He told us in a sour voice, “Hell no, I have walked this far, I’m going to walk the rest of the way.” As far as I know, he did.

“August 31st we went to Bucharest, Romania and landed at an airfield near there. We picked up 1,000 of our boys who went down in that area. The Romanian patriots battled the Germans off this airfield so we could land and pick up our boys. The Russian/German line was three miles away from Bucharest. When we landed, the boys shook hands, yelled and hollered. Boy they were a happy bunch! The Romanians were very glad to see us. They shook hands with us and waved when we left. People stood outside their houses when we went across, waved and shook white cloths at us.

“Quite a few Russians had slipped through to the airfield and we had a chance to talk with them. There was a large Russian woman with two guns and two ammo belts on her. While I was talking to her a bi-plane (old) flew a half circle around the airfield. I looked up and laughed at it. She gave me a dirty look so I got back into my B-17.

“One of the POWs asked me if I had any American cigarettes and I told him I had some Lucky Strikes. He offered to trade me some German cigarettes, so I did. I tried one of them, they were “nasty, filthy.” I still have the rest of them. I also got some medals; one a First Order of the Iron Cross of the Third Reich, and another, Silver Romania Wings.

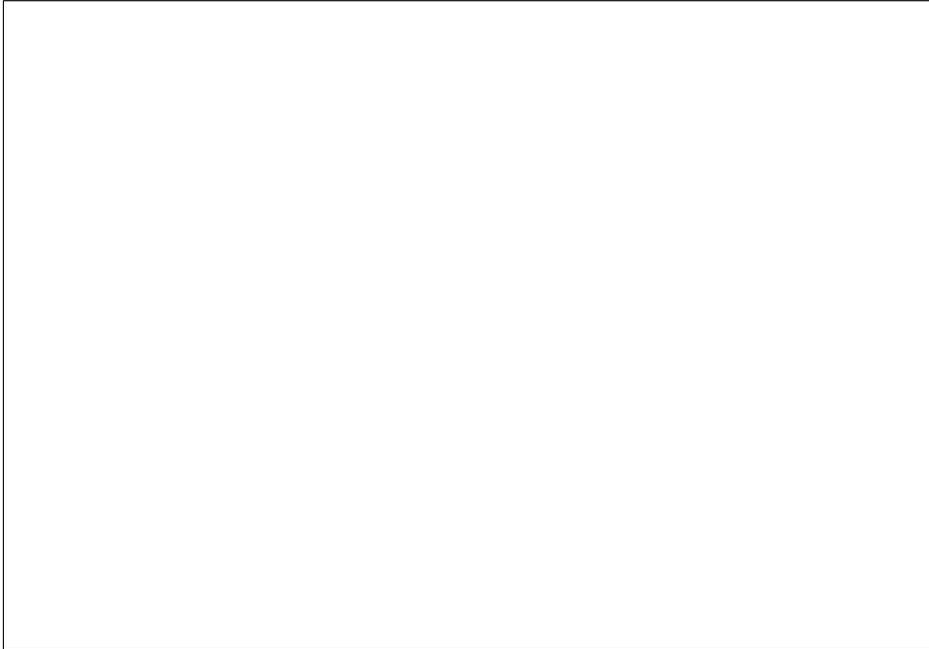
“On September 1st we landed at the airfield near Bucharest again and a well-dressed man got in the waist and wanted to come back to Italy with us. He offered to pay a large sum of American greenbacks. I told him no, to see my pilot and tell him what you want. I don’t know what happened to him.

“Some of the boys told me how mean the Germans had been. They said, “If a gunner didn’t get killed in the air, he might get killed otherwise.” We really snatched those boys from under the Germans’ noses!

“My last mission was to Blechhammer, Germany on September 13th. My diary shows that we had trouble with our oxygen system and our tail gunner, S/Sgt. Charles Hill, passed out from lack of

oxygen. He was unconscious for so long he stopped breathing and one of the waist gunners had to give him artificial respiration to get him breathing again. We landed at Foggia Main and he was taken to a hospital where he recovered.”

Major Richard F. Kuhn was the Flight Surgeon of the 96th Squadron, after transfer from the 49th Squadron. He was the recipient of the Legion of Merit for work with the OSS, Purple Heart, Air Medal, the Nifkin Aktar Medal from the Bey of Tunis for humanitarian work with Arab civilians and



the Merital Sanitar Medal presented by the King of Romania for aid to that country during a typhoid outbreak. June 5, 1990: “As I remember it, the week of February 20th was a nightmare! No one of the 96th Squadron made all three main missions. The attacks on our Group were made in wave after wave of Me-109s and FW-190s. I remember one first pilot, saying to me after Steyr, ‘Geez Doc, it was

Air Evacuation - August 31, 1944

Dr. Julius Levine unloading S/Sgt. Peter Tierney (Courtesy - R. Kuhn)

just like in the movies, planes falling out of the sky in flames, parachutes all over the place.’ I remember Colonel Lovelace, the Head Flight Surgeon for the Air Force, chose to go on the Regensburg mission, not realizing what a catastrophe it might be. The plane he flew in did not return to Amendola and we, Dr. Julius Levine (Flight Surgeon of the 96th Squadron) and I thought he had been lost. However, we later learned they had been shot up pretty badly and managed to land at another airfield.

“At the end of each mission we were kept busy following planes that had “Red Lights” on, as a sign that someone aboard was wounded and needed assistance. We did the best we could administering plasma, morphine, etc. If not too badly wounded, sewing skin together and applying temporary splints and slings. After the men were carried to the hospital, they came under the care of that staff and we had visiting privileges which we did daily after early morning missions had taken off. Of course we were always in attendance for the take-off and return of missions. We were always glad when we could count all our planes as safe while they were several miles away.

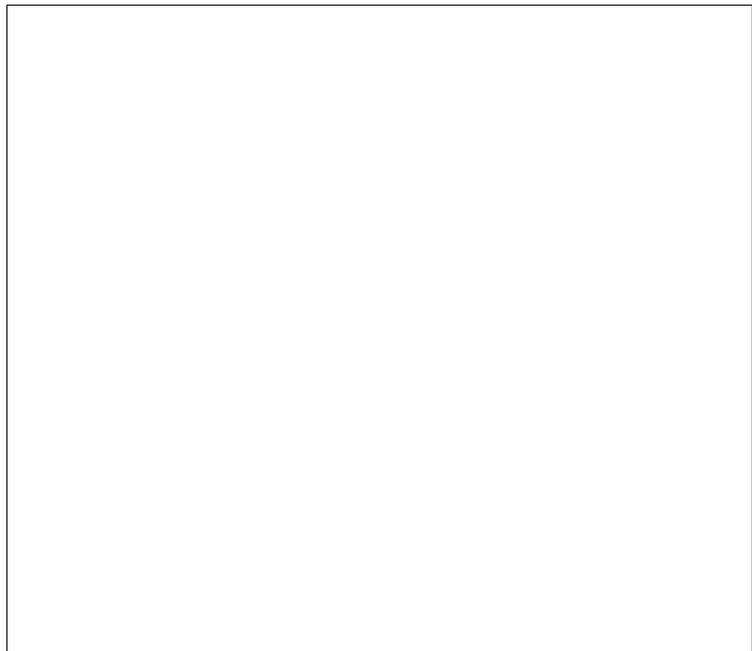
“In August 1944, Dr. Julius Levine and I were selected to go to Romania to aid in the evacuation of airmen that had been shot down over Ploesti. We packed whatever penicillin we could get into ice jugs and all the first aid equipment we could gather, and in two, separate B-17s flew, with P-38 escort, to Bucharest. We found several hundred of our men waiting anxiously to be sent back to

Italy. We questioned them about wounds and illnesses and put them on planes for their trip back to Italy. The same day we went to Puchini where we found a small hospital, which was near the Ploesti area; finding quite a few Americans, including a T/Sgt. Peter Tierney, a T/Sgt. from a B-24 Group, who was badly wounded. Julius and I took turns, staying up all night, giving him penicillin every four hours. We later moved him to a Russian hospital in Bucharest where we could observe the care given Russian soldiers. I was introduced to a Mr. Rokota, who was head of the telephone company. He offered to call all the hospitals in Romania to see if there were any wounded Americans there.

“It was decided that Julius (Dr. Levine) would stay at the hospital and help the Romanian doctors care for the wounded while I would travel to outlying districts to find the wounded airmen.

About this time the Russians issued an order that no Americans could leave the Ploesti area for bomb damage reports. However, as I was on errands of mercy, I continued to travel far and wide in Romania to various hospitals. The Russians would stop me at roadblocks, hold me overnight or for several days, until they communicated with “Moscow” to see if I was for real. The OSS Commander, Frank Wisner, U.S.N., asked me if I would work for them since I was able to roam about without causing too much trouble. I was transferred after we returned to our base at Amendola. The OSS briefed me on Bacteriological warfare and I was looking for American airmen (cover was perfect) all through Bessarabia and parts of Russia as far as Odessa.

“My experience in North Africa, prior to the move to Italy, ranged from delivering a baby to the daughter of an Arab Chief, Arabs with eye diseases, and shrapnel wounds from land mines left behind after the fighting. My Sergeant, John Monroe, and the rest of the staff had many interesting experiences.”



Bari, Italy Hospital  
Dr. J. Levine, Peter Tierney, nurse, and Dr. R. Kuhn

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# 13

## OPERATIONS: SEPTEMBER, 1944

### **B**UCHAREST, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 265 - SEPTEMBER 1, 1944

Orders for this mission were essentially the same as Mission No. 264 except that only 15 A/C were required plus one A/C for litter cases. Fighter cover to be provided by the 306th Fighter Wing. At 0730 hours, 16 aircraft took off and landed at Popesti Airdrome, loaded the airmen and flew to Bari, Italy. The men were unloaded and the A/C returned to Base at 1730 hours. No. 350 remained at Popesti. Mission successful.

### **BELGRADE, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 266 - SEPTEMBER 3, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 27 aircraft, with a bomb load of six, 1,000-lb. GP bombs, dropped their load on the Sava Railroad Bridge at Belgrade. The bombing was recorded as good although the bridge was still standing. One aircraft made an emergency landing on the Island of Vis. The bombardier, Lt. Johnson, was wounded and remained in the hospital there. The remainder of the crew returned the next day.

1st Lt. Elliott Hansell, 96th Squadron, N, on the crew of 1st Lt. Eliot Spiess. May 29, 1992: "I suppose my first mission, which was to Belgrade, Yugoslavia, September 3, 1944, was probably my most exciting mission. That ended with a crash landing on the Island of Vis, off the coast of Yugoslavia. Fortunately, all the crew survived and we returned to base the next day.

"I was fortunate to complete my tour without injury despite the fact that 20 of my missions were double credits because of length and severity of the target. That does not mean that the others were "milk runs" because flak was everywhere and there were enemy airfields galore all around the targets we visited.

"Ten of my missions were into Germany: Lechfield (1), Blechhammer (4), Munich (4), Regensburg (1). Six were into Austria: Salzburg (1), Vienna (2) and Linz (3). My four other double credits were to Czechoslovakia: Brux (3), and Brno (1). I had four missions into Yugoslavia: Belgrade, Subotica, Bratislava, and Maribor. Two were to Bucharest and Debreczen, Hungary. One to Kalamaki, Greece and (3) to Italian targets: Bologna, Treviso, and Trento.

"Three missions were "Lone Wolf" missions in which we flew to targets alone. Two were to Linz, Austria, and the other to Blechhammer, Germany.

"My final mission, 31, and credited with 51 because of double credits was to Linz, Austria, January 8, 1945."

1st Lt. Eliot Spiess, and his crew, were assigned to the 96th Bomb Squadron, August 26, 1944. June 13, 1992: "Original members of my crew were 2nd Lt. Robert F. Merino, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Elliott Hansell, Navigator; 2nd Lt. Joseph Humel, bombardier; T/Sgt. Woodrow W. Harris, engineer; S/Sgt.

Andrew D. Miller, Lower Turret; S/Sgt. Delbert E. Ellis, Right Waist; S/Sgt. Theodore J. Collins, Left Waist; S/Sgt. John A LeClair, Jr., Tail Gunner; and T/Sgt. Gerald Voss, Jr., Radio Operator.

“When we were assigned to the 96th Squadron we were told how lucky we were to have just missed the last of the Ploesti missions. What we heard of those missions “scared the pants off us.” But as time went on, we found that Ploesti to be only one knockout of very many that needed similar treatment.

“As was the Group policy, new crews were split up for a time and flew with experienced crews. I flew my first five missions as co-pilot.

“On my first combat mission, September 3, target, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, I co-piloted with a veteran pilot. Our navigator, Elliott Hansell, was the only man from my crew on board. We took off at 0715 and were over the target at 1050 when No. 3 engine spouted an excessive oil leak and high cyl. pressure. We fell out of formation and were attempting to drop bombs on a second target when No. 1 engine let loose a huge stream of black smoke. We feathered both engines and salvaged bombs, gun guts and ammunition to lighten our load, although the ball turret was retained. Air speed decreased to 120 mph and altitude was being lost at 200 ft/min. Highest altitude was at 27,000 feet when engines were feathered. When at 11,000 feet, after an hour’s return, we were over the Dalmation Alps and encountered moderate flak, easily aimed at our crippled ship. The bombardier was severely wounded in the leg. Ell Hansell gave him first aid. We sweated out the readiness for abandoning the ship, with sharp, rocky terrain below, when two P-38s appeared and gave us escort to an emergency field on the Island of Vis, just off the Dalmation Coast.

“As we approached the island, red flares went up to signal position of the runway - a stretch of not more than 1,000 feet surrounded by high hills. Our pilot, already experienced by many missions was over-cautious about the short landing strip and was planning to go around for a second look, but I overruled him because the bombardier needed attention and going around the high hills was risky. So, I put down the flaps and landing gear. The pilot over-shot the runway so that the wheels touched down half-way down the strip. Our speed was about 60 mph when we got to the far end - beyond were grape arbors and chicken coops. We tore through those but then came to a 20 foot drop to a muddy pond. We stood on the brakes, the ship nosed down, and came to a rest with the nose section looking like an accordion. Ell Hansell and the wounded bombardier were shoved up against the floor boards of the cockpit. Both were bruised, shaken and madder than hell!! As soon as we got out, Yugoslav-Tito Partisans and British Rangers rushed up to help. They took the wounded bombardier to a field hospital where he was given emergency treatment. Hansell had hash marks across his chest but otherwise was OK. The plane’s main spar had buckled so it was not flyable.

“That evening the crew and I went into town, went swimming in the harbor; gorgeous castles on promontories at each side of the harbor entrance plus a view of the Dalmation Alps beyond. The next morning, after a terrific Yugoslav breakfast, we returned to base by ferrying a B-17 that previously had landed for repairs. We arrived back at base September 4 at 1330 hours.

“Thirty years later, my son Bruce, at Dennison University, Ohio, heard the story of this mission told by one of his fraternity friends, Dean Hansell. Our two sons at the same college! What a coincidence! The Hansell family and the Spiess family had a joyous reunion!

“September 12. Co-pilot. Take-off 0800 hours. Target: Airdrome west of Munich, Germany, where jet aircraft were being manufactured. Altitude, 24,500. Alps beautiful but ominous looking. Flak over Munich very intense but stopped when we turned toward the I.P. until we got right over the target when it started up again. Perhaps 50 guns were tracking us. One of our planes in another squadron blew up. Target was hit OK. Returned at 1600 hours.

“September 13. Co-pilot. Take-off at 0630 hours. Target: Blechhammer North Oil Refineries, East Germany near the Poland border. Over the target at 1130 hours and at 29,000 feet. It was smoky and hazy below and flak intense and accurate. Two B-17s had direct hits, blowing up, and considerable

damage to other aircraft. No enemy fighters appeared. Our plane had a four-inch hole through the left wing spar plus a hole in the pilot's window, but no personal injuries. Hit target OK. Landed at base at 1430 hours.

"September 15. Co-pilot. Take-off 0535 hours (predawn). Target: Kalamaki Airdrome, Athens, Greece. Purpose of knocking out German transports on the ground during the Nazis' evacuation of Crete. As we approached Athens at 28,000 feet, flak barrage was very intense ahead of target, though at point of bomb drop, there was no flak. I could see the Acropolis beyond and the Lykabettos. While I was watching, I felt an inability to catch my breath. Thinking about some obstruction in my oxygen supply, I opened the supply full on, then I passed out. It seemed that my air hose had disconnected accidentally and when I slumped over, our engineer, Woody Harris, noticed and plugged me back in. All of a sudden the lights came back ON! Very interesting experience! The flight back was very picturesque along the Adriatic Coast; cliffs and mountains. Landed at 1300 hours.

"September 21. First Pilot! Take-off 0630 and target: Debreczen, Hungary, Marshalling Yards. Over target at 1050 hours and 23,000 feet. Flak intense, heavy, and accurate. Had been briefed for 37 guns, but those looked like 3700! No injuries on our ship but several others heavily damaged. Coming home we hit weather close to the Yugoslavian coast at 12,000 feet. Formation broke up and came through a cold front. Came out at 3,000 feet over the Adriatic. We took a fix with a radar station with visibility about a one-fourth variable. Landed at 1540 with a strong cross wind. OK until at the end of the runway where the ship veered sharply into the wind to the right - engines could not restore straight run, and tires went over the steel mat. Flat tire in the mud, UGH!

"September 22. Take-off 0740. Target: Munich Allach BMW Works, Germany. Over the Alps again, and over the target at 1257. Target was a machine plant in the center of Munich. Bombs landed in a very smoky area. Flak thickest and heaviest I have ever met. In flak for about four minutes. Lead ship took evasive action. No injuries but two pieces of flak hit the nose and bombardier's sleeve. No enemy fighters. Landed at 1600 hours.

"October 4. Take-off 0730. Target: Main Marshalling Yards west of Munich. Alps more snow covered than before. Over target at 1215. Our purpose was to disrupt transportation between industrial center and southern fronts. Target well hit. Smoke from 1,000-lb. bombs rose up to 10,000 feet. Our altitude, 28,000 feet, with very intense and accurate flak. No enemy fighters. Chutes came out of group behind us. Ship behind - opposite us had to leave formation because of an oxygen leak. Lucky guys, they came back too. Landed at 1530.

"October 13. (Friday, my birthday). Target: Blechhammer, Germany, South Oil Refineries. Over target at 1100, altitude 26,000 feet. Flak very intense and accurate. Four holes in our ship; two in the nose, one in the co-pilot's window and one in the left waist position. Target was well hit! No fighters but enemy was reported over Vienna at the same time. Landed at 1430. Some birthday!

"Received promotion to 1st Lt., October 15th - belated birthday present.

"October 16. Take-off 0620. Target: Assigned originally Brux Ordnance Works, Czechoslovakia. Bombed alternate, Salzburg, Austria, because of bad weather to north. Alps white with snow. Salzburg was under a thick smoke screen but Marshalling Yards well hit. Much smoke from oil billowed up. We dropped 500-lb. RDX bombs. Flak very heavy and accurate. In flak for six minutes! Our damage: leads to No. 3 oil and fuel gauges and outside air temp. gauge were blown out. Altitude 22,000 feet. Landed at 1330.

"October 20. Take-off 0700. Target: Brux, Czechoslovakia Oil Refineries. Weather good except for undercast (9/10) at 15,000 feet. Altitude over target, 26,000 feet, 1300 hours. Flak very intense barrage, no tracking however, so it was not very accurate. Radio operator, Jerry Voss, got sick (detached oxygen) but not seriously. Very long mission. We had only about 340 gals. left. Landed at 1630.

“November 5. Take-off 0640. Target: Vienna Florisdorf Oil Refineries, Austria. Over target at 1150, altitude 30,000 feet. Undercast and bombed by radar. Flak extensive at target but very little reached our altitude. Made three runs at the target! Huge number of our planes over Vienna today. Poor B-24s got hell down at 23,000 feet. On radio we heard a B-24 yelling for escort when a couple of Me-109s started attacking near Lake Balaton. On return, we had to leave the formation once, over the Alps, in order to sweat out our gasoline usage - 1700 RPM at 27" manifold. Landed at 1500 hours with 50 gals. per tank.

“November 11. Take-off at 0700. Target: Originally briefed for Bruz, Czechoslovakia. Winds were so adverse the formation turned to Salzburg instead. Our ship had no heat! At 1049 hours, our No. 2 engine lost oil pressure and feathered the prop; turned to Villach, Austria Marshalling Yards as an alternate. Guns at Villach were supposed to be only six, but each was accurate. Flak knocked out hydraulic line to cowl flaps and also hit the ball turret. No injuries. Bob Merino and I froze our feet and our bones ached as we thawed out. Temperature at altitude was -60 degrees C! As we approached the Adriatic we reached lower altitude to warm up. Tornados (water spouts) were reported and very turbulent - low pressure in atmosphere. Landed at 1345. At briefing headquarters, at base, we spotted a tornado touch down about two to three miles from us, just north of the Operations Office. Some sight!

“November 16. Take-off 0635. Target: Munich West Marshalling Yards, Germany. Over target at 1203 hours at 30,000 feet. Snow on the ground over landscape. Bombed visually plus radar combined. Temperature outside was -52C but were comfortable in our heated suits. Flak extensive but not accurate. Had one hole in ship. Went through flight gyro, under the co-pilot's seat. Weather good except some high cumulus at target. Formation better than usual. Major Redden led our Squadron and Group. Hit target, BULLS EYE! Landed at 1500.

“November 24-25 (Night)! Take-off 2255. Target: Linz Benzol Oil Refineries, Austria. We were leading a single ship mission with radar navigator for bombing, etc. Briefed for thick cirrus clouds over the Alps as protection during the night. But almost no clouds - Alps were gorgeous in bright moonlight! We doubted whether we should bomb the main target, but within 50 miles of Linz, clouds thickened at our altitude (28,000 feet). Over Linz, searchlights came on, plus a moderate amount of flak. Over target at 0421 hours. At Graz, some searchlights came on but failed to penetrate clouds. Searchlights give you the feeling of being in a goldfish bowl. Arrived at base, landing at 0700. Slept all the rest of the day.

“December 9. Take-off 0745. Target: Originally briefed for Bruz Oil Refineries but we bombed the third alternate instead because of bad weather; Regensburg Marshalling yards. Group lead kept changing and giving us trouble in formation. Bomb run was very long - more than 20 minutes. Coming back, weather deteriorated and formation troubled everybody. Our nine-ship formation came back with only four ships of the original Squadron. Two did not return at all, several landed at the emergency field at Ancona, Italy, or ditched. We landed at 1610.

“December 19. Take-off 0650. Target: Blechhammer North Oil refineries. Everything went well up to the target (29,000 feet) where the lead and deputy lead's radar sets became inoperative. Red and green flak as well as the usual black appeared. We did not drop bombs. Instead, we turned off and dived at 200 mph down to 22,000 feet. We held our bombs until one of the Squadron lead could catch up and assist us in triggering our bombs. Time, 1230 hours. By 1330, they decided to bomb the 4th alternate, Soporon Marshalling Yards just south of Wiener Neustadt, Austria. After a 15-minute bomb run, we dropped ours and found our gasoline remaining was just 90 gals. per tank. The formation finally slowed down to 140 mph. We got our props down to 1700 RPM and MP at 28". Result: we landed at 1615 with about ONE gal. in tank No. 1, 10 gals. in No. 2, 20 gals. in tank No. 3, and 5 gals. in No. 4. Total time, 9 hours and 30 minutes!

“December 27. Take-off 0820. LAST SORTIE! Briefed target: Kornernburg Oil Refineries, Austria. Formation went well. Operations scheduled all our original crew together as a final “present.” We bombed Linz, Austria Marshalling Yards. The first target was cloud covered. Over the target at 1230 at 27,000 feet. Used radar. Flak was intense and accurate. A hole in the upper metal rim of my front windshield. A piece of flak across my feet and landed opposite side. This is the piece I saved. No injuries and not much damage. Landed at 1620.

“Left the 2nd Bomb Group for Naples Departure Station, January 26, 1945. Left Naples for U.S.A. on U.S. General Meigs. February 26, 1945. Passed Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor, March 8, 1945.”

#### **BUCHAREST, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 267 - SEPTEMBER 3, 1944**

At 0758 three aircraft took-off and landed at Popesti Airdrome for the rescue of the remaining Allied POWs at Bucharest. The aircraft took off immediately and landed the rescued airmen at Bari, Italy. They returned to home base at 2011 hours. Mission accomplished!

#### **GENOA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 268 - SEPTEMBER 4, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 82.75 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on Harbor Installations at Genoa. It was reported that German submarines were in the harbor and the mission was intended to destroy them. Bombs were believed to be in the target area, which was covered by smoke from the bombing of a previous Group. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate resulting in wounding of three airmen: 2nd Lt. James E. Craig, Co-pilot 96th Squadron, was seriously wounded; S/Sgt. Paul M. Langley, Toggler, 96th Squadron, was slightly wounded; and S/Sgt. Raymond E. Bastion, Tail Gunner, 49th Squadron, was slightly wounded.

#### **BUDAPEST, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 269 - SEPTEMBER 5, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 27 aircraft dropped 79.5 tons of 1,000-lb. RDX bombs on the South Railroad Bridge in Budapest. The bombs of the First Wave were over and to the right while the remainder were in the target area with possible direct hits. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate, resulting in serious injury to T/Sgt. James W. Hunter, Radio Operator, 49th Squadron, and a slight injury to Captain George A. Redden, Pilot 429th Squadron. The aircraft carrying T/Sgt. Hunter landed at Foggia Main where he was immediately taken to a hospital. All other planes returned safely.

The 2nd Bomb Group softball team won the NATOUSA crown in Oran today.

#### **ORADEA, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 270 - SEPTEMBER 6, 1944**

Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 325, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Oradea. There was no flak over the target. The bombing pattern covered the entire area of the Yards.

#### **BROD, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 271 - SEPTEMBER 8, 1944**

Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 78 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Brod. The target area was well covered. Flak was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate. S/Sgt. Lloyd C. Miller, Lower Turret 49th Squadron, was slightly wounded. All planes returned safely.

September 9, 1944 was a non-operational day. There were several rest camps available for the men to attend; Bari, Rome, Isle of Capri, Cairo, Egypt to name a few. I wasn't scheduled for one at the time but had some free time so decided I would get a pass and go on my own to visit Rome. S/Sgt. Emil Schneider, our supply Sergeant, from Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, was also interested in going. I had checked with our Operations and found that a flight was going to Rome this day and received

approval for us to go. We arrived at the flight line early and took off. We flew over the town of Cassino and the Abbey and were amazed at the total devastation! It was hard to understand how anyone could survive the bombing and shelling! When we arrived over the Rome airport, we found it closed in by the weather and could not land, so we returned to the Base.

We decided that we still would go so caught a ride to Foggia, stopped at the Red Cross and found a truck driver going toward Naples. Later found that he was not going all the way and were dumped off, in the rain, at a little town near Ariano. We finally caught a ride with an English soldier and rode to the outskirts of Naples. We then rode a bus for a way and finally caught a ride with a G.I. to the Red Cross where we thought we might sleep. No dice in the sleeping, but we did eat there. We finally found a room with an Italian family and went to bed.

The next morning, we went to the Red Cross to clean up and eat breakfast. Found out that there was a train running to Pompeii so decided it would be an interesting place to see. It was worth the trip. We then went back to Naples and caught a ride with a G.I. truck driver but found he was only going part way to Rome. We caught several rides and finally caught a straight through ride at Capua.

In one town, I believe it was Cisterna, the truck driver saw a fruit stand and he pulled over. Emil and I got out also to buy some grapes. There were some young women nearby and one walked over to us and addressed us in excellent English. She asked where we were from and I said I was from Ohio. She said, "I'm from Ohio, what town?" When I told her I was from Steubenville, she cried, "I'm from Steubenville too!" Her name was Anna Dalessio, had married an Italian, moved to Italy and was caught up in the war. The ironic thing about our meeting was that she lived in Rome, had come down to visit relatives for a few days and had just come to the stand to get some fruit. Unfortunately she was not going back to Rome, so I never saw her again. The truck driver was anxious to get going so never had a chance to get her address. We finally arrived in Rome around 8:30, found the Red Cross and had something to eat. We had the address of the woman who took in G.I.s and knew we were coming. However, it was too late to find the place. An elderly fellow stopped us and offered us a room. Cost us \$2.00. His wife made some coffee for us and we went to bed.

The next day we had breakfast at the Red Cross and set out to find the apartment of the woman where we planned to stay. Finally found it and it turned out to be real nice. It cost each of us \$1.25 a day with a light breakfast. We had taken some things with us for bartering; cigarettes, soap, sugar, etc., and gave some to her. We spent the 11th, 12th, and 13th of September touring Rome. We attended services at the Vatican and saw the Pope. I did some shopping for the folks at home. All in all, it was a rewarding experience.

On the 14th we were up early, had breakfast, caught a ride and headed out of Rome. We were dropped off about 20 miles out of Rome and couldn't get another ride. After a long wait we decided to go back to Rome and try again, which we did. We met a truck driver at the Red Cross who said he was going to Naples in the afternoon so we rode around with him until he was ready to go. It turned out he had a change of orders and we were dropped off about halfway to Naples. We caught another ride but the truck broke down. We finally caught a ride with some fellows who were coming back from Pisa. They had some K-Rations and shared them with us. Finally arrived in Naples around 10:00 p.m. We went to the home of the family who had given us a room on the first night in Naples. We hit the hay, plenty tired after a very trying day.

We were up early the next day, went to the Red Cross to eat and cleanup. We hit the road for Amendola and after several rides, arrived in camp around 4:00 p.m. It was a good trip but we were happy to get back in camp.

It was fortunate that we arrived when we did because it started pouring rain and we had a violent windstorm which blew the roofs off the 20th Squadron Mess Hall, Orderly Room, and Enlisted Men's Clubhouse. We thought our roof was going also.

During my time in the service I never met many fellows from Steubenville. Francis "Bill" Brooks came into the 96th Squadron in mid-1944 as part of a combat crew. On a day he was ill, and grounded, his crew was shot down and he was devastated! He did survive the war. Daniel Daugherty was a combat gunner in the 97th Bomb Group across the field from us. He finished his missions and went home. Jack Blum was a navigator, or bombardier, on a B-24 crew and he finished his missions and went home. We all got together one day at my camp and it was great to be with fellows I had known.

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 272 - SEPTEMBER 10, 1944**

Lt. Col. Charles H. Hillhouse, Deputy Group Commanding Officer, led 28 aircraft on take-off and 27 dropped 64 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Lobau Oil Refinery in Vienna. One aircraft dropped its bombs with another Group. The target area was well covered and several fires were seen. Flak was moderate to intense, accurate and heavy, resulting in serious injury to S/Sgt. T. E. Dingler, RW, 49th Squadron; light wounds to Cpl. Dorsey Back, TG, 20th Squadron; Cpl. S. C. Lewis, UT, 20th Squadron; 2nd Lt. L. C. Allen, N, 429th Squadron; and 2nd Lt. J. J. Nixon, B, 429th Squadron. Twenty-six aircraft suffered flak damage but all returned safely.

#### **SECRET MISSION - ITALY/France - A/C #42-30500 - "MISS CHARLOTTE" - SEPTEMBER 10, 1944**

2nd Lt.	John R. Meyers, 0-822048, P.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Darl J. Heffelbower, 0-771010, CP.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Ian S. Raeburn, 0-723433, N.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Raymond L. Wilson, 0-722102, B.	(DED)
T/Sgt.	Donald C. Pullis, 12127802, U/T.	(DED)
Cpl.	Robert B. Lloyd, 39912971, R/W.	(DED)
Cpl.	Walter M. Bildstein, 38514657, L/W.	(DED)
Cpl.	Louis H. Simpson, 37378872, T/G.	(DED)
Sgt.	Ernest G. Kolln, 6932469, R/O.	(DED)

Records in the history of the 2nd bomb Group show this crew was assigned to the 96th Squadron from 5th Wing Headquarters, 17 August, 1944. The following day they were transferred on DS (Detached Service) to the 885th Bombardment Squadron (H). Records of 19 August 1944 show they were transferred from duty to a secret destination. A further statement reads, "The history of this crew will be inserted at a later date due to them being on DS."

Records of the 885th Bombardment Squadron (H) note that this aircraft took off on the night of September 10, 1944, from an airfield at Maison Blanche, Algeria, on a secret mission to drop supplies to either French or Italian underground fighters.

The plane, and remains, were located 2 August 1945 on Mt. Gran Mioul, or Mt. Gran Miule, near Sestriere, Italy. The bodies were eventually moved to the U.S. Cemetery at Mirandola, Italy. All bodies were eventually returned to the United States with the exception of Lt. Ian S. Raeburn and Cpl. Walter M. Bildstein. They are now located in the Florence American Cemetery, Florence, Italy. Lt. Raeburn's marker reads, "96th BS, 2nd BG."

Some information was contributed by John K. Mattison, Peru, Illinois, of the 885th Bomb Squadron while serving in North Africa, and Phillipe Castellano, Mandelieu, France.

#### **LECHFIELD, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 273 - SEPTEMBER 12, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 70 tons of 250-lb. GP bombs on the Airdrome at Lechfield. The target area was well covered. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate, causing some damage to 11 aircraft. No injuries, no losses.

## **BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 274 - SEPTEMBER 13, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 18 aircraft dropped 141, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the North Oil Refinery. Results could not be determined due to clouds and smoke over the target. Flak was heavy, intense and accurate. No injuries.

Seven aircraft bombed a target of opportunity, the Marshalling Yards at Vrutky, Czechoslovakia, dropping 55, 500-lb. RDX bombs. This target was well covered.

Two aircraft were early returns and one B-17, #42-97490, 429th Squadron is missing. T/Sgt. Charles Hill, TG, 96th Squadron, listed in serious condition due to lack of oxygen.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-97490 - 429TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt.	Daryle R. Stucky, 0-716577, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Henry E. Tennyson, 0-758750, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Herbert (NMI) Traurig, 0-723210, N.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	William M. Spruce, 38512482, TOG.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Robert L. Caryl, 12165962, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	George R. Gasparik, 32921810, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	C. P. Reinhart, 13022225, R/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Robert W. Hare, 12054334, L/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Thomas W. Cima, 36485755, T/G.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	William L. McKibbin, 39207684, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of S/Sgt. William M. Spruce, after evading: "Lt. Tennyson, S/Sgt. Robert Hare, and myself evaded. I do not know what happened to others of the crew. I was the second out of the ship. All chutes (10) opened and all men landed. Hearsay information was that two men were taken prisoner and one had a broken arm. Plane crashed but did not burn. Partisans got guns, etc."

Escape narrative of S/Sgt. C. P. Reinhart: "I was flying in a B-17 on Wednesday, 13 September, 1944, and the No. 4 engine started to windmill and so it was cut off about one and one-half hours. Before that, the ball turret gunner reported that the No. 1 engine was shooting a lot of black smoke and it continued. Then No. 1 and, soon after, No. 2 engines were out, and when No. 4 went out we headed SE and the co-pilot tried to contact the fighters but wasn't able to, and figured it might be possible to make it back with good luck, but the No. 3 engine started to windmill and the navigator said we were east of Budapest.

"The engine trouble started at about 27,000 feet and we were also 20 minutes late according to the schedule. We were informed to head SE and at 5,000 feet the pilot told us to bail out (time: 1050 a.m.) and I believe most of us landed in a clearing, but the pilot headed the plane for the woods. We weren't attacked by enemy fighters nor was there any flak there, but a short while before, we passed some flak but it was low.

"I was the last out of the ship, as far as I know, and fell at least 1,000 feet before pulling the ripcord and saw the other chutes in the distance. I landed in a clearing east of the town of Nestri, Czechoslovakia. When I got up I heard some people talking and I got out of there. There were two people picking hay and a man saw me running to the woods and started up the hill towards his wagon. They were about 1,500 feet from me.

"I continued to stay in the brush and woods, and continued to walk SE. About 1330 I laid down in the woods and rested until about 5 p.m., then walked further and stopped again after about one-half hour. I waited until approximately 6:45 and started again through the woods. After awhile, I hit a wagon road through the woods and followed it. It brought me to a clearing with a pretty well-traveled

dirt road. I continued SE and in the south I saw a big orange light, or possibly it was a fire. I understand that the plane didn't burn or explode.

"I continued to walk until 4:15 a.m. Thursday and then went up in a field and laid in a small ravine and slept for awhile. I watched some farmers all day, working only about 40 feet from me. I went down the road about 7:45 a.m. to a man walking along and he mentioned something to me and then I motioned that I was hungry and thirsty. About 75 feet down the road he pointed to a house and he called a man who brought me some water and food. He motioned if I was going south, and I pointed SE. He was about 60 years of age.

"I walked through a good sized town, it was dark and no one said anything to me, and I continued on a black-topped road for several miles. In the meantime, I heard several planes at different times, and to the south saw flashes in the sky and I think it was flak. Also saw a yellow light far off in a field on a tower and then another one came on and flashed off and on.

"After awhile I took a dirt road and went through several small villages. About 11:00 p.m., I ran onto barriers across the road and figured something was up. About midnight I ran across a big cut in the road and went down along the bank, and when I got on the road again someone said something to me. They were in a small hut along the road and pointed rifles at me. One said something to me and called several of his buddies and they asked me if I were Russian, German, or French. I asked if it was Czechoslovakia and one said, "Ja," and I said I was an American. One patted me on the back and said, "Comrade." Another man came up the road with a searchlight and searched me. Then they took me down the road and another man came out. They were all Partisans.

"They took me into the town of S.V. Benadik (48-20N - 18-35E) and into a building with a large wooden door. There was a drug store next door. They rang the bell and talked to a woman a few minutes, then later took me into a big room in a building two doors away. There were a lot of men sleeping on straw, in their clothes. They got me something to eat and drink and also mentioned there was an American pilot next door. In the morning I saw the pilot and it was Lt. Tennyson who was co-piloting the ship.

"We were taken to another town, Zarnovica (48-30N - 18-45E). This was another headquarters and met a Chaplain, Rev. Alexander Lickman, from Bratislavia. We stayed there the rest of the day and slept in the Catholic priest's house at night. They said they saw some of the other fellows and one had a broken arm.

"Left there Saturday morning by auto to Banska Bystricia, which is the capital, and they said there were some more American pilots there. They gave us a dinner and said some American planes were coming. They took us to the airmen but the plane did not arrive. Coming back we met the other Americans. The field was bombed slightly at 2:00 p.m. Saturday. Stayed there and left, the 17th of September."

#### **ATHENS, GREECE - MISSION NO. 275 - SEPTEMBER 15, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 27 aircraft dropped 38.61 tons of 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the Kalamaki Airdrome at Athens. Excellent coverage was reported by returning crews. No enemy opposition was encountered. One A/C was an early return.

#### **BUDAPEST, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 276 - SEPTEMBER 17, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 26 aircraft dropped 84 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the Rakos Marshalling Yards. The target area was well covered. Two A/C were early returns. Flak was heavy, slight to moderate, inaccurate. No losses, no injuries.

#### **SUBOTICA, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 277 - SEPTEMBER 18, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 27 aircraft dropped 81 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Subotica. The target was well covered with several fires seen. A few bombs were over. Flak was heavy, slight, and inaccurate. No injuries, no losses.

#### **BUDAPEST, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 278 - SEPTEMBER 20, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 84 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the South Railroad Bridge in Budapest. The target was well covered with possible direct hits reported. Flak was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate. No injuries, no losses.

#### **DEBRECZEN, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 279 - SEPTEMBER 21, 1944**

Major W. Randall Bedgood, 429th Squadron, led 28 aircraft on take-off and 25 aircraft dropped 73.5 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards. Results could not be determined due to heavy smoke over the target caused by the bombs of another Group. The target was believed to be well covered. Flak was heavy, intense and accurate, resulting in extensive damage to A/C #42-38078, "SWEET PEA." In all, 22 of the 25 aircraft were damaged.

In A/C #078, S/Sgt. Elmer H. Buss, Waist Gunner, and S/Sgt. James E. Totty, Tail Gunner, were killed; S/Sgt. John F. Maguire, Waist Gunner, was seriously wounded, and S/Sgt. Anthony Ferrara, Radio Operator, was lightly wounded. Other crew members were 2nd Lt. Guy Miller, Pilot; 2nd Lt. Thomas Rybovich, Co-pilot; 1st Lt. Theodore Davich, Navigator; S/Sgt. Robert R. Mullen, Toggler; T/Sgt. Gerald E. McGuire, Flight Engineer, and Cpl. William F. Steuck, Ball Turret.

Other aircrew wounded were 2nd Lt. E. W. Henderson, 49th Squadron; S/Sgt. Levia, 49th Squadron; and 1st Lt. J. F. McCullough, 429th Squadron.

One aircraft dropped its bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Subotica, Yugoslavia. Two aircraft were early returns.

T/Sgt. Gerald E. McGuire, Flight Engineer, A/C #078. March 7, 1991: "On the morning of September 21, 1944, I was briefed for a mission to Debreczen, to bomb Marshalling Yards.

"Our ten-man crew, flying "SWEET PEA," #078, was made up of a nucleus of members of other crews. Only pilot Guy Miller and myself were from my original crew that came over from Stateside. Miller was flying his first mission as First Pilot, having been a co-pilot up to this mission. If I remember correctly, two of our gunners, I can't remember which, were flying their first mission.

"Despite poor weather conditions, everything went normal en route to the target area. After arriving at the target I.P. and on the final bomb run, with the bomb bay doors open, we suffered what appeared to be a direct hit of flak in the waist section, just aft of the radio room. Those of us forward of the bomb bay felt a very heavy concussion that lifted the aircraft from the normal position of flight but we had no realization of the severe damage it had done.

"After the concussion, I came out of my upper turret position and observed both pilots struggling for control of the aircraft with both control columns forward and the aircraft mashing nose high. My first reaction was to attach my chest parachute to my harness and climb down to jettison the front door hatch as it appeared at that moment we may have to bail out. About that time, one of the pilots tapped me on the shoulder and indicated they had maintained some control. During this time we had dropped away from the Group and lost much altitude, which was necessary because of severe damage to the oxygen system.

"The communication system was destroyed so we had no contact with the rear of the aircraft to inform us of the damage sustained. So as soon as it appeared the aircraft was somewhat controllable, I made my way through the bomb bay, into the radio room, and it was hard to believe the damage we had suffered in the waist area and we were still flying. The left waist gunner, S/Sgt. Elmer Buss, had been fatally wounded. The other waist gunner, S/Sgt. John Maguire, was seriously wounded; radio

operator, S/Sgt. Anthony Ferrara, was also wounded. The ball turret gunner, Cpl. William Steuck, was in a somewhat state of shock after cranking his ball turret to a position so he could remove himself from it.

“It did not appear to me that the extreme tail section had suffered much flak damage but as we did not have communication with the tail gunner, I went to his position to check on him and it was a shock to find him semi-conscious with very massive stomach wounds. Later, S/Sgt. Mullen and I carried the tail gunner to the radio room, having some difficulty getting him around the tail wheel assembly as he was a fairly big fellow. Despite all aid and efforts, S/Sgt. James R. Totty, died about an hour before we reached Base.

“After further assessing the damage and doing what I could do to comfort those in the rear of the aircraft, I went forward and reported the condition to the pilots, describing the extensive damage and the injuries to the crew. I don’t think the pilots realized how much damage was suffered until we landed and were able to see it first hand, as it was almost indescribable. I did not believe the aircraft would stay intact to get back to our Base.

“The bombs had not been dropped before we were hit but a few of the bombs had been released by the concussion. S/Sgt. Mullen released the remaining bombs with a screwdriver and then assisted me with moving the tail gunner to the radio room. He remained in that area to aid the wounded.

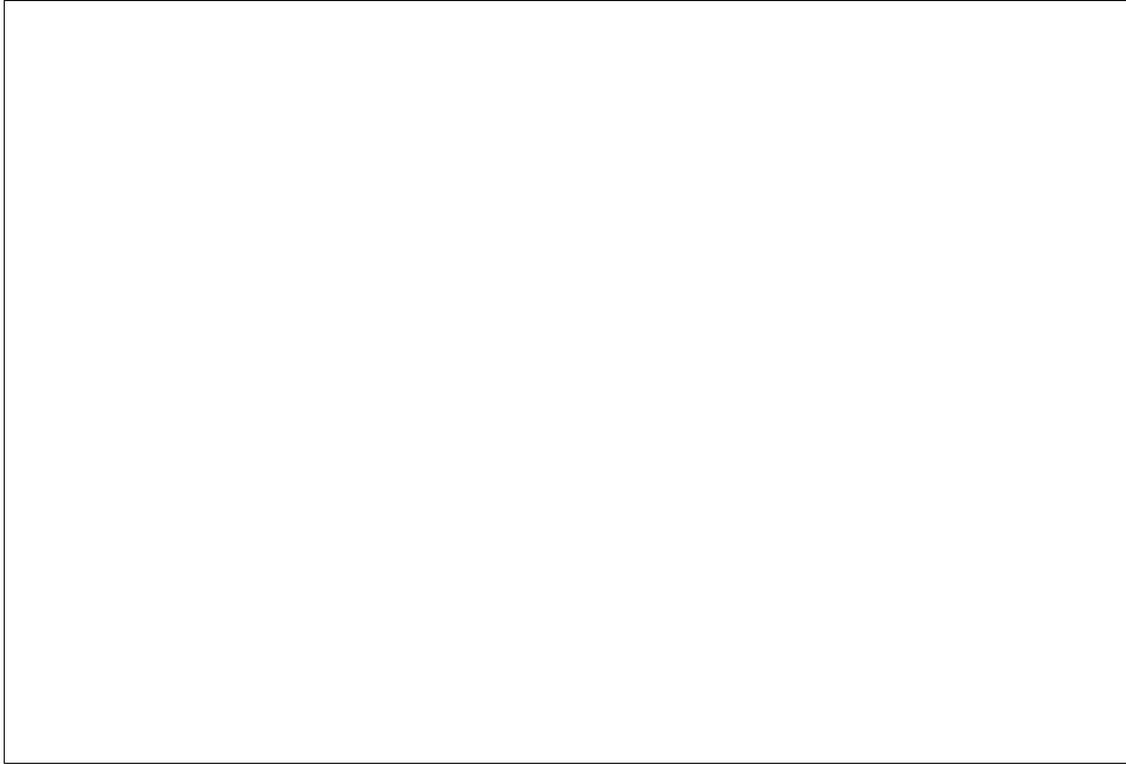
“In the meantime the pilots, because of the control system being severely damaged, had difficulty controlling the aircraft with the engines only and other limited controls. Due to structural damage, the speed of the aircraft was kept to a minimum and we were flying alone. Although the weather was somewhat adverse, the navigator, 1st Lt. Davich, after several hours in the air, guided us to the coast of Italy and to our Base. During the flight down the coast of Italy, I was in the rear of the aircraft throwing out loose debris, and I noticed a P-38 fly up along side of us and take a good look at our aircraft, and then peeled off and left. What is interesting about this is, on a later night mission, I was on a crew that made a belly landing in a pasture next to a fighter field along the coast of Italy. During breakfast at this field, in the Officers Club, I talked to this P-38 pilot that had flown beside us and he expressed how amazed he was to see “SWEET PEA” flying with such damage.

“Arriving at our Base, Lt. Miller made a long, low straight-in approach and landed on a mud-covered unfinished airstrip, landing gear down, tail wheel up. Miraculously the landing was as good as could be expected and the tail section, although twisted out of shape, held together.

“Even though it appeared this may be our last flight, each member of the crew played their own part and would have their own stories to tell of their actions.

“Tribute should be given to the sturdiness of the B-17 and certainly to the skills of the pilots, 2nd Lt. Miller and 2nd Lt. Rybovich. Lt. Miller was recommended for the Congressional Medal of Honor and subsequently was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.”





#078 - "SWEET PEA"

S/Sgt. Robert R. Mullen, Togglier on A/C #087. August 27, 1991: "Because our regular pilot, Lt. George Eilers, had been interned in Switzerland, the crew ended up filling places with other crews. Most of the time I flew as left waist gunner, the armorer gunner position, for which I had been trained. I wasn't getting many missions so when volunteers were asked to fly the bombardier position, I was asked to become what I remember as being called a "Togglier." I wanted to fly the required missions so I could go home. I don't remember how many missions I flew in this way, perhaps five or so. It was quite a different sensation, being in the nose, seeing the planes headed for a forest of flak!

"On the Debreczen mission, I think we were hit early in the bomb run. I think I dropped the bombs, probably on the instructions of Lt. Guy Miller, the pilot, or he might have done it himself.

"On one mission I went to the bomb bay, freeing the bombs that were hung up. I don't remember if it was this mission.

"On the Debreczen mission, the left waist gunner was killed instantly. Amazing to me, the right waist gunner seemed to have light injuries. He must have been no more than 10 to 20 feet from the exploding 20mm shell. He had a flak jacket on and I think he had sort of curled up in a ball. I think that probably saved him. I believe I opened three First Aid Kits looking for morphine. Apparently two had been opened - no morphine. So I divided one injection between the two. The tail gunner had a severe abdominal wound and I had little hope for him. He must have bled a lot and I guess he went into a coma soon. I think he could have survived only if he had very good medical attention within an hour of his wound.

"Lt. Miller reduced speed, but going to a lower altitude because our oxygen system was out. The controls were out or badly damaged. Fortunately he was able to maintain control with the throttles.

“Later, my parents seeing photos of the plane, assumed since only six crewmen were shown, the other four were killed. Miller landed off the runway. The spar broke when the plane hit a drainage area, resulting in further damage.”

S/Sgt. Arthur L. “Bud” Hunt, 20th Squadron. June 6, 1992: “My regular crew were John Malik, P; William Campbell, CP; Harold Skinner, N; John Young, B; Gene Knitter, Engineer; Charles Kelly, Radio; Edward Levin, Ball; Red Gronsky, Waist; Jack Bradley, Waist (KIA); and me, I flew Tail.

“I flew 35 sorties (51 missions). As you know we had to get at least 35 sorties and some long, tough missions were double credit, so my log shows 51 missions. I completed a total of 292.30 combat flying hours. My first mission was to Sete, France, a total of eight hours.

“I went to Ploesti twice and another time we had to abort after a three-hour flight. Vienna was tough. I went there five times. I’ll never forget Blechhammer, five trips and my last one gave me 51, October 13, 1944. I went to France three times, and another trip after four and one-half hours was another abort - no credit. There were several times into Germany that were very tough; Munich and Odertal. In all my combat time we had to abort seven times and one was a seven hour, ten minutes mission to Linz, Austria.

“I remember one mission, Debreczen, Hungary, September 21st. Our plane was number seven of the last 2nd Bomb Group Squadron over the target. Being the tail gunner, I was the last American to see where we had been. We were briefed for 44 guns on the ground, however, it felt more like 444! We were in low at 18,000 feet, expecting something like a milk run. I had just opened a can of bacon and cheese, my favorite K-ration. The first burst of flak was the end of the K-ration (I never did find it). At about two-thirds of the bomb run, I saw a 50 cal. machine gun fly past, followed by a stream of clothing bags. When we cleared the anti-aircraft, I called the navigator, Harold Skinner, to mark the position of where we lost the airplane. Having seen the hole in the waist of the plane I was sure the plane would never make it back to Italy. This ship was #078, ‘SWEET PEA,’ from the 429th Squadron. Later it was highly photographed and captioned as having flown back to England. I guess that all the war correspondents didn’t know there was a U.S. Air Force flying missions out of Italy. If I recall correctly, there were casualties to everyone from the radio room to the tail.

“My single “Romantic mission” was to pick up POWs at Bucharest on August 31, 1944. At the time of the briefing it was not known who held the short grass landing field that was our destination. My flight log lists the destination as ‘SECRET.’ Tail gunners were ordered to stay in their positions with guns ready to fire. On the way to Bucharest we joked about the D.F.C. awards and possibly something from the British until our flight engineer, Gene Knitter, injected, ‘I can see the headlines now. How brave these crewmen were who paid the supreme sacrifice in an attempt to save their comrades.’ Bye, Bye, romance!

“My standard practice was to carry a full package of Lucky Strikes and a reserve of two packs, together with matches, all carefully tied into G.I. condoms (smoke while you float). Needless to say, all the cigarettes were passed around one time and were ALL GONE! We didn’t get the D.F.C. but getting the job done and experiencing the happiness of the fellows, who we brought home, was a wonderful reward that lingers with me even today.”

#### **MUNICH, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 280 - SEPTEMBER 22, 1944**

The assigned target was the Munich Allach BMW Plant. Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 26 aircraft dropped 78 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Industrial Center of Munich. The primary target was cloud covered on the bomb run over the target so the alternate was bombed, visually. Results were not known. Flak was intense, heavy, and accurate resulting in light injury to 1st Lt. Grady and 2nd Lt. Mathews, both from the 20th Squadron. Twenty-two of the 26 aircraft sustained damage.

One aircraft dropped its bombs on a Railroad Bridge at 45-33N - 12-36E with unknown results. There was one early return. All planes returned safely.

**BRUX, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 281 - SEPTEMBER 23, 1944**

Major Lawrence Jordan, 96th Squadron Commanding Officer, led 27 aircraft and dropped 81 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Synthetic Oil Refinery at Brux. The target was cloud covered and bombing was by PFF. Results were not known. Flak was heavy, intense, and inaccurate. No injuries, no losses.

Operations from September 24th through the 30th were canceled because of inclement weather over the Base and targets over the Continent.

# 14

## OPERATIONS: OCTOBER, 1944

### **M**UNICH, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 282 - OCTOBER 4, 1944

“A” Force, under the leadership of Captain E. L. Blanton, comprised of 24 aircraft, took off and 23 aircraft dropped 46 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the Munich West Marshalling Yards. Bombing was by PFF with hits believed in the Yards. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate resulting in the loss of B-17 #44-8043, piloted by 1st Lt. Robert B. Donovan, 429th Squadron. Nineteen other aircraft suffered flak damage.

There were no enemy fighter attacks although one report stated that six E/A, possibly Jets, were seen below the formation. S/Sgt. R. C. Kuhrt, RW, 429th Squadron, was slightly injured by flak and S/Sgt. R. J. Capper, Lower Turret, 49th Squadron, suffered from frost bite.

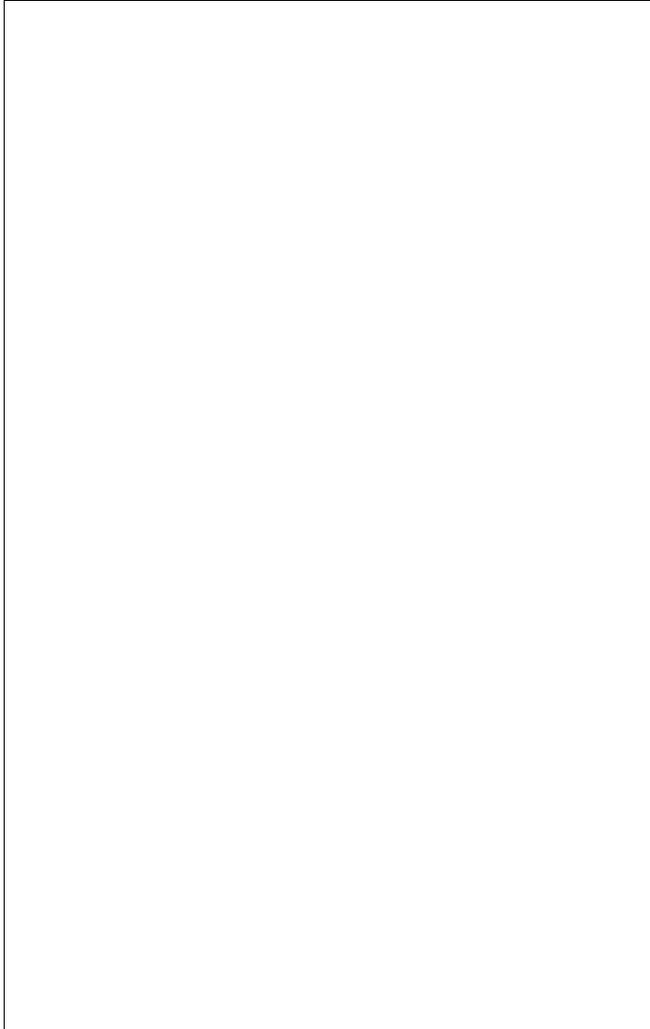
### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-8043 - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Robert B. Donovan, 0-819770, P.	(KIA)
1st Lt.	Juan J. Dyer, 0-679060, CP.	(KIA)
1st Lt.	William M. Daly, 0-713005, N.	(POW)
1st Lt.	Roy R. Rule, 0-713228, RN.	(KIA)
1st Lt.	Henry (NMI) Safer, 0-683155, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Richard O. Pollari, 35318007, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Sterling A. Putzel, 11066016, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Alfonso S. Beltri, 38438867, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Gerald V. Hamilton, 39129778, T/G.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Robert R. Hindert, 16075860, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of Lt. Henry Safer, after liberation: “We were at 30,000 feet when we were hit by flak. We were leading the No. 3 Squadron. I was able to bail out and the radio operator and navigator bailed out also. The plane crashed in the outskirts of Munich. The pilot, co-pilot, radar navigator, upper turret gunner, left waist gunner, and tail gunner were still in the plane when it crashed. I last saw the radio operator in prison camp, and navigator William M. Daly in the United States.

“Sgt. Hindert bailed out from the bomb bay into the city of Munich. During the jump, a shoulder was torn from the socket. I saw him in a hospital where he went for x-rays and then in prison camp in February, 1945.

“Sgt. Hindert told me that while he was in the bomb bay trying to leave the plane, he saw Sgt. Pollari struggling to fix his harness. The last conversation with Lt. Rule was when he told me that he could not pick up the target in his scope. Sgt. Hindert told me that Lt. Rule was in the bomb bay ready to jump and could not understand why because he was directly back of him.



Lt. Robert Donovan - KIA 10-4-44  
(Courtesy - Patricia Donovan Moran)

“The last conversation I had with Lt. Donovan was to give him the time at “bombs away.” Information that I received from Sgt. Hindert on October 5, 1944 was to the effect that Lt. Donovan was not injured but could not save himself because of the spin. I have no knowledge of the others.”

1st Lt. William M. Daly, Navigator. January 10, 1995: “MY LAST MISSION TO MUNICH.” “Just after noon of 4 October 1944, a few minutes short of bombs away, when a violent explosion crippled the left wing and engines of ‘043,’ our B-17, I knew almost immediately that the time had inescapably come to jump. Although the 429th Squadron had lost its lead plane, the deputy lead, according to subsequent intelligence reports, took over and helped the Group to direct its bombs effectively down into the west Marshalling Yards in Munich. The overpowering force of the explosion in the left wing area of ‘043’ instantaneously threw her into a violent flat spin. Those who have piloted even a small plane will recall that a spin, once established, sets up intense centrifugal force which virtually freezes in place the pilot and anyone else in the plane until it comes

out of the spin. That day, the centrifugal force began to intensify rapidly. Within five to ten seconds, I managed, though with great difficulty, to reach and open the nearby escape hatch and jump.

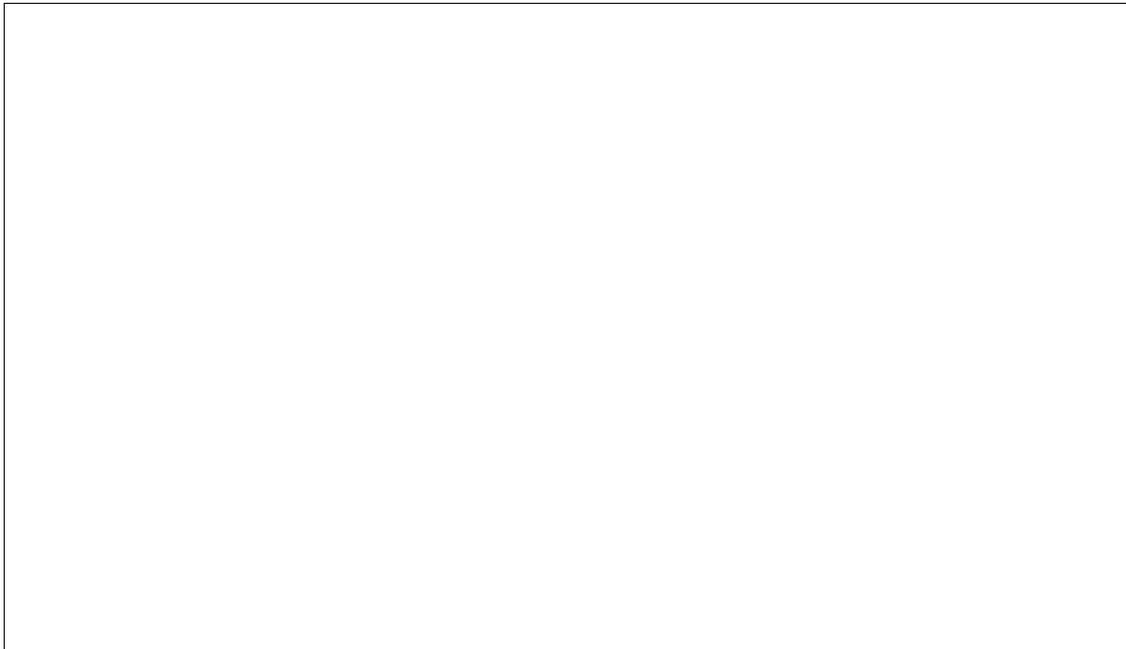
“Only three of us were lucky that day: Bob Hindert, the radio man; Henry Safer, the bombardier, and I, the navigator. Seven others, tragically, were not. If the explosion had been less destructive and allowed more time, all ten of us could well have parachuted out and survived. In retrospect, it is remarkable that any of us did.

“It seems to me now, looking back, that there were several reasons why we three made it out of ‘043.’ They add up to a complex amalgam. If any of them had been absent, we would have probably gone down with the plane too. The most obvious reason was the luck of being close to an escape opening. Bob near the open bomb bay, Henry and I near the escape hatch in the nose, a feature of the B-17. Other reasons derived in part from our individual personalities and, for Henry and me, they owed a lot to the kind of instinctive communication, spoken and unspoken, that had grown between the two of us over the months we had been together. The usual pattern in Air Force life, was that certain crew members seemed to share quarters, pilots with co-pilots, navigators and bombardiers. Within a whole

crew, in good part due to Air Force conditioning, a quasi-familial bonding tended to develop. It was reflected when talking to the rest of the world in the use of ‘my engineer,’ ‘my pilot,’ ‘my bombardier,’ and so on, not in any sense possession or superiority to other members, but nonetheless as ‘my brother’ is used within families. To explain beyond a bare-bones outline how and why we happened to survive will take more words than might at first seem necessary to a reader, but the long narrative that results will provide a more complete and perhaps a more interesting story.

“To the best of my recollections, the likelihood of becoming a prisoner of war rarely crossed my mind during the many months of flight training, from early pilot training through gunnery and navigation schools and phase training. Beyond providing some initial instructions and some subsequent follow-ups in how to open a parachute, unpack and repack it, the Air Force gave us no real-life training in the matter. Reportedly it didn’t want to risk the investment of money and time in us by exposing us to inevitable injuries that practice jumps would involve, a rationale that also preferred that we play volleyball rather than football for exercise or pleasure, the former perhaps also conceived as circulating quicker, more cooperative group interaction.

“The real-life likelihood of having to jump did not come into clear focus for me, and I suspect for many others, until we had arrived at the point of embarkation in Norfolk, Virginia, where, before boarding a victory ship for Oran, we received a few lectures about what lay ahead of us crossing the Atlantic in convoy and later in combat duty with the Fifteenth Air Force out of Southern Italy. I remember being surprised that Germany held a large number of American prisoners and the Air Force knew quite a bit about the German prison system, including details about interrogation procedures. Instructions at this time and subsequently ingrained in our minds the obligation if we would be shot down to provide German interrogators with nothing but name, rank, and serial number as well as the expectation that we make every effort to escape, the purpose being to put stress on the German system from within and thus use up enemy manpower.



Lt. Donovan - Third from left - Others unknown  
(Courtesy - Patricia Donovan Moran)

“Soon after arriving at the 2nd Bombardment base at Amendola, some miles northeast of Foggia, we received a standard sequence of orientation conferences including more or less repetition of what we had been told at Norfolk. Occasionally, thereafter, a briefing might add some details. I was surprised, and a little bit skeptical in fact, when an intelligence officer warned us if we were shot down over Yugoslavia to avoid the Chetnicks and seek out the Partisans. Reports sifting in occasionally showed that things might be tough either way, and that at least some Chetnick units were friendly and helpful to Americans. The prospects in either situation were unpleasant, and even more so should you parachute further north in sight of a bloodthirsty Hungarian or German farmer with a pitchfork, a situation mentioned as not uncommon in some reports filtering back to Amendola. Yet, if we squirmed when we heard them, I don’t recall myself or my friends dwelling on them.

“My early ideas about death in the sky had been simplistic, conditioned as they were by radio and film reports in 1940 of the heroic RAF fighters who won the Battle of Britain. But during the summer of 1940 we developed more realistic visual and emotional knowledge of what combat in the air involved for bomber crews. One or another somber image of destruction on occasion might flash into my imagination, whether in the air during a barrage of flak or back in our peaceful tent as I recalled the day’s events on my cot before going to sleep. Near or over the target, images usually were of being exploded into smithereens as happened to many crews, or of being wounded again by a 20 millimeter shell from a German fighter as I had been on my first mission; the recollection thereafter resonated in my neuromuscular system whenever I saw shells exploding. At another time the image might be ditching in a damaged plane on the way home and drowning in the Adriatic, lost to human sight or at best having your bones wash up on some remote shore to bleach away in the Mediterranean sun.

“These bleak images or their like were not omnipresent to us, but with me at least they tended to overshadow the prospect of becoming a POW, even, surprisingly, after talking and empathizing with two plane loads of POWs whom we were flying out of Bucharest back to Italy in the late summer. For one thing, it finally dawned gradually on many of us that the chances of surviving 50 missions weren’t all that good. The moment of discovery came for me one August afternoon when I stopped by at the Squadron bulletin board to read some notices. One of them, which reviewed the much feared Ploesti missions, reassured the reader casualties in them were not so bad as generally assumed, running only at about two and one-half per mission as I recall. The notice pointed out that this was a lower rate than for some other less feared targets. I remember being surprised but not reassured and after doing some mental arithmetic standing there with the hot Italian sun soaking into my already sweating back, thinking to myself that 50 missions would be a hard goal post for me to pass. Luckily, I didn’t know at the time what historians of the air war now know, namely that the overall casualty rate in the Fifteenth Air Force, which was at about 35 percent ran higher than that of the Eighth Air Force, whose doings and those of the RAF the press tended as the whole story of the air war in Europe.

“Somehow the scares and tragedies that collected in our lives during the long summer of 1944 hadn’t until then seemed to quite add up to what statistics suggested. In the air there were bad days when planes nearby or at a distance lost engines, fell out of formation, or exploded into a ball of smoke and fragments, metal and human, and you flinched as you flew through the debris in horror. But there were some easy missions. Life could be a lot of fun on the ground on the days we did not fly combat. By early July, however, two of my best friends on our crew, Ken Durtschi, our co-pilot, and Howard Kidney, our belly gunner, had not returned from missions. We assumed that both of them were dead, although I now know that Ken survived and, indeed, in our old age we enjoy correspondence and phone calls at the transcontinental distance separating Massachusetts from Idaho. Other friends and acquaintances were not returning from missions. One day Safer and I came back to the base from a leave to discover that one of our Squadrons had been virtually wiped out that day. The pattern was random and intermittent but the dangers sank in more and more, even if you yourself escaped a direct

shock for a long time and half assumed, at least in the early weeks, that you were leading a charmed life.

“It is no surprise, as I look back now, to understand in these circumstances Henry and I, close, almost brotherly friends though we had become, occasionally got on each other’s nerves. Even a happy marriage goes through these times, and two men forced to live so closely together even without such trying conditions surrounding them could not have been jolly or easy to live with all the time. What surprises me now that such irritants as there were came so seldom in our tent and were so brief and superficial.

“I was a very deliberate navigator, or to use Henry’s preferred adjective, slow. But he was happy enough to discover early that the results tended to be accurate fixes and ETA’s which benefited his approaches to the target and implied safe returns to base for us all. By September, however, I could tell that my pace was getting him down as most of us began to take seriously the possibility of having to parachute in a crisis. ‘If I have to bail out Bill,’ he would say, ‘I want you to move. If you don’t, I’ll kick you right out of my way and walk over you to get out that escape hatch.’ He repeated such semi-humorous, but as they would turn out salvific, remarks often enough that some of our friends would ask me, ‘What’s eating Safer these days?’ Although I was more amused than hurt, I recognized that I needed the needling and determined that if the time came, I would move as quickly as I could to get out the escape hatch first and not obstruct him. The idea became ingrained as I repeated his words to myself from time to time. But in imagining such a turn of events, we forgot that accidents aren’t usually programmed and we both assumed, I think, that in a crises there would be an order from the pilot over the intercom and some time to think and act sequentially. Yielding to repeated advice during morning briefings, those of us who wore chest pack chutes began to fasten them to our harness more regularly in threatening situations, despite their cumbersome interference with our work at the navigator’s table, the bombsight, or other spots requiring precise use of arms and hands.

“At our early morning briefing on 4 October, we received the bleak news that the day’s project was to be the Munich Rail Yards. We’d been there before, many of us more than once, and knew that it would be a toughie. By now the guns were more numerous and better than ever. Down at the flight line, just before or after helping push the props through, I heard a mechanic’s voice over my shoulder saying something like, ‘Lt. Daly, you’ll be in luck today in the nose of the lead plane in the high squadron. It is the safest place in the whole Group.’ I absentmindedly thanked him but remember experiencing little interior solace. The Group had been assigned an altitude of 29,000 feet, which meant that the high squadron would be at an even greater altitude. After a long rainy spell, the weather had recently cleared, presumably as a result of a cold front passing through southern Germany. After returning to the States, Henry reported to an intelligence officer that our altitude had been 30,000 feet on the bomb run, and my recollection has it even higher. I remember being astounded at the ground speed I roughly calculated at nearly 400 miles per hour as we flew by the familiar two large lakes some 20 to 40 miles south of Munich. On the verge of entering the bomb run, I marveled as I recorded entries in my log that our altitude and ground speed were the highest I had ever known, so much so that I made a mental note to check that astounding but possibly inaccurately calculated ground speed as soon as possible after leaving the target and flak area. That deliberate (slow if you prefer) navigator’s good intention was almost immediately blotted out forever. A few minutes before ‘bombs away,’ with no warning from tracking flak bursts nearby, the theoretically safest plane in our group of 28 was hit.

“On the ground later we heard from Germans that ‘043s’ left wing had been shot off and that she had crashed in the English Garden in Munich. Perhaps that is how the plane’s condition appeared to those who watched it fall or crash. At least for what took place at the moment that we were hit by the flak burst, the damage to the wing was not total. In the few seconds that I had a chance to see the wing, it was damaged but not destroyed. That is the condition described in the intelligence material that was put together immediately after the completion of the mission. Deriving as it does from reports

made by various crew members in other ships who saw what happened, it describes the damage to '043' alternately as a 'hit on the left wing panel,' or a 'hit on the left wing; the wing tip and the aileron were blown off.' The first of those two witnesses added that 'the ship started to go into a spin; then seemed to fall on its back and slipped out of sight.' The second witness recalled that '043' stood up on the left wing and almost turned over, then fell off into a slow vertical spin.' A third witness described '043' as 'going down in the target area in a tight flat spin. One chute was observed, possibly from the waist.'

"All of this is consistent with my recollections. The smooth, controlled order of the bombing run of the best kind of pilots and best kind of bombardiers, in this case Bob Donovan and Henry Safer, characteristically produced between them, was shattered by a loud explosion. A huge jolt hurled me from my work at the navigator's table, as it went in a giant twist over and downward. The plane took on the feel of a roller coaster entering into a violent paroxysm. The engines raged in an ascending roar more overpowering than any sound I ever heard in the air. I remember thinking several thoughts virtually fused together into one by a strong burst of amazingly clear concentration lasting no more than two or three seconds. The intensity and rapidity were like nothing I had ever experienced before or since.

"At the distance of 50 years, I can still distinguish the main element of this amalgam. They had emerged out of several different experiences which had internalized, some of them consciously, others not, over many months as a developing airman. Instantaneously in those few seconds, they fused in one intuitive conclusion: 'This is it, move now!' Since without this convergence of ideas, Henry and I might not have escaped the intensifying maelstrom, it may clarify what happened if I pause to reexamine the components of what I have called an amalgam.

"The foremost component of this fusion was rooted in my experience as a student pilot who had completed primary training. It had allowed me over the past several months of flying as a navigator with many different pilots to build up an intuitive 'feel' of their individual flying styles, almost as if their personality and way with a plane were absorbed into my nerves and muscular reactions. A few pilots came across as cowboys of the air, most of them, thankfully, fairly trustworthy on balance. Others were muscularly competent and dependable, football tackles you might say, but lacking in spontaneous, appropriate agility in the face of the unexpected. And other analogies come to mind. One of the two best pilots I ever knew was George Redden, the first pilot of our original crew. Henry and I had flown many hours, stateside and in combat, with him. The planes he flew transmitted the feel of an utterly reliable pilot, skilled, resourceful, expert. We liked to fly with him because we trusted him implicitly. Indeed members of some other crews used to envy our good fortune in having him as our pilot. In the previous few weeks he had not flown as such with us because he was in the process of transferring to another Squadron to become its commanding officer. He was not with us in '043' on 4 October.

"The other outstanding pilot whom both Henry and I knew, Bob Donovan, was flying with us that day. That was far more reassuring to me than our location up front in the high squadron. He had come overseas as a 19-year old co-pilot and had recently turned 20. The senior Squadron and Group officers had spotted him as a comer and groomed him for qualification as a pilot. In mid-summer, George had flown with him on his qualification training mission. George, at 27, could run out of patience with some of the young guys and occasionally tell me, then 23, about the unsteady reactions in the air of one or another of them that had raised the hairs on the back of his neck, but he admired Bob unreservedly, both as a person and as an outstanding flier. He remarked more than once to me what an amazingly fine pilot 'that young Donovan' was. A few weeks after our arrival in Italy, Henry, then 25, had adopted Bob as a close friend and he soon became a sort of big brother to him. Bob was a jolly, fun-lover whom everyone liked and enjoyed teasing, but he ran deep when he was away from a crowd. I had flown with him several times, both in his days as a co-pilot and as a pilot, and there was no doubt in my mind that he was the very best pilot I knew.

“Three decades later, in a letter of reminiscence about him that his mother had asked me to write, I described his skills to her as I recalled them. As a background I mentioned my first meeting with Bob. I had just returned to my tent from three weeks in the hospital after the Me-109 shell episode and was less than enthusiastic about meeting this allegedly great new friend of his. Henry insisted, went out, and within a few minutes returned with Bob and three or four ‘neighbors’ to welcome me back home. I quote from the 1978 letter to Mrs. Donovan with a few revisions.”

“All of the physical energy and laughter gave me at first the impression of boyishness, and he seemed as I watched him out of the corner of my eye to have an innocence that was rare among us. I don’t mean that he was naive or that he didn’t know his way around, but rather that he had completely without even a small measure of the ability to hurt others that most humans have. Even the first day, I already sensed that underneath the boyish surface there was something very serious and mature. He didn’t seem to let on to most people that it was there. Henry was one of the few with whom he talked seriously when they were by themselves. Gradually Bob and I, too, became this kind of friend.

“Bob was unique. When he throttled up the engines, the plane took on a swift, eager quality. It moved down the runway like a hunting dog that knew where it wanted to go and never strayed an inch from the track. When he gathered speed to take off, it was all done with an enthusiastic precision and control that seemed the product of a swift, sure mathematical formula that couldn’t go wrong.

“Once the plane was in the air there was nothing but sure response and mercurial adjustment in every turn or maneuver that he did. It was as if he had become one with the plane itself and given it a soul that made it fly like an arrow, effortlessly and flawlessly, through the air. When something had to be done fast, you could feel his sure, quick, spontaneously sensitive push and pull on the rudders as he played them into position just right. As I flew with him, I intuitively absorbed all this from the plane and felt it inside of me as if for the time being it had become part of me and I a part of it. We conferred and cooperated as pilot and navigator in a trusting, spontaneous give-and-take that I experienced with no other pilot. And that overpowering vitality and that utter, distinctive control were never matched in any other pilot I knew. One way or another, we all felt the same way about him.”

“As I was thrown across to the other side of the nose, I assumed for a split second that Bob would as always bring the plane around, but then I realized that not only had he completely lost control of it but that the controls themselves were gone for good. The feel of him was suddenly not there outside or inside of me as the plane went wild, irretrievably beyond the ability to do anything. Even if the intercom had not gone too, the roar of the engines as they madly speeded up made conversation unthinkable. Henry’s warnings to me flashed into my mind. I gave him an intense ‘this is it’ look. He looked back, his eyes concentrated and wide-eyed, as for another split second we seemed to be staring intensely at each other. I gestured with my head toward the escape hatch and wrestled my way against the escalating centrifugal force across the bottom of the lurching nose to it, pulled the release handle and rammed myself out into the middle of nowhere. All this had taken no more than ten seconds, if that. Somehow I missed being hit by the plane, which as I fell away from it, I could see tumbling wildly for a few moments. While I was wondering if it would crash into me I abruptly entered absolute silence as it vanished from sight and earshot.

“Thanks to Henry’s prior coaching, I had been swifter than he to react. Neither of us witnessed the other’s jump. He hadn’t flown as a pilot and therefore not internalized the same interpretations and reactions of the movements of the plane as I. He later told me he couldn’t remember that look I gave him, nor did he recall my gesture pointing toward the escape hatch. Apparently he thought there was a margin of time left and was amazed to see me gone: ‘First I saw you and then I didn’t.’ This shock immediately decided him to make for the escape hatch he had so often feared I might block. His parachute took hold unevenly with a jerk but did not disable him. Separately and totally out of sight of each other, we floated down some 30,000 feet and landed far apart in separate sections of Munich. This mission was the first that I had flown with any of the enlisted men and apart from having carried

on a brief conversation with them before entering the plane that morning I did not know any of them. I was to discover when Henry and I were reunited the next day, that Hindert had managed to jump successfully. Henry told me that when the police brought them together and were marching them along some streets of the city to a secure place, enraged citizens had badgered them. They were not kept together, however, because Hindert's shoulder had been dislocated and he was placed in a Munich hospital where he spent a few months recovering before entering the Luftwaffe prison system. His account of what happened to him from the time our wing was hit onward, especially his hospital experiences, is a fascinating one which deserves to be put in print.

“To return to what was happening to me. A few seconds after losing sight of ‘043,’ I began, as we had been taught, to count to ten before pulling the ripcord on the chute, the purpose being to allow descent to an altitude with enough oxygen to sustain consciousness. When I pulled the ripcord nothing happened. I remember thinking to myself, ‘This is it,’ and that the impact on landing would be so sudden and forceful that I wouldn’t know what happened to me. Within a few seconds a thin strip of white nylon peeking out from my chute caught my eye and I realized that I had jumped with my arms pulled tightly across the flaps so that it wouldn’t open out. I had not in the previous months consciously updated the axiomatic ten seconds to something more than that to allow for the much higher altitudes I had been flying at most of the time. I suddenly realized the mistake and gave myself more seconds (I can’t recall how many) of free fall to compensate, then released my grip. The chute ballooned open with a sharp yank in my harness and I was afloat in a sea of intense silence.

“When the chute took hold, or perhaps even during the free fall, I said a few rapid, intense prayers. I had seen no chutes and I was afraid that no one except me had escaped the plane. Would it recover, should I have stayed in it, I wondered as I began to get muddleheaded from lack of oxygen? But it was hard to imagine that plane, having gone wild, ever recovering. I soon began to plan how to handle the next crises. It was a blue-skied, clear day and I was still several thousand feet above the tiny features of the area south of Munich. I could see to the south the two elongated lakes against which a few minutes earlier I had measured my ground speed, and the territory far beyond them father south. I began to calculate how to conceal myself until night and make my way overland in the dark down to the area of the lakes, then if possible find a way to reach Switzerland. The irrationality of conceiving this fantasy, while my chute and I were slowly descending minute by long minute in full view of the hundreds of suburban German and security forces below, indicates that I was still at sufficient altitude to be short of oxygen. I am a bit vague about my thoughts for a while after making this plan, but lower altitude, and then an increasingly clearer view of what lay below, snapped me into realization that I would be captured upon landing or immediately thereafter.

“As the air warmed and the ground began moving up toward me with ever increasing speed and visual detail, I could see that I would land in what looked like a very well-to-do suburb with many large houses, most of them with sharply pointed, gabled tile roofs. They were surrounded by lawns and large trees. From a short distance to the north, several uniformed men with weapons were beginning to converge toward the spot that I would likely land. Miraculously, I just missed hitting in succession a tiled roof point and a big tree limb, each of them by a few feet. The chute caught on another high branch of the tree so that its descent was gently stopped and I was left swinging up and down, suspended a few feet above the ground. For no good reason except to allow the security men to find my escape kit with its condensed food and map, as I foolishly thought I could, I decided to drop it. A large crowd was gathering as the guards moved in, but before either could reach me, I released myself free from my chute harness and landed standing up on the ground. The crowd was angry. A rope one of them carried suggested serious trouble, but the security guards got to me first. Suspecting that I was carrying a weapon they ordered me to drop it. Instead I raised my arms above my head. When they were sure I was not dangerous, they approached, two of them grabbed my arms, and they hurried me toward two small police cars that had pulled up on a nearby lane.

“The angry crowd tried to get me away from the police and security officers, who managed to elude them and push me toward one of the cars and into the rear seat. One of them slammed the door shut and one of them jumped into the front seat beside the driver only to discover that he could not start the car. When those two got out and with some other security men ran to the rear to push the little car into a start, the crowd howled at them and me and tried to open the rear doors on each side to pull me out. I managed to hold the handles on each door tightly and use the force on one side to counteract the conflicting force on the other. The guards now pulled their guns on the crowd and forced them back. After a few seconds of being rocked and pushed, the car coughed into action, two or three guards bounded in, one of them beside me as I recall, and the two cars sped away.

“To my surprise, the guards seemed to me to be as frightened as I. Their disciplined action, in the midst of angry threats, saved me from what looked like a prospective lynching or at least a severe mauling. As the drivers floored their cars, we sped out of the suburb and onto a secondary road. The ones with me remained in an excited state and I avoided any effort to communicate with them. We sped along the deserted road until we reached a large gravel pit and careened into it out of sight of the road. The thought struck me that I had completely left behind in Italy the due process Americans take for granted and that they were going to stand me up against one of the gravel banks and shoot me. No one would have known the difference. But this anxiety evaporated when they took out maps and began locating their position. I realized they were almost as lost as I was. Once they found out where they were, they relaxed and drove me into the center of Munich.

“I had parachuted at about 12:15. By now it was about an hour later. At a distance a huge pillar of smoke was billowing up from the bombed rail yards into the sky. As a few of the guards walked me along a sidewalk toward an imposing building that turned out to be police headquarters, a line of weary men and women, seemingly store employees, civil servants, and such, were emerging from a nearby air raid shelter. The bombing of Munich had started into a big way in mid-summer and I worried about their reactions, but unlike the mob in the well-to-do suburb, they looked as if they had gone through this sort of thing many times. I caught several war weary glances from them. They had missed their lunch and possibly some sleep to the RAF the night before, and they seemed hungry and discouraged rather than angry. I could even imagine some measure of compassion in a few faces.

“As we entered the police station, the guards lost their hitherto absolute authority over me when a few superior officers took charge of me. Their body language and words made it clear to the guards that they were not welcome inside the building and should clear out. If other evidence had been lacking, I would have known from their display of rank that I was now in Germany, all right. The new officers, to whom this duty was a familiar affair, took me upstairs and through a door into a spacious, well appointed office of a police major and after a few words, politely melted away. What I saw, experienced, and learned in the next 24 hours involved no more real or imagined threats. Indeed it was one of the most interesting, though certainly not the very happiest, 24 hours I have ever spent. But that is another story.

“I would not learn until the next day that Henry and Bob Hindert had survived. Henry and I were together for a few days but were sent to different Stalags to meet again only after we returned to the States, where we deepened our friendship in the years before his premature death toward 1960. Because Bob Hindert was hospitalized, I did not see him then, and then we did not meet for almost 50 years. After being released from prison the next spring, he returned to live in his home city, Peoria. We finally met at the 1993 reunion of the Second Bombardment Group in Houston. While there, my wife and I persuaded him and his wife to visit us, which they did last fall. They arrived in our driveway after the long drive from Peoria on 4 October at 12:15. They were a bit late, or so it seemed to me. I had been worrying that I might have given them poor directions and for a moment, I didn't get the point that Bob had in mind. It hit me when he asked a few pointed questions: the date and the times were exactly 50 years from when the AA shell had ended our combat careers.

“In the 50-year interval, though not at the Munich police station or at the various Stalags I was to visit after, I came to realize how fortuitous our survival had been. Bob Hindert had prepared himself intelligently beforehand for such an eventuality. His parachute was securely buckled beforehand, he interpreted the wild actions of the plane expertly, and he acted promptly and strenuously to take advantage of the very difficult opportunity offered by the nearby open bomb bay to escape the inevitable crash. Henry and I were fortunate in being the only members of the crew close to the escape hatch. It may be that one other enlisted man did not jump because he had not buckled on his chute beforehand. The radar navigator, whose desk was back in the waist, though he was wearing his parachute, may have frozen on the spot when he was about to jump. With little doubt, the pilot’s area was too cramped and distant, however, for either of them to move far and fast enough to the bomb bay or escape hatch.

“On 4 October 1944 or 4 October 1994, my joy about having survived was bittersweet. Granted that it is good to be alive, I continue to grieve inside me the deaths of our brave, able comrades and to wish that favorable coincidences had favored them too. They deserved them as much as we did. The bittersweet joy came back to me every time I looked at the bouquet of flowers which arrived from the Donovan family shortly after the Hinderts drove into our yard. Our son’s family now lives in Syracuse, the city where Bob Donovan grew up. When we visit them, I often disappear into the background and drive the few miles to the beautiful side hill cemetery where Bob’s remains lie buried next to the grave of his father, who was killed in an accident when Bob was a boy. Nearby lies his nephew, not yet born when Bob died, who himself was killed in Vietnam. Since combat days and the anonymous loss of many comrades, graves have meant very little to me. Bob is the only one that I feel that need to visit. It is the closest to a hero I will ever be.

“Our grandson Pete, whose pranks and ready laugh and Syracuse accent reminds me just a bit of Bob, plays basketball, fishes and repairs his friends bicycles within a few miles of the open fields where Bob, his older brother, and friends used to hunt pheasants and deer. While standing or kneeling in St. Agnes Cemetery near what is left of Bob on earth, I usually find myself remarking silently that our country produces so many magnificent men while so many of its safe, comfortable citizens who owe them so much do not honor them. And I always pray there that Pete will grow up to be a man with the kind of integrity, courage, love and generosity that lit Bob’s life so brightly for all of us who knew and enjoyed him as a friend in those last months of his admirable life.”

At the 2nd Bombardment Group reunion in Dayton, Ohio, September 1991. I was introduced to Mrs. Patricia Donovan Moran, the sister of Lt. Robert Donovan. She had come to the reunion to meet surviving members of the brother’s crew. I asked if she would share some background of her brother’s life. The following letter from her reflects the tragedy on the lives of one family.

“I am glad that you are writing this book. It personally relieves me of some of the sorrow I feel about the loss of my brother and for the pain it caused my Mother and older brother. It is good to think that he will not have died without someone noticing, or being grateful, that we can point to.

“About three years ago, my oldest brother, Francis, brought Bob’s personal things to me for keeping. He had acquired them after my Mother’s death. She had often asked me not to throw out his belongings that were sent home. I was recuperating from surgery so had time to read all the letters he had written to her while overseas and again to look over his things. I was struck with the love and the relationship he had with my Mother and brother. I was also impressed with his accomplishments of one so young and the regard which some of the men felt for him, and wrote Mother of. I started to read about what it was like for the men serving at that time in particular, the conditions under which they flew those missions.

“Our Father died when Bobby was thirteen and I was three. Brother Francis was nineteen and took Father’s place at work. Bobby, in turn, quit school and went to work in a steel mill at sixteen, and

then joined the Army Air Force, January 16, 1943 at the age of eighteen. About this time my Mother went to work at one of the local factories, inspecting the very same .50 caliber machine guns used on the B-17s.

“His flight log shows that he flew his first mission, June 14th, to Budapest, Hungary. He received his promotion to 1st Lieutenant, August 11, 1944, and was appointed Flight Commander of Flight “D” in his Squadron, September 20th. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross posthumously, for extraordinary achievement, as a Pilot, on a bombing mission, September 21, 1944. He was only 20 years old.

“His flight log shows that he had flown six missions to Ploesti, four missions into Southern France, several missions to targets in Germany and others into Poland, Hungary, Austria, and Northern Italy. I also understand that he flew the rescue mission into Romania to aid in the rescue of over 1,100 Americans, many of whom had been shot down over Ploesti. Our older brother, Francis, was with Clark’s Fifth Army, driving tanks and ammunition trucks. They were able to meet in August before his unit left the area. My Mother had to write to him of Bobby’s death while he was still in the field. He recently told me how hard it was for him and how the men had tried to comfort him.

“Bobby was shot down over Munich, Germany on his 47th mission while flying the lead position of his Squadron. The families of the crews were notified, within three weeks, that they were missing in action. My Mother, by this time, knew something was wrong because she hadn’t received any mail from Bobby and it had never been that long before.

“During the next three months, it was reported that three men had survived the crash and were imprisoned, and six other crew members had been killed in action. The families were notified. Bobby’s status remained, missing in action. At the end of six months it was the policy of the War Department to assume that the missing were dead, and so, we received the telegram stating officially that he had been killed in action. My Mother was in touch with the other families so was aware they were all accounted for. During this time my Mother didn’t give up hope that he would be found alive. Then, unlikely as it seems, she always wondered about the circumstances of his death, if he had somehow survived the crash and died of wounds later, or been killed by German civilians. One year later, captured German reports listed that seven recovered bodies were buried in a cemetery in Munich. Six had been identified. The one unidentified body was presumed to be that of Bobby. It was not until 1949 and after many letters, back and forth, from my Mother to Government officials, that his remains were finally identified. The lapse of time certainly caused my Mother much anguish. In 1949 my brother was finally brought home.

“I have a great deal of compassion for the MIA families from the Vietnam war. My brother Francis lost his oldest son in Vietnam. His name was Bobby Donovan, after our brother. He was 20 years old when he was killed.

“I hope we find another way.”

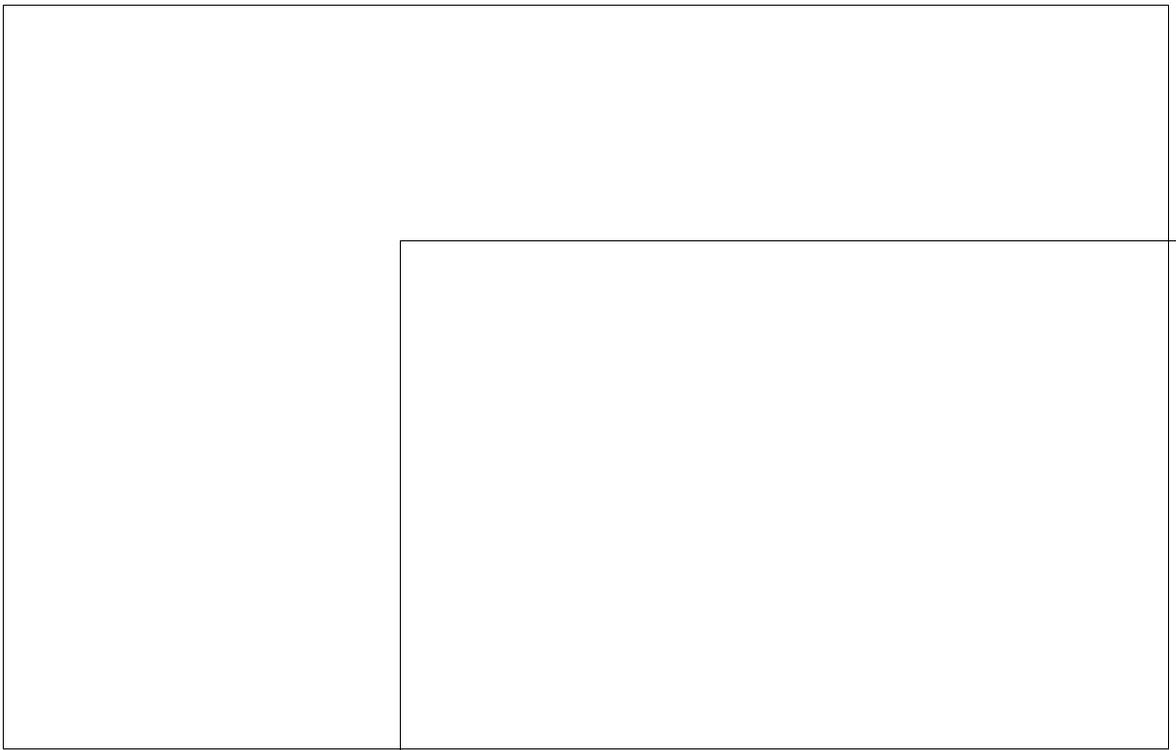
S/Sgt. Charles F. Hollenberg was a member of the 49th Squadron and Tail Gunner on the crew of 1st Lt. R. Q. Hutchins on October 4, 1944. The following is his unique literary account of that mission, and others, taken from his diary. June 16, 1994: “So once again we head-um-up and sally forth to Kraut Land, with the consistent round figure remainder, to with, 200 guns and 200 E/A’s within Munic area. Tis a ‘gandy-dance-un’ job we do at the rail yards.

“Well, the drivers of the ‘Flying Latrine’ got as close as they ever will to lead-un the Fifth Wing. The 2nd B.G. went ‘whole hog’ an put up 48 ships, 20 of those were sent to North Ginnie land to drop on a bridge. Twenty-seven ships and ‘Flying Latrine’ were lead-un the pack to Munic. The 49th Sqd. was lead-un an we of crew ‘30-30’ entertained No. 3 slot off the Col’s. How about that!

“Our drivers did themselves well in the jaunt what with our starboard wing tuck’d all-most up the Col’s caboose. Ken in the starboard seat says the Col likes it that way! Not so the Col’s T/G. Ah

think he was a shade uncomfortable with the proximity of our wing. From time to time ah would give a look-see his way, he always seemed to be look-un at our wing. He refrained from give-un a social response when I gave him a thumb up. So much for birdman urbanity from foxhole ten. Some birds just have to 'kite' a hard mission.

“For once ah had the pleasure of view-un all those folks to our aft. We were ‘Kite-un’ along at what I am told was 30,000 feet plus as we crossed the flats towards Munic. Ah don’t know if the bird next door was enjoy-un the panoramic view of the multi B-17s and their contrails with the Austrian Alps for the background. This bird was. Used the 120 camra for a photo shot of the same. Have a roll of Kodacolor for camra load, eight shots. Don’t know who the 38s and 51s were escort-un, wasn’t us. We did have other escorts. B-24s were out in front of us a couple of miles an about three or four thou lower; which was to be their misfortune. Between the I.P. an our target drop our (ball gun), Tom Schwarzlose, came on the ‘wire’ that three 24s were torch’d, an he reported two more 24s taken out as the Group made a port turn off their bomb run.



A/C #42-102830 - “FLYING LATRINE”

Crew: R. Hutchins, L. Lawlor, E. Shaw, W. Luke, C. Jackson, R. Janerone, G. Lenard,  
D. Hausler, T. Schwarzlose, T. Dingler, C. Hollenberg (Courtesy - Charles Hollenberg)

“Well, the crap was up there with us at 30 thou. We were to know how well it was - when our R/O, Joe Black, shriek’d over the ‘wire,’ ‘I’m

S/Sgt. Charles F. Hollenberg

hit!' George could see him stand-un by the bomb bay open door, which was his job to see that all ordnance departed the bomb bay. By George's account: 'when Joe bellow'd, ah looked his way. Ah seen he was swat-un at his neck like he'd been stung by a hornet. Ah figured if he could jump around like a ol Texas jackrabbit he weren't tag'd too bad.' Now I took a gander past the tail wheel well an all ah could see was George (our port gun), an our new gun on the starboard, both in a crouch behind the waist armor plate. When ah turned back ah was face-un my port window. Twas at that moment I caught a view of what I thought to be an aircraft part pass to our port side. Now the 429th Sqd was to be in the No. 3 box of the Group formation. They must have changed where the position was to be, cause our B/T man came on the 'wire' that a 429th ship had just lost its wing up to the No. 4 engine, was on its back in a flat spin. Tom counted four canopies deployed. Tom says they may have dropped ordnance before they were tag'd. Twas the only ship lost by the 2nd B.G. as far as we know. On our return 'Tail Crazy' (087) got to straglan as ah made a photo shot of the ship with the Alps as a background. Our flight was eight hours and 20 minutes, an we got to sit down first, no land-un prop wash to sweat. When we got parked at Steve's pad we check'd the ship over. Had five holes in the tail area and one B-B size thru the radio hatch plexi-glass. Though the velocity was terminated, the B-B was still 'hot' an it lit on Joe's neck just above his flight jacket collar. There may have been a blister of sorts. One has to use some very good imagination to see it. Maybe he will get the P/H for be-un scared out of his wits. He said he was go-un to get the medics to look at his neck. Ah don't know if he did. He always goes there to get his free shot of booze after each jaunt. He said something about a P/H as he got out of the lift truck at base. All ah said to him was - some of the boys got one the hard way today. George says the 429th ship that was tag'd was the Sqd. lead. There were four aboard that were fly-un their 50th. Those that went to the bridge-did the bridge. The Sqd. in low box brought their ordnance back. No target left. No flak. Too bad the four on their 50th didn't draw the bridge gang.

"I was flying the T/G position on August 29 on the mission to Moravska, Czechoslovakia to bomb the Privoser Oil Refineries. We were fly-un in the No. 5 ship, 'Flying Latrine,' of the 49th Squadron. I witnessed ship #44-6369 from our Squadron disintegrate, in high altitude, into remains of four fire-balls, which were presumed to be petrol tank remains. German reports were that the Group was bounced by 89 E/As; 65 Me-109s and 24 FW-190s. One of the survivors from one of the downed planes told me years later that a German Colonel told him, at interrogation, that they were bounced by 125 aircraft and the Krauts lost 25 in the encounter.

"Our former ball gun, Don Hausler, was on ship No. 7 of the 49th, #44-6369. It was his first ride on this ship as their toggler. I had a letter from him on his release from POW camp and then we had an evening in Cleveland, Ohio in 1959 and he related some of the details to me.

"He never viewed any E/As. All he saw was a large hole where one 20mm came in. He took a frag from a 20mm in the posterior. There was a signal to 'step out.' He recalled looking towards our aircraft. Viewed some smoke from our ship and had the notion that we were torch'd. He turned to grab his chute propped behind him. 'It' had departed-so had the navigator. He saw the navigator's closed gear bag, zipped it open. There was a chute within. At his exit he believes the ship detonated. Apparently he pop'd his chute at the same time. Results, his canopy had a large hole which gave him a fast drop. By hitting the 'tall' uncut no doubt saved him; though he took a beating from tree limbs. That evening he was incarcerated with fourteen others. Two crewmen with back wounds died that evening, no medics. The following a.m., August 30, he was on a detail with the Krauts to see some demised airmen. He knew what happened to people on Bullock's crew.

"During the air encounter, our port waist gunner, George Lenard, and I viewed a 17 at about 7 to 8 bells being harassed by five 109s. George came on the 'wire' and said that a 109 was torch'd as well as the 17 which went into a spin. When he said it blew up, I looked in that direction and viewed four fireballs (presumed to be the four gas tanks). There was not much left of that ship to make a crash site. Hausler told me he, with the Krauts, were looking for our 'Latrine.' I told him we had no fire but

were do-un considerable expenditure of ammo. That's the closest ah came to empty ammo boxes on my tour.

“August 30, the bomb bay floors of our 17 were planked an on the next a.m. I got to ride shotgun, when our ship flew No. 3 slot in the third wave. Thus we were the first of this group to touch down at Popesti to take out over 1,100 of our buddies that had been shot down over Ploesti and other targets in Romania.”

After reading Charles Hollenberg's account of the loss of A/C #44-8043, and the remark made by the ball turret gunner that he had seen four canopies deployed, raised the question of only three survivors. If the gunners report was correct, who was the fourth parachutist and what happened to him? Was he killed on the way down or killed by angry civilians? There were known cases of that happening. I had met Robert Hindert at three of the reunions and we became friends with he and his wife Lettie. On June 15, 1997 I called Bob at his home in Peoria, IL and explained my dilemma; four chutes, three reported survivors. He was as surprised as I was. He went on to explain that he saw two bodies leave the front of the plane and when he bailed out he never saw any chutes in the air.

He said he was standing in the bomb bay to watch for the bombs to release when they were hit. It was the duty of the radio operator to report that the bombs had cleared. The flight engineer was in the forward part of the bomb bay, without a chute, and he pulled the emergency release to drop the bombs. Bob was thrown around, face cut and bruised, and finally was able to bail out. He feels that the flight engineer did not get out because he never kept his chute nearby. The radar navigator was the most likely person to get out, if one did. His desk was in the radio room with the radio operator's. Bob feels that if anyone got out, it was the radar navigator who he feels was right behind him.

After bailing out, he found that he had his chute reversed and had difficulty reaching the ripcord. When the chute deployed, his arm was tangled in the lines and his arm was torn from the socket. He landed in the woods, a park like area in the suburbs of Munich, and hid in a brushy area for some time before capture. He was finally taken to a small jail and the only attention he received was by a doctor who tried to reset the arm, failed and wrapped his arm tightly to his body with some cloth. The room he was in evidently was a dressing room of sorts and men kept coming in, changing clothes and eating. He was given some bread, water, and some meat. It wasn't until the next day that he was hospitalized. In all his time in the hospital, he never knew of any fourth person. He did say that beatings of captured airmen did occur. He had seen two men brought into the hospital that were battered, black and blue, and evidently beaten by civilians before army or police personnel got to them.

#### **CASARSA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 283 - OCTOBER 4, 1944**

“B” Force was comprised of 14 aircraft that took off to bomb the Railroad Bridge at Casarsa. Thirteen aircraft dropped 39 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the bridge with good results reported. One Squadron made two runs over the target while the other Squadrons made three runs. All planes returned safely.

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 284 - OCTOBER 7, 1944**

“A” Force was comprised of 23 aircraft that took off and 22 aircraft dropped 55 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the Lobau Oil Refinery in Vienna. Flak was intense, accurate, and heavy. S/Sgt. H. L. Bode, TG 49th Squadron was lightly wounded. The area was well covered with a good pattern.

One aircraft dropped its bombs on a Railroad Junction at Czeleonolk, Hungary. It was reported that the RR Junction was hit.

#### **ERSEKJVAR, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 285 - OCTOBER 7, 1944**

Eighteen aircraft of "B" Force took off and 17 aircraft dropped 42.6 tons of 1,000-lb. bombs on Marshalling Yards in this city. Flak was slight, inaccurate and heavy. Two runs were made on the target and the area was well covered with several fires observed. The 18th aircraft of this formation targeted Marshalling Yards in Banhida, Hungary, with the bombs reported short of the yards. There were no losses.

#### **TREVISO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 286 - OCTOBER 10, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off, with one aborting. Twelve aircraft dropped their bombs on the East Marshalling Yards and 15 aircraft dropped their bombs on the South Marshalling Yards. There were 170, 500-lb. M-17 incendiary bombs and 100, 500-lb. RDX bombs dropped on these targets. Three runs were made on the targets. One Squadron dropped on the first run and the other Squadrons dropped on the third run. Bombs were reported in the target areas. No flak was encountered and there were no losses.

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 287 - OCTOBER 11, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off to bomb the South Ordnance Depot in Vienna. Due to adverse weather conditions, 27 aircraft dropped their load of 500-lb. RDX bombs on a Rail Line at 46-4N - 13-42E. Flak was heavy, slight, accurate. No losses. One aircraft, an early return, dropped its bombs on a Road Bridge at 46-22N - 14-17E. Results at both targets were not known.

#### **BOLOGNA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 288 - OCTOBER 12, 1944**

Forty-two aircraft took off and dropped 60.48 tons of 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on a German Bivouac Area south of Bologna. Two runs were made over the target and bombing was visual with the target area well covered. Flak was heavy, slight to moderate resulting in the death of Cpl. M. J. Hanchak, LW, 49th Squadron, and lightly wounding T/Sgt. N. A. Drurey, RO, and S/Sgt. L. O. Steward, RW, both from the 429th Squadron.

#### **BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 289 - OCTOBER 13, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off to bomb the South Oil Refinery at Blechhammer. Twenty-one A/C dropped their bombs on the primary target by PFF. Results unknown. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate, resulting in the wounding of S/Sgt. W. L. Dalheimer, LW, 49th Squadron. One A/C dropped its bombs on an unknown town in Germany. Lt. V. D. Hansen, N, 96th Squadron, was lightly wounded by flak. One A/C attacked a town 49-55N - 18-20E, results unknown. One A/C attacked storehouses at 49-14N - 18-44E, results unknown. A total of 288, 500-lb. RDX bombs were dropped on the four targets.

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 290 - OCTOBER 13, 1944**

Eighteen aircraft took off to bomb the Florisdorf Oil Refinery in Vienna. Fourteen A/C attacked the primary target bombing by PFF. Results were unobserved. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate, resulting in a light wound to S/Sgt. H. L. Bode, TG, 49th Squadron. One A/C attacked an Airdrome at 47-16N - 18-06E. Three A/C were seen burning on this A/D. One A/C, attacking the primary target, dropped half of its load on a Railroad Bridge at 47-46N - 18-06E with a direct hit on the bridge. Two other A/C were early returns. A total of 180, 500-lb. bombs were dropped on these targets.

#### **BRATISLAVA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 291 - OCTOBER 14, 1944**

The Blechhammer North Oil Refinery was the intended target for 36 aircraft. Due to inclement weather on the way to the primary target, the Group went to various targets of opportunity. Five A/C

attacked Komorom, Hungary, Marshalling Yards with the East end well covered. Flak was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate.

Thirteen A/C attacked Bratislava, bombing by PFF, with unobserved results.

Eight A/C attacked Borzavar, Hungary, with unknown results.

Six A/C attacked Papa, Hungary, with bombs through the center of town.

One A/C attacked a Railroad Bridge at 48-07N - 17-29E with possible damage to bridge.

Three A/C were early returns. All planes returned safely.

Flak was responsible for injury to 2nd Lt. J. C. Harris, P, 429th Squadron, and T/Sgt. R. C. Labadie, UT, 429th Squadron.

### **SALZBURG, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 292 - OCTOBER 16, 1944**

The assigned targets were Oil Refineries at Brux, Czechoslovakia, but bad weather caused the Group to divert to an alternate, the Marshalling Yards at Salzburg. Thirty-three A/C attacked Salzburg with a good pattern reported across the Yards. One A/C that dropped part of its bombs on Salzburg dropped the remainder of its bombs on Marshalling Yards at 46-50N - 13-26E. One A/C attacked Rail Lines at 45-56N - 13-37E. Two A/C were early returns. A total of 97.5 tons of 500-lb. RDX Bombs were dropped on the targets. Flak at Salzburg was heavy, moderate, and accurate, resulting in wounds to 2nd Lt. C. J. Weiner, B, and 1st Lt. W. O. McKenna, N, both of the 49th Squadron.

### **BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 293 - OCTOBER 17, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 25 dropped 60 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the South Oil Refinery by PFF. Flak was heavy, slight to moderate, fair to good accuracy. S/Sgt. Billy R. May, LT, 96th Squadron, was lightly injured by Flak.

B-17s #42-107006 and #44-6739 were involved in a mid-air collision just off the target and went down. One A/C attacked an Airdrome at 47-20N - 17-30E. Two A/C were early returns. Results of the bombing was unobserved due to cloud cover.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-107006 - "OLD BIRD" - 96TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt.	Donald L. Peart, 0-813570, P.	(POW)
F/O	John C. Mumma, T-62369, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Elliot J. Kaplan, 0-2057939, N.	(POW)
F/O	Tommy (NMI) Jones, T-12447, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Orie C. Lee, 34150089, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Marion L. Green, 35576462, L/T.	(POW)
Cpl.	Philip L. McWaters, 34767776, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Andrew J. Frederico, 12141936, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	James (NMI) Growney, 12163195, R/O.	(POW)

\*Nine man crew

T/Sgt. Orie C. Lee, Flight Engineer, May 14, 1992: "My original crew was split up on the day I went down. Lt. Peart was my Pilot; F/O John C. Mumma, Co-Pilot; Lt. Howard Kresge, Navigator; F/O Tommy Jones, Bombardier; Sgt. James Growney, Radio Operator; Cpl. Philip L. McWaters, Right Waist; Sgt. Timothy Donahue, Left Waist; Sgt. Richard Holland, Tail Gunner; and Sgt. Robert C. Wolfe, Ball Turret.

"On October 17th, we were briefed to bomb the Oil Refineries at Blechhammer, Germany, but bombed the West Marshalling Yards at Salzburg, Austria. We had a new navigator, a Lt. Kaplan, a new tail gunner and ball turret gunner, S/Sgt. Frederico and S/Sgt. Green. No one flew left waist that day.

“We had a mid-air collision with one of our own aircraft. The other aircraft went almost straight down. All crew members killed apparently. My aircraft was able to level off after the crash. No. four engine looked like it would fall off at any minute, our left wing had a big, gaping hole near the fuselage. After flying for several minutes, our pilot gave the order to bail out. We all got out safely. Some experience! No previous training on bailing out. None of our crew were injured on bail-out or landing. We saw very few German fighters but quite a bit of flak.

“I was sent to Stalag Luft IV shortly after being captured. We had an oversize German Sgt. that liked to knock us around. Our radio operator, Sgt. James Growney, tried to go over the wire and was shot twice. He lost his left arm.

“After the first year, I was transferred to a prison camp near Nurnburg. We then next marched to Moosdorf, Stalag VIIA, which was a distance of about 125 km from Nurnburg. At the beginning of the march I was suffering from jaundice but had no sign of it when I reached Moosdorf.

“On April 29, 1945, we were liberated by the 14th Armored Division, 7th army. We were evacuated from Moosdorf May 9th and on the way May 9th. Took off in a C-47 and landed at Rheims, France. May 12th we were flown by C-47 to LaHavre, France to Camp Lucky Strike. June 1st I boarded the SS Marine Robin for the United States.”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6379 - 96TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Arnold T. Kwiatkowski, 0-553589, P.	(KIA)
1st Lt.	Edward C. Buettner, 0-825772, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Fredrick H. Brilliant, 0-208406, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	David J. Eiseman, 0-1695546, B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Richard H. Ferro, 31277854, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	James F. Johnston, 36883676, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Elton I. Schuman, 35226565, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Richard J. Radlinger, 36815362, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Jacob P. Fiebleman, 37619870, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Robert C. Wolfe, 37563381, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of S/Sgt. Arthur E. Reeb, TG on B-17 #483 at interrogation: “I observed B-17 #379 right after bombs away. The Squadron was dispersed then, flying this way and that. The weather was bad. At the time there was no flak bursts in the Squadron’s area. I next saw #379 when it broke in half at the waist door. The tail assembly floated back by itself while the front half went straight down. No chutes were seen and I lost sight of #379 as we went into the clouds. This was at 1158 hours and at 29,000 feet.

Statement of S/Sgt. Jacob P. Fiebleman after liberation: “The ship exploded and I was blown out. I only saw one other parachute and assume it was S/Sgt. Richard J. Radlinger since he is the only one that I have heard anything about. The only other communication from any of the crew, prior to the accident, was from the pilot, 1st Lt. Kwiatkowski, over the interphone, ‘Watch that ship, ball turret.’

“I heard the other crew were saved and that information came from Sgt. Green, in the other ship, in POW camp.”

#### **BRUX, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 294 - OCTOBER 20, 1944**

Thirty-six aircraft took off and 33 aircraft dropped 98 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Oil Refinery at Brux. Bombing was by PFF with results unobserved. Flak was moderate to intense, heavy, and accurate. 2nd Lt. R. G. Williams, P, and 2nd Lt. M. K. Herring, N, were slightly wounded.

One A/C dropped 3 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at 45-57N - 12-50E by PFF. One A/C dropped 3 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at 50-46N - 13-04E by PFF and one A/C was an early return.

B-17 #42-39999, "BATAAN AVENGER," 49th Squadron, was hit by flak over the target, managed to get as far as the Adriatic Sea and was forced to ditch. All crew members were rescued by a Catalina flying boat. The rescued were: 1st Lt. E. W. Holtz, P; 2nd Lt. W. R. Myers, CP; F/O D. W. Powell, N; Sgt. G. A. Weamer, B; T/Sgt. C. M. Collins, UT; S/Sgt. Z. A. MacKool, LT; S/Sgt. W. J. Wilts, RW; S/Sgt. S. P. Pokrywka, LW; S/Sgt. R. J. Capper, TG; and T/Sgt. T. M. Shadrow, RO.

#### **PILSEN, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 295 - OCTOBER 23, 1944**

Thirty-three aircraft dropped 203, 1,000-lb. RDX bombs on the Skoda Armament Works in Pilsen by PFF. Results were unobtainable due to cloud cover. There was no enemy action.

#### **KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 296 - OCTOBER 25, 1944**

A single plane mission was flown by the 2nd Bomb Group to bomb the Klagenfurt Aircraft Factory. Each Group in the Wing furnished one plane. Colonel John D. Ryan, former Group Commanding Officer now of Wing Headquarters, piloted the plane from the 2nd Bomb Group. Bombing was by PFF with unobserved results.

#### **INNSBRUCK, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 297 - OCTOBER 26, 1944**

Two planes were assigned to bomb the Marshalling Yards at Innsbruck. They were over the target at 1140 hours and dropped 4 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs. The target was bombed visually and was reported to be fairly well covered. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate. Seriously wounded was S/Sgt. Otto Pierce, LW, 96th Squadron, and slightly wounded was S/Sgt. H. T. Higgins, TG, from the 49th Squadron.

Captain Henry J. "Hal" Wallet and crew were assigned to the 96th Squadron on July 3, 1944. May 6, 1993: "In the winter of 1944, the 15th AF based in the Foggia area of Italy was grounded for a great deal of the time by bad weather. Our missions had been suspended for several days and our former Group Commanding Officer, Colonel John D. Ryan, now at Wing, had thought up a new wrinkle. Because we were socked in for such a long period, Colonel Ryan wanted to resume the bombing of Germany by sending a single B-17 on round-the-clock bombing missions of Axis targets. The plane would be a Mickey ship (bombing by radar).

"I was selected for this mission because of the high number of instrument hours I had logged in the States as an instructor.

"The target that early cold overcast morning was the Marshalling Yards at Innsbruck, Austria. Taking off in the soup that bleak unforgettable morning, I hoped this experimental mission would be an initial success as we customarily were accompanied by P-38s and P-51s to the target.

"After four hours in the soup we came to the I.P. and rumbled down the final heading to the target. Suddenly the weather front ended, the sky was blue, the terrain visible, and there nestled in the valley was the city of Innsbruck, Austria. My bombardier shouted gleefully. He would bomb visually and not use radar because of V.F.R. conditions. What a strike bombardier's dream of! It was so quiet it was eerie; one plane in the sky, no flak and on the final headings towards a perfect strike on the railroad yards. With bomb bay doors open and pulling all the inches of mercury you can, suddenly all hell broke loose! The flak started in clouds from their anti-aircraft batteries and getting closer all the time. I had to do some maneuvering but still stay close to the final run until bombs away. Flak bursting at the wing tips I headed back for that wonderful soup for protection, and limped back. The crew chief counted 250 holes from flak on that mission.

“The bombing pictures of this mission from Intelligence showed a 100% strike of direct hits on the gas house, pumping station, and troop trains in the railroad yards.

“Colonel John Ryan changed the operations from that first mission to make it mandatory to bomb by radar, using alternate targets if V.F.R. conditions came up unexpectedly.

“I was on the October 4th mission to Munich and will never forget it! I was wounded leading the Squadron on that day and remember well the various Squadrons getting all spread out of formation from the Group, and another Group also finding the same flak problems and fighters that two of their Squadrons wound up in our Group, and we hit the target well that day even though there was a mixup.

“I peeled off after bombs away and headed for Rome to the General Hospital where they put in 27 stitches and dug out a large piece of flak in my left thigh. Purple Heart and D.F.C. for that one.”

#### **KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 298 - OCTOBER 28, 1944**

A two-plane mission was scheduled for this target on this date. Two aircraft took off at 1224 hours and dropped 4 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Klagenfurt Aircraft Factory area at 1444 hours. Bombing was by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, moderate, accurate. No injuries, no losses.

#### **MUNICH, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 299 - OCTOBER 28, 1944**

This was the second of a two-plane mission for this date. One aircraft dropped 2 tons of RDX bombs on the target by PFF. The second aircraft had two engines fail on the way to the Munich target, turned and dropped its bombs on Rail Lines at Innsbruck, Austria. Some flak was encountered at both targets with no injuries to crews.

T/Sgt. Walter L. Siegmund, 49th Squadron. June 15, 1992: “I arrived overseas June 3, 1944 and our crew was assigned to the 49th Squadron. My 20th, and most memorable mission was on September 1, 1944, and we flew to Bucharest to rescue American POWs that had been imprisoned in that country.

“As I recall, the field was very small for a Fort to land. We were concerned if we would clear the trees at the end of the runway with a bomb bay full of POWs. We landed with fighter cover overhead. The enemy was marching about 15 miles away as we came in. Some of our crews were instructed to stay at their gun positions at all times while on the ground.

“The POWs came running out almost immediately, dressed in all kinds of garb. We loaded and got out of there ASAP! The POWs all wanted cigarettes, candy, anything we had that they had been denied for so long. Some of these boys had been prisoners for a long time. Long enough to be bombed by Russia-Germany-Americans as the city changed hands.

“We got underway and, as we suspected, we did clip a few branches off the trees getting airborne. We later found branches in the wheel well when we landed back at base. It was a good feeling to see the POW’s faces light up as we neared our destination at last! We never saw any of them after that. They were taken for interrogation and then returned to the States, we were told.

“That flight lasted eight hours. I went on to finish my missions and arrived back in the States, December 27, 1944, almost six months duration.

“One other memorable mission that I must relate was October 28, 1944. It was written up in the 2nd Bomb Group’s *FORTRESS* news as follows:

At six o’clock on the evening of October 28, a 15th Air Force Flying Fortress, part of a Squadron operating from an advanced base in Italy, streaked down the runway and climbed into the cloud splattered sky.

For men of the crew, experienced veterans with an average of 40 combat missions to their credit, this was something new. Night flying hadn’t been on their list of specialties until this moment when they were circling their base, watching the runway lights

become pinpoints of luminescence as they soared higher and higher. Nor had they before as important a target as Munich, Germany, to bomb alone. They were alone - ten men in a giant plane, winging their way to their goal to deliver a load of destruction.

1st Lt. J. Loren Peck, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, navigator, was constantly plotting and checking the course. Things were going smoothly. So far, the flight had been routine, but even as such there was a feeling of expectancy, tenseness, as they flew toward their target.

“When there is nothing but darkness below, above, and around, you begin to feel just a bit on edge,” said T/Sgt. Walter L. Siegmund, Perryville, Missouri, aerial engineer and top turret gunner of the crew.

“We reached the central point and were at bombing altitude,” said Lt. Robert L. Turner, Falls Church, Pennsylvania, pilot, “when our No. 2 engine began to throw oil. We decided to keep heading for Munich, it wasn’t too serious a failure. Some 20 minutes before we reached the I.P., the oil pressure on No. 1 engine dropped, and with a whirr, the propeller began to run away.”

The ship shuddered violently in protest against the sudden strain. Pilot and co-pilot fought the momentarily bulky prop controls and managed to feather the prop. There was no turning back. Munich was the target, and despite a partially disabled ship, there were ten men determined to carry out their assignment. As the navigator signaled that they had reached the I.P. and the bombardier, 1st Lt. Harold H. Tripp, Boise, Idaho, began to set his bomb sight, the plane lurched. No. 2 engine oil pressure had dropped and the prop was running away. Losing altitude and careening in the darkness, it was a tricky job bringing the engine under some control so that the prop could be feathered.

“We couldn’t bomb Munich, our altitude was hopelessly low for the job, and the pilot and co-pilot were having a bit of difficulty with the ship,” said the bombardier.

Despite mechanical difficulties, loss of ceiling and growing difficulty insofar as handling of the plane was concerned, the men were still determined to drop their bombs where they would do the most good. They headed for the rail yards at Innsbruck, Austria. No. 3 and No. 4 were still going strong as they headed for the bomb run.

“Suddenly it seemed as if we were in the midst of a Fourth of July celebration,” said S/Sgt. Lloyd C. Miller, tail gunner. Down “Flak Alley” they went. Bombs were away and the pilot turned and made a bee-line for home. Both the pilot and co-pilot, Lt. Henderson S. Hall, Tupelo, Mississippi, had to concentrate on fighting the controls.

“I don’t think either of us could have handled the Fort alone,” said Turner. With mountains ahead of them, darkness all around, on instruments, and constantly losing precious altitude they had left, Lt. Turner headed for home. The Special Navigator, Lt. Frank J. Gooseelin, Lynn, Massachusetts, kept advising the pilot of his distance above the mountain tops. The navigator kept giving locations and headings. The radio operator, T/Sgt. John R. Reinehl, Cottage City, Maryland, was relaying messages back and forth to ground emergency stations as was the co-pilot.

Everyone was working at top speed. The gunners were throwing out all heavy equipment. Guns, ammunition, bomb hoist, and shackles went overboard. The engineer thought to wind up the special dome of the plane. The Fort was barely moving, creeping along on two engines.

The mountains were behind them. The most dangerous flying was over but there was still no relaxing for the pilots. There were layers of ice coating the wings. It took their combined efforts to keep the ship under control. Over the water they went, flaps ¼

down. Everything had been done so they wouldn't lose the little altitude that they were able to maintain.

Land was in sight when No. 3 engine went out. The navigator called a heading to the pilot and they turned in a new direction. Green flares from a below-emergency landing field, "Crash landing position," ordered the pilot. Down they headed. Wheels were up until the last possible second. Flaps were full down and then the wheels. Solid ground was once more beneath them.

"I've been on some ripping Saturday night parties, but never before was it anything like this," said T/Sgt. Dan A. Vanni, Mt. Shasta, California, cameraman as he climbed out of the ship with a sigh.

The emergency landing of this aircraft was made at Falconaro, Italy.

# 15

## OPERATIONS: NOVEMBER, 1944

**V**IENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 300 - NOVEMBER 1, 1944  
Thirty-six aircraft took off and 20 aircraft dropped 40 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the South Ordnance Depot in Vienna. Flak was heavy, moderate, and accurate. Bombing was

by PFF with unobserved results.

Seven aircraft bombed the Marshalling Yards at Graz, Austria, dropping 14 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs by PFF with unobserved results.

One aircraft joined the 97th Bomb Group and dropped 2 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Graz Marshalling Yards.

Four aircraft bombed a Railroad Bridge at 45-00N - 14-40E, dropping 8 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs by offset bombing with unobserved results.

One aircraft bombed warehouses and a railroad chokepoint at 47-15N - 16-37E, dropping 2 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs by visual methods, hitting a warehouse.

One aircraft was an early return and jettisoned its bombs in the Adriatic. One other returned its bombs to Base.

Nine aircraft were damaged by flak. S/Sgt. R. J. Vandling, UT, 49th Squadron, died of anoxia.

B-17 #438, piloted by 1st Lt. William C. Donnell, made an emergency landing at Bari, Italy, due to lack of fuel. Five members of this crew bailed out in the vicinity of Wiener Neustater, Austria. No. 438 jettisoned its bombs on railroad tracks in town west of Lake Neustater.

Also missing is 2nd Lt. Harold E. Ayers, Bombardier on the crew of 1st Lt. Thomas M. Rybovich, 429th Squadron, who bailed out of his aircraft.

### MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6198 - 429TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	Thomas M. Rybovich, 0-540274, P.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Pat W. Farwell, 0-761776, CP.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Donald F. Maine, 0-716492, N.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Harold E. Ayers, 0-777294, B.	(MIA) (RET)
Sgt.	John L. Staup, 36563963, U/T.	(RET)
Sgt.	Harold F. Gross, 33409556, L/T.	(RET)
Sgt.	William H. May, Jr., 15176407, R/W.	(RET)
Sgt.	Richard O. Blackry, 39216422, T/G.	(RET)
Sgt.	Donald B. Parkins, 16119564, R/O.	(RET)

\*This was a nine man crew

The following is a consolidated statement of 1st Lt. Rybovich, 2nd Lt. Farwell, and 2nd Lt. Maine. "While we were over the primary target, No. 4 engine of #190 received a flak hit which caused us to lose oil. Oil cooler of No. 4 was hit causing loss of engine. It then froze and eventually the prop fell off.

"The pilot instructed the navigator and bombardier to leave the nose section and ordered the rest of the crew to prepare, if necessary, to abandon the aircraft.

"The bombardier and navigator went to the flight deck, the bombardier under the top turret, the navigator behind the co-pilot's seat.

"As the prop seemed about to fly off, and was pointing toward the fuselage at an angle of about 20 degrees, the pilot and co-pilot decided to leave their seats and stand on the flight deck within reach of the C.I. This necessitated the navigator and bombardier to move further to the rear of the aircraft several times. When the bombardier saw the navigator's gestures and the pilot and co-pilot leave their seats, he went to the waist section, but was still not in communication with the pilot. The prop flew off several minutes after the bombardier left the flight deck. The crew members returned to their positions and the bombardier did not. On checking with the gunners in the waist, it was learned that the bombardier had bailed out. Two enlisted men stated that they could not see his chute open. No orders were given to abandon, only to put on chutes and be ready."

Statement of Lt. Harold E. Ayers: "I bailed out at around 26,000 feet due to lack of oxygen. I was unconscious for a period of 24 days and know nothing from the time I had lost my oxygen until I came to in (not legible) hospital."

Lt. Ayers was over Yugoslavia at the time he bailed out and was eventually returned to Allied control. No records were found regarding his rescue.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-07438 - 96TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	William C. Donnell, 0-465920, P.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Thomas J. Vaughan, 0-1695538, CP.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Roy L. Compton, 0-2064527, N.	(POW)
1st Lt.	Charles W. Melvin, 0-727364, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Jack D. Gruner, 16070475, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	John J. Meringola, 32425100, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	James H. Holbrook, 39215382, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	James H. Pewitt, 14177013, L/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Francis J. Maiers, 39342317, T/G.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Stanley J. Pociask, 12077800, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 1st Lt. William C. Donnell, after the mission: "Before the I.P. was reached, the No. 3 engine started running roughly and smoking. When the bomb bay doors had been opened, the formation started pulling ahead, and we were unable to keep up. We made a right turn after passing over Vienna and dropped our bombs on a R.R. line at a small town west of Lake Neusiedler.

"Shortly afterward, the engine got worse. The co-pilot hit the feathering switch, but it wouldn't feather. The engine was vibrating very badly, pieces of the cylinders flew out, and the cowling came off. The prop shaft was red hot. The five members bailed out at this time by way of the bomb bay and the tail gunner saw them go past the tail section, and he saw at least three chutes open. This was at about 47-45N - 16-25E, S.W. of Wiener Neustadt at approximately 1311 hours. The pilot's interphone had gone out, but the co-pilot called the rest of the crew to stay with the plane. Shortly after this, the prop came off, and this eliminated the mechanical difficulty. We took a 195 heading, hit the coast near Brindisi and flew to Bari, where we landed due to lack of gas."

Partial report of an Investigation Unit, Budapest, Hungary, 26 October 1945: On 1 November 1944, a plane was heard in Marcali, Hungary. A few minutes later eye witnesses saw three parachutes descending in the direction of Marcali. One was driven by the wind toward the village of Pajez and the other two landed 6 kms S.W. of Marcali. One man was captured that evening. Another was captured two days later. Three weeks passed and the body of an American soldier was found. His belongings had disappeared and no parachute was found.

A village doctor examined the body and was not certain of the time of death but put it at three to four weeks. Other witnesses felt that this body, buried in Marcali, came from the plane as there had been no other flights or a crash in that area.

The remains were disinterred and on the trousers, the name "J. J. Meringola," 32425100 was found in seven places. Records at the 2612 Graves Unit listed no one with this name or serial number.

1st Lt. Roy L. Compton, N, July 20, 1994: "On October 3rd we flew to Italy from Tunis. We landed in the southern part at a maintenance base where some further modification to our aircraft was completed. On the 10th we ferried the aircraft to our final base, near the town of Manfredonia. We were assigned to the 96th Squadron.

"The officers were assigned a tent with four canvas cots, and I think we were issued sheets and blankets. There was a wood floor, and occasionally electricity, although we used candles most of the time. Some of the other tents had stone sides as did other structures in the area.

"From what I can determine, we were on the seventh mission, having started on the sixth of October. On that mission, the bombardier, Charles Melvin, had six bombs 'hang up' (not release) and we had to go to another target. We had four holes in the aircraft from ground fires.

"Other missions were flown on the 17th, 20th, 23rd, 24th, and 29th. On the 10th of October, we flew a four-hour practice mission. Something about bad formations. The targets of these missions were Salzburg, Regensburg, and Vienna (Wien).

"The last mission on the 1st of November was to Wien. The target was a synthetic oil refinery south of the city. We were in the last position of a formation of ten planes. This aircraft was equipped with a 20 millimeter cannon along with a 50 caliber machine gun in the tail. This was provided to have the range to shoot at the German Me-109s which used the 20mm cannon in their armament. Also, there was a radar jamming device, which was turned on over enemy territory.

"Prior to the target we started having problems with the aircraft, and being 'tail end Charlie,' we could not keep up with the rest of the formation. We started back for Italy, and Charles Melvin, the bombardier, dropped the bomb load on a railroad, possibly near Salvar. As the trouble got more uncontrollable, a decision was made to head for the Russian lines, which at that time was East Hungary. A P-51 came alongside and directed us to Yugoslavia.

"Part of a letter from Bill Donnell to mother, December 29, 1944:

Roy had to bail out shortly after the bomb run over Vienna on November 1st. Our No. 3 engine's oil line broke and we couldn't feather the engine. After a short while, the prop ran away, setting up engine vibrations and creating excessive drag. Presently the cylinders started blowing off and several pieces came through the cockpit and nose making it a very precarious spot, making it necessary for everyone to get out of the nose. Shortly thereafter the whole works dropped off (prop, cowling and all) and we were able to maintain our altitude and land at the first base we came to.

"Bill gave the order to evacuate the nose of the aircraft. I believe the alarm bell rang as we headed for the bottom door. After reading his letter, and thoughts of the radio operator, and engineer/top turret gunner, I have no doubt in my mind that the alarm bell rang. I opened the door and dropped on it, as the door wanted to close due to the pressure of the slip stream and the hinges being toward the front of the aircraft. I guess my parachute harness caught the door handle, so I dangled against the bottom of the aircraft. I guess Charles either kicked off the handle, or pulled the hinge pin

release, as soon as I was falling away from the aircraft. As I fell, I looked up and saw the aircraft streaming smoke and flying straight and level. I did not see any bodies or chutes from the aircraft.

“We had bailed out at about 31,000 feet, so we had been told in training to free fall to a lower altitude before deploying the parachute. When the tree branches were visible, I pulled the ripcord, and since I was face and head down, the chute went out between my legs, rolling me over, and when the chute filled, giving me a sharp jolt. On the way down, I wondered how I would get back for the donuts we always got when we landed. Little did I know I would be thinking about food for the next six months.

“A tree broke my fall, the chute holding me about six feet from the ground. I cut the chute from the tree, and buried it, and went into a swampy area and hid in some brush. Since we had been over Vienna at noon it was now about 2 p.m. I am not sure of the landing location, but it was south of Lake Balaton, possibly north of Nagykanizsa. I keep remembering Gyeric, but that is located north of the Lake, near Vienna. I did hear people searching the woods, but did not see anyone. I stayed in this area until dark.

“After dark when crossing a road, I was stopped and taken to a church which had a few houses around it. There the priest called someone on the telephone who spoke English. He asked me who I was and I was taken to the basement.

“A short time later, a military man arrived, I was put on a wagon and taken a couple of miles to an office in a small town. There, persons I assumed to be the local police tried to question me. They did not speak English and my knowledge of other languages was zero, so we did not communicate at all. They had a flotation device (Mae West) and wanted to know how it worked. I pulled the Co2 cord and it inflated. They ripped open a dye marker and scattered it all over the floor. Part of it got on me and stayed for days before it wore off.

“Soon it was evident to the interrogators that their efforts were getting them nothing, so they started getting rough. Finally one hit me with a rifle butt and knocked me out. I woke up in the morning in a room adjacent to the offices, on the floor, shackled to the foot of a bed. Soon the police came, pushing Jack Gruner. He had been roughed up and did not have any shoes. I thought Charles Melvin was there, but another account indicates he joined us in Budapest.

“We did not speak, and in a short time, different guards came and took us out of the building, and walked us about a block to the railroad station. Outside the station was a pump, and I got my first water since bailing out, and rinsed off my face. The waste water was yellow from the dye marker.

“This was the afternoon of November second that we boarded the train with two guards. It was night when the train came to the west side of Budapest. We got off in a rail yard and walked to a concrete building. There were no markings to indicate where we were. We were taken to the basement, to a room about 20 x 20 feet, with a high ceiling. There was a small barred window, which was just below sidewalk level. About a quarter of the room was covered with straw in a burlap mattress. We were given some weak soup and permitted to wash.

“The bombardier from our crew, Charles Melvin, was brought in the next day. We were so dirty and unkept that we did not immediately recognize one another.

“For the next few days we talked very little, and I know nothing of the details of the others captured. Three crewmen of a B-24 were brought into the same cell. We were fed little and permitted out of the cell one at a time to go to the toilet. Another man was brought in to the cell, but he did not sleep on the mattress, and did not speak. When he left, we assumed he was listening to our talk, for information. Also he knew the straw was full of lice, which we found out later. How long we were in the cell, I don't remember, probably only three days. The last day, the guards who were in their 50s, were laughing and showed us that they no longer had ammunition for their weapons.

“That evening, the six of us were taken by two new guards to a street car across the Danube River to a large railroad station. This area was being shelled by artillery and swarms of people were

fighting to get on trains. The guards pushed us through the crowd and Jack Gruner left the group. We were put on a passenger car, and the guards shoved others off, so we had plenty of room. I thought the Russians were about to take the city, but it did not fall until about April of 1945. We tried to sleep, and picked lice out of each other's hair. After about three hours, Jack came into the car. He had tried to escape, but decided that the Russian's shelling was too bad, so he hopped on the train. The guards were angry at what he had done, so they hit the arch of his foot with a rifle, breaking the bones, so we later had to carry him. The next evening after many stops, we reached Vienna, possibly 6 November.

"My memory of Vienna is very limited. The Air Corp had done a lot of bombing in the area, so we could not get into the city by train. So we were put on a bus to the center of town. The guards were not familiar with Vienna, but did find a military soup kitchen, where we were fed. We then seemed to ride the street car in circles looking for the railroad that would take us east. Finally we got off in the center of town. The guards got directions from some civilians, but since it was six o'clock in the evening, and rush hour, they could not herd us onto a street car. I remember a large building behind us, that had cement figures of lions in front. Someone said it was a museum. Somewhere we got an old German raincoat with bread and meat to carry and to eat on the train, which we finally got to by street car.

"The distance from Vienna to Frankfurt is three times the distance from where we traveled to Bucharest, but I don't remember how long we were on the train. I do remember seeing a station marked Nurnburg, and arriving at the main station in Frankfurt. It was early morning and either foggy or misty. We walked out of the main entrance to the left and boarded a street car for the interrogation center (Dulag Luft) north of the city at the town of Oberusal.

"After walking through a wooden gate, we entered a building on the ground floor. The room was bare, with shower heads on the ceiling. We were told to undress, and our clothes were taken to another room, probably fumigated while we stood under the shower and washed off. For some reason we got rid of the lice in this procedure.

"This is the last I saw of Jack Gruner. In a letter from his mother to mine, dated February 21, 1945, she said Jack was in the hospital with a broken ankle. On April 4th, he was in Stalag IX C, KOM 1249, a hospital camp near Leipzig.

"Then, as individuals, we were taken upstairs to a long hall with many solid doors on either side. I was put in a room about eight feet wide by twelve feet long, which contained a wooden bed, with one blanket. There were no windows, and in the ceiling about 12 feet high, there was a single light bulb controlled from the hall. The cell temperature was either very hot or very cold, and the light would be off for a time and then on, then off, then on. The food consisted of a cup of ersatz coffee and a piece of black bread at a time which seemed like morning, and a cup of watery soup and a piece of bread in what was probably evening.

"After about a day, I was taken from the cell to an office, where questions were asked, but not answered, and threats were made, the chief one being that since I had no identification except dog tags, I could be a spy and would be turned over to the Gestapo, unless my answers were satisfactory. After about 30 minutes, I was returned to the cell. The next day the same routine was repeated.

"On the third day, I was taken to the office about noon, asked a few questions that were not answered and then taken to a large hall, where many German military men and a few American prisoners were gathered. We were fed some soup and bread, and then saw a movie of a German circus. I was then returned to the cell block.

"Early the next morning, I was taken from the cell and with others walked to the street car and returned to the Frankfurt railroad station. There we were put in a room just to the right of the main entrance to wait to board a train. In 1954 when in Frankfurt, I went to the station. The room was an office.

“The trip to Wetzler was about 50 miles, and we arrived early in the afternoon of the 22nd of November. During the walk from the train to camp, as we passed a brick wall, natives in the street threw stones at us. With the number of prisoners that passed this way, it now seems to me that this was a staged demonstration. That night we were fed and the next morning given a card to write our next of kin, and an issue clothing. After getting clothing, our pictures were taken for identification records. When we were liberated, these records were found and distributed to the prisoners.

“The time at Wetzler seemed very short. I don’t remember actually leaving the camp for Sagan (Zagan). The train car was a compartment affair, with each compartment having two facing bench seats with an overhead metal luggage rack. The compartments opened to a hall which ran the entire length of the car. There were toilet facilities at each end of the car. I believe there were bars on the windows, and a steel gate at each end, with a room for guards. There was one car of prisoners, with six to a room, with probably ten rooms. To rest, two men laid in the luggage racks, two on the seats, one on the floor and the other in the hall.

“The real event of the trip was in Leipzig. The car was removed from the train, and shuttled to a rail yard. Next to our car was an anti-aircraft gun on a flat car. About noon, the sirens went off signaling an air raid. Knowing one of the main targets of our bombers were railroad yards, and after watching our guards get out of the car, lock the doors, and leave the area, the prisoners in the car became panic stricken. From a shack at the end of a flat car, the gunners came out, took the covers off the gun, dusted it and the ammunition. They then started moving the gun around in search of a target. About that time a large explosion occurred. Whether it was a bomb or another anti-aircraft gun going off, I do not know. Upon hearing the explosion, the gunners leaped from the car and vaulted a stone wall about eight feet high. The panic turned to laughter and all was calm. About an hour later our guards returned, however, we did not see the gun crew again.

“We arrived at Sagan after dark. We walked through the woods and along a road to a building in the North Compound. Here we were stripped, our clothes taken away and probably searched and fumigated. We showered and our clothes were returned to us. We were then marched back along the road and continued around the town of Sagan about three miles to a camp on a bare hill, near a military airport. The place was called Belaria, and although a part of Stalag Luft III, very few men I have met from the main compounds knew of its existence.

“Records indicate that we arrived Monday, on the 27th of November. Charles Melvin, the crew bombardier, was sent to a billet room in one of the northern barracks and I to one in a southern building. There were 12 men to a room, and possibly five rooms to a building. There was a bath house, a kitchen, a theatre, and latrines. The last time I remember seeing Charles was when we entered camp. Camp life was survival. It was bitter cold, so little outdoor activity was taking place.

“The Germans had the exterior guards, interior guards (referred to as ferrets, since they were constantly snooping around, crawling under the buildings, etc.), and some laborers who would bring items to the kitchen.

“There was a radio in camp where BBC news was received daily. A penciled note of the days news was handed from prisoner to prisoner to read. Since we also officially received a German news release, we did not talk about the news, for fear we would say something that did not come from an authorized source.

“The clothing we received at Wetzler was the only clothing we received. Trades were made with other prisoners for better fitting items. All money was kept at the camp office since there was no canteen or any other use for money. When we left the camp, all records of the accounts were left behind, and the records have never been recovered. German food, as listed in German reports, was greatly overstated. There was one central kitchen at Belaria, which supplied some hot water, barley soup, vegetable soup and raw meat when available. All other cooking was done in the room on the stove which also was used for heat. All food for the room was pooled, with a meal schedule and what

to fix and how specified by the majority. The typical day's menu as listed was for full German rations and a Red Cross parcel per man per week. Neither of these conditions existed.

"Some health care was probably available but I am not aware of what was available. As for bathing, our barracks was once walked back to the North Compound, deloused and given a shower. At the same time our barracks was fumigated and searched. This walk, etc., took all day. As far as sanitation goes, we had a central latrine which was used by all prisoners. At the end of each barracks there was a single, outhouse type facility. This was used only in emergency, at night, when the barracks were locked. The only time I know of its use, was Christmas, when we all got ill from rich food we received in a special parcel. As for mail, due to the time we were at Belaria, only one card was made available to us and, of course, no mail was received.

"The paradise of camp life came to an end in late January. The Russians were rumored to be in Breslau (now Wroclaw, Poland), about 35 miles away.

"Belaria (Note: The Camp) departed at 5 a.m., Sunday the 26th of November. They were the last unit of Stalag Luft III to leave. Temperature on the march was estimated to be from minus ten to plus twenty degrees Fahrenheit. It was a strange procession that wound over the German countryside to a village named Kunau, a distance of approximately 20 kilometers. We were put into barns in Kunau. The march wasn't too bad, the roads were frozen and it was easy for those that were pulling sleds. However, we were foot sore and extremely tired. We cooked meals over small fires and brewed tea or coffee. We had been given one Red Cross parcel before leaving camp which was a blessing. The Germans, during the complete march, gave us little or no food.

"We left the next morning around 9 o'clock and marched to Gross Selton and arrived around 4 o'clock. We were again put into barns. It was surprising that most German people along the march were friendly. We bartered for water and food for cigarettes. We had a warm and restful night here. We stayed there for one day to rest.

"We left Gross Selton, after a day of rest, at about 8 o'clock and marched about 20 kilometers to the village of Birkenstadt. It got warmer and there was a thaw which turned the roads to mud, and walking was more difficult and slowed the march considerably. We did not arrive until around 5 o'clock and were again put into barns. These were not as comfortable as our last stop. No heat and no lighting. We were locked in the barns and could not have fires because of the straw. There were no water taps and no sanitary arrangements.

"We spent the whole day there. We got one-fifth of a loaf of bread, the first German rations in five days. There was a much greater thaw that day and we realized that everything we wanted, had to be carried on our backs.

"The next day we set out over very heavy terrain, and the mud on the roads was ankle deep. We arrived at Schonheide and put into damp, straw less, unlighted barns. We were immediately locked in so could not cook a hot meal. Everyone was dead tired but found it difficult to sleep.

"The following day we marched to Spremberg. The Americans were separated and taken to a bombed out glass bottle factory. I don't remember if we were given anything to eat or drink, but I do remember Colonel Spevey, talking to about 80 Americans, saying he was on his way to Berlin to meet with the German High Command to get some treatment for the American POWs.

"It was the 4th of February when we were put into box cars at Spremberg. We must have been crowded, but I can't remember much of the trip to Moosdorf, the location of Stalag 7A. My notes indicate going through the following places: Lauta, Ruhland, Muchenburg, Pleasa, Cheminitz, Zwichau, Reinchnbach, Jaheta, Jabnitz, Hapilbraun, Plauen, Waldgruin, Syra, Frontau, Meiltherer, Schenberg, Filzitch, Glerenfurst, Laudengune, Hof, Roslau, Herenbrunn, Augsburg, Marketedwitz, Hadpelmoor, Mannkapen, Munich, Friesing, and Moosdorf.

"One stop was in a rail yard where the cars were opened. The German workers were friendly, or maybe they were laborers from other countries. There was a latrine trench along the tracks that gave

us a chance to relieve ourselves. I do not recall getting any food or do I remember any sickness. It was very cold, and all thoughts were of food and water.

“When the train reached Munich, we were on a siding and the doors of the cars were opened. There was a group of United Kingdom men with shovels filling in the bomb crater holes. One said something to the effect that you dig them and we fill them up.

“It was late the afternoon of the 7th of February that we were finally detrained at Moosdorf and entered Stalag 7A. I was crowded into a barracks which appeared to be in the center of camp. The kitchen stoves in the middle of the barracks had been buckled so badly that they were useless. In order to get something to burn in our tin stoves, we would crawl under the building, take the underfloor and use the boards for fuel. I did make one trip out of the camp to collect firewood. It was a pleasant day to walk through the countryside, however, the areas we traveled did not have anything burnable laying around. The natives were also in need of fuel, so most was already removed.

“April 9th we were notified President Roosevelt had died.

“There was a fear of being moved again, or of the Germans killing the prisoners. From the 1st of April there was always an American fighter aircraft over the camp. We were instructed that if any attempt was made to move the camp, or any shooting, we were to set fire to the buildings, and action would be taken.

“During those three months there were no showers, and only cold water to wash ourselves and our clothing. The problem of the latrines running over was constant. The tank trucks that hauled the sewage were painted with red crosses, but were still strafed and blown apart. The claim was that most of the trucks were destroyed, but I am sure there was also a shortage of fuel for this program.

“I did not see or hear the battle during the liberation of the camp on the 29th of April. Team “A” of the American 14th Armored Division, after a brief fight, liberated the camp. The only recollection I have is of a tank followed by a command car with General Patton in it going by on the main street of the camp.

“The Army set up a kitchen and bakery to provide us with food, but after one day everyone was sick from the white bread and military rations. They put us back on the Red Cross parcels and our own cooking. Some men left camp and got food from troops in the area. It was said that some ate so much of the concentrated army rations, that their digestive systems ruptured. Also, some Russians got into some industrial alcohol and died as a result of their drinking.

“On May 8th we were loaded on trucks and taken to an airport at Ingolstadt. While waiting there a German Me-109 buzzed the field with machine guns firing. We all jumped into bomb craters along the runway. The plane landed and I guess it was his last salute to the surrender of the Nazi military.

“Finally some C-47s landed and we were flown to Reims (Rheims), France. There we were given showers, deloused, and provided with new underwear, uniforms, insignia, and toilet articles. We were there only one day. How we left and got to LaHavre I do not remember. It must have been the 10th of May when we reached Camp Lucky Strike (LaHavre).

“It seemed to me that we were there a long time. We did get some money to use at the PX, but most items were not allowed for prisoners, since they were rich and made us sick. The food was very bland, with stewed chicken and mashed potatoes the main entree. We were watched to see that we did not eat more than one serving, and segregated from others.

“It was a long time, as I see by an order that I was assigned as Ticket Officer in the mess line of the SS Sea Porpoise on June 9th, 1945. As I recall the trip, I was billeted in a room back of the galley with five others. There were two stacks of three-tier bunks. We spent most of the time in the galley eating, especially frozen egg nog and peaches. The cooks also gave us brandy, but none of that would stay down.

“Nothing seemed important, we had been herded like animals for the past six months and it still was about the same without guns. The United States flag had been raised at Moosdorf, Rheims, and LaHavre, but we were still not really free.

“We entered New York harbor in the night. The lights of the city did not glow in the cloudless sky. Most of us were on deck when the Statue of Liberty, with the torch glowing, came into view. The sound of Gershwin’s *Rhapsody In Blue*, was played repeatedly over the ship’s speakers, and through the tears, we knew we were home.

“The ship was unloaded that night. I believe we were at Staten Island. A short train ride took us to Fort Dix where we were still under restricted movement. Some more clothes were issued and we were able to draw some money. Things were still rationed so our purchases at the PX were limited.

“After a short stay, probably one day, we were put on trains to the military installation nearest our home. Here we were given orders and told to leave our address for further orders. I ended up at home for over 60 days before being ordered to Miami Beach.”

S/Sgt. James H. Pewitt was a Waist Gunner on the crew of Captain Charles Childs, 96th Squadron. S/Sgt. Pewitt was flying with a strange crew on the Group’s 300th mission to Vienna, Austria, 1 November 1944. August 27, 1994: “That mission to Vienna was my first mission. They split up our crew to fly with old crews for a few missions. Believe me, I was broken in good!

“We were flying on the tail end of the formation. The pilot was flying his first mission as 1st pilot. When we got to Vienna we got that engine hit. I’m not sure where we dropped our bombs but we came back alone. For a brief time my oxygen went out and when I came to I heard the pilot say, ‘I’ll hold it, everybody jump.’ I got up off the floor and was going for the door. About that time the pilot put it in a dive and threw me back on the floor. I saw the tail gunner trying to come up to the waist. When he came out of the dive, I tried to get to the door and just as I got the door open the prop flew by. I looked back and the co-pilot was standing in the radio room and motioned not to jump, but five had already jumped.

“When we hit the Adriatic Sea we were down real low on the water thinking we might have to ditch. We had no electrical system. When we hit land it was almost night and searchlights came on from the ground. We had no radio and I was in the top turret so I started shooting flares. We did not know where we were but could see a landing strip so we landed and spent the night.

“We flew back the next day. My crew was sure glad to see me. I had to fly again the next day but it was not so bad.

“I flew 16 missions. We went to Capri to the Rest Camp after my 15th mission. I got hit on my 16th mission over Vienna by flak. It broke my left arm and another piece went into the back of my left shoulder and it is still in there.

“This happened on February 21st and I was in the hospital over there until April 10th and we came back to the States. We left Naples April 10th and arrived in Boston April 20th, on a Troop Transport. I stayed in hospitals until January 21, 1946, and I was discharged.

“I live on a farm and farmed until 1985, semi-retired and rented my land out. Since then I have been working with the Kentucky Department of Agriculture.

“We meet every two years. Our first reunion was in 1967 and our last was in Sioux City, Iowa on June 10th of this year (1994). This was our 50th anniversary since we all got together. We did go to Dayton, Ohio in September 1991 to the dedication of the 2nd Bomb Group Memorial and it really was nice.”

### **MOOSBIERBAUM, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 301 - NOVEMBER 2, 1944**

Three aircraft took off at 1715 hours on a night mission to bomb the Chemical Works at Moosbierbaum. A/C #739, 20th Squadron, was piloted by 1st Lt. R. F. Bischoff; A/C #615, 96th

Squadron, was piloted by 1st Lt. Arthur T. VanCura, and A/C #189, 429th Squadron, was piloted by 1st Lt. O. L. Printy. At 2044 hours, two A/C dropped 20, 500-lb. bombs on the target by PFF with unobserved results due to a heavy cloud cover. The plane of the 96th Squadron returned early and did not bomb.

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6399 - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	George (NMI) Reilly, P.	(DED)
1st Lt.	Arvin C. Hildebrand, CP.	(DED)
1st Lt.	Richard J. Glattly, N.	(DED)
S/Sgt.	Benjamin T. English, UT.	(DED)
S/Sgt.	Melvin Talley, RO.	(DED)

The following statement was issued by Captain William S. Dickens, Investigating Officer, dated 5 November, 1944.

Findings and conclusions regarding loss of a B-17 type aircraft, number 44-6399. This aircraft took off from its home base, Amendola, Italy, on 2 November at 0918 hours on an Instrument Navigational Training Mission. The crew was briefed to fly the following route at an altitude of 10,000 feet or above the current overcast; Amendola to Rome, to Naples, to Taranto, to base. Clearance was given for flight at 10,000 feet; weather was slight rain with 7/10 to 10/10 cloud coverage from 3,000 to 5,000 feet, visibility two to 22 miles, icing conditions at 7,000 to 18,000 feet.

Careful interrogation of other crews flying that day reveals that winds at 10,000 feet were between 40 - 50 knots from 240 degrees, blowing aircraft considerably off course. Icing conditions occurred at 9,000 to 12, 000 feet.

There is no other information as to the fate of this aircraft as it was flying alone, and simply did not return to base at scheduled time. Search for the missing aircraft was conducted by Regional Flying Control.

**VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 302 - NOVEMBER 3, 1944**

Six aircraft took off at 0642 hours to bomb the South Ordnance Depot in Vienna. Three aircraft dropped 30, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the target by PFF with unobserved results. Two aircraft dropped 20, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Graz, Austria, one visually and one by PFF, results unobserved. One aircraft was an early return. Flak at Vienna was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate. All aircraft returned safely.

**REGENSBURG, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 303 - NOVEMBER 4, 1944**

Thirty-five aircraft dropped 680, 250-lb. GP bombs on the Winterhafen Oil Storage at Regensburg. Bombing was by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, slight to moderate, and inaccurate. No losses, no injuries. One aircraft, an early return, dropped its bombs on Marshalling Yards at Lienz, Austria with unobserved results.

**VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 304 - NOVEMBER 5, 1944**

Twenty-three aircraft dropped their load of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Florisdorf Oil Refinery by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense and accurate, resulting in damage to nine B-17s. There were no losses and no injuries. One A/C dropped its bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Graz, Austria, and one A/C dropped its bombs on a Railroad Bridge at 47-00N - 16-03E. Results were not reported. Nine Me-109s attacked one A/C and it returned safely to base without injury to crew.

**MOOSBIERBAUM, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 305 - NOVEMBER 6, 1944**

Twenty-five aircraft dropped their 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Oil Refinery at Moosbierbaum by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, moderate, accurate. Two runs were made over this target. Six aircraft dropped their bombs on Marshalling Yards at Graz, Austria, with the bombs observed across the Yards. One aircraft dropped its bombs on Gleisdorf, Austria, and another dropped its bombs on Zeltweg, Austria. Results were not recorded. Thirteen aircraft were damaged by flak over Moosbierbaum, three severely. There were no injuries to crews.

### **MARIBOR, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 306 - NOVEMBER 7, 1944**

Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 263, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Maribor. Two runs were made on the target with bombs reported in the target area and several fires observed. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate resulting in the death of 2nd Lt. Charles H. Ingles, CP, 96th Squadron, and slightly wounding T/Sgt. Joseph W. Buckwalter, T/Sgt. T. J. Collins, 2nd Lt. R. N. Duffie, S/Sgt. Felix A. Janas; all from the 96th Squadron, and Captain D. T. Joyce from the 429th Squadron.

S/Sgt. Andrew D. Miller was a member of the 96th Squadron and assigned to the crew of 1st Lt. Eliot B. Spiess. July 17, 1992: "My first combat mission was on September 6, 1944 and the Marshalling Yards at Oradea, Romania. It was the start of a long, tough haul, and I was very fortunate to complete my 35 missions.

"We went to Blechhammer three times, a long trip of nearly nine hours. One of those we did not get credit for even though our flight time was recorded as 8 hours and 45 minutes. Went to Munich three times, Vienna seven times, and five of those were my last five missions. A rough way to finish up! Went to Regensburg twice; Brux and Pilsen, Czechoslovakia which were 9 hours and 30 minutes. We had several raids to Italian targets but most missions were into the Balkan countries, Germany and Poland. Oil was a big target at that time.

"One of my most impressive missions, to me, was a mission to Maribor, Yugoslavia, November 7, 1944. It was to be a so called 'Milk Run' as we were briefed that it had only 32 heavy anti-aircraft guns. I don't remember the names of the others who flew with me on that mission but I remember that it was not my crew. I flew ball turret as I did on 32 of my 35 missions. The target was cloud covered and the Colonel in the lead plane decided to go under the clouds rather than bomb by PFF. They really peppered us! Rather than seeing puffs of smoke as usual, I saw shells bursting and smoke filled my turret. We had about 75 holes in our plane. After the report to call in at the conclusion of the bomb run, I could not readily talk. I had been extremely shaken. The crew thought I had been hit.

"Another interesting mission was to Villach, Austria, on November 11, 1944. There were seven or eight holes in my ball turret. One piece of flak hit my ammunition belt which flattened two bullets and cartridge linkage. If it wasn't for that, this piece of flak would have hit me.

"Our mission to Debreczen, Hungary, on September 21, 1944 was another one with sharp memories. This was only my sixth mission. When we landed after the mission, it was with a blown tire. The plane swung around to an abrupt stop. We all got out of our plane to watch the other planes land over us. A shortened runway! No time to remove our plane as others had to land because of shortage of gas. One plane came down with the waist shot out (#078 Sweet Pea). One waist and tail gunner killed. The pilots flew it back rather than bail out as the ball turret gunner was not able to free from the turret. He was cut out with a torch after landing (rumor). Another plane landed with bomb bay doors open and they were sheared off. The propeller on one engine of another plane flew off across the field after it landed. One plane came down with wheels up. Several others were in bad condition.

"I flew one night mission on November 23, 1944 as a waist gunner to Linz, Austria. Mickey, inter-phone, radio equipment, and my electric suit all burned out. It was minus 35 degrees Fahrenheit but it wasn't as bad as it would have been when I was flying ball turret. Search lights were a long way

off. The only other eventful occurrence was that a night fighter made a pass at us with no damage to the plane.

“We always dreaded going to Blechhammer as their flak always seemed to be so accurate. On a mission there on September 13, 1944 (my third mission), I saw two planes blow up. One was flying right beside ours. It spiraled downward in flames, breaking up into three parts before hitting the ground. There were no parachutes coming out.

“We were initially ordered to England but believe our orders were changed to Italy in Gander, Newfoundland. My discharge states that I served in England on the dates that I served in Italy. A history buff would certainly have a time trying to figure that one out after seeing my records!”

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 307 - NOVEMBER 7, 1944**

Three aircraft took off at 0950 hours and dropped 30, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Florisdorf Oil Refinery in Vienna at 1352 hours. Bombing was by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate. No injuries, no losses.

#### **SALZBURG, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 308 - NOVEMBER 11, 1944**

Thirty-six aircraft took off at 0656 hours to bomb Brux, and after three runs trying to locate the target, turned and 27 aircraft dropped 313, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Salzburg. Flak was heavy, slight and inaccurate. Bombing was by PFF and results were unobserved. Nine aircraft became separated due to the weather and returned to base with one dropping its bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Villach, Austria. Results were not reported. All Aircraft returned safely.

#### **BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 309 - NOVEMBER 13, 1944**

Four aircraft took off on a night mission at 2226 hours to bomb the South Oil Refinery at Blechhammer. Two aircraft dropped 20, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Refinery at 0230 hours. Bombing was done by PFF. Large fires and explosions were observed. Flak was heavy, moderate to tense and accurate.

One aircraft dropped its 10, 500-lb. RDX bombs on an alternate target at Kaevinna, Poland by PFF with unobserved results.

B-17 #42-8189 was forced to crash land at the northwest tip of Lake Lessina due to shortage of fuel. The PFF went out and it was impossible to pick out the primary target. A large pattern of lights was seen through the clouds and this target was believed to be Gleiwitz, Germany. It was bombed visually. The plane was moderately damaged and the crew, with bombsight, returned to base. During the mission the tail radar flashed green, north of Budapest. The pilot dove, in diving turns and the signal would disappear. After 20 or 25 minutes the signal would reappear and the pilot used the same tactics. The enemy aircraft never came close enough to give the red signal. This pursuit lasted until  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour from the Yugoslav coast. Members of the crew were: Lt. S. G. Trump, P; Lt. W. E. Spencer, CP; Lt. D. F. Maine, N; Lt. J. D. Sisson, B; Lt. L. H. Tope, RN; S/Sgt. G. E. McGuire, UT/S/Sgt. C. Keene, RW; S/Sgt. C. C. Doty, LW; S/Sgt. R. C. Bartels, TG; and T/Sgt. D. C. Dvork, RO.

B-17 #44-8195 was forced to ditch in the Adriatic Sea, three miles south of Manfredonia due to a shortage of fuel. It was believed that two engines were damaged by flak as they went out on the home leg. The crew was ordered to prepare for ditching and they hit the water at 0718 hours. They were picked up by Italian fishing boats and brought to Manfredonia, then to base. Members of the crew were: Lt. Isaac C. Pederson, P; Lt. Robert D. Draper, CP; Lt. Arthur A. Worth, N; Lt. Raymond C. Tulwalski, B; Lt. Byron S. Martin, RN; T/Sgt. James F. Miller, UT; S/Sgt. James F. Goodrich, RW; S/Sgt. Theodore L. Scott, TG; T/Sgt. Carmine S. Noce, RO; and Cpl. George Barrett, Observer, *Yank Magazine*. Lt Martin received serious injuries during the ditching while S/Sgt. Goodrich, S/Sgt. Scott, and Cpl. Barrett were slightly injured.

S/Sgt. James F. Goodrich was a member of the 20th Squadron and on the crew of 1st Lt. Isaac C. Pederson. October 20, 1993: "On the night of 12/13 November 1944, I was on one of the four crews assigned to fly a 'Lone Wolf' mission to bomb an oil refinery at Blechhammer, Germany. Our ships were equipped with radar that allowed us to bomb through the clouds without the necessity of visually seeing the target. The night bombing could be done in rough weather, and also give us the ability to do a 'round-the-clock' bombing of enemy territory. It also made it more difficult for enemy fighters to locate us.

"At the briefing, we found that the four aircraft would take off at close intervals, not in formation, and that bombers from other Groups would be going to the same target but at different intervals. We were loaded with 10, 500-lb. bombs, some were fused to detonate from six to 36 hours after impact. We were the lead plane in our Group and scheduled to arrive a short time after other planes had bombed. We were told we could not return the delayed fussed bombs and must bomb our target, or designated alternate, regardless of conditions, clear or cloudy. In prior missions, the crews were instructed not to bomb if the target was clear. This was because it was easier for the anti-aircraft and night fighters to locate us. We were told there was a great possibility of attacks by Me-110 night fighters and to make careful observations of tactics in order to help other crews.

"When we arrived at our aircraft, I found that we were to have an observer with us. This man was Cpl. George Barrett, a reporter from *Yank Magazine*. Our pilot felt that an 11th man created more weight for such a long mission and so, our left waist gunner, S/Sgt. David W. Dykes, was 'bumped.' I gave Barrett some instructions on use of the oxygen mask and left waist gun.

"We loaded up and got off on time. We climbed rapidly and over the Adriatic, test fired our guns. Around 10,000 feet, we went on oxygen and soon reached our assigned altitude. Flying at night was strange, we were blacked out and I had a feeling of being in a tunnel. Occasionally lights could be seen through breaks in the clouds and on one or two occasions, search lights came on but no flak was fired. It was bitter cold.

"As the target was neared, it was evident that the planes that had preceded us had alerted the Germans. The men in the nose reported that the flak was really heavy. Everyone put on their flak jackets and helmets and prepared for the worst.

"It was on the bomb run when we started having trouble. Blechhammer was visible but the bombardier reported that the bomb sight was useless. The temperature had dropped so low that the bombsight was covered with ice in spite of a special heated cover. It was now up to the radar to prove that we could bomb at night without the bombsight. Our 'Mickey' navigator took over and at 1430 hours the bombs were dropped along with some propaganda leaflets. The job was done and the pilot swung off the target to head for home base.

"As we turned off the target, the No. 3 engine died, apparently struck by flak. The co-pilot and engineer joined the pilot in attempting to feather the engine but were unable to get the prop feathered. The wind-milling prop created a terrible drag and then about 30 minutes later, No. 2 engine flamed and blew some cylinder heads. The gyro instruments went next and the radar quit because of a shortage of power. We were bucking a heavy head wind and we switched off our electric suits to give the navigator enough electricity to operate his instruments.

"With only two engines left, the situation certainly did not look good. We were 600 miles from base, mostly over enemy territory and the Adriatic to cross. The plane at this time was dropping 1,000 feet per minute. The pilot called for us to prepare to bail out. The emergency hatch was jettisoned and we checked our parachutes. Someone suggested that we lighten the plane so we immediately started to throw guns, flak vests, and everything else that could be moved, overboard.

“At 8,000 feet the engines began to operate better and our descent was reduced to 300 feet per minute. The Yugoslav mountains were the next concern and the pilot felt that we could clear them if we could hold our altitude to over 6,000 feet. The pilot then thought we could make the emergency landing strip at Vis, a tiny island off the Balkan coast. Suddenly, a storm over the mountains forced us to go lower and we flew along a canyon with the mountains sometimes visible, on both sides. We hung on and prayed for the best. About three and one-half hours after leaving the target, we arrived over Vis. We relaxed and felt most of our troubles were over.

“Suddenly the word came that the airstrip was covered with clouds, ceiling zero. Without radar we knew it was impossible to get in there. We were now faced with the Adriatic to cross. Lt. Pederson came on the interphone for a check of the crew and what to do. He felt it

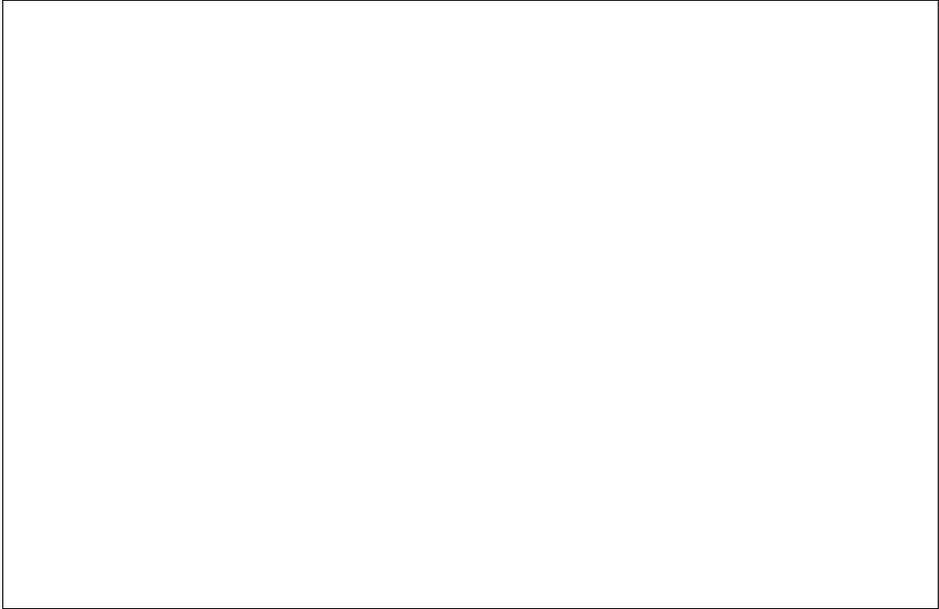
was best to stay with the plane and, one by one, the rest of the crew agreed.

“At 4,000 feet the ship seemed to level off and we began to feel a little more comfortable about making it across the Adriatic. Suddenly, gusts of wind hit the ship and we were down to 2,000 feet and the radio operator sent out the ‘May Day’ distress signal. Everyone was at the point of getting ready to bail out when land was sighted. We now had a great feeling that we were going to make it to base. The radio operator canceled the ‘May Day’ call and we began to relax.

“Suddenly the No. 1 engine ran out of gas and the ship fell sharply. Lt. Pederson called over the phone to prepare for ditching. We removed our parachutes, checked our ‘Mae Wests’ and hurried to the radio room, our assigned stations for ditching.

“At 0718 hours we hit the water, three or four miles off the coast. A great burst of water smashed into the radio room and George Barrett was lifted up through the radio hatch. We scrambled around and finally got two dinghies out, piled into them and paddled away. It had been a close call, one engine out of gas, a wind-milling prop, and two other engines out.

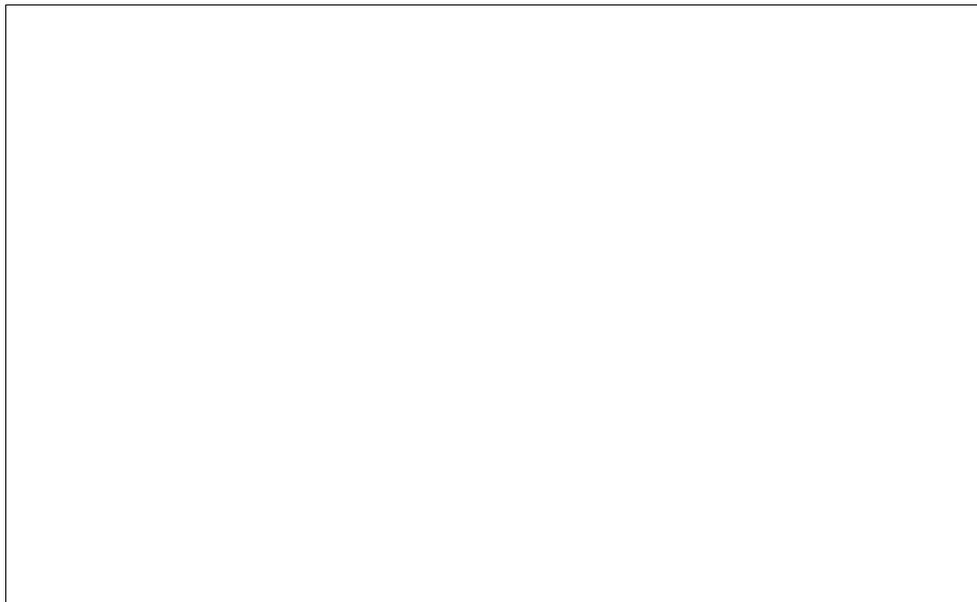
“Italian fishermen picked us up and we watched our bomber sink, nose down, into the Adriatic. As we piled into the ambulances, waiting for us, the co-pilot looked at his watch, smiled and said, ‘Some of those bombs should be blowing up about now.’ Some of us got banged up during the ditching but it wasn’t long before we were back in the air on another mission.



T/R - L/R - A. Worth, R. Tulwalski, R. McClure, I. Pederson  
B/R - L/R - M. Miller, C. Noce, J. Miller, C. Stewart, J. Goodrich, and T.  
Lively  
(Courtesy - J. Goodrich)

“I went on to finish my missions. Lt. Pederson, Lt. Draper, and T/Sgt. James Miller were missing on a mission to Salzburg, Austria on December 7, 1944, captured and interned. Of the crew on that mission, Lt. Pederson, T/Sgt. James Miller, S/Sgt. Charles W. Stewart, and S/Sgt. Morris Miller were members of my regular crew. I don’t recall now about the other members of my crew. I lost track of all of them and went to the last reunion at Houston in September, 1994, hoping to find some of them.

“In the mission report of the raid, it was stated that I was injured. I was not injured.”



T/R - L/R - H. Bullis, J. Tomsyck, A. Poindexter (\*), F. Reed  
B/R - L/R - E. Wagner (\*), S. Heathman, L. Sambuco, R. Rudolph  
\*KIA 3-14-45 (Courtesy - R. Rudolph)

#### **LINZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 310 - NOVEMBER 15, 1944**

Six aircraft took off at 0752 hours and dropped 69, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Benzol Plant at Linz. One aircraft dropped 5 bombs on this target and 5 bombs on an alternate, the Kapfenberg, Austria Steel Works. Bombing of both targets was by PFF. Results of bombing of both targets was not obtainable due to cloud cover. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate. There were no injuries and no losses.

#### **MUNICH, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 311 - NOVEMBER 16, 1944**

Thirty-six aircraft took off and 34 aircraft dropped 260, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the West Marshalling Yards at Munich. Bombing was by PFF with hits observed on the Yards through holes in the clouds. Flak was heavy, moderate and accurate with no losses and no injuries. One aircraft dropped its bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Villach, Austria with one bomb hitting in the Yards. One aircraft dropped its bombs on Railroad Lines in the Brenner Pass and results were unobserved.

#### **SALZBURG, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 312 - NOVEMBER 17, 1944**

The primary target was to Brux, Czechoslovakia but the 36 aircraft were diverted to bomb the Marshalling Yards at Salzburg. When turning off the I.P. the lead aircraft opened its bomb bay doors, at which time a malfunction caused the bombs to be dropped. The second and third Squadrons dropped

on the leader and the bombs fell into a wood and mountainous area six to eight miles south of Salzburg. Flak was heavy, slight and accurate. There were no losses and no injuries. The fourth Squadron of 10 aircraft did not bomb this target but dropped its 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Villach, Austria with some bombs seen to be in the target area. These ten aircraft were the only ones credited with a mission.

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 313 - NOVEMBER 18, 1944**

Thirty-six aircraft took off to bomb the Florisdorf Oil Refinery in Vienna. Thirty-five aircraft dropped 418, 500-lb. RDX bombs by PFF with unobserved results. One aircraft was an early return. Flak was heavy, slight to moderate and inaccurate. There were no injuries and no losses.

#### **WISEGRAD, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 314 - NOVEMBER 18, 1944**

Eight aircraft took off to bomb Troop Concentrations at Visegrad and dropped 160, 250-lb. GP bombs. Two runs were made on the target with the bombs reported in the target area. Flak was heavy, moderate and accurate with no injuries and no losses.

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 315 - NOVEMBER 19, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off with 22 dropping 427, 250-lb. GP bombs on the Winterhafen Oil Refinery in Vienna. Bombing was by PFF with unobserved results. Six aircraft were early returns. Flak was heavy, intense and accurate resulting in injuries to Cpl. A. L. Butcher, LT, and Cpl. N. L. Gillis, TG, both of the 49th Squadron, and S/Sgt. J. H. White, RO, Sgt. D. W. Dykes, LW, and Lt. O. H. Lynch, CP, from the 20th Squadron.

#### **FERRARA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 316 - NOVEMBER 19, 1944**

Eighteen aircraft took off to bomb Railroad Bridges at Ferrara. Due to cloud cover over the target, the Group returned to base without bombing. The Group did not get credit for this mission.

#### **BRNO, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 317 - NOVEMBER 20, 1944**

The primary target was the South Oil Refinery at Blechhammer but weather forced the Group to divert to Marshalling Yards at Brno. Thirty-three aircraft dropped their 200-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards. One aircraft bombed Trnava, Czechoslovakia and one of the 33 dropped half its bombs on Brno and dropped the remainder on a bridge at 48-09N - 17-06E. Bombing at the main target was by PFF with unobserved results. The Second Wave made two runs on the target. Flak was heavy, slight to moderate and accurate. There were no injuries and no losses.

#### **MUNICH, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 318 - NOVEMBER 22, 1944**

Thirty-eight aircraft took off with two early returns. Twenty-six aircraft dropped 208, 500-lb. GP bombs on the West Marshalling Yards at Munich. Bombing was done by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, intense, and inaccurate.

Targets of opportunity attacked: RR Bridge three miles south of Villach, Austria; RR Bridge at 47-28N - 12-35E; RR Line south of Salzburg, Austria at 47-18N - 13-13E; RR Junction north of Dorfgastein, Austria at 47-18N - 13-03E; RR Line and Industrial Buildings near Mittersill, Austria at 47-20N - 12-25E; and Marshalling Yards at 47-58N - 10-12E near Memmingen, Germany. A total of 80, 500-lb. GP bombs were released on these targets with results not noted.

B-17 #44-6487, 429th Squadron, piloted by Captain David Joyce, was forced to ditch in the Adriatic due to a shortage of fuel and damage by flak. Members of the crew were picked up by two Air-Sea-Walrus aircraft. Four men were taken in one Walrus and their names were not listed in the

report. Six taken in the second Walrus were: Captain Joyce; 2nd Lt. William Misic; S/Sgt. Clair H. Schmitt; S/Sgt. Robert H. Gayle; Sgt. Kenneth L. Hoffman; and Sgt. Harold J. Brett.

**LINZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 319 - NOVEMBER 24, 1944**

Five aircraft took off at 2345 hours and four aircraft dropped their 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Benzol Oil Refinery at Linz by PFF. Results were unobserved. One aircraft dropped its 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Klagenfurt, Austria. There were no losses. The aircraft returned at 0650 hours, November 25th.

**LINZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 320 - NOVEMBER 30, 1944**

Five aircraft took off at 0110 hours with one early return. Four aircraft dropped 40, 500-lb. RDX bombs and four, M26 propaganda bombs on the Benzol Oil Refinery at Linz. Bombing was done by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, slight, and inaccurate. Two planes reported that tracers were fired at them just following bombs away. No injuries, no losses.

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# 16

## OPERATIONS: DECEMBER, 1944

### **B**LECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 321 - DECEMBER 2, 1944

Forty-one aircraft took off with 40 aircraft dropping their bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Blechhammer. One aircraft attacked the Marshalling Yards at Czelldomolk and one aircraft, that dropped part of its load on Blechhammer, dropped four bombs on Sarvar, Hungary. A total of 402, 500-lb RDX bombs were dropped on these three targets. The bombing at Blechhammer was done by PFF with unobserved results. Bombing on the other targets was done visually with good results at Czelldomolk.

Flak at Blechhammer was moderate to intense and accurate resulting in the death of S/Sgt. Joseph Lipczynski, Upper Turret Gunner of the 429th Squadron. S/Sgt. George W. Faulkner, Left Waist Gunner of the 20th Squadron, was slightly wounded.

B-17 #44-6456, 20th Squadron, was reported missing. Crew members were:

2nd Lt.	John J. Hickey, 0-1540359, P.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Warren L. Miller, 0-737201, CP.	(RET)
1st Lt.	Robert Sullivan, 0-673643, N.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Richard E. DeNeut, 0-2071437, B.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Charles E. Goff, 16131225, U/T.	(RET)
Sgt.	Morton L. Klauber, 12185021, L/T.	(RET)
Sgt.	Joseph W. MacMillan, 11054392, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Bernard D. Chessir, 37071494, L/W.	(RET)
Sgt.	Junior C. Turknett, 18190263, T/G.	(RET)
Sgt.	Angelo Collis, 19073597, R/O.	(RET)

B-17 #44-6456 was hit by flak over Blechhammer. With No. 2 engine out, prop windmilling, No. 3 engine burning, interphone and oxygen system out, and control cables cut, the pilot crash landed the aircraft ten minutes behind the Russian lines. Sgt. Morton L. Klauber suffered a slight head injury as a result of the crash landing. The crew was returned to Bari, Italy on December 10th and returned to Base on December 11, 1944.

### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 322 - DECEMBER 3, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 23 aircraft dropped 183, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Southwest Goods Section in Vienna. Bombing was by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, slight to intense with fair accuracy. Four aircraft were early returns and one aircraft crashed on takeoff.

B-17 #44-6632, 20th Squadron, crash landed after take-off, 12 miles south of the field. No. 1 and No. 3 engines caught fire as the plane left the runway. Crew members were:

1st Lt. K. Pilger, P.

Lt. Col. Luther Bivins, CP.  
 2nd Lt. D. H. Johnson, N, injured  
 1st Lt. A. K. Benner, B., injured  
 T/Sgt. J. W. Kelly, U/T.  
 Sgt. B. A. Lennon, B/T.  
 S/Sgt. G. R. Carlton, R/W.  
 S/Sgt. G. D. MacDonald, L/W, injured  
 S/Sgt. R. R. Taylor, T/G.  
 T/Sgt. J. J. Splitek, R/O.

### **LINZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 323 - DECEMBER 3, 1944**

This was a Pathfinder, "Lone Wolf," mission. Four aircraft took off at 0808 hours. Two aircraft returned early. At 1130-1139 hours, two aircraft dropped 4 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Industrial Area of Linz. Bombing was by PFF with unobserved results. One Me-109 was reported seen at 1025 hours but did not attack. Flak at the target was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate.

B-17 #44-8381, 96th Squadron, piloted by 1st Lt. William G. Pepperman is reported missing with no particulars as to reason.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT - A/C #44-8381 - 96TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	William G. Pepperman, 0-758376, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Charles O. Dewey, 0-776248, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Howard N. Kresge, Jr., 0-2057954, N.	(POW)
1st Lt.	William L. Torske, 0-761317, B.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	James J. Teske, 0-723724, RN.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Ernest F. Walker, 18048700, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	James J. Johnson, 16010066, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Alva L. Flowers, 15339227, L/W. 20th Squadron.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Budd C. Argyle, 39919628, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	James B. Dodge, Jr., 19112475, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of S/Sgt. James J. Johnson, RW, after liberation: "All the crew bailed out successfully. Lt. Pepperman, Lt. Dewey, Lt. Torske, T/Sgt. Walker, T/Sgt. Dodge, and S/Sgt. Argyle were with me in Stalag Luft I together.

"I saw S/Sgt. Flowers, after bailing out, at a German Army Hospital near Linz, Austria. He had a broken leg. T/Sgt. Dodge had a sprained ankle from the jump. T/Sgt. Walker had suffered a slight head injury from flying glass."

### **BROD, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 324 - DECEMBER 6, 1944**

Twenty-nine aircraft took off at 1006 hours to bomb a Highway Bridge at Brod. They returned to base at 1555 hours without bombing, due to weather. All bombs were jettisoned. No credit was given for the mission.

### **ZAGREB, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 325 - DECEMBER 6, 1944**

Fourteen aircraft took off at 0650 hours to bomb the Marshalling Yards at Zagreb. One aircraft crashed on take-off and one was an early return. The other 12 aborted the mission due to weather and returned their bombs.

B-17 #42-31682, 96th Squadron, crashed and burned on take-off killing all ten crew members. The crew consisted of: 2nd Lt. Eric J. Zachrison, P; 2nd Lt. Harold Beall, CP; 2nd Lt. Edward E.

Quimby, Jr., N; F/O John M. Burch, B; T/Sgt. John P. Harlan, UT; S/Sgt. Thomas S. Barton, LT; Sgt. Lloyd O. Terry, RW; Sgt. Arthur R. Dixon, LW; Sgt. Cornelius J. Reilly, TG; and T/Sgt. Daniel P. Soltis, RO.

### **SALZBURG, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 326 - DECEMBER 7, 1944**

Three aircraft took off at 0139 hours on a "Lone Wolf" mission to bomb the Marshalling Yards at Salzburg. Two aircraft dropped 20, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the primary target and one aircraft dropped 10, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Klagenfurt, Austria. Bombing was by PFF and flak at the primary target was described as heavy, slight, and inaccurate.

B-17, #42-97652, 20th Squadron is reported missing.

The following statement was issued by Captain George B. Sweeney, Investigation Officer of the 20th Squadron.

B-17, #42-97652 was one of three Pathfinder aircraft on a mission to Salzburg M/Y, Austria, on 7 December 1944. Each aircraft was to bomb the target singly. One of the aircraft bombed the primary target and another bombed the first alternate, Klagenfurt, Austria. It is presumed that B-17 #42-07652 bombed the primary target. The one aircraft bombing the primary target and returning to base reported the flak as slight, inaccurate as to altitude and deflection, and of a heavy type. No enemy aircraft were observed during this mission.

At 0615 hours, the aircraft that bombed the first alternate target received a message from a B-17 that stated it had hit a target of opportunity by Pathfinder methods and bombs were away at 0433 hours. The call sign letters from this aircraft, as stated by the radio operator receiving the message, were "XAA," but the radio operator could not be sure as the reception conditions were poor. The call sign letters of B-17 #42-97652 were "XAK-U." No bombs away signal was received at the base as coming from B-17 #42-97652.

### **MISSING AIRCREW REPORT - A/C #42-97652 - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Isaac C. Pederson, 0-761757, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Robert D. Draper, 0-558840, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Frank C. Madill, 0-2058435, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Gildo F. M. Phillips, 0-722604, B.	(EVADED)
1st Lt.	James P. Doty, 0-793217, RN.	(EVADED)
T/Sgt.	James F. Miller, 34671710, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Anthony J. Pope, 32875468, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Morris H. Miller, 37567629, L/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Charles W. Stewart, 39213765, T/G.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Hubert Y. Simerson, 14190048, R/O.	(EVADED)

Statement of 1st Lt. James P. Doty, January 5, 1945, after evading and return to Allied control: "The bombardier was the last to leave the ship that I know of. I saw the engineer leave the ship and believe the pilot and navigator were the only ones in the ship when I left. I also believe the ship was empty from radio room to tail. The only one seen by me on the ground was the radio operator who was left in a Partisans doctor's hands.

"My knowledge of crew members not returned: Lt. Pederson, Lt. Madill, and S/Sgt. Stewart, unknown; Lt. Draper, believed bailed out; S/Sgt. Simerson, left with Partisans; and T/Sgt. Miller and S/Sgt. Pope were seen bailing out."

2nd Lt. Frank C. Madill was the regular Navigator on the crew of Lt. Warren E. Newhouse. He was flying as a replacement on the 7th of December 1944. May 17, 1992: "Gildo Phillips, our regular

Bombardier, and I were flying with a special crew that fateful night. We were flying one of those special night-time missions, sometimes called “Lone Wolf” missions. We flew one plane at a time, about half an hour apart. That night we were to hit the railroad complex at Salzburg, Austria. We were sort of an all-star crew. A Lt. Pederson, from the Salt Lake area, was pilot. A Lt. Draper, from southwestern Michigan, was our co-pilot. Lt. Draper was normally a first pilot on another crew. I believe our ‘Mickey’ operator was a Lt. Doty. In our night missions, a ‘Mickey’ operator flew in place of a belly turret gunner. My job, as Navigator, was to see that the pilot got to the target area at a particular time. Our ‘Mickey’ operator then took over, guided the plane through the final leg, and when possible (weather), would let the bombardier do the final drop. I honestly can’t remember if Lt. Doty or Lt. Phillips made the final ‘bombs away’ switch. We were roughly a half hour behind one plane and half an hour ahead of the rest.

“As soon as we dropped our bombs we headed for home. It was then after midnight and we were flying home on the 7th of December, a day easy to remember. On the way, we were either hit by flak or simply developed engine failure. At roughly 0500 we were given the ‘abandon ship’ order. Gildo got out right away. I had trouble getting the leg straps of my parachute harness strapped to my legs. I finally got one strap secured. I walked to the midsection of the plane and jumped out just ahead of the two pilots. We were probably 10/15,000 feet high. As I floated downward, I could see the morning was dawning but there was a cloud cover beneath us. I broke through the clouds at nearly treetop level. I was unable to avoid the last tree which caught my parachute and somewhat broke my fall. For about ten minutes I just curled up in a ball in my parachute, rested and caught my breath.

“I was just north of Zagreb (Croatia), Yugoslavia. Some Croatian farmers found me and took me to their farmhouse. Later that day some ‘Ustachi’ soldiers captured me. I thought I was being rescued. They took me to a German unit where I was ‘deloused’ and sent to Frankfurt for the usual interrogation.

“After a week of solitary confinement, and interrogation, I was shipped to Stalag Luft I on the Baltic Sea. There I met Pederson, Draper, and one of the enlisted crew members whom I had never known. My POW number was 6672.

“We were freed in May 1945 and sent home, (usual stories).

“Last year (1991), Gildo Phillips and I got together for a day of reminiscing after 47 years.”

2nd Lt. Gildo Phillips was a member of the 20th Squadron and the original Bombardier on the crew of Lt. Warren E. Newhouse. August 6, 1993: “I was part of a mixed crew flying a night mission December 7, 1944, to bomb Marshalling Yards at Salzburg, Austria. Frank Madill and I were the only original members of our crew from the United States on the mission that night. Frank was our navigator. We kept in close touch over the years and recently discussed the mission in some detail.

“It is my opinion that the only remaining person in the aircraft, when I left by way of the right waist door, was 1st Lt. Pederson, pilot. Frank said he left the nose right after I did and jumped through the bomb bay. I assumed he was still struggling to snap on his leg strap. I stayed and got one strapped but was having trouble getting the other snapped. We had received the last call from Pederson and Frank motioned me to leave. I had never intended to leave by the nose hatch and neither did Frank.

“I took off toward the rear, checked the pilot but saw no co-pilot. I passed the top gunner post - empty. The radio position was empty as was the ‘Mickey’ spot. Naturally it was a quick trip and I could have missed someone. In the waist was one waist gunner, Miller. He told me that the tail gunner had gotten out. Not seeing the other waist gunner, I assumed he had already bailed out. Not being overly brave, when Miller was stalling, I knew he and I were in the same frame of mind, but self preservation prevailed and I was going to push him out but it wasn’t necessary. I sat in the door, legs dangling. The plane lurched and I bailed. So it is my assumption that either Frank or I were the last

prior to Pederson's leaving. I can't imagine his missing the two of us in the waist and not coming back to bail there, so it is possible that he got out before me.

"Frank bailed with only one leg strap snapped. We both had a good belly laugh about the fact that we both landed in a tree.

"After getting out of the tree, to the ground, I looked up to see if it was possible to remove the parachute, and saw my G.I. boots tied to the parachute harness. I returned to retrieve them knowing the electrical boots I wore were not good enough for traveling. Hearing the bark of dogs, the task had to be quick. Reaching the ground made the dogs seem closer, so I ran. When exhausted, the barking less ominous, and noticing a small cave, I crawled in to rest and collect myself. I changed into the G.I. boots, opened the escape pack, and took out the compass to determine a southerly direction. Proceeding cautiously and avoiding over exposure, I walked until dark. To my surprise, I walked into a group of people coming from, what appeared to be, a church. There was nothing to do but bluff. Some of them greeted me and I mumbled to those who did. So, until I reached a wooded area in which it was impossible to proceed, without daylight, I made a bed of limbs, popped the float vest which I still had on, and tried to get some sleep, lying on the vest. I soon woke up cold. I began to exercise, and when warm, fell asleep again. This series continued until I could see enough to proceed again.

"I now thought about what those people must have thought seeing a hulk walking toward them in a flying helmet and orange vest. I laughed, relaxed and suddenly realized I was walking toward a house, heard noises, and dropped behind a bush. A boy, about five years of age, appeared, did his morning call to nature, and returned to the house. It was 'be more alert' time. That made progress slow all day.

"Just before dark, I noticed a shed ahead, looked all around. The only thing puzzling was a post with something on it. I went to see and saw a religious plaque. You can bet I prayed more sincerely than ever. In the shed was some lumber from which I fashioned a sleeping place off the ground. I rested soundly until daylight and awoke to the sound of rhythmic pounding that seemed to get progressively louder. I crawled toward the sound which was coming from a road below. Coming down the road was a company of goose stepping soldiers in grey heavy coats. I disappeared as fast as I could. The word 'caution' stuck with me all day and night.

"The next day I noticed fields that were farmed but they kept me exposed so I kept going around them, but at dusk I wandered into them and, at the edge, found what appeared to be turnips. Noticing a small creek nearby, I went to clean them. All I had to eat was chocolate from the escape packet. While washing them I heard the snap of a limb, looked up and saw an old man with a large ruck sack on his back. I froze, hoping I was not to be noticed, but it was too late. He stood over me and asked, 'Englise?' then 'Americano?' to which I said 'Yes' by a donkey nod. He replied, 'Gut.' Then said 'Partisano' and pointed to the mountains, motioned for me to follow and soon we were at a small house. He gave me black bread to eat and 'Vino' to drink, put me in the barn loft and covered me with hay.

"The next morning he awakened me and told me that Partisans would come for me soon. Two nights later, 'Mr. Dark Skin,' was introduced to me. All Partisans had fake names, so only being interested in myself, the name was ever remembered, but he was taking control of me.

"We walked most of the night, stopping at a house that night and traveled the next day to a farm house at dusk. Here we were fed and 'Mr. Dark Skin' wanted to see my dog tags and took info from them. The family we were with consisted of a father, mother was dead, he had a 16-year-old daughter and two young boys. The daughter kept house, father and sons worked in town for the Germans. He prodded me to eat and I motioned for him to slow down. He spoke to me in what I took to be German but my two years of high school German was in 1932-33 and I shook my head. Then he spoke Italian, which my mother taught me as a child. I had trouble understanding so he spoke slowly and clearly. We at least got the basic things across to one another and he repeated to others, in what I later was informed was Croatian. I learned that the nearest town of any size was Celje. Incidentally, the first old

gent that aided me said I was walking in the wrong direction, which was toward Zagreb, and Partisans functioned in the mountains from which I had come. Speaking of my first benefactor, he asked for a ring I wore, which was a gift from my wife. Naturally, I gave it to him. To this day my wife doesn't believe it.

"That night I slept in a cold room with 'Mr. Dark Skin,' fully clothed, under quilts and awoke cold and alone. He was gone and the girl and I were alone. While she fed me black bread and ersatz coffee, pilfered from the Germans, I noticed a man dressed in the same dress as the goose steppers. She told me he was a soldier but not to worry. Humbug, I watched him all day.

"That night two couriers (later surmised that all couriers had a route to travel each night) came for me and along with mail orders of the day, etc., transported me to the next station. It was their means of getting news to everyone, and me, along the way.

"Now the sequence breaks down completely. I will relate what happened as I remember, totally out of sequence.

"On one occasion, I was moved with a swarthy looking gent, well dressed, who claimed to be a Russian and was told how the Russians were winning the war and would liberate the world. This I heard daily, on the sides of mountains, among trees in the snow, watching smoke billow from chimneys of homes in the valley, and I'm exercising to keep from freezing. Then one night, 'swarthy' was gone.

"One morning we entered a house where a little old grandmother fed us corn meal mush with fried bacon fat poured over it. God, it was good!

"I don't know how many nightly treks we made until I was told we were to join two other evadees, but before we did, we were climbing a mountain when the sky lit up from flares which I looked at, and tripped over a courier who had hit the dirt in front of me. I rolled down the mountain and returned to the group to receive a stern lecture. Later I learned that I had torn a cartilage in my right knee.

"The two other evadees were 1st Lt. John Doty, 'Mickey' operator, and Sgt. Morris Miller, waist gunner. Prior to joining them, I spent a day with three Partisans and the house we were in came under artillery fire. The whistle of the shells puzzled me and the impact told me I had better get under an interior doorway.

"Once Doty and Miller joined us we were passed on to two new couriers, one who could speak English. I got so excited talking to him that he shushed me several times. I deferred to Doty who was much more composed.

"On another occasion we were taken to a house, at night, and before the new couriers arrived, about 10 Partisans came and they were laughing and carrying on. We learned that they were on a search and destroy operation. They claimed they had destroyed a company of Germans. They had guns, ammunition, food, medical supplies, and clothing. It was a celebration time.

"My wife is Slovak and when they are partying, whiskey is poured into a glass, set in front of you and it is customary that you drink it. The Partisans filled a fairly large glass of what was potato whiskey in front of me and I tried to drink it. I never finished it, but I passed out and later woke up drunk, sick and ran out the door heaving my cookies. The next day I asked Doty if he had the same experience. He hadn't - they never forced him. He took a sip and passed it to Miller.

"We hooked up with two English Majors, two Sergeants, and a US 1st Lt. The Majors were whisked away but the Sergeants stayed with us. We learned from the 1st Lt. (Jack) that there is no mixing of enlisted and officer personnel in the British forces and that the Sergeants were aides to the Majors. Together, they, including Jack, were gathering intelligence behind enemy lines. Jack was OSS. He eluded every effort at telling me his real name.

"We joined a battalion of partisans at Christmas time and were fed roast pig and Vino. They, including their Colonel, treated us great. While with them, a B-17 Group flew over us and a Partisan told us that the black bottom plane leading was English, and the rest were American. I explained that

they were all Americans. I explained to them that the so called 'English' plane was equipped to see the ground when it was - here I was unable to remember the word of clouds. About two days later, one of the Partisans remembered and told me.

"Another time, when we were with a small group of Partisans, one man asked to look at my jacket. First he examined it, then put it on and gave me his, shook my hand and walked away. His jacket was two sizes too small for me. If it wasn't for a large section of parachute to wrap myself in, I would have frozen to death.

"The battalion had a goodly group of women in it. They performed all the duties along with the men. One of them wanted to know how, as an American, I spoke the Venetian dialect. I explained that my mother was native Vettorio Veneto.

"While with the Partisans, we washed in a creek. Our bodies and clothes both needed it regardless of the cold. One night, six Partisans, Doty, Miller, and I were taken to a house near the encampment that was like our neighborhood bar. I believe they call it a Bortega. I produced five dollars from my pocket and we ate and drank all night and I received several pieces of paper money as change, some was kept as souvenirs, the rest I gave to a 10-year-old boy who served as the Colonel's gopher. He was rich and I was too. He gave me a big hug.

"Prior to joining Doty and Miller, a courier told me there was a man living nearby who could speak English and I asked if I could speak to him. He had lived in the USA years before and lived and worked in Pennsylvania. If my memory serves me, in Nanticoke, Pennsylvania, digging coal at 10 cents an hour. Wages during my time were much higher and he was overwhelmed when I told him. The others couldn't believe it when he told them.

"When the Majors, and party, joined us I learned the Sergeants had guns and I asked to buy a gun. They produced a German Luger, a P-38, a Spanish 38 caliber which looked like our 45 caliber hand gun and an Italian Beretta (small pocket hand gun). They came cheap with a clip each of ammunition. No one else wanted them. I bought them cheap.

"Mess kits to the Partisans was a tablespoon stored in their boot leg. Food was usually soup made of very little, if any, meat but much suet. I got to use a spoon after a kind soldier, or courier, finished eating out of the common pot at center table and after he licked it clean. Naturally, I licked it clean before returning it.

"Cooking was done in a large fireplace built into the kitchen wall and extending into the living area. This served as a sleeping place at night. Prime spot was on top, next to the benches built into the sides. If you didn't make either, the floor was your spot. When the march was over, you made the choice of food or a reasonable spot.

"When we were divorced from the battalion, our couriers took us on a two or three day walk to what may have been a corn field converted to an airfield. The only distinguishing feature - large piles of brush for fires to facilitate night landings. We were taken to a house a couple miles away to wait for transport home.

"We were taken to the field on two occasions without results. So back we went. On each occasion there was some small arms fire. The Partisans had a radio for contact with either a plane in the air or a field position. We saw some equipment the third time we went to the field, which was our last, and with it they were in touch with a plane. When the planes came over, there were two C-47s and about ten P-51s. It was an English controlled set-up. The C-47s landed and the P-51s circled the field until the C-47s were unloaded with whatever cargo they had, then loaded with sick and wounded. We were the last to board.

"Then Bari, delousing, a hot shower, food, debriefing, and back to the 2nd Bomb Group. After a period of rehab, I returned to missions with a different crew each time. I did manage one with my original crew on pilot Warren Newhouses' 35th mission."

### **VILLACH, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 327 - DECEMBER 8, 1944**

Two aircraft took off at 0145 hours on a "Lone Wolf" mission to bomb the Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery at Vienna. One plane was an early return and the other plane dropped 11, 500-lb. RDX bombs and 1, M26 propaganda bomb on the Marshalling Yards at Villach. Bombing was by PFF with unobserved results. No injuries, no losses.

### **REGENSBURG, GERMANY/PILSEN, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 328 - DECEMBER 9, 1944**

Thirty-six aircraft took off to bomb the Synthetic Oil Plant at Brux, Czechoslovakia. Two aircraft were early returns. Seventeen aircraft attacked the Oil Storage Plant at Regensburg, Germany dropping 200, 500-lb. RDX bombs. Bombing was by PFF with unknown results. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate.

Seventeen aircraft of the 20th and 429th Squadrons made two runs on Regensburg but did not bomb. They then made a third run, changed Mickey lead with B-17 #739 taking over (this aircraft is now missing). The change was made too late to bomb Regensburg, so they continued to Pilsen, at which time 16 aircraft dropped 48 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs and three propaganda bombs by PFF with unknown results. One aircraft from this Group jettisoned its bombs previously with results unknown. After bombing, they continued on, delaying turning off the bomb run and encountered heavy, intense flak at Praha.

B-17 #020 turned back at 45-47N - 12-41E because of loss of two turbos and couldn't keep up with the formation. This A/C bombed Villach, Austria by PFF with unknown results. B-17 #403 received a radio call from B-17 #501 stating it was at an altitude of 800 feet and was going to ditch. When last seen, #501 was off the coast of Yugoslavia with No. 2 engine feathered. At 1630 hours, the radio operator in B-17 #644 picked up an SOS message from #501 stating ditching.

B-17 #739, piloted by 1st Lt. Woodruff Warren, is missing.

B-17 #455, piloted by 1st Lt. Guy Miller made an emergency forced landing at Issi A/D, Italy due to a shortage of gas and severe flak damage. B-17 #550, piloted by 2nd Lt. D. M. Price; B-17 #542, piloted by 1st Lt. A. J. Grossman; and B-17 #365, piloted by 1st Lt. H. L. Baynes also landed at Issi A/D, Italy due to gas shortage.

B-17 #428, piloted by 1st Lt. J. W. Karsten, Jr., made an emergency landing at Falconara A/D, Italy due to a shortage of gas.

B-17 #501, piloted by 1st Lt. D. L. Pierce was forced to ditch in the Adriatic Sea at 1610 hours as a result of serious flak damage received over Praha, Czechoslovakia. The crew was picked up by a Air-Sea-Rescue launch at 1750 hours and taken to Ancona, Italy. F/O J. E. Skoba, 2nd Lt. J. E. McWhirter, and Sgt. John E. Childress sustained slight injuries as a result of the ditching.

Returning to base from Ancona, Lt. Porter, CP, stated that treatment of the crew, while at Ancona, was quite poor. Upon arrival at the town of Ancona, the entire crew was transported, in one command car, to a compound 16 miles away. At the camp the men were taken to a tent and left there. No medical treatment was offered, though three men suffered injuries from the ditching. All the men were sea sick. Three of the men had lost their shoes and did not receive any footwear until the following day. Members of the crew were: 1st Lt. Dale L. Pierce, P; 2nd Lt. Maurice D. Porter, CP; F/O John E. Skoba, N; 2nd Lt. James E. McWhirter, B; Sgt. Joseph Bury, U/T; Sgt. V. T. Burber, L/T; Sgt. Douglas D. Dimitry, R/W; Sgt. John E. Childress, L/W; Cpl. Anthony S. Genovese, T/G; and Cpl. W. D. Jeffries, R/O.

Four Me-262s were reported at different times, none attacking.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-97739 - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt. Woodruff J. Warren, 0-755803, P.

(KIA)

1st Lt.	Donald L. Hart, 0-822620, CP.	(KIA)
1st Lt.	Burke W. Jay, 0-2058488, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	William (NMI) Jolly, 0-777407, B.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	George D. Mayott, 0-768826, RN.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Frank Pinto, Jr., 38248136, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Joseph A. Cox, 14182286, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Ralph E. Henry, 14192736, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Benjamin J. Sheppard, 12133360, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Warren (NMI) Anderson, 14076996, R/O.	(POW)

The following statement was taken from 1st Lt. Sidney P. Upsher, Pilot on B-17 #650 after the mission: "At 1330 hours, at 47-00N - 13-19E, I called B-17 #739 to ask about the formation. Then he called our aircraft saying that he had one engine feathered and trouble with another and didn't know if he could make it over the Alps. He said he would have to bail out if he couldn't, and would have to ditch if he did make it over the Alps. He was losing altitude and his altitude at that time was 15,000 feet. I called him back and wished him 'Good Luck,' and then heard no more from him.

Statement of S/Sgt. Benjamin J. Sheppard, after liberation. "I have no knowledge of when we left the formation, but I was able to bail out and know of three others that did also.

"I bailed out the waist door first, S/Sgt. Ralph Henry followed, T/Sgt. Anderson was next, and 1st Lt. Jay left by the nose.

"The last word from Lt. Warren was, 'We'll never get over the Alps. We'd better abandon ship.' I was told, after I was captured by the enemy, that he was shot by a German on the road, after being captured. This source was a crippled farmer living nearby. He had a humped back and slightly shorter in one leg.

"I believe he crash landed the ship, after he gave orders to bail out, because one of the other crew members refused to bail out. I have no knowledge of the others except that T/Sgt. Pinto, Upper Turret, was fastening his chute and heading for the bomb bay when I last saw him."

T/Sgt. Warren Anderson was the Radio Operator on Lt. Warren's crew. March 11, 1996: "Apparently my memory of events during my combat days and incarceration days is not very good after 52 years. I had thought all these years that my final mission was to bomb Me-109 fuel storage at Regensburg. I have just reviewed the letter ostensibly from General Twining to my guardian and it states the mission was to Pilsen. In any event, I recall we were bombing by PFF and made several passes before dropping the bombs and subsequently got too close to Munich to avoid the flak. It must have been Innsbruck. Anyway, as I recall the situation, the plane kind of gradually lost power and the flight engineer (Frank Pinto) was changing turbo regulators or something in the camera well with little positive result. Gas was coming out of the wings into the bomb bay. Finally, we were flying at 9,000 feet between the peaks of the Alps and the pilot (Woodruff J. Warren) said to bail out. As I went out the hatch, I saw one of the waist gunners (Cox) by the hatch gritting his teeth. I don't know if he followed me.

"After about 45 seconds I landed hard on my behind in about two feet of snow. I got up and walked around the mountain a little way and ran across Ralph Henry. We were eating emergency rations and studying some silk maps when a small Austrian soldier with a big rifle fired a shot over our heads and took us captive.

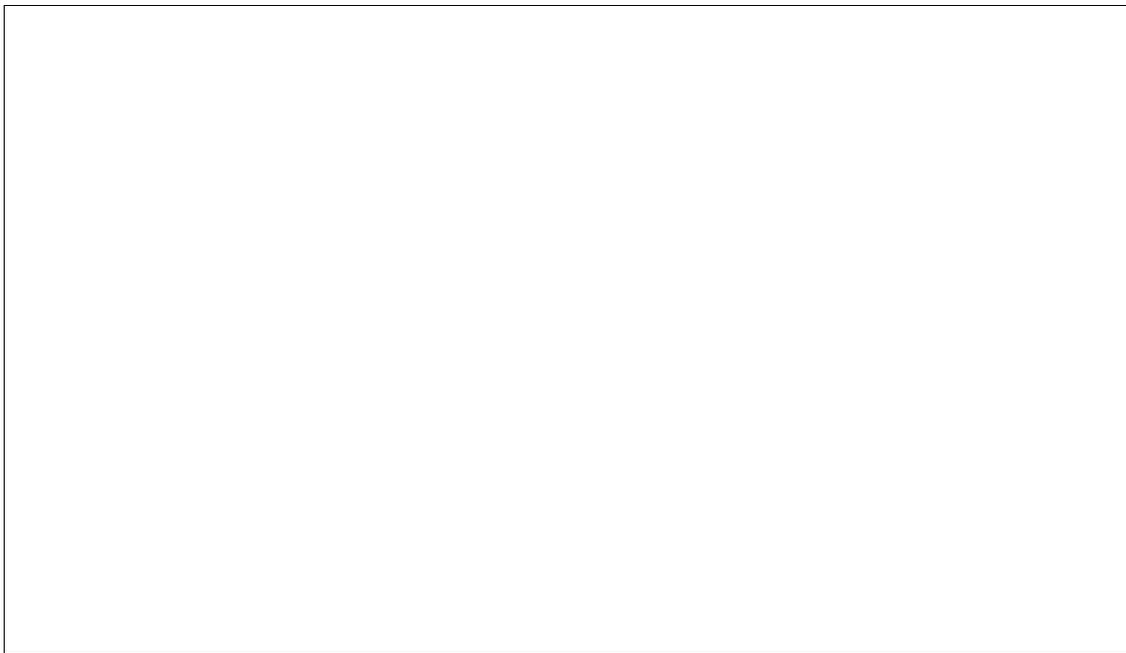
"They took us to a little mountain village which I remember as Oppoltz or Opoltz. I have been unable to locate such a place in several Atlases I have. When we arrived there, Ben Sheppard was

already there. There were several people at this place including a rather attractive young blond who spoke some English. I can't remember what she had to say.

"The next day they began to walk us down the mountain to where transportation by truck to Linz was available. On the way, I heard some gunfire (I can't remember whether this was going to the village or away from it), but I do remember seeing a B-17 pancaked in the snow, and apparently unburned, when leaving the village. I remember Ralph Henry and Ben Sheppard because they helped me along the trek down the mountain when my Florida legs gave out in that deep and steep mountain snow. I do not know who the fourth survivor was, perhaps Burke Jay whom I don't remember at all. I am sorry to hear of the demise of Ralph and Ben and to be able to shed so little light on the fate of the other crew members.

"I don't recall that I engaged in much socializing with other members of the Squadron: possibly because I was in a state of chronic fatigue having flown 33 sorties, one rescue (Bucharest) and 53 practice missions in the five months I was in Italy. I do remember going on R&R on Capri but don't remember much of what I did there. The Blue Grotto and the usual, I suppose."

In October 1995, I received a letter from Mr. Karl Affenzeller, living in Freistadt, Austria. We had lost several aircraft in that country and Karl found that I was doing research relative to our Group



A/C #42-97739 Crew: W. Warren (\*), D. Hart (\*), B. Jay, W. Jolly (\*), G. Mayott (\*), F. Pinto, Jr., (\*) J. Cox (\*), R. Henry, B. Sheppard, and W. Anderson  
\*Murdered by local police (Courtesy - Karl Affenzeller)

and so we began to exchange what information we each had. One bit of information was of extreme importance because it dealt with the findings in the deaths of members of Lt. Warren's crew. Portions of Karl Affenzeller's letter follows:

September 18, 1995. "Today I send you a very rare picture, showing Lt. Warren's ship lying in the field on the Austrian-Czechoslovakian border. If you would like it you can publish this photograph in your book.

"Now to the tragic event on December 9, 1944: Franz Strasser-Kreislerter in Kapliz and Captain Karl Lindemeyer, Chief of Police, murdered the following members: 1st Lt. Woodruff J. Warren, 1st Lt. Donald L. Hart, 2nd Lt. George D. Mayott, T/Sgt. Frank Pinto, and S/Sgt. Joseph A. Cox.

"Strasser was hanged by the neck until dead by the Americans in December 1945. Lindemeyer had died by reasons of suicide after World War II in Czechoslovakia.

"Josef Witzany, Nazi-Ortsgruppenleiter and "Volksturm-Chief" in the village of Oppolz (Ticha) was the murderer of 2nd Lt. William Jolly. Before the emergency landing took place, Lt. Jolly bailed out with his chute and landed safely nearby the pilgrimage 'Maria Schnee.' Few minutes later he was shot by Josef Witzany. The murderer fled, possibly to Austria, at the end of the war. I don't know his fate."

Note: Franz Strasser was tried in an American War Crimes trial, convicted and hung.

S/Sgt. Howard F. Struble was a member on the crew of 1st Lt. J. E. Sibert, 20th Squadron. July 15, 1992: "One of my most memorable missions was my 22nd, December 9, 1944. My diary shows that we headed for Brux with 500-lb. bombs at 24,000 feet. All Groups turned back but ours, due to weather. Made a run on Regensburg, Germany, third alternate. Circled around Germany for one and one-half hours and finally dropped our bombs by PFF. Don't know what we bombed. About 10 minutes later, hit flak and got hit pretty bad. In it for about 15 minutes. Formation broke up and we formed No. 2 on a 429th Mickey ship. Hit snow and in it for about 45 minutes when ice sent us into a spin. Sibert gave orders to prepare to bail out, but he got it under control after dropping about 7,000 feet. Nearly dark when it happened and over the Adriatic. Made it back with about 50 gals. of gas left. Got back at 5:15, gone 9:25 hours. Togglier got hit by flak knocking his helmet off. A big piece just missed the engineer, sticking in the turret. About a dozen holes in the wings. Turned out we hit Pilsen, flak was from Prague.

"My first mission was September 8th to the Marshalling Yards at Brod, Yugoslavia, a six-hour trip at 25,000 feet. Dropped 12, 500-lb. demolition bombs. No enemy fighters. Flak medium but accurate. Just the 2nd made the raid, 26 planes with P-38s as escort. Seven accompanied us to the Adriatic. Had trouble transferring fuel and headed for a field on some island. We turned back and made a lone bomb run on a target as the Group was too far ahead. Entire crew flew except Lt. Leet. Sibert flew as co-pilot, Lt. Hancock as pilot. Direct hits on target reported.

"September 10th, Mission No. 2. Bombed oil refinery in the suburbs of Vienna. Flak heavy and accurate. Don't see how we got through it. Flew at 28,000 feet (-32, plenty cool). Dropped 12, 500-lb. bombs. Flames and great clouds of smoke seen. I flew with another crew as they needed a waist gunner. Was really rough! Tail gunner clipped in the wrist by flak. Big hole in the waist and a piece came through the upper turret dome and knocked the gunner's oxygen mask off. Numerous holes in the wings. Some planes had feathered engines and others with oxygen systems out had to drop down. Escort of P-38s and P-51s helped us out. Credited with two missions.

"September 12th, Mission No. 3. Bombed Airdrome near Munich. The whole Wing (six Groups) participated. We were third Group over target. I rode the lower ball as Flowers wasn't feeling very good. Nearly froze to death. Flak not bad on our Squadron, others caught hell! I was watching the target but some fellows saw three or four planes go down. Had escort of 150 P-51s. Some Nazi jets were expected but think our escort was too much for them. Bombed the devil out of the target. Noticed silver planes on ground, too big for fighters. Results of raid were good. Passed over another airfield that had been blown to heck. Credited with two missions, 7-1/2 hours.

“September 15th, Mission No. 4. Bombed airfield near Athens, Greece. So called milk-run for the Group, clear of flak. In air eight hours, up at 2:30, which I didn’t like. The whole Wing was on raid. Supposed to be 20-30 Ju88s and transports, but very few planes seen. We had 150, 30-lb. frags and they really made a pattern! Group behind had demos. Other four Groups bombed docks, ships, and city. Greece looked to be nothing but mountains and water. Saw the Acropolis. Red grounded for ear trouble so flew in his place. Had Lt. Radner as pilot, good flyer. Lt. Sibert was co-pilot. Joe, Mac, Black, and myself went. Dropped foil.

“September 17, Mission No. 5. Bombed Marshalling Yards in the heart of Budapest, Hungary. Flak heavy and accurate but our Squadron got away with a few holes. One B-17 dropped bombs on another. There was a flash and smoke, then nothing. Left at 5:30, back at 12:45. Had total of 100 gals. left. One B-17 ditched in the Adriatic on the way back. Leet flew his first mission and Sibert his first pilot. Red grounded so had a fill-in gunner and a different navigator.

“September 23rd, Mission No. 7. Bombed Synthetic Plant at Brux, Czechoslovakia. Expected 350 enemy fighters and we had 400 escorts. Four Groups over target before us. Flak heavy, some ships hit pretty bad, but we had only a few holes. Enemy fighters showed up in small numbers and attacked stragglers; which were many! It was a long raid, 7-1/2 hours, 7:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Flew over Germany for a couple of hours and had flak half dozen times; but could run around it. Makes 10 missions, double credit.

“October 13th, Mission No. 11. Friday the 13th and went to Vienna with 350 guns. My heated suit went out and I nearly froze. Up at 27,000 feet, -40 degrees. Picked up half a dozen flak holes; two near me in waist. The Squadron got separated over target due to vapor trails. Three of us got together and came back alone. There were other Groups nearby. Saw some Me-109s but they kept their distance. About every other plane had a prop or two feathered. A plane ahead of us went into a spin and the guys never had a chance. Bombed an oil refinery, dropped 12, 500-lb. demolition bombs.

“October 17th, Mission No. 13. Bombed Oil Refineries at Blechhammer, Germany. Three radar ships led the Squadron as we led the Group and Wing, No. 6 in the formation. Had 10/10 cloud coverage. Caught little flak as we were at 30,000 and first over target. Two ships from 96th collided over target. Think one crew had a chance to bail out. Had a 4,000-lb. bomb load. Sky was full of P-51s. Our navigator, Lt. Brilliant, was in one of the planes that went down. May have bailed out but doubtful. A crew from Drew was in the other plane and their first mission. Lt. Brilliant had about 20 missions.

“October 20, Mission No. 14. Went to Brux, Czechoslovakia. Flew from 7:30 to 4:30. Barely had enough gas. Nearly landed in Yugoslavia to refuel. Flak was heaviest I have seen yet. Looked like millions of puffs. Don’t see how we got through it! Had half a dozen holes around the nose. Sibert got one in the cockpit. Bombed the same synthetic oil plant. Briefed for 190 guns but will change it to 390 after today’s raid. Last over target and low Group (25,000). Had 200 plane escort. Twenty-one missions.

“November 7th, Mission No. 18. Bombed Marshalling Yards at Maribor. We were going over target at 23,500 but clouds forced us down to 18,000. Flak was terrific! One ship in our Squadron feathered an engine after it was hit. Another had No. 4 windmilling. We had a hole about one foot in diameter in the wing between No. 3 and No. 4. Must have been a dud because it didn’t explode. Tail gunner saw a B-17 behind us blow up and another go down in flames. We didn’t drop a bomb due to a rack malfunction. Had 10, 500-pounders. Twenty-eight missions.

“November 19, Mission No. 20. Bombed Vienna at 30,000 feet. I flew lead Mickey ship with Major Shepard. Led the Group. Got hit hard with flak and windmilling prop. About shook the plane apart. Believe we hit the target. Had 250-lb. bombs. Came back alone doing 125 mph. Red and Black flew “GREAT SPECKLED BIRD” and landed at Ancona. They were badly shot up, and wounded co-

pilot and navigator. Saw some fighters coming back but they didn't attack us but did some other planes. There were some P-38s in the area. Thirty-two missions.

"December 3rd, Mission No. 21. Bombed Vienna at 30,000 feet with 500-lb. demos. Tail gunner passed out over the target when oxygen mask came loose and nearly died. Reached him just in time. Flak minimum. P-38s over target for escort. Three hundred thirty-eight guns, 34 missions.

"December 26, Mission No. 23. Bombed Blechhammer from 30,000 feet with 10, 500-lb. RDX bombs. Weather was clear. Flak heavy. Lead plane of our Group, with Major Redden, had all four engines shot out and went down over target.

"February 1st, 1945, Mission No. 27. Bombed Graz, Austria at 27,000 feet with 10, 500-lb. RDX bombs. Flew #542 with Sibert. Got hit with flak one-half hour before target. Two big holes; one in radio room and one in vertical stabilizer. Bombed Marshalling Yards. Very hazy at target. Formation broke up, then reformed. Forty-four missions.

"March 15, Mission No. 35. Started out to bomb Ruhland, 75 miles from Berlin. No. 2 engine blew a cylinder 45 minutes before target so we turned back and bombed Marshalling Yards in Amstettin, Austria. Four P-51s escorted us back. We had 250 P-51s as escort with possibility of 300 enemy fighters. Had 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs. Missed the target, bombs landing 200 feet over. Was 50TH MISSION!"

#### **KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 329 - DECEMBER 10, 1944**

The Oil Refinery at Brux, Czechoslovakia was the primary target this date. Thirty-two aircraft took off with two aircraft returning early. The formation was recalled at 1030 hours because of the weather. The last Squadron of the Group formation went ahead and bombed Marshalling Yards at Klagenfurt, Austria, by PFF, with unobserved results. Seven aircraft got over the target with six dropping 60, 500-lb. RDX bombs and 1, M26 propaganda bomb. The one aircraft had a rack malfunction and did not bomb. No flak.

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 330 - DECEMBER 11, 1944**

Twenty-nine aircraft took off and 16 aircraft dropped 160, 500-lb. RDX bombs and 2, M26 propaganda bombs on the Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery at Vienna by PFF. There was an effective smoke screen but two large fires were observed. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate, resulting in light wounds to 1st Lt. David Lande, pilot.

Twelve aircraft dropped 120, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Tank Works at Kapfenburg, Austria. Bombing was visual with a good percentage of bombs in the target area.

One aircraft dropped 10, 500-lb. RDX bombs and one, M26 propaganda bomb on an Airdrome at 47-16N - 16-8E. Results were not noted.

Sgt. Dean L. Homer, Tail Gunner of the 96th Squadron, died of anoxia.

#### **BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 331 - DECEMBER 12, 1944**

Four aircraft took off at 0634 hours and three aircraft dropped 30, 500-lb. RDX bombs and two, M26 propaganda bombs on the South Oil Refinery at Blechhammer. Bombing was by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, slight, and inaccurate. One aircraft dropped 10, 500-lb. RDX bombs and one, M26 propaganda bomb on Oil Refineries at Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia by PFF with unobserved results. All returned safely by 1402 hours.

#### **BRUX, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 332 - DECEMBER 16, 1944**

Thirty-four aircraft attacked the Synthetic Oil Refinery at Brux by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate with no injuries. One aircraft attacked Marshalling Yards at Villach, Austria, and one aircraft dropped its bombs on Boreun, Czechoslovakia with probable

hits on both targets. A total of 277, 500-lb. RDX bombs and five, M26 propaganda bombs were dropped on the three targets. All aircraft returned safely.

#### **BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 333 - DECEMBER 17, 1944**

Thirty-eight aircraft took off to bomb the North Oil Refinery at Blechhammer. Flak at the target was heavy, intense, and accurate wounding the Lead Radar Navigator in the First Wave. He was knocked unconscious and was not able to prepare the First Wave for bombing. The Second Wave of 18 aircraft dropped 178, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the target by PFF with results unknown. Radar Navigator, Lt. Morton Weinman, recovered and 18 aircraft of the First Wave dropped 170, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Oil Refineries at Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia by PFF with unobserved results. B-17 #459 bombed an unknown target of opportunity, dropping 2.5 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs.

In addition to flak injuries to Lt. Weinman, Lt. Anderson, Co-pilot, and Lt. William Callaghan, Navigator, received slight wounds. All were men from the 96th Squadron. One Me-109 attacked one straggler near Blechhammer, making four passes. There were no injuries.

B-17 #44-6350, piloted by 1st Lt. Leonard Waldman, 429th Squadron, was observed lagging, jettisoning 3, 500-lb. RDX bombs at 45-12N - 16-51E at 1040 hours. This aircraft then joined the formation and was last observed going over Blechhammer, and is missing. Crew members are: 1st Lt. Leonard (NMI) Waldman, P; 2nd Lt. Clayton L. Stemwedel, CP; 2nd Lt. H. J. Kraus, N; 2nd Lt. Milton Bloom, B; T/Sgt. T. A. Price, UT; S/Sgt. C. E. Walker, LT; T/Sgt. J. T. Deets, RW; Pvt. H. M. Jacobs, LW; S/Sgt. W. D. Schultz, TG; and S/Sgt. J. B. Story, RO.

This aircraft was having trouble with No. 3 engine and jettisoned three bombs south, southwest of Lake Balaton. Over the target, #350 was hit by flak. No. 1 engine went out and No. 2 engine was windmilling and could not be stopped. The A/C began losing altitude, left the formation, began jettisoning loose equipment and ball turret then turned due East. Three hours after leaving the target, this A/C made a wheels down landing at Esbesto, Yugoslavia. No one was injured. On December 26th, all crew members, except Lt. Waldman and Lt. Stemwedel, returned to Bari by C-47. The pilot and co-pilot were later to attempt to fly B-17 #350 back to Foggia.

B-17 #452, piloted by Lt. E. C. Bender, made an emergency landing at the 325th Fighter Field due to a feathered engine and a gas shortage. B-17 #386, piloted by 1st Lt. E. H. Miller, made an emergency landing on the Island of Vis due to a gas shortage. There were no injuries on either aircraft.

#### **ODERTAL, GERMANY/MORAVSKA OSTRAVA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 334 - DECEMBER 18, 1944**

Thirty-two aircraft took off to bomb the Oil Refinery at Odertal, Germany. Only seven aircraft were able to bomb Odertal, dropping 84, 500-lb. RDX bombs by PFF with unobserved results. Fourteen aircraft attacked an Oil Refinery at Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia, dropping 165, 500-lb. RDX bombs by PFF with unobserved results. Six aircraft dropped 71, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Industrial Buildings at 47-20N - 15-10E. Weather was clear with target well covered. One aircraft dropped 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs on a Railroad Bridge at 46-43N - 15-38E. Weather was clear and hits were observed on the north approach and bridge. One aircraft dropped 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Feldback, Austria. Weather was clear and several fires were observed in the Yards.

Six to ten Me-109s and FW-190s were encountered at 49-40N - 17-16E. A joint claim was made for one FW-190 by S/Sgt. M. H. Laude, L/T, and S/Sgt. L. M. Scofield, L/T. One FW-190 was probably destroyed by S/Sgt. D. W. Dykes, L/W, and one Me-109 was probably destroyed by S/Sgt. Ben Sherman, L/W. All were members of the 20th Squadron. There were no injuries and no losses were reported.

A Congressional Committee visited the Base today. I had the pleasure of escorting the Congressmen from Ohio and Michigan on a tour of the area and to lunch.

**BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY/MORAVSKA OSTRAVA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA/SOPRON, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 335 - DECEMBER 19, 1944**

Sixteen aircraft dropped 125, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Oil Refinery Gas Plant at Blechhammer by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, slight, and inaccurate. Six aircraft dropped 46, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the South Oil Refinery at Blechhammer by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, slight, and inaccurate. Six aircraft dropped 48, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Oil Refinery at Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia by PFF with unobserved results. Six aircraft dropped 48, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Sopron, Hungary by PFF with unobserved results. There were three early returns.

B-17 #44-6532, piloted by 1st Lt. Haddon Johnson, Jr., is missing. This A/C was last seen in the South Oil area at Blechhammer, dropped from formation and lost sight of.

B-17 #374 was a late take-off, joined the 99th bomb Group and bombed the primary target with that Group.

B-17 No 162, piloted by 1st Lt. D. E. Hoene, was forced to land at Vis due to fuel shortage. The A/C was severely damaged in landing while avoiding another aircraft.

B-17 #386, piloted by 1st Lt. A. J. Grossman, was forced to land at Vis due to shortage of fuel. All engines had stopped turning and severe damage occurred as a result of the crash landing.

B-17 #459, piloted by 1st Lt. N. E. Falkenstern, made an emergency landing at Vis due to a fuel shortage.

B-17 #654, piloted by 2nd Lt. W. L. Miller, made an emergency landing at Vis due to a fuel shortage. There were no injuries reported in these landings and all crews returned to Base.

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6532 - 20TH SQUADRON**

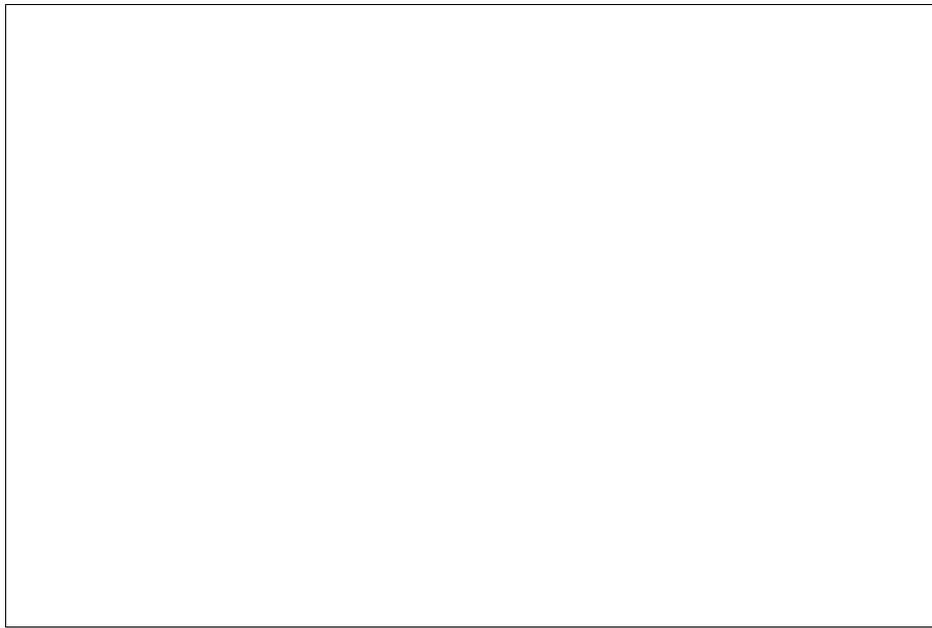
1st Lt.	Haddon (NMI) Johnson, 0-819323, P.	(RET)
1st Lt.	Banks (NMI) Campbell, 0-767112, CP.	(RET)
F/O	Robert B. Pilcher, T-127068, N.	(RET)
1st Lt.	Richard H. Clarke, Jr., 0-751804, B.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Herbert S. Kelly, 13038140, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Edward (NMI) Storrer, 37207172, L/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Victor (NMI) Slivka, 6944841, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	David W. Dykes, 34683581, L/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Leo J. Francis, 12129823, T/G.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	James I. Cash, 34730650, R/O.	(RET)

1st Lt. Robert B. Pilcher, N, 20th Squadron. July 20, 1992: "My entire crew never flew an entire mission together. My pilot, Robert Draper, was shot down over Germany and became a POW after two, three, or four night 'Lone Wolf' missions. He had crash landed in the Adriatic before that flying as co-pilot. Robert Phillippe was shot down and think they crash landed in Poland. He also crash landed in the Alps Mountains after the war.

"On December 19, 1944, it was my 21st mission, and was flying as navigator of B-17 #44-6532. We were flying in the deputy lead position. On a seven-minute bomb run, we were three minutes from the target, the Blechhammer Oil Refinery, when we were badly hit by flak. We lost No. 2 engine, and No. 4 engine was on fire, and we lost altitude immediately. We also had sustained a direct hit through the right wing fuel tank.

“Blechhammer was located in Silesia, which became part of Poland after World War II. We knew we could not make it back over the Alps Mountains to Italy, so we set a southeast course hoping to make it to the Russian lines. We just skimmed over and around mountains in Czechoslovakia and nearly crashed head on with a German command plane in a mountain canyon. We had expected an attack from German fighters who usually tried to pick off ‘lame ducks’ such as we, but we didn’t expect an attack by two Russian fighters near the Hungarian border. We thought such an attack as pure stupidity as all identifications were given by us. Kelly, the upper turret gunner, sent one down in smoke. We saw the pilot’s parachute and the other plane then took off. After contacting the Russians later, we of course never mentioned this.

“We were a make-up crew. Banks Campbell and Ed Storrer were from the same original crew. Other than Campbell and Storrer, none of us on that mission were acquainted before we crash landed in Hungary that day. We estimated that we had 15 minutes of fuel left when we crash landed near the front lines in Hungary.

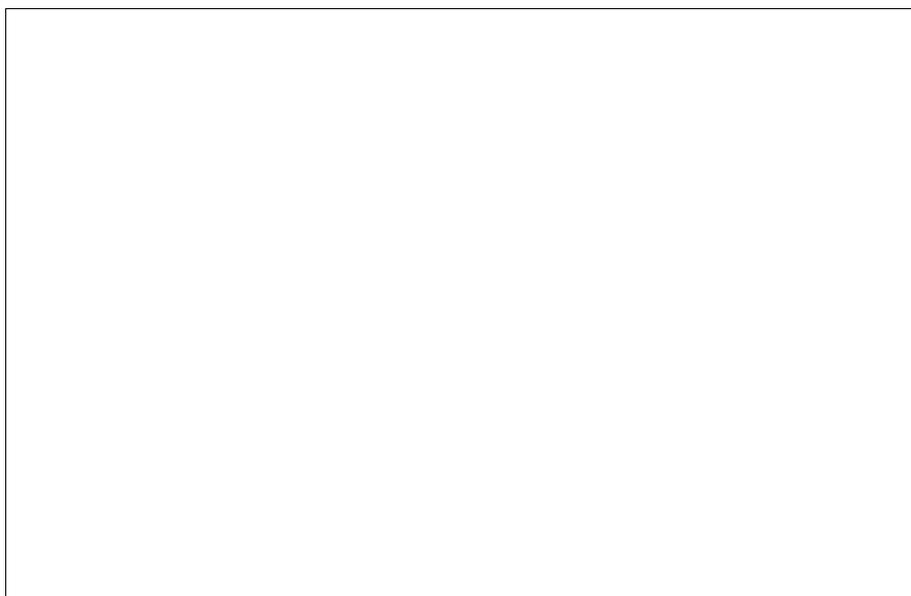


A/C #44-6532 - Crashed in Hungary 12-19-44  
Crew: H. Johnson, B. Campbell, R. Pilcher, R. Clarke, H. Kelly,  
E. Storrer, V. Slivka, L. Francis, J. Cash (Courtesy R. Clarke)

“The Hungarians helped us contact the Russian area commander in the town of Nagybanya, Hungary. We were guests of the Russian commander for dinner. As you might expect, we had a large bowl of Hungarian stew and a large glass of vodka, no water. Since none of us spoke the same language, we soon had two civilian interpreters from the gold mines in the area. One interpreter was a Yugoslav named Payle (Paul ) M. Kavacevic, a mining engineer and graduate of the University of Leeds in England. The other interpreter was a Hungarian Jew from Budapest, Hungary, that we called Joe. Joe was a chemical engineer who had escaped from a German labor battalion and was now employed in gold mine processing by the Russians. He hadn’t heard about his family in Budapest for several years. We spent many hours with our interpreters and heard many stories about their experiences during the German occupation. When we returned to our plane with the Russians, Joe took many photographs and I think the Russians wanted photographs too. When we went to the town photo

shop to get the film developed we met the photo shop owners, Zoltan and Foltanne Suba, who were friends of Paul and Joe. We were all invited to their home for Christmas dinner although food was rather scarce. We enjoyed our Christmas evening very much.

“The Russians were friendly but the command seemed suspicious and we were thoroughly interrogated. After about a week, we were driven, in a Studebaker truck, by a Russian Air Force captain and a sergeant who had arrived to take us to their air base at Arad, Romania. Ironically, the Russian captain had ferried airplanes out of the Kansas City Modification Center in 1942 while I was working there. From Arad, we were flown, in a Romanian two-engine airplane, in a hair-raising ride to Bucharest, Romania. In Bucharest, we were weathered in for a period of about two weeks, where we had many experiences with the Romanians and the Russians who were in control of the city. Finally, our crew and another American crew were flown back to Italy in a C-47. After a week’s leave in Rome, I returned to my base to complete my tour of duty.”



T/R - L/R - R. Burns, F. Brice, R. Draper, R. Pilcher, R. Colvert  
B/R - L/R - K. Markey, J. Johnson, R. Phillippe, W. Mitchell  
(Courtesy - R. Clarke)

1st Lt. Richard H. Clarke, Jr., B, on A/C #44-6532. January 26, 1994. “On the December 19th mission, it was a hasty made-up crew. None of us were flying with a regular crew. As a matter of fact, I recall that none of us knew each other until that day although each of our regular crew were flying.

“My story is much the same as Bob Pilcher’s and others of the crew. I guess we all may have had some individual differences.

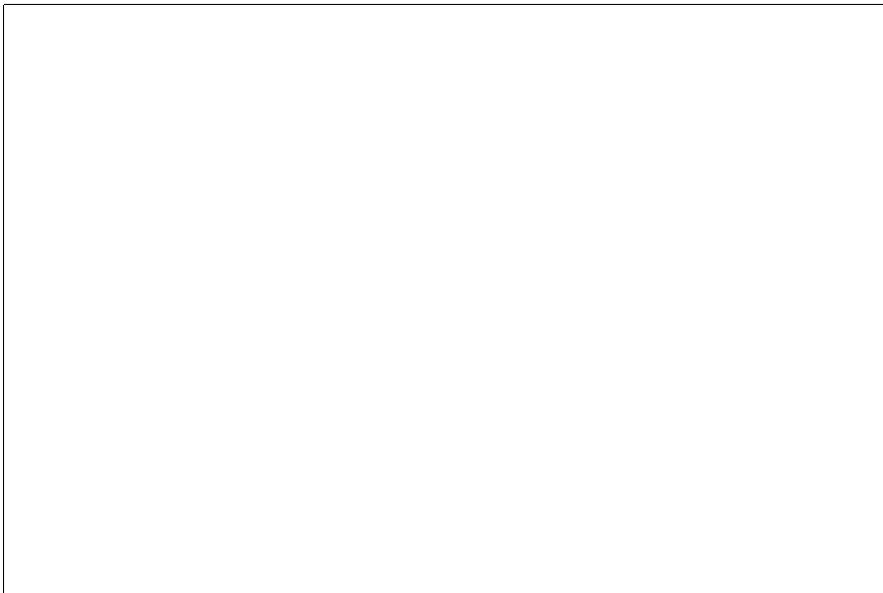
“We crashed in Hungary, in a remote area originally called Nagybanya, but the name we knew it by was Baia Mare. Don’t know what it is now as it was in Russian hands after the war. Location was in the Carpathian Mountains. The town is, or was, a small one, typical of rural eastern agricultural villages. We were there for a week as Christmas passed that time. The place may not have been important to the Krauts or the Russians as there was not noticeable devastation as I recall.

“One interesting thing I encountered there of a personal nature was to be told by some local types that there was a gold mine, or mines, in the area. I was alone when told this and it was pointed

out by a civilian that in the direction northwest of town was the gold mine area. Being young, a junior officer on our aircrew, in the middle of a war, this meant little to me although I always remembered it.

“At a later time, I was leaving a Russian Colonel’s office and saw some rock quartz on a shelf, and took one. It was pinkish quartz with dirt and other material on it. There was also what appeared to be shiny flakes and yellow larger pieces in it. I took it as a souvenir but never pursued the matter further. I did keep the rock through the war and for some years after in my home but eventually was lost somewhere in moves.

“After leaving Nagybanya, to go to Bucharest, we were piled into a HE-111 (I think it was) or maybe a Junkers of some kind. We were trucked to a small field where the plane was. Not a corn field as we know it but just a field. The plane had three black German crosses on it, on wings and fuselage, Swastika on the tail. The flight was very low over hills and dales so I guess that the Jerry’s would not pick us up or maybe let them see the plane and not shoot one of their own down. I don’t know. Dangerous territory!



L/R - R. Clarke, B. Campbell, H. Johnson, R. Pilcher  
Knocked out No. 2 Engine (Courtesy - R. Clarke)

“We landed at Bucharest at one of the many fields the Luftwaffe used before the Russians came there. I recall vividly being trucked from where we landed (Ploesti area I think) through the big oil storage area that was hit during the early Ploesti raids. I remember seeing large storage tanks painted black but the paint had faded enough to see the original logo and printing of the big oil producers before the war. Distinctly I remember seeing the name of ‘Concordia Vega Oil Co.’ and a large logo of the one

used by Shell Oil Company. It was the large, yellow sea shell the company uses and Concordia Vega, I checked out years later, was part of the European Shell Oil empire.

“The weather kept us grounded in Bucharest for about two weeks. Bucharest was declared an open city in that sector of battle with the Russians moving ever forward to Germany. So, as Bucharest was an open city, very little hard destruction took place there. Some of course, but not the terrible rainstorm as we saw in other places.

“The city was known through the centuries as ‘Little Paris’ and so it was! I was so amazed at the wholesale obliteration elsewhere that the city seemed like an American city. There were wide, beautiful boulevards and avenues. Plenty of civilian cars - all American made - in use. Taxi cabs, buses and trucks. Most of the passenger cars were four-door sedans with chrome. I remember particularly that a very high number of them were Packards. Perhaps the Packard was symbolic of

money from before the war when the oil companies operated from the famous Ploesti oil fields and refineries.

“In addition, the shops were open, hotels, bars and restaurants in operation, book stalls, wine shops all doing a brisk business.

“Upon arrival in Bucharest, we were lodged at the Hotel Staniscu, right in the city proper. I do not remember if all of us were put up in that hotel or only part of us, others going to other hotels. In any event, at the Staniscu we all had individual rooms, comfortable with basic amenities.

“Not far from the hotel and just across the street was the large, King Carol’s palace with iron fences, gates and concrete walls. It was not in use at the time and had a very ominous appearance. It was a very dark grey color and dreary looking. I am not sure if there had been a fire there as there were a lot of black streaks all over. I would imagine from the air it would look somewhat indistinguishable. Perhaps it was painted that way as a camouflage because it was explained to me that it had been used by the German Gestapo as their headquarters in that area for interrogation, holding of suspect prisoners, and the usual Gestapo activities. I was asked if I would like to see the place and it did not take me very long to say, ‘NO.’ I did not wish to go near the place other than walk by it while strolling on the sidewalk.

“All of us were using the money from our ‘escape kits’ that were given to us at briefing before the mission. We were buying things to bring back, small items for souvenirs, and through eating, etc., our finances were running very low. At that time we were in contact with, I believe, an American Mission, somehow connected with a legation or something of that sort. Anyway, they had a large black field safe in their office in one of the better buildings in Bucharest. That safe was jam packed with American money. I know because a couple of us went there and cried the blues that we were in bad shape financially and sorely in need of money.

“Since these people were State Department reps or some other U.S. Government organization, they probably had more diplomatic functions to perform and we were the last thing they wanted to have anything to do with. So they gave us some more money. I do not recall how much, but not a lot, enough to get rid of us and out of their hair. So after that we went out and about and continued doing our ‘thing.’

“One of the things we spent a lot of time at was a downstairs bar-restaurant-dance and show place. It was a very nice, respectable place, always crowded, good music, food and drink. This place was used by better class people and nothing out of tone although there were plenty of ladies around for dancing, talking, etc. The name of the place as I vaguely recall - ‘The Manhattan Bar and Restaurant’ or maybe, ‘The New York Club Restaurant and Bar.’ Anyway, the name had something to do with New York.

“There were not nearly as many Russian military there as one might expect. We fraternized with them but the association did not get too cozy because neither the Russians nor we people could understand the language differences. But our associations, as fleeting as they were, were quite cordial.

“One person totally befriended us and was always around. He was a Romanian Luftwaffe officer, young and about our ages. He was really taken up by us and we enjoyed his company too. He helped get us around and showed us the ‘ropes’ which served us quite comfortably. His name was Rodu Stanoiu and rank was a Lieutenant of some sort. He became a good friend with me as he spoke fair English. We exchanged wings. I cherish these wings of silver which are quite ornate with the crest in color at center. The device is quite stylish so my wife on occasion would use it as dress jewelry from time to time. In fall and winter, I sometimes wear a beret and affix the wings to it. Once in awhile someone asks where they could obtain one and that brings up an enjoyable conversation.

“The wings were pinned on the right upper tunic pocket and slanted at about 45 degrees inward. Rodu said he was an Me-109 pilot and slanted wings indicated fighter status. Rodu was a very intelligent young man and not very interested in the war, or military, even before Romania capitulated.

He talked so many times about after the war as he visioned. His main obligation was to come to the United States and go to Harvard University. I lost his calling card and address with notes I made of our talks. I would have liked to have seen him again through the post-war years.

“An incident I recall vividly was New Year’s Eve, 1944. Bob Pilcher had befriended the very young son of the Swiss Ambassador and played ping-pong with him on occasion. As a result, the boy invited us to the New Year’s Eve party at the Swiss embassy. It was a gala occasion; fine orchestra, good food, plenty to drink, ladies in formal gowns, men in tails or tuxedos. Just like in the movies.

“The amazing part was that we grubby people in our flying jackets and only G.I. shirts, trousers and those big G.I. shoes we wore when flying, made quite a contrast. We also sported our pistols at our hip, cowboy fashion. I often wondered what those people thought we were. It was a great party and a very liberated night. We were chauffeured in a limo to the party as well as being returned to the hotels. One of the more pleasant and memorable times during the wartime ugliness.

“Sometime later, I do not recall when, a C-47 or DC-3 arrived to take us back to Bari, Italy. I do not know how this got coordinated but it must have been through the American Mission people who, it seemed, would be happy to get rid of us. I think we were becoming pests to them.

“What a low blow it was on returning to Italy after carefree time in Bucharest. We were impounded at Bari. Sent through the delousing chambers as was the routine for all returnees. Interrogation followed and then we were sent back to our units. There were others that joined us in Russia besides those of the 2nd Bomb Group. There was an assortment of fighter pilots, transport crews, and other Bomb Group members.

“It was interesting to note that at the Russian field from which we took off was loaded with U.S. lend-lease equipment, but all with Russian markings. One of the unusual things was that almost all of the Russian C-47s were modified with an upper gun turret similar to our B-17s. They were very distinguishable and the unique silhouettes made a big impression on us.

“After Bari, back to the units. Some people go home to the U.S., some to rest camps, and others just resting around the Squadron for a few days and then back to combat again.

“Oh those terrible years! How they changed people!”

#### **REGENSBURG, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 336 - DECEMBER 20, 1994**

Thirty-four aircraft took off to bomb Oil Storage Tanks at Regensburg. Thirty aircraft dropped 300, 500-lb. RDX bombs by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, slight, and inaccurate. One aircraft dropped 10, 500-lb. RDX bombs at 47-32N - 14-06E by PFF. Three aircraft were early returns. No injuries, no losses.

#### **BRUX, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 337 - DECEMBER 25, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off to bomb the Synthetic Oil Refinery at Brux. Twenty-five aircraft dropped 291, 500-lb. RDX bombs into a very effective smoke screen by PFF. Flak at the target was heavy, intense, and accurate resulting in the loss of B-17 #44-6550, 49th Squadron, piloted by 1st Lt. William R. Myers. One aircraft dropped 6, 500-lb. RDX bombs on a Railroad Bridge at Klagenfurt, Austria with bombs straddling the bridge. Two other aircraft were early returns.

1st Lt. R. E. Chambers, Co-pilot, 20th Squadron, and 2nd Lt. L. H. Seeholm, Navigator, 429th Squadron, were slightly wounded by flak.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6550 - “OLD CROW” - 49TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	William R. Myers, 0-1692801, P.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Libero P. Casaccia, 0-779783, CP.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Walter R. Stone, 0-723707, N.	(RET)
F/O	John T. Dunlap, T-5741, B.	(RET)

T/Sgt.	William N. Carruthers, 34509149, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Richard L. Greiner, 771750, L/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Joseph (NMI) Waladkewics, 32751006, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	William S. Gutmann, 12166767, L/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Herbert W. Wendt, 6694118, T/G.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	James B. Miller, 32390963, R/O.	(RET)

Statement of T/Sgt. William N. Carruthers after return to Allied control: “The plane was going over the bombing run when No. 1 and No. 2 engines began running away. There was no obvious reason for this so Lt. Myers assumed that there was flak damage, which afterwards proved to be true, and feathered both engines. The plane lost air speed and altitude so bombs were salvoed and plane turned out of formation. The men worked on plane and administered first aid to S/Sgt. Wendt who had been hit with a piece of flak in the right hand. Despite repeated efforts, the No. 1 engine failed to respond. Lt. Myers decided that according to the distance to go and the remaining gas, it would be impossible to make the base.

“Lt. Myers asked for the nearest Russian base and the navigator, Lt. Stone, gave him the A/D at Gyangyos, Hungary. When we arrived there we couldn’t find it. Later it proved to be there but well camouflaged. So we circled around and found another field. This was at Koraconj, Hungary, 48-08N - 19-40E. We were taken in by some Russian fighters and landed safely.

“We were never in enemy hands.

“The plane landed and we were met by Russian officials, who had S/Sgt. Wendt taken care of and the rest of us dined and billeted. Lt. Myers attempted to make contact with home base by radio every day, finally succeeding about three or four days after landing. Home base kept in contact from then on, but due to adverse conditions of weather, could not send any fighters or repair planes to aid us. After much work and many attempts of Russians to repair plane, they sent to Debreczen, Hungary for a new prop governor from a B-17 that had landed there. This was finally adjusted, loaded with Russian gas, about 95 octane, and we took off, landing at base 16 January 1945.”

S/Sgt. Joseph Waladkewics, Right Waist Gunner, April 10, 1995: “I will attempt to tell my story of Christmas Day, 1944. We were briefed to drop on the Brux Iron Works, Czechoslovakia. As best as I recall, we were flying at 31,500 feet, 105s were exploding above us and 88s below us. We got to the I.P. The concentration of anti-aircraft artillery was very heavy. We made our bomb drop and shortly after, the plane was hit. I felt a gush of air and, flying right waist, I thought my window was knocked out but now looking at it, it was okay.

“Instinctively, to my left waist gunner I said, ‘Touch my left leg if you are all right.’ No response and thinking maybe he had touched my leg and I was badly hurt and had no feeling, but he was okay. I had failed to push my throat mike button.

“Then over the intercom it was pilot to navigator, ‘Give me a course to Russian lines.’ The reply was, ‘For now make a 160 degree,’ and soon after the navigator gave the correct course to Hungary.

“The plan was, after dropping our bombs, we were to turn left and return to base with the rest of the Squadron. We turned right, going over the target area and were reported, by other crews, that we went down over the target. No. 3 engine was knocked out. After flying on the corrected course for awhile, we were picked up by two Russian fighters and escorted to a small landing strip. We landed in a frozen cornfield in Koraconj, Hungary (Christmas, Hungary-translation).

“After safely down, my ability to communicate with the Russians made things very easy for us. We were later transported to Hatvan, Hungary where I was interviewed by a Russian Colonel. Can’t remember what we talked about except being based in Italy, our target mission, and maybe my heritage.

“We made several attempts to contact our base without success, and inspecting our damage with the engineer, William Carruthers, and the pilot, we discovered our prop governor was knocked out.

“We reported this to the Russians and the following day, or so, a Russian Captain and I reinspected the damage, and then later, the Russian Captain and I flew to Debreczen, Hungary where there was a downed B-17. We flew just above the telephone poles, almost as if traveling a highway.

“We stayed overnight in Debreczen and returned the following day with the prop governor, and the engineer installed it in our plane. Sometime later our pilot pre-flighted the engines and we all boarded and took off for base. Home base was surprised to hear from us since we had been reported ‘Missing in Action’ for 21 days.

“Our plane was named ‘OLD CROW,’ which had been baptized by Ed Troy. I remember one non-com on board was a young tenor who entertained the Russians, and fellow American flyers, with the international song, *Rosalie*.

“I never really had any buddies in the service. I moved around a lot and don’t remember ever flying with the same crew I went overseas with. Strange but true. I best remember Ed Wade because as I recall, he laughed with and not at me.

“One other memorable mission was in the latter part of my tour in Foggia, maybe March 1945. The mission was to support ground troops north of the Po River. We were carting 100 pounders, and we only had a few minutes to drop our bombs. The mission was to drop bombs, peel off to the left and come back.

“The routine get-to the I.P. and then the silence signal by the pilot. Shortly after, the bombardier reports bomb bay doors coming open-radio man echos doors coming open and are open. Next it is bombs away and bomb bay doors coming closed. It did not go as routinely. As the doors were almost closed, one live bomb, which had hung up, released as the doors were closing, falling halfway through the belly skin of the door of our plane. Normally the radio man says if all went correctly that doors were coming closed and now closed. Instead, the radio man excitedly relayed the message over the intercom that a live bomb was hanging through the belly of the plane. I checked the condition and said to myself that I can handle this. Holding onto the chain railing, while standing on the cat walk, I pulled the bomb free from where it was lodged, holding it by the fins. I held the bomb in that position until we were over the open sea, west of Italy. Then released the bomb as instructed by the pilot. I then went back to the waist position.

“The only recognition I got was a personal satisfaction of doing a fine job. While walking away from the plane after landing at our base, the co-pilot said to me, ‘You ought to be put in for the Bronze Star.’ I heard nothing more. What is more strange is that, as were most of my flights, this was a strange crew and don’t remember any of the other flyers’ names.”

#### **BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 338 - DECEMBER 26, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 22 aircraft dropped 315, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the South Oil Refinery at Blechhammer by offset bombing and with good results. Many fires were reported. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate resulting in the loss of B-17 #42-97715, 96th Squadron, and wounding S/Sgt. G. D. Cosby, TG, 96th Squadron. Thirteen aircraft received minor damage and seven received major damage. One aircraft dropped 10, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Czelldemoke, Czechoslovakia with good results reported. Five aircraft were early returns.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-97715 - “FRANKIE” - 96TH SQUADRON**

Major	George A. Redden, 0-728558, P.	(RET)
1st Lt.	James O. McHood, 0-768184, CP.	(RET)
1st Lt.	Chester E. Toton, 0-722900, N.	(RET)
Capt.	William R. Underhill, 0-729520, B.	(RET)

1st Lt.	Morton Weinman, 0-703354, RN.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Alphonso C. Liberto, 33776753, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	George R. Merritt, 38478369, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	James J. Duchek, 37136693, L/W.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Sol D. Azar, 0-828605, T/G-ObsERVER	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Charles F. Carey, 31226007, R/O.	(RET)

Major George A. Redden, P, after return to Allied control: “We were at bombs away at target when we were hit and left the formation. No one bailed out. We crash landed at Rzeszow, Poland. All the crew were in their crash positions except the co-pilot and all were un-injured except Lt. McHood. He was taken to a hospital in Rzeszow where his leg was amputated.

“We sent his possessions to Cairo, Egypt to be delivered, upon his request, to him. I have heard, indirectly, that Lt. McHood survived and returned home.”

Captain William R. Underhill was a member of the 96th Squadron, serving at various times as either Radar Navigator or Bombardier. June 13, 1992. “I was commissioned and received my wings at Victorville, California, 4 September 1942, and after instructing at various bombardier and navigation schools, I was sent to Boca Raton, Florida for radar navigation. I departed from the United States from Camp Patrick Henry, in Virginia, aboard the U.S. Admiral Mann and landed at Oran, awaiting assignment orders. I arrived in Naples, Italy in June and received orders assigning me to the Fifth Wing - the only B-17 Wing in Italy. Jim Snyder, Dick Phelps and I were still together but then I received orders to report to the 2nd Bomb Group and Dick and Jim were assigned to the 99th B.G. nearby.

“With flight crews, we climbed aboard a little Italian train that chugged its way through the mountains toward Foggia. It wasn’t a passenger train in the usual sense for it had no seats or compartments. I suppose at one time it had hauled produce or live stock of some kind. The trip to Foggia took almost a day and a half. Our pace was so slow that we sometimes got out and walked just in order to get some exercise and relieve the boredom. Often when passing through a little town in the mountains or valleys, women would come along side trying to sell baskets of peaches, grapes or plums. We particularly like the purple plums. Most of us ate far more than we should, and by the time we reached Foggia, we were stopping more often than the train. It was a painful way to learn the dangers of eating unwashed Italian fruit.

“The day was beastly hot when we arrived in Foggia. The train left us off in a wheat field that had just been harvested, and I remember the grasshoppers were the largest I have ever seen. We boarded a 2-1/2 ton truck and headed for west of town. My first sight of the 2nd was inspiring, for I saw a large rambling one-story building of stone perched on a hill. It was impressive, and the driver told us it was the officer’s mess hall and officer’s club.

“I reported to the 96th Squadron, and since every flying officer was supposed to have a home crew, I was assigned to one already there. My first crew consisted of Charles Duncan, pilot; Hal Bogie, co-pilot; Wib Clark, navigator; and Roger someone, bombardier. In addition, there were five enlisted men, whose names I’ve forgotten. I was supposed to be the radar navigator, but since only the lead or deputy lead ships were equipped with radar, I never flew any combat missions with my assigned home crew. For nearly a week, I flew training missions around the boot of Italy, learning the coastline, islands, cities, or mountains that could be more easily identified on my clock shaped radar scope.

“My first combat mission was to the Winterhafen Oil Depot at Vienna, Austria, July 16, 1944. My pilot for this initial mission was a Lt. Flannigan, and it was the only mission I ever flew with him. Flak at the target was reported to be very heavy and quite accurate. I couldn’t tell because as yet had no basis for comparison, and besides, shut in my darkened cubbyhole all I could hear above the roar

of the engines was the incessant spattering of what sounded like hail on the ship's fuselage. It was reported that the Group lost two aircraft that day.

"My next mission was to Memmingen Airdrome at Munich, Germany. The weather was good, and there was little need for Mickey although, of course, I kept the set on and a log of our flight. We carried 12, 500-lb. bombs and our base altitude was 25,500 feet. We had excellent bomb results from the visual sighting. The Group lost one aircraft and our navigator reported seeing one ship peel out of the formation ahead before going down and that could have been it.

"On the next mission, July 22, which was scheduled for the huge Romano/Americano Oil Refinery at Ploesti, Romania, I was assigned as bombardier. We rendezvoused over the Adriatic, and as was standard practice to clear all the machine guns while we circled and climbed for altitude over the water our pilot ordered us to test fire our guns. I was just getting into position to test fire the chin turret guns when all of a sudden there was a sharp hit on the nose of the plexi-glass in front of me and I couldn't figure out what happened. I felt the air rushing in through a web-like hole that was now in front of my face. Both Ed Harris and I were stunned, and he said, 'My God, you'r hit.' I hadn't felt anything, but blood was running down my forehead.

"A shell casing from the tail guns of the ship ahead of us had come through the nose and struck me. The plexi-glass had almost stopped the casing, so it had very little velocity by the time it hit my forehead. It was amazing that I bled so profusely because the wound was little more than a scratch; nevertheless because of the hole, the pilot decided to abort the mission. I went to the dispensary and the aide insisted on putting an oversize bandage on it. We got no credit for the mission. It turned out to be a particularly tough one and the 20th Squadron lost one ship.

"August 22nd. Today was my toughest mission so far. Our target was a synthetic oil refinery at Odertal, Germany. I led the Squadron again, and we bombed at 26,000 feet. My home crew flew in the number seven position, and the entire crew went down when we were hit by bandits near Lake Balaton. Our tail gunner reported seeing three chutes get out of Duncan's plane. We also lost another ship from the 96th.

"On September 22, we made another long flight to Brux, Czechoslovakia. We carried 12, 500-pounders and bombed from an altitude of 27,500. We expected a lot of fighter opposition and as a result were well protected by our friendly P-38s and P-51s. Our Group saw no enemy planes but learned that the brigands had successfully attacked several bombers that had lagged and had to fall out of formation. Czechoslovakia was cloud covered by the time we got there. The clouds didn't prevent the flak from coming up in heavy and accurate bursts, however. We led the Group, Major Jordan, pilot, and Mike Weinman as Mickey. We bombed entirely on PFF (radar), and Weinman and I are beginning to get our coordination down better. He doesn't seem to get excited over the intercom. Often I fear he is not in control of his set and position, but I am learning that is just his manner and nonchalance. Of course we had no idea of where our bombs hit; all we can be sure of is that they reached the ground somewhere in Czechoslovakia. This was a really tiring flight as we had to cross some very heavy flak areas both going and coming. We were in the air just five minutes short of ten hours.

"One afternoon, I went down to a nearby fighter field. This one was for P-38s. A few of those ships had been fixed so that they could carry a 500-lb. bomb under each wing. Three ships would then fly in a close V formation. The lead one had been modified by installing a plex-glass nose in which they put a bombardier and a bomb sight - not a Norden but a relatively simple thing called the D8. It was made by National Cash Register Company and our standing joke was that when the bombardier missed his target a little red flag popped up reading, 'No Sale.' The sight was simply a dropping angle that the bombardier set manually. It was pretty rudimentary compared to the intricate Norden or Sperry, but for low level it served its purpose, and the cramped space of the P-38 was about all that could be used anyway. These modified ships were called 'droop snoots,' and I decided to fly at least one mission in them just for the hell of it even though I knew it would not count in my total for a tour.

It was a chance to see more tactical bombing than strategic and to fly in one of the fighters I had admired from the ground.

“Three of the P-38s, with me in the nose of the lead one, took off just after lunch and headed for a target in northern Yugoslavia. Our B-17s usually required a couple of hours to reach bombing altitude, but those three jocks were at 15,000 feet before I even got my oxygen hooked up. We had climbed to that altitude in order to cross the mountains; when it came time to bomb we would descend to an indicated altitude of 12,000 feet where we would be only 4,000 feet above the target, a Railroad Marshalling Yards. I kept listening to the three pilots chatter among themselves. In a bomber crew I usually stayed on intercom, but on this flight there was only the pilot to listen to anyway, and all three pilots in the echelon needed to be kept informed. At one spot we saw a few specks of flak quite far off to our right. You’d have thought those pilots were approaching flak at Ploesti; they were so concerned about that distant flak. To us in bombers, flak was expected on every mission. It was enemy fighters we dreaded most. However, these crazy hot rods kept searching the sky hoping to find some German fighters whom they could entice into a fight. If that would have happened they would immediately jettison the bombs and I would merely be a passenger-witness to a dog fight. The idea left me cold, for I never saw a German fighter that I didn’t fear. However, we saw no Jerries, and in no time we were over the target. We circled it once, dropped down to our bombing altitude and came in at a ground speed that was twice as fast as I was used to. At that low altitude though there was no chance of missing, and the three pilots complimented me for the bomb results.

“Late on Christmas Day, flight crews for a mission on the morrow were posted on Squadron bulletin boards. Redden, Toton, Weinman, and I were scheduled, and we were all glad to see we would be in ‘FRANKIE,’ old reliable #715.

“At briefing the morning of December 26th, we learned that the target was Blechhammer South. The Blechhammer Oil Refinery was in Selesia. We took off at 0700, each ship in our Group carrying 10, 500-pounders. On this day Redden was not only leading the Group, we were in the first Group in our Wing. This one would be my 50th mission, and with a touch of bravado I had broken my habit of not telling the folks at home what was my score. I wrote my Uncle a day or two before Christmas that with only one mission it would be all over for me, one way or another, by the time he was reading this letter. Of course, I really thought that it would be simply another run and then I would take pride in completing 50 of them. I doubt that any young man feels that he’s likely to die on a particular day. I know I didn’t. I was a little apprehensive about the bad luck of drawing Blechhammer for this last one though. Why couldn’t it have been a milk run to some place in Northern Italy?

“There seemed to be a little consolation in the fact that our indicated altitude was to be 29,500 feet. Since the target itself was 690 feet above sea level that meant that we would be at 28,810 feet above the big guns on the ground. That altitude was higher than we had ever gone before and we knew that some ships would not be able to make it. Later events shredded any hope that a higher altitude would result in less accurate flak.

“Our I.P. was Neustadt, a town lying 50 miles directly south of Blechhammer. We arrived there without incident, even crossing the dangerous Lake Balaton area without seeing any fighters. When we were at the right altitude and about 15 miles from Neustadt, Toton and I climbed into our flak suits. Since we were to be the lead ship in the First Wave to hit the target that day, we as yet saw no flak in the distance. Almost as soon as we leveled out from our turn at the I.P. and established our course of 355 degrees, however, flak began coming toward us. From the first volleys, it was heavy and very accurate. One of the early bursts struck our ship on the right side wounding Lt. McHood, our young co-pilot. He was slightly injured in the right arm, but by this time we had sighted the target area and were leveling out on the run. I looked around and saw the other ships had their bomb bay doors open and were packed in tightly with us. Toton had retreated to the farthest corner of the nose. The flak was so intense I wished I could join him, forgetting the fact that a few feet farther back gave him no further

protection than I had hovering over the bombsight. We were getting closer to the target now, and flak was so heavy I had such crazy thought as wondering why in the world they were shooting at us. We hadn't done anything. Just about that time, a terrific burst struck No. 3 engine, and much of the shell must have hit McHood in the knee, shattering his right leg.

"This happened nearly a minute before bombs away. Although I knew we were targeting the refinery all right, there was so much smoke on the ground that I could not quite make out our assigned aiming point. I found a series of tanks that according to the briefing pictures was close to our aiming point, so I synchronized on them. Flak continued rattling through our ship and Redden called out that the co-pilot had been hit. I told him we were still a minute from bomb release. The automatic pilot on 'FRANKIE' had been working so well, but suddenly, it too went out and I could only move the plane by swinging the secondary clutch. Meanwhile, flak never left us, and after a few particularly close, dusty, bursts, I smelled the acrid odors that were almost suffocating. Another burst came directly in front of us splintering a web-like hole in the plexi-glass nose. The blast might not have been as large as it seemed, but the bombsight had been hit and I fell over backward either in fright or from the force of the onrushing air. I crouched forward and took a final look through the eyepiece. Fortunately, the cross hairs were now on our aiming point and were not moving, meaning that we were well synchronized. I judged the indices were about 10 seconds apart, so I locked the trigger mechanism and stared in frightened fascination at the dangerous clouds of flak churning all around us.

"How glad I was when I felt the ship jump upwards, for that meant the bombs were finally away and we were 5,000 pounds lighter. Almost at bomb release, our No. 1 engine also was knocked out and Major Redden was calling for someone to help the co-pilot. The flak was still heavy and right on us. I closed the bomb bay doors, removed my flak suit and went to the cockpit.

"Jim McHood, whom I had known only slightly before this mission, was in deep shock - so much so that at first I thought he was dead. Liberto, flight engineer, and I tried to lift him out of the seat, and then he moved his left arm slightly in a vain effort of trying to help. His flak helmet fell off, but some how we got him pulled out of his seat and dragged him to the catwalk. Lib kept giving him oxygen all the time, and after we got him stretched out on the catwalk, we got a better look at his knee. The whole joint had been shot away and bones showing through the dark red meat were jagged and glistening white. At that altitude there wasn't really a lot of blood and what had run out had quickly congealed into a thick dark, red mass. We found a nylon strap and tied it tightly around his thigh somewhat like we had been instructed to in first aid classes. I opened one of the emergency first aid packets and found a paper of sulfanilamide powder which I sprinkled liberally over the horrible gaping wound. Then I asked Lib to loosen the tourniquet every ten minutes if we stayed in the air that long. I then took one of the needles from the first aid packet and gave McHood a full shot of morphine in his left arm. For the first time we noticed the wound in his right arm, but it was slight compared to the grisly one that had almost severed his leg just below his right knee. I wasn't sure how much longer the Major could keep us flying, for now the entire ship was shuddering violently and we were losing altitude rapidly.

"I had no idea what I could do, but I climbed forward again and into the co-pilot's seat. Major Redden's flak helmet came so far down over his ears that about all I could see was his mustache and a glimpse of a very white face behind it. He was fighting the controls with both hands and trying desperately to feather No. 3 prop. I put on McHood's headset and tried to contact the formation. We now were alone and headed roughly in a 90-degree direction. Fortunately, Redden had enough sense to head due east rather than trying to go immediately south - a heading which would have put us over the dreadful Moravska Ostrava and into continuing flak. We were temporarily out of the flak zone, but we had lost enough altitude that we were in clouds and I didn't think the ship would stay in the air much longer. I watched the altimeter and saw that we were losing altitude at about 1,000 feet per

minute. No one had seen our bombs hit but that seemed unimportant now. It looked like the fire in No. 3 engine was out, but I couldn't be sure. I felt useless, and Redden was left to fight the ship himself.

"We were at about 15,000 feet when I called to the crew to be sure to strap on their parachutes. We didn't know how much longer we could stay in the air. One of the gunners from the waist replied that the tail gunner was coming forward to help. Only then did I remember that our tail gunner was Lt. Sol Azar, a rated pilot, new to the 96th Squadron. It was SOP to have a pilot fly as a tail gunner in the ship leading the Group in order to observe the formation and to report lapses in flying to the Group Commander. Azar's progress had been slowed because most of the oxygen back of the cockpit had been shot out and he had to depend on the little green bottles.

"Now all of a sudden we encountered a small burst of flak. It was not heavy or accurate, but at 15,000 feet, I knew it wouldn't be too long before they could zero in on us. The ship's shuddering got worse as we descended into heavier air. I wondered what we would do with McHood if we had to hit the hanky.

"Lib tapped me on the shoulder and when I turned around there was Azar ready to climb into the co-pilot seat and try to help Redden with the controls. I unplugged my headset; my efforts had been useless anyway, and wiggled out of the seat to make room for Azar.

"Back on the catwalk with Liberto and McHood, I could see the leg was beginning to bleed profusely at this lower altitude. The blood no longer was dark but was now very bright red. His face was the color of wood ash, but his lips moved occasionally and he appeared to be clutching at his left breast. I thought perhaps he had been wounded there too, but when I opened his jacket and shirt I found a little black prayer book in his pocket. I took it out and put it in his hands. The book fell open to a dog-eared place and I could see Mac was trying to say something. It was then I realized he was Catholic and he was giving himself the last rites he had already marked for just such an emergency. I felt utterly helpless.

"We broke out of the second barrage of light flak and Redden at last succeeded in feathering the No. 3 prop. With that success, most of the violent shaking ceased. I crawled back into the nose and could see that the oil coming from No. 3 had congealed on the cowling and had frozen into a heavy black tar. The windmilling prop had gotten red hot and torque had caused most of the ship's shuddering. Now we felt only a slight vibration. I asked Toton where we were, but he merely shrugged his shoulders. I looked at the compass and saw that we were heading 120 degrees. Although we had two feathered props, old 'FRANKIE' still had two good engines and was holding her own as far as air speed was concerned. Our indicated airspeed was 135. Although we normally used oxygen at anything over 12,000 feet, I figured I could risk a little, so I grabbed a portable and went back to the catwalk.

"Lib had kept McHood supplied with mixed oxygen, and we now disconnected that and now put him on the navigator's pure stuff. The wound looked worse than ever because it was bleeding more profusely. We cut away more of this pants and tightened the tourniquet. I thought McHood was trying to talk and he appeared to be awake enough to feel what must have been horrible pain. I did not see how he could live with such a huge wound nor did I want to see him suffering. Not knowing what else to do, I grabbed another first aid packet and gave him another shot of morphine. It was not until days later that I realized that probably there had not been enough time for the first one to take full effect. We moved him so that his feet were slightly higher than his head and wrapped him with an extra coat that Lib had always carried. By this time, Mac had lapsed into unconsciousness, either from the shock or the morphine.

"I went back to the nose and could now see the ground occasionally through the broken clouds. There were some rivers that showed against the snow, but I couldn't really find any landmarks. I called Weinman, but he could only report that his set had been inoperative since soon after the I.P. He too had been watching our heading and airspeed, and he figured we were still over occupied territory but were heading for Poland.

“We both encouraged Redden to continue 120 degrees, and we kept that heading for approximately 20 minutes. Visibility got worse the farther east we came, and we were down around 5,000 feet before Toton and I located a town named Rzeszow on the map. I didn’t know how the hell anyone could pronounce it, but there was a railroad running through it as well as another coming up from the south. Redden circled the town and ordered Lib to fire the emergency flares. I could see no landing strip, and none showed on the map. The Major decided to try a crash landing. I know he figured that with the wounded McHood aboard, there wasn’t much else he could do.

“McHood couldn’t be moved, and I offered to stay with him in the nose, but that was foolhardy, and the Major ordered all of us, except the three in the cockpit, to go into the radio room and follow prescribed ditching procedures. I put one last tourniquet on McHood’s leg, said goodbye to Lib, not sure whether I’d ever see him again, and went to the rear.

“There were six of us huddled on the floor, hands behind our heads and facing the rear. We went around the town once more, and then Redden made what could only be described as a beautiful crash landing. We never knew how he did it with only two good engines and the wheels up. It was a tribute to his judgment, skill, and to the durability of that old reliable B-17. As soon as the fuselage hit the ground, it sounded like a giant can opener was ripping through the belly of the plane; dust and dirt coming up through the closed bomb bay almost choked us there in the radio room. We didn’t crash any structures, however, and the ship finally skidded to a noisy stop. We climbed out and saw probably two dozen men running towards us. Many were in strange uniforms and some apparently were civilians. We saw no weapons in their hands and we hoped they were friendly. That had watched our flares and our descent. They jabbered excitedly in a tongue I knew was not German. At first, I supposed they were Russians, but they seemed friendly enough and seemed to be trying to help us. When two came to me I led them to the nose of the ship, now resting on the ground nearly six feet lower than its usual position, and by gestures tried to make them understand that we had a wounded man still there. One of the men made a chopping motion with his hand, and then I remembered the emergency axe hanging in the radio compartment. I rushed back to get it and when I returned one of the strangers took it from me and chopped a hole in the plexi-glass. By this time a makeshift ambulance had appeared, and the attendants brought out a stretcher.

“The first job was to get Mac out of the ship through the cutaway nose, and I must say these men did it fast and efficiently. About all I could understand was an occasional word of ‘doktor.’ As soon as McHood was put on the stretcher and taken away, we quickly surveyed the damage. The tips of every prop were bent at almost right angles from the force of hitting the ground and the ship was riddled with flak holes. The biggest hole was the gaping one forward of the right cockpit - the one that almost killed McHood.

“We had drilled so many times on ditching and survival procedures that now my thoughts returned to the secret bomb sight. Even though these people seemed friendly, I thought I ought to destroy the Norden. So I climbed back into the nose and fired three shots from my .45 into the rate and gyroscope of the sight. Then I took the axe and went back to the radio room and slashed away at the IFF - an identification signal that was changed daily - and the innards of Mike Weinman’s APQ15 radar set. That too was supposed to be highly secret at the time. This destruction didn’t seem to sit too well with the strangers, but they made no attempt to interfere or stop me.

“Outside more people had gathered, examining our wrecked ship. There was a lot of talk, but it was all very confusing. I knew only a few words of German, and I don’t believe anyone else in our crew knew a foreign language. Mike Weinman was Jewish and had remembered a surprising amount of Yiddish he had learned as a child. He whispered to me he was sure these people were Polish. One of them seemed to take charge and beckoned for us to get aboard an old Model A truck. We chugged through the town and were brought to a home that seemed to serve as headquarters for a small band of Russian soldiers. At least I thought they were Russian from their tunics and the insignia boards on their

shoulders. We couldn't tell their rank, but they kept calling one 'Myor.' He was short, dark, and evidently the one in command. We soon grasped that he was a Major, and before long we were referring to him as Major Gromyko. From what we could gather we were safely in Polish territory and about 25 miles behind the front lines.

"We were given some head cheese and dark bread, and then our friends brought a village woman to us. She told us in good English that her name was Catherine Bandelak and that she had lived in Pennsylvania. She could speak English, Polish, and Russian. For several days she was to be our interpreter, guide, and go-between. In those roles she was invaluable in helping us to understand where we were and what would be our future.

"That night five of us were kept at Catherine's house. I stayed at Catherine's. We were fed again, and the Russians insisted in sharing their vodka with us. It was my first taste of this strong liquor. Language problems disappeared when we would raise a glass of vodka and say, 'Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin.' 'Roosisky-Americansky,' or 'Hitler Kaput!' By ten o'clock that night we were all very tired and sleepy.

"December 27. We awakened this morning still tired after our exhaustion of yesterday and from four sleeping crossways in Catherine's bed. We breakfasted at her house and ate more head cheese, bread, butter, and ersatz coffee. Even at breakfast we drank a little more vodka - almost under duress.

"After breakfast the Major came over and we all chugged out in the old Model A again to look at our plane. It was wrecked even more than our hasty examination the day before had indicated. There were flak holes from the rudder to the chopped plexi-glass in the nose. Two engines were completely ruined. Oil had leaked even from the two good engines, and we could see the fire damage to No. 3. The control surfaces had been so riddled we now understood why the ship had shaken so violently. Someone produced a camera so we took several pictures of the plane, of us around it, and among our new Polish and Russian friends.

"From the field we went to the Russian emergency hospital to see McHood. His leg had been amputated just above the knee during the night. The Russian doctor told us in broken English that he had been given two transfusions of whole blood. McHood looked very bad, in some ways worse than when I had last seen him, but he was conscious and tried to talk. We all spoke to him for a few minutes, wished him the best, and left him most of our cigarettes and candy rations. We didn't know whether he would live, but he was in better hands than he had been in the ship. I knew nothing of the hospital care he would get, but at least he had gotten two transfusions that had kept him alive.

"We went back to Catherine's house and ate bread and cheese again. The bread is very dark, heavy, and moist. I like it. Again, we were given plenty of vodka. I think it must be the Polish pastime.

"That night the Russian Major took Redden and me to his house. The Russians are very rank conscious. We drank more vodka, and soon an orderly brought in a small wash basin filled with what looked to me like raw fish about the size of bait minnows back home. The Russian said they were 'shishtaftki' or at least something like that. I couldn't pronounce the word nor did I relish the thought of eating those helpless little creatures. Evidently they were appetizers, for Major Gromyko showed us how to place one on our tongue and then hastily gulp down a shot of vodka. Even with the vodka, I couldn't get a fish down; my tongue could feel the scales. Later on, we were served pork loaf, chicken, bread, and more vodka. Our hosts are trying to impress us with their hospitality now that they are convinced we are not White Russians. It wasn't long before I began to feel the liquor and I knew I would get sick if I drank much more. I think Redden and I pretended to be more soused than we really were.

"The Russian Major had a little Victrola and some records. When they started playing Russian music, it wasn't long before they wanted to dance. There were no women so men had to dance with one another and, as I said, Russians are very rank conscious. Redden, as our ranking officer, was paired

with his Russian counterpart, and they did quite a dance together until the Russian began slipping into the traditional Russian bear dance, then Redden bowed out. Unfortunately, I was paired with the only Russian Captain. He must have been 6 foot 4 inches with weight to match. He insisted on swinging me around the floor, but when his gyrations began getting a little too strenuous, Gromyko growled something and my dancing partner subsided and went in a corner with his vodka.

“Later, about midnight, Catherine brought up waist gunner Merritt and Carey, the radio man, who also slept with us at her house. Again, it was four in the bed.

“The next day only Redden and I went to the hospital to see McHood. He was about the same, no better nor worse. We didn’t stay long, but we bumped into two American G.I.s who had been looking for us. They were stationed in the area on some kind of duty. They gave us a little wine and said they were arranging for us to be flown to Poltava. In one or two days we would be at this Russian Air Base that had been used in shuttle bombing earlier in the war. There we would get clean clothes and a comfortable bed. We took the wine but accepted their promises with a grain of salt.

“December 28. We spent the night at Catherine’s house. She has two small babies. Liberto enjoys bouncing the cute little tykes on his knee. Catherine tells us a C-47 is to come in and take us over to Russia, but she warns us in conspiratorial tones not to trust the Russians. Many people disappear within that vast land and are never heard from again. She claims we will be well treated, however, because the Polish Red Cross has been notified of our safety. As a result, our commanders eventually will get the message, and the Russians knowing that would never dare harm us. It is evident that she doesn’t like the Rooskies.

“This morning we awakened ready to leave and with a healthy respect for Russian vodka and whiskey. They also served us a little different liquor in smaller glasses; it was called slivovitz and was really fiery and potent. Catherine told me it was plum brandy and to watch out for it. Her warning came a little too late.

“The Russian Major came in and told us that a C-47, he called it a ‘Dooglas,’ would be arriving and take us to Poltava. He expressed pleasure at meeting us and was sure that together, Russians, with a little American help, would soon end the war. We kept waiting for the ‘Dooglas’ but noon came and no ship in sight. Catherine fixed us some more food and also made us a snack to carry with us in case weather forced us down somewhere. Two other Russian officers joined us and gave us a few small souvenirs. We exchanged insignia with them. It seemed to me there was a lot of boasting on their part of their national strength. Nearly every Russian officer we meet soon asks: ‘Do you think America and Russia will ever have to fight?’ The question is so strange and seems so out of place when we are supposed to be Allies, but it is evident that topic occupies their thoughts much more than it does ours. The Russians ask many political questions; probably this is their way of interrogating us. At least, that is what we surmised and we tried to evade most of their inquiries.

“Late in the afternoon, the Model A chugged up and we boarded it. With a ceremonious goodbye we headed for an auxiliary airport where we expected to meet our C-47. Before we could enter this small airport, we were stopped and interrogated by Russian intelligence officers. One of them, a Lieutenant named Weinman, by coincidence the same name as our Mike. The Russian Weinman is also Jewish and can speak Yiddish. Since Mike could struggle a little with that language we began to communicate a little more freely. He told us that we would be sent to this camp and that our home base in Italy would be notified of our safety.

“We came to this airfield and were dismayed to find that this ‘Dooglas’ had not arrived. At the field our Russian escorts, we don’t know whether they are guards or not, brought us to a new home. It is a dug-out or enlarged trench that can house a couple dozen men. Late today 12 more Americans joined us. Most of them are from B-24s that also have made emergency landings somewhere along this section of the eastern front.

“The dug-out in which we are to live is underground and is covered by a large mound of earth. The stalls are separated by heavy planks, and each stall is filled with clean straw. There is a wood burning stove made from a 50 gal. drum at each end of the dug-out. At night there are two of us in each stall. We’re warm enough considering the circumstances, but I envy Mike Weinman that large green parka he somehow managed to scrounge back in sunny Italy and had enough foresight to carry on the plane with him. It also gets pretty smoky in this dug-out although there are small chimneys extending above the ground from each of the stoves. At night the guards, or orderlies, put a few lumps of coal in the fires. There is a little water for washing, but it is icy cold and there is no soap or towel.

“The next day a few other downed airmen joined us, and our dug-out is beginning to get crowded. Tonight we are bedding down three to a stall. That isn’t too bad though, for the extra man gives us more warmth. The main thought in everyone’s mind is the concern our relatives must feel if they get reports we are missing. We wonder if they will be notified of our safety. We all are in good health and are being cared for as conditions allow. We are getting plenty to eat and too much vodka to drink. We all would like to be certain that any MIA reports would be corrected, but we have no way of knowing whether that will happen. By this time we were joking about events of the 26th and everything that happened on the fateful day.

“December 29th. Still waiting for the C-47. The weather was closed in and is no better.

“The next day we awakened tired and stiff from our cramped beds and cold. A three-inch snow has fallen and has blanketed the surrounding area. The temperature is 10 degrees. Our breakfast today was as heavy as a full course American supper. A barber came early this morning and we all got a crude shave. The guards also brought us a tub of tepid water; one man dribbles it from a cup into another man’s hands. This is a pretense at washing. At least the ritual awakens us and makes us feel somewhat cleaner.

“Some of us walked over to the Russian planes sitting on the ground and tried to talk to the crews. We are quite an oddity, but it is obvious that they have been warned to have little to do with us. Whenever we try to start a conversation with our limited words and gestures, a Russian officer immediately joins the group and takes over.

“About noon today, nine more Americans strolled in. They are from another B-17 crew that had also been on the Blechhammer raid. Their ship had been shot down, but the entire crew parachuted safely and had been kept in hiding since the 26th.

“Today, December 30, shortly after breakfast, the big news happened when the C-47 arrived. We had it surrounded before it had completely stopped and the pilot had cut the engines. An American engineer, an American doctor, and some enlisted personnel climbed out. We were all happy to see them, especially when they unloaded a case of cigarettes and other rations. Tobacco was doled out to eager hands amidst an excited jargon of English, Russian, and Polish voices.

“The American doctor wanted to visit McHood and another wounded man, so Major Redden went to town with him. Later that night, when they returned, Redden reported that McHood was improving and looked somewhat better.

“The C-47 could take 15 healthy men in addition to the slightly wounded or sick. The all important question was who was to leave and who were the unlucky ones to remain. Three crews were represented - nine men from two crews and 12 from another. We decided to use coins and odd man out. Since the Major was in town, I and two Captains from the other crews flipped. All crowded tensely around us and we carefully turned our coins over, one at a time. It was all three heads and we all sighed. We flipped again, two heads and a tail. I had the tail so I lost. Naturally the boys claimed that I let them down.

“By this time it was quite late and the C-47 had to remain here. That meant more men in the dug-out. The air that night was really dense both from stories and the heavy breathing of men who did get to sleep.

“December 31, we awakened and shortly after breakfast we gathered around to see the C-47 take off. They did so with the dubious promise that in two or three days they would return for us. There were 17 of us left in the dug-out. Tonight is New Year’s Eve, and naturally everyone is recalling similar holidays in the past. The Douglas left us two cases of 10 in 1 rations, which Lib and I carried to the dug-out. Inside the cases were crackers, jam, butter, cheese, and a rice pudding which is my favorite. At supper we drank one or two small toasts and sang a few American songs. We returned to the dug-out and sang a little and then tried to sleep.

“The next morning, January 1, 1945, Major Redden and some of the other fellows awakened with acute cases of Russian G.I.s. At least we are calling it Russian. This was New Year’s Day and five of the boys went to the only church still open in the nearby village. Of course the rituals and songs were all in Polish so they didn’t understand it. Three of us went for a long walk. We encountered a Polish gent who wanted to know if he could safely write to his sister somewhere in America. I never caught just what were his great fears - whether from Russian censors or exaggerated stories of Al Capone in Chicago. Nearly everyone we meet claims to have relatives of some sort in America. It must be a great place; I hope to get there sometime soon. Tonight we can easily hear the guns from the front.

“January 2, 1945. This morning we awakened and went to breakfast. Mike and I had a separate meal which included real coffee for a change. Afterwards, we came back and the Major and I went with the Russian Weinman over to the airfield and talked to the commanding officers. We exchanged compliments, cigarettes, and a lot of bragging. The officers treated us well but they are real braggarts. The Russians characterize the nations by means of various gestures. England is the old man with a beard; Italy is a nation of violin players; Russia and America are young giants with large biceps. We brought the barber back with us and we all got a shave and a haircut.

“January 3, 1945. Today was a repetition of those already passed. We’ve also bartered among the Russians a little of our personal goods. The Russians are really envious over my colt .45 and I’ve been tempted to swap it for one of their 9mm Luger, but the Captain I was dealing with told me he would be shot if he ever lost the side arm the government had issued him. Whenever we got together with two or more officers, they are immediately joined by a civilian. I’m told he is a political representative - a kind of liaison between the government and the military. I notice that the ranking officers always seem to defer to advice and consent from one of those fellows. Strange.

“After lunch, Redden, Duchek and I went for another walk. We had just reached the village when we looked up and saw an Amerikansky C-47 circling the field. Our hopes soared, only to fall again when we learned the plane was not for us. However, the new faces were encouraging and the plane’s arrival meant that flying was picking up. This three-man Russian crew brought us additional rations which included playing cards, and these helped pass the time.

“The next morning the good news happened. The C-47 arrived here about 10:30. In a very bitter wind we carried our meager belongings out to the ship. Then we climbed aboard and had to wait nearly an hour before the pilot was satisfied we could take off. After take-off, we headed for the famous Poltava, the town we had heard so much about and, by this time, we were anxious to see. On the entire trip I don’t think the pilot got much above an altitude of 250 feet. Although I always enjoyed a good buzz job, I don’t care for it with an unknown pilot and a strange ship.

“We stopped in a town named Zamosk for about an hour in order to check on a B-24 which had been downed and was possibly to be flown out. The ship was in such bad shape, however, that the pilots all decided it would have to remain there.

“We buzzed on east for about three and a half hours and had fair flying weather. About 15 minutes before our ETA for Poltava, the clouds settled right down on the ground. We tried to get under them, but even this daring pilot couldn’t make it. When we reached what we were told was Poltava, it was so socked in we couldn’t pick up the landing field. This crazy Russky pilot kept buzzing and

dodging trees and radio wires. There was no need to be flying so low among the flocks of ground birds that sounded like light flak as we flew through them. After half an hour of this foolhardy flying, we came to an alternate base 40 miles away. We landed at this cold, bleak alternate - a place called Mirgorod. After standing in a rough wind, we loaded on a truck and were taken to a Russian Major's office. Two C-54s had also landed at this base. They were regular ATC crews, and one of them carried a USO unit. The unit included four American girls. The girls were the first females we had seen for some time and, of course, every man in several of our crews were vying for their attention.

"Last night we had a plentiful supper at a little house that was to serve as our quarters. It had electricity, but the single light in each room hangs from a cord on the ceiling, and the light is turned on at the bulb or from an old-fashioned black switch on the wall. There are beds, however, and these beds actually have sheets on them. After our stay in the straw, these sheets will be welcome. We are disappointed that we could not make Poltava, and most of the night we lay shivering with the cold. The sheets weren't as warm as the straw. If there's heat in this old house, we can't feel it. At least we have our C-47, so all we need is proper weather to let us continue.

"The next morning we awakened, tired, stiff and eager to get going. The weather dampened our spirits as we stared outside in a low, solid cloud bank. We dressed and splashed a little cold water on our faces; I don't see how that water can be so cold and not freeze. Then we went to a very heavy breakfast; sauerkraut, pickles, hamburger, fried barley called groats, tea and C ration crackers - not a typical American breakfast. Afterwards we walked to a nearby Russian market. This place was crowded with poorly clothed people, most of them looked underfed despite their remnants of thick clothing. Several were roasting chestnuts over charcoal and wanted us to buy a bag. Redden and I had a photo taken as did most of the other fellows. The pictures were taken by a woman who reminded me of my grandmother Anderson with a shawl over her head. The woman had a little box camera that looked as if it had been the original Kodak, but the picture she took wasn't so bad. Redden with his mustache and I look like a couple of bonafide Russkies. We got into a misunderstanding over the number of rubles for the picture, and I think we overpaid the ole gal.

"At 1500 we decided it was clear enough to try to take off, so we boarded our truck and went out to the plane. We climbed aboard and after a long time in warming those cold engines, we took off. En route to Poltava, we again hugged the ground, and the weather was similar to that of the previous day. We maintained a good air speed and were over level ground. We really dusted the weeds that occasionally struggled up through the snow. We think we have found the original mad Russian! When we reached Poltava, all were able to see the field, and everyone was jubilant. The pilot raked it so sharply over a building that our left wingtip nearly scraped the roof. Presumably he wanted to give us a thrill and show off for his Americansky passengers.

"We were courteously received at Poltava. We were given a good de-lousing, clean clothes, and a wonderful hot shower. That shower was so welcome it seemed one of the highlights of my life!

"On January 6, we were scheduled to take off for Tehran, but the weather closed in. The next day we awoke and strolled over to the Officers Club, and after lunch eight of us drove through Poltava in an open weapons carrier. The town is about the size of Kokoma, spread out and gutted either by demolition squads or German bombings. There is not a single large building of any sort intact. That night we went to a USO show - the first ever, we were told, to come to Poltava, and later to a dance at the Officers Club.

"The next day was uneventful. We sat around the base but the weather is still against us. Another sleepless night.

"The following day we arose at 5:00 a.m. and were told we probably would be leaving soon. We had a breakfast of eggs and meat. Shortly after daylight, we climbed into a cold, C-46. At eight o'clock dawn was breaking; we took off and headed for Tehran, Iran. The weather was undercast most of the way, but flying was smooth with the exception of occasional rough air over the mountains. The

undercast began breaking up somewhere over northern Iran and we got our first glimpse of that barren region.

“We reached Tehran about nine hours later and put down at the ATC base there. Trucks took us to our quarters where we showered, shaved, and enjoyed real luxuries.

“We went to the Officers Club where I saw more Colonels, a few Generals, and other high ranking officers than I’ve seen in three years past service. I can’t understand why they need so many high ranking officers at a remote base like this. We enjoyed a fine meal beautifully served by pretty Polish girls. The Officers Club here is spacious and really fancy. There are spotless tablecloths on the dining tables, three forks, two knives, and one spoon for both lunches and dinners. All kinds of booze is available.

“The next morning we went to the PX and bought a few small items. Most of us don’t have much money. The PX is so well stocked it makes me think of Sears Roebuck or Marshall Fields in Chicago. We then had lunch at the club. Late in the afternoon we came down to the airfield and boarded another C-46 flown by an ATC crew. We’ve learned that our next stop is Cairo. We took off and reached Cairo at 2100 hours, very tired.

“The next day we arose late - almost noon - after our arduous flight and trouble getting billeted. It was nearly 0200 when we finally crawled into our beds. We’re told that we will be leaving for Italy tonight, but will have time enough to go into Cairo and look around. Most of us went to Heliopolis, a suburb of Cairo. There we bought boots and souvenirs.

“We returned to the air base and bumped into Harry Grossnickle of Manchester. He had some time to kill before his plane left for America. He’s a Finance Officer stationed in Cairo. We went into Cairo to the famous Sheppard Hotel; we both wanted to say we had been to Sheppard’s. Harry promised to call my Mother and tell her I was safe.

“About 4:00 a.m., 20 of us boarded a C-47 and taxied out for take-off. The right engine had an RPM drop, and we taxied back to the parking stand. We spent a very uncomfortable three hours waiting before they finally told us our flight would have to be canceled. Back to the barracks and bed.

“The next day was uneventful, and we slept away most of it. Then at about midnight, we came to the terminal again. At 2:30 a.m. we climbed aboard another C-47, took off at 3:00 a.m., and headed for a stop at Benghazi. We stayed there only briefly for fuel and a maintenance check of some kind. We didn’t leave the plane’s area and soon were headed north over the blue Mediterranean toward Italy.

“We arrived back in Foggia that same day, and I’ll never forget the warm smile that greeted me from Bob McCook when I entered my old tent. After the final dismal stories had been reported about how we were last seen on fire and falling rapidly, all kinds of rumors had filtered back to our base. We had all been killed. We had parachuted and been captured. Some of us had escaped and were roaming around Germany or Poland. Finally, word had been relayed that we were safe. As lumpy as it may be, my cot here in this cozy tent among my old friends seems like a bit of paradise. I suppose tomorrow I’ll find out more about my future.”

#### **LINZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 339 - DECEMBER 27, 1944**

Korneuburg, Austria Oil Refineries were the primary target but diverted to Marshalling Yards at Linz and only 16 aircraft dropped 160, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the target by PFF with unobserved results. Ten aircraft dropped their bombs at 48-47N - 14-50E because of an accidental release of bombs by the lead plane. Two aircraft dropped 20, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Villach, Austria visually with hits observed in the Yards. There were three early returns. Flak at Linz was heavy, intense and accurate. 2nd Lt. Woodrow W. Abbott, pilot, was lightly wounded by flak.

#### **REGENSBURG, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 340 - DECEMBER 28, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 27 aircraft dropped 312, 500-lb. GP bombs on Oil Storage Tanks at Regensburg. Bombing was visual with hits reported on the target. Flak was heavy, slight, and inaccurate. One aircraft dropped 8, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yard at Salzburg, Austria visually with hits reported on the Yard. No injuries, no losses.

**CASTELFRANCO/VENETO, ITALY/UDINE, ITALY - MISSION NO. 341 - DECEMBER 29, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off to bomb Marshalling Yards at Innsbruck but 12 aircraft dropped 144, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Locomotive Depot at Castelfranco and 16 aircraft dropped 187, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Locomotive Repair Depot at Udine. Both targets were reported to have been hit. Flak at the targets resulted in damage to 27 aircraft, and also resulted in the death of S/Sgt. James W. Thompson, TG, from the 20th Squadron, and slight wounds to 2nd Lt. Daniel Jackel, N, 1st Lt. Wilbur J. Tepo, Jr., CP, 1st Lt. O. J. Nastoupil, P, and Cpl. W. L. Gillman, RW.

The end of 1944 found a great improvement over 1943. Living conditions had improved. Food was more plentiful and of a greater variety. Cokes and beer were now a part of the PX rations. Officers now had a splendid clubhouse and all the Squadrons had permanent mess halls and enlisted men's club houses. Still, it had been a long 21 months for most of the ground personnel, and war's end still seemed far away.

# 17

## OPERATIONS: JANUARY/FEBRUARY, 1945

**V**ERONA, ITALY/PADUA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 342 - JANUARY 4, 1945  
Twenty-eight aircraft took off with 15 aircraft dropping 160, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Porto Nuova Marshalling Yards in Verona by offset bombing with the target area hit. Eleven aircraft dropped 130, 500-lb. GP bombs on Marshalling Yards at Padua, Italy visually with the target well hit. Flak was heavy, moderate, and accurate. No injuries, no losses. Two aircraft aborted.

### LINZ, AUSTRIA/KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 343 - JANUARY 8, 1945

Twenty-eight aircraft took off with 19 aircraft dropping 190, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Main Station at Linz by PFF with unobserved results. Eight aircraft dropped 78, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Klagenfurt, Austria by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate. No injuries, no losses.

### NON MISSION - JANUARY 10, 1945

#### MISSING AIR CREW REPORT - A/C #44-6350 - "HELEN BELLE" - 429TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	Leonard (NMI) Waldman, 0-1578004, P.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Clayton L. Stemwedel, 0-764151, CP.	(DED)
Major	Roy V. Covington, 0-909719	(DED) *
S/Sgt.	Eric G. Page, 36521643	(DED) *
S/Sgt.	Clarence P. Junnisson, 36199446	(DED) *
S/Sgt.	Arthur J. Brown, 6571690	(DED) *
Cpl.	Earl J. Freed, 35399711	(DED) *
	A Captain, Italian Army, name unknown	(DED)

\*Major Covington and the enlisted men were assigned to the 324th Service Group.

The following report was submitted to the 15th Air Force Headquarters, 14 January 1945.

"On 10 January 1945, at 1045 local time (C-47 #42-10097) departed Belgrade in company with a B-17 #350 belonging to the 429th Squadron, 2nd Bomb Group.

"The B-17 had been repaired in Belgrade and had no navigator nor navigational equipment aboard and the Command set worked only on the 'D' channel. It was planned that they fly on our wing back to Italy.

"At Belgrade, the weather was better than it had been for the preceding four or five days with a ceiling of approximately 1,000 feet, broken and eight or nine-tenths covered. Lt. Waldman checked the weather forecast at the airport and told us only that it seemed all right, that the ceiling, visibility, etc. in Italy were suitable for landing. I do not know who the forecasting agency was, British or

American, and I do not know what information, if any, was given concerning weather conditions en route.

“After leaving Belgrade we climbed over the first layer of clouds to 6,000 feet and headed slightly southwest looking for a break in the solid mass of stratocumulus and cumulus clouds to the west, which would enable us to fly a more direct route to Foggia, since neither we nor the B-17 had much of a safety margin where gasoline was concerned. We proceeded on the above-mentioned course as far as Uzice (43-50N - 19-52E), but without seeing any breaks in the West and then turned on a course of 160 degrees to 43-18N - 20-38E where we picked up the river system that went south to Metkovic and the pass to the coast. We attempted to go down under the clouds and fly the river valley, but found that clouds went clear down to the ground.

“Up to this point the weather had been broken and we had been able to see the B-17 at all times and the ground at frequent intervals. But we could see that from here on the clouds were covered and the entire field of vision to the East, South, and West. They also seemed to go up to well over 20,000 feet. In view of these conditions and before proceeding, Lt. Howard, my pilot, called Lt. Waldman and advised him it looked impossible to go under, or around, and asked him whether he wanted to turn back to Belgrade. In both Lt. Howard’s and my opinion this was the point of no return. Lt. Waldman elected to continue on and we began to climb on a course of 110 degrees. This was the last time I personally saw the B-17.

“We climbed to 5,000 feet encountering light snow and icing conditions until I saw the pass at 45-45N - 21-00E through a break in the clouds and advised the pilot to turn West towards the coast on a course of 200 degrees. Lt. Howard saw the B-17 momentarily, contacted it on the radio, advised of our change of course, and saw the B-17 bank to the right. This was the last time that anyone either saw or heard from the aircraft.

“Between the last mentioned position (42-45N - 21-00E) and where we broke out on the coast (48-18N - 18-53E), we were in slushy snow and heavy icing conditions for approximately 45 to 50 minutes and were forced to use our deicers steadily.

“From the coast we proceeded to Bari, where Lt. Howard immediately notified the Big Fence and Regional Flying Control.”

LEONARD B. KORNFIELD, 1st, Lt. AC 0-712108

### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 344 - JANUARY 15, 1945**

Twenty-five aircraft dropped 287, 500-lb. GP bombs on the Northeast Marshalling Yards in Vienna by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate resulting in serious wound to T/Sgt. J. A. Taylor, LW, and S/Sgt. Dorsey F. Back, TG, both of the 20th Squadron.

1st. Lt. John D. Sisson was a Bombardier assigned to the 429th Squadron. September 20, 1992: “My story begins in Pittsfield, MA where I was born and brought up. During the 1920s and 30s, I lived next door to the Palme family. The father and mother were from Vienna, Austria; he an engineer and employed by GE in Pittsfield until his death in 1947. His family, however, remained in the family residence and were there all during the war. During my adolescence and young manhood, I was a close friend of that family and their children.

“I enlisted and went off to war. In 1944 I was assigned to the 429th Squadron in Foggia, Italy as a Bombardier. I ultimately became Squadron Bombardier and finally, Group Bombardier. We flew to Vienna more times than I care to remember as it was one of our most difficult targets. On one mission (perhaps #344, Vienna NE Marshalling Yards), I flew as lead Bombardier. The bomb plots from our Group show a fine dispersion with the majority in the target area. Because we pattern bombed, some fell in areas adjoining the Marshalling Yards. The Palme family home was located three

blocks from the yards and bombs from my formation destroyed their home. Mr. Palme discovered this on examination of charts and bomb plots I brought home with me, confirming that his home had been hit on the precise date of my flying that mission. By good fortune, his father and mother and other family members were safely located in a bomb shelter and not at home at the time of the bomb strikes. The confirmation came from a letter his mother wrote to him months after it was first written, but it provided the date and time of the hits.

“Oh yes, the family and I are still friends.”

#### **BROD, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 345 - JANUARY 19, 1945**

Forty-one aircraft dropped 501, 500-lb. RDX bombs and 4, M26 propaganda bombs on the North Marshalling Yards at Brod. Bombing was visual and the target area was well covered. Flak was heavy, slight, moderate to accurate resulting in light wounds to 1st Lt. C. H. Conley, B, 49th Squadron.

#### **REGENSBURG/ROSENHEIM, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 346 - JANUARY 20, 1945**

At 0840 hours, 28 aircraft took off to bomb Oil Storage at Regensburg. Fifteen aircraft dropped 551, 100-lb. GP bombs on the target by PFF with unobserved results. Due to a bomb rack malfunction, ten aircraft diverted to Rosenheim Marshalling Yards and dropped 369, 100-lb. GP bombs visually with hits reported in the target area. One aircraft dropped 38, 100-lb. GP bombs on a Railroad Bridge at 47-46N - 12-28E visually with the target report as hit. Two aircraft aborted with one aircraft, #44-8168, reported missing. Flak at the primary target was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate. No injuries, one aircraft missing.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-8168, “FLYING HOME” - 49TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	William J. Wittlinger, Jr., 0-704996, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Hill W. Bohannon, 0-626479, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Samuel (NMI) Aboulfia, 0-206506, N.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Chester C. Lollar, 34802773, TOG.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Warren C. Ganue, 12022317, U/T.	(POW)
Cpl.	Edward W. Pullis, 12138777, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Thomas G. Schwarzlose, 36689315, R/W.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	George T. McCluskey, 18116758, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	John (NMI) Mikita, 36034443, T/G.	(POW)
Cpl.	James R. Harrington, 14193807, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Nowell M. Terrell, Pilot of B-17 #637, after the mission: “B-17 #168 made a radio call and said he was at 16,000 feet with two engines out and losing altitude at 300 feet per minute, and said he could possibly get across the Alps. Last seen to left of course holding reasonable altitude and heading in the direction of Yugoslavia.”

German reports record this crew as POWs and confined to prison camps.

American reports show this entire crew repatriated after the war.

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA/GRAZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 347 - JANUARY 21, 1945**

Forty aircraft took off to bomb the Schwechat Oil Refinery in Vienna. Twenty aircraft attacked this target dropping 198, 500-lb. RDX bombs by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, slight to intense, and accurate. Fifteen aircraft dropped 143, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Graz, Austria by PFF with unobserved results. One aircraft dropped 10, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Klagenfurt, Austria visually with hits on the tracks reported. Three aircraft were early returns. 2nd Lt.

J. F. Boyle, B, 96th Squadron, and Cpl. Thomas E. King, LW, 20th Squadron, were lightly wounded by flak. B-17 #44-6606, 20th Squadron, is missing.

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6606 - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Alvin L. Notheis, 0-773208, P.	(RET)
F/O	George L. Bills, T-4386, CP.	(RET)
F/O	Paul (NMI) Stephens, T-129762, N.	(RET)
1st Lt.	William T. Scott, Jr., 0-552901, B.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Joseph (NMI) Koden, 16035714, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Robert K. Train, 36894479, L/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Paul D. Surprenant, 39699651, R/W.	(RET)
Sgt.	Victor A. Lennon, 32371630, L/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Lewis H. Waters, 35893477, T/G.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Robert G. Cheney, 32547489, R/O.	(RET)

Report regarding A/C #44-6606 from 2nd Bombardment Headquarters, 22 February 1945: En route to the target, engines were detonating and using excessive fuel. After leaving target, pilot discovered that there was insufficient gasoline to return to home base, that the oxygen system was out, that two men of the crew had been wounded, this pilot headed for emergency field at Debreczen, Hungary. Because of uncertainty of position and condition of two wounded men, pilot crash landed in an open field at 47-47N - 21-00E. When aircraft crossed the Russian front lines, it was met by six Russian fighters, one of which fired warning shots. Crew held fire; pilot rocked the wings; fighters left. Aircraft was slightly damaged in crash landing.

Russians, one of which was a doctor, came to the aircraft; the two wounded men were given first aid, and subsequently were taken to a hospital in Mezo Csat, a small town six miles from the field where aircraft was crash-landed. The other men were taken to Russian Area Commandant's Headquarters in Tisza Kesci, 47-48N - 21-00E, approximately six miles north of the field. After six days, wounded men were released from hospital and joined other crew members in Tisza Kesci. All crew members lived in Commandant's quarters, a requisitioned Hungarian home, for 16 days, during which time pilot was arranging with Russians for repair of the aircraft. Such arrangements necessitated several trips to Miskoloz Airdrome; finally Russian engineering personnel were transported by truck to Tisza Kesci and repaired the damaged aircraft. A tail wheel from a German aircraft was installed on aircraft. The entire crew took off for Miskoloz airdrome where aircraft was serviced and 750 gallons of gasoline was put in tanks. The crew stayed at a local hotel in Miskoloz for five days before they were allowed to take-off; they then flew to their home base, arriving 18 February 1945, they were then sent on 19 February 1945 to Headquarters, Fifteenth Air Force, returning to their unit on 20 February 1945.

S/Sgt. Lewis H. Waters, TG on crew of 1st Lt. Alvin L. Notheis. January 3, 1995: "I graduated from Shortridge H.S. in Indianapolis, IN, in June 1943, and volunteered for the Air Force in August. I was processed through Fort Harrison and sent to Amarillo, A.F. Base for basic training. I passed the test for Air Force Cadets and was scheduled for bombardier training after the college training required. But, my records, along with 11 others, were misplaced and we languished for approximately four and one-half months with little to do. Finally our records were located, but it was too late because the Cadet program was closed. So, the 12 of us were transferred to a temporary assignment called, 'On the Line Training' at Luke A.F. Base, Arizona. There were approximately 250 cadet prospects in this program, and eventually we were all assigned to gunnery training at various bases.

“Our crew assembled at Dyersburg, Tennessee, in August 1944, and we finished training in October, 1944. We picked up our plane in Lincoln, Nebraska and flew to Foggia, Italy via Newfoundland, the Azores, and Africa.

“We didn’t have a name for our aircraft until after returning from M.I.A. in Hungary. The rear half of our plane was damaged, so engineers and ground crew replaced the rear section with a camouflaged rear half, and we ended up with a silver front half and brownish green back half, thereby ending up with a plane we called ‘HALF BREED.’

“On January 21, 1945, on a mission to Vienna, we had to leave the formation on the 2nd attempt at a bomb run due to a serious lack of oxygen. Because of weather, our only choice was to head east toward Hungary. We passed over a front line German air base and were shot at by German machine guns and 20mm cannon. We were flying at an altitude of approximately 1,500 feet, and we were hit with only two or three bullets, but one 20mm shell entered next to the ball turret and fortunately exploded upward, leaving quite a hole in the upper left side adjacent to the ball turret. Fortunately only two of us were injured, the ball turret gunner, Robert Train, and me. Bob was hit in the back and I had wounds in the hand, leg, and face. It wasn’t long before we had to land (the weather was bad), which was in an open, snow-covered field near the little village of Tisza Kesci, Hungary. Upon landing the tail wheel was torn off and the tail section damaged.

“Bob Train and I were taken to a Russian Field Hospital for treatment. Bob was released after three or four days, and I was released after one week. The Russian doctors, all female, didn’t try to remove any flak from my leg or face, just cleaned and bandaged the wounds. My transportation back to Tisza Kesci was by horse drawn wagon with me on a bed of straw. We were bivouacked with the Russians in a large house in the center of the village. Our three-week stay with the Russians is a whole other story in itself.

“Romanian mechanics and engineers, with the help of Romanian laborers, repaired our plane, replacing our tail wheel with one taken from a German transport, which was held stationary by timbers bolted together. We took off from the snow covered field and hit a small tree with the tip of our left wing, but able to fly on to Miskoloz, an industrial city about 35 miles away. We stayed there five days before flying back to our base at Foggia.

“I flew my first combat mission, November 1, 1944 to Munich, Germany, then flew my last on April 26, 1945. F/O Stephens was killed on March 15, 1945, on a raid to Ruhland, Germany while flying with another crew. Lt. Notheis stayed in Italy, after the war, flying personnel to various locations. I returned to the States and was discharged October 30, 1945.”

#### **MOOSBIERBAUM, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 348 - JANUARY 31, 1945**

Forty-two aircraft took off and 39 aircraft dropped 457, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the MOOSBIERBAUM Oil Refineries by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate. No injuries, no losses. One aircraft attacked a Marshalling Yard at 47-12N - 16-00E, dropping 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs visually with no results given. Two aircraft were early returns.

#### **GRAZ, AUSTRIA/KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 349 - FEBRUARY 1, 1945**

Forty-one aircraft took off to bomb Oil Refineries at MOOSBIERBAUM but were ordered to divert to other targets due to weather. Twenty-one aircraft dropped their 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Graz, Austria. Seven aircraft dropped their bombs on Marshalling Yards at Klagenfurt, Austria (one aircraft dropped bombs on both targets). One aircraft dropped its bombs on Marshalling Yards at 47-22N - 15-42E, and one aircraft dropped its bombs on Marshalling Yards 15 miles north of Maribor, Yugoslavia. Results were unobserved on all targets. Flak at Graz was heavy, slight, and accurate resulting in injuries to 1st Lt. J. J. Meade, N, and 1st Lt. J. M. Grady, B, both of the 20th Squadron. Twelve aircraft aborted, returning their bombs to base.

## **TRAINING FLIGHT - SAN MARCO, ITALY - 96TH SQUADRON - FEBRUARY 4, 1945**

1st Lt. Richard A. Pinner, 0-1010443, P. (DED)  
2nd Lt. Donald W. Waddell, 0-928771, CP. (DED)  
Cpl. Nelson A. Nickel, 16152682, UT. (DED)  
Cpl. John B. Anastasi, 32491318, R/O. (INJURED)

Reported missing on a routine training flight over Italy, 4 February 1945.

Reported 7 February 1945: 1st Lt. Richard A. Pinner, P, and Lt. Donald W. Waddell, CP, who were reported missing 4 February 1945 on a routine training flight to killed in accident, 4 February 1945, near San Marco, Italy. Multiple fractures, lacerations and burns.

Reported on 8 February, 1945: Cpl. John B. Anastasi, who was reported missing on routine training flight 4 February 1945, to seriously injured to absent sick (LD) 61st Station Hospital, APO 368, 5 February 1945. Diagnosis: Simple fracture of the left leg, compound fracture of right lower leg, and lacerations above the left eye.

Reported on 9 February 1945: Cpl. Nelson A. Nickel, to killed in aircraft accident (LD) 4 February 1945, near San Marco, Italy: compound fracture skull, extensive simple fracture dorsal spine and left femur; flying status Upper Turret Gunner.

February 4, 1945, Sunday. Today I was scheduled to go to the Rest Camp on the Isle of Capri. I was up early and down on the flight line only to find that the flight had been canceled; weather? Back again in the early p.m. and took off for Naples. Arrived there in mid-afternoon, caught a truck to the Rest Camp hotel and checked in. Spent the night there. Up early the next day but boat for Capri didn't leave until early p.m. The day was overcast but crossing was smooth. Checked into the Windsor Hotel. There I met four enlisted crew men from the 96th. S/Sgt. James H. Pewitt, S/Sgt. Franklin Keller, S/Sgt. Ross Sessions, and S/Sgt. Ernest Short were all on the crew of Captain Charles Childs. They were all battle hardened veterans and in need of a break from the exhausting missions they had been flying. For me it was just one break from the frustrations of, now, three years service, 22 months overseas, a recent 'Dear John' letter and the only hope of seeing home was the war's end, which still seemed many months away. Little did they know what lay ahead of them. Pewitt would be seriously wounded February 21st, hospitalized and returned to hospitals in the States. For him the war was over. Keller and Short were flying with Colonel Ryan on the 28th of February when their ship was badly shot up. Ryan, Short and two others were wounded and two men were killed.

The hotel was top drawer, big beds, clean sheets, maid service. Our assigned eating place was the LaPalma Hotel, and here too, fine service, silverware, music, and good food. We wound up that night at Luigi's, drinking Italian champagne, getting a little high. On the way back to the hotel we ran into an Italian who guided us to a place for black market steaks and potatoes. Expensive but very good!

We spent our days roaming the Island and most nights down at Luigi's. One night we went to the Seaside Club to a dance - plenty of Wacs, Red Cross and Italian girls to dance with. Went into the Blue Grotto one day, exciting getting in because of rough water but beautiful to see. Another point of interest was Rudolph Valentino's villa, which had been converted to a club - seems to be a lot of clubs for the men's entertainment. One day we went way up to see the castle (villa?) of Tiberius. One story I remember was of a large room with a window overlooking the rocks and ocean below. Seems that when he got tired of a wife or mistress he had them thrown out that window. How strange you remember insignificant things. This same day we were riding way up to Tiberius' castle and we passed a man riding a donkey. A few paces behind plodded a woman carrying a large log on her shoulders. It must have been ten or twelve inches in diameter and six to eight feet long. This behavior seemed to be the norm in Latin countries; women were oppressed.

We sailed back to the mainland on the 11th of February. It was a drizzly, windy day. The water was rough and many were sick. We fellows had abstained from drinking the night before so had no trouble. Upon arrival we were trucked to the Rest Camp Hotel. The weather was bad and our plane

had not arrived for us so we spent the night there - cots, what a comedown! On the 12th, the plane came but was not going back until the next day. No beds were available at the hotel so the five of us went out on the town to find a place to bed down for the night in Italian homes. Cigarettes and soap were more in demand than money.

We were up early and went to the Red Cross to eat and then back to the hotel. Our plane was going back so we boarded and were airborne at 3:21; flew out of the weather and had a beautiful flight back to the Base. Back to the old grind!

### **REGENSBURG, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 350 - FEBRUARY 5, 1945**

Forty-one aircraft took off to bomb the Rhenani and Danubia Storage Facilities at Regensburg. Thirty-one aircraft dropped their 250-lb. GP bombs on the primary target by PFF with unobserved results. One aircraft dropped its bombs on Marshalling Yards at Salzburg, Austria visually with hits observed in the Yards. One aircraft dropped its bombs on Marshalling Yards at Lienz, Austria, with hits severing the tracks in the Yards. A total of 758, 250-lb. GP and 6, 500-lb. GP bombs were dropped on the three targets. Two aircraft were early returns. Flak at the primary target was heavy, slight, and accurate. A/C #44-6678, 429th Squadron, is missing.

B-17 #530, piloted by 2nd Lt. J. E. Weber, was forced to make an emergency landing at Falcenaro Airdrome, Italy due to a fuel shortage. There were no injuries.

B-17 #42-102493, piloted by 2nd Lt. R. B. Edelen, was destroyed in a taxi accident. There were no injuries.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6678 - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Maurice D. Porter, 0-826284, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Donald M. Fishback, 0-927014, CP.	(POW)
F/O	John E. Skoba, T-129305, N.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	John P. Olinik, 36892273, TOG.	(INTERNEDED)
S/Sgt.	Charles E. Smith, 34773171, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Christian L. Fredrickson, 39923520, L/T	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Arden O. Lannigan, 19199892, R/W.	(INTERNEDED)
S/Sgt.	Glenn W. Machovec, 37682987, L/W.	(INTERNEDED)
S/Sgt.	Franklin T. Whartman, 17142758, T/G.	(INTERNEDED)
T/Sgt.	Kenneth L. Hoffman, 19123112, R/O.	(INTERNEDED)

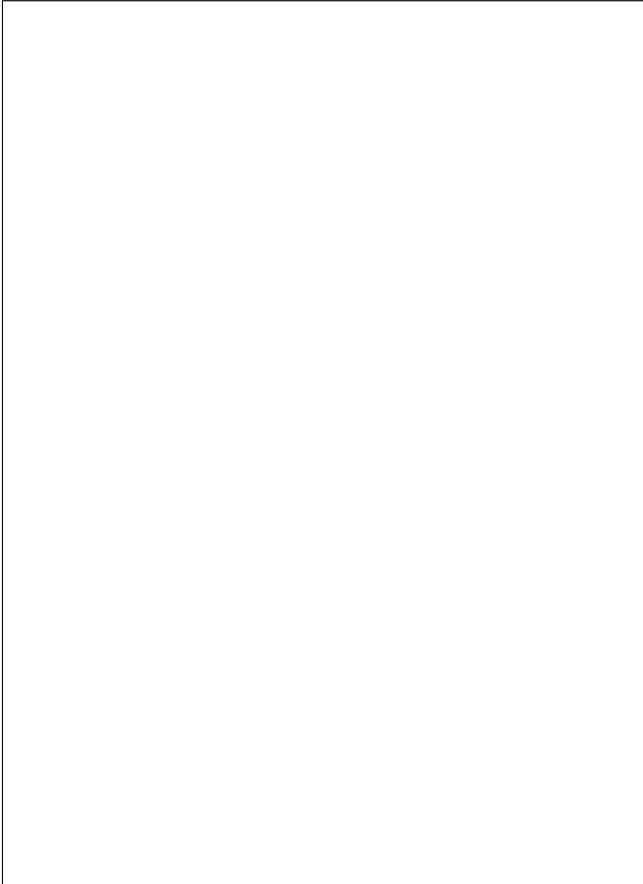
Statement of S/Sgt. Charles C. Turner, RO on B-17 #1108, after the mission: "I heard a radio message from aircraft #678 as follows: VZZF-losing altitude. Trying to make Switzerland - 40 gallons of gasoline left. Above is all I heard. No observations. This was at 1450 hours at 45-40N - 12-30E."

Statement of S/Sgt. Glenn W. Machovec, LW, after return to Allied control: "All members of the crew bailed out. F/O Skoba bail out, two men ahead of me. I saw him leave in good condition. We bailed at 17,000 feet and he could have lost consciousness from lack of oxygen and failed to pull cord. Our plane struck the ground in Switzerland. Four members of the crew were captured in Germany and five others, including myself, escaped to Switzerland, leaving F/O Skoba, the crew member missing."

The following translated story is from the Switzerland newspaper, *Engadiner Post*, 10 February 1945, and furnished by Fredy Peter, a Swiss historian. Report from Schuls: On 5 February 1945, also Schuls had been overflown by foreign aircrafts. According to the noise, the aircrafts must have been fighting each other. One could hear the high pitch of fighters as well as loud sound of bombers.

Nothing however could be seen due to the snow storm. After several detonations, the noise disappeared in the direction of Scarltal. One of the aircrafts then crashed in the steep slopes near Alps Plazer. No trace from crew.

As the local customs officers went to the crash site to see if they could help the crew, they were surprised by an avalanche and thrown down the slope. Border policeman G. Konnte was able to free himself and discovered, after much searching, the finger tips of his comrade in the snow. He was able to free him alive.



S/Sgt. John P. Olinik - (Courtesy - Olinik)

Sgt. John P. Olinik. February 14, 1996: "This is my condensed copy of my 28th mission to Regensburg, Germany, from my unpublished copyright book, *A GOING CONCERN*: At 7:30 a.m. February 5, 1945, our Flying Fortress, loaded with (10) 500-lb. bombs took off from Amendola Airfield in Foggia, Italy. Our bombing target today was to destroy the remaining oil refineries in Regensburg, Germany. It was a beautiful morning as we crossed the Adriatic Sea and approached the Swiss Alps. As we got nearer the target, and into Germany, we were greeted with heavy flak from all directions. Most of the Squadron got through unscathed and with little damage. Finally, over the target, I released my bombs, closed the bomb bay doors and started to head home. A heavy snow storm and blizzard with strong winds developed. Also, we got some more heavy flak and at this point, we got hit and lost (2) engines and started to lose fuel very rapidly. The pilot, Lt. Maurice Porter, radioed the lead commander and informed him of our situation. We then began to lose altitude as we left the formation and headed south, hopefully,

towards Switzerland. The heavy snow and winds still raged outside with visibility zero. We were now off course and probably lost. The crew started to throw out all loose baggage and ammo to lighten the ship. A few minutes later, the pilot put the plane on auto pilot and yelled, 'everyone out.' When I bailed out, my chute got jammed and did not open right away. I had a chest type on which had a small flap on top and I immediately started to struggle with it and finally a small chute opened and triggered a larger chute to open. Several moments later, I landed in the snow in the mountains in the Alps. Gathering my parachute, I sat down and thanked the Lord for a safe landing.

"The snow was still coming down fiercely and visibility was about zero. About an hour later, I heard a gunshot and before long I found another crew member, Glenn Machovec, waist gunner. We spent the night huddled up in my parachute as the blizzard continued. The next morning the weather cleared a little and we decided to start walking. The snow finally stopped and the weather cleared. In

the distance we saw a couple of figures making their way towards us and they were (2) more crew members, S/Sgt. Ken Hoffman and S/Sgt. Arden Lannigan.

“We started to walk again until we stumbled on an abandoned German cabin. On the front door, the nameplate read (STRUSSBURGER HUTTEE, GERMANY, 1907), which probably meant that we were still on the German side of the Alps. Inside the cabin were (4) beds, nicely made up, an assortment of pictures, maps, and several Swastika flags. Hitler’s picture was on the wall. We spent a week or so here but with the rest of the rations gone, we started making plans to start our way out of there. Studying the maps, we decided to head South and East towards Switzerland.



A/C #44-6678 - Down in the Alps 2-5-45 (Courtesy - Olinik)

“A couple of days later, the weather cleared and we started our decent down the mountain. Each man was tied to each other at 20 foot intervals for safety reasons. We encountered endless ravines, slippery rocks and deep snow making walking very difficult. Towards evening we found another cabin. We had to break in where we found a pantry full of canned food and fruit. After resting a day or so, we stored up on food and proceeded our trip down again. After a couple of hours, we got lucky when we ran into a Swiss Ski Patrol. We now were in Swiss territory and were told we were interned. We proceeded walking to the small town of Chur where we were fed and put up for the night in a hotel.

“The next morning we were put on a train with a couple of guards and proceeded to Bern, then Zurich and finally Geneva, where we were interrogated, given new clothes and assigned quarters in an Army barracks. There were about 30 more crew members here who were shot down and interned for the rest of the war. Eventually, after a few weeks, we got repatriation orders and were flown to Marseille, France, and then to Naples, Italy. We made a short stop at our base in Foggia for a visit. Soon after, we boarded a troop ship and headed home. After an R&R in Miami, Florida, and a (30) day furlough, finally got reassigned to the National Aeronautical Committee for Aeronautics, as a design

engineer, at Langley Field, Virginia. When the war ended in 1945 I got an honorable discharge in November 1945 and returned to civilian life. Four of our crew, Lt. Maurice Porter, pilot; Lt. Don Fishback, co-pilot; Sgt. Charles Smith, Eng.; S/Sgt. Christian Fredrickson, ball turret, all landed on the German side of the Alps and got captured and were POWs. F/O John Skoba, navigator, landed on the rocky side of the mountain and was killed. S/Sgt. Franklin Whartman, tail gunner, made his way to Switzerland alone.”

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 351 - FEBRUARY 7, 1945**

Forty-two aircraft took off to bomb the Lobau Oil Refinery at Vienna. The First Wave dropped its 500-lb. RDX bombs by offset bombing. Results were unobserved due to an effective smoke screen. The Second Wave, one hour later, was able to bomb visually with its bombs in the target area. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate. A/C #44-6682 was hit by flak and the pilot radioed he was heading for the Russian lines. 2nd Lt. R. W. Harp, N, 429th Squadron, was lightly wounded by flak.

One aircraft dropped its bombs on a Railroad Bridge at 46-43N - 15-13E. One aircraft dropped its bombs on a Railroad Track at 47-00N - 16-00E. One aircraft dropped its bombs on a Railroad Bridge at 47-12N - 15-20E. Reports did not note results. One aircraft was an early return and another aborted.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6682 - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Dale E. Gold, 0-819997, P.	(POW)
1st Lt.	Wayne L. Rickert, 0-822080, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Andrew E. McGuire, 0-2071813, N.	(POW)
1st Lt.	Ellsworth L. Dougherty, 0-718083, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Louis D. Kaszak, 16138903, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Robert H. Gale, 18232323, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Andrew G. McCay, Jr., 13012702, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Albert H. Matula, 37475019, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Lawrence W. Burger, 37583388, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Duane J. Young, 16154396, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of T/Sgt. Robert H. Sherwood, UTG, after the mission: “We were on the bomb run, at an altitude of 29,000 feet. The time was 1419 hours, when I first noticed plane #682, which was flying number three position in the Second Squadron on our right. The plane received either a direct hit or near miss from flak on the under side of the left wing, which threw the plane into a steep right bank. The pilot of the plane immediately tried to correct this and the plane went into a steep bank to the left and in doing so, went into a skid and passed under our plane, just avoiding a collision. I watched the plane for the next two or three minutes and he continued on out in his skid, losing altitude rapidly and then into a cloud. That was the last I saw of plane #682.”

Statement of 1st Lt. Dale E. Gold, P, after liberation: “We left the formation over the target and bailed out about 20 minutes later. All crew members bailed out at one minute intervals in the area of Papa, Hungary. All my men were captured and made prisoners of war. S/Sgt. Matula was killed. He was seen by the tail gunner just before he hit the ground. His chute billowed only a short distance from the ground and collapsed. His chute was either full of holes or there was a malfunction.

“I last saw all the crew at a prison camp near Moosdorf, south of Munich, on the seventh of May, 1945.”

### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 352 - FEBRUARY 8, 1945**

Twenty-seven aircraft took off and dropped 313, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Southwest Goods Section of Vienna. Bombing was by PFF and offset bombing with results unobserved. Flak was heavy, intense and accurate. Colonel Richard E. Waugh, Headquarters, was slightly wounded by flak. There were no losses.

### **MOOSBIERBAUM, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 353 - FEBRUARY 9, 1945**

Three aircraft took off at 0843 hours and dropped 34, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Oil Refinery at Moosbierbaum by PFF with unobserved results. Landing was at 1450 hours.

### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 354 - FEBRUARY 13, 1945**

Forty-two aircraft dropped 410, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the South Ordnance Depot in Vienna. Bombing was by PFF and offset bombing was used with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate, resulting in the death of S/Sgt. Paul W. Hampstein, 429th Squadron, and wounding of Cpl. W. Kopke, 20th Squadron.

### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA/GRAZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 355 - FEBRUARY 14, 1945**

The assigned target was the Schwechat Oil Refinery in Vienna. The First Wave of 25 aircraft took off at 0830 hours and dropped 210, 500-lb. RDX bombs by PFF with unobserved results. The Second Wave took off at 0930 hours and diverted to bomb the Marshalling Yards at Graz with 14 aircraft dropping 187, 500-lb. RDX bombs visually with hits reported in the Yards. One aircraft dropped its bombs on Railroad Tracks at 47-18N - 16-02E with unreported results. Flak at the targets was heavy, moderate to accurate, resulting in the wounding of 2nd Lt. D. E. Jones, N, 20th Squadron.

B-17 #44-6659, 429th Squadron, which was flying in the formation bombing Vienna, is missing. Two aircraft were early returns.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6659 - "HELLS ANGELS" - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Robert E. Davis, 0-826889, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Frank S. Covey, 0-838667, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Edward P. Perry, 0-2065096, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Harold P. Marsh, 0-2069641, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Donald A. Bruegeman, 39468843, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Bobbie A. Davis, 34835407, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Emil P. Uhor, 15075526, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Richard (NMI) Hearing, 33611026, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Gerald P. Dickerson, 15125559, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Max A. Little, 19159865, R/O.	(POW)

1st Lt. Frank S. Covey, CP, after liberation: "We were 30 miles from Vienna when we left the formation. All crew members bailed out and nine members of the crew landed within a ten-mile radius of the village of Dubova, Czechoslovakia and were captured. The tenth member, S/Sgt. Hearing, was seen to leave the ship and his chute was seen to open but he was never seen subsequently."

2nd Lt. Edward P. Perry in his book, *RECALLING WORLD WAR II, A Personal Experience*, published by Vantage Press Inc., relates his experience of the mission to Vienna. January 18, 1993: "The target was the Schwechat Oil Refinery in Vienna. Since the target was predicted to be visual according to the weather briefing, we were to go over in Squadron trail, or only nine ships over the target at a time - just one long narrow parade of planes. Intelligence reported that Vienna was protected

by 360 flak guns, so we knew it would not be a happy Valentine's Day. My navigation work was good and my ETA right on the button. We caught accurate flak at the Initial Point, with the entire bomb run flown through a cloud of steel. They had our number from the start. Smoke from the exploding shells filled the plane. A piece of flak tore off my helmet and another zipped along my left leg and through some flesh at the calf.

"The bombardier assigned to this mission, Marsh, was hit in the chest with a small piece of flak. Fortunately, he was wearing his flak vest as designed - as a vest. Because of a morbid fear of flak arriving from below and traveling up into my rear end, I had developed the bad habit of sitting on my flak vest. The force of the blow threw Marsh against me and I landed under the cockpit. We got the bombs off on the target OK and then the real trouble began. The number two engine had been knocked out completely and the prop started to windmill causing the ship to vibrate worse than an old Model T. Frantic efforts to control or feather the prop was unsuccessful. To finish things off, a fire started in the left wing. A fire near the gas tanks is a sure sign of approaching death, so the order to bail out was given by the pilot, Bob Davis. The plane was in a steep glide and seemed ready to start its spin. Then came the pleas through the intercom directed to me as the navigator: 'Where are we? Where the hell are we?' I know our location but the worst would happen. I could not reply! The wire from the microphone neck unit had been cut. It is difficult to describe the closeness that develops among members of a combat crew. Not being able to come through for them at that moment, when needed so, will always be one of my life's serious regrets.

"The formation was now almost out of sight. The cover flew away as I pulled the escape hatch lever. Looking down, I could see the fields and woods far below. What a terrible, low, depressed feeling - all alone in the middle of an enemy country. It must be a nightmare; but no it isn't. This is really happening! We were about 22,000 feet as I tumbled out of the hatch. If possible I wanted to free-fall to about 10,000 feet before pulling the ripcord. There is no sensation quite like falling through the air. The only noise is that of the wind whistling past. The only pain is that in your ears as the air pressure builds. These sharp pains are relieved by almost constant 'popping.' I felt myself losing consciousness at about 12,000 feet, so I had to pull the ripcord. The jerk of the chute was sickening but the sight of the big white umbrella overhead was a welcome sight. I had hardly enough time to get settled before bullets started whistling past, first the hissing noise, then the sharp crack. Guess it's true you may not hear the one that gets you. Maybe I should have delayed opening my chute a little longer, but then I didn't think anything like this could happen. The bitter realities of war even included shooting helpless, tied up victims like myself. I acted as though I had been hit by hanging limply as my head rolled around. Apparently it was a bad performance. The bullets continued to whistle by.

"The fact of facing almost certain death finally sank in. I said a prayer that Mom and Dad would soon recover from their grief. I also prayed that if He willed, I might have a safe deliverance. After that, followed a strange period of absolute mental calm with no fear or anxiety. It was a feeling beyond description - one of absolute peace - a power 'which passeth all understanding.' Looking back, I know I had a chosen encounter with a very loving and personal God.

"The ground started coming at me pretty fast and I had trouble getting my back to the wind. Once, while trying to turn around, I almost spilled my chute. That stopped my messing around. The trip down, which seemed like an eternity, finally ended when I cracked into the top of a tall pine tree.

"Hanging there in the harness, swaying back and forth, I looked down. Two deer scurried away through the snow. This can't be happening, but why don't I wake up? It was always the other guy that didn't get back. This just can't be for real.

"I managed to swing to the trunk of the tree, unbuckled the parachute from the harness, and climbed down. The parachute hanging over most of the tree top was a dead giveaway and would soon attract company. I started to run through the forest with no particular object in mind. Because of the snow and the heavy flying suit I was wearing, it didn't take long to become exhausted. Walking along

a small ridge, I noticed six men in the valley below. I knew I was very close to the Austrian border, or perhaps had even crossed over into Czechoslovakia. We had been briefed that some pro-Allied activity was taking place in that area. These men were wearing brown uniforms, not like the German uniform that I knew of. Maybe I had come across a small group of friendly guerrillas. Deciding my only chance was to make contact, I walked down to them with my hands held high. They started calling out, 'Comrade, comrade,' and proceeded to shake my hands with friendly pats on the back. Overjoyed, I passed around cigarettes and tried to understand what they were telling me. One of the Slovaks guided me to a small tunnel, and by drawing a circle on the ground, gave me to understand he would be back at 7 p.m. to take me out. The tunnel, about three feet high, led to a small chamber. I had just finished cleaning my pistol and was looking over my escape maps we were given when outside I heard a whistle and saw a couple of blue uniforms. Apparently my buddies had betrayed me. My first thought was of the blue SS troop uniforms and what would lie ahead in that case. They started shouting something about shooting and pointed their rifles at the cave. From where I lay, the automatic rifles looked like cannons. Immediately, all desire of fighting left me (not that I had much desire to begin with).

"For the life of me I couldn't recall the German word for 'surrender,' so I started shouting, 'Comrade, comrade,' and proceeded to crawl out with a white handkerchief in my hand and heart in my mouth. Outside it seemed as though the whole German army was waiting for me.

"A sergeant searched me while the others trained their guns on me, an unnecessary precaution indeed. After the search, I ended up with nothing but a pencil, and surprisingly the gold signet ring with a diamond, given me as a junior high school graduation present. Apparently it just wasn't noticed. I was marched for about three miles to a small village where just about the entire population came out to see this curiosity. Unlike many (maybe most) of the German civilians, these people were not hostile, merely inquisitive. One woman, who I took to be an imported Russian slave worker, looked me over, shook her head, and said what sounded like, 'Oh he is so young.' After a short wait for transportation, I was taken to a larger town, Mostar. Here I was marched with soldiers to a large building containing their living quarters. While sitting on the bench with the soldiers, a German officer entered. The men, of course, snapped to attention and stayed that way while the officer really gave them hell. Later, one of the soldiers confirmed what I had realized from my high school German. They disobeyed orders not to take prisoners, and I was not supposed to be alive. That's why I can't hate all Germans - just some. The raw realities of war continued to sink in.

"It was then about 5 p.m., and I sat in the barracks until about 8 p.m. Marsh, the bombardier, had also been brought in. I had a terrific headache, and every muscle in my body ached also. By feeling around, I discovered I had been scratched up a bit upon landing, but nothing serious. Fortunately my leg had stopped bleeding, and although my body ached inside and out, no bones seemed to be broken.

"It was about 8 o'clock when Marsh and I were loaded into a small sort of bus and taken to a private home. The several men sitting in the room wore plain civilian clothes - and I was not happy - thinking for sure the Gestapo had us. To add to the concern, several horsewhips and pieces of rubber hose were hanging on the wall. We were offered some sausage and dark bread, but foolishly we refused to eat. I do not understand why, because we were certainly very hungry and there were no laws against eating - just talking. Maybe we were afraid of being poisoned. Marsh was then escorted from the room. Two of the men, who spoke English quite well, then started to question me, and this interrogation continued until after midnight. No torture or rough stuff was used. When Marsh returned he also said he made out OK and also had not been roughed up. Happily our Gestapo fears appeared to be unfounded. Apparently the rubber hoses and whips were displayed for psychological effect - at least in our case.

“Thinking back, these men were probably members of the town council or whatever is local power. Of course this would mean they were Gestapo, or at least under Nazi control. Maybe it’s best not trying to figure it out - just accept the mild interrogation as just another blessing.

“So far all my actions had been ‘by the book:’ no conversations with German soldiers, no friendly gestures, etc. Also no answers to questions other than the permitted name, rank, and serial number. This goes with the job of course. But it may have served a very practical purpose. Perhaps it is logical to assume that if any useful information were furnished, I would be of no further use (alive that is).

“Shortly after midnight we were marched to what must have been the town jail, and the rest of the night we spent on some boards that served as a cot. No blankets were offered. And it was cold! However feeling miserable and in a state of exhaustion, I slept like a rock until awakened at dawn.”

Lt. Perry eventually was confined in a permanent camp at Langwasser, near Nurnberg, and the rest of the crew, except S/Sgt. Uhor, was confined there also. The camp was evacuated April 4th, 1945 and forced marched, in the bitter cold, away from the advancing Russian army. Lt. Perry developed double lobar pneumonia while on the march and finally was hospitalized at a POW camp near Moosdorf. The camp was liberated April 29th by American forces. He was transferred to hospitals in Regensburg, Germany, Rheims, France, and Verdun, France, released June 8th and transferred to LaHavre for return to the U.S.

T/Sgt. Gerald Voss, Jr. was the Radio Operator on the crew of Lt. Eliot B. Spiess. They were assigned to the 96th Squadron, August 26, 1944. November 26, 1994: “I was fortunate to survive my fifty missions, (35 sorties) due to the severity of them. My first mission was to bomb railroad bridges at Budapest, Hungary, September 5, 1944.

“I had missions to Salzburg (1), Linz (2), one of which was a night mission, and Vienna (9). Those missions to Vienna were extremely tough due to all the flak batteries that were surrounding the city and oil refineries.

“I had three missions to Brux and one to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia. Brux was very rough. I went to Blechhammer (3), Regensburg (2), and Lechfield (1). Of course, everyone knew that trips into Germany spelled nothing but trouble.

“I went to an airfield in Athens, Greece one time and once each to Budapest and Debreczen, Hungary. Debreczen is where “Sweet Pea” took a terrible hit, but came home. I had three trips into Northern Italy: Bologna, Treviso, and Verona; one to Ordea Marshalling Yards, Romania, and three to Yugoslavia, Brod, Maribor, and Sabotica.

“My last mission was on February 14, 1945 to the Schwechat Oil Refineries in Vienna, Austria. What a target to finish my missions! The 429th lost a ship that day.”

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 356 - FEBRUARY 15, 1945**

Eighteen aircraft took off and 15 aircraft dropped their 500-lb. RDX bombs on the South Station Freight Yards in Vienna. Bombing was by PFF with unobserved results. One aircraft bombed Wiener Neustadt, Austria by PFF. One aircraft bombed Marshalling Yards at Klagenfurt visually, with hits reported. One aircraft bombed Treibach, Austria Marshalling Yards visually, with hits reported. A total of 202, 500-lb. RDX bombs were dropped on the four targets. Flak at the primary target was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate. No losses.

#### **VIPITENO, ITALY/BOLZANO, ITALY/HALL, AUSTRIA/LANDBURG, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 357 - FEBRUARY 16, 1945**

The assigned target was the Lechfield Airdrome, Germany but weather forced both waves to selected alternates. The First Wave of 20 aircraft took off at 0630 hours and seven aircraft bombed Marshalling Yards at Vipiteno, Italy. Seven aircraft bombed an Airdrome at Landsburg, Germany. Six aircraft bombed a Railroad two and one-half miles south of Bolzano, Italy.

Nineteen aircraft took off in the Second Wave at 0636 hours. Five aircraft bombed Marshalling Yards at Hall, Austria. Two aircraft bombed Marshalling Yards at Vipiteno, Italy. Eight aircraft bombed a Railroad Line two and one-half miles south of Bolzano, Italy. One aircraft was an early return and three aborted. A total of 528, 100-lb. bombs were dropped on all the targets.

Flak was heavy, intense and accurate at some targets seriously wounding S/Sgt. E. W. Finch and light wounds to 1st Lt. James R. Mitchell, 1st Lt. D. N. Drice, 2nd Lt. O. T. Merwin, 2nd Lt. H. L. Hodges, 2nd Lt. W. J. Morrow, 2nd Lt. W. J. Gotter, T/Sgt. A. L. Walker, S/Sgt. H. W. Strutt, and Cpl. C. L. Refford. Good bombing results were reported at all targets by both waves.

#### **LINZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 358 - FEBRUARY 17, 1945**

Twenty-nine aircraft took off and 28 aircraft dropped 336, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Main Station Marshalling Yards at Linz by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, moderate, and accurate with no injuries and no losses. One aircraft was an early return.

#### **LINZ/SALZBURG, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 359 - FEBRUARY 18, 1945**

The intended target was the Linz Benzol Plant but 14 aircraft diverted to bomb the Industrial Center at Linz, dropping 166, 500-lb. RDX bombs by PFF with unobserved results. Thirteen aircraft diverted to bomb Marshalling Yards at Salzburg, Austria, dropping 156, 500-lb. RDX bombs with unobserved results. Two aircraft were early returns. There were no injuries and no losses.

#### **KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 360 - FEBRUARY 19, 1945**

The primary target was Vienna but due to high winds, the Group diverted to the Marshalling Yards at Klagenfurt. Several runs were made at the target before 26 aircraft dropped 292, 500-lb. RDX bombs visually on the target. A good bomb pattern in the Yards was reported. There was little flak, no injuries and no losses.

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 361 - FEBRUARY 20, 1945**

Twenty-nine aircraft took off with 26 dropping 264, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Lobau Oil Refinery in Vienna. Bombing was by visual and offset methods with a good concentration of bombs in the target area. Flak was heavy, moderate, and accurate. 1st Lt. William T. Hix, 429th Squadron, was the lead bombardier and though mortally wounded by flak, remained at his post and completed releasing the bombs. S/Sgt. R. D. Bradley, 96th Squadron, was lightly wounded. Six aircraft dropped 68, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Steel Works at Kapfenberg, Austria visually with some hits reported in the target area.

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 362 - FEBRUARY 21, 1945**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off with 26 aircraft dropping 301, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Central Yards and Shops in the Vienna Marshalling Yards. Bombing was visual and a good concentration of hits were recorded. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate resulting in injuries to S/Sgt. T. R. Lively, B, 20th Squadron, and S/Sgt. James. H. Pewitt, LWG, 96th Squadron. Flak also accounted for loss of two B-17s of the 429th Squadron.

One aircraft dropped 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Feiskritz, Austria and another aircraft dropped 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at 46-24N - 15-50E. Results were not recorded.

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6198 - "DOLLAR 98" - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt. Robert P. Trowbridge, 0-827083, P. (POW)  
2nd Lt. William D. Struby, 0-829099, CP. (POW)  
2nd Lt. Allen W. Swain, 0-2064355, N. (DED)  
S/Sgt. Arthur B. Hauft, 12083561, TOG. (POW)  
S/Sgt. Dozier W. Linder, 34775580, U/T. (POW)  
S/Sgt. Donald F. Moon, 37634486, L/T. (POW)  
S/Sgt. Edward L. Fry, 33763314, R/W. (POW)  
S/Sgt. Leigh W. Fuller, 42030388, L/W. (POW)  
S/Sgt. Richard N. Schrode, 17164752, T/G. (POW)  
S/Sgt. Ira L. Cox, 38494426, R/O. (POW)

B-17 #198 was observed to have one engine feathered at the target area, after bombs away. The aircraft was losing altitude and seen in a turn going toward Russian lines. This is the last known information about this aircraft.

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6689 - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt. Eugene F. Bull, 0-672321, P. (RET)  
2nd Lt. Harold E. Frazer, 0-825141, CP. (RET)  
2nd Lt. John R. Specker, 0-2072373, N. (RET)  
2nd Lt. Robert C. Krejsa, 0-776933, B. (POW)  
T/Sgt. Lewis E. Fifield, 11014690, U/T. (POW)  
S/Sgt. William E. Martin, Jr., 38517837, L/T. (POW)  
S/Sgt. Clyde T. Freestone, 39923682, R/W. (POW)  
S/Sgt. John Gillece, 12041244, L/W. (POW)  
T/Sgt. Ted J. Bunnell, 6920232, T/G. (DED)  
T/Sgt. Jesse A. Killian, 13120001, R/O. (POW)

T/Sgt. Bunnell died of wounds in a German hospital

Statement of 1st Lt. John D. Sisson, B, on B-17 #581, after the mission: "Coming off the target after we had gotten clear of the flak, plane #689 appeared under us heading for the Russian lines. A big hole behind his No. 4 engine was burning. This was at approximately 1305 hours at an altitude of 23,000 over Neustadter Lake. At about 1306 hours, one parachute appeared. The plane was under control but was losing altitude rapidly with pieces of wing breaking off.

"When I last saw plane #689, he was south of Gyor and I believe he was heading for Papa. I would judge he was about 20 to 30 miles from the Russian lines."

Statement of T/Sgt. Jesse E. Killian, RO, after liberation: "We were in the No. 3 lead box when we were hit over the target and left the formation. The time was 1259 and we were at an altitude of 23,000 feet.

"All of our crew bailed out of the plane over Hungary at approximately one and one-half hours after target time. We headed for Russian lines but were unable to make them. Our aircraft struck the ground about 30 miles south of Gyor.

"The last seen of the pilot, co-pilot, bombardier, and navigator was just before we bailed out of the plane. I saw, and was with, the rest of the crew after we were taken prisoner. The two waist gunners were injured, and the tail gunner was injured seriously. The ball gunner and top gunner were not injured at all.

"The tail gunner was wounded while in the plane and then shot through the feet coming down or either just after landing. He was refused medical treatment for approximately three days. The last

time I saw him he was at a German airfield at Papa, Hungary, at which time he was taken to a German hospital located in Hungary. The right waist gunner, S/Sgt. Clyde Freestone, and the left waist gunner, S/Sgt. John Gillecee, were also taken to the same hospital. The other crew members, consisting of top turret gunner, T/Sgt. Lewis Fifield; ball turret gunner, S/Sgt. William E. Martin; and myself were left at the field for a period of 14 days and then after being joined by S/Sgt. Freestone, were taken to Germany. S/Sgt. Gillecee joined us in the prison camp around the first of April, 1945, and then told us that T/Sgt. Bunnell had died in the hospital. However, this information had been gained from the Germans and we had no way to prove it.”

1st Lt. Eugene F. Bull was the pilot at the date of assignment to the 429th Squadron, and other crew members were: 2nd Lt. James B. Brown, CP; 1st Lt. Bernard W. Stark, N; 2nd Lt. Robert C. Krejsa, B; T/Sgt. Lewis E. Fifield, Engineer; Cpl. Jesse A. Killian, RO; and gunners, S/Sgt. Ted J. Bunnell, Cpl. Clyde T. Freestone, and Cpl. William E. Martin, Jr. September 7, 1992: “On the 2-21-45 mission, my co-pilot was 2nd Lt. Harold E. Frazer; navigator was 2nd Lt. John R. Specker, Jr.; and my left waist gunner was S/Sgt. John Gillecee. The rest were my regular crew.

“I kept a diary of sorts until my paper ran out so I do know what happened on 2-21-45. We bombed Vienna at 1300 hours. Right after bomb release, I received two direct hits by 88s, one in the tail cutting rudder controls and losing most of the vertical stabilizer and the left elevator. The tail gunner came out OK. One took most of the wing between Nos. 3 and 4 and I lost both engines and right aileron. The blast knocked out the right window. By way of explanation, I was flying on the right hand side, Wing man for the Group leader. The co-pilot was a first pilot on his sixth mission to check out before returning to his own crew. It was customary for new pilots to fly for a few combat missions, as co-pilot, with an experienced crew. I had one and a half years as an instructor and think I was one of the hightime pilots in the Group. Since I could fly from either side, I asked Frazer if he wanted to fly left side since he was a first pilot and he agreed to fly there. When we got hit, I was in the right and my regular navigator was in the lead ship and saw me get hit by flak and reported me gone when he got back. I was hit in the right shoulder but not bad, however, I was blown over and forward by the blast. The hit turned the ship almost over and was on fire which blew itself out, together with the Co2.

“I was losing altitude about 800 feet per minute and trying to get the ship under control. We had bombed at 25,000 feet and I got righted out at 9,500. The choice was where to go next with only partial controls and losing altitude. The Russians were closest and I was afraid I wouldn’t be able to clear the Alps, if I got that far.

“At briefing we were told the location of the Russian lines and so I turned toward Russian territory and was losing altitude at 500-800 feet per minute. After we left the target area, I told my engineer, Sgt. Fifield, to get rid of everything; guns, ball turret, and all other extra weight. We flew east until we could see Lake Balaton where we were jumped by four Me-109s. I told the crew to bail out and after I saw the chutes open, I told the officers to bail out; navigator, bombardier, and then the co-pilot. They went out the nose hatch. When the co-pilot went out I saw he had his leg straps hanging loose. The next time I saw him, he said he started to slip out of his harness and he threw his shoes, which were tied together by the laces, and caught them on his foot.

“The fighters were attacking the ship and at least one of them went after the men in the chutes. Lt. Specker was wounded and Lt. Krejsa had a big hole blown in his chute. I put the plane in a dive and then pulled up and turned into the 109s but had no luck in trying to ram them. I was hit several times by 20mm cannon fire and machine gun fire. Two hits were in the cockpit area, blowing off the top turret. The second one came in the cockpit on the pilots side (I was standing between the seats) and took the wheel right out of my hand, blew out the left window and windshield. I wasn’t touched but at this point I figured I had pushed my luck as far as prudent, and bailed out the escape hatch. I delayed my jump as I could see the fighters going after other chutes, and delayed my opening until I was about

300 feet from the ground and, as a result, I fractured my back. Although I couldn't move my legs, I saw a German soldier head toward me so I shot at him and he dropped and I didn't see him again. Feeling came back to my legs so I started toward the Russian line and they started shooting, but missed. They picked me up and took me to a Field HQ where they worked me over thinking I was German because I was blond, fair and tall. They took my watch and gun but then found a pack of Old Gold cigarettes in my leg pocket and then decided I was American, which I had been telling them all along. After a time, and giving me back my belongings, they brought in Lt. Frazer. We were then taken to the Headquarters of a Russian General. There I met Lt. Krejsa and we were taken in a truck at night, no lights and very fast, to a local area HQ where we met a Colonel. There we met Lt. Specker who had been wounded in the right thigh by a Me-109. The Russians said they had seen one man near a German tank but had received no word from him. I later found out it was my engineer, when I saw him after the war.

"We stayed there that night, and the next day we were taken to another town where we were fed and stayed that night. The following day we were taken to a town called Dunavcse where we met three members of a B-24 crew. We were told we would be taken to an Allied mission but it would be several days. We were billeted with an old lady and her son. I don't know how old she was but her son was 67. It was just one room with attached shed, where we stayed, and we were pretty cramped for room. Then began the boredom! Each day an interpreter would tell us we would go to an Allied mission, maybe tomorrow or next week.

"On March 6th, we were joined by a Canadian, Lt. Joseph Gordon. He was left behind at Dieppe and was a prisoner of the Germans and Hungarians after walking across Germany. He could also speak Russian so was a great help to me in negotiating with the Russians. On March 9th, they gave me two more men who had bailed out March 3rd from a B-24, Lt. Robert French and Lt. Robert Parkhurst. That made ten of us. March 10th, the Germans counter-attacked in the Lake Balaton area and were making headway. We were still getting the same story, maybe TOMORROW or next week.

"On March 11th, a Russian came in and told us to get ready to leave. They gave us a Russian Sgt. and a private to go with us. We got rations (bread and moldy sausage) and took off in an open truck. There were now 12 of us, nine airmen, one Canadian, and two civilians, one of which was a British Lt. in civilian clothes. We got to Kecskemet, Hungary, where we lost the truck and we were held there until the 16th. I think it was, since I ran out of paper on the 11th.

"I am a little hazy about the date we left, but it was several days later. We walked to the main street and the Sgt. commandeered a truck at gun point (Thompson sub), over the objections of the driver, but the machine gun won out. From there we rode and walked to Debreczen, Hungary where there was supposed to be an Allied mission. It took us a couple of days and many mis-directions, but we finally found it. After walking about 15 kilometers, we finally came to what had been a hospital-asylum. There were two Hungarians at the gate who didn't seem to know where they were or what was going on so I decided to look further. As we were leaving, I heard an American voice yelling, 'where the God-damned hell have you guys been, we knew you were out there someplace.'

"They asked me to vouch for the people I brought in with me, but I could only vouch for my own officers, and the rest was up to them. An hour or so later, an officer came in and said they were all they said they were, including the civilian who said he was OSS. After that we had the first decent meal since 2-21-45 and it tasted real good. I had dropped from 175 to 128 pounds. A couple of days later we were loaded in a C-47, flown by General Ira Faker, who had been on an inspection mission, and we were flown to Bari, Italy.

"I took Lt. Specker to a hospital to get him checked out and he was fine, completely healed. He had mentioned to the doctor that I had hurt my back so they had to see me. The result was that I had to spend a couple of weeks in the hospital although my back was almost healed. They let me sleep on boards. I returned to the 429th Squadron on my 25th birthday, April 16th.

“There are many things I have left out, many incidents when we were with the Russians. They were not too friendly, seeming to resent our presence. I was going to dinner with a Russian officer one time when he came upon one of their guards who was asleep at his post, so the officer woke him. There was an exchange of words, in Russian, and he shot the guard dead, with no reaction. We were held in a house, as I wrote, and we could go out but all the perimeter was under guard to confine us to a small area. After a few days of Russian food we were pretty hungry so I decided to do something about it. Late one night, when things were quiet, I sneaked out and broke into a warehouse where they had food, etc. stored and I stole as much as I could carry. When I got it back to the house it was cans of pork, and on the bottom it said, ‘packed in St. Louis.’

“I became a dropping point for any soldier they picked up, which I gladly accepted the responsibility for, and was the ranking officer. I would give only rank, serial, and name when we were interrogated, and I made sure that was all they got from me. After all, they were supposed to be our Allies but they just didn’t act like it much.

“My enlisted men were all liberated and got back home before I got back to Allied control. They didn’t know about me, nor I about them. Not a day passed that I did not wonder how they made out or where they were.”

T/Sgt. Jesse A. Killian, RO. September 25, 1992: “We had just dropped our bombs and I was looking in the bomb bay to see that all bombs were clear when we were hit with what I always felt was a three-gun burst. Pieces came through the radio room, just above my head, and it was always my understanding that we lost both No. 3 and No. 4 engines and, therefore, headed for the Russian lines because we could not get back over the Alps. We flew for some time by having good pilots and because we threw out everything that was not nailed down. We were trying to get the ball turret out when we began to get flak, around Gyor, Hungary, and a little later the flak stopped and the German fighters came in on us. We jumped against the metal under the waist guns and I pulled my flak suit up over me for protection because the fighters kept attacking us and we did not have anything to fight with as we had thrown all the ammunition out. That was when Fifield came back and said, ‘Bull says to get the hell out of here!’

“We began to leave the ship from the rear door and I do not know when or how Fifield left the ship, but I was the last to go out the rear door. I did not open my chute immediately because we had been told to wait awhile, and I could also hear the fighter planes and I was afraid of them. I floated long enough, after bailing out, that I saw the plane hit the ground, crash, and then burn. After I pulled my chute I came down, and as I got close to the ground I could hear bullets and see people shooting at me, but they did not hit me.

“I came down on top of a Hungarian command post and was captured at once. They took my watch, rings, shoes (which were on my harness) and my map pouch with money and other stuff. They also took my .45 but I had emptied the clip when I saw I was going to be taken. I was taken to a farmhouse and it was noted that I was wounded on the left side of my back, and a doctor who spoke English put some kind of medicine and gauze on the wounds. He advised me that the Hungarian Colonel was going to ask me some questions, and if I knew what was good for me, I would answer them. I told him I would give only name, rank, and serial number. They turned me over to some soldiers who took me into another room, placed the bare soles of my feet over the bed rail and beat them. The pain was unbearable, and I either passed out or pretended to do so, as the next thing I knew they were trying to make up to me and offered me some cigarettes, and brought me some water.

“I was later turned over to the Germans, about 9 p.m. that night, and after being talked to by a German Colonel and interpreter, and because of my name, they wanted to know if I spoke German and I told them I did not. After telling them I could give only my name, rank and serial number, I was told that I would be placed with German NCOs of my rank, or better, and that a Comrade was there but I

could not talk to him. When they took me to the NCOs, T/Sgt. Fifield was there and when we tried to talk to each other, they moved me into another room and gave me cheese, bread to eat, and water to drink.

“Later that night we were put on a truck with the rest of the crew and carried to a German airfield at Papa, Hungary. T/Sgt. Bunnell was in bad shape and we tried to get something done for him. After about three days, the Germans carried Bunnell, Freestone, and Gillecee to a German hospital and me to the dispensary on the airfield where they gave me a shot, put some medicine on my wounds and bound me up.

“After 14 days we were carried back into Germany, along with other Americans who had been brought in; approximately 15 or 16 of us. We traveled by rail and by foot when rails were bombed out, and ended up at Wetzler, Germany for interrogation, then to Nurnburg for Stalag 13-A and then back on the road, ending up at Muhlberg at the end. After 47 years, these memories are fresh in my mind.

“Prison camp was not so bad, except for anyone who had not been restricted, it was very confining. Mostly it was the absence of food, and the fact you could not take a bath was very frustrating. As most of us at Nurnburg were fliers and in rank of Staff Sergeant or better, we could not be made to work and we took advantage of this. At Wetzler we were fed twice a day and evidently the Germans had access to Red Cross parcels because we were fed twice a day with oatmeal and powdered milk. Later at Nurnburg, and on the road, we received practically nothing, usually a soup made of some kind of beans, and when they had worms in it, we ate that too (anyway they were cooked).

“When we left Nurnburg, on the road, we were attacked by US fighters when one came down, strafed and dropped a bomb, but a second one started strafing then pulled up and did not drop his bombs. Evidently they found out what it was. After this we were checked out every day by a fighter plane and when on the morning of liberation, the P-51 pilot gave us a show over the prison camp. We can remember the times we had to leave our building, or tents, for bombing raids by the British or our own forces, especially in Nurnburg.

“I can remember when we stole all of one farmer’s potatoes and also when we got into a beet bed thinking it was a turnip bed. This is the way we stayed alive. I lost 30 pounds and Fifield, who was much larger, must have lost 70 pounds or more. We could cook our own meals, with a partner, using Klim cans, which were powdered milk in Red Cross packages. These packages were supposed to last one week, per man, but we never received anything like that, only once in awhile.”

#### **IMMENSTADT, GERMANY/REUTTE, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 363 - FEBRUARY 22, 1945**

Thirty-five aircraft took off to bomb Marshalling Yards in the Munich area. Due to extremely poor weather, only five aircraft were able to bomb Marshalling Yards at Immenstadt, dropping 60, 500-lb. RDX bombs, and four aircraft dropped 48, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Reutte. Heavy clouds obscured the targets and results of the attacks were not known. Twenty-six aircraft aborted after over eight hours in the air. Flak was heavy, slight, and accurate with no losses or injuries.

#### **WORGL, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 364 - FEBRUARY 23, 1945**

With many of the main Marshalling Yards in disrepair, the Germans were forced to use yards in smaller towns. The 15th Air Force was now concentrating knocking out yards being used for movement of troops and supplies. Twenty-nine aircraft took off to bomb Marshalling Yards at Amstettin, Austria, but were diverted by weather to bomb Marshalling Yards at Worgl. Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 316, 500-lb. RDX bombs. This target was partially obscured by smoke from a previous bombing. One Squadron had a good concentration at the choke point, one Squadron was over, and two Squadrons dropped into the smoke. No flak, no losses.

### **FERRARA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 365 - FEBRUARY 24, 1945**

Weather prevented the bombing of a primary target, so 19 aircraft dropped 222, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Ferrara. Two Squadrons had hits in the Yards and one Squadron over. One Squadron of seven aircraft dropped 84, 500-lb. RDX bombs on a Railroad Bridge with no hits on the bridge but a good pattern around it. No injuries, no losses.

Sgt. Elmer J. Alberternt, 429th Squadron, died of injuries incurred between two military vehicles between Manfredonia and Foggia.

### **LINZ, AUSTRIA/AMSTETTIN, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 366 - FEBRUARY 25, 1945**

Twenty-nine aircraft took off to bomb the Marshalling Yards at Linz. Smoke at the target from other bombing obscured the target and only seven aircraft dropped 80, 500-lb. RDX bombs into the smoke. Fourteen aircraft diverted to Amstettin and dropped 168, 500-lb. RDX bombs into the Marshalling Yards. A very good concentration of hits was recorded in the Yards and Round House areas. Flak was heavy, intense and accurate. Seriously wounded was T/Sgt. Nicholas Michaelysnin, RO, 96th Squadron. Lightly wounded were 2nd Lt. R. F. Kennelly, P, 49th Squadron; 2nd Lt. F. J. Plata, CP, 49th Squadron; and Cpl. D. A. Barta, RO, 49th Squadron. Eight aircraft aborted.

### **AUGSBURG, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 367 - FEBRUARY 27, 1945**

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 167, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Augsburg. Bombing was visual and good hits were reported with one large explosion and one minor explosion reported. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate wounding 1st Lt. L. C. Allen, N, 429th Squadron.

### **VERONA/PERONA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 368 - FEBRUARY 28, 1945**

Colonel John D. Ryan had rejoined the Group, from 5th Wing Headquarters, temporarily, and was leading the Group to bomb the Verona/Perona Railroad Bridge which was considered a choke point for all rail traffic through the Brenner Pass. Twenty-one aircraft dropped 121, 1,000-lb. RDX bombs with poor results reported. Colonel Ryan's aircraft was severely damaged by heavy, accurate, and intense flak.

Fourteen aircraft bombed an alternate target, the Breecia Goods Yards, Italy. One Box of seven dropped 21 tons of 1,000-lb. RDX bombs with poor results reported. The second Box dropped 21 tons of 1,000-lb. RDX bombs with excellent results reported.

Seven aircraft dropped 21 tons of 1,000-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Conegliano, Italy with excellent results reported.

B-17 #582, piloted by Colonel Ryan, was hit before and after bombs away and forced to make an emergency landing at Falcanaro Airdrome, Italy. The following members of the crew are listed as casualties: Pilot, Colonel John D. Ryan, wounded hand (amputated finger); CP, 2nd Lt. Francis L. Michaelis, seriously wounded; N, 1st Lt. Robert L. Hall (KIA); B, 1st Lt. William Bachardy, slightly wounded; UTG, T/Sgt. Donald R. Simon (KIA); ROG, T/Sgt. Richard K. Forst, seriously wounded. Other crew members were: BT, S/Sgt. Ernest Short; WG, S/Sgt. Franklin E. Keller, Jr.; and TG, 1st Lt. Benjamin W. Doddridge, Observer (pilot).

Wounded members were hospitalized and remaining members were returned to Base.

1st Lt. Luther S. Reams, Navigator on another aircraft, was seriously wounded.

Henry L. Berryhill, Jr. was a member of the 49th Squadron and in a letter dated May 23, 1944 to Rudolph Koller, gave more information regarding Lt. Reams. "1st Lt. Reams, Navigator, 49th Squadron, lost a leg over Verona, February 28, 1945. He was awarded the Silver Star for this mission because he continued to call headings to the flight deck after his leg had been severed by flak eight

inches below the crotch. The Bombardier received the Distinguished Flying Cross for saving Reams' life by effectively applying the tourniquet that kept him from bleeding to death."

2nd Lt. Francis L. Michaelis was a member of the 96th Squadron and the regular co-pilot on the crew of Captain Charles Childs. October 10, 1994: "I did not know the navigator or bombardier on the mission of the 28th of February. They were officers that evidently flew with Colonel Ryan on missions that he flew lead. Nor did I know who was flying in the tail, but believe it was an officer and perhaps a pilot. I have no knowledge whether he helped Colonel Ryan after I was wounded and left the co-pilot's seat. Other members said he was an officer in the tail for observation but did not know him or his rank.

"I was moved from my seat to below the flight deck. Frank Keller gave me a shot of morphine and applied tourniquets to my arm and leg. At periodic times I nudged his feet to come down and release them to let the blood flow to my extremities.

"If I remember correctly, we bombed at an altitude of 27,000 feet. We bombed from the north where the mountains were almost that high. I told Colonel Ryan before we entered the plane that we would 'get the hell shot out of us from that low altitude.' He responded that, 'It won't be that bad.' Most of our bombings were from 29,000 to 31,000 feet.

"We landed not too long after that and were taken to an emergency hospital where our wounds were temporarily taken care of. We were then taken from there, either the next day, or the day after, in litters, so it must have been a hospital plane. The hospital was in Bari, Italy.

"There has been controversy as to how many fingers that Colonel Ryan lost. My recollection was that it was one and that they attempted to reattach it without success. The Colonel was in another area from me but he did visit me. He was a fine gentleman and I did receive a letter from him one time when he was near my home, but unfortunately I did not have the opportunity to visit with him.

"I was in the hospital, in Bari, for several weeks and then returned to the States on a hospital ship. I never returned to the Group. I was in hospitals and rehabilitation centers until late 1946 when I received my discharge from the Air Force."

S/Sgt. Ernest H. Short, Ball Turret Gunner on the crew of Captain Charles Childs. December 5, 1994: "It is hard to remember what happened over 50 years ago on a specific mission. I have tried to erase some of the details over the past years.

"On February 28, 1945, Mission No. 368, we were briefed to bomb a railroad bridge and highway bridges at Verona, Italy. We were briefed that the Germans were moving equipment north out of Italy toward the Brenner Pass. 'Knock out the bridge.'

"A brief truck ride from our camp to the airfield where the ground crews had our plane ready, loaded with bombs and gas. A brief introduction of the pilot, Colonel John Ryan to the other officers and crew members which were as follows: 2nd Lt. Francis L. Michaelis, CP; 1st Lt. R. L. Hall, N; 1st Lt. W. Bachardy, B; T/Sgt. Donald R. Simon, U/T; T/Sgt. Richard K. Forst, R/O; S/Sgt. Ernest H. Short, B/T, Panther Operator; S/Sgt. Franklin E. Keller, WG; Pilot-unknown, TG. I did not know the navigator, bombardier and possibly a pilot. The Colonel did not have a regular crew so would select members from the Squadrons to fly with him. We had flown with him several times.

"Take off was at about 7:30 a.m. After several hours of flying and gaining altitude, the formation was formed and proceeded to the north of Italy and the target of Verona.

"On the bomb run the flak was very intense and accurate. The bomb bay doors were opened and the bombardier was taking control of the plane. On the countdown to bombs away, I could hear the 88mm and 195mm shells exploding all around us. About the same time as bombs away, we got hit with flak in the left wing. The shell exploded as it exited the top of the wing between No. 2 engine and the front of the plane. This hit is what killed the navigator, Lt. Hall, and the upper turret operator, Don

Simon. It also wounded Colonel Ryan, co-pilot Michaelis, bombardier Bachardy, and radio operator Richard Forst.

“Needless to say, frantic moments occurred at this point. The plane lost altitude rapidly, the smell of 100 octane gas from the wing tanks; the frantic call over the intercom for help in the cockpit brought the pilot from the tail of the plane. The radio operator wounded and lying on the floor in the radio room and the top turret gunner killed, blocking some of the access to the cockpit, and the pilot and co-pilot bleeding very badly. The navigator killed and the bombardier wounded. It was total panic!

“The search for first aid kits, tourniquets, bandages, etc., sulfa powder, found some not complete. Novocain, tourniquet, bandages, and sulfa powder were missing. No first aid kits were a complete unit.

“After the aircraft descended to a safe oxygen level, it wasn’t long until we made an emergency landing at Falconara Airdrome. The wounded were taken off the plane and treated.

“The two dead flyers, Lt. Hall and T/Sgt. Simon, were removed from the plane. S/Sgt. Keller and myself remained with the plane until Colonel Ryan sent orders for us to be taken by truck to a nearby airfield where Keller and I were flown back to the Foggia airfield and trucked to camp.

“I believe the next day or so, all the wounded were flown to Bari, Italy hospital and later transferred to the U.S.A.

“Our crew has had reunions every few years for the past 50 years and I miss those that were killed in action and those that have passed away in civilian life.”

T/Sgt. Richard K. Forst was the Radio Operator on the crew of Captain Charles Childs. January 17, 1995: “My story starts with my crew, which formed in Lincoln City, Nebraska, in June of ‘44. We went to Sioux City, Iowa for combat training, and upon completion of training, took some leave time and reported to Langley Field, Virginia, a radar school for lead crew training in all weather bombing. Here we picked up a radar navigator but lost our navigator and bombardier. Upon completion of this training, we were assigned a B-17, and nine of us proceeded to Gander Field, Newfoundland and flew to Gioia, Italy after stops in the Azores, Marrakech, and Tunis.

“At Gioia we left the B-17, #295, and were picked up and flown to the 96th Squadron at Amendola. B-17 #295 was sent to another Squadron and was shot down on the first mission.

“We called ourselves the “GRAVEL GIRTIE” crew and formed a close bond on the ground and in the air. In fact, I wondered if the officers had a home since they spent so much time in the enlisted men’s tent, and wonder of wonders, even shared their monthly ration of whiskey with us.

“Our pilot, Captain Charles L. Childs, had many hours at the controls of a B-17, and we soon began flying Squadron Lead, Deputy Lead, and eventually Group Lead. Colonel John D. Ryan, our new Group CO, did not have a crew, picked the “GRAVEL GIRTIE” crew when he flew, and Captain Childs had to shift for himself with another crew. On one of Ryan’s missions, our waist gunner, Harold Pewitt, was very badly wounded in the left arm and sent back to the States.

“On February 28th, 1945, Ryan’s last combat mission, we were bombing the Perona Railroad Bridge at Verona, Italy, which was to be a ‘milk run’ when all hell broke loose! Francis ‘Mike’ Michaelis, our co-pilot, had informed me he asked the Colonel if we weren’t coming in too low, at which the Colonel replied, ‘We’ll be all right.’

“It was a beautiful, clear day so I was going to view the scene below. Just as we turned on the I.P., I opened the door from the radio room to the bomb bay and sat on my frequency meter, looking through the open bomb bay doors, when there was a burst of flak below us.

“I didn’t want to watch anymore so I turned and sat away from the door. Then a direct hit up front shook the plane. I was hit from above, just missing my spine and lung, and knocked to the floor. I immediately moved my arms and legs to make sure I wasn’t paralyzed from a spinal injury. They

worked! I was in no pain, but did not move lest I aggravate the wounds. The plane was reacting violently from many hits so I knew we had major damage. I thought we lost No. 3 and No. 4 engines, but 'Mike' later informed me we lost three engines.

"After we were out of the flak area, Keller and Short came to give me first aid and wanted to give me a shot of morphine which I refused because I thought we might have to bail out. Every one from the radio room forward was either killed or wounded. The navigator and engineer were killed, Ryan lost two fingers, the bombardier had splinters in his stomach, 'Mike' the co-pilot was badly hit in the wrist and leg and I was hit in the neck.

"Fortunately we were still in Italy and not too far from a friendly field and were able to land at Ancona. We were taken from the plane and to a field hospital at, which I believe, Ancona. I also believe it was an emergency unit of the British Army. There we received emergency treatment and I believe I was operated upon that evening although I was so heavily sedated I did not know much of what was going on. We were flown back to Bari, Italy two days later.

"At the hospital in Bari my wounds were treated further and I was getting penicillin shots every three or four hours for 18 days. I was in pain from all the stitches in my back and kept heavily sedated. I remained in the hospital one month and then returned to the 96th Squadron.

"I have been asked who was flying in the tail position that day and it was a pilot. It was the custom at that time to have a pilot in the tail, to observe the formation for the Group Leader. He may have helped the Colonel to fly the plane after Lt. Michaelis was hit because I saw him go forward towards the cockpit.

"I did not know Lts. Hall and Bachardy. They were possibly the Group Navigator and Group Bombardier. I had flown with Colonel Ryan seven times before. Lt. Michaelis, Sgts. Short, Keller, Simon, and myself were crew members of Captain Charles Childs and had been selected to fly with the Colonel that day. We must have had another waist gunner but I don't know who that was.

"I finally returned to flying and the records that I have show my last five missions were to Marshalling Yards at Rosenheim, Germany, April 19, 1945; Marshalling Yards at Vipiteno, Italy, April 20, 1945; a Supply Depot at Peschiera, Italy; April 23, 1945; a Bridge at Malborgahetto, Italy, April 24, 1945; and finally, an Ammunition Dump at Bolzano, Italy, April 25, 1945.

"In reviewing my flight log, I note that I flew my first mission to Graz, Austria, November 1, 1944, and the mission to Verona was my 22nd. Of these missions prior to Verona, I had been to Blechhammer twice, Munich twice, Regensburg twice and Vienna four times. These were the most notable missions, but does not mean that the others were not just as tough.

"I left the 2nd Bomb Group on May 24, 1945, and was assigned to the 301st Bomb Group. I left the 301st and was assigned to the 321st Bomb Group on June 14. They flew B-25s. This Group was returning to the States and I was assigned as radio operator on one of the planes. We ended up at Hunter Field on July 2, 1945. I received a leave and was home when the Atom bomb was dropped and I was discharged on October 10, 1945.

"I mentioned that the "GRAVEL GIRTIE" crew had a close bond as evidenced by the fact that we have had many reunions over the years, the most recent was our 50th anniversary reunion on the 10th of June, 1994 weekend at Sioux Falls where we took our basic training."

(Ed. Note: Most recent, Las Vegas, 1997)

1st Lt. Benjamin W. Doddridge was a First Pilot in the 96th Squadron. March 17, 1995: "I never knew why I was selected to fly with Colonel Ryan on that day, February 28, 1945, as an observer in the tail position. It seemed to be the practice, at that time, to have an officer there, with the Group Leader, to keep him informed as to the Group's position.

"I had flown my own crew from the States in October, 1944, and had completed 21 sorties up to that time.

“Heavy flak hit us over the target and I felt our B-17 slide off and start down. I scrambled across the catwalk in the bomb bay while the doors were still open. I felt faint from the lack of oxygen but managed to get to the co-pilot’s seat. Lt. Michaelis was badly wounded and was removed from the seat. Colonel Ryan was wounded and bleeding. I learned that the navigator and engineer were dead and bombardier and radio operator were wounded.

“I found that we had lost two engines. With the navigator dead, I used the sun as a guide over a heavy overcast and we were able to land at an emergency field in Northern Italy. The dead and wounded were removed from the plane and Sgts. Keller, Short, and myself were flown back to our base at Amendola. I heard that I had been recommended for a Silver Star.

“I went on to complete a total of 35 sorties. The first mission was to Vienna, Austria, November 18, 1944, and my last to Peschiera, Italy, April 23, 1945. I had eight missions into Germany: Blechhammer (3), Munich, Regensburg, Ruhland, Landshut, and Rosenheim. One of these in the Berlin area, we were badly shot up and I was awarded the DFC. I flew 16 missions in Austria: Vienna (5), Linz (4), and one each to Klagenfurt, Wiener Neustadt, Worgl, Amstettin, and Spittal. I had two missions to Brux and Prague (1), Czechoslovakia; Brod, Yugoslavia; the Zony Refinery, Hungary, and six trips to various targets in Italy, one of which was on February 28th.

“My regular crew members were: 2nd Lt. Carl R. Buehner, CP; 2nd Lt. Herman Dooha, N; T/Sgt. Martin Goziker, E; T/Sgt. Mark L. Swirsky, RO; S/Sgt. Calvin N. Poorman, WG; S/Sgt. Paul H. Couchman, WG; S/Sgt. Ellis R. Replogle, BT; and S/Sgt. Carl Kepper, TG. I was not assigned a bombardier for the overseas flight.

“Despite all the tough missions that we flew, my crew managed to survive.”

Captain Charles L. Childs, First Pilot, 96th Squadron. October 4, 1994: “Before going overseas, I had been a B-17 and B-24 instructor and had a lot of time in a B-17. I was a 1st Lt. and picked up my crew in Lincoln, Nebraska. My crew were: 2nd Lt. Francis L. Michaelis, CP (wounded); T/Sgt. Donald R. Simon, E (killed); T/Sgt. Richard K. Forst, RO (wounded); S/Sgt. James H. Pewitt, WG (wounded); S/Sgt. Franklin E. Keller, WG; S/Sgt. Ernest H. Short, BTG; and S/Sgt. Ross V. Sessions, TG. After training with them we were sent to Langley Field, VA for Mickey training. My navigator and bombardier were taken away from me before we arrived there and I picked up a Mickey Navigator, 2nd Lt. Russell E. Lampka. After our training was over and we were ready to go overseas, I was taken away from my crew and was made an instructor pilot at Langley. My crew went to the Base Chaplain and then the Base Commander and had the orders rescinded, and we left the States for Italy with a new airplane named “GRAVEL GIRTIE” on October 10, 1944.

“We arrived at the 2nd Bomb Group and were assigned to the 96th Squadron. I remember my first meeting with Colonel P. T. Cullen. I thought he looked like Abe Lincoln. I noticed that he had a Bible on his desk and he was very serious. He looked over my records and said, ‘Lt. Childs, it will not be long before you will be flying lead with the 96th Squadron.’ I flew my first Squadron lead on my fifth mission to Maribor, Yugoslavia on 7 November, 1944, and it was a rough one! My instrument panel was shot, oxygen and hydraulic system shot out, and one engine shot out. When we got back we counted over 200 holes in the ship and quit counting. It was hard to believe that only one of the crew was hurt. I had a spare waist gunner that was wounded. He had replaced James Pewitt because Jim had flown on a previous mission with another crew and they were shot up. Five of the crew bailed out, but Jim stuck with the ship and they did not get back in time for him to fly this mission with me.

“Before I finished my combat missions, and God was certainly with me, I had flown seven Squadron leads, three Deputy Group leads, and eight Group leads, and two single missions called ‘Lone Wolf’ missions. It was because of these Group lead missions that Colonel Ryan started using my crew. Lt. Lampka had become Group Lead Mickey Navigator, but I did get to fly with him and my crew at times when the Colonel wasn’t using them.

“On that fateful day of February 28, 1945, over Verona/Perona, Italy, when the Colonel was using my crew and the plane was badly shot up, my engineer was killed. My co-pilot was badly wounded (he was awarded the Silver Star for this mission) and my radio operator was wounded. Keller and Short were on that mission and the Colonel had put Keller in for the Silver Star, because he was running around patching up the wounded and giving shots. The paper for his Silver Star got lost somewhere in the Squadron and he never received it.

“I was leading the Second Wave of the Bomb Group on that mission and vividly remember the radio message (in the clear) on the Colonel’s ship being hit and going down. It was a sad day for me. I flew up to Ancona, where they crash landed the plane, the next day to bury my Engineer, Don. He was buried on a hill overlooking the Adriatic Sea, a beautiful and quiet place. The ship was a mess and it was not pleasant seeing all the blood and flesh around the ship.

“I would like to make a note of a couple of my other missions that were interesting. A mission flown to Blechhammer, Germany, when the lead ship, Colonel Cullen, made two passes over the target. I was flying wing and on the first pass, I lost an engine. I fell back but kept up enough to make the second pass and lost a second engine. Needless to say, the formation left me behind on the way home. We were fortunate that there were no fighters in the area and so I struggled with two engines trying to maintain as much airspeed to fly. The navigator, flying with me that day, gave me a heading for Switzerland. I was not interested in going there, so I took my own heading going south for Italy.

“In order to get past the Alps we threw out everything that we didn’t feel we needed, including the guns, to get home. I flew through, not over the Alps, and when we were on the final leg to land, the third engine quit. I was on my glide so it was no big deal, but had it quit before, we would have been bailing out. What really pleased me was that my ground crew had not given up on us and were still waiting for us. The flight took exactly ten hours, which was about two hours more than the rest of the formation.

“Another crazy mission was when the formation was coming home and a formation of B-24s were at the same altitude and neither leader would give way and we passed through each other. There were B-17s and B-24s above, below and flying side by side, and without any collisions. A real miracle!

“Another time I was flying Deputy lead on Colonel Cullen and we were coming home. He decided to make a circle to let another formation catch up. We were at 12,000 feet and he circled a flak area and we really got shot up. A bombardier was killed in his plane. You have got me telling war stories.

“I mentioned flying the single missions. I actually flew two of them and had to turn back on another one. When the winter months set in, the missions became slow and the Germans were beginning to rebuild their refineries, Marshalling Yards, etc. The 15th Air Force devised a plan where they would send single planes to bomb the targets, either visual or on instruments. This took instrument flying. A check of the pilot’s log clued them as to who had the most instrument time. You were then asked if you would volunteer for this type of mission. I talked it over with my crew. They were 100%-well maybe only 98%. We volunteered.

“Our first try was on December 8, 1944. We were briefed at 12:15 a.m. The target was Vienna. These ‘Lone Wolf’ missions were taking their toll of planes, so when the Mickey man became lost or confused, because the set wasn’t working right, I aborted the mission and came back home. We dumped the bombs in the Adriatic and landed at the base. I had just gotten into bed and fallen asleep when in come the Squadron Commander raising Cain and calling me ‘chicken’ for not continuing the mission. After he talked to the Mickey man and checked out the radar set, he realized that it was not my fault and I was scheduled for another mission on December 12th. This time it was a day mission in all weather.

“At 4:00 a.m., we were briefed. Four crew pilots were assembled in a large stone room at the 2nd Bomb Group Headquarters. ‘The target for today will be Blechhammer South Oil Refinery and

your call sign will be Lonesome.’ Within a couple of hours we would be aboard a B-17 flying alone over Germany. The call sign ‘Lonesome’ was, therefore, appropriate. The pilots, each from one of the four Squadrons in the Group, sat with his own thoughts on this mission.

“Blechhammer, a vital Nazi oil center, was one of the best guarded targets in Europe, and according to intelligence information, our mission was something along the lines of a bad-risk situation. Specifically we were to make a day bombing attack, under the most extreme weather conditions, against a stiffly defended target, without fighter protection, and flying blind most of the way. We were to fly as ‘Lone Wolves’ and, if we succeeded, it meant that in spite of Italy’s terrible winter months, which made formation flying impossible, the bombing could continue with planes equipped with synchronous radar. Therefore we could continue to hammer the Nazis day and night around the clock, in good or bad weather, and supplement the RAF bombers.

“The briefing was a long session and did not finish until about two hours later. The instructions were that the four planes from the 2nd Bomb Group were to take off at close intervals and climb to our assigned altitude. The operations were so fused that each bomber flying a different route, altitude and speed, would arrive over the target at brief intervals. There were planes from another Group that were hitting the same target and we were to arrive over Blechhammer a short time after their planes had already bombed the oil city.

“While I was being briefed, the planes on the field were being loaded with ten, 500-lb. high explosive bombs with delayed fuses, set to detonate from six to 36 hours after dropping. The mission we were to fly was slightly different than those going before us. The planes from the other Group were briefed to return to base without dropping their bomb load if they found they had no cloud cover over the target. We were told that we could not bring our delayed-fuse bombs back and, therefore, we would bomb Blechhammer, regardless of cloud cover, visually or by instrument.

“The briefing also brought out the importance of oil centers to the Nazis and how the route to the target of Blechhammer was covered by huge flak areas. Three secret maps on the whitewashed wall showed the flak areas, and since they could not be copied in note form, I memorized the information. We were told that there was a possibility of an attack by Me-110s, and that we should make careful observations of these fighters so that it would help other crews later. When being attacked by German fighters, you did not have much time for careful observations.

“Arriving at the field, we dressed beside the B-17. It was going to be sub-zero weather so we kept our woolen underwear and ODs on. We struggled into coveralls, an electric suit, electric gloves, wired slippers, fleece lined flying pants, a fleece lined jacket, heavy flying boots, a Mae West life preserver, parachute harness, headpiece, and oxygen mask. We walked like gorillas.

“Our heavy G.I. shoes went along, to be tied to our parachute harness in case we were forced to jump into enemy territory and had to walk out. In the knee pocket of my flying pants I stuck the emergency kit of food and first aid. Now it was time to brief the crew on the mission ahead of us. They never seemed to enjoy the good news we gave them of the target for the day.

“We were on schedule when I turned on the runway, the hydraulic system sending eerie wheezes through the ship. It was still dark at 6:10 a.m., and as I glanced back through the bomb bay I could see tiny shafts of light blinking behind the swaying curtains in the radio compartment where the two figures of Dick (my radio operator) and Russ (my radar expert-Mickey man) were bent in concentration. I pushed the throttles forward and the plane began to vibrate and move. Within seconds we were off the runway and into the dark, dawn sky headed for Blechhammer.

“I was flying on instruments and Russ was giving me headings. We climbed fast to get over the Alps and then the gunners tested their guns. I asked the crew for radio silence so that I could have complete concentration between Russ and myself. Every 15 minutes, the bombardier would call for an oxygen check and after that only the voices of Russ and myself could be heard. The others seemed to be deep in their own thoughts as the plane droned its way through the weather toward the target.

“I had talked to Russ concerning the route we were to fly to try to avoid the known flak areas. Russ’ job was to navigate by radar, as we were on solid instruments, and to get us there and back. The outside temperature was now at 40 degrees below zero, and overcast, had moisture in it so that the wings were picking up ice. We put on the de-icer pumps and watched the rubber boots on the wings pulsate causing the ice on the wings to drop off, however, the number three engine carburetor would not de-ice and the engine started to miss and finally quit. Mike, my Co-pilot, closed the prop feathering switch, as number three was on his side, while I pulled the turbo supercharger off, closed the throttle, moved the mixture control to idle cutoff, closed the fuel shut-off valve, turned the booster pump off and then turned off the ignition switch. This was all done in a matter of seconds as we had done this many times before and it was just routine. We then closed the cowl flaps and adjusted the others to maintain cylinder-head temperatures. We advanced the throttles to maintain airspeed, and with three good engines we were able to do this. We then had a discussion as to whether we should continue the mission. I told the crew we could make it on three good engines, and our purpose for being there was to bomb the target and that is what we were going to do.

“As we reached the Initial Point, Russ Lampka, my Mickey man, gave me the heading for the bomb run. We were now beginning to break out of the clouds, which concerned us as we were the only plane on the bomb run and the chance of enemy fighters was probable. I adjusted my airspeed, and was able to hold 150 mph with my three remaining engines, set up my altitude for the run, and then told the bombardier to take over. I do not recall who the bombardier was as he was a Group Bombardier. During the bomb run on a radar plane, coordination between the pilot, Mickey man, and bombardier is essential. The pilot had to fly a smooth course holding precise airspeed and altitude, the Mickey man gave slight degree settings, and the bombardier controlled lateral direction through the bombsight, which locked onto the autopilot.

“As we continued on the bomb run, the bombardier told Russ that he could see the target areas and a visual run was possible but there were low clouds drifting over the target, so Russ continued using radar. My ball turret gunner, Ernie Short, advised us that flak was coming up as he could see the burst of the flak guns on the ground. We continued the run, flying through the heavy flak when the bombardier said, ‘Bomb bay doors coming open,’ my radio operator, Dick Forst, confirmed that they were open, and then there was complete silence, except for the sound of flak ripping through the metal of the plane and the sound of bursts, until the bombardier yelled, ‘bombs away.’

“I made a steep diving turn to the right to get away from the flak and headed for a cloud formation. It was then that we spotted some fighters coming up and we made a run for the clouds. I flew in and out of clouds while the fighters tried to get at us. Finally we entered a heavy overcast and headed for home. Once again we were flying into icing conditions and we were on solid instruments. I told Russ to keep us above the Alps and try to bring us in over the Adriatic Sea so we could let down out of the clouds. We broke out in the clear over the water, transferred the fuel from the dead engine and headed for home. I had landed on three engines before, so this was no problem.

“The mission took us over eight hours and we were a tired and a very happy crew as we had successfully inflicted grave damage to the oil installation at Blechhammer, Germany with only losing one engine and having slight flak damage. For this mission, I received the Distinguished Flying Cross.

“I was proud of my crew record. I was lucky not to get hurt and I made the bombing accuracy honor roll four times. My co-pilot was wounded and sent home (he received the Silver Star for his mission with Colonel Ryan). My Navigator (Mickey Operator) flew many lead missions and received the DFC (he was shot down on one mission but got back to the Squadron to fly again). My Engineer was killed flying with Colonel Ryan. My Radio Operator was wounded and came back to the Squadron to fly again. My Right Waist Gunner was wounded (he stuck with the ship that five of the crew had bailed out of). My Left Waist Gunner was with Colonel Ryan and ran around patching up wounded. The Ball Turret Gunner on Colonel Ryan’s ship stayed with the radio operator to keep him calm. My

Tail Gunner received frost bites on his fingers and was hospitalized for that. The experiences of my crew in combat were more than usual.

“The crew decorations were: One Silver Star, three Distinguished Flying Crosses, four Purple Hearts, nine Air Medals, and 14 Oak Leaf Clusters.

“I retired from the Air Force in February 1961 in the rank of Lt. Colonel. I flew the Berlin Airlift and also in the Korean War. I felt that my luck was about to go bad so I quit while I was still ahead.”

1st Lt. Rolland C. Kelley was an Aircraft Commander assigned to the 20th Bomb Squadron. December 18, 1992: “I was assigned to the 20th Squadron 1 February 1945, and remained with them until October 1945.

“One memorable mission that I was on was a long one to Ruhland, Germany, 15 March 1945, Group Mission No. 378. We were one of 26 aircraft that bombed the alternate target, KOLIN. We were flying B-17 #678. It was a little strong in burning gasoline and we ran low on the way home, so decided to land in Yugoslavia, just north of the Adriatic. I can’t remember the exact spot. The U.S. had an emergency landing strip there and refueling capabilities, so we spent the night sleeping in a tent and flew back to our Base the next day. Interesting enough, my flight log does not show us landing there. It just shows one long mission, nine hours and ten minutes on the day before. That was the only Berlin or Ruhland mission that I was on.

“I was on the next to last mission, No. 411, to Bolzano, Italy on 26 April 1945. We were aware that the war was about over a week before we stopped flying missions, and the last mission, No. 412, was May 1, and VE day was May 8.

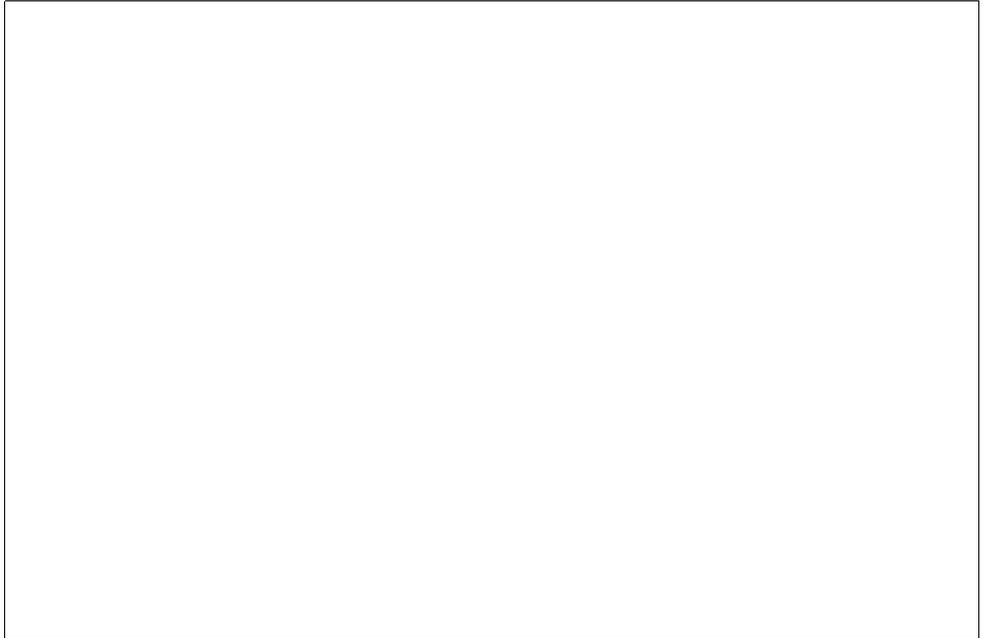
“I guess my most memorable mission was one to Northern Italy, possibly to Verona/Perona but it was near the Brenner Pass. That day we were receiving ‘Trail Flak’ in lieu of ‘Barrage Flak’ that we normally caught. We decided that all the normal German gunners had either been killed or captured and all that was left to man the guns were the Gunnery Instructors. They had ‘lots more practice’ and were sitting on top the mountains (up 12 to 13 thousand feet). Anyway, as we approached the bomb run, we started receiving individual bursts of flak. We caught several holes in our plane. Some in the wing, but also the biggest, about a six-inch diameter hole close to the radio compartment. In fact, if the radio operator had been in his regular seat, sitting straight up, he would have caught some. Several planes’ engines were smoking and we could see them breaking formation. My visualization was catching a burst, or shell, right through the floor below me. It never happened, but it was a little ‘nerve wracking.’ I do not remember how many holes we did have, but it was the most we ever received on a single mission before or after.

“After VE Day, they started evaluating. Since ‘points’ got important toward getting out of the service, they started adding and everyone that had completed 25 ‘Sorties,’ as missions were called, they got to go home. Also, anyone who had 15 or less were sent home to go to the PACIFIC, although I hear they never went. I had 19 to ‘go’ so I stayed there.

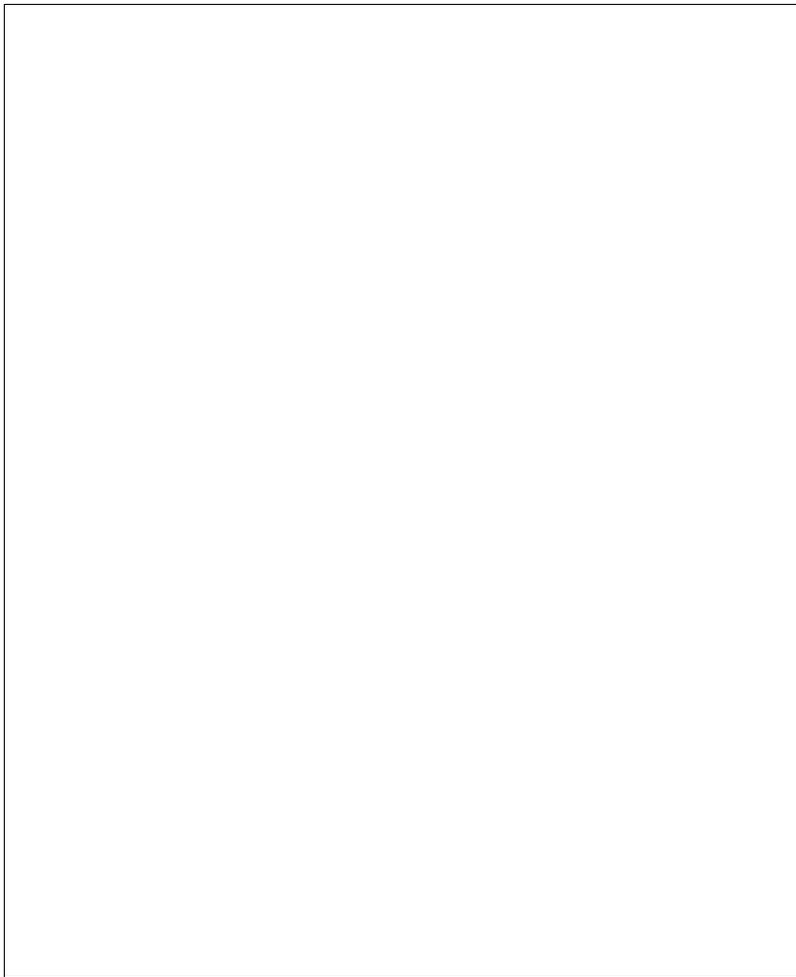
“Things got real slow. We flew others to rest camp and back, and one trip I flew a ground crew (cooks, etc.) up over the Brenner Pass to Munich and around over the Alps. We also spent three or four days moving a Fighter Squadron from Northern Italy down to a site that the 97th Bomb Group had vacated. We hauled British supplies (food) up to Milan. In June I took a crew, not mine, in a B-17 and flew to Cairo and Palestine for a few days trip. I had another rest camp in Rome in July.

“In early September, I and three other Flight Commanders were sent on Temporary Duty to Naples to relieve others that had been flying ground troops home. This was from Naples to Marrakech. Others flew other legs to get the troops back to the States. We fiddled around there for about three weeks without doing anything when they closed the operation down.

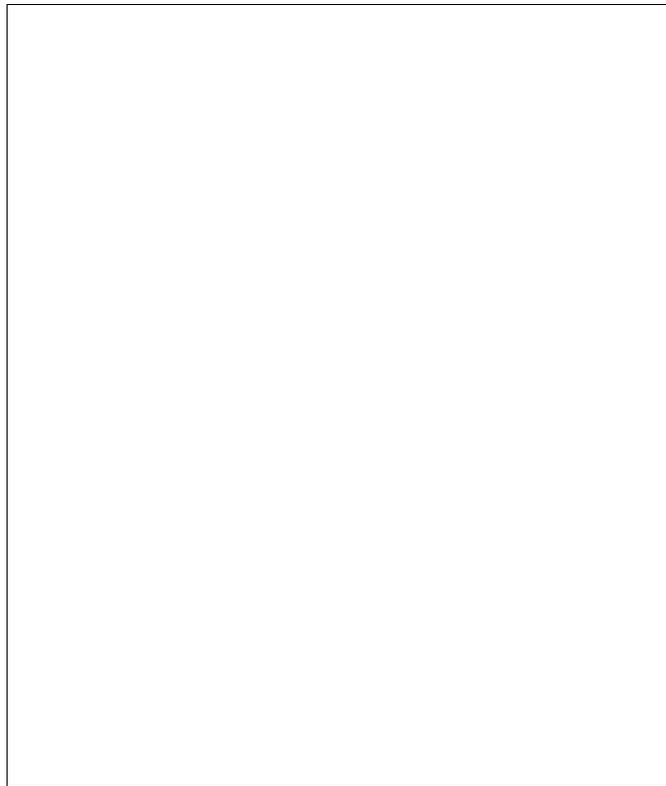
“This is when I was transferred out of the 2nd Bomb Group and back to Foggia to the 97th Bomb Group (September 27, 1945) where I crewed as co-pilot to a Lt. Col. and flew home on the 11th of October. That ended my tenure with the 2nd Bomb Group.”



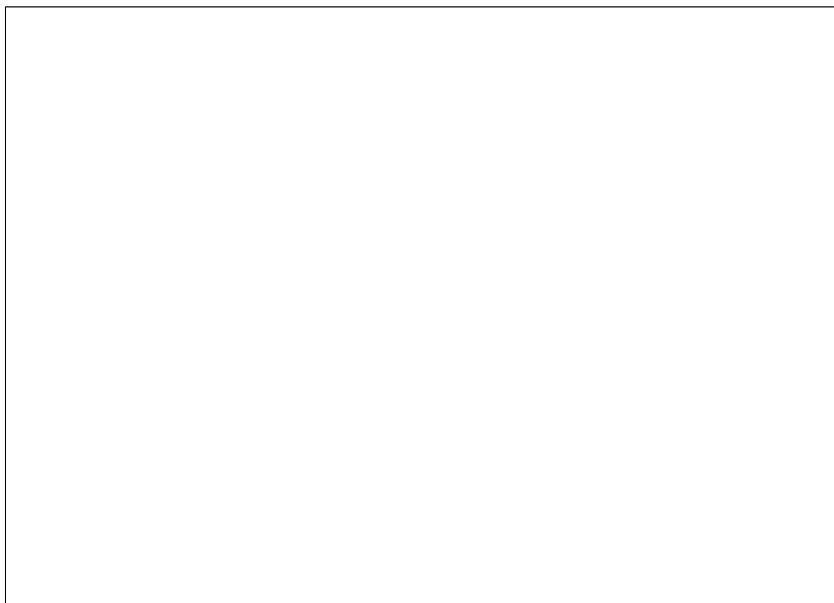
Colonel Richard Waugh, 2nd BG Commanding Officer  
24 February/16 March 45 (Photo Section)



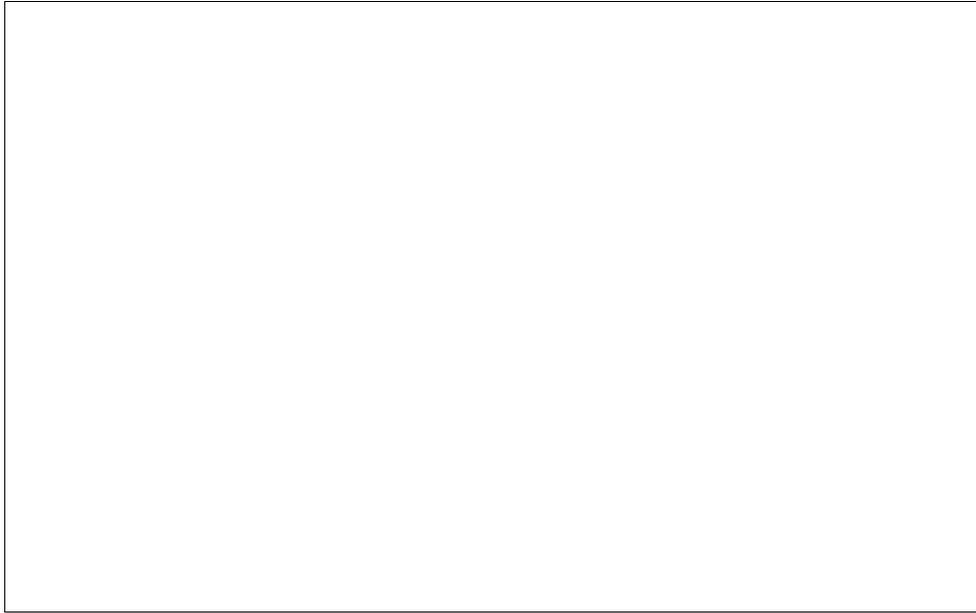
Colonel John D. Ryan - Commanding Officer - 2nd Bomb Group  
8 July 44/25 September 44 and 9 February 45/28 February 45  
(2nd Bomb Group Photo)



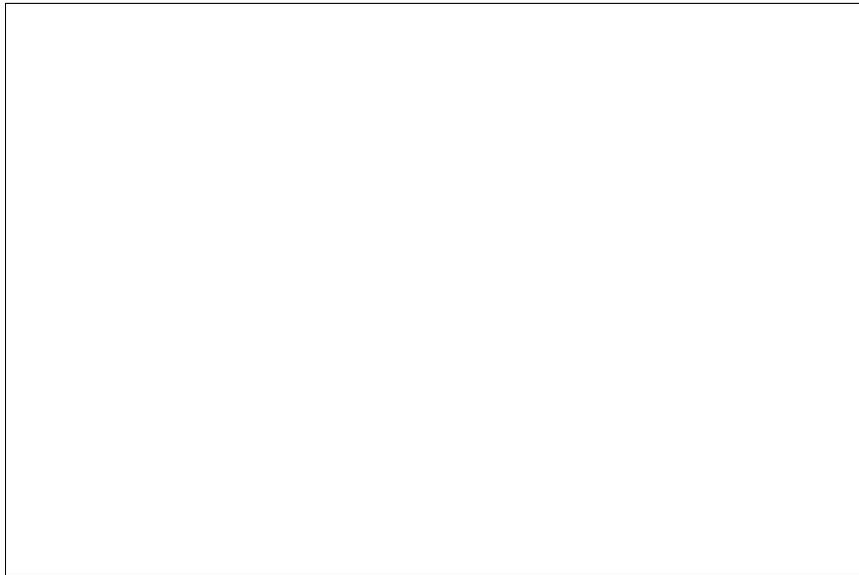
L/R - Lts. C. Childs, H. Wallet, W. Torske  
(Courtesy - C. Childs)



T/R - L/R - F. Keller, R. Lampka, J. Pewitt, R. Sessions, R. Forst  
B/R - L/R - C. Childs, D. Simon (\*), F. Michaelis  
\* KIA 2-28-45 (Courtesy - E. Short)



L/R - F. Keller, J. Pewitt, E. Short, R. Sessions - Isle of Capri Rest Camp  
2-45 (Courtesy - C. Richards)



T/R - L/R - L. Waters, R. Train, P. Surprenant, R. Cheney, J. Koden  
B/R - L/R - G. Bills, I. Lewis, P. Stephens, A. Notheis  
(Courtesy - Lewis Waters)

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# 18

## OPERATIONS: MARCH, 1945

### **M**OOSEBIERBAUM, AUSTRIA/MARIBOR, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 369 - MARCH 1, 1945

Forty-two aircraft took off, each carrying a load of 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs. Twenty-nine aircraft dropped 340 bombs on the Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery with unobserved results. One aircraft from this formation only dropped six bombs and later dropped six bombs visually on Marshalling Yards at Judenburg, Austria with hits on the target. Flak was heavy, moderate and accurate. B-17 #44-8814, 96th Squadron, was severely damaged and crash landed near the 463rd Bomb Group field. There were no injuries.

Six aircraft dropped 72 bombs on a Locomotive Depot at Maribor, Yugoslavia visually with hits reported. Four aircraft dropped 44 bombs on Marshalling Yards at Knittelfeld, Austria visually with hits reported. One aircraft dropped 12 bombs on a Railroad at Wilden, Austria visually with hits reported. Two aircraft aborted.

### **L**INZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 370 - MARCH 2, 1945

Thirty aircraft took off carrying 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs. Twenty aircraft dropped 234 bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Linz by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate with no injuries. Six aircraft dropped 72 bombs on Marshalling Yards at St. Polten, Austria by PFF with unobserved results. One aircraft dropped 12 bombs on Marshalling Yards at Lienz, Austria visually. Hits were reported on Tracks and Roundhouse. One aircraft aborted and two were early returns.

### **S**OPRON, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 371 - MARCH 4, 1945

Forty-one aircraft took off carrying a load of 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs. Thirty-nine aircraft dropped 455 bombs visually on Sopron with good concentration of hits in the target area. Flak was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate with no injuries. One aircraft dropped 12 bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Furstenfeld, Austria visually with hits reported in the Yards. One aircraft was an early return.

### **H**EGYESHALOM, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 372 - MARCH 8, 1945

Forty-one aircraft dropped 397, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards visually. There were scattered hits in the Marshalling Yards with a good concentration in the west end of the Marshalling Yards. Flak was heavy, slight, and inaccurate with no injuries.

### **G**RAZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 373 - MARCH 9, 1945

The primary target was the Marshalling Yards at Bruck, Austria but a cloud cover forced the formation to divert to alternate targets. Forty-two aircraft took off loaded with 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs.

Weather forced 27 aircraft to abort and return to base with their bombs. Fourteen aircraft dropped 165 bombs on Freight Yards at Graz by PFF with unobserved results, and one aircraft dropped 8 bombs on a Marshalling Yard at Feldkirchen, Austria visually with hits reported at the choke point in the Yard. Flak at Graz was heavy, slight and accurate resulting in slight wounds to S/Sgt. J. M. Martin, LT.

#### **VERONA/PERONA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 374 - MARCH 10, 1945**

Twenty-one aircraft took off and 19 aircraft dropped 114, 1,000-lb. RDX bombs on a Railroad Bridge with an excellent bombing pattern reported but results were unobtainable due to smoke from previous bombing. Two aircraft were early returns. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense with no injuries.

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 375 - MARCH 12, 1945**

Forty-three aircraft took off with 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs with 40 aircraft dropping their bombs on the Florisdorf Oil Refinery by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate with no injuries. One aircraft dropped its bombs on Marshalling Yards at Pontebba, Italy. Another aircraft dropped its bombs on Marshalling Yards at Conigliana, Italy. A third aircraft dropped its bombs on Marshalling Yards at Litija, Yugoslavia. A total of 497 bombs dropped included all targets. Results of bombing were not reported.

#### **REGENSBURG, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 376 - MARCH 13, 1945**

Reconnaissance reported 900 wagons in the Main Marshalling Yards at Regensburg. The 2nd Bomb Group directed 27 aircraft to this target and dropped 317, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards by PFF with unobserved results. One aircraft dropped 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Landshut, Germany with hits reported in the Yards.

#### **SZONY, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 377 - MARCH 14, 1945**

Forty-one aircraft took off in two waves, each loaded with 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs, to bomb the Szony Oil Refinery. The First Wave dropped 240 bombs and the Second Wave dropped 250 bombs on the target. Explosions and fires were reported. Flak was heavy, moderate and accurate resulting in the loss of B-17 #44-6428 of the 20th Squadron.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6428 - 20TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt.	Frederick J. Reed, 0-830938, P.	(RET)
F/O	Bartley H. Moberg, T-6316, CP.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Aubrey H. Poindexter, 0-2074158, N.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Harry H. Hollinger, 20330205, TOG.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Laverne E. Chambers, 38401996, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Floyd (NMI) Lechner, 19211160, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Max A. Wilder, 34706346, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	James E. Hamilton, 36640919, L/W.	(POW)
Cpl.	Henry J. Bullis, 19205220, T/G.	(RET)
Cpl.	Edward I. Wagner, 33776581, R/O.	(KIA)

Records of this crew showing (RET) (returned) did not indicate that they were prisoners of the Germans. Information concerning those that show (POW) came from a member of the crew that was a POW.

Statement of S/Sgt. Alfred Novak, LTG on B-17 #671, after the mission: "I saw #428 last at 1426 hours from 17,000 feet at 47-38N - 18-11E where he received a direct flak hit in the No. 2 engine.

Then he pulled out to the right, left the formation in flames. The aircraft was going down, and at this time I observed two chutes. The aircraft then exploded and I saw pieces of the aircraft falling earthward.”

S/Sgt. James E. Hamilton was the original LWG on the crew of Lt. Warren Newhouse. January 17, 1990: “I arrived in Foggia, Italy in September or October of 1944. My crew was captained by Lt. Warren Newhouse and co-pilot was Lt. Dudley M. Bray, Jr. Both are alive today (1990).

“The mission requirements at that time were 35. After 25 missions, I wanted to hurry up and return home so I volunteered to fly extra missions. On the first of the missions after 25 (volunteered), we were shot down over the Szony Oil Fields in Hungary. The date was March 14, 1945.

“I was flying with the crew piloted by Lt. Frederick J. Reed. We were flying at 31,000 feet when we were hit directly in the radio room and the fire started. I called up to the Captain and said we had better bail out, and I did. I waited a long time before I pulled the ripcord since it was very cold at that altitude.

“Upon reaching the ground I was immediately captured by the Hungarians who turned me over to the Germans. I traveled by many means of transport, under guard, to Nurnburg Prison Camp, then to Moosdorf, Stalag Luft VIIA, as prisoner of war No. 145662. I was freed in the middle of May, 1945 and returned home.

“The only POWs from our crew that I know of were Max Wilder, Harry Hollinger, and myself. I have no information about the others.”

1st Lt. Warren Newhouse was a Pilot and he and his crew were assigned to the 20th Squadron. January 5, 1992: “We flew a B-17G, #44-8195, from the States and my crew consisted of 2nd Lt. Dudley M. Bray Jr., CP; 2nd Lt. Frank C. Madill, N; 2nd Lt. Gildo F. M. Phillips, B; Cpl. John H. Boone, E; Cpl. William H. Francis, RO; and Cpl. Raymond J. Kryzyzanek; Cpl James E. Hamilton, Cpl. Francis R. Furlong and Cpl. Chester E. Sallee, Aerial Gunners.

“The B-17 we flew from the States was radar equipped and it was to be used as a lead plane so it was taken from us and I was assigned another aircraft with the serial number 46729. The plane we flew across had an electrical problem on one mission to bomb the Marshalling Yards at Salzburg, Austria, dumping the bombs prematurely on a snow capped mountain. Since several bombardiers toggled off short of the target, the officers received no credit for the mission. Gildo Phillips, our bombardier, knew better than to drop and we brought our bombs back, with the exception of two delay-action bombs which had to be jettisoned in the Adriatic Sea.

“I did get all my missions in, the first being on October 23, 1944 to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia and the final one was March 19, 1945 to Landshut, Germany. I kept a small diary and recollection of some missions are noted:

“11/05/44 - Vienna, Austria. Oil Refinery - heavy flak, no damage to us. Ball turret gunner on Mart’s plane died of anoxia.

“11/06/44 - Graz, Austria. Marshalling Yards - moderate, accurate flak. Sustained five holes, one made by a live 88mm shell through left wing, failed to explode. Lost two engines on return and landing with but 5 gals of gas.

“11/19/44 - Vienna, Austria. Oil Refinery - bomb racks failed. Bombardier had to kick out bombs at high altitude.

“12/02/44 - Blechhammer, Germany. Oil Refinery - 9 hours and 45 minutes engine time with ample gasoline. Light, very accurate flak. Picked up two holes. One ship missing.

“12/06/44 - Did not fly. Crew missing on 12/2 returned safely. Ship of another Squadron exploded with a full bomb load after take off as it made turn too close to ground. Phillips and Madill missing from a ‘Lone Wolf’ mission at night.

“12/11/44 - Moosbierbaum, Austria. Oil Refinery. Heavy accurate flak. Target visible through the smoke cover. Hits scored. Waist gunner on another plane had piece of flak cut off throat mike but not injured.

“12/12/44 - Blechhammer, Germany. Oil Refinery. First ‘Lone Wolf’ mission. Moderate flak, picked up two holes. Much icing in the clouds.

“12/17/44 - Blechhammer, Germany. Oil Refinery. Flak was too intense on first run. Had to make second, got three holes, one in Co-Pilot’s windshield. Flew B-24 crew to Bari at night.

“01/02/45 - Two planes crashed and burned at end of runway.

“01/04/45 - Lt. Phillips reported safe and returning to base.

“02/01/45 - Moosbierbaum, Austria. Oil Refinery primary target. Bombed target of opportunity, a Marshalling Yard south of Graz. Light flak, no hits. Lost No. 3 engine due to excess power used in clouds. Had to drop four of 12 bombs before target.

“02/07/45 - Vienna, Austria. Oil Refinery. Moderate flak, no holes. Visual target, good results. Ship left formation to go to Russia. Crew bailed out, almost dropping bombs on us.

“02/13/45 - Vienna, Austria. Oil Refinery. Intense flak, two holes. Blew out spark plug on No. 3 engine. Dropped Nelson’s autographed bomb. Radio Operator on 429th ship killed by flak.

“02/25/45 - Linz, Austria. Marshalling Yards. Intense, accurate flak, two holes, one in the gas tank. Saw “rocket flak” over Munich. Visual, only box to hit target.

“02/28/45 - Conigliano, Italy. Marshalling Yards. Moderate flak at Brenner Pass. Three holes. Alternate had no flak. 1,000-lb. bombs hit yards. Lead ship hit, two men killed, CO lost finger.

“Learned that our Navigator, Lt. Frank Madill, is a POW.

“03/01/45 - Vienna, Austria. Oil Refinery. Light flak, no holes. One ship crash-landed. Later exploded.

“03/14/45 - Szony, Hungary. Oil Refinery. Flak, intense and accurate. Seven holes, one in No. 4 turbo amplifier and another in the boot of the tail gunner. No. 428 exploded over the target, four chutes, one in flames. Hamilton (James E.) was in it. Furlong (Francis E. ) flew his last mission.

“03/19/45 - Landshut, Germany. Marshalling Yards. No flak. 15,000 feet, good strike. MY LAST MISSION!

“03/22/45 - Ruhland, Germany. Oil Refinery. Group hit by fighters on long haul. Group lost three planes. F/O Williams’ ship hit by rocket. One chute (on fire). Ship broke up. Me-210's and Me-262's.

“03/24/45 - Berlin, Germany. Hit by jets - lost one from Squadron.”

T/Sgt. Robert N. Rudolph was the Flight Engineer on the crew of Lt. Frederick J. Reed when assigned to the 96th Squadron. April 17, 1995: “I joined the AAF October 12, 1942, took my basic at Kessler Field, Mississippi and sent to Douglas, Arizona, a new advanced flying school, and worked as a mechanic. Sent to North American Aviation in Los Angeles on B-25s. Returned to Douglas, Arizona for a couple of months and signed up for gunnery school.

“Passed the physical and sent to Kingman, Arizona. Graduated in September 1944, sent to Avon Park, Florida where I joined the crew who were: 2nd Lt. Frederick J. Reed, P; F/O Bartley H. Moberg, CP; 2nd Lt. Aubrey H. Poindexter, N; 2nd Lt. John P. Tomsyck, B; myself, E; Cpl. Edward I. Wagner, RO; Cpl. Sidney M. Heathman, RW; Cpl. Leo Sambuco, LT; and Cpl. Henry J. Bullis, TG.

“We trained at Avon Park, went to Savannah, Georgia, picked up a new B-17 and equipment. Flew to Bangor, Maine, Azores, Marrakech, Tunis, Foggia. We flew as a crew until March 14, 1945. That was the first mission we were separated. Those of my crew that went down that day were Reed, Moberg, Poindexter and Wagner. I know Wagner and Poindexter were killed. It was reported that one chute was on fire after bail-out and it possibly was Moberg. The reason I say that is I received a letter from his sister and she was seeking information as to what I knew about the disaster. She had

accounted for all on board but her brother, but I didn't have any information. Some years later I heard from someone that they had seen a Memorial Wall in Florence, Italy with names of all persons missing in action and Moberg's name was on it.

"After those of my crew went down, we flew with other crews coming from the States. I don't remember who I flew with from then on. I remember one Captain who wanted to go to Switzerland, who I will never forget. I got stuck with a dandy, the pilot, not the crew. We took off and got in a cloud bank, came out and nobody around, up over Northern Italy. Flak started and I hollered for the pilot to turn right or left quick. If he hadn't we would have got a direct hit. He panicked after that and said we were going to Switzerland. I said let's go on, that we probably would meet another Group. He said no, but all the crew didn't want to go. Well, we finally met a Group over the Alps and moved in close. Then all the guns turned towards us. Boy we did everything to make contact; colors of the day, showed our patches on our jackets, waved and finally we were welcome. We knew Germans had a B-17 that they flew sometimes and radioed to ground as to our height, speed etc.

"Well, we bombed a target. I don't know what but when we got back we were told we were in an eyelash of being shot down by our own bombers. What a disaster that would have been!

"After V-E Day we were just flying training missions some days and training pilots to be pilots. I had a very bad experience with one of the co-pilots. He was flying alone with me as engineer and a radio operator; no co-pilot. This guy buzzed everything but the control tower. We buzzed the small country of San Marino which was a No-No to even fly over. I could look up and see the steeples. I told him to take me back and if he wanted to kill himself OK but not me. I was really scared! He took me back and raised holy hell! I told the CO what he did and I was blackballed from then on.

"On leaving for home, I was a passenger along with six infantry guys and the crew. We got in the air and fuel was running off the left wing like a creek. Someone forgot to lock the fuel cap. We circled Naples for an hour and decided to go. Went to Tunis, Marrakech, Dakar, Natal, Georgetown, Puerto Rico, and West Palm Beach, Florida.

"We all went our separate ways home. Now as I think back over those times, they were the greatest, bar none. I lived a lifetime in a short time. I am proud that I served in the Air Force, saw combat and flew with some wonderful people. 'Family all the way.' I must admit that I still catch myself drifting back and a tear will appear. I was closer to those crewmen than I was to my own family."

### **KOLIN, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 378 - MARCH 15, 1945**

Forty-three aircraft took off to bomb the Schwartzheide Synthetic Oil Plant at Ruhland, Germany. The primary target was not attacked because of cloud cover and Mickey trouble. Flak over this target was heavy, moderate, and accurate resulting in injury to F/O B. N. Norton, N, 20th Squadron; 1st Lt. H. Dooha, N, and 1st Lt. A. G. Martell, B, both of the 96th Squadron. Twenty-six aircraft, in two waves, dropped 282, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Oil Refinery at Kolin with excellent results. There was no flak at the target. Five aircraft dropped 58, 500-lb. RDX bombs on a Railroad Bridge at Klagenfurt, Austria with results unobserved. And one aircraft dropped 12 bombs on Marshalling Yards at Amstettin, Austria with its bombs over the target. Seven aircraft jettisoned their bombs when the lead aircraft accidentally dropped its bombs. Four aircraft aborted and two aircraft were early returns. Flak damaged 13 aircraft; eight minor and five severe.

Three aircraft are missing. B-17 #44-6671, piloted by 1st Lt. John Stravers, 20th Squadron; B-17 #44-6443, piloted by 2nd Lt. John W. Collens, 96th Squadron, and B-17 #44-6674, piloted by 1st Lt. Phillip Good, 96th Squadron.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6671 - "HOMESICK" - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt. John J. Stravers, 0-822561, P.

(RET)

1st Lt.	Richard F. Shipka, 0-926712, CP.	(RET)
F/O	Paul (NMI) Stephens, T-129762, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	John P. Tomsyck, 0-206169, B.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Edward Janoski, 33608555, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	James L. Almond, 34679066, L/T.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Ralph E. Nussbaum, 15084746, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	John F. Skalny, 16159574, L/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	William T. Stewart Jr., 39921281, T/G.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	John W. Leyden, 42002400, R/O.	(RET)

Statement of 2nd Lt. John W. Ellsworth, CP of B-17 #378, after the mission: “I saw B-17 #671 last at 1403 hours from 26,000 feet. I observed a fire inside his left wing and behind the No. 1 engine. I called him but received no answer. B-17 #671's pilot must have noticed the fire coming up through the top of the wing, for he called “Able” box leader and then peeled off to the left. Pilot said he was afire and was leaving the formation. I observed no chutes.”

T/Sgt. Edward Janoski, Flight Engineer: “I bailed out and all crew members left the plane alive. The aircraft blew up before it reached the ground.

“Regarding F/O Paul Stephens: When ordered to bail out I opened the escape hatch. Navigator went first, around 30 seconds bombardier left, followed by me. I delayed my jump until I was in the proper altitude. When my chute opened I was met with small arms fire, followed later by machine gun fire. I noticed a chute on the ground, body motionless, chute half dragging in the breeze and it stayed that way until out of sight.

“It was later reported to the Russians who tried to recover the body at nightfall. It failed. Body was still in the same position the next morning. Russians agreed to give military burial upon recovery of the body.

“Rest of the crew reformed at Sagan, Germany and later came to Allied Base in Southern Russian country and finally reached home base.”

1st Lt. John J. Stravers, Pilot: “After being hit by anti-aircraft fire over the target at Ruhland, Germany, I decided to leave the formation and head for the Russian lines, approximately 40 miles away. As the No. 1 engine gas line was on fire I decided to give the bail out order and, after issuing the order, the navigator, F/O Stephens, was the first member to leave the plane. The other members of the crew following immediately from their respective positions. I did not see F/O Stephens on the ground but from questioning other members of the crew, they stated that when he hit the ground there wasn't any movement and, from all indications, it seems F/O Stephens landed between the lines, as we were just behind the lines when we hit the ground.

“That same afternoon I instructed two Russian officers that there were other members of my crew that bailed out, and about 9 p.m. I was informed that eight other men had been picked up by Russian soldiers. The following day I was reunited with my co-pilot and waist gunner and it was then that I heard the news about F/O Stephens. I immediately asked the Russian officer if he would dispatch a patrol to investigate the area which he promised to do that evening as it was too risky to attempt such a search during the day. The following morning I was informed by the Russian officer that the search had been a failure as the patrol was harassed by German small arms fire. As we were being sent to a rear area, away from the front lines, I was informed that the area in which F/O Stephens was downed would be taken by the advancing Russian Army and all the available information would be dispatched to the proper authorities.

“As the bombardier, engineer and waist gunner were the only members of the crew that saw F/O Stephens hit the ground, I will gladly submit their names and addresses if you so desire. I feel, in some instances, their information would be more valuable in securing the information concerning F/O Stephens.”

T/Sgt. John W. Leyden, RO: “All crew members bailed out safely. F/O Stephens was the only man unaccounted for and was the first to bail out of the aircraft approximately 80 miles southeast of Ruhland, Germany. He was reported to have landed between the German/Russian fighting line. Russians claimed that they would move out to rescue him under cover of the coming night. The following day they reported him dead.

“In my opinion, Stephens fell into the hands of the Germans and was either killed or taken prisoner. However, it is possible that he was shot by the Russians while approaching the ground in his parachute.

“The Russians attempted to kill me while I approached the ground in my parachute. It is possible they believed us to be German paratroopers. If the Russians had killed Stephens naturally they would not admit their mistake to us. He was definitely the first crew member to bail out and, as we were headed about 60 degrees toward the Russian lines, he should have landed closer to the German troops. He was never heard from again by any member of the crew. To my knowledge, the Russians never produced the body or any identification of it.”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6443 - 96TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	John W. Collens III, 0-774950, P.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Harry R. Maginnis, 0-784210, CP.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Emilio J. San Juame, 0-2071918, N.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Richard D. Bradley, 32945887, TOG.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Herman E. Coones, 32931532, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	William T. Prescott Jr., 13126020, L/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Robert J. Bair, 35914067, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Richard J. Shepard, 37671651, L/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Jesus C. Briseno, 39711479, T/G.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Richard V. Beauchamp, 38447609, R/O.	(RET)

1st Lt. John W. Collens III was a pilot assigned to the 96th Bomb Squadron. He left the Air Force after World War II, went to college, and was recalled to active duty in 1949. He served a total of 33 years in the Air Force, serving in Korea, Viet Nam, and at the Pentagon. He retired with the rank of Major General. “April 10, 1993: TWENTY-FIVE IS A BAD NUMBER: What does a 20-year old kid “airplane driver” think about as he takes off as a Group spare? Well, it’s March 15, 1945 and his crew has already received a bunch of hits from German flak over targets in Austria, Germany and Italy on earlier missions.

“So, spare - hell, they seldom go to the target anyway. We’ll be back in our comfortable sacks (?) In those palatial tents at Amendola in an hour or two. OK Harry (the co-pilot), let’s get’em turning (the props) and taxi out with our Squadron (the 96th) for this easy day. It ended up being our 25th mission BAD DAY!

“Back in the mid-section for the take-off is our ball turret gunner, William T. Prescott Jr. Bill is about my age, the rest of the crew somewhat older, so he and the others called me ‘Skipper.’ Thinking back on it, we had two old time, regular Army crew members who had to put up with a Lieutenant who was a decade their junior. ‘Skipper’ seemed appropriate.

“As we approached the bomb line over Northern Italy en route to the target, on oil refinery at Ruhland about 75 miles southeast of Berlin, one of the Squadron’s aircraft aborted. We filled in at the No. 9 slot (tail end Charlie). Now we were in an unfamiliar setting and approaching the bomb run for what was supposed to be a lightly defended target.

“Events would record that we were shot down over Kolin, Czechoslovakia, because that is where the returning 20th Squadron crews last noticed us in their formation as we reached the IP. All I know is that we were on the bomb run for Ruhland. The Russians had pushed the Germans back closer to ‘der fodderland,’ and the lightly defended target now had many, many more dual purpose 88s as the Germans moved back closer to Ruhland.

“One round went through a gas tank without exploding. That cost us the fuel we needed to get back to Italy. Another round took out an engine on the right. With the bombs still in the bay, we dropped like an anvil before jettisoning our calling cards. At 10,000 feet we were able to maintain altitude and headed for Lodz, Poland and sanctuary with the Russian allies who had recaptured that town.

“Bill Prescott had been hit in the forehead by a piece of flak that penetrated the ball turret. Fortunately, the turret’s metal thickness spent much of the flak’s energy, so Bill was only rendered unconscious. When he didn’t answer the oxygen call, the waist gun crew pulled him from the ball turret. Although our B-17 was riddled by those flak holes, no other crew member was injured.

“As we circled Lodz looking for a Russian airfield, a Yak fighter made a pass in front of us (VERY CLOSE) and we fired the Very pistol with the colors of the day - ‘hey we’re friendly.’ We later learned that the Yak had shot down a B-24 from England that was also attempting to make an emergency landing at Lodz. Its surviving crew members joined up later for our repatriation journey. Bill Prescott was coming back to life from his head injury wound. That Yak pressed on and didn’t fire at us, and the sod airfield came into sight, Whew!

“The landing roll was short and we were immediately surrounded by a horde of Russians in uniform. Our No. 2 engine had been windmilling when it wouldn’t feather. After the engine seized for lack of oil, the stage was set for a fire once the slipstream was gone. True to form, a fire started after rolling to a stop. Bless those ‘Ruskies,’ they started throwing dirt at the cowling to put out the fire (you gotta go with what’s available). Fortunately, the top turret gunner jumped out and used the aircraft hand extinguisher to save our bird.

“In the distance we noted a large cloud of black smoke. Soon a couple of U.S. airmen came walking up with the remains of their chutes. We learned they were the survivors of that ‘unfriendly’ B-24 that the Yak shot down. Later when interrogated by the Russians to determine if we were friend or foe, we learned that the Germans had used captured U.S. bombers against Soviet forces. They took no chances - you better fire the colors of the day from your Very pistol or face a shoot down.

“After what seemed like an eternity, and several shots of potato vodka to make us talk (‘What base did you come from, how many airplanes in your raid, what was your target, why did you come to Poland?’) we were packed off in a truck to downtown Lodz. Our Russian guards (we were still considered captives) entered a hotel, herded out a number of civilians and gave us their rooms. With those guards in the hallway outside, Thompson-type machine guns in hand, we wondered about our fate - when and where do we eat? Soon we were declared friendly, but the guard remained.

“Our two older, regular Army gunners displayed that knack of ingenuity for which peace time soldiers are famous. Somehow they got some vodka, got the guards pie-eyed, put them in their room, and strolled off in pursuit of a skirt they eyed upon entering the hotel. The navigator and I took off to see the sights of Lodz. Those sights included large groups of half-starved German POWs being herded down the street. We encountered a man who offered to take us to his home for ersatz coffee. Upon meeting his wife we learned that they were Jews that had escaped the holocaust due to being accomplished musicians.

“We were in Lodz but just a few days before being put into a truck to take us to another airfield. I encountered a young man dressed in U.S. Army uniform, sporting 2nd Lt. bars. He asked how he could get back to the U.S. side, called me ‘Sir,’ and his demeanor seemed fishy. I wondered how a U.S. Army Officer could get over into the Soviet side of battle hundreds of miles away from the nearest U.S. forces. Was he a deserter or maybe even a potential spy? I never saw him again.

“The truck took us from Lodz to a Soviet tactical airfield close to the front lines. We could hear the artillery in the distance. Our hosts were not prepared for our arrival and we spent the first night on straw in a barn along with other ‘grunts.’ Later we moved into better accommodations just slightly better than an outhouse. We also got our first taste of how Soviet soldier/airmen got to bathe and change into fresh underwear, but still retaining the outer wear. They had constructed a steam room at the barn. When you exited you turned in your dirty under clothes and were given clean long johns. Our next issue of clothing would await our arrival at the American shuttle base, Poltava, Ukraine USSR.

“While we were at this forward tactical airbase, we were split up - officer crewmen one place, eating with other Soviet officers, and our enlisted crew elsewhere. The Soviet political officer wore a different color uniform than the other aircrew officers. His manner was very suspicious and he alone spoke English. The Russians live off the land. We observed them leading in a cow on a rope behind the mess hall, shoot it, skin it on the spot and that was the meat for the meal. Polish peasant women were observed being herded down the road, implements in hand, and they brought in the potatoes for the meal. Which reminds me - in this the 1992 political year, the plural of potatoes does indeed have an ‘e.’

“Other American airmen were being brought into this forward airbase for repatriation back to U.S. hands. Our proximity to Berlin found us in the company of the 8th Air Force crewmen who were shot down and made their way into Soviet held territory. One, a Major, expressed a desire for a haircut one night following our meal. It was dark, we were loaded into trucks, taken to a nearby village, and the Russians went to the homes of the village barbers, forced them to their shops and demanded they cut our hair. When we offered to pay for the haircuts, the Soviets said, ‘nyet.’ We were still under guard.

“So controlled were the Russians that when we expressed delight at seeing American Jeeps, trucks, C-47 aircraft, etc. they reminded us that these were Soviet built vehicles and aircraft, not Lend Lease offerings. We can now realize, after the collapse of the USSR, how they were able to keep their people unaware of the events and contributions in the free world. Freedom of information is the foe of totalitarian governments.

“Next day we flew low level under the direction of the Russian navigator to Poltava. The low level flight was to prevent the American C-47 aircrew from viewing USSR airfields and other military activity. The Cold War had its beginning before the Hot One (WW II) ended. Pay attention America.

“While we were in Poltava, we were issued uniforms and underwear to replace those we had been wearing for two weeks. The trek from Lodz to Amendola would be via Tehran, Iran, Cairo, Egypt, Athens, Greece, and Bari, Italy. Upon arrival back at the 2nd Bomb Group we found our possessions were packed and about to be shipped to next-of-kin. Out tent mates had removed and consumed our hoarded beverages. We were, after all, declared Missing-In-Action and presumed dead. The dead don’t drink, so our stash of booze was gone. Thanks guys!

“By now, Bill Prescott’s wound was healed and the Group’s medics would not support award of the Purple Heart. They reasoned that since he was not hospitalized nor a wound was visible, the request for the award could not be honored. It would take another 45 years for the Air Force to give him the medal that none of us seek. At its 1991 Reunion in Dayton, Ohio, the Second Bombardment Association’s program included a ceremony at which S/Sgt. Bill Prescott received that long overdue Purple Heart.

“We flew three more missions before the war ended. Our first mission after our return was on April 20th, Vipiteno, Italy; the next on April 23rd, Peschiera, Italy, and the last one was on April 24th, Malborghetto, Italy. I did not have a permanently assigned navigator, so the one who was with me when we were shot did not participate in those final three missions.”

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6674 - 96TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Phillip Good, 0-761811, P.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Tare Powers, 0-830917, CP.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Cyril O. Keopp, 0-2065395, N.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Martin R. Schlau, 0-2001318, B.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Russell Kirts, 15382885, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Charles D. Nichols, 15127446, L/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Felix D. James, 32794940, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Michael Roll, 33756902, L/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Steve A. Tarby, 32587328, T/G.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	John Cetinich, 35219432, R/O.	(RET)

Interrogation report of 1st Lt. Phillip Good, and crew, upon return to Allied control: “We departed our base in Italy at 0855 hours for our target at Ruhland, Germany. Our approximate time was 1405 but we did not drop because the bombardier in the lead ship was hit. The flak was tracking and was very accurate. We turned off the bomb run. No. 4 was just about gone and we couldn’t keep up with the formation. About 1420 we left the formation, salvoed our bombs in a field, and headed due east. At about 1430 we lost No. 4. We found ourselves by pilotage and started for Lublin, Poland, which was briefed as an auxiliary field. We were able to hold our altitude at about 8,000 feet at 125 MPH, IAS. At about 1510 we let down to 3,000 feet due to 8/10ths clouds from 5 - 7,000 feet. We kept going until about 1545 when the soup closed in and visibility down to about three miles. We spotted Kielce, Poland, and circled to find a field since visibility prevented us going any further. While circling the town we were fired at and shot red and white flares and the firing stopped. Finally, we found an open field, and made a swell, wheels down landing in a field just outside of Bratagon at 1600. Damage to plane - buckled waist back of ball, hit telephone pole with No. 2 engine and dented nacelle and hole in navigator’s compartment. No. 3 prop was bent due to nosing over, leading edge of elevators are dented plus numerous flak holes.

“A little kid came out to the plane and when we said ‘Amerikanski’ the whole town came out. It took us quite awhile to get our things together. The camera and bombsight were left intact. The guns were taken apart to keep the people from firing them. The town constable stayed on guard. The people took us in town and gave us some milk and bread. Then the Commandant of Kielce, a Russian Major, came to see us. We were in luck since our right waist gunner and cameraman could both speak Polish. We assured the Major that no one was injured. He then ordered some of his men to guard the plane. I came into Kielce with the Major and he tried to interrogate me. I told him we were based in Italy, had attacked a target in Germany, had lost two engines and headed east. A woman, who could speak English fairly well, was brought in but I told no more. Finally the rest of the fellows came and we were told that they had to have more information in order to wire Moscow. We therefore told them our base and target. After this they gave us a large room and beds. We washed as best as possible, the Russians providing soap and towels. They gave us a very good supper with vodka which did things to us and finally to bed.

“The next day the pilot, navigator, engineer, cameraman and radio operator went out to the plane. We fired a rocket for one of the Russian officers that was with us and fired the radio gun up into the air. Our radio operator then succeeded in notifying 15th Air Force where we were and that all were

OK. The guns were all thoroughly dismantled, but we couldn't get to the ball turret. We then took our camera, bomb sight, radio receiver, cushions, radio gun intact, Gibson Girl back to the room with us. They wanted to take everything but the plane is pretty intact. Fuses, etc. were removed so they couldn't do any damage or learn anything of importance. The Russians drained the oil out of the airplane. On the bomb run, the oxygen went out and the tail gunner interphone was out, both due to flak."

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 379 - MARCH 16, 1945**

Thirty-nine aircraft took off, each with a load of 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs to bomb the Florisdorf Oil Refinery. Twenty-five aircraft dropped 294 bombs on the primary with several large explosions observed. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate lightly wounding 2nd Lt. W. B Cope, P, 429th Squadron; 1st Lt. C. J. Weiner, B; 2nd Lt. D. W. Powell, N; Cpl. W. G. Wapp, TOG; and F/O A. Houliars, N, all of the 49th Squadron.

Seven aircraft attacked Marshalling Yards at Amstettin, Austria, dropping 84 bombs with bomb hits observed in the Yards. Five aircraft attacked Marshalling Yards at St. Veit, Austria, dropping 60 bombs with hits reported in the Yards. Two aircraft were early returns.

B-17 #44-8820, with Colonel Richard G. Waugh, temporary Group Commanding Officer, piloting is missing.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT - A/C #44-8820 - 49TH SQUADRON**

Colonel	Richard G. Waugh, 0-20124, P.	(RET)
Major	Ernest L. Blanton, 0-670985, CP.	(RET)
1st Lt.	Bernard W. Stark, 0-669136, N.	(RET)
1st Lt.	Joseph Swift, 0-717957, B.	(RET)
1st Lt.	Albert A. Pierard, 0-768893, Mickey Navigator	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Herbert P. Taylor, 32935444, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Anthony T. Calabrese, 33690034, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Francis A. Abbott, 32912889, L/W.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Charles W. Freeman, 0-558355, T/G - Observer	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Edwin C. Wade Jr., 13121103, R/O.	(RET)

The 2nd Bomb Group Ground Radio Station received this message from A/C #44-8820:

A/C #820: "I have a message for you."

Ground Station: "Received - go ahead."

A/C #820: "I am going to land at Pecs, Pecs. Go ahead."

Ground Station: "Received - is this correct?"

A/C #820: "I am going to land at Pecs."

Ground Station: "Okay - received."

1st Lt. Charles W. Freeman, TG - Observer, after return to Allied Control: "We left the formation over Vienna. The entire crew was with the ship when we crash landed two miles south of Sasd, Hungary, which is approximately 20 miles NE of Pecs, Hungary.

"We were in our crash landing positions when landing and everyone was OK except that S/Sgt. Calabrese was wounded by flak over Vienna. The entire crew came back to Italy and were last seen on 25 April 1945."

Despite the fact that the Russians were Allies, it seemed that they did everything in their power to retain American airmen. This crew, and others that were to join them, were shunted from place to

place from March 29, 1945 until arriving in Odessa. On April 21, 1945, a contingent of 106 Allied airmen, including Colonel Waugh and seven of his crew, departed Odessa on H.M.S. Straffordshire for Naples, Italy. The other two members of his crew returned later.

This was the 83rd Mission for Major Ernest Blanton. He had flown one tour with the 2nd Bomb Group, gone home on leave, and returned to fly again. He had flown his first mission January 16, 1944 and completed that tour on May 12, 1944. Upon his return to combat his 51st mission was on August 25, 1944.

T/Sgt. Edwin C. Wade was a RO in the 49th Squadron: February 21, 1992: "My original crew flew to England in the early fall of 1944 to be assigned to the 8th Air Force. My pilot was Lt. William K. Buehler; Lt. Carl DeBois, co-pilot; Captain J. J. O'Hern, navigator; Lt. William Kerns, bombardier; Cpl. Herbert P. Taylor, engineer; Cpls. Joseph Waladkewics and Joseph DeVito, waist gunners; Cpl. Paul Siebert, tail gunner; and Cpl. Melvin Cook, ball turret gunner. Because of the heavy casualties in the 15th Air Force over the Ploesti Oil Fields, our stay in England was cut short, and we were transferred to Italy.

"During the fall and winter of 1944 and 1945 we had completed 25 successful missions over Southern Germany, Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia.

"My original crew was split up and for my 26th mission on March 16, 1945, I was assigned to a crew flying the lead ship on a bombing mission to the Florisdorf Oil Refineries near Vienna, Austria. The crew consisted of Colonel Richard Waugh, Group Commanding Officer; Major Ernest Blanton, Co-pilot; 1st Lt. Joseph Swift, Bombardier; Capt. Bernard W. Stark, Navigator; T/Sgt. Herbert P. Taylor, Engineer; S/Sgt. Anthony Calabrese and S/Sgt. Francis A. Abbott, Waist Gunners; and 1st Lt. Albert A. Pierard, Observer and Tail Gunner.

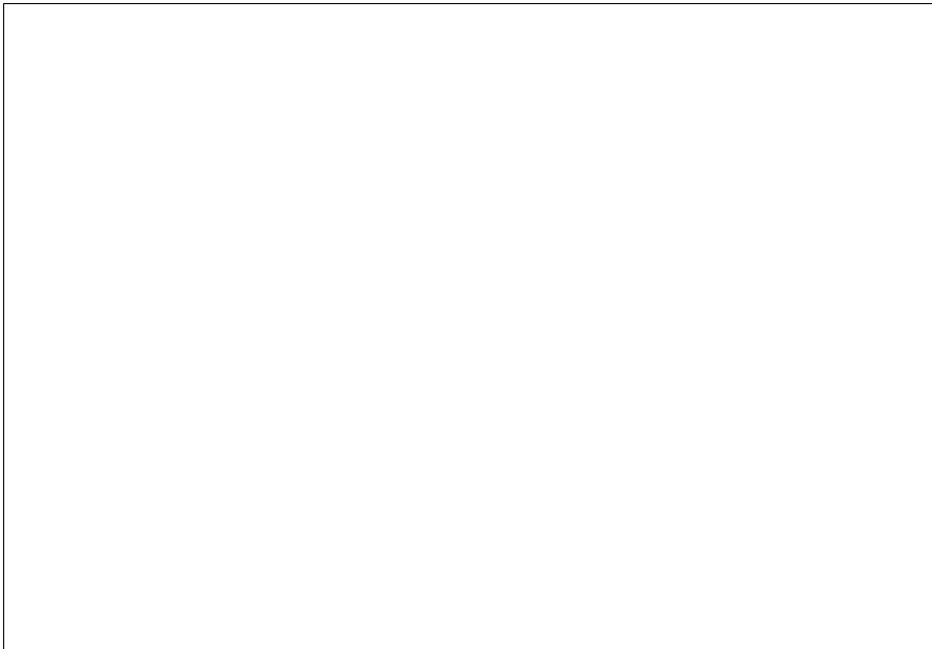
"During the bomb run the flak was severe and the plane was badly damaged. The bombs were dropped but the two left engines were lost and feathered. The left wing was severely damaged; the hydraulics and part of the oxygen tanks were shot out. Our plane immediately dropped out of the formation. Knowing we could never get back to the base, we headed toward the Russian lines hoping to make an emergency landing at Pecs, Hungary.

"Limping along at about 5,000 feet we were shot at with everything from rifle fire to 40mm shells. We barely managed to get over Lake Balaton and crash landed in a country field in Hungary. In crash landing we clipped several trees and I thought we were going to be buried alive in dirt being plowed up into the plane during landing.

"We got out of the plane and it was not long before we saw many peasants gathering a hundred or so yards away just standing and looking at us. We did not know if we were in German or Russian territory. Shortly though, a military vehicle drove up in which appeared to be a Russian Commandant. He was accompanied by a contingent of women soldiers holding machine guns and with many rounds of ammunition slung over their shoulders. Fortunately, with our Russian I.D. cards, we were able to identify ourselves as Americans.



A/C #44-8820 - Down in Hungary - 3-18-45  
(Courtesy - E. Wade)



T/R-L/R - E. Wade, H. Taylor, J. Swift, C. Freeman,  
Russian Doctor, A. Pierard  
B/R-L/R - Lisa (Russian Nurse), F. Abbott (Courtesy - E. Wade)

“They took us to a nearby village where we were fed vodka and wine while all along, drinking toasts to ‘Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill.’ The next day Captain Stark and S/Sgt. Calabrese were sent off to a hospital in Budapest for treatment to their injuries.

“The next couple of weeks were spent living in homes of Hungarian peasants and riding in the back of a broken down Model A Ford truck. On one occasion a couple of us were nearly shot by drunken Russian soldiers who really did not know who we were. Along the way we met up with 28 other American airmen who had been shot down. On March 29th, At Baja, Hungary, we all boarded a train that had been made up from old German boxcars. The next day we had a long stopover at Szeged, Hungary where we went in and enjoyed the town. After we left, about 20 miles out, it became evident that many were missing. We soon pulled over to a side track, the locomotive disconnected and went back to find the missing airmen. After several hours, the locomotive came back blowing their whistle, with all the men hanging on the sides.

“We traveled through Velika Kikinda, Serbia; Timisoara, Romania; Turnal Severin, Romania; Craiova, Romania; arriving at Bucharest, Romania on April 4th. Here we got our first decent meal, thanks to the International Red Cross. The next day we left Bucharest on a Russian train and passed through the dreaded Ploesti Oil Fields. On April 8th, we ended up in Odessa, Russia on the Black Sea. We were put up in a cold building where we slept in wooden stalls and ate and lived like prisoners. It was a gathering point for English and Canadian soldiers who had been released from prison camps by the Russians.

“After about two weeks in Odessa, we, along with the many Englishmen, were boarded on a British transport ship that had arrived from England with a load of released Russian POWs. We traveled for five days across the Black Sea, through Istanbul, the Dardanelles, around the coast of Greece and were dropped off at Naples, Italy on April 27. Here we were finally under American Military control.”

#### **LANDSHUT, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 380 - MARCH 19, 1945**

Forty-three aircraft took off with 42 aircraft dropping 481, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Landshut with good concentration of hits reported. There was little flak and no injuries. One aircraft dropped 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Passau, Austria. Results were not noted.

#### **WIENER NEUSTADT, AUSTRIA/ST. POLTEN, AUSTRIA/KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 381 - MARCH 20, 1945**

Forty-two aircraft took off each with a load of 10, 500-lb RDX bombs to attack the Vosendorf Oil Refinery in Vienna. Due to weather problems a multitude of targets were attacked. Twelve A/C dropped 60 bombs on Marshalling Yards at Wiener Neustadt. Six A/C dropped 30 bombs on Marshalling Yards at Klagenfurt. Eleven A/C dropped 100 bombs on St. Polten. One A/C attacked Marshalling Yards at Judenburg, Austria. One A/C attacked St. Veit, Austria Marshalling Yards. One A/C attacked Railroad Shops at Littlefeld, Austria. One A/C attacked Marshalling Yards at Amstettin. One A/C was an early return and six A/C dropped on an accidental release of the lead plane. Ten bombs were dropped on each of the single mission targets except only seven were dropped on the Knittelfeld Iron Works.

Bombing results were as follows: Wiener Neustadt and Amstettin Marshalling Yards were well covered with hits. Bombs were to the right at Klagenfurt and short at St. Polten and St. Veit. Part of the bombs hit in Judenburg Marshalling Yards. Bombs were across at Salla and Iron Works. Railroad Shops were hit at Knittelfeld. There were no reported injuries.

## **VIENNA/VILLACH/KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 382 - MARCH 21, 1945**

For the second day in a row the Group bombed a number of targets. Forty-three aircraft took off, each carrying four, 1,000-lbs GP bombs, to bomb the Kagran Oil Refinery at Vienna. Twelve aircraft dropped 48 bombs on the primary by PFF. Results unknown. Thirteen A/C dropped 52 bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Villach with hits reported. Six A/C dropped 24 bombs on Marshalling Yards at Klagenfurt with hits reported. One A/C dropped four bombs on Marshalling Yards at St. Polten, Austria with unobserved results. One A/C dropped four bombs on a Railroad Bridge at 45-11N - 15-7E. Bridge not hit. One A/C dropped four bombs on Marshalling Yards 46-37N - 14-38E with hits recorded. Eight A/C returned their bombs.

Flak at the primary target was heavy, moderate, and accurate resulting in slight wounds to 2nd Lt. Carl R. Buehner, CP. Cpl. Lee Rounsville, T/G, suffered from anoxia.

## **RUHLAND, GERMANY/KLAGENFURT/ZELTWEG, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 383 - MARCH 22, 1945**

Thirty aircraft took off to bomb the Oil Refineries at Ruhland. Fourteen aircraft dropped 148, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Refineries at Ruhland. Hits were reported in the target area. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate severely damaging 12 A/C and minor damage to 10. Lightly wounded were Captain Ralph E. Chambers, P, 20th Squadron; 2nd Lt. Frank J. Rickman, P, 96th Squadron; F/O P. E. Jones, B; and 1st Lt. F. Saenz, B, both of the 49th Squadron, and from the 429th; 1st Lt. F. M. Fouts, B; F/O E. S. Fox, B; Cpl. E. A. Morrow, RO, and seriously wounded was T/Sgt. T. I. Shivak, RWG.

Eight Me-262s attacked the formation with B-17 #44-6440 lost to this action. One Me-262 was destroyed in a joint claim by S/Sgt. Frederick L. Downs, S/Sgt. Warren T. McKane and S/Sgt. George D. Glass Jr., all of the 20th Squadron. Credit for probable destruction of an Me-262 went to S/Sgt. Darrell W. Jensen, 20th Squadron.

Also missing are B-17s #44-6697, #44-8191, #44-6738 and #44-6682.

Six A/C dropped 60, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Klagenfurt with hits reported and six A/C dropped 60, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Zeltweg, Austria with bombs reported as missing the target. There was one early return. It was not known if A/C #191 and #738 dropped their bombs on the target.

## **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6440 - 20TH SQUADRON**

F/O Ernest H. Williams, T-5279, P.	(KIA)
F/O Miles W. Massey, T-6027, CP.	(KIA)
F/O John O. Black, T-135855, N.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Maurice A. Tilbey, 19171445, TOG.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. Clarence S. Weibert, 37343659, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Willie P. Skeffington, 19033460, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. John C. Shuey, 35926904, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Conrad R. Schryer, 36825476, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. John H. Bryner Jr., 33694867, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Henry C. Lawson, 14178412, R/O.	(KIA)

S/Sgt. Alfred Novak, LTG on B-17 #729, after the mission: "I saw B-17 #440 attacked by an Me-262 which came in from 6 o'clock, low, firing 20mm. It received a direct hit between No. 1 and No. 2 engines and caught fire. The aircraft appeared out of control and in a roll. The wing then fell off and the aircraft continued in a dive. I couldn't follow it all the way to the ground because of fighter attacks at this time. I observed no parachutes. This was at 1255 hours at 51-40N - 14-10E."

Statement of S/Sgt. John H. Bryner Jr. after liberation: "A number of fighters attacked the B-17 on which I was the tail gunner. Both wings caught fire and the plane started spinning. I bailed out. I did not see any other members of the crew bail out and have not heard anything regarding the other members since this time."

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6697 - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	John W. Pierik, 0-731101, P.	(MIA)*
2nd Lt.	Robert W. Steele, 0-785002, CP.	(MIA)*
1st Lt.	Harold A. Taylor, 0-669140, N.	(MIA)*
2nd Lt.	John P. Yatsco, 0-929489, B.	(MIA)*
T/Sgt.	Richard H. Benjamin, 37566405, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Vernon T. Burger, 39216824, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Tony (NMI) Zvenbergen Jr., 38387823, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Charles L. Redford, 39920100, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Wilbur W. Jaffke, 33670805, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Raymond J. Levesque, 31309769, R/O.	(POW)

\* The missing Air Crew Report gave no further status for the four officers and a search of other sources gave no information regarding the fate of these four men.

Statement of 1st Lt. William J. McCormick, Pilot of B-17 #455, after the mission. "B-17 #697 was flying No. 4 position and he pulled down and to the left. I started to follow but he waved me on. As far as I know all of his engines were running. I lost sight of him after he pulled under me. I did not have time to ascertain any flak holes and the plane appeared to be under control. This was right after we came off the target."

T/Sgt. Richard H. Benjamin, UTG, March 7, 1994: "On March 22, 1945 our B-17 encountered flak over the target area which disabled our aircraft. We headed toward the Russian lines and were eventually escorted by three Russian aircraft (P-39s), our bomb bay doors were open and we used our red flares. The Russian fighters were positioned, one on each wingtip, and one on our tail. They next peeled off into the sun and attacked us, utilizing the 37mm cannons and machine guns. Our gunners returned fire, the upper turret was hit, in which I was in, our bomb bay was filled with smoke. I made my way back to the waist of the plane. Our plane was in flames and smoke. The cockpit was strafed, and my feeling is that the four officers were killed at this time. An attempt was made to return to the cockpit area, however, it was impossible with the flames and smoke.

"The plane was descending as if on automatic pilot. We, the six enlisted men, bailed out, were strafed in our chutes, some holes punctured our chutes but none of us were hit. To the best of my knowledge this was near Salzbrunn, Germany. We watched our plane descend. It went over a hill and that was the last view of it.

"All the enlisted men were POWs and eventually returned to the United States. I never heard any information regarding the officers again."

1st Lt. Samuel H. Martin was the original co-pilot on the crew of Lt. John Pierik. July 11, 1995: "My activities on March 22, 1945 were actually dictated by an event occurring the day before on March 21, although I did not realize the consequence at the time. During the day I was notified that I had to have a Typhoid Booster shot so I went to the Infirmary to receive it and went about my business for the balance of the day. Our crew was put on the alert for a mission the next day so I turned in early. When we were awakened early for breakfast and briefing I did not feel too well and could tell I had a fever,

but, felt that it would pass so I proceeded to briefing and the flight-line. Several members of the crew stated that I looked real flushed. John Pierik, our pilot, felt my forehead and said I felt like I was burning up with fever and that he felt I would jeopardize the other members of the crew if I proceeded in my condition. He then called for a replacement from the spare ship, a pilot named Robert Steele, and called for transportation to take me to the Infirmary where I checked in with a 104 plus degree temperature.

“That evening, after a reasonable time allowed for debriefing, I suspected something had happened to our crew when they failed to come to the Infirmary to see me. Shortly thereafter, the CO, Doc and Operations Officer came into the room where I had a bed in the Infirmary and told me about my crew being missing.

“I had flown 11 sorties up to this time. After my crew went down, I flew eight more sorties for a total of 19 at the end of the war in Europe. This included the last bombing mission of the European War on May 1, 1945, the target being Salzburg, Austria.

“I had the feeling that had I been able to go on this mission instead of my replacement, Robert Steele, things may have been different, but, who knows. Fate is fate.

“Although the 2nd was being held over for occupation, I had enough points to get out and was on my way back to the United States (in the middle of the Atlantic) when V-J Day came.”

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-8191 - 429TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Andrew F. Crane, 0-825538, P.	(POW)
1st Lt.	Paul M. Honke, 0-777679, CP.	(POW)
1st Lt.	George W. Betchley, 0-2057955, N.	(KIA)
1st Lt.	James S. Barnett, 0-716906, B.	(KIA)
1st Lt.	Donald F. Maine, 0-716492, R.N.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Donald A. Dorman, 31325264, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Robert A. Keuchel, 37434464, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	R. G. DeMatteis, 13157733, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Stephan J. Futur, 13189816, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Daniel P. Dunkerley, 6980834, R/O.	(KIA)

Capt. Andrew F. Crane after liberation: “We left the formation just after dropping bombs on the target. We flew eight miles to 10 miles N. of Breslau then bailed out. I personally saw five chutes, and other crew members bailed out five minutes previously. Dorman, Betchley, Barnett, Honke, and myself bailed out after other crew members had bailed out a few minutes before. No members were in the plane when it crashed as far as I know. Saw bombardier, navigator, co-pilot and engineer jump. Others were informed to jump three minutes before we jumped. Germans couldn’t find any in the aircraft and asked me if I knew their whereabouts.

“I saw none of the crew on the ground or anywhere except five descending chutes. My co-pilot and I found each other at German Headquarters. Both he and I were strafed, in our chutes by Me-109s. I heard gunfire continually and assume other crew members were killed by strafing or in attempting to make the Russian lines.

“At German Headquarters I saw a picture of Betchley (escape picture which we all carried) and dog tags of Dorman and Dunkerley. I saw Dorman and Betchley bail out. As I see it, they were definite victims of strafing. The co-pilot was strafed four times. He oscillated his chute and managed to only sustain a grazing from a machine gun bullet. I was strafed twice.

“For information of other crews: I saw two B-17s quite a distance in front of me being attacked by Me-109s. Both caught fire and exploded. I did see two chutes. Possibly one ship could have been Lt. John Pierik’s.”

One aircraft not reported missing, #682, made an emergency landing at a Russian forward base on 22 March 1945 at 1510 hours. This A/C went over the primary target on the first run over the target, but left the formation before the second run was made. The A/C was pulling excessive power and the pilot left the formation with less than 50 gallons of gas in each tank. The bomb load of 10, 500-lb. RDX bombs was jettisoned at 1456 hours. This A/C received major damage from two Russian piloted aircraft, a P-39 and Yak 3, because, as pilots of fighters later informed the crew; the "Y" on the fin of the B-17 looked like a German insignia at a distance. The A/C was repaired by Russians and the crew returned to base on 26 March 1945. Crew members were:

2nd Lt.	Arthur K. Forest, P.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Libero P. Casaccia, CP.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Walter F. Javor, N.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Louis (NMI) Etter, B.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Hugh W. Sexton, U/T.	(RET)
Cpl.	Willie J. Schonage, L/T.	(RET)
Cpl.	Hugh A. Stevenson, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Herbert W. Wendt, L/W.	(RET)
Cpl.	Joseph F. Klykamp, T/G.	(RET)
Cpl.	Vernon H. Sanders, R/O.	(RET)

Another aircraft, not reported missing in the report, was #44-6738 from the 96th Squadron. This aircraft was hit by flak at the I.P. and was in the flak for about 20 minutes. They were hit heavily and turned to a heading of 65 degrees. They were fired upon along the route and over the Russian lines. Russian P-39s left them at the Oder River and they landed at Ieczycza, Poland. The crew was treated well but interrogated extensively. The Russians were souvenir conscious, wanted everything the men had. They had complete freedom on the base but watched closely in town. On the 26th of March they were picked up and taken to Poltava and returned to Base from there. Crew members were:

2nd Lt.	William C. Landers, 0-9287725, P.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	C. A. Wooten, 0-928891, CP.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	C. W. Olson, 0-9926667, N.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Bernard N. Sepolio, 18199830, TOG.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	George P. Shimko, 15014212, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Frank J. Kozina, 16147791, L/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Ivan R. Thornberry, 34736345, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Edward (NMI) Ratner, 32926626, L/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	John L. Bosshart, 36831136, T/G.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Jackson J. Boone, 15915783, R/O.	(RET)

#### **RUHLAND, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 384 - MARCH 23, 1945**

Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 253, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Oil Refineries at Ruhland. Smoke obscured the target but bombs fell in the smoke area. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate resulting in serious injuries to 1st Lt. C. Wickersham, P, 20th Squadron, and light injuries to Sgt. Ronald T. Sebold, TOG, 20th Squadron. S/Sgt. W. S. Grooms, LWG, 49th Squadron, suffered from anoxia.

B-17 #44-6452 from the 20th Squadron is missing.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6452 - "BIG STUFF" - 20TH SQUADRON**

F/O	Arthur L. Ferkin, T-4221, P.	(RET)
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F/O	Andrew J. Girelamo, T-5192, CP.	(RET)
F/O	Paul F. Kisak, T-133040, N.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Robert W. Phillippe, 16130219, TOG.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Carlton J. Sprague, 32865124, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Raymond L. Isaac, 18915370, L/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Curtis R. Hollister, 14090769, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Russell H. Johnson, 36783233, L/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Wilson (NMI) Woodburn, 39569164, T/G.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	William A. Harrison, 19151991, R/O.	(RET)

Statement of T/Sgt. William A. Harrison after return to Allied control: “We were over Ruhland, Germany when we left the formation. I did not bail out nor did any others in the crew. We crash landed near Kety, Poland. All ten of the crew were safe. We were then taken from one Russian prison camp to another. We were under Russian guard for about two months.

“There were about 85 Americans and two British RAF men in the prison in Kiev, Russia. Americans were from the 8th and 15th Air Force. All were sent back to Italy and arrived at Naples on the 7th of May 1945.”

Statement of F/O Arthur L. Ferkin, Pilot, after return to Allied control: “Over the target we were hit by flak and Me-262s. Two engines were knocked out immediately and we headed for Russian lines. We landed near Kety, Poland and for about 60 days we were with the Russians who were helping us to return to our base in Italy. This crash landing was a wheels-up job with nobody hurt except the pilot who suffered a bruised left knee.

“After the landing we wandered around Russia for 60 days going from Krakow to Lwow to Kiev and finally to Odessa where we all boarded a British boat and returned to Italy, including Russell H. Johnson. In Italy I was the first of the crew to return to the U.S.”

### **BERLIN, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 385 - MARCH 24, 1945**

Thirty aircraft took off and 27 aircraft dropped 128, 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the Daimler Benz Assembly Plant in Berlin. Three aircraft were early returns. Flak was heavy, intense and accurate. 1st Lt. William Callaghan, N, 96th Squadron, was seriously wounded and B-17's #44-6718 and #44-8162 are missing. The majority of the bombs were slightly left and short of the target with some hits in the assigned area.

Ten to 12 Me-262s and one Me-109 attacked “Charlie” Box. Attacks were from out of the sun and formation vapor trails. E/A were in glide, jet units not being used, breaking off low; jet power then used. These attacks came when the formation was in the flak. P-51s then engaged the enemy.

E/A consisting of Me-262s, Me-109s and Me-210s attacked “Dog” Box. E/A were very aggressive. One Me-262 was firing rockets. The attacks ended before bombs away. Two P-51s were observed to shoot down one Me-262 which hit the ground and exploded.

S/Sgt. K. E. Alles and S/Sgt. Benjamin W. Prostic, 96th Squadron, were each credited with destruction of an Me-109 and Cpl. Lawrence T. Ashley credited with the probable destruction of an Me-262.

B-17 combat damage: From flak, 16 minor and 2 severe. From fighters, two minor.

### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6718 - 20TH SQUADRON**

1st Lt.	Robert W. Tappan, 0-693193, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Hyacinith C. Thimmesch, 0-700681, CP.	(POW)
1st Lt.	Leon J. Gesicki, 0-2065978, N.	(POW)

S/Sgt.	Walter (NMI) Sura, 35383424, TOG.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Irving M. Chary, 42001603, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	James E. Ash, 16078841, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	William J. Kralich, 37571156, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	James W. Carter, 15048264, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	James L. Shrout, 14143669, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Robert C. Reardon, 37530618, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of S/Sgt. James D. Silianoff, TG on B-17 #365, after the mission: "Of two Me-262s which attacked our plane, one continued an attack on plane #718, spraying that aircraft with 20mm fire into the fuselage and bomb bay doors. Plane #718 started to lose altitude and speed rapidly and falling behind the Squadron, and smoke began to emit from the tail. Two to three other Me-262s also attacked at this point. Then I saw two parachutes open and then I lost sight of the plane. All this happened before we reached the target at 51-45N - 13-12E, at 1217 hours, altitude 26,000 feet."

The following statements were given to the Army Air Forces Personnel Affairs Branch, regarding the death of S/Sgt. Irving M. Chary:

S/Sgt. William Kralich: "I don't know if he bailed out, but if he did it was about ten miles south of Berlin. I don't know if he was injured. I was flying the upper turret and Irving M. Chary was flying right waist position during the flight. Those in the front portion of the plane were unable to get to the back because of enemy fire destroying the passageway."

S/Sgt. Walter Sura, Togglier: "In my opinion he did not bail out. The ball gunner said he (Chary) had been hit by gunfire. The ball gunner said, 'As I kicked the other waist gunner out the waist door, I saw Chary crawling toward the door.'" The ball gunner then bailed out. I think he was wounded and without oxygen and went down with the plane. We didn't hear anything about him after the flight. All the other crew members were accounted for in some manner, either by one of us or the Germans."

S/Sgt. James L. Shrout, Tail Gunner: "Due to the fact that I was flying as a replacement on that particular mission, I was not acquainted personally with T/Sgt. Chary. I believe he bailed out according to information picked up later. I bailed out near Juterbog, Germany which is a little south of Berlin.

"My interphone was shot out on the first pass therefore I had no contact with remaining crew members. To the best of my knowledge he was not injured. Due to the fact that I was flying tail, I saw a parachute leave the plane almost immediately after the first attack and it was quite some time before I saw anymore chutes leave the plane and from information received later, the first chute had been T/Sgt. Chary, because the remaining crew members were accounted for and they claimed to have bailed out at very close intervals."

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-8162 - 429TH SQUADRON**

2nd Lt.	Richard (NMI) Rapelyea, 0-830931, P.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Allie G. Melson, 0-784904, CP.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Charles N. Parrish, 0-2072522, N.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Marvin J. Steinfeld, 17070404, TOG.	(KIA)
Cpl.	Melvin L. Rowe, 19040904, U/T.	(KIA)
Cpl.	Donald (NMI) Roberts, 36873682, L/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Glenn R. Bailey, 36442831, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Herbert M. Jacobs, 12220058, L/W.	(RET)
Cpl.	Fred C. Bryant Jr., 36435437, T/G.	(RET)
Cpl.	Donald L. Wagaman, 33871546, R/O.	(RET)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Richard Rapelyea, P, after return to Allied Control: "I was the pilot of our plane when enemy fire shot out our controls. The entire crew bailed out. But I believe S/Sgt. Marvin Steinfeld, who was on his first mission with this crew, was killed by rifle fire while descending. We came down over German/Russian lines and soldiers of both sides shot at us as we came down in our chutes. I was not an eye witness to his death. His place of burial is not known to me.

"Cpl. Melvin Rowe was the toggler on our plane and he also bailed out. I believe he also was shot while descending in his chute. I was not an eye witness to his death nor do I know the place of his burial."

Lt. Leland Ray Swanson was a member of the 20th Squadron and CP on the crew of Captain Clarence O'Donnell. May 4, 1992: "We were one man short of a full crew and always had a fill-in man at one of the waist guns. Sgt. Bill Reinfeld was assigned to our crew for several missions until he became Squadron Photographer. He just happened to be the cousin of our bombardier, Lt. Walter Ershow.

"On two separate occasions we had men wounded but each time they were fill-in gunners. The only casualty to our crew were two frost bitten ears of our tail gunner, Carl Bray. I'm sure he didn't think there was anything minor about it, but for some reason he didn't get the Purple Heart.

"We always felt our crew was top notch. No wise guys, no goof-ups. We all took our jobs seriously and went all out to look out for each other.

"Our crew flew in a lead position, Squadron or Group, on six occasions and O'Donnell was the only Lt. in our time frame that I am aware of, who was promoted to Captain in one tour of duty. We flew to targets in Germany, Northern Italy, Austria, Hungary and Yugoslavia, including the long dudes to Ruhland and Berlin where some had to land in Northern Italy because they ran out of fuel.

"I'd say that our tour was the typical B-17 story. We had knocked out engines, the whole shell through a wing that took off a corner of the fuel tank, the six foot gash up the side, the damaged hydraulic lines, the engine afire, the fire in the cockpit, saw a few planes explode, saw friends pull out of formation on fire and anxiously counted chutes, had a Me-262 take a B-17 right off our wing with a single pass at the Squadron and had the usual bomb hang-ups that had to be pried loose over the Adriatic. We were on a raid to Szony, Hungary the day that Lt. Gordon McDaniel made some kind of history by shooting down five FW-190s, thereby becoming an ace in a single day.

"I did not fly the Berlin mission on March 23, 1945, but had flown the day before to Ruhland. We always referred to them as Berlin missions because Ruhland was so close to Berlin. My pilot, Clarence O'Donnell, did fly the Berlin mission and later told me what they had experienced. It was his 24th mission and was flying co-pilot on the crew of William Horton, Squadron Operations Officer. They were flying as leader of "Charlie" box. He said they had no flak maps for part of the route and varied course as that black stuff came up to meet them. Lt. Tappan, the No. 3 man in the box was shot down by Me-262s on their first pass. Tappan had flown every one of his orientation missions with Clarence and on every one had the you know what shot out of them. He received a post card from Tappan, from Paris, after he walked out of prison camp. A supercharger was shot out of his No. 2 engine, a 1,000-lb. bomb dropped through the bomb bay doors and two of his crew were killed. The rest of the crew bailed out and were lucky that German army personnel got them instead of civilians. Clarence said that an Me-262 went across the top of their left wing so close that he could reach out and shake hands with him. He said Templehoff was just off to their left if they needed a runway. Several were looking for a runway or service station before finally reaching Amendola.

"The middle of May 1945, the war in Europe suddenly ended, stranding as it were, a B-17 bomber crew a few missions shy of 35 required for a full tour. We fully expected to be retrained for B-29s and sent to the Pacific Theater after a short leave Stateside. Crew chiefs and mechanics were working feverishly on our beloved B-17s to shape them up for flights across the Atlantic and two or

three crews were leaving daily. After a boring eternity of two months our number finally came up on July 20, and our nine man crew and five P-47 jocks we were taking along as passengers happily stowed our luggage in the big bird and made ready to soar.

“As co-pilot, part of my responsibility was to accompany the pilot in a thorough pre-flight inspection of the plane’s exterior. During our extended walk around the plane, I picked up a tiny white plastic cylinder about ½ inch in diameter with a tiny metal spring protruding from one end. I had no idea what it was or how it came to be lying on the tarmac. Entering by the waist door near the rear of the plane I made my way forward between the rows of duffel and flight bags. The first man I came upon was Carl Bray, our tail gunner from Toronto, Ohio. For no reason whatsoever I cornered Carl, pressed the little white cylinder into his hand and quietly told him, ‘Take care of this for me Carl, I’ll tell you about it when we get back to the States.’ Then I promptly forgot about the whole incident.

“When we landed at Bradley Field, Connecticut three days later we were in a constant scramble to get through medical exams and train arrangements to go home for rest leave. Carl and I did not cross paths again at Bradley nor as we expected, after our 30-day leaves. A dozen or so days later, August 6 and 9, the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and now combat crews were lower than low in Air Corps priority. Provided with a choice, Carl and nearly all the crew separated and returned to being civilians.

“As the years rolled by we gradually lost track of old war buddies. Everyone was involved with getting themselves educated and pursuing careers. Then 40 years later, summer of 1985, our pilot, Clarence O’Donnell, and two of our crew members accidentally met at a 15th Air Force reunion at March AFB, California. They resolved to go all out to locate all the other crew members. Two years later they had all been located, miraculously alive, and all but one, retired.

“November 1, 1989 we finally got the whole crew together at a 2nd Bomb Group reunion in Tucson, Arizona. After the hugs and tears finally mellowed out to smiles and laughter, Carl Bray sidled up to me and with rather an intense look on his face said, ‘Swanee, I’ve got something of yours. You told me to take care of it and you’d tell me what it was when we got to where we were going.’ He pulled out a tiny purple velvet bag with a drawstring at the top. Thoroughly puzzled and fascinated by the elegant appearance of the velvet bag and his demeanor, I watched as he ceremoniously spread open the drawstrings, dug in the bag with a forefinger and proudly held up a tiny white plastic cylinder with a spring protruding from one end! I was absolutely amazed and speechless! I took it from his hand, held it, examined it closely, stalling for the words... and words. Carl watched me intently, expectantly. Finally I blurted out, ‘Carl, that was 40 years ago!’ He shrugged, ‘Yea, well you told me to take care of it for you and this is the first time that I’ve had a chance to give it back to you.’

“By now I had suppressed the wave of guilt within me enough to realize what this dear man had done and what it meant to him. Caressing the tiny velvet bag, I looked at my friend. ‘I don’t know what it is Carl. I didn’t know then, and I don’t know now. It was a little joke, a prank. That’s what it was. But what it is now, well it’s one of my proudest possessions. If you can look out for it for 44 years, I will look out for it from here on in. I’ll never part with it, I’ll never give it up as long as I live.’ And I never will. That little cylinder occupies a place of honor in my trophy case right beside my Air Force wings, ribbons and medals.”

Lt. Richard K. Radtke was in the 96th Squadron and flew the Berlin mission on the crew of Captain William Boyce. October 2, 1993: “A day or two before the Berlin mission the Group flew a mission to a target called Ruhland. The target was relatively close to Berlin. We lost a number of aircraft on that mission, most of which crash landed behind the Russian lines, and ultimately the surviving crewmen were returned. We, those of us who did not fly the mission, were told that fighters were responsible for most of the losses.

“One can well understand our disbelief and shock when the cover was removed from the Mission Map, during briefing, on the day of our mission.

“Ordinarily, the string (in red) they used to mark the route of ingress and egress were relatively squat, i.e., short on ingress, wide on egress. This was long on the vertical axis, narrow on the horizontal. In short, we all recognized ‘trouble’ when we saw it.

“We went through the usual briefing routine, had breakfast, and were airborne. The target was the Daimler-Benz Tank Works located on the southwest edge of Berlin. It lay adjacent to the stadium where the track and field events were held in the 1936 Olympics, our landmark for spotting the target. The attack was on a north-easterly axis with Groups in trail, dropping 1,000-lb. General Purpose bombs, some with delayed action fuzes. All Squadrons dropping on the Group lead. I do not recall the intervolometer settings.

“The Tank Works was the 5th Wing’s target for the day. The 5th Wing of the 15th Air Force had six Groups of B-17s attached to it during my tour of duty. The 2nd’s Order of Battle for the mission was as follows: Lt. Col. Luther M. Bivins, CO of the 49th Squadron, flew Group lead, the 96th was high right, 20th flew low left, and 429th brought up the rear. I was the 96th’s Lead Bombardier, Fred Rice Jr., the Lead Navigator, and Bill Boyce, 96th Lead Pilot. I was from Menasha, Wisconsin, Rice from Emporia, Virginia, and Boyce was from Cleveland, Ohio.

“Two events occurred, just prior to turning on the I.P. and on the bomb run, until engaged by ‘flak’ - and both involved German fighters. This mission was the first in which I personally saw German fighters. I started flying missions in October 1944 and finished my tour in early April 1945.

“Secondly, the chin turret of the ‘G’ Model B-17 had two, 50 cal. machine guns mounted on it. The weapons could be changed two ways, one way or another, but not both. The first was manually. There was a lever about 18 inches long on either side of the bombardier’s seat. By pulling up on the rear end of the lever, the charging handle of the gun was pulled back, the bolt opened. A round was inserted into the chamber as the bolt moved forward into battery position, ready to fire. The other method was a hydraulic charging mechanism that accomplished the same sequence, it involved pushing a button, needless to say, easier. On this day, our aircraft was equipped with the manual mechanism.

“Early on, it was the practice to test fire all guns en route to the target. This procedure fell into disuse and was dropped entirely while Col. Paul T. Cullen commanded the Group, for fighter resistance had dropped to ‘zip;’ until this day! The guns had not been test fired!

“When attacked by the fighters, my attempt to charge the guns jammed both of them. So I sat in fear, rage and frustration calling out the incoming targets for the others.

“On return to Amendola, I teased Rice about shooting at our P-51s; his response was short and positive, ‘If they come that close, I’m going to shoot.’

“The mission was memorable for a variety of reasons. It was the longest, round-trip mission flown in the ETO during the war. And, we were attacked by Me-262 fighters, truly a first in the annals of warfare, however, others too make that claim. While on the bomb run, the Wing formation was ‘Groups in trail’ which reduced our overall defensive fire significantly. We were engaged by one sweep of a Me-262, which did not fly a pursuit curve, but rather came straight from the rear, at our altitude, and flew down the line of Groups, taking out one aircraft from each Group. Other crew members reported that the Me-109s were chewing them up at their leisure.

“From the ‘front row center’ seat in the nose of our aircraft, I witnessed this unprecedented display of speed, which I suspect, changed aerial warfare as we knew it, for all time.

“The Nazi war machine was hurt, badly hurt, but we still felt its sting. The Group lost two B-17s that day.”

S/Sgt. Virgil F. Hoelscher was the TG on the crew of Lt. Bernard Donahue and assigned to the 96th Squadron. September 26, 1993: “I was in the Cadet Program at Spring Hill College near Mobile,

Alabama from December 1943 until April 1994. I was one of the 65,000 that was eliminated from the program due to the fact that they didn't need as many pilots as they had anticipated.

"I took my flexible gunnery training at Kingman, Arizona and my overseas training, as a crew, at Avon Park, Florida. My crew consisted of Bernard Donahue, P; Ira D. Stroup, CP; William Waag, N; George Geilman, B; James Walker, U/T; Nyles Grissett, R; Charles Jamison, W; Thomas McElhiney, BT; and myself, TG. I do not recall the other waist gunner's first name. His last name was Johnson and he joined us in Italy.

"I arrived in Italy in January 1945 and flew 22 missions. I kept a brief diary which I shall note as recorded at that period of time.

"February 18, 1945 - Today I flew my first mission. Target was Linz, Austria. Medium amount of flak. Bombed through clouds at 25,000 feet.

"February 19, 1945 - Target, Vienna, but bombed an alternate, Klagenfurt, Austria. No flak, had some oxygen trouble. Bombed at 27,000 feet.

"February 25, 1945 - Target, Linz, Austria. After flying over it and through flak, we didn't drop bombs. We went and hit Amstettin, Austria. No flak, made two bomb runs. Encountered some Ju-88s.

"March 1, 1945 - Target, Moosbierbaum, Austria. Didn't see any flak. Easy mission.

"March 4, 1945 - Target, Sopron, Hungary. Very cold. Didn't encounter any flak. Really blasted target although we made two runs on it.

"March 9, 1945 - Target was to have been Brux, but we bombed Graz, Austria as an alternate. Flak medium but we encountered it at Brux and Maribor. Little damage to plane.

"March 12, 1945 - Target, Vienna, Austria. Expected lots of flak but saw little. 10/10 cloud covering. Several holes in plane, no major damage.

"March 14, 1945 - Target, Szony, Hungary. Visual with lots of flak and they were really on the ball tracking us perfectly. A number of holes in plane, two in the tail.

"March 15, 1945 - Target, Ruhland, Germany. We didn't drop on target but did get flak. Really had a rough time! Came in with No. 1 engine feathered and No. 4 wasn't giving us any power. Picked up several holes in plane.

"March 16, 1945 - Target, Vienna, Austria but we had to turn back just before arriving at Yugoslavia coast. No. 4 engine went out. Able to feather it. Dropped bombs in Adriatic and headed for home. Also hit bad weather, ice formed on wings and stabilizer.

"March 20, 1945 - Target, Vienna, but we couldn't keep up with formation due to loss of power in an engine. Bombed Knittelfeld, Austria. Didn't see any flak over target but did encounter some over a small town near the target.

"March 21, 1945 - Target, Vienna. Bombed by PFF at 30,500 feet. 52 below zero. We put first mission on No. 750 today.

"March 24, 1945 - Mission No. 13. The other evening someone jokingly said that one of these days we would bomb Berlin. Well, today we did and what a mission it was! The sky was black with flak and Me-262s hitting us! The first came in at 6 o'clock high. After firing several bursts, the Me-262 began to smoke and it still was smoking when it went under me. Later the ball turret gunner told me it was still smoking as it passed under him. It seems a miracle we made it. No. 2 engine was losing power all the way to the target and had to drop two bombs to keep with the formation.

"Were unable to drop bombs after passing over target. Saw a chute open as the crew of a disabled B-17 bailed out. Had to feather a prop on No. 2 engine, lost altitude. Sure good to see those P-51 escorts! (What a day!)

"April 1, 1945 - Target, Maribor, Yugoslavia. A railroad bridge but it had been bombed before we got there. Too much overcast to go to an alternate. Brought bombs back to base.

"April 5, 1945 - Today hit an airdrome in Northern Italy in the Udine area with 38 frag bombs. Photos showed a thorough job. Lots of flak.

“April 7, 1945 - Target, railroad bridge at Bressnone, Northern Italy but due to 10/10 cloud coverage did not drop our bombs.

“April 9, 1945 - Bombed the front lines in Northern Italy with frag bombs. Did a good job supporting British 8th Army. Very little flak.

“April 10, 1945 - Bombed the front lines in Northern Italy again. Easy mission.

“April 15, 1945 - Target near Bologna, Italy. Flak slight, easy mission.

“April 18, 1945 - Target near Bologna again. Mission scrubbed right after takeoff. At noon we were briefed to go again. Very little flak, easy mission.

“April 23, 1945 - Target, railroad bridge in Northern Italy, was knocked out by Group ahead of us. As an alternate we hit supply dumps at Peschiera, Italy. No flak, easy mission. My ‘LAST’ mission!

“When the war ended, I was assigned to the Army of Occupation flying some formations at times to let them know we were still around. I came home in October 1945.”

#### **PRAGUE, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 386 - MARCH 25, 1945**

Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 1,026 fragmentation clusters on the Kbely Airdrome at Prague. Strikes were reported in the target area and many fires started. Little flak.

#### **WIENER, NEUSTADT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 387 - MARCH 26, 1945**

Twenty-nine aircraft dropped 1,100, 100-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Wiener Neustadt with an excellent concentration of bombs in the target area. Flak was minimal.

#### **GRAZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 388 - MARCH 30, 1945**

Four aircraft took off on a Pathfinder mission at 0742 hours to bomb the North Station Goods Depot at Vienna. Two aircraft dropped 24, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Graz by PFF with unobserved results. These aircraft diverted to Graz due to insufficient cloud cover at the primary target as instructed to do. Two others aborted and returned to base. Flak was heavy, slight and inaccurate.

#### **LINZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 389 - MARCH 31, 1945**

Twenty-six aircraft dropped 254, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Main Station at Linz by PFF. Observation through a hole in the clouds indicated that all bombs hit in the city. Flak was heavy, slight and inaccurate. One aircraft dropped 10, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Linz, Austria with unobserved results.

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# 19

## OPERATIONS:

### APRIL/MAY/JUNE, 1945

#### **M**ARIBOR, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 390 - APRIL 1, 1945

Thirty-two aircraft took off to bomb a Railroad Bridge at Maribor. Only six aircraft were able to drop 34, 1,000-lb. RDX bombs. All Boxes made three to four passes at the target but only one Box was able to see the target long enough to bomb. Its bomb pattern covered the target. Flak was heavy, moderate, and accurate causing the death of 2nd Lt. Richard S. Wood. Lightly wounded were 1st Lt. W. B. Cope, P; 1st Lt. A. H. Stover, P; 2nd Lt. T. C. Andrews, N; and S/Sgt. S. W. Dudley; UT, all from the 49th Squadron. S/Sgt. H. L. Lindaberry, 96th Squadron, suffered from frostbite.

B-17 #542, piloted by 1st Lt. Walter B. Cope was forced to make an emergency landing at Prakos Airdrome, Yugoslavia having engines No. 1, 3 and 4 knocked out by flak. The crew was returned to base by C-47.

#### **GRAZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 391 - APRIL 2, 1945**

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 280, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Graz. A good concentration of hits was reported in the yards. Flak was heavy, moderate and accurate with no losses and no injuries.

#### **UDINE, ITALY - MISSION NO. 392 - APRIL 5, 1945**

Twenty-six aircraft dropped 1,045, 125-lb. fragmentation clusters on the Airdrome at Udine. A good pattern was reported in the assigned area. The airfields in this area had always been a particular problem for the heavies of the 15th Air Force. The enemy pilots were experienced, aggressive and the cause of loss of many B-17s, B-24s and fighters. Flak was heavy, slight and accurate with no losses or injuries.

#### **VERONA/PERONA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 393 - APRIL 6, 1945**

The Germans were on the run in Northern Italy and targets now were to cut them off from returning to Germany and also to support the British 8th Army in its drive. Twenty-five aircraft dropped 150, 1,000-lb. RDX bombs on the Railroad Bridge. There was a near miss on the bridge but patterns were to the left and right of the target. This was the third failure of the Group to completely wipe out the bridge. Flak was heavy, moderate and inaccurate.

#### **BRESSANONE, ITALY - MISSION NO. 394 - APRIL 7, 1945**

Forty-three aircraft took off to bomb a Railroad Bridge at Bressanone. The planes did not bomb the primary nor alternates due to cloud cover over the targets.

#### **BRESSANONE, ITALY - MISSION NO. 395 - APRIL 8, 1945**

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 168, 1,000-lb. RDX bombs on a Railroad Bridge at Bressanone. This was the second attempt in two days to cover this target. Strike photos showed that the bridge was successfully downed. Flak was heavy, moderate and inaccurate.

#### **OPERATION BUCKLAND, ITALY - MISSION NO. 396 - APRIL 9, 1945**

This mission was designed to do a saturation bombing of German troop positions in the Bologna area. The area was designated as "APRICOT." Forty-one aircraft dropped 1,537, 120-lb. fragmentation clusters on this target. Bombing by the First Wave showed an excellent pattern in the assigned area while the Second Wave started a little short, carried to the left and into the target area. Flak was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate, wounding one man.

#### **OPERATION BUCKLAND, ITALY - MISSION NO. 397 - APRIL 10, 1945**

This mission was a repeat of April 9 in support of the British 8th Army. This target was also in the Bologna area and designated "CHARLIE." Thirty-nine aircraft dropped 1,482, 120-lb. fragmentation clusters on the enemy positions with excellent coverage by both waves. Flak was heavy, slight and inaccurate. No injuries, no losses.

#### **PADUA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 398 - APRIL 11, 1945**

Twenty-eight aircraft attacked the North Railroad Bridge at Padua dropping 446, 300-lb. GP bombs on the bridge. Probable hits on the bridge were reported. Flak was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate but damaging six B-17s, two severe. B-17 #44-8108, 429th Squadron, was severely damaged. When over friendly territory the pilot ordered the crew to bail out and he crash landed the plane without injury. S/Sgt. W. D. Schultz broke an ankle while landing. Members of the crew were: 2nd Lt. C. E. Underwood, P; 2nd Lt. K. O. Woodruff, CP; 2nd Lt. T. M. Hyndman, N; Cpl. J. M. Cloud, B; S/Sgt. C. E. Brokoff, UT; Cpl. J. E. Dobrin, LT; S/Sgt. R. W. Blades, RW; S/Sgt. W. D. Schultz, LW; Cpl. T. R. Vinsan, TG; and S/Sgt. L. W. Lisusky, RO.

#### **MALCONTENTA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 399 - APRIL 11, 1945**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off to bomb the Ammo Filling Station at Malcontenta. The formation could not penetrate the weather and returned the bombs to base.

#### **NERVESA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 400 - APRIL 15, 1945**

Eighteen aircraft took off to bomb the Railroad Diversion Bridge at Nervesa. The target was smoke covered from a previous bombing and only six aircraft dropped 72, 500-lb. RDX bombs with the bombs falling to the right of the target. Flak was heavy, slight and inaccurate. The remaining 12 aircraft diverted to an alternate target, the Ponte Di Plave Railroad Bridge, Italy and dropped 144, 500-lb. RDX bombs, missing the target over and to the left. It was not a very worthy occasion for the Group's 400th mission.

#### **BOLOGNA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 401 - APRIL 15, 1945**

This was the second mission of the day, with this formation of 41 aircraft taking off at 0850 hours and dropping 1,558, 100-lb. GP bombs on German troop concentrations in the area designated as MA-16. The target area was reported to have been well covered. Flak was heavy, slight and inaccurate.

### **BOLOGNA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 402 - APRIL 16, 1945**

Forty-one aircraft were assigned to attack German troop concentrations at area MA-7. Due to a heavy cloud, bombing was impossible and bombs were returned to base.

It was two years ago that I sailed from New York Harbor. It has been a long, tough two years! The end seems to be in sight.

### **BOLOGNA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 403 - APRIL 17, 1945**

Forty-one aircraft attacked German troop concentrations at Area MA-19 in two waves dropping 561, 250-lb. GP bombs. The First Wave reported excellent results and the Second Wave's results were fair. Flak was heavy, slight and inaccurate.

### **BOLOGNA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 404 - APRIL 18, 1945**

Forty-one aircraft again attacked German troop concentrations in Area MA-19 dropping 1,535, 120-lb. fragmentation clusters on this target with results reported as fairly well covered. Flak was heavy, slight and inaccurate.

### **RATTENBURG, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 405 - APRIL 19, 1945**

Forty-two aircraft took off with 29 aircraft dropping 348, 500-lb. RDX bombs on a Railroad Bridge at Rattenburg. There was an excellent pattern on the target with probable direct hits on the bridge and approaches. Flak was heavy, slight and inaccurate. Seven aircraft attacked Marshalling Yards at Rosenheim, Austria, dropping 84, 500-lb. bombs. Clouds concealed this target but smoke was seen rising from the Yards. Six aircraft attacked Marshalling Yards at Lienz, Austria, dropping 72, 500-lb. RDX bombs. Direct hits were observed in the Yards. There were no injuries and all A/C returned safely.

### **VIPITENO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 406 - APRIL 20, 1945**

Forty aircraft dropped 450, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Vipiteno with a very good concentration of bombs in the Yards. Flak was heavy, moderate, and accurate resulting in serious wounds to 1st Lt. Herman Dooha, N, 96th Squadron; serious wounds to S/Sgt. William Spaulding, B, 20th Squadron and slight wounds to S/Sgt. A. D. Goodrich, LWG, 96th Squadron.

B-17 #44-6374, 49th Squadron, 1st Lt. Tommy N. Baer, P, was hit by flak on the bomb run and lost the No. 1 and No. 2 engines. The bomb load was jettisoned; a few seconds later the left wing was blown off and the plane exploded. Lt. Baer, 1st Lt. Carleton E. Smith, CP, and S/Sgt. Robert E. Blazer were blown clear and safely parachuted into friendly territory. Lt. Smith was hospitalized in the 26th General Hospital and S/Sgt. Blazer hospitalized in the 86th Infantry/100th Mountain Division Medical Department. Lt. Baer reported he believes the other seven members of his crew went down with the aircraft and were killed.

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

1st Lt.	Tommy N. Baer, 0-831665, P.	(RET)
1st Lt.	Carleton E. Smith, 0-514863, CP.	(RET)
F/O	Donald L. Gawronski, T-137686, N.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Ivan L. Schraeder, 16062287, TUG.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Patrick (NMI) Shaughnessy, 39047225, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Orval L. Burman, 37685167, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	John H. Dunston, 32989132, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Robert E. Blazer, 37207308, L/W.	(RET)
Cpl.	Joseph T. Hart, (ASN ?), T/G.	(KIA)

S/Sgt. Hugh A. Stevenson, 34892918, R/O. (KIA)

The records of this crew were of such poor quality that one Army Serial Number, returning statements of eye witness personnel and the returning survivor statements were not legible.

#### **ROSENHEIM/SPITTAL, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 407 - APRIL 21, 1945**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off to bomb Marshalling Yards at Rosenheim. Due to a 7/10 cloud cover at the primary target, only six aircraft dropped 72, 500-lb. RDX bombs with unobserved results. Flak was minimal. Twenty-one aircraft diverted to a secondary target at Spittal dropping 252, 500-lb. RDX bombs into the Marshalling Yards. Bombs carried across central and NW sector of Yards, direct hits on Station, freight warehouse, rolling stock and tracks.

#### **BONAVIGO/PESCHIERA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 408 - APRIL 23, 1945**

Forty-two aircraft took off in two waves to bomb a Railroad Bridge at Bonavigo. Twenty-one aircraft dropped 250, 500-lb. RDX bombs on this target. Two patterns covered approaches to the bridge and one pattern carried over the bridge. Twenty-one aircraft dropped 252, 500-lb. RDX bombs on a Supply Depot at Peschiera with one pattern in the Installation Area and the other two patterns short and to the right.

#### **MALBORGHETTO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 409 - APRIL 24, 1945**

Forty-two aircraft took off in two waves to bomb the Railroad Bridge at Malborghetto. Only 17 aircraft dropped 102, 1,000-lb. RDX bombs on the bridge with unobserved to good results. Three aircraft dropped 18, 1,000-lb. RDX bombs on a Railroad Bridge at Casarsa, Italy with excellent results. Three aircraft dropped 18, 1,000-lb. RDX bombs on a Railroad Bridge at Arnoldstein, Italy with the bombs reported as near misses.

Nineteen aircraft returned their bombs to Base due to weather.

The Group Infirmary was partially destroyed by fire today. Fortunately, no one suffered injuries.

#### **LINZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 410 - APRIL 25, 1945**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off with 26 aircraft dropping 204, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Main Station Sidings at Linz. Bombing patterns were reported short, to the left and right. Flak was heavy, moderate, and accurate resulting in light wounds to 1st Lt. J. S. Clayton, P; S/Sgt. Raymond J. Kryzyzanek, LW; S/Sgt. Morton L. Klauber, LT; and Cpl R. C. Bentley, LT; all of the 20th Squadron. T/Sgt. J. M. Azar, UT, 429th Squadron, suffered from anoxia.

One aircraft dropped eight, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Wels, Austria. Reports were that the West entrance to the Yards, and choke point were covered. There was one early return.

#### **BOLZANO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 411 - APRIL 26, 1945**

Thirty-one aircraft took off to bomb the Gries Stones and Ammunition Dump at Bolzano. Due to a 10/10 cloud cover over this target and alternates, no bombing was done.

The sad news of the death of Captain John G. "Jerry" Hofmann was received at Group Headquarters. Captain Hofmann was killed on the 24th of April in a tank battle in Northern Italy. For some time there had been a voluntary exchange of ground and flying officers to act as observers in order that one branch of service could understand the other.

Captain Hofmann was the original bombardier on the crew of Captain Charles E. Crafton. They left the States on April 24, 1944 and joined the 429th Squadron. He had completed his tour of duty,

received the Distinguished Flying Cross, with Cluster, and Air Medal with three Clusters. Rather than go home, he stayed with the Group, and his mission log had shown his missions, plus many local flights, evidently training new bombardiers.

Recollections from friends were: "Jerry was wonderful - he treated the enlisted men as equals. Jerry was a happy-go-lucky joker, a nice guy with a good sense of humor. Jerry was big, not in height, but in character. He was head and shoulders over most of those serving. A superb human being who was good at what he did as a bombardier. Jerry was thinking of flying a second tour. We were telling him to go home."

Captain Hofmann was awarded the Purple Heart Medal posthumously and buried in an American Cemetery near Florence, Italy. The last 2nd Bomb Group death of World War II.

This month, a Temporary Duty rotation system was established whereby men would receive a leave to the United States for a period of time, and then return. Fourteen enlisted men and one officer (Captain Alexander J. Tyborski, Adjutant) from the 96th Squadron, along with a like number from the other Squadrons, departed this station.

### **SALZBURG, AUSTRIA - MISSION 412 - MAY 1, 1945**

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 309, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Main Station Marshalling Yards at Salzburg by PFF with possible hits reported in the East Marshalling Yards. Flak was heavy, moderate and inaccurate causing slight wounds to S/Sgt. C. F. Radcliff, LW. S/Sgt. C. T. Knox, suffered from anoxia.

B-17 #485, 49th Squadron, was last reported heading for the Munich area with one prop feathered. The crew was later reported to have landed at Cervia, Italy with all members reported safe. Crew members were: 1st Lt. W. B. McCulloch, P; 2nd Lt. J. B. Cook, CP; F/O J. C. Davis, N; Cpl. D. F. Hart, TOG; T/Sgt. D. E. Davis, UT; M/Sgt. R. H. Richardson, LT; S/Sgt. R. R. Shorten, RW; S/Sgt. R. T. Powers, LW; S/Sgt. H. G. Fichtner, TG; and S/Sgt. E. H. Ricketts, RO. All members returned to Base.

### **THIS WAS THE LAST COMBAT MISSION FLOWN BY THE 2ND BOMBARDMENT GROUP IN WORLD WAR II.**

2nd Lt. Farley G. Mann was the Navigator on the crew of 2nd Lt. Wallace R. Braff when assigned to the 429th Squadron, September 9, 1944. January 9, 1944: "I flew my first combat mission September 15, 1944 to Athens, Greece, which was not credited for some reason which I don't remember, but my flight log shows that our flight was for 6:25 minutes. My next one was September 17 to Budapest, Hungary and that was my first credited mission. The missions came fast and furious until I began flying Squadron Lead and then my missions stretched out.

"I remember one mission to Munich, Germany. We were flying Deputy Lead and we saw Lt. Donovan's plane go down. I am not sure but I believe a portion of the wing was lost and the plane went into a spin. I have learned since that there were three chutes. Lt. William Daly, Navigator; Lt. Henry Safer, Bombardier and Sgt. Robert Hindert, Radio Operator, survived. Our Tail Gunner kept us informed and then he lost sight of the plane.

"I had two 'Solo' missions. These were flown during the daytime and the idea was to send a single aircraft in the weather. Keep the enemy and their radar on their toes. We had radar on our ship and could see the target. I did not care for these missions. The flak was still there and on one we saw fighters, but quickly found safety in the clouds. I don't know how many were flown by the Group.

"I flew five missions to the Vienna area. The flak was terrible there! I went to Munich three times, Regensburg, Blechhammer and Ruhland. We were after the Nazi oil and they really had the flak batteries around them. Ruhland was a rough one! It was the first mission I remember being hit by jet

fighters. Two members of my original crew, Lt. James Barnett, Bombardier, and T/Sgt. Donald Dorman, Engineer, were killed while flying with another crew.

“My 33rd and last mission was to Salzburg, Austria on May 1, 1945. It was the Group’s 412th. I believe it was the last mission flown by the 15th Air Force in World War II. I was the lead Navigator flying with Colonel Reardon. As we were approaching the target, a decision was made by Colonel Reardon, and agreed on by his crew, that we would not drop our bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Salzburg. We all knew that the war was all but over. Colonel Reardon said, ‘Let’s get them in the open fields, this war is over,’ and we dropped our bombs in what we hoped were open fields. We were called to Group that evening as the bomb strike photos disclosed that we had not hit the target. The CO of the Group appeared to be a little upset with us. However, I believe he was putting on an act. I was 20 years old at the time and did not really appreciate the historical significance of the final mission. I would like to hear from anyone else who was in the lead aircraft. I sure would appreciate knowing who they were and where they live. The one I remember was Colonel Reardon and perhaps Captain Sisson was the Bombardier. I just don’t remember.”

**MAY 2, 1945 - GERMANS IN ITALY SURRENDER!**

**MAY 5, 1945 - NEWS CAME OF GERMANS SURRENDERING IN HOLLAND AND NORTHERN GERMANY!**

**MAY 8, 1945 - V-E DAY!**

All towns nearby are off limits for 48 hours. At the camp tonight it was like the 4th of July. Pistols, rifles, machine guns going off, even some flares. It is a wonder no one was killed!

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# 20

## THE FINAL CHAPTER

**W**ith the ending of the war, crews were kept busy with rescue missions to Northern Italy, carrying food and medicines to the starving Italians; flying sightseeing missions for ground personnel; flying older crews to Naples for return to the States; flying personnel to rest camps.

Word soon came down from 15th Air Force Headquarters that the 2nd and 97th Bomb Groups were to remain in Italy as part of the Occupation Forces. A point system was established, 85 being the magic number as I remember it. Those with more were to be rotated home by means of other units going home. Those below 85 were to remain. Replacements for those going home were to come from low point personnel of other units.

It was a hectic time for the Records Section, not only shipping personnel out but receiving the replacements. Many men had to wait for, and train, a replacement before being placed on shipping orders. My replacement arrived on the 26th of May and I immediately began the orientation process. Some tent mates began to leave. We had hoped to all go together.

My orders came to go to the 456th Bomb Group on June 29th but still remained at the 2nd. By this time, only 1st Sgt. John McWeeney and I remained in "TURMOIL VII."

July 3, a contingent departed for the 456th Bomb Group but I had been removed from the orders - reason unknown. July 4th I found myself on orders to report to the 301st Bomb Group with John McWeeney and others. Upon arrival we were lined up to check in. Somewhere between "M" and "R" there was a cutoff, and I was returned to the 2nd. I was angry, discouraged and disheartened. All my friends were gone. Unbelievable happening! July 6th I was on orders again to report to the 999th Engineering Squadron and found some of our men there already; so I was among friends. Physicals, shots, etc. kept us busy.

July 9th we loaded onto trucks for departure to Naples. A strange scene occurred at this time. Our truck was open bedded with drop down benches on each side. As we climbed aboard and sat down, one fellow crawled between the legs of others and under one of the benches. As the convoy pulled out from the walled and gated compound, I noticed a horse and buggy near the gate. In it were an older Italian man and a young, very pregnant Italian girl. The man was peering intently at each truck as it passed through the gate. We had progressed, perhaps 75 yards, when this fellow crawled out from under the bench, stood up, and waved and called goodbye to the girl. With that, the driver of the buggy took off, whipping the horse with a large whip. Suddenly the convoy stopped, the buggy was getting closer and closer. The G.I. began pounding on the truck cab and shouting for the driver to "GO, GO!" The driver had no idea of what was happening and could not have moved had he wanted to. Just before the buggy reached the truck, the convoy started to move and pulled slowly away. I don't know what might have happened had he caught up to the truck. I didn't see a gun but that whip looked very dangerous. So much for Italian-American relations.

We arrived at a staging area in Naples and assigned quarters. Beds were slats, no mattress. Sleeping was a back breaker for the time we were there. We had more physicals and traded in our Lira for American money. July 19th we boarded the S.S. Argentina, a sister ship of the S.S. Mariposa on which I had sailed to North Africa. I was assigned a stateroom with 29 others. Bunks were three tiers of steel and canvass.

The trip was uneventful and I spent most of my time on deck, soaking up the sun and reading. Card and crap games were in process all over the place but I stayed away from them.

The morning of July 29 we entered New York harbor. We were greeted by fire boats spouting streams of water and other ships sounding their horns and whistles. We lined the rails watching all that was happening, and as we passed the Statue of Liberty tears came to my eyes. I am sure that I was not the only one to shed a tear. We quickly debarked and Red Cross girls were there with milk and ice cream, a band was there also.

We were loaded onto a train and soon on our way to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. This is from where I departed over two years ago. I remember passing through some town with three and four-story housing developments. The back porches faced the tracks and were lined with flags and bunting. People were out waving and children were running along the tracks calling and waving. What a wonderful feeling! We were more excited than they were.

We arrived at Camp Kilmer, were assigned quarters and told we would be processed for a 30-day leave as quickly as possible. By this time it was late afternoon and we were directed to the Mess Hall. What a feast! The t-bone steak was the largest I had ever seen and there were all the trimmings to go along with it, and, all we could eat.

We were then told where there was a long bank of telephones available to call home, free of charge. There was a mad dash for the telephones. It finally was my turn and I dialed home. Mother answered the phone and I said, "Hello Mom, it's Charles, I'm home," and tears flowed on both ends of the line. I explained I had just arrived at Kilmer, was to be given a 30-day leave, and was to be processed from there as soon as possible. I said I would call again as soon as I knew anything further.

The next day I was shipped to the Military Reservation at Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. There I received orders for a 30-day leave and to report to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, September 1 for further assignment. I called the Greyhound Bus Line for departure times for Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and transfer to my hometown, Steubenville, Ohio. I called Mother, told her where I was and my travel plans. My sister, Wilma Skinner, was home at the time and insisted on picking me up at the depot in Pittsburgh.

I was told to keep what I wanted to take home, pack the rest in my barracks bags, identify them and they would be shipped to Sioux Falls. I never saw them again!

The ride to Pittsburgh through the Pennsylvania countryside was a wonderful sight to me. The rolling hills, green forests, farms were a real contrast to the stark countryside of North Africa and Italy.

Wilma and a nephew, George Ross, were waiting at the Bus Depot and we were quickly on the way to Steubenville, about 35 miles away on the Ohio River. We crossed the Ohio, over the Fort Steuben Bridge, into town. As we drove down tree lined North Fourth Street, I felt that as last I was home.

Mother, three other sisters, older brother, nieces and nephews were there to greet me. Only brothers Robert and Walter were not there. Bob, in the Navy, was on the West Coast about to ship out to the Pacific and Walt was in Austria. He was in the 80th Signal Corps, 80th Infantry Division. They had entered France shortly after D-Day, fought across France, diverted to the "Bulge" to help relieve Bastogne, back into France, across Germany and now he was part of the Occupation Forces in Austria. I hadn't seen him in three and one-half years.

What a joyous reunion and what a wonderful month! Picnics, other family gatherings, fishing with my oldest brother Louis. Many an afternoon was spent in the Fort Steuben Hotel Grill drinking

beer with other veterans that had just returned, swapping tales of our experiences. There was sadness also; news of many of our friends that would not be coming home - Ledley Basden, Edward Daugherty, Robert Dunkle, William Erwin, John C. Kaufman, William Mabius, John MacIntosh, William Mushrush, Howard Nickolson, Robert Reiger, Loren R. Thompson, and Robert Thompson to name a few. The real tragedy was that many of these young men were the only son in the family. Now no one to carry on the family name. Then there was the fun of becoming reacquainted with those wonderful American girls!

It was during this month that the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the surrender of the Japanese - "VJ Day." Debates still continue about the need for using those bombs. It is a known fact that the Japanese were preparing for an invasion. The loss of life would have been terrible on both sides and devastation of the Japanese homeland would have been catastrophic. If one American life was saved by the use of those bombs, they were worth it! It must be remembered that the Japanese started this war, and we finished it! What a relief to Mother that her three sons were coming home.

The month passed quickly and I received orders to report to Camp Atterbury, Indiana on the 1st of September. I reported to camp and received my discharge on the 7th of September, 1945 and was on a train for home.

So it was over! Nothing spectacular, no heroics, just proud to have served, and survived. I still get a lump in my throat when the "Flag" passes by and when I hear the *National Anthem* or *God Bless America*.

# Index

## -A-

- Abbey, Richard (311, 322, 336)  
Abbott, Francis A. (490-492)  
Abbott, Woodrow W. (446)  
Abel, Harry (87)  
Abelhof, L. G. (85)  
Able, Leon D. (vii, 139)  
Aboud, Albert J. (12)  
Aboulfia, Samuel (NMI) (449)  
Adair, John H. (vii, 338)  
Adams, Conrad G. (67, 89)  
Adams, Emmitt L. (74)  
Adams, John E. (vii, 76)  
Adams, John F. (v, 139, 188, 268)  
Adams, L. M. (224)  
Adams, Lemuel E. (105, 119)  
Adams, Wesley F. (21)  
Aeschbacher, William E. (v, 307-309)  
Affenzeller, Karl (v, 208, 315, 421, 422)  
Ainsworth, Donald H. (141, 192, 263, 267, 268, 273, 276, 281-283)  
Albertert, Elmer J. (vii, 467)  
Aleks, Charles (109)  
Alexander, Martin R. (130)  
Alexo, Jr., Paul (NMI) (290)  
Allen, Bob (186)  
Allen, Fred (283)  
Allen, Ira B. (5)  
Allen, L. C. (366, 467)  
Alles, K. E. (498)  
Almond, James L. (485)  
Amos, Robert F. (v, 33, 38)  
Anastasi, John B. (452)  
Andeel, Buster (NMI) (vii, 67, 73)  
Anderson, (444)  
Anderson, Carl V. (vii, 219)  
Anderson, Earl M. (228)  
Anderson, Gene C. (74)  
Anderson, Lee Warren (v, 16, 44, 45, 58)  
Anderson, Paul (29)  
Anderson, Richard C. (228)  
Anderson, Robert (v, 16)  
Anderson, S. L. (425)  
Anderson, Warren (NMI) (v, 420, 421)  
Andrews, James H. (249)  
Andrews, T. C. (505)  
Angiolini, Aldo (NMI) (vii, 71)  
Annex, Harold (12, 40)  
Anthony, Floyd W. (199)  
Apple, Clyde W. (vii)  
Apple, George (119)  
Applegate, Donald W. (255, 256, 270)  
Appleton, George R. (vii, 139)  
Aratari, Anthony A. (104)  
Argyle, Budd C. (413)  
Arkinson, Joseph H. (81)  
Arm, William R. (181)  
Armstrong, Charles J. (323)  
Armstrong, Eugene L. (v, 283)  
Armstrong, Howard H. (145)  
Armstrong, Lawrence T. (vii, 138)  
Arnold, Henry H. (50, 83)  
Arnold, Robert E. (vii, 195, 196, 285)  
Ash, James E. (499)  
Ashe, Thomas J. (40, 92)  
Ashley, Lawrence T. (498)  
Ashley, Milton Y. (68)  
Ashook, Phil W. (151-153, 158, 160, 164)  
Atkinson, Joseph H. (96, 122)  
Austin, Norman D. (v, 313)  
Austin, Stanley J. (86, 88)  
Ayers, Harold E. (395, 396)  
Ayo, S. (67)  
Ayotte, Paul (186)  
Azar, J. M. (508)  
Azar, Sol D. (434, 438)
- B-**  
Babek, James L. (vii, 228)  
Babin, (294, 297, 298, 300)  
Baca, Mirka (343)  
Baca, Mojmir (342, 343)  
Bachardy, William (468-470)  
Back, Dorsey F. (366, 448)  
Back, John F. (vii, 111, 114)  
Bacsu, John (NMI) (130, 167)  
Baer, Tommy N. (507)  
Bailey, Glenn R. (499)  
Bair, Robert J. (486)  
Bair, William C. (vii, 287)  
Balcerzak, Frank J. (vii, 337)  
Baldwin, Kenneth P. (313)  
Baldwin, Wallace B. (95, 96)  
Ball, Charles B. (168, 169)  
Ballard, (162)  
Banasiewski, Walter (NMI) (147)  
Bandelak, Catherine (440, 441)  
Barcalow, Jack L. (46, 89)  
Barfield, Jr., Elmer (336)  
Barga, Luke H. (vii, 96)  
Baris, David W. (139)  
Barker, Jesse L. (338-340)  
Barnett, James S. (vii, 496, 510)  
Barney, (103)  
Barratt, Francis E. (307)  
Barratt, Harry S. (72, 73)  
Barrett, George (407, 409)  
Barron, (56)  
Barron, Frank (163)  
Barron, John J. (74)  
Barrow, Alvin G. (vii, 213, 236, 285)  
Barta, D. A. (467)  
Bartell, Richard W. (148, 150, 172)  
Bartels, R. C. (407)  
Barth, Harold S. (319)  
Barton, Frederick P. (119)  
Barton, Thomas S. (vii, 414)  
Bartoszewicz, Chester P. (41)  
Bascomb, Harold G. (218)  
Basden, Ledley (513)  
Basehore, Richard I. (vii, 170, 171, 189, 190)  
Bastion, Raymond E. (364)  
Bauer, Berta Kurz (v, 315, 316)  
Bauman, Everett J. (174, 181, 185)  
Bauman, Jerome (NMI) (vii, 338)  
Baxter, William (26)  
Baynes, H. L. (419)  
Beacham, Farrow (287)  
Beal, (119, 281)  
Beall, Harold K. (vii, 414)  
Beasley, Robert I. (vii, 75)  
Beauchamp, Richard V. (486)  
Beck, Ronald E. (68, 69)  
Beckstrand, M. V. (93)  
Bedgood, W. Randall (329, 369)  
Beecham, Charles N. (v, 294, 295, 301, 302)  
Beem, Gerald K. (vii, 9)  
Beene, Otha G. (146, 147, 173-175, 209)  
Beers, Peter B. (293, 294)  
Behm, Paul H. (151, 161, 163)  
Bevelich, Joseph H. (305)  
Bell, Alfred H. (104)  
Bell, Thomas H. (171, 172)  
Belli, Jacques (278)  
Bellingham, James H. (105)  
Beltri, Alfonso S. (vii, 374)  
Beltzer, Walter C. (89)  
Benbrook, Marion M. (92, 94)  
Bencal, Witt W. (286)  
Bender, E. C. (425)  
Benfer, Marlin C. (vii)  
Bengston, Earl E. (vii, 107, 108)  
Benjamin, Richard H. (v, 495)  
Benner, A. K. (413)  
Bennett, (7, 29)  
Bennett, Allen T. (vii, 105, 106)  
Bennett, Ed (111)  
Bensheimer, Robert D. (v, 105, 108)  
Benster, Norman T. (vii, 90)  
Bensyl, Lavern H. (135, 236)  
Bentley, Ed R. (271)  
Bentley, Edwin Richard (v, 266, 269, 271, 272)  
Bentley, Jack L. (34, 35, 42, 48, 52-54, 93)  
Bentley, R. C. (508)  
Bentley, Richard M. (36, 61, 62)  
Bentley, Robert H. (v, 104, 105, 140)  
Beranek, James (NMI) (195, 229)  
Bergin, Edward (103)  
Berkowitz, Israel M. (vii, 130, 143)  
Berlin, Clarence L. (vii, 96)  
Berman, Isadore (273, 356, 357)  
Bernier, Raymond T. (14)  
Berryhill, Jr., Henry L. (468)  
Berschig, Thomas F. (88)  
Bessey, Howard (NMI) (vii, 130, 143)  
Betchley, George W. (vii, 496)  
Beverly, (300)  
Bezdaris, Chrisgos C. (291)  
Bigham, Jacob W. (34, 35)  
Bigham, Joseph (138)  
Bigham, W. Modene (67, 130, 131)  
Bildstein, Walter M. (vii, 366)  
Bills, George L. (450, 479)  
Bingham, Rutherford G. (vii, 138)  
Birbiglia, Michael A. (vii, 238)  
Birdsall, Steve (v)  
Bischoff, R. F. (404)  
Bivins, Luther M. (214, 413, 502)  
Bjorklund, Earl H. (vii, 76)  
Black, E. J. (423, 424)  
Black, Eugene F. (350)  
Black, Joe (386)  
Black, Jr., John B. (vii, 312)  
Black, John O. (vii, 494)  
Blackford, Newton S. (vii, 59, 62)  
Blackry, Richard O. (395)  
Blades, R. W. (506)  
Blanton, Ernest L. (130, 295, 296, 374, 490, 491)  
Blaska, Casimir L. (vii, 287, 288)  
Blazer, Robert E. (507)  
Blomquist, Richard M. (v, 134, 189, 192-194, 196, 197, 208, 229, 230)  
Bloom, Milton (425)  
Blum, Jack (366)  
Blumer, Jacob T. (317, 318)  
Bode, H. L. (388, 389)  
Boehm, Louis M. (232)  
Bogie, Harold (NMI) (333, 434)  
Bohannon, Hill W. (449)  
Bolick, Harold L. (276, 277, 279, 280)  
Bolt, Clarence E. (v, 134, 210)  
Bonet, (234)  
Bonneau, Raymond (353, 354)  
Bonnell, Andrew A. (105, 196)  
Bonovich, (68)  
Boone, Jackson J. (497)  
Boone, John H. (482)  
Booth, Duane J. (vii, 119, 141, 142)  
Borders, Herbert D. (vii, 69)  
Borech, Hugo O. (120)  
Borgard, Frederick G. (vii, 90)  
Bosely, Robert W. (92)  
Bosmans, Raymond W. (vii, 139)  
Bosshart, John L. (497)  
Bossi, Frank R. (vii, 291)  
Boulware, Robert E. (305)  
Bourke, Terry (115, 116)  
Bowman, (84)  
Bowman, Martin (v)  
Boyce, William (501, 502)  
Boyd, Bill (188)  
Boyer, William W. (108)  
Boyle, J. F. (449)  
Bradley, James J. (74, 77)  
Bradley, John (36)  
Bradley, John (NMI) (vii, 73, 74, 77)  
Bradley, John J. (vii, 323, 324, 372)  
Bradley, Omar (165)  
Bradley, Richard D. (461, 486)  
Brady, Jr., Vivian H. (130)  
Brady, William T. (vii, 58, 69)  
Braff, Wallace R. (509)  
Brager, Joseph F. (vii, 50)  
Brand, George J. (vii, 92, 94)  
Brasfield, Lester (333, 335)  
Brau, Paul E. (292)  
Bray, Carl (500, 501)  
Bray, Jr., Dudley M. (482)  
Brazzell, Mark A. (247)  
Bredesen, Robert (NMI) (vii, 228)  
Brett, Harold J. (411)  
Brice, Forney S. (428)  
Bridges, Clyde A. (138)  
Bridges, Julius H. (145, 215, 216)  
Bridges, R. W. (130)  
Brienza, Robert A. (117, 215, 217)  
Briggs, Merlin C. (105)  
Brilliant, Fredrick H. (vii, 390, 423)  
Bringolf, Raymond C. (vii, 145, 195, 236)  
Briseno, Jesus C. (486)  
Bristol, J. A. (130)  
Britton, Charles M. (286)  
Brockman, Victor A. (130, 137)  
Brodniaak, Anthony P. (122-127)  
Brokoff, C. E. (506)  
Brooks, Francis (366)  
Brousseau, William E. (vii, 68, 75)  
Brower-Anchor, Charles J. (vii, 290, 291)  
Brown, (84)  
Brown, Arthur J. (447)  
Brown, Frederick T. (vii, 9)  
Brown, Hale W. (120)  
Brown, James B. (463)  
Brown, John H. (vii, 60)  
Brown, Robert L. (vii, 338)  
Brown, William D. (313)  
Brown, William V. (135)  
Bruce, Owen L. (305)  
Bruegeman, Donald A. (457)  
Bruner, William A. (vii, 140)  
Brunson, Avery (42)  
Bruso, Richard J. (vii, 60)  
Bryant, Earl A. (vii, 140)  
Bryant, Jr., Fred C. (499)  
Bryner, Faye W. (303)  
Bryner, Jr., John H. (494, 495)  
Bryson, Robert H. (vii, 91)  
Buchanan, William B. (vii, 195, 196)  
Buckwalter, Dick (274)  
Buckwalter, Joseph W. (405)  
Budimirovich, Bernard (NMI) (vii, 13)  
Buechner, Orvel W. (vii, 213, 225, 236, 284)  
Buehler, William K. (491)  
Buehner, Carl R. (471, 494)  
Buel, Kermit J. (122)  
Buell, William D. (110)  
Buettnet, Edward C. (vii, 354, 390)  
Bull, Eugene F. (v, 462, 463, 465)  
Bullis, Henry J. (409, 481, 484)  
Bullock, Jr., William C. (vii, 324, 344, 346, 347, 387)  
Bumgardner, Lonnie H. (vii)  
Bunnell, Ted J. (vii, 462, 463, 466)  
Bunting, William C. (109, 218)  
Buret, V. T. (419)  
Burch, John M. (vii, 414)  
Burger, Lawrence W. (456)  
Burger, Vernon T. (495)  
Burks, Reese N. (vii, 291, 292)  
Burman, Orval L. (vii, 507)  
Burney (30)  
Burns, Robert L. (428)  
Burrill, Wilson E. (228)  
Bury, Joseph (419)  
Buss, Elmer H. (vii, 369, 370)  
Butcher, A. L. (410)  
Butchkoff, Benjamin H. (272)  
Butler, J. M. (302)  
Butler, Jr., Williard O. (vii, 196, 225)  
Butts, Jr., Robert O. (272, 276)  
Byam, Loren E. (vii, 338)  
Bybee, Walter E. (vii, 13)  
Byer, Samuel (NMI) (307, 309)  
Byrd, Donald M. (218)  
Byrd, William N. (196, 224, 246, 295, 296)  
Byrne, Albert D. (v, 172, 174, 181, 184, 185, 196)
- C-**  
Cagle, Hubert R. (313)  
Cahill, William E. (256, 263)  
Calabrese, Anthony T. (490, 491, 493)  
Callaghan, William (425, 498)  
Callahan, William F. (88)  
Campbell, (17)  
Campbell, Banks (NMI) (426, 427, 429)  
Campbell, Claston D. (105, 166, 167)  
Campbell, William (372)  
Canfield, Merle E. (vii, 96)  
Cannata, Nicholas A. (145, 227)  
Cantacuzene, (275)  
Caplan, Leslie (332, 333)  
Capper, Robert J. (336, 374, 391)  
Caputo, John A. (vii, 111, 113)  
Carastro, Lawrence (NMI) (v, 141, 142)  
Cardone, Martino (NMI) (291, 292)  
Carey, Charles F. (353, 354, 434, 441)  
Carl, Arthur (NMI) (vii, 178)  
Carl, Clair I. (92, 145)  
Carle, Emile H. (109, 120, 138, 219)  
Carley, Walter G. (311)  
Carlson, Clair A. (238, 239)  
Carlson, George (NMI) (vii, 95)  
Carlson, John W. (88)  
Carlton, G. R. (413)  
Carney, George R. (vii, 139)  
Carney, John W. (143, 181, 184, 185)  
Carney, Jr., William R. (58)  
Carpenter, Jr., Otis C. (264)  
Carper, Kermit L. (vii, 135)  
Carrazales, Henry (NMI) (vii, 178)  
Carroll, Thomas J. (266)  
Carruthers, William N. (432, 433)  
Carson, Doyle C. (313)  
Carson, John W. (v, 111, 113, 114)  
Carter, Cary E. (vii, 139)  
Carter, James W. (499)  
Carter, John T. (73, 74)  
Caruthers, Marion F. (5, 11, 12, 33, 52, 82, 83)  
Cary, Robert R. (vii, 145, 232)  
Caryl, Robert L. (367)  
Casaccia, Libero P. (432, 497)  
Casano, Joe J. (148)  
Case, John C. (v, 319)  
Case, Maxon O. (74)  
Casey, (7)  
Cash, James I. (426, 427)  
Cash, Jr., Joseph B. (vii, 291, 292)  
Cashore, John W. (91)  
Casingham, Paul B. (vii, 91)  
Castellano, M. Philippe (v, 278, 366)  
Cawdry, Jr., Leo M. (vii, 60)  
Buckwalter, Dick (274)  
Center, Donald F. (137)  
Centers, Robert D. (145, 236)  
Cetinich, John (489)  
Chalcraft, William E. (323)  
Chambers, Keith M. (vii, 228)  
Chambers, Laverne E. (481)  
Chambers, Ralph E. (431, 494)  
Chambers, Russell W. (108, 109, 120)  
Chandler, Howard R. (227)  
Chapman, Richard H. (222)  
Chappie, Raphael (65)  
Charbonnet, Louis (105)  
Charlson, James C. (v, 32)  
Chary, Irving M. (vii, 499)  
Checkmain, Eugene H. (88)  
Cheney, Dale K. (136)  
Cheney, Robert G. (450, 479)  
Chesser, Walter H. (111-113)  
Chessir, Bernard D. (412)  
Childress, John E. (419, 420)  
Childress, M. L. (348)  
Childs, Charles L. (v, 403, 452, 468-472, 478)  
Chilek, Joseph A. (86, 88)  
Chisholm, John H. (99)  
Chism, Reed T. (vii, 82)  
Cholson, Shelbourne M. (218)  
Chrismon, Harold L. (61, 68-70, 136, 143, 144, 224, 227, 285)  
Christenson, Howard T. (130, 268)  
Church, Willis M. (323)  
Churchill, Sir Winston (50)  
Ciampa, Robert C. J. (116, 117)  
Cima, Thomas W. (367)  
Clancy, Edward (163)  
Clapp, Charles (5)  
Clark, Benjamin O. (286)  
Clark, Francis A. (74)  
Clark, John C. (vii, 146, 174, 209, 266)  
Clark, Mark (277, 384)  
Clark, Merle A. (333, 434)  
Clark, Robert C. (250, 252-254)  
Clarke, Jr., Richard H. (v, 426-429)  
Clausen, Walter (iv, v)  
Clayton, George (192)  
Clayton, J. S. (508)  
Clayton, Wallace M. (v, 344, 346, 347)  
Cleesattel, Robert F. (190, 214, 220, 222)  
Clem, Durwood C. (110)  
Clemens, Benjamin A. (151)  
Clement, Judith H. (v)  
Clement, Jr., L. W. (v)  
Clemens, J. (67)  
Clendenin, Jarrel L. (v, 256, 257)  
Clepper, John H. (36, 74, 85)  
Cloud, J. M. (506)  
Clyburne, Joseph G. (vii, 95)  
Coady, Neil J. (v, 269-271)  
Cobb, Murray (29, 30, 102)  
Cobb, Neal (293)  
Cochran, Thomas (36)  
Cockshott, John B. (286)  
Coe, Alfred W. (116, 117)  
Coffey, John (145)  
Cohan, Sidney A. (14)  
Cohen, Bernard B. (v, 12, 16, 23)  
Cola, Napoleone (278)  
Coleman, Carl D. (119, 229)  
Colihan, Robert T. (134, 210)  
Collens, III, John W. (v, 485, 486)  
Collins, (278)  
Collins, C. M. (391)  
Collins, Elton C. (vii, 140)  
Collins, Leroy E. (vii, 62)  
Collins, Theodore J. (361, 405)  
Collis, Angelo (412)  
Colvert, Rolla H. (428)  
Comer, Thurman L. (190, 210, 256, 262, 263)  
Compton, Roy L. (v, 396, 397)  
Conley, C. H. (449)  
Conlon, John J. (198, 201, 202, 204)  
Connors, John B. (190, 191, 210, 262, 265)  
Conrada, Vincent A. (350)  
Conway, Edmond C. (145)

Conway, James F. (vii, 82)  
Coogan, Thomas C. (341, 342)  
Cook, J. B. (509)  
Cook, John J. (286)  
Cook, Kenneth C. (145, 225, 232)  
Cook, Melvin (491)  
Cook, William J. (196)  
Cooley, Homer J. (179-181, 212)  
Coones, Herman E. (486)  
Cooper, Adrian D. (vii, 141, 142)  
Cooper, Phillip L. (131, 145)  
Cooper, Jr., Rex C. (vii, 104, 167)  
Cooper, Roy (273)  
Cooper, William L. (v, 289)  
Cope, Walter B. (490, 505)  
Copp, Max (NMI) (vii, 138)  
Coppinger, John M. (146, 209)  
Corbin, Cecil C. (131)  
Corbin, William F. (vii, 213, 228, 236, 285)  
Corcoran, Jeremiah F. (95, 96)  
Corley, Cleo L. (88, 92, 104, 112, 137, 218)  
Corpening, Ira B. (292)  
Cosby, G. D. (433)  
Cosgrove, (38)  
Cotton, Joseph F. (97, 98)  
Cotton, M. J. (335)  
Couchman, Paul H. (471)  
Counihan, Frank D. (vii, 94)  
Counts, Fred W. (92)  
Covell, William G. (v, 25)  
Covey, Frank S. (457, 458)  
Covington, Roy V. (447)  
Cowan, Clarence A. (v, 190, 210, 211, 262)  
Cox, Arthur E. (vii, 305)  
Cox, Harold K. (101, 109)  
Cox, Ira L. (462)  
Cox, Joseph A. (vii, 420-422)  
Coyish, William J. (120)  
Crafter, Charles E. (v, 273, 275, 350, 356, 508)  
Craig, Burliegh (41)  
Craig, James E. (364)  
Crane, Andrew F. (496)  
Crank, Jr., George H. (134, 214, 222)  
Cravath, John (233)  
Crawford, Franklin D. (vii, 59)  
Crawford, Lewis W. (111, 113)  
Creelius, Jesse B. (vii, 95)  
Croccia, Michael A. (vii, 119, 145, 232)  
Crombie, John F. (264)  
Cross, George (285)  
Cross, Oscar F. (239)  
Crosser, Eugene H. (273)  
Crowl, Walter R. (vii, 235, 236)  
Crowley, James D. (36, 85)  
Crutcher, Donald E. (355)  
Crutchfield, Frederick B. (42, 47)  
Cuba, William J. (vii, 90)  
Cullen, Paul T. (214, 472, 473, 502)  
Culligan, Frank (74)  
Cuniff, David L. (250, 251)  
Cunningham, Bill (188, 194)  
Cunningham, Joseph S. (247, 282, 335)  
Curran, John J. (343, 344)  
Curri, Paul (278)  
Curtis, Edward H. (58)  
Curtis, Jr., Willard (NMI) (269, 272)  
Cutler, Kay R. (330, 331)  
Cutsinger, Elmer Ray (v, 276, 280)  
Cwiek, Stanley F. (106, 110)  
Czechowicz, John J. (238, 239)

**-D-**  
Dahir, Elias (38, 71)  
Daier, (199)  
Dalcanele, George D. (vii, 338)  
Dalesio, Anna (365)  
Dalesio, Felix A. (vii, 74, 82)  
Dalheimer, W. L. (389)  
Dalls, Jr., Harry C. (vii, 140)  
Dalton, Floyd W. (264)  
Daly, Pete (383)  
Daly, William M. (v, 286, 374, 375, 378, 509)  
Danforth, Charles S. (135, 147)  
Dannenbauer, Claudio B. (120)  
Daughdrill, Charles A. (166)  
Daugherty, Daniel (366)  
Daugherty, Edward (513)  
Davich, Theodore (369, 370)  
Davidson, Edgar A. (vii, 141, 142)  
Davies, Robert A. (225)  
Davis, (233)  
Davis, William E. (145)  
Davis, Bobbie A. (457)  
Davis, Carl H. (vii, 168, 169)  
Davis, Claude (293)  
Davis, D. E. (509)  
Davis, Ernest (NMI) (181-185)  
Davis, J. C. (509)  
Davis, Ollie S. (286)  
Davis, Robert (v)  
Davis, Robert E. (457, 458)  
Davis, William D. (29)  
Dean, George O. (171, 172)  
Debois, Carl (491)  
Debrosky, Edward A. (232)  
Decker, Frederick C. (131)  
Decllements, Roger C. (v, 171, 189, 193, 213)  
Deets, J. T. (425)  
Degan, Thomas R. (196, 207, 215-217)  
Dehart, Milno H. (249)  
Dehler, Charles E. (92)  
Deibel, Mervyn E. (170, 171, 189, 190, 213)  
Deiter, George (350)  
Deiter, John M. (303)  
Dekew, Marshall (109)  
Delap, Francis D. (vii, 228)  
Delatte, Anthony J. (94)  
Delutes, Jr., James J. (350)  
Dematteis, R. G. (vii, 496)  
Dembecki, Edward L. (33, 35, 36)  
Dempsey, John C. (336)  
Dempsey, Walter E. (73, 92)  
Dendor, Joseph (NMI) (147)  
Deneut, Richard E. (412)  
Denight, James L. (92)  
Dennis, Robert T. (v, 8, 58, 81, 82)  
Dent, Clyde A. (74)  
Denton, Claude H. (vii, 94)  
Derderich, Ed (132)  
Desoto, Jr., John (NMI) (330, 332)  
Devereaux, John E. (177, 178)  
Devine, (34)  
Devine, Philip (112)  
Devito, Charles (36, 74)  
Devito, Joseph (491)  
Devlin, James E. (319)  
Devlin, William J. (348, 349)  
Devoe, Bernard F. (vii, 130, 143)  
Devoe, William D. (292)  
Dewey, Charles O. (413)  
Dewitt, Ralph E. (338-340)  
Dickens, William S. (404)  
Dickerson, Gerald P. (457)  
Dickinson, Loy A. (v, 339-342)  
Dickinson, Midge (342)  
Dickson, Charles T. (214, 222)  
Digh, Webb J. (vii, 170)  
Diglio, Peter H. (94)  
Digulielmo, (26)  
Dillon, Harry T. (116, 117)  
Dimitry, Douglas D. (419)  
Dingler, Thomas E. (337, 366, 385)  
Dippolito, Adolph F. (vii, 111)  
Dishong, Leland L. (vii, 91)  
Dixon, Arthur R. (vii, 414)  
Dixon, L. E. (73, 88, 92)  
Dobrin, J. E. (506)  
Doddridge, Benjamin W. (v, 468, 471)  
Dodge, Jr., James B. (413)  
Dodson, Robert D. (vii, 167)  
Doebele, William E. (vii, 71)  
Donahue, Bernard (503)  
Donahue, Robert D. (341)  
Donahue, Timothy (390)  
Donnell, William C. (395-397)  
Donnelly, John J. (105, 130)  
Donovan, (380, 383)  
Donovan, Bobby (384)  
Donovan, Francis (383, 384)  
Donovan, Robert B. (vii, 374-376, 379, 380, 383, 384, 509)  
Dooha, Herman (471, 484, 507)  
Doolittle, Corbin M. (vii, 138)  
Doolittle, James (34, 49, 50, 56, 83, 113, 157)  
Doone, Bernard E. (58, 68-70)  
Dorman, Donald A. (vii, 496, 510)  
Dotson, Donald C. (108, 109, 119, 120)  
Doty, C. C. (407)  
Doty, James P. (414, 415, 417, 418)  
Dougherty, Ellsworth L. (456)  
Doughty, Orville L. (116, 117)  
Douglas, Wade O. (33, 35, 38)  
Downs, Frederick L. (494)  
Dowsing, Albert (36)  
Doyle, William S. (vii, 227, 269)  
Drais, A. B. (289)  
Drake, Robert L. (131, 132)  
Drake, Robert R. (vii, 225)  
Draper, Robert D. (407, 409, 414, 415, 426, 428)  
Drice, D. N. (461)  
Drurey, N. A. (389)  
Drury, Byron R. (vii, 91)  
Dubberly, Robert R. (vii, 140)  
Duchek, James J. (434, 443)  
Dudley, S. W. (505)  
Duffie, R. N. (405)  
Dumas, Edward J. (8, 58)  
Duncan, Charles M. (333, 434, 435)  
Dunkelberger, Richard E. (vii, 312)  
Dunkelberger, Vance (67, 113, 114)  
Dunkerley, Daniel P. (vii, 496)  
Dunkle, Robert (513)  
Dunlap, John T. (432)  
Dunlop, John W. (v, 151, 153, 154, 158, 160, 163, 164)  
Dunn, James (314)  
Dunn, Lawrence J. (170)  
Dunston, John H. (vii, 507)  
Dupuis, Harvey J. (141, 142)  
Durfee, Russell (NMI) (250, 254, 255)  
Durkee, George P. (81)  
Durney, George P. (166, 167, 196)  
Durette, Luther L. (vii, 343, 344)  
Durtschi, Kenneth A. (318, 377)  
Dutton, Hulon B. (vii, 9)  
Dvork, D. C. (407)  
Dyer, Juan J. (vii, 356, 374)  
Dykes, David W. (407, 410, 426)

**-E-**  
Eaon, (97, 98)  
Earl, Wilbur E. (269, 272)  
Easterbrook, William C. (272)  
Eaton, Robert H. (68, 76)  
Eberle, John E. (75)  
Eberle, Oscar H. (v, 218, 224)  
Eckels, Marlin E. (vii, 168)  
Eddleman, Howard W. (68, 86)  
Edelen, R. B. (453)  
Eden, Sir Anthony (50)  
Edmonds, Charles G. (232)  
Edwards, Harold R. (vii, 47)  
Edwards, Ralph F. (v, 179, 180, 212)  
Edwards, William T. (289)  
Egan, John D. (130, 131)  
Eggers, Richard F. (v, 9, 91-93)  
Ehredt, Chester S. (92, 94)  
Eilers, George W. (317, 318, 350, 351, 372)  
Eisenman, David J. (vii, 331, 390)  
Eisenhower, Dwight D. (84, 86, 157, 165, 278)  
Eisner, Eugene (NMI) (307, 309)  
Elder, Donald E. (92, 94)  
Elero, Leonard J. (vii, 90)  
Ellis, Archie (62)  
Ellis, Delbert E. (361)  
Ellis, James G. (192, 266, 273, 275, 281, 287, 294, 298, 299, 302, 317)  
Ellis, Kenneth W. (vii, 337)  
Ellis, Leland C. (294)  
Ellsworth, John W. (485)  
Embry, Jr., Robert L. (vii, 338)  
English, Benjamin T. (vii, 404)  
English, Ernest (53)  
Entrekin, Julius H. (269)  
Epling, William A. (104)  
Erickson, Kenneth D. (327, 328)  
Erpelding, Charles F. (255, 256)  
Erpelding, Raymond (61)  
Ershow, Walter (500)  
Erwin, Kelly H. (vii, 76, 77)  
Erwin, William (513)  
Esser, Wilhelm (209)  
Etter, Louis (NMI) (497)  
Eubanks, E. A. (130)  
Evans, Bradford A. (71, 129, 138, 141, 147, 224, 233, 263)  
Evans, Jack J. (vii, 54)  
Evans, William H. (88, 105)  
Evanson, Russell (145)  
Everett, Edwin R. (vii, 343, 344)  
Evert, Charles A. (vii, 225)  
Eye, Everett E. (14, 67)

**-F-**  
Facer, Don M. (327, 328)  
Faker, Ira (465)  
Fales, Joseph E. (vii, 90)  
Falkenstern, N. E. (426)  
Farley, Jack (97)  
Farr, Rolan S. (268)  
Farrell, James A. (vii, 13)  
Farrell, Raymond J. (76)  
Farwell, Pat W. (395, 396)  
Faulkner, George W. (412)  
Fawls, Eugene F. (vii, 287)  
Feierstein, Louis N. (33, 34)  
Felix, Ruben A. (337)  
Feltner, Marshall W. (256, 257)  
Fenn, Merrill (NMI) (178)  
Fennessy, Edward J. (107, 108)  
Ferguson, Joe E. (226)  
Ferkin, Arthur L. (497, 498)  
Ferrara, Anthony (369, 370)  
Ferree, Norman E. (vii, 8, 9, 45, 58, 82)  
Freireira, Joseph (317)  
Ferro, Howard E. (329)  
Ferro, Richard H. (vii, 355, 390)  
Fichtner, H. G. (509)  
Fiebleman, Jacob P. (391)  
Fields, Grethel C. (286)  
Fields, Orethl C. (266)  
Fifield, Lewis E. (462-466)  
Fillingame, Robert D. (v, 12, 16, 23, 57)  
Finch, E. W. (461)  
Finch, Thomas E. (vii, 120, 121, 140)  
Fink, Merideth D. (94)  
Finkelstein, Harold (190, 191, 210, 262)  
Finley, Henry (NMI) (236)  
Finn, John A. (vii, 255)  
Finnegan, Thomas E. (89)  
Fishback, Donald M. (453, 456)  
Fisher, Carroll L. (72, 73)  
Fitch, Robert E. (vii, 337)  
Fitzgerald, Franklin W. (88)  
Fitzpatrick, Earl W. (37, 38, 48, 88)  
Fitzpatrick, John F. (350, 351)  
Fitzsimmons, Lawrence J. (286)  
Flahive, Robert J. (vii, 338)  
Flannigan, (435)  
Fleming, Frank P. (291, 292)  
Fleming, James E. (vii, 287, 288)  
Fleming, Jr., William H. (130, 137)  
Flett, Robert G. (46)  
Flicek, Donald G. (86)  
Flood, Raymond E. (327, 328)  
Flournoy, Richard C. (94, 97, 98)  
Flowers, Alva L. (139, 413, 422)  
Flynn, Francis W. (340-342)  
Fohy, Harold W. (vii, 95)  
Fontana, Rich (274)  
Foote, Leo (214)  
Forbes, Harry J. (272)  
Forbes, Thomas W. (224, 229, 231)  
Ford, Roy T. (269-272)  
Forest, Arthur K. (497)  
Forst, Richard K. (v, 468, 469, 471, 474, 475, 478)  
Foster, Carl R. (193, 208)  
Foster, Ivan H. (269, 272)  
Foster, Raymond D. (67)  
Foust, Paul A. (vii, 146, 174, 194, 196, 209)  
Fouts, F. M. (494)  
Fox, E. S. (494)  
Fox, Howard T. (5, 31, 65, 249)  
Foy, Bernard T. (289)  
Framm, Roger C. (276)  
Frampton, James R. (303, 304)  
Francis, Leo J. (426, 427)  
Francis, William H. (482)  
Frank, Jr., Anderson (291)  
Franklin, C. E. "Ben" (v)  
Frazer, Harold E. (462-464)  
Frederick, (207)  
Frederick, Andrew J. (390)  
Fredrickson, Christian L. (453, 456)  
Freed, Earl J. (447)  
Freel, Harold L. (232)  
Freeman, Charles W. (490-492)  
Freestone, Clyde T. (462, 463, 466)  
Frei, Walter G. (74)  
Freidman, Howard (NMI) (vii, 291)  
French, Robert (464)  
Fricke, Joseph W. (130, 131)  
Frinsco, Wesley (NMI) (vii, 291)  
Fry, Edward L. (462)  
Fry, Harold E. (21)  
Fuller, Leigh W. (462)  
Furlong, Francis R. (482, 483)  
Fuscaldo, Tony (14)  
Futur, Stephan J. (vii, 496)

**-G-**  
Gabbert, C. (67)  
Gaby, Joseph P. (178)  
Gagnon, Marcel (130)  
Gaines, Bert F. (147)  
Gale, Robert H. (456)  
Gallager, Leslie (109)  
Galligan, William J. (74)  
Gallup, Robert F. (168, 170, 292)  
Gamache, Robert C. (v, 177, 178)  
Gantt, Carol F. (vii, 121)  
Ganue, Warren C. (449)  
Garcia, Victor (NMI) (68)  
Gardner, Donald C. (236)  
Garello, Giancarlo (235)  
Garland, William T. (338-341)  
Garlick, Harold W. (vii, 147, 148)  
Garnett, Henry W. (vii, 291, 292)  
Garnett, Robert M. (136, 167)  
Garrison, Thane S. (337)  
Gasparik, George R. (367)  
Gatewood, James O. (vii, 179, 180, 212)  
Gathercole, Clark B. (v, 8, 9, 16, 40, 82)  
Gawronski, Donald L. (vii, 507)  
Gay, Warren G. (vii, 102, 136)  
Gayle, Robert H. (411)  
Geiger, C. E. (130)  
Geilman, George (503)  
Geller, Ralph (v)  
Genovese, Anthony S. (420)  
Genter, Donald F. (212, 234)  
George, William N. (vii, 62)  
Georges, G. T. (336)  
Gerace, Joseph P. (v, 50)  
German, Willie W. (vii, 238, 249, 270)  
Gerstein, Albert (24)  
Gerstenhaber, Sidney (21)  
Gervin, Charles C. (92)  
Gesicki, Leon J. (499)  
Gibson, F. (73)  
Gibson, Joseph W. (130, 137)  
Gilbert, Richard A. (vii, 213, 228, 236, 284)  
Gill, John L. (141, 142)  
Gillan, Lester L. (vii, 92, 94)  
Gilleece, John (462, 463, 466)  
Gillis, N. L. (410)  
Gillman, W. L. (446)  
Gilmore, Donald D. (179-181, 212)  
Gilmore, Eddie (281)  
Girelamo, Andrew J. (498)  
Gjertsen, Ralph N. (vii, 143)  
Glossow, Mark O. (307)  
Glass, Frank H. (135, 167, 196)  
Glass, Jr., George D. (494)  
Glatly, Richard J. (vii, 404)  
Glor, Frederick R. (v, 92, 97)  
Glorer, Tomas E. (v, 148)  
Goedecke, Jr., Clarence W. (v, 22, 59)  
Goering, Herman (45, 82, 107, 147, 169, 205)  
Goff, Charles E. (412)  
Gold, Dale E. (456, 457)  
Goldberg, Morris (344, 347, 348)  
Golden, William C. (vii, 36, 121)  
Goldstein, Richard (NMI) (vii, 228)  
Goldsmith, (249)  
Goldstein, Herbert S. (vii, 337)  
Goldstraw, David H. L. (151)  
Gonzalez, Jr., Ascension (v, 193, 208, 229)  
Good, Phillip (485, 489)  
Goodall, Pacher (109)  
Goode, Tom (274)  
Goodfellow, John C. (71)  
Goodman, Carl S. (vii, 337)  
Goodrich, A. D. (507)  
Goodrich, James F. (v, 407, 408)  
Gooseelin, Frank J. (394)  
Gordon, Joseph (464)  
Gotter, W. J. (461)  
Goulet, Clarence R. (vii, 290, 291)  
Gowans, Franklin H. (250)  
Gower, Richard L. (171, 172)  
Goziker, Martin (471)  
Gracy, Raymond W. (vii, 60)  
Grady, (373)  
Grady, Cletus (29, 102)  
Grady, J. M. (452)  
Grafton, William L. (255, 256)  
Grandquist, Roy (172)  
Grantham, Delbert (53)  
Graves, Jr., Thurman D. (vii, 143)  
Graves, Norman D. (130)  
Gray, Charles R. (v, 239)  
Gray, Edward E. (vii, 91)  
Gray, Elmer F. (249)  
Greathouse, Wayne M. (vii, 36, 61)  
Green, Fred L. (4)  
Green, Herschel (234)  
Green, Jack C. (vii, 75)  
Green, Marion L. (390, 391)  
Greenlaw, Edward A. (227)  
Greener, Walter M. (286)  
Gregor, Albert E. (289)  
Greiner, Richard L. (432)  
Greskamp, Joseph E. (330, 332)  
Gricius, Albert D. (vii, 228)  
Griffeth, Seth L. (272)  
Griffin, Charles E. (338-340)  
Griffith, Jack B. (vii, 141, 142)  
Griffith, Theodore (NMI) (vii, 196, 227)  
Grimmer, (126, 127)  
Grissett, Nyles (503)  
Grissom, Jr., Calton B. (vii, 59)  
Grissom, Thomas J. (131, 132)  
Grommont, Arthur D. (106, 107)

Gromyko, (440, 441)  
Gronsky, Red (372)  
Groom, Stanley A. (289)  
Grooms, Charles W. (52-54)  
Grooms, W. S. (497)  
Groot, William E. (vii, 76)  
Groover, Robert T. (vii, 139)  
Gross, Harold F. (395)  
Gross, Nicholas R. (312)  
Grossman, A. J. (419, 426)  
Grossnickle, Harry (445)  
Growney, James (NMI) (390)  
Gruchawka, Anthony S. (143, 264)  
Gruner, Jack D. (396, 398, 399)  
Guilfoil, William K. (vii, 74, 86, 88)  
Guinn, Tandy (62)  
Gulik, J. A. (196, 224)  
Gunn, (275)  
Gustafson, Wilbur M. (170, 171, 189, 190, 213)  
Gutmann, William S. (432)

**-H-**  
Habif, Joseph (NMI) (viii, 130, 137)  
Hackett, George A. (140)  
Haefes, Lloyd O. (v, 66, 67, 111-113, 117, 118)  
Haffner, John B. (68, 69)  
Hagerman, Joseph R. (viii, 94)  
Hall, Harvey P. (10, 21)  
Hall, Henderson S. (394)  
Hall, Hobart L. (viii, 9)  
Hall, Robert L. (viii, 468-470)  
Hall, William M. (24)  
Hallinan, James F. (92)  
Hamann, Donald C. (85)  
Hamilton, Gerald V. (viii, 356, 374)  
Hamilton, James E. (v, 481-483)  
Hamm, Lowell M. (250-253)  
Hammer, Alfred (208)  
Hammond, Darial G. (146, 147, 174, 209)  
Hampstein, Paul W. (viii, 457)  
Hanchak, M. J. (viii, 388)  
Hancock, (422)  
Hancock, Richard L. (167)  
Handy, Walter M. (229)  
Hannah, Howard C. (v, 330, 331)  
Hannon, Marshall E. (135)  
Hannon, Stephen J. (104, 137, 196)  
Hansell, Dean (361)  
Hansell, Elliott (v, 360, 361)  
Hansen, Carl I. (v, 16, 22, 23, 103)  
Hansen, Harold E. (viii, 232)  
Hansen, V. D. (389)  
Hanson, Burton G. (viii, 108, 119, 120)  
Hanson, Marshall (114)  
Hanson, Wallace H. (viii, 9)  
Harbin, James F. (88)  
Hardin, John M. (105)  
Hardin, William C. (224)  
Hare, Robert W. (367)  
Harkness, William R. (131, 132)  
Harlan, John P. (viii, 414)  
Harmon, George R. (104)  
Harp, R. W. (456)  
Harrington, James R. (449)  
Harrington, John N. (305)  
Harrington, Robert T. (viii, 62)  
Harris, (327, 328)  
Harris, Clifford (38)  
Harris, David A. (137)  
Harris, Ed (435)  
Harris, James C. (350, 356, 389)  
Harris, James R. (207)  
Harris, Marvin C. (20)  
Harris, Woodrow W. (361, 362)  
Harrison, Robert J. (74)  
Harrison, William A. (498)  
Harrop, John V. (137, 168, 170)  
Hart, D. F. (509)  
Hart, Donald L. (viii, 420-422)  
Hart, Edward M. (145, 195)  
Hart, Jesse C. (105, 166)  
Hart, Joseph T. (viii, 508)  
Hartgrave, Archie N. (130, 137)  
Hartlinger, (312)  
Hartman, Richard P. (viii, 338)  
Hartsfield, Wylie T. (312)  
Hartsock, Woodrow W. (v, 189, 190, 213)  
Harvey, Chester A. (146, 147, 209)  
Hastings, Dwight F. (v, 318, 319)  
Hauber, Jacob M. (viii, 61)  
Hauff, Arthur B. (462)  
Haug, Raymond G. (viii, 290)  
Hauser, Harold H. (40, 88)  
Hausler, Donald B. (348, 385, 387)  
Hausler, Richard M. (350)  
Hausler, Thomas G. (viii, 74)

Hawk, George R. (99, 141, 142)  
Hawk, Jarvel (309)  
Hawkins, Gilmer (311, 336, 337)  
Hawton, James L. (viii, 225)  
Hayden, Clyde J. (viii, 195, 196)  
Hayes, Edwin A. (317, 318)  
Hayes, Eugene M. (167)  
Hayes, Russell (NMI) (74)  
Hayett, William C. (338, 340, 341)  
Haynes, Caleb V. (2)  
Haynes, Robert E. (21, 41, 48, 49, 54)  
Hazay, Louis C. (viii, 94)  
Hazlett, John M. (120, 130)  
Heaberg, James H. (v, 52-54, 93)  
Headrick, Richard T. (34-37, 39, 41, 47, 95)  
Hearing, Richard (NMI) (viii, 457, 458)  
Heath, Theo (NMI) (viii, 337)  
Heathman, Sidney, M. (409, 484)  
Heatwole, Dwight E. (viii, 145, 195, 196)  
Hecker, Robert B. (21)  
Hedrick, Glen M. (232, 255, 256)  
Heffelbower, Darl J. (viii, 366)  
Heinen, Urban M. (52, 53)  
Heintz, James E. (317)  
Helstrom, Herb E. (viii, 291)  
Helveston, Jr., Harold W. (viii, 343, 344)  
Henderson, E. W. (369)  
Henderson, Ernest A. (v, 151, 161, 163)  
Henderson, Paul R. (viii, 225, 235)  
Henderson, Walter H. (viii, 82, 84)  
Henke, Vincent G. (104)  
Henry, (146)  
Henry, James J. (189, 190, 213, 264)  
Henry, Ralph E. (420, 421)  
Hepp, Gilbert J. (147)  
Hernandez, Sebastian S. (viii, 76, 79)  
Herring, M. K. (391)  
Herron, Frank W. (viii, 249)  
Hershey, Jacob W. (viii, 54)  
Herzing, James J. (76)  
Hess, George W. (68)  
Hiatt, Robert W. (viii, 195, 196)  
Hickey, James L. (88)  
Hickey, John J. (412)  
Hicks, Merrill C. (336)  
Higgen, (328)  
Higgins, H. T. (392)  
Higgins, Wallis L. (74)  
High, Floyd A. (135, 212, 234-236)  
Hildebrand, Arvin C. (viii, 404)  
Hildt, Jack K. (viii, 54)  
Hileman, Floyd N. (viii, 90)  
Hill, Charles H. (329, 355, 358, 367)  
Hillhouse, Charles H. (263, 264, 266, 269, 275, 276, 286, 288, 291, 318, 366)  
Hillman, K. D. (196)  
Hindert, Lettie (387)  
Hindert, Robert R. (293, 374, 375, 381-383, 387, 509)  
Hinsey, Albert D. (viii, 35, 54)  
Hinshaw, Marv (274)  
Hippard, Robert M. (v, 282, 283)  
Hiskey, Jr., James L. (viii, 111)  
Hitler, Adolph (46, 125, 150, 157, 163, 169, 207, 222, 223, 284, 455)  
Hix, Jr., William T. (viii, 461)  
Hizenski, Jesse S. (148, 150)  
Hoadley, Robert C. (338-340)  
Hodges, Glenn N. (viii, 129)  
Hodges, H. L. (461)  
Hoelscher, Virgil F. (v, 503)  
Hoene, D. E. (426)  
Hoffman, Kenneth L. (411, 453, 455)  
Hoffmann, Gail P. (vi, 106)  
Hofmann, John G. (viii, 273, 275, 329, 356, 508, 509)  
Hofmann, Robert (v)  
Holbrook, James H. (396)  
Holdeman, Herbert H. (235)  
Holland, Richard (390)  
Holland, William W. (38)  
Hollenbeck, Francis (109)  
Hollenberg, Charles F. (vi, 287, 384-387)  
Hollinger, Harry H. (481, 482)  
Hollingsworth, Elvyn O. (166)  
Hollister, Curtis R. (498)  
Holloway, Seward S. (116, 117)  
Holt, John M. (vi, 313, 314)  
Holtz, E. W. (391)  
Homer, Dean L. (viii, 424)  
Honeycutt, Arliegh C. (viii, 143)  
Honis, John L. (169, 196)  
Honke, Paul M. (496)  
Honour, Reginald S. (viii, 62)  
Hopkins, John J. (viii, 58, 75)  
Hopp, Walter C. (viii, 54)

Hopper, George E. (viii, 67)  
Horn, J. D. (36)  
Hornbeck, D. S. (73)  
Horne, Paul E. (viii, 139)  
Horne, Jr., Raymond E. (226)  
Hornor, Frank (NMI) (88, 111, 113)  
Horne, Paul E. (286)  
Horst, Warren E. (108, 109, 120)  
Horton, Driscoll B. (293)  
Horton, Harold F. (136)  
Horton, William (500)  
Hoskins, F. (214)  
Houliars, A. (490)  
Howard, (448)  
Howard, James H. (317, 318)  
Howard, William W. (145)  
Howarth, Raymond R. (250, 252, 253)  
Howell, George R. (viii, 91)  
Howes, Richard W. (10, 33-38)  
Hudson, J. J. (336)  
Huey, Jefferson F. (272)  
Hughes, Benjamin M. (105, 170)  
Hughes, Francis X. (91)  
Hughes, Septimus B. (247)  
Hullis, Stanley G. (273)  
Hummel, Joseph (361)  
Humphrey, Harold E. (21)  
Humphries, Satch (50)  
Hunt, Arthur L. (vi, 372)  
Hunt, Earl W. (148)  
Hunt, Joseph R. (86, 88)  
Hunter, James W. (364)  
Hurley, William P. (293)  
Hurwitz, Sidney (NMI) (307)  
Huskins, Fred S. (222)  
Hutchins, Arthur E. (38)  
Hutchins, R. Q. (384, 385)  
Hutchinson, Martin C. (viii, 225)  
Hutchison, Homer H. (86, 88)  
Hutter, Carl N. (247)  
Hyatt, Arthur L. (viii, 232)  
Hyde, Leon J. (181, 185)  
Hyndman, T. M. (506)

**-I-**  
Iellice, W.o. (234)  
Ihle, Lyman (31, 296)  
Imhoff, Jack (NMI) (249)  
Immonen, George F. (52, 53)  
Ingles, Charles H. (viii, 405)  
Ipert, Louis (278)  
Irby, Richard L. (vi, 195, 213, 284)  
Ireland, Paul (NMI) (107, 108)  
Irwin, Raymond S. (136)  
Isaac, Raymond L. (498)  
Isabelle, Hubert W. J. (110)  
Isbell, Thomas P. (151)  
Istre, Robert (NMI) (viii, 62)  
Ivanich, Frank J. (268)

**-J-**  
Jackel, Daniel (446)  
Jackson, Clarence B. (344, 346, 347, 385)  
Jackson, Edwin D. (viii, 120, 170)  
Jackson, Ottie (109)  
Jackson, John B. (86)  
Jacobs, Edward J. (286)  
Jacobs, Herbert M. (425, 499)  
Jacobson, Charles A. (74)  
Jacobson, Samuel (viii, 34, 35, 58)  
Jaffee, Joseph (104, 222)  
Jaffke, Wilbur W. (495)  
James, Felix D. (489)  
Jamiot, Ben (NMI) (109)  
Jamison, Charles (503)  
Janas, Felix A. (405)  
Janerone, R. (385)  
Janicek, John J. (vi, 194, 213, 284, 285)  
Janoski, Edward (485)  
Jarrell, Chester S. (246)  
Jarrell, James O. (viii, 291)  
Javor, Walter F. (497)  
Jay, Burke W. (420, 421)  
Jeffries, W. D. (420)  
Jenkins, Lawrence L. (v, Vi, 305-307)  
Jensen, Darrell W. (494)  
Jensen, Keith L. (40, 116, 117)  
Jensen, Vernon A. (226)  
Jesse, Jr., James A. (87)  
Jillson, Clarence (7)  
Jobin, Arthur E. (148)  
Johnson, D. B. (406, 503)  
Johnson, D. E. (130)  
Johnson, D. H. (413)  
Johnson, Delos I. (101)  
Johnson, George L. (38)  
Johnson, Jr., Haddon (426, 427, 429)  
Johnson, Herbert N. (viii, 312)  
Johnson, James J. (viii, 338, 413)

Johnson, Jr., John R. (428)  
Johnson, Joseph (NMI) (105)  
Johnson, L. (329)  
Johnson, Leroy E. (viii, 337)  
Johnson, Paul F. (232, 233)  
Johnson, Paul L. (307, 309)  
Johnson, R. (67)  
Johnson, Ralph E. (viii, 170, 171, 189, 190, 213)  
Johnson, Robert F. (235, 246, 248)  
Johnson, Jr., Roscoe H. (vi, 38)  
Johnson, Russell H. (498)  
Johnson, William D. (134)  
Johnson, William J. (219)  
Johnston, James F. (viii, 391)  
Johnston, Robert L. (136)  
Jolly, William (NMI) (viii, 420-422)  
Jones, Jr., Carl C. (viii, 313)  
Jones, Charles A. (100, 131)  
Jones, D. E. (457)  
Jones, Darrell (55)  
Jones, Freeburn R. (109, 219)  
Jones, Jack C. (40, 92)  
Jones, James A. (343, 344)  
Jones, James H. (viii, 168, 169)  
Jones, Jay E. (vi, 181, 184, 185)  
Jones, P. E. (494)  
Jones, Robert M. (viii, 238)  
Jones, Tommy (NMI) (390)  
Jonson, Harold M. (38)  
Jordan, Joseph A. (276)  
Jordan, Lawrence (263, 311, 316, 373, 435)  
Jorgensen, Earl L. (303)  
Jost, George J. (238, 250-252)  
Joyce, David T. (405, 411)  
Julian, Thomas F. (viii, 143)  
Junnisson, Clarence P. (447)  
Justi, Jr., Charles R. (viii, 47)

**-K-**  
Kaczmarek, Robert W. (249)  
Kahler, Clayton H. (81, 104)  
Kaliszcik, Joseph (311)  
Kamanek, Michael J. (21)  
Kanner, Louis (NMI) (305)  
Kaplan, Elliot J. (390)  
Karcich, Dominic L. (viii, 72, 73)  
Karel, Joseph E. (329)  
Karlinger, (315)  
Karmyzooff, Alec Nick (204)  
Karp, Julius (NMI) (145, 318)  
Karpinal, John (47)  
Karsh, Frank L. (109)  
Karsh, Ralph L. (170)  
Karsten, Jr., J. W. (419)  
Kasper, Edward J. (72, 73)  
Kaszak, Louis D. (456)  
Katz, Irving D. (viii, 338-341)  
Katz, Stanley H. (104, 131)  
Kaufman, John C. (513)  
Kavacevic, Payle (Paul) M. (427, 428)  
Keaton, C. E. (335, 336)  
Keene, C. (407)  
Kehm, Robert L. (268)  
Keifer, Gordon P. (286)  
Keller, A. (212)  
Keller, Jr., Franklin E. (452, 468-472, 478, 479)  
Keller, Ray (vi, 14)  
Kelley, Rolland C. (vi, 475)  
Kellogg, John F. (292)  
Kelly, (281)  
Kelly, Byron D. (238)  
Kelly, Charles (372)  
Kelly, Christopher T. (232)  
Kelly, Herbert S. (426, 427)  
Kelly, J. W. (413)  
Kelly, James H. (viii, 303-305)  
Kelly, Leonard H. (195)  
Kelly, Patrick L. (256)  
Kelly, William (228)  
Kemendo, Donald E. (vi, 351)  
Kemp, George A. (190, 210, 262)  
Kemp, William R. (viii, 108, 139)  
Kenlein, John J. R. (137, 151)  
Kennedy, John (85)  
Kennedy, Robert L. (106, 107)  
Kennelly, R. F. (467)  
Kenyon, Donald I. (viii, 60)  
Keopp, Cyril O. (489)  
Keophart, (295, 297, 298)  
Kepler, Vincent A. (viii, 167)  
Kepper, Carl (471)  
Kerns, William (491)  
Kessel, Buri K. (288)  
Keuchel, Robert A. (viii, 496)  
Kidd, Mack H. (viii, 96)  
Kidney, Howard J. (viii, 318, 319, 377)  
Kilgalen, John J. (119, 120, 139, 218)

Killian, Jesse A. (vi, 462, 463, 465)  
Kilson, George H. (291)  
Kimbird, Otis (17-20)  
Kincaid, Kenneth A. (46)  
Kinchloe, Gerald L. (330, 332)  
King, Jr., Eph S. (viii, 58, 75)  
King, Robert S. (38, 58, 86)  
King, Thomas E. (450)  
Kingsbury, Robert G. (vi, 75, 78)  
Kingsland, James D. (61, 62)  
Kinnaird, Lawrence H. (viii, 47)  
Kinnen, Henry W. (72)  
Kinnes, Kenneth S. (viii, 62)  
Kinyon, Harry F. (54)  
Kirby, Albert S. (viii, 74, 75)  
Kirk, James R. (327, 328)  
Kirkendall, (249)  
Kirkland, Frank J. (219, 220)  
Kirkpatrick, Charles T. (139)  
Kirsch, Robert R. (341, 342)  
Kirts, Russell (489)  
Kirwin, Thomas E. (116, 117)  
Kisak, Paul F. (498)  
Kizer, Ben W. (106, 107)  
Klauber, Morton L. (412, 508)  
Klaus, Lionel (46)  
Kline, Roy S. (viii, 12, 59)  
Klinkoski, Henry J. (151)  
Klute, Allen A. (227)  
Kluttz, Walter G. (viii, 121, 140)  
Klykamp, Joseph F. (497)  
Knaggs, Clyde H. (33-38, 74)  
Knapus, Ned D. (13)  
Knecht, Wilbert C. (vi, 308)  
Knight, Chester A. (viii, 9)  
Knighton, Austin S. (329, 335)  
Knitter, Gene (372, 373)  
Knutson, Frank J. (219)  
Knox, C. T. (509)  
Knox, Wesley W. (viii, 95)  
Koch, William P. (viii, 46, 81, 83, 84)  
Koehler, Edwin G. (60)  
Koden, Joseph (NMI) (450, 479)  
Koller, Jr., Rudolph C. (vi, 42, 468)  
Kolln, Ernest G. (viii, 366)  
Kolstad, Robert F. (137)  
Kocieczny, Frank S. (68, 74)  
Konnte, G. (454)  
Kopenhefer, Gilbert A. (58)  
Karlinger, (315)  
Kopra, Wikko A. (86, 195)  
Korb, Richard A. (viii, 287, 288)  
Korell, Stanley M. (vi, 17, 47)  
Kornetsky, Harry (281)  
Kornfield, Leonard B. (448)  
Kortright, John F. (58)  
Kotien, Arthur (NMI) (268)  
Kozina, Frank J. (497)  
Kralich, William J. (499)  
Kramlichfeld, J. (67)  
Kraus, H. J. (425)  
Kravet, Robert (308)  
Krejsa, Robert C. (462-464)  
Krent, Thaddeus T. (viii, 288)  
Kresge, Jr., Howard N. (390, 413)  
Kronenberg, Harold J. (vi, 214, 220, 222)  
Krueger, Arthur A. (109, 111, 131)  
Krutchfield, Pete (42)  
Kryzyzanek, Raymond J. (482, 508)  
Kuck, Earl (44)  
Kuhn, Richard F. (vi, 83, 84, 358, 359)  
Kuhrt, Raymond C. (337, 374)  
Kurtz, Reginald W. (146, 172)  
Kurz, Clarence J. (96)  
Kurz, Robert L. (68, 70)  
Kutschera, Walter F. (vi, 55, 56, 141, 144, 187, 188, 196, 217)  
Kwiatkowski, Arnold T. (viii, 353, 354, 390, 391)

**-L-**  
L'Amoreaux, Raymond C. (14)  
Labadie, R. C. (389)  
LaBlanc, Marjorie (247)  
Laiger, Frederick G. (120)  
Laich, Walter C. (viii, 35, 42, 48, 58)  
Lamb, Hamilton M. (viii, 138)  
Lamb, John A. (329, 336)  
Lambert, John A. (199, 201)  
Lambert, Robert N. (327, 328)  
Lamonica, Julius L. (38)  
Lamont, Edward C. (viii, 71)  
Lamont, Howard (NMI) (227)  
Lampka, Russell E. (472, 474, 475, 478)  
Lande, David (424)  
Landers, William C. (497)  
Landsburg, Leonard A. (92)  
Lane, Clair H. (viii, 312)  
Lane, Keisling (31)

Lanford, William (307)  
Lang, James I. (vi, 327)  
Langley, Paul M. (vi, 357, 364)  
Lanham, Clarence B. (109)  
Lani, Leroy F. (134, 210)  
Lannigan, Arden O. (453, 455)  
Lantz, Roy T. (90)  
Laratta, Joseph M. (viii, 344, 347)  
Larouche, Maurice R. (212, 234, 235)  
Larsen, Alf L. (viii, 287, 288)  
Larson, Donald J. (168-170, 196)  
Larsen, Harold E. (166, 169)  
Larson, Robert T. (327, 328)  
Lasalle, Harry S. (145, 228, 229)  
Lastowski, Walter (311, 350)  
Latshaw, Merton B. (86, 88, 104)  
Latshaw, Richard C. (74)  
Laude, M. H. (425)  
Lauer, Dennie L. (46, 74, 89)  
Lauer, Ford J. (14, 16, 23, 39, 42, 103, 282)  
Lauterbach, Theodore G. (226)  
Laux, Robert A. (viii, 337)  
Lavine, (82)  
Lavine, Harry (NMI) (viii, 71)  
Lavine, Herman S. (viii, 190, 194, 196, 232)  
Lavoie, Urban B. (viii, 54)  
Lawlor, L. (385)  
Lawrence, George A. (212, 234)  
Lawry, John M. (viii, 138)  
Lawson, Frederick (NMI) (viii, 228)  
Lawson, Henry C. (viii, 494)  
Layfield, Edward T. (viii, 9)  
Lazar, Virgil (NMI) (viii, 218, 219, 232)  
Lea, Jr., Dabney H. (viii, 138)  
LeBlanc, Joseph L. A. (viii, 104)  
LeChiusia, Anthony J. (130)  
Lechner, Floyd (NMI) (viii, 481)  
LeClair, Jr., John A. (361)  
Lee, C. A. (130)  
Lee, Harold O. (76)  
Lee, Orie C. (vi, 390)  
Lee, Robert E. (viii, 74)  
Leet, W. R. (422, 423)  
Legge, James M. (135)  
Leggett, Albert N. (256, 263)  
LeGrand, Herman J. (109, 219)  
Lehman, Eugene R. (9, 58)  
Leibel, Lewis (214)  
Leighty, Charles H. (viii, 35, 42, 59)  
Leinart, Joseph G. (286)  
Leland, Paul (NMI) (viii)  
LeMaster, Floyd M. (120, 219)  
LeMay, Curtis (2)  
Lemon, Jr., Frederick M. (viii, 138)  
Lenard, George (385, 387)  
Lennon, B. A. (413)  
Lennon, Victor A. (450)  
Lenz, John W. (116, 117)  
Leonard, Russell R. (92, 97)  
Leppo, M. S. (337)  
Leszczynski, William J. (292)  
Letters, Karl J. (119, 171, 179)  
Letz, Fred E. (276, 277, 279, 280)  
Levchak, George A. (83, 111, 119)  
Levesque, Raymond J. (495)  
Levia, (369)  
Levigne, (109)  
Levin, Edward (372)  
Levine, Joseph (333)  
Levine, Julius (358, 359)  
Lewis, Bernard J. (viii, 85, 91)  
Lewis, Donald J. (107, 108)  
Lewis, I. (479)  
Lewis, S. C. (366)  
Lewis, William A. (147)  
Leyden, John W. (485, 486)  
Liberto, Alphonso C. (434, 437-439, 441, 443)  
Licence, Fred R. (viii, 12, 40, 113, 139, 140)  
Lickman, Alexander (368)  
Lighte, Rubin R. (viii, 47)  
Lillie, (249)  
Lindaberry, H. L. (505)  
Lindemeyer, Karl (422)  
Linder, Dozier W. (462)  
Liney, Joseph E. (42)  
Lins, Warren E. (134, 210)  
Lipczynski, Joseph D. (viii, 412)  
Lipsett, Ernest I. (212, 234)  
Lisa, (492)  
Lisowski, Walter R. (289)  
Lisusky, L. W. (506)  
Little, Max A. (457)  
Little, Russell L. (viii, 167)  
Lively, T. R. (408, 462)  
Llewellyn, Gordon C. (40, 116, 117)  
Lloyd, Robert B. (viii, 366)  
Lollar, Chester C. (449)  
Lombard, Edward H. (68)  
Long, J. M. (196)  
Long, James (139)  
Long, Lester (9)  
Long, Richard P. (8, 10, 16, 17, 45)  
Long, William E. (viii, 312)  
Love, Charles F. (41)  
Lovelace, (358)  
Lowery, (307)  
Lubowski, Nathan W. (viii, 170, 171, 189, 190, 213)  
Lucas, D. B. (130)  
Ludwig, Harry R. (viii, 107, 108)  
Luke, W. (385)  
Luksch, Richard L. (viii, 218, 236)  
Lunan, Allison W. (179, 180, 212)  
Lund, George (NMI) (vi, 219, 220)  
Lundell, Robert J. (viii, 139, 140)  
Lundquist, Woodrow N. (170, 171, 173, 175)  
Lutterbach, James P. (viii, 312)  
Lynch, O. H. (410)  
Lyons, Jr., Thadden J. (viii, 177, 178, 192, 196)  
Lyons, Martin B. (viii, 178)  
**-M-**  
Mabius, William (513)  
MacDonald, Edgar N. (vi, 76, 77)  
MacDonald, G. D. (413)  
Machovec, Glenn W. (453, 455)  
Macias, Henry (NMI) (145, 215, 216)  
MacIntosh, John (513)  
MacKenzie, James I. (34, 59)  
MacKenzie, John R. (viii, 312)  
MacKool, Z. A. (391)  
MacMillan, Joseph W. (412)  
MacMickol, Lloyd (93)  
Macoy, Wells A. (69, 70)  
Madden, Lawrence F. (viii, 136)  
Maddox, Marion J. (viii, 145, 213, 236, 285)  
Maddux, Horace B. (viii, 145, 225)  
Madill, Frank C. (vi, 414-416, 482, 483)  
Maginnis, Harry R. (486, 487)  
Maglaty, Frank L. (286)  
Magnuson, Bruce (v)  
Magnuson, Clifford E. (144, 196, 207, 226)  
Maguire, John F. (369, 370)  
Magyar, John (109)  
Mahabirsingh, Horace (109, 122, 123)  
Mahan, Joseph J. (74, 85, 93)  
Maher, Patrick J. (viii, 60)  
Mahon, James F. (317, 318)  
Mahoney, James E. (24, 25)  
Mahood, William B. (68-70)  
Maiers, Francis J. (396)  
Main, Nelson T. (287)  
Maine, Donald F. (viii, 395, 396, 407, 496)  
Major, Charles E. (92, 94)  
Malatesta, Marino P. (viii, 336, 350, 351)  
Malcomson, Donald (NMI) (195)  
Malik, John (372)  
Malinowsky, (133)  
Mancuso, Anthony R. (105, 119, 145, 225)  
Manka, Casimir C. (viii, 61)  
Mann, Farley G. (vi, 509)  
Marak, Rick (274)  
Maria (116)  
Marinello, Jr., Joseph (NMI) (viii, 341, 342)  
Marion, William B. (viii, 236)  
Markey, Keran A. (428)  
Marlow, Harold (52, 53)  
Marsh, Harold P. (457-460)  
Marshall, (50)  
Marshall, Gordon S. (120)  
Marshall, Jennings A. (196, 199, 207, 232)  
Martell, A. G. (484)  
Martin, Jr., Bernard M. (166)  
Martin, Byron S. (407)  
Martin, Charlie (NMI) (viii, 109, 143)  
Martin, Earl W. (vi, 238, 250, 270)  
Martin, J. M. (481)  
Martin, James R. (344-348)  
Martin, John D. (151, 153, 154, 161, 163)  
Martin, John J. (viii, 338)  
Martin, Kemp F. (12, 76, 77)  
Martin, Samuel H. (vi, 495)  
Martin, William D. (85, 130)  
Martin, Jr., William E. (462, 463)  
Martinez, Vincente J. (337, 350)  
Martucci, Angelo (NMI) (307, 309)  
Marturano, Victor (NMI) (vi, 151, 159, 163, 164)  
Mason, Richard C. (317, 318)  
Massey, Harry C. (viii, 59)  
Massey, Miles W. (viii, 494)  
Matheny, Kester D. (89)  
Mathews, (373)  
Mathews, Malcolm R. (92, 94)  
Mattison, John K. (v, 366)  
Matula, Albert H. (viii, 456, 457)  
Maxwell, Lyttleton W. (viii, 249)  
May, Billy R. (389)  
May, Donald C. (273, 275, 356)  
May, John C. (356)  
May, Jr., William H. (395)  
Maybee, Harper C. (193, 194, 208, 230)  
Mayberry, Alexander G. (viii, 75, 78, 79)  
Mayer, Samuel P. (130, 171, 172, 176, 177, 183)  
Mayer, William H. (71)  
Mayers, William J. (67)  
Mayfield, Darrel W. (67, 113, 170-172, 175, 196)  
Mayott, George D. (viii, 420-422)  
Mays, William R. (viii, 338)  
Mazar, Rich (274)  
McAdam, Robert E. (293)  
McAllister, George (302)  
McAlpine, (37)  
McArthur, Max W. (viii, 13)  
McCaffrey, Thomas F. (58, 74)  
McCain, Robert D. (88)  
McCarter, Douglas L. (14)  
McCarthy, Robert T. (viii, 89, 90)  
McCarvel, Edward J. (166)  
McCay, Jr., Andrew G. (456)  
McClain, Elmo F. (71)  
McCloskey, Robert O. (343)  
McCloud, Merlin S. (62, 86, 96)  
McClure, Robert (408)  
McCluskey, George T. (449)  
McConnell, Bernard E. (227)  
McConnell, William (NMI) (147)  
McCook, Bob (445)  
McCord, James B. (179-181, 196, 212)  
McCorkle, (205)  
McCormick, William J. (495)  
McCrary, Charles (130)  
McCrossan, Andrew M. (viii, 225, 235)  
McCulloch, W. B. (509)  
McCullough, J. F. (369)  
McCully, Leonard C. (viii, 95, 96)  
McDaniel, Gordon (500)  
McDaniel, Herbert (41)  
McDaniel, Richard A. (viii, 169, 196, 197)  
McDonald, James M. (82)  
McDonald, John (93)  
McDonough, William M. (viii, 338)  
McElhiney, Thomas (503)  
McFarland, Norman (246)  
McFaull, (7)  
McGehearty, James (93)  
McGhee, Charles H. (350)  
McGrane, John R. (46, 74)  
McGuire, Andrew E. (456)  
McGuire, Gerald E. (vi, 369, 407)  
McGurk, Marceline (246)  
McGurk, Thomas (64, 246, 248, 265)  
McHood, James O. (434, 437-442)  
McIlhargie, William L. (290)  
McInerny, Bill (264, 265)  
McIntyre, Vincent J. (viii, 36, 45, 61, 72)  
McKane, Warren T. (494)  
McKee, Homer D. (viii, 236)  
McKee, Raymond R. (226)  
McKenna, W. O. (389)  
McKibbin, William L. (367)  
McKool, Z. A. (337)  
McLauchlan, George A. (40, 92)  
McLish, Earl E. (273, 275, 356)  
McMullin, John B. (viii, 140, 170)  
McMurdo, Andrew T. (82)  
McNichol, William E. (viii, 215, 216)  
McPhee, James D. (viii, 74)  
McQuaid, Philip J. (viii, 291, 292)  
McTeague, John J. (170)  
McVey, Charles H. (337)  
McWaters, Philip L. (390)  
McWeeny, John J. (31, 32, 246, 248, 265, 511)  
McWhirter, James E. (419)  
Meade, J. J. (452)  
Meadows, James L. (36)  
Meagher, Elizabeth (132)  
Meagher, Patrick J. (vi, 131-133)  
Meehan, Robert E. (viii, 47)  
Meek, L. (67)  
Mehl, Willis L. (viii, 312)  
Meidl, Lawrence H. (viii, 108, 226)  
Meiselbar, William (NMI) (166)  
Melcher, John M. (35, 37)  
Mello, Clarence W. (92)  
Melrose, William T. (107)  
Melson, Allie G. (499)  
Melvin, Charles W. (396-398, 400)  
Melzer, Frederick W. (viii, 143)  
Mercier, Charles R. (viii, 219)  
Meringola, John J. (viii, 396, 397)  
Merino, Robert F. (360, 363)  
Merkle, Carl F. (276)  
Merritt, (329)  
Merritt, George R. (434, 441)  
Merwin, O. T. (461)  
Metcalfe, Douglas T. (vi, 10-12, 41, 82, 83)  
Meyer, Harry C. (170, 196)  
Meyer, Jr., Harold A. (viii, 236)  
Meyers, John R. (viii, 366)  
Meyrick, Russell W. (viii, 341, 342)  
Miceli, James J. (vi, 273, 274, 356, 357)  
Michaelis, Francis L. (vi, 468-471, 474, 478)  
Michaelysnin, Nicholas (467)  
Mickadeit, Robert E. (348)  
Mikita, John (NMI) (449)  
Mikula, Stanley J. (viii, 47, 58, 75)  
Miles, Charles, A. (vi, 264)  
Milhajlovic, (223)  
Miller, (357)  
Miller, Andrew D. (vi, 361, 405)  
Miller, Carl T. (viii, 13)  
Miller, Clark E. (104)  
Miller, E. H. (425)  
Miller, Earl J. (viii, 249)  
Miller, George B. (viii, 290, 291)  
Miller, Guy (369, 370, 372, 419)  
Miller, Harry L. (vi, 206, 282, 283)  
Miller, Herbert (247, 248)  
Miller, J. R. Derek (53)  
Miller, James B. (432)  
Miller, James F. (407-409, 414)  
Miller, John F. (92, 120)  
Miller, Lloyd C. (336, 364, 394)  
Miller, Michael R. (viii, 291, 292)  
Miller, Mike (108, 196)  
Miller, Morris H. (408, 409, 414, 415, 417, 418)  
Miller, Orchard B. (272)  
Miller, Victor L. (viii, 169, 196)  
Miller, Warren L. (412, 426)  
Milleson, Delbert W. (272)  
Mills, Carlton E. (106, 107)  
Mills, Frank (29, 249)  
Minasian, Armen N. (89, 130)  
Mirchin, Norman (NMI) (viii, 131-133)  
Mistic, William (411)  
Mitchell, James R. (461)  
Mitchell, John W. (47, 48)  
Mitchell, William (1)  
Mitchell, William E. (viii, 213, 236, 284, 428)  
Mitrovi, Joseph (13, 54, 55)  
Mo, Betty (v)  
Mo, Gene (v)  
Moberg, Bartley H. (viii, 481, 483, 484)  
Moberly, Coleman D. (232)  
Moleti, Edward C. (viii, 168, 169)  
Molitor, John A. (350)  
Monicken, Jay L. (vi, 167, 168)  
Monroe, John (359)  
Monroe, Thomas C. (75)  
Monteago, Joseph (99)  
Monteago, Tina (99)  
Moody, Robert G. (86)  
Moon, Donald F. (462)  
Mooney, Ralph T. (viii, 291)  
Moore, Allen C. (88)  
Moore, Clarence E. (199)  
Moore, Norman C. (52, 53)  
Moore, Troy E. (36, 85)  
Moorman, (192)  
Moran, (249)  
Moran, Michael (40)  
Moran, Patricia Donovan (vi, 375, 376, 383)  
Moriarity, Eugene J. (350)  
Moriarity, Thomas M. (vi, 94, 145, 215)  
Moriarty, Thomas M. (215)  
Morien, Joseph H. (344-348)  
Mork, Kendall E. (146, 209)  
Morlan, Robert G. (viii, 303)  
Morozos, Stanley (107)  
Morrish, Tony H. (viii, 236, 237)  
Morrison, Alexander (NMI) (viii, 59)  
Morrison, Clarence P. (14)  
Morrison, Glen E. (119)  
Morrow, E. A. (494)  
Morrow, Richard R. (54-56)  
Morrow, Vernon D. (viii, 36, 61)  
Morrow, W. J. (461)  
Morton, Raymond J. (330, 332)  
Moser, Mel (273, 356)  
Moss, Frank (264)  
Motola, Jr., Frank P. (255)  
Moyer, Clarence T. (viii, 167-169, 196)  
Mroy, Edmund, A. J. (vi, 41, 82)  
Mullen, George N. (313)  
Mullen, Robert R. (vi, 350, 369, 370, 372)  
Mumma, John C. (390)  
Munden, Charles A. (viii, 343, 344)  
Muringchack, Stephen M. (viii, 227)  
Murphy, Raymond T. (293)  
Murray, Fred E. (viii, 9)  
Murray, John A. (viii, 131-133)  
Murray, Virgil F. (354, 355)  
Mushrus, William (513)  
Musser, Roy D. (52-54)  
Mussolini, (163)  
Myer, William (viii)  
Myers, Joseph L. (viii, 50)  
Myers, William R. (391, 431, 432)  
**-N-**  
Nabers, Jr., Benjamin E. (viii, 130, 215, 216)  
Nabinger, William (NMI) (viii, 291)  
Nalewak, Edmund J. (viii, 249)  
Naljahlovic, (223)  
Nargiso, Jr., Charles (327, 328)  
Naro, Frank (NMI) (104)  
Nash, Albert L. (67, 71)  
Nastoupil, O. J. (446)  
Neal, Robert W. (13, 93)  
Neihla, William J. (109)  
Neilson, Harold G. (viii, 62)  
Nelson, (483)  
Nelson, A. L. (74)  
Nelson, Charles (298, 301)  
Nelson, Eldred J. (134, 210)  
Nelson, John G. (204, 207)  
Nelson, Maurice E. (viii, 344, 347)  
Nesbit, George D. (42)  
Netzley, William P. (343)  
Newhouse, Warren E. (vi, 415, 419, 482)  
Newland, Lewis J. (9)  
Newland, Regis J. (viii)  
Newman, Paul N. (286)  
Newton, Elwood R. (vi, 199)  
Nichols, (178)  
Nichols, Charles D. (489)  
Nichols, Ray L. (viii, 95)  
Nickel, Nelson A. (viii, 452)  
Nickolson, Howard (513)  
Nickolson, Joe D. (viii, 91)  
Nicolosi, (301)  
Nies, Walter (NMI) (viii, 120, 134, 162, 172, 210)  
Nighborowicz, John A. (348, 349)  
Nimirovski, Michael (vi, 190, 191, 210, 211, 229, 262)  
Nixon, J. J. (366)  
Noce, Carmine S. (407, 408)  
Nolder, Duane H. (viii, 139)  
Norman, William R. (vi, 29, 102, 249)  
Norton, (194)  
Norton, B. N. (484)  
Norwine, Jack (347)  
Notheis, Alvin L. (450, 451, 479)  
Novak, Albert E. (338-341)  
Novak, Alfred (482, 494)  
Novak, Edward E. (92, 95, 97)  
Nowell, Harlow L. (110)  
Null, Joe B. (vi, 145, 191, 238)  
Nunnery, Edwin W. (122, 170, 171, 210)  
Nurre, Alvin H. (vi, 217)  
Nussbaum, Ralph E. (485)  
Nystrom, Jim (274)  
**-O-**  
O'Brien, Eugene P. (viii, 74)  
O'Brien, Robert R. (viii, 303, 304)  
O'Brien, Timothy D. (286)  
O'Connor, Joseph P. (190, 210, 262)  
O'Connor, Robert H. (viii, 238, 250, 251)  
O'Connor, Roderic (52, 54, 55)  
O'Connor, Thomas J. (266)  
O'Donnell, Clarence (500, 501)  
O'Donnell, John J. (151)  
O'Grady, Peter F. (viii, 236)  
O'Hare, William M. (170, 171, 189, 190)  
O'Hern, J. (491)  
O'Leary, Cornelius J. (146, 209)  
O'Neill, Henry F. (viii, 291, 292)  
O'Neill, Robert E. (41, 68)

O'Shea, Henry M. (191, 192, 196, 198-202, 204, 207)  
Oates, Warren D. (193, 208)  
Ochocki, Henry M. (72, 73)  
Odegaard, Robert H. (vi, 212, 235)  
Officer, Ted (264)  
Ogletree, Robert C. (109, 110)  
Olds, George R. (84, 113)  
Olinik, John P. (vi, 453-455)  
Oliver, Robert H. (12)  
Olsen, Charles N. (219)  
Olsen, Charles P. (130, 151, 158, 160, 164)  
Olsen, Fred N. (viii)  
Olsen, Samuel F. (13)  
Olson, C. W. (497)  
Orebaugh, William (16)  
Osborne, James D. (293)  
Oster, Lloyd A. (198, 201, 202, 204, 205)  
Ostgulan, Norwine O. (303, 304)  
Owen, Billy B. (312)  
Owens, Bill (264)  
Owsnianik, Joseph P. (341, 342)

**-P-**  
Page, Eric G. (447)  
Palme, (448)  
Palmer, Stanley L. (68, 72)  
Panini, Arthur P. (viii, 76, 79)  
Pankratz, Anthony A. (viii, 95)  
Papousek, Elishka (343)  
Papousek, Miraslav (343)  
Park, Jr., Owen E. (323)  
Parker, Eugene (v)  
Parker, Jr., Irl (226)  
Parker, Willard M. (viii, 47)  
Parkhurst, Robert (464)  
Parkins, Donald B. (395)  
Parks, Donald F. (viii, 107, 108)  
Parrish, Charles N. (499)  
Parrish, Hilliard S. (130, 137)  
Parsons, Carmel F. (viii, 75, 79)  
Parsons, William A. (vi, 333)  
Pasero, Bernard B. (35, 36, 73, 76, 77)  
Pastorino, Ben J. (348, 349)  
Patterson, Jr., James H. (135)  
Patton, George (149, 200, 254, 257, 265, 271, 402)  
Pauls, (162)  
Pausha, Joseph J. (151, 152, 158, 159, 163, 196)  
Payne, Russell I. (viii, 338-341)  
Payne, W. (67)  
Payne, William C. (138, 179, 180)  
Peart, Donald L. (390)  
Peck, J. Loren (393)  
Pederson, Isaac C. (407-409, 414-416)  
Pederson, William L. (122)  
Pedigo, Millard F. (307)  
Pelligrino, Clem R. (143)  
Penn, Fred W. (viii, 218)  
Pepperman, William G. (413)  
Perkins, L. E. (130)  
Perrett, Francis (85)  
Perry, Edward P. (v, vi, 457, 458, 460)  
Perry, Frank N. (viii, 139)  
Pesature, Vincent J. (136)  
Peter, Fredy (v, 454)  
Peterscak, Peter S. (239)  
Peters, Joseph A. (119, 171, 172, 174)  
Peters, Kenneth R. (131)  
Peters, Lester M. (283)  
Peters, Thomas G. (46)  
Peters, William A. (viii, 74)  
Peters, Jr., William F. (viii, 218)  
Peterson, Robert D. (105)  
Peterson, Robert T. (v, vi, 147, 171, 173, 176, 209)  
Peterson, Wilbur F. (14, 58)  
Petrey, Claude A. (viii, 337)  
Petroski, Henry R. (67, 72, 73)  
Pewitt, James H. (vi, 396, 403, 452, 462, 470-472, 478, 479)  
Pezel, John A. (256)  
Pfaff, Curtis A. (ix, 290)  
Pharr, Frank C. (276)  
Phelan, John J. (33)  
Phelps, Dick (434)  
Phelps, Everett L. (33, 34)  
Phillippe, Robert W. (426, 428, 498)  
Phillips, (97, 98)  
Phillips, Gildo F. M. (vi, 414, 415, 482, 483)  
Phillips, Russell W. (229, 231, 232)  
Picard, (162)  
Picking, Robert L. (14)  
Pickrel, Jr., Turner W. (ix, 135, 145, 218)  
Pierard, Albert A. (490-492)

Pierce, Dale L. (419)  
Pierce, Jr., Peter G. (317, 318)  
Pierce, Otto (392)  
Pierik, John W. (495, 496)  
Pilcher, Robert B. (vi, 426-429, 431)  
Pilger, K. (413)  
Pilgrim, Gene T. (67)  
Pinner, Richard A. (ix, 452)  
Pinter, Alfred T. (313)  
Pinto, Jr., Frank (NMI) (ix, 420-422)  
Pioli, Robert L. (vi, 256, 257, 262)  
Pittard, Robert C. (348, 349)  
Pittman, Paul (NMI) (ix, 62)  
Plata, F. J. (467)  
Plattner, Milton (NMI) (106, 107)  
Plunkett, Willis H. (73, 74)  
Pociask, Stanley J. (396)  
Podany, George (7)  
Poindexter, Aubrey H. (ix, 409, 481, 484)  
Poitras, George W. (ix, 62)  
Pokrywka, S. P. (391)  
Pollard, Elbert W. (255, 256)  
Pollari, Richard O. (ix, 374)  
Poorman, Calvin N. (471)  
Pope, Anthony J. (414)  
Popowski, William T. (307, 309)  
Popoff, William (NMI) (195, 215, 217)  
Popp, Clifford C. (328, 329, 350)  
Porter, Donald H. (76)  
Porter, Maurice D. (419, 453, 454, 456)  
Post, Jess W. (ix, 54)  
Potempa, Walter (105)  
Potvin, Joseph O. (9, 41)  
Powell, D. W. (391, 490)  
Power, Rex D. (ix, 138)  
Powers, (154)  
Powers, R. T. (509)  
Powers, Tare (489)  
Prentice, Merrill A. (ix, 337)  
Prescott, Jr., William T. (486, 487, 489)  
Price, D. M. (419)  
Price, T. A. (425)  
Prievie, (45)  
Printy, O. L. (404)  
Privensal, Edmond L. (116, 117)  
Propper, Bill (84)  
Prostic, Benjamin W. (498)  
Proto, Raymond O. (195)  
Pruitt, Jr., Elmer J. (ix, 343, 344)  
Pullis, Donald C. (ix, 366)  
Pullis, Edward W. (449)  
Putzel, Sterling A. (ix, 374)  
Pysnik, Joseph (106, 107)  
Pysnik, Joseph (NMI) (ix, 121)  
Pyzanowski, Frank J. (250, 252-255)  
Pyzyna, Adam J. (225)

**-Q-**  
Queeney, Daniel (16)  
Quessnal, Robert H. (74)  
Quimby, Jr., Edward E. (ix, 414)  
Quinn, (108)  
Quinn, Hugh V. (119)  
Quinn, John C. (324, 344, 346)  
Quinn, Randy W. (58)

**-R-**  
Radcliff, C. F. (509)  
Radeheld, Frederick W. (ix, 54)  
Radje, George J. (336)  
Radlinger, Richard J. (391)  
Radner, (423)  
Radtko, Richard K. (vi, 501)  
Raeburn, Ian S. (ix, 366)  
Ralph, Eugene K. (134, 210)  
Ralston, Orville A. (ix, 9)  
Ramsey, Theodore F. (ix, 15, 41, 42)  
Ramsey, Walter E. (286)  
Rand, Robert M. (ix, 119, 167)  
Rapleyea, Richard (NMI) (499, 500)  
Rapley, Frank A. (ix, 312)  
Rappe, Henry (NMI) (ix, 288)  
Ratner, Edward (NMI) (497)  
Ravid, Albert J. (268)  
Raymond, Rowland (NMI) (178)  
Reams, Luther S. (468)  
Reardon, J. C. (510)  
Reardon, Robert C. (499)  
Rebstock, Robert C. (ix, 104, 141, 142)  
Redden, George A. (363, 364, 379, 424, 434, 436-444)  
Redford, Charles L. (495)  
Redick, Jr., James H. (ix, 92, 108)  
Redmon, William E. (104)  
Reeb, Arthur E. (391)  
Reed, Frederick J. (409, 481-484)  
Reedy, Henry F. (ix, 94)  
Rees, Howard L. (94)  
Reese, Paul J. (135)

Reeves, Kendrick U. (178, 256)  
Refford, C. L. (461)  
Reich, Thomas F. (86, 97)  
Reilly, Elaine (247)  
Reidy, Phillip (5, 246, 247)  
Reidy, Timothy J. (vi, 348, 349)  
Reiger, Robert (513)  
Reilly, Cornelius J. (ix, 414)  
Reilly, Francis K. (218)  
Reilly, George (NMI) (ix, 404)  
Reilly, Jr., Orville W. (ix, 236)  
Reinehl, John R. (394)  
Reinfeld, Bill (500)  
Reinhart, C. P. (367)  
Reiss, Jacob V. (ix, 9)  
Reinshemer, Frank (356)  
Replogle, Ellis R. (471)  
Ressler, Raymond E. (ix, 82)  
Resta, Delbert (12, 33, 46)  
Rey, Andre (278)  
Reyes, Niconor N. (319)  
Reynolds, Kermit L. (105)  
Reznick, Jack (NMI) (ix, 96)  
Rheinheimer, Charles J. (ix, 138)  
Riccio, Silvio A. (vi, 146, 174, 209)  
Rice, Herbert E. (37, 39, 56, 96, 102, 118, 119, 187, 192, 195, 207, 225, 247, 267, 272, 273, 281, 282, 285, 294, 299-301)  
Rice, Jr., Fred (502)  
Rice, Jr., Owen E. (ix, 291, 313)  
Rice, Loren C. (312)  
Richards, Charles W. (1, 5, 7, 63-66, 248, 479)  
Richards, Jean (vi)  
Richards, Louis (513)  
Richards, Ray (23)  
Richards, Robert (512)  
Richards, Walter (512)  
Richardson, Howard E. (ix, 92, 106, 107)  
Richardson, R. H. (509)  
Richmond, William B. (330-332)  
Rickett, Wayne L. (456)  
Ricketts, E. H. (509)  
Rickman, Frank J. (494)  
Riddle, Milburn (NMI) (vi, 256)  
Rigney, Leroy P. (ix, 194-196, 213, 236, 284, 285)  
Ring, Donald V. (24)  
Ringler, Charles E. (122, 123)  
Rink, Jr., Edward (272)  
Ritchie, Doris J. (247)  
Rivers, Richard C. (198)  
Rix, Paul (8, 9)  
Robbins, (42)  
Robbins, Hubert C. (12)  
Roberts, Donald (NMI) (499)  
Roberts, George R. (67, 68)  
Roberts, Grady M. (266)  
Roberts, Matt (298, 301)  
Robins, (37)  
Robins, David A. (ix, 312)  
Robinson, Charles (327, 328)  
Robinson, George A. (vi, 37, 46)  
Roche, James K. (305)  
Roche, Joseph M. (85)  
Rodenburg, Earl E. (vi, 276, 278-280)  
Rodriguez, Louis A. (ix, 290)  
Rodriguez, Jr., Regino (333)  
Roe, Raymond C. (323)  
Roessig, Allen (21)  
Rogers, Jr., Elmer J. (195, 215-217)  
Rogers, Maynard T. (ix, 74, 75)  
Rogers, Robert H. (ix, 323, 324)  
Rohrig, David G. (ix, 111, 112, 114)  
Rokosovsky, Marshall (157)  
Rokota, (359)  
Rolek, Joseph (NMI) (151)  
Roll, Michael (489)  
Rollins, Yates K. (232)  
Rollwage, (209)  
Roman, John R. (120)  
Rome, Oscar (NMI) (ix, 171, 176, 232)  
Rommel, (93, 284)  
Roper, Claude T. (92, 94)  
Rosa, Adrien (278)  
Rosa, Gerouette (278)  
Roscian, Louis (278)  
Rose, Raphael (NMI) (ix, 218)  
Rosemore, Fredric M. (vi, 313, 330, 331)  
Rosenbaum, Moses A. (255, 256)  
Rosenow, Donald S. (ix, 60)  
Rosenthal, Joseph (NMI) (102)  
Ross, (270)  
Ross, Jr., Edward C. (263)  
Ross, George (512)  
Ross, George L. (84)  
Ross, Harold M. (121, 140)

Rossi, Leo C. (226)  
Rounsville, Lee (494)  
Rowe, Melvin L. (ix, 499, 500)  
Rozzelle, Richard E. (ix, 36, 73, 75, 79)  
Rubenstein, Erwin (NMI) (ix, 130, 236)  
Rudolph, Robert N. (vi, 409, 483)  
Rule, Roy R. (ix, 374)  
Runyon, William A. (ix, 290, 291)  
Russell, Thomas J. (266, 291, 301)  
Ryan, John D. (192, 194, 233, 234, 236, 238, 246, 247, 263, 265, 266, 268, 272, 285, 302, 315, 323, 329, 391, 392, 452, 467-472, 475, 477)  
Ryan, John F. (ix, 92, 195, 196)  
Ryan, Jr., William L. (ix, 47)  
Rybovich, Thomas M. (369, 370, 395, 396)

**-S-**  
Saatala, Einard A. (355)  
Sacco, Gene (205)  
Saenz, F. (494)  
Safer, Henry (NMI) (374, 375, 377-383, 509)  
Sallee, Chester E. (482)  
Sallings, Joseph E. (286, 287, 341, 342)  
Sambuco, Leo (409, 484)  
Samora, Joseph D. (ix, 71)  
Sanders, Vernon H. (497)  
San Jaume, Emilio J. (486)  
Sanvito, Francis A. (212, 234, 235, 270)  
Sanvito, Mary (vi, 235)  
Sartore, Philippe (278)  
Saulnier, Morrill (7, 29)  
Scalisi, Bernard L. (vi, 122)  
Scarborough, Howard E. (134, 210)  
Schachschneider, Herbert J. (75)  
Scheiderman, Furman M. (ix, 195, 196)  
Schiffer, Arthur (NMI) (68, 72)  
Schilling, William M. (273, 275, 356)  
Schirmer, Harold (NMI) (ix, 343, 344)  
Schlagle (194)  
Schlau, Martin R. (489)  
Schmalriede, Ben H. (135, 232)  
Schmeelk, George (281)  
Schmitt, Clair H. (411)  
Schmittener, John N. (293)  
Schneider, Edward E. (131)  
Schneider, Emil (364, 365)  
Schneider, Richard E. (130)  
Schojan, Eugene R. (ix, 59)  
Schonage, Willie J. (497)  
Schorheim, Ernest C. (97, 98)  
Schraeder, Ivan L. (ix, 507)  
Schrode, Richard N. (462)  
Schrubba, (208)  
Schryer, Conrad R. (ix, 494)  
Schultz, W. D. (425, 506)  
Schumaker, Leo T. (105)  
Schumaker, Robert M. (121)  
Schuman, Elton I. (ix, 391)  
Schuster, G. W. (302)  
Schwartz, Louis (NMI) (286)  
Schwarzlose, Thomas G. (385, 386, 449)  
Schwerin, Wilbert F. (ix, 150, 151)  
Scofield, L. M. (425)  
Scott, David C. (214, 222)  
Scott, Raymond P. (ix, 139)  
Scott, Theodore L. (407)  
Scott, Jr., William T. (450)  
Seaman, Duane B. (348)  
Seamans, George J. (ix, 232)  
Season, Howard I. (ix, 323, 324)  
Sebian, (194, 263)  
Sebold, Ronald T. (497)  
Seeholm, L. H. (431)  
Segal, Albert J. (195, 196, 205)  
Seifert, Morris (317)  
Seiman, Sherman (17)  
Seimer, George F. (92, 109)  
Seimor, George F. (12)  
Sellers, E. E. (335)  
Selling, Holger A. (34, 36, 37, 47, 77)  
Seng, Harold W. (ix, 34, 46)  
Senta, Joseph F. (219, 220)  
Sepolio, Bernard N. (497)  
Sereni, Alfred (93)  
Sergakis, John B. (122)  
Sessions, Ross V. (452, 471, 478, 479)  
Sevruk, Adolph (NMI) (138, 181-185)  
Sexton, Hugh W. (497)  
Seyfried, (294, 297, 298, 300)  
Shadrow, T. M. (391)  
Shaftron, (53)  
Sharp, Charles E. (239)  
Shaughnessy, Patrick (NMI) (ix, 507)  
Shaw, E. (385)  
Shaw, James A. (318)  
Shawaker, Karl D. (122)  
Shea, David F. (74)

Shea, James J. (ix, 312)  
Shea, James W. (130, 137)  
Shearin, Jr., William J. (46, 58)  
Sheckles, Jr., Benjamin F. (193, 218)  
Shelfield, Orlander B. (104)  
Sheldon, Monroe O. (86)  
Sheldon, Willis I. (86, 88)  
Shellabarger, Royce E. (104, 131, 132)  
Shepard, C. W. (424)  
Shepard, Richard J. (486)  
Sheppard, Benjamin J. (420, 421)  
Sherman, Ben (426)  
Sherwood, Robert H. (456)  
Shields, Rudolph E. (ix, 58, 69)  
Shimko, George P. (497)  
Shipka, Richard F. (485)  
Shipley, Ray U. (42)  
Shivak, T. I. (494)  
Shively, L. W. (85)  
Short, Ernest H. (vi, 452, 468-472, 475, 478, 479)  
Shorten, R. R. (509)  
Showmaker, Bennie P. (287)  
Shrout, James L. (499)  
Shuck, Charles A. (82, 83)  
Shuey, John C. (ix, 494)  
Shuman, (194)  
Shuping, William K. (76, 106, 107)  
Siani, Jr., Dominic A. (318, 319, 321, 322)  
Sibert, (83)  
Sibert, J. E. (422-424)  
Siebert, Paul (491)  
Siegmund, Walter L. (vi, 393)  
Siegrist, Raymond (86)  
Siewers, Jr., Henry E. (305)  
Sikole, Anthony J. (104, 215)  
Sikora, Walter L. (41)  
Silianoff, James D. (499)  
Simerson, Hubert Y. (414)  
Simmons, (282)  
Simmons, Paul A. (33-36, 73)  
Simmons, Walter E. (23)  
Simon, (302)  
Simon, Donald R. (ix, 468-472, 478)  
Simpson, Jr., Ellsworth L. (ix, 47)  
Simpson, Louis H. (ix, 366)  
Sims, Frank J. (147)  
Singer, Elizabeth Albrecht (v)  
Sisovsky, Michael (v)  
Sisson, John D. (vi, 407, 448, 462, 510)  
Skalny, John F. (485)  
Skeffington, Willie P. (ix, 494)  
Skinner, Harold (372)  
Skinner, Norton D. (292, 293)  
Skinner, Wilma (512)  
Skoba, John E. (ix, 419, 453, 456)  
Skoehn, Ernest C. (vi)  
Slack, Robert E. (239)  
Slade, (194)  
Slaughter, William A. (109)  
Slivka, Victor (NMI) (426, 427)  
Slumock, Robert K. (ix, 138)  
Smiley, Paul A. (46, 81)  
Smith, Albert E. (139, 226)  
Smith, Albert E. (vi, 323, 324, 344, 346)  
Smith, Arthur J. (vi, 284)  
Smith, Carleton E. (507)  
Smith, Charles E. (453, 456)  
Smith, Chester A. (ix, 302)  
Smith, Clair J. (ix, 143)  
Smith, Clarence F. (ix, 290)  
Smith, Colin M. (105)  
Smith, Donald (281)  
Smith, Donald L. (147, 196)  
Smith, Jr., George T. (105)  
Smith, Leo C. (289)  
Smith, Paul H. (ix, 276, 278-280)  
Sneed, Ralph J. (170)  
Snure, Charles L. (286)  
Snyder, Alfred E. (ix, 136)  
Snyder, Jim (434)  
Snyder, Roy K. (105, 106)  
Sodaro, Vincent J. (293)  
Sokolowski, Adam F. (ix, 228)  
Solesbery, George O. (107, 108)  
Soltis, Daniel P. (ix, 414)  
Soltis, Frank (293)  
Southern, Clarence W. (ix, 228, 229)  
Spaatz, Carl (50)  
Spaulding, William (507)  
Specker, Jr., John R. (462-465)  
Speed, Edwin M. (vi, 21)  
Speede, Hayden B. (ix, 130, 137)  
Speight, John C. (vi, 337, 354)  
Spencer, W. E. (406)  
Spettner, Samuel (109)  
Spevy, (401)  
Spiewe, Bruce (361)  
Spiess, Eliot B. (vi, 360, 361, 405, 460)

- Spillers, Byrle L. (42, 67)  
 Spinning, Jr., Kenneth W. (ix, 13, 14, 94, 95)  
 Splitek, J. J. (413)  
 Sporer, Jr., Fred (NMI) (108, 119)  
 Sprague, Carlton J. (498)  
 Spriggs, Edward R. (ix, 185, 219)  
 Springer, Billie G. (120)  
 Spruce, William M. (311, 350, 367)  
 Squires, Robert A. (303)  
 Stacy, Jack (NMI) (ix, 59)  
 Stalin, Joseph (282)  
 Staphill, Belton D. (110)  
 Stamps, Robert B. (vi, 193, 194, 208)  
 Standridge, Dudley E. (ix, 338)  
 Stanford, Joseph F. (104)  
 Stanou, Rodu (430, 431)  
 Stanton, Eldon M. (224)  
 Stark, Bernard W. (463, 490, 491, 493)  
 Starr, John (103)  
 Stasik, George W. (137)  
 Staugas, William J. (ix, 218)  
 Staup, John L. (395)  
 Stearns, Arlin (137)  
 Steele, Robert B. (97, 98)  
 Steele, Robert W. (495, 496)  
 Steelman, Randolph M. (305)  
 Stehlik, Joseph (343)  
 Steinfeld, Marvin J. (ix, 499, 500)  
 Steinheuser, George F. (ix, 219)  
 Stenwedel, Clayton L. (ix, 425, 447)  
 Stephens, Paul (NMI) (ix, 450, 451, 479, 485, 486)  
 Stepp, Jr., John D. (181, 185)  
 Sterns, Arlen S. (120)  
 Stetner, (146)  
 Steuck, William F. (369, 370)  
 Stesussey, Donald A. (38)  
 Steven, (296)  
 Stevens, Edgar F. (224)  
 Stevenson, Reese (NMI) (312)  
 Stevenson, Hugh A. (ix, 497, 508)  
 Steward, L. O. (389)  
 Stewart, Charles M. (ix, 76-78)  
 Stewart, Charles W. (408, 409, 414)  
 Stewart, James S. (vi, 134, 193, 208, 230)  
 Stewart, Jr., William T. (485)  
 Stewart, Robert C. (ix, 293)  
 Stillman, Donald L. (vi, 303, 330-332)  
 Stinson, Cornelius W. (ix, 256, 257)  
 Stockstill, Norman J. (212, 234, 235)  
 Stoeger, Donald (36, 37, 42)  
 Stohl, Stanley A. (vi, 198, 200)  
 Stohldriker, Oliver H. (vi, 255)  
 Stone, Walter R. (432)  
 Storm, Freeman D. (169, 196-198, 207)  
 Storror, Edward (NMI) (426, 427)  
 Story, J. B. (425)  
 Stout, Robert (281)  
 Stover, A. H. (505)  
 Strasser-Kreislerter, Franz (422)  
 Strate, Paul (93)  
 Stravers, John J. (485)  
 Strickland, Cantello H. (ix, 145, 195, 225)  
 Strode, Samuel L. (292, 293)  
 Stroup, Ira D. (503)  
 Struble, Howard F. (vi, 422)  
 Struby, William D. (462)  
 Strutt, H. W. (461)  
 Stuart, Edgar M. (82)  
 Stuart, Virgil R. (292)  
 Stucky, Daryle R. (367)  
 Stultz, Shields G. (292)  
 Sturk, Traugott (208)  
 Suba, Foltanne (428)  
 Suba, Zoltan (428)  
 Sudam, (249)  
 Sulkey, Frank L. (ix, 338)  
 Sullivan, Arthur F. (119)  
 Sullivan, John E. (139)  
 Sullivan, Robert (412)  
 Sullivan, T. B. (313)  
 Sumner, Chester C. (42, 58)  
 Sumner, Oscar E. (vi)  
 Sumner, Paul E. (vi, 311, 350)  
 Sura, Walter (NMI) (499)  
 Suratt, George H. (312, 313)  
 Surprenant, Paul D. (450, 479)  
 Surratt, M. Dewey (196, 205)  
 Sussman, Herman (NMI) (vi, 138, 171, 175)  
 Swain, Allen W. (ix, 462)  
 Swan, Robert D. (ix, 136)  
 Swan, Walter L. (227)  
 Swank, Donald D. (105, 121, 140)  
 Swanson, Leland Ray (vi, 500, 501)  
 Swartwood, Harry R. (74)  
 Sweeney, George B. (414)  
 Swift, Joseph (490-492)  
 Swirsky, Mark L. (471)  
 Switzer, Jr., John J. (ix, 47)  
 Sykes, Robert F. (214, 218, 222)  
 Szabo, Joe (351)  
 Szabo, Steve E. (ix, 90)  
 Szafranek, Alfred R. (255, 256)  
 -T-  
 Talley, Combie J. (120)  
 Talley, Melvin (ix, 404)  
 Tansey, Jack (222-224)  
 Tappan, Robert W. (498, 500)  
 Tarby, Steve A. (489)  
 Tauber, Saul M. (ix, 168, 169)  
 Taylor, Arthur (225)  
 Taylor, Edwin E. (266)  
 Taylor, Harold A. (495)  
 Taylor, Herbert P. (490-492)  
 Taylor, J. A. (448)  
 Taylor, James H. (ix, 234)  
 Taylor, John J. (272, 276)  
 Taylor, Joseph H. (ix, 102, 136)  
 Taylor, Kinnon W. (137)  
 Taylor, Orville H. (72, 73)  
 Taylor, R. R. (413)  
 Teague, Edward F. (67)  
 Tegge, Michael R. (74)  
 Tennyson, Henry E. (367, 368)  
 Teora, Ernest V. (46)  
 Tepo, Jr., Wilbur J. (446)  
 Terrell, Nowell M. (449)  
 Terrell, Raymond L. (135, 225, 238)  
 Terry, Ernest C. (ix, 131-133)  
 Terry, Lloyd O. (ix, 414)  
 Teske, James J. (413)  
 Thacker, Ralph E. (238)  
 Thalken, John W. (171, 172, 175, 179, 182, 183, 196)  
 Thayer, H. L. (196)  
 Thigpen, Oliver O. (190, 210, 262, 263, 276)  
 Thimmesch, Hyacinth C. (498)  
 Thomas, (33, 34, 36)  
 Thomas, Daniel A. (232, 233)  
 Thomas, George J. (269, 270, 272)  
 Thomas, Harold A. (85)  
 Thomas, Herbert D. (ix, 73, 75)  
 Thomas, Joseph H. (16, 39, 42-44)  
 Thomas, Thaddeus G. (ix, 287)  
 Thomas, Thayne L. (337, 338)  
 Thometz, Franklin G. (73, 85, 89)  
 Thompson, (34, 47, 53)  
 Thompson, Guy A. (ix, 47)  
 Thompson, Harold (NMI) (ix, 54)  
 Thompson, Irving D. (338)  
 Thompson, James W. (ix, 446)  
 Thompson, Loren R. (513)  
 Thompson, Marvin E. (135)  
 Thompson, Robert (513)  
 Thompson, Robert L. (90, 91, 94)  
 Thompson, Roger C. (330, 331, 357)  
 Thompson, Scott R. (ix, 95)  
 Thompson, Jr., Walter S. (ix, 52, 53)  
 Thompson, William C. (92)  
 Thorman, Burton R. (vi, 52, 54, 59)  
 Thornberry, Ivan R. (497)  
 Thorntom, Robert R. (137)  
 Ticknor, Floyd A. (293)  
 Tienber, Benedict R. (148, 150)  
 Tierney, Peter (358, 359)  
 Tiffany, Robert M. (148, 150)  
 Tilbey, Maurice A. (ix, 494)  
 Timko, (4, 5)  
 Tingle, Maynard D. (179-181)  
 Tinker, (31)  
 Tittman, Harold (128)  
 Tojo, (163)  
 Tomasik, Teddy V. (ix, 333)  
 Tomlinson, Harold T. (291, 292)  
 Tompkins, Frederick L. (273, 276, 279, 280)  
 Tomsyck, John P. (409, 484, 485)  
 Toole, Oliver A. (ix, 119)  
 Tope, L. H. (407)  
 Torpy, Donald B. (167)  
 Torrey, David B. (ix, 131-133)  
 Torske, William L. (327-329, 413, 478)  
 Toton, Chester E. (434, 436-439)  
 Totty, James E. (ix, 369, 370)  
 Townsend, Dick (115, 116)  
 Townsend, Joseph B. (122)  
 Train, Patrick (8, 9, 12, 37, 82, 86, 111, 112)  
 Train, Robert K. (450, 451, 479)  
 Traurig, Herbert (NMI) (367)  
 Treadway, Malcolm N. (287, 288)  
 Trevathane, Talmadge, W. (194, 196, 215)  
 Triggs, Joseph (16, 33-35, 37, 62)  
 Tripp, Harold H. (393)  
 Tront, Walter P. (ix, 95)  
 Troutman, Harold A. (vi, 193, 208)  
 Trowbridge, Robert P. (462)  
 Troy, Ed (433)  
 Truesdale, Ralph W. (109, 122, 123)  
 Trump, S. G. (406)  
 Tucker, Carroll (205)  
 Tucker, George H. (61, 62)  
 Tucker, William L. (214, 218, 222)  
 Tulwalski, Raymond C. (407, 408)  
 Tune, William S. (340-342)  
 Tunstall, Robert W. (74)  
 Turcinek, Dr. (343)  
 Turcinek, Jan (343)  
 Turcinek, Marcellus (343)  
 Turknott, Junior C. (412)  
 Turner, Ben (41)  
 Turner, Charles C. (453)  
 Turner, Donald R. (ix, 72, 73)  
 Turner, James M. (215)  
 Turner, Robert L. (393, 394)  
 Turnquist, Fred S. (ix, 141, 142)  
 Twibell, James H. (284, 289)  
 Twining, Nathan F. (331, 420)  
 Tyborski, Alexander J. (5, 509)  
 Tyler, John J. (18, 19, 21)  
 -U-  
 Uhor, Emil P. (457, 460)  
 Underhill, William R. (vi, 434)  
 Underwood, C. E. (506)  
 Underwood, Richard F. (35, 62)  
 Unger, Robert E. (289)  
 Upsher, Sidney P. (420)  
 Upston, Bruce S. (ix, 13)  
 Upton, Frank W. (ix, 82)  
 -V-  
 Vaculin, Hanna (343)  
 Vaculin, Stanislav (343)  
 Vaillancourt, Robert F. (264)  
 Valentine, Leo H. (ix, 48, 54)  
 Valys, Charles T. (ix, 9)  
 Vancouver, Arthur T. (404)  
 Van Denplas, Jr., Warren V. (333)  
 Vander Mullen, Bob (299, 301, 302)  
 Vandling, R. J. (ix, 395)  
 Vandy, John P. (ix, 150, 151, 196)  
 Vanni, Dan A. (394)  
 Vaughan, Clyde R. (169, 196)  
 Vaughan, Shelby F. (286)  
 Vaughan, Thomas J. (396)  
 Vaughn, Lou (294, 295, 297, 298)  
 Vavrik, William J. (ix, 236)  
 Veneziano, Carlo (NMI) (105, 130, 287)  
 Verbruggen, George J. (vi, 148, 149, 172, 196)  
 Verdi, James J. (195, 196, 205)  
 Vezetinski, Paul L. (33, 34)  
 Victor, Peter A. (ix, 236, 285)  
 Vinsan, T. R. (506)  
 Vinson, John D. (120, 210, 264)  
 Vitali, Louis W. (190, 191, 210, 262)  
 Vogel, Henry S. (107, 108)  
 Vos, Raymond J. (305, 307)  
 Voska, Gerald H. (vi, 151, 153, 158, 163)  
 Voss, Jr., Gerald (vi, 361, 363, 460)  
 Voss, Robert C. (256, 263)  
 -W-  
 Waag, William (503)  
 Waddell, Donald W. (ix, 452)  
 Wade, Clifton O. (ix, 71)  
 Wade, Ed (433)  
 Wade, Jr., Edwin C. (v, vi, 490-492)  
 Waganan, Donald L. (500)  
 Wagner, Edward I. (ix, 409, 481, 484)  
 Wagner, Henry P. (vi, 303)  
 Wagner, James E. (ix, 312)  
 Wagner, James M. (97)  
 Wagner, Melvin H. (ix, 228)  
 Wagoner, Ernest W. (ix, 338)  
 Waladkevics, Joseph (NMI) (vi, 432, 491)  
 Waldie, Leland (42, 67)  
 Waldman, Leonard (NMI) (ix, 425, 447, 448)  
 Walker, (216)  
 Walker, A. L. (461)  
 Walker, C. E. (425)  
 Walker, Ernest F. (413)  
 Walker, James (503)  
 Wallace, James D. (ix, 90)  
 Wallet, Henry J. (vi, 333, 351-353, 392, 478)  
 Walling, Walter D. (140)  
 Walter, Harriet (vi, 184-187)  
 Walter, Joseph (184)  
 Walter, Milan G. (vi, 181, 184-187)  
 Walters, Phil (165)  
 Walton, Orville A. (67)  
 Wapp, W. G. (490)  
 Ward, Jr., Edmund F. (135, 167)  
 Ward, Walter R. (104)  
 Ware, Howard T. (348, 349)  
 Warga, Jr., Andrew W. (ix, 138, 236)  
 Waring, (327, 328)  
 Warner, Richard B. (ix, 90)  
 Warr, Nemor (97, 229)  
 Warren, Woodruff J. (ix, 419-422)  
 Washman, T. L. (130)  
 Waters, Hinton M. (14)  
 Waters, Lewis H. (vi, 450, 479)  
 Watkins, C. R. (130, 196, 207)  
 Watkins, Thomas B. (250)  
 Waugh, Richard E. (457, 477, 490, 491)  
 Wavell, Sir Archibald (50)  
 Weamer, G. A. (391)  
 Weaver, James L. (vi, 214, 222)  
 Webb, James K. (105)  
 Webber, A. J. (337)  
 Weber, J. E. (453)  
 Wechtenhiser, (62)  
 Weibert, Clarence S. (ix, 494)  
 Weiler, James A. (ix, 338)  
 Weiner, C. J. (389, 490)  
 Weinman, (442, 443)  
 Weinman, Morton (425, 434-436, 439, 440, 442, 443)  
 Weiss, Daniel (NMI) (212, 234)  
 Weiss, Robert E. (234, 269-272)  
 Weitzenfeld, Dick (217)  
 Welde, George M. (330)  
 Weller, Jr., Eugene F. (ix, 121)  
 Weller, William H. (135)  
 Wendt, Herbert W. (432, 497)  
 Wentzel, Jr., Samuel P. (333)  
 Wenzel, Hans A. R. (ix, 219)  
 Wernich, Paul W. (ix, 71)  
 Westmorland, John T. (ix, 74)  
 Whartman, Franklin T. (453, 456)  
 Wharton, Otis W. (58, 61, 62)  
 Wheeler, Dwight C. (ix, 291)  
 Whitaker, (297, 301)  
 White, Charles B. (8)  
 White, Charles R. (286)  
 White, J. H. (410)  
 White, J. L. (336)  
 White, Loren (NMI) (151)  
 Whiton, Joseph L. (119)  
 Wick, John W. (ix, 312)  
 Wickersham, C. (497)  
 Wickham, Fred O. (ix, 236)  
 Wickland, Donald D. (ix, 312)  
 Wika, Raymond J. (94-96)  
 Wilder, Joseph (281)  
 Wilder, Max A. (481, 482)  
 Wilds, Charles (129)  
 Wilkens, Earl J. (151, 163)  
 Wilkinson, Dale E. (vi, 138, 193, 196, 197, 208, 229)  
 Willett, Charles W. (ix, 333)  
 Williams, Captain B. (21, 74)  
 Williams, Edward J. (36)  
 Williams, Ernest H. (ix, 483, 494)  
 Williams, Howard S. (236, 266, 272, 287)  
 Williams, John C. (ix, 106, 107)  
 Williams, Jr., John D. (ix, 35, 52, 53)  
 Williams, R. G. (391)  
 Williams, William C. (171, 172)  
 Willis, Robert (131)  
 Willock, James (8, 9)  
 Wilson, Dewight C. (vi, 198, 199, 201)  
 Wilson, Jr., John N. (ix, 177, 178)  
 Wilson, Raymond L. (ix, 366)  
 Wilson, Thomas M. (vi, 327, 329)  
 Wilson, Thomas W. (ix, 75)  
 Wilson, William C. (235)  
 Wilts, W. J. (391)  
 Wimer, George J. (105)  
 Winberg, George (293)  
 Winters, Robert C. (vi, 303, 304)  
 Wise, James D. (vi, 166)  
 Wisner, Frank (359)  
 Wisner, Harlan C. (179-181, 190, 210, 262, 263)  
 Withers, Lloyd J. (195, 196, 204, 205, 207, 285)  
 Witoff, Arnold (356)  
 Wittlinger, Jr., William J. (336, 449)  
 Witzany, Josef (422)  
 Wivell, Charles J. (104)  
 Wochholz, Hal (v)  
 Wohlbreuck, Roy (NMI) (256)  
 Wojcik, Joseph S. (ix, 67)  
 Wolfe, Jr., Leslie H. (266, 269, 272)  
 Wolfe, Robert C. (ix, 390, 391)  
 Wolfe, Robert S. (ix, 291, 292)  
 Wollenweber, Earl C. (ix, 13)  
 Wolquitt, Harold (NMI) (ix, 228)  
 Wood, Olen (93)  
 Wood, Richard S. (ix, 505)  
 Woodburn, Wilson (NMI) (498)  
 Woodruff, Bob (174)  
 Worth, Arthur W. (ix, 506)  
 Woods, Arch J. (119)  
 Woods, Charles L. (ix, 291)  
 Woods, Howard R. (9, 41)  
 Woods, Robert E. (ix, 76)  
 Woods, Samuel C. (323)  
 Wooten, C. A. (497)  
 Waters, Arthur A. (407, 408)  
 Wright, Henry T. (ix, 60)  
 Wronkoski, Edward J. (vi, 196, 205, 212, 234)  
 Wyatt, Thomas G. (ix, 121)  
 Wylie, Ray F. (313)  
 Wyrba, John H. (102)  
 -Y-  
 Yanushis, Paul J. (148)  
 Yatsco, John P. (495)  
 Wechtenhiser, (62)  
 Yeager, Chester R. (ix, 35)  
 Young, Duane J. (456)  
 Young, Edwin A. (46)  
 Young, John (372)  
 Young, Theodore T. (106, 107)  
 -Z-  
 Zachrisson, Eric J. (ix, 414)  
 Zafran, Saul (NMI) (179-181, 212)  
 Zahn, Mike O. (9, 41)  
 Zaplatynski, Leo W. (170, 171, 189, 190, 213)  
 Zeiter, Jr., Raymond L. (ix, 13)  
 Zelasko, Thomas A. (ix, 90, 92, 94)  
 Zemke, (157)  
 Zeugin, Richard T. (212, 234, 235)  
 Zezula, (26)  
 Ziegler, Warren C. (ix, 72, 73)  
 Zimmerman, Phillip E. (45, 61, 62)  
 Zremski, Henry A. (24)  
 Zupan, Leo A. (vi, 338-340)  
 Zvenbergen, Jr., Tony (NMI) (495)  
 Zyzula, Carl S. (225)