

99TH BOMB GROUP



B-17 FLYING FORTRESS

1943 • • AFRICA/EUROPE • • 1945

395 COMBAT MISSIONS



THE 99th BOMB GROUP HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 14, No. 8 3

August 1994

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This past April we had a successful mini reunion in Daytona Beach, FL hosted by the Magees. Sixty plus members and associates attended including two couples who were enthusiastic first timers.**** About halfway home, after leaving Daytona on Saturday afternoon, I ran into a very heavy thunderstorm. I was driving with traffic when a sudden gust of wind hit me causing my auto to hydroplane. I ended up in trees alongside the parkway. I was in so deep that it was very difficult to open the door to exit my car. Needless to say the car was totaled (I didn't have time to lower flaps and raise the landing gear.) I wasn't hurt at all most probably due to Fran Grantz's prayers.

Now we look forward to Hampton, VA in September. Bob Bacher assures me that we have a great program in store for the attendees. Len Smith and Bob have signed contracts for the reunion to be held in St Louis, MO in the Spring of 1995. Fran Grantz will be the host. Fran would enjoy and appreciate hearing from any local 99ers who might be able to lend a helping hand. It is a big job, as I well know.

The 99th Historical Society owes a big vote of thanks to Walter Butler, Bernie Barr, and Roy Worthington for the super May '94 newsletter. Hopefully, now that glitches have been resolved, we will receive four issues each year. Its good to know that we have the kind of people to step in and do a necessary job when needed.

How about letters and items (kudos and constructive criticisms) for OTBF (over the back fence) from some of you members who don't attend the reunions. You are part of our family and we do want to hear from you. **** Hoping to see many of you at Hampton, VA this September. **Keep smiling and good health to all !**

Jules Horowitz



THE CHAPLAIN'S CORNER



The other day I was reminded of a clipping I had attached years ago to the flypage of a Bible my parents sent to me shortly before I was to join the 99th at Foggia. I found it in the Air Force Association Magazine. It is entitled "The Airman's Psalm".

"The Lord is my Pilot. I shall not falter. He sustaineth me as I span the heavens; He leadeth me, steady, o'er the skyways. He refresheth my soul. For He showeth me the wonders of His firmament For His Name's sake.

Yea, though I fly through treacherous storms and darkness I shall fear no evil, for He is with me. His Providence and Nearness they comfort me.

He openeth lovely vistas before me In the presence of His Angels. He filleth my heart with calm. My trust in Him bringeth me peace.
Surely, His Goodness and Mercy Shall accompany me each moment in the air, and I shall dwell in His matchless heavens forever.

From the Office of the Air Chaplain"

I was listening to the sermon on Sunday after our Daytona Beach Reunion. My mind was searching for the substance of an article for our Newsletter, which awaited my writing at home, when I heard the minister read the 23rd Psalm. When he came to the part that reads:

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever",

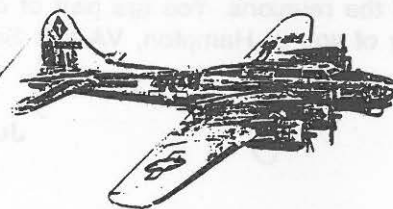
he went on to explain that the word in the Hebrew text "shall follow me" should be translated "shall pursue me". I thought about this and related my thoughts back to the "talk" and visits of the Reunion...you know the "war stories"!

Suddenly the text made more sense than ever before! "...Goodness and Mercy pursues us all the days of our lives! And we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever"! Certainly this is true for each of us as members of the 99th. In whatever part we played in the scheme of our wartime operations, we were in Harm's Way. Then and now, in the wonder and mystery of the love of God, He comes to us in the words of the Shepherd Psalm to remind us that, in His Goodness and Mercy He pursues us! His promise is "I will be with you!"

Let's be reminded again the God who flew beside us, guarded our safety, assisted in time of danger, is the same God who "pursues" us all the days of our lives, and is with us now!

We look forward to Hampton, Virginia in September! Let's get our reservations in early and have a full house for a great time Len Smith and Bob Bacher and their gang have planned for us! "I'm bringing my cap and packing my bags!" God bless you, my comrades, and us all together!

Francis W. Grantz
Francis W. Grantz



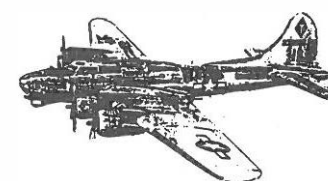
NOTES AND LETTERS

RICHARD J. MCGEE writes . . . "May I extend my thankful appreciation to you and the other Albuquerque personnel who have been most instrumental in the formation and continuing operation of the 99th BG Historical Society. (Thanks Richard, it is good to have notes of thanks. We will publish your " LONE WOLF MISSIONS" in November '94 issue. Editor)

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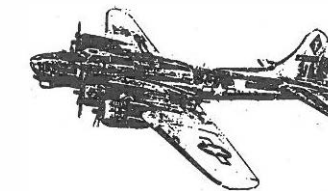
M. J. (Lark) LARKIN writes . . . " Bernie, as you see we are still working on the 99th display. The 99th here wants to help but they are short of items to display. Please remind our members to clean out their closets and garages for items they can send to me for the museum. . . . I have been appointed to the Ellsworth Air Force Base Museum Board. . . . In order to make the museum successful we need the help of all our Society members. . . . Over the past several years we have collected many pictures along with some 99th memorabilia. We need much more. We need old flying clothes, boots, anything you may have. Please ask the members to clean out their attics and/or garages to find items they will donate to help the museum's 99th BG,s display from its origin to the present. . . . Items will be in display with credit given to donators. . . . Please send any donations to me so I can make sure they are properly taken care of and delivered to the museum.

Thanks for your help,
M. J (Lark) Larkin, 346th Sq.
3827 Clifton Street, Rapid City, SD 57702
Phone: 605/343-1070



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1611 Woodruff Court
Severn, MD 21144
April 15, 1994



99th Bomb Group Historical Society Newsletter
ATTN: Walter Butler
8608 Bellehaven Place, NE
Albuquerque, NM 87712



Dear Mr. Butler:

I would like to put a request in the Society Newsletter asking if any members remember flying with my father, Robert Joseph Miller. He was a pilot assigned to the 5th Wing, 99th Bomb Group, 348th Bomb Squadron. He flew from August through December 1944. I would like to hear from anyone who knew him and can be contacted at (410) 551-5524. Thanks for your help.

Robert J. Miller, Jr.

Robert J. Miller, Jr.

Ing. Gaffarelli Alessandro
Viale Mantegazza 51
RIMINI (Italy) 47037

Historian
99th Bomb Group Historical Society
8608 Bellehaven Place, N.E.
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87112

Rimini April 15, 1994

Dear Sir

I receive the very interesting newsletter of the 99th Bomb Group Historical Society and I thank you very much.

Now I should ask you an information concerning an air raid carried out in the year 1944 by the 99th Bomber Group over Italy.

Of course after so many years after the end of the Second World War the recollections vanish but, if there are diaries or written notes, it is possible to remind the old memories. The air raid of which I should request informations, was carried out over Urbania that is a small town placed in the middle Italy, near Urbino, about 25 miles from the Adriatic Sea.

On date 23 January 1944, one Bomb Group consisting of four Bomb Squadrons, took off from the base of Tortorella to hit the town of Poggibonsi (so is written in the war-diary of the 99th B.G.). Owing to the bad weather over Poggibonsi, the raid wasn't carried out, the bombs weren't released and the four Squadrons came back to land to their base.

During the return flight, when the Bomb Squadrons were flying over the town of Urbania at about half past noon, one Squadron dropped the bombs over that town, that was occupied by Germans.

I should be very grateful to you if you could kindly do any search about this air raid over Urbania in order to make clear the identity of the raider Bomb Squadron and the details of the bombardment. (Reading the air-raids of the 23 January 1944 also in the war-diaries of other Bombardment Groups I think that really the bombardment was carried out by the 99th B.G. though the official war diaries mention only the action over Poggibonsi). Is it possible to publish a short advertisement on the newsletter of the 99th B.G. in order that the retired pilots and air-crew members can read it?

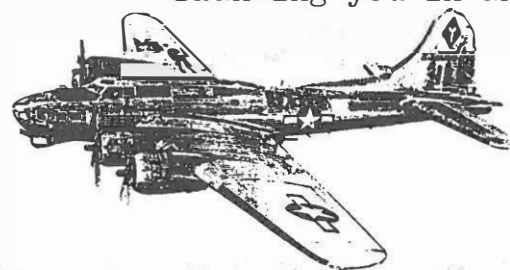
I should like to know whether the town of Urbania was a secondary target or the bombardment was carried out for a mistake. Is there any "log book" mentioning that air-action?

About three years ago a retired pilot of the United States Air Force, who was visiting Italy and particularly the town of Urbino, went to the Public Library of Urbania and asked to the librarian about the "bombardment of Urbania".

Thanking you in anticipation for your kind reply, I am

Yours faithfully

Gaffarelli Alessandro



REPORT OF DAYTONA BEACH MINI REUNION HELD APRIL 20-24, '94

We, The Magees, want to thank all who came to Daytona Beach for our reunion. Those who did not come missed a good time.

We had 62 registered members. We also found a few new members.

Our "WELCOME BASH" Poolside Party on Wednesday night was a great success - even Mother Nature created a beautiful evening. Our favorite story of that night was: A NEW couple, standing in line, Warren and Helen Burns from Maine met up with Vincent and Luciann Bell from California. Vincent had been Warren's Pilot and they had not seen each other for 50 years!!!!!! Also found out a crew member of theirs was from Branford, Ct.....Charlie Baldwin was a neighbor of Mort Magee's back in school days!!!!!!

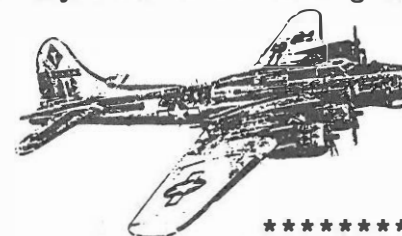
On Thursday, we rented a bus to take 37 of us on a tour of our Daytona International Speedway where the NASCAR races are heldit was enjoyed by all. The next race there will be on July 2nd, 1994.

Our Banquet was held in the Penthouse Ballroom "TOP OF THE SURF", which gave us all an excellent view of the city lights. The band, "THE SOPHISTICATED SOUND" was great and enjoyed by all....by many dancers as well as watchers. A HIGH NOTE of the banquet was the surprise birthday cake for JOHN TOTH and was supplied by his son and his daughter in law....John and Shelley Toth, who were his guests at the banquet.

Mother Nature treated us to several spectacular lightning and thunder storms. Many people enjoyed their walks along the beach.Our breakfasts every morning in the hospitality room were a favorite way to start each day..... Our Hospitality Room bar was well handled by our experienced and loveable John Toth.....assisted by George Tennesen.....Many thanks to all of you who helped.....Jim Smith also for the trips to the airport.

It was a lot of work for us, but we enjoyed it and we feel it was enjoyed by all.

Everyone of us is looking forward to Hampton in September.....we will all be there.



Happy Landings to all,

Mort & Virginia
Mort and Virginia Magee



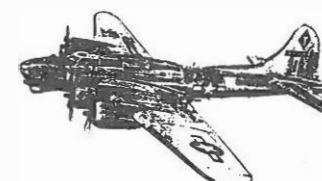
SUBJ: 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF WORLD WAR II

It is the intent of the attached press release to inform you of the forthcoming celebration of the 50th Anniversary of World War II to be held in Knoxville, Tennessee, July 4, 1995. In our effort to reach as many veterans of that war as possible, we came to the conclusion that it was a giant undertaking, if not impossible.

I would appreciate your assistance in informing your members through your newsletter or magazine. This event is national in scope and all veterans are invited to come to Knoxville so that we and the entire nation can honor them.

CONTACT:

Bill Housley
Director of Sales or
Amy H. Williams
Communications Manager
1-800-727-8045



TAPS • TAPS • TAPS • TAPS • TAPS

RALPH W. LIDER **** JOHN K. MILOSOVICH **** C. K. CARROLL

HILLARD VOLIN **** BEN JONES

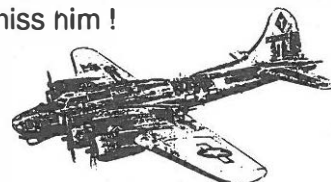
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OVER THE BACK FENCE ITEMS SUBMITTED BY PRESIDENT JULES

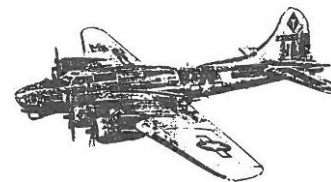
About a year ago I instigated a reunion of my flying class ('42K - Dec. 1942). Since I hosted the Ft. Lauderdale reunion several years ago, I didn't care to do it again! I arranged with an outfit that caters this kind of work. We met in Jacksonville, FL (the caterer picked the location). About 25 pilots, most with spouses, attended. There were a large number of inquiries by mail and phone. It seems that other than one other pilot, all the rest of the pilots were career retirees. I had an opportunity to kid them when I addressed the group and said "I feel great, I'm the lowest ranking guy here and I get a chance to crack the whip over all the Colonels." Everyone enjoyed themselves and we decided to meet again in May in San Antonio, TX. This meeting was most successful and we have decided to meet again in May of '95 in Nashville, TN.

My lady friend and I spent a week at an Elderhostel at the U.S. International University in San Diego, CA May 1 thru 8. I'd been to about 10 previous Elderhostels, and this was a winner. Two Bedroom suite, sitting room and private bath, heating and air conditioning. The food was excellent, the three subjects were very interesting. Twenty-five seniors attended. Three outings off campus were quite enjoyable. Student body were mostly foreign kids. We had a great time eating with them. Elderhostel brochures can be seen at most libraries if you are interested.

Winna Jones, Corsicana, TX informed me that her husband BEN passed away April 26, 1994. He died while in heart surgery. Ben was an original 99er, and was Group Navigator. He flew most of his missions with Gen. Uppie. I flew my first mission with Ben. He was a most likable, but quiet man. I always looked forward to meeting with him at our reunions. Many of us will miss him!



SPECIAL REQUEST



In stripping up the newsletters I have used our B-17 outlines to separate items or fill in borders. Our ground crews and equipment were equally vital for mission success. If anyone has photos of ground equipment (any kind) I would appreciate receiving same (any size). I will make sure they are returned to the owner when I make copies to use in our newsletters along with the flying machines. ...Send to Roy Worthington, 16786 Air Force Village West, CA 92518-2918 (Please use all 9 zip code digits.)

UPDATE FROM YOUR REUNION SITE COMMITTEE

Hampton, VA, Sept. 6 to Sept. 11, 1994

Everything going well - Reservations are coming in at a respectable rate at this early date. We predict an excellent turn out. Reminder, July 15, 1994 is the cut off date for discount prices for registration and the various activities.

Bob Bacher is doing all possible to make sure everything is in order at Hampton. The Hotel, Chamber of Commerce, and Visitors Bureau have all cooperated with your site committee and are looking forward to being the Host City for the 99th B.G. Historical Society '94 reunion. They will do all in their power to make you feel welcome.

There will be plenty of activities for all who wish to keep busy with much to see in the Hampton, Norfolk, and Williamsburg area.

For those who prefer to take it easy and relax, the Hotel has a large atrium and pool, plus a large comfortable hospitality area to relax in and visit with your friends and comrades.

If you haven't already made your reservations, do so now, before July 15 to take advantage of the savings, and come enjoy the festivities.

St. Louis, MO, May 1995

Your site committee has thoroughly investigated several cities interested in hosting our 1995 reunion. We have concluded that St. Louis was most desirable and met all of our requirements that would assure a successful reunion. Therefore, the site committee recommended St. Louis to the Board of Directors. The Board reviewed the information submitted with our recommendations and subsequently approved St. Louis for a May 1995 reunion.

One of the many attributes of St. Louis is that Fran Grantz and his lovely wife, Nel, live in Ballwin, MO. Ballwin is a suburb of St. Louis. Fran, as you know, is serving as Chaplain for 99th B.G. Historical Society and his message appears in our newsletters. Fran has also been serving on the site committee, devoting much time and energy to the committees' efforts. Now he has graciously accepted the responsibility as Chairman and Host for our '95 reunion. A better more dedicated person can't be found. So our '95 reunion is in good hands. St. Louis is a fascinating city. Famous for the great arch and gateway to the West. Located in the geographical center of the U.S. The hub of the nation so to speak, accessible from any direction.

Air, Rail, Interstate Highway, even Riverboat if you so desire. There is something for everyone as you will learn as Fran starts sending you information later this year in preparation for the '95 reunion.

April 23, 1989

Further Reunions

Your site committee would like to hear from the membership on recommendations for future reunions. What areas and type of activities are most appealing? Would you like a change in the format? Remember, this is your organization. It is the Board of Directors and its' committees desire and obligation to serve and please you.

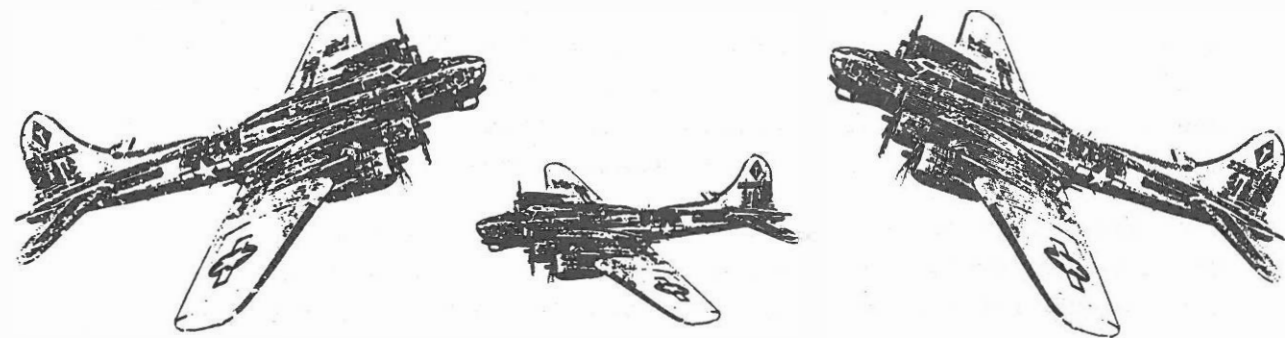
We welcome and would appreciate your input and support. This is very necessary if we are to keep our group healthy and active.



Your newsletter composition, print, and mailing representative, Roy Worthington, is again very sorry for the delay in getting this issue to you. Bernie Barr, your Editor, got all the material in my hands on time but I came down for over five weeks with crippling rheumatism. After five visits to three doctors I finally got the medication that got me back on my feet. I'll not be making the Hampton event but expect to see all who attend the St Louis, MO reunion.

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Your newsletter composition editor requests you take advantage of the relatively inexpensive word processing services available today to have the material you submit for printing in future newsletters set in a medium to bold faced type of 10 or 12 point size. 'Writ' by hand and the light gray printed matter generally produced by dot matrix printers do not make suitable material for clear printing in our newsletter. It is best not to fold your submissions. Mail the original flat in a suitable envelope. We will return your material in good shape. If you don't want to send your original please have your pages photo copied at a quality copy service so the material we receive is good 'black' copy. We don't want this request to prevent anyone from sending newsletter material. If you cannot comply send us the best you can and we will do our best to make it ready for the printer. Much Thanks!



Dear George;

It was good to visit with you earlier this month. I have enclosed a single spaced copy of my diary and I think this should replace the earlier one since I left out three missions, (completely omitted them) in that first copy. Also, since I wrote up that last one I have visited with a number of our men that I flew with and I have been able to clarify some of the points.

Give our love to Martha;

*Joe and Maude*



THE FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS FROM MY DIARY WHICH I KEPT DURING WWII. THESE INCLUDE ONLY THAT PERIOD OF TIME IN WHICH I FLEW MY 50 COMBAT MISSIONS AS A RADIO OPERATOR/GUNNER AND ARE CONFINED TO THE COMBAT MISSIONS THEMSELVES. To begin with and for a small amount of background, I joined the 346th Bomb Squadron of the 99th Bomb Group when we were located at Oudni, Tunis, about 20 miles southwest of the city of Tunis. We were attached to the 12th Air Force at that time. When the 15th Air Force was established on November 1, 1943, all heavy bomb groups were transferred into this for the nucleus of that Air Force. We moved to Italy the last of November, 1943 and were based at Foggia No. 2 at Tortorella, some 12 miles Northeast of Foggia. These observations are as I wrote them as a 20 year old and are as accurate only as my memory served me.

Mission No. 1, 1/20/44. Target - Ciampiano Air Field at the south of Rome. Bomb load was frags and I consider this as a "hot load." We had a P-38 Escort, saw no enemy fighters, encountered no flak and bomb coverage was good. A milk run if ever there was one. This was a part of an effort to diminish the number of enemy planes in the area preceding the Anzio Invasion.

Mission No. 2, March 18, 1944. Target - Villaorba Air Field, northern Italy. This effort was designed to draw as many enemy fighters into the area as possible from 95 P-38s which went in ahead of us to draw enemy fighters from Graz and Klagenfurt in Austria and all of the enemy fighters off the bases in northern Italy into the air, engaging them long enough for them to need fuel and land at Villaorba and Udine Air Dromes for fuel. We were then to be in position to catch as large a number on the ground as possible for fuel. The 5th Wing was to have flown up the Adriatic with the timing being such that the 113 B-17s would be over target at that crucial time. I'm not sure that these elaborate plans worked at all since we were attacked by 67 ME 210s which came in on us in waves of four, launching rockets from just out of range of our defending 50 calibre machine guns. They really hit us hard with both the ME 210s and ME 109s working us over, the B-17 Group to our right took the heaviest of these attacks which resulted in their loss of 3 bombers. On the bomb run the flak was intense and we were all of us taking battle damage. At bombs away our plane ran into problems when the two lower bomb stations on the left side of the bomb bay hung up. The bombs from the upper hangers came off normally as did the right side of the bomb bay. Since these were again frag bombs, they come in clusters and as soon as they are released the clusters break up. Those clusters came apart above those hung up stations and we wound up with the left side of the bomb bay being full of loose frags. It was a part of my duties to watch the bombs go. I reported our condition to the bombardier and he salvoed with the bombs falling helter skelter from the bomb bay. I checked to make sure that the bomb bay was clear, (it was) and glanced out of the bombay and saw a B-17 drifting to our left, very close, underneath us. About this time our Ball Turret Operator reported a B-17 drifting to the left with the dorsal fin blown off. The tail gunner had been blown from his position and believed not to be alive. We watched as the B-17 continued to the left and counted 9 'chutes as the rest bailed out. It was reported that the plane made it home safely and that the fin had been blown off by a German rocket. We believe the tail was blown off by a frag bomb from our problem. Those rockets are mighty disconcerting because of the trail of white smoke they leave indicate an inherent instability that made them inaccurate enough to be dangerous as heck. Flak over the target was accurate enough that we heard a few bursts. We were under attack for about 48 minutes and this was a somewhat rough one.

Mission No. 3, March 30, 1944. Target - Sofia, Bulgaria city. This effort was designed to force Bulgaria out of the war. Our Mission was preceded the three previous nights with the Royal Air Force dropping leaflets each night warning the Bulgarians of Sofia of our intent to bomb that city if they did not pull out of the war. When we went over Sofia,

half that city had been destroyed, an example of pattern bombing and the awesome effects of such an effort using 500 lb bombs. The city was heavily defended, probably because of the leaflets heralding our arrival. There was a total of 367 heavy bombers on this mission, 253 B-24s and 114 B-17s. Flak was very heavy and it was accurate. Fighter opposition was hot and aggressive. We had a P-47 escort which was drawn down by ME109s which decoyed them out of high altitude. The Luftwaffe came in with determination that really put us on edge and they were able to shoot a number of our heavy bombers down. I flew right waist on this mission and saw a B-17 from a group ahead and somewhat below take a hit in the left wing from a very aggressive attack from an ME 109. The '109 was driven off by the heavy 50 calibre machine gun fire from this B-17 and those bombers surrounding. As we proceeded I noticed a vapor coming from the left wing of that B-17 that took that hit in the left wing with first, a flash at the trailing edge and then the big flash when the bomber exploded. When there is such an explosion the forward motion of the plane stops and at our ground speed of somewhere around 225 miles per hour at that altitude, about 25,000 feet, what was left passed behind us in an instant. The 5th Wing lost 6 B-17s on this mission from the information I have. I have no idea how many B-24s were lost but I do know that there were several.

NOTE: This was the only mission I was to fly as waist gunner and also the only City we bombed deliberately. We otherwise followed the strict rules of Strategic Targets only.

Mission No. 4, May 13, 1944. Target - Trento, Italy Marshalling Yards. At briefing we were told that we could expect at least 50 enemy fighters in the area. Flak was to be heavy and accurate. We were scheduled to have a P-47 escort but they did not show up, probably engaged with enemy before scheduled arrival. It did cause some significant sweating but, as it turned out, we encountered no fighters and the flak was light. We did get a few flak holes and heard a few bursts, but on the whole it was pretty much of a milk run. Pilot was Calhoun.

Mission No. 5, May 14, 1944. Target - Piacenza Air Drome, northern Italy. D. E. Barlow, Pilot. P-47s were to escort but, again, they probably were engaged with the enemy further south. We took our usual course up the Adriatic Sea and as we took our westerly course, still climbing, we flew over a small island off the coast of northern Italy where they put up a fairly heavy barrage of flak that was pretty accurate. We took some damage and began to have problems with our number 4 engine immediately. That engine began to smoke and this smoke simply got heavier as we gained altitude. Along with this, the higher we flew, the rougher that engine ran. On the bomb run the ball turret operator reported that the number two engine was smoking. The number one engine had to be feathered about the time of bombs away and Lieutenant Barlow had me pull up the floor in the radio room and change the amplifier on the number one engine. This accomplished, we were out of formation by this time, our pilot restarted number one only to have it fail again, only this time we had a hole in the top of the engine nacelle. We'd blown a cylinder head. Number two engine was cleared up and number four continued to smoke and run rough. We were completely alone with that black smoke trailing behind forever. Pilot Barlow was maintaining altitude for safety reasons but when our tail gunner, Dischman, called to point out a substantial number of fighters not yet identifiable, we went into a shallow dive and picked up a substantial amount of airspeed. As we came out of altitude into the denser air our number 4 engine smoked less and ran smoother. We caught up with our group and fell back into formation and then on back to our base with no further problems. The fighters turned out to be P-51s. A lot of sweating on a mission that would otherwise be considered pretty much of a milk run.

May 19, 1944:

Mission No. 6, Ploesti, Romania. Ploesti was always very rough and we could always expect to experience intense and accurate flak for approximately 55 miles going into and an additional 55 miles off target on your return. There were approximately 600 heavy bombers that started out on this mission. We ran into heavy weather and only 206 B-17s made it into Ploesti itself where they could successfully complete their bomb run. We were unable to do so ourselves and made a pass at Belgrade, Yugoslavia but did not drop our bombs due to the poor visibility. We lost 3 B-17s on this trip, two reportedly collided and the 3rd was shot down by an enemy fighter. From my vantage point in the radio room I did not see any of these go down. A radio operator has good visibility only straight up through the gun hatch with very poor visibility below though some observations can be made. The 15th Air Force lost a total of 14 heavy bombers on this very bad day.

Mission No. 7, May 19, 1944. Target - Puerto Marghera, near Venice, Italy. Oil and gasoline dump. Our bombing on this was very good and results were excellent with smoke rising to more than 20,000 feet. Achtung, the name of the B-17 232570 had problems from the time it came into the Squadron of developing a strong, raw gasoline odor on occasion and this was one of those days. The bomb bay doors were cracked open a bit for ventilation to re-

duce that odor and also the danger of an explosion. We also ran into engine problems and number 1 was shut down and feathered. It was a very easy mission otherwise with our fine P-38 escort holding fighters completely away from us.

Mission No. 8, May 22, 1944. Target - Avenzano, Italy. This was my first mission on the lead ship and this day we flew Group lead with Major Al Schroeder, our Squadron Commander. We flew Radar ship No. 650, had no flak, no fighters but found it necessary for the Radar equipment to be used and bombed our target through the underlying clouds.

NOTE: I always felt that Major Schroeder was an unusually good commander, an excellent pilot and always a good and completely fair man.

CREDIT FOR TIME ONLY. May 22, 1944. Radar ship 650, Major Schroeder pilot. This was a "same day" flight" and we went back into the Avenzano area and this became a "fighter sweep" hoping to draw the enemy aircraft up so that our P-51 escort could let 'em have it. Since the heavy cloud level remained in tact and we could not see a target to hit properly, we brought our bombs home and received credit for combat time only.

Missions Numbered 9 & 10, May 24, 1944. Target - Atzgersdorf Aircraft Factory, Austria. We flew B-17 855, "Wearie Willie." This was the first combat mission for this airplane. We were again flying lead ship with Adams as our pilot. (Squadron lead) The flight was pretty much routine until we got into the target area. The B-17 Group ahead to the left and below our formation was attacked by fighters and two B-17s were lost. One appeared to go pretty much straight in and I have no idea as to how many or if any were able to leave this plane. The second was on fire and 8 men had bailed out. The plane did a steep 180° turn flying directly back over these 8 men where it exploded, setting 4 of the 'chutes on fire. This incident has been with me and bothers me greatly. Those 4 men did not get a second chance. I must point out that I, personally, was not able to see this because of the nature of a radio room. All of this was related from the conversations by others on the crew. I considered this to be a rough one since we had some mighty rough flak over the target.

CREDIT FOR TIME ONLY. May 25, 1944. Radar plane 733, Pilot Adams, Squadron lead. Our target was to have been Lyon, France where we were to have hit a marshalling yard. Our course across Italy was to have taken us just south of the Anzio Beach Head but an error in navigation placed us over the German front lines at 10,000 feet. Some of the ground levels were reported to have been about 4,500 feet so we were mighty close to some of it. They let us have it with everything they had and absolutely shot us to pieces. We sustained a direct hit from a 40mm cannon shell in our number 3 engine losing all the oil and making it mandatory that it be feathered. We took some heavy damage in the left wing and I can remember seeing the 200 gallons of gasoline spraying out of our left Tokyo tank from the trailing edge of the wing, wondering how close that gasoline was getting to that white hot turbo in the number 1 engine. Some damage was evident to the left aileron along with a considerable number a flak holes throughout the whole airplane. Since all this was going on, the Radar man sat on the floor of the radio room sharing with me a piece of flat armour plate. We were shoulder to shoulder when a large chunk of flak came through the right side of the radio room, passed between our heads and disintegrated against my oxygen regulator. Had we not shared that armour plate, one or the other of us would certainly have been hit, more than likely fatally. We were in big trouble since we were light on the left wing with little or no control on that side, and heavy on the right side with the number 3 engine out plus battle damage on that side. The bombs were salvaged at a fairly low altitude but we still had control problems. We were alerted for a possible bail out and headed for the emergency field at Anzio. We were diverted from this because 2 B-17s had gone into that field and were blocking a possible landing for us. A third B-17 ditched out in the bay. We began to throw out our cans of ammunition and when that was completed we still had problems. The pilot requested that the gunners move forward to the radio room and the center of the plane to give him better control and this was done. (Communications were severed behind the radio room) At least we could maintain 1,000 feet of altitude and this became better as we transferred and burned off fuel as did the control. We flew down the coast until we finally had enough altitude to go on across the mountains and head for home base. We were the last plane to arrive back and we were more than somewhat late. When the landing gear was extended it was evident that the right tire had a gash of some length across the face of it and it was not possible to know whether or not it was flat. There was a possibility of damage to the landing gear itself and no guarantee that it would hold. We were given the choice of bailing out over the field or riding that B-17 on into the landing and we, naturally, chose to ride in with the pilots. Pilot Adams made 4 approaches before he felt secure enough to put it on the runway. He landed with the tail quite high, left wing low and on the left gear. The tail wheel touched before the right main touched. Everything held but we took to the dirt and weeds because we had no brakes. I firmly believe that Adams, who had been



a United Airlines Captain, had all the necessary expertise to save that B-17. A lesser experienced man probably would have lost it. The 99th lost 3 airplanes on this fiasco with all the rest sustaining various degrees of damage from light to very heavy as was our case.

Mission No. 11, May 26, 1944. Target - Behac City, Yugoslavia. We were after a docking area. Squadron lead again with Adams as pilot again. Airplane No. 232064 (Rex Greathouse was Crewchief on this B-17) This was a very short mission to just across the Adriatic Sea. We had no flak and no fighters and made two passes before we dropped our bombs exactly where we wanted them. A boni fide milk run.

Mission No. 12, May 27, 1944. Radar B-17 '733, Major Schroeder, Pilot. We led the 15th Air Force on this one. Target - Avignon, France, marshalling yards. This was the first mission I was to operate the Liason Transmitter (SCR-287-A) from an airplane. (I was sent overseas as a replacement from radio school to aerial gunnery school at Harlingen, Texas to Salt Lake area and then directly overseas with no phase training.) I had the "Bombs Away" message to send just off target and was amazed to get my receipted message back from "59-T" base. One B-17 in our Group had his bomb load hang up over the target. By the time they were able to salvoe we were beginning our turn off target to the south. The bomb load from this B-17 struck the Roman Aqueduct and bridge that crosses the Rohn River, dead center and I believe this was not the intent of the bombardier. Although if it was his intention he did an excellent job. As we turned easterly we could see the dust and dirt blowing along the ground at Marseille, France some 25,000 feet below and probably 50 miles south. This was a milk run with no flak or fighters but a very long haul.

Missions 13 & 14, May 29, 1944. Radar B-17, '733, Major Schroeder, Pilot. Group lead on this one. Target - Wallersdorf Air Craft Factory in Austria. We were briefed for heavy to intense flak and this was to be accurate. Possibility of aggressive enemy fighter opposition was included within the briefing. Flak turned out to be moderate with accuracy not as good as was expected. However, we did receive battle damage and this one was quite a close one for me. A radio operator has many extra little duties in addition to being a radio operator and gunner and this includes the transfer of fuel upon request, photos if they should decide to place a camera in the camera well in the radio room, medic, distribution and collection of escape kits, goes to the briefings and he also has to dispense the chaff (tin foil to foul up enemy radar) on the bomb run. I had just completed my job as "Chief Chaff Dispenser", seated at my radio desk, when I strongly felt that things were not right and had the strong urge to move. It was a strong enough urge that I stood up and turned with my back to the bulkhead door into the bomb bay and took my machine gun in hand. (There were no enemy fighters in the area). A chunk of flak opened up a hole 6 inches long just inside the forward bulkhead and over the left corner of my radio receiver (SCR-287-A). The trajectory of this piece of flak, about 2 inches long, crossed my desk striking the back of my chair, hit the face of the transmitter, splintered the open door into the waist and then struck the bottom of my machine gun with enough force to be noticeable. I still have that piece of flak which is unusual in that it has the German Swastika and Eagle imprinted upon it along with some numbers, 9A281 to be exact and not the last few numbers in my Army Serial Number. There is no question in my mind that the Good Lord had his arms around me on this one. The 15th Air Force lost some planes on this mission although I saw no one go down. I have no idea how many were lost. This one had some very deep meaning for me.

Missions Nos. 15 & 16, June 2, 1944, Co. Ford Lauer, Pilot, Brig. General Charles Laurence, Co-Pilot. We led the 5th Wing on this trip, the first of an operation called F.R.A.N.T.I.C. Target for today - Debreczen, Hungary. Destination, Poltava, Russia, the first Shuttle Run into Russia. The flight was composed of 140 B-17s of the 5th Wing of the 15th Air Force. We hit the Debreczen marshalling yards with excellent results. The initial force from our bombs was so great that the entire red tile roof of the depot was seen to rise to a significant height before it disintegrated. As I remember it we did have a little flak but this of not much consequence. However, a B-17 from the 97th Bomb Group exploded just off target for unexplained reasons. We flew on to Poltava which is located in the Ukraine approximately 65 miles southeast of Kiev, Russia. This was a most interesting trip to say the very least.

NOTE: Our experience in Russia was an education in itself. We were appalled by the incredible amount of destruction done to Poltava and the plight of the citizens during the German occupation was horrible. The city itself was pretty much in rubble, yet, the citizens had carefully cleaned up and repaired the town square which was a beautiful park. One thing that really impressed me was the fact that their children were clean. This was not the case in Italy. We could not help but notice the single track the Russians were on. I saw women off-loading bales of steel mat runway from rail road flat cars and they were doing this impossible job by hand. I have to say that I was impressed by the people but what a tremendous sympathy I have for those under the appalling conditions and the oppressive hold their type of government has over them. Certainly not the American way.

Mission No. 17, June 6, 1944. Radar B-17 #733. Col. Lauer, Pilot. Air Force lead again and I had the bombs away message to send. NOTE: The recall code word at the behest of Col. Ford Lauer was "Poontang." Target - Galeti, Romania and this was an airfield. This mission was pulled from Russia and was a target more easily reached from Russia than from our bases in Italy. This was the second in the operation known as F.R.A.N.T.I.C. Our bomb load was of frags, and, as always I regarded this to be a "Hot" load. We did achieve excellent coverage over this air field catching quite a number of German planes on the ground. At bombs away we had a cluster hang up on the outer bomb rack and I again, watched helplessly as other clusters broke apart and cascaded over this hung up cluster. The bombardier salvoed that one out the instant I told him where our problem was, but fractions of seconds can seem like eternities under these circumstances. I had the bombs away message but no receipt was given. When we returned to Poltava I thought the Russians must have thought our mission was mighty successful because they were so tremendously excited. We learned when we had landed that the Normandy Invasion had taken place and they were celebrating over this. This was very definitely the beginning of the end for Hitler and Germany in this war.

Missions numbered 18 & 19, Radar B-17, '733. Col. Lauer, Pilot, Brig. Gen. Charles Laurence, Co-pilot. Air Force lead again and the final mission on this series called F.R.A.N.T.I.C. Target - Fascani, Romania, Air Drome. We hit this target with good results and ran into some fairly accurate flak over the target. The 97th Bomb Group lost a B-17, probably from damage from that flak over the target. We saw it drifting farther and farther behind with fighters beginning to make passes on it as it drifted out of sight. This plane became a stragler and this is always a bad situation. We arrived back at hot, dusty, sunny southern Italy and what a contrast from that of the Russian Ukraine. This mission was flown on June 11, 1944 and I would call it fairly routine although just a little rough.

Missions Numbered 20 & 21, June 13, 1944. Target - Oberpfoffenhofen Air Drome located at the southern edge of Munich, Germany. B-17 No. 232028, Captain Karnes, Pilot, Squadron Lead on this one. The briefing on this mission gave every indication that it was to be a very rough one. The indication was for very intense and accurate flak with a possibility of around 200 enemy fighters in the area and they were expected to be aggressive. I recall the awesome foreboding I had on this one, the dread before take-off. I briefed the balance of the crew along with a stray photographer who was to go along. We had his cameras in place but it was rough enough that this photographer cancelled because of sudden "illness." I think the rest of us were kind of ill as well. One thing that really bothered us was the fact that two B-24 Groups had gone into this same area a week before and had lost half their airplanes. The flak over the target was intense and accurate with most of us suffering battle damage. Even though we heard that fighters were around, none ever attacked our formation. We took a number of hits, one that went through the top turret without hitting Adam Zamoni, the Engineer. Another put a hole in one of the oxygen tanks and the system began to exhaust itself. I was able to save four walk-around bottles and others in the crew did the same before pressure became too low. Adam came through and collected those bottles so the pilots could maintain their alertness. We went off oxygen at about 22,000 feet as I recall, and flew across the Austrian Alps before we could get down to more dense air. I can remember the rotten headache I sustained from that lack of oxygen. The 15th Air Force lost six heavy bombers on this one and I'd have to classify this as a rough one.

Missions 22 & 23, June 23, 1944. Radar B-17 '733, Captain Chamberlain, Pilot. Squadron lead. Target - Ploesti. We saw plenty of action on this day with strong resistance from enemy fighters. Our P-38 Escort did a magnificent job of keeping them out for the most part. However, one of Hermann Goering's Yellow Noses, a part of Goering's Flying Circus, made a direct frontal attack on our airplane. As he neared with that tremendous closing speed, I heard the Top Turret fire several bursts and then saw tracers ripping down the length of our plane, followed by that flickering shadow of the FW 190 as it came over the length of our plane as well. I saw that he was trailing smoke and it began a spiral to its left and that began to tighten up as it burst into flame. The pilot did not get out. T/Sgt. DeLay, the Engineer, got him cold with superb use of his Sperry Automatic Computing Sights. The flak was again unreal and we were in that intense and accurate stuff for about thirty-five minutes and that is one heck of a long time. All of us received battle damage. We were a force of 139 B-17s and lost six of them. A rough mission without question.

Mission No. 24, June 27, 1944. B-17 # 232068 (Heaven Can Wait), Pilot Janisch, Rickerson is Co-pilot. (NOTE: Up until this time I have been an "Extra Radio Operator" and had flown where I was needed with various crews and have flown fairly consistently on the Lead Ship.) I have been assigned to this crew and have to say that, after flying with them, they are a well disciplined crew and they work very well together. Our primary target was to be Bucharest, Romania but heavy cloud below us prevented us from making a proper bomb run on this target, (our desire was only to get the military target designated, not the City) so we took our secondary target of Brod, Yugoslavia Marshalling Yards. We had made three bomb runs on

Bucharest so we had some real down to earth sweating done before we hit Brod. We did hit the Marshalling Yards but, unfortunately, some of the bombs strung out into the City. A Tail Gunner named Merko Krajcar who lives in my tent went immediately to his writing material and began to write a lengthy letter when we got back. He said to us, "How's this for news." "Dear Ma and Pa, we bombed heck out of your hometown today." Krajcar is a good friend from Mingus, Texas. The mission over all turned out to be not rough at all. We had a little flak over Brod but none over Bucharest even through three full bomb runs. I don't believe we lost any B-17s today.

Mission Number 25, June 30, 1944. Target - Budapest, Hungary. B-17 '855, (Wearie Willie), Pilot Janisch. Our scheduled Mission was for Breslau, Germany which was deep into Eastern Germany, north of Czechoslovakia and next to the German/Polish border. We were deep into Austria when we ran into a very tall weather system. The 99th was 15th Air Force lead on this one and we were gaining enough altitude that it appeared we just might make it over this frontal system. The rest of the main force was below and circling to gain their necessary altitude and were under fighter attack. The decision was made to call off Breslau and take targets of opportunity along the way. At this point we were still climbing and still on the course for Breslau. It takes a while to turn a Bomb Group of 28 B-17s around and by the time we were headed back the whole 15th Air Force was out of sight. We were quite high, 28,000 feet I think I recall that figure. We had a German interpreter on board and he was seated in the radio room with me. He was monitoring German frequencies when he intercepted a message to German fighters vectoring them in to this lone group of B-17s, namely, US! They had us on radar and were giving all the correct directions and positions to approximately 100 enemy fighters in the area. (Our escort was with the main body of the 15th Air Force) This sort of information has a way of making us real nervous. One hundred enemy fighters against twenty-eight unescorted B-17s meant that if this battle took place, there would undoubtedly be a whole lot less of us around in a very short time. We picked Budapest for our target of opportunity, flew the bomb run, dropped and missed the target completely. Just a lousy waste in my opinion. The fighters were never able to get to our altitude and us although they had hit some of the 15th Air Force hard. I picked up an S.O.S. and followed his progress until he finally gave his "Mayday" call which meant they were bailing out. Another incredibly frustrating day with all the ramifications that went with it. That S.O.S. call was just another frustrating incident. This was somewhat rough even though we didn't get hit. One that made us sweat.

Mission Number 26, July 4, 1944. Target - Brasov, Romania. B-17 232068, Pilot Janisch. The mission itself went pretty much routinely in forming up and proceeding on into the target area. No enemy fighters were encountered either on the way in or coming out. Flak over the target was heavy and quite accurate. We lost Lt. Elliott and his crew flying wing. We were unable to contact them either through VHF nor was I when requested to try to contact by CW. We watched as they bailed out after throwing everything they could overboard. I regarded this as a very bad day with this terrible loss. So many times I find myself deeply depressed when I count the awesome losses of our crews, our friends, those who are gone. For me, this one was rough.

Mission Number 27, July 6, 1944. Target - Bergamo Steel Works in Northern Italy. B-17 # '855, Major Wiper, Pilot leading the 99th Bomb Group. All went well until our pilot believed we had a short supply of fuel and believed we could not make it back to our base. We were still in a maximum climb on the way into the target when Major Wiper requested that I begin the transfer of fuel from the Tokyo tanks and this I did. When we had attained target altitude and were again level with proper cruise speed it was learned that '855 registers low fuel in a climb. We had no problem. We encountered light flak over the target and, although enemy fighters were in the area, they did not attack us. This was not a rough mission but the fuel shortage scare was sufficient to take any pleasure we might have gained from this easy mission. There were other features about this particular B-17 that seemed undesirable and I'm not sure of all complaints made but Pilots complained that it was inclined to hug the ground on take-off.

Missions Numbered 28 & 29, July 7, 1944. Target - Bleckhammer, Germany, a Synthetic Oil Refinery. B-17 232068, Pilot, Janisch. This target is not far from Breslau. This turned out to be a very rough mission, I considered it to have been the worst to that time. We were briefed for heavy to intense flak over the target with aggressive fighters in the area. We were deep into Austria when we were attacked by a large force of ME 210s escorted by ME 109s. The ME 210s remained just out of 50 calibre machine gun range and launched rockets into our formations. The 463rd Bomb Group close by to our right took the heaviest and most accurate part of the attacks which came in waves of six with many continuous attacks being completed. As before, these rockets had that strange erratic trajectory indicating something of instability but there were enough of them to be quite effective. After the initial attack, two B-17s fell from formation from the 463rd with a third compelled to salvo his bombs to remain with the Group. One of the two falling from formation simply went into a spiral and went on into the

ground with no survivors. The second, on fire, crossed behind us with all ten men bailing out. One of the 210s went in on these ten men, strafing them repeatedly with the puffs of machine gun fire from the ME 210 clearly visible to us. We were, of course, completely unable to give any kind of help. This is where I learned to hate the Nazi's and all they stand for with all my heart, I cannot forget this. The enemy continued to press us enough to keep our position hot until our escort finally showed up. The P-51s were able to shoot down several enemy planes before they were able to clear the area. We went on into the target area where the flak was heavy and accurate as predicted. We dropped our bombs on target very effectively with smoke rising from that target to over 25,000 feet. After crossing the target, the B-17 that had run into trouble earlier pulled from formation beginning a fairly rapid decent. The crew bailed out before it went on in. This mission convinced me that the Germans are just as low as the Japs with their ever present atrocities and incredible indecencies with them all the time, rotten people, all. I don't have any idea how many planes the 15th lost in this rough, rough of missions.

Missions Numbered 30 & 31. July 14, 1944, B-17 # 232068, Pilot, Janisch. Target Budapest, Hungary, Industrial Oil Refinery. We were briefed for heavy to intense flak with a significant number of enemy fighters in the area and these could be expected to be aggressive. The mission was pretty much routine. Flak was as briefed and many of us suffered from light to moderate battle damage. Fighters were sighted but they did not come in on us. Our escort is very effective with both P-38s and P-51s giving us that wonderful protective cover. Several B-17s were shot down, one from the 99th being lost to flak over the target. Target coverage was believed to be good. Nothing too unusual about this mission other than being a little rough.

Mission Number 32, July 15, 1944. Radar B-17 # '733, Squadron lead, Captain Karnes, Pilot. Target - Ploesti. Again, the foreboding feeling I always have when we are scheduled for this particular target. Very rough mission over all and pretty much as we were briefed with the flak being intense and very accurate, all 35 minutes of it. Enemy fighters again sighted but they did not attack our formation with any degree of aggressiveness. It seemed as with other attacks, that they begin a concerted effort on us but break away prior to closing on us. That tight formation helps tremendously. We lost Mighty Mike today, B-17 232028, from our Squadron. It appeared they'd had an engine shot out and then lost a second engine a little later, beginning to lose altitude and drift behind. Captain Karnes was unable to contact them either on VHF or the Command set. He asked me to attempt to raise them on the Liaison Set using CW, Morse Code. I was not able to raise the Radio Operator. They continued to lose altitude and drift north of our course. Lemming was the Radio Operator and a good friend of mine. Another bad day for us and the 15th Air Force. We lost a total of 20 heavy bombers on this mission, this deeply depressing day, an awesome loss to say the very least.

Missions Numbered 33 & 34, July 21, 1944. Radar B-17 # '733, Pilot Captain Karnes, Squadron lead. Target - Brux, Czechoslovakia, Industrial Oil Refinery. We were briefed for intense and accurate flak with the possibility of 250 fighters in the area and these considered to be aggressive. Our trek into Brux was pretty uneventful, our escort was effective in keeping enemy planes from our formation and we eventually turned on our I.P. for an unusually long bomb run. Our bomb bays were open and our bombardier was calling for "level", when we were suddenly engrossed in violent evasive maneuvers to avoid a B-24 Group in a tight left turn at our altitude. The B-24 Group literally flew through our Bombers with most of us salvaging bombs to help us get away. We were low Squadron and did not drop our bombs and had suffered two aborts leaving us with only five planes in our Squadron. We reformed and did not go over Brux. (No losses sustained in this melee, an incredible event that no one was hurt or killed in) Now the fact that we were low Squadron and really not too terribly much affected does not mean that pulse rates and blood pressures didn't rise considerably. Captain Karnes was never one to bring bombs back home and since we still had our bombs our Bombardier, Chris Christensen began the process of selecting a suitable target. They finally agreed on one, pulled from formation flying a bomb run on a fairly good sized community with a large Marshalling yards and a train was in the yard area. The flak was considerable and it was accurate as we heard the bursts and the rattle of schrapnel as it either went through or glanced off wings and fuselage. The drop was very accurate as we made a steep turn away after bombs away. Chris Christensen asked us to look at what was happening. The drop was perfect and the loads from three planes would not have been overly significant but that train was an ammunition train and exploded like dominos and I guess it literally obliterated that town. I was able to view this past the trailing edge of the left wing from my tiny radio window. This mission had more in store for us since we discovered that we could not transfer fuel from one of the Tokyo tanks. We were very low on usable fuel when we returned and came out of formation for a straight in approach. A British Colonel cut us from the final and we were obliged to go around for a second run. It was mighty close on fuel. This was one time when it was good to be back on the ground.

NOTE: I feel it interesting at this late date to place in here a note regarding a Bombardier named Roy Buckmeier who lives right here in Lander, Wyoming and he was in one of the B-24s that flew through the 99th on that fateful day. He mentions heavy losses in his group just moments later over Brux with three B-24s out of his Squadron alone.



Mission Number 35, July 22, 1944. Radar B-17 # '733, Captain Karnes, Pilot, Squadron lead. Target - Ploesti. At briefing as you sat there, all the foreboding you ever felt came back to the surface, you became almost sick at your stomach. The mission turned out pretty much routine up into the target area. The 99th did not lose any planes on this one but 15th Air Force losses were such that if we lost this many planes on every mission we flew, you would have no hope of ever completing your tour of 50 missions. The flak was, as always, very intense and very accurate. This intensity is with you for all of thirty-five minutes and very definitely takes it's toll. Virtually every plane suffers battle damage. If you've ever experienced thirty-five minutes of very intense and accurate flak, you know that it seems to be an eternity. There were a few enemy fighters in the area but the escort, as usual, was very effective and we were not attacked. Bomb coverage was again good and smoke again raised to more than 26,000 feet. As we turned left off the bomb run I saw two B-24s go down. One seemed to spiral down and we saw no 'chutes but at our distance it was hard to tell. The other was on fire and coming toward us but somewhat below. There was an explosion where one wing separated from the plane and the rest went into a violent roll with a second and much larger explosion leaving only a large ball of black smoke with smoking wreckage falling from around it. Those ten guys never had a chance. That plane was totally involved in fire almost from the first. The 15th Air Force put 607 heavy bombers over the target that day and we lost 24 of them, an incredible loss. This was a very rough mission.

Mission Number 36, July 24, 1944. B-17 # '855 (Wearie Willie), Pilot, Boyd, Squadron lead. Target - Turin, Italy, an Industrial Tank Works. Not too much flak over the target but we did hear a few bursts. There were no fighters seen and the mission was pretty much without problems until we got pretty close to home base, over land. We were fairly low and the air was rougher than a cob, as was usual. In another Squadron a B-17 developed a runaway prop and this gave him a boost in power, suddenly gaining unwanted speed and altitude. A B-17 flying above and ahead was clipped and this took the tail section off and it went in with all of the crew. The plane with the prop problem landed safely but this was an unnecessary loss that made the whole situation all the more grim. Another bad day.

Missions Numbered 37 & 38, July 25, 1944. Radar B-17 # '733, Captain Karnes, Pilot, Squadron lead. Target - Linz, Austria, Hermann Goering Tank Works. This was the roughest mission I have flown to date. However there have been other times when incidents occurred where we were individually closer to getting shot down, wounded or killed. We did not receive any great amount of battle damage to our plane. However, the fighter attacks began early on with a B-24 Group below and somewhat behind us taking attacks with devastating results. As more and more fighters showed up, more and more of us became involved and shortly, we were involved in a full blown areal battle. The whole war seemed to engulf us. On the bomb run the flak became very intense and it was accurate. This, too, began to take it's toll in battle damage and further loss of heavy bombers as we progressed on into the target. In one instance the wing was blown off of a B-17, there were no survivors. Several B-17s exploded. Any place you looked in the sky you could see a trail of smoke and/or a ball of flame. There were parachutes almost every where you looked. At bombs away we flew through the blast and wreckage of a B-17 that had exploded above and ahead of us. Captain Karnes took suitable evasive action to avoid that wreckage and it was pretty much of a terrifying experience for us. We sustained some battle damage but not serious. We counted 34 heavy Bombers going down or in trouble including the one that exploded in front of us. I have no idea of the actual bombers lost on this one since some of those in trouble probably made it back. This was a very rough mission.

NOTE: July 27, 1944 we flew to Cairo, Egypt for a week of R & R. This was a very good interlude for us during my combat tour. I gained greatly from this trip but, this is another story and not pertinent to this record.

Missions Numbered 39 & 40, August 3, 1944. B-17 # '855, (Wearie Willie), Janisch, Pilot. Our Target was to have been Fredrickshaven, Germany where we were to bomb a Jet Engine Factory. The target was so well camouflaged that we could not see it well enough to bomb it effectively. Our Secondary Target was Imstadt, Germany which was nearby and we hit the marshalling yards there with good coverage and results. We encountered very little flak, and, if there were any fighters in the area, we did not see them. Even though we were deep into enemy territory it turned out to be a "milk run."

NOTE: When we were in Cairo, Egypt, another crew flew our plane, B-17 # 232068 (Heaven Can Wait) and they were shot down with no survivors and this over Ploesti July 28, 1944.

Mission Number 41, August 6, 1944. B-17 # '855 (Wearie Willie), Harold Rickerson, Pilot. Harold Rickerson had been our Co-Pilot on this crew. Target - Les Valence, France, marshalling yards. This Mission was a very long haul. We had no flak and no fighters. Target coverage was good. We are always thankful for these milk runs even when they are such a long haul for us.

Missions Numbered 42 & 43, August 7, 1944. B-17 # 232055, Janisch, Pilot. Target - Bleckhammer, Germany. I was deeply concerned about this one from our briefing regarding flak intensity and possible aggressive fighter action but probably more influenced by our earlier experience into this same target on July 7, 1944. The trip from Foggia all the way into the target area was totally routine and uneventful. Flak over the target was intense and accurate as was indicated at our briefing. When we were over the target under this intense anti-aircraft fire when I again, had strong feelings that all was not right and that something critical might be at hand. We took a sizable piece of flak from a nearby shell and this chunk entered through the bomb bay but was deflected from its trajectory when it struck a bomb hoist which was hanging on the bomb bay side of the bulkhead just in front of where I was standing. There were quite a lot of fighters in the area but our escort was again very effective and none attacked our formation. A number of heavy bombers were shot down but I have no idea just how many. Although most of us sustained battle damage from light to fairly heavy, no planes were lost from the 99th Bomb Group. Our Pilot, Bill Janisch, completed his fiftieth mission on this one. To quote him he claimed he finished "on a good old hell fire and brimstone, hammer and tongs, double.: I think this summed up what kind a mission we were on today.

Mission Number 44, August 9, 1944. Radar B-17 # '733 (Bugs Bunny), Major Wiper, Pilot. Group lead today. Target - Gyor, Hungary. Briefing indicated we might have fighter opposition and that flak would be moderate and accurate. This mission was entirely routine into the target area. Flak was as briefed, but the only fighters we saw were P-38s and P-51s. Many of us sustained battle damage from that accurate flak. It can always be assumed that when you can hear the bursts the flak is accurate and you will receive some battle damage. One of our B-17s took an 88mm shell through the Number one engine nacelle but that shell did not explode. If it had, there is a good bet that the plane would have been shot down. They did sustain heavy battle damage from it any way. We took battle damage that effected our left landing gear. Our Engineer had to crank down that gear, but we were not certain that it was down and locked since there was no indication of down and locked other than the Engineer had cranked as far as it would go. It was locked and we did sweat out that landing. This one was kind of rough.

Mission Number 45, August 10, 1944. Radar B-17 # '733, (Bugs Bunny), Pilot, Erdosy. Group lead. Target - Ploesti. At briefing, as always, that awesome foreboding feeling because this has been such a raunchie target. The flak, again, at briefing, very intense, very accurate. Those boys had certainly had enough practice. The flight from take off, assembly and positioning into the 15th Air Force Bomber stream was entirely routine. Our altitude over the target was 28,500 feet. It seemed difficult to believe but the outside temperature at that altitude on August 10, was 60° below zero. I suspect that our inside temperature did not differ very much from what we had outside. Although the flak was intense at that altitude, it did seem a little less accurate. When we were really into the bomb run and the flak was getting to us, our Tail Gunner discovered he had rings in both his parachute harness and the 'chute he was to snap into the harness. He reasoned that, under these circumstances, this would probably be the day we'd get shot down. He headed for the Waist Position to select a 'chute that would work but did not have a walk around supply of oxygen and passed out next to the tail wheel. Left Waist Gunner grabbed his emergency supply, went off oxygen and got the Tail Gunner plugged in. The Left Waist Gunner passed out with the Right Waist Gunner rescuing Left Waist Gunner and he, too, passed out with Left Waist fixing him up. After Bombs away I reported Bomb Bay clear but when the Bombardier tried to close the Bomb Bay Doors, they remained open. The Engineer was on a Walk Around Bottle when he squatted on the cat walk trying to crank those doors closed. He ran out of his supply and I went off oxygen, taking my walk around bottle to him and he was conscious enough to take the bottle, plug in and get back to his position leaving those doors open. I returned to my position only to get somewhat hung up in the bulkhead door into the radio room where I was rescued by the Radar Navigator. All of this with that intense flak clear throughout the bomb run. I have to say that the cat walk through that bomb bay with the doors open seems mighty narrow and 28,500 feet appears to be a long ways down. When we got down to a lower and warmer altitude, the doors closed OK. We saw no enemy fighters on this mission, but out of 414 Heavy Bombers that went over the target, we still lost 16 of them. We again were subjected to that terrible loss of men and bombers. Very rough again.

Mission Number 46, August 12, 1944. B-17 # '855, (Wearie Willie), Rickerson, Pilot. Target - Savona, Italy, Gun Position. No flak, no fighters, nothing unusual at all. A complete milk run-

Mission Number 47, August 13, 1944, B-17-F I did not have the number. Pilot, Rickerson. Target - Genoa, Italy. The plane we were to take did not check out and the standby B-17 was this B-17-F. With the waist windows stowed and the radio hatch removed to place my gun in position we were back to the "good old days" of my earlier missions before we got the B-17-Gs. The mission was routine and we were briefed for another no flak, no fighters milk run. After we had dropped our bombs and I was preparing my "Bombs Away Message", we were hit with some light but very accurate flak. We heard some bursts with the usual rattle of the scharpnal glancing off or going through the wings and fuselage. I have to say that, not expecting it gave me a real start when it occurred. A few holes, no serious battle damage, not too bad as missions go.

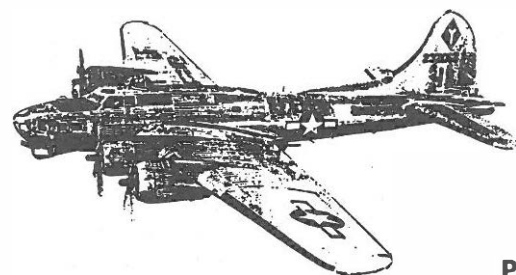
Mission Number 48, August 14, 1944. B-17 # '570 (Achtung). Target - Toulon France, Gun Position. Rickerson, Pilot. Routine mission. We had flak over the target but they just couldn't get it to us. No fighters and this was indeed a milk run although we again had some of Achtungs raw gas problem on our return, but not a bad mission at all.

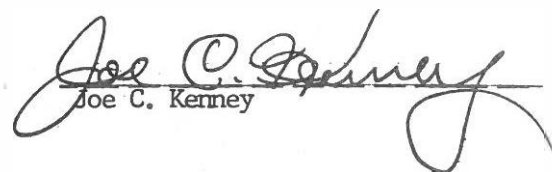
Mission Number 49, August 15, 1944. Radar B-17 # '733, Erdosy, Pilot. Squadron lead. Target - Beach Head # 261, just south of St. Tropez, France. Our "H-Hour" was at midnight. Breakfast was cold dehydrated eggs (green in color), cold, slick flat pancakes with cold watery syrup, cold greasy stale sausage and that washed down with the vilest coffee you could ever dream of. With that I guess it sums up the kind of chow we have been subjected to. Take-off time was 03:00 and the night was pitch black. Shortly after take-off we saw a plane explode when it crashed on take-off. I think it was a B-24 from another field. Just seconds later a second plane crashed, also a B-24, and this exploded as well. A third B-24 was seen blazing away as it bounced along the ground and it also exploded. Two B-17s collided and exploded when they hit the ground. A third B-17 was on fire, salvoed his bombs and made a spectacular trail across the sky as he made for the air field where he landed safely. With all of this going on we couldn't help but wonder if we were not being subjected to some sabotage, frightening to say the least. We flew to an area just north of Corsica where we entered a great circle with all of these bombers from the 15th and 12th Air Forces there. Each Group in this tremendous circle was formed to split off this circle to go into their assigned targets at specific times set. A very spectacular sight. We had some low clouds below us and could not see much going on, on the surface. Our Radar Navigator showed me on the scope what radar was picking up and we could see the action of the assault boats going in clearly beneath those clouds. The landing craft and gun boats, the whole thing and this was most interesting. Our flight altitude was only 13,000 feet which was the lowest mission I flew and we did not use oxygen. As we went in on our bomb run the clouds thinned as we approached the shore. We had a camera installed in the camera well and I could see around it and view what was going on below. I saw a large number of invasion craft churning in toward the beachhead. These bombs were 100 pounders and their only purpose was to create ready made fox holes for the troops as they hit that beach. Quite a tremendous occurrence and I found this to be a most interesting mission. We hit it just as the sun rose.

Mission Number 50, August 17, 1944. B-17 # '855 (Wearie Willie). Pilot, Harold Rickerson. He is a great Pilot, a good guy and a good friend. When we went into briefing I saw that our mission scheduled was to be Weinerneustadt, Austria. While I sat there contemplating the prospects of finishing up on a rough one, a Captain from Head Quarters came in, erased Weinerneustadt and then chalked in Nis, Yugoslavia. What a relief! The only problem I saw was that we had another load of frags and I certainly hate that "hot" load. I was not overjoyed with this bomb load and we did have some interesting possibilities when the Bombardier discovered that the Armourers had failed to safety wire this load. The problem here being that when the bomb bay doors are opened, this would permit those arming propellers to turn in the wind, arming those bombs while still in the bomb bay. As it turned out we had no flak or fighters and even though I saw some of those arming props turn, our Bombardier toggled those off in perfect sequence, all going out without a hitch. A Radio Operator appreciates a considerate Bombardier since he has to watch 'em go. This was a genuine milk run for my last mission.

After we had landed I had very mixed emotions as I suppose every one had when this was complete. First, the great relief that some of those big problems were behind me, and along with this elation and happiness that it was over. Then next, quite strangely for me, was regret that I would not be flying combat any more and that, somehow, I was letting down first, the Crews I flew with, and my friends who were still flying, and then our Country, in getting this rotten War over with.

NOTE: I have attempted to get this down as nearly as I possibly could from my diary along with some recollections of things that I recalled when I was working this up. There may be a couple of discrepancies of occurrences attributed to missions that may have occurred on another mission but it should be abundantly clear that what has been written here did happen. These being as I saw them from my own viewpoint. In no way can I express myself with a clarity that would mirror my own, actual feelings and emotions.



  
Joe C. Kerney

## PUTTING THE USAAF'S BOMBER ORIENTED AERIAL COMBAT IN PROSPECTIVE, FIFTY YEARS LATER

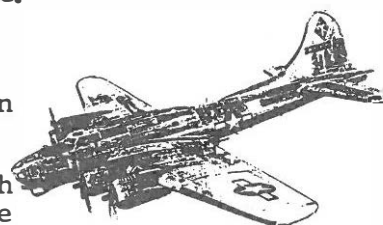
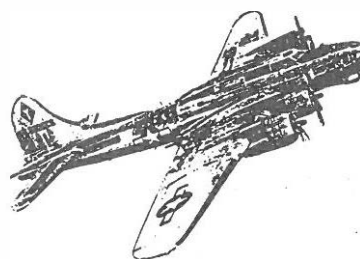
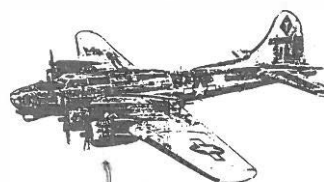
*During the last several years on TV's fine Education Channel, the program **WINGS**, has captured the imagination and historic fascination of a lot of us, especially those who remember World War Two, and many younger folks who have been captured by its romance, danger, and excitement, along with its great combat aircraft, and those tough, cocky, mostly young men, who manned them in combat. What a rich heritage for all Americans to share. Our American Spirit with its "will to win and remain free" had been challenged by Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, during that vital and exciting period in contemporary American History.*

*In this positive context, there was one group of American fighting men who have never received the credit due them. These fighting men were the aerial gunners on the A-20, A-26, B-17, B-24, B-25, B-26, and the B-29. The gunners on these great combat aircraft, shot down more enemy aircraft than all of the P-38's, P-39's, P-40's, P-47's, and P-51's combined.*

*The reason they did not receive proper acknowledgment for their combat accomplishments was simply because they did not have gun cameras to record their kills, as the fighter planes had. Only a very few scenes of their actual combat have been recorded because those gunners who had movie cameras with them on bombing missions, were busy shooting their 50 calibers during the fighting, and the movie camera was the furthest thing from their mind. The only official USAAF movie cameraman who went along with our crew, to film a mission to the Ploesti Oil Fields, ended up a real "smelly mess", after having his camera and its mount shot off the right waist window of the B-17 by either a FW-190, or a ME 109. There just weren't many volunteers for that job, so there aren't many film shots of the gunner's victories.*

*When I speak of the power and the absolute supremacy of our aerial gunners, who, if we pilots flew good tight formation, were so effective against enemy fighters, that they created a "Ring Of Fire" around our bomber formations, through which few enemy fighter pilots had the guts to challenge. Most of those who did attempt to penetrate this "Ring Of Fire" were quickly shot down. Bombers in good formation were rarely touched by enemy fighters. Our gunners ruled the skies over Germany by both intimidation and ferocity! Some of them completed an entire combat tour without ever having seen a German fighter. This is testimony to their warring ability and reputation.*

*In our group, on one mission, twenty three enemy aircraft were shot down, without any losses of our own, and one of our waist gunners had seven victories on one mission. It was our aerial gunners who made High Altitude Precision Daylight Bombing a success in Europe during '44 and '45, not, I apologetically say, our highly touted fighter escort, who were frequently not there. A quote from then Colonel Curtis LeMay (later USAF Chief of Staff) when leading his bomber force: the only fighters I saw "had black crosses on their wings"\**





Make no mistake about it, when we had fighter escort who stayed with us, we were not attacked by enemy fighters, the problem with the escort was that they simply were not there most of the time, and when they were with us, the Krauts would divert them from their escort mission by having one or two (a few) of their aircraft feigning an attack on one of our bomber formations, then all of the escorts would drop their auxiliary fuel tanks, giving chase to the few enemy aircraft, each pursuing that fighter pilots "dream" of becoming an ace, (shooting down five or more enemy aircraft), but leaving the inbound and outbound bomber stream unprotected. This general lack of professional military discipline by the escort, undoubtedly resulted in many unescorted (straggler) bomber losses, and cast a sham on the integrity and honor of the long range fighter escort. The two times I found myself alone returning from a mission deep into enemy territory and called for some escort, none responded; one was from Ploesti on 18 August '44 and the other was Blechhammer on 27 August, '44..

Our escort, the P-38 and P-51, were certainly beautiful to look at, but in reality their escort function was, at best, only "one way", inbound toward the IP (Initial Point) of the bomb run, then the escort disappeared from the scene, rarely if ever seen again during that mission; and in bad weather conditions they were rarely seen at all. The bomber missions flew whether the escort was available or not; little attention was paid to the escort during the bombers mission briefing. As long as we had our gunners, we could power our way to any target and return. Thus the combat success of the Eighth and Fifteenth Air Forces in their Strategic Bombing of Hitler's Europe, and their "right of safe passage anywhere in the skies over Europe," in my opinion, rested primarily on the shoulders of our aerial gunners. They were worthy of that task, and executed it to perfection!

A couple times each year, the very fine WINGS TV program features the B-17 Flying Fortress from its inception on the drawing board to its strategic mission against Nazi Germany. At this point in their narrative, the record needs to be set straight by someone who was there during '44 and '45 flying the B-17, and who had flown all formation positions including group lead pilot, and that person is me. The WINGS version always ends up with the long range escort saving the day by escorting the bombers almost to their target; nothing is mentioned about the escort not being at the rally point after "bombs away", where they were really needed to assist those bombers crippled by flak during the bomb run. Little is ever said about their assistance to the bomber who has lost a couple of engines and is a straggler, alone and "far from home", and no mention at all is made concerning escorts rendezvous tardiness or when clouds were present, their total absence. The escorts contribution to the success of the strategic bombing of Hitler's Germany, in my experienced judgment, was minimal. Of great significance was our aerial gunners with the updated B-17G and its twin fifty calibre nose turret, the electronic turbo supercharger control which greatly improved high altitude formation flying, and the staggered waist gunner windows. Utilizing this updated B-17G, there was really no need for the long range fighter escort.

The WINGS version also concluded with fighter gun camera scenes of a B-17 getting shot down. This is a phoney film flick, because the bomber getting shot down was one that had been abandoned by its crew because of an engine fire or some other serious problem. This is obvious because all of the bombers gun turrets are in the "abandon" position, not in a firing position.

My entire objective in this brief narrative is to set the record straight concerning who was most effective in enabling our strategic and tactical bombers to carry out their

mission against enemies of the United States of America. Was it our long range escort, or the aerial gunners who were aboard the attacking bombers? After a very rational and unemotional evaluation, there is just no doubt about it, the aerial gunners were most effective.

JOHN A. PLUMMER, REGULAR LT. COL. USAF (RET.)  
347th Bomb Squadron, 99th Bomb Group, 13th Air Force  
B-17 Combat Pilot, and Squadron Operations Officer  
38 Combat Sorties; 6 Combat Group Leads. 3/10/94.



### THIRD MISSION TO PLOESTI (10 AUGUST, 1944)

This mission was not like any other we had flown. The Army Motion Picture Service decided to make a major story out of the Ploesti missions, and my crew was to be the featured combat air crew of the documentary. We went through the routine motion picture scenes, including interviews, loading the bombs, getting aboard the aircraft, starting the engines and taxiing out to take off.

As I recall, during WW2, the Army commissioned camera men right off the production studios in Hollywood, and made them 1st or 2nd Lieutenants. The officer assigned to do this task with my crew was a real hot shot, who knew all things about all things. He didn't need to be briefed on the use of the oxygen system, or walk around oxygen bottle, he already knew this, or safety belts or the use of the parachute or any of those small details-he was just a little above that. However, he did seem to know about movie cameras. The B-17 waist windows were made of good thick curved plexiglas, and in the center of this plexiglas was a flexible gun mount that could swivel about 170 degrees both vertically and horizontally. Even though I would lose one gun position, this was the logical place for the movie camera to be mounted, and since I would be flying the number five position in the squadron formation, (right wing of the second element lead), this would give the cameraman an unobstructed view of the "air of battle" which was the area to the right of the formation, and the area from which the enemy fighters usually attacked.

As we approached the target area, but before reaching the IP, we were hit by Hun fighters, we took some hits; the top turret gunner was wounded in the shoulder by fragments from the fighter, but not sufficiently bad to take him out of the battle; it may seem strange, but in real bloody air battle, which could rapidly escalate into a life or death struggle, it takes a lot more than one little hit to take a crewman out of the fight; up here there are no "aid stations," you don't call "medic" or crawl into a fox hole and count yourself out of the battle; you are in it all of the way-win, or die. Needless to say a lot of our gunners stayed by their guns and kept on fighting when it seemed impossible to do so, there was simply no other rational choice.

From the IP to beyond the target the flak was terrible, my aircraft took a direct 55 mm hit about two feet outboard from where the right wing meets the fuselage, near the trailing edge, but it did not detonate (explode), but passed on through the wing and out the top; if it had exploded

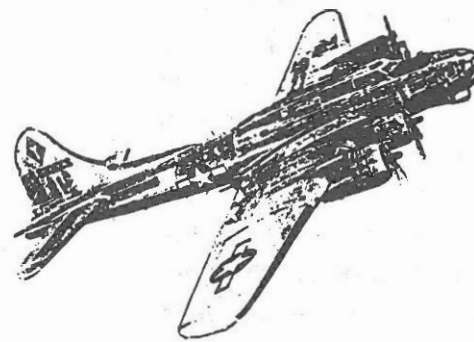




(as it was supposed to do) our aircraft would have been blown to hell, and all of us with it. During all this action, I heard nothing from our camera man, but since the left waist gunner was back there with him I assumed he was OK., the fighters stayed around during the withdrawal from the target, and made several more passes at our formation, and we took some more hits, including one that shot the flexible gun mount, with movie camera attached, right off of the aircraft, and scaring the terrified hot shot camera man nearly to death. After the battle was over, and we were below 10,000 feet, I left the cockpit and went aft to inspect the battle damage, and we were really damaged, both by the fighters and flack. I attempted speaking with the camera man, but he was apparently unable to speak coherently, and he was in a horrible smelly mess. In retrospect, one can't help wonder that perhaps the Krauts had advanced notification that my right waist gun position would be occupied by a movie camera and a cameraman, instead of a 50 caliber machine gun and a professional military gunner.

After we landed back at the home base, the "hot shot" camera man stepped out of the aircraft and just started walking. Some of his ground support crew were with him, and the last time I saw him he was walking away, he still may be walking. I never saw or heard of him again, I had a wounded crewman to attend to and a good old B-17 that was so shot to pieces that I think it was scrapped. This is just an example of how the best and toughest air crew in the entire USAAF handled this rather routine mission, and, I never heard anything more about the movie documentary on the Ploesti Oil Fields of Rumania.

JOHN PLUMMER



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## THE INVASION OF SOUTHERN FRANCE, OPERATIONS DRAGOON (15 August, 1944)

The invasion of Southern France, Operations Dragoon, occurred on 15 August, 1944. Little importance of that invasion was noted because it was conducted in the text book manner of military efficiency. Since it was conducted without loss of Americans or other allied troops, there was nothing bad for the media to write about, and it would have been out of character for the press to report only good news. Never the less, this invasion, involving thousands of men, had great air support, prior to, during and after the invasion.

The missions of August 13th and 14 destroyed Nazi gun emplacements and lines of communications along the southern coast of France near Toulon; the mission of 15 August was in direct support of Allied troops who would be landing there. This was quite an event, and I was glad to have been a part of it, I was not aware that such an event was pending, but when we were scheduled for some night flying practice, I knew something was cooking. Now night flying had always been a joy, because of the smooth air, the many lights on highways and towns and cities, but here in a war zone, there wasn't a light in sight, and with no moon, it was black.

In order to protect our airfield from enemy night attack, the runway lights were shielded from above and the side, in such a manner that the lights could only be seen when on the final approach for landing, and they were used only when an aircraft was taking off or landing. It was a super secure system, but we friendly pilots had one hell of a time finding the airfield in total darkness and with no radio aids to navigation except the radio compass homing in on the armed forces radio station, which was near the city of Foggia. I do not recall who the navigator was, it was not NJ, he had been selected for lead crew, but whomever it was, he was sharp (as most navigators are). Another difference in night flying in the states and in a war zone was that we (the US and the British) had many antiaircraft (AA) units scattered about, and these very important people sure did keep the skies over our portion of Italy well protected from enemy aircraft, and they did it in part by using search lights. Search lights are very powerful beams of light that would streak up into the night sky like a bullet, and once they had you in their beam, there was no escape, because as you flew out of their general range, another closer unit would pick you up, and, you knew that they had their loaded guns right on you, and could blast you at any moment. I do not know

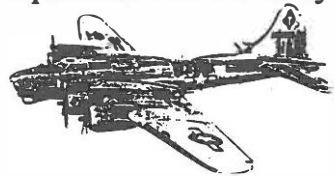
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how we got out of that mess without getting zapped, but we did, and the navigator got us back to our airfield, and we landed OK.

On the return flight to Italy on 14 August from our mission to Toulon, South France, I really had some first class shooting practice by getting into the ball turret. This device was so engineered that a big fellow like me (6 ft., 210 pounds) could easily fit into it without crowding, it had twin 50 caliber machine guns mounted in such a manner that it had 360 degrees of movement forward and to the rear, and, 180 degrees laterally, all controlled by control knobs; move the knobs to the left and that is where the turret pointed, moved it up or down and that is the way you went; the two knobs each had their own trigger, with the gun sight in between. It was a very fine and powerful weapon, much feared by the Krauts.

Our altitude above the Mediterranean Sea en route back to Italy from southern France, was about 5,000 feet. I got myself comfortable in the turret, located all of the switches, and took aim at the Mediterranean Sea directly below; touched off a short burst (about 2 seconds) and sure enough I hit it. I could see the "splash" where the bullets hit the water, then I would see if I could hit the "splash" etc., it was great fun, except that I held a couple of the bursts a little longer than 2 seconds and soon I was nearly out of ammunition, and the barrels were very hot. I let the barrels cool for a while, and just spun the turret all around, this way and that. I even called the real professional ball turret gunner, Sgt. Fitz-Patrick, whom I had sent to the cockpit to sit in my pilot's seat while I was in his, and asked if he would like to trade jobs. He said he would just as soon be in his ball turret where lots of fun could be had. I rather agreed with him; shooting at the Germans is one thing I didn't get to do because while the shooting was going on, I was busy flying the aircraft. After the mission, the Squadron Armament Officer stopped to tell me that my ball turret gunner had overheated the gun barrels, I then confessed that it was I who had done the overheating; he frowned, and then gave me a sort of crooked smile, and walked away.

When any of the guns were fired (50 caliber), it could be felt all over the aircraft, the entire craft shook and vibrated, this was especially noticeable in the cockpit, where the flight engineer had his twin 50's, which were located only a couple of feet behind and above the cockpit. Anytime it was even remotely suspected that he was going to fire his guns, both the pilot and copilot opened their sliding window a couple of inches or the vibration would frequently break the windows. It was a real nerve shattering experience to be busy flying the aircraft, and all of a sudden the top turret



opened up with those twin 50's, not only did it shake the entire aircraft, but dust from whatever source clouded the cockpit.

Our crew had flown missions to the Southern France area on 13th and 14th of August and we were also scheduled to fly on the day of the invasion, which was the next day, 15 August, 1944. After landing from the mission on 14 August, about 1600 hours local time (4:PM), our crew was informed that a special secret briefing for the Invasion of Southern France would be 0130 hours (1:30 AM), 15th of August, which was only nine and a half hours after landing from the mission on the 14th. All of the pilots, who would fly on the invasion were given dark red goggles, which we were to wear constantly until we were lined up for take off. The dark red glasses were to protect the rods in the retina of our eyes from the white light, so that our night vision would be protected for the "blacked out" night formation flying that was to come during the early hours of tomorrow, and this system really did work. These glasses were so dark, that we could scarcely see anything.

Everyone on the crew was really very tired after two consecutive days flying, so we were fed the evening meal, and went to bed to try and get as much sleep as possible. We were awakened at about 2330 hours (11:30 PM), got dressed and stumbled over to the mess hall for breakfast, then up to Group Headquarters for the 0130 briefing, with our takeoff scheduled for around 0300 hours. Our mission for the day was to hit Beach Head # 261, near the city of Toulon, on the southern coast of France, with 38 general purpose 100 pound bombs at between the hours of 0715 and 0730. Our bombs were to start at the waters edge walk right across the beach, other following aircraft would pick up the bombing where we left off, continuing to walk the pattern bombing on inland. The groups bombing formation was: squadrons echelon right, flights echelon right, which covered the entire landing area. The bombing objective was to destroy enemy land mines, enemy ground personnel and their lines of communication. The bombing altitude was 13,500 feet. The landing ground forces, in multi-Division strength (7 divisions; 3 American, 4 allied,-both French and British) were to be 1,000 feet off shore when we attacked from the air.

Those damn dark glasses may have been fine for preserving our night vision, but in the dark of the night you couldn't see anything, I had to be led everywhere. When we got to the aircraft, for the first time ever, I did not perform a visual inspection; the ground crew chief assured me that the big bird was ready, and I took his word for it (I didn't have any choice). In the cockpit, neither Lt. Todd or myself needed any light to start up the engines,

and none of the aircraft had any lights showing. Since I couldn't see anything, Todd lifted his goggles and did the taxiing out to take off position, then at take off time, with the Fort all lined up, I took off my goggles.

As soon as those damn goggles were removed, and with all of those little rods in my retina just waiting to "see at night", it was amazing, I could see real well, better than on a night when the full moon was out, but on this night there was no moon. The cockpit instrument lights on the Fort were also red, so this blacked out night formation flying, for the next three and a half hours, would be a piece of cake.

My position in the formation was number five (right wing of second element lead), and before number 4 was off the ground, I poured the coal to all 4 engines, and I never lost sight of my leader. Since the wind was calm, I hit the prop wash of the other aircraft that had taken off before me, but by now I was used to it, and plowed right through it. The takeoff and formation join up was routine, and I could see the other ships in the formation, and the ground below. This idea of protecting our night vision with those red goggles was a smart move by someone. Our night vision would remain good until the rods in the retina of our eyes were subject to white light as in daylight sunshine, or a close explosion which gave off white light. Then it happened; to my right there was a tremendous explosion; it appeared to be very close and near our altitude. The explosion's white light, completely destroyed Todd's and my night vision. I couldn't see anything outside of the Fort, I concentrated my vision on where the leader should be, since none of the aircraft were showing any lights, none of the pilots in any of the aircraft could see anything outside of their aircraft either, and we were all pretty close together; after a few seconds I recognized the exhaust flame of the number 4 engine of my lead, and locked on to it. Even though I could see the exhaust flame, it was much subdued because exhaust flame arrestors had been installed for this mission so the Krauts could not see us. I had barley gotten back into formation when another similar explosion lit up the night sky, it was obvious that there had been a mishap of great proportions, probably a mid-air collision with its explosion. About another minute later another similar explosion. This really shook up the crew, including me, would this happen to us in another minute? But as Sherman said "war is hell".

Prior to takeoff, the Flight Surgeon (medics) gave each person going on the mission a pill to keep them awake. I took mine, but I was told after the mission, that all of my crew had taken their pills from another source, and instead of it being a "keep awake" pill, it mistakenly had been a

strong "sleeping" pill. Anyway, as we continued the flight, things quieted down, and the voices on the intercom became silent; not much wonder, what is there to see and report on during a night formation flight with no moon and no lights on the ground.

Flying formation at night when all you can see is the muted exhaust flame from your leaders numbers 3 and 4 engine is nerve wracking and very fatiguing. It had been at least 45 minutes since takeoff and I had done all of the piloting, I was hot, thirsty, tired and I needed a rest; but, I couldn't take my eye off the leaders exhaust flames or I would lose him, so, using the intercom, I called Lt. Todd to take it for a while, but received no response from him, I repeated the call several times with no response, so I called for the top turret gunner to tell Todd that I wanted to talk to him; there was no response from the top turret gunner. All this time I was flying formation, and couldn't take my eyes off the leader for one second; this no response on the intercom had never happened to me before, my calls on inter phone were always answered immediately. I became a little cross, and said over the inter phone " THIS IS THE PILOT, RESPOND TO ME IMMEDIATELY, TAIL TO NOSE, OVER," to my utter amazement, no one responded. I then took my eyes off of the lead plane, and gave a quick glance at Lt. Todd, my faithful friend and copilot; he was slumped over in his seat, fast asleep. While flying with my left hand, I shook Todd with my right hand, then I shook the hell out of him, but to no avail. I had to assume that the entire air crew was sound asleep, and I was the only one awake in the entire aircraft.

The pilots microphone (mike) switch on the Fort was a push button on the top of the right control yoke, and to speak over intercom, you just depressed the mike button. This I did many times during the next 3 hours, hoping that someone would respond, none did. Another thing that complicated the situation, was the fact that I was wearing my thin leather flying gloves, and since I was sweating profusely, the thumb on the right hand of my glove began to collect sweat. and every time I attempted to use the mike, sweat would drip through the thumb of my glove down through the mike switch, and shock the hell out of me. I was almost a prisoner in my own airplane, I couldn't talk to anyone, and couldn't leave my pilots seat to investigate because I could not take my eyes off of the exhaust flames of my formation leader, so, I hung in there alone, flying night formation for a solid 3 hours until the crew began to stir, when they did begin to awaken, I could have shot the entire crew; but who didn't check that they took the right pills before takeoff, me? How could I have seen what pills anyone was taking, I

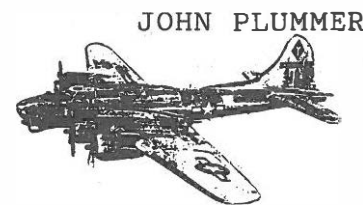


couldn't see my hand if it were in front of my face, because of the dark red goggles I was wearing, and I wouldn't have known the difference anyway; it was the Flight Surgeons (medics) responsibility; suppose I too had taken the same pill, then there would probably would have been one B-17 and crew unaccounted for after the mission. I will never forget that frustrating, thirsty, angry, fatiguing, hot and lonesome night that I spent (alone) in a Flying Fortress in the skies over Southern Europe during WW2. After I had gotten back from the mission, I was so totally fatigued that I slept for most of the next two days, and did not report, or investigate the matter further.

At dawn's first light, which was around 0545, my sleeping crew awakened and seemed all refreshed, we were over the island of Corsica in squadron formation and in rendezvous with the other three squadrons of the group. We were early, so we circled the island and departed in group formation in sufficient time to reach the southern coast of France within our strike time of between 0715 and 0730. The air was full of bombers, B-25's, B-26's, B-24's, and B-17's. and lots of surface ships. We hit our targets right on schedule, and the ground troops came ashore without a casualty, and moved inland with minimum resistance. What a great feeling it was to have been a part of such a great and noble undertaking. Through our efforts we assisted the allied forces in freeing southern France from the hated Germans, and as we rallied right, I observed the landing barges approaching the beaches, and tears of courage, pride and honor swelled my eyes; I wept.

The return flight back to Foggia and our home field lasted about two and one half hours, and as Todd set the big bird down on our PSP runway, it was a good sound, rest was not far away. I was not physically able to attend the mission critique, as I nearly collapsed when I got out of the aircraft, they took me to my quarters and I slept and slept, -- mission accomplished.

The three explosions we observed after take off, that destroyed my night vision, were reported to have been three B-24s that had exploded shortly after takeoff. The unofficial reason for their explosions was that it was the work of saboteurs, who had placed explosives within the wing root area of the aircraft and was detonated by an aneroid (barometric) device. Thirty fine men died in those explosions. One of those aircraft could just as easily have been mine; remember, I was not able to make a visual inspection of my aircraft either, because of the red glasses.



#### 4TH MISSION TO PLOESTI (18 August, 1944)

I was well rested from the Invasion of Southern France missions of 13, 14, and 15th of August and was "hot to trot" again. I would be flying the number 6 position (left wing of second element lead), and Major Schaffer would again be leading the group, which was good news. The one thing I didn't like was that I would be short one crew member. There would not be a navigator aboard, there was not a sufficient number of navigators to go around, so my bombardier would be flying with two helmets, his and the navigators. This would leave me short one gunner in the nose, and that could be costly.

Beginning with the H hour call, things just did not go well for me personally. I lit the fire to heat up some water for washing and shaving, and while the water was heating on our gasoline fueled, home made stove, I took my visit to the "throne of ten seats" (things didn't go too well there either). Upon my return I discovered that the gasoline fueled fire in the stove had gone out (now how that could have happened still puzzles me), so I would have to shave and wash in cold water. While shaving, I nicked my face in a couple of places, one right under my nose which bled for about 15 minutes, finally it stopped, and I hurriedly got dressed. When I put my foot into my right boot, it didn't feel right, and after examining it, I discovered that my boot had been taken over, during the last three days, by a colony of centipedes, and when I jammed my foot into the boot, I smashed them-what a mess, I had to find another pair of socks, wash my feet and wash out my boot. All of this had just a little more than a modest irritating effect on my normal happy self, I was about half ticked off, and I almost missed breakfast. Breakfast was good, we had SOS (creamed beef gravy on toast), grapefruit juice and coffee; things were looking up.

From briefing to engine start, things were very normal, but for some strange reason number 4 engine would not start, it would almost start, then faltered, then bark a few times then falter again. I motioned the ground crew chief to come aboard, he was the engine expert, and he finally got it started, and just in the nick of time, as taxi time had arrived and I almost missed our spot in the taxiing sequence. During the engine runup, our flight engineer leaned out the mixture on number 4 engine, ran the prop through several extra times, gave it a maximum power check, 47 inches of manifold pressure and 2550 rpm's; then as I gave it the magneto check, (left mag, then both mags, then right, then back to normal with both mags), the engine

checked out normal, except that the oil pressure was a little lower than the other 3 engines, and the oil temperature, and cylinder head temperatures were slightly higher than normal, but within acceptable limits. However, the engine appeared, and felt, a little rough; when I watched the top of the cowl flap on number 4 engine, it vibrated ever so slightly. Big command decision for me, to go or not to go. I elected to go because there was insufficient data to support not going; just because I thought I felt, and thought I saw, a very slight vibration, would not justify a decision not to go, especially when all other instruments were within acceptable limits.

The element leader on whose left wing I was flying I think was 1st Lt. William J Briery, his lead was very smooth, and the group join up was routine. Everything was going along fine, except something just didn't feel right. I had flown this particular Fort before, its last three numbers were 075, and it was a good bird. When we checked the maintenance record of the aircraft, prior to take off, numbers 2 and 4 engines had slightly over 600 hours on them, (about 10 to 12 weeks of flying) and numbers 1 and 3 had less than 100 hours on them (about 8 to 12 days of flying).

As we began the climb to 28,000 feet, the oil pressure on number 4, which had been a little low during engine run up prior to take off, was still a little low, but within the acceptable range of between 40 and 60 pounds per square inch [psi], and the oil and the cylinder head temperature were higher than the other 3 engines. About one hour after take off, the oil pressure on number 4 engine had continued to drop slowly and the right waist gunner reported what appeared to be an oil streak on the top of the right wing, behind number 4 engine; however, with only a little more than two hours to the target, and with the very slow drop in oil pressure, I decided to stay with the formation and continue the mission. There was little doubt in my mind that number 4 engine would last the mission.

To abort (turn back from) the mission now, would have left the group short 13 guns, and 3 tons of bombs, in addition, the psychological effect of "turning back" from a mission to Ploesti was a stigma thing inferring "yellow" (coward), and I sure didn't want that connotation associated with my name. One hour out from the target at 26,000 feet, the oil leak was very apparent; the top of the right wing behind number 4 engine was covered with a thick layer of frozen and congealed oil, and frozen and congealed oil had begun to form a build-up on the leading edge of the engine cowling, this would indicate a possible oil leak in the vicinity of the propeller governor. The oil pressure had dropped to 41 psi and its oil and cylinder head temperatures were near the red line on the high side. I knew that we were in

deep trouble with number 4 engine, so we reduced power on number 4, and added power to numbers 1, 2, and 3 engines, and continued the climb to 28,000 feet.

About 10 minutes short of the IP, at 28,000 feet, things began to happen badly for us. We had already taken some flak hits, and one of the fragments apparently struck one of the electric bomb door motors, because it caught on fire; the flight engineer, who was also the top turret gunner, was dispatched to put the fire out. He hooked up his portable oxygen walk around bottle, entered the bomb bay and extinguished the fire. By the time he had returned, number 4 was pumping oil all over the engine nacelle, and its oil pressure had gone below the red line mark of 40 psi. According to the technical order, I should have shut number 4 engine down right then, and feathered its prop, because oil under pressure was required to feather the propeller, but if I had done so, I could not have maintained our position in the bomber formation, would have fallen behind, and the Kraut fighters would have been on us quickly, so, we hung in there, with firm instructions for Todd to shut number 4 engine down, when its oil pressure got down to 20psi.

Shortly after turning on the bomb run at the IP, we all got a big surprise; number 2 engine suddenly quit with no prior warning of any type, it was probably internal engine failure, as the ball turret gunner did not report any flak hits on the under side of the wing in the vicinity of number 2 engine, and I could see no damage on the top side. Good old "on the ball" Todd immediately feathered the propeller on number 2, and I applied nearly full power on engines 1, 3, and 4, knowing full well that number 4 engine was going to fail shortly. Even with nearly full power on the three operating engines, I was unable to maintain my position in the formation and was dropping slowly behind; it simply required more engine power to maintain altitude because of the very thin air at high altitude. When I had dropped back sufficiently far to be even with number 7, we sort of traded places, he moved up into my abandon number six position, and I descended to his number seven position. This was a proper switch, insuring a more precise squadron bomb pattern, when our squadrons bombs struck the target. When I assumed number seven's position, I traded altitude for airspeed, and slowly descended below number seven's position, which permitted me to maintain a vertical position within the formation, insuring that our bombs would be within the squadrons bomb pattern. This trade off of altitude for airspeed paid off, because when the "bombs away" light flashed on my console, we were in number seven's position, but about 100 feet low, and our bombs would be within the squadron's bomb pattern at the target. I then reduced

power on numbers 1, 3, and 4 engines, and if my Irish luck would hold on a little longer, we might just limp back to Italy, which was 600 miles away, because Major Schaffer would reduce the groups air speed to 140 mph, and during the descent I could maintain position within the formation with only three engines in operation.

This was not to be! Within one minute after "bombs away," number 4 engine caught fire; Todd immediately feathered the propeller on number 4, and extinguished the engine fire. While Todd was attending to the engine fire, I was busy flying the airplane; we now had only two engines operating, numbers 1 and 3, and I knew we were in big trouble.

In an attempt to remain as close as possible to the protective cover of our squadron and group, I turned rather sharply to the right in an attempt to catch them as they rallied to the right after bombs away. This maneuver proved to be a near disaster, because with only two engines operating and the very thin air at this altitude, a very rapid loss of altitude resulted. I saw my squadron and group rapidly disappear. I was alone in a crippled aircraft, about 400 miles inside enemy territory with the finest combat crew in the entire USAAF, but at this time, things looked very dim for us; our work would be rather structured for the next few hours. To the enemy fighters (Me 109's), our crippled Fort would be an easy kill; I called several times for friendly fighter assistance, -- none responded as usual --; the only fighters to be seen were Me 109's, there wasn't a P-38 or P-51 to be seen anywhere. As a matter of fact, in all of my 66 missions, I do not recall seeing any friendly fighters after we had reached the IP inbound, prior to target, unless there were some clouds around and the fighters were lost, and needed help navigating back to Italy.

To discourage enemy fighter attacks, I maneuvered the Fort in a series of steep turns, during which I encountered severe turbulence (probably prop wash) and the fort stalled violently (it may have been a high speed stall) and entered a spin to the left. The enemy fighters apparently assumed another Fortress kill, because we saw them no more. As Todd and I struggled to regain control of the spinning Fort, my forefinger, left hand, reached for the "bail-out" switch. The lives of eight other fighting Americans depended on my judgment as to the proper bail-out time. It is extremely difficult to bail-out of a large spinning aircraft because centrifugal forces (forces moving outward from the center of a spinning body), if sufficiently strong, can prevent movement in any direction except outward, thus preventing movement to a bail-out exit.

To the best of my knowledge, no one had ever pulled a B-17 out of a spin, but since we had plenty of altitude, somewhere above 20,000 feet, and nothing to lose, I decided to attempt a spin recovery, which if successful, would assure our crew an opportunity to bail-out under much improved circumstances. The spin recovery techniques learned from Joe Morall, my Lock Haven, Pennsylvania College flight instructor in a J-3 Piper Cub, and my AAF flight instructor, movie star Robert Cummings, in a PT-17, at the Mira Loma Flight Academy at Oxnard, California, were utilized: Power off; elevator controls (stick) or in the B-17 the yoke, forward; hard opposite rudder until the spin rotation stops; then gently ease back on the yoke (elevator) and return to level flight. In the Cub at Lock Haven and the PT-17 at Oxnard, this had been a simple and enjoyable maneuver, but in a spinning Fort it was a different matter.

With the power off on the two operating engines ( numbers 1 and 3), and the other two engines (numbers 2 and 4) with their propellers feathered, the vertically spinning Fortress rushed earthward. (I would hit the bail-out switch at 12,000 feet if the spin recovery technique was not effective). Both Todd and I stood on the right rudder, while holding the yoke forward and throttles closed. After several rapid rotations, the Fort's rate of spin rotation began to slow, and as we passed somewhere in the vicinity of 13 or 14,000 feet, going straight down, the spin rotation stopped and we began the recovery with the indicated air speed very high indeed; much in excess of the maximum red line placarded speed of 300 mph. During the recovery from the vertical dive, the elevators would not move, so, we used the elevator trim tab; and completed the recovery somewhere in the vicinity of 8 to 10,000 feet, but we kept losing altitude slowly at about 300 feet per minute. Both of the operating engines had really cooled down during the long dive and spin from somewhere in excess of 20,000 feet, and each had to be warmed up before I could apply sufficient engine power to maintain near level flight. I would really need those engines before that day was over, so the extra care didn't cost anything but a little altitude.

While warming-up the two operating engines (numbers 1 and 3), I trimmed the fort for straight flight, and took account of the situation; there were no enemy aircraft in sight, so now the crew could bail-out safely. If time permitted, I had planned to put the Fort on auto-pilot, establish a gentle turn, then inform the crew by interphone that bail-out was imminent then hit the bail-out switch, and if lucky we would all land close together, and perhaps be able to avoid the Hun, and return through the underground to fly and fight again.



After several minutes, I increased power to 42 inches of manifold pressure and 2,450rpm, this power setting permitted me to maintain an air speed of approximately 115 mph, but we continued to lose altitude. We were still in the general vicinity of the target, but things were not all that bad; so why bail out now, when we might land in unfriendly hands, when perhaps we could get a little further from the target, where we might receive kinder and more helpful treatment from the local inhabitants. A quick check of the maps revealed that we were about 50 miles west-north-west of the Rumanian city of Bucharist. It might be possible to nurse our wounded Fortress a little closer to the western boundary of Rumania and Bulgaria, perhaps even to the eastern foothills of the Coastal mountain range of Yugoslavia, where friendly Chetniks or Partisans might save us from the POW fate.

By now our altitude was approximately 1,500 feet above the ground, and I added maximum power (47 inches of manifold pressure and 2,550 rpm) on numbers 1 and 3 engines to maintain level flight, with the air speed only slightly above a stall. A closer check of the maps revealed that the Fort would be required to climb at least 2,000 feet to cross the eastern foothills of the Coastal mountain range, and at least 6,000 feet to cross the Coastal range itself,—I knew this was impossible—The two operating engines were long over-stressed, and could fail at any time.

The moment of decision with respect to bail-out, crash landing, or continue the flight was rapidly approaching; I must decide before reaching the eastern foothills, and within 30 minutes we would be at those foothills.

In order to lighten the load, I ordered the crew to throw everything not absolutely needed for flight overboard. This included the 1,200 pound ball turret with its twin 50's, reserve ammunition, flak suits, technical orders, radios, master compass, and anything that could be broken or ripped off was tossed out. The crew accomplished this in short order, and with the decrease in weight, the Fort flew better, and I reduced engine power slightly. Even though we were still flying, I knew full well that at any moment either engine number 1 or 3 could fail, and with only one engine operating, would result in an immediate semi-controlled crash landing or bail-out. If it were just myself I would stick with it, but I had eight others to be concerned about.

I knew that the engines could not withstand these high power settings indefinitely, and, after evaluating all of the circumstances, it became painfully clear that the situation was hopeless; to continue the flight defied all logical and rational thought. My fighting spirit and "will to win" began to fade. I realized full well that when I activated the bail-out switch, our contribution as a crew, to the Allied victory in Europe would be over, and we would become a liability to our country instead of an asset. How I hated that thought and the thought of becoming a POW of the Krauts.

During these moments of extreme personal stress, I am sure that I asked for divine guidance, and, as the eastern foothills of the Coastal mountain range appeared over the astrodome on the top of the Fort's nose, the most unusual event that I have ever experienced occurred; — the crew all had their radio headset jackbox set to the interphone position (except the radio operator), this would shut out all other communication noise, and permit instant inter-plane conversation. However, over my headset, and I presumed the headsets of the entire crew, loud and clear came the most beautiful and inspiring symphonic music and choral voices I have ever heard:

*"O BEAUTIFUL FOR SPACIOUS SKIES, FOR  
AMBER WAVES OF GRAIN..... FOR PURPLE  
MOUNTAIN MAJESTIES ABOVE THE FRUITED  
PLAIN!..... AMERICA, AMERICA, GOD SHED HIS  
GRACE ON THEE..... AND CROWN THY GOOD  
WITH BROTHERHOOD.....FROM SEA TO  
SHINING SEA!"*

As if by magic, my fighting spirit and "will to win" snapped back. I could feel the hair on the back of my neck bristle, then with tears of

courage, pride, and patriotism swelling my eyes, I informed the crew that we were returning to our base in Italy, to man the guns protecting our flanks, top, front and rear; for the navigator to find the lowest passes through the mountains, that the copilot and I would nurse the great ship up narrow valleys, across mountain ridges (occasionally with the help of wing flaps, which increased lift and reduced the stall speed), across small towns and farms (I could see the faces of people looking up), at altitudes of 50 feet or less. I have no recollection as to what altitude we reached as we passed over the crest of the Coastal mountain range, I was too busy keeping her flying. I know we just made it by the skin of our teeth. I can recall in my mind's eye of seeing a huge rock about the size of an average house at our flight level. We had been pulling maximum engine power (47 inches of manifold pressure and 2,550 rpm's) for nearly 2 hours, and after crossing the crest of the Coastal range, I reduced power as we descended the western slope of the range, heading toward the Adriatic Sea and our home base in Italy.

The distance from the crest of the Coastal mountains to the Adriatic Sea was about 50 miles, and from the coast of Yugoslavia to landfall in Italy was an additional 135 miles, then from landfall to our base near the city of Foggia was another 20 miles, so we still had about 200 miles to go, which equated to about 1 hour and fifty minutes at 115 miles per hour.— Another decision, to attempt crossing the Adriatic Sea or belly the Fort in along the coast. Both options were a gamble. The two operating engines had long outlived their useful life, and to call on them again for at least another hour and half seemed unreasonable; but then again, to belly it in on some unknown beach had its drawbacks too, since I didn't even know if there was a beach suitable for a safe controlled belly landing.

I decided to continue on across the Adriatic Sea toward Italy, and I was confident that if ditching was necessary, our crew could handle it as they handled other adversities on this particular mission. As we crossed the coastline enroute to Italy, I permitted the Fort to descend to somewhere less than 50 feet above the water, and added power to maintain level flight at about 115 mph; since I was well within the ground effect (which greatly reduces the induced drag of the aircraft), I was able to reduce power to 40 inches of manifold pressure and 2,400 rpm's. Both engines appeared to be operating smoothly. However, all of the crew were in their ditching position, because if one of the engines had failed, we would be ditching within 1 minute.

The low level flight across the Adriatic was uneventful, and in a little over 1 hour we sighted land, and at landfall, we continued straight toward our base at not above 50 feet altitude. When we contacted "Sandfly tower" we were cleared to land "straight in", and about 1 mile out on the final approach I called for "landing gear down". I was committed to land whether the landing gear was down or not; the main landing gear came down, but, unknown to me, the tail wheel did not extend, but the faithful tail gunner, Sgt. Don Blankenship observed this, and began cranking it down manually, and just seconds before we touched down, he had completed the job. As I recall I made a good landing. As soon as speed permitted, I pulled the great bird off of the runway, and told Todd to cut the engines. A jeep quickly stopped in front of the Fort, in it was our Squadron Commander, Major Schaffier, who had led the mission to Ploesti that day. He looked up at me and said "I knew you'd make it".

We briefly examined the damaged Fort, it was really shot up, and the two engines that brought us home were totally worn out. The propellers could be wobbled back and forth, and as I recall, the faithful

***My apologies for the reduced type size on this and the next page and some earlier in the text. We didn't have enough copy for 40 pages and too much for 36 pages. Please use your magnifying glass if necessary.***

**Roy Worthington**



Fortress would be scrapped. It was indeed a noble and great airplane, one to which I probably owe my life. Philosophically speaking, this great bird had returned a fine air crew back to its operational base, where through them, the great old Fortress would continue to fight the Germans.

Prior to dismissing the crew, I made the comment "wasn't that great music we heard over in Rumania? To which they replied -- what music? -- I said nothing more to anyone about hearing "America The Beautiful" when we were deep in enemy territory (or they might have locked me up in a mental ward), however, I am certain I heard it; or, had some power greater than all of us, taken me by the hand and guided my every thought and act during those most stressful hours of my life? Because you see, it was virtually impossible, from an engineering point of view, to climb over mountains and sustain flight for over 4 hours, pulling maximum power (2550 rpm and 47 inches of manifold pressure) on only two engines!

As I passed the Operations Office en route to my tent, I checked the bulletin board, and my crew was not scheduled to fly tomorrow, so at my tent, I poured a couple helmet liners full of water over my head and body, dried off with a GI towel, ate some rations, climbed into my mesquite netted cot, and went to sleep, still proud and happy; there is no place I would rather have been that day, than right there, doing what I did best in this war -- fighting the Hun, and assisting, in some small, but direct way, in hindering the Hun's ability to wage war by the destruction of his oil producing capability with strategic daylight bombing.

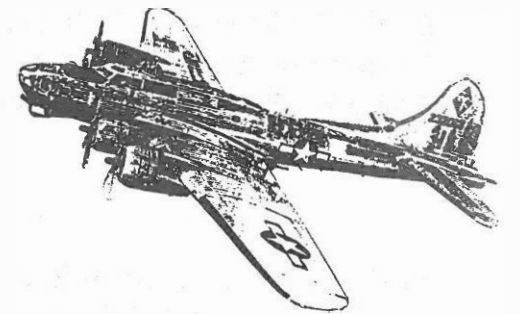
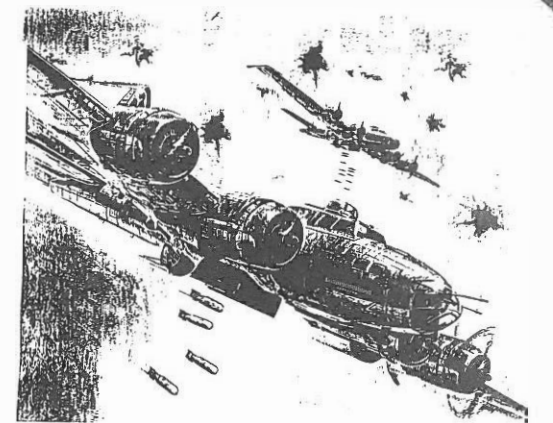
I was awakened during the wee hours of the next morning by a subconscious thought that had bothered me since I had preflighted the Fort for yesterday's mission to Ploesti. This thought was: why had numbers 2 and 4 engines failed and numbers 1 and 3 continued to function, even though terribly abused for over 4 hours en route back from Ploesti? Somewhere in that thought was a message, a constructive message, and I had to sort it out before I could sleep.

During the inspection of the aircraft maintenance record (the Form 1), prior to takeoff, the flight time on the engines had impressed me; numbers 2 and 4 (the engines that had failed) had somewhere over 600 hours on them, and engines number 1 and 3 (the engines that did not fail) had in the vicinity of 100 hours. Then the entire picture began to fall in place for me. Remembering that number 4 did not start easily and that its oil pressure was abnormally low, and its oil temperature abnormally high, but both within safe operating range, and during the climb to 28,000 feet, their pressures and temperatures continued toward the unacceptable range, with number 4 spewing oil all over and around its nacelle, and catching fire. Number 2 had quit, without any warning, while on the bomb run, and shortly after having its power increased, to make up for a power reduction on number 4; both numbers 2 and 4 failed within a 5 minute critical time period, which without a lot of Irish luck, guts and skill, would have cost our country a highly trained combat air crew.

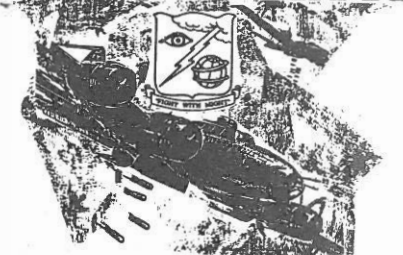
My sleepy conclusion: Anytime during the preflight inspection by the pilot, he observes the total engine time to be in excess of 450 hours, that, en route back home from the mission, and when within a safe distance (50 miles), that he increase power on the other three engines, then turn the electronic turbo supercharger up to position "8", open the throttle on that particular engine to 47 inches of manifold pressure, then push the propeller control down to 1,200 rpm, and within 2 minutes -- "pow" -- (the engine explodes), then button it up (feather the prop) and drive home. This practice was used by many of our pilots, and it was perhaps the best kept secret of WW2.

The ground maintenance personnel did not establish any records for "the most number of combat hours on an engine", and we fly boys felt terrible about that, but our crews and aircraft came back to fly again, and, we continued to pound those Nazi bastards until there were no more targets to strike, and the war in Europe was history.

JOHN PLUMMER



**99TH BOMB GROUP**



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### NEW MEMBERS

Courtney A. Abbott, Box 485, Elyria, OH 44036  
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Thomas M. Shive, 12348 Avenue Consentido, San Diego, CA 92128  
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### ADDRESS CHANGES

Bert Kempt, 508 North Boundary, Chapel Hill, NC 27514  
Paul W. Capen, 3481 Carnelian Lane, Oceanside, CA 92056  
Bill Meux, 449 Hillabee Drive, Montgomery, AL 36117



### CORRECTION

*In the previous issue we carried an item concerning the P-51 fighter escort we frequently had for our missions. The organization was known as CHECKERTAILS (the 325th Fighter Group) an all white organization. Some of our members thought we were referring to the 99th Squadron (the Redtails) an all black organization. We were from time to time adequately protected by the 99th Redtails, however.*

### SPECIAL REQUEST

Please remember that we would like to make our NOVEMBER Newsletter dedicated to the single aircraft missions that we flew 50 years ago. Please send your stories to Bernie Barr, 7408 Vista Del Arroyo, Albuquerque, NM 87109 so I can include your stories in the that issue. ... Bernie

