The

Military Career

Of

HORACE MELTON MEACOMES, SR.

Bailey, North Carolina

May 28, 1943 - October 28, 1945

Eighth Air Force
445th Bomb Group
B-24 Crew Member

Asbestos Alice

445th
Bomb Group
Insignia

PREFACE
TO
MILITARY SECTION

There have been many situations in which military personnel have either failed or refused to talk about their experiences. This can be well understood, because there are many things that can happen under combat conditions that are not pleasant. Some of these experiences have such profound influences on our lives that we find that we should not dwell on them. However, it is not fair to our children and grandchildren that we wait until it is too late to tell them who we are (or were).

To that end, I have decided that it is time to put some thoughts, ideas, and especially some history of my life into words that they may keep and study. If they are not interested, then I still have not wasted my time. It has been a release for me to be able to relive some of the experiences, and especially to remember some of the fun times and the people whose lives touched mine.

At this time, generally considered to the the fiftieth anniversary of those World War II experiences, it has been good to reflect upon a segment of my life that covered about two and one half years. I met some very fine people. They were part of my life, and therefore a part of me. I am glad to say that those close relationships have continued to exist through the years.

I have access to, and have relied heavily on five diaries that were kept by members of our bomber crew. It has been interesting to note that they are so similar. Each member saw his surroundings from a different perspective, but the greatest disparities I found in the diaries only amounted to five hundred feet difference in bombing altitude, or five degrees difference in temperature over the target. It lends proof that whatever was said was accurate. It is also a testimony to the dedication of one of the best crews in the Army Air Force. I want to thank them for keeping these diaries and making them available.

To my children, grandchildren, or whoever, I hope that this work can be an inspiration to do and attain greater things than I did. However, the more important thing is to dwell on the things that are uplifting, those things that we hope will make this world a better place for those who follow us. We saw so many proofs that God was with us during those months of combat. Let us not forget that He must have had a special purpose for us then and later. As a descendant, you could be part of that purpose.

MILITARY CAREER

In the spring of 1943 I was attending Duke University as a freshman, and was not doing too well academically. I guess that there were several reasons for that. First, it was a tremendous jump from Bailey High School to Duke. About the only qualifying background I had was in English. At least Bailey did have a good English teacher and Business teacher. At Duke a large number of students were from New York and other places where they had already studied most of the freshman courses in high school. The professors graded on a curve, leaving those of us who were already struggling at the bottom of the grade level. There was a third deterrent - the Selective Service System.

The law provided that all males register for the draft on their eighteenth birthday. My situation was pretty typical of the times. I registered on March 15, 1943, and two months and five days later I had already been called up, examined, and sworn into the Army. Actually, I had begged for and received a deferment to try to finish out a semester in order for me to delay enlistment that long. The orders for induction, even then, were before the end of the semester, and I had to take my final exams and leave before the term was actually over.

I reported to the Nash County Draft Board in Spring Hope, N. C., where we boarded one of the wartime busses built like a tractor-trailer. We went directly to Fort Bragg to the Induction Center. About the first thing that we did after arrival was to divest ourselves of all of our worldly possessions. That means totally everything from the skin out. The rest of the day was spent in going from one type of examination to another, until we finally arrived at the end of the line.

It was an interesting and educational experience. At Duke I had been in a swimming class where bathing attire was prohibited, and I had become somewhat accustomed to nudity. However, this was ridiculous. Everyone lost his timidity before the day was over though.

I did not know whether or not to be proud of the results of the exam. My papers that had accompanied me through the day did not have a red mark on them, indicating that they had found nothing to keep me from being rushed on through. We were asked in which branch of service we wanted to serve. I asked for the Air Corps Medical Branch, and was informed that there were no openings. Then I asked for the Coast Guard, and was given the same answer. I then asked what was available and was told that only the Infantry needed men at the time.

Before we were even allowed to find our clothes, we were sworn in, and were informed that we were now in the Army. At that time, each enlistee was allowed seven days to get his business in order and report back. We were taken home on the same bus and began that last week of freedom.

Upon returning to Fort Bragg, we were assigned to a replacement pool, awaiting shipment to a basic training center. We were given our Quartermaster issue of clothing and assigned to a kitchen police detail. That only lasted one day, however, because three barracks of men awaiting shipment to Air Corps basic training had to be quarantined for measles. We substituted for them and shipped out to Keesler Air Force Base, Biloxi Mississippi.

Keesler Field in June and July is a very hot, humid place. We spent almost every day on the drill field, either doing calisthenics or close order drill. We also spent considerable time on the obstacle course. It was so hot that we had a lot of men pass out. The humidity was such that our clothes did not dry out during the night, nor did our beds dry out from our nightly perspiration during the day. Many times I was too sick to eat - especially lunch. This was also the time that we were given all of the inoculations that the military requires.

Toward the end of our stay at Keesler, we were given I. Q. tests. We were an unusually illiterate group. Most of us were from the mountains of North Carolina and West Virginia, and there were quite a few who could not even read and write. I was one of the fortunate few, and had to help others with their correspondence. All who scored over 115 on the I. Q. test were then sent to Auburn Polytechnical Institute, in Auburn, Alabama for more testing. A few of us who excelled there were ordered to attend the Army Specialized Training Program.

My ASTP assignment was to Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York. We asked our commanding officer why we were there, but he could never give a definite answer. Pratt is an institute of art and engineering. We were taking the engineering course. Actually everyone started as a freshman, no matter what his previous experience had been, and started us on a doubly accelerated college course. We covered two semesters in the time usually allotted to one. We had courses in English, French, History, Algebra, Trigonometry, Physics, Chemistry, Mechanical Drawing, and many others. We did not get any art, except that there were more girls there than soldiers and civilian boys altogether. We were kept so busy that we did not have much time to even see the girls. After one semester, we were shipped out to BTC 10, Greensboro, N. C. for reassignment.

Basic Training Center 10 was one of those temporary wartime camps that was built in the City Dump at Greensboro. It was composed almost entirely of tarpaper buildings. We were there in December 1943, when we experienced one of the coldest winters on record. We were put through many of the same rigors of basic training that we had at Keesler, except that we were blue with cold instead of suffering from heat exhaustion. While we were there we had freezing rain and the ground was covered with ice for several days. During the Christmas season we were not allowed out of the camp, even though I could have made it home easily for Christmas Day.

This was the first time that I was given a choice of anything in the military. We were asked what kind of school we wanted to go to. I selected aircraft engineering. A few days later I was on a troop train headed west. About five days later we were awakened at daybreak and told to prepare to disembark. We were at Lowry Air Force Base at Denver Colorado - an Aircraft Armament School. For about three weeks we pulled K. P. duty in one of the largest mess halls I ever saw. It was built like a hangar and served everyone on the base, including WACS and prisoners. We started at four o`clock in the morning and worked until about nine at night. We served three days out of every five. The other two days were spent on the drill field.

Lowry was where we stayed, but we marched through ice and snow every day around the end of the runways to Buckley Field for our Armament School. I enjoyed this school. We learned about all types of aircraft armament. We had some basic training in electricity, hydraulics, and anything that had to do with operating armament. We wired bombays in different types of bombers, installed thirty and fifty caliber machine guns, and twenty, thirty-seven, and seventy-five millimeter cannon in noses and wings of several types of aircraft. We synchronized those that fired through the propeller, and boresighted to align those that were installed in the wings

We studied all types of gun turrets - electric, hydraulic, and electro-hydraulic. They included Bendix, Sperry, and Martin. We learned to adjust them, make minor repairs, and install gun cutout mechanisms to avoid firing through props and rudders. We spent a lot of time learning to do detail stripping, reassembling and adjusting the fifty caliber Browning Automatic Machine Gun blindfolded. Much time was also spent on aircraft recognition.

Again I was asked where I wanted to go upon completion of the Armament School. Since most of us were from the east coast and had had enough of the frigid west, we said we wanted to go to Fort Myers, Florida to Aircraft Gunnery School. This time our request was granted, and we left Lowry on May 10, 1944 wading through about eight

inches of snow in arctic boots, and wool uniforms including overcoats.

Before we arrived at Fort Myers, every man on the train had stripped down to nothing but shoes and undershorts. It was a drastic change from dry cold to humid heat. For about two weeks we did detail work about the base until time for our class to start. One of the details I remember most vividly was the bedbug detail. I was marched into an area of barracks that had just been vacated. The sergeant gave half of us flit guns and said to work in pairs killing bedbugs. Any questions? I asked what did a bedbug look like. He took us inside and rolled the edge of a mattress back. There were bedbugs end to end from one end of the mattress to the other. Now I know. Buckingham Field was rather isolated, so we did not get much chance to see Fort Myers

At Buckingham, every day was spent being lectured about the use of guns, turrets, aircraft recognition, and anything that could possibly confront a gunner. Part of every day was spent on one or more firing ranges. We began by firing 22 caliber rifles at moving targets in a large gallery. We then went to twelve gauge shot guns firing singles on a skeet range. Then we went to double skeet, followed by mobile skeet, in which we fired at moving skeet targets from the back of a truck running thirty miles per hour. There were various ranges where shotguns were mounted in turrets and we fired at clay pigeons being shot from high towers. We fired about a case of shells per man each day.

At the same time we were firing thirty and fifty caliber automatic guns from mounts, and from every kind of turret available. Some targets were stationary while others were on rail cars. In mockups, we fired electronic beams from turrets at moving pictures of attacking fighters. We also fired from hand held and turret mounted guns in B-17 bombers over the Gulf of Mexico. There our targets were either air to ground or sleeve targets pulled by B-26 bombers which were piloted by women.

In August 1945 I left Florida on a delay en route for Topeka, Kansas. It was good to get home for a change, even if it was for only a short visit. At Topeka, all records were processed again, and within a very few days my name came up on shipping orders. I had been assigned to bomber crew, but I did not know any of the members. Since all military shipping was top secret, we did not learn our destination until after we were on the train. We were then given the names of all of the bomber crews, so we went through the train trying to find members of the crew to which we had been assigned. We were headed for Boise, Idaho.

At Boise, we learned to live together and to work as a crew. We still attended lectures,

went to firing ranges, and continued aircraft recognition. Here we did a lot of flying. We had missions which were programmed to give exercises to all members of the crew. There were actual firing missions with ammunition, but some were done with cameras when attacked by actual fighter planes. We dropped practice bombs, and flew missions on various cities which we bombed with cameras. Every member of the crew was required to check out in every other position on the plane. Therefore each man actually flew the plane. Even the pilot checked out as tail gunner. Mainly, we learned each other as crew members and learned to use our equipment efficiently. It was a bonding experience in both.

My position on the plane was the lower ball turret. On a B-24, the Sperry ball turret is retracted into the plane for landing, and lowered outside the plane for defensive use. It was thirty-six inches in diameter, and contained two fifty caliber machine guns, 1250 rounds of 50 Caliber ammunition, an automatic computing gunsight, and a 155 pound man who had on four suits of clothes, a parachute, and harness. It was not a place for a claustrophobic. However, as the Armorer Gunner, I was all over the plane. It was my duty to pull and/or replace fuse pins in bombs, and make repairs and adjustments to any other armament. I was the one usually called upon when any crew member had a malfunction with heated suits or oxygen.

From Boise, we went to Wichita, Kansas where we got all of our last minute physical exams, immunizations (including tetanus, typhus, cholera, typhoid, yellow fever, and small pox, all at one standing), and a new issue of Army Air Corps equipment. This included flying clothing, parachute harness, boots, parkas, escape equipment, and side arms. We were informed that as soon as we completed our processing, we could leave the base for about four days. I could not make it home due to wartime travel restrictions and bad connections, so my parents met me in Chicago, at the home of one of my crew members. We had a wonderful visit, but a somewhat sad one, because they knew that we were leaving almost immediately.

We shipped out from Wichita and headed for Camp Miles Standish, Massachusetts, near Boston. We were only there about three days, during which time we were not allowed to call home for security reasons. We boarded the troop ship, the USS Mt. Vernon, and headed east. After about five days, running without escort, we arrived at Liverpool, England. We entrained there for some girl`s school nearby to spend the night. The next morning we were ordered into formation, where we were told that our shot records had been lost. We had to line up and get all six shots again. I was never without my own personal shot record after that.

Shafer`s crew, as we were known, was assigned to the 445th Bomb Group at Tibbenham Air Base, at Tivetshal Station in northeast England. We were to replace some of the crews lost when the 445th sent thirty-one planes on a raid to Kassel, Germany and lost twenty-seven of them. There was not much equipment left that was flyable, but what there was got a real workout. Many of the planes were left over from the African Campaign, and still wore the desert camouflage paint. Most of them had many patches and even whole new sections that had been canibalized from other planes. Before VE Day, we had B-24`s in our formations from Model D to Model M.

Our base was located in northeast England, about six miles from Diss, and about fifteen miles from Norwich. It was not a modern base by any means, but was a deserted Royal Air Force Base, forced into wartime use. There were practically no permanent buildings. Most of the operation buildings, mess halls, chapels, and theater were Quonset huts. That was a round top metal building, like one half of a large corrugated culvert. The barracks were mostly one story tarpaper buildings. As is usual with air bases, it was a rambling affair, but this had civilian homes, pastures, and cultivated fields mixed in. Cows grazed beside our barracks, and crops grew up near the runways.

When we first arrived, we stayed for a few days in an old building that had once served as a mess hall. Later we were given a small building that had once been a shower room. This building was superior to the tarpaper ones in that it was made of cement blocks, with a metal roof. The first morning we woke up and had to brush the snow off our bunks. We found a pick and broke up some frozen mud, thawed it, and used it to seal newsprint in the open ventilators that ran the entire length of the roof. Our home housed eighteen men, the enlisted men from three crews. We had a tiny coke stove to heat it with, and after insulating as best we could, it was fairly comfortable. I painted a sign to go over the door giving our hut the name "Stand Down". Stand Down was the order usually given to indicate no flying, due to weather or other conditions. The sign pictured a B-24 bomber with a large ship`s anchor on a line, holding it back from flying.

We were given a ration of coal of ten pounds per man, per week. It was delivered by a dump truck which drove into the area and dumped the ration for the whole area in a pile. Anyone who was away on a mission at that hour missed out on the ration for that week. We readily solved the problem by briefing for a mission of the coal stockpile nearby. It was surrounded by a concrete wall, topped with barbed wire. Two men left the barracks late at night with wire cutters and a duffel bag. At designated intervals, two more men would leave with an empty bag, pick up a full one and return. After a few trips, we did not worry about rationing. We stored it in the rafters of the building.

Inspections were few and far between.

We did not fly every day. If we were posted for a mission, we would be awakened about one o`clock in the morning. We went to the mess hall, about a quarter mile away for breakfast. It always consisted of two sunny side eggs. This may not sound like much, but these combat crews were the only ones who got real eggs, and then they were only available before a mission (like the condemned man`s last meal). We then went to the briefing room, another quarter mile walk. There the mission was announced and described. There was a large map showing the entire mission, checkpoints, target, secondary targets, and other data. This was followed by more specific briefings for individuals with special needs, like the pilots, navigator, radio operator, etc.

The gunners all went to their dressing room and donned electric heated suits, flying suits, harness, and parachute. We also picked up emergency gear that we had stowed, and caught a truck for the opposite side of the base to the ordinance shack. There we found the gun guts for the 50 caliber guns for the plane we were to fly. Even though the last person to use these guns had detail cleaned them, we cleaned them again. One drop of moisture in the mechanism could freeze up the whole gun and make it useless. We then hopped another truck which took us and our guns to the plane which was parked on a concrete hardstand.

By the time the pilot and others finished their additional briefings, we had installed all of the guns, done the preflight inspection of the plane, and had run through the propellers to circulate the oil before cranking. The duties of the crew were never cut and dried to certain details. Everyone worked together to see that everything was done. When the pilot arrived, his next concern was to start the engines and taxi out.

Takeoff time was determined by the time that one could see from one end of the runway to the other. Northeast England is famous for those fogs that roll in from the North Sea, so at times the departure time was indefinite. We assembled over the base area by flying in a circle until all the planes were up and in their designated slot in the formation. Then it was time to head east over the English Channel.
One of my jobs as Armorer Gunner was to go into the bombay about the time we cleared land and pull all of the safety pins in the bomb fuses. This would let them arm themselves so that they would explode upon contact. Then I returned to the right waist position to man a 50 caliber gun. I was thankful that in this outfit, we did not use the lower ball turrets, and removed them from the plane altogether. The planes in the formation flew so close together, we could defend each other`s underside. This eliminated a lot of weight and made a lot of ball turret gunners happy.

Every crew member aside from any other designation, is an observer. We had to constantly observe one another once we were on oxygen, to make sure that the supply never failed and caused the member to pass out. We had to observe the entire operation of our plane during flight, to call attention to any malfunction. We took pictures of bomb strikes for verification of accuracy and success of the strikes. Most important, however was to be constantly alert for enemy aircraft. They had many sneaky ways of slipping into a formation through vapor trails or directly from the sun. They had jet fighters long before we did, and they could be upon a formation almost before they were spotted.

I flew twenty-two missions. I do not plan to go into details of them here. A complete tour of duty was thirty missions, but we did such a good job that the war ended before we could get thirty. On the first mission, we were off the ground and were in the circle, getting into formation. There were many other bomb groups doing the same thing over about a two county area, their flight patterns overlapping. Naturally I was all eyes at the enormity of it all, when all of a sudden I saw a B-24 go down. Within another minute or two a B-17 went down. No one got out of either, they were so close to the ground. They had been caught in the prop-wash of other formations, thrown off balance, and were unable to recover before crashing into the ground. I then wondered, "What kind of crazy outfit have I gotten into?"

V E Day, in May I945 came with all its celebrations. We did our celebrating on our base. There were fireworks at night along with free beer in one of the hangars. Rumors were rampant as to our next move. We were told that we should get ready to go east to assist in what was left of the war in the Pacific area. Then suddenly, orders came through to have the base packed and ready to go to the States in about three days. That was one time when not one person was heard to complain about scrubbing, packing, or whatever else he was assigned to do.

We flew from our base to Wales, where we spent one night. There we transferred from the Eighth Air Force to the Air Transport Command. We had our nine crew members, eleven ground crew members, and two dogs in our plane. We had made a platform in the bombay to hold all of the luggage. We flew from Wales to Iceland, where we landed and were fed about the middle of the afternoon. We kept waiting for night to come so that we could go to bed, but finally learned about two A. M. that the sun was not going to set. The next morning, we headed for Greenland. There we saw icebergs in the bay at the foot of the runway. Weather fronts between us and the States prevented our leaving the next morning, so we spent two nights. This was the first popcorn we had seen since leaving the States.

We flew without incident to Bradley Field, Windsor Locks, Connecticut. It was a little sad, because we left our plane there, and saw it for the last time. They fed us all of the milk we could drink, but told that as we were not accustomed to milk, it would make us sick. It did bother some who overdid.

Those of us who lived in the Carolina area were sent directly to Fort Bragg to get some new clothes and begin a thirty-day recuperation leave. That was good. After the leave we went to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where the 8th and 15th Air Forces reassembled. We had been told that we would go to the Pacific area from there, but suddenly they informed us that they did not want us any more. We tried to volunteer as a seasoned combat crew, in order to keep the crew together, but they would not allow it. The base was so crowded that there was hardly enough food to go around, so many of us worked in the oat fields, helping the farmers by shocking the oats after they were bound. The farmers fed us well.

I was shipped out to Las Vegas. There we were just waiting out the last few days of the War, and were there on V J Day. I was among a few who were transferred to Indian Springs, Nevada, about forty miles into the desert between Las Vegas and Death Valley. There I was temporarily assigned to the Military Police for about a month.

After V J Day, it was time to begin demobilizing the troops. We were in the Army, but the discharge centers set up by the Army would not discharge us. I was in a group sent to Wichita Falls, Texas, to help in setting up a separation center for Army Air Force personnel. The first day we worked, we discharged six men. Within a couple of weeks, we were processing several hundred each day. I had helped train men from the basic training center to do our jobs, and since I had enough points to get out, I discharged myself. This was on October 28, 1945, two and one half years after I was drafted.

It has been said many times, but I shall repeat it. It was a real experience worth a million dollars, but I wouldn`t go through it again for two million.

Shafer Shook Overstake Gregorich

Howell Reed McLaughlin Paone Cassinari Meacomes

MEET THE CREW

In September 1944, a group of men from various and sundry places were assigned to work together as a bomber crew in the U. S. Army Air Corps. These men had many different talents, having attended schools around the country. They were assembled at Lincoln, Nebraska, preparatory to being formed into crews. I was one of those men. Here is how it happened, and who they were.

I had attended an Aircraft Armament School at Lowry Air Force Base and Buckley Field, Denver, Colorado. Then I went to Aircraft Gunnery School at Buckingham Air Force Base, Fort Myers, Florida. My expertise was in armament. As an armorer gunner, I was familiar with guns, turrets, bomb racks, and anything pertaining to their use, temporary repair, or adjustment.

At Lincoln, we were examined physically, again, after having already been through pressure chamber tests, night blindness tests, and about everything else imaginable. Then, after a few days, we received shipping orders. We boarded a troop train headed west, and were informed the name of the pilot of the crew to which we had been assigned. This was the first indication we had of who our associates would be for the rest of the war. It was up to us as individuals to roam through the train cars to try to find other members of the crew.

I never did learn until many years later just how this "random" selection of men came about. It blew my faith in random selection processes. Tom Shafer found that he had a high school acquaintance working in the office that made the crew assignments. He coerced this acquaintance to screen all of the prospective crew members, and make up a special crew for him. He says that selection was made of the pick of men coming from the various specialty schools - those who made the highest grades and showed the most promise. I must admit that this random selection worked out to a good advantage, because there was not a crew that was more diverse in nature, but there was not one that was able to work better as a team. Maybe Tom had an insight that we did not know about. Maybe his friend was put in that position for a reason.

We wondered many times why we were combined into this one unit. Was there a Master Plan somewhere that placed us together at this particular place and time? As we look back at the many instances that we can recall when we were spared; when everyone else else in the formation was shot full of holes, when someone else flying in our slot in the formation was shot down, when a protective shield seemed to appear around our plane like an aura of light in the middle of a barrage of flak, when the

antiaircraft shell that was meant for us turned out to be a dud; we wonder why. Why were we singled out to be brought through without even one injury? It became so obvious, that even the other crews in the group began to take notice. For what purpose were we to be used later in life? Has that purpose been fulfilled, or is it yet to come? Most likely we shall never know the answers to these questions. We acknowledge that we were well blessed, and stand prepared to fulfill whatever that purpose may be.

As the troop train chugged its way west that first day, we found those other nine men who were to be our future family. They were a strange looking lot at first, but it did not take us long to begin to realize how close a bomber family can become. The time spent in training us to operate as a crew in Boise, Idaho, was well worthwhile. It brought all of the specialties together and made them a working team.

Thomas A. Shafer was the pilot. He was from Pennsylvania, one of the small towns near Pittsburgh. He was the commanding officer of the crew, and felt his position and responsibility. Later, after some harrowing experiences, he admitted to being the most useless man on the crew. He became, not the tyrannical leader that we saw in other crews, but one of our family. He bore the responsibility for everything, but never let his disappointments filter down on the crew members.

Richard H. Shook, the co-pilot, was from Evanston, Illinois. He was married to a cute little bobby-soxer. Peggy followed us out to Boise and stayed there for the duration of the overseas training. Dick had trained for and wanted to be a fighter pilot, but Uncle Sam did not always ask us what we wanted to be.

The Navigator, Bob Overstake, was from Wichita, Kansas. Bob was a quiet individual who went about his work without fuss or bother. He endeared himself to the crew when during our cross country training, he brought us from Elko, Nevada, through the clouds and down out of the cloud about 150 feet directly over the runway at Boise, Idaho. He was good at what he did.

The Bombardier trained with us in Boise, but did not go overseas with us. In the Eighth Air Force, missions were flown in tight formations of about twenty-seven bombers to a group. They did pattern bombing and only required a lead bombardier and a secondary lead for each group. All of the planes dropped their bombs on signal from the lead. The man we had was extremely good, however, and could have made us proud overseas. He could drop a practice bomb in a haystack from ten thousand feet.
Our Engineer was Edward E. Cassinari, from New Britain, Connecticut. He was married at the time, but his wife did not follow us. Cass is Italian, and as such was

always the lively one - always kept something going. His duties as engineer were to assist the pilot and co-pilot on takeoff and landing, to supply the auxiliary power at proper times, and to transfer fuel. He also operated the upper gun turret, a Martin.

Darrell E. Reed, from Cherokee, Iowa, was our radio operator. Darrell was also married, and his wife, LaVonne came to Boise for a short time during our stay there. Darrell kept busy operating several radios, both transmitting and receiving. At other times he was busy jamming German radio stations as he found them broadcasting.

Jim McLaughlin, our nose gunner was also from Pennsylvania. Mac was considered the old man of our crew. He was in his upper twenties at the time and was the only member of the crew old enough to vote. Mac was one of those Irishmen who could find something every day of the year to celebrate. If it was not an Irish holiday, it might be Jewish. One day while overseas, he seemed unusually sad. He said that there was nothing to celebrate on that day. We told him to celebrate the fact that it was a good day. He went to the pub happily.

Richard H. Howell, the tail gunner, was a happy-go-lucky, girl crazy kid from Cincinnati, Ohio. He was extremely neat in appearance, and very conscientious about his job as tail gunner. He had to ride backwards on all of our missions, but that was where most of the fighter opposition came from.

My elbow buddy was Thomas A. Paone, the left waist gunner. Tommy was a short, Italian from Chicago, Illinois. His parents both came from Italy. He also was madly in love with some girl named Josephine. His job was to operate the fifty caliber left waist gun, but I was more proud of the other things that he did. He probably saved my life more than once, because he always watched me constantly when I was away from my station. If I gave out of oxygen while working in the bombay, he did not hand me another bottle. He came and plugged it in for me. He was the one who pulled me up out of the rear escape hatch when I tried to jump over Furth, Germany. He was the member with whom I worked most closely. He was the one with whom I could communicate without having to use the intercom system.

My job as armorer gunner required that I go into the bombay and pull all of the fuse pins after we arrived over the English Channel. This was necessary for the bombs to be armed and ready when time came for them to explode. If they were not dropped on the target, I also had to return and replace all of them so that they would not explode in the North Sea. I usually had to make a trip or two up to the nose of the plane on every mission, because someone would burn out a heated suit cord or have some other

training was successful. Not all bomber crews solved all of those problem areas.

After we had completed all of the assigned classes, exercises, and programs, it was time for us to begin to use our talents that we had been trained for. We were shipped out from Boise to Topeka, Kansas, where we went through more physical examinations, service record exams, and new quartermaster and Air Corps clothing issue, ready for the next assignment - overseas.

TRIP OVERSEAS

In early December, 1944, after having been thoroughly processed for shipment overseas at Topeka, Kansas, our bomber crew was shipped to Camp Miles Standish, in Massachusetts to await the shipping date. Since this was during the wartime years, everything was a deep dark secret. We had not been informed anything about our destination, but arriving in the Boston area gave us a hint that it possibly could be the European Theater.

In preparation for overseas shipment, we had been exposed to training that would help if we were required to make forced landings anywhere in the world. When flying, the landing could be at sea, in jungle or desert areas, or even in the polar regions. The landing area could be inhabited by friendly people, behind enemy lines, or in completely desolate areas. We had been shown how to protect ourselves from the heat, cold, and starvation. Access to food, or at least nourishing items, included many kinds of plants, animals, and insects. None of this, however, gave us an idea of out direction of travel.

During our stay at Camp Miles Standish, we were not allowed to make many outside contacts. We did get to call home once, but I am almost sure that the calls were being censored to prevent leaks of information. It was a typical Army game of hurry up and wait.

We did arrange to get a short pass into Boston while we were there. We did not get much of a sight seeing tour of the city, but only had time to roam around down town. Some of us went to the Old Howard theater in Scollay Square. It was one of the last of a long line of burlesque theaters. We sat in the balcony, which was horse shoe shaped with the ends extending over the edge of the stage on both sides. During the show, we looked down, and there sat the remainder of the crew almost below us. There was much entertainment in progress in the balcony that detracted from what was going on on stage.

Time arrived when we were to depart, so we entrained right on the base. The train took us to the harbor in Boston and deposited us on the pier. We had very little delay between the train and the ship. Everything was scheduled for rapid action. We were already lined up in the same order as our shipping orders, so we only had to identify ourselves as we started up the gangplank.

Most of our luggage had been stored in the hold of the ship. We were allowed to carry

one small musette bag containing toilet articles and the like, and one other bag containing clothes. Naturally, we had to have gas masks with us, but those of us in the Army Air Force were allowed to store our side arms in a locked area. The Infantry troops aboard complained about this. They were required to keep their rifles with them. Our side arms were 45 caliber automatic pistols in shoulder holsters, and were easily stolen when not being worn.

The ship was the U. S. S. Mount Vernon. It had been refitted as a troop ship and had little luxury accommodation about it. There was no room for luxury, however, because beside the ships crew, there were about fourteen thousand Infantry and one thousand Air Corps troops on board. Space was precious.

Sleeping quarters for our enlisted men was on Promenade Deck, just inside the center door on the starboard side. It was a good location, motion wise, but it was still crowded. The bunks were made of canvas, sewn to a rectangular pipe that was hinged to two posts. There was a matching bunk hinged to the opposite side of these same posts. There were four more such bunks directly above the bottom one, hinged in the same manner. The vertical space between the bunks was about twelve inches. This meant that to turn over, one had to exit the bunk and re-enter already turned over. All baggage had to be stored in the bunk, because the space in the aisle between the next row of similar bunks was only about eighteen inches wide and had to be kept clear at all times.

Abandon ship drills were held every day, and sometimes more than once. Everyone had to go to their stations, wearing life vests, and be prepared to leave the ship. Security was heavy at night, because we were running in total blackout. No smoking was allowed except on deck, and none during the blackout. The smoking lamp was out from official sunset until official sunrise. Since my bunk was on the bottom, near the exit, I was placed on fire watch and had to stay awake certain hours during the night.

One night while I was on fire watch, we experienced a severe storm. The waves were so large that even a ship the size of ours was tossed around quite a bit. As I sat on the floor (deck) near my bunk, I had to lock my elbow around the post to keep from sliding across the deck. Even at that I did slide back and forth with each roll of the ship. I did not suffer more than others by having to serve fire watch, because they could not sleep either. If one went to sleep and relaxed, he soon rolled out of the bunk and hit the metal deck. From the fifth bunk, that made quite a hard landing.

Our meals were served in a galley which was about four or five decks below us. We

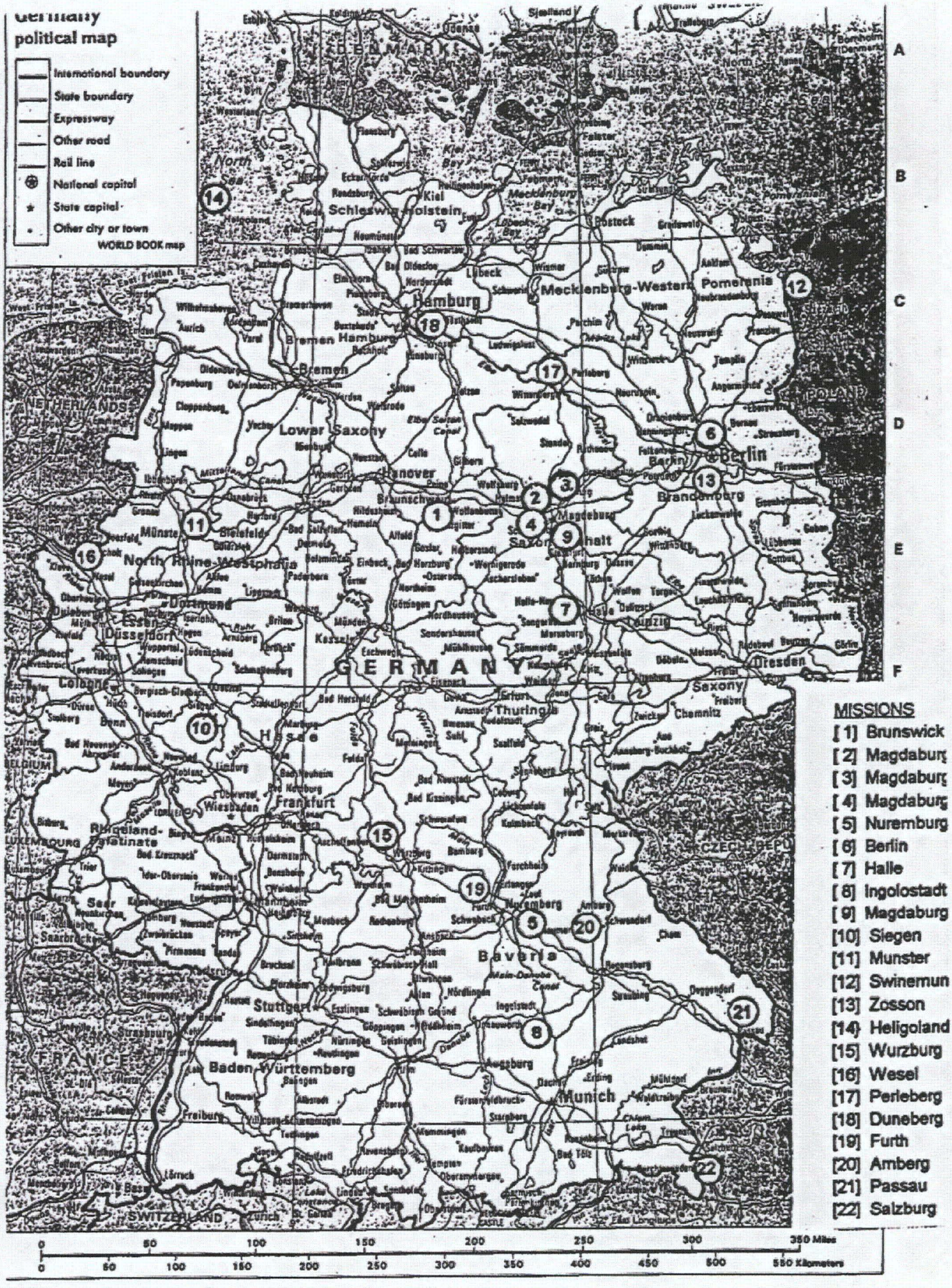
did not descend a grand staircase to get there, but had to go down something similar to an interior fire escape. It wound down to the bottom of the ship. In the galley, there were no seats. The tables were at a height for standing. They had low rails around the edge to prevent things sliding off. If the ship was rolling much, the plates would slide up and down the table. The food was not like home cooking, but we were so hungry that we could not complain too much.

One day, as we were ready to go do dinner, there were many gulls flying around the ship. We could see someone below us throwing bread out the porthole for the gulls to dive after. We thought this would be a good diversion, so we collected all the scraps we could carry and took them back up to Promenade. However, when we arrived, the gulls were gone. We deposited the garbage in a helmet hanging on the side of the bunk. During the night, I awoke so hungry that I thought I was going to be sick. Suddenly I thought of the garbage in the helmet I sneaked my hand in to see if I could find a crust of bread. The first thing I found was another hand.

What was our escort doing during all of this time? We never had any escort, except for an occasional radar plane that came from Greenland or somewhere and flew around looking for submarines. We never saw another ship. We made good speed, however, much better speed than a submarine would be able to make, and much faster than we would have if we had been in a convoy.

Bathing on a troop ship is practically nonexistent. The water supply is limited, so the only fresh water available was at drinking fountains, and canteen filling was not allowed there. The toilets were all operated with salt water. Bath soap will not lather in salt water, but will only increase the scum on unbathed skin. We had to wait until we reached England to get a hot bath. By that time, we did not smell nice.

Landing at Liverpool, we were tempted to make remarks like "Here we are, England". However, we were taught how to be good ambassadors and not say things that would detract. It was good to be back on land and ready to start on another adventure.



MISSIONS

[1] Brunswick
[2] Magdaburg
[3] Magdaburg
[4] Magdaburg
[5] Nuremburg
[6] Berlin
[7] Halle
[8] Ingolostadt
[9] Magdaburg
[10] Siegen
[11] Munster
[12] Swinemun
[13] Zosson
[14] Heligoland
[15] Wurzburg
[16] Wesel
[17] Perleberg
[18] Duneberg
[19] Furth
[20] Amberg
[21] Passau
[22] Salzburg

FIRST BOMBING MISSION

Our first bombing mission over Germany was to Brunswick. We were all excited and scared, because this was like a test - the culmination of all the intensive training that we had endured. Naturally we were all eyes and ears, wanting to see everything and keep up with what was going on.

This was on Wednesday, January 31, 1945. In northeastern England, it is very cold. The prevailing wind is from the northeast, off of the North Sea. It produces a heavy fog when it comes over land. This fog often freezes on the trees and falls to the ground to wait for the same occurrence the next night. The result is an accumulation under the trees that looks like it has snowed. It also, when persistent, prevents the takeoff and landing of aircraft. It was very dangerous to fly when there were thousands of planes in the area unless visibility was good. We therefore had been scheduled for missions earlier, but they had been scrubbed because of weather. We saw many days when there was no sun.

The usual custom was to awaken crews that were scheduled to fly about one o`clock in the morning. That gave them time to get dressed and go to the mess hall before time for the first briefing. The mess hall was about a quarter mile from our barracks in a Quonset building. There were sunny side eggs on the mornings that we were flying. Otherwise it consisted of dry cereal, powdered milk, and powdered eggs. The cereal was in large cartons, the milk had dry lumps floating around, and the powdered eggs could be smelled most of the quarter mile before we reached the mess hall. It was almost worth the risk of flying just to be privileged to have the sunny side eggs.

The briefing room was a large room in another Quonset Hut about another quarter mile beyond the mess hall. It had a large map covering one end wall, upon which was outlined the entire mission for the day. An operations officer explained the whole mission to all of the crew members. Next we went to our dressing rooms, where our equipment was stored, and preflighted our personal gear. The electric suits, boots, and gloves had to be tested for shortages, the parachutes inspected, and all of the necessary flying gear put on.

From here, some of the crew members needed to attend additional briefings that pertained to their individual duties. The gunners rode on a truck to the far side of the base to the Ordinance Shack to locate and clean the guns that were to be used on the particular plane assigned to them for that day. No matter who cleaned the guns last night, they had to be individually cleaned again before being installed in the plane.

One particle of dirt, or one drop of moisture could freeze and cause the gun to be inoperable. That could not be allowed to happen during the mission, because temperatures of fifty below zero could be expected at high altitudes.

The gunners proceeded to the plane and installed the guns, charged them with ammunition, and checked out all of the turrets. We also did a preflight examination of the plane, inside and out. We even checked to see that the ground crews had used safety wire on the fuel tank caps. We turned the propellers a specified number of times to circulate the oil in the four engines before an attempt was made to crank them.

With the whole crew assembled and the preflight completed, we were ready to go. Usually, as soon as we could see from one end of the runway to the other it was time to take off. Since this was my first mission, I was wanting to see everything that was done, and was anxious to go. The weather was not good, so we had to take off in the rain about eight fifteen o'clock with only about one hundred yards visibility. We successfully made our take off and circled to get into formation.

We crossed the North Sea and entered the continent just above Amsterdam.We went almost to Brunswick, which is located in the north-central part of Germany. About fifteen minutes before we arrived at Brunswick, the orders came through for us to abort the mission. I never did learn the exact reason, but I assume that allied troops had entered the target area, or else the target was deemed destroyed before our group passed over. We did not go to a secondary target, but were ordered to drop our bombs in the North Sea. This necessitated going back into the bombay and replacing the fuse pins that I had previously removed from the bombs so that they would not detonate when dropped.
This was a disappointment. I felt that this was a sign of our failure after all of the time we had spent in training for this job. It seemed like such a waste not to bring the bombs back and use them again. I was to learn that they were too heavy to land the planes safely and must be jettisoned. The load consisted of five one thousand pound general purpose bombs.

Even though we did not reach the target, we got credit for this mission. We flew lead position in the low left element of the lead squadron. There was practically no antiaircraft fire and we were not attacked by enemy fighters. We were in the air for eight hours, five of which were spent on oxygen. Our altitute was 22,000 feet, and the temperature was minus thirty-five degrees.

Before we returned to our base, we learned that there was a weather front that had

completely closed our base. We were diverted to Scotland, to a Royal Air Force Base at Middleborough for the night. Upon arrival, we had to park our planes on the far side of the base. Snow was about a foot deep, so we had to walk the long way around to get to the operations building. We were not prepared for this. We did not have walking shoes nor the type of clothing to be out in a freezing drizzle.

Naturally, the base was not prepared for the influx of such a large guest list. They waited several hours before they fed us. They returned us to a recreation room to wait until they could find somewhere to bed us down. It seemed like hours later, I was called and taken to a bunk that belonged to someone who was on leave. At that stage of the game, the day had been extremely long. I did not care whose bed it was. I was just thankful for any place that was warm and dry.

The next morning we were given clearance to return to our base. It seemed almost like going home. This gives some illustration of what the weather can do to destroy the best plans anyone can make. From that moment on, we never flew a mission that we were not better prepared for contingencies. We carried our GI Shoes wired to our parachute harness. We carried emergency rations, and even extra underwear. Even if we had to bail out over enemy territory, we would have our shoes and be ready to start walking.

Howell, Meacomes, Reed, Paone, Cassinari

VISIT TO LONDON

In January of 1945, I visited London on a forty-eight hour pass. Our bomber crew was stationed in northeastern England, about eighteen miles from Norwich. This was the first pass we had been issued since arriving in the European Theater. All of us were very excited about getting off the base.

It was very cold weather, which was nothing unusual for this area. We were required to carry an overcoat, a heavy wool one, and were not allowed to get off the base without it. There were several other requirements as well. The pass did not seem to rate very high on the list of importance to the military police on the gate. They were more interested in determining that we had our gas mask, overcoat, raincoat, condoms, and prophylactic kits. All of these were considered more essential than the pass.

We boarded the train at Tivetshal Station which was near our base at Tibbenham. It was still a novelty to ride in the English type of passenger cars which had compartments with individual doors opening to the outside. We had a hard time understanding the conductor when he opened the door and announced that we were at Ipswitch and that all must change trains. He practically had to force us out of the car. After we were on the platform, we found that the other train was waiting for us.

London was a strange place to us. I had not even studied a map of the area, and therefore, I had no idea where we were going. Some men on our base had advised us to go to Russell Square to find a hotel that our people usually stayed in. We rode the underground from the train station to Russell Square. This was not so strange to those of us who had used the subways in New York, except that the platforms in the underground stations were lined with cots and people`s belongings. These people had been bombed out of their homes and slept on the station platforms. They were seldom bothered, because their rights were respected by others.

At Russell Square we checked into our hotel, four of us to a room. Actually, I believe we took the beds apart and slept about eight people in the room. There was a lavatory in the room, but the toilet and bath area was at the end of the hall. There was practically no privacy in the bathroom, as anyone might walk in as it was being used. It really did not make much difference which sex.

We left the hotel and began to walk around to see the area. The first thing a soldier usually looks for on liberty is something to eat that is different from what he has on base. We stopped in the first restaurant. The only meat on the menu was duck, and

since we had only corned beef in our mess hall, we thought duck might be a good change. The portions were pitifully small for hungry G. I.`s, so after eating, we stopped at the next restaurant and ate again. We were not used to being rationed, and found it hard to adapt to the small portions that the British were served.

We decided that the best way to see London was to hire a cab. This was done, and the driver said he would take us on a tour for ten shillings each. That was about two dollars. The top of the cab opened to the back, giving us plenty of viewing room. He took us to the famous places that we had heard of. We went to Buckingham Palace, The Tower of London, Parliament, St. Paul`s Cathedral, London Bridge, and many more. He pointed out hangouts used by Shakespeare and many other famous authors.

We had just crossed back over the Thames River and were only three or four blocks back into London when a V-1 Rocket landed right behind us. These rockets were fired across the English Channel by the Germans. The V-1 was a flying bomb that was propelled by a rocket engine. It made an awful, almost deafening noise as it traveled. We learned not to pay them much attention as long as we could hear the noise. When the noise stopped, the bomb immediately began to glide to earth. This one hit a hospital.

As we toured around the City, we were made aware of the amount of damage that the Germans had done in the Blitz of London. There were blocks upon blocks of houses and apartments that were completely gone. Where the rubble had been removed, the blocks were nothing but basements. It was amazing to notice that St. Paul`s Cathedral was standing amid total destruction for many blocks around, but it had not been destroyed. It had only been struck by one bomb that did not explode. Later the bomb was dug out of the basement and taken out of the city where it exploded before they reached the detonation area.

It was night when we went to Picadilly Circus. This is an area in London that has been compared to Times Square in New York. It is a center of night life, with many clubs. We had never been there before, and I knew nothing about the layout of the area. It was easy to get there by underground, but it was not easy to get around up on the street. Upon climbing the stairs to the ground level, we found ourselves on a sidewalk that was in total blackout. It was "dark as Egypt", and we were about as lost as one can get. Did that bother us? Never in a minute did we worry. We were out for adventure anyway.

As we started walking down the sidewalk, holding to the wall of the buildings, we soon

learned a few rules of the road. A flashlight was only to be used in short flashes, and then only when pointed at the ground. Any misuse would bring a reprimand of, "Mind the torch, lad!". It was not allowed that one should strike a match to light a cigarette in the open.

We quickly learned that there were many others on the same sidewalks. They lined the walls of the buildings, soliciting sex. Naturally, as we moved along the walk, guided by feeling along the building, we came into contact with them. It was only in a day`s work for them. One of the most famous men at Picadilly was a newspaper vendor who stood on the corner selling papers. He would say, "Papers. Papers. Get your condoms here. Papers, Papers." For the fun of it we tried to buy one of his papers. His answer was; "You don`t want one of these papers, lad. Condoms?"

At Trafalgar Square we went to the Whitehall Theater. It was a burlesque theater, but we were surprised to find that it was not to be compared with the "bump and grind" type of burlesque found in the States. Everything there was more artistic. Entertainment was done in skits. Some of them were comedy while others were of a more serious nature. The props used in the skits were nudes posing as statues. Some were up on pedestals, and maintained their position during the entire skit. I never could understand how they could hold themselves still for so long, and especially in some rather awkward poses.

We had agreed to meet some buddies from another crew at the Viaduct Tavern, which is located just across the street from the Old Bailey Prison. We finally found ourselves on the right street after being given directions by many who said, "You cawnt miss it." But we did miss it, and after being told the same thing several more times, we finally learned that we were standing in front of the door all the time. In a total blackout, it is easy to miss it.

A forty-eight hour pass does not last very long when one is having fun. This one had to come to an end, and we had to return to our home away from home. We could only tell others what we had seen and done and hope for the early day when we could go back to London.

FOUR MISSIONS TO MAGDEBURG
(Our Second, Third, Fourth, and Ninth Missions)

Magdeburg is a large city in north-central Germany, southwest from Berlin. During World War II, it had a huge oil refinery that was a necessary target for Allied bombers. Our crew made four trips to Magdeburg, and our officers made an additional one when they were training.

One factor that caused failures to destroy the target was the weather. In the four missions I made over Magdeburg, I never saw any part of it until the last one. The undercast of clouds was usually 10/10 (completely undercast). In fact, I never saw much of Germany until about the thirteenth mission. We had to bomb through the clouds using radar. As many times as we went there, I can hardly think that anything could have been left standing except the refinery. Surely all else in the area must have been flattened.

Our first time to Magdeburg was on our second mission, which was on Tuesday, February 6, 1945. Our targets were to be the refineries and railroad marshaling yards. The mission took seven hours, forty-five minutes flying time. The temperature was - 48 degrees centigrade at 22,500 feet altitude. Our bomb load consisted of ten 500 pound general purpose bombs. We could not see the bomb strikes, so we did not know what the results of our strikes were.

There was no fighter opposition today, and antiaircraft fire was moderate but very accurate. German gunners were well trained at operating their antiaircraft guns. They also were having to use radar because of the complete cloud cover, but they knew how to figure the altitude perfectly. We saw one B-24 go down in prop wash while we were assembling over England. No one got out. We saw a B-17 go down over the English Channel as well.

Some excitement that occurred on this mission was when a man who was flying with us passed out from lack of oxygen on the way back home. He flew with us through our sixth mission. His original crew had been almost totally destroyed in an earlier mission, but he did not want to go home. He wanted to finish his tour of thirty missions, but he never did finish all of them.

The second time we went to Magdeburg was on our third mission. That was on Friday, February 9, 1945. We flew on "Old Buggs Bunny" today and put the 106th mission on it. It was a B-24 Model D, and had come to us as a survivor of the African Campaign. It

was such an old model that the waist windows had to be removed completely in order to install the guns. That also meant that a lot of cold air came through. It was a six hour and forty-five minute trip, and was an unusual one for us. Our crew was not to fly with our group in the usual formation, but were to be a part of a special squadron that flew ahead of the rest of the Eighth Air Force.

It was the usual custom for all bombers in the formation to dispense "chaff" while in areas where heavy antiaircraft concentrations existed. Chaff is a bundle of strips of aluminum foil, wrapped in a sleeve of brown wrapping paper. The bundles were usually pushed through a little door in the side of the fuselage, just behind the waist window. As the bundle entered the slip stream, the paper wrapping came off and the bundle of aluminum strips almost exploded into a little fluttering cloud. These bundles were about the size of a small rolled up newspaper, and were dispersed at the rate of about one every five seconds. The result was that the German radar picked up a reflection of radio waves from the chaff as well as from the planes, which caused problems for them in aiming the antiaircraft guns. The chaff we usually threw did more good for the planes that followed than it did for us.

On this mission, our job was to fly ahead of the rest of the other bombers with nothing but a load of chaff. Instead of one bundle each five seconds or so, we went in higher than usual and dumped it as fast as we reasonably could. Our whole waist area in the plane was stacked with cases of chaff. Our mission was to thoroughly saturate the air space with floating particles of aluminum. We actually had to make a circle over the target area at 24,000 feet as we did this. It was a working mission for me, in that I was one of the main chaff men. Fortunately, we made that double loop and got out without a hole.

We had an extra man on board on this mission. He was supposed to be an observer and do some photography work, but he was so frozen with fear that he never accomplished much. He was wearing a outdated helmet, which resulted in having his ear freeze to the earphone. The temperature at the time was minus forty degrees. The pain was so intense that he tore the phone from his head, and along with it came a peel of skin from his ear. I had to doctor him somehow. All I could think to do was sprinkle the ear with sulfa powder, apply a compress bandage, and let him hold an electric hand muffler to the ear. The thawing from the muffler probably caused more pain than the original freezing.

On this mission, the antiaircraft fire was heavy, but we did not get hit. "Old Buggs Bunny was obsolete in more ways than one. The nose gunner had to break the door off

his turret before he could get out of it when we returned to England. Incidentally, we witnessed the destruction of this plane. It exploded as it took off just two missions later as it was beginning its one hundred eighth mission. It scattered over a couple of counties in northern England.

The third time we went to Magdeburg was on our fourth mission, and the trip was rather uneventful. It was on Wednesday, February 15, 1945. Briefing was at three A. M. We were still looking for the refinery. The mission required six hours, fifteen minutes flying time, of which five and one half hours were spent on oxygen. Antiaircraft fire was intense, but all of our ships returned to base. Our bomb load consisted of twelve 500 pound general purpose bombs. The temperature at bombing altitude of 24,500 feet was a minus 45 degrees.

Our fourth trip to Magdeburg was on our ninth bombing mission. It was on Saturday, March 3, 1945. This was probably our toughest mission thus far. It required a flying time of seven hours, fifteen minutes with temperatures at minus 40 degrees centigrade at 23,000 feet altitude. We were on oxygen for five hours. Our bomb load consisted of ten 500 pound general purpose bombs.

This time, there was no question as to whether the refinery had been hit. The general undercast was 3/10 visibility, and there was a hole over the target area. The bombs really knocked it out. We saw flames from blazing oil, and a black column of smoke made its way up above the clouds to 15,000 feet.

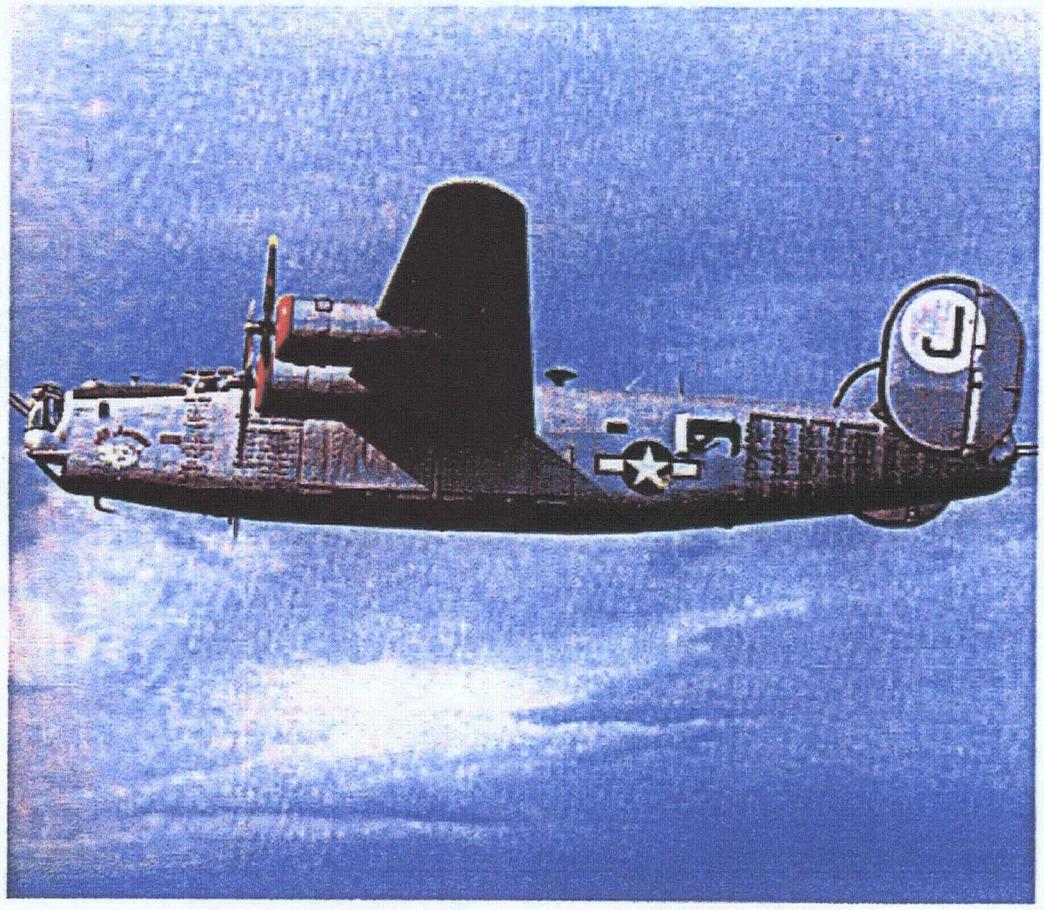
Antiaircraft fire was very heavy and accurate. They tracked our high right squadron on the way in. Over the target they threw up a heavy barrage of explosives. On the way out, they tracked the lead squadron, of which we were a part. Our group lost three ships, one of which was our wing lead ship. We only saw one parachute, but it was reported that four more were sited.

Fighters were very prominent in the area on this mission. We saw an ME-163 being chased by some P-51's off to our right. That was a German rocket plane that only carried about five minutes of fuel. It took off on a dolly and landed on skids. It was very fast. It accelerated rapidly by using short bursts of rocket fuel and then glided. About fourteen more P-51's joined the chase and finally ran him out of fuel.

We also saw ME-262's, which were the German jet planes. At that time our forces did not have any jets of any kind. One of them was about 200 yards off our right wing, but none of our gunners could fire because of the proximity of other bombers. Six

ME-262's were ready to peal off for an attack on us, but the P-51's scared them away. We were always thankful for the beautiful P-51's.

Quite a few of our ships came back from this mission with large flak holes, but we had none. Ironically, we were not flying in the position in the formation that we were originally assigned to fly. Someone in the lead squadron failed to get off the ground in time to make the formation, so we were ordered to vacate our slot and fill theirs. Whoever filled our slot was shot down that day. This was just another of those times when we were so mercifully spared. This type of thing happened over and over so many times that it became very obvious, not only to us, but to the other crews.



FIFTH MISSION - NUREMBURG
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 1945

We were called out at three thirty to get our breakfast and get ready to fly. It was a draw between Berlin and Nuremburg as targets, but Nuremburg won out at the last minute because of weather conditions. The target was to be the railroad marshalling yards, so we were loaded differently today. We had forty-two one hundred pound general purpose bombs. It took a long time to pull all of the fuse pens on these as we crossed the channel, since there were two fuses in each bomb.

The mission was fairly long, eight hours and fifteen minutes. We were on oxygen for six hours. We assembled at nine thousand feet and crossed the French coast at twenty thousand feet. On crossing the Ruhr there was some scattered flak at a distance and some more over the target, but it was not very accurate.

We dropped our bomb load from 23,000 feet. The lead ship had aborted, so the deputy lead took over. It was a minus thirty-eight degrees over the target, but we were warmer later coming back across France. We let down to about ten thousand feet. The weather was excellent except for right at the target area. We were low enough coming back across France to see that many of the towns had really been bombed out.

Our tail gunner, Dick Howell, developed a leak in a swivel joint to his turret and hydraulic fluid sprayed all over his pants and boots. There were no other casualties on our crew, and in fact, all of our planes returned from this mission.

1,200 Heavies Hit Reich After 1-Day Nazi Air Bid

The flaming air war which the Luftwaffe rekindled Saturday appeared yesterday to have been extinguished once more by U.S. fighters and bomber gunners as over 1,200 Fortresses and Liberators, protected by approximately 750 fighters, bombed rail yards, airfields and oil targets in central Germany without opposition from enemy planes.

The only air activity along the route of the bombers came in the form of three training planes, which were promptly shot down by the fighters. On Saturday, when the Luftwaffe daringly attacked a force of 1,300 heavies in strong groups, fighters of the 8th downed 64 planes while bomber gunners accounted for 40, making a grand total of 104.

It was the strongest opposition thrown at the bombers since Mar. 2, when fighters and gunners knocked down 73 planes. The renewal of opposition Saturday cost the 8th 22 bombers and three fighters. Ten bombers and one fighter are missing from yesterday's missions.

Visual Bombing Over Targets

The bombers had ideal weather yesterday, with visual bombing prevailing over all targets except a rail yard at Plauen, 40 miles southwest of Chemnitz. The target area stretched from just west of Berlin to 15 miles south of Nuremberg.

Three airfields were hit, one southwest of Dessau and the others southwest and south of Nuremberg. Rail yards beside those at Plauen were at Stendal, 70 miles west of Berlin; at Hof, 15 miles southwest of Plauen; and at Eger, 30 miles southeast of Plauen.

Ordnance depots in the Bayreuth area, 40 miles northeast of Nuremberg, were pounded and another objective in the Nuremberg area was a jet-propelled repair plant at Furth, north of the city. Fifty-five miles west of Berlin, the bombers hit an oil depot at Derben.

Flak, described as meager by airmen, represented the only opposition for the day. One fighter pilot called it a quiet day everywhere in enemy territory, with "not a thing moving."

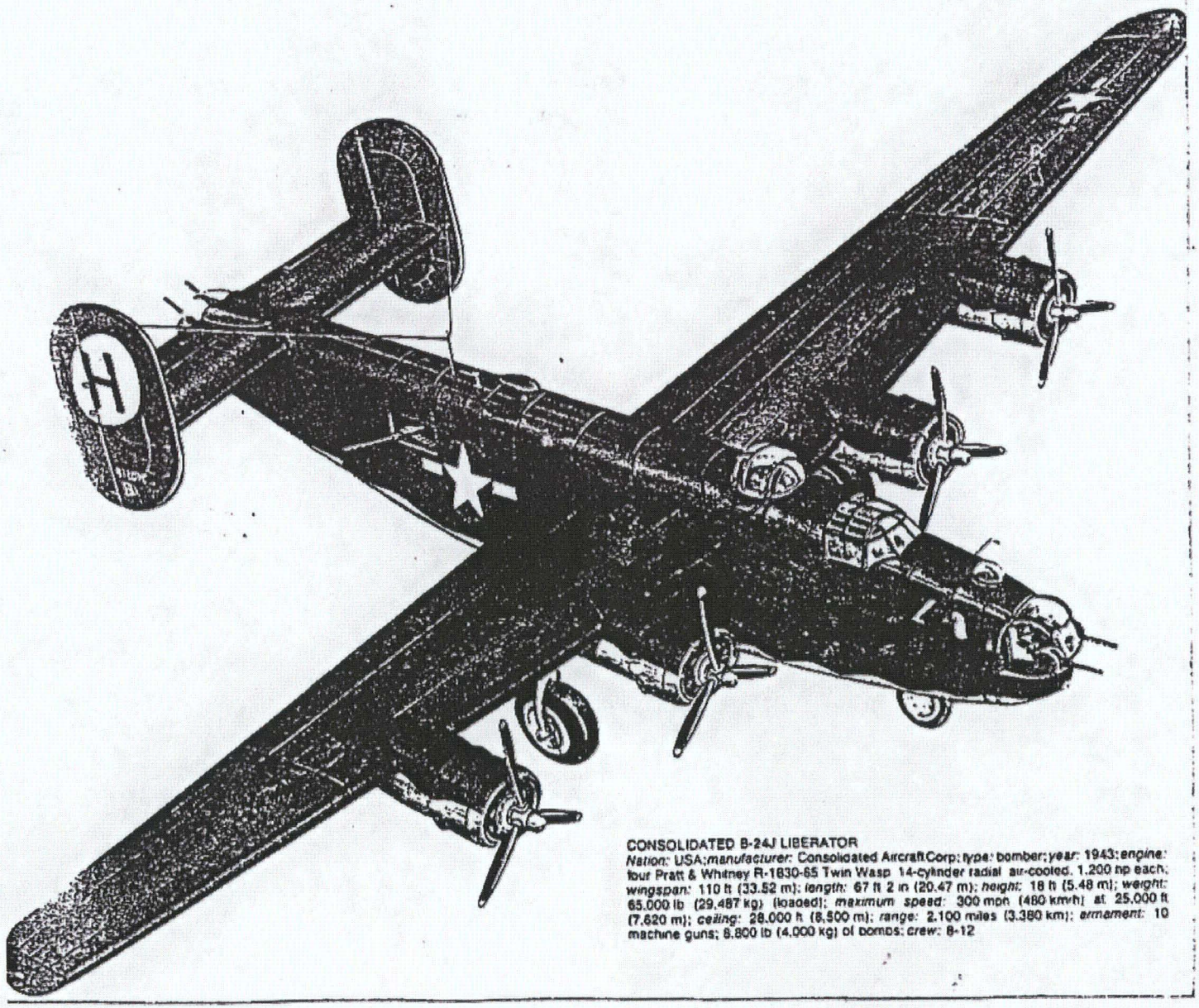
Heavy bombers of the 15th Air Force made their third consecutive raid on the Brenner Pass route yesterday, besides plastering railroad bridges along the northern Italy front.

THE BIG "B" - BERLIN
THE SIXTH MISSION
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 1945

This was a mission that we had been briefed on several times, but weather conditions had caused it to be scrubbed or substituted. This time, everyone was a little more apprehensive than usual because of the name of the target. We were loaded with five 500 pound general purpose bombs and five 500 pound incendiary clusters. The whole Eighth Air Force was going to this same target today. It was a long string of formations as far as the eye could see.

We briefed at 4:45 A. M. for the marshaling yards near the center of town. Our bombing altitude was 24,000 feet where the temperature was about thirty-five degrees below zero. The flak was fairly heavy, mostly of the barrage type, but we received no damage from it. Some of the others in our group did get some damage.

Gene Atkinson, who had been with us temporarily after his crew had been shot down flew his last mission today. He passed out just after we left the target. The flight surgeon said that it was anoxia (lack of oxygen), but we did not think so. He was war weary (flak happy), and needed to be relieved from duty. He was frothing green vomit, and I held him in my arms nearly all the way back to the base. We came in shooting red flares, and were met by the medics and our commanding officer who took him from me and carried him to the ambulance. Atkinson had lost his crew earlier when they were nearly all killed. He had insisted in completing his tour of missions, but was not able to do so. He was sent back to the States.



CONSOLIDATED B-24J LIBERATOR
Nation: USA; *manufacturer:* Consolidated Aircraft Corp; *type:* bomber; *year:* 1943; *engine:* four Pratt & Whitney R-1830-65 Twin Wasp 14-cylinder radial air-cooled, 1,200 hp each; *wingspan:* 110 ft (33.52 m); *length:* 67 ft 2 in (20.47 m); *height:* 18 ft (5.48 m); *weight:* 65,000 lb (29,487 kg) (loaded); *maximum speed:* 300 mph (480 km/h) at 25,000 ft (7,620 m); *ceiling:* 28,000 ft (8,500 m); *range:* 2,100 miles (3,380 km); *armament:* 10 machine guns; 8,800 lb (4,000 kg) of bombs; *crew:* 8-12

HALLE - THE SEVENTH MISSION
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 1945

This was our second mission in two days. It was a little unusual to do this, because a mission was so tiring, both physically and mentally, that we needed some rest. We were assigned an old war weary ship today known as "S-Sugar". In fact most of our ships were relics of the past, many of them being left over from the African Campaign. Most of the planes in our group were lost on the Kassel raid when twenty seven out of thirty-one failed to return. What we had consisted of "homemade" planes which were patched up with parts cannibalized from wrecks.

We assembled at 8500 feet and climbed to 12,000 feet at the Belgian coast. We crossed the front lines at 20,000 feet. There was no flak in the Ruhr. We climbed to 24,500 feet where the temperature was a minus thirty degrees centigrade. We were in the lead squadron where flak was not heavy over the target, but the other squadrons had flak so heavy it seemed that one could get out and walk on it. We lost one ship over the target. It just suddenly exploded. We did not see any chutes.

Halle is near Leipzig, where most of the other groups had their target. Our MPI (main point of impact) was the railroad marshaling yards, so we were loaded with ten 500 pound general purpose bombs. The visibility was 10/10 (completely covered with clouds) at the target, so we did not see our bomb strikes.

We did not have any fighter opposition today, but Tom Paone, the left waist gunner, commented about seeing a vapor trail from a V-2 rocket headed for England. Our fighter escort is good about keeping the enemy fighters away from us.

This old plane had been used for practice missions and was put back in service. There was a big hole in the Plexiglas dome of the tail turret, which made the ride rather windy for Dick Howell. He also had a hydraulic leak in the actuating unit, which sprayed fluid inside the turret until he could not see through the glass. However this old S-Sugar got us there and back, all in one piece.

1,300 8th Heavies Again Blast Reich as Nazis Hide

The air paths of 8th Air Force bombers and fighters were clear of enemy fighters yesterday after Tuesday's destructive raids on jet fighter bases, and over 1,300 heavies and more than 850 fighters carried the 8th's non-stop offensive into its ninth day by striking at airfields, rail targets, ordnance stores and oil objectives in southern Germany.

Two airfields, five marshalling yards, two oil storage depots, two ordnance depots and an explosives factory were hit. All targets were located in the areas of Munich, Nuremberg and Regensburg.

Latest tabulations of damage wrought by 8th fighters Tuesday show that eight new records were hung up by the Thunderbolts and Mustangs, including the total bag of 305 planes and the 339th Mustang Group's destruction of 100 ships on the ground.

The 56th Thunderbolt Group, leading fighter outfit, became the first group to reach the 900 mark in destruction when it KO'd two in the air and 39 on the ground to boost its total to 904, of which 684 were killed in the air. One squadron of the 339th made a new squadron mark by knocking off 62, and the day's total of 284 blasted on the ground by all groups set a new mark for the 8th in strafing.

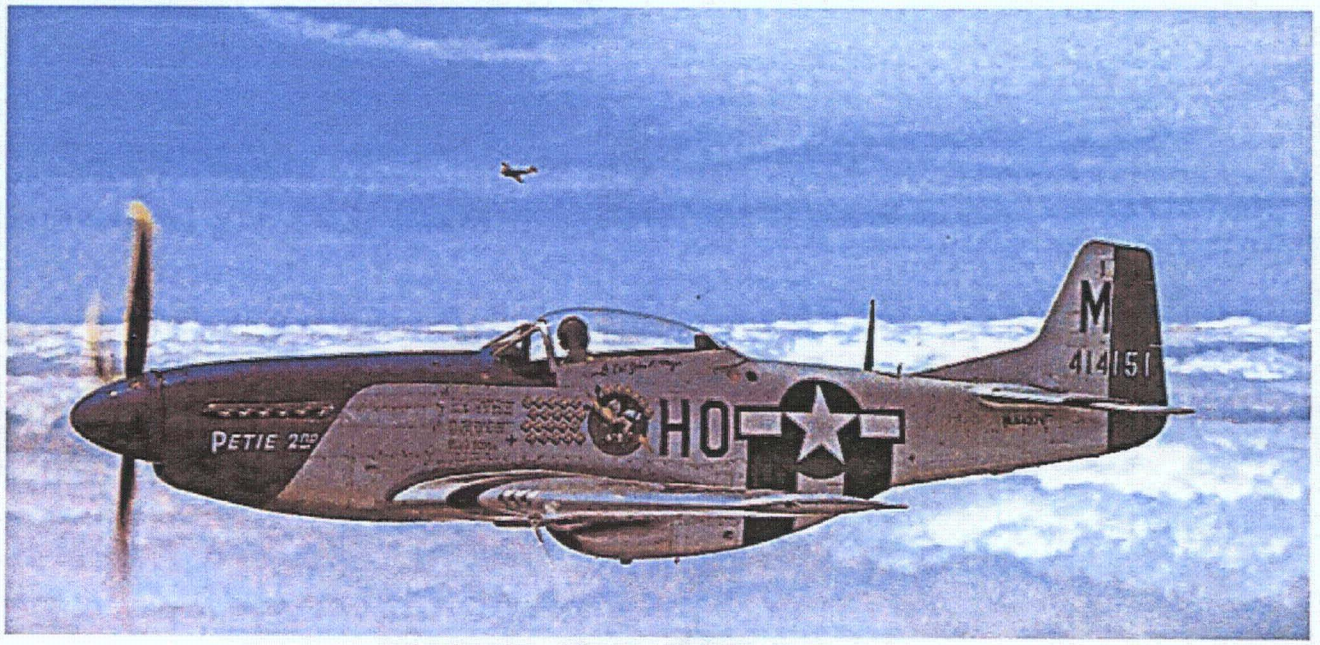
Lt. Col. John D. Landers, of Joshua, Tex., established a new individual record in ground kills by getting eight, and Lt. Col. Joseph L. Thury, of St. Paul, Minn., destroyed four to up his ground strafing total to 18½ and lead all 8th fighters in this respect. The 20 jets shot down by the fighters in air combat also created a new record.

THE EIGHTH MISSION - INGOLOSTAT

The bomber crew was up and going at four thirty this morning. It was Thursday, March 1, 1945, and the target area was Ingolostat. It is located in the southern part of Germany just north of Munich. The primary target was a jet field, but we were routed to the secondary target, a railroad marshaling yard. Our bomb load was typical for this type of target, ten 500 pound general purpose bombs.

Our bombing altitude was lower for this mission than usual, only 16,500 feet. Therefore the temperature was a little easier on us, only eighteen degrees below zero centigrade. There was no flak at all at the target, and the only fighter planes we saw were our own fighter escort. It made for an ideal mission except for the tedium of the long hours. We were airborne for nine hours, seven of which was on oxygen. Coming back we were kept at 15,000 feet because of the weather.

We could not see the target, because the cloud undercast was 10/10, but we did get some good views of the Alps Mountains going in and coming out. We thought we might have to land on the continent because of low fuel, but Paris was not ours for today. We made it back home.



P-51 Mustang - Our usual fighter escort

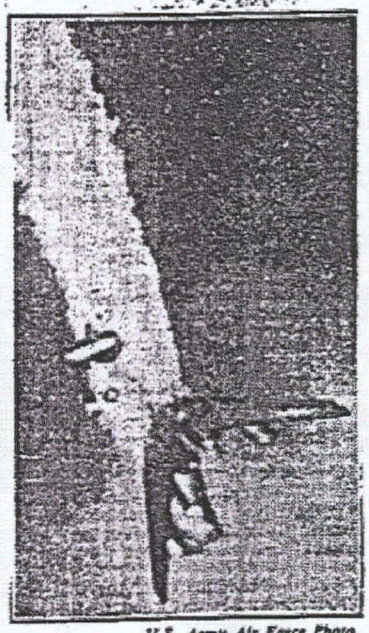
SIEGEN, MISSION NUMBER TEN
THURSDAY, MARCH 8 1045

Siegen is located in the west-central part of Germany, making it one of the shorter missions. Therefore, we did not have to get up and start getting ready quite as early as on many of the others. We were called out at 6:30, had briefing scheduled for 7:30, with takeoff time scheduled for 10:30. The target was another railroad marshaling yard, so our bomb load consisted of twenty-four 250 pound general purpose bombs.

We entered the continent over Holland and then turned south toward the target. This was another of the days when we could not see the ground because of cloud cover, but we did see a column of black smoke from the target area. Our bombing altitude was 22,500 feet and the temperature was a minus thirty-five degrees.

We were fortunate today in that we did saw only a few bursts of flak and there was no fighter opposition. The mission was one of the short ones, six hours thirty-five minutes, and we were only on oxygen for three hours. This was generally classified as a "milk run". Would that all of them could be like this.

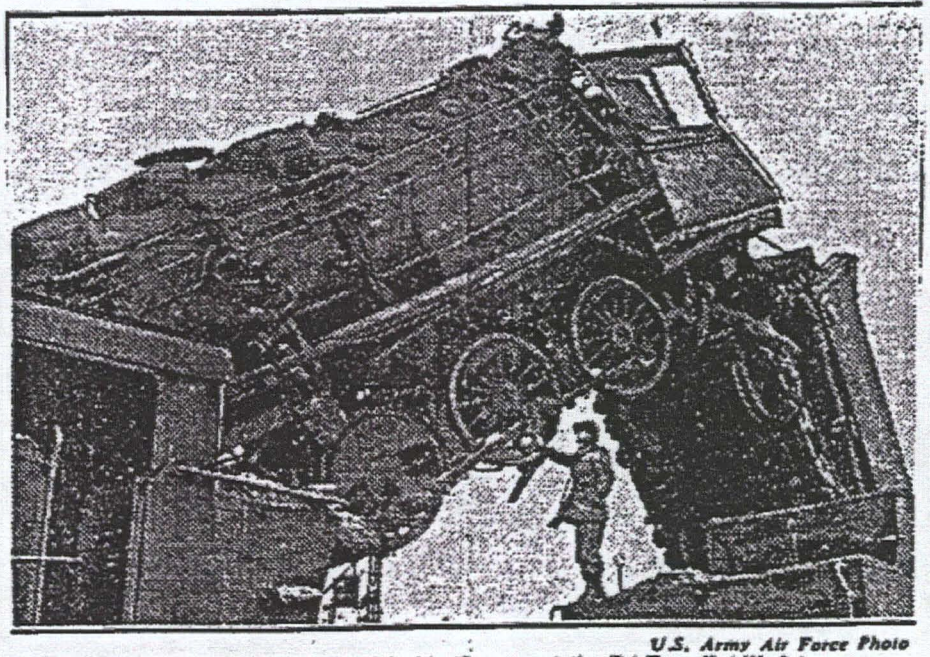
Blaze of Glory



U.S. Army Air Force Photo

An 8th Air Force Lib, its left wing eaten away by blazing fuel tanks, plunges to earth after being hit by ack-ack over Munster last Friday.

Work of a Rail Splitter



U.S. Army Air Force Photo

Munster, a well-hit target of the 8th Air Force and the RAF until Allied troops overran this key rail city, still shows the scars of terrific air pounding. Here a U.S. doughboy examines a battered locomotive in the city's marshalling yards.

NUMBER ELEVEN - MUNSTER
FRIDAY, MARCH 9, 1945

The trip to Munster was another fairly short one, but they really had us up early to get started on it. It is located in the north-western part of Germany, near Holland. We were called out at 2:15 A. M. It is a good thing that they gave us real eggs at a time like this. Those powdered eggs that we got at other times were awful tasting and smelled even worse. Maybe the real eggs were a bribe to get us started.

We were loaded with forty-four 100 pound general purpose bombs and two 500 pound incendiary clusters. The target was another railroad marshaling yard, and this time we really had a good bomb run and dropped on target. The target itself was visible, and we could tell that we did a lot of damage. It will be some time before they are able to assemble trains there. We dropped our bombs from 22,500 feet altitude. It was twenty-eight degrees below zero today.

There were no fighters planes giving us opposition at the target today, but perhaps that was because of the antiaircraft fire. The flak was very intense and accurate. We were not hit, but it was exploding so close to us that we could feel the concussion from the bursts. Two of our ships went down. One of them was the lead ship of our squadron. Five chutes were reported as being seen, but that left about fifteen men unaccounted for.

Our flying time today was five hours, thirty minutes, with only two hours on oxygen. These shorter missions are better in some ways, but not when there is so much opposition from the ground or air fire.

Heavies Hit Near Rhine, Along Baltic

Well over 3,500 heavy bombers and fighters of the 8th and 15th Air Forces and the RAF roared over Germany yesterday in attacks that shook the Reich from the Rhine to the Oder and south to Vienna.

The tremendous blow, spearheaded by the 8th in an assault that spreadeagled both Eastern and Western fronts, gave direct aid to U.S. and Russian troops battling on both approaches to the heart of Germany.

Half the force of 1,350 Fortresses and Liberators and 750 escorting fighters split to attack naval and military installations at the Baltic port of Swinemunde, 35 miles north of Stettin, and marshalling yards at six towns in an area about 60 miles long parallel to the Rhine and 40 to 60 miles east of the river opposite Cologne and Coblenz.

RAF Smashes Dortmund

While the 8th was blasting its string of targets in the Rhineland, more than 1,000 Halifaxes and Lancasters of the RAF, protected by a screen of Spitfires and Mustangs, struck 40 miles to the north, bombing the communications center of Dortmund, 15 miles east of Essen, which was still smoking from the RAF's raid the previous day.

The 15th's effort, fashioned by Forts and Libs and a strong shield of fighters, was directed at oil installations in the Vienna area.

The attack on Swinemunde was the closest blow to the Eastern Front the 8th has yet delivered. It fell only 16 miles from where Marshal Zhukov's forces are striking for the Baltic port of Stettin. Plans for the attack were laid after photo reconnaissance three days ago showed the one-time seaside resort on the Oder estuary teeming with activity.

Clouds Obstruct View

Specific targets attacked were not disclosed and results were not observed because of heavy cloud. But the port is known to be a strong naval base, with shipyards and oil storage depots, and a likely base for the pocket battleship Adm. Scheer and U-boats which may have left the East Baltic.

The marshalling yards opposite the Rhine were at Siegen, Betzdorf, Dillenburg, Wetzlar, Friedburg and Marburg. Here, too, as over Swinemunde, there was heavy cloud. Bombardiers used instruments over the targets.

One bomber and three fighters failed to return.

Last night, German radio broke out with ringing Achtungs, describing a strong force of fast enemy bombers approaching the Hanover-Brunswick area—"bomb alley" to Berlin—indicating that Mosquitoes were out to hit the capital for the 21st successive night.

TWELFTH MISSION
SWINEMUNDE
MONDAY, MARCH 12, 1945

Swinemunde is located in the northwestern corner of Germany on the Baltic Sea. It is on the Pomeranian Bay where the Oder River flows into the sea. Our primary target for today was a troop ship, but due to weather conditions, we were diverted to the secondary, the harbor.

We were scheduled for briefing at 4:30 A. M. Our bomb load consisted of five 1000 pound general purpose bombs. We went almost all of the way over water, going in over the North Sea and by way of Denmark. We dropped our load from 20,000 feet through a 10/10 undercast. We could not see the target, but we did have black smoke up to about eleven thousand feet. There was no fighter opposition, and very little flak.

We were airborne for eight hours and twenty minutes, six hours of which was on oxygen. The temperature was down to a minus twenty-five degrees below zero. We finished this mission with some apprehension about the next one.

Hit Nazi Army HQ

High Command Gets Big Blow; Rails to East Front Pounded

U.S. heavies yesterday dumped the war right into the laps of the German high command when they bombed the German General Staff HQ at Zossen, 20 miles south of Berlin. They tossed some 6,000 individual high explosives and more than 325,000 incendiaries at the Nazi command in this first attack on Zossen.

At the same time, U.S. fliers joined with the Red Air Force for the first time in the war to bomb Nazi targets in Austria, Hungary and Jugoslavia—and continued to help the Russian armies facing Berlin by hitting 20 miles north of the capital at the Oranienburg rail yards feeding the Eastern Front.

Again Use 11-Tonner

During the day, too, the RAF for the second time used its new 11-ton super-bomb, the world's largest, in attacks on German rails.

Although part of the Nazi HQ is deep underground, the attack was aimed at paralyzing the Army nerve center through destruction of administration buildings, vital records, barracks, utilities and communication and transportation lines. The bombers encountered no Luftwaffe opposition on the day's mission.

While half of the 8th's total force of 1,300 heavies struck at Zossen, the rest teamed up with the 15th Air Force and RAF Lancasters to strike at German communications and industrial centers.

Mustang-escorted Lancasters, loaded for the second time with the new 11-ton explosives, struck at the Arnsburg Railway viaduct with unannounced results. Twenty-first Army Group HQ announced that Wednesday night's initial blow by the new 22,000lb. missiles knocked out seven central spans of the Bielefeld viaduct in an attack which appears to have cut off the last main German escape route from the Ruhr.

Blow at Supply Links

The Oranienburg rail yards were hit by thousands of bombs, many of them 2,000-pounders, in a direct blow at supply links between the German home front and their armies trying to hold Marshal Zhukov at the Oder.

Meanwhile, the Ruhland oil refineries between Berlin and Dresden were attacked with "good results" in the greatest effort yet made by Allied Air Forces in the Mediterranean. While B17s made the 1,400-mile round trip, Liberators attacked other oil refineries at Moosbierbaum, Floisdorf and Schwechat, near Vienna.

A spokesman at Allied Mediterranean HQ also disclosed that 15th Air Force fighters and bombers joined Russian fliers for the first time Wednesday in [illegible] attacks on Austria, Hungary and Jugoslavia.

THIRTEENTH MISSION - ZOSSON AND A VISIT TO YOVIL

On March 15, 1945, I flew my thirteenth bombing mission over Germany. What a way to spend a birthday. We went to Zosson, about twenty miles south of Berlin. This is where the Nazi General Headquarters was located. It was constructed underground and had survived the war so far.

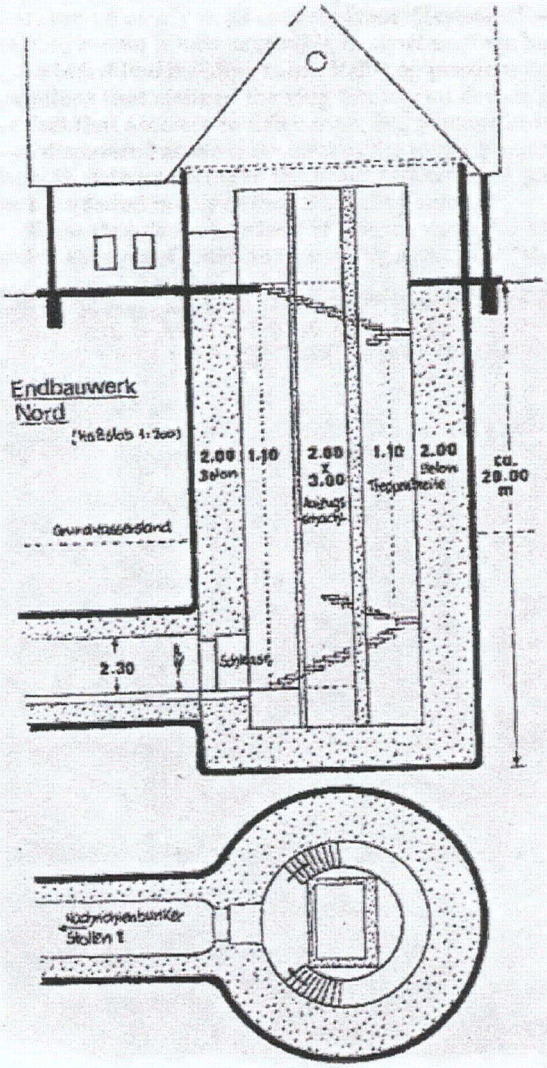
We had some trouble getting off the ground to begin the mission because of fog. Visibility was only about 150 yards. Normally, we were not allowed to take off until we could see from one end of the runway to the other. This is not hard to accomplish generally, but when so many other planes were involved, and all of them were heavily loaded with explosives, it was advisable to wait for good visibility.

Today, for a change, we had the first totally visual target of our bombing career. Our bomb load consisted of five one thousand pound general purpose bombs, which we dropped from 20,000 feet altitude. We were one of the lead groups going in on the target, and did such a good job that the rest of the Eighth Air Force was ordered to abort and claim the secondary target. The first three groups dropped right on target.

Antiaircraft fire was limited on the way in and out, but what there was of it was extremely accurate. It was close enough for the concussion from the bursts to rattle our ship. There was no flak over the target, however. We picked up our first flak hole of the war between engines number three and four. It was near the leading edge of the wing, and was located between fuel tanks in that wing, so there was no serious immediate damage.

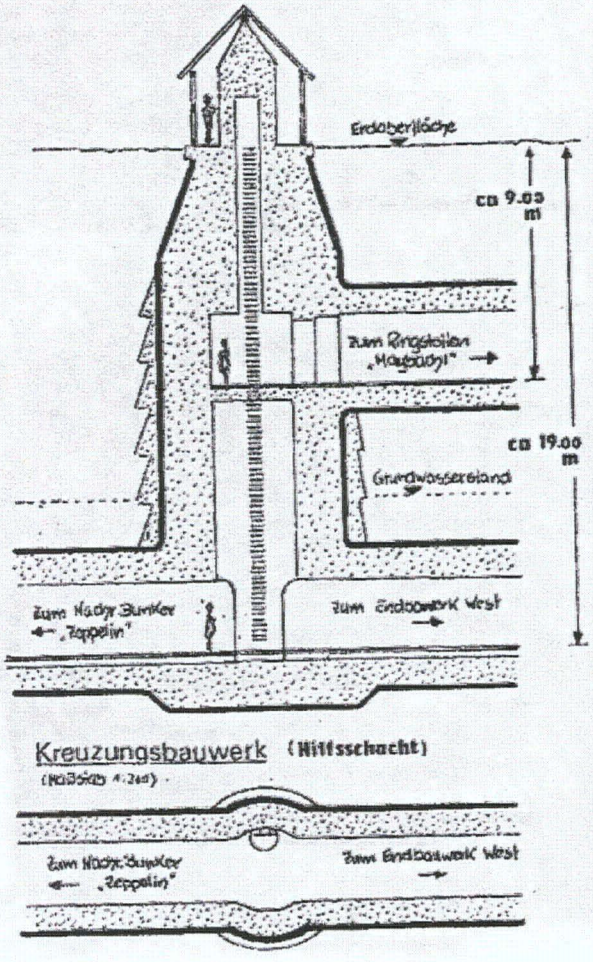
We approached the target from the west. Immediately after release of the bomb load, we made two right turns and headed west, always keeping a very tight formation. The groups that aborted, made two right turns before they reached the target, placing their route parallel to ours for their bomb run on the secondary target. Since we had such good visibility in the air and on the ground, it was almost like having a grandstand seat to watch their bombing performance.

The secondary target was a town somewhere southwest from Zosson. It consisted of a large marshaling yard on the east side, next to which was the business district, and then the rest of the town spread to the west. Visibility was so good that from our altitude of twenty thousand feet, the hump in the rail yard was easily located. There was a considerable amount of rail activity in the yard.



Left: The originally planned design of the north terminus on the Zeppelinstrasse. In 1937/38 it was determined that for economic reasons the floor level for all tunnels would be a standard 9-12 meters' depth (originally 15-20 meters) and the so-called RPD building would be the main entrance. This resulted in the changes to the design of the north terminus which are still visible today.

Right: The original design of the junction section. The previously mentioned project corrections also led to changes in the planned tunnel junction between "Zeppelin" and "Maybach I." The south passageway leading to "Maybach I" was now connected to the west passageway at the same level, resulting in considerable economic savings.



The Undergroung Military Command Bunkers of Zossen Germany

As the various groups dropped their bomb loads, it was easy to see how pattern bombing works. The bombs from the first group hit directly in the leading edge of the marshaling yards. The next group dropped in an area adjoining that of the first group. The patterns proceeded on to the business district and across town. There was no part of the town that was omitted from the pattern of overlapping strikes.

It was really good to get back to the base and relax. This had been one terrible way to spend a birthday. It was my twentieth birthday. Already I had flown thirteen missions and was still not eligible to vote. There was something good about it as well. Bomber crews always sweat out that thirteenth mission. Why the superstition, I do not know, but it is always approached with apprehension. We had made it, and all was well.

As soon as we returned to the base after the mission, and had cleaned our guns, had our debriefing, and stored away the flight gear, we were informed that we had all been promoted that day. As an added pleasure, we were informed that we had passes starting the next morning, good for two days.

When I was at Duke University, before being drafted, I had a roommate who was also drafted. He and I had kept in contact by mail as well as we could, and I had learned that he was in Yovil, England. I had only seen J. B. Smith once since he left school. That had been an accidental meeting in the middle of the street in Times Square in New York. That had been a real surprise, because the last we had heard from each other, he was at Fort Dix, on his way overseas, and I had been in Mississippi.

Yovil is in the southern part of England, and was part of the staging area for the men and equipment assembled for D-Day. J. B. had told me that he worked in a railway traffic office. Our other crew members were going to London, but I decided to go on past London to visit with my friend. I took off down there blindly, not knowing much about where I was going.

I was amazed at the countryside as my train covered the area south of London. Up in the northeast corner where we were based, everything was cold, snowy, or frozen fog, and all plant life was dead. It was dreary all the time. Here in the south, pasture land was already beginning to turn green as were buds on the trees. The sun actually was shining.

Upon arrival at Yovil, I had not a clue as to the location of the railway traffic office. No one was very helpful, because in wartime, everyone is suspicious of everyone else and do not readily offer information. I finally found the Army Post Office, and inquired about

my friend. I gave his name, his APO number, and all other information I had. Likewise, they were suspicious, and only told me that there was no such APO number in that area. I insisted that J. B. was there, and asked directions to the railway traffic office. Finally, after deciding that I was not going to go away, the clerk admitted that he did not know a J. B. Smith, but he did know a Jimmy Smith, and would call him.

It was only a matter of minutes before a jeep arrived with my friend. It was a happy reunion, and certainly a surprise for him. He took me back to his office for a little bit and then home. He lived in a private home, had his own room and bath, and his own private jeep to get around in. That was greatly different from our tarpaper barracks, no bath, and only two feet to get anywhere on..

Shortly after arriving at home, it was "tea time". I was surprised to see how little the family had to eat. I was reminded immediately of a training film we had been required to view, watching Burgess Meredith teach us "How to act in England". Therefore, I ate my toast and marmalade and watercress. I drank my tea and was happy with it. They did have a small portion of Spam. That was unusual for me, in that we never had any kind of meat except corned beef in our mess hall. They only had the Spam because of their star boarder. Otherwise their ration would not have permitted it.

With reference to rationing, people back home were complaining about it. There was never enough for the greedy, who tried to hoard what they could. The people in England did not complain, that I ever heard. They made the best of what they had. The ration for eggs was one per person per week - if they could be found at all. Other things were about on the same par. The people took great pride in showing their gardens. These were usually ten by ten foot plots in the small city backyards. They were highly cultivated, as were window boxes. The other half of the backyard was taken up with the family bomb shelter.

It was a joy to be able to go to the bathroom and get a tub bath. That was only the second tub bath since early in December 1944, and that had been in a tub with three other men. Some things are never so greatly appreciated until they have to be done without.

After tea, J. B. took me to a small town nearby to meet with some of his friends. He had previously lived in this little town and became endeared to the family there. They were glad to see him and welcomed me as his friend. I had made the mistake of telling him that I had just come back from a mission over Berlin. He told his friends, and I immediately became famous. They treated me royally. We went to the favorite family

pub so that they could buy me a mug of bitters. Very shortly, they wanted to buy me another, but I still had most of the first one. I declined as graciously as I could, and kept trying to drink the one I had. I never did get to the place that I could call bitters good. After a lot of visitation, I finally finished the bitters, and decided for lack of anything else to do, I would get another. I learned later that I had highly insulted the men by first refusing their hospitality, and then buying my own.

One of the men I met, who was the head of household where J. B. used to stay, was an interesting character. He had once been in the Queen's Guards. Those are the ones who accompany the Queen's carriage on horseback. The horses as well as the men are never to talk, never to show emotion, nor do anything except remain at attention. The horses do not even flinch when bitten by a horse fly. This man told of one day when they were escorting the Queen's carriage, his mate mumbled something funny and caused him to smile slightly. At that same moment a camera flashed. The next morning, there was his picture on the front of the newspaper, smiling. He was reprimanded for this, but in later years he still thought it was funny.

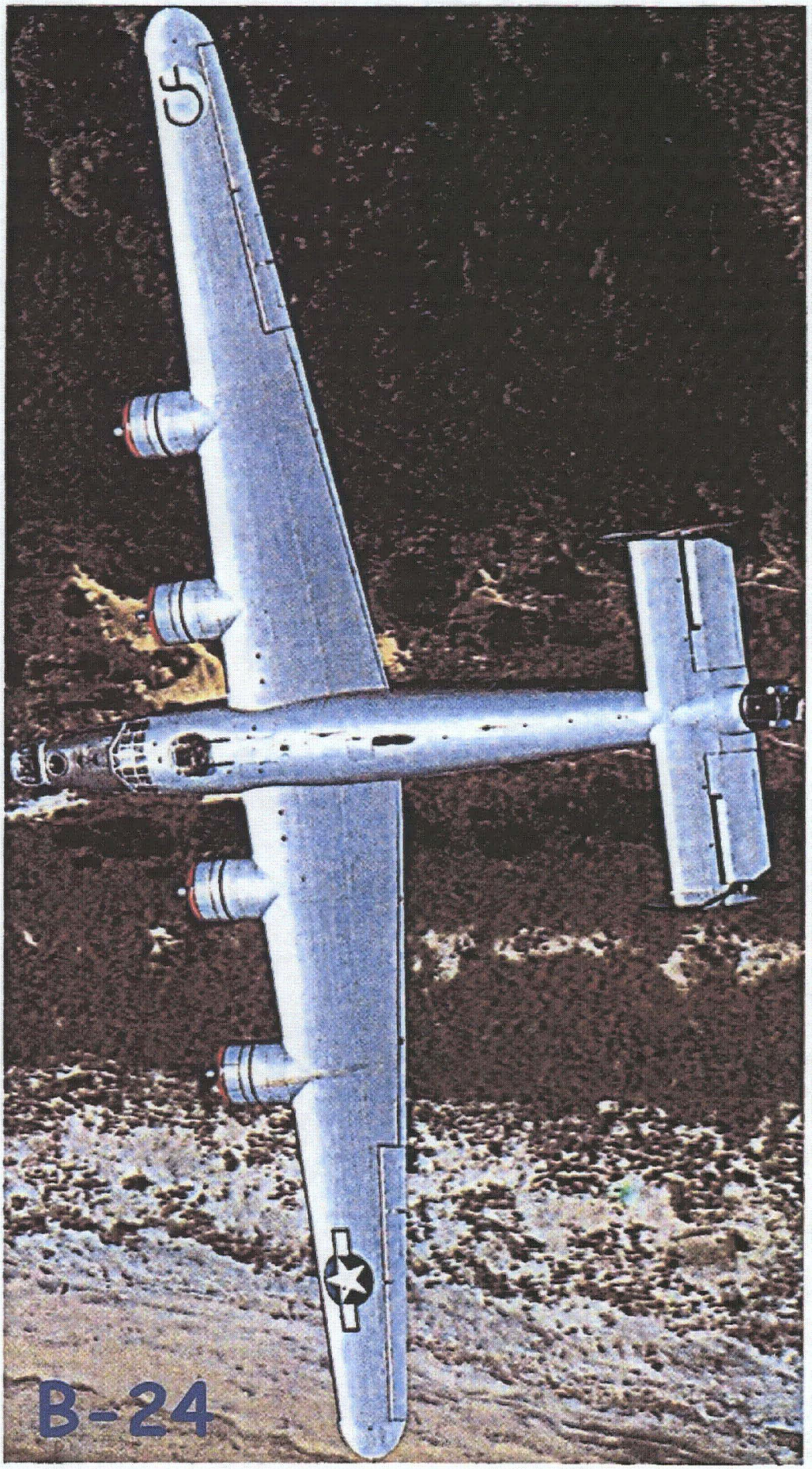
Another oddity in this area that stood out in my mind, was the excessive number of pretty women. That could have been due to the fact that I had seen few women of any kind lately. Most of these were pushing perambulators (baby carriages). I happened to glance into one carriage, and there was a black baby. The next was the same. Then I noticed that all of them were. I learned that a lot of black troops had staged in this area before moving to the continent, and those "American Indians" had left their mark.

J. B. enjoyed playing a saxophone, and had played with a band in the area. They insisted that he play with them at a dance. We had to go to the dance, and naturally we got home late.

I actually slept on sheets that night and had a pillow with a pillow case on it. That was really luxury. The bunk that I had become accustomed to was made of three biscuits, no sheets, a pillow made of a flour sack stuffed with straw, and cover made of four army blankets and all of my clothes that I was not wearing at the moment. J. B. did not know just how well he was faring.

The next morning, I had to leave all of this luxury, and head back to London where I found my crew. After a little while, it was time to head back to our base. I was glad to have the opportunity to make this side trip, not only to see my friend, but to learn a little more about England and its people.

The mission to Zosson involved seven hours thirty minutes of flying time of which five hours were on oxygen. At this time I had accumulated ninety-eight hours and twenty-five minutes of total combat flying time.


B-24

HELIGOLAND SUB PENS
MISSION FOURTEEN

It was rather unusual, but we were scheduled for briefing at 12:30 P. M. today, Monday, March 20, I945, rather than being awakened long before daylight. It was supposed to be a relatively short mission since the primary target was an oil refinery in Holland, not far from Amsterdam. We were required to made a visual bomb drop on the target, but scattered clouds obscured the area. We proceeded to the secondary target, Heligoland.

Heligoland consisted of two small islands in the North Sea. One of them had crossed runways that ran out to the water's edge in all four directions. The other island was about the same size and contained German submarine pens. That was not so bad, but it also contained the German antiaircraft school where they trained instructors. German gunners were very good at what they did, but these instructors had a lot of experience and were even better.

We approached the islands at about 20,000 feet altitude against a very strong head wind. This caused our ground speed to be very slow and gave the gunners plenty of time to track us while we were on the bomb run. I was watching the B-24 on our immediate right as it was being tracked by them. Antiaircraft guns are loaded with four shells to a clip. The gunner had calculated the perfect altitude, and had set his fuses to explode at our exact level. He fired four bursts which approached nearer and nearer to his target. He stopped to reload. When he fired the next series, he was still tracking, closer and closer. I could tell in advance that the fourth burst was going to explode in the bombay of the plane. It did. The plane exploded in a large red ball of fire and black smoke and completely disintegrated. I saw only one chute, and it was probably opened by accident. The airman could not have survived in the cold water of the North Sea, even if he made it that far.

Our pilot, Tom Shafer, was watching our plane being tracked from the other side by one of their gunners. He said, "I first observed a burst off our left wing about 100 yards out at our altitude and in line with the wing. Almost immediately, there was another burst about halfway between the first burst and our plane. From the spacing of the bursts, I knew the next one was for us, so I crowded as deeply as possible into my flak vest and waited for the inevitable. Nothing happened! I glanced to my right and saw another burst (I believe it was from the same gun) about 50 yards off the right wing! The shell I was expecting must have been a dud!"

The lead ship salvoed our bombs short of the target and began a steep diving turn as we left the target area. Even then the German gunners continued to track us. If we had continued the bomb run, very few of us would have made it back. As it was, every plane in the group was full of flak holes - except ours. This was another of those instances in which we were mercifully spared.

It happened so many times that it became very noticeable, not only to us, but to those who flew near us. Tom Shafer stated that this was the mission when he knew we were going to complete our tour of missions and return home. God was with us one more time.

We were the only group in two world wars to even attempt to bomb this target.

This started out to be a short mission, but we were up there for five hours and forty five minutes. We were on oxygen for two hours. The temperature was thirty-five degrees below zero centigrade. This was one mission we were glad to have behind us.

GILBERSTADT NEAR WURZBURG
FIFTEENTH MISSION
THURSDAY, MARCH 22, 1945

The crew was up at 5:30 for this mission. We went to breakfast of sunny side eggs as usual for a mission day and then to briefing. The primary target was a jet plane factory and airfield at Gilberstadt, near Wurzburg, in the south central part of Germany. We were loaded with fifty-two 100 pound general purpose bombs. At this time, the Germans had jet planes, but we had none. They were a real menace to us as bomber crews.

It was a perfect day for bombing as the visibility was about forty miles at the target area. The bombing altitude was 15,000 feet, and the results were excellent. We really wiped out the entire target. It could really be classified as a milk run, because there was no fighter opposition and no flak.

The most unpleasant thing about the whole mission was that we were airborne for eight hours, five of which was on oxygen. The temperature was at minus thirty-five degrees centigrade. As of this mission I had accumulated one hundred twelve hours and ten minutes of total combat flying time. I was getting to be a veteran at this combat business, but not enough of one to keep from being extremely scared.

WESEL
MISSION NUMBER SIXTEEN

One of the most unusual bombing missions occurred on Saturday, March 24, 1945. We had planned for it for some time, and were briefed with the details, except for the date and time. Naturally, that had to be kept secret until the last possible minute.

The allied troops had been advancing across France and Germany, and were facing an obstacle that was going to call for a different kind of help. In fact it was going to require the assistance and cooperation of practically every branch of service. The obstacle was the Rhine River. Land Forces come to a halt when they can no longer walk or roll.

Our planes were stripped of guns and ammunition and we were loaded with supplies equipped with parachutes. In the bombays of our plane, we had twelve large bundles hanging on the bomb shackles. They were loaded there like bombs, so that they could be released by the Navigator, in the same manner that he would ordinarily toggle out the bombs. Just behind the bombay was an open well where the lower ball turret normally would be positioned. This area was unsealed at the bottom and there were fuel cans hanging in the well. Around the turret well were spools of telephone wire and other various supply bundles. At the rear escape hatch were three more of the long bundles like the ones in the bombay. The parachutes of all of the bundles were attached to the plane by static lines that would open the parachutes as soon as they left the plane. We did not know the contents of all of the bundles, but that was of little consequence.

On the morning that the mission was to take place, we saw many planes in the air over England that were not usually in evidence. The first planes were the type of transport that was used for paratrooper deployment. By the time they went by, they were immediately followed by large glider planes. These gliders were loaded with ground troops. They were pulled through the air with long tow lines. These gliders were made of plywood.

A little while after the gliders had gone, it was time for us to become airborne. We were able to travel faster than they, so we had to give them time to get to the target area. After we had completed our circling over the base and were in formation, we left England over the White Cliffs of Dover. We were flying very low. We crossed the English Channel at and arrived on the continent at Normandy.

It was interesting to note the total devastation in the Normandy area. The ground was

bombed and shelled until the craters almost overlapped. There were no trees in the area, nor any standing construction. We flew at very low altitude across France, gradually turning to the left until we had circumvented Holland, and began to arrive at the target area.

Practically everyone had preceded us to the target. As we neared the Rhine River at Wesel, Germany, there was a mass of men and equipment, either on the move toward the river or getting ready to move. The Corps of Engineers were on hand and were installing pontoon bridges across the river. The Navy was there with landing craft, ferrying men and equipment across. The paratroopers had jumped first to clear the way, and immediately behind them came the gliders full of troops. We flew in just as the gliders were landing and dropped our supplies on them.

We were flying so low that it was as if we were in a grandstand seat to see the whole battle. It was not quite that comfortable, however. We were sitting there like ducks in a shooting gallery. We had no guns or ammunition, nor could we have used them because of the danger to our ground forces. The flight plan required us to drop our load of supplies, and immediately make a right turn and recross the Rhine. That would give us the least amount of exposure to ground fire, and we would be back over our lines quickly. It did not work quite that way.

Just as we released our load, another group that was out of place, cut across in front of us. In order to avoid a collision, our group had to made a left turn and then swing around to the right. That put us over a concentration of firepower from the Germans. At the time we were only slightly above treetop level and were almost like sitting targets. It is exasperating, to say the least, to stand by a waist window looking straight down, and see soldiers only a hundred or so feet from you. Some of them were waving and cheering us on. Across the next hedge row, they were firing their machine guns at us. In the midst of the battle, there was a Frenchman plowing his field with a steer, as if nothing was amiss.

The plane to our immediate right and slightly behind, was so close to us in the formation that I could look into the face of the pilot. Suddenly, as I watched, they were hit. They immediately exploded and scattered along the ground in a huge ball of fire. The last thing I saw of them were the four engines rolling across the field and through hedge rows in balls of fire.

We were like dead ducks in the water. No formation is supposed to break up, but ours did. Our pilot dived our plane down on the deck, as close to the ground as it would fly,

in order to get out of the crossfire zone. We were flying between the trees and barely skimming over the hedges. I remember seeing the uprights of a railroad crossing on both sides of our plane as we went between them. It is evident that we made it out of there, but many did not. Our squadron lost two out of nine planes. The squadron immediately behind us lost seven out of nine. Someone`s navigation mistake cost a lot of lives.

It still seems that it was wrong, but our pilot was in serious trouble for saving our plane and our lives. He was almost court marshaled for breaking the formation and lowering his altitude. It is almost certain that if he had not done so, we would never have made the return across the Rhine.

All in all, it was an interesting mission. No one has ever been more scared than we were, but that goes with the job. We spent five hours and fifty minutes flying time on this mission. One good aspect, however, was that none of it required any time on oxygen.

Footnote: At a crew reunion in 1995, I was discussing this mission with our navigator, whom I had not seen in fifty years. From his vantage point in the nose of the plane, under the upper turret, he had wondered about flying over the railroad. He had worried that the pilot would not climb enough to clear the tracks. At this point, the pilot interrupted with the question, "Didn't you guys see the power lines? I couldn't climb any higher and still go under them." We were glad that we did not see all of this as it happened.

8th AF Aided Paratroops

Having culminated its role in the Rhine crossing Saturday with blazing bomber and fighter sweeps up and down enemy territory, activities of the 8th Air Force fell off sharply yesterday as approximately 250 Liberators and some 250 Mustangs and Thunderbolts attacked three underground oil storage depots near Brunswick and Hamburg.

But on Saturday, the 8th put together a mighty procession of bombers and fighters which flew 3,000 sorties in cooperation with the troops streaming across the river. The bombers, which had been devastating enemy airfields east of the Rhine for three days, plastered 16 more and dropped weapons and supplies in a daring low-level operation to paratroops immediately after they had landed.

From dawn to dusk Thunderbolts and Mustangs patroled the battle area, riddling troop concentrations, supply columns, rail yards and airfields. Only 66 Nazi fighters were met, an indication of the results of the bombers' relentless attacks on Luftwaffe fields, and 53 of these were shot down. The 8th lost 22 bombers and four fighters during the day.

Liberators which dropped supplies to the airborne troops bore the brunt of the losses—20 out of approximately 240 which followed directly behind transports and gliders and dropped the sky-fighters some 600 tons of weapons and medical supplies from 100 feet. The Libs had to battle through an intense storm of 20-mm. anti-aircraft, machine-gun and small weapons fire.

The massive operation of the 8th was split three ways. Early in the morning, around 1,050 Forts and Libs hit 12 airfields east of the Rhine. This was followed by the mission supporting the airborne troops. Then late in the afternoon 450 heavies struck four additional fields in the Reich, raising to 25 the total of airdromes hit by the 8th in its fierce attack on Nazi fighter bases.

At the day's end the German lines were a shambles, supply lines wrecked, rails torn and twisted, airfields gutted and cratered. Long columns of enemy convoys were set aflame and riddled by fighters. An entire motorized infantry battalion was battered and routed by Mustang pilots who caught the unit as it roared along a highway near Cologne.

Fighter pilots reported shooting up 45 locomotives, 210 rail cars, 300 motor vehicles and 21 barges. Most of these transportation elements were loaded with personnel.

Flyers Watch Long Lines of Nazis Give Up

A U. S. 8TH AIR FORCE BOMBER BASE, England, March 24 (AP).—Liberator crews returning today from supplying air borne troops across the Rhine reported that stretches of the Rhineland were engulfed in smoke and flames and that many Germans were surrendering.

"Wesel and near-by small towns were all ablaze," said Lt. Col. William H. Strong, Great Bend, Kas., pilot of a Liberator which parachuted food, medical supplies, and ammunition to air borne troops two and one-half miles northeast of Wesel.

"Wesel was the worst pile of rubble I ever saw. There were no streets. Everything had collapsed. Smoke stretched for miles around.

Germans Surrendering.

"We could see plenty of activity, despite the smoke. Long lines of German prisoners with their hands up were winding back toward the Rhine. The entire east bank of the Rhine is lined with landing craft."

Sgt. Frank B. Collins of 65 Newton st., Somerville, Mass., member of another Liberator crew, said he saw only a few German soldiers who were not prisoners.

"They were so busy surrendering they didn't pay any attention to our planes," he said.

The Liberators, while encountering no fighter opposition and only weak flak, were forced to fly so low to drop their bundles that they were big targets for German ground gunners, whose faces easily were distinguishable.

Like a Practice Run.

Notwithstanding, Capt. Robert G. Seever, Forsker, Okla., commented "It was just like a practice run."

Sgt. Richard Trousdale of Dumont, Ia., said: "The British really are going to town. It was a sight."

Sgt. Marion Scarberry, Dallas, Tex., said the planes drew rifle fire from the ground, "but we got it down to our boys just where they wanted it. We could see them running and picking up the bundles."

"The instant we hit the Rhine we knew the British had gone across," said Capt. Louis C. Wieser of Hammond, Ind., "a tremendous battle was raging just east of the river, with literally hundreds of fighters strafing and diving and with gun flashes everywhere."

PERLEBERG
MISSION SEVENTEEN
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 4, 1945

The crew was called out at 1:30 A. M. to begin a mission day. After breakfast came the briefing, where we learned that the target for the day was a jet field near Perleberg, Germany. This is in north central Germany, about halfway between Hamburg and Berlin. Our pilot was in the hospital with the flu, so we flew with Lt. Derr, his copilot, and navigator. They proved to be good men to work with.

We were loaded today with ten 500 pound incendiary clusters. An incendiary bomb is about two to three inches in diameter, and is about six feet long. A round bundle of these incendiaries about two feet or more in diameter will weigh five hundred pounds. They are held together with metal bands that are loaded with explosives which are preset to detonate at certain altitudes. This is dropped as one unit, but at the designated altitude, the bands explode and let the incendiaries scatter and fall on their own. Each one creates its own fire where it lands.

We took off at 5:30 and made up our formations at 14,000 feet altitude. We headed across the English Channel. We were to bomb visual targets only, because the Germans were moving prisoners all across Germany. They had a habit of placing them very near to good targets to discourage the bombing of those areas.

One of our planes went down before we arrived at Hamburg. We do not know why. The left waist gunner saw two chutes deploy before it went through the clouds and disappeared. Around the Hamburg area, the antiaircraft fire was very heavy, some of the most intense flak we had seen up until this time. Then the fighters came.

We were hit by eight or ten Messerschmitt 262's, one Messerschmitt 163, plus several Messerschmitt 109's. One of the first ones hit our deputy lead ship, and he went down in flames. We only saw two chutes. The left waist gunner fired on him as he made his breakaway, but he was gone in a hurry. All of the gunners from the formation were firing on the attacking planes, so they made only a few passes. Our fighter escort was keeping some of them busy before they could break away and attack us.

Mac and Dick, the nose and tail gunners, had some real good shots. The tail gunner thinks he got some good hits, but could not claim a knockdown, because there were many others firing at the same time. I was busy on the right side of our plane trying to track the jet fighters that were coming out of our vapor trail. They came so fast that

they were into our formation almost before we could see them coming. They were traveling the same direction we were, but at such speed that they could only lob a few shells at us, and we could not get but a short burst of fire at them.

After the mission, at debriefing, a pilot from another crew came over to our table and asked who was firing the right waist gun on our plane. I thought I was in for trouble, but he said that he wanted to congratulate me for some fine shooting. He said that the finest part of it was when I stopped firing. He said that the tracer rounds from my gun would stop just over his head.

We were in more flak during most of the mission, but it was not quite as intense. We were not able to bomb our primary nor secondary targets because the visibility was obscured by clouds. We dropped them on a target of opportunity - another town.

Our losses were heavy. We lost three bombers. Many were wounded and most of the ships were full of holes. One of the ships was hit in the bombay, and the incendiaries exploded. We reported six chutes out of this one. In other groups we saw four or five ships go down. The gunners in our group got credit for knocking down two enemy fighters.

We were in the air for eight hours, ten minutes. Six hours of this was on oxygen. This was another of those missions when everyone in the group was shot full of holes except us. We did not get one single hole. How can we continue to explain these instances when we were the only crew spared? Over and over it happened.

DUNEBERG
EIGHTEENTH MISSION
SATURDAY, APRIL 7, 1945

We were up again at 1:30 A. M. to start getting ready for a mission. Our target was to be an ammunition dump at Duneberg, near Hamburg, Germany. This is in the north central part of Germany, and we were to go in by way of the North Sea. We had such a thick ground fog that our take off time was delayed until 8:30.

We were about twenty minutes from our target when we were hit by bandits. There were reported to be forty-five or fifty ME-109's and ME-262's in the area. The P-5l fighter escort kept most of them busy and away from us, but some managed to come in. We had one ME-109 that came in on a pursuit curve, and Cassinari got a few shots at him from the upper turret before he was blocked off by the left rudder. Dick Howell, the tail gunner fired about two hundred rounds at him. Suddenly he flew up beside us about five o'clock high and stayed there for a few seconds. He had just cleared the right rudder, so I was able to get some good shots at him. I was almost sitting on the floor while firing up at him. I could see the armor piercing incendiary bullets hitting his armor plate. He finally broke away down under us and to the left side as he fell away smoking. The right waist gunner got some good shots at him at that time. Several P-5l's followed him down until he crashed. We could not take individual credit for the kill, because there were others in the squadron firing at him also.

Immediately following this action, someone called a jet coming through underneath from six o'clock. Mac, the nose gunner, began firing as soon as he could but the jet was almost out of range by the time he could get his sights on him. Pieces of the canopy flew from the jet as the the plane pitched over.

We watched as a ME-109 seemed to deliberately fly into the wing of the deputy lead ship. It veered over and into the lead ship. All three of the planes went down in one tangled mess. This was the first incidence of a suicide attack that we had seen, and it certainly seemed to be just that. Only eight chutes were reported sighted.

Only moments later we arrived at our target. As we were over the target area, we were suddenly blasted up, up, up, in the air from the concussion at the target area 20,000 feet below. It is a pretty sure bet that we hit the target to get that much of a boost from so far away. I would not have expected such a shock unless we had been doing very low level bombing.
This mission lasted for six and three quarter hours, with three hours being on oxygen.

The temperature was twenty-eight degrees below zero centigrade. It was another day when our ship was not hit.

FURTH
NINETEENTH MISSION
SUNDAY, APRIL 8, 1945

We were called out at 4:30 this morning for breakfast and a briefing on a jet field at Furth, near Nurenburg, Germany. To begin with there were a number of bandits reported to be in the area, but they did not bother us. Our fighter escort kept them so busy that they did not have time to approach us. Later, there was so much flak over the target area that they could not afford to come near.

We were loaded with eleven 500 pound general purpose bombs and dropped them from 22,000 feet altitude. The Germans threw up such a heavy barrage of flak that our wings were cutting through the balls of smoke like a knife cutting cake. The pilot said that our deputy lead ship made too sharp a turn and letdown after bombs away. He caused us as leader of the low left element to make a very steep turn with the throttles cut back. As a result, the bomber stalled.

It was reported that Cassinari, the engineer who was in the upper turret, was ready to bail out, and tried to pull his seat release but it jammed. The nose gunner knew we were hit and going down, so he ejected from his turret and was determined to open the nose wheel doors. The navigator, Bob Overstake had to sit on him to keep him from bailing out. These incidences were only reported to me. I do know, however what happened in the rear portion of the plane.

On this mission, Tom Paone the left waist gunner, wanted to take the pictures of the bomb strikes. I was delighted to surrender the 35 MM movie camera to him for a change. We opened the rear escape hatch door, which is in the floor of the plane near the tail turret. He was down on his knees, leaning over the hatch with the camera. Suddenly, the plane lurched, and we were thrown up against the top of the fuselage, where we stuck for what seemed to be several seconds.

In our training, we had been taught that in the event of a hit, many times parts of the wing or rudder broke off and caused the plane to go into a spin. The centrifugal force of the spin will plaster an individual to the wall or ceiling with such force that he cannot move or extricate himself. That is the reason that many do not escape from damaged ships. At times, another portion breaks away, causing the plane to change direction of spin, giving a momentary respite. During that moment, the individual must take quick advantage to move before the next centrifugal force holds him inside for good.

All of this training flashed through my mind in the split second when our plane was pulled back into a flying configuration. As I descended rapidly to the floor, I came down just over the open escape hatch. My only thought was to vacate the premises while I could. I assumed the prescribed position of squatting facing the hatch and starting a somersault roll out of the plane.

Tom Paone came down near the waist window. He was able to rapidly see that we still had both wings and both rudders. His quick thinking and training caused him to also analyze my predicament. He grabbed the straps of my parachute harness and held on. I was already over balanced over the hatch, on my way out. Only his strength held me back to keep me from visiting Furth. I shall never forget him for this and many other things he did for me during our experiences together. That was one trip of 5.41 miles that I am glad I did not take through air where there was no oxygen, and the temperature was thirty-five degrees below zero.

This was another of those rather long missions where many things happened to make it more unpleasant. We were up there about seven and one half hours. We were on oxygen for five hours. In the midst of all of the other inconveniences, the nose gunner's heated suit burned out. Another call for Horace to dig into his bag of confiscated goods and find an electric comforter. That meant a trip from the waist, through two bombays, under the flight deck, over the nose wheel, between the navigator's legs, and to the nose turret to get Mac wrapped in the blanket and plugged in to a power supply. All of that time I was having to move around with a small walk-around oxygen bottle that carries a very limited supply of oxygen. Part of the job.

I notice in Paone's diary that I was good enough to clean his guns again for him after we returned to the base. Maybe I felt that I owed him something.

It is well to note that with the unusually heavy barrage of flak, again today, we were not hit at all. How long can this last for one crew?

We did not learn until many years later, and then only from Blanche Shafer his wife, that our pilot had another revelation about our destiny. During this mission, when the barrages of flak were so thick that we could not see through them, Tom saw an aura of light, a foot or so out from, and surrounding our plane. He decided then that we had a protective sheild about us, and that we would survive as a crew. His faith in God was strengthened and he was at peace in the midst of utter confusion.

AMBERG
TWENTIETH MISSION
APRIL 11, 1945

Amberg is in the extreme southern part of Germany, west of Nuremburg, near the Czechoslovakian border. They had a rail yard that we needed to remove, so we were loaded with five 1000 pound general purpose bombs.

We were up at five o'clock for breakfast and briefing. We had such a heavy overcast that we were not able to make our formations over England. We had to assemble over France at about 4000 feet altitude.

A new problem developed on this mission that we had not experienced before. As we made our journey across the rest of France and nearly across Germany, we found that we were flying alone. Our fighter escort had not shown up. We never knew how to really appreciate those P-51's and P-47's until they were not there. It was very frightening to think that we were cruising along over enemy territory without their protection. A bomber is not able to make defensive maneuvers and makes a good target for a fighter plane.

About fifteen minutes before we reached the target area, our escort appeared. Fortunately, there had been no attacks from enemy fighters. Neither was there any flak to bother us on this mission. Our bomb load was directly on target and did a good job of destroying the yards.

The mission took eight hours, twenty-five minutes, with four hours being spent on oxygen. The temperature at 22,000 feet was forty degrees below zero. Thanks for the new model of electrically heated suits.

Few Enemy Planes Up, 22 KO'd

Heavy bombers of the 8th Air Force and the RAF again lent their crushing weight yesterday to the great tactical blitz on Nazi military and communications zones in the Ruhr. More than 1,300 Fortresses and Liberators of the 8th, with a cover of some 700 Mustangs, lashed out in excellent weather at nine Wehrmacht administration and supply centers ringing Essen in the Ruhr and continued to blast enemy airfields, striking four more near Frankfurt-on-Main and Stuttgart and one at Ahlhorn, near Bremen, which had been pommeled in Wednesday's big blow.

RAF heavies were out in great strength and with strong escorts, indicating the 8th and Bomber Command had well over 3,000 aircraft out. The British heavies threw their punches at three Nazi advance bases for the lower Rhine near Wesel—Bocholt, Dorstein and Dulmen—hit the railway center of Hildesheim, near Hanover, and climaxed the day with a Lancaster-borne assault with 11-ton bombs on railway bridges in northwest Germany.

Thunder Up from Italy

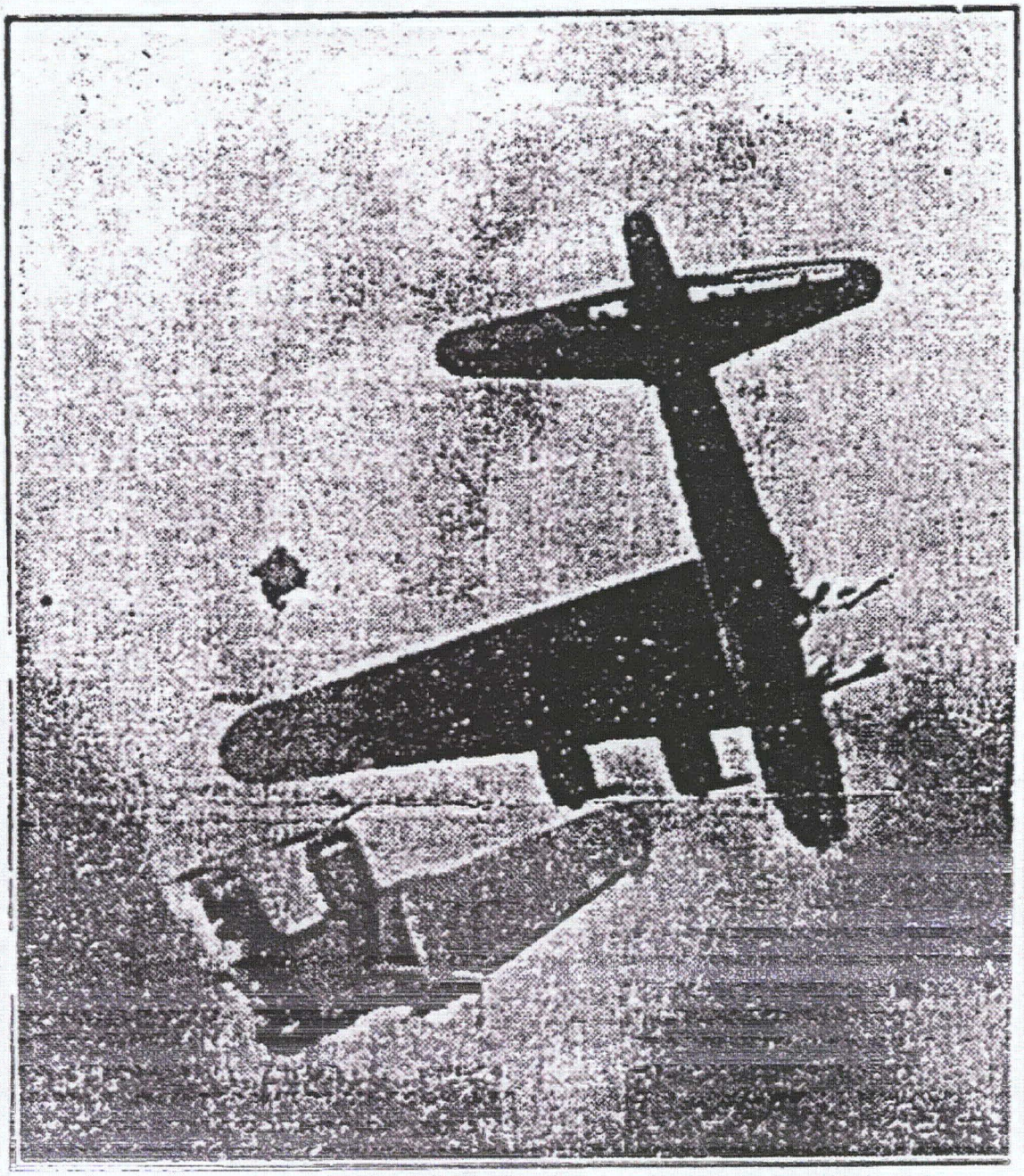
From the south, Forts and Libs of the 15th thundered up from Italy to bomb the Ruhland oil refinery, 70 miles south of Berlin, and oil refineries and railroad yards in Vienna. At Ruhland, Libs picked up part of the escort of 8th Mustangs for the bomb run, thus capping a big day for the fighters, too.

The Mustangs had the distinction of providing protection for three separate forces, for in addition to shielding the 8th and 15th, some went along to defend the RAF's Lancasters which poured 11-tonners on the bridges. Some scattered enemy air opposition was met but no passes were made at the heavies and 8th fighters KO'd 13 in the air and shot up nine more in strafing attacks on fields in central Germany.

The 4th Mustang Group, which met the 15th Libs over Ruhland, bagged ten of these planes in a fierce battle with 15 FW190s which had just taken off from an enemy airfield. Lt. Col. Sidney S. Woods, of Somerton, Ariz., who led the group, shot down five for his first kills in the ETO after shifting here from the Pacific.

The specific targets for 8th heavies around Essen were at Bottrop, Gladbeck, Barminghotten, Dorsten, Westerholt, Mulheim, Hinsbeck, Hattingen and Geresheim. Ack-ack over these objectives was particularly heavy but over the four airfields in the Frankfurt and Stuttgart areas—Kitzengen, Giebelstadt, Rhein Main and Schwabisch-Hall—

No Milk Run Here



U.S. Army Air Force Photo

The massive blows of Allied air armadas have broken the back of the Luftwaffe, but the skies over Germany are not all lined with velvet. Here an 8th Air Force Fortress, one wing shot off by an Me109, plunges earthward after attacking an airfield near Oranienburg on Tuesday's record day. The 8th lost 25 bombers and eight fighters out of a force of 1,300 bombers and 850 fighters.

PASSAU
TWENTY-FIRST MISSION
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18, 1945

Briefing for Passau was early in the morning, but we did not take off until 9:30. The target still had to do with railroads, but this time, it was a bridge over the Danube River. Passau is located in eastern Germany near the Austrian border.

This was another of the rather long, boring missions. The war was nearer to an end than we realized, and fighter opposition was almost a thing of the past. We went all the way in without having to contend with bandits in the air. Neither were we bothered with antiaircraft fire.

The mission was deemed a success, in that our eight 500 pound general purpose bombs were right on target. About eight hours after leaving England, we were back and ready to go again.

SALZBURG
TWENTY-SECOND MISSION
APRIL 25, 1945

This was a long mission, because we had to go across France, and Germany to get to Austria. Our fighter escort never did show up on this mission. There was one instance when two ME-262's showed up over the target, but they did not attack us.

The target for this mission was like many of the others, another railroad yard. We had some problem with the propeller governor on our number three engine, so we were late getting off the ground. We soon caught up with our formation and made it to the target. There was some flak over the target area, but it was not very accurate. We dropped five more 1000 pound general purpose bombs, the last for our group for this war.

Mac, our nose gunner, did not fly with us on this mission because of a bad cold. He missed some good views of the Alps Mountains as we went in and out of Austria. It was a very tiring mission due to the fact that we had to remain on extra alert without our escort.

We did not realize that this was the last mission that we would fly. We would not be able to complete our thirty mission tour, but not one complaint was heard. At this point I had completed 163 1/2 hours of combat flying time. Along with the rest of our crew, I had been well blessed in so many ways that I can never recount them. Not one of us had been injured. The only damage that we had received to any plane we flew was one flak hole in a wing between gas tanks, and one small arms bullet in one gas tank.