
10

Operations: May/June 1944

The Ordnance Section, formed as a separate unit March 13, 1944, returned to Group and Squadrons May 1, 1944.

BOLZANO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 190 - MAY 2, 1944

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 36 aircraft to bomb Railroad Bridges and Marshalling Yards in Bolzano. Arriving at a point 75 miles east of Bologna, they encountered 10/10 cloud cover and were unable to reach the assigned target, and alternates.

PLOESTI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 191 - MAY 4, 1944

Shortly after take-off, this mission was canceled by orders of 5th Wing Headquarters. Weather reports caused the cancellation to bomb the Pumping Station at Ploesti.

PLOESTI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 192 - MAY 5, 1944

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 36 aircraft and dropped 108 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs by Pathfinder methods. The target was smoke covered and results not known. Flak was intense and accurate causing damage to 33 of the 36 aircraft. Four airmen were injured by flak. Coming off the target, four aircraft dropped out of formation to protect one B-17 having two engines feathered. This formation was jumped by two Me-109s resulting in one Me-109 being shot down. S/Sgt. Howard T. Christenson, LT, and Sgt. Frank J. Ivanich, TG, both of the 20th Squadron, received joint credit for the E/A. All A/C returned.

Wounded: 2nd Lt. Albert J. Ravid, N, 96th Squadron, severe wound, right leg; 2nd Lt. Arthur (NMI) Kotlen, 96th Squadron, severe wound, right inner canthus; 2nd Lt. Robert L. Kehm, CP, 20th Squadron, slight abrasion, left foreleg; and T/Sgt. Rolan S. Farr, UT, 96th Squadron, first degree burns right side of face.

2nd Lt. John F. Adams, O-754711, Radar Navigator, 49th Squadron, Missing in Action on mission to Ploesti while flying with the 463rd Bomb Group.

BRASOV, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 193 - MAY 7, 1944

Lt. Col. Donald H. Ainsworth led 33 aircraft and dropped their bombs on the Aircraft Factory in Brasov. The target was well covered and only one E/A made one pass at the first plane over the target. Flak at the target varied from slight to intense. One B-17, #42-32022, 96th Squadron, failed to return.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-32022 - "LONESOME POLECAT" - 96TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt. Robert E. Weiss, 0-748484, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt. Neil J. Coady, 0-813328, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Edwin R. Bentley, 0-757793, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt. George J. Thomas, 0-755249, B.	(EVADED)
T/Sgt. Roy T. Ford, 17123636, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt. Wilbur E. Earl, 16084107, L/T.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Willard (NMI) Curtis, Jr., 20536316, R/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Leslie H. Wolfe, Jr., 32929248, L/W.	(EVADED)
T/Sgt. Ivan H. Foster, 12174204, T/G.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt. Julius H. Entrekin, 34446056, R/O.	(EVADED)

Statement of T/Sgt. Ivan H. Foster, 7 August 1944, after evading: "After the bomb run the engines were hit by flak; three and four were dead, three windmilling and could not be feathered, and the number two engine was tearing itself off the wing. The order was given to bail out and I bailed out at 1,500 feet. I counted nine other chutes in the air besides my own, thus accounting for all crew members. Shortly after landing I contacted six crew members: Weiss, Thomas, Curtis, Entrekin, Wolfe, and Earl. I received information from my helpers that Coady, Bentley, and Ford were captured by the Germans."

2nd Lt. Edwin Richard Bentley, N. War Diary, 1944: "The missions were getting tougher every day. Flak batteries were heavy around the oil fields, refineries and airfields. Enemy fighters were being moved into areas we were bombing and they are excellent flyers.

"Sunday, April 2, 1944, we went to Steyr, Austria. Our pilot was Lt. Doyle, Operations Officer and Bombardier was Lt. Thomas. The flak was heavy but inaccurate. The raid was a complete failure. The enemy cleverly camouflaged at the target. Used smudge pots to produce haze. Bombs were dropped. On the previous raid, there was a 50% loss. Today we lost three out of 33 planes. Today the B-24s caught hell from fighters, rockets and floating bombs. Raid was about 47 degrees N so we got a two mission credit, which made my fifth and sixth.

"Today, April 4, 1944, we hit the Marshalling Yards at Bucharest, Romania. I flew with Lt. Weiss, pilot, and Lt. Thomas, bombardier. This was the first mission that the 15th had pulled on this target. The flak was heavy and accurate. The trip was long and we caught a hell of a lot of flak. We were again credited with two missions, my 7th and 8th.

"April 5, 1944, we went back to Ploesti, Romania to bomb the Marshalling Yards. The flak was HEAVY! I flew with Major Hillhouse and the Squadron bombardier. The raid did a hell of a lot in the attitude of the people on who is winning the war. The flak was thick as hell and our ship was lucky, only six holes. I was sprayed with flak particles, which were extracted at the field hospital. I was credited with my 9th and 10th mission.

"April 12, 1944, we went to Fischamend Market, Austria. My pilot was Lt. Weiss and the bombardier was Lt. Thomas. This raid was on the aircraft components parts plant. The raid was partially successful. Never have I seen so many Wings of bombers before in the air over several targets, all of which were hit hard. B-24s were thick as flies. We were untouched and fighters didn't bother us at all. All planes returned. Two hundred enemy fighters attacked the B-24s. Flak was light. Received the Air Medal with first cluster. Received credit for 11th and 12th mission.

"April 13, 1944, our target was a components factory at Gyor, Hungary. My pilot was Lt. Weiss and bombardier was Lt. Thomas. There was no flak. The bombing attack was successful. There were

flak guns but the Germans played a trick on us and sent fighters from under, which cost us dearly in airplanes. Our escort was over us and did not see the enemy. Martin's crew from Dow Field went down today. Reeve's crew went down. Applegate's crew went down. Ross's crew went down. German's crew went down. Sanvito's crew went down. Credited with my 13th and 14th mission.

"April 15, 1944. Ploesti Marshalling Yards. My pilot, Lt. Weiss, bombardier, Lt. Thomas. Flak heavy and accurate. Today's target was a long hard grind back to Ploesti. The mission before of April 5th describes this one except the enemy fighters were thick, although our Squadron wasn't hit. First I saw rockets used. A new kind of harassing flak was used. Credited with missions 15 and 16.

"April 24, 1944, Ploesti, Romania Marshalling Yards. My pilot, Lt. Weiss, and bombardier, Lt. Thomas. Today, as usual, the flak was terrific; heavy intense, accurate. Our plane was hit badly. Had a direct hit in gas tank. Altogether, six holes. The main problem was that German fighters were thick as flies. Their pilots were not experienced so we shot quite a few down. I shot one myself, which was my first. Credited with missions 18 and 19. Received third cluster to Air Medal.

"We were shot down on May 6, 1944, at 1346 o'clock. The target was an aircraft production plant at Brasov, Romania. We lost engines No. 3 and No. 4 near Brasov to flak. We could not maintain altitude to clear the Alps nor did we have enough gasoline to reach the sea. Therefore we bailed out.

"Coady, Ford, and myself were taken captive by the Chetnicks and were told we were being held in protective custody. About midnight we were traded to the Germans for \$30 each. The Germans took us to Sarajevo. After two nights in a dungeon used to house political prisoners, we were taken to an airfield and flown to Belgrade in a Heinkel III. While in flight, we were attacked by two P-51s but due to low level flight, we were not hit.

"I was immediately placed in solitary confinement. For two days I was fed only bread and water. I guess they expected me to weaken for interrogation at the end of that time but I didn't tell them a thing.

"May 11th I was taken out of solitary confinement with three other officers and placed on a train for Vienna. One of our guards, a German Army Corporal, about 65 years of age, had a son that was a POW in south Texas. He read all of his son's letters to us. The day we spent in Vienna was swell. Our guards allowed us to enter a bar where we enjoyed a beer and some cinnamon rolls. It cost us an American quarter, which I happened to have on me.

"On May 13, we reached Stalag Luft III where we stayed until January 26, 1945. Our chief hardship there was the inadequate food we received. On January 28th, the Russian offensive caused the evacuation of the camp. About 10,000 American and British started a forced march to Spornburg. The temperature was between 5 to minus 15 degrees. After arriving in Spornburg, we boarded 40 & 8 box cars. The train reached Nurnburg. There our chief source of nourishment was an unappetizing cabbage soup with bugs in it which we received twice a day. We called it 'Green Death.' I don't know what we would have done without our supply of YMCA equipment and Red Cross parcels.

"On April 4, as the U.S. Army approached, we made another nine-day forced march covering 145 kilometers to Stalag 7A, near Moosdorf. Many prisoners and guards dropped out from exhaustion, but on the way I managed to trade some cigarettes for food and I actually gained weight. One day I ate 18 eggs. During this march, the 9th Air Force fired on our column with a few badly injured.

"April 29th, at 9:00 o'clock, a tank of the 7th Army penetrated our barbed wire encampment. At 9:20, the same day, my father arrived and landed next to the barbed wire in a Piper scout plane. The first person he talked to was a friend that I had joined the Air Corps with. Therefore, he was able to find me in a few minutes, even among the 30,000 prisoners in the camp.

"At 11:00, Dad and I left Moosdorf for his Headquarters at Weimer, Germany. Needless to say, Dad and I had a great time in Weimer, Weisbaden, and Paris for about 10 days."

Lt. Bentley's father, Lt. Col. Ed R. Bentley, was with the 9th Air Force Judge Advocates Office stationed in Weimer, Germany. He had made one hazardous unsuccessful trip, by Jeep, to the prison camp at Nurnburg, only to find that Lt. Bentley had been moved out of the camp two days prior.

2nd Lt. Neil J. Coady, CP of A/C #42-32022, March 4, 1991: "We lost engine No. 3 and No. 4 to flak and could not feather them. We lost altitude steadily on the way to Italy and had to bail out when we neared the mountains of Yugoslavia. When it was time to bail out of the aircraft, I went to the front of the bomb bay and saw some enlisted men at the back end of the bomb bay. I motioned for them to jump but they would not, afraid I guess. So being a dumb hero, I jumped out first to show them it was necessary. If I had waited another three or four minutes, we would all have been picked up by British paid Chetnicks and there would have been no POWs. But you never know.

"T/Sgt. Roy T. Ford followed me and then Lt. Edwin Bentley went third. We landed on one side of the mountain and the rest of the crew landed on the other side of the mountain. Partisans who picked up Ford, Bentley, and I were paid by the Germans. Chetnicks on the other side of the mountain were paid by the British and guided the rest of the crew to a mountain hideout where a C-47 flew them out in a couple of weeks. This is what I remember Bob Weiss telling me several years ago. If his story differs, take his facts as he knows them better than I.

"I had landed in a tree and my chute caught in the top branches. By the time I had pulled the chute out of the tree, a civilian, with an overseas cap with a Red Star on it, pointed a new American Thompson sub-machine gun at me and said something in Yugo that I did not understand, but did understand the gun pointing at my chest. Then he said, 'Pour vous is gare est fini.' And that I understood.

"He marched me down the mountain and I was turned over to the German Field police and later they brought in Ford and Bentley. We were taken by truck to some town and then flown in the bomb bay of a converted He-111, with benches in the bomb bay, to Belgrade for interrogation. We then were taken through Vienna, Austria, through Czechoslovakia and arrived at Sagan, Stalag Luft III a few days later. Bentley and I got the same barracks, but different rooms, and Ford got a different barracks. We had ten men in our room but later was increased to 15. POW condition at Stalag Luft III was pretty good and we received Red Cross parcels.

"Prison life was pretty uneventful until 21 January 1945 when the Germans told us to be ready to march overland toward the West. It was a bitterly cold, snowy afternoon when we all marched out in columns, in our winter coats and hats, all GI stuff provided for us through the International Red Cross. We marched the back roads, all through the day and night, all the next day, and late the second night we stopped in the town of Gottbus. We boarded box cars, with 50 men in a car and moved south to Nurnburg, another camp, Stalag 13-D.

"At Stalag 13-D, in Nurnburg, conditions were poor. After surviving a 40-hour bombing raid on Nurnburg on 3 April 1945, we walked to Moosdorf, Stalag 7A, near Munich and were held there in a camp holding thousands of POWs of all nationalities. At Stalag 7A, conditions were very bad but fortunately General Patton's Tank Army liberated us one day in May, before we really got sick and diseased.

"Ten days later we were flown out on C-47s to Camp Lucky Strike near LaHavre. I then went to a hospital to regain 20 pounds I lost while a POW. We were then sent back to the United States aboard a Liberty Ship troop transport to New Jersey. I then received a 60 day leave and then went back to Atlantic City for assignment to Douglas, Arizona.

"I remained in the service flying B-47 bombers for SAC (Strategic Air Command). I flew C-47s in Korea and held a desk job at 5th Air Force Headquarters in Korea. After more time with SAC, flying bombers, I got to go to Nam and spent one year there in the Inspector General's office. I got to see all

the USAF bases in Viet Nam and Thailand. I retired in 1969 with the rank of Lt. Col. My Korea and Viet Nam experiences have shaded out many of the World War II experiences that Bob Weiss keeps reminding me of when we meet. However, overall, I would say that my POW experience was one of my life's most experience in three wars.

"I made an effort to find all of my old WWII crew members four or five years ago and found Bob Weiss, Edwin Bentley, George Thomas, Doug Ford, Ivan Foster, and Willard Curtis. I found that the ball turret gunner, 'Shorty' Earl, was killed in a car crash about ten years ago and our tail gunner, Leo Wolfe, was killed in a plane crash after he returned to the United States in World War II."

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 194 - MAY 7, 1944

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 33 aircraft and dropped 96 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Bucharest. Bomb strike photos showed hits across the southeast end of the freight yards; severe damage and destruction of rolling stock; hits on two locomotive depots, warehouses and shops, a fuel storage tank; and damage to industrial buildings and into the city. Flak was moderate to intense and fairly accurate. There were no injuries to crews. Eight to 10 Me-109s and FW-190s attacked the formation coming off the target and were driven off by the fighter escort.

Sgt. Delbert W. Milleson, LW, 20th Squadron, was credited with destruction of one FW-190 and S/Sgt. Harry J. Forbes, TG, 20th Squadron, was credited with the probable destruction of a FW-190.

WIENER NEUSTADT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 195 - MAY 10, 1944

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 31 aircraft and dropped 91.50 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Aircraft Assembly Plant, Werk I. A smoke screen prevented observation of the area. Flak was very intense, accurate and heavy, resulting in damage to 31 aircraft and injuries to three men. 2nd Lt. Benjamin H. Butchkoff, B, 96th Squadron, suffered severe compound fracture of the upper right leg; 2nd Lt. Seth L. Griffen, B, 429th Squadron, suffered lacerations of the right arm; and S/Sgt. Jefferson F. Huey, LT, 49th Squadron, suffered a laceration of the forehead.

T/Sgt. Orchard B. Miller, Radio Gunner, 96th Squadron, and S/Sgt. Howard S. Williams, TG, 96th Squadron, were each credited with the destruction of an Me-109. Sgt. Robert O. Butts, Jr., LW, 429th Squadron, was credited with the probable destruction of a Me-109.

2nd Lt. William C. Easterbrook, Radar Navigator, 49th Squadron, was reported MIA while flying with the 463rd Bomb Group. 2nd Lt. Edward Rink, Jr., Radar Navigator, 49th Squadron was reported MIA while flying with another Bomb Group.

CIVITAVECCHIA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 196 - MAY 12, 1944

Colonel Herbert E. Rice led 34 aircraft to bomb German Headquarters at Massa D'Albe, Italy. Due to 10/10 cloud cover over the assigned target, the Group then dropped its 102 tons of GP bombs on the town and a nearby chemical factory. Each plane carried two, 2,000-lb. and two, 1,000-lb. bombs. Flak caused damage to three B-17s and injury to T/Sgt. John J. Taylor, UT, 429th Squadron, who suffered lacerations to the right cheek, eyebrow, and head.

MASSA D'ALBE, ITALY - MISSION NO. 197 - MAY 12, 1944

Colonel Herbert E. Rice, for the second time today, led 33 aircraft and dropped 66 tons of 1,000-lb. and 33 tons of 2,000-lb. GP bombs on German Headquarters. It was reported that hits were scored at the tunnel entrance and along roads leading to them. There was no flak and no E/A were encountered.

BOLZANO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 198 - MAY 13, 1944

Lt. Col. Donald Ainsworth, Group Operations Officer, led 29 aircraft and dropped 84 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs. The assigned target was a Railroad Bridge crossing the Iscaro River. The target was smoke covered from the bombing by a previous Group and assessment was difficult. There was a large concentration of hits along the track in the Marshalling Yards including a hit on the choke point. A highway bridge, adjacent to the railroad bridge, was knocked out.

En route to the target, the Group was attacked by 20 to 30 Me-109s and FW-190s. They made one pass and inflicted no damage to the Group's planes. Flak at the target was the tracking type and ranged from slight to intense, all heavy. Eleven B-17s received minor damage and three men were injured.

2nd Lt. Stanley G. Hullis, B, 429th Squadron, suffered lacerations on the right hand; Sgt. Eugene H. Crosser, Waist Gunner, 20th Squadron, suffered lacerations to the right thigh, and 2nd Lt. Frederick L. Tompkins, P, 429th Squadron, suffered a slight laceration to the left hand.

FERRARA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 199 - MAY 14, 1944

Major James G. Ellis, 20th Squadron CO, led 31 aircraft and dropped 93 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Ferrara Marshalling Yards. Two runs were made and reports were that the bombs fell in the assigned area. Flak was slight to moderate with fair accuracy. Fourteen planes were damaged, four severely. There were no losses and no injuries.

BIHAC, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 200 - MAY 17, 1944

Colonel Herbert E. Rice led 31 aircraft to bomb German Headquarters in this area. A 9/10 cloud cover obscured the target but a "hole" was found and 93 tons of 1,000-lb. bombs were dropped. Results could not be determined due to the cloud cover. No flak and no E/A were encountered.

BELGRADE, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 201 - MAY 18, 1944

The Marshalling Yards at Ploesti, Romania was the assigned target. Thirty-seven aircraft took off under the leadership of Lt. Col. Donald Ainsworth. A cloud cover prevented penetration to this target and the Group proceeded to Belgrade and dropped 73 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards. Bombing was by PFF and no accurate assessment of damage could be made. One plane tacked on to the 97th Bomb Group and dropped its bombs on Marshalling Yards at Nis, Yugoslavia, and reported good results. Three B-17s bombing Belgrade received minor flak damage.

1st Lt. James Miceli, Radar Navigator, 49th Squadron, was reported MIA while flying with the 463rd Bomb Group in A/C #725 on a mission to Ploesti, Romania.

1st Lt. James Miceli, Radar Navigator, 49th Squadron. April 12, 1944: "I picked up my crew at Avon Park, FL and assigned to the 3rd A.F., 88th Bomb Group, 318th Squadron. Our crew consisted of Pilot, Chuck Crafton; Co-pilot, Roy Cooper; Navigator, Jim Miceli; Bombardier, Jerry Hofmann; Engineer, Don May; Radio, Bill Schilling; Waist Gunners, Mel Moser and Isadore Berman; Tail Gunner, Earl McLish. It was a very good crew and we trained together from December 18, 1943 to January 19, 1944.

"I was assigned for Special Radar Training with the 4th Air Sea Search Attack Squadron at Langley Field, VA. I and our crew finished our training early in March, 1944.

"We flew our B-17 from Langley Field April 28, 1944 to West Palm Beach, FL - Caracas, Venezuela - Belem, Brazil - Natal, Brazil - Dakar, No. Africa - Marrakech, Morocco - and finally to Foggia, Italy, arriving May 9th.

"Unfortunately I did not spend much time with the 2nd Bomb Group. On May 18, 1944, I was awakened at 3:00 a.m. and told that I would be flying with the 463rd Bomb Group as they needed a Mickey navigator. At this period of time, the 49th had a special assignment to furnish Radar Navigators to the other five Groups of the 5th Wing. I was the only one from the 2nd assigned to this crew from the 463rd. I would have preferred going with my own crew but it was determined that the target was cloud covered and radar would be needed for bombing. The target was Ploesti, covered with overcast skies, plus smoke pots effectively covering the Astro Romano Refinery.

"I was assigned to a crew consisting of Pilot, Rick Marak; Co-pilot, Rich Fontana; Navigator, Dick Buckwalter; Bombardier, Rich Mazar; Mickey Operator, Jim Miceli; Radio, Marv Hinshaw; Waist Gunner, Jim Nystrom; Engineer, Tom Goode.

"We took off at 8:00 a.m. - rendezvoused with the five other Bomb Groups. Because of weather, three Bomb Groups of B-24s were recalled but we continued with our 108 planes. We were leading the flight and dropped our bombs, which later proved to be 80% effective. On our return we were hit with flak, radio compartment caught fire, and the deflected flak hit my right hip, fracturing it on impact. We put out the fire, lost altitude falling out of formation and were attacked by three Me-109s who knocked out two engines, forcing us to abandon the plane. I crawled out and jumped from the bomb bay. I was followed down by a Me-109 who I assumed would use me for target practice, but luckily he just radioed my position to the ground troops. I landed in a wheat field. Landed heavily due to my fractured hip. Captured by four farmers with pitch forks, hustled to a nearby farmhouse. One of the women took pity on my condition and put some salve on my burned face and hands and let me sit down. The Nazi soldiers arrived in ten minutes, took me to the local jail for two hours of interrogation.

"Later, two other crew members arrived and we were kept in a jail cell for the night. We were finally given some ersatz tea and a slice of bread for breakfast. We were trucked to an Army Garrison and surprisingly the people weren't too hostile, lots of yelling and jeering but nothing physical. We met other crew members and discovered they all shared similar experiences and had bailed out successfully. We remained in the Garrison for three weeks and then they separated the officers from the enlisted men. The officers were assigned to an old, three story brick school house in downtown Bucharest, the enlisted men to a camp near the Marshalling Yards. The airmen from the first raid to Ploesti were imprisoned in Timusual, a small town near Bucharest.

"Surviving was the key. We had no amenities such as soap, tooth brush, tooth paste, towels, etc. The toilets were holes in the basement, the food was scarce as well as horrible, but the most disturbing was the lack of freedom and not knowing what was happening in the war.

"Each classroom held 20 to 25 men, beds were a steel frame on the floor filled with straw, infested with lice and bed bugs. The meals were identical each day. Breakfast - one slice sour bread with a cup of ersatz tea. Lunch - watered cabbage of fish head only soup, one slice of bread. Dinner - potato soup, piece of cheese, one slice of bread.

"As we were located in central Bucharest, we suffered almost daily air raids and bombing by the Americans during the day, and the British by night. It was most harrowing! On May 24 we were visited by the Red Cross and received a post card we could send home. The visit did not improve our condition, but they finally advised our families that we were POWs and not Missing In Action. Actually, I was shot down on May 18 and my parents learned I was a POW on July 5. It was a difficult time for our wives and families.

"We did have a friend in Princess Catherine Caradja who provided us with what little reading material we had, some cards and a basketball so we could have some physical activity. I became used to my fractured hip and was able to limp along without too much discomfort. No medical attention was provided.

“On August 23, 1944, the Russians stormed into Bucharest and the Romanians capitulated. The guards disappeared and we were free, but where to go? We raided the warehouse and discovered Red Cross packages which were never delivered to us so we appropriated them and distributed them equally among ourselves. We were bombed by the Nazi Air Force as they were trying to recapture Bucharest. Colonel Gunn, our senior ranking officer, arranged to stow away in a Romanian Me-109, and the pilot, Captain Cantacuzene, flew him to Bari, Italy to advise them of our situation.

“The 2nd Bomb Group was assigned to fly to Bucharest and 39 B-17s were modified to carry men back to Bari, Headquarters of the 15th Air Force. In all they flew three days, taking out 1,116 American POWs.

“We landed in Bari, stripped of our lice infested clothing, which was put in a burning pile, and then we were hosed off, and carefully deloused. What a great feeling! Fresh new clothing, clean body, and freedom!

“We were put back on active duty and I received my long awaited promotion to 1st Lt., awarded the Air Medal and the Purple Heart.

“We were then taken to Naples and boarded the U.S.S. Athos and sailed back to the U.S.A. We arrived back in the States September 9, 1944 at Camp Upham and promptly given a four week furlough. We returned to Fort Dix and given R&R at the Claridge Hotel in Atlantic City.

“Meanwhile back in Foggia, at the 2nd Bomb Group, my original crew were finishing their missions. I was the first to fly a mission and the first to be wounded, shot down and incarcerated.

“Jerry Hofmann finished his missions and was killed in action, volunteering as an observer, in the front lines in Northern Italy. Bill Schilling hit by rocket fire; Chuck Crafton and Don May were wounded but continued to fly; Earl McLish badly wounded. Now 50 years later, I have two artificial hips as a souvenir of my experience. Six of my original crew are still alive and kicking, but not very high!”

RIMINI, ITALY - MISSION NO. 202 - MAY 19, 1944

Major Charles H. Hillhouse, 96th Squadron CO, led 35 aircraft to bomb Railroad Bridges at Rimini. Dropped were 105 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs. Strike photos showed one direct hit on the edge of one bridge and other possible hits on the north and south railroad bridge and highway bridge. No flak, no E/A encountered.

AVEZZEANO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 203 - MAY 23, 1944

Major James G. Ellis, 20th Squadron CO, led 36 aircraft to bomb enemy troop concentrations in this area. Several runs were made over the target but heavy cloud cover prevented bombing. Two planes dropped 6 tons of 500-lb. GP Bombs with the 97th Bomb Group and two others dropped 6 tons of bombs on a highway on the eastern edge of Rescina, Italy. No flak, no E/A encountered.

FERENTINO, ITALY -MISSION NO. 204 - MAY 23, 1944

Major James G. Ellis again led a Group formation of 33 aircraft to bomb the escape route of the German forces at Cassino. The Group flew over the target for 40 minutes trying to find a hole in the clouds without success and returned its bombs to Base. No fighters were encountered but some slight but intense flak was seen to the left of the formation with no damage to aircraft or crews.

ATZGERDORF, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 205 - MAY 24, 1944

Major James G. Ellis led 32 aircraft and dropped 96 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Aircraft Factory at Atzgerdorf. Bombing was by PFF due to a heavy cloud cover over the target. Flak was

moderate to intense with fair accuracy causing damage to 19 planes, two severely, and wounding four crewmen. One Me-109 made one weak pass at the formation.

1st Lt. Oliver O. Thigpen, P, 96th Squadron, suffered a severe wound in left arm; T/Sgt. John J. Taylor, UT, 429th Squadron, suffered lacerations of forehead and cerebral concussion; S/Sgt. Frank C. Pharr, UT, 429th Squadron, suffered lacerations to forehead; and S/Sgt. Arlen J. Sterns, TG, 429th Squadron, suffered lacerations on right hand.

LYON, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 206 - MAY 25, 1944

Major Charles H. Hillhouse led 36 aircraft with 34 aircraft dropping 99 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Venissieux Marshalling Yards in Lyon. A good concentration of hits inflicted damage to the yards, shops, and rolling stock. No flak was encountered at the target but flak was encountered at landfall, damaging four B-17s with no injuries.

ST. ETIENNE, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 207 - MAY 26, 1944

Lt. Col. Donald H. Ainsworth, led 34 aircraft to bomb the Marshalling Yards at St. Etienne. There were 100.5 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs dropped and three Squadrons were off target due to a malfunction of the PDI and AFCE in the lead ship. One Squadron's bombs fell in the west end of the yards. Two aircraft jettisoned their bombs and returned early. B-17 #42-39999 left the formation early and was assumed to have landed at a friendly field.

May 27, 1944: Word was received today that B-17 #42-39999, piloted by 2nd Lt. Frederick L. Tompkins, had landed at Corsica. While en route to the target, the plane was suddenly rocked by an explosion, followed by a great sheet of flames that enveloped the cockpit. The pilot gave the signal to abandon the plane after the first few minutes of attempting to combat the blaze. The fire shorted the electrical system and the men in the rear did not hear the signal to jump. The co-pilot, navigator, bombardier, and upper turret gunner had already left the plane when the pilot realized that the remaining men had not received the signal to jump. The pilot then elected to stay with the ship and attempt to save it. He switched on the auto pilot and set to combating the blaze alone. Blinded by smoke, half dazed by lack of oxygen and in danger of exploding ammunition, he first threw out everything movable and then worked until he stifled the flames sufficiently for the radio operator, S/Sgt. Elmer R. Cutsinger, to come forward and aid him. Finally the flames were extinguished, and while the pilot headed for Corsica, the radio operator made temporary repairs to his burned equipment, enabling the pilot to find the field and attempt a landing. He was forced to ground loop the brakeless plane to avoid a 30-foot ditch. Remaining aboard the plane were:

2nd Lt. Frederick L. Tompkins, 0-690408, P.
S/Sgt. Elmer R. Cutsinger, 38200294, R/O.
Sgt. Roger C. Framm, 19206441, L/T.
Sgt. Carl F. Merkle, 19090034, R/W.
Sgt. Robert O. Butts, Jr., 33553787, L/W.
Sgt. Joseph A. Jordan, 38341267, T/G.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-39999 - "BATAAN AVENGER" - 49TH SQUADRON - MAY 25, 1944

2nd Lt. Earl E. Rodenburg, 0-700368, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt. Fred E. Letz, 0-699203, N.	(RET)
2nd Lt. Paul H. Smith, 0-696292, B.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Harold L. Bolick, 39268736, U/T.	(EVADED)

Escape statement of S/Sgt. Harold L. Bolick, UT, taken 6 May 1945, after evading: "On the way to the target, near the Fort of Tunda (44-10N - 07-36W) on the French-Italian frontier, source's aircraft received four bursts of flak. Oxygen system was damaged, a fire was started in the bottom of the ship beneath the top turret, the fire being spread by the oxygen system. The gasoline lines burned away, and the gasoline added to the blaze. Men bailed out on the pilot's orders. Aircraft crashed, exploded and burned just over the border into France, near San Martin. Never in enemy hands. (Ed. A/C did not crash.)

"Source's greasy overalls caught a spark on one leg, and the cloth was smoking. After his parachute opened, source beat out the sparks. After landing, source washed his face in the snow to remove blood and used first aid kit to bandage his head, where an exploding 50-cal. shell had hit him with a fragment. In about four hours, friendly Italians arrived, fed him and took him where he met the navigator, Fred E. Letz. After dark they were taken to the Partisans. They stayed there 11 days, while one of the Partisans went to an American mission in France to get instructions. He brought back by word of mouth from the mission that sources were to stay where they were, as there was no evacuation from Southern France at that time. Sources were transferred (13 hours) on foot to another partisan band where they could sleep in a house and get medical attention. There a doctor removed a bullet fragment from source's head.

"They stayed there three months. The Partisans organized a band of 2,000, took over the town in the valley of Cazzo and held or raided the surrounding country. After the invasion of Southern France, Germans wanted to open a road in full force and full equipment, through the Partisan held area between Northern Italy and Southern France, promising they would go quietly without attacking. The partisans refused. The Germans then attacked. The partisans held the line for four days. The Germans broke through and the Partisans (and source) retreated three days into the mountains. The Germans burned out the valley and opened the road, allowing their trapped units (25,000 men) in Southern France to retreat East. In the fighting, 355 Germans were killed and 100 Italians and 15 French Partisans were killed. All this time, source was one of the Partisans. For three weeks, the Partisans laid low. The frontier was mined, the Germans, patrolling with binoculars, were all around. Source then went to a place where he heard of an English mission. The next day, Lt. Letz followed, being crowded close by a patrol. Source and Lt. Letz stayed with the mission for ten days, then the officer in charge was killed in an auto wreck and two others arrived to run the mission. Several other American and British escapees and evaders joined. After several weeks, another British mission had arrived. Partisans had built up a strength of about 1,500 by this time. The British mission was warned to go up into the mountains as a plane drop had been planned in daylight. They left at midnight. Source wanted some British clothes (he was in civilian clothes) and the British wanted to destroy some radio equipment, so the two of them started up to the dropping ground. Behind them they heard rifle fire, as the Germans advanced and the Partisans resisted. They got to the dropping ground, accomplished their business and went to Fontana, where they were to meet the rest of the mission. Source did not meet Letz again. Fontana was occupied by Republicans and Germans, who caught sight of source and the Captain, and chased them on skis, keeping them moving for two weeks. They then got back to Fontana, as no alternate meeting place had been set up. They found that the mission, a total of 12 British had been captured. The Americans had been sent away just previously. The two went to another mission, picked up a radio operator, and then went to the Captain's mission. Here they formed four Partisan bands and armed 2,000 men. During this time, the Captain was captured and taken to Turin. Source tried to get another officer, in the meantime, 2-1/2 months, running the mission himself. During this time there were three attempts by the Germans and Republicans to cleanup, but the Partisans kept them away.

"A Major arrived. The Partisans stayed quiet, waiting for the big push. When orders arrived from General Mark Clark, the Partisans captured the entire region, from the French frontier to the 5th

Army front. Source went to Savona, which was then the Partisan Headquarters of this region. After seven days some Americans arrived. The American advance party in Genoa consisted of two Negro soldiers, who walked to the edge of town and then took a street car. In Savona, a jeep arrived with two Negro soldiers with a white Lt. from an engineering unit. Then Brig. General Collins arrived in a second jeep, and the next day, 200 American soldiers arrived for police work. Source came back through military channels.

Lt. Paul H. Smith was interred in the U.S. Cemetery, Mirandola, Italy. Subject was positively identified by one dog tag found on the body.

In September, 1991, I received a letter from a young French writer, M. Philippe Castellano, who was researching Americans that either crashed or parachuted into his home area of Southern France during World War II. He had seen a recent news article (1991) in a French newspaper about Lt. Rondembourg (Rodenburg) and sent a copy to me. Translation:

FORTY-SIX YEARS AGO BREIL YOUTHS RESCUE AMERICAN AVIATOR.

Late August 1944, after several key Allied flights over our border area, woodcutters in the Magli Valley noticed a parachutist landing in the forest.

Mr. Louis Ipert, with two fellow workers (Mr. Louis Roscian and Mr. Philippe Sartore) sought him. After a long search they found him in the area called "le Chucarics." He stated that he was an American officer, Lt. Earl Rondembourg. They then informed him that they were from the French Resistance and he was safe, but he was in an enemy occupied area.

To save him from German patrols, which had been alerted meantime by a collaborating municipal official (the latter tried and convicted after the Liberation), following a long trek of more than three hours to cover their trail, they brought him safely to the "Toina" neighborhood. For several days the German patrols, with dogs, hunted him without success.

At once, Mr. Adrien Rosa, Lieutenant F.F.I., also known as "Marneau," leader of the local resistance; Mr. Andre Rey, county secretary and Mr. Napoleone Cola, head of the municipal housing, are alerted by Mr. Louis Ipert of the presence of the American officer. For two weeks, Lt. Earl Rondembourg remained hidden.

Before his departure for Nice (August 4 or 5, 1944), I.D. papers are drawn for him under the heading "Alps Reserved Zone" by Andre Rey, without which papers, any person stopped by Germans is arrested. On the eve of his departure, Mr. Paul Curti, forestry official, with the vehicle of Mr. Rosa, drives him to the Maglia bridge for Breil with Mr. Rosa biking ahead to scout for enemy patrols. At the Breil crossing, as bad luck would have it, they ran out of gas. Mr. Rosa and Mr. Curti pushed the vehicle to the train station (some 30 meters), passing two German patrols.

At the station, he spent the night in the restaurant cellar guarded by Mrs. Georgette Rosa who was concerned of the continued German patrols. The next morning, around 6:15, Mr. Jacques Belli, PLM Stationmaster and F.F.I. Lieutenant, takes the officer, dressed as a rail worker, with a tool belt, into his van. Once in Nice, Mr. Belli directs the officer to the "Parent Group," 1 Place Messera, where he will join his unit after the Liberation. In conversation with the local Resistant Group, Lieutenant Rondembourg declared that Allied troops would land shortly in Southern France.

Mr. Louis Ipert later received, from American Military Authorities, headed by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the medal of thanks for services rendered to Allied aviators shot down in France during the German occupation. Mr. Louis Roscian, Mr. Philippe Sartore, Mr. Adrian Rosa, Mr. Jacques Belli, are since deceased, but their memory remains alive in the resistance team which for a year and a half accepted enormous responsibilities aggravated by a collaborating municipal government.

Isolated from the rest of France, beginning August 15, 1944, this network continued its action even when the population suffered deportation by German troops on October 29, 1944 and interment

in the San Palo camp in Turin from which, during the winter of 1944/45, important intelligence passed underground to France.

2nd Lt. Earl E. Rodenburg, CP. December 13, 1991: "We had an explosion in the plane, which happened with a loud bang, like flak from an 88 going through the top turret. There was fire from cartridges, oxygen, grease, and dirt; the noise of shells exploding, especially the "Vary" pistol shells with their little balls of fire and sulphur. I was flying the B-17 as co-pilot in the 2nd position of the formation, so was looking to my left and ahead, or as we would say, 'across cockpit.' I saw this explosion and thick smoke out of the corner of my eye, coming from the bottom of the top turret and what I thought at the time was a fire in the bomb bay. When I opened the window on my right, the suction pulled my flak jacket off along with my helmet, oxygen mask and throat mike. It seems to me that the altitude was 19,000/20,000 feet. Airspeed about 160.

"Fred 'Lonnie' Tompkins took over the plane when the explosion occurred. I retrieved my chest pack chute and snapped it in place. I made my way to the nose of the plane to see if the three men were all right. I found that Letz and Bolick had already jumped and Smith was looking out the open hatch. I motioned for him to jump, then went back and handed Lonnie his chute from behind the seat and told him to bail out. When I got to the escape hatch, Smith wasn't there. He had bailed out and I never saw him again. I didn't know what happened to him until I heard from his Mother after the war.

"Letz and Bolick had jumped a bit before Smith and maybe three to four minutes before me. Letz and Bolick landed in Italy. I landed on the side of a very steep mountain. My chute caught in a sapling and I found myself sitting gently on the ground. Before I could free myself, two young Frenchmen found me. They lived in the area and cut wood to make charcoal. The town where I was rescued by these two youngsters is Breil. These boys contacted the French Underground, the 'Marqui' (pronounced 'Mah-Key'). I was transported from Breil to Nice where I was met by two Marqui and taken back north to the vicinity of Digne. This is in the Base and Maritime Alps and the terrain is very difficult. I spent over three months with these Marqui before being captured by Germans early in August, between the first and 15th. I was held prisoner along with an enlisted man, a Sergeant from Tennessee, who was a gunner on a B-25. We were held in various towns in Southern France for a couple of days before we were handed over to the Luftwaffe and transported up the Rhone River Valley by bus through cities like Marseille, Avignon, Lyon, Dijon, Nancy, Metz, Saarbrucken, to Frankfort on the Mainz where I was held in solitary confinement for four or five days.

"I was then sent to Wetzler where the Red Cross was allowed to give us clothes. They were British uniforms. I was put on a train and taken east across Germany to River Neisee, which we crossed at Golitz, then on to Sagan on the Oder River to Stalag Luft III. I arrived there in September, the 18th or 19th, I remember spending my 25th birthday there on September 21, 1944.

"Between December 25th and January 1st we were assembled and marched out in a heavy snowstorm because the Russians were attacking towards Berlin and would overrun our compound. The first night we were billeted in a pottery plant in Spremberg, then the second day to Golitz. We were put in 40 & 8 box cars and transported across Czechoslovakia to Moosdorf, Stalag 7A, in Bavaria, a small town near Munich, and close to Dachau, the notorious concentration camp. I don't remember how many days we were in the forced march and on the train, but do remember that those 40 & 8 cars were dirty, drafty, and cold.

"On April 29, 1945 we were liberated by the 7th Army. That Sherman tank, ugly as they are, looked beautiful rolling up the company street! We were repatriated to Camp Lucky Strike at LaHavre, France and transported home on Liberty ships, in convoy, in the North Atlantic. We were 25 days on board and 23 days on the ocean, a rough trip! I arrived home in Malvern, Iowa, on June 14, 1945."

T/Sgt. Elmer Ray Cutsinger, RO on A/C #42-39999, January 21, 1992: "We flew the southern route, leaving the States on March 18, 1944, and landed in Italy, March 28th. On the 29th we flew to Amendola and were assigned to the 49th Squadron, 2nd Bomb Group.

"My first mission was to Fischamend Market, April 12th, and was credited with a double mission. April 15th we went to Ploesti, Romania to bomb the Marshalling Yards. It was rough and we were credited with another double mission. In all, I went to Ploesti six times and none were easy. On the raid of the 24th of April we had our control cables shot away by Me-109s and the right aileron was mangled. Then on the 9th of July we lost No. 4 engine and had a flak hole in the right Tokyo tank.

"I went to Southern France four times and I would say that my most exciting mission came on May 26, 1944 on a mission to St. Etienne, France. We were flying #999, "BATAAN AVENGER" and my first sign of trouble was a loud cracking sound in my headset. We were on fire! Then the intercom went completely dead! I started forward with my chest pack parachute on but couldn't get through the narrow cat-walk, in the bomb bay, so went back to my radio room and took it off. The plywood, 3/4 " thick door at either end of the bomb bay had kept me from hearing the explosion or fire. When I opened the second door I was met by a wall of flames and numerous 50-cal. shells exploding. I found a fire extinguisher in the radio compartment and emptied it into the fire with little or no affect. I went back to the waist and found two more. I emptied both to no avail.

"About this time the two waist gunners, ball turret gunner, and tail gunner wanted to bail out. I made one more trip forward and found that the fire was dying down, so went back to the rear of my radio compartment and waved both forearms in the horizontal position like an umpire signaling a runner safe at home plate. They stayed put and I went through the smouldering furnace to see if any help was needed. Tommy was alone in the cockpit but could not see out. We found some rags and I scrubbed vigorously for 20 minutes until we could see out. Tommy dumped the unarmed bombs in the ocean, then headed for the Island of Corsica.

"I was in the co-pilot's seat when we touched down and got a shower of hydraulic fluid when we hit the brakes. This small civilian airport couldn't accommodate larger planes so we rolled past the runway and out into an open field. Directly ahead of us, a farmer was plowing with a team of horses. 'Tailspin Tommy' came through like the ace we knew him to be. His right hand moved to the throttles so fast I couldn't see it and he cut No. 1, 2, and 3 engines while operating No. 4 to the maximum. He plowed furrows three feet deep when he spun around in a perfectly controlled ground loop. We missed the farmer too. A full case of ammo punched through the skin of the plane due to the centrifugal force. I wasn't scared any part of the time until I looked back - then my knees were really weak and shaken.

"Tommy always did a superb job of evasive action, changing altitude, etc., when the flak started getting too close. He always thought the B-17 would barrel roll very nicely, but we all objected, so he never tried it. We called him 'Tailspin Tommy' Tompkins after a 1938 comic strip character.

"I found out later that Lt. Earl Rodenburg, co-pilot, parachuted into France and was picked up by the French Underground. Lt. Fred Letz and S/Sgt. Harold Bolick parachuted into Italy, and Lt. Paul Smith was killed when he opened his chute too early and it was caught on the ball turret guns and it was shredded.

"My last mission (50-51) was to an airdrome at Memmingen, Germany. We saw no flak nor fighters but another Group lost half their planes to fighters. One of our planes turned back and never got to Base (landed in Switzerland). Our old plane, #490, came back early on three engines. We ran out of oxygen and low on gas."

T/Sgt. Cutsinger was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions aboard his aircraft. S/Sgt. Bolick was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions with the British and Italian Partisans. For saving his plane and the remaining members of his crew, Lt. Tompkins was awarded the Silver Star.

WOLLERSDORF, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 209 - MAY 29, 1944

Major James G. Ellis led 28 aircraft and dropped 53.5 tons of 100-lb. incendiary bombs on the Wollersdorf Airdrome. The target was well covered and many fires were seen. Flak was moderate to intense causing slight damage to ten B-17s.

SHUTTLE MISSION TO RUSSIA - MISSIONS 210, 211, 212 - JUNE 2 TO 11, 1944

DEBRECZEN, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 210, JUNE 2, 1944

Colonel Herbert E. Rice led 33 aircraft and bombed the Marshalling Yards at Debreczen. A good coverage was reported. The Group then proceeded to a Landing Field at Mirgorod, Russia. Some flak was encountered over Yugoslavia and at the German/Russian lines. All planes landed safely. The 97th, 99th, and 301st Bomb Groups also participated in the Shuttle Operation.

Lt. Col. John Ryan and Lt. Kelly, Group Bombardier, met the crews on their arrival with a Russian Colonel and woman interpreter. Interrogations were held. This was the first face to face meeting with the Russian Allies and there was much curiosity aroused. Quarters assigned to the crews were neat and orderly and all went smoothly.

An emergency appendectomy was performed on Lt. Johnson, 96th Squadron, by Major Beal, Group Surgeon.

June 3, 1944: No operation scheduled. The morning was devoted to organization and information to the crews. Meetings were conducted by Colonel Rice, Lt. Col. Ryan, Lt. Col. Ainsworth, and Captain Simmons. The operation section was set up in a tent shared with S-2 and S-3. M/Sgt. Donald Smith, S/Sgt. Joseph Wilder, S/Sgt. George Schmeelk, and Sgt. Robert Stout began the preparation of operations data.

The Group Photo Officer, Captain Paul Collins, went to Poltava, Mission Headquarters, for planning of bomb strike photos. Colonel Rice and Lt. Col. Ainsworth went to Poltava to receive instructions from Lt. General Eaker, Commanding General, Mediterranean Allied Air Forces.

June 4, 1944: Another non-operational day. Lt. General Eaker visited the camp quarters, hospital and mess halls with a group of newsmen and photographers. Colonel Rice accompanied General Eaker to Poltava to receive orders for the following day. Representatives from British, American, and Russian newspapers arrived at the Group Base. Eddie Gilmore, of the Associated Press remarked that this visit to Russia was the biggest single event of the war. At 1900 hours a message was received canceling operations for the following day.

June 5, 1944: another non-operational day. Orders were received that the Group would return to Italy the following day. Bags were packed and loaded on the aircraft. Briefings were held and then orders came through canceling the operation. Personal luggage was removed from the planes and an operation was planned for the following day.

GALATZ, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 211 - JUNE 6, 1944

Colonel Herbert E. Rice led 28 aircraft to bomb the Airdrome at Galatz. There was one early return and 27 aircraft dropped their bombs on the target. Strike photos showed the bombs were well concentrated on the Airdrome. Some fighters were seen in the area with no encounters. There were 104 B-17s and an escort of 42 P-51s participating in this raid from the Russian Bases, with no losses.

Everyone in the Group was excited by the news of the Allied Invasion on the beaches at Normandy. It was reported that the operation today was to hold German fighters from the invasion landings.

June 7, 1944: Non-operational.

June 8, 1944: Many officers accompanied Russian officers on tours of viewing Russian fighter planes. The Group was notified there would be no operation on the 9th. The men were beginning to get bored at the inactivity.

June 9, 1944: The weather officer reported that two weather fronts made missions to intended targets impossible. Some men of the Group visited Poltava where Colonel Lauer, former CO of the 2nd, escorted them around the town of Poltava. Once a population of 300,000, it had been badly demolished by the retreating Germans.

June 10, 1944: Another non-operational day. Many of the men visited a local military hospital and found many English speaking Russian soldiers. A bomb load was announced for the following day and that the Group was going home. This would be the last night in Russia.

FOCSANI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 212 - JUNE 11, 1944

After a wake-up call at 0415 hours, and another breakfast of C-rations, the crews went to their planes. Shortly after take-off, Lt. Col. Ainsworth, in ship #615, developed engine trouble and returned to the field. On board were Captain Simmons and Captain Hippard.

Colonel Rice led the remaining aircraft to bomb the Focsani Airdrome. The 2nd led the 5th Wing to the target. The bombing appeared to be good over the assigned area and a dense blanket of smoke covered the target. Flak was not accurate or intense. Enemy fighters attacked some of the following Groups but there were no encounters with the 2nd. P-51 fighters flew escort for the wing. At about 1400 hours the Group was down at home Base. The first U.S. Air Force Task Force to Russia was history.

Captain Harry Miller, Engineering Officer, 429th Squadron. December 26, 1991: "In reading some publications about the Shuttle Mission to Russia, I found another variance with my memory. I, at the time, was Engineering Officer of the 429th, and flew as ordered, with Colonel Cunningham, CO of the 429th, on the Shuttle. I did not fly on the mission from Mirgorod and the return to Mirgorod, the day of the invasion, but recall asking the crews, on their return, where they bombed. This was, of course, after they told us the second front had landed in Normandy. Incidentally, they had this only from monitoring British radio. The reply I got was Dresden, Germany, in order to confuse the Germans or divert some fighters away from the landing. The account I read said the mission was to Galatz, Romania because Stalin wanted to soon follow up on his drive westward to take the Balkan countries west of the rail center. I flew back with the same crew and the navigator told me we were bombing a Marshalling Yard near Ploesti. When you compare the distance to Dresden and to Galatz on a map, it shows the Romanian target closer to Poltava and I feel certain the mission was gone from the base too long to have gone to Galatz.

"Nobody had to tell me we were under ack-ack fire from both Germans and Russians as we flew over the front lines. We also had flak from both targets, so in two missions we were under fire six times total. We were not hit by fighters on the two missions but did see some Me-109s taking off from a dirt field. After they were up to about 10,000 feet, they turned tail and went back. I assume that the P-51s and P-38s we had with us were too much for them. I flew a mission out of North Africa as a stow-away but it was not as much fun as the Russian deal.

"There were several good stories coming out of my experience in Russia but I will only mention one in this writing. We had to change an engine on one plane after the D-Day mission that really taught me something about the Russians. We had orders from the highest command to be friendly with the Russians and fully explain all we knew about the B-17 to any Russian pilot that might express interest. In keeping with these orders, locally I was ordered to use five Russian mechanics to do the engine change. Naturally I was taken aback by such an unsuspecting order. Fortunately, one of the four crew

chiefs I had with us spoke Polish and some Russian. He was able to communicate very well with those five Ruskies that reported to me that day.

“Those Ruskies worked like hell! They laughed and joked constantly. They were extremely careful about everything. I think all the careless ones had already been shot. On our planes there were aluminum lock nuts that were not supposed to be used but once and then thrown away when taken off. The hardest part of my Polish speaking crew chief was to keep the Ruskies from reusing those Pal nuts. They would not waste anything. They did not strip any threads or lose a single nut or bolt. They changed the engine in almost as little time as my prize engine change crew in Italy. I was impressed and they left us with a good feeling about the Russian G.I.s. No one can say they are dumb and lazy.”

Captain Robert M. Hippard, 96th Squadron Engineering Officer. March 18, 1992: “Harry Miller and I were assigned to the 49th Squadron as Engineering Officers at Ephrata, Washington in November 1942. I was Harry’s assistant. In September, 1943, at our base near Massicault, Tunisia, I was transferred to the 96th as Engineering Officer when Lt. Lester M. Peters was made Group Engineering Officer. Harry, Fred Allen, 96th Armament Officer, and I were transferred to the 301st Bomb Group and came home together in July, 1945 when the 2nd Bomb Group remained in Italy as part of the Occupation Forces.

“Of course I have memories and recollections of people and happenings during the entire period. Some not so good, but for the most part, very pleasant as well as plenty of laughs! Although it seems almost unreal after 47-50 years and try to remember everything in detail, I do remember things pretty well: Going to North Africa on the SS Monterey in convoy; the train ride from Casablanca to Chateau Dun, Algeria; the several moves in North Africa and the final move to Foggia-Manfredonia; the dreary winters of 1944/45; the hard work and long hours put in by the guys in the Engineering Section, ‘down on the line,’ and trying to get planes ready for another ‘maximum effort’ the next day; the comradeship and great spirit of cooperation by almost everyone; the occasional holidays and trips; the stay in Russia as well as the flights going and coming. I was flying with the Group Operations Officer, Lt. Col. Don Ainsworth, and we lost an engine on the return flight and had to go back to Poltava for repairs. Then we flew back to Italy by way of Tehran and Cairo a few days later.

“I well remember watching take-offs and landings and sweating out the returning planes on almost every mission, but I cannot remember dates, places, names and numbers of losses. I did not keep a diary for which I am sorry.”

Lt. Eugene Armstrong, N, 49th Squadron. January 13, 1993: “Our crew had been in England and then transferred to the 15th in Italy. Although we were billeted and named a crew, we did little flying together in Italy. I flew most of my missions with other crews and don’t remember a single name. I think I flew a milk run to Bihac, Yugoslavia the day after arriving and thought what a welcome relief from the 8th Air Force. In late May, 1944, I was invited to go on what turned out to be the ‘Russian Caper.’ We landed at a town in the Ukraine called Mirgorod, which is within 50 miles of the city of Poltava. There were three bases that the 15th occupied during the nearly two weeks we were in Russia; Poltava, Mirgorod, and Piryaton (?). My crew did not make the mission. I cannot remember the crew I flew with. We carried in the B-17s the ground crews for the fighter maintenance (P-51s) and as I remember, keeping them on oxygen at 20,000 to 25,000 feet was no small trick.

“This Russian Caper was kept a deep secret for almost a month before it was revealed to the navigators, at about three days before take-off. The participants in this mission were restricted to the Base for the rest of the month. The primary goal of the mission, as we were eventually told, was to bomb the German synthetic oil refineries in Poland that could not be reached from either England or Italy and return. But these targets were within easy reach of bases in Russia. Intelligence reported that the

Germans had moved 1,500 plus fighters from the western defenses to the target area in Poland. We had, at most, two Groups of P-51 fighters for our defense. It was a mission impossible!

"We were summoned for a 3:00 a.m. briefing on June 6th. We proceeded from the briefing to the airplanes, which were loaded full of 500 pounders (Russian women loaded bombs by hand) and full tanks of gas. This was more than one should have suffered through since the runway was short and a very tall smokestack existed at the end. The targets were about 400 nautical miles from our base. Due to a mechanical malfunction, we did not fly the mission.

"At the briefing, after the mission, we were told that the mission had been successfully accomplished. The invasion of Normandy was taking place and that no German fighters were in evidence. I wonder if Hitler's reluctance to release his reserves to Rommel to defend Normandy had anything to do with this Caper?"

T/Sgt. Arthur J. Smith, 49th Squadron, RO on the crew of 2nd Lt. James H. Twibell. January 15, 1993: "My tenure with the 2nd Bomb Group was quite short. I arrived in Italy March 4, 1944, flew my first mission March 18, my last was June 26, and I left for the States July 7th.

"My tour of missions, while not boring by any means, were uneventful. Unfortunately I remember the sad things, particularly of other crew members we went to Italy with. In particular, there was one fellow who had not flown yet and we, who already had five or six missions, kidded him about it. His philosophy was, 'As long as I don't fly, I'm here.' Finally he flew his first mission, and was shot down over Yugoslavia. Then there was another good friend who finished at about the same time I did, came home on the same ship, went home on our 30 day leave, then on the way back to duty he was killed in a train wreck near Terre Haute in August 1944.

"I recall an incident which was not nearly as tragic, at least in the sad sense. I don't remember the nature of the target, although I seem to recall large oil tanks, but it was directly on the shore line of Southern France. We had three missions to France in a matter of three or four days; Lyon, St. Etienne, and Avignon. I'm guessing the latter. Anyway, our bombardier had been selected to fly in the lead aircraft. As was custom, hand held cameras were issued to radio operators throughout the formation, and I later found out that for some unaccountable, illogical, terrible reason, my photos were the only clear ones of the bomb strikes. There on the wall, in all its clarity, was the photo of virtually all the bombs landing in the water! Fortunately, I don't believe our bombardier found out who took the pictures. My diary notes contain the words, 'I think it was a pretty lousy job.'

"I was on the Shuttle to Russia. We were supposed to be on the mission flown from there (I think it was on D-Day) but in taxiing for take-off, the aircraft went off the taxi-way into a quagmire of mud. The rest of the aircraft were long gone by the time we were towed out, so that scrubbed that one for us.

"Since we were going to Russia for an extended period, we had to pack other clothing in a barracks bag. Unfortunately, my barracks bag and I never met in Russia. So, with only my clothes on my back, there was a touch of inconvenience for ten days. I lost my wallet, but more important, I lost my A-2 jacket with the same eagle painted on the back as was painted on our aircraft. Now that was a heart-breaking loss!

"I separated in October 1945, and returned home to New Hampshire. About three months later, I received a package which was postmarked New York. It contained my wallet, with all my papers and pictures in it, but no money, and definitely not my A-2 jacket."

2nd Lt. Richard L. Irby, 20th Squadron, Bombardier. August 10, 1992: "Our crew from the States were 2nd Lt. Leroy P. Rigney, Pilot; 2nd Lt. John J. Janicek, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. William E. Mitchell, Navigator; myself, Bombardier; T/Sgt. Orvel W. Buechner, Engineer; S/Sgt. Richard A.

Gilbert, Lower Turret; S/Sgt. William F. Corbin, Right Waist; S/Sgt. Alvin G. Barrow, Left Waist; Sgt. Marion J. Maddox, Tail Gunner; and Sgt. Peter A. Victor, Radio Operator. All of these men, with the exception of Lt. Janicek and myself, were involved in a mid-air collision with another ship from the 20th Squadron on March 30, 1944, and were all killed. I was flying as Squadron bombardier that day and Lt. Janicek was ill. I never did know the particulars of that crash. Lt. Rigney was my pilot from Ephrata, Washington, Walla Walla, Washington, and Avon Park, Florida and overseas. I flew eight combat missions with them. It was a terrible loss for me.

"I did fly the missions to Steyr, Regensburg, and the Shuttle to Russia. These stand out in my mind more vividly than many others.

"If I recall correctly, we started out last in the last position, in our element, on the Steyr and Regensburg missions and as a plane was lost we moved up in the number three position on the return home. Our losses over these targets were terrible! I believe those were my sixth and seventh missions.

"Captain Robert E. Arnold, killed on the Regensburg raid, was with our training Group at Ephrata, Walla Walla, and Avon Park. He arrived in Foggia after we did and was scheduled to replace Captain Chrishmon as CO of the 20th Squadron. He was not scheduled to fly on the Regensburg run but asked to replace Lt. Withers' co-pilot in order to gain experience. He was a fine man and a fine officer. The irony of the story is that the man he replaced, and another officer, took a Jeep ride into Foggia and the Jeep overturned. He was killed but no one else was injured.

"As I said before, I flew the Shuttle Mission to Russia and have a few reflections on that trip, not so much of the missions, but of the Russian Army. In Mirgorod, everyone got water from the well in the middle of the street. About 5 p.m. one day a lady, with a bucket in her hand, approached the well. When a guard yelled, 'Stoy,' she took one more step and he blew the top of her head off. Two men with a two-wheeled cart picked up the body and carried it away. Nothing was said by anyone.

"When we landed at Mirgorod we were told to take everything from the plane that we would need. Colonel Rice needed papers on board so myself and three other officers returned to the plane for them. The guards would not let us enter but called for their commander who arrived with a new set of guards to let us go to the plane. Their orders are never changed, only the guards. From the time of Peter the Great, their mentality has not changed. I do not believe we can ever trust this nation.

"My last mission was as Group Bombardier to Ploesti. Lt. Col. Jack Ryan was our pilot and George Cross was navigator. It was my sixth trip to Ploesti."

Meanwhile back at the Base at Amendola, the news that Rome had been taken on June 4th and the invasion of Normandy on the 6th was met with great excitement by men of the 2nd.

OBERPFAFFENHOFFEN, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 213 - JUNE 13, 1944

Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 75 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on Airdrome Installations and Dispersal Areas. The target was well covered with only a few bombs falling short. Flak was intense and accurate. Eight to 12 E/A attacked the formation and one Me-109 was destroyed. There were no losses and no casualties.

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 214 - JUNE 14, 1944

Twenty-six aircraft dropped 65 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Koolaz & Fante Oil Refineries. The target was covered by smoke from previous bombings and the Group dropped its bombs into the smoke. Flak was moderate to intense, fair to good, barrage type. Thirteen aircraft received minor damage, four badly damaged.

Ten E/A attacked the formation resulting in the loss of B-17 #42-31527, 49th Squadron. Ten chutes were seen to open. One E/A was destroyed.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31527 - "BROWN NOSE" - 429TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	Charles M. Britton, 0-745605, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Charles R. White, 0-687778, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	John J. Cook, 0-752980, N.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Grethel C. Fields, 0-685466, B.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Witt W. Bencal, 32580141, U/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Walter E. Ramsey, 36726402, L/T.	(EVADED)
Sgt.	Gordon P. Keifer, 36298475, R/W.	(POW)
Sgt.	Edward J. Jacobs, 32797045, L/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Timothy D. O'Brien, 18017073, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Joseph G. Leinart, 14121364, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of S/Sgt. Walter M. Greer, LWG on B-17 #006, after the mission: "At approximately 1209 hours, plane #527 was attacked by 12 Ju-88s and set No. 2 engine on fire. The plane lagged, lost altitude fairly fast and all ten men bailed out. Fire spread rapidly and plane went into a spiral, the left wing came off and exploded at about 4,000 to 5,000 feet. I took pictures with a K-20 camera; one as the plane was lagging and on fire, two as men were bailing out, and a third as plane exploded."

Statement of 1st Lt. Charles M. Britton, after evading and returning to the United States: "We left the formation about six miles S.E. of Nabjaluka, Yugoslavia. All ten men bailed out. The navigator and bombardier went out the nose hatch, pilot and co-pilot and engineer bailed out the bomb bay, radio, lower turret gunner, right and left waist gunners out the main hatch, and tail gunner out the tail hatch. None were injured and all have since returned to the United States and are on inactive duty."

VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 215 - JUNE 16, 1944

Major Charles H. Hillhouse led 29 aircraft to bomb the Florisdorf Oil Refinery at Vienna. Three planes were early returns and only 17 aircraft dropped 42.8 tons of 250-lb. GP bombs into a cloud covered target. Results could not be determined. Flak was moderate, fair and heavy, barrage and tracking type, resulting in damage to 15 aircraft. B-17 #42-38089 is missing as a result of flak and last sighted at 46-00N - 17-00E. Eight to 12 E/A attacked the rear Squadron north of Lake Balaton. B-17 #665, 429th Squadron, was hit by fighters, starting a fire in the radio room. Crew dropped its bombs, extinguished the blaze and returned safely to Base.

2nd Lt. William M. Daly, N, 429th Squadron, was slightly wounded. Sgt. Benjamin O. Clark, 49th Squadron, was credited with the possible destruction of a Me-109.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-38089 - 49TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	Shelby F. Vaughan, 0-804883, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Lawrence J. Fitzsimmons, 0-813685, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Charles L. Snure, 0-712928, N.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Paul N. Newman, 0-726797, B.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Frank L. Maglaty, 31280196, U/T.	(EVADED)
Sgt.	Ollie S. Davis, 33454805, L/T.	(EVADED)
Sgt.	Joseph E. Sallings, 34491635, R/W.	(EVADED)
Sgt.	Paul E. Horner, 33166503, L/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Louis (NMI) Schwartz, 35303424, T/G.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	John B. Cockshott, 35092297, R/O.	(EVADED)

Statement of S/Sgt. Charles Hollenberg, TG on B-17 #053, after the mission: "At approximately 1150 hours, #089 was losing altitude, No. 2 engine throwing oil and No. 4 engine feathered. No. 089 was straggling and we lost sight of him. I believe our escort was covering him."

Statement of S/Sgt. Joseph E. Sallings after evading: "We did not bail out but crash landed safely 100 kms east of Zagreb. We had no casualties. I returned safely to Italy."

PARMA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 216 - JUNE 22, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft took off to bomb Marshalling Yards in Parma. The majority of the bombs fell in the assigned area. No injuries, no losses.

PLOESTI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 217, JUNE 23, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft led by Major James Ellis, took off to bomb the Dacia Romano Oil Refinery at Ploesti. Due to a heavy smoke screen over the target, 26 aircraft dropped their bombs on the city. No results were obtainable. Flak was intense, fair to good, heavy, both tracking and barrage type. Four to eight Me-109s attacked the formation and one E/A claimed as damaged. No injuries, no losses.

SETE, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 218 - JUNE 25, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 76 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Oil Storage Plant at Sete. The target was well covered. No E/A fighters, no injuries, no losses.

VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 219 - JUNE 26, 1944

The Schwechat Oil Refinery was effectively bombed on this date. The bombs of one Squadron fell out of the target area but bombs of the other three Squadrons were in the assigned area. Flak was inaccurate and the Group suffered no injuries and no losses.

Russia Shuttle bombers of the 8th Air Force landed at nearby fields in Italy.

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 220 - JUNE 27, 1944

Thirty-eight aircraft took off to bomb the Marshalling Yards in Budapest. Arriving over the target, the Group found it to be cloud covered and some bombed the center of Budapest by PFF. One Squadron bombed the northeast part of Budapest visually and another Squadron bombed the assigned target visually. Flak caused the loss of B-17 #42-32053, which was hit over the target, went into a dive, then a spin, caught fire and exploded. Two chutes were seen. Sgt. Eugene F. Fawls, LWG, 96th Squadron, was killed by flak.

The formation was vigorously attacked by E/A before and after the bomb run resulting in damage to three B-17s with no losses. S/Sgt. Farrow Beacham, LT; T/Sgt. Bennie P. Showmaker, LW, and S/Sgt. Howard S. Williams, TG, were each credited with destruction of an Me-109. A joint claim of a Me-109 went to S/Sgt. Nelson T. Main, LW, and S/Sgt. Carlo Veneziano, TG.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-32053 - 49TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	Richard A. Korb, 0-751354, P.	(KIA)
1st Lt.	Alf L. Larsen, 0-813919, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Casimir L. Blaska, 0-707372, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	James E. Fleming, 0-671411, B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Malcom N. Treadway, 14156502, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	William C. Bair, 33325510, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Thaddeus G. Thomas, 13013527, R/W.	(KIA)

Sgt.	Henry (NMI) Rappe, 36328316, L/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Thaddeus T. Krent, 36765305, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Burl K. Kessel, 16075803, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of Malcom N. Treadway, UT, after liberation: We were hit by flak and I was blown out of the plane. I believe all the enlisted men and co-pilot bailed out. T/Sgt. Kessel was wounded, and captured and was in the same prison camp with me. The plane crashed about 30 miles S.W. of Budapest, near a small village. After capture, soldiers took me to the wreckage and I saw the body of Lt. Korb, still at the controls and the bodies of Lts. Fleming and Blaska, in the nose section. I saw Lt. Larsen as he passed me going into the bomb bay when I discovered the fire in the bomb bay about three minutes after the target. Hungarian soldiers told me his chute caught on fire and burned on the way down. This is only hearsay information. Sgt. Kessel saw the other enlisted men bail out.”

BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 221 - JUNE 30, 1944

Major Charles H. Hillhouse led 28 aircraft to bomb the North Oil Refinery at Blechhammer. After reaching Lake Balaton, a 10/10 cloud cover could not be penetrated. The Group was forced to turn back and dropped its 12, 500-lb. GP bombs in the Adriatic Sea.