

12

Operations: August, 1944

PORTES LES VALENCES, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 244 - AUGUST 2, 1944
Lt. Col. James Ellis, 20th Squadron CO, led 28 aircraft to bomb the Marshalling Yards in this city. Reports were that only 20% of the bombs were in the target area. No flak and no E/A were encountered.

FRIEDRICHSHOFFEN, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 245 - AUGUST 3, 1944

The Ober Radweach Chemical works, in this city, was the assigned target. Twenty-eight aircraft took off with one early return. Twenty-seven aircraft got over the target with only 13 dropping 26 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs. The First Wave missed the target by 1,500 to 2,000 feet due to malfunction of bomb racks in the lead airplane. Flak was heavy, slight, and inaccurate. Thirteen aircraft, the Second Wave, bombed a target of opportunity, a highway bridge at 45-38N - 13-34E, with a few hits on the bridge and several near misses.

B-17 #42-31655, 429th Squadron, reported missing. Believed headed for Switzerland.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31655 - "WANITA" - 429TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	James E. Heintz, 0-813569, P.	(INTERNEED)
2nd Lt.	George W. Eilers, 0-761907, CP.	(INTERNEED)
2nd Lt.	James F. Mahon, 0-717677, N.	(INTERNEED)*
2nd Lt.	Jacob T. Blumer, 0-757959, B.	(INTERNEED)
T/Sgt.	James H. Howard, 14004671, U/T.	(INTERNEED)*
S/Sgt.	Morris Seifert, 15169679, L/T.	(INTERNEED)
T/Sgt.	Edwin A. Hayes, 14002465, R/W.	(INTERNEED)
S/Sgt.	Richard C. Mason, 32773217, L/W.	(INTERNEED)
S/Sgt.	Joseph Ferreira, 11032607, T/G.	(INTERNEED)
S/Sgt.	Peter G. Pierce, Jr., 18213806, R/O.	(INTERNEED)*

*Escaped from Switzerland

Statement of Captain James E. Heintz, P, after repatriation: "We were approximately 75 miles from Lake Constance when we left the formation. All members were in the aircraft when we landed at Dubendorf, Switzerland. I have seen S/Sgt. Seifert, in December 1945, at Traux Field, Wisconsin, uninjured and in good health. Lt. Eilers was last seen at Davos, Switzerland about the middle of October 1944 at which time he attempted to escape. He was captured and imprisoned in a prison camp around the middle of October. This came from Lt. Jacob Blumer who was also imprisoned at Veuwolemons. I last saw T/Sgt. James Howard in Dubendorf on October 4, 1944. The enlisted men were sent to

Adelboden and officers were sent to Davos. I found later that he had escaped and later apprehended by Swiss police."

Statement of S/Sgt. Richard Mason, LW, after repatriation: "Lt. Eilers, Lt. Blumer, T/Sgt. Hayes, and I were repatriated together from Switzerland on 17 February 1945 at Geneva. Information I had regarding T/Sgt. James Howard was that he had successfully escaped on his second attempt, was returned to the 429th Squadron, then shipped to the States."

Escape statement of 2nd Lt. James F. Mahon, N, 4 January 1945. Source stated that an engine was hit and could not be feathered. Prop was vibrating and pilot feared wing would fall off, so decided to go to Switzerland. Salvoed bombs in German territory, crash landed at Dubendorf. Landing gear was washed out. Source not allowed to inspect ship.

Source sent to Davos and stayed there five months. Source made two attempts to escape and put in prison where he received poor treatment. On 29 December, source, using a forged pass, managed to reach Zurich where he contacted the American Consul. Source was sent to Berne, stayed overnight then taken to Munsingon. He stayed there overnight and again brought to Berne. He was then brought to the border and led across by a FFI guide. This guide brought source to Annecy, then to Lyon, then to Naples for two nights, and then to Bari on 3 January 1945.

Escape statement of S/Sgt. Peter G. Pierce, RO, after escape. Source stated they were given first aid and taken to the officers barracks for interrogation. Stayed overnight and sent to Chaumont, near Neuchstol, where source spent a 21-day quarantine. Source was then taken to Adelboden, stayed for one month and then taken to Wengun. He stayed here for three months, managed to get a forged pass and got to Berne by train. The next day he went to the American Air Force Attache Officer, stayed three days, and brought by moving van to a rendezvous point where he met a woman contact. She took source to Vevey and stayed four days. Source was then taken by cab to a Polish guide who walked source through swamps and across the border. He stayed here overnight in a hotel and was taken to Annecy by truck. Stayed overnight and then to Lyon. Was flown to Naples and then to Bari, arriving here 31 December 1944.

LE POUZIN, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 246 - AUGUST 6, 1944

Lt. Col. Charles H. Hillhouse led 27 aircraft to bomb Oil Storage Tanks in this city. Strike photos showed a fairly good coverage. Light, inaccurate flak. No injuries, no losses.

BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 247 - AUGUST 7, 1944

Twenty-six aircraft dropped 67.5 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the South Oil Plant in this city. Due to heavy smoke covering the target, bombing was by PFF. Results were not known. Flak was moderate to intense, accurate and very heavy resulting in the loss of B-17 #44-6176, 49th Squadron. Eight Me-109s were seen with one making a single pass at a B-17 with no damage done.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6176 - 49TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	Dwight F. Hastings, 0-819095, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Kenneth A. Durtschi, 0-706150, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	James A. Shaw, 0-712924, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Dominic A. Siani, Jr., 0-755166, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Julius (NMI) Karp, 12152818, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Howard J. Kidney, 36542158, L/T.	(KIA)

S/Sgt.	John C. Case, 38343521, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	James E. Devlin, 33578618, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Nicanor N. Reyes, 32636356, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Harold S. Barth, 33758700, R/O.	(POW)

S/Sgt. John C. Case, RW. April 19, 1992: "I read your letter with interest. Seeing the names of the crew triggered a lot of memories.

"Sgt. Devlin was new to the crew. We dropped our regular gunner for a photographer, who turned out to be Devlin. Kidney was killed while still in his chute coming down, or immediately thereafter. The Germans brought me his chute, Mae West, and flying boots. His Mae West was stitched from left to right with bullet holes and lots of blood. We checked as best we could after liberation but neither the Red Cross nor Germans had any record of him.

"As for my personal story - well, I am happy to be here alive and in reasonably good health. There were so many that did not make it."

1st Lt. Dwight F. Hastings, P. October 23, 1994: "We were a mixed crew on that mission of 7 August 1944 to Blechhammer. I had checked out as a 1st pilot after about 12 missions, and inherited individuals from other crews, sometimes flying with newly arrived crew members until their pilots checked out for combat.

"That morning as I briefed the crew, and we boarded the B-17, I remember Sgt. Howard Kidney, the ball turret gunner, telling me he certainly was going to walk out of Germany if he were shot down because he believed his wife was expecting their first child momentarily. He had his GI boots and his 45 along, and I reminded him of the strong recommendation of our CO to not take handguns on missions because of the evidence that captured airmen who did so were killed by their own guns. That day, my very good friend and bunkmate, Dominic Siani, had managed to fly with my crew as bombardier on what I believe was his 50th mission.

"We were leading the #4 Squadron on that mission and everything went smoothly to the target area. As the #4 Squadron leader, our position within the six Squadron formation placed us right in the middle of the Group as viewed from the ground, and we heard all five of the 88 anti-aircraft shell bursts (they were fired in clips of five shells), which rocked our plane as we were on the bomb run. Right after "bombs away," we were trying to evaluate our damage as smoke was being reported by crew members in the rear of the aircraft. When I looked back along the trailing edge of the left wing, I saw a frightening hole fairly close to the fuselage with what looked like a very large blow-torch like flame reaching back several feet. Because on a previous mission, when leading the high Squadron, I had witnessed a similar fire on the right wing of the deputy lead plane and that plane had exploded within 10 to 15 seconds, I immediately ordered the crew to bail out, and dumped the stick forward to try and pick up speed to get out of the formation and to drag the fire back to delay any explosion as long as possible. I remember trying to set the automatic pilot so we all could get out with a minimum of complications, and found it had been shot out, so then trimmed the controls as best I could to try to keep it in a dive while I left. The crew responded to my order to bail out with reasonable haste. When I felt that I was ready to go, I looked back to see my good friend, Dominic Siani, looking up through the hatch to see how I was doing. I motioned for him to go out, and swung down to go myself. As I left my seat, I saw no movement anywhere within the plane, and with all doors open I could see it was empty. Knowing we were about 25,000 feet, and without oxygen after falling out of the escape hatch, I waited to get away from the plane and down to where more oxygen would be available before opening my chest type chute and, of course, when I pulled the ripcord I became vertically upright with a tremendous jerk. Soon after the chute opened I saw the plane going away, but then I was rocked by what must have been

the concussion from the plane exploding. I then discovered there was a big hole in my chute (probably made by shrapnel from the plane) that I hoped would not get any bigger. Another distraction was finding that a German fighter (possibly a Me-109) was swinging toward me in a manner that could lead to strafing me, but then he kept on turning and I saw the fighter was on fire and slowly spiraling toward the ground.

"I landed in a freshly plowed field, with more impact than I had been led to expect, on my feet, rear and back. The chute was so flat on the ground when I stood up I suspect I was momentarily dazed by the impact. Looking around me, and finding nothing to hide behind, I saw a farmer waving a pitchfork at me from perhaps 200 yards distance, obviously wondering if I was friend or foe. Looking clockwise 90 degrees, a man with a long rifle was perhaps 300 yards away and running toward me. Clockwise, another 90 degrees, was a motorcycle policeman bouncing across the field waving a pistol, and to complete the circle, a 1936 Ford sedan loaded down with soldiers was rapidly approaching. Realizing it would take a minute or so for them to reach me, and having a very strong urge to urinate, I let fly.

"The SS Troopers arrived first and surrounded me with four or five Tommy guns at the ready. The SS contingent consisted of a Captain, Lieutenant, and five enlisted men. All the others arrived about the same time, and a serious argument ensued between the civilians and the SS Captain, and from the hatred in the eyes of the civilians I was hoping the Captain would win. During this confusion, I looked around to see the long rifle was being pointed between my eyes from a distance of perhaps three or four feet, and I thought my time had arrived as I stared at the man with the rifle. The Captain must have seen what was going on about the same time I did for he actually kicked the rifle out of the man's hands and confiscated it, kicked him away from the group, and I was obviously going to be his prisoner; and recognized as being an officer I was to be taken alive. As things settled down, the Captain had a very large enlisted man show me, by example, what I was to do - stripping off my clothes one by one and making sure I was not armed or had anything hidden. They then let me put my clothes back on, and put me in the back seat of the Ford with the Lieutenant and drove toward town.

"While riding into town the Lieutenant tried to carry on a conversation with me in his terrible broken English. He had "admired" me, which I didn't understand at all at first, and asked why? He said I had not flinched when the long rifle was being aimed at me, and respected me for the way I behaved. He wanted to know if I had been a Boy Scout in America. He got the question across by sketching a Boy Scout insignia on a piece of paper, and when I confirmed it he said he had been a Boy Scout, and that he was "Russ." I later learned that in those areas between Germany and Russia, there were probably many former Russians serving in the German Army, especially the SS.

"After a relatively short drive, the Ford engine conked out in the middle of a village, and it seemed like the whole town turned out to surround the car and calls of "Americanisch Swine" and "Americanisch Gangster." There were many shaking pitchforks and fists at me, and the veins stood out in the foreheads - convincing me that there were very strong feelings being expressed, and it was to my advantage to have been picked up by the SS Captain and his men. A couple of the enlisted men were working feverishly on the engine for what seemed like a very long time, and the demonstration continued. I then had a very strange experience. I noticed that a woman about my mother's age was smiling, and then I realized I was smiling also, and something about this woman's actions seemed to change the whole tone of the crowd. I didn't hear the "Gangster" and "Swine" anymore. The engine started, and we went on to what may have been the next town where I was relegated to a chair in the center portion of what was probably a town hall meeting room.

"After waiting in the town hall meeting room for an hour or so, there was a commotion at the door, and apparently a little arguing. Then the Lieutenant brought me a large pork sandwich which he said the lady in the village, where the car broke down, had made for me. He added that I looked like

her son who is in the German Army and she knew I must be hungry. I'm not sure that I had ever enjoyed a sandwich more than that one!

"Soon after that another commotion at the door brought in Dominic Siani. He had landed about two miles on the opposite side of town and had been forced to walk, with a gun in his back, on a sprained ankle, to this town hall. He was ghostly white and in obvious pain. It was good to see each other, even though they didn't want us to talk to each other.

"About the middle of the afternoon, a Wehrmacht Captain and some men arrived to pick Dom and me up and take over our detention - driving to a permanent Army Base, probably a half hour away. This German Army Captain must have had some serious disease with high temperatures in his life for he had no hair on his head. He had a black patch over one eye, and with his short stocky stature and high voice, Hollywood would have paid a mint for his services in propaganda films during the war. I carried Dom on my back whenever possible because his foot hurt so badly. The Captain transported us in a three wheeled "truck" with covered cargo area behind a motorcycle front. He sat up front with the driver and a soldier sat back by the tail gate to guard us. The Captain told us not to talk, but we found the guard did not care so we talked quietly during the trip. I remember being impressed by the beautiful and peaceful surroundings as we passed through the villages and countryside.

"After arriving at the Army Base, we were taken to the Captain's office where he announced for us "the war is over," and then leaning back in his chair he looked at me and said, "Ah Sonny Boy!" When neither of us reacted - not knowing what he was referring to, he gave his Aide instructions and the Aide returned with a German magazine which might have been the quality of our *Time* magazine. On the back cover were four cartoons and the title was "Sonny Boy." The first picture was a young American boy, perhaps age six, with a bow and arrow killing dogs and cats - learning to kill. In the second cartoon the boy, now age eight, had a sword in his hand and was destroying statues and cultural stuff - learning destruction. In the third, now perhaps age ten, with a burning torch in his hand running gleefully away from burning buildings and homes. In the last cartoon, at perhaps age 12, he is shown with USAAF pilot wings after having received all the destructive training to qualify him. My reaction was an immediate "BULL SHIT." The Captain didn't know how to handle that reaction because he obviously didn't know what it meant. He repeated my "BULL SHIT" over and over again with all sorts of inflections trying to find something similar in his language, and Dom and I got to laughing over the episode. He was still repeating "BULL SHIT" as we were taken back to our cells by a couple of soldiers.

"Not much later, I was taken from my cell to Dom so I could carry him to another transport. This time it was a German Air Force transport to take us to a Luftwaffe Base. We were put into separate cells for the night, and later that evening they brought me a rather large bowl of boiled potatoes with skins on. I ate the whole thing much to the amazement of my handlers. I later learned that the Germans didn't eat the skins because of predominant practice at the time of using human manure.

"Ever since my first meeting with Dom at the town hall, we had been trying to get a doctor to examine his ankle. Dom and I were taken to the Base Headquarters building the next morning and there we got a doctor to examine and tape Dom's ankle, and we gave up one dog tag so they could send it to Geneva to identify us as POWs. I believe it was that night that Dom and I were put into a truck and taken, under guard, to the railroad station in Breslau (now Wroclaw) where we were put into a third-class compartment and started the trip to Frankfurt Am Main. We discovered other captured American airmen on board, none from our crew, and many more guards. We pulled out of the station late in the evening and it seems we arrived in Frankfurt about dusk the next evening.

"As we approached the main Frankfurt Railroad Station, we saw nothing but destruction on each side of the train - rubble in most cases to make it impossible to see where one block ended and another began. The station itself had no glass windows remaining - just a shell of a station. As we were taken

off to the platform and assembled as a group of about 12 prisoners, and as many guards, we could see a crowd starting to gather, and hatred seemed to be building. We were thankful we had guards to insure our safety at this point. They hurried us out of the station and into a tram (street car) that delivered us to Dulag Luft, the Luftwaffe Interrogation Center outside Frankfurt. We were separated and placed in solitary confinement units. A German officer with a Red Cross band on his arm came to interrogate me, telling me he wanted information to send to Geneva and implying he needed other information to confirm my accurate identification. He wanted a lot more information about my military position, alternate target, etc. I stuck with our guidance from our Army that had instructed under the Geneva Convention all I was to provide was my name, rank, and serial number. He went away implying that I would have to give more information than that.

"Our food in solitary was ersatz coffee and a piece of dark bread in the morning, a very weak potato soup with a piece of dark bread with a little ersatz jam at noon, and a repeat of the noon meal in the evening. I was allowed to go down the hall to the bathroom once in the morning and once a night. This was not an automatic allowance as I had to ask for it each time. The room may have been 5 feet x 10 feet. The door was very thick with a small peep hole, or window, so the guard could look in but the hall was too dark for me to see anything from inside looking out. There was a small window, perhaps 15" x 12" which seemed to be shuttered and locked from the outside. It was open my first day or so, but then the rest of my 12 nights and 11 days it was closed. The bed consisted of a wooden frame with about five slats holding a flat, straw mattress - very thin, hard and uncomfortable. I remember buttoning the collar of my shirt tight at the neck to try to keep as warm as possible at night. There generally was no heat in the room. I discovered there were fleas in the room that caused the inside of my collar to be spotted with red from the bites.

"The second day I was there a guard came and took me to the office of the official interrogator, a very sharp appearing 1st Lieutenant with impeccable English with a distinct English accent. He tried to convince me that he needed more than my name, rank and serial number in order to convince the Gestapo that I really was simply a US Army pilot and not a spy to be turned over to the Gestapo. I told him I could not believe that because it was very clear, under the circumstances of my capture, what brought me to Germany. He sent me back to my cell "to think about it." The next day I was taken down again to his office, and he tried again to get me to give more information. This time he said, "Do you think we don't know you were leading the 49th Bomb Squadron of the 2nd Bomb Group, and that your CO is Major Richard Abbey and" correct on all counts! He obviously was trying to further confirm this information. Hoping not to make my surprise too obvious, I said if he though he knew all about me I didn't know why he bothered with this interrogation. He got mad, yelled for the guard to take me back so I "could rot in my cell until I was ready to talk." I believe it was the same day that I passed Dom leaving the latrine as I was going in and passed the comment that someone on our crew had talked.

"The food didn't get any better and I was subjected to no further interrogation during the rest of my stay at Dulag Luft. On the 12th day of solitary confinement, my door burst open and the interrogator who had sent me back to rot in my cell came in with an implied surprise at finding me in solitary. He said he had just returned from leave and had left instructions for my release to go to prison camp."

GYOR, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 248 - AUGUST 9, 1944

Twenty-four aircraft dropped 71.75 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Airdrome and Assembly Plant at Gyor. Two runs were made on the target. Bombs of the First Wave were in the target area while bombs of the Second Wave fell to the left. Flak was moderate, accurate, and heavy. There were no losses and no casualties.

SAVONA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 249 - AUGUST 12, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 79.5 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on German Gun Positions in the Savona area with good results. No flak, no enemy fighters.

GENOA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 250 - AUGUST 13, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 84 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on Gun Positions in the Genoa area. Bombs were reported to have hit the assigned area. The Second Squadron made two runs over the target. Flak was slight to moderate lightly wounding one bombardier.

TOULON, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 251 - AUGUST 14, 1944

For the third consecutive day Gun Positions were attacked in preparation for the Allied landings in Southern France. Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 54 tons of 2,000-lb. GP bombs on gun positions in the Toulon area. Flak was moderate, heavy, and accurate. No losses, no injuries.

ST. TROPEZ, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 252 - AUGUST 15, 1944

Lt. Col. John D. Ryan led 23 aircraft and dropped 41.5 tons of bombs on Beach Head No. 201 in support of the invasion of Southern France. The bombing was done by PFF due to a heavy cloud cover and results were not observed. No flak, no fighters.

ST. VALIER, FRANCE - MISSION NO. 253 - AUGUST 16, 1944

Twenty-nine aircraft, each with a bomb load of two, 2,000-lb. GP bombs, dropped their bombs on the St. Valier Railroad Bridge. Crews reported a large concentration of hits around the bridge. There were no encounters with enemy aircraft.

PLOESTI, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 254 - AUGUST 19, 1944

Twenty-five aircraft dropped 50 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Romano-American Oil Refinery at Ploesti. There was an ineffective smoke screen over the target. The target was reported to have been well covered with numerous fires seen. Flak over the target was heavy, moderate to intense, causing the loss of one B-17, #44-6275, 20th Squadron. This was the last of the Group's 13 missions against Ploesti.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6275 - 20TH SQUADRON

F/O	Robert H. Rogers, P,	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Howard I. Season, CP.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Albert E. Smith, N.	(RET)
1st Lt.	William E. Chalcroft, B.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Willis M. Church, U/T.	(RET)
Sgt.	Samuel C. Woods, L/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Charles J. Armstrong, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	John J. Bradley, L/W.	(DED)
S/Sgt.	Raymond C. Roe, T/G.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Owen E. Park, Jr., R/O.	(RET)

Joint statement of seven surviving crew members after rescue: "We are the crew members of B-17 #44-6275, which developed a fire in No. four engine (believed caused by flak) at approximately 1329 hours as we were returning to home base following the mission. This was at a spot about 75 miles from Trieste, Italy and around an altitude of 15,000 feet. The pilot put the plane in a steep dive in an effort

to put out the fire, but to no avail. At about 12,000 feet, we noticed there was a big hole burned through the right wing. At that time we all bailed out; ten chutes opening. None of the crew was suffering from injuries. The aircraft hit the water and exploded. Three B-17s with red tails circled us and dropped dinghies (one man dinghies), which were in good condition except for one which had two small holes in it. A B-26 circled us and dropped a seven-man dinghy which had the Co2 bottles torn from it when it was dropped. We tried to blow this dinghy up by mouth but were unable to complete the job as the PBV that picked us up came by at that time. Three of our crew members are still missing as yet: F/O Robert H. Rogers, pilot; 2nd Lt. Howard Season, co-pilot, and S/Sgt. John J. Bradley, left waist gunner. When we returned to the Italian mainland, a pilot of a PBV told us he had seen two bodies, face down, with parachutes attached, floating in the water and they would soon be picked up. These may be two of the three members of our crew."

2nd Lt. Albert E. Smith, N. July 25, 1992: "We were shipped by boat from Norfolk, Virginia about mid-May 1944 to Oran, North Africa. After about a week we left, by boat, for Naples, Italy. After a railroad box car trip to Foggia, we were taken by truck to the 2nd Bomb Group camp. I will never forget the greeting when we signed in. "Boy are we glad to see you. We have been losing a lot of navigators lately." True to their word, my first mission, on June 1, was with another crew to the Vienna area. Then for the next month or so, I would fly with my crew and then another crew. For awhile I had twice as many missions as my own crew. I flew with 13/14 other crews. Everyone of them was shot down before I was, except for the crew on my first mission. That was their last mission (50). Also I do not know about the crew I flew with on August 28, the day before I was shot down. I began to think of myself as a jinx. I was on my 37th mission and 25th time over the target when I was shot down in Czechoslovakia. This does not count the early returns caused by engine failure, and a trip to Linz, Austria for which the Group got no credit because of fouling up on the bombing run and dropping most of the bombs before we got to the target.

"I always said I would like to make a parachute jump but I sure picked a heck of a place to do it. On August 18, 1944, I flew with my co-pilot, Howard Season, with another crew. My pilot, Bill Bullock, and bombardier, John Quinn, flew in another ship. Our enlisted crew were all at rest camp. I kicked the night before because Howie and I couldn't fly with Bill and Johnny but it didn't do any good. The pilot I flew with (I don't remember his name) was a former co-pilot, flying his first mission as a pilot.

"I didn't feel so good flying and for the first time I got air sick on a combat mission. While in training as an Air Cadet, I had trouble with air sickness a few times. It was just before we started the bomb run. We picked up some flak but didn't think we were hit very badly. We came off the target O.K. and started for home, and everything was O.K. when just about halfway across the Adriatic things happened in a hurry. I had been thinking, "Well another mission over. Every time I had been to Ploesti something always happened, but I guess this is going to be uneventful.

"All of a sudden I saw fire coming from our No. 4 (right outboard) engine. I yelled over the interphone and at the same time some of the men in the waist saw it. The pilot pulled away from the formation and put the plane in a dive trying to put the fire out. The fire was too well started though and it only made it worse. We thought, at first, we might have time to ditch but it was too dangerous as the ship might blow up at any minute. There was a huge hole in the wing where it had burned through, and other parts of the wing were beginning to melt. The pilot yelled, "Abandon ship" so out we tumbled. I was near the escape hatch, which is back of the navigator's compartment. At these words, I yanked the emergency handle to knock the door pins out. As soon as I pulled it, the door flew out and immediately, I went out too. At that time we were a little above 7,000 feet altitude.

"I had a chest pack parachute. Right after I went out I pulled the ripcord, except nothing happened. I immediately looked at my chute and saw I had pulled the carrying handle instead of the ripcord. I then pulled the ripcord, which was beside the handle on the right side of the pack. The chute still didn't open. Then I noticed I had my left arm across the top of my chute and the spring snaps couldn't open. I removed my arm, hit the side of the chute with my hand and the chute opened. This sounds like a long time but all this happened in a matter of seconds. In retrospect, pulling on the strap instead of the ripcord may have saved my life. The bomb bay doors had been opened so the crew could bail out. I did not think I was really clear of the plane when I pulled the carrying handle. If it had been the ripcord, the chute may well have caught on the bomb bay doors or some other part of the plane and taken me down with it.

"While floating down, I noticed, for an instant, the plane going down with the whole right wing burning fiercely. Later, some of the other fellows said the wing fell off before the ship hit the water. It exploded when it hit. I saw it just before it hit and smoke right afterwards, but I didn't see it hit the sea. When we thought we might have to bail out, I had removed my heavy flying boots, and it is a good thing that I did. While swinging downward, I was unbuttoning a couple of buttons on my coverall legs and taking off my shoes and socks (I only got one sock off before I hit). Just before I hit the water I tried to loosen my chute leg straps (unbuckle them) but my struggling with my shoes had sort of tightened them up and I couldn't loosen them.

"When I hit, I was floating backwards in the chute. I didn't get my chute turned so I could drift facing forward, as we had been told in the minimum training we received on this. I also did not get both leg straps and chest strap unbuckled so I could slide out of the harness just as I hit the water, according to standard procedure. I think landing backwards helped save my life. My feet hit the water and I fell backwards. I unfastened my left leg strap because my right one was still tight. I then unfastened my chest strap. This loosened my right leg and I unbuckled it in a hurry. The wind was strong enough to billow up part of my chute and blew me along the water all this time. If I had been facing forward, I could have been pulled along the water face down and probably drowned. All crew members got out of the plane but three evidently drowned after they hit the water, before or after they got out of their chutes. They were my pilot, my co-pilot Howard Season, and a waist gunner. I understand two bodies were seen floating in their chutes and a boat was to go out and pick up the bodies. I never had confirmation of this or which crew members they were.

"When I got out of my harness I pulled the cords of my Mae West life jacket to inflate it and it didn't work! Boy, that scared me! Here I had all my heavy flying clothes on me and nothing to hold me up. I immediately loosened the strap that held the Mae West on me so I could get out of my clothes. I guess I blew it up a little by mouth before this; I don't remember. I found out that the valves on my life jacket were open, rather than closed, when I pulled the cords to inflate it. So, all the air immediately went out. When I realized this, I blew it up partially by mouth and twisted the valves shut. I struggled out of the heavy flying jacket I had on and started on my coveralls. All this time I was swallowing half the sea and was underwater two thirds of the time. I jerked and struggled and finally, after half drowning, got my coveralls, electric suit and suntan uniform off, together with my gun. When I had all this on and it was pulling me under, I really thought I was going to drown, but I gasped for air when I could. Half the time I gasped for air a wave would come along and I'd get a mouthful of sea water.

"After I stripped down to my undershorts, I tried to blow up my Mae West more and sort of regained my breath. In retrospect, I should have left my suntan uniform on for sun protection, but since I had so little flotation from the life jacket, I was desperate to get rid of all possible weight. All this time, three B-17s of the Group that followed us, were circling the area. They called the Air-Sea-Rescue who got a "fix" on them. They continued to circle and dropped a couple of one-man life rafts. We had a couple of these one-man rafts in the waist of the plane but the waist gunners didn't think to grab them.

These rafts fell pretty far from me. In the meantime I had ripped open the packet of sea marker on my Mae West and that turned the sea a yellowish green for yards around. This helps locate you. I would drift out of it but it wasn't hard to keep in it.

"After awhile I heard some yelling and I yelled back. Then I saw a raft with one fellow in it and one hanging to the side. The raft was one the Fort dropped. I finally got over to them and by then I was pretty well pooped, as I hardly had breath to completely blow up my Mae West. After I got to the raft and hung on a minute, I felt a lot better. We switched around so that every man could lie in the raft while the other two hung on. With the kit that contained the raft was also a can of sea marker, two hand paddles, a can of drinking water and some wooden plugs to stop leaks in the raft. As the raft had two holes in it, we used the latter. Still we had to blow up the raft, by mouth, every five minutes or so.

"All this time the Forts were circling us, but soon they had to pull off and head for base, as they were getting low on gas. Soon after they left, however, a B-25 came out and started circling us. He dropped a large life raft, supplies and a lot of stuff. We saw the raft quite a ways away and started toward it. All the stuff sank, or at least we couldn't see it.

"While we were struggling toward the large raft, we saw a PBY Catalina, Air-Sea-Rescue amphibian airplane circling and dropping a smoke bomb. While it was going around to land, I reached the large life raft, turned it right side up and searched for the Co2 cylinder. It had been jerked out and was gone. It was a sad feeling because although we saw the Cat above us, we weren't too sure he saw us or when he would pick us up.

"I blew the two seats up partially and started on the rest of it when the Cat landed not a hundred feet from us. They tossed us some ropes and pulled us to the ship. They pulled us on board, gave us towels to wipe dry and blankets to wrap around us. The rescue squad used a knife to puncture the life raft compartments so it would sink. Another Cat picked up the other crew members. After we took off, we flew around another three hours looking for a fighter pilot who had gone down, but we evidently never found him. There were bunks on the Cat and the four of us who were picked up, slept most of the time. The fourth man was evidently alone in the water. He was not with the three of us in the one-man raft.

"When we got back to Foggia Main airfield, about 6:30, we had to practically land in a lake. They had a terrible rain here and everything was flooded, including the runway. We got out and got in an ambulance, which brought us to the hospital. To get there we came through water up to the hubcaps. When we got to the hospital, they filled out some forms and put us in a ward for observation for 24 hours or so.

"The Cat that picked us up picked up the bombardier, ball turret gunner, and one waist gunner. Another Cat landed a little ways off and picked up the engineer, radio operator, and tail gunner. It also found two bodies that it left for a launch, that was coming out to pick up.

"In the hospital I saw the other three. The tail gunner said he was the last out of the waist, and the engineer said he was the last out of the nose, so everybody got out of the ship. The two bodies that were found had their chutes attached. They must have been knocked unconscious or else tangled up in their harness and drowned.

"We don't know what made the fire break out. It happened in an instant. We thought a piece of flak might have hit the gas tanks and the gas finally dripped down to the super chargers and ignited. When I got back to my Squadron, I heard later that it might have been one of our own planes that shot us down. It was a normal procedure that once you hit the coast of Yugoslavia, on the way home, that all machine guns would be torn down and cleaned. I heard that a burst of fire from the plane behind on the right went into our outboard engine and set us on fire. If this is so, it must have been when they were tearing down the guns for cleaning.

"We went down at 1:30 p.m. and were picked up at 3:30 p.m. The water was pretty warm and that is what saved us. If it had been cold we might not have been here. As it was I got pretty chilled at one time.

"On the morning of August 18, at the hospital, the Army Public Relations people, or whatever they were called at that time, had the seven of us that were picked up, the B-25 pilot who circled us and a cameraman he carried, and the pilots of the Cats assemble for a newsreel release. They had our radio man tell what happened to us. The B-25 cameraman had taken movies and photos the day before while we were in the water. It was an Army take for release to the Movietone Newsreel Company. However, I never saw it nor heard of anyone who did."

OSWIECIM, POLAND - MISSION NO. 255 - AUGUST 20, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 24 dropped 60 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Synthetic Oil and Rubber Works in this city. There was an effective smoke screen over the target but the bombs were reported in the smoke covered area. Results were not known. Flak was moderate to fair, good, and heavy. B-17 #42-102908 was lagging and the formation slowed in order for it to catch up. It continued to lag and two Me-109s were reported to be attacking it and finally it passed out of sight.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-102908 - "SILVER STREAK" - 96TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	Robert N. Lambert, 0-816238, P.	(POW)
1st Lt.	Don M. Facer, 0-819887, CP.	(POW)
1st Lt.	Kenneth D. Erickson, 0-713513, N.	(POW)
1st Lt.	Thomas M. Wilson, 0-762856, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	James I. Lang, 35698179, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	James R. Kirk, 36580844, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Raymond E. Flood, 38143475, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Charles Robinson, 32797174, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Charles Nargiso, Jr., 32786873, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Robert T. Larson, 36650627, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 1st Lt. Don M. Facer, CP, after liberation: "We left the formation about 10 minutes from the target. We all bailed out successfully about 30 miles from Budapest, Hungary. I have no knowledge of the others, on how leaving the plane, only that they went out the bomb bay or waist door. All members were in good health when last seen. Lt. Lambert broke his ankle when he struck the ground but he was mended and walking normally when last seen. Lt. Erickson had a flak wound in the thigh but it had also healed when last seen. All the others were in good health but mighty hungry at times."

T/Sgt. James I. Lang, Flight Engineer. July 22, 1992: "We made our bomb run, dropped our bombs, and were leaving the target. Just as we were turning off, No. 2 engine was hit by flak and feathered. We pulled out of the formation to get out of the way of everyone. I think Lt. Lambert could better tell what happened next as he called for a heading from the navigator to cut short our assembly point after heading for home. I went to the front and rear of the plane to asses damage for Lt. Lambert. Knowing there was a long haul ahead to get back, we had thoughts of getting rid of weight later on.

"About 30 minutes later, three FW-190s were spotted at 9:00 o'clock level, about 1,000 yards out. They followed us for awhile. I think we were over Czechoslovakia at the time. They stayed out for a few minutes to plan an attack or see if our fighters, we had called for, had located us. Then they came in, one at a time, one right behind the other, in single file, to about 50 to 100 yards and broke away

at rear, and down. Half of the time my guns could not fire because of the cut-off switch on the turret. They knew what they were doing by staying at 7:00 o'clock level. During the attack, a cannon shell ripped a hole about one and one-half foot wide up the back of No. 3 engine, knocking No. 3 out completely. That must have been when Lt. Erickson was hit in the back of the knee area. The fighters made only one pass.

Most of us, that saw the planes, agree that they were FW-190s. After they left, Lt. Lambert asked for a check on all men, and the plane's condition. I first went to the nose because of the report that Lt. Erickson was hurt, then to the rest of the plane, clear to the tail to check on Sgt. Nargiso. He reported he was hit from cannon fragments. He showed me his back, and his flying jacket was full of small holes. It looked like moths had been in it. He wasn't in any real danger, so I left him at his guns.

"In reporting to Lt. Lambert, he said he was having trouble with the controls. I told him that all the fibering was gone off the rudder, elevator, and aileron controls. We asked if we should start throwing out weight, and Lt. Lambert said no. He could not control the plane, we were losing power and prepare to jump. When we left the plane we were on the border of Czechoslovakia and Hungary. We landed near Balassagyarmet, Hungary.

"Glad to hear Sgt. Popp say that he saw #908 crash land in a field. Always wondered what happened to a fine plane. After reading Sgt. Higgen's report, it seemed to me that the plane he watched, off the target, was not our plane. Lt. Lambert's statement is correct, down to the last sighting of the enlisted men. The party on the ground was not what you would write home about! Lt. Facer mentioned Lt. Lambert's ankle on landing, after bailing out. His ankle was also hurt in the States on leaving for overseas. He got on the plane, to fly to Europe, on crutches because he said, "It's my crew and we go together."

"Some of our crew kept in contact after the war, especially Lambert, Larson, Facer, Kirk, Waring, and myself. Lost contact with Torske, Harris, Flood, and Robinson. I saw Lt. Facer at



T/R-L/R - W. Torske, D. Facer, R. Lambert, Harris
B/R-L/R - Waring, J. Lang, C. Nargiso, J. Kirk, R. Larson
Front - C Robinson (Courtesy - James Lang)



Captain Hofmann (*), Major Bedgood, Captain Merritt, L. Johnson
 (*) KIA - Italian Front (Group Photo)

LaHavre, France on my way home. Saw Lt. Torske at LaHavre in a chow line. Last time I was with Torske he was in a hospital in Foggia, Italy as late as August, 1944. After getting out of the hospital, recovering from wounds over Vienna, Austria, Torske returned to duty later. In December 1944, he was shot down over Linz, Austria. Lt. Torske was our bombardier from State side until he was wounded and replaced by Lt. Wilson.”

ODERTAL, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 256 - AUGUST 22, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft took off, led by Lt. Col. John Ryan, and 27 dropped 580, 200-lb. GP bombs on the Oil Refinery at Odertal. Bombs were believed in the target area. A partially effective smoke screen obscured results. One plane bombed Marshalling Yards at 52-23N - 17-40E. Some bombs were reported to have hit in the Yards. Flak at the primary target was heavy, intense and accurate. T/Sgt. C.C. Popp, 429th Squadron, was slightly wounded.

Four to eight Me-109s and FW-190s were encountered at 47-10N - 17-10E. A joint claim of one FW-190 was given to T/Sgt. Howard E. Ferro and S/Sgt. Charles H. Hill, both of the 96th Squadron. A joint claim for the probable destruction of one Me-109 went to T/Sgt. Austin S. Knighton and S/Sgt. Joseph E. Karel, both of the 96th Squadron. The claim of probable damage of one FW-190 went to S/Sgt. John A. Lamb, also of the 96th Squadron.

B-17s #44-8103 and #42-38069 of the 96th Squadron are missing. Both aircraft were believed hit by flak, lagged behind the formation, and were shot down by enemy fighters.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-8103 - 96TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt.	Kay R. Cutler, 0-763962, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	George M. Welde, 0-714801, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Fredric M. Rosemore, 0-723172, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Donald L. Stillman, 0-762831, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	William B. Richmond, 13048090, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	John (NMI) DeSoto, Jr., 38440127, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Howard C. Hannah, 11052257, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Gerald L. Kinchloe, 37564611, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Raymond J. Morton, 34813265, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Joseph E. Greskamp, 36716688, R/O.	(POW)

A German report recorded the capture of this crew. Lts. Cutler, Welde, and Stillman were transferred to Stalag Luft III. Sgts. Richmond, Greskamp, and Hannah were transferred to Stalag Luft IV. Lt. Rosemore and Sgts. DeSoto, Morton, and Kinchloe were hospitalized due to injuries suffered in the downing of their aircraft.

1st Lt. Donald L. Stillman, Bombardier. April 19, 1992: "I flew the majority of my missions with Roger, by count, 18 of the 23 sorties I flew before being shot down. My first mission was the Marshalling Yards at Parma, Italy on June 21, 1944. We got three flak holes in the nose and two in the top turret. The 49th lost a ship. The next day we went to Ploesti and I found out what heavy flak was! We were attacked by five enemy fighters and a piece of flak jammed our bomb bay doors open but we made a good landing with the doors open.

"Things really got tough on July 7, 1944. We went to bomb Oil Refineries at Blechhammer, Germany. We were attacked by 20 to 25 Me-109s and five were claimed by our gunners, but we lost four B-17s and one P-51. We went to Ploesti again on July 9th and 15th. Flak had not diminished a bit! We picked up some holes but did not have any losses.

"July 16th we went to Vienna, Austria. I was nicked on the finger by a piece of flak. The flak was intense and we had over 100 holes in our aircraft. The Group lost two B-17s.

"July 18th we flew a long range mission to bomb an Airdrome at Memmingen, Germany. We came home with four minutes of fuel remaining, having tossed out everything not nailed down, to lighten our aircraft. We heard that the 429th lost a ship that couldn't make it back to base so they went to Switzerland. Also heard that most of the crew were on their 49th or 50th mission. What a break!

"July 21st we aborted a mission to Brux, Czechoslovakia and the wheels came up on landing. The chin turret was pushed in, ball turret crushed, and all props were bent. The Group lost two aircraft. July 26th we went to Wiener Neudorf, Austria, ten miles south of Vienna. Target was an Aircraft Factory. We did a 360 degrees over the target at 27,000 feet. The flak was heavy, intense and accurate. We had several wounded.

"July 28th our target was the Standard-Astra Oil Refinery at Ploesti. The flak was heavy, intense and accurate, and we picked up six holes. Smoke from the bombing was up to 16,000 feet and could be seen from a distance of 225 miles. August 3rd we were off to Friedrichshafen, Germany. It was reported that this place was making fuel for jets and buzz bombs. The 429th lost another plane that landed in Switzerland.

"We went back to Blechhammer on August 7th. Target was the South Synthetic Oil Refineries. Smoke from the bombing rose to 10,000 feet. The 49th lost a B-17.

"August 22nd was the fateful day for me. I had been to rest camp on the Isle of Capri and two days later was tagged to go on a mission to bomb the Oil Refineries at Odertal, Germany. I was assigned to the crew of 2nd Lt. Kay R. Cutler as a fill-in for his regular bombardier. He was in the hospital with

a face full of plexiglass from the mission on the day before. We were flying #44-8103. We lost No. 2 engine to flak over the target, fell behind the Group and were jumped by four Me-109s. The plane went down near Gelse, Hungary. Our crew claimed one Me-109 destroyed. I bailed out at 16,000 feet and was captured. I was eventually imprisoned at Stalag Luft III. All the crew parachuted safely; some with serious injuries, but imprisoned. Ironically, my own crew went on to finish their missions and they arrived in New York the day after my folks learned that I was a POW. They also learned in the letter from General Twining, telling of my being Missing In Action. This also happened to be my 42nd mission.

"The nine months I spent as a guest of the Third Reich was an entirely different experience. Like many persons, I probably felt that my six visits to Ploesti were the most meaningful as far as making a real contribution to the war effort. They certainly ranked at the top of the "Fright Meter" with everyone I knew.

"My own crew was a very tight knit group. I am the only officer still alive along with the tail gunner and two waist gunners. We have visited each other many times and communicate frequently. (Note: Donald Stillman was the original Bombardier on the crew of Roger C. Thompson.)

2nd Lt. Fredric M. Rosemore, Navigator on B-17 #44-8103. March 23, 1992: "We had been in the same general area on the 20th and were badly shot up. Our regular bombardier, F/O Dave Eiseman, had facial wounds with plexiglass and Lt. Stillman was his substitute. On the 20th we barely made it back. On our final approach to "Darn Thing" we had a windmilling prop and the entire engine fell off the airplane.

"The day we were shot down we were hit by fighters on the way to the target and sustained only slight damage. Over the target we were severely damaged by flak. One engine was knocked out and another so badly damaged that it was windmilling. We could not maintain altitude nor keep up with the Group. In order to keep sufficient altitude to get over the mountains, we had to lighten the plane, as we had done so many times before. This meant jettisoning everything; ball turret, 50 cal. waist guns, etc. We saved very little ammo. We thought once again that we could make it back to Italy and our airport, "Darn Thing."

"We made it back to southern Hungary and were jumped by four German fighters. From out of nowhere a lone P-51 came to our rescue. He shot down a German fighter and then he was shot down by the remaining German planes. Our top turret gunner, "Wink" Richmond, shot down one of the German fighters. Our ammo was now gone. We flew for about five minutes, which seemed like an eternity, taking all the punishment dealt out by the fighter planes. When flames started along the wing, our pilot rang the bell to bail out. We were all badly shot up, and with great effort we left the aircraft. We all parachuted safely, were captured, and imprisoned in prison camps in Germany.

"In 1991, five of us met, after 47 years, at the 2nd Bomb Group reunion in Dayton, Ohio. What a special event!"

S/Sgt. Howard C. Hannah, RW on #44-8103. March 26, 1992: "We were hit over the target by flak and lost an engine. We were later hit by fighters and our plane was badly shot up and went down.

"On the way back we were losing altitude badly and needed to lighten the load to get over the mountains. Lt. Cutler told us to throw everything out except the top turret and tail guns and hold a small amount of ammo. I had gotten rid of half of my ammo but was going to save my gun. While I was helping get rid of the ball turret, I saw one of the other gunners get rid of my gun.

"We were being attacked by fighters and I was looking to see which way one plane was coming so I could hide behind my armor plate. That worked on most passes. That was because they came in from the side and tail. I think it was a 20mm that got me. I only got some stuff in my right arm. I

though it had gone in and out but a later x-ray showed a lot of little specks. I had two specks taken out at different times after the war.

"I thought it was a 109 that made the first pass that got Morton and a second engine. Then I thought they made three more passes. Then they made one more pass as Morton was by the tail wheel. The wheel must have saved him as holes were going all around him. On one pass I saw Greskamp go down like he was done for. He said when he got hit he passed out. I believe the reason that three of the crew were hit was because they were on the left side of the armor plate. When one of them asked if I was going to use my flak vest, I said no because I thought we would have to jump. I didn't want it to get in my way. I guess that the flak vests did save the lives of Morton, Greskamp, DeSoto, and Kinchloe.

"I do not remember DeSoto and Kinchloe getting out. I checked on Morton as he had blood on his face. I asked him if he could get out and he said, "Yes." I was surprised to see Greskamp get up and run to the door. I just missed a plane as I jumped out. My chute opened and he went right under me. A P-51 was on his tail and it could be that Richmond was also shooting at him. He blew up right off our right wing.

"I could only count seven chutes while in the air. I thought Richmond and the pilots were going to try to make it back to base, but then I saw the plane go down. After I hit the ground, a guy punched me and said, "Russian?" The whole town was there. I asked a farmer to hide me - he thought that was a joke. He said the soldiers would come for me. Two did, on bicycles, and then they got a wagon and a kid to drive it. After awhile we picked up DeSoto who was hurt quite badly. A German Doc came to the wagon to check him. He was not out of it and was talking to me. They took me to a hospital but I don't remember if DeSoto was taken there but I thought he must have been. They showed me a fellow from another plane that was in bad shape. His whole face was black and blue. I understand it was from a beating. They gave me a tetanus shot in the chest there and then Greskamp, Stillman, and I were sent to a Hungarian Cadet Base.

"They kept us there for a few days. They had a Polish doctor take care of us there. Then we were taken to Budapest where we were put in cells, one to a cell. It was a week before they talked to us. The jail looked like Sing Sing and was loaded with bugs. Whenever they got done interrogating 25 gunners, they would ship you out to a POW camp.

"It took about four or five days to get to the prison camp. We had nine or ten guards and one could talk to us in English. He said that two of the guards were fighter pilots that had been hurt in plane crashes.

"Life at Stalag Luft IV was not too bad. Not enough food. Around February 4th or 5th, we were moved out. While we got some bread and part of a Red Cross package, we got no other food from the Germans for another week, in the group that I was in. For the first week it was more of a case of staggering than marching. Guys were passing out in great numbers and Dr. Leslie Caplan was trying to take care of them. I was in the group column "C" that ended up at Altengrabow.

"At Altengrabow I came down with a very bad case of dysentery. I didn't want to go on sick call as no one seemed to return from sick call. Richmond said I didn't have a choice. I was taken to the horse stable (dispensary) where I was given charcoal pills. These pills did the job. While I was in the dispensary, the rest of column "C" was moved out. There were about 50 Americans and British remaining in the dispensary and we were left behind. About 20 of the ones that had been moved out tried to escape and were caught and returned to Altengrabow. Then the Germans captured a bridgehead over the river north of Magdeburg and moved another 150, or so, G.I.s in. Some of these were injured by American shells.

"The French doctor that was taking care of us told us that the Germans had moved about 500 Jewish women in from Hungary. This was about two weeks before the war was over. The German

guards wanted to get them to a gas chamber but a German doctor, and other doctors, were trying to save them. What happened to them I do not know.

"About a week before we were released, some American OSS bailed out into our camp to take it over. The German officers turned the camp over to the highest ranking Allied officer who was a Russian Colonel. It made no difference to us. We spent most of the time fighting body lice, which we got on the way to this camp.

"A few days later, American trucks came into camp and took the Americans and English out. Each truck had two German guards in it and when we arrived in the American lines, these guards turned themselves in.

"As a final word - to me, some of the great men of the war were the section leaders in those camps and above all was Doctor Leslie Caplan."

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-38069 - "BIG TWIDGET" - 96TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	Charles M. Duncan, 0-758321, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Harold (NMI) Bogie, 0-819746, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Merle A. Clark, 0-712999, N.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Robert P. Cazier, 38438747, TOG.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Warren V. Van Denplas, Jr., 32740444, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Regino Rodriguez, Jr., 34546205, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Samuel P. Wentzel, Jr., 33618113, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Teddy V. Tomasik, 32824296, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Charles W. Willett, 34669724, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Joseph Levine, 32020046, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 1st Lt. Charles M. Duncan, P, after liberation: "Nine of the crew bailed out. Lt. Bogie and Lt. Clark went out the nose hatch. T/Sgt. Van Denplas, T/Sgt. Levine, S/Sgt. Rodriguez, and S/Sgt. Wentzel went out the escape hatch in the rear of the plane. I went out the bomb bay. T/Sgt. Cazier bailed out in the general area of Savar, Hungary. I saw him last at a prison camp at Budapest. He left for prison camp in northeast Germany with Sgts. Rodriguez, Van Denplas, and Levine. These men could possibly give you some information about him. I have had no word from him, or his family, since liberation. I supposed he was liberated and was home.

"S/Sgt. Tomasik bailed out about ten miles from Savar, Hungary. T/Sgt. Van Denplas helped him out of the plane. Civilians that picked up other enlisted men showed them his ration card and seemed to be trying to tell them his chute did not open.

"S/Sgt. Willett was killed instantly by a direct hit in the tail. This information came from T/Sgt. Van Denplas."

T/Sgt. William A. Parsons was the radio operator on the crew of Lt. Lester Brasfield, 96th Squadron. August 14, 1992: "My combat tour of duty started on May 14, 1944 and lasted until September 8, 1944. Lt. Brasfield finished his missions before I did. Captain Hal Wallet was a superb pilot that got me through my final missions. The performance of Les was perfect, he did not shun the tough missions, but insisted that the airplane be capable of formation flying. On the occasion that the plane was not in combat condition, he would abort the mission because if a defective plane was in the Group, it would be targeted for extinction by enemy fighters. The final score for our crew was: Our bombardier was shot down by fighters over Blechhammer while flying with another crew and survived as a POW. A waist gunner was killed by flak while flying with another crew. Our tail gunner was sprayed by flak and lost an eye while flying with another crew, and seven of us got round trips.

"Greater Silesia lay along the border between Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Germany established many synthetic oil refineries in the area to process coal into liquid fuels to support their war effort. It lay south of Breslau (now Wroclaw) and was an out of range, safe haven for fighter bases that could contribute to the defense of Berlin from raids by the 8th Air Force.

"The assignment to attack the synthetic oil industry, in Silesia, was given to the 15th Air Force. These missions involved climbing to oxygen mask levels immediately after mustering so as to get safely over the Austrian Alps. This was followed by a cold, medium range trip to targets which involved perilous exposure to enemy fighters in addition to the tremendous flak batteries around the targets. Because of the high altitude conditions, support by bomber escort fighters was thin, particularly in the distant target areas, and on the return trip German fighters stationed in Austria would frequently intercept returning bomber formations so as to harvest any stragglers from the formations. There was little prospect for wounded bombers to escape by using the tactic of "hitting the deck" because they needed the altitude to get over the Austrian Alps that blocked the route to Italy. Such was the Group's Mission No. 256, to Odertal, Germany on August 22, 1944.

"Odertal is difficult to locate on the map these days because it lies in the area that was ceded to Poland, by Germany, after the war. The Polish renamed the towns and so Odertal disappeared in the Polish garble. I believe that Odertal was located about 25 miles south of the present Polish city of Opole. The mission was a long haul for B-17s and definitely in the area that was not my favorite place to go.

"The orderly came at 3:00 a.m. enthusiastically blowing his police whistle. The enlisted crew tumbled out, dressed, then went to the mess hall for an unappetizing breakfast; greenish powdered eggs, slimy-lumpy oatmeal, chip beef and white gravy over toast, etc. After breakfast the crew collected their personal carry-on items for the mission (pistol, knife, pictures, favorite hat, etc.). The mechanical crew boarded the trucks to take them to the flight line to pre-flight the plane and the radio man walked to Headquarters for the mission briefing.

"The briefing officer informed us that the target of the day was a synthetic oil plant at Odertal, Germany in the Silesia area. The bomb load was 250-lb. demolition bombs.

"Following the briefing, we radio men picked up a few packets of propaganda leaflets that were supplied by a British Sergeant stationed in the tent in front of Headquarters. The briefed crews boarded trucks going to the flight line where they joined the mechanical crews. Our assigned plane was a silvery beauty that had just been flown from the States.

"We boarded the plane and the engines started at about 7:00 a.m. The bombers crawled onto the taxi strip and lined up for take-off. At the signal for take-off, the engines were pushed to full throttle and the bomb laden, gas laden bombers, shuddered, shook, moaned and groaned as they rolled down the runway in their struggle to get airborne. It was always a tense moment for the flight crews because an engine malfunction could result in a spectacular event at the end of the runway.

"Once airborne, the planes went over the Adriatic for mustering into formation. After mustering, the Group turned north and proceeded to climb to get over the Austrian Alps. When reaching 8,000 feet, the formation spread and the gunners test fired their guns with short bursts. Shortly thereafter, the flight engineer came back to remove the safety pins from the bombs, and removed the lanyards that stabilized walks across the catwalk in the bomb bay. Soon thereafter, the navigator called on the intercom and advised us that the plane had reached 10,000 feet and the crew was to put on their oxygen masks.

"The bombers reached the target area after a long, cold trip. The Group lined up for the bomb run and headed for a black cloud of flak bursts. Over the target the flak was intense and accurate. As we came out of the barrage, two planes in our Squadron had to feather damaged engines. The damaged planes struggled to keep up with the formation but tended to fall behind. One of the wounded birds

elected to leave the formation and try to return to base solo. Later, it was intercepted by fighters and went down.

"As the formation approached the foothills to the Alps, the remaining straggler was about 1,200 yards behind the formation, trying valiantly to keep up on three engines. Four Me-109s appeared and circled the formation. After inspection, they apparently concluded that there was no other easy prey, so they assembled and attacked the straggler. I watched eagerly, expecting to witness a bomber fight for its life! To my astonishment, parachutes commenced to pour out of the bomber. I counted seven but there were probably more because the fighters seemed to be satisfied that it was a complete evacuation.

"The fighters made a fake pass at the straggler without firing. Three of the fighters peeled off and one commenced a sudden pass at the formation. When the fighter came in range, the gunners of the formation responded with a thunderous barrage of heavy machine gun fire. The fighter was caught in a cone of fire that caused immediate disintegration of the plane, pieces of the plane flying off into the slipstream.

"The pilot opened his canopy and attempted a roll-over and dive-out, but he merely slumped over the side as the gunners continued to fire. There was no parachute; the pilot most certainly had no use for one. The straggler bomber, #069, which we had ferried overseas, flew into the horizon on automatic pilot.

"As we approached the Adriatic, pilot Brasfield called Knighton, the flight engineer, and asked him to check that the Tokyo tanks had been completely transferred to the main tanks. Brasfield expressed concern that his gas readings were uncomfortable since we were over 300 miles from the base. Knighton reported that the transfer of gasoline was complete.

"Shortly thereafter, Brasfield called our crew and ordered us to throw overboard any loose objects on board, stating that he considered the gas situation to be critical. Items such as ammunition and flak jackets were jettisoned. Ward, a waist gunner, called Brasfield and asked if the ball turret should be dropped. Brasfield replied, "Yes." Ward borrowed Knighton's pliers and proceeded to remove the bolts holding the ball turret. The ball turret dropped and a roar of air blew into the waist of the bomber. The dropping of the ball relieved the bomber of about 1,000 pounds of weight.

"We arrived at base with barely enough gas to taxi us to the parking stall. At 8 hours and 45 minutes, this was the third longest mission on my Flight Log.

"The mission was another outstanding performance by our pilot, Brasfield. He alertly monitored the status of the plane and courageously implemented counter-measures early enough in the flight to keep the crew from getting a bath in the Adriatic."

WIENER NEUDORF, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 257 - AUGUST 23, 1944

Twenty-seven aircraft took off under the command of Lt. Col. J. S. Cunningham, CO, 429th Squadron, and 22 aircraft dropped 250, 500-lb. M76 bombs on the Engine Factory in this city. A 7/10 cloud cover, and smoke, prevented observation of results although the bombs were believed in the target area. One B-17 dropped its bombs on Marshalling Yards at Nagyanuzsa, Austria and four were early returns. Flak was heavy, moderate and accurate resulting in injury to S/Sgt. C. Keaton, LT, 49th Squadron.

PARDUBICE, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 258 - AUGUST 24, 1944

Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 51.3 tons of 100-lb. GP bombs on the Airdrome and Installations at Pardubice. Two runs were made over the target. No flak was encountered. Three enemy A/C attacked the third Squadron as it made a second run over the target. T/Sgt. M. J. Cotton, UT, 49th Squadron, was seriously wounded, and S/Sgt. E. E. Sellers, TG, 49th Squadron was slightly wounded.

Four gunners of the 49th Squadron received a joint claim for the destruction of one FW-190. They were: S/Sgt. C. E. Keaton, S/Sgt. Lloyd C. Miller, S/Sgt. Robert J. Capper, and S/Sgt. George J. Radje.

BRNO, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 259 - AUGUST 25, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 25 aircraft bombed the Brno/Lisen Aircraft Factory at Brno. One aircraft bombed a town at 47-28N - 19-30R and two others were early returns. A total of 75 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs were dropped on the respective targets. A good concentration of hits on the primary target were reported, some over. Flak at the primary was heavy, slight and inaccurate.

VENZONE, ITALY - MISSION NO. 260 - AUGUST 26, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 27 aircraft dropped 81 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Viaduct and Bridge at Venzone. The bomb pattern covered both Viaduct and Bridge in the target area. No flak, no fighters.

BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 261 - AUGUST 27, 1944

Major Richard Abbey, CO 49th Squadron, led 27 aircraft and dropped 78 tons of 500-lb. bombs on the North Oil Plant at Blechhammer. The target area was covered with some bombs to the right of the target. Flak was intense, heavy, and accurate resulting in serious injury to S/Sgt. John C. Dempsey, R/G; S/Sgt. Merrill C. Hicks, Jr., L/T; T/Sgt. J. L. White, T/G; and 2nd Lt. G. T. Georgees, B., all from the 96th Squadron.

MOOSBIERBAUM, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 262 - AUGUST 28, 1944

Twenty-five aircraft dropped 73.5 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on the Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery. A good pattern was reported in the target area. Flak was heavy, moderate, and accurate resulting in injury to three men of the 49th Squadron: S/Sgt. Elmer Barfield, Jr., R/W; Sgt. J. J. Hudson, R/O; and 2nd Lt. W. J. Wittlinger, CP. T/Sgt. Marino P. Malatesta, U/T, 429th Squadron, died of a heart attack.

MORAVSKA OSTRAVA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 263 - AUGUST 29, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 18 dropped 26.5 tons of 300-lb. GP bombs and 22.875 tons of 250-lb. GP bombs on the Privoser Oil Refinery. Bombing was by PFF and the area was reported well covered. One aircraft, #161, jettisoned 20, 300-lb. GP bombs at 42-19N - 10-30E due to inoperative bomb racks damaged by flak over the primary target. Flak was heavy, slight, and inaccurate causing slight damage to only two B-17s.

It was a disastrous day for the Group, losing nine B-17s on the way to the target. It was the second greatest, one day, aircraft loss for the Group but one with the greatest loss of life. Forty of the young men, out of a total of 90 shot down, lost their lives on the mission. Fifty to 70 Me-109s and FW-190s attacked the formation starting at approximately 1041 hours and continuing to approximately 1100 hours in the vicinity of the I.P. This action resulted in the loss of all seven planes of the 20th Squadron, one from the 49th Squadron, and the ninth from the 429th Squadron.

The enemy was extremely aggressive, making numerous passes, coming through the formation firing rockets, then 20mm cannons and machine guns. Attacks were made in line, four to ten abreast, staggered up. It was reported that the E/A, while in the distance before forming for the attack, assumed the position usually flown by the P-51 escort, which led the gunners to believe they were the friendly escort.

In addition to the losses, S/Sgt. John A. Lamb, T/G 96th Squadron, was seriously wounded by 20mm gunfire and Sgt. Gilmer Hawkins, T/G 429th Squadron, was slightly wounded by 20mm gunfire.

Fortress gunners making claims were: Each credited with destruction of a Me-109 were Sgt. M. S. Leppo, LT, and S/Sgt. A. J. Webber, RW, of the 429th Squadron; credited with destruction of a FW-190 was T/Sgt. John C. Speight, RW, 96th Squadron; each credited with possible destruction of a Me-109 were T/Sgt. Ruben A. Felix, UT, 96th Squadron, and Sgt. Gilmer Hawkins, LW, 429th Squadron; a joint claim of a Me-109 went to Sgt. Raymond C. Kuhrt, LW, and S/Sgt. Vincente J. Martinez (MIA), LT, 429th Squadron; credited with damage to a Me-109 was S/Sgt. Z. A. MacKool, LT, 429th squadron; each credited with damage to a FW-190 were S/Sgt. Thomas E. Dingler, RW, 49th Squadron, and S/Sgt. Thane S. Garrison, LW, 96th Squadron.

In addition to the losses of the 2nd Bomb Group, a B-24 from the 737th Squadron, 454th Bomb Group, had straggled far behind its Group and had sought protection with the 2nd. It was also shot down resulting in the death of one man and capture of nine others.

In the final analysis of losses for the 2nd: Nine B-17s were lost, 40 crewmen were killed, 46 crewmen were captured, and four crewmen evaded capture.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31885 - 20TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	Merrill A. Prentice, 0-664239, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Theo (NMI) Heath, 0-812259, CP.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Charles H. McVey, 0-722926, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Robert A. Laux, 0-694467, B.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Herbert S. Goldstein, 32535166, U/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Frank J. Balcerzak, 35229450, L/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Leroy E. Johnson, 37658774, R/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Claude A. Petrey, 39518514, L/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Robert E. Fitch, 16113685, T/G.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Kenneth W. Ellis, 34671862, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Charles H. McVey, N., after liberation: "It was around 1040 a.m. and we were around 24,000 feet. Our ship was the last in the formation of our formation, the last in the Wing that day. At that time our formation was attacked by about 90 planes and our plane was immediately hit by 20mm flak. There were some hits on the wing section. I could see my ammo box smoking. About two or three seconds after the flak hit us, the pilot, on the interphone, yelled, "Bail out." I tried to pull the emergency handle on the escape hatch. By then, both pilots were trying to open the same with the regular handle. Out of the corner of my eye I could see the bombardier slump over my table. He must have been injured, or dazed, or he would have been directly behind me ready to jump. The pilot and co-pilot were kicking the escape door to open it and then another burst of flak took most of the nose away. I was pretty stunned but realized that I might get out through the blown nose, so I half turned to bail out that way. The next thing I knew, I was falling through space and opened my chute barely in time to land upright. All this time we were at the hatch, the ship was completely out of control and throwing us around.

"I have no knowledge of any of the others in the crew other than the pilot and co-pilot attempting to open the nose hatch, and don't believe Lt. Laux bailed out because he apparently was wounded. I had helped him with his flak suit a short time before we were hit. There was a lot of blood on my coveralls which proved, since he was fairly close to me, that it might have been his blood."

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-38096 - 20TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt.	Thayne L. Thomas, 0-760685, P.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Carl S. Goodman, 0-768069, CP.	(KIA)

2nd Lt.	William M. McDonough, 0-719978, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Richard P. Hartman, 0-772173, B.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Robert L. Brown, 17153889, U/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Robert J. Flahive, 39212329, L/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Jerome (NMI) Bauman, 19151738, R/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	James J. Johnson, 35807258, L/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Dudley E. Standridge, 6283357, T/G.	(KIA)
Sgt.	William R. Mays, 39294274, R/O.	(KIA)

A casualty statement was submitted by Lt. Thayne Thomas noting that he returned to Allied lines September 18, 1944, and that the status of his crew was unknown. He reported seeing one man going down, parachute was open, but not filled. Identity unknown.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-32048 - 20TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt.	James A. Weiler, 0-757348, P.	(KIA)
F/O	Irving D. Thompson, T-61736, CP.	(POW)*
2nd Lt.	Robert L. Embry, Jr., 0-2057882, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Frank L. Sulkey, 0-761265, B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Lonnie H. Bumgardner, 34303666, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Ernest W. Wagoner, 35892365, L/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	John H. Adair, 18073665, R/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Loren E. Byam, 16131456, L/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	George D. Dalcanale, 16138204, T/G.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	John J. Martin, 6974501, R/O.	(KIA)

*Wounded in enemy hospital. No further information given.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-107118 - "SNAFUPERMAN" - 20TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt.	William T. Garland, 0-760614, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Leo A. Zupan, 0-762508, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Albert E. Novak, 0-768889, N.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	William C. Hayett, 16006113, TOG.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Irving D. Katz, 16026642, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Jesse L. Barker, 16041653, L/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Ralph E. DeWitt, 16077033, R/W.	(POW)
Sgt.	Russell I. Payne, 33732813, L/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Robert C. Hoadley, 39125408, T/G.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Charles E. Griffin, 12120038, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 2nd Lt. William T. Garland, after liberation: "It was around 1130 hours and we were hit and left the formation between the IP and the target. I bailed out and all members of my crew bailed out and were interned in German prison camps with the exception of two men, S/Sgt. Irving Katz and S/Sgt. Russell Payne. My aircraft exploded in the air.

"S/Sgt. Katz was known to have bailed out near Frenstat, Czechoslovakia. He was instructed to abandon the plane and jumped through the bomb bay just before the bombardier. A German officer, at Gestapo headquarters, in Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia, showed me his dog tags and told me that he was dead, that his chute had failed to open. He also made an issue of the fact that he was Jewish. A full report of this was sent to the Adjutant General's Office, who informed me, by return mail, that this information had been made a matter of permanent record in S/Sgt. Katz's file. Personal opinion,

based on attitude and words of the German officer, that S/Sgt. Katz was killed, after landing, due to his religion.

"S/Sgt. Payne was unconscious when I bailed him out, using the emergency ripcord strap. It was in the vicinity of Frenstat, Czechoslovakia. He was injured with a 20mm wound through the stomach. Czech police showed his dog tags to Sgt. R. C. Hoadley in a Czech hospital on the same day we were shot down, and he was told that Sgt. Payne was dead when he reached the ground. The fact that he was dead was verified about two weeks later by a German officer at Frankfurt, Germany.

"A statement of fact is that he opened his eyes, then suddenly went limp in my arms as I was bailing him out and I think, he died in that instant. A 20mm shell had entered from the opposite side of the plane, hit Sgt. Payne in the back and entered his stomach while he was firing at attacking planes."

Statement of S/Sgt. Jesse L. Barker, LT., after liberation: "I was able to bail out but have no knowledge of the co-pilot, navigator, bombardier, and upper turret gunner. The right waist gunner went from the waist door just before me. The pilot was the last to leave.

"Our Squadron was attacked from the tail, just about the Initial Point. Our communication system was destroyed almost immediately and No. 2 engine caught fire. We were unable to converse



T/R-L/R - I. Katz (*), R. Payne (*), R. Hoadley,
C. Griffin, R. DeWitt, J. Barker
B/R-L/R - L. Dickinson, W. Garland, L. Zupan, A. Novak
*KIA - 8-29-44 (Courtesy - Loy Dickinson)

with the front of the ship. I left the ball turret when my guns hopelessly jammed and the left wing afire. I found the left waist gunner lying on the floor unable to move, but conscious. With the help of the right waist gunner, who had been manning his guns, restored oxygen to the wounded gunner. The tail gunner and radio man were also wounded but were able to help themselves. The tail gunner helped me get the left waist gunner to the waist door after the right waist gunner had secured a spare

chute for the radio operator whose chute had been badly damaged. We secured the safety strap to the ripcord of the injured gunner. When the pilot came back to the waist, the right waist gunner had jumped. The pilot had each of us jump and then released the body of the left waist gunner. Then the pilot bailed. I failed to mention that the pilot had dived the plane to put out the flame but to no avail.

"All members of the crew were captured and the bodies of the left waist gunner and upper turret gunner were recovered."

2nd Lt. Leo A. Zupan, CP of #42-107118. September 7, 1995: "My recollection of August 29, 1944. Tomorrow is the big day. We make the milk run to bomb the Privoser Oil and Refinery Yards at Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia and when we return we get our first few days of leave in Rome. We have been flying tough missions to places like the Ploesti Oil Refineries in Romania, the southern invasion of France, Blechhammer, Gyor, etc. In less than two months we will have completed one half of our 50-mission tour.

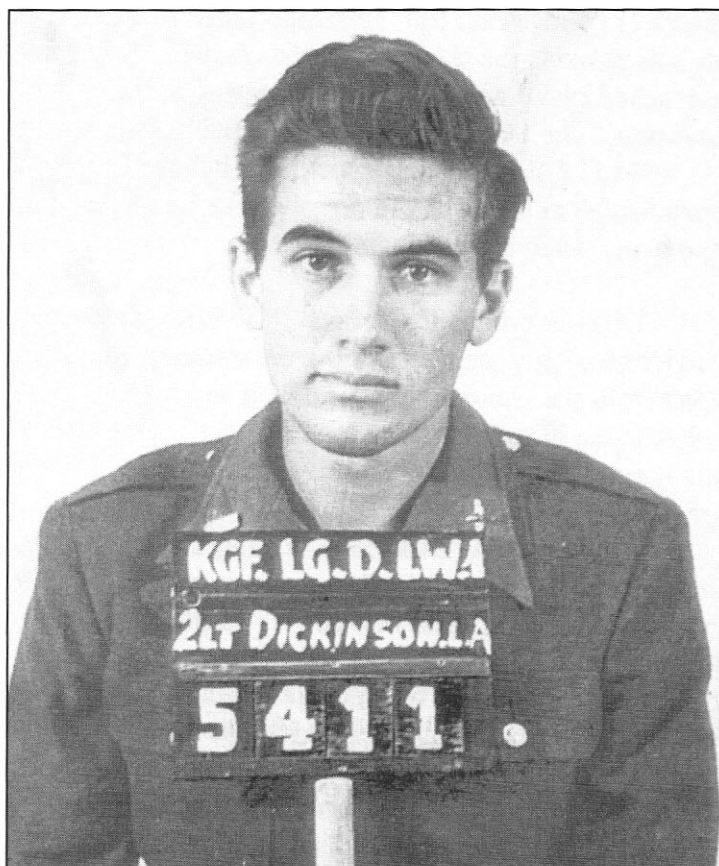
"August 29 arrives. Before leaving our tent that morning, I placed my cigars and beer ration on my cot, because late that afternoon we are heading for a little good life in Rome.

"We arrive at the flight line about 5:15 a.m., go to our lockers and get our flying gear, pre-flight the plane and brief the crew on the mission. Bill Garland, flying as pilot; I'm co-pilot, Albert Novak, bombardier; Loy Dickinson, our navigator, is flying in the lead plane as Squadron navigator; S/Sgt. William Hayett is flying as nose gunner in Loy's position; S/Sgt. Irving Katz, engineer and upper turret gunner; S/Sgt. Charles Griffin, radio operator; S/Sgt. Jesse Barker, lower turret; Sgt. Russell Payne, left waist; Sgt. Ralph DeWitt, right waist; and Sgt. Robert Hoadley, tail gunner.

"A few minutes before 6:00 a.m., we start engines. At 6:00 a.m. the lead plane starts down the runway, the others follow at about ten second intervals. As we are climbing, we form our seven planes into squadron formation and then the four squadrons form a box formation which has proven to be the best defensive formation.

"As we are climbing, Sgt. Katz opens the K-rations and we eat some crackers and cheese, because powdered eggs at 4:00 a.m. are not very appetizing. So we get a little nourishment before we reach 10,000 feet and have to put on our oxygen masks. We head north over the Adriatic and will climb to 26,000 feet. Flying a tight formation is hard work. In order to stay alert we fly 15 to 20 minutes and then trade off flying the wing of the lead aircraft. We are at altitude now and getting close to the target. About 11:00 a.m. the message came over the intercom that we are about 10 minutes from the I.P. We all put our flak vest and metal helmets on for a little more protection to our vital parts over the bomb run. I had been watching a twin engine plane about two miles out to our right of the formation. Novak opened the bomb bay doors, I was flying at the time. All of a sudden there was a burst of small flak exploding in front of us. I thought it might be from mobile flak guns. About that time the tail gunner calls in FIGHTERS! Then our radio and intercom went dead. Fighters were screaming past us. Our lead plane, flown by William Tune and Francis Flynn, was aflame and going straight down. They must have been hit by 20mm cannon because the left wing and fuselage area exploded into a ball of fire. At the same time our number one engine was on fire. The Group was pulling away. I pushed the throttles forward to try to keep up. Bill told Novak to close the bomb bay doors, then they hit our number two supercharger. The engine was useless. Bill had feathered number one engine. At the same time a hit the size of a basketball was made in the left aileron. The fire in number one persisted. We put the plane in a dive for about 5,000 feet and leveled out. We thought we had the fire out. Two fighters stayed with us, pass after pass, then the fire started up again on number one engine and it spread into the wing. All of a sudden the control cables were severed and the plane could not be controlled manually. Bill switched on automatic pilot and we were fighting it with the knobs. Bill told Novak to open the bomb bay doors and get rid of the bombs. Novak put on a walk around oxygen bottle and got the doors open and dropped the bombs. They were unarmed and one stayed with the plane. The bombs were never armed until target time. We weren't trained to raise havoc with the countryside from stray bombs. Only bomb the enemy war facilities. One Me-109 fighter attacked from one o'clock, guns firing. He was so close I could see the pilot's face. Then he zoomed over our bomber. To this day I don't see how he

missed us. We were going down, we had one good engine, number four on the right. Our air speed was about 105 miles per hour. Bill locked the auto pilot into a spiraling glide. Then we were hit with a 20mm shell on the left side of the cockpit putting about an 18" hole in the body and right through the oxygen tanks. Acid smoke filled the cockpit and the plane shuddered and shook like a wounded animal. We were lucky, 12" forward would have taken Bill's and my head off. Well, that was enough, the left wing was burning so bad the wing ribs were exposed. I hollered to Bill, "Lets get the hell out of here!" Bill went to the back of the plane to get the boys out. I pulled Sgt. Katz's leg and pointed to the bomb bay. He went out followed by Sgt. Hayett and Lt. Novak. As I got up to leave, I checked the altimeter and we were at 18,000 feet. I bailed out the bomb bay, pulled the ripcord at about 3,500 feet. A few minutes later I was a guest of the Third Reich. I heard later that our tail gunner opened his chute early and watched our plane blow up. Sgt. Russell Payne was killed in the battle and Sgt. Katz was killed. According to the Germans his parachute failed. Later there were many Purple Hearts issued for that fateful day. I wonder who the lucky guy was that got my beer and cigars?"



Lt. Loy A. Dickinson - POW 8-29-44
(Courtesy - Loy A. Dickinson)

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-97159 - "TAIL END CHARLIE" - 20TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	William S. Tune, 0-810970, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Francis W. Flynn, 0-686351, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Loy A. Dickinson, 0-721919, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Russell W. Meyrick, 0-746593, B.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Thomas C. Coogan, 6250322, U/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Joseph (NMI) Marinello, Jr., 32984201, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Joseph P. Owsianik, 32775462, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Joseph E. Sallings, 34491635, L/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Robert D. Donahue, 33163119, T/G.	(EVADED)
T/Sgt.	Robert R. Kirsch, 33039143, R/O.	(POW)

Casualty Report, August 4, 1945, from 2nd Lt. Francis W. Flynn: "Sgt. Joseph (NMI) Marinello, Jr.: Place of death was 29 August 1944, Rudimov, Czechoslovakia. B-17 knocked down by German

fighters. I believe that Sgt. Marinello failed to bail out because he was hit by attacking fighters. His body was found in the plane after it had crashed. S/Sgt. Joseph E. Sallings, a fellow crew member, saw the crashed plane and the graves of Sgt. Marinello and Lt. Meyrick. He has photos of both in his possession. The place of burial was a small village called Rudice.

"2nd Lt. Russell W. Meyrick, B: I believe Lt. Meyrick was killed instantly by 20mm shells from German fighters, since he did not open the bomb bay doors or bail out when hit. His body was found in the plane when it crashed."

T/Sgt. Thomas C. Coogan, UT, after liberation: "All told, eight of us bailed out. I have no knowledge of any members of the crew except Lts. Flynn and Tune. Both of them were injured and helped from the plane by Lt. Dickinson and myself. Saw both of them the following day and three of us were in the hospital in Prague. I saw Sgts. Owsianik and Kirsch in prison camp in March 1945 and both in good condition."

2nd Lt. Loy A. Dickinson, N. July 21, 1992: "One responsibility of the Squadron Navigator is to record the significant times and events en route, in the navigator's log. If my log ever turned up it would be missing at least one entry - "Bailed out at 21,000 feet, 11:00 a.m., 8/29/44. Bombardier: Meyrick, fatal."

"We would learn later that all seven of our Squadron and a total of nine of the 28 planes of our B-17 Group were shot down by Messerschmitts. German fighter planes prudently chose unprotected bomber Groups for attack. Our fighter cover picked us up over the Adriatic Sea and took us as far as southern Czechoslovakia. A second Group was to take us to the target and part way back. The third Group would meet us and bring us back to friendly skies. The second Group was late.

"The Germans knew this and we were almost sitting ducks as we headed north from Bratislava, near Vienna, toward Ostrava, which was our target on the Polish-Czech border. Five of the bombers crashed in the Slavcin area, which is where I came down in a plowed field. Incidentally, to the question, "Were you afraid to jump?" The answer is that you never even think about it. Things happened too fast. I had no injuries, not even a scratch. I was the only one in the crew that did not receive a Purple Heart.

"My Czech benefactor, Mojmir Baca, lived with his parents, a brother and sister, in a small isolated farmhouse less than a mile from where I landed. Mojmir found me in the woods not long after I landed. He communicated to me that he would come back for me after dark. That evening he took me to his house and hid me in a loft. I was a curiosity to several locals who had to climb to the loft to see me. As I recall, only one visitor could speak any English and he wanted to know about "GANGSTERS" in Chicago.

"The following day I decided that I should leave. Being unarmed and not knowing the language does not give you any advantage. I walked into the village of Slavcin and was met by a doctor and an elderly policeman. They took me to the Police building, which is now the local Communist Party Headquarters. Later I was transferred to the custody of the Wehrmacht who took me by train to Vienna and later to Wiesbaden, near Frankfurt. Here I was held in solitary confinement for seven days and interrogation. Later I was transferred, by train, to Stalag Luft I, at Barth, Germany. This was my address until VE Day.

"In 1991, Midge and I decided to take our golf clubs with us when we went to a Rotary International Convention. This changed when we had a letter from Mojmir in which he said, "It has been 40 years when you involuntarily visit Czechoslovakia, this year you volunteer come." The last week in May we drove from Frankfurt to Nurnberg and crossed the Czech border. It is an eerie feeling going behind the Iron Curtain into a Communist controlled country. Young, uniformed guards carried machine guns.

"Our friend Mojmir met us in Brno and took us to meet their oldest daughter Marcellus; her husband, Jan Turcinek, and their two children. Jan's father, Dr. Turcinek, now 78, was the same doctor I met in the village of Slavcin on August 30, 1944. We then drove east from Brno to Vicnov where we witnessed a colorful festival and then on to Lahavovice, famous as a major spa. There we met Mojmir's No. 2 daughter, Elishka, and husband Miraslav Papousek. We then went to the home of Mojmir and met a third daughter, Hanna, and husband, Stanislav Vaculin, and their fourth daughter, Mirka, who was single. Hanna was the biggest help because she spoke some English.

"One morning, Mojmir drove us into Slavcin to pick up his English speaking friend, Joseph Stehlik. Joe flew with the Czech RAF Squadron and the last year and a half against the Germans. He was one of 22 Czech pilots sent to Russia to fight against the Germans. He was the most openly contemptuous of the Russians of any Czech we met.

"Joe was our interpreter as we drove around the countryside where Five American planes had crashed on that morning in August. They were near villages named Rudice, Bojkovic, Krhov, Komna, and Samov. Two of the bodies that were found had no parachutes. My parachute brought me down in a field near Rudimov. The distance from the airplane crash must have been two miles. He also stopped at the Baca house where I slept.

"Later on, Mojmir took us to a flower shop where we purchased some flowers. We drove up the hill to a cemetery where we placed the flowers at the grave of 28 American flyers who were killed in the action that day. The enormity of it all hit me that day. The people of this little town never knew the war in personal terms, any other time, except on that day and they memorialized it and lived with it ever since.

"During our visit, Mojmir presented me with a plaque which is made from B-17 fragments, the only one of which I can identify is a 50 caliber machine gun bullet. There was an inscription on the back which read, 'National freedom is not deserved by those who do not respect the sacrifices with which this freedom is purchased. For you silent brothers, for you whose lives have been taken, for you flyers, this is the memory of this war day 29-8-44. They have fallen so that we may live.'

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-31473 - "MY BABY" - 20TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt.	Robert O. McCloskey, 0-765023, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Harold W. Helveston, Jr., 0-767547, CP.	(KIA)
F/O	William P. Netzley, T-3374, N.	(POW)
Sgt.	John J. Curran, 17142883, TOG.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	James A. Jones, 38508391, U/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Luther L. Durette, 15364269, L/T.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Charles A. Munden, 38529009, R/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Harold (NMI) Schirmer, 35454927, L/W.	(KIA)
Sgt.	Elmer J. Pruitt, Jr., 36878553, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Edwin R. Everett, 13171748, R/O.	(KIA)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Robert O. McCloskey, P., after liberation: "We were flying #6 in the Squadron formation and were at about 26,000 feet altitude. The time was around 1150. I bailed out and when I gave the bail out order, in the nose, the nose gunner went first, then the bombardier through the nose hatch, then the engineer, co-pilot, and myself. I was unable to check the rear because of the flames in the bomb bay.

"Lt. Helveston was flying as my co-pilot in the absence of my regular co-pilot. He bailed out just before I did approximately 70 miles north of Vienna, over southern Czechoslovakia. The last I talked with him in the plane was when I asked him to get on the controls and help me. The last I saw him was

on August 30, 1944 when we were taken to Brunn hospital by the Germans. The hospital was for German soldiers. We were the only POWs there. Lt. Helveston was unconscious at this time. On August 31, the German doctors told me that Lt. Helveston had died that morning. He was buried there at Brunn. The doctors said that the cause of death was a skull fracture at the base of the spine.

"Regarding Sgt. Schirmer; I believe he bailed out in the same area as the rest of the crew. I had no conversation with him prior to giving the bail-out signal. The Czech natives in this area showed his dog tags to Sgt. Jones, and said they buried him in a grave with Sgt. Pruitt and one unknown body. They said his chute was partially burned. The Czech natives showed him the dog tags of Sgt. Pruitt also.

"The last personal contact I had with Sgt. Everett was when he told me he had forgotten his dog tags. He may have been the unidentified body buried with Sgts. Schirmer and Pruitt. His chute was also partially burned. I cannot speculate on Sgt. Durette and Munden. Sgt. Curran said that on August 30th he saw the dog tags of Sgt. Durette in the possession of German guards but had no knowledge of Sgt. Munden.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6359 - 20TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	William C. Bullock, Jr., 0-813654, P.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	Clarence B. Jackson, 0-820754, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Albert E. Smith, 0-712927, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	John C. Quinn, 0-551058, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Joseph H. Morien, 36418953, U/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	James R. Martin, 39131325, L/T.	(POW)
Sgt.	Morris Goldberg, 33794395, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Joseph M. Laratta, 12186371, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Maurice E. Nelson, 37564252, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Wallace M. Clayton, 18124393, R/O.	(POW)

2nd Lt. Albert E. Smith, N. July 25, 1992: "On this day I flew with my regular crew plus replacements that had been necessary. These were two waist gunners and co-pilot. We lost our first waist gunner when we carried a cameraman instead and he flew with another crew and was shot down by fighters over Southern Germany. Our second waist gunner had been wounded over the Vienna area and was still in the hospital. Our co-pilot was lost in the Adriatic, as mentioned before. That day we were flying on the right wing of the Squadron lead ship as second in command. We had flown a couple of previous missions where we were Squadron lead and I was Squadron navigator.

"That day was a very bad day from the very start. The 20th Squadron was the #4 Squadron that day, or "Tail End Charlie," in our usual diamond shaped formation for the four Squadrons. For some reason our Squadron could never catch up with the rest of the 2nd Bomb Group and get in formation. We were always low and behind. In addition, that was the 2nd Bomb's turn to be the last Group of the Wing over the target. This meant that the 20th Squadron was really "Tail End Charlie."

"Other than the Squadron's position, the mission continued normally. Part of the way to the target our fighter escort joined us and flew with us. A little before we reached the area over Trencin, Czechoslovakia, as I recall, the fighter escort left us to go ahead and clear the area of fighters. This was standard procedure. However, on this mission the German fighters used this tactic to their advantage. They evidently were aware of this procedure and waited south of the target. After our fighters left, they attacked our Group. This was about 10:30 a.m. and we were at about 22,000 feet altitude. I learned at our 2nd Bomb Group reunion in Dayton, Ohio, in September 1991, there were 89 Me-109s that attacked our Group plus FW-190s. After we were captured, a German Colonel told Wally Clayton, our

radio operator, Joe Morien, engineer, and Jim Martin, ball turret operator, that there were 125 fighters that attacked us and they lost 25 of them.

"The attack was severe and concentrated. For most of us, it didn't last more than 20-25 minutes before we were shot down. The entire 20th Squadron plus two other ships were shot down, I found out later. I also heard later, I think it was from the 2nd Bomb Group airmen that were shot down later, about October and came to prison camp, that the Lt. Col. who was leading our Group that day received a medal for getting the rest of the Group back to base. I always thought he should have been court martialed for not getting our Group in protective formation to start with.

"On our ship we were all firing at attacking fighters. Then I noticed that our right inboard engine, as I recall, was on fire. We had lost our ship's intercom system. It evidently had been shot out. I stuck my head up in the navigator's astrodome, which is a short ways in front of the pilot's windshield, and looked at my pilot. He was gesturing violently with his head and mouthing the words to "Get out." With that I motioned to the bombardier, took off my flak suit, pulled the escape hatch handle to release the door, and bailed out.

"On missions we always wore our parachute harness but the chest pack was detachable and we didn't put it on until we got near the target or were attacked by fighters. We wore both parachute and flak suit going over the target or any point that had flak guns.

"Just before I bailed out, I looked at my chest pack chute and thought I had clipped it to the harness upside down, so I took it off and reversed it. After I bailed out I did not pull the ripcord. I knew at that altitude (22,000 feet plus) the air was rare and fighters were still attacking. I didn't want to be a target for them while swinging down in a chute. I let myself free-fall. I thought I would fall until I was about the same altitude that I bailed out over the Adriatic (7,000 feet plus) before I pulled the ripcord. While free-falling, however, I was tumbling over and over. I had no idea how to stop this, which shows the lack of training we had on parachutes. On the way down, as I tumbled, I tried to judge how high I was above the ground. I only seemed to get a quick glimpse on each of my rotations. Finally I thought I was close enough and reached for the ripcord.

"It wasn't there! I looked at my chest pack and saw the ripcord on the left side of the pack instead of the right. In the heat of the battle I had reversed the chute when I should not have. I momentarily wondered if when I pulled the ripcord, if the clips to my harness would hold or if the chute would be ripped and I would fall to the mountains below. However, I immediately pulled the ripcord and the clips held.

"When the chute opened I felt like I was on the end of a "crack the whip line." There was a violent jerk as the chute snapped me upright. After it opened I saw that I was still much higher than I thought I was. I believe it was around 12,000 feet. So I had fallen about two miles of 10,000 feet.

"The ride down was beautiful! It was absolutely quiet and you had a wonderful view of the countryside. You had no sensation of falling until you got close to the ground. I was over the Carpathian Mountains north or northeast of Trencin. Since then I have thought sport parachuting would be fun but family responsibilities and the cost held me back.

"I was coming down in a forested area. One thing I did remember from our parachute training was that you should cross your legs when coming down through trees. This I did. I missed the main part of the tree but did not get my feet uncrossed before I hit the ground. Although I did not realize it at the time, I badly sprained my left foot and ankle that took the full force of my landing. Later I found that my right groin was entirely numb, the same effect you have as when you have novocain at the dentist's office. It didn't affect any movement but there was no sensation when I touched the skin. This lasted two or three weeks or so. This evidently happened from the shock of the parachute opening. I quickly got out of my chute harness. The parachute was hung up in the tree branches so I couldn't gather it in to hide it. So I took off to get away from the area as quickly as possible.

"After a ways, I stopped to remove my heavy flying boots and hid them under some tree roots along a little drainage way - it was hardly enough to call a creek. Then I found a heavy patch of bushes and crawled into the center to hide.

"Later I heard noises of people in the woods and a shout, which I guessed was someone finding my parachute. I stayed quiet and no one came near me. One thing I always wondered about was a person that I heard. He was whistling "Yankee Doodle!" I have always wondered if it was a trick of the Germans or if it was some local trying to contact me. I never responded to the whistle.

"I escaped immediate capture and during the next eight days I evaded and hiked south and west. In one old farm shed, where I took refuge one night to sleep, I got a terrible dose of fleas. I was bitten all over. I got away from there and completely stripped down to try to pick them out of my clothing. I don't think I ever got them all. I was finally taken prisoner near Piestany, about 30 miles south of Trencin. I might have covered 50 miles during that period. By that time I was sick with a bad cold and badly blistered feet from the new GI shoes I got after I went down in the Adriatic.

"After I came down, and for days after that, I wondered if I had misinterpreted my pilot's signal to bail out. When I was floating down I never noticed any other chutes. I kept wondering if my crew was back in Italy wondering why I had bailed out.

"I was taken by train to Vienna and then on to Frankfurt, Germany. Just outside of Frankfurt was the POW Interrogation Center. There the first thing they did was to decontaminate my clothes. So at least I got rid of the fleas. We were in solitary confinement there but it didn't bother me since I think I slept about 18 hours a day. After three or four days of interrogation, a bunch of us were sent to a Stalag Luft near Wetzlar, Germany. There I finally got a shower. We were there several days until they got a trainload of POWs assembled and shipped us to Stalag Luft I, at Barth, north of Berlin on the Baltic Sea. One of the first faces I saw was my bombardier, Johnny Quinn. He told me he thought everyone bailed out. This was the first conversation I had that the plane went down. However, I had assumed this earlier, because at the Interrogation Center they showed me a complete listing of all my crew members, including my name.

"Stalag Luft I was an officer's POW camp run by the German Luftwaffe. It contained both American and British POWs. We had no physical mistreatment like some of our enlisted crew had. Food at times was the main problem. We received food parcels from the Red Cross.

"On the night of April 30, 1945, the Germans pulled out and headed west to get away from the Russians, who were advancing. The Russians came to our camp the next night, May 1st. The next day, as I recall, the Russians told us to be ready in the next few hours to abandon camp and walk east toward Poland. We were all busy assembling back packs, etc. However, luckily, our American commanders talked them out of this. We stayed in camp until the 8th Air Force B-17s came May 12-14 and flew us out. I flew out on May 13th, Sunday, to a camp near Reims, France. Then late the next day we were taken to Camp Lucky Strike, near St. Valery, France. We stayed there about a month until we went to LaHavre where we loaded on a Navy transport, manned by the Coast Guard, and sailed into Boston, MA. We were given two months leave. About a month after my leave, I was discharged at San Antonio, Texas, at the same place where I took my preflight training.

"In looking back on the war-time period, it is still hard to believe how young many of us were. I went through all my training, flew my missions, and had my 20th birthday in prison camp in October 1944. We had 20 men in our prison barracks room and the "old man," as we sometimes joked, was all of 27. Our crew was as follows: Pilot, 1st Lt. William C. Bullock - KIA, blew up with plane according to co-pilot; Co-pilot, 2nd Lt. Clarence C. Jackson - Evaded, got back to Italy in late October 1944; Navigator, 2nd Lt. Albert E. Smith - POW; Bombardier, 2nd Lt. John C. Quinn - POW; Engineer/Top Turret, T/Sgt. Joseph H. Morien - POW, shot down one enemy fighter and one probably shot down; Radio Operator, T/Sgt. Wallace M. Clayton - POW, wounded; Ball Turret, Sgt. James R. Martin -

POW, wounded - shot down two enemy fighters; Right Waist, Sgt. Morris Goldberg - POW, I saw him at Camp Lucky Strike after liberation and I think he said he shot down at least one fighter; Left Waist, S/Sgt. Joseph M. Laratta - KIA; and Tail Gunner, S/Sgt. Maurice E. Nelson - KIA.

"When I got back home, I learned the Government had sent names and addresses of all the crew member's families to each of the others. The families corresponded during all that time we were POWs, exchanging information. That is the way I learned about Lt. Jackson evading and getting back to Italy, and his comment about Bill Bullock blowing up with the plane."

T/Sgt. Wallace M. Clayton, RO. December 10, 1993: "I still have memories of that fateful day of August 29, 1944.

"I feel that the German Air Force were, so to speak, waiting for us. We had a slight cloud coverage over us when all of a sudden the German fighters were through the clouds and swarmed all over us, like bees around honey. There were fighters all around us; Me-109s and FW-190s. The Me-109s had cannons in the nose and were chewing us up. The attack was so fast and quick we had little chance to fight back.

"Just about the same time the fighters hit us, our co-pilot yelled over the intercom, "bail out, bail out, salvo bombs." As radio operator, I was responsible to make sure all the bombs were out so I immediately went into the bomb bay and saw the bombs in the right rack had jammed as fighters hit the right bomb bay door. Just about the same time I yelled, "Right bomb bay door jammed," I was hit in the left leg and was backing out of the bomb bay when all of a sudden something hit the radio set which blew up and a piece of plastic from the radio hit me in the upper inside of my nose, then moving into my right eye. The impact was so great it knocked me off my feet. I was stretched out on the floor and felt I was about to fall asleep. I later realized that my oxygen hose had a cut in it. Just about that time, I felt something hitting me on the feet so I opened my eyes and saw that Jimmy Martin, the lower ball gunner, was throwing spent machine gun shells at me and motioning for me to bail out.

"I crawled over to my chute, which was lying on the floor under my radio table, hooked it to my chest and walked into the bomb bay about the same time Whitey Morien came out of the upper turret and we both faced each other. I gave Whitey a nod to jump and right after he jumped, I followed.

"While I was floating down to the ground there were many civilians running to where I would land. I hit the ground and an elderly lady, dressed in what looked like a white cotton dress, grabbed me in her arms, held me tightly, and sounded like she was giving me instructions.

"Soon after landing, a small truck came up and I was gently handled and placed in the truck. People then started to give me food such as bread, meat, and water. I saw Whitey Morien had landed not far from me and we were put together for a short time. Whitey advised me that the navigator, bombardier, and co-pilot had all bailed out. He said that when he came out of the upper turret, he saw Bill, our pilot, still in his seat and completely soaked with blood from his shoulder all the way past his hip onto the left leg from waist to floor. Whitey and I were the last ones out alive. As I was floating down I continued looking at my plane still flying straight and level with our pilot Bill, still aboard.

"Our left waist gunner, Joseph Laratta, was killed by enemy fire and was caught at the waist door. It seems he tried to bail out but the door was jammed. He had replaced our regular gunner, Jack Norwine, who was in the hospital having been previously hit by flak in the left arm.

"Maurice Nelson, our tail gunner, left his tail position to bail out the escape hatch in the tail but he couldn't get there, probably due to lack of oxygen. Our right waist gunner, Morris Goldberg, went to the waist escape hatch to bail out. He saw Nelson lying there with his chute on but not conscious. So Goldberg grabbed him and pushed him out of the plane and quickly also bailed out. This can be verified as Jimmy Martin told me he saw two persons come out of the escape hatch right before he came

out of the ball turret and only one chute opened and that was Goldberg's. Then was when he started to throw machine gun shells at me to get his attention to bail out.

"Morris Goldberg, Jimmy Martin (who by the way had his left big toe shot off), Whitey Morien, and myself were taken to Zlin, Czechoslovakia for interrogation. I was badly wounded in the right leg and right eye. Jimmy Martin and I were taken to a hospital. Two Czech doctors operated on Jimmy and I. On the operating table I was unconscious but came to while the doctor was cutting dead flesh around my leg, and I thought he was cutting around my leg to get to the bone to cut my leg off. I later regained consciousness and saw my two feet at the end of the table so realized I still had my leg. As I was being unstrapped from the operating table the Czech doctor was lighting a Lucky Strike cigarette. Just as he got it lit, I reached up, took it from his hand and inhaled deeply. The doctor laughed and asked me if he could have my Air Corps Wing so I unpinning it and gave it to him. The doctor also operated on Jimmy Martin and cut off his big toe.

"I believe I was in a Catholic hospital as Nuns came to the room where Jimmy and I were lying in bed. They changed the dressings on our wounds.

"Now, a strange thing happened. A German Colonel with the German Luftwaffe came through our room and I told him all I could give was my name, rank, and serial number. In perfect English he assured me he was not interested to interrogate me but wanted Jimmy and me to come with him to the German Air Base which shot down our whole Squadron. We were driven in a car to the Airdrome and driven through woods, came to where trees seemed to part and we went underground. We talked to the German boys who had shot us down. Some spoke broken English. We drank schnapps together and I asked some of them how many planes had attacked our Squadron. Two of them said over 100 German aircraft, Me-109s and FW-190s, and later on the Colonel verified this as factual.

"Jimmy and I spent one day and night there and in the a.m. were driven to a railroad and loaded on cattle cars that had some other American POWs. We traveled to Vienna, where upon arrival an air raid was in progress. Marshalling Yards were being bombed. We had to leave the cars and were marched to an air raid shelter near the Vienna Opera House. Civilians tried to attack us but just got pushed out into the street shouting, "Luftgangsters." I really had thought, while in college, that I would try and visit the well known opera houses in Europe, but I never thought that one day I would be lying in the gutter of the famous Vienna Opera House during an air raid.

"There is so much more to tell. So many things happened from the day I was shot down until I was liberated at Bad Soden, Germany, 25 miles north of Frankfurt, Germany on March 31, 1945. I truly must have had a guardian angel looking after me.

"I kept a diary from the time I boarded a Liberty ship at Newport News until I was shot down. Luckily I got my diary back because men were not supposed to keep one. I recorded all my missions, giving dates, targets and things that happened to my fellow crewmen."

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6369 - 20TH SQUADRON

F/O	Duane B. Seaman, T-61734, P.	(POW)
F/O	Ben J. Pastorino, T-62452, CP.	(POW)
F/O	Robert E. Mickadeit, T-2603, N.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Donald B. Hausler, 15130915, TOG.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	John A. Nighborowicz, 33252499, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Timothy J. Reidy, 32034292, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Robert C. Pittard, 13118452, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Howard T. Ware, 34058797, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	M. L. Childress, 18126215 T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	William J. Devlin, 31228846, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of S/Sgt. Robert C. Pittard, after liberation. "I was able to bail out as well as the rest of the crew. Pastorino was the last to leave through the nose escape door. Devlin bailed out from the bomb bay. S/Sgt. Ware broke an ankle from the jump. I don't know the condition of Pastorino and Devlin. T/Sgt. Nighborowicz, S/Sgt. Ware, and I were together for three days, during which we cared for Ware as best we could. Impossible to evade enemy with Ware so we arranged for him to turn in. Nighborowicz and I evaded for three more days, then captured. My leg and knee were hurt badly but did not keep me from walking. Other crew members were picked up as soon as they hit the ground. We were fired at from enemy planes and ground personnel."

S/Sgt. Timothy J. Reidy, LTG. January 8, 1991: "I volunteered for the Army in 1941 and was assigned to an Infantry unit. Finding that it was not my "cup of tea," I decided to transfer to the Air Corps, spending my last part of the war in a German prison camp.

"I wrangled a transfer out of the Infantry Training Center at Camp Croft, S.C., to an Army Air Base at Kessler Field, Mississippi.

"I wanted in the worst way to get into the flying, fighting end of the war, so I volunteered for aerial gunnery school at Kingman, Arizona. After completing the program there, I was assigned to the 49th Squadron as a ball turret gunner.

"My luck ran out on my 20th mission to a synthetic fuel plant in Czechoslovakia. We were "Tail End Charlie" in our Squadron and over the target a flock of enemy fighters approached from the rear. Some of our gunners thought it was our P-51 escort but it was German Me-109s. It didn't take long for the enemy fighters to hose our B-17 with cannon and machine gun fire, which ruptured our fuel line, setting us on fire. The pilot gave the order to "bail out" and we all got out safely, with only one man suffering a broken ankle.

"After landing in a Czech field, I was approached by a truck loaded with German soldiers. One soldier, a little guy who didn't seem to be all there, ran over and placed the muzzle of a rifle at my head. The other soldiers, who were uniformed rather shabby for Germans, laughed at their comrade and took me in charge, making the comment, "For you the war is over." They brought me to a local jail and a young civilian girl tried to pry information from me but I didn't bite, only telling my name, rank, and serial number.

"I was transferred to a POW "propaganda camp" in Germany with good food, clean quarters, etc., while interrogators tried to pry information from me. I figured I'd hold out as long as I could until they turned to torture, but it never came to that. I was out of that camp only to a very grim one of about 8,000 British and 2,000 American air crew prisoners.

"The camp was near Peenemunde on the Baltic coast. We could see V-1 and V-2 rockets taking off, but really didn't know what they were. I am not bitter but do not remember my captors fondly. They were a brutal bunch, no doubt about it. Their treatment of the Russians on the other side of the wire, from our wire, was inhuman. We did what we could to help the Russians, throwing such food and clothing as we could spare. The Germans were stingy in the distribution of Red Cross parcels for the British and American prisoners, issuing only one parcel per week for every two prisoners. They could have given each prisoner one per week; they had enough of them. When the German attack in the Ardennes was going well, the guards became arrogant and abusive. When the news came of President Roosevelt's death, the elated Germans predicted the fortunes of war would change in their favor.

"As the American and British armies pressed into Germany in the west and the Russians drove from the east, the captors moved us to keep the airmen from being liberated. We were taken on a forced march through Germany for 90 days, beginning in February. We were exposed to rain, snow, and cold; sleeping in sheds, abandoned buildings and often on the ground.

"When the German collapse came, we were in a small town in Germany. The British Royal Dragoon Guards, an armored unit, liberated us on May 10, 1945. We were shown every consideration by them. They really laid on a big smorgasbord for us! I never saw so much food in my life.

"But I never really believed this ordeal was over until I was sitting on my bunk at Fort Dix, New Jersey after being repatriated, and heard Gene Autry singing, *Back In The Saddle Again* on the radio.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-97915 - 429TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt.	John F. Fitzpatrick, 0-761067, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Charles H. McGhee, 0-704812, CP.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Richard M. Hausler, 0-717431, N.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Paul E. Sumner, 0-768194, B.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Eugene J. Moriarity, 31128421, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Vincent J. Martinez, 38351864, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	John A. Molitor, 16114611, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Vincent A. Contrada, 33631109, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	James J. DeLutes, Jr., 33514502, T/G.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Eugene F. Black, 35504813, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of 1st Lt. Charles E. Crafton, P of B-17 #858, 429th Squadron, after the mission: "B-17 #915 called at 1230 hours stating that he was approximately 35 miles northeast of Lake Balaton and was calling for escort for protection. I did not see any fighters attack #915 but only heard them give his position."

2nd Lt. Paul E. Sumner, B, November 24, 1993: "I joined the 2nd bomb Group in June or July of 1944. We went over as a replacement crew. Our original crew flew together, except for our co-pilot, Lt. James Harris. I understand that he was wounded later, 16 October 1944, on a mission to Brux, Czechoslovakia. We usually flew with our first pilot, George Eilers, as a second pilot. We didn't get to fly many missions together.

"Our radio man was a young fellow, George Deiter, and the first man wounded on our crew. As I recall, he had a flak wound above the knee, which was not too serious. Then I was wounded and spent two weeks in the hospital. Our belly gunner, Sgt. Walter Lastowski, shot down the Me-109 that got me. T/Sgt. Clifford Popp was wounded 22 August 1944 on a mission to Odertal, Germany. Our engineer, T/Sgt. Marino Malatesta, died on a mission, 8 August 1944, to Moosbierbaum, Austria. Our navigator, Lt. Richard Hausler, called for an oxygen check off the target. Malatesta did not respond and Hausler found him, still in the top turret unconscious. We got him into the nose. I couldn't see any wounds so thought that his oxygen had been cut off. We worked on him all the way home, but to no avail. I never did get the final report as to the cause of his death.

"I was wounded on 21 July and got out of the hospital 3 August, and that was the day our original pilot, George Eilers, went down on a mission to Friedrichshafen, Germany. They made it to Switzerland and were interned. I understand that Sgt. Robert Mullen was flying on #078, "SWEET PEA," 21 September to Debreczen, when they were so badly shot up with two dead and two wounded. I also heard that S/Sgt. William Spruce was flying as togglier on 13 September to Blechhammer, Germany when they were shot down and successfully evaded and returned to Base. Then, of course, Lt. Richard Hausler and I went down on 29 August on the Privoser Oil Refinery raid. This is quite a story for one crew!

"The day I was wounded we were bombing a target at Brux, Czechoslovakia. It was my ninth mission. We were hit hard by Me-109s. Among other hits, we took three cannon shells. One exploded in the bomb bay, one smashed the right aileron, and the third came through the astrodome and got me. We still had our original crew except the co-pilot, Lt. Harris. Eilers was flying co-pilot and a little 1st

Lt. was in command. The plane was a mess! It was shattered! This guy went to pieces and told the crew to put a chute on me, throw me out and abandon the airplane. Eilers got him out of the cockpit and had Marino Malatesta take his place to help control the plane. Between the two, they got the plane back to Foggia. Eilers went down and I heard later that this 1st Lt. was given the DFC for getting the plane back.

"The way I remember it, the day we went down, it must have been 10:30 a.m. We were hit by a bunch of Me-109s. They were coming in from 6:00 o'clock and the tail gunner thought they were our escort of 51s showing up a little late. We were eventually, as I recall, down to one engine. We turned back and were escorted by a couple of 51s until we crashed.

"Lt. John Fitzpatrick, the pilot, was unable to maintain altitude and rather than risk bailing out in clouds, we stayed with the plane. We finally broke out of the clouds at a low level and Lt. Fitzpatrick made a perfect crash landing in open country. While the rest of the crew were captured immediately, I managed to evade capture for a few days and worked my way toward Budapest.

"I was captured near a town called Papa and taken to the city of Szekesfehervar, Hungary. This was pretty far removed from the war and had never had the problem of a captured enemy. A trial was held and they decided to hang me. I'll never know if they intended to carry out the order because that afternoon, a German Intelligence officer, in civilian clothes, arrived and threw his weight around, then took me to Budapest where I was placed in a civilian prison. From there I went to Stalag Luft III.

"Of all the experiences I had as a POW, two stand out in my mind. One was the interrogation at Budapest, a couple of weeks after I was captured. It was the same officer that saved me from hanging. He was pleasant and pulled out a pack of Camels, inviting me to help myself, then began questioning me.

"I gave him my name, rank, and serial number. He smiled and proceeded to tell me where and when I graduated from high school and where I taught school before the war. Each time I responded with name, rank, and serial number, he would tell me more about myself, even giving the name of my senior officers at the base and told me who had been promoted. If he intended to impress me, he certainly succeeded. I hope our intelligence was as good as theirs.

"The other experience was when I was first captured and taken to Papa. There was a small garrison there and I was put in a small room in a barracks. I had been traveling several days without sleep, food, or water, but now the game was up and the adrenaline ceased to flow and I just lay down on my cot and passed out.

"It couldn't have been more than 10 minutes when someone was shaking me awake. It was a young Hungarian soldier who could speak English. He was about 18 and very excited. "I'm Joe Szabo and the cook's helper. My uncle lives in New York, do you know him?" It took a few seconds to collect my wits. I figured I may as well see how far this would go so I jumped up, grabbed the guy's hand and said, "Gosh yes, I do happen to know your Uncle." The kid was really excited so I told him to get me some food and we would talk about his Uncle. He left and I fell asleep.

"Someone shook me awake again. It was Joe with no food but he had another young soldier, excited as Joe. Joe said, "He has an Uncle in Cincinnati." I said, "I know both your Uncles, get me some food." This happened a third time, no food, same story. I told them to get me some food and I would tell of their relatives. The guard apparently was getting tired of these comings and goings because the next time it was only Joe with food and water. I was so grateful and told him what a great guy his Uncle was, and he believed every word."

1st Lt. Donald E. Kemendo was the co-pilot on the crew of 1st Lt. Henry J. Wallet, when assigned to the 96th Squadron, July 3, 1944. June 10, 1993: "My first mission was to Verona, Italy, July 13th and my 50/51st mission was to Brux, Czechoslovakia, October 20, 1944. My itinerary included the following missions: six in Italy; four to Budapest, Hungary; five to Vienna, Austria (and vicinity);

four to Munich, Germany (and vicinity); two rescue missions to Bucharest, Romania; two to Ploesti, Romania; one to Valences, France; four to Blechhammer, Germany; one to Oswiecim, Poland; one to Belgrade, Yugoslavia; and four to Czechoslovakia (two to Brux and one each to Pardubice and Moravska Ostrava).

"Shortly after being assigned to the 96th, Hal (Wallet) and myself started flying co-pilot with experienced crews. My first two missions were easy. The third to Vienna was scary. As we neared the target area, fighters attacked the Group ahead. Saw one B-17 and two fighters go down. Over the target our Squadron lost the plane flying #4 position - nose severely damaged! Anti-aircraft gunners were tracking us. Several burst near our plane and we could hear the shrapnel striking. Sounded like we were in a tin barn and buckets of gravel were being thrown at us. This was to be a familiar sight and sound in the future.

"As we neared the target, a B-17 in the Group ahead, climbed straight up, stalled and spun earthward. Our pilot said this was one of his most scariest missions. At debriefing we heard that we had lost another bomber.

"A few days later I was assigned as a co-pilot on two missions to Ploesti. Had heard that Ploesti was one of the most heavily defended targets in the European Theater. On one mission, long before we reached the target, I could see a black cloud of smoke, which indicated that a Bomb Group was over the target. Winds dispersed the smoke, then the black cloud would appear again when another Bomb Group was making a run. While the Group ahead of us was over the target, one of the bombers got a direct hit and exploded. Then it was our turn. The anti-aircraft gunners launched an intense barrage of flak and continued to do so while we were making our run. As with all intense barrages, the explosions created moderate air turbulence. We knew the shell bursts were close when that happened.

"There was a shortage of pilots in our Squadron. After my second Ploesti mission, the Squadron CO wanted me to be a first pilot. Was both surprised and unprepared for that responsibility. However, after a check ride and three or four take-offs and landings, I was pronounced a pilot.

"Before my first mission as a pilot, I wanted to know more about the B-17, so I made a visit to flight operations to review operating manuals. While there, one of our Squadron bombers returned early from a mission. It had aborted with a mechanical problem. This was the B-17 I was to fly the next day. I voiced some concern to the crew chief, but he assured me that it was all right.

"The mission was a long, over-water flight to Valences, France, August 2nd. The plane did alright until we reached higher altitude. One or more of the engines was under-powered and we couldn't keep up with the formation, even with full power. After a short time, the flight engineer tapped me on the shoulder and told me to look at the engines. The cylinders were white hot and I was afraid they would explode. We immediately opened the cowl flaps, to cool the cylinders, and dropped our bombs into the sea. We were over water, west of Italy. Thanks to the observant flight engineer, we were able to complete the mission.

"Missions to Blechhammer were always scary. The target was well defended by flak and fighters. On one mission I saw a lone B-17 flying toward the target. It was ahead and below us slightly. As I looked, a spot of fire appeared out of each engine. The plane seemed to stop and just hang there; then exploded into a large ball of fire. We flew through a black cloud of smoke that was left. That was an eerie feeling.

"High altitude flying was both tiring and hazardous. The thin air made close formation more difficult. There was delayed action in response to throttle settings. The pilot had to continually adjust power settings to keep the proper position in the formation. Oxygen regulators would malfunction at times. Another reason for maintaining communications with the crew. My regulator malfunctioned one time. Just as I was about to lose consciousness, I flipped the regulator to MAX oxygen. That quickly revived me.

"The weather was ideal for flying and we had a mission scheduled almost every day. On August 29, our Group went on a mission to Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia. The 96th Was flying the high position, to the right and behind the lead squadron. Hal Wallet was flying #4 position, below and behind our Squadron leader. I was flying #6, off Hal's left wing. Don't remember the positions of the other Squadrons, however, I believe the 20th was flying the rear and low position in the Group.

"My gunners said a large formation of P-51s was approaching. That didn't seem right because I had never heard, nor seen, P-51s approach in such a threatening manner. They knew we were skittish about any planes approaching our formation, so they would keep a comfortable distance away. I scanned forward and to each side. Didn't see any B-17 formations nor P-51s. Something was wrong, we were alone!

"A few seconds later, the area was saturated with cannon bursts and tracers. Fighters started attacking our Squadron. I took the controls from the co-pilot. My duty at that time was to keep our plane in close formation so that our Squadron could maintain maximum defense. I could see the fighters coming directly at us from 3:00 o'clock. All of a sudden a big hole appeared in the rudder of Hal's bomber. He momentarily lost control, but recovered soon enough to stay in the formation. Surprised that he could keep the plane in the air.

"The gunners were saying that the entire rear Squadron (#4) had been shot down. Also, one from the lead Squadron and one from the #3 Squadron. A total of nine bombers were shot down in the most devastating fighter attack I have ever experienced. Finally the fighters broke off the attack. Probably because they were out of ammunition and P-51s finally began to appear. Our Group bombed the target, encountering scattered, ineffective flak. The 96th returned to Base fully intact with multiple holes in our bombers. Our Group was crippled after this mission. I doubt if we had 28 crews available for a combat mission.

"Our next mission, August 31, was an unusual and pleasant surprise. During the early morning briefing, we were told that we would be going to Bucharest, Romania to bring home some POWs. I listened carefully to what the briefing officer said about where we would land. It was a small, grassy field built for fighters. We were to have close fighter protection, so we didn't need all our gunners. Our crew was reduced from ten to six.

"Had to land the plane slower than usual, which was easy to do because it was so lightly loaded. We were on the ground long enough to load 20 G.I.s in each bomber. They were put in the bomb bay, in which was installed a wooden floor, and in the waist section. For take-off on this short field, we were told to push our throttles to full power and hold for a few seconds. There was an officer on the ground that gave the signal to release the brakes and start rolling. Was a relief to get airborne with a comfortable margin of real estate remaining.

"Our most uncomfortable moment happened when we landed at Bari, Italy. Just as we were about to land, a pilot taxiing next to the runway blew a large cloud of dust across the runway. Had to make an unexpected blind landing because I couldn't see the ground. Fortunately we landed and rolled straight through the cloud of dust. A Colonel came up and congratulated me after I parked. I was just thankful that I got through safely with our crew and POWs.

"Since I was a spare pilot, I never was assigned to any particular crew. I probably flew with almost every crew in the 96th. I do remember flying with crews of Hal Wallet and 2nd Lt. Arnold Kwiatkowski. These were both experienced combat crews when I flew with them.

"Had a mishap on a mission with Arnold's crew. We had just finished our bomb run and I called each member to check their condition. Couldn't get an answer from the radio operator, Sgt. Charles F. Carey, so I called for help from one of the gunners close by. The ball turret gunner, Sgt. Raymond Bonneau, responded. Bonneau connected him up to another source of oxygen and revived Carey. Carey had a headache for a couple of days afterward.

"I thought Bonneau deserved a medal for saving Carey's life. Wrote a letter to Headquarters requesting a Soldier's Medal. Headquarters said they couldn't issue the medal because Bonneau vacated his position in a combat area.

"Seems as if I was flying all the time. I lost 20 pounds from my initial 160 pounds halfway through my tour. The best morale builders were letters from home. My wife and I kept the post office busy. For piece of mind I read a small Bible the Red Cross included in a packet for service men going overseas. Also went to Chapel service whenever I could; usually with 2nd Lt. Edward C. Buettner, co-pilot on Arnold Kwiatkowski's crew. Another co-pilot that occasionally flew with me carried a large Bible. He would always do his duties during a mission, but when he wasn't handling the controls, he would read the Bible.

"My last mission to Blechhammer was October 13th. Had a replacement crew with me. We were still climbing to a higher altitude when I noticed a lowering of oil pressure in No. 2 engine. Feathered the prop, hoping there would be enough oil to use the engine again, if there was an emergency. Didn't want to stress the three engines, so dumped all the bombs.

"After the bomb run, the Group went into a slight dive and increased speed. This was a normal procedure; get out of the flak as soon as possible. We were left behind so I decided to use the idle engine. Had the co-pilot unfeather the prop. Immediately had a runaway prop because all the oil pressure had gone. What a helpless feeling! Then we heard there were unfriendly fighters in the area. The runaway prop acted like an air brake, and we trailed farther behind. My poor judgement had gotten us in trouble.

"I had heard of all kinds of disasters with runaway props. Just before complete panic struck, I remembered that the primer pumped gasoline into the oil system. Had the co-pilot operate the primer plunger. In a few seconds the prop feathered and I pushed the throttles forward on the other three engines. In the meantime, the Group leader reduced speed. In a few minutes we caught up and tucked our bomber into the formation.

"My last mission was to Brux, Czechoslovakia, October 20th. This was to be a nine and one-half hour mission, one of the longer ones. Had another replacement crew going on their first mission. The pilot of the crew was flying co-pilot. The mission was relatively easy. Had one minor mishap before arriving at the target. Was checking the crew by intercom, then looked over at the co-pilot. He was leaning forward with his head hanging down. Tried to call him but he didn't answer. Called the flight engineer for help. He found the oxygen hose was kinked. The co-pilot revived but he was a little woozy. Didn't want to take a chance on his condition so piloted the plane the rest of the mission.

"What a memorable day that was for me! Praise the Lord! I had finished! Several of the fellows I had flown with came to the tent to congratulate me. That was 49 years ago. Often wonder what happened to those that were left; those who were shot down, those that were injured. Maybe this book will provide some answers.

"I didn't consider my experience noteworthy. However, most of us did finish without the trauma of being shot down, injured or becoming a POW. Perhaps my experience in the 2nd Bomb Group was typical.

"Special consideration goes to those I served with and the ground crews. The ground crews worked under considerable tension. Many nights they worked all night to prepare the bombers for the next day. It was a time of uncertainty. A time I will always remember."

T/Sgt. John C. Speight, RO on the crew of Lt. Virgil F. Murray. May 18, 1991: "29 August was a memorable day for me. My notes were very brief at the time, so my reference is that the mission was to the Privoser Oil Refinery, Czechoslovakia, and that we were credited with two sorties, which indicated it was a difficult target/mission. I also wrote that we were attacked by 100 FW-190s and Me-

109s and that I shot down my first, and only, fighter; an FW-190. That day was memorable also, because I twisted a knee during evasive action and a cartilage was damaged, resulting in a ballooned knee for several days.

"Our pilot was Lt. Virgil F. Murray and our crew name was "Virgil's Virgins," alluding to our not having been in combat before. We didn't always fly together, though it seemed to be a pattern that the engineer and radio operator usually flew with the pilot. However, one was assigned wherever his skill was needed, so we finished our mission requirements at different times. I was assigned as a Squadron lead radio operator and because I passed R and R, I completed my missions first. Virgil became a Squadron Leader and finished his missions shortly thereafter. The others that weren't injured or killed, finished at different times but within a short time of one another.

"On 31 August and 1 September 1944, several 2nd Bomb Group crews, including ours, were assigned to a mission involving most, if not all, of the B-17 Groups of the 5th Wing (Note: 2nd and 97th Bomb Groups only) to Bucharest, Romania to assist in the evacuation of Allied POWs that had been held by the Germans. We carried a crew of six, 50 cal. ammo for guns but no bombs and a minimum of material and equipment in the plane to allow for 20 to 25 POWs per airplane.

"Concerning our crew, I have located or confirmed the status of our original crew, although three of them did not end up in the 2nd Bomb Group. Those three positions were never permanently filled after our assignment to the 2nd, except perhaps the tail gunner who flew with us until being injured and subsequently being returned to the States because of the injury. Mostly, Operations assigned us whomever was available to fill out the crew. I am still in contact with four members of the 2nd Bomb Group crew, but can't say whether they were on the 29th mission, although I think Virgil Murray should have been. Our engineer, Richard H. Ferro, who was later KIA on his 49th mission, should have been with me that day, but I can't confirm that. Donald E. Crutcher was our ball turret gunner. Einard A. Saatela was our co-pilot and he got his crew along the way. Charles H. Hill, our replacement tail gunner, was injured soon thereafter and was sent home.

"My first mission was to Vienna, Austria on 16 June and my last was to Budapest, Hungary on 17 September 1944. The rest of my time was in indoctrination, practice flights, etc. before combat, and instructing new radio operators and other non-combat duties after I completed my missions."

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 264 - AUGUST 31, 1944

Operation "REUNION:" Orders had been received from 5th Wing some days previously to prepare aircraft for a secret mission. The bomb bays had the racks removed and flooring installed in the bomb bay. August 30th, orders were received that 30 aircraft from the 2nd Bomb Group and eight aircraft from the 97th Bomb Group were to proceed to Popesti Airdrome to evacuate Allied POWs.

Thirty-two A/C were to accommodate 20 rescued personnel and two A/C were to accommodate ten litter cases. Each would carry a crew of six: Pilot, Co-pilot, Navigator, Engineer, Radio Operator, and Tail Gunner.

A/C were to be divided into three Waves of 12 A/C each and a Fourth Wave of two litter A/C dispatched at one hour intervals. The 306th Fighter Wing was to provide escort of each Wave during penetration and withdrawal. Upon approach of within 30 miles of Bucharest, one flight of fighters was to leave the formation and precede the bombers to receive signals as to friendly or enemy status of the field. Fighters to return to bombers and relay signals to proceed or return to base. Route in and out to be strictly adhered to in order to avoid known flak batteries. A/C to land, load and take-off as quickly as possible.

On 31 August 1944, 30 aircraft took off: First Wave, 0615; Second Wave, 0717; third Wave, 0815. A/C unloaded rescued airmen at Bari, Italy. First Wave, 1540; Second Wave, 1608; Third Wave, 1700. Two A/C remained at Popesti.

1st Lt. Charles E. Crafton, First Pilot in the 429th Squadron. July 7, 1994: "We departed the States and flew the southern route: Trinidad, Belem, Natal, Dakar, Marrakech, El Ouina, Gioia, Foggia Main, Amendola. Our aircraft was a B-17 FA, #42-97726, a Mickey ship. The crew consisted of 2nd Lt. Juan J. Dyer, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. James J. Miceli, Radar Navigator; 2nd Lt. John G. Hofmann, Bombardier; S/Sgt. John C. May, Engineer; S/Sgt. William M. Schilling, Radio Operator; and Frank Rensheimer, Radar Mechanic. I don't remember that Cpl. Rensheimer flew a mission with me. My other crew members, Sgts. Isadore Berman, Mel Moser, Earl E. McLish, and Gerald Hamilton came by boat.

"Lt. Dyer and Sgt. Hamilton were shot down and killed on a raid to Munich, Germany on the 4th of October 1944. Lt. Miceli was shot down and taken POW on the 18th of May 1944 while flying as Radar Navigator on a mission to Ploesti. He was flying with a crew from the 463rd Bomb Group. S/Sgt. Isadore Berman was shot down on 10 August 1944 while flying with another crew. He was taken prisoner by the Germans.

"Captain John "Jerry" Hofmann, my bombardier, completed his missions and then volunteered to go to the front lines in Italy as an observer. I believe there was a volunteer program at this time to exchange ground and flying officers in order that each service could experience the life of the other. Jerry lost his life 24 April 1945 in the front lines of Northern Italy. I had flown my last mission in late September and tried to get Jerry to come home with me. It was a tragic loss! Other crew members were also wounded but for some strange reason I must have led a charmed life.

"I would think that one of my most memorable missions was the rescue operation to Bucharest, Romania the 31st of August. We knew on the 30th that something big was in the wind. The crews had been on the alert status since 1600 hours and we couldn't find out the reason. We did know we were loaded to the maximum gas load and special racks installed in the bomb bay, making a platform for which we could not figure the use.

"On the 31st we had an early briefing and the answer to all the secrecy was the - MASS EVACUATION OF POWs FROM BUCHAREST, ROMANIA! Besides myself, my crew consisted of 2nd Lt. James C. Harris, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Arnold Witoff, Navigator; T/Sgt. Donald C. May, Engineer; S/Sgt. Earl E. McLish, Tail Gunner; and T/Sgt. William M. Schilling, Radio Operator.

"The flight consisted of 38 B-17s, two of which were litter planes, to take off in three waves at one hour intervals. We were to form in two, six-ship boxes and proceed on course to the coast of Yugoslavia, where we were to meet our escort. Each Wave picked up 16 P-51s and P-38s, which escorted us to the Popesti Airdrome just a few miles southwest of Bucharest, where we landed, upon the all clear signal of two yellow flares fired from the ground.

"I was flying deputy lead in the Second Wave and we were to land at 1100 hours. While we circled the field, to the left we could see a line of men formed on the ground in groups of about 20, waiting for us. All the ships landed safely. We taxied up to the men and they began waving and shouting in their joy to see us.

The crewmen, some held prisoner for over a year, were dressed in motley uniforms of all descriptions. Some sported German helmets, German and Romanian officer's uniforms, long and wicked looking knives, fancy belts, scarfs, colorful pants and shirts. Some had long beards but apparently all were in good health. One sergeant, for some unknown reason, had lugged a complete German machine gun with him and another was carrying two, unopened boxes of German hand grenades.

"Romanian cigarettes, which they had purchased in prison camp canteens, were thrown to the ground, or given to curious soldiers, and cases of American cigarettes were opened and eagerly smoked by the airmen. Twenty airmen were loaded in each B-17 and started to taxi again being on the ground for 18 minutes.

"Popesti Airdrome itself was a fighter field roughly square and with a decided hill in the center, sloping down on all sides. Enemy fighters of all kinds covered the fields, some in perfect condition and others a little worse for wear due to previous strafings.

"Our Second Wave unloaded at Bari, Italy, where the minute we stopped, the evacuated men were swept into a whirl of excited news photographers, war correspondents, high ranking officers, and surprised bystanders. Of the first American airmen to land, the first 670 were in excellent condition, 50 were on crutches, and 10 were litter cases.

"Our Wave, the second, encountered enemy opposition on the way up and our escort shot down two Me-109s. After that we learned one P-51 had been lost from the escort of one of the other Waves.

"Of the two days of operations, Thursday and Friday, August 31 and September 1, only two accidents occurred. One of the planes in the First Wave, on the first day, blew a tire while taxiing, but the tire was changed and the ship flew back the next day. On the second day, the outer Tokyo tank on the right wing of one of the planes exploded, blowing the tip of the wing off. It was repaired and the crew flew it back in ten days.

"Among those brought back on the first day was my own navigator, Lt. James Miceli. He had acquired a Radar Navigator's rating and we flew a "Mickey" ship across. Both Miceli and the plane went down on their first raid over Ploesti, 18 May 1944.

On the second day, they brought out another member of my crew, S/Sgt. Isadore Berman, shot down over Ploesti on 10 August 1944. All in all, I would say that my participation in this "Reunion" mission had been one of the outstanding highlights of my time overseas. It was especially gratifying to me to know that the missing members of my crew were saved."

S/Sgt. Paul Langley, 96th Squadron, flew most of his missions as a Waist Gunner on the crew of Captain Roger C. Thompson. March 15, 1993: "I was fortunate to finish my missions but some were rough and I remember them clearly. I kept a diary, although we weren't supposed to, and some of the following information is taken from it.

"July 13, 1944 we went to bomb the Marshalling Yards at Verona, Italy. A rookie waist gunner had his head blown off by flak.

"July 15th we went to bomb oil fields at Ploesti. We had to clean our ammunition to fire our guns. The ack ack was so bad that Sgt. Miller looked up and said over the interphone, "Oh Lord, don't let this happen to us!" We got a crew check from the pilot and all were OK. It was the same plane that the rookie got killed in, #508.

"One day in August we were on our way back from Bari and passed a G.I. with badly worn out shoes and a heated flight suit, cut off at the knees. He looked like a bum, very sun tanned and looking like he had spent many miles on the road. We stopped our 6x6 and asked him to get in because we realized he had been shot down over enemy territory and was walking home. He told us in a sour voice, "Hell no, I have walked this far, I'm going to walk the rest of the way." As far as I know, he did.

"August 31st we went to Bucharest, Romania and landed at an airfield near there. We picked up 1,000 of our boys who went down in that area. The Romanian patriots battled the Germans off this airfield so we could land and pick up our boys. The Russian/German line was three miles away from Bucharest. When we landed, the boys shook hands, yelled and hollered. Boy they were a happy bunch! The Romanians were very glad to see us. They shook hands with us and waved when we left. People stood outside their houses when we went across, waved and shook white cloths at us.

"Quite a few Russians had slipped through to the airfield and we had a chance to talk with them. There was a large Russian woman with two guns and two ammo belts on her. While I was talking to her a bi-plane (old) flew a half circle around the airfield. I looked up and laughed at it. She gave me a dirty look so I got back into my B-17.

"One of the POWs asked me if I had any American cigarettes and I told him I had some Lucky Strikes. He offered to trade me some German cigarettes, so I did. I tried one of them, they were "nasty, filthy." I still have the rest of them. I also got some medals; one a First Order of the Iron Cross of the Third Reich, and another, Silver Romania Wings.

"On September 1st we landed at the airfield near Bucharest again and a well-dressed man got in the waist and wanted to come back to Italy with us. He offered to pay a large sum of American greenbacks. I told him no, to see my pilot and tell him what you want. I don't know what happened to him.

"Some of the boys told me how mean the Germans had been. They said, 'If a gunner didn't get killed in the air, he might get killed otherwise.'" We really snatched those boys from under the Germans' noses!

"My last mission was to Blechhammer, Germany on September 13th. My diary shows that we had trouble with our oxygen system and our tail gunner, S/Sgt. Charles Hill, passed out from lack of oxygen. He was unconscious for so long he stopped breathing and one of the waist gunners had to give him artificial respiration to get him breathing again. We landed at Foggia Main and he was taken to a hospital where he recovered."

Major Richard F. Kuhn was the Flight Surgeon of the 96th Squadron, after transfer from the 49th Squadron. He was the recipient of the Legion of Merit for work with the OSS, Purple Heart, Air Medal, the Nifkin Aktar Medal from the Bey of Tunis for humanitarian work with Arab civilians and the Merital



Air Evacuation - August 31, 1944

Dr. Julius Levine unloading S/Sgt. Peter Tierney (Courtesy - R. Kuhn)

Sanitar Medal presented by the King of Romania for aid to that country during a typhoid outbreak. June 5, 1990: "As I remember it, the week of February 20th was a nightmare! No one of the 96th Squadron made all three main missions. The attacks on our Group were made in wave after wave of Me-109s and FW-190s. I remember one first pilot, saying to me after Steyr, 'Geez Doc, it was just like in the

movies, planes falling out of the sky in flames, parachutes all over the place.' I remember Colonel Lovelace, the Head Flight Surgeon for the Air Force, chose to go on the Regensburg mission, not realizing what a catastrophe it might be. The plane he flew in did not return to Amendola and we, Dr. Julius Levine (Flight Surgeon of the 96th Squadron) and I thought he had been lost. However, we later learned they had been shot up pretty badly and managed to land at another airfield.

"At the end of each mission we were kept busy following planes that had "Red Lights" on, as a sign that someone aboard was wounded and needed assistance. We did the best we could

administering plasma, morphine, etc. If not too badly wounded, sewing skin together and applying temporary splints and slings. After the men were carried to the hospital, they came under the care of that staff and we had visiting privileges which we did daily after early morning missions had taken off. Of course we were always in attendance for the take-off and return of missions. We were always glad when we could count all our planes as safe while they were several miles away.

"In August 1944, Dr. Julius Levine and I were selected to go to Romania to aid in the evacuation of airmen that had been shot down over Ploesti. We packed whatever penicillin we could get into ice jugs and all the first aid equipment we could gather, and in two, separate B-17s flew, with P-38 escort, to Bucharest. We found several hundred of our men waiting anxiously to be sent back to Italy. We questioned them about wounds and illnesses and put them on planes for their trip back to Italy. The same day we went to Puchini where we found a small hospital, which was near the Ploesti area; finding quite a few Americans, including a T/Sgt. Peter Tierney, a T/Sgt. from a B-24 Group, who was badly wounded. Julius and I took turns, staying up all night, giving him penicillin every four hours. We later moved him to a Russian hospital in Bucharest where we could observe the care given Russian soldiers. I was introduced to a Mr. Rokota, who was head of the telephone company. He offered to call all the hospitals in Romania to see if there were any wounded Americans there.

"It was decided that Julius (Dr. Levine) would stay at the hospital and help the Romanian doctors care for the wounded while I would travel to outlying districts to find the wounded airmen. About this time the Russians issued an order that no Americans could leave the Ploesti area for bomb damage reports. However, as I was on errands of mercy, I continued to travel far and wide in Romania to various hospitals. The Russians would stop me at roadblocks, hold me overnight or for several days, until they communicated with "Moscow" to see if I was for real. The OSS Commander, Frank Wisner, U.S.N., asked me if I would work for them since I was able to roam about without causing too much trouble. I was transferred after we returned to our base at Amendola. The OSS briefed me on Bacteriological warfare and I was looking for American airmen (cover was perfect) all through Bessarabia and parts of Russia as far as Odessa.

"My experience in North Africa, prior to the move to Italy, ranged from delivering a baby to the daughter of an Arab Chief, Arabs with eye diseases, and shrapnel wounds from land mines left behind after the fighting. My Sergeant, John Monroe, and the rest of the staff had many interesting experiences."



Bari, Italy Hospital

Dr. J. Levine, Peter Tierney, nurse, and Dr. R. Kuhn