
13

Operations: September, 1944

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 265 - SEPTEMBER 1, 1944
Orders for this mission were essentially the same as Mission No. 264 except that only 15 A/C were required plus one A/C for litter cases. Fighter cover to be provided by the 306th Fighter Wing. At 0730 hours, 16 aircraft took off and landed at Popesti Airdrome, loaded the airmen and flew to Bari, Italy. The men were unloaded and the A/C returned to Base at 1730 hours. No. 350 remained at Popesti. Mission successful.

BELGRADE, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 266 - SEPTEMBER 3, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 27 aircraft, with a bomb load of six, 1,000-lb. GP bombs, dropped their load on the Sava Railroad Bridge at Belgrade. The bombing was recorded as good although the bridge was still standing. One aircraft made an emergency landing on the Island of Vis. The bombardier, Lt. Johnson, was wounded and remained in the hospital there. The remainder of the crew returned the next day.

1st Lt. Elliott Hansell, 96th Squadron, N, on the crew of 1st Lt. Eliot Spiess. May 29, 1992: "I suppose my first mission, which was to Belgrade, Yugoslavia, September 3, 1944, was probably my most exciting mission. That ended with a crash landing on the Island of Vis, off the coast of Yugoslavia. Fortunately, all the crew survived and we returned to base the next day.

"I was fortunate to complete my tour without injury despite the fact that 20 of my missions were double credits because of length and severity of the target. That does not mean that the others were "milk runs" because flak was everywhere and there were enemy airfields galore all around the targets we visited.

"Ten of my missions were into Germany: Lechfield (1), Blechhammer (4), Munich (4), Regensburg (1). Six were into Austria: Salzburg (1), Vienna (2) and Linz (3). My four other double credits were to Czechoslovakia: Brux (3), and Brno (1). I had four missions into Yugoslavia: Belgrade, Subotica, Bratislava, and Maribor. Two were to Bucharest and Debreczen, Hungary. One to Kalamaki, Greece and (3) to Italian targets: Bologna, Treviso, and Trento.

"Three missions were "Lone Wolf" missions in which we flew to targets alone. Two were to Linz, Austria, and the other to Blechhammer, Germany.

"My final mission, 31, and credited with 51 because of double credits was to Linz, Austria, January 8, 1945."

1st Lt. Eliot Spiess, and his crew, were assigned to the 96th Bomb Squadron, August 26, 1944. June 13, 1992: "Original members of my crew were 2nd Lt. Robert F. Merino, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Elliott

Hansell, Navigator; 2nd Lt. Joseph Humel, bombardier; T/Sgt. Woodrow W. Harris, engineer; S/Sgt. Andrew D. Miller, Lower Turret; S/Sgt. Delbert E. Ellis, Right Waist; S/Sgt. Theodore J. Collins, Left Waist; S/Sgt. John A LeClair, Jr., Tail Gunner; and T/Sgt. Gerald Voss, Jr., Radio Operator.

"When we were assigned to the 96th Squadron we were told how lucky we were to have just missed the last of the Ploesti missions. What we heard of those missions "scared the pants off us." But as time went on, we found that Ploesti to be only one knockout of very many that needed similar treatment.

"As was the Group policy, new crews were split up for a time and flew with experienced crews. I flew my first five missions as co-pilot.

"On my first combat mission, September 3, target, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, I co-piloted with a veteran pilot. Our navigator, Elliott Hansell, was the only man from my crew on board. We took off at 0715 and were over the target at 1050 when No. 3 engine spouted an excessive oil leak and high cyl. pressure. We fell out of formation and were attempting to drop bombs on a second target when No. 1 engine let loose a huge stream of black smoke. We feathered both engines and salvoed bombs, gun guts and ammunition to lighten our load, although the ball turret was retained. Air speed decreased to 120 mph and altitude was being lost at 200 ft/min. Highest altitude was at 27,000 feet when engines were feathered. When at 11,000 feet, after an hour's return, we were over the Dalmation Alps and encountered moderate flak, easily aimed at our crippled ship. The bombardier was severely wounded in the leg. Ell Hansell gave him first aid. We sweated out the readiness for abandoning the ship, with sharp, rocky terrain below, when two P-38s appeared and gave us escort to an emergency field on the Island of Vis, just off the Dalmation Coast.

"As we approached the island, red flares went up to signal position of the runway - a stretch of not more than 1,000 feet surrounded by high hills. Our pilot, already experienced by many missions was over-cautious about the short landing strip and was planning to go around for a second look, but I overruled him because the bombardier needed attention and going around the high hills was risky. So, I put down the flaps and landing gear. The pilot over-shot the runway so that the wheels touched down half-way down the strip. Our speed was about 60 mph when we got to the far end - beyond were grape arbors and chicken coops. We tore through those but then came to a 20 foot drop to a muddy pond. We stood on the brakes, the ship nosed down, and came to a rest with the nose section looking like an accordion. Ell Hansell and the wounded bombardier were shoved up against the floor boards of the cockpit. Both were bruised, shaken and madder than hell!! As soon as we got out, Yugoslav-Tito Partisans and British Rangers rushed up to help. They took the wounded bombardier to a field hospital where he was given emergency treatment. Hansell had hash marks across his chest but otherwise was OK. The plane's main spar had buckled so it was not flyable.

"That evening the crew and I went into town, went swimming in the harbor; gorgeous castles on promontories at each side of the harbor entrance plus a view of the Dalmation Alps beyond. The next morning, after a terrific Yugoslav breakfast, we returned to base by ferrying a B-17 that previously had landed for repairs. We arrived back at base September 4 at 1330 hours.

"Thirty years later, my son Bruce, at Dennison University, Ohio, heard the story of this mission told by one of his fraternity friends, Dean Hansell. Our two sons at the same college! What a coincidence! The Hansell family and the Spiess family had a joyous reunion!

"September 12. Co-pilot. Take-off 0800 hours. Target: Airdrome west of Munich, Germany, where jet aircraft were being manufactured. Altitude, 24,500. Alps beautiful but ominous looking. Flak over Munich very intense but stopped when we turned toward the I.P. until we got right over the target when it started up again. Perhaps 50 guns were tracking us. One of our planes in another squadron blew up. Target was hit OK. Returned at 1600 hours.

“September 13. Co-pilot. Take-off at 0630 hours. Target: Blechhammer North Oil Refineries, East Germany near the Poland border. Over the target at 1130 hours and at 29,000 feet. It was smoky and hazy below and flak intense and accurate. Two B-17s had direct hits, blowing up, and considerable damage to other aircraft. No enemy fighters appeared. Our plane had a four-inch hole through the left wing spar plus a hole in the pilot's window, but no personal injuries. Hit target OK. Landed at base at 1430 hours.

“September 15. Co-pilot. Take-off 0535 hours (predawn). Target: Kalamaki Airdrome, Athens, Greece. Purpose of knocking out German transports on the ground during the Nazis' evacuation of Crete. As we approached Athens at 28,000 feet, flak barrage was very intense ahead of target, though at point of bomb drop, there was no flak. I could see the Acropolis beyond and the Lykabettos. While I was watching, I felt an inability to catch my breath. Thinking about some obstruction in my oxygen supply, I opened the supply full on, then I passed out. It seemed that my air hose had disconnected accidentally and when I slumped over, our engineer, Woody Harris, noticed and plugged me back in. All of a sudden the lights came back ON! Very interesting experience! The flight back was very picturesque along the Adriatic Coast; cliffs and mountains. Landed at 1300 hours.

“September 21. First Pilot! Take-off 0630 and target: Debreczen, Hungary, Marshalling Yards. Over target at 1050 hours and 23,000 feet. Flak intense, heavy, and accurate. Had been briefed for 37 guns, but those looked like 3700! No injuries on our ship but several others heavily damaged. Coming home we hit weather close to the Yugoslavian coast at 12,000 feet. Formation broke up and came through a cold front. Came out at 3,000 feet over the Adriatic. We took a fix with a radar station with visibility about a one-fourth variable. Landed at 1540 with a strong cross wind. OK until at the end of the runway where the ship veered sharply into the wind to the right - engines could not restore straight run, and tires went over the steel mat. Flat tire in the mud, UGH!

“September 22. Take-off 0740. Target: Munich Allach BMW Works, Germany. Over the Alps again, and over the target at 1257. Target was a machine plant in the center of Munich. Bombs landed in a very smoky area. Flak thickest and heaviest I have ever met. In flak for about four minutes. Lead ship took evasive action. No injuries but two pieces of flak hit the nose and bombardier's sleeve. No enemy fighters. Landed at 1600 hours.

“October 4. Take-off 0730. Target: Main Marshalling Yards west of Munich. Alps more snow covered than before. Over target at 1215. Our purpose was to disrupt transportation between industrial center and southern fronts. Target well hit. Smoke from 1,000-lb. bombs rose up to 10,000 feet. Our altitude, 28,000 feet, with very intense and accurate flak. No enemy fighters. Chutes came out of group behind us. Ship behind - opposite us had to leave formation because of an oxygen leak. Lucky guys, they came back too. Landed at 1530.

“October 13. (Friday, my birthday). Target: Blechhammer, Germany, South Oil Refineries. Over target at 1100, altitude 26,000 feet. Flak very intense and accurate. Four holes in our ship; two in the nose, one in the co-pilot's window and one in the left waist position. Target was well hit! No fighters but enemy was reported over Vienna at the same time. Landed at 1430. Some birthday!

“Received promotion to 1st Lt., October 15th - belated birthday present.

“October 16. Take-off 0620. Target: Assigned originally Brux Ordnance Works, Czechoslovakia. Bombed alternate, Salzburg, Austria, because of bad weather to north. Alps white with snow. Salzburg was under a thick smoke screen but Marshalling Yards well hit. Much smoke from oil billowed up. We dropped 500-lb. RDX bombs. Flak very heavy and accurate. In flak for six minutes! Our damage: leads to No. 3 oil and fuel gauges and outside air temp. gauge were blown out. Altitude 22,000 feet. Landed at 1330.

“October 20. Take-off 0700. Target: Brux, Czechoslovakia Oil Refineries. Weather good except for undercast (9/10) at 15,000 feet. Altitude over target, 26,000 feet, 1300 hours. Flak very

intense barrage, no tracking however, so it was not very accurate. Radio operator, Jerry Voss, got sick (detached oxygen) but not seriously. Very long mission. We had only about 340 gals. left. Landed at 1630.

"November 5. Take-off 0640. Target: Vienna Florisdorf Oil Refineries, Austria. Over target at 1150, altitude 30,000 feet. Undercast and bombed by radar. Flak extensive at target but very little reached our altitude. Made three runs at the target! Huge number of our planes over Vienna today. Poor B-24s got hell down at 23,000 feet. On radio we heard a B-24 yelling for escort when a couple of Me-109s started attacking near Lake Balaton. On return, we had to leave the formation once, over the Alps, in order to sweat out our gasoline usage - 1700 RPM at 27" manifold. Landed at 1500 hours with 50 gals. per tank.

"November 11. Take-off at 0700. Target: Originally briefed for Bruz, Czechoslovakia. Winds were so adverse the formation turned to Salzburg instead. Our ship had no heat! At 1049 hours, our No. 2 engine lost oil pressure and feathered the prop; turned to Villach, Austria Marshalling Yards as an alternate. Guns at Villach were supposed to be only six, but each was accurate. Flak knocked out hydraulic line to cowl flaps and also hit the ball turret. No injuries. Bob Merino and I froze our feet and our bones ached as we thawed out. Temperature at altitude was -60 degrees C! As we approached the Adriatic we reached lower altitude to warm up. Tornados (water spouts) were reported and very turbulent - low pressure in atmosphere. Landed at 1345. At briefing headquarters, at base, we spotted a tornado touch down about two to three miles from us, just north of the Operations Office. Some sight!

"November 16. Take-off 0635. Target: Munich West Marshalling Yards, Germany. Over target at 1203 hours at 30,000 feet. Snow on the ground over landscape. Bombed visually plus radar combined. Temperature outside was -52C but were comfortable in our heated suits. Flak extensive but not accurate. Had one hole in ship. Went through flight gyro, under the co-pilot's seat. Weather good except some high cumulus at target. Formation better than usual. Major Redden led our Squadron and Group. Hit target, BULLS EYE! Landed at 1500.

"November 24-25 (Night)! Take-off 2255. Target: Linz Benzol Oil Refineries, Austria. We were leading a single ship mission with radar navigator for bombing, etc. Briefed for thick cirrus clouds over the Alps as protection during the night. But almost no clouds - Alps were gorgeous in bright moonlight! We doubted whether we should bomb the main target, but within 50 miles of Linz, clouds thickened at our altitude (28,000 feet). Over Linz, searchlights came on, plus a moderate amount of flak. Over target at 0421 hours. At Graz, some searchlights came on but failed to penetrate clouds. Searchlights give you the feeling of being in a goldfish bowl. Arrived at base, landing at 0700. Slept all the rest of the day.

"December 9. Take-off 0745. Target: Originally briefed for Brux Oil Refineries but we bombed the third alternate instead because of bad weather; Regensburg Marshalling yards. Group lead kept changing and giving us trouble in formation. Bomb run was very long - more than 20 minutes. Coming back, weather deteriorated and formation troubled everybody. Our nine-ship formation came back with only four ships of the original Squadron. Two did not return at all, several landed at the emergency field at Ancona, Italy, or ditched. We landed at 1610.

"December 19. Take-off 0650. Target: Blechhammer North Oil refineries. Everything went well up to the target (29,000 feet) where the lead and deputy lead's radar sets became inoperative. Red and green flak as well as the usual black appeared. We did not drop bombs. Instead, we turned off and dived at 200 mph down to 22,000 feet. We held our bombs until one of the Squadron lead could catch up and assist us in triggering our bombs. Time, 1230 hours. By 1330, they decided to bomb the 4th alternate, Soporon Marshalling Yards just south of Wiener Neustadt, Austria. After a 15-minute bomb run, we dropped ours and found our gasoline remaining was just 90 gals. per tank. The formation finally slowed down to 140 mph. We got our props down to 1700 RPM and MP at 28". Result: we landed

at 1615 with about ONE gal. in tank No. 1, 10 gals. in No. 2, 20 gals. in tank No. 3, and 5 gals. in No. 4. Total time, 9 hours and 30 minutes!

"December 27. Take-off 0820. LAST SORTIE! Briefed target: Kornernburg Oil Refineries, Austria. Formation went well. Operations scheduled all our original crew together as a final "present." We bombed Linz, Austria Marshalling Yards. The first target was cloud covered. Over the target at 1230 at 27,000 feet. Used radar. Flak was intense and accurate. A hole in the upper metal rim of my front windshield. A piece of flak across my feet and landed opposite side. This is the piece I saved. No injuries and not much damage. Landed at 1620.

"Left the 2nd Bomb Group for Naples Departure Station, January 26, 1945. Left Naples for U.S.A. on U.S. General Meigs. February 26, 1945. Passed Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor, March 8, 1945."

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 267 - SEPTEMBER 3, 1944

At 0758 three aircraft took-off and landed at Popesti Airdrome for the rescue of the remaining Allied POWs at Bucharest. The aircraft took off immediately and landed the rescued airmen at Bari, Italy. They returned to home base at 2011 hours. Mission accomplished!

GENOA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 268 - SEPTEMBER 4, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 82.75 tons of 500-lb. GP bombs on Harbor Installations at Genoa. It was reported that German submarines were in the harbor and the mission was intended to destroy them. Bombs were believed to be in the target area, which was covered by smoke from the bombing of a previous Group. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate resulting in wounding of three airmen: 2nd Lt. James E. Craig, Co-pilot 96th Squadron, was seriously wounded; S/Sgt. Paul M. Langley, Toggler, 96th Squadron, was slightly wounded; and S/Sgt. Raymond E. Bastion, Tail Gunner, 49th Squadron, was slightly wounded.

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 269 - SEPTEMBER 5, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 27 aircraft dropped 79.5 tons of 1,000-lb. RDX bombs on the South Railroad Bridge in Budapest. The bombs of the First Wave were over and to the right while the remainder were in the target area with possible direct hits. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate, resulting in serious injury to T/Sgt. James W. Hunter, Radio Operator, 49th Squadron, and a slight injury to Captain George A. Redden, Pilot 429th Squadron. The aircraft carrying T/Sgt. Hunter landed at Foggia Main where he was immediately taken to a hospital. All other planes returned safely.

The 2nd Bomb Group softball team won the NATOUSA crown in Oran today.

ORADEA, ROMANIA - MISSION NO. 270 - SEPTEMBER 6, 1944

Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 325, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Oradea. There was no flak over the target. The bombing pattern covered the entire area of the Yards.

BROD, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 271 - SEPTEMBER 8, 1944

Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 78 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Brod. The target area was well covered. Flak was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate. S/Sgt. Lloyd C. Miller, Lower Turret 49th Squadron, was slightly wounded. All planes returned safely.

September 9, 1944 was a non-operational day. There were several rest camps available for the men to attend; Bari, Rome, Isle of Capri, Cairo, Egypt to name a few. I wasn't scheduled for one at the time but had some free time so decided I would get a pass and go on my own to visit Rome. S/Sgt. Emil

Schneider, our supply Sergeant, from Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, was also interested in going. I had checked with our Operations and found that a flight was going to Rome this day and received approval for us to go. We arrived at the flight line early and took off. We flew over the town of Cassino and the Abbey and were amazed at the total devastation! It was hard to understand how anyone could survive the bombing and shelling! When we arrived over the Rome airport, we found it closed in by the weather and could not land, so we returned to the Base.

We decided that we still would go so caught a ride to Foggia, stopped at the Red Cross and found a truck driver going toward Naples. Later found that he was not going all the way and were dumped off, in the rain, at a little town near Ariano. We finally caught a ride with an English soldier and rode to the outskirts of Naples. We then rode a bus for a way and finally caught a ride with a G.I. to the Red Cross where we thought we might sleep. No dice in the sleeping, but we did eat there. We finally found a room with an Italian family and went to bed.

The next morning, we went to the Red Cross to clean up and eat breakfast. Found out that there was a train running to Pompeii so decided it would be an interesting place to see. It was worth the trip. We then went back to Naples and caught a ride with a G.I. truck driver but found he was only going part way to Rome. We caught several rides and finally caught a straight through ride at Capua.

In one town, I believe it was Cisterna, the truck driver saw a fruit stand and he pulled over. Emil and I got out also to buy some grapes. There were some young women nearby and one walked over to us and addressed us in excellent English. She asked where we were from and I said I was from Ohio. She said, "I'm from Ohio, what town?" When I told her I was from Steubenville, she cried, "I'm from Steubenville too!" Her name was Anna Dalessio, had married an Italian, moved to Italy and was caught up in the war. The ironic thing about our meeting was that she lived in Rome, had come down to visit relatives for a few days and had just come to the stand to get some fruit. Unfortunately she was not going back to Rome, so I never saw her again. The truck driver was anxious to get going so never had a chance to get her address. We finally arrived in Rome around 8:30, found the Red Cross and had something to eat. We had the address of the woman who took in G.I.s and knew we were coming. However, it was too late to find the place. An elderly fellow stopped us and offered us a room. Cost us \$2.00. His wife made some coffee for us and we went to bed.

The next day we had breakfast at the Red Cross and set out to find the apartment of the woman where we planned to stay. Finally found it and it turned out to be real nice. It cost each of us \$1.25 a day with a light breakfast. We had taken some things with us for bartering; cigarettes, soap, sugar, etc., and gave some to her. We spent the 11th, 12th, and 13th of September touring Rome. We attended services at the Vatican and saw the Pope. I did some shopping for the folks at home. All in all, it was a rewarding experience.

On the 14th we were up early, had breakfast, caught a ride and headed out of Rome. We were dropped off about 20 miles out of Rome and couldn't get another ride. After a long wait we decided to go back to Rome and try again, which we did. We met a truck driver at the Red Cross who said he was going to Naples in the afternoon so we rode around with him until he was ready to go. It turned out he had a change of orders and we were dropped off about halfway to Naples. We caught another ride but the truck broke down. We finally caught a ride with some fellows who were coming back from Pisa. They had some K-Rations and shared them with us. Finally arrived in Naples around 10:00 p.m. We went to the home of the family who had given us a room on the first night in Naples. We hit the hay, plenty tired after a very trying day.

We were up early the next day, went to the Red Cross to eat and cleanup. We hit the road for Amendola and after several rides, arrived in camp around 4:00 p.m. It was a good trip but we were happy to get back in camp.

It was fortunate that we arrived when we did because it started pouring rain and we had a violent windstorm which blew the roofs off the 20th Squadron Mess Hall, Orderly Room, and Enlisted Men's Clubhouse. We thought our roof was going also.

During my time in the service I never met many fellows from Steubenville. Francis "Bill" Brooks came into the 96th Squadron in mid-1944 as part of a combat crew. On a day he was ill, and grounded, his crew was shot down and he was devastated! He did survive the war. Daniel Daugherty was a combat gunner in the 97th Bomb Group across the field from us. He finished his missions and went home. Jack Blum was a navigator, or bombardier, on a B-24 crew and he finished his missions and went home. We all got together one day at my camp and it was great to be with fellows I had known.

VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 272 - SEPTEMBER 10, 1944

Lt. Col. Charles H. Hillhouse, Deputy Group Commanding Officer, led 28 aircraft on take-off and 27 dropped 64 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Lobau Oil Refinery in Vienna. One aircraft dropped its bombs with another Group. The target area was well covered and several fires were seen. Flak was moderate to intense, accurate and heavy, resulting in serious injury to S/Sgt. T. E. Dingler, RW, 49th Squadron; light wounds to Cpl. Dorsey Back, TG, 20th Squadron; Cpl. S. C. Lewis, UT, 20th Squadron; 2nd Lt. L. C. Allen, N, 429th Squadron; and 2nd Lt. J. J. Nixon, B, 429th Squadron. Twenty-six aircraft suffered flak damage but all returned safely.

SECRET MISSION - ITALY/FRANCE - A/C #42-30500 - "MISS CHARLOTTE" - SEPTEMBER 10, 1944

2nd Lt. John R. Meyers, 0-822048, P.	(DED)
2nd Lt. Darl J. Heffelbower, 0-771010, CP.	(DED)
2nd Lt. Ian S. Raeburn, 0-723433, N.	(DED)
2nd Lt. Raymond L. Wilson, 0-722102, B.	(DED)
T/Sgt. Donald C. Pullis, 12127802, U/T.	(DED)
Cpl. Robert B. Lloyd, 39912971, R/W.	(DED)
Cpl. Walter M. Bildstein, 38514657, L/W.	(DED)
Cpl. Louis H. Simpson, 37378872, T/G.	(DED)
Sgt. Ernest G. Kolln, 6932469, R/O.	(DED)

Records in the history of the 2nd bomb Group show this crew was assigned to the 96th Squadron from 5th Wing Headquarters, 17 August, 1944. The following day they were transferred on DS (Detached Service) to the 885th Bombardment Squadron (H). Records of 19 August 1944 show they were transferred from duty to a secret destination. A further statement reads, "The history of this crew will be inserted at a later date due to them being on DS."

Records of the 885th Bombardment Squadron (H) note that this aircraft took off on the night of September 10, 1944, from an airfield at Maison Blanche, Algeria, on a secret mission to drop supplies to either French or Italian underground fighters.

The plane, and remains, were located 2 August 1945 on Mt. Gran Mioul, or Mt. Gran Miule, near Sestriere, Italy. The bodies were eventually moved to the U.S. Cemetery at Mirandola, Italy. All bodies were eventually returned to the United States with the exception of Lt. Ian S. Raeburn and Cpl. Walter M. Bildstein. They are now located in the Florence American Cemetery, Florence, Italy. Lt. Raeburn's marker reads, "96th BS, 2nd BG."

Some information was contributed by John K. Mattison, Peru, Illinois, of the 885th Bomb Squadron while serving in North Africa, and Phillipe Castellano, Mandelieu, France.

LECHFIELD, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 273 - SEPTEMBER 12, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 70 tons of 250-lb. GP bombs on the Airdrome at Lechfield. The target area was well covered. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate, causing some damage to 11 aircraft. No injuries, no losses.

BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 274 - SEPTEMBER 13, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 18 aircraft dropped 141, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the North Oil Refinery. Results could not be determined due to clouds and smoke over the target. Flak was heavy, intense and accurate. No injuries.

Seven aircraft bombed a target of opportunity, the Marshalling Yards at Vrutky, Czechoslovakia, dropping 55, 500-lb. RDX bombs. This target was well covered.

Two aircraft were early returns and one B-17, #42-97490, 429th Squadron is missing. T/Sgt. Charles Hill, TG, 96th Squadron, listed in serious condition due to lack of oxygen.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-97490 - 429TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt.	Daryle R. Stucky, 0-716577, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Henry E. Tennyson, 0-758750, CP.	(EVADED)
2nd Lt.	Herbert (NMI) Traurig, 0-723210, N.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	William M. Spruce, 38512482, TOG.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Robert L. Caryl, 12165962, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	George R. Gasparik, 32921810, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	C. P. Reinhart, 13022225, R/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Robert W. Hare, 12054334, L/W.	(EVADED)
S/Sgt.	Thomas W. Cima, 36485755, T/G.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	William L. McKibbin, 39207684, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of S/Sgt. William M. Spruce, after evading: "Lt. Tennyson, S/Sgt. Robert Hare, and myself evaded. I do not know what happened to others of the crew. I was the second out of the ship. All chutes (10) opened and all men landed. Hearsay information was that two men were taken prisoner and one had a broken arm. Plane crashed but did not burn. Partisans got guns, etc."

Escape narrative of S/Sgt. C. P. Reinhart: "I was flying in a B-17 on Wednesday, 13 September, 1944, and the No. 4 engine started to windmill and so it was cut off about one and one-half hours. Before that, the ball turret gunner reported that the No. 1 engine was shooting a lot of black smoke and it continued. Then No. 1 and, soon after, No. 2 engines were out, and when No. 4 went out we headed SE and the co-pilot tried to contact the fighters but wasn't able to, and figured it might be possible to make it back with good luck, but the No. 3 engine started to windmill and the navigator said we were east of Budapest.

"The engine trouble started at about 27,000 feet and we were also 20 minutes late according to the schedule. We were informed to head SE and at 5,000 feet the pilot told us to bail out (time: 1050 a.m.) and I believe most of us landed in a clearing, but the pilot headed the plane for the woods. We weren't attacked by enemy fighters nor was there any flak there, but a short while before, we passed some flak but it was low.

"I was the last out of the ship, as far as I know, and fell at least 1,000 feet before pulling the ripcord and saw the other chutes in the distance. I landed in a clearing east of the town of Nestri, Czechoslovakia. When I got up I heard some people talking and I got out of there. There were two

people picking hay and a man saw me running to the woods and started up the hill towards his wagon. They were about 1,500 feet from me.

"I continued to stay in the brush and woods, and continued to walk SE. About 1330 I laid down in the woods and rested until about 5 p.m., then walked further and stopped again after about one-half hour. I waited until approximately 6:45 and started again through the woods. After awhile, I hit a wagon road through the woods and followed it. It brought me to a clearing with a pretty well-traveled dirt road. I continued SE and in the south I saw a big orange light, or possibly it was a fire. I understand that the plane didn't burn or explode.

"I continued to walk until 4:15 a.m. Thursday and then went up in a field and laid in a small ravine and slept for awhile. I watched some farmers all day, working only about 40 feet from me. I went down the road about 7:45 a.m. to a man walking along and he mentioned something to me and then I motioned that I was hungry and thirsty. About 75 feet down the road he pointed to a house and he called a man who brought me some water and food. He motioned if I was going south, and I pointed SE. He was about 60 years of age.

"I walked through a good sized town, it was dark and no one said anything to me, and I continued on a black-topped road for several miles. In the meantime, I heard several planes at different times, and to the south saw flashes in the sky and I think it was flak. Also saw a yellow light far off in a field on a tower and then another one came on and flashed off and on.

"After awhile I took a dirt road and went through several small villages. About 11:00 p.m., I ran onto barriers across the road and figured something was up. About midnight I ran across a big cut in the road and went down along the bank, and when I got on the road again someone said something to me. They were in a small hut along the road and pointed rifles at me. One said something to me and called several of his buddies and they asked me if I were Russian, German, or French. I asked if it was Czechoslovakia and one said, "Ja," and I said I was an American. One patted me on the back and said, "Comrade." Another man came up the road with a searchlight and searched me. Then they took me down the road and another man came out. They were all Partisans.

"They took me into the town of S.V. Benadik (48-20N - 18-35E) and into a building with a large wooden door. There was a drug store next door. They rang the bell and talked to a woman a few minutes, then later took me into a big room in a building two doors away. There were a lot of men sleeping on straw, in their clothes. They got me something to eat and drink and also mentioned there was an American pilot next door. In the morning I saw the pilot and it was Lt. Tennyson who was co-piloting the ship.

"We were taken to another town, Zarnovica (48-30N - 18-45E). This was another headquarters and met a Chaplain, Rev. Alexander Lickman, from Bratislavia. We stayed there the rest of the day and slept in the Catholic priest's house at night. They said they saw some of the other fellows and one had a broken arm.

"Left there Saturday morning by auto to Banska Bystricia, which is the capital, and they said there were some more American pilots there. They gave us a dinner and said some American planes were coming. They took us to the airmen but the plane did not arrive. Coming back we met the other Americans. The field was bombed slightly at 2:00 p.m. Saturday. Stayed there and left, the 17th of September."

ATHENS, GREECE - MISSION NO. 275 - SEPTEMBER 15, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 27 aircraft dropped 38.61 tons of 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on the Kalamaki Airdrome at Athens. Excellent coverage was reported by returning crews. No enemy opposition was encountered. One A/C was an early return.

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 276 - SEPTEMBER 17, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 26 aircraft dropped 84 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the Rakos Marshalling Yards. The target area was well covered. Two A/C were early returns. Flak was heavy, slight to moderate, inaccurate. No losses, no injuries.

SUBOTICA, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 277 - SEPTEMBER 18, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 27 aircraft dropped 81 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Subotica. The target was well covered with several fires seen. A few bombs were over. Flak was heavy, slight, and inaccurate. No injuries, no losses.

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 278 - SEPTEMBER 20, 1944

Twenty-eight aircraft dropped 84 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the South Railroad Bridge in Budapest. The target was well covered with possible direct hits reported. Flak was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate. No injuries, no losses.

DEBRECZEN, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 279 - SEPTEMBER 21, 1944

Major W. Randall Bedgood, 429th Squadron, led 28 aircraft on take-off and 25 aircraft dropped 73.5 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards. Results could not be determined due to heavy smoke over the target caused by the bombs of another Group. The target was believed to be well covered. Flak was heavy, intense and accurate, resulting in extensive damage to A/C #42-38078, "SWEET PEA." In all, 22 of the 25 aircraft were damaged.

In A/C #078, S/Sgt. Elmer H. Buss, Waist Gunner, and S/Sgt. James E. Totty, Tail Gunner, were killed; S/Sgt. John F. Maguire, Waist Gunner, was seriously wounded, and S/Sgt. Anthony Ferrara, Radio Operator, was lightly wounded. Other crew members were 2nd Lt. Guy Miller, Pilot; 2nd Lt. Thomas Rybovich, Co-pilot; 1st Lt. Theodore Davich, Navigator; S/Sgt. Robert R. Mullen, Toggleliel; T/Sgt. Gerald E. McGuire, Flight Engineer, and Cpl. William F. Steuck, Ball Turret.

Other aircrew wounded were 2nd Lt. E. W. Henderson, 49th Squadron; S/Sgt. Levia, 49th Squadron; and 1st Lt. J. F. McCullough, 429th Squadron.

One aircraft dropped its bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Subotica, Yugoslavia. Two aircraft were early returns.

T/Sgt. Gerald E. McGuire, Flight Engineer, A/C #078. March 7, 1991: "On the morning of September 21, 1944, I was briefed for a mission to Debreczen, to bomb Marshalling Yards.

"Our ten-man crew, flying "SWEET PEA," #078, was made up of a nucleus of members of other crews. Only pilot Guy Miller and myself were from my original crew that came over from Stateside. Miller was flying his first mission as First Pilot, having been a co-pilot up to this mission. If I remember correctly, two of our gunners, I can't remember which, were flying their first mission.

"Despite poor weather conditions, everything went normal en route to the target area. After arriving at the target I.P. and on the final bomb run, with the bomb bay doors open, we suffered what appeared to be a direct hit of flak in the waist section, just aft of the radio room. Those of us forward of the bomb bay felt a very heavy concussion that lifted the aircraft from the normal position of flight but we had no realization of the severe damage it had done.

"After the concussion, I came out of my upper turret position and observed both pilots struggling for control of the aircraft with both control columns forward and the aircraft mashing nose high. My first reaction was to attach my chest parachute to my harness and climb down to jettison the front door hatch as it appeared at that moment we may have to bail out. About that time, one of the pilots tapped me on the shoulder and indicated they had maintained some control. During this time we had dropped

away from the Group and lost much altitude, which was necessary because of severe damage to the oxygen system.

“The communication system was destroyed so we had no contact with the rear of the aircraft to inform us of the damage sustained. So as soon as it appeared the aircraft was somewhat controllable, I made my way through the bomb bay, into the radio room, and it was hard to believe the damage we had suffered in the waist area and we were still flying. The left waist gunner, S/Sgt. Elmer Buss, had been fatally wounded. The other waist gunner, S/Sgt. John Maguire, was seriously wounded; radio operator, S/Sgt. Anthony Ferrara, was also wounded. The ball turret gunner, Cpl. William Steuck, was in a somewhat state of shock after cranking his ball turret to a position so he could remove himself from it.

“It did not appear to me that the extreme tail section had suffered much flak damage but as we did not have communication with the tail gunner, I went to his position to check on him and it was a shock to find him semi-conscious with very massive stomach wounds. Later, S/Sgt. Mullen and I carried the tail gunner to the radio room, having some difficulty getting him around the tail wheel assembly as he was a fairly big fellow. Despite all aid and efforts, S/Sgt. James R. Totty, died about an hour before we reached Base.

“After further assessing the damage and doing what I could do to comfort those in the rear of the aircraft, I went forward and reported the condition to the pilots, describing the extensive damage and the injuries to the crew. I don’t think the pilots realized how much damage was suffered until we landed and were able to see it first hand, as it was almost indescribable. I did not believe the aircraft would stay intact to get back to our Base.

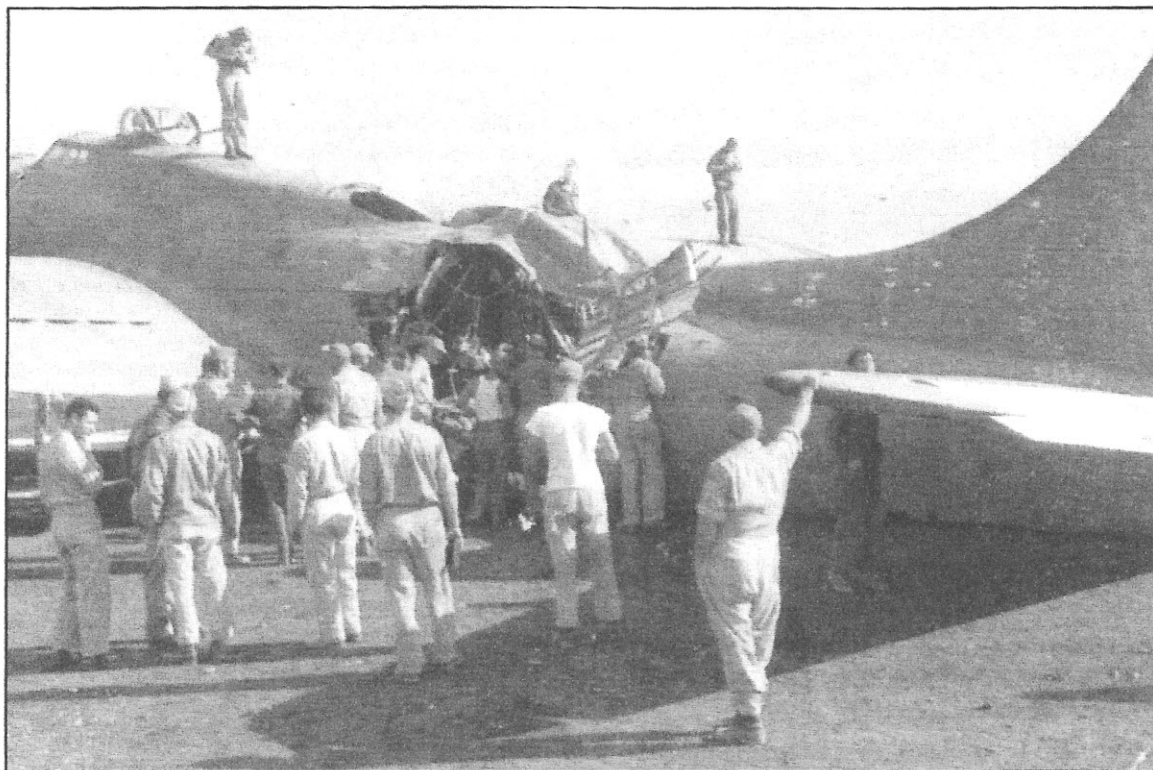
“The bombs had not been dropped before we were hit but a few of the bombs had been released by the concussion. S/Sgt. Mullen released the remaining bombs with a screwdriver and then assisted me with moving the tail gunner to the radio room. He remained in that area to aid the wounded.

“In the meantime the pilots, because of the control system being severely damaged, had difficulty controlling the aircraft with the engines only and other limited controls. Due to structural damage, the speed of the aircraft was kept to a minimum and we were flying alone. Although the weather was somewhat adverse, the navigator, 1st Lt. Davich, after several hours in the air, guided us to the coast of Italy and to our Base. During the flight down the coast of Italy, I was in the rear of the aircraft throwing out loose debris, and I noticed a P-38 fly up along side of us and take a good look at our aircraft, and then peeled off and left. What is interesting about this is, on a later night mission, I was on a crew that made a belly landing in a pasture next to a fighter field along the coast of Italy. During breakfast at this field, in the Officers Club, I talked to this P-38 pilot that had flown beside us and he expressed how amazed he was to see “SWEET PEA” flying with such damage.

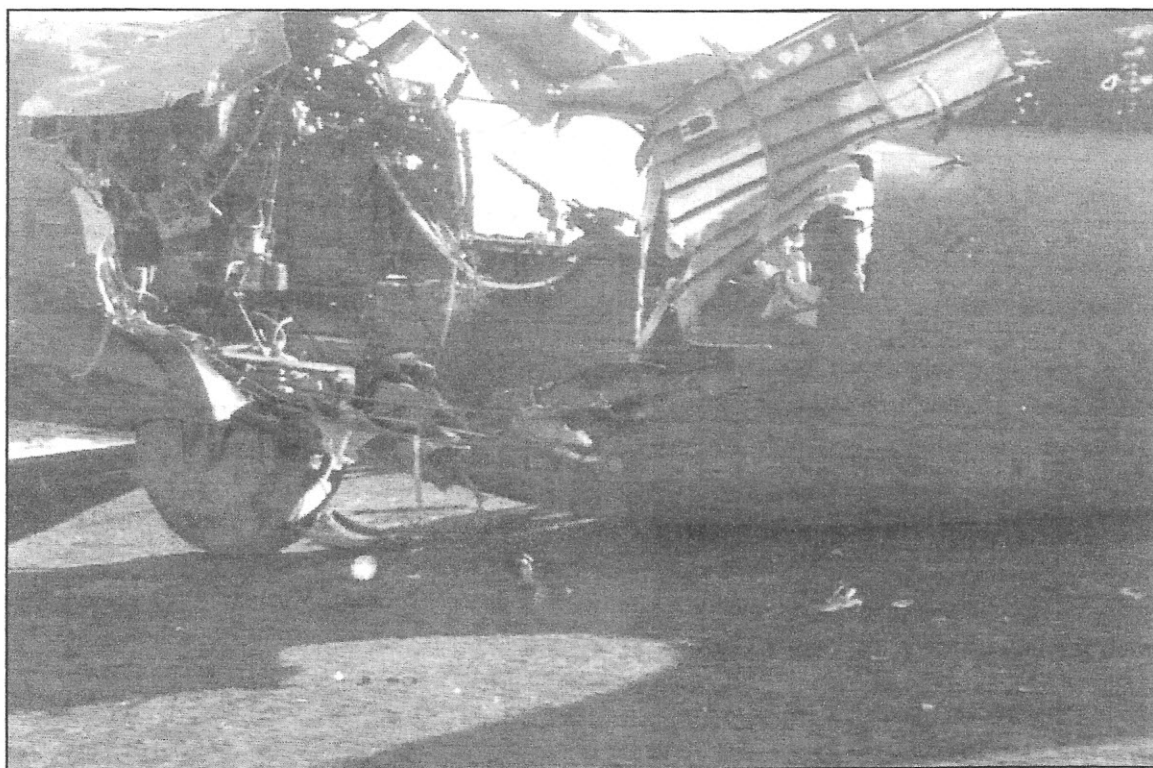
“Arriving at our Base, Lt. Miller made a long, low straight-in approach and landed on a mud-covered unfinished airstrip, landing gear down, tail wheel up. Miraculously the landing was as good as could be expected and the tail section, although twisted out of shape, held together.

“Even though it appeared this may be our last flight, each member of the crew played their own part and would have their own stories to tell of their actions.

“Tribute should be given to the sturdiness of the B-17 and certainly to the skills of the pilots, 2nd Lt. Miller and 2nd Lt. Rybovich. Lt. Miller was recommended for the Congressional Medal of Honor and subsequently was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.”



#078 - "SWEET PEA"



S/Sgt. Robert R. Mullen, Toggler on A/C #087. August 27, 1991: "Because our regular pilot, Lt. George Eilers, had been interned in Switzerland, the crew ended up filling places with other crews. Most of the time I flew as left waist gunner, the armorer gunner position, for which I had been trained. I wasn't getting many missions so when volunteers were asked to fly the bombardier position, I was asked to become what I remember as being called a "Toggler." I wanted to fly the required missions so I could go home. I don't remember how many missions I flew in this way, perhaps five or so. It was quite a different sensation, being in the nose, seeing the planes headed for a forest of flak!

"On the Debreczen mission, I think we were hit early in the bomb run. I think I dropped the bombs, probably on the instructions of Lt. Guy Miller, the pilot, or he might have done it himself.

"On one mission I went to the bomb bay, freeing the bombs that were hung up. I don't remember if it was this mission.

"On the Debreczen mission, the left waist gunner was killed instantly. Amazing to me, the right waist gunner seemed to have light injuries. He must have been no more than 10 to 20 feet from the exploding 20mm shell. He had a flak jacket on and I think he had sort of curled up in a ball. I think that probably saved him. I believe I opened three First Aid Kits looking for morphine. Apparently two had been opened - no morphine. So I divided one injection between the two. The tail gunner had a severe abdominal wound and I had little hope for him. He must have bled a lot and I guess he went into a coma soon. I think he could have survived only if he had very good medical attention within an hour of his wound.

"Lt. Miller reduced speed, but going to a lower altitude because our oxygen system was out. The controls were out or badly damaged. Fortunately he was able to maintain control with the throttles.

"Later, my parents seeing photos of the plane, assumed since only six crewmen were shown, the other four were killed. Miller landed off the runway. The spar broke when the plane hit a drainage area, resulting in further damage."

S/Sgt. Arthur L. "Bud" Hunt, 20th Squadron. June 6, 1992: "My regular crew were John Malik, P; William Campbell, CP; Harold Skinner, N; John Young, B; Gene Knitter, Engineer; Charles Kelly, Radio; Edward Levin, Ball; Red Gronsky, Waist; Jack Bradley, Waist (KIA); and me, I flew Tail.

"I flew 35 sorties (51 missions). As you know we had to get at least 35 sorties and some long, tough missions were double credit, so my log shows 51 missions. I completed a total of 292.30 combat flying hours. My first mission was to Sete, France, a total of eight hours.

"I went to Ploesti twice and another time we had to abort after a three-hour flight. Vienna was tough. I went there five times. I'll never forget Blechhammer, five trips and my last one gave me 51, October 13, 1944. I went to France three times, and another trip after four and one-half hours was another abort - no credit. There were several times into Germany that were very tough; Munich and Odertal. In all my combat time we had to abort seven times and one was a seven hour, ten minutes mission to Linz, Austria.

"I remember one mission, Debreczen, Hungary, September 21st. Our plane was number seven of the last 2nd Bomb Group Squadron over the target. Being the tail gunner, I was the last American to see where we had been. We were briefed for 44 guns on the ground, however, it felt more like 444! We were in low at 18,000 feet, expecting something like a milk run. I had just opened a can of bacon and cheese, my favorite K-ration. The first burst of flak was the end of the K-ration (I never did find it). At about two-thirds of the bomb run, I saw a 50 cal. machine gun fly past, followed by a stream of clothing bags. When we cleared the anti-aircraft, I called the navigator, Harold Skinner, to mark the position of where we lost the airplane. Having seen the hole in the waist of the plane I was sure the plane would never make it back to Italy. This ship was #078, 'SWEET PEA,' from the 429th Squadron. Later it was highly photographed and captioned as having flown back to England. I guess that all the

war correspondents didn't know there was a U.S. Air Force flying missions out of Italy. If I recall correctly, there were casualties to everyone from the radio room to the tail.

"My single "Romantic mission" was to pick up POWs at Bucharest on August 31, 1944. At the time of the briefing it was not known who held the short grass landing field that was our destination. My flight log lists the destination as 'SECRET.' Tail gunners were ordered to stay in their positions with guns ready to fire. On the way to Bucharest we joked about the D.F.C. awards and possibly something from the British until our flight engineer, Gene Knitter, injected, 'I can see the headlines now. How brave these crewmen were who paid the supreme sacrifice in an attempt to save their comrades.' Bye, Bye, romance!

"My standard practice was to carry a full package of Lucky Strikes and a reserve of two packs, together with matches, all carefully tied into G.I. condoms (smoke while you float). Needless to say, all the cigarettes were passed around one time and were ALL GONE! We didn't get the D.F.C. but getting the job done and experiencing the happiness of the fellows, who we brought home, was a wonderful reward that lingers with me even today."

MUNICH, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 280 - SEPTEMBER 22, 1944

The assigned target was the Munich Allach BMW Plant. Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 26 aircraft dropped 78 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Industrial Center of Munich. The primary target was cloud covered on the bomb run over the target so the alternate was bombed, visually. Results were not known. Flak was intense, heavy, and accurate resulting in light injury to 1st Lt. Grady and 2nd Lt. Mathews, both from the 20th Squadron. Twenty-two of the 26 aircraft sustained damage.

One aircraft dropped its bombs on a Railroad Bridge at 45-33N - 12-36E with unknown results. There was one early return. All planes returned safely.

BRUX, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 281 - SEPTEMBER 23, 1944

Major Lawrence Jordan, 96th Squadron Commanding Officer, led 27 aircraft and dropped 81 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Synthetic Oil Refinery at Brux. The target was cloud covered and bombing was by PFF. Results were not known. Flak was heavy, intense, and inaccurate. No injuries, no losses.

Operations from September 24th through the 30th were canceled because of inclement weather over the Base and targets over the Continent.