

# 14

## ***Operations: October, 1944***

### **M**UNICH, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 282 - OCTOBER 4, 1944

"A" Force, under the leadership of Captain E. L. Blanton, comprised of 24 aircraft, took off and 23 aircraft dropped 46 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the Munich West Marshalling Yards. Bombing was by PFF with hits believed in the Yards. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate resulting in the loss of B-17 #44-8043, piloted by 1st Lt. Robert B. Donovan, 429th Squadron. Nineteen other aircraft suffered flak damage.

There were no enemy fighter attacks although one report stated that six E/A, possibly Jets, were seen below the formation. S/Sgt. R. C. Kuhrt, RW, 429th Squadron, was slightly injured by flak and S/Sgt. R. J. Capper, Lower Turret, 49th Squadron, suffered from frost bite.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-8043 - 429TH SQUADRON**

|         |                                    |       |
|---------|------------------------------------|-------|
| 1st Lt. | Robert B. Donovan, 0-819770, P.    | (KIA) |
| 1st Lt. | Juan J. Dyer, 0-679060, CP.        | (KIA) |
| 1st Lt. | William M. Daly, 0-713005, N.      | (POW) |
| 1st Lt. | Roy R. Rule, 0-713228, RN.         | (KIA) |
| 1st Lt. | Henry (NMI) Safer, 0-683155, B.    | (POW) |
| T/Sgt.  | Richard O. Pollari, 35318007, U/T. | (KIA) |
| S/Sgt.  | Sterling A. Putzel, 11066016, L/T. | (KIA) |
| S/Sgt.  | Alfonso S. Beltri, 38438867, L/W.  | (KIA) |
| S/Sgt.  | Gerald V. Hamilton, 39129778, T/G. | (KIA) |
| Sgt.    | Robert R. Hindert, 16075860, R/O.  | (POW) |

Statement of Lt. Henry Safer, after liberation: "We were at 30,000 feet when we were hit by flak. We were leading the No. 3 Squadron. I was able to bail out and the radio operator and navigator bailed out also. The plane crashed in the outskirts of Munich. The pilot, co-pilot, radar navigator, upper turret gunner, left waist gunner, and tail gunner were still in the plane when it crashed. I last saw the radio operator in prison camp, and navigator William M. Daly in the United states.

"Sgt. Hindert bailed out from the bomb bay into the city of Munich. During the jump, a shoulder was torn from the socket. I saw him in a hospital where he went for x-rays and then in prison camp in February, 1945.

"Sgt. Hindert told me that while he was in the bomb bay trying to leave the plane, he saw Sgt. Pollari struggling to fix his harness. The last conversation with Lt. Rule was when he told me that he could not pick up the target in his scope. Sgt. Hindert told me that Lt. Rule was in the bomb bay ready to jump and could not understand why because he was directly back of him.



Lt. Robert Donovan - KIA 10-4-44  
(Courtesy - Patricia Donovan Moran)

"The last conversation I had with Lt. Donovan was to give him the time at 'bombs away.' Information that I received from Sgt. Hindert on October 5, 1944 was to the effect that Lt. Donovan was not injured but could not save himself because of the spin. I have no knowledge of the others."

1st Lt. William M. Daly, Navigator. January 10, 1995: "MY LAST MISSION TO MUNICH." "Just after noon of 4 October 1944, a few minutes short of bombs away, when a violent explosion crippled the left wing and engines of '043,' our B-17, I knew almost immediately that the time had inescapably come to jump. Although the 429th Squadron had lost its lead plane, the deputy lead, according to subsequent intelligence reports, took over and helped the Group to direct its bombs effectively down into the west Marshalling Yards in Munich. The overpowering force of the explosion in the left wing area of '043' instantaneously threw her into a violent flat spin. Those who have piloted even a small plane will recall that a spin, once established, sets up intense centrifugal force which virtually freezes in place the pilot and anyone else in the plane until it comes out of the spin. That day, the

centrifugal force began to intensify rapidly. Within five to ten seconds, I managed, though with great difficulty, to reach and open the nearby escape hatch and jump.

"Only three of us were lucky that day: Bob Hindert, the radio man; Henry Safer, the bombardier, and I, the navigator. Seven others, tragically, were not. If the explosion had been less destructive and allowed more time, all ten of us could well have parachuted out and survived. In retrospect, it is remarkable that any of us did.

"It seems to me now, looking back, that there were several reasons why we three made it out of '043.' They add up to a complex amalgam. If any of them had been absent, we would have probably gone down with the plane too. The most obvious reason was the luck of being close to an escape opening. Bob near the open bomb bay, Henry and I near the escape hatch in the nose, a feature of the B-17. Other reasons derived in part from our individual personalities and, for Henry and me, they owed a lot to the kind of instinctive communication, spoken and unspoken, that had grown between the two of us over the months we had been together. The usual pattern in Air Force life, was that certain crew

members seemed to share quarters, pilots with co-pilots, navigators and bombardiers. Within a whole crew, in good part due to Air Force conditioning, a quasi-familial bonding tended to develop. It was reflected when talking to the rest of the world in the use of 'my engineer,' 'my pilot,' 'my bombardier,' and so on, not in any sense possession or superiority to other members, but nonetheless as 'my brother' is used within families. To explain beyond a bare-bones outline how and why we happened to survive will take more words than might at first seem necessary to a reader, but the long narrative that results will provide a more complete and perhaps a more interesting story.

"To the best of my recollections, the likelihood of becoming a prisoner of war rarely crossed my mind during the many months of flight training, from early pilot training through gunnery and navigation schools and phase training. Beyond providing some initial instructions and some subsequent follow-ups in how to open a parachute, unpack and repack it, the Air Force gave us no real-life training in the matter. Reportedly it didn't want to risk the investment of money and time in us by exposing us to inevitable injuries that practice jumps would involve, a rational that also preferred that we play volleyball rather than football for exercise or pleasure, the former perhaps also conceived as circulating quicker, more cooperative group interaction.

"The real-life likelihood of having to jump did not come into clear focus for me, and I suspect for many others, until we had arrived at the point of embarkation in Norfolk, Virginia, where, before boarding a victory ship for Oran, we received a few lectures about what lay ahead of us crossing the Atlantic in convoy and later in combat duty with the Fifteenth Air Force out of Southern Italy. I remember being surprised that Germany held a large number of American prisoners and the Air Force knew quite a bit about the German prison system, including details about interrogation procedures. Instructions at this time and subsequently ingrained in our minds the obligation if we would be shot down to provide German interrogators with nothing but name, rank, and serial number as well as the expectation that we make every effort to escape, the purpose being to put stress on the German system from within and thus use up enemy manpower.



Lt. Donovan - Third from left - Others unknown  
(Courtesy - Patricia Donovan Moran)

"Soon after arriving at the 2nd Bombardment base at Amendola, some miles northeast of Foggia, we received a standard sequence of orientation conferences including more or less repetition of what we had been told at Norfolk. Occasionally, thereafter, a briefing might add some details. I was surprised, and a little bit skeptical in fact, when an intelligence officer warned us if we were shot down over Yugoslavia to avoid the Chetnicks and seek out the Partisans. Reports sifting in occasionally showed that things might be tough either way, and that at least some Chetnick units were friendly and helpful to Americans. The prospects in either situation were unpleasant, and even more so should you parachute further north in sight of a bloodthirsty Hungarian or German farmer with a pitchfork, a situation mentioned as not uncommon in some reports filtering back to Amendola. Yet, if we squirmed when we heard them, I don't recall myself or my friends dwelling on them.

"My early ideas about death in the sky had been simplistic, conditioned as they were by radio and film reports in 1940 of the heroic RAF fighters who won the Battle of Britain. But during the summer of 1940 we developed more realistic visual and emotional knowledge of what combat in the air involved for bomber crews. One or another somber image of destruction on occasion might flash into my imagination, whether in the air during a barrage of flak or back in our peaceful tent as I recalled the day's events on my cot before going to sleep. Near or over the target, images usually were of being exploded into smithereens as happened to many crews, or of being wounded again by a 20 millimeter shell from a German fighter as I had been on my first mission; the recollection thereafter resonated in my neuromuscular system whenever I saw shells exploding. At another time the image might be ditching in a damaged plane on the way home and drowning in the Adriatic, lost to human sight or at best having your bones wash up on some remote shore to bleach away in the Mediterranean sun.

"These bleak images or their like were not omnipresent to us, but with me at least they tended to overshadow the prospect of becoming a POW, even, surprisingly, after talking and empathizing with two plane loads of POWs whom we were flying out of Bucharest back to Italy in the late summer. For one thing, it finally dawned gradually on many of us that the chances of surviving 50 missions weren't all that good. The moment of discovery came for me one August afternoon when I stopped by at the Squadron bulletin board to read some notices. One of them, which reviewed the much feared Ploesti missions, reassured the reader casualties in them were not so bad as generally assumed, running only at about two and one-half per mission as I recall. The notice pointed out that this was a lower rate than for some other less feared targets. I remember being surprised but not reassured and after doing some mental arithmetic standing there with the hot Italian sun soaking into my already sweating back, thinking to myself that 50 missions would be a hard goal post for me to pass. Luckily, I didn't know at the time what historians of the air war now know, namely that the overall casualty rate in the Fifteenth Air Force, which was at about 35 percent ran higher than that of the Eighth Air Force, whose doings and those of the RAF the press tended as the whole story of the air war in Europe.

"Somehow the scares and tragedies that collected in our lives during the long summer of 1944 hadn't until then seemed to quite add up to what statistics suggested. In the air there were bad days when planes nearby or at a distance lost engines, fell out of formation, or exploded into a ball of smoke and fragments, metal and human, and you flinched as you flew through the debris in horror. But there were some easy missions. Life could be a lot of fun on the ground on the days we did not fly combat. By early July, however, two of my best friends on our crew, Ken Durtschi, our co-pilot, and Howard Kidney, our belly gunner, had not returned from missions. We assumed that both of them were dead, although I now know that Ken survived and, indeed, in our old age we enjoy correspondence and phone calls at the transcontinental distance separating Massachusetts from Idaho. Other friends and acquaintances were not returning from missions. One day Safer and I came back to the base from a leave to discover that one of our Squadrons had been virtually wiped out that day. The pattern was



random and intermittent but the dangers sank in more and more, even if you yourself escaped a direct shock for a long time and half assumed, at least in the early weeks, that you were leading a charmed life.

"It is no surprise, as I look back now, to understand in these circumstances Henry and I, close, almost brotherly friends though we had become, occasionally got on each other's nerves. Even a happy marriage goes through these times, and two men forced to live so closely together even without such trying conditions surrounding them could not have been jolly or easy to live with all the time. What surprises me now that such irritants as there were came so seldom in our tent and were so brief and superficial.

"I was a very deliberate navigator, or to use Henry's preferred adjective, slow. But he was happy enough to discover early that the results tended to be accurate fixes and ETA's which benefited his approaches to the target and implied safe returns to base for us all. By September, however, I could tell that my pace was getting him down as most of us began to take seriously the possibility of having to parachute in a crisis. 'If I have to bail out Bill,' he would say, 'I want you to move. If you don't, I'll kick you right out of my way and walk over you to get out that escape hatch.' He repeated such semi-humorous, but as they would turn out salvific, remarks often enough that some of our friends would ask me, 'What's eating Safer these days?' Although I was more amused than hurt, I recognized that I needed the needling and determined that if the time came, I would move as quickly as I could to get out the escape hatch first and not obstruct him. The idea became ingrained as I repeated his words to myself from time to time. But in imagining such a turn of events, we forgot that accidents aren't usually programmed and we both assumed, I think, that in a crises there would be an order from the pilot over the intercom and some time to think and act sequentially. Yielding to repeated advice during morning briefings, those of us who wore chest pack chutes began to fasten them to our harness more regularly in threatening situations, despite their cumbersome interference with our work at the navigator's table, the bombsight, or other spots requiring precise use of arms and hands.

"At our early morning briefing on 4 October, we received the bleak news that the day's project was to be the Munich Rail Yards. We'd been there before, many of us more than once, and knew that it would be a toughie. By now the guns were more numerous and better than ever. Down at the flight line, just before or after helping push the props through, I heard a mechanic's voice over my shoulder saying something like, 'Lt. Daly, you'll be in luck today in the nose of the lead plane in the high squadron. It is the safest place in the whole Group.' I absentmindedly thanked him but remember experiencing little interior solace. The Group had been assigned an altitude of 29,000 feet, which meant that the high squadron would be at an even greater altitude. After a long rainy spell, the weather had recently cleared, presumably as a result of a cold front passing through southern Germany. After returning to the States, Henry reported to an intelligence officer that our altitude had been 30,000 feet on the bomb run, and my recollection has it even higher. I remember being astounded at the ground speed I roughly calculated at nearly 400 miles per hour as we flew by the familiar two large lakes some 20 to 40 miles south of Munich. On the verge of entering the bomb run, I marveled as I recorded entries in my log that our altitude and ground speed were the highest I had ever known, so much so that I made a mental note to check that astounding but possibly inaccurately calculated ground speed as soon as possible after leaving the target and flak area. That deliberate (slow if you prefer) navigator's good intention was almost immediately blotted out forever. A few minutes before 'bombs away,' with no warning from tracking flak bursts nearby, the theoretically safest plane in our group of 28 was hit.

"On the ground later we heard from Germans that '043s' left wing had been shot off and that she had crashed in the English Garden in Munich. Perhaps that is how the plane's condition appeared to those who watched it fall or crash. At least for what took place at the moment that we were hit by the flak burst, the damage to the wing was not total. In the few seconds that I had a chance to see the wing, it was damaged but not destroyed. That is the condition described in the intelligence material that was

put together immediately after the completion of the mission. Deriving as it does from reports made by various crew members in other ships who saw what happened, it describes the damage to '043' alternately as a 'hit on the left wing panel,' or a 'hit on the left wing; the wing tip and the aileron were blown off.' The first of those two witnesses added that 'the ship started to go into a spin; then seemed to fall on its back and slipped out of sight.' The second witness recalled that '043' stood up on the left wing and almost turned over, then fell off into a slow vertical spin.' A third witness described '043' as 'going down in the target area in a tight flat spin. One chute was observed, possibly from the waist.'

"All of this is consistent with my recollections. The smooth, controlled order of the bombing run of the best kind of pilots and best kind of bombardiers, in this case Bob Donovan and Henry Safer, characteristically produced between them, was shattered by a loud explosion. A huge jolt hurled me from my work at the navigator's table, as it went in a giant twist over and downward. The plane took on the feel of a roller coaster entering into a violent paroxysm. The engines raged in an ascending roar more overpowering than any sound I ever heard in the air. I remember thinking several thoughts virtually fused together into one by a strong burst of amazingly clear concentration lasting no more than two or three seconds. The intensity and rapidity were like nothing I had ever experienced before or since.

"At the distance of 50 years, I can still distinguish the main element of this amalgam. They had emerged out of several different experiences which had internalized, some of them consciously, others not, over many months as a developing airman. Instantaneously in those few seconds, they fused in one intuitive conclusion: 'This is it, move now!' Since without this convergence of ideas, Henry and I might not have escaped the intensifying maelstrom, it may clarify what happened if I pause to reexamine the components of what I have called an amalgam.

"The foremost component of this fusion was rooted in my experience as a student pilot who had completed primary training. It had allowed me over the past several months of flying as a navigator with many different pilots to build up an intuitive 'feel' of their individual flying styles, almost as if their personality and way with a plane were absorbed into my nerves and muscular reactions. A few pilots came across as cowboys of the air, most of them, thankfully, fairly trustworthy on balance. Others were muscularly competent and dependable, football tackles you might say, but lacking in spontaneous, appropriate agility in the face of the unexpected. And other analogies come to mind. One of the two best pilots I ever knew was George Redden, the first pilot of our original crew. Henry and I had flown many hours, stateside and in combat, with him. The planes he flew transmitted the feel of an utterly reliable pilot, skilled, resourceful, expert. We liked to fly with him because we trusted him implicitly. Indeed members of some other crews used to envy our good fortune in having him as our pilot. In the previous few weeks he had not flown as such with us because he was in the process of transferring to another Squadron to become its commanding officer. He was not with us in '043' on 4 October.

"The other outstanding pilot whom both Henry and I knew, Bob Donovan, was flying with us that day. That was far more reassuring to me than our location up front in the high squadron. He had come overseas as a 19-year old co-pilot and had recently turned 20. The senior Squadron and Group officers had spotted him as a comer and groomed him for qualification as a pilot. In mid-summer, George had flown with him on his qualification training mission. George, at 27, could run out of patience with some of the young guys and occasionally tell me, then 23, about the unsteady reactions in the air of one or another of them that had raised the hairs on the back of his neck, but he admired Bob unreservedly, both as a person and as an outstanding flier. He remarked more than once to me what an amazingly fine pilot 'that young Donovan' was. A few weeks after our arrival in Italy, Henry, then 25, had adopted Bob as a close friend and he soon became a sort of big brother to him. Bob was a jolly, fun-lover whom everyone liked and enjoyed teasing, but he ran deep when he was away from a crowd. I had

flown with him several times, both in his days as a co-pilot and as a pilot, and there was no doubt in my mind that he was the very best pilot I knew.

"Three decades later, in a letter of reminiscence about him that his mother had asked me to write, I described his skills to her as I recalled them. As a background I mentioned my first meeting with Bob. I had just returned to my tent from three weeks in the hospital after the Me-109 shell episode and was less than enthusiastic about meeting this allegedly great new friend of his. Henry insisted, went out, and within a few minutes returned with Bob and three or four 'neighbors' to welcome me back home. I quote from the 1978 letter to Mrs. Donovan with a few revisions."

"All of the physical energy and laughter gave me at first the impression of boyishness, and he seemed as I watched him out of the corner of my eye to have an innocence that was rare among us. I don't mean that he was naive or that he didn't know his way around, but rather that he had completely without even a small measure of the ability to hurt others that most humans have. Even the first day, I already sensed that underneath the boyish surface there was something very serious and mature. He didn't seem to let on to most people that it was there. Henry was one of the few with whom he talked seriously when they were by themselves. Gradually Bob and I, too, became this kind of friend.

"Bob was unique. When he throttled up the engines, the plane took on a swift, eager quality. It moved down the runway like a hunting dog that knew where it wanted to go and never strayed an inch from the track. When he gathered speed to take off, it was all done with an enthusiastic precision and control that seemed the product of a swift, sure mathematical formula that couldn't go wrong.

"Once the plane was in the air there was nothing but sure response and mercurial adjustment in every turn or maneuver that he did. It was as if he had become one with the plane itself and given it a soul that made it fly like an arrow, effortlessly and flawlessly, through the air. When something had to be done fast, you could feel his sure, quick, spontaneously sensitive push and pull on the rudders as he played them into position just right. As I flew with him, I intuitively absorbed all this from the plane and felt it inside of me as if for the time being it had become part of me and I a part of it. We conferred and cooperated as pilot and navigator in a trusting, spontaneous give-and-take that I experienced with no other pilot. And that overpowering vitality and that utter, distinctive control were never matched in any other pilot I knew. One way or another, we all felt the same way about him."

"As I was thrown across to the other side of the nose, I assumed for a split second that Bob would as always bring the plane around, but then I realized that not only had he completely lost control of it but that the controls themselves were gone for good. The feel of him was suddenly not there outside or inside of me as the plane went wild, irretrievably beyond the ability to do anything. Even if the intercom had not gone too, the roar of the engines as they madly speeded up made conversation unthinkable. Henry's warnings to me flashed into my mind. I gave him an intense 'this is it' look. He looked back, his eyes concentrated and wide-eyed, as for another split second we seemed to be staring intensely at each other. I gestured with my head toward the escape hatch and wrestled my way against the escalating centrifugal force across the bottom of the lurching nose to it, pulled the release handle and rammed myself out into the middle of nowhere. All this had taken no more than ten seconds, if that. Somehow I missed being hit by the plane, which as I fell away from it, I could see tumbling wildly for a few moments. While I was wondering if it would crash into me I abruptly entered absolute silence as it vanished from sight and earshot.

"Thanks to Henry's prior coaching, I had been swifter than he to react. Neither of us witnessed the other's jump. He hadn't flown as a pilot and therefore not internalized the same interpretations and reactions of the movements of the plane as I. He later told me he couldn't remember that look I gave him, nor did he recall my gesture pointing toward the escape hatch. Apparently he thought there was a margin of time left and was amazed to see me gone: 'First I saw you and then I didn't.' This shock immediately decided him to make for the escape hatch he had so often feared I might block. His



parachute took hold unevenly with a jerk but did not disable him. Separately and totally out of sight of each other, we floated down some 30,000 feet and landed far apart in separate sections of Munich. This mission was the first that I had flown with any of the enlisted men and apart from having carried on a brief conversation with them before entering the plane that morning I did not know any of them. I was to discover when Henry and I were reunited the next day, that Hindert had managed to jump successfully. Henry told me that when the police brought them together and were marching them along some streets of the city to a secure place, enraged citizens had badgered them. They were not kept together, however, because Hindert's shoulder had been dislocated and he was placed in a Munich hospital where he spent a few months recovering before entering the Luftwaffe prison system. His account of what happened to him from the time our wing was hit onward, especially his hospital experiences, is a fascinating one which deserves to be put in print.

"To return to what was happening to me. A few seconds after losing sight of '043,' I began, as we had been taught, to count to ten before pulling the ripcord on the chute, the purpose being to allow descent to an altitude with enough oxygen to sustain consciousness. When I pulled the ripcord nothing happened. I remember thinking to myself, 'This is it,' and that the impact on landing would be so sudden and forceful that I wouldn't know what happened to me. Within a few seconds a thin strip of white nylon peeking out from my chute caught my eye and I realized that I had jumped with my arms pulled tightly across the flaps so that it wouldn't open out. I had not in the previous months consciously updated the axiomatic ten seconds to something more than that to allow for the much higher altitudes I had been flying at most of the time. I suddenly realized the mistake and gave myself more seconds (I can't recall how many) of free fall to compensate, then released my grip. The chute ballooned open with a sharp yank in my harness and I was afloat in a sea of intense silence.

"When the chute took hold, or perhaps even during the free fall, I said a few rapid, intense prayers. I had seen no chutes and I was afraid that no one except me had escaped the plane. Would it recover, should I have stayed in it, I wondered as I began to get muddleheaded from lack of oxygen? But it was hard to imagine that plane, having gone wild, ever recovering. I soon began to plan how to handle the next crises. It was a blue-skied, clear day and I was still several thousand feet above the tiny features of the area south of Munich. I could see to the south the two elongated lakes against which a few minutes earlier I had measured my ground speed, and the territory far beyond them father south. I began to calculate how to conceal myself until night and make my way overland in the dark down to the area of the lakes, then if possible find a way to reach Switzerland. The irrationality of conceiving this fantasy, while my chute and I were slowly descending minute by long minute in full view of the hundreds of suburban German and security forces below, indicates that I was still at sufficient altitude to be short of oxygen. I am a bit vague about my thoughts for a while after making this plan, but lower altitude, and then an increasingly clearer view of what lay below, snapped me into realization that I would be captured upon landing or immediately thereafter.

"As the air warmed and the ground began moving up toward me with ever increasing speed and visual detail, I could see that I would land in what looked like a very well-to-do suburb with many large houses, most of them with sharply pointed, gabled tile roofs. They were surrounded by lawns and large trees. From a short distance to the north, several uniformed men with weapons were beginning to converge toward the spot that I would likely land. Miraculously, I just missed hitting in succession a tiled roof point and a big tree limb, each of them by a few feet. The chute caught on another high branch of the tree so that its descent was gently stopped and I was left swinging up and down, suspended a few feet above the ground. For no good reason except to allow the security men to find my escape kit with its condensed food and map, as I foolishly thought I could, I decided to drop it. A large crowd was gathering as the guards moved in, but before either could reach me, I released myself free from my chute harness and landed standing up on the ground. The crowd was angry. A rope one of them carried



suggested serious trouble, but the security guards got to me first. Suspecting that I was carrying a weapon they ordered me to drop it. Instead I raised my arms above my head. When they were sure I was not dangerous, they approached, two of them grabbed my arms, and they hurried me toward two small police cars that had pulled up on a nearby lane.

"The angry crowd tried to get me away from the police and security officers, who managed to elude them and push me toward one of the cars and into the rear seat. One of them slammed the door shut and one of them jumped into the front seat beside the driver only to discover that he could not start the car. When those two got out and with some other security men ran to the rear to push the little car into a start, the crowd howled at them and me and tried to open the rear doors on each side to pull me out. I managed to hold the handles on each door tightly and use the force on one side to counteract the conflicting force on the other. The guards now pulled their guns on the crowd and forced them back. After a few seconds of being rocked and pushed, the car coughed into action, two or three guards bounded in, one of them beside me as I recall, and the two cars sped away.

"To my surprise, the guards seemed to me to be as frightened as I. Their disciplined action, in the midst of angry threats, saved me from what looked like a prospective lynching or at least a severe mauling. As the drivers floored their cars, we sped out of the suburb and onto a secondary road. The ones with me remained in an excited state and I avoided any effort to communicate with them. We sped along the deserted road until we reached a large gravel pit and careened into it out of sight of the road. The thought struck me that I had completely left behind in Italy the due process Americans take for granted and that they were going to stand me up against one of the gravel banks and shoot me. No one would have known the difference. But this anxiety evaporated when they took out maps and began locating their position. I realized they were almost as lost as I was. Once they found out where they were, they relaxed and drove me into the center of Munich.

"I had parachuted at about 12:15. By now it was about an hour later. At a distance a huge pillar of smoke was billowing up from the bombed rail yards into the sky. As a few of the guards walked me along a sidewalk toward an imposing building that turned out to be police headquarters, a line of weary men and women, seemingly store employees, civil servants, and such, were emerging from a nearby air raid shelter. The bombing of Munich had started into a big way in mid-summer and I worried about their reactions, but unlike the mob in the well-to-do suburb, they looked as if they had gone through this sort of thing many times. I caught several war weary glances from them. They had missed their lunch and possibly some sleep to the RAF the night before, and they seemed hungry and discouraged rather than angry. I could even imagine some measure of compassion in a few faces.

"As we entered the police station, the guards lost their hitherto absolute authority over me when a few superior officers took charge of me. Their body language and words made it clear to the guards that they were not welcome inside the building and should clear out. If other evidence had been lacking, I would have known from their display of rank that I was now in Germany, all right. The new officers, to whom this duty was a familiar affair, took me upstairs and through a door into a spacious, well appointed office of a police major and after a few words, politely melted away. What I saw, experienced, and learned in the next 24 hours involved no more real or imagined threats. Indeed it was one of the most interesting, though certainly not the very happiest, 24 hours I have ever spent. But that is another story.

"I would not learn until the next day that Henry and Bob Hindert had survived. Henry and I were together for a few days but were sent to different Stalags to meet again only after we returned to the States, where we deepened our friendship in the years before his premature death toward 1960. Because Bob Hindert was hospitalized, I did not see him then, and then we did not meet for almost 50 years. After being released from prison the next spring, he returned to live in his home city, Peoria. We finally met at the 1993 reunion of the Second Bombardment Group in Houston. While there, my wife and I

persuaded him and his wife to visit us, which they did last fall. They arrived in our driveway after the long drive from Peoria on 4 October at 12:15. They were a bit late, or so it seemed to me. I had been worrying that I might have given them poor directions and for a moment, I didn't get the point that Bob had in mind. It hit me when he asked a few pointed questions: the date and the times were exactly 50 years from when the AA shell had ended our combat careers.

"In the 50-year interval, though not at the Munich police station or at the various Stalags I was to visit after, I came to realize how fortuitous our survival had been. Bob Hindert had prepared himself intelligently beforehand for such an eventuality. His parachute was securely buckled beforehand, he interpreted the wild actions of the plane expertly, and he acted promptly and strenuously to take advantage of the very difficult opportunity offered by the nearby open bomb bay to escape the inevitable crash. Henry and I were fortunate in being the only members of the crew close to the escape hatch. It may be that one other enlisted man did not jump because he had not buckled on his chute beforehand. The radar navigator, whose desk was back in the waist, though he was wearing his parachute, may have frozen on the spot when he was about to jump. With little doubt, the pilot's area was too cramped and distant, however, for either of them to move far and fast enough to the bomb bay or escape hatch.

"On 4 October 1944 or 4 October 1994, my joy about having survived was bittersweet. Granted that it is good to be alive, I continue to grieve inside me the deaths of our brave, able comrades and to wish that favorable coincidences had favored them too. They deserved them as much as we did. The bittersweet joy came back to me every time I looked at the bouquet of flowers which arrived from the Donovan family shortly after the Hinderts drove into our yard. Our son's family now lives in Syracuse, the city where Bob Donovan grew up. When we visit them, I often disappear into the background and drive the few miles to the beautiful side hill cemetery where Bob's remains lie buried next to the grave of his father, who was killed in an accident when Bob was a boy. Nearby lies his nephew, not yet born when Bob died, who himself was killed in Vietnam. Since combat days and the anonymous loss of many comrades, graves have meant very little to me. Bob is the only one that I feel that need to visit. It is the closest to a hero I will ever be.

"Our grandson Pete, whose pranks and ready laugh and Syracuse accent reminds me just a bit of Bob, plays basketball, fishes and repairs his friends bicycles within a few miles of the open fields where Bob, his older brother, and friends used to hunt pheasants and deer. While standing or kneeling in St. Agnes Cemetery near what is left of Bob on earth, I usually find myself remarking silently that our country produces so many magnificent men while so many of its safe, comfortable citizens who owe them so much do not honor them. And I always pray there that Pete will grow up to be a man with the kind of integrity, courage, love and generosity that lit Bob's life so brightly for all of us who knew and enjoyed him as a friend in those last months of his admirable life."

At the 2nd Bombardment Group reunion in Dayton, Ohio, September 1991. I was introduced to Mrs. Patricia Donovan Moran, the sister of Lt. Robert Donovan. She had come to the reunion to meet surviving members of the brother's crew. I asked if she would share some background of her brother's life. The following letter from her reflects the tragedy on the lives of one family.

"I am glad that you are writing this book. It personally relieves me of some of the sorrow I feel about the loss of my brother and for the pain it caused my Mother and older brother. It is good to think that he will not have died without someone noticing, or being grateful, that we can point to.

"About three years ago, my oldest brother, Francis, brought Bob's personal things to me for keeping. He had acquired them after my Mother's death. She had often asked me not to throw out his belongs that were sent home. I was recuperating from surgery so had time to read all the letters he had written to her while overseas and again to look over his things. I was struck with the love and the relationship he had with my Mother and brother. I was also impressed with his accomplishments of one

so young and the regard which some of the men felt for him, and wrote Mother of. I started to read about what it was like for the men serving at that time in particular, the conditions under which they flew those missions.

"Our Father died when Bobby was thirteen and I was three. Brother Francis was nineteen and took Father's place at work. Bobby, in turn, quit school and went to work in a steel mill at sixteen, and then joined the Army Air Force, January 16, 1943 at the age of eighteen. About this time my Mother went to work at one of the local factories, inspecting the very same .50 caliber machine guns used on the B-17s.

"His flight log shows that he flew his first mission, June 14th, to Budapest, Hungary. He received his promotion to 1st Lieutenant, August 11, 1944, and was appointed Flight Commander of Flight "D" in his Squadron, September 20th. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross posthumously, for extraordinary achievement, as a Pilot, on a bombing mission, September 21, 1944. He was only 20 years old.

"His flight log shows that he had flown six missions to Ploesti, four missions into Southern France, several missions to targets in Germany and others into Poland, Hungary, Austria, and Northern Italy. I also understand that he flew the rescue mission into Romania to aid in the rescue of over 1,100 Americans, many of whom had been shot down over Ploesti. Our older brother, Francis, was with Clark's Fifth Army, driving tanks and ammunition trucks. They were able to meet in August before his unit left the area. My Mother had to write to him of Bobby's death while he was still in the field. He recently told me how hard it was for him and how the men had tried to comfort him.

"Bobby was shot down over Munich, Germany on his 47th mission while flying the lead position of his Squadron. The families of the crews were notified, within three weeks, that they were missing in action. My Mother, by this time, knew something was wrong because she hadn't received any mail from Bobby and it had never been that long before.

"During the next three months, it was reported that three men had survived the crash and were imprisoned, and six other crew members had been killed in action. The families were notified. Bobby's status remained, missing in action. At the end of six months it was the policy of the War Department to assume that the missing were dead, and so, we received the telegram stating officially that he had been killed in action. My Mother was in touch with the other families so was aware they were all accounted for. During this time my Mother didn't give up hope that he would be found alive. Then, unlikely as it seems, she always wondered about the circumstances of his death, if he had somehow survived the crash and died of wounds later, or been killed by German civilians. One year later, captured German reports listed that seven recovered bodies were buried in a cemetery in Munich. Six had been identified. The one unidentified body was presumed to be that of Bobby. It was not until 1949 and after many letters, back and forth, from my Mother to Government officials, that his remains were finally identified. The lapse of time certainly caused my Mother much anguish. In 1949 my brother was finally brought home.

"I have a great deal of compassion for the MIA families from the Vietnam war. My brother Francis lost his oldest son in Vietnam. His name was Bobby Donovan, after our brother. He was 20 years old when he was killed.

"I hope we find another way."

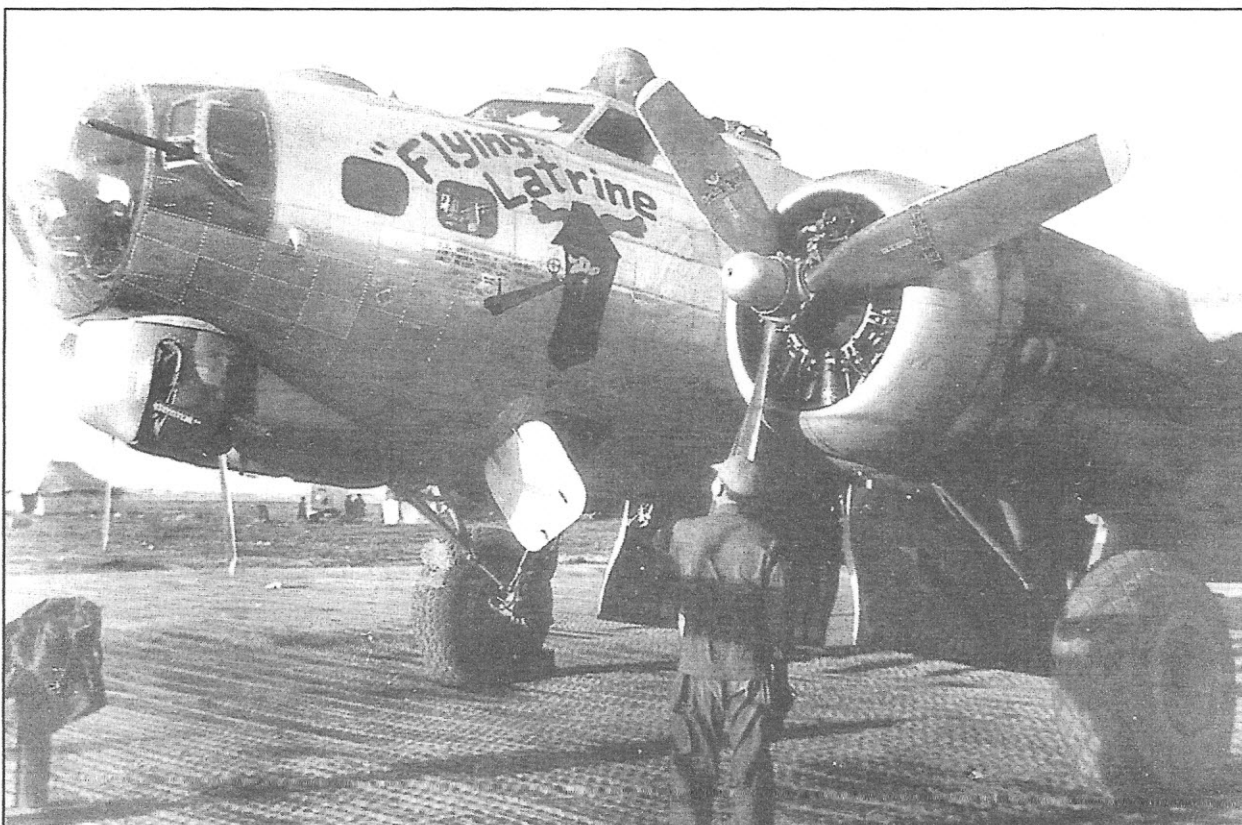
S/Sgt. Charles F. Hollenberg was a member of the 49th Squadron and Tail Gunner on the crew of 1st Lt. R. Q. Hutchins on October 4, 1944. The following is his unique literary account of that mission, and others, taken from his diary. June 16, 1994: "So once again we head-um-up and sally forth to Kraut Land, with the consistent round figure remainder, to with, 200 guns and 200 E/A's within Munic area. Tis a 'gandy-dance-un' job we do at the rail yards.



"Well, the drivers of the 'Flying Latrine' got as close as they ever will to lead-un the Fifth Wing. The 2nd B.G. went 'whole hog' an put up 48 ships, 20 of those were sent to North Ginnie land to drop on a bridge. Twenty-seven ships and 'Flying Latrine' were lead-un the pack to Munic. The 49th Sqd. was lead-un an we of crew '30-30' entertained No. 3 slot off the Col's. How about that!

"Our drivers did themselves well in the jaunt what with our starboard wing tuck'd all-most up the Col's caboose. Ken in the starboard seat says the Col likes it that way! Not so the Col's T/G. Ah think he was a shade uncomfortable with the proximity of our wing. From time to time ah would give a look-see his way, he always seemed to be look-un at our wing. He refrained from give-un a social response when I gave him a thumb up. So much for birdman urbanity from foxhole ten. Some birds just have to 'kite' a hard mission.

"For once ah had the pleasure of view-un all those folks to our aft. We were 'Kite-un' along at what I am told was 30,000 feet plus as we crossed the flats towards Munic. Ah don't know if the bird next door was enjoy-un the panoramic view of the multi B-17s and their contrails with the Austrian Alps for the background. This bird was. Used the 120 camra for a photo shot of the same. Have a roll of Kodacolor for camra load, eight shots. Don't know who the 38s and 51s were escort-un, wasn't us. We did have other escorts. B-24s were out in front of us a couple of miles an about three or four thou lower; which was to be their misfortune. Between the I.P. an our target drop our (ball gun), Tom Schwarzlose, came on the 'wire' that three 24s were torch'd, an he reported two more 24s taken out as the Group made a port turn off their bomb run.



A/C #42-102830 - "FLYING LATRINE"

Crew: R. Hutchins, L. Lawlor, E. Shaw, W. Luke, C. Jackson, R. Janerone, G. Lenard,  
D. Hausler, T. Schwarzlose, T. Dingler, C. Hollenberg (Courtesy - Charles Hollenberg)



"Well, the crap was up there with us at 30 thou. We were to know how well it was - when our R/O, Joe Black, shriek'd over the 'wire,' 'I'm hit!' George could see him stand-un by the bomb bay open door, which was his job to see that all ordnance departed the bomb bay. By George's account: 'when Joe bellow'd, ah looked his way. Ah seen he was swat-un at his neck like he'd been stung by a hornet. Ah figured if he could jump around like a ol Texas jackrabbit he weren't tag'd too bad.' Now I took a gander past the tail wheel well an all ah could see was George (our port gun), an our new gun on the starboard, both in a crouch behind the waist armor plate. When ah turned back ah was face-un my port window. Twas at that moment I caught a view of what I thought to be an aircraft part pass to our port side. Now the 429th Sqd was to be in the No. 3 box of the Group formation. They must have changed where the position was to be, cause our B/T man came on the 'wire' that a 429th ship had just lost its wing up to the No. 4 engine, was on its back in a flat spin. Tom counted four canopies deployed. Tom says they may have dropped ordnance before they were tag'd. Twas the only ship lost by the 2nd B.G. as far as we know. On our return 'Tail Crazy' (087) got to stragglun as ah made a photo shot of the ship with the Alps as a background. Our flight was eight hours and 20 minutes, an we got to sit down first, no land-un prop wash to sweat. When we got parked at Steve's pad we check'd the ship over. Had five holes in the tail area and one B-B size thru the radio hatch plexi-glass. Though the velocity was terminated, the B-B was still 'hot' an it lit on Joe's neck just above his flight jacket collar. There may have been a blister of sorts. One has to use some very good imagination to see it. Maybe he will get the P/H for be-un scared out of his wits. He said he was go-un to get the medics to look at his neck. Ah don't know if he did. He always goes there to get his free shot of booze after each jaunt. He said something about a P/H as he got out of the lift truck at base. All ah said to him was - some of the boys got one the hard way today. George says the 429th ship that was tag'd was the Sqd. lead. There were four aboard that were fly-un their 50th. Those that went to the bridge-did the bridge. The Sqd. in low box brought their ordnance back. No target left. No flak. Too bad the four on their 50th didn't draw the bridge gang.



S/Sgt. Charles F. Hollenberg

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"I was flying the T/G position on August 29 on the mission to Moravska, Czechoslovakia to bomb the Privoser Oil Refineries. We were fly-un in the No. 5 ship, 'Flying Latrine,' of the 49th

Squadron. I witnessed ship #44-6369 from our Squadron disintegrate, in high altitude, into remains of four fire-balls, which were presumed to be petrol tank remains. German reports were that the Group was bounced by 89 E/As; 65 Me-109s and 24 FW-190s. One of the survivors from one of the downed planes told me years later that a German Colonel told him, at interrogation, that they were bounced by 125 aircraft and the Krauts lost 25 in the encounter.

"Our former ball gun, Don Hausler, was on ship No. 7 of the 49th, #44-6369. It was his first ride on this ship as their toggler. I had a letter from him on his release from POW camp and then we had an evening in Cleveland, Ohio in 1959 and he related some of the details to me.

"He never viewed any E/As. All he saw was a large hole where one 20mm came in. He took a frag from a 20mm in the posterior. There was a signal to 'step out.' He recalled looking towards our aircraft. Viewed some smoke from our ship and had the notion that we were torch'd. He turned to grab his chute propped behind him. 'It' had departed-so had the navigator. He saw the navigator's closed gear bag, zipped it open. There was a chute within. At his exit he believes the ship detonated. Apparently he pop'd his chute at the same time. Results, his canopy had a large hole which gave him a fast drop. By hitting the 'tall' uncut no doubt saved him; though he took a beating from tree limbs. That evening he was incarcerated with fourteen others. Two crewmen with back wounds died that evening, no medics. The following a.m., August 30, he was on a detail with the Krauts to see some demised airmen. He knew what happened to people on Bullock's crew.

"During the air encounter, our port waist gunner, George Lenard, and I viewed a 17 at about 7 to 8 bells being harassed by five 109s. George came on the 'wire' and said that a 109 was torch'd as well as the 17 which went into a spin. When he said it blew up, I looked in that direction and viewed four fireballs (presumed to be the four gas tanks). There was not much left of that ship to make a crash site. Hausler told me he, with the Krauts, were looking for our 'Latrine.' I told him we had no fire but were do-un considerable expenditure of ammo. That's the closest ah came to empty ammo boxes on my tour.

"August 30, the bomb bay floors of our 17 were planked an on the next a.m. I got to ride shotgun, when our ship flew No. 3 slot in the third wave. Thus we were the first of this group to touch down at Popesti to take out over 1,100 of our buddies that had been shot down over Ploesti and other targets in Romania."

After reading Charles Hollenberg's account of the loss of A/C #44-8043, and the remark made by the ball turret gunner that he had seen four canopies deployed, raised the question of only three survivors. If the gunners report was correct, who was the fourth parachutist and what happened to him? Was he killed on the way down or killed by angry civilians? There were known cases of that happening. I had met Robert Hindert at three of the reunions and we became friends with he and his wife Lettie. On June 15, 1997 I called Bob at his home in Peoria, IL and explained my dilemma; four chutes, three reported survivors. He was as surprised as I was. He went on to explain that he saw two bodies leave the front of the plane and when he bailed out he never saw any chutes in the air.

He said he was standing in the bomb bay to watch for the bombs to release when they were hit. It was the duty of the radio operator to report that the bombs had cleared. The flight engineer was in the forward part of the bomb bay, without a chute, and he pulled the emergency release to drop the bombs. Bob was thrown around, face cut and bruised, and finally was able to bail out. He feels that the flight engineer did not get out because he never kept his chute nearby. The radar navigator was the most likely person to get out, if one did. His desk was in the radio room with the radio operator's. Bob feels that if anyone got out, it was the radar navigator who he feels was right behind him.

After bailing out, he found that he had his chute reversed and had difficulty reaching the ripcord. When the chute deployed, his arm was tangled in the lines and his arm was torn from the socket. He

landed in the woods, a park like area in the suburbs of Munich, and hid in a brushy area for some time before capture. He was finally taken to a small jail and the only attention he received was by a doctor who tried to reset the arm, failed and wrapped his arm tightly to his body with some cloth. The room he was in evidently was a dressing room of sorts and men kept coming in, changing clothes and eating. He was given some bread, water, and some meat. It wasn't until the next day that he was hospitalized. In all his time in the hospital, he never knew of any fourth person. He did say that beatings of captured airmen did occur. He had seen two men brought into the hospital that were battered, black and blue, and evidently beaten by civilians before army or police personnel got to them.

#### **CASARSA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 283 - OCTOBER 4, 1944**

"B" Force was comprised of 14 aircraft that took off to bomb the Railroad Bridge at Casarsa. Thirteen aircraft dropped 39 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the bridge with good results reported. One Squadron made two runs over the target while the other Squadrons made three runs. All planes returned safely.

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 284 - OCTOBER 7, 1944**

"A" Force was comprised of 23 aircraft that took off and 22 aircraft dropped 55 tons of 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the Lobau Oil Refinery in Vienna. Flak was intense, accurate, and heavy. S/Sgt. H. L. Bode, TG 49th Squadron was lightly wounded. The area was well covered with a good pattern.

One aircraft dropped its bombs on a Railroad Junction at Czeleonolk, Hungary. It was reported that the RR Junction was hit.

#### **ERSEKJVAR, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 285 - OCTOBER 7, 1944**

Eighteen aircraft of "B" Force took off and 17 aircraft dropped 42.6 tons of 1,000-lb. bombs on Marshalling Yards in this city. Flak was slight, inaccurate and heavy. Two runs were made on the target and the area was well covered with several fires observed. The 18th aircraft of this formation targeted Marshalling Yards in Banhida, Hungary, with the bombs reported short of the yards. There were no losses.

#### **TREVISO, ITALY - MISSION NO. 286 - OCTOBER 10, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off, with one aborting. Twelve aircraft dropped their bombs on the East Marshalling Yards and 15 aircraft dropped their bombs on the South Marshalling Yards. There were 170, 500-lb. M-17 incendiary bombs and 100, 500-lb. RDX bombs dropped on these targets. Three runs were made on the targets. One Squadron dropped on the first run and the other Squadrons dropped on the third run. Bombs were reported in the target areas. No flak was encountered and there were no losses.

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 287 - OCTOBER 11, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off to bomb the South Ordnance Depot in Vienna. Due to adverse weather conditions, 27 aircraft dropped their load of 500-lb. RDX bombs on a Rail Line at 46-4N - 13-42E. Flak was heavy, slight, accurate. No losses. One aircraft, an early return, dropped its bombs on a Road Bridge at 46-22N - 14-17E. Results at both targets were not known.

#### **BOLOGNA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 288 - OCTOBER 12, 1944**

Forty-two aircraft took off and dropped 60.48 tons of 20-lb. fragmentation bombs on a German Bivouac Area south of Bologna. Two runs were made over the target and bombing was visual with the target area well covered. Flak was heavy, slight to moderate resulting in the death of Cpl. M. J.

Hanchak, LW, 49th Squadron, and lightly wounding T/Sgt. N. A. Drurey, RO, and S/Sgt. L. O. Steward, RW, both from the 429th Squadron.

#### **BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 289 - OCTOBER 13, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off to bomb the South Oil Refinery at Blechhammer. Twenty-one A/C dropped their bombs on the primary target by PFF. Results unknown. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate, resulting in the wounding of S/Sgt. W. L. Dalheimer, LW, 49th Squadron. One A/C dropped its bombs on an unknown town in Germany. Lt. V. D. Hansen, N, 96th Squadron, was lightly wounded by flak. One A/C attacked a town 49-55N - 18-20E, results unknown. One A/C attacked storehouses at 49-14N - 18-44E, results unknown. A total of 288, 500-lb. RDX bombs were dropped on the four targets.

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 290 - OCTOBER 13, 1944**

Eighteen aircraft took off to bomb the Florisdorf Oil Refinery in Vienna. Fourteen A/C attacked the primary target bombing by PFF. Results were unobserved. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense, and accurate, resulting in a light wound to S/Sgt. H. L. Bode, TG, 49th Squadron. One A/C attacked an Airdrome at 47-16N - 18-06E. Three A/C were seen burning on this A/D. One A/C, attacking the primary target, dropped half of its load on a Railroad Bridge at 47-46N - 18-06E with a direct hit on the bridge. Two other A/C were early returns. A total of 180, 500-lb. bombs were dropped on these targets.

#### **BRATISLAVA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 291 - OCTOBER 14, 1944**

The Blechhammer North Oil Refinery was the intended target for 36 aircraft. Due to inclement weather on the way to the primary target, the Group went to various targets of opportunity. Five A/C attacked Komorom, Hungary, Marshalling Yards with the East end well covered. Flak was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate.

Thirteen A/C attacked Bratislava, bombing by PFF, with unobserved results.

Eight A/C attacked Borzavar, Hungary, with unknown results.

Six A/C attacked Papa, Hungary, with bombs through the center of town.

One A/C attacked a Railroad Bridge at 48-07N - 17-29E with possible damage to bridge.

Three A/C were early returns. All planes returned safely.

Flak was responsible for injury to 2nd Lt. J. C. Harris, P, 429th Squadron, and T/Sgt. R. C. Labadie, UT, 429th Squadron.

#### **SALZBURG, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 292 - OCTOBER 16, 1944**

The assigned targets were Oil Refineries at Brux, Czechoslovakia, but bad weather caused the Group to divert to an alternate, the Marshalling Yards at Salzburg. Thirty-three A/C attacked Salzburg with a good pattern reported across the Yards. One A/C that dropped part of its bombs on Salzburg dropped the remainder of its bombs on Marshalling Yards at 46-50N - 13-26E. One A/C attacked Rail Lines at 45-56N - 13-37E. Two A/C were early returns. A total of 97.5 tons of 500-lb. RDX Bombs were dropped on the targets. Flak at Salzburg was heavy, moderate, and accurate, resulting in wounds to 2nd Lt. C. J. Weiner, B, and 1st Lt. W. O. McKenna, N, both of the 49th Squadron.

#### **BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 293 - OCTOBER 17, 1944**

Twenty-eight aircraft took off and 25 dropped 60 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the South Oil Refinery by PFF. Flak was heavy, slight to moderate, fair to good accuracy. S/Sgt. Billy R. May, LT, 96th Squadron, was lightly injured by Flak.



B-17s #42-107006 and #44-6739 were involved in a mid-air collision just off the target and went down. One A/C attacked an Airdrome at 47-20N - 17-30E. Two A/C were early returns. Results of the bombing was unobserved due to cloud cover.

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #42-107006 - "OLD BIRD" - 96TH SQUADRON**

|         |                                     |       |
|---------|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 2nd Lt. | Donald L. Peart, 0-813570, P.       | (POW) |
| F/O     | John C. Mumma, T-62369, CP.         | (POW) |
| 2nd Lt. | Elliot J. Kaplan, 0-2057939, N.     | (POW) |
| F/O     | Tommy (NMI) Jones, T-12447, B.      | (POW) |
| T/Sgt.  | Orie C. Lee, 34150089, U/T.         | (POW) |
| S/Sgt.  | Marion L. Green, 35576462, L/T.     | (POW) |
| Cpl.    | Philip L. McWaters, 34767776, R/W.  | (POW) |
| S/Sgt.  | Andrew J. Frederico, 12141936, T/G. | (POW) |
| T/Sgt.  | James (NMI) Growney, 12163195, R/O. | (POW) |

\*Nine man crew

T/Sgt. Orie C. Lee, Flight Engineer, May 14, 1992: "My original crew was split up on the day I went down. Lt. Peart was my Pilot; F/O John C. Mumma, Co-Pilot; Lt. Howard Kresge, Navigator; F/O Tommy Jones, Bombardier; Sgt. James Growney, Radio Operator; Cpl. Philip L. McWaters, Right Waist; Sgt. Timothy Donahue, Left Waist; Sgt. Richard Holland, Tail Gunner; and Sgt. Robert C. Wolfe, Ball Turret.

"On October 17th, we were briefed to bomb the Oil Refineries at Blechhammer, Germany, but bombed the West Marshalling Yards at Salzburg, Austria. We had a new navigator, a Lt. Kaplan, a new tail gunner and ball turret gunner, S/Sgt. Frederico and S/Sgt. Green. No one flew left waist that day.

"We had a mid-air collision with one of our own aircraft. The other aircraft went almost straight down. All crew members killed apparently. My aircraft was able to level off after the crash. No. four engine looked like it would fall off at any minute, our left wing had a big, gaping hole near the fuselage. After flying for several minutes, our pilot gave the order to bail out. We all got out safely. Some experience! No previous training on bailing out. None of our crew were injured on bail-out or landing. We saw very few German fighters but quite a bit of flak.

"I was sent to Stalag Luft IV shortly after being captured. We had an oversize German Sgt. that liked to knock us around. Our radio operator, Sgt. James Growney, tried to go over the wire and was shot twice. He lost his left arm.

"After the first year, I was transferred to a prison camp near Nurnburg. We then next marched to Moosdorf, Stalag VIIA, which was a distance of about 125 km from Nurnburg. At the beginning of the march I was suffering from jaundice but had no sign of it when I reached Moosdorf.

"On April 29, 1945, we were liberated by the 14th Armored Division, 7th army. We were evacuated from Moosdorf May 9th and on the way May 9th. Took off in a C-47 and landed at Rheims, France. May 12th we were flown by C-47 to LaHavre, France to Camp Lucky Strike. June 1st I boarded the SS Marine Robin for the United States."

#### **MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6379 - 96TH SQUADRON**

|         |                                     |       |
|---------|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 1st Lt. | Arnold T. Kwiatkowski, 0-553589, P. | (KIA) |
| 1st Lt. | Edward C. Buettner, 0-825772, CP.   | (KIA) |
| 2nd Lt. | Fredrick H. Brilliant, 0-208406, N. | (KIA) |
| 2nd Lt. | David J. Eiseman, 0-1695546, B.     | (KIA) |
| T/Sgt.  | Richard H. Ferro, 31277854, U/T.    | (KIA) |

|        |                                      |       |
|--------|--------------------------------------|-------|
| S/Sgt. | James F. Johnston, 36883676, L/T.    | (KIA) |
| S/Sgt. | Elton I. Schuman, 35226565, R/W.     | (KIA) |
| S/Sgt. | Richard J. Radlinger, 36815362, L/W. | (POW) |
| S/Sgt. | Jacob P. Fiebleman, 37619870, T/G.   | (POW) |
| T/Sgt. | Robert C. Wolfe, 37563381, R/O.      | (KIA) |

Statement of S/Sgt. Arthur E. Reeb, TG on B-17 #483 at interrogation: "I observed B-17 #379 right after bombs away. The Squadron was dispersed then, flying this way and that. The weather was bad. At the time there was no flak bursts in the Squadron's area. I next saw #379 when it broke in half at the waist door. The tail assembly floated back by itself while the front half went straight down. No chutes were seen and I lost sight of #379 as we went into the clouds. This was at 1158 hours and at 29,000 feet.

Statement of S/Sgt. Jacob P. Fiebleman after liberation: "The ship exploded and I was blown out. I only saw one other parachute and assume it was S/Sgt. Richard J. Radlinger since he is the only one that I have heard anything about. The only other communication from any of the crew, prior to the accident, was from the pilot, 1st Lt. Kwiatkowski, over the interphone, 'Watch that ship, ball turret.'

"I heard the other crew were saved and that information came from Sgt. Green, in the other ship, in POW camp."

#### **BRUX, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 294 - OCTOBER 20, 1944**

Thirty-six aircraft took off and 33 aircraft dropped 98 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Oil Refinery at Brux. Bombing was by PFF with results unobserved. Flak was moderate to intense, heavy, and accurate. 2nd Lt. R. G. Williams, P, and 2nd Lt. M. K. Herring, N, were slightly wounded.

One A/C dropped 3 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at 45-57N - 12-50E by PFF. One A/C dropped 3 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at 50-46N - 13-04E by PFF and one A/C was an early return.

B-17 #42-39999, "BATAAN AVENGER," 49th Squadron, was hit by flak over the target, managed to get as far as the Adriatic Sea and was forced to ditch. All crew members were rescued by a Catalina flying boat. The rescued were: 1st Lt. E. W. Holtz, P; 2nd Lt. W. R. Myers, CP; F/O D. W. Powell, N; Sgt. G. A. Weamer, B; T/Sgt. C. M. Collins, UT; S/Sgt. Z. A. MacKool, LT; S/Sgt. W. J. Wilts, RW; S/Sgt. S. P. Pokrywka, LW; S/Sgt. R. J. Capper, TG; and T/Sgt. T. M. Shadrow, RO.

#### **PILSEN, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 295 - OCTOBER 23, 1944**

Thirty-three aircraft dropped 203, 1,000-lb. RDX bombs on the Skoda Armament Works in Pilsen by PFF. Results were unobtainable due to cloud cover. There was no enemy action.

#### **KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 296 - OCTOBER 25, 1944**

A single plane mission was flown by the 2nd Bomb Group to bomb the Klagenfurt Aircraft Factory. Each Group in the Wing furnished one plane. Colonel John D. Ryan, former Group Commanding Officer now of Wing Headquarters, piloted the plane from the 2nd Bomb Group. Bombing was by PFF with unobserved results.

#### **INNSBRUCK, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 297 - OCTOBER 26, 1944**

Two planes were assigned to bomb the Marshalling Yards at Innsbruck. They were over the target at 1140 hours and dropped 4 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs. The target was bombed visually and was reported to be fairly well covered. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate. Seriously wounded was

S/Sgt. Otto Pierce, LW, 96th Squadron, and slightly wounded was S/Sgt. H. T. Higgins, TG, from the 49th Squadron.

Captain Henry J. "Hal" Wallet and crew were assigned to the 96th Squadron on July 3, 1944. May 6, 1993: "In the winter of 1944, the 15th AF based in the Foggia area of Italy was grounded for a great deal of the time by bad weather. Our missions had been suspended for several days and our former Group Commanding Officer, Colonel John D. Ryan, now at Wing, had thought up a new wrinkle. Because we were socked in for such a long period, Colonel Ryan wanted to resume the bombing of Germany by sending a single B-17 on round-the-clock bombing missions of Axis targets. The plane would be a Mickey ship (bombing by radar).

"I was selected for this mission because of the high number of instrument hours I had logged in the States as an instructor.

"The target that early cold overcast morning was the Marshalling Yards at Innsbruck, Austria. Taking off in the soup that bleak unforgettable morning, I hoped this experimental mission would be an initial success as we customarily were accompanied by P-38s and P-51s to the target.

"After four hours in the soup we came to the I.P. and rumbled down the final heading to the target. Suddenly the weather front ended, the sky was blue, the terrain visible, and there nestled in the valley was the city of Innsbruck, Austria. My bombardier shouted gleefully. He would bomb visually and not use radar because of V.F.R. conditions. What a strike bombardier's dream of! It was so quiet it was eerie; one plane in the sky, no flak and on the final headings towards a perfect strike on the railroad yards. With bomb bay doors open and pulling all the inches of mercury you can, suddenly all hell broke loose! The flak started in clouds from their anti-aircraft batteries and getting closer all the time. I had to do some maneuvering but still stay close to the final run until bombs away. Flak bursting at the wing tips I headed back for that wonderful soup for protection, and limped back. The crew chief counted 250 holes from flak on that mission.

"The bombing pictures of this mission from Intelligence showed a 100% strike of direct hits on the gas house, pumping station, and troop trains in the railroad yards.

"Colonel John Ryan changed the operations from that first mission to make it mandatory to bomb by radar, using alternate targets if V.F.R. conditions came up unexpectedly.

"I was on the October 4th mission to Munich and will never forget it! I was wounded leading the Squadron on that day and remember well the various Squadrons getting all spread out of formation from the Group, and another Group also finding the same flak problems and fighters that two of their Squadrons wound up in our Group, and we hit the target well that day even though there was a mixup.

"I peeled off after bombs away and headed for Rome to the General Hospital where they put in 27 stitches and dug out a large piece of flak in my left thigh. Purple Heart and D.F.C. for that one."

#### **KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 298 - OCTOBER 28, 1944**

A two-plane mission was scheduled for this target on this date. Two aircraft took off at 1224 hours and dropped 4 tons of 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Klagenfurt Aircraft Factory area at 1444 hours. Bombing was by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, moderate, accurate. No injuries, no losses.

#### **MUNICH, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 299 - OCTOBER 28, 1944**

This was the second of a two-plane mission for this date. One aircraft dropped 2 tons of RDX bombs on the target by PFF. The second aircraft had two engines fail on the way to the Munich target, turned and dropped its bombs on Rail Lines at Innsbruck, Austria. Some flak was encountered at both targets with no injuries to crews.

T/Sgt. Walter L. Siegmund, 49th Squadron. June 15, 1992: "I arrived overseas June 3, 1944 and our crew was assigned to the 49th Squadron. My 20th, and most memorable mission was on September 1, 1944, and we flew to Bucharest to rescue American POWs that had been imprisoned in that country.

"As I recall, the field was very small for a Fort to land. We were concerned if we would clear the trees at the end of the runway with a bomb bay full of POWs. We landed with fighter cover overhead. The enemy was marching about 15 miles away as we came in. Some of our crews were instructed to stay at their gun positions at all times while on the ground.

"The POWs came running out almost immediately, dressed in all kinds of garb. We loaded and got out of there ASAP! The POWs all wanted cigarettes, candy, anything we had that they had been denied for so long. Some of these boys had been prisoners for a long time. Long enough to be bombed by Russia-Germany-Americans as the city changed hands.

"We got underway and, as we suspected, we did clip a few branches off the trees getting airborne. We later found branches in the wheel well when we landed back at base. It was a good feeling to see the POW's faces light up as we neared our destination at last! We never saw any of them after that. They were taken for interrogation and then returned to the States, we were told.

"That flight lasted eight hours. I went on to finish my missions and arrived back in the States, December 27, 1944, almost six months duration.

"One other memorable mission that I must relate was October 28, 1944. It was written up in the 2nd Bomb Group's *FORTRESS* news as follows:

At six o'clock on the evening of October 28, a 15th Air Force Flying Fortress, part of a Squadron operating from an advanced base in Italy, streaked down the runway and climbed into the cloud splattered sky.

For men of the crew, experienced veterans with an average of 40 combat missions to their credit, this was something new. Night flying hadn't been on their list of specialties until this moment when they were circling their base, watching the runway lights become pinpoints of luminescence as they soared higher and higher. Nor had they before as important a target as Munich, Germany, to bomb alone. They were alone - ten men in a giant plane, winging their way to their goal to deliver a load of destruction.

1st Lt. J. Loren Peck, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, navigator, was constantly plotting and checking the course. Things were going smoothly. So far, the flight had been routine, but even as such there was a feeling of expectancy, tenseness, as they flew toward their target.

"When there is nothing but darkness below, above, and around, you begin to feel just a bit on edge," said T/Sgt. Walter L. Siegmund, Perryville, Missouri, aerial engineer and top turret gunner of the crew.

"We reached the central point and were at bombing altitude," said Lt. Robert L. Turner, Falls Church, Pennsylvania, pilot, "when our No. 2 engine began to throw oil. We decided to keep heading for Munich, it wasn't too serious a failure. Some 20 minutes before we reached the I.P., the oil pressure on No. 1 engine dropped, and with a whirr, the propeller began to run away."

The ship shuddered violently in protest against the sudden strain. Pilot and co-pilot fought the momentarily bulky prop controls and managed to feather the prop. There was no turning back. Munich was the target, and despite a partially disabled ship, there were ten men determined to carry out their assignment. As the navigator signaled that they had reached the I.P. and the bombardier, 1st Lt. Harold H. Tripp, Boise, Idaho, began to set his bomb sight, the plane lurched. No. 2 engine oil pressure had dropped and the



prop was running away. Losing altitude and careening in the darkness, it was a tricky job bringing the engine under some control so that the prop could be feathered.

"We couldn't bomb Munich, our altitude was hopelessly low for the job, and the pilot and co-pilot were having a bit of difficulty with the ship," said the bombardier.

Despite mechanical difficulties, loss of ceiling and growing difficulty insofar as handling of the plane was concerned, the men were still determined to drop their bombs where they would do the most good. They headed for the rail yards at Innsbruck, Austria. No. 3 and No. 4 were still going strong as they headed for the bomb run.

"Suddenly it seemed as if we were in the midst of a Fourth of July celebration," said S/Sgt. Lloyd C. Miller, tail gunner. Down "Flak Alley" they went. Bombs were away and the pilot turned and made a bee-line for home. Both the pilot and co-pilot, Lt. Henderson S. Hall, Tupelo, Mississippi, had to concentrate on fighting the controls.

"I don't think either of us could have handled the Fort alone," said Turner. With mountains ahead of them, darkness all around, on instruments, and constantly losing precious altitude they had left, Lt. Turner headed for home. The Special Navigator, Lt. Frank J. Gooseelin, Lynn, Massachusetts, kept advising the pilot of his distance above the mountain tops. The navigator kept giving locations and headings. The radio operator, T/Sgt. John R. Reinehl, Cottage City, Maryland, was relaying messages back and forth to ground emergency stations as was the co-pilot.

Everyone was working at top speed. The gunners were throwing out all heavy equipment. Guns, ammunition, bomb hoist, and shackles went overboard. The engineer thought to wind up the special dome of the plane. The Fort was barely moving, creeping along on two engines.

The mountains were behind them. The most dangerous flying was over but there was still no relaxing for the pilots. There were layers of ice coating the wings. It took their combined efforts to keep the ship under control. Over the water they went, flaps  $\frac{1}{4}$  down. Everything had been done so they wouldn't lose the little altitude that they were able to maintain.

Land was in sight when No. 3 engine went out. The navigator called a heading to the pilot and they turned in a new direction. Green flares from a below-emergency landing field, "Crash landing position," ordered the pilot. Down they headed. Wheels were up until the last possible second. Flaps were full down and then the wheels. Solid ground was once more beneath them.

"I've been on some ripping Saturday night parties, but never before was it anything like this," said T/Sgt. Dan A. Vanni, Mt. Shasta, California, cameraman as he climbed out of the ship with a sigh.

The emergency landing of this aircraft was made at Falconaro, Italy.