
18

Operations: March, 1945

M OOSBIERBAUM, AUSTRIA/MARIBOR, YUGOSLAVIA - MISSION NO. 369 - MARCH 1, 1945

Forty-two aircraft took off, each carrying a load of 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs. Twenty-nine aircraft dropped 340 bombs on the Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery with unobserved results. One aircraft from this formation only dropped six bombs and later dropped six bombs visually on Marshalling Yards at Judenburg, Austria with hits on the target. Flak was heavy, moderate and accurate. B-17 #44-8814, 96th Squadron, was severely damaged and crash landed near the 463rd Bomb Group field. There were no injuries.

Six aircraft dropped 72 bombs on a Locomotive Depot at Maribor, Yugoslavia visually with hits reported. Four aircraft dropped 44 bombs on Marshalling Yards at Knittelfeld, Austria visually with hits reported. One aircraft dropped 12 bombs on a Railroad at Wilden, Austria visually with hits reported. Two aircraft aborted.

LINZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 370 - MARCH 2, 1945

Thirty aircraft took off carrying 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs. Twenty aircraft dropped 234 bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Linz by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate with no injuries. Six aircraft dropped 72 bombs on Marshalling Yards at St. Polten, Austria by PFF with unobserved results. One aircraft dropped 12 bombs on Marshalling Yards at Lienz, Austria visually. Hits were reported on Tracks and Roundhouse. One aircraft aborted and two were early returns.

SOPRON, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 371 - MARCH 4, 1945

Forty-one aircraft took off carrying a load of 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs. Thirty-nine aircraft dropped 455 bombs visually on Sopron with good concentration of hits in the target area. Flak was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate with no injuries. One aircraft dropped 12 bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Furstenfeld, Austria visually with hits reported in the Yards. One aircraft was an early return.

HEGYESHALOM, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 372 - MARCH 8, 1945

Forty-one aircraft dropped 397, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards visually. There were scattered hits in the Marshalling Yards with a good concentration in the west end of the Marshalling Yards. Flak was heavy, slight, and inaccurate with no injuries.

GRAZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 373 - MARCH 9, 1945

The primary target was the Marshalling Yards at Bruck, Austria but a cloud cover forced the formation to divert to alternate targets. Forty-two aircraft took off loaded with 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs. Weather forced 27 aircraft to abort and return to base with their bombs. Fourteen aircraft dropped 165 bombs on Freight Yards at Graz by PFF with unobserved results, and one aircraft dropped 8 bombs on a Marshalling Yard at Feldkirchen, Austria visually with hits reported at the choke point in the Yard. Flak at Graz was heavy, slight and accurate resulting in slight wounds to S/Sgt. J. M. Martin, LT.

VERONA/PERONA, ITALY - MISSION NO. 374 - MARCH 10, 1945

Twenty-one aircraft took off and 19 aircraft dropped 114, 1,000-lb. RDX bombs on a Railroad Bridge with an excellent bombing pattern reported but results were unobtainable due to smoke from previous bombing. Two aircraft were early returns. Flak was heavy, moderate to intense with no injuries.

VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 375 - MARCH 12, 1945

Forty-three aircraft took off with 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs with 40 aircraft dropping their bombs on the Florisdorf Oil Refinery by PFF with unobserved results. Flak was heavy, moderate, and inaccurate with no injuries. One aircraft dropped its bombs on Marshalling Yards at Pontebba, Italy. Another aircraft dropped its bombs on Marshalling Yards at Conigliana, Italy. A third aircraft dropped its bombs on Marshalling Yards at Litija, Yugoslavia. A total of 497 bombs dropped included all targets. Results of bombing were not reported.

REGENSBURG, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 376 - MARCH 13, 1945

Reconnaissance reported 900 wagons in the Main Marshalling Yards at Regensburg. The 2nd Bomb Group directed 27 aircraft to this target and dropped 317, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards by PFF with unobserved results. One aircraft dropped 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Landshut, Germany with hits reported in the Yards.

SZONY, HUNGARY - MISSION NO. 377 - MARCH 14, 1945

Forty-one aircraft took off in two waves, each loaded with 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs, to bomb the Szony Oil Refinery. The First Wave dropped 240 bombs and the Second Wave dropped 250 bombs on the target. Explosions and fires were reported. Flak was heavy, moderate and accurate resulting in the loss of B-17 #44-6428 of the 20th Squadron.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6428 - 20TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt.	Frederick J. Reed, 0-830938, P.	(RET)
F/O	Bartley H. Moberg, T-6316, CP.	(DED)
2nd Lt.	Aubrey H. Poindexter, 0-2074158, N.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Harry H. Hollinger, 20330205, TOG.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Laverne E. Chambers, 38401996, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Floyd (NMI) Lechner, 19211160, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Max A. Wilder, 34706346, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	James E. Hamilton, 36640919, L/W.	(POW)
Cpl.	Henry J. Bullis, 19205220, T/G.	(RET)
Cpl.	Edward I. Wagner, 33776581, R/O.	(KIA)

Records of this crew showing (RET) (returned) did not indicate that they were prisoners of the Germans. Information concerning those that show (POW) came from a member of the crew that was a POW.

Statement of S/Sgt. Alfred Novak, LTG on B-17 #671, after the mission: "I saw #428 last at 1426 hours from 17,000 feet at 47-38N - 18-11E where he received a direct flak hit in the No. 2 engine. Then he pulled out to the right, left the formation in flames. The aircraft was going down, and at this time I observed two chutes. The aircraft then exploded and I saw pieces of the aircraft falling earthward."

S/Sgt. James E. Hamilton was the original LWG on the crew of Lt. Warren Newhouse. January 17, 1990: "I arrived in Foggia, Italy in September or October of 1944. My crew was captained by Lt. Warren Newhouse and co-pilot was Lt. Dudley M. Bray, Jr. Both are alive today (1990).

"The mission requirements at that time were 35. After 25 missions, I wanted to hurry up and return home so I volunteered to fly extra missions. On the first of the missions after 25 (volunteered), we were shot down over the Szony Oil Fields in Hungary. The date was March 14, 1945.

"I was flying with the crew piloted by Lt. Frederick J. Reed. We were flying at 31,000 feet when we were hit directly in the radio room and the fire started. I called up to the Captain and said we had better bail out, and I did. I waited a long time before I pulled the ripcord since it was very cold at that altitude.

"Upon reaching the ground I was immediately captured by the Hungarians who turned me over to the Germans. I traveled by many means of transport, under guard, to Nurnburg Prison Camp, then to Moosdorf, Stalag Luft VIIA, as prisoner of war No. 145662. I was freed in the middle of May, 1945 and returned home.

"The only POWs from our crew that I know of were Max Wilder, Harry Hollinger, and myself. I have no information about the others."

1st Lt. Warren Newhouse was a Pilot and he and his crew were assigned to the 20th Squadron. January 5, 1992: "We flew a B-17G, #44-8195, from the States and my crew consisted of 2nd Lt. Dudley M. Bray Jr., CP; 2nd Lt. Frank C. Madill, N; 2nd Lt. Gildo F. M. Phillips, B; Cpl. John H. Boone, E; Cpl. William H. Francis, RO; and Cpl. Raymond J. Kryzyzanek; Cpl James E. Hamilton, Cpl. Francis R. Furlong and Cpl. Chester E. Sallee, Aerial Gunners.

"The B-17 we flew from the States was radar equipped and it was to be used as a lead plane so it was taken from us and I was assigned another aircraft with the serial number 46729. The plane we flew across had an electrical problem on one mission to bomb the Marshalling Yards at Salzburg, Austria, dumping the bombs prematurely on a snow capped mountain. Since several bombardiers toggled off short of the target, the officers received no credit for the mission. Gildo Phillips, our bombardier, knew better than to drop and we brought our bombs back, with the exception of two delay-action bombs which had to be jettisoned in the Adriatic Sea.

"I did get all my missions in, the first being on October 23, 1944 to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia and the final one was March 19, 1945 to Landshut, Germany. I kept a small diary and recollection of some missions are noted:

"11/05/44 - Vienna, Austria. Oil Refinery - heavy flak, no damage to us. Ball turret gunner on Mart's plane died of anoxia.

"11/06/44 - Graz, Austria. Marshalling Yards - moderate, accurate flak. Sustained five holes, one made by a live 88mm shell through left wing, failed to explode. Lost two engines on return and landing with but 5 gals of gas.

"11/19/44 - Vienna, Austria. Oil Refinery - bomb racks failed. Bombardier had to kick out bombs at high altitude.

"12/02/44 - Blechhammer, Germany. Oil Refinery - 9 hours and 45 minutes engine time with ample gasoline. Light, very accurate flak. Picked up two holes. One ship missing.

"12/06/44 - Did not fly. Crew missing on 12/2 returned safely. Ship of another Squadron exploded with a full bomb load after take off as it made turn too close to ground. Phillips and Madill missing from a 'Lone Wolf' mission at night.

"12/11/44 - Moosbierbaum, Austria. Oil Refinery. Heavy accurate flak. Target visible through the smoke cover. Hits scored. Waist gunner on another plane had piece of flak cut off throat mike but not injured.

"12/12/44 - Blechhammer, Germany. Oil Refinery. First 'Lone Wolf' mission. Moderate flak, picked up two holes. Much icing in the clouds.

"12/17/44 - Blechhammer, Germany. Oil Refinery. Flak was too intense on first run. Had to make second, got three holes, one in Co-Pilot's windshield. Flew B-24 crew to Bari at night.

"01/02/45 - Two planes crashed and burned at end of runway.

"01/04/45 - Lt. Phillips reported safe and returning to base.

"02/01/45 - Moosbierbaum, Austria. Oil Refinery primary target. Bombed target of opportunity, a Marshalling Yard south of Graz. Light flak, no hits. Lost No. 3 engine due to excess power used in clouds. Had to drop four of 12 bombs before target.

"02/07/45 - Vienna, Austria. Oil Refinery. Moderate flak, no holes. Visual target, good results. Ship left formation to go to Russia. Crew bailed out, almost dropping bombs on us.

"02/13/45 - Vienna, Austria. Oil Refinery. Intense flak, two holes. Blew out spark plug on No. 3 engine. Dropped Nelson's autographed bomb. Radio Operator on 429th ship killed by flak.

"02/25/45 - Linz, Austria. Marshalling Yards. Intense, accurate flak, two holes, one in the gas tank. Saw "rocket flak" over Munich. Visual, only box to hit target.

"02/28/45 - Conigliano, Italy. Marshalling Yards. Moderate flak at Brenner Pass. Three holes. Alternate had no flak. 1,000-lb. bombs hit yards. Lead ship hit, two men killed, CO lost finger.

"Learned that our Navigator, Lt. Frank Madill, is a POW.

"03/01/45 - Vienna, Austria. Oil Refinery. Light flak, no holes. One ship crash-landed. Later exploded.

"03/14/45 - Szony, Hungary. Oil Refinery. Flak, intense and accurate. Seven holes, one in No. 4 turbo amplifier and another in the boot of the tail gunner. No. 428 exploded over the target, four chutes, one in flames. Hamilton (James E.) was in it. Furlong (Francis E.) flew his last mission.

"03/19/45 - Landshut, Germany. Marshalling Yards. No flak. 15,000 feet, good strike. MY LAST MISSION!

"03/22/45 - Ruhland, Germany. Oil Refinery. Group hit by fighters on long haul. Group lost three planes. F/O Williams' ship hit by rocket. One chute (on fire). Ship broke up. Me-210's and Me-262's.

"03/24/45 - Berlin, Germany. Hit by jets - lost one from Squadron."

T/Sgt. Robert N. Rudolph was the Flight Engineer on the crew of Lt. Frederick J. Reed when assigned to the 96th Squadron. April 17, 1995: "I joined the AAF October 12, 1942, took my basic at Kessler Field, Mississippi and sent to Douglas, Arizona, a new advanced flying school, and worked as a mechanic. Sent to North American Aviation in Los Angeles on B-25s. Returned to Douglas, Arizona for a couple of months and signed up for gunnery school.

"Passed the physical and sent to Kingman, Arizona. Graduated in September 1944, sent to Avon Park, Florida where I joined the crew who were: 2nd Lt. Frederick J. Reed, P; F/O Bartley H. Moberg,

CP; 2nd Lt. Aubrey H. Poindexter, N; 2nd Lt. John P. Tomsyck, B; myself, E; Cpl. Edward I. Wagner, RO; Cpl. Sidney M. Heathman, RW; Cpl. Leo Sambuco, LT; and Cpl. Henry J. Bullis, TG.

"We trained at Avon Park, went to Savannah, Georgia, picked up a new B-17 and equipment. Flew to Bangor, Maine, Azores, Marrakech, Tunis, Foggia. We flew as a crew until March 14, 1945. That was the first mission we were separated. Those of my crew that went down that day were Reed, Moberg, Poindexter and Wagner. I know Wagner and Poindexter were killed. It was reported that one chute was on fire after bail-out and it possibly was Moberg. The reason I say that is I received a letter from his sister and she was seeking information as to what I knew about the disaster. She had accounted for all on board but her brother, but I didn't have any information. Some years later I heard from someone that they had seen a Memorial Wall in Florence, Italy with names of all persons missing in action and Moberg's name was on it.

"After those of my crew went down, we flew with other crews coming from the States. I don't remember who I flew with from then on. I remember one Captain who wanted to go to Switzerland, who I will never forget. I got stuck with a dandy, the pilot, not the crew. We took off and got in a cloud bank, came out and nobody around, up over Northern Italy. Flak started and I hollered for the pilot to turn right or left quick. If he hadn't we would have got a direct hit. He panicked after that and said we were going to Switzerland. I said let's go on, that we probably would meet another Group. He said no, but all the crew didn't want to go. Well, we finally met a Group over the Alps and moved in close. Then all the guns turned towards us. Boy we did everything to make contact; colors of the day, showed our patches on our jackets, waved and finally we were welcome. We knew Germans had a B-17 that they flew sometimes and radioed to ground as to our height, speed etc.

"Well, we bombed a target. I don't know what but when we got back we were told we were in an eyelash of being shot down by our own bombers. What a disaster that would have been!

"After V-E Day we were just flying training missions some days and training pilots to be pilots. I had a very bad experience with one of the co-pilots. He was flying alone with me as engineer and a radio operator; no co-pilot. This guy buzzed everything but the control tower. We buzzed the small country of San Marino which was a No-No to even fly over. I could look up and see the steeples. I told him to take me back and if he wanted to kill himself OK but not me. I was really scared! He took me back and raised holy hell! I told the CO what he did and I was blackballed from then on.

"On leaving for home, I was a passenger along with six infantry guys and the crew. We got in the air and fuel was running off the left wing like a creek. Someone forgot to lock the fuel cap. We circled Naples for an hour and decided to go. Went to Tunis, Marrakech, Dakar, Natal, Georgetown, Puerto Rico, and West Palm Beach, Florida.

"We all went our separate ways home. Now as I think back over those times, they were the greatest, bar none. I lived a lifetime in a short time. I am proud that I served in the Air Force, saw combat and flew with some wonderful people. 'Family all the way.' I must admit that I still catch myself drifting back and a tear will appear. I was closer to those crewmen than I was to my own family."

KOLIN, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 378 - MARCH 15, 1945

Forty-three aircraft took off to bomb the Schwartzheide Synthetic Oil Plant at Ruhland, Germany. The primary target was not attacked because of cloud cover and Mickey trouble. Flak over this target was heavy, moderate, and accurate resulting in injury to F/O B. N. Norton, N, 20th Squadron; 1st Lt. H. Dooha, N, and 1st Lt. A. G. Martell, B, both of the 96th Squadron. Twenty-six aircraft, in two waves, dropped 282, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Oil Refinery at Kolin with excellent results. There was no flak at the target. Five aircraft dropped 58, 500-lb. RDX bombs on a Railroad Bridge at Klagenfurt, Austria with results unobserved. And one aircraft dropped 12 bombs on Marshalling Yards at Amstettin, Austria with its bombs over the target. Seven aircraft jettisoned their bombs when the lead

aircraft accidentally dropped its bombs. Four aircraft aborted and two aircraft were early returns. Flak damaged 13 aircraft; eight minor and five severe.

Three aircraft are missing. B-17 #44-6671, piloted by 1st Lt. John Stravers, 20th Squadron; B-17 #44-6443, piloted by 2nd Lt. John W. Collens, 96th Squadron, and B-17 #44-6674, piloted by 1st Lt. Phillip Good, 96th Squadron.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6671 - "HOMESICK" - 20TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	John J. Stravers, 0-822561, P.	(RET)
1st Lt.	Richard F. Shipka, 0-926712, CP.	(RET)
F/O	Paul (NMI) Stephens, T-129762, N.	(KIA)
2nd Lt.	John P. Tomsyck, 0-206169, B.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Edward Janoski, 33608555, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	James L. Almond, 34679066, L/T.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Ralph E. Nussbaum, 15084746, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	John F. Skalny, 16159574, L/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	William T. Stewart Jr., 39921281, T/G.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	John W. Leyden, 42002400, R/O.	(RET)

Statement of 2nd Lt. John W. Ellsworth, CP of B-17 #378, after the mission: "I saw B-17 #671 last at 1403 hours from 26,000 feet. I observed a fire inside his left wing and behind the No. 1 engine. I called him but received no answer. B-17 #671's pilot must have noticed the fire coming up through the top of the wing, for he called "Able" box leader and then peeled off to the left. Pilot said he was afire and was leaving the formation. I observed no chutes."

T/Sgt. Edward Janoski, Flight Engineer: "I bailed out and all crew members left the plane alive. The aircraft blew up before it reached the ground.

"Regarding F/O Paul Stephens: When ordered to bail out I opened the escape hatch. Navigator went first, around 30 seconds bombardier left, followed by me. I delayed my jump until I was in the proper altitude. When my chute opened I was met with small arms fire, followed later by machine gun fire. I noticed a chute on the ground, body motionless, chute half dragging in the breeze and it stayed that way until out of sight.

"It was later reported to the Russians who tried to recover the body at nightfall. It failed. Body was still in the same position the next morning. Russians agreed to give military burial upon recovery of the body.

"Rest of the crew reformed at Sagan, Germany and later came to Allied Base in Southern Russian country and finally reached home base."

1st Lt. John J. Stravers, Pilot: "After being hit by anti-aircraft fire over the target at Ruhland, Germany, I decided to leave the formation and head for the Russian lines, approximately 40 miles away. As the No. 1 engine gas line was on fire I decided to give the bail out order and, after issuing the order, the navigator, F/O Stephens, was the first member to leave the plane. The other members of the crew following immediately from their respective positions. I did not see F/O Stephens on the ground but from questioning other members of the crew, they stated that when he hit the ground there wasn't any movement and, from all indications, it seems F/O Stephens landed between the lines, as we were just behind the lines when we hit the ground.

"That same afternoon I instructed two Russian officers that there were other members of my crew that bailed out, and about 9 p.m. I was informed that eight other men had been picked up by

Russian soldiers. The following day I was reunited with my co-pilot and waist gunner and it was then that I heard the news about F/O Stephens. I immediately asked the Russian officer if he would dispatch a patrol to investigate the area which he promised to do that evening as it was too risky to attempt such a search during the day. The following morning I was informed by the Russian officer that the search had been a failure as the patrol was harassed by German small arms fire. As we were being sent to a rear area, away from the front lines, I was informed that the area in which F/O Stephens was downed would be taken by the advancing Russian Army and all the available information would be dispatched to the proper authorities.

"As the bombardier, engineer and waist gunner were the only members of the crew that saw F/O Stephens hit the ground, I will gladly submit their names and addresses if you so desire. I feel, in some instances, their information would be more valuable in securing the information concerning F/O Stephens."

T/Sgt. John W. Leyden, RO: "All crew members bailed out safely. F/O Stephens was the only man unaccounted for and was the first to bail out of the aircraft approximately 80 miles southeast of Ruhland, Germany. He was reported to have landed between the German/Russian fighting line. Russians claimed that they would move out to rescue him under cover of the coming night. The following day they reported him dead.

"In my opinion, Stephens fell into the hands of the Germans and was either killed or taken prisoner. However, it is possible that he was shot by the Russians while approaching the ground in his parachute.

"The Russians attempted to kill me while I approached the ground in my parachute. It is possible they believed us to be German paratroopers. If the Russians had killed Stephens naturally they would not admit their mistake to us. He was definitely the first crew member to bail out and, as we were headed about 60 degrees toward the Russian lines, he should have landed closer to the German troops. He was never heard from again by any member of the crew. To my knowledge, the Russians never produced the body or any identification of it."

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6443 - 96TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	John W. Collens III, 0-774950, P.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Harry R. Maginnis, 0-784210, CP.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Emilio J. San Juame, 0-2071918, N.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Richard D. Bradley, 32945887, TOG.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Herman E. Coones, 32931532, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	William T. Prescott Jr., 13126020, L/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Robert J. Bair, 35914067, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Richard J. Shepard, 37671651, L/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Jesus C. Briseno, 39711479, T/G.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Richard V. Beauchamp, 38447609, R/O.	(RET)

1st Lt. John W. Collens III was a pilot assigned to the 96th Bomb Squadron. He left the Air Force after World War II, went to college, and was recalled to active duty in 1949. He served a total of 33 years in the Air Force, serving in Korea, Viet Nam, and at the Pentagon. He retired with the rank of Major General. "April 10, 1993: TWENTY-FIVE IS A BAD NUMBER: What does a 20-year old kid "airplane driver" think about as he takes off as a Group spare? Well, it's March 15, 1945 and his crew has already received a bunch of hits from German flak over targets in Austria, Germany and Italy on earlier missions.

"So, spare - hell, they seldom go to the target anyway. We'll be back in our comfortable sacks (?) In those palatial tents at Amendola in an hour or two. OK Harry (the co-pilot), let's get 'em turning (the props) and taxi out with our Squadron (the 96th) for this easy day. It ended up being our 25th mission BAD DAY!

"Back in the mid-section for the take-off is our ball turret gunner, William T. Prescott Jr. Bill is about my age, the rest of the crew somewhat older, so he and the others called me 'Skipper.' Thinking back on it, we had two old time, regular Army crew members who had to put up with a Lieutenant who was a decade their junior. 'Skipper' seemed appropriate.

"As we approached the bomb line over Northern Italy en route to the target, on oil refinery at Ruhland about 75 miles southeast of Berlin, one of the Squadron's aircraft aborted. We filled in at the No. 9 slot (tail end Charlie). Now we were in an unfamiliar setting and approaching the bomb run for what was supposed to be a lightly defended target.

"Events would record that we were shot down over Kolin, Czechoslovakia, because that is where the returning 20th Squadron crews last noticed us in their formation as we reached the IP. All I know is that we were on the bomb run for Ruhland. The Russians had pushed the Germans back closer to 'der fodderland,' and the lightly defended target now had many, many more dual purpose 88s as the Germans moved back closer to Ruhland.

"One round went through a gas tank without exploding. That cost us the fuel we needed to get back to Italy. Another round took out an engine on the right. With the bombs still in the bay, we dropped like an anvil before jettisoning our calling cards. At 10,000 feet we were able to maintain altitude and headed for Lodz, Poland and sanctuary with the Russian allies who had recaptured that town.

"Bill Prescott had been hit in the forehead by a piece of flak that penetrated the ball turret. Fortunately, the turret's metal thickness spent much of the flak's energy, so Bill was only rendered unconscious. When he didn't answer the oxygen call, the waist gun crew pulled him from the ball turret. Although our B-17 was riddled by those flak holes, no other crew member was injured.

"As we circled Lodz looking for a Russian airfield, a Yak fighter made a pass in front of us (VERY CLOSE) and we fired the Very pistol with the colors of the day - 'hey we're friendly.' We later learned that the Yak had shot down a B-24 from England that was also attempting to make an emergency landing at Lodz. Its surviving crew members joined up later for our repatriation journey. Bill Prescott was coming back to life from his head injury wound. That Yak pressed on and didn't fire at us, and the sod airfield came into sight, Whew!

"The landing roll was short and we were immediately surrounded by a horde of Russians in uniform. Our No. 2 engine had been windmilling when it wouldn't feather. After the engine seized for lack of oil, the stage was set for a fire once the slipstream was gone. True to form, a fire started after rolling to a stop. Bless those 'Ruskies,' they started throwing dirt at the cowling to put out the fire (you gotta go with what's available). Fortunately, the top turret gunner jumped out and used the aircraft hand extinguisher to save our bird.

"In the distance we noted a large cloud of black smoke. Soon a couple of U.S. airmen came walking up with the remains of their chutes. We learned they were the survivors of that 'unfriendly' B-24 that the Yak shot down. Later when interrogated by the Russians to determine if we were friend or foe, we learned that the Germans had used captured U.S. bombers against Soviet forces. They took no chances - you better fire the colors of the day from your Very pistol or face a shoot down.

"After what seemed like an eternity, and several shots of potato vodka to make us talk ('What base did you come from, how many airplanes in your raid, what was your target, why did you come to Poland?') we were packed off in a truck to downtown Lodz. Our Russian guards (we were still considered captives) entered a hotel, herded out a number of civilians and gave us their rooms. With

those guards in the hallway outside, Thompson-type machine guns in hand, we wondered about our fate - when and where do we eat? Soon we were declared friendly, but the guard remained.

"Our two older, regular Army gunners displayed that knack of ingenuity for which peace time soldiers are famous. Somehow they got some vodka, got the guards pie-eyed, put them in their room, and strolled off in pursuit of a skirt they eyed upon entering the hotel. The navigator and I took off to see the sights of Lodz. Those sights included large groups of half-starved German POWs being herded down the street. We encountered a man who offered to take us to his home for ersatz coffee. Upon meeting his wife we learned that they were Jews that had escaped the holocaust due to being accomplished musicians.

"We were in Lodz but just a few days before being put into a truck to take us to another airfield. I encountered a young man dressed in U.S. Army uniform, sporting 2nd Lt. bars. He asked how he could get back to the U.S. side, called me 'Sir,' and his demeanor seemed fishy. I wondered how a U.S. Army Officer could get over into the Soviet side of battle hundreds of miles away from the nearest U.S. forces. Was he a deserter or maybe even a potential spy? I never saw him again.

"The truck took us from Lodz to a Soviet tactical airfield close to the front lines. We could hear the artillery in the distance. Our hosts were not prepared for our arrival and we spent the first night on straw in a barn along with other 'grunts.' Later we moved into better accommodations just slightly better than an outhouse. We also got our first taste of how Soviet soldier/airmen got to bathe and change into fresh underwear, but still retaining the outer wear. They had constructed a steam room at the barn. When you exited you turned in your dirty under clothes and were given clean long johns. Our next issue of clothing would await our arrival at the American shuttle base, Poltava, Ukraine USSR.

"While we were at this forward tactical airbase, we were split up - officer crewmen one place, eating with other Soviet officers, and our enlisted crew elsewhere. The Soviet political officer wore a different color uniform than the other aircrew officers. His manner was very suspicious and he alone spoke English. The Russians live off the land. We observed them leading in a cow on a rope behind the mess hall, shoot it, skin it on the spot and that was the meat for the meal. Polish peasant women were observed being herded down the road, implements in hand, and they brought in the potatoes for the meal. Which reminds me - in this the 1992 political year, the plural of potatoes does indeed have an 'e.'

'Other American airmen were being brought into this forward airbase for repatriation back to U.S. hands. Our proximity to Berlin found us in the company of the 8th Air Force crewmen who were shot down and made their way into Soviet held territory. One, a Major, expressed a desire for a haircut one night following our meal. It was dark, we were loaded into trucks, taken to a nearby village, and the Russians went to the homes of the village barbers, forced them to their shops and demanded they cut our hair. When we offered to pay for the haircuts, the Soviets said, 'nyet.' We were still under guard.

"So controlled were the Russians that when we expressed delight at seeing American Jeeps, trucks, C-47 aircraft, etc. they reminded us that these were Soviet built vehicles and aircraft, not Lend Lease offerings. We can now realize, after the collapse of the USSR, how they were able to keep their people unaware of the events and contributions in the free world. Freedom of information is the foe of totalitarian governments.

"Next day we flew low level under the direction of the Russian navigator to Poltava. The low level flight was to prevent the American C-47 aircrew from viewing USSR airfields and other military activity. The Cold War had its beginning before the Hot One (WW II) ended. Pay attention America.

"While we were in Poltava, we were issued uniforms and underwear to replace those we had been wearing for two weeks. The trek from Lodz to Amendola would be via Tehran, Iran, Cairo, Egypt, Athens, Greece, and Bari, Italy. Upon arrival back at the 2nd Bomb Group we found our possessions were packed and about to be shipped to next-of-kin. Out tent mates had removed and consumed our

hoarded beverages. We were, after all, declared Missing-In-Action and presumed dead. The dead don't drink, so our stash of booze was gone. Thanks guys!

"By now, Bill Prescott's wound was healed and the Group's medics would not support award of the Purple Heart. They reasoned that since he was not hospitalized nor a wound was visible, the request for the award could not be honored. It would take another 45 years for the Air Force to give him the medal that none of us seek. At its 1991 Reunion in Dayton, Ohio, the Second Bombardment Association's program included a ceremony at which S/Sgt. Bill Prescott received that long overdue Purple Heart.

"We flew three more missions before the war ended. Our first mission after our return was on April 20th, Vipiteno, Italy; the next on April 23rd, Peschiera, Italy, and the last one was on April 24th, Malborghetto, Italy. I did not have a permanently assigned navigator, so the one who was with me when we were shot did not participate in those final three missions."

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6674 - 96TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	Phillip Good, 0-761811, P.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Tare Powers, 0-830917, CP.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Cyril O. Keopp, 0-2065395, N.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Martin R. Schlau, 0-2001318, B.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Russell Kirts, 15382885, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Charles D. Nichols, 15127446, L/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Felix D. James, 32794940, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Michael Roll, 33756902, L/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Steve A. Tarby, 32587328, T/G.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	John Cetinich, 35219432, R/O.	(RET)

Interrogation report of 1st Lt. Phillip Good, and crew, upon return to Allied control: "We departed our base in Italy at 0855 hours for our target at Ruhland, Germany. Our approximate time was 1405 but we did not drop because the bombardier in the lead ship was hit. The flak was tracking and was very accurate. We turned off the bomb run. No. 4 was just about gone and we couldn't keep up with the formation. About 1420 we left the formation, salvoed our bombs in a field, and headed due east. At about 1430 we lost No. 4. We found ourselves by pilotage and started for Lublin, Poland, which was briefed as an auxiliary field. We were able to hold our altitude at about 8,000 feet at 125 MPH, IAS. At about 1510 we let down to 3,000 feet due to 8/10ths clouds from 5 - 7,000 feet. We kept going until about 1545 when the soup closed in and visibility down to about three miles. We spotted Kielce, Poland, and circled to find a field since visibility prevented us going any further. While circling the town we were fired at and shot red and white flares and the firing stopped. Finally, we found an open field, and made a swell, wheels down landing in a field just outside of Bratagon at 1600. Damage to plane - buckled waist back of ball, hit telephone pole with No. 2 engine and dented nacelle and hole in navigator's compartment. No. 3 prop was bent due to nosing over, leading edge of elevators are dented plus numerous flak holes.

"A little kid came out to the plane and when we said 'Amerikanski' the whole town came out. It took us quite awhile to get our things together. The camera and bombsight were left intact. The guns were taken apart to keep the people from firing them. The town constable stayed on guard. The people took us in town and gave us some milk and bread. Then the Commandant of Kielce, a Russian Major, came to see us. We were in luck since our right waist gunner and cameraman could both speak Polish. We assured the Major that no one was injured. He then ordered some of his men to guard the plane. I came into Kielce with the Major and he tried to interrogate me. I told him we were based in Italy, had

attacked a target in Germany, had lost two engines and headed east. A woman, who could speak English fairly well, was brought in but I told no more. Finally the rest of the fellows came and we were told that they had to have more information in order to wire Moscow. We therefore told them our base and target. After this they gave us a large room and beds. We washed as best as possible, the Russians providing soap and towels. They gave us a very good supper with vodka which did things to us and finally to bed.

"The next day the pilot, navigator, engineer, cameraman and radio operator went out to the plane. We fired a rocket for one of the Russian officers that was with us and fired the radio gun up into the air. Our radio operator then succeeded in notifying 15th Air Force where we were and that all were OK. The guns were all thoroughly dismantled, but we couldn't get to the ball turret. We then took our camera, bomb sight, radio receiver, cushions, radio gun intact, Gibson Girl back to the room with us. They wanted to take everything but the plane is pretty intact. Fuses, etc. were removed so they couldn't do any damage or learn anything of importance. The Russians drained the oil out of the airplane. On the bomb run, the oxygen went out and the tail gunner interphone was out, both due to flak."

VIENNA, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 379 - MARCH 16, 1945

Thirty-nine aircraft took off, each with a load of 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs to bomb the Florisdorf Oil Refinery. Twenty-five aircraft dropped 294 bombs on the primary with several large explosions observed. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate lightly wounding 2nd Lt. W. B. Cope, P, 429th Squadron; 1st Lt. C. J. Weiner, B; 2nd Lt. D. W. Powell, N; Cpl. W. G. Wapp, TOG; and F/O A. Houliars, N, all of the 49th Squadron.

Seven aircraft attacked Marshalling Yards at Amstettin, Austria, dropping 84 bombs with bomb hits observed in the Yards. Five aircraft attacked Marshalling Yards at St. Veit, Austria, dropping 60 bombs with hits reported in the Yards. Two aircraft were early returns.

B-17 #44-8820, with Colonel Richard G. Waugh, temporary Group Commanding Officer, piloting is missing.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT - A/C #44-8820 - 49TH SQUADRON

Colonel	Richard G. Waugh, 0-20124, P.	(RET)
Major	Ernest L. Blanton, 0-670985, CP.	(RET)
1st Lt.	Bernard W. Stark, 0-669136, N.	(RET)
1st Lt.	Joseph Swift, 0-717957, B.	(RET)
1st Lt.	Albert A. Pierard, 0-768893, Mickey Navigator	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Herbert P. Taylor, 32935444, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Anthony T. Calabrese, 33690034, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Francis A. Abbott, 32912889, L/W.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Charles W. Freeman, 0-558355, T/G - Observer	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Edwin C. Wade Jr., 13121103, R/O.	(RET)

The 2nd Bomb Group Ground Radio Station received this message from A/C #44-8820:

A/C #820: "I have a message for you."

Ground Station: "Received - go ahead."

A/C #820: "I am going to land at Pecs, Pecs. Go ahead."

Ground Station: "Received - is this correct?"

A/C #820: "I am going to land at Pecs."

Ground Station: "Okay - received."

1st Lt. Charles W. Freeman, TG - Observer, after return to Allied Control: "We left the formation over Vienna. The entire crew was with the ship when we crash landed two miles south of Sasd, Hungary, which is approximately 20 miles NE of Pecs, Hungary.

"We were in our crash landing positions when landing and everyone was OK except that S/Sgt. Calabrese was wounded by flak over Vienna. The entire crew came back to Italy and were last seen on 25 April 1945."

Despite the fact that the Russians were Allies, it seemed that they did everything in their power to retain American airmen. This crew, and others that were to join them, were shunted from place to place from March 29, 1945 until arriving in Odessa. On April 21, 1945, a contingent of 106 Allied airmen, including Colonel Waugh and seven of his crew, departed Odessa on H.M.S. Straffordshire for Naples, Italy. The other two members of his crew returned later.

This was the 83rd Mission for Major Ernest Blanton. He had flown one tour with the 2nd Bomb Group, gone home on leave, and returned to fly again. He had flown his first mission January 16, 1944 and completed that tour on May 12, 1944. Upon his return to combat his 51st mission was on August 25, 1944.

T/Sgt. Edwin C. Wade was a RO in the 49th Squadron: February 21, 1992: "My original crew flew to England in the early fall of 1944 to be assigned to the 8th Air Force. My pilot was Lt. William K. Buehler; Lt. Carl DeBois, co-pilot; Captain J. J. O'Hern, navigator; Lt. William Kerns, bombardier; Cpl. Herbert P. Taylor, engineer; Cpls. Joseph Waladkewics and Joseph DeVito, waist gunners; Cpl. Paul Siebert, tail gunner; and Cpl. Melvin Cook, ball turret gunner. Because of the heavy casualties in the 15th Air Force over the Ploesti Oil Fields, our stay in England was cut short, and we were transferred to Italy.

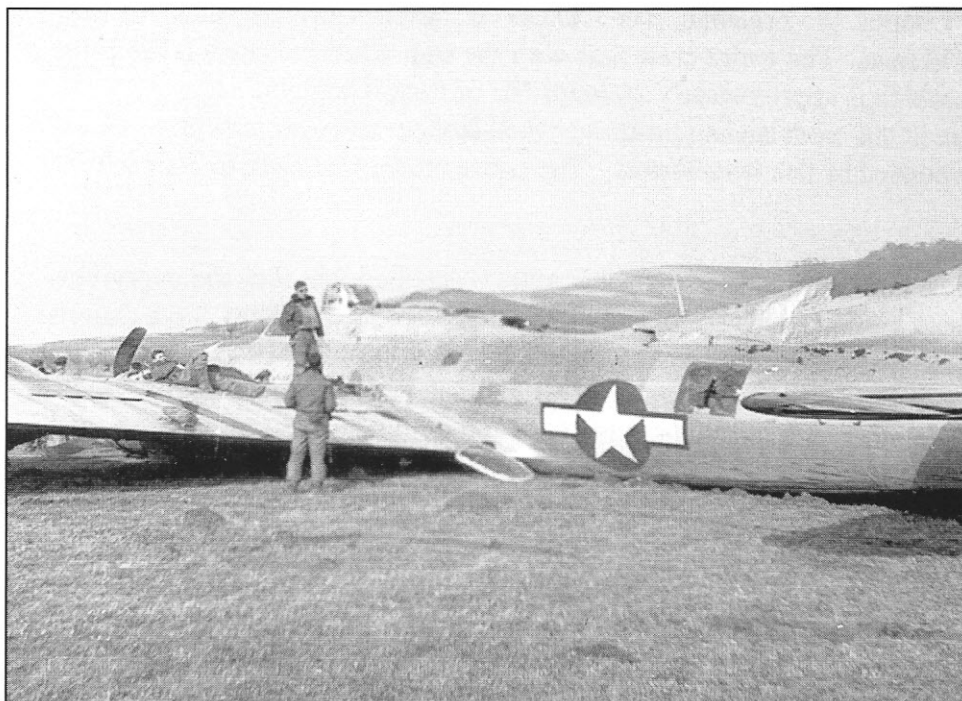
"During the fall and winter of 1944 and 1945 we had completed 25 successful missions over Southern Germany, Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia.

"My original crew was split up and for my 26th mission on March 16, 1945, I was assigned to a crew flying the lead ship on a bombing mission to the Florisdorf Oil Refineries near Vienna, Austria. The crew consisted of Colonel Richard Waugh, Group Commanding Officer; Major Ernest Blanton, Co-pilot; 1st Lt. Joseph Swift, Bombardier; Capt. Bernard W. Stark, Navigator; T/Sgt. Herbert P. Taylor, Engineer; S/Sgt. Anthony Calabrese and S/Sgt. Francis A. Abbott, Waist Gunners; and 1st Lt. Albert A. Pierard, Observer and Tail Gunner.

"During the bomb run the flak was severe and the plane was badly damaged. The bombs were dropped but the two left engines were lost and feathered. The left wing was severely damaged; the hydraulics and part of the oxygen tanks were shot out. Our plane immediately dropped out of the formation. Knowing we could never get back to the base, we headed toward the Russian lines hoping to make an emergency landing at Pecs, Hungary.

"Limping along at about 5,000 feet we were shot at with everything from rifle fire to 40mm shells. We barely managed to get over Lake Balaton and crash landed in a country field in Hungary. In crash landing we clipped several trees and I thought we were going to be buried alive in dirt being plowed up into the plane during landing.

"We got out of the plane and it was not long before we saw many peasants gathering a hundred or so yards away just standing and looking at us. We did not know if we were in German or Russian territory. Shortly though, a military vehicle drove up in which appeared to be a Russian Commandant. He was accompanied by a contingent of women soldiers holding machine guns and with many rounds of ammunition slung over their shoulders. Fortunately, with our Russian I.D. cards, we were able to identify ourselves as Americans.



A/C #44-8820 - Down in Hungary - 3-18-45
(Courtesy - E. Wade)



T/R-L/R - E. Wade, H. Taylor, J. Swift, C. Freeman,
Russian Doctor, A. Pierard
B/R-L/R - Lisa (Russian Nurse), F. Abbott (Courtesy - E. Wade)

"They took us to a nearby village where we were fed vodka and wine while all along, drinking toasts to 'Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill.' The next day Captain Stark and S/Sgt. Calabrese were sent off to a hospital in Budapest for treatment to their injuries.

"The next couple of weeks were spent living in homes of Hungarian peasants and riding in the back of a broken down Model A Ford truck. On one occasion a couple of us were nearly shot by drunken Russian soldiers who really did not know who we were. Along the way we met up with 28 other American airmen who had been shot down. On March 29th, At Baja, Hungary, we all boarded a train that had been made up from old German boxcars. The next day we had a long stopover at Szeged, Hungary where we went in and enjoyed the town. After we left, about 20 miles out, it became evident that many were missing. We soon pulled over to a side track, the locomotive disconnected and went back to find the missing airmen. After several hours, the locomotive came back blowing their whistle, with all the men hanging on the sides.

"We traveled through Velika Kikinda, Srbisa; Timisoara, Romania; Turnal Severin, Romania; Craiova, Romania; arriving at Bucharest, Romania on April 4th. Here we got our first decent meal, thanks to the International Red Cross. The next day we left Bucharest on a Russian train and passed through the dreaded Ploesti Oil Fields. On April 8th, we ended up in Odessa, Russia on the Black Sea. We were put up in a cold building where we slept in wooden stalls and ate and lived like prisoners. It was a gathering point for English and Canadian soldiers who had been released from prison camps by the Russians.

"After about two weeks in Odessa, we, along with the many Englishmen, were boarded on a British transport ship that had arrived from England with a load of released Russian POWs. We traveled for five days across the Black Sea, through Istanbul, the Dardanelles, around the coast of Greece and were dropped off at Naples, Italy on April 27. Here we were finally under American Military control."

LANDSHUT, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 380 - MARCH 19, 1945

Forty-three aircraft took off with 42 aircraft dropping 481, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Landshut with good concentration of hits reported. There was little flak and no injuries. One aircraft dropped 12, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Passau, Austria. Results were not noted.

WIENER NEUSTADT, AUSTRIA/ST. POLTEN, AUSTRIA/KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 381 - MARCH 20, 1945

Forty-two aircraft took off each with a load of 10, 500-lb RDX bombs to attack the Vosendorf Oil Refinery in Vienna. Due to weather problems a multitude of targets were attacked. Twelve A/C dropped 60 bombs on Marshalling Yards at Wiener Neustadt. Six A/C dropped 30 bombs on Marshalling Yards at Klagenfurt. Eleven A/C dropped 100 bombs on St. Polten. One A/C attacked Marshalling Yards at Judenburg, Austria. One A/C attacked St. Veit, Austria Marshalling Yards. One A/C attacked Railroad Shops at Littlefeld, Austria. One A/C attacked Marshalling Yards at Amstettin. One A/C was an early return and six A/C dropped on an accidental release of the lead plane. Ten bombs were dropped on each of the single mission targets except only seven were dropped on the Knittelfeld Iron Works.

Bombing results were as follows: Wiener Neustadt and Amstettin Marshalling Yards were well covered with hits. Bombs were to the right at Klagenfurt and short at St. Polten and St. Veit. Part of the bombs hit in Judenburg Marshalling Yards. Bombs were across at Salla and Iron Works. Railroad Shops were hit at Knittelfeld. There were no reported injuries.

VIENNA/VILLACH/KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 382 - MARCH 21, 1945

For the second day in a row the Group bombed a number of targets. Forty-three aircraft took off, each carrying four, 1,000-lbs GP bombs, to bomb the Kargan Oil Refinery at Vienna. Twelve aircraft dropped 48 bombs on the primary by PFF. Results unknown. Thirteen A/C dropped 52 bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Villach with hits reported. Six A/C dropped 24 bombs on Marshalling Yards at Klagenfurt with hits reported. One A/C dropped four bombs on Marshalling Yards at St. Polten, Austria with unobserved results. One A/C dropped four bombs on a Railroad Bridge at 45-11N - 15-7E. Bridge not hit. One A/C dropped four bombs on Marshalling Yards 46-37N - 14-38E with hits recorded. Eight A/C returned their bombs.

Flak at the primary target was heavy, moderate, and accurate resulting in slight wounds to 2nd Lt. Carl R. Buehner, CP. Cpl. Lee Rounsiville, T/G, suffered from anoxia.

RUHLAND, GERMANY/KLAGENFURT/ZELTWEG, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 383 - MARCH 22, 1945

Thirty aircraft took off to bomb the Oil Refineries at Ruhland. Fourteen aircraft dropped 148, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Refineries at Ruhland. Hits were reported in the target area. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate severely damaging 12 A/C and minor damage to 10. Lightly wounded were Captain Ralph E. Chambers, P, 20th Squadron; 2nd Lt. Frank J. Rickman, P, 96th Squadron; F/O P. E. Jones, B; and 1st Lt. F. Saenz, B, both of the 49th Squadron, and from the 429th; 1st Lt. F. M. Fouts, B; F/O E. S. Fox, B; Cpl. E. A. Morrow, RO, and seriously wounded was T/Sgt. T. I. Shivak, RWG.

Eight Me-262s attacked the formation with B-17 #44-6440 lost to this action. One Me-262 was destroyed in a joint claim by S/Sgt. Frederick L. Downs, S/Sgt. Warren T. McKane and S/Sgt. George D. Glass Jr., all of the 20th Squadron. Credit for probable destruction of an Me-262 went to S/Sgt. Darrell W. Jensen, 20th Squadron.

Also missing are B-17s #44-6697, #44-8191, #44-6738 and #44-6682.

Six A/C dropped 60, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Klagenfurt with hits reported and six A/C dropped 60, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Zeltweg, Austria with bombs reported as missing the target. There was one early return. It was not known if A/C #191 and #738 dropped their bombs on the target.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6440 - 20TH SQUADRON

F/O Ernest H. Williams, T-5279, P.	(KIA)
F/O Miles W. Massey, T-6027, CP.	(KIA)
F/O John O. Black, T-135855, N.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Maurice A. Tilbey, 19171445, TOG.	(KIA)
T/Sgt. Clarence S. Weibert, 37343659, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Willie P. Skeffington, 19033460, L/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. John C. Shuey, 35926904, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. Conrad R. Schryer, 36825476, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt. John H. Bryner Jr., 33694867, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt. Henry C. Lawson, 14178412, R/O.	(KIA)

S/Sgt. Alfred Novak, LTG on B-17 #729, after the mission: "I saw B-17 #440 attacked by an Me-262 which came in from 6 o'clock, low, firing 20mm. It received a direct hit between No. 1 and No. 2 engines and caught fire. The aircraft appeared out of control and in a roll. The wing then fell off and the aircraft continued in a dive. I couldn't follow it all the way to the ground because of fighter attacks at this time. I observed no parachutes. This was at 1255 hours at 51-40N - 14-10E."

Statement of S/Sgt. John H. Bryner Jr. after liberation: "A number of fighters attacked the B-17 on which I was the tail gunner. Both wings caught fire and the plane started spinning. I bailed out. I did not see any other members of the crew bail out and have not heard anything regarding the other members since this time."

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6697 - 429TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	John W. Pierik, 0-731101, P.	(MIA)*
2nd. Lt.	Robert W. Steele, 0-785002, CP.	(MIA)*
1st Lt.	Harold A. Taylor, 0-669140, N.	(MIA)*
2nd Lt.	John P. Yatsco, 0-929489, B.	(MIA)*
T/Sgt.	Richard H. Benjamin, 37566405, U/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Vernon T. Burger, 39216824, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Tony (NMI) Zvenbergen Jr., 38387823, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Charles L. Redford, 39920100, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Wilbur W. Jaffke, 33670805, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Raymond J. Levesque, 31309769, R/O.	(POW)

*The missing Air Crew Report gave no further status for the four officers and a search of other sources gave no information regarding the fate of these four men.

Statement of 1st Lt. William J. McCormick, Pilot of B-17 #455, after the mission. "B-17 #697 was flying No. 4 position and he pulled down and to the left. I started to follow but he waved me on. As far as I know all of his engines were running. I lost sight of him after he pulled under me. I did not have time to ascertain any flak holes and the plane appeared to be under control. This was right after we came off the target."

T/Sgt. Richard H. Benjamin, UTG, March 7, 1994: "On March 22, 1945 our B-17 encountered flak over the target area which disabled our aircraft. We headed toward the Russian lines and were eventually escorted by three Russian aircraft (P-39s), our bomb bay doors were open and we used our red flares. The Russian fighters were positioned, one on each wingtip, and one on our tail. They next peeled off into the sun and attacked us, utilizing the 37mm cannons and machine guns. Our gunners returned fire, the upper turret was hit, in which I was in, our bomb bay was filled with smoke. I made my way back to the waist of the plane. Our plane was in flames and smoke. The cockpit was strafed, and my feeling is that the four officers were killed at this time. An attempt was made to return to the cockpit area, however, it was impossible with the flames and smoke.

"The plane was descending as if on automatic pilot. We, the six enlisted men, bailed out, were strafed in our chutes, some holes punctured our chutes but none of us were hit. To the best of my knowledge this was near Salzbrunn, Germany. We watched our plane descend. It went over a hill and that was the last view of it.

"All the enlisted men were POWs and eventually returned to the United States. I never heard any information regarding the officers again."

1st Lt. Samuel H. Martin was the original co-pilot on the crew of Lt. John Pierik. July 11, 1995: "My activities on March 22, 1945 were actually dictated by an event occurring the day before on March 21, although I did not realize the consequence at the time. During the day I was notified that I had to have a Typhoid Booster shot so I went to the Infirmary to receive it and went about my business for the balance of the day. Our crew was put on the alert for a mission the next day so I turned in early. When we were awakened early for breakfast and briefing I did not feel too well and could tell I had a fever,

but, felt that it would pass so I proceeded to briefing and the flight-line. Several members of the crew stated that I looked real flushed. John Pierik, our pilot, felt my forehead and said I felt like I was burning up with fever and that he felt I would jeopardize the other members of the crew if I proceeded in my condition. He then called for a replacement from the spare ship, a pilot named Robert Steele, and called for transportation to take me to the Infirmary where I checked in with a 104 plus degree temperature.

"That evening, after a reasonable time allowed for debriefing, I suspected something had happened to our crew when they failed to come to the Infirmary to see me. Shortly thereafter, the CO, Doc and Operations Officer came into the room where I had a bed in the Infirmary and told me about my crew being missing.

"I had flown 11 sorties up to this time. After my crew went down, I flew eight more sorties for a total of 19 at the end of the war in Europe. This included the last bombing mission of the European War on May 1, 1945, the target being Salzburg, Austria.

"I had the feeling that had I been able to go on this mission instead of my replacement, Robert Steele, things may have been different, but, who knows. Fate is fate.

"Although the 2nd was being held over for occupation, I had enough points to get out and was on my way back to the United States (in the middle of the Atlantic) when V-J Day came."

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-8191 - 429TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	Andrew F. Crane, 0-825538, P.	(POW)
1st Lt.	Paul M. Honke, 0-777679, CP.	(POW)
1st Lt.	George W. Betchley, 0-2057955, N.	(KIA)
1st Lt.	James S. Barnett, 0-716906, B.	(KIA)
1st Lt.	Donald F. Maine, 0-716492, R.N.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Donald A. Dorman, 31325264, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Robert A. Keuchel, 37434464, R/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	R. G. DeMatteis, 13157733, L/W.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	Stephan J. Futur, 13189816, T/G.	(KIA)
T/Sgt.	Daniel P. Dunkerley, 6980834, R/O.	(KIA)

Capt. Andrew F. Crane after liberation: "We left the formation just after dropping bombs on the target. We flew eight miles to 10 miles N. of Breslau then bailed out. I personally saw five chutes, and other crew members bailed out five minutes previously. Dorman, Betchley, Barnett, Honke, and myself bailed out after other crew members had bailed out a few minutes before. No members were in the plane when it crashed as far as I know. Saw bombardier, navigator, co-pilot and engineer jump. Others were informed to jump three minutes before we jumped. Germans couldn't find any in the aircraft and asked me if I knew their whereabouts.

"I saw none of the crew on the ground or anywhere except five descending chutes. My co-pilot and I found each other at German Headquarters. Both he and I were strafed, in our chutes by Me-109s. I heard gunfire continually and assume other crew members were killed by strafing or in attempting to make the Russian lines.

"At German Headquarters I saw a picture of Betchley (escape picture which we all carried) and dog tags of Dorman and Dunkerley. I saw Dorman and Betchley bail out. As I see it, they were definite victims of strafing. The co-pilot was strafed four times. He oscillated his chute and managed to only sustain a grazing from a machine gun bullet. I was strafed twice.

"For information of other crews: I saw two B-17s quite a distance in front of me being attacked by Me-109s. Both caught fire and exploded. I did see two chutes. Possibly one ship could have been Lt. John Pierik's."

One aircraft not reported missing, #682, made an emergency landing at a Russian forward base on 22 March 1945 at 1510 hours. This A/C went over the primary target on the first run over the target, but left the formation before the second run was made. The A/C was pulling excessive power and the pilot left the formation with less than 50 gallons of gas in each tank. The bomb load of 10, 500-lb. RDX bombs was jettisoned at 1456 hours. This A/C received major damage from two Russian piloted aircraft, a P-39 and Yak 3, because, as pilots of fighters later informed the crew; the "Y" on the fin of the B-17 looked like a German insignia at a distance. The A/C was repaired by Russians and the crew returned to base on 26 March 1945. Crew members were:

2nd Lt.	Arthur K. Forest, P.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Libero P. Casaccia, CP.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Walter F. Javor, N.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Louis (NMI) Etter, B.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Hugh W. Sexton, U/T.	(RET)
Cpl.	Willie J. Schonage, L/T.	(RET)
Cpl.	Hugh A. Stevenson, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Herbert W. Wendt, L/W.	(RET)
Cpl.	Joseph F. Klykamp, T/G.	(RET)
Cpl.	Vernon H. Sanders, R/O.	(RET)

Another aircraft, not reported missing in the report, was #44-6738 from the 96th Squadron. This aircraft was hit by flak at the I.P. and was in the flak for about 20 minutes. They were hit heavily and turned to a heading of 65 degrees. They were fired upon along the route and over the Russian lines. Russian P-39s left them at the Oder River and they landed at Ieczycza, Poland. The crew was treated well but interrogated extensively. The Russians were souvenir conscious, wanted everything the men had. They had complete freedom on the base but watched closely in town. On the 26th of March they were picked up and taken to Poltava and returned to Base from there. Crew members were:

2nd Lt.	William C. Landers, 0-9287725, P.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	C. A. Wooten, 0-928891, CP.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	C. W. Olson, 0-9926667, N.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Bernard N. Sepolio, 18199830, TOG.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	George P. Shimko, 15014212, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Frank J. Kozina, 16147791, L/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Ivan R. Thornberry, 34736345, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Edward (NMI) Ratner, 32926626, L/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	John L. Bosshart, 36831136, T/G.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Jackson J. Boone, 15915783, R/O.	(RET)

RUHLAND, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 384 - MARCH 23, 1945

Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 253, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Oil Refineries at Ruhland. Smoke obscured the target but bombs fell in the smoke area. Flak was heavy, intense, and accurate resulting in serious injuries to 1st Lt. C. Wickersham, P, 20th Squadron, and light injuries to Sgt. Ronald T. Sebold, TOG, 20th Squadron. S/Sgt. W. S. Grooms, LWG, 49th Squadron, suffered from anoxia.

B-17 #44-6452 from the 20th Squadron is missing.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6452 - "BIG STUFF" - 20TH SQUADRON

F/O	Arthur L. Ferkin, T-4221, P.	(RET)
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F/O	Andrew J. Girelamo, T-5192, CP.	(RET)
F/O	Paul F. Kisak, T-133040, N.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Robert W. Phillippe, 16130219, TOG.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	Carlton J. Sprague, 32865124, U/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Raymond L. Isaac, 18915370, L/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Curtis R. Hollister, 14090769, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Russell H. Johnson, 36783233, L/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Wilson (NMI) Woodburn, 39569164, T/G.	(RET)
T/Sgt.	William A. Harrison, 19151991, R/O.	(RET)

Statement of T/Sgt. William A. Harrison after return to Allied control: "We were over Ruhland, Germany when we left the formation. I did not bail out nor did any others in the crew. We crash landed near Kety, Poland. All ten of the crew were safe. We were then taken from one Russian prison camp to another. We were under Russian guard for about two months.

"There were about 85 Americans and two British RAF men in the prison in Kiev, Russia. Americans were from the 8th and 15th Air Force. All were sent back to Italy and arrived at Naples on the 7th of May 1945."

Statement of F/O Arthur L. Ferkin, Pilot, after return to Allied control: "Over the target we were hit by flak and Me-262s. Two engines were knocked out immediately and we headed for Russian lines. We landed near Kety, Poland and for about 60 days we were with the Russians who were helping us to return to our base in Italy. This crash landing was a wheels-up job with nobody hurt except the pilot who suffered a bruised left knee.

"After the landing we wandered around Russia for 60 days going from Krakow to Lwow to Kiev and finally to Odessa where we all boarded a British boat and returned to Italy, including Russell H. Johnson. In Italy I was the first of the crew to return to the U.S."

BERLIN, GERMANY - MISSION NO. 385 - MARCH 24, 1945

Thirty aircraft took off and 27 aircraft dropped 128, 1,000-lb. GP bombs on the Daimler Benz Assembly Plant in Berlin. Three aircraft were early returns. Flak was heavy, intense and accurate. 1st Lt. William Callaghan, N, 96th Squadron, was seriously wounded and B-17's #44-6718 and #44-8162 are missing. The majority of the bombs were slightly left and short of the target with some hits in the assigned area.

Ten to 12 Me-262s and one Me-109 attacked "Charlie" Box. Attacks were from out of the sun and formation vapor trails. E/A were in glide, jet units not being used, breaking off low; jet power then used. These attacks came when the formation was in the flak. P-51s then engaged the enemy.

E/A consisting of Me-262s, Me-109s and Me-210s attacked "Dog" Box. E/A were very aggressive. One Me-262 was firing rockets. The attacks ended before bombs away. Two P-51s were observed to shoot down one Me-262 which hit the ground and exploded.

S/Sgt. K. E. Alles and S/Sgt. Benjamin W. Prostic, 96th Squadron, were each credited with destruction of an Me-109 and Cpl. Lawrence T. Ashley credited with the probable destruction of an Me-262.

B-17 combat damage: From flak, 16 minor and 2 severe. From fighters, two minor.

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-6718 - 20TH SQUADRON

1st Lt.	Robert W. Tappan, 0-693193, P.	(POW)
2nd Lt.	Hyacinith C. Thimmesch, 0-700681, CP.	(POW)

1st Lt.	Leon J. Gesicki, 0-2065978, N.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	Walter (NMI) Sura, 35383424, TOG.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Irving M. Chary, 42001603, U/T.	(KIA)
S/Sgt.	James E. Ash, 16078841, L/T.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	William J. Kralich, 37571156, R/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	James W. Carter, 15048264, L/W.	(POW)
S/Sgt.	James L. Shrout, 14143669, T/G.	(POW)
T/Sgt.	Robert C. Reardon, 37530618, R/O.	(POW)

Statement of S/Sgt. James D. Silianoff, TG on B-17 #365, after the mission: "Of two Me-262s which attacked our plane, one continued an attack on plane #718, spraying that aircraft with 20mm fire into the fuselage and bomb bay doors. Plane #718 started to lose altitude and speed rapidly and falling behind the Squadron, and smoke began to emit from the tail. Two to three other Me-262s also attacked at this point. Then I saw two parachutes open and then I lost sight of the plane. All this happened before we reached the target at 51-45N - 13-12E, at 1217 hours, altitude 26,000 feet."

The following statements were given to the Army Air Forces Personnel Affairs Branch, regarding the death of S/Sgt. Irving M. Chary:

S/Sgt. William Kralich: "I don't know if he bailed out, but if he did it was about ten miles south of Berlin. I don't know if he was injured. I was flying the upper turret and Irving M. Chary was flying right waist position during the flight. Those in the front portion of the plane were unable to get to the back because of enemy fire destroying the passageway."

S/Sgt. Walter Sura, Togglier: "In my opinion he did not bail out. The ball gunner said he (Chary) had been hit by gunfire. The ball gunner said, 'As I kicked the other waist gunner out the waist door, I saw Chary crawling toward the door.' The ball gunner then bailed out. I think he was wounded and without oxygen and went down with the plane. We didn't hear anything about him after the flight. All the other crew members were accounted for in some manner, either by one of us or the Germans."

S/Sgt. James L. Shrout, Tail Gunner: "Due to the fact that I was flying as a replacement on that particular mission, I was not acquainted personally with T/Sgt. Chary. I believe he bailed out according to information picked up later. I bailed out near Juterbog, Germany which is a little south of Berlin."

"My interphone was shot out on the first pass therefore I had no contact with remaining crew members. To the best of my knowledge he was not injured. Due to the fact that I was flying tail, I saw a parachute leave the plane almost immediately after the first attack and it was quite some time before I saw anymore chutes leave the plane and from information received later, the first chute had been T/Sgt. Chary, because the remaining crew members were accounted for and they claimed to have bailed out at very close intervals."

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT: A/C #44-8162 - 429TH SQUADRON

2nd Lt.	Richard (NMI) Rapelyea, 0-830931, P.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Allie G. Melson, 0-784904, CP.	(RET)
2nd Lt.	Charles N. Parrish, 0-2072522, N.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Marvin J. Steinfeld, 17070404, TOG.	(KIA)
Cpl.	Melvin L. Rowe, 19040904, U/T.	(KIA)
Cpl.	Donald (NMI) Roberts, 36873682, L/T.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Glenn R. Bailey, 36442831, R/W.	(RET)
S/Sgt.	Herbert M. Jacobs, 12220058, L/W.	(RET)

Cpl. Fred C. Bryant Jr., 36435437, T/G. (RET)
Cpl. Donald L. Wagaman, 33871546, R/O. (RET)

Statement of 2nd Lt. Richard Rapelyea, P, after return to Allied Control: "I was the pilot of our plane when enemy fire shot out our controls. The entire crew bailed out. But I believe S/Sgt. Marvin Steinfeld, who was on his first mission with this crew, was killed by rifle fire while descending. We came down over German/Russian lines and soldiers of both sides shot at us as we came down in our chutes. I was not an eye witness to his death. His place of burial is not known to me.

"Cpl. Melvin Rowe was the toggler on our plane and he also bailed out. I believe he also was shot while descending in his chute. I was not an eye witness to his death nor do I know the place of his burial."

Lt. Leland Ray Swanson was a member of the 20th Squadron and CP on the crew of Captain Clarence O'Donnell. May 4, 1992: "We were one man short of a full crew and always had a fill-in man at one of the waist guns. Sgt. Bill Reinfeld was assigned to our crew for several missions until he became Squadron Photographer. He just happened to be the cousin of our bombardier, Lt. Walter Ershow.

"On two separate occasions we had men wounded but each time they were fill-in gunners. The only casualty to our crew were two frost bitten ears of our tail gunner, Carl Bray. I'm sure he didn't think there was anything minor about it, but for some reason he didn't get the Purple Heart.

"We always felt our crew was top notch. No wise guys, no goof-ups. We all took our jobs seriously and went all out to look out for each other.

"Our crew flew in a lead position, Squadron or Group, on six occasions and O'Donnell was the only Lt. in our time frame that I am aware of, who was promoted to Captain in one tour of duty. We flew to targets in Germany, Northern Italy, Austria, Hungary and Yugoslavia, including the long dudes to Ruhland and Berlin where some had to land in Northern Italy because they ran out of fuel.

"I'd say that our tour was the typical B-17 story. We had knocked out engines, the whole shell through a wing that took off a corner of the fuel tank, the six foot gash up the side, the damaged hydraulic lines, the engine afire, the fire in the cockpit, saw a few planes explode, saw friends pull out of formation on fire and anxiously counted chutes, had a Me-262 take a B-17 right off our wing with a single pass at the Squadron and had the usual bomb hang-ups that had to be pried loose over the Adriatic. We were on a raid to Szony, Hungary the day that Lt. Gordon McDaniel made some kind of history by shooting down five FW-190s, thereby becoming an ace in a single day.

"I did not fly the Berlin mission on March 23, 1945, but had flown the day before to Ruhland. We always referred to them as Berlin missions because Ruhland was so close to Berlin. My pilot, Clarence O'Donnell, did fly the Berlin mission and later told me what they had experienced. It was his 24th mission and was flying co-pilot on the crew of William Horton, Squadron Operations Officer. They were flying as leader of "Charlie" box. He said they had no flak maps for part of the route and varied course as that black stuff came up to meet them. Lt. Tappan, the No. 3 man in the box was shot down by Me-262s on their first pass. Tappan had flown every one of his orientation missions with Clarence and on every one had the you know what shot out of them. He received a post card from Tappan, from Paris, after he walked out of prison camp. A supercharger was shot out of his No. 2 engine, a 1,000-lb. bomb dropped through the bomb bay doors and two of his crew were killed. The rest of the crew bailed out and were lucky that German army personnel got them instead of civilians. Clarence said that an Me-262 went across the top of their left wing so close that he could reach out and shake hands with him. He said Templehoff was just off to their left if they needed a runway. Several were looking for a runway or service station before finally reaching Amendola.

"The middle of May 1945, the war in Europe suddenly ended, stranding as it were, a B-17 bomber crew a few missions shy of 35 required for a full tour. We fully expected to be retrained for B-29s and sent to the Pacific Theater after a short leave Stateside. Crew chiefs and mechanics were working feverishly on our beloved B-17s to shape them up for flights across the Atlantic and two or three crews were leaving daily. After a boring eternity of two months our number finally came up on July 20, and our nine man crew and five P-47 jocks we were taking along as passengers happily stowed our luggage in the big bird and made ready to soar.

"As co-pilot, part of my responsibility was to accompany the pilot in a thorough pre-flight inspection of the plane's exterior. During our extended walk around the plane, I picked up a tiny white plastic cylinder about ½ inch in diameter with a tiny metal spring protruding from one end. I had no idea what it was or how it came to be lying on the tarmac. Entering by the waist door near the rear of the plane I made my way forward between the rows of duffel and flight bags. The first man I came upon was Carl Bray, our tail gunner from Toronto, Ohio. For no reason whatsoever I cornered Carl, pressed the little white cylinder into his hand and quietly told him, 'Take care of this for me Carl, I'll tell you about it when we get back to the States.' Then I promptly forgot about the whole incident.

"When we landed at Bradley Field, Connecticut three days later we were in a constant scramble to get through medical exams and train arrangements to go home for rest leave. Carl and I did not cross paths again at Bradley nor as we expected, after our 30-day leaves. A dozen or so days later, August 6 and 9, the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and now combat crews were lower than low in Air Corps priority. Provided with a choice, Carl and nearly all the crew separated and returned to being civilians.

"As the years rolled by we gradually lost track of old war buddies. Everyone was involved with getting themselves educated and pursuing careers. Then 40 years later, summer of 1985, our pilot, Clarence O'Donnell, and two of our crew members accidentally met at a 15th Air Force reunion at March AFB, California. They resolved to go all out to locate all the other crew members. Two years later they had all been located, miraculously alive, and all but one, retired.

"November 1, 1989 we finally got the whole crew together at a 2nd Bomb Group reunion in Tucson, Arizona. After the hugs and tears finally mellowed out to smiles and laughter, Carl Bray sidled up to me and with rather an intense look on his face said, 'Swanee, I've got something of yours. You told me to take care of it and you'd tell me what it was when we got to where we were going.' He pulled out a tiny purple velvet bag with a drawstring at the top. Thoroughly puzzled and fascinated by the elegant appearance of the velvet bag and his demeanor, I watched as he ceremoniously spread open the drawstrings, dug in the bag with a forefinger and proudly held up a tiny white plastic cylinder with a spring protruding from one end! I was absolutely amazed and speechless! I took it from his hand, held it, examined it closely, stalling for the words... and words. Carl watched me intently, expectantly. Finally I blurted out, 'Carl, that was 40 years ago!' He shrugged, 'Yea, well you told me to take care of it for you and this is the first time that I've had a chance to give it back to you.'

"By now I had suppressed the wave of guilt within me enough to realize what this dear man had done and what it meant to him. Caressing the tiny velvet bag, I looked at my friend. 'I don't know what it is Carl. I didn't know then, and I don't know now. It was a little joke, a prank. That's what it was. But what it is now, well it's one of my proudest possessions. If you can look out for it for 44 years, I will look out for it from here on in. I'll never part with it, I'll never give it up as long as I live.' And I never will. That little cylinder occupies a place of honor in my trophy case right beside my Air Force wings, ribbons and medals."

Lt. Richard K. Radtke was in the 96th Squadron and flew the Berlin mission on the crew of Captain William Boyce. October 2, 1993: "A day or two before the Berlin mission the Group flew a

mission to a target called Ruhland. The target was relatively close to Berlin. We lost a number of aircraft on that mission, most of which crash landed behind the Russian lines, and ultimately the surviving crewmen were returned. We, those of us who did not fly the mission, were told that fighters were responsible for most of the losses.

"One can well understand our disbelief and shock when the cover was removed from the Mission Map, during briefing, on the day of our mission.

"Ordinarily, the string (in red) they used to mark the route of ingress and egress were relatively squat, i.e., short on ingress, wide on egress. This was long on the vertical axis, narrow on the horizontal. In short, we all recognized 'trouble' when we saw it.

"We went through the usual briefing routine, had breakfast, and were airborne. The target was the Daimler-Benz Tank Works located on the southwest edge of Berlin. It lay adjacent to the stadium where the track and field events were held in the 1936 Olympics, our landmark for spotting the target. The attack was on a north-easterly axis with Groups in trail, dropping 1,000-lb. General Purpose bombs, some with delayed action fuzes. All Squadrons dropping on the Group lead. I do not recall the intervolometer settings.

"The Tank Works was the 5th Wing's target for the day. The 5th Wing of the 15th Air Force had six Groups of B-17s attached to it during my tour of duty. The 2nd's Order of Battle for the mission was as follows: Lt. Col. Luther M. Bivins, CO of the 49th Squadron, flew Group lead, the 96th was high right, 20th flew low left, and 429th brought up the rear. I was the 96th's Lead Bombardier, Fred Rice Jr., the Lead Navigator, and Bill Boyce, 96th Lead Pilot. I was from Menasha, Wisconsin, Rice from Emporia, Virginia, and Boyce was from Cleveland, Ohio.

"Two events occurred, just prior to turning on the I.P. and on the bomb run, until engaged by 'flak' - and both involved German fighters. This mission was the first in which I personally saw German fighters. I started flying missions in October 1944 and finished my tour in early April 1945.

"Secondly, the chin turret of the 'G' Model B-17 had two, 50 cal. machine guns mounted on it. The weapons could be changed two ways, one way or another, but not both. The first was manually. There was a lever about 18 inches long on either side of the bombardier's seat. By pulling up on the rear end of the lever, the charging handle of the gun was pulled back, the bolt opened. A round was inserted into the chamber as the bolt moved forward into battery position, ready to fire. The other method was a hydraulic charging mechanism that accomplished the same sequence, it involved pushing a button, needless to say, easier. On this day, our aircraft was equipped with the manual mechanism.

"Early on, it was the practice to test fire all guns en route to the target. This procedure fell into disuse and was dropped entirely while Col. Paul T. Cullen commanded the Group, for fighter resistance had dropped to 'zip,' until this day! The guns had not been test fired!

"When attacked by the fighters, my attempt to charge the guns jammed both of them. So I sat in fear, rage and frustration calling out the incoming targets for the others.

"On return to Amendola, I teased Rice about shooting at our P-51s; his response was short and positive, 'If they come that close, I'm going to shoot.'

"The mission was memorable for a variety of reasons. It was the longest, round-trip mission flown in the ETO during the war. And, we were attacked by Me-262 fighters, truly a first in the annals of warfare, however, others too make that claim. While on the bomb run, the Wing formation was 'Groups in trail' which reduced our overall defensive fire significantly. We were engaged by one sweep of a Me-262, which did not fly a pursuit curve, but rather came straight from the rear, at our altitude, and flew down the line of Groups, taking out one aircraft from each Group. Other crew members reported that the Me-109s were chewing them up at their leisure.

"From the 'front row center' seat in the nose of our aircraft, I witnessed this unprecedented display of speed, which I suspect, changed aerial warfare as we knew it, for all time.

"The Nazi war machine was hurt, badly hurt, but we still felt its sting. The Group lost two B-17s that day."

S/Sgt. Virgil F. Hoelscher was the TG on the crew of Lt. Bernard Donahue and assigned to the 96th Squadron. September 26, 1993: "I was in the Cadet Program at Spring Hill College near Mobile, Alabama from December 1943 until April 1994. I was one of the 65,000 that was eliminated from the program due to the fact that they didn't need as many pilots as they had anticipated.

"I took my flexible gunnery training at Kingman, Arizona and my overseas training, as a crew, at Avon Park, Florida. My crew consisted of Bernard Donahue, P; Ira D. Stroup, CP; William Waag, N; George Geilman, B; James Walker, U/T; Nyles Grissett, R; Charles Jamison, W; Thomas McElhiney, BT; and myself, TG. I do not recall the other waist gunner's first name. His last name was Johnson and he joined us in Italy.

"I arrived in Italy in January 1945 and flew 22 missions. I kept a brief diary which I shall note as recorded at that period of time.

"February 18, 1945 - Today I flew my first mission. Target was Linz, Austria. Medium amount of flak. Bombed through clouds at 25,000 feet.

"February 19, 1945 - Target, Vienna, but bombed an alternate, Klagenfurt, Austria. No flak, had some oxygen trouble. Bombed at 27,000 feet.

"February 25, 1945 - Target, Linz, Austria. After flying over it and through flak, we didn't drop bombs. We went and hit Amstettin, Austria. No flak, made two bomb runs. Encountered some Ju-88s.

"March 1, 1945 - Target, Moosbierbaum, Austria. Didn't see any flak. Easy mission.

"March 4, 1945 - Target, Sopron, Hungary. Very cold. Didn't encounter any flak. Really blasted target although we made two runs on it.

"March 9, 1945 - Target was to have been Brux, but we bombed Graz, Austria as an alternate. Flak medium but we encountered it at Brux and Maribor. Little damage to plane.

"March 12, 1945 - Target, Vienna, Austria. Expected lots of flak but saw little. 10/10 cloud covering. Several holes in plane, no major damage.

"March 14, 1945 - Target, Szony, Hungary. Visual with lots of flak and they were really on the ball tracking us perfectly. A number of holes in plane, two in the tail.

"March 15, 1945 - Target, Ruhland, Germany. We didn't drop on target but did get flak. Really had a rough time! Came in with No. 1 engine feathered and No. 4 wasn't giving us any power. Picked up several holes in plane.

"March 16, 1945 - Target, Vienna, Austria but we had to turn back just before arriving at Yugoslavia coast. No. 4 engine went out. Able to feather it. Dropped bombs in Adriatic and headed for home. Also hit bad weather, ice formed on wings and stabilizer.

"March 20, 1945 - Target, Vienna, but we couldn't keep up with formation due to loss of power in an engine. Bombed Knittelfeld, Austria. Didn't see any flak over target but did encounter some over a small town near the target.

"March 21, 1945 - Target, Vienna. Bombed by PFF at 30,500 feet. 52 below zero. We put first mission on No. 750 today.

"March 24, 1945 - Mission No. 13. The other evening someone jokingly said that one of these days we would bomb Berlin. Well, today we did and what a mission it was! The sky was black with flak and Me-262s hitting us! The first came in at 6 o'clock high. After firing several bursts, the Me-262 began to smoke and it still was smoking when it went under me. Later the ball turret gunner told me it was still smoking as it passed under him. It seems a miracle we made it. No. 2 engine was losing power all the way to the target and had to drop two bombs to keep with the formation.

"Were unable to drop bombs after passing over target. Saw a chute open as the crew of a disabled B-17 bailed out. Had to feather a prop on No. 2 engine, lost altitude. Sure good to see those P-51 escorts! (What a day!)

"April 1, 1945 - Target, Maribor, Yugoslavia. A railroad bridge but it had been bombed before we got there. Too much overcast to go to an alternate. Brought bombs back to base.

"April 5, 1945 - Today hit an airdrome in Northern Italy in the Udine area with 38 frag bombs. Photos showed a thorough job. Lots of flak.

"April 7, 1945 - Target, railroad bridge at Bressnone, Northern Italy but due to 10/10 cloud coverage did not drop our bombs.

"April 9, 1945 - Bombed the front lines in Northern Italy with frag bombs. Did a good job supporting British 8th Army. Very little flak.

"April 10, 1945 - Bombed the front lines in Northern Italy again. Easy mission.

"April 15, 1945 - Target near Bologna, Italy. Flak slight, easy mission.

"April 18, 1945 - Target near Bologna again. Mission scrubbed right after takeoff. At noon we were briefed to go again. Very little flak, easy mission.

"April 23, 1945 - Target, railroad bridge in Northern Italy, was knocked out by Group ahead of us. As an alternate we hit supply dumps at Peschiera, Italy. No flak, easy mission. My 'LAST' mission!

"When the war ended, I was assigned to the Army of Occupation flying some formations at times to let them know we were still around. I came home in October 1945."

PRAGUE, CZECHOSLOVAKIA - MISSION NO. 386 - MARCH 25, 1945

Twenty-seven aircraft dropped 1,026 fragmentation clusters on the Kbely Airdrome at Prague. Strikes were reported in the target area and many fires started. Little flak.

WIENER, NEUSTADT, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 387 - MARCH 26, 1945

Twenty-nine aircraft dropped 1,100, 100-lb. GP bombs on the Marshalling Yards at Wiener Neustadt with an excellent concentration of bombs in the target area. Flak was minimal.

GRAZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 388 - MARCH 30, 1945

Four aircraft took off on a Pathfinder mission at 0742 hours to bomb the North Station Goods Depot at Vienna. Two aircraft dropped 24, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Marshalling Yards at Graz by PFF with unobserved results. These aircraft diverted to Graz due to insufficient cloud cover at the primary target as instructed to do. Two others aborted and returned to base. Flak was heavy, slight and inaccurate.

LINZ, AUSTRIA - MISSION NO. 389 - MARCH 31, 1945

Twenty-six aircraft dropped 254, 500-lb. RDX bombs on the Main Station at Linz by PFF. Observation through a hole in the clouds indicated that all bombs hit in the city. Flak was heavy, slight and inaccurate. One aircraft dropped 10, 500-lb. RDX bombs on Linz, Austria with unobserved results.