

**Men and Bombers  
In World War II  
Combat Action  
Over Europe**

This is a story of men and airplanes, of life and death in the skies over Nazi-occupied Europe between 1942 and 1945. The 306th Bombardment Group was one of the oldest bomb groups stationed in England and flew 341 missions to targets in France, Germany, Belgium and Holland.

Maynard H. (Snuffy) Smith earned the Medal of Honor on his first mission, extinguishing fires, driving off an enemy attacker and saving the life of a fellow crewman while flying in a 306th plane.

Arizona Harris gained undying fame while his guns sought out a German fighter plane as the Flying Fortress settled into the icy waters of the English Channel.

There were heroes aplenty in the 306th, most of them undecorated, but for nearly three years this bomb group carried on against the enemy. In the early days of the war the odds seemed insurmountable, but as the battle moved on to the continent, the bombers sought out the oil refineries that fueled the Luftwaffe and the Wehrmacht, and slowed the enemy.

When the first American bombing force to enter Germany raided Wilhelmshaven, it was the men of the 306th in the lead. To some this was their finest hour, but the harsh realities of war soon confronted them over Schweinfurt as they lost ten airplanes on "Black Thursday." On two other raids ten of the group's Fortresses failed to return.



Out of this bomb group came eleven men who commanded other bomb groups in the 8th AF during the war and a dozen general officers in the postwar United States Air Force.

**The Author**



1944



1988

Russell A. Strong served as a combat navigator with the 367th Squadron of the 306th Bomb Group from June to December, 1944, during which time he flew thirty-four combat missions. Strong retired in 1988 as a senior development officer and director of research for the Western Michigan University Foundation. He now makes his home in Charlotte, NC, where he continues to serve as secretary, editor and historian for the 306th Bomb Group Association.

The jacket art is from a painting made by Lee Kessler of Canton, OH, of his plane as it went down over Wilhelmshaven, Germany.

# Germany

## The Story of the 306th Bombardment Group

By Russell A. Strong

1990  
Revised  
Edition

This pdf version is available by permission of the copyright holder and contains notes by Barbara Neal, Association Secretary (for 10 years and counting) since 2009. It is available at the website of the 306th Bomb Group Historical Association.

[www.306bg.us](http://www.306bg.us)

A donation to the Association is requested

This book is dedicated to those who served their nation in World War II as members of the 306th Bombardment Group, U.S. Eighth Air Force.

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# PREFACE

The 306th Bombardment Group (H) was one of the original bombardment units of the Eighth Air Force in World War II. Because I feel that the achievements of this outstanding fighting unit have too often been overlooked or improperly credited in written and pictorial accounts of the air war in Europe, this book has been prepared to recount in accurate detail the combat history of the group from its activation in March 1942 until V-E Day in May 1945.

Since bombardment was the primary mission of the 306th, this history quite naturally focuses on the combat missions flown by the group, on the risks involved and on the men who flew the B-17 with the proud Triangle-H on the vertical stabilizer. This emphasis must not be construed to disparage the equally important and vital contribution of ground crews, mechanics, clerks, armorers, cooks, drivers and hundreds of other personnel who faithfully and diligently served in support roles so that the bombers might get to their targets and destroy their objectives. No slight to these all-important members of the 306th team is intended by this concentration on the combat crews. The simple explanation is that there are no day to day records which document the activities of the support echelons in the way the combat mission reports cover in detail the activities of the aircrews.

Research for this study began in 1974 at the USAF Museum, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio, and continued over the years in various libraries and records repositories and with numerous individuals throughout the United States. The author is particularly indebted to the personnel of the National Archives General Records Division at Suitland, Maryland, where many visits were made to search mission records and other data and to the staff of the Simpson Research Center, Air University, Maxwell AFB, Alabama.

While these repositories were gold mines of information, it was ultimately the veterans of the 306th who furnished most of the human interest material. Many of them recounted incidents about which they had not talked since leaving England or the prisoner of war camps in Germany. Sometimes this recall was a very painful experience. They also delved into personal files to find records, diaries and pictures, all of which were willingly loaned and became invaluable in the reconstruction of those distant days. While one might assume that official records would be complete and intact and would contain all the information I was trying to find, I quickly learned to my dismay that many vital papers, orders and directives were missing and that some were never saved. Later I was often able to locate needed copies on a chance basis in the possession of the many individuals I contacted.

The interest and cooperation of the 306th veterans were phenomenal. There was a group of these men which generously provided funds so that my research could be pushed beyond what my own resources could support. To them I owe a special debt of gratitude. There have been others who have unstintingly given their time and their expertise to this project. One friend loaned a WATS line for a year so that I could talk to men in far-flung places. There were even those who had no connection with the 306th but who became fascinated with my quest and gave me great assistance.

A special mention must be made of Colonel John L. Ryan who, one night in Colorado Springs, generously offered to serve as the critic for my manuscript. Once he began reading he spent many hours helping resolve all kinds of technical, historical and grammatical problems, to the end that the book you read is better for his efforts.

Like any historian, I have been confronted with the necessity of picking and choosing items for inclusion in the book from official records and from word of mouth stories. Initially I selected seventy-five missions to write about and later expanded the list to perhaps one hundred. In the course of collecting information from 306th veterans, I was sometimes forced to discard good stories that could not be verified; some of these otherwise unsubstantiated stories I have still chosen to include, although admittedly with a bit of trepidation. I had also to resolve the problem of which eyewitness account of a particular incident to use. Those who find their version missing have my apologies.

Unfortunately, I cannot mention all of those who have contributed in so many ways to the completion of this history. I appreciate the patience of those who have been close to the work, especially members of my family, for it has been a seven-year task. Being a part of the 306th in 1944 was exciting, sometimes terrifying. Living again with the 306th from 1974 to the present has been a most rewarding and enjoyable personal experience.

I must make mention of Milton M. Adam, an extraordinary pilot who sustained me as I learned the navigator's craft, and who brought me home repeatedly from perilous combat missions when we might easily have met a different fate.

To my family I give my thanks for the freedom to spend untold hours at work on various phases of the book and for accepting in an understanding manner my many trips in search of new stories and information.

R.A.S.

Charlotte, NC

# The Second Edition

Most such histories as this never see a second edition, but this book needed another "run". In large measure this is to satisfy a continuing demand for it, not only from former 306'ers but from many devotees of WWII reading.

A second edition affords the author the opportunity of correcting any errors in names, of spelling a few words in a more acceptable manner, using a bit of the continuing scholarship on the men and events of the 306th, and in at least one case correcting an egregious error in judgment in assessing what actually happened in one stricken airplane.

Unfortunately, in many cases, no more is known of the fate of certain fliers than was known in 1981. This is deeply regretted.

Many stories have come to light since the first edition and have appeared in 306th Echoes, the group's quarterly newspaper; but in an effort to hold down costs few of these events have been entered into this manuscript. The story of the gallantry of the 306th men and planes continues on, and will only abate with the passing of those who witnessed first hand its days of glory.

This book has run its course, and the copies of Echoes, published since 1975, are now preserved on microfiche. We have assuredly left our small mark on the history of combat aviation in America, a principal factor in beginning this endeavor back in 1975.

To all of those who had some small role in the success of the 306th Bombardment Group (H), this author salutes you.

R.A.S.

Charlotte, NC

## Chapter 1

# FIRST MISSION — FIRST LOSS

## 9 October 1942

Only the combat crews were afforded the opportunity for any rest at Thurleigh the night of 8 October 1942. Group and squadron staff officers, maintenance crews, ordnance teams, armorers and almost all personnel in the offices and on the flight line were frantically preparing twenty-four new B-17F aircraft for their first combat mission over enemy-held Europe.

The flyers had been edgy since before supper when order had gone out restricting everyone to the base, a sure sign that something was in the wind. This had happened several times before since 28 September, when the group was declared combat ready, but perhaps tonight there was a more definite feeling that all of their training would culminate tomorrow in the ultimate — taking the war to the Germans. Some slept, but others tossed and turned, waiting for the Charge of Quarters to call them.

Flight crews were up at 4, with briefing a mile away at 5. The group commander, Col. Charles B. Overacker, Jr., a trim, mustached and dashing figure, would lead the 306th on its first mission. After briefing, the crews, loaded down with flying gear, parachutes and other impedimenta of their individual specialties, were trucked to the ponderous B-17s, dispersed in hardstands around the perimeter of the field. Last moments were spent in consultation with the crew chiefs, armorers and other excited ground personnel. Then a flare arched out from the tower and starters began to whine, followed by the throaty growl of the Curtiss-Wright 1200 horsepower engines as the propeller blades turned faster and engines coughed, belched smoke and caught.

Col. Overacker was in a 369th Squadron plane, 41-22471, with Capt. James A. Johnston as his copilot along with Johnston's crew. "Chip" Overacker was determined to lead his men into battle and equally determined to bring them home again. For him this was not just another American military unit, gathered from the far-flung forty-eight states. Since he first began to mold his crews into a fighting unit on the desert wastelands of Salt Lake and Wendover, Utah, these young men were "his", and he bore them an abiding affection.

Tension was high for the twenty-four first pilots and their nine-man crews who were to begin this adventure, a journey that would take the 306th Group and its four combat squadrons on 341 missions until hostilities would come to an end in a far distant April of 1945.

Other 369th crews with Overacker in the lead squadron were Capt. Richard D. Adams, 1st Lt. Charles W. Cranmer, 1st Lt. Clay Isbell and 1st Lt. Robert P. Riordan.

Maj. James W. Wilson was leading his 423rd Squadron, with Capt. Mack McKay, 1st Lt. John R. Barnett, 1st Lt. Loyal M. Felts and 1st Lt. William H. Warner.

Maj. Harry Holt led his 367th Squadron and his pilots were Capt. John W. Olson, Capt. John L. Ryan, Capt. Henry W. Terry, 1st Lt. George R. Buckley, 1st Lt. John R. McKee and 1st Lt. James M. Stewart.

Leading the 368th was Maj. William A. Lanford and flying with him were Capt. William S. Raper, 1st Lt. Otto Buddenbaum, 1st Lt. John M. Regan, 1st Lt. Robert W. Seelos, 1st Lt. Walter N. Smiley and 1st Lt. Robert W. Smith.

At 0732 the lead plane started to roll down the 6,500 foot main runway as the pilot eased the throttles forward. Gathering speed, it roared past the control tower on its left and began to lighten as the wheels bounced on the blacktop surface. At 5,500 feet the plane broke ground, then was over the fence, power pole and small building at the end of the runway, and tension of the takeoff eased slightly.

For the next hour the leader circled near the field and the twenty-three other planes found their places in the formation, the last clearing the runway at 0814. It was much like a practice mission, except that the planes were heavier, and there was an air of expectancy throughout the group, ground and airborne, along with the excitement of plunging into the unknown. The days, months and years of training represented among the men came to fruition in this moment.

Col. Overacker directed the join-up from his left window, urging his pilots to close up the formation before they headed east from the English coast, outward bound for the Compagnie de Fives Lille, the great steel and locomotive works at Lille, France. This was the target selected for 9 October for the newly-reinforced 8th AF. Today the 8th launched its largest air fleet ever, 108 of the giant four-engined bombers that were to become so common a sight in the skies over England. Flying with the new B-17s of the 306th were the earlier model B-17Es of the 92nd, 97th and 301st groups and the B-24s of the 93rd group.

As the bombers began the arduous climb to operational altitude, the neat, green fields of England slipped quickly past and they were over the English coast at Felixstowe at 0912, continuing their climb over the English Channel from 10,000 feet towards the not-distant French coast at Dunkirk. The crews saw only other bomber aircraft, none of the promised RAF fighter cover. They had been briefed that Spitfires would accompany them to the enemy coast, but could take them no further. Once past the Nazi-controlled coastline they would be on their own — and may God protect them!

Hardly a man felt tired at this point, even though sleep may have been brief the night before. The aircrews had never known such excitement and could hardly wait to complete the mission and return to base to recount what happened — and they all knew they would be coming home. They also expected to put a serious dent in the Axis war machine this day because they had confidence in the Norden bomb-sight and in their own abilities to drop their bombs with precision on their assigned target.

Two planes aborted the mission before reaching the enemy coast, unable to maintain formation because of mechanical problems. Formation flying with fully-loaded B-17s imposed engine demands not encountered during training flights and, despite months of practice missions, this was a whole new game today. Flak came up, marking the target ahead. Later, in comparison, the crews would realize that it was sparse. On the bomb run, Col. Overacker's ship took a direct hit in the number 2 engine, forcing him to relinquish the lead.

Nineteen of the planes dropped 159 500-pound general purpose bombs (thirty-one short of a full load) on the primary, while two aircraft bombed the secondary, the airfield at Courtrai with twenty bombs. (The pressure of preparation for this first mission had been particularly hard on the ordnance people. In the darkness they were unsuccessful in fully loading all twenty-four planes to capacity, a failure that was never to be repeated in thirty-two months of combat.) Planes were in the target area from 0930 to 0948.

As the 306th came off the target, Hermann Goering's favorite yellow-nosed "Abbeville Kids" hit the Group with both head on and tail attacks, striking repeatedly and hard. At least fifty Focke Wulf 190s were involved in the engagement and the 306th gunners were kept busy searching out the diving, twisting planes and trying to keep them in their sights.

While this violent fighter attack was going on, one of the German fighters broke through the defensive fire and hit 41-24510, a 367th Squadron plane flown by Capt. John W. Olson. He and his copilot, 2nd Lt. Joseph N. Gates, were both killed in the attack, their blood spattering the inside of the cockpit area.

"I can still see those yellow-nosed bastards as they almost flew into our nose," says 2nd Lt. Albert W. LaChasse, Olson's bombardier.

LaChasse was intent on the attacking fighters, firing his hand-held, side-firing nose gun, but he soon realized that their aircraft had been hit and was going into a flat spin when he saw the sun go by the nose the second time. He crawled around 2nd Lt. William J. Gise, navigator, and into the catwalk towards the cockpit. When he could stand upright, he saw that the two pilots were beyond help. The top turret gunner, however, was still in action, tracking enemy aircraft and firing. LaChas-

se grabbed T/Sgt. Erwin Wissenback's legs to signal him to bail out and then headed down into the catwalk to the front escape hatch located on the lower left side of the nose just behind the bulkhead that isolated the nose compartment from the rest of the fuselage.

Wissenback had been knocked out of his turret earlier when enemy bullets hit the glass and metal enclosure. He had climbed back and, holding an oxygen mask to his face with one hand, he continued to operate the turret with his other hand and to fire at the attacking fighters. A terrific explosion rocked the plane, forcing Wissenback to abandon his valiant effort. He came out of the turret and saw that both Olson and Gates were dead. Olson was leaning far out of his seat, bleeding profusely, and Gates was slumped over the wheel. The top turret gunner still had to get his parachute, a seat pack, which was stowed in the nose. As he came down the crawlway he caught a glimpse of someone's feet disappearing out the front escape hatch. He found his chute, buckled the chest strap, forgot to fasten the leg straps and went out the nose hatch. He was the third and last survivor of the 306th's first aircraft to be lost in combat. Olson's plane was flying on the wing of 1st Lt. John R. McKee and one of McKee's gunners, S/Sgt. Darwin Wissenback, was the twin brother of Erwin.

"It seemed to me the whole top part of the plane blew off in an explosion and then the airplane went into a spin, falling towards the ground," says Darwin. "I watched until it was out of sight and did not see any parachutes come out. That evening back in England a gunner from a plane in another squadron came to me and said he saw two chutes from Erwin's plane. I knew Erwin had to be one of them." In all likelihood, however, the observant gunner saw Gise and LaChasse, while Erwin's chute was not seen, except by one gunner who said he watched the plane until it hit the ground and saw a chute come out at a very low altitude.

Erwin Wissenback himself estimates he went out of the plane at a thousand feet, a fact which may well account for his good fortune in avoiding capture. The three survivors evaded for a day, but LaChasse finally had to give himself up when he saw that the small barn in which he was hiding was surrounded by German soldiers who were about to set it afire. He became the first 306th man to go to a German prison camp and in the next two and one-half years saw many of his friends and later arrivals from the 306th walk through the gates of Stalag Luft III at Sagan. In later months when he learned from incoming prisoners that the 367th Squadron had become known as the "Clay Pigeon Squadron," LaChasse assumed the undisputed title of "First Pigeon," a title which he proudly carries to this day.

Wissenback landed unharmed and got rid of his parachute, then hid himself in a ditch. "After hiding for what seemed like hours, a civilian

came walking along the ditch bank and motioned to me to stay down. Later he came back and dropped some clothes and pointed out the direction I should take. I took off my flying clothes and put on those from the bundle, then proceeded in the assigned direction.

"When I came to the end of the ditch, I stood up and could see him standing by a small barn, beckoning me to come. Quickly I approached the barn and went inside where I was greeted by another man and a woman. They began hugging and kissing me. That is how I was picked up by the Underground.

"These wonderful people were Belgians. Until this time I thought I was in France. That night, on a bicycle, I followed my original rescuer to a Belgian home. There I was reunited with our navigator, Bill Gise, and we took up our travels together, this time with a guide. We rode trains and buses crowded with German officers and men in uniforms. Many times we pretended to be asleep and always avoided looking at them.

"Our journey took us through Paris, Marseilles and Nice, then back to Marseilles where arrangements were made for us to walk across the Pyrenees. We made it into Spain, but at Barcelona Bill was caught by the Spanish authorities. I didn't see him until we met six weeks later in London where I had to identify him for Intelligence. I had no trouble in traveling across Spain to Gibraltar. There I inquired if any other Americans had come out through the Underground and was told that a Lt. McKee had. He was from our squadron and the pilot of my twin brother's crew.

"I hooked a ride on a mail plane to London. One of the crew members on this plane was later shot down and ended up in Stalag Luft 7A with my brother. There he told Darwin that I was safe and had escaped."

Killed in action on this first mission, in Olson's plane were T/Sgt. Thomas W. Dynan, radio; S/Sgt. Bruce Nicholson, ball turret; S/Sgt. Truman C. Wilder, waist, and S/Sgt. Bert E. Kaylor, tail.

The first few missions of the 306th were generally flown with nine-man crews as it was believed that the waist gunner could adequately man the "outside" gun, while the gun on the inside of the formation would not need to be used. But, since formations were small, fighter attacks were often overwhelming, persisted for extended periods of time and came from all directions, it did not take long to realize that all guns needed constant manning.

Thus it was that the 306th began to fly with ten-man crews. But though this decision solved one problem, it created another: Where to find the extra crewman for each plane? The group had no spare gunners, so that call went out around the base for volunteers. Armorers, clerks, medics and cooks all expressed a willingness, even an

eagerness, to fly. With minimal training they were soon in the air, filling out the crews with an additional gunner and replacing other gunners killed or wounded in action.

While Olson's aircraft was being attacked and shot down, there was a running battle elsewhere in the formation as attacks were pressed by an estimated fifty Luftwaffe FW 190s and Messerschmitt 109s.

This was a great day for the 306th. A pencilled remark on a preliminary report to First Wing says "Cert 10, Prob 12, Dam 1", but these early claims were later found to be highly inflated and not really supportable. A re-evaluation at a subsequent date credited the 306th with three kills and three damaged, a far cry from the original claims.

T/Sgt. Arizona T. Harris, flying as engineer with 1st Lt. Charles Cranmer in 41-24470, saw three FW 190s five minutes after the target. At 900 yards they peeled off to attack and Harris opened fire at 600 yards. His bullets hit the cockpit of the leader, setting the plane on fire. It went into a fatal dive which was observed by Sgt. Harris N. Meyers. Sgt. David Goldberg, radio operator for 1st Lt. John R. Barnett in 41-24508, caught an FW 190 in his fire at 100 yards and the enemy plane started down. S/Sgt. Charles M. Counts saw the pilot bail out. Sgt. Stanley Stemkoski, engineer for 1st Lt. Robert W. Seelos in 41-24465, hit another Focke-Wulf and sent it down in flames. His claim was confirmed by the crews of his own and other planes.

Everyone agreed that, on a first mission with a long and persistent enemy attack, it would be normal to make more claims for downed planes than could later be substantiated. This was a problem which haunted the 8th for more than a year and a half in combat (until fighter attacks became very scarce) and was the cause of continuous squabbling between the combat groups and higher headquarters. There were repeated attempts to introduce methods of evaluation that would render more accurate assessments of fighter claims but, seemingly, no foolproof method was ever established.

Records show that American claims consistently outnumbered losses recorded by the Luftwaffe in its own operational records. USAAF claims of enemy fighters destroyed and German claims of B-17s and B-24s shot down were always fair game for the propagandists. American losses were exaggerated or minimized in the same way that the Germans reported their losses.

But back in the skies of France these were exciting minutes for the twenty crews of the 306th still in the air as the planes headed back toward England. The men were exhausted by the tension and exhilarated by what they had been through. Later they would be saddened by the loss of nine of their fellow airmen.

But for 1st Lt. James M. Stewart and his crew in "Man O'War" 41-24486, their real mission began only after leaving the target area and after the fighters. First they lost their number 2 engine. Then both

outboard engines began to overheat and lose power. Their plane dropped from the bombing altitude of 22,500 feet to 1,500 feet over the English Channel. At mid-Channel it seemed they could go no farther. As Stewart prepared his plane and crew for ditching, a low-flying RAF Spitfire appeared. All radios were out in the 367th plane. But the Spit pilot, Flight Lieutenant A.J. Andrews from 91 Squadron at Hawkinge, sized up the situation and signalled Stewart to follow him. He took them to the coast, over some low lying hills and wagged his wings to indicate a landing spot. Ahead lay the giant emergency airfield of Manston and there Stewart brought his crippled plane in.

It was fortunate for this American crew that a "Little Friend" had spied them and understood their plight. They later learned that their life rafts had been holed by flak over the target and would have been useless in the Channel. In addition to their damaged engines, they had holes in two propellers and in both wings and elevators. Flying with Stewart were 2nd Lt. William W. Dickey, copilot; 2nd Lt. Joseph E. Consolmagno, navigator; 2nd Lt. John M. Creamer, bombardier; T/Sgt. Charles J. Meriwether, engineer; T/Sgt. Thomas E. McMillan, radio; S/Sgt. Raymond C. Schmoyer, ball turret; S/Sgt. Hugh L. Langan, waist, and S/Sgt. Jack M. Wheeler, tail.

"I was picking out a nice soft spot in the water, which was very rough," laughed Stewart later. It was at this moment that the Spitfire roared in to the rescue. The first intelligence report filed by the 306th for the mission said, "No wounds, no casualties." But that was certainly premature and the group paid heavily in wounded men, heavily damaged aircraft and the one downed crew.

Critically wounded was S/Sgt. Arthur E. Chapman, a gunner with Seelos. In the fury of the attack, Chapman first lost his left hand to enemy fire and shortly after that was shot through the chest with a bullet from a German fighter's guns. Ambulances met Seelos' plane on the ground, and Chapman was quickly taken carefully to the station dispensary where he was given blood transfusions and skillfully attended, under the direction of Capt. Harold Munal, 368th surgeon.

Chapman's needs however, were beyond the equipment and capability of the station medical facility and so, on the afternoon of the 10th, a cargo plane was flown in and Chapman became the first 8th AF wounded man to be air evacuated, being flown to the 2nd General Hospital at Oxford for further treatment. Despite the excellent care he received, Sgt. Chapman unfortunately succumbed 14 October.

Sgt. Edmund Becker, a gunner for 1st Lt. Otto Buddenbaum, had both hands frozen while trying to retrieve his oxygen mask. His condition was also regarded as critical and he was sent to a larger hospital for specialized treatment, never returning to the 306th. No amputations were necessary.

The Group landed at Thurleigh at about 1100 and not without

incident. Maj. J.W. Wilson's plane lost a propellor on the runway after having had its number 3 engine shot out by flak over the target. Seelos and Regan brought their planes in with feathered engines. Regan had been unable to keep up with the formation on the way home. 1st Lt. William Warner landed on one good wheel and with a badly ruptured gas tank. 1st Lt. John R. Barnett had his tail wheel shot up and destroyed. Ground crewmen stopped counting the holes in Warner's and Barnett's planes at the 170 mark, though there were more, many more.

It was a long, hard initiation to combat for the men of the 306th, affecting those who stayed at home as much as it did those who flew. Earlier groups in the 8th had flown half a dozen missions without great loss or damage, but the 306th learned just how rough combat could be on the very first mission.

"Man must be nothing but a fool to face a hell of fire like that. But that's what we came here for and we'll have to see it through," wrote Capt. Thurman Shuller, group medical officer, in his diary for 9 October 1942.

## Chapter 2

# THE MAKING OF A BOMB GROUP

## March-July 1942

The skies over western Utah in the early months of 1942 were quiet. No flak, no chattering machine gun fire, no roar of aircraft engines broke the silence of the desert wastes. The coyotes, jack rabbits and rattlesnakes remained the undisputed masters of the territory. The few people in the area knew "there was a war on" but as yet had seen little direct evidence of it.

But in Washington the war was a serious business. It was not yet a full-blown shooting war. It was a time of building weapons and of training people to operate them. It was a planner's nightmare and a planner's delight. All the stops were out and restraints on men, money and material had been lifted in the rush to get things done. Plans were implemented before their ink was even dry. Units were formed and American fighting men found themselves in strange overseas locations they had never before heard of. Out of this chaos, disorder and confusion which characterized the opening weeks of the war somehow evolved the Eighth Air Force.

The 8th had originally been programmed to go to North Africa as a part of Operation Gymnast but, very early in its existence this assignment was changed to England. Documents were signed in late January 1942 at Savannah, Georgia, the headquarters of the fledgling 8th AF, creating the 306th Bombardment Group (Heavy). At a later date the German Reich would feel the presence of the 306th in the skies over Europe but for the present the only living things threatened by this nascent fighting force were the coyotes, the jack rabbits and the rattlesnakes.

In March men began to congregate from the far corners of the nation at the Salt Lake City Air Base, the original focus for the group, although it had earlier been established that its training site would be 120 miles west on the salt flats at Wendover. Early arrivals saw little to convince them that they would ever get a fighting group formed. The confusion was monumental; supplies, equipment and quarters almost non-existent.

The Group was officially activated 1 March and Lt. Col. Charles B. Overacker, Jr., arrived 16 March to take command. With him came seven officers and a first sergeant. They found forty-one Enlisted Men

already waiting for them, all of whom were classed as basic trainees — no first sergeant, no clerks, no cooks, just men. They did have airplanes, three obsolete, twin-engined B-18s, and a single-engined A-17. The latter plane was said to have a peculiar quality in that it took off, cruised and landed, all at 100 miles per hour.

By 22 March, it became obvious to Col. Overacker that it would be best to make the planned move to Wendover Field without further delay to avoid congestion and overcrowding with the 305th Bomb Group which was also assigned to Salt Lake. By this time assignment orders had been received on fifty-one pilots, most of them fresh from flying schools and due to report during the next two weeks. On 1 April, the group officially relocated at Wendover.

Overacker was among those career Air Corps officers who had been carefully chosen for responsible command duties by Lt. Gen. Henry H. Arnold, commanding general of the USAAF. He was actually the second bomb group commander to be selected. Overacker's experience included recent service with both the 17th and 19th Bomb Groups at March Field, Calif., and this new assignment almost certainly guaranteed rapid promotion and opportunities unparalleled for professional advancement.

Capt. Delmar E. Wilson became the third person to sign in to the 306th, after Col. Overacker and the first sergeant. A tall, spare man of six years' military experience, Wilson was destined to play long and important roles in the development of high altitude bombardment in Europe.

As the 306th began its training activities, no one knew where or when it would all end. Before it would be over thousands of men, hundreds of airplanes, tons of bombs and rations sufficient to house, care for and feed a small city would flow to the 306th at its duty stations, Wendover, Utah, and Westover, Mass., and later through mud, fog, rain, sparse sunshine — through hell — at Thurleigh, Bedfordshire, England.

On 16 March 1942, Col. Overacker issued Special Order #1 for the 306th Bombardment Group. From that time onward, almost daily, the publication of special orders from the 306th continued until the war ended more than three years hence. According to this first order the initial flying officers assigned to the 306th were Lieutenants Charles O. Reynard, William E. O'Brien and Marlen E. Reber. That first special order listed Capt. Delmar E. Wilson as group operations and group intelligence officer. Lt. William C. Melton was the adjutant. Both of these officers were assigned to the headquarters and headquarters squadron, commanded by Lt. Charles A. Polansky, Jr. Lts. Percy A. Vincent and John A. Coulter, both ground officers, were the first arrivals according to the order, having actually reported on 6 March; they too were assigned to the headquarters squadron.

The first order named the squadron commanders and officer members of the four squadrons:

367th: Capt. Harry J. Holt, commander; Lts. William W. Ely, Charles O. Reynard, Jr., Earl C. Tunnell, Alvin L. Barker and Edwin F. Patterson. (Reynard and Barker did not go overseas with the 306th.)

368th: 1st Lt. William A. Lanford, commander; Lts. William E. Friend, William E. O'Brien and Marlen E. Reber. (O'Brien did not go.)

369th: 1st Lt. Ralph L. Oliver, commander; Lts. Edward P. Maliszewski, Bradford A. Evans, Russell G. Kahl and Clay M. Isbell. (Evans did not go.)

34th: 1st Lt. James W. Wilson, commander; Lts. Degland Kenealy, Robert C. Williams, Frank A. Saunders, Harry A. Robey, Jr., and John B. Brady. (Saunders and Robey did not go.)

One story about assignments is that the first eight pilots to arrive at Salt Lake City were lined up and ordered to count off. The odd numbered stepped forward into the 305th and the four remaining joined the 306th.

As quickly as men came out of pilot, navigation, bombardier, gunnery and radio operator training and a host of newly opened technical schools, they were assigned to the 306th. Many came directly after graduation without even an intervening leave. Enlisted men were also arriving still classified as basic trainees. Also coming singly and almost daily were numbers of officers who would be needed to perform staff functions and technical operations for the group. Some came from specialist schools; others arrived almost directly from civilian life. There was also a significant group of new officers who had considerable experience as enlisted men during the '30s and these brought with them that wealth of service "know how" that was vital to the success of the operation.

As one veteran remarked, it was this dedicated staff of ground officers, composed mostly of professionals somewhat senior to the flying officers, which made things work and which enabled the rated officers to concentrate their attention on their flying duties.

Among those most notable was perhaps Capt. Douglas R. Coleman who almost immediately became group adjutant, relieving Lt. Melton to return to flying duties. Coleman came from the New York financial district and achieved a singular prominence among those who served the 306th. He eventually became ground executive officer and attained the rank of lieutenant colonel before leaving Thurleigh 25 July 1944.

Wendover made lasting impressions on those who came that way. Comedian Bob Hope later termed it "Leftover," and that probably epitomized the feelings of many. An Englishman who visited Wendover in the '30s, Sir John Cobb, set a world land speed record there,

strangely enough of 368 miles per hour. One wonders if there might have been any prophetic connection between Sir John's 368 mph and the 368th Bomb Squadron which would later bore holes in the sky over his measured mile . . .

Sgt. Marshall E. Baker, the first squadron clerk for the 368th, in those early days penned a brief, but probably accurate sketch of the reactions of the new arrivals at Wendover:

"Pvt. John Doe, after a long and tiresome journey, the last part of which was across 'No Man's Land' (the Great Salt Lake desert), arrives at a railroad station at the west extremity of Utah, at perhaps 9 a.m. He glances curiously out of the coach, and it's not the train that makes him wonder 'What in hell have I done to deserve this?'

"This is what is before his eyes: on the north side of the tracks the village of Wendover. Beside the R.R. station there were a few scattered houses, a general store, a cafe, two filling stations, eight small trees and the famous State Line Hotel, just across on the Nevada side, all under the shadow of the towering mountains in the background.

"Now Pvt. Doe, though half dazed, becomes brave enough to glance to the south. There is Wendover Field, which is by far mostly field. There is a radio tower, two (sic) runways, two B-18s, four barracks, and to the east many rows of beautiful tents.

"Pvt. Doe has just come from Keesler Field, Sheppard Field, Fort Logan, or some other well established camp, and what he now sees makes a most unpleasant contrast. As the GI truck rolls him merrily down to headquarters, and later to those beautiful tents, he has sort of a lost feeling, and thinks of what a lovely home he left behind."

By 22 March transition to the cumbersome B-18 was started for pilots. At the end of the month those designated as first pilots were sent off to the Jack Fry School of Aeronautics at Albuquerque, N. Mex., where they began to learn the intricacies of four-engined aircraft operation, albeit in LB-30 Liberators built by Consolidated originally for the RAF. There they learned to taxi a four-engined plane, to hold it on the runway until it flew itself off, to ease it into a steady climb, and then to bring it around the traffic pattern for a landing, itself a thrilling experience for the novice bomber pilot. At the end of four weeks they were sent back to Wendover to begin transition to the B-17E.

Meanwhile, officers and men were arriving from training fields and induction centers — 6 April, fifty men from Pendleton, Ore.; 17 April, Maj. Watts Humphrey and Capt. Douglas Coleman with assignments in intelligence, and twenty-three enlisted men from Scott Field, Ill.; 15 April, four medical officers from Ft. George Wright, Wash., and nine medical enlisted men from Pendleton; 17 April, thirteen men from Chanute Field, Ill.; 20 April, twenty EM from Pendleton; 25 April, eight officers from Ft. George Wright; 2 May, eleven EM from Ft. Logan, Colo.; 5 May, twenty-two EM from Chanute; 9 May, thirteen

EM from Lowry Field, Colo.; 15 May, twenty-three EM from Pendleton; 16 May, five EM from Lowry; 21 May, thirteen EM from Davis-Monthan Field, Ariz.; 22 May, eleven EM from Chanute; 24 May, seven EM from Sheppard Field, Tex.; 27 May, eight EM from Chanute.

The pace quickened in June: 3 June, one hundred and twenty-five EM from Yakima, Wash., twenty-four EM from Sheppard Field and twenty-three EM from Davis-Monthan. And still they came: 5 June, forty-two EM from Sheppard; 8 June, thirty-six EM from Boise, Id., and twenty-seven from Harlingen, Tex.; 15 June, fourteen officers from Kelly Field, Tex.; 19 June, twenty-four officers from Salt Lake City; 23 June, thirteen officers from Hamilton Field, Calif., and fifty EM and twenty-two officers from Salt Lake; 25 June, twenty EM from Salt Lake; 26 June, seventeen officers and eleven EM from Salt Lake; 27 June, seven EM from Salt Lake and thirteen EM from Spokane, Wash.

On 28 June, fifty-one officers and seventy-one EM, all combat crewmen, came from Hamilton Field and the following day twenty-three officers showed up from Salt Lake. On 1 July, 116 ordnance EM were assigned to the Group and the following day 102 EM came from Salt Lake. This ended the large contingents and from this date on, additions were likely to be individuals or very small groups, generally augmenting the combat crews. But the additions never stopped, even at Westover, Mass., where numerous changes were made.

Airplanes were harder to come by than people at this stage. Finally the flood gates opened in mid-July: 11 July, one plane came from Pendleton; 15 July, one from Muroc, Calif., and fourteen from Westover, Mass.; 16 July, seven arrived, one of them coming from as far as Dow Field, Maine; 18 July, nine planes; 20 July, one plane, and the build-up finally came to an end on 21 July with the arrival of the last two planes. By late in the month rumors were rife that a permanent change of station for the 306th Bombardment Group (H) seemed an imminent possibility. Inspections by visiting high ranking officers tended to confirm the dates being bandied across the salt flats.

In mid-July, group staff officers included:

Col. Charles B. Overacker, Jr., commander

Maj. Delmar Wilson, executive and operations officer

Maj. Douglas R. Coleman, adjutant

Maj. Watts S. Humphrey, intelligence

Capt. Berkeley I. Springfield, assistant S-3 and oxygen officer

2nd Lt. Herbert J. Avise, weather

1st Lt. Ray V. Hopper, communications

Capt. Charles A. Polansky, S-1

Capt. Ralph C. Teall, surgeon

Capt. Wiley W. Glass, photo

1st Lt. William M. Walters, statistical  
1st Lt. John L. Lambert, assistant S-3  
1st Lt. Henry J. Schmidt, S-4  
1st Lt. Roy M. MacLeod, chaplain  
1st Lt. Rex D. Stutznegger, dental  
1st Lt. Rudolph Skalak, S-2 and photo  
1st Lt. Claude F. McGrath, special services

But as every veteran well knows and as Murphy's law dictates, as soon as the list was published, the staff began to change with Capts. Polansky, Springfield, Teall and Lt. McGrath all gone before the end of the month.

Of the four medical officers who came 15 April, all were destined to become group surgeons for the 306th: Capt. Ralph C. Teall, 1st Lt. Thurman Shuller, 1st Lt. John Manning and 1st Lt. Harold D. Munal. Teall left the group at Wendover and Shuller took his place, holding the job through the first year of combat when he became 40th Combat Wing surgeon. Manning followed for a couple of months, then returned to the States for specialized medical training. Munal held the post for the longest tenure, serving through the rest of the war.

The early planners of the War Department General Staff had envisaged a heavy bombardment group composed of three bombardment squadrons and a reconnaissance squadron; the latter was intended to provide necessary intelligence to support bomber operations. This concept of organization was tactically sound for operations over the broad expanses of the Pacific Ocean but totally unsound for European operations where a single B-17 reconnaissance aircraft operating in daylight over the continent would have had absolutely no chance of survival. Consequently, for Europe-bound units the reconnaissance capability was deleted and the fourth squadron was converted to a bombardment squadron. Accordingly, by 15 April the 34th reconnaissance squadron headed by 1st Lt. J.W. Wilson was redesignated the 34th bombardment squadron. On 26 April this designation was changed again to 423rd bombardment squadron. This accounts for the arrangement of numbers, 367th, 368th, 369th, and 423rd, a pattern which holds in the other bomb groups designated for combat in 1942 (e.g. 305 BG: 364, 365, 366 and 422 BS).

Once a few flying officers had gathered at Wendover, the main objective was to get men and planes in the air. Young pilots were anxious to get their time in and to fly combat aircraft. The B-18 was familiar to the more senior officers, but few had any experience in the B-17. Some of the flying officers to arrive later had flown earlier B-17s, as a number had been with 303rd Bomb Group units headed for the Pacific and the famous battle of Midway. When they returned to the States they were split among the new groups then being formed.

The B-17E, when it arrived, was a challenge to both pilots and

mechanics. Most of them found it necessary to work with a manual close at hand. One crew chief said that he and a neophyte pilot found they had to study the tech order, and refer to it constantly to get a B-17 started, a first for both. 2nd Lt. John M. Regan got six hours in the air in a B-17 and suddenly found himself an instructor pilot. Such drastic measures were necessary to get the maximum work done in a minimal amount of time.

Among those who arrived early at Wendover was one who was to become a legend in the 8th AF, the 20th AF and the postwar USAF — Lt. Col. Curtis E. LeMay. He was the consummate aviator, one of the few in the Air Corps at that time skilled as a pilot, navigator, bombardier, gunner, and anything else required in the modern aircraft of 1942. LeMay had been the lead navigator on an early goodwill mission to South America, a flight of B-17Cs. He came to Wendover as deputy commander, being assigned temporarily to await his transfer to the 305th Group at Salt Lake, which came on 10 June.

At Wendover LeMay conducted a program for the group that was of fundamental importance: he took personal responsibility for checking out the four squadron commanders as instrument pilots. He put in a grueling ten to fifteen hours in the cockpit with each of the young commanders who were only slightly older than the pilots in their squadrons. Some say they never saw Curtis LeMay smile while he was at Wendover; indeed, there was certainly little for him to smile about. He was a stern taskmaster and precisely what a neophyte air organization needed. Unfortunately his talents were soon taken east to Salt Lake to whip a sister outfit into combat readiness.

Everyone at Wendover, from orderly to commander, was learning hour by hour new and complex duties. The ability to meet the many and hazardous demands that would be placed upon group, squadron, flight, crew and individual in the days ahead was being developed during the summer of 1942. Fortunately, the personnel folks at headquarters had selected for Col. Overacker a group of dedicated men, some of whom had as much as six years of active duty experience. They came from all over America and at Wendover quickly meshed and coordinated their talents into a fighting organization. Meanwhile Lt. Gen. Henry H. Arnold in Washington was committing the United States to pour an ever increasing stream of bomber crews into the war in Europe. There was thus great pressure on the bomb groups to perform miracles of organization and training without precedent in the history of military aviation.

Despite the intensive training at Wendover, there was still an occasional moment for recreation. Some relaxed at the State Line Hotel, where half of the bar was in Utah and half in Nevada. When midnight closed Utah, the bar patrons simply moved a few steps west. Gambling was legal and continuous. Some met Torchy, the accommodating ele-

vator operator in Salt Lake City, and there were nurses to be impressed in Elko, Nevada. (In those days a buzz-job in a B-17 had a way of attracting a lady's attention!)

The senior officers, many with wives, lived at the State Line Hotel. During a hot summer before air conditioning had become a universal blessing, days and nights were often spent in the open air. Wendover itself offered almost nothing. In pre-war days there were only fifty inhabitants. It was a railroad watering and whistle stop, and repair shops provided the only employment; its saloon the only excitement. The ground-bound speed merchants of another day in their racing cars had been replaced by the airborne speed merchants of 1942. The major difference was that the aviating speeders in their B-17s were about 200 miles per hour slower than their earth-bound predecessors. In its own way the 306th left an indelible mark on Wendover, which would not be quite the same again.

Those unmarried and in search of excitement had to travel the 120 miles to Salt Lake City, or go west to Kimberley, Nev. And occasionally their cup ran over with excitement, causing problems for themselves and their commanders. Like any such organization, the 306th had all kinds of people but, as flyers are prone to be, it had a large measure of devil-may-care individuals who flew hard and played harder. They broke hearts left and right in Northwestern Utah, as well as a few airplanes. Most of them had more money than they had ever earned before; most had cut their ties with home; and many soon began to express sentiments that indicated a fatalistic temperament. Some seemed to sense that they were proceeding into the "jaws of death" and were not likely to return.

Days and nights blended into one long, gray blur for many. The crews flew horrendous hours. An in-commission aircraft never sat on the ground for long. Capt. Delmar Wilson flew 160 hours one month as an instructor pilot for neophyte first pilots. Day and night they flew gunnery, bombing and navigation missions. Many went off to other bases for additional training in all of the specialties that would be needed to maintain a bomb group in a far off place and to permit it to carry out its assigned mission. At Wendover they had ground school on hydraulics, electrical systems, fuel systems, armament, fire control systems, emergency procedures, aircraft recognition and communications, often with the instructors only a few pages ahead of their students in the tech manual.

One would like to think that combat crews were chosen carefully, with the talents and shortcomings of each member carefully blended to bring out the best in each. One officer recalls how combat crews were formed in his squadron. First the available pilots lined up, behind them the copilots fell in, then the navigators, followed by the bombardiers.

Engineers came next, then radio operators, and the three gunners for the ball, waist and tail positions. The formation was dismissed, file by file, and each file was magically transformed into a combat crew. Capt. J.W. Wilson is given credit in the 423rd Squadron for attempting, at least at a later date, to try matching the strongest officer groups with the weakest enlisted men, and vice versa, so that the strong might bring the weak ahead. Be assured that in the early 306th, as in the later unit, there were mismatches on crews that caused men to be shifted or to ask to be changed for a limitless variety of reasons. Many of the crews developed strong bonds that withstood tragedy and the inevitable strains of combat.

Combat is traditionally a time of rapid promotion, but little equalled the spectacular advances in rank during the buildup phase of the 306th. Pilots arrived at Wendover as first lieutenants, were appointed squadron commanders and within three months were majors. Enlisted men found themselves moving up in grade at a pace not dreamed of in the peace time army. Col. Overacker received his eagles before the group left Wendover. Delmar Wilson arrived a captain and boarded the Queen Elizabeth in command of the ground echelon as a lieutenant colonel. And this pattern obtained through much of the combat history of the organization. Many of those who came to Wendover with shiny gold bars were by Christmas of 1943 sporting gold or silver leaves. The ablest who survived found themselves being promoted into new positions and, as time wore on, there were numerous transfers and promotions that took top pilots, navigators and bombardiers to other jobs. The way was thus opened for more junior officers to move up and the cycle would begin over again. One of the interesting facets is that before going into combat there had been no designated staff positions for navigators and bombardiers. Soon, however, it was found that there was a need for officers in both specialties at staff level and authorization for increased manning was forthcoming in the table of organization. Unfortunately, many very able officers were early casualties and never had an opportunity to participate in the constant shuffling.

Enlisted men who came to Salt Lake and Wendover as privates often left for England as staff sergeants, technical sergeants and master sergeants. One reason for the rapid promotion of enlisted aircrew members to the grade of staff sergeant was the humane desire to insure the best treatment possible for them from the Germans in case of capture. Non-commissioned officers received considerably better handling in POW camps than the lower enlisted grades.

Unfortunately, the war production effort had not yet gotten up to full capacity and aircraft output was still not adequate to provide the early combat units with optimum numbers of aircraft for training. But

the B-17s slowly began to arrive, usually ferried to Wendover by skeleton crews sent out from the group. As more planes arrived, crew training was intensified and only lightened by an occasional deployment to Ephrata, Wash., for patrol duty as the threat of Japanese invasion waxed and waned. After a lone Japanese submarine lobbed a few cannon shells against Santa Barbara, Calif., in mid-May, the 306th responded on 26 May by sending a B-18 to Muroc whence it flew submarine patrol missions over the Pacific coastal waters until recalled to Wendover on 16 June.

Joe Gabrish was typical of so many who joined the 306th early: "About fifteen of us came from Sheppard Field, Tex., just out of mechanics school. Arrival at Wendover was a chilling experience, for there was practically nothing there, except a few tents huddled around the control tower. We started out in tents but quickly built shacks. One of the bad features of the tents was that they were blown down almost nightly by the desert winds.

"Just one runway cut across the Wendover landscape, but a plane could land almost anywhere on the salt flats. There was little mechanical equipment, and the men were totally ignorant of the planes they were about to work on. Everything went by the book, not because the men wanted it that way, but because that was the only way they could learn what to do."

Gabrish remembers that they got beer from the State Line Hotel, but the absence of coolers made them improvise. They were soon tying lines on the bottles and dropping them down test holes in the salt where they cooled nicely some distance below the surface. Later in England test flights were discreetly scheduled on the days of major parties to insure that there was sufficient ice at the officers' club bar. Ice was made by taking a B-17 to 30,000 feet with containers of water sitting in the waist area. Ice formed quickly and the cool drinks preferred by the American flyers became a reality, much to the amazement of the RAF liaison officers at Thurleigh.

Three important aspects of crew training were never adequately covered at Wendover: instrument flying, formation and aerial gunnery. This statement is in no way meant to disparage the efforts of trainers and trainees who strove mightily to produce quality results. Neither is it meant to cast aspersions on either the command or the supply echelons of the group or higher headquarters. The culprit in all three areas was time or, more precisely, the lack of it.

Instrument flying as a skill was in its incipient stages in the early forties. Instruments were primitive and ground facilities relatively crude. Needle, ball and airspeed were the primary cockpit references. The artificial horizon was reputed to be a dangerous instrument to rely on; gyros had a tendency to tumble at the most inappropriate moment. Consequently this instrument was usually covered over during instrument training flights and during instrument checks. Likewise the gyro compass was held in ill repute; it was given to excessive precession. This

instrument, too, was masked during training and checks, like the attitude indicator. Even the obscure little rate of climb indicator was declared anathema; it reacted too fast to changes in altitude. It too was outlawed. So, the instrument training program concentrated on what the pilots affectionately (or otherwise!) called the "needle, ball and speedle." Pilots had been exposed to the Link trainer in flying school and it had produced results that were outstanding considering the primitive state of the art. But at Wendover the stumbling block was time, time that had of necessity to be devoted to other aspects of the training program.

In the scale of priorities for transition to the B-17 criteria number one was the development of an ability to get the bird in the air and back on the ground in one piece. And in the development of this basic skill, instrument training took second or worse place to the acquisition of such fundamental skills as taxiing the aircraft with the throttles and not the brakes and recovering from a bad bounce on landing. We must not forget that the B-17 was equipped with conventional landing gear. The newly-developed tricycle gear which the pilots who went to Albuquerque encountered during their training was much more forgiving of a bad approach and landing than the older system of main gear and tail wheel. One could slam a tricycle gear equipped aircraft into the ground and it generally stuck fast. The B-17 with its conventional gear system had learned tricks from the desert natives around Wendover; it reacted like a jack rabbit to a bad touchdown and was more stubborn than a jackass in coming back under control.

Instrument flying was practiced whenever the opportunity presented itself, mostly on cross country flights. These, however, were always scheduled as navigational training flights and navigators were prone to become a bit vociferous, even downright belligerent, at the gyrations of the pilot especially during a celestial shot with a handheld octant. Likewise, bombing missions afforded little opportunity for instrument practice. The best one could do was to fly instruments from base to bombing range; but, alas, the bombing range was itself on the reservation and this proximity effectively wiped out much instrument training on bombing missions. So, instrument training suffered; it suffered because there were higher priority skills which had to be learned, skills more closely related to basic flying safety.

Formation flying met the same fate at Wendover. Here the culprit was not so much time as it was the inability to get aircraft in the air to fly formation with. During April usually no more than one B-17 was available at one time. Later as more aircraft arrived they had to be dedicated to transition flying for new pilots who were standing in line by the score.

Formation flying is not inherently difficult but it is a skill acquired only by constant practice. Unfortunately there were seldom, even in the final days at Wendover, enough aircraft to schedule them primarily for formation training. Operations officers tried desperately to effect

join-ups of aircraft in the local area after transition, bombing or navigation missions and to fly formation in the local area until fuel considerations required that the flights be terminated. But it was at best two or three aircraft that could be mustered together under these conditions. The only formation of even squadron size ever flown by the 306th in the ZI was on the cross country deployment of the group from Wendover to Westover which began on 1 August. After the necessary de-emphasis of this aspect of training at Wendover, it is no surprise that many of the original pilots affectionately refer to this deployment as a "gaggle of four-engined monsters."

Aerial gunnery at Wendover was almost an impossibility. The basic deficiency was simply something to shoot at. True, there was some little opportunity to shoot at a towed sleeve; indeed this was the reason why the A-17 had originally been assigned to the group. There was also a fixed target on the side of a low cliff. But lack of targets was, in retrospect, a secondary deficiency. What was primarily lacking was a lack of know-how and technical expertise about the theory of aerial gunnery. In those early days aerial gunnery theory was regarded as an extension of the shotgun versus pheasant problem. "Get on the target, throw in some lead and pull the trigger." This was the bible. Much later in combat it was the work of a 423rd Squadron navigator, 1st Lt. Eugene J. Pollock, that led to significant improvement in flexible gunnery! Pollock learned during his combat tour that the idea of always leading an attacking fighter was erroneous and that in a beam attack the gunner ought to shoot behind the attacking fighter, rather than in front of it.

Gunners had undergone training on their weapons in specialized gunnery schools. But what of the officers in the nose of the B-17? Navigation and bombardier training was never designed to make machine gun marksmen of them and they came to Wendover not knowing the difference between a .30 and a .50 caliber. Here the problem reached its most basic level. So to provide entry-level weapons familiarization training, an old mine car was set to running on a distant track and was used for machine gun target practice. There was nothing exotic about this training; all that can be said is that, considering the lack of better equipment, it helped get the job done. It was only one of the many examples of Yankee ingenuity which would characterize the 306th during its long history.

Even if better facilities for aerial firing had been available, one wonders how much they would have actually contributed to aerial marksmanship. Hand held waist and nose guns lacked any form of sophistication; power driven turrets produced more firepower and provided a steadier mount. But the whole theory of aerial gunnery was little understood and remained throughout the war at the primitive level of the ring and post sight. Surely there must have been an element of luck coupled with an innate skill with a weapon which helped the gunners of B-17s to do so much damage to the Luftwaffe.

Navigation missions criss-crossed the Western United States day and

night as dead reckoning and celestial navigation techniques were practiced and improved. Bombardiers unlimbered their Norden bombsights on targets and unleashed a torrent of blue practice bombs on great circles hastily whitewashed on the flat lands around Wendover. Pilots began to develop confidence in the use of the automatic pilot geared to the bombsight on the bomb run. Use of the automatic system was always looked at apprehensively by pilots since a fast or major correction cranked into the bombsight on a bomb run produced an immediate effect on the attitude of the aircraft, often resembling a snap roll.

The major soul-searing event of the Wendover phase was the loss of Lt. Arthur L. Birleffi's plane on 7 July, as it crashed on a night mission ten miles southeast of Wendover. Also aboard were Lt. Van Vander-Bie, Lt. Floyd R. Reno and Privates Swann, Emswiler, Gillies and Holsey. Vertigo may have been the cause of the crash but whatever the cause, the search on the desert the next morning for the debris of the aircraft and the bodies of the men had a profound impact upon some of the men of the 306th.

The four months spent at Wendover were such a fast moving experience that it is a great wonder that the group was ready to deploy overseas by 1 August. As a matter of fact there is probably serious question that it was indeed ready. But the pressures from London and Washington left no alternative. Gen. Arnold's continued promises to the British had to be made good and thus the 306th became the fifth bomb group to leave for England.

The trickle had begun in the summer of 1942 with the 92nd, 97th, 301st and 44th bomb groups. Now it was the turn of the 306th. The group was placed on alert and during the last two weeks of July there were daily rumors that Wendover would soon be only a memory. Speculation about the overseas destination of the 306th was prevalent and fueled endless guessing games. The air war in England had died down from the hectic days of the Blitz but the situation in Africa was critical with Rommel's Afrika Corps only seventy miles from Alexandria at El Alamein. Talk of an allied invasion of North Africa was everywhere. It seemed only too logical to the barracks planners of the 306th that the Group would simply trade the Utah desert for the Sahara. It is doubtful that, in these last few days at Wendover, even Col. Overacker could have answered the perplexing question, "where?" with any degree of confidence. But the teletype began to clatter on 31 July and on 1 August the 306th's Odyssey began.

Much credit must be given to every member of the 306th Bomb Group for what was accomplished at Wendover. Everyone, from top to bottom, gave his all to do the impossible. The result of these combined efforts was the launch on the morning of 1 August from Wendover of a fighting organization created in the short period of four months from mechanics who had never laid a wrench on a B-17 and pilots who ten months before had been college students. From this point on it was all "Go!"

Joe Conchowski had been Nov + Jan 5 Stewart cop for Birleffi, w 301st when plane crashed Hawaiian for battle of Midway + returned to Wendover for formation of 306th. Joe + J. Stewart had been given all night off by Birleffi when his plane was bombed + crashed

7 July

1 Aug

## Chapter 3

# PREPARATION FOR COMBAT

## August-September 1942

On 31 July everyone at Wendover was packing and making last minute preparations for leaving on the morrow. The ground crews, technical and administrative personnel left by train for Richmond, Virginia, under the command of Lt. Col. Delmar Wilson, the group's deputy commander. This was to be their staging area for overseas shipment, and they arrived there on 5 August.

The train ride across the country was no picnic, but like many such troop train movements, accorded the men an opportunity to see vast areas of the United States. The combat-bound men received enthusiastic receptions from civilians along the route; gifts of food were numerous and received with welcome hands by the men. Lt. Edgar Hallman of the 368th made it personally a bit more eventful by failing to be on the train when it pulled out of one station. By good fortune he was able to catch up six hours later.

Flying crews were in the air by mid-morning 1 August, leaving the desert and mountains of Western Utah for the plains of the agricultural midwest, flying six hours or more across fertile farmlands. Thirty-eight planes left Wendover, each with fourteen men aboard. In addition to the flying crews, the extra passengers were ground personnel who would be needed to provide support services for the aircrews while they spent an anticipated month at Westover Field, Springfield, Massachusetts. The planes were heavily loaded with the extra men and considerable personal baggage.

An intermediate stop was planned with the 367th and 423rd Squadron planes refueling at Chanute Field, Illinois, and the 368th and 369th landing at Scott Field, Illinois. Officers and men enjoyed their all too brief stays at luxurious (compared to Wendover!) permanent stations. Other than weather, flying crews had few problems en route to Westover. The Scott Field contingent got into Westover first, arriving 2 August. The Chanute takeoff was delayed by ground fog and only three planes managed to depart before weather closed the field for the day. These three aircraft were diverted to Bolling Field, Washington, D.C., where they remained over night. On 3 August the three aircraft at Bolling and the remaining aircraft at Chanute all made it to Westover. Once the group had assembled at Westover, the men settled into their new routines, soon joining the Atlantic sub patrol, complete with depth bombs. But, despite their enthusiasm, 306th fliers never spotted a Nazi submarine.

Training at Westover did afford profitable flying experience for all personnel, although even with this when the planes headed for England, 2nd Lt. Pervis E. Youree, a 423rd pilot, had only seventy-eight hours of flying experience since graduating from flying school. Command officers were aghast at this, but found no adequate remedy other than to try to keep the men and planes in the air as much as possible.

The 423rd Squadron history relates an incident of Capt. Mack McKay and Lt. Loyal Felts buzzing the Queen Elizabeth at sea in their newly-acquired B-17Fs, which had begun to arrive on 16 August. There is another well documented report of Lt. John Brady and crew flying under the bridge at New London, Connecticut, a remarkable feat and one laced with a good bit of luck. Although the bridge looked wide enough when they reconnoitered it, there was actually a clearance of only six inches on either wingtip as they flew through. These were not the only escapades by these early birdmen; there were other bridges flown under, other ships buzzed and other diverse shenanigans, as they shook down their brand new airplanes before launching out across the North Atlantic.

While this was going on at Westover, down at the Richmond Army Air Field the other part of the 306th was preparing for overseas shipment and 13 August entrained again, this time headed north for the port of embarkation at Fort Dix, New Jersey. On the following day, 192 officers and men from Westover were on the southbound train for Fort Dix to join forces with the ground echelon and begin the wait for sea transportation.

The total number of personnel aboard each aircraft was cut to ten men, nine crew members and one passenger. The makeup of the crews had undergone some shifts as well; the lineup that had flown into Westover was not the same that flew out. Several officers and men were replaced because of illness or other factors.

Passengers accompanying the 423rd included Col. Charles B. Overacker, Jr., Maj. James W. Wilson, Lt. Rush Poulan, Lt. Robert C. Williams, Lt. John A. Coulter, Lt. Jim H. Speck, Lt. Herbert J. Avise, M/Sgt. Howard J. Bauman and T/Sgt. Raymond T. Stymacks.

367th passengers were Maj. Harry J. Holt, Capt. William B. Sory, Capt. Thurman Shuller, Lt. Percy A. Vincent, Lt. Carl G. Smith, Lt. Lewis R. McKesson, Lt. Ray V. Hopper, T/Sgt. Herbert L. McVicar and T/Sgt. Clements Amundsen.

The 368th carried with it Maj. William F. Lanford, Maj. William H. Cleveland, Capt. Robert S. Stevens, Capt. Henry J. Schmidt, Lt. John F. Bennett, Lt. William E. Friend, Lt. Jesse L. Wilburn, M/Sgt. Arnold G. Gunderson and M/Sgt. George G. Owens.

Maj. Ralph Oliver led the 369th passengers, along with Maj. Watts S. Humphrey, Lt. Charles G. Nowark, Lt. Doyle L. Dugger, Lt. Frank G. Kelly, WO (jg) Joseph F. Pryga, M/Sgt. Clyde M. Bennett and T/Sgt. John A. McCrory.

While thirty-eight planes had traveled eastward, the flight to England was made by only thirty-five aircraft, the 369th having eight planes and the other squadrons nine each. One of the reasons for cutting the personnel load on the Atlantic flight was that each plane had been equipped with an 800-gallon bomb bay tank to ensure sufficient fuel for the non-stop flight across the ocean and this added considerably to the weight of the aircraft.

On the night of 30 August, at about 10 p.m., the movement of 306th personnel began from Fort Dix to Hoboken. From there the men were ferried across New York Harbor to the Queen Elizabeth's berth on the Hudson River. The 306th made small impact on the total passenger complement of the great Cunard liner. The ship was carrying four times its normal peacetime load, 17,300 troops, including 3,000 men with anti-aircraft duty assignments aboard. Staterooms were jammed with passengers; usually sixteen men were assigned to each compartment. As there weren't sixteen bunks, the men slept in six hour shifts, followed by six hours on the top deck with a blanket, and then twelve hours on other decks. Fortunately for everyone, this was not an around-the-world cruise.

By 4 a.m. Col. Wilson could report to the ship's captain that the 306th was aboard. At 10 a.m. tugs inched the mighty Queen out of her Hudson River pier. Once clear of the harbor traffic the ship set course for a high-speed dash across the treacherous North Atlantic. The Queen Elizabeth made thirty-three knots in daylight hours and cut to thirty knots in darkness, a speed guaranteed to outrun any of the Nazi U-boats and most surface ships. Automatic steering brought about a zigzag course change every forty-five seconds. The more enterprising among the passengers quickly found a solution to their cramped living conditions in the abundant life boats and rafts where sleeping was not restricted to six-hour shifts. While subsequent replacements of the 306th often winged their way to the combat zone, many others traveled by ships less well equipped than the Queen Elizabeth. (Will some ever forget the SS Rangitata?) Early portions of the late summer voyage were very warm, encouraging sun bathers, but the weather quickly changed as the destination neared, noted by all on the arrival of RAF Coastal Command planes overhead to escort the ship into its Scottish berth. The men of the 306th were off-loaded into lighters and taken to the dock at Greenoch, near Glasgow.

Meanwhile, at Westover, leaves had been cancelled. Flight crews were working feverishly on their planes to get them ready for the flight to England. Many men had been able to go home for a few days while those from distant parts of the country had found New York a major attraction. Morale ran high for the group at this point, although there was evidence of strong misgivings about the future by some. Capt.

August-September 1942

John Olson was among those reported as having a premonition that he would not make the return trip. Even after restrictions were placed on all crews, Col. Overacker softened to Olson's entreaties for one final visit with his parents who lived nearby.

The pilots and crewmen were busy flying their planes, testing them, modifying them — and still encountering and trying to correct problems. All aircraft were flown on missions of long duration in order to develop fuel consumption data in preparation for the Atlantic crossing.

On 26 August there was a taxiing accident. Sgt. John Loftus was hit by pieces of flying metal, suffered a compound fracture of the left leg, and became one of those left behind. After a delay caused by an errant shipment of parts, the 423rd took off 2 September at 9 a.m. from Westover and headed north for Gander, Newfoundland, the final jumping off point from the western hemisphere for the 306th Bombardment Group (H). Lt. Raymond Check and crew remained behind with mechanical problems. Slowly the other squadrons followed and, by 4 September, all thirty-five crews were on the ground at Gander, eager to move on eastward. As in all such ventures, there were problems. Sgt. Francis Bowes missed Check's plane out of Westover and caught up at Gander. And from Gander Sgt. Jack C. Webb, Sgt. Charles Fatigati and Pvt. William V. Baker missed their 423rd plane when they got lost while hunting. Fortunately, they were able to squeeze into 369th planes taking off later.

Gander furnished the flying crews with a last opportunity to indulge in some North American shopping. They filled their planes with cases of cigarettes, candy, liquor and soap; the more intrepid and farsighted spent their money on silk stockings! Finally the clearances were ready and the 306th planes began to move out of Gander on the night of 6 September, bound for Prestwick, Scotland, 2100 miles across the waters of the North Atlantic. This flight was destined to bring the 306th in close touch with the harsh realities of what lay ahead.

An hour or more out of Gander at least two 423rd ships witnessed a brilliant flash in the sky and the B-17 of Lt. John Leahy was no more. Some suspected sabotage at Gander. The investigation noted that the aircraft blew up at the precise time that the flight plan called for the 800-gallon bomb bay tank to be switched on and suspected an electrical short. No one will ever know the real cause of the tragic loss. Lt. William Warner and his crew circled the area where the flash had been seen, but observed nothing. With Leahy that night in 41-24473 were copilot Robert H. Landry, navigator Andrew J. Hoyt, bombardier Frank L. Shannon, Jr., engineer William Blakesley, radio operator James A. Wiley, gunners Charles H. Carlton, Roland L. Oikle and Leslie R. Pettyjohn and the squadron engineering officer, Lt. Rush Poulan.

26 Aug

4 Sep

6 Sep

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Most of the 306th planes sailed on, oblivious to this event, while Lt. William C. Melton, Jr. and his crew were developing their own drama in a 368th plane, 41-24516. An hour or so out of Gander Melton's plane lost an engine. Melton elected to continue on with a feathered engine. But as is the peculiarity of multi-engined planes at heavy gross weights, gasoline consumption rises when operated on less than all engines. (In normal operation a B-17 uses about 240 gallons an hour for four engines, but on three engines consumption jumps to 300 gallons per hour, a twenty-five per cent increase.)

About midway of the trip, Melton's plane developed problems in another engine. It too was feathered and the plane continued eastward. Fuel was a critical problem for the deploying planes in normal operation, but for Melton's aircraft, now on two engines, it became hypercritical. Off Magilligan's Point, Ireland, the saga of this valiant crew came to an end. The pilot ditched the plane in shallow water, skidding to a stop within walking distance of the beach, which all aboard reached without difficulty. Unfortunately the aircraft was carried out to sea on the next high tide with the reputed loss of a considerable supply of bourbon.

The 306th now had thirty-three combat airplanes!

Perhaps this trip had portents of things to come for Melton's original crew, because it became one of the hardluck crews, six of the nine crew members dying over Europe. Melton was later transferred to another command; Alex Kramarinko, copilot, and Leland J. Kessler, a gunner, became prisoners of war.

Haven for the exhausted crews was at Prestwick, where they staggered in on their own schedules. Pilots had flown the last several hundred miles with constant attention to fuel consumption. When they landed there was not enough fuel left in any of the planes to have carried them much further. Lt. Robert Seelos says his tanks were dry as he turned on final approach. As he touched down he found he had no brakes either. When he had passed over Prestwick initially he had noted a grassy field off the end of the runway. He let "Montana Power" run on to the grass as it slowed down and there it came to an abrupt halt in a peat bog, later to be towed rather ungracefully out of the mire.

This was an unusual Sunday morning for the tired 306th crews as they gathered at the Prestwick terminal for some warm food and even warmer dark beer. Even now some of those who were at Prestwick are amazed at the conditions they found — very curious civilians mixing with them, questioning them about who they were, where they had come from, where they were going. When later they found themselves surprisingly greeted at Thurleigh by Lord Haw Haw broadcasting from Berlin and by the Luftwaffe with Christmas Tree bombs, many of them wondered how many of those civilians at Prestwick may have had divided loyalties.

On 8 September the crews were out of Prestwick, headed south in the typical murk that was to become so much a part of their flying experience. By the time they reached Bedfordshire it had cleared away and they were able to land their planes at Chelveston, about twenty miles from their ultimate destination. In the USAAF history of the early 8th AF, it says "The initial bombardment units were to be established in the Huntingdon area . . . These eight airdromes constituted the RAF 8 Group establishment and, to fit into the existing communications system, it would be necessary to set up an AAF wing . . . The 8 Group headquarters at Brampton would thus become the 1st Wing headquarters. This was necessary because the eight airdromes had wire connections with Brampton . . . and it would require nine months to change the system."

Facilities at Thurleigh were not yet adequate to handle an American bomb group since expansion was underway in early September. The primary runway, known to the Americans as Runway 24, was 5910 feet long. The other two runways were each approximately 4200 feet long, one running north and south and the other northwest-southeast. At the time of the 306th arrival on 8 September eighty sections of concrete were being laid on the 24 runway, and the perimeter track was being repaired. This construction came under the British Air Ministry Works Directorate with some involvement by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Encouraging was the fact the runways were of concrete and would be able to withstand the weight of the loaded bombers.

In June 1942 the field had been used by Wellington bombers as an RAF Operational Training Unit. Prior to the arrival of the 306th Thurleigh had been the home station for a Polish RAF bombardment unit.

The ground echelon began to arrive at 0300 on 7 September, with the last contingent of the 423rd coming on 11 September.

The arriving pilots had a common complaint: "there were too many fields to tell which was ours." Not only did 306th aircraft land at Chelveston, but others were scattered at Grafton-Underwood and Oakington. Within a few days the main runway at Thurleigh was repaired and the thirty-three B-17Fs, broken in by the long North Atlantic flight, were ready to settle for good maintenance and as much flying as weather would permit.

Housing at Thurleigh was inadequate: the only items in oversupply seemed to be mud and strange slop-pails! Many of the men were put into tents awaiting completion of construction of permanent quarters by the British. On 12 October there were 800 in tents. Two weeks later this number had declined to 500 and by 17 November only forty-four anti-aircraft personnel were still tented, adjacent to their gun sites.

It is noted that by 27 November thirty-six hardstands for planes were

available, with fifty being in use two years later. From that initial thirty-three plane inventory, the count dropped seriously until April 1943 and then began to slowly climb. In 1944 there were inventories of sixty planes at times.

By the end of 1942 electricity provided by the Bedford Corporation Electrical Supply had become adequate, sewage disposal had been improved and communication facilities now met the immediate needs. Four water tanks served the base, each holding 15,000 gallons. Gasoline storage was provided for 144,000 imperial gallons of aviation gasoline, 5000 imperial gallons of motor vehicle fuel, and 7000 imperial gallons of oil. Tanker trucks seemed to be on the roads to the gasoline dump daily, bringing in the needed fuel, while other tankers were quickly pumping it out of storage and delivering it to the voracious planes dispersed around the field.

British flying procedures and radio practices were among a few things which had to be learned quickly as the group began to develop into a combat organization. Flying officers and enlisted men were back in training again with more flying, formation work, gunnery and any other training that could be thrown into a packed schedule. All of the men were anxious to visit Bedford, London and assorted other places; the natives were equally curious about this latest invasion of foreigners they were suffering. Suspicions were soon dispelled as S/Sgt. Norman L. Johnson of the 367th endeared himself to Bedford people with a daring rescue of WAAF A/CW 2 Monica Holliday from the black waters of the River Ouse. The base was closed the night of 12 September, but that did not deter Johnson who had a great date planned for that evening. He took with him Pvt. Robert T. Yahn of the 369th and they left through a "hole in the fence" and walked into Bedford.

After the bar closed at the Swan Hotel, the two soldiers and their dates were walking along the Embankment near the bridge. They saw people on the bridge, but gave them no thought until they heard a splash in the river below the bridge, and shortly afterwards a strangled noise from the water. Johnson quickly shed his blouse, shirt, shoes and dog tags and dived into the river. It was very dark. He swam towards the bridge and when about in the middle of the stream, began treading water and looking for the drowning victim. In desperation he hollared, "Where the hell are you?"

Just then he saw fingers rise out of the water about six feet from him. He swam there, saw nothing and then went under grasping for anything. The second time down he caught some clothing and swam back to the surface. He was afraid the girl might panic but soon realized that she was unconscious. He began swimming towards the Embankment with her in tow. It was cold and dark in the river and Johnson was very tired. Several times he almost had to abandon the rescue. But he finally

made it to where people grabbed him and the girl, hauling them out of the water on to the steps. Later when he heard the girl groan he felt that all of his efforts were worthwhile.

About a year later, after being returned to the States to recuperate from a near miss by a German bomb at Canterbury, Johnson spent considerable time in Washington, DC, at Walter Reed Hospital. While reading a copy of *Yank* there one day he glanced through a list of decorations and found that he had been awarded the Soldier's Medal for saving the girl's life.

One of the early casualties of this period between deployment and combat was 2nd Lt. Basil Johnson, a 369th copilot, who suffered a broken leg in a jeep accident. He was shuttled off to Oxford General Hospital for treatment and early return to the Zone of the Interior with never a mission flown. Potential tragedy in the air was narrowly averted on 24 September when a ball turret gunner had his hatch open unexpectedly. He nearly fell out, but managed to catch his feet on the edges of the turret and laboriously pull himself back into the safety of the ball.

Flying training was intensive now. Equally spirited was the work of the rumor mills which were daily announcing the imminent departure of the 306th for North Africa. This rumor flared up and died down several times in the early months and, while other units departed, the 306th stayed on at Thurleigh. Several planes and crews were detached at various times to provide transportation to Africa for high ranking personnel.

On 28 September the 306th was declared combat ready. The long wait at last seemed over.

Tragedy struck with full force, however, on 2 October as the group was flying a practice formation and a young 367th gunner encountered an oxygen problem. When his pilot, Lt. William Ely, became aware of the trouble, he put his plane into a dive from 25,000 feet and apparently exceeded the structural limitations of the aircraft. He reportedly recovered at one point, stalled and went into a fatal plunge. During the long dive at excessive speeds the plane began to come apart in the air with the tail section breaking off some distance from the ground.

Sgt. William Kellum, tail gunner, was able to kick himself free from the disintegrating aircraft and parachuted to safety; he landed near the tail section. Sgt. Raymond McAskill, ball turret, was in the waist of the plane and was sucked out through a hole in the bottom of the fuselage; he suffered a slight scalp laceration and a scraped ankle.

Besides Ely, others killed were 1st Lt. Edwin Patterson, copilot; 2nd Lt. William Kuhlman, navigator; 2nd Lt. Ralph Cameron, bombardier; T/Sgt. Dudley Fuller, engineer, and Pvt. Clinton Goller, gunner.

J.B.S.

J.D.

Robert  
Cameron

This incident closed the opening phase of the long history of the 306th, for within a week the great adventure of World War II combat began for the men, now six months and 4000 miles from their beginning at Wendover, Utah.



Col. Charles B. Overacker, Jr., first group Commander



Col. Frank A. Armstrong, Jr., second group commander, and Maj. Harry Holt, 367th Squadron C.O.



Col. Claude E. Putnam, third group commander



Col. George L. Robinson, fourth group commander



Col. James S. Sutton, fifth group commander



Col. Hudson H. Upham, sixth group commander

Maj. Thurman Shuller, group surgeon and diarist



Capt. Raymond Check, killed in action,  
26 June 1943



T/Sgt. Arizona Harris, KIA, Dis-  
tinguished Service Cross



Lt. Col. William Raper, 367th Squadron C.O., de-  
puty group commander





Traditional 'smoking' of officers' club ceiling with missions. Maj. Harry Holt, left; Capt. John L. Ryan, with candle; Capt. John L. Lambert, left, and Capt. George Buckley, right.

1st Lt. John McKee, evadee

Capt. Frank Yaussi, first group bombardier

T/Sgt. Charles Vondrachek, Distinguished Service Cross





Maj. J.W. Wilson, 423rd Squadron C.O.  
deputy group commander

Lt. Robert Riordan discusses battle damage with  
King George VI, November 1942



Maj. John Bairnsfather, group intelligence officer

Officers serenade Actress Carole Landis during  
visit to Thurleigh, November 1942





Princess Elizabeth meets members of lead crew of 'Rose of York'. Col. George L. Robinson, left, Capt. Perry Raster, pilot, makes introductions, July 1944.

M/Sgt. Edward Gregory, crew chief, is at left of file of ground crew of 'Rose of York'



Capt. Henry W. Terry and crew meet King George VI, November 1942





Sgt. Robert Taylor at a Fortress waist gun

9 Oct 42  
1st Mission

## Chapter 4

# COMBAT HEATS UP

## October-November 1942

With the shock of Mission number 1 quickly over, the 306th soon stood ready to fly again. 8th BC kept going through the motions: missions were laid on, briefed and then scrubbed as weather proved unsuitable for operations by this fledgling group and the others.

Needless to say, the troops grew restive. They had come to fight, not just to continue training. And the irregular timing of early morning or mid morning briefings, the waiting, and the general frustration of repeated cancellations caused the men to lose their enthusiasm.

October crept on. The miserable English weather, the acres of mud and the general lack of preparation for the influx of over a thousand men and their airplanes were a continuing cause of concern to the commanders. But there was little that anyone could do. It must be reiterated that this whole venture was a new experience. Pilots accustomed to flying within a reasonably stable North American air mass soon found that the uncertainty of English weather, and that of the continent also, was totally frustrating.

As October slipped into November, the 306th still had only one mission smoked on the ceiling of the Officers' club. The enforced idleness, however, soon was to erupt into a flurry of missions. The interruption from combat had permitted more time to settle into the routine of working and living at Thurleigh. Even this was not without its problems and tragedies as witness the death of Pvt. Charles Rubenstein of the 367th Squadron when hit by a bulldozer.

In early November for three straight days the crews were briefed for a mission to St. Nazaire, but the planes remained on the ground because of weather. Whenever weather permitted, there was flying in the local area; several pilots were even given permission to try very low level flying across England. Cruising northeast to The Wash and back at 500 feet or less, Capt. Mack McKay with Lts. Raymond Check, William Warner, John Barnett and John Brady left no doubt in the minds of their ground crews that they had taken this permission to heart. Upon landing all of the planes were found to be sporting greenery hanging from odd places and several wing leading edges had newly-developed dents.

The 423rd Squadron during this period earned itself the dubious honor of being restricted to the confines of the base for its lack of military courtesy. Things obviously improved for on 24 October the squadron history noted, "Someone must have saluted someone, because we can now get to Bedford again." Maj. J.W. Wilson, the West

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7 Nov 42

8 Nov

Point 423rd commander, had a reputation for some tough action at times. Finding Lt. L.P. Johnson on a bus in Hartford, Conn., when he was supposed to have been on the base at Westover with everyone else, Wilson restricted him to the base for the remainder of the war. (This was quickly rescinded or forgotten.)

On 7 November the group was readied for Brest and flew the mission, the second in six weeks on combat status. Col. Overacker again led the group, flying with the 423rd Squadron. Flying for this squadron were Maj. J.W. Wilson, Capt. Mack McKay, Lts. Pervis Youree, John Barnett and Loyal Felts. In the 367th, Maj. Harry Holt flew with Capt. Henry Terry, and was joined by Capt. John Ryan, Lt. George Buckley and Lt. James Stewart.

Maj. William Lanford again led the 368th, along with Lts. Otto Buddenbaum, Marlen Reber and James Ferguson. Flying his first mission as a squadron commander was Maj. Ralph Oliver. With him from the 369th were Capts. Richard Adams, James Johnston and John Howard, and Lts. Clay Isbell, Charles Cranmer, Robert Riordan and Jack Spaulding.

Although en route weather was clear, the 306th was confronted with an impenetrable cloud formation over the target. As bombing at this time was by individual squadron, some munitions were dropped by 306th planes, most could not locate the target, and Col. Overacker had no choice but to take planes and bombs home. Indiscriminate bombing in France was prohibited.

While in the target area about twenty enemy aircraft rose to do battle with the group. Capt. Ryan's plane was jumped by two ME 109s and Lt. Buckley's crew fought off three FW 190s. Sgt. William E. Baker of the 368th got off six bursts at an FW 190 level astern and sent it down in flames. A total of four probables and four damaged was claimed by the excited gunners. This brief encounter from which the group emerged without loss inspired a new sense of confidence in the group as it bested the Luftwaffe on this the unit's second mission.

The following day, 8 November, saw the 306th return to Lille. RAF Spitfires flew top cover for the group to the enemy coast at which point the Luftwaffe took over escort duty. Twenty planes had taken off and after seven aborted for a variety of reasons thirteen were left to press on to the target area.

A second run on the target by the 369th Squadron proved disastrous to Capt. Richard D. Adams and his crew. During the 30 minutes the squadron was alone, thirty FW 190s made at least 200 attacks on the five-plane formation.

"... we were hit by flak," said Capt. Adams later. "The right wing dropped. I tried to level the plane with full left aileron. The bombardier said we had dropped our bombs.

"I switched over to command and found that the leader had not been

able to release his bomb load. This explained the second trip over the target. I told the leader I was hit and would have to slow down. I jerked off my oxygen mask to ask the copilot which engine was hit. He seemed in a dazed condition, sitting with his elbows on his knees. I pushed him back against the armor plate for protection.

"I could see a large hole in the wing between the number 1 and number 2 engines. Gas was spraying out and the number 2 engine was on fire. I tried to shut off number 2, but its controls were inoperative. During this time we were taking a heavy beating from flak. The instruments and oxygen system were out. With the flight controls out, the bank of the plane was increasing dangerously. I rang the alarm bell and called over the interphone to 'abandon ship.' I gave Lt. Cook, the copilot, a visual signal to bail out.

"Cook was still sitting in his seat but, as I jumped up, he followed. When he tried to pass my parachute to me it got wedged between the seats. We finally got it free after a struggle. We were then at 20,000 feet. I don't remember anything else until I pulled my ripcord at 2,000 feet."

This long delayed jump may have saved Adams from capture for he became the third 306th evadee. Besides Lt. Carl Cook, also leaving the plane and surviving were Lt. Julius C. Landrum, navigator, and Lt. John Latchford, bombardier. S/Sgt. Ford L. Winchell bailed out from his tail position and parachuted to safety.

Sgt. Jim T. McCloy, radio operator, got out of the plane, was picked up by the Germans and was taken to an Army hospital in Lille where he died the next day. It is not known what happened to the other crew members, except that the Luftwaffe reported them killed: S/Sgt. Peter Greyno, S/Sgt. John S. Saunders, Sgt. Anthony J. Lacek, and S/Sgt. Frank M. Zeck.

Adams landed in a pasture, hitting hard, but was uninjured. He got out of his chute and headed for a hedgerow in which to hide, getting rid of his Mae West there. While walking toward a woods he passed a French boy on the road and said "R.A.F." The boy shrugged his shoulders but did not react in any other way.

As Adams walked, a woman across the road signalled for him to go back. He reversed course, found a chicken coop and crawled into some straw above it. About 10 minutes later someone came by and rearranged the straw covering the pilot.

After hiding for half an hour, Adams saw a French farmer approaching. He was surprised when the man stopped in front of him and removed a suit of clothing, revealing a second suit beneath. The man signalled Adams to put on the new outfit, after which the unlikely pair headed north on the road. The Frenchman shortly stopped two boys on bicycles and a quick exchange was made. The men pedalled off on their way to a farmhouse. Adams was given food and cognac, which

3 Nov  
9 Nov

tasted very good in the late afternoon of a long and harrowing day. Several visitors came to the home while the downed pilot was there, including the boy whom he had first encountered and who now had more clothes and shoes for Adams. (Shoes were a key item as the well-built American boots and shoes were easily recognized in the occupied countries and were a dead giveaway of the wearer.)

After dark Adams was taken to another house about three miles away and hidden there until the next night. An English-speaking person showed up and talked with Adams, then took him on to another house where his journey across France was arranged.

Little information is available on this phase of his escape, but Adams did visit Nice, Toulouse and Marseilles before walking into Spain and finally reaching Gibraltar 21 April. He was back in London three days' later for a lengthy interrogation and a visit to Thurleigh before returning to the States.

Although Lt. Robert Riordan's crew reported no injuries, it had a major incident involving Sgt. John DeJohn, tail gunner, who did not make it to interrogation. He was hit by shrapnel in the left arm and abdomen, and was flown to the 2nd General Hospital. By Christmas he was on a hospital ship to Halloran General Hospital in New York, where he was a patient for fifteen months. DeJohn received a medical discharge with a seventy per cent disability, including the loss of the use of his left arm.

One serious aspect of combat crew manning was the ever increasing loss of skilled personnel, not through entire crews going down, but in the severe wounds and deaths of individual pilots, navigators, bombardiers, engineers, radio operators and gunners. The 306th had gone overseas with some extra pilots who were functioning in operations and other areas; these could be viewed as a replacement pool.

There was little time for the crews to be bored with inactivity. They had flown three days in a month, lost two airplanes, and by the evening of 8 November knew they were to be in the air again on the morrow — and the "met" experts promised good flying weather.

9 Nov

Headquarters planners had decided that this was the time to try the Flying Fortresses at low level. Bombing accuracy would be the big gain if the tactic proved successful. There were also those wizards who said that at 7000 or 8000 feet the bombers would be between the low and high flak. What these desk bound tacticians may not have realized was how slowly the B-17 moves at those altitudes at 155 or 160 MPH indicated airspeed. Additionally, at such altitude there was little likelihood of a tail wind of real magnitude to shorten the trip across the target and through the flak.

Such matters were of great concern to those who had already flown and when the teletype at Thurleigh began to click out the Field Order, Col. Overacker reacted immediately. He was on the telephone to 8th BC protesting the idiocy of such an order. There was to be no debate

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CONT

October-November 1942

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from the lower echelons, he was told; the command decision had been made and would be obeyed. A livid commander then said:

"If my crews have to fly that mission, I'll lead them!"

And lead them he did, into the jaws of hell, where in seconds three planes from the 306th disintegrated, carrying to their deaths 22 crewmen.

All four squadron commanders also flew, refusing to send their men unless they were with them.

Col. Overacker flew in a 367th Squadron plane with Capt. Henry W. Terry, Jr. as his copilot. Fifteen planes took to the air for this mission. Out of the lead squadron, 2nd Lt. James M. Stewart's plane went down with all of the crew killed, concluding a very rough and brief tour of duty after their hazardous return from the opening mission to Lille.

Others on Stewart's crew were 2nd Lt. William W. Dickey, copilot; 2nd Lt. Joseph A. Creed, navigator; 2nd Lt. John A. Creamer, bombardier; T/Sgt. Charles J. Meriwether, engineer; T/Sgt. Thomas E. McMillan, radio; S/Sgt. Raymond C. Schmoyer, S/Sgt. Jack M. Wheeler, Sgt. George R. Rumph, Sgt. Martin M. Barthe and Cpl. Hugh L. Langan, gunners. The reason for this crew having eleven men on this mission is unknown.

Lt. Loyal M. Felts' 423rd plane was battered on the bomb run. The first flak bursts blew off his number 3 engine. Copilot Robert J. Jones was knocked out of the plane by the force of the explosion and somehow survived. It is believed that Felts may have been killed by the same burst.

Another well-aimed burst from a Luftwaffe gun crew at St. Nazaire took off the plexiglas nose, knocking 2nd Lt. Andrew L. Graham, Jr., bombardier, off his seat, back against 2nd Lt. Forrest D. Hartin and the bulkhead at the back of the nose. Then the plane tilted over into a dive and Graham fell out, fortunately wearing a seat-type chute. Hartin was caught in the nose, but worked his way loose; that slight delay probably was the difference between early capture and evasion.

Graham landed near an anti-aircraft emplacement and got into a wrestling match for his parachute with a Frenchman; the German gun crew promptly took him captive. There was one other survivor from this crew, Sgt. Doane Hage, Jr., a waist gunner. Others killed were T/Sgt. Richard L. Beers, engineer; T/Sgt. John A. Westcott, radio; S/Sgt. Charles E. VonderLieth, ball turret; Sgt. Elden I. Wright, waist, and Sgt. George P. Bogumill, tail.

"Miss Swoose," another 423rd plane piloted by 1st Lt. John R. Barnett, was also hit hard in the number 3 engine by flak between the IP and the target and an uncontrollable fire developed. The crew dropped its bombs and got out of the target area, hoping to reach an island in the Bay of Biscay or to ditch, but the rapid spread of the fire forced a bailout.

2nd Lt. Thomas D. Hall, navigator, had been badly wounded in his

left arm and given first aid in the plane by 2nd Lt. Norman R. Nelson, bombardier. Hall was picked up by a German flak boat, still alive, but died aboard the boat from loss of blood, shock and exposure. Barnett was rescued unconscious and revived on the ship. Four other crewmen taken aboard the same boat were T/Sgt. Francis M. Counselman, Sgt. Frederick Mannello, Pvt. Walter Crawford and S/Sgt. Charles R. Wilson.

Three of the crew are presumed to have drowned: 2nd Lt. Lowell E. Kinney, copilot; S/Sgt. Bernard P. Papeika and Sgt. Jack M. Madison.

Lt. William P. Erickson had arrived at Thurleigh 29 October in one of the first replacement crews, and was cut down by a 20 mm cannon burst while crouching over his bombsight in Maj. Holt's 367th ship.

When Col. Overacker's lead ship arrived back in England and was inspected, the engineering report noted that the right tire was blown, the upper turret glass broken and the number 2 propellor needed to be replaced. There was flak damage to the left wing, the number 2 engine, the bombardier's compartment, the number 3 engine, the right wing, the left elevator, the bomb bay doors, the number 3 and the number 1 propellers. A cryptic last comment on this report was: "No internal bracing damaged to any serious extent."

During WW II the Luftwaffe was charged with anti-aircraft protection and manned the flak batteries throughout Occupied Europe. One of the principal methods of firing was to estimate speed and altitude from the best available information, and then to shoot at the formation or a plane overhead. With successive shots the gunners would follow a plane along, frequently coming closer with each shot, unless the plane altered course or altitude. Later in the war over the larger targets and with hordes of bombers the anti-aircraft fire was often a barrage thrown up by many guns, hoping to hit someplace in the formation.

Obviously, on this date the Luftwaffe gun crews a mile and a quarter below were zeroed in on the 306th; those who returned were convinced of it. The 306th followed another group across the target at the same altitude, giving the flak gunners ample opportunity to perfect course, altitude and speed.

Landing at Portreath in Cornwall, three of the six 367th planes which returned were listed as "damaged to extent unable to fly back until repairs are made." Bringing his badly damaged plane in, Maj. Holt went off the end of the runway, over a dirt ledge and crashed into a field beyond. 2nd Lt. William L. Eubank, navigator, was catapulted through the plexiglas nose, but miraculously was only shaken up.

Once safely on the ground after their harrowing experience at low level, the flyers came somewhat unglued and almost wrecked the officers' club at Portreath. As one of the squadron histories relates it: "... after a stand up interrogation we all relaxed in a big way. Our future welcome at Portreath is somewhat in doubt." The roisterers pulled the chandelier loose from the ceiling and broke a great deal of

glassware. Apologies were later extended by Col. Overacker and accepted by the RAF, along with a check for two hundred pounds for damages.

As mentioned earlier, Lt. Forrest Hartin, navigator on Felts' ill-fated plane, became an evadee and spent an exciting five days on the ground in France before being taken under the protective wing of the French Underground. He eventually was escorted to Spain and safety.

Five miles northwest of St. Nazaire Hartin clawed his way out of the nose, as his stricken plane began its fatal dive. He saw his plane crash and observed two other parachutes. Hartin had been hit by flak while in the plane and was also shot at by Germans while descending. Then on landing he sprained both ankles.

His became a classic escape story. He used his escape kit properly and despite his injuries, waded and walked, approaching the French warily, hiding well and eventually reaching sanctuary. He was also very, very lucky, a prime element in most evasions.

Unable to walk immediately upon landing, Hartin concealed his chute and then crawled for several hundred yards in a ditch. Whenever he stopped he was able to watch peasants examining the spot where he had landed. Finally, exhausted, he picked out a soft, muddy spot in the ditch and covered himself with leaves and mud. From there he heard rifle shots, watched several German soldiers who were searching the area, heard their dogs barking, and could see the smoke from the St. Nazaire fires as it obscured the sun.

At dark he emerged, found two sticks to use as canes and began walking in a northeasterly direction. Fortified with two benzadrine tablets from his escape kit, he made his way across fields, avoiding roads and traveled slowly until 6 on the morning of 10 November. Unfortunately for him, when a low level mission had been briefed, he did not wear the standard high altitude leather and sheepskin lined clothing of the period, but instead had on his A-2 leather jacket and light weight clothing. This gave him little protection against the early morning chill, adding to his woes.

Approaching a farm house very early in the morning, he watched for some time and then crept in very close. Hearing no German spoken inside, he knocked. A woman and two young men answered his plea for help, but would not let him in. They did give him coffee, and he went back to his earlier hiding place for the remainder of the daylight hours.

About 4 in the afternoon thirty Germans arrived in military vehicles and began a search of the area. Two of them stopped within twenty feet of Hartin and then talked for half an hour. As darkness approached they finally left. Again Hartin waited and about 7 began walking to a small village three miles away. When he heard German spoken in the streets he retreated by the same route he had come. He finally found a barn and went to sleep on the straw inside.

14 Nov

Later he heard German soldiers outside the barn. When they departed, he left his hiding place and walked into a large marsh known as Grande Briere. The close standing tall reeds proved tiring to the injured navigator and he was unable to go on to the three villages he saw in the distance. He built a small fire and kept it going all night.

When he started out again at dawn, he soon discovered three elderly men cutting peat and asked them in poor French for something to eat. They gave him a cold potato and some sausage and he thanked them as best he could. Hartin left them and walked to a canal and found there a boat which he bailed out. He first crossed the waterway and then decided to row on, moving into another canal.

After two hours he stopped when he heard voices. He soon saw a group of Frenchmen. He approached and identified himself as an American flier. They gave him food, wine, a pair of pants, an old sweater and a beret, for all of which he thanked them. Now dressed somewhat differently, he blended better into the group of farmers; he was also warmer. He spent the afternoon with the accommodating group as they herded their cattle, and at dusk went with them by boat toward the three villages he had seen the day before.

His French friends told him there were Germans in their village and that he should go to a central point between the three villages where they would meet him at nine the next morning, 13 November. Hartin found a house near the appointed spot, went to it and was given food, but was not permitted to enter. Instead, he spent the night in the shelter of a nearby barn and remained hidden all day until about 4. Then the door opened and an old French woman started in, saw Hartin and began screaming. He could find no way to silence her. Eventually the woman who had fed him the night before heard the commotion and came to his rescue, explaining to the old woman what was taking place. Then he was offered more food and advised to leave. Since there were Germans all around, it was suggested that he travel north.

Following a path, Hartin fortunately picked the left fork and soon came to a home. He knocked and was admitted when he said, "American." Here he was fed and soon departed, continuing his walk. After some distance he found another farmhouse but was refused admittance, and so returned to the path. Knocking at the next place he found, he was given a meal and hidden in a barn.

724 Nov

Before dawn on 14 November he was awakened by a French boy who brought food and showed him the direction he should take. He was helped along the way by friendly natives and finally reached St. Croix where he found food and his wounds were at last dressed. His new friends gave him an overcoat, wooden shoes, a bottle of cognac, food and cigarettes. Soon he was back walking, this time headed for Nantes. Shortly two Frenchmen on bicycles stopped him and said they had

13 Nov  
17 Nov

arranged for a truck to take him to Blain, a village north of Nantes. At Blain he was kept in a stable for a few days and then was lodged in a house where he remained for a month, hiding by day and appearing only at night. It was here that Hartin finally came under the care of the Underground and began his journey back to England.

Meanwhile, back at Thurleigh on 13 November, the base prepared for its initial contact with the British royal family. King George VI and a small entourage arrived at Thurleigh, accompanied by Lt. Gen. Carl Spaatz, top American air officer in England; Maj. Gen. Ira Eaker, commanding general of the 8th AF; and Brig. Gen. Newton Longfellow, 8th BC. -13

Much of their brief visit was occupied with talking with combat crews, particularly those of 1st Lt. Robert P. Riordan, 1st Lt. John M. Regan and Capt. Henry W. Terry, Jr. Numerous pictures were taken of Riordan and the King as they looked over the battered "Wahoo", which Riordan had brought back from the 8 November raid on Lille. The visitors also toured the Enlisted Men's mess and one of the Squadron sites. 17 Nov

Another trip to the submarine pens at St. Nazaire was flown on 17 November, a day that saw the group face intense enemy opposition. While all of the planes came back to England, the mission was not without heroics and casualties.

Capt. Robert C. Williams, 423rd operations officer, took the crew of the ailing Lt. William H. Warner on this mission and, in a terrific pounding from the Germans, had one crewman killed and three others hospitalized.

The field order again assigned the 306th as the last unit over the target. The 93rd led with twelve B-24s, followed by the 91st and 303rd groups each with eighteen B-17s. The 306th was scheduled to bring up the rear with twelve planes. However, three planes returned early with supercharger and gun problems and only nine were left to weather the flak and the attacking Luftwaffe fighters.

All went smoothly on the bomb run and the start of the trip home, until twenty miles northwest of the target when the 306th was jumped by fifteen FW-190s. In the first flurry of cannon fire Williams' ship lost an elevator. When the ship was hit again on the next fighter pass, the slightly built Williams and his copilot, 2nd Lt. Warren George, Jr., had to use their combined strength on the controls to keep the nose level. The 200-pound George braced both legs against the control column to keep the plane in a reasonably normal flight attitude.

S/Sgt. William E. Williams got credit for the only enemy aircraft of the day for the 306th, as at 1145 at 15,000 feet over Locmine, a 190 came in on his tail position in Capt. Williams' plane. Sgt. Williams first hit the enemy at 700 yards and destroyed it at 300 yards. Tracers were seen going into the nose and the plane, in a flat spin, became engulfed

in flames. T/Sgt. Eddie Espitallier in the radio room confirmed the kill.

Capt. Williams had been forced to pull his plane out of the tiny formation as it lost speed. Then a cannon shell exploded in the radio room, setting the insulation on fire. Espitallier fought the fire alone, but was unable to contain it. Williams then ordered Lts. Emmett Ford and Jacob Shively, bombardier and navigator, respectively, to go back and help out. Shively had trouble with his bulky parachute getting through the narrow passage in the bomb bay. He swung around the outside of one of the bomb racks just as a 20 mm shell burst nearby, peppering his head, arm and leg with shrapnel. He fell onto the bomb bay doors and was helped back to safety by Ford. (The doors would normally open when a weight of 100 pounds landed on them, but this time they held.)

Although Shively had a broken arm, he was able to help fight the fire and the three men finally got it under control.

A serious blow was sustained by the ship when a cannon shell exploded in the top turret, killing T/Sgt. Kenneth G. Aulenbach. In an effort to get the turret back into operation Lt. Ford took Aulenbach's body out of the turret, only to find that the guns were useless.

Back in the waist of the plane, S/Sgt. Hubert Houston was hit in the thigh and severely wounded; his fellow gunner, S/Sgt. Colin Neeley, was also wounded, but only slightly. In the ball turret, S/Sgt. Claiborne W. Wilson was unhurt, but oil from a leaking engine had covered the aiming window of this turret, rendering it useless.

Lt. Regan was also in difficulty: his plane had taken a direct hit in the number 3 engine, with pieces of the cowling flying off. Regan dropped down to 500 feet across the Brest Peninsula, but he was not alone. Capt. John Brady and Lt. Marlin Reber fell into position on his wings to provide protective fire against the German fighters. At the same time, Williams' badly damaged plane was being escorted by 1st Lt. William J. Casey and Capt. Mack McKay. (Heroics of this type were common in the early missions, but were frowned on by commanders as they broke the inherent strength of the close knit group. Pilots were threatened with courts martial if they continued such acts.)

Williams landed his plane at Exeter and it never flew again; it was the first of three planes known as "Chennault's Pappy." The name was the antic creation of Lt. Raymond J. Check who thought the B-17s with all their size were fit to father the P-40s made famous by the Flying Tigers of Maj. Gen. Claire Chennault. Regan's plane made it into Membury and after some minor maintenance, the young pilot took off on three engines and flew it back to Thurleigh. That night Gen. Eaker was at the American base for the first ceremonial presentation of medals to the men of the 306th.

The planes were out again the next day, this time to La Pallice for

17 Nov cont  
1943 Nov

12 Nov

another try at German submarine installations. Flying straight south from Lizard Point, the group suffered from some erroneous navigation, finding itself over a break in the clouds above St. Nazaire. Flak damaged the group, and they quickly found LaPallice and dropped their bombs.

On this mission the 367th lost another plane, "Floozy," flown by Lt. Ralph J. Gaston and his crew. The 306th put up only six planes this day, and Gaston found the heavy flak over St. Nazaire too much, suffering damage in the number 3 engine as it caught fire and began to vibrate badly. Finally, the last CO<sub>2</sub> cartridge put out the fire, but the plane was in bad shape. The bomb bay doors were jammed open, a condition which did not help the pilots in trying to cope with their loss of power.

Letting down over the Bay of Biscay, the lone plane was hit by fire from flak boats and later by FW-190s. Evasive action kept the plane in the air, but each time the pilot made a violent maneuver the plane lost another 100 feet, which he could ill afford. Toward the end, the four red fuel lights went on, indicating five minutes of fuel remaining. During this erratic descent, 2nd Lt. Kenneth H. Jones, bombardier, bailed out over the water, possibly slipping off the catwalk in the bomb bay; he is presumed to have drowned.

T/Sgt. Lester D. Quandt, engineer, was knocked out of his turret, his face covered with blood, as the attacking fighters shattered the plastic enclosure. Gaston and his copilot, 2nd Lt. Don H. Eldredge, kept maneuvering their plane to meet the assaults from three German fighters but, in the final pass, there was one fighter head-on and one on each wing. It was all over for the struggling "Floozy" and Gaston and Eldredge put the plane into the water two miles off Ile d'Ouessant at the tip of the Brest peninsula.

The plane floated for five minutes during which time the remaining crewmen were able to get the rafts out and to extricate the wounded Quandt. They were picked up quickly by a French fishing boat. The grateful flyers gave the boatmen their escape kits and their money. Within five minutes the men were taken from the fishermen and placed aboard a German coast guard boat. Later, the German fighter pilots who had shot them down visited the battered crew in a hospital.

Other surviving members of Gaston's crew were: 2nd Lt. James O. Walker, navigator; Sgts. John B. Jones, radio, Percy C. Bolinger and Albert J. Conte, waist, Rudolph Garcia, ball, and Joseph A. Dillard, tail gunner. All became prisoners.

The 368th plane of Lt. Robert W. Seelos also came under a stiff attack by the Luftwaffe, as well as being hit by heavy flak. Fragments from an 88 mm shell hit his navigator, 1st Lt. Charles G. Grimes, in the small of the back. "Seelos, I'm hit bad," called Grimes on the intercom

— and then died. 2nd Lt. John R. King, copilot for Seelos, was wounded by the same burst of flak. Upon his return to England he was hospitalized and his combat career came to an end.

Meanwhile, in another 368th plane flown by Lt. James M. Ferguson, his copilot, 2nd Lt. Robert Dresp, was seriously wounded, with one buttock destroyed and with massive internal injuries. Despite the severity of his wounds, Dresp attempted to help his pilot handle the plane on the way home. Dresp was taken to the 2nd General Hospital at Oxford, lived for several weeks, and finally succumbed. A waist gunner in the same plane, Sgt. Rupert W. Arnold, was also wounded.

The death of Lt. Grimes hit the group hard, as he was a favorite of many. His navigational skills had earned him a solid reputation and, because he was older than most of the combat men, he was affectionately known as "Pappy". Maj. Thurman Shuller, group surgeon, later pointed out that the entire group was always emotionally jarred by the return home of the bodies of good friends. This had a greater impact than did the loss of a plane and crew. It was difficult for both flyers and ground personnel to deal with the reality of a returned battered body and a funeral service to be held.

Another diversion of sorts appeared during November, as preparations were being made in England to film a wartime movie, *Four Jills in a Jeep*. The actresses, who attracted much attention wherever they went, included Carole Landis, Mitzi Mayfair, Kay Francis and Martha Raye. They appeared at Thurleigh in the course of touring USAAF bases, and other contacts were made with the group, especially with Miss Landis and Miss Mayfair. Eventually the story of the movie making venture was related in a book by the same name, authored by Miss Landis, and seven of the 306th flyers are mentioned in the tale she tells.

Late in November Sir Dudley Pound, First Lord of the Admiralty, wrote General Eaker: "It is too early to say with certainty what effect these raids have had on the German U/Boat campaign. The existing evidence suggests, however, that although the direct damage to the U/Boats and their shelters may not have been very great, the raids have caused a dislocation of the ports and the delicate organization of the U/Boat service which is only just becoming apparent. If this is so, and I personally believe that it is, the U.S. aircraft will already have performed a valuable service and discovered one of the few chinks in the enemy's armour so far as the U/B campaign is concerned."

St. Nazaire, the fast developing nemesis of the group, was again the target on 23 November, a day on which 1st Lt. William J. Casey's 369th crew distinguished itself. Flying in "Banshee", the crew recorded seven confirmed "kills" against the Luftwaffe. This was the top score of any 8th AF crew to date. (The 306th held the record for confirmed kills for

23 Nov 1942

25 " "

October-November 1942

51

23/cont.

one plane at the end of the war, although Casey's crew had its record eclipsed).

During a 12-minute running battle with the Luftwaffe fighters, Casey's crew ran up the following score:

Parley D. Small, tail gunner, got the first at 1328 at 400 yards, with the pilot bailing out.

Waist Gunner Reginald Harris hit one at 200 yards at 1334; the plane went into the water with no escape for the pilot.

Joe Bowles in the ball turret scored at 1335, destroying the attacker at 50 yards as the plane broke up in flames.

Engineer Wilson Elliott caught one at two o'clock high and saw it disintegrate in the air at 200 yards.

At 1338 Harris got his second at 100 yards; the pilot bailed out.

Bowles hit his second, catching the fighter as it zoomed toward his ball turret. He used only 70 rounds of ammunition and watched the plane hit the water.

Allan Meaux in the waist got his at 1340; the plane fell out of control and plunged into the sea.

During the running battle around Casey's plane, 2nd Lt. Lemuel Smith, navigator with 1st Lt. Earl Tunnell, shot down an FW-190. Sgt. Robert Mumaw, engineer for Maj. Harry Holt, got the last plane of the day.

While Casey's gunners were busy, his bombardier, 2nd Lt. A.G. Smith, was badly wounded, but managed to drop his bombs on target; 2nd Lt. Walter Leeker, his navigator, was also wounded.

The 369th Squadron also lost a plane on this mission, which had seen the 306th only get eight planes off the field. Four aborted before reaching enemy territory, and four remained to make the bomb run. The attacking fighters nailed 1st Lt. Clay Isbell's ship on the bomb run, knocking out the number 1 and number 2 engines and tearing 10 feet off the left wing. Only 2nd Lt. Abraham Burden, bombardier, and 1st Lt. Peter Fryer, navigator, survived; both bailed out near St. Nazaire and were immediately captured on landing. Killed from Isbell's plane, besides the pilot, were 2nd Lt. Fulton Dyer, copilot; T/Sgt. Erwin Grenke, engineer; Pvt. Robert S. Kryak, radio; S/Sgt. Edward Kosticki, ball; Sgt. Ray E. Buckminster, waist; S/Sgt. George L. Houx, tail, and Sgt. David W. Lindsey, waist. The seven men were trapped when the plane exploded.

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25 Nov

On 25 November 8th BC took the 306th "off combat." A troubled peace settled over Thurleigh for the rest of the month, not to be shattered by the angry roar of engines until 5 December. During this breathing spell the group devoted all its efforts to repairing its battered aircraft, resting its tired crews and hoping for replacements.

## Chapter 5

# FATALITIES DICTATE CHANGE

## December 1942

A small ray of sunshine burst brightly through the low hanging clouds over Thurleigh on 1 December, dispelling some of the gloom generated by continued miserable weather and combat inactivity. The good cheer came on a postcard written from Stalag Luft III by Lt. Albert LaChasse, a former crew member of the 367th and the first man from the group shot down and taken prisoner. LaChasse had been Capt. John W. Olson's bombardier on the 9 October mission to Lille. From the information on the card it appeared that there might be two additional survivors from Olson's crew. This supposition eventually turned out to be correct although at that time no one on the base was aware that the navigator and engineer were in fact making their way across France to freedom.

Troop well-being was an important factor on the base and, as the damp English weather gripped the area, the declining health of the men became a major concern to the medical officers. Frequently every bed in the hospital was full and patients had to be given medicine and sent back to their barracks to recuperate on their own.

On 5 December came the first break in the original command structure of the group as Major Ralph L. Oliver was moved from command of the 369th Squadron to group operations. His post was assumed by Capt. Henry W. Terry, Jr., of the 367th Squadron. In mid-month, Lt. Col. William H. Cleveland, group operations officer, was transferred from Thurleigh and his position in operations was taken over by Oliver.

In the early days of combat Lt. Robert Salitrnik, a 423rd navigator, had been designated as group navigator, and Lt. Frank Yaussi, a 423rd bombardier, had become the group bombardier. These moves were designed to fill an already described void in these specialties at staff level. In the tactical squadrons certain officers were given additional duty assignments as squadron navigators and bombardiers. Those holding the original assignments in the squadrons were: 367th, Hugh Phelan and Walter H. Coons; 368th, Wallace D. Boring and Robert T. Levy; 369th, George Spelman and Gerald Rotter; 423rd, Harold Gaslin and Chester May.

Capt. Watts S. Humphrey, the first fulltime group intelligence officer, had already left the 306th by late October, moving to 8th BC. At Thurleigh he was replaced by Capt. John B. Wright. Lt. Rudolph

Skalak was the first and only photographic officer, and Lt. William VanNorman was the only public information officer the group had throughout the war.

German documents captured later and subsequent writings by senior Luftwaffe officers have shown that when the 306th and other groups first began flying combat the enemy had no good tactics for attacking the B-17. German pilots quickly discovered to their dismay that the classic pursuit-curve tail attack often proved fatal to the attacker. They soon found, however, that the nose of the bomber was vulnerable as there were head-on approach cones for the fighter where the bomber was unable to defend itself while in formation and unable to take evasive action.

The B-17F was the first model Fortress equipped with nine .50 caliber machine guns, and one .30 caliber in the nose was provided that could be moved from one gunport to another. This meager firepower did little to deter an enemy frontal attack. The side guns in the nose could not be fired straight ahead. The crews discussed this deficiency constantly; the problem was finally turned over to Sgt. James C. Green, Jr., an armorer, and Sgt. Ben Marcilonis, a welder.

Together they fashioned a mount, enlarging the .30 caliber gunport to accommodate the .50 caliber gun barrel and then providing supporting rods. However, such a unit had only a partial coverage of the front of the plane because of the Norden bomb sight immediately beneath the gun. Their idea was taken in hand by Lockheed personnel at Langford Lodge in Ireland, and from there mounts were made for other planes in the 306th and its sister bomb groups.

For their resourcefulness, Green and Marcilonis were awarded the Legion of Merit medal. Unfortunately, by the time the presentation was arranged in April of 1943, Green had been in a German prison camp for more than a month, his flying career having been of brief duration.

This development was merely a stop gap to improve the fire power of the B-17F. G-model Fortresses included a chin turret which provided twin .50 calibers mounted below the plexiglas nose with an optical sight for the bombardier which in no way hindered the operation of the bomb sight. In the early stages of the war bombardiers and other crewmen were anxious to do anything possible to cut down on the severity of the nose attacks that were raising havoc with the formations and with individual planes. Such attacks also contributed to the high death rate among pilots and copilots during this phase of operations. A study of 306th original crews showed that 30 per cent of the original pilots and copilots were killed in action and that 23 per cent of the total killed in action in the original crews were pilots and copilots.

Meanwhile, the enemy found the Flying Fortress a formidable

enemy. Johannes Steinhoff, a Luftwaffe pilot and postwar German air leader, commented: "... the result of our first fighter attack against Flying Fortresses was terrible for us indeed. We did not shoot down a single bomber, but lost a considerable number of our own fighters."

Speaking of the B-17, Gen. Adolph Galland told Hermann Goering: "Unless we immediately reinforce our fighter units, unless we are given better and more effective armament and develop new tactics for the attack, these birds will one day fly all the way to Berlin."

Steinhoff in *Command and Commanders* writes further, "The finer points of the doctrine for attacking these bombers had not yet been worked out in the air, but a few principals had nevertheless already been established. They were:

1. Attempt to break up the formation; single planes are easy to shoot down.
2. If you succeed in leading your concentrated fighter force in frontal attack on a collision course right into the bomber formation, you will be sure to break it up.
3. Maintain your fighter force in the closest formation possible and do not open fire except at shortest range, but then 'fire from all buttonholes', as we used to say."

During December the bombardment offensive was suffering from weather and necessary repairs to aircraft. Heavily damaged planes were cannibalized for spare parts and as a result the available force continued to shrink. Especially was this true in the 306th which had incurred more casualties than any other group.

There continued to be a high incidence of aborts because of mechanical failure or crew judgment; these two factors aggravated both field and headquarters commanders. Stern measures were threatened and, at one point in early 1943, at least one 306th pilot was told that if he aborted one more mission he would be on his way back to the States. Evidently the manner in which the message was delivered was convincing; this pilot never again aborted and in fact flew many more missions than did most pilots.

After a long stand-down from combat, the group was back in the air on 12 December. Eighteen planes were launched against the marshalling yards at Rouen. Unfortunately, seven aborted before reaching the target and of the remaining nine only six planes managed to drop their bombs on the primary.

On the way in from the French coast where the fighter escort had bidden the bombers goodbye, 40 to 50 Luftwaffe planes attacked the formation and, continued a running fight until mid-channel on the way home. Miraculously, the 306th escaped serious damage and suffered no losses, a factor raising the morale of those participating.

However, from the standpoint of overall mission effectiveness only

47 per cent of the First Wing planes taking off were able to complete the mission. Such statistics were gleefully welcomed by foes of daylight bombing. Gen. Eaker was called upon to defend his 8th AF and its mission against both British and American critics. Some of these favored converting the 8th into an adjunct of the RAF while others wanted the planes shifted to the Pacific where an entirely different kind of war was being fought.

On this mission to Rouen Lt. Sherwood Olds, a 367th bombardier, was severely wounded by a 20 mm. shell bursting in the nose of his plane, with fragments hitting him in the head, shoulder and foot. This was to be his last mission. Sgt. Clifford R. Langley, 369th, although badly wounded, destroyed an enemy plane, one of 14 claimed by the 306th. Lt. Robert P. Riordan's crew was credited with four of the total.

Again, weather stepped in and kept the group on the ground for another week, and this time there was trouble brewing on the base. In the early days food was an ever present problem, often in both quality and in quantity. The first complaint, about quality, was rectified by the substitution of American for British cooks — and this mollified the men for a while. The second problem, quantity, was a different matter as it was directly related to British food rationing; it was eventually solved with the arrival of quartermaster food supplies from the Zone of the Interior.

Before Christmas there had been an outbreak of numerous respiratory ailments which left the group in rather poor physical condition and did little to improve overall morale. The enlisted men again began to grumble about food. Reports of unsanitary conditions and poor food at the enlisted men's mess came to Col. Overacker's attention. He adopted a unique solution: he switched the cooks at the officers' mess with those at the enlisted mess! Under close supervision, a major cleanup was undertaken and, within two weeks (during which the men ate a lot of sandwiches), the meals improved and a bad morale problem was alleviated.

On 9 December Thurleigh had been treated to an unusual sight. At a formal review in front of the group headquarters building Royal Air Force Station Thurleigh was formally turned over to the United States Army Air Forces. This was the first official transfer of a base to the Americans in the British Isles. Taking effect at 1200 hours, the measure among other things gave the base commander responsibility for perimeter defense of the installation.

After a week's rest from combat, on the 19th the revived group took off on a long, unescorted mission to Romilly-sur-Seine, one hundred and eighty miles from the English Channel and a hundred miles southeast of Paris. Led by Lt. Col. Delmar Wilson, deputy group commander, with Maj. J.W. Wilson of the 423rd as his copilot, the

306th was flying a strung out formation of vees of three, this time 18 airplanes in six elements.

"The mission was run about as smoothly as any so far and is particularly noteworthy for the excellent bombing," notes the 423rd diary. That opinion was not held by the 367th, which continued on its downhill course and lost three planes: 1st Lt. John R. McKee, an original pilot; 1st Lt. Lewis McKesson, former squadron operations officer; and 1st Lt. Danton J. Nygaard, a recent replacement. This cut the original complement of nine crews to only three, a fact not lost on those still remaining. Thirty crew members from the squadron went down on the 19th.

Lt. McKee had with him 2nd Lt. Leonard E. Hamaker, 1st Lt. Thomas S. Marchant, 2nd Lt. George L. Mathews and T/Sgts. Stanley Garner and Francis Hess, and 1st Sgt. Carl Warheit, Sgts. Helmuth Roeder, ~~Darwin Wissenback~~ and Walter Wynn and of these only Warheit was killed. In McKesson's plane were 2nd Lt. Quentin W. Burgett, 1st Lts. Sydney Berk, Robert M. Freeman, and Sgts. Lucien Bedard, Fletcher M. DeWolf, Richard E. Cox, Sgt. Ludvik Dejnozka, Sgt. Stanley Milik and T/Sgt. Delmar L. Swyers. Berk, Freeman and Milik were killed.

Nygaard had in his crew 1st Lt. Daniel D. DeButts, who was killed, along with S/Sgts. Robert B. Sandlin, Cecil J. Floyd, Arnold Pearson, Sgt. Stephen Ross, Sgt. Arthur A. Bloom and Edwin Simonceck. Only Nygaard, 2nd Lt. Frank Bob Leasman, navigator, and 2nd Lt. John S. Trost, bombardier, survived.

Leasman and Trost agree that the plane was raked by 20 mm. cannon fire shortly after the target, as shells exploded in the nose, cockpit and throughout the fuselage.

"As we slowly fell away from the formation, the plane went into a flap spin and rolled over. Nygaard was burned on the face and arms and went out the nose hatch, followed by the bombardier," explains Leasman. "I was caught under debris until the engineer freed me. With the plane still upside down and at about 4,000 feet, I climbed out of the nose hatch and then jumped up as the plane passed under me."

Leasman was rescued by a French girl, Colette Florin, who was with the Resistance. She helped him hide in a woods about twenty miles west of Romilly where he was safe from German patrols, but, as the hunt for missing airmen heated up, he moved on and was soon captured. Leasman felt that by staying where he had been placed he was unnecessarily endangering the lives of the French who were trying to help him.

Trost says that the left elevator was shot off and that shortly thereafter the plane went into a steep climb, fell into a spin and then levelled off upside down. Trost bailed out much earlier than Leasman and saw only Nygaard's chute in the sky, a mile or more away from him. He landed in a muddy field north of Nangis; immediately four French farmers

rushed up to help him out of his chute. After checking him over for any injuries, they pointed to a distant woods and he set out on a mile and a half walk. Before he went into hiding he met another Frenchman with three children; this man also pointed to the woods and then to his watch, indicating the time he would return.

After dark the farmer and several other men came back, took Trost to a farm building and gave him food and wine. They left him there for the night, but were back in the morning with more food and clothes: old military boots, trousers, top coat, beret and other items designed to make him look like a typical Frenchman. He was later picked up by horse and buggy, driven through St. Just and into Nangis where a train ticket for Paris was bought for him. He and his new friends waited in a cafe across from the station until the overcrowded train arrived. Once on board Trost was placed in a compartment while his friends stood outside in the aisle.

Arriving in Paris, they rode the Metro to the end of the line and then caught a bus to the home of one of the men with Trost. There he stayed until 1 January while his subsequent journey was arranged. His identity card showed a picture taken in a department store, rather than the kind of escape photos supplied by American intelligence. This latter became so stereotyped that German interrogators could identify the unit of assignment by the necktie worn or the background used.

On 9 February, less than two months after bailing out of his stricken plane, Trost was en route across the Pyrenees on foot. This proved to be one of the most difficult ordeals he underwent. A large party set out after midnight and, with only an hour's rest, walked for twenty-two hours, spending the remainder of the next night in a cabin. The next day Trost began to suffer from the cold. His feet were wet and his socks and shoes froze to his feet. On the third day he walked with badly swollen feet, then stopped for two days. After that he had to be carried because of his frost-bitten feet. Once inside Spain, he spent a month in a hotel under a doctor's care, during which time a toe was amputated. Later the U.S. Military Attache took him to Madrid and he spent another six weeks in the British-American hospital. He eventually reached Gibraltar on 21 April and was back in London within three days.

Meanwhile, Lt. McKee, whose plane had received substantial damage, was finally forced to order his crew to bail out. He himself left the plane at 15,000 feet, landing in a plowed field near a small village.

McKee was greeted by fifteen French women. After they told him they had seen eight chutes out of his plane, he headed west, crossed a river by boat and continued walking. About dusk he came in sight of a bridge. Approaching it carefully, he saw it was guarded by Germans, so he turned ninety degrees and walked for a quarter of a mile. Pausing then, he turned and saw a German sentry taking a bead on him with a

rifle, but the shot never came and, when the enemy turned his back, McKee left the area in a hurry.

Coming to a river, he met a Frenchman fishing from the bank and conversed with him for fifteen minutes in sign language. The man gave McKee his overcoat, fishing rod and pail. Then the pair walked past a German sentry and on for two miles to a place where McKee was given food and clothing and allowed to sleep for four hours. His friends learned from Germans nearby that one of the crewmen from McKee's plane had died on the ground, one was missing and six had been captured.

Leaving this area late at night, McKee was taken across a river and then he walked west until after midnight when he found a haystack and slept until dawn. Continuing on his way, McKee frequently confirmed his route with French people he met, until he finally arrived at a fork in the road. At loss as to which way to go, he waited until an old man finally came along. McKee asked him for directions and the man stood looking at him for several minutes without responding. Finally in disgust, McKee said "You dumb old, son of a bitch!" The man began to laugh and then said in excellent English, "I didn't know until then that you were really an American."

Following his newfound friend, McKee was taken to the nearby home of a relative of the man and there he was visited by another English-speaking Frenchman. He waited six days until his travel was arranged. He was back in the United Kingdom on 26 January, something of a record for an evadee.

Both McKee and Nygaard were "sitting ducks" in the formation that day, flying as wingmen to Capt. John Howard, the last two planes in the stretched out formation. McKesson was in the third element on the wing of Capt. John L. Lambert.

Capt. Howard's plane did not escape the fury of the attack as 2nd Lt. Conrad J. Farr, bombardier, was hit by flak fragments and killed.

Twelve claims were registered for destroyed Luftwaffe planes for the mission, with another six probables. Those claiming attacking FW-190s were Sgts. Robert Guthrie and Mark B. Arrieta, flying with Lt. Otto Buddenbaum; Sgt. William R. Wilkinson, Jr., Sgt. Michael Roskovitch (two claims) and Lt. George Horner, with Lt. Pervis E. Youree; Sgt. Eulis E. Smith with Lt. Robert Seelos; Sgt. Andrew Bezak with Capt. Maurice Salada; Sgt. Chester Wendoloski with Capt. John L. Lambert; Sgt. Robert L. Stevenson and Lt. Gerald Rotter with Lt. Robert P. Riordan; Cpl. Leith C. Lemmerhirt with Capt. William Melton, and Lt. Robert Hermann with Capt. John L. Ryan.

Riordan brought a badly damaged aircraft home for the fourth mission in a row. All four officers were wounded by the Luftwaffe attacker which was downed by Bombardier Rotter. Luckily, all were

minor wounds, but the plane was a shambles. The left horizontal stabilizer was shattered, the number 3 engine out, the number 2 engine damaged, the hydraulic and oxygen systems inoperative, the nose shattered and the copilot's windshield gone.

After landing from a long and very rough day in the air, one pilot was described as "so drunk he couldn't hit the floor with his hat" and his ball turret gunner, a young man with a tough reputation, was "just sitting and staring into space." It was such situations that, during the nights that followed often brought on tears, violent outbreaks of emotion, sometimes uncontrollable muscular spasms. By some reckoning the actual duration of combat was rather brief, but it was the intensity of the action, the determination of the enemy, the losses of friends, and the inability of an individual to control the situation that brought men near to the breaking point — and sometimes beyond. Here it was the responsibility of the Group surgeon and the other doctors on the station to keep a close watch over the crew members. In critical cases they would remove men from flying status; at other times it was simply a matter of listening to them as they poured out their concerns for themselves or their crew mates.

Christmas came, the first one for the men at an overseas station, and the gift for all was a week's respite from facing the enemy at 20,000 feet or higher. The planes were not in the air for combat until 30 December when Lorient was again the target. Although Maj. J. W. Wilson got the planes into the air, one abort after another forced him to abandon the mission when fewer than nine planes remained as he was about to penetrate enemy territory.

Capt. John Brady was late on takeoff, waiting for a bombardier, and eventually joined the 305th Group in the murky English weather. After bombing, the formation headed west around the Brest peninsula. Making landfall against heavy northwesterly winds, the three-plane element in which Brady was flying was attacked by fighters, and the 306th plane was heavily damaged. Bailout actually came over the water, and 2nd Lt. Gardner M. Reynolds, bombardier, quickly spotted a lighthouse close by. He guided his chute in that direction, and landed in the water. Once he was rid of his shroud lines he found he could stand on the rocky bottom, and walked to the base of the tower. He got in out of the weather at the top of the tower, but soon was greeted by a French fishing boat, which included in its crew two Wehrmacht men. Others who are believed not to have survived the bailout into the icy water were 2nd Lt. Bernard T. Healey, 2nd Lt. Warren M. Lewis, Sgts. James L. Carberry, William L. Nisbett, Eugene H. Stein, Edward J. Sanski, John J. Vallorani and James P. Gaffney.

New Year's Eve was party time for the group, but combat was never far from anyone's mind, even though the men sought relief from the

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specter of death and their own inner turmoil by courting the young women of Bedford and the area, recounting a variety of London experiences, endearing themselves to many Englishmen and enraging others by their presence, their conduct and their money. One of the stories which came back from London with two resourceful airmen was their meeting with and attempt to bring a young woman up to their hotel room. They finally hit upon a means of taking her through the lobby undetected; she donned the uniform of one of the men while he waited shivering in an alley beneath their room's window. Quickly the window opened and the clothes were dropped over the sill — only to land on a ledge just out of reach! It took a lot of explaining to resolve the situation and not to bring another case of pneumonia back to the dispensary at Thurleigh.

3 Jan  
St. Nazaire, a target which brought catcalls and groans from the flyers of this era, as Berlin did in 1944, was back on the schedule for 3 January, the primary aiming point being the torpedo dump. Maj. William Lanford, 368th commander, was the leader on this ill-fated day as two planes were lost at the target and another failed to make it back to Thurleigh when the group came home five days later. Problems with planes and men figured prominently in mounting each operation, and on this mission the 306th found itself unable to put a navigator in each plane because there were not enough on the base in condition to fly.

The two inboard engines of Lt. James Ferguson's plane were shot out by flak over the target. The pilot headed his laboring plane north across Pt. Croisie and out to sea. Shortly after leaving the French coast the conditions worsened aboard Ferguson's ship and, when another engine quit, he reluctantly turned back towards France with fighters all over him. His thus became the first crew from the 368th Squadron to go down over enemy territory.

After heading back to the coast, Ferguson gave the bailout signal. Navigator Donald Greene and Bombardier Robert Levy were first out, leaving from the nose hatch and falling to their deaths in the surf below. Earl Kerbow and Rupert Arnold, both gunners, were killed, Kerbow by gunfire from the fighters and Arnold when his chute failed to open. Robert Kingen, ball turret, had no power in his turret and had to hand crank it to the vertical position where he could climb back into the waist of the ship. Radio Operator Richard Hackworth was waiting for him, handed him his parachute, and both went out safely. Also surviving as prisoners of war were Ferguson, Lt. John B. Elliott, copilot, and S/Sgt. James V. Loving and T/Sgt. Charles Edinger. Cirled by the Luftwaffe on their way down, Ferguson and Kingen chose the runway of a German fighter field for their landing spot, insuring early capture.

1st Lt. Charles W.B. Cranmer's plane was also attacked by enemy

fighters and on the second pass took a terrific pounding as 20 mm shells smashed into the craft. Other crew members were Lts. Albert Brunsting, John G. Reed, Paul E. Byer, and Sgts. Arizona Harris, Kermit J. Constantine, William Musick, Charles S. Wall, Robert L. Ransom and Edgar G. Whittaker.

Gunners in the other planes watched as Cranmer's ship continued to absorb punishment until it was finally forced down in the Channel. At interrogation that day, witnesses reported that as the plane settled into the waves the twin top turret guns of T/Sgt. Arizona T. Harris continued their firing until finally the water closed over the plane. There were no survivors from "Sons of Fury" this day, down 40 miles northwest of Brest.

Eventually the Distinguished Service Cross, the nation's second highest award for "extraordinary heroism" was awarded posthumously to Harris. The citation read in part: "While on a combat mission over enemy-occupied Continental Europe, the airplane in which he was serving as top-turret gunner was badly damaged by enemy anti-aircraft fire and forced out of formation. A large force of enemy planes then concentrated their attacks on this lone airplane, finally driving it to a crash landing in the sea. Throughout the descent, and as the airplane disappeared beneath the waves, Sergeant Harris was seen to be still firing his guns at the enemy airplanes. The dogged determination to fight against all odds and sheer bravery displayed by Sergeant Harris upon this occasion uphold the highest traditions of the Armed Forces . . ." Of the seven highest decorations awarded to members of the group throughout the war, this was the only posthumous award.

Even after Cranmer's plane went down, the group still faced a hard flight back to Thurleigh, one that took them five days, cost another crew and made a lasting mark on the career of Maj. Lanford, the 24-year-old leader of the group on this raid. The leading group, the 303rd, with Brig. Gen. Heywood Hansell flying his first mission since becoming commander of the First Wing, barely made it back to Molesworth in the gathering gloom of the British winter.

With two planes down, Maj. Lanford brought the battered formation back to the English coast and landed at St. Eval in Cornwall. Weather soon closed the field and forced the planes to remain there. Finally on 6 January, Maj. Lanford was told in the tower that by the time the group could reach Thurleigh the field would be cleared for landing.

The clouds opened over St. Eval and the 306th took to the air again, headed northeast for home. Lanford talked with the Thurleigh tower, found that conditions were not as predicted and took his formation back toward St. Eval. Upper air winds were high and the formation above the clouds unwittingly drifted southward across the English Channel and over the Channel Islands. Flak suddenly burst among the

ships. Lanford remembers breaking into the clear over water and witnessing a pass by several German fighters.

As the planes recovered at Land's End, Lt. Robert E. Brandon and his crew were missing. They had become lost and were found by a British Spitfire, who flew close formation with Brandon's plane and brought it in to the landing pattern at Land's End, only to have Brandon abort the landing, pull up and never was seen again. After extensive searches by RAF planes the crew was given up for lost and presumed dead. In addition to Brandon there were 1st Lt. Murrel C. Henry, copilot; 2nd Lt. James C. Murphy, bombardier; 1st Lt. Lemuel B. Smith, navigator; 2nd Lt. James O. Jones, Jr., a copilot flying as waist gunner; S/Sgt. Carlton F. Porter, engineer; S/Sgt. J.W. Elliott, radio; S/Sgt. Joseph S. Barnes, ball; S/Sgt. Jerrold M. Hopkins, waist; and S/Sgt. Earl K. Owen, tail. It was finally 8 January before the formation made its way back to Thurleigh, finding upon landing that the group had a new commanding officer, Col. Frank A. Armstrong, Jr.

On the morning of 4 January, General Ira Eaker gathered Col. Armstrong and Lt. Col. Bierne Lay for a trip to Thurleigh.

"Things are not going well up there," Eaker told the two men, "and I think we ought to take a look around."

Arriving at the main gate in Eaker's staff car, flying the red flag with two prominent white stars of a major general, they were indifferently waved through the gate by a sentry who failed to render proper military courtesy to the distinguished visitor. Eaker's car proceeded to group headquarters with the general seething over the affront at the gate. There he picked up Col. Overacker and toured base facilities and sites.

"As we visited hangars, shops and offices, I found similar attitudes as seen at the front gate," Eaker later recounted. "The men had a close attachment to their commander, and he to them. But there was a lack of military propriety and I could not help feel that this might be a part of the problem that was being revealed in combat." The 306th had lost nine planes on its last three missions.

When the visitors returned to group headquarters they entered Col. Overacker's office and, after the door was closed, Eaker said:

"Chip, you'd better get your things and go back with me."

He then turned to Col. Armstrong, who had been the original commander of the Eighth's first combat group, the 97th, and said: "Frank, you're in command. I'll send your clothes down."

Thus, the 306th witnessed its first change of command, an act that was to be repeated four more times during its combat history, but never under such circumstances as these.

A third trip to the engineering and locomotive works at Lille was scheduled for the group on 13 January, a day beset by bad weather and enemy opposition. About four kilometers north of Lille two 369th

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13 Jan cont

planes collided, killing nine of the airmen, with eleven surviving. Both planes landed at Marcq en Baroeul at Lille, and funeral services for those killed were held the next day at the cemetery at Wambrochies.

Capt. James A. Johnston was pilot of one plane and lost his life, as did Capt. Doyle Dugger, copilot; and S/Sgt. Charles R. Tipton. Surviving from this plane were 1st Lt. Frank J. Jacknik, navigator; 1st Lt. Sherrick B. Jones, bombardier; T/Sgt. Robert L. Stevenson; S/Sgt. Clyde M. Bennett; S/Sgt. John P. Morrison; Sgt. Fred J. Zdobyak and Sgt. Thomas McMahon.

KIA

1st Lt. Jack A. Spaulding was the other pilot, returning to flying after an illness. He was killed, as were 2nd Lt. Gordon R. Grant, bombardier; T/Sgt. Thomas H. Gilliland; T/Sgt. Leon Williams; S/Sgt. Dale A. Davis, and Sgt. Louis R. Morgan.

KIA

1st Lt. Russell G. Kahl, copilot for Spaulding, escaped from the wrecked aircraft in the air through a hole in fuselage next to his right hand seat. Others surviving out of this plane were 2nd Lt. Wallace B. Kirkpatrick, navigator; S/Sgt. Edward A. Nork, and Sgt. Earl Santos.

Johnston's plane was cut in two by the collision and men were trapped in the tumbling halves. Most of them finally either fell out or were able to claw their way into free air.

Jacknik was badly injured in the collision, bail out and landing. He was operated on in a German hospital at Lille and after eight weeks was still suffering from the severe internal injuries he had suffered. But he and others were removed from the hospital in March and sent off to prison camp for the duration of the war. During this march to prison the entire group was also subjected to an Allied air attack.

Gen. Eaker entered the picture again on 17 January when he summoned Maj. Lanford to his office at 8th AF headquarters.

"I haven't seen you since I pinned that medal on you," was the general's greeting to the young squadron commander. "You've been an outstanding commander in this theatre, but you made a mistake and you are going to pay for it." Col. Overacker had talked with Lanford earlier at headquarters, warning him that he was to be sacked and demoted one grade to captain.

"Chip tells me you want to go home," Eaker continued. "If you will stay in England, I assure you I'll give you your rank back and probably one more promotion."

Lanford did not waiver long in his decision. He had seen the heavy losses the group was taking and he felt that heavy bombardment would be in for rough sailing in the weeks ahead. There was also an inducement from home, the arrival of a new son since Lanford had left for combat. He also hoped he might find a more satisfying flying assignment than he now had.

Lanford later said that his sacking was based on three factors:

- 1) He took the group out of St. Eval without a clearance, which he did

not know was necessary.

2) A crew was lost.

3) The RAF raised hell because it lost two planes in the search for Brandon's aircraft.

"Without question, the third factor was the most important in forcing Eaker to take some definite action," says Lanford.

Lanford thus became the second of the original Squadron commanders to depart. He was replaced by Capt. Mack McKay, a flight leader in the 423rd Squadron.

On 19 January Col. Armstrong transferred Lt. Col. Delmar Wilson, deputy group commander, and brought in as operations officer Maj. Claude Putnam, at 28 one of the ablest pilots in the heavy bombardment business and also a veteran of the 97th group's early days in England.

The task of rebuilding the combat-decimated 306th was straightway undertaken by Armstrong. Within a few days he had begun to restore the fading morale. He also started preparations for an event which would forever tag the 306th with the proud slogan, "First Over Germany."

9 Oct 43

## Chapter 6

# GERMANY AND BEYOND

## January-March 1943

27 Jan 43  
Wilhelmshaven  
mission

The first American bombers over Germany were more of a morale booster for the young 8th AF than a deadly threat to the German war effort in progress below.

Col. Frank A. Armstrong, Jr., the new commander of the 306th, had earlier led the 97th Bomb Group on the first all-American bombing raid of the European war and, for reasons never fully explained, was picked by M/Gen. Ira Eaker to perform a similar act again.

Flying with Col. Armstrong as copilot was Maj. Claude Putnam, group operations officer, with Lt. Robert Salitnik, navigator, and Lt. Frank Yaussi, bombardier. Weather, which held fast over the primary target at Vegesack, forced the bombers to attack a partially obscured Wilhelmshaven instead.

Others in the lead ship were Sgt. J.E. Collette, engineer; T/Sgt. Robert A. Siavage, radio; S/Sgts. Charles D. Hill, Raymond H. Eriksen, and Donald Tunstall, and Sgt. Harvey J. Ross, Jr. gunners.

Six different types of German fighters were encountered over their homeland by the 306th, but the planes and crews returned with some damage and no losses. Another tough ordeal was awaiting them on the ground at Thurleigh where the returning heroes found almost as many reporters as there had been flyers on the raid.

A summary of the raid appears in a 1946 USAF publication:

"The uncertain weather prevailing that day over Northern Germany may well account for the fact that the mission met much less opposition than it had anticipated. Flak was encountered almost continuously over Germany and the Frisian Islands, and several of the bombers suffered slight damage; but at no time was it intense enough or accurate enough to have deterred the attacking force in any way. At Wilhelmshaven, especially, the flak defenses appear to have been thoroughly confused, their effort at a predicted barrage being what a British observer who flew in one of the B-17s called 'pathetic'. Considering the number of guns the enemy was known to have in the area, this showing came as a complete surprise to the American forces.

"The only losses that occurred during the day's mission resulted from enemy air action. Both the B-17s of the 1st Bombardment Wing and the B-24s of the 2nd Bombardment Wing stirred up a sizable force of enemy fighters, estimated in all at more than 100 aircraft. In the resulting combat the Liberators lost two of their number and the

Fortresses one. Yet even the German fighters proved less dangerous than had been feared, for they seemed much less experienced than those the bombers had encountered in France. Claims of the bomber crews against the fighters were assessed at 22 destroyed, 14 probably destroyed, and 13 damaged. All bomber claims made during the first half of 1943 must, however, be taken with a grain of salt. Despite a new and much improved method of establishing them, they were still affected by many confusing circumstances; and they continued to run high.

"It was, if not an especially well executed mission, a very interesting one. A relatively small force of heavy bombers, their crews no more experienced than necessary, had penetrated by daylight, and necessarily without benefit of escort, well into the enemy homeland and had, moreover, done so without prohibitive loss. Operations of this sort had generally been considered feasible only for a large force of highly trained units. But, as 8th AF commanders knew only too well, they might expect heavier and more efficient resistance in the future. And so it happened . . ."

The following morning General Hansell had his group commanders and First Wing staff together, and their comments were summarized in three areas:

"The Combat Wings on this mission did not keep close enough together to give shielding protection, one to the other. Fifty-four aircraft in a formation are not enough aircraft to be able to defend themselves. It is felt that most of our losses were the result of poor formation flying which resulted in aircraft becoming separated and an easy prey to fighters.

"Gunnery must be stressed . . . even when a formation brought all its guns to bear on some of the attackers during this mission the enemy continued to come in firing.

"Poor visibility at the target made the bombing very difficult . . . a target as small as this one should only be assigned when the weather is very clear and visibility is good."

As the session opened, Col. Armstrong commented that weather was bad at launch. Takeoff delays, however, were attributed to passengers arriving late and not properly equipped. This raid was most attractive to journalists. Andy Rooney of *Stars and Stripes*, for example, flew in the nose of Capt. William J. Casey's plane.

Many things that later became standard operating procedures were discussed in this First Wing meeting; use of radio as the IP and bomb run approached to keep all groups informed, use of the Very pistol for group identification on rendezvous, making a double drift before leaving England to determine ground speeds and to corroborate navigational data ("that evidently the 306th [commander] did not do yesterday, for his ground speed was way off"), additional gun installa-

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January-March 1943

tions to ward off nose attacks, the installation of cameras for record keeping and analysis, maintaining formation integrity on the route home rather than scattered planes leaving the formations to drop a few bombs, and placing gunnery officers on flying status.

While losing no planes, damage to five of the 306th aircraft was substantial enough to require several engine changes and much sheet metal work to cover flak holes.

By the end of January the 306th still led the 8th AF in tonnage of bombs dropped, but during the month its score against enemy aircraft dropped to just two "probables", a far cry from the victories recorded in November and December.

In the First Wing summary for the month there is a cryptic note: "With opening of air attacks on targets in Germany, the use of incendiary bombs will begin and this Wing is prepared to meet the demands for this type weapon."

The elation over finally taking bombs to Germany was intensified on the 29th as veterans welcomed back 1st Lt. John R. McKee, the 367th pilot shot down 20 December on the Romilly raid who had made it back to England in phenomenal time. "The sight of him has done this outfit more good than any amount of hearing about it and morale has taken a decided change for the better," wrote Surgeon-Diarist Shuller.

McKee reported that he learned in France that one of the bombs dropped on the Romilly raid hit a German mess hall and killed 200 of the enemy. This was one of the long-lived stories at Thurleigh, still being told with vigor a year and a half later.

Early February saw the group going to Germany again, and though they didn't bomb at Hamm, the intense cold brought about a dozen frost bite cases. The most exciting event of these days when missions were few because of inclement weather was the arrival of a photograph taken inside Stalag Luft 3 showing Lts. Al LaChasse, Julius Landrum, John Latchford, John Barnett, Ralph Gaston, Don Eldredge, Abe Burden and Peter Fryer. Again, spirits at Thurleigh were brightened by the knowledge that some of those comrades who had been shot down were alive and well, even though prisoners of war. That, coupled with a Wing "holiday" from combat flying, gave another boost to morale.

By mid-month it was back to the war, back again to St. Nazaire on the 16th, with bombardiers aiming for the southwestern corner of the sub-basin. Twenty ships took off of which two later aborted. The group joined the First Wing formation during a 360° turn at Selsey Bill and departed there at 20,000 feet at 1003 with Lt. Col. Claude Putnam leading.

Flak was very intense over the target, but lasted for only about five minutes. In spite of its short duration the 306th took a severe pounding. Immediately after bombs away the plane of 1st Lt. Joseph A.

16 Feb

Downing was heavily damaged by flak. His number 1 engine was hit first, then number 3. After the turn off the target and during the withdrawal enemy fighters began to concentrate their fire on Downing's crippled plane. Repeated hits from FW-190s finally knocked out a third engine, leaving Downing no alternative. He left the shelter of another Fortress which had tried to give him protective cover and put his ship into a dive from 10,000 to 4,000 feet where he found some desperately needed clouds in which to hide. Then he ordered his crew to bail out; he and his copilot, Lt. Howard W. Kelly were the last to leave the plane.

Downing wound up in prison camp along with Lt. Howard H. Pratt, navigator; Lt. George V. Bryan, bombardier; S/Sgt. Henry H. Jones, radio; S/Sgt. Royal A. Green, ball; S/Sgt. George W. Green, waist, and S/Sgt. Loras C. Elliott, tail. Only S/Sgt. Harvey J. Ross, Jr., a waist gunner, was killed.

Two evadees came from Downing's 367th crew: Lt. Kelly, and S/Sgt. Allen H. Robinson, engineer.

Robinson landed in a plowed field. Seeing a truck approaching along a lane, he made off in an opposite direction for several miles before getting rid of his flight gear. Later he stole clothes, acquired wooden shoes, and was on the loose for a week, living off the country, before seeking refuge in a small hotel. His feet had been so badly blistered by the wooden shoes that he could travel no further. After three days of rest he was interrogated by the Resistance and then the remainder of his exodus from France was arranged. Robinson became the last evadee of the four from this raid to get out, arriving in Spain 1 September and in England 21 September.

Kelly, a resourceful and persistent evadee, had the most bizarre experience. He hit the ground between Cohiniac and Quintin and headed west. After a mile or so of walking he met a man and two children. They said they were friends and would help him. While Kelly and the French family hid in a ditch and discussed the situation as best they could, other curious residents of the area found them and joined the group. After much debate, a boy took Kelly to a nearby castle where he met the Bourgmestre.

The civil leader told Kelly that because he had come in daylight and been seen that he would have to be turned over to the police. Under other conditions the man would have aided the pilot's evasion plans. But, he added, he would wait forty minutes before calling the police.

Kelly disappeared instantly, going back into the woods with the boy. He remained hidden there while his young friend scouted up trousers, a jacket, shirt, sweater and beret. A knapsack of food was also provided. Kelly exchanged his low cut officer's shoes for wooden shoes and attired more like a native, set out for St. Brieuc.

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(evadees from  
16 Feb)

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16 Feb

Passing near the St. Brieuç airfield, Kelly heard fighter planes and quickly decided that he would steal a plane and fly back to England. On more sober reflection, he gave up the idea and proceeded into St. Brieuç. He found wine and bread in a bistro, but while the people were friendly, none was in a position to help him. Kelly then walked into the countryside, easily found a hay stack and slept in it that night.

The next morning Kelly headed for St. Malo, seeking to get out of the immediate area where he had landed. Again he thought of stealing a plane. Upon reaching Yffiniac he went into a cafe, announced himself as an American and obtained food. Kelly had no trouble with his communications and found ready listeners at every turn. He left the cafe to go to a French home to negotiate the purchase of a bicycle, but while there was warned that the Germans were aware he was in the area. He had probably fallen prey to a Nazi sympathizer who had been identified in the cafe. Kelly left Yffiniac quickly.

Again on the road, he slept in barns and after a couple of days found an old pair of leather shoes which proved kinder to his feet than the unyielding wooden sabots.

On 20 February he walked onto a bridge guarded by Germans, but managed to bluff his way out. From there he began retracing his steps toward St. Brieuç with the nagging idea of resorting to FW-190 passage back to England. On 24 February he was back at the St. Brieuç airfield, waiting and watching while some friendly French were busy preparing a new identity card for him. The next morning, hidden by a heavy ground fog, Kelly sneaked onto the airfield, checked an empty hangar, then dodged two guards and entered a second hangar. For an hour he sat in the cockpit of an FW-190 and studied the instruments. He finally concluded that he would be caught before he could get the plane started, out of the hangar and into the air.

Leaving the airfield as stealthily as he entered it, his thoughts turned to Spain and he set his course to the south. In Rennes he found help and took a train to LeMans, planning to walk across the Line of Demarcation between German-occupied France and Vichy France.

In a small village he came upon more assistance and made his way about by identifying himself readily as an American, pointing out that his identity card was false. He got a serious lecture from the Underground on security and was escorted further south by train. From Toulouse he headed towards the mountains and, with guidance along the way, managed to walk alone across the Pyrenees, reaching safety 7 March.

Kelly spent six days in Sort, twelve days in Lerida, reached Gibraltar on 21 April and was back in England three days later.

Meanwhile, the enemy fighters which had appeared about ten minutes after bomb release subjected another individual aircraft to in-

tense fire. During the first attack, the pilot of this plane, 1st Lt. William H. Warner, 423rd, who was leading an element in another squadron, was mortally wounded by a bullet which hit him between the eyes. His plane was then blasted by six more FW-190s in a frontal attack. Lt. Robert E. Kylius, bombardier, and T/Sgt. Claiborne W. Wilson, engineer, had front row seats for this onslaught. Sgt. Wilson had to get out of his turret to help the copilot, Lt. Arnold Carlson, pull back Warner's body which was slumped forward jamming the controls.

As Carlson put the aircraft into a rapid descent, Wilson went through the bomb bay and into the radio compartment to alert the crew for bailout. He found T/Sgt. Eddie Espitallier seriously wounded in the left leg and hip by 20 mm cannon fire. Through the door at the back of the radio room, he saw Sgts. Robert D. Kisling, Colin Neely and William Williams, waist gunners and tail gunner, respectively, all dead from enemy fire. He helped Espitallier to the rear exit, snapped on the static line to open his parachute and pushed him out. The ball turret had been so badly damaged in the intense action that it could not be operated and Sgt. Walter C. Morgan went down with the plane.

Wilson bailed out of the rear door and landed near Floreval, did not come in contact with any natives for several days, until, cold and hungry, he approached a lone farmhouse and received food. At that time he was quickly turned over to the Underground. Kylius, in the cockpit with Carlson after Wilson went aft, finally told the copilot they had to bail out. The bombardier headed for the nose hatch and, from his crawling position, signalled Lt. Lewis H. Utley, navigator, who immediately left the ship. Kylius was the last one out of the plane as it descended below 2000 feet, and he hit the ground just after his chute opened. Utley was captured and became a prisoner. Carlson never left the plane and was killed when it crashed.

Kylius prepared to evade upon landing and managed to stay well concealed as he moved through the country. By sundown he was in the village of Malestroit. There a 15-year-old boy approached him and when Kylius signalled he was hungry, the boy took him home and fed him bread and cheese. This French family sent for a man who spoke English. Kylius later was taken to the interpreter's home and from there was placed in the hands of the Underground.

Espitallier, making plans for evasion while still in his parachute, landed in an orchard inside a small village. Of course he attracted a crowd. He gave his watch and escape kit to two men, and asked the crowd to leave him. Badly crippled and perhaps in shock from his extensive wounds, Espitallier hobbled across a street to a small house, entered and lay down on a couch. Unable to go further, he was soon captured and spent six weeks in a German hospital before being sent to Stalag Luft 7-B.

16 Feb  
17 Feb  
21 Feb

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During the running fighter attack, the enemy lost two fighters to the marksmen of the 306th. S/Sgt. Ray J. Smith, waist gunner for Capt. Robert W. Smith, nailed an FW-190 at 3 o'clock level. At 150 yards the Luftwaffe fighter turned into a dive engulfed in flames. Lt. Charles F. Jones, Lt. Edward Hennessy's navigator, got a confirmed FW-190, hitting it first at 200 yards. The plane went into a flaming dive at 100 yards and then blew up. Lt. William Colantoni, Hennessy's bombardier, earned two probables, with both planes in flames when they disappeared into the clouds.

Major events were taking place back at Thurleigh, as on 17 February Col. Frank A. Armstrong, Jr., received the silver stars of a brigadier general, relinquishing command of the 306th Bomb Group to Lt. Col. Claude Putnam. Maj. J.W. Wilson left his commander's desk at the 423rd Squadron to become group executive officer and Capt. John L. Lambert moved from the 367th Squadron to command the 423rd. Henry W. Terry, Jr., commander of the 369th, was promoted to major.

A few days later Maj. Douglas Coleman, the ground executive officer, was promoted to lieutenant colonel. Recognition in the form of captain's bars also came to Lts. Robert Salitrnik, group navigator, and Frank Yaussi, group bombardier.

Sunday, 21 February, dawned cool and foggy with the planes grounded for the day. The chapel was almost full for the Protestant worship service led by Capt. Roy M. MacLeod, a Presbyterian. Capt. Adrian Poletti, group Roman Catholic chaplain, was also getting a good response from the men under his care.

Maj. Thurman Shuller observed in his diary on this date: "I think some of these fellows who meet death so often do a lot more thinking than they once did. The Catholics have just completed a 'mission' and they had excellent attendance every night. Even \_\_\_\_\_ says he catches himself praying when he gets in a tight spot, though I don't suppose he does much praying any other time.

"In the nearly six months we have been over here it is very striking that some of the young officers have aged ten years or so. When they first came they stayed out as late as possible as often as possible, but earlier in the week I went to a movie in Bedford and to my amazement about eight of the most notorious playboys caught the 10:15 bus back to the field."

Weather finally broke and missions were flown on 26 and 27 February to Bremen and Brest, respectively. The traumatic event late in the month, however, had nothing to do with flying but was the receipt of an order from 8th BC that reveille was to be sounded every morning at 6:15 and that each squadron was to have an officer of the day. It was getting too much like the Army for some!

March roared in like a lion with a mid-air collision during local

4 March '43

6 March

flying. Lt. Ralph W. Jones' plane slammed down on top of Capt. John M. Regan's ship. The force of the impact sheared off Regan's top turret, knocked off his number 1 propellor and bent his number 2 propellor into the shape of a corkscrew. The ball turret of Jones' airplane became imbedded in the left wing of Regan's ship. Both pilots managed to land at emergency airfields where their planes were written off as total losses. In some miraculous way, injuries consisted only of minor cuts for several crew members.

The early days of the month were costly for the 306th. In addition to the two ships mentioned above, it lost four planes and crews in combat. Fortunately, replacement aircraft were beginning to arrive in somewhat larger numbers, but it was the loss of experienced pilots and their crews which hurt most seriously.

On 4 March the 306th sent twenty-one planes off to Hamm to bomb the marshalling yards. After "one of the smoothest group takeoffs yet witnessed", the mission got as far as Texel Island where two fighters went roaring through the formation, damaging Capt. William Friend's plane and forcing it out of formation. Eventually flames were seen enveloping the entire aircraft. Seven chutes were counted yet no survivors were ever reported. Besides Friend, others on the crew were Lts. Aaron Cuddeback, George W. Frederick and George W. Owens, and Sgts. Mahlon Snover, William Cherry, Gilbert Shoemaker, Stanley Guiou and Ernest Garland. Weather forced the remaining planes to return to base early.

Two days later the group lost its only squadron commander to enemy action during the entire war, Capt. John L. Ryan, who had been ordered to head the 367th only the day before, after Maj. Harry J. Holt, the last of the original squadron commanders, had been relieved. In fact, orders had not yet been cut on the assignment and, when Ryan failed to return, the orders were never issued. A popular figure, it was felt on the base that to have then published orders on Ryan's appointment would have unduly upset the men of the 367th. In his place, Capt. William S. Raper was transferred from the 368th to be the new squadron commander.

The target for 6 March was the power station at the submarine pens at Lorient. The mission was flown at low altitude for much of the route out, crossing the Scilly Islands at 1,000 feet. The climb to bombing altitude of 23,000 feet was not begun until late in the mission.

Leading the First Wing was Maj. J.W. Wilson, group air executive, while Ryan was leading the low squadron. Upwind bombing kept the planes in the target area for an inordinately long time. According to the Wing leader and Lt. Col. Claude Putnam in his command report, the low ground speed in the flak area caused the group's two losses for the mission.

Coming into Lorient the leading 306th "was subjected to fairly intense and most accurate fire . . . with the result that two aircraft in the low squadron are believed to have been shot down." Those surviving from these two missing aircraft will especially appreciate the continuation of the day's official report by the 8th AF flak officer: "It appears to me to be merely circumstantial that the low squadron should have lost two aircraft to flak and had another that was severely damaged."

Lt. Earl Tunnell's plane was the first to go down, immediately after clearing the target area and was soon followed by Capt. Ryan's "Sweet Pea."

Tunnell's plane had developed an oil leak in the number 3 engine over the Channel, but the pilot did not turn back, observing that the oil pressure on the engine was holding steady. Soon after rounding the Brest Peninsula, fighters came in and later, when Tunnell's plane began to drop back in the climb to bombing altitude, it became easy prey for the Luftwaffe. When the number 4 engine quit, Tunnell ordered his men to bail out; they were led by 1st Lt. Robert E. Biggs, the copilot, with 1st Lt. Andrew J. Friedrich, bombardier, right behind him.

Biggs delayed opening his chute from 22,000 to 10,000 feet and was passed on the way down by Friedrich, who pulled his ripcord at about 7,000 feet. Biggs saw five other parachutes in the air and watched Friedrich land in a village about a mile from his own landing spot.

Biggs lost his shoes in the jump, and landed in his stocking feet. Straightaway he met two Frenchmen, but after an abortive attempt to understand each other, they all gave up and parted. After hiding until sundown, Biggs began walking in earnest, often encountering German soldiers. At one point he found a group of seemingly abandoned buildings, entered one and struck a match. The place was full of beds and he had the distinct impression that some of them were occupied. He immediately blew out the match and beat a hasty retreat.

Before the night was out he had walked into Lorient and there he wandered into a street full of bombed out buildings. In one of the buildings he located a bed and a few blankets, and slept all night. In the morning he found some raw potatoes and onions, which he ate and, more importantly, came across a pair of felt shoes. At dark he began to walk again, but soon gave up and returned to the same house and spent another night there. On a second exploration of the premises he found a cap and suit of clothes. The coat was good, but the pants were very ragged; they too became a part of his developing disguise.

He was awakened in the morning by a noise and looked up to see a man in the doorway. The intruder was evidently scared by what he saw and left quickly, soon followed by Biggs, who in his "new" clothes now

walked in broad daylight without attracting any attention.

Once out of Lorient, he found an isolated house and approached a man in the yard, speaking to him and identifying himself. The man looked him over carefully, then took him in and fed him. Later Biggs was escorted to a bridge where he began the long journey south toward Spain.

Some distance on he came across another house; he was admitted by the frightened owner, fed, given cigarettes and allowed to sleep there that night. His host put him on his way the next morning, directing him towards Languidic and telling him to buy a rail ticket to Nantes. The night of 8 March, he slept in a hayloft and was given wooden shoes to replace his now badly worn felt shoes. Somehow he missed Languidic, but kept on walking and, on approaching another man, was taken to his home and fed. He soon came under the watchful eye of the Underground. Biggs arrived in Spain 6 June, three months after being shot down, and was back in England on 28 June.

Tunnell's plane had taken a severe pounding from the German fighters, with three of the crew killed in the plane: Lt. Meyer Etkin, navigator; T/Sgt. George A. Tracy, ball, and S/Sgt. Ernest C. Maynard, waist.

During bailout Lt. Friedrich, the bombardier, had been on one side of the front escape hatch and Biggs at the other. The hatch was stuck, but Friedrich finally punched it loose with his fist. Biggs jumped first followed by Friedrich who landed in the middle of a squad of German soldiers and was an instant prisoner of war. By the time he arrived at a depot with his captors, the remainder of the crew had been assembled there, including Lt. Tunnell; T/Sgt. Charles K. Kirby, Jr., engineer; T/Sgt. Robert A. Siavage, radio, and S/Sgt. Donald Tunstall, tail. S/Sgt. Charles D. Hill, Jr., suffered a broken leg on landing and was hospitalized.

"We received an almost direct burst of flak between the number 3 engine and the fuselage," says Capt. Ryan. "The turbine was blown off completely and the engine caught fire . . . After a few minutes the engine seized and the propellor flew off, cutting a swath through the fuselage about a foot and a half in front of the copilot's windshield. The force of the impact shattered the windshield and the broken glass flew back into Lt. Gerald L. Simmons' face, cutting him in many places. His face became covered with blood and he seemed in some pain."

Ryan had signalled for the bailout before the propellor came off. Lt. Robert Hermann and Lt. James A. Laine went out of the nose. The enlisted crew, all of whom landed safely, included T/Sgt. Charles E. Perry, and S/Sgts. Glenn A. Blakemore, William Forrester, James C. Green, John R. Chapman and Robert G. Mumaw.

The pilot then motioned the wounded copilot out of his seat and Simmons shook Ryan's hand, telling the pilot he would meet him in

London. But fate stepped in and in retrospect it appears that Simmons' head wounds may have been more serious than suspected at the time. Once on the ground he ran and, when told to halt by a German sergeant, did not do so; he was shot and killed.

Lt. Hermann and others were shot at from the ground as they descended but Capt. Ryan, as the last man out of the plane and at some distance from the others, landed unobserved.

Bailing out at 1,200 feet or less, Ryan had no time to delay pulling his rip cord and suffered a broken shoulder and broken ribs when his chute opened. As he lay unconscious on the ground a group of French people gathered around him, and Ryan slowly became aware of them. Already fluent in French, Ryan heard one old woman say, "Oh, the poor boy! Is he dead?" and another, "What will we do with him?"

Finally one woman stepped forward to the now conscious pilot, helped him remove his parachute, and indicated the direction to go to avoid German patrols. From about 2:30 until dark Ryan wandered about, trying to avoid people, and when darkness came he lay down in a cornfield to rest. He got little assistance from anyone during a hectic four days that followed. The French, being unsure of his identity, tried to decide what to do with him. Ryan found some food, but badly needed medical attention for the broken bones and the high fever which had developed.

After five days the Underground became satisfied about his identity and then took him under its wing. For two weeks he was hidden in a seaside hotel at Loctudy and nursed back to some semblance of health. His new identity card as "Jean Louis Stefan," fisherman of Bretagne, was prepared. He was forced to flee the hotel when a contingent of German soldiers was suddenly billeted there. Taken to a house in Pont-Aven he was one day attracted to a window by a commotion outside and from his hidden vantage point saw a large German flatbed truck pass by carrying the fuselage of "Sweet Pea." "That was certainly a strange and disheartening experience," says Ryan. He stayed at Pont-Aven for ten days and then went on to Paris by train.

Ryan spent another 10 days in Paris, housed just off the Champs Elysees. During this period he met an RAF officer who was organizing French resisters, and also Col. Charles Passy, G-2 for Gen. Charles DeGaulle. When a coded signal came on the BBC, "Emile sends his love to his aged mother," Col. Passy, the RAF officer and an excited Ryan were off by train to Fleury-sur-Seine, near Rouen. One night later they waited alongside a small wheat field until two "really beat up looking Lysanders" came in. One was quickly loaded with mail, Ryan and the RAF chap, and the other took Passy, in an operation that saw the planes on the ground for not more than three minutes. Thus, Ryan arrived back in England 17 April, only 42 days after being shot down. He waited in London until Capt. William S. Raper, his successor as 367th

inc Cont'd 6 Mar 43

8 Mar 43

commander, came to identify him. Unfortunately, the remainder of the crew spent the war in prison camps. Lt. Hermann was frequently interrogated about the missing officer from his ship. The Germans, "knowing" that it was a high ranking officer, evidently suspected far more than a newly-appointed squadron commander who had not yet had time to be promoted from captain to major.

Back to -  
6 Mar -

Ryan's crew had acquitted itself well in its dying moments in the air, during which Lt. Laine accounted for a German FW-190 as it made a head-on pass. A dozen or so pastel colored FW-190s hit the 306th over the target, along with some black ME-109s, with most of the attacks coming from 12 to 3 o'clock. A lone silver FW-190 made two passes at Lt. Otto Buddenbaum's plane in the lead squadron.

Credit for downing five Luftwaffe attackers went to Lt. Joseph C. Wilkins, bombardier for Buddenbaum; T/Sgt. Harvey L. Cox, tail gunner, for Capt. John Howard; S/Sgt. Lee Sanders, ball turret for Capt. Raper; T/Sgt. William S. Buchanan, tail gunner for Lt. Craig Harwood, and S/Sgt. Joseph E. Collette, engineer for Harwood.

Maintaining formation, the group proceeded north to England. Its main concern then was for Lt. Carroll Briscoe, who was nursing a very sick "Sis" across the Channel. Briscoe landed at Exeter at 1726 along with nine other planes from the group. Another eight went into Chivenor and Lt. Richard O'Hara put his "Piccadilly Commando" in at Davidstowe because of fuel. Three planes were forced to remain at Exeter because of damage, but all the other crews returned to Thurleigh the next day.

Col. Putnam in his operations report deplored the upwind bombing and also was critical of the flying of some groups. The tactic on this mission had been to maintain a low altitude on the way out over the water, climbing late in the mission to 23,000 feet for bombing. The 306th leader stayed at 500 feet around the Brest Peninsula, but at least two other groups were substantially higher, making tracking easy for continental radar stations.

Two days later the target was the marshalling yard at Rennes and losses continued to harass the 306th. Just after the Spitfire escort left, FW-190s attacked the formation, knocking down Lt. Otto Buddenbaum's tail-end plane in the low squadron.

Flames enveloped the entire ship, but nine of the crew were able to escape and only Buddenbaum was lost. Navigator Wilton Biggs broke his ankle in landing and was immediately captured. Lt. Warren Edris, copilot, evaded capture for two months before the Gestapo apprehended him in Paris. Others on the crew who became POWs were Lt. Joseph C. Wilkins and Sgts. Robert Guthrie, Sylvester Horstmann, Robert S. Liscavage, Donald R. Huddle and Eulis E. Smith.

8 Mar

Sgt. Ernest T. Moriarty, a waist gunner, was one of the last men out of the ship, getting in a last burst at an attacking fighter as other crewmen were rushing past him to the rear escape hatch. Liscavage had been wounded in the first attack in his tail gun position and had to be pulled from there by Horstmann and Huddle. As they pushed him out the door, Moriarty grabbed the D ring on Liscavage's chute, so it would be sure to open. Smith had jumped first and, after the wounded man, Horstmann, Moriarty and Huddle went out in that order.

"The last I saw of the plane was a trail of smoke in a sharp downward curve," said Moriarty. The waist gunner landed in a field and was immediately surrounded by French people working there. All were eager to help; they pulled his chute out of a tree and hid it along with his flying clothing. He was bleeding from a bullet that had grazed him beneath his chin.

Soon some other Frenchmen showed up and reported that two of the crewmates were about three miles away. Moriarty picked up his escape kit and started off, walking in his stocking feet; his English boots had come off when his chute had opened. While crossing a plowed field two more Frenchmen greeted him and asked him to come to their house. They gave him food and wine and as Germans were reported searching in the area, advised him to walk further.

Moriarty crossed several fields and then lay down in some tall ferns to rest. After an hour he was up and walking again. He then followed a hay wagon, thinking it might take him to sanctuary. Two Frenchmen passed him on bicycles, stopped a bit down the road to talk and then let him know they were friendly. They took him to a nearby farmhouse where a farmer and his wife hid the flyer in their woods. After dark they retrieved him, fed him and then put him in their barn for the night.

Before dawn Moriarty was awakened, fed and put back in the woods for the day. Later in the morning two French gendarmes found Moriarty and informed him that they knew the whereabouts of three of his crew mates; they said that they would bring them there that night. During the rainy afternoon, he was brought into the house again to eat and then went to the barn to await his buddies. The gendarmes returned to tell him that the three had been captured. They identified only Wilkins by name. Moriarty deduced that another was Liscavage.

Two days later, after having been moved again, Moriarty was put in the hands of the Underground and was back in London in one of the quickest returns recorded.

Out of the front of the plane, copilot Edris landed in the back yard of a small farm, with his parachute draped over a tree. He was so near Lamballe that the Germans were quickly out looking for him.

"Allemands, allemands, vite, vite!" shouted one of the Frenchmen

8 Mar

nearby. Edris was quickly shoved into a pig sty where he remained hidden while a truckload of German soldiers looked the place over. After they left he was put in a chicken coop.

Edris was not in the best of shape for an evasion attempt. He had been on the raid at Lorient two days earlier, had not had any sleep on the overnight stop at Exeter, and had been routed out of bed at 0300 on the eighth to fly his "last" mission. That evening after Edris had been fed, Maurice de Frete, a businessman, appeared and he and Edris walked all of that night to get to St. Brieuc. There he finally was given a real bed in a French home and slept all day.

When evening came he was escorted on foot through St. Brieuc and on to another town where he stayed three days with a French woman and her daughter. There his Air Force ring was buried so that it would not give him away. (The ring was returned to him after the war.) Hearing that the Germans were closing in, Edris left by the back door of the house with a former French pilot as his guide. They rode on bicycles thirty miles into the country where he was put in the care of a priest. He remained there for two weeks, then another priest took him to catch a train to Paris.

Jacques, a Haitian married to a French woman, was his escort on the ten-hour train ride to Paris where he spent the next six weeks in the couple's apartment. While there Edris was visited by a very pregnant American. Edris thinks this woman "fingered" him to the Gestapo for he was arrested shortly afterwards when the apartment was raided. The next seventy-seven days he spent in solitary confinement in La Fresnes prison, undergoing endless interrogations by Gestapo agents. He was finally put on a bus with a number of newly-captured Americans, still in uniform, who viewed him skeptically because of his civilian attire. He finally convinced them of his identity during a long train ride to Oberursel, and then to Stalag Luft 3.

In the area of Rennes, three of the Luftwaffe attackers went down before the guns of the 306th: S/Sgt. Robert G. Adams and Sgts. Warren McGregor and Roy H. Gibson earning the extra clusters on their Air Medals.

Four crews were lost on the first four raids of March, but the situation soon improved dramatically. The 306th flew about 20 planes each on missions to Rouen on the 12th; Amiens, the 13th; Vegesack, the 18th; Wilhelmshaven, the 22nd; Rouen, the 28th, and Rotterdam, the 31st. There were no losses.

Gen. Ira Eaker called the raid to Vegesack "the end of the experiment" in high altitude precision bombing; expressions of satisfaction about the performance of 8th AF bombers that day came from all quarters. While not losing a plane, credit for downing four of the enemy went to Lt. Harold W. Whiteman, Sgt. Lee Sanders, T/Sgt. Thurman H. Ray and Sgt. Raleigh W. Holloway.

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At Wilhelmshaven, the group lost S/Sgt. Raymond J. Henn, killed by a 20 mm cannon shell after downing an enemy plane. His waist partner, Kenneth F. Powell, was wounded in the same attack. Both were flying with Lt. L.P. Johnson.

Over Rouen T/Sgt. George Klucick got credit for one German fighter downed. Lt. Otis B. Tillery, navigator for Lt. Richard O'Hara, was seriously wounded by shell fragments hitting him in the chest.

Late in the month Lt. John E. Bennett was appointed group bomb and gunnery safety officer; a wrestling tournament was being held; and Thurleigh began to organize its first baseball team.

## Chapter 7

# LOSSES MOUNT RAPIDLY

## April 1943

For those who thought March had been rough, April held many unpleasant surprises: it became the costliest month of the war thus far for the 306th in spite of only four missions being flown out of Thurleigh. Since October of 1942 the 306th had lost twenty-one planes in battle; April would add fourteen more to this dismal list. Additionally another airman would be killed in action and most regretably 1st Lt. Robert Salitnik, group navigator, would later die in the hospital of wounds sustained.

4 April  
On 4 April the group was airborne for a five-hour trip to Paris to bomb the Renault works at Billancourt. The mission was scored as a success, marked by the greatest number of planes yet to be put into the air by the group. Thirty took off, three aborted and twenty-seven crossed the target; both takeoffs and completed missions represented new highs, totals not to be achieved again for some months. The British press reported that this trip by the 8th AF was more successful than a celebrated RAF raid to the same Renault works fourteen months earlier.

Flak was moderate, damage to aircraft was slight and only on the return in the vicinity of Rouen did activity intensify when seventy-five German fighter planes attacked. S/Sgt. Norris R. Phifer, 367th, took credit for two downed planes from his tail gunner's spot in Lt. Kelly Ross' plane. Other 306th gunners scoring single knockdowns were S/Sgt. J.E. Collette and S/Sgt. Leonard H. O'Brien, 367th; S/Sgt. Leith C. Lemmerhirt, 368th; and T/Sgt. Leon L. Bamforth, S/Sgt. Billy J. Lamb and S/Sgt. George J. McClennan, 423rd.

5 April  
mission to  
Erla Works  
at Antwerp,  
Belgium  
The flyers were back to the war again on the 5th with Lt. Col. J.W. Wilson, newly-promoted as of 2 April, as the group leader for the day. The 306th led the 8th AF on its second successive day of attacks devoted to automotive production with the Erla Works at Antwerp, Belgium, as the primary target. A short haul of only four and one-half hours from takeoff to landing, the mission quickly became anything but the milk run that had been expected.

Flying with Col. Wilson was Capt. John M. Regan as copilot and with Salitnik and Lt. Frank Yaussi in the nose. As an observer on this mission the lead plane carried Brig. Gen. Frank A. Armstrong, Jr., former 306th commander and now deputy commander of the First Wing. Of the twenty planes which left Thurleigh, two aborted at the

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English coast with engine failures. Seventeen actually dropped their bombs and fourteen made it back to the base. For the leader, takeoff was at 1245, bombing at 1531 and touchdown at 1655.

The 306th was intercepted by enemy fighters just after crossing the Belgian coast and the attacks continued across the target and until the fourteen surviving planes of the group were picked up by RAF Spitfires at the coast coming out. Four aircraft went down over Antwerp and environs, those of Lt. Robert J. Seelos, Lt. Kelly Ross, Lt. Clarence Fischer and Lt. William H. Parker.

Lt. Fischer's 367th plane, "L'il Abner", was hit over Ghent on the way in, falling out of formation where it became easy prey to fighters. The Luftwaffe finished it off in three or four quick passes. After bailing out, the crew saw their plane explode before it hit the ground.

Landing in and around a factory, members of the crew were quickly gathered up by the Germans, although Fischer had had sufficient time to acquire and put on civilian clothing. Others on his crew that day were Lt. James Crouch, copilot; Lt. Joseph Consolmagno, navigator; Lt. William A. Moses, bombardier; T/Sgt. Francis L. Eastham; S/Sgts. Henry B. Compton, Walter R. Kuczynski, Norris R. Phifer and Lee Sanders; and Sgt. William C. Rhodes.

Lt. Seelos says the group was flying an experimental, staggered up formation that day and that his plane became a sitting duck when it lost an outboard engine when flak ripped through a propellor blade. Unable to feather the engine, he was forced to drop out of formation and then lost the other outboard.

Fighters finished off the plane and the crew went out. Sgt. Roland Magee was hit in the eye by flak. Lt. James E. Murray, T/Sgt. Stanley Stemkoski and T/Sgt. Fred R. Hampton were killed in the plane. Captured quickly and imprisoned were Seelos, Magee, Lt. William W. Saunders, T/Sgt. William H. Kesky and S/Sgt. Raymond Walls.

To Lt. Murray went the dubious distinction of having had the shortest combat career of anyone assigned to the 306th Group. Capt. Regan remembers meeting Murray in the middle of the night, as ten crews arrived during the late hours as replacements at Thurleigh. For the next morning's mission to Antwerp the 368th was short a bombardier and Murray was assigned to fly. Later that day six of the ten new crews, including Murray's, were transferred to other groups.

After bailing out, Seelos landed in a street in Wuestwezel, met a pretty blond and, as he was quickly being marched away by German soldiers, managed to slip his escape kit to the girl.

Landing in the next street was Lt. Alexander Kramarinko, the copilot. He soon located S/Sgt. William E. Baker and with quick civilian assistance the two were on the high road to Paris.

"The British had told us," relates Kramarinko, "that the best way to get into the right hands in Paris was to locate a prostitute. We tried it,

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but when the girls found we were Americans they left in a hurry and we were no closer to the Resistance than before." Luck was with Kramarinko and Baker and they were soon on a Paris-Bordeaux express, arriving at that southwestern harbor after eleven hours. Then the pair headed for the Pyrenees and, in less than ten days after being shot down, were well on their way to freedom.

Tackling the Pyrenees at any season was a job for a seasoned hiker; and the American airmen found the struggle through the ascending hills and valleys into snow and cold forbidding and almost impossible. Struggling on, the pair finally crossed the Spanish border. Soon they found a hut and collapsed inside out of the biting winds, only to be awakened shortly by German soldiers. It developed that the two had gone six kilometers over the border before stopping, not knowing that a German-Spanish treaty permitted the Germans to seek and arrest errant airmen ten kilometers into Spain. Thus, the successful escape and evasion saga came to a quick and sorry end; the two men were in German prison camps for the remainder of the war.

Shot down over the Erla Works was Lt. Kelly Ross' 367th plane. Becoming prisoners with Ross were Lts. George Lewis and Sidney Miller, and Sgts. Earl Benson, William Hovekamp, Clyde Smith and Douglas Bowles. T/Sgt. Arnold E. Hyman and S/Sgt. Arthur Byrd, tail gunner and waist gunner, did not survive. Hyman was first out of the plane. Bowles, from the radio room, had helped him fasten the chest strap over his heavy leather flying suit. It is suspected that Hyman may have forgotten to fasten the leg straps of his parachute.

Ross was wounded on the right side of his head and shoulder and the fragments later removed proved to be from .50 caliber ammunition. Bowles suffered a wound at the base of the spine, from either flak or gunfire, and was hospitalized in Antwerp for two weeks before being moved on to prison camp. The pilot had ordered the bailout after the number 2 engine was shot out, the left wing badly damaged and most of the flight controls rendered inoperative.

The fourth 367th plane down on this mission was that of 1st Lt. William H. Parker, with only three survivors out of the crew: Lt. Charles Thelen, copilot; Lt. Arthur Milbourn, navigator; and T/Sgt. Leonard O'Brien, tail gunner. Flying as a squadron lead, Parker's plane was hit hard by fighters and, although under control, began to drift away from the formation. Then Parker, Thelen and Milbourn bailed out.

Tail gunner Leonard O'Brien relates that when he heard the bailout signal he was busy shooting down an attacking aircraft; and with that accomplished he headed forward to see what was going on. He passed the two waist gunners, both dead, and the radio operator who was standing in the middle of the radio room. When O'Brien got through the bomb bay and top turret to the flight deck he found Engineer John

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Creatore in the pilot's seat and Navigator Paul Spaduzzi in the copilot's position.

O'Brien asked what they were doing and they told him they were going to fly the plane into France and crash land it. O'Brien suggested that they head for the Channel and try to ditch the plane there. Spaduzzi called for a 270° heading and, as Creatore started to turn the plane, it did a full roll and went into a spin.

The nose had been heavily damaged earlier and Spaduzzi's parachute had been popped by the force of the explosion. O'Brien forced his way out of the nose hatch and pulled his rip cord; he landed about seventy-five yards away from the spot where the plane crashed and burned.

After nearly drowning in a canal, O'Brien was first rescued by Belgian farmers and then taken captive by German soldiers. Before being imprisoned his truck stopped to pick up the body of the pilot, Parker. Other crew members who died were waist gunners Richard E. Haeft and Sidney E. Davis, radio operator James E. Gross and ball turret gunner James S. Clark.

Action in the lead ship was frantic as the German fighters pressed their head-on attacks. A 20 mm. cannon shell exploded in the nose against a can of .50 caliber ammunition. It was these smaller cartridges that tore into the leg of Lt. Salitnik. Although critically wounded, the group navigator gave Col. Wilson a heading off the target for home before lapsing into unconsciousness.

Regan also was wounded, but he and Engineer John Crowther were able to extinguish a hydraulic fluid fire in the cockpit. The lead ship's oxygen system and radios were shot away. In addition, the flight controls had been damaged by the fierce attacks.

Upon landing at Thurleigh Salitnik received four pints of plasma in the plane, administered by 1st Lt. Samuel D. Simpson, 423rd Squadron surgeon. The critically wounded man was further treated at the dispensary on the base and then taken to the hospital at Diddington. He responded well, was out of shock the following day, but developed gas gangrene on 15 April and died the next day.

Of that mission Col. Putnam said that the death of Salitnik was "the greatest loss to the fighting power of the group" that they could have had.

Gen. Armstrong was later to receive the Distinguished Service Cross for his part. Although the citation states that Armstrong was flying the plane, he never touched the controls. But after Salitnik was wounded Armstrong did administer first aid to him as he shared a walk-around oxygen bottle with Capt. Regan.

The scoring on this mission seemed a bit lopsided in favor of the Luftwaffe, but the 306th gunners still got in a few good licks of their own. Confirmed kills went to T/Sgt. Louis J. Enloe and S/Sgt. William G. Hicks of the 367th, T/Sgt. Edward H. Small of the 368th, and S/Sgts. George J. McClennan and James J. Garris of the 423rd.

The raid on the Erla Works was a disaster! The fighters not only downed four 306th planes, but they also diverted the attack so that most of the 8th AF bombs fell on the tiny Belgian town of Mortsel where 943 people were killed and 1300 injured. Only five bombs hit the Erla Works; they did, nevertheless, cause extensive damage.

Other events were moving along in England. It was at about this time that Maj. Gen. Ira Eaker, commanding general of the 8th AF, made one of his more popular announcements — that a “tour” of combat would consist of 25 missions, after which crew members would be sent back to the United States.

Much of the impetus for this definitive action may have come from the pen of Maj. Thurman Shuller, 306th Group Surgeon. Becoming increasingly alarmed at the deteriorating mental condition of the flyers in his charge, Shuller in March wrote a lengthy letter to Col. Putnam, who in turn endorsed it to higher headquarters. Shuller wrote passionately of the declining morale and stated that no crew member felt he could possibly survive the combat ordeal. By mid-March, 20 of the original 35 crews were gone from the 306th, along with several replacement crews.

There was also a happy side to the mission on 5 April to Antwerp, for this marked the completion of a 25-mission tour of combat for T/Sgt. Michael Roskovitch, known to one and all as “The Mad Russian.” His antics on the base and in the air were something to behold; officers held no special place in Rosky’s heart and, to anyone daring to venture into “his” plane wearing a necktie, the Russian quickly brandished a pair of scissors and cut off the offending piece of clothing.

Roskovitch was the very first flyer in the 8th AF to make the 25-mission mark, but it was not the end of his days on the combat theatre. Shortly, he and two other gunners, Joe Bowles and Harold Lightbown, were commissioned as second lieutenants and became gunnery officers, all having exhibited their expertise on numerous missions.

The next mission the group flew was also a time for limited rejoicing, as 1st Lt. Eugene J. Pollock, a 423rd navigator, came to the end of his combat stint. Pollock distinguished himself by developing a new approach to aerial gunnery, as he deciphered the physics of a plane approaching from either side and then taught the gunners how to shoot behind the attacker to hit it.

Cloudy weather intervened after the Antwerp debacle to give the 306th a breather, during which time Maj. Mack McKay relinquished command of the 368th Squadron to return to the United States to report on the B-17 in combat. He was replaced by Capt. John M. Regan. Lt. Charles F. (Casey) Jones, a transfer from the RAF, succeeded Salitnik as group navigator.

Although not mortally wounded, the 367th Squadron was suffering severely from the mauling it received at Antwerp. To strengthen it

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16 Apr.  
mission to  
Lorient

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with veteran crews, Lt. Richard K. O'Hara was transferred from the 423rd and Capt. William J. Casey and Lt. Frank K. Watson moved over from the 369th, bringing their veteran crews with them.

On 16 April the Group went off to Lorient to try to hit the power station at the sub pens. The frustrations that were a part of the air war were heightened here when four planes aborted; one could not open its bomb bay doors and three jettisoned their bombs. Twelve out of the original twenty made it over the target, but the lead group overran the initial point of the bomb run and, in the resulting confusion, the bombs missed the target. 16 (6)

Sgt. Enloe scored again on this mission, knocking down one plane, and others were credited to Sgt. Roy E. Livingston 367th and S/Sgt. Carl E. Frymoyer 369th. 17

17 April became one of those never to be forgotten days in the history of the 306th Group, as disaster stalked its two dozen planes from the Focke Wulf plant at Bremen to the Dutch coast. Ten planes were slaughtered by the unrelenting fighter attack that seemed to concentrate on the 306th, almost to the exclusion of all other bomb groups. 17 (7)

The fourteen planes that did come home that afternoon had expended 98,000 rounds of ammunition. Claims were approved for eight Luftwaffe attackers destroyed, two probables and one damaged, while the count from the ten missing planes will never be known.

Not only did the 306th lose ten airplanes and a hundred men, it lost a tremendous amount of battle experience. Capt. William J. (Wild Bill) Casey, an original pilot with the group, was on his 22nd mission and was one of eight first pilots going down at Bremen who had come to Thurleigh the previous September. Some of them had arrived as copilots and now had their own crews, but they were the core of the combat-experienced pilots now with the group. Many of the crew members had more than ten missions to their credit at this time. Most of the gunners mentioned earlier in this chapter went down on 17 April.

This was another maximum effort for which crews on leave were called back to base. The 8th AF put up a record number of 116 planes and 111 of them engaged the enemy, with probably fewer aborts than on almost any mission to date. The 91st Group was in the lead and it suffered six losses. The remaining ten of the sixteen total downed planes were from the 306th. The 8th lost fourteen percent of its planes over the target, but the 306th lost forty-one percent of its ships!

Four groups were in action against Bremen; while another four groups were just arriving in England for final polishing before entering the battle. The 111 planes were flying as six units, each of the four bomb groups providing six other airplanes to make up the additional two formations. Maj. Henry W. Terry, Jr., 369th commander, led this

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extra six-ship squadron for the 306th and, although hit by fighters, it did not undergo the intensity of attack that the main group faced.

Maj. John L. Lambert, 423rd commander, was the group leader for the day and, strangely, his leading three-ship element came through relatively unscathed. The high squadron led by Capt. Walter D. Smiley lost five of six; the low squadron led by Capt. Casey had two aborts and lost three of the remaining four. The "hole" element led by Capt. Pervis Youree lost two of its four planes.

Upon returning to base the remaining seven crews from the main group reported that two planes went down over the target, six after the target and two disappeared without anyone noticing them. Because of the ferocity of the action it has been impossible to determine the exact order in which the planes went down.

Before dropping their bombs, the planes of the group were enveloped in heavy anti-aircraft fire and attacked by swarms of Luftwaffe fighters, later numbered at 105 in official reports. The German attacks were made even through the thickest flak barrages. Flak was so heavy that day that later planes found trouble with visibility; pictures taken of the formation bear out the very great number of rounds of defensive fire.

The 8th AF flak officer's report, written April 20, says, "The intensity of the flak was probably the most severe that has ever been experienced by this wing and the huge volume of smoke that overhung the target area acted as a very real deterrent, causing many members of crews to feel that it would be an impossibility to fly in the area without suffering damage."

Yet, only forty-three of the returning 8th AF planes had flak damage; six were called "severe". The report credits the Germans with knocking down only one plane by flak, that being a 306th aircraft. Survivors in the main 306th group still talk about the flak and about the daring fighter attacks launched before the target and continuing to the coast on the way out.

As the group neared the target, Lt. Raymond Fortin's plane developed an engine fire without benefit of enemy assistance; Fortin has always suspected maintenance as a possible cause. Additionally, the top turret guns fired only a few rounds before jamming. W/O Maurice Pickett was the engineer that day and, although he was a squadron gunnery officer, was unable to clear the problem and use the guns. Fortin's ship was on his element leader's right wing because he and Lt. Kenneth Reecher had earlier decided to swap places in the formation. Now Fortin was learning that the outside was no place to be.

With his number 2 engine already out, Fortin was forced to feather number 4 as the fighter attacks picked up in the target area. Coming off the bomb run a vicious assault knocked out the number 3 engine,

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prevented the bomb bay doors from being closed, almost shot off the left wheel, and killed the radio operator, ball turret gunner and two waist gunners: Sgts. John A. Quinn, John E. Barnes, Harold G. Pease and Donald E. Dorion. On one engine at 25,000 feet, Fortin gave the bail out order. Those jumping were Lt. David Farrell, copilot; Lt. Thomas Walden, navigator; Pickett; S/Sgt. George W. Pederson; and the tail gunner, S/Sgt. Fred A. Newcomb.

Fortin was hit by something in the air after leaving the plane and suffered broken ribs. When he came to he was hanging in some trees with his parachute canopy caught in the tops. Having on a quick release parachute harness, he decided to activate it before the Germans injured him further trying to extricate him. As he punched the button, the blow to his stomach knocked him out again and he had only fleeting glimpses of consciousness until recovering in the Reserv Lazarett in Oldenburg. He remained there for six weeks, recovering from his wounds, before he began his trip to prison camp.

Capt. William J. Casey, leading the 367th low squadron, was in as much trouble as anyone. Only a single plane from that squadron, that of Lt. Kenneth Reecher, made it back home. Casey's plane was raked over by fighters and his crew fought back valiantly, but the deteriorating condition of "Banshee" forced Casey to head his plane back to land as his one remaining engine was running away. During the repeated fighter attacks, and the final pass by a twin-engine fighter, the five crewmen in the back of the bomb bay were all killed: Sgts Lewis F. Ayscue, Joseph R. Borzym, Frank R. Stetler, Morris J. Gecowets and Charles W. Raidline.

At 23,000 feet the men up front began leaving the plane, planning to open their chutes immediately so that the high winds aloft might blow them over land in the Frisian Islands. All made it, although they landed close to the water and almost immediately were captured. Lt. Edward J. O'Brien was the copilot; Lt. William H. Owens, navigator; Lt. James B. McCracken, bombardier, and T/Sgt. Wilson C. Elliott, engineer. All preceded Casey out of the stricken craft. McCracken was a five-day veteran of the 306th, flying his first mission.

Casey's story is that he hit the ground and soon commanded a bicycle, riding off down a dike, only to find that his escape was cut off by an approaching group which he spied at some distance. He threw his bike in a canal and jumped into the water himself. Lying under water and breathing through a straw proved good cover until a boy tried to jump across the narrow waterway and almost landed on him. Casey was pulled out of the water and taken to a nearby store where he was fed. German soldiers soon arrived to take him into custody. Eventually arriving in Oberursel, Casey was kept there longer than usual because of his truculence in dealing with his German interrogators.

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But, like most of his fellow 306th officers, his trail soon made its way to Stalag Luft 3 at Sagan where he would spend nearly two years.

1st Lt. Frank K. Watson was flying as Casey's wingman. Right after bombs away Watson's airplane was hit hard by flak in the tail and almost collided with Casey's plane. The plane wanted to slow roll but Watson and his copilot, 1st Lt. Robert B. Kemp, kept it upright as the German fighters swarmed in. An ME 109 with gun blisters underneath each wing hosed the aircraft with 20 mm cannon fire. With his controls shot out and fires developing, Watson ordered his crew to bail out.

He himself had trouble making his way out of the smoke-filled cockpit and fell between the pilots' seats into the nose crawl way. He went out the nose hatch and landed in a pasture where he was kept under restraint by two German farmers until soldiers shortly arrived to pick him up. Other survivors besides Watson and Kemp were Sgt. Robert E. Hansen, nose gunner; Sgt. George Kormish, waist, and Sgt. Roy E. Livingston, engineer.

2nd Lt. Calvin O. Bjornsgaard, navigator, died of wounds due to lack of medical attention. S/Sgt. Arthur J. Sanders, waist, also died later of wounds. Killed that day were Sgt. Reed M. Bottomley, ball; S/Sgt. Lawrence E. Davis, tail; and T/Sgt. Wilbur R. Giraud, radio.

Capt. Walter Smiley, leading the high squadron, was attacked by fighters but made it across the target and out to sea, only to turn back when he evidently realized that his plane was doomed. The plane hit the water before reaching land and there were no survivors. With him that day were Lts. Avery L. Ewan, copilot; Wilbur W. Breunig, navigator; and Martin M. Strauss, bombardier; and T/Sgt. Donald B. Hepler, T/Sgt. Raymond C. Clifton, S/Sgt. Roderick C. Clark, S/Sgt. William R. Payne, S/Sgt. Lawrence J. Sliff and S/Sgt. Roy K. Staiff.

Lt. Robert C. Miller's 368th plane was hit on the bomb run and severely damaged. When the group made a turn off the target, Miller was unable to turn his ship to remain with the formation. Continuing on a straight course, he quickly became a target for the Luftwaffe fighters. The number 2 engine by this time was burning fiercely and Miller ordered bailout. Jesse Wade, one of the waist gunners, had a foot nearly severed by a 20 mm. shell. Edward H. Small, engineer, says that soldiers and farmers were waiting for him as he landed in a field, but a couple of shots of whiskey eased his concerns.

Others of the crew surviving that day were Lt. John D. Teare, copilot; Lt. Jack S. Shaeber, navigator; Lt. James C. Shelley, bombardier; T/Sgt. Joseph M. Spiro; S/Sgt. William J. Phillips, ball; S/Sgt. Edwin A. Truscott, waist, and Sgt. Milton K. Williams, tail.

Lt. Fred D. Gillogly was leading the second element in the low squadron and was undamaged until hit by flak over the target. With only one engine feathered, Gillogly and his crew watched Smiley's plane go down in the water, saw Judas leave the formation, and

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watched the remaining 368th planes of Miller, Jankowski and Lally all go down.

Gillogly tried to join the 423rd Squadron planes for protection. When the Luftwaffe realized that Gillogly's gunners were out of ammunition, the ME 210s began flying formation with the B-17 and leisurely shot out another engine. Then a wing began to blaze and as the fire got worse out over the North Sea, Gillogly turned the plane back towards land and ordered bailout. He was the last to leave, going out of the bomb bay as the plane began to disintegrate. Members of Gillogly's crew included 2nd Lt. Donald E. Whipple, copilot; 1st Lt. Carl G. Jones, navigator; 2nd Lt. John A. Brown, Jr., bombardier; T/Sgt. Lyle V. Edwards, engineer; T/Sgt. Charles F. Fehr, radio; S/Sgt. William Allen, ball turret; S/Sgt. Archie M. Baker and S/Sgt. Henry E. Warren, waist; and Sgt. Daniel Dolinka, tail. One of the men in the rear was wounded by enemy aircraft and Warren was free for a day and a half on the ground before being captured.

368 Lt. Theodore Jankowski's plane was in bad shape by the time it reached the target. It had taken solid blows in the nose, top turret, waist, and the number 3 engine was on fire and out of control. Flak over the target just after bombs away heavily damaged the tail and the plane lurched up. Jankowski and Lt. Bill Scheil, copilot, were able to force the nose down again, but then it headed into a dive from which they could not recover, so the pilot ordered bailout.

Killed in the plane were S/Sgt. Charles R. Bell, S/Sgt. John E. Chinlund and S/Sgt. Charles E. Wylie; the latter was on his first mission having arrived in the group on 12 April.

Jankowski reports that as he was floating down he watched German soldiers on the ground following along, waiting for him. Scheil suffered a broken leg in landing. Sgt. Benedetto Benigno, radio operator, was blown out when the plane exploded; he landed in Emden. Others surviving the experience were Lt. Reginald E. Wigham, navigator; S/Sgt. Thomas P. McDonnell, nose gunner; T/Sgt. James B. Stelzer, engineer, and S/Sgt. William G. Gelnett, waist gunner.

Lt. Glenn Lally was flying on Gillogly's right wing and suffered some damage by flak before reaching the target. Right after dropping his bombs, Luftwaffe fighters five abreast roared through the formation inflicting great damage on his aircraft. Lally went to full power just to stay in formation as breaking glass and smoke filled the cockpit area.

Both inboard engines were on fire, an extra chute underneath the seats was burning and, while still at 27,000 feet, Lally rang the alarm bell. He pulled the throttles back and started down in a series of S turns. His copilot, F/O Ben R. Hopkins, a two-week combat veteran, bailed out. By the time Lally was at 10,000 feet there were flames in the cockpit. Lally tried to go out his side window, but could not make it. His movement was somewhat restricted as the fire had shrunk the leather jacket he was wearing. He then leveled the plane again, turned on the

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auto-pilot and decided to go out another way. Flames below blocked that exit and, as he moved between the seats, his seatpack parachute caught on the armor plate. He finally struggled through the base of the top turret and went out the open bomb bay.

Lally had been burned on his legs and face and his eyes were puffing up. As he descended he could see the North Sea and came down in a plowed field near Wilhelmshaven. He and his tail gunner, S/Sgt. Robert J. McKeage, spent the next two months in a naval hospital at Wilhelmshaven. S/Sgt. Leno Off died when he fell through his parachute. T/Sgt. Jesse R. Downard, engineer, went out of the plane with his parachute on fire and was reported as having died of injuries.

Besides Lally, Hopkins and McKeage, other survivors were 2nd Lt. Frank E. Ross, Jr., navigator; T/Sgt. James R. Curry, Jr., nose gunner; T/Sgt. Eugene A. Lanning, radio; S/Sgt. Leo L. Gallegos, waist gunner, and S/Sgt. Alvin C. Johnson, bail turret.

"Unmentionable," flown by Lt. Warren George, Jr., was one of the two planes out of the lead squadron to be lost before it reached the target. Under attack by waves of fighters, sometimes four abreast, the plane took a sharp dive after being hit in the empennage and losing a stabilizer and then levelled off again.

"It was like firing into a feeding frenzy of sharks," says Gunner Donald J. Bevan. Everyone was calm and stayed at his post until George finally came over the intercom to the crew, "All right, I guess we better bail out."

All made it to prison camp, except for George and T/Sgt. Warren A. MacGregor, engineer, who were unaccounted for and presumed dead. Crew members who survived besides Bevan were Lt. Robert O. Malin, copilot; Lt. Andrew V. Simmons, navigator; Lt. John B. Parker, bombardier; T/Sgt. James H. Thornton, radio; S/Sgt. George J. McClenan, S/Sgt. Charles E. Randall and Sgt. Jack S. Amrey, gunners.

Capt. Craig J. Harwood's plane, the last ship in the lead squadron, completed the bomb run, but the 367th planes were under heavy attack. The flak had been exceedingly accurate and anti-aircraft shells had holed both wings. The number 3 and 4 engines were on fire and hydraulic fluid leaking into the bomb bay was also in flames. The entire crew bailed out, but three of its members died of unknown causes. It was later reported that Harwood had bled to death based on the testimony of T/Sgt. Louis J. Enloe, engineer, who had seen the pilot's blood soaked clothing.

Enloe, Lt. Harold W. Whiteman, navigator, and S/Sgt. Raymond H. Eriksen, a gunner, were all together in a German hospital suffering from wounds or injuries. Others of the crew surviving were Lt. Gerald F. Clymer, copilot; Lt. Frank W. Wolinski, bombardier; T/Sgt. Robert G. Robel, radio, and S/Sgt. Clinton C. Collins, gunner. S/Sgt. Joseph E.

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Collette, tail gunner, was observed in the plane having difficulty with his parachute and was not seen by any of the survivors. He, Harwood, and S/Sgt. William S. Buchanan, were listed as killed in action.

It was a good day for American gunners as the 8th AF this day claimed sixty-three destroyed, fifteen probables and seventeen damaged. Compared with the figure of 105 German planes engaged, these numbers must appear somewhat inflated.

The 306th gunners were credited with nine victories, four of them by the main group and five by Terry's squadron in the composite group. Lt. John Hickey, bombardier for Lt. Carroll Briscoe, earned the rare distinction for an officer of gaining credit for downing two Luftwaffe fighters, both FW190s, on the same mission.

In the main group, S/Sgt. E.J. Zabawa in Lt. Kenneth Reeher's plane got one E/A just off the target and S/Sgt. Lamont J. Durfee, a waist gunner, hit another. S/Sgt. Walter Piotrowski, ball gunner for Capt. Robert W. Smith, destroyed one, while S/Sgt. William E. Hull, nose gunner, downed an ME 109.

Just before the composite group got to the target Sgt. Richard J. Daly, tail gunner for Lt. Edward Maliszewski, hit an FW 190 and Sgt. Raleigh W. Holloway, top turret gunner, saw the pilot bail out of a plane he was shooting at as the formation turned off the target. S/Sgt. Glen Rummels, tail gunner for Lt. Roy Vinnedge, got the last plane of the day at 1315, an ME 109.

Lt. Maxwell Judas, the only 368th plane to make it home, was hit hard on the bomb run by fighters and as he turned off the target, all of his squadron had disappeared. Unable to maintain altitude he was forced to descend to 500 feet. He nursed his aircraft back across the North Sea on about an engine and a half, flying all the way to Thurleigh at 105 mph indicated airspeed.

In "Old Faithful" Captain Pervis Youree, traveled down the bomb run with two engines feathered and the top turret shattered after encountering a Luftwaffe welcome. Youree also had to take his plane down on the deck and flew 200 miles at wave top heights with one good engine. Lt. Leroy Sugg, the copilot, held the control cables for the number 3 engine together with his hands. With full power on one engine, Youree was able to make 115 mph indicated airspeed. The crew busily jettisoned everything, including the ball turret.

"Old Faithful" finally came over the coast and, as the red lights began to blink their ominous message of low fuel, Youree and crew spotted an RAF Spitfire base. When Youree throttled back, the plane stalled and he had no choice but to land immediately without regard to runways, traffic patterns, or any standard procedures. As a finale, one wheel would not go down and lock in place.

"It's kind of a mystery how we got back," Youree said later.

Those still able to fly were having an exceedingly rough time getting out of German air space. On the route homeward Lt. Reecher hit the deck at about 500 feet. Reecher's bombardier, Lt. Harold E. Lane, a two-week veteran from Lt. Thomas Ledgerwood's crew, was hit in the groin by a 20 mm. cannon shell which severed a main artery. There was no way the embattled crew could stanch the bleeding and Lane quickly bled to death. Reecher finally joined up with a 91st Group plane which had a black swan emblazoned on the right side of its nose. The tail wheel of Reecher's plane had been shot off. Sgt. William D. Brittain, the tail gunner, had a bag of clothing in the back of the aircraft. Upon reaching British air space it was found that the clothing also had been shredded by shrapnel.

Planes were all over the sky and, except for the lead element with Major Lambert, the formation had become completely disorganized. Planes of the 91st and 306th were thrown together and all were seeking leaders to form on to try to survive the trip home.

Thirty-four men of the 306th were killed that day over Bremen, a high price to pay for a mission which was regarded by higher headquarters as successful, rendering "severe damage to approximately seven-tenths of the Fock-Wulf works."

As the toll exacted of the 306th became evident, the waiting officers and enlisted men at Thurlleigh were stunned. With four crews lost on 5 April, and now another ten on 17 April, morale on the base was devastated. New crews had arrived this month, but it was the loss of old familiar faces which caused the deep, aching feeling.

"The Group tonight is stunned, but not broken," wrote Maj. Shuller. "We used to reel and rock with the loss of three planes in a raid, but we didn't believe it possible to lose ten in one mission." Meanwhile, at First Wing headquarters, Gen. Hansell was assessing the mission and its impact upon his four veteran groups. He "stood down" the 306th indefinitely until the savage hurts could mend. Two days later Col. Putnam reported to Gen. Hansell that his group was again ready for combat. At this juncture, nature stepped in and inclement weather provided the group a two-week rest. For a week no missions were even planned and during the second week several were scrubbed. This, seemingly, was the lull before the history making events of 1 May.

30 April  
In a report on the mission filed on 20 April, it is stated, "The formation leader of the 306th group (Major Lambert) reported that on the way in from the coast some forty E/A in a string flew parallel to our formation, level and about 2,000 yards to the left. Attacks were withheld until we were on our bombing run, when there were heavy attacks . . . The 306th Group fell out of column to the left, with resulting concentrated head-on attacks. . . . Dozens of E/A sailed right into and through our formations, rolling over and diving as they passed through.

This was the period when heaviest losses were sustained . . . ”

Gen. Hansell wrote in an Operations Report on 23 April: “. . . most of our losses were the result of poor formation flying which resulted in aircraft becoming separated and an easy prey to the fighters.”

He said that the first German warning of an impending attack was broadcast at 1145. Bombs were dropped at about 1300. He also stated that the Luftwaffe fighters had been instructed to “go into the attack regardless of everything” and to pursue the enemy until ammunition was exhausted.

American airmen that day will believe all of these statements; for there have been many comments by participants that the German fighters knew exactly where to wait for the bombers and what the target would be.

And what were the long range effects on the group of the raid to Bremen? The unit history notes that on the 21st the 367th enjoyed a squadron party with 400 men and guests in attendance. Defeat was only a momentary phenomenon.

World War II was a field day for many emerging young physical scientists, social scientists and statisticians who easily found plentiful raw data to measure almost everything in sight. And the First Wing was no stranger to this war of numbers as is shown from a brief condensation of its lengthy April 1943 report.

The 306th was praised for its “high operation efficiency” as during the month 83.8% of its assigned planes were available for combat. Bombing results were highly satisfactory.

By the end of the month, the 306th led the Wing with 512 sorties since beginning combat operations. It also had thirty pilots who were qualified for night flying in the United Kingdom.

The 306th expended 11,672 rounds of ammunition per enemy aircraft destroyed; but, in contrast, the gunners at the 305th were knocking one down with every 2,976 rounds.

When the men were not in the air they were in the trainers: as 204 pilots spent 227 hours in Link, 141 men recorded 49 hours in Combination, 99 logged 98 hours in bomb trainers, 143 tallied 106 hours in spotlight trainers and 519 were in Hunt trainers for 360 hours.

On the skeet range, 252 men fired 25 rounds apiece, with an average score of 12; 131 participated in gunnery flights; one pilot flew the Standard Beam Approach; nine engaged in night flying, and 263 flew bombing missions.

More planes were hit by flak at 26,000 feet than any other altitude.

It was also at this time that official word came that the WAAC would soon be placing women in the Eighth units. Again the EM got a break — “It is a definite ruling that no officers will be permitted to date an enrollee of the WAAC.”

Movies, stage shows and dances were popular.

Flak helmets for flyers first became available in April, but it was quickly found the top turret and ball turret gunners could not use them because of the close confines of their turrets.

Some limitations were found in the new center-mounted single nose gun which arrived from the States during April. It would traverse from 10:30 to 1:30, elevate 20-25 degrees, but only depress 15-20 degrees. The position of the bomb sight proved to be the problem.

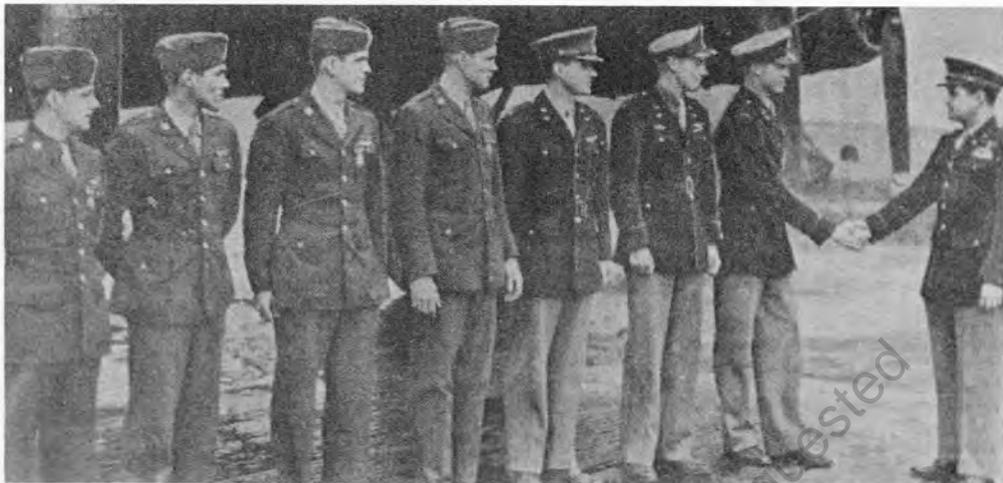
Station 111 also won praise for its driver training program.

The 306th continued to have the highest rate of upper respiratory infections, although considerably improved in April over previous months. That the 306th ranked third in venereal disease statistics was of little consolation for the medics; First Wing had a higher rate in this category than the ETO in general.

Among the Very Important Persons (VIPs) visiting the base was Archbishop Francis Spellman from New York.

As April 1943 passed from the scene many major concerns of the combat crews were eased by the assignment of four new groups to 8th BC. This in itself did not mean that the 306th would fly any less, but it did perhaps indicate that the fighter attacks would be spread out a little more. But what was really needed was more new planes and more replacement crews.

This was also a month in which the 306th was directed to assist in the preparation of the 94th Bomb Group for combat, two squadrons of the 94th came to Thurleigh for bombing, formation flying, classroom work and gunnery missions.



Rescued after thirty hours in the North Sea and eleven enemy planes downed were, left to right: Sgt. Arthur Adrian, Sgt. Clarence F. Buchanan, Sgt. Zygmund Warminski, Sgt. Wayne J. Gray, 2nd Lt. Daniel Barberis, 2nd Lt. Robert McCallum and 1st Lt. Robert H. Smith, being congratulated by Col. Curtis LeMay. 21 May 1943.



Maj. John Wright, group intelligence; and Maj. Ralph Oliver, 369th Squadron C.O., listen to some of the lead crew members on the first raid to Germany 27 January 1943. 1st Lt. Frank Yaussi, 1st Lt. Robert Salitrnik, and S/Sgts. Donald Tunstall, Raymond Eriksen and Charles D. Hill.



Fr. Adrian Poletti, Roman Catholic chaplain, leads the crew of 1st Lt. Edward Hennessy in prayer in front of its plane, 'Little Audrey'.



A wounded crew member is aided before leaving his plane by S/Sgt. William F. Houlihan, Capt. C. Palmer McKim and Sgt. Clarence W. Hoheisel.



Cameras were a vital part of the bombing effort, here checked out before being taken to the planes.



The American flag was raised over Thurleigh 9 December 1942, the first base turned over to total American control in the British Isles.

Three hundredth mission wait.





An enlisted barracks interior in late 1942

Enlisted men wait in line for Christmas dinner, 1943



The bomb handlers, 367th Squadron ordnance personnel in early 1945.





Medics around the ambulances, waiting for the planes.



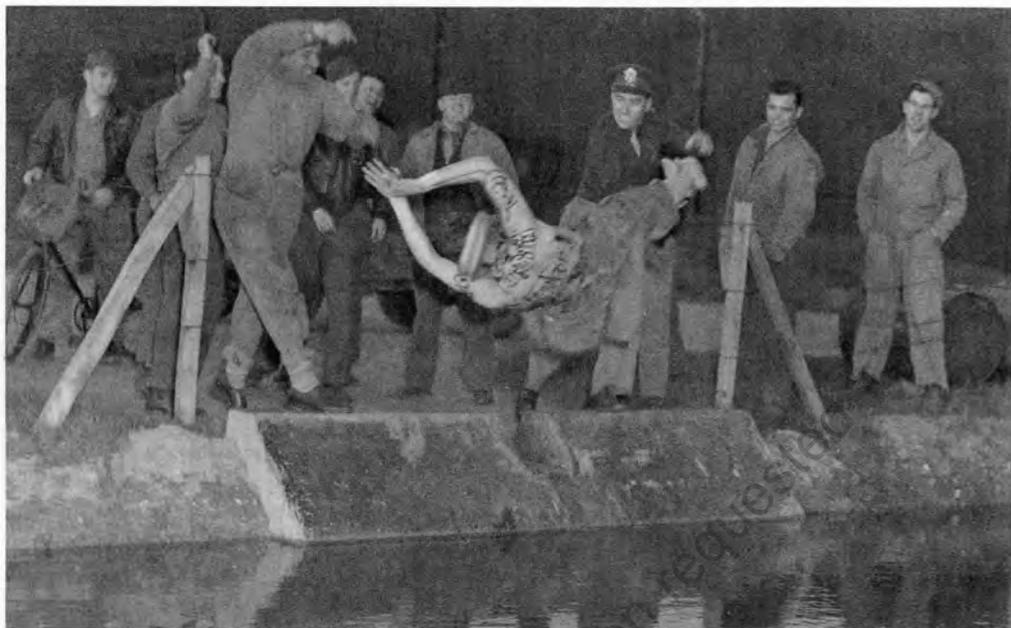
Extreme care in packing life-saving parachutes was essential.

A 367th Squadron lead crew prepares for takeoff on D-Day, 6 June 1944.



Five 367th flyers finished their tours, 22 December 1943: T/Sgt. Arnold Coulter, S/Sgt. John Corcoran, 1st Lt. Woodrow W. Thomas, S/Sgt. John Bloom, and T/Sgt. James Argentos.





The paint pit was a familiar 'dumping' place for flyers who completed their tours, until banned in late 1944.



The surviving and healthy members of a crew after being shot up over St. Nazaire 17 November 1942: Lt. Emmett Ford, Sgt. Colin Neeley, Capt. Robert Williams, Sgt. Eddie Espitallier, Sgt. Claiborne Wilson and Lt. Warren George.

A crash landing 28 April 1944.





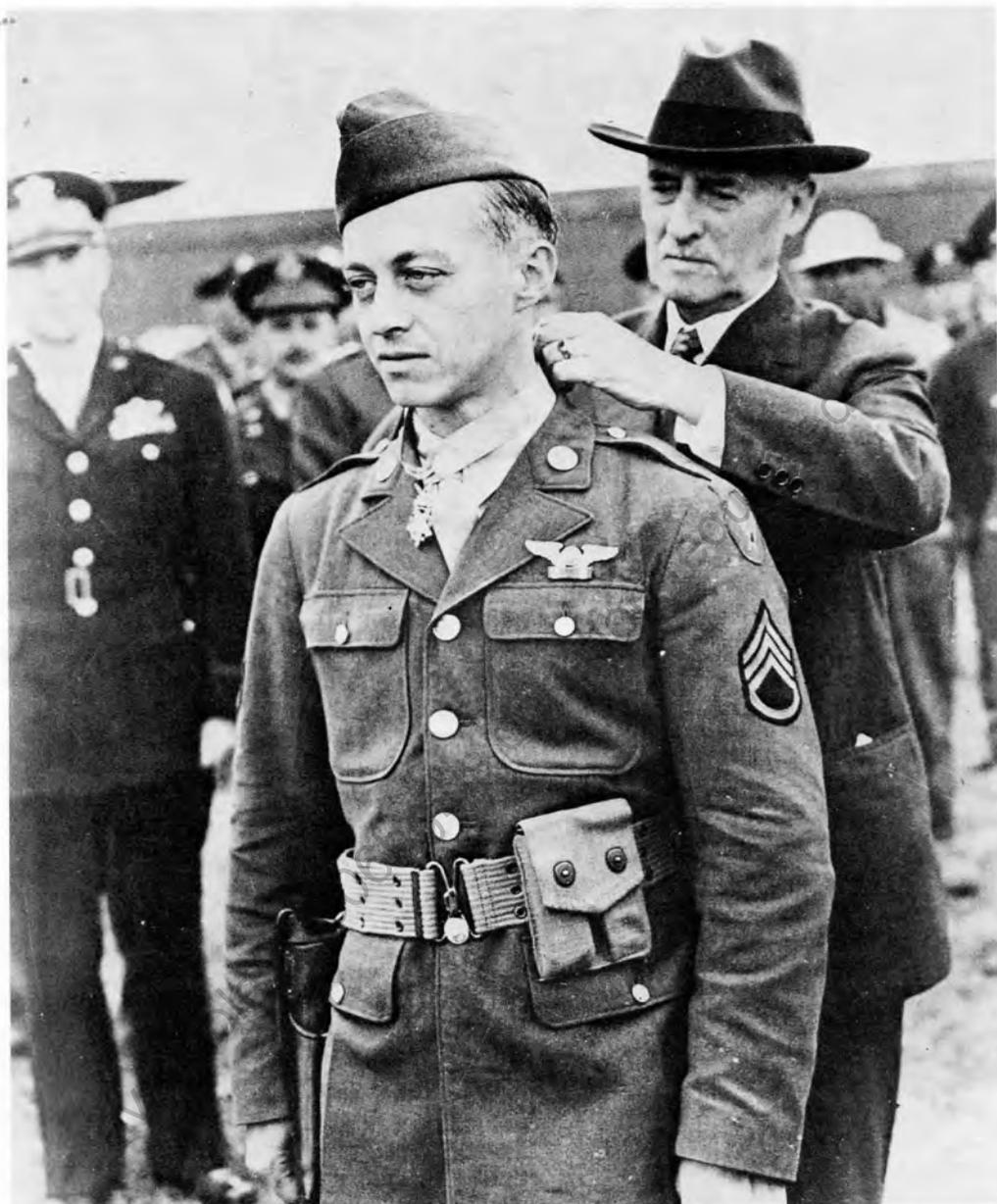
This photo was taken inside Stalag Luft 3 of seven 306th officers, left to right: Quentin Burgett, Joseph E. Consolmagno, Frank J. Jacknik, Lewis McKesson, Robert Hermann, George L. Mathews, and Andrew Friedrich.



Hyman Goldberg inspects damage to vertical stabilizer.

Putting the finishing touches on a plane. Painters normally earned \$5 for such work.





Maynard H. (Snuffy) Smith receives the Medal of Honor from Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson. The ceremony was unusual in being held in a combat theatre and it was a rare occurrence for the presentation to be made by anyone other than the President of the United States. 15 July 1943.

## Chapter 8

# SNUFFY SMITH'S DAY

1 May 1943

May 1, 1943, was a memorable day in the history of the 306th Group, the day in which the most medals were awarded for a single mission, and it was the day in which Sgt. Maynard H. (Snuffy) Smith earned the Medal of Honor for "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty."

Navigational errors, never satisfactorily explained, created the setting for Smith's heroic action; they also cost the group three airplanes and their crews, plus three other men lost. It was a day which the survivors never stopped talking about, with the stories being repeated over and over again for the following two years at Thurleigh. New crews were likely to hear more from Smith's detractors than they were from the other side.

Eighteen planes under the command of Lt. Col. Claude Putnam were off the ground that morning at 9 a.m., joining the 91st Group over Bassingbourne to form the 101st Combat Wing. The two groups headed south to Portland Bill where they met the 102nd Combat Wing, joining together the 8th's four B-17 groups. The 303rd was leading the mission, followed by the 305th, the 91st and the 306th.

St. Nazaire, by now a familiar place to almost everyone in the formation, was again the target. For this mission the 306th planes were each carrying two 2000 pound bombs which would be aimed at the harbor installations. St. Nazaire was by no means a favorite target and when this raid was concluded the group had put a total of eighty-three planes across the city, of which twelve failed to come home. The 8th had seventy-eight planes take off on this morning, but only twenty-nine of them bombed St. Nazaire. Eleven planes aborted because of mechanical failures or personnel problems, thirty-eight aircraft aborted because of weather, and seven were shot down. In all there were seventy-three men missing in action, eighteen wounded and two killed.

It was graded as one of the easier missions the 306th had flown in quite some time with little defensive activity before or at the target. Bombing on a 270° heading, Col. Putnam led his planes west and began a letdown off the target. A half hour later at 12,000 feet the group turned to 320° and shortly thereafter made another smaller correction to the right. At 1313 the formation turned sharply to the right at 800 feet towards what was assumed would be a landfall on southwestern England. There can have been no doubts in the lead ship that day, as the new navigational procedure when position was at all in question was to fly 360° for half an hour and then turn to 45° and England would be there.

At 1340 the bombers made landfall at a harbor and some men remarked later of noticing the "lights" blinking at them. Suddenly they were hammered by flak of great intensity and variety: 88 mm guns, heavy coastal artillery, 8 mm machine guns. By this time the helpless planes were over the harbor of Brest, the most important naval base in France; not over England. Frantically, the leaders began to turn the formation as quickly as they could. It demanded all the flying skills the pilots could muster to keep their planes in the air at low altitude; those on the inside of the turns struggled to keep from stalling, a maneuver that could easily have been fatal. The survivors never doubted the abilities of the Germans to throw lots of shells their way and to put them accurately into the careening aircraft. The shells found their marks and later S/Sgt. Eli Rogers was to say that the holes appearing in the top of the wing of his ship looked like corn popping.

Unfortunately, Rogers did not have much time to watch this phenomenon as his aircraft flown by Lt. Edwin Pipp hit the water, the first of two to go down in the harbor. Rogers, the engineer, had been wounded earlier by flak and the navigator had put a bandage around his injured wrist. This later almost killed Rogers, as the bandage caught on something when the plane went under water. Rogers has no idea how long he struggled to free himself, or just how he did it. He eventually floated out of the plane unconscious and was luckily seen by Pipp and S/Sgt. James L. Babbs, the tail gunner. Babbs, too, had been knocked out, but came to, saw Pipp in a raft and swam to him. Together they caught hold of Rogers' jacket and held his head out of water against the side of the raft until all were picked up by a German boat.

After having been wounded in the left knee and right elbow by the Brest flak, Babbs left his tail guns and went to the waist. There he found one waist gunner dead and the other in a state of shock. Babbs fired the right waist gun at an attacking German fighter and believes that he knocked it down just before his own plane hit the water. Also surviving out of this crew was Sgt. James J. Melillo who was flying as the nose gunner.

Killed were 1st Lt. James B. Lear, copilot; 2nd Lt. Leland J. Flower, navigator; T/Sgt. Buren C. Williams, radio; S/Sgt. Eddie Zaban, ball; and Sgt. Edward Kaczanowski and S/Sgt. Norman A. Neuweiler, waist gunners.

The action caused by the arrival of the bombers was furious. To the German flak gunners were added about twenty Luftwaffe planes which attacked from the rear. A second 423rd Squadron plane, that of 1st Lt. Bart Wigginton, also was lost in the harbor. His entire crew was killed including 1st Lt. Ralph L. Denny, copilot; 2nd Lt. Robert C.

Farmer, navigator; 2nd Lt. David J. Nordberg, bombardier; S/Sgt. John M. Cybulski; Sgts. Abraham L. Cogan, William J. Dyakovich, Robert W. Gordon, Cleston K. Harrison and Ralph W. Wallace.

A 367th plane is reported to have ditched in the water outside the Brest harbor, the third to go down. 1st Lt. Owen Luby and his crew were lost: 2nd Lt. Evan D. Clayton, navigator; 2nd Lt. Thaddeus V. Powell, copilot; T/Sgts. John Alexander and Reuben Van Sickle; S/Sgts. Thomas D. Oakman, Robert L. Teegarden, Elmer E. Wenzel, Jr., and Edward J. Zabawa; and Sgt. Louis H. Wichmer.

When the fighters hit the tail end of the formation the outside planes on either side of the group took the most severe pounding, those of 1st Lt. L.P. Johnson and 2nd Lt. Carroll D. Briscoe.

As they had been proceeding home from the target, Johnson had said to his copilot, 2nd Lt. Bob McCallum, an eleven-day veteran and transfer from the RAF, "It seems odd to be flying northeast here." Within minutes they realized the prophetic wisdom of this statement as they became engulfed in the fury of the defense of Brest; they probably were pounded so badly because they were at a lower altitude than almost any other plane. As Capt. Raymond Check, Johnson's element leader, began his sharp turn out of the battle area, Johnson made every effort to stay with him. Precisely at this moment the fighters hit, inflicting great destruction.

"I knew we had been hit and had a serious problem; the plane was on fire and not flying well," says Johnson.

He ordered T/Sgt. William W. Fahrenhold, his engineer, to go back to check on conditions in the rear of the airplane. When Fahrenhold opened the front door to the bomb bay he saw nothing but flames at the rear of the bay across the wall of the radio room. Johnson and McCallum glanced back and told Fahrenhold to take a fire extinguisher with him.

"Lieutenant, I can't go back there," was Fahrenhold's reply. Nevertheless, he began spraying his extinguisher the length of the bomb bay. Eventually the flames died down and he was able to scramble through the bomb bay to open the door on the destruction that lay beyond.

Sgt. Maynard H. Smith, flying his very first mission as a bomber crew member, had been assigned to the ball turret. While tracking an oncoming fighter, Smith felt and heard a terrific explosion above him.

His story as told to Andrew A. Rooney of *Stars and Stripes*, recounts the remainder of the action:

"My interphone and the electrical controls to my turret went out, so I handcranked myself up and crawled out of the turret into the ship. The first thing I saw was a sheet of flame coming out of the radio room and another fire by the tail wheel section.

"Suddenly, the radio operator came staggering out of the flames. He made a bee line for the gun hatch and dived out. I glanced out and watched him hit the horizontal stabilizer, bounce off and open his chute. By this time the right waist gunner had bailed out over his gun and the left waist gunner was trying to jump but was stuck half in and half out of his gun hatch. I pulled him back into the ship and asked him if the heat was too much for him. All he did was to stare at me and I watched him bale out the rear door. His chute opened okay.

"The smoke and gas were really thick. I wrapped a sweater around my face so I could breathe, grabbed a fire extinguisher and attacked the fire in the radio room. Glancing over my shoulder at the tail fire, I thought I saw something coming, and ran back. It was (Roy H.) Gibson, the tail gunner, painfully crawling back, wounded. He had blood all over him.

"Looking him over, I saw that he had been hit in the back and that it had probably gone through his left lung. I laid him down on his left side so that the wound would not drain into the right lung, gave him a shot of morphine and made him as comfortable as possible before going back to the fires.

"I had just got started in this when that FW came in again. I jumped for one of the waist guns and fired at him. As he swept under us, I turned to the other waist gun and let him have it from the other side. He left us for a while, so I went back to the radio room fire again.

"I got into the room this time and began throwing out burning debris. The fire had burned holes so large in the side of the ship that I just tossed the stuff out through them. Gas from a burning extinguisher was choking me, so I went back to the tail fire. I took off my chute so I could move easier. I'm glad I didn't take it off sooner, because later I found that it had stopped a .30 caliber bullet.

"I fired another burst with the waist guns, and went back to the radio room with the last of the extinguisher fluid. When that ran out I found a water bottle and a urine can and poured these out.

"After that I was so mad I urinated on the fire and finally beat on it with my hands and feet until my clothes began to smoulder. That FW came around again and I let him have it. That time he left us for good. The fire was under control, more or less, and we were in sight of land."

Knocked out of formation almost immediately, Johnson and McCalum wrestled with the controls, finally bracing their knees against the yoke to keep the aircraft level.

"The plane did not start to disintegrate, so I didn't even think of bailing out," says Johnson. They had only about a half hour flight to England and when they reduced power the plane seemed to stabilize.

As they approached Predonnock, which had a landing strip but was not an operational field, Johnson prepared for a straight-in approach

1 May 1943

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— no turns, no twists — as he felt the plane could not stand any maneuvering. Perhaps he was fortunate at this point in not really knowing the full extent of the damage to his plane.

Johnson brought the aircraft in to a smooth landing but, as he put the tail wheel down and slowed down, the fuselage began to crack at the trailing edge of the wing and finally crumpled to a standstill. It became one of three planes that day that were turned over to 8th AF Service Command for salvage.

L.P. Johnson had originally been the copilot for Capt. Mack McKay and when McKay was transferred to the 368th as a squadron commander Johnson took over the crew. Smith became its ball turret gunner when S/Sgt. James H. Hobbs completed his 25th mission on the crew's previous raid, the second EM in the group to complete the newly-designated tour.

This was Johnson's 25th mission and on the crew interrogation form is written a quote from him, "This is a hell of a way to finish." The form also notes that everything in the plane, except the engines, was damaged.

1st Lt. Stanley M. Kisseberth was the navigator, flying his first mission since being wounded in a thigh two months before. Again, he was wounded in an almost identical spot and this became his final combat mission. S/Sgt. J.C. Melaun, the nose gunner, received an injury to his right hand.

Most seriously wounded was Sgt. Gibson, the tail gunner who had been treated by Smith. He suffered from shoulder and chest wounds, recovered, but never flew again. The three crewmen who bailed out over the English Channel and were presumed to have drowned were T/Sgt. Henry R. Bean, S/Sgt. Joseph S. Bukacek, Jr., and S/Sgt. Robert V. Folliard.

On the opposite side of the formation in 2nd Lt. Carroll D. Briscoe's 369th plane there was also serious trouble with a critically wounded tail gunner and an oxygen fire. As the fighter planes approached from the rear their 20 mm cannon shells ripped into the tail gunner's compartment wounding S/Sgt. John R. Roller in the arms. They also ruptured the oxygen system in the tail and ignited an oxygen fire. Roller, despite the pain from his new wounds, crimped the oxygen tubing with his bare hands to stop the flow and quench the fire.

S/Sgt. Victor L. Rose was Briscoe's ball turret gunner. As they flew over the flak ships at Brest, Rose worked his guns continuously until a shot came through the glass of the turret and peppered his face with fragments. The turret mechanism was damaged and would not traverse, so Rose came up into the waist of the plane and acting as a fireman, extinguished several flames.

Because of his wounds, Roller came out of the tail gunner's position

and went into the radio room. When the plane was attacked again he manned the radio gun with his left hand and assisted in driving off the attacks until he lost consciousness from his wounds and loss of blood.

Briscoe's number 3 engine was feathered and the supercharger on number 2 was shot out. All radios were damaged. Aileron controls, the radio compass and the hydraulic system were also gone. Briscoe thought they might have to ditch before reaching England, but a thermal current at the right place helped them maintain sufficient altitude to land at Predonnock. As they slowed down on the runway the plane cracked open at the trailing edge of the wing and became another candidate for salvage.

Roller lay on the radio room floor, semi-conscious. When his crew mates and the medics began to move him he told them: "Take care of Vic, there's nothing wrong with me." But it was Roller who needed the serious medical attention for, upon close examination, he was found to have seven separate wounds. His eighth mission was his last. Before he received a medical discharge in August, 1944, John Roller was awarded the Air Medal, the Purple Heart and the Distinguished Service Cross. The latter is the nation's second highest decoration for valor in the face of the enemy.

Like Snuffy Smith, T/Sgt. Charles E. Vondrachek was flying his first mission, as engineer in the 367th plane piloted by 1st Lt. Alden Mann. During a fighter pass before the target, Vondrachek's turret had been squarely hit and he was knocked to the floor behind the pilot's seats. Vondrachek was a tough man and not easily defeated. He climbed back into his turret, manned his guns and stayed at the ready throughout the mission. There was talk that some gunners were so sure they were approaching England that they had unloaded their guns and when the Luftwaffe struck they were defenseless. Vondrachek's concerted firing helped drive off the attackers.

His performance was highly praised. He too was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, later pinned on him at Thurleigh by Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers, the theatre commander, while at the same time he also received the British Distinguished Service Medal.

Thus, the medals indeed did fall on 306th personnel for this 1 May mission. Besides Smith, Roller and Vondrachek, the Silver Star was given to Fahrenhold for his part in getting Johnson's stricken ship home; the pilot was himself the recipient of the Distinguished Flying Cross.

It was a sorry lot of battered airplanes that came to roost on the Cornish coast late in the day, so badly battered that three were left there for salvage (Johnson's, Mann's and Briscoe's). Three others had found a final resting place in French waters.

Besides the planes, T/Sgt. Julius Kliffer, a veteran of a week at Thurleigh and flying his first mission for the 367th, was killed in combat.

A diarist, writing about Kisseberth, said as the navigator went to briefing: "When he opened the door and saw that it was St. Nazaire again he almost fell through the floor. But being a plucky little devil, he insisted on going. The outcome was that he was again hit by flak, again in the same leg, and again over St. Nazaire, the first time he had been in a plane in two and one-half months." He was the first man in the combat history of the 306th to earn an oak leaf cluster to the Purple Heart medal.

The wounded, in addition to Roller, Gibson, Kisseberth, Vondrachek and Rose, also included Sgt. Leonard B. Kay, S/Sgt. Marcel J. St. Louis, S/Sgt. Richard L. Newport, S/Sgt. Philip B. Foster, Sgt. Mike J. Komo and Sgt. Frank C. Latto.

A raid that counted for so little exacted a heavy toll from the Group which had been on its first mission since the devastation of 17 April over Bremen. This time it was six aircraft, thirty men killed, four missing in action and eleven wounded, three of whom would never fly again.

The 8th AF claimed eighteen fighters downed over St. Nazaire and Brest with eight credited to 306th gunners. Two of them went to Sgt. Peter P. Nolasco and single claims to Roller, Komo, Fahrenhold, S/Sgt. Lamont J. Durfee, S/Sgt. James E. Smoot and S/Sgt. Milton B. Edwards.

In his report to First Wing, Col. Putnam wrote: "As usual, the navigation problem was made extremely difficult by having poor compass equipment. After the French Coast is crossed all radio aids, with the exception of the J Beams are useless, due to the fact that the enemy has beacons and stations set up to jam and meacon them. It is therefore necessary to rely wholly on the compass, when flying under such poor conditions as those encountered on this mission. Compass installations at present are far too unreliable to put that much faith in them. There is a new heavy gyro compass of exceptional reliability, of the remote reading type, which should be made immediately available to the operational groups.

"The leadership and navigation displayed by the lead Group of the 102nd Combat Wing was hardly exceptional."

Memories of this day were to stay with the 306th throughout its existence — a day of glory and a day of tragedy. Today the veterans of 1 May speak of it with both awe and with bitterness.

Snuffy Smith was distinguished from other Medal of Honor winners by several factors: he was living, he was not transferred home to receive the medal from the President of the United States, he saw further combat after the heroic act — and he was frequently on KP.

Smith became the first enlisted man in the European Theatre to receive the nation's highest medal. Thus he was a dream-come-true for public relations officers and his exploits were played up in the press to

the hilt. Once the documentary evidence had been gathered, the citation prepared and plans for the presentation made, it was decided that the medal would be presented at Thurleigh by Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson. As there were no Medals of Honor in the combat theatre, Secretary Stimson carried Snuffy Smith's medal to Europe in his own personal luggage.

15 July was set as the big day for Snuffy and the 306th. Stimson and his entourage gathered to do the honors; the VIPs included Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers, commanding general of the European Theatre of Operations; Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker, commanding general of the 8th AF; Brig. Gen. Robert B. Williams, commanding general of First Wing, and a bevy of other general and field grade officers. Col. Putnam was gone from the group and Col. George L. Robinson was the host for the day.

It was widely reported at the time that in order to have Snuffy in attendance at his own party that he had to be rescued from KP duty. And, either before or after the event, pictures were posed in proper fatigue attire and surroundings.

Small of stature, Smith was forced to raise his eyes considerably to the tall Secretary Stimson, but it was his day all the way and he enjoyed it. The presentation was made before the assembled ranks of Thurleigh personnel and visitors gathered in front of the control tower. The only men excused were those in the planes who concluded the salute to Snuffy with a formation flyover. Without question, it was the biggest event to be witnessed at Thurleigh between September 1942 and May 1945.

It was Snuffy's day, never to be forgotten by those who crowded in to see the formalities or for those who survived the hell of Brest, France, at 500 feet.

The citation for the Medal of Honor reads:

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action above and beyond the call of duty. The aircraft of which Sergeant Smith was a gunner was subjected to intense enemy anti-aircraft fire and determined fighter airplane attacks while returning from a mission over enemy-occupied continental Europe on 1 May 1943. The airplane was hit several times by anti-aircraft fire and cannon shells of the fighter airplanes, two of the crew were seriously wounded, the aircraft's oxygen system was shot out, and several vital control cables severed when intense fires were ignited simultaneously in the radio compartment and waist sections. The situation became so acute that three of the crew bailed out into the comparative safety of the sea. Sergeant Smith, then on his first combat mission, elected to fight the fire by himself, administered first aid to the tail gunner, manned the waist guns, and fought the intense flames alternately. The escaping oxygen fanned the fire to

such intense heat that the ammunition in the radio compartment began to explode, the radio, gun mounts, and camera were melted, and the compartment completely gutted. Sergeant Smith threw the exploding ammunition overboard, fought the fire until all the fire fighting aids were exhausted, manned the workable guns until the enemy fighters were driven away, further administered first aid to his wounded comrade, and then by wrapping himself in protecting cloth, completely extinguished the fire by hand. This soldier's gallantry in action, undaunted bravery, and loyalty to his aircraft and fellow crew members, without regard for his own personal safety, is an inspiration to the armed forces of the United States."

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## Chapter 9

# A NEW RECORD IN LUFTWAFFE KILLS

## May 1943

There was a lull in combat after the first of May as weather kept the planes on the ground, even though 8th BC tried repeatedly to put sizable forces into the air over the continent.

A significant step upward was recorded by Claude Putnam on 10 May as he received the eagles of a colonel at the age of 28, probably the youngest group commander in the 8th AF at that time. Col. Putnam had been born 7 October 1915 at Jacksboro, Texas, and had always been interested in the military. A big lad for his age, he enlisted in the Texas National Guard at the age of 12 years and eight months. He remained in the Guard for ten years, then left in 1937 to enter the Air Corps while in his senior year at Texas Technological College. He was graduated from flying school at Kelly Field, San Antonio, in June 1938.

After crossing over from pursuit to bombardment, Putnam became a bombardier instructor. He was a flight engineer on the famed goodwill tour of South America flown by a group of twenty-five B-17s in May 1941. In May 1942 he was stranded with his crew on the ice of Greenland for eight days; in July he was in England with the 92nd Bomb Group.

Putnam came to Thurleigh as a major with Col. Frank A. Armstrong in January 1943. He was group operations officer until he succeeded Armstrong as group commander in late February. He was then promoted to lieutenant colonel and ninety days later became a colonel.

During April and early May, under considerable pressure from Washington, the 8th AF laid on most missions as "maximum efforts", a requirement which demanded the presence of every assigned crew ready to fly. Since coming to England and entering combat the groups had rotated their flying personnel, allowing some of them to be on two or three-day passes every three or four weeks. Once the word was passed the afternoon or evening before a mission that the next day's effort would be a "maximum effort" all crew members away from the station were notified to return immediately.

Maj. Thurman Shuller, 306th Group surgeon, became increasingly irritated by this procedure and by the effects he observed among the air crews at Thurleigh. On 12 May he composed a letter to Col. E.J. Tracy, VIII BC surgeon, protesting the cancellation of leaves for maximum effort operations:

*story of  
Shuller's getting  
limit on # missions*

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"It is requested that strong protest be immediately registered with the Commanding General, VIII Bomber Command, against the calling of combat crews back to the home station from regular passes in order to participate in a so-called 'maximum effort'.

"The first such mission was on 4th April when several of our crews were called back from a two-day pass in London. One of these crews was on its first pass in over four weeks at that time. Although they were a little vexed at having their well-earned pass broken up, they returned willingly because they felt that it must surely be a most unusual circumstance and that it would not be a frequent occurrence. However, a few days later a maximum effort was called again. It was finally scrubbed, but not until crews had already been called back from London again. On 4th May, such a mission was called for a third time, and a pilot, who had gone to London with his crew the evening before for the first time in weeks, was recalled to the base. The mission was later cancelled and the pilot and crew returned to London to resume their pass. The next day, 5th May, a maximum effort was again called and this same crew was recalled to the base a second time in 24 hours. This mission was likewise scrubbed and they still had no leave after two attempts, neither was the mission run.

*4 + 5  
May  
mission  
scrubbed*

"It should not be necessary to point out just how disastrous this practice can be to the morale of the fighting men if this policy is continued. It completely nullifies the real purpose of a pass, that of complete relaxation in the knowledge that one will not be called on for duty within a definite period of time. As a result, our crews can no longer go into London with any more assurance that they not be called upon than if they were not on leave at all.

"It has long been recognized that regular and frequent leave is one of the essentials in the prevention of flying fatigue. Therefore, it would seem that it should be an extraordinary case indeed which would interfere with that policy, and especially should the cancellation of leaves after they are already in effect be most vehemently condemned. It would seem that such an effort can be justified only by a target vastly more important than any thus far assigned. It is difficult to see how the advantages the few extra planes operated by such means can possibly, at this time, outweigh the inevitable increase in flying fatigue and the tremendously decreased morale that most certainly will become apparent shortly.

"It is requested that operations of 'maximum effort' not be interpreted to include crews whose regular two-day passes are in effect."

Although the 25-mission tour had been instituted in early April, it was only after forwarding this letter that Maj. Shuller learned his previous letter concerning a definite tour had caused a "real flap" at 8th AF headquarters and had been instrumental in bringing about the definition of the combat tour.

Col. Tracy sent a reply to Maj. Shuller on 22 May:

"... I have taken up this matter with General Longfellow with little or no satisfaction insofar as getting results are concerned. Pressure from higher headquarters necessitates getting every possible plane in the air on 'maximum efforts' and now that we have been getting additional forces over here, instances such as you described probably will not be frequent. General Eaker has had a very difficult time convincing the arm-chair strategists back home that raids by American bombers from British bases are really worth while. The past year has been not only a trying one for the few original Groups that had to bear the brunt of carrying out the convictions of our Commanding General, but for General Eaker as well. He fully realized the tremendous load these crews were being asked to carry and certainly is aware that certain measures and means that were used to making the best showing with a small force operating under difficult personnel and supply conditions, were not the best from a standpoint of morale. However, he has won his fight for a large force of bombers over here and our original Groups have had to win it for him.

"I am heartily in accord with the opinions you have expressed concerning leaves and passes for combat crews and am taking the matter up with Colonel Grow to see if we cannot get a policy established that will exclude the possibility of personnel on pass, leave or D.S. (detached service) being recalled for any reason except a dire emergency."

Maj. Shuller commented to his diary on receipt of Col. Tracy's letter that it "would be small comfort to our boys down over in France."

On 13 May the largest force ever launched from Thurleigh, thirty-six planes, took off for Meaulte airdrome in France. Twenty-six planes were from the 306th; the additional ten were from the 94th Bomb Group which had been training for two weeks at Station 111 before being committed to combat operations. No planes were lost on this mission by either group; the next day they flew to Kiel and again all returned.

But on the 15th the fates conspired again to take three ships from the 367th Squadron. This day the 306th put up twenty-four planes and the 94th had thirteen. Maj. Henry W. Terry led the group to Wilhelmshaven, but weather prevented bombing the primary target. The bombs were dropped instead on the secondary at Helgoland and the Dune Islands with good hits observed on military targets. More than one hundred fighters, however, rose to attack the bombers.

S/Sgt. James J. Garris, a 367th gunner, was credited with downing the first enemy plane at 1040. Garris initially winged the enemy at 300 yards and the FW 190 went into a nose dive into the sea.

Damaged first by the Luftwaffe fighters and then by flak, 1st Lt. Alden T. Mann's 367th ship was the first to go down. The ball turret

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had been "red-lined" the day before and presumably repaired. But, because there was great pressure against aborts for "minor" reasons, when the crew found the ball turret inoperative again, the decision was made to continue the mission. ME 109s attacked Mann's plane and it was mortally wounded on their first pass. When last seen, the plane was going down with flames streaming out the waist windows. What the onlookers did not know was that the entire inside of the plane was filled with flames and that the crew members who jumped out were all badly burned.

Mann did get out of the plane but was critically burned and died several days later in the hospital at Schleswig. There with him was 2nd Lt. Lawrence E. Wolfe, navigator, who was supposed to be on leave. Wolfe had landed in the water after bailing out and was picked up by a German fishing boat. Extensive burns on his head, face, neck, hands and arms kept him in the hospital for six weeks before he was moved on to Stalag Luft 3. Wolfe's back-pack parachute had also been burned, but it let him down into the water slowly enough for him to survive.

1st Lt. Claude V. Toyek, bombardier, suffered broken ribs and minor burns. He bailed out behind the front escape hatch through holes made in the fuselage by 20 mm cannon shells. He landed in the water and was picked up by Danish fishermen forty miles north of Helgoland. The only other survivor was S/Sgt. Reginald G. Harris, a gunner who had plans for a wedding on 16 May to a Bedford girl, plans that had to be changed to an "indefinite" status.

A flak burst between the pilot and copilot killed the copilot, F/O Leo R. Kisamore. Others on Mann's crew who died that day were T/Sgt. Charles E. Myers, T/Sgt. Alfred M. Schatz, T/Sgt. Woodrow Mosbarger, S/Sgt. Sherman E. Coleman and S/Sgt. John C. McElroy.

Next the plane of 1st Lt. Frank B. Clemons, another 367th aircraft, was hit hard by flak or fighters, or perhaps both, as the air was filled with enemy ordnance that day. 2nd Lt. Louis S. Means, navigator, was knocked sprawling as an explosion in an ammunition can on the floor of the nose sent hundreds of shrapnel fragments into his right leg. His oxygen system began to burn and, as he lay on the floor of the nose, he could see red hydraulic fluid dropping from the pilot's compartment above him and to his rear.

Means informed Clemons of his condition and was told to prepare to bail out. In a few moments, "abandon ship" was called. Means crawled to the front escape hatch and finally jettisoned the door after a struggle. He was one of four to escape "Battling B" that day. The others were F/O James M. Clark, copilot; 2nd Lt. Oran R. Highley, bombardier, and T/Sgt. William J. Condon, engineer. After a long fall, Means opened his chute at about 8,000 feet. He had bailed out over water but, while floating down in his chute, Means drifted over land. His descent

Louis S.

took him to the outskirts of Cuxhaven. An ME 109 roared past, circled him and the pilot waved. After Means hit the ground and released his chute, a little old lady working beyond a nearby hedge waved to him.

"What a different reception than I had expected," later wrote Means. "Within a few minutes I had a hot cup of tea in my hand while a young girl was slitting my pants leg and giving me first aid for my wounds. The assembled crowd then wrapped my legs in my parachute to keep them warm and told me the ambulance would arrive in ten minutes. Half an hour later I was on the operating table at the big Naval hospital in Cuxhaven, tended by a surgeon who spoke perfect English." Despite the expert ministrations of the medical personnel at Cuxhaven, Means' right leg was eventually amputated and he was later removed to Stalag Luft 3. In early 1944 he was repatriated home aboard the S.S. Gripsholm.

6 KIA — Besides Clemons, other members of the crew killed that day were S/Sgt. John L. Mulherin, radio; S/Sgt. Donald A. Kind, ball; S/Sgts. Emil J. Miller and Reuben A. Carr, waist; and S/Sgt. Roy T. Fries, tail.

Lt. Gaylord O. Ritland's 367th plane had already developed mechanical problems before encountering the enemy and its number 2 engine was now feathered. But over Helgoland one of the prop blades on the number 4 engine was shot off and a direct hit in the oil tank on number 3 knocked that engine out of commission. With not much place to go, Ritland and his copilot, 1st Lt. John H. Winchell, managed to ditch the plane off Helgoland. No one was injured during the landing and all crew members had time to get into the two large dinghies. A one-engine ditching is hazardous under the best of circumstances and Ritland's crew had nothing but high praise for his skill in putting the plane safely into the water.

The downed airmen were in the dinghies for eighteen hours during which time a Lockheed Hudson flew low over them but never returned. Finally a German fishing boat which had been converted to air-sea rescue work picked them up and brought them to shore. Others on the crew were 2nd Lt. Richard S. Callaghan, navigator; 2nd Lt. William F. Granins, bombardier; S/Sgt. Aloysius N. Lambert, engineer; T/Sgt. Robert E. Lee, radio; S/Sgts. William S. Anderson and Harold J. Novak; and Sgts. Charles F. Miller and Gail V. Burkett.

With all of the missing planes coming from the 367th, a not unusual event in the Group, the Squadron seemingly merited the name with which it had been tagged in a *Saturday Evening Post* magazine article appearing about this time, the "Clay Pigeon" Squadron. The name stuck for the rest of the war, and beyond. These losses on 15 May brought the squadron total of missing aircraft to 22 since 9 October 1942 when the first plane the group lost was also a 367th ship.

Aside from the 367th losses, the rest of the formation was not without

at bottom:  
"Clay Pigeon" name given  
367th by ~~the~~ *Saturday Evening Post*

15 May cont'd

cont'd  
15 +

17 May

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activity on this mission. A 368th ship flown by Lt. Joseph M. Belser had a 20 mm cannon shell penetrate the nose and shatter against the support of the navigator's table. It filled the leg of 2nd Lt. George M. Arnold with metal fragments. Arnold continued his duties and was later awarded the Purple Heart and the Silver Star medals.

"Just before we got to the target," relates 2nd Lt. Reginald L. Robinson, piloting a new 368th plane, "an ME 109 hit us, first in the nose then in the number 4 engine. Our number 1 engine ran away and then the number 4 began smoking and, as we dropped back from the formation a bit, fighters came at us from every direction."

Sometime during the excitement of all of this, S/Sgt. Maynard B. Standley, the tail gunner, bailed out. No one on the crew was aware of this until the German fighters made it evident by their persistent and unanswered attacks from the rear. "They lined up on our tail and gave us hell," reads the interrogation report. During this melee, S/Sgt. Richard J. Tronzo, a waist gunner, knocked down two attacking Luftwaffe fighters, one at 1044 and the other thirty seconds later. Both pilots bailed out. S/Sgt. Louis T. Hlavac, radio, fired about thirty rounds at an attacking FW 190 triggering an explosion in the fighter's engine which was soon followed by a flaming dive into the sea near Helgoland.

Robinson, meanwhile, was taking his stricken plane down in diving turns until finally leveling off at 400 feet. The fighters left them soon after Helgoland and this crew came home across the North Sea on two engines at about 120 mph. Concludes Robinson, "We threw overboard everything in the ship that we could get our hands on. We landed at Thurleigh o.k., but the number 4 propellor dropped off as we hit the runway."

A commendation went to the group from Col. Putnam after this mission: "Warmest congratulations to every member of the 306th Bomb Group for outstanding accomplishments achieved during the first fifteen days of May. During this period we have continued to deliver our full quota of heavy blows to the enemy, both in occupied territory and in his homeland. In addition to this, we have made one half of a newly-arrived Group fully operational and have carried them through their intensive training period and their first three operational missions without a single casualty. This feat is all the more remarkable when it is considered, that well over one half of all crews who have been lost in action in this theatre were lost before they completed their first five missions."

On the 17th it was Lorient again, with twenty-one ships attacking the primary. Light fighter opposition was met. Still, two gunners did score victories: S/Sgt. Joseph C. Stoner, 369th, and S/Sgt. Paul J. Mardis, 368th.

17/11

19 May  
 A mission to Kiel on the 19th was uneventful and without losses, but it brought from Col. Putnam a blast that highlighted a number of faults in precise detail. He addressed his remarks to the commanding general of First Wing. First he cited the delayed takeoff, which was ordered after the 94th Group had already put twelve ships in the air. Because of weather it was impossible to bring the planes back into Thurlough when the mission was delayed, so they landed at Bassingbourne for refueling and another takeoff. This caused no end of confusion for the 91st, 94th and 306th Groups.

Then he commented on the changes in bomb loadings: "In this case our ships were about eighty percent loaded when the final change came in at a late hour. Armorers and ordnance personnel worked far into the night undoing the work that they had so assiduously performed previously, resulting in dangerous loss of sleep to these men, and, what is more important, a definite drop in morale."

There followed a lengthy comment on another group trying to intrude into the First Wing formation. "The problems presented by this incident are many," wrote Putnam. "In the first place, the present use of flares, with the coordination and knowledge displayed, does not seem to have solved the problem of Group identification. Secondly, a better quality of 'battle thinking' must be developed in order that such a thing is not allowed to happen again. Thirdly, a closer coordination must be developed between the Combat Wings, and among the individual groups, so that a rendezvous may be effected without any possible chance of a recurrence of this incident."

His fourth blast was saved for the 92nd Group: "It is again recommended that this Group not be required to participate in combat missions until such time as they demonstrate proficiency in maintaining the Combat Wing formation." His final charge concerned incendiary bombs, stating that too little was known about the ballistics of such bombs to warrant carrying them, saying "... the risk involved ... (is) out of proportion with the results attained."

31 May  
 Weather during the second half of May was more conducive to high altitude precision bombardment than it had been in some months. Continuing the assault on U-boat construction facilities, Wilhelmshaven was the target for the seventh time on the 21st. Lt. Col. J.W. Wilson was the leader on the mission, flying in a 367th plane piloted by Capt. Richard K. O'Hara. Capt. John G. Magoffin led the high squadron for the 369th and Capt. Edward J. Hennessy led the 368th's low squadron. The 306th was second in the bomber stream behind the 91st Group and was assigned the lowest bombing altitude for the day, 22,000 feet. Three groups from the 102nd Combat Wing followed. Twenty-one planes took off, two turned back with engine problems and two lost the formation in clouds and aborted the mission. Seven-

teen planes dropped 500-pound general purpose bombs with results that were deemed poor because of haze caused by smoke pot use in the target area. Intense opposition was encountered in the air.

1st Lt. Maxwell V. Judas and his 368th crew had had a narrow escape on 17 April at Bremen. Then the day before this mission they had wrecked a brand new plane on a practice mission. Now they found the fighter attacks on the bomb run overwhelming. A 20 mm cannon shell came through the cockpit, knocked out the windshield post, a control wheel and the throttle control handles. Judas himself was badly wounded in the right shoulder by the explosion: his copilot, 2nd Lt. Frank R. Arrison, Jr., was also hit by the same blast.

T/Sgt. Leland J. Kessler, a survivor of the ditching with Capt. William Melton on the original flight to England, was the only man in the front of the plane capable of normal movement as he was uninjured and he busied himself getting those still alive out of the plane. Arrison and 1st Lt. Foster G. Daniels, bombardier, died in the plane but Judas was able to parachute out. 2nd Lt. James O. Cummings, navigator, was for a long time believed to have died in the plane, but was later found to have lived. Others surviving were T/Sgt. Joseph R. Graziano, radio; S/Sgts. Elwood H. Brotzman and Gerald Stroud, waist; and S/Sgt. John R. Geimer, tail. The ball turret gunner, S/Sgt. Roy LaBlanche, died in the plane.

En route home the 368th plane of 1st Lt. Floyd J. Fields was first hit by fighters. Two engines were shot out and the attackers followed the plane down as Fields prepared to ditch. One wing was burning badly and when the plane struck the water it split in half at the radio room. Five men made it into the one good life raft that had popped from its storage bin. Only 2nd Lt. Irwin R. Efird, copilot, was unhurt. S/Sgt. Fortunato Gelfo, tail, sustained both a broken arm and a broken leg; 1st Lt. Harry L. Young, bombardier, had a crushed right elbow; T/Sgt. Roy T. Goodwin, engineer, suffered a gun shot wound in the groin; and S/Sgt. Harry D. Cromer, waist, was also injured. The men were in the North Sea for seven hours before the five survivors were picked up by a twin-engined German seaplane and flown to Helgoland where all were hospitalized. Those who drowned were Fields; 2nd Lt. Robert L. Clauson, navigator; S/Sgt. Philip J. Zimmerman, radio; S/Sgt. Morriece G. Moody, ball turret; and S/Sgt. August Retcofsky, waist.

The major drama of the day unfolded in and around the 423rd plane of Lt. Robert H. Smith. Smith's aircraft felt the brunt of the enemy defense, being hit by flak and fighters at the initial point of the bomb run. The number 3 engine was shot out at about the same time S/Sgt. Arthur R. Adrian sent an ME 109 diving into the water with his ball turret guns. By sheer determination and flying skill, Smith managed to keep his plane in the air. Right after bombs away the plane was

hit hard by flak and two superchargers were shot away. It dropped out of formation and the Luftwaffe pounced on it for the coup de grace. But it was not to come for a long time.

S/Sgt. Wayne J. Gray, flying in the nose as togglier, got the second kill and the flaming enemy plane almost hit "Dearly Beloved." The next attacker went to T/Sgt. Hendrik Kate who downed an FW 190 that had also been fired at by the engineer, T/Sgt. Bennett F. Buchanan. Fifteen German fighters swarmed on the plane at 17,000 feet as it was gliding downward with two engines feathered and a third streaming oil. Smith and his copilot, 2nd Lt. Robert McCallum (who had been copilot 1 May on the same aircraft with Snuffy Smith), fought desperately to control the plane.

The next attacking fighter went to Buchanan. Then Gray got his second. By now cannon shells were starting fires in the plane and S/Sgt. Clarence W. Durham had to leave his waist gun for firefighting duties. He controlled three separate blazes, turned back to his own guns and got an ME 109 just as Adrian was claiming his second from the ball turret. Perhaps the strangest event of the day, and one of those happenings long talked about, was in part the handiwork of S/Sgt. Billy Lamb, tail gunner. He was firing alternately at two attacking planes, one level and the other high and was scoring hits on both. The two pilots, intent on the attack, failed to see each other, collided and both plummeted into the sea. Score two for Lamb!

Adrian got his third, an FW 190, as the Fort was settling closer to the water, still pointed toward a distant England. Smith ordered his crew to prepare for ditching, even though a lone German fighter was still trailing them. As the enemy plane began shooting again, McCallum got out of his copilot's seat and took over the vacated top turret. A few well placed shots brought down the attacker and McCallum became the only copilot in 8th AF history credited with shooting down a German fighter.

At 1421 "Dearly Beloved" settled onto the long swells of the North Sea. The surface was almost glassy smooth, which eased the touchdown considerably. The radio hatch had been jettisoned and, as the plane slowed in the water, the crew scrambled out onto the wings and into the dinghies, neither of which had been damaged in their compartments atop either side of the fuselage. The pilots fought their way out of the side windows and Smith disappeared into the water. Lt. Daniel Barberis, bombardier, reached in, grabbed Smith's jacket and pulled him back onto the wing.

The record of seven enemy planes downed on a single mission set in November 1942 by Lt. "Wild Bill" Casey's crew was surpassed and the new record now became eleven by Smith's crew. The survivors talked about their turkey shoot while in the rafts, but that was not their

immediate concern. As they floated away from the plane, they lashed the two rafts together and under Smith's leadership completed the prescribed procedures for ditching and leaving the plane, which went down quickly. Touchdown was at 1421 and "Dearly Beloved" disappeared forever at 1423.

"We didn't have much food, but we rationed what there was," says Barberis. "Our main energy went into cranking the Gibson Girl emergency radio." (This radio was so named because of its curvaceous shape: it was designed to be held between the knees while being hand cranked, at which time a continuous tone went out so that ground stations could establish its position.) The Gibson Girl antenna was carried aloft by a balloon and during the moonlit night it caused some visual problems for the exhausted fliers; it appeared to be the same size as the moon and for a time was located right next to it. The SOS signals were heard in England, but no one was able to establish an accurate fix. The men remained awake all night, endeavoring to keep each other warm for the rescue which they "knew" was imminent.

The hours ticked on and during the second day the waves came up and a dense fog settled in. By afternoon spirits were beginning to sag and rescue seemed more and more remote to the stricken airmen. But the search was continuing and British crews were about, working in areas of limited visibility. Suddenly about 7 p.m. a British minesweeper almost ran over them. Frantic signals were exchanged and the ship hove to and quickly pulled the ten wet airmen aboard. Everyone had been drenched during the ditching when water poured in through the open radio hatch. "No matter how we tried, we just could not get dried out," says Barberis.

While combat wounds were minor, remembers Gray, the real problem facing all of the men was hives created by the mixture of salt water with wool clothing. This only eased with treatment and rest. Once aboard the minesweeper, each of the men was given a ration of rum and all promptly went to sleep on the long trip in to port. Their adventure in the water had begun only sixty miles off the coast of Germany and concluded in England.

When Smith's men arrived at the Air-Sea Rescue Station, Major John L. Lambert was waiting with a plane to take the newest heroes back to Thurleigh where they "boosted the morale of the group about 200 per cent," wrote Maj. Shuller. All were bundled off to rest homes for a week of complete relaxation, the officers to Stanbridge Earls at Romsey and the enlisted men to Moulford Manor, Berkshire.

Tragedy for the day was not restricted to the 306th, however. Three planes from the 94th Group, still stationed at Thurleigh, went on a mission to Emden and the crew of Lt. Wieand was lost in action.

Col. Putnam was never bashful about pointing out the errors of

other groups or of command decisions both in the air and on the ground. The day following the epic mission to Wilhelmshaven he addressed "Tactical Comments and Recommendations" to the commanding general of First Wing:

"1. It is recommended that, after the bombing force has left the extremely dangerous interception area, the leader be authorized to climb to about 25,000 feet in order that the navigator be given a chance to get a fix, using radio aids . . .

"2. The lead group of the 101st Combat Wing dropped their bombs much too early and immediately turned off the bombing run. Our Group continued on course to drop its bombs at the proper time and then was exposed to a severe attack by enemy fighters, since it was away from the protection of the lead Group for a few seconds. It is recommended that the lead Group be ordered to continue on the bombing run for such a length of time as to allow the following Groups to do their bombing.

"3. It is felt that it was extremely inadvisable to run this mission due to the problems presented by the very poor weather over the North Sea . . . Since it is our purpose to destroy enemy targets and not to joy ride over Germany, it is felt that this mission should have been cancelled because of weather along the route."

As often seemed to happen after a big one, there followed a lull in the action and the group was not up again until the 29th when it went to St. Nazaire to break up new construction observed around the sub pens. This appeared to be accomplished and the group returned without loss. Some air to air bombing was again reported, but the group made no claims for enemy fighters. On numerous occasions gunners reported at interrogation that they had seen German fighter planes above the bombers dropping bombs on the formations. Whether planes were actually hit by such devices is difficult to determine, but it points up only one of the various ideas tried by the Germans to dissuade the Americans from continuing their raids over Germany and its occupied territories.

11 June

## Chapter 10

# TRAGEDY STALKS THE 306th

## June 1943

June began as a slow month for the 306th. No missions were flown on the first ten days. Only on the eleventh were the crews finally able to get on with the war.

Of this mission which had been briefed for Bremen but bombed at Wilhelmshaven, Maj. Robert C. Williams, group operations officer, commented in a report to the commanding general of First Wing: "The mission should never have been flown under the weather conditions prevailing."

Writing for his commanding officer, Williams continued comments on the formation flying of the 92nd Group, echoing those Col. Putnam had made during May, calling the 92nd "... a menace to the rest of the Wing by their display of so-called formation flying." When queried later on this particular memo, Williams said Brig. Gen. Robert B. Williams' reply was a very pointed statement to cease such writing. Gen. Williams' more caustic replies were usually penned by Col. Bartlett Beaman, the Wing chief of staff, who was known far and wide as "Poison Pen" Beaman.

11 June

On this 11 June mission twenty-seven planes flew, with twenty-six of them over the secondary target. All of the planes came home and the group was credited with seven Luftwaffe defenders downed and one probable. The fury of the action can be judged from the 46,000 rounds of .50 cal. ammo expended.

Two days later Bremen was again on the briefing map; again twenty-seven planes were launched with twenty-seven over the target, the submarine building works. Aborts appeared to be slowing a bit. The 306th lost one plane on this mission, that of Lt. William H. Marcotte, a five-week 423rd veteran. Not only were Marcotte and his crew lost, but the 423rd also lost its veteran squadron adjutant, Capt. Charles R. Patten, who had flown as a waist gunner with Marcotte. Patten had visions of being a flyer himself; he thought that by completing twenty-five missions in any capacity he could be homeward bound and then get into pilot training. He saw another and less romantic side of the war when Germans on the ground fired at him while he was descending in his parachute. Once down, Patten was stood against a wall and he thought surely he would be shot. But nothing happened and he was taken into Bremen on his way to prison camp.

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Flying in the lead squadron of the formation, Marcotte's plane, like most of the aircraft in the formation, was hit in a heavy barrage of flak at bombs away. The plane received two distinct flak bursts, but after each blast the pilot was able to get the plane back into formation. However, when it was hit a third time the plane caught fire and the decision was quickly made to abandon the aircraft in the target area. (Lt. Thomas Witt, 367th, was also knocked out of formation at the same time, but made it home with a feathered engine.)

2nd Lt. Joseph Van Troyen, copilot, jumped from Marcotte's plane, and was seen a few moments later to be hit by a flak burst and killed. 2nd Lt. Marc F. Pitts, bombardier, also died that day.

Survivors, besides Marcotte and Patten, were 2nd Lt. Joseph M. Carvalho, navigator; T/Sgt. Edward J. Dostie, engineer; T/Sgt. Mason E. Houchens, radio; S/Sgts. Glenn Loveland, ball; Lawrence J. Huschle, waist, and Earl S. Mason, tail. These eight were all quickly in prison camps, but Loveland proved to be the kind of man often lectured about by escape experts.

He refused to knuckle under to the German camp authority and spent every waking moment studying ways in which to get out of the camp and elude recapture. It was not often done, most prisoners not wanting to risk being shot. Then too, most Americans had little facility with the language and almost no knowledge of German geography. Unlike occupied France and the Low Countries, there was no large civilian population interested in aiding the escape of wandering airmen.

Loveland's story did not become generally known until long after the war. It is retold in part as written in the first person by a 15th Air Force interrogator in 1944, after which the story was filed away:

"At Moosburg all nationalities were segregated and confined in separate compounds within the prison camp. The guards were, for the most part, soldiers who had returned from the Russian front and hated all prisoners. They were very brutal. The camp was laid out in the form of a large rectangle with a central street running the length of the area. The street was fenced off from the compounds by barbed wire. Each compound was surrounded by double rows of barbed wire and at each corner were guard towers. Inside the area of each compound there was a trip wire. We were instructed that if we went beyond the trip wire we would be shot by the guards in the tower. In the American compound the trip wire passed over the edge of a baseball diamond and during baseball games the men would sometimes forget the wire in the excitement of trying to retrieve a long hit. When this happened, the guards would immediately fire upon them. It was at such close range that the men were always killed with one shot. While I was at the camp ten Americans were killed in this manner.

"Opposite the American compound was the Russian compound. They were given very little food and most of them were starving. At times we would try to throw food across from our area into their compound. When the food would fall short and the men inside, crazed by hunger, would make an attempt to retrieve the food, they would be shot by the guards.

"The usual daily ration for the Americans consisted of one slab of margarine about one-half inch wide and two inches long, a quarter of a loaf of bread, a bowl of soup, and a small portion of jam every other day. In the morning we were given ersatz coffee.

"After one week here I began to save most of my food and make plans to escape. The food was inadequate, treatment was bad and the entire setup was unpleasant. I made up my mind to get out somehow. I managed to steal a pair of wire cutters from a Frenchman and then I waited my chance.

"I picked a foggy night about July 1 to make my first try. While the guard was at the far end of his post I cut the first string of barbed wire. Then I crept back into the shadows and hid. The guard returned to the end where I was hiding, turned, and began the trip back to the other end. As soon as he was out of earshot, I slipped through the hole, cut the outer wires and squirmed through into the fields beyond.

"I remained at large in the fields around Munich for a week and a half, living off the country, stealing what food I could and in general keeping myself as inconspicuous as possible because I was still wearing GI overalls. After reconnoitering the countryside and satisfying myself that it was possible to live off the land, I decided to return to the prison camp and make more extensive preparations. I returned one morning, after a week and a half of freedom, but the guards on duty at the gate ordered me away. I spent nearly a half hour convincing them that I really was an escaped prisoner of war. They finally admitted me, checked my story, found it was true, and put me in solitary confinement for four days as punishment. The guards were very much amused by the incident and couldn't understand why I had returned, which was just as well.

"I remained in camp for three weeks collecting a food supply from my Red Cross packages and making more plans. I waited until one morning when the Red Cross truck was in the compound unloading packages. When I got the chance I slipped under the bed of the truck and concealed myself between the chassis and an air compressor. In due time the truck moved out of the compound, but due to my discomfort and precarious position I decided to jump off when the truck slowed down about one kilometer away from the camp. I wasn't so fortunate this time and was spotted by a group of civilians who set up a hue and cry. The Red Cross truck stopped and picked me up and

before long I was back in the compound again. This escapade brought ten days of solitary confinement.

"After this second bid for freedom, I remained in camp for about a month before I tried again. I was aware that the prisoners in the Serbian compound were mostly elderly men and were not too well guarded. I also understood that they had some tools. I succeeded in bribing the guard on duty at the American compound with ten cigarettes to permit me to enter the main street. Then for an additional ten cigarettes I received permission from the guard on the Serbian compound to enter that area. I was accompanied in this enterprise by a Canadian prisoner. In the Serbian compound we secured an old pair of wire cutters and waited for nightfall.

"About midnight and in the midst of a downpour, we crept out of the compound and reached the first strand of barbed wire. With the first snip the cutters broke, alarming the guard. The floodlights around the area flashed on and both of us were afraid we'd be shot. My companion, paralyzed with fear, remained where he was, flattened out on the ground. I slipped along to the corner of a building and tried to conceal myself but was discovered and taken into custody by the guard only a few moments after they captured him. We were taken to the main office and the food we had collected for the trip was distributed to the guards. I was pretty 'browned off' to see all that good cheese go to waste. We were both given six days' solitary.

"While I was 'sweating out' this latest punishment, I determined that I would give my captors more trouble if possible. Using some cigarettes that were smuggled in to me by friends, I bribed the guard to let me out of the solitary confinement cell and into the English compound. My tentative plan was based on information that the English prisoners were under orders to leave for a new prison camp near the Russian front. If I could escape detection and get aboard the train I felt my chances of escaping en route would be reasonably good.

"Shortly after I entered the English compound, however, I heard another rumor which caused me to change my plans, namely, that the American compound was also going to be transferred. I resorted to bribery once more and succeeded in getting a clerk in the main office to transfer my records from the file of escaped prisoners back to the American file. I used the same method to get back to the American compound myself.

"On September 15th the Americans were moved. There were approximately 3,200 enlisted American personnel, all of whom had either parachuted or crash-landed on German territory. This time our destination was Krems, Austria. Once again we were herded like cattle into boxcars and began the five-day journey to Krems. I watched for an opportunity to make a break but none presented itself. Bomb damage

along the railroad right of way was tremendous and the entire system, even at that time, was in very bad shape. Several times it was necessary to halt the train while new tracks were laid in front of us and I lost count of the number of times the locomotive broke down during the trip. Food during the journey was fairly good but there was very little of it. What was given to us was furnished by the German Red Cross.

"At Krems, the prison camp contained all nationalities, again in separate compounds. Only enlisted personnel of the Air Forces were in our compound. The camp itself was situated on a mountain about eight kilometers from the city. Treatment was good and there was sufficient food. German officers in various uniforms mingled with the prisoners in the compound for the purpose of eliciting information. Most of these men were 'smooth customers' and generally their tactics consisted of engaging a man in conversation and then leading him into an argument during which items of military information would be painlessly extracted, usually without the subject even being aware of the fact.

"By the time two weeks had elapsed, I was once again at work planning my next escape attempt. Information was received in the camp, through the guards and from prisoners who had gone into town to pick up packages, that there were civilians in the area who would aid an escapee. It was a simple task to cut the barbed wire enclosure this time and I slipped out of the camp and struck out for St. Polten. I lost my way, however, and wandered around in the mountains for almost a week before I came to a town which I later learned was Wiener Neustadt. Here I was fortunate enough to contact some French laborers who took me in and gave me food, clothing and maps. I remained with them for only a day and then started out again.

"I went as far as Mattersburg but by this time my food supply had given out and I was afraid I would be unable to continue. I decided to take a chance and seek aid in one of the nearby houses. I selected the house and asked the woman who came to the door for something to eat and a place to sleep. She apparently recognized me as an escapee and told me I could not remain in her home. She summoned a little boy and directed him to take me to a place where, she informed me, I would be cared for.

"She was right. He led me directly to the police station where I was immediately jailed. While I was considering this latest turn of events, a woman entered the jail accompanied by two attractive girls of about 18 years of age. She came to the cell where I was being detained and started a conversation. After asking me numerous questions about conditions in the U.S. and about the events leading up to my capture, she asked me point-blank whether or not I would like to escape again. When I answered in the affirmative she promised to return and help me.

"She returned later in the afternoon with a shovel which she passed in to me. I presume she had taken care of the other necessary details because when the jailer left he unlocked the door and threw me a knowing wink. That night there was only one elderly guard on duty and long before midnight he was sound asleep. I left the cell as quietly as possible and walked out into the courtyard surrounding the jail. There was a wall enclosing the courtyard but I put the shovel to good use and managed to break a hole large enough to crawl through. Once again I was free.

"I set out for the Hungarian border and reached it without incident. At the border I encountered some miners who showed no particular interest in me. They gave me some food and told me I was now in Hungary. Encouraged by their apparent indifference I told them that I was an escaped prisoner of war and was trying to get back to the American forces. This proved to be a bad mistake for one man in the group was an ardent Nazi. He hurried away and before I had an opportunity to decide on a course of action, he had returned with the local police, who took me into custody.

"I was marched to the city of Sopron and from there I was taken to Komarom where I was once again incarcerated in a prisoner of war camp. The camp was composed principally of Russians with a few Italian Fascists. I was actively disliked by all the other prisoners in the camp for reasons unknown to me and I believe that if it had been possible for them to kill me they would gladly have done so.

"One attempt was made on my life during the month I remained at Komarom. I was approached one day by one of the Italian prisoners who informed me that there was another American prisoner in one of the camp buildings. I accompanied him to the second floor where the American was alleged to be but found instead another Italian waiting for us. They grappled with me and attempted to throw me from an open window, but I broke free and ran from the building.

"This little episode was sufficient to convince me that my position was anything but secure and that if I failed to take some steps to protect myself my chances of ever getting back to friendly territory would be virtually nil. I complained to an Hungarian colonel about the treatment I was getting, informing him that I was an American officer and as such was entitled to all the privileges befitting my rank. The colonel was very sympathetic and made arrangements to have me transferred to another camp. From this time on I stuck to my story of being a commissioned officer.

"Within a few days I was taken to another prison camp near the town of Szombathely. The treatment here was very good. Clothing was supplied by the Red Cross in Budapest and by the Hungarian and

Swiss legations. It was at this camp that I met Lieutenant Richard Bridges who remained with me during the rest of my travels.

"I remained at Szombathely for a month and a half. The prisoner personnel at the camp consisted mostly of high-ranking Polish officers, about 150 in all. Their status was not altogether that of prisoners of war but rather that of internees. Their families resided in the town and they were permitted to visit them with very little supervision. Relative freedom was granted Lt. Bridges and myself and we were permitted to visit the town almost at will, until one day I was caught in the act of purchasing a knapsack. Thereafter whenever we visited the town we were guarded very closely.

"We decided that if we were to escape from Szombathely, it would be necessary for one of us to go into town and make the initial contact with an underground organization. I conveniently became afflicted with a terribly painful toothache, and was dispatched to town under the watchful eye of a guard to visit the dentist. The guard, however, remained at a wine shop while I was with the dentist and this gave me an opportunity I was seeking to make the necessary contact. The only drawback to the plan was that I had to have a tooth pulled in order to allay suspicion.

"All the arrangements for our escape were made by the Underground and the details were not disclosed to me. All I know is that on the night of January 15 (1944) we walked boldly out of the prison camp in the company of a guard and boarded the 8:15 train for Szombathely.

"We arrived in Szombathely about nine o'clock and waited until midnight for a train to Budapest. Arriving in Budapest the next morning at nine o'clock, we were taken directly to the home of the guard who was escorting us. The necessary supplies had been arranged for and were waiting us at his home. During our brief stay in Budapest we ate in restaurants in the center of the city, accompanied by our friend and others who were in on the plan. We were given \$50 in green seal U.S. currency and 5000 kulas in Serbian money by the leader of the organization, who did not reveal his identity. In addition, we were taken by a woman who spoke English to several shops in Budapest where civilian clothes were purchased.

"Before leaving Budapest we were taken to visit an English colonel who had been a prisoner of war in Germany and had escaped into Hungary. The colonel had a radio transmitter and he told us that he was in touch with Allied authorities. Our friends introduced us to an Allied officer whom they said would leave Budapest with us. We gave him the 5000 kulas and \$40 of the U.S. currency to cover expenses.

"That night we boarded a train in Budapest and rode all night, detraining the next morning at a small town where we met, by pre-

arranged plan, an 18-year-old girl who took us to her home. Preparations for the trip over the mountains to the Yugoslav border included having cleats affixed to our shoes. This night we set out with full packs and accompanied by six Hungarian guides and two Allied friends. At the border we encountered four Hungarian guards who surrounded our party, and at gun point forced us to return to the town we had just left. One of the two foreigners escaped on the march back, but the rest of us were imprisoned under guard in the cellar beneath the Governor's mansion. We were interrogated several times but all of their attempts to elicit information about those who had helped us escape were stubbornly resisted.

"The following day we were taken by train to Pecs where we were placed in a very modern prison. The administration of the prison was very poor and in some cases women were detained in the same cells with men. We were told that we would be severely punished for our attempted escape, but that if we would give them the information they desired, namely the identity of those who had assisted us, we would be treated excellently. After two days, during which we refused to answer any questions, we were taken back to Komarom to the Russian prison camp from which I had been recently transferred.

"Strangely enough, we were treated much better this time and each day we were permitted to go into town for four hours. It wasn't too bad a life at this point. The Hungarian colonel who had befriended me and arranged for my transfer from Komarom when I had been there previously, came up from Budapest on a routine inspection. He sent for us and told us that our attempt to escape was very silly.

"Three weeks later, Lt. Bridges and I were transferred to a prison camp at Siklos. The camp was supposed to be a punishment camp but the only punitive measures were confinement. We were permitted no such liberty as we had enjoyed at Szombathely.

"We remained at Siklos for a month and a half, until sometime in March. There were eleven other Americans in the camp and we were all treated very well by the guards. The food was also good. About this time the Germans occupied Hungary and took over all prisoners, including Lt. Bridges and myself. We were sent to Zemun together where we were placed in a large prison camp. It was impossible to estimate the total number of prisoners but they were of all nationalities.

"The camp was situated across the river from Belgrade which was selected by the USAAF as a target two weeks after our arrival. The heavy bombers came over in force and the resulting confusion in the camp came as the guards fled for cover. Lt. Bridges and I, together with a number of others, made a mass break. We made our way into the country and after wandering about for a week or so, we approached a shepherd and asked for cigarettes. He proved to be a Partisan and

recognized us as American airmen. He immediately contacted the Partisan organization and we joined forces with them.

"For the ensuing three months we remained with various Partisan groups, playing hide and seek with German patrols and moving frequently from place to place to avoid recapture. On the night of July 20th we were evacuated from Yugoslavia and arrived in Italy."

Loveland came back to Thurleigh in late summer of 1944 and was quickly put to work by 8th AF, speaking to airmen on escape techniques. He continued this for several months until illness finally brought about his transfer home.

After Bremen the bomber crews gained nine days of rest because of bad weather. They were not in the air again until the famous raid on Huls 22 June.

On the 20th the Group saw the transfer of its third commanding officer, Col. Claude E. Putnam, who went to First Wing where he became operations officer. "Claude Putnam was the finest combat commander I had any association with," Brig. Gen. Heywood M. Hansell, Jr., commander of First Wing during early 1943, later told the author. "He was prepared to lead every mission and instilled an excellent spirit in his men."

A battle hardened veteran of the 303rd Group, Lt. Col. George L. Robinson, was transferred to Thurleigh to become the fourth commander of the 306th Bomb Group. On leave in London, Robinson arrived back at Molesworth to be informed that he would leave his duties there as deputy commander for a new role in the air war. Robinson, another superb flyer and combat leader, had gone to England as group operations officer for the 303rd, having first joined that group at Boise, Idaho, 11 March 1942 as a captain.

Frequent commendations appear in Robinson's personnel file for his abilities as a leader of combat missions. He had received the Silver Star for the mission of 18 March 1943 and continued to receive decorations for his coolness under fire. Unlike some, Robinson preferred to fly his own lead plane, as well as act as air commander, and he soon led the 306th into combat.

On 22 June other changes saw the departure of Lt. Col. James W. Wilson, first commander of the 423rd Squadron and more recently group deputy commander. He was transferred to First Wing and then to the 101st Provisional Wing. Succeeding him as group deputy commander was Maj. Henry W. Terry, Jr., originally a pilot with the 367th Squadron and for some months commander of the 369th Squadron. This last change brought Capt. Robert P. Riordan as the new commanding officer of the 369th. Riordan was a much decorated pilot from the original group who had demonstrated an ability to function well under stress in combat.

22 June '43

25 June

22 June "Twenty-four aircraft led by Capt. Marlen Reber took off and twenty effectively bombed the synthetic rubber plant at Huls, Germany," reads the Group Diary for 22 June. "It won't be necessary to go back on this target again." From all accounts, the bombing was superb this day and set the synthetic rubber production of the Reich back to dismal proportions.

Again the 367th Squadron led the way with the only loss the Group suffered, as 2nd Lt. James W. Johnson's plane, "Janell," went down. Johnson and most of his crew had flown their first raid on 13 June to Bremen. Only Bombardier Edward S. Gast had an additional raid to his credit. Other crew members who went down with Johnson were F/O H.M. Dunn, copilot; Lt. Norman H. Simpson, navigator; S/Sgt. George LaRubio, engineer; S/Sgt. D.W. O'Connor, ball; T/Sgt. L.B. Hansen and S/Sgt. Mike Shuta, waist; and S/Sgt. Rob G. Bell, tail. Four enemy fighters were claimed by 306th gunners for the day.

25 June Col. Robinson chose 25 June as the first day on which he would lead his group which was designated to lead the 102nd Combat Wing. It was miserable flying weather with heavy cloud cover obscuring the primary at Hamburg. Robinson was able to see Bremen and he led the wing in that direction; twenty-one aircraft from the 306th dropped their bombs on a Target of Opportunity.

Flak was heavy at Bremen. Lt. Thomas E. Logan's plane was hit hard before reaching this target with the number 3 engine taking the most punishment. Just before the group bombed, Lt. Logan salvoed his bombs and fell out of formation. The Luftwaffe planes in the vicinity swarmed over the aircraft, flying formation with it while sharpening up their gunnery. Logan was headed west, trying to get down from the 25,000 foot bombing altitude to a cloud layer at 5,000 feet where he might find respite from his attackers. But the dive was too much for the plane and, during the pullout, the elevators came off. Logan ordered his crew to bail out in the vicinity of Amsterdam.

Members of the crew who jumped and survived were Logan, Lt. Maurice W. Davis, copilot; Lt. Eugene F. Dornbrook, navigator; Lt. Donald W. Cox, bombardier; Sgts. Selden M. Wentworth, Howard V. Wilson, Antonio Romero, Jack C. Webb and Frank M. Porcelli. Sgt. Albert Swartz, radio, was killed when his chute did not open. Lt. Logan learned later that Swartz had a deathly fear of leaving the plane; the crew had to put his parachute on him and toss him out a waist window.

Wilson, an original combat crewman with the group, was on his 25th mission, flying as ball turret gunner. When flak shattered his turret, Wilson was badly wounded in the hip and back. He managed to get out of the turret, hobble to the rear exit and bail out. He landed in an irrigation ditch and, although picked up immediately, almost lost a leg when he was given no medical treatment of any kind for a week. Once

body  
found  
up

he arrived at Stalag Luft 17B he came under the care of an American doctor who had been captured in Italy.

Officers of the 423rd Squadron were planning a party for the night of 26 June because on this day Capt. Raymond Check, an original pilot and a very popular member of the squadron, would be completing his twenty-fifth mission, along with his navigator, 1st Lt. M. Prue Blanchette. A short hop over the Channel to an airfield at Tricqueville looked like an ideal run for those winding up tough combat tours. Because it was Check's last ride, Lt. Col. J.W. Wilson, his original squadron commander, came back to Thurleigh to fly with him.

As the crew was preparing for the mission, it was noted that a waist gunner was needed. Lt. William Cassidy, Check's regular copilot who had had his seat preempted by Col. Wilson, said that he needed a milk run as badly as the next person and would fly as the waist gunner, a circumstance which proved most fortuitous for members of this crew. The takeoff of twenty-one planes at 1555 was uneventful, and the mission proceeded to Tricqueville under the command of Maj. Henry W. Terry. Two planes aborted and nineteen were on the bomb run.

Col. Wilson was flying in the left seat and Check was serving as copilot as the nineteen planes turned on the bomb run. At almost the time of "bombs away," Check's plane was hit by 20 mm cannon fire in the cockpit area by a German fighter attacking out of the sun. One shell exploded just above Check's head, sending fragments into the cockpit and killing Check instantly, nearly decapitating him. At the same time a machine gun bullet hit the flare box behind the pilot's seat and 20 mm fragments punctured the oxygen system.

Check was dead; T/Sgt. James A. Bobbett, engineer, was wounded and flames were dancing through the cockpit area, severely burning Col. Wilson's hands and face. Bobbett fought the fire and extinguished it. When the flares exploded, the concussion blew open the bomb bay doors and the doorway behind the top turret was filled with flames, reported Lt. Cassidy from his vantage point in the waist.

The alarm bell rang! Lt. Lionel Drew, bombardier, squeezed between Lt. Blanchette and Maj. George Peck, a visiting surgeon who insisted on flying, and bailed out. Those in the rear of the plane were preparing to jump when Lt. Cassidy told them to wait while he investigated; the plane was flying all right and the engines at the moment sounded good. Cassidy pushed through the radio room, across the bomb bay catwalk, crawled through the turret frame and came up between Wilson and the bloody body of Check. The plane was in a climb and Cassidy reached in and pushed the yoke forward to get a more level flight attitude while he assessed the situation.

Col. Wilson turned to him and motioned Cassidy to take the oxygen mask off his burned face. Cassidy shook his head that he would not,

Wilson had been flying the plane with his elbows as long strands of skin hung off both hands. Wilson finally forced his mask off, got out of the left seat and went down to the nose where Dr. Peck was. Sgt. Bobbett had already been there for treatment of his wounds.

Once the way was cleared, Cassedy got into the left seat, trying to ignore the body of his close friend and flying mate a couple of feet away from him. He began to get the plane oriented for the short flight over the English coast and north to Thurleigh. Soon Col. Wilson came back to the flight deck and, as the English coast disappeared under the nose of the plane, he motioned for Cassedy to take the aircraft down and land. Cassedy, a second lieutenant, ignored the hand motions and the implied order and kept the plane churning northward toward Thurleigh. He reasoned that medical treatment for the wounded would be faster and better at the home station than at some other base. There were other problems for him to consider as well. As they closed in on the base how was he going to handle the traffic problem and the landing pattern?

In all of the intense enemy activity, the plane had had its flare gun destroyed and it was therefore unavailable for signalling. The radios had also been shot out. Cassedy did not think the plane was in condition to fly by the tower to convey any messages. He did not want to get into the traffic pattern already being flown by the other aircraft of the group that had arrived before him. Nor did he think that to land on one of the short runways intersecting the main runway was the safest way to get on the ground either. There was another complicating factor in all of this, a human equation that must have run through Cassedy's mind during these tense moments. A big party was being planned that evening and among those attending was an American nurse. Check and the nurse were to be married the next day. She was in a jeep at the end of the active runway waiting with others for the momentous conclusion of Check's tour. Not wishing to bring his planeload of misery to a stop there, Cassedy decided to land down wind, against the oncoming traffic and to take his chances.

As he came in on final approach the planes flying in the opposite direction sensed a problem and pulled up. Cassedy brought his craft in for a smooth landing and pulled off the runway at the far end of the field, away from the waiting crowd. When the engines wound down and the switches were off, Cassedy raised himself out of the seat and, with a long, tearful look at his good friend Check, dropped down into the nose and lowered himself out of the plane.

Col. Robinson was waiting. "What's the situation?" he asked.

"Check's dead and all of the others are hurt except the doc and me," Cassedy replied. Asked why he had not signalled, Cassedy explained the devastation inside the plane. No question was ever raised again on the propriety of his actions.

When the medals were passed out Cassidy received a Distinguished Flying Cross. A Distinguished Service Cross went to Col. Wilson: "... despite the excruciating pain from burns which left his hands almost without skin, and with complete disregard for his personal safety, Lieutenant Colonel Wilson courageously flew his airplane on to the target and successfully bombed it. Taking violent evasive action to ward off enemy fighters who concentrated their attacks on his crippled aircraft, this officer heroically fought his way back to the English Coast," reads the citation for Col. Wilson's medal.

Col. Wilson was taken to Oxford General Hospital for treatment of his serious burns. He says that he is eternally grateful to the chief of surgery there who day after day told his staff, "Let's wait another day," before beginning skin grafts. Slowly the hands healed themselves and permitted him to retain full use of his fingers, which could have been restricted in movement by skin grafts.

At this point one might conclude that only Check's plane had really been on a raid this day, but that was not true. Six planes were damaged, according to the Group engineering report, most of them by .50 cal. ammunition, except for a 368th plane flown by Lt. George E. Paris, Jr. It had no heavy flak damage but was hit hard by 20 mm cannon fire: damage consisted of shell holes in the dorsal fin, the inner structure of the left wing between number 1 and number 2 engines was damaged, number 3 propellor was hit, number 1 and number 2 engines were severely damaged and the left tire was ruined.

The group was credited with four enemy fighters destroyed. At 1745 Lt. James S. Cheney, navigator for Lt. Frank M. Kackstetter, downed an ME 109. Cheney fired one hundred rounds into the plane as it came in at 2 o'clock high. The ball turret gunner, S/Sgt. Walter Piotrowski, saw the plane hit the ground. Sgt. Bruce A. Hardy, ball turret gunner, got the next ME 109 five minutes later. This one went into a dive and plunged into the Channel. Sgt. Frederick E. Hutchison, flying in a 367th plane, got the third at 1758, an FW 190. This also hit the Channel. S/Sgt. Fred H. Nabors in Lt. Oleron S. Linn's aircraft got the last at 1800 as an ME 109 burst into flames and went into a spin.

While there was great drama in the sky for a short period of time, another drama was beginning in Northern France for Lt. Lionel Drew, the bombardier who bailed out of Check's plane when the alarm bell went off. Drew tells in his escape and evasion narrative of the head-on fighter attack, that he could actually see the open ends of the muzzles of the 20 mm cannon in an ME 109 which fired into the cockpit of the plane. Drew did not wait when the bell rang for a second invitation, but made his way between Lt. Blanchette and Major Peck and dived out of the nose hatch, just missing the ball turret. "The plane started to shiver; I thought it had stalled and that I had better get out," Drew said later.

From 23,000 feet Drew could see England as he began his descent by parachute, opening the canopy at 10,000. At a thousand feet he could see that he would hit in a hayfield. A French farmer and his son were working on a haystack there when suddenly the boy looked up to spot Drew near the ground. Drew hit, rolled over and in so doing sprained a knee though he didn't realize it until later. He picked up his chute and crouched while running to a hedge on one side of the field. Taking off his chute harness and Mae West, he found he could not hide them in the hedge, so he covered them with grass.

The farmer came over and asked in German, and then in broken English, if Drew could speak French. "I'm an American airman," answered Drew. The farmer asked for his papers, but Drew showed him only his dog tags, and the man seemed satisfied. Drew says the farmer spoke a smattering of English, but seemed far more interested in the mission flown that day than in Drew himself. The farmer reported that there were Germans very near and that they would certainly be searching.

"He seemed most worried about the woman on the next farm," says Drew, "as she was a known collaborator." Within a brief time she showed up with two Germans and searched within a hundred yards of where Drew had been concealed in a blackberry thicket. The farmer hid Drew's Mae West and flying boots. About an hour later he brought food and drink and said he would bring clothing that night; for the present Drew must remain hidden and quiet as the Germans were conducting a thorough search for a parachutist.

About nine that night the Frenchman returned, signalling for Drew to follow him to his house where he hid him in a hayloft. Drew had bandaged his hands with his silk scarf, as he had suffered cuts on both hands on the escape hatch of the plane. Supper was served to him that night in the house, and he spent the night in the hayloft after agreeing not to identify the farmer if he was found by the Germans. In the morning Drew was taken back to the blackberry thicket. In the afternoon he was again moved to the barn where shortly a lone German soldier showed up to conduct a search. In a classic ploy, the milk girl there engaged him in such lengthy conversation that he never made the intended search; Drew's hiding place remained safe. He stayed in this area for five days while arrangements were made for his journey out of France. Little did he realize the adventures that still awaited him.

Once the underground picked him up, Drew was taken to Pont-L'Eveque, and kept in an inn there for a week. The room next to this was occupied by a high ranking German naval officer.

"Pierre" picked him up on a Sunday afternoon and they rode a tandem bicycle fifteen miles to a farm where Drew became one of the

occupants of a secluded tenant cottage. Also living there was "Andrew", a Frenchman who wanted to get to England. Andrew had food, and for amusement they played checkers during what developed into a six-week sojourn in the place.

Later Drew was picked up and taken to Paris by train, meeting first an RAF Lancaster crew and then joining up with other Americans and a Norwegian. For reasons now unknown, Drew was sent off to the south of France, then back to Paris, and on to Brittany where he stayed with a French couple for three weeks. Picked up again by the Underground, he was integrated into a group of 18 to 20 evadees who were being moved to Brest. There he spent six to eight weeks living in the home of a doctor. Finally arrangements were completed for the entire group to go out by submarine. They were trucked to a coastal area and walked to an isolated island at low tide. They lived in a cave there for five days, existing on shellfish, before the attempt was abandoned. Three weeks later a British PT (patrol torpedo) boat also tried to pick them up. The evadees had dinghies and rowed around in them all of a dark night, but never contacted the PT boat.

Drew ended up back in Brest, first at the doctor's home for a few days, and then in an apartment for three weeks. Christmas night was the time scheduled for another departure. This time a PT boat came in towing two whale boats manned by Canadian commandoes with blackened faces. The coded BBC message for the rescue attempt of the large group was: "The time has come to remove the chestnuts from the fire." Drew arrived in London wearing a British uniform and was identified there by Capt. Degland Kenealy, 423rd Squadron operations officer.

Two days after Capt. Check's death, the same fate befell Sgt. Richard J. Daly, a tail gunner flying his 25th mission with Lt. Keith Conley's 369th crew. In a brief flurry of gunfire Daly was hit and killed. He was found in his assigned position by Lt. Immanuel Klette, copilot, who came back to check after Daly failed to respond to a crew check in. Klette took Daly out of the tail position and moved his body into the radio room for the trip home. This was a significant day for the 369th Squadron as it marked its 35th consecutive mission without losing a plane; the only personnel loss during that time was Daly.

On the following day, June 29, the 306th flew its fiftieth combat mission, led to Paris by Capt. Marlen Reber who was on his 25th mission. His combat career was marked by his being the first 8th AF pilot to complete a tour without ever having aborted a mission. It also was the 25th mission for Capt. John G. Magoffin, a 369th flight commander and the first replacement pilot to complete a full combat tour with the group; Magoffin had arrived at Thurleigh on 15 January.

on June 29th

With the 50th mission finished for the 306th, it found twenty officers had completed combat tours: 1st Lt. Eugene J. Pollock, 423rd navigator; 1st Lt. Lewis P. Johnson, 423rd pilot; Capt. Robert W. Smith, 423rd pilot; 1st Lt. Gerald D. Rotter, 369th bombardier; Capt. Robert P. Riordan, 369th pilot; Capt. Pervis E. Youree, 423rd pilot; 1st Lt. Edward P. Maliszewski, 369th pilot; 1st Lt. George S. Horner, 423rd bombardier; Capt. George J. Spelman, 369th navigator; Capt. Edward J. Hennessy, Jr., 368th pilot; Capt. Harold E. Gaslin, 423rd navigator; 1st Lt. Emmett W. Ford, 423rd bombardier; Capt. John H. Dexter, 367th navigator; 1st Lt. M. Prue Blanchette, 423rd navigator; 1st Lt. William J. McKearn, 367th pilot; 1st Lt. Clyde J. Travis, 369th bombardier; Capt. John G. Magoffin, 369th pilot; Capt. Marlen E. Reber, 368th pilot, and 1st Lt. Luther Bergen, 368th navigator.

It is believed that thirty-three enlisted men had flown full tours by this time: T/Sgt. Michael Roskovitch, 423rd radio; T/Sgt. James M. Hobbs, 423rd ball; T/Sgt. Andrew Bezak, 423rd engineer; T/Sgt. Charles M. Counts, 423rd radio; T/Sgt. Nicholas M. Sawicki, 423rd engineer; T/Sgt. Harold C. Greene, 369th tail; T/Sgt. George Klucick, 367th engineer; S/Sgt. Glen R. Wyly, 368th engineer.

T/Sgt. Waverly C. Ormond, 368th radio; S/Sgt. August J. Krajcik, 368th tail; T/Sgt. Anthony L. Santoro, 369th engineer; T/Sgt. Jess F. Williams, 369th tail; T/Sgt. William J. McDonald, 369th toggler; T/Sgt. John K. Crowther, 368th engineer; T/Sgt. William E. Hull, 423rd waist; S/Sgt. William V. Baker, 423rd tail; S/Sgt. Kenneth N. McClure, 423rd ball.

T/Sgt. Albert N. McMahon, 369th tail; T/Sgt. Richard L. Bohland, 368th waist; T/Sgt. Robert D. Dwiggin, 369th waist; T/Sgt. William G. Hicks, 367th ball; S/Sgt. James A. Bobbett, 423rd engineer; T/Sgt. Orville B. Schulz, 369th radio; T/Sgt. Harold K. Fowler, 369th waist; T/Sgt. Peter W. Pappas, 369th ball; T/Sgt. Theodore A. Rosato, 369th tail; S/Sgt. Peter P. Nolasco, 369th ball; T/Sgt. Harvey L. Cox, 369th tail; S/Sgt. Cecil B. Smith, 369th waist; S/Sgt. Walter Piotrowski, 423rd ball; T/Sgt. Jacob K. Kirn, 423rd radio; and T/Sgt. Chester Wendolowski, 367th engineer.

Thus June was a very eventful month for the 306th with combat losses at lower ebb than in previous months, but with combat activity at a high pitch. It also provided two of the best stories to come out of the entire period of combat: Capt. Raymond Check's last mission was talked about until April 1945, while the tale of Sgt. Glenn Loveland's escape from a German prison camp did not really become known to many until well after the war was over.

Without question, the biggest story of all was that large numbers of men could survive a combat tour of twenty-five missions. The fabric of war in the air was changing and the change would intensify as the war

went on. Those who flew in late 1942 and early 1943 fought a very different war from those who came later. After the group's second anniversary in England it changed even more.

The 306th in fifty missions had become a battle hardened organization and visitors were frequently brought to Thurleigh to see a bombardment group that had taken the worst the Germans could offer and still fought on. The men were constantly changing, as was the leadership in the group and squadrons, but the spirit that had marked the group from the very first remained.

On 27 June Sir Anthony Eden, British foreign secretary, was a visitor at Thurleigh, accompanied by Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers, commanding general, ETO; Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker, commanding general, 8th AF; Brig. Gen. Newton Longfellow and Brig. Gen. Frank A. Armstrong, the onetime 306th commander. Col. George L. Robinson was their host as they inspected the flying area and the rest of the base.

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## Chapter 11

# FIRST SCHWEINFURT

## July-August 1943

4 July

Independence Day 1943 was celebrated by the 306th with a trip to Nantes, France, to bomb an aircraft factory. Seven victories were scored against the Luftwaffe on this mission and the group did not lose a single plane.

10 & 11 July

On the 10th and 11th of July the crews journeyed to Villacoublay, again against aviation-related targets. The first day they dropped on the Caen-Carpiquet airdrome because of 10/10ths cloud cover at the primary. The second trip, on the French Bastille Day, was a big one for the tail gunners; against repeated attacks from out of the sun on the rear of the formation the gunners scored six victories.

15 July

15 July was a holiday from the war as Snuffy Smith received the Medal of Honor from the secretary of war. The only flying that day was the ceremonial flyover to honor the event.

17 July  
recalled

The 306th headed for Hannover on 17 July, but the mission was recalled at the Dutch coast. German fighters flew close escort for the bombers back almost to the English coast. Three of the attackers were downed en route by 306th gunners.

A new target in a new country was laid on for 24 July when the group was briefed for a mission to Heroya, Norway, the longest flight to date assigned to the group. The crews were in the air for eight and one-half hours, most of it over water with a climb from a 2,000 foot cruising altitude to 15,000 feet for bombing. The 8th AF put up 180 planes of which thirteen returned early and 167 bombed the target. One plane was lost and five men were wounded.

sh. loc 24

Perhaps the story of the Heroya raid is best told in the USAF manuscript, *Combined Bomber Operations*. "One of the most remarkable of the 8th's second phase missions was the 23 July raid on a newly-constructed magnesium, aluminum and nitrate works at Heroya, 70 miles southwest of Oslo, Norway. The *Bi-Monthly Report of Bombing Results* reported tremendous destruction 'among installations vital in the operations of the works', but more remarkable was the execution of the large-scale mission in very difficult weather conditions . . . In addition to the 167 B-17s which dropped 414.3 tons of bombs at Heroya, forty-one bombed the submarine base at Trondheim, and a third force, finding its target cloud-covered, returned to base with its bombs. Many of these planes made a round trip of 1,900 miles, yet only one failed to return. The Norwegian mission was executed because of

the importance of the targets and because weather over Europe did not permit a mission to Germany that day, but primarily to encourage a dispersion of German fighter defenses."

A more recent report from Norsk Hydro on the matter reads: "The target for the attack at Heroya was the works belonging to Nordisk Aluminium A/S. The Germans were building plants at Heroya at that time in order to produce the lightmetals Magnesium and Aluminium due to its importance in the war. Those constructions, not yet ready for production, were situated close to Norsk Hydro's factories for nitrogenous fertilizers. Consequently Norsk Hydro's factories as well were damaged pretty hard during the attack.

"The attack was by US 8. Air Force aeroplanes and in total 1500 bombs or approx. 300 tons were dropped. The damages on Nordisk Lettmetall were so severe that the Germans definitely cancelled all further plans concerning the lightmetal production at Heroya during the war. The production of magnesium was, however, started in 1951 based essentially on the German constructions."

Capt. Roy A. Vinnedge with his bombardier, Lt. Michael M. Zinkovich, led the 306th on their 25th and last missions. The two navigators in the lead ship were Lts. Kermit B. Cavedo and David MacGhee. That day they were flying in "Fightin' Bitin'," 42-25426, a plane with which Cavedo had a special attachment and one which lasted four months and five days in combat; it met its end over Kiel four days after this raid.

Cavedo liked the numerical connection between the 369th Squadron and the Fightin' 69th regiment of World War I out of New York. So, with some literary license, he arrived at "Fightin' Bitin'" as the name for the plane and painted a special emblem on it showing two insects sparring. The name caught on, as did the emblem and became the nickname and insignia of the 369th Squadron throughout the remainder of its life with the 8th AF.

The 306th was flying as the second group in the formation, trailing the 92nd Group to Heroya, but in the target area the 306th took over the lead when it became apparent that the 92nd had lost sight of the target. Heroya was overrun and bombed after a 180 degree turn with the 306th placing the first bombs on the target. Those two hundred men of the 306th over Heroya that day will be surprised to learn from the 92nd Group history, *The Route as Briefed*, that "Col. (William M.) Reid's brilliant leadership in setting up a new bomb run after weather conditions had prevented following the briefed one earned him the award of the Silver Star."

The 306th Intelligence Report for the mission, signed by Maj. John B. Wright, states: "Bombing. Looked to be right on nose. Lead Group missed target which permitted our lead bombardier to pick up A.P.

copy  
7/24

(aiming point) and drop first bombs. Heavy black smoke was seen billowing up at estimated 5000'. Probably won't have to go back there again."

The 306th planes were hit by flak at Heroya and, at 1342 off the coast near Christiansand, they saw eight red bursts. Then came the big surprise; they were jumped by German fighters.

Levity in the lead ship at this time was described by one of the navigators: "Headed back for England, cigars were passed around because it was the last mission for the pilot and bombardier. All the cigars had been lighted when ME-109s attacked suddenly and Cavado almost swallowed his 'stogey' in his haste to reach his guns. The attackers were driven off and the crew lighted another round of cigars. The German fighters promptly dived in again, but when that was over the cigar supply was exhausted and the celebration had to be postponed."

Seven planes were damaged, but only 42-5086 was seriously hit. As the flight home looked peaceful, Capt. David H. Wheeler got out of the pilot's seat to check on the gunners, 1st Lt. Donald R. Winters took over the controls. Looking out a waist window, Wheeler saw movements on the ground — German fighters taking off — and as the formation was at only 2,000 feet, it did not take long for the enemy to arrive.

"I dashed back for the cockpit and arrived in time to see two ME-109s coming in high," says Wheeler. "I pulled the nose up and the fighters pulled up. I pushed the nose down and the fighters screamed across the top of the plane, firing as they came." A 20 mm cannon shell shattered the instrument panel causing lots of smoke in the cockpit; fragments from the same shell hit Lt. Duane Bollenbach, the navigator, in the temple. Bollenbach, whose flak helmet was then hanging on the bulkhead nearby, was in critical condition. Lt. Floyd A. Evans, bombardier, held Bollenbach's bleeding head in his arms for the five hours on the way back to Thurleigh.

During the melee a fighter came up under the tail of Wheeler's plane and almost cut the tail gunner's position open, seriously wounding Sgt. Raymond L. Norris in the legs. The damage left Norris nearly hanging out of the plane. As the group made a turn towards England, Wheeler found that his aileron cables had been shot out and he was unable to turn. Letting down further, Wheeler began maneuvering the plane with his engines and, as fighters were still nearby, he took the aircraft into some cloud cover. Quickly the crew became aware that German planes were still firing at them; then they realized that the clouds were thin and, although the fuselage was concealed, the big Boeing tail was sticking out above providing an ample target for the Luftwaffe.

Thinking that they might have to ditch at any time, Wheeler tried everything to keep the plane in the air. The crew got rid of any equipment they could drag to an exit. Despite the severity of wounds to

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personnel and battle damage to the plane, Wheeler opted for landing at Thurleigh rather than at an English base, if he could make it, feeling that immediate medical attention for his two wounded men was essential.

As they approached Thurleigh, Wheeler asked Engineer Harvey L. Noyes, Jr., to crank down one wheel and the flaps. It was then that Noyes informed him that the crank was among the items which had gone into the North Sea. Flying precariously, Wheeler and Winters managed to turn on to runway 24 and began the final let down without flaps, without aileron control and with one wheel only partially extended. They touched down at about 120, roared down the runway and finally ground-looped to a halt, missing the plane ahead of them on the runway by ten feet. Bollenbach was permanently out of combat, but survived; Norris later was able to complete his tour.

After a day off, the 306th was back in the air on 26 July and bombed a synthetic rubber plant at Hannover. Twenty planes dropped their bombs including two ships which were later lost in action that day. They were under fighter attack for an hour and twenty minutes by FW-190s, ME-109s, ME-110s and JU-88s. But it was the flak that produced the most serious problems. 2nd Lt. Wesley Courson's plane, 42-30156, had its vertical stabilizer removed by flak over the Frisian Islands on the way in. He managed to keep the plane in formation with some difficulty down the bomb run. Unfortunately for Courson and his crew it did not take the German fighters long to spot the plane with the missing Triangle H.

The plane was on fire as it came off the bomb run and Courson ordered bailout. Sgt. Cedric A. White, a waist gunner saw S/Sgt. Billy J. Lamb, tail gunner, leave the plane, but, as he checked forward, he noted that S/Sgt. William G. Dayton, radio, had been decapitated by flak, with blood spattered over the back of the plane. In addition Sgt. Dock G. Thomas, Jr., ball turret, and Sgt. Robert C. Stevens, waist, were listed as killed in action. Besides Courson, others who escaped from the front of the stricken aircraft were 2nd Lt. Roy B. Bronson, Jr., copilot; 2nd Lt. Ted Grezlak, navigator; 2nd Lt. Henry J. Lynch, bombardier; and S/Sgt. John G. Champion, engineer. A 22 mm slug had hit Champion's computing sight in the top turret and his face was peppered with bits of glass and metal. He was later repatriated to the U.S. on the S.S. Gripsholm. The enlisted men had a rough time in Frankfurt when civilians tried to avenge the bombings to which they had been subjected by the USAAF and RAF.

F/O Norman A. Armbrust and his crew had a normal bomb run, but were plastered with anti-aircraft fire just as they dropped their load. The number 2 engine was knocked out immediately. The number 1 and number 3 engines were so badly damaged that they quit within a

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few minutes. Then number 4 caught fire. There was nothing left for Armbrust to do but ring the alarm bell and begin the bail-out. On the interphone S/Sgt. Paul Milakovich, engineer, reported flak coming up very close behind the plane and then went silent. He came to when Armbrust shook him to find that his oxygen mask had been knocked off by a close burst. He tried all the engine controls at Armbrust's signal and found nothing responding.

Milakovich went to the nose to alert the bombardier and navigator, 2nd Lts. Charles L. Wallin and Robert J. Ellwood, both of whom had been wounded and were in the process of helping each other get bandaged up. They all left by the nose hatch. Armbrust and copilot Lester M. Kramer went out the bomb bay and the rest of the crew vacated *Unbearable II* by the back door. Wallin and Ellwood were taken to a German hospital on landing. They were joined there by Sgt. Nelson J. Huston, ball turret. All three were soon transferred to another hospital. Huston had been hit in the heel by a piece of shrapnel and was in no worse condition than Lt. Ellwood. Hospitalized between Hamburg and Bremen, they were treated by Yugoslavian doctors. But Huston's heel refused to respond to treatment and on several occasions additional surgery was performed to remove gangrenous tissue.

Huston finally said to Lt. Ellwood, "I'm not going to get better because I'm a diabetic."

"How did you ever get into this situation with diabetes?" asked Ellwood.

"When you want something bad enough you can do it," was the engineer's answer. He lingered on for several months, but eventually died one afternoon in the bed next to Ellwood's.

Other surviving members of the crew were T/Sgt. Robert L. Myllykoski, radio; S/Sgt. Louis A. Skinner and S/Sgt. Pete Dascoulias, waist; and S/Sgt. Brice E. Robison, tail.

Some of the drama for the day was saved for the English coastline by Lt. A.H. Maresh and crew. As they had begun their climb that morning, Maresh had found that he had three erratic superchargers, especially number 2. He was running with too much power and burning fuel at a high rate. Just before the target the plane was hit hard by flak, especially in the number 1 fuel tank and in the bomb bay; the tail gunner, T/Sgt. Reaford G. Watkins, was cut on the face and had a tooth knocked out.

Now with number 1 feathered, Maresh managed to keep the plane with the formation until the bombs were dropped and "from that point on it was just a question of getting back on the gas we had," said the pilot. With their power and fuel problems, they were downhill all the way home. When they hit 6000 feet, about forty-five minutes from England, they lost a second engine and began letting down again.

\* Norm  
Armbrust  
(at ~~tail~~)  
copilot  
Kramer)

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Nearing Cromer at 1504, they were down to 500 feet and close to shore when both number 3 and number 4 engines quit. Maresh and 2nd Lt. Robert J. Hoyt, copilot, made a deadstick landing in the water. Life boats put out from shore and picked them up within minutes. Others experiencing the ditching were Lts. James F. Brown and Arthur Isaac, navigator and bombardier; S/Sgt. Gordon F. Lewis, radio; S/Sgt. John T. Ross, engineer; Sgt. Maurice Steinhart, ball; Sgts. Theodore A. Harkin and Linden K. Voight, waist; and Watkins.

Hannover had been the group's deepest penetration into Germany. Two days later it extended its range by traveling to Kassel, a raid led by Capt. Dinwiddie Fuhrmeister, 367th Squadron. This was a mission in which every plane in the formation suffered flak damage. It was a strange mission from start to finish, one that cost the 306th two aircraft over Germany and three crashes on return to England. Three other planes were later transferred to the 8th Service Command for repairs because of the severity of the damage. 28

Takeoff was at 0700 for the 306th. At 0931 the first defection came when Lt. Carroll Briscoe aborted. He was running at 2450 RPMs and forty six inches of mercury and could only make 140 miles per hour; this was too slow to keep up and his engines were overheating.

Five minutes later Lt. Immanuel Klette had a prop run away, lost his radio compass and encountered dropping fuel pressure; his plane went into a spin in clouds. Five aborts followed: by Lt. Charles Schoolfield, with two turrets out and supercharger problems; F/O D.C. Brown, two engines out; Lt. Fred P. Sherman, gas supply too low; Lt. ~~Barney R. Price~~, lost formation and an engine overheating; F/O Virgil H. Jeffries, turned around fifty miles inside Germany with a bad engine. Wm. A.

2nd Lt. Stephen W. Peck, a veteran 423rd pilot, was flying "Peck's Bad Boys" on this mission and was hit by fighters when the formation loosened up in heavy weather before reaching the target. Both number 1 and number 2 engines were knocked out and on fire. Controls were gone so that the engines could not be feathered and, when trouble began developing in the remaining two engines, Peck ordered his crew to bail out.

"Everyone got out," says 2nd Lt. Ben G. Irons, bombardier, "but most of us pulled our rip cords too soon and suffered in the 25,000 foot plus atmosphere." Irons landed among a group of civilians near Detmold, Germany, and was quickly rescued by a young soldier. Within two hours the entire crew had been assembled; seven of the men required some medical treatment before being transferred to Oberursel (German interrogation center) and Dulag Luft (holding center before assignment to prison camps).

The crew was composed of 1st Lt. John A. Bartlett, Jr., copilot; 2nd

Lt. Daniel J. Barberis, navigator; T/Sgt. David C. Davis, engineer; T/Sgt. Robert G. Jones, radio; S/Sgt. Daniel DeFlorio, ball; S/Sgt. Walter G. Berthold and S/Sgt. John Gutierrez, waist; and Sgt. Henry Winkeller, tail.

The group bombed from 26,000 feet: "bursts were well concentrated on target, causing smoke and fires." Anti-aircraft fire over the target claimed a second plane, piloted by 2nd Lt. Jack Harris, also a 423rd aircraft. Four of the crewmen survived: 2nd Lts. Russell E. Maxwell, copilot; Kenneth H. Fultz, navigator; William F. Neary, bombardier; and S/Sgt. Irwin C. Aaseby, engineer. Casualties that day with Harris were S/Sgt. James P. Connally, radio; Sgts. William W. Isaacson, ball; Lawrence T. Sullivan and Ralph Burgio, waist; and Frank J. Bradley, Jr., tail.

Fighters were first encountered at 0956 before the enemy coast had been crossed inbound and attacks continued intermittently until 1215 near the Dutch coast on the withdrawal. More than 100 Luftwaffe planes were seen, seventy of them over Holland at the time the P-47 escort was scheduled to arrive. "Had rendezvous been made as briefed, most of the E/A encounters would have been avoided," says the intelligence summary.

Six of the twelve planes credited to the 306th went to 367th Squadron gunners: Sgt. J.J. Thompson, 1st Lt. Zias D. Davis (a pilot flying as a tail gunner), S/Sgt. Stanley J. Couvillion, S/Sgt. William R. Earnest, S/Sgt. Edward DeBuyser, Jr. and S/Sgt. James E. Harris. In the 368th claims were awarded to S/Sgt. Fred H. Nabors, S/Sgt. John C. Lotti and T/Sgt. Immanuel J. Enos, while in the 423rd credits were earned by Sgt. Walter A. Kozlowski, S/Sgt. Milton B. Edwards and T/Sgt. Walter J. Bieloga.

Two 367th planes made it only to the coast of England on the return. Lt. Woodrow W. Thomas crash landed his plane at Hawkinge, Thomas' plane lost one engine at the IP and a second over the target. He made a dive for cover and then flew a straight line across Germany and The Netherlands, cruising through the Ruhr Valley without drawing another attack from the air or the ground. Sgt. Marcel J. St. Louis was flying with Thomas and survived his third crash landing. St. Louis had been shot in the head in May, sustaining a skull fracture with pieces of metal lodged in his brain. His left arm was also paralyzed. He recovered the use of his arm and elected to stay with the group and return to flying rather than accept the proffered option of going home. He shot down an enemy fighter on this mission, but the claim was later altered to a "probable." Three missions and three crash landings was St. Louis' claim to fame, a record not envied by others in his barracks.

Lt. Lawrence W. Kooima's plane was heavily damaged by flak, but made it back to Framlingham where it crashed. From the target on Kooima flew by manually pulling the control cables; his plane was

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demolished in the landing. Lt. George P. Kusnir of Kooima's crew was wounded by flak and Lt. Donald W. Berkey, navigator, was injured in the landing.

Lt. William J. Dooley of the 368th crashed with his ship southwest of Orford on the return. No one was injured.

On 29 July the CQ's were in the barracks at 0430 to get the crews out for the long haul to Kiel with takeoff scheduled for 0700. Many of the same crews who had gone to Kassel were in the air for this mission. The grousing was a loud rumble since crews were being called on for their third tough mission in five days. Little did they know that the fighter attacks would be just as vicious and almost as prolonged at Kiel as they had been the day before. It was this kind of mission that produced the nightmares, the tears, the extreme fatigue among the flyers.

Capt. George E. Paris, Jr., a 369th lead pilot with a new set of double bars on his shoulders, was leading the 306th. Eighteen planes had left Thurleigh, but by 0845 five ships had aborted for a variety of reasons — one could not catch the group after a late plane change before takeoff, another had crew problems, others reported mechanical failures. On this day the 306th entered Germany thirteen strong to do battle with the ME-109s, FW-190s, ME-110s, ME-210s and JU-88s. It was a hairy day for the group and an exhausted ninety men returned to the base in the early afternoon.

This was also the day that the 369th Squadron's illustrious record of forty-two consecutive missions without a loss ended, not with just one plane down, but with two missing in the target area; the group lost four in all. At 0901, just before the target, the first of more than one hundred attacking aircraft stormed through the small formation in a vicious head-on pass. The combat narrative is a bit hazy, but it would appear that 1st Lt. Keith Conley, a 22-mission veteran, was the first to go down when the E/A swept through the depleted low squadron. Ten chutes were counted out of the aircraft, but 2nd Lt. Hyman Adler, navigator, and Sgt. Louis A. Leonardini, engineer, were later reported killed in action. Those surviving were Conley, 2nd Lt. Vincent W. DeVos, copilot; 2nd Lt. Robert B. Sanford, bombardier; S/Sgts. Frank Oettinger, radio, and Hugh H. Furr, ball; and Sgts. Russell F. Robinson and Charles R. Owen, waist; and Marvin G. Carrier, tail.

Next down was 1st Lt. Donald R. Winter's crew from the same low squadron. A wing came off and six or seven chutes were seen. Killed were Winters, Lt. Levi Ballard Irwin, bombardier; Sgts. Robert E. Moore and Frank C. Latto. Survivors included 1st Lt. Robert J. Hoyt, copilot; 2nd Lt. Arnold B. Derifield, navigator; S/Sgts. Arthur D. Johnson and Mike J. Komo; and Sgts. Theodore W. Nichols and Roy Peterson.

A few minutes later the <sup>E NOT</sup>entire crew in F/O Carl D. Brown's 367th plane died when the aircraft blew up. The officers on the crew in-

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29 July cont'd  
 survived; POW status

cluded 2nd Lt. Roy Y. Padgett, copilot; 1st Lt. John G. Fogarty, navigator; and 1st Lt. Robert L. Alexander, bombardier. The enlisted crew members were T/Sgt. Graham W. Diggs, Jr., engineer; T/Sgt. Earl W. Norlen, radio; S/Sgt. Perry G. Pedersen, ball; Sgt. James C. Seigler and S/Sgt. Larry D. McCoy, waist; and S/Sgt. Jesse O. Wheeler, tail.

Eight chutes came out of F/O Berryman H. Brown's 367th plane after it lost two engines and could not be controlled. The two casualties were S/Sgt. Harry W. Lofgren, ball, and S/Sgt. Eric G. Newhouse, waist gunner and legendary figure in the 306th. (Newhouse had left his native Austria in 1938 as a boy of 15 to escape the Nazi persecution of the Jews, finally arriving in America.) Both were killed during fighter attacks. Survivors from the crew were Brown; 2nd Lt. Ewald W. Benson, copilot; 2nd Lt. Edgar P. Fergon, navigator; 2nd Lt. George J. Beyer, Jr., bombardier; T/Sgt. Charles A. Sheffield, engineer; Sgt. Joseph J. Thompson, radio; S/Sgt. Charles H. Clark, waist; and S/Sgt. Charles M. Roberts, tail.

Benson landed in a canal, was rescued by an old couple in a sail boat, then was turned over to the authorities. Clark was badly wounded in one arm during the fighter attacks. Brown's crew believed that it had accounted for five German fighters before their plane went down.

Officially, the group was credited with six victories over the attacking Luftwaffe. At 0913 2nd Lt. James T. Harrison, a bombardier flying as a tail gunner, got an ME-110. The enemy pulled up over the low squadron with an engine smoking and, from his lead ship position Lt. Harrison put a stream of .50 caliber bullets into it at 300 yards. The other engine burst into flames, the ship went into a spin and crashed into the sea. Lt. Francis X. Pierce, flying in the lead ship of the high squadron, got an FW-190 at the same time and the pilot was observed to bail out.

Two 368th men got credit for downing enemy aircraft: 1st Lt. August Winters, a bombardier, forced a bailout of an FW-190 pilot; S/Sgt. George P. Fisher downed an ME-210. In the 369th, S/Sgt. James J. O'Neill, who was luckily not flying with his regular pilot, Lt. Conley, took the wing off an FW-190. Sgt. Carmel A. Melita got an ME-110 when the plane broke up after he shot its left engine off. In the fray, one Fortress was damaged slightly by flak, another by 20 mm fragments. Five planes were damaged by empty .50 caliber shell casings from American planes.

Commenting on conditions, Maj. Thurman Shuller wrote at the time: "They were so terribly tired . . . they had to get up a 1:30 this morning and I doubt that some of them had slept any at all. The maintenance crews are tired too and they can't keep the planes in shape for so much combat . . . Its all a vicious circle resulting in poor flying by

the pilots, poor bombing by the bombardiers, and high losses. There is a human element to this thing that Bomber Command seems to fail to consider."

On 31 July 8th BC announced a three-day stand-down from combat. Shuller wrote 2 August: "The three-day holiday was a wonderful thing for the fellows. They are already in fighting shape again and were anxious to resume the combat today but the weather is bad now."

August was a month for changes at the 306th. Veteran officers moved on to higher positions and greater responsibilities and thereby created openings for younger men to rise to better positions within the group. As July ended, Maj. John B. Wright moved over to 1st Bomb Wing headquarters to become Wing intelligence officer. He was supplanted by Capt. John Bairnsfather, one of the oldest men on the field and an early 306th veteran. Thus, two 306th intelligence chiefs had now moved on to higher posts, Maj. Watts B. Humphrey having done so in late 1942. On 9 August Capt. Herbert J. Avise, weather officer, packed his bags and moved to 8th BC. He was succeeded at Thurleigh by Capt. Dalton H. Wright. 9 Aug

Orders on the 14th moved Lt. Col. Henry W. Terry, Jr., an original 367th pilot, then 369th Squadron commander and now group deputy commander, to the 41st Bomb Wing. On the 18th Maj. William S. Raper became the new deputy CO, and the 367th had as its new commander, Maj. George R. Buckey, who had been squadron operations officer. Maj. Thurman Shuller, group surgeon since 4 August 1942, moved on 15 August to 1st Bomb Wing as Wing surgeon; his place in the group was taken by Capt. John J. Manning, 367th surgeon. Manning's job with the Clay Pigeons was assumed by Capt. Arthur Weihe. 14 Aug  
18 Aug  
15 Aug

The big promotion of the month was on 16 August when Lt. Col. George L. Robinson, group commander, exchanged his silver leaves for eagles. 16 Aug

Early in the history of the 8th AF a select committee of target analysts had been appointed. It included experts on German industry and economy and was given the task of developing target systems and priorities for attacks on Germany. One of the categories determined to be of vital importance to the German war effort was ball bearings. And the place where many of them were made was Schweinfurt.

One story is that at a conference hosted by Prime Minister Winston Churchill which included Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris of RAF Bomber Command and Lt. Gen. Ira Eaker of the 8th, Churchill rolled a ball bearing down the table. Eaker picked it up and by so doing committed the American 8th to Schweinfurt as a future target.

As deeper penetrations of the Reich continued, planning for Schweinfurt

began in early summer. The best combat minds of the 8th were called upon for help. Certainly one of the leaders was Col. Curtis LeMay, now commander of the 4th Wing. He was a onetime executive officer of the 306th and had been a pioneer in solving early problems besetting the 8th. LeMay was a thinker and doer and out of deliberations in this period came his idea for a two-pronged attack to be launched against Germany on a mid-summer date. LeMay would take his 4th Wing force to Regensburg to bomb aircraft production facilities. The 1st Wing would launch a nearly simultaneous assault on Schweinfurt. It was felt that with two major waves of bombers over Germany the fighter defenses would be overwhelmed and confused and the bombers might be able to fight their way through with a minimal loss.

Practice began nearly two months before for *Target A*, the coded name for Schweinfurt. Pilots and their crews flew interminable hours in patterns that made little sense to them, but which were deemed essential to the success of this imaginative mission. Bombardiers studied target layouts and maps of various kinds, all unidentified as to actual location. Total familiarization with the flight patterns, bombing tracks and other special procedures was required of the crews.

7 Aug  
10 Aug  
A "maximum effort" was scheduled 7 August, but not briefed or flown. Finally on 10 August the crews were briefed for Schweinfurt — and the secret was out. However, the mission was not launched because of the weather and questions were immediately raised about the release of the secret target on a day that from the start was questionable for flying.

11 Aug  
On 11 August Brig. Gen. Robert B. Williams, 1st Wing commander, issued an order that there would be no more "maximum efforts", pulling men back from leaves and flak houses except on his direct order. Thus, the commotion made months earlier by Major Shuller in his letter about the deleterious effects of such actions on combat crews had brought about the desired result. By now the situation was not as bad as it had been in the spring because of the arrival of more bomb groups and the availability of additional crews.

12 Aug  
On 12 August it was not *Target A*, but a trip into the Ruhr to Gelsenkirchen that provided the first activity for the bombers in two weeks. A solid layer of clouds over the target greeted the sixteen planes of the 306th along with heavy, intense barrage flak and about 150 E/A at the IP. Thus, Capt. Carroll Briscoe, the formation leader, bombed Recklinghausen, a target of opportunity. Twenty planes had left Thurleigh, four aborted and the 367th plane of 1st Lt. William J. Cunningham was lost.

Cunningham's plane was knocked out of formation when hit by flak and was nearly out of control. 2nd Lt. Theodore M. Pochily, navigator, was standing in front of his desk when the plane nosed over violently

and he was catapulted out through the astrodome. 2nd Lt. Morris E. Butler, bombardier, was in his position a few seconds later as the plane blew up. When Butler regained consciousness he was free of the wreckage, pulled his rip cord and landed, although he had a badly cut up foot. Butler also had the distinction of landing in the midst of a German Army camp at Frankfurt and was an instant prisoner of war.

Cunningham, S/Sgt. James A. Bayne, engineer; S/Sgt. Doyle M. Persson, radio; and Sgt. Robert L. Brucks, waist, were all killed in the explosion. S/Sgt. Gordon C. Roberts, ball turret; Sgt. John R. Seaman, waist, and S/Sgt. Harold C. Gotcher, tail, all died on the ground, and 2nd Lt. Walter A. Bolte, copilot, died at a later date of wounds.

An observer with the 306th on this mission was Col. Howard M. Turner, commander of the 102nd Combat Wing, who flew with Lt. Frank Kackstetter of the 423rd. During the fighter attack Kackstetter was wounded by splintered glass when a 20 mm cannon shell flew across the cockpit and disappeared through the instrument panel without exploding. S/Sgt. Elmer W. Mills, 368th, gained the only fighter claim for the day, an ME-109 destroyed.

Maj. Maurice V. Salada led twenty planes to Flushing airdrome on the 15th and Col. George L. Robinson took twenty to Le Bourget airdrome outside Paris on the 16th. Sgt. Guy DePietro of the 423rd received the only credit for an enemy plane on this mission, an ME-109.

On the 17th it was finally *Target A!*

Maj. William S. Raper, serving what was to be his final day as commander of the 367th Squadron, was chosen as the 306th leader for the day. Others on his lead crew were Capt. Thomas F. Witt, copilot; 1st Lt. Otis B. Fillery and Capt. George D. Bennett, navigators; Capt. Hugh J. Toland, bombardier; and Sgts. Joseph C. Bocelli, Gus Riecke, Francis W. Pulliam, Charles A. Adams and William R. Earnest. 2nd Lt. Douglas H. White, a pilot, was the observer in the tail. (Later, on the famous 14 October mission to Schweinfurt, White, Riecke, Pulliam, Adams and Earnest were killed, while Bocelli was the only survivor out of the crew.)

Twenty-one planes flew in the 306th formation which led the third task force. The remaining nine 306th aircraft in the air were in a composite group with nine 305th and two 92nd Group planes.

Pilots in the lead squadron behind Raper were Maj. George R. Buckley, 1st Lt. Lawrence W. Kooima, Capt. Dinwiddie Fuhrmeister, 1st Lt. Zias D. Davis, 1st Lt. Woodrow W. Thomas and 1st Lt. Laek L. Robinson. In the high squadron, led by Capt. David H. Wheeler, were Lt. Byron C. Bryant, Lt. Robert W. Porter, Lt. Alphonse H. Maresh, 1st Lt. William A. Price, F/O Edward M. Murphy and 1st Lt. Immanuel J. Klette. The low squadron was led by 1st Lt. Frank Kackstetter and included 2nd Lt. John D. Jackson, 1st Lt. Clarence E. Munger, 1st Lt.

12 Aug 43  
cont'd  
17 Aug 43  
1st Sch...  
first  
begin  
below

17 Aug

William P. Cassedy, 2nd Lt. John H. Lewis, F/O Virgil H. Jeffries and 1st Lt. George Reese.

Capt. Robert R. Fryer, on his 25th mission, led the composite group along with Capt. George Paris, 1st Lt. Reginald L. Robinson, Capt. Louis Cook, 1st Lt. Leo S. McIntire and 1st Lt. William Dooley. 1st Lt. Toy Husband led the high squadron with 1st Lt. Ferdinand H. Onnen and 1st Lt. Joseph Belser. Fryer had as his navigator 1st Lt. Maynard Dix and as his bombardier 1st Lt. Herschell Ezell.

The oft-told story of this Schweinfurt effort is that the LeMay force took off from its coastal bases, heading for Regensburg and then on to a landing at North African bases. While it was climbing across the Channel and over the continent, the other B-17 force was held on the ground by bad weather with visibility too limited for takeoff. Takeoff for all planes had been scheduled for 0700, with the LeMay force to be out ahead by nine minutes. Takeoff at Thurleigh began at 1055 and was completed by 1203.

This delay effectively canceled the long and careful planning which had gone into this mission. The German defenders attacked the first force and destroyed twenty-four planes as they headed south. Although the Luftwaffe did not know it then, there was ample time to land, refuel, rearm and rest before another American force was airborne.

Some Monday morning quarterbacks thought that the Germans must have had advance warning of the second force as they were out with their deadliest teams to wipe the 8th AF from the skies. Another thirty-six planes went down before this formation got back to its British sanctuary. But, for the 306th, it was a moment of high drama: no planes were lost, three suffered serious damage and fourteen had only minor write-ups. There were no Purple Hearts for the mission, no aborts.

The composite group bombed first, dropping ninety 500-pound bombs at 1505 from 23,075 feet on an 85° heading with a 35-second bomb run. The main group dropped at 1506 with 105 1000-pound bombs on a 118° heading with a fifty second bomb run at 21,950 feet.

Capt. Paris' plane was listed as seriously damaged from gun fire. A 20 mm shell released a life raft which then hit the stabilizer and damaged it badly. Lt. Dooley's plane had extensive 20 mm damage underneath and around the left waist window. Lt. Lewis landed his plane at Chedburgh on two engines, having lost the number 1 to flak at the target.

Planes were in the air from five hours and thirty-seven minutes to seven hours and twenty-four minutes, approximately four hours on oxygen. Fuel consumption ranged from 1,335 gallons to 1,625 gallons.

Nine enemy planes were credited to 306th gunners, six of them by

17 Aug 73 cont'd  
(1st Schweinfurt)

17 Aug '43 cont'd

+ 24 Aug '43

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the nine-ship composite force. Successful hunters and their pilots were: Sgt. Edward F. Gramm (Cook) at 1400; S/Sgt. George Monser (Fryer) at 1400; S/Sgt. William J. Tremper (Cook) at 1430; Sgt. John Coulson (Paris) at 1439; T/Sgt. David A. Philpot, Jr. (Belser) at 1440; S/Sgt. Walter R. Clark (Fuhrmeister) at 1443; S/Sgt. Daniel J. Antonelli (Davis) at 1525; S/Sgt. Arthur Jenniges (Cook) at 1545; and S/Sgt. Harold E. Rogers (Porter) at 1546. Coulson, Philpot, Antonelli, Jenniges and Rogers were tail gunners; Gramm and Monser fired from the waist, and Tremper and Clark were ball turret gunners.

When the static cleared, especially from Washington, the 8th AF was still operational, but its detractors were more vocal than ever that the B-17 and B-24 were incapable of carrying the battle to the heartland of Germany without unacceptable losses. Gen. Eaker continued to stand tall and to defend his concept of strategic bombardment with vigor and determination. The wolves were determined to have his head. A reading of the Eaker-Arnold correspondence indicates that even their longstanding friendship was strained at this time. Arnold was a stern taskmaster who demanded superb performances from his subordinates and the halcyon days of the '30s were forgotten as he frequently blistered Eaker in his incessant correspondence across the Atlantic.

For the men of the 306th the complete lack of losses provided a great feeling of euphoria. They KNEW they could beat the Germans! They had faced the enemy's best and had "won"! But, there was to be another day at Schweinfurt . . .

Two events closed out August for the group. It flew four missions in all without loss and without serious challenge. On the 24th the crews went to Villacoublay with Maj. Robert P. Riordan leading the group. Riordan had "enjoyed" considerable notoriety in the early days, but the honors on this mission, saved for those waiting at Thurleigh, went to 1st Lt. Immanuel J. Klette, who was completing his 25th mission. *Yank* magazine told the story thusly:

"Klette's number 4 engine had been knocked out just before he started her on the bomb run, and the bombs had gotten away on three engines. Number 3 engine died a minute or so after the *Connecticut Yankee* left the target. From then on it was touch and go. The ship was knocked out of formation. Klette had to have his tail gunner keep him informed of Forts coming on, and he managed to stay under them, thus getting temporary cover. All the rest of the gunners were ordered into the radio room, in order to get as much weight forward as possible.

"Halfway across the Channel he ordered all the ammunition thrown out. He tried to send distress signals. Couldn't. He tried QDM. No luck. As he neared the coast of Britain he had to rely entirely on the navigator's dead reckoning.

" . . . He transferred gas from his right wing to his left, just managed

to slip past London's balloon barrage, and came over the trees where 200 men assembled on the ground saw him.

"The crippled plane came sliding over the field, flying at 2,500 feet ... Numbers 1 and 2 were holding the ship up — nothing else.

"The *Connecticut Yankee* circled to the right. The ship was unable to make a left turn because of the damaged engines. Klette started to point in toward the field. As he did a burst of flame came from his number 1 engine.

"On the control tower balcony the colonel (George L. Robinson) was doing as much flying as Klette. 'Bail out, boy,' he yelled."

Klette ignored the instruction and went about the business of landing. Flying with maximum power on number 2 engine, he found himself going too fast on the final approach. Wheels did little to slow the plane down and, when copilot Willard Lockyear resisted dropping full flaps above the maximum speed, Klette again ordered him to do so. Upon landing, the pilots discovered that the left tire was shot out and that the tail wheel would not unlock. But finally Klette ground looped the plane to a stop.

With his twenty-fifth out of the way, Klette became the first pilot in the 8th AF authorized to fly an additional five missions on a tour. After this hair raiser he was entitled to some time off and did not return to combat until 15 September.

On the 27th, eighteen ships led by Capt. George Paris went to "Watten" which appeared to be nothing but a large and mysterious hole in the ground in northeastern France. No one quite knew what it was, but it had become an area of intense interest and activity among the Germans, and the French Underground thought it ought to have attention. Thus, Watten became the first of a long series of missions flown generally against targets in Northern France which usually were listed as "Noball", a coined word meaning that the Americans and British did not know what the target really was. As was later learned, these mysterious constructions were part of the V-1 and V-2 rocket launching installations that the Germans first fired at London in mid-1944.

## Chapter 12

# FACING THE FIGHTERS

## September-October 1943

Improved weather in September saw the pace of missions accelerate for the 306th: the planes were out on the 3rd and on the 6th Col. Robinson led the 102nd Combat Wing to Stuttgart. As a target Stuttgart was stretching the range of the B-17 and considerable difficulty was experienced on the way home with planes running out of gas. 3

1st Lt. Martin Andrews, 423rd, was the first to take his plane out of formation when he left near Stuttgart and landed in Switzerland where the crew was interned. Flak and fighters had about finished his aircraft in the target area by shooting out most of his engines. Picking up a course to an airfield in Switzerland posed some problems of navigation since few crews carried Swiss navigational charts. 2nd Lt. C. Gordon Bowers relied on his silk "escape" map to come up with an accurate heading and the crew finally landed near Ticino. 65 per cent FI

Others interned were 2nd Lt. Keith W. Rich, copilot; 2nd Lt. Robert W. Huisinga, bombardier; T/Sgt. Ralph B. Biggs, engineer; S/Sgt. Venton H. Scott, radio; S/Sgt. Guy DiPietro, ball; S/Sgt. Elmo Simpson and S/Sgt. Walter Kozlowski, waist; and S/Sgt. Henry C. Hucker, tail.

Col. Robinson reported that the returning formation began to loosen up in the vicinity of Paris when there seemed little danger from flak or fighters for the rest of the trip. All the pilots were trying every available technique to stretch dwindling gas supplies to get back across the English Channel to safety.

2nd Lt. Wesley D. Peterson, 368th, and his crew did not make it; they bailed out about forty miles from the coast south of Dieppe. Nine chutes came out of the plane, but T/Sgt. William B. Plasket, radio, was believed to have perished in the aircraft. A most notable accomplishment of this crew was that four members evaded capture and eventually made their independent ways back to England. They were 2nd Lt. Edward L. Maslanka, copilot; 1st Lt. August Winter, bombardier; S/Sgts. George S. Monser and William E. Scott, Jr., waist gunners. 65

Lt. Maslanka and Lt. Winter were both injured in bailing out of the bomb bay. Maslanka suffered a broken rib and Winter serious injuries to his left leg and hip. Reunited soon after landing, they were hidden by the French. Maslanka, however, wanted to move on quickly and get out of the area, so he left. Winter was unable to walk easily for more than a week and stayed close to the place where he had landed. Winter finally recovered enough for the Underground to move him along, and he arrived in Spain on 10 October. Maslanka did not get there until the 25th. Winter was back in England on 3 November and Maslanka

arrived 20 November.

Sgt. Monser landed near a large group of Frenchmen and was quickly taken in their care. After some discussion and a long walk, he was told that another crewman was nearby and shortly he and Sgt. Scott were reunited. That same night they were in the hands of the Underground. They walked into Spain on 14 October and were back in England on the 29th. These were speedy returns to England for all four members of this crew. Those of the crew who met a different fate and became prisoners of war were Peterson; 2nd Lt. Donald E. Phillips, navigator; T/Sgt. William L. Utley, engineer; Sgt. Frederick E. Huntzinger, ball, and S/Sgt. Douglas G. Wright, tail. Peterson's loss was the first in twenty-six missions dating back to 21 May for the 368th Squadron.

It was a tough ride home for the rest of the planes. 1st Lt. William A. Price of the 369th celebrated his 25th mission with a crash landing short of the runway at New Romney on the south coast in Kent when his plane ran out of gas. 1st Lt. Byron C. Bryant, 369th, put his plane down in a field near Deanland because of flak damage. Several other aircraft from the group landed near the coast to refuel before flying the rest of the way back to Thurleigh in the Midlands.

2nd Lt. Ralph J. Zimmerman, 423rd navigator for F/O Virgil Jeffries, was hit by flak over Stuttgart and was seriously injured and out of combat for several months. Three crewmen came home to claim victories over the Luftwaffe: 2nd Lt. Walter R. Wick, 423rd bombardier; S/Sgt. Carl Shelley, 423rd ball gunner; and S/Sgt. Edward DeBuyser, Jr., 367th ball gunner.

As the first anniversary of the group's arrival rolled around September became a time of celebration at Thurleigh. It was an occasion that many thought might never come. Still, the planes were flying and a few of those crewmen from among the thirty-four crews who had originally come to Bedfordshire were still in the air. Sadly, many more were missing in action, dead, wounded, had completed tours, or been taken off crew duty.

Two new airplanes had arrived at Thurleigh on 16 September and 18 September, both with chin turrets, the first planes thusly equipped to join the 306th Group. These were F models and were among the last eighty-six of this model manufactured by Douglas before the complete conversion to the B-17G.

The first G-models appeared on 19 September when two arrived and were quickly assigned to the 367th and 368th Squadrons. Basically the F and G models were the same, but it was the outer appearance that quickly differentiated the two. The G had a distinctive chin turret, a modification first tried on the ill-fated B-40, a ship loaded with machine guns and ammunition which was designed to accompany Fortress formations and protect them from attacking fighters. The B-40s lasted in combat no more than a month; they were lost because

their excess weight prevented them from keeping up with the bombers after bombs away. The chin turret on the new planes provided forward firing guns that were so badly needed.

The G had enclosed waist windows which were staggered to provide more freedom of movement for the waist gunners. This also helped cut down frostbite among waist gunners who were now spending extended periods at 20,000 feet or more as the missions became longer. In addition, the Gs had Tokyo tanks in the wing tips which added 540 gallons of gasoline and extended the range of the aircraft considerably.

The gun in the radio compartment was eliminated to reduce weight. (It also made it much easier to walk through the radio room.) Soon the planes were delivered without camouflage paint which was now considered to be of no practical value in very large formations operating at high altitude over the continent. This, too, materially lightened the plane. Despite the changes, the B-17 remained a very cold aircraft and the flyers were protected only by the heated suits, gloves and boots that they wore. (Later, by 1944, the aircraft heaters and the external clothing of the flyers were greatly improved, much to the physical comfort of the crews.) The oxygen system also was changed from a high pressure constant flow to a low pressure demand system.

Between 16 September and 21 September, the 306th received fourteen new aircraft. As new planes arrived at the operational groups, they were quickly transferred out to theatre modification centers for three days for the installation of special equipment, such as the G-box, a British invention used only in the European theatre as a navigational and bombing device. It projected radio signals on a cathode ray tube and quickly resolved many navigational problems. (Similar to Shoran/Loran systems.) The receiver was mounted above the navigator's desk.

From the perilous times of early 1943 when the aircraft inventory at Thurleigh was precariously low, the weekly reports in late September of 1943 show that there was a steady inventory of forty planes. Combat losses were replaced within a matter of a day or two. Planes were no longer grounded for long periods awaiting parts because there was now an adequate inventory of spare parts.

Supply was a continuing problem. At one time during 1943 spark plugs were almost impossible to obtain. The crew chiefs preferred to equip the B-17s with Rolls Royce spark plugs, but with the advent of high performance fighter planes, this make plug was no longer authorized for issue to bombardment units. Maj. Robert S. Stevens, 368th Squadron engineering officer, at one point got word through a friend that an American freighter unloading at Liverpool had sunk at the wharf, but there might be supplies worth looking at already on the pier. Stevens took a truck and driver and headed west to the great port city. When the two men arrived they found that the ship had indeed sunk, that the pier was full of supplies, and that there were no guards about. They scouted through the piles of boxes, found spark plugs

and loaded their truck. When they returned to Thurleigh they had 50,000 new plugs; Stevens had to pay off some friends for past favors and the inventory soon shrank to 30,000. The rest were well hidden, but the word could not be kept from 8th BC. Soon there were higher headquarters "visitors" at Thurleigh nosing about. As a result, the 306th lost half of its inventory, but was still 15,000 spark plugs ahead as a result of quick action by two men.

Originally the planes had been unmarked except for tail numbers. This was soon changed when large letters were added along the sides of the fuselage for squadron and plane identification — GY, 367th; BO, 368th, WW, 369th, and RD, 423rd. As the 8th AF grew in numbers it became necessary to improve visual identification of the planes. First Division planes were assigned a triangle on either side of the vertical stabilizer, on the under side of the left wing and the top of the right wing. An H was allotted to the 306th. To this triangle was later added a broad horizontal band which identified the 40th Combat Wing, and 306th planes used a yellow color. In mid-1944 colors were added to the tip of the vertical stabilizer indicating the squadrons — red, 367th; white, 368th; bright green, 369th, and medium blue, 423rd. Each individual plane also had a letter designation which appeared on the stabilizer underneath the serial number of the plane. Plane markings began in December 1942 and were under change until August 1944.

Increasingly, the new planes added during the fall of 1943 were G models, but there were still Fs in the pipeline and it is believed that the last F shipped into Thurleigh arrived on 21 December and was 42-3188. By 6 June there were sixty-three G models at Thurleigh and six Fs still in service. One E served as a tow target plane, although the 306th never flew Es in combat. The report of 6 October 1944 shows one F model in the inventory and sixty-five Gs. By 7 January there were no Fs and sixty-five Gs.

How different were the various models? Everett Daniels, 369th crew chief of "Steady Hedy", which flew over 100 missions, says that basically they were alike, from the Es at Wendover to the late Gs at Thurleigh.

September was also a month in which more "originals" left for jobs in higher headquarters: Maj. Frank Yaussi, Maj. Robert W. Smith and Maj. Marlen E. Reber. Change became a continuing pattern, especially among flying personnel, and those who came as second lieutenants and proved their leadership capabilities were soon captains.

Eight missions were flown in September, but only two planes were lost, and the usual comment at the end of each mission report was "No score on enemy fighters." The gunners were less experienced than their predecessors as American fighter escort was having a depressant effect upon the Luftwaffe.

After a suitable rest from his harrowing 25th mission Lt. Immanuel

Sep 7, 15  
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4 Oct

September-October 1943

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Klette returned to combat on 15 September raid to Romilly and following day to Nantes. On that day a 368th plane flew the bomb run on three engines and crashed in Southern England on the way home when another engine quit. -15

On 23 September the group was off to Nantes again, with Klette leading the high squadron. His plane was peppered by flak over the target, a Nazi submarine supply ship, and he started home. However, a fuel leak of sizeable proportions began to cause problems and, by the time Klette's plane reached the English Channel, two engines were feathered because of a lack of gas. With one engine at full power the plane was still descending at 400 feet per minute. With directions from "Darky", Klette crossed the English coast at low altitude, anxiously looking for a place to land. In the darkness he turned on his landing lights and saw that there was very rough terrain ahead. Almost by brute strength he held the plane off that area until he came to woods beyond, and then allowed it to settle into the tree tops. When the left wing hit a particularly large tree, the plane dropped to the ground. -23

Klette crawled through the pilot's window and got away from the wreckage. He counted his crew members and found that Lt. Eugene P. Madden, his navigator, was missing. Shortly an RAF rescue team arrived, dug into the nose and pulled Madden free. Klette and Madden were soon headed for the hospital at Aylesbury where doctors found that Madden had suffered eight fractures, while Klette had to settle for five including a broken pelvis which put him in a body cast for five months. His tour at Thurleigh ended at twenty-eight missions rather than the planned thirty, but he was later to serve as a squadron commander in the 91st Bomb Group and before the war came to a close he had registered a grand total of ninety-one missions.

On 7 September crews got a thrill out of seeing a flashing light two miles north of Flushing airdrome in Holland with a distinct "V" for victory signal being sent. The Aldis lamps came out and "V"s were flashed from several planes to anyone on the ground reading Morse code. Col. Robinson led the group on 9 September, eleven months after the group's first raid, to bomb Lille again. On this trip the target was the Lille Vendeville airfield, rather than the Fives-Lille plant. The Germans won this round, however, as the bombs of the 306th plastered a dummy airfield three miles from the intended target. -75

With the coming of October, the group enjoyed a mission with almost no enemy opposition, a thing that had happened to some degree in September. Combat crews had difficulty believing that they encountered no enemy fighters and only saw distant flak. On 4 October the 306th led the First Division to Frankfurt, with Col. Budd J. Peaslee of 40th Combat Wing as the division leader. Capt. George Paris, 368th, was his pilot. Excellent escort to the target was provided by P-47s and Spitfires, but a forty-minute gap in the protective screen 407

4 Oct (cont'd)  
8 Oct

near the target left ample time for the Luftwaffe to work over some of the fourteen ships which had made it to their objective. Gunners credited with victories were S/Sgt. William D. Brittain and T/Sgt. Alexander Heyburn of the 367th along with T/Sgt. Thaddeus F. Powell, S/Sgt. Steve J. Kriski, 368th, and Sgt. William J. Meade, 369th. T/Sgt. Francis W. Palmer, radio operator for Lt. Woodrow W. Thomas, 367th, was killed on the raid.

Some of the old ways returned on 8 October when the 306th made its way to Bremen, flying as the low group of the 40th Combat Wing. Before the fighter escort left, two ME-109s dived headlong through the entire wing. Then from 1450 to 1531 the 306th was under almost continuous attack and lost three crews. A navigator and several crewmen were wounded. It was the worst fighter encounter since 17 August at Schweinfurt.

It was estimated that 150 German planes were in the air around the 306th, reminiscent of the 17 April raid to the same area when the group lost ten airplanes. Capt. Thomas F. Witt led the 367th Squadron down the bomb run with twenty JU-88s and ME-110s weaving back and forth directly in front of the formation, evidently hoping to distract the bombardiers. For some reason the deputy lead plane dropped its bombs about four minutes after leaving the IP, and other planes in the formation dropped their bombs then, as well. The lead ship maintained its position and eventually dropped its bombs in the center of Bremen, its target of last resort, as both primary and secondary objectives were totally obscured.

Gunners reported considerable rocket fire from various German planes, and there were also reported discus-shaped objects being dropped into the formations, which then exploded with a burst about the size of a flak shell. The gunners also reported seeing a few ME-109s and FW-190s, the usual opposition, but also HE-111s, DO-217s, BV-141s, FW-189s and ME-210s. Flak was intense and continuous in the target area.

Twenty planes had departed from Thurleigh and there were no aborts. The first aircraft to go down was from the 423rd, that of 1st Lt. Dean C. Rodman at 1515 with two engines on fire. While eight chutes were reported out of the plane, there were only five survivors: Rodman; 2nd Lt. Norman J. Sansom, a bombardier borrowed from the 368th; T/Sgt. Clifton R. Barber, engineer; and S/Sgts. Bobby J. Downing and Jack W. Koetter. Reported as killed in action were F/O Morris B. Cook, copilot; 2nd Lt. John J. Garland, navigator; S/Sgt. Urban G. Hupfer, radio; S/Sgt. William H. May, ball turret; and Sgt. Martin A. Mitosinka, waist.

A minute later at 1516, the 367th plane of 1st Lt. Lawrence W. Kooima, took a direct hit in a wing while transferring gas from the Tokyo tank. The wing was in flames almost immediately and Kooima

had barely uttered the words "Bail out" to his crew, when the airplane blew up. It had been an unusually quiet crew that morning before takeoff, as they looked ahead to their second trip to Bremen and their 24th mission as a crew. Earlier, over the target, the plane had taken a direct flak burst in the ball turret, which had killed S/Sgt. Stanley J. Couvillion. When the plane exploded those killed were Kooima; 1st Lt. Frank H. Crawford, copilot; 1st Lt. Donald W. Berkey, navigator; 1st Lt. Charles A. Cressy, bombardier, and S/Sgt. Alvis W. Tinsley, waist. Survivors from the plane were T/Sgt. Virgil A. Struckhoff, engineer; T/Sgt. Cecil L. Brooks, radio; S/Sgt. Frederick E. Hutchison, waist; and S/Sgt. Robert S. Weston, tail. Hutchison parachuted into the streets of Bremen, and was rescued by eight soldiers who marched him away to the jeers of irate civilians; Hutchison reports seeing several American airmen hanging from light poles along the way.

While the other two losses had been out of the high squadron, 1st Lt. Thomas E. Ledgerwood was flying as deputy leader for the group. His 367th plane was bracketed by an ME-110 firing rockets. The first two shots missed, but the third and fourth rockets exploded between the number 1 and number 2 engines, knocking the cowling off one of them. Ledgerwood and his copilot, 2nd Lt. John G. Acker, were able to get one engine feathered but control of the other engine was impossible. In addition to the trouble on the left, the Tokyo tank in the right wingtip was streaming flames.

Ledgerwood ordered the bailout and Capt. Paul J. George, 43-year-old assistant group engineering officer, was the first to jump. Also leaving the plane were 2nd Lt. Myron L. Sorden, navigator; Sgt. Eugene H. Levy, togglier; T/Sgt. Harvey D. Cooke, Jr., engineer; S/Sgt. Robert Van Dragt, radio; S/Sgt. John K. Spell, ball; S/Sgt. Andrew E. Fila and S/Sgt. Patrick A. Walsh, Jr., waist. Only S/Sgt. Arthur E. Robinson, tail gunner, did not leave the plane, as the back of the ship had been so heavily damaged he could not get out of his position and died in the wreckage.

When Ledgerwood jumped at 3200 feet he had set the controls to get the plane out of the area, but it circled him once, passing over the top of his parachute canopy by about forty feet, then shortly stalled and dove straight into the ground. Ledgerwood landed close to Meppen, near the western border of Germany, and in that area at about the same time another B-17 crashed, along with two German fighter planes. Descending, Ledgerwood watched eight or ten home guardsmen following him, and he was captured immediately. While he was still lying on the ground, Ledgerwood was kicked several times in the ribs, but his captors finally let him stand up and get rid of his chute. Then they walked a considerable distance, meeting several other crewmen before all the Americans were finally put on an old truck.

That it was a rough mission can be appreciated by inspecting the two

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 combat check forms which try to place the fighter attacks in perspective. They show that all planes were under vigorous attack throughout a forty-minute period. When the P-47s reappeared at 1531 the Luftwaffe immediately departed. The 306th gunners were credited with fifteen E/A destroyed, five probables and ten damaged. Gunners in the 367th earning laurels were S/Sgt. Duane J. Foster (Zias Davis, pilot) at 1450; T/Sgt. John W. Walkenhorst (Laek Robinson) at 1452; T/Sgt. Loren McCullar (Davis) at 1506; S/Sgt. Edward DeBuyser (William Bisson) at 1517; and S/Sgt. Walter R. Clark (Robinson) at 1518.

368th gunners awarded victories were T/Sgt. James K. Herman (William Katz) at 1445; 1st Lt. L.P. Blatnica (Paul Paulsen) at 1500; T/Sgt. Thaddeus V. Powell (Paulsen) at 1515; S/Sgt. Richard C. Litherland (Paulsen) at 1520 and again at 1527. Litherland knocked a wing off the first plane, then hit the second in the left engine. A piece of the stabilizer came off the second attacker, the plane started into a spin, then went into a vertical dive to the ground. Lt. Roger D. Barton (Clarence Munger) led off the 423rd defenders at 1440, followed by S/Sgt. Harry R. Shutts (Kenneth Bickett) at 1445; S/Sgt. Willard H. McQuarrie (Robert McCallum) at 1502; S/Sgt. Donald Richardson (George Reese) at 1516; and S/Sgt. Lester B. Parks (Munger) at 1527.

Lt. J.E. Voehringer was flying as the navigator for Lt. Oleron S. Linn whose plane was in the center of the low squadron. During the fury of the attack, Voehringer was hit by a bullet from an ME-109 and killed. To even the score, Lt. Joseph P. Ryan, bombardier, who had been firing at the attacker, succeeded in setting it on fire.

1st Lt. John H. Lewis, high squadron leader, had more than his share of trouble, as three stabilizer cables were cut by enemy action and the window in front of the copilot, 2nd Lt. Daniel H. Carey, was broken. One of his waist gunners, S/Sgt. Almond Weed, was wounded in the left leg, arm and ear by fragments from a 20 mm cannon shell. Also wounded on the mission were 2nd Lt. Raymond Feilbach, a navigator in another plane, and S/Sgt. Bernard J. Nitti, a tail gunner in the formation.

As one of the squadron diaries said, "Again the 369th missed a helluva fight." The "Fightin' Bitin'" was not operational that day.

9 Oct  
 Briefing the following morning, 9 October, was at 0530. Maj. Robert C. Williams, group operations officer, told the assembled combat crews that if there were any doctors in the room it would be best if they remained until after the screen hiding the mission route was rolled up. The yarn looped across Northern Germany as it never had before, leading to Gdynia, Poland, where the target was naval, industrial and port facilities. Capt. Frank Kackstetter of the 423rd was designated the leader for the 306th on this very long mission. Kackstetter, after leading the group to the target and back out, was forced out of formation over Denmark on the way home and Capt. George Reese took over

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the lead to bring the planes in for a 6 p.m. landing.

Twenty-one planes took off and twenty made it to the target. Rendezvous for the 40th Combat Wing was at low altitude over Thurleigh and furnished a spectacular show for the men on the ground. The target, a supposed major storage and supply area for naval and maritime equipment, had been picked up in aerial reconnaissance. Situated 200 miles east of Berlin, the Nazis thought it a very safe harbor. But the 8th AF on this day was out to prove the error of that decision. In an effort to divide the Luftwaffe defenders, a diversionary attack was scheduled against Marienburg and Anklam.

After the IP the 306th was forced to make a 360° turn to avoid a B-24 outfit, but was soon back on course and dropped its bombs in the center of a heavy smoke screen. Aerial photos taken the next day showed the badly mauled trans-Atlantic liner, the Stuttgart, being towed from the harbor. Hits on other ships, on railroad tracks, in the city and throughout the harbor area were also plotted. At least ten of the crews on this mission had flown the previous day, so it was an especially long and tiring trip west to England. Flak was light and fighters were few on the mission; nevertheless, claims for enemy planes downed were awarded to Sgt. Raymond J. Kristoff, 368th, and S/Sgt. Arthur R. Adrian, 423rd.

The brief flurry of fighters had damaged the 368th plane of Lt. Roy C. Ranck, Jr. The controls were mangled and the oxygen system was shot out, so Ranck brought his aircraft down to 3,500 feet and, as he approached the Baltic Islands off the coast of Denmark, he ordered the crew to bail out. Almost as soon as the pilots released the controls the plane went into a dive and was seen by the crew to crash. Part of the crew was quickly gathered together by a Danish Underground leader who tried valiantly to get them off the small island where they had landed. Unfortunately, he could not secure a boat. The men were hidden that Saturday night, but eventually were captured by the Germans. The Underground leader was also arrested, but, by Tuesday when the last of the Americans was captured, the Dane had escaped. Ranck and other members of his crew who survived were 2nd Lt. Miles C. McCormack, copilot; 2nd Lt. Carl A. Grosebeck, navigator; 2nd Lt. William C. Hewitt, bombardier; S/Sgt. Harry A. Hall, engineer; T/Sgt. William J. Skahan, radio; Sgt. Henry J. Kozier, ball; S/Sgt. Fred H. Nabors, waist; and S/Sgt. William D. Barton, tail. During the fighter attack Sgt. Douglas R. Farris, right waist gunner, was hit in the abdomen by a 20 mm shell and was killed.

Eighteen planes carrying 180 men left Thurleigh at 1025 on 14 October bound for Schweinfurt. This was the second attempt to destroy the ball bearing manufacturing capacity of the city; another raid like 17 August which had not accomplished all that was hoped for. Capt. Charles Schoolfield, a tough and experienced pilot from the

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369th Squadron, was selected as the 306th leader for the day. He had already earned a Distinguished Flying Cross and an oak leaf cluster, would receive a second cluster for this mission, and then later garnered a third; he was one of the top two or three recipients of DFCs for the Group, no one receiving more than three clusters. There was some feeling of apprehension at briefing, as the yarn on the mission map revealed a penetration beyond the coverage range of the P-47s. At briefing it was also thought that weather would cancel the mission before the scheduled 1000 takeoff. However, it was "green-green" at takeoff time. The signal flare arced out from the balcony of the control tower and the heavy laden planes trundled down runway 24 and staggered into the air. Visibility was marginal. Schoolfield knew it was time to fly when his copilot, Capt. Charles Flannagan, told him they had crossed the last of the intersecting runways. Officially at that time visibility was 200 feet, with 10/10ths clouds at 100 feet. Other stations were reporting fog, drizzle and rain, but at station 111 there was none of this.

Schoolfield's plane was off and climbing at 500 feet a minute when the pilot began a half needle-width turn to the right, came 360° and climbed straight ahead through the clouds, then did another turn above the overcast and fired red-red flares.

"Assembly was no problem," says Schoolfield, "and the eighteen planes came into position rather quickly."

At least his plane, and probably others that day, were overloaded. At the instance of S/Sgt. Bert Perlmutter, a waist gunner, the lead ship had been loaded with an extra 12,000 rounds of ammunition. There was a premonition shared by many that the Luftwaffe might be waiting in force for the group. Troubles began early when only two of three groups of the 40th CW made rendezvous, the 92nd and 306th. Schoolfield signalled the 41st CW to take over the lead and swung in behind them. The 306th planes were carrying six 1000 pound bombs, a maximum load for the B-17. Since the 8th AF had learned that high explosive bombs did not do all the desired damage, a goodly number of incendiary bombs were carried by other planes on the raid. Blast damage to machine tools can be repaired, but melted machinery is useless; this was what the planners hoped for.

1st Lt. Clarence E. Munger, 423rd, flying number three in the high squadron, was the first of three planes to turn back; he left at 1255 shortly after the formation crossed the enemy coast. The number 3 supercharger induction system had a hole in it and the number 2 oil cooler was shooting oil over the ball turret. 1st Lt. William Tackmier, low squadron leader, turned back at 1314 with supercharger problems which resulted in his inability to keep the squadron in group formation. 1st Lt. Zias D. Davis, 367th, lost the formation in the maneuvering that took place after Tackmier left and turned back just as the fighters were

on 367 plane  
of Schoolfield

beginning their attack about 1320.

"The enemy planes were on us almost immediately after the 47s started home," says Schoolfield.

"All told more than 300 enemy aircraft participated in the battle and these made 700 separate attacks on the bombers during the principal fight," says the account in *The Combined Bomber Offensive*.

As the fighter attacks started, the 40th CW soon found itself in serious difficulty. Ammunition was expended at a furious rate and the tactics of the German fighters overwhelmed some of the bombers. The book continues:

"... the first enemy maneuver was to attack from the front at very close range with a screen of single-engine fighters firing 20 mm cannon and machine guns. Following this screen were numbers of twin-engine fighters in formation, firing rockets from projectors suspended under the wings. The rocket-firing craft began their attacks at a distance and did not come in nearly so close as the single-engine fighters. The Fortress formations were subjected to great numbers of rocket projectiles.

"After the single-engine fighters had made their initial assault, they refueled and returned to the battle, this time attacking from all directions in an attempt to confuse the gunners in the heavy bombers. Then followed the second effort of the enemy twin-engine fighters, which attacked principally from the front and rear.

"The rocket-firing craft seemed to concentrate upon a single combat wing until their ammunition was exhausted. After these maneuvers, all enemy fighters centered their attention on the bombers that had been crippled by the organized attacks ..."

Just how many enemy fighters the 306th may have downed that day will never be known, because many of the best witnesses did not survive to recount their successes. Apparently the first German fighter claimed by a 306th gunner went to Sgt. Bennett E. Ball, flying with Lt. Davis, who downed a plane at 1325. It was more than half an hour later when Sgt. Duncan J. Williams, with Lt. John P. Noack, got an FW-190 at 1408. S/Sgt. William L. Threatt, Jr., a waist gunner with 1st Lt. Virgil H. Jeffries, took on two FW 190s at 1410 and was credited with one destroyed and one damaged. As a gaggle of four JU-88s came in towards Jeffries' plane, T/Sgt. James S. Porter, framed the first plane in his sights at a very close range. The attacker fired its two rockets and turned away just as Porter gave it a long burst. The right engine seemed to come off, the plane went into a spin and then went completely out of control.

"There's one down; mark him up for me, Tex," Porter called over the intercom to copilot 2nd Lt. Thomas McGalliard.

Then the busy Porter got a bead on the third plane in a line of oncoming fighters, hit it and the ship burst into flames. When seen by

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2nd Lt. John H. Moon, bombardier, the German was in a spin completely in flames. Unfortunately, Porter was not credited with this kill. Before the attacks really got hot Porter had had a machine gun bullet go through the calf of his leg and was in considerable pain as he manned his top turret guns.

There was also much activity in the waist of the lead ship where T/Sgt. Robert J. Conley had been seriously wounded in the left hand by an exploding 20 mm cannon shell. Sgt. Perlmutter put a tourniquet on Conley's arm and reported the injury to Capt. Schoolfield. Perlmutter was told that he would have to handle the waist guns and the wounded man as best he could because everyone else was too busy to lend any assistance. Once the tourniquet was in place and the enemy planes roared in, Conley went back to his guns and at 1430 blew up an FW-190 at 150 yards. Conley then passed out for several minutes, recovered and went back to his gun and tried to fight some more. He later received a Distinguished Flying Cross for his heroic action.

2nd Lt. Dudley F. Fay, Jr., navigator for Lt. Noack, got the last plane, an ME-109, at 1435 and saw the pilot bail out.

Intense damage was done to the 306th during the fighter attacks, although the group was flying good defensive formation. Rockets were seen to knock several planes out of formation, after which the German fighters finished them off one by one.

The 305th Group was the hardest hit that day en route to Schweinfurt, losing a quarter of the total lost by the 8th AF, fifteen out of eighteen planes. "I watched from my left window as the 305th, flying low and to our left, away from the other groups, lost one plane after another," relates Schoolfield. "First they got the last plane, and then chewed up through the formation, until they almost completely destroyed it."

In the fury of the assault it was difficult for Schoolfield as the group leader or Lt. Curtis L. Dunlap, flying as his tail gunner and formation observer, to keep track of what was happening. Schoolfield was shocked when the shooting slackened to learn that he had only five planes left. The 306th birds huddled together for mutual protection, as they came down the forty second bomb run, tailed only by the 92nd Group. The 306th dropped its 1000 pound bombs and sixteen of them landed within a 1920 foot circle. "Bombing was good," reads the intelligence narrative. "Photographs show our bombs bursting right on the aiming point ..."

Having bombed on a heading of forty-five degrees, the planes came around to the left and headed west on a withdrawal route that took them south of Paris and then north towards England. Schoolfield's badly wounded plane was staggering along as the leader. At one point, with a fire in the number 3 engine, Schoolfield had actually pushed the

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alarm bell switch, but nothing happened, so he gave up thoughts of bailing out and tried to keep the plane flying.

Later, M/Gen. Orval Anderson, in conversation with Schoolfield, said that the withdrawal route had been his idea; both agreed that had the withdrawal been along the line of penetration the casualties would have been many more than the sixty lost by the 8th AF. This represented twenty percent of the planes taking off on this raid. In the annals of warfare, and particularly to those who met an unwanted fate on 14 October, the day will be known forever as "Black Thursday." Indeed it was for the ten 306th crews who gave their all on the mission.

Of one hundred men who did not return to Thurleigh that afternoon, thirty-five died on the mission or later of wounds. Sixty-five went to prison camp, eventually returning with a variety of experiences. On the two crews of 1st Lt. Richard Butler, 367th, and 1st Lt. Ralph T. Peters, 369th, all survived.

1st Lt. Douglas H. White, 367th, was the first plane shot out of formation by the swarm of Luftwaffe fighters. He was flying one of the new Gs. Last seen at 1400 with serious damage to the horizontal stabilizer, White's plane quickly went down. As there was only one survivor, T/Sgt. Joseph C. Bocelli, radio operator, there is little information on what took place, but one theorizes that the aircraft exploded and broke apart at the radio room. Those who died were White; 1st Lt. Emil O. Rasmussen, Jr., copilot; 1st Lt. Carl A. Alexander, navigator; S/Sgt. George Toney, Jr., togglier; T/Sgt. Gus Riecke, engineer; S/Sgt. Francis W. Pulliam, ball turret; S/Sgt. Charles A. Adams and S/Sgt. William R. Earnest, waist; and S/Sgt. Walter D. Sherrill, tail.

Knocked out of formation at about the same time was the plane of 1st Lt. Willard H. Lockyear. "We were hit by rockets in the nose, killing the navigator and bombardier," says Sgt. Earnest J. Gilbert, waist gunner. "The 1, 2 and 3 engines were on fire and the radio room was burning."

The daily report from the village of Andernach in which Lockyear's plane plays a dramatic role tells something very graphic about this mission:

"During the raid, 1336-1608, the most exciting drama up to this point could be seen. Approximately one half hour after the start of the alarm, several squadrons of English-American bombers were flying across the city from northwest to southeast at very high altitude. The airplanes were flying so high that they appeared like little silver sparks. The single squadrons kept close together and could be distinguished very well with the naked eye in the bright sunshine; as well as the German planes which were flying around the separate groups in pursuit.

"Suddenly, there was one airplane that soon had high flames coming out of it so that a cruel, gruesome drama could be watched, that took

place between Andernach and Neuweid high above in the sky and that could be watched well by the whole city.

"At all windows and in the streets, nose people appeared who could simply not be restrained by the air patrol nor by the police; and many times the people looked up at this drama with pale faces and certainly with their hearts pounding. Soon the entire airplane was in flames, single parts broke off and twisting peculiarly, they slowly sank down. The rump (tail), on the other hand, was pulling a flame banner behind itself toward Neuweid where it soon, in a racing flight down, fell like a rock.

"Among the red-glowing flames appeared brightly-glowing little silver balls, and then there was a scream in the streets: 'They are parachuting!' Soon one saw the wide-spread-out parachutes and attached to them the little flyers, who could be seen swaying strongly at times in order to get away from the river over which they were gliding. The last one just jumped from the rump of the flaming airplane.

"While the enemy planes, which were pursued by the Germans, disappeared in the southeast, the parachutes were coming down. Two came down in the Andernach area, seriously injured, one with a serious head wound and soaked, because he dragged himself out of the river. The second landed with very serious internal injuries and was taken to the prisoner dispensary . . . and later transferred to the dispensary in Maria Laach. The fourth of the airplane passengers came down in the area of Neuweid . . ." This report was obtained from the Andernach village hall in 1971 by Sgt. Gilbert.

Gilbert landed in the Rhine and was rescued by two foreign workers. He was wounded in the back and partially paralyzed from the waist down. He was joined in the hospital at Maria Laach by S/Sgt. Alfred H. Weiland, Jr., ball turret gunner, who later died there of internal injuries. The casualties in the nose of the airplane before bailout were 2nd Lt. Paul N. Welton, navigator, and 1st Lt. Albert J. Nagy, bombardier. Members of the crew surviving were Lockyear; 1st Lt. Craig S. Powell, copilot; S/Sgt. Don C. Rich, engineer; S/Sgt. Bernie A. Swift, radio; S/Sgt. John J. Regan, waist; and S/Sgt. Lester J. Kurk, tail.

1st Lt. John D. Jackson's 423rd plane went down at 1415, hit over Friesburg by both flak and fighters. "The flak was thick enough to have walked on," says S/Sgt. Raymond J. Ristau, tail gunner. Jackson went down with his plane; 2nd Lt. Bernard A. Bernstein, navigator, was killed as he bailed out; S/Sgts. Jerry Greenberg and Elza McQuithy, waist gunners, were both casualties. Those who survived were Ristau; 2nd Lt. Daniel H. Carey, copilot; 2nd Lt. Henry H. Farmer, bombardier; T/Sgt. Sol D. Levine, engineer; T/Sgt. Warren V. Eitner, radio; and S/Sgt. Burl W. Ford, ball.

About twenty minutes after the target, flak scored direct hits on two engines of 1st Lt. William C. Bisson's plane, while fighters worked over

KIA:  
Eitner  
Others  
POW

no count  
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still cool

the back of the plane, killing S/Sgt. Thompson E. Wilson in the tail position. This was a 367th plane which had been with the group for about a month. 2nd Lt. Charles R. Stafford, copilot, who reportedly wriggled through the small window to his right, and four crewmen from the aft section of the plane, T/Sgt. John J. McLellan, Jr., radio; S/Sgt. Richard H. Vader, ball; S/Sgt. Constantine "Gus" Lamb, waist; and S/Sgt. Peter Giovanini, waist, got out of the plane. Besides Wilson and Bisson, 2nd Lt. George W. Young, Jr., navigator; 1st Lt. Joseph W. Lukens, bombardier; and T/Sgt. Edward S. Osep, engineer, were killed in action.

During the intense fighter onslaught, the number three engine on 1st Lt. George Bettinger's 369th plane ran away. Attempts to bring the engine under control failed and the plane dropped out of formation. Almost instantly the number 1 engine caught fire, and the pilot ordered a bailout. 2nd Lts. Elbert S. Wood, Jr., navigator, and Leland A. Dowden, bombardier, had been wounded in the nose, but were able to leave the plane. Wood's parachute failed to open properly and he plummeted to his death. Dowden had a bad landing and was critically injured; he was finally repatriated in early 1944. 2nd Lt. Abraham Block, co-pilot, broke his collarbone in the bailout, and Bettinger was badly injured by an improperly fitted parachute. S/Sgt. Linden K. Voight, tail gunner, suffered a very serious injury to a leg, but survived as did the remainder of the crew: T/Sgt. Elmer W. Mills, ball turret; and S/Sgts. Samuel F. Gerking, engineer; Gordon F. Lewis, radio, James F. Montana and Donald E. Williams, waist gunners.

1st Lt. Gustave S. Holmstrom, an original 369th copilot, who had been off flying status for several months following a traffic accident, lost his number 4 engine in the first fighter attack on the way in, feathered it and managed to stay with the group. Just past Frankfurt, as another wave of fighters continued the assault, Holmstrom saw a large hole appear in the left wing with a resultant loss of gasoline. At that point he asked his navigator, F/O Philip D. Anderson, for a heading to Switzerland. As he pulled "Piccadilly Commando" out of formation a Luftwaffe fighter followed and continued firing. Suddenly the plane went into a climb, Holmstrom and 2nd Lt. Francis E. Ferguson, copilot, found they had no controls and the pilot ordered the crew to bail out. Holmstrom did not realize that Ferguson had been rather severely wounded in both legs and that he himself had also picked up some extraneous metal.

The navigator, Anderson, and the bombardier, 1st Lt. Jack A. Kelly, went out the nose hatch and were never heard from again. In fact, the Germans were never able to account for their bodies. S/Sgt. Michael Uhrin, radio, was killed in the plane during one of the fighter attacks. Crewmen who parachuted to safety were T/Sgt. Paul R. Loubet, engineer; Sgt. Frederick K. Massey, ball; Sgts. Ralph E. Ellsworth and Bill

Oliver, waist; and T/Sgt. Charles Mace Fatigati, tail. Most of the surviving crewmen were gathered together that night by the Germans and made their slow way to prison camps after periods of solitary confinement at Dulag Luft. Holmstrom, although surviving, was reported at one time by the Germans among those killed and appeared so in *Missing Air Crew Reports*.

1st Lt. Ralph T. Peters and his crew to their dismay learned about German airborne rockets which knocked out the number 2 engine enroute to the target. The plane, contrary to most reports, was able to stay with the formation until after the bombs were dropped, but, when the group went into a climb from the 22,500 foot bombing altitude, Peters was unable to stay with it. While there was no internal damage to the plane nor any injured men aboard, the plane was in serious difficulty with damage to both wings. The added stress of the climb wrote *finis* to the mission and Peters ordered his crew to bail out. Soon after everyone left the plane and were still in their chutes, the plane blew up, adding a "well done" to Peters' decision. Most of the crew, including Peters, was captured rather quickly, as was the fate of most of the surviving airmen on this mission. Others in Peters' crew were 2nd Lt. Edward B. Hughel, copilot; 1st Lt. Dan H. Peterson, navigator; S/Sgts. Blair S. Steed, Raymond M. Grimm, and Manford L. John; and Sgts. Richard L. Kern, Pierre L. Noisat, Jr., and Daniel J. Piedmont.

But 1st Lt. James V. Vaughter, the bombardier, landed in a pine forest about twenty minutes distant from the target and hid there until dark. He was free for two days and walked to Heidelberg where he found civilian clothes and a bicycle. He was finally picked up between Heidelberg and Strasbourg, pointing up the limitations of evasion in Germany with no friendly natives or any kind of assistance. A civilian guard captured Vaughter and, having himself been treated well as an Allied prisoner of war in World War I, was courteous to him. He even took the downed airman to his home where Vaughter was fed soup, apple cider and two apples before being turned over to the Polizei.

One of the earlier planes to leave the formation was a 423rd aircraft flown by 1st Lt. Vernon K. Cole. Tagged by a rocket-firing JU-88 over the continent his plane was hit in the bomb bay and caught on fire. T/Sgt. Robah C. Shields, Jr., radio, and S/Sgt. Donald Richardson, ball turret, were both killed in the plane by rocket fragments. S/Sgt. Frederick W. Zumpf, waist, failed to bail out.

T/Sgt. Robert D. Folk, engineer, went to the back of the plane to check the damage and then returned to the front where he passed out from lack of oxygen. He was pushed out the nose hatch by the bombardier, 2nd Lt. Joseph M. Columbus. Lt. Cole stayed with the plane as long as he could and was blown out when the aircraft exploded. His body was later found hanging in his parachute in a woods. S/Sgt. Irving J. Mills was able to extricate himself from the tail section after the plane

(Folk lived)

came apart. 2nd Lt. Robert E. Partridge, copilot; 2nd Lt. Charles R. Kuehn, navigator, and S/Sgt. Adrien H. Wright, waist, all successfully bailed out.

"Queen Jeannie" was flown by 2nd Lt. Robert McCallum, a pilot who had a well-earned reputation for flying on tough missions: he had been the copilot when Snuffy Smith earned the Medal of Honor and then had been Lt. Robert H. Smith's copilot when that crew spent thirty hours adrift in the North Sea after a mission to Bremen. His luck, however, ran out on this trip and he was killed along with his copilot, 2nd Lt. Homer D. Fitzer. When the crew members had been kidding around before takeoff, little did they know that the jibes directed at Fitzer as one flying on his first mission would portend such a tragic ending.

In the nose, 2nd Lt. Paul V. Manning, bombardier, could not get the nose hatch open, so 2nd Lt. Albert John Prentice, navigator, pushed him aside and gave the release pins "a helluva jerk" and the door flew off. Then Prentice leaned back and let Manning bail out first. They both landed near Hasselt, Belgium, and had little chance to evade. Prentice got rid of his chute and tried to walk away, but a crowd of curious Belgians followed him. He was shortly arrested by a Belgian policeman who turned him over to the Germans. Prentice and Manning were quickly reunited.

S/Sgt. Willard H. McQuarrie got the "jump" message and found that his tail escape hatch was frozen tight. He crawled through the narrow tunnel beside the tail wheel into the waist where he saw S/Sgt. Austin H. Sadler open the waist door. T/Sgt. John W. Drennan, radio, was ready to jump, but pulled his ripcord while standing in the doorway. The chute lines caught on the doorframe and wrapped around the horizontal stabilizer. Drennan was whipped out of the door and then hung suspended between the door and tail, unable to free himself.

Meanwhile, the control cables had snapped loose from their moorings and had pinned Sadler to the floor. McQuarrie tried to free him while the other waist gunner, S/Sgt. Ned L. Bostic, was helping S/Sgt. James E. Dunford out of the ball turret. McQuarrie noted that the ground was coming up fast and signalled Sadler that he was going to jump. He landed in a ploughed field and civilians pointed the direction he should run. When McQuarrie looked around, he was startled to see Sadler running toward him. The ship had broken in half in the air, thrown Sadler free, and he had parachuted to safety. Prentice, Manning, Sadler, McQuarrie and T/Sgt. Marvin L. Bartlett, engineer, were the survivors. It is assumed that McCallum, Fitzer, Bostic, Dunford and Drennan died with the plane. McQuarrie and Sadler, following civilian directions, hid in a woods and about a week later were picked up by the Underground. They walked a considerable distance toward freedom, but were finally apprehended by the Germans.

1st Lt. Richard Butler was pilot of a 367th plane in which all men survived. Attacked by fighters on the way in, Butler ordered his crew to bail out after three engines had been knocked out by the Luftwaffe attackers. The plane was on the bomb run between Wurzburg and Schweinfurt when the alarm bell rang as flames streamed out of the fourth engine. Leaving with Butler were 1st Lt. John W. Kappmeyer, copilot; 1st Lt. Harold K. McCaleb, navigator; 2nd Lt. Francis X. Banda, bombardier; T/Sgt. Alexander Heyburn, Jr., engineer; T/Sgt. Amos R. May, radio; S/Sgt. Edward DeBuyser, Jr., ball turret; S/Sgt. Marcel J. St. Louis, and S/Sgt. Ernest H. Henderson, waist, and S/Sgt. James E. Harris, tail. DeBuyser broke both legs on landing, and all of the men were quickly captured.

Edward K. Fox flew the mission as engineer for J.P. Noack's 369th plane, and during the course of the fighter onslaught was seriously wounded in his left leg 45 minutes before the target. He maintained his post in the top turret, and upon return to Thurleigh was hospitalized for surgery. Returning to the U.S. in early 1944, Fox received a Distinguished Service Cross in May 1944 for his steadfastness that day in the face of the enemy fighter attacks.

Thus ended one of the three worst days in the combat history of the 306th Group. It was a shattered five crews that returned and it was a stunned and saddened Thurleigh that received them. There were those who recalled 17 April at Bremen, but there were many new aircrewmembers there who could not believe what had happened.

It was even worse at the neighboring 305th Group, where fifteen crews were lost. Lt. Col. Delmar Wilson, who had been 306th deputy commander and had headed the 305th during the preparations for this raid, hurried down from 8th AF headquarters to Chelveston to commiserate with his former command. There was little that could be done for those who came back. They were physically and mentally exhausted. Their emotions were strung as tight as possible and they needed rest and understanding. Those flyers left at Thurleigh, sharing barracks with so many empty beds, found themselves assailed by the depth of the tragedy.

Five days later, Maj. Thurman Shuller, now division surgeon, reported that while morale was low, he felt an influx of replacements would be the right tonic to rejuvenate the hardest hit groups. Maybe it was significant that at Thurleigh a new Protestant chaplain, 1st Lt. Ralph Simester, arrived on the 15th to take over the spiritual care of a large element of the base personnel. One of the traditions at the 306th, different from many bases, was that chaplains were allowed inside at the secret combat crew briefings. They made themselves available to the men as the briefings concluded, Fr. Adrian Poletti on one side of the back door and Chaplain Simester on the other. There were always

those who stopped for a few last words of comfort before starting on another mission.

October was the costliest month of the last quarter of 1943. The 8th AF lost 176 planes. Only 93 would go down in November, but the losses would climb back to 163 in December.

There seemed little appreciation in Washington for the battle the airmen were waging. "More planes over the target on more days of the month" was the constant demand of Gen. H.H. Arnold. Only those who tried to fly on a regular basis seemed to appreciate the limitations imposed upon flying by European weather.

*Combined Bomber Offensive* states "The rate of VIII BC operations was never satisfactory to AAF headquarters . . . General Arnold sent a cable to General Eaker in which he said that since German air power appeared at a critical stage, it was necessary to send the maximum number of planes against the enemy.

"We are under constant pressure to explain why we do not send massive flights of aircraft against a target now that we have planes and pilots to put over 500 planes in the air," wrote Arnold. Some days later, near the middle of October, in a letter to Sir Charles Portal he said, ". . . we are not employing our forces in adequate numbers against the German Air Force in being, as well as its facilities and sources. On my part, I am pressing Eaker to get a much higher proportion of his force off the ground and put them where they will hurt the enemy."

Gen Eaker wrote an optimistic report to Washington about the Schweinfurt raid, concluding his remarks with, "We must show the enemy we can replace our losses . . . We must continue the battle with unrelenting fury. There is no discouragement here."

On 21 October Portal took a different tack than had Arnold, as he wrote: "The U.S. Eighth Air Force has earned for itself during the past weeks a reputation that the Royal Air Force will never forget. The Schweinfurt raid may well go down in history as one of the decisive air actions of this war, and it may prove to have saved countless lives by depriving the enemy of a great part of his means of resistance."

## Chapter 13

# BATTLING THE WEATHER

## November 1943

Schweinfurt became synonymous with "disaster" around the 306th, but there were bright spots on the horizon.

To be sure, the detractors of high altitude precision bombing pointed to Schweinfurt as the final proof that the bomber of 1943 could not fight or fly its way to victory, even in formations of several hundred planes.

Eaker and his adherents would point out that, although the losses were high, the target was bombed effectively and damage was much greater than on the 17 August raid. Photo reconnaissance had shown that the August damage was repaired quickly and neutral sources provided information that ball bearing supplies had not been adversely affected. But the more recent raid had an air of finality to it in the destruction of machine tools, although Schweinfurt reappeared as a target with some regularity throughout the remainder of the war. The 8th AF was learning its lessons well and Gen. Eaker stressed to Gen. Arnold that a very real need was more long range fighter escort; his battle report asked for more and larger drop tanks. As later battles were to prove, the answer was embodied in a single aircraft, the P-51.

Albert Speer, a high official in Germany, wrote in his book, *Inside the Third Reich*, that the 17 August raid cut ball bearing production by thirty-eight per cent. But of the 14 October raid he wrote "... the damage was far worse than after the first attack. This time we had lost sixty-seven percent of our ball-bearing production." He also states that the real failure was that the RAF and 8th AF did not continue their raids on ball bearing production with regularity.

About this same time scientists on both sides of the Atlantic were busy with new ideas. The British and Americans were developing and supplying new and effective countermeasures to the anti-aircraft defenses. "Window" or "Chaff" and "Carpet" became familiar additions to the lexicon of the airmen. "Chaff", the American term for "Window", consisted of foil covered strips of paper in varying widths and lengths. Bundles of these were pushed down a tube in the radio room and, as the bundles came apart in the air stream, the foil strips fell through the sky and appeared on the radar screens of the German anti-aircraft units. Instead of reflecting the bombers, radar signals bounced off the foil strips and showed the altitude of the bombers to be considerably lower than it actually was. It was a familiar sight to see the

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black 88 mm bursts in the sparkling foil cloud, rather than at bomber altitude. "Carpet" was a system of radio transmitters, with each bomber carrying perhaps half a dozen, which broadcast on different wave lengths to cover the frequency band used by the German radar. Together, "Chaff" and "Carpet" aided the bombers to complete their mission without quite as much harassment from flak as they had previously.

With the 306th "grounded" right after the Schweinfurt raid, the immediate problem was to repair the damage and return the group to full combat status. This depended upon replacements. On 16 October seven new crews checked in. First pilots included 2nd Lt. Fred J. Rector and F/O Loren Page, assigned to the 367th; 2nd Lt. Martin Newstreet and 1st Lt. Loy F. Peterson to the 369th; and 2nd Lt. J.P. Toombs, 2nd Lt. Norwood L. Garrett and 2nd Lt. Elmer L. Heap to the 423rd. On 21 October three more arrived: 2nd Lt. John M. Kelly, 368th; 2nd Lt. Howard J. Snyder, 369th; and 2nd Lt. Albert A. Adams, 423rd. And on the orders of 31 October were 2nd Lt. Ray W. Ryther, 367th; 2nd Lt. Leland C. Hendershot, 368th; 2nd Lt. Charles J. Kinsey, Jr., and 2nd Lt. Billy W. Casseday, 369th; and 2nd Lt. Geno DiBetta, 423rd.

The inventory of crews had been more than built up, but this was to be expected as 8th BC was finally reaping the benefits of the massive training program in the United States. Deliveries of replacement aircraft had been assured the British in late 1942 by Gen. Arnold, but reality was another twelve months in arriving. The pipelines were now full of crews and planes and would remain so until the end of the war.

As a result of the Schweinfurt debacle replacement aircraft were soon to arrive. Nine new B-17 Fs and Gs appeared on 19 October and three more flew in on 21 October. Now that the group was refitted, Maj. George R. Buckey was assigned to lead it to Duren, Germany, on 20 October. The twelve planes brought their loads of incendiaries home as heavy weather over the continent forced cancellation of the mission at the English Channel.

A major staff change had been effected on the day of the Schweinfurt raid when Capt. James S. Cheney moved from the 423rd Squadron's navigator's post to group navigator, supplanting Capt. John H. Dexter. Cheney was to hold the post until 7 January 1945, the longest tenure of anyone in this job.

November did not get off to an auspicious start for the 306th: in the first three missions flown there was a mid-air collision which cost two planes and two crews and the loss of two other planes in heavy weather over England. Collisions in combat formations were not too difficult to explain. The proximity of other aircraft, flying through clouds and heavy contrails, enemy fighters and flak reaction always placed the planes and crews in jeopardy. A pilot succumbing to vertigo could

easily endanger several planes in a formation, or a moment's diverted attention under attack could spell doom.

On 3 November Col. Howard M. Turner, Jr., 40th CW commander, led the 306th to Wilhelmshaven. Bombing was successful and fighter escort out and back by P-47s and P-38s precluded any encounters with enemy aircraft, although a few were seen in the distance. Flak was meager. But on the way out of Germany, just after crossing the enemy coast, two 368th Squadron planes piloted by 1st Lt. Donald L. Wadley and 1st Lt. George E. Goris, Jr., collided. One chute was seen. There were no survivors.

On Goris' crew were 2nd Lt. Kenneth R. Cabe copilot; 1st Lt. Frank E. Bullard, navigator; 1st Lt. Harry Urman, bombardier; T/Sgt. Walter P. Back, engineer; T/Sgt. Leroy E. Morton, radio; S/Sgt. LeRoy Haskell, ball turret; S/Sgt. Joseph A. Kelch, Jr., and S/Sgt. William J. Meade, waist; and S/Sgt. Howard E. Jordan, tail.

Lt. Wadley had as his copilot on this mission Flight Lt. Kazimier Kazimiorcruk, a veteran Polish RAF pilot. Other crew members were 2nd Lt. Peter Marinos, navigator; 2nd Lt. Charles A. Ashman, bombardier; T/Sgt. Santiago M. Cano, engineer; S/Sgt. Randall Little, radio; S/Sgt. LeRoy M. Stahlman, ball turret; S/Sgt. Kenneth M. Cameron and S/Sgt. Merl E. Dixon, waist; and Sgt. Michael A. Rvasio, tail.

Maj. John Regan, 368th commander at the time of this incident, explained the appearance of the RAF flyer on one of his crews: "I had many Polish people in my squadron; my own crew included Kosakowski, Stemkoski and Jankowski. Because I had so many men of Polish origin and many who spoke the language, the 8th AF and RAF assigned this senior Polish RAF officer to fly one mission in a B-17 with my squadron.

"It seems this man had requested permission for one B-17 mission as he thought it was such a great airplane. He had thousands of hours of flying time in many different types of aircraft and was the commander of a Polish RAF unit. We found him to be a thoroughly delightful companion.

"He stayed with my outfit for about two weeks, flew several practice missions and, as he was inexperienced, I sent him as a copilot on the mission of 3 November. Unfortunately, the B-17 he was in collided with another with no known survivors. It was a sad situation. I well recall the members of his RAF outfit coming to pick up his gear. They were all deeply saddened by the loss, as they liked and respected him.

"Repercussions? No, it was just one of the many unfortunate incidents of the war."

Hardly had the commotion settled from this collision when the group was off to Bremen on the 13th, lead by Capt. David W. Wheeler. Weather was miserable over England and the mission was recalled

micro-bottom 12 Nov # 8 Nov  
top 13 Nov 1943

before leaving the English coast. A month-old 367th B-17, piloted by Lt. Clyde Cosper, flew through a thunderhead, went into a spin and lost several thousand feet of altitude in a few seconds. Lt. Cosper recovered from the spin and was able to level the plane long enough for the crew to bail out. It included 2nd Lt. Wesley B. Brinkley, copilot; 2nd Lt. Allen T. Ballard, navigator; 2nd Lt. Donald F. Dickson, bombardier; Sgt. Kenneth C. Iviemy, radio; T/Sgt. Charles E. Vondrachek, engineer; S/Sgt. Stanley G. Downs, ball turret; S/Sgt. Lloyd L. Meyer and S/Sgt. Harold K. Twing, waist; and S/Sgt. Denver A. McGinnis, tail.

"In a heroic effort to keep the plane, which was still carrying a full bomb load, from crashing in an English village, Cosper chose a clearing near the town of Princes Risborough (Buckinghamshire) and crash landed his almost uncontrollable plane in an open field. The A/C immediately caught fire and exploded within a few seconds, instantly killing Lt. Cosper. Through his valiant efforts he saved the lives of his crew and, without doubt, the lives and property of many British civilians," reads the 367th Squadron diary, authored by Lt. Edward T. Murtha. Lt. Cosper was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for his heroism.

On the same day, 2nd Lt. Floyd O. Scudder's plane encountered severe turbulence and icing and crashed near Great Haseley in Oxfordshire. Upon impact the plane blew up and completely disintegrated killing the ten men on the crew which was composed of 2nd Lt. Leland C. Hendershot, copilot; 2nd Lt. Ewing Shields III, navigator; 2nd Lt. John A. Strausser, bombardier; T/Sgt. Harris R. Whitten, engineer; T/Sgt. Sam P. Bearden, radio; Sgt. Albert E. Tessier, Jr., ball turret; Sgt. Eustasio C. Gonzales and S/Sgt. Albert A. Gripenstroh, waist; and S/Sgt. Charles R. Nicholson, tail gunner. Six of the crew members had arrived at Thurleigh on 31 October with Lt. Hendershot as their pilot.

On 12 November Maj. John J. Manning, group surgeon, checked out of Thurleigh for transfer to the United States and his place was taken by the fourth medical officer to join the group on that same April day in 1942 at Wendover, Utah, Capt. Harold D. Munal, Jr. Munal headed the medical staff of the group during the remainder of the war.

During November the 8th AF bomb groups found themselves hosting visiting dignitaries and on the 15th Lt. Gen. Sir Harold Alexander and his entourage were at Thurleigh to inspect personnel and operations. This tour by Alexander came during a brief period of rest for him in England before he became Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean Forces.

The following day the group made its second sortie to Norway with Capt. David W. Wheeler at the helm, he having been a veteran of a near disastrous trip earlier to Heroya. Its target on this second raid far north

was the molybdenum mines at Knaben. The aim was to prevent the Germans from importing this vital steel-hardening element. It was not one of the 306th's better days. Twenty-three planes took off, but the weather played havoc with the group formation: three planes flew with the 356th Group, one with the 91st Group and two aborted over England because of mechanical problems. One of the planes encountered severe turbulence and icing, dropped several thousand feet and lost the formation altogether. During this maneuver the ball turret gunner bailed out. He was S/Sgt. Charles W. Hamby, flying with 1st Lt. Richard B. Thompson in a 423rd ship. Shortly thereafter Hamby phoned the base from Waddesdon, near Aylesbury, saying he had landed unhurt. Both the 306th and the 356th Groups circled the target three times, trying to identify aiming points, and both finally did drop their bombs. The 306th plane which flew with the 91st Group brought its bombs home when it found its host group "dropping bombs all over Norway with 10/10ths clouds."

During a late November lull in combat action, M/Sgt. William E. Futchik of the 367th was awarded the Legion of Merit medal for "performance of outstanding services while serving as a crew chief from 1 April 1943 to 1 November 1943." His plane, 42-5306, flew twenty-five missions, never failing to take off on schedule and never having any serious mechanical problems. On the last fourteen missions this aircraft was chosen as the Group lead because of its maintenance record. At about this time major changes were underway along the flight line, directed by Maj. Henry J. Schmidt, group engineering officer. His idea was to turn some of the major maintenance problems over to special groups of mechanics, so that these experts could get the planes back into action more quickly. Futchik headed a new engine change section for the group. In November Futchik went before an 8th AF board and in December was sent back to the States to attend Officer Candidate School. He later returned to Europe as an engineering officer.

On 26 November Capt. Dinwiddie Fuhrmeister, 367th operations officer, led the group to 29,000 feet to bomb Bremen again, a mission badly flawed throughout by inclement weather. It was one of those days in which flak was of little account, but enemy fighters estimated at from twenty to one hundred attacked the group and knocked down two airplanes. About forty miles west of the target 1st Lt. Virgil H. Jeffries pulled his plane out of formation and dropped its wheels. The plane had two engines feathered because of mechanical problems and had its controls shot out in a pass by German fighters. "Las Vegas Avenger" crashed in The Netherlands. Killed from the crew were T/Sgt. Richard G. Mowrer, radio; S/Sgt. Arthur R. Adrian, ball turret; S/Sgt. Harold M. Owen, waist; and S/Sgt. Henry A. Steelsmith, tail. All

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may have been fired on while in their parachutes. The only survivor out of the back of the plane was S/Sgt. William L. Threatt, Jr., waist. Bailing out of the front of the plane and surviving were Lt. Jeffries; 1st Lt. Thomas R. McGalliard, copilot; 2nd Lt. Frank L. Ramsey, navigator; 1st Lt. John H. Moon, bombardier; and T/Sgt. James S. Porter, Jr., engineer.

Also disappearing during the fighter attack was the 368th plane piloted by 2nd Lt. Francis J. Hoey. All crew members survived, including 2nd Lt. John B. Harr, copilot; 2nd Lt. Stanley S. Silverman, navigator; 2nd Lt. James B. Morrow, bombardier; Sgt. William H. Sanford, engineer; Sgt. Robert P. Randall, radio; S/Sgt. William J. Tremper, ball turret; Sgt. Gerald F. Brennan and S/Sgt. Neil H. Brennan, waist; and Sgt. Walter A. Townsend, tail. The Brennans were not related.

In the closing days of November, Capt. Thurman Dawson was named group ordnance officer and Maj. Hugh Toland was transferred to become First Division bombardier. Capt. Walter H. Coons, an original 367th bombardier and more recently group training officer, was moved into the group bombardier's post.

December began with a first day mission to Leverkeusen, but bombing was on the secondary, Solingen. Capt. Frank Kackstetter led the twenty-two planes of the 306th. In wintry weather, trouble developed soon after takeoff and the 423rd plane of Capt. George Reese was caught in a thunderhead, went into a spin, recovered and then in continuing turbulence cracks began to appear in the wings and fuselage. Reese ordered the crew to bail out and all left, although S/Sgt. Kenneth B. Rood, ball turret, was killed. It later was found that his chute did not open. Takeoff that morning for Reese had been at 0805 and at 0910 Reese phoned the control tower that his plane had crashed in a woods two and one half miles northwest of Lapham. Being fully loaded, the plane's bombs exploded on impact, but no damage was done to people or property, other than trees.

The remainder of the group continued on the mission, unaware of the drama below. The lead reported that fighter escort was generally good until the group crossed the Rhine on the way in. Then a gap occurred and E/A hit the 306th, inflicting some damage, but failing to down any planes. One E/A was destroyed by S/Sgt. Calvin T. Brend, ball turret gunner for 2nd Lt. J.P. Toombs of the 423rd. Brend caught the ME-109 in a turn underneath his ship, and at 800 yards laced it well with his .50 calibers. Smoke came from the nose and, as the fighter neared the clouds below, the pilot bailed out and the ship went out of control. On their return crewmen reported seeing two FW-190s, disguised as P-47s with white noses and wing tips, which attacked the low squadron from 11 o'clock.

About four minutes after bombs away the plane of Lt. Toombs was hit by incendiary bombs from a plane above from another group. The left wing tip was hit, the left aileron sheared off and number 3 engine struck by an exploding bomb. There were two holes in the right side of the nose and the chin turret was badly damaged. The left elevator was knocked off, as well. During this "friendly" bombardment, the right waist gunner, S/Sgt. Guy J. Aubrey, bailed out. S/Sgt. John C. Foley, left waist gunner, returned with a frost bitten cheek and neck.

"The pilot performed an unusual feat in bringing this aircraft back to base in so severely damaged condition," wrote Capt. Rudolph Skalak, the interrogating officer.

A lasting impression was always made on bomber crewmen by observing other B-17s in distress: this mission was certainly no exception. The intelligence report to First Bomb Division on this day showed the following observations by 306th crewmen:

"One B-17 at 1112 in spin under fighter attack just inside enemy coast. No chutes seen.

"One B-17 at 1133 blew up → no chutes seen.

"One B-17 at 1138 went down on fire with pieces coming off — one chute.

"One B-17 at 1145 going down in spin under fighter attack — two chutes.

"One B-17 just before IP going straight down. A big piece broke off. No chutes seen.

"One B-17 at 1205, hit by AA gun fire, down in flames — one chute.

"One B-17 at 1209 on fire, then blew up — eight chutes.

"One B-17 from low squadron of 92nd Group, at 1211, hit by AA gun fire. Fire appeared to stream back from an engine, then stopped, then reappeared through fuselage, eventually causing tail of A/C to twist and fall off. Four to seven men seen jumping. Two chutes seen opening . . . Plane had a letter B in triangle. Call sign letter D. Pilot should be recommended for extreme heroism, holding blazing plane steady for four and one-half minutes by watch so crew could bail out. Our people say one of finest examples of sheer courage ever observed. (2nd Lt. George C. Hale and eight of his crew members died in this plane. Only the tail gunner, Sgt. Donald L. Wilson, survived.)

"One B-17 at 1213 going down with wing off — no chutes seen.

"One B-17 at 1215 blew up — one chute.

"One B-17 at 1230 disintegrated, under attack by two FW-190s. No chutes seen.

"One B-17 at 1240 at about 13,000 feet blew up — no chutes seen.

"Two single engine A/C reported as P-47s, but possibly E/A, collided at 1250 and went down."

This report vividly illustrates that it was often a very busy sky that the

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airmen were viewing. When those planes going down included planes out of one's own squadron or group, the tension among the air crews could become almost unbearable. Most, however, were able to maintain a reasonably detached attitude, centered on self survival. Additionally, any one man was likely to have seen only a small fraction of the action described above.

On 11 December, Col. George L. Robinson flew with Maj. Robert P. Riordan with the 369th Squadron leading a raid to Emden. Anti-aircraft fire was described as moderate "but extremely accurate," as could be attested later by 1st Lt. John P. Noack and his crew. They were mortally hit over the target at 1259 and fell out of the formation. Noack had nearly completed his tour and survived along with all his crew: 2nd Lt. Robert A. Schoch, copilot; 1st Lt. Dudley H. Fay, Jr., navigator; 1st Lt. Hyman H. Bittman, bombardier; S/Sgt. Frank J. Wesner, engineer; Sgt. Michael J. Gallagher, radio; S/Sgt. Duncan J. Williams, ball turret; S/Sgt. Kenneth H. Smith and S/Sgt. Albert H. Sewald, waist; and S/Sgt. Thurman H. Smith, tail. All but Schoch were veterans of several months' of combat duty, but the copilot had been with the group only three weeks.

Two days later the planes were up again with Capt. Thomas Witt leading twenty-two aircraft to Kiel, a venture which cost the 367th 2nd Lt. Wesley B. Brinkley and his crew. Three men survived the intense anti-aircraft fire which downed the plane: 2nd Lt. Bernard A. Grossman, navigator; T/Sgt. Ralph G. Landherr, engineer, and S/Sgt. Frank M. Cargill, waist. Besides Brinkley, other casualties were: 2nd Lt. Charles A. Mull, copilot; 2nd Lt. Donald F. Dickson, bombardier; S/Sgt. Frederick D. Kittredge, radio; S/Sgt. George Murat, ball turret; S/Sgt. Stanley W. Rust, waist; and S/Sgt. Floyd G. Younger, tail. All bailed out into the North Sea, three were quickly picked up by German boats, and survived the exposure to the frigid northern waters. After being saved, Cargill saw Brinkley's body, and believes that exposure claimed the pilot's life as well as most of the seven who died.

December was a heavy month in the combat log, with the group finding its average number of planes on a raid climbing above the twenty mark. Because of weather most of the missions were being flown with airborne radar used for navigation. Because targets along coasts and rivers were more easily identified by radar than inland cities, most of the raids in this period went to coastal objectives in Germany: Emden, Kiel and Bremen. There was also the factor still of inadequate long range escort to take the lengthening bomber stream deeper into enemy territory. On the 20th Lt. Col William S. Raper and Capt. Joseph Belser led the group to Bremen, four days after an earlier raid to the same target. The 367th Squadron had not flown on the earlier trip, but on this mission was the low squadron and received the heaviest

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concentration of anti-aircraft fire. Enemy planes were seen, but did not attack the 306th.

2nd Lt. Ray Ryther's plane was flying as tailend Charlie for the entire combat wing which, just before reaching the German coast, approached a solid cloud buildup and began to climb over it. Ryther's plane could not keep up with the formation in the climb and lost an engine which was feathered. As Ryther's plane began losing altitude, the pilot kept tagging on to other lower groups and eventually did drop his bombs on Bremen. As Ryther turned off the target, three ME-109s jumped his lagging plane and it was soon gone. 2nd Lt. John N. Dennison, navigator, was killed in the nose during a fighter pass and Ryther himself was shot in an arm. The crew bailed out, but Ryther found that, as he got out of his seat, he was pinned against the side of the spinning plane. At some point the plane exploded and the next thing Ryther knew he was swinging in an opened parachute.

"It was the first time I had worn a back pack on a mission, as they had just been issued," says Ryther. "Had I had a chest pack I am sure I would never have snapped it on in time."

The pilot landed in a field near Bremerhaven and found there T/Sgt. Wilmer D. Griffith, his engineer, who listed among his talents a speaking knowledge of German. Both were quickly in the hands of Wehrmacht personnel and spent that night in a Bremen school with many other 8th AF personnel. Besides Dennison, others missing and presumed dead were S/Sgt. Paul L. Wells, ball turret; S/Sgt. Lee R. Laney, waist; and S/Sgt. LaMoyné W. Billheimer, tail. None of these three was ever accounted for. Surviving the experience were 2nd Lt. Alvie N. Myers, copilot; 2nd Lt. Jay R. Weiselberg, bombardier; T/Sgt. Thomas A. Gold, radio; and S/Sgt. Lester Terry, waist. Weiselberg was hit in the eye by shrapnel, which stayed with him throughout his prison camp experience. Ryther tells that while the captured airmen were waiting for transfer to Dulag Luft, the young, blond German fighter pilots who had shot them down appeared. They were not really interested in anything except a trophy: the devil's head patch of the 367th Clay Pigeon Squadron on Ryther's leather A-2 jacket. In one of the hard-to-explain events of this mission, Lt. Herbert Bloom, bombardier for 2nd Lt. Charles J. Kinsey, Jr., 369th, died of anoxia.

22 Dec. Although the 367th had enjoyed a fairly lengthy period of loss free combat flying, the days of December again lengthened into periods of tragedy. On the 22nd the group fought its way into Osnabrook. Capt. Charles Schoolfield was the 306th leader and the mission went well until there was a brief hiatus in the fighter defense just after bombs away.

Fifteen ME-109s worked their way among the bombers and eight enemy planes made a pass through the 306th formation, knocking

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down 1st Lt. James E. Winter and causing serious injuries in the plane of Lt. Arthur H. Crapsey, Jr., a veteran of a month in combat. As a fighter came across the front of "Punchy" it raked the plane, killing Winter and his copilot, 2nd Lt. Robert W. Ashley. The plane was shattered by cannon fire that was so intense it tore off the number 1 and number 2 engines and almost ripped off a wing. The plexiglas nose was destroyed and 1st Lt. Ralph K. Pringle, bombardier, tumbled out. His chute was on, but he opened it too soon and the canopy caught on the jagged edges of the plexiglas and he rode the plane down to his death.

2nd Lt. Robert F. Jones, navigator, went out the nose escape hatch, but did not open his chute for some distance as burning pieces of the plane were dropping around him. He finally pulled the rip cord when he could begin to distinguish trees below him and then was knocked out when he landed on his back in mud and leaves. It was a grey, overcast day on the ground and Jones was not observed. He managed to get away, hopping railroad trains, and eventually reached Frankfurt. There he found himself in the middle of an RAF raid and almost gave himself up as his morale had hit bottom. Instead, he caught another train and got off the next day in a forest. Jones found a safe spot, pulled leaves over himself and went to sleep, only to waken at the sound of voices. He looked up to see two wide eyed German school children carefully look at him and then run away. Jones ran the other way but was soon captured by an anti-aircraft crew. Along with Jones, the only other survivors were T/Sgt. David M. Hovis, engineer, and S/Sgt. Otis F. Thomas, tail gunner. Their paths never crossed in Germany. Victims from the crew included T/Sgt. Walter C. Rozanski, radio; Sgt. John E. Olson, Jr., ball turret; and S/Sgts. Henry Sall and Ray Y. Wilson, waist gunners.

Lt. Crapsey's plane took its share of punishment during the fighter attack, as a 20 mm cannon shot came through the plexiglas nose seconds after bombs away and exploded against the right rudder pedal in front of Crapsey, nearly severing his foot. 2nd Lt. Wm. Sherman Smith, bombardier, had just closed the bomb bay doors and had lowered his arm, escaping by almost a miracle the shot which hit Crapsey. Smith was wounded when pieces of a 20 mm shell slammed against the back of his flak suit, tearing a large hole in it, but was not seriously injured. 2nd Lt. Richard Wright, navigator, received shrapnel wounds in a leg. The interior of the nose was torn up by ricocheting pieces of metal and plexiglas, leaving the nose very cold. The interior was covered by red hydraulic fluid which later startled medics and maintenance men, causing them to expect the very worst. A piece of shrapnel from the shell that hit Crapsey continued on aft, passing through the right ankle of T/Sgt. Donat Heon, the engineer. Heon was knocked from his turret by the impact, but, not immediately realizing

he had been injured, climbed back into the turret and shot down one of the attacking 109s.

2nd Lt. Perry Cavos, the copilot, had been around Thurleigh for two months, picking up some combat time and experience, and he took over the wheel while Crapsey calmly assessed his own status and then applied a tourniquet to his right leg. The tourniquet and the intense cold helped to slow the blood loss and, when not in shock, Crapsey was able to assist in flying the crippled airplane. S/Sgt. Martin J. Kilcoyne, radio, was at his gun as the fighters hit and, during the first pass, became overly curious as to what was going on. So he stood on tip toes to try to get a better view. This was a mistake for a 20 mm projectile hit the trunion block of his machine gun and the fragments sprayed his face, some entering one eye. Kilcoyne was knocked to the floor by the impact and when found was covered with blood. But the extreme cold also contributed to his survival.

With Cavos at the controls, the battered aircraft made its way home, flying under the formation. As it approached the field, Crapsey saw that Cavos was lined up to land on the perimeter track, so he took over the controls and got the plane aligned with the runway for a proper landing. Capt. Alfred Erb, a surgeon, was in the plane to help the wounded as soon as a door was opened. Wright, Smith and Heon were taken out easily through the front escape hatch, while Kilcoyne went out the back door. The problem that remained was the removal of the critically wounded Crapsey from the narrow confines of the pilot's seat. Erb, who was short of stature, got into the cockpit and Crapsey rose up to greet him with, "Why didn't they send a man?" But Erb was equal to the comment and the situation at hand; Crapsey was removed from the plane, ending his combat tour on his third mission. Heon and Kilcoyne had both completed two flights.

Kilcoyne was hospitalized for four months, returned to the 367th and completed his combat tour in September, 1944, only to lose his battered eye twenty years later. Heon was confined to hospitals for three years and his wound continued to trouble him in the ensuing years. Crapsey's foot was not immediately removed, but, when gas gangrene set in, it was necessary to amputate close to the hip to save his life. Wright and Cavos were both killed as crewmates on their next mission, 11 January. Smith flew for a time, then was hospitalized for surgery unrelated to this mission and ended his combat tour in May, 1944, at nine missions.

When the fighter planes of the Luftwaffe roared through the formation, Clay Pigeon gunners downed four of them and 2nd Lt. George Boncic, 423rd bombardier, got credit for an ME-109. The 367th gunners scoring were S/Sgt. Bennett E. Ball (a wing came off an ME-109); Sgt. Heon (ME-109 exploded); T/Sgt. Patrick F. Murray (ME-109 pilot bailed out) and S/Sgt. Floyd M. Shade (E/A blew up).

The group went to Calais on 24 December; to Ludwigshafen on 30 December (with Lt. Ian Elliott of the 367th making his way home alone from deep inside Germany when he lost an engine); and on 31 December to an airfield at Cognac. On this last mission Lt. Charles O. Smith of the 367th crashed his plane near Stevenage, southeast of Bedford and east of Luton, when he ran out of gas and had lost his radios. Lt. Ellis J. Andras, copilot, was seriously injured, suffering a fractured skull. All but two of the crew had cuts and scratches. Andras was taken to Diddington hospital. He died 30 September 44. 24 Dec

The mission to Cognac ended a year and three months in combat for the 306th, during which time the planes had flown ninety-seven missions. Losses were still a significant factor, but, perhaps more noticeable, was the fact that the 306th was putting more than twenty planes over the target on almost every mission. There were more planes on the base, more crews, and more missions were being flown. As New Year's Eve settled over the base in the English Midlands, the 3,000 men of the 306th also were out to prove that they could party with the best. 31 Dec

available at 306bg.us documents

## Chapter 14

# ENDING A YEAR

## December 1943

The end of 1943 marked another milestone for the Combined Bomber Offensive. Talk of scrapping the daylight program had come to an end and those who looked into the future were now thinking of proper ways to assess what had been accomplished and what would happen during the remainder of the war.

Detractors a year earlier had been sure that the entire program would be scrapped before 1944. But the military leadership and political acumen of Lt. Gen. Ira Eaker had prevailed. Despite the devastation wrought on his force twice over Schweinfurt and on other ill-fated raids, the loose threads had been painfully knotted into a fabric that became a major force in the winning of the war.

In early December Gen. H.H. Arnold had begun to make major changes in commands and one can only wonder how much the hand of Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower may have been a factor in the shifts that took place. Evidently, the decision was made sometime in the fall to trade Eaker and Maj. Gen. James H. Doolittle, but was not publicly revealed until December. First Lt. Gen. Carl Spaatz was moved into overall responsibility for strategic bombing operations in Continental Europe. Then came the transfer of Eaker to the Mediterranean, where he was given command of two air forces, the 12th and the 15th. Doolittle was moved to England from command of the 15th.

Eaker was incensed at the move and tried every stratagem he could to have it cancelled. One must view his actions against the background of public relations. Since 1942 the 8th had always been center stage and its commander was mentioned almost daily in press releases. Neither the 12th nor the 15th enjoyed such coverage and often in news stories their operations seemed added only as an afterthought. Eaker cannot be faulted either for having a tremendous pride in his accomplishments during twenty-three months of leadership of the 8th, from creation to successful continuing operation.

Perhaps there is a clue to the change in a memo written by General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower, dated 1 February 1945, in which he ranks his various commanders with a succinct statement about the outstanding characteristics or qualifications of each. Thirty-eight general officers were placed in order. "The order of listing hereon is based primarily upon my conclusions as to the value of services each officer has rendered in this war and only secondarily upon my opinion

as to his qualifications for future usefulness," wrote the Supreme Allied Commander.

Generals Omar Bradley and Carl Spaatz were rated as coequals in the number one position. Of Spaatz he wrote, "Experienced and able air commander; loyal and cooperative; modest and selfless. Always reliable."

Doolittle stood seventh in this interesting list of both air and ground commanders: "Dashing, learns rapidly, enthusiastic."

Eaker was thirteenth: "Cooperative, firm, experienced."

Maj. Gen. Frederick Anderson, the only other 8th AF figure in the list ranked thirty-fourth: "Brainy, cooperative, experienced."

One might even read into these few brief words that Eisenhower was a bit awed by Doolittle and his brilliant record as a flyer, an engineer and as the daring leader of the Tokyo raid launched from the aircraft carrier Hornet.

As 1943 drew to a close, the 306th could point with pride to its accomplishments: at this time it was leading the 8th AF in the number of missions completed. A rundown of some of the figures based actually on one hundred missions as of 11 January 1944, is: 2,054 planes participating in the 100 missions with 1,634 planes actually attacking the targets. Of those not attacking, 174 were prevented by mechanical or equipment failures, and 245 were stopped short by personnel failures, enemy action, etc. The 306th had gained credit for 1,886 sorties against the enemy and had dropped 3,679 tons of high explosive bombs and 474 tons of incendiaries. The 368th Squadron was the first in the 8th to drop 1000 tons. Those men at the machine guns had expended 2,977,485 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition and in exchange were credited with 315 enemy planes destroyed, 109 probables and ninety-three damaged. The cost in planes was eighty-seven with the 367th Squadron suffering forty per cent of the losses.

In surveys of the group, it is also noted that not all time was spent eating, sleeping, flying and working. There was time for an extensive recreation program which captured the attention of those interested in more intense physical activity — basketball, football, baseball and handball. Some of the more enterprising also found means of playing golf.

Team sports became increasingly organized. The daily bulletin reveals that the first half basketball championship in October went to the 4th Station Complement Squadron with nine straight victories. Their ninth victory came at the expense of the 876th Chemical Company, 44 to 30. Ebel's 96 points for the 876th in nine games topped the league in scoring. In this particular game Walter Miller and John Savedge led the 4th team with fourteen and thirteen points, respectively. The same evening the 423rd team defeated the Group Headquarters team, 57 to 30, with Raymond Krawczak and Jack Melton getting fifteen and

twelve points, respectively. Also on the schedule, the 369th officers, led by Maj. Robert P. Riordan, drubbed the 367th officers, 37 to 22. Riordan scored eleven points and Lt. William Tackmier had eight for the losers.

Praise for the men of the 306th came from headquarters, 8th BC, in a letter from Maj. Gen. Frederick J. Anderson to Colonel George L. Robinson:

"By hard work, unswerving perseverance and the resourceful and intelligent employment of technical skills and professional qualifications, the personnel of this command — ground forces, maintenance men, combat crews and staff officers alike — have written a new chapter in the history of aerial bombardment. The crews of our bombers have, in broad daylight, fought their way through the strongest defense which the enemy could bring against them and have ranged over the length and breadth of Germany, striking with deadly accuracy many of the most important hostile industrial installations and ports.

"To you, as commanding officer of the 306th Group goes a large share of the credit for this remarkable achievement. Your keen understanding of administrative problems and your superior tactical leadership have obviously been an inspiration to your officers and men. The 306th Group, which has now completed 98 combat missions, is one of the oldest veteran groups of this Command. On 25 September 1942, the 306th Group became operational in this theatre. Since that date the 306th Group has repeatedly distinguished itself in combat, including such outstanding accomplishments as participating in the first mission to Lille, France, 9 October 1942; lead group of the first AAF attack on Germany, 17 January 1943. The solid foundation of esprit de corps and the high tradition prevailing in the 306th Group is one of the most prized and elusive distinctions that any military organization can achieve.

"I hope that you will convey to all your officers and men my unbounded admiration and appreciation for the manner in which they have executed their difficult assignments during the past year. Their courage, skill and resourcefulness have been of such character as to win credit and commendation for Americans in general and for the Air Force in particular.

"I firmly believe that the VIII Bomber Command has reached a state of indoctrination which, with the required quantity of equipment and qualified personnel now arriving, will enable it to destroy Germany's capacity to wage war or maintain an effective defense against invasion."

The approximately 3,000 men who occupied Station 111 at any one time represented a changing panorama of people. There was a hard core that had arrived with the first shipment which seemed destined to remain until the end of hostilities. There were combat crewmen who

came and left by various routes. There were men who found a home at Thurleigh and in the surrounding communities, who became husbands and fathers while serving in England.

Weddings were occurring with some frequency, although the way to the altar was paved with innumerable documents and several stumbling blocks. When quizzed on this later, Col. Robinson said: "The chaplains and I had an agreement: all applications for marriage to English girls were turned down on first submission. We felt this helped some men who found themselves in an untenable position, but who could then report, 'The colonel says I can't get married!'"

"We also, just as quickly, approved the second application by the same couple."

As the new year was about to begin the complement of officers on the field included one colonel, five lieutenant colonels, twenty-one majors, fifty-four captains, 130 first lieutenants, 228 second lieutenants, seven flight officers and three warrant officers, for a total of 459. Six months later there was just one more officer. Of the rated officers there were eighty-nine pilots, seventy-two copilots, seventy-two navigators and seventy-five bombardiers, a total of 308. Six months later this total had climbed to 329.

Thirty-five combat crews had left for England in September 1942. None of these crews remained, the last vestiges of the original flying personnel having gone down at second Schweinfurt, except for some command and staff officers. Original officers still with the group included four lieutenant colonels: Douglas R. Coleman, ground executive; John L. Lambert, 423rd commander; William S. Raper, deputy group commander; and Robert C. Williams, group operations officer.

Among the majors were John A. Bairnsfather, group intelligence; George R. Buckey, 367th commander; Charles G. Duy, Jr., group adjutant; Frank B. Edelbrock, 4th Station Complement commander; Charles A. Flannagan, 369th operations; Edward T. Miazza, 368th executive; Elbert G. Odle, 368th operations; John M. Regan, 368th commander; Robert P. Riordan, 369th commander; Maurice V. Salada, 423rd operations; Henry J. Schmidt, group engineering; and William B. Sory, 449th subdepot engineering.

The captains included Fred C. Baldwin, John E. Bennett, Herman B. Blumenthal, William R. Cain, Walter H. Coons, Wiley W. Glass, Edgar S. Hallman, Wendell L. Hull, Stanley J. Jarrow, Henderson N. Knight, Phil G. Kraft, Harold D. Munal, Jr., Shubel J. Owen, Rudolph Skalak, Jr., Robert S. Stevens, Rex D. Stutznegger, William C. VanNorman, James M. Venable, Jr., Percy A. Vincent and Alfred W. Weld.

Those who remembered the weeks at Wendover were most numerous in the enlisted grades. These men performed valiantly in their

daily tasks, many putting in hours on duty that would defy the most dedicated of men. Ordnance, armament and maintenance men gave selflessly in their performance whether loading bombs, reloading as orders changed, performing the myriad plane maintenance tasks, or the more specialized instrument, turret and other work. The 306th was in every sense a team, with clerks and typists contributing their efforts; chauffeurs, cooks, medics, carpenters, riggers, all doing their utmost to get the job done.

Unfortunately, there were a few who did not measure up to the needs of the group, and usually were transferred elsewhere to other duty. The 306th forged ahead, starting a new year as the old had ended, flying the assigned missions and providing one of the links in the overall combat effort in Europe.

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# Chapter 15

## NEW TARGETS, HIGH LOSSES

### January-February 1944

✓ We do have a mission report for 3 Jan - 44

Because the 306th was grounded by weather for the first three days of 1944, there was ample time for the celebrating airmen to recover from the festivities of New Year's Eve before they had to take to the air again.

On the 4th, however, it was into the wild blue yonder, this time with thirty-three planes bound for Kiel under the leadership of Capt. Charles Schoolfield. Fighter activity was slight and flak was ineffective, with twenty-six planes crossing the target.

But the aircraft of a brand new 367th crew under the command of 2nd Lt. Charles E. Tucker, Jr. failed to return. Not wanting to face the kangaroo court then operating at Thurleigh for aborting pilots, Tucker left England with only three operational superchargers and had trouble all across the North Sea in maintaining formation. An engine caught fire at about the IP and Tucker turned his plane around to head for England. An 88 mm battery caught the plane and, after being hit, the aircraft went into a spin and then into a bank of clouds. Faced with innumerable problems aboard, Tucker landed the plane on a sandbar on the Isle of Sylt in the North Frisian Islands. Tucker had his original crew members, all flying their first mission, except for the bombardier who had already filled in as a substitute on other crews and was flying his third. It was not the usual practice to send out new crews alone on a first mission. More commonly the first pilot flew as copilot with an experienced crew or had an experienced copilot fly with him on his very first mission. Whatever policies may have existed were not followed in this case and the 367th lost a crew before anyone had time to get acquainted. The entire crew survived: 2nd Lt. Eugene R. McFadden, copilot; 2nd Lt. Owen W. Johnson, navigator; 2nd Lt. Sidney Passin, bombardier; S/Sgt. Arthur L. Pahl, engineer; S/Sgt. Samuel J. Covino, radio; Sgt. Laurence W. Neuhauser, ball turret; Sgt. Stephen J. Korba and Sgt. M.J. Badeaux, waist; and Sgt. John F. Bentley, tail.

It was back to Kiel on the 5th with Capt. Dinwiddie Fuhrmeister as the air commander leading the group with the 367th Squadron. In one of those heart-rending events, Capt. Ian R. Elliott, flying almost his last mission, crashed on takeoff and eight of the crew were killed. The only survivors were 2nd Thomas J. Bridgman, copilot, and S/Sgt. William W. Winans, Jr., tail gunner. Casualties besides Elliott were: 1st Lt. Harry M. Renfro, navigator; 1st Lt. William H. Peterson, bombar-

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dier; T/Sgt. John R. Petlewski, radio; S/Sgt. Anthony J. Waive, engineer; Sgt. G.A. Johnson, ball; S/Sgt. Richard S. Payne and S/Sgt. James L. Mitchell, waist. Five of the crew members had come from Lt. Fred J. Rector's crew.

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It was a very different day from the previous one. The weather was clear over the target and bombing results for the twenty-five planes were excellent. But what really mattered to the crews was that the fighter support never appeared and the bombers found themselves in a hot fight with the Luftwaffe. Victories went to S/Sgt. Charles W. Hamby, 423rd; Sgt. Oakland V. Bittikoffer, 368th, who got two, an ME-109 and an FW-190; Sgt. Albert J. Doine, 368th; and Sgt. George B. Richardson, 369th.

2nd Lt. Sidney Wolfe and his crew had joined the 369th Squadron on 1 December, but had not flown very much and were making their second raid. They came through the target area unscathed, and were about midway between Kiel and Hamburg when the fighters hit the formation in a head-on attack. The German gunners knocked the tail off Wolfe's plane and the tailless fuselage went into a spin. Bailout was ordered but only 2nd Lt. Alvin A. Enos, copilot, and 2nd Lt. Fremont H. Jewell, navigator, who both went out the nose hatch, escaped. It is believed that the destruction wrought by the fighter attack aft of the bomb bay may well have killed or seriously wounded most of the gunners. Lt. Enos saw only two other chutes in the air and watched from his parachute as the B-17 plowed into the ground and exploded. Enos had flown two missions, both on successive days to Kiel, and his combat career ended when he landed feet first on brick pavement in the center of a small town and was immediately captured. Such a landing spot was extremely hard on his feet, ankles and knees, and for several days he had great difficulty walking. Although Jewell survived, Enos never saw him on the ground or at Stalag Luft I where Enos spent the remainder of the war. Besides Wolfe, others killed were 1st Lt. Harry H. Tomlin, bombardier; S/Sgt. Adolph E. Sicola, engineer; S/Sgt. Gene H. Paige, radio; Sgt. Robert A. McClure, ball; Sgt. Robert H. Zeigler and Sgt. Myles F. Hannify, waist; and S/Sgt. Gerald W. Allen, tail.

The group was up again on the 7th on a rather unspectacular mission, but really returned to the shooting war on 11 January. On this date Col. George L. Robinson was the leader of the 40th CW; the 306th had as its primary target an aircraft component plant at Halberstad, a new target for the group. Halberstad quickly became one of the legendary missions in 306th history, ranking along with Bremen, Schweinfurt, and later targets at Oberpfaffenhofen and Ruhland as devastating days for the combat crews and the returning aircraft. Today the 306th dropped five crews, encountering an overwhelming fighter

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attack. The main group had twenty planes in it and the composite group, led by Capt. Howard Sharkey flying with a high squadron from the 92nd Group, had fourteen more planes from Thurleigh.

From the standpoint of bombing it was also a bad day. The lead bombardier salvoed four seconds late, placing most of the bombs in a field northeast of the target. The composite group hit the target. Bomb release was followed by an intense fighter attack. To complicate matters, on returning to England the group found Thurleigh closed by weather and planes had to be diverted to Hethel, Foulsham, Deopham Green, Great Saling, Horsham, Kimbolton and Attlebridge. This created an especially difficult situation for the intelligence officers in conducting their post-mission crew interrogations.

Thirty-four planes had taken off that morning, but Lt. Joseph M. Gay, 368th, and 2nd Lt. Ralph F. Clark, 423rd, returned early. Gay's plane had mechanical problems and Clark became ill. The weather was not very good when takeoff began at 0812, but in the target area it was clear and the mission proceeded without incident. However, at noon a twin-engined fighter hit the main group and then stayed around for an hour making sporadic forays, but without causing significant damage.

"At 1322½," says Col. Robinson, "thirty to thirty-five FW-190s came in on us high from 1030 to 0130 and rolled through the formation. In seven and one-half minutes I had eight planes missing from the formation, leaving only eleven of us." During those few minutes, five 306th planes and the deputy leader, a PFF (although PFF is an abbreviation for pathfinder force, the term was commonly applied during WW II combat to designate a plane with airborne radar used for navigation and bombing) ship from another group, were shot down. One of the first fighters through the formation went between Robinson's lead ship and the PFF aircraft flying on its wingtip, and shot away the tail of the PFF plane. No chutes were seen from it.

To those returning, Halberstad was certainly considered a very rough raid, but only a later accounting would show how costly the mission actually had been to the men of the 306th. From the five 306th planes to go down fifty airmen were lost. Forty-three of these men were killed, probably the highest personnel casualty rate experienced by the group since that incredible day over Brest on 1 May 1943.

1st Lt. Willard D. Reed, an experienced 368th pilot, was lost off Robinson's left wing, thus stripping the lead ship of both its protective wingmen. Reed's crew was the luckiest of the day, with five survivors who included Reed; 1st Lt. Ivan E. Glaze, navigator; 1st Lt. Myron J. Dmochowski, bombardier; S/Sgt. Joseph G. O'Connell, ball turret; and S/Sgt. Warren W. Cole, tail gunner. The plane was hit hard in the leading edge of a wing and the extensive damage caused the plane to go into a spin. A raging fire ensued and the plane broke up in the air.

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Lt. Dmochowski had minor flak wounds when he bailed out and landed near a small Dutch town. Those members of the crew who died were 1st Lt. Thomas J. Brady, copilot; T/Sgt. Orian G. Owens, engineer; T/Sgt. Charles A. Nichols, radio; and S/Sgts. John J. Gem-browski and Albert C. Schaeffler, waist gunners.

Two members of this crew, Lt. Glaze and Sgt. Cole, had Lady Luck with them and managed to evade capture. Cole tells his story: "After the pilot rang the alarm bell, and while I was putting on my parachute, a 20 mm shell hit the base of the vertical stabilizer, stunning me. I was unable to open the tail hatch and started crawling to the forward hatch from which the others were jumping. The plane went into a spin and broke in half. The next thing I knew I was falling through the air. I must have dropped about 15,000 feet before opening my parachute. I landed in a woods and was soon joined by a crew member (possibly O'Connell). A number of people gathered around us and we told them to go away because they attracted too much attention. After the crowd had dispersed a young fellow told us to follow him and led us to a gully where we stayed until dusk. Then a boy came and took us to a farmhouse, where we were hidden. Later we were taken to a more secure place where preparations for our travel were worked out."

Lt. Glaze tells his story: "I was thrown out of the bomb bay at about 18,000 feet. I opened my parachute at about 8,000 feet and landed in a tree. I was slow in getting out of the harness and almost before I could do anything a Dutch farmer was there to help me. The Dutchman took me to a farm, fed me and gave me civilian clothes. Another man came, looked at my dog tags and asked me a lot of questions. When these people were satisfied that I was an American, I was taken to another location to await developments. Later I met Sgt. Cole and we traveled together.

"After many weeks when we got down to the Franco-Belgian border, our helpers could take us no farther and we were left on our own. We went to a farmhouse, explained who we were and asked for help. The farmer was at first very distrustful. Since we were in civilian clothes he feared that we were a 'Gestapo plant'; but we managed to convince him that we were bona fide Americans. He took us to another farmer who was more knowledgeable and helpful about moving evadees.

"We were in a number of different places, and then were placed with a resistance group. When things became hot for them, a large group of us was assembled in a very crowded shelter in a woods. Some weeks later we started to build a larger structure in another woods to shelter us until we could be evacuated. Since we could see that there was little chance of moving such a large group for some time, Sgt. Cole and I decided to set out on our own, which we had long wanted to do.

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"We no longer had any compasses from our escape kits. After some distance we saw a gate across the road which marked the Franco-Belgian border. We easily bypassed this control by a route through the woods that seemed designed for this purpose. In France that evening we stopped at a small farmhouse and asked for food and shelter. The people there told us that we were extremely fortunate in approaching their house for the people all around them were pro-German. The next night we slept in a bombed out house. We then tried a number of isolated farmhouses for help but were refused at all of them. Finally we were taken in and sheltered for the night. These people who finally befriended us had no connections for passing us on, so we continued on alone the next day.

"That day while we were going through a town we were stopped by French policemen. We declared ourselves as Americans right away. They took us to a police station, brought out drinks, shined our shoes, gave us bread and meat tickets, money, and made us generally welcome. We explained we wanted to go to Paris. The policemen asked us whether we could buy a ticket by ourselves, and we assured them we knew enough French to do so. We went to the station, bought tickets with the money the police had given us and caught a train. We made a mistake in getting off before our station. We noticed a lot of people going out of the station by a back way, followed them, and so did not have to give up our tickets. We then went to a house to try to get help, but we found the gate locked and we went on to another. The people there were at first afraid and would not let us stay, but, when we assured them we would be happy to sleep on the floor, they finally provided a bed. The next morning the man of the house took us to the railroad station, bought us tickets for Paris, explained where we would change trains and put us in a compartment.

"When we reached Paris we had no idea where to go. We stopped at a couple of places, but got no help until finally a man told us he could not help but then brought a woman to talk to us. We were later taken to a place where we were questioned very thoroughly; after this arrangements for our travel were made." Both Lt. Glaze and Sgt. Cole reached England on 28 June. 28 J

2nd Lt. Donald W. Tattershall's 369th plane had the tail shot off and was last seen near the Zuider Zee. Only the radio operator, T/Sgt. James A. Hobbs, survived, leading one to surmise that the plane blew apart at the wing roots, freeing Hobbs. Casualties included Tattershall; 2nd Lt. William E. Grisham, copilot; 2nd Lt. James Crabtree, Jr., navigator; 2nd Lt. John T. Whittle, bombardier; S/Sgt. LeRoy K. Johnson, engineer; S/Sgt. Carmel A. Melita, ball turret; Sgt. Robert H. Hogg and Sgt. Elmer J. Sweitzer, waist; and Sgt. William E. Dodson, tail. 16 Jan

2nd Lt. Ross McCollum was on his second mission for the 367th,

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 11 Jan Halberstadt mission

flying in the low squadron. En route home his plane's right wing was struck by another plane in the formation, causing some damage. McCollum rang the alarm to bail out, but regained control. Almost immediately the plane was hit by three elements of FW-190s from head-on. 2nd Lt. Lloyd G. Crabtree, bombardier, now knew it was time to abandon ship. He turned around to see that the navigator, 2nd Lt. Daniel P. Jones, had already inadvertently "popped" his chute in putting the chest pack in place, with the pilot chute lying on his desk. Crabtree tugged at Jones' jacket, motioning for him to come. But Jones just looked at Crabtree and did not budge. It was difficult to move about in the plunging plane, but Crabtree managed to pull the pins on the front escape hatch and just rolled out the hatch. An ME-109 circled him while he drifted down in his chute, but did not use him for target practice. Crabtree landed on the roof of a farmhouse near Appeldoorn and was captured immediately. He later learned that the remainder of the crew had been killed: McCollum and Jones; 2nd Lt. Marcum E. Thomas, copilot; S/Sgt. Wayne A. Warner, engineer; S/Sgt. Henry A. Stelmach, radio; Sgt. Howard L. Chatelain, ball turret; Sgt. Leander J. Aurie and Sgt. Warren B. Goss, waist; and Sgt. Andrew P. Barrus, tail. McCollum and his crew had arrived on 1 December 1943.

1st Lt. George Campert, a veteran 367th pilot, was knocked out of formation during the fighter attack and was last seen flying beneath the formation. But the ultimate fate of the plane is not known since the entire crew was killed. Included were 2nd Lt. Gerald C. Coots, copilot; 1st Lt. John L. Dougherty, navigator; 1st Lt. Joseph A. Sparks, bombardier; T/Sgt. Patrick F. Murray, engineer; T/Sgt. Cyril E. Lebert, radio; S/Sgt. Adolf Graubart, ball turret; S/Sgt. Welton P. Teston and S/Sgt. Perley E. Colburn, waist; and S/Sgt. Kneeland H. Hudson, tail.

2nd Lt. Perry Cavos, whose previous raid had been especially tough, went down at Halberstadt and all his crew was lost. Four of the men died of wounds after reaching the ground: 2nd Lt. Richard D. Wright, navigator; 2nd Lt. Julius J. Monticone, bombardier; S/Sgt. Howard Kline, radio; and S/Sgt. George P. Amoroso, ball turret. Killed in the plane were 2nd Lt. Michael D. O'Grady, copilot; T/Sgt. Gerkin C. Norris, Jr., engineer; S/Sgt. James J. Allie and S/Sgt. Samuel C. Sin, waist; and S/Sgt. Roger W. Collins, tail.

It was a strange mission in other ways. Col. Robinson reported no flak on the flight to the target and "not a burst" at the target. But flak bothered the reduced formation all the way back to the coast. He also reported that "he saw no friendly fighters" on the mission. Robinson's lead plane came home with its number 4 engine malfunctioning and his was one of three planes so severely damaged that it was turned over to 8th AF Service Command for repairs.

Lt. Kenneth F. Dowell's 369th plane was one of the flying "wounded" as it staggered all the way back. The Luftwaffe FW-190s began by

1944

11 Jan

flying parallel with the formation, then cut across the front and came in head-on to the bombers, hitting Dowell's number 3 engine. He was unable to feather it, lost his electrical system and put the plane into a dive to escape, with flames streaming out of the battered engine. It burned so furiously that it fell off the airplane: "which is probably what saved us," says Dowell. With the loss of the electrical system, the alarm bell did not ring when he hit the switch, so everyone stayed aboard. At 4,000 feet the plane became more manageable, the fire was out, and the pilot continued on toward home. While they were in the dive an ME-110 flew along with them, spraying them with machine gun fire. Later when the crew members could assess the damage, they found their landing gear was inoperative, several control cables were shot away, the horizontal stabilizer was loosened by machine gun fire and the dive. The plane was very difficult to fly at this point, and their oxygen was gone, the top turret would not work and the tail wheel would not extend. Dowell crash landed at Great Saling, an RAF station, and there the plane was declared a total loss. The fighter attacks had also taken their toll from the crew: 2nd Lt. James W. Wirth, bombardier, had serious leg injuries; S/Sgt. Hugo O. Honkonen, engineer, ended his combat career with serious arm and head wounds; S/Sgt. John E. Mellyn, radio, had pieces of flak in his face; and Sgt. James E. Cannon, waist, had a flesh wound.

Lt. Charles J. Kinsey's plane went into Foulsham, with the pilot himself wounded. At 1327 a 20 mm shell hit the base of the pilot's window, wounding Kinsey in the leg and ending his combat flying. Kinsey's plane had been badly shot up and was turned over to Service Command for repairs. Lt. Billy W. Casseday crash landed his 369th plane at Horsham where it was declared a total loss. In all, five planes were lost, two were washed out in crash landings, three had severe damage, eight had serious damage, four were classified as slightly damaged, and eight escaped unscathed.

If a hero's award was to be made to anyone on this mission it might well have been presented to S/Sgt. Daniel J. Antonelli, tail gunner for F/O Loren E. Page, leading the low squadron for the 367th to Halberstadt. Tail attacks were popular on the mission, as well as head-on passes, and four times the crackling twin machine guns manned by Antonelli found their mark. At 1200 hours Antonelli got his first, an ME-110. He first made contact at 500 yards and then continued with several short bursts until a long burst at 100 yards knocked off the attacker's canopy. After passing under the B-17, the ME-110 blew up about 150 yards away and 1st Lt. Allen T. Ballard, navigator, saw it explode. At 1210 Antonelli gained credit for two more: an ME-110 and an ME-109, both of which blew up. Both kills were witnessed by T/Sgt. Edgar E. Harbour, engineer. Later at 1320, Antonelli got a second ME-109, with help from F/O Page, who turned the plane so Antonelli

could take better aim. This plane also blew up and again Harbour was the witness. At one time there was a policy that a gunner got an Air Medal or an oak leaf cluster for each enemy plane downed, but the records tend to show that this was not a consistent reward. Antonelli did not pick up four extra oak leaf clusters to his Air Medal for this mission. He did, however, receive an oak leaf cluster to his Distinguished Flying Cross for his outstanding work, a more fitting reward for the highest single mission total for a 306th gunner during the war.

Other 367th Squadron gunners added six more enemy planes downed to the day's Group total of sixteen. Clay Pigeon marksmen were Sgt. Charles E. Dapra, tail gunner for Lt. Arthur W. Mack; Sgt. Marvin F. Burleson, ball turret for Page; Lt. Allen T. Ballard, navigator for Page; Sgt. Farris R. Rashid, ball turret for Lt. John J. Stolz; 1st Lt. Thomas P. Cliney, bombardier for Page; and S/Sgt. Harold K. Twing, waist gunner for Page.

Gunners in the 368th credited with kills were S/Sgt. Paul R. Ward, engineer for Col. Robinson; Sgt. Raymond J. Kristoff, ball turret for Lt. Raymond D. Tripp; 1st Lt. Donald W. Baltzer, bombardier for F/O James R. Coleman; and S/Sgt. Clinton E. Snyder, left waist for Coleman. Two gunners in the 369th also earned laurels: 2nd Lt. James W. Wirth, bombardier for Lt. Dowell, and Sgt. George G. Kessel, right waist gunner for Lt. Charles E. Berry. The 306th gunners were also credited with four probables and eleven damaged. Claims were not validated for another ten Luftwaffe planes claimed. There are no figures for the gunners on the five planes lost for the day.

There was yet another casualty, Lt. Charles L. Stevenson, a veteran 368th navigator flying with Lt. Charles W. Smith in the low squadron of the composite group, was killed. With tired crews scattered all over licking their wounds, the weather played into their hands and grounded them at distant bases for an extra day.

The 368th Squadron reported that at Hethel the entertainment was of the best with Lt. Maynard Dix serving as master of ceremonies in an evening spent trading songs with RAF crews. Capt. Stanley Silverstein, the lead bombardier for the group, finished his 25th mission with the raid, the 91st officer in the 306th to complete a tour. He had begun flying 23 April 1943.

During the remainder of January there were a couple of missions to the Pas de Calais, bombing rocket installations, and at the end of the month there were longer missions to Frankfurt and to Brunswick. The trip to Frankfurt on 29 January re-emphasized the truism that what was often an easy mission for some crews could be a very rough one for others. Five Luftwaffe planes were shot down, four of them by 368th gunners: Sgt. Albert J. Doine, Sgt. David Burger, Sgt. Oakland V. Bittikoffer and S/Sgt. Ben B. Ferns. In the 423rd, T/Sgt. Warren F.

1944 still 11 Jan + other  
 @ bottom remainder of January  
 29 Jan

Reminders  
 of Jan

29 Jan

Day celebrated his final mission by downing an enemy plane. The 368th had three men wounded: Sgts. Harvey E. Easterly, Alphonse V. Leri and Hurl N. Millikin.

February became a month for decorations with an unusually large number of medals handed out to officers and airmen. They included one Silver Star, presented to Lt. Kenneth F. Dowell for Halberstadt, eighteen Distinguished Flying Crosses, one oak leaf cluster to the DFC, twenty-three Purple Hearts, 205 Air Medals and a record 383 oak leaf clusters to the Air Medal.

With more men flying more missions throughout 1944, the output of medals increased sharply, but seldom was there anything higher now than a Distinguished Flying Cross. Those who completed tours usually went home with a DFC, an Air Medal with three oak leaf clusters and the European Theatre ribbon. By 1945 there was a shift in policy and fewer DFCs were awarded than previously. Many more oak leaf clusters to the Air Medal were given to those men who flew the 35-mission tours that became the norm. Fortunately for all concerned, the Purple Heart appeared no more frequently than it had in the past and, when calculated in proportion to the man hours in the air, it was being awarded much less than in the first year of combat.

On 14 February 1944 General Order No. 44 of the First Bombardment Division was issued citing "The 369th Bombardment Squadron (H), Army Air Forces, United States Army, for outstanding performance of duty in action against an armed enemy of the United States in the European Theatre of Operations.

"In the aerial offensive against targets in Western and Central Germany, France, and other occupied territories, the 369th Bombardment Squadron (H), has established an exceptional combat record. Over a six months period, from the 23 January 1943 to 29 July 1943, this unit participated in forty-one (41) consecutive combat missions without loss of one of its aircraft over enemy or enemy occupied territory.

"In rendering this service the personnel of the 369th Bombardment Squadron (H) demonstrated a high degree of skill and courage. The exemplary conduct exhibited by combat personnel resulted in a spirit of teamwork capable of nullifying the vicious and determined opposition of the German Air Force to the extent that the integrity of formations was maintained without loss. The administrative and maintenance personnel of this squadron contributed untiring effort and efficiency in sustaining the continued attacks carried out by this unit. In these operations the 369th Bombardment Squadron (H), by extraordinary skill and great courage, has given evidence of unswerving loyalty and devotion to duty of the highest nature which reflects great credit upon this organization, the Army Air Forces and the Armed Forces of the United States."

3 Feb 1944

4 " "

This order was issued by command of Brig. Gen. Robert B. Williams and, while greeted with obvious sour grapes and envy on the part of personnel of the other three squadrons, remained the single such commendation for any squadron in the group to be earned during its three years of WW II service.

The group returned to combat 3 February to familiar Wilhelmshaven, with thirty-seven crews in the air, slightly less than the forty flying each of the last two missions in January. Lt. Col. John L. Lambert led the A group with a 423rd contingent and Capt. Thomas F. Witt of the 367th led the B Group. The target appeared to be 10/10ths covered. Witt's group had flown on dead reckoning from the Dutch coast and, just as Lt. Romulus V. Houck, Jr., squadron navigator, reported his ETA was up, came over a break in the clouds and dropped its bombs. A later appraisal indicated that both 306th groups hit Wilhelmshaven.

"No fighters, little flak" was the mission comment for the day. However, 2nd Lt. Richard S. Wong, the Group's only Chinese-American pilot, did not bring his 369th plane home. Those down and surviving, besides Wong, were 2nd Lt. Walter P. McBroom, copilot; 2nd Lt. John W. Rodgers, navigator; 1st Lt. Curtis L. Dunlap, bombardier; Cpl. George D. Collins, radio; Sgt. Charles L. Whetsone, ball turret; and Sgt. Armand C. Cournoyer, waist. Reported later to have been killed in action were S/Sgt. George B. Walker, engineer; Sgt. Robert E. Sykes, waist; and Sgt. Walter E. Kells, tail. Lt. Wong had been the butt of many jokes at Thurleigh. For a time he was addressed as "Calais" Wong for a wrong turn he made on a practice mission, ending up over Calais where the Germans greeted him with a few well placed bursts of flak.

4 Feb

The next day the group was off to Frankfurt, with Lt. Col. George R. Buckey and Capt. William S. Nally as group leaders. The Clay Pigeons returned to their old form and lost two planes. 1st Lt. Charles E. Berry, flying one of the newest F models at Thurleigh, took a direct hit in the right wing, which burst into flames. The plane went into a spin and finally broke in two at the ball turret. The front section of the plane went down, with those aboard killed. The tail section, however, stabilized momentarily and three of the crew were able to escape: S/Sgt. Opal Ray Hunter and S/Sgt. George G. Kessel, waist gunners, and S/Sgt. Raymond V. Sokolowski, tail gunner. For a brief period the men could move about, and Kessel buckled on his chest pack and dove out the right waist window. Those in Berry's crew who were killed were 1st Lt. Norman J. Laux, copilot; 2nd Lt. Paul S. Jones, navigator; 2nd Lt. Brian E. James, bombardier; T/Sgt. Leo D. Wells, engineer; T/Sgt. Charles Zubov, radio; and S/Sgt. James O. Simon, Jr., ball.

En route home the plane piloted by 2nd Lt. Henry L. Ware was shot

1944 4 Feb cont'd  
8 Feb

down at 1357 in the vicinity of Calais. The pilot and all of his crew survived: 2nd Lt. James P. Roberts, copilot; 2nd Lt. Clark R. Amen, navigator; 2nd Lt. Emil R. Maricondo, bombardier; S/Sgt. Robert W. Longerbone, engineer; S/Sgt. Nicholas G. Tricoles, radio; S/Sgt. Arden J. Butler, ball turret; Sgt. Robert Waldrop and Sgt. Frederick S. Braniger, waist; and S/Sgt. Reed H. Kuykendall, tail.

At the end of January 2nd Lt. Michael Roskovitch returned to the group. He was once known as the Mad Russian and became the first enlisted man in the 8th AF to complete the 25-mission tour. This time he was a gunnery officer assigned to the 423rd Squadron. Roskovitch, the radio operator with the abundant nerve and sharp scissors who dared cut neckties from high ranking officers about to embark on combat missions in his plane, was greeted by one and all. But his stay was all too short and a new generation of flyers scarcely got to know his antics. On 4 February he flew with 1st Lt. Woodrow S. Ellerton, 1st Lt. Arthur G. Moseley and 2nd Lt. Edward D. O'Malley to Scotland. There, in an attempted three-engine takeoff from Drew Field at East Lothian, the plane crashed, killing all of the occupants. The three pilots were all veterans, although none seems to have flown any great number of missions. Ellerton had come in August, Moseley in October and O'Malley in November. Ellerts

After two missions to France, the 306th was airborne on 8 February for Frankfurt and, in the normal weather pattern for this time of year, bombing was through 10/10ths clouds. About an hour after the target, two FW-190s roared into the formation from below, with their attack focusing on the "hole" plane of 1st Lt. Howard J. Snyder. The "hole" plane was the fourth in the lead squadron, flying up under and just behind the leader. After bombing Snyder had been unable to get the bomb bay doors closed, thus his aircraft was using excessive power and losing its formation position. His obvious predicament may have been the reason that the Luftwaffe planes chose to attack in a rather isolated incident. The one pass by the fighters knocked out the number 2 and 3 engines, setting them on fire. Controls were shot away and the oxygen tanks in the cockpit exploded sending flames racing through the enclosed area. Snyder was knocked out by the force of the explosion. When he came to he found 2nd Lt. George W. Eike, his copilot, struggling to get free of his seat. No words were exchanged and Eike bailed out. Snyder did not see his engineer, T/Sgt. Roy K. Holbert, in the plane and assumed he had bailed out. Then the pilot dropped down to the nose, telling 2nd Lt. Robert J. Benninger, navigator, and 2nd Lt. Richard L. Daniels, bombardier, to bail out, which they did. Snyder returned to the flight deck and tried to extinguish the flames, but quickly gave up; he went out the nose hatch at 29,000 feet with the

8 Feb.

plane flying on automatic pilot. Soon after the pilot had cleared the plane, it exploded.

While all of this was going on in the front of the plane, there was plenty of action in the back. T/Sgt. Joseph J. Musial, waist gunner, found that T/Sgt. Ross L. Kahler, radio, and Sgt. Louis J. Colwart, Jr., ball turret, were both dead. Musial was attempting to drag Kahler's body toward the back door when something happened and Musial regained consciousness lying against the tail wheel and trying to determine how he had gotten there. He did not waste any time, though, and bailed out the rear door along with S/Sgt. William O. Slenker, Jr., tail gunner. Musial had been hit hard in the back by a piece of flak which slammed into his flak vest. Once out of the plane he lost consciousness when his chute opened, came to and then passed out again. When he recovered, he began to examine his painfully sore back with his hand, but could find no evidence of blood. Then, becoming aware that a foot felt terribly cold, he glanced down and saw that one foot was missing. This accounted for his loss of consciousness in the plane, he realized. A 20 mm shell had sliced across his ankle, completely severing his foot as if an ax had been used. He immediately applied pressure to the back of his knee, trying to slow down the blood loss.

Musial landed in a field and a French farmer rushed over to him. The farmer cut one of the parachute lines and together the two men fashioned a tourniquet; within a few minutes Musial was on his way to a French hospital. There a nurse tied off the arteries and cleaned up the wound. On the following day he was transferred to a Luftwaffe hospital in Brussels where he received excellent care. Musial was flying his second combat tour when this incident occurred, already having flown more than seventy missions with the 13th AF in the South Pacific. He was at Hickam Field, Hawaii, on 7 December 1941, left Guadalcanal on 12 July 1943, and began his 8th AF tour of duty 8 October 1943.

Sgt. John Pindroch, waist gunner, Benninger and Eike all evaded capture once they were on the ground and came together with the French Underground. More than two months later they and five other airmen were hiding in a shack when the Germans surrounded them and ordered them out. At that juncture one of the men may have tried to escape. The Germans machine gunned the group, killing them all. After the war the German on-scene commander was tried in a war crimes court and executed.

Holbert was the only other man from Snyder's crew, besides Musial, to go to prison camp and preceded Musial there by some months. Musial knew little of what had happened to his crew and learned much by listening to the better informed Germans. When he finally arrived at a prison camp along the Baltic Sea six months after the fatal mission,

wrong -  
Richard -  
L. Daniels  
bomber  
also POW

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he met Holbert and discovered that the engineer's once jet black hair was now snow white.

Meanwhile, Snyder, upon jumping from the plane, delayed opening his chute until about 1500 feet when he saw the ground approaching. He landed in trees and was left hanging twenty feet off the ground. A group of farmers showed up and finally threw him a rope. He tied it around his waist and they pulled him over to a tree and from there he was able to get down to the ground, although suffering from shrapnel wounds in one leg. A young man of about 18 helped to hide Snyder, while the others got rid of his parachute. There was snow on the ground and the German dogs had trouble tracking him. That night a farmer returned for him and took him home. Snyder remained in hiding while the Underground contacted London to authenticate his identification. Once that was done, the pilot was sent traveling with the Underground and eventually joined an active Maquis unit engaged in guerilla warfare against the Germans. When operating with the Maquis, Snyder carried a pistol and a submachine gun. When travelling, he dressed as a farmer and often sat next to German soldiers on trains. At six feet two inches, Snyder was at a disadvantage because he was considerably taller than his new comrades in arms. But no one questioned this and he worked and fought with the group until he finally made his way to the U.S. Third Armored Division at Trelon, France; he was back in London in October. Although a rated pilot, Snyder actually had far more experience in combat as an infantryman, or a guerilla, than in the cockpit.

S/Sgt. William O. Slenker, Jr., had gone out the tail escape hatch and had landed at Signe la Petite where he was found by a mother and daughter. Quickly taken over by the Underground in an area crawling with Germans, Slenker was hidden for seven months by a family at Cimey, Belgium. He was moved once during a thorough search of the town by the Gestapo, but neither he nor three other 8th AF evadees hidden nearby were ever seriously threatened with capture. Slenker had been wounded in the plane with shell fragments in a leg and a foot. At one point he was sneaked into a hospital by the Underground where a fluoroscopic examination was made of his metal collection. He was finally liberated by a U.S. First Army spearhead, after German troops had marched through the town for three consecutive days in retreat. During this period there were Germans sleeping nightly in the room next to his.

On 11 February the 8th AF was back at Frankfurt again, bombing through 10/10ths clouds in an attempt to hit the target that had been missed three days before. But for 1st Lt. Geno DiBetta and his 423rd crew it was a harrowing day that opened a Pandora's Box of experi-

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ences, especially for four crew members who evaded capture. Flak and fighters had harassed the planes all the way from the coast to the target. DiBetta's plane was hit by flak at the IP and the number 3 engine was knocked out. He and his crew managed to hang with the formation until dropping their bombs and then turned away, with flak again scoring on the left wing. A cloud deck was below and, as DiBetta began to descend toward it, a half dozen FW-190s caught up with him, hitting the plane on the first pass and then queuing up for head-on attacks, one at a time.

The engineer, radio operator and left waist gunner were all hit in the fusillade of 20 mm fire and the plane itself was ablaze by the time it reached the clouds at 8000 feet. One of the officers in the nose came up to the flight deck and was immediately put to work helping T/Sgt. Fortunato V. Chiccarelli whose arm had been almost severed by gun fire. Chiccarelli was taken down to the nose and from there was pushed out, with his parachute rip cord handle snapped to a static line to pull it open twenty-five feet from the plane. To complete this tale, Chiccarelli was picked up by the Germans immediately, hospitalized and his arm was promptly amputated. He eventually recovered and was liberated at the end of the war.

One of the rear gunners fought his way forward through the flames to tell the pilots that the fire in the back could not be extinguished: DiBetta then ordered bailout. About this time four or five holes also appeared in the right wing. With the plane on auto pilot, the crew bailed out and, when 2nd Lt. Earl J. Wolf, Jr., copilot, got ready to leave, the plane abruptly nosed over to the right. He returned to the flight deck, levelled the wings and then jumped; he was probably the last one to leave the plane. When Wolf came out of the clouds he was all alone and did not see any other chutes. But he did see the plane break through the clouds and feared it was coming directly at him. It did not follow him and was actually quite some distance away when it blew up in the air. The only crew member lost was S/Sgt. James H. Coleman, ball turret.

Wolf landed in a woods north and west of Saarbrucken and was so exhausted and dispirited that he was ready to give up. A Frenchman approached and, after kissing Wolf on both cheeks, signalled for him to follow. He was taken to a small village and remained there for three days during which time he was introduced to an Underground unit led by a Canadian. While he was there S/Sgt. Leonard F. Bergeron, left waist gunner, also appeared. Bergeron had been the first one out of the plane and had opened his parachute immediately; as a result he had drifted a long distance. Bergeron was of French-Canadian origin and could speak French, which helped in communicating. From their meeting place Wolf and Bergeron went to St. Clair where they met

three more Americans. Then they went to Paris by train, arriving at Gare de l'Est. During this trip they had tickets and identity cards, although it was feared by the Americans that the cards would not pass even a casual scrutiny. A woman was in charge of the men, although she did not sit with them. They followed her out of the Paris railroad station and met a dozen or so other Americans. They were dispersed to various hotels; Wolf and Bergeron ended up in a hotel in Place Pigalle.

Later the Underground began to shuttle them out of Paris in small groups, Wolf and Bergeron being taken north to Creil by car. There they would go for walks and would literally rub elbows with German soldiers. The French always greeted them effusively and everyone seemed to know who and what they were. After enduring a B-26 raid while waiting aboard a train to take them back to Paris, they returned to the capital and then were put on a train headed to Brest. Twenty Americans were together at this time, the explanation seemed to be that they belonged to a special work party. Finally they went to Quingamp by train where they were delayed a bit longer. One night, with the Americans holding hands in a long chain, a French guide took them through what they later learned was a mine field. They went down a cliff by rope to a beach and waited. About two or three in the morning small British boats arrived, manned by two sailors each and able to accommodate about six passengers. The boats could not be beached on the rocky shore and it was necessary for the Americans to jump off a rock into the cold water. Wolf and Bergeron went in together, holding hands until they hit the water. Bergeron was unable to swim. By the merest chance they regained contact and were then hauled into a boat. Of the twenty-nine who had traversed the mine field, only nineteen survived the experience in the water.

The small boats took the refugees out to a larger ship and in early morning they arrived at Portsmouth, England. There they transferred to another ship where they were kept for several days while British intelligence grilled them on a variety of subjects. By 3 April they were in London and ensconced at 63 Brook Street where a lengthy interrogation began on their escapes, on what they had seen in France, on technical aspects of planes and equipment. Lt. Paul Coad, the original navigator on their crew, came down to identify Wolf and Bergeron; eventually they visited Thurleigh and then were off to the States.

1st Lt. Geno DiBetta, pilot; T/Sgt. Clyde E. Hewitt, Jr., radio; S/Sgt. Guy H. Golden, Jr., waist; and S/Sgt. Eldo C. Weseloh, tail gunner, all avoided capture and were kept with an Underground unit until Gen. George S. Patton's Third U.S. Army overran the area and liberated them. They were returned to England on 13 August 1944 where their whereabouts had been unknown from the time of the raid. Besides Chiccarelli, only two other members of the crew were actually prison-

ers of war, 1st Lt. Raymond F. Feilbach, navigator, and 1st Lt. Jerroll E. Sanders, bombardier.

Less than half way through February the 306th had already lost five crews and, before the month was out combat would claim another dozen. But, in many respects, February spelled finis to the major German defensive effort in the air and the month was termed a period of great strategic victory for the 8th AF and the RAF.



Two planes from the 305th Bomb Group collided over Thurleigh on a murky day, 22 October 1944. Seventeen men were killed and there were no survivors.



1st Lt. Robert P. Riordan



Lt. Kermit Cavedo







Down in Switzerland.

'Scarlet'



Flak heavily damaged William Tarr's plane 11 April 44, and took the lives of his bombardier and navigator.





Note single machine gun protruding from nose.



Foam smothers an engine fire.



Hangars were often busy at night as ground crews made major repairs.

A white radar dome replaces the ball turret on a late G model.





Even a squadron commander is decorated, Lt. Col. John M. Regan, as he finished his tour 10 April 1944.



Maj. James S. Cheney, longest serving Group Navigator.

Staff officers: Maj. Walter Coons, Lt. Henry Sibley, Maj. James S. Cheney, Lt. Col. Robert C. Williams, Lt. Col. William S. Raper, Capt. William W. Peterman.



Lt. Col. John L. Lambert





Elizabeth Shapley, Bedford, watches as "her" plane is touched up after christening.



Edward K. Fox, 369th, received Distinguished Service Cross for mission of 14 October 1943.



End of a mission, 27 July 1944.

Nerve center for the 369th 'Fight-in' Bitin' Squadron.





A view of Thurleigh, looking northeast, with sixty-five hardstands for aircraft.



For some the stay in England ended in marriage, as witness Col. and Mrs. Henry W. Terry.

## Chapter 16

# BIG WEEK AND BERLIN

## February-March 1944

The final report of the Casablanca Conference dated 23 January 1943 called for "The heaviest possible air offensive against the German War Effort." This decision was amended by the Combined Chiefs of Staff in a directive known as "Point-Blank," issued 10 June 1943, "so as to give first emphasis to the attack on the German fighter forces and the German aircraft industry." For the successful invasion of Western Europe, code-named "Overlord," it was of vital importance for the survival of the allied land forces that the Luftwaffe be rendered at least tactically ineffective, at best totally destroyed.

As the date for invasion neared, the top allied command became insistent that destruction of the Luftwaffe be accomplished in the late winter months of 1943-44. The 8th AF had continued to grow rapidly in strength. It now had the planes, equipment, armament and men that had been envisioned and promised by late 1942. Now came the pressure to put the 8th AF to the test. Recovery from the material and psychological effects of "Black Thursday" had been achieved and the planners were hard at work on what was to become known as "Big Week." This was to be an all-out assault on the German Air Force, aimed at destroying it in the air and reducing its capability to refit and replace its lost and damaged aircraft.

M/Gen. James H. Doolittle and his subordinate commanders knew that time was growing short, although they were not privy to the invasion date. Weather predictions indicated that conditions might be adequate in late February to launch an all-out attack on the German fighter forces. The beginning of the assault was accordingly set at 20 February. The 306th, as a major force in Brig. Gen. Robert B. Williams' First Bomb Division, was counted on for high performance in this period. The veteran group would lose twelve airplanes and twelve crews, a high cost for the missions involved.

Nine days of bad flying weather preceded the planned start of the offensive. However, on 20 February the 306th put forty-one planes in the air, divided into two groups under the command of Capt. William S. Kirk of the 367th and Lt. James Bruce McMahon of the 368th. Leipzig was the destination and the target the aeromotive works. While determined to complete the job, Kirk's twenty-one ships failed to make rendezvous with the 40th CW and returned before penetrating the enemy coast.

McMahon's twenty planes went on to the primary and later strike photos indicated that they did a good job. Lt. Daniel A. Logan, Jr., was

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the lead bombardier. The price paid for the strike at the Erla Me-109 manufacturing plant was one crew. 1st Lt. Harold G. Richard of the 423rd, flying a three-week old plane, was knocked out of formation in the target area when flak crippled an engine. Goering's finest jumped the slowed plane. Richard tried to avoid the inevitable by diving away from the attackers and finally found refuge in a cloud deck. But that was no salvation and the alarm bell sounded in the plane. Sgt. Donald L. Kennedy, waist gunner, was killed because flak hit his parachute pack and he was unable to bail out. Richard tried to leave the plane when it was too low and was killed. Most of the crew bailed out at about 1500 feet and was captured immediately by irate German civilians. They included F/O Jack Cuthbertson, copilot; 2nd Lt. Murray S. Greenberg, navigator; 2nd Lt. Richard R. Bale, bombardier; S/Sgt. James L. Crouse, engineer; S/Sgt. Floyd A. Baker, radio; S/Sgt. Foster L. Smith, ball turret; Sgt. Clayton E. Cretton, waist; and Sgt. Jack E. Hall, tail.

The next day the 306th had twenty-one planes in the air with Lt. Col. John L. Lambert, 423rd Squadron commander, as the leader for the 40th CW. Bombs were dropped on the Hopston airdrome northeast of Rheine. Until 1420 fighter cover was good, but a series of red-red flares from a group ahead "called" all the fighters to its aid. The unprotected 306th then underwent an attack by two ME-210s which made a violent head-on pass during a ten-minute lull in fighter escort. A 92nd Bomb Group plane, flying at the rear of the group's high squadron, lost a wing to one of the 210s and went down. Two chutes were seen. In addition flak at the target and at the coast damaged seventeen of the planes in the formation.

There was little letup in this maximum effort. The 306th was in the sky again on 22 February for a mission to Bernburg led by Lt. Col. Robert P. Riordan, 369th Squadron commander. Thirty-nine planes were split into two groups, nine aborted the mission and twenty-nine actually dropped their bombs on the target. Bombing by the group was effective and reconnaissance showed that damage should slow production of JU-88 planes by seventy to eighty percent during the next month.

This was a costly mission, the worst of "Big Week" for the 306th, as seven of its planes did not come home. Near Koblenz on the way back the fighter escort disappeared. Straightaway the ME-109s came in to attack, only to be driven away by two P-51s who appeared out of nowhere. A few minutes later these two guardian angels also departed and a dozen or more FW-190s pounced on the unprotected group. Crews reported seeing as many as seventy-five planes in the area, but they spread their 20 mm fire around through other groups as well. Returning flyers said that had it not been for the determined leadership of Col. Riordan the toll might have been greater. Twice he

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turned the group into the attacking fighters, forcing them to abandon their attacks and reform for another pass.

The "killed in action" count for the day was fifty-three out of the seven planes that went down. The returning aircraft brought back Lt. Robert W. Fry, Jr., a seriously wounded bombardier for 2nd Lt. Bill H. Rutherford, 367th. Three crew members from 2nd Lt. Warren C. Koch's 423rd plane were also wounded: Sgt. Victor D. Campbell, S/Sgt. Cecil S. Brown and Sgt. Bertrand J. Theriault. Not only did the group suffer from the sustained fighter attacks, but the remaining planes also were bombarded by flak twice on the return trip, first over the Ruhr and then again over Holland.

1st Lt. Leland M. Love, a 423rd pilot, recounted: "Over the Ruhr flak knocked out the number 3 engine and it could not be feathered. Then more flak hit the number 1 engine which flamed for ten minutes before it burned out against the nacelle firewall. With one prop windmilling and the oxygen system shot out, we found our way home alone for over a hundred miles of enemy territory and then landed without brakes." Lt. Gilbert M. Roeder's 368th aircraft took more than seventy flak holes and flew most of the way home at low altitude on two engines.

When the fighters hit the group, the crews found it extremely difficult to keep track of what was going on. The entire crew of 1st Lt. Rudolph Horst, III, 369th, was killed, including 2nd Lt. Frank E. Wright, copilot; 2nd Lt. John C. Joplin, navigator; 2nd Lt. Henry N. Schmitz, bombardier; T/Sgt. William I. Osgood, engineer; T/Sgt. Arthur G. Cook, radio; S/Sgt. Laurel M. Kloster, ball turret; S/Sgt. Edward R. Justice and S/Sgt. Edward N. Ryan, waist; and Sgt. Joseph E. Threlkeld, tail.

Ten casualties were also suffered by the 367th crew of 2nd Lt. Francis W. Macomber, veterans of a month with the group. The crew consisted of 2nd Lt. Charles R. Wickham, copilot; 2nd Lt. Robert W. Wigton, navigator; 2nd Lt. Lawrence J. MacNeil, bombardier; S/Sgt. Charles E. Graham, engineer; S/Sgt. Leopoldo Tortora, radio; Sgt. Emil Bohaty, ball; Sgt. Gunnard M. Johnson and Sgt. Donald W. Shinnars, waist; and Sgt. Bruce D. Cox, tail.

S/Sgt. Alexander F. Markowski, waist gunner, was the only survivor of the 369th plane flown by 1st Lt. William C. Quaintance, one of Fightin' Bitin's veteran pilots. Those who were killed were 1st Lt. Rudolph L. Jenson, copilot; 1st Lt. Arnold W. Ostrow, navigator; 2nd Lt. Henry I. Levy, bombardier; T/Sgt. Joseph F. Strukel, engineer; T/Sgt. Francis X. Driscoll, radio; S/Sgt. Robert J. Might, ball turret; S/Sgt. Maxwell W. Williams, waist; and S/Sgt. Richard C. Donohue, tail.

1st Lt. Fred J. Rector, 367th, was flying as the leader of the low squadron, sweating out his eleventh mission. He describes the fighter attack and the ensuing minutes: "They just kept coming. Although our

gunners took a heavy toll, our left inboard engine was set on fire and we lost most of the control surfaces on the vertical and left horizontal stabilizers. We flipped over violently and dropped out of formation. We were able to level out considerably lower, but, when power was applied to maintain flight, we again lost control and the plane had to be abandoned. German fighters were swarming all around. We were still over Germany and bailed out in a small rural area east of the Ruhr Valley." Rector was not captured for four days during which period he rode trains and walked a lot. Survivors from his crew were 1st Lt. Patrick J. Pierce, copilot; T/Sgt. Elmer G. Waibel, engineer; T/Sgt. Warren N. Russell, radio; S/Sgt. Raymond F. Fiermuga and S/Sgt. John M. Elliott, waist. Casualties from Rector's plane were 1st Lt. Herbert C. Edelstein, navigator; 1st Lt. John E. Caldwell, Jr., bombardier; Sgt. Earl S. Schade, ball turret; and S/Sgt. William J. Bell, tail.

It was the thirteenth mission for 1st Lt. Thomas W. Symons III and most of his crew and proved to be an unlucky one for them. S/Sgt. Albert J. Doine was new to the 368th crew that day because he had not gone on leave with his regular crew, but had instead volunteered to fly. Fighters hit the plane, killing Symons instantly. The plane tried to loop, but came back to horizontal with a sheet of flame enveloping the right wing. The nose had taken hits from 20 mm cannon fire. 1st Lt. Robert F. Proctor, bombardier, was badly wounded on his entire right side from face down and both legs had been shot up. A cannon shell hit the navigator, 1st Lt. Robert G. Jobe, in the side where the front and back of his flak suit did not quite meet, killing him. The only crew member to bail out of the stricken plane was S/Sgt. Hayden M. Collier, a waist gunner, who jumped an instant before it blew up.

When Proctor regained consciousness from the explosion he had just come through a cloud layer at about 1500 feet and managed to pull the rip cord on his back pack with his left hand. He was knocked out again when he hit the snow covered ground in a stand of young pine trees. Had he been wearing his usual chest pack, which was in for repack, Proctor thinks he would never have retrieved it in time to have survived. When he regained consciousness a second time, an old man and a boy of about fifteen were standing over him, the boy holding a rifle almost as tall as he was. The young German waved the gun menacingly at Proctor, although it was obvious that the holder was as scared as the prisoner. The old man said, "I come from Cincinnati in 1934. Why do you bomb Germany?" Proctor had no reply, as he had considerable pain in the left side of his mouth. All of his teeth on that side had been loosened, but a soup diet for some days helped in allowing the teeth to reseat themselves.

Also blasted out of the plane and to safety were T/Sgt. Robert L. Woodruff, radio, and S/Sgt. Joseph P. Fiddes, waist. Collier says that "Woodruff did not have his parachute on when we were hit. When he saw the plane was on fire he started to put on his chute. The explosion

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blew him out and in some way the shoulder strap from Woodruff's chute wrapped itself around his wrist. As he came free of the debris in the air, Woodruff noticed that he was attached to his chute harness by the strap around the wrist and, knowing that he had nothing to lose, pulled the rip cord. The chute opened and the pressure created by his weight against the twisted strap kept it in place and he landed safely. Once on the ground, he shook his wrist and was free of the chute." Besides Symons, others killed from his crew were 1st Lt. John R. Wempe, copilot; T/Sgt. Oscar V. Ellison, engineer; and S/Sgt. Julius G. Parrish, ball turret.

Three men escaped death from the 423rd crew of 1st Lt. J.P. Toombs, Jr., a veteran team that had come among replacements for the losses of the second Schweinfurt mission. They were S/Sgt. Calvin T. Brend, ball turret; S/Sgt. William V. Harris and S/Sgt. John C. Foley, waist gunners. Killed besides Toombs were 1st Lt. Howard C. Taunton, copilot; 1st Lt. Albert G. Pulver, Jr., navigator; 1st Lt. Buford E. Branom, bombardier; T/Sgt. Ralph H. Wheeler, engineer; T/Sgt. Paul G. Gaire, radio; and S/Sgt. Virgil G. Chappie, tail.

The seventh missing plane was that of 2nd Lt. Carey K. Olivier from which only two 367th gunners survived. Killed along with Olivier were 2nd Lt. George E. Dumas, copilot; 2nd Lt. George A. Milburn, navigator; 2nd Lt. Siegel L. Hawkins, bombardier; S/Sgt. Earl C. Swilley, engineer; S/Sgt. Silvio Paoli, radio; Sgt. Maurice D. Pershing and Sgt. Jack E. Osborn, gunners. The two gunners who outlived the holocaust were Sgt. William E. Huddleston and Sgt. William E. VanHoutte.

The survivors from Symons' crew and other American airmen were brought together at Geilenkirchen. There they were kept under surveillance by Home Guardsmen. After a night in the local jail, they were all marched into the street where they stood to hear a German officer berate them as criminals. His speech was going along well until an eighteen-year-old girl among the bystanders began to laugh, and that ended the officer's great moment in dealing with the American "criminals".

English weather provided a respite on 23 February, but on 24 February it was back to an old and dreaded target, Schweinfurt. Lt. Col. William S. Raper, deputy group commander, was the 306th leader for the day. This was the third mission to the ball bearing manufacturing center and Raper was the leader for his second time. In the Osna-bruck area, en route to the target, the 306th was a few minutes ahead of schedule and the fighter escort missed its rendezvous, a factor which cost the group the leaders of its high and low squadrons. 2nd Lt. Loren E. Page and 1st Lt. Norwood L. Garrett and their crews went down as the result of a head-on attack by about thirty ME-109s. Flying in pairs, it appeared to men in the downed planes that the Luftwaffe fighters had by prior agreement decided to concentrate on these leaders.

At 1218 Garrett's plane was out of formation with its number 2

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engine on fire. Two chutes were seen by others in the group, but in fact Garrett and seven of his crew got out; 1st Lt. Robert N. Muri, copilot; 1st Lt. Joseph Elgin, navigator; 1st Lt. Robert J. Shurilla, bombardier; T/Sgt. Joseph Vinciquerra, engineer; T/Sgt. Alvin E. Dilts, radio; S/Sgt. William J. Carroll, Jr., waist; and S/Sgt. Lawrence L. Yator, tail. Those killed were S/Sgt. Jim A. Glenn, ball turret, and S/Sgt. Almond A. Weed, waist.

Ten minutes later Page had his number 1 engine feathered, number 2 engine on fire and part of his left wing tip missing. This crew was not as fortunate, as only four survived: T/Sgt. Edgar E. Harbour, engineer; T/Sgt. James R. Merson, radio; S/Sgt. Ralph L. Whiteside, waist; and S/Sgt. Ted D. Dixon, tail. In addition to Page, other casualties were 2nd Lt. Thomas P. Kenny, copilot; 2nd Lt. Joseph E. Feeley, Jr., navigator; 1st Lt. Henry B. Holt, bombardier; Sgt. George A. Morehead, ball turret; and S/Sgt. Bennett E. Ball, waist.

When the group hit the initial point and started on the bomb run the lead bombardier was unable to pick up the target. The group continued on across Schweinfurt, made a 360° turn and followed the remainder of the 40th CW across the target, dropping its bombs this time. One of the things gained by this maneuver was a lot of extra flak holes in the planes. Fighter claims were confirmed for S/Sgt. Philip D. Vaught, 423rd; S/Sgt. Charles G. Smith, 367th; T/Sgt. Ernest B. Jackson, 423rd; and S/Sgt. Philip Brouman, 423rd.

There was no rest for the 306th in the push to complete "Big Week" bombing schedules on 25 February. Capt. Thomas Witt and Capt. William S. Kirk of the 367th were in the lead ship, flying low in the 40th CW, as the 8th headed deep into Southern Germany to bomb the ME-410 assembly plant at Augsburg. About 1210, on the way in, the planes were greeted by accurate and unexpected flak from Saarbrücken. This split the group open and, before it could properly reform, two diving attacks by German fighters took a 368th plane on each pass. F/O J. Ray Coleman and his crew went down at 1210 near Charleville, France. Three FW-190s missed the plane with 20 mm fire on the first pass, but, coming from three o'clock on the second, put incendiary shells into the bomb bay and into the nose. 1st Lt. Louis Rodriguez, navigator, tried to put out the flames with a fire extinguisher, but could not. The fire melted the intercom cable and, when Rodriguez looked into the cockpit, he saw the copilot had left and the pilot was motioning for him to bail out.

Rodriguez left the plane at 14,000 feet and did not open his chute immediately. He hid in a woods until sundown and then approached a farm house he had been watching. He was given food and clothing; the next morning he was put into the hands of the Underground. T/Sgt. Rex L. Hayes, engineer, was with him for a time, and there was some communication between these two and Pilot Coleman and 1st Lt. Oscar

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B. Bourn, copilot. Rodriguez stayed with the Underground for about a month, until the Gestapo began to work the area over intensively; he then moved into a Belgian Maquis unit operating in the Ardennes Forest. There he met three American enlisted men from another B-17 crew and two RAF men. They all finally despairing of getting out through France directly, left the Underground unit and set out on their own for Switzerland. They reached Swiss territory on 9 May and were placed in an American Evadee camp commanded by the pilot of the crew from which the three other enlisted men had come. Rodriguez remained there until he heard that American patrols of the Seventh Army had reached the Swiss border. He and four other Americans walked across the border in a search for compatriots and finally made contact at Grenoble. From there they were sent to Naples and then back to England.

Coleman and Bourn were with the Underground and an attempt was made to take them through Paris. Unfortunately, they were captured by the vigilant Germans. Hayes and Rodriguez became separated after Hayes developed pneumonia. Upon recovering the engineer made his way alone to the Pyrenees. He was captured at the Spanish border and spent the remainder of the war in a concentration camp. Others of the crew who ended up in prison camp were T/Sgt. Calvin G. Garrison, radio; S/Sgt. Clinton E. Snyder, nose gunner; S/Sgt. Phillip D. Vaught, ball; Sgt. Joseph E. Buckley and S/Sgt. William Wiersma, waist; and S/Sgt. Fred T. Organ, tail.

The second plane in the group that day to become a fatality was that of 1st Lt. Joseph M. Gay, Jr., a veteran of more than twenty missions. His aircraft was attacked by ME-109s and lost a wing. Six chutes were counted out of the plane and five men survived: 1st Lt. Daniel McCauley, navigator; Sgt. Paul F. Hughes, engineer; T/Sgt. Eric G. Danielson, Jr., radio; S/Sgt. Louis Brofford, ball turret; and S/Sgt. George E. Lilja, waist. In addition to Gay, 1st Lt. Ira L. Gordon, copilot; 1st Lt. Howard L. Harmston, bombardier; S/Sgt. Steve J. Kriski, waist; and S/Sgt. Bernard J. Nitti, tail, bought the farm. Kriski

A third plane was knocked out of formation about fifteen minutes later when hit by flak. 1st Lt. Charles M. Bayless, 368th, was being checked out as a first pilot on this mission. The flak hit an engine and severed several control cables. S/Sgt. Raymond J. Manski, radio operator, was hit by flying shrapnel and killed. The other enlisted crew members bailed out early: T/Sgt. George W. Wallace, engineer; S/Sgt. William C. Vought, ball turret; S/Sgt. Carl E. Hudson and S/Sgt. Kenneth E. Willey, waist; and S/Sgt. William C. Christian, tail gunner. The officers stuck with the plane until it was burning fiercely and all went out the nose hatch at about 3000 feet: Bayless, and 1st Lt. Clarence J. Cowl, copilot; 1st Lt. Michael Kalish, navigator, and 1st Lt. James H. Laughlin, Jr., bombardier. After capture, processing and a

trip to Barth, Germany, the four became roommates in Stalag Luft I.

This mission brought "Big Week" to a close. It did not finish the Luftwaffe, but it caused serious supply, maintenance and eventually training problems. Subsequently it became apparent that the quality of the German pilots opposing the increasing numbers of 8th AF bombers declined. It had been a costly venture for the 306th, but it marked a turning point for attacks on Germany; emboldened, the 8th took its planes and bombs to every corner of the Reich. There is no question that the major element in the advance of the 8th was the saturation of the sky around the bomber stream with long range fighter escort. The P-51 had not yet become the most numerous plane in the fighter screen, but, as rapidly as new P-51 groups could be trained or old groups refitted, they were added to the flights of P-38s and P-47s still flying through contrails to protect the bombers. With the rapid fighter buildup there were fewer gaps in the bomber stream. Soon there would be a fighter in the air for every bomber.

Since that first raid into Germany — Wilhelmshaven, 27 January 1943 — there had been lurking in the back of everyone's mind the ultimate target, Berlin! The RAF had raided Berlin often, but the 8th knew that it could count on the greatest defense it had ever encountered when it began to schedule planes over the enemy's capital. By the fall of 1943 planners had begun to work on targets, routes and a rationale for going all the way. As spring rounded the corner in 1944 it seemed that the 8th had the strength to make this most important raid.

The briefing room for the combat crews at Thurleigh had a large map of England and the continent across the front. When the crews arrived for briefings this map was covered because on it was stretched a long, red yarn showing the mission track for the day. Only after the doors had been closed, guards posted, and Maj. John A. Bairnsfather, group intelligence officer, opened the briefing and announced the target was the covering drawn aside and the combat crews gained a look at where they were going for the day. To reach Berlin it was necessary to use another map because the Nazi capital lay off the edge of the first map. When crews settled into the room they could tell if it was to be an extra long mission because the long distance map frame would show beneath the curtain covering the main map.

On 4 and 6 March the long range map was out again. Lt. Col. John M. Regan was the leader for the 4th. Heavy weather and thick contrails made for poor flying conditions and the mission was abandoned. Six ships joined with the 305th Group and flew high squadron on a mission to the Bonn area. The 6th was another day and the long-anticipated mission to Berlin was finally able to go. Capt. Richard B. Thompson, an RAF-trained pilot who had come to the 306th the previous August, was the leader for twenty-seven planes which attacked the east side of Berlin in the Kopenick and Lichtenberg areas. Flak was not as bad as

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expected and fighter attacks were driven off in most cases by the escorts. Still, S/Sgt. Lawrence R. Stevenson, 423rd, downed an ME-109 and S/Sgt. Charles G. Smith, 367th, was credited with an enemy plane destroyed.

The 423rd plane of 1st Lt. Albert A. Adams faltered over Berlin when the number 4 engine failed. "The prop could not be feathered, so we were forced to drop back out of the formation," said Adams later. "ME-109s attacked us, and T/Sgt. Lloyd B. Keene, our top turret gunner, was severely injured, but not until he had downed an FW-190. We then had enemy attacks for thirty minutes. One ME-109 attacked us four times and could not down us. Over the Zuider Zee we were only a hundred feet above the water. Our number 1 engine was hit and couldn't be feathered, and our air speed was 135 mph. Over the coast every damn gun in the world seemed to be throwing shells at us. Then a P-51 showed up and escorted us to a B-24 base in England. Keene died of his wounds in the plane."

Meanwhile, confusion and pain were rampant in the back of the plane. The windmilling engine and the loss of altitude, coupled with the ringing of the alarm bell twice, prompted the men to prepare to jump. 2nd Lt. Joseph B. Mathis III, copilot, twice told the men over the intercom to disregard the bell. When T/Sgt. Matthew B. Palenica staggered out of the radio room with wounds to his face, a leg, a hand, and his back, he found that the waist gunners were preparing to leave. S/Sgt. Cleo C. White had blood all over his face, and S/Sgt. Martin Cech was wounded in the back. White and Cech left, and Palenica headed for the back door, only to stop when a helmet and goggles hit him in the leg. He found S/Sgt. John K. Hedberg was unable to extricate himself from the tail position, but got out with Palenica's help. Hedberg had been wounded in the hand and was bleeding profusely. Palenica made a tourniquet for Hedberg, got him to the door and then kicked him out, after assuring him he could open his own chute.

Palenica jumped, and later joined White and Hedberg in a POW camp. Cech reached friendly Hollanders, spending from July 1944 to February 1945 quartered in Marienberg, Holland. On 5 April 1945 the Canadian Army picked him up in its sweep along the North Sea coast to Denmark.

On the way to the target 1st Lt. Philip Field's 306th aircraft ran into trouble in the Dummer Lake area, a region always regarded by crews with considerable trepidation. Gunners were often given an extra alert when they approached this area. Flak knocked out the number 2 engine and Field was forced to abort as he could not continue the climb to bombing altitude on three engines. The pilots turned the plane around, salvoed their bombs and headed for cloud cover at 4,000 feet. Unfortunately, the cloud cover ran out as they reached the Zuider Zee. They tried to leave the continent between two small islands among the

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Frisians at the north end of the Zuider Zee and were at 3,000 feet when a flak battery to the right of the plane opened up. The first shot went through the emblem on the right wing and another exploded in the wing tip, damaging twelve feet of the leading edge. By the time Field and his copilot had the plane under control again it was down to 900 feet, and the navigator ordered the gunners, "Shoot 'em!" All responded and the ball turret gunner used up 1100 rounds of ammunition as he sprayed a crisscross pattern over the gun emplacement that had bothered them. This action gave "Vapor Trail" just enough time to get beyond the effective range of the guns and the crew returned to Thurleigh. The eager ball turret gunner was sure his guns had jammed, or he would have done more damage. But there was no jam, he had just used up all of his .50 caliber ammunition.

1st Lt. Charles W. Smith's 368th plane was hit hard over the target by flak and lost an engine. Dropping out of formation, the bomb load was salvoed by 1st Lt. Herman F. Allen, bombardier. The crew headed for a cloud bank north of Berlin, hoping to escape the fighters. First they went east towards Russia, but quickly turned north towards Sweden. They crash landed the plane on the Swedish island of Gotlund and the ten men walked away from the wreckage. Smith and 1st Lt. Merle P. Brown, copilot, only stayed in Sweden for a few weeks after which they were flown back to England on one of the regular night courier flights. But S/Sgt. Donald S. Courson, waist gunner, and T/Sgt. Victor R. Marcotte, radio, were taken to Malmo, Sweden, where they were put to work repairing crippled American airplanes. Marcotte remained there for more than a year and Courson for eighteen months. Other members of the crew who were interned were 1st Lt. Stanley N. Buck, navigator; T/Sgt. Carl Heuser, engineer; S/Sgt. Thomas E. Stillson, ball turret; Sgt. Joseph R. Paul, waist; and S/Sgt. R.B. Trumble tail.

The results of this raid were so satisfactory to 8th AF commanders and the reaction so good from Washington that the 306th along with other bomb groups found itself returning to "Big B" on 8 March with Maj. Charles Flannagan leading twenty-eight planes and on 9 March with Capt. William S. Kirk and twenty-one planes.

March soon became the busiest flying month the 306th had yet experienced in its combat history. A catalog of the middle week in the month reads: 16th, thirty-two planes to Augsburg, led by Col. Lambert; 18th, thirty-four planes to Lechfeld, led by Col. Regan; 20th, twenty planes to Frankfurt, led by Col. Buckley; 23rd, twenty-nine planes to Hamm, led by Capt. McMahon; and 24th, twenty-one planes to Frankfurt, led by Maj. Salada.

On 22 March, Berlin was again the target and Col. Howard M. Turner, 40th CW commander, flew with the 306th as it led the First Bomb Division. There was 10/10ths cloud cover at the target. Bombs were dropped by PFF using the Friedrichstrasse Station as the aiming

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point. The raids mentioned in the preceding paragraph encountered little flak and no fighters, but the flak at Berlin made up for its absence on other days. Every plane over Berlin was damaged, fourteen of them classed as serious. The 306th was in the Berlin flak for seven minutes and the Berlin defense was regarded as the best in Europe.

Lt. William D. Reeder's plane was shot out of formation over Berlin by flak. He lost all controls on the number 4 engine, number 3 had a runaway propeller which he controlled with the throttle but which did not put out any power and number 2 was hit and losing oil. Only the number 1 engine was really carrying any load. Reeder tried to hang in with the formation, but was soon left alone as they flew away from him.

With a dead right wing, losing altitude and wondering when the fighters would hit, Reeder trimmed the ship and then flew with the right wing cocked up about thirty degrees. The log showed 25,000 feet at Berlin, 7000 at Hannover, 4000 at the Zuider Zee and one hundred feet at the Dutch Coast. As they flew across Holland at low level, people were seen waving encouragement to them. The crew was busy jettisoning all extra weight: flak suits, escape kits, one crew member's parachute and even the emergency dinghy radio. Before reaching Hannover the crew members had discussed bailing out, crash landing, or carrying on. They decided it was up to Reeder and they flew on. Air-sea rescue made radio contact with them at midchannel and they landed at Leeston, a fighter base, the first field they came to. "Baby those engines and they will do a lot for you when you need them most," was Reeder's admonition to other pilots. The fighter strip was a bit short for the beleaguered plane and it barreled off the end of the concrete and through a couple of sheds before stopping.

Lt. Ragnar L. Carlson's 423rd plane was also hit hard by flak over the target. The number 3 propeller was knocked out of line and the engine caught fire, the hydraulic system was damaged, an oxygen bottle exploded in the cockpit setting fire to the leaking hydraulic fluid and most of the instruments were destroyed. The plane dropped several thousand feet before it could be brought under control and from that point Carlson and his crew set out for home alone at 115 mph. In the Osnabruck area they picked up additional flak damage. At that point Carlson took rather violent evasive action and five members of the crew bailed out. This is a good example of a problem often experienced by the crews in combat. With the intercom knocked out, the men in the rear of the plane had no easy means at altitude of communicating with the flight deck. Sometimes the certainty of a parachute seemed better than the uncertainty of staying with a badly damaged plane. Crew members who ended up in prison camp were T/Sgt. Philip Brouman, S/Sgt. Charles W. Kester, S/Sgt. Nicholas A. Orlando, S/Sgt. Frederick C. Blum, Jr., and S/Sgt. Anthony J. Mariani. Carlson and the remaining crew members continued laboriously on-

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ward, crossing part of the North Sea at twenty-five feet, and finally after the number 2 engine quit they came over the English coast on one engine and crash landed in a plowed field with injuries to those aboard.

Sgt. Paul Wenrich on Lt. Albert Rehn's crew, was not only wounded once by German anti-aircraft fire, but was actually hit twice in two distinct incidents. He first took flak in his left shoulder while reaching to stuff chaff down the chute in the radio room floor. He went back to manning the .50 caliber machine gun, and three or four minutes later was knocked to the floor when he was hit in the left hip. He recalls having a crew member working over him in the plane, and next came to with a doctor tending to his wounds in the plane. His sixteenth mission was his last, as he was taken from the plane at a fighter base in Southern England, was hospitalized nearby and then moved to Lincoln before winding up in the VA Hospital at Utica, NY. After 15 months of treatment, he was discharged with his left arm permanently an inch and three-quarters shorter than the right.

On a pleasant Sunday afternoon late in March, the 26th, the crews from Thurlleigh joined with other groups for a "milk run" just over the English Channel to bomb a "Noball" target near St. Omer, France. This was one of those missions that men clamored to fly, as one would not be at altitude very long and might be back in time both for a good meal at the combat mess and a date in Bedford that evening. (At the 306th men returning from a combat mission went from interrogation to a special mess where they were treated first to a double-double of whiskey and then to a first-class meal. Crews ate together, and it was usually a welcome finish to the day's work.)

The Fates toyed with the 306th again. With twenty-nine planes strung out in five squadrons for bombing, the Luftwaffe flak gunners below had them in their sights for a considerable period of time and slammed them hard with their 88s. Twenty-six planes were hit, seventeen of them seriously. One plane went down, two crash landed at the base, a bombardier was killed and ten men were wounded. It was a very costly run, the only saving being in aviation fuel.

2nd Lt. Barney R. Price, a 369th veteran, and his crew went down at 1518. "Just before the target I saw Lt. Price's aircraft get a direct flak hit," said 2nd Lt. Kurt A. Ahlstrom. "He dropped his bombs before the rest of the formation and peeled off into a steep dive. I saw him level off almost on the deck and four parachutes came into view. He seemed to be under control when I last saw him." In fact, the entire crew got out of the plane.

"We were hit seven times by flak," says Doran L. Gillette, nose gunner. "The left wing tip was knocked off, the number 2 engine was out and half the plexiglas nose was shot off." That was enough for Gillette and he followed T/Sgt. Carl R. Kalbach, engineer, out of the plane at 21,000 feet. Everyone else bailed out eventually and seven of

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26 Mar  
27 Mar

the crew were brought together by their German captors two days later. Missing from the group were 1st Lt. William R. DeWolf, copilot; 1st Lt. Donald H. White, navigator; and S/Sgt. Kenneth D. Simpson, waist gunner. The Germans told them that the others had been injured in varying degrees upon landing and had been hospitalized. Gillette landed in a plowed field, was soon captured and then beaten on the head by a German officer using Gillette's own .45 cal. pistol to administer the treatment. Others on the crew were T/Sgt. Raymond R. Decker, radio; Sgt. Leslie J. Johnson, ball turret; S/Sgt. Lester L. Plumbtree, waist; and S/Sgt. Frederick J. Kappan, tail.

2nd Lt. William C. Tarr's 369th plane was also ill-fated on this trip: the bombardier, F/O Dominic J. Giosso, was killed when a piece of flak went through his jugular vein. Tarr's crew had arrived 21 February and this was its fourth mission. While Tarr's combat history was relatively brief, tragedy stalked his plane on almost every mission following this. Lt. Ralph Malsom, 367th, lost an engine to flak and ground-looped to a stop on landing. 1st Lt. Clifford W. McBride, 369th, crash landed at Thurleigh on his return.

Five men from the 367th were wounded on this mission: S/Sgt. Robert E. Weber, S/Sgt. Floyd M. Shade, 2nd Lt. Phil G. Griswold, Sgt. Edward F. McGlinchy and Lt. James D. Welch. Wounded from the 368th were 1st Lt. Ray C. McDaniel, Sgt. Stanley Lesnieski, F/O George W. Tapper, 1st Lt. Kenneth M. Farrar and 1st Lt. Mitchell K. Antoon. The men of the 306th learned the lesson again: those missions which often seemed so easy were, in reality, often the roughest. One needs look at only two others: Antwerp on 5 April 1943 and Tricqueville on 26 June 1943.

Better weather over England meant more flying and the group was back in the air on Monday with Lt. Col. John L. Lambert leading twenty-one planes to LaRochele. Clear weather, no opposition and good bombing put the bombs right on target — but another plane went down. This time it was 1st Lt. Rene C. Fix of the 368th. The plane was hit by flak approaching the target, and numbers 3 and 4 engines were lost. Fix then took his plane out over the Bay of Biscay to "avoid the fighters." They were forced to ditch and during this maneuver, 2nd Lt. Charles F. Hill, bombardier, broke his ankle. Everyone got out of the plane and into the dinghies, except that Fix and 2nd Lt. Weldon B. Frantz, copilot, stayed in the water for a long time putting cold patches on the holes in one dinghy. About dark a three-engined German amphibian found them and took them into Bordeaux where the entire crew was hospitalized for several days. Others on the crew were: 2nd Lt. Peter G. Kenny, Jr., navigator; S/Sgt. Eugene C. Engberg, engineer; S/Sgt. David L. Stoddard, radio; Sgt. Rudolph W. Phillips, ball turret; Sgt. Frank A. Pfeifer and Sgt. Alvin E. Naumann, waist; and Sgt. Wade S. McRary, tail gunner.

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29 March 1944

On 29 March Capt. Elmer Heap took off leading twenty-one aircraft to Brunswick. Two aircraft aborted early for mechanical reasons. The group got to the target with difficulty, but about five minutes after bombing the P-51 escort disappeared and sixteen FW-190s were soon observed flying level with the formation. The enemy fighters were momentarily lost to sight, but in a few seconds roared back through the formation from out of the sun, knocking two high squadron planes out of the formation. The bombers were then finished off by the fighters.

1st Lt. Gerald R. Haywood, Jr., was the pilot of one of the two 369th planes in the high squadron to be downed in the big fighter melee. "At approximately 1338 hours I saw Lt. Haywood's plane shot out of formation," said 1st Lt. Robert K. Welter, pilot of a nearby plane. "He fell about 2000 feet and leveled off. His number 3 engine was burning and the inside of the nose was on fire. He was then attacked by two more enemy fighters." As the plane went out of sight, one to three chutes were reported. In reality, there were four survivors: T/Sgt. Jerome A. Evenson, radio; S/Sgt. Harold M. Maron and S/Sgt. Edgar M. Johnson, waist; and S/Sgt. Ralph P. Butler, tail. Haywood had arrived right after the second Schweinfurt mission and was at the end of his tour. Killed with him were 2nd Lt. Rubin M. Robertson, Jr., copilot; 2nd Lt. Jack D. Bailiff, navigator; 1st Lt. William D. Daniels, bombardier; T/Sgt. Billie D. Oldfield, engineer; and S/Sgt. Melvin T. Ross, Jr., ball turret.

1st Lt. Alvin G. Schuering and 1st Lt. Robert J. Flood, pilot and bombardier, were flying their last mission on this run and turned down the squadron lead. It was indeed their final mission — with a different ending than they had planned. Flood says, "The squadron leader allowed the squadron to drift out of formation after turning off the target and heading for home. Another plane in the formation decided to change position and, as that maneuver began, the fighters hit us, both FW-190s and ME-109s. We lost our number 2 engine and the number 3 was damaged, so we could no longer keep up with the squadron. We saw cloud cover at 14,000 feet and Schuering, pursued by the fighters, headed for it. Our crew shot down at least two of the attackers. When we broke out of those clouds we tried for more at 4000 feet and were again attacked and set on fire. Schuering dived the plane like a fighter and everyone was shooting like hell. This blew the fire out and we made it to the clouds."

Then anti-aircraft fire north of Hannover found the plane and Schuering decided the only solution was to take the plane in. He made a perfect, wheels-up landing in spongy, irrigated farmland. The crew scattered while Schuering and Flood stayed behind to try to burn the plane as fighters buzzed over them. They were captured along with six of their crew mates. A group of civilians with rifles, shotguns, farm

see story in Echoes Oct-96 pp. 4-5 by Flood

implements and ropes were marching them down a road when soldiers appeared and took them in custody. The soldiers later told them that the civilians were planning to hang all of them. 1st Lt. Jack M. Hamilton, navigator, and T/Sgt. Michael Comarnisky, radio, disappeared before the civilians found the main group and were not captured by the Germans until the next day, fifteen miles from the plane. Eight of the crew were checked in at a Luftwaffe radar station and then taken to a fighter base where the claims had been registered for both Schuering's and Haywood's planes. Additional crew members were 2nd Lt. Harvey C. Nielsen, copilot; T/Sgt. Frederick M. Hawthorne, engineer; S/Sgt. Henry C. Ashley, ball turret; S/Sgt. Leon W. Currie and S/Sgt. Norton S. McAlister, waist; and S/Sgt. Max H. Bergen, tail gunner.

In an unusual occurrence, perhaps the only time it happened in just this way, credit for an enemy plane downed was given immediately after the mission to a crewman who did not return. Sgt. Bergen was credited with one FW-190: "One E/A after attacking head-on passed by the tail and flipped up and around to make a tail attack. At this point, the tail gunner was seen to shoot and E/A first smoked, then there was a huge explosion and it completely disappeared." Sgt. William M. Yager, tail gunner for Capt. William B. Hilton, made this initial report and it was corroborated by members of several other crews.

Another plane failed to return to Thurleigh. On the bomb run, as the doors were opened, fire flashed through the cockpit of 1st Lt. Nelson W. Hardin's plane, filling the flight deck with smoke. It is believed that wiring on the back wall of the cockpit had been reworked between missions, then shorted out and the air from the open bomb bay doors caused the smoldering wires to burst into flame. The bombardier salvoed the bombs and activated the door switch, but, as the doors were closing, the copilot hit the salvo button; for some reason this jammed the doors partially open. Hardin had no choice but to fall out of the formation. The fighters immediately jumped him and shot out the number 2 and number 3 engines. At the same time he observed oil leaks in number 1 and number 4. He turned the stricken plane west and hoped for the best, but over Holland the number 4 engine seized and that left only number 1 working.

With the North Sea lying between "Wampus Cat" and home, it seemed wisest to settle for surrender at that point. Their altitude was 5000 feet and they were going down. Hardin turned the plane around and the crew bailed out. By the time the men were gone, "Wampus Cat" was too low for Hardin and 2nd Lt. Richard T. Knowles, copilot, to leave so they crash landed in a field about twenty-five miles south of Amsterdam. The crew was captured immediately upon landing, but Hardin and Knowles were free for a day before being arrested. Others in the crew were 1st Lt. John F. Huistra, navigator; 1st Lt. Lee F. Barrows, Jr., bombardier; T/Sgt. Ernest B. Jackson, engineer; T/Sgt.

Wendell W. May, radio; S/Sgt. Ralph E. Moulis, ball turret; S/Sgt. Lee T. Jenks and S/Sgt. Joseph L. Dilley, waist; and Sgt. Robert M. Richardson, tail gunner.

Of those men shot down on the 29th, those who had flown more than twenty-five missions were Haywood, Scheuring, Bailiff, Flood, Oldfield and Evenson.

Sgt. Virgil F. Jenzen, tail gunner for Lt. Perry Raster of the 367th, was hit by flak on the mission and killed. Sgt. Winston W. Burroughs on the same crew also was wounded.

March set a high-water mark for missions flown by the 306th, sixteen in all. It was in 8th AF Memorandum 35-1 of 4 March that the standard tour of missions was raised from the twenty-five established a year earlier to a new level of thirty. Those who had flown a part of their tours were given prorated credit so that they might have to fly from twenty-six to thirty.

The 369th Squadron diary states: "Some of the old timers were not required to do a total of thirty, but anyone with fifteen or fewer had to resign himself to a tour of thirty. Statistically, this increase is probably sound. From an operational standpoint, the 8th AF cannot afford to be caught short in replacements. Certainly, for the most part, missions have become 'safer' — thanks to better and better fighter support, new 'anti-flak' measures, and perhaps, better navigation."

Those planes lost on 29 March were the only aircraft lost to fighters during the month, a rare event in the history of the group, but as 1944 progressed fewer and fewer went down due to enemy fighter attacks.

Late in March M/Sgt. Forrest W. Goodwill became the first man in the 369th to receive a Legion of Merit medal when he was honored for his "splendid record in servicing combat aircraft."

March witnessed a quickening in the pace of activities at Thurleigh, due in part to the impending invasion, which was in the forefront of speculation. It was also due to improved technology, particularly the airborne radar (PFF) which permitted navigation and bombing through heavy clouds. Combat losses were still high, but fighter attacks were lessening. On fourteen of the sixteen completed missions no enemy fighters were seen. What a marked contrast to the previous year when eight out of nine missions underwent fighter attacks.

The increasing frequency of missions also meant a faster turn around time for combat crews. Men were not staying as long, and even with the increased tour, many would now complete their assignments within a three-month period and then return to the States. The pipeline was full of personnel, planes, supplies, food and other equipment, factors which added comfort and increased efficiency for the entire station complement.

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## Chapter 17

# OBERPFAFFENHOFEN

## April 1944

Early April in England was marked by bad weather. After the intense activity of March this was good news for weary flyers. No mission was attempted until the 9th and this one failed when the Group could not rendezvous with the wing because of the towering and ubiquitous clouds over England. 9 A=

But 10 April was another day and Lt. Col. John M. Regan, commanding officer of the 368th Squadron, was the group leader. This marked his fifth attempt to fly his twenty-fifth and final mission and to return to the U.S. with his combat tour completed. Regan had been one of those eager, green second lieutenant pilots who had arrived at Wendover, Utah, two weeks out of flying school. He learned to fly the B-17, survived and eventually became an able and popular squadron commander. While some old timers never flew very many missions but served well in other capacities, Regan flew his tour and had his share of hair raising episodes along the way. He was also one with a reputation as a good party man, a designation that tapped many in the group. 10 A=

As luck would have it on this mission to the Evere airdrome near Brussels, the Norden bombsight in the lead plane "blacked out" on the bomb run and the 306th did not drop. Regan pulled his twenty-one planes aside and let the rest of the 40th CW through since he was the Wing air commander for the day. Then the 306th made a second run over the target. Capt. William B. Hilton took the lead on this run with Lt. Roy W. Howard, a veteran bombardier. Howard found the briefed aiming point obscured by previous bombings and then chose installations in the southwest corner of the airdrome which had not been previously bombed and hit them squarely. For this he was commended by his fellow airmen for an excellent piece of bombing on very short notice.

The following day the group took off to bomb Sorau in Northern Germany, but that was obscured. A run was, therefore, begun on Politz, aborted and the bombs were finally dropped on Stettin. Capt. John J. Stolz of the 367th led the group, flying as the low group in the 40th CW, while Capt. James S. Opdyke, 369th, led the lead squadron of a composite group. At 1037 the 306th planes ran into twenty single-engine Luftwaffe fighters west of Hannover which, in their pass through the group, hit the 369th hard. Capt. Opdyke's plane was severely damaged as was Lt. William S. Tarr's aircraft. The American 11 A=

fighter escort picked up the enemy planes coming out of the first pass and chased them off. This, unfortunately, left the bombers as sitting ducks for the second wave of enemy fighters.

"I got a couple of direct hits," says Tarr. "I had one engine completely knocked out and on another the supercharger was damaged. Another hit took out the entire plexiglas nose. This was when I lost my bombardier and navigator. They were both killed instantly. The only thing that kept the bombardier's body in the plane was that he had been strapped to his seat." 2nd Lt. A. J. Parnes was the bombardier for Tarr on this mission and the navigator was 1st Lt. Carlyle Singer. A machine gun slug went through the front of Singer's flak helmet, killing him instantly. A remarkable aspect of this whole incident was that Tarr flew his damaged plane on to the target northeast of Berlin and then back to England.

"It was very noisy and windy with the nose off," says Tarr in a masterpiece of understatement. Adding to the battered appearance of the plane, there was hydraulic fluid all over the nose and flight deck. "Little did we know as we came across Denmark that it would be one long letdown all the way to England," adds Tarr. During the two and one-half hour flight the crew busied itself removing excess weight from the plane — guns, flak suits, sundry equipment. When the English coast came in sight the gunners had the ball turret about half off on its way to a watery grave. (Experts felt that jettisoning the ball turret would set up a critical drag that would equate to the same fuel consumption as carrying the turret intact in the plane. Thus, a lot of men expended much energy unnecessarily in trying to hammer off the safety lugs that overhung the track for the ball turret.)

Tarr reports that his plane straggled a bit coming back across the North Sea. One wonders why it still flew! He landed at Foulsham, the first field on his route. For his action on this mission Tarr was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in bringing his severely damaged plane home.

The group was hit a second time by fighters at 1102 about three miles north of Brunswick. This time forty Luftwaffe planes roared through the formation, finishing off Capt. Opdyke's struggling aircraft. 1st Lt. Trygve C. Olsen, pilot, motioned for the deputy to take over the lead and the stricken plane left the formation. Capt. Opdyke had been hit in the face by pieces of an exploding 20 mm shell, fragments of which also struck Olsen. All of the cockpit windows had been knocked out creating a very drafty flight deck. In a first fighter attack the number 1 engine had been knocked out and could not be feathered because of a lack of oil. On the second attack the number 2 engine was damaged and feathered. A course was set for Sweden by 1st Lt. William J. Flynn,

navigator. The plane could not hold even the 12,000 foot altitude at which it was first hit, but Olsen tried to maintain as much altitude as possible. The number 4 engine had also been damaged and was putting out about half power. Opdyke left the cockpit to get some first aid treatment from the men in the nose and later returned to his right hand seat, although unable to see. As the plane drifted lower Olsen began to encounter difficulty with air turbulence caused by the changing terrain beneath them. Each time the plane encountered an air pocket a few more feet of height were lost.

Due north of Berlin and about twenty-five miles from the Baltic Sea Olsen encountered severe turbulence and, in trying to right the plane, the last measure of altitude was lost. Olsen looked up to see a church steeple at Ludwigslust right in front of the plane. He managed to avoid the steeple, saw a break in a forested area and landed in a sod field. As they came down Opdyke yelled, "Cut the switches." The remainder of the crew had taken crash positions in the radio room and Opdyke had been secured in the copilot seat so that he would not be thrown loose and further injured. However, the camera hatch was open. When the plane hit the ground sod boiled up into the radio room, hitting 1st Lt. Clarence Couch, bombardier, with such force that it broke several ribs one of which may have punctured a lung. In the early fighter attacks the crew had lost its radio operator, T/Sgt. Thaddeus W. Hunter, Jr., the victim of a machine gun bullet. <sup>All of the</sup> Those crew members who survived their POW experience were T/Sgt. William R.L. Jones, engineer; S/Sgt. Raymond N. Gates, ball turret; S/Sgt. George J. McManus and S/Sgt. Edward J. Gustafson, waist; and S/Sgt. Eugene R. Moody, tail gunner.

Likewise hit in the second fighter attack was 2nd Lt. Kurt A. Ahlstrom's 423rd plane. One wing caught fire and the ship soon exploded. No chutes were seen at the time, but miraculously the entire crew survived: 2nd Lt. Nathaniel L. Bliss, copilot; 2nd Lt. Herbert R. Ossusky, navigator; 2nd Lt. Delbert W. Chase, bombardier; S/Sgt. Francis M. Parsley, engineer; S/Sgt. Robert N. Burley, radio; Sgt. Louis E. Kelch, ball turret; S/Sgt. Joseph J. Pagano and S/Sgt. Patrick Gaynor, waist; and Sgt. Francis A. Mooney, tail.

In the first fighter attack, T/Sgt. George P. Farkas, engineer for Tarr, was credited with destroying the FW-190 which had killed the navigator and bombardier in the plane. The enemy attacker burst into flames as Farkas held the triggers down on his twin .50s. S/Sgt. Robert Seaman, tail gunner, saw the plane explode and completely disintegrate behind the formation. At 1115 Seaman caught an ME-410 in his sights and sent it into a spin with the left stabilizer and large pieces of the vertical fin gone. He was awarded a "probable".

On 12 April Maj. Maurice V. Salada, an original pilot with the 423rd

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Squadron, was transferred to the 368th Squadron as commanding officer replacing Regan. On 22 April Maj. Henry J. Schmidt, group engineering officer, was transferred to the 449th sub-depot at Thurleigh as its commanding officer.

24 Apr  
With improving weather missions were now being planned daily. The group diary mentions good weather, no fighters and inaccurate flak as a way of life for the combat crews. But all of this came to an abrupt halt on 24 April, when the assigned target was Oberpfaffenhofen in Southern Germany where there was an aircraft assembly and repair works. Twenty-five planes were up for the day with Capt. John J. Stolz of the 367th as the leader. The 306th was assigned as the low group in the 41st CW "B" Force. The group entered continental airspace close to Dieppe, France, flying at 19,500 feet at 1118 hours. At 1123 the 367th lost its first of three planes for the mission; 2nd Lt. Walter R. Peterson's plane was hit by meagre, but very accurate, flak. Peterson was veteran of eleven days with the group. The number 4 engine was set on fire and the plane peeled out of formation. Three or four chutes were seen and within a minute the plane blew up. Evidently those first chutes were the only survivors: 2nd Lt. Christian A. Dinkel, navigator; 2nd Lt. Edmund M. Storolis, bombardier; S/Sgt. Clarence R. Marlow, waist; and Sgt. Roderick H. McAllister, tail. Killed in action that day were Peterson and 2nd Lt. Leslie W. King, copilot; S/Sgt. Antonio T. Celli, engineer; S/Sgt. Archie J. Smith, radio; Sgt. John R. Bell, ball turret; and Sgt. Roger C. Burton, waist.

After Peterson's departure the flight settled down until about 1215 when the group was crossing the upper Seine River near the German border. Off and on for an hour and a half the group was badgered by enemy fighters, apparently not inflicting any great damage. But, the aim of the attacking planes improved and Capt. Stolz' ship received several damaging shots: the number 3 engine was plastered and could not be feathered, the number 2 engine was hit and was feathered and the number 1 engine was damaged. Stolz tried to leave the formation and start down, but the group followed him until finally he lowered his wheels. Before that, to ease the load on the stricken aircraft, Stolz had dropped his bombs. Most of the group dutifully followed, dropping its bombs and digging up German forests. At about 16,000 feet Stolz called his deputy, Lt. Richard J. Somerville, and said, "Well, Slim, I've got two engines left and you know where I'm going." Pulling away from the other 306th planes, Stolz headed for Switzerland where he landed at Dubendorf and ground-looped to a stop. The plane was hauled off later to a junkyard where its bones may still lie buried. Stolz had been apprehensive before takeoff and during rendezvous over Molesworth that morning. His 23rd mission was his last, but in a sense he continued as a leader even after quitting the formation for his was

the first of three 306th planes to find a way to Switzerland before the day was over. With Stolz on this mission were 1st Lt. Bill H. Rutherford, copilot; 1st Lt. Allen T. Ballard, navigator; 1st Lt. Thomas P. Cliney, bombardier; S/Sgt. Arnold D. Springer, engineer; T/Sgt. John G. Miller, Jr., radio; S/Sgt. Farris R. Rashid, ball turret; S/Sgt. Albert J. Gentile and Sgt. Herbert D. Wooten, waist; and 1st Lt. William M. Leiser, tail gunner. Leiser was also an assistant squadron operations officer.

Because of the intense fighter activity and the concentration of the crews on the defense of their own aircraft, it is difficult to determine the order in which the 306th lost eight more planes on this mission. In addition to the two crews already mentioned, these eight additional planes ran the group's loss to a record equalling Bremen on 17 April 1943 and Schweinfurt on 14 October 1943. From the standpoint of losses suffered in combat these were the three roughest missions flown by the 306th. Oberpfaffenhofen was much lighter in men killed, though, as there were only thirteen fatalities. At Bremen the toll had been thirty-four and at Schweinfurt thirty-five. One major difference was that three of the lost crews on this mission made their way to Switzerland where one crew member died later while interned. There was also one more man on this raid, a passenger-observer who went to prison camp.

1st Lt. Dale Ebert had checked out as a first pilot when his original pilot completed a mission tour. On this day he had 2nd Lt. Kerneth J. Hall, a veteran flyer, as his copilot. Their aircraft was hit hard in the fighter assaults which came from all directions. Ebert was flying the low ship in the low squadron, always regarded as the most vulnerable position in a formation. With both number 3 and number 4 engines shot out, Ebert was losing altitude before the target was reached and jettisoned his bombs. After briefly assessing the situation and realizing that he was never going to get his 423rd aircraft back to England, he headed south to Switzerland. As this crew neared Lucerne, minus their ball turret and other weighty supplies and equipment, the Swiss shot at them. T/Sgt. Kenneth N. Feltner, engineer, replied with a barrage of flares in return and Ebert and Hall brought the plane in for a crash landing in a farmer's field near Neffenbach. Ebert, Feltner, 1st Lt. Anthony Baltunas, navigator, and S/Sgt. James B. Early, ball turret, would have completed their combat tours on this day if they had returned to Thurleigh. It was the 29th raid for Baltunas. Other members of the crew were 1st Lt. Julius Tobias, bombardier; Sgt. Charles W. Hamby, radio; S/Sgt. Ira E. Walker, Jr. and S/Sgt. James D. Stotts, waist; and S/Sgt. Martin J. Knapp, tail gunner. For thirty minutes after leaving the formation, Ebert's plane was followed by an ME-109 which continued to fire at it until the attacker evidently ran out of ammuni-

tion and gave up, still not having downed the crippled plane. This is an indication of the decreased quality of German fighter pilot training which was becoming apparent. In mid-October Sgt. Stotts died in Switzerland and was buried at Munsigun on 16 October, the only man of the three crews who did not make it out. Hall injured his back in the crash landing and Hamby had some 20 mm shell fragments in one arm.

2nd Lt. Robert E. MacDowell, flying one of the group's oldest planes which was a veteran of the first Schweinfurt mission the preceding August, was hit hard in the first big fighter attack. This was the pilot's eighteenth day with the group and the last day of his life; he was killed in the fighter pass which also cost the plane its number 3 and number 4 engines. The plane was in bad shape and 2nd Lt. Fred A. Puckett, Jr., copilot, ordered bailout from the burning ship. Puckett suffered some burns; 2nd Lt. Robert E. Schmielau, navigator, sprained an ankle; and 2nd Lt. Lawrence F. Christofori, bombardier, had broken ribs. The remainder of the crew was composed of S/Sgt. Donald J. Frye, engineer; S/Sgt. James H. Prout, radio; Sgt. William L. Murdock, ball turret; Sgt. Robert F. Emery and S/Sgt. Lawrence E. Wagoner, waist; and T/Sgt. John Hazy, tail gunner.

The first fighter attack also caught 2nd Lt. David B. Ramsey and his crew. This was another new crew which was completing three weeks in combat with this mission. The fighters knocked out two engines on their pass and Ramsey peeled his plane out of formation. 2nd Lt. Sterling T. Strange, Jr., bombardier, suffered 20 mm wounds in both legs during the attack. With fire burning in both wings and gas siphoning into the plane's waist, Ramsey ordered his crew to jump. Everyone left the plane, all survived and Ramsey and his three officers became prison camp roommates. His crew members were 2nd Lt. Edwin W. Miller, copilot; 2nd Lt. Robert I. Krohn, navigator; S/Sgt. James R. Ryan, engineer; S/Sgt. John Gray, radio; Sgt. Paul D. Callahan, ball turret; Sgt. Donald V. Miller and Sgt. Carl L. Potter, waist; and Sgt. Paul Walshin, tail gunner.

1st Lt. William C. Tarr, mentioned several times earlier as having serious problems, was leading the high squadron of a composite group on this mission. This six-plane unit lost four of its aircraft. During the intense fighter attack Tarr's plane was hit in a wing tip and in the nose. These hits were observed by other aircraft. Tarr sensed that many things were wrong and quickly ordered his crew to bail out. Within a minute after they left, the plane exploded. Flying with Tarr had been 1st Lt. Ross E. Handy, Jr., copilot; 2nd Lt. Olin O. Odom, Jr., navigator, and 2nd Lt. Bertram Krashes, bombardier. The latter two had been in the group only twelve days and were assigned to Tarr's crew after the earlier loss of his navigator and bombardier. Most of the

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enlisted men were veterans of Tarr's previous episodes: T/Sgt. George P. Farkas, engineer; T/Sgt. Jack R. Cunningham, radio; Sgt. Donald C. Lively, ball turret; Sgt. John A. Moore and S/Sgt. William C. Simpson, waist, and S/Sgt. Robert Seaman, tail gunner. Tarr's plane also had the extra man aboard, Capt. Shubel J. Owen, an intelligence officer, who gained more combat experience than he had bargained for.

2nd Lt. Irwin Schwedok's plane was first hit at Strasbourg by fighters, but continued on, following Stolz' plane as it attempted to get away from the group, and was then hit again by fighters. By this time the number 2 engine was out and the prop was windmilling. The pilot could get only twelve to fifteen inches of manifold pressure on his badly vibrating number 3 engine. Schwedok's plane could not keep up and the bombs were salvoed while the plane was descending. While some crew members may have thought about returning to England, they were barely able to make it to Switzerland where they landed at Dubendorf and all were interned for the duration. In late February 1945 2nd Lt. Paul J. Gambiana, copilot, and 2nd Lt. Howard O. Hunter, Jr., bombardier, made their way out of Switzerland on an exchange and came back to England. They then visited Thurleigh and reported on the fate of their plane in this disastrous mission. Other members of Schwedok's crew were 2nd Lt. Harris M. Palmer, navigator; T/Sgt. Edward N. McNeil, engineer; T/Sgt. Constantine Tsairis, radio; S/Sgt. George L. Dufau, ball turret; S/Sgt. Richard P. Iacona and S/Sgt. Martin L. Willoughby, waist; and S/Sgt. Bryce C. Frisbie, tail gunner.

The crew of 1st Lt. John F. Coughlin was one of the few that suffered appreciable personnel casualties with five fatalities on the raid. The crew of a nearby plane reported that Coughlin's aircraft was hit in the first wave of fighters, that five chutes appeared and then the plane blew up. Surviving were 1st Lt. Frank J. Hall, navigator; 1st Lt. George T. Gretton, bombardier; T/Sgt. Orville E. Libby, radio; S/Sgt. Charles D. Ladage, waist; and S/Sgt. Melvin T. Tucker, tail gunner. Those killed in addition to Coughlin were 1st Lt. Allan J. Johnson, copilot; T/Sgt. Madison O. Beasley, engineer; S/Sgt. Thomas A. Flores, ball turret; and Sgt. Ralph A. Garner, waist. Coughlin's original crew had arrived 26 February and had included Johnson, Hall, Beasley, Libby, Ladage and Tucker.

2nd Lt. Carroll G. Biggs and his crew had reported to the 369th on 5 April. The crew had trained together as a unit in the States and was to remain together until the end. Biggs flew two orientation missions before his crew was assigned to go and together this was the crew's fourth mission. They were a part of the high squadron of the composite group. Their plane was hit on the first fighter pass as two groups of German planes came in, one engaging the escort and the other attack-

ing the bombers. "Misscarriage" lost its number 3 and number 4 engines immediately and fire began to spread over the entire right wing. An internal oxygen fire broke out which threatened the bomb bay, so the bombs were jettisoned. The top turret and tail guns were knocked out by enemy fire and miscellaneous electrical equipment shorted out. Biggs' radio operator, T/Sgt. Gerald E.F. Swift, and his two waist gunners, Sgt. Lee A. Prugh and Sgt. Walter W. Garr, were badly wounded and Biggs ordered the other crew members to help them bail out. After everyone left he toyed with the idea of trying to take the plane to Switzerland, but decided against it and jumped. As his chute opened his nearby plane exploded. Biggs landed between two large pine trees and was suspended some distance off the ground for a time. The crew was all brought together at Regensburg before going to Dulag Luft and eventually to prison camps. Others flying with Biggs were 2nd Lt. William W. Chapman, Jr., copilot; 2nd Lt. Joseph B. Weldon, navigator; 2nd Lt. John R. Pedevillano, bombardier; S/Sgt. George Economos, engineer; Sgt. Matthew G. Moore, ball turret; and Sgt. Luther D. Victory, tail.

The final plane down at Oberpfaffenhofen was that of 1st Lt. William R. James, who was checking out 2nd Lt. Gilbert E. C. VanderMarliere as a first pilot. VanderMarliere was in the left seat when ME-109s hit them out of the sun. This attack immediately knocked out two engines and a third was soon lost. Twenty mm cannon shells ripped into the generator control panel next to VanderMarliere, wounding him in the left leg and left arm. His control column was useless and the oxygen system failed. VanderMarliere passed out from lack of oxygen as James tried to maintain some semblance of control over the stricken plane. The engineer got a walkaround bottle, plugged it into VanderMarliere's mask and brought the pilot around. Bailout was ordered, although the order had to be passed from man to man as the intercom was gone. Again the pilot passed out. When he revived the plane was at 4,000 feet and James was urging him to struggle out of his seat. VanderMarliere could not squeeze out the left window, but grabbed a rope he had tied to his chest-pack parachute and went down to the nose hatch. There in the confusion, his chest-pack fell out of the open hatch. Fortunately, the rope was also tied to VanderMarliere's parachute harness, so he reeled the chest-pack back into the plane, snapped it in place and bailed out.

The attitude of the diving plane pinned VanderMarliere against the outside of the fuselage between the escape hatch and the bomb bay doors. When the crew had tried to jettison the bombs the doors would not open, but as VanderMarliere lay spread eagled against the outside of the plane, the doors suddenly swung open and he felt himself to be in a position close to death. Finally pushing himself away from the

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plane and timing his move to go between the swaying doors when they were farthest apart, VanderMarliere broke free and was safe. Meanwhile, James went out the hatch, pulled his ripcord and saw his chute open, swing one way, then the other and his feet hit the ground. He was unhurt.

F/O Sidney Shertzer, the bombardier on the crew for this mission, had come out to the plane after engine start. VanderMarliere had called the tower to report that they were ready to taxi but had no bombardier. Shertzer was located, assigned, rushed to the plane, climbed in and was off on his first bombing mission. Once on the ground, both VanderMarliere and Shertzer were found by friendly farmers who felt on seeing them that they might well not survive any rough handling by soldiers and so hid them. Shertzer had landed in a tree fifty feet off the ground. Remembering instructions on how to cut the shroud lines carefully and lower oneself to the ground, he did. Only he cut the wrong lines and fell fifty feet landing on his back. The bombardier had two crushed vertebrae and was in considerable pain, as was VanderMarliere from his wounds in the plane.

After being hidden for a day, they were taken by ambulance to a military post and then to the University of Munich Hospital. Their first meeting ever was in the ambulance and Shertzer was most reluctant to be convinced that VanderMarliere was in fact who he claimed to be. When VanderMarliere spoke French with a nurse, Shertzer was even wavier. But finally Shertzer became convinced that this man had been his pilot for the day. VanderMarliere was in the hospital for six weeks before being transferred to a prison camp for the remainder of the war. Other members of the crew were 2nd Lt. Raymond Urich, navigator; T/Sgt. George A. Vogt, engineer; S/Sgt. Willard O. Elliott, radio; S/Sgt. Earl R. Wynn, ball turret; S/Sgt. Everett L. Minto and S/Sgt. James R. Copeman, waist; and S/Sgt. Walter W. Lastinger, tail gunner.

The returning planes of the 306th were credited with eight victories over enemy attackers. How many others may have been downed by those planes which did not come home will never be known. ME-109s were credited to S/Sgt. C.L. Hum and S/Sgt. Othal Woodall (Tripp); S/Sgt. Gene W. Holland, S/Sgt. Herman Shore, S/Sgt. Durward F. Offord and S/Sgt. Charles G. Smith (Somerville); S/Sgt. Francis A. Weitzel (Paulsen); and T/Sgt. William H. Morgan (Carlson). Later, credit was given to two members of Capt. Stolz' crew: S/Sgt. Arnold D. Springer, engineer, and Sgt. Herbert D. Wooten, waist.

For ten enemy planes shot down, the 306th had traded ten Fortresses of its own, a heavy price for the raid. Only two planes, the sole survivors of the six-ship high squadron in the composite group, dropped their bombs on the target. Of the twelve planes which came

back to Thurleigh with flak damage, seven of them were classed as severe. It was a dispirited group of flyers that climbed out of their planes at 1712 after a long, hard day that had begun with an 0600 wakeup and an 0900 takeoff.

25 April  
A year and a week earlier when the 306th had lost ten planes over Bremen it had been stood down from combat until Col. Claude Putnam could pull his forces back together, a matter that took about three days. But conditions were different in April 1944 — more planes, more crews, and a stronger organization behind the planes to prepare for future missions. The 306th flew every day for the remainder of the month, putting up twenty planes on the next day, 25 April.

26 April  
Tragedy continued to stalk the group, however, and the very next morning Lt. Donald J. Schaefer and eight other members of his 367th crew were killed when the plane lost its number 1 engine on takeoff, stalled and crashed about a mile and a half from the field in the area of Bletsoe Castle. The plane burned but did not explode since its "bombs" were loaded with propaganda leaflets, commonly called "Nickels". The sole survivor of this unfortunate incident was Sgt. George S. Littlefield, tail gunner. He had been operating the Aldis lamp from his position to warn following aircraft; in the crash the tail section separated from the fuselage and was the only part of the plane that did not burn. All other crew members were lost: 2nd Lt. Floyd D. Henry, copilot; 2nd Lt. Willard A. Transeith, navigator; 2nd Lt. Roy A. McKinney, bombardier; Sgt. Charles E. Weller, radio; Sgt. Sheldon H. Kinberg, engineer; Sgt. John W. Byrd, ball turret; and Sgts. D.M. Minter, Jr. and John C. Simons, waist.

On 27 April a new wrinkle was introduced in the 8th AF operations. Two distinctly different missions were flown on the same day by the heavy bombers. The first was a Noball mission, using eighteen planes from the 306th; it was marked by rather ineffective bombing. The second mission took another eighteen planes to the Essey airdrome at Nancy. The first mission remained noteworthy for a spectacular crash landing at Thurleigh by 2nd Lt. Clifford F. Baxter, a recent addition to the ranks of 369th pilots. He could only lower one wheel, came in crosswind and set his bird down. The resultant damage was repaired in just twenty-eight hours, a real tribute to the expertise and dedication of the ground crews.

On 29 April the group made its sixth foray to Berlin, led by Lt. Col. John L. Lambert. Only fifteen planes crossed the target and dropped their bombs on the west side of the city. Near Magdeburg, on the return trip, flak caught the plane of 2nd Lt. Warren S. Lutz, an early April addition to the 368th. "The cover of the right wing seemed to be stripped off," reported 2nd Lt. Richard D. Buttorff, a 369th pilot. "He peeled up over the lead, rolled over and went straight down enveloped

in flames." No chutes were seen. The plane came apart before reaching the ground, freeing Sgt. Aleck A. Lazek, left waist gunner, fell out the rear door, and Sgt. Charles H. Lux, tail gunner, never knew how he escaped. They were the only survivors. Those who were killed numbered 2nd Lt. Thomas W. Johnson, copilot; 2nd Lt. Edward P. O'Neill, navigator; 2nd Lt. James L. Knox, bombardier; S/Sgt. Warren J. Adams, engineer; S/Sgt. Joe D. Reed, radio; Sgt. Roy Y. Ward, ball turret; and Sgt. Ray Y. Ward, waist gunner. The two Wards were twin brothers, like the Wissenbacks of the original group, but who had been assigned to different crews.

The month of April ended with a mission to the Lyons airdrome, flown by only seven planes of the 367th with 1st Lt. Richard J. Somerville as the leader. The squadron's 1000-pound bombs were seen to hit directly on the aiming point. Two fighter attacks occurred, at 0916 on the way in and at 1155 on the way home. Both were driven off by escorts without damage.

Lt. Col. George R. Buckey, who came to Thurleigh as one of the original pilots, closed out his combat career, turning over command of the 367th Squadron to Lt. Col. Robert C. Williams, longtime group operations officer, who thus moved from a staff position to a tactical unit.

## Chapter 18

# PREPARATIONS FOR INVASION

## May 1944

Early May was again a time of change in the command and staff structure. Maj. Toy B. Husband became group operations officer, replacing Lt. Col. Robert C. Williams, who had moved to the 367th commander's post.

Operations was the nerve center of the bomb group. The A-3 job demanded a tough constitution and complete dedication to the task at hand. It was in operations that decisions were made for group lead and alternate, positions in the formation and requirements for aircraft and crews. When crews were lost or individuals killed, operations personnel could not permit themselves to become sentimental. Like show people, they too had a motto: "The war must go on."

Col. Williams had learned the job early in the 423rd Squadron under J.W. Wilson who later set down the rule that squadron operations officers were not regular combat flyers, because they had to be on duty to mount the next day's raid despite what may have happened on a previous mission. Thus, the early squadron operations officers did not fly a great deal and, in several cases, served long tenures in the squadrons and often came to the end of their combat duty without having completed the specified mission total. On the other hand, some who later became operations officers had already completed their combat tour and then flew additional missions.

As the teletypes began to clack out the field orders in the hours of darkness, it was through group operations that assignments were made to the squadrons and to the service organizations to prepare the planes. It was operations' duty to see that everything was in readiness, that each operational unit had received its proper instructions and that these orders were carried out.

On 4 May, Maj. John S. Chalfant was appointed commanding officer of the 423rd Squadron, replacing Lt. Col. John L. Lambert who had recently completed this tour of duty, ending the combat career of another original pilot. With Chalfant's promotion, Capt. John M. Kelly was transferred from the 368th Squadron to become operations officer of the 423rd.

Weather continued to be a problem in early May. Not that planes could not get off the ground, reach the target and drop by radar, but the persistent contrails and roiling clouds at altitude made formation flying particularly hazardous. It was an enervating job for crews to

maintain great vigilance and also to keep group defensive formations.

Even though no enemy fighters were in the air on the 1 May mission to Calais, a 367th waist gunner was wounded by machine gun fire. A .50 caliber slug came through near the ball turret, hit the left waist gun and splattered S/Sgt. Richard W. Russell with fragments. 1st Lt. Edward W. Magee turned around seven miles from the enemy coast and brought his plane home after the incident. The bullet was probably fired during test firing which was standard practice over the Channel. Too often insufficient care was taken by gunners and those officers manning machine guns to insure a clear field of fire before depressing the trigger. 1 May

The problems of flying in heavy weather were no better illustrated throughout the history of the 306th than on 8 May when the group set out for its third attempted mission to Berlin in five days. This time thirty planes were in the air with Capt. Carl Grending leading the low group of the 40th CW and Capt. Loy Peterson the high group. Five planes of the low group aborted when they were unable to maintain formation in the climb. 2nd Lt. Darvin A. Smith, a relative newcomer to the 367th, was one of these five. He dropped behind initially at 0959, later came back to the formation, then dropped back another time and was never seen again. It was later learned that the entire crew had been killed although nothing is known about what happened to Smith's plane. Members of his crew were 2nd Lt. Arturo E. Camosy, copilot; 2nd Lt. Claude R. Hawkins, navigator; 2nd Lt. Anthony J. Laura, bombardier; Sgt. Maynard M. Miller, engineer; S/Sgt. Jack W. Childers, radio; Sgt. George E. Kriekhaus, ball turret; S/Sgt. Eugene E. Wright and Sgt. William D. Holder, waist; and Sgt. Robert P. Granberg, tail gunner. This was the first of five planes lost on the mission. 8 May

At 1042 occurred the biggest single tragedy the 306th ever suffered in the loss of aircraft not due to direct enemy action. The foe on this occasion was the weather which was responsible for the loss of three planes which went down northwest of Berlin in the vicinity of Wittstock. Many crew members of other planes saw bits and pieces of the action, some witnessed the collisions, others saw only parts of planes falling through the air. The group's official narrative of the accident was based on the accounts of 1st Lt. Edward W. Magee, 367th pilot, and 2nd Lt. Lowell W. Burgess, 369th pilot, both of whom were close to the action in the formation.

2nd Lt. Richard W. Lambert, a 369th pilot (younger brother of the 423rd commander, John L. Lambert), was flying in the number 6 position in the lead squadron of the low group. His plane was bounced hard by prop wash, probably from a group ahead. In trying to remedy the situation he moved to the left and his plane came down on top of

8 May cont'd

the 367th aircraft flown by 2nd Lt. Edwin H. Jacobs. Jacobs had been flying number 3 in the low squadron but had dropped back. When he returned to the formation he found that another plane had taken his original spot, so he moved into the vacant number 2 spot. Upon impact Lambert's plane lost at least part of its left wing and appeared to make a loop around Jacob's ship, cutting or knocking Jacob's tail completely off. This tail section then hit the right wing of 1st Lt. Edwin C. Schlecht's plane, a 369th aircraft flying the number 4 spot in the low squadron. Schlecht's plane lost its number 1 engine in the rapid-fire action. All three aircraft fell out of the formation and were soon lost to sight in the poor visibility, so it is not known whether or not any of the planes blew up before hitting the ground.

A fact which was not established at Thurleigh during the remainder of the war was that there were actually four survivors from the three planes. T/Sgt. James H. Davis, engineer for Schlecht, lived through the experience as did three from Lambert's plane: Sgt. Fernando A. Montez, ball turret; Sgt. Daniel F. McNamara and Sgt. Benny M. Zamarron, waist gunners.

All of Lt. Jacobs' crew were killed: 2nd Lt. Carl M. Miller, copilot; 2nd Lt. George H. Grace, navigator; 2nd Lt. Ira B. Ogden, bombardier; S/Sgt. Robert J. Grofenberg, engineer; S/Sgt. Robert J. Klein, radio; Sgt. Jesus M. Salas, ball turret; Sgt. Robert H. Bolin and Sgt. Henry R. Wehrmann, waist; and Sgt. Edward A. Getzewich, tail gunner.

Those killed from Lambert's plane in addition to the pilot were 2nd Lt. Walter E. Owens, copilot; 2nd Lt. William J. Campbell, navigator; S/Sgt. Carl J. Crawford, togglier; T/Sgt. Thomas McNulty, engineer; S/Sgt. Ernest Stone, Jr., radio; and Sgt. Ronald R. Gordon, tail.

Victims from Schlecht's crew were 2nd Lt. Frank W. Hunt, copilot; 1st Lt. Edwin W. Gorder, navigator; 2nd Lt. Richard K. Ware, bombardier; T/Sgt. Charles B. Pillen, radio; S/Sgt. Stanley Michalicki, ball turret; S/Sgt. John R. Wharton and S/Sgt. Chester E. Hinds, waist; and S/Sgt. John D. Haudenshield, tail gunner.

2nd Lt. Louis F. Matichka, whose plane had moved from the number 2 position to the number 3 position in the low squadron, thereby escaping the collision, had difficulty staying with the formation. By the time the target was reached at 1111, Matichka's plane had dropped down into a group flying below where it was observed at the time of bombing. With two engines out and low on fuel, Matichka headed his plane north towards Sweden. They broke out of the heavy clouds at a hundred feet over the water, and as they approached the coast too low for parachuting, ditching was the only solution left. They hit the water with thirty-foot waves, and the plane immediately broke in two. But everyone escaped the fuselage, only to have one dinghy sink. They were picked up by a Swedish fishing boat only a hundred feet from shore and all survived this eighth mission for the crew. The Swedes interned Ma-

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tichka and 2nd Lt. Willis S. Nelson, copilot; 2nd Lt. Walter D. Morris, navigator; 2nd Lt. William D. Stevens, bombardier; T/Sgt. Robert B. Goodwin, engineer; T/Sgt. Robert T. Morris, radio S/Sgt. Warren H. Johnson, ball turret; S/Sgt. John F. Watt and S/Sgt. Forest B. Buford, waist; and S/Sgt. Jesse P. Watts, Jr., tail gunner. Matichka's plane, according to Swedish reports, is still at the bottom of the sea.

On 11 May the 306th was off to Saarbrucken to bomb the railroad marshalling yards. A thick ground haze gave the bombardiers considerable trouble and the 306th made a second run over the target. As the group turned away, Lt. William D. Wills' plane from the 369th peeled out of formation and was seen going down under control. After bombing the target, the Combat Wing leader encountered some difficulty and relinquished the lead to Capt. J. Bruce McMahon, the 306th leader, who then led thirteen planes of the group out, along with two other six-ship squadrons. Will's plane fell out of formation after incurring severe flak damage, and was finished off by ME109s, taking with it 2nd Lt. John H. Roberts, copilot; 2nd Lt. James W. Sharpe, Jr., navigator; 2nd Lt. Richard F. Jindrich, bombardier; S/Sgt. Charles E. Caine, engineer; S/Sgt. Robert G. Carleton, radio; Sgt. Cleo H. Dark, ball turret; Sgt. Kenneth Hanson, waist, and Sgt. Delbert E. Bishop, tail gunner. The lone member of the crew killed was Sgt. John J. Bartron, a waist gunner. Most of this crew had come overseas with Lt. Roberts as the first pilot, arriving at Thurleigh 27 April.

The most dramatic story that gripped the base when it became known concerned 2nd Lt. Edward J. Wagner and his 367th crew. This crew had arrived on the same day as Lt. Roberts' crew and was shot out of formation at the same time Wills left. Wagner's plane lost its number 4 engine and half of the oxygen system. Bombs were salvoed to slow its descent and Wagner pulled his plane in with another group headed north. He was unable to keep up, however, and four P-51s en route home found the plane alone and provided escort. During this period the number 1 engine ran out of gas and quit. Just before reaching the French coast the number 3 engine also stopped. Four more P-51s arrived to lend what moral support they could. Everything movable was jettisoned and the plane arrived over England at 6,000 feet. Like most pilots, home base was Wagner's objective, until the crew heard the whistles on the London barrage balloons. Wagner turned the plane around and decided the wisest course was to try to reach Manston, the great emergency field near Ramsgate on the far eastern coast. As the wheels touched the runway the overworked number 2 engine caught fire. But the crew and plane were safe after a harrowing and skillfully flown trip back.

Daily missions became the pattern in May and on the 13th Lt. Col. William S. Raper was air commander for the 40th CW on a long mission to Stettin with the 367th in the lead squadron. No fighters

attacked the group, but the flak at the target was intense and very accurate. The left wing of 1st Lt. Henry E. Hanson's plane was hit by flak over the target. Just off the west coast of Denmark on the return his plane lost its number 2 engine when it ran out of oil. Formation position was maintained until an hour and a half from England and then the number 3 engine also died. Hanson dropped out of formation and, while the crew was busy throwing out everything, the pilots were weighing the problems confronting them. When sixty miles off the English coast the remaining engines began to give trouble, Hanson informed the group leader that he would have to ditch. A radio signal was sent to Air-Sea Rescue and Lt. Taylor Leedy's airplane was dispatched from the group to circle Hanson's plane. While on final approach into the water, the remaining two engines quit and a "dead-stick" landing was made into the long swells of the North Sea.

It was a good landing, tail dragging, and the plane settled nicely into the water. Seven men in the crew seated in ditching position in the radio room were suddenly neck deep in water as the plane came to a halt. The sudden deceleration threw 2nd Lt. Vincent J. Kiely, navigator, through the radio room door and into the bomb bay, injuring his back. The crew got out of the plane without delay only to find that one raft had been riddled by flak and was useless, so six men occupied the one serviceable five-man raft and the other three remained in the cold water. Two Wellingtons dropped additional rafts, but because of the overloaded raft and the weight of their soaked flying clothing, the men were unable to move close to the RAF rafts. Members of the crew alternated between the water and the raft and, after two hours in the drink, were picked up, little the worse for their experience. Now all qualified for membership in both the Goldfish Club and the Sea Squatters Club. After being warmed and dried, the men slept at an RAF base and returned to Thurleigh the next day. In the 423rd, Lt. Edwin O. Jarvie, navigator for Capt. Earl W. Kesling, was hit in the head by flak over the target and died before the plane could get him back to England. He had been with the group since 21 April.

After a six-day respite, the Group on 19 May made a routine trip to Berlin, highlighted by a freak occurrence in a 369th plane piloted by 1st Lt. Clifford W. McBride. One of his waist gunners, Sgt. Howard E. Parks, had a piece of flak travel up his trouser leg, cut the fabric of his pant leg, hit the escape kit in his pocket and still fail to cause even a minor flesh wound. Things like this happened frequently on missions and defied any logical explanation. In the 368th Squadron, S/Sgt. Roy L. Wiklund, a gunner, was wounded.

A major change in manning now began to take place. Although not officially directed, many crews were being sent into combat with only one waist gunner. Two factors were behind this move. First, the cut in weight of one hundred fifty to two hundred pounds or more meant a

25 May  
24 "

few more miles of range. Second, because of fighter escort, enemy attacks had fallen off. The 306th had begun combat with nine-man crews and was now moving back to it, although during the summer months planes were still going out with ten men aboard. As new crews arrived with ten men, a surplus of gunners began to build up on the base. Finally the flood of replacements forced some action and in August gunners were offered a chance to go home if they had flown twenty missions or more. Many took advantage of this offer and the surplus was soon reduced to manageable proportions.

If at all possible missions were being flown during this period in support of the impending invasion. The 8th AF now came under the direct command of Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower and for some weeks served more as a tactical, rather than a strategic, air force.

Airdromes, marshalling yards, bridges and coastal batteries are found interspersed in the mission record with aircraft factories, oil refineries and major cities in Germany during this entire period. Weather was the major factor in deciding where the bombers would go and, if at all possible, the choice was France. Relatively clear weather was needed to operate in France as the bombing required greater accuracy. When the clouds closed in, targets were selected in Germany where radar bombing could be employed.

On 23 May the 306th was in the Metz area to bomb the marshalling yards at Thionville. Lt. Nelson R. Troup's 423rd plane was hit by moderate flak in the target area and left the formation with the number 2 engine smoking and its propellor windmilling. Troup's plane was picked up over the Channel by fighters and led to Friston airbase, northwest of Beachy Head. Not liking the looks of the situation, Troup did not try to land and then was taken to Ford airbase where he started an approach, tried to go around, stalled and crashed at 0958. Four members of the crew survived, but were seriously injured and taken to Oxford for hospitalization: 2nd Lt. Alan E. Telifer, navigator; S/Sgt. Lawrence H. Arnold, radio; Sgt. Sherman W. Herritt, ball turret; and T/Sgt. Joseph Kerr, waist gunner. The plane burned completely, but did not explode. Those killed in addition to Troup were 2nd Lt. Sanford E. White, copilot; 2nd Lt. Robert W. Hanson, bombardier; S/Sgt. Joe Fajardo, engineer; and Sgt. Alton G. Speakman, tail gunner.

Berlin was targeted on the 24th and eighteen planes flew as the lead group in the 40th CW with Lt. Col. Robert C. Williams as air commander. On the way to the target the plane of Lt. Francis H. Bennett, 369th, was hit by a stray burst of flak forcing the pilot to feather an engine. Bombs were salvoed when the navigator estimated they were over Hamburg and Bennett's plane returned home alone.

Just after bombs away, the 369th plane of 1st Lt. Robert H. Ehrler was hit in the tail by a flak burst that tore away the elevators and flipped the aircraft on its back. From there the plane went into a flat spin, the

crew seemed unable to regain control and it passed out of sight of the formation at 18,000 feet. Before going into the spin, the plane went up into a steep stall and, after "standing on its tail" for a moment, slid off to the left, turned over on its back, then momentarily regained a normal flying altitude before beginning to spin. No fire, explosion or smoke was seen from the aircraft. The flak burst killed those aft of the bomb bay: T/Sgt. Ben B. Ferns, Jr., radio; S/Sgt. Gaetano C. Abbatiello, ball turret; S/Sgt. Chester J. Predko, waist; and S/Sgt. John C. Hay, Jr., tail gunner.

1st Lt. Alden D. Maynes, copilot, bailed out and pulled his rip cord, only to see his chute stream out and refuse to open. Maynes says that at first he seemed to be headed for the center of Berlin, but his trajectory finally took him into more of a residential area. As he neared the ground at a high rate of speed, his streaming parachute looped over a tall building, slowing his rate of descent abruptly. Then the chute slipped off the building, caught on a tall post and left him suspended fifteen or twenty feet in the air. German civilians eventually rescued him and he was in no condition to cause them any problems at all. His legs and torso had taken a terrific beating in the last seconds of his drop. He was quickly hospitalized and remained under medical care for some period of time. Besides Ehrler and Maynes, other survivors were 1st Lt. John W. James, Jr., navigator; 1st Lt. Burton C. Gustafson, bombardier; and T/Sgt. Paul J. Pratt, engineer.

One of the changes that became obvious in May was the increasing numbers of planes being flown from Thurleigh on missions. Some experimentation was underway at this time to enlarge the formations thereby enabling more planes to be effectively controlled in the air. More than thirty planes were being flown on many of the late May missions, with thirty-five for example on 29 May. While fighter attacks were few and far between, the flak was intensifying and, even though many of the bomb drops were made from 25,000 feet or higher, the quantity of flak being thrown up over the major targets was increasing.

Berlin always brought a big response from crews at briefing and its reputation as a "hot" target was well justified. The flak there was seldom equalled, except over a place to the south, Merseberg. Located west of Leipzig, Merseberg boasted the world's largest synthetic oil refinery. It was also labeled by many as the most concentrated flak area in the world. Crews learned to dread an assignment in the Leipzig-Merseberg-Halle area. As the 8th AF stepped up its campaign against petroleum targets, Merseberg became something of a regular on the charts. This aspect of the Combined Bomber Offensive met with considerable success as 1944 wore on. The production of aviation fuel in April in the Third Reich was 175,000 tons, in May it was 156,000 tons, in June 53,000 tons and in July 29,000 tons. The same dramatic

reductions were seen in automotive fuel, although diesel fuel production did not drop as rapidly. So strapped had the German war machine become by late 1944 that in the Battle of the Bulge a high percentage of German supply units had to employ horses to move their transports.

May came to an end with a mission to Liege on the last day, a venture that cost the life of Sgt. H.C. Jenkins from the 8th AF photographic section. Jenkins was hit by flak over Namur when pieces of shrapnel came through the armor plate and through his flak helmet. The victim was flying in the plane of Lt. Kenneth Yass, 423rd. Two other crewmen were also wounded, S/Sgt. Epifanio P. Campos, in the waist with Jenkins, took some shrapnel in the left side of his neck and S/Sgt. Michael N. Farkash, tail gunner, was hit in the left arm. The number 4 engine was also damaged and, upon landing, the number 4 propellor fell off.

During the month the group flew twenty missions with 416 sorties being credited. Losses and aborts were down sharply; bombs delivered on target were up. The group diary says "Enemy fighter interceptors were conspicuous by their absence."

Two veteran group officers who had taken top jobs at Wendover, Utah, were awarded the Legion of Merit for their dedicated service: Lt. Col. Douglas Coleman, ground executive officer, and Maj. Henry J. Schmidt, who was the first group engineering officer.

It was also a time for commendations covering earlier missions. From Lt. Gen. James H. Doolittle, commanding general, 8th AF, came the following:

"On 24 April 1944, the 41st Combat Wing executed a highly successful attack on important enemy airfields at Oberpfaffenhofen and Landsberg in southwestern Germany. The 41st Wing was formed for this operation into two separate combat wings, the 41st "A" Combat Wing, comprised of two groups from the 379th Bomb Group and one from the 303rd Bomb Group; and the 41st "B" Combat Wing, comprised of the 384th, 306th and a composite of the 384th-303rd Groups. On this operation, despite heavy losses, the 41st Combat Wing, under the air leadership of Brigadier General Robert F. Travis, distinguished itself by penetrating through unusually severe resistance from enemy fighters and anti-aircraft fire and bombing its objectives with excellent results.

"In particular it is desired that Colonel Dale O. Smith and the officers and men of the 41st "B" Combat Wing, who bore the brunt of the enemy attacks, receive special commendation for the exemplary manner in which their mission was accomplished. With its escort of P-51's outnumbered and drawn off in combat this formation was left, for more than an hour, without fighter protection. Before and during this period, in addition to intense fire from ground defenses, the crews of the 41st "B" Combat Wing were exposed to repeated savage assaults

31 May

from more than fifty ME-109s and FW-190s, at one time remaining under unremitting attack for approximately forty minutes. Undiscouraged by these difficulties, and despite the loss of sixteen of its airplanes, the 41st "B" Combat Wing continued steadily on to the target at Oberpfaffenhofen, dropping its bombs with accuracy and inflicting severe damage on the enemy. This instance serves to typify the spirit in which the crews of the 41st "B" Combat Wing carried out their assignment. Hit badly by one of the first enemy fighters encountered, Captain John J. Stolz, leader of the 306th (low) group, with great courage and determination for three hours succeeded in holding his damaged plane in formation before a second enemy fighter attack knocked him out of position . . ."

In his endorsement to Gen. Doolittle's commendation, Brig. Gen. Robert B. Williams, commanding general of the 1st Bombardment Division, wrote: "The fighting qualities demonstrated by these units plus their ability to put the bombs on the target, are vital factors in completing our job over here and are typical of the combat spirit of this Division."

On 20 May, Gen. Williams issued a letter of commendation to all Combat Wing and Group commanders in the 1st Division:

"An official report from Headquarters, Eighth Air Force, indicates that during April, 1944, the 1st Bombardment Division led all the divisions of the Air Force in inflicting damage on the enemy. Combined averages for February, March and April, 1944, show that the bombing results achieved by this Command were also the best in the Eighth Air Force for the entire three-month period. Both in April and for the three-month period the bombing average of each of the four Combat Wings of the Division was higher than the average of the Eighth Air Force as a whole.

"In addition to dealing these most effective blows to the German war machine, the 1st Bombardment Division excelled in all separate categories covered by the report. The Combat Wing with the best bombing record in the Eighth Air Force during April and during the combined months of February, March and April, 1944, was the 41st Combat Wing, of this Division. During April, the 1st Bombardment Division's record for gross errors was less than 75 per cent of the general Air Force average. Superior maintenance work by the Division's ground crews resulted in our having a higher ratio of fully operational aircraft to aircraft on hand than any other division. The statistics further show that the 1st Division has the greatest number of aircraft bombing targets, and achieved the highest percentage of aircraft bombing in relation to aircraft dispatched. The abortive rate for the 1st Division during this time was only 58 per cent of the general abortive rate for the Air Force. Our loss was down to 2.8 per cent of accredited sorties,

which was by a considerable margin the lowest in the Eighth Air Force.

"It is a matter of keen pride that this Command, whose original combat units blazed the trail for the Eighth Air Force in Europe, and for many months fought the American air war against Germany alone, should continue to hold first place in the campaign. Due to the quality of your leadership, the skill and courage of our combat crews in battle, and the tireless efforts of our supporting personnel on the ground, the 1st Division's curve of efficiency and accomplishment has been rising steadily for months . . ."

As June began, there seemed a certain tension in the air. Everyone knew that the long awaited invasion was coming. Just when and where remained a well guarded secret.

For the bombers, tactical targets in France were the order. Planners had physically spaced them, some in what was to become the invasion area, others scattered around France, in different coastal areas and deeper inland. All efforts were designed to seal off Northern France, to depress the German Air Force and to conceal the true focus of the invasion.

The 306th flew to St. Cecily and to Mass-Palaiseau on the 2nd, to St. Cecily on the 3rd to bomb heavy coastal gun emplacements and to Equihen on the 4th.

Remember that the invasion was originally planned for the 5th, but weather cancelled the effort even though many of the troops were already in the invasion barges. It also restricted air action.

But the bomber crews were up early on the 6th and at 0430 took off. Twenty-four aircraft were assigned a 105mm howitzer installation a mile inland at Arromanches and eighteen aircraft attacked a defended locality at Anselles. Weather prevented seeing the ground so bombs were dropped using navigational aids.

At 0730 the second mission took off. Twelve planes commanded by Capt. Earl W. Kesling were scheduled to bomb a road junction at Caen in what was to be the British-Canadian invasion area. The lack of PFF equipment and a solid undercast forced the group to bring back all of its bombs.

The third takeoff was at 1730 when thirty-three planes flew in two different groups to bomb a bridge over the River Orne at Thury-Harcourt. The weather had worsened as the day wore on and assembly was a disaster with planes joining any formation they could find. One plane aborted but all others dropped in the target area.

"Crews reported seeing great fires on land and the Channel filled with ships and landing craft," says the group diary.

The third mission was so confused that one 306th plane flew with a 3rd Division group and a B-24 joined the bombing formation with the 306th, probably a first for the entire war. When the day ended the men

of the 306th were elated that the invasion had taken place and that they had had even a small opportunity of participating in this monumental historical event. For a week and a half the group's missions would continue to be in direct support of the tactical needs of the American, British and Canadian forces attempting to exploit their lodgement on the continent. Throughout the early stages of the invasion the prior work of the heavy bombardment groups became increasingly evident in the failure of the Luftwaffe to defend Fortress Europe with any measure of efficiency or effectiveness. The Wehrmacht was, for all intents and purposes, on its own and the Abbeville Kids were a distant memory.

12 June Lille, an old target for the group, was again listed for 12 June. The group was off course and drifted into the Antwerp flak where the 367th plane of 2nd Lt. Edward J. Magner took three 88 mm. bursts in a line along the fuselage, causing untold damage. Magner slipped out of formation with one engine out and his wheels down, doing a 180° turn in an attempt to head for the coast. He thought if he could get over the water and then ditch, he and his crew might be picked up by RAF Air-Sea Rescue.

The aircraft was in bad shape, and when fires began to appear Magner ordered his men to bail out. He himself had been wounded somewhat, and 2nd Lt. Robert H. Monaghan, bombardier, had been wounded in an arm.

Sgt. Laurence A. Snifka, engineer, was badly shot up, and Magner had him moved to the front escape hatch and pushed out while someone held on to his ripcord. 2nd Lt. Paul Q. Chapman, navigator, went out first, followed by Snifka, 2nd Lt. Robert A. Dobson, copilot; Monaghan, and Magner.

Jumping from the rear were Sgt. George K. Egelston, radio; Sgt. Elvin L. Sexton, waist; Sgt. John H. Siedlicki, ball turret, and Sgt. Joseph A. Stuart, Jr., tail. All had been on Magner's original crew except Sexton.

Siedlicki was badly wounded in the pelvis and bladder and was loaded in the same ambulance with Magner. Siedlicki died in St. Giles Hospital, Brussels, and was buried on 9 July. Snifka succumbed quickly. Stuart's body was not found for more than a week as he had landed in the water. He was buried on 21 June. The plane itself landed in the River Scheldt.

## Chapter 19

## FRANCE AND GERMANY

## June-August 1944

Once the Normandy beachhead had been established, the 306th and the other 8th AF bomb groups settled back for the remainder of June into their routine of a mission nearly every day. On the 15th the targets were two large railroad bridges across the Loire River at Nantes, both of which probably were used extensively for the transport of German war material to the north. As for bombing, the Nantes mission was not exactly a roaring success, although the group did manage to hit one bridge and damaged its adjacent structures. Bridges were difficult targets for high altitude bombardment. Strike photos frequently showed most of the bombs straddling the bridges with the spans still standing.

One 306th aircraft was lost on this mission while another was hit hard and barely made it back to England. A barrage of about thirty-six anti-aircraft shells burst at bombs away and several planes in the large formation were hit by flak. 2nd Lt. Wilbur B. O'Brien's plane was hit at 0807 and pieces of debris were seen to fly off the airplane. He peeled out of formation and off to the left, losing altitude rapidly. His number 2 engine was initially reported on fire, later as smoking. The crew bailed out and all survived: 2nd Lt. George C. Price, copilot; 2nd Lt. William D. Allen, navigator; 2nd Lt. William B. Uhlhorn, bombardier; T/Sgt. Richard F. Boozer, engineer; T/Sgt. Odis G. Pearson, radio; S/Sgt. David F. Gibson, ball turret; and S/Sgt. John S. Sutton, waist. They went to prison camps, while the tail gunner, S/Sgt. Arne G. Ziem, became an evadee. Ziem delayed opening his chute until 4,000 feet, landed, hid his chute and harness and then walked about a mile across country before hiding. Soon he contacted a French boy and was taken to the boy's home. He was then passed by Maquis groups back and forth in the valley of the Loire River, at one time meeting up with his pilot in an island hideaway. Later he was in a group that was surrounded by Germans, but with an RAF sergeant managed to evade trouble. On 15 August, with the direct aid of a French Resistance fighter, Ziem went through the German lines on a bicycle and was taken over by the U.S. Third Army at Sens de Bretagne.

1st Lt. Wilbur C. Weiland, another 423rd pilot, had his plane hit in the number 3 engine at the same time and could not feather the prop. He, too, dropped out of formation, continuing due north toward home as the bomb run had been made from south to north. His number 4 engine was also running rough and finally quit at the French coast.

17 June

When they landed at Kimbolton, Weiland and his crew had the additional surprise of seeing the number 3 propellor fall off as the wheels touched the runway. Even this was not the end of the damage to their airplane for the departing propellor sliced into the number 4 prop as a final coup de grace.

On 17 June an early morning mission was planned and then scrubbed just before briefing. Then there was a flurry of activity with a briefing at 0900 and a takeoff at 0945. To compound the confusion of the hurried last minute changes, the target weather closed in and the primary was obscured. As luck would have it, the PFF equipment was inoperative forcing the group to choose a visual target of opportunity, a bridge at Noyen. This, too, was not the most successful mission ever flown by the 306th. Forty aircraft had taken off, but seven never found the group at the rendezvous point and returned to the base. Several others bombed with other formations, but the deepest cut of all was that two planes were lost in the effort. A 367th plane piloted by 1st Lt. Virgil W. Dingman from the lead squadron of the low group was shot out of formation near Dieppe. A direct hit was taken in the number 4 engine and when last seen Dingman's plane was under control but with the right wing on fire. All of the crew survived although seven of them went to prison camp: Dingman, 1st Lt. George W. Clements, navigator; 1st Lt. Robert G. Danknich, bombardier; T/Sgt. Wallace P. Powers, engineer; T/Sgt. John A. Sheridan, radio; S/Sgt. Winston W. Burroughs, ball turret; and S/Sgt. Robert A. Simonson, waist.

Two members of Dingman's crew became evadees: 2nd Lt. Wilbur C. Pensinger, copilot, and S/Sgt. Robert J. Starzynski, tail gunner. Pensinger was picked up almost immediately by the Underground and remained under its wing until the ground forces overran his position and liberated him; his next target was the Zone of the Interior. Starzynski bailed out near Boschy in Northern France and began a seventy kilometer walk west toward LeHavre. He hoped in that great port city of the North of France to find an easy means of transportation back to England. In spite of blistered feet, his grim determination to remain free took him to the outskirts of Le Havre. Along the way he was helped by wary Frenchmen but he was primarily on his own and traveled mostly by daylight. Only when he arrived in the outskirts of LeHavre did he learn that the Germans had cordoned off the city and that there was no way for him to get in. The tail gunner then retraced his steps to Bolbec, headed south to Lillebonne and then continued to the River Seine. He crossed the river only to learn from friendly Frenchmen that the Gestapo was hot on his trail. He was caught in a P-38 strafing attack before the Resistance finally took him in. After being shuttled around for ten weeks by the fast-moving French, he at last fell into the hands of Canadian tankers at Quillebeuf. Starzynski

Dingman + Clements also were evadees per Echoes of Apr 88 + Oct 88 and per Bob Starzynski email on 5 Oct 11 to me

not only used his maps and escape kit to good advantage, but he also showed that ingenuity and determination which were necessary to evade the Germans. Still one cannot avoid the conclusion that a successful evasion was probably ten percent skill and ninety percent pure luck.

2nd Lt. Joseph W. Pedersen, another 367th pilot flying as deputy lead in the low group, was also hit at the coast going in, but was able to stay with the formation. Then about 1245, northeast of LeMans, his plane was seen to have an engine on fire. It peeled out of formation, did a 360° turn and nine chutes were observed; then the aircraft went into a spin. Five members of this crew became evadees and four others met varying fates. T/Sgt. Barney F. Arnold, engineer, was shot on the ground after landing and was killed. S/Sgt. Warren E. Kerr, waist gunner, was injured after bailing out, and was hospitalized. Pederson and T/Sgt. John E. Wanning, radio, became prisoners of war.

1st Lt. William A. Smith, bombardier, inadvertently opened his chute in the plane. He then unhooked the chute and crawled through the plane to the waist looking for a spare chute. When he found it he discovered that the leg straps were too short for him, and a plane describing wide circles on its way down was no place to test his dexterity and strength at trying to lengthen the straps. He put the chute on as best he could and jumped. When the chute opened, one leg became tangled in the chute and his hip was dislocated, and he landed in this condition. Smith was rescued by several Frenchmen, and that night was put on a courier plane and flown back to England for treatment.

1st Lt. Ragnar Gustafson, navigator, went out early and delayed opening his chute until he was about to enter a cloud layer. He came through the clouds and landed in a field of rye with French farmers near by. Gustafson found his chute a difficult beast to collapse and tramped down a good bit of rye before finally besting the unwieldy cloth. He jumped into a deep ditch and began walking away from the area, finally hiding his chute in a hole. That night he was found by a family working in a field, and later they brought him food.

Several days later Gustafson was taken to a chateau near Brulon and stayed there a month. Moving to Juigne by bicycle, he arrived shortly before a German Panzer division took up quarters there and remained three weeks. When the Germans headed east they were followed shortly by an American armored division which rescued him and sent him back to England. Other members of the crew evading were 2nd Lt. Leon J. Blood, copilot; S/Sgt. Jack E. Blackwell, ball turret; and S/Sgt. Herman P. Ehrhard, Jr., tail gunner.

On the next day, the 18th, the bombardment of Germany was resumed. Gen. Eisenhower released the 8th AF back to strategic operations over Germany. For some months ahead the 8th AF targets were

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often likely to be in support of the ground forces if there was an overwhelming need, even though the bombers were ill-suited for such work. The primary consideration on target selection was meteorological, whether or not bombing could be accomplished under visual conditions.

Hamburg was hit on both the 18th and 20th of June with thirty-six planes the first day and a record setting fifty-two on the second when Maj. John S. Chalfant led the 40th "A" Wing, made up only of 306th aircraft. Just after bombs away 1st Lt. Derrill L. Latham, 423rd, had his plane hit by flak. The aircraft took a direct hit in the nose, in the right inboard fuel tank, in the ball turret and at the back exit door. Killed by this massive flak attack were 1st Lt. Harold A. Bryant, Jr., bombardier; T/Sgt. Winston J. Breckels, radio; S/Sgt. Harold L. Reed, ball turret; S/Sgt. Edward W. Smith, waist, and Cpl. Edward D. Walsh, tail gunner.

The plane went into a flat spin, during which time the remainder of the crew bailed out. T/Sgt. Bryan Epps, engineer, was the first to leave, holding his chest pack parachute in his arms as he dove out the front escape hatch, and then snapping the chute to his harness in the air. Also escaping were 2nd Lt. Ellis O. Porter, copilot; 1st Lt. Andrew Nuttall, navigator, and the pilot. Then the plane headed into a vertical dive, exploding on impact with the ground. Epps eluded Germans on the ground for three days before being captured; the remainder of the crew members were arrested upon landing.

A new record fifty-three planes left Thurleigh the next morning bound for Berlin, the first time in a month that the enemy capital had been targeted. The planes went outbound over the North Sea, and then came into the target from the east. The group faced a terrific flak barrage over the city where visibility was markedly hampered by heavy contrails. Three aircraft were shot out of formation; however, each of them made its way home alone. 1st Lt. Charles M. Tell's 367th plane was hit before the target by two FW-190s which knocked it out of formation. Sgt. Bernard E. Humiston, engineer, shot down one of the attackers. A wing fire then developed, but burned itself out in about four minutes and Tell brought his plane home alone.

Just after bombs away, 2nd Lt. Milton M. Adam, a 367th veteran of two weeks, was shot out of formation with a direct hit in his number 3 engine. Losing all of its oil, the engine could not be feathered and caught fire. Adam was able to extinguish the blaze twice by violently sideslipping the plane. Flames had been streaking back beyond the ball turret. The propellor continued to turn at a high rate of speed until the engine finally "froze" and the shaft spun free, but the assembly stayed in place. With some fighter escort, Adam's crew came home alone across the North Sea and, with help from "Darkey," landed at Rackheath on the coast.

Lt. Charles T. Niblack's 368th plane was hit by flak at the same time as Adam. He lost his number 2 and 4 engines and was unable to feather number 4. He came home solo, much of the time at 600 feet. Over the North Sea Niblack was able to get the number 2 engine restarted. He also landed at Rackheath and the propellor on number 4 dropped off as the wheels hit the runway.

Capt. Albert Rehn, 368th, had two gunners wounded by flak. Sgt. James K. Adkins, waist, was hit in the head and seriously wounded, while Sgt. Cecil L. Hopkins, tail, received less serious wounds. Rehn landed at Tendham Hurst and the two men were hospitalized there.

In June mission activity increased, more tonnage of bombs was dropped and fewer planes were lost. This latter must be attributed to the increasing control of the skies over the continent by the hordes of long range American fighters that cruised at all altitudes throughout bomber missions. "Seek and destroy the Luftwaffe" was their mission. After they hunted the skies at altitude for the enemy, the fighters would hit the deck on the way home and shoot at almost anything that moved. American fighters lurked around German airfields waiting for planes to take off or land and then jumped them in the traffic pattern when they were most vulnerable to attack. They disrupted the training of new German pilots at training fields which were now within easy fighter range. The P-51 was literally everywhere chasing the Luftwaffe and intimidating the German people as a part of its total battle role.

Late in June the combat crew tour was changed again, this time to thirty-five, with a proration for the number of missions one had already flown. If one had five to one's credit when the change came, one had only to fly thirty-four actual missions. Enlisted men were flying complete tours without ever firing at an enemy plane, something that the early veterans of the 8th AF could not remotely visualize.

During June the First Bombardment Division published a report on the first three hundred evadees to return to the United Kingdom, a total in which the 306th had registered its fair share. This select group included thirty-two pilots, thirty-seven copilots, thirty navigators, twenty-seven bombardiers, thirty-two engineers, thirty-seven radio operators, fifty-three waist gunners, twenty-five ball turret gunners and twenty-five tail gunners. Some of the comments in the report were: "Successful evasion naturally has a high element of luck . . . There is little doubt that delaying the opening of the parachute has a great bearing on avoiding initial capture . . . The splendid cooperation of the French has largely been responsible for returning these crews. Recorded statements by evadees indicate that oftentimes these peasants were found wearing two suits of clothes to expedite the changing from flying clothes to civilian attire. Repeatedly, they mis-

directed the German searching parties and their quick and efficient help has been the big factor that has made evasion possible."

It was noisy on 30 June at Thurleigh, the day the bomb dump blew up. Forty-eight one hundred pound fused bombs had been returned from a mission and twenty-four of them went off, shaking windows across the base. The bombs had been stored properly against such an eventuality and, consequently, there were no casualties. But a Fortress parked nearby was so badly damaged that it had to be salvaged. On 5 July, under the direction of Maj. Thurman Dawson, the remaining twenty-four were detonated in the presence of a large—and safely distant—audience.

"Rose of York" became one of the more famous planes at Thurleigh because of its association with the British royal family and its long service as a lead ship of the 367th Squadron. The plane had originally been named "The Princess" by M/Sgt. Edward S. Gregory, its crew chief. Later the name was changed to "Princess Elizabeth" and it was then that Gregory hit on the idea of having it christened by Princess Elizabeth. Once the idea was broached the public relations people expanded on it and the invitation made its way through channels to the royal family. The suggestion was returned as being worthy, but it was said that in order to do this the name must be changed because, if this plane were to go down, it would be a bad omen. Thus, "Rose of York" became the name of the plane, and Sgt. Malcolm B. Currie was the artist to paint the new insignia on the nose.

Finally on the 6th of July the royal family made its appearance, riding in maroon Daimlers that were shinier than cars any of the Americans had seen in a long, long time. The crowd gathered along the flight line to the west of the control tower. The plane had been carefully groomed for the occasion, and promptly at 1230 a fifty-four plane formation of B-17s roared across the airfield in a salute to the visiting royalty. This was the first visit to the 306th by any of the royal family since King George VI had been here in November of 1942. From all reports Thurleigh was the only American base in England visited twice by the British king during the war.

The King and Queen Elizabeth brought Princess Elizabeth, Lady Patricia Hambolden, Sir Eric Mievill, Col. the Hon. Bowes Lyon, the Hon. Mrs. Bowes Lyon and Wing Commander Peter Townsend. Lt. Gen. James H. Doolittle led the American delegation, accompanied by Maj. Gen. Robert B. Williams, Brig. Gen. Robert Travis, Brig. Gen. Howard M. Turner and Brig. Gen. Bartlett Beaman. Col. George L. Robinson, 306th commander, was the host for the day.

When the band had played the two national anthems and opening speeches had been made, Princess Elizabeth stepped forward and swung a bottle of English cider against a metal plate fastened between

the lowered guns of the chin turret. The bottle shattered and the ranks of onlookers cheered the princess' effort. After this each member of the flying and ground crews was introduced to members of the royal family and there was much animated conversation between the guests and the Americans. Aircrew members who were presented to the royal family were Capt. Perry E. Raster, 1st Lt. Talmadge G. McDonough, Capt. Stephen Tanella, Lt. William E. Pleasant, Lt. Marion J. Northway, Sgts. Eugene E. Kelly, George G. Roberts, Herman Shore, William E. Landrum, Donald F. Urban and Watson R. Vaughn. In addition to M/Sgt. Edward S. Gregory, who had conceived the idea, were Sgt. Mark L. Madsen, assistant crew chief; Sgt. E.C. Rowell, armorer, and Pvt. Thomas E. Boyd, mechanic.

After photographers had recorded all of the activities around the plane, the guests and other invited personnel moved to the "A" officers' mess for lunch. Later when the British visitors returned to their Daimlers to leave the base, a thermos of ice cream manufactured at Thurleigh went with them. Could any more typical American gift have been found for them?

An abandoned English ice cream plant had been discovered some months before by Thurleigh personnel who somehow acquired possession of it. The plant's equipment was moved to the base and set up under the direction of Capt. Nolen D. Harden. From that time on, as supplies were available, Thurleigh was one of the few places in the British Isles where ice cream was readily to be had. It was sold both at the Aero Club and the Officers' Club bar.

Capt. Harden must also be given credit for solving a sticky problem concerning the inadequacy of liquor rations. Normally a month's ration would be consumed in two days. It occurred to Col. Robinson that someone with some business acumen might be able to ameliorate this situation. He summoned Harden, an experienced businessman and manufacturer before the war. Col. Robinson gave this officer a truck, driver, a "key" to various warehouses and an order to procure some Scotch. Harden and his driver checked in at a stores warehouse and into their truck loaded 500 pounds of sugar, numerous gallon containers of cooking oil and a considerable quantity of tea and coffee. They drove out of Thurleigh under orders from "the boss" and headed for Scotland. Upon arrival, Harden made some discreet inquiries and then contacted the president of one of the major distilleries.

When he was finally admitted to the distiller's office, Harden said that he was interested in buying a quantity of whisky. He was politely informed that all he could obtain was perhaps a case. This was not precisely what Harden had in mind. After some more sparring, Harden asked how long it had been since the distiller's wife had seen a hundred pounds of sugar, or five gallons of cooking oil, or a sizeable

8, 11, 12, 13, 16 July

quantity of tea? The eyes of the canny Scot opened wide at this point. Harden proposed that if the distiller would sell him a quantity of whisky he was prepared to deliver the proffered goods to his home. The deal was consummated on the spot and duly executed. Then the distiller made several telephone calls to heads of other distilleries in the area and in a couple of days Harden was headed south with a truck load of Scotland's finest product. Every couple of months the trip was repeated and Thurleigh officers had ample supplies to satisfy their thirst, although rations even then were somewhat restricted. Late each afternoon a large portion of the bar in the B officers' mess would be covered with glasses containing double-double portions of whisky. When the bar opened these would be sold and when they were gone there would be no more that day.

The subject of passengers on bombing missions had been a sore point since the advent of 8th AF operations. It was a problem without an easy solution. Crews did not mind carrying some of the 306th personnel who wanted to see what combat was all about, but outsiders were never more than tolerated. On 8 July another passenger, Sgt. R.S.O. Neal, an official USAAF photographer, was wounded by flak over Amiens. Generally the flyers regarded those who wanted to fly missions when they did not have to as not being fully in touch with reality.

During July reasonably decent weather prevailed over England and the continent and the Fortresses and Liberators were out almost daily to far flung targets. 8th AF transmitted thirty-eight field orders during the month, but not all were executed by any means. On 11, 12, 13 July, the 306th participated in three successive missions to Munich, almost guaranteed to get one ten hours in the air each day. Little flak was observed on the first two missions but there was somewhat more on the 13th. T/Sgt. Lewis A. Richardson, radio operator for 1st Lt. Eldon L. Ralstin, 369th, was badly wounded in the hand. 2nd Lt. Fred G. Jones' plane took some hard blows over the target. He lost his number 2 engine, which was feathered, and later his number 1 engine gave out and had to be feathered. Flak also holed a gas tank. When Ralstin landed at Thurleigh with both engines out on the left side, he had only thirty gallons of fuel left in his tanks.

After two days of rest, the crews were back in the air again on 16 July with Munich the target for the fourth time in a week. Maj. Charles Flannagan, new commanding officer of the 367th Squadron, was the formation leader. One plane was lost to enemy action, the first loss in a month. Lt. Jones, who had barely made it home on the 13th, was the victim this time. Both number 1 and 2 engines were lost in the target area when hit by a flak at 29,700 feet and the plane dropped away from the formation and was quickly lost to view because of heavy

16 July  
18 July

contrails. En route home, the plane lost considerable altitude by the time it reached Strasbourg. Here flak found the mark again and destroyed the plane's oxygen system. From there the pilot headed south, still over 10/10ths clouds but at low altitude, traveled across Lake Geneva into Switzerland and then back to a crash landing near Laninges, Haute Savoie, France. The crew was picked up by the Maquis, stayed with them for twenty-four hours and then walked into Switzerland and internment.

Later the crew members were classified as evadees. Jones and his engineer, Sgt. John Griffiths, were the first to leave, traveling back into France and joining Allied forces invading from the Mediterranean. By 10 October, Lt. Clifford K. Hammersley, copilot, and 2nd Lt. Charles H. Weaver, navigator, had reported in to Thurleigh with a story of their adventures. The other evadees were 2nd Lt. Robert E. Stalnaker, bombardier; Sgt. Robert Price, radio; S/Sgt. Woodie M. Rose, ball turret; Sgt. Milton Katz, waist; and Sgt. Arthur A. Flores, tail.

On this same mission F/O Robert D. Stewart, a new 369th pilot, returned to Thurleigh on two engines after he lost the number 2 just before bombing and the number 3 at the French coast coming home.

Two days later the group was outbound for Peenemunde, a long haul across the Danish peninsula and into the Baltic. It was an inviting target, but at the same time was regarded as tough because of flak. It was a mysterious target to many as there was talk of rockets, exotic fuels and strange weapons tests, but it was "liked" by the radar operators because of its location on a long peninsula sticking out into the sea which provided good radar returns. Because the bomb runs were made for a long distance over water, crews had the feeling that they were coming in "naked" and presenting very good targets to the Luftwaffe gunners on the ground. Briefing was at 0200, certainly not a time that endeared the mission to the combat crews after returning only fourteen hours earlier from the long mission to Munich. Takeoff was at 0501 and the planes were back at 1400. One plane of the thirty-six dispatched was lost. 2nd Lt. Lois C. Parks, Jr., lost an engine on his 423rd plane shortly before the IP and feathered number 1. When the plane was last seen number 2 was on fire. There was only one logical place to take a crippled plane from Peenemunde and shortly Parks landed his plane at Bulltofta in neutral Sweden. Parks and several of his crew returned to England in rather short order but the remainder of his crew was interned. With Parks were 2nd Lt. Paul F. Finn, bombardier; S/Sgt. Andrew E. Toth, radio; and Sgt. Randolph D. Mason, tail. Interned in Sweden were 2nd Lt. Clifford G. Payton, Jr., copilot; 2nd Lt. Stan J. Paprocki, navigator; T/Sgt. Raymond V. Peters, engineer; Sgt. Sherwin S. Kremen, ball turret; and Sgt. Russell O. Hawkins, Jr., waist.

20 July 44

A Junkers manufacturing plant, making forty per cent of the Luftwaffe's Jumo 213 engines, was the target on 20 July when the 306th formed the 40th "B" Combat Wing under the command of Maj. John S. Chalfant. The plant was located at Kothen in eastern Germany. Weather was a critical factor in the mission. Maj. Chalfant's plane lost an engine over Frankfurt when the 306th was blown into a flak area by unexpectedly high winds. The leader managed to stay with the group, although the number 3 engine was pouring out quantities of smoke. The plane would have been an inviting choice for enemy fighters had any been seen during the mission. Lt. John G. Davis, Jr., 369th deputy lead, took over the bomb run. He, too, was inadvertently forced into the flak over Leipzig when another group was encountered flying a collision course with the 306th. The lead group bombed Rudolstadt. The low group began a visual run on the target, found haze and smoke obscuring the area and dropped on a small town nearby. The high group also started a run on the primary but, fifteen seconds before bombs away, flak knocked out the intervalometer and release mechanism in the lead plane. It finally dropped on a town in the vicinity of Marburg.

The high group lost two airplanes to flak at about the initial point of the bomb run. 2nd Lt. David A. McNaught's 423rd aircraft was hit in the left Tokyo tank and the number 1 engine; both caught fire. The plane went into a steep glide out of the formation and, when it levelled off, was not burning. All of the crew became prisoners of war: 2nd Lt. John P. Wollack, copilot; 2nd Lt. William E. Glass, navigator; 2nd Lt. Marlyn P. Watson, bombardier; T/Sgt. Jerome A. Scherr, engineer; Cpl. Theodore J. Hansen, radio; Sgt. Michael G. Gesino, ball turret; Sgt. William J. Burke, waist; and Sgt. Harold T. Eckenrode, tail.

Much of the suspense for the day was reserved for the crew of Lt. Malcolm C. Frazee. He had taken over the crew of 2nd Lt. Ellis O. Porter who had been shot down on his first mission over Hamburg. Frazee's plane took the first burst of flak in the two left engines, both of which were then feathered. Bombs were immediately dropped, but 5000 feet were lost before the plane could be stabilized in flight. Heading for home, the number 3 engine quit and with surrender staring them in the face they refused to give up immediately. Frazee and 2nd Lt. Aram J. Nahabedian, copilot, fought the controls while unsuccessfully trying to restart number 1 or number 2. At their 110 mph airspeed they were sitting ducks for even the poorest Luftwaffe marksman, whether flak gunner or fighter pilot. They did receive a measure of protection from a lone P-51. Everything movable in the plane went out except the ball turret, probably a wise decision. They were very low over Belgium, receiving small arms fire and finally, eight miles off Ostend, Belgium, could go no further and ditched.

Sgt. George Johnson, waist gunner, was sitting in the radio room in the approved ditching procedure, holding the Gibson Girl emergency radio between his legs. As the plane hit the water the impact threw the Gibson Girl out through the open radio hatch and it lodged under the horizontal stabilizer. The crew left the plane, taking about twenty seconds to get into rafts and away. The plane itself broke in two at the ball turret and went under the waves in a minute and a half.

Sitting under the Nazis' nose so close to the Belgian shore was not a very comfortable location. Nahabedian opines that it may have been ultimately in their best interest to have lost the Gibson Girl, as its signal might well have attracted enemy rescue craft more quickly than the sought-after English. Although the men were ostensibly only a dozen miles from a rescue boat when they went down at 1500, they remained in the rafts all night, drifting ever closer to the enemy shore. In the morning they saw a Beaufighter, fired flares and were soon found by friendly rescue aircraft. A "Wimpy" crew came over and dropped a life boat. The excited men in the water found they had trouble getting into the boat and trying to get it under way. Their parachute lines had entangled the propellor and the water was a bit rough for inexperienced sailors. An hour and a half later a British rescue launch picked them out of the sea ten miles off Dunkirk. The life boat was sunk and the crew was taken to Dover where the men were put into a British naval hospital for checkups. Then it was off to a nearby RAF station where they received royal treatment until they were brought back to Thurleigh two days later. The other crew members were 2nd Lt. Theodore W. Lee, navigator; 2nd Lt. Samuel C. Jordan, bombardier; and Sgts. Richard A. Hill, radio; Walter A. Butschek, engineer; Paul H. Wehunt, ball turret; and Carroll L. Reimann, tail gunner.

Four men were wounded on this mission, none seriously: 2nd Lt. Andrew P. Kata, 369th pilot, with face wounds; 1st Lt. E.L. Lawrence, navigator, and 2nd Lt. H.H. Winning, bombardier, both in the high group lead plane flown by 1st Lt. F.J. Millette; and S/Sgt. Lawrence F. Pesterfield, a tail gunner.

No bombing mission was flown on 22 July. Six planes, however, were sent on leaflet missions to Bremen, Kiel and Hamburg. Leaflets were a part of the propaganda battle being fought by both sides. The leaflets carried on the 22nd had been prepared to take advantage of the very recent attempt made on Adolf Hitler's life and were designed to encourage the German people to overthrow their government. Two planes went to each of the target cities. Their takeoff was at 1524 and all returned around 2030.

24 July brought a major change in the ground organization when Lt. Col. Douglas Coleman, the first ground executive and a member of the 306th since early Wendover days, departed for the United States. He

had arrived in Utah as a captain and became group adjutant on 1 May 1942. His promotion to ground executive came on 11 January 1943. Replacing Coleman was Maj. Charles G. Duy, group adjutant, who had begun his 306th duty as the first adjutant of the 367th Squadron. Moving into Duy's place was Capt. Paul Baillie and two days later Capt. Joseph A. LaMotta became assistant group adjutant. Of course, the names of Coleman, Duy, Baillie and LaMotta were familiar to most men serving in the 306th, as they had appeared on countless numbers of daily orders and other documents issued from group headquarters.

Aside from the continuing war in the air, intense interest developed among the flying crews about what was happening on the ground in Normandy. Many made almost daily visits to the War Room run by the intelligence section in group headquarters on which the front line between the Allied and the German forces was displayed. As the Allies advanced, a bomb line became a feature on the briefing room map as well. At this time, however, the invasion seemed stalled and the 8th AF was often called upon to provide frontline bombing support to get the battle moving. The bombers were ill-suited for front-line tactical work, but in the deadly game of war it was essential to get every possible unit involved. The Air Force held the potential for inflicting great destruction on the enemy. On 24 July fifty-four planes were in the air for a devastating assault in the St. Lo area south of the beachhead. The idea was that an intensive bombing assault by the heavies, followed by the mediums and a mop up by fighters would spring the waiting infantry and armored divisions loose for a dash across France, and eventually into Germany. This finally did happen and the name of Gen. George S. Patton became a household word in the English speaking world and an anathema to German defenders. But the execution of the plan was not quite that simple. The 306th crews were briefed at 0315, but adverse weather played its hand and it was 1022 before takeoff began. The crews were kept at their stations during the delay, so they slept wherever they could: in the planes, on the bare hardstands and in the ground crew tents and shacks at the dispersal areas. It was a long and boring delay, but the planes were finally off and then back in four hours. The 306th crews felt they did a good job, if anything bombing slightly long and laying down a pattern of one hundred pound general purpose bombs over a wide area.

This carpet failed to dislodge the Germans and another attack was ordered for the next day. Again it was an 0315 briefing and takeoff began at 0819 for another fifty-four planes. Because of weather the bombers were forced down to 12,000 feet on this raid. They made their bomb run from north to south into the target area, then turned west to the sea and north around the Cherbourg peninsula. Unfortunately, bombs from some planes, thankfully not from the 306th, fell short inside the bomb line and killed a number of American troops, includ-

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 25 Jul  
 3 Aug

ing Gen. Leslie J. McNair, chief of the Army Ground Forces, who was in the front lines as an observer. The front lines had been marked by orange colored panels spread out on the ground, by smoke pots and by non-directional radio beacons. The trips to St. Lo were mercifully brief but hazardous, as the weather failed to cooperate. With so many planes packed into a narrow corridor over the front lines, the aircrews found it a rather nerve-racking experience. Fortunately for all, except the Germans, the second assault opened the door and Patton began his monumental dash south and then east to Paris. But, this was not the last of frontline bombing for the heavies.

"As for bombing results on the mission (24 July), they were not quite so good as they could have been, but they were as good as would normally be expected with the very poor visibility. Bombs of . . . one unit of the 306th . . . fell within the target area designated. Other units of the . . . 306th . . . hit the area just behind the German lines or west of the target area in enemy lines," reads the First Bomb Division report on St. Lo.

On the second day's mission, the report notes: "Approximately one-half of the bomb patterns of the formation were plotted outside the target area, but these fell south of the target in the area immediately behind the German lines. There was only one instance in which the bombs fell north of the assigned target . . . Altogether on this mission 1,495 bombers attacked the primary target, dropping 3,406 tons of bombs in the area. The overall bombing plot was well concentrated in the target area and a high degree of saturation was achieved."

A tally was made as of 10 July of losses during operations since 9 October 1942. Up to this point the 306th had lost 136 planes: eighty-two of them in Germany, thirty-six in occupied territory, six in neutral territory and twelve down at sea. In personnel the losses totalled 1,377. There were 359 missing in action, 304 killed in action, 626 prisoners of war, sixty-one internees and twenty-seven returned, including two who had been repatriated.

Operational totals by squadrons through 31 July were:

	Dispatched	Attacked	Sorties	Lost
367th	1206	937	1112	51
368th	1331	1032	1231	27
369th	1279	1033	1201	33
423rd	<u>1280</u>	<u>1055</u>	<u>1195</u>	<u>30</u>
	5096	4057	4742	141

On 3 August the Group went to Merkwiller and again proved the old adage that while a raid seemed easy to many there were often those for whom it was extremely difficult. Near Moutzen the group met meager and generally inaccurate flak, but 1st Lt. Robert E. Nabors, a veteran

3 Aug thru 9 Aug 1944

12 Aug

423rd navigator, was hit near the heart by a small piece of flak and died almost instantly. S/Sgt. Donald W. Urdahl, a 368th radio operator, was also wounded.

Starting with this mission, the group flew seven days in a row and was then grounded by weather. Then from the 12th it flew five more days in succession until weather forced a halt. Still, operations during July were on an almost daily basis. With an abundance of crews and planes the 306th was putting up a minimum of thirty-six aircraft for each mission and the crews were getting regular leaves. Forty-eight planes were up on 8 August for another front line mission, this time in support of the beleaguered British at Caen. The aiming point was a thousand yards in front of the troops and bombing was from 14,000 feet. One of the twelve-ship squadrons returned with its bombs because of poor visibility. 1st Lt. Andrew P. Kata's, 369th aircraft was hit over the front lines and the crew bailed out. Landing points were touch and go: six of the crew came down on the British side of the line and were back at Thurleigh the next day for more combat duty while four crew members fell into German hands and became prisoners of war.

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Those with the quick round trip were Kata, 2nd Lt. George C. Simons, copilot; 1st Lt. Raymond E. (Bleker) navigator; Sgt. Philip Mundell, togglier; T/Sgt. Joseph Brown, engineer; and S/Sgt. Cliff G. Latta, ball turret. Those not so fortunate who became prisoners were T/Sgt. Stanley A. Endrusick, radio; S/Sgt. Horace F. Kepler and S/Sgt. John J. Lawlor, waist; and S/Sgt. Basil F. Lowry, tail. The plane was first seen with the number 3 engine on fire and four men were observed to jump during the turn to the right out of formation. Then the plane turned left towards the Allied lines and the remainder of the crew jumped. The plane was seen to hit the ground and explode.

Things were rough in the 369th aircraft of 1st Lt. Joseph L. Murphy. His engineer, T/Sgt. Edwin H. Rees, was wounded by flak on the bomb run and his ball turret gunner, S/Sgt. Clifford B. Dodson, was killed by flak. Other men wounded on the mission were F/O Edward S. Smolenski, one of the three navigators in the lead ship; T/Sgt. Carl R. Chase, T/Sgt. Floyd A. Clites, Sgt. Haig Gadarian, T/Sgt. Russell J. Schonekas, 2nd Lt. Saul Soifer and Sgt. A. J. Mandelaro, a visiting photographer.

Some of the excitement was saved for the landing at Thurleigh. 1st Lt. John J. Allen had landed his plane and was on a taxiway when he was struck by the plane of 1st Lt. Malcolm C. Frazee, which had lost its brakes on landing. Frazee and his copilot, 2nd Lt. Aram J. Nahabedian, were taken to the hospital but their injuries were not serious. Allen's aircraft was declared a total loss and was salvaged.

On 12, 13 and 14 August the group was back in France against targets in support of the ground forces. The target for the mission of

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the 13th was in ahead of the front lines in the Rouen area. Turning east at Flers, the group came under fire from German army mobile 88 mms which had been elevated to shoot at the planes at 21,000 feet. Six aircraft were severely damaged, perhaps the worst being that of 1st Lt. Milton M. Adam, 367th pilot, who lost his number 4 engine and had his bombardier, 2nd Lt. Clifford J. Stanton, incapacitated by a single burst. Stanton was hit in the right hip. He was removed from his position and the navigator, 1st Lt. Russell A. Strong, dropped the bombs. Adam pulled maximum power on the bomb run to stay in formation with smoke pouring out of the number 1 engine. He feathered it as soon as the bombs were gone. Dropping 6,000 feet immediately, Adam flew his plane back to Thurleigh on the two inboard engines. Lt. William R. Allen, a 367th pilot, was also slightly wounded.

On 15 August the group was scheduled to Frankfurt's Eschborn airport. The twenty-ninth plane scheduled off crashed on takeoff and subsequent takeoffs were cancelled. 1st Lt. Berle F. Smith was the veteran 369th pilot of the plane. Those killed were 2nd Lt. Albert J. Trelford, Navigator; T/Sgt. Herbert E. Reichle, togglier; S/Sgt. Billy A. Helms, radio; S/Sgt. Thomas H. Davis and S/Sgt. Frederick A. Hesser, waist. Besides Smith, other members of the crew who survived were 2nd Lt. Warren M. Doman, copilot; T/Sgt. Robert C. Spry, engineer; and S/Sgt. Charles W. Thomas, ball turret.

The next day the group went to Bohlen in the Leipzig area to bomb a synthetic oil refinery. Oil production had now become one of the major target systems for the 8th. The target analysts correctly theorized that if the supply of aviation and motor vehicle fuel could be shut off it would hasten the demise of the German war machine. Hence, at this time a great many missions were being flown into the Leipzig area of Germany against refineries of various types. It was usual on such missions to see few if any enemy fighters, but on this one Maj. Maurice Salada's lead plane crew reported seeing four B-17s in the wing ahead going down under enemy fighter attack. Two 306th planes returned home alone with coverage by P-51s; they made the long trip without being accosted. Nevertheless, the mission cost the 306th two airplanes. 1st Lt. Young B.C. Newsom and 1st Lt. Eldon L. Ralstin lost their planes after being hit by flak in the target area. Newsom had his number 3 and number 4 engines shot out over the target. He let down to 5,000 feet where he could maintain altitude, only to suffer an internal failure in the number 2 engine. There was nothing to do but bail the crew out with the pilot being the last to leave the ship at 3,000 feet. Newsom landed in trees, got to the ground and ran. He could hear people searching for him and, on the occasion, saw them, but managed to elude his captors. He was free for about twenty-four hours, but was captured at noon the next day by a group of civilians. Sgt. Henry

13 A

15 Aug

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Kantor, radio operator, was killed on the ground. The rest of the crew joined Newsom in prison camp: 2nd Lt. Irving L. Dudley, copilot; 2nd Lt. Harold Pasvoll, navigator; Sgt. Gordon M. Slocum, togglier; T/Sgt. Jerry M. Myers, engineer; Sgt. Milton M. Bassett, ball turret; Sgt. Orville W. Werts, waist; and Sgt. Floyd F. Owens, tail gunner.

Ralstin's plane also took several flak bursts over the target and was last seen with one engine feathered and another on fire. Ralstin and T/Sgt. Robert F. Behnke, radio, were reported killed in action. Survivors from the crew were 2nd Lt. William H. Goetz, copilot; 1st Lt. Richard T. Locke, navigator; 1st Lt. Thomas J. Meersman, bombardier; T/Sgt. William M. Howard, engineer; S/Sgt. Samuel Simonian, ball turret; S/Sgt. Gerald W. Wrightsman, waist; and S/Sgt. Fred Lloyd, tail gunner.

24 Aug

From 12 to 24 August inclement weather provided a restful interlude from combat for the crews of the 306th. Some other groups did fly one mission during the period. One mission was scrubbed on the 23rd. But on 24 August the 306th went to Merseberg, usually described as the largest synthetic oil refinery in the world and the "hottest" flak area as well. Not only was Merseberg a bad place for aircraft to fly, but the routes penetrated between the Leipzig and Halle flak areas and any errors in navigation could keep planes under AA fire for inordinate periods of time. A universal groan filled the briefing room at Thurleigh any time the yarn was seen to go into this area. Maj. John S. Chalfant was the air commander for thirty-six airplanes on this date, but, when a smoke bomb went off in his plane over England, four of his crew members bailed out and he was forced to return to the base. 1st Lt. Robert C. Fife, Jr., of the 369th took over the lead for the mission. However, on the bomb run his doors would not open and the drop was triggered from the pilot's emergency bomb release. To be sure, no one wanted to make a second run over Merseberg for any reason.

25 Aug

The group headed for Peenemunde the next day, but two squadrons dropped their bombs on a bridge at Stralsund when the lead could not visually acquire the target soon enough on the first run. As usual, Peenemunde was covered by haze and smoke screens. Sgt. P.F. Haney, engineer for 2nd Lt. Paul H. Martin, 367th, was killed when hit by flak and 2nd Lt. Arthur P. Trimble, navigator in the same plane, was wounded. Sgt. George S. Dykeman, a 368th ball turret gunner, was also wounded.

26 Aug

The mission of the 26th to Gelsenkirchen in the Ruhr Valley was something of a classic. Almost as the wheels left the runway the planes were in the clouds and did not break out until about 12,000 feet, where the group formed as the 40th "B" CW in a beautiful, clear blue sky. As the bombing altitude was 29,000 feet for the lead group, the climb was steady all the way to the IP and then leveled off to the drop point. Buckeye Blue, the weather scout, reported that weather in the target

26 Aug 1944  
27 "

area was doubtful. Finally only the high group, led by the 367th Squadron, was able to drop its bombs from above 30,000 feet. The other twenty-three planes brought their bombs home. Flak was intense over the target and seemed to zero in on a plane from the 369th, "Hard to Get". At about 30,000 feet flak tore into the left wing tip and shredded the wing all the way to the number 1 engine. The aircraft flipped to the left and, while the wings were vertical, another burst outside the bomb bay drove the doors inward. A third blast tore off the rudder. The plane turned over, then upright again and went into a flat spin. As the flak hit, it killed 1st Lt. Charles U. Rapp, Jr., copilot; 1st Lt. Michael L. Vlahos, bombardier; T/Sgt. Robert B. Newsbigle, radio; and S/Sgt. Eugene W. LeVeque, ball turret.

368th  
Dean  
Allen  
Charles H. Evans  
Harvey J. Purkey  
Richard C. Huebotter  
James R. Carey

T/Sgt. Harvey J. Purkey, Jr., engineer, was singed by flames when he opened the door to the bomb bay. Purkey, 1st Lt. Dean C. Allen, pilot, and 2nd Lt. Charles H. Evans, navigator, finally fought their way to the nose hatch and bailed out. S/Sgt. Richard C. Huebotter, waist, and S/Sgt. James R. Carey, tail gunner, came out the rear door. Allen was quickly captured. As he lay on his back a German soldier walked over to him, put a boot on Allen's chest, extracted the escape packet from Allen's pocket and walked away. Allen was in no position or condition to protest.

On the night of 27 August the five remaining members of the crew were on a train headed south along the Rhine River towards Cologne. In the middle of the night the train stopped at a small town and the guards were all asleep. Evans and Purkey got off to take a walk and were never seen again. After the war Allen read a news story from that town which told of the mayor, police chief and three others being tried, convicted and executed for the beating deaths of two American airmen. A closer check revealed that the victims were indeed Evans and Purkey.

27 A.

August was also a month for medals. A tally at the end of the month showed that 784 Air Medals were awarded. Many names appear more than once on the list, as the combat crewmen were flying often and easily completing the five missions needed for each award of the Air Medal or an oak leaf cluster to it. Distinguished Flying Crosses numbered ninety-six, usually given sometime between the twenty-fifth and thirty-fifth missions, although as the war continued they were presented with less frequency. Six Purple Hearts were awarded for wounds suffered during the month.

Eight Bronze Star Medals were conferred on ground personnel, but the awards list notes in the margin, "No medals available". It is indeed sad that the supply of medals was not on a par with the quality of the services performed by the recipients. Those granted Bronze Stars were M/Sgt. Arthur J. Harnois; M/Sgt. Everett P. White, T/Sgt. William H. Jones, T/Sgt. Francis L. Waugh, S/Sgt. Charles H. Huffman, S/Sgt.

James M. Slusher, M/Sgt. Melvin A. Kidwell and M/Sgt. John P. Ziarko. The Soldier's Medal, usually awarded for individual heroism not involving the enemy, was awarded to M/Sgt. Hamilton Griffin and M/Sgt. Robert D. Watts, both of the 369th Squadron.

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## Chapter 20

# ONCE MORE FIGHTERS

## September 1944

September was an unusual month for the 306th. It was marked by three major events: the celebration of the group's second anniversary at Thurleigh, its last catastrophic loss of aircraft to enemy fighters on a single mission and the assignment of its fifth commanding officer since the beginning at Wendover.

As weather permitted, missions were flown. When the planes were grounded combat crewmen attended their two-a-day squadron meetings. Many of them heard lectures on a variety of combat-related subjects. Some shot skeet, others worked out in the Link and other trainers. Almost all wandered through the War Room to study the latest maps or to read classified intelligence reports.

The shops and maintenance offices continued at a normal pace and on the flight line the maintenance crews fine-tuned their planes. As dusk turned to evening, liberty trucks would depart for Bedford. Those who preferred to remain on the station might head for the post theatre for the latest "Red Circle Cab" movie featuring Bill Bendix. Those who felt the urge to move about simply wandered around the air field or rode their bicycles to nearby hamlets. There were some who had married English girls and lived off base among the British civilians. Others found respite from the boredom of their routine jobs or the uncertainty of combat by establishing close ties with English families. All kinds of outlets were developed by men to burn up their excess energy and to compensate for their frustrations, their homesickness and their doubts. Letter writing was always there and many wrote daily to loved ones and to brothers who were fighting the war in other parts of the world.

Despite the varied escape mechanisms used by one and all to forget the war, at all hours of the day and night there might be heard in the background the rumble of a nine-cylinder Curtiss-Wright engine as a ground crew struggled to get "its" bird ready for takeoff the following morning.

At the start of the month two squadron commanders, John S. Chalfant, 423rd, and Maurice V. Salada, 368th, received their silver leaves as lieutenant colonels, a cause for celebration at the senior officers' club. And a round of drinks for everyone!

The group flew on the 3rd, 5th and 8th, all three days to Ludwig-

shafen with bombs targeted against the huge I.B. Farbenindustrie there, the world's largest chemical manufacturing complex.

On 9 September the group was stood down for three days for the celebration of two years in England. Festivities began on Friday and the men of Thurleigh needed little time to catapult themselves into a wild celebration, one that had the earmarks of a great sports event, a county fair and a college homecoming. The trimmings were typically American. A traveling carnival was brought to the base and all day Saturday events built to a crescendo, in spite of a 306th defeat by the 8th AF All-Star baseball team.

Maj. Glenn Miller's band was there, with one unit playing Saturday night in a hangar cleared of war birds, while Ray McKinley, Mel Powell, Johnny Desmond and their fellow musicians performed in the Junior Officers' club. British girls arrived by bus and truck load to join the local celebrators. It was afterwards rumored that some of the visitors did not go home at least until Wednesday. Many will never forget, even those indulging rather heavily in spirits and levity, that midway through the evening party at the Officers' club there was a pause when all the squadron operations officers were ordered to report to headquarters. As they departed, the party built to a new pitch and no one seemed to care about the prospects of a mission on Sunday morning.

Many times that evening the "funnel" that had been constructed outside the front entrance of the club to guide the unwary across the bridge covering the drainage ditch served its purpose well. Of course, there were those who got across the bridge without difficulty, only to tumble into the ditch on the far side of the road. Many who witnessed and participated in parties with the 306th over three years called the second anniversary party the biggest and best ever held.

Men seemed determined to party to the hilt that night only to learn to their chagrin that there was an 0400 briefing for a six and one-half hour mission to Stuttgart. Uninitiated observers would have been horrified in the morning to see the revelers arriving at the flight line in their dress uniforms and in a physical condition that belied their ability to fly. But Lt. Col. Robert P. Riordan took thirty-six planes to Stuttgart where they bombed successfully and then returned to base without incident. Oxygen may have partially revived some during the mission, but when the crews were back on the ground again they were exhausted and collapsed into bed at an early hour.

That was just as well, as briefing on 11 September, the very next day, was at 0430 and takeoff for Merseberg, the heavily defended oil target, began at 0742. Col. Salada led thirty-six planes of the 40th "B" CW. They overflew the target, holding their bombs, when the radar equipment failed to pick up any returns. The high and lead squadrons later bombed at Eisenach and the low squadron at Lutzendorf.

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Approaching the IP for Merseberg, it was noted that the plane of 1st Lt. John F. Machosky, 368th, was lagging behind, and which attracted the attention of a lone ME 109. The Luftwaffe pilot fired at the Fortress from above and behind, finally hitting the gas tanks in the left wing. When the crew was unable to control the fire in the wing, the order for bailout was given. Machosky and 2nd Lt. William N. Roberts, Jr., bombardier, were together and free for seventeen days, before being apprehended. 2nd Lt. Robert B. Swartz, navigator, evaded capture for only a single day, while T/Sgt. Edward R. Lanich, engineer, enjoyed nine days of freedom. Others from the plane who become prisoners of war were 2nd Lt. James L. Phillips, copilot; S/Sgt. Lester R. Geisman, radio; Sgt. Alphonse A. Micuta, ball turret; Sgt. William D. Stanley, waist, and S/Sgt. Andrew J. Dolovacky, tail.

Some were apprehensive at briefing in the early morning hours of 12 September as they watched the yarn wind across Northern Germany, around Berlin, southward a short distance to Ruhland and then, in an almost straight line, stretch westward toward England. The proximity of the route to the northern edge of the Berlin flak coverage seemed ominous to the navigators and they commented on it at their own specialized briefing. It was explained that the route was designed to flush out the Luftwaffe so that the numerous P-51s could finish off the enemy in air-to-air combat.

Briefing was at 0345, a very early hour, and takeoff was planned at the first hint of dawn at 0644. Lt. Col. John S. Chalfant headed his PFF ship down runway 24 and the mission was on for the 40th "A" CW. 1st Lt. Gordon Donkin of the 367th led the low group and 1st Lt. John W. Sasser of the 368th led the high.

Perhaps the report from First Division tells the story succinctly, if not entirely accurately from the author's point of view as a participant: "The 306th Group . . . made its turn north of Berlin, when three or four jet-propelled A/C leaving contrails far above the formation and traveling very fast, were seen to sweep down the column of combat wings from front to rear. There was a group straggling badly immediately behind the 306th and as the jets were above this group they described a wide circle, their contrails being very distinct, as though designed to mark the spot.

"Combat wings ahead of the 40th "A" were observed to be turning too close to Berlin, so the 306th leader began sliding off to the left at about the same time the flak broke out in the middle of our combat wings ahead and on the right. Before the 306th group got entirely clear, one A/C in the lead group (Farwell's) and the leader of the high group (Sasser) were hard hit. This was at 1126. The lead group held together solidly, but the high group lost altitude following the crippled

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lead. The low group, trying to get clear of the flak, was flying a collision course with another group which came barging out from the right and passed right through the 40th "A" CW, breaking up the formation.

"At this moment about twenty-five FW-190s jumped the disorganized planes. The entire attack did not last more than five or six minutes, but accounted for seven planes from the 306th group, one of which crash-landed in England. The lead group of the 40th "A" CW which hung together solidly was not attacked, and reports attacks on other groups as being from 5 to 7 o'clock high, level and low by E/A flying four to six abreast. The lead group lost one A/C to flak.

"The low group reports that about twenty-five FW-190s came from 11 o'clock high firing at the group to their left and made one pass, then turned and came at the low group from 6 o'clock low in five waves of three and four A/C each. They half rolled beneath us and fell away steeply. The low group lost five A/C to fighters, one of which (Donkin) crash-landed in England.

"The high group was attacked by seven to eight fighters and lost one to flak. Two planes of the high group tagged on to the lead, while the remaining planes of the high and low, with a few stragglers from the group which was responsible for breaking up the 40th "A" CW formation, struggled together into group formation and pulled clear as P-51s came to their rescue.

This is probably a reasonably accurate account of the action north of Berlin. The time span is perhaps a bit dragged out. The attack by the enemy fighters was more like a single pass through the formation with subsequent passes prevented by the prompt arrival of escort aircraft. The escorts had been elsewhere along the bomber stream to repel an attack. This displacement of the escorts to cover a "brush fire" often left segments of the bomber stream uncovered, and the Luftwaffe was quick to use decoy tactics to allow at least one pass through the bomber stream at another point.

Maj. Robert Farwell, on his fifth mission and leading the high squadron of the lead group, was the first to feel the brunt of the German defensive reaction as flak covered his plane. The first explosion came in the cockpit, setting the entire area on fire and causing hydraulic and oxygen failures. "Belle of the Brawl", a 368th plane, was in more than a little trouble at 27,000 feet and Farwell quickly ordered his crew out of the plane. Nine chutes were observed. It was later reported back at Thurleigh that one chute appeared not to deploy properly. 2nd Lt. William D. Markle, flying his twenty-fifth mission as copilot, was the only casualty. It is believed that he fell out of his parachute during the descent, indicating that he may not have had his leg straps fastened. (Pilots frequently flew with the leg straps unsnapped for comfort.)

Over the next six weeks Maj. Farwell saw all of the members of his

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crew except Markle. Those who survived were 2nd Lt. Warren F. Tryloff, navigator; 2nd Lt. Oliver A. Bonner, Jr., bombardier; T/Sgt. Warren F. Wilson, engineer; S/Sgt. Earl E. Hall, radio; Sgt. Robert K. Winther, ball turret; S/Sgt. Charlie C. Williams, Jr., waist; and Sgt. Ernest E. Lindsey, tail gunner. Both Farwell and Wilson were burned on their faces where skin was exposed. Wilson delayed his jump to 1,500 feet and upon landing was able to evade capture for three days. Tryloff was a veteran of only two weeks with the 306th.

"Tailwind", the plane in which 1st Lt. John W. Sasser was leading the high group, was shot out of formation by flak in the initial flurry. Two engines were gone immediately and, because several members of the crew were wounded, it was decided not to bail out, but to attempt to fly out of the area and perhaps reach safety in a neutral country. Once out of formation, the Luftwaffe pilots spotted the plane and a single pass cost "Tailwind" a third engine. With only number 1 still running the decision was made to crash land the plane and this Sasser and 1st Lt. James T. McStay attempted. They were progressing well when the last engine failed on their final approach into a field. The plane dropped precipitately, clipped an oak tree, broke apart and threw most of the crew out of the radio room where they had assumed crash landing positions. Only S/Sgt. Arthur C. Schultz, ball turret, remained in the plane and was a survivor.

Killed in the crash were McStay, 2nd Lt. Anthony J. Carlino, navigator; 2nd Lt. Robert E. Banta, bombardier; S/Sgt. Raymond M. Wilson, tail gunner; and T/Sgt. Eugene T. Carroll, radio. Sasser, Schultz, the engineer and the waist gunner, Sgt. Virgil S. Mitchelson and S/Sgt. David R. Revolti, survived, although all were seriously injured. Sasser was the most critically hurt and died 20 March 1945 during surgery on his head wounds at Meinengen, Germany. The other three were eventually liberated.

"Methuselah," so named for its last three numbers, 969, was a veteran 367th plane and on this mission was flown by 1st Lt. Earl R. Barr. After the fighters hit, Methuselah developed fires in the number 1 and number 3 engines, the right wing and the radio room. Bailout was ordered and most of the crew jumped, but T/Sgt. Hector Chavez, engineer, and S/Sgt. Nicholas Hoolko, ball turret, were still in the plane when it blew up. A section of the waist where they were remained intact and they bailed out of it, although in the excitement neither knew the other man's identity. Barr reports that after landing he stumbled around for several hours before police from a small town captured him. He was taken to a building where Americans were being collected and it looked to him as if he were entering a 367th Squadron meeting. Chavez and Hoolko were wounded in the plane, along with S/Sgt. Alfred R. Capen, waist. The only casualty was 2nd Lt. Mathew A.

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Meyerson, navigator, who either fell out of his chute or did not have it on when the plane blew up. Other survivors were 2nd Lt. Robert E. Reid, copilot; 2nd Lt. Garland A. Montague, bombardier; T/Sgt. William J. Bauer, engineer; and S/Sgt. Wilbur A. Whitaker, tail gunner.

*(momack as of 8 Mar 78)*  
1st Lt. Paul F. Bailey, a veteran 367th pilot, had his plane hit first by flak and then by fighters with 20 mm cannon fire riddling the old aircraft (a replacement for the second Schweinfurt losses). An engine was on fire, oxygen was burning in the radio room, the bomb bay was in flames with the bombs still in the shackles and the bombardier and navigator reported fires and dense smoke in the nose. At 31,500 feet Bailey ordered bailout. T/Sgt. Tom F. Chandler, radio, had been hit badly; his left arm was broken both above and below the elbow and his right arm was full of shell fragments (Chandler's left arm was amputated after he returned to the States.) The tail gunner, Sgt. Leo E. Zych, had been blown off his seat, but got back into position and shot down an attacking fighter. S/Sgt. Harold J. Boland, ball turret, was wounded in the face and head. Nevertheless, he and S/Sgt. J. A. Durns, waist, claimed two probables from among the attacking enemy planes. (Such claims were seldom confirmed because the men responsible did not return from the mission to be interrogated.) It was Durns who helped Chandler get his chute on and properly fastened as the bailout bell rang.

Chandler fell to about 2,000 feet before opening his parachute and losing consciousness. When he later awakened he was lying flat on his back on the ground, too weak from his injuries to do anything. Within half an hour he was captured by two men in uniform who kept hostile civilians away from him. When he begged for water, a little old lady timidly crept over to him and let him drink from her water jug. All of the crew except the copilot, 2nd Lt. Rudolph M. Babel, and the navigator, 1st Lt. Richard M. Rodenberger, were rather quickly captured. Rodenberger was later reported as killed in action. Babel hid out and was not captured for an extended period of time. 2nd Lt. Robert J. Vickers, bombardier, and S/Sgt. Leroy H. Hollenberg, engineer, also survived.

*(MACK)*  
2nd Lt. Lewis H. White, Jr., and his 367th crew were hit first by flak and then FW-190s shot off the plexiglas nose and started an electrical fire. The next attack came from the rear. Suddenly there were large holes in the fuselage, the radio room was on fire and the ball turret had been hit by shell fire. In the tail attack, Sgt. Peter A. Miritello was killed at his guns. White yelled "Bail out" three times over the intercom. Sgt. John V. Fisher, waist gunner, helped Sgt. Albert Handel, radio, put his chute on. Handel had been shot through his left wrist and was unable to use his hand. Fisher finally kicked off a stubborn rear door and he and Handel jumped. Sgt. Foy W. McClung, ball turret, checked and

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found Miritello dead, then jumped. 2nd Lt. Richard A. Christensen, navigator, was the first to leave by the front hatch, followed by Sgt. William R. Pivk, engineer; 2nd Lt. Gordon F. Zrust, bombardier; 2nd Lt. Stanley W. Henceroth, copilot; and lastly White. They were all quickly captured and most of the crew was together that evening.

"Umbriago," another 367th plane, had just been put back into service after a month of repairs. 1st Lt. Donald C. Marsh, navigator, later remarked, "We should have aborted. Not much went right that day." 2nd Lt. William F. Griffin, copilot, describes the plane as "an instant wreck" after the fighter pass. All controls were shot out and the plane was completely sprayed with 20 mm cannon fire. One engine was out and there was an oxygen fire. Marsh says that his first awareness that they were under fighter attack came when a 20 mm shell burst under his navigator's desk and knocked out his intercom. Within seconds the bombardier, 2nd Lt. William C. Stewart, Jr., was motioning him to bail out. During the attack T/Sgt. Joseph Stroyoff, engineer, was hit in the foot by a 20 mm shell fragment; he later had a toe amputated. When the fighters hit the back of the plane two men were killed: Sgt. William V. Gardiner, waist, and S/Sgt. Henry H. Rodgers, tail gunner. 1st Lt. Charles C. Wegener was the veteran pilot of the plane, nearing the end of his mission tour. He survived along with T/Sgt. Jack P. Krahn, radio, and Sgt. John V. Eden, ball turret.

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"Belle of the Blue", flown by 2nd Lt. Daniel W. Gates, a 423rd pilot with ten missions to his credit, was last seen with flames enveloping the back half of the plane as it went out of sight. The casualty aboard was Sgt. Raymond W. Fountain, Jr., ball turret. In addition to Gates, 2nd Lt. Edward E. Jordan, copilot; 2nd Lt. John F. Taylor, navigator; T/Sgt. Hugo Cappelli, togglier; T/Sgt. Charles L. Sulzinski, engineer; Sgt. James L. Peltz, radio; Sgt. Buffard L. Johnson, waist; and Sgt. Howard E. Reed, tail, survived. Fountain was able to get out of his ball turret after the fighters hit, but was mortally wounded and did not leave the plane. Peltz, was in the waist, manning a gun when he was hit by shell fragments and collapsed on the floor. He snapped his chute on, crawled to the waist door, and then could not get the pins in the hinges to release, but finally managed to force himself out of the door and away from the burning plane. His left leg had been broken and soon after he landed Lt. Gates and Lt. Jordan found him and administered morphine, from his parachute first aid kit. He was quickly taken to a civilian hospital where he was cleaned up and a cast put on his leg and within two days was in the Hermann Goering Luftwaffe Lazaret (hospital) in Berlin where he was treated for two months.

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The eighth plane shot down was that of 2nd Lt. Marvin W. Freeman. It was reportedly hit by two fighters and later broke in half. The only survivors of this 423rd crew were F/O Curtis M. Barber, copilot; S/Sgt.

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James E. Hughes, waist; and Sgt. Robert L. Appell, tail. Freeman was killed as were 2nd Lt. Charles E. Stansbery, navigator; F/O Francis B. Smith, bombardier; S/Sgt. Marlin D. Summer, engineer; S/Sgt. Kenneth W. Lovens, radio; and Sgt. John G. Holmes, ball turret.

One lone attacker was shot down by returning gunners that day, most of whom had never shot at an enemy fighter before. The furious attack was over almost before it started and few got good shots. Only Sgt. Joseph M. Hoffman, engineer for 2nd Lt. Leon A. Risk of the 368th, got credit for an FW-190. This plane came in from seven o'clock high and blew up after two bursts from Hoffman's twin guns. There were also two probables and six damaged recorded.

The Luftwaffe attack took a far shorter time to happen than to describe. Within minutes the planes that remained in the air were seeking the protection of the group again. Col. Chalfant's lead group bore on, almost oblivious to what had taken place. The shattered high and low groups formed together and proceeded, first with 1st Lt. Gordon L. Donkin leading and, when his plane was unable to maintain the position, with Lt. Lawrence W. Gassman in the lead.

The target for the day had been an oil refinery complex at Ruhland and the planes that made it to the target dropped their bombs. It was with considerable trepidation, and some relief, that the aircraft turned to a westerly heading toward England. The crews then knew they had three hours of flying before reaching home, most of that period over enemy territory. Bombs were dropped between 1215 and 1220 and the group reached Thurleigh at 1538.

Much of the remaining drama of the mission was left to Lt. Donkin and his crew. Their own plane had not been flyable, so they were in a borrowed 368th plane, "The Cap'n. and the Kids." Two engines were feathered when they went across Ruhland and dropped their bombs and they became a sitting duck for even a neophyte German fighter pilot since none of the turrets would work. During the fighter attack T/Sgt. Willard M. Colvin, radio, had been hit in the neck, hip and back; at one point he looked out a window directly into the face of a German fighter pilot roaring by. T/Sgt. Clarence E. Tuers, engineer, was blown out of his turret by 20 mm fire and was wounded in the left arm, shoulder and chest. "The Cap'n." was picked up by P-51s who called to ask if there was trouble. When that was confirmed the 51s stayed with the plane until their fuel ran low. As Donkin's aircraft crossed the Channel with only one operating engine, the pilot and the copilot, 2nd Lt. Donald C. MacDonald, had full right rudder and full right aileron trying to counteract a turn to the left. They got to the edge of the Manston emergency field, but, as they were on final approach, their last engine quit. They crash landed on a smooth area, hit a tree, crossed a ditch, and knocked down a search light tower as the tail of their plane swung around.

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2nd Lt. Gerald A. Weiler, navigator, had gone to the rear of the plane to help get the men out and they began to jump as soon as the coast line appeared beneath them. Sgt. Colvin, Sgt. Tuers, S/Sgt. Norman Morrow, ball turret, and Sgt. Lawrence G. Joslin, waist, went out the back door; Weiler decided that at 300 feet it was just too close to the ground to jump. Instead he grabbed the ball turret stanchion and held on as the plane hit the ground, suffering a moderately severe puncture wound to the left buttock and lacerations to his right hand and the right side of his forehead. It was assumed by the crew that Capt. Arthur S. Hostettler, bombardier, had bailed out when they came over the coast because he had been sitting in the front escape hatch with his feet hanging out when Weiler left the nose. But in the wreckage Hostettler's body was found. Donkin and MacDonald suffered lacerations. Tuers was hospitalized in the Ramsgate General Hospital while the rest of the survivors were taken to the Manston dispensary and then returned to Thurleigh.

Although the group felt somewhat ravaged by the onslaught of 12 September, twenty-four planes were off to Merseberg on the 13th. It was another rough mission for the group, resulting in the loss of one plane, the death of one airman and the wounding of another. The group encountered flak only at the target, but it was described as very accurate, both barrage and tracking. "Duration Plus", flown by 1st Lt. Clayton A. Nattier, was shot out of formation and was seen straggling behind with a P-51 escort. The plane crashed at 1132 at Ammendorf, near Halle. It was later reported that three officers of the crew died in the crash when two of them were still trying to get the third officer out of the plane. One of them was reported suffering from shock and unable to bail out of his own volition. Those killed were 2nd Lt. Gerald I. Johnson, copilot; 2nd Lt. Bernard F. Weinstein, navigator; and 2nd Lt. William A. Gregory, bombardier. Sgt. Gerald B. Bump, engineer; S/Sgt. Edwin J. Block, radio; Sgt. Cecil Richardson, ball turret; Sgt. Max H. Kimmel, waist; and Sgt. Richard G. Edwards, Jr., tail, survived in addition to Nattier.

Another 369th aircraft flown by Lt. Robert H. Brown, took a hard pounding and Sgt. Michael J. Ferrara, tail gunner, was killed. Sgt. Ernest P. Hovey, waist, was wounded in a leg.

After weather forced the planes to remain home for four days, the 8th AF was out on 17 September to help the ground troops at Volkel, Holland. When the lead squadron circled to make a second run on the target, the course took the planes too near Volkel and two men in 367th planes were wounded by flak. 2nd Lt. Frank A. Wagenfohr, Jr., a copilot, was shot in the left hip, and S/Sgt. Arthur W. Christensen, in the ball turret for 1st Lt. Joseph Couris, was wounded in the left leg above the knee.

On 19 September the 306th flew to Unna, Germany, but bad weather on the return forced two-thirds of the planes to land at Halesworth.

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A major change in command took place 23 September. Col. George L. Robinson, commanding officer since 19 June 1943, had by now completed fifteen months with the 306th, an unusually long tenure for a bomb group commander in the 8th AF. He had been in England almost as long as the 306th, having arrived as group operations officer with the original 303rd Group. During the summer of 1944 Mim Smith, director of the American Red Cross at Thurleigh, had been transferred to a Third Division base and shortly thereafter to the States. Upon Robinson's return to the ZI the two were married. Robinson had run a good fighting organization and certainly flew more missions as an air commander than did many bomb group commanders. His forte was as air commander, especially one who always came home even from the roughest missions. Unlike many air commanders, Col. Robinson was always the pilot when he led a mission, never the copilot or an observer. After WW II he continued service in the Strategic Air Command as a wing commander, then retired to become civil defense director for the State of Florida.

Ordered to Thurleigh as commander was Col. James S. Sutton, one of the earliest group commanders in the 8th, having preceded the 306th to England as the original commander of the 92nd Bomb Group. Sutton was a 1930 West Point graduate and was with the 2nd Bomb Group as a squadron commander when the war began. When he took the 92nd Group to England he incurred the wrath of Lt. Gen. Carl Spaatz and Maj. Gen. Ira Eaker by insisting that he fly his group directly from the U.S. to the British Isles, without the customary stops along the way. To win authorization, he had gone directly to Gen. Arnold in Washington. His indiscretion was not forgotten by the American commanders in England. He stayed with the 92nd for some months and was then transferred to Northern Ireland as base commander at Langford Lodge, hardly a fitting post for an able bomb group commander. While infuriated by the action, Sutton was willing to bide his time. When Gen. Eaker had moved out of England and Spaatz was in France, Sutton visited some old friends at 8th AF headquarters in search of a better assignment. His transfer came when there was an opening at the 306th. He was again a combat commander.

Sutton made the same statements on his arrival that Armstrong, Putnam and Robinson had made before him — the 306th could not fly formation. But he was in a position to solve the problem! With more planes and men, coupled with fewer losses, there was ample time for pilots to become proficient in formation flying.

On the mission of 27 September the 306th realized a major advantage from the forward movement of the ground forces. 2nd Lt. John L. Davis landed his plane at Brussels, now in allied hands, because of damage and, after repairs were made flew it back to Thurleigh. During

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the remainder of the war numerous 306th planes and crews were saved because they did not have to extend their luck trying to cross the English Channel. No longer were planes forced to ditch because of fuel shortage.

Weather continued to play havoc with bombing, but there were also problems brought on by the sheer number of planes in the air on a given mission. There were missions in late 1944 in which the 8th AF put up a thousand bombers and it was extremely difficult to funnel all these aircraft over a single target. In addition to the bombers an equal number of fighters would be dispatched to harass the enemy. In Germany there was no sanctuary for the Luftwaffe from the far-ranging P-51s.

The problem of crowding was brought out on 28 September at Magdeburg where the 306th was forced out of position over the target by another combat wing on a converging course. Flak at the target was generally below and inaccurate, except for the 367th flying as the low group which had eight of its planes damaged. Over the target 2nd Lt. Robert L. Cardon's plane was hit by flak, knocking out the number 1 engine and the oxygen system. Cardon quickly sought a lower altitude and while crossing the Rhine River had the number 2 engine shot out by flak. As he headed for Brussels, the number 3 engine quit, so Cardon ordered his crew members to bail out. They jumped at 1445 over Tourinne, Belgium. The navigator landed at Mont St. Guibert where the crew was later assembled. Cardon and his copilot landed the plane in a pasture. This particular aircraft had on the nose a picture of Donald Duck dropping bombs through the clouds, an apt description of fall weather operations over the continent. The plane was demolished, but the Gee Box, IFF equipment, maps and astro compass were turned in at an American base at Bauvavechauts. The French Forces of the Interior gathered up the crew members. They were later taken to Brussels and then flown back to Thurleigh by C-47. No one was injured by flak, but T/Sgt. Floyd L. Kline, engineer, suffered a broken ankle in the parachute jump and S/Sgt. Tunis Dykstra, ball turret, suffered serious neck injuries. Both men were treated at the RCAF 52nd Mobile Field Hospital and then air evacuated back to Thurleigh 2 October. Sgt. Leslie E. Smith, engineer for Lt. Eldon J. Burrell, was wounded by flak and S/Sgt. Harry Schneider, tail gunner for 1st Lt. Lawrence W. Gassman, was hit in the foot by flak.

On the 29th the 306th lost another original pilot, as Lt. Col. Robert P. Riordan left the command of the 369th Squadron to become air executive officer of the 92nd Bomb Group at Poddington. There he joined Lt. Col. James W. Wilson, the original commander of the 423rd Squadron, who had returned to combat after recovering from his wounds of 26 June 1943 while serving in the States. Wilson became

commander of the 92nd on 27 September. Shortly, Wilson also brought another original member of the 306th back to England as he appointed Capt. John R. McKee as his group operations officer. McKee has been a 367th pilot until shot down 19 December 1942 over France. He evaded capture and was back in England 27 January 1943, and then had flying duties in the States. McKee eventually won promotion to lieutenant colonel while serving with the 92nd.

Decorations continued to roll in, with the preponderance of Air Medals, a good number of Distinguished Flying Crosses, too many Purple Hearts and at the end of the list, five Bronze Star medals. These latter were awarded to M/Sgt. Franklin A. Turek, 423rd; T/Sgt. William H. Jones, 368th; and M/Sgt. Carl J. Hays, M/Sgt. Valentine Halfar and M/Sgt. Harry Waholak of the 449th subdepot.

The group also lost its oldest officer at the end of September when Capt. Wiley W. Glass, 55 years of age, was transferred back to the States. Glass had joined the group in Wendover, Utah, as an intelligence officer and was conspicuous for a strip of WW I ribbons on his blouse.

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## Chapter 21

# ROUTINE MISSIONS?

## October-December 1944

If such is at all possible in war, aerial combat was becoming a bit more routine as the late months of 1944 passed into history. There were many, many planes in the air, but fewer were being lost. More aircrew members were being exposed to air-to-air combat because there were many more crewmen available. With fewer losses tours of duty were being flown more quickly. As enemy fighters were now seldom seen and attacks had become very scarce, the number of men being wounded was much lower than in the previous two years.

Combat still produced losses, however, and some planes were shot down, crewmen were killed and wounded. The missions were longer, the time at altitude was longer, but the formations were much larger and better able to protect themselves. But the real difference was that American fighters had at last achieved air supremacy in the skies over the Third Reich.

For those on ground duty the time dragged on with two years in England already gone by. Rumor mills began to grind rapidly in the fall of 1944 with frequent forecasts of an early end to hostilities. Predicted dates came and went, and still the missions continued. However, the atmosphere of Thurleigh was changing; there was now a solidly grounded belief that the war would soon be over.

Men who had been there the longest were changed in many ways and the boys of Wendover had become mature men. Many had married English girls though there seems to be no accurate accounting of the number. Father Adrian Poletti later estimated that he may have performed fifty marriages at Thurleigh. The total of men with British wives may have been as high as one hundred. The number of children born to these couples will probably never be known because of the complexities of compiling and comparing both birth and marriage records.

October began with the 369th Squadron acquiring a new commander, Capt. James A. McKinney. He was a West Pointer of the class of January, 1943, and had come to the 306th on 28 August as a pilot.

There were almost daily missions, eighteen during the month, with more in the first fifteen days than in the last. On 3 October Capt. Sam S. McNeely, Jr., a veteran intelligence officer, was named station historian and station security officer. Marksmen were invited to join a carbine competition to represent the group in the First Division finals.

5 Oct Basil O'Connor, national chairman of the American Red Cross, came to Thurleigh on 5 October at the invitation of Col. Sutton. With him were Richard Allen, national vice chairman in charge of service to the Armed Forces, and Harvey Gibson, director in Great Britain and France. Newly-appointed to his post, O'Connor at Thurleigh was seeing his first combat station. Other Red Cross personnel present were Harry Studer, field director; Peg Haapa, Aeroclub director; Betty Bowley and Mary Kate Wheeler, staff assistants in the Aeroclub; Polly Serber, clubmobile supervisor; Frances Cookson, captain, and Betty Stroud and Elizabeth Turner, assistants. After lunch O'Connor and the other guests watched the planes return from a mission to Cologne and Coblenz.

7 Oct On the 7th the group was off again to Ruhland, the first visit since the disastrous mission of 12 September. Another six planes and crews were detailed to Air-Sea rescue duty, on station over prescribed areas of the North Sea. In response to a signal picked up by their radio operator, Lt. Leon Risk and his crew left their assigned station and soon spotted seven to nine men in a life raft with a sail. They transmitted an SOS and circled the raft from 1050 to 1232 until two rescue launches arrived and retrieved the downed crew.

10 Oct Capt. Lester G. Williams became acting station ordnance officer on 10 October, replacing Maj. Thurman E. Dawson. This same day 1st Lt. Hubert R. Jones was named station courts and boards officer. Capt. Charles P. McKim, a veteran medical officer, was transferred on 13 October to the 457th Bomb Group where he became group surgeon. He was replaced in the 423rd Squadron by Capt. Louis A. Lame.

12-13<sup>th</sup> Weather kept the group from attacking the enemy for three days, although a practice mission was flown on the 12th. On the 13th briefing for a mission to Cologne was postponed from 0440 to 0800 and then scrubbed at 1000. The planes went to Cologne on the 14th and again the following day. On the 15th the lead plane was hit on the bomb run and went out of control for a short period, though the pilot was later able to regain stability. Lt. John G. Davis, Jr., the deputy from the 369th, took over the lead and the bombs were dropped on the smoke bombs of the group ahead. Antiaircraft fire was accurate and intense on the lead group, with three planes knocked out of formation. Five additional planes had severe damage and five were slightly damaged.

14 Oct  
15 Oct 2nd Lt. Warren M. Doman and his crew were flying in the number 6 position. At bombs away the top turret was hit by flak and Sgt. Louis D. Hardin was seriously wounded. The oxygen, hydraulic and electrical systems were knocked out at the same time. Doman tried to follow the formation for a period, but had to let down after crossing the Rhine River. Two P-47s escorted him across the "bomb line" (west of which no bombing could be done because of the advance of the Allied troops)

south of Aachen. Once they knew they were over friendly territory, red-red flares were fired to indicate wounded aboard. "Skipper", one of the P-47s, then guided Doman to Strip A-87 at Gosselles near Charleroi, a 9th AF field, where he landed. Credit for saving the seriously wounded Hardin went to 2nd Lt. Robert H. Wood, copilot, for getting him out of the turret quickly, and to 2nd Lt. James J. Fitzsimmons, navigator, for administering first aid. Fitzsimmons first gave Hardin a shot of morphine, and then began patching up the engineer's right leg and packing a wound on the inside of the left knee which was bleeding profusely. Then he applied tourniquets to both of Hardin's legs. When Hardin was examined later at the 115th General Hospital at Liege, doctors found three holes in the right leg and two in the left. The medics said that Hardin would not have lived another ten minutes had not Fitzsimmons taken immediate and direct action to stop the flow of blood. Doman and the remainder of the crew returned to Thurleigh a few days later.

Flying just ahead of and above Doman was 2nd Lt. Robert G. Ritter, on the left wing of the group leader. At about the same time as Doman's plane was hit, Ritter's received a direct 88 mm burst in the nose, which blew off most of the front of the plane. Killed were 2nd Lt. Joseph A. Seibert, navigator; 2nd Lt. Robert A. Stalker, bombardier; and 2nd Lt. Roy W. Duncan, copilot. Ritter, S/Sgt. Samuel J. Bussieres, engineer; S/Sgt. John J. Daly, radio; Sgt. Kenneth D. Ross, ball turret; Sgt. Daniel F. Callahan, waist; and Sgt. John W. Tomke, tail gunner, bailed out of the stricken craft and survived as prisoners of war.

2nd Lt. William Moroz was flying his plane in the number 5 spot of the lead group and he too was shot out of formation over the target. When last seen he had number 2 and number 4 engines feathered and was headed west. Moroz radioed the group that he was going to France and intended to land there. He never made it. The crew bailed out and survived, again as prisoners: 2nd Lt. George S. Cowan, copilot; 2nd Lt. Seymour M. Feinstein, navigator; 2nd Lt. Joseph L. Blotner, bombardier; S/Sgt. Robert C. Corbin, engineer; S/Sgt. Joe T. Dean, radio; Sgt. Marcus M. Finley, ball; Sgt. Gerald L. Beaupre, waist; and Sgt. John M. Holzermer, tail gunner.

On 17 October three original officers of the group turned over their duties to later arrivals and headed for new assignments in the States: Lt. Col. Robert C. Williams, handed Group Operations to Maj. Thomas F. Witt; Maj. Walter H. Coons relinquished the Group Bombardier's post to Capt. Donald R. Ross; and Maj. Charles E. Flannagan transferred the 367th Squadron to Maj. Earl W. Kesling.

The next day was one of those frustrating days that combat crews, ground crews and most base personnel had long since learned to hate. Flyers were out of bed at 0230 for a 0330 briefing, after a long mission

the previous day, the fourth to Cologne in the month. This day's target was to be Kassel. Briefing was held and specialized briefings were completed. Crews picked up their parachute bags, escape kits and other equipment and were at their planes at 0600. Takeoff was scheduled for 0706. The weather had been soupy since the night before and even to the uninitiated looked highly questionable for flying. It was with a sense of relief and utter futility that the men around the planes watched the red-red flares arc from the control tower at 0705, scrubbing everything. Reversing their routes, the combat crews returned all of their equipment and then headed back to bed, only to return to the flying area in the afternoon for regular squadron meetings.

19 Oct  
 Capt. Joseph L. Murphy, 369th, flying in the deputy group leader's spot on 19 October, was hit hard just before the target at Mannheim and lost two engines and his aileron controls. He made it home alone on two engines and landed without difficulty although with a flat tire.

As the British and American ground forces advanced, they captured pieces of abandoned equipment from German radar installations. From these bits and pieces the British tried to assemble a complete German early warning radar installation. When some of the vital parts were found to be missing, British commandos accompanied by technical experts raided a radar station along the Channel coast and acquired the parts needed to complete the work. On the day when the 306th planes joined others to bomb Mannheim, another dozen planes from Thurleigh assembled into formation over England and flew to Farnborough where they became part of a test of the newly-acquired Nazi radar station. Four runs were made over the equipment: the first without chaff, the second with radio operators putting chaff down the chutes in the floor of the radio rooms, the third with chaff dumped from the bomb bays in what was called "razzle dazzle," and the fourth with a lead group all discharging chaff to attract gunfire while the bombers were able to proceed undetected to the target.

21 Oct  
 Maj. Elbert Odle, 368th Squadron operations officer since 13 February 1943, left on 21 October for the States and was replaced by Capt. George DeVack.

22 Oct  
 The mission of 22 October was marked by two midair collisions involving the 306th Group. The first came at 1222 while the group was climbing from Cromer to the Dutch Coast enroute to Munster where it was to bomb a foundry. At 12,000 and in a slight climb, 1st Lt. Harry J. Alyea, Jr., leader of the high squadron, reduced indicated air speed to 140 mph. This was confirmed in a conversation between Alyea and Lt. Harold Brown, one of his wingmen, who had radioed to ask what the airspeed was in the lead ship. At this same time, the number 4 ship

flying "in the hole" underneath and behind Alyea's plane, slid ahead but made no attempt to clear itself from the lead plane by dropping down. The two planes remained very close together for about ten seconds and then collided. Capt. Joseph B. Mathis III, a veteran of a year's combat flying with the 423rd Squadron, was the pilot of "Lilly Marlene" in the slot on this mission. When the planes hit, Mathis' ship exploded and disappeared, while Alyea's went down in a spin.

"We were flying lead and the slot plane cut our tail off," said S/Sgt. Hastings S. Key, Jr., the sole survivor out of the two crews. "I was in the tail, fell out with my chute hooked on one ring, and, when I was free of debris, hooked the other side, pulled the rip cord and landed in the water. I was picked up forty-five minutes later by British Air-Sea Rescue and returned to Norwich."

Others on Alyea's crew who died that day were Capt. William C. McKee III, copilot; 1st Lt. Charles F. Handler, navigator; 1st Lt. Charles E. Mueller, bombardier; 2nd Lt. Raymond L. Layfield, radar navigator; T/Sgt. Gilbert H. Terry, engineer; S/Sgt. Donald W. Coleman, radio; S/Sgt. Robert P.M. Capps, ball turret; and S/Sgt. Vincent E. O'Brien, waist. Casualties in "Lilly Marlene" besides Mathis were Maj. Joseph E. Lowe, copilot; 1st Lt. Gorman W. Siler, navigator; 1st Lt. Ivan Brill, navigator; T/Sgt. John P. Maupin, engineer; T/Sgt. William R. Covington, radio; S/Sgt. Creston O. Cooke, Jr., ball turret; S/Sgt. Joe A. Kasmiersky, waist; and S/Sgt. Carroll L. Reimann, tail. Maj. Lowe had been transferred to the 306th three days earlier from First Division and was flying his first combat mission.

The mission continued on to Hannover where the target was the Hannoversche Maschinenbau A.G. and the planes were due back at their home base at 1735. Ground crews and other personnel had gathered to watch the planes come home when at about 1710 planes of the 305th Group appeared over Thurleigh in very murky weather. The ceiling was down to about 800 feet. One squadron was approaching from the east and was well in sight when another squadron broke out of the gloom on the south side of Thurleigh. Reportedly both squadron leaders saw each other, were in radio contact and agreed that the westbound group would climb and the northbound group would descend. All went well until the last of the northbound planes went up instead of down and collided with the tail end plane of the westbound group. There was an horrendous explosion. The two crews, totalling seventeen men, were all killed. Bodies were scattered over the 367th dispersal area and one of the runways. Falling debris started several fires around the base and the incident caused great anguish among those who witnessed it. In February of 1945 a picture of the collision taken by T/Sgt. Francis L. Waugh was released and

appeared in statewide newspapers; it remains one of the outstanding air action pictures of the war. *(see appendix p. 245)*

30 Oct The following day Capt. Richard Nickelhoff, an eleven-month veteran as a 423rd pilot, was appointed group gunnery officer. Maj. Thomas M. Hulings became commanding officer of the 368th Squadron; he replaced Lt. Col. Maurice V. Salada, who had moved to air executive officer during the temporary absence of Lt. Col. William S. Raper. Col. Raper left the group for good on 30 October, assuming command of the 303rd Bomb Group. Appointments later in the month included: Capt. Seymour D. Ramby, station legal assistance officer; 1st Lt. Gordon A. Spencer, group PFF navigator, replacing 1st Lt. Albert G. Damico, Jr., who had held the post for two weeks; Maj. James M. Venable, Jr., station reciprocal aid and lend-lease reporting officer; and Capt. Phil G. Kraft, station claims officer, replacing Maj. Donald M. Eckstein.

31 Oct On 31 October it was calculated that 160 aircraft had been lost by the 306th to all causes since the Group had arrived in England. By this date it had also recorded 72,918 flying hours and had dropped 13,819 tons of bombs.

About 600 Air Medals were given out during October, along with sixty Distinguished Flying Crosses and six Purple Hearts. Although no Bronze Star medals were yet on hand, the decoration was given to Maj. Edward T. Miazza, Capt. Seymour D. Ramby, 1st Lt. Charles E. Murphy and T/Sgt. Demetrius G. Chakiris.

During November the 306th flew eleven missions, eight of them against oil targets. Two ground support missions were flown, both bombing through complete overcast. Gen. George S. Patton was lavish in his praise of the accuracy of the 8th, since all bombs fell ahead of the American troops on enemy positions.

As to Luftwaffe fighter attacks, the group history says: "Their best efforts appear to be sporadic, all-out attempts against elements of the 8th AF and not against the whole show. The attacks have been very costly to those groups which had to bear the brunt of the attacks . . . The Germans have turned more and more to flak defenses since they have found it impossible to keep pace in the air . . ."

Col. James S. Sutton on 8 November won favor with many men as he ordered the establishment of an hourly bus service to and from Bedford, a welcome relief to many who had found transportation either expensive or non-existent.

Capt. Neill G. Kirby joined the 423rd as a pilot. Flying his first mission on 8 November, after having flown a combat tour in the Pacific, he observed: "The flak compares to the flak at the more difficult targets in the Pacific. You are in it about the same length of time. The Pacific missions are longer but we seldom were on oxygen as

Football

we bombed from about 7,000 feet." One wonders how Merseberg at 7,000 would have been this day, as it was extremely "hot" above 25,000 feet. As an added feature on this mission against the synthetic refining center the group climbed through clouds and heavy contrails to 19,000 feet before breaking into the clear.

Another feature of the fall of 1944 was the organizing of a group football team. A field was laid out on the flying area in front of the control tower. During games a mixture of American and English fans would stand along the sidelines, much as many high school and college spectators did in the States before WW II. 1st Lt. Abraham Grondin, commander of the Chemical Warfare Service detachment was the coach and Sgt. John A. Savedge the manager. Among players listed was R. Navinger, left end; Robert Yahn, left tackle; Joe Ross, left guard; LeeRoy Patterson, center; John E. Buckley, right guard; Walter E. Renn, right tackle; Adolph Visconti, right end; Homer L. Burch, Jr., quarterback; William Kaufman and Warren Sellen, halfbacks; and George Bowers, fullback. Other players whose positions are not known were Wilbur Bowers, Kirt Coburn, Donald MacDonald, George W. Johnson, Arthur Vann and Clements Amundsen.

On the 16th the planes went to Eschweiler for front line bombing. Of the forty-eight ships launched on this mission only three reached Thurleigh on their return. The clouds went up to 12,000 feet and these three planes made it down through the murk by Gee Box navigation and found the flare pots five miles east of the end of runway 24. Visibility was zero, except straight up and straight down, and any kind of flying was extremely hazardous. Most of the other forty-five planes made it to Honeybourn, an RAF training station, and had to remain there until the 18th.

A new wrinkle, which had an unmistakable suggestion of the peacetime army, entered the financial picture on the base during November: monthly dues of ten shillings were voted by the members to support the Officers' Clubs.

Col. Sutton led thirty-six planes to Merseberg on 21 November while the group also provided a twelve-ship protective force to carry large quantities of chaff ahead of the bombers. Designed to skirt flak areas and to shield the bombers from anti-aircraft radar detection, the screening force was itself hit by flak four different times. Weather finally forced the group to turn around and to make a run on Osna-bruck. Col. Sutton's lead plane lost two engines on the bomb run.

1st Lt. Edwin A. Schoenbachler and crew in "Casa de Umbrigo" were knocked out of formation when two rounds of flak hit under the nose, wounding 1st Lt. Matthew I. Radnofsky, the navigator. These same explosions also set the number 2 engine on fire and severed the throttle linkage to the number 1 engine. Then another burst hit on the

fo  
to

16 Nov

21 Nov

right side of this 423rd plane and 2nd Lt. Marvin E. Traver, copilot, was badly wounded in his right leg. A little trouble was nothing new to Schoenbachler who was flying his thirty-fourth mission nor to most of the remainder of the crew which was nearing the end of its combat tour. The exception was 2nd Lt. George C. Hauck, radar navigator, who was on his first mission. T/Sgt. Robert W. Moore, engineer, was knocked out by the concussion from the last detonation. Finally when the aircraft appeared doomed, Schoenbachler ordered his veteran crew to bail out. The pilot landed near Firsteman, Germany, and was spotted by children on bicycles. In short order he was in the town jail below the city hall.

S/Sgt. William E. Martin, waist, found the back door jammed and went back to the tail escape hatch. That was crowded with two men trying to get out, so he returned to the waist door where he and T/Sgt. Norbert A. Lynch, radio, finally got the pins out of the door hinges, kicked off the door and jumped. Martin delayed opening his chute and finally landed on top of a tree; he slid off into a church yard only to find a Home Guardsman waiting for him. He was taken to a Biergarten first and then soldiers picked him up and took him to a school where he met Moore. Lynch had also made a delayed jump, landed safely, and then evaded capture for some hours by hiding in a woods. About 11 that night he ran into a two-man Home Guard road block and was shortly in jail.

The tail gunner on this mission for Schoenbachler was another veteran who could not be blamed for viewing the whole episode with considerable trepidation. On his last mission, 22 October, S/Sgt. Hastings S. Key, Jr. had ended up in the North Sea, the only survivor of a two-plane collision. Today his combat career ended with only one more trip marked to his credit. He got out of the plane without difficulty and was soon in a German prison camp where he stayed for the duration of the war. Other members of the crew who bailed out were 1st Lt. Douglas K. McKnight, bombardier, and S/Sgt. Sam C. Pugliese, ball turret.

Thanksgiving fell on 23 November and the principal observance for Americans took place in St. Paul's Church, Bedford, where Lt. Gen. James H. Doolittle read the presidential Thanksgiving Proclamation. Chaplain W.E. Dorre, senior chaplain of the 8th AF, gave the address, and Capt. Ralph E. Simester, Protestant chaplain at Thurleigh, offered the prayer. Among dignitaries attending were the Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire and the Lord Mayors of Bedford, Luton and Dunstable. Back on the base everyone was served an excellent, traditional American Thanksgiving dinner at midday and the leftovers were sufficient for the evening meal.

In the Dummer Lake area, always regarded as a "hot spot" for

Thanksgiving  
23 Nov.

2670

German fighter attacks, the 306th flyers on 26 November saw the P-51 escort take on all that the Luftwaffe could offer. The Germans hit the front of the bomber stream, and then began to queue up for an attack on the 306th. Before they could press home their assault, however, the response to the call "Bandits!" had summoned American fighters from far and near, all spoiling for action against the enemy. Although the P-51s kept the attackers away from the 306th, for the next hour the air was full of newly-arriving pairs of fighters all looking for a German to shoot down.

The 306th continued on to Misburg, near Hannover, where bombardiers had been carefully briefed to bomb a refinery producing lubricating oils and low grade fuels, while avoiding a nearby POW camp. 2nd Lt. Walter P. Rozett, 369th pilot, and S/Sgt. Charles Walters, 367th tail gunner, both suffered flak wounds. Sixteen of the forty-eight planes up this day had flak damage classed as severe. 1st Lt. Richard L. Breed's 367th plane was shot out of formation with the number 2 engine feathered, the instruments on number 1 inoperative and the engine smoking and running rough. The number 3 engine had an oil leak and on final approach to an emergency landing at Woodbridge actually caught fire.

In late November the flying personnel of the group won recognition for their "Share the Smokes" move. Combat crewmen were allotted five packages of cigarettes a week, while non-flyers were not being allocated any. At a meeting it was decided by the flyers to limit their PX ration to three packs a week, thus opening the way for non-flying personnel to get a pack a week. The cigarette shortage was indicative of the increasing numbers of ground troops in France and the limited shipping space available for such items as cigarettes.

An event of historical significance took place on 27 November when Lt. Col. Maurice V. Salada was transferred from his post as air executive officer and deputy commander of the 306th to the 40th C.W. He thus became the last flying officer from the original thirty-five crews that came to Thurlough to end his combat career with the 306th. At least four other pilots were still active with the 8th AF at this time, along with one former commander of the 423rd Squadron and the first group operations officer. Lt. Col. Henry W. Terry was commanding officer of the 91st Bomb Group; Lt. Col. William S. Raper, commander, 303rd Bomb Group; Lt. Col. Robert P. Riordan, 92nd air executive; Maj. John R. McKee, 92nd Bomb Group operations officer; Lt. Col. James W. Wilson, commander, 92nd Bomb Group; and Col. William H. Cleveland, commander, 466th Bomb Group (B-24s).

With this passing of the old guard, perhaps it is fitting to pause here and review what did happen to the 315 combat crewmen who went to England on the thirty-five nine-man crews in September of 1942:

27/16

	Pilots	Cps	Nav	Bom	Eng	RO	Guns	Total
25 Missions	8	8	8	8	5	9	22	68
Killed in action	12	9	9	10	10	8	32	90
Died of wounds		1	1				1	3
Killed	2	1	2	2	2	1	3	13
Wounded and left combat		1	2	3			4	10
Prisoners of war	6	12	9	9	9	13	29	88
Evadees	3	1	2	1	1		1	9
Transferred	4	2	1	1	2	1	5	15
Non-flying status				1	5	3	5	14
Unknown			1		1		3	5

Personnel changes at the end of the month included Capt. Joseph A. LaMotta's designation as reclassification officer and Lt. Earl W. Rudolph's appointment as station bomb dispersal officer. The reclassification officer was charged with examining men on the base who could be transferred into ground combat units on the continent where there was an urgent need for more manpower, a need which would soon increase dramatically with the start of the German offensive known as the Battle of the Bulge. As a result, some 306th Air Force personnel found themselves on their way to rifleman duties, while men no longer suited for ground combat service were being transferred into the 306th.

29 Nov. Weather hampered combat operations until the 29th when Maj. James A. McKinney led thirty-six planes back to Misburg for another strike at the refinery there. On the following day Maj. Thomas M. Hulings took the planes to a synthetic oil refinery at Bohlen. The target was completely obscured by ground haze and a smoke screen. Because of fuel problems and confusion in the target area between a number of groups, twenty 306th planes bombed Gera and sixteen dropped at Ohrdruf.

30 Nov. At the end of November eight crew chiefs and their planes were cited for having completed more than one hundred missions: "Skipper", 101 missions, M/Sgt. Adolph Visconti, 367th; "Pretty Baby", 105 missions, M/Sgt. John A. Halzel, 367th; "Steady Hedy", 118 missions, M/Sgt. Everett V. Daniels, 369th; "We Promised", 101 missions, Sgt. Jackson VanDever, 367th; "Bouncing Baby", 108 missions, Sgt. James A. Furay, 369th; "How Soon", 108 missions, S/Sgt. Lawrence C. Foster, 369th; "Solid Sender", 100 missions, S/Sgt. Joseph F. Terrana, 423rd; "She Has To", 106 missions, T/Sgt. Earl Deibert, 368th; and "Begin the Beguine", 113 missions, M/Sgt. Donald W. Dougan, 368th.

In late 1944 another innovation came about in operations which was of considerable help to the bombers in their final target selection. The idea came from Col. Budd Peaslee, onetime bomb group commander

and later 40th CW commander, who started the Buckeye weather scout program. Veteran bomber pilots were checked out in the P-51s and then scouted the route and target area ahead of the bombers. These pilots could furnish air commanders with up to date information viewed through the eyes of experienced bomber pilots about one-half hour ahead of the bomber stream. It began operating in November and was on every mission in December.

Capt. Henry Hanson, 367th, was air commander for the 40th CW "B" force to Berlin on 5 December. There were four PFF ships in the formation and they made the normal thirty to forty minute bomb run under radar conditions on the target at the General Engineering and Armament Works of Rheinmetal in northwest Berlin. Forty-five seconds before the drop point a hole opened in the clouds and Capt. Arthur Vann, lead bombardier, was able to make a visual correction on the target. Just before bombs away, however, he was hit in the eye by flying glass and the navigator toggled out the bombs on elapsed time. "Little Lulu", a 423rd ship flown by 2nd Lt. Wayne M. Stetler, was hit and went down over Berlin. There were only three survivors from the crew and nothing is known about what actually happened to the plane. Those who lived were F/O Samuel J. Culbert, Jr., navigator; 2nd Lt. Arthur G. Dealy, bombardier; and S/Sgt. Robert D. Jarvis, engineer. Besides Stetler, others killed were 2nd Lt. Andrew Pauko, Jr., copilot; S/Sgt. Donald R. Frantz, radio; Sgt. Daniel R. Tachan, ball turret; Sgt. Charles C. Laubach, Jr., waist; and Sgt. William J. Eschenbach, tail gunner.

Just after bombs away, 2nd Lt. William B. Kaufman, navigator for 1st Lt. Howard O. Balcom, was hit in the head by a piece of flak and died instantly. Balcom later called this the worst mission of his entire tour with the 367th. Another 367th plane, "Fightin' Car barn Hammerslaw" (named for a comic strip character), was shot out of formation over Berlin and disappeared from view. Later on planes heard a message to Air-Sea Rescue and a fix on its position was reported. The plane was never seen again and was presumed to have gone down in the North Sea. 2nd Lt. Charles F. Manning was the pilot and the officers of this crew lived together in a barracks that had not lost anyone in combat for more than eighteen months. The other crew members were 2nd Lt. Paul A. Wilson, copilot; F/O Norman Schneider, navigator; 2nd Lt. Paul Tannenbaum, bombardier; Sgt. William Nusser, engineer; Sgt. Vincent S. Johnson, radio; Sgt. Harry L. Gile, ball turret; Sgt. Edwin R. Dewey, waist; and Sgt. John A. Cox, Jr., tail.

In addition to being a rough day in the air, this day had not started well back at Thurleigh. Before takeoff, 2nd Lt. Joe D. Marsh, a 368th pilot, was killed by a .50 caliber machine gun bullet. During installation and check-out of ball turret guns at a remote dispersal area two rounds were inadvertently fired. One of these ricocheted off a wall and hit

9 Dec

Marsh in the back. Many combat crewmen agreed that one of the scariest moments they experienced was during the pre-dawn wait at their planes when they heard one or two shots boom out from one of the machine guns being prepared in planes dispersed around the airfield.

9 Dec. Meager flak was reported over Stuttgart on 9 December but it was sufficient to knock down one 306th plane and to drop another out of formation for a long, lone trip to Messenger A/D in France and then back to Thurleigh two days later. 1st Lt. Robert H. Brown's plane was flying in the number 3 position in the lead group of the 40th CW when it was hit. 1st Lt. William F. Giglio, copilot, had started combat flying with Brown in mid-July and, on this his thirty-fifth mission, was seriously wounded. With the number 4 engine and the right wing on fire, the order was given to abandon ship. Giglio had been hit in the right knee by a piece of flak, which then continued up into his thigh and came out close to his torso. Giglio was bleeding badly, but got out of his seat and went down to the nose hatch, which proved to be frozen shut. The bomb bay doors were opened and Giglio crawled back out of the catwalk, through the base of the upper turret and then dived out of the bomb bay. Leaving the plane at over 20,000 feet, the wounded man permitted himself to drop a considerable distance before opening his parachute.

When he landed, Giglio's leg was further battered and he was unable to move from the spot. He was almost immediately picked up by some German soldiers and taken to a nearby town. Up to that time he was not sure on which side of the German-French border he was, until he saw a street sign that read "Adolf Hitler Strasse". The soldiers put a tourniquet on Giglio's bleeding leg, loaded him into a truck with some other members of his crew and set out. Shortly they came to a hospital and left the wounded man there. The copilot was treated and, after a week, the doctors determined that they could not save his leg and amputated it. After several weeks Giglio was transferred to Dulag Luft. When offered a choice between prison camp and a nearby hospital, he chose the hospital and remained there until liberated. Only the pilot was killed and it was never determined whether he had bailed out of the plane or not. Brown had often told Giglio that he would never jump from a plane. Those who were imprisoned were 2nd Lt. James B. Walden, navigator; 1st Lt. James R. Moore, bombardier; T/Sgt. Jerrold J. Fann, engineer; Sgt. Raymond A. Ohm, radio; S/Sgt. Samuel E. Abdelnour, ball turret; S/Sgt. Ernest P. Hovey, waist; and S/Sgt. Joseph W. Bollard, tail.

Another 369th plane was hit at the same time, that of 2nd Lt. Roy E. Trask. The plane had its rudder and right aileron cables severed and all hydraulic and right Tokyo tank lines cut. The rear spar was also

sheared and there were many other flak holes. Trask was able to control the plane by using the trim tab on the left aileron and by jockeying his engines. S/Sgt. Charles C. Krone, ball turret, and S/Sgt. Emil R. Wilke in the waist got busy with some bomb arming wires and patched the rudder cables back together so that the pilot could exercise at least some directional control on landing. S/Sgt. Elmer R. Wilke, the other half of the twins on this crew, received some flak splinters in an eye.

Kassel was a tough mission on 15 December; the target was completely obscured and the bombs were dropped by radar. The weather was bad on return to England and at about 2100 feet the 368th plane of 2nd Lt. Charles A. Crooks collided with the 423rd plane of 2nd Lt. Lorn A. Wilke. Both planes crashed at Greenham Common, killing all but two of the men. Wilke remembers hearing a loud noise, followed by an explosion. His plane blew apart at the cockpit and he and his copilot, 1st Lt. John A. Murphy, escaped. They both opened their chutes immediately. Wilke landed on the wing of a C-47 at a troop carrier base, injuring his leg. As Murphy jumped, the plane stayed with him until he popped his chute and got away from the wreckage. His canopy caught in a tree on a hospital evacuation base and he was suspended two feet above the ground. Two men in a jeep arrived almost immediately and rescued him. They had him in the hospital within minutes to be examined and to have a cut on his face treated. Because of the bad weather, the collision was virtually unobserved by other flyers in the formation. Killed from Wilke's crew, most of whom had arrived with him in mid-July, were F/O Edward S. Smolenski, navigator; 1st Lt. Richard E. Gard, bombardier; T/Sgt. William R. Farrell, radio; T/Sgt. Robert K. Reis, engineer; S/Sgt. Walter E. DeHoff, ball turret; Sgt. William J. Boyle, waist; and S/Sgt. Gail W. Pashon, tail. Members of Crooks' crew who perished that day were 2nd Lt. J.P. Mockus, copilot; 2nd Lt. Elijah B. Slocum, navigator; T/Sgt. Harold A. Polderman, nose gunner; Sgt. Albert W. Seaberg, radio; S/Sgt. Wayne F. Laubert, engineer; Sgt. Joseph M. Mandula, ball turret; Sgt. Lloyd Cain, waist; and Sgt. Richard W. Miller, tail. Both Wilke and Murphy were able to return to combat flying after periods of hospitalization and recuperation.

2nd Lt. William A. Ruffin's plane encountered engine problems on the mission when first the number 4 engine failed. Ruffin pulled his plane out of formation at the IP and feathered 4, made a solo bomb run and then headed home, picking up fighter escort and one of the group's PFF planes which furnished navigational help. Well along toward home, Ruffin feathered his number 1 engine and, when the weather closed in over the Channel and he could not let down, he turned back towards Messenger A/D to land. Shortly before landing

15 Dec cont'd

24 Dec

28 Dec

29 Dec

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*Routine Missions?*

his number 2 engine also began to give trouble. Ruffin's crew threw out much of their equipment — even the copilot's wrist watch. 2nd Lt. Edward E. Huelat, Jr. was helping the crew when an object caught the wrist band of his watch and tore the watch from his arm and carried it out of the plane. The crew reported that even their escape kits had gone overboard. Two days later the crew was flown back to Thurleigh.

Christmas Eve found the 306th sending twelve planes to Nidda to posthole an airfield and thirty-four planes to Giessen to bomb airfield installations. Weather closed in on the way home and forty-six crews were forced to "enjoy" the Christmas hospitality of bases east of Thurleigh. By Christmas evening some of the crews made it home, but the majority did not return until the 27th.

A mission to Siegburg on 28 December was foiled because of a radar malfunction, failure of bombs to release and a lack of radio communication. The high squadron did manage to bomb the primary, while the lead and low bombed at Coblenz. On the trip home 1st Lt. Paul J. Reioux's plane caught fire, probably from an electrical short fed by oxygen in the nose. Ten minutes from Thurleigh Reioux rang the alarm bell. 2nd Lt. Robert Daniel, copilot, went back to check the gunners and then bailed out the rear door. 2nd Lt. James C. Talley, navigator, jumped and founded that his chute was partially fused by the fire in the plane. He managed to tear the pack open with his hands and to deploy the chute in time. Reioux swung around the bomb racks, slipped and fell on the bomb doors, but clambered back onto the catwalk and went out the rear door. 2nd Lt. Milton J. Olshewitz, bombardier, had already changed into his dress uniform in preparation for a quick departure from the base; he jumped without chute or harness and was the only member of the crew killed. Enlisted members of the crew were T/Sgt. John B. Price, Jr., engineer; T/Sgt. Herman H. Kaye, radio; S/Sgt. Leon J. Persac, Jr., ball turret; S/Sgt. Colvin W. Sheorn, waist; and S/Sgt. John W. Perry, tail.

Flak was meager the following day at the marshalling yards at Bingen, but the mission cost the 368th a plane. 1st Lt. Edwin D. Woellner, Jr. and his crew sustained three direct hits on their plane at 1320, just after the bombs were dropped. One hit in the tail, another in the waist, and the third in the bomb bay. This last shot ignited the oxygen system and the plane was doomed, although T/Sgt. Clarence E. Gibbs, engineer, and T/Sgt. Glenn A. Korf, radio, tried to fight the fire with all the extinguishers available. Sgt. Homer C. Nyberg was burned to death in his ball turret. The crew bailed out and nothing was ever found of Gibbs, 2nd Lt. Carmon J. Nickols, copilot, or S/Sgt. Yuen Hop, tail gunner.

With three engines out and only number 1 remaining, Woellner had ordered the bail out. The pilot went out of the plane at more than

20,000 feet and, when he landed near Bingen, was surrounded by fifty farmers armed with pitchforks and old weapons. One old man beat him on the hips and legs with an ancient rifle, bruising Woellner severely. He was saved when a dozen Home Guardsmen hove into sight and ran up yelling "Verboten! Verboten!" At a Red Cross station in Bingen the pilot met other members of his crew: Korf, Cpl. Franklin J. Lehnert, waist; 2nd Lt. Theodore E. Pollard, navigator; and T/Sgt. Frank L. Arnold, nose gunner. Korf later said that in his travels through Bingen he observed that the marshalling yards were untouched but the rest of the city was in flames. Woellner spent two weeks at Dulag Luft and then was marooned on a train bound for Stalag Luft I at Barth for another two weeks because conditions in Berlin were so chaotic from bomb damage that it was difficult for a train to get through.

A final mission to Mainz on 30 December ended the work of the 306th for 1944.

The fighting Thurleigh football team finished its season in late December, registering four wins, two losses and three ties.

Ten Purple Heart medals were awarded during the month and five Bronze Star medals were presented: Capt. Henderson N. Knight, 423rd; M/Sgt. Wilbur S. Barks, Group headquarters; M/Sgt. George H. Allen and S/Sgt. Byron W. Pirtle, 368th; and T/Sgt. John L. Norris, 423rd.

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1 Jan 45

## Chapter 22

# THE WAR WINDS DOWN

## January-March 1945

War did not wait for a New Year's Eve celebration to be terminated properly. When men might otherwise be expected to be sleeping off the effects of the night's revelry, the combat crews were in the briefing room getting the word about a predawn takeoff scheduled for 0651.

1 Jan

Weather throughout the mission played tricks on the crews and eventually slowed their return to base and bed considerably. Lt. Col. Thomas M. Hulings led the group across Magdeburg twice, failing to drop either time because of clouds. Buckeye weather scouts had advised the bombers that the target would be clear on their arrival. The 306th then tried a run on Göttingen, but the bombs were held again when the target was obscured. A run was finally set up in the marshalling yards at Kassel and the lead and low groups did drop their bombs, but the high group aborted the run and turned off to bomb the marshalling yards at Limburg. The group flew more than twice as many missions in this January than it had in January 1944, but weather played havoc with both the flying and the bombing on numerous occasions.

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Coming home from Magdeburg the low group ran into weather during its letdown over the North Sea. When the group broke out and the twelve ships tried to reform again, there were only eleven. The plane of 1st Lt. Robert D. Stewart, 369th, and his crew was not seen again. Nothing was ever learned about the missing plane and it is presumed that it went down in the North Sea and that nine men drowned. These included Stewart, 2nd Lt. Kenneth H. Strine, copilot; 2nd Lt. Lewis L. Wilson, navigator; T/Sgt. Louis J. Peterson, togglier; T/Sgt. Anthony R. Cecere, engineer; T/Sgt. Gilbert A. Maple, radio; S/Sgt. William J. McCue, ball turret; S/Sgt. Donald F. Bohrer, waist; and S/Sgt. Roy L. Chancellor, tail. Stewart was a veteran of more than twenty-five missions and the combat experience of some of the enlisted men dated back to April of 1944.

Jan

2, 3, 4

5, 6, 7, 8

With the four bomb runs, 100 octane became a critical factor on the way home and seven of the planes touched down at Messenger to refuel. They then found that seventy-five German fighter planes had made a morning visit, wrecking havoc among the American and British planes parked there.

Missions were also flown on the 2nd and 3rd. When no mission was called on the 4th, the 306th put up thirty-six airplanes for a formation gunnery mission over The Wash. There were also combat mission on the 5th, 6th and 7th. Flying to Speyer on the 8th, the group had a

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confusing time in trying to decipher the information given out by the Buckeye scout who first had trouble finding the general area, then picking up the target, and finally not being sure whether he could see the target or not through the heavy haze. After bombing in the vicinity of Speyer, the group was hit by flak several minutes later in the Ludwigshafen-Mannheim area. 2nd Lt. John L. Davis, 367th, had lost his number 2 engine before reaching the IP, dropped his bombs and then, as he turned off the target, had his number 1 engine fail. He got the plane back to Thurleigh and was making a good final approach when a strong cross wind caught the craft causing it to stall just before touchdown. When the plane slammed onto the runway the left wing and a propellor were damaged, but there were no crew injuries.

Capt. James S. Law, a 368th veteran of two weeks in combat, took his plane off as a spare and then joined the formation. Over the target Law was severely wounded by flak and his plane lost two engines. The crew struggled back to Manston where a landing attempt ended in a crash and T/Sgt. Willie S. Fant, tail gunner, was killed. In a teletype to Thurleigh from Manston, reported as seriously injured were 2nd Lt. Kenneth A. Wait, copilot; 1st Lt. Quentin T. Conway, bombardier; T/Sgt. Floyd E. Sweet, radio; and Sgt. W.O. Timmons, ball turret. Those listed as slightly injured were 1st Lt. Paul V. Connelly, navigator; T/Sgt. Denison C. Lockhart, Jr., and Sgt. Edsel H. Trammel, waist. Two men in other planes were also wounded: 2nd Lt. George W. David, 367th bombardier, and Sgt. Benjamin M. Brown, 369th radio operator, who lost two fingers. 2nd Lt. Joseph L. Chancey landed his crippled plane at Farnborough.

The group was out again on 10 January, this time to Gymnich, and this was scored as another rough mission. Because of weather, the Gee-H (a navigation/bombing system employing two ground radio beacons and an airborne interrogator) ship took over the bomb run. The 306th formation was then forced off its course by another group and finally pushed into the Cologne flak area. Then the special equipment failed and a visual run was made on Gymnich.

Maj. James A. McKinney was the air commander on this mission and his plane was hit badly by flak one minute before the bomb drop. His entire electrical system was shot out and his waist gunner, S/Sgt. Norman C. Sulser, had his left ankle shattered by flak. McKinney dropped his plane out of formation after bombs away and headed for Brussels where he landed at RAF Base #56. Sulser was taken by RAF ambulance to RAF hospital #8 in Brussels where surgery was performed.

2nd Lt. Leo K. Reinhart's plane was hit before the target, with both number 2 and number 4 engines knocked out. Number 2 could be feathered, but number 4 was uncontrollable. The electrical system was gone. The bombardier, 1st Lt. Ernest P. Lambert, was seriously

10 Jan.

wounded in a leg and eye by flak which had knocked him off his seat. He crawled back into position and dropped the bombs despite his wounds. Later he was awarded a Silver Star for his heroism, along with the Purple Heart for the wounds. Reinhart landed the plane in a field near Quesnoy, France, because all gauges were out and he was uncertain about his fuel supply.

2nd Lt. Henry W. Pearce, Jr., was one of those pilots who thought that a flak helmet was a detriment to handling the airplane and seldom put one on. On this day at Gymnich he paid dearly for this opinion as he was hit in the head by a large piece of flak over the target. 2nd Lt. Robert E. Powers, copilot, took over the controls and landed the plane in France to get immediate medical attention for the stricken pilot. Pearce lived only a few days.

The intense damage to the 306th on this mission centered on the 369th Squadron and principally in the lead group of the formation where four of the six planes were knocked out of position. 2nd Lt. Harold C. Mattson, flying as the deputy leader to McKinney, was caught in the flak barrage and when last seen had number 1 and 2 engines on fire and was going down. One parachute was reported. Best available information indicates that Mattson and his ball turret gunner, Sgt. Joseph T. Zymanek, were killed. Surviving from the crew were 2nd Lt. Roy J. Kruger, copilot; F/O Lawrence C. Shaw, Jr., navigator; 2nd Lt. Jesse A. Bryan, bombardier; 2nd Lt. William Mocharnuk, radar navigator; S/Sgt. James M. Jenkins, engineer; S/Sgt. Richard Ramierez, radio; Sgt. Vernon T. Crowton, waist; and Sgt. David S. Koubeck, tail.

2nd Lt. Carl B. Hathaway and his crew were leading the high group in their 368th plane, "Debbie", and were hit in the radio room and waist. Bombs were toggled out on the leader very shortly thereafter, but the ship was a shambles. When a shell exploded in the radio room, S/Sgt. Meade S. Seaman, Jr., was evidently blown out of the plane and nothing further is known about him. The number 3 and 4 engines were shot out, the flux gate compass, radio compass, navigator's heat control, rudder controls, oxygen in the back of the plane and communications were all gone. Hathaway followed the formation for a while and at Aachen turned on a 290° heading, passing over Maastricht. He had two men in serious condition. He felt that the plane was going to quit flying soon as it could not be held at any altitude. Consequently Hathaway picked out Hombeck A/D near Malines, Belgium, and made a wheels up landing there. Sgt. Edward F. Danaher was badly hurt, shot through both legs and one arm, and was bleeding profusely. S/Sgt. Eugene J. Feeney had taken charge in the waist and had applied tourniquets, which probably saved Danaher's life. Feeney also had to pull S/Sgt. Harry E. Sohn, tail gunner, back into the plane

10 Jan 1945

14 Jan

when Sohn passed out while trying to bail out. Sohn was seriously frost bitten. Various members of the crew considered bailing out, but did not. Conditions in the interior of the plane were extremely hazardous with a stream of raw gasoline blowing through the plane until landing. Danaher and Sohn were taken to the 109th General Hospital at Malines. Then the remaining crew members began a long wait for transportation. They sat for three days, then finally the RAF took them to Swinden and the Air Transport Command flew them to Honington, a roundabout flight which took them over Thurleigh twice without landing. From Honington they were taken back to their base by truck.

1st Lt. Lester A. Evans, flying in the 368th's "Mamu", had somewhat less serious problems. His navigator and bombardier, 1st Lt. Cyrus Rubenstein and 2nd Lt. James E. Shook, both were suffering from anoxia. Evans took the plane out of formation south of Ghent and came home alone at a lower altitude. 1st Lt. Forrest J. Stewart, 423rd, had his number 4 engine shot out over the target, could not feather it and came back alone. He managed, however, to remain in the bomber stream.

1st Lt. Howard E. Hutchinson, 423rd, saw the plexiglas nose in the ship he was piloting give way to a flak burst which also peppered the face of 2nd Lt. Norman E. Outcalt, bombardier, with shrapnel. First the victim was treated by 2nd Lt. Wesley W. Gunkel, navigator, and then was brought back to the radio room, while Gunkel stayed in the nose to continue directing the plane's course. Hutchinson's plane was hit twice more by flak with the second blast wrecking Gunkel's oxygen regulator.

Over in a 367th plane flown by Capt. W. Bradley Butterfield three crew members were setting a record of sorts as they were all completing their second tours, a total of fifty missions each. T/Sgts. Durwood F. Offord and William A. Lindsey had joined the group in November 1943 and T/Sgt. Clarence H. Gillespie on 1 December 1943. All three men had flown thirty-mission tours, had thirty-day rest and recuperation leaves in the U.S., and then had come back to the 367th for second tours, the limit of which was set at a total of fifty missions.

This raid was illustrative of the perplexing question that had been facing the 8th AF for some months: how to handle the air traffic control problems imposed by having 500 to 1000 planes crossing the same target within a specified time and on the same course. There seemed no way to assure that all of the groups would be on time, on target or on the proper heading.

On 14 January the group was at Cologne, trying to hit the Hohenzollern bridge; strike photos showed the bombs hitting the target, but failed to reveal any major structural collapse. 1st Lt. William B. Winslow, flying number 3 position in the lead group, had his 367th plane hit

14 Jan

by flak and came home with two men seriously wounded, S/Sgt. Newell F. Russell and Sgt. Alvin C. Miller.

Weather was knocking out mission after mission, so the men of the 423rd found a bit of diversion on 16 January when they welcomed to their area Miss Elizabeth Shapley of Bedford, honored as the "Squadron Sweetheart". Accompanied by her mother, Elizabeth christened a plane, "Elizabeth's Own", and met the pilot, 1st Lt. Lorn A. Wilke and members of both the flying and ground crews. A dance followed the day's festivities and featured the music of the "Esquires": Lt. Kenneth E. Bollerup, sax; Corp. Sol M. Spital, sax; and Sgt. Daniel Bastida, guitar.

The crews were out on the 20th flying to Rheine where the marshalling yard was bombed as a secondary target. Near the IP 2nd Lt. Ned W. McKinny, 368th, lost his number 2 engine. He tagged the formation over the target and then turned west for home. About twenty minutes later the number 1 engine quit and the troubles for the crew began to multiply. As McKinny descended to 13,000 feet he came over a small town and was hit by flak again. Near Liege he found a C-47 base and prepared to land, only to find on final approach that one wheel would not come down. McKinny tried to go around, but could not get the left wing up. When the airspeed reached 90 miles per hour, the number 4 engine also stopped. The plane clipped the top strand of some telephone wires near the field and came in to crash-land. The plane bounced twice, spun around and, before it finally came to a stop, lost the number 2 engine and the ball turret. It also sustained a smashed left wing and a twisted and cracked fuselage. The catwalk in the bomb bay had buckled into a "V" shape. McKinny had five teeth knocked out and was cut about the mouth. 1st Lt. J. Webster Beck, navigator, suffered a big gash in his forehead; Sgt. Leon J. Opper broke a wrist; and Sgt. Freddie B. Newell injured a leg. The crew stayed in Brussels overnight, got a C-47 ride to Hampton the next day, and was trucked to Thurleigh, arriving at one in the morning. McKinny and Beck were back at Thurleigh by 30 January, but Newell remained hospitalized on the continent.

More major changes in staff were underway, as Maj. James S. Cheney, group navigator since November 1943, left to join the 303rd Bomb Group at Molesworth as group navigator. The 303rd was commanded by Lt. Col. William S. Raper, former 306th air executive. Capt. John D. MacPherson, 369th Squadron navigator, took Cheney's place at group and 1st Lt. Alton A. Kester replaced MacPherson. At the end of the month Maj. Harold D. Munal, Jr., group surgeon and on continuous duty since April 1942, received a thirty-day rest and recuperation leave in the States.

A record 876 Air Medals and oak leaf clusters were awarded in

January and Bronze Star medals were presented to 1st Sgt. James P. Shepherd and T/Sgt. Vernon V. Hukee, 367th; M/Sgt. Charles W. Bone, 368th; and M/Sgt. Oscar L. Keller, Group headquarters.

A significant departure from Thurleigh was recorded 2 February when Pvt. Maynard H. (Snuffy) Smith, the lone Medal of Honor winner to come from the 306th, was transferred to the Casual Replacement Pool for rotation to the United States. This ended a long and somewhat touchy relationship between those in command and Smith who had sometimes flaunted his medal and could be difficult. The transfer was effected quietly, engineered by Col. James S. Sutton and Lt. Col. Charles G. Duy, Jr., ground executive officer. 8th AF headquarters did not become aware of the movement until Smith was in the States and then there were angry blasts directed at Thurleigh's command echelon. Smith, however, did not return.

Meanwhile, the situation on the continent was changing rapidly as the front line moved toward and across the Rhine and the end seemed imminent. The bomber bases in England were filled with rumors of approaching peace, of a total collapse of Germany and of the long trip home. But the end again did not materialize; the men of the 306th were not through flying or dying.

Berlin still remained for a time a most intriguing objective. It became the target of one of the greatest shows of the Combined Bomber Offensive on the night of 2 February and the following day. The 306th put up thirty-six bombers and six planes of a screening force. Briefing was at 0300 and takeoff began at 0655. During briefing the men could hear the thunderous return of the RAF which had put all available planes over Berlin in the middle of the night. The 8th put up more than a thousand bombers with the attack concentrated on the administrative center of the city. Lt. Col. Eugene LaVier led this 40th "C" CW. As predicted, weather over the target was relatively clear and visual bombing was possible. The group diary reads: "No enemy fighter opposition was encountered. Intense and accurate flak tracked the group for eight minutes in the target area." Eight minutes in flak over Berlin could seem like an eternity and three planes were missing when the 306th landed at 1600.

As in the beginning months, it was the 367th Squadron that took the brunt of the assault; all three planes were from the Clay Pigeons. The aircraft of 2nd Lt. George V. Lockett, Jr., was hit at bombs away. The first shots struck the Tokyo tank in the left wing tip and then rounds of flak burst all over the plane. At that first blast, Lt. R. Pierce Foster, navigator, grabbed his chest pack and snapped it in place — or so he thought. His next recollection was trying to open his eyes and hearing a loud noise; he finally realized that the noise was the wind whistling through his shroud lines. His parachute was open but only the left snap

was fastened. His fur-lined flying boots were gone and one of his heated boots was also missing; Foster had two very cold feet. Chaff was falling around the navigator and at a distance he saw another parachutist who was being shot at from the ground. Foster worked his shroud lines in order to descend faster and avoid a similar fate for himself.

Losing consciousness in the air, Foster came to lying in the middle of Unter den Linden, near Templehof airdrome. As he lay there he saw civilians close by throwing a rope over a lamp post; he sensed the fate that awaited him. But, two German police officers arrived in a Volkswagen bus, rescued him and threw him in the back. They took him to a nearby jail and it was there that he first got a look at himself. The blast had singed his hair, his face was red from the heat and his hair was matted with his own blood. That night he was given some soup to eat and was allowed to clean himself up a bit, using cold water and some German brown soap. The next day a German doctor began cleansing his wounds, while the doctor's English-speaking wife stood by asking Foster why the Americans were bombing the German people. He told her only "I am an American soldier." The doctor understood and acknowledged this fact.

After two days Foster was taken to Templehof where he joined about thirty others in a basement detention cell. Through a window the prisoners could see FW-190s taking off. Several days later the American were taken from the Templehof confinement and admonished to be quiet and restrained else the irate citizenry might take them in hand. "This was enough to quiet everyone," says Foster. They were marched through snow to a train station, taken to Dulag Luft for interrogations and then sent to Nurnberg for confinement. There Foster found a single overworked English doctor and, as Foster had grown up in a medical family, he was able to apply his extensive experience gained at his father's elbow to begin his first medical practice with "patients" who needed help and cared little for the formal training they might have demanded under other circumstances.

Foster later learned that the other survivor, S/Sgt. Victor M. Spevak, tail gunner, found himself in the tail after the plane blew apart. He worked himself to the open end of the plummeting compartment, popped his chute and was pulled away from the wreckage. His may have been the other chute that Foster saw while he was coming down. Spevak became a prisoner of war and survived. The body of the pilot, Luckett, was later reported by the Germans to have been found near the Brandenburg gate. Crew members killed were 2nd Lt. Gilbert W. Clark, copilot; Sgt. Victor J. Cunningham, nose gunner; Sgt. Wayne L. Martin, engineer; Sgt. Jack R. Boesel, radio; Sgt. Bernard L. Whitman, ball turret; and Sgt. Anthony L. Spera, waist.

2nd Lt. Roland A. Lissner's plane was hit just after bombs away,

3 Feb cont'd

Case York down

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taking a shell through the number 3 tank and losing all its fuel. The left Tokyo tanks were lost when the left outer wing was hit. The number 2 turbo was knocked out by flak. The oxygen system in the back of the plane was ruptured with pressure going to zero immediately; the front system, while also hit, lost pressure slowly. The number 3 engine was damaged by flak, could not be feathered and continued to windmill. Lissner figured that one and a quarter hours of fuel remained in the tanks as the plane cleared the Berlin flak and that the crew could remain at altitude for forty-five minutes on emergency oxygen. Number 2 and 3 engines were not producing any power; number 1 and 4 were pulling forty-six inches of mercury at 2500 RPM with the cylinder head temperatures climbing to 240°. Lissner soon turned towards Sweden and got P-51 escort to five miles west of Lubeck. Entering Swedish air space at 1235 at 3500 feet, the plane circled Malmo twice and then was escorted by two Swedish fighters to ~~Bulltofta~~ where it landed. The PFF radar dome was down in landing and cracked as it hit the runway. 2nd Lt. Chester J. Britton was the copilot; 2nd Lt. Finley G. Robbins, navigator; 2nd Lt. Donald C. Haagenson, bombardier; F/O James G. White, radar navigator; Sgt. Lloyd M. Miller, engineer; Sgt. Vere L. (John) Fennerty, radio; and Sgt. Harold R. Bemetz, waist. The tail gunner, Sgt. George W. Beck, had received a flak wound in the left wrist and was hospitalized at Malmo.

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"Rose of York" was also up on this mission, piloted by 1st Lt. Vernor F. Daley, Jr. and with several crew members completing their tours. One engine was shot out over the target and apparently another damaged. Daley lagged behind the formation on the trip home. About two-thirds of the way across the North Sea he radioed the air commander that he thought he could make it to England. That was his last communication and the plane was never found. His other crew members were 2nd Lt. Joseph J. Carbine, copilot; 1st Lt. Paul A. Becker, navigator; S/Sgt. Robert E. Crede, nose gunner; T/Sgt. Reisel R. Horn, engineer; T/Sgt. Porfirio J. Marquez, radio; S/Sgt. George W. Petrillo, ball turret; S/Sgt. Silvio P. DeZolt, waist; and Sgt. Okey R. Coplin, tail. Also riding with them was Guy F. Byam, a war correspondent for BBC, who was recording this greatest mission to Germany. Byam had been torpedoed at sea and rescued, had been in France on D-Day and had jumped with the British Airborne at Arnhem. This mission was his final story.

(Cont)  
3 Feb

Lutzkendorf was the target 9 February, the aiming point being another synthetic oil plant. Due to malfunctions and other factors it was not a particularly outstanding display of American bombing accuracy or combat efficiency. Lt. Wilfred T. Riedel's 423rd plane was hit at the target and, as it came over the front lines, the number 2 engine caught on fire. The blaze was extinguished, then started again and Riedel ordered his crew to bail out. The men jumped over friendly territory, but then the winds began blowing them back to-

9 Feb (cont)  
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wards the front. However, all landed in safe hands and 9th AF provided transportation home.

10 Feb The next day the group headed for Wesel, but bombed a fuel dump at Dulman, Germany, instead. 2nd Lt. A.A. Lomar's plane had the upper half of the nose blown off by flak and Sgt. Charles F. Hitchcock, nose gunner, had flesh wounds on his face. F/O Richard W. Sprunger's plane lost two engines and he landed the crippled craft at St. Trond, Belgium. Sgt. Smedley D. Rile, ball turret gunner for 2nd Lt. William B. Winslow, caught an arm in the turret mechanism and was hospitalized at Sudbury. 2nd Lt. Wallace W. Young became ill, landed his plane at Hardwick, and was hospitalized for an appendectomy.

The 306th flew one of the much-talked-about raids to Dresden on 14 February and experienced its first fighter attack in many, many missions when three FW-190s hit the formation. Trouble developed when the low squadron did not drop on its first run over the target and turned to make another pass. The Luftwaffe hit the small formation. Lt. Harold R. McGahan's plane was straggling and the fighters jumped it, but the defensive fire turned them away. They then attacked Lt. William D. Carder's plane and damaged it severely. Lt. Robert H. Wood's 369th plane also appeared as a likely target, but the fighters got too close and the engineer, Sgt. Edward P. Richards, shot down one of the planes. Crews gave the P-51 escort credit for shooting down the plane that had hit Carder's aircraft.

Capt. Boylston B. Lewis' 369th plane left the formation over the target and was seen heading east. The Focke Wulfs had hit this aircraft hard, severing control cables, setting the number 4 engine on fire and starting a blaze in the waist of the plane. Sgt. Alfred B. Lubojacky, ball turret, was severely wounded and died. First to bail out were Sgt. Frank L. McDonough, waist, and Sgt. Leon Nahmias, tail gunner. The remainder of the crew bailed out over Czechoslovakia, about seventy-five miles southeast of Dresden: 2nd Lt. Robert S. Whitelaw, copilot; 1st Lt. Lester A. Harrison, navigator; F/O Joseph R. Sicard, bombardier; T/Sgt. James F. Standlee, Jr., engineer; and Sgt. Hardin F. McChesney, Jr., radio. Whitelaw and Standlee met several hours after bailing out and were free for more than twenty-four hours before being captured.

Another 369th aircraft, that of 2nd Lt. Jack S. Henley, left the formation and was reported on the way home. A message was relayed to First Air Division (the designation had been changed from First Bomb Division 1 January 1945) that this ship would land at Field B-53 on the continent as it was running short of fuel. Late checks through 8th AF Service Command concluded that the plane never arrived, nor had any subsequent messages come from it. Henley left the formation

because two engines were shot out by flak. Slowly the crew made its way unescorted across Germany and, in trying to reach the front lines and beyond, flew across the Ruhr Valley and was shot down over Coblenz when flak took a third engine. S/Sgt. Frederick Piepenbrink, flying as tail gunner with a crew unknown to him, landed fifty or so miles on the German side of the front lines. He was captured immediately by the crew of a flak battery and was quickly joined by Sgt. Herbert R. Whitaker, nose gunner. Within four or five days the entire crew had been gathered together. Besides Henley there were 2nd Lt. Roy H. Stewart, copilot; F/O Warren A. Becker, navigator; S/Sgt. Victor J. Coppa, engineer; S/Sgt. Daniel F. McCarthy, radio; Sgt. Raymond C. Hanson, ball turret; and Sgt. Albert Harcarik, waist.

By 20 February the flying schedule had begun to intensify and missions were to continue on an almost daily basis throughout the remainder of February. It was on 22 February, however, that the 306th reached a special plateau when Col. James S. Sutton took thirty-six planes of the 40th "A" CW, leading the First Air Division, and marked the 300th combat mission of the 306th Bomb Group since Col. Charles B. Overacker, Jr., had led the first mission of twenty-four airplanes to Lille on 9 October 1942.

This time the target was Wittstock, northwest of Berlin, where the assembled air forces from England, France and Italy made a major attempt to disrupt the still existing German ground transportation system. Marshalling yards were in the bombsight for Capt. Donald R. Ross, group bombardier, but a mistake was made in the nose and the lead group missed its target. Word got to the high group before it dropped and Maj. Earl W. Kesling, 367th commander, turned his planes away and towards Ludwigslust where they bombed the center of the city most effectively.

During the rest of the month the 306th planes went to Hamburg, Plauen, Berlin, Leipzig and Hagen, one oil (Hamburg) and four rail targets. On 26 February Capt. Edward W. Magee of the 367th was the air commander on his ninth mission to Berlin. This had to be something of a record. This was the group's twelfth trip to Berlin and Magee probably missed three missions in May and June when he was on R & R leave in the States between his first and second combat tours. He had flown on the raid of 6 March 1944, the first that the group made to the German capital.

## Chapter 23

# ONE LAST PLANE GOES DOWN

April 1945

March was a busy month for the Group. Twenty-one missions were flown, many of them against transportation targets, but the available enemy territory over which the bombers could roam was shrinking rapidly. During the month American and British troops fought their way across the Rhine River and the Russians were pushing hard from the east. The end seemed near, but the work of the heavy bombers continued.

*2 Mar* Capt. Donald R. Ross, group bombardier, redeemed himself on 2 March after the fiasco of 20 February over Wittstock. He hit an oil refinery at Bohlen right on the nose. 1st Lt. James A. Frederick, 368th, lead bombardier in the low group, then proceeded to put his bombs exactly on top of the lead group's, according to strike photos which the planes brought home. The aircraft of 1st Lt. William H. Wear, 367th, was hit over the target by flak, knocking out the oxygen system. Shortly thereafter Wear noticed that his engineer, Sgt. Charles D. Petitjean, had passed out but some quick action brought him around. Then the number 3 engine lost all of its oil and had to be feathered. While crossing the front lines en route home flak again hit the plane and particularly F/O Donald L. Wilson, bombardier. Wilson was slammed hard in the chest, but fortunately was wearing a flak suit and suffered only some superficial bruises.

*7 March* A mission to Giessen on 7 March cost the 423rd one airplane when 2nd Lt. Clifford L. Steiger's aircraft collided with the 368th plane of 2nd Lt. Herbert B. Cohn just as the bomb run was about to begin. Steiger was changing position in the formation for the bomb run, as he had been briefed to do, and received no warning from any crewmen about the proximity of the other aircraft. Steiger's plane came up under Cohn's ship and Cohn's number 1 propellor chewed into the vertical stabilizer of Steiger's plane. The stabilizer was bent, part of the rudder gone, both elevators knocked off and the tail gunner's compartment cut open. Only later was it learned that when this happened Sgt. Harold W. Rial fell out of the tail gunner's position to his death. His parachute was later found in the waist of Steiger's aircraft.

Steiger and his crew thought that the plane had been hit by flak, never realizing that they had collided with another ship. The plane lost 2000 feet before the pilots were able to recover from the impact. "We had to maintain full right aileron to keep the plane level," said Steiger later. With all rudder control gone it was difficult to maneuver the

plane around flak areas. Oxygen was out from the radio room back, so the radio operator and the ball turret man used walk-around bottles as long as they needed to. At 1221 and 10,500 feet near field A-70, Steiger ordered his crew to bail out. Everyone was out within thirty seconds and, as the automatic pilot was inoperative, the plane went into a tight spiral and the men saw "Dear Mom" crash in a field not far from them. There was no explosion or fire, but parts of the airplane were widely scattered. Crew members were bruised and scratched in their landings by parachute.

Cohn reported that the formation was headed into the sun and that visibility was poor at the time of the collision. The propellor was knocked off the number 1 engine of his plane. The pilot, an initial spare who had been subsequently utilized in the formation, stayed with the group until the English coast was reached on the return trip; then he went into Thurleigh alone.

Another non-combat loss was suffered on 9 March when "Hellcat Hattie" went down on a gunnery mission over The Wash. Thirty-six planes were in the air during the afternoon. At 1603 2nd Lt. Wilfred E. Miessler took his 367th plane out of formation and shortly thereafter his crew was seen to bail out. 2nd Lt. Stanley D. Burns, copilot, reported that a fire first appeared under the top turret and, as the crew was bailing out there was an explosion in the right wing, probably in the number 3 engine. Then the plane went into a dive. As the pilot was setting up the autopilot, Burns went to the forward escape hatch, kicked off the door and jumped. He was followed by 2nd Lt. John S. Pappas, navigator, and 2nd Lt. William J. Johnson, bombardier.

Burns and Johnson were picked up by a British Air-Sea Rescue launch, but none of the other crew members was found. Casualties that day, in addition to Meissler, were Sgt. Mont D. Baughman, engineer; Sgt. Walter D. Searles, radio; Sgt. Carlo Caserta, ball turret; and Sgt. Robert L. Harrison, tail gunner. 2nd Lt. Donald G. Kingsley, Jr. left the formation as the incident developed and circled the area, dropping three dinghies to the stricken men. Evidently only Lt. Johnson ever got into one of the dinghies. The rescue launch reached the first dinghy twelve minutes after the SOS was sent. The accident occurred about seven miles north of Wells over The Wash. Kingsley circled the area until 1800, by which time several other aircraft and a launch had joined the search.

In mid-March the 367th Squadron could boast on its officers' roster seven men who were nearing the completion of second tours of combat with the 306th, including Maj. Earl W. Kesling, squadron commander; Capt. W. Bradley Butterfield, operations officer; Capt. Paul V. Osburn, squadron navigator; capt. Edward W. Magee, Capt. Francis E. McCullagh and Capt. Henry E. Hanson, pilots; and 1st Lt. Glenn

9 March

John S  
+ Pappas  
2nd Lt

mid Mar

18 Mar 1945

30 Mar.

L. Feltz, navigator. All but Kesling and Butterfield had been able to return to the States before beginning a second tour. Each man flew a total of fifty missions.

Sgt. George L. Sarver, ball turret gunner for 2nd Lt. Edward J. Sandini, 369th, gained a measure of fame as he recorded the last confirmed fighter kill by a 306th gunner during World War II. On a mission to Berlin 18 March, just after the 306th gunners had fired at two ME-262 jet fighters attacking the group behind, a lone ME-109 came in on Sandini's plane from three o'clock. Sarver caught the attacker as it passed beneath his ship and the German plane exploded. This became the 332nd fighter destroyed by 306th gunners during the war; they were also credited with ninety-seven probables and 185 damaged.

Two missions were flown on 30 March, three squadrons furnishing planes for a trip to Bremen to fulfill a British Admiralty request for the bombing of highway bridges there. Sgt. Phillip H. Rueschoff, 367th radio operator for 1st Lt. Verlin Higginbottom, was hit in the head by flak and knocked out. He was not seriously hurt, but did bleed profusely.

At the same time, twelve heavily loaded planes from the 369th Squadron were on a mission to Farge, Germany, to bomb submarine pens with what had been labeled a Disney bomb. Each B-17 carried two of these 3,000-pound monsters, externally slung under the wings. They were rocket propelled and had a capability of piercing twenty-three feet of reinforced concrete. One of the critical features of this bomb was that it had to be dropped from exactly 20,000 feet. At 10,000 feet a rocket motor cut in and gave it the extra velocity needed to pierce the roof of a sub pen.

Major Thomas F. Witt, group operations officer, was the air commander and his pilot was 1st Lt. Walter P. Rozett. On the first pass over the target the area was fifty per cent cloud covered and the intermittent visibility caused the bombardier to lose sight of the target. Maj. Witt ordered a 360° turn and the formation approached the target from a slightly different direction, giving the bombardier a different chance to see the target. The bomb release mechanism failed to function on this run and flak hits knocked out the number 2 engine on the lead plane. The third run for the lead squadron of six planes encountered more clouds, while the second section of the formation dropped on the target. A fourth run was then made and this time the bombs were salvoed, using the manual release mechanism in the cockpit. With one engine out and severe over-all flak damage to the plane, Witt and Rozett set the plane down at Attlebridge, the first field they saw. Without brakes or hydraulic pressure the plane rolled out to a stop on the long runway without difficulty. It was later learned that only

10 Apr. 45  
(+ 12 Apr)

April 1945

311

seventy gallons of fuel remained in the plane, not enough to have taken it to Thurleigh. This was the only time that a target was attacked four times by the lead aircraft on a single mission during the entire war. For this Maj. Witt was awarded the Silver Star on 8th AF orders issued on 3 May. Rozett received a DFC for his day's work.

The winter basketball league play came to an end as the 423rd team defeated the 369th team, 51 to 34, to win the station championship. In the title game Cpl. Frederick P. Riggle led the scoring with nineteen points and Pfc. Warren J. Sellen had fifteen. Boxing, wrestling and tumbling classes were being held and golf lessons for beginners were available. Baseball practice was started for a 306th team to play in the First Air Division league.

Academic subjects were also presented: "Small Business of the Future," taught by 2nd Lt. Kenneth Herbster; "Psychology of Love and Marriage," by Chaplain Ralph E. Simester; and "Algebra for Beginners," by 1st Lt. Abraham Grondin. A technical library which included many self-teaching texts was also opened to all personnel. A USO show, "Miff Pherri," came in March and was viewed by 575 men. Some 24,000 attended movies at the post theatre during the month and the post band played thirteen dance engagements with 4,000 persons in attendance.

More than 900 Air Medals were presented during March, but there were only eighteen Distinguished Flying Crosses and four Purple Hearts.

"No flak, no fighters" is the frequent laconic notation on reports of missions which were flown in April when the 306th was in the air almost daily. But on the seventh mission of the month, 10 April, 1st Lt. Allen L. Babin's 369th plane, "Flack-Shack," became just that on a flight to Oranienburg. It was the last 306th plane shot down during the war. "Flack-Shack" was hit over Wittenberge. At 1455 a direct burst in the tail killed Sgt. Theodore J. Rickerl and tore the entire tail section off the fuselage. The plane went into a series of stalls and Babin ordered his crew to bail out.

Babin was the last man out and could see the other members of his crew in their parachutes as they drifted down. Babin tried to avoid a wooded area but landed in the top of a tree. After some effort he got rid of his chute and climbed down, then in the late afternoon hid in a nearby ditch and decided to wait until dark before trying to move. He was some fifteen or twenty miles northeast of Hannover at the time. He walked during hours of darkness, hid in the daytime and had several close encounters with small groups or individuals. In mid-afternoon of 12 April, the pilot hailed a jeep and was ordered to advance and be identified. Shortly thereafter he was at the 334th regimental headquarters of the 84th Division, U.S. Ninth Army.

10 Apr

2nd Lt. Gilbert J. McGuff, copilot, also landed in a tree and managed to extricate himself. Then he played hide and seek with German soldiers and civilians for two days. McGuff finally ran into a group of five or six Germans who, he discovered, were trying to avoid the German Army as much as he was. They stayed together in a wooded area for some hours. He finally convinced them to move so that they could make contact with the Americans and they eventually located an American convoy. McGuff explained the situation and the Germans were picked up as prisoners and interrogated.

McGuff explained his encounter with the Germans: "For the most part I was making good time and was feeling quite pleased with myself, when I came to the edge of a forest and five Germans came out of the woods and halted me. They came up from behind, took my gun and immediately motioned me to put my hands down. None of them could speak English, but I gathered that they wanted to know where the Americans were. I finally convinced them that I, too, had been looking for the Americans and explained with gestures that I was an aircrew member, that I had bailed out and was looking for the American Army.

"In a very friendly manner they gave me some of their food and water and I made quite a meal for myself. While I was eating, several German troops passed near us and the men had me lie down and tried to hide themselves after cautioning me to remain quiet. This rather puzzled me for I couldn't understand exactly what was going on. One of the men finally convinced me, through sign language, that we were to go back deeper into the woods and sit down for a while. On the way we ran into about four others who were apparently friends of these men and they also came along. We found a perfect hideout and proceeded to have another meal. One of the new men could speak fairly decent English and after talking with him for a while I learned that they had been avoiding their own SS troops and were hoping to become prisoners of the Americans.

"After a bit of conniving, they agreed that we should leave the woods and head out for a road to see if we could find any American troops. After a long walk we spotted a convoy and, while the others remained hidden, one of them and I watched it for quite a while to determine whether or not it was American."

2nd Lt. Donovan B. Clemetson, navigator, and Sgt. Robert J. Zamiska, ball turret, got together soon after landing and were caught by German soldiers and civilians. Rather quickly they came under the care of a German military doctor who spoke some English and they were kept in a small hospital about three miles from Utze until the American ground forces got there. The doctor was anxious to surrender; so too were many German soldiers who kept coming in, breaking up their weapons and donning Red Cross arm bands.

10 Apr  
14 Apr  
16 Apr  
313

April 1945

S/Sgt. William R. McKillop, nose gunner, and S/Sgt. William M. Quinn, tailgunner, were also together, although Quinn had injured an ankle and had difficulty walking. They were found by Germans and ended up in the home of one of their captors where they rested until being brought together with Clemetson and Zamiska. S/Sgt. Henry P. Deutsch, radio, and S/Sgt. William L. Ferguson, engineer, also made their way to freedom within a couple of days.

The 369th plane of 2nd Lt. Robert E. Woods was also shot out of formation, lost two engines, and finally staggered back to Thurleigh. 1st Lt. John G. McDonald, copilot, was dazed when flak bounced against his helmet, chopping a large hole in the metal but not injuring his head. Wood's crew members had jettisoned the bombs at the IP and, in their desire to lighten the "wounded" craft, got rid of the ball turret, ammunition, flak suits, flying gear and even the B-10 fur jacket of S/Sgt. Renato P. Iafrate, ball turret, which had been cut up by flak without injuring the occupant.

On 14 April 1st Lt. Richard H. Claeys, a 368th pilot who had been around since late July 1944, led a bombing mission to France, hitting gun positions along the Garonne River near Bordeaux. Claeys had become something of a legend, ended the war with seventy missions credited, and earned an Air Medal and nine oak leaf clusters, the most such decorations of any officer with the group.

This date also marked another accident which claimed the lives of 306th personnel when a 367th plane flew into a hill on the Isle of Man while en route to Langford Lodge in Ireland. Lt. Robert A. Vielle was the pilot and on his crew that day were Capt. George E. Cubberly, squadron executive officer; Capt. W. Bradley Butterfield, squadron operations officer; Miss Emily Rea, American Red Cross; 2nd Lt. Collins E. Liersch, copilot; 1st Lt. Austin J. Parrish, pilot; F/O Howard F. LeCompte, navigator; M/Sgt. Derrell Jones; Sgt. Chester F. Smalczewski, radio; Sgt. Earnest E. Gallion, engineer, and Sgt. William C. Starbuck. Services for all were held at the Cambridge American cemetery.

It was late in the war for changes, but on 16 April Col. James S. Sutton departed for the United States after nearly three years in England and Ireland. He was replaced by another West Pointer as commander, Col. Hudson H. Upham, who had been commander of the 492nd Bomb Group at Harrington, the special operations organization known as the Carpetbaggers. This group dropped men and supplies to the French Underground by dark. Although combat flying was nearly over, in his service with the 306th Col. Upham established a reputation as a quiet, effective administrator and a good flyer. His special love was chess and his usual opponent for many months was Capt. Stanley L. Jarrow, group engineering officer.

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Vielle  
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to Id.  
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Boston  
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David  
Jarrow  
16 Apr  
visited  
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in June  
2017

Sgt. Jack E. Sperling, 367th radio operator, observed his second week with the group by being wounded over Dresden on 17 April while flying with the crew of 1st Lt. Frederick K. Shepard.

19 Apr The very last bombing mission, number 341, was flown by thirty-eight aircraft on 19 April, with the target the marshalling yards at Falkenburg, Germany. S/Sgt. Roscoe V. Bradley, 367th radio operator for 1st Lt. Carroll Q. Hills, became the last man wounded when a piece of flak hit him in the wrist. Flak was described as "meager" for the mission and Hills' plane, although damaged severely, was the only one hit. The sentence in the report that would bring pangs to those who were first in combat with the 306th was the last in the descriptive paragraph of the 367th Squadron history: "No E/A were seen and P51s gave close support throughout the mission."

The 306th Bombardment Group had come a long way in thirty months of rigorous combat. And suddenly the war came to a close. But the planes continued to fly as leaflet missions were loosed all over Germany, taking the word in German, English and assorted other languages to great cities, prison camps and villages, telling of the end of the fighting and giving directions for the future.

Combat decorations came to an end in April when another 844 Air Medals, eleven Distinguished Flying Crosses and four Purple Hearts were awarded. The Bronze Star was presented to Capt. Wendell L. Hull, group mess officer and a very important man around the station for many months.

New crews kept pouring in throughout the month, nineteen to be exact. But the exodus of personnel also increased at this time and many three-year veterans with the group were checking out for duty stateside.

On orders issued 19 April were a host of administrative changes: Lt. Col. Henry J. Schmidt, deputy for services; Lt. Col. Charles G. Duy, Jr., deputy for administration and air inspector; Maj. Billy W. Caseday, deputy for operations; Maj. Frank B. Edelbrock, station executive; Capt. Joseph A. LaMotta, station adjutant; Maj. William B. Sory, director of maintenance; Maj. Paul J. Baillie, director of services; Capt. George L. Sawyer, director of material; Maj. Claude L. Hostetter, station plans and training officer; and Capt. Herman B. Blumenthal, station administrative officer.

Three days later there were further shifts as Lt. Col. Felix Hardison, a much decorated pilot from the early Pacific war days of the 7th Bomb Group, arrived and became deputy group and station commander. Lt. Col. John S. Chalfant was shifted from that post to group operations officer, and Maj. Earl W. Kesling became operations officer and assistant deputy for operations. Maj. Thomas F. Witt was appointed commanding officer of the 367th Squadron, succeeding Kesling.

Quickly the base was being transformed into a peacetime operation,

8 May

and by the time V-E Day arrived on 8 May the 306th men were ready to celebrate. The final arrival of V-E Day left the men somewhat subdued as there had been so many premature declarations of peace. Each time spirits had risen, only to drop again, so on the official day there was not quite as much levity as one might have imagined earlier.

The men were restricted to the base, as was the case throughout the United Kingdom. According to the 367th Squadron diary a "brown haze" settled over the field, only to be lifted after supper when kegs of beer were rolled out on the baseball diamond, the post band provided music, and a large bonfire was lit. The officers were celebrating at the "B" mess across the road from the diamond, where the Scotch whisky was unlimited for the night; they came to watch the bonfire.

Reveille, drill and organized sports were dropped for the morning of the 9th, and that afternoon the base restriction was lifted. Most of the men headed for Bedford and, "What they saw amazed every man," says the 367th diary.

"The English had dragged every 'bloody' light bulb in town and strung it up outdoors. The streets were filled with a blaze of lights that hurt your eyes. The people, old and young, filled the streets and danced and sang *Roll Me Over and Do It Again* at the top of their lungs. There had been great fear for the conduct of the Yanks, but the spectacle of the staid and reserved English letting their hair down as it had never been down before so startled the Yanks that they were left without a leg to stand on. For once the British 'out-hollered' and 'out drank' the Americans."

## Chapter 24

# EPILOGUE

When hostilities came to a close it was not the end of 306th Bombardment Group. As planners during the war began to look at what might go on later, someone tagged the 306th with a new assignment that would keep this group and the 305th in England. It was reckoned that with the planes and men still on duty, it would be an excellent time and an unusual opportunity to undertake the most extensive photographic mapping of the Old World ever attempted.

Thus, the 306th which stayed longer at one base and was in continuous combat longer than any other group, remained at Thurleigh and became an operational group for Project Casey Jones.

This did not happen all at once and, as the days lengthened following the German surrender, the work of the Post VE-Day Educational, Advisory and Military Training Committee at Thurleigh picked up steam. Flying training continued and ground schools of all kinds were organized. The Army did not intend to let time lie heavy on anyone's hands.

One of the most popular ventures undertaken at this time was the scheduling of special flights during the last half of May to let the ground personnel see where the planes had been going. So a total of ninety-three flights was made to carry these hard working and dedicated non-flying members of the group over many of the major targets of the war. This was indeed an eye opener for all, as these tourists saw the onetime targets from low level, a far different view than the high-flying combat men had observed.

It was also a time for reflection by those who had come with the original group from Wendover, Utah. They had seen 177 planes fail to return to base following missions. They could also count 483 men killed in action, 305 missing in action, 145 wounded in action, and 884 who had become prisoners of war.

The figures quoted above are those which were recorded at Thurleigh as the war concluded. An examination of the final disposition of men, as shown in the foregoing text, shows that there were 738 killed on combat missions, even though some of them died over England. There were thirty-eight men killed in flying accidents after the group left the States. In addition, there were 885 prisoners of war, sixty-nine men interned in either Sweden or Switzerland, forty-four evadees and one escapee from a German prison camp.

From the figures available, it would appear that the 306th had far fewer internees than the average bomb group, particularly when viewed against the extensive time period the group was in combat. Many who flew missions along the Baltic Sea or near the Swiss border will recall looking longingly at those sanctuaries from combat which lay only a few miles away.

The 306th plunged into the "Casey Jones" project with its usual vigor and efficiency. There were men and planes, fuel and film, and, by stripping planes and other equipment from groups being deactivated the 306th had what was needed to carry on the project. It was this program which produced those B-17 G models noted in a number of pictures which had no chin turrets. The heavy hardware was removed from many of the planes to permit them to be more fuel economical as they forged back and forth across the continent of Europe and into North Africa, clicking off thousands of overlapping aerial photographs which could then be put together into a mosaic to reveal landscape features of Europe never known before. When such materials were placed under the new instruments then being developed maps were made that were far more accurate than anything previously conceived.

The planes often flew from bases on the continent but returned to Thurleigh for servicing. By mid-December 1945 this phase was halted, and the servicing of the planes was conducted on the continent. The last of the men of the 306th lifted their feet from the hardstands at Thurleigh into waiting planes and flew off to join their mates.

Men and planes were to be found at varying times at the French airfield at Istres, Gibraltar, Marrakech, Port Lyautey, Dakar and finally, Giebelstadt, Germany. Then in June 1946 the 306th ended its camera flying stint. It was finally inactivated 25 December 1946 in Germany.

The group number did not stay unused for long, however, as 1 July 1947 the 306th Bombardment Group (Very Heavy) was reactivated; in August 1948 it became the 306th Bombardment Group (Medium); 1 September 1950 the 306th Bombardment Wing was activated; and 15 August 1976 the 306th Strategic Wing was activated at Ramstein, Germany. Today the 306th Strategic Wing claims its lineage from the 306th Bombardment Group, recalling the proud history of 1942, 1943, 1944 and 1945 as a part of its own.

At the same time American planners were deciding about the 306th's further usefulness, the Royal Air Force was also considering the recovery of the airfield and facilities at Thurleigh, Bedfordshire. When the 306th left, the RAF came back to Thurleigh, establishing there the Royal Aircraft Establishment, a flight test facility. While many onetime American airfields have reverted to agricultural usage, Thurleigh continues as an active flying site. But it is scarcely recognizable to the

intrepid men who once served there, as it has become a modern facility with a single 10,000 foot runway.

As one reads today's newspapers and muses over time gone by, what of the men and planes of Station 111, the 306th Bombardment Group (H) of 1942-1945? Was it all in vain? Was there a mission to be served? What was accomplished?

Because the world is an ever changing place, the politics of another era evoke differing responses. Veterans of World War II know that there arose a situation that could only be resolved by armed conflict in 1941. As the flames of war rose and swirled the 306th group was caught up and went forth to serve. Many died, but their efforts were a part of the total needed to defeat the enemy and to bring about a new peace.

Since 1975 the veterans of the 306th Bombardment Group have gathered annually for reunions. They are kept posted on many events, as well as reading tales from 1942-45, in a quarterly newspaper, *306th Echoes*.

# Appendix A

## MISSIONS OF THE 306th

#	Date	Target	Bombed			
				41	May 19 ✓	Kiel 21
				42	May 21 ✓	Wilhelmshaven 14
				43	May 29 ✓	St. Nazaire 21
				44	June 11 ✓	Wilhelmshaven 24
				45	June 13 ✓	Bremen 28
				46	June 22 ✓	Huls 16
				47	June 25 ✓	NW Germany 20
				48	June 26 ✓	Tricqueville 19
				49	June 28 ✓	St. Nazaire - missing 19
				50	June 29 ✓	Villacoublay 0
				51	July 4 ✓	Nantes 22
				52	July 10 ✓	Caen 15
				53	July 14 ✓	Villacoublay 23
				54	July 17 ✓	NW Germany 0
				55	July 24 ✓	Heroya - missing 20
				56	July 26 ✓	Hannover - missing 21
				57	July 28 ✓	Kassel - missing 16
				58	July 29 ✓	Kiel - missing 13
				59	Aug. 12 ✓	Gelsenkirchen 16
				60	Aug. 15 ✓	Flushing 20
				61	Aug. 16 ✓	LeBourget 19
				62	Aug. 17 ✓	Schweinfurt ) 2t 30
				63	Aug. 19 ✓	Brussels 20
				64	Aug. 24 ✓	Villacoublay 18
				65	Aug. 27 ✓	Watten 9
				66	Aug. 31 ✓	Amiens 18
				67	Sep. 3 ✓	Romilly 16
				68	Sep. 6 ✓	Stuttgart 20
				69	Sep. 7 ✓	Brussels 11
				70	Sep. 9 ✓	Lille 18
				71	Sep. 15 ✓	Romilly 17
				72	Sep. 16 ✓	Nantes 18
				73	Sep. 23 ✓	Nantes 14
				74	Sep. 27 ✓	Emden 18
				75	Oct. 2 ✓	Emden 18
				76	Oct. 4 ✓	Frankfurt 14
				77	Oct. 8 ✓	Bremen 20
				78	Oct. 9 ✓	Gdynia 20
				79	Oct. 10 ✓	Munster 18
				80	Oct. 14 ✓	Schweinfurt - 2ms 5
				81	Oct. 20 ✓	Duren 0
				82	Nov. 3 ✓	Wilhelmshaven 23
				83	Nov. 5 ✓	Gelsenkirchen 18
				84	Nov. 13 ✓	Bremen 1
				85	Nov. 16 ✓	Knaben 19
				86	Nov. 26 ✓	Bremen 28
				87	Dec. 1 ✓	Solingen 22
				88	Dec. 5 ✓	La Rochelle 0
<b>1942</b>						
1	Oct. 9 ✓	Lille	19			
2	Nov. 7 ✓	Brest	15			
3	Nov. 8 ✓	Lille	13			
4	Nov. 9 ✓	St. Nazaire	18			
5	Nov. 14 ✓	St. Nazaire	6			
6	Nov. 17 ✓	St. Nazaire	9			
7	Nov. 18 ✓	La Pallice	13	Plus:		
8	Nov. 22 ✓	Lorient	0	Nov. 21		
9	Nov. 23 ✓	St. Nazaire	3			
10	Dec. 12 ✓	Rouen	6			
11	Dec. 19 ✓	Romilly	15			
12	Dec. 30 ✓	Lorient	0			
<b>1943</b>						
13	Jan. 3 ✓	St. Nazaire	17			
14	Jan. 13 ✓	Lille	14			
15	Jan. 24 ✓	Lorient	16			
16	Jan. 27 ✓	Wilhelmshaven	16			
17	Feb. 2 ✓	Hamm	0			
18	Feb. 4 ✓	Emden	17			
19	Feb. 14 ✓	Bremen	0			
20	Feb. 16 ✓	St. Nazaire	18			
21	Feb. 26 ✓	Wilhelmshaven	17	Bremen		
22	Feb. 27 ✓	Brest	17			
23	Mar. 4 ✓	Hamm	0			
24	Mar. 6 ✓	Lorient	21			
25	Mar. 8 ✓	Rennes	15			
26	Mar. 12 ✓	Rouen	1			
27	Mar. 13 ✓	Amiens	20			
28	Mar. 18 ✓	Vegesack	20			
29	Mar. 22 ✓	Wilhelmshaven	19			
30	Mar. 28 ✓	Rouen	20			
31	Mar. 31 ✓	Rotterdam	0			
32	Apr. 4 ✓	Paris	27			
33	Apr. 5 ✓	Antwerp	16			
34	Apr. 16 ✓	Lorient	12			
35	Apr. 17 ✓	Bremen	26			
36	May 1 ✓	St. Nazaire	12			
37	May 13 ✓	Meaulte	21			
38	May 14 ✓	Kiel	26			
39	May 15 ✓	Helgoland	19			
40	May 17 ✓	Lorient	21			

89	Dec. 11	✓	Emden	20	142	Apr. 27	✓	Pas. de Calais	18
90	Dec. 13	✓	Kiel	20	143	Apr. 27	✓	Nancy	18
91	Dec. 16	✓	Bremen	18	144	Apr. 28	✓	St. Avord	6
92	Dec. 20	✓	Bremen	18	145	Apr. 29	✓	Berlin	15
93	Dec. 22	✓	Osnabruck	21	146	Apr. 30	✓	Lyon	7
94	Dec. 24	✓	NE France	25	147	May 1	✓	NW France	0
95	Dec. 30	✓	Ludwigshafen	25	148	May 1	✓	Reims	6
96	Dec. 31	✓	Cognac	23	149	May 4	✓	Berlin	0
					150	May 7	✓	Berlin	23
					151	May 8	✓	Berlin	21
					152	May 9	✓	Thionville	18
					153	May 11	✓	Saarbrucken	23
					154	May 12	✓	Merseberg	17
					155	May 13	✓	Stettin	20
					156	May 19	✓	Berlin	19
					157	May 20	✓	Orly	24
					158	May 22	✓	Kiel	17
					159	May 23	✓	Metz	20
					160	May 24	✓	Berlin	24
					161	May 25	✓	Thionville	24
					162	May 27	✓	Mannheim	18
					163	May 27	✓	Fecamp	10
					164	May 28	✓	Ruhland	32
					165	May 29	✓	Cottbus-missing	16
					166	May 31	✓	Liege	12
					167	June 2	✓	St. Cecily	17
					168	June 2	✓	Mass-Palaiseau	15
					169	June 3	✓	St. Cecily	17
					170	June 4	✓	Equihen	12
					171	June 6	✓	Arromanches	18
					172	June 6	✓	Caen	0
					173	June 6	✓	Thury-Harcourt	22
					174	June 8	✓	Rennes	18
					175	June 11	✓	Illuers	2
					176	June 12	✓	Lille	35
						June 12	✓	Cambrai	12
					177	June 14	✓	Etampes	35
						June 14	✓	Bretigny	17
					178	June 15	✓	Nantes	52
					179	June 17	✓	Noyan	31
					180	June 18	✓	Hamburg	0
					181	June 19	✓	Noball = V1 and V2 rocket launch sites	0
					182	June 20	✓	Hamburg	53
					183	June 21	✓	Berlin	51
					184	June 22	✓	Ghent	46
					185	June 24	✓	Bremen	42
					186	June 25	✓	Joigny	47
					187	June 28	✓	Laon	35
					188	July 2	✓	Noball	24
					189	July 6	✓	Noball	12
					190	July 7	✓	Leipzig	30
					191	July 8	✓	Corbie	1
					192	July 9	✓	Angers	24
					193	July 11	✓	Munich	18
					194	July 12	✓	Munich	17
					195	July 13	✓	Munich	33

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(a) all - pt. 160  
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196 July 16 ✓	Munich	30
197 July 17 ✓	Hamm	46
198 July 18 ✓	Peenemunde	33
199 July 19 ✓	Augsburg	13
200 July 20 ✓	Kothen	35
201 July 21 ✓	Ebelsbach	35
202 July 22 ✓	Bremen, Kiel, Hamburg	7
203 July 24 ✓	St. Lo	42
204 July 25 ✓	St. Lo	54
205 July 28 ✓	Merseberg	36
206 July 31 ✓	Munich	36
207 Aug. 3 ✓	Merkwiller	36
208 Aug. 4 ✓	Anklam	36
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210 Aug. 6 ✓	Brandenburg	49
211 Aug. 7 ✓	Montbartier	43
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213 Aug. 9 ✓	Ulm	32
214 Aug. 12 ✓	Chamant	36
215 Aug. 13 ✓	Rouen	36
216 Aug. 14 ✓	Florennes	36
217 Aug. 15 ✓	Frankfurt	28
218 Aug. 16 ✓	Bohlen	35
219 Aug. 24 ✓	Merseberg	33
220 Aug. 25 ✓	Peenemunde	32
221 Aug. 26 ✓	Gelsenkirchen	12
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224 Sep. 3 ✓	Ludwigshafen	36
225 Sep. 5 ✓	Ludwigshafen	34
226 Sep. 8 ✓	Ludwigshafen	31
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229 Sep. 12 ✓	Ruhland	35
230 Sep. 13 ✓	Merseberg	12
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233 Sep. 22 ✓	Kassel	24
234 Sep. 25 ✓	Frankfurt	37
235 Sep. 27 ✓	Cologne	36
236 Sep. 28 ✓	Magdeburg	41
237 Sep. 30 ✓	Munster	23
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239 Oct. 3 ✓	Nurnberg	24
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241 Oct. 6 ✓	Stralsund	47
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243 Oct. 9 ✓	Schweinfurt	37
244 Oct. 14 ✓	Cologne	37
245 Oct. 15 ✓	Cologne	25
246 Oct. 17 ✓	Cologne	48
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249 Oct. 25 ✓	Hamburg	35
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MISSING  
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252 Nov. 2 ✓	Merseberg	24
253 Nov. 4 ✓	Harburg	35
254 Nov. 5 ✓	Frankfurt	36
255 Nov. 6 ✓	Hamburg	36
256 Nov. 8 ✓	Merseberg	23
257 Nov. 9 ✓	Metz area	35
258 Nov. 16 ✓	Eschweiler	50
259 Nov. 21 ✓	Meppen Leeuwarden, Merseberg	35
260 Nov. 26 ✓	Misburg	47
261 Nov. 29 ✓	Misburg	33
262 Nov. 30 ✓	Gera	36
263 Dec. 2 ✓	Koblenz	38
264 Dec. 5 ✓	Berlin	33
265 Dec. 6 ✓	Merseberg	36
266 Dec. 9 ✓	Stuttgart	34
267 Dec. 11 ✓	Frankfurt	48
268 Dec. 12 ✓	Merseberg	37
269 Dec. 15 ✓	Kassel	36
270 Dec. 18 ✓	Kaiserslautern	39
271 Dec. 24 ✓	Nidda & Giessen	49
272 Dec. 28 ✓	Siegburg & Koblenz	37
273 Dec. 29 ✓	Bingen	35
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279 Jan. 6 ✓	Cologne	38
280 Jan. 7 ✓	Euskirchen	39
281 Jan. 8 ✓	Speyer	35
282 Jan. 10 ✓	Gymnich	29
283 Jan. 14 ✓	Cologne	33
284 Jan. 15 ✓	Freiburg	35
285 Jan. 17 ✓	Bielefeld	37
286 Jan. 20 ✓	Rheine	32
287 Jan. 21 ✓	Aschaffenburg	36
288 Jan. 28 ✓	Cologne	39
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290 Feb. 1 ✓	Mannheim	38
291 Feb. 3 ✓	Berlin	35
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294 Feb. 10 ✓	Dulmen	38
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300	Feb. 22	✓	Wittstock	36	322	Mar. 24	✓	Vechta	36
301	Feb. 23	✓	Plauen	39			✓	Hespe	12
302	Feb. 24	✓	Hamburg	29	323	Mar. 24	✓	C-Twente	13
303	Feb. 26	✓	Berlin	38	324	Mar. 28	✓	Berlin	34
304	Feb. 27	✓	Leipzig	35	325	Mar. 30	✓	Bremen	37
305	Feb. 28	✓	Hagen	36			✓	Farge	11
306	Mar. 1	✓	Neckarsulm	36	326	Mar. 31	✓	Halle	40
307	Mar. 2	✓	Bohlen	36	327	Apr. 3	✓	Kiel	47
308	Mar. 4	✓	Ulm	35	328	Apr. 4	✓	Fassberg	24
309	Mar. 7	✓	Giessen & Siegen	39	329	Apr. 5	✓	Weiden	36
310	Mar. 8	✓	Gelsenkirchen	37	330	Apr. 6	✓	Leipzig	38
311	Mar. 10	✓	Dortmund	39	331	Apr. 7	✓	Wesendorf	35
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314	Mar. 14	✓	Hildesheim	36	334	Apr. 11	✓	Kraiburg	35
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## Appendix B

# COMMAND AND STAFF OFFICERS

### 306th Bomb Group

*Commanding Officers:* Charles B. Overacker, 18 March 42 to 4 January 43; Frank A. Armstrong, 4 January 43 to 17 February 43; Claude L. Putnam, 17 February 43 to 20 June 43; George L. Robinson, 20 June 43 to 23 September 44; James S. Sutton, 23 September 44 to 16 April 45; Hudson H. Upham, 16 April 45 to May 46.

*Deputy Commanders:* Delmar Wilson, Henry W. Terry, William S. Raper, Maurice V. Salada, John S. Chalfant, Felix Hardison.

*Executive Officers:* Curtis E. LeMay, Delmar Wilson, Douglas Coleman, Charles G. Duy.

*Air Executives:* Delmar Wilson, James W. Wilson, Henry W. Terry, William S. Raper, John S. Chalfant.

*Operations Officers:* Delmar Wilson, Berkeley I. Springfield, William H. Cleveland, Ralph L. Oliver, James W. Wilson, Robert C. Williams, Toy Husband, Robert C. Williams, Thomas F. Witt, John S. Chalfant.

*Adjutants:* William C. Melton, Jr., Percy A. Vincent, Douglas Coleman, Charles G. Duy, Paul S. Baillie, Joseph A. LaMotta.

*Intelligence Officers:* Delmar Wilson, Watts B. Humphrey, John B. Wright, John A. Bairnsfather.

*Navigators:* Robert Salitnik, Charles F. Jones, John Dexter, James S. Cheney, John D. MacPherson.

*Bombardiers:* Frank Yaussi, Chester May, Hugh Toland, Walter Coons, Donald R. Ross.

*Surgeons:* Ralph C. Teall, Thurman Shuller, John J. Manning, Harold A. Munal.

*Flying Control:* John H. Crump, Albert A. Conrad, Louis B. Hartsell, William W. Peterman.

*Chaplains:* Roy M. MacLeod, Everett E. Denlinger, Ralph E. Simester, Adrian Poletti.  
*Gunnery:* Joe Bowles, William E. Foose, Thomas F. Witt.

*Weather:* Herbert J. Avise, Dalton H. Wright.

*Armament:* William R. Cain.

*Ordnance:* Thurman E. Dawson, Lester G. Williams, Hubert R. Jones.

*Communications:* Ray V. Hopper, William C. Golliday, Donald P. Roeber.

*Equipment:* John T. Threadgill.

*Personnel:* Paul J. Baillie, Robert F. Morris

*Engineering:* Henry J. Schmidt, James M. Venable, Jr., Stanley Jarow.

*Special Services:* Claude F. McGrath, Henry G. Clarenbach, Darrell S. Mattoon.

*Supply:* George L. Sawyer, Dudley J. Allen

*Finance:* Ming Rose, Robert K. Andrews.

*Mess:* Wendell L. Hull.

*Provost Marshal:* Frank Douthit, John H. Eby, John B. Wright, Seymour Ramby, George J. Pratt.

*Photographic:* Rudolph Skalak, Jr.

*Public Information:* William C. VanNorman.

*Dental:* Rex D. Stutznegger.

*Postal:* William M. Walters, Harold G. Taylor.

## 367th Squadron

*Commanding Officers:* Harry Holt, 18 March 42 to 4 March 43; John L. Ryan, 5 March 43 to 6 March 43; William S. Raper, 6 March 43 to 18 August 43; George R. Buckey, 19 August 43 to 2 May 44; Robert C. Williams, 3 May 44 to 18 July 44; Charles Flannagan, 19 July 44 to 14 October 44; Earl W. Kesling, 15 October 44 to 22 April 45; Thomas F. Witt, 23 April 45 to 30 May 45.

*Executive Officers:* Richard E. Walck, George Cubberly, Donald F. Sheridan.

*Operations Officers:* Lewis McKesson, Kenneth M. Reecher, George R. Buckey, Kenneth M. Reecher, Dinwiddie Fuhrmeister, Earl W. Kesling, Wilbur B. Butterfield, Albert J. Bowley.

*Engineering Officers:* William B. Sory, Stanley J. Jarow.

*Communications:* Carl G. Smith, Claude E. Brock, Donald P. Roeber.

*Adjutants:* Charles G. Duy, Ronald F. McCormick, Donald L. Giles, Richard L. Moore.

*Navigators:* Hugh E. Phelan, Romulus V. Houck, William Pleasant, Paul V. Osburn, Stanley G. Mull.

*Bombardiers:* Walter H. Coons, Jerome J. Kostal, Stephen Tanella, Robert G. Schwein.

*Armament:* William R. Cain, Percy A. Vincent.

*Ordnance:* Howard L. Ellison, John Grimm, John P. Foulkes, Glen R. Hoover.

*Intelligence:* John A. Bairnsfather, Robert Hogg, Edward T. Murtha, Shubel J. Owen, William A. Leatherman, Philip W. Haberman, Jr.

*Gunnery:* Roy W. Griffith, George D. Bennett.

*Supply:* Donald L. Giles.

*Medical:* John J. Manning, Arthur Weihe.

## 368th Squadron

*Commanding Officers:* William A. Lanford, 18 March 42 to 19 January 43; Mack McKay, 20 January 43 to 8 April 43; John M. Regan, 9 April 43 to 13 April 44; Maurice Salada, 14 April 44 to 24 October 44; Thomas H. Hulings, 25 October 44 to unknown.

*Executive Officers:* Edward T. Miazza, Willie S. Williams, Jr.

*Operations Officers:* Walter N. Smiley, William E. Friend, Jr., William C. Melton, Jr., Elbert Odle, George DeVack, Robert G. Matzke.

*Engineering Officers:* Robert A. Gearhart, Robert S. Stevens, William Widlansky, John P. Walsh.

*Communications Officers:* Elbert Odle, Jesse L. Milburn, Robert Klawuhn, William Foose.

*Adjutants:* Louis Schulstad, Edward T. Miazza, Edgar S. Hallman, Richard L. Moore, Albert Greaves, Robert L. Whitney.

*Navigators:* Wallace D. Boring, Maynard D. Dix, Roy E. Buchanan, K.L. Warner, Paul C. Wagner.

*Bombardiers:* Robert T. Levy, Joseph E. Kosakowski, Stanley Silverstein, Eduardo Montoya, Donald R. Ross, Irving Norton, Ralph E. Bordner, Reginald H. Thayer, Jr.

*Armament:* Louis Schulstad, John E. Bennett.

*Ordnance:* Thurman E. Dawson, Richard L. Moore, William Winship.

*Gunnery:* William E. Foose, Edward J. Seifried.

*Intelligence:* Robert W. Smith, Jeremiah O'Sullivan, Alfred W. Weld, William C. VanNorman, Ralph Schreiter.

*Supply:* James Ferguson, Edgar W. Hallman, Robert L. Whitney.

*Medical:* Harold D. Munal, James E. McClung.

## 369th Squadron

*Commanding Officers:* Ralph L. Oliver, 18 March 42 to 6 December 42; Henry W. Terry, 7 December 42 to 22 June 43; Robert P. Riordan, 23 June 43 to 18 April 44; Charles Flannagan, 19 April 44 to 9 July 44; Robert P. Riordan, 10 July 44 to 1 October 44; James A. McKinney, 2 October 44 to unknown.

*Executive Officers:* Paul J. George, John T. Stanko, Willie S. Williams, Jr., Philip G. Kraft.

*Operations Officers:* Doyle L. Dugger, Charles Flannagan, Billy W. Casseday.

*Engineering Officers:* Frank G. Kelly, Jr., Robert E. Michaelis, Frank W. Phillips.

*Communications:* Lawrence H. Dammert.

*Adjutants:* Van VanderBie, Robert H. Bassett, John T. Stanko, Willie S. Williams, Jr., Willis D. Hogg, Charles E. Murphy.

*Navigators:* Charles F. Jones, George Spelman, David MacGhee, John Mazanek, David B. Dash, Frank Sovis, John D. MacPherson, Alton A. Kester.

*Bombardiers:* Gerald Rotter, Clyde J. Travis, Carl H. Frantz, Vincent J. Palumbo, Arthur Isaac, Malcolm A. Phillips, Donald E. Currier, Laurence E. Carroll.

*Armament:* Charles G. Nowark, Howard Aronson, Lyman H. Everly.

*Ordnance:* Ernest H. Behrens, William M. Collins, Jr.

*Intelligence:* William Berkeley, Wiley W. Glass, John M. Kavanaugh, Henry L.P. Moore.

*Supply:* Willis D. Hogg.

*Medical:* Thurman Shuller, Charles P. McKim, Arthur L. McGilvra.

## 423rd Squadron

*Commanding Officers:* James W. Wilson, 18 March 42 to 19 February 43; John L. Lambert, 20 February 43 to 5 May 44; John S. Chalfant, 6 May 44 to 28 November 44; Eugene C. Lavier, 29 November 44 to 19 March 45; John H. Buie, 20 March 45 to unknown.

*Executive Officers:* John T. Threadgill, Donald M. Eckstein, Philip G. Kraft, Edward Miazza, Willie S. Williams, Jr.

*Operations Officers:* Robert C. Williams, Maurice V. Salada, John S. Chalfant, John M. Kelly, Carl N. Grending, John Murphy.

*Engineering Officers:* Rush Poulan, Alfred C. Gailey, James M. Venable, Jr., Robert B. Phillips.

*Communications:* Jim H. Speck, Theodore E. Marvis, Isidore M. Sternberg.

*Adjutants:* Charles Patterf, John T. Threadgill, Philip G. Kraft, Robert F. Morris, Joseph C. Brashares.

*Navigators:* Harold Gaslin, Luther S. Pierce, Ralph Zimmerman, C.J. Olenik, Richard H. Wessler, Wesley W. Gunkel.

*Bombardiers:* Chester May, Donald A.R. Teller, Walter R. Wick, Norman Niersbach, Hollis H. Baker, Charles R. Dimter.

*Armament:* John A. Coulter, Jr., Henderson N. Knight.

*Ordnance:* John T. Threadgill, Edgar R. Dagit.

*Radar:* Morton Schacher.

*Intelligence:* Beekman Pool, Maurice Wahl, Fred C. Baldwin, Joseph C. Brashares.

*Gunnery:* Degland Kenealy, Roy W. Griffith, Michael Roskovitch.

*Supply:* Dudley J. Allen, George J. Lemberger.

*Medical:* Edmund F. Longworth, Samuel D. Simpson, Henry Dantzig.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Two major sources provided the material for this volume: Governmental archives and the men who served with the 306th Bomb Group. Group.

Initially visits were made to the USAF Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. This source provided technical data about the B-17 itself, and also a source of basic printed material on the air war of World War II, and particularly the 8th AF.

Without question, the most valuable repository was the General Records Division, National Archives, at Suitland, Maryland. Here the mission reports were closely examined, missing air crew reports were located, and numerous other reports were read.

Thirdly, the Simpson Research Center, Air University, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, provided a wealth of supporting data from the original files of the 306th Bomb Group.

In addition to the personal visits paid at each of these places, personnel were also frequent purveyors of data by mail in answer to my queries. Other more specialized collections were also searched for specific pieces of information.

The single most valuable piece of material found was the diary of Dr. Thurman Shuller, McAlester, Oklahoma, and the group surgeon for the 306th during its first year of combat. Not only did this tell about the flyers under the stress of combat, but in several places it provided the key to data which could not be found in the official records.

Other diaries, scrap books, and voluminous correspondence with veterans of the 306th provided much of the background from which the narrative was built.

The group and squadron diaries provided the chronology for the book, as they proved to be a rich source of anecdotal material.

Of considerable value were the works prepared at the direction of the Air Force Historical Office either in the late stages of the war, or almost immediately afterwards. Unfortunately, these book-length manuscripts have never been published. They are:

*Origins of the Eighth Air Force: Plans, Organization, Doctrines, to 17 August 1942.* October 1944.

*The Early Operations of the Eighth Air Force and the Origins of the Combined Bomber Offensive, 17 August 1942 to 10 June 1943,* October 1946.

*The Combined Bomber Offensive, April through December 1943,* March 1946.

*Combined Bomber Offensive, 1 January to 6 June 1944*. April 1947.

The next single most valuable source for the overall picture of the war, and with considerable attention to the 8th AF, is *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, by James Cate and Wesley Craven. Published in seven volumes between 1949 and 1958, volumes two and three are of particular interest.

Other books of worth have been:

*The Air Offensive Against Germany*, by Allen A. Michie, New York, Holt, 1943.

*The Air Plan That Defeated Hitler*, by Maj. Gen. Heywood S. Hansell, Jr. Privately printed, 1972

*Big Week*, by Glenn B. Infield. New York, Pinnacle, 1974.

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*Global Mission*, by Gen. H.H. Arnold. New York, Harpers, 1949.

*Heritage of Valor, The Eighth Air Force in World War II*, by Col. Budd Peaslee. Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1964.

*The Mighty Eighth*, by Roger Freeman. New York, Doubleday, 1970.

*Mission with LeMay*, by Curtis LeMay. New York, Doubleday, 1974.

*The Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower: The War Year*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1970.

*Skyways to Berlin*, by John Redding and Harold Leyshon. New York, Bobbs-Merrill, 1943.

*Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany, 1939-45*. Charles K. Webster and Noble Frankland. London, HM Stationery Office, 1961. (4 volumes).

*Target: Germany*, by the editors of *Life*. New York, Simon & Schuster, 1943.

*War Reports of Marshall, Arnold and King*, foreward by Walter Millis. Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1947.

*White Rabbit*, by Bruce Marshall. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1953.

To these can be added at least seven doctoral dissertations since 1950 that dealt specifically with the 8th AF.

Lastly, one should make mention of the fiction which has been published, with many more than a dozen books dealing with the flying, romance, evasion and prison camp experiences. But of primary concern to the 306th Bomb Group is *Twelve O'Clock High*, the work of Bierne Lay and Sy Bartlett. Published in 1948 by Harpers, the book opens with sketches taken from the 306th.

# INDEX - 306th Personnel

An attempt has been made to index all 306th members appearing in this book. In a few cases only last names are known. The author has reconciled variant spellings and in many cases used *Missing Air Crew Reports* as the most authoritative source, after consultation with Wilbur Barks of the 306th Personnel section.

To provide the reader with greater information, those men who died while members of the 306th are indicated with a **K** immediately following the name. Others, known by the author to have died following 306th service and through 1981, have their names annotated with a **D**.

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