

TIMES OF OUR LIVES (AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY)

Transcribed by Michael Yamada

**VOLUME III: (PART 1): WORLD WAR II YEARS- COMBAT
OPERATIONS, B-17 FLYING FORTRESS BOMBING MISSIONS
DURING TIME PERIOD 7 NOVEMBER 1942 TO 30 JUNE 1943**

**BY: 1ST LT. BERT W. HUMPHRIES
322ND SQUADRON OPERATIONS OFFICER
91ST BOMB GROUP (HEAVY)**



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my mother, Ada Pearl (Harris) Humphries, who inspired me into writing this book by her writing one of her own, "The Luckiest Girl in the World." She loved and served the Lord and taught her children to do likewise.

To my father. Albert 'Bert' Humphries, that great baseball player, sportsman and a great dad. One might say that he "finished the series" to receive the crown of righteousness given by the Great Umpire of the hearts and lives of men. He played well his last inning in the game of humanity.

To my wife Emily for her constant support and encouragement. I might say, "I love you - not only for what you are, but for what I am when I am with you."

To my sisters, June (Smedley) and Helen (Davis) who put up with me and nurtured me with compassion and loving understanding when I deserved much worse.

To my sons, Bert, Jr. 'Butch', and John 'Randy' - sons who make this father proud; Sons who never shame their mothers, sons who never fail their brothers, true, however false are others. Again I say. you make me proud!

To my many friends, the world around: "With such a comrade, such a friend, I fain would walk till journeys end, through summer sunshine, winter rain, and then? Farewell, we shall meet again!" (Henry Van Dyck)

To my combat buddies, especially to those of you who have made the supreme sacrifice, how well I remember your faces as we use to sing with gusto the "Army Air Corps Song":

Off we go into the wild blue yonder,

Climbing high into the sun.
Here they come, zooming to meet our thunder,
at 'em boys, give 'em the gun!
Down we dive, spouting our flame from under,
off with one hell—uv—a roar!

We live in fame or go down in flame. Shout! Nothing'll stop the Army Air Corps!

Minds of men fashioned a crate of thunder,
sent it high into the blue.
Hands of men blasted the world asunder;
how they lived God only knew!
Souls of men dreaming of skies to conquer
gave us wings, ever to soar!
With scouts before and bombers galore. Shout!
Nothing-'ll stop the Army Air Corps!

Off we go into the wild sky yonder
keep the wings level and true.
If you'd live to be a gray-haired wonder
keep the nose out of the blue!
Flying men, guarding the nation's border,
we'll be there, followed by more! In echelon we carry on. Shout!
Nothing-'ll stop the Army Air Corps! (R. Crawford)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS (CONT'D)

I am also indebted to Roger E. Freeman, author of "The Mighty Eighth" (A History of the U.S. 8th Army Air Force); Winston S. Churchill and the Editors of "The Second World War"; The Automobile Association of London and their "Road Book of England and Wales "

TRANSITION FROM VOLUME 2

FRIDAY, OCT. 30, 1942 THROUGH FRIDAY, NOV. 6, 1942

DIARY INPUT: "This has been the most boring period of my combat training to date. We have endured our first winter storm and it has brought us a variety of cold, windy days laced with rain, sleet and touches of snow. Our aircraft have been grounded for the past four days and a few ground school training sessions are the only meaningful activities that we have had.

On Tuesday, November 3rd the 91st Bomb Group (including our air-crew) was scheduled for its first COMBAT MISSION against the enemy and I was scared! I mean I was frightened at the potential risks that awaited us but not to the extent that I was immobilized by fear. But the fact remains that if you want to be assured of being stung by a bee, then try stirring up the bee-nest! Our bee-nest target was to be the German manned fighter aerodrome at Abbeville/Drucat, France . However, the weather was generally foul with heavy fog lying close to the ground. The mission was cancelled before takeoff. On the evening of Friday, November 6th, the last day of our 'winter-like' confinement, I learned that I am slated for my second COMBAT MISSION! Where to, I do not know; that plus other essential mission information will be disclosed to those of us taking part in the raid, at our briefing session scheduled for 0530 hours tomorrow morning.

On the evening of November 6th, I retired early to my room in the officer's quarters so as to get a good night's sleep. But sleep I couldn't, because I was still scared! (Any combat pilot who says he is not frightened at the prospect, of battle is either certifiably insane, or a damn liar). I kept thinking about: (1) my lack of knowledge of the B-17F and all the things a copilot is responsible for in the event of an emergency; (2) my lack of piloting skills; i.e. would I be able to land the airplane in the event Don (Lt Bader) became a casualty - because I had not yet had the opportunity to practice landing the B-1 7; and (3) my general lack of combat training. I got up from bed, went to my desk, turned on the light, got out my Pilot's Flight Log and started analyzing the training time I had accumulated since graduating from Lubbock Flying School. Here are the flying hours that I logged at the various training centers to which I had been ordered:

Salt Lake City , Utah , Army Air Base	0:00 hours
Ephrata , Wash. , Army Air Base	1:00 hours
Boise , Idaho , Gowen Army Air Base	5:30 hours
Bangor , Maine , Dow Army Air Base	27:05 hours
Trans-Atlantic Flight (Dow to Kimbolton)	17:00 hours
Kimbolton , England , RAF Aerodrome	0:45 hours
Bassingbourn, England, RAF Station	25:30 hours
Total Combat Training Time	75:70 hours

TRANSITION FROM VOLUME 2

FRIDAY, OCT, 30 1942, THRU FRIDAY, NOV. 6, 1942

DIARY INPUT: (Cont'd)

"Since arriving here at Bassingbourn I have been talking with other copilots in my squadron, and with exception of recent volunteers like myself, they had several hundred hours of flying time accumulated in their three phases of combat training - all completed before leaving the States. (See Page 2A for a picture of the 'early birds' back at Pendleton Field, Oregon, September, 1941). I finally came to the realization that all of this soul-searching was getting me no where! After all, Don is an excellent pilot with almost 500 hours of B-17 time and I have the utmost confidence in Don and the remaining members of the crew; after all, I am the only neophyte!

So I put away my Pilot's Flight Log and took out my Holy Bible and turned to that favorite phrase of mine in Isaiah (40:28-31)

"Do you not know, Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;

but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint."

With that reassurance, I returned to my bed and finally got to sleep."

CHAPTER 1 - AT FIRST, LEARNING COMBAT WITH RAIDS ON FRENCH TARGETS

7 NOVEMBER, 1942 - SATURDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: _Alert No. 2, Mission No. 1

Target: (1) Brest , France - Submarine Pens

(2) Brest , France - Navy Docks Along Water Front of Harbor

Enemy Defenses: Fighters - Expect both S.E. & T. E. Fighters

Flak Batteries - Heaviest Anti-aircraft-Protection in France

Enemy Fighters Shot Down By Our Ship: By Tail Gunner, Hansbury: 1 FW-190

Friendly Fighter Support: None

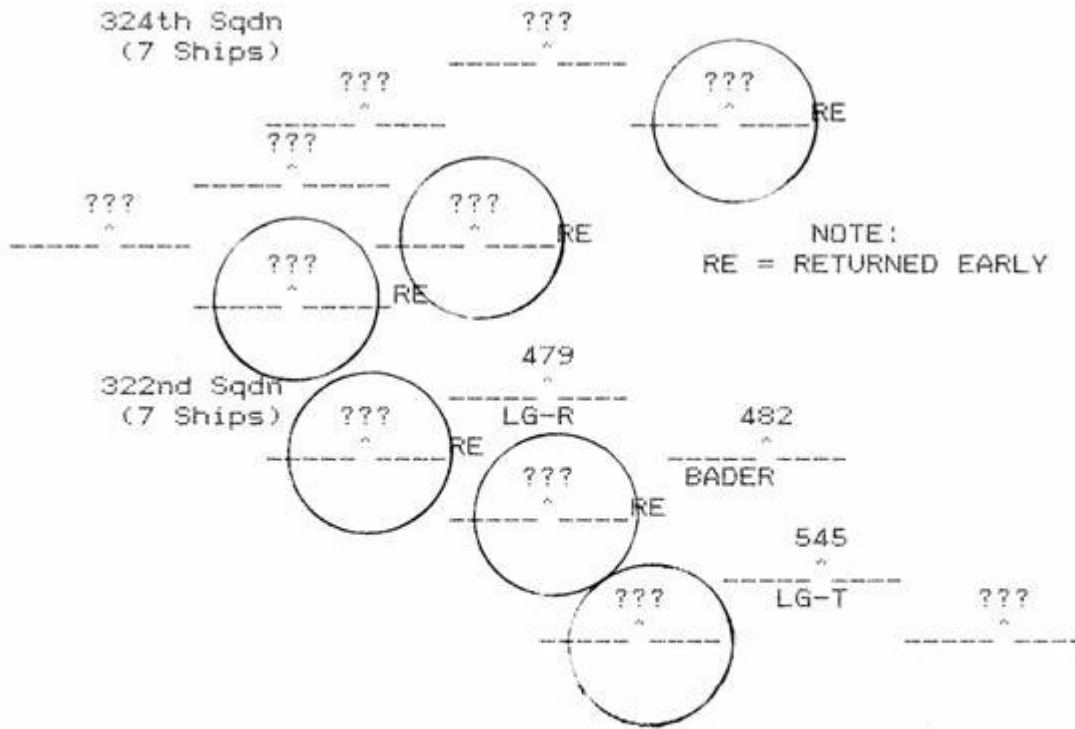
Time Schedule: Brief 0530 (changed to 0730);T.O. 1000 (changed to 1030

Bomb Load: 10 x 500 pounds High Explosive

Bombing Altitude: 91st B.G. at 19,000 Ft.

Other Bomb Groups: 301st and 306th B.G. plus (B-24 Liberators),

91st Bomb Group, Flight Formation: (Details are missing).



MISSION REMARKS: (Only 8 ships of the 91st B.G. attacked the target; See Pages 3A and 3B for more.)

DIARY INPUT: (See photo section for pictures of B-17 No. 712, "Heavy Weight Annihilator" and my crew members)

1st OPERATIONAL MISSION-

NOV. 7TH, 1942 - SATURDAY

SUBMARINE BASE & DOCKS- BREST , FRANCE

Ship # 1-24482

Officers: Pilot: Lt. Bader

Co-Pilot: Lt. Humphries

Navigator: Lt. Adkins

Bombardier: Lt. Hensley

Enlisted: Sgt's Gray, Kessler, Olague, Budzisz, Hansbury, and Peipho

GENERAL INFORMATION: The target was the submarine base and docks along the water front at Brest , France. Bombing altitude of 19,000 ft. with 10- 500 lb. H. E. bombs per aircraft; 12 B-17 bombers (our group) to make up formation, with 2 replacements. Target area reported to have heaviest anti-aircraft protection of any point in France ; were advised that we would not have any fighter aircraft for protection. Weather conditions were unfavorable with cold front lying along target area.

REMARKS: We were awakened at 04:00 hrs. by broadcast on P.A. announcing "briefing" at 0530 hrs. Hurriedly dressed and ate breakfast. At breakfast, I was given erroneous info. that briefing was postponed until 0730 hrs, which was reasonable as it was raining then. Consequently, returning to barracks and by the time I discovered error, was ½ hour late to briefing and had been replaced by Lt. Cox: had to do a lot of pleading with Maj. Z in order to get him to change his mind. Takeoff was scheduled for 1000 but due to bad weather, did not get off until 1030. (that ½ hour on the ground was an indescribable strain- allowing free time for the imagination to run wild.) Settled down, more or less, after takeoff, and everything seemed like just another training flight until we got 10 or 15 miles inside the French coast. At that point, we could see the two bomb groups (U.S. 301st and 306th) just turning on their bombing run, and some distance to the right over the target area, there were what seemed to be hundreds of fighters, swarming like a hive of bees, undoubtedly engaged in a gigantic dog-fight over the target. I can truthfully say that I was scared to death. Looking to the right and left, I could count only eight of our bombers out of the original fourteen to take off (six returned due to some mechanical failure)- our total destruction seemed not only inevitable, but immediate! I uttered a prayer and thought longingly of home and family. As we approached the target those specks in the skies which I thought to be fighters, could now be recognized as "flak" bursts. What a relief! The bombing run was extremely long, being 90 sec. or more- and that minute and a half seemed like hours, with the vari-colored (red-black-white) flak bursts getting close and heavier all the while; and the tracer bullets and cannon fire of enemy fighters along with the return fire of our 50-cal. incendiary bullets!! The tail gunner, our ship brought down in flames a German F. W.-190 fighter while we were on bombing run. The effects of our bombs could not be determined due to cloud cover but reports indicate that the U-Boat pens were smashed and warehouses & docks leveled. The enemy fighters kept attacking us until we reached mid-channel. The most comforting sight was the rocky-crags and cliffs, as we crossed over the south coast of England. It turned out to be a beautiful day- and it felt so good to be alive!

CHAPTER 1 - AT FIRST, LEARNING COMBAT WITH RAIDS ON FRENCH TARGETS

23 NOVEMBER, 1942 – MONDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: Alert No . 11 ; Mission No . 8

Target : (1) Brest , France - Submarine Pens

Enemy Defenses I Fighters - Many S . E . and T . E . Fighters

Flak Batteries - Both Medium 3 Heavy

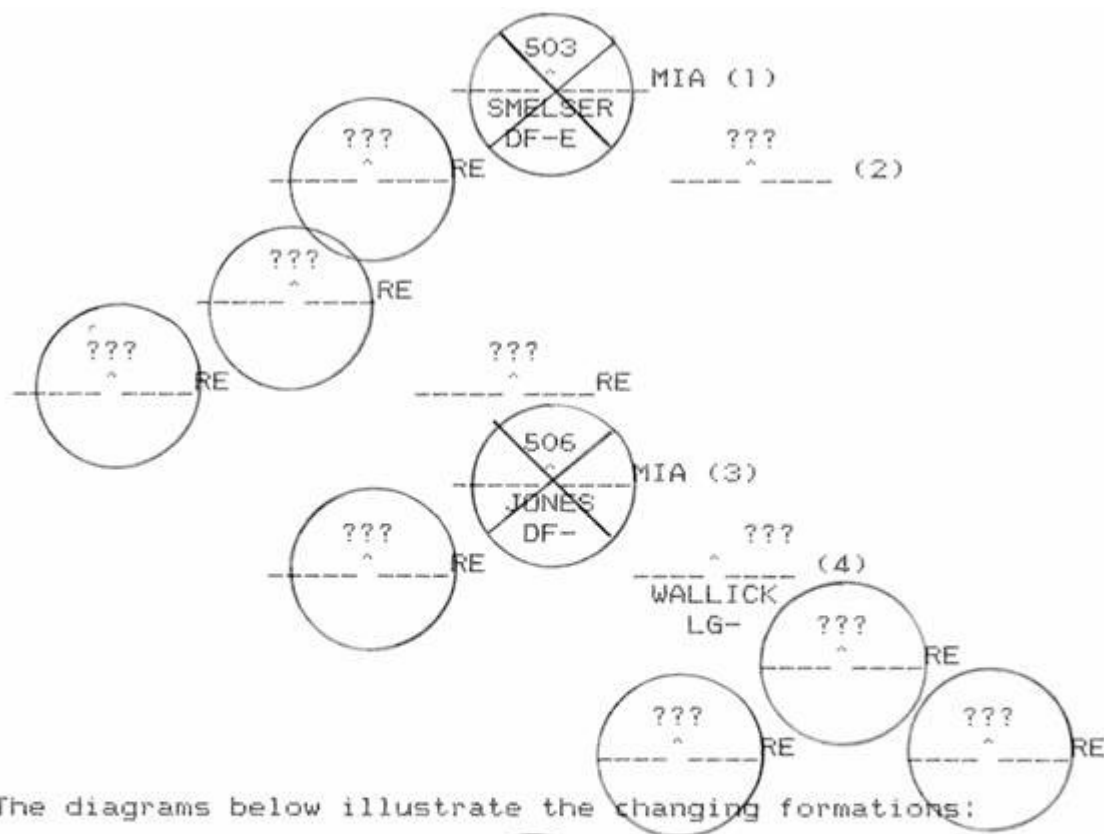
Enemy Fighters Shot Down: 4 S.E. Fighters, plus 1 probable

Friendly Fighter Support : None

Bomb Load: 10 x SOD pound High Explosive

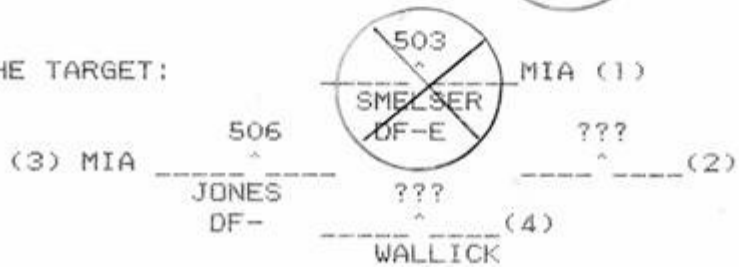
Bombing Altitude: 91st B.G. at 19,000 Ft.

91st Bomb Group, Flight Formation : (Details are missing)



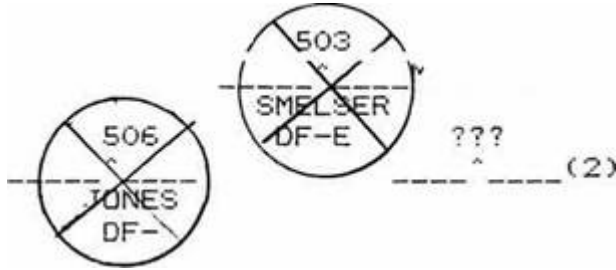
The diagrams below illustrate the changing formations:

OVER THE TARGET:



23 NOVEMBER, 1942 - MONDAY (CONT'D)

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT; Alert No.11; Mission No.8 Target:(1) Brest . France - Submarine Pens



DURING RUNNING BATTLE :

MIA (

--
 ???

WALLICK
 LG-

RE = RETURNED EARLY: MIA = MISSING IN ACTION

FINAL DISPOSITION OF THE REMAINING FOUR AIRCRAFT THAT BOMBED THE TARGET:
 (1) A/C 503 "Pandora's Box" was shot down with the 324th Squadron Commander. Major Harold C. Smelser, and Pilot Captain Duane L. Jones aboard; (2) A/C ??? returned safely to Bassingbourn, casualties and battle damage not known. (3) A/C SOS crash-landed in England . Five of the crew did not survive: Navigator, 2nd Lt. John A. Ball; Bombardier, Gene F. Davis; Ball Turret Gunner, Shelby L. Welton; Waist Gunner, Sgt Walter J Wright; Waist Gunner , Sgt Herbert Hoffman (4) Capt. Wallick landed at the diversion aerodrome (Chivenor) in England with wounded aboard.

MISSION REMARKS: The following remarks, extracted from an Awards Medal Citation for Captain Wallick, describe the battle that took place:

AWARDS CITATION FOR CAPTAIN KENNETH WALLICK

"On November 23, 1942, twelve B-17F airplanes took off from base (Bassingbourn) to bomb a target in St. Nazarine. France. By the time the formation reached the coast of France , six of the aircraft were forced to turn back and the remaining half of the force continued on to the target

Shortly after crossing the coast of France (at 19,000 feet) the leader of the second element made an abrupt turn to the right and Capt. Wallick, flying the right wing position, turned also, remaining in formation - as did the left wing ship- After the element leader had completed a 90-degree turn. he feathered his number

three engine which had been struck by flak and he indicated to the wing ships by hand signal to leave him and rejoin the lead element of 3-ships, which were now between one and two miles ahead. Captain Wallick increased speed and gave chase, as did the other wing ships. Before leaving the element leader, Captain Wallick ascertained that, aside from his number three feathered engine (propeller), his ship was in good control and not losing altitude).

23 NOVEMBER, 1942 - MONDAY (CONT'D)

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: Alert No. 11 ; Mission No. 8

Target:(1) Brest , France - Submarine Pens

DIARY INPUT: Awards citation for Capt. Kenneth Wallick- (cont'd)"

After giving chase for about five minutes, Wallick's wing man abandoned the mission and returned to England, leaving Captain Wallick in lone pursuit. After approximately five or six minutes of further chase, Captain Wallick caught the lead element.

The remaining four ships continued over the target but the weather conditions were such that the ground was completely obscured. Just as the formation passed over the target, they were attacked by 12 to 15 Focke-Wulf 190s and the fighters continued their attacks - striking from the tail position and the sides.

The enemy fighters fiercely pressed home their attacks and were brazen enough to fly between the Fortresses in formation a number of times. Captain Wallick's ship was hit time and time again by explosive cannon fire causing severe damage. All of the other three ships were observed to have suffered a similar damage and had either one engine (propeller) feathered or were on fire!

The lead ship was particularly badly riddled with holes, had one engine on fire, the ball turret was besmeared with blood and the life raft (had been ejected during combat) was lodged on the horizontal stabilizer, making the ship very uncontrollable. Captain Wallick had been flying the number four (or the diamond slot) position until empty 50-caliber cartridge cases from the lead ship commenced to fall on his ship - forcing him to take position on the left wing of the No. 3 ship.

Shortly after taking this position, the No. 3 ship was badly damaged and began to lose altitude. Captain Wallick remained on his wing and escorted him down so as to afford protective fire cover, although Captain Wallick's ship had received further damage, in that a 20 MM explosive shell had torn off his left wing tip. Also, another explosive shell had hit the tail of the fuselage of the aircraft - seriously wounding the tail gunner & also damaging the control cables. After Captain Wallick had descended to about 8,000 feet, the fighters broke off their attacks, since they were then far out to sea.

The cloud cover was now at 2,000 feet and the cloud layer broken. Captain Wallick continued to escort the No.3 ship until it entered the clouds and was lost to sight. However, the breaks in the clouds permitted Captain Wallick to keep an eye on the ship so as to be sure that it did not crash into the sea. After it became apparent that the No. 3 ship (flying at approximately 1,000 ft.) was under control and should safely make it back to England , Captain Wallick immediately took up a heading to the diversion Aerodrome at Chivenor , England , since he had a badly wounded tail gunner on board.

"During the running battle, Captain Wallick's crew shot down four enemy fighters, and claimed a fifth as 'probable'. In accounting for the four B-17s that went over the target, Major Smelzer, No. 1 , did not return from the mission.: the No. 2 ship returned to base (Bassingbourn); the No. 3 ship crash-landed somewhere in England ; and Captain Wallick , under the most difficult circumstances, landed safely at Chivenor Aerodrome without further damage to his ship or crew.

23 NOVEMBER, 1942 - MONDAY (CONT'D)

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: Alert No.11; Mission No.8 Target:(1) Brest , France - Submarine Pens

AWARDS CITATION FOR CAPTAIN KENNETH WALLICK – (Cont'd)

His was the only ship, out of the original twelve, to complete the mission as briefed. (Incidentally, he and his crew were stranded at Chivenor for 13 days, awaiting parts and repair, so that the ship could be flown back to its home station (at Bassingbourn)." (See Page 7A, upper left hand corner, for a picture of Capt. Kenneth Wallick and his crew).

CHAPTER 1 - AT FIRST LEARNING COMBAT WITH RAIDS ON FRENCH TARGETS

20 DECEMBER, 1942 - SUNDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: Alert No.13; Mission No.11

Target: (1) Rornilly Sur Seine , France - German Aircraft Pool

Enemy Defenses: Fighters - An additional 100 fighters moved into area

Flak Batteries - Heavy, all along route?

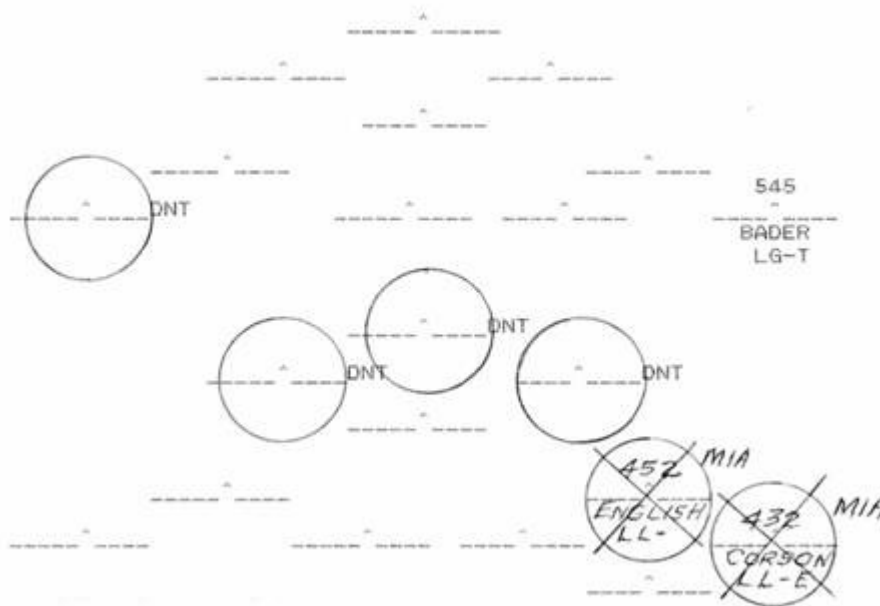
Enemy Fighters Shot Down By Our Ship I 1 CME-103E)

Friendly Fighter Support: RAF Spitfires to accompany, 50 miles inland

Time Schedule: Eng. 0930; Taxi 0950; Bomb Load: 10 X 500 pound High Explosive

Bombing Altitude: 91st B.6. at 21,000 Ft.

Other Bomb Groups: 306th B.G. (Leading), 303RD B.G., 305TH B.G. 31st Bomb Group,
Flight Formation: Details missing.



REMARKS: (See Pages 8A thru 8E)

DNT = Did Not Takeoff; **MIA** = Missing In Action

11th OPERATIONAL MISSION

20 DECEMBER, 1942

TARGET: German Aircraft "Pool" Aerodrome, Romilly Sur Seine, France

Ship- B-17F #1-24545

Off. Crew- Pilot- Bader, Co-pilot- Humphries, Navigator- Admons, Bombardier- Hensley

Enlisted Crew- Sgts. Gray, Kessler, Burton , Budzisz, Hansbury, and Piepho

GENERAL INFORMATION: The target was the great Nazi Aircraft pool base at Romilly-sur-Seine, 80 miles south of Paris , and 180 miles from the coast of France , to be attacked by four "groups" (91st, 306th, 303rd, 305th) composed of both Flying Fortresses and Liberators. The 306th group led the formation and 91st group followed, attacking the target at 21,000 ft. with 10-500 lb. HE bombs per aircraft. We were advised to expect heavy flak concentrations all along the route. The latest intelligence reports indicates the recent arrival of approx. 100 fighter aircraft near target area and since we could expect friendly escort of fighters to accompany us only 50 miles inland- that meant we could be assured of 260 miles of continued enemy fighter attacks.

REMARKS: I was awakened a few minutes before six A.M. by the alert officer (Jim Hensley), and I was dead for sleep, due to the late hours of the Dance last nite. Fortunately, I had not had anything to drink- but there would be plenty that had! After a hurried breakfast, I rushed over to the briefing room- where we were given all of the pertinent facts concerning the target, etc. Our crew were slated to fly Lt. Beasley's ship, since he and his crew were on "pass"- also our ship was out of commission, still awaiting to have the guns test-fired at high altitude.

We taxied out of dispersal pens at 9:50 and ran into quite a bit of confusion when one of the 323rd ships got stuck in the mud- and held up 3 other ships behind it. Consequently, only 17 of the proposed 21 aircraft took off- and since our ship was considered a spare, we immediately filled in for the ship that got stuck in the mud. The climb to our cruising altitude was without incident except for the fact that we lost No. 3 supercharger due to breakage in exhaust stack- making it difficult to maintain our position in formation. As we crossed the coast of France we would see the long, thin, white vapor trails of fighters far above us. Whether they were friendly or not, we were unable to tell- but we were on the alert for the worst. And in a few minutes later the worst came! A formation of fighters to our left front came screaming down on us in a head-on attack! At first they came in rather orderly in flights of 4 to 6, and "peeling-off", would rake our formation with machine gun and cannon fire. It was after the second or third of these attacks that our rear gunner announced seeing two bombers of our group go down. Presumably, these were ships piloted by Lts. English and Lt. Corson, of the 401st Squadron.

Then the attacking fighters seemed to come in from two or here directions at once- and it was on such attack that our ship got raked with three 30 cal. machine gun shells finding their place on our nose. One came in above the nose and apparently exploded in the control panel, sending up a sheet of flame between Don and I. Don called over the interphone that he had been hit, for there was blood all over the floor. At the same time, I thought it was me who had been hit for I was suffering from acute pains in the stomach. It turned out that neither of us were scratched: the blood on the floor was found to be the red hydraulic fluid, and the pains in my stomach were due to the "bends". The second bullet entered the right side of the ship, not more than a few inches from me, penetrated five bulkheads, giving Sgt. Piepho (waist gunner) a flesh wound in the thigh, and then the bullet veered out the right side of the ship- just before reaching the tail gunner! The third bullet did little or no damage.

It was shortly after this attack the ball turret (Sgt. Budzisz) caught an ME-109E trying to sneak up on us from the rear and shot the fighter down. The intensity of the attacks decreased as we flew further inland- apparently the fighters were running out of ammunition and fuel. But we knew, as we saw them break away and head for home, that they were just going down to reload, and would be back up to meet us on the way out! But what an enjoyable “breathing spell” those few minutes were. Our bombing run over the target was conducted without interference. The expert job done at camouflaging the landing field was worthy of mention- and I fear if we had been less thoroughly “briefed” the target would have escaped detection. As it were, very good results were seen on the target. Our tail gunner reported seeing both of the hangers afire!

We had turned away from the target, headed back for the coast and had flown but very few minutes when we were re-engaged by enemy fighters. The preponderance of the attack were made against the far side of the formation, though we suffered several surprise head-on attacks that almost got us. This trip back was far more nerve-racking than the trip in- for I was able to observe at least 75% of the enemy fighters as they climbed for altitude, just out of range of our guns; then as they positioned themselves above us and to the beam’ and finally their screaming dive on the formation. That rolling dive is hard to forget; with the wing guns and nose guns spitting tracer bullets and cannon fire- it appeared as though the fighters were on fire. You would hopefully await for them to explode from the flames-but on they would come, still spitting tracers and cannon!

It was on the trip out that I saw for the first time, an aircraft get shot down- and both of them were bombers from the 306th group. The first had its tail shot away and it immediately plummeted to earth like a falling rock. Only one person was seen to bale out- and then the crash! The second ship was seen to gradually slide out of formation, with one engine dead and another afire, and enemy fighters swarming over it- waiting for the kill. It was a comforting sight to see eight of the crew parachute to safety. I’m still “sweating out” those other two men (my guess is that they were pilot and co-pilot- for they have quite a time getting out). One interesting and amusing episode during the flight back to the coast was Capt. Wallick’s trickery against the Hun. After losing an engine, he was forced to drop out of the formation, and his two wing ships piloted by Lt.’s Barton and Baird courageously followed him down. Of course their small number of 3 attracted the fire of a great number of fighters and as a result Burton’s ship got badly shot up and headed for the ground (he managed to get across the channel and crash-land in South England- hitting two sheep and a rabbit while doing so).

Lt. Baird, in the meantime, gave his compatriots up for lost, so he pointed his nose down and streaked for home- and made it! Capt. Wallick on the other hand, having lost a second engine, was losing altitude rapidly and never expected evading capture. So in desperation he lowered his landing gear (having heard that to be international sigh of surrender) and spiraled down with a FW-190 on his tail. But the tail gunner had not known of Capt. Wallick’s armistice, so when the trailing enemy fighter came within range- he shot him down. When Wallick reached cloud cover, he raised his landing gear, started up one of his dead engines and staggered home. It is said that the propeller on his damaged engine flew off the hub (while he was making a landing) and beat him to the field. The fighters broke off their attacks on us, over the coast of France, so we were able to cross the channel unmolested- and started our descent. Then was the first opportunity we had had to assess the damage to our ship, and crew (only Sgt. Piepho). Since our main hydraulic line was damaged, we would have no brakes on landing, consequently we ordered all the crew to radio room (safest place in case of crash) just in case. We had to circle the field until all other planes had landed. Then we came in making a dead-stick landing on grass area; it was a very slow, tail-first landing and we scarcely had to touch the emergency brakes to bring the ship to a stop. Taxied over to control tower where an ambulance met us to pick up

Sgt. Piepho. My, what a relief to set foot on earth again for this was one afternoon I truly never expected to see.

(Intelligence reports disclosed the loss of 6 bombers versus approx. 50 fighters)

CHAPTER 1 - AT FIRST, LEARNING COMBAT WITH RAIDS ON FRENCH TARGETS

30 DECEMBER, 1942 - WEDNESDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: Alert No.19; Mission No.12

Target: (1) Lorient , France - Submarine Installations

Enemy Defenses: Fighters - Heavy concentration of both S-E. and T. E. Fighters

Flak Batteries - Heavy concentration in vicinity of target area

Enemy Fighters Shot Down By Our Ship: 1 Focke Wulf 190 (probable)

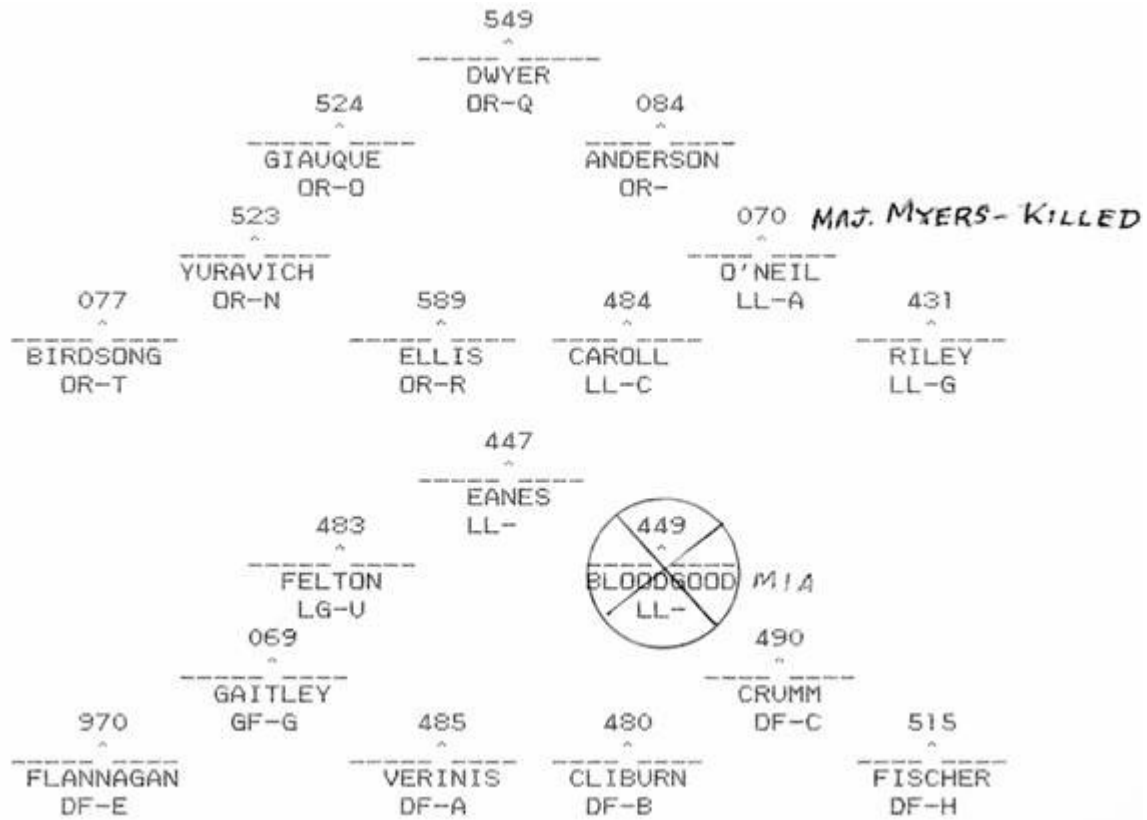
Friendly Fighter Support: None

Time Schedule: Sta. 0904; Taxi 0919; T.O. 0934; Leave 0954; Zero 1100

Bomb Load; 2 x 2,000 pound High Explosive

Bombing Altitude: 91st B.G. at 21,000 ft.

Other Bomb Groups: 306th B.G. (leading) at 20,000 ft. 303rd at 22,000 ft.; 305th at 23,000 ft 91st Bomb Group, Flight Formation: (First. 18 aircraft!)



30 DECEMBER, 1942 - WEDNESDAY (CONT'D)

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT : Alert No .19; Mission No . 1 2

Target: (1) Lorient , France - Submarine Installations

91st Bomb Group, Flight Formation; (Last 3 aircraft)

481

CAMPBELL

LG-M

432

453

BADER

HARDIN

LG-S

LG-O

GENERAL INFORMATION: The target was the important sub-base and its installations, located on the Atlantic coast of France at Lorient. Four bombardment groups (306, 91, 303, 305) composed of Flying Fortresses and Liberators were taking part with the 306th B.G. leading. Our group was to be the second bomb bombing the target at 21,000 ft. with two 2000 lb. bombs per aircraft. This was to be our eighth attack on military objectives in that locality, so we knew from past experience that we might expect both dense, heavy, accurate flak as well as the best of the Luftwaffe fighters. The weather forecast was uncertain- so this mission might end up like the last over Lorient where we went on a “cooks tour” of France and no bombs were dropped due to overcast skies obscuring the target.

REMARKS: Was awakened shortly before 6:00 this morning by Lt. Corley, and since “briefing” was at 6:45 I hurriedly dressed and rushed downstairs for breakfast. As I left the club for briefing room, I was amazed to find the ground covered with snow- the first time in my life I remembered seeing such a sight- and it was truly beautiful. However, the strong wind blowing made it quite uncomfortable, and I withdrew tortoise-like into my fur-lined flying suit.

The “briefing” was completed in short order, and after last minute preparations, Don and I secured a truck, picked up Jim and Jack at their room and went out to the ship. It was snowing quite heavily when we arrived and since the ground crew were pre-fighting the ship, we remained huddled in the truck- watching the snow fall and wondering if we would be able to get off the ground. The snow finally subsided and the next 45minutes was busily spent assembling guns, etc.

Taxiing and takeoff were without unusual incidents; but we had climbed only several hundred feet when we ran into snow flurries that put on “on instruments”. We almost lost the formation. Our group was scattered all over the sky and never assembled correctly until almost mid-channel point. The other bomb groups must have had the same difficulty, for they were pretty well scattered and mixed up too. (The 306 group established an abortive record- all but one-lone-rear of our formation).

We circled the rendezvous point at 21,000 ft. looking in every direction for the 306 group-who were to lead. At 11:05, five minutes after the zero hour, the 91st assumed the lead and started across the channel. The coast of France was obscured by clouds as we passed over it, but they soon dissipated into nothingness, allowing a full clear picture of the target- yet 20 miles away! The bombing run was interrupted by several fighters making head-on attacks at the lead-ships and the flak was beginning to get dense- but we flew straight and level through it all, making the smoothest bombing run I have ever seen.

All of this time I could see the enemy fighters off in the distance- climbing feverishly for altitude. They had positioned themselves for the attack, which came at the very instant we had dropped our bombs. The next fifteen minutes were so filled with activity that it is difficult to single out any particular episode. We managed to keep in close formation with our element leader, Capt. Campbell and by using violent evasive action; we weathered attack after attack from enemy fighters- without being hit once. Our gunners claimed one enemy FW-190 probably destroyed.

Towards the latter part of the melee, I noticed a lone B-17 quite a ways beneath us with No. 1 engine on fire, and No. 2 engine feathered- and fighters still attacking him. Don called Capt. Campbell, element leader, on the radio- set and asked him to drop down with our 3 ship element and render support to the unfortunate bomber beneath us. After several unsuccessful attempts to contact Capt. Campbell, Don & I decided to leave formation and go down by ourselves. We had just positioned our ship on the other wing in time to receive the attacks of two enemy fighters, which we successfully drove away. We recognized the lone B-17 as belonging to the 306th (it was the only one of its group not to turn back before reaching the channel) and after it had put out the first and gotten both the engines running again and since no fighters were to be seen- our ship rejoined the formation then nearest to us.

But close examination revealed the markings on the ships in that formation not to be ours, so we tried another, and another and finally the fourth, which proved to be the remnants of our group. There were remnants, or bunches, of ships scattered all over the sky, so that it was difficult to determine who belonged to what! That is the tendency after a hard fight, to relax by spreading out the formation- and worse yet, to head for home as individual ships. But this was one day where such a practice would prove extremely dangerous, for we were flying above overcast clouds and a freak wind change made our navigation quite unreliable. (We were retuning from the target by water-route, rather than re-crossing France again.)

Nevertheless, it seemed as though few of the crews realized the seriousness of the situation. I know ours didn't. The pilot (Don) left his seat and went down to the nose of the ship to stretch and have a bite to eat. The bombardier (Jim) came up and sat in the pilot's seat and proceeded to fly the airplane, under my instruction. It was such a relief to let go of the wheel, remove my feet from the rudder pedals, and take a long wanted stretch and smoke! Soon we flew over some small islands and land was just ahead when all of a sudden a red ball of flame shot past our nose and exploded uncomfortably near! I immediately diagnosed it as "light flak" and called up the navigator to make note of the event on his log and warned him to get busy with the signal lamp and answer any further challenges from the ground so we wouldn't be fired on again! I thought to myself, that it was bad enough to be fired at by the enemy, let alone to be fired upon as we return to England. Hardly a minute had elapsed when we had flak bursting all around us. I immediately speeded up to catch the formation just ahead. It was then that I glanced out over the right wing and saw a tremendous dog-fight. I could make out a burning B-17 (later believed to be the same ship we had rescued over an hour ago) making its death-spin into the sea, and another B-17 was frantically fighting for its life with 5 or 6 fighters attacking from every side.

[It seems like this was a long drawn out incident the way it is told, but really the time required was very few seconds.]

Then it suddenly dawned on me; that wind change had blown us off course and – My God, were over France! Things happened quicker than you could begin to tell them. Don was in the pilots seat before I could call him on interphone, we had rejoined formation, changed our course- and away we flew!

Although we were never attacked by fighters still we came pretty close to some flak bursts. Needless to say the trip home, from there on, was in dead earnest and I daresay, no one relaxed till they set foot on grounds.

PASSING COMMENT: Three bombers were lost on the raid, one of them from the 91st group (piloted by Lt. Bloodgood, 401st squadron) but our losses, one bomber and possibly two were lost as we blundered over France, thinking it to be England. Another tragedy of the day was the death of Maj. Myers (copilot for Lt. O’Neil). Maj. Myers was C. O. of the 401st squadron and his death marks the loss of four Squadron Commanders since our start on operations. Also, Capt. Yuravich, of the 323rd Sqdn., was severely injured and his co-pilot, Lt. Shaw, brought the ship safely home, though injured himself.

CHAPTER 1 – AT FIRST LEARNING COMBAT WITH RAIDS ON FRENCH TARGETS

1 JANUARY, 1943 - FRIDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: None

DIARY INPUT: "I awoke quite late this morning with a horrible hangover from the big 'New Year's Eve' party last night. The only reason I got out of bed was to go over to Finance Office to get paid - and cabled home \$76.00 to Emily. After having dinner, my disposition was much improved. Since our ship's crew received 24-hour pass today - Don, Jack, Jim, and I made plans for a trip to London - catching the 2:21 PM train out of Royston via the villages of Baldock, Hitchin, Hertford, Enfield , into London . (See Pages TOP and 10E for map of area; On map Page 1 DJ>, Royston may be found at coordinates: Horizontal 3.5,' and Vertical 4.1; also, Bassingbourn may be found 2 miles N. of Royston). We were lucky to get rooms and suite reservations at the Mayfair Hotel in Berkley Square -quite a ritzy place! (See Page 10F for postcard picture of an earlier visit). Our evening was devoid of any conspicuous celebration other than having a very nice, but expensive, dinner in the hotel. Afterwards, we talked over our drinks -discussing our crew, our ship, the raids - past and those to come! Got to bed about 2:00 AM next morning.

2 JANUARY, 1943 - SATURDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: None

DIARY INPUT: The room clerk gave us a wake-up call around 7:30 this morning, but Jim and I were the only ones to heed the call and we went shopping. I made inquiries, found the Government Post Office and sent a cable to Emily - just to let her know I was Okay.

“The morning passed quickly and Jim and I rushed to the Kings Cross Railway station and telephoned Don and Jack from there, warning them not to miss the 10:15 AM train. They arrived while Jim and I were out having a cup of coffee in the station and when we returned to the loading point, we never could find them in the crowd. It so happened that they caught the train while we were out searching for them. Jim and I disgustedly (oh yeah!) returned to the city, deciding to spend our wait ('til the next train

at 12:23 PM) in the American Bar at the Piccadilly Hotel. We became engrossed in a conversation with a Canadian officer, lost track of time and missed the second train. Fortunately, the bar closed at 3:00 PM, so we caught the 3:21 PM train just as it was pulling out of the station. On my return to the field, I was delighted to find two letters from my sister Helen, and a cable and #49 letter from Emily. The discouraging feature of our return, was hearing of a raid 'cooking' for tomorrow - maybe into Germany. Wow!

I wanted to write Emily this evening but rest is now demanded in order to meet the trials of tomorrow."

3 JANUARY, 1943 - SUNDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: Alert No. 20; Mission No. 13

Target: (1) Submarine base at St. Nazaire , France

Time Schedule: Brief 0600; Sta. 0830; Taxi 0857; T.O. 0912; Leave 0932;

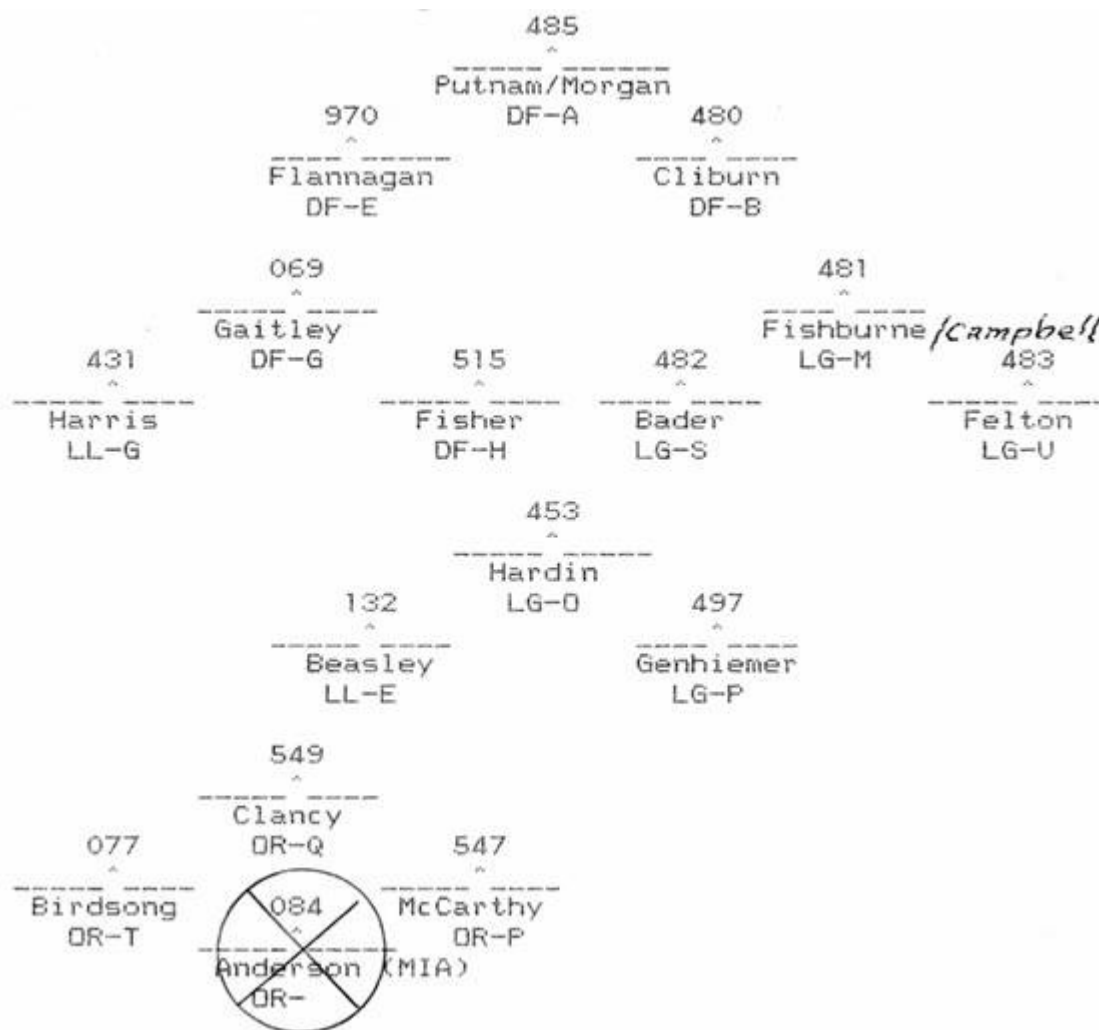
Zero 1030: Target 1137

Bomb Load: 5 x 1,000 pounds High Explosive

Bombing Altitude: 91st B.G at 22,000 Ft.

Bomb Groups: 303rd Leading at 20,000; 305th at 21,000; 306th at 23,000 Ft.

Bomb Group Formation:



GENERAL INFORMATION: The target for this mission was the installations of the important U-Boat base at St. Nazaire , France. The same four bombardment groups (303, 305, 91, 306) as in the last few raids were participating with the 303rd group leading. Our group was to be the third over the target, flying at an altitude of 22,000 ft. with 5-1000 lb. bombs per ship. Our past experience over St Nazaire has been grievously memorable, so we were expecting the worst- both in flak and fighters. Weather forecasts were very good; with exception of very high winds (100 mph) opposing us on our bombing run- but if the flak isn't too heavy, the resultant low speed on the run should make for some accurate bombing.

3 -JANUARY, 1943 - SUNDAY (CONT'D)

MISSION REMARKS; "You could tell this was Sunday by the fact that we are going on a raid - which makes it the 5th of its kind on St. Nazaire. Four Bomb Groups are to participate and we 91st B.G.) are to be the third over the target at 22,000 ft. with 5 x 1000 pound High Explosive bombs. The takeoff and climb to altitude were without incident. As we crossed the coast of France , I attempted to put on my steel helmet. But I finally decided against it; because the diminished field-of vision would decrease my effectiveness as a pilot. As for the flak vest, I decided that I would sit on it! The flight across France was quite calm, too damn calm!

"However, it did give me a chance to look down on the country—side, which looked so peaceful and green. The clouds were non-existent, though they were forecast to have been scattered.

We finally got to the Initial Point (IP) and started our bombing run against the wind at 100 mph, which seemed like an eternity; although in actuality was only 14 minutes. Nevertheless, we kept our ships flying straight and level much too long, which allowed the flak batteries to make accurate adjustments on us. Our ship got two huge flak fragments hitting our right wing; one fragment severed the oil line on No. 4 engine, which caught on fire! We lost all power on No. 4 engine and were unable to feather the propeller; so we couldn't maintain sufficient speed and the formation pulled away from us!

I can't begin to describe the nightmare which followed -for we were one lone ship fighting against approximately twenty enemy fighters. After it was all over, our ship confirmed the destruction of six Focke Wulf 190s; but in payment, our ship was literally a sieve! For a while it appeared that we would have to ditch the aircraft into the freezing waters of the Bay of Biscay . However, we finally got the fire extinguished and staggered homeward - battered but victorious! We managed to make a good crash landing at the St. Eval Aerodrome in Southern England . The pilot (Lt. Don Bader) and the bombardier (Lt. Jim Hensley) were carried away in an RAF Ambulance to the Headland Military Hospital , near Newquay , England - to have their battle wounds tended.

An RAF lorry picked up the remainder of our crew and delivered the enlisted men to the St. Eval enlisted barracks and Jack Akins and myself to the officers club. I was dead tired and after having a fresh egg (fried over-light) I went to bed. That night, I had a wild dream about meeting, Capt. McCormick, Lt. Frazier, and Ward Matthews (all deceased); that dream almost came true today!"

DIARY INPUT: (I spent a very restless night being awakened by wild dreams and nightmares. In one, I dreamed that I met Lt. Frazier and Capt. McCormick in some strange and distant land. This particular dream really bothered me for both of the above mentioned were shot down over St. Nazaire on Nov. 23rd raid.) So I awakened this morning with premonition that disaster was close on my heels. The "briefing" was scheduled for 0600, which was too early to allow us to have breakfast; so I was far from being in a pleasant mood. Since we had seen the target pictures so often, and knew the fighter and anti-aircraft defenses, almost by heart, the "briefing" lived up to its name and was very short. We returned to the club and had breakfast; then secured transportation and went out to the ship, to get it in readiness for takeoff. While the ground crew was pre-fighting the ship I strolled over to a nearby fallen log and sat down. As the first streaks of dawn broke through and silhouetted our bomber, it was an awe inspiring sight and I murmured a prayer for the safe-keeping of the crew on this mission. The top-turret guns gave us considerable trouble and when we took off neither of them were operating. But Sgt. Hall (replacement engineer for this mission) worked feverishly on them and by the time we had reached mid-channel he had both of them working- and all other guns were working sweetly (except radio gun), so we continued on. There were scarcely a cloud in the sky and the visibility was unlimited- it seems as

3 -JANUARY, 1943 - SUNDAY (CONT'D)

though you could see clear across France. It was by far, the prettiest day we have yet had- and the flight inland was not marred by one burst of flak or one enemy fighter! It must be the proverbial “calm before the storm” thought I, to myself. This was the first chance I had been able to study the landscape beneath me: it looked so green and pleasant, with the little villages nestled in the valleys of the rolling hills; all seemed so quiet and peaceful beneath.

The bombing run approached St. Nazaire from the east, almost parallel with the Loire River. The bombing run was much too long (14 min) and allowed the flak batteries to make very accurate adjustments on us. We flew straight and level for the last several minutes (that seemed like ages) and should have gotten some excellent hits on the target. Just as the last bomb left the ship, we received a direct hit of “heavy” flak in our right wing tearing a huge hole in it. Other near-misses were bouncing us around like a cork on a stormy sea. Finally the formation turned off the target to the left, and headed for the water; but just as we were crossing the coast, we flew right through a dense barrage of mixed-colored heavy flak, and one of the shells had our number on it for it made a direct hit in the No. 4 engine and literally blew the “guts” out of it. It seemed as though the whole right wing burst into flames then- and Don and I were busy-beavers in the cockpit with feathering the prop, trying to extinguish the flames, evade the attacking fighters, and try to keep formation. (Just then someone was talking over the interphone and I learned that the flak had torn numerous holes in the Plexiglas nose- and both Jim and Jack were injured.) What a condition we were in: No. 4 engine blazing with fire and sending out a stream of smoke that could be seen for miles, inviting every fighter in the sky to the kill- and steadily we were falling further and further behind and dropping lower and lower beneath the formation, which was our only hope.

Just about that time, I saw a B-17 off in the distance, burning like a torch and tumbling downward. Just before hitting the water it exploded into what seemed a hundred pieces. You can imagine the fear that gripped me as I looked out my side and seeing the No. 4 engine blazing more fiercely than ever with the flames enveloping the entire wing- and the gasoline tanks just beneath the skin surface of the wing. Our end was very near, only I wasn't exactly sure of how the picture would close. I was certain, however, that there could be only two alternatives- either we would explode into a million pieces when the flames ate their way into the gasoline tank, or else the fighters would save us from the torture of burning by riddling us with their cannon and machine-gun fire. It seems as though the Judge couldn't decide our fate and without further cross examination and testing, so to speak, for the fighters started diving on us from every direction while Don and I were trying every trick we knew to evade them. How long these withering attacks kept coming, I don't know, but it seemed like hours. But the first breathing spell I had, I gave a quick glance to number 4 engine and the flame was out! What a feeling of elevation I experienced! That was our first ray of hope- for escape, and life! (Some say it was “Vulcan” the good gremlin (who eats fire) that came to our rescue. But I have my own convictions- the same convictions I held while sitting on that log early this morning, while watching the crew preflight the airplane.)

3 -JANUARY, 1943 - SUNDAY (CONT'D)

Needless to say, this new stroke of luck gave new life and courage to the whole crew and time after time we fought off the attacks of the fighters returning their withering gun fire with tracers of our own- that often found their mark, sending another Focke-Wulf-190 spinning to the ground in flames. But still the fighters came screaming in- not one at a time but two and three- coming from all directions. Did some one say you couldn't maneuver a B-17? Don't let 'em kid you. On several occasions we had the ship in a seventy degree bank, which left the attacking fighters firing at thin air. We were trying every evasive action we could think of- and they must have been good- for we had fought off approximately twenty or twenty-five fighter attacks without their getting in a single damaging shot to either our ship or crew. But both Don and I were getting so tired, and I had severe cramps in both of my legs from kicking the rudders so continuously and violently. However, during all of our maneuvering we made it a point to keep track of our formation- now quite a distance ahead and above us. Suddenly there came an excited warning over the interphone "fighter approaching from the twelve o'clock position' below" I immediately nosed the ship down, but it was too late- for he had us in his sights- and I could hear the crashing of glass, the breaking of metal, and could see a spurt of flame in the cockpit, and then it was over. A light yellow smoke having an acrid sickening smell hung over the cockpit. I saw Don reach downward to his trouser leg and examine his leg. He had been hit. The wounds were not serious, but still it impaired his flying. It would only be a matter of minutes now till the fighters would have to turn back for we were quite some distance out to sea- but we needed help if we were to last few minutes. I started calling the lead ship (Maj. Putnam) by radio- once, twice, three times and no reply. I tried again, pleading for him to drop down some and reduce his airspeed so we could catch up with the formation. Finally, I received an answer; it was Capt. Campbell's voice! He had heard our call and was now making a large circle and dropping down to cover our tail- and just in time to shoot down a fighter coming in to attack us. Whew! We were safe from the enemy- now if we can only reach England. It was questionable at the time for No. 4 engine was dead and wind milling, and No. 3 engine was coughing & sputtering! We finally caught up with the formation and limped home, sometimes on three engines, and on short breathtaking intervals- sometimes only two engines. Since the flight was along one and our gas running low, we had to land at St. Eval Aerodrome, on the southern tip of England. The hydraulic system was shot out on our ship which meant no brakes, so we were the last to land. It was difficult landing but successfully accomplished, with nothing more than a mild ground-loop at the end of the runway- due to lack of brakes. As the ship came to a stop and the wheels settled in the soft underground, I can remember now the tired sigh of relief Don and I exchanged. An ambulance came driving up and removed Don and Jim to the hospital before I got energy enough to climb out of my seat, and make my exit through the front hatchway. Then I walked slowly around the ship and surveyed her many battle scars and damage. I was a bit sad as I drove away in the truck and looked back on our ship, "Heavyweight Annihilator"- I would never forget that she lived up to her name; for against overwhelming odds she "slugged-it-out" to a victorious finish- and brought her crew safely home.

PASSING COMMENTS: Interrogation revealed this mission to be the costliest in loss of ships and crews of any raid yet made by U.S. bombers in the European Theatre of operations. The count: 7 bombers and their crews lost in action. Of this number the 91st group lost one ship (#084, piloted by Lt. Anderson, 323rd squadron). There is a note worthy of mention in regard to enemy fighters shot down: Total destroyed- 38; of this number the 91st group claims 24; of this number, the 322nd squadron claims 17; of this number, our crew claims 6!! Sgt. Hall-2, Lt. Hensley-1, Sgt. Hansbury-1, Sgt. Budzycz-1, Sgt. Tamsett-1 B-17F # 1-24482 Officers: Bader (P), Humphries (CP), Hensley (B), Adkins (N) Enlisted: Sgts: Hall, Kessler, Burton, Budzicz, Tamsett, Hansbury

3 -JANUARY, 1943 - SUNDAY (CONT'D)

Editor's Note: This was the last Combat Mission for Bert Humphries because his B-17 #482 was badly damaged, crash landed, and subsequently salvaged. From here on he was 322nd B.S. Operations Officer and planned missions for the squadron.

4 JANUARY, 1943 - MONDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: None

DIARY INPUT: "NOTE: Seven bombers were lost in yesterday's raid - one of them from the 91st Bomb Group (that being Lt. Anderson and crew from the 323rd Bomb Squadron).

Jack and I went out to see Don and Jim at the Headland Hospital. They had just finished operating on Jim, removing a fragment of flak from his right knee. The wound though not serious may cause a slight lameness, since the knee cap was fractured. Don's status was not fully known but it is believed that his leg wound is not serious and the doctors expect him to be up and around before the week is out.

Jack and I enjoyed another delicious fresh egg for breakfast. The accommodations at St. Eval Aerodrome are very poor in comparison to Bassingbourn and all the comforts we enjoy there; so that fact, in conjunction with many others, made us all anxious to get 'home'.

I assembled the crew and went out to our ship and removed all accountable squadron equipment from it - for our ship, No. 482, "Heavyweight Annihilator" was a badly mangled B-17, with little hope of taking to the air again! I felt a little sad as I walked away because our ship had served us well and I hated to see her scrapped and become a 'hangar queen'. We split up the crew and equipment so that half of us could fly back to Bassingbourn on Lt. Hardin's plane and the remainder with Capt. Campbell - who had flown down to pick us up.

It certainly felt good to get 'home' again! After taking a nice hot bath and having a good, substantial evening meal, I returned to my room and went to bed. My severe case of stomach cramps seems to be leaving me now."

5 JANUARY, 1943 - TUESDAY BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT; None

DIARY INPUT: "I awoke this morning somewhat refreshed. As I peered out the window of my second floor bedroom to check the weather, I could see very little for a thick fog obscured the landscape. I attended the regular squadron meeting this morning and had to explain to the Operations Officer why the silk 'innards' of one of our parachutes that we brought home was missing. I explained that on the St. Nazaire mission the chute got caught in the ball turret gears which chewed it up badly. After landing at St. Eval, the members of the crew proceeded to slash out panels of silk (for scarves).

After the squadron meeting, I returned to my room and tried to get caught up on my "Battle Journal". Jack Atkins and Jay Beauchamp came over to see me this afternoon and urged me to accompany them into Cambridge for the purpose of celebrating Jay's birthday but I was unable to do so. However, I gave Jay a message to cable back to Emily to let her know that I was still alive.

My correspondence is suffering here of late - but with all the activity, accompanied by my state of mind and despondency that I have had - I decided maybe it would be better if I did not write just yet.

CHAPTER 1 - AT FIRST, LEARNING COMBAT WITH RAIDS ON FRENCH TARGETS

6 JANUARY, 1943 - WEDNESDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: None

DIARY INPUT: "I forgot to set the alarm clock last night and as a result, I didn't wake up until 0300 hours and missed the squadron meeting this morning, as well as breakfast. Poor me! I have been having an ache in my chest, here of late, and so I reported for sick call at the hospital. After examining me, the doctor seemed to think that I might be having a reoccurrence of the pleurisy that I was plagued with in 1937.

I reported to squadron operations to explain my absence at this morning's meeting and Lt. Corley pointed out some interesting figures concerning the last St. Nazaire raid that should bear mention: 38 fighters were claimed to have been shot down by the combined four Bomb Groups; of these, 24 were credited to the 91st Bomb Group; of these 17 were credited to the 322nd Squadron; of these, our ship got 6! Not bad, eh?

I've forgotten to mention the weather today; there was a light snow fall on the ground this morning (.it snowed during the night); but now it is raining and has become very cold and dreary.

This evening, I checked the mail box and discovered that I had received two letters from Emily (Nos. 44 & 47) and one from her sister (Robert White). It certainly feels good to get back in 'contact' with home. I heard a rumor today that we may be back in the USA by March 1st!"

7 JANUARY, 1943 - THURSDAY BATTLE

JOURNAL INPUT: None

DIARY INPUT: "When I set foot outside this morning what should greet *me* but a cold drizzling rain - good old England. Brr! Sometimes I think, too bad they don't shoot down all the barrage balloons and scuttle the island!

I made out a recommendation for Sgt. Burton to become Gunnery Instructor Officer - I hate to lose him from our crew but 2nd Lt. bars would be a great break for him and he deserves the opportunity.

There is a rumor floating around that I am to be checked out as 1st Pilot and then get a ship and crew of my own. There is nothing on this side of the ocean I would like better - but gosh, how I would hate to leave Don and the others.

I inspected the mockup installation of the new 50 caliber gun installation in the nose of B-17 No. 537 - replacing the current 30 caliber machine gun. I hope this modification works and helps to discourage 'Jerry' from making those frontal attacks on our formations.

CHAPTER 1 - AT FIRST, LEARNING COMBAT WITH RAIDS ON FRENCH TARGETS

7-JANUARY, 1943 - THURSDAY (CONTD)

DIARY INPUT: (CONTD)

"I attended a Presentation of Awards ceremony wherein 1st Lt. Charles Cliburn was presented the first Distinguished Flying Cross CDFC) in the 31st Bomb Group.

I censored outgoing mail this afternoon until General Hansell came barging into the room, distracting everyone. He made me self-conscious so I left.

Just before dinner, Don telephoned me from the Musgrave Military Hospital in Taunton , Somerset (both he and Jim have just been moved from the Headland Hospital to this one for their recuperation phase). Don requested that I come down tomorrow to visit with him and Jim; also to bring their uniforms and personal stuff.

I received two letters (Nos. 51 & 52) from Emily today.

8 JANUARY, 1943 - FRIDAY BATTLE

JOURNAL INPUT: None

DIARY INPUT: "I attended squadron meeting this morning and arranged to get a 43-hour pass for Jack, Jay and myself - so that we could visit our lads in the hospital, and fill their specific requests as follows;

- Lt. Berku (324th Squadron): Garrison cap, fountain pen, and January flight certificate.
- Lt. Fisher (323rd Squadron): January flight certificate.
- Lt. Hensley (322nd Squadron): 2 copies of promotion orders to 1st Lt. (from his 201 File), A-2 leather jacket, Pair of slippers and January flight certificate.
- Lt. Bader (322nd Squadron): Pair of 'pink' dress trousers, 'Short' coat, and January flight certificate.
- Lt. Harris: personal baggage.

Since we were delivering quite a load of stuff, I obtained authorization to get a reconnaissance vehicle out of the motor pool and since I was the only one who had an International Driver's License, I became the designated driver.

We left Bassingbourn after lunch and we took Lt. Brodnax with us as far as London . It seems as though we got lost and had to stop and inquire for directions at the most convenient times - making three stops - all in pubs! It seems queer that after 2:30 PM (pubs close then) - we never got lost again. However, the lads were certainly feeling 'high' by the time we got to London !

I decided that since we still had five to six hours of driving ahead of us to reach Taunton, and with the "difficulties of 'blackout conditions' permitting only a slit of light emanating from the vehicle's headlights, we had best not try to negotiate those winding, undulating roads at night. I decided that it would be better for us to stay in London overnight and resume our trip early in the morning. We obtained rooms at the Tuscan Hotel, near Piccadilly Circus, in the center of London . Jay Beauchamp and I went out for the evening while Jack Atkins stayed in the hotel."

9 JANUARY, 1943 - SATURDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: Alert. No. 21; Mission No. None

Target: Emden , Germany

Mission Details: Not Available MISSION REMARKS: Mission Cancelled.

DIARY INPUT: "We awakened quite early this morning, eager to get an early start on our trip, but by the time we had eaten breakfast, reloaded the reconnaissance vehicle and cleared the hotel, it was almost 9:00 AM. Then we lost over an hour's time by taking the wrong road out of London - which was typical of the whole trip, for we were continually taking the wrong fork in the road, a wrong turn here or there, or something else! (But it must be noted that the British were prepared for invasion by the Hun and, therefore, all road signs, road numbers, town names, etc. had been removed!) Our route from London was through Brendon, Bassingstoke, Salisbury and then to Taunton our destination. The ride was most uncomfortable, as it was freezing cold and the recon vehicle did not have its side curtains aboard. Nevertheless, the trip was quite an experience and revealed quite an assortment of beautiful country-side. It seemed as though the character of the complete landscape would change every 25 or 30 miles. It is needless to say that our lads were most pleased to see us; all of them were getting along well and were in good spirits-except Jim, who was suffering considerable pain in his knee. Colonel Moore (Head of the hospital) was exceedingly gracious to us and arranged for our meals and lodging."

CHAPTER 1 - AT FIRST, LEARNING COMBAT WITH RAIDS ON FRENCH TARGETS

10-JANUARY. 1943 – SUNDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: None

DIARY INPUT: "I enjoyed a very restful night of sleep here in Taunton , after going without much sleep in London , Friday night. After breakfast, we (Jack, Jay and I) visited the lads again. Just before leaving the hospital, we saw Don all dolled up in the dress uniform we had brought him - he had a date with a nurse to go to church. What a Casanova! (See Page I8A for snapshots showing Don's first day out of the hospital plus other shots of our aircrew). Our return trip to Bassingbourn was along a route somewhat westerly of the one we took down, which allowed us to see even more variety in the terrain of this unique country. From Taunton we proceeded, in turn, to Bath , Swindon, Oxford , Luton , Royston and Bassingbourn.

This country has some of the most beautiful landscapes and scenery that I have ever viewed —but oh, the roads! The roads are very narrow (except arterial highways) and they twist and turn, go up and down, zig and zag, etc., endlessly! And it seems as though you are scarcely out of one village before you pass through another; and without road signs and town markers, it is hard to tell one from another. To make matters worse, the last 75 miles of our return trip was driven in a thick, freezing fog and an ice covered road. It was difficult to keep the windscreen (i.e. windshield) clear of the rime ice and to keep the tires from slipping on the ice-covered pavement as we climbed some of the steep hills. I was dead tired when we finally arrived at Bassingbourn, and I was glad to relinquish my role as designated driver. I was delighted to have waiting for me 6 letters and a cable-gram from Emily, the dear! (Incidentally, all of Emily's letters were Air-Mailed and quite tardy as compared to V-Mail). One of the letters contained a much wanted photograph of my two sons, Butch and Randy - my, how they have grown! I also received a letter from my sister June, who is a missionary in South America ."

11 JANUARY, 1943 - MONDAY BATTLE

JOURNAL INPUT: None

DIARY INPUT: "Our Squadron Operations Officer, 1st Lt. Corley, announced this morning that today's was to be the last daily, squadron meeting we would have - as long as our attendance to ground school, trainer schedules, etc. are kept up! Whoopee! This means that I can sleep late when there is nothing scheduled - especially the day after a completed mission. I learned that the 31st Bomb Group is planning a new tactical formation for our next mission. The rationale behind it is "that it will enable the group to bring more guns to bear on enemy fighters making frontal attacks. The 305th Bomb Group has been using this 'staggered' formation all along and have had wonderful success with it. See the diagram on the next page:

CHAPTER 1 - AT FIRST, LEARNING COMBAT WITH RAIDS ON FRENCH TARGETS

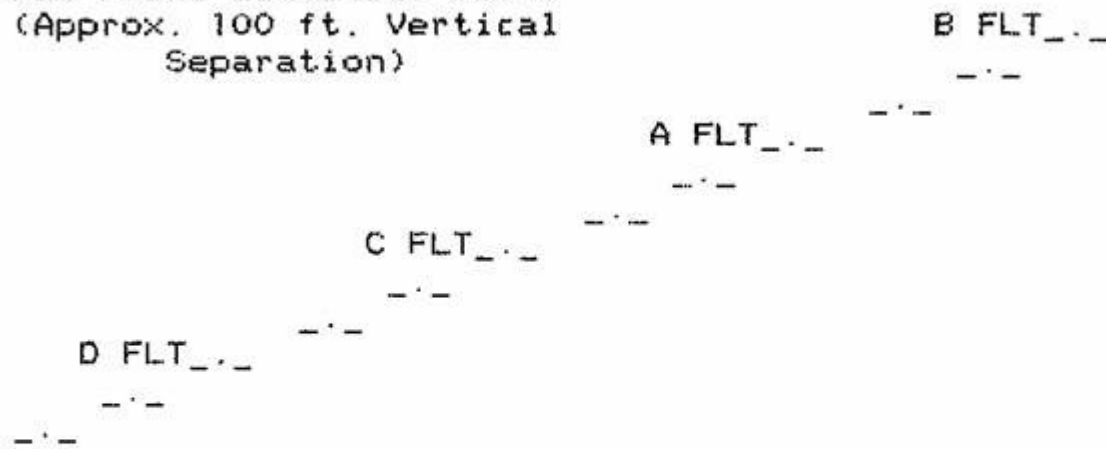
11 JANUARY, 1943 - MONDAY (CONT'D)

DIARY INPUT: (Cont'd)

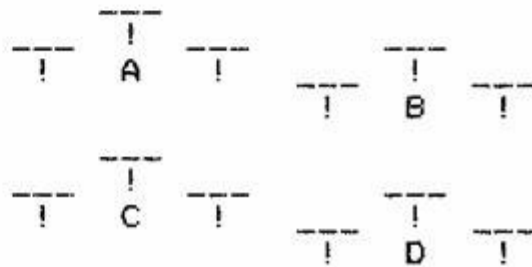
"New Plan View:



New Front Elevation View:
(Approx. 100 ft. Vertical Separation)



Old Plan View:



Old Front Elevation View:



The "New Formation" does seem to open up more guns to the front. I only hope it changes our luck on those frontal attacks.

Added Footnote: To my knowledge, the 91st B.G. never tried this new "staggered" formation.

11 JANUARY, 1943 - MONDAY (CONT'D)

DIARY INPUT: (Cont'd)

"I received a letter from my sister Helen with three snapshots enclosed which I like very much. Also, I received an early Christmas carton of Lucky Strikes cigarettes (with a Yowell & Drew sticker, but no name). I don't have a clue who sent them. A mission 'alert' has been sounded for tomorrow but I doubt that anything shall come of it because of poor weather."

12 JANUARY, 1943 - TUESDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: None

DIARY INPUT: "As I predicted, the proposed combat mission for today was cancelled due to inclement weather. I spent the early afternoon catching up on my correspondence. It certainly is uncomfortable in this room of mine - it is so cold and drafty that I put on my fur-lined flying jacket, whenever I plan to stay in the room for any length of time. I was going to buy an electric heater but it wouldn't be permitted to be used. It is rumored that the temperature of the steam-heated radiators is to be raised 20 degrees; maybe that will help.

I received two letters from Emily (Nos. 39 & 48) and also a Christmas card from the Klaises and Blakes.

At dinner this evening I met a Mr. Feldman, who makes transcription records of special events for NBC. He wants me to assist, him on his next job which will be sound effects, etc. of our B-17s taking off and returning from a raid.

I learned from a newspaper article that the lone B-17 from the 306th Bomb Group which we assisted on the Lorient raid, December 30, did not get shot down over Brest, France - but instead made a successful crash landing in England. (The Pilot's name: Captain Clyde B. Walker; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Ship's Name - " Boom Town ")

Wrote Emily a letter (No. 47), cards to Aunt Daisy and to Helen Belle Henderson.

13 JANUARY, 1943 - WEDNESDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: Alert No.22; Mission No.14

Target.: (1) Lille, France - Railroad Marshalling Yards

Mission Details: Not Available

MISSION REMARKS: (See Diary Input)

DIARY INPUT: "My room-mate, Lt. Kious, was awakened this morning by the Alert Officer and informed that he was scheduled to go on a raid. Since my ship is very much torn up and being cannibalized down at St. Eval Aerodrome, I didn't have to go on this mission - so I rolled over and went back to sleep. We have had three prior alerts on this same target, with one raid completed on December 6. Today, the four Bomb Groups (303rd, 305th, 91st, and the 306th) of the 101st Combat Wing were involved. About 1:30 PM the formation flew over our field, quite high, and left a beautiful pattern of vapor trails. I counted 73 ships in the combined force.

CHAPTER 1 - AT FIRST, LEARNING COMBAT WITH RAIDS ON FRENCH TARGETS

13-JANUARY, 1943-WEDNESDAY (CONT'D)

DIARY INPUT: (Cont'd) "Interrogation of crews revealed the raid to have been a relatively easy mission since they encountered but few fighters and very little flak, which was inaccurate. The only ship to encounter trouble in the 31st Bomb Group was Lt. Pelton's (Lt. Kiou, my room-mate is Pelton's co-pilot). Their ship literally got riddled with gun fire from two attacking enemy fighters. Lt. Kiou said that he knew his time had come and this was going to be their finish because; their ship was the 13th in the formation and this is the 13th day of the month. However easy it was supposed to be, three bombers were lost in the effort.

I received letter No.50 and a cable-gram from Emily this afternoon."

14 JANUARY, 1943 - THURSDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: Alert No.23; Mission No. None

Target: Lorient , France - Submarine Pens

Mission Details: Not Available MISSION REMARKS: Mission Cancelled

DIARY INPUT: "Last night, an alert was called for a mission. This morning the crews were briefed and were on their way to the dispersal areas to prepare for engine start when word was passed that the mission had been cancelled due to inclement weather. I understand that it was to be another raid on the submarine pens at Lorient , France . (If so, this will have been the 5th alert that we have had on that target and the last completed mission was on November 22). I wish that we could stay away from those targets down there on the Bay of Biscay - places like St. Nazaire, La Pallice, Brest and Lorient. I know that they are important to the elimination of the submarine threat to Allied shipping but here of late, we have really been taking a beating when we bomb those installations.

Don called me late this afternoon from Musgrave Hospital (down at Taunton , Somerset) anxious to hear how we made out in the raid. I briefed him in cryptic terms that only he could comprehend since we were talking on an insecure telephone connection. He expects to be back with the squadron next week and claims that the other three (Lts. Hensley, Berku and Fisher) are coming along fine. He seemed very dejected to hear of the new combat mission requirements that will have to be met before we are qualified to return to the States: Completion of 30 missions AND 200 hours of combat flying time! Who wouldn't, be dejected - so am I!

CHAPTER 1 - AT FIRST, LEARNING COMBAT WITH RAIDS ON FRENCH TARGETS

14 JANUARY, 1943 - THURSDAY (CONT'D)

DIARY INPUT; (Cont'd) "In Emily's last letter she wrote that Robert Wilder (Class mate of mine at Randolph Field) is now a 1st Lt. and flying A-20s in North Africa. I wrote him a letter and also letter No. 49 to Emily."

15 JANUARY, 1943 - FRIDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: Alert No. 24; Mission No. None

Target: Amiens , France - Railroad Round House & Yards
MISSION REMARKS: Mission Cancelled

DIARY INPUT: "When I awoke this morning, I found out that the Bomb Group had been 'briefed' for a raid on Amiens , France -the target being the railroad roundhouse and the adjacent, marshaling yards. However, after two hours of 'standing by', the mission was finally cancelled due to unfavorable weather. Several of our 'soon to be' escort fighter buddies, flying Republic P-47s, landed at our field this afternoon to pay a friendly visit. Gee! They certainly are powerful looking fighter planes, with four 50-caliber machine guns mounted in each wing; and I am told that the new ones have two 20 MM cannon firing through the propeller! The ship is not only large but heavy (13,500 pounds). I would like to see one of them tangle with a Focke-Wulf 190

This afternoon, our Squadron Commander, Captain Fishburne, advised me that our ship, No.482, "Heavy Weight Annihilator" has been turned over to Air Division Salvage. So until our crew gets a replacement aircraft, I am to be Assistant Squadron Operations Officer and also Armament Officer. My intention is to turn in such a good job performance in that capacity that I will be permanently retained as such.

This evening, I received my sister Helen's No. 1 letter, written January 2nd, and it certainly was welcome."

16 JANUARY, 1943 - SATURDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: Alert No. 25; Mission No. None
Target: Amiens , France - Railroad Roundhouse and Adjacent

Marshaling Yards Mission Details:

Not Available

MISSION REMARKS: Mission Cancelled

DIARY INPUT:" I was awakened quite early this morning by one of the English 'batmen' (civilian servants) to receive a telephone message from Group Operations to the effect that we would be 'briefed' for a mission this morning. So I dressed hurriedly, ran down the stairs, jumped on my bicycle and pedaled away into the darkness to the barracks and awakened "the combat crews who are scheduled to fly. I awakened some by mistake and you can imagine the rude expletives that I received. (For some reason or other, they couldn't appreciate the fact that this was the first time I had done this task as Assistant Squadron Operations Officer.) The briefing covered the same target as of yesterday - the railroad roundhouse and the adjacent, marshaling yards at Amiens , France . Zero hour over the IP was 1200 hours and we were to drop our bombs with the lead ship. Six squadrons of British Spitfires were to provide fighter 'side cover' on the way in, and five squadrons on the way out. The briefing had scarcely started before Wing Headquarters telephoned and reported that the mission had been cancelled.

While we were assembled, Col. Wray (See Page 23A) told us that the 'poop sheet' on the new combat flying requirements that stated - 30 completed missions and 200 hrs of combat flying time - was based on RAF Night Flying Operations and could not possibly be used as a yardstick for us. (He hinted that Army Air Corps requirements would be in the neighborhood of 15 missions completed, which would be much better).

My new assignment as Assistant Squadron Operations Officer and Armament Officer has kept me quite busy today - all to my liking!"

17 JANUARY, 1943 - SUNDAY BATTLE

JOURNAL INPUT: None

DIARY INPUT: "I set my alarm clock to awaken me early this morning so that I could get in a couple of hours work done on a 'tricky' operation report that should have been finished yesterday evening. I spent the morning assembling crews and taking care of many other details incident to getting two ships airborne for some necessary engineering checks on recent equipment repairs.

This afternoon, I learned that a mission is 'cooking' for tomorrow and our squadron has only two ships in commission. To make matters worse, the waist gunner on Captain Campbell's ship (No.178) had an accidental discharge of the gun he was testing and put several rounds of 50-caliber rounds through the tail assembly of his own ship - leaving us with only one aircraft in commission!

We have a squadron of P-39 Airacobra fighter planes, enroute to North Africa, which have landed at our field for several days of rest for the pilots, and maintenance for the their aircraft. Well, wouldn't you have guessed it, one of those 'pea-shooters' during preflight checkout, accidentally "put a couple of 30-caliber slugs through Captain Wallick's ship (No.512) which has been undergoing repairs since the Romilly sur Seine raid on December 20th. Gosh, it's getting so that it isn't safe, not even on your own home base! Again, no letters from home."

18 JANUARY, 1943 - MONDAY BATTLE

JOURNAL INPUT: None

DIARY INPUT; "THE Squadron Operations Officer, Lt. Corley-went on pass today., which means that I have the run of squadron operations. But due to a thick layer of fog, no flying was done today - which means I didn't commit any big blunders.

I attended the weekly news/discussion session with our S-2 Officer, Captain Parker, who gave us a digest of the war news in the four different, theaters of operation. *(See picture on page 24-a)*

Major Holmes, RAF anti-aircraft expert reviewed the 'flak' mistakes on the St. Nazaire raid (the one I was on -January 3rd) and gave opinions and photographic proof that the German A.A. Batteries laid down a barrage which we had to fly through.

Captain Parker gave out some good news; that eight members of Lt. English's crew and two of Lt. Corson's crew (Romilly sur Seine raid, December 20th) are prisoners of war. Also, he reported that last Saturday night's raid by the RAF on Berlin , Germany was made by 201 four engine bombers and only 1 bomber failed to return. In retaliation, the German Air Force raided London last night with 30 aircraft, seven of which were destroyed. Quite a favorable exchange for our side, I would say!

I finally received some mail from home. A card from the church 'supper crowd¹,' a birthday card from Helen (she's providing a lot of lead time between now and my December 23 birth-date): and two letters (Nos. 55 & 56) from Emily; and a letter from our family lawyer/friend, Bill Whitfield - so I feel very much better this evening!"

19 JANUARY, 1943 - TUESDAY BATTLE

JOURNAL INPUT: (None)

DIARY INPUT: "What a day of weather! Conditions were zero-zero (that is: zero ceiling, zero visibility) when I got up this morning and it grew steadily worse as the day went on. It is said that even the clay pigeons on the skeet range are "grounded. Obviously, there was very little doing in squadron operations office today. There is something peculiar going on and a mystery is developing: Our squadron was assigned two new B-17Fs to be 'picked up' at- Prestwick , Scotland ; also, we were given several replacement bombardiers and navigators - but at the 'eleventh' hour both the ships and men were turned over to the 92nd Bomb Group. Does this mean that the 92nd Group is being organized for combat- operations?

What is to happen to the 91st Group then? The latest rumor has it that a select few (among whom are Corley, Campbell, McClintic, and Santora) will return to the States by March 1st. Therefore, the 91st Bomb Group will probably become a replacement center very shortly. If Corley returns to the States, then I will probably become Squadron Operations Officer, and then my long awaited captaincy will be forthcoming! (I wonder who in the world originates these fantastic, and sometimes ridiculous, rumors.).

This evening I attended the G.I. (on base) movie and saw "Hot Spot" with Betty Grable and Victor Mature.

No mail from home today.

20 JANUARY, 1943 - WEDNESDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: None

DIARY INPUT: "A warm-front weather condition still prevails -which means continued poor visibility and low ceilings and was the cause for the cancellation of a flight to Ireland , which I was going to make as copilot, for Lt . Hardin (in No. 453). Perhaps the weather will allow our going tomorrow.

I wasn't feeling well this evening and so, I retired shortly after dinner. Then about 10:30 PM, I was awakened by the wailing of sirens and a 'Tannoy' announcement from our Headquarters advised that we were now under RED ALERT (meaning 'go to nearest shelter immediately' - but very few of us ever comply). My bedroom was already darkened so I pulled back the curtains, raised the window, and sure enough – I could hear the droning of a twin-engined aircraft. It was quite low (estimated at 4000 feet) and although the moon was almost full, a heavy haze prevented my seeing the aircraft. However, I could follow the noise of his engines and after making several passes over our airfield, I heard several nearby explosions; and then the aircraft engine noise faded away into the east. The 'all clear' siren signal came on about 10:45 PM.

21 JANUARY, 1943 - THURSDAY BATTLE

JOURNAL INPUT: None

DIARY INPUT: "This is one of the clearest and the most beautiful mornings that I have yet seen in England - not a cloud in the sky and the full, yellow moon sinking below the western horizon - it makes one think of home, sweetheart, better times, etc. But all of that will have to wait.

The word is being passed that 24 enemy raiders attempted to bomb London last night, ten of which were shot down and only six dropped bombs on the city.

Jay Beauchamp, Jack Adkins and I arranged a short pass and talked Lt. "Red" Cliburn into flying us down to Exeter , England . We had brought along clothes, pay vouchers, etc. for Don and Jim, who are still in the Musgrave Hospital at Taunton . We were hoping to get a car at Exeter and drive the remaining 30 miles to the hospital but we found out that transportation was not available for that purpose. So, we had to return to Bassingbourn with Lt. Cliburn, our mission of ~~mercy~~thwarted.

When we got back to the airfield, we learned that an 'Alert' was on for a mission tomorrow. After dinner, I drove a recon vehicle in to Cambridge with Lt. Cliburn and went 'pub calling' - trying to find Cliburn's crew so that they could fly the mission tomorrow; but we couldn't, find them all.

Later this evening, after we returned from our unsuccessful search, I retired to my bedroom and wrote letter No.53 to Emily.

22 JANUARY, 1943 - FRIDAY

BATTLE JOURNAL INPUT: Alert No.26; Mission No. None

Target: Vegesack , Germany - Seven Submarine Slips and Adjacent. Power House

MISSION REMARKS: Mission Cancelled

DIARY INPUT: "Lt. Corley awoke me this morning and informed me that breakfast would be served at 0530 hours and briefing at 0615 hours. Gee, I hated to crawl out of bed. The briefing covered a target in Vegesack , Germany - seven submarine slips and their supporting electrical power house installation, to be attacked with a combination of 500 and 1000 pound bombs from 24,200 feet altitude. This was to be our first raid into Germany and from the intelligence reports the target, was defended by 50 to 70 anti-aircraft, guns and an estimated 150 single and twin-engine (SE & TE) fighters. All in all, this should make for a very hot time over the target area! However, just before takeoff the mission was cancelled. Presumably, the mission was scrubbed because of weather conditions in the target area. Whew! That was a close one. I spent, the remainder of the day working either in "squadron operations or in the armament shop. But I did take time to write a hurried letter (No. 54) to Emily. Since I was the designated alert officer and there was a proposed mission 'cooking' for tomorrow, I retired early in an effort to get a little sleep before Group Operations started pestering me with phone calls. But my sleep was mighty intermittent. By midnight I had received four phone calls -having to dress and trudge downstairs on each occasion to answer the phone. On the last-occasion, I left word with the 'batman'¹ to awaken me at 0500 hours."

CLOSING THOUGHTS TO CHAPTER 1

Learning by experience was the way of things at this time and the ordered chain of command of military establishment became less evident in these circumstances. Colonels sought the views of 2nd Lieutenants on tactical problems which 'the book' did not mention, let alone provide a ruling. Indeed, military manuals had little bearing on life or operations undertaken by the Eighth Air Force at this time.

As with all military organizations the Commanding Officer was responsible for the conduct of his unit. Group Commanders often flew on combat missions, usually picking the 'toughest' ones. Original leaders of the four pioneer Bomber groups were Col. Frank A. Armstrong, Jr. (306th B.G.); Col. Curtis E. LeMay (305th E.G.); Col. James Wallace (303rd E.G.); and Col. Stanley T. Wray (91st E.G.). (See Page 27A for a group picture of these four Group Commanders being presented with the British Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for their heroic and meritorious contributions in aerial combat operations over the German occupied territories in Europe.)

After initial baptisms of fire and losses (8 aircraft and crews over enemy territory plus others crash-landing in England) after raiding such targets in France as: Brest, St. Nazaire, La Pallice, Lorient, Lille, and Romilly sur Seine), we look forward with reserved judgment on whether or not we are ready for the 'tough' targets in Germany proper. The next chapters will tell.

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