

OPERATION REVIVAL

Written by John W. Howland

RESCUING THE POWs FROM STALAG LUFT 1

The final combat mission of the 8th Air Force was number 968, dispatched on April 25, 1945. Two hundred seventy six B-17s attacked the Skoda works in Czechoslovakia while two hundred eighty B-24s attacked four targets in Germany. Six B-17s were reported missing in action. In the ensuing three week period there were several leaflet drops and many humanitarian missions flown. By May 7, 1945, bombers had dropped more than 4000 tons of food in occupied territories, largely in The Netherlands.

However, there was some disturbing news regarding repatriation of American prisoners of war held in prison camps over-run by the Russian Army. Negotiations to obtain their release at high levels were not going smoothly. When discussions reached a frustration level, the decision was made by Eisenhower to fly in and rescue our POWs.

This was the start of OPERATION REVIVAL. The 1st Combat Wing commanded by Brig. General Bill Gross was chosen to lead the operation. The 91st BG, 381st BG and 398th BG made up the 1st Combat Wing. They did a first class job, and the memories of that mission are indelibly engraved in the minds of those who participated. Of all the missions flown by these men, their flight to rescue the POWs from Stalag Luft 1 is the most vivid in their memories and they share a common pride in having been able to participate in Operation Revival.

These are the stories of some of these men.

Raymond W. Darling

I was twenty-three years old, had flown thirty-one missions and had just been promoted to first lieutenant when the war ended on May 7, 1945. We were all waiting with great anticipation for our orders to return to the States when this message came over the intercom, "All pilots and navigators report to your respective squadron orderly rooms immediately."

"Oh, boy," I thought the day has finally come."

When we assembled in the Orderly Room we were told by the briefing officer that we had one more mission to fulfill. Our mission would be to fly into Northeastern Germany to rescue our POW airmen from Stalag Luft 1. The Russians had liberated the camp but seemed to be hesitant about releasing the American POW airmen. They were not being at all cooperative with their Western Allies. The briefing officer told us that we were flying into an airstrip at Barth airdrome, a few miles from Stalag Luft 1 and just south of the Baltic Sea. Here we would load the POW's aboard our B-17s and fly them to the Bordeaux area of France where they would be put on ships and sent back to the good old U.S.A. "The name of this operation is 'Revival,' he said. "The Russians don't seem to want to cooperate in releasing our American airmen POWs so we're going in and getting them. If the Russian's don't like what we're doing," the briefing officer went on, "Then it's just – Tough Shit."

That was the first time I ever heard applause at a briefing! We were told to be cautious on this mission, to stick to the flight plan and land only at the designated airfield where we would receive further orders. We would be flying singly, leaving at one or two minute intervals and would fly at an altitude under ten thousand feet so no oxygen would be required. We were told to conserve on gasoline because

this would be a long trip and our twenty-eight hundred and ten gallons of gasoline had to last all the way home. Our crew would consist of five crewmen: pilot, copilot, navigator, radio man and flight engineer.

“Just so that you won’t be taken by surprise,” the briefing officer continued, “you will be landing at Barth Airdrome on a narrow steel mesh runway rather than the cement runways you have been used to. But don’t worry,” he went on, “they have been B-17 tested.”

The B-17s had been readied with all guns and armament removed. If you can imagine a transport without any seats except for the pilot and copilot, that’s what we were flying to rescue these POW airmen. The B-17 I was flying that day was lucky a/c #777, no name. As we went to full military power for take off in the early morning of May 13 1945, I felt very comfortable. The crew consisted of my old crew members George Hobbs as flight engineer and Smokey Montgomery as radio man plus a good friend and navigator from Ted Santos crew, Waldo Bowen. I’m sorry, but fifty some years has erased the name of my copilot from my memory.

Our flight started perfectly, with clear weather and a beautiful sunrise. It felt wonderful to not have to worry about assembling a group of thirty-six bombers. We took off worrying only about one B-17 and getting to Barth. It was so different and nice, no formation, no oxygen checks, no flak and no fighters. After getting to cruising altitude and trimming up the ship, the navigator gave me a heading. I set the autopilot and leaned back like an airline pilot and left the flying to it. No more six to eight hours of close formation.

Then came the message I wanted to hear from Waldo, the navigator, “Barth straight ahead. Start your let down.” Smoky, the radioman, announced he had the control tower on the radio. The control tower gave me landing instructions and reminded me of the mesh runway. Several B-17s had already arrived, and after a smooth landing I taxied over to get into the line they had formed. The tower advised me to look for a ground signalman with a red flashlight. “He will signal you when to stop and go,” I was advised. “Don’t shut down your engines, and don’t let any one off the airplane,” the tower continued. There were burned out hulks of German aircraft all around the field. But the only German aircraft I had seen in combat were 109s, 190s and 262s, and there were none of those among the hulks.

Waldo, the navigator, asked. “When we stop to load, is it OK if I jump off and get some pictures with my camera?” Having known Waldo for a long time and trusting him I said, “Go ahead but hurry. I’ve got to go when they give me the signal.” As he was leaving, the American POW airmen began to load the ship from the rear door. I sat in the pilot’s seat with engines idling and brakes locked and watched through the bomb bay as the men were coming aboard. George directed six to eight of them down into the nose compartment. Most had old shabby uniforms. They were all haggard and skinny and looked and acted like they were in a trance. Their eyes appeared glazed, and no one smiled. They acted as if they didn’t know what was happening to them and appeared so meek and humble. They were just following orders. I tried to comfort a few of them by assuring them “We’re going to get you the hell out of here and on your way home.”

George made his way to my side and told me, “We’re all in and the waist door is secure. “I told George to tell all the airmen to sit down as best they could till we were airborne. Then the “Usher” with the red flashlight motioned for me to “go,go.go.” As I taxied out onto the runway, the B-17 in front of me was just getting airborne. Then it was our turn to start our takeoff roll. We started our long trip across Germany and France to an airfield near Bordeaux of which I didn’t know the name - - nor did I know where it was located. But my navigator knew, and that’s all that counted.

After climbing to altitude and trimming up the ship, I pressed the intercom button and said, “Pilot to

navigator, I'm ready for my heading, over....." A few seconds later I called, "Pilot to navigator, my heading please..." Then, in aggravation, I shouted. "Pilot to navigator, Pilot to navigator,"

Then a shaky, weak voice came over the intercom saying, "Sir –uh-sir, I'm one of the POWs that just came aboard. I'm sitting in the navigator's compartment and heard your calls. There's no one up here except us guys that just came aboard."

I said, "Thank you, over and out."

Immediately, I frantically searched the sky ahead of us. There it was, just a speck in the sky. I could recognize those B-17 tails miles ahead. I didn't even consider going back to Barth. Waldo could catch the next plane out. I just increased my air speed to catch that dot in the sky. I told George and the copilot to keep their eyes on the B-17 ahead. I was going to follow him wherever he was going. I said a silent prayer, "God, get me out of this mess I've got myself into, and I'll never do it again." In no time we gained on the other B-17 until we were flying loose formation with it, and we still had plenty of gasoline to make it home.

About this time, a skinny, bedraggled, frail figure came up from the nose compartment and asked, "Sir, did you find your navigator?"

"No," I said, "but it's no problem. We're following the B-17 ahead of us, and we're going to the same place."

We struck up a conversation and he commented that he was a Captain and had flown B-17F's. He said he noticed that quite a few changes had been made to the B17G. He told me what it had been like to be in the Stalag I and IV. The thought struck me as I empathized with what he had been through. I got out of my seat and said, "Captain, get in my seat and fly the G for a while. You'll like it." He got into the left-hand seat and for that brief time he looked young and vibrant again as he once again flew that magnificent machine, the B-17. He just beamed. Then after a few minutes of flying, he got up and went back to the nose compartment. In a few moments he returned with a handful of German souvenirs he had picked up while in captivity: a box of German matches, a swastika arm band and some patches from German pilot uniforms. I still have and cherish those few small gifts he gave me.

The rest of the flight was routine. We followed the leader to our destination, landed and watched as they loaded the rescued American POW airmen into trucks. We then parked the B-17 next to the one we had followed and had a nice tasty K ration for lunch. While eating lunch I heard a voice call out, "Ray, there you are!" It was Waldo. He had caught the next plane out of Barth.

After lunch, we flew back to Bassingbourn, and none of us ever mentioned what had happened. Waldo was part of my crew when I ferried a no name B-17 back to the States.

The 91st sent forty-one B-17G's to Barth on the 13th of May 1945. If each B-17 carried thirty POW's as we did, twelve hundred and thirty American POW airmen were freed and sent on their way home that day. Operation Revival lasted three days.

Raymond W. Darling - Pilot - 91st Bomb Group

George Jacobs was a Navigator with the 91st Bomb Group. His description of Operation Revival is one of the most vivid of all that I reviewed.

George Jacobs

I flew on the Revival Mission to Barth on May 13, 1945. I consider it one of the most memorable days of my life! It remains very indelible in my memory. As I recall, it was a beautiful, clear, sunny day.

Pilots and navigators were called into the orderly room just as the sun began to rise to brief us on this mission to "bring home" our Air Corps colleagues who had been prisoners of war at Stalag Luft 1. The POW camp was located near the town of Barth, north of Rostock, on the Baltic Sea. In the few days since the end of the War in Europe, our B-17s were modified to hold up to three dozen passengers. The bomb bay was covered with a wooden floor, and all guns and turrets had been removed. Our crew of five, Pilot, Co pilot, engineer, radioman and I, were among the first that took off. I looked forward to the mission with great excitement, anticipation, and with personal pride. It felt very strange, but very comfortable, flying in a B-17 without needing to assemble formations, or go to high altitude or face flak and German fighters. Instead of a formation, we formed a stream of B-17s, separated by a few minutes, flying more or less in a straight line, at altitudes less than 10,000 feet.

I had my outgoing and incoming courses plotted on both my GEE map and my pilotage maps. But the day was so nice and clear I was looking forward to the "sightseeing" aspect of pilotage navigation. We crossed the Channel at Dover and had a remarkable view of the white cliffs bathed in a brilliant golden yellow from the rising sun. We headed southeast across Belgium, than northeast over "Flak Valley," but we were now in a very peaceful sky. Perhaps we cheated a bit by dropping altitude to take a good look at Hamburg as we flew over. The vast destruction to this city was very visible. We headed a bit more to the north and began to parallel the Baltic coast line, past Rostock to Barth. It was an easy pilotage trip. I did use the GEE box from time-to-time, and it was a pleasure to see the pips so nice and clear without the grass noise or attempts by the Germans to jam them. As we entered the landing pattern for Barth, at just a few hundred feet above the town, we could see every building flying a white bed sheet of surrender and the landmark church steeple. Russian soldiers were waving vigorously at us and seemed to be cheering us on. What a sight this armada of B-17s must have been to them. As we made our final approach, we could see the line of B-17s on the sides of the runway center already loading their passengers. We had a bit of a bumpy ride on the steel runway and parked on a spot to which we were directed. There waiting for us were 30 ex-POWs, and nearby were several ex-German vehicles with big bright newly painted white stars on them. In the field we could see several damaged German aircraft which we later learned were sabotaged by the fleeing Germans.

Everything seemed to have been well organized. We got outside and welcomed the group under the wing of our plane. We said "Guys you're on your way home". We shook each hand as they got into the plane. Now 57 years later it is still difficult for me to describe my feelings, which were mixed with compassion, joy, pride, and a remembrance that lingers with me today of the great Flying Fortress which played such an crucial wartime role was now playing such an important humanistic role.

As I look back, it is hard to describe the reaction of our thirty passengers, since they seemed to be so varied. Many looked thin, tired, and amazed. Others looked to be alert and in relatively good shape. Some wore fragments of uniforms mixed with tee shirts and sweaters, some were dressed in German supplied buttoned jackets probably left over from World War-I, while others were dressed in Air Corps uniforms, some even still wearing their bomber jackets. One guy amazingly still had his crushed hat. A few still had their wings, but I later learned that these were manufactured in the liberated machine shop of Stalag Luft 1 in the two weeks time before our arrival. Some had what seemed to be full duffle bags with them, some had little packages, and others had nothing but what they were wearing. It was quite a group.

Whatever the differences in appearance, as soon as we took off and flew over white sheet-bestowed Barth, there was one big roar of cheers, and a sound of clapping which almost matched the noise of our engines. We all took part in this salute.

About half of our passengers were navigators or bombardiers. They visited with me in the nose in small groups. This B-17 was having its finest hour as far as navigation was concerned. I didn't have to do much pilotage, as my "visitors" sat along side me at the navigator's table, or in the bombardier's position with my maps tucked across their knees. Some had never seen a GEE box before and were fascinated by this "automatic navigator". As we passed over Hamburg and the Ruhr Valley, they pointed out targets that they had hit, and a few recognized the targets and locations where they had been shot down. I had each visitor to my "nose office" sign my short snorter. Despite the ominous briefing we had about expected "no cooperation" from the Russians, there seemed to be unanimous appreciation to those that I spoke with for their May 1 liberation by the Russians and how well the Russians tried to take care of them in the 13 days before we arrived. Some showed me little souvenirs that the Russians had given to them.

Our destination was the American air base at Laon Couvron, also known as Camp Lucky Strike, which was about 80 miles NE of Paris. This was a special depot set up to expeditiously process ex-POWs and get them on their way home. I could sense the heightened excitement as we approached the air base. Upon landing up went another roar and cheers and hand clapping. Some kissed the ground as they debarked. We again shook hands with our passengers and wished them a fast trip home.

Laon Couvron was also a short rest stop for our crew of five. We used the facilities, and had a GI lunch. During this rest period I reviewed with our pilot our return route to Bassingbourn, using the Paris aeronautical map. He noted what I had noted, that Paris was only 75 miles away towards the SW. He had the engineer do some fuel availability calculations. Yes, we had more than enough to make this deviation on our way home, and the Pilot said that he would be able to account for the extra time that would be involved. In less than a half hour after take off we were over the beautiful city of Paris. We circled the city once, and then lowered altitude to I am not going to tell you what, and buzzed the center of town. What a beautiful buzz it was!

We arrived back at Bassingbourn during the early afternoon. What a day it had been. I recognized the humanistic importance of this at age 20, but I realize it more and more with each passing year. I can remember most events, sites and faces today at age 78 as I did that evening of May 13 as I lay in my Bassingbourn bed exhilarated by the amazing events of that day.

George Jacobs - Navigator - 324 th B.S. 91st B.G.

February - June 1945

Mel Dart also flew the POW rescue mission to Barth on May 13,-15, 1945. He recalls that famous mission as follows.

Mel Dart

"The weather was clear the day we flew to Barth, so there was no need to use GEE. As I recall, it felt good to be flying at low altitude over Germany and not being shot at. The guns and ammunition had been removed from our plane and the bomb bays had been modified with temporary seats for our passengers. We landed at Barth and the POW's were lined up next to the taxiway. We throttled back and came to a short stop while our passengers climbed aboard. We were told to take them to France (Camp Lucky Strike) if they were Americans or to England if they were British. We picked up thirty Brits and they fit comfortably into the nose, radio room, modified bomb bays and the waist of the B-17. They were extremely glad to be going home. But they were also tired and very weak. We dropped them off at an RAF base in England and then returned to Bassingbourn.

Mel Dart, Navigator, 91st Bomb Group

Charlie Hudson

One of the most colorful participants in Operation Revival was the Group Bombardier for the 91st BG. Charlie Hudson started flying missions in October 1943 and was cited for heroism on three of the first four raids he flew. He flew a full tour of duty (30 missions) and returned to fly a second tour. Miraculously he was still alive and well at the end of the war and serving as Group Bombardier with the rank of major for the 91st BG at Bassingbourn. General Bill Gross, commander of the 1st Combat Wing based at Bassingbourn, was chosen as director of Operation Revival. He selected pilot Don Sheeler, Karl "Tommy" Thomson and Charlie Hudson as part of the "evacuation crew" to put the entire operation together at the Barth airport near Stalag Luft 1.

As soon as General Gross and his team arrived at Barth, they contacted Hubert Zempke, a POW at the camp who was the top ranking officer in charge of all POWs. Zempke helped provide sleeping quarters in the prison compound. Food was no problem since the rescue team brought many boxes of K-rations on their plane. The first job was to set up a control tower to handle all air traffic in and out of the airport. Charlie Hudson's plane was parked in the grass alongside the metal runway. A putt-putt generator was set up outside to keep the plane's batteries fully charged. The "tower" operators took their positions seated atop the nose of the B-17 and were soon ready to receive and dispatch the rest of the rescue planes.

With everything working smoothly on the flight line, Charlie Hudson had time to look around and do a little "operating". He found the occupying Russian soldiers to be quite friendly. He met two young men who had a motorcycle. Charlie was intrigued so he negotiated with them. He finally struck a deal and swapped his Colt 45 pistol for the motorcycle. Charlie proudly drove it back to the plane and stowed it on board. However, General Gross happened to see his trophy and ordered him to get it off the plane. Charlie was undaunted. Just prior to takeoff he loaded it in the back of the plane and completely hid it with blankets and other gear. When he returned to Bassingbourn he rode it triumphantly for a few days. However, as Charlie put it, his trophy was ruined when, "Some idiot put the wrong kind of gasoline in it."

Although the Russian troops were friendly to the Americans, they were front line troops and quite coarse. Many were drunks. On one occasion he visited a nearby town with some Russians. They were quite insistent when they asked Charlie what he wanted. Charlie's reply was, "just a souvenir." At that, one of the Russians marched up to the first house, went inside and returned with a portable sewing machine. Charlie was flabbergasted and told the Russian he couldn't accept a woman's sewing machine. The Russian casually tossed it aside. But Charlie never again mentioned "souvenirs".

The "evacuation crew" did a fine job. As Charlie put it, "We could land a plane and pick up 25 to 30 passengers and be back in the air in 11 minutes." A total of 9000 POW's were flown out and another 3000 POW's from the camp split early, against Zempke's orders and made their way by foot back to the allied troops. Those flown out were taken to Camp Lucky Strike Command near Paris. They were delivered, quartered, issued new clothing and got their back pay.

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Charlie Hudson, Group Bombardier, 91st Bomb Group

Jack Gaffney

I was fortunate to fly on two missions to Barth, May 12th and 13th of May 1945. Fortunately, there was an airfield next to the POW area so the 8th A.F. took advantage of it, and the 8th. Air Force swore they would fly the prisoners of war out of Stalag 1 near Barth Germany as soon as the Nazi troops left the area. Each B-17 was sent with a pilot, copilot, engineer, navigator, and radio operator. We were assigned a specific air lane to fly in from England over the channel, the Baltic Sea, and over German territory to Barth, with a warning to stay in that flight corridor or be subject to possible ground fire. Flight plans and take offs were similar to combat operations. We took off at intervals and flew on our own to Barth, arriving in a predetermined order. When we landed, we did so in single file and taxied slowly to a pre-designated area where we took on 25 to 30 POWs again taxiing in predetermined order to the take-off point and again in selected order taking off for the flight back to either England or France. On the 12th we brought back British prisoners to Olde Ford south of London. After unloading our cargo and being totally deloused, including the entire aircraft, we proceeded back to Bassingbourn. The American POWs were flown to Camp Lucky Strike near La Havre, France.

During this operation the 8th. A.F. flew 5 operation Revival Missions, four to Barth, one to Linz, Germany, formerly Austria. Linz was located southeast of Regensberg, south southeast of Berlin, Barth was located north northwest of Berlin. During this series of missions 110 aircraft were used and 2,453 P.O.W.'s were returned. I flew as crew/chief engineer, on 014 LL-C. It was quite a sight to see all those bombers going in and out of Barth with their precious cargo Some had been prisoners for 3 years. I was proud to have been a part of their safe return.

On the return flight from Olde Ford we flew over London. The lights were starting to get back to pre-war status, and we were enjoying seeing them. Suddenly out of the darkness came a P-61 night-fighter, he dipped his left wing and we raised our left wing, and we just barely missed each other. My thoughts were oooh-boy 33 months of war and I'm going to end up a blotch on the streets of London, a victim of a non-combat accident.

At the 1998 reunion of the 91st Bomb Group in Tucson, Arizona, we were standing in line to get some drinks when I was relating an incident at Barth. The plane ahead of us dropped its right main wheel off the taxi-strip and got stuck. Thanks to the help of a lot of men's shoulders and a small tractor they got back on the strip. We all breathed a sigh of relief, for we did not want to get stuck there for the rest of the day. The kicker is a gentleman in front of me turned around, offered his hand and said, "Hello that was us".

What a wonderful bunch of memories, and this was one of the best ones.

Jack Gaffney - Engineer - 91st Bomb Group

One of the most rewarding missions flown by navigator Richard Betencourt of the 381st Bomb Group was the May 13th mission to Barth..

Richard Betencourt

On May 13, 1945 we were awakened early for a briefing at 0315. Our target this day was Barth in the Russian occupied section of east Germany. We were scheduled to pick up POWs and fly them to an airfield in France near Laon. Guns and ammunition were removed to reduce weight, and the bomb bays of our B-17s were covered with wood flooring over the doors. This was necessary because the bomb bay doors had an emergency release mechanism. They popped open if an object such as a bomb falling out of the rack should strike them. Our POWs surely didn't need to be "surprised" by the floor popping open at 10,000 feet after the ordeal they had been subjected to. Temporary planks were also

added to provide rather primitive seating facilities for our passengers in the bomb bays.

The trip to Barth was a breeze. My GEE chart covered the entire distance and we had no difficulty finding our objective. Further, we weren't bothered by flak, and the GEE signals were not jammed. We spent very little time on the ground. As soon as we rolled to a stop, the doors of the plane were opened and thirty POWs (all commissioned officers) were loaded aboard. No one had a seat or a seat belt. They were scattered all over the plane from the nose to the bomb bay to the tail.

As soon as thirty POWs were loaded aboard, the doors were slammed shut and we were ordered to take off. We were part of a solid stream of bombers flying into Laon airport that afternoon. However, we weren't carrying bombs. We carried the happiest load of men I have ever laid eyes on.

After we took off, some of the POWs came up to the nose to see what improvements had been made in our navigation systems. They seemed both jubilant and grateful. They gave me some German coins, and one fellow gave me a cloth with an eagle flying over a swastika. One fellow remarked that when the German guards left, their senior (American) officer said they would stay where they were until the Americans came to get them. They did not want to clog up any roads trying to march out of the prison compound.

Then the Russian army showed up and asked them what they needed. The POWs said they needed food. The Russians went out and rounded up every cow, pig, goat and sheep in the region and drove them on to the base. After the regular Russian army soldiers left, some irregular Russian soldiers came into the town. Some ex-POWs from the base walked into town to see what was going on. One of the ex-POWs was standing around trying to talk to some of the Russians when he saw a German walking by with a nice pair of leather boots. The Russian noticed him looking at the boots and asked him if he liked those boots. Without thinking, the ex-POW said, "Yes!". The Russian pulled out his revolver went over to the German and shot him. He then took off the boots and gave them to the American. After that the Americans were very careful about what he said.

They saw a Russian cannon at the head of the main street The Russians asked if they would like to see it fired. There were people walking all over the place. The Americans said no. They did not want to see anybody hit. Those irregular Russians had no conscience whatever about killing Germans.

As soon as we landed at Laon and unloaded our cargo of jubilant men, we were ordered to take off for England and our home at Ridgewell. But we had problems. A fairly strong cross-wind was blowing, and while preparing to take off, the pin sheared that locked the tail wheel. The locked tail wheel was needed to keep the aircraft moving in a straight line before reaching airspeed. We got some wire, went out on the runway, lined up the ship and tied up the tail wheel. We started down the runway. The wire broke and we had to abort the take off. The engineer scrounged around and found a bolt. We tried the take off again. The bolt sheared and again we had to stop. The engineer then got a jeep and a driver and went into town where he found a hardware store. He bought a large bolt. We got out on the runway and inserted the bolt. This time it held and we were off for home. It was a long day, almost twelve hours. We took off at 0600 hours and landed back at Ridgewell at 1730 hours. However, it was indeed the most satisfying mission I flew in my entire tour of duty.

Richard Betencourt - Navigator - 381st Bomb Group

Those who flew the mission to Barth all have an interesting story to tell. However, the most poignant of all is that of a 91st Bomb Group POW who was flown to freedom by his comrades.

Don Freer

I Will never forget the thrill and joy of marching out of Stalag Luft 1 to the airfield at Barth and seeing the 91st BG aircraft waiting to take us home. I recognized some of the planes but not the crews since most of the people flying during my time at Bassingbourn had already gone home. I want to take this opportunity to thank all you folks who participated in this final mission. You will never know what that meant to your human cargo.

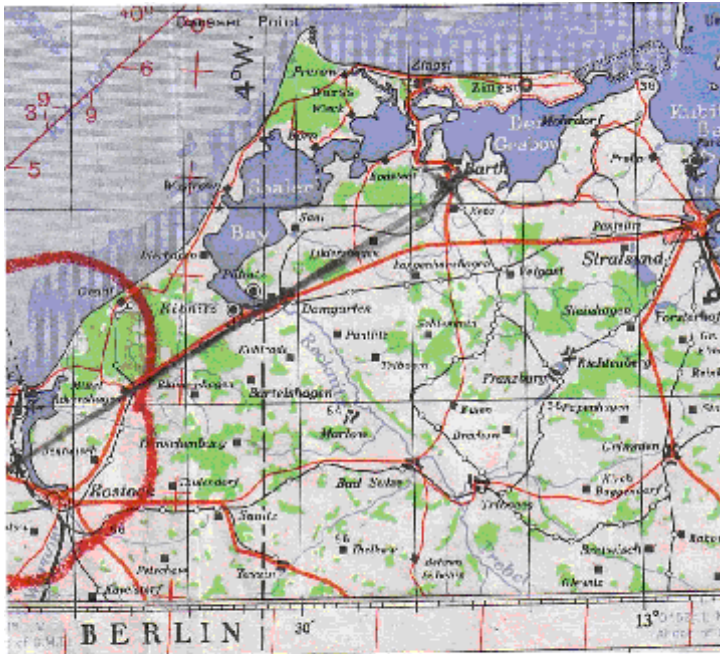
Hal Lasch and I were together in the prison camp and returned to Bassingbourn by way of Camp Lucky Strike. We hitched a ride on a couple of B-17s and went back to the 91st BG rather than wait for delayed transportation to the States. Nearly everyone had already left Bassingbourn for the States in their B-17s so we went to London and "relaxed" for 30 days. As a reward, the Army sent all us stragglers home in a convoy of 12 LST's and it took another 16 days at full speed ahead.

Don Freer – Ex-POW - Stalag Luft 1 - 91st Bomb Group



E. Zimer photo American Staff Car - Barth 1945

Col. Hubert Zemke was the top ranking prisoner and C.O. at the Barth POW camp. He "liberated" a German car and promptly painted a white identification star on the hood. It was his personal staff car and used for local transportation.

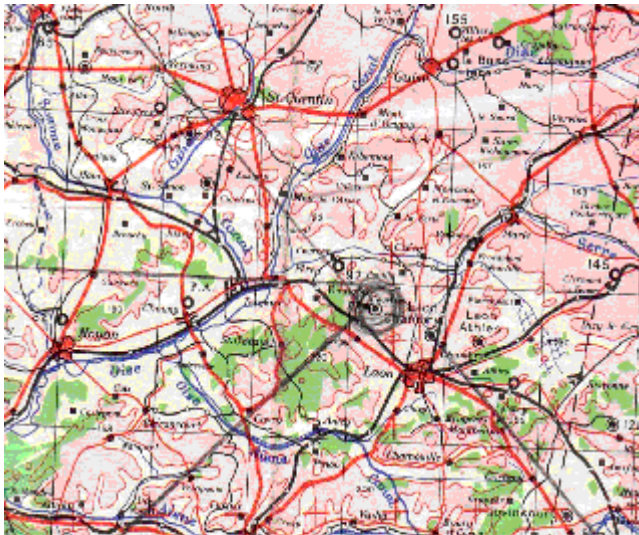


RAF pilotage used by George Jacobs to guide him to Barth. Note that he charted his course right through the flak circles surrounding Rostock. Three weeks earlier he would very carefully avoided this area.



Ex-POWs from Stalag Luft 1 await their flight to freedom aboard B-17s from the 91st Bomb Group flying out of Bassingbourn, England.

Photos by Charlie Hudson



George Jacobs plotted two courses out of Laon. One NW direct to Basingbourn and a second, SW to make a tour around Paris providing they had sufficient gasoline. The fuel check showed ample supply and they had a fine sightseeing tour. They also performed an excellent "buzz job" on Paris itself.



E. Zillmer photo
Picking up American Prisoners after liberation - Barth 1945



Charlie Hudson's B-17 served quite effectively to transport General Bill Gross, Commander of the 1st Combat wing as well as war correspondents into Barth. During a three day period the plane was used as the "Control Tower" for flight operations in and out of the Barth Airport. The Putt-Putt generator in the immediate foreground provided all the electrical power that was needed to keep the batteries charged and direct traffic in and out of the Barth airport using the command radio of Charlie's B-17. The "Tower" operators had an unobstructed view of all traffic as they sat perched on the nose of the aircraft.



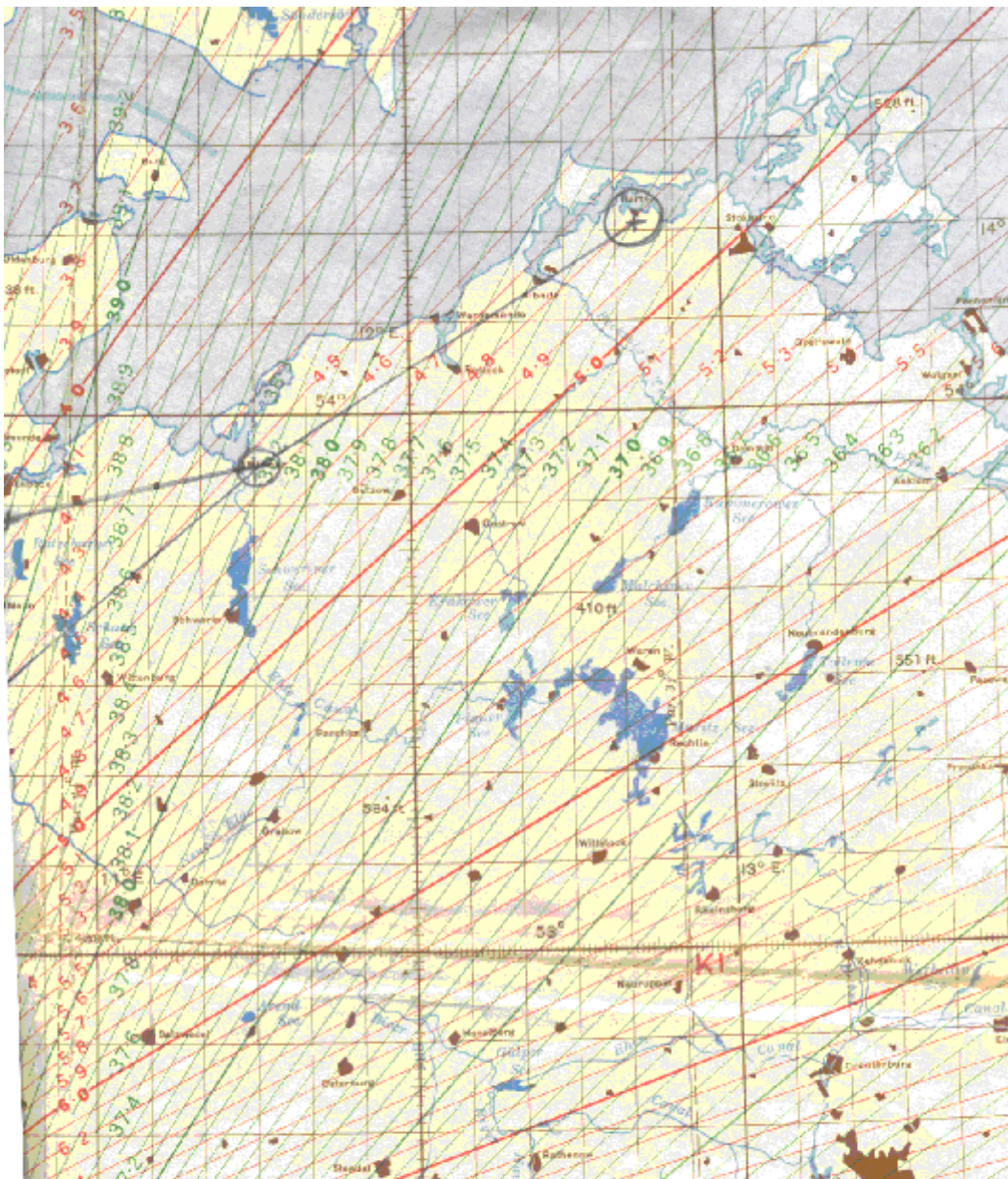
Russian "Cossacks" brought their horses with them.



Charley Hudson swapped a Colt 45 for this motorcycle. The two Russian soldiers were pleased with the trade, but when Charlie tried to load it aboard the plane, General Gross, commander of the Revival Operation, said no. Undaunted, Charlie loaded the bike in the back of the plane just before the return trip, camouflaged it with blankets and other gear, and brought it home to Basingbourn



(Left) An un-named flier with the rescue team stands in front of a German aircraft destroyed by the fleeing Germans.



Gee chart used by Richard Betencourt on the mission to Barth on the Baltic Sea. The southern tip of Sweden is visible in the upper portion of the chart and the northern part of Berlin visible at bottom right. The German rocket base of Peenemünde was located on the right edge of the chart east and slightly south of Barth.



Crew Photo

Rear, L to R: Austin Hebert, Eng.; Replacement WG, Bill Geist, Radio Op; Tom Vandeventer, TG; Dick Zoph, B.T.; Front, L to R: Wesley Huff, Pilot; Jack Youk, Co-pilot, Richard Betencourt, Navigator; Joe Manfredi, Bombardier.



Memento given to Richard Betencourt by a POW they flew to freedom on May 13, 1945

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