

MISSION NUMBER 3

Written by Unknown

MISSION NO. 3

OSCHERSLEBEN, Germany

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 22ND, 1944

(WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY)

TARGET..... Aircraft assembly plants in Oschersleben, Germany.

Course of our flight plan took us near the Ruhr Valley, Munster, Hamm, Nordhalisen and Kassel.

CREW..... PILOT, Lt. Pingel; CO PILOT, Lt. Goss; BOMBARDIER, Lt. Gettis; NAVIGATOR, Lt. Marsh; ENGINEER

Jacoby; RADIO OPERATOR, Ehret; BALL TURRET, H. Humm; RIGHT WAIST, Oswosky;

LEFT WAIST, Kunst; TAIL GUN, Cascone.

BOMB LOAD..... Twelve 500-lb demos

SHIP NO..... 333-W (Wee Willie)

BREAKFAST..... 0530 (5:30 AM)

BRIEFING..... 0600 (Missed it)

ENGINES..... 0825

TAKE-OFF..... 0906

TIME..... 7 hours 41 minutes (Landed 1647; engines off 1648)

ALTITUDE..... 20,000 feet

TEMPERATURE..... 34 to 38 degrees below.

ENEMY FIGHTERS...Everything in the book. Rough as hell.

8th AF LOSSES...41 heavies

BATTLE DAMAGE.....No. 3 engine shot up by enemy fighters. No. 4

Engine shot but not out of commission. 3 holes in the plexi-glass nose. (Largest about 10 in. in diameter). Bullet hole in right tail plane.

GROUND CONDITIONS. Snow on the ground deep in Germany.

REMARKS- This was almost a disastrous mission for our ship and crew. Later on, after completing my tour of ops., No. 3 mission tallied up to be the roughest of the lot. The more experienced vets who flew it remarked to us upon our return: "You boys really got checked out on that one, now you can consider yourself combat men."

Following is a summary of Mission No.3 from the notes I jotted down upon its completion.

Dense cloud and con trails over channel on way to target. Stiff fighter opposition 40 minutes before target. P-47 escorts left us and P-51 escorts were supposed to pick us up at target but didn't show up. Saw a few with belly tanks but they disappeared.

About 40 to 65 enemy fighters closed in and gave our Group a hot and furious running battle which became a very intense 20 minutes before the target. Our ship received repeated attacks at 1 o'clock high level. Pilot Pingel thought some of us boys got it when an FW 190 seemed to spray the entire ship from nose to tail as it made a pass. We were all very quiet on the interphone after the attack, which accounted for his fears.

No. 3 engine was shot up and smoking badly. Prop feathered and bombs salvoed immediately. The fighter making the pass came so close that one of its empty machine gun casings crashed through the plexi-glass nose of our ship making a large hole which allowed sub-zero air to rush through the fuselage making all those in the forward part bitter cold, especially the navigator and bombardier.

With only three engines running we fell out of formation and made a desperate effort to join some other ships for better protection before Jerry came back to finish off his kill. (Meaning us). Our speed miraculously blew out the fire in No. 3 just as pilot Pingel skillfully maneuvered our ship in a good protective spot among ships of another formation. Later on upon our return to home base, Pingel said he was ready to push bailout bell button if the fire had not gone out.

Pingel handled the ship skillfully in evasive action during flak barrages and fighter attacks. Flak was heavy. A brown burst came very close to the left wing. T/Sgt. David Jacoby, Engineer, claimed on Focke-Wulf 190 from his top turret. He saw the Jerry pilot remove the canopy from his fighter and get ready to bail out.

We stayed with formation during target time and most of the way back but dropped behind when nearing the channel as we did not want to chance burning up the remaining engines after getting so near home. Finally after leaving the fighters and flak behind we sweated out our gas supply. Upon landing at home base the hydraulic unit on the landing gear went out so Pingel ran the ship off the runway and onto the grass where we finally rolled to a stop. A "cat" came out and towed us into the hangar. We had less than 30 minutes of gas left when we landed.

Sgt. G. Oswosky, right waist gunner, was a spate for Mahoney. It was his 10th and roughest mission. Mahoney had a cold and was grounded by the flight surgeon.

Only two ships in our squadron were in shape to fly after the Oschersleben mission. Lt. Greer's crew was missing in action. Sgt. Purton, one of the boys in Lad Kunst's bay at the barracks, having only three missions to go before completing the tour of ops, was among those missing. The co-pilot took Greer's place that day and Greer nearly went crazy when his crew failed to return.

Looking out of my top hatch towards the rail or about 6 o'clock level I could see a No. 2-engine smoking badly on two ships in the group behind ours. One of these planes fell out of formation. Humm, Cascone and Knust saw '17 go down behind us out of control. No smoke, pilot probably shot.

TAIL GUNNER, SGT. FRED CASCONI'S ACCOUNT OF MISSION NO. 3

(From his private diary)

Before reaching target, our escort left and not a minute passed before 60 to 70 Focke-Wulf 190's and Messerschmitt 110's came head-on at us. It was as though hell broke out all over. They came in from all directions into the formation for protection. We were fighting like mad men but we all kept our heads and put on a good show B-17s were going down all around us and in between attacks I was praying and scared stiff. We all thought our numbers was up. They got 12 of our 50 planes that we sent up. Our roommates who were off our right wing were shot down. A swell bunch of guys. After a stiff flight our escort showed up again and stayed with us until we returned home. With only a little gas to spare, we landed. Our brakes wouldn't hold so we rolled to a stop off the runway.

MISSION NO. 16

THURSDAY, MAY 25, 1944

NANCEY, FRANCE

(Near Switzerland)

SHIP NO..... 128 "Red Alert"

TARGET..... Hangers on airfield in France

ALTITUDE..... 20,000-feet

TEMPERATURE..... Minus 28° C

BOMB LOAD..... Ten 500-lb. Demos.

TAKE OFF..... 0545

LANDED..... 1200

TIME..... 6 hours, 15 minutes

REMARKS..... Heavy flak over the French coast. Four ships from

Another group went down in flames. There were 9 parachutes from one ship with a wing fire, 3 chutes from another ship, 5 chutes from another. We used evasive action and flak missed us. No flak over the target. No enemy fighters. No flak when leaving Belgium coast. Milk run for us. Lt. Marsh, Navigator, took Lt. Howard's place today. Marsh finished his 25th mission. We trained together as crew in the States. He completed his tour of ops. And will go home on leave. Upon his return to theater of war he will be lead navigator. Lt. Marsh is the finest navigator I have ever flown with. He installed my confidence in him a hundred fold after our flight across the North Atlantic in December 1943 when we ferried our own B-17 and crew from Gander, Newfoundland to Nutts Corner, Ireland. Upon landfall, his accurate navigating brought us within 150 miles of our destination. Many ships were lost on this new operation since it was the first time they attempted ferrying ships and crews on this northern route in the winter. At one time we climbed to over 29,000 feet to rise above storms in the mid-Atlantic. Some navigators possibly miscalculated the curve and flew too straight a course across thus running out of fuel and not making it to landfall. Even if they had discovered their error, there is always a point of no return to consider.

Wednesday July 19, 1944

91ST Bomb Group flew its 200th mission today

THURSDAY, JULY 20, 1944

We lost 8 ships on a mission to Leipzig, Germany today. A tragic flight for the 91st Bomb Group. The 322nd Sqd. lost 3 ships:

982-S “Superstitious Aloysius” (Our original old ship that Pilot Pingle was issued on our arrival at Bassingbourn.)

027-A from the 322nd was lost

819-E, a new ship on its first mission was also lost.

It was also a great loss to me since two of the members were buddies from our original crew, which was formed at Ephrata, Washington and trained further as a crew at Kearney, Nebraska. Co-Pilot, Lt. Max Bender was one, and Tail Gunner Sgt. Fred Bender flying his 27th mission was the other. I think Lt. Bender ended up in a POW camp, and I know Cascone was a prisoner in Stalag Luft III until released. Three other crewmembers I had recently flown with were also lost: R.O. Keene, B.T.—Burgin, W.G.—Dizzadula. Other members of that fateful crew were: Pilot, Walby, Nav. Dye, Bombardier. Mounts, and Eng. Ingram, N.W. 1 ships were lost in the day’s operations over the continent.

Whether this a true fact, and where I got my notes I do not know, but I have as a footnote that there were 25 men left out of the 110 of us who came over to England together.

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