

TEXAS CHUBBY/THE J'VILLE JOLTER

Written by Lowell Getz

"The Mission"

During assembly, Lt. Manville, pilot of No. 088, "Red Wing," could not find the 91st formation in the overcast. Eventually, he saw the 457th Bomb Group from the nearby Glatton airbase, forming up for a mission to the Schkeuditz Aircraft Works near Leipzig. Following standard operational procedures ("SOP"), Lt. Manville formed up with the 457th rather than abort the mission. Lt. Manville moved "Red Wing" into the "diamond" position of the Number Four Element of the "Low Box" and flew on to the target. The Low Box was led by Cpt. Joseph F. Reilly. Lt. Sherrill, flying as the "spare" in the diamond position of the Second Element, saw that Lt. Manville's space was not occupied. He therefore moved over into the No. 2 position of the Fourth Element to complete the mission.

While the Group was forming up over Bassingbourn, Lt. Gaddis, pilot of No. 333, "Wee Willie," became ill and had to return to the base. They came back at 0810, an hour and fifty minutes after taking off. As the Group approached the IP, the 324th Squadron began running into heavy prop wash from the Group flying directly in front of them. The planes were buffeted around in the sky, making it difficult for the pilots to hold their position in the formation. The squadron formation began to loosen up. Some of the pilots wanted to drop below the turbulence. However, this was not possible because Group integrity had to be maintained.

In the vicinity of Eisenach, flak bursts began appearing near the High Squadron Lead Plane. According to the flak chart Lt. Crans had taped to his knee, there should not have been flak batteries in this area. While looking down at the map on his leg to confirm the location, Lt. Crans called over the intercom to his Navigator, 2nd Lt. Carl R. Phifer, and asked where the flak was coming from. At the same time, Lt. Phifer yelled--"Lead, Lead!" Lt. Crans looked up and saw the Group Lead plane had started a turn to the left. Lt. Crans started chasing him, with the rest of the High Squadron attempting to follow. However, being on the outside of the turn, the 324th had a much longer route to fly. In addition, the planes were continuing to encounter the heavy prop wash. The combined effect was to prevent them from keeping up with the rest of the Group during the turn. The High Squadron had dropped behind the rest of the 91st Group squadrons by the time the formation came up on the IP.

Prior to the approach of the 91st Group to the IP, some of the top turret gunners had observed a gaggle of 25 to 30 German fighters, ME 109s and the new Model "D," long-nosed FW 190s, flying back down the bomber stream. The fighters appeared to be looking over the formation for an appropriate Group to attack. The Germans went on past the rear of the 91st formation.

Shortly thereafter, the 324th Squadron tail gunners saw what they at first believed to be the over-due American fighter escorts, finally approaching from out of the sun at six o'clock level. It soon became obvious the planes were the German fighters coming back at them. While still out of range of the bomber's guns, the fighters began firing 20-mm cannon shells with timed fuses into the 324th formation. Puffs of white smoke from exploding shells appeared within the formation, and shells began hitting a number of planes. In flights of 2,3 and 5 abreast, the fighters caught up with and barreled into the 324th Squadron formation. A few of the fighters slid in close and under the bombers, lowering their flaps briefly and "walking their rudders" (swinging the wings from side to side), spraying cannon and machine gun fire into the underside of the bombers. Just before stalling out, the German fighter pilots throttled forward, raised their flaps and went on through the formation, rolling inverted. They flew

downward through the Lead and Low Squadrons, firing as they went. The fighters kept on going--only one pass was made through the 91st formation.

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No. 4, No. 634, "Texas Chubby-The J'ville Jolter," 2nd Lt. Halsted Sherrill. A "spare," flying in the rear or "diamond" position, No. 634, "Texas Chubby-The J'ville Jolter," was piloted by 2nd Lt. Halsted Sherrill. Lt. Sherrill was on his 19th mission. He had flown his first ten missions as a copilot with a number of different crews. He was assigned his own crew on 28 July and had flown 10 missions as a first pilot. The ball turret gunner, Sgt. Enrique T. Perez, was on his 25th mission and the waist gunner, Sgt. Joseph R. Morrison, his 23rd. The remainder of the crew had flown at least eleven missions. 2nd Lt. William M. Porter was originally the navigator on Lt. Richard W. Burch's crew. Lt. Burch's crew arrived at Bassingbourn on the 7th of April. Almost as soon as they arrived, Lt. Porter came down with a bad cold, accompanied by fits of coughing. Unable to shake the cold or coughs, Lt. Porter finally went on sick call. In checking him over, the doctor discovered that because of his coughing, Lt. Porter had developed a hernia that required surgery. He was operated on immediately and removed from flight status while recovering. In the meantime, Lt. Burch's crew began flying combat missions with different navigators filling in for Lt. Porter.

On their 12th mission on 20 June, Lt. Burch's plane, No. 982, was hit by flak over Hamburg and exploded in midair. Only the tail gunner escaped. But for a simple cold and the resulting complications, Lt. Porter would have been aboard No. 982. Thus, the difference between death and life. But for Lt. Porter's cold, Cpt. Harold I Fox, the navigator on the 20th of June, would not have been aboard No. 982. Lt. Porter was returned to flight status on the 20th of July and had flown three missions as a fill-in. On the 28th he was assigned to Lt. Sherrill's crew. Today was his 12th mission.

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No. 634

No. 634 was hit immediately in a number of places by 20 mm cannon fire, became engulfed in fire and started spinning downward. The bombardier, 2nd Lt. William M. Porter, was hit in the head by shrapnel from the first exploding shells, filling his oxygen mask with blood. At the same time, the pilot, Lt. Sherrill, rang the bail out bell and told the crew over the intercom to leave the plane. Lt. Porter took off his oxygen mask, buckled on his "chest pack" parachute and started making his way to the nose escape hatch. Just as he arrived at the hatch, Lt. Porter passed out from his wounds and from lack of oxygen, falling onto the hatch cover. The copilot, 2nd Lt. Frank J. Gilligan, got to the hatch a few seconds later, and seeing Lt. Porter's body lying over the hatch with blood all over his face, thought he was dead. Lt. Gilligan kicked the hatch open and pushed Lt. Porter out before bailing out himself. As Lt. Porter dropped lower, the oxygen in the air became greater, and he came to and pulled his ripcord. As soon as the chute opened, he passed out again. Lt. Porter landed on the side of a high garden fence and slid to the ground. Had he hit the top of the fence, he most likely would have been severely injured, if not killed. An elderly couple, who lived in the house, came out as other civilians started running into the garden, calling Lt. Porter a "Chicago Gangster." This name was given by the Germans to the American bomber crewmen who were creating so much damage and death in the German cities. However, the elderly couple told the gathering crowd that Lt. Porter was their prisoner and to leave him alone. The woman then went to get water to wash off Lt. Porter's facial wounds. Lt. Porter told her not to bother with them. The blood was clotted and he was afraid his face would start bleeding again if the coagulated blood were washed off. The couple took care of Lt. Porter until the authorities came for him. While waiting, they explained as best they could in German that they had a son who was a prisoner of war in England. He had written them to say he had plenty of food, clothing and comfortable

living conditions. Protecting Lt. Porter was one way the German couple could reciprocate for the treatment their son was receiving. When the order to bail out had come over the intercom, the tail gunner, Sgt. Chester W. Chis, started to go back into the fuselage to bail out the side hatch. Just then the plane exploded, throwing Sgt. Chis out of the fuselage. Although the front half of the plane disintegrated completely from the exploding bombs, the tail section remained intact and was floating down slowly. Sgt. Chris was also floating down, bumping up against the tail section. He was afraid to pull his ripcord, fearing his chute would become entangled in the tail and drag him down. Finally realizing if he didn't do something, he was going to be killed anyway, Sgt. Chis pushed against the floating tail section, causing him to drift far enough away to open his chute safely."

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