

MY LUCKY THIRTY

Written by Earl G. Williamson Jr.

Introduction

This is a copy of S/Sgt. Earl G. Williamson's diary during his tour of duty in the 8th Air Force in 1944. Most of the diary was copied verbatim. Small changes were made where needed for clarification. When a decision was made about whether to change something or to leave it intact I usually choose the latter. Hence there is some confusion regarding the numbering sequence of some missions and a few missing words. Reference to the pictures in the diary, are deleted. Otherwise the bulk of the work is as written by Earl in 1944 when he was 20 years old.

It should be noted that I often hear that mission diaries were forbidden to be kept, by flying personnel. How fortunate that Earl Williamson decided to write down his thoughts shortly after each mission.

Robert S. Morris

Diary of S/Sgt. Earl G. Williamson

We took from the airfield at the Kearney Air base in Nebraska on the morning of Nov. 24th, 1943- our destination the aerial POE at Presque Isle Maine. Landed at Syracuse, NY instead of Maine and stayed there overnight. Left at 9:45 a.m., Nov. 25th and landed at Presque Isle about 2:30 p.m. Delayed here until Nov. 30th, because of bad weather forced to land at Stevensville, Newfoundland. We spent fifteen days on this snow-covered island and then moved to Gander, Newfoundland.

At midnight (Newfoundland time) or 2:30 a.m. Greenwich time (English time) on the 18th of December we took off for Prestwick Scotland. Bad weather forced us to climb to 17,000ft. But our navigator (Lt. Schottmiller) hit Prestwick right on the head and our pilot (Lt. Wilkinson) made an excellent landing.

Passes through Eire and Glasgow, Scotland en-route to Stone, England (Replacement center). Assigned to the 91st bomb Group, 322 Bomb Sqd. At Bassingbourn, England thirteen miles from Cambridge and 44 from London.

These notes were taken after each mission or air battle and now I have compiled them into this book together with pictures.

MISSION ONE

Brunswick, Germany 30 January 44

Sunday, Jan 30, 1944

My first mission (later proved to be a real air battle and on of the roughest raids I went on) was voluntary on my part and this temporary eagerness vanished after returning to base.

I was awakened at 4:45 a.m.- sent to chow and was given a briefing slip for preliminaries scheduled at 5:20. At briefing our target (ME 110 Fighter Factory located at Brunswick) was flashed on a screen and every detailed explained. We were told about such things as weather, altitude, position in formation, cloud cover, fight support, prisoner of war instructions, time of return, and many other necessary facts that are conducive to a perfect raid.

The mission was to be about seven and a half-hours long of which five hours would be under oxygen. At this particular time it was the custom in most cases for a crew to split up and go with an experienced crew on the first one, and I was to fly with a Lt. Register and his crew. His right waist gunner had a frozen his eye from the last mission, and it was his place that I took instead of my originally assigned left waist. The formation assembled at a prearranged point and we climbed en-route. I might add that the oxygen is used above 15,000ft on flights. This is one of the many hazards of flying the ETO. During the month of Dec. 43, ten aircrew members died from anoxia (or lack of oxygen). Constant checks every five minutes have to be made because man cannot live but a few minutes without oxygen above 20,000 feet. He must also pinch his oxygen mask every few minutes to break the ice, which sometimes plugs up holes to his supply.

We were engaged by the enemy fighters soon after we got over France and there were several attacks to the formation on our side before we hit to the target. As we approached the target I could see chaff being thrown out by the formation in front. Chaff is hundreds of strips of tin foil cut and released in small packages and its purpose is to protect the planes behind by throwing off the enemy's radar equipment. Enemy uses radar to predict calculations for guns when planes cannot be seen.

Suddenly flak (anti-aircraft fire mostly from 88 mm and 105's) begins to burst all over. Large puffs of white (105's) and black smoke (mostly 88's) would hang in the sky long after the audible cracking steel had started on its journey below. As the bombardier hollered, "bomb bay doors opening" and lined up with his target, I could feel tenseness, which is also evident in any veteran of ETO aerial warfare. After "Bombs Away" and the doors had closed there was a silence of about two minutes on the intercom. (Interphone used to communicate with members of the crew).

Hardly before I realized it, the left waist gunner had called out an enemy fighter

Approaching and he was blasting away with that cal. 50 almost monotonously. Suspense was really great especially since I couldn't see any fighters and he was firing on my opposite side or in other words behind my back. It seemed like ages before he quit firing although it was only about 25 or 30 seconds –then there was another short lull.

Suddenly I saw an enemy fighter (FW 190) coming in at our formation at one o'clock (clock system used to give an accurate position of fighters with nose as twelve and tail at six o'clock) and I began to fire. Then he did a barrel roll and cut off our short off our formation just as my gun mount worked loose from its position. I found myself with a heavy bucking cal. 50 and all its mountings in my lap and I was mad for being so careless. The armorer should have put another bolt and nut on the mounting. I noticed this before taking off but I thought it would hold. I fixed the mount quickly and saw two FW 190's attacking the formation to our side. I only got in a few shots before I had to stop short of a Fortress.

I was getting a good workout on my first mission and I was really scared. There were times when I didn't think we would make it back. Our fighter escort was not around and everything looked bad. I had already seen my first Fort go down and four or five chutes come out. Some of those veteran German fighter pilots were plenty good and they proved it as they came barrel rolling in and shooting while upside down. They had plenty of guts and they passed our formation so fast at times that it was difficult to make out what kind of enemy fighter they were. When a Fort is making 200 miles an hour and an attacking fighter is making 400 the closure is 600 miles an hour and if you get your sights on him early you never will. Altogether I saw about seventy-five enemy fighters. Everywhere I looked I could see dogfights and occasionally a P-47 Thunderbolt (our escort finally caught up) would chase a ME 109 and a FW 190 down in flames. Then I would cast a worried glance at some exploding Fortress

in the distance and would watch for chutes to come out so that we could count the number that came out and report it at interrogation. Most of the time our escort, consisting of P-47's, Spitfires (at the channel and mostly in France since their range was limited) P-38's and P-51's, were engaged in bitter dogfights and most of the way we got a hot reception from Jerry. Our escort didn't catch us until we were about 75 miles from the channel and they were really a beautiful sight. The English Channel looked mighty good.

We landed, gathered all our equipment, took our guns out of their receivers and loaded then on the waiting truck. The driver took us to the hanger and we put our guns in their shelves. From there, we thrived on cake and coffee while the officers interrogated us. Later we washed and went to chow, and then back to the hanger to clean our guns. Then it was time for bed.

Battle damage to ship was three flak holes in the bomb bays.

Oh yes, I forgot to mention that I saw a JU (Junker) 88 to the left of the ship at seven o'clock about 1200 yards away and apparently he was getting ready to fire a rocket. They do this by raising their wings and from underneath the rocket are fired. Rockets are usually ineffective and are accurate. But before he could fire it, P-47's came up and I last saw the enemy diving.

MISSION TWO

Leipzig, Germany 20 February 44

Sunday, Feb. 20, 1944

This second mission (probably our roughest mission) was the first with my original crew and naturally we were glad to get together again rather than fly with other crews.

Our target, Leipzig, about 90 miles from Berlin, was a ME component factory parts for every type of ME airplane.

After all preliminaries, we taxied down the runway, took off, assembled in formation, and started on our way across the English Channel. As we approached the Belgium coast we began to put on our Flak suits and helmets. Flak suits fit over your parachute harness like a kitchen apron without sleeves, and their makeup of steel discs weigh about twenty-five pounds. These suits designed by an Englishman have saved many lives in the air. On top of this we wear the original steel helmet except for minor alterations for headsets and it is also cut down in front for better visibility. The ball turret operator has a specially designed helmet, which fits right over his flying helmet since he is in such a compact position. I might add here that the ball turret and top turrets are the only two positions containing automatic computing sights. Shooting from other positions is entirely a flexible gunnery problem. The two waist guns are mostly for passing shots and here it is most difficult to obtain results since Jerry doesn't attack from the side anymore.

The ball turret gunner usually enters the turret while over the English Channel. He enters the turret from the fuselage (near radio compartment) by engaging a hand clutch and rotating a hand crank. When he rotates the turret as far as he can the door to the turret is opened and a power clutch engaged so the ball will not revolve when entering. Turret is hydraulically operated. Process is reversed on getting out of the turret.

Visibility was very good today and there were not many clouds. It was quite a sight to see Belgium, Holland, and Germany covered with snow.

I felt very sick as we were over the channel and I began to feed the fishes, so to speak, many times. I would have to empty my oxygen mask every once in a while. After this I just gagged continuously for the rest of the trip. I had eaten some British fish called fish cakes, fish, and potatoes the night before and I knew that I had ptomaine poisoning. Then too, with open waist windows, my face (part exposed above the mask) got very cold and later turned out to be a light case of frostbite.

We got to the target and all we could see was black smoke from other formations ahead. Heavy concentrations of black flak began to come up and it was very accurate. The suspense was great and as we dropped our bombs right in the middle of the smoke, we could see the formation behind being attacked by enemy fighters. I couldn't help but wonder when our time was coming. From the left side we could see some of the Forts going down under control.

About ten minutes after bombing the target we got our first in a series of three attacks on our airplane by enemy fighters. The first attack was from a ME 109 approaching at about two o'clock and coming in sideways sweeping motion. Our right waist gunner called the plane out on interphone and began to fire. Later he said he could see the smoke rings from the ME's 20 mm cannon and they seemed to be pointing right at him. Naturally the tail gunner (Fennel) looked quickly around to his left to see if he could see the plane and maybe get in a burst or so.

The ME 109 passed by him very, very fast, and as he turned he saw an FW 190 coming in directly at six o'clock and already firing at six hundred yards away. Fennel and the ball turret operator (Roberts) started peppering away. The FW passed under our ship and the pilot said he saw it go down in flames. I began to test fire my guns to see if it would work. I fired a few rounds and it jammed. I looked out and saw an ME 109 coming in a sideward sweeping motion about 900 yards away. I was very sick, my gun was jammed and an enemy fighter was attacking. I had to do something fast since the other guns on our ship were engaged with other enemy fighters and my gun was the only one that could be trained on the fighter. I was very scared and gagging and I knew that it would be fatal to pick up the cover of my gun and attempt to fix it. Jerry can easily see with open waist windows and he knows when something is wrong. Then I did the only thing there was to do and it later proved to be successful. I waved my gun up and down and back and forth as if I was tracking him. Other guns on our ship were firing at the time and I guess he thought I was firing at him because he turned off his main course enough to miss us but not before I had seen the red flare and black rings of smoke from his 20 mm's.

An attacking fighter's guns are fixed, and in order to hit a bomber he must point the nose of his ship at an angle so that the gunfire will meet the fort. We learned the hard way. This was the last attack and Love helped me fix my gun. I've never been any sicker and I said I would never fly again. Twenty minutes later we saw our escort- the most glorious sight in the world after an attack.

When we landed our ship had seventy-five holes in it. One large piece of flak struck right outside the co-pilot's window and tore a long hole in the window frame. Another piece went through our dinghies and we would have been out of luck if we had to ditch (process of landing with wheels up over water). There were a couple of 20-mm holes in the horizontal stabilizer. Luckily they didn't explode. Our right wing peppered with 7.9 (about the size of our .30 cal slug) bullets. We even had holes in two of our propellers. The ship "Chennaults Pappy" was sent to the sub- depot for repairs and we had no idea it was in such bad shape. The ground crew chief said that there were 36 bullet holes in the right wing- some just missing the supercharger- and that the main spars had been cut. He said that twelve slugs were removed from the gasoline tanks and he doesn't see how the wings stayed together. The ship stayed in sub- depot for a month, went on one more raid and then was retired. The engineering officer said that our pilot wouldn't have wanted to fly the ship home if he had known the condition it was in.

This mission lasted eight hours.

MISSION THREE

Achmer, Germany 21 February 44

Monday, Feb. 21, 1944

My third raid was with my crew and the target was an airfield at Bergurg or Ackner between Berlin and Switzerland.

We took off and on the way across the channel to Germany we could see a white B-17 with red tips. General Doolittle was looking over the formation. The idea of formation flying is to stay tightly stacked so that all guns can be concentrated on an attacking fighter. Jerry likes to come winding right through formation and it almost defeats his attempts if a tight formation is held. The enemy will always attack a loosely formed group before the others.

We arrived at IP (Target- Indicated Point) without any trouble and most of the time fire was medium and inaccurate and the chaff from other formations helped a great deal. Suddenly we could see the formation in the rear being attacked by swarms of German FW 190's. I could see tracers shooting across the sky and smoke and fire from a distance. The right waist gunner (Love) punched me and pointed out his window. I looked and saw a Fort going down in flames and a few parachutes come out. I saw one enemy fighter get hit in the distance and the plane scattered in the sky.

I might add that the interphone conversation continued practically all the time we were in the air. We reported everything we saw briefly and to a point on every mission. I think interphone discipline is one of the most important factors and played an important role in our success.

We made the trip back passing over the Rhine River. Those white cliffs of Dover are certainly pretty to a tired crewman. Eight or nine hour raids are really tiring with heavy flak suits, flying cloths, oxygen masks, and constant checks on equipment. To this add the mental strain, which is always terrific from the moment the enemy coast is reached.

We landed and as we were undressing the sad news came that two of our squadron were missing. I shall not mention all our losses in this book, but just some of the fellows I knew well. One of the crews reported back later. They had to ditch in the English Channel and were picked up by the efficient British Air Sea Rescue. We had trained with the other crew (Lt. Osterburg's crew) and they had been our constant companions since arriving in England. One group reported seeing ten parachutes come from the distressed ship. Now, some months later they reported as POW's (prisoners of war)

MISSION FOUR

Schweinfurt, Germany 24 February 44

Thursday, Feb. 24, 1944

On my fourth raid, my heart leaped, and so did others, as the colonel briefed us on the great ball bearing works at Schweinfurt. His important factory had been hit twice before with heavy losses for our groups. In fact I learned that my Sqd. was practically wiped out in the great raid of October were on a much smaller scale. That isn't the whole story because at least fifty more ditched in the English Channel. However, most of the crews were picked up.

Schweinfurt produced most of the ball bearing for the German Air Force as well as the rest of Hitler's war machine. Its importance can be seen since on the other two occasions it was bombed, it was rebuilt to approximately two-thirds of its previous strength in just a few months.

It usually takes an hour or more to assemble at altitude over bases. These Forts can't be quickly assembled together in formation and it takes time for each Sqd. to find his particular leader. A pilot first looks out for his group, which is indicated by characters of the alphabet such as "A" which is the 91st Bomb Group. Then the pilot looks for his Sqd. which is usually indicated by two-alphabet character together such as OR (323rd Sqd.) and this located on the fuselage near the rear. After locating Sqd. and leader he assembles his prearranged position in formation. In many cases a pilot cannot find his formation due to maybe a late takeoff, etc. and when this happens he usually tacks on to another formation.

Fighters were scheduled to meet us at different points according to precision timing since at this particular writing our escort is not capable of staying with us due to gas shortages. This was later remedied to a certain degree by new long range P-51 Mustangs carrying belly tanks but even they are limited. When they engage enemy fighters they have to drop their belly tanks. British Spitfires accompanied us until we got sufficient long-range fighters over here but they couldn't go as far as our P-47's, P-38's and P-51's. However, they did excellent work inside France and the channel.

We were thirty minutes early at the target due to a terrific wind and this threw part of our fighter escort off. The Germans must have been more or less suspicious because we were amazed to find the flak medium over the target. The ground area ahead of us was rolling in huge puffs of black smoke. We dropped our bombs right in the target area but couldn't observe results since the area was a mass of flames and smoke. In distance we saw a few enemy fighters attack another wing and we were amazed at the week resistance the Germans put up over the target.

Later it was reported that some groups were heavily attacked by swarms of German fighters who pressed their attack but as a whole the Eighth lost fewer planes involved. Some of the crews who had been on the two other famous raids said that they considered it rougher than the previous raids.

When we landed it was discovered that we had two small flak holes in our horizontal stabilizers.

MISSION FIVE

Augsburg, Germany 25 February 44

Friday, Feb 25, 1944

Fifth mission. The target was Augsburg only about 100 miles from Switzerland. To date my first five missions were as long as any the Eighth Air Force has made.

Our fighter escort was very good despite the fact that we got to the target earlier than briefed. We dropped our bombs and the ball turret gunner (Roberts) reported good hits.

In the distance we could see the snow-covered Alps and it presented an artistic picture. One Fort had an engine knocked out by flak and he headed toward Swiss territory with an enemy fighter on his tail. When an engine gets hit with flak it has to be feathered (change the angle of propeller so that it will have less wind-resistance- if not feathered it will cause drag). This slows the plane down and it cannot keep up with the formation. This is just what Jerry likes and what he looks for so that he can pounce on the bomber from every direction. Jerry has probably knocked more planes down this way than any other way. Just after we hit the target we got a good example of this when we saw a straggler being attacked by three FW 190's. The fort got one of the FW's but the Fort was hit and caught on fire. We saw seven chutes come out just as the ship went into a terrific spin and enveloped into one ball of hell. Then I saw one of the German fighters following the chutes down obviously giving position to ground forces.

Our battle damage was a couple of flak holes.

The six days between February 20 and 25th were most significant in the history of strategic bombing. In some 3,800 bomber and 4,300 fighter sorties, the 8th and 15th Air Forces attacked factories whose estimated production was more than two-thirds of Germany's single engine and more the three quarter of her twin-engine fighters. The cost was high. On February 24 the 8th The six days between February 20 and 25th were most significant in the history of strategic bombing. In some 3,800 bomber and 4,300 fighter sorties, the 8th and 15th Air Forces attacked factories whose estimated production was more than two-thirds of Germany's single engine and more the three quarter of her twin-engine fighters. The cost was high. On February 24 the 8th Air Force alone lost 49 heavies over Schweinfurt, Gotha, and Rostock. The next day, when two American spearheads met at Regensburg, the 8th and 15th expended a total of 65 heavies over this and other targets. Altogether, in the cyclonic month of February, 250 four-engine bombers failed to return to their bases. That involved 2,500 men right there but the majority can be presumed safe. However, at the end of the month after studying pictured and assessing damages, the chief of the Air Forces knew that the price was not too high.

They knew without question that during February the wastage of the Luftwaffe's fighter strength exceeded its replacement capacity by a substantial margin. It was estimated that the productive capacity of the Nazi aircraft industry as planned for March was down by at least fifty percent for an undetermined period. Just how long a period depended on the ability of precision bombers to return to the targets when factory repairs had advanced sufficiently to make it necessary. Even pessimists conceded that without further bombing the crippling effects of "Blitz Week" would last between one and two months.

This was not long but it might be long enough. If the strain on the Americans has been great, the pressure on the Luftwaffe had been almost unbearable. During Feb the Americans heavies' claimed 540 enemy fighters destroyed in combat. This does not take into consideration the enemy fighters that were shot down by the bombers that failed to return to their bases. Then American fighters, whose camera guns made reliable checking easy, shot down 365.

Americans had learned, somewhat to the confusion of the man in the street that a destroyed factory could not be counted upon to remain destroyed. Even when precision bombing wrecked a building, some of the machine's tools could be saved and put to work elsewhere in a matter of weeks. The Germans were providing themselves masters of the art of salvage. Also the miserable weather of Nov., Dec. and some of the months of 1944 gave them time to rebuild somewhat.

MISSION SIX

Frankfurt, Germany 24 February 44 Flew on Blue Dreams
Thursday, March 2, 1944

The target, often-bombed Frankfurt, presented a shorter trip than previous ones, and it turned out to be one of the easiest trips I made to Germany.

Careful planning is made in routing bombers to targets. Practically all flak are known by our S2 intelligence and they do their best to route us around them. Many times a trip is almost doubled by zigzagging around flak areas. Sometimes the lead navigator makes a mistake and all hell breaks out in the form of flak.

After we got over Belgium territory one of the superchargers went haywire and we went on to Frankfurt on three engines. This caused us to lag behind in formation, but as soon as we got to the German border we dropped our 5,000lbs and then caught up with the formation. Heavy clouds at 15,000ft prevented us from observing bomb hits. We flew the Fortress "Blue Dreams" and brought her back without a scratch.

Our friendly fighter escort of Spitfires, P47 Thunderbolts, P38 Lightning's, and P51 Mustangs were good.

MISSION SEVEN

Berlin, Germany 3 March 44

Friday, March 3, 1944

We were briefed for Berlin, and excitement and tenseness could be felt all around. Berlin to date had never felt the hard touch of American bombs. Photographers were snapping pictures here and there. This was to be the biggest thing since the bombing of Tokyo, and I might add, much more resistance was expected.

We took off, formed, and were on our way. It was extremely cold with the temperatures as low as 60⁰C below, as cold as it gets anywhere in the world. We wear electrically heated clothing and the temperature can be regulated by a thermostat. To take a glove off a few seconds would mean a frozen hand. We usually wear our clothes over the heated clothes to keep all the warmth inside. Gauntlets (huge leather gloves) are worn over the electrically heated gloves in case they should burn out. Heavy flying boots are worn over the electrically heated shoes.

In planning our trip to Berlin we were routed up by the North Sea in a zigzag course, which led up close enough to get a little flak from the Frisian Islands. As we passed the islands clouds got so thick that we climbed to 26,000ft. As we passed the islands clouds got and the vapor trails were so dense that we could hardly see some of the planes in our formation. We were called back and we and we hit Wilhelmshaven instead. Bombed through clouds and could observe results. We returned VIA Belgium and North Sea. There were a terrific number of airplanes in the sky today and we had to be careful when we test fired our guns. The guns are fired at high altitude to make sure they are ready for action. Guns often froze at extremely low temperatures but that has been remedied by the proper setting of headspace, a new type of oil, and electric heaters.

When we reached the North Sea on our way back our ball-turret gunner (Roberts) had to come out of the ball for some reason? He got one of the numerous walk around oxygen bottles and plugged in. These bottles contain a few minutes supply of oxygen and enable crewman to walk about the ship. However they have to be constantly checked by a gauge at the top of the bottle on my left filler plug. The valve inside the plug stuck and the whole oxygen system began to leak. We tried every way to unstick the valve with no result. The system was gradually draining and our pilot came down to a low altitude (on the deck as it is called) and we came across the North Sea by ourselves at two or three thousand feet.

We didn't see any enemy fighters at the target but the flak was heavy.

When we returned to base, Lt. Pickard's crew was reported missing. Later we heard the fatal story of one of our favorite companion crews.

On engine had been knocked out by flak over Germany and they started back home alone and on deck. En-route they passed too close to a small town in Holland and the Germans knocked another engine out with flak. This left only no. 3 and no. 4 engine running and no. 3 was threatening. They reached the North Sea and were losing altitude fast. They saw a boat in the distance and decided to ditch as close as possible to the boat in the hope of being picked up. Ditching is the procedure of landing on water. All crewmembers except the pilot and co-pilot assemble in the radio room and brace themselves in a prearranged way to try and prevent injury. All heavy equipment is thrown away, the radio hatch is taken out, the radio man sends out an SOS fix, and one of the crew members pulls two handles in the radio room after the plane had almost stopped which throws out a dinghy on each side of the ship. They ditched but later found that the flak had torn huge holes in both dinghies. The ship stayed up almost five minutes and thus left all men in the icy North Sea with nothing but life preservers. According to experts, man cannot live longer than 35 minutes in the sea during this time of year. Their life preservers (Mae West) fit under the parachute harness and each side contains a cylinder. Strings can be pulled which break the cylinder and inflate the preservers. A P51 spotted them and contacted an old tugboat. The old boat broke down and they sent out a smaller boat to pick them up. The boat would only hold five and so they planned on making two trips. An airplane landed near the other five and then took off again. One of the crewmembers held up five fingers. The full story is not known at this writing but the five left, froze to death and we don't know whether they were picked up or not. They were some of our best friends.

MISSION EIGHT

Ekner, Germany 4 March 44

Saturday, March 4, 1944

We were briefed for the same target- a VKF ball bearing works at Eckner in the suburbs of Berlin. Our secondary target was to be the center of the industrial city of Berlin.

We were only about an hour from Berlin when once more, because of clouds and vapor, we were told to bomb another target identified as Cologne. Appalling weather, with condensation trails that made formation flying virtually impossible, forced the recall of the bulk of the force. However, one formation slipped through to Berlin escorted by fighters whose round-trip penetration of 1,200 miles exceeded even their Regensburg performance and set a new distance record for the war. Very few enemy aircraft were seen over the cloud-shrouded city. Fifteen American heavies were lost but only one as a direct result of enemy fighter action. The cold was intense. One gunner, whose oxygen equipment froze, died of anoxia, the first assault was not a fair test and it was at best a glancing blow.

On the way back from Cologne we were running short of gas and we came back across the English Channel by ourselves. The clouds were so low that we flew only a few hundred feet from the water. I might mention that on our way back we passed over the outskirts of the Ruhr valley- the heaviest flak area in the world. We believe it.

I got a good look at the French coast at low altitude and I couldn't help but wonder what kind of a defense it could offer against our invasion.

MISSION NINE

Berlin, Germany 6 March 44 Crashed landed in England Flying "Blue Dreams"

Monday, March 6, 1944

We climbed out of warm sacks in the pre-dawn darkness, went to briefing and found that our target was again Berlin. This would be our (my crew) third attempt to bomb Berlin since our group was called back due to weather on two occasions.

Luring the Luftwaffe into combat was only one of the several valid reasons for daylight blows at the heart of Germany. The great ball bearings works at Ekner, (our target) in the suburbs of Berlin, was high on the list of priority targets. The ferocity with which the Germans usually defended Schweinfurt indicated the dependence of their war economy on these plants, coordinated with blows at aircraft industry, were designed to make the replacement of aircraft factories more and more difficult.

We took off and hadn't been in the air for five minutes when gasoline began to pour out of the wing close to out No. 3 engine. Someone must have left the gas cap off or at least didn't fix it very tight. Our pilot (Lt. Wilkinson) and co-pilot (Lt. Mughee) have always been extremely afraid of any gas, because one spark and you've had it as the British say. Our pilot radioed for an emergency landing at our field but they told him he couldn't land for fifteen minutes because other Forts were taking off. So-we flew over an adjacent fighter field only three miles away and radioed for an emergency landing. All communications between ground and air do not come over the interphone and the crew was ignorant of the fact that we were going to land so soon. The pilot should have let us know on interphone. The bombardier (Lt. Matthews), ball turret operator, (Roberts) radioman, and (Schliyer) and right waist gunner (Love) were all in the radio room. The navigator (Lt. Schottmiller) had just crawled out of the nose. The bombardier was in the radio room because in a short while (5,000ft) he would have to pull the arming pins out of the bombs- the ball turret operator doesn't get in his cramped position until over the English Channel- the radio man was in his position – and the right waist gunner went up to check something in the radio room. The tail gunner (Fennel) was near the tail wheel adjusting and checking his equipment, and I was near him doing the same thing but still on interphone.

Suddenly we felt the flaps on the wings come down and the plane slow down. Then we realized we were going to land. The tail gunner (Fennel) looked back and noticed that our tail wheel was still up. This means that our main landing seat was still up also and that we were going to land. I ran to the interphone mike button to tell the pilot as Fennel ran towards the radio room. Just as I pushed the button in, we hit, and all hell broke out. We were bouncing and hitting everywhere with ten five hundred-pound bombs, a full gas load and at 125 miles an hour with our wheels up. We were not even braced-at least most of us were not. There were a few seconds I don't remember what took place. I was going from side to side like a ping-pong ball and I landed near the tail wheel when the plane stopped. I could picture the Fort blowing up, and I thought I could see myself floating around in the air, also there was the fear of getting struck by the ball turret since it protrudes lower than the fuselage and usually flies back toward the tail in a crash landing. All the pins were in the bombs but it's still a hell of a feeling. Then as the bomber came to a stop I heard gas sizzling like those sizzling steaks in good old America. Sparks would fix things. I could hear ambulances fire trucks, and crash crews with their sirens going full blast. I wondered about the others, and in my daze I knew that I had to get out of the plane in a hurry but for some reason I was frozen. The next thing I remember was the fellow coming from the radio room telling me to hurry. I stepped out and the other fellows were close behind and we almost ran over the ambulances and fire trucks getting away from that bomber. I looked out of back to see the co-pilot coming out of the cockpit window and the pilot navigator close behind. Crash crews and crew personnel began to swarm out near the plane with fire extinguishers and fire fighting equipment. We got a safe distance from the smoking and badly battered plane and everyone seems all right except for the fact that it was very hard to light a cigarette. It was hard to keep moving about and everyone was shaking like a dog that has just been doused in water only we couldn't help it. The doctor

looked us over and we were told we were all right.

The pilot had forgotten in all the excitement to put the landing gear down. The engineer (Wilson) had gone back to check the landing gear with a crank but before he could do so the pilot was hollering for him to call out ground speed and so he rushed back to. The pilot said, "Sorry boys, I just forgot to put the wheels down. I've made worse landings with my wheels down." He had controlled the plane considering everything. How a crew can walk from a wreck is beyond me. We were plenty lucky and everyone realized it. In a few minutes the Colonel and a captain from our field were over there. Trucks came, and after we had gathered our equipment, took us back to our base. This was the third time we had started out for Berlin and still had not gotten over the capital.

The raid turned out to be the first major (day) air battle over Berlin. Losses were heavy. Some combat wings got through easily but others sustained fierce attacks from fighters and rocket-carrying fighter-bombers. Sixty-nine American bombers failed to return to England, the severest losses yet suffered by the eighth Air Force. A few cripples landed in Sweden. Altogether, 176 enemy fighters were destroyed by the bombers and fighter escort. Eleven fighters are missing.

MISSION TEN

Berlin, Germany 8 March 44 No credit, had an abort, 3 members shot down, POW's.

Wednesday, March 8, 1944

Our Radio operator, (Schliyer) right waist gunner, (Love) and I were to fly with Lt. Kuel from East Texas. We were going along as replacements and the Nazi capital was again our target. At the last moment Schliyer was changed and was to fly with Lt. Williams's crew. Our Bombardier (Lt. Matthews) and ball turret operator (Roberts) were also flying with Lt. William's crew.

We were to be lead plane in Sqd. flying in a high position. We took off, grouped, and were almost across the channel when an oil cooler burst on our no. 3 engine. The pilot could not feather the prop and we had to abort. We turned and came down to a lower altitude as we returned across the channel. The bottom of the wing was almost covered with oil and the engine was wind milling. After we turned, a P47 came up and flew out to the side most of the way back across the channel.

He came so close that we could see him wave. He saw that we were going to make it all right and he turned and headed toward enemy territory. We have a great admiration for those fighter pilots that give us protection and who escort crippled bombers back to their bases.

When we landed we could see oil all over the fuselage, ball turret, and wings. This was at two o'clock and at six we came back to sweat the boys in. Lt. Williams and crew didn't come back. Our bombardier, (Matthews) radio operator, (Schliyer) and ball turret operator, (Roberts) were with him as I said before. We were told that one of their engines had been knocked out and that they were lagging somewhere between Hanover and Berlin. They were last seen gradually going down.

Months later we got the news that most of the boys are POW's in Germany. No word has been heard about the whereabouts of Morby (tail gunner). The pilot (Williams) is interned and obviously he escaped to a neutral country. I know that the three members of my crew are POW's.

Fourth time I started to Berlin and still not over the capitol.

MISSION NINE (Officially)

Oberpfaffenoffen (Munich), Germany 24 February 44

Oberpfaffenoffen presented another long target and a round trip of 1,200 miles. We were to hit an airfield just a few miles from Hitler's famous beer hall in Munich and about fifty miles from Switzerland.

We have three new crew members-Art Haber originally a waist gunner on Williams' crew who checked out as a toggler or bombardier, (lead plane only one with bombsight) Laddie Chotal, ball turret, and Glen Smith, radio operator. These fellows were grounded when their crew went down with our three-crew members.

Our Sqd. (323) led the whole 8th today and we were putting mission no.50 on a ship, which had no name. For us it was just a long tiresome trip and we encountered no enemy fighters even though the 8th lost 43 bombers and 10 fighters today. Flak was medium at the target yet fairly accurate. When the burst isn't close enough to tear, you don't get the impression of an explosion. It's just that where nothing was before there is suddenly and magically this ugly little cloud-a bursted ball of grayish-black cotton, maybe a couple yards across, with sooty particles of steel and iron in it. It sounds like a poompf – or maybe Poompf.

We didn't hit the target and we don't know exactly where we hit. However, the wing behind us hit the target.

Our fighter escort of P47's and P38's was good.

MISSION TEN

Frankfurt, Germany 20 March 44

Monday, March 20, 1944

My tenth mission was to be a 1,100 miles trip to Frankfurt.

We took off in the same ship and everything went well until we approached the target. Then- flak began to come from everywhere and I could see the radio operator (Smith) grin as I grabbed for my flak helmet. He already had his on. A few of the bursts exploded right under the fuselage where Love and I were standing. It didn't hit the ship but it was so close it shook the fuselage violently and sounded like bricks falling on a tin roof. We dropped our bombs but couldn't see for clouds. Our 42 incendiaries dropped in the Karlsnuke- Manheim area it was later reported.

There were plenty of contrails and the clouds were so dense that at times we couldn't see the planes in our own formation. The different groups were split up and this dangerous flying continued for almost an hour. When we came out planes from other groups were underneath and we could not observe the results.

Our navigator (Lt. Schottmiller) turned in some fine navigation and we were especially on the alert for enemy fighters. We came home on three engines and made a good landing.

We got credit for the mission- my eleventh- and even though we came back it was a 1,000mile round trip.

This was our fifth attempt at Berlin and yet we did not reach the city. Should be some sort of record.

MISSION ELEVEN

Berlin, Germany 22 March 44 Silver B17 assigned-changed to #333

Wednesday- March 22, 1944

We were assigned a new silver B17 (#116) as our own and it was already named "Hi Ho Silver". It is one of the first silver B17's on our field. From this point on all the bombers coming over are silver.

Our target was Berlin again and excitement was high.

As we were taxing for position on runway we discovered our bomb bay doors would not open. Ground crews-those boys who get less credit and deserve more- quickly helped us switch to a spare ship "Wee Willie" (#333).

We took off and assembled at 18,000 feet and crossed the long icy waters of the North Sea without mishap. Just east of Hamburg, which is about forty minutes from Berlin, we had to feather no. one engine due to mechanical failures. We certainly weren't going to Berlin on three engines. The pilot decided to turn back and try to make the trip back alone. I don't know whether this was such a good idea or not. After turning the bombardier dropped the bombs in the Hamburg area. However, heavy cloud was with us and vice versa. Nevertheless, it was a good job considering and most of us got back safely.

When we landed we had one flak hole in the bomb bay and one in the gas tank under the wing. The small piece of flak went through the wing and the three thickness automatic seal gas tank. It was oven red and it was a cubic inch in size.

MISSION TWELVE

Munster, Germany 23 March 44

Thursday- March 23, 1944

The target on my twelfth mission was an airfield at Munster north of Werl, and a few miles south of Hamm, Germany.

Over the target visibility was so bad that we could not see the airfield as we bombed the city of Werl instead. There was a great deal of flak over the target and several bursts sounded like as if they were pounding on our ship. It was so close that I could hear it crack and even smell the smoke from the bursts. There are two types of flak batteries, predicted and box barrage. Predicted batteries are used on clear days when the ships can be seen easily and therefore tracked. Evasive action can be taken to a certain extent by changing the position of the ship as you see you are being tracked. In the box barrage mostly used on cloudy days, the radio equipment picks up the planes and they send up a box pattern in the hope that some of the bursts will find their mark. No evasive action can be taken this type as the flak is more wildly scattered and all you can do is hope and pray.

All during the mission we had trouble with the elevator flaps which hang from two to five inches down and making it harder to hold a good formation. The engineer (Wilson) came back in the radio compartment, got a crank and proceeded to try to crank the elevators up. The crank was worn and would not fit. I had a pair of pliers so I threw them to the engineer and he cranked them up. But they wouldn't stay. The engineer went back to his top-turret position in the front of the ship. I could easily watch the flaps from my waist window and when they would get too low I would crank them up again. This went on all during the mission and kept our radioman (Smith) busy.

We made the trip back all right, although some of the wings had fierce fighter opposition. The 8th lost 27 bombers and six fighters.

MISSION THIRTEEN

No credit for this mission

Schweinfurt, Germany 24 March 44

Friday- March 24, 1944

The schedule was so arranged that I was to fly with a new crew-an idea that I contested bitterly, with no results. According to the operations Captain, they needed at least one experienced man to help in case of oxygen failures-and then too we (323 Sqd.) were to lead the whole 8th Air Force over the famous ball bearing works at Schweinfurt. I laughed sarcastically at his explanation but it did no good. I told the Captain it was hard enough to finish twenty-five (was regular operational tour) with your own crew but when you have to complete thirty with mixed crews it's rough.

We got to the ship, put our guns in and began to check everything. I found that the engineer hadn't even checked out an extra parachute. We finally got another, and then I saw the ball turret man stripping his gun and wiping all the oil off. I told him to leave that oil on there – he might wish he had after all it isn't one mans life-it's ten and those guns are the most important thing on the ship when engaged by the enemy. I knew I was in for a day of that sort of thing.

We took off, formed over the base at 18,000ft and started on our journey. Everything went well until we got half way across the channel and began to test fire our guns. All guns were working except the two tail guns, the most important guns on the ship. I was half scared and angry-I had my idea about any gunner who couldn't get either of his guns to work from the start. I asked him on the interphone what he thought was wrong and he gave me several unthoughtful answers. He said he thought the guns were frozen. I told him that couldn't be because I had been up with the temperature as low as 55⁰ C below to 60⁰ C and my guns had never frozen. After all it was only 30⁰ C below today. Then he said that he thought that the firing pin was broken. He hadn't even fired a round so I told him to abandon that idea. He told me in what position it had stopped on and I told him to loosen the headspace. He did and his right gun worked. This helped considerably because one gun would be enough to get by. A hundred different things could have been wrong with the guns and then too, working at altitude with that monotonous oxygen mask, that heavy flak suit, those two interphone wires (one for hearing and the other for speaking) and that heated suit cord in such a small space is surely no picnic.

The bombardier called for an oxygen check (this is done every few minutes) and the tail gunner would not answer. I unplugged my cords and got a portable walk around bottle. After plugging my hose into the oxygen bottle I started toward the tail to see what was wrong. I thought maybe that his interphone plugs had been disconnected in trying to fix his gun-but there was the possibility he might be unconscious from anoxia. My first thought was right and soon he was plugged in again and I crawled back toward my position.

We continued on, and after we were about twenty-five miles inside France, I noticed that our no. one engine was smoking. I notified the pilot on interphone. We continued to have some trouble with it, and the pilot feathered the engine and turned back toward home. I could see flak in the distance as the pilot asked the navigator for a course back to base. We dropped our bombs on the French coast but the bomb bay doors would not close. It is possible to land with them down- in fact it is done every day. The bomb bay doors are worked electrically by means of a motor and when this fails they can be cranked up by hand. But before this is done its advisable that the fuse be removed because the electric motor might start and it would break his arm. The fuses are located back in the fuselage near the ball turret and so the engineer plugged in on his portable walk around the bottle and came back. He removed the plate from the fuse box but e couldn't get the fuse out. Luckily I had a pair of pliers and gave them to him. I unplugged again- got another walk around the bottle and proceeded to help him. He removed the fuse and I had told him I would put it back after he had cranked the doors up and thus save him a trip. He

cranked the doors up and I put the fuse and panel back. Everything went all right until we had elevators (flaps) down and were about to land with only three engines perking.

I noticed that the ball turret man was trying to crank his guns. I asked him if he has his guns cranked up yet and he said no. There we were about to land with three engines and the ball turret guns still hanging down. He wasn't going to say anything about it. I ran to my position in the waist- plugged in on interphone and told the pilot not to land the plane. He pulled the plane up just in time.

When the ball turret comes out of the turret the guns are hanging down and they must be cranked before landing. To do this, power clutches must be disengaged and hand clutches engaged. The guns extend down far enough so that if they are not cranked up they will hit the ground before the wheels do. This would not cause a crash but would ruin a \$2,000 turret plus two cal .50 machine guns.

We made a good landing on three engines. Gosh, I was glad that trip was over.

We did not get credit for the mission.

MISSION THIRTEEN

Pas de Calais, France 26 March 44

Sunday, March 26, 1944

We were briefed early to bomb Leipzig, but the weather closed in that part of Germany. So another briefing was in order and I couldn't help but grin when we were told that we were to hit the Pas de Calais area of France. My thirteenth raid-an airfield in France and we would only be over enemy territory forty minutes.

We had a nice, smooth short run and we saw no enemy fighters. Our fighters we down near the ground strafing airfields, and military installations. Visibility was good and we saw our bombs hit the target. Flak was light but very accurate and at times bursts were so close that they jut rocked our ship like a rocking chair. A couple of rockets were fired at us from ground batteries. The Germans also shot up a couple of sky markers explode a bluish- gray smoke hangs in the sky and it leaves a long thin trail from the ground to the exploded altitude.

I guess it was one of the easiest missions I will ever make. Easy to contrast this short two and a half hour raid to our nine and ten hour missions over Germany,

MISSION FOURTEEN

St. Jean d' Angely, France 27 March 44

Monday, March 27, 1944

We were awakened at four o'clock, ate breakfast, and briefed at five for an airfield at St. Jean d' Angely sixty- five miles north of Bordeaux. Gathered all of our clothes, equipment, guns, etc., and were at our ships by seven. After putting our guns in, the weather became so foggy that there was a delay in takeoff. Finally at 11:30 the fog cleared and we took off for southern France. We assembled in formation at 18,000ft over the base and our mission had begun. This was almost the perfect raid. Visibility was very good and we actually saw our bombs hit a few twin-engine aircraft parked on the airfield. We think they were Ju88's. Three hangers were a total mass of red flames and the black smoke came up as high as 18,000ft. We saw only a few bursts of flak and they were very inaccurate.

Our fighter escort was very good and at times we could see P47's go down and strafe. A few rockets were fired at us but they were so far off that it amazed me.

No. fourteen was history.

MISSION FIFTEEN

Rheum, France 28 March 44

Tuesday, March 28, 1944

Again we were briefed early and had to sweat out the ramp until eleven.

Our objective now is to knock out all the airfields, and the German Air Force if possible, before the invasion.

Today it was another over the target and very accurate. We picked up a few small holes in our left wing.

We saw our bombs hit a hanger and it was a mass of flames.

Our escort was very good and we saw no enemy fighters.

Eight missions in the last eleven days, six out of seven, and two periods of three consecutive raids left us in a very nervous and tired mood.

MISSION SIXTEEN

Oldenburg, Germany 8 April 44

Sunday, April 8, 1944

Number sixteen was a 680-mile round trip to an airfield near Oldenburg, Germany. We had been briefed for this mission the day but it was scrubbed due to bad weather. Fog closed in and we had to wait two hours before we could take off.

After reaching the enemy coast, we noticed that the Germans had flooded the strip of land between the North Sea and the Zuider Zee obviously to strengthen Hitler's Atlantic Wall and slow down the mechanized invasion forces when and if they land in this sector. Water covered the land and was very high on some of the houses.

Just before reaching the target we began to sweat out heavy flak, which shook our Fort several times. Visibility was good and we saw our 42 (100lbs) incendiaries hit right in the target area. One of the ships in our Sqd. carried propaganda leaflets.

We saw no enemy fighters. B24 Liberators in another Wing were having fighter attacks and we heard them call for friendly fighters. After landing and checking up we found two flak holes, in the panel of no. 2 engine and the other in the wing.

MISSION SEVENTEEN Scrubbed

Gdynia, Poland 9 April 44

Easter Sunday, April 9, 1944

We were briefed on a 1750 round trip to Gdynia, Poland just a few minutes from where Russians were fighting and as long a mission as the 8th Air Force attempted.

I thought I was going to see Poland from the air but bad weather caused the mission to be scrubbed after we were 150 miles from the English coast and not far from Sweden.

MISSION SEVENTEEN (Scrubbed)

Brussels, Belgium 10 April 44

Monday, April 10, 1944

Our target for today was an airfield repair works east of Brussels in Belgium.

We saw no enemy fighters and our escort was very good. Flak was heavy and accurate and we acquired a few holes in our wing.

Visibility was very good and we could see the target area saturated with bomb hits. Chavatal (ball turret gunner) saw some of our bombs hit a flak battery and silence their guns,

Water from busted dykes proves the Germans expect invasion very soon.

MISSION EIGHTEEN

Schweinfurt, Germany 13 April 44, Ship "Sweet 17- The Spirit of St. Louis"

While we were on pass, our ship (Hi Ho Silver) went on a mission to Stettin, Germany and one of her engines got hit and now a new one is being installed. So we flew another new ship #276.

We were awakened at 3 A.M. – went to breakfast and then briefing. At briefing, S-2 (Intelligence Office) takes the stand- the lights are lowered and then a picture of the ball bearing works at Schweinfurt was shown.

The Germans were proving themselves masters in the art of repair. Then too, part of on huge building was left standing on the last attack and our main aiming point was this building. The lights on again and the screen up and we can see a red strip of ribbon showing our route and where different groups of fighters for our escort will be. After briefing there are two chaplains (Protestant and Catholic) in the front and the rear.

I saw a terrible sight today. We were about thirty minutes from the target and up to this time everything had gone well. Suddenly, I looked back at eight o'clock from my position and I saw German 20 mms guns bursting like firecrackers. From that moment on we knew that Jerry was determined to protect this vital target. The Germans were in wolf packs ranging from thirty to forty panes and they were attacking relentlessly. Most of the planes were FW 190's but there were a few ME109's. We had fighter escort at this point but it was not sufficient to cope with the situation. Our fighters were scattered and the enemy was engaging them while other enemy fighters were knocking the hell out of some of the formation. Saw where tremendous dogfights were taking place and at times some of the enemy fighters headed toward our ships. We would get ready by aiming our guns only to see them pass by out of range. Suspense was terrific.

Always in war the suspense is more frightening than the actual combat. Suspense tortures you by slow degree, making you weak and limp. Fighters and Forts were going down like flies from an alert swatter. Then there was news that the Group on our right was being attacked. By this time we were near the target and flak began to come up. It was very heavy and very accurate. Love (right waist gunner) motioned to me. I looked out and saw one; two, three, four, five forts go down from many enemy fighters. It was as if a referee were counting them out. Enemy fighters were going down too. Many parachutes were seen, propellers floating around in the air, escape doors flying past, men hurdling in the sky like toy tops. I followed one of them down to the ground and it was a pitiful sight. The plane had caught fire in the bomb bays. Momentarily the nose of the Fortress dropped, three chutes came out- I waited anxiously for more but didn't see them. Maybe they pulled delayed jumps. Then it began to spin like a merry-go-round and it was nothing but a big ball of fire. After falling a few thousand feet,

half the fuselage just parted. The sky all around was dark with black flak puffs, burning airplanes, and a few rockets that were fired at us from the ground. It looked like a field artillery battle that I once saw in a movie- only it was five miles up- a long way from the ground. The Germans were concentrating their firepower at bomb bays, which contained incendiaries, and they would burst easily into a huge ball of flame. If someone had told me that the Air Corps was the easiest branch of the service I would have told them they were a damn liar.

The bombardier (Haber) announced that the bomb bay doors were coming open. A few minutes later he said "bombs away". The radio operator (Smith) opened the door from the radio room to bomb bays and announce that the bombs were away-the bomb bay doors are closed. God save the King and let's go home.

I looked back at seven o'clock and I saw a Fort on fire and spinning. I saw five chutes come out. Everywhere dog fights were still taking place between our fighters and Jerry. It was a square three miles of burning hell. I saw fighters go down like pieces of wood after being hit. This went on for several minutes and finally our fighters were seen chasing the last pack away.

Practically every formation around us had been attacked yet our Group had not been hit. Still- all of this put us under the same strain as an actual attack. The Colonel said we had the tightest formation today but more than likely we ere just lucky.

We were so busy watching that most of us didn't observe bomb hits. However, the ball turret gunner (Chavatal) said our bombs hit in the target area.

Just as we got to the English Channel, a small battery (nicknamed Captain Von Sterner by Smith) opened up with 88mm flak guns. It was a small battery but it was throwing up deadly accurate fire. I had pulled off my flak suit because of its burdensome weight but at the moment I prayed and wished that I had it on. I could see three small holes in our left wing. For a few seconds our ship was bouncing around like a rubber ball. It was indeed a relief as we started across the channel.

Our tail gunner noticed one Fort that had been hit and was struggling at lower altitude. As it passed over the same battery a terrific explosion ensued. I heard a moan from the engineer (Wilson) and the tail gunner (Fennel). A direct hit in a vital spot had blown the ship apart. One parachute came from the wreckage. This Fortress had come through all of the other hell and had finally met its doom at the hands of a small battery when its eyes could see the freedom loving English Channel.

One piece of flak tore a small hole in the ship and it was right above Loves head (right waist).

We counted eight flak holes in the ship. One of the fellows in the bomb bay got a small piece of flak in the head but the doctors say he will live.

MISSION NINETEEN

Pas de Calais, France 20 April 44

We were briefed for reconstruction works in the Pas de Calais area. Station time 12:15, Engines 1:15, Taxi 1:30, Take off 1:50.

After taking off and grouping at 18,000ft we were on way. It takes an hour or more to group a large number of planes in formation at high altitude since the bomber usually had 5,000lbs of bombs and then a full gas load.

When we got to the English coast we could see large convoys, invasion, barges, and other equipment.

Our Fortress and Liberators, and fighters poured back and forth across the English Channel in a steady stream this afternoon, and there wasn't a moment up to dark that found the skies above the channel free from the roar of the shuttling bombers or their escorts. In a belt forty miles deep, which stretched along the coast westward from Pas de Calais and once bloody Dunkirk, American bombs formed a precise pattern on the already crater- packed fields and woods of France. Swarms of P51's, P38's, and P47's were searching, mostly without luck, for German fighters. Later most of our fighters went down to strafe.

When we were about ten minutes from the target flak began to come up. It was medium but very accurate. The Germans have moved most of their 20,37,88,105-mm flak guns to the coast for the expected invasion. We were hit several times I know because it shook the plane violently.

We counted fifteen flak holes in our wings, stabilizer, and fuselage. However, our very efficient ground crew had it ready to go the next day.

MISSION TWENTY

Merseburg, Germany 20 April 44

Friday, April 21, 1944

We were briefed for oil refineries and installations at Merseburg just west of Leipzig. The mission was scrubbed due to bad weather after we had been up for a couple of hours.

MISSION TWENTY-ONE

Hamm, Germany 22 April 44

We took off late in the afternoon for railroad installations at Hamm, Germany. Visibility was very good and from the air I could see the English coast and French Coast at the same time.

Flak wasn't very heavy although we saw one ship get a direct hit. Part of the wing went hurdling to the ground and we saw ten parachutes come out. It was Major Lee and crew in the low combat wing lead ship.

It was as pretty a bomb exhibition as I have seen. As I said before visibility was excellent and we saw our bombs hit the target. I could see fires from our incendiaries and the whole three-mile target was plastered. We saw no enemy fighters today and our escort was very good, especially the P38 Lightning's. P38's can dart in and out of formations not be afraid of being shot at since the twin boom is so easily recognized.

We landed at 2300(11 p.m.) hours and the airfield lights had to be turned on- the first time we have had to land after dark.

Hitler's Europe, hourly expecting the allied invasion, is reeling under the greatest air blows the world has ever known.

MISSION TWENTY-TWO

Metz, France 25 April 44

Tuesday, April 25, 1944

Today we bombed an airfield near Metz, France.

We bombed visually and results were very good. Approximately forty engine aircraft were destroyed on the ground; considerable damage was done to repair shops, and Jerry Cadet barracks were practically

wiped out. We used fragmentation bombs today with great results. Fragmentation bombs contain many oval discs in each bomb and when aircraft are parked on the ground.

There was very little flak at the target but as we approached the French coast flak was very heavy and accurate. I could already see one flak hole in the left wing. The Germans were shooting 88 and 105 mm at us.

We saw only one enemy fighter and he was hung over a cloud out of range, possibly observing our formation. He left when our escort met us.

MISSION TWENTY-THREE

Brunswick, Germany 26 April 44

Wednesday, April 26, 1944

My second mission to Brunswick was much different from the first and not quite as rough.

We flew over a solid layer of clouds and bombed scientifically by instruments, (PFF). Hence we could not observe bomb hits. Flak was medium at the target and we saw no enemy fighters. This is very unusual for such important targets in this area. We were originally briefed to bomb an airfield north of Brunswick, but due to the overcast we bombed the city of Brunswick.

The 8th Air Force lost no bombers today- a very unusual occurrence possibly due to unfavorable clouds.

We ran into trouble on the Dutch coast on our way back and for a while I thought we had it as the British say. The flak began to come up and it was extremely accurate. Several bursts shook our ship and it was so close we could hear the steel cracking from the exploding shells from 88's and 105's. We really sweated it out so to speak and acquired only a few flak holes.

Our fighter escort was very good.

MISSION TWENTY-FOUR

St. Alvard, France 28 April 44

Friday, April 28, 1944

Target- an airfield at St Alvard, 110 miles south of Paris, France. This target holds the night bombers, which are operating against England.

We bombed visually at 15,000 feet and results were good. Flak was heavy at the target and we saw two Fortresses go down. One spun round and round from a direct hit and four chutes (what we counted) came out. The last fellow to jump got out just in time for a couple of seconds after jumping- the Fort exploded. One of the parachutes passed right by my waist window and he was very close. I felt like trying to reach out and pull him in. He seemed horrified and didn't move.

After "Bombs Away", our formation to the right was attacked by ME109's. P51's were chasing the ME's and they came right through the formation. There were about seven enemy fighter's altogether and they only made one pass at our formation. Lt. Schottmiller, (Navigator) Wilson (Engineer) and Love (right waist gunner) fired at some of the ME's as they came through but has to be careful since the P51's were close behind.

Our fighter escort took care of the situation and we returned home safely. Had a few flak holes but that's nothing unusual.

MISSION TWENTY-FIVE

Berlin, Germany 29 April 44

Saturday, April 29, 1944

Target for today was the center of Berlin; one of our most heavily defended in the world and second only to the great Flak Happy Ruhr Valley. Our main aiming point was an important bridge. The whole 8th Air Force went to Berlin today and one of the greatest air battles of the war took place.

We encountered heavy clouds along the route but they broke at their target and we could see the great city plainly. Berlin at 15,000ft looked just like many other real cities that we had flown over. It presented a huge target and there is no doubt heavy destruction's was done.

Just before we got to the target another group, at seven o'clock, was attacked by enemy fighters. There were about twenty-five enemy planes and I could see their exploding 20mm even though we were some distance away. I saw two Fortresses go down spinning in flames and a few chutes come out. The enemy headed our way- we got ready for them but they turned off short of our formation.

We were an hour late at the target, which threw our fighter escort off schedule. However, we could see some of our escort circling around the target but they were just giving area support.

As we reached the suburbs of Berlin tremendous flak barrages began to burst over the city. The Germans had certainly prepared a defense for their city in the way of anti-aircraft fire. I have never seen so much in all my life. The sky over Berlin was black from exploding bursts. They were tracking us and it was very accurate. We felt like clay pigeons five miles up. I looked out the window and I saw where a small fragment had hit our left wing. The ship shook and swayed like a balloon being tossed around by air. It was all over the skies and so thick was the black smoke from exploding shells that it appeared as if we could walk over the city by leap frogging from one puff to another. I was praying, sweating and scared stiff. I imagine the others were too. From my window I could see airplanes, flak and flak. I saw a Fort in our Group get a direct hit and one-fourth of the wing was torn off. It went down I a spin and exploded. I reached over and turned the thermostat (regulates heat) down on my heated suit. It was beginning to get hot even though it was 32⁰ C below. Flak was so close that we could smell powder from the bursts and at times the ball turret gunner would holler, "gee that was close". This tremendous concentration lasted for over an hour and it seemed as if every citizen and his brother had a flak gun. The ball gunner (Chavato) could see the flashes coming from the batteries and he said batteries were linked up and down the streets practically every street. We had a strong head wind and it was taking us a long time to get away from Berlin and its suburbs. After we dropped our ten five hundred lbs. And we had gotten out of Berlin other targets began to shoot at us and this continued. It seemed as if we would never get away from the flak area. Since we were an hour late at the target due to terrific headwind, we had no fighter support from the Berlin suburbs until we were deep into the Netherlands.

While we were in Germany we saw six ME 109's attacking stragglers especially the Liberators (B24's). We were flying in tight formation when someone passed underneath our formation. Simultaneously the nose of the ship suddenly went straight up in a violent and trembling jerk. We thought we had it. My whole life flashed before me in a very few seconds. I thought maybe the enemy has hit our pilot. In the waist we seemed to be pinned to the floor and it was very hard to move. Without looking, I gave one big jerk and my flak suit came off. My knee had hit the edge of the box I had been sitting on in the sudden jerk and it hurt. As I reached for my parachute the plane came back to normal flight. The pilot announced over the interphone for us to stand by that he was having trouble with the ship. By this time

we were far out of formation and the pilot and co-pilots were fighting with the controls. We could see those same ME's hitting a straggling Liberator from six o'clock low. They knocked the Lib down. We were lagging behind but desperately trying to keep up with the other planes. I looked back and I could see two large holes approximately twelve feet behind me. The pilot put the plane on automatic pilot. Then Fennel (tail gunner) announced that the left trim tab on the horizontal elevator on the tail had been hit. Then we noticed one cable loose. This was the root of the evil and we flew back on automatic pilot control. We finally caught up with the formation although we were high above them. We passed back and forth over our Group as if we were some observers.

We could still see those ME 109's attacking straggling Liberators. I saw them knock another Lib down. Those Liberators (B24's) probably saved our hides. I have nothing against the liberators but enemy fighters had rather attacked the B14's and 17's for some reason.

The pilot would push the controls forward as far as they would go and the plane continued to climb-hence the automatic pilot. We continued to fly over the planes and lead most of the way. After a while we saw the ME's dive under the heavy cloud cover beneath. Then our escort appeared on the scene and never were we as glad to see them.

We still had a landing to make and the pilot told us to prepare for a rough landing. He couldn't use the flaps.

MISSION TWENTY-SIX

Cherbourg, France 6 May 44

Saturday, May 6, 1944

Our target, was an airfield in Cherbourg, France. We got over the target but couldn't see it due to cloud formations. We brought our bombs back because if you can't see the target in France, the bombs aren't dropped because we don't want to kill the Frenchmen.

Our escort was very good- flak was tight and we saw no enemy fighters.

Chavatol (ball turret operator) completed his operational tour today. We gave him a bath with his clothes on in cold water.

Returned from pass and learned that some friends of ours, Lt. Kovacavich and crew had gone down. Some were on their last mission.

MISSION TWENTY-SEVEN

St. Dizier, France 9 May 44

Tuesday, May 9, 1944

Target for today was a JU88 dispersal area at St. Dizier in France.

At the target, flak was very light- we saw no enemy fighters and our escort, which consisted mostly of P38's, was very good. Observed huge masses of fire and smoke from bomb hits.

MISSION TWENTY-EIGHT

Rosenburg, Germany 9 May 44

We started for a target in Rosenburg, Germany but after reaching the enemy coast it was scrubbed due to bad weather.

MISSION TWENTY-EIGHT

Konzkarthans, Germany 11 May 44

Thursday, May 11, 1944

Railway marshaling yards at Konz Karstan, east of Luxembourg and just inside the border of Germany presented a dream raid since we saw no enemy fighters and no flak. First trip I've ever been on that there wasn't any flak. We were briefed for eight flak batteries in the area but they had been moved or knocked out by our fighters.

Our P38's, P47's, and P51's covered us well. Our pilot (Lt. Wilkinson) completed his thirty missions today and now we have to sweat all the more with some other pilot.

Two more to go for me and I find myself very nervous and sweating more so to speak than before.

MISSION TWENTY-NINE

Lutzkendorf, Germany 12 May 44

May 12, 1944

A synthetic oil plant at Lutzkendorf near Halle, Germany presented a change in targets from marshaling yards to oil. Our bombardier (Sgt. Haber) and I flew with a Lt. Collins and part of his crew in the Fortress "Just Plain Lonesome". 239975

Visibility was very good and we could see black smoke rising as high as 17,000ft as we approached the target. Just before we got to the target I saw what I thought was a ME 109 coming in at seven o'clock a little high at the formation behind us. I got ready to shoot but couldn't because of the Fortresses. I was suspicious because some of the Forts were not shooting at it. I called on interphone as a 109 but the tail gunner on this crew said it was a P47. Later it proved to be a ME 109 and I was right.

We saw 39- 100lbbers hit right in the middle of the other black smoke and we were satisfied even though we could just imagine the results.

Flak at the Target was light but later as we reached the coast it got thicker and a couple of bursts shook us quite a bit.

We had two flak holes in the right wing and one in the tail fin.

Love (right waist gunner) finished his tour today and he got the usual soaking.

We had a tremendous head wind going in to the target and we were making only 120 miles an hour. This made the trip a long one. The 8th Air Force lost 42 bombers and 10 fighters today, which proves that some formations encountered fierce resistance from enemy fighters while some formations saw none.

MISSION THIRTY

Villacoublay, France 20 May 44

May 20, 1944

Our co-pilot (Lt. Maghee) checked out as first pilot and I flew with him on this my last mission.

We went to Paris to an airfield and unloaded our destruction. The Eiffel Tower could be seen in the distance and we could see Paris plainly.

There wasn't much flak. On our way back we sang "The Last Time I Saw Paris".

Haber (bombardier), Fennel (tail gunner) and I finished up today- and oh happy day.

When we got to the White Cliffs of Dover on the way back I told Haber on interphone to "Gaze thy weary eyes on those White Cliffs of Dover and hope that thoust never have to pass them again".

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