

## Edward Gates Diary

### Mission #1 – Kiel (August 30, 1944)

This is it gang. I was listed on the alert list for today. I finally expected to get pulled out of a nice comfy sack about 5am, particularly since I didn't get in till about 1am last night via "taxi" service, but that's another story which shouldn't come under past events. The really inspiring thing is WE combat men-with experience & missions & stuff. Anyhow due to a passing front we couldn't take off early this morn, so we stayed in bed till 0800. Ah! How nice! Surprisingly enough I got up & ate breakfast. Maybe that's what did it. About 1020 Capt. Right came in & told us there would be briefing at 1015. Well, that's close anyway. o the other people got ready & I fuddled up things here & there & finally got large numbers of things draped around me & rambled off to the great gray room of information, that palace of perdigent poop, more commonly known mundanely as the – I hesitate to say it so prosaically-briefing room.

There on the big, old, fat map are strings leading via a long, tedious & edacious route to Kiel AND a nice large bright red spot which indicates to me & a few others present-flak! Various people got up & rambled along about a lot of stuff. I eagerly took notes here & there & understood nothing-except that P-51s would be our little friends. This makes me very happy. Then I met my first pilot for a day-Dietrich Rabedeaux flew as waist gunner with me. All the rest of the crew flew with Kirk as co-pilot for Dietrich's old co-pilot. Frankie was still grounded. We meandered around picking up various flak maps, flimsys, etc. Today on my first mission I am hot stuff. I am the deputy lead of the high squadron flying lead ship of the high element. Anyhoo, I am in the co-pilot's seat of the ship that is doing all this. I got that old shaky feeling before briefing started. Everything was happening so fast that I practically couldn't keep up with myself. Finally we went out to the ship, messed around awhile & then got the orders to take off. We climbed up to 12000 & started forming. Took out across the coast of England in formation about 1400. Started climbing about then. Went up to 26000. I did manage to keep plenty warm. In fact I was too warm to start with, it wasn't long till I got me little tootsies cooled off to a chilled mass. Just like one of those practice missions over the the states. Nothing to it!

I kept wondering whether I'd be scared or not. Nothing happened. Lots of innocent little puffs of black smoke, P-51s zooming all around out there to the side & above us. But nothing happened. No planes blew up, no fighters came roaring down on us, the pilot said "Let's drop these bombs & get the hell out of here!", we did and nothing more happened. It was all that easy. I had my flak helmet on & I was wearing the front part of my flak suit. It was all just a big panorama with all those little black clouds bursting down below us-so carefully silhouetted against the white blanket of clouds below us. We came back. I flew about half the time. My knees got tired. I got tired of sitting. A little sleepy, but I didn't go to sleep which proves something. I don't know what. Crossed the English coast about 1800 at about 3000'. Started letting down from 26000 in a nice gradual descent after leaving the German coast. Finally came over some broken spots in the clouds & saw below the cold, blue North Sea. No whitecaps. Looked peaceful & blue. I remember watching the bombs (we were carrying 10 – 500# incendiaries in the high squadron-the other squadrons had 10 – 500# bombs). They fell so slowly. Little black specks dropping out of sight down & down. So easily, so slowly. Down onto the white rolling blanket of clouds. Soon I'll know more I guess. I'll know enough to be afraid. Those little puffs won't seem so innocent-so far away-so harmless-so innocuous (Ahem! New word!)

The all say it takes about 10 missions to really learn. Anyway we're back home again. I've fought the war. Big laugh! Went to bed after supper. Wrote in this little old book. Memoirs & stuff. My, my! Over

in the states they interrogate us for an hour or so about cornfields & passing birds & the temp. of the air. Here we sat down for about 5 min. The interrogator asked a few questions-we ate cake, drank coffee. It was over before we could finish eating. Time of T.O., time of landing, how was the flak, what time did you see it-here the navigator pattered over his bag for awhile, gave the approx. time. That was about all. The mission was complete. Saw one of the planes that had been hit by flak. Blew out the flap & the rear gas tank on the right wing. (?) & chunk knocked out. They were flying 4<sup>th</sup> element of our high group. Dear Kirk. Hmmm, that's all.

### **Mission #2 – Ludwigshaven (September 9, 1944)**

Up bright and early on the morn of the 9<sup>th</sup> for a hot mission to Ludwigshaven to hit the chemical plant again (third time). This was our first mission as a crew. Took off about 7:15 & up into the blue. It was a lovely day. We had a plenty rough ride. I think they threw everything in the book at us. Had the old plane bouncing the flak was so close. When I began seeing that orange flash then that's close enough for me. I'm satisfied to go back & make up stories for my children after that. We bombed visually & learned later that the boys really plastered the target. We came out dodging various flak bursts. Finally got quite far from the target & since my ear was aching quite badly I tossed off my flak helmet. About that time the boys sing out "flak at 11 o'clock level"! Oh woe was me! I sat there with no helmet watching that stuff popping away. Sweat, sweat! Lesson #1. Pardon me while I "brown out". We got out O.K. Did have a little more trouble tho.

There was a plane going down ahead of us and Frankie was watching it go down into the clouds. Suddenly he yells "Pull up! Pull up!" Here I am flying formation and some character yelling "Pull up!" over the interphone. And I don't know what the hell he's talking about. My God, what a feeling! The surely checked me out on everything but fighters on this mission. I finally found out that he was telling the boy in the plane going down to pull up. Oh boy! That, I don't think will happen again.

Joe hurt his ears on the let down – punctured ear drum – so he was grounded for awhile. Didn't fly with us on the 11<sup>th</sup>. We had a toggler. Anyway, we got back to the base safe & fairly sound. Landed at 1408.

### **Mission #3 – Merseburg (September 11, 1944.**

Up about 3 and we got off & on time. Gee! Went to Merseburg & hit the synthetic oil plant. Bombed "part visually" & did a good erasing job. Flak was pretty heavy, but none of it came as close to us as that stuff did last Sat. Thank God! Got three or four holes. Got lesson #2 in how to sweat. Not quite as derisive as lesson #1, but quite satisfactory. I took my flak suit off before we came to the French coast and the poof, poof after we had crossed the coast. Some little pistol packing character down on the coast was getting in a little practice & he didn't need it. He was right well checked out. He was laying it right in our sqdn., but fortunately nobody got hurt.

Home at 1542 safe & sound – and happy. From now on I think I'll leave my flak suit & helmet on until I get in the briefing room for interrogation. I'm losing too much weight by watching little black puffs right beside us. Brother, what a sweet sound that is when I hear "flak at 5 o'clock, flak at 7 o'clock." Got a couple of letters from mom today. Also got lots trouble. I went back to the barracks after supper & hit ye olde sack. I was pretty well knocked out. The about 6 what should happen but in comes Kirk & says we have to fly tonight. Oh my God! We fly 8 hours & I'm so dead I can't move. Then we fly nite flying. The first nite in many, many days that I don't go to town & we get "elected" to fly. I had a hunch Kirk should have refused to fly. In fact I asked him in all seriousness to refuse, but no we have to make group lead or something. I don't flame him I guess. If I was a first pilot, I'd be looking enviously

at those two silver bars too. They do look pretty. Anyhow, I climbed out of bed dressed & went down to the line. We took off about 8:30, I guess. I don't really remember. Flew around a prescribed course. I wanted to call up "darky", just for practice. Sure enough I got the chance because we got lost. The only catch was that we couldn't get an answer from darky. Oh, woe is us! So we called the field & asked them to shoot off flares. Finally located them & came on in. We were coming in all right when as we were nearing the ground things started happening. I was calling the airspeed & alt because Griswold was having a little trouble seeing them. I remember seeing the alt fall to 0(zero) & the airspeed drop off to 85mph. Then I started wondering just a little. I looked up & it seemed to me we were pretty high. Then I remember we fell off in a slip to the right. The next thing I remember is a terrific crash, a bright flash in the cockpit & the #3 engine was blazing. I remember Kirk jammed the throttles forward & I thought at the time that that was pretty smart because it got us off the runway & also the friction against the engine seemed to "burn out" some of the fire. Then we stopped & Kirk & I slapped switches off here & there. I found out the next morn that we had cut off the master & eng. Switches. Too bad we didn't cut the fuel shut-off too. Kirk never remembered slamming the throttles forward after we hit. Still don't know what happened. I thought that probably we hit in a slip & collapsed the right wheel. The next morn we discovered Kirk hit about 10 feet short of the runway & the wheel was laying on the runway. We had only one about 50 ft. down the runway & the plane had done a complete 180 degree turn off the runway to the right. The tire tracks indicated that we had been almost off the right side of the runway when we first hit. This same ship landed this morn with a full bomb& gas load after aborting because of an oxygen leak. So it seems to me that probably what happened was that the shock with which we hit was just enough to snap the gear that was probably weakened this morn.

Kirk said he thought we hit tail first once & then bounced, but there was no tail wheel track in the dirt off the end of the runway with the wheel marks. Deguardo said it just seemed like a pretty rough landing to him. He thought we were turning off the runway after the landing roll. Griswold slipped down into the catwalk when we hit & he said he didn't realize anything was wrong except we had hit a little hard. He heard Kirk advance the throttles & thought we were taking off again. Noticed the glow from the flame & then heard Kirk yell to get out & so out he went. Kivinmaks was leaning over the shoulder of a fellow that just went up for the ride. Whee! What a ride! They were looking out the nose. The fellow didn't have anything to say. Kivi remembered our falling off to the right. Then it seemed to him Kirk straightened it up & we came in normally. He was thrown off balance and was "rolling around in the nose". He didn't realize anything was wrong tho' till he saw the flame lighting up the nose. And that takes care of all the diversified stories of the crew members. What funny impressions people with get in an accident. From the tire marks short of the runway & the fact we were way over to the right on the runway I think my version was pretty near right. It is a certainty that the alt was off. The fellow in the tower said they had had it reported earlier in the eve that the altimeters were registering off with the settings they were getting. Oh yes! I remember Kirk yelled for me to get out & he had both feet in the "aisle". So I suggested he get out first & he was on his way. More fun. I grabbed both flashlights & my gloves which I had in my lap. Pretty lucky because when we got out to the ship the next morn it had been pretty well cleaned. My B-10 jacket & Kivi's lad been taken, as had my officer's cap. Deguardo & Kivi's gloves, Deguardo's escape kit, my canteen and a couple of flashlights. The fire crew wouldn't let us get in after the fire was out because they said the plane would be full of gas fumes from the extinguisher. I got a cut on my nose & a couple of bumps on my forehead. Probably hit the throttles. (Gulp! I didn't have my belt fastened.) The passenger got a cut on the face & that was our total injuries. What a rough day! Guess that's about my roughest on in the E.T.O. – so far. I hope it will always continue to be so. We put away what equipment we had & went back to the sack where we should have been all eve. This oughta teach somebody (It does me! I don't know what. But it does.

Namely I guess listen to my intuitions & don't fly).

#### **Mission #4 – Mainz (September 21, 1944)**

Up at 6 A.M. courtesy of Capt. Riser. Briefed & actually got off. Flew “Mary Lou” #504, Usher’s “P” for Peter. Things got interesting from the start. Just after we finished running up the engines – I had just released the brakes – the plate on top of the #4 engine between the cowl flaps suddenly came off & went flying away. Tower told us to go ahead & take-off. So out we go. Went roaring down the runway & whoopee, here we go! First number two runs away & then all of them started going, I started batting throttles right & left. Oh what a life! Kirk held it on the ground till he had 130 mph & then up, up, up, and away. We were on instruments in the fog almost as soon as we got off the ground. I knew something was awful screwy. I told Kirk to change inverters. No results, then I suddenly noticed #2 oil pressure falling off. Something was definitely phoney. Kirk tried to pull down the RPM. It was locked! The oil pressure dropped to 20#. Kirk hit the feathering button. Nothing happened. He cut the mix. Control after he had tried to cut #1 instead. Oh, me! Then finally after so long Gris noticed that the generators weren't on. Funny how much better everything works when you've got electric power. Now we got turbos & oil pressure & everything! So I ask if I should pull the #2 mix. Control back on. He says “yes”. Promptly #2 runs away so I cut it off & he bawls me out for pulling it on. Ho he! Woe is a poor co-pilot's life! Anyway we finally got everything back to reasonably near normal. And were only 90 degrees off course on a turn & naturally still on instruments. Thank God a B-17 is stable. We straightened it up & headed out again. Didn't even get hit by anybody. Then the crew called up & said the interphone had gone out; Kivi said that the radio compass had also gone off. Everybody sweat ping pong balls. Oh me ! Kirk told them we had found the trouble & that everything was O.K. Reminds me about the story the guy was telling us at Bovingdon. This was the same story teller as the one I quoted in yesterday's daily dozen. He was also the guy who told us at Bremen the flak comes “directly from the factory to you”. There you “climb up on your instruments thru the stuff” so that you can “taxi across the top.” Anyway he was telling us one time that he & his co-pilot were over the target when they got a hit in #3 engine. So the co-pilot yells “Shall I feather #3?” Comes back the reply, “Yeh! Feather #3!” So he tries to feather #3, but it doesn't work. Meantime they get a hit in #2. The co-pilot yells, “I can't feather #3!” So the pilot says “O.K. then feather #2!” Meanwhile the crew has been listening to all this, sweating and out flak, & not knowing what's happening. Somebody hells, “What the hell are you guys doing? Playing games?” I can well see how that conversation over the interphone could well disturb a slightly flak-nervous crew. Oh, me! Anyway our instructor used that incident to encourage us to get hand signals between the pilot & co-pilot. I think it's a good idea but I guess Kirk doesn't. So we don't! Well so we finally got up out of the stuff & then tried to find our place in the formation. He came in about 500 feet below the formation & wouldn't believe me when I told him where we were supposed to be, so he makes a 360 degree circle & comes in again. We finally go into our spot - #3 in the low flight of the lead sqdrn. of “A” group in the division. Kirk decided to fly from the left seat today & let me stay on the inside which is plenty O.K. with me since I've got lots of confidence in my ability. As it turned out I'm even happier because I'm glad Kirk was on the inside for the let down & landing we had to make when we came back. Anyway we finally got in formation & got along all hunkey-dory till we got over the target.

Then more trouble. The flak wasn't very accurate (Oh yeh!) or thick I should say, but it was plenty accurate on us anyway. We were getting bumped right along & it wasn't on any bumpity good to love. First Joe couldn't get the bombs away. Then zoom ! – the element leader racks it up in a steep bank. Kirk was flying cross-cockpit & the bank almost stalled us out. I took over since I could see better naturally & “Oh me! What a ride!” I don't know whether this guy-our element lead-got scared by the

flak or what, but he was sure flubbing all over the place. Joe got the bombs away finally while we were in about a 30 degree bank about half way thru the turn off the target. Then we got tracked for awhile. The boys were right on us but low just enough. Jolly felt a piece hit the door on the ball turret that left a fair scratch as we saw when we got down. A piece went clear thru the nose between Joe & Kivi. Went thru from side to side. Kivi said he felt some fragments hit his mask. We also got holes thru Tokyo tanks in both wings. Br-r-r! We had all the gas drained out of them & fortunately the gas vapor didn't cause any trouble. We had quite a time following our element lead for about an hour. I guess he was really nervous. But then who wasn't? Then we get back and find the ceiling about 300 to 600 feet. We had to make an instrument let down from about 6000 feet. Found the field by luck mostly I think. Found ourselves right over the hangers when we first saw the field. Dodged various C-47s & B-17s. Missed the runway the first time & had to go around. finally got down O.K. After we got safely back in our little hole & had let most of the sweat evaporate I did a little investigating. There were 7 or 8 holes in the right wing & engines, 4 in the nose counting where the big one went in & came out, 4 in the left wing & four in the tail. Interesting time was had by all. Back to interrogation & then to supper & so to the barracks. I spent the eve writing up this little old journal of history. Incidentally we hit the railway marshalling yards at Mainz. T.O. at 1013 & landing at 1631. A nice clean old mission all in all. I'm satisfied now. I've seen enough of this to make up some pretty good stories for my sweet little kids if I ever have any. Oh yes I am supposed to be an uncle in March according to the admirals last letter. Geez

#### **Mission #5 – Frankfurt (September 25, 1944)**

Awakened about 3 a.m. for mission. Went back to sleep since briefing wasn't till 4:35. The "awakers" got a little too darned eager. Up about 3:45, ate breakfast (this is the only time I ever get breakfast), & down to briefing. Briefed for visual bombing of railroad marshalling yards at Frankfurt or PFF (path finder force – radar) with MPI (map point of impact) in the town of Frankfurt. Another busy day although not rough. First we had to wait till after T.O. time to get oxygen. Got off at 0726 (T.O. time scheduled for 0705). We were taking off with the ships of the low group instead of the high as we should have been. Caught up O.K. then began having "leader trouble" again. The guy was flubbing all over. We were flying #2 spot in the 4<sup>th</sup> element of the high squadron. We were supposed to be the fifth group in today, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 3 groups that the 1<sup>st</sup> division put up which makes us Swordfish Baker if that proves anything. Anyway we were about five minutes from the target – had already turned from the IP – when finally our element leader really messed us up. We were flying at a 130mph & he was flubbing around & darn near stalling us out alternately with running away from us. Then we noticed that the #3 man in the low element of the low squadron was missing so we left our flub-dub boy & went zipping down to the low squadron & tacked on there. The element leader wasn't flying very close but at least he made it reasonably easy for his wingmen and that kept me happy since I did all the flying around the target.

Got one hit directly in the nose. Shattered the plexi-glass, but didn't come thru. Also got one little one back in the stabilizer. Hardly had any flak at all as is obvious. I don't believe I saw over ten bursts at the most in our formation. However we saw some guy going down with two engines out & another one was out of formation with one feathered. So that proves I didn't have my helmet down over my eyes. Besides it's kind of hard to fly formation by mental telepathy & intuition although that's about what we've had to do it by on these last two raids such element leaders as the 323<sup>rd</sup> has got. It ain't right! We did mild evasive action after bombs away but none of that 90 degree bank stuff like last trip out. Br-r-r! That still scares me. Or would if I had sense enough to be scared. I have sure learned how to be scared of flak alright. I have even lost my desire to see fighters. I wouldn't mind seeing on or two little bitty FW's or 109's getting the shit kicked out of em' by about 50 P-51s, but that's about all the "white flak"

I'd care to see. We got back home all safe & sound & nicest yet, by virtue of our "picked" position, we were the first ship to peel off. Well planned – executed "spot-swapping!" Tough to see all those boys from the high squadron getting in about half an hour later. We landed at 1325. Interrogated & then I got my rations & also had some copies make the photo taken of E.C. Gates, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. A.C. when I was at Rapid City, So. Dak. This is mainly for the exquisite benefit of one Pamela Y. Rampling. Also one shall make Jeanne Turner very happy. Spent the eve at home writing up diary for today & yesterday. Wrote letter to Pam. Good nite all!

### **Mission #6 – Osnabruck (September 26, 1944)**

Found another one of those better ways to go to combat. Up at 8 for some uncanny reason & ate breakfast. I must be psycho because sure enough we jumped into the big blue. Briefed at 9:15. We took off at 1130 in 909 ("Nine O' Nine") the same ship we had yesterday. Flew #2 slot in the high element of the low squadron. We were briefed as the 9<sup>th</sup> group going into the target which was the marshalling yards at Osnabruck. Had a 110 knot wind from about 290 degrees over the target at 26000. That gave us a ground speed of something like 325 mph. Wow! At last I'm a hot pilot. Back to the hum drum existence after a big old vacation. We discovered a 9 tonight that we were on pass. We got what is commonly known as censored! Seems that the guy scheduled for today went to the flak home so they moved his pass up to the time when he'd get out & by some uncanny means they chose us probably because ours was such a beautiful time – right after payday. Naturally we were all thoroughly embittered. Frankie was really mad. Just to help our general attitude, we've got a squadron stand-down tomorrow. We stayed at her house again. (I don't know who I'm kidding with all this present tense since I wrote this Friday the 29<sup>th</sup> after wearily returning from pass Thurs. nite) Went back to the sack, climbed in & rested up for the next two days. Incidentally about that mission this morn. We went right straight in over the North Sea, coast of Holland, & into Germany-zoom! Today for some reason I was really scared. Maybe everything was too nice. Kirk was flying, everything was working fine, & there was that little black puffy stuff popping away. There wasn't much of it but it was right up in there. Honest to god I almost wished an engine would go out or something would happen so that I wouldn't just have to sit there. I think today was the first time I've really been scared & yet we didn't get a single hole. Actually it was the easiest since Kiel for me. Now I can easily see how bombardiers get flak happy. We got back all perfectly safe & sound. Landed at 5:23.

### **Mission #7-Munster (September 30, 1944)**

Up about 6 & off to fly the big silver birds. Briefed for the marshalling yards at Munster. Took off at 1033 after having our times set back an hour. We flew LL-J (no name on it) in the high squadron, right wing of the 4<sup>th</sup> element. Had a pretty decent time today. Hittema did a good job. Really had us in there tight on the bomb run. Unfortunately the high element wasn't as tight & they came too, too close to dropping their bombs right thru our nose. Very uncomfortable to look up & see 6-1000# dropping towards one. We didn't even see a puff of flak on the entire trip largely because the "Mickey" operator got the wrong target on his PFF equipment & we missed Munster by 16 miles. Blew turnip & potatoe fields all over western Germany. Stew galore! I got gas pains at alt & was having some trouble with them. Then when we started down I had trouble with my ears. Oh, me! If it isn't flak it's drowsy physique. Guess I need more P.T. Got back safe & reasonably sound. Landed at 1637. Milk run of all milk runs. Not a scratch naturally. Floyd said he saw a few puffs of white flak after we left our "target". Rough day. I'd just love to have ten or fifteen more like that. I wouldn't even mind too much hitting one or two targets just now & then.

### **Mission #8-Kassel (October 2, 1944)**

Awakened about 3 after which I promptly went back to sleep. Kirk woke me at 3:45. (Briefing at 4:30) Briefed for ordinance depot at Kassel (visual target) or motor & tank assembly plant (PFF). We took off at 0714 in "5" for Sugar ("Sweet Seventeen"-also "The Spirit of St. Louis") Enough 5's. Maybe that's why we did so much "S-ing" today. Somehow when I first flew today I had a hunch I was in for a bad day of flying. And believe me, I wasn't wrong. Maybe it was flying from the left side instead of the right altho' it didn't bother me as much the other time as it did today. I couldn't hold position for applebutter (where did that word come from?) Then too our element leader was flubbing around pretty badly today. We were flying #3 in the high element of the low squadron. That's a pretty hard element to lead. I guess, particular from the right seat as I well know from experience as of my first flight. I'm a hot rock-element lead on my first flight-pretty sharp! Gee! Can't understand my demotion. Anyhow we hit "at the target" PFF thru about 7/10 this coverage. We were the 8<sup>th</sup> group in & we got practically no flak over the target altho' after we left the little bastards started bashing us thru the clouds. They were really laying it right in the lead squadron for awhile. Knocked out a couple of ships with feathered engines. But all got back O.K. (pronounced "Oh Ki"). Then for awhile they were laying the stuff right in our formation. Really looked close to me as I edged my flak suit a little more that way. We got thru with one little hole in the top of our left wing. Milk run! Yuckity, yuck! Nothing more of interest. Pretty rough over England under the clouds. Big old fat stand-down tomorrow. Hooray! We landed at 1423. Pretty long flight. We went in over Belgium & went down almost to Frankfurt before turning north & coming up to Kassel. Then went by the town & came in on our bomb run from the NW taking full advantage of the wind. With a route like that we should have fooled somebody-especially many, many fighters. I guess maybe we did. Maybe they just decided to recuperate awhile & whop us again when we're not looking. Anyhow we got back.

### **Mission #9-Bru(x?) (October 7, 1944)**

Up at 3:15 after being awakened at 2:45. I was tired before I started, but nothing compared to what I am now. Believe me, I am really tired tonite. We briefed at 4:15 for the synthetic oil plant at Bru(x), Czechoslovakia, a long, long haul. Many, many hours in the blue. Here I decided to just relax for a minute before the ball game came on the air. Put on my pajamas to write my diary while soaking & was asleep almost as soon as I got in bed, about 6:30. Woke up about 9 & the Cards were leading my dear old Brownies by 5 to 0 in the seventh. Oh, no! How can they do that! After I woke up, the Browns scored on in the eighth, but that's the way it ended. Pitching for the Cards was Brecheen who gave up nine hits, but really kept them scattered-one in every inning except the seventh & there he gave up a walk. Brownies even managed to get two in the \_\_\_\_\_. But the Cards kicked in with a couple of double plays to cool my boys off. Looks like all I have to do is listen to the game & it's a cinch for the Browns. I turn off the radio in the plane Thursday nite & before I can get to the radio in the parachute hut the Cards score a run & win. What a low, low blow. I carefully listen to both games on Wed. & Fri. & the Brownies win. Incidentally Jakucki started for the Brownies & was replaced by Hollingsworth (for the 4<sup>th</sup>) & Shirley (for the 8<sup>th</sup>). I managed to get up after the game was over, brush my teeth & come back to the sack. I think the reason I was so tired is because I took my mask off at about 14000. Never thought of it at the time. Someday I'll learn, I keep telling myself. My knee (right) was bothering me so I had a little trouble getting back to sleep. Listened to a big, old mystery thriller & then drowsed off for a not too long nite. Anyhoo! As I was going to say way back there before I went to sleep last nite, we really had a rough, rough day. Witness as exhibit "A" my very tired, weary body. Took off at 0729 in 563 "U for Uncle", Winged Victory. (Boy, what a name for an airplane! The guys must have been in a high-minded mood.) We assembled at 10,000 in number three position in the lead flight of the high

sqdn. Today we had a big old rough M.E. (maximum effort). Our group was third into the target. The first division also hit another target near ours. Bombers flubbing around all over the lair of the Hun. And what I mean we really “flubbed”. Went in on the run to bomb the target visually & found that clouds had just moved in over it. They didn’t want to bomb PFF because there are two P.W. camps right beside the plant, so we swung around & came back after the visual secondary. Everybody at once was chattering over VHF & nobody knew what they were doing, why, or where. Our lead ship called the deputy for a position fix. Heard some guy yelling for fighters. Said he was about 5000 ft. below his formation, being hit by ten “bandits”. Some other guy was explaining that his co-pilot (Oh, no!) had been hit & that they had pulled him off the wheel & the engineer had taken his place so they were O.K. again. People cussing group leaders, div. Leaders, & everybody else. Wow! What a day! We passed over the secondary & part of the group dropped. For some reason the high sqdn. Didn’t drop & then we really started having fun. We were dodging flak on all sides (including above, below and –gulp!-right in the middle). “Swordfish Charlie High to Swordfish Charlie lead!” on right after another & no answer. Oh me! Finally we dropped on some little bitty old village (Wurzen) with a railroad track & a couple of sidings in it. Probably turnip center for the Toonerville Trolley. Then like a bunch of scared little rabbits we went clippity-clopping off dodging flak guns (the farmer’s shotgun, if I may continue the simile). When we dropped, the leader called up at last & asked if we had bombed. High leader said, “Yes”, & the group lead lets us in on the fact that he had been looking for a target of opportunity for us all this time. Course he kept it a secret & wouldn’t even tell our sqdn. leader, so everybody cussed everybody else. Landed at 1602. The sore and weary lad.

#### **Mission #10-Sweinfurt (October 9, 1944)**

Into the blue again. Up at 6:15 or thereabouts & down to briefing at 7:15. Briefed for Sweinfurt marshalling yards (PFF) or the ball bearing works at Sweinfurt if it was visual. Yuck, yuck! Big laugh. Had 10/10 almost all the way. The clouds were really beautiful-especially pretty on the way home as we were coming in towards the sun for awhile. We had an almost level lower coverage at about 8000’ & then we had high clouds at about 26,000 that formed what looked like a funnel due to the perspective. The lower clouds were really smooth & fluffy & just like a big blanket. We had quite a few rocks in our blanket over the target. Little black ones. We were awfully lucky over the target. Our group leader steered us around most of the flak. We got a few little holes. The ship Perkins was flying tail gunner in (Harris’ crew) had a flak shell go thru the waist-came right straight up thru & burst above them. Cut all the waist gunners oxygen & interphone connections. Woof! Easy run as far as we were concerned. Flying #3 in the low flight of the high sqdn. Mullins gave us a pretty easy time till we started the let down & then he started flubbing around just like he did last time. Oh, me! Lots of worries! We had to make another instrument let down when we got back. Landed at...

#### **Mission #11- Cologne (October 14, 1944)**

Up about 6. Briefed at 6:40 for Cologne. Took off at 0847 in “Bombard-Deer” (Co-pilot Henson’s ship) “M”-Mike, #7234. We flew #3 position in the low flight of the low sqdn. Had a pretty fair day. Had some leader trouble coming off the target. My cold has cleared up enough that it didn’t bother me any more than the usual deafness. Also had a runaway prop about 15 min. after we left the target. Got a couple of little flak holes under the nose even tho’ we saw some really close in. I’ll be damned if I can see how we missed it all. Our element lead (Cunningham was flying as their “toggleer”) had three in Tokio tanks, blisted spar & various other lesser damage. And we inherit two little holes. Actually I’m beginning to believe that I’m just lucky. Pardon me while I vigorously rap on wood. Knock, knock! Who’s there? Boo!, Boo who? Cry baby! Hmmm. Sweet memories of childhood. Anyway we came back & promptly ran into a collection of many, many B-24s coming in. Very exciting! We were running



headlong thru three or four groups. The last one really kept things exciting. B-24s close at 12 o'clock level & looking in our cockpit. Everybody got thru O.K. tho' it really broke up our group & theirs. Wow this is getting rough when we have to fight flak, runaway props, ceiling & visibility 0 & then dodge B-24s. Fortunately today we had good visibility over England. Very few clouds. How strange. Landed at 1500 & off to dinner-supper.

### **Mission #12-Cologne (October 17, 1944)**

Up about 3 – Briefed for one of the four marshalling yards at Cologne. Incidentally part of the 8<sup>th</sup> AAF hit Cologne again yesterday. Today the whole 8<sup>th</sup> AAF hit Cologne. Each of our squadrons made a separate run on different yards. Ours was the one right in the center of the city since we were the lead sqdn. today. Gulp! Incidentally recently P-51's have been going in ahead of us over the target & dropping chaff bombs. I guess this helps-I keep telling myself. Then I look at last Sun. results & gulp deeply. We bombed from 27,000 ft. with 34 100# G.P.'s & 2-500# incendiaries. Oh yes! In case I forget, which I no doubt will, G.P. is General Purpose-demolitions. Today we had just lots of fun. Climbed thru the overcast which was solid & when we got on top-what do you know? No other airplanes! Then we got a short in our interphone system & had to switch to command channel #3. Then discovered our VHF transmitter was out or off frequency or something. "Deke" (Dequardo to me) finally found the short in his mike button & fixed it so we went back on interphone. Then we couldn't find our formation. First got into a third division group, then got in with the Nuthempstead (398<sup>th</sup>, "W" group). Finally found our own boys & got up into formation. #2 in the fourth element of the lead sqdn. Finally got contact on channel #2 command with another ship in our formation who just happened to switch over. It just happened that today we were Channel #2 guard so nobody else was scheduled to listen to it. O.K. so fortunately somebody else got nose & listened in. Anyway we finally got buddy-buddy with everybody & got somebody else to listen on Channel #2. We could receive all right over VHF, but just couldn't transmit, T.S.! Chaplain's office three doors to the right. All cards punched there. Fortunately that's all we got punched today. We were flying old lucky "Nine O' Nine"- "R", Roger. Got only two little holes. Uneventful approach to target, lots of flak, but not too bad. Fairly accurate, on the bomb run, I watched a 5 gun battery track right above us & directly in front of the nose. They sent up about four "sets" of shots & I could almost reach out thru my top vision glass & touch it. Fortunately the flak was decent enough not to try to touch me. I was really sweating out that fifth group of bursts. Never came; I guess; or else it fell behind us. Floyd saw a ship in the group behind us blow up. Rough, mates! On the way out we were fired at from Coblenz, but all of it burst off to our left tho' it was right on our level. Also saw a smoke trail off to the left climbing up, up, up & away. I figured it was a rocket shell from the flak guns, but some of the fellows were "boosting" for fighters rocket ships. Could be! Anyway we got back safe & healthy coming in about 2000' under the clouds. Landed at 1241. We took off at 0624 this morn & got in a little night flying. Really dark when we took off. Well, we need another 45 minutes of nite flying anyway. Too bad we can't get it this way. Who knows? Maybe we can – it says here. As I said we got back by noon (late noon). It was raining by the time we got out of interrogation. Lovely weather. I hit the sack for awhile after I got back to the barracks.

### **Mission #13-Ludwigshaven (October 19, 1944)**

Up at 4:30 for a briefing originally scheduled for 5:30, but moved back to 5:50. What a low blow! I got there about 20 min. early consequently. Tsk, tsk! Briefed for the oil storage depot at good old Ludwigshaven & a "gulp" ran thru the crews being briefed. This was to be the visual target. The PFF was supposed to be across the river in Mannheim. While we were waiting for the trucks to take us out

the stations, time was moved back two hours to 0915 so I & a lot of the other fellows went back to the sack. I climbed up & went to sleep with all my flying clothes on – boots & all. Back down to equipment hut about 8:45 & out to plane. Took off at 1023. I put us in formation today & “naturally” did a good job. Yuck! We flew #2 in the 4<sup>th</sup> element of the high sqdn. Pretty good formation until zoom, bang, swish! The airspeed began dropping. We were almost stalling out & then the low squadron slipped over into us, dived under & very thoroughly split up. Our #3 man cut his throttles & slipped back to keep from getting hit. Then Eblen, leader of the low element, climbed back up out to the left, picked up one of his wingmen & started to slide back into formation & was just about in when we started a turn to the left. But Eblen kept right on coming, started out on the inside of the turn & almost hit the lead ship. That pretty thoroughly split things up. We finally got back into formation about the time we turned on the I.P. The clouds were up to almost 28000’, so we climbed to 30,000’ to bomb. Temp. was 45 below. Br-r-r! I used the warmth system consisting of heated suit with heated shoes covered with a pair of wool socks & wearing my boots over this. No shoes. Didn’t have to turn in on. We had no clouds over us so the sun kept the cockpit fairly warm. Boy! I guess it was really cold back in the waist & balls now! Anyhow we started on the bomb run & flub-dubbing galore ensued. We went over a clear area & got visual lock. Went over the target – Ludwigshaven – the edge of which was visible thru the clouds. For some reason the high group didn’t drop anyway we finally dropped on some place after flopping around in various places looking for a PFF target of opportunity. More VHF trouble like at Bruxe. Nobody could contact who they wanted. I guess we dropped our load somewhere near Mainz and at Bad Kreuznach. We were carrying 34-100 # G.P. & two 500# M-17 incendiaries. The 100# went away but couldn’t get the two incendiaries out. Joe went back & kicked them out & almost froze his hands doing it. We tried everything our salvo switch, Joe’s salvo, etc. Nothing worked because as we discovered later there were two switches back at the back of the bomb bay that had to be turned on. These switches controlled the two top racks only & aren’t installed in the 323<sup>rd</sup> sqdn. ships. We were flying a 401st ship today – LL “J”. Then when we got back on the ground Joe also said that the bomb shackles were on backwards. Oh what a time. I’ll bet we dropped on everything in eastern Germany. What a lovely pattern. Floyd said that from the tail he could see bombs dropping all along the way. I guess all the bombardier & togglers got bitter & were drubbing them out practically whenever they decided to do so. Besides that the formation was all spread out. We were pulling 24-42” to keep with our element & our element was steadily dropping behind. The rest of our squadron was scattered all over Hell & gone. Then our element lead started losing altitude. We tried to contact him on channel #2 & “A” channel & couldn’t. We could see something wrong with his #1 engine. Found out later it had been hit & was wind milling. Later we heard over VHF that he never could get it feathered but finally he threw it off. Anyway we followed him down. I told Kirk to get back up to the formation. But the crazy dope said we’d better fly off this guy’s wing & give him protection against fighters. We were about 1000’ below the formation before Kirk finally had sense enough to leave the guy. Then I took over & had a hell of a time getting back up to the squadron. We were still pulling 24&42” & were gaining slowly. I didn’t want to give it full power because of the engine strain & resulting loss in power after the first ten minutes or less. Finally got back to the squadron’s altitude & were following them tho quite a ways behind. Kirk was flying & I was on VHF when suddenly Kirk starts waving wildly & pulling RPM controls. I switched to interphone & gave him full power & RPM. He says “did anybody report bandits in the area”. I said no & he goes on yuckity, yucking about two 109’s that just went under us on a pass against a single plane down below us. I looked out & saw three P-51s still with their wing tanks flying across in front of us. I guess just maybe I was pretty pistoffer. The other two planes were P-51s too. Jolly and the rest of the boys said they came in on something like a pursuit curve & that Kirk started yucking about bandits & bang, bang, etc. Jolly said he almost fired on them & that

they would have been perfect targets as they passed under. But fortunately he recognized them first in time. This damn Kirkham is beginning to scare me in combat. He's a hot-rock flier on practice formations or over England, but when we're on the bomb run he almost never is tucked in close. And something like the lead ship dropping down or fighting or climbing on the controls when I'm flying. Sometimes I wonder. I don't think he can think fast enough or clearly enough or something to handle an emergency. What a guy, tho! Big wheel! He "buddies around" with all the big shot element & squadron leads. "Brass hats" are like a magnet for the boy. Ah me! Such is life! So maybe we make element lead. Well, anyway after I "let the boys in on the fact" that P-51s with wing tanks aren't bandits, we cut back to 24-42". Finally caught up with the formation while they were letting down to 25000. I wanted to go down & fill in a spot with the low sqdn. when we were way back there because in the first place they would have been much easier to catch & besides – ahem! – we would have landed ever so much sooner. Then we got back up behind our sqdn. I was flying below the low sqdn. in what would have been the lead spot of the #4 element if I had been below the lead sqdn. Later we shifted over onto the wing of some guy flying #4 element lead. Then something happened (one of the crew got the bends) in the sqdn. lead & everybody busted up. Some guy (their element lead) took off like a herd of turtles & was all for following him or getting in this low sqdn. We were over Eng. then. But Kirk glub-glubbed around & finally circled around behind the lead & low groups. Then we saw six ships – what was left of the high sqdn. so we go sailing up behind them & I got some more practice flying #4 element lead only without wingmen. The instead of following the element down on an S.O.P. let down Kirk peeled off & started looking for a hole in the clouds he thought he had seen. Never found it & finally we came down using an S.O.P. let down all by ourselves. Finally got back to the field. Kirk let down at around 170mph at from 500 to 2000' ft per min. S.O.P. be damned. I landed this time. Geeze! Something new. This was my fifth, sixth & seventh landings. Made three of the prettiest bounces. Made a good approach & pattern except that I did overshoot my turn on the approach & had to cut back but I had plenty of time. Didn't break any wheels off. Landed at 1700. Hit the old sack about 10:30. This mission finished up Henson, Gould, Stone & Strait among others of less familiar acquaintance.

#### **Mission #14-Brunswick (October 22, 1944).**

Up about 6 for briefing about 7 for the vehicle factory at Brunswick (Braunschweig according to the better Germans). Into the beautiful skies at 1031. We flew #3 in the low element of the low squadron. The 91<sup>st</sup> led the 8<sup>th</sup> AF in today, Geeze! Big wheels. We flew a 324<sup>th</sup> ship, 035 "K" – King, assembled at 9500 & left the base at about 1115. Went in over Holland. The ship we flew was really slow. We were having an awful time keeping up. On the bomb run Kirk got out of formation & couldn't get back in. Then later after we had bombed I was flying & tried to put us back in formation & almost overran our element lead. I don't know whether I would have or not. Kirk put down some flaps & really messed me up. The ship ballooned up & then the drag cut us down so much that before I could get them up we had slipped back out again. My, my, I was a wee bit pissed off & bitter. Cuss, cuss! Finally got back home by various means, ducked thru a hole in the clouds & came in under them. I don't know how it works but whenever we fly low squadron we either flub around & get in last or get eager & only let one other squadron get in ahead of us. Tonight we were eager & only let the lead sqdn. land ahead of us. Pretty clever & speedy. Down at 1700 & so back to the barracks. Ate supper, cleaned up & meandered out to the gate with Kivi about 8:15 to catch the trucks to Royston for the 9pm train to London.

#### **Mission #15-Munster (October 26, 1944)**

Up & into the blue again! Breakfast 6 (6:30 for we of the aircraft aristocracy), briefing at 7. Hit "at" the marshalling yards & an aircraft repair depot in Munster. All in all the nicest mission we have had yet or

can ever expect to have. We were in the air only 5 1/2 hours, flew about the easiest spot possible - #3 on the lead ship of the lead squadron. Besides that all the flak we saw over the target was off to our right & low. I just saw the stuff back of us & to the right as we went over. Floyd said there was quite a bit behind us. Nice place for it to be & not us. We had one little piece that sneaked around in front & glanced off the Plexiglas on the nose. Remember when combat was rough. Yeah! Figures for the past month were posted a little while back & the 91<sup>st</sup> was the only bomb group over here not hit by fighters during that period. Rub that good old rabbit's foot & rub it hard. I'm not so eager to see those fighters anymore – not even with all the P-51s & 47s we have buzzing around us these days. Big wheel today. We were channel "D" guard & under the new system that channel is for 1<sup>st</sup> Division communication between their fighters or their ground control. Even got to call up the leader a couple of times & tell him that Balance 1-3 was calling Vinegrove 1-7 which was us in case you don't recognize it. Back intact & happy. Landed at 1653. Take-off was at 1051. We flew 083, "Q" Queenie. Bombed from 25500 with six 500# G.P. & six 500# M17 incend. Naturally PFF thru 10/10ths. Spent the eve dairying & trying to figure out where in London we had been. Sinabaldo & Mefford finished up today. Let off some lovely little flares & then all went down to Red Cross & had a "big dinner" on the wealth of Sini. Sat in the side room & gabbed about combat.

### **Mission #16-Hamm (October 30, 1944)**

Briefing at 7:10 for the marshalling yards at Hamm. Took off at 0937 in 625, Ushers "W"- "Willie", commonly known as-pause for sigh & whistle – "Cheri". We flew #3 in the high element of the high squadron of the fourth group of the third task force. Oh, yes, & we were one of the low groups of our task force – supposedly. This is another new idea of the big wheels – chairborne, 1<sup>st</sup> class. The groups are staggered according to alt when they hit a target. Usually first a high one, then a low one, then another high one & so on. I guess there is supposed to be 2000' between groups vertically & the usual 2 min. interval in flying time. Then the other idea they worked-up was sending a full group into the target area before the bombers get there & having them release chaff bombs. No other bomb load – nothing but chaff. I guess it surely worked over Munster, but if they ever get hit by fighters, it's going to be rough because according to our intelligence dept. the group is supposed to "fan-out" when they get over the target so their chaff will spread out more. Today however we only had one sqdn. dropping chaff on our target because the 8<sup>th</sup> A.F. was hitting so many targets. Three or four targets right around Hamm & a couple more at other spots. The RAF even went in with us today. Wonder where they learned to fly formation. They've been blasting Cologne steadily at nite for quite a while now. Oh, yes, also we have a couple of little "devices" under the wings that are supposed to "distract" flak guns or something. Don't have the faintest idea how they work. Well, anyway, so back to the mission. We got over the continent & ran into high clouds galore. Briefed for no middle & no high clouds, unlimited visibility, non-persistent contrails. What do you know? Heavy persistent contrails. So we climbed to 30000' & got out of most of the clouds anyway. A little cool up there – 50 degrees below – and that just happens to be centigrade. Br-r-r! Besides all that Mullins was giving us a pretty bad ride. Quite a bit of weaving & flying us in too close to the lead sqdn. We spent about half the day in trail of the #2 ship in the lead. Made more people sweat that way on bomb runs. We got lost from the lead & low sqdn. Someplace along the line & bombed by ourselves. Navigators seem to think we hit at least near the target altho' we did approach it from about 45 degrees off course. Bombed with 18-250# G.P. Supposed to have bombed from 27,000. So what? After the bombs-away I was flying & was coming up into formation pretty well had just cut back & I think would have come in just right when zoom over goes the big paw & starts flapping down flaps & flubbity-dub out we go & up & up. He put down almost a third flaps & really screwed us up. I opened it up to full throttle to try to stay in because when Kirk

tried to get them back up they wouldn't work. Had to be cranked up. Sometimes I really get bitter about this two man flying or should I say flubbing. I guess you really can't blame him too much tho' because after all if anything does happen, he's responsible even tho' it might be my fault. Course I do think we'd stand a lot less chance of ever getting into trouble if he'd leave the ship alone when I'm flying. I'll admit tho' just between diary & me that when I put us in formation, this morn I did need flaps because just as I was about ready to reach (it say here) Kirk put some down. Anyway, about the flaps, Jolly looked up & saw something sticking thru the bomb doors. Looked like a cylinder or something- which "Deke" confirmed. Also spotted a hole in the wing back of #3 engine. We concluded that maybe flak had hit the flaps & that probably the cylinder had something to do with the flaps. I made the landing. Flaps went down all right. Kirk dropped out of formation & landed last. Big sacrifice! We would have been 3<sup>rd</sup> from the last otherwise. He thought maybe the flaps wouldn't even come down, but as I said they did. I'm getting better-only bounced twice & that because I landed in a slight crab again. Down at 1540. Boys cranked up the flaps. Then after we were peacefully parked in our area the crew chief gets in the ship, runs the flaps down & right back up again. The cylinder is part of the bomb bay retracting mechanism. I suggested maybe the cold at alt affected them, but Kirk said he tried running them up with the switch when we were on the downwind leg. Oh, me! Such is life! Hole in the wing didn't even hit a thing but we had one in the #3 engine that we hadn't even known about. Went thru from the front, thru the cowling & hit directly on one of the pushrod covers. Bent it in but just was expended enough so that it didn't bend the pushrod too much. Caused a little oil leak & that's all. That flak was really up there on us. Didn't see much on the bomb run. First burst any place close was right beside us & then poom, poom. The #2 & #4 ships in our element really got popped up. 20 or so holes each. Rough show! Old lucky us. Oh, yes, we had to draw again for our mission number when we go home. This time I got #23. Pretty good chance, maybe. Quick shower, clean-up & into town on the trucks.

### **Mission #17-Merseburg**

Briefed about 6:30 for the synthetic oil plant at Merseburg. Also briefed that this was the largest ammonia producer in Germany in addition to other oil by-products. Took off at 0905 in good old "Nine O' Nine", 909, "R-Roger". Oh, I love that ship. I love the wings & engines it flies on. Thru the grace of God, & luck, & fate, and God knows what else I'm back to write this. We had everything in the book except "it". Started off by getting knocked clear out of formation twice by prop wash. Thank God that wasn't after we left the target. Donahue was doing a pretty good job as our element lead, I thought. Just had tough luck those two times. We saw a lot of B-17s coming back alone on our way in. Bill said at the time, "maybe they know what's coming". Maybe they did. I wonder did Bill? He reported that he had counted 14 when we were still about an hour from the target. We had wonderful P-51 & P-47 support going in. They were thicker than spatter. Saw some P-38s under us while we were on the bomb run. Still had our fighters. We were flying #2 in the low element of the low group. We were Vinegrove 2-6 today, the last group in on this target. Everything worked lovely for us. Just before the lead group hit the target the flak almost stopped. I watched a six gun battery up ahead of us but right on our level. There had been quite a barrage over the target. Just like fighters on the way in - they had been there. While we were out about 20 min. over the North Sea we heard bandits reported over the Dutch coast. Then while we were over Holland they were reported in the Leipzig area. On the way over the channel we saw quite a convoy off to our right a little. I counted 57 ships & there were more I couldn't see because of haze. Up at our altitude it was beautifully clear all the way in. Briefed for both middle & high clouds & dense persistent contrails. Never got them in the low sqdn., anyway. We assembled at about 8000' & then climbed on course. Bombed from 27,000 with eighteen 250# G.P.s. Just after we turned off the target I looked out of my window & saw a B-17 going straight down. Then the tail just

folded up & the plane went to pieces & I watched the little tiny pieces each with its little smoke trail drifting down like snow. When we were about 20 min. from the target I had spotted another 17 (“J”-Jig” in the lead, fire in cockpit) off at about 4 o’clock circling down & down in big graceful circles. Called Floyd & he watched it slip into the clouds & out of sight. It looked pretty peaceful but this other one surely didn’t. I had heard over the VHF just about a minute before somebody yelling “Bail out, bail out, bail out” & so on for quite a few seconds. Guess he thought he was on interphone. It might have been from our group because the lead sqdn., 401<sup>st</sup>, lost two ships(only one to flak). I think the one I saw circling down might have been the other one (It was!). Quite possibly it was “Mutter J-Jig” the #3 man on the group lead (It was!). I heard him calling in about being in trouble not long before I saw the ship. We had just gone thru some light flak when the other ship went down. It was #2 in the 4<sup>th</sup> element. Direct hit in cockpit according to what I heard later. This is it! The fighter attack that is reportedly part of the biggest air battle since the beginning of the war. According to Friday’s Stars & Stripes over 400 Jerries jumped the 1100 Forts & Libs and their escort of over 900 Mustangs & Thunderbolts. Too bad we never saw any of those 900. The fighters set a new one-day record by getting 130 in the air. Also shot up 25 on the ground. The bombers were credited with 53 “kills” of which I guarantee our group got well over their share. According to the English paper that Rex saw in town we lost 19 fighters & 41 bombers. Once again we had well over our share. According to “Stars & Stripes” the last time the Jerries came up in force was Sept. 11, our last Merseburg raid. Guess they don’t like for us to hit Merseburg. We should have known what was brewing when we didn’t get much flak over the target. A few minutes after we turned off the target, just after I had seen the B-17 breaking up, we lost the lead & high sqdn. in a cloud bank that lay to the south of the target. Saw a break in the clouds off to our left & I saw a barrage of white flak, the big stuff, 105mm and I’m quite sure it was flak not fighters because we were the last thing out there since the lead & high sqdn. had turned inside of us & were off to our right quite a ways, I guess. I heard a call over VHF saying Swordfish Able – 398<sup>th</sup> had been hit by bandits. Learned later that they lost 5 or 6. That must have been where our fighter support went because we surely didn’t see them after we left the target. We broke out into the clear & saw the high & lead sqdn. out to our right & on a course about 45 degrees towards ours. Then it began. Kirk was still flying. I heard a ship in the Swordfish Baker high sqdn. (322<sup>nd</sup>) report that they had been hit by two jet propelled & had knocked one of them down. Then a little later a jet propelled was reported circling above us. I told the boys & they said later that then they looked up & could see it slowly “S’ing” back & forth. The jets were spotting, I guess, probably yucky, yucking all over because they had found a split up group without any fighter support & that was us. And then-“here they come”! I relayed that to the boys & waited. It seemed like hours and then I heard their guns chattering. Think maybe Gris fired first. I remember seeing that stuff busting up in front of our formation. It was white with a silver center or so it looked to me. We were on a heading of about 250 degrees then according to “Tex’s” log. He recorded that they hit first at 1253. It’s funny how hazy everything seems. I remember while I was relaying the “Here they come” message that we were pulling up under the lead sqdn. The next time I remember noticing the formation we were right up under the lead sqdn. The high sqdn. & the lead were all mixed up together & one ship was flying about 100’ below the lead group & Boggs, our sqdn. leader, was about 50’ below him. The one ship, I found out later, was “Tex” (O’Neil is the pilot). That must have been quite awhile because according to “Tex’s” log “Z-zebra”, (Mullin’s ship) their element lead (high element), didn’t drop out till 1303 ½ & that was after the fighters left. “Tex” recorded that the bandits left at 1301. I do remember noticing that we were flying below our element lead “Q-Queenie”, & almost under “A-Able”, the left wingman of the lead ship. That must have been about half way thru the attack. I remember earlier seeing the left wingman on the 4<sup>th</sup> element, ship Passerger & Werner were in, bursting into flame. It was just one big sheet of flame from nose to tail. I

don't remember feeling any emotional effect as I watched it flaming & then I watched it slide slowly under us. I do remember thinking at the time, what if they blow up under us? We've had it if they do! I called up the boys & asked if they could see it. Somebody said the ship was going off to our left & that they had seen tow chutes come out. One looked like it was on fire. I don't ever remember seeing any of the other ships of the 4<sup>th</sup> element or the high element, nor do I remember seeing Leikus, who was flying the other wing in our element. Somebody on another said after we got back here that they had seen them blow up or break up or something. I was really watching the oil pressure & manifold pressure. It would have been a mighty short trip between any hand & the feathering button. I had my hand on the RPM lock release ready to check to see if it was the instruments or the engine. I think I wondered how much trouble I would have getting out between the seats with a back-pack on. I remember what a long wait it was in there when they first hit. I relayed the call that they were coming in for the first pass. Before I switched to interphone I tried to be very calm. It seemed to me that my voice was very steady & "matter of fact". Then I remember watching those white puffs & waiting that interminable length of time till I heard Gris' gun rattle behind me. Then there they were sliding up there beside me with those big black crosses looking at me. The first one scared me but then after that I think I was very calm. They looked pretty as could be. Artistically designed craft just like Sinibaldo's little model was. I think they were yellow but I really don't remember. I wasn't even certain whether they were 109's or 190's after the attack was over. I never thought to wonder about that when they hit. I remember glancing up once & seeing three or four of them all with their bellies towards us. "How can they keep from hitting each other", I wondered. They must be very good. They seemed to be aiming for "B-Baker" the #2 on the lead ship. It was the one without a ball turret. About half way thru the attack his tail guns jammed. He was very lucky to ever get back. Had he been in our spot he would never have made it because we were low, low & back, back after the fourth element was knocked out & I guess that was just about at the start. Seemed that the fighters were shooting over us & up into the formation. We only had three holes that we saw & we figured they were from flak because they came in from the front. Could have been from 20mm bursts. One in the left wing, one in the right wing, & one in the #2 engine that hit the supercharger oil reserve. When we got on the ground the crew chief said all the oil was gone from the reservoir tank & it was just a question of minutes before the supercharger would have burned out. Deitrich told Kirk Saturday that the stabilizer was peppered with .30 cal. holes about the size of my little finger. Didn't see them I guess. I remember those 190s riding in there & throwing their bellies up. The boys said they could see their bullets bounce off that armor plate. But there were quite a few that didn't bounce. Jolly got one for sure. Blew it up as it was coming in. Floyd & Gris set the wing on fire on another & sent it down, but they didn't have time to follow it to see what happened. "Tex" said that near the end of the attack they saw 12 190s coming in & then five of them broke away as two P-51s were sighted coming down. He said they watched the 51s get one, two, three, four and they were betting he wouldn't get the fifth but the little fellow fooled them & blew up number five. Don't know what happened to the other seven 190s. Guess they came on in. Jolly & Floyd said they saw 4 attack one B-17 & then 17 shot two down & the other two peeled away. They didn't know or have time -or desire- to follow the B-17 to see whose it was, but it might very easily have been "Dex" Mullins also might have been the boy. When he dropped out he had two engines feathered. Right after that over VHF, I got the old call, "Here they come again!" Then pretty soon somebody said that they were hitting a straggler instead. Don't know who it was. Mullins was back there somewhere. Incidentally he was flying the ship without waist guns. Somehow he got back by God's grace, good gunners & luck, luck, luck. But then that's true for all of us. Just before that last call (1306 according to "Tex's" log) I looked up & saw two P-51s cruising across our formation pretty high. Didn't look like they were moving very fast. As soon as the fighter attack ceased we were picked up by flak. Such

coordination. We first got flak at 1240, four minutes from the target. I don't know, maybe that's when I saw this ship circling down that I thought might be "Mutter J-Jig". Seemed like at least 15 minutes before the target as I look back but that's the first flak that "Tex" has recorded in our formation. Funny how slow times goes. Kirk flew it well, plenty well, for about an hour, from before the IP till after the fighter attack was over. We got our last flak at 1325. Forty-five minutes of flak & fighters. Rough, plenty rough. We still had six ships left in our squadron. The "B-Baker" (Corman's crew) dropped out after about an hour or more because he had two men injured & his control cables shot up. Another ship had the rudder & elevator cables shot out, but got back O.K. & landed on AFCE. "Q-Queenie" dropped back later on, feathered an engine & stayed with us. We flew #2 spot on the lead. It was a long, long ride back home & to top it off we had gotten lost during the battle. None of the Mickey's could get a fix & none of the navigators had a pin-point, naturally, since they had been manning the guns. So we just took a general heading of Northwest. First pin-point they got was WSW of Hanover thru a break in the clouds. Then they got a definite fix thru some open spots at 45 min. Northwest of Hanover at 1355. Spotted some flak behind up at 1410 & went out over the North Sea at 1421 up between the Dutch border & Wilhemshaven. Got an injury of the most minor sort on our crew. It was after we had left the fighters & flak behind that the toggler & Kivi got their biggest scare. They heard a "rack!" in the nose & thought we had been hit by flak. Found out that the cold or something had caused some plywood up in the nose to crack. I imagine they were a little jumpy anyway. Especially the toggler, Sgt. White, who has 19 missions. Don't think Kivi thinks fast enough to be scared. Frankie was flying in "Q-Queenie" because they had to have a bombardier in every lead ship. This White is a good boy. In fact after that ride everybody is the very best there is. We broke up the formation over the North Sea & came down by squadrons thru holes in the clouds. We came over the field & peeled off our entire squadron at one pass - Yeh! All five ships. "B-Baker", Corman's ship, & "K-King", Mullins' baby, limped in later. The final count seems to be this. The high sqdn., 322<sup>nd</sup>, lost six ships, but Leroy Hare & Schroeder, the two crews that came in with us, both got back. The lead lost two ships, both to flak. Tommy Holmes brought his boys back O.K. & he is the only crew that went to the 401<sup>st</sup> from our replacement crews. Out of the 323<sup>rd</sup> we lost the entire fourth element, Snow "U", Rustand "L" & Farris "LL-G"; the left wingman in the high element Harris "W" & the left wingman in our element, Leikus "M". What a feeling to come back to our bay this eve. It was as desolate as could be. The boys said theirs was even worse, especially since Perkins was gone. Jolly & Bill were the only two to return in their bay. In ours "Tex", Kirk & I were the only ones to come back out of ten that left this morn. Leikus, Wisor, Sambo, Young, Passeger, Werner & Schwartz. It's funny how many things you remember about them now. And I was going to have my crew picture signed by all the boys. Perkins was riding with Harris. Ships lost were "U", "L", "W", "M", & "LL-G". I guess this was the roughest one this group or squadron has ever been hit. One fellow over in the boys barracks is on his second tour, had been thru three other fighter attacks. Quit flying after this one. Hmmm-m! During a brief lull in the fighters attack Jolly got his oxygen hose pulled off. Couldn't do anything. Just had control enough to call "Help!" over the interphone. Bill thought he had been hit. Pulled him out of the ball. He was semi-conscious, though pretty blue Bill said. Jolly put up a "fight" when they pulled him out & took him into the radio room & put him on oxygen. Bill said he couldn't find anything wrong with Jolly & he was "eagerly fighting" to get back in the turret. By that time the Jerries had hit again. Bill says he remembers wondering what the heck he'd do if we were knocked down & there was Jolly stretched out on the radio room floor semi-conscious. Deke was back in the waist firing away. The boys said that Gris was really on the ball today too. Said he was really calm. He had radicals in his sight & was calling out the range for the other boys. Incidentally I guess the old man, our good old "fat boy", was really in there blazing away. He only had 10 rounds left in one gun & about 25 in the other. Good thing the Jerries didn't hit the last time.



Incidentally I was talking to Luther, Deitrich's engineer, & he said that it was "B-Baker" (116) that had all the .30 cal. holes in the tail, not 909. I thought it was funny that I hadn't seen them because I walked all the way around it looking for holes & so did the crew chief. Guess Kirk misunderstood him or else Deitrich made a mistake. Tsk, tsk! Kirk said that while he was flying there he was really sweating. Said it was standing in pools in his shirt & running down his legs. Said every once in awhile he would feel it run down his leg & that he would reach down & feel to see if he's been hit. I was so busy watching instruments & looking out that I never even saw him. Jolly & I were talking while we were sitting around the table waiting for the intelligence officer for interrogation after the mission. Pretty quiet place. Saw LeRoy, Hare & Schroeder briefing but couldn't find out whether Tommy Holmes was back or not. Had to "sweat him out" till later in the eve when I saw him. Anyway Jolly & I were sort of reminiscing & he mentioned that he never even thought of bailing out while the attack was going on. He said he did remember seeing one ship going down flaming – going straight down burning like a torch – and he thought at the time, "that's not such a bad way to die." Maybe the little fellow's right. Death was pretty close to us there. Had quite a time convincing "Bill" that B-17s would glide. The boys can't see it – especially after seeing "it." I tried to change all that. Let them in on all the poop that when the ship is trimmed for level flight with 4 engines, naturally it's not going to be in trim even for a glide without any power – but it can be trimmed. Then back to our boys. God! What a desolate place this was. Of the ten guys that went out this morn – just the three of us got back. They don't call that 4<sup>th</sup> element "purple heart corner" for nothing.

#### **Mission #18-Frankfurt (November 5, 1944)**

Squadron stand-down, so we fly. All the big wheels sack while the lovely wing men go out so they can fly seven missions in a row. Maybe I'm bitter! Anyway we up & had fresh eggs-Gee! – and briefed at 0525 for the marshalling yards at Frankfurt. Supposed to be one of the main centers of shipping to the front. Handles 3100 cars per 24 hours. Hm-m-m! Bigger than the "Map" at Wichita. We were supposed to fly "B-Baker", but after filling the oxygen & getting all ready to go, we had an oxygen leak show up in the new ball turret. This was after the armorer had come over & fixed the ball turret guns which had various things in backwards or something. So we up & grabbed a spare, namely a brand new ship (one of those that just arrived last night), by the letter of Ushers "W-Willie". Finally (T.O. 0811) got off O.K., just a little after the last ship in the regular T.O. had left. Since we were flying #2 on the 4<sup>th</sup> element in the low sqdn., we would have been one of the last off anyway. Right in there in old "purple heart corner" & maybe I wasn't a little jittery. I guess, everybody else was, too. We were filling in with the 322<sup>nd</sup> who lost six in the attack. "Tex" was flying in #3 on the high element of the low sqdn. Got a very good look in their bomb bay a couple of times on the bomb run. Do I worry? I'll say I do! Lots of flak before & after we went over the target but we didn't get much. The high sqdn. really got hit by the flak according to Floyd & I guess they did. One man was killed – a mickey operator. We bombed P.F.F. from 26000' with six 1000# semi-armor piercing. Don't know what they were supposed to pierce. Just beside the target was a big open space & Jolly & Frankie both said they saw the hit & that it was right on the target. Whoopee! About time we hit what we went out for. Quite a few broken spots in the clouds around there, but for some reason, no flak AND no "bandits". Had flocks & droves of P-51s & P-47s. Pretty little rascals. Now the latest thing is a group of fighters gives close cover to one B.G. at all times besides a target area force that joins up as escort after the last group leaves the target. Sounds better! We came back out as we went in, that is by way of Belgium. Got a good look at Leige thru a break in the clouds. Saw a lovely looking big building in the town. Looked like a library or something. Let down below the stuff just after we left the Belgian coast & crossed the Eng. Channel & England at about 500'. Nice buzz job. This is enough for tonite. Time for bed & I'm plenty weary. Probably fly

tomorrow.

### **Mission #19 – Harburg (November 6, 1944)**

Told us briefing was at 0445 & told a lot of the others 0435. I got there early by five minutes & was late by five minutes. What do you know? The 0435 was right & the door was locked. Had a nice little queue of almost half a dozen or more fellows outside. Gee! I was #1 in the queue & Bernie Goldstein was #2. Ain't we lucky. Heard most of the briefing thru the door but didn't get to see all the pretty pictures. Briefed for the marsh. yards at Harburg just south of Hamburg as P.F.F. Also "hoped" we hit the oil refineries in Harburg which was to have been our visual. Took off at 0721 in our own ship, "U"-Uncle. Whee! We got one all our own – just for us. Kirk has the name all picked so that takes care of that. It is to be "Flexible Clipper". As Kirk says we've got flexible guns. Hm-m-m! Very unimpressive. It is the name of some "blank"(Wilson added "blank" because Ed didn't put any name here, just a space) in his home town back there in "blank". Sounds lousy to me, but I figure that I'm going to try to check out soon anyway so maybe I shouldn't have much to say about it. Today was Kirk's birthday – 28 years old. Got a terrific B-day present from the Germans. Got the roughest flak I've ever seen yet. Really rocked the ship. Twice I thought we had hits directly under me. Felt like it was bursting right under my seat. Somehow we got thru it with no troubles. Had seven holes in the left wing, one in the #3 engine that almost got us, five in the right wing & in the top turret by Gris' head. Luckily he had on his flak helmet and his goggles. Didn't even know it had come thru till he felt the wind flowing thru the hole. Also had a deep gash about three inches from the end of one of the prop blades. Really dug in – about ½ inch deep & about four inches long. The lead ship got a big hole blown above the "mickey". Blew out almost the entire left side & naturally riddled the whole waist. Killed the waist gunner & radio operator & seriously injured the mickey man. In the Tuesday morn meeting Maj. Taylor who was flying the ship said he thought the boy was going to live. "Smitty" was flying as observer – tail gunner in the lead ship. The hit was just before "bombs away" but the bombing was O.K. Jolly said that the bombs really plastered a built up area. Might have been the oil target – it says here! Dropped six 1000# G.P.s. Had a toggler today – Barker. Joe was flying with Dietrich who was leading the low element. We were flying his right wing. In the lead squadron of "A" group today. We were eighth into the target supposedly. Had beautiful fighter support all the time. But – Oh! That flak! We were getting 88, 105 & 156 – everything they had I guess, and way too close. I think they were shooting visually part of the time. Probably using these jets to spot the flak, too. The boys said they saw a couple that they thought were jets today. I thought we had lost our first engine today. Must have been when the engine got hit. The oil pressure dropped off slowly (on #3) to about 50# & I was all ready to run the prop pitch thru & punch that little old red button when the needle stopped & then climbed back up slowly to a nice clean old 75# & stayed there. I asked the crew chief after we got back & he said he didn't know what could have caused it to act that way. Believe me I was sweating it out. I'm afraid to even mention to anybody that we have never even had to feather an engine yet. I have even been afraid to write it in here. Now I can sweat out these words. It's funny how easy it is to believe in luck & fate & everything in the world. Corman had to feather an engine. As usual he was flying a wing on the lead. Stephens also had one feathered. I'm beginning to believe that maybe this lead isn't such a nice place. Naturally there is speculation that the Germans have some way to pick up our radar beam & use it to "home on" with flak. Two radar operators in two missions. Br-r-r! Maj. Taylor was losing about 500' per minute after the hit. The squadron stayed with him thinking that he was letting down intentionally. His interphone, radio, et all was shot out. We got down to about 22000 when he fired red-red flares & left us. What a mess! Basnight took over the lead & these guys really messed up the formation. They can't change formation worth a dime. Maybe I ought to check out these element leaders. Dietrich swerved way out to the left & then came back in after way too long – as far as I'm concerned. I don't like this far-away

look of the formation in my eyes. Even with pretty P-51s galore around. Went out near Heligoland. Saw a little flak from somebody's back yard on a little Freishen Island near there. Low & way off to our left. We almost got stalled out after we crossed the Eng. Coast (at about 3000' this time). Had us down to 125 mph once. Deitrich got bitter & left the formation so we couldn't do anything but leave, too. So there! This little old U-Uncle flies quite nicely. Praise the Lord! Landed at 1430. Everybody got back except Maj. Taylor & he landed at another base up by Norwich. Only other man hurt that I know of was Overstreet. Think he was flying as navigator or bombardier in Basnight's ship leading the high element. Nothing much doing tonite. Got to bed early – about 9:30 – expecting a big mission tomorrow.

#### **Mission #20 – Metz (November 9, 1944)**

Up at 3 for briefing at 4. Briefed to hit a fort four miles past our lines. It was part of the old Maginot line I suppose. Had 155mm guns & a concrete roof 9 ft. thick. Lies just a little east of Metz. We passed over Verdun on our bomb run Assembled at 18500' & we almost froze to death – not to mention going all over the sky looking for our formation. Flares everywhere & darkness exceedingly black. The temp. was about 35 degrees below at 20,000'. We covered the whole sky & finally found the formation & got into it about 0745. Left the base a little after 8. We flew #3 off the lead ship. Flying high sqdn. It was so cold that we couldn't fly but 7 or 8 min. at a time. Then had to chuck our hands in the muff. I had my electric suit turned up to about 10 & luckily I wore the jacket, too. Kept very comfortable. We went in over France. Very nice for us. When the sun finally got up & warmed our little glasshouse I was perfectly happy. What a milk run! Bombed from 25,000' at about 41 degrees below. We really pounded the little boys all but two ships in the formation had eight 1000# semi-armour piercing. We were one of the lucky two – we only had six 1000# so we didn't have to sweat quite so much when the big boys at briefing said, "Well, I guess we'll (catch that "we") use 31 today instead of 25. Everybody managed to have the big birds off O.K. We bombed about 1015 by micro H & Gen. Patton's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army went over the top about 1130 or 12. I guess we hit a little south of the fort according to various claims & reports. We hit the right woods where the fort was but the wrong part I guess. Could have made a visual run on the target, but didn't. Big breaks in the clouds just after the I.P. Some fun! The bombardier leading the low sqdn. thought he could make a visual target & he figured the lead & high were off course so he didn't drop. They made on 360 degree & didn't get a long enough run so they made a second 360 degree & by then the target had clouded over so back they came. However, by then they were short of gas & with an 8000# bomb load they couldn't make it home so they landed at an A-20 base near Paris. We came home under the clouds at about 2000' & my boy really messed up the formation. I was flying the wheel & he the throttles because it was pretty rough & he kept us so far back I had trouble tell which group were in. Wella almost. War is hell! We landed at 1338. I'd like to have 15 real quick ones just like that. That "line of flak" we were supposed to have had, didn't quite materialize. We saw some stray bursts spread around near where our lines might have been. But the localizer worked fine so everybody's happy. I really felt better when we got back. Chipper as could be. No troubles internally or externally. What a relief, too. To have a mission like that after Merseburg & Hamburg. Wonderful feeling of relief. One can almost hope combat isn't so rough after all.

#### **Mission #21 – Paderborn (November 26, 1944)**

Up for briefing at 0555. Sounded like a rather nice mission. Supposed to hit a 10 span railroad viaduct 565 yards long that was about 10 miles east of Paderborn (half way between Osuabruck & Kassel). Which just shows to go you that you can't always be right. We took off at 0821 in 083, Q-Queenie. Flying #3 off the lead of the high sqdn. We were the fourth group into the target today. Had five groups of fighters escorting us. The ship was pretty hard to trim up so I had been doing most of the flying & was going to fly the bomb run. We were just over the Dutch border about 15 minutes from the I.P. Bris

had just put our flak suits on & Kirk was flying when I looked down & saw a whole “swarm” of planes flying about 5000’ below us going the opposite direction. We had our escort about 5000’ above us. I called them out and then switched back to VHF. We all should have known they were “bandits”, but nobody called them over VHF. They weren’t flying in any formation – or so it looked to me – just a big mob. Must have been about 75. A couple of minutes later it came – “Bandits attacking” & then that white stuff. I looked back & saw them “quite a ways back” – must have been about 500 yards – coming in. Then I took over & flew thru the attack which all together lasted 4 or 5 minutes. I guess our escort came right down on top of them & really shot them up. They got a total of 122 between the fighters & bombers and lost 37 bombers & 13 fighters according to the Mon. “Stars & Stripes”. We lost three ships from the 324<sup>th</sup> (I didn’t know any of them) flying low & one ship from our sqdn. – Stevens. He was flying #3 in the high element. Reports said he pulled out to the side & they saw some chutes come out & then the ship blew up. Weisgarber, Cunningham’s navigator, was flying as nav. Incidentally, he flew as navigator with Deitrich on my first mission. Cunningham really seems to think – or hope – that he has a good chance of getting out because he has spent a lot of his time hunting & fishing alone. Hope he can make it! Barber was flying as toggler on his 35<sup>th</sup> mission. One of the boys said that he said after briefing this morn. that this was a good day to finish up on a milk run like this. On the way in and every since I’ve been stood down – last mission was on Nov. 9 – I was kidding the boys about this being a rough one because they were saving us good men for the rough ones. Didn’t know how true that was. Stevens’ co-pilot was Johnson, pilot of the newest crew (they sleep in our bay). It was his first mission. Averett also flew his first mission today and it almost scared him to death I guess. Really felt sorry for the poor kid. Quite an impression even tho’ it wasn’t too bad as far as losses go. Our boys said that most of the Jerries were coming in in ones, twos & threes. None of this “company front” attack like last time – Thank God! However some of the other gunners claimed that they were coming in three & four at a time. Don’t know. I tried to fly above & well up on the lead ship so the low sqdn. could tuck it in tight. Don’t remember, but guess I did a good job. I remember of pulling up closer after I took over from Kirk and seeing a big wall of those damn silver flashes right in front of me. Then just as I got in I remember turning to the right just as it looked like we were about to run into “the wall”. Also remember seeing some bursting below us & then above us – and then – right in front of us. Gulp! I flew on into the target & for awhile off of it. We had a visual run for about 8 min. & then the last couple of minutes were over clouds. Made the bombing by Micro-H whatever it is. I think it must be a refined pin point type of P.F.F. only visible if you are pretty certain by visual check points of the position of the target. Sounds good anyway. We bombed with 6-1000# G.P.’s from 21500. Temp. was -40 degrees C. Somewhere during the attack Weigel popped his chute & was yuckity, yucking over interphone about getting another chute. I was so concentrating on flying that I didn’t even say a word. Gris finally told him to take his & that if he needed one he’d go back thru the bomb bay & get one. Then Weigel started “worrying” about Gris. Finally got him shut up. I never even said a word. Never thought about it. Guess I probably should have “taken over” as aircraft commander since Kirk was on VHF. Monday Morning Quarterbacking – literally. One group missed the target (I think it was the 398<sup>th</sup>) & made a 360 over the target. I think they got hit there by fighters. We heard a call that Swordfish Able was being hit after we had left the target. “Smitty” got a hit in the #2 engine that caused a fire in the wing. He pulled up in front of the lead – Maxwell – and asked him to look at it and advise him as to seriousness. We could see the fire burning behind the engine in the wing. Maxwell told him how it looked & told him to use his own judgement so Smitty decided to try for England. By some God given guidance he made it to a field in England. Landed, pulled off the runway, got everybody out of the ship & got them away & it caught on fire & burned up. Smitty said yesterday (Tues.) that the “big shots” were bitter because he took the chance. Could have blown up at any time but with luck, luck & luck he made it.

Nothing more doing. The long weary ride back & landed at 1446. Another day another dollar. This was #24 for the crew. Their third cluster. Today the attack wasn't as "intriguing" as last time. Seemed like I had more time to be scared. Those little white & silver flashes & puffs sort of worried me. Results. No holes from anything except .50 cal. Bill almost shot the right horizontal stabilizer off. Really shot it up. Tsk, tsk! Judging from the time I fired the waist guns on the Rapid City range I can see how it wouldn't be hard. I couldn't even see thru the sight. My, my!

#### **Mission #22 – Offenburg (November 27, 1944)**

Up & into the blue again. Briefed at 0620 for the Marsh. yards at Offenburg which is SE of Strasbourg. Took off at 0854 flying 911, "P" for Peter, in the #2 on the high element, low sqdn. Once again we were the fourth group to our target. I think there were five groups that hit "our" target. Bombed from 25000' with 10-500# G.P. & two M17(500#). Lovely route. All the way in over France then turned in just south of Strasbourg. More sweating tho'. Called out "Bandits in the area", over VHF. How I have some faint idea of the nervous strain back in the days when combat was rough. Some P-47's gave us quite a scare by pointing their noses at us. Had a visual run but as usual, "Snafu!" Deitrich was flying sqdn. lead & besides getting too far behind the other sqdns. They also never tested their doors till on the bomb run so – what do you know? – doors wouldn't open. Then instead of telling the deputy lead to take over & bomb visually as we were, he calls over VHF & says they will fire flares at bombs away & also call over VHF. Went off fairly well. Jolly said he thought we missed the target, but that the groups ahead of us really hit it. Glad somebody can. Temp. was 44 degrees below, but the cold sweat was actually on me when we were on the bomb run. Sometimes I think I'm nervous in the service, I guess. What do I mean – guess? Flak was light & inaccurate. Just a few puffs up in us. Nothing but the nervous strain. Just a milk run – after your back in the sack. Long ride back over France & home again. Landed 1607. Bill was really nervous. Even worse than me, I guess. Kivi flew in the deputy lead ship today & Otto Kraus, 324<sup>th</sup> nav. from Laws crew, flew with us. Old Otto is a pretty sharp navigator. Right on the ball. That's what we like. About Bill, tho, I guess that ride with 3 engines feathered over Merseburg, then the fighter attacks & then the strain today was almost too much. He said he was just shaking like a leaf after we got back over France. And to think the Alps looked so nice & pretty & peaceful off to the south. Really looked close tho', I guess we were about 50 miles from them. Back to the old sack. Went to bed about 9. I was really tired. Combat IS rough – even now.

#### **Mission #23 – Kassel (December 4, 1944)**

Up about 5:30. Briefed for an important little marsh. yard about 15-25 miles west of Kassel as a visual target with Kassel as our PFF secondary. Ran in over a big visual area in the target area. We were flying in the high sqdn. The lead sqdn. "micro – H" went out so our sqdn. took over. We flubbed around about 10 min. that seemed hours & then finally figured out we were lost. About this time the low sqdn. thought they spotted the target so they took off & we fell in behind them. After many, many yuckity, yucks & flubbing around we finally discovered we were on our way to Kassel. We bombed quite a ways to the right of the flak so we probably missed everything. As usual. We supposedly went in ahead of both the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> division but after all our flub. dubbing we trailed everybody out, I think. Saw a lot of 3<sup>rd</sup> division ships & B-24s going out as we were going over to Kassel. Oh, me! Sweat, sweat! Lots of clouds below us & not too many fighters, friendly type to suit me. O'Neil lagged behind after losing an engine & "Tex" says they saw some fighters queing up behind them, but some P-51s chased them off. Finally made it back O.K. We were flying "U" for Uncle again & as usual I watched the oil temp. on #1 engine go up to about 85 degrees & the pressure drop to about 55#. That's always interesting. We flew #2 off the lead – right wing. Landed at 1703 just edging out the darkness in a close race. After

only eight hours & five minutes on a mission that should have been about 7 ½ hours at the most. As is usual in our wonderful “Flexible Clipper” (Ugh!) we had oxygen trouble. Went out in the waist & radio. Sometimes you can’t even win. Bombed 10-#500 G.P. & 2-500# M17.

#### **Mission #24 – Berlin (December 5, 1944)**

Big “B”! Glub, glub! La de da! Oh, Hell yes! Milk runs! Shoulda been here up in the blue-gray of clouds & darkness. Briefed about 0445 for big B. Supposed to hit a munitions plant that manufactures among other things – anti-aircraft shells. Some more of that direct from the factor to you stuff. Br-r-r! We flew our baby in the right wing of the lead again, Gee! Big wheels. That’s us! Low sqdn. today. We led the first division in, but fortunately the third div. went in ahead of us. Really had beautiful fighter cover. The 51’s & 47’s were thicker than spatter, Oh those lovely boys. Read in the Wed. Stars & Stripes that the Jerries poked their noses up & lost about 90. Oh, hubbah! Hubbah! Flak was really right in there altho’ I didn’t think it was as bad on us as it was at Hamburg. Got four or five holes & had to watch that #1 oil temp. & pressure again. Can’t seem to find the trouble on the ground. We as usual got lost or something. Had a visual area right next to the target (Could see the lake by Big “B”). Our sqdn. bombardier or navigator or somebody saw that the lead sqdn. was going off to the left so we “took off” on our own & dodged flak & other groups – sweated out one group that went over us with their bomb bay doors open. Might have even come fairly close to the target. In briefing we were told that the factory had 25,000 workers & maybe we could just make it when the shifts were changing. Jolly said he thought we really blew the hell out of the residential district right next to the factory. Big housing shortage these days. We bombed at 24,500 with ten 500# G.P. & two M17. Flak got three from our group. By God’s good graces & the hand of a favoring fate our sqdn. didn’t lose any. We lost the rest of the group in the turn off the target. Thought they were in front of us so we go barreling along at 170 mph trying to catch them and zooming past the bomber stream. Dietrich who was leading today thought he saw them as we were passing Drummer Lake so we go batting along in full chase. He calls on VHF & asks them to “S” to the left so we can catch up. So we catch up & discover the group we’ve caught is the 398<sup>th</sup>. Then we figure out from a position report that the rest of our group is about ten min. behind us just “S-ing” like mad “waiting” for us. Tough! We landed at 1457 only seven hours & 35 min. in the air. T.O. at 0722. We heard that the engineer, navig. & toggler out of some ship in the 322<sup>nd</sup> bailed out over Berlin because the engineer got scared when they got a flak hit & yelled “Bail out!” Ship got back perfectly O.K. except for a feathered engine. Imagine they had a little rough ride down in flak, bombs, et all. Temp. was between 45 & 50 below today. Jolly got a little frost bite on his little fingers of his right hand. Not too bad, thank goodness.

#### **Mission #25 – Merseburg (December 12, 1944)**

Up about 4:30. Briefed for the synthetic oil plants at Ludskindorf (a little-bitty burg about 5 mi. SW from Merseburg). Took off at 0809 in 618-“U”. Flew the right wing off the lead again. We were high sqdn. in the third group into the target. Our crew didn’t fly on the last mission. Group went to Frankfurt. Had a pretty easy ride, I guess. Anyway, when we go it’s back to Merseburg. Basnight flew his first lead today & was all over the sky. Even gave his wingmen a tough time. Airspeed anywhere from 130 mph to 170 & we spent about half our time in propwash. Then we get on the bomb run (or rather at the IP) & “Bas” screwed up his turn & started racking the formation around trying to get his interval. Kirk took over at the IP & promptly let Basnight get away from us. I think I could have done better flying cross-cockpit. We got some flak right up near us. Nobody hurt that I know of. We put on full power & then started gaining on the formation. Then Kirk decided to trail them around the target, so we did. Then my dear old flak-happy boss decides we can’t catch the formation since he dived down about 200’ below them so he says we will go up & fly the diamond off Bull in the high element. So he

cuts the throttles back to about 31". After a little "discussion" I finally took over & climbed up at the side of the formation & then Kirk decided that maybe it could be done so he flew us into position. Oh, me! Sometimes this guy worries me. In the last few missions I have reverted to my earlier idea that this K-boy hasn't got much smarts when things get tough. I got that theory further proved when we came into the field. Incidentally we hit the Coblenz flak going in & got some from boats on the Rhine coming out. Then over England they decided to bring the group down thru the holes in the clouds so Kirk gets way out of formation & messes up everybody else. I tried to get him back up in but he just kept lagging back. Forced the high element clear out. Visibility wasn't too good when we got down. Came in on the approach too low & too close behind another plane. Let the airspeed drop to 90 mph. Oh, my God! I must have aged about ten years. It's not the flak or the missions but this batty first pilot that's getting me. If it wasn't for the rest of the crew I'd get myself out of this plane right now. There isn't enough money in the world to get me into another tour with Kirk – anywhere. Adams says Kirk scares him on landings. Boy! Let me tell you about my troubles. If we had ever hit the propwash from the other plane we'd have had one stacked up B-17. Then the crazy dope tries to say that it's O.K. You can slow-fly a B-17 at 85 mph. Oh, me! I informed the dear boy that I didn't think it was quite the thing to try when one is so likely to get propwash. Wow! Oh, yes! This morn when we were climbing for assembly we picked up pretty bad ice on the windows, aerial, & some on the wings. Could only get about 200 ft./min. at 5000' – 6000'. Broke out about 6000'. Thank God! Was beginning to have a few worries. Many, many woes. "Tex" Frye finished up today. Cunningham & Westberg finished on the one to Frankfurt.

#### **Mission #26 – Kassel (December 15, 1944)**

Briefing about 0545 for the marsh. Yards at Kassel as PFF. Very intriguing weather briefing. Today we have clouds beginning at 800' & going up to about 8000'. Then we have a middle layer beginning about 10000 & running up to the bottom of the high which goes on up to 30000. Over the channel they expected only 8/10 to 10/10 coverage. Then right over the target the high clouds were supposed to thin out to only 4 or 5 tenths. We weren't even supposed to have high clouds. Ain't we lucky. The route on return was supposed to be the same as when going in except that there wouldn't be any break between 8000' & 10000'. More fun! Then the gent that gives with the taxi & T.O. instructions says, "Today's crosswind will be from the right." We were all hot for a back to the sack movement. Comes engine time & no "good word", so first thing we know we're up in the blue. So we break out of the clouds at about 7000' & the sky is as clear as a bell. Seems like the front had moved a little further than they expected because we found it over Germany. Flying around among dense, persistent con-trails all mixed up with clouds, clouds, & more of same. Most perfect weather I've ever seen for a fighter attack & no Jerries. Thank the Lord! Had beautiful friendly fighter cover. We bombed from 27,500. Lost the other two sqdns. (as usual) on the bomb run. Somehow our sqdn. managed to stay together. Lonely planes, parts of sqdns., & so on popping out of clouds all over. Contrails thicker than spatter. Every once in awhile we would have a visual break – up! I flew the bomb run. Couldn't keep my goggles from fogging up. Finally had to take them off. Saw a couple of bursts of flak thru the clouds, con-trails, etc. More yuckity, yucking by Kirk. I'd have to give it to him when my goggles fogged up & he would promptly drop down & back thus efficiently screwing up the low element. Then I'd take it & have to use full boost & he would start glub-glubbing about catching up, etc. Thank God I only have six more to go with the "boss". Came out of the clouds & lost the con-trails after we got off the target about 15 min. Happened to find the other two sqdns. Just by luck the sqdn. was in good formation just at the moment the bombs went away. Uneventful return. Came down thru the clouds over England. Ceiling about 1000'. Visibility not too bad. We bombed from 27,500 with the usual 10-500# G.P. & 2-M17 incendiary. Flew left wing on the lead. Kirk made a real nice landing tonite. Kirk says that Reed said

the flak home was full now & we could either wait for a flak leave or take a seven day leave right now. The general opinion of the crew was – best we take what we can get right now. Personally I'd rather go to the flak home but I don't quite feel like passing up anything. Remember Snow – he decided to pass up his flak leave because they only had three to go. What do you know? Nov. 2! No more Snow!

#### **Mission #27 – Near Coblenz (December 28, 1944)**

We were briefed to hit a rail bridge (viaduct) near Coblenz. All the customary blah, blah, I suppose. We flew old “Q” for Queenie (083) in the lead of the third element. I really enjoyed sitting up there wheeling & dealing. Kirk took us up to the formation. The airspeed got too low to suit him so instead of putting down some flaps & riding it out he decides to go zooming off on some “S-es”. So away we go, round & round. We got so far out that we had to chase the formation like mad to catch them when they finally left the base. Caught up about over the Belgian coast. Then I flew it all the rest of the way in & most of the way back. Beautiful formation, I thought. I really kept it tucked up nice & close. Got some pretty sharp flak along the bomb run & just to help we had some thin clouds at our level if I remember correctly. I remember that they were tracking right up to our element so I does a nice little “S” & Adams on our left wing was, oh ever so happy when we got back. One looked like it burst right where he would have been. On the bombs away, I really had us up in there. Nice and cozy. Our wingmen said we did a good job except coming over England on the way home the lead made a sharp turn & I was in too close & almost stalled Adams out. Did force him to get out of formation. I think I'm pretty sharp. Too bad Kirk messed up the assembly. Put in 6 hours & 25 min. from engine time to landing according to the operational record. Probably took off around 0800. We flew high sqdn. today. According to the records in my 201 file we hit. I think we got the viaduct. Bombed by Gee-H.

#### **Mission #28 – Witlich (December 29, 1944)**

Once again we led the third element, this time flying our dear old 618 “U” for Undertaker – “The Flexible Clipper”. Briefed to hit a hiway viaduct in the city which is near Trier. Don't remember anything in particular. I flew most of the time. Actually it's less strain this way. The old boss is really getting flakky. Sometimes I don't think he has good sense anymore. I don't really believe he knew what he was doing part of the time. What is it they say about crazy people always think others are the lacking ones. As our old buddy J.J. Hoffman used to say – “they ain't got all their smarts”. We put in 5:40 today. Flew in the low sqdn. Nothing of interest as I recall. Just another of those nasty old milk runs.

#### **Mission #29 – Prum (January 2, 1945)**

The first one of the new year. This one, we were to plaster the town of Prum which was the center of communications on the front where the breakthrough was made in Dec. I believe it was started on Dec. 17. I remember all leaves, passes, et cetera were held up for about a week or so during the state of emergency. But due to bad weather the 91<sup>st</sup> only got off once while we were on our leave. The only reason we got our leave was because the orders had already been cut & were on their way to the sqdn. from group before the state of alert was declared. The one mission they flew while we were on pass was on Dec. 24<sup>th</sup>. Really blasted the German front line airfields, I guess. Bombed visually. For some reason the Jerries never hit the boys. Guess they couldn't get thru the escort. Our boys couldn't get back to Bassingbourn because of weather so they had to land at Bury St. Edwards. That must have been a real nite. I guess Bury was one of the few heavy fields open because they said everybody was landing there. No accomodations available so they had to sleep in the planes. I guess it was really cold. Then the next day they were briefed for another mission but the ice was so heavy on the planes that it was finally scrubbed. Part of the 8<sup>th</sup> from other bases sent over. Anyhow by this time (Jan. 2) the breakthrough, which penetrated to a depth of 30-40 miles into Belgium & Luxembourg, has been



halted & is being slowly beaten back. Military leaders estimated that it might delay the end of the war as much as six months altho' later it was claimed that it cost Runstedt more than it was worth. The Yanks were said to have stayed in their foxholes & fought even as the Jerry tanks rolled over & past them. The fortress of Bastogne never fell & was relieved from siege after about a week by a breakthrough of Patton's boys. But about that 29<sup>th</sup> mission – we took off at 0739 in 379 "O" for Oboe. Coincidence – the ship number & time of T.O. Relegated back to a wing. Flew right wing on the high. Kirk cragged out behind as usual. Actually I've been flying closer & better formation than Kirk. Really, tho', for the last five missions or so he wasn't exactly the sharpest boy in the world (Course, I was! Sure, that's probably why we were flying a wing again. Well, that element lead was fun while it lasted.) Remember nothing about the target or flight. Probably a nice quiet day. No doubt, the wonderful 91<sup>st</sup> fairly "clobbered" the city, as usual. (It says here) We were I the high sqdn. today, fourth group into the target. Got back nice & early. Landed at 1300, ate our cake, gave the good word to the interrogator & off to "home". (I suppose all this is true. It usually was.)

### **Mission #30 – Colongne (January 3, 1945)**

I believe that this was the one that "Smitty" got it on the way back home. Kivi finished up on this one – I think. We were in the low sqdn., the first group into the target. Flew 618 on the right wing of the lead ship. Oh, what a sad story! Took off at 0758. We were in rather sad position as I recall. It's a pretty certain guess, anyway. If I recall correctly the flak was right in there but not very heavy. No bad damage to us, anyway. Course as I look back I wonder if we couldn't have gone thru Hamburg at 10,000 & come out on the other side happily driving along unhurt. Oh, lucky, lucky me, to live in luxury! Supposedly hit the marsh. yards in Cologne. Back home & landed at 1358. It was one of these last two missions (either the 29<sup>th</sup> or 30<sup>th</sup>) that a piece of flak hit right above the windshield on Kirk's side. Cracked a big arc in the glass & put a nice dent in the frame. We went right thru the smoke. Poor Kirkham really got scared. He said "Hey! They're shootin' at me!" The funny part was I don't think he meant it for a joke. I got a big laugh out of it all. Had my "philosophy" pretty well worked out. I almost had myself convinced that there wasn't anything to worry about – if I got hit, so what. The world wouldn't particularly lose anything but ideals & hopes of mine. Course I did still sweat "a little" on #35.

### **Mission #31 – Cologne (January 6, 1945)**

That big old 35<sup>th</sup> one for the boys. Finished up Kirk (Thank God!) & the crew today. Exceedingly rare for all the enlisted men to finish at the same time the pilot did. Back to the marsh. yards at Cologne. Really tearing up the Jerries front line communications and supply. Took off at 0733 in the old Flexible Clipper for the last time. For some ghostly reason Reid got the mad idea of having us lead the high element. Since the 323<sup>rd</sup> was lead sqdn. today that made us deputy lead. Pretty sad job of flying! We lagged, zagged, zigged, and slipped. Kirk did practically all the flying (if such it was). Naturally I wouldn't think such things about my own flying. But anyway we got back safe & reasonably sound. Landed at 1358. For the last time I've sweated out the Kirkham approaches & landings. Slow flying in prop wash. But I guess it's just as well this way. I learned a lot from "the boss" – both in what to do & in what not to do. I still say he was a really good flier when we came over. Can't say the same as they go back. But Kirkham brought his crew thru 35 missions without an abort. Darn good record! Co-pilots just ride along. (Could I be bitter – or jealous – or something. You cad!) Incidentally the crew got four ahead of me back there somewhere. I think they flew one on Dec. 17. I was supposed to check out Whitten's crew but my first pilot papers had never been made out so group wouldn't allow such rash action. So I sat on the ground. Tough!

### **Mission #32 – Cologne (January 11, 1945)**

New experiences. Rode as co-pilot in the high sqdn. lead ship today. Donohue was pilot – his first mission as lead. Took off at 1002 after due encounters with trouble. First, we flew a 324<sup>th</sup> ship “DF-R”. the plane was supposed to have all the flak suits in it but we came up two short so had to have them sent out. Then we had troubles with the fluorescent lights as I recall. Finally got started & had to stop because a ship in front of us ran off the taxi strip which was frozen over – “about” 2 inches of snow. Finally one of the crew chiefs who knew the “area” came out to “pilot” us around. All kinds of people, a couple of tractors, and various assorted trucks, and lots of sand were scattered all around the culprit aircraft but to no avail. They did manage to pull it a little further on the runway so that we had to go off further to get past, but the old crew chief gave her the throttle & we went wheeling right on around scattering snow all hither & yon – and some other places, too. So we finally got up to assembly along with con-trails & clouds. Found only about six ships of the sqdn. What a daffy ride! The clouds & stuff made it pretty difficult to hold position. We flubbed all around. Donohue wasn’t exactly happy about the whole thing. When we went over the target we only had 8 ships in the sqdn. as I recall. Lots of flak before we went over and at the group behind us, but we got hardly any. Old lucky us. As for the troubles we had plenty of those. The target was visual so McNichol (mine old buddy – more interphone yuckity, yuck on the way back) played with the bombsight. Ah, me! More snafu! The bombs hung up so I had to use the mechanical salvo. What a job! I was pulling with both hands & bracing my feet against the wall & jerking, yanking & pulling like mad. Sweat, sweat – literally! Got one side away almost at once but the other side we dribbled for about five minutes. As I remember we were carrying 250# bombs. I think our smoke bomb went away when the bombsight indices met. Part of our “sqdn.” dropped on it, part on the first bombs that I got out with the salvo & some of them just bombed (who knows where?). Briefed for the airfield S.E. edge of town. Got some bombs on it & the marsh. yards near there. According to reports we hit in the town about a mile from our target. Oh, me! Great life! Somehow Donohue managed to keep sight of the other two sqdns. So we started out chasing them. Pulled out at 170 for awhile & got the sqdn. well strung out. I encouraged him to slow it up a little so we wouldn’t be quite such perfect fighter bait. Finally caught up with the other sqdns. after Charlie Funk did a lovely job of cutting corners here & there. I think this was Charlie’s last mission. Rest of the ride was fairly uneventful. Touched down at 1602. I made a lovely landing. Brag, brag!

### **Mission #33 – Paderborn (January 17, 1944)**

Briefed for marsh. yards at Paderborn. I was scheduled to fly as co-pilot for Lawson. Naturally I loved that since he had all of three missions. Fortunately (I think) we were flying left wing on the low element so I was on the inside. I flew the bomb run & better than half the time I guess. He made a nice landing, tho’; and I didn’t have to sweat out a Kirkham approach making 30 degree banks at 50’ off the runway & 85 mph. Oh, me! The worries a poor co-pilot has. Rode old “Outhouse Mouse”, (636, N-Nan) today. We were lead sqdn. today, the seventh group into the target area.

A new directive came thru from division requiring the group lead ship to carry an “experienced & reliable pilot” in the tail as observer. So real quick like Lt. Gates’ name starts appearing as the lucky boy. Sounded like a lot of fun. See more things & get more variety this way. Then I began thinking about the cold back there. I could just see myself with ice cubes for hands & feet. Sat around on the ground awaiting my initiation for about a week before we finally flew the mission. I dreamed one nite a few nites before the mission that I got out in the tail & discovered that I had no clothes, but Maj. Taylor wouldn’t let me go back for them. So here I was way up in the air freezing to death. Wonder what Freud would say.

### **Mission #34 – Cologne (January 28, 1945)**

Up into the blue after various difficulties – among them my catching the release handle on the escape door in the tail. Davis – the waist gunner – and I were trying to get it fixed when all of a sudden the plane starts to move. Naturally, I wouldn't pull the thing till the engines were started & it was about taxi time. I raced up to the waist door, dived in & yelled to Sherriff to stop the ship (via interphone to the Maj., of course). So they slap on the brakes & the plane keeps right on sliding on the icy taxi strip. Finally got it stopped & Davis, Luther (Dietrich's old engineer), & I got it fixed. That probably started the Major off well. Oh, happy day. I heard later that he thought I yuckity-yucked too much on the interphone. Boy, he should have listened in on our crew. And on these last two flights, our dear old lead bombardier, Dave Bronstein ("Murphy" according to McNichol – also known to me as "McSnickles"), only made about ten oxygen checks per mission. A guy could pass out, freeze to death, and die of old age before he'd ever get called. So Davis & I held our own little checks every once in awhile. I took notes like mad on the formation. Oops, again! Just decided it was the right mission. It was on this one that they were so thick I couldn't see our low sqdn. & most of the time I could only see the lead of the fourth element (neither of his wingmen). I remember the target was visual but I never got to see what Cologne looked like from the tail because we left such thick trails. Luckily the Jerries didn't poke their little snoots up thru those con-trails or we would have had no end of worries. I can just see me back there shooting like mad. I heard reports that I scared the poo-wadden out of the low sqdn. on my last (35<sup>th</sup>) mission by test firing out across them. Mighty "purrrty" little headlight tracers we have. I rode the landing down in the tail. Basnight made a lovely one - felt like from back there anyway. Rather funny feeling – this "backing" into a landing. Look down & see the ground coming closer & closer & still no field. Then – pop! – and all of a sudden there you are on the runway. More fun! We bombed the Hoenzollern bridge supposedly. Dave said we got a couple of direct hits on the bridge but most of the bombs hit at the western approach. I guess we pretty well annihilated the old cathedral. I really envy the people who saw the beauty of Europe before so much of it was destroyed in this war. Guess there isn't much left of cultural interest in Germany's cities. And besides that all the German blitz's & thieving probably pretty well messed up Poland & France & the Balkans. If I ever get around to my world travels I'll be viewing a lot of plaques saying, "Here stood –", "These are the ruins of –", or "On this spot there was –". Make lovely photographic additions to one's war album. I can show my kiddies the ruins of Cologne's once magnificent cathedral & say, "See what daddy did!" So I got back home safe again although slightly weary. There we were riding over Cologne, flak "busting" hither & thither, the Major yuckity-yucking about how the formation was, me trying to take notes, and struggling vigorously to get my flak suit on. The latter had been going on for about half an hour before we got there. I'd almost get it up on my shoulders when down would come my parka hood & the flak suit would fall back down on my arm. I squirmed, and I pulled, & I "trapped" the suit up against the wall & tried to slide up into it, & attempted to lie back & pull it up around me, and I – Ah, me! And by that time we were thru the flak & off the target – so I threw the damn thing away & turned on full oxygen for awhile and attempted to recuperate. Great life the tail gunner must have. And so I had the big one left after 1446 on Sunday Jan. 28. And didn't it seem big then. I remember wondering if there could be a little specialty just saved for that 35<sup>th</sup>.

### **Mission #35 – Gotha (February 6, 1945)**

Having been briefed for BERLIN, DRESDEN, OR MERSEBURG, we end up at Gotha. So who is unhappy? Dear friend, you aren't look at me. Of course we did pick interesting routes in & out. Course it's a good way to check the flak maps. I prefer checking the empty spaces. They usually have so much more healthful climate. Anyhoo! We took off in the "Big-gas bird" (Quote from name of one of the

ships from Kimbolton.) at some early hour. Don't care how late it was it was still "early". Seems to me that T.O. was about 7:30 if my poor memory serves correctly. Assembled at 10,000 to save oxygen since we were in for a long haul. Briefed for Berlin on plan A & Merseburg or Dresden (if either were visual) for plan B. finally decided on plan B as just the thing to put joy in the hearts of all good hunters. If neither M. or D. were visual then we were to pick a target of opportunity that was visual & bomb it. Naturally everybody hoped for many, many clouds in the lower strata over SE Germany. Yesterday we were briefed & then scrubbed on a trip to Munich. The S-2 had all the poop that the refugees from Berlin were pouring into Munich & that activity there had increased after last Sat. raid on Berlin. The boys bombed the center of Big "B" visually. Gulp! Quite a raid. I guess. Lost the lead ship of the group with Col. Lord aboard. Maj. Calletti was supposed to go but for some reason Lord took his place at the last minute. And – Gulp! – they got a direct hit in the – Gulp! Gulp! – tail. Gotta quit that stuff. Makes us tail gunners a trifle "noivous" as "we" say in Brooklyn. The papers said that the bombers blasted a two mile wide strip across the heart of Berlin. Swedish reports claim that 25,000 civilians were killed. Tough! Poor old "Dobby" (Dobrowitz), his anti-civilian-killing feelings probably got a real jolt there. Well, at least it was visual. Theoretically the MP1 was a center of communications or something (like the MP1 we had for Munich yesterday – Big laugh followed the poop about that we were supposed to be hitting right in the center of Munich). Anyway we got up in the blue today & went roaring out across the channel at 10000'. Couldn't get in our position in the bomber stream because a couple of other groups were six or seven minutes late & occupying our place. Crossed the Dutch coast at about 12000 ft. still out to the right of the stream & began getting accurate flak right up in our formation. Watched that old red stuff all around. Gulp! Wished for more flak suits. I gave up the idea of trying to put one on, so I took the parts of two and "lined" the tail with them. Pulled the old flak helmet down a little tighter, tried to think of how there was no sense in being afraid, and wondered if maybe I should have been a little more attentive to my Christian duties. Maybe it's true that only the good die young. Honest! I'm not that good. Everybody got thru that one O.K. after about 10 minutes of evasive action & trying to slide over into the stream. 12,000-14,000 is no altitude to be checking the accuracy of the kids' shooting ability. I guess they were pretty well checked out on the alt. but thank God, a little off on the pin-pointing of position. So we go driving on into Germany leading our little flock uneventfully. Then Maj. Taylor switches over to interphone & says that Dresden & Merseburg are obscured so we are to pick up a target of opportunity. Almost immediately the Mickey man, Sherriff, reports that Jena is coming up right ahead so they start a run on it, Dave opens the doors & we're about 30 sec. from the target when the Maj. Switches back on interphone, hears sighting angles being called off, & promptly has a couple of "caniption" fits. He starts yuckity-yucking all over, tells them not to bomb, close the doors & why doesn't somebody tell him these things so he can call the other people & let them know what's going on. So we drive over Jena & its two railroads without bombing. Luckily no flak. In the meantime we have gotten off the bomber stream to the left (south) so far that we can't see anybody else. How nice! One little lonesome group chasing around south of Leipzig. Once I saw four of our fighters but they didn't stay long. Anyway we turn east & start back out. Pick up an interesting little place that we find out was Gotha when we get home. Wellings was lost by now after being "flustered" no end by Maj. Taylor's "interruption". He thought we were about 20 miles south of the course we were actually pursuing. So we go driving up wind – ground speed about 90 mph – and Dave spots a town up ahead, the whole area being visual by now. Major Taylor decides to take a chance & bomb upwind. Wellings was sweating little steel needles and quote he, "If we get any flak we've really had it with this ground speed." Get 'em up in the other alley. Clay pigeons coming up. But luckily either all the flak guns were gone or all the gunners were snoozing under the spreading chesnut trees. Course that didn't stop us from almost getting killed. Everything is progressing real nice & peacefully so I call up Davis (waist) & tell him I am going off interphone a second to get my flak helmet. In that

second the high sqdn. leader has to get vertigo and he comes zooming over & down on us. I guess Basnight happened to glance over & saw him coming cause just as I was straightening up – zoom! – down we go. At first I thought we'd been hit by flak. I pulled myself back on the seat just in time to see four props of the high sqdn. lead ship swish across our tail. Looked like they were about two inches from my nose. I was too surprised to be scared. I guess Adams, flying our left wing, just got out of the way in time, too. Wow! Too close for comfort & those flak suits aren't thick enough for that. After that the high sqdn. dropped back & the came on in on their own bomb run; the low followed us in. More fun! The high came in from about 7 o'clock behind us & almost dropped on the low sqdn. More snafu! Maybe I'm not lucky in those lead ships. Then after going over the target we began getting flak – light but fairly accurate. Discovered after getting home that we had been going right along beside a railroad. Sharp pilotage navigating. And to think, my old buddy, Dooley, was up there helping with the navigation. He was the “book-keeper” for Wellings. Hey pard! About this time we started looking for the bomber stream to keep us company. Guess they had all gone home by then. As “Hoofman” (Hoffman-to the world at large) used to say (sense – Picadilly, heart of the nation), “Which way did they go, Goerge? Which way did they go?” Somehow we finally managed to drag everybody back O.K. I observed the curious little “bullseye” rainbow rings on the clouds once again & tried to take pictures of it with the movie camera (16mm.) furnished by the group. More stuff for the “experienced & reliable pilot” to play with. Supposed to take pictures of group at IP & at bombs away which I did like a good boy. Also took pictures of the target. Wonderful view. Lots of white smoke. More discoveries when we got back. At the northeast corner of the town is an airfield & an aircraft parts factory. So Dave bombs what looked like warehouses along the railroad. Pictures showed that the groups' bombs hit on both sides of the railroad & really plastered the city park. No birds & bees & flowers to learn from. We'll wreck they're morale. Heh, heh! And so we came back home & found the field all socked in down to about 200' or less. Lovely visibility (?). Planes nice & thick. Had a couple of C-47s come in at us from 3 o'clock – one went under & one went over. Fortunately they're formation wasn't too tight. We went around three times due to missing the runway, being cut out, et cetera. One B-17 came right directly into us & just passed underneath us going the opposite direction. Everybody busy as little bees. “B-17 coming in at 9 o'clock. Collision course!” He turned inside us. And then – finally we made it. Eight hours & 45 min. since engine time. Down for the last time on that tour. Thank God I didn't have to sweat out Kirk that day. Not good for the nerves. Pretty comfortable ride today. Nice & warm. Outside temp. was -38 degrees at 25000 as I remember. It was 50 degrees below on the other raid (my 34<sup>th</sup>) but I was really dressed for it. Little too warm.

Gates diary provided by Wilson

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