

WAR DIARY OF NICHOLAS MANDELLA 450TH BOMB GROUP 723RD SQUADRON

FORWARD

This is and will continue to be an accurate and true account of experiences as Radio-Operator-Gunner of a B-24 heavy bomber. Any similarity between my writings and good grammar and punctuation is definitely and surely accidental, due to my limited literary talents.

On our first mission an experienced Co-Pilot, Waist gunner and Tail-gunner replaced, Haworth, Johnson and Weiland, but I am relating the story as if they had been along so as to keep this as a story of our crew. Poetic license claimed.

I write this solely for the interest of my beloved wife, Mary, and my dear Mother and family, as I know that they want to know all that I cannot tell them because of censorship regulations. In the event that I may be chosen as one of the many boys who shan't return to happy homes ever again, I shall, at least be happy to know that someday, after this war has ended, this book will offer some explanation to those I love so dearly and for whose happiness I willingly give my all.

I pray that I may find a safe return home, but if that is not the Lords' wish, it is His will. May God Bless you all, always. Goodnight, dearest heart. I'll love you forever.

Nick

B-24 Combat Crew Nos. and Crew
2nd Air Force Crew No. 4316 “Best in “A” Flight”
Boise, Idaho Phase
Training Crew No. 10
Traveling APO 16282-AQ-40

Pilot – Victor A Bahr – Long Bottom, Ohio – “Greaser”

Co-Pilot – Ed S Haworth – Chicago, Ill – “Curly”

Navigator – Frank E Clark – Los Angeles, Cal – “Handsome”

Bombardier – Fred M Sherrill – Austin, Tex – “Pappy”

Engineer – George W Spuda – Milwaukee, Wis – “Legs”

Radio Operator – N. J. Mandella Jr – Hempstead, NY – “Slats”

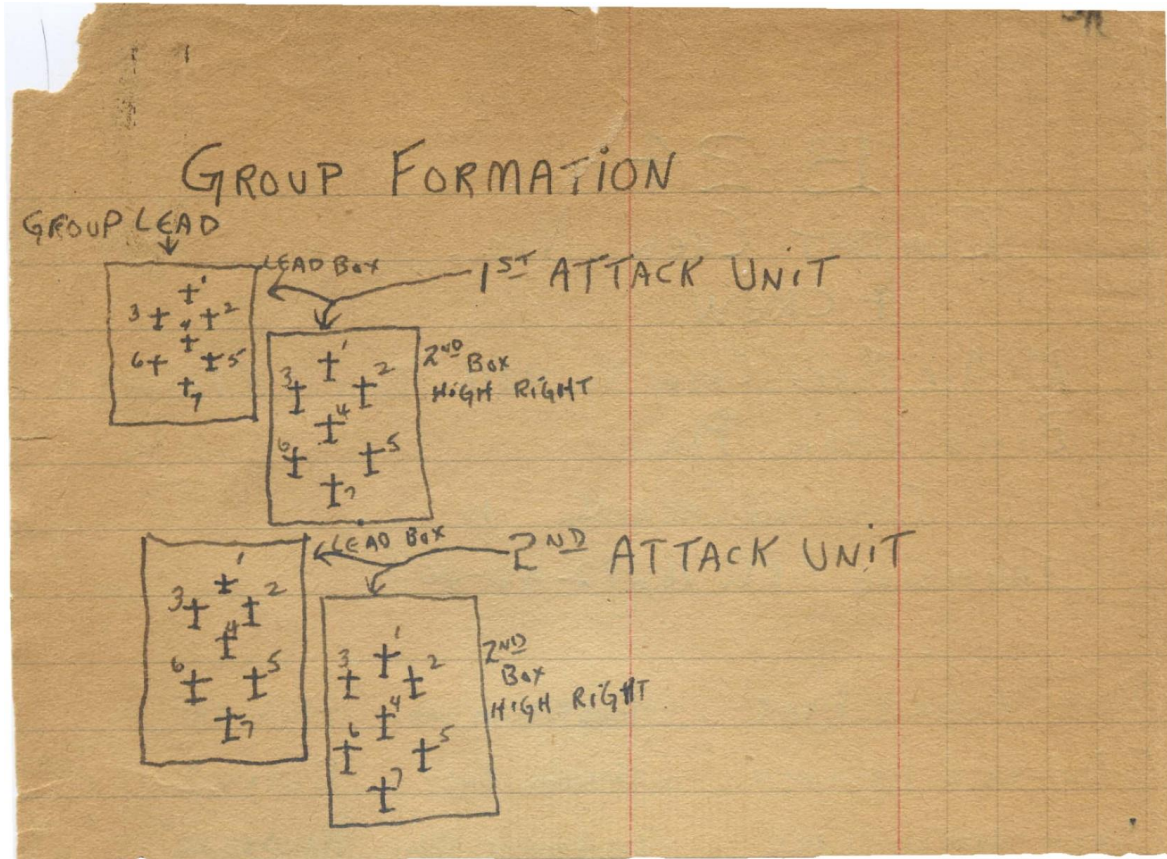
Nose Gunner – Herbert R Britt Jr – Worcester, Mass – “Junior”

Ball Turret – James G Sheehan Jr – Danville, Ky – “Lazy”

Left Waist Gunner – Evald G Johnson – Boston, Mass – “Old Fat/Red”

Tail Gunner – Keith L Weiland – Aurelia, Iowa – “Worry Wart”

Joined 723rd Bomb Squadron of the
450th Bomb Group “Cotton Tails”
July 23rd, 1944



The group assembles thusly after take-off. Squadrons alternate with each mission, different box positions. Each squadron flies seven ships to form one box. Combat crews alternate ship positions within their respective squadron boxes.

No 1. Position: Generally flight commander, Squadron C.O. or if squadron is Groupleader, the Group C.O.

No. 2 Position: Deputy Lead. Takes over in event leader is taken out.

No. 3, 4, 5, 6: No. 4 is flying "In the hole"

No. 7: "Tail-end Charlie" or "Purple Heart Corner"

July 27, 1944

Pos. No. 5

Budapest, Hungary

Target: Manfred-Weiss Steel and Armament Works

Ship No. 985 – “Two-Way Stretch”

Briefing Time: 4:15 AM

Take-Off Time: 5:30 AM

Escort Time: 9:12 AM

I.P. Time: 9:30 AM

Target Time: 9:40 AM

Return: 12:30 PM

Bomb Load: 10 – 500 LB. G.P.B.

REMARKS: After take-off, Jim, Red, Keith and I settled down to our usual half-to-three quarter hour siesta, while ships gained altitude and rendezvoused before setting out on course. We four always take off in waist unless ship is tail heavy. On reaching altitude it gets colder and colder as we go up so we all start putting on our heated suits. Going about it systematically two of us would dress at once then the other two. Jim always has the most trouble getting dressed as it is a little more difficult with Red and I holding on to his pants legs while he tries to get them on. We are all settled down in a few minutes and all catch a few more winks while waiting for the enemy coast to appear. On approaching enemy territory, I already have the detonator in place for protection of the I.F.F. in case of forced landing in enemy land. Everyone stands by their respective turrets and guns. With guns swung out of the waist window, charged and ready to fire. Red and I do our best to scan the skies for enemy fighters, he in the left waist, I in the right.

We picked up our escort right on time, P-38's and P-51's. 55 of them and boy they are really a beautiful sight, especially when at first they are unidentified, then someone recognizes them and the sigh of relief is mutual throughout the ship. They float lazily over, around and under us like guardian angels and believe me they are.

All the way out and up to the I.P. (Initial Point) a lively and humorous conversation is kept up on the intercom, with Pappy and Spuda doing most of the talking. They both being in the nose they have a better view of what is going on ahead. Just at the I.P. our first indoctrination to “flak” was presented to us. One ship in the lead box had been hit and an engine on fire. The pilot peeled off and seemingly attempted to get control but apparently the fire had spread. Some of the crew escaped as five chutes were seen to open. The plane all but disintegrated in the air. Part of it floated back past us. That was extremely unfortunate as there were only a few guns there and only about a dozen bursts of flak seen. On we went to the target. Spuda relayed the message that our lead ship had opened bomb-bay doors, so we opened ours. Nearing the target, the

flak came pouring up at us. All of us had donned our flak suits and flak helmets about five minutes before the I.P. so now we squatted down or kneeled trying to get as much of our anatomy inside of the suit and helmet as was possible and then some. (Jim always says I look like I had built a small tee-pee and got inside of it someway.) We just sat and kneeled there and I don't know about the others but I prayed, and prayed fervently as I never had before. Presently came Pappy's happy phrase, "Bombs Away." Although we are still in the midst of the flak and it is bursting all around us, it is somewhat of a relief to see the bombs go out as there is always the fear of a flak hit in the bomb-bay which would – well we will let that up to ones imagination. After a few minutes we are out of reach of the flak and can rest a little easier. We looked around to see what damage we had caused and from the smoke and fires below it looks like we had hit our objective. The trip home was uneventful, and everyone talking about our first trip. On the way back, after losing some altitude, we were able to remove our oxygen masks and have a much needed smoke. Italy never looked so beautiful as it did and still does when returning from a mission. I had only heartfelt thanks to God for seeing us home safely and related those thanks to Him.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Frankly I can describe it in very, very few words. I WAS SCARED – STIFF.

August 3, 1944

Pos. No. 4

Bressanone, Italy

Target: Ora Bridge Important Railway Bridge at Brenner Pass

Ship No. 919 – “The Steamer”

Briefing Time: 4:30 AM

Take-Off: 5:45 AM

Escort: 9:40 AM

I.P. 9:58 AM

Attack: 10:09 AM

Return: 1:30 PM

Bomb Load: 5 – 1000 LB. G.P.B.

REMARKS: This turned out to be what we fondly call a milk-run. I didn't fly this one with my crew. Another crew was short of a radio-operator (I forgot to ask why) so I filled in. Not knowing any of these boys it was more or less a quiet day for me. One of the boys took a water-melon along to cool it at high altitude and as luck would have it, it wasn't ripe. We flew straight up the Adriatic and on up to Brenner Pass, crossing the coast just east of Venice. Our escort joined us on time and they are always welcome, however once again we had no need of them. (P-38's) We saw no fighters and surprisingly on the bomb-run, saw no flak. That is there was none guarding our target, but there was some far over to our left. It's really a wonderful feeling to be able to stand-up and look out at it knowing you are out of range. The Jerries put up a fine barrage alright but we weren't even close to it. Boy did we plaster that bridge too. We had a photographer on our ship, who said our ship had 3 out of 5 direct hits right on the bridge. We really demolished it. What didn't hit it, hit a mountain rising up from the bank of the river and probably covered up what was left of the bridge. On the way back we just took things easy. This is the kind of missions we like. Larry (Nick's brother who flew with another Bomb Group) was here that day and was on hand sweating our return along with the rest of the boys.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Feeling of relief for an easy mission, though scared and praying just the same.

August 10, 1944

Pos. No. 7

Ploesti, Rumania
Target: Oil Refineries
Ship No. 175 – “UMBRIAGO”

Briefing Time: 5:45 AM
Take-Off: 7:00 AM
Escort: 10:30 AM
I.P. 10:35 AM
Attack: 10:45 AM
Return: 2:00 PM
Bomb Load: 10 – 500 LB. G.P.B.

REMARKS: Larry had slept over last night and went to briefing with us. On entering the briefing room all of us were still sleepy-eyed, but one look at the map on the wall and we were wide awake but quick. As the S-2 officer put it we were hitting the old standby. Our group had hit Ploesti thirteen times before. Intelligence reports show approximately 288 flak guns defending the area. This was going to be no picnic. It wasn't.

On the way out we had the usual chatter and kidding around over the intercom, but everyone had that same funny feeling. We picked up our escort on time and donned our flak suits and helmets in plenty of time. This was going to be rough and we knew it. We started our bomb run and all too presently the Jerries started tossing it up at us and believe me those gun-crews of theirs must have taken post-graduate courses. They have radar controlled guns which are plenty accurate. We throw tin-foil out of the waist windows while on the bomb-run which messes up their radar but they still manage to keep us pretty closely in their sights. This time we could hear it, I hadn't heard it before. For an exploding shell it sounds more like the beat of a big bass drum. Wump. Wump. I have never prayed more fervently and devoutly than ever before. Wump, Wump, they put a whole pattern of it right under us. I was sort of kneeling and leaning on an extra flak suit and a life-raft when I caught a small burst of flak in the chest. It came up from below the waist window, splintering the wooden floor board. I was too scared to look and was wondering whether I was hit or not.

We finally dropped our bombs and after a few minutes rode out of the flak area. The skipper called up to see if anyone was hit. All the boys reported in, in turn but when it came to my turn, I asked him to hold it for a minute while I looked. I didn't feel any thing and thank God my flak-suit had saved my life. It had four little holes right over the heart, one of them just about a half-inch from the edge of the suit. I was plenty lucky but our troubles weren't over. No. 2 engine had been hit and was smoking so Lt. Bahr feathered it. We were flying “tail-end Charlie”, No. 7 position so the boss had to keep her in there with three engines. On the way back No. 3 engine prop ran away three times and old Bahr-head was doing a magnificent job up in that cock-pit.

We were going along alright for awhile and keeping up with the formation flying it about 10,000 feet. Suddenly No. 4 engine started acting up and the skipper had to feather it for a few minutes. That left us with only No. 1 and No. 3

running and just at that time No. 3 started running away again. We were approaching some mountains, approximately 7,500 feet high and when the No. 3 engine started running away with No. 2 and No. 4 both feathered things looked pretty bad and we all had our chutes ready to take quick leave. Haworth got excited and started chattering over the interphone ordering us to throw all the weight we could overboard. We lost about 2,000 feet in a few minutes and those mountains looked close but again good old Bahr-head proved himself the master. He cut No. 4 back in and got No. 3 under control again. Meanwhile we had started throwing out ammunition and had another pile of it on the floor ready to kick out of the camera hatch when the skipper called and said everything was okay and we would make it alright. He was flying that ship and really doing a grand job of it. Spuda too was there pitching in.

By this time we had lost our formation and had to make it back alone, but as long as we had enough gas, Clark would get us there the quickest way. That boy is a genius at navigating and knows just where he is all the time. We came in alright and Bahr made a pretty good landing with only 3 engines cooking. When we piled out of that ship I was never more thankful. I had been praying all the way in earnest and once again God had heard and answered. There were 28 flak holes in the ship, but luckily none in any of us. We learned later that one of the crews we were with in Boise from a different group over here, had went down and eight chutes were seen to open.

Ploesti had been everything we had heard about it and more. Larry was there again sweating us out and this time really sweating. I thank God and Lt. Bahr and Spuda for our safe return today and as I told the skipper, disregarding all military discipline and good manners, "You may be an ugly bastard, but I sure could kiss you now." Not a very pretty statement but with the feeling of relief and joy I had to thank him.

Later reports say that all eight of the crew that went down were prisoners of war, officially reported. The pilot, Lt. Bodger and the bombardier, Lt. Riley had blown up with the ship.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Plenty of praying and scared to death.

August 17, 1944

Pos. No. 5

Ploesti, Rumania
Target: Oil Refineries
Ship No. 117 – “No! No! Nanette”

Briefing Time: 4:45 AM
Take-Off: 6:00 AM
Escort: 9:35 AM
I.P. 9:52 AM
Attack: 10:02 AM
Return: 2:00 PM
Bomb Load: 8 – 500 LB. G.P.B.

REMARKS: Well, well. Hit the jackpot again. If this keeps up we are going to get in the bad habit of throwing matches in gas stations. Dear old Ploesti with its pretty guns. How we hated the sight of it, but here we were going back for another look. We were a little late going out and missed our escort of P-38's going over the target. Picked them up for withdrawal cover afterwards. As before the Jerries had the smoke-pots going and the whole city of Ploesti, or what is left of it was invisible due to the very effective smoke screen.

This time we made our bomb-run at a little higher attitude which must have fooled them quite a bit. Once again they threw everything but the kitchen sink at us but the majority of it was just a little low, where we would have been had we made this run at the same altitude as before. Nevertheless, it was no easy ride. Every ship returned with some flak holes. We had nine. Jerry Stewart got a piece of flak in his behind, right in the cheek, so he isn't hurt too badly. He's in the hospital now and probably will stay there for about a month.

Going over the target I was again kneeling on an extra flak suit, praying with all my might, and hearing the horrible sound of those exploding flak shells. Wump. Wump. Fortunately we got through the target area without losing a ship. As we peeled over to the right to turn around and head home, I could see a dense black smoke rising through the middle of the white smoke screen. This looked like we had hit some oil but later reports showed poor bombing. As for our ship we didn't come close as something went wrong with the bomb release and Pappy had trouble dropping them, by the time he got them away, we were way past the target. One just wouldn't release at all and after we were on course for home, Spuda had to go back and kick it out.

Things looked rosy, we had our escort, had dropped to 10,000 feet and nothing apparently wrong with the ship. We were enjoying a smoke when suddenly Junior called out flak straight ahead, we cut around but it was too close for comfort, especially when we weren't expecting it. Everyone got through that area okay too but damn if we didn't run into another one. Clark was calling them out and knew we were heading into them but we were following the lead ship navigator in formation. Still flying at 10,000 feet we ran into still another flak area just above some airdrome. This time we weren't so lucky. At that attitude we were like sitting ducks anyway. The formation over to our right lost two ships as they were right in the thick of the flak while our box was skirting the edge of it.

Only one ship evaded it by peeling sharply over towards us and after passing the area, pulled back into what was left of his box. Losing those two ships was really tough as flak is more or less expected over a target, but on course to or from a target we always fly around them for they are marked in all navigation charts. The lead ship always carries two navigators, one riding nose turret. We learned later that the lead navigator had been wounded and the other one had to climb out of the nose and not having kept his own log did not know exactly where we were, and led the group back about 90 miles off course and consequently through these three flak areas. Such things happen I suppose, but it was a tough break and we sweat this one out all the way home. Piling out of the plane there was a nice flak hole just above the waist window on Red's side. They're really aiming at the old man and I. I tell you it ain't safe.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Again plenty scared and did as much praying as any human could. Thank God again for a safe return from another tough one.

August 22, 1944

Pos. No. 7

Vienna, Austria

Target: Lobau Underground Oil Storages

Ship No. 947 – “Merry Widow”

Briefing Time: 4:45 AM

Take-Off: 6:00 AM

Escort: 9:15 AM

I. P. 9:58 AM

Attack: 10:08 AM

Return: 1:00 PM

Bomb Load: 4 – 1000 Lb. G.P.B.

REMARKS: We thought sure this was going to be a new stab at Ploesti with 1000 pounders. When we walked into the briefing room we were, at first, greatly relieved to see the tape laying out our course to target and back reaching up around Austria. Our relief was short-lived however as from the S-2 officers briefing, this was almost as mean. We were to expect intense, heavy and accurate flak and anywhere from 60 to 100 fighters. We are always told to expect enemy fighters, but as yet had not seen any. This was getting close to German soil tho and the possibility was even greater.

As always with that heavy bomb load and full gas load we first sweated the take-off, especially on this runway of ours. The ship rides like a roller coaster and you think we are off, when suddenly the wheels hit again. After bouncing up and down four or five times we finally become airborne, with precious little of the runway left. Talking with Lt. Bahr (“the Greaser”) after the mission I asked him about that and he explained satisfactorily. He could pull her up after the first or second lift into the air, but would rather hold her down and let her fly herself off. There is less danger of stalling out this way and more air-speed is gained.

Taking our usual nap of about an hour or so – we couldn’t do without that you know – we set out on course and everyone got dressed and took care that their guns were charged and ready to fire. As we hit the coast of Yugoslavia, we begin our search of the skies. They must have sent the whole 15th Air Force up there today, or at least to targets in that vicinity as formation after formation of B-24’s and B-17’s passed over us, under us, behind us. The sky was full of planes. One huge formation passed right over us and so close that we caught all their prop-wash, which shook hell out of our ship and us. The air was extremely rough yesterday anyway, besides, although we had a new ship, the control cables had plenty of play in them and was hard to handle. All in all we had a rough ride all the way. We were all feeling a little green around the gills back in the waist. Jim finally tossed his cookies into the bomb-bay, adding insult to injury, so to speak. Keith and I were very nearly on the verge of doing likewise but somehow managed to hold on. As for Red, the Old Fart, was again lying down on his big butt, half-asleep. We let him alone as it really is tough on a guy his age. That oxygen has a weakening effect after awhile.

Junior had to use his flak helmet as a recipient for his breakfast, although fortunately he was able to hold it until after we had hit the target area and were on our way home. On the way out after Spuda had transferred fuel from the wing-

tips auxiliary tanks to the main tanks he called for the booster pump for number four engine. Somehow, somehow, I don't know exactly what happened, except that Haworth made a mistake and feathered number four instead. He hit the feathering button and before it could stop Bahr was already working to bring it back on. The engine let out a roar like an angry lion, then coughed and the prop windmilled a while but he got it back in to normal again. We picked up our escort on time and sure was glad to see them. P-38's and P-51's. The Jerries call the 38's, fork-tailed devils and mean it. I don't know what they call the 51's. Probably haven't thought up a suitable name for them as they are equally as potent as the Lightnings.

We hit the I.P. and Red and I started throwing out the tinfoil, just before the flak started coming up. We were making our bomb run at 24,000 feet and apparently they hadn't quite got our range as yet as most of it was low. We were the first group over the target perhaps the groups following us would not be as fortunate, as still on the run they were getting closer. Right into the middle of all this two ME-109's dove in at us. One headed for a pass at our lead ship and another for the lead ship of the formation to our left. We were flying, "tail-end Charlie" again, also known as "purple heart corner", number seven position which is right in line with the lead ship. Junior got a shot at him as he came through, just under us, by the time Keith picked him up from the tail he was out of range. However there were 3 P-51's on his tail so we didn't worry too much more about him coming back at us again.

Standing at my gun I could see the flak black and red bursts all around us and the formation to our right. Would have liked to have seen what happened to that enemy fighter, but with the flak getting close, we could hear it now, we were waiting for that especially pretty phrase of Pappy's, "Bombs Away, Suh"!! Finally it came and after a few more anxious minutes we were out of the flak. Looking back after we turned we could see dense black smoke. If we didn't hit oil we at least uncovered some of it for the next group to shoot at.

The trip back was almost uneventful. The lead navigator was right on the ball and kept us away from any and all flak areas. We had our escort still with us almost all the way back to the Adriatic Coast, so there was little to worry about. That lead navigator had 48 missions and since we were getting double credit for today, he was all through with the grand total of 50. He was really happy, but took no chances and led us back beautifully, right on course. This had definitely been no milk-run, but it was a lot easier mission than Ploesti ever is, and here we get double for this and single for Ploesti. Oh well. This is the Army.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Praying as hard as ever and just as scared as before.

P.P.S. Just read in the war room that good old "Joe" Stalin had gained 40 miles in an offensive aimed at Ploesti. Are we pulling for him and his boys? What do you think???

August 24, 1944

Pos. No. 6

Vinkovci, Yugoslavia
Target: Railroad Marshalling Yards
Sip No. 968 – “Swamp Rat”

Briefing Time: 4:45 AM

Take-Off: 6:00 AM

Escort: None

I.P. 10:42 AM

Attack: 10:52 AM

Return: 12:30 PM

Bomb Load: 10 – 500 Comp. B. (American Secret Formula ½ again as powerful as TNT)

REMARKS: A dream ride. This one was a cinch that is it turned out that way. Before starting it wasn't a nice one to look forward too. None of them are for that matter. We could have run into a lot of trouble but didn't. We were going up primarily as a decoy, sort of running interference. It was our purpose to draw the enemy fighters away from the Budapest area, so as to avert them from the main air forces attack of oil installations in the Vienna area, which we had hit a few days ago. We followed a specially planned course that I imagine fooled the Jerries plenty. They apparently did not fall for the first, as we saw no fighters at all but they must have had quite a time trying to figure what our target was to be.

We headed up towards Lake Balston then turned right for a few hundred miles, across the Danube then turned right again, recrossed the Danube and then started looking for our own target. The beautiful Danube may look blue to a couple of lovers, but to us riding high, deep in enemy territory it looks as brown and dirty-looking as the Mississippi. Hitting the I.P. we donned our flak suits and helmets, even tho there was no flak expected we don't take foolish chances, and started tossing out the chaff (tinfoil). Not a bit of flak came up and we made our bomb run with no interception whatsoever. Looking down at the target we could see our bombs hit a little to the left, but when all of our group and another group from our wing had unloaded, there wasn't much left of those railroad yards I'm afraid. We could see the smoke of all the bomb-blasts covering the whole of the target area.

Still having seen no form of opposition at all we set our course for home. Somehow, as has happened before, we got a little off course and passed over a large town. Up came the flak. We corrected to the left of it, but some came a little to close. Another box rode right through it. Fortunately our ships got through it okay. We were flying No. 6 position with Smilin' Jack's crew, that's Joe Marazzi's pilot, flying No. 7, tail-end Charlie. Smilin' Jack is evading the flak, pulled over just a little too far to the left than most of us, and wound up directly beneath us and not more than 50 feet below. That's plenty close chum. All went well tho, and except for this one bit of disturbance, it was an easy mission all the way.

The worst part of it to me was having the new-type waist windows, with no deflectors. When the plexi-glass window is missing it's pretty damn cold at 22,000 feet. This plexi-glass window was missing from one side of our ship. Another little incident we didn't exactly care for happened right over the field on returning. As usual, the group flies

right over the field and one squadron, which made up a box, peels off, one after the other in a formation landing, while the others go around the field again and come back in the same way, while another box peels off, until all have landed. We happened to be in the second box to peel off. As we did, Haworth hit the gear lever, but nothing commences. The landing gear would not go down. With illusions of every description on the possibility of having to hit the silk or try to ride her in on her belly, we waited. Spuda, our clever little genius, made the grade and did something to the hydraulic line that made it work and got the gear down alright. He talks a good line of engineering, but he proved his point this once anyway.

P.P.S. Just heard a rumor that, retroactive to July 15th Ploesti would be a double credit mission. If so I'll have to go back and change these numbers, but I think I'll wait until I see for sure. I do trust the Army you know. Just as I thought – Pure rumor.

August 28, 1944

Pos. No. 7

Misrolcz, Hungary

Target: Railroad Marshalling Yards 1200 Cars and 18 Engines

Ship No. 947 – “Merry Widow”

Briefing Time: 5:45 AM

Take-Off: 7:00 AM

Escort 9:52 AM

I.P. 10:47 AM

Attack: 11:02 AM

Return: 2:00 PM

Bomb Load: 10 – 500 LB. (G.P.B.)

REMARKS: Boy do we love these kind. An easy ride and double credit. This doesn't happen too often so when they do give us a mission such as this we really appreciate it. Since there isn't much to relate about this sortie, I'll describe the activities leading up to take-off as I've neglected to do heretofore.

In the afternoon, Squadron operations posts an alert list for the next day's mission containing just the crews who are to fly. Upon seeing our crew listed we naturally start sweating the details. Later in the afternoon, after operations has received the engineering report from the line chief, they post the number of the ship each crew is flying and the position. Still later in the evening the morning briefing time is posted, which in a way means little for if the “operations commandoes” didn't come through the barracks awakening everyone no one would arise in time. Consequently whether flying that day or not all are awakened for briefing, they make so much noise. That is all but a few very sound sleepers. Ahem!!!

On arising, most of the boys go to breakfast. I kind of go for the extra half hour sleep myself. Alright so I am lazy. Just before briefing time we carry our equipment, heated suits, heavy boots, flak helmets, Mae Wests and parachute harnesses, over to the parachute shop to pick up our chutes and flak suits. Then we go to briefing. The S-2 officer has the red tape stretched up on the map to and from the target and describes our course, giving us the latest intelligence reports on flak areas, possible enemy fighter strength in certain areas and the best evasive action routes to take in the event we are shot down and find ourselves roaming around enemy territory.

After briefing, the squadron trucks, take us out to our ships. The officers have their briefing in a separate room and always take longer than ours. As a result we are always at the ship and have our equipment preflighted by the time they get there. The lead and deputy lead ship, radio operators are the only ones who keep contact with the ground and send the bombs away report after we hit the target. Since we haven't flown any of those positions as yet, all I have to do is preflight the radio sets, set the transmitter up on air-sea rescue frequency and preflight my gun and oxygen equipment. As I said we are all through our preliminaries when the officers come out and are sitting around having a smoke. Haworth passes out the escape kits, which contain concentrated foods, maps, compass, money and what-not, and at fifteen minutes before take-off time we all pile in and the skipper starts engines.

The ships all taxi out to the runway in proper sequence, according to positions in formation and take-off one after another twenty to thirty seconds apart. Once in the air the ships assemble, which generally takes about twenty minutes or half an hour, then circle the field awhile, gaining altitude. When all set we take out on course. All went well and we picked up our escort right on time, just as the briefing officer had told us. Three groups of P-51 Mustangs. They sure are pretty to see floating over and around us. These all had red noses and red tails and against the silver fuselage they are easy for us to spot. Ladies and gentlemen the famed Luftwaffe is truly beaten and knocked out of the skies. Again we saw no enemy airplanes in the area where they were expected to be.

The first two groups to hit the target were a little late so we had to alter our course slightly in order to follow them in. Doing this we missed our original I.P. and made our bomb run from a slightly different course as planned. Nevertheless we really nailed the target, in fact all the groups put them right in there this day. When Pappy released our bombs, only one of them went out, something had gone wrong with the intervalometer. On the way back we passed over a small bridge so Haworth pulled the salvo handle, only he pulled it to late and the bombs fell far away from the bridge into the river. It had been a fairly easy ride as over the target, the flak was extremely low and when they did get closer to our altitude it was wild and not very close to us. They must have had the German Home Guard handling those guns today as they didn't even get close enough to bother anyone. They sure weren't any students of the Ploesti school of expert flak gunners in that area. Nothing else very exciting took place.

Greaser and Haworth had brought along two cans of grapefruit juice and on the way back we all had some. It was ice cold, in fact some of it had frozen. Boy that was good. We landed around two o'clock and as usual the Red Cross girls were waiting with doughnuts, coffee and lemonade. They are there after every mission and coming back we really look forward to those refreshments. Also every mission entitles us to a slight stimulant of one ounce of whisky. We are saving ours for our trip to a rest camp or for when Pappy becomes a pappy again. Handsome and Greaser are also expecting but Pappy's is the nearest. We have almost two quarts saved already so should have a nice time, especially since only about half of the crew drinks. Thank you. I'm holding the bottles so that there will be no "quick ones" every now and then by the more indulgent members of this crew.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Still praying hard and long and scared although not as bad as at other times.

P.P.S. Just heard that Wing Headquarters disapproved of the double the Group C.O. had put the mission in as, and has made it only a single. The @##*&* so and so's.

September 1, 1944

Pos. No. 6

Kraljevo, Yugoslavia

Target: Railroad Bridge

Ship No. 385 – “Horrible – Magic Carpet”

Briefing Time: 6:45 AM

Take-Off: 8:00 AM

Escort: None

I.P. 10:15 AM

Attack: 10:25 AM

Return: 12:00 PM

Bomb Load: 4 – 1000 LB. G.P.B.

REMARKS: After getting out to our ship this morning and almost ready to start engines, Keith noticed a small leak in the left tire. Good old worry-wart, he seldom misses finding something wrong and this time we profited. Quickly we changed ships as there are always spares, loaded and ready to go for just such emergencies. The ground crew had the engines all going and we piled in and taxied out in line for take-off.

Just after we became airborne, the interphone cut down to uselessness, everything spoken was just a bumble-up mess and couldn't be understood. I checked the dynameters, amplifier and fuse and all were working properly. Fault may have been a loose wire connection or improper shielding. Instead of tracing every wire I set up the emergency interphone, working off the command set (274N). Just about fifty miles inside of the Yugoslavian coast two fighters approach. They came from in front of us and going in opposite direction passed about 1,000 yards off to our right. Some of the boys say they were Spitfires, others say FW-190's and still others, as I myself think, say they were ME-109's. However they made no attempt to make a pass anywhere at any of our ships and kept going until they were out of sight behind us. Since they had passed so close to us it's highly probable they were Spits, anyway we were all ready for them. It's surprising, and also a consolation, to see how instinctively we all grabbed our guns and turrets and stood ready, tracking them all the way. When Red loaded his gun on the way out, it ran away on him and fired about twenty rounds before he could stop it. That my lads is about all the excitement we had on this trip.

Upon reaching the target we were unable to see the bridge as the first group over had laid them eggs nicely and all we could see was the smoke from their bombs. There wasn't a burst of flak seen. Nice? I love it. We had “Fearless Red” (Lt. Col. Gideon) our group C.O. leading the group today, so he called the first run on the target a dry run and we went right over made a 360 degree turn and came back at it from the downwind side. The smoke still obscured the target, but we let them go this time and since there was still no flak, I leaned way out of the waist window and watched the bombs all the way down. They entered right smack in the middle of the clouds of smoke and even so, I could see the flashes of the explosions. It was impossible to tell whether or not we had actually hit the

bridge, but we couldn't have done any better and methinks pretty surely there is no bridge where one use to was.

On the way home a group of P-51's passed below us and apparently they were on their way or coming from a strafing mission. That's our main work these days, disrupting any and all kinds of communications so as to help trap the Germans down in the Balkan States. By slowing up their retreat from Bulgaria and Rumania and Yugoslavia, it gives old Joe Stalins' boys a helping hand in trapping them down there. It sure was a happy, glorious day around here when "Joe" took Ploesti and Bucharest. At briefing we were told we would have no escort, but also that we might not expect any enemy fighters or any flak in the target area. Of course, there is always the chance that we might meet some opposition but this time intelligence was right on the stick.

This turned out to be a real dream ride, milk-run pure and simple. I don't know tho, why we call any of these little sorties of ours milk-runs even if they are. Every time we set foot in these B dash two fours, we are rolling the dice. So far they have been loaded in our favor, all naturals. What makes a guy sweat tho, is when you crap out in this game, you don't pick up the dice and roll again. Capish??

PERSONAL FEELINGS: As always, praying. Not scared this time just a little nervous. Sounds unbelievable, I know, but it's a fact.

September 5, 1944

Pos. No 5

Ferrara, Northern Italy
Target: Ferrara Railroad Bridge
Ship No. 045 – “Curly”

Briefing Time: 5:30 AM
Take-Off: 6:45 AM
Escort: 9:26 AM
I.P. 9:50 AM
Attack: 10:00 AM
Return: 12:15 PM
Bomb Load: 5 – 1000 LB. G.P.B.

REMARKS: “Little Ploesti”. That’s what the boys had nicknamed this target and I soon found out why. This was the fifth time the group was going after this bridge, although it was my first trip up there. It is very important to the Germans supply and communications lines and they were guarding it heavily. One span had been knocked out in the previous mission and we were to try to knock it out completely, just as other groups have tried before including us and failed. We were the first of the four groups of the 47th wing to go over the target and since we didn’t do so well, I don’t know whether the other groups hit it or not.

Our squadron was flying second box, 1st attack unit and were to go over by boxes, one after another instead of the usual group formation. The lead box had trouble as the lead ship was hit and wasn’t able to stay on the run. As they pulled over, they crowded us off course so we didn’t do any good either, both boxes returning home with their bombs. The other two boxes dropped but although close I don’t think they damaged the bridge much. As we outrode the flak, I looked back to watch the others push their way through the stuff and saw their bombs hit, some a little short and some a little too long. The Heinies had upwards of 90 to 100 heavy guns here and they really knew how to use them. The ship was shaking like a leaf in a wind storm as it always does when those 88’s get close. We were very fortunate to come away with only four holes in the ship. Our lead ship had his controls shot away and dropped out of formation, so the deputy lead ship, No. 2, took the lead and we pulled up into No. 2 position from our No. 5.

The leader got back alright straggling along behind us. We had flown straight up the Adriatic to the target area, went inland, and followed somewhat the same course home, so there was little worry about flak popping at us on the way and also little worry about enemy fighters as our fighters have this area all around us well-strafed and cleaned up. I was looking for the actual battle-line of the ground forces but couldn’t see anything doing. Some of the boys say the shore batteries opened up on us, but I didn’t see that either. Our escort was half-hour early meeting us for some reason or other. Whatever the reason we’re glad of it as those fighters of ours are a pretty picture and give you a somewhat secure feeling.

About 15 minutes from target, Pappy noticed he had picked up the wrong chute and it didn't fit his harness. He came back to the waist to get on of the emergency chutes - we always carry two extras – and both were also the wrong kind for his harness, so he had to change harnesses too. He and Jim were trying to pour Pappy into something that apparently was fitted for a midget. There wasn't much time though so they kept wrestling with it and at the same time, keep their oxygen refill bottles full as they were working far from an oxygen station. They were still at it going over the target, with no flak suits on or nothing. They finally got him strapped in although he could hardly breathe and was bent over like an old man. It could have been disastrous, but watching them, and having that flak popping all around, now that I look back on it, it was very funny. It was a rough target and I wish I could say we powdered it, but unless the other groups hit it, we may be going back again real soon.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: It was a nice ride but going over the target scared hell out of me again and as always I was praying hard.

September 8, 1944

Nis, Yugoslavia
Target: Railroad Marshalling Yards
Ship No. 339 – "I'll Get By"

Briefing Time: 5:45 AM
Take-Off: 7:00 AM
Escort: 9:45 AM
I.P. 10:05 AM
Attack: 10:15 AM
Return: 12:00 PM
Bomb Load: 10 – 500 LB. G.P.B.

REMARKS: We are still pounding away at supply, communications and especially German paths of retreat. This was rather a short mission and an easy one as compared with others. We seem to have a knack for having some kind of trouble on every trip, and this was no exception. We gained most of our altitude circling the field after take-off and rendezvoused with the rest of the Wing, over our field at 12,000 feet, then set out on course. We weren't going far into Yugoslavia, so were supposed to meet our escort at the coast, on the way in. Somehow they were late, but finally arrived, to our relief as usual. P-38's all over the place, protecting us.

As we turned on the I.P., Red and I started dispersing the chaff, when through, we just kept still, sweating out the rest of the bomb run. The flak was coming up alright and they had our range, but apparently did not have too many guns. I think the S-2 officer had said about 20 mobile guns, but being mobile no one could tell whether they had moved any in or moved some out. Anyway the flak wasn't too heavy even if it was accurate. Presently came "bombs away", which is always a sort of thrilling sensation. Don't know why but it is. Just as we outrode the flak and were rallying on course for home, No. 3 engine started shooting oil and smoking. At first I thought it was gas so removed my oxygen mask and stuck my head out the window for a whiff. Luckily it wasn't gas but oil. If it had been gas we would all be, probably, walking back through Yugo. As it was I was ready to take leave until I found out it was oil and everything was okay.

It kept spitting oil and smoking all the way back, me giving the descriptions blow by blow from the waist window, while Spuda and Lt. Bahr kept their eye on the instrument board for No. 3 cylinder-head pressure, oil temperature and oil pressure. They kept her going as long as they possibly could and then finally had to feather it as the pressure dropped off. It was necessary to keep her running as long as possible so as to save gas. When running on three engines more gas is used than when running on all fours, as the other three must pull more at more RPM's. It's Greek to me too, but that's the way it works out. Except for this it wasn't a bad ride at all. We had landed on three engines for the second time now I hope it will be the last.

After we had parked the crate, the ground crew chief drained the remaining oil out of No. 3 and out fell the shattered remains of a few piston rings.

We hadn't been hit by flak at all, it was just an internal malfunction. That was a surprise although it made little difference. We were home again and why something went wrong we weren't particularly interested in knowing, just as long as we knew what it was in case it happened again. Now for some doughnuts and coffee and a shot of rye.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Same as every time. Praying and hoping and scared.

September 15, 1944

Pos. No. 7

Larissa, Greece
Target: Marshalling Yards
Ship No. 285 – “Illegal Eagle”

Briefing Time: 6:00 AM
Take-Off: 7:15 AM
Escort: 10:08 AM
I.P. 10:35 AM
Attack: 10:42 AM
Return: 12:30 PM
Bomb Load: 10 – 500 LB. G.P.B.

REMARKS: This was a very easy one, even easier than briefed as things turned out. It was a nice mission to go on too as this was the first time the 15th Air Force attacked Greece, as we were in a way, making history, they told us. We were assigned a ship borrowed from the 722nd Squadron, a ship that had just spent almost two months in the service squadron getting a new nose section after a crack-up. In short we were going to test-hop the damn thing on this mission and buddy that isn't good.

All the way to the target and all the way back we had troubles. What a life. A guy can't even enjoy a milkrun anymore. Trim tab and control cables were loose, had a gas leak in one of the lines, generators all out of line, nose-wheel hydraulic pressure set wrong were just some of the many things wrong. Spuda took everyone's gum and put it together but before he could plug the gas line it froze and he had to chew it all up again. Dirty job that engineering. We got over the target but that was all as we couldn't see the ground for the 100% cloud coverage, so we proceeded to the alternate target, Salonika a big naval base but – that was weathered in too. That would have been rough as there were plenty of flak guns defending the harbor but since we were already there we would have liked to have hit it instead of hauling the bombs all the way home again. No soap tho so home we came bombs and all without seeing flak, fighters or target. Our escort must have missed us as we didn't see them either. We sweated tho as that old jalopy was really drinking the gas and we made it home with precious little to spare.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Felt like a tourist, yet praying for gas.

September 17, 1944

Pos. No. 5

Budapest, Hungary
Target: Marshalling Yards – 800 Cars
Ship No. 175 – “UMBRIAGO”

Briefing Time: 5:45 AM
Take-Off: 7:00 AM
Escort: 9:55 AM
I.P. 11:26 AM
Attack: 11:35 AM
Return: 2:15 PM
Bomb Load: 6 – 1000 LB. G.P.B.

REMARKS: Someday this crew of ours is going to take a ship up without any trouble. It hasn't failed yet. We get into some kind of mess every time. This trip had all the earmarks of a rough baby. Our briefed course and bomb run from the I.P. to the target took us right down Main Street of Budapest, right over the town. That is what is known as inviting flak. The weather in the vicinity of the base was pretty cloudy so we went right up to altitude over the clouds all the way to the target.

As we approached Budapest from the southwest we could see wave after wave of 17's and 24's coming off the target and huge columns of smoke and fires spreading in the area. We flew around skirting the city at a safe distance keeping the target to our left until we turned in at the I.P. Expecting to be riding through very heavy flak we were sweating it out as usual. I was just about finished throwing out the chaff when “Bombs Away” came. It was almost unbelievable no flak as yet. It couldn't last though and up it came but it wasn't very accurate, about 2,000 feet too low.

After dropping our bombs we rallied sharply to the left and were just about out of range when they finally tracked us down and started coming close. However only two bursts got close enough to be heard by us. We were all trying to get a look at the target then to see how we had done thinking we were out of the flak area so those two bursts scared hell out of us. It had been a very easy run though. We planted our bombs right in there and saw more fires and smoke. More groups followed us so that target was just about wiped off the map. They really plastered it. Seeing all those planes up there gave us first hand proof of the Allied supremacy in the air.

We had a beautiful escort of P-38's who picked us up a half hour earlier than expected and rode us all the way in to the target and almost all the way home again. There were 10 or 12 of them covering each group all the time. Coming home Red and I were stretched out on the floor calling out the 38's as they circled over head. It isn't the best thing to do, taking it easy like that as one never knows when an enemy fighter group is going to jump you, but we were feeling pretty safe and also pretty tired as coming home, instead of letting down to a warmer altitude, the sky was plenty cloudy so we stayed up above. It was damn cold up there at 20,000 feet we had bombed at 23,000 and altogether we

must have sucked oxygen for at least 3 ½ hours. Spuda was keeping close check on our gas supply and was transferring from one engine tank to another. Some way between he and Haworth there was some sort of mix-up and three props at once started to runaway. We lost about 500 feet in a few seconds but Bahrhead was on the stick as usual and recovered okay. Everybody grabbed for their chutes and waited for the Greasers order, but he had everything under control.

On take-off he pulled somewhat of a boner that scared hell out of us and himself too. Taking off, one after another he cut in too sharply and met the others as they came around. The colonel in No. 1 ship passed over us by about 50 feet and the No. 3 ship under us by the same margin. We went skidding right in between them. I thought sure we were going to have company back in that waist for tea and crumpets. More fun!!! Boy there's nothing like it. It says here.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: DITTO as always.

September 19, 1944

Kraljevo, Yugoslavia
Target: Railroad Bridge
Ship No. 947 – “Merry Widow”

Briefing Time: 6:00 AM
Take-Off: 7:15 AM
Escort: None (P-38's)
I.P. 10:14 AM
Attack: 10:20 AM
Return: 12:20 PM
Bomb Load: 10 – 500 LB. G.P.B.

REMARKS: Just to prove how well the Air Force had done its job the last month or so in destroying communications and transportation installations, we were hitting a temporary bridge next to a temporary bridge that had been destroyed near the regular bridge also knocked over. They really mean to keep those enemy forces trapped down in Greece and Bulgaria and the rest of the Balkans. We had been up here a couple of weeks ago and it was a milkrun then with no flak or fighters so we were enjoying this one with everyone in a good humor, singing and kidding around on the interphone. About twenty minutes from the target Keith spotted a fighter at 6 o'clock high and caused us some uneasy moments. Presently they swung around to my side of the ship at about 4 o'clock high but were too far out to identify although we could see plainly there were about 20 of them. We kept a good eye on them as we weren't supposed to meet any escort. We sweated them for about 5 minutes until they got tired playing around out there and moved in close where we could spot them. P-38's. The pretty little devils. We love em. They were probably out on a strafing job and figured they might as well cover us before going home. We didn't mind a bit.

We made our run on the target but something must have went wrong in the lead ship as they didn't drop so we didn't either (Each box of seven ships drops its bombs on their own lead ship. The Bombardiers have almost a big a racket here as the radio operators. The lead Bombardier does all the work and the others, when they see his drop, just hit the toggle switch. Toggle-eers we call them). Anyway it was a dry run so we went around again on a 360 degree turn and came back again. On the turn we could see the marshalling yards in the town, we had hit on our other trip here. There were quite a few cars in the yards although what condition they were in is hard to say. From the amount of bomb craters seen in the yards, if those were the same cars, I don't think their condition is very good. We gunners always report observations of these things, airdromes, trains, bridges (whole) marshalling yards and amount of cars they contain, amounts of barges seen on a river in one place, anything of the like that merits attention to Handsome and he makes a note of them and fixes their positions on his logs and navigational charts. In so doing we don't have to sweat out interrogation after returning as the navigator has it all down and he alone has a brief chat with Intelligence. If those cars in that yard were new they'll make a nice target for another day or a good strafing mission for some fighters.

We made our second run and this time dropped. Only three of ours went out as the other bomb racks failed to work, so we lugged the seven home again. When tested on the ground again they still wouldn't release, which made us feel good as it was then clear to the big boy that it wasn't our fault. Things like that happen every now and then but I wonder why it always happens to us. No. 2 supercharger was oscillating and was pulling anywhere from 30 to 43 inches of manifold pressure. Spuda switched tubes in the amplifier, but she still kept oscillating so the Greaser had a little extra work to do, keeping his eye on the manifold pressure and coming back on the throttle when she got too high. More fun!!! Nothing like it!! It was fairly safe though as we could have even feathered it and came in on three, we had plenty of gas for a change. All in all it was a nice easy run. Like em? I love em!

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Yah, Yah milkrun, milkrun!!!

September 22, 1944

Pos. No. 5

Larissa, Greece
Target: Marshalling Yards
Ship No. 777 – “Lady Luck”

Briefing Time: 7:00 AM
Take-Off: 8:15 AM
Escort: None
I.P. 11:14 AM
Attack: 11:22 AM
Return: 12:55 PM
Bomb Load: 10 – 500 LB. Comp. B.

REMARKS: You've read this chapter before. This was another trip to the target we couldn't see on account of the cloud coverage, only we had a little more fun this time. We had a brand new ship with only a few missions to its credit so the ride was more comfortable than our last visit to Greece the day we test hopped the old “Illegal Eagle”. The weather around the base was bad and at first we didn't think we would go at all, but the target must have been reported clear so we took-off on schedule. We were supposed to rendezvous at 12,000 feet over the field but the base of the clouds was around 14,000 feet. We took off and everyone looked for a break in the clouds through which to go up. That's when the fun started. Boy what a rat race that turned out to be. Twenty-eight ships from the group, all floating every which way trying for an opening, were all over the place. One broke out of the clouds directly ahead of us and coming head on towards us. He missed us, passing about 100 feet below. We found a large breakout over the Gulf of Taranto so went up quick and were at 12,000 feet an hour before rendezvous time. We stayed in that clearing until all the others found us and then formed.

All the way to the target we flew over an almost solid overcast and it looked as though we weren't going to find the target again. On the way Keith spotted three fighters out at five o'clock low and just as I picked them up they dove through the clouds and we lost them. I don't know what they were as they were too far to identify. However that was the last we saw of them although we kept looking. We turned in at the I.P. and started our bomb run. We could see the target from the approach, but as we neared it a large cloud obscured the target area enough to keep the bombardier in the dark. None of us in our box dropped nor any in the lead box, but the second attack both let theirs go and we watched them hit. A few of them came close but mostly they missed. We made a turn, I think was intended for another run but the leader decided against it I guess so we headed home.

It wouldn't have been bad making another run as there were only about 12 heavy guns there and the flak wasn't too bad although they did get a couple of bursts pretty close. The target wasn't really visible tho and rather than scatter bombs all over a Greek town, we brought them home again. Up in Hungary, Austria or Germany they don't mind wiping a city off the maps, but down here in the Balkans, where the people and the government are more or less on the fence as to who they are supporting, it's a bad policy so the Air Force tries to be as careful as possible. The majority of the

Balkan population is really Allied countries now, that is, the people always did favor the Allies I think. Oh hell, you know what I mean.

Anyway, we lugged the eggs home again. I'm sure glad they count our missions as sorties and not on amount of bombs dropped. I'd be at zero still. This was another pretty easy one. They're going to catch me soon and hand me a rough one. These milkruns can't keep up. Darn it.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: DITTO, with more prayers.

September 24, 1944

Pos. No. 7

Athens, Greece

Target: Athens Airdrome – 72 JU-52 Troop evacuation transports.

Ship No. 339 – “I’ll Get By”

Briefing Time: 8:15 AM

Take-Off: 9:30 AM

Escort: None (P-38’s – P-51’s)

I.P. 12:40 PM

Attack: 12:47 PM

Return: 15:20 (3:20 PM)

Bomb Load: 40 – 100 Lb. Demolitions

REMARKS: We really had a rough trip and sweated for hours. Usually it’s the bomb run that causes most of our concern, plus the possibility of enemy fighters but today we had all of that and plenty more. We were tail-end Charlie today for sure as we were the last group over the target and our ship was tailing the group. The Germans are trying hard to get their men out of the Balkans and we are trying just as hard to keep them there. (It’s a close fight Mom, but I think we’re winning.) We were going after these big transports dispersed about the airdrome, in a coordinated attack. Just before the heavies were to hit, a group of P-38’s were to make a strafing survey of the field, while another group of P-51’s were to cover us over the target area. Since there must have been very little fighter opposition our share of the escort didn’t show up. However we did see some 51’s down below us. Perhaps they wanted a close look at the show as this was a very interesting bit of work and the Air Force hadn’t seen very much of this corner of the world.

On the run we could see Athens over to our left the Parthenon plainly visible as was a huge stadium of some kind. From the air Athens seemed to be a very nice city. Each box had its own aiming point and we spread a trail of demos all over the area. From the looks of the pictures we just about covered almost every yard of the area. The flak wasn’t bad at all as we could see plenty of it way down low and very little up by us at 20,000 feet. They must have concentrated their guns on the fighters instead of us which is unusual as we can do the most damage.

It was a beautifully carried plan and one of those rare missions a guy likes to take part in, for a ring side seat. All would have been peaches and cream, and was for everyone but us. Just after take-off No. 1 started shooting a little oil and kept it up all the way out on course. Just before the target it got worse but the Greaser kept her cooking on the bomb run. After rallying for home we had gone only a few miles when it had to be feathered. Even that wouldn’t have been too bad as we were getting used to coming home on three. Spuda is accusing old Bahr-head for cutting one out just because its easier to fly with three throttles than four, it happens so often. Nevertheless this was only the beginning.

After feathering it the damn prop started winding up, windmilling in the opposite direction. Props are designed to rotate in only one direction on a B-24

and when they spin the other way they tear out cylinders and other parts that shouldn't be torn out. If it winds itself up to around 600 RPM's in the wrong direction it may tear off a wing. Happy little thought, but then these big a - - birds are cute little playthings anyway. The skipper got it stopped somehow and we breathed a little easier. We had dropped way back from the formation by this time although we could have kept up, Lt Bahr thought it wiser to hold her at 160 MPH and use less gas. Lt. Sorenson, whom I had flown my second mission with was on his last ride today, No.50, so he peeled off from the formation, made a beautiful tight turn and came in on our right wing to escort us home. He knew there was always the chance of enemy fighters jumping us and figured it would be a good idea to ride herd on us as where fighters may jump one straggler they may not jump two. We learned later that he had suggested coming back to his crew and let them decide. Since they all agreed he came back to help us. It was a swell, grand and noble gesture and we fully appreciated it although an unfortunate incident almost occurred.

The formation was too far ahead for us to see him pull out and turn back so the first look we got at him he was still in the turn with his nose pointed straight at us. We knew it was a 24 but couldn't tell whose it was and with stories around that the Germans sometimes fly captured 24's right along with a formation, we all had our guns on him and ready. Not sure, we were giving him the first shot, then we would have opened up. I hate to think what might have happened had one of his gunners accidentally fired just one round. He finally got around to where we could distinguish his tail markings and then when he hugged our right wing I could see Sorenson in the cockpit, with Troup, his engineer looking over his shoulder, Joe Valencia in the nose and Red Chapman in the waist making faces at us. On the ground, in the doughnut and coffee line, we thanked them for their help and Valencia told us how he had felt with all of our guns looking down his throat. From the time we spotted him coming around until we identified him, I don't think more than a minute or two had passed, but emotions were flowing.

That could have been the climax to this ride but for still another and much more uncomfortable little bit of mechanical difficulty, I noticed a spark shooting off of something in the No. 4 engine. I watched it awhile to make sure and by that time Spuda had come back to the waist. I showed it to him and he didn't like the looks of it either. Since I don't know my butt from third-base about engines, all I could see was sparks and gasoline and even I knew the two don't mix. When Spuda agreed there was a possibility of a fire, I made sure my chute was handy. He went up and pulled out a voltage regulator which had a burned point and thought he had it fixed, but she still kept sparking. He sent Junior up to start pulling fuses while he watched it then he went up and pulled a few more. He had a handful of them, for every electrical connection to that engine except the magnetos but she still sparked. He tested the mags, both right and left but that didn't help either. We were afraid we would have to feather No. 4 too but the Skipper decided it would be alright. I stared for almost two hours at that spark expecting a fire at any moment. While fiddling around up there on the flight deck, Spuda accidentally rang the alarm bell for bail out. Keith came out of the tail like a bat out of the well known place and Jim, Junior and I made a grab for our chutes. Things seemed to be under control tho, so I called and asked why the bell had rung and Spuda explained, otherwise we would probably be walking through Greece right now.

We have something of a new set-up in the crew arrangement now. In order to keep Spuda on the flight deck at all times, in case something goes wrong, he won't have to be climbing in and out of the top turret, or taking the time to get out of it in a hurry to fix something. Instead, Red rides the top-turret and Junior took Red's place back in the left waist with me at the right, while Pappy rides the nose turret. Since he only has to hit a toggle-switch to release the bombs at the same time as the lead ship he can do it from the nose turret. It's a whole lot better all around although we miss the Old Fart stretched out on his butt in the waist.

My eyes got blurred after awhile watching that spark and relaying to Spuda so Jim took over for awhile. We made it back alright and were coming in for an emergency landing with Sorenson behind us now, he had stayed with us all the way, when some jerk cut into the traffic pattern right in front of us. He landed to the right of the runway and we to the left with not a couple hundred feet between us. The tower ordered him to report there immediately after parking, which is a small consolation if we had piled up from his prop wash, but I hope they chewed him out good and proper. However we made it, thank God. We had sweated this one out more than any other and were extra glad to be home. I don't know where we acquired the knack for making a milk-run a rough ride, but I hope we lose it soon. The boys in the barracks are laying 3 to 1 we never make it, finishing fifty missions. Up to now they have no takers. Cheerfully bright future we have in store for us don't we? Brrrrrrrrrrrr –

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Praying more than ever and scared stiff. I'm beginning to wonder whether it's really fright or anxiety. I don't know. At least I know I can keep my head and don't get all excited and jittery which is a help and a good sign.

October 4, 1944

Pos. No. 6

Bolzano, Northern Italy
Target: Brenner Railroad - Brenner Pass
Ship No. 777 – “Lady Luck”

Briefing Time: 4:00 AM
Take-Off: 5:40 AM
Escort: None
I.P. 10:05 AM
Attack: 10:18
Return: 1:00 PM AM
Bomb Load: 8 – 500 LB. Comp. B.

REMARKS: Lo and behold. We flew a mission today without having a single difficulty. That is no mechanical difficulties, of course something had to happen to spoil an otherwise perfect day and as might be expected it was the unpredictable Spuda who supplied the fly for the ointment so to speak. After landing he forgot to turn in the Form 1, which is comparable to shooting an Officer, as far as Operations is concerned, and Lt. Bahr had to write a letter of endorsement as to why Spuda had forgotten to turn it in. Does that sound silly, well this is still the Army.

As for the mission itself it was a swell ride for a change. We were aiming at German supply routes through the Brenner Pass railroad. Our group hit a railroad bridge near Balzano, which city has quite a bit of flak protecting whatever they have to protect. We were just out of their range tho, so could stand and watch them popping away at other boxes hitting the town and other targets in their close vicinity. We could see the flashes of those flak guns on the ground. One battery was stationed on the top of one of the peaks that had been leveled off. We often wish we could somehow shoot back at them.

Those Alps are really high and had snow all over them. We had to go up to 23,000 feet to clear them and was it cold up there. My heated suit works fine but my feet almost froze. All in all it was a nice milkrun for us although two of our ships were forced to land at emergency fields on account of engine troubles and since the weather has closed in again, haven't returned as yet. One of them crash landed but all are safe, thank God, according to reports that came in.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: I LIKED THIS ONE.

October 7, 1944

Pos. No. 6

Vienna, Austria

Target: Winterhafen Oil Refineries

Ship No. 045 – “Curly”

Briefing Time: 7:30 AM

Take-Off: 8:45 AM

Escort: 12:18 PM

I.P. 12:53 PM

Attack: 1:00 PM

Bomb Load: 8 – 500 LB. Comp. B.

REMARKS: We had been sweating this one out for almost two weeks now, but finally made the trip. The weather is still very poor for flying and four or five times we were briefed for this target, and had the mission called off on account of the weather. Once we had even taken off and were maneuvering our way through small openings to get up over the low overcast, only to find the stuff solid again a few thousand feet higher, so came home again. Rather than risk dropping in with a full load, we let our bombs go out over the Adriatic.

Since this target or any target in the Vienna area holds the highest priority, everyone was sort of anxious to go and get it over with as sitting on the ground sweating it out had us all in an emotional strain of jumpy nerves and the like. The weather being fairly clear this day the group, putting up maximum effort of fourteen or fifteen ships to a squadron, hit two separate targets. The 720th and us, the 723rd were hitting Vienna, and the 721st and 722nd were hitting Budapest. Jim was grounded temporarily on account of his ears being plugged so Bobby Grant, a spare ball-gunner, rode with us in his place.

It was a long haul way up there, so we all dressed early for it's fairly cool these days, and settled comfortably as possible until we had crossed the Adriatic and entered Yugo. Once in Yugo we opened the waist windows and slung our guns out, charged and ready as likewise were the turret gunners. Handsome was supposed to have flown with our lead ship, as the squadron is short of navigators, but he too was grounded due to a heavy cold and fever. At present he is in the hospital and coming along okay. Pappy was to be our Bombagator so Junior rode the nose and Red came back to the waist again. Spuda to the upper.

We were briefed to expect heavy, intense and accurate flak and a possibility of 60 to 70 enemy fighters. Not a very pleasant thought but we kept prepared as much as possible. We had a wonderful escort of P-51's and P-38's, pick us up right on time, and like guardian angels, rode herd on us all the way there and half way back. Gee they sure are pretty, scooting around above us and all around us. Upon entering the I.P. we donned our flak suits and helmets and Red and I started throwing out the chaff.

Almost all the way to the target and home again, I find complete consolation in thoughts of home, and all the happiness the future holds for me there, and in prayer. Just before, and while on the bomb run from the I.P. fervent prayer fills my mind and heart. One can never imagine how thankful to God a

person can be after completing a run dropping bombs and pulling out of the flak safely. We had an unfortunate occurrence cause us to turn out of our bomb run yesterday, so we didn't go through the flak. Nevertheless, my feelings were the same and my prayers as ardent. Some may say it was fortunate we didn't go through that barrage, but that's a matter of opinion.

Just as we started on the run, not yet encountering any flak, the lead ship on opening his bomb-bay doors, must have had a malfunction of some sort as his bombs came out at the same time. The deputy lead ship flying number two position quickly toggled his bombs on the sight of the leader's bombs going away. The rest of the ships in our box, realizing that we weren't even close to the target as yet, held theirs, but since the lead and deputy lead had both dropped and there was time for the others in the box to set up their bombsights, we pulled out just before hitting the flak barrage. As we circled around our box was out in an open area without escort so were highly vulnerable to enemy fighters but none showed.

We did a complete 360 degree turn and I guess the leader decided it wasn't worth the chance of taking us through, over the target, so we floated around waiting for the rest of the group to come off, meanwhile salvoing our bombs and hitting nothing but a wheat field or something. They did come pretty close to a small bridge, but didn't damage it any. Not bad for not aiming. We had an excellent view of the target area from where we were and could see the rest of the boys pushing their way through the stuff. Those Heinies sure put up a mean barrage in a concentrated pattern. They have approximately 355 heavy guns in the Vienna area and that my dear is plenty, especially when the majority of them can bear down on you at once.

Miraculously we didn't lose a ship. I will ever contend it was a miracle as watching those flak bursts popping, they seemed to be inches apart at an altitude ranging from 18,000 to 25,000 feet. Our bombing altitude was 23,500 feet which put the boys right in the middle of it. The smoke pots were going full blast down on the ground but the target was still visible and as the bombs hit they appeared to have missed it. One pattern of bombs hit to the right and we could see no oil fires or smoke. Another hit closer and a huge sheet of flame shot up that was almost immediately enveloped in black smoke. All in all it was a bad day for the group as far as bombing went although they did hit at least one large oil storage tank.

We joined the rest of the group and headed for home. The long ride was uneventful except that we let down to around 9 or 10 thousand feet and along the course home, from small towns in Yugo, a few bursts of flak came up at us. It seemed to be 40 millimeter stuff, but with only a few bursts and not close enough to do any damage no one was hurt. It was annoying tho. At one place they threw up what looked like rockets. Four balls of fire, looking something like tracers but larger, came up and popped about a thousand yards behind us. They had the appearance of roman candles, like we used to shoot on the fourth of July, only bigger. As it turned out it was really an easy double for us but as I say it was unfortunate or fortunate depending on ones opinion. As for myself, after hauling those eggs all the way up there and sweating it out for so long I would rather have dropped them on the target, than spreading them over the countryside, even if it meant going through all of that flak, I'll be going through quite a bit of

flak again, quite a few more times, and if any of it's going to catch us, it might just as well have been then as later.

"Axis Sally", the German radio announcer, who broadcasts to all of our forces here in Italy and England, came out with a challenge to the 15th Air Force, to again raid Vienna. She says they are waiting for us. Well we answered that challenge yesterday and there wasn't anything in the way of defenses that they haven't had there all along so I guess it was just more of her threats. That young lady whoever she is has caused a great deal of concern to the boys of the 15th. There have been times when groups have taken off and just as they were rendezvousing over the field, she has come on the air, telling them what groups they were, their course out, their escort, I.P. and target time and the target, the whole works. She really gets the straight dope from somewhere and all too often. However we may not have done so well in answering her challenge yesterday, but we'll be going back again and again. In fact we were briefed for it again this morning but the weather closed in and we couldn't go.

The boys who went to Budapest had awful luck. Our squadron commander was leading the 722nd squadron and went down, he and four ships, all five out of the same box went down. The Krauts must have had them right in their sights. Some of the boys who got back had seen some of the chutes come out, so no one knows as yet how many there were in all who got out safely. The Germans are pretty good about turning in the reports on prisoners of war to the Red Cross in Switzerland, so in a while the report will come back to the group. I'm hoping all of them are safe, but I know that is highly improbable. He was a good joe, that C.O., Major Murray, a good clean-living man. He used to lead us in our daily Rosary this month of October, so now I offer my prayers for him along with all the others and my loved ones at home.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Anxiously praying hard as always.

October 11, 1944

Pos. No. 5

Vienna, Austria

Target: Oil Refineries

Ship No. 045 – “Curly”

Briefing Time: 6:45 AM

Take-Off: 8:00 AM

Escort: None (Briefed P-38's – P-51's)

I.P. None (Briefed 12:20 PM)

Attack: None (Briefed 12:28 PM)

Return: 11:30 AM

Bomb Load: 8 – 500 LB. Comp. B.

REMARKS: That rough baby again. That is it was supposed to be and we were sweating it as usual. Handsome is still in the hospital so Pappy was again Bombagator. Haworth got grounded for a cold and fever and was replaced by a new co-pilot, just arrived a few days ago and this was his first mission rather, his first two as this one would have been good for. We rendezvoused and set out on course for that long haul up there. We had all just finished putting on our heated suits and were just getting comfortable, when Pappy started bitching and wondering where we were going. Seems we had run into some weather and in trying to go around it we were some 80 miles off course, heading into Yugo.

Lt. Col. Jacoby was leading. Junior was also grounded, and Dave Laughon, who sleeps in the bunk next to mine was holding down our nose turret. He has 37 to his credit now. We went through one flak area and in about 5 minutes, right through another one. Being so far off course no one had any maps or charts along for this territory so we just floated around over there trying to get around the clouds. Finally they decided it was no go so we turned around and came home. A couple of the boys in the barracks had 49 and were really sweating out a mission credit. Since the whole formation had gone through two flak patterns they gave us a single credit.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: This one was a gift although at the outset I was really praying and sweating.

October 12, 1944

Pos. No. 6

Bologna, Northern Italy
Target: Troop Barracks – Troop Concentrations
Ship No. 603 – “Kathleen”

Briefing Time: 6:30 AM
Take-Off: 7:45 AM
Escort: 11:44 AM – P-38's
I.P. 12:18 PM
Attack: 12:25 PM
Return: 2:30 PM
Bomb Load: 40 – 100 LB. G.P. (Anti-Personnel)

REMARKS: This was to be our important action. Just after our group and the three other groups of the 47th Wing hit this area, our ground forces were to move in on it. I hope it was successful. Our course took us out over the Ligurian Sea, breaking out of the coast about 60 miles above Rome and picking up our escort just as we turned into Italy again to go across the boot towards our target. Since we had a ship with open type waist windows we kept ours closed as long as possible, before opening them to swing our guns out, as it is getting extra cold up there these days. We were at 23,000 feet at a minus 26 degrees.

At the coast just as we picked up our escort of P-38's, Red and I slung our guns out. It wasn't long then until we were at the I.P. and our course took us straight out into the Adriatic. It is surprising how quick we crossed Italy you could almost see both coasts, from the middle. We hit the I.P. and started on our bomb run. The 38's were zooming over us, sweeping back and forth, and leaving beautiful vapor trails. That was a wonderful sight to see.

Still on the run the flak was popping all around us, one in particular burst right underneath us and rocked the ship violently. Our interphone had cut out earlier and I had set up the emergency interphone on the command set. With our jack boxes on command we could hear all the pilots' inter-ship communications, although we wouldn't be transmitting unless the skipper switched the transmitter selector switch to the out going frequency. There was a box of planes directly beneath us, so we didn't drop our bombs and rallied left. On that left turn we encountered more flak instead of turning out of it.

As we came out into the Adriatic a few small guns were still popping away at us, although most of it was low. As we didn't have enough gas to carry that load of bombs back, we dropped them in the Adriatic. I watched them going out and saw the fuses spin out. They sure scatter out all over the place, making a large scattered pattern when they hit. Just below the area we had come out of, we witnessed some sort of naval engagement. A destroyer was blasting away at four or five other ships who were trying to hide in a smoke screen. We could see the destroyer gun batteries flashing, although there appeared to be no fires or oil smoke coming from the other ships, he seemed to be giving them holy heck.

We closed our windows again as soon as we thought it impossible to be jumped by fighters, well almost before it was impossible. It was terribly cold up there and we hadn't started letting down yet so since we still had our escort we

pulled our guns and closed the windows. That isn't exactly cricket or a good thing to do for ones safety, but it was a lot more comfortable. Junior was still grounded and another gunner I didn't know took his place, Pvt. Schultz. We had another co-pilot, who was a better pilot than the one we had yesterday. He too put in his first mission with us. Well that adds another to our list, almost halfway now.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Ditto.

October 14, 1944

Pos. No. 5

Maribor, Yugoslavia

Target: Railroad Bridge

Ship No. 311 – ~~“Hi-Get-By”~~ “Duchess”

Briefing Time: 5:45 AM

Take-Off: 7:00 AM

Escort: None

I.P. 10:27 AM

Attack: 10:32 AM

Return: 1:30 PM

Bomb Load: 3 – 2000 LB. Comp. B.

REMARKS: A diversionary raid. The bulk of the 15th Air Force was hitting Vienna and we were to draw the enemy fighters towards us. Our course was plotted in such a way as to make the enemy think we were heading for Vienna and to draw their interception. With no escort we always sweat these kind out as when the Luftwaffe hits, they don't hit in pairs anymore, they travel in dozens, its safer for them.

As we came abreast of Lake Balston we turned west and went on to our target. The flak wasn't too bad and we made a nice run. I was looking out of the window to see the bombs hit. One box had hit the marshalling yards just in the town close to the bridge we were hitting. They really covered the yards alright and while watching the smoke rise from that bomb pattern, ours hit right smack on the money. Those 2,000 lb. babies really go off with a bang sending up a huge red flash. If that bridge is still standing it's made of something a million times stronger than steel. We really laid them in there.

After coming off of the target we watched about five more boxes go in. All told they literally wiped that area around the train yards and bridge right off the map. The smoke just kept pouring up as more and more bombs rained in the area. We floated around the target area for about 20 minutes trying to locate the rest of our group, but couldn't find them so our box came home by itself. Junior and Haworth are both still grounded and Handsome is still in the hospital. Lt. Fitzsimmons was our co-pilot while John O. Tate held down the nose. Pappy again Bombagator. Fitz was Capt. Kahan's co-pilot and the Capt.'s crew was flying lead with our new commanding officer, Capt. Smith as pilot and Capt. Kahan as co-pilot.

About sixty miles from the base here tragedy struck and brutally. The lead ship feathered number four engine and dropped back out of formation. As he did so the formation scattered, sort of opening out in a straight line. Capt. Kahan dropped back and peeled over beneath us. Jim was standing in the other waist but figured the same as I, that they were heading straight in for priority landing, so we just forgot them for a moment and watched the other ships jockey back into position. No. 2 took the lead and we pulled up into No. 2 position. When we landed, Col. Davis, the group operations officer, drove up and asked us if we had seen a box leader crash land about sixty miles from the base. It hit us like a bolt of lightning as we never for a minute thought they were in any trouble other than

the loss of one engine, and that isn't too serious as quite often ships come back with one gone. It's strange that I didn't watch them all the way, because whenever I had seen a ship feather one and drop back out of formation I have always kept an eye on them to see how they are doing and report it to Lt. Bahr. Somehow they just didn't strike me as being in trouble and Bahr didn't ask about them as he usually does so we didn't give them much thought at the time. Joe Marazzi had been watching them tho and had seen them continue to lose altitude and finally attempt a landing in a small field. He says the terrain was rough around there and they hit once and bounced and then hit again. They didn't blow up but we learned later, that it did go on fire after breaking into three pieces. Abbott the ball gunner and Capt. Smith were the only two to come out alive, Abbott with two broken legs and badly cut face but sure to live, the Capt. however in critical condition and may or may not pull through.

I had seen a ship blow apart over Budapest and some chutes get out but this?? It's so unreal, so unjust. We had known these boys in the states, they were at Boise with us, and came over on the same boat, same compartment of the ship and slept in our barracks here. Some perhaps can be indifferent and sort of hard hearted, charging it up to – this is war and war is hell – but I just can't, although in a way I suppose that is true enough. It goes deeper than that to me. I'm not smart enough or brilliant enough to describe my feelings in words. All I know is that those boys were all young and full of life the night before and now through the despicable, ghastly, horrible results of man's inhumanity to his fellow man they are dead tonight. From the official report I could perhaps describe the accident, more fully but see no reason to haunt myself further or the others who may read this. Believe me it isn't pretty.

All the boys here in the barracks, some of whom finished their fifty missions and are waiting to go home, broke out all the whisky and beer they could find and proceeded to get very drunk and noisy. They are doing everything possible to draw a laugh, singing and fooling around, but only some are succeeding and they not fully. They're all trying to relieve the tension and jumpy nerves and the thoughts running through their minds, but most just can't help themselves. Can't blame them at all for trying but things like this you just don't forget easily, or ever.

Capt. Smith – Pilot – Lived. Seriously Injured

Capt. Kahan – Co-Pilot

Lt. Jones – Navigator

Lt. Evans – Bombardier

Cecil Mattos – Engineer

Gene Carney – Radio Operator

Bill Smiley – Nose Turret

Bill Abbott – Ball Turret – Lived – Both legs broken

Ned Rentmeister – Waist Gunner

Bernie Kaplan – Tail Gunner

November 12, 1944

Nighthawks – Lone Wolves

Kosel, Germany

Target: Blechhammer Synthetic Oil Plants

Ship No. 907 – “Kansas City Kitty” or “Gray Radar”

Briefing Time: 3:00 PM

Take-Off: 4:30 PM

Escort: None

I.P. 8:10 PM

Attack: 8:17 PM

Return: 12:25 AM

Bomb Load: 8 – 500 LB. (Delayed)

REMARKS: This is the start of something new and would make very interesting reading if I but had the sense or ability to record it. However I will try. It's been almost a month since flying my last mission, the main reason for which was my extended 24 day stay in the hospital with Hepatitis, or enlarged liver. I'm feeling fine now and it's great to be back with the boys again. Whilst having that nice long rest, the boys were not flying anymore in the daytime. They did get in three missions but as I was two ahead of them we are still pretty close. After their last daylight raid, just a few days after I entered the hospital, they started flying night practice missions. Thereby hangs this tale.

Each squadron in the group has two crews practicing nights and instrument flying. When the rest of the group is grounded on account of weather, we carry the mail alone, one ship from each squadron, a few miles apart. Night or day whenever the orders come through, we hit the blue. I got back in time to fly one practice mission and then Sunday night the McCoy.

Sixteen ships took off at 4:30 PM, four from each group in the Wing. Our target was supposedly one of the RAF's roughest targets and approximately 680 miles in a straight line from here. Having to fly in anything but a straight line, we covered somewhere around 1500 miles, round trip and were airborne for seven hours and 55 minutes. A long haul chum.

We use the new pathfinder type of bombing, which the Air Force has nicknamed “Mickey.” It's a radar outfit and picks up the target on a scope, or sort of screen. It is also used for navigation as it records mountains, valleys, thunderstorms in the air, buildings, anything and everything below and above flat ground. It's really a wonderful instrument. Since we are up there alone and unescorted we have to stick in the clouds. If it is in anyway clear we have to turn around and come home. When the Mickey man picks up the target he gives the Bombardier the dropping angle as we approach and start on our bomb run. The Bombardier can't see the target through his sight but along with setting his dropping angle, he synchronizes for speed and course, ballistics and temperature and whatever else he has had to allow for. It is almost 100% Mickey-man and Bombardier coordination and synchronization with the Pilot always ready to correct a few degrees right or left as needed.

It is really very interesting and since we were lucky enough not to have any flak or fighters bothering us this night, the boys made a very good run. Of course, we couldn't tell whether or not we hit the target as the ground was obscured by the clouds and the bombs were delayed action, but we think we put them right in there. Those bombs also have a booby trap fuse. They can be set for anything from instantaneous to a week delay, yet if someone tries to remove the fuse, the booby trap attachment sets the bomb off. That's rough on the Krauts, I do believe. Although it may not have been so funny had one of the bombs went off in the ship, it was good for a couple of laughs after we got back. Pappy and Jim were pulling the pins out of the bombs when something dropped to the floor. Pappy picked it up and read "Don't Remove - Delayed Action Fuse." He hadn't pulled the fuse, but did take off a pin. They didn't tell any of us about it until we got back and personally I'm glad they didn't, sweating that out would have been rough.

We cut across Yugoslavia into Russian held territory and went North, just a little to the right of Budapest, which the Russians are closing in on at present. Once on the way up a green flare was shot about 100 yards to our left and level with us. We don't know who shot it, but think it was a Russian night fighter attempting to identify us. However we weren't bothered by whoever it was and kept on. We were the ninth ship stretched out in almost a straight line and on course, every now and then we were hitting a break in the clouds and could see the ground. We were supposed to turn back if this occurred but the Greaser would call the No. 1 ship and see if there were any clouds ahead. The Mickey-man advised turning back, so did the Navigator, Bombardier and Co-Pilot. We six enlisted men have no right to argue the matter so kept quiet. As for myself, and I know the other boys felt the same way, it wouldn't have made me angry to turn back and try it another night, but if Lt. Bahr wanted to go ahead, I'll go with him. In fact anywhere that lad wants to go with a B-24 he's got a radio operator, (such as I am). We could see the ground clearly all around us but the Greaser held her on in spite of the others advising turning home from time to time. It was a long ride way up there and I would just as soon make the trip successfully as to call it off after going so far. Over the target that looked something like a huge runway of clouds, so we barreled right down it and made our run successfully.

On the way home we again saw some green flares about 500 yards to our right, but again wasn't molested. Crossing the Russian front we could see heavy artillery guns blasting, but don't know which side they belonged to. The hardest part of this trip was the long ride and the extreme cold. The free-air temperature indicator swung around to a minus forty-six and hit a stop pin, so couldn't go any lower. I guess it was about a minus fifty or fifty-five at 23,800 feet, our bombing altitude. Our navigator, Lt. Crowley (Clark is still in the hospital with the same thing I had) was unfortunate enough to have his heated suit burn out and suffered frost-bitten feet. He is in the hospital now and will be for at least another three weeks although he is coming around okay. He never complained much tho outside of mentioning his suit going out and his feet getting cold, and did a wonderful job of navigating as did the Mickey-man, Lt. Marcus. That Marcus is a good boy and really knows his stuff with that contraption.

Incidentally, I ride the radio table all the way and Jim takes over my waist gun, as there is no ball turret. This mickey machine is encased in something that looks like the ball turret and is lowered the same way and in the same place the ball is on other ships. After hitting the target I sent in the "Bomb's Away Report"

which is my most important job although I monitor the net all the way in case the ground calls us back or any other information. On the way back I got the weather report from the base, "Ceiling 5,000 feet with light rains" which wasn't too bad.

Monday at dinner time while most of the officers were together having lunch, the Squadron Commander made the following announcement. "Last night one of our crews brought a high credit to our squadron. Of all the ships that headed out for the target, the only ship in the whole Air Force that made the trip successfully was our own Brother Bahr. All the others turned around and headed home. This raid was also the longest and furthest mission ever pulled in the history of the 15th and possibly any other Air Force except B-29's. Those weren't his exact words as I wasn't there. Perhaps he made more of a speech, but the gist of it was something like the above, I imagine. We're kind of proud of ourselves I guess, although none of us are bragging any, but we still have that peculiar feeling of pride of having done something unusual and sort of outstanding. I'm pretty sure there will be some decorations handed out to Lt. Bahr and Crowley and Marcus, possibly all of us. Those three really deserve it tho, especially the Greaser. Due to the fact that this night work is still strictly hush-hush and secret it may be forgotten before it's allowed to be known, but I am really hoping the boys get the credit they deserve.

After that long hard ride, we raided the mess hall and then logged quite a few hours of sack time, with two more missions under our belt, and glad to be back. Going that far into Germany and German occupied territory we were really sweating all the way. We crossed Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, hit an I.P. in Poland and bombed a target in Germany. If we could have seen the ground, that would have been quite a sight-seeing trip.

Master James P. Kelleher Jr. has been riding me about how good the Fortresses are and the Eighth in general. I wish I could let him know how far a Liberator can go to see if he can top it. I know he can't as those 17's couldn't go around the block without bomb-bay tanks, nor carry enough bombs to scatter a haystack from 100 feet.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: SWEATING AND PRAYING VERY HARD.

November 21, 1944

Pos. No. 2

Doboj, Yugoslavia
Target: Railroad & Highway Bridges
Ship No. 593 – “Will Rogers Special”

Briefing Time: 9:30 AM
Take-Off: 11:15 AM
Escort: None
I.P. 1:27 PM
Attack: 1:33 PM
Return: 3:15 PM
Bomb Load: 6 – 1000 LB. G.P.

REMARKS: Since our crew has been kept idle to fly night missions, we have been lying around on the ground not getting any missions in. The weather lately has been surprisingly good, so the group has been flying regularly while we had to wait for cloudy weather before we could get any missions. Yesterday they gave us a break and flew us with the group as we used to. Flying deputy lead, we were ready to take the lead at any time, if the lead ship should have trouble. Clark had flown a practice mission the night before, preparing to get back with us on these night jobs, so he didn't go with us on this one.

There are some six divisions of Germans who have evacuated Greece and are making their way through Yugo, trying to get back into Germany. They are more or less concentrated along a highway and railroad that run parallel for an area of approximately 150 miles. The 15th Fighter Command were first over the area for a strafing run. Then the 376th Group and the 98th Group of our wing were to hit junctions along the route. Then the 15th Fighter Command would come in to strafe again after which we would hit the Doboj bridges. At briefing we were told there would be no flak or no fighters, at least they weren't expecting any, so this had all the earmarks of an easy mission, yet an interesting one. We were all looking forward to seeing some of the doings, particularly because we were going to bomb at 15,000 feet instead of the usual 23 or 24 thousand. But the deal fell flat for us. I don't know how the rest of the operation came off but I imagine the fighters were the only ones to get in.

Just as we hit the coast of Yugo, going in, we ran into a solid deck of clouds beneath us. Not a break in the carload, but we kept on and came abreast of the target area. The clouds were still solid below us and we had no pathfinder ship, as all bombing was to be visual, so we had to turn home. We were a little surprised to have received credit for this one although we were in enemy territory and over the target. However we saw nothing but clouds all the way and came home, bombs and all. It isn't very cold, since we didn't go too high, but James and I were uncomfortable. As usual we were too lazy to get up and go to breakfast and since we took off so late we missed lunch too. The Red Cross girls caught it when we landed as we really dove into the doughnuts and coffee.

This puts me just halfway through and it is a good feeling. From here on out I will be going downhill and each one bringing me closer to home.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Interesting and hoping to see something unusual, yet praying as always, for a safe return.

December 3, 1944

Gray Radars – Lone Wolf

Villach, Germany

Target: Marshalling Yards

Ship No. 907 – “Gray Radar” – “Kansas City Kitty”

Briefing Time: 5:45 AM

Take-Off: 7:15 AM

Escort: None (P-51's)

I.P. 10:32 AM

Attack: 10:42 AM

Return: 1:15 PM

Bomb Load: 8 – 500 LB. Comp. B. (2 delayed – 6 instant)

REMARKS: Another something new. Flying alone and unescorted again but this time in broad daylight. Clark is back with us again from the hospital. Lt. Crowley our navigator on that Blechhammer raid was taken to the hospital the day after that mission with frost-bitten feet and had lost a few toes. That's really too bad as he was an excellent navigator and a nice guy to fly with.

We were briefed to hit the industrial area of Linz, through the overcast with our pathfinder radar. If the weather was clear over that area we were to hit Klagenfurt as an alternate. In the event Klagenfurt was clear, to hit Villach and that's just the way it happened. Out of the whole 15th Air Force, 52 ships each on their own were to hit these same targets, as outlined, within a space of two hours or so. These raids are designed, more or less as morale breakers, as we are using all sorts of trick devices. Two of our bombs were dropped delayed, yet when the Jerrys tried to remove the fuse, a booby trap would set them off. Besides this, all of the bombs were fitted with four large whistles on each one, so as to make a shrieking, screaming noise as they came down. Doing this keeps the workers out of the factories and awake all night, along with scaring the daylighters out of them.

The rest of the group was flying to Yugoslavia somewhere, Zagret, I think, and we briefed just before them and took off just before they did, although we learned later that they had been called back. Three of us from this group went on this special radar job. We got up around Venice and things started happening. The ship farthest up, over the Alps called back and reported Linz clear and said he was turning back for home. I was listening on command and was taking it all in. The Greaser, gave them all a general call and suggested forming into a box formation and bomb in the clear as the groups generally do. The others agreed but they couldn't locate each other so it didn't pan out. Most of them were more eager to turn back is really the truth, I think, as they could have formed easily enough. The weather was really too clear for us to work in as we could see at least seven other ships at all times. Then from here and there we could see some of them turning back.

We kept going and headed for Klagenfurt. We hit over I.P. and started on the run, Jim and Red throwing out the chaff through the waist windows, and I came out of my “office” to put on my flak suit and helmet. With the mickey ‘mans’ equipment spread all over the flight deck, my radio equipment has been moved back to the command deck, which is just forward of the waist and above the bomb-bays. It makes

a nice little cubby-hole and is quite warm as compared with the rest of the positions in the ship as I get no drafts from anywhere. Anyway, we were on the run and over the town, while the "brass" up front was arguing about whether it was too clear to go over it or not. Bahr said to Pappy, "Shall we hit it", as he couldn't see the weather below. The Mickey-man had put us on the run and then told Bahr, it was up to him whether he wanted to go or not. Pappy said hell, we might as well, so they were set for a minute, then Haworth said it was too clear, let's turn and hit the other alternate, which we had used as on I.P. Bahr thinking it was the navigator who said to turn, gave it the aim and we went back and hit the alternate. If we had dropped just as we made that turn, we would probably have come closer than if by using a sight. We enlisted men don't enter those discussions, not because of rank, but because we are all willing to abide by the Skippers' decisions. He can't do it all himself and has to depend on the eyes of others.

Some guys lose sight of the fact, that there is an enemy below and should expect some opposition. No one is any happier than I, when we make a successful bomb run without seeing any flak, but there's no excuse for refusing to go over a target because there might be some flak. Of course there is going to be flak, there should be. If a target is worth bombing it's also worth defending and the Germans are going to defend it. We finally dropped on Villach, with the mickey-man, Lt. Marcus and Pappy working fine together and making another successful run. We can't see where our bombs hit, due to the clouds, but judging by the precision of the instruments used, they should be right on the button.

On the way up, and when the others all started turning back, there were planes all over the place. P-51's were making a strafing sweep in the Udine area and were to cover us on withdrawal. While listening on command I heard the others say they were turning back and one pilot was calling the fighters for help, claiming he had seen one of Germany's jet-propulsion fighters. Four P-51's passed right over us after awhile. Once the Greaser called to a formation of fighters challenging them for identification but they didn't answer and kept turning. They passed us, going the opposite way, just as two more B-24's turned around for home. They were an orange colored single-engine job and looked very much like ME-109's. Our P-51's today were silver with red tails and red noses. However they didn't bother us and kept going to the rear of us.

All in all it was an easy mission as far as opposition is concerned as we saw no flak at all and the fighters left us alone. The trouble with these sorties though is that we sweat them all the way, as being alone, no one knows when fighters will jump us. Sitting at that radio table doesn't help any either, I would feel a whole lot better with a gun in my hands. When we got back we found out the regular group mission had been called back and that the other two squadrons' radar ships that had taken off with us had returned early too. The notice from the Group Commander that came out later said, Lt. Bahr's crew received credit for a mission, all others in the group received no credit. Again we were the only ones to hit the target. Makes a guy feel sort of proud.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: PRAYING HARD, SWEATING AND ANGRY.

December 6, 1944

Pos. No. 2 (& 5)

Sopron – Odenburg, Hungary

Target: Marshalling Yards

Ship Nos. 404 – “Daisy Mae” & 985 – “Two-Way Stretch”

Briefing Time: 6:00 AM

Take-Off: 7:30 AM

Escort: None (P-38's)

I.P. 11:18 AM

Attack: 11:25 AM

Return: 2:15 PM

Bomb Load: 10 – 500 LB. G.P.B.

REMARKS: Oh me. Back to our old tricks. We flew with the group again today which gave us two missions in three days. We only got two all last month so if this keeps up we may have a good month. The Air Force has made a change that is a break for us. We now have to fly 35 sorties instead of the old 50 missions. Each sortie now is a single credit no more doubles. For the new crews just starting it isn't so good as most of our missions nowadays are up to “double territory” and counting the old way they may put in as high as 60 missions before completing 35 sorties. It's a break for us tho as I now have 11 more sorties to pull and if every single one of them is a double, which is improbable I will wind up with exactly 50 missions. I should get in a few singles anyway.

We took off today and rallied into our deputy lead position, but we were just about on our second turn, around the field climbing for altitude when the No. 3 prop governor went out and the prop started running away. Spuda kept riding the feathering button to keep her down to normal RPM's, but we couldn't go all the way like that, so the Greaser called the tower and told them we were coming back in for a spare ship. We feathered it and Greaser broke an Air Force regulation, by landing with all the bombs and almost a full gas load, on three engines. We hurried out of that ship, “Daisy Mae”, and jumped right into “Two-Way Stretch” without any preflight at all. The ground crew had warmed her up, so we just piled in and took off again.

The formation was up at 16,000 feet and the Greaser gave her all she had to catch them. He was using such a rich gas mixture to get the added power that all four engines were shooting a black smoke from the exhaust. We caught the formation just as they were setting out on course and filled in No. 5 position, as the No. 5 man had taken our place. This target had never been hit by any of the Air Forces, so Intelligence didn't have much dope on its defenses. Seeing as how this was a fairly large town and only about 40 miles from Vienna, we thought sure there would be quite a few guns there or at least some mobile guns from the Vienna and Weiner-Neustadt area as these yards and railroad lines are in a direct line from Vienna.

Almost all the way up there was a solid overcast beneath us and we thought the target would be covered too. The air was cold and misty and we were all leaving thick vapor trails. They are real pretty but dead giveaways to enemy fighters or tracking flak guns. Just before turning on the I.P. we went through a

layer of thin clouds and when we broke out of them, could see the target clearly. We were very fortunate as there were plenty of clouds all around, yet the one large clearing was over the target. We turned in at the I.P. and went on the run. For some reason, this sure was a long bomb run. It seemed like ages before the bombs went away, and all the while we were expecting heavy flak. However we didn't see a single burst and as we rallied right, in the turn for home I could see the target, or rather what was left of it. We sure powdered that area, no fooling. The whole train yard was completely covered with bomb bursts. A few ships had trouble releasing their bombs and salvoed them late, right into the town itself.

Coming back the leader got a call from the group behind us saying they were jumped by enemy fighters. It was a group from the 55th Wing and might have been Larry's old outfit. We were all on the alert, but didn't see any of the fighters. We were almost back to the coast of Yugoslavia when about 12 P-38's came hovering over and around us. Again it had been an easy mission, but another one like our lone-wolf rides, where we sweat it out the whole way. The Greaser is making a fine record for himself around here. Not many guys make an early return with engine trouble and still make the mission. He really knows his stuff and is a favorite with the ground crew chiefs. They know when he has their ship, he will find out any and all troubles and doesn't complain about minor things like a lot of the guys.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: ALWAYS THE SAME.

December 12, 1944

Lone Wolf

Kosel, Germany

Target: Blechhammer South Synthetic Oil Plant – Utility Section

Ship No. 907 – “Kansas City Kitty” or “Gray Radar”

Briefing Time: 6:00 AM

Take-Off: 7:15 AM

Escort: None

I.P. 10:56 AM

Attack: 11:04 AM

Return: 2:25 PM (Crash Landed on Vis, Yugoslavia)

Bomb Load: 8 – 500 lb. R.D.X. (2 delayed – 6 instantaneous) 1- propaganda leaflets

REMARKS: ROUGH!!! Rough is hardly the word for it, but read on this ought to be good for a couple of laughs.

The night before flying this mission the alert list on the operations bulletin board contained two, three-ship boxes. We were to lead the first box and Lt. Gregory's crew was to lead the second box, both of the lead ships being radar jobs and the wing men would drop their bombs when ours went out. How they ever expected to get those other ships way up there in Germany I'll never know. The lead ship can maintain a constant power setting but the others have to keep jockeying their throttles to keep in formation and in so doing use much more gas than the leader. However when we got to briefing we found that only Gregory's crew and us were to fly, from our squadron, with two ships each from two other squadrons. We were to fly in pairs, we leading and Gregory on our wing. These trouble-raids that are keeping the German morale down low are also “test” missions. We have been bringing back a lot of interesting information that should prove helpful. The idea today, or rather for this mission, as it is a couple of days now since getting credit for this sortie (you'll find out why as you read on, thank you) was to see if it would be possible to fly a regular group formation up there in bad weather. That's why they had put up those other ships, but I guess, thought better of it and let Gregory fly his radar as wingman. If he found it impossible to fly formation with us, he could go on his own as we were to do. All of us briefed together and when we saw that red tape strung out on the map reaching all the way up to Blechhammer, alone and unescorted, we thought they were kidding. They weren't. In the light of day we knew this would be rough, but someone would have to be the pioneers, the Pilgrim Fathers so to speak, to find out what the Air Force wanted to know, so we're elected.

We carried eight R.D.X. bombs, two delayed and six instantaneous. This R.D.X. formula is the new ultra-high explosive. Besides the regular bomb load we had a small flare-bomb that was loaded with leaflets printed in German, that read something like: “Beware!! Mortal Danger. Since you, the German people, continue to work in the Nazi factories, it is necessary that we use every conceivable method in our power, and we have plenty of them, to hamper your production, and to defeat the Nazi armies. If a bomb should land in or near your home do not tamper with it as it will go off. It is fitted with a delayed action booby-trap fuse, and will go off in time. Leave your job, leave Germany, revolt, etc...” The leaflet read something like that with a bit more to it along the same lines.

We took off with Gregory following and set out on course almost at once. We were climbing all the way and went up through a slight break in the overcast. We crossed the Adriatic and headed into Yugoslavia and across Yugo into Russian held

territory. That was one good point in our favor, our course all the way up past Budapest, was over Russian held grounds. We might have drawn fighters but at least we wouldn't get any stray flak. The micky-man – Marcus – and Clark kept us right on the stick, even tho the weather was extremely bad which is good, for us. Sounds like double talk but it's the truth. There was a sort of thick mist, like a heavy fog and just above Budapest we lost Gregory as we could hardly see our own wing tips. It was bitter cold, although our heated suits kept us good and warm, and we started icing up. We had been losing oil out of No. 2 engine, since right after take off and it too was freezing solid and coating the top of the nacelle. To carry the extra load of ice, the "Greaser" had to pull more power and so use more gas. That wasn't good as we had none to spare.

We were briefed to bomb at 25,000 feet but made it about 23,700 instead, to save some fuel. The last time we hit this place we used a town in Poland as an I.P. and headed west on our bomb run. This time we stayed in Germany and made the run towards the east and this time we drew flak too, lots of it. We were to hit the northwest corner of the plant which contained all the utilities works. Previous raids had put part of the plant out of commission and if we could disable the electricity, water, and gas supply, the whole plant may be closed down for three or four months, at least that's the way Intelligence had it figured and they are the boys who should know. Turning in at the I.P., there was still a heavy overcast, although the air was a bit clearer, and "mickey" soon picked up our target and started calling off the dropping angles to Pappy. While on the bomb run, there is a camera attached to another scope, similar to the one the micky-man uses to "see" through, and takes pictures of that scope. In this way, they can compare them with actual photographs and other radar photos and figuring the point of release, can tell pretty well how close we came and what we hit. We drew plenty of flak but fortunately it wasn't very accurate, although most of it was level. We didn't hear any of it, so we knew it wasn't too close.

Some of the other ships that were up there for some reason or other, went after the alternate targets, both of which were close by, and we could see them midst the flak bursts too. Perhaps the German gunners were a little confused as the stuff was all over the sky. We made another nice run and rallied a sharp right, and started evasive action, as by this time they were on to us and getting close. We kept banking and turning, all the while headed in our plotted course to home, and everywhere we left, flak hit. Finally we outrode it and took up our heading. Generally that flak is a puff of black smoke as it explodes, but this stuff was white and a very pretty red color too. That is if flak can be called pretty. We were on our home and sweating our gas supply. The weather had been perfect for this type of raid and was the same coming back. Now comes the trouble and I do mean trouble.

The oil had kept on leaking out of No.2 until finally the oil pressure indicator started falling off denoting a very low oil supply for that engine. Greaser and Spuda kept watch on it closely and let it run as long as was possible, but finally had to feather it. Very ungood. We would have been cutting it pretty thin to make it back on all four, but with only three engines and those three using more gas than four would, we knew we would never make our home field. Greaser decided to cut a straight line for Foggia so Clark whipped up a heading for there. Since the de-icer boots weren't working we were still carrying that load of ice on the wing and horizontal stabilizer, even though we dropped down as low as we possibly could. We had to stay up at least 10,000 feet to clear the Yugoslavian mountains. We were pulling plenty of power to stay up and it soon became evident that it would be a fifty-fifty chance to even make Foggia.

Rather than risk having to ditch in the Adriatic, Greaser decided on our only other alternative, Vis, Yugoslavia. This Island of Vis, is a small island just off the Yugo coast, which the Partisans had wrestled from the Germans about 10 months ago, and turned over to the Allies for use as an emergency landing field. The landing strip is in a valley

or rather a shallow spot in the mountains, as the hills are all around it. I called our wing ground station here, and told them we were going to land on Vis and asked them for a weather report for the vicinity of Vis. They came back with: "Rain, ceiling 2,000 feet and wind direction southeast at 10 M.P.H." We were floating around above the overcast trying to locate the island with the mickey, but couldn't pick it up. We knew the weather was bad, but not that bad. Clark asked me to get a radio fix on our position but I had Greaser get it over the VHF Command Set, rather than with the Liaison transmitter as it was a whole lot quicker. It would have taken me a good five minutes (rushing) to change units, retune and call, where as Greaser only had to press his button and ask for his position. He got it alright and we headed for Vis until our mickey could pick up the Island and then we knew exactly where we were. Knowing we were clear of the mountains we let down through the overcast.

Meanwhile Greaser called the Vis tower and told them we wanted to come in. They came back advising us to try for the mainland if we could possibly make it as the ceiling had dropped to 1,500 feet and there was a strong cross wind blowing across the runway. Greaser knew we couldn't possibly make Italy and told them we were coming in. We let down over the water and could see the landing strip. It was built primarily as a fighter strip, but a bomber could land on a good day with the winds right. This wasn't a good day and the winds weren't right. On the final approach, coming in for a landing a bomber has to almost slide down a hillside to set down on the edge of the runway, so as to get the full benefit of the strip on the long roll to a stop. The wind was blowing almost directly across the runway and we all decided to prepare as best we could for a possible crash.

Clark and Pappy came back to the waist and I came out of my little office. We set up the crash belt, stretching it across from one waist gun mount to the other. Red, Pappy and Clark sat with their backs braced against the belt, Jim sat in between Pappy's legs and Keith in between mine. There we sat and although we were all sweating this out, I don't think any of us were actually scared. That's the Gods honest truth and I'll tell you why. It comes from having extreme confidence in your Pilot and we had one of the best. I don't think any of us doubted for a moment that Greaser wouldn't bring her in alright. As we turned in on the approach Cameron, our Co-Pilot, called back and told us to open the waist windows just in case. He had been in two crack-ups before so we took his word for it. Greaser brought her down and just as we were about to stall in and hit the ground, the cross wind got us. Greaser shoved the nose down as hard as he could but couldn't put her down. The wind literally picked the '24' up and tossed it around like a kite. We had come in with a mean crab into the wind but when it set us down again we were almost halfway up the strip and still doing 150 miles per hour.

The runway is one of those steel-mat jobs and when we hit the second time, our left tire blew out and we veered left. We couldn't tell much about what happened next, being braced solid on the waist floor. After the tire blew the next thing we felt was the belly scraping the ground and mud flying up through the bomb-bay and spraying us. We slid to a stop and Keith went out the window, with my feet almost on his back I was so close behind him, with Red right after me. Jim, Clark and Pappy went out the other window just as fast. We had all seen the results and heard two ships crash land, one going on fire and the other blow up. So we were out and moving away fast, but before getting very far, almost to a man, we stopped and looked back to see how the boys up front were and started back to help them when Marcus stuck his head out of the top hatch, Spuda following him with Junior next, Cameron and then old Bahr-head. They were all okay and coming out fast. We all got together and put plenty of room between us and what was left of the ship.

Before describing the looks of the ship, I'll take the events in order. We were standing around checking on each other and miraculously no one was hurt. Entering the pattern was another "24", only he was coming in downwind, from the opposite direction from which we had come in. We had slid off the end of the steel-matting and slid into the mud of the vineyard at the end of the runway. This other one came in and set her down right in the vineyard. His nose wheel buckled and he slid to a stop on his nose, his gear still holding. Fortunately they too all escaped injury. That's the kind of field this is. They get anywhere from one to thirty-five ships a day forced down there and some of them hadn't been as fortunate. It's a regular airplane graveyard. We saw what was left of quite a few B-17's, B-24's, P-38's, P-51's, Spitfires, all kinds, and they have salvaged the greater part of many others.

When all was clear and we were sure that our ship wasn't going to burn or explode, we all went back to get our chutes, helmets, papers and whatever we had left there. Boy what a mess. The whole left gear had sheared off taking the No. 2 prop with it. They were lying about fifty feet from the ship. The right gear had dug into the soft, muddy ground covering the whole wheel and up to about a foot from the wing. The nose wheel had buckled back into the ship. If it had been hard ground the right gear would probably have sheared off and came back into the waist with us. The nose section and particularly the bomb-bay were just a mass of tangled wires, struts, fallen and ripped bulkheads and the doors bent in. How we had gotten out without serious injury or being killed only God knows.

We piled all of our stuff into a Limey truck and rode up to a house that had been made into a mess hall. We were waiting around for something to eat and had a chance to talk the whole thing over and over again. Two things we all agreed on. Greaser had proven our confidence in him and had done a really masterful job of bringing in that ship in as well as he had with such weather conditions and on three engines. Cameron and Spuda were right there looking on and both voiced their admiration. The other thing we are grateful for was Cameron worked fine with Bahr and if ever the Greaser needed a good, helping hand, he needed it then. Cameron also had presence of mind to cut the main line switches, just before setting down, so as to eliminate the greater part of the possibility of fire or explosion.

We were still waiting for something to eat when they came for us, saying there was a C-47 going to Bari and we were to board it. Before going to the C-47, Marcus went back to the ship to get the camera and film off of the radar set as that stuff is still very secret material, especially those pictures of the target. I figured we could use those nice soft cushions in the Pilot and Co-Pilot seats for our easy chairs in our "casa" here at the base, so I brought those along too. We piled into the C-47, along with the other crew that had come in right after us. They were from the 455th Group, up around Foggia, and their wingman who had flown along side of them all the way to a different target from ours and back, had ditched in the Adriatic. It sure had been a rough day. Coming off the target, as I prepared to send in our 'bomb report' I heard Gregory's radio operator send his, to the effect that they had bombed the second alternate. We later found out that they had made it back to the base alright. I sure hope the Air Force has found out all they wanted to know. The best thing for us now that all of our targets are pretty far up and almost out of range, is to shuttle-run, landing in Russia, picking up another load and hitting again on the way back. To make that raid on Blechhammer, we have to have a perfect ride. The least bit of engine trouble, or ice, or anything that would cause us to use more gas, and we are up the creek.

To get back to the awful story, we got aboard this C-47, which itself had to make two passes at the field before it set down, and took off. That one was close too. He must have been one of those "hot rock" pilots, as he held her down for a long run and then jumped her into the air. I don't know just how close we came to those hills surrounding

the field, but it was just that. Close. He may have been showing off for us, but I hope he knows none of us appreciated it a bit. That wasn't enough, the damn fool skimmed across the whole Adriatic at about 75 or 100 feet. True the ceiling was low, but he could have gotten up to a 1,000 easily. Then entering the pattern at Bari he almost let down right on top of a B-24, but saw it just in time and pulled up and went around again. What a jerk he was. It was dark by then and we could see the runway lights of Bari and were all sweating this guy out, but good. What a day!!! Surely, there must be easier ways to make a living. He made it alright and we all charged into the transient mess and hit that awful lick. From here we went to the 22nd Replacement Battalion to spend the night, and what a night. Four blankets and a cot, in an old tent, with no heat and raining out. We didn't even undress, just put two blankets under us and two over us, then tried to sleep. As tired as we were, we still couldn't sleep.

The next morning we were up and ready to leave that outfit as soon as we possibly could, if not sooner. The squadron sent a ship up to Bari to pick us up and bring us back here. That was sort of a round about way to return from a mission, but we made it only a day late. All the boys here were sweating us out and annoying operations so much that they hung up a sign saying "Lt. Bahr's crew landed on Vis and are all safe." Guess how many hours I logged in the sack after this was over? Cameron, Spuda and Junior are in for the Purple Heart on account of a few small cuts. We all tried but couldn't get it. I'll get it yet tho!!!

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Perhaps it was because I had something to do at my radio instead of just standing in the waist sweating it out, but I wasn't for a moment scared. I knew what the score was and knew what I had to do and did it. I'm a little proud of that, I don't know why, but I'm glad I can keep my head about me in an emergency of that kind. I had often wondered what my reactions would be and I hope I can always feel the same as I did then. First of all I hope nothing like that ever happens again.

I have always prayed fervently to God asking His protection and guidance to a safe return from every mission and He has always brought us through. On this particular raid however, I feel more than certain that God was riding right along with us. I like to think that He was there in answer to my own prayers and those of my darling wife, Mary, although I know the rest of the boys were asking for His aid as well. No one can ever tell me that God was not keeping us safe from harm. How else could we have climbed out of that twisted wreck unscathed???

December 16, 1944

Pos. No. 7 & 4

Innsbruck, Austria
Target: Marshalling Yards
Ship No. 404 – “Daisy Mae”

Briefing Time: 6:30 AM
Take-Off: 7:45 AM
Escort: None (P-51's – P-38's)
I.P. 12:26 PM
Attack: 12:32 PM
Return: 1600 (4:00 PM)
Bomb Load: 8 – 500 LB. COMP.B.

REMARKS: Back to our old tricks. We flew this one with the group and boy it was a long haul. We were airborne for almost eight hours. We took off and pulled into our assigned No. 7 position, in a nine ship box. Our course took us almost straight up the Adriatic, so we had plenty of time to sit down and rest before entering the territory of possible enemy fighters. We had just charged our guns and got prepared when we spotted a flock of single-engine ships out to our right and behind us. They caught up pretty fast and we could see they were P-51's. Beautiful things. We weren't supposed to have any escort so we were a bit anxious until we identified them. They had two belly tanks each and were probably going deep into Germany on a strafing job.

We went up over the Alps and that was another beautiful scene. There was a pretty heavy undercast and the snow covered peaks jutted up over the clouds. Soon we came to a break in the clouds and could see the snow covered valleys, all through the Alps range. Small towns with rivers or streams running through them all blanketed with snow. It was really very pretty and I was looking for ski-tracks but could never see any signs of life.

We had a mickey-ship leading and we were to bomb visually or by P.F.F. whichever was needed. As we turned on the I.P. we could see a complete undercast so knew it would be pathfinder bombing. We went on the run and soon Pappy called out flak straight ahead. He was riding the nose turret as Junior had to ride the top so that Spuda could be free to work on No. 2 engine. The turbo-supercharger kept surging and he had to keep pulling the amplifier out to keep it running normal. As always the pathfinder uses a long bomb run and we are sweating out “bombs away” the whole time. Just as we came into the flak area, we dropped and rallied a sharp left to get out of the flak. They were plenty accurate with that stuff and we were glad we weren't in any longer than a minute or so. It was black, white and a few puffs of red and much too close for comfort, although we had seen much rougher days.

Coming back we could see Villach, through a large opening in the clouds and while we were looking at it, bombs started going off right in the marshalling yards. We searched all over the sky but could find no airplanes and were wondering who could have bombed it. We were speculating as to whether the delayed action bombs we had dropped there about two weeks ago were just going off or not. Kidding of course, but it was odd we couldn't find the planes that had dropped them. While still watching, another whole pattern of bombs flashed as they exploded and we still couldn't find any

planes. They sure were parking them right in there too. About 50 miles farther on course home we spotted some P-38's down low, skimming the top of the clouds, so perhaps they were the ones that had hit Villach, in a low level attack. They have modified some of the P-38's over here, with a bombsight and a place for a bombardier.

It took us an awful long time to get home it seemed. We went over Italy up around Foggia and then back out over the Adriatic. I don't know what the lead navigator was doing but a straight course home would have been appreciated by all, methinks. As we neared our field, No. 1 engine started sucking wind so the Greaser feathered it. Out of gas although the No. 1 tank read 50 gallons, which still isn't very much. Then we were sweating out the other three, but they kept going alright and we peeled out of formation for a priority landing. Coming in on three is old stuff to us now, but we still don't like it.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: God is still with us and I will never cease thanking Him.

December 17, 1944

Pos. No. 7 & 4

Wels, Germany
Target: Marshalling Yards
Ship No. 841 – “NITA”

Briefing Time: 7:00 AM
Take-Off: 8:15 AM
Escort: 11:31 AM (P-38's)
I.P. 11:58 AM
Attack: 12:06 PM
Return: 3:15 PM
Bomb Load: 10 – 500 LB. Comp. B.

REMARKS: I flew this one with a different crew. Since Lt. Bahr had three more sorties than I had, I volunteered to fly with any crew who needed a radio operator for three missions so that I could be even with the Greaser and we could finish together. I don't know whether it is because I am getting close to finishing or whether it was flying with another crew, but I had an uneasy feeling and was sweating it out more than usual. As for the mission itself, we had a very easy ride, in fact it was almost an exact duplicate of yesterdays mission only with a different target and much to our joy, no flak.

Our course up was almost exactly the same and I again enjoyed the beauty of the Alps. On the way, just above Foggia we were still climbing and ran into an overcast. We had to get over it so the formation split wide open and everyone went up on his own. Once over the solid layer of clouds we formed again and kept on. As we turned on the I.P. the target again was 10/10 covered so we bombed by P.F.F. (pathfinder – mickey). While on the run the intercom cut out completely so we couldn't hear “bombs away” and watched for it.

After coming off the target I went up to the flight deck and set up the emergency interphone on the command set. About fifteen minutes later the No. 4 man called the leader and said he was dropping out and feathering his No. 2 engine. As he pulled out I watched him and saw that bad engine smoking badly. He would feather it and it would run away again. After three or four attempts he finally got it feathered but kept dropping back until I lost sight of him. Shortly, he came in on the radio with “I've got No. 2 feathered and No. 3 is acting up. I may have to bail.” We were right over the Alps by this time and that would be about the roughest country in the world to bail out in. We were all sweating them and I particularly so because this was the last mission for three of the boys in that ship and the rest of them needing only a few.

Francis Maloney, who lives in our house here with us was flying tail in that ship too. I knew just about everyone in the ship so was very anxious about them, and was glad to hear old “Stony” Marston, the pilot, come in with, “I think we have it under control now and will try to make an emergency field in Northern Italy.” That was the last we heard from them and all the way home I was thinking, hoping and praying for them to make it alright.

We came in over the field and peeled off in order. We had taken over the No. 4 position, just as we had done yesterday when the No. 4 man had had some engine trouble. We landed and parked the ship and as usual all piled out and were waiting for the squadron truck to come out and pick us up. While we were standing around talking

with the ground crew and writing up any faults of the airplane, so as to have them fixed, we saw this ship coming in for a landing with No. 2 and No. 4 engines feathered. It's a rare sight and one none of us ever hope to see or experience.

Landing that big bird with four engines going is quite a job, but with two it's something a little short of a miracle, yet he brought her in and made a beautiful landing. As he went past us down the runway we could see the number on the tail and sure enough it was Stony Marston and the boys. How on earth he made it back, God only knows. It sure was a swell feeling, seeing them come in alright.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: All of us know why we are fighting this war, but what is best is that God too, knows, agrees and is with us always, guarding and protecting us.

December 19, 1944

Pos. No. 1

Rosenheim, Germany
Target: Marshalling Yards
Ship No. 770

Briefing Time: 6:10 AM
Take-Off: 7:30 AM
Escort: 11:43 AM (P-38's Withdrawal)
I.P. 11:26 AM
Attack: 11:31 AM
Return: 3:00 PM
Bomb Load: 6 – 500 LB. R.D.X.

REMARKS: What ho??? Prestige. Today I checked out as group radio operator. Still trying to catch up to Bahr, I flew this one with Capt. Taylor our squadron commander and Capt. Kent, Maloney's pilot. Francis himself had to fly with another crew, as the group armament officer was flying tail turret to check on the gunners while on the mission. We were leading the group so he could see all of the squadrons and whether or not they had let their ball-turrets down and were alert.

As radio operator in the lead ship I had to maintain contact with the ground at all times and also in contact with the other groups of our wing. Riding the radio table on the flight deck is much more comfortable than the waist gun. I have a heater right under me and a nice comfortable chair and table. The weather has been fairly good lately, that is good enough to allow us to take off.

Once on course we climbed up over the overcast and our "mickey" kept us on course there after. It was up over the Alps again and into southern Germany or what used to be Austria. We were briefed for no flak so were feeling pretty good about the whole deal, but just before crossing the Alps, our "mickey" set went out and since there was an undercast covering the target we thought we were going to hit an alternate target which would have been rough. We went on the bomb run to our primary target hoping the "mickey" could pick it up, but the set was too weak and we just rode on past it. We tried then to find an open area at one of the alternates.

The only one open was Villach, but it too had scattered clouds. Our bombardier set up his sight and we made the run. Clouds obscured his vision through the bombsight until when he could finally see the target again we were right at the dropping point. With a few adjustments still to be made, he couldn't aim in time so again we didn't drop. Capt. Taylor then decided we couldn't hang around much longer as we would run short of gas for the trip home.

We picked up some P-38's but they couldn't follow us all around either, so left. I sent in the bomb report stating the mission was unsuccessful due to adverse weather conditions. The base would know by that that our "mickey" had gone out. The reason mainly for that report tho, is so that wing and group can start the paper work rolling long before we even land. The trip home was uneventful as we all took things easy and sweated the long ride home. It had been a very easy mission, no flak, no fighters, no bombs dropped, no nothing.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: A little proud of the responsibility of flying lead. Praying as always.

December 20, 1944

Pos. No. 4

Preilassing, Germany
Target: Marshalling Yards
Ship No. 603 – “Kathleen”

Briefing Time: 6:45 AM
Take-Off: 8:00 AM
Escort: None (P-38's)
I.P. 11:36 AM
Attack: 12:42 PM
Return: 4:00 PM
Bomb Load: 8 – 500 LB. R.D.X.

REMARKS: I flew this one with my crew and back at my waist gun position. That was a short career. We are still hitting marshalling yards and supply routes leading into Vienna and the Brenner Pass. Since Joe Stalin's boys have moved across the Balkans this is about the only area we have left as targets, up around northern Italy and Brenner Pass and southern Germany. This one however was no milkrun as the few other had been.

At briefing they told us to expect heavy, intense and accurate flak so we were sweating it as usual. There isn't anything else one can do about it. Put on a flak suit and helmet and watch it pop all around you. We had a cameraman flying with us which makes it a little crowded at first, but after everyone gets settled in their positions it's not so bad. The heated suit outlet in Jim's turret wasn't working so I plugged his cord in the 24-volt socket of my outlet and he sat in the waist. He had the ball cover open and ready to jump in it if necessary. There was no extra oxygen station, since we had a cameraman along so he had to use a walk-around bottle which lasts about five minutes. He just sat there filling and refilling the thing all the way up and back.

We ran into a strong headwind and were about 40 minutes late going up, consequently we missed our rendezvous with our escort, although we did see some P-38's around. We turned on our bomb run and, Clark was calling off the time in minutes until “bombs away”. Just as he called three minutes the flak came up and they were right on us. The cameraman was taking pictures out of my window and I was watching him and waiting anxiously for the bombs to go out. A minute and a half – one minute. One burst in particular went off right on the edge of our wing, spreading a huge black puff of smoke. It was so close I wondered why we didn't lose the wing, but the strangest part of it was not even a piece of it touched the wing. Wump, wump, boy they were close and Pappy's “Bombs Away” was something of a relief even though we were still in the stuff.

We rallied a sharp left and got out of it okay. Again the long trip home proved uneventful. After we had let down to a comfortable altitude over the Adriatic and safely out of possible fighter attack, the cameraman broke out some “K” rations and food never tasted so good. Concentrated ham and eggs and some cheese and crackers. It was very cold from the high altitude but really delicious. Never thought I'd be raving about “K” rations but this little picnic of ours tasted mighty fine.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Praying fervently and once again God has answered my prayers and returned us safely.

December 21, 1944

Pos. 1

Rosenheim, Germany
Target: Marshalling Yards
Ship No. 578

Briefing Time: 6:45 AM
Take-Off: 8:00 AM
Escort: 11:39 AM
I.P. 12:31 PM
Attack: 12:37 PM
Return: 3:30 PM
Bomb Load: 6 – 500 LB. R.D.X.

REMARKS: I flew again with Capt. Kent and Francis was in the tail. We were leading the second attack unit of our group so I rode the radio table again. Unlike the last ship I flew radio in this one had “the little office” up over the bomb-bays on the command deck. Lt. Marcus was flying the mickey. Since the group lead operator was responsible for keeping wing contact, I only had to check in and then listen in case there was a call to cancel the mission or perhaps the lead operator might have trouble with his set. After coming off the target I also sent the bomb report for our unit.

All the way and back the bombardier had the radio compass tuned in on good music from Foggia. When possible I listened in and heard some swell programs, except for when they played a few of Guy Lombardo’s records. Again our radar set went out and Marcus worked on it for about an hour but couldn’t fix it so he just went along for the ride. We were flying Y-1 box and the lead ship in the X-2 box was a spare radar ship, for just such an emergency, so we switched box positions and our box dropped on the X-1 box. The Germans had already repaired these yards after we hit them the other day, so you can see how important they are to them.

Bombing by radar through the undercast we couldn’t observe how well we hit them so the Air Force sends in a reconnaissance ship at low altitude shortly after and they find out that way. Just as it was the day before, when we had hit this target, that is our attack unit hadn’t dropped that day, but the other half of the group had, we saw no flak. The Alps, as always, were beautiful.

After sending my bomb report, I listened to some more music and a good comedy program, with Howard and Sheldon and a few others, and Deems Taylor as guest star. Capt. Kent wanted a weather report from the field so I got it for him. They sent me “Weather good – High overcast.” We had to stay up at about 12,000 almost all the way back to the field and when we finally let down we had to rock our way through the undercast and didn’t get entirely out of it until we were around 2,000 feet. If that’s a high overcast – well you’ve heard of Macy’s window. That was the roughest part of this mission as there were times when we couldn’t see further than our wing tip and in formation, our other ships could have been climbing in our window before we or they noticed it. Most of them however, spread out and gave plenty of room to themselves and others while going through the stuff.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Glad now to be even with Bahr and with only five more to go. As always praying too.

December 27, 1944

Pos. No. 4 & 1

Brenner Pass, Northern Italy
Target: Loop and Tunnel of Brenner Pass Railroad Line
Ship No. 603 – “Kathleen”

Briefing Time: 6:15 AM
Take-Off: 7:30 AM
Escort: 10:39 AM
I.P. 11:12 AM
Attack: 11:16 AM
Return: 2:35 PM
Bomb Load: 3 – 2000 LB. R.D.X.

REMARKS: We were to fly deputy lead position so I rode the radio table again. In position 4 we were right behind Lt. Donnelly, the leader, and could take over lead easily by just pulling up, if he had trouble and had to turn back. On take-off Donnelly's left gear wouldn't retract but he stayed in and was going to go all the way with that left wheel hanging down. However one of his engines gave him trouble and he had to return to the base.

We took over the lead and went on. Our target was right in the middle of the Alps and at this particular loop in the railroad line there is a solid foundation of brick and masonry supporting the tracks. If we could mess up this construction it would take the Jerries quite awhile to rebuild it. At the I.P. we ran into a little flak but turned out of it on the bomb run. Pappy took over and needed a correction of about 50 degrees right. He flipped his knobs and we damn near did a slow roll. How the rest of the formation followed that turn I don't know but they did.

Pappy picked up his target and up came the flak. It wasn't too bad although those lads were really coming close. Presently Pappy let them go, although one of them hung up in the bomb bay and Spuda kicked it out after we were out of the flak. The flash pictures showed our box bomb pattern slightly left of the aiming point, but good bombing and good results. The trip home was uneventful and we listened to some more good programs on the radio compass.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Praying.

December 28, 1944

Pos. No 4

Brenner Pass, Northern Italy
Target: Loop and Tunnel of Brenner Pass Railroad Line
Ship No. 777 – “Lady Luck”

Briefing Time: 6:45 AM
Take-Off: 8:00 AM
Escort: 11:39 AM
I.P. 11:54 AM
Attack: 11:59 AM
Return: “5 days later”
Bomb Load: 6 – 1000 LB. R.D.X.

REMARKS: We were hitting the very same target as yesterday and since we had been able to pick it up we were flying deputy lead again in the event Donnelly's bombardier couldn't find it. Donnelly again had trouble getting his gear up but finally did. I was riding the flight deck again and just going along for the ride. What a ride!!!

The course up was the same as yesterday only we had a different I.P. in order to avoid the flak. We turned on the bomb run and with doors open I was sitting there sweating out “Bombs Away.” I only have a very small window and couldn't see any flak on our right side and the flight deck being all closed in I couldn't hear any flak bursting so I was thinking perhaps we had caught them napping and were going to have a milkrun. Then things started to happen and it wasn't good.

Bahr came in with “Get rid of those bombs Pappy, quick.” Pappy salvoed them and we pulled out of formation. I didn't know why but I knew we were in trouble. Bahr asked Clark for a heading home and we started out alone. We had caught a burst of flak right over our left wing and it knocked our No. 1 engine and No. 1 fuel cell. One piece hit one of the bombs and bounced off onto the catwalk. All of the oil ran out of No. 1 engine and when Bahr went to feather it she wouldn't feather and the prop kept windmilling. It was threatening to spin off, perhaps vibrating the whole engine or even the wing off with it. “Greaser” told us to be ready to bail out and when that lad says bail we were really in bad shape.

Just as he said that I looked out my window and I do believe the highest peak of the Alps was staring me in the face. Those Alps are beautiful when you are well up over them and have all four engines cooking, but to bail out amongst them is bad business. The chute would probably spill you on one of those mountain sides and if you don't fall the rest of the way, you would probably freeze to death trying to climb down, so any way you look at it, it wasn't pretty. I've never prayed so fervently and pleadingly as I did then.

By some miracle, I will ever contend God answered my prayers, the prop froze stiff and stopped spinning. After having lost all its oil the thing got so hot, it froze. That's how the engineers explain it, although no one really knows, I don't think. Although the prop was stopped its blades were flat into the wind and were creating plenty of drag. “Greaser” rolled in all the trim he could and still had to hold almost full right rudder to keep her under control. He then asked Clark for a heading to Yugoslavia, as we could possibly make one of the Partisan areas to bail out over and stand a fairly good chance of being returned to Italy. Quite a few have gotten back that way as Tito and his partisans have done a wonderful job over there.

Meanwhile Spuda had started transferring the gas out of No. 1 tank into the other three, as fast as possible, as we were losing it. The boys in the waist could see it

pouring out. The Greaser decided that we might be able to make an emergency landing field at Falconara about 60 miles from the front lines. It was either bail out over Yugo or try and make this field in Italy with the possibility of having to ditch in the Adriatic, so we took a heading for Italy. Bahr told us to throw out all the guns, ammunition and whatever other heavy stuff we could.

I was out on the catwalk in the bomb-bay, throwing the ammunition out as Spuda hauled it to me from the top turret and Junior's from the nose turret. I had just heaved out the flak suits when – WUMP – right under me a flak burst. We were crossing a river, just west of Udine and there were a few bridges in that area, so I guess they didn't want our company. Spuda jammed a flak-helmet on my head and we sweated that one out. We couldn't pull any evasive action because if we had turned into our dead engine we would have spun in and we couldn't turn right too much either.

After throwing everything out all we could do is wait, hope and pray. If fighters had hit us we would have been cooked for sure as we didn't have a slug we could throw at them. As we broke out over the coast and were heading across the Adriatic, Greaser gave the Air-Sea rescue boys a call and they fixed our position and kept it in the event we were forced into the sea they would know just about where we were. We didn't have any too much gas left and all three engines were running hot at about 290 cylinder head temperatures.

We were still at 14,000 feet when we went in over Italy just below Rimini and had an undercast below us. We let down over Falconara and we all got in position for a possible crash landing, remembering Vis, but the Greaser brought her in okay. I'm telling you that boy could fly an ironing board with putt-putt on it. This was a much nicer field than Vis tho, 6000 feet of steel matting and in excellent condition. We sure were a happy and grateful bunch of boys to be down safely and in friendly country. I radioed the base letting them know we had made Falconara alright and later Bahr checked in by phone.

All those reports about the Italian mud weren't exaggerated. The weather closed in and we were sloshing around in it, living in tents with the colored boys of the service squadron there. Those colored boys really treated us swell tho, and so did the English RAF boys who were operating out of there. It was a rugged five days but we didn't kick a bit as after that trip anything looked good. We visited Ancona, Joe Marazzi's old home town while there.

Our squadron sent a ship up to bring us back, and we learned that Capt. Taylor, our squadron commander had been killed by flak over this same target the day after we were there. We hit there at 24,000 feet but the flak guns are in the mountains so really we are anywhere from 12 to 18 thousand feet above them and those Krauts are too good with those guns to be spotting them that much space. It sure was a blow to hear that about Capt. Taylor as I had flown with him a couple of weeks ago and knew him well. He had been operations officer before making squadron commander.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: I'm nearing the end now and they are coming hard. I've got just three more sorties to fly and believe me I am really sweating them out. Perhaps I shouldn't worry after having been spared miraculously, twice now, but when I think of having only three more trips before I may get to see my darling wife and family again, I just can't help sweating them out. God has been wonderful to us and nothing I could put into words is enough to express my true gratitude. All I know is that I will always thank Him and forever trust in Him.

February 2, 1945

Pos. No. 1

Vienna, Austria

Target: Moosbierbaum Oil and Gas Refineries

Ship No. 082

Briefing Time: 6:45 AM

Take-Off: 8:00 AM

Escort: 11:39 AM (P-38's)

I.P. 12:32 PM

Attack: 12:40 PM

Return: 2:30 PM

Bomb Load: 6 – 500 LB. R.D.X.

REMARKS: I've been sweating these last three for over a month now, as the weather has been extremely bad and the group only flew two missions the whole month of January. We were flying group lead with the group operations officer Major Blair flying pilot and Lt. Bahr as co-pilot. The group bombardier and two navigators were also in our ship as Pappy and "Handsome" Clark didn't fly with us, nor did Jim. Since one of the navigators was riding nose turret, Junior took the waist gun and with no ball turret in this mickey ship, Jim flew with another crew and Pappy with still another different crew. This target holds one of the very highest priority, since the Russian advance has reached Blechhammer, making this one of Germany's last sources of fuel. The whole Air Force has hit it two days in a row and will probably keep on hitting it until it's either completely knocked out or its production curtailed considerably – or the Russians take that too.

The weather was very clear here at the base for a change and after take-off we climbed, rendezvoused and set out on course on time. The weather was still clear all across the Adriatic and well into Yugoslavia. As we crossed Yugo and were going into Hungary, the ground looked beautiful, covered with snow, with lazy sleepy-looking little towns here and there, dotting the landscape. Try as I may I can never see any signs of life at all, no cars no nothing moving. Perhaps we are too high or maybe everyone is in an air-raid shelter or something.

We were about half an hour from the target when we started running into some thin cirrus clouds, but kept going. It got worse tho and we were the last group in the wing, so when the wing leader called up and said we couldn't get through, we headed for an alternate, Graz marshalling yards. As we neared that we could see that we couldn't get through the weather to hit that either so we headed for another alternate, Pola Submarine Pens. Pola is on the coast of Yugoslavia so we knew if we couldn't get to it once we were in the vicinity, we would have to come home, bombs and all. The navigator picked out three marshalling yards in three towns near where we were at first turning around, in Austria, Hungary and Yugo border area, which we could have hit, but the big "wheels" said no.

As we neared Pola, the Wing Commander called and ordered all groups to return to the base, so home we came with our bombs. It was a screwed-up affair and all we accomplished was a sightseeing trip plus some practice formation flying. We had picked up our escort of P-38's but they left when we turned for Pola. One of the navigators with us was on his last mission and was pretty sore, thinking we weren't going to get any

credit for this one. All the way back we were talking and moaning about floating all around the country for nothing and even after we got back to the base, none of us were in a very good mood. However at supper the rumor had it that they had given it a one sortie – one mission credit.

Although they go by sorties now, some of the boys still here can finish fifty missions with less than 35 sorties. Vienna was and still is a double mission, but they made today's a single since we didn't quite reach it. Now that it's flown it was really a milk-run as it turned out, but we were sweating plenty on the way. The "Vicious V" still holds plenty of terror for the boys.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: Feel fortunate to get one of my last three so easily. Thanking God always for bringing us safely home these many times.

February 17, 1945

Pos. No. 7

Linz, Austria

Target: St. Valentine Tank Works – Graz Marshalling Yards, Austria

Ship No. 593 – “Will Rogers Special”

Briefing Time: 6:45 AM

Take-Off: 9:15 AM

Escort: 12:37 PM

I.P. 1:46 PM Linz – 2:14 PM Graz

Attack: 1:55 PM Linz – 2:20 PM Graz

Return: 6:15 PM

Bomb Load: 8 – 500 LB. R.D.X.

REMARKS: Our crew just got back from Rome Rest Camp and we are going to try to finish up as soon as possible. That is we enlisted men are. After today Bahr, Pappy, Spuda and I will only have one more to go and Spuda and I are going to fly with whoever we can while Greaser and Pappy wait before flying their last one, so that the skipper can possibly make Captain and at the same time wait for Clark who will have three more to go.

This is one of the saddest ships we have and as usual they stuck Bahr with it. They all know he is one of the best pilots who ever flew a “24”, so whenever a ship has any kind of faults, engines due for a change or anything else, they let the Greaser fly it for they know he will bring it back if it's at all possible. After take-off we settled down for that long period of climbing, rendezvousing and setting out on course, As we got far into Yugoslavia we went over the undercast and stayed there. There isn't much to be seen then except the white blanket of clouds a few thousand feet below us. Clark had been doing mostly Dead Reckoning and using the fixes obtained by the mickey-man in the lead ship for navigating when something must have gone wrong with that mickey set.

We knew we were in the target area around Linz, even thought we were on the bomb run, but apparently the mickey-man couldn't pick up the tank works so we took a heading towards home. About half an hour later, still not knowing exactly where we were, Greaser called Pappy and told him to open the bomb-bay doors as the leader had just opened his. We didn't have time to get our flak-suits on although Red and I in the waist made a good attempt. Just as the flak started coming up the bombs went out. Clark identified the target as Beuck, a large town south of Vienna, which had thrown up quite a bit of flak meant for us on our way up, but had been far off to our right. The target was hazy and with the smoke of the bombs added one couldn't tell very well whether we had hit it or not. It was another of those messed up affairs, but we hit something and were on our way home.

The trip back was uneventful except for that airplane. The skipper said it handled worse than any ship he'd ever flown and would refuse to fly it if they ever put him up for it again. When that lad condemns a ship its bad, believe me. The sight gauges froze and Spuda couldn't get an accurate check on the gas supply so we headed for Foggia just to make sure. As we got over Foggia at 14,000 feet, Greaser let down at about a rate of 1,500 feet a minute. Just before entering the traffic pattern

the gauges thawed out and read close to 400 gallons which was plenty enough to get back to our own base, but we landed anyway at Foggia main. We all climbed out and had a smoke while the ground crew there filled her up, then we took off right away for home. We were late returning again but this time with not as much trouble.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: We later found out we had hit the Graz marshalling yards, our No. 1 alternate.

February 21, 1945

Pos. No. 1

Vienna, Austria

Target: Matzleindorf Main Marshalling Yards

Ship No. 770

Briefing Time: 7:45 AM

Take-Off: 9:20 AM

Escort: 12:50 PM (P-51's & P-38's)

I.P. 1305 (1:05 PM)

Attack: 1314 (1:14 PM)

Return: 1550 (3:50 PM)

Bomb Load: 6 – 500 LB Comp. B.

REMARKS: Spuda and I flew this one together in the lead ship with Johnny Noll as Pilot. Jim and Keith were flying on our right wing with Melahn's crew. Red was on our left wing with Seeman's crew, Junior in No. 6 position with Hamer's crew and Francis in No. 7 with Jones's crew. All of us in the same formation where we could keep an eye on each other. None of our officers were flying this one although Greaser has found out that he is getting screwed out of his Captaincy. It's sort of a funny feeling knowing this would be the last one and if things went alright we would be going home, if not – well it was still our last one and we would have completed our tour of duty.

We had just set out on course when George came back to the waist and said – I quote – “I forgot my chute.” Oh me. I was supposed to bring out the extra chute but the parachute shop had run out of spares and just as I got in the truck to go out to the ship one of the clerks comes along with some borrowed from another squadron. Already on the truck I figured the hell with it we won't need any extra, everyone will have their own. Not little Georgie – he had to forget his. He wouldn't tell Noll about it as it would have been quite embarrassing to have to make an early return for that reason, so he mentioned it to Fitzsimmons, the co-pilot and told Fitzy he would ride down with him in the event anything happened. It wasn't a very pretty prospect for Spuda, going to the “Vicious V” without a chute and for myself, blaming myself for not bringing the extra chute.

Being our last mission we were really sweating, all the way, and praying more than ever. We hit an undercast in Yugo and went up over it, hoping it would last through the target area so that we could bomb by mickey. The flak isn't too accurate when they can't see you to track you. When they have to depend on their radar-controlled guns for sighting, we jam their radar and mess it up considerably. However the undercast gave out right near the target and the weather ship, flying ahead, advised visual bombing so we got set for a rough ride.

There was a light haze over the area, plus the smoke-pots burning on the ground so the mickey-man kept working with the bombardier, setting him right on course until the bombardier could pick up the target through his sight. We started throwing chaff out in the waist just before hitting the I.P. and with flak helmets and vests on we went on the run. Our escort of P-38's and P-51's had met us earlier than planned and stayed with us so we felt secure from fighters. Just after the I.P. the flak started coming up and boy they were putting it in there close. They really had our course, altitude and airspeed down pat. It was a long seven minute bomb run and

we were in flak for a good six minutes of it. Wump, Wump, Wump all the way through we could hear it and when you can hear it, it's much too close for safety.

One burst in particular lifted our left wing up and rocked the ship violently. Finally after what seemed like ages, came "Bombs Away" and we rallied a sharp right and still they were putting that stuff in close to us. Shortly however, we outran it, all seven ships in our box. I'll never in my life be able to understand how so many ships can get through that stuff as they do repeatedly. We checked our ship thoroughly as best we could and found only three or four holes. How we got away so lucky I don't know, but it looked now as if George and I were going to make it alright. I'm really sorry to say that all of "my boys" didn't do as well.

Melahn called up and said his tail-gunner and waist-gunner had been hit, one of them with a broken leg. I knew that was Keith and possibly Jim, so wasn't feeling too good about it, all the way home. As we came back through Yugo, someone reported fighters in the area, so we were all on the alert, even though we had our escort still with us. A few ships from other boxes were in trouble and Melahn had dropped down low to help keep the wounded warm, all straggling behind and underneath, but each with a couple of P-51's circling around right over them. Those fighters of ours are really honeys, we love them all.

We broke out over the Adriatic, not having seen any enemy fighters, so our escort left us and went home. Melahn said he was going in at Foggia to get help to the two boys, but we found out later that Keith was the worse off of the two and had told Melahn it was okay to go back to our own base. The other boy was the camera-man who had caught a piece in the shoulder but wasn't hurt too badly. When we landed George and I met Jim who told us all about it. The two wounded were already on their way to the hospital.

As Jim told us, how it had went and all, our already high admiration of Keith went even higher. There isn't a better tail-gunner in the air and I know no finer fellow. He's still a boy in a lot of ways, but every inch a man. He caught it about three inches below the knee, right in front of the leg, fracturing the bone. He has three more to fly but I doubt seriously whether he will get that chance. Even without any complications setting in, it will be a long time before he can walk normally much less withstand a possible parachute jump. I think he will be shipped home with his leg still in a cast to recuperate. At least I hope so. What hurts too is that all of us will be finishing and going home leaving the kid here in the hospital. Perhaps they'll send him home real soon too.

PERSONAL FEELINGS: This was it. The big one. The one we've been looking for. It was a rough baby and we were really sweating all the way, especially with that chute incident. I was praying fervently and once again God heard and answered. It's a grand feeling now, to know that I'm on my way home to see my darling Mary and the gang.

"FINITO"

♪ ♪

♪ **"I'LL BE SEEING YOU"**

♪ ♪ ♪

Bombing Percentages of the 4 Groups Comprising the 46th Wing of the 15th AAF

<u>Date</u>	<u>98th</u>	<u>376th</u>	<u>449th</u>	<u>450th</u>
8-20-44	40.1%	46.4%	45.8%	68.7%
8-22-44	32.9%	46.4%	51.5%	68.7%
8-23-44	37.3%	42.7%	41.5%	55.9%
8-24-44	38.4%	48.6%	47.9%	49.9%
8-26-44	38.4%	48.6%	39.9%	59.4%
8-27-44	35.7%	42.5%	39.9%	58.4%

* BITCH SESSION *

(Army Life is Incomplete Without One)

1. MAIL – Sometimes the situation is terrible.
2. CHOW – Sometimes good but mostly poor.
3. RATINGS – Spuda and I should have made Tech and the rest of the boys Staff. That's the 15th A.F.T.O., and what we are entitled to while flying combat, but after 20 missions we haven't received them as yet and none in sight. If the other groups in our Wing can give their boys their full ratings, it is evidence that this group is holding them up for reasons of their own, selfishly.

INTERESTING NOTES

Starting sometime around August 20th the 15th Air Force is concentrating mostly on bridges, railroad marshalling yards, troop concentration and the like. This action is designed to trap any German troops in Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Yugoslavia and Hungary, from pulling out in face of the combined Russian Advance towards Transylvania, the Rumanian and Bulgarian Capitulation and the Allied successes in France. Had the 15th failed, most of these enemy troops and supplies would have been brought up to bolster the defenses in France and Germany proper. It may never be told and surely could never be figured accurately, just how many Allied soldiers lives were saved by our effective bombing plans. We know for sure that we have helped greatly to spare many and I don't mind feeling proud. One thing about flying bombers, although you feel like a sitting duck in those flak areas, you never see how many people are killed by the bombs you drop. To me this is a happy thought as since I hate war in its every form of violence, I can always imagine that perhaps our bombs hit the target, but no human was around to be hurt. I like to think that all persons, enemy or not, had found safe shelter somewhere. Perhaps that's a poor attitude, but it's my true feelings. I much rather think of having helped to save the lives of many other soldiers in France and Italy, by our actions on enemy transportation and communications, for truly the 15th had and still is doing a magnificent job on the targets.

Sept. 29

On September 26 (which incidentally made me 26) the rainy season of southern Italy began. The group hasn't flown a mission since our last visit to Athens, Greece, on the 24th, five days ago. The weather has socked in completely, with continuous rains and fogs. Our activities are confined to sloshing through the mud to chow and back to the sack. At least if we can't fly, we also cannot drill. At least I think we can't. One never knows what the big boys, who like to play soldier, will think up. Lately they have had us out for drills, inspections and whatnot, all in all making us look like boy scouts. We're doing our job and very well, why don't they let us alone. Oh well, "This is the Army, Mr. Jones," it says here. I must be one of the Smith boys.