

a select number of us were told of the secret nature of the bombs which we were to carry. This included only the lead officers plus the few pilots and bombardiers of our three ships. The bombs were fragmentary and they had new radar controlled fuses which were set to go off 30 to 40 feet above the ground. The warning that we were not to get too close to the bombs as they fell did not help things. For we were to be very close as they fell from our bomb racks.

We took off and the group formed over the field. It was a hard climb to Northern Italy as we had to be at altitude when we crossed the enemy lines. When we were over the Alps and were about three minutes from the IP, our leader called over the radio, "The three ships can take off now." In we went with our three planes looking mighty lonely. The flak was right in there and we could hear the bursts going "Ker-Whoom, Ker-Whoom." After bombs away, our lead plane flew on in the unrelenting flak for what seemed to be several minutes, (probably no more than 5 to 10 seconds). With that I said, "To hell with this", and racked the bomber into a steep turn. Jeff Brown thought we had been hit and grabbed for the controls, but I waved him off. Now after 34 missions it was my turn to control a rally. After months of combat flying, we acquired a sixth sense of just how long we had before we must turn to avoid the newly aimed incoming shells. There had been many an expletive yelled into an oxygen mask when the day's leader did not act soon enough. Now, at what I thought was the appropriate time, I turned around to and had great satisfaction in watching a series of flak bursts outline a curved course we had just left. The Germans certainly had good equipment, but more important, they knew how to use it. Our bombing did their work, as the B-24s behind us received no flak even though they made several passes at the target.

Now it was my turn to be on the receiving end of some very expressive four letter words as our three plane formation played follow the leader, "like fighter planes" After the other planes broke off, Jeff and I tried a trick I learned in advanced flight training. Put an object on your lap and see how long you can keep it floating in air. So the crew was treated to weightlessness floating in air many years before the astronauts practiced this in a NASA 707. The angry words on the intercom from the floating men in the back soon put a halt to the aerobatics. But this didn't cool my euphoria of reaching my last mission with no more day after day killing, or being killed.

One of the crew, Don Askerman reported, "I looked all the way back to the tail and saw Hank Davies straddled in mid air like he was seated on the top of his tail turret." The relief radio man was furious. He said

he was going to see that the pilot got court martialled, repeating this over and over. When we landed Hank and I took him off to one side and advised him gently that if he made any trouble for our pilot, we would personally make a midnight visit to his tent.

But after we landed and parked Miss Lace and climbed out of the ship, I noticed that one of our crew had left. When I asked where he had gone, I got the full treatment. I was told, due to my flying he took straight off to see the squadron C O to have me court martialled and nothing they said could dissuade him. I sat down and waited for the truck. To forget this new turn of events, I opened my ice cold can of beer. It was frozen solid. We waited and waited, the canvas covers were put on the plane, and I could see the big brass holding the truck while they argued over my fate. Finally we caught sight of Capt. Ernest Parsonson, the squadron operations officer, approaching in his jeep. This is it, no more the hero dropping secret bombs, I was to be busted right on the spot. But all he wanted to know was why we were still there. Instead he took our crew picture, (Note only nine members present) So that was it. The beer had thawed by now, it was the best I ever tasted.

Now after 43 years I offer my apologies to the radio man for all that fancy flying. If I had known of his discomfort then I would have been . . . more . . . cautious.



**April 24, 1945 Left to right back row:**

**1) Unknown; 2) Unknown; 3) Clair Alexander, pilot; 4) Hank Davies, tail turret; 5) Jeff Brown, co-pilot; and 6) Frank Gaudio, bombardier. Front row: 7) Lee Emanuel, engineer; and 8) Don Askerman, ball turret. Donald L Askerman photo 764 Sq.**