

When it came time to be briefed on the weather, the weather officer said that clouds might be a problem, so the mission was put on hold and a few hours later was scrubbed for the day. May 9 came, the same procedure was followed with the same results. Again on May 10 we followed the script up to the weather briefing officer who said that the target would be clear and we would have a tail wind on our bomb run. Finally we were going to go.

Our group assembled over the field and took off going north across the Adriatic. It was quite a sight, planes everywhere, the whole 15th Air Force going after one target. We had climbed up to 21,000 feet by the time we reached Lake Balaton, our IP. As we made our turn to on our bomb run a burst of red flak appeared at our altitude and to our right we noted an ME-109. They had our altitude!! From that time on the flak was intense. Planes were dropping out of formation, some under control, some on fire. We looked for parachutes. What a sickening sight. We continued on our run, steady on course as the flak peppered us. Bombs were dropped over the target, thousands of six pounders, but the flak did not stop until we were well past the target. We had flown on our bomb run with a ground speed of 88 knots and were in flak for 26 minutes. No wonder it seemed so long,.

Upon landing we found that we had sustained no structural damage, had 212 holes in the plane but had incurred no injuries to the crew. Sergeant Jones and his crew had lots of work to do to repair our "Vicious Virgin".

Later we concluded that a front had passed the target before we arrived giving us a headwind instead of the briefed tailwind. Also we concluded that because of the stand down the Germans knew we were com-

ing and what our route was to be so they moved 500 88MM guns down from Vienna and had them deployed along our bomb run.*

That evening I wrote my wife the following: The Germans had their chance today. If they didn't get me today they never will. I'll be home soon". They didn't and I was. I flew 51 missions in 93 days.

Orville Wildman 826 Sq.

** Editors note :* It was common practice in the ETO for the German Luftwaffe to mount flak batteries on railroad cars or motorized vehicles and move them about to protect vital targets. The highly rated 88MM cannon was used as an anti tank gun as well as for anti aircraft and was often mounted on a trailer towed by a half track. Correct site placements of the guns was dependent on the quality of Luftwaffe intelligence. As any veteran crew member can testify. "It was damn good".

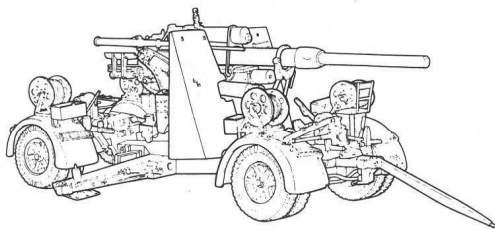


Photo below: Ground crew ship #56 Sgt Jones presumably is the one on the left. Orville Wildman photo 826 Sq.



#56 Vicious Virgin Crew. Standing from left: James Cain,engineer; Orville Cox, top gunner; Bob Neid, ball gunner; Murry Gould, tail gunner; Charles McDowell, nose gunner; and Arthur Anderson, radio operator. Front Row from left: Harold "Bud" Noel, pilot; John Enright, co pilot; Orville Wildman, navigator; and Jack Martin (deceased) bombardier. Orville Wildman photo 826 Sq



Crew Photo: They are from left top row: William H Miller, nose gunner; Robert W Bell, upper gunner; and Carton M Killian, radio operator. Bottom row from left: Aurelio S Lopez, engineer; Lester V Reall, tail gunner; and Charles F Lake, ball gunner.

Robert W Bell photo 825 Squadron.