

# The Day We Went West to East

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Photos by Rod Stewart 826 sq.

### Part 1 The Story

The orders that had come down from 15th AF Headquarters indicated that photo reconnaissance had detected a large amount of rolling stock at the Vienna marshalling yard spur. It ran West to East. 15th HQ ordered a minimum effort of four flights of B-24's.

We usually attacked Vienna from the Northwest to Southeast to pick up any tail wind to minimize the time on the bomb run and over the target. But this day we would go cross wind.

We went in with 26 aircraft, 13 in Able and Baker flights, and 13 in Dog and Easy. I was leading the second attack unit in Dog 11.

As we headed in from the IP, I dropped (ordered) Dog and Easy down about 500 feet below Able and Baker, but close behind. It was a trick I learned from older hands. The German flak crews couldn't change the altitude fusing to get both attack units.

It was an unwritten law, that no one except the pilot and bombardier would talk on the interphone during the bomb run. But today that rule would be violated.

As we went down the bomb run, I was oblivious to anything but maintaining constant airspeed and altitude for my Bombardier Lt Roderick W Campbell.

As the lead ship, we purposely dropped our load slightly short, and all the following aircraft crews salvoed their load when they saw our bombs come out. The time delay involved usually had us dropping slightly short so the rest of the group's pattern would fall directly on the target.

The famous Vienna AA batteries were at their best that day, I could hear it popping even over the noise of the aircraft, but I didn't see much as I was hunkered down below the sun visor.



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They used to brief us that Vienna had 400 guns and AA batteries. When it was captured, they found over 1200 guns, some of which were the relatively new 120MM stuff we had been seeing.

The bomb run went as usual except down to the last 30 seconds. First the co-pilot pointed up through the plexiglass roof at a lone B-24 just a few feet above us. I could see right into his open bomb bay. All I could think of was, "Don't drop on us." We were going slightly faster than he was, but as any flight leader will tell you, you just can't pull the power off on the bomb run. Your wing men, your bombardier, and your CO be they, Colonel or General, will never forgive you. You might say we were caught between a rock and a hard place.

Just then he dropped just a few hundred yards in front of us, as I heard Campbell say, "Bombs Away." We rolled off the target losing altitude and letting the airspeed build up to the red line, (Never exceed airspeed restriction. Beyond that things would begin to fly off the airplane).

The violation of the unwritten law came at the worst possible time. The tail gunner called up to say his heated suit was out and he was freezing. During that last few seconds Campbell gave me his last correction on the run, "3 degrees right." I never heard it. We missed the marshalling yard by about 300 yards to the left, and it cost us much, those who were lost on the mission, and the costs involved in repeating the mission a few days later.

The single B-24 above us was the only one left of Able and Baker flights of the starting 13. I don't know who the pilot of that lone plane was, but I do say as a combat pilot with the 826 squadron, in Korea and Viet Nam, his continuing down the bomb run all alone is the greatest demonstration of bravery I have ever witnessed. Some fifty miles south of the target, I saw a flight of B-24s up ahead and assumed that it might be what was left of Able flight. I tucked in under him and all was well. He was going too slow and making shallow turns to the left which didn't make sense. I finally got on the VHF interplane channel and said, "Able 11 this is Dog 11 put on some steam." Imagine my surprise when he came back and said this is Easy