

but contempt for the type that aborted (turned back) on the slightest pretext if the target promised to be a tough one. Every plane that turned back out of a flight weakened it proportionally in fire power. The Germans were quick to jump either the high or low flight if they did not have their full complement of ships.

Our heaviest loss (for my tour of duty) occurred on a mission to Munich, Germany. again the newspaper was taken up with advances made on the ground or raids by the Eighth Air Force. This mission was bad from the start. Because of a friendly rivalry between us, one pilot took off with a booster pump inoperative rather than let me go a mission ahead of him. The intercom and radio went out on my ship shortly after take-off and it was necessary to devise signals in case of an emergency. The co-pilot passed the word back that a sharp movement of the tail would be the jump signal. Five ships aborted, leaving one flight with only five ships. Fighters jumped us over the target area and we lost seven ships; the flight of five ships and two others. One of these was the pilot with the defective booster pump. Without the pump he was unable to transfer gas from one of his tanks and, as a result, he ran out of gas and was forced to ditch in the Adriatic. Four of the crew members were killed when the plane broke in half; the other six, some critically injured, took to a life raft. They were later picked up by a German hospital ship, after their injuries were treated, the pilot talked the Captain into replacing them in the life raft. They were picked up by a Navy PB4Y airplane and in two days the pilot and co-pilot were back in the group ready to fly. The survivors received the Soldiers Medal for this exploit.

Vienna was the target most dreaded by all combat areas. It was considered the worst in Europe. Again the newspapers failed to comment on the Fifteenth Air Force. Every crew member feared that this might be his last. Five ships were seen shot out of the preceding group by the heavy and accurate flak over the target. Our flight path seemed to take us down a corridor upon which most of the guns couldn't bear and, as a result, only one flight suffered any flak damage and lost one ship. It was a relieved group of men that returned from the target.

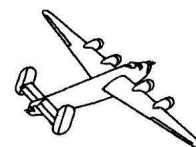
We, my crew and I, came nearest to death on a mission to Blechammer, Germany. The newspapers carried no comments on this mission because it was never completed. I was flying under the lead element

of the high flight, with a plane flying each wing. I had to fly looking up in order to maintain position and did not notice that the new pilot flying my right wing was having trouble staying in position. Perhaps he was worrying about the incendiary bombs we were carrying and had been cautioned not to land with under any conditions. We got as far as Lake Ballentine in Austria, when cloud conditions forced us to turn back. Our squadron was on the outside of the turn and we were unable to keep up. We all increased manifold pressure in order to catch up and, after getting back in position, throttled back with the exception of the green pilot on my wing. He over-ran and came up right under the nose of the plane. This was brought to my attention by a gentle tug on the controls by the co-pilot. (His quick thinking in this emergency saved our lives.) If he had made a sudden movement of the controls I would have instinctively cross-corrected and a collision would have resulted. The tug on the controls made me look down right at the tail gunner whose eyes were about to pop out of his head. His turret was just in front of the propellers as I pulled the airplane up and out of danger. We got back in position and continued toward home. We passed over ripe wheat fields, small cities, and other possible targets, but the group leader waited until we reached the Adriatic and then dumped his bombs into the sea. We followed suit, but I still believe even the wheat fields would have been a better place.

The newspapers remembered us on our next mission to Vienna and printed, "The Mediterranean Air Force yesterday flew 2,200 sorties the allied warplanes blasted rail-road bridges and supplies in northern Italy and his enemy oil plants, an airdrome, and railway facilities in the Balkans". This mission was viewed with the same misgivings as the last one, but again we were lucky. As we went over the target, another group made a run below us and they took all the anti-aircraft fire. We came through unharmed. Returning from the target, I heard a man's voice say, 'I've got fifty missions in and I'm on my way home and those S.O.B's sent me here'. When a crew neared their fifty missions that comprised a tour of duty, the practice was to send them on the easier missions to insure their returning home. Apparently it hadn't been done in this case and the voice on the radio, from someone some place in the Air Force, was letting off steam because he had made it anyhow. Two days after flying this mission, my crew was

ordered home for a thirty-day leave. We had completed forty missions and were to come back and fly the remainder as a flight leader crew. The war took a turn for the better before we returned and we stayed in the States. This is the story behind the news.

The End



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