

War Diary

My Mission Record

by
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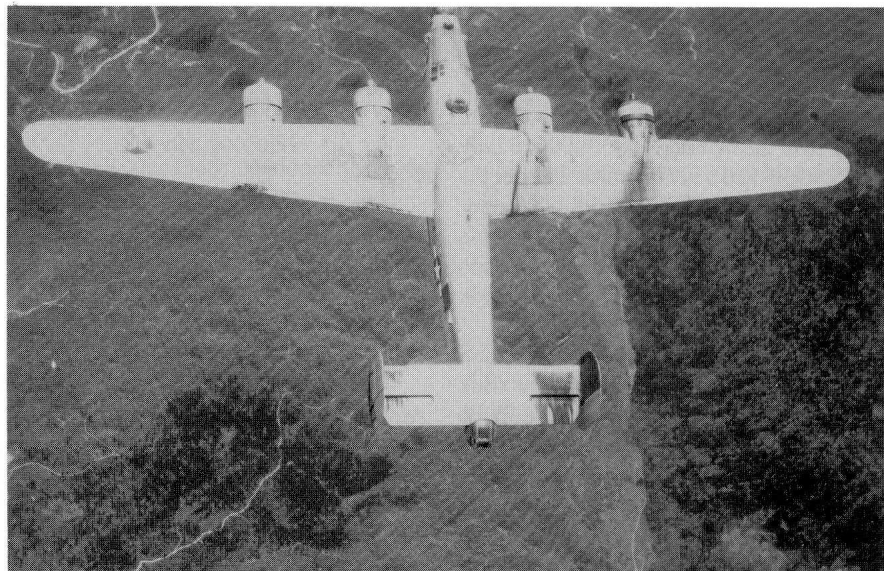
Our crew ferried a B-24H, (44-50200) from Hamilton Field near San Francisco, California August 26 1944, and arrived at Torretta Field, Cerignola, Italy, September 9, 1944 Our route was from San Francisco to Amarillo to Manchester, New Hampshire, to Presque Isle, Maine, to Gander Lake, Newfoundland, to Lagens Field, Terciera Island, Azores, We made landfall in North Africa, landing at Marrakech, Morocco, and then on to Tunis and across the Mediterranean Sea to Bari, Italy, finally arriving at Torretta Field, 12 Kilometers southwest of Cerignola, Italy.

Presque Isle was an unscheduled stop. Lt Dionne landed here for reasons unknown to me, and caught the radio operator off guard, as he was using the trailing antenna for transmission, and when we came in over the town on the final it sheared off including the fish (a 2*lead weight used to stretch the wire into line behind and below the plane). We stayed two nights there. Next day while playing baseball I sprained my ankle and on the following morning left for Gander Lake.

At Gander Lake the pilot Dionne contacted the Convair tech rep and protested the handling of our plane. Thereon we took an impromptu test flight. On getting airborne we discovered that our #3 engine oil tank was siphoning oil as the cap was not secured by the mechanics, causing a loss of almost all of the oil in number three tank in just one circle of the field.

In the Azores our navigator came up with an infected eye, and was hospitalized for four days. Our crew hopped the fence and went to town, and had a ball after meeting a Portuguese restaurant owner who had lived in New York for ten years. He treated us to champagne after we dined, to which we responded by buying more after which we found a horse and buggy, and took a drive to the beach. Beautiful white sand and no one but ourselves in sight...

The following was taken from personal notes recorded in my impromptu "note-book diary."



A 484th BG B-24 in distress. 1484th BG photo via W A Moncrief, 824 sq.

Mission No #1

August 13, 1944. Marshalling yards vicinity of Vienna, Austria. The flak was very heavy. Intelligence estimated that 450 A. A. guns protected the target, but we suspect there were a lot more, as the flak was really thick. Although we came through this with flak holes scattered through the forward end of the plane, and spent flak bruised the bombardier, and ripping through the co pilot's flight suit near his calf, our engines, flight controls, and flight surfaces were not damaged, and everything was normal when we peeled off for our base to line up for landing.

While waiting for our turn to land we saw a plane touch down hard on the runway. A 500 pound bomb, fully armed fell out of the bomb bay, bounced, and blew off the tail of the plane, causing it to roll end over end.

When we landed we passed the control tower and a mass of rubble in front of it, no tail, broken off props, hydraulic fluid, and flight jackets strewn all about. It was all that remained of Mickey ship#200, the same plane that our crew ferried from Hamilton Field to Torretta. We were not too happy when we found out that this plane was to be taken away from us and assigned to another crew.

Mission No #2

August, 24, 1944. Railroad. bridge, Ferrara, Italy. We lost number one engine a few minutes before reaching the IP.

I was in the bomb bay trying to change turbo amplifier when bomb bay doors opened on the bomb run. We were hit by heavy flak, Number 2 engine quit immediately and number 3 engine developed large plume of oil indicating a punctured oil tank siphoning it empty in three or so minutes leaving the plane with one full operating engine, (#1), which ran away, bomb doors stuck open, and one 1,000 pound bomb stuck on one hook in the bomb bay, which I toggled out. Also had indication of engine fire.

I was still in the bomb bay and out of contact by interphone when the Pilot, Henry Dionne, gave the order to bail out, we landed in a ten mile circle 45 miles north of Ancona in the middle of the Adriatic Sea. We lost our navigator, Garland A Hall, 2nd Lt. Ashville NC. He was never seen again after we plunged into the middle of the Adriatic Sea. We assumed he hit a bulkhead on bailout. and was knocked out.

At about dusk we were picked up and taken to an English Army hospital in Ancona, Italy, where we were housed for about four days, and then sent by British hospital ship to Bari, Italy. (15th Air Force headquarters) from where we were sent to our home base, except Ervan Hestad, tail gunner, who was hospitalized after we were discharged. He was pulled from the sea six hours later, in total darkness in very poor condition, due to exposure in the sea. He rejoined us later.

Mission No #3

September 1, 1944. The target was again the railroad bridge at Ferrara, Italy.