
The Mission of June 13, 1944

Part 1 Introduction

This story is told in six parts for clarity. With the exception of this Introduction, Parts 2-6 are shown as they appeared in the micro-film frames to preserve the original appearance of some of the documents.

The visual bombing techniques employed by the Italian based 15th Air Force depended on good weather for accurate results. In the days before satellite transmission of weather data, weather forecasting in WWII was not as accurate as it is today. The target had to be seen through the bombsight. The use of Radar (pathfinder) for navigation was still not in general practice, the equipment was crude and unreliable, and it took much training for the navigator to recognize and identify the scanned image of the ground below. Visual bombing accuracy took, 1) good weather, 2) a skilled bombardier, and 3) good luck, the latter often playing a big part in the success of the mission. Often a sudden break in the clouds as in the case of this mission could transform a failed mission into a successful one. The Innsbruck mission of June 13, 1944 was an important one for the 484th Bomb Group for the problems as stated above and for the fact that the mission earned the Group its first Presidential Unit Citation.

Correspondence Related to the Mission

Editors Note: I was intrigued by the June 13, 1944 mission to Innsbruck when I received a letter from Mr Alfred Whitman of Ingolstadt, Germany inquiring about a B-24 crash near his home near Ingolstadt on June 13, 1944. He had in his possession, a handwritten report dated 21/6 /44, listing the casualties of the aircraft flown by Robert Willen's crew and further relating to the disposition of the deceased crew members in a nearby churchyard. It may be that the recent publicity about the 50th anniversary of D Day triggered the letter.

Ships Lost on June 13, 1944

42-52679 825 squadron lost near Munich (Ingolstadt) Pilot Robert W Willen
42-52602 825 squadron lost near Natters, pilot Robert C Quinlan.
42-52715 825 squadron lost near Sillertshausen, pilot Sylfest L Olson
42-94741 826 squadron No #62 "Vivacious Lady" lost near Venedig, pilot Robert L Remington
42-52655 824 squadron ditched in the Adriatic, pilot Robert E Bedwell Jr (See Item #2)
42-52661 827 squadron forced to land in Switzerland, pilot Edward H Eibs (See Item #3)

My letter to Mr Wittman

Alfred Wittmann

Barlachstrabe 41
85053 Ingolstadt, Germany
Dear Mr. Wittmann

I will attempt to answer your inquiry as best as I can. I wish to thank you most wholeheartedly for the information on the six airmen who died on June 13, 1944. It will comfort their families to finally know that they were buried with dignity in a churchyard by German authorities.

Of the five airmen listed Arthur C Roth was an officer as determined by the leading zero (0) of the ASN (Army Serial Number). I have determined he was the navigator. All of the men were assigned to the 825th squadron, 484th Bomb Group, 49th Bombardment Wing, 15th Air Force.

The usual crew complement for a B-24 Liberator bomber was ten men, six enlisted men and four officers. In aircraft equipped with an aerial camera, an 11th enlisted man photographer would be on board. My records show that a photographer was not assigned to the aircraft involved. The official mission report for June 13, 1944 shows six aircraft lost and 60 airmen listed as MIA (missing in action).

One of the aircraft was 42-52679, a B-24 flown by Lt. Robert W Willen ASN # 0690333 shot down by fighter aircraft and fell near Ingolstadt, Germany. He was a POW, as well as the navigator, Alfred H Walker 0355464 (prisoner of war) at Stalag Luft III, Center Camp. I talked with Robert Willen today before writing this letter.

He reported that his aircraft was hit by anti aircraft fire in the number 3 engine and that they had to fall back from the formation. He was attacked by Luftwaffe fighter planes causing a fire in the bomb bay, just aft of the flight deck. The fire became so intense that he bailed out of the aircraft through the pilot's sliding window (which is some feat as this window is quite small and with full flight clothing, almost impossible to transit). He goes on to say that the Co/pilot Arthur C Roth was trying to get out of his sliding window, on the right side of the aircraft and that his seat pack parachute was on fire. Roth did not escape and fell with the aircraft.

The crew is as follows:

Officers

2nd/Lt Robert W Willen -Pilot ASN 0690333 MIA POW Stalag Luft III
1st/Lt Alfred H Walker-Navigator ASN 0355464 MIA Stalag Luft III
2nd/Lt Arthur C Roth-Co/Pilot ASN 0820068 MIA (deceased)
2nd/Lt William M Capece-Bombardier ASN 0703445 MIA Stalag Luft III

Enlisted men

S/Sgt. Roland B Giroux ASN 31242281 (deceased)
S/Sgt. Otis E Rule ASN 39408445 (deceased)
Sgt. Julias E Jackson ASN 33564517 (deceased)
Sgt. Earl J Schapker ASN 35723167 (deceased)
S/Sgt. George M Theobald ASN 19010327 (deceased ?) *
Sgt. Philip S Davison ASN 31284665 (deceased ?)*