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In the dangerous terrain over the Alps several layers of clouds were encountered. In the swiftly gathering overcast the Group following became lost from the formation. Entirely alone, our formation was now easy prey for the hordes of enemy fighters which we had been briefed to anticipate. At 0928 the Group Leader, flying the only Pathfinder aircraft, was forced to abort with a blown cylinder head. The Deputy lead instantly took over command and once through the clouds, quickly tightened his formation.

Enemy aircraft were first sighted south of Fahlenbach. This force of approximately twenty (20) ME 410's paralleled the bomber formation through the IP at Aichach. Just after the turn a second force consisting of more than fifteen (15) ME 210's, was observed in the tight Lufberry circle immediately above and ahead of our formation. Now both forces converged for the attack. The ME 210's breaking out of their circle sped across the top of our formation in line astern in an air- to-air bombing attack. Simultaneously, the force of ME 410's opened their attack with a heavy cannonading of rocket fire. Rockets expended, they passed to the front of the formation and making a wide circling turn, rushed to join the other twin engine fighters already gathering at the rear. Singly and in waves of three abreast, this entire enemy fighter force now pressed home their attack on our lone group. With ever increasing ferocity, they dove, climbed, reformed and dove again. Attack were mainly from five to eleven o'clock , but single aircraft repeatedly swarmed on the bomber lead. As the primary objective was neared the assault mounted in intensity and a smaller force of ME 109's and FW 190's now joined the original attacking force. In pass after pass, with sometimes fatal aggressiveness they pressed continuously closer using twenty millimeter cannons and machine guns. Desperately attempting to break up the bomber formation, the attacks never ceased even as we closed on the target and the first scattering flak burst began to find the range of the formation. Under this punishing assault five our bombers were shot from the sky before reaching the primary target. Three other badly crippled bombers unable to keep pace, turned back and successfully eluding pursuit, bombed a target of opportunity. Taking our own toll in the violent air battle eighteen (18) enemy fighters were put out of action and either destroyed or damaged. Still our formation continued in to the target.

Munich is defended by an extremely powerful concentration of heavy flak guns. In the face of intense barrages of enemy gunfire and still harried by swarms of enemy fighter, the bomber formation penetrated all defenses to find the objective completely obscured by smoke. Having lost their own Pathfinder and unable to bomb by other than visual means, they flew on over the target, continually braving the flak, hoping for a break in the passive defense which would permit a successful run. No hole in the smoke was found. Undaunted, the Group rallied quickly out of range of the anti-aircraft batteries and reformed. A few more passes were made at the formation by the last of the enemy fighters, but the concentrated defensive fire our formation was still strong enough to repulse this attack.

Every ship in the bomber formation had now been hit repeatedly by either flak or fighter fire. The lead aircraft and both planes in the wings of the lead plane had suffered serious damage. Many aircraft had difficulty staying in formation because of severe hits by both flak burst and twenty millimeter cannon shells. In full realization of the dangers involved and ignoring the peril of their dissipated strength the formation gathered itself for an assault on the important alternate target at Innsbruck. Many men had been wounded, but all remained heroically at the assigned posts. Approaching the target, for the second time on this mission the formation encountered heavy, intense and accurate anti- aircraft fire. In the face of repeated burst of murderous enemy gunfire the group leader kept his remaining force intact and led the formation on a perfect bombing run for a brilliant piece of precision bombing. Keeping on incredibly close formation in spite of their crippled condition, the entire explosive force of their bombs was concentrated in the immediate target area inflicting grave damage to the enemy. The determination , superior flying and professional skill of all air crews who reached or attempted to reach the target is exceptional. This damaging blow to the enemy's war effort is a tribute to their outstanding gallantry and unswerving devotion to duty in the face of the greatest opposing odds.

8. RESULTS OF THE BOMBING A concentration of bomb strikes fell across