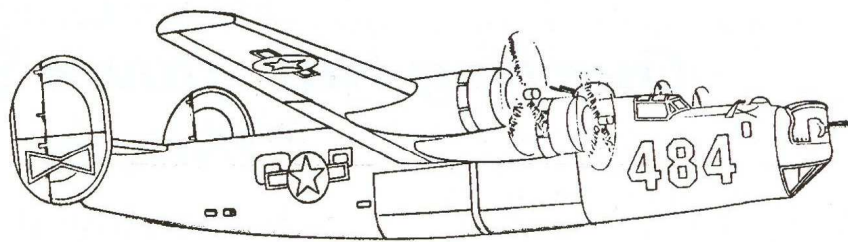


The Torretta Flyer



Torretta Flyer No 39

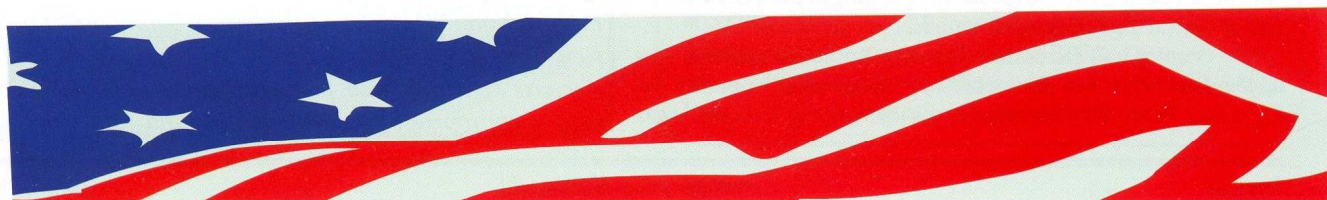
484th Bomb Group Association

Fall- Winter 2001

The Torretta Flyer Publication Ends With This Issue!



This color slide was provided by Rod Stewart -P, 826 Sq.



Our flag Has flown In So Many Places

by Gordon Graham
VFW Post 7439, Indian River

Memorial Day has come and gone once again and most of our lives are back to a normal pace after the parades and family cook-outs that took place over that long weekend. Our flag, the stars and stripes, now as prominently displayed on front porches, on cars, bicycles and boats and in the hands of kids watching the parade that afternoon.

Everywhere you looked you saw "Old Glory" flying in the breeze, reminding us of the importance of the day, the day we have chosen to honor our war dead. And that's the way it should be! After all our flag is the symbol of our country, and the men we honor on that day gave their lives for what it represents.

Ever since Betsy Ross first sat down to sew together the 13 stars and 13 stripes that represented the original 13 states, the flag has stood for our desire for freedom and remains so today. Our dear old flag has been to some very interesting places since then, the only change being the addition of a star as states were admitted to the union.

It flew over Fort McHenry during the war of 1812 and remained flying in spite of the merciless bombardment by the British, inspiring Francis Scott Key to write our National Anthem "The Star Spangled Banner." "Our flag was there when the wagon trains moved west. And, can you ever remember seeing any old western movie when the leading rider in the cavalry charge didn't have an American flag anchored to his saddle, flapping in the breeze, on his way to rescue the beleaguered settlers.

Our flag was there when Theodore Roosevelt made his way up San Juan hill. It was there when our "doughboys" went over the top during World War One. And it was there, flying from the masts

of the ships as they approached the beaches of Normandy. And who can forget the famous picture of the flag raising on Mt. Suribachi by the marines on Iwo Jima.

Our flag was at Pusan, Taegu, Inchon and the Chosen reservoir in Korea! The red, white and blue was in Vietnam in places

with strange names like Saigon, Pleiku and Nha Trang. It was on the tanks and armored cars as our troops chased Saddam out of Kuwait during Desert Storm, and our flag is visible today in Bosnia as our servicemen attempt to keep the peace.

Yes, our flag has even been to the moon! But one of the more important places you'll find our flag at this time of the year is on the graves of our fallen comrades, placed there annually out of respect, by those of us who served alongside the men and women who paid the ultimate price for the freedoms we enjoy today. So, the next time you visit the family plot to pay

respects to your loved ones, look for one of those small flags take a minute, go over and read the plain bronze marker that identifies the man who served his country. You won't find a fancy stone with glorious inscriptions you'll simply find the man's name, his date of birth and death, his rank and his branch of service. That's the way he'd want it!

Editors Note: This piece was written before the attacks on New York and Washington DC on September 11, 2001. Because of the renewed patriotic feelings about America it is most appropriate to show our beautiful flag once again.



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Torretta Flyer History

With this edition Number 39 Fall-Winter 2001 "The Torretta Flyer" will cease publication. The magazine format was adapted from number 10 onward. Numbers 1 through 3 were called bulletins of one to three pages. The name Torretta Flyer did not appear until number 4. Numbers 5 and 6 were of mimeograph style. Numbers 7 through 9 were the first to use justified type and were printed from paste up boards. Number 9 had a green cover and incorporated a membership roster. From Number 14 the Flyer was composed and laid out on our Apple computer using a program called Ready-Set-Go. Later editions were created using Adobe PageMaker which had superior layout features. Scanned photographs were first used in issue number 37 and subsequent issues. Each magazine was made up from contributions from members and articles adapted from other publications. The style of the Flyer was adapted from the American Aviation Historical Journal, and the New Yorker Magazine.

The 484th BG PX Items

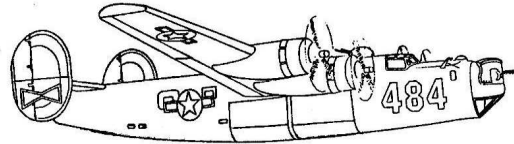
- 484th BG Logo patch, stitched, 2 3/4 " in diameter -----\$5.00.
- B-24 three- dimensional tie tac, silver, 1 3/4 " - - ----- \$5.00.
- Association Pin with 484th Logo- - - - - \$5.00.
- Baseball Cap, red & white. side view of 484th silver B-24 on front, postage inc.- - - - - \$12.00.
- Miniature Plaque 1 3/4 " with display stand, postage inc.- - - - - \$20.00.
- Back issues of the Torretta Flyer, (25) Nos 10 thru 39, postage inc.- - - - - \$130.00.
- Individual issues- - - - - \$7.00 ea.

Note : Some early back issues of the Torretta Flyer are available only in zerox form. A cumulative index of the Torretta Flyers will be available for those who wish one, courtesy of Dick Olson.

Return to Torretta & Cerignola

The May 1 to May 10, 2002 tour to southern Italy is gaining momentum, more people are signing up. Cities included are: Rome, Naples, Pompeii, Sorrento, Isle of Capri, Amalfi Drive, Solerno, Bari, Cerignola, and Torretta Airdrome. Umberto Albanese and his wife Antonietta have invited all members to their home in Cerignola, guests on the tour will enjoy the hospitality of this couple well known to the 484th members for making the Italian Scholarship Program so successful. Contact your congenial tour leader, John H Nicolai-827 Sq at (701) 223-3560 to sign up.

The Torretta Flyer



Issue # 39 Fall-Winter 2001

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The Torretta Flyer is the official publication of the 484th Bomb Group Association. Normal distribution is limited to members only. Requests from nonmembers for copies should be directed to the Editor.

The Torretta Flyer reports primarily on the history of air warfare during WWII and the accomplishments of members of the 484th Bomb Group during WWII. From time to time the magazine has covered other subject matter related to aeronautical events.

Editor, Bud Markel *Associate Editor,* Bea Markel

Board of Directors 2001, Bea Markel, John Billings, Ken Hubertz, and Ed Schwartz

Scholarship Committee, Dick Muscatello, Chairman, Joe Hebert, Vernon Janke, and Ross J Wilson

Membership Committee

Al Kline, Adolph Marcus, Jack Robson, Herb Weinstein,

Publicity Committee, Adolph Marcus, Bud Pressel

Before December 31,2001, direct all inquiries to the Editor, Torretta Flyer, 1122 Ysabel St. Redondo Beach, CA 90277-4453-13, USA Phone (310) 316-3330 . We can be reached via the internet at BUD484BG@AOL.com. Also, visit our web site at <http://members.aol.com/bud484bg>. Faxes can be received at prearranged times.

A Summing up of the History and Activities of the 484th Bomb Group Association, 1981-2001

After twenty years of bringing people together, the 484th Bomb Group Association will close all activity as of the end of the year. The 2001 reunion is the last of twenty reunions held from 1981 to 2001. They were: 1) Torrance, CA-1981 Holiday Inn, 2) Dayton OH-1982 Sheraton Hotel 3) Williamsburg, VA-1983 Hilton Hotel, 4) Orlando, FL-1984 Hyatt Hotel, 5) Torrance, CA-1985 Annual Meeting Holiday Inn, 6) San Antonio, TX 1986- Marriott Riverwalk Hotel, 7) Colorado Springs, CO 1987-Clarion Hotel, in conjunction with the 15th Air Force Assn. reunion, 8) San Francisco, CA-1988, Airport Marriott Hotel, 9) New Orleans, LA-1989, Marriott Hotel, 10) Nashville, TN 1990-Marriott Hotel, 11) Kansas City, 1991-Crown Plaza Hotel, 12) Dearborn, MI 1992- Marriott Dearborn Inn 13) Harrisburg, PA-1993, Marriott Hotel, 14) Cruise-Carnival Cruise Lines-1994, 15) Dayton, OH 1995-Marriott Hotel, 16) San Diego, CA-1996, Hilton Hotel.17) Washington, DC-1997, Marriott Hotel,18) Tucson, AZ, 1998-Hilton Hotel 19), St Louis, MO,1999- Airport Marriott Hotel, 20) Dallas, TX-2000, Airport Marriott Hotel, 21) Atlanta, GA 2001, Airport Marriott Hotel. We have held one singular annual meeting in 1985, one cruise reunion in 1994, and eighteen regular place reunions in the ensuing years.

The association has published 39 Torretta Flyers, 29 each in the new magazine slick paper format and has granted scholarships to 105 Italian high school students and 8 high school students at Harvard School and one student in Washington, DC in the USA. A total of \$53,000 dollars has been awarded for scholarships, from monies contributed by members.

The association has installed a bronze plaque and tree in the Memorial Park adjacent to the United States Air Museum, and a plaque and tree in Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, VA.

With the support of our members, the association has gathered historical data from the National Archives in Washington DC, as researched and copied by member Joe Shugrue, consisting of Mission Reports, and Missing Air Crew Records. From the Military Record Center in St. Louis, Missouri, researched and copied by member Orville Hommert and his wife Katie, the association received the Morning Reports. General William B Keese provided the association with monthly Intelligence Reports and other documents pertaining to the war effort. The story starting on page 12 came from Gen Keese.

Historical microfilm reels were purchased from the Albert E Simpson Memorial Library at Maxwell Field, Alabama, and printed. The summarized history of the 484th Bomb Group was drawn from these reels and printed in the Torretta Flyer No 25 , Winter- Spring 1994.

A master data base was drawn up containing some 5300 names of personnel who passed through the 484th Bomb Group from its inception in Harvard, NE, on 14 September 1943, its deployment overseas late winter, early spring 1944, and to combat operations flown between April 1943 and, May 1945. The number of ground echelon troops such as, armorers, orderly room NCOs, COs, cooks, drivers, fuelers, guards mechanics, storekeepers, to name a few, stayed fairly constant .

On the other hand, flight crew numbers varied each day depending on operational needs, and who was available for any

mission. Provision had to be made for losses due to combat and illness and the number of serviceable aircraft. Flight crews often flew long tiring missions exposed to enemy fire from flak, fighter or both, and therefore could not fly consecutive missions over a long period of say two weeks or more without nervous exhaustion and shell shock. Two to three crews were assigned to each aircraft to relieve each other. As each crew member finished his tour, others were assigned out of replacement depots, or arrived via new aircraft being flown over from the States.

Before the computer and the internet were available, searching for new members was reduced to primitive methods, many potential members could not be found easily in the early years of the Association. When we became computerized, many of the newly found members were physically unable to participate. We were surprised too by the sheer number of members who had already passed on. Most of the reports regarding deceased personnel were sent in by members, and probably is not current, as agencies such as the Social Security Administration or Veterans Administration do not advise of the deaths of persons represented by their organizations unless queried .

The first aircraft to be used in combat were ferried over from Topeka, KS to the Torretta Airdrome in Italy by 484th BG flight crews before the onset of combat. Most of the B-24s assigned to the 484th for delivery overseas afterwards were built by the Ford Motor Co. at Willow Run, MI. Additional B-24s were flown in from the depot at Gioia Del Colle, Italy, as needed, by spare crews.

The three goals Bea and I set out for ourselves have been met. They are :

- 1) Bringing members together in reunion.
- 2) Perpetuating the history of the 484th Bomb Group.
- 3) Creating a Living Memorial and bringing it into fruition by the awarding of scholarship grants.

I want to take this opportunity to thank every member and spouse for their continued support of the organization throughout the years, I want to thank our members for their generosity in making the scholarship awards so successful. No one need tell you that the 484th is well respected and loved in Cerignola, Italy and surrounding country.

I want to thank those particular members who gave so willingly of their time and energy 1) Finding new members, 2) Sending out publicity releases, 3) Being local hosts at the out of town venues, and 4) Contributing stories to the Torretta Flyers.

We cling to one another to say goodbye for the last time, our eyes moist with full emotion, and our hearts and minds struggling to find words to say perfectly that final Goodbye and Thanks, it was a great experience. Yes! It was fun, we made new friends, we laughed and cried, and ate together. We saw great cities and wondrous sites together. The word of oneness was added to our vocabularies. It was the melding of all into a team as in the war years and that was a good team once more to be remembered by all of the living and the ones to come after. Indeed, it was good.

Bud Markel, Founder and President

Report of The 2001 Reunion In Atlanta , GA

Notice of Dissolution

This will be the final issue of the Torretta Flyer. The Association has filed for dissolution of the 484th Bomb Group Association corporation, as of December 31st of this year, as approved by the Directors and Members of the Association. As noted in the 2001 annual meeting report, the Association's collections and archives will be transferred to the WWII Military Institute, of Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida. We will be busy in the coming months indexing documents and preparing them for shipment.

Report on the 2001 Reunion

The last reunion was held in Atlanta, GA at the Airport Marriott Hotel Oct 3-8, 2001. It was anticipated that because of the attacks on New York and Washington, DC on September 11, 2001, many cancellations would occur because the safety of air travel was put into great doubt. However the bravery of WWII veterans and their families was assured from the get go, facing adversity is not new to our generation, what with the depression, enemy fighters and flak we endured during the war years. 230 brave ex GIs, and wives, children, grandchildren, friends, and family members attended the reunion. It took a little guts to climb on an airplane and defy the new unknown enemy. The only reason for cancellation, that we know of, was health problems.

Starting with registration on the 16th floor and our displays in the adjoining Mercedes Room of the Atlanta Airport Marriott Hotel on Wednesday October 3, 2001, more than 230 members and guests gathered together one more time in reunion and enjoyed the hospitality of Atlanta and the Airport Marriott Hotel. The view from the 16th floor of Atlanta and commercial flights taking off from the airport was spectacular, as well as a "reassuring" sight to behold.

There was much to see in Atlanta and the tours gave members an opportunity to enjoy the sights. The Atlanta City Tour, including a visit to Coca Cola, and nostalgia; Margaret Mitchell (Gone With the Wind-Author) House; Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama; and Georgia's Stone Mountain Park.

At the banquet on Sunday evening, the patriotic mood of the country and all of our members was reflected in the table arrangements where 10 small American flags were placed inside each of the red, white and blue napkins on each table, as a souvenir for each guest. With the military on alert, we were fortunate to have the Dobbins Air Force Reserve Color Guard for the flag ceremony and the presence of Lt/Col Army Chaplain Paul Harwart and his wife Lorilee, from Forscom Hdqtrs, Ft McPherson, Georgia, to give the invocation before dinner was served.

A poem written by Joseph L Revelas, 826th Squadron, and dedicated to the members of the 484th Bomb Group, was read by Ross J Wilson 825th Squadron See page 6.

The program began with a written message from the 484th C.O. M/Gen (retired) William B Keese, read by Harry B Harris 825th Squadron and is reproduced on page 7.

Your President and Founder, Bud Markel, gave a summing up presentation of the Association's history and accomplishments. Music and dancing continued on to close the evening.

The Memorial Service on Monday, October 8th, was conducted by Chaplain (LTC) Paul Harwart. The names of 34 deceased members and family members, made known to us since the 2000 Reunion, was read by Russell L Hawes, 827th Squadron.

Annual Meeting Report

The annual business meeting took place on Sunday, October 7, 2001 at 9 AM. Minutes of the Members Meeting of October 29, 2000, were read and approved. Reading of the Financial Report for the year ended December 31, 2000 was dispensed with and the Report was made available for anyone who wished to look at it.

The Chairman reported that the balance of monies in the Memorial Scholarship Awards fund totalling \$13,096.16, has been distributed during the year 2001, as follows: Two awards of \$1,000 each was given to two Harvard Public School students in Harvard, Nebraska. 18 awards were given to students in Cerignola, Italy. Two awards of \$705.36 each and 16 awards of \$605.34 each.

In accordance with recommendation and approval by the Board of Directors, the location for the 484th Bomb Group's archival materials, was determined to be World War II Institute at Florida State University, in Tallahassee, Florida.

The Chairman reported that the 29 issues of The Torretta Flyer, the Association publication, will be bound in two volumes, and distributed to 53 appropriate museums, institutions and libraries, such as: The Air Force Museum, Wright-Patterson, Ohio; San Diego Aerospace Museum Library, National Air and Space Museum, Washington, D.C.; the Air Force Academy Library, Colorado Springs and others.

Upon dissolution of the corporation, any remaining assets in the general fund will be distributed to the 15th Air Force Association, which meets the requirements of our Articles of Incorporation, as a Veterans organization under IRS Code 501(c)(19).

Election Of Directors

In accordance with the Notice of Annual Meeting for the purpose of electing Directors for the year 2000-2001, the election of directors was set to take place. On recommendation that the present slate of Directors be elected to serve until the final dissolution of the Corporation, and upon motion made and carried, voting was dispensed with and Sigmund B Markel, Beatrice M Markel, John M Billings, Harry K Hubertz and Edward Schwartz were elected to so serve until the final dissolution of the Corporation has been made.

15th Air Force Association Membership

Here is the address of the 15th Air Force Association for those interested in membership: The 15th Air Force Association, Box 6325, March Air Force Base, CA 92518.

The Deceased list since the last reunion

2/Lt	Russell K Bolton Jr.-P	827-027
Sgt	Frank W Carr-G	824-247
Sgt	Henry W Cushard Jr.- C/C	826-116
2/Lt	Clair Daniels -N	825
	Henry Deck-B	826
1/Lt	Lyman N Fairbanks-P	827-058
	Dorothy Fetter*	827
1/Lt	Michael P Goodman-B	827-094
	Mike Karworski	824-167
S/Sgt	Pat Layne-E	827-082
CpI	Glenn A Lloyd -BG	827
S/Sgt	Aurelio S Lopez -E	825-094
S/Sgt	Ralph E Parkhurst-G	827-208
	Phyllis Peters*	826
	Daniel R Peters*	826
2/Lt	Amos Pollard-P	827 099
2/Lt	Paul J Schiappacasse-P	825-003
	John Schneider-W/O	484
	Betty Schroeder*	827
N/G	Glendon F Smith	827
Sgt	Edward H Stoerkel-R/O	827
Cap	Eual E Stone-P	826
2/Lt	Moses D. Stone	826
T/Sgt	Walter G. Stowe-R/O	824
Maj	Gilbert E. Strauser	826
Sgt	John D. Strey -B/G-B/G	825
S/Sgt	Richard E. Stromback	826
S/Sgt	Alfred G. Strout -R/O	826
Cpl	George C. Stuart	825
T/S	Arno L. Stuebinger	825
T/Sgt	Howard C. Stump	826
S/Sgt	Mathew W Subiclak-G	826
S/Sgt	Floyd W Suddreth-N/G	825
Sgt	Trez T Thompson -G	825-216
T/Sgtt	Willis Wong-R/O	827-214
Cpl	A J "Red" Wise -E	827-141

* Family members

The Poem Read At The 2001 Reunion

**Those Valiant Men Of The 484th
By Joe Revelas, 826 Sq.**

They came from parts near and far
From east and west, south and north
To help this nation win the war
Those valiant men of the 484th

Leaving family and friends behind
They gladly answered the call
Firmly vowing with heart and mind
That this country would never fall

They trained together day and night
To form a perfect team
Working together to get it right
To win the war was everyone's dream

They left one day for a foreign shore
Traveling by air and sea
To put an end to that dreadful war
And retain our precious liberty

Arriving there they set to work
Everyone doing their share
Pilots, ground crew, cook and clerk
To get those Liberators in the air

Taking off daily before the dawn
With engines spewing fire
The bomb laden birds are soon airborne
Striking faster and higher

Off they go over land and sea
There's "Fuel Cell Fanny"
Umbriago and "Sally D"
"Black Jack 2 and "Toggle Annie"

Today there will be no milk runs
The targets are well protected
By plenty of fighters and flak guns
For our missions are always expected

Heading for their destination
Over distant enemy soil
To bomb a railroad station
Or maybe some tanks of oil.

With "bombs away" comes the flak
They try to pay it no mind
But at six o'clock high sits a 109
Sneaking in for the attack

Mission complete, now homeward bound
Flying through heavy flak
With enemy fighters all around
Some of the planes never come back

The bombings proceed with little rest
As they face the daily combat
Striking Ploesti, Vienna or Budapest
Yugoslavia or Weiner- Neustadt

As the war came to a bitter end
All the killing did finally cease
Thanks to all those valiant men
Who helped the world regain the peace

The price of freedom is always high
Paid by courageous men
Who fought the battles in the sky
And secured our liberty once again

They fought and died for the USA
Land of our founding fathers
Risking their lives day by day
They became our American martyrs

Let us remember those heroes so brave
Who fought the battle in the air
Praise them for their lives they gave
And salute them with a solemn prayer

They were from the greatest generation
They came from east, west, south, and north
Flying and dying for this great nation
Those valiant men of the four eighty fourth

The letter from William B Keese M/Gen USAF Ret Read at the 2001 Reunion



Dear Fellow Members:

Because of physical limitations on my part I have asked my good friend, Harry B. Harris, former Romanian POW, to pass on to all of you some final thoughts from me.

I'd like to start this brief message with a note of sincere thanks to Bud and Bea Markel for the time and many efforts they have made in organizing and keeping the 484th reunion running smoothly for the past years.

When I think back to our reunion in Dayton I remember stating that I never gave any thought to the idea that we might be gathering for a reunion 50 years after the war was over, let alone one at this time. However the purpose of this message is not to discuss all that has happened to may of us over the years but to express a farewell to all of you and remind you that there are some benefits in growing

older. For instance:

People no longer view you as a hypochondriac.

Things you buy now probably won't wear out.

You can live without sex but not without your glasses.

When you talk about, "good grass" a you're referring to some ones Lawn.

Your back goes out more than you do,(mine sure does).

Your secrets are safe with your friends because they can't remember them either.

You're not likely to be charged with sexual harassment, despite what you may have been thinking at the time.

Enough of that attempt to add a little humor to the occasion.

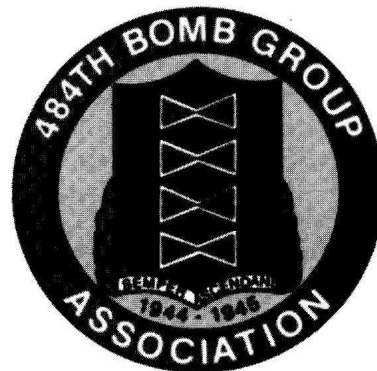
I put in 35 years in the military and never fought harder to get a job then I did to get the assignment to command of the 484th Bomb Group.

There were times that I wondered if maybe I hadn't been too clever for my own good. That was particularly true on missions to Munich, Vienna, Blechhammer, and the like, however at the time I was primarily interested in getting the job done, a thought that I'm sure was in all minds - there were some places we just weren't interested in returning to. I know a lot of promises were made to the LORD at those times - and I hope they have been kept.

As I write this I think of the many good friends I made and regret I wasn't able to make more - and I think of all the fine men that were lost doing their jobs. Whether you were a member of a crew or one of the support personnel you were all very important and I close by saying simply

Thank you, farewell, and god bless.

William B. Keese, M/Gen. USAF (retired)



The Scholarship Awards for 2001 Announced

Scholarships have been given to 18 Italain, and 2 Americans in Harvard, NE

The 2001 ceremony for presentation of 18 awards to Italian students took place 9/21/01 in Cerignola, Italy, under the supervision of Professor Umberto Albanese, with Vice-Mayor Dott. Carbone and Prof. Granato of the Institute of Art among those present. The ceremony was preceded by two of the awardees calling on all attendees, on behalf of the awardees to honor the victims of the

recent 9/11 attack on the USA with a moment of silence. There was also a proposal by Dott. Carbone and Prof. Granato to place a Memorial Monument in front of the school in Cerignola in remembrance of the 484th Bomb Group Association. Following are letters of appreciation from the 18 students in the English language as learned in the classroom.



Angiola Bancone
Via Gela n.6
71042 Cerignola (FG), Italy

Cerignola, 15 September 2001 Members 484th Bomb Group Association: Thank you very much for the scholarship that your foundation has awarded me! I am Angiola Bancone and I'm seventeen. Now I attend the fourth year of high school Liceo Classico "Nicola Zingarelli" in Cerignola. Your scholarship will help me to go on with my studies at the University, as I'd like to become a manager. I hope to realize my plans! I have never won a scholarship. Although my marks have always been excellent, so I am very pleased for that because I have been also rewarded by an important foreign association! With my best regards, Angiola Bancone



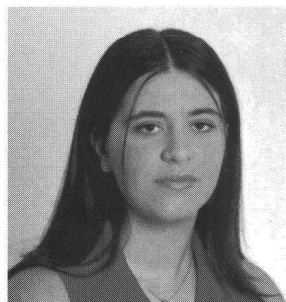
Francesca Bellomo
via 2 Demartinis 83
Cerignola (FG) 71042 Italy

(Cerignola 15 September 2001 Dear Members of the Association, I'm the above mentioned Francesca, I'm 16 years old and I'm studying at the Art High School Institute S. CUORE in Cerignola. I chose this school because I have been curious, particularly of laboratories where the pupils can produce articles of very fine quality and nice showing, and also because I love so much doing paintings and I enjoy the motive that I can be able to create some artistic things, therefore I'm happy to have been given this choice. I'm really glad to have been privileged for this scholarship, as this is the first time. Many and hearty regards. Francesca Bellomo



Simona Berteramo
71042 Cerignola (FG), Italy.

Cerignola., August, 31, 2001 Dear President of the 484" B.G.,my name's Simona Berteramo, I'm a 16 years old student of Cerignola's Scientific Licee. First of all, forgive me for my poor English. I'm trying to improve it day after day, I'll do all my best. Oh, I can't write how great is my joy for being chosen winner of your scholarship! Very often my uncle told me stories about the life at the former air fields stationed around Cerignola's area, how hard the life of the American flyers in the tents was, how good all the G.I.S. to our people were and how many human lives they lost doing their missions over Germany and all the European theatres of the World War II. Particularly he mentioned the many lost over Ploesti: thanks to those wonderful men we can enjoy our freedom and our welfare. I wish to thank you and all the members of the 484 th B.G. with all my heart. God bless you all.. Sincerely, Simona Berteramo



Rossella Bruno
Via Puzandeloi O/D
71042 Cerignola, FG. Italy

Cerignola, 15 September 2001 Dear 484th Bomb Group Association, I'm very happy for the victory of this scholarship. I would like to thank your association, which offers to a limited number of deserving students the opportunity of receiving a scholarship every year. I believe it is fair that the most intelligent students have useful economical helps to carry on studying and to pursue their own aims and dreams. Besides, I hope that every candidate who receives this scholarship will be an example for everyone who considers studying like something less important. It would be positive if they understood that studying will become at least a pleasure, if they have good will and also the basis for our future. This is all that I wanted to tell you and I thank you again for this opportunity you gave me. Yours faithfully, Rossella Bruno

Mattea Caiaffa
Via Iglesias 43
71042 Cerignola, Italia

Cerignola, September 15, 2001 Illustrious Members of 484th Bomb Group Association: I'm a girl and my name is Mattea, I'm seventeen years old and I attend the "Liceo Scientifico Albert Einstein". I write you this letter because I want to show you all my gratitude with great emotion that I felt when I received official announcement about the scholarship. Also, I'm very happy because I saw that my willingness had been recognized by you. This event has been reason of great satisfaction for me and for my family, therefore I say to you again. Thanks Mattea Caiaffa



Gaetana Calvio
Via Pompei 11
Cerignola -FG Italy 71042

Cerignola 15 September 2001 I'm Gaetana Calvio, I'm a 16 year old girl. I'm a student at the Art Institute S.Cuore of Cerignola. Doing paintings is everything for me and also studying with teachers and friends is outstanding. Just three years ago I had no ideas of what to do when I became older. At present it seems to be very different and I will try to study really hard to be someone in good business position in future. Many thanks to all the Members of Association and I feel very lucky to receive this scholarship, I find it very important and I believe it is so for any other student. See you sometime. Gaetana Calvio



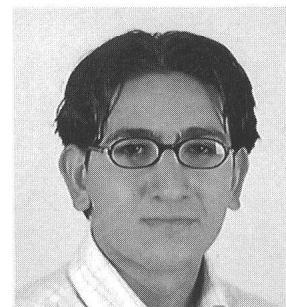
Cristina Cazzolla
Piazza Ventimiglia, no 1
71042 Cerignola (FG), Italy

Cerignola, September 07 2001 Dear members of The 484th Bomb Group Association, My name is Cristina and I'm eighteen years old. I live in Cerignola,. At the present time, I'm in last year of grammar high school in my town and in June I'm going to face the State exams; after the high school I will probably go to university but I don't know yet what kind of subject I'm going to choose. However I would like to thank you for giving me this chance because I really didn't expect it and I didn't imagine I would have gotten the possibility of winning this scholarship. I know a lot about the origins and the history of your society and the strong ties that bind your association to my hometown; it's a really big honor for me to be candidate for winning this scholarship, I really didn't think you would have chosen me, and I'm sure it's the same for each one of the other candidates you chose. Thank you all again, Cristina Cazzolla



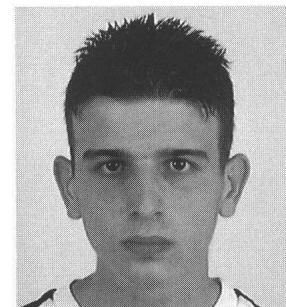
Alberto Cellamaro,
Via Positano,, 23
71042 Cerignola,
Italy

Cerignola 15 Settembre 2001 Dear Sirs, My name's Alberto Cellamaro, I'm 17 years old and attend Commercial Technical school "Dante Alighieri" in Cerignola. The third year of a programmers course is finished very good. This is confirmed from your recognition about myself with a scholarship. For this reason I'm writing to thank you for the possibility that you have given me and I'm sure that this will be a very important stimulant in the future. I hope that this result is an example for my school friends to always do their best. Yours faithfully, Alberto Cellamaro,



Robert Coratella
Via Camogli 2
71042, Cerignola,
Italy

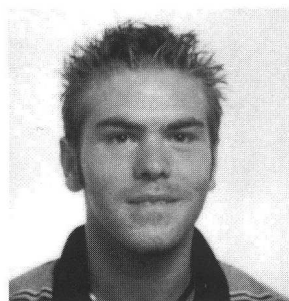
Cerignola 15 September, 2001 Dear members of Bomb Group America, I'm Robert Coratella one of the students that has won the scholarship. I'm very happy for this. I live in Cerignola a small town in the south of Italy. I'm sixteen years old and in this year I'm in class eleven and I hope to continue the last year with good results. I don't find the words to thank you but I'm very proud of my own score because my efforts have been so repaid. I give a big value at school because it is important to enter in business world as in my town is very hard find a job. Thank you, thank you very much again for the scholarship.. Yours Faithfully Robert Coratella





Savino Coratella,
via Camogli 2
Cerignola (FG) 71042
Italy

15th September 2001 Dear Members of The Bomb Group: I want to thank you for granting this scholarship to me. I'm Savino Coratella, I'm in class eleven of T.C. "Dante Alighieri" situated in Cerignola, I'm sixteen years old and I like very much to study. I'm very happy to have won this scholarship for two motives: The first motive because to win this scholarship was my wish; The second motive because with this scholarship to find work is easy in the future. All this is your merit but also mine. Thank you. Yours faithfully Savino Coratella.



Nicola Cotugno
Viale di Levante, 64
71042 Cerignola (FG), Italy

Cerignola 15 September 2001. Dear Sir, My name is Cotugno Nicola and I'm 17 years old. I'm just beginning the 4th year of the Agrarian School in my city, Cerignola. Last year I've been very busy with my school duties but, in spite of this, I've been very happy with my final outcome at the end. I'm glad to know there are important initiatives like yours. I think they are an encouragement for guys, pushing them to work hard to do their best, becoming an example to their friends. I do appreciate receiving this bonus and I really thank you. I firmly believe that, thanks to my will and to these important initiatives I'll be always ready to overcome difficulties, not only at school but also at work. I know, actually, that the world of business is a hard world that needs, above all, cultural resources. Many thanks. Nicola Cotugno



Angelo Ferricchio
Via Caporetta, 59
71042 Cerignola (FG) Italy

Cerignola 15/ September 2001 Dear Sirs: I'm Angelo Ferricchio. I'm 16 years old and I'm attending the fourth year of the technical agricultural school in Cerignola. I am very happy to have received your award. I think that this initiative will act as a stimulus for students to do their duty well, and help them to enter the working world. I thank you very much again and, hoping one day to visit your beautiful country. Best wishes to everyone.



Luciana Gallo
Via Bracciano,3
71042 Cerignola (FG)
Italy

Cerignola, September 15, 2001. Dear Members of the 484th Bomb Group Association, my name is Luciana Gallo. I am 18 years old and I attend the fourth year of the Istituto Tecnico Industriale "A Righi" in Cerignola. I am very happy to receive an award and I thank you for this opportunity you gave me. Thanks because your award of a scholarship makes my parents very proud of me. I want to use this scholarship to continue my studies because my greatest dream is to become a Journalist. Thank you very much for this award. Best Regards. Luciana Gallo



Viviana Lupo
C.so A. Moro 129/E
71042 Cerignola (FG), Italy

Cerignola, 13/09/2001 Dear Sirs, My name is Viviana Lupo and I'm fifteen years old. I attend the third year of the "Liceo" specializing in scientific studies. I wish to thank you for the opportunity offered to me of receiving this scholarship. I had never heard about your wonderful initiative towards us students of Cerignola and I'm proud of having had the possibility to know you. Studying the history of the Second World War, I've had the opportunity of knowing the profound catastrophe of the civilized heart and of justice, and no one in the world can forget it, as we cannot forget other tragedies that happened and are happening all over the so called civilized world. In the future I'd like very much to continue my university studies for obtaining my medical degree and then to take a specialization in cardiology. I hope that one day I can know you personally. My best wishes and thanks. Viviana Lupo

Nicoletta Pagone.
Via Sanremo, 8
71042 Cerignola (FG)
Italy

Cerignola 15/09/2001 Dear Members of the 484th Bomb Group Association, I am Nicoletta Pagone. I am 17 years old. I am attending the fourth class of the Technical Industrial Institute in Cerignola. I thank you for having given me this opportunity. I am very happy to have won this scholarship, my parents are very happy too. They are very proud of me. I have many dreams and expectations that I want to reach concerning my future. For me, this is a great privilege because it will help my future study. Thank you again for your prize. Best greetings, Nicoletta Pagone.



Benedetta Prudente.
Via Ivrea, 62
71042 Cerignola (FG)
Italy

Cerignola, 15th September, 2001 Dear Sirs, My name is Benedetta Prudente. I'm 16 years old and I attend the fourth class of the Commercial School "Dante Alighieri" in Cerignola. I'm writing to say thank you for enabling me and other students to win a scholarship.. I hope to come to America some day in order to improve my English. Thanks ever so much again. Yours faithful, Benedetta Prudente.



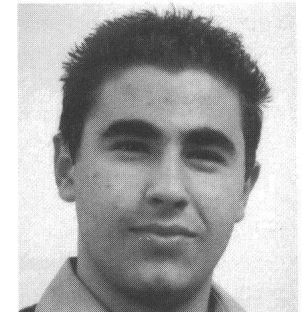
Angela Lia Scarano
Via Monviso, 34
71042 Cerignola (FG)
Italy

Cerignola, September 15, 2001 Dear Members of The 484th Bomb Group Association, I'm writing to thank you for your scholarship. I'm Angela Lia Scarano, I'm eighteen and I'm going to attend the fifth year of Liceo Classico "Nicola Zingarelli" in Cerignola, so I'll take my diploma next July. I didn't expect this important and generous scholarship and I'm very proud for this reason. I'd like to study Economics at University; therefore, I'll use your prize to realize my dream. Thanks again for the opportunity you give to young students like me every year. Yours faithfully, Angela Lia Scarano



Vincenzo Terenzio
via San Ferdinando, 19
Cerignola (FG) 71042
Italy

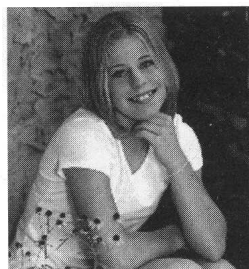
Cerignola 15th September 2001 Dear Sirs, I have been pleasantly surprised to know about your student grant. It has been a great honor for me and a form of reward for my good school results. Therefore I must express my appreciation to all the Members of the 484th Bomb Group Association. Thank you on behalf of my family too. I'm thinking of using this money to buy some English works or some works that will broaden my cultural and formative horizon. Yours sincerely, Vincenzo Terenzio



The 2001 awards were also given to two students of Harvard Public School, Harvard, NE. as follows:

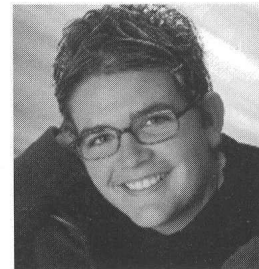
Libby Nelson
Harvard Public School
Harvard, NE 68944

I am planning on attending Wayne State College in Wayne, NE in the fall majoring in Elementary Education.



Kilee Portentier.
Harvard Public School
Harvard, NE 68940

I am planing on attending Chadron State College in Chadron, NE in the fall majoring in Physical Therapy.



Operation of the German Air Force, "Luftwaffe," in World War Two



HQ Office of The Assistant Chief of Staff A-2, 15 April 1945

Special Intelligence Report #110

Editors Note

This report first appeared in Torretta Flyers No 9 and 10, but because these two issues have been out of print for many years only a few members have access to this information.

15 April 1945

The following statement has been secured from a senior and experienced German Air Force (GAF) flying officer captured recently on the Western Front.

The purpose of my statement is to show the development of air warfare during the last two years and all its possibilities as well

as its actual course, which I experienced as Pilot, as "Gruppenkommandeur" and as "Geschwaderkommodore". I should like to stress right away that I am not taking the "Flak" into account as my knowledge of that subject is too slight and I had little to do with it.

Before coming to my main subject, it is first necessary to give a short survey of the development and especially the preliminary steps of air warfare up to that period in order to facilitate the understanding of the subject. We all witnessed the triumphal march through Poland, Norway and then in the Spring of 1940 in the West with great admiration and enthusiasm. It made clear to us the importance for successful modern warfare of motorized troops, and especially tanks, on the ground and of the GAF in the air. I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that the main factor which enabled us to crush and defeat France in so short a time and drive the British Expeditionary Force from the continent was the German Air Force (GAF).

After the French campaign was over we airmen often won-

dered about the continuation of the fight against England; we thought the next step would be to throw in the entire GAF against England's most sensitive spot, her shipping. We all agreed the thing to do would be for us all to take a torpedo on board and try and cut England's life line. Instead of that came the battle against England itself, against London. Before the air offensive started, our General Staff promised that our opponents would consist of three hundred British fighters, part of whom would be piloted by very young and inexperienced pilots and also that, to some extent, with the exception of Spitfires their aircraft were inferior. As a result we were amazed when in the battle of Britain the three hundred fighters drew to an end. There weren't just three hundred but at least as many as we had. At the time we had about nine hundred or a thousand fighter aircraft operating and the English had the advantage of fighting over their own territory. The British armament industry had prepared for this period with great foresight. The construction of fighters was given priority over all other types of aircraft during the battle of Britain; pilots, reconnaissance and bomber pilots were restrained in order to be able to be employed as fighter pilots in case of emergency. As a result we were faced with a fighter force of practically equal strength to ours which had the additional advantage of having plentiful material reinforcements at hand. If a pilot was shot down over England and it transpired that 60 or 70% of them landed safely by parachute the following day he went at us again in a new aircraft. That was a situation which unfortunately the GAF never experienced.

When the war started it was said: "Well, we'll have plenty of aircraft, too many in fact; but we'll lose our pilots; there will be a shortage of them because the training lasts so long and we won't manage to provide the necessary reinforcements." That situation never actually arose; it was always just the opposite. We always had enough pilots, reinforcements of crews were at hand but we lacked reinforcements of equipment of aircraft. England has to thank her policy of retraining pilots for defense and her total concentration on defense in the air for the fact she won the battle of Britain and that, after both sides were completely exhausted, we had to give it up. Now the English say that they only had twenty fighters left on the last day, or after the last day raids, but we hadn't many more either.

The next phase of air warfare was the transition from day raids to night raids, which it was possible to keep up for a relatively long period until British night fighting had developed to such a point that night raids also became too costly for us. Then our battles in the Southeast started, followed by fighting in the East the following year. That gave England a breathing space. They were able to bring their fighter arm up to strength and increase its numbers, and above all, it enabled them to start building up their strategic air force, building bombers, which by the end of 1941 and beginning of 1942 were already coming out as four engine models.

Then we experienced a similar situation at home. Night raids started on the Reich, on Germany. We started developing night fighting, which already existed in its preliminary stages; and night fighting was developed in a relatively short time into at least a weapon to be reckoned with. The whole development was further delayed by the fact that instruments still had to be constructed, and even invented, and tested in operations. At the time our night fighting only had one aircraft, the Me-110, at its disposal; it was first used operationally as a long range fighter bomber; it was intended as a long range fighter and was then specially equipped with instru-

ments for night fighting, but with no other improvements.

At first we tried equipping the approach lanes used by the enemy with a belt of searchlights which were to illuminate the enemy aircraft approaching at night. Our night fighters were waiting above and tried to attack the enemy aircraft and shoot it down while it was in the cone of searchlights. It was a fairly exciting but not very successful enterprise. At the same time we developed the so called dark night fighting restricted to a given area. It was based on the following principle: a whole belt of radio transmitter beacons was placed along the entire coast, from Jutland down as far as possible towards the Brest area. An aircraft, a night fighter circled around each of these beacons whenever enemy aircraft were approaching, and these night fighters were directed to the enemy aircraft by control from the ground. The disadvantage of this method was that the instruments we had at the time only covered a radius of 20 KM; they described exact circles of 20 KM, adjacent circles of 20 KM; there was a second similar belt of them behind the first forming a double ring. If you succeeded in directing your own night fighters on to the tail of the enemy aircraft while it was within this 20 KM radius, by instructing it to: "fly slightly to the left or to the right, or somewhat higher or lower". The exact height and everything was given to the fighter until he was immediately behind the enemy aircraft, could see it and attack it visually.

This method of night fighting, this restricted area night fighting, as it was called, was to be built up in such a way that this one belt extended all along the coast and then there was to be a second belt, a little inside the Reich, running from North of the Ruhr district, west of the frontier of the Reich down as far as Switzerland. That was the second belt which was planned; then thirdly, there were planned similar belts near the most important objectives, the Ruhr district, Frankfurt on Main, the industrial area of the Upper Rhine, Berlin, etc. That was to be the third line of defense.

These night fighter tactics would have been more successful and some aircraft were actually shot down; the number varied between 15, 20 and 25 per night, had not the enemy adopted their tactics to our defense methods. How did British bombers avoid being shot down? Firstly, they approached at a very high altitude and secondly, after these areas where our night fighters were operating had become known, the enemy dived down to cross these areas at the greatest possible speed. Their aircraft nosed down, that is, they converted their height into speed and thus reduced to a minimum the period in which they could be attacked.

After we monitored that by instruments covering twice the radius and able to locate the enemy and direct our fighters within a 40 KM radius instead of 20 KM, the enemy changed to a policy of approaching in thick streams, that is to say they assembled all their bombers over England and approached like a narrow stream at low level. It was the real bomber stream, as we are experiencing it even today in daylight. It put our night fighters under a great disadvantage, as it was no longer possible to direct individual fighters with all those enemy targets; even when it was possible we could only bring three, four or five night fighters into fighting contact with those enemy aircraft.

Of course the development of our tactics continued during this time; we switched over to free lance night fighting when each aircraft was fitted with an instrument, a radar, to enable it to home on to enemy aircraft on its own once it had been directed into the neighborhood of the stream of enemy bombers. That was the period when our night fighter successes increased and we used to

shoot down an average of 40, 50, 60 and sometimes even 70 a night. That was the period, roughly from the end of 1942 until the beginning of 1943, during which the British bombers suffered such heavy losses that one could reckon on their having to give up these attacks sooner or later.

However, parallel with those British night raids came the growth of the American Air Force in England. Vast airfields were laid out and runways and underground battle HQs were built in the area of the Northeast of London, right up to the Wash. Fog dispersing plants were constructed, working as follows:

You burn petrol on the airfield; you spray it out of some sort of pipe lines and it produces great heat. The hot air disperses the fog, that is to say the air can absorb the humidity in it and thus it is possible to clear airfields of fog up to a height of 100 m.

Apart from this, there is to be observed from the middle of 1942 onwards, all the training which was taking place in England, where American crews were working up and being trained in formation flying and, as soon as they were ready, undertook their first flights over France. With what could we oppose those American four engine aircraft: What was our fighter arm like at the time? Our standard model was the Me -109, the further development of the 109 with which we had entered the war, and the recently added FW-190.

The armament of the '109' at the time consisted of two MG 17s with the normal caliber of 7.9 mm, and an MG 131, a 13 mm MG. The armament of the ME-109 was better; it consisted of two MG 131's and two MG 151/20 that is two 20 mm cannons. With that armament our fighters on the Channel coast met the first attacks made by the four engine formations. In their initial experiments the enemy flew in with a tremendous fighter cover. Forty or fifty bombers were protected by about a hundred or a hundred and fifty Spitfires. Our only chance was for our fighters to gain height in time and just dive through the enemy fighter formation, fire a short burst at the bombers and dive down further in order to avoid being involved in dog fights with the superior number of enemy fighters, as these fights always led to considerable losses on our side owing to the numerical superiority of the enemy. In order to make myself clear we had to add about a hundred fighters along the entire coast, the huge stretch from the Heligoland Bight to Biarritz. Of course, it was never possible to assemble these fighters as it would have meant their being in the air so long that they would have run out of fuel; usually about fifteen or twenty aircraft was the maximum number that operated in these invading bomber formations with fighter protection.

This disparity in number was reported to higher authority by the "Verbandsfuhrer" concerned and an increase in the number of night fighters was asked for. It had little or no effect, the reason being: that we were tied down in the East; our valiant fighter pilots

were as indispensable on those immense fronts as they were in Africa, down in the South.

After the American Air Force realized that their fighter protection was superfluous because we had too few fighters anyhow and the ones we had were badly armed and as a result very seldom shot down a four engine aircraft, they started flying without fighter protection. The raids were always on territory occupied by us. Paris was attacked, Lille, in the Northern French Industrial area, Holland, with the result that their losses were very much less than the Americans had estimated. I should like to add another example: A Fortress, a Boeing B-17 is flying home alone from a raid over Holland with one engine shot to pieces, a wave of Me 109s with the armament mentioned above, two MG 17s or a MG 131 attacks the Fortress.

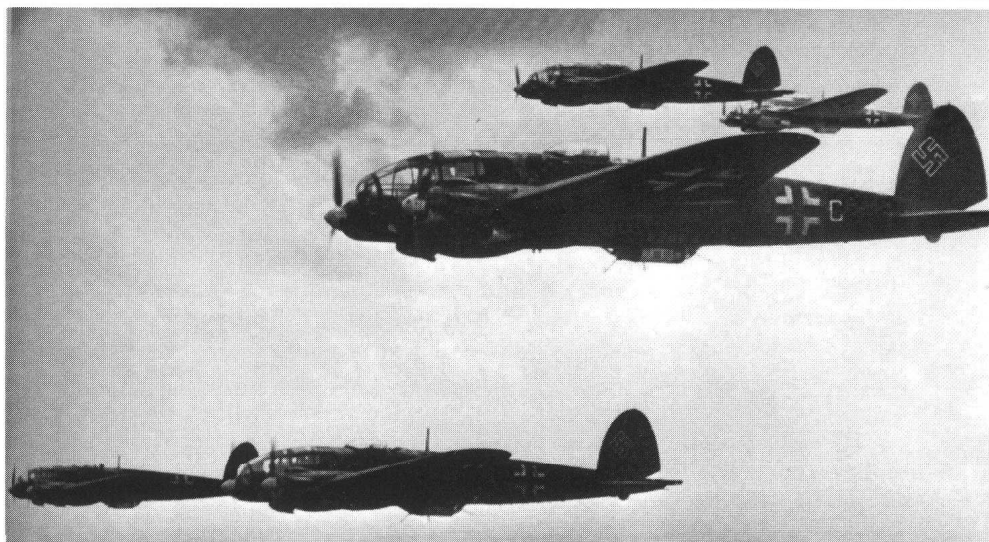
Three out of the four aircraft are shot down by the Fortress and the fourth gets the wind up and makes off. That was the situation at that time. As a result it was said that Fortresses were not to be attacked, as no fighter can shoot them down. That was the first blow at morale German fighter pilots had. It was realized that their armament was inadequate and something was done about it too. The "109" was given two MG 131s instead of its two MG 17s, that is two 13 mm MGs, and instead of one of its 13 mm MGs it was given a 20 mm one; that is to say its explosive capacity was quadrupled; the FW-190 was given four cannons instead of its two and retained its two MG 131s. That made us at last capable, as far as armament is concerned, of taking up the fight against four engine bombers with success.

The following is a short description of the armament of the four engine bombers, and of the way in which, in combination with the tactics they employed, i.e. close formation it affected the attackers, our fighters. The Flying Fortress has been advertised since 1940; we knew they were coming. When attacking from the rear you are faced by six or seven MGs, firing to the rear at the fighter. Let us reckon according to the law of probabilities, six MGs against three MGs in the ME-109. This is, however, to some extent compensated in favor of the fighter by the difference of size. Now it must be realized that you're not faced by a single aircraft, but by at least fifteen in close formation. At the start, eighty to a hundred and twenty aircraft used to fly over the Reich in the very closest formation, a flying achievement of the first order. If you take the average of eighty aircraft approaching in close formation you have to reckon with 720 MGs firing out to the rear at you. You were already hit at a distance of 1000 m. The first aircraft were shot down while they had little chance of hitting a bomber

on account of their armament. The MG 12.7 has the advantage over our cannon that owing to its initial velocity it has a considerably greater range. That proved that these aircraft cannot be attacked from the rear, and attack from the front turned out to be the only possible method. From the front you are only faced with the defensive fire of two or four MGs. In addition, you have the tremendous



Reichsmarschall Herman Goring Looks at England from across the Channel



Luftwaffe He 111 bombers head for England during the Battle of Britain

speed at which you approach your target; the bombers do about 400 KM at a height of 8000 m and your own speed when you approach at full speed is usually 600 KM; as a result you are approaching your target at 1000 KM and are only exposed to the enemy fire for a very short time.

On account of the dispersion fire and the density of the cone of fire the most dangerous distance for the fighter is between 1000 and 600 m. Once you are nearer than that the dispersion from those guns is so slight that the smallest error of aim will cause the whole cone of fire to miss you. Once you've passed the effective range of 1000 to 600 m it is much more difficult to hit you and you have a chance of bringing them down. There are many advantages besides which make frontal attack appear to be especially appropriate: firstly you can kill the crew straight away and secondly the four engines are in front and they're most vulnerable, the tanks are in front and they are more easily hit by an attack from the front than the rear.

A FW-190 and ME-109 were the mainstay of the German Air Force's emphasis on fighter planes. While this type of aircraft was suited to the defense of their homeland, the need for long range 4 engine bombers was evident during the battle of Britain when it was shown that the twin engine HE111 had insufficient range to penetrate deep into the English heartland to destroy war production. During the height of the battle of Britain when the English were nearly on their knees, a trickle of Spitfires and Hurricanes continued to be received by Fighter Squadrons from factories out of range of the German bombers. When targets were within range, the German bomber force could wreak terrible havoc. As exemplified by the devastating attack on Bari harbor in December 1943, sending to the bottom Allied shipping containing supplies for the newly formed 15th Air Force

With the start of raids into the Reich proper, which took them first to the Ruhr district, then the industrial areas of the Upper Rhine, then beyond the Main, Darmstadt, Ludwigshafen, the so called defense of the Reich was initiated. We had a Fighter "Gruppe" of about thirty aircraft, at our disposal in Holland. Twenty of them were operational. We also had at our disposal in the Reich the fighter schools with the so called operational 'Schwarms'. They consisted of one or two 'Schwarms' that is four or eight aircraft piloted by

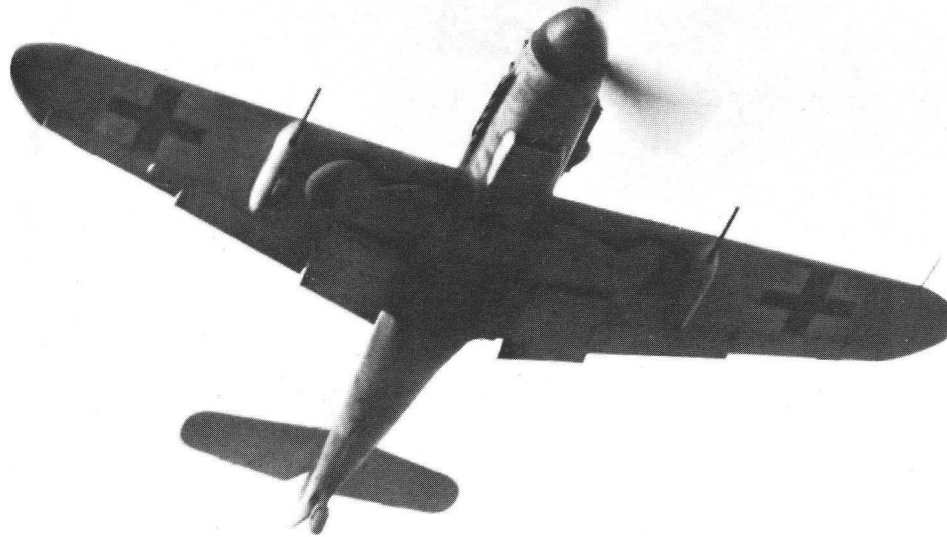
instructors. We had at our disposal the so called industrial 'Schwarms' manned by industrial test pilots. That was the fighting force which was the foundation of the Reich. What happened to this fighting force was that they also on account of their lack of experience had heavy losses and little success.

Then we started denuding our front lines; we brought up fighter formations from the south, from the southeast, from the east, from the west, in order to obtain more or less adequate fighting force with which to oppose that assault. 'Divisions' were formed; seven fighter 'Division'; whenever we actually went into operation, each fighter 'Division' had

from thirty to fifty aircraft in the air. That is to say, if two fighter 'Division' both threw in their aircraft together. These raids proved the impossibility of operating according to old principles or to principles which were all right in the east; that is to say to send them up simply on the strength of 'Fluko' reports; a thoroughly reliable ground control had to be developed. I shall skip this development as it would take me too far a field. Finally the defense of the Reich was as follows: the 'Division' who were to put fighters into operation, received detailed reports about enemy raids from 'Corps' and from their own range finding posts.

As soon as the first aircraft took off in England and reached a height of 500 in we received the report: "Assembly has started in England." Then the assembly was continuously observed until they started to leave, as soon as the assembling of those many hundreds of aircraft, a thing which presents colossal technical difficulties, was completed. Then their flight was followed, to establish where they were going, whether they were heading due east, or north across the North Sea or south east. From all those items we formed our decisions. The 'Division' for day fighting were able to make use of battle HQs which had already been prepared for the night fighters. Slight alterations were necessary but on the whole this huge apparatus could be used for direction by day too. Then the formations got the take off order: "Take off at such an such an hour." Usually ten minutes or a quarter of an hour before. Assembly point for instance at the end of 1943 or beginning of 1944 Hanover and Brunswick, at a height of 8000 M. Then all the formations flew to that area and assembled at the prescribed height. After assembling, this close formation of 50, 80, 100, 150 aircraft was directed towards the enemy formation until it sighted them. As soon as it sighted the enemy the leader of the formation had the task of organizing the attack in whatever way seemed most favorable. This control was fairly easy as long as there was no fighter escort present.

The first attacks, which were carried out without fighter escorts, were easier to combat and were easier for the ground control to direct than they were in later developments. The most famous and widely known was that attack on the ball bearing factory at Schweinfurt, which resulted in the first large victories, which, I believe, were announced as 140 aircraft. 140 aircraft were an-



An Me 109G equipped with 20MM wing guns takes off, headed for the Allied bomber stream penetrating deep into the heart of Germany.

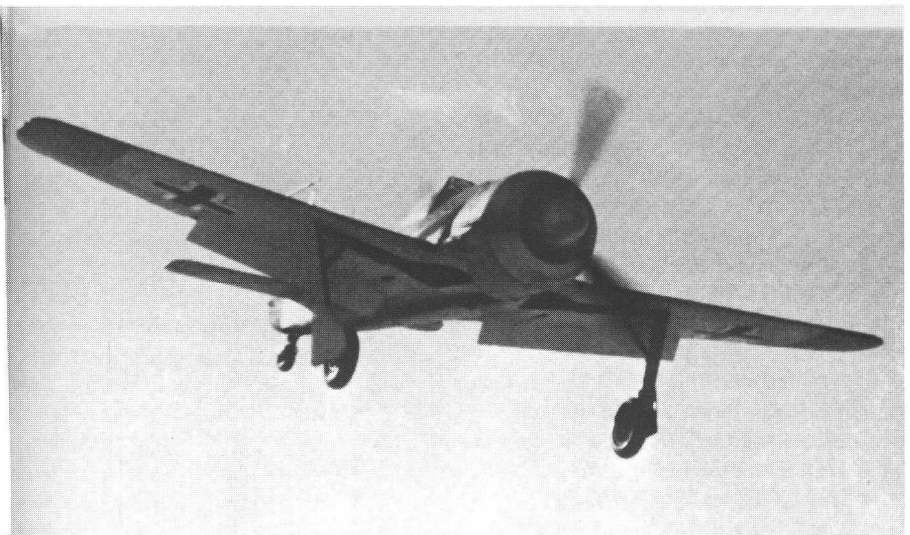
nounced as having been shot down, 67 or 68 were actually found on Reich territory and in the occupied countries i.e. barely half the number announced and about 300 were reported as having been shot down. How can one explain that? Is it simply the pilot's dishonesty or are there other reasons? I can assure you that there are other reasons, and one of them is as follows: in an air battle everything happens so tremendously quickly that the whole thing is over in a few seconds. One fellow fires on an aircraft and it catches on fire, in the same instant a second fighter, say further behind on the right, fires at the same aircraft; the pilot sees that it's on fire; still a third fighter comes up and in his excitement doesn't see that it's on fire, open fires on it as well, and suddenly the bomber falls earthwards. Result: three fighters report shooting down an aircraft. In addition to all that: after air battles like those, aircraft always landed all over the place, fighters which took off from Munich landed in Holland, on the North Sea coast, or in the industrial area, and there they handed in the reports of their victories at the airfield HQ. In addition to which the pilot rang his home airfield and said "I shot one down." Again a duplicated report. Why? Because the authorities have demanded to know within two hours the exact numbers of aircraft shot down. I know of one single instance only where a 'Division Kommandeur' refused to pass on a report, because the 'General'... was rung up maybe three, four, five times by the Reichsmarschall. "How many aircraft did your fighters shoot down?" and he kept repeating: "I can't say, they haven't arrived back yet; they landed

all over the place; if I do tell you, the reports may turn out false."

Why weren't the successes any greater? At that time the 'Defense of the Reich' had already about 250 to 300 fighter aircraft. The long range fighter bomber Geschwader 26, to which I belonged, was then also withdrawn from both the eastern and southern fronts and put on to Reich defense. You will have noticed that it never happened either in the east or the south that 50, 80 or 100 of our aircraft flew in a body and carried out any major operation. In Russia they flew in 'Rotten' of two or 'Schwarme' of four. The fighters, that is. What were the long range fighter bombers doing? They had been dropping bombs and had thereby lost all feeling for flying as fighters, and now, thanks to a situation forced on us by the enemy, thanks to the huge formations in which they fly in and which in turn can only be attacked with huge formations,

our fighter arm suddenly had to conduct the fight in a strength to which it was never accustomed. The few who could have done it right from the beginning of the war were no longer there, they had already been killed. As a result only individual dog-fights developed in all those raids. An enormous number of us arrived, a crew of 30, 50 sometimes 60 aircraft, but each pilot simply attacked wildly at random. Result: Each of them was shot down wildly at random.

The long range fighter bombers and the FW-190 then received, in addition to their other armament, the so called 'mortar shell 21 cm, the one you know from the 'Nebelwerfer'. That would have been a marvelous thing had we had the necessary sights for it.



An FW-190 drops his flaps preparatory to landing at a forward airfield

Two such mortar howitzers were built into each wing of the '110' for instance, making four mortars in all, the fuse was at 1000M or 1200M it kept changing during this experimental stage. Some very good successes were actually scored with it; my predecessor shot down two four engine aircraft with one round from it. Their fuselages simply broke in half and the two huge things plunged earthwards. But, taking it all round, one had to say that successes due to the 'mortar shell' were infinitesimal, in fact so few that it was withdrawn again. I had no instrument in the aircraft for calculating exactly how far away I was from the enemy aircraft. The only means I had was that so called 'Reflex' sight. That's an illuminated circle with a reticule in it, there's a target in it, rather similar to a telescopic sight, and I know that when the Boeing takes up a third of the diameter I am 1000M away from it. But it's impossible to say whether it's exactly 1000M or 1100M or 900M. That's why it kept occurring that people fired at too great a range; especially the inexperienced crews were always afraid of those huge aircraft which already had so many victories to their credit, so they didn't wait to open fire at 1000M but fired at 1500M, 2000M in and 2500M. The 'mortar shell' also had a bad effect on the pilots; they wouldn't close in any more but remained at a distance at which it was impossible to engage in combat. That's why, having introduced that 'mortar shell' in the Autumn of 1943, they started to remove the thing again at the beginning of 1944, and rightly so, as I had to admit afterwards also, although I was all for it in the beginning.

After that lack of success a strongly worded order was received from the Reichsmarschall in which he again reminded fighter pilots of their duty to protect the Fatherland, to get to close grips with and shoot down the enemy, and ordered that the attack be delivered from behind and that fire must not be opened until the range had closed to 400M. If one can get to within that distance, there's a lot of point in what he said, but we have already seen that the probability of attaining that range was extremely small. That was because it's also harder to shoot down an aircraft from the front. Naturally, the inexperienced crews had little success when they started attacking from the front and only after half a dozen operations did they find out how it should be done and really record some successes. For these reasons, there were the strictest orders that the attack must come from the rear and anyone who didn't comply was court marshaled.

The result: our fighter forces which was already sickening under a shortage of experienced pilots, obstinately pressed home its attacks from the rear and were equally obstinately shot down. It was dreadful to see; they approached from the rear, flying in closest formation, and doing a slightly greater speed than the enemy and 50,60, 70% or even greater percentage of them were shot down.

To the existing dilemma there was added, at the end of 1943 or beginning of 1944, the Allied fighter escort, the American long distance fighter, the Thunderbolt and then the Mustang. The first time the Thunderbolts escorted them as far as the RHINE everyone was horrified and utterly confounded what ever next? Then they got auxiliary tanks and flew as far as Hanover. The troops reported this but they were laughed at and were told they were seeing things; "It's impossible for a fighter to fly that far," said our GOC Fighters and said the Reichsmarschall nobody dared tell the Fuhrer that it was possible for enemy fighters to fly so far into Reich territory. The GOC fighter himself took off with his inspector in order to have a look and see how his fighters pressed home

their attack. He was fortunate enough to meet four Mustangs and the Mustangs took him in charge and chased him all the way to Berlin, so then he knew how far the things could fly and believed it; but despite that no one dared report the air situation to the Fuhrer. Orders to our fighter pilots remained the same, to avoid air battles with enemy fighters and go solely for the bombers. I should like to add here that by the beginning of 1944 no one was attacking from the rear anymore, despite the 'Reichsmarschall's' orders and despite the fact that this order is still in force today,, it was just impossible. I have several times requested, even in writing, that order be rescinded, but it was in vain. That order which I mentioned earlier, to attack only the four engine bombers, is, of course, understandable insofar as it was only the bombers which were a nuisance to us, because it was they that dropped the bombs. The order was however, psychologically wrong. When talking with one of the Reichsmarschall's staff officers in January or February of 1944, I said: "It's absolutely essential that one day in one of those penetrations we attack only the fighters, to take them down a peg, make them lose their feeling of superiority and make them suffer losses for a change." This desire on the part of the men, which wasn't only my own wish, was passed on; it went up to the 'Division, 'the 'Corps' and to the GOC Fighters; it was turned down with the remark: 'We must shoot down the bombers, those are the ones we don't like, the ones which are dangerous to us.' What was the result of that?

The flight of an American fighter over Germany was the safest flying in existence. Not a soul attacked him. The pilot had no need to look around to see whether there was anything coming up from behind which would try to shoot him down. It never happened, he merely had to look ahead, What is down there ahead of me that I can shoot down without endangering myself?" There again we felt the effect of this factor. To start with, the Americans were rather apprehensive and attacked very unwillingly. But once they noticed that nothing happened to them they grew increasingly cockier and more daredevilish. Then they had successes and got a taste of how wonderful it is to be able to shoot down an aircraft; until finally it got to the stage when our fighter formations were no longer able to reach their bomber formations because they were shot down first by the fighters, which always had the advantage of coming from a higher altitude. The moral effect of that on us was that all our pilots, whether rightly or wrongly, I'll leave open, felt inferior to those enemy aircraft, and the collapse of our fighters' morale dates from then.

The inferior aircraft at those heights was the FW-190 which, although it had shown excellent performances at low level, was inferior to the enemy aircraft at altitudes of 8000 in. Equal to the Mustang and superior to the Thunderbolt was our '109'. In addition to all that, on account of the losses suffered in those air battles, the ground control made the greatest effort to direct their own fighter formations so as to avoid the enemy fighters and bring them on to a bomber formation which had no fighter escort or only a small one. As a result, this feeling of inferiority increased still more, and you ran into fighters again any way, for it's impossible to get such a clear air picture as to be able to say: "There are fighters there, there are no fighters there." In the end they were all over the place. This difficult situation for us was complicated still further in the spring of 1944 by the attacks of the enemy air force on our fighter industry, Augsburg, and the large aircraft factory at Weiner-Neustadt which produced 600 fighters a month was destroyed. Also destroyed

were the engine factories at Magdeburg, the engine factories at Cassel, the aircraft factories at Posnan, at Sorau in Silesia, everywhere and it was really remarkable with what spirit and energy the industry and our workers succeeded in the shortest possible time at Augsburg for example, from that completely ruined and oft bombed factory they reached not only the equal production figure but an even higher one within fourteen days; they hadn't a roof over their heads, either.

You met with the same picture practically everywhere. Despite that however, we were faced with the necessity of splitting up and dispersing the whole aircraft industry. Small workshops were set up in villages, engines were mounted there; one workshop produced the rudder, the second produced the elevator, the third the fuselage end, etc., etc., and in the fifth or sixth the whole thing was assembled. It was a sisyphian task, which had now become necessary. When the enemy air forces realized that they couldn't completely destroy the aircraft industry, they switched over to smashing our fuel industry. We have learned in the meantime, with what success.

We flyers had one ray of hope in that situation and that was the new jet fighter the Me 262. The Me 262, armed with four cannon 108, caliber 3 cm, is the first combustion turbine aircraft to be used operationally. First an explanation of the superficial details; a low decker with extremely thin wing profile, with a wonderful aerodynamic rounded shape and a so called tri-cycle undercarriage. The two wheels, just like in ordinary aircraft, fold inwards, but the third wheel, which is about at the nose is drawn backwards into the fuselage. Now, as far as I'm able, just a short description of the combustion turbine. The principle is as follows: air is sucked in front through the revolution of the turbine, which is first started up with a small two stroke engine.

This sucked in air then passes into a combustion chamber after it has been compressed before induction by compressors and there it is mixed with a substance similar to Diesel oil it can also be crude oil and this mixture is then ignited and explodes and it then propels the turbine, which is at the back, and the exhaust comes out at the back. With the high RPM attained by the turbine over 6000 RPM the thing works out as follows: air is sucked in front, the aircraft literally sucks its way forward. In other words a suction and pressure effect with the pressure effect considerably greater than the suction effect of course.

The normal cruising speed of this type of aircraft is over 800 kph. When one thinks that the highest speed of the most modern fighters is 600 kph one can realize how superior this aircraft is, as regards speed to all other aircraft so far used operationally. The disadvantage of this aircraft firstly, it is difficult to move on the ground and for this reason has to be towed by tractors or MC trac-

tors or similar things which are capable of pulling the aircraft. It weighs about six tons. For just taxiing once around the airfield one uses about half the amount of petrol which in flight is sufficient for one and half to two hours of flying time, according to the height. The aircraft is simply wonderful from the point of view of flying.

Of course with that speed, the takeoff presents difficulties, as does the landing, because it needs a very long run. So we put all our hopes on this type of aircraft and kept hoping that when it went into operation it would finally turn the scales of the air war again. As luck would have it, my 'Gruppe' was chosen to be retrained on to this pattern of aircraft in May 1944. Unfortunately, I was unable

to accompany them, because I then had to take over the 'Geschwader'. After the 'Gruppe' had already started retraining and some of the pilots were already accustomed to this pattern of aircraft, and others were still retraining, an order was suddenly received from Supreme Command: "This aircraft will not be employed as a fighter, but as a bomber." So after we were already up to our necks in trouble this type of aircraft began to be tried but as a bomber, as a fast bomber, to be exact. A fierce struggle went on between Air Staff Officers and the Fuhrer. But they stuck to it at the time, that the aircraft was to be

tried as a bomber. It was badly suited to that or not suited at all; its maximum load was one 500 kg bomb, and its flying time barely an hour.

Question: What was its consumption of fuel compared to that of an ordinary Messerschmitt?

Answer: Of course, with those turbine aircraft the consumption of fuel is terrific, corresponding with the performance. The aircraft needs about 1800 liters of fuel to be able to fly for two hours; that's to say about twice as much as an ordinary twin engine aircraft; but that you can fill it up with anything combustible, Diesel oil, crude oil and one can therefore obviate the need for all kinds of fuel, etc. In May last year there was still no acute shortage of petrol, there was still sufficient petrol available. Meanwhile the aircraft was actually employed as a bomber and dropped an odd 500 kg bomb here and there. But as there was also no bombsight for use at this speed, they didn't hit anything and now they have at last reached the point of saying that the aircraft is to be employed solely as a fighter, now when it is already too late.

Simultaneously with this experimental employment of the '262' as a fighter, the Me 163, a peculiar looking aircraft of which the principle of propulsion is completely different from the Me 262, was sent into operation. The 163 which is armed with three 3 cm cannon, is entirely a rocket aircraft with proper rocket propulsion. It has broken entirely new ground. It retains hardly any similarity to an ordinary aircraft, it no longer has an elevator at all, and that



A gaggle of Me 110s peels off for an attack against Allied forces.

accounts for its peculiar shape. The elevator is incorporated in the aileron which can be set to alter the direction of flight according to the height. This aircraft may possibly play a tremendous part in the future as a so called specific target fighter or Flying Flak. The speed of this type of aircraft amounts to about 1200 kph in horizontal flight, and it can climb to 8000M in within three minutes. I have seen a film of a Me-163 taking off and I thought at first it was a trick film; as a matter of fact I saw the film in Berlin.

For taking off this aircraft has two wheels, a small undercarriage on which the aircraft rests; there is a skid on which it slides when it lands again. When the rocket fuse is actuated, a huge cloud of smoke comes out behind with a deafening noise, and with terrific acceleration the aircraft shoots forward, leaves the ground after a short run, jettisons the wheels undercarriage and then climbs at an almost vertical angle of about 80 degrees, until the fighting altitude of 8000M to 9000M, whichever is necessary, is reached, then it changes over to horizontal flight and tries to get into a favorable position for attacking the, enemy aircraft. The pilot has seven minutes in which he can, so to speak, keep the throttle open, and if after several minutes he has still failed to attain a favorable position for attack, then the propellant will have been used up, there is no longer any propulsion and all there is left for him to do is to come down to earth again like a glider. Several have been shot down in these circumstances and if they weren't shot down at once, because of their excellent maneuverability, then they were shot up on the ground as soon as they had landed.

The success of this aircraft which has been employed in the Leipzig area since August last year, has remained negligible; the losses were terrific. It also frequently happens that these things explode or catch fire and in that case even an asbestos suit, etc, which the pilot had to wear was no protection. They were only employed as day fighters. A further development permitting a longer flying period would give us the means of waiting on the ground for the enemy, spotting him, then taking off and shooting it down within sight of the object to be protected. The aircraft cannot be maneuvered at all when it is being propelled, but once the maximum speed has slackened, it is extremely maneuverable, that's to say it is more maneuverable in ordinary gliding flight than any fighter because it is very light and its construction is extremely suited to flying tight curves.

It was then recognized in all these developments that our greatest weakness is the small number of aircraft we can send into operation. A so called 'Fighter program' was accordingly set in motion, which, by the stopping of production of all other aircraft, whether bombers, reconnaissance aircraft, or anything, achieved in November 1944 the production of 4000 fighters a month. A terrific number which is larger than the total production of fighters in England and America then came the dark side of this mass production, and above all this production in primitive work shops under unimaginably unfavorable conditions. In September I started to reequip the first 'Gruppen' of my 'Geschwader' and to bring up to strength and to equip the second 'Gruppe' which was already in operation against the invasion. The 'Gruppe' were brought up to a strength of about 60 to 70 aircraft and a corresponding number of pilots, and then the retraining started.

The third Gruppe flew the '190'. During the retraining I lost the following: six excellent pilots killed, a large number seriously wounded, and between 40 and 50 aircraft, I can no longer remember the number exactly. Only because of technical defects!

Each time a 'Gruppe' went on a so called 'Gruppe' training flight, I had to count on probably one killed and on two, three four or five emergency landings of which a certain number of aircraft had to be written off because they were damaged. I should like to describe one sortie on which I flew in the Aix La Chapelle district with the second 'Gruppe' after Christmas. I took off in bad weather, we had about 100M in visibility that's to say you could just see the limits of the airfield. Those were weather conditions in which we would never have flown in the old days. I took off with rather more than 40 aircraft, and then set off in the direction of the Ruhr district. Over the Ruhr district I heard someone say on the radio (RT), presumably a young pilot: "What shall I do, what shall I do, the cockpit's on fire?" Presumably an engine was on fire. As there was dense fog down in the Ruhr district, and not more than 500 in visibility, and an emergency landing was consequently impossible, and was also inadvisable after the losses we had already sustained which could have been avoided if the pilots concerned had bailed out in time. I gave him the order clearly and concisely: "Bail Out!" Then, of course, everyone looked to see whether he would get out, until they did see him get out. He landed all right, the aircraft was done for. These were conditions which of course did not contribute towards raising the pilots' self confidence or strengthening their confidence in their aircraft.

I have already described the effect of the enemy air raids on the aircraft industry, and also the effect on the fuel industry which then led in the summer and autumn of last year to an acute petrol shortage. I will touch briefly on the effect on communications centers. The bottle neck industries which were attacked by the enemy, such as the ball bearing industry for example, resulted for instance in the latest engine produced by Daimler Benz, the 'DB 603', having sleeve bearings for its crankshaft instead of ball bearings which were no longer obtainable; these sleeve bearings are a type of bearing which is quite useful for reasonable peacetime use by suitably trained personnel, but is, however, not as reliable as a ball bearing, and it has recently led to an extraordinary amount of engine trouble.

In view of the whole situation, it was fairly clear to us airmen what course the invasion would take. The whole available fighter force would be thrown into action, we had been told that beforehand and it was quite obvious to us personally that the whole of the fighter force would be destroyed after two, or at the most three days. That's what happened, too, and that's why the invasion was the success which we saw it to be. With the approach of the front to the borders of the Reich, came the fighter bomber post in addition to all the other enemy air attacks. Fighter bombers spent hours darting about the territory near the western frontier of the Reich, and attacked trains and engines driving along, and fired into petrol dumps and houses, and it was these attacks which caused the complete collapse of all means of transport. It was, for instance, no longer possible for us to move a petrol tanker by day. Petrol supplies could only be brought up at night, the passenger trains were normally from 15 to 20 hours late, they had to stop umpteen times on the way, and all the passengers had to tumble out of the carriages and lie in the ditch or take cover somewhere. I heard from a railway man that at the end of last November there were about 60 smashed locomotives at Zwolle in Holland which had been smashed up in these attacks. That was only one station. It was no longer possible to transport from the Ruhr district the available coal which was being requested and which in November amounted to about 30,000 trucks of coal. It was equally impossible to take ore

and raw materials to the Ruhr district to be worked up there. Along with the transport system generally, the post, which had previously carried on fairly well, naturally also suffered delays. I have received ordinary letters which have taken from three to four weeks from Austria to central Germany. I am also convinced that 90% of the letters we write from here don't arrive at their destinations.

Now I should like to touch quite briefly on how this utter failure of the GAF came about. If our leaders had realized at the end of 1942 that we hadn't finished with Russia, we had to reckon with the American Air Force, and that we must, therefore, change over to the defensive not only on the ground, but also in the air, then it would easily have been possible to quadruple the fighter arm in one year. By the middle of last year we could easily have had a force, not of 1000 or 1200 fighters as we did have, but of 4000. It would have been possible for us to inflict right at the coast such heavy losses on all enemy air forces that they would never have penetrated into Reich territory. It would have been impossible for the enemy to start the invasion. Our Fatherland would have been spared this fearful devastation which is its lot, not only by night but now also by day. The fighter program which I have mentioned did not get under way until towards the end of last year. It was started in the middle of the year, and was halfway completed by the end of the year. Not until towards the end of last year did we take steps to retrain the bomber pilots we had into fighter pilots, as far as they were suited to it, because we could no longer manage the training. It was not until last year in November that an attack by about 2000 to 2500 fighters was to be mounted against a penetration into Reich territory.

The planning was wonderful. The proportions were magnificent but it was never carried out because the air leaders had lost their nerve and had already withdrawn three Geschwader from the west before then. They were wiped out, decimated, in no time. Then the remaining 'Geschwader' were also withdrawn and the great blow which it was supposed to be, the turning point in aerial warfare, again failed to materialize. I am convinced that if this operation had been flown, in which for once we should have appeared in numbers equal to the enemy's about 1000 fighters act as escort to round about 1000 to 1200 American bombers, so there would have been one of our fighters to each enemy aircraft. I have guaranteed that we would have shot down at least 300 to 400 bombers, and that would have been the shock the enemy needed to make them cease their penetration, at least into the heart of Germany. Our command lacked the adaptability which I have described in the case of England in 1940. Above all, we failed in sending the formations into this new type of battle inside the Reich without giving them any sort of tactical training beforehand. The experience the fighter pilots gained in the west attacks from the front, etc., was simply ignored, and I have already described the result of this adherence to old customs.

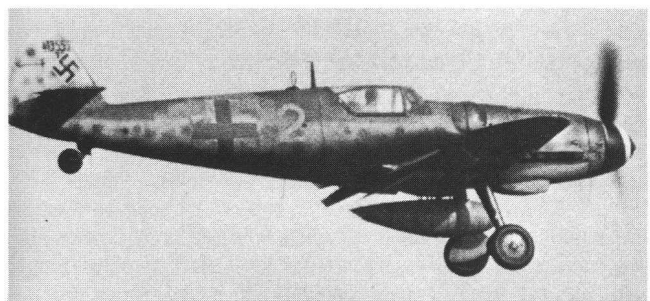
The complete collapse of the defense of the Reich came about during Rundstedt's offensive when, in consequence of the enormous losses we sustained, for little gain, we simply gave up the fight against the four engine aircraft. They were allowed to fly wherever they pleased and nobody did anything about it. It's shattering that things had to reach that pitch. The change of tactics which also took place only last November namely that everything which came along was to be attacked, regardless of whether it was an enemy fighter or bomber also failed to make its effect felt, due to the occurrences I have previously mentioned. The order was duly

issued but it no longer achieved its effect. It's a tragic fatality in German history; whatever we did was too soon or too late. One felt almost ashamed to go out in GAF uniform at home. The civilian population with their confidence and trust the new GAF is coming with their questions: "Well, when are the new aircraft, the fast ones about which we were told so long ago, coming out, and the good ones which are better than any others and which will shoot down masses; when are they really coming out? It must be soon. It's high time. If things go on like this we shall cease to believe that the outcome can be good." These questions were so difficult to answer, especially for us airmen who had been through the whole thing what could we tell the people? That in the end we hardly even left our own airfield. If I say, for instance, that I took off with seventeen aircraft that was in the Spring of last year and of those two had to turn back on account of engine and undercarriage trouble one of them could not retract its undercarriage, and the engine of the other one was not in order.

As leader of a battle formation with these fifteen aircraft I tackled an enemy division with some sixty aircraft and then when I say that of these fifteen aircraft not a single one returned, but all were shot up half of them killed or severely wounded, and the other half had made crash landings and were wounded then you can form a fairly accurate picture of the severity of these battles. Then when the following day I took off again with the remaining eight aircraft which we had raked together, and was then the only one to return home because I was the oldest and most experienced pilot, that only makes it clearer still.

At a conference at Corps' at which this attack on 1 January was briefly announced, General Pelz and General Schmidt said: "If we don't at last succeed in driving the fighter bombers from our Reich territory, then after three weeks our remaining industries will have no coal left, and in about as many weeks the industries in the Ruhr district will have no ore." These three weeks have now passed, and I have been told by a 'Hauptmann', who was only just recently taken prisoner, that there are a great many factories in which the workers no longer have anything to work on because there is no coal and no raw material there. Particularly the GAF, which is such a highly developed technical arm, has special need of far sighted planning. Measures which are adopted only take effect in the available aircraft about four to six months later. You have to arrange for the necessary training and provide the necessary material. Unfortunately, we lacked this far sighted planning, so that, as a member of the GAF, I have to admit that the war which we are now waging has been lost by the GAF.

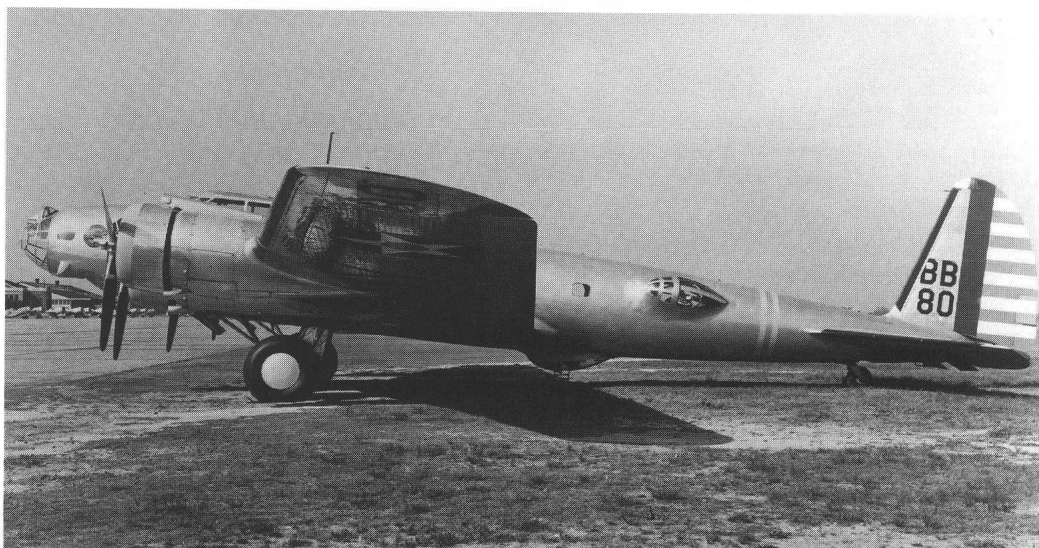
The End



The Other Heavy Bomber of World War Two

The B-17 Flying Fortress

Editors Note: Some members will wonder why a story about B-17s should be included in the Torretta Flyer. Like it or not the other bomber played a big part in the winning of the air war over Germany. The Fifth Bomb Wing of the 15th Air Force, with six B-17 groups was the largest in the 15th, and was based farther north in Italy. The Second Bomb Group was one of the oldest heavy bomb groups flying the B-17 in the 15th AF. All 15th Airforce B-17s can be identified by the letter Y painted on the upper fin above the serial number. The surround in the case of the 2nd BG was a Y in a circle, 97th Y in a triangle, 301st Y in a square, 99th Y in a diamond, 463rd Y in a 60 degree arc, and the 483rd a Y without a surround but had a star underneath the lowest arm of the Y.



YB-17 2nd Bomb Group May 17, 1939 Langley Field, VA

In May of 1934 the US Army Air Corps requested bids on Project X, which would comprise a bomber capable of carrying a bomb load of 2,000lb and possess a range of 5,000 miles. Boeing Airplane Company and the Glenn L. Martin Company submitted designs. This request was that a 1,000hp engine be utilized, but the only thing available at the time was a Pratt and Whitney 850hp Twin Wasp.

The Air Corps further specified in April of 1934 for a multi-engine aircraft that would carry a 2,000lb bomb load for not less than 1,020 miles and if possible, 2,200 miles at a speed of 200 MPH and possibly higher. A flyable prototype was to be available not later than August 1935.

In August 1934, Boeing set out to build the prototype of design now called the Model 299. The aircraft was to have all-metal construction, with a semi monocoque fuselage. Monocoque meaning a braced aluminum skin that employed formers and string-

ers to maintain the shape and riveted to the aluminum skin. Together these components were to carry the entire load without external braces as seen in fabric covered structures of the biplanes of earlier days. The plane was to use a forward gun turret in the nose. The pilot and copilot were seated side by side as in conventional commercial airline style as in the Boeing 247 and Douglas DC-2. The bomb bay was to have a capacity for 4,800lb of bombs. The radio room was a separate compartment aft of the bomb bay. Aerial gunners were provided with blisters on each side of the rear fuselage and another blister in the belly aft of the radio room. Armament consisted of five machine guns. The Model 299 was powered by four Pratt & Whitney R-1690 radial engines each developing 750hp.

The name "Flying Fortress" was coined by Dick Williams, a reporter for the Seattle Times newspaper who gave this name to Model 299 when it was rolled out 299 on July 17, 1935 displaying



2nd BG YB-17s over Manhattan

its colorful five machine-gun blisters Boeing quickly recognized the value of the title and had it copyrighted.

The first flight test was carried out on July 28, 1935, with Boeing chief test pilot Les Tower at the controls. Following the company test program the Model 299 took off for Wright Field, Ohio, on August 20, 1935. The aircraft flew the 2,100 mile trip in only 9 hours and 3 minutes an amazing ground speed of 233 MPH. The performance of the aircraft completely stole the show from the Douglas B-18, which was essentially a bomber version of the DC-2 transport and Martin's reworked, but obsolete B-10 bomber.

On 30 October of that same year, disaster struck the new bomber. After taking off from Wright Field, the 299 immediately went into a steep climb, stalled and failed to level out before crashing into the ground. The pilot, Major Ployer Hill, chief of the Wright Field Flight Test Section, was killed and the Boeing test-pilot, Leslie Tower, died from injuries received. One of the innovations of Model 299 was a system of control surface locks* which could be operated from the cockpit. Evidently Major Hill had failed to release the lock control and neither he nor Tower noticed this. The tragedy was a major setback for Boeing and there was little consolation to be had from the fact that the crash was due to human error and not to some fundamental weakness in the design.

**These locks prevented damage to ailerons, rudder and elevators from wind gusting when the aircraft was parked. The members of the 484th Bomb Group mechanics, and flight crews will remember the bright red tape that ran from top to bottom on the left side of the cockpit in plain view of the seated pilot. The usual practice before the innovation of the "Gust Lock" was to use a hand placed bright red wooden batten to block the movement of the flight controls. These were to be removed before flight, but there were*

incidents where their removal was forgotten, thus the gust lock.

The aircraft was not a complete loss, but the crash did dash the hopes that Boeing had for a sizeable contract. The bulk of orders for a new Army Air Corps bomber went to Douglas for the B-18. The Boeing Company had committed the major proportion of its resources to the building of this aircraft and, as the outstanding tests could not now be completed, the contract would be lost to one of the other competitors. The superiority of Model 299 was unchallenged, but the fact that the Army could have two Douglas B-18s for every Boeing purchased was an important consideration. The crash of the Boeing entry resulted in the decision late in the year to give Douglas a contract for 133 aircraft, to be known as the B-18A, based on the successful DC-3 transport. Again some of our members will remember flying this airplane with the early antisubmarine squadrons that became the basis of the 484th Bomb Group.

A contract, at long last was forthcoming: 17 January, 1936 for 13 YB-17s for service test. The new aircraft was fitted with Wright R-1820-39 Cyclone engines which developed 850hp, and a change from the hoop type landing gear struts, allowing easier tire changes.

The YB17s were assigned to the 2nd Bomb Group based in Langley Field, VA which at the time constituted the entire heavy bombardment strength of the US Army Air Corps "We were a careful bunch of fliers in those days," recalls Robert F Travis, then a second lieutenant and later a brigadier general in World War II, "and each crew was handpicked. We knew if a YB had crashed we could probably say goodbye to the nation's bomber program." To prevent future pilot error the 2nd Group devised a pilot's check list, a device listing all the actions of the pilot and copilot in preparing the plane for takeoff, flight, before and after landing. While the B-

The first B-17 Mission, 8th AF WWII

41-2578	<i>Butcher Shop</i>	340 BS	Col Frank A. Armstrong, and Maj Paul W. Tibbets
41-9125	<i>Prowler</i>	342 BS	Lt Alexander Blair Jr.
41-9026	<i>Baby Doll</i>	342 BS	Lt James M. Sammons
41-9042	<i>The Berlin Sleeper</i>	342 BS	Lt George D. Burgess
41-19043	<i>Peggy D</i>	342 BS	Capt William B. Musselwhite
41-9017	<i>Heidi Ho</i>	342 BS	Lt Walter F. Kelly
41-19023	<i>Yankee Doodle</i>	414 BS	Lt John P. Dowswell
41-9089	<i>Johnny Reb</i>	414 BS	Lt Richard S. Starks
41-9103	<i>Dixie Demo</i>	414 BS	Lt Clarence L. Thacker
41-19021	<i>The Big Bitch</i>	414 BS	Lt Claire M. Smartt
41-9030	<i>Big Punk</i>	414 BS	Lt William P. Saunders
41-9100	<i>Birmingham Blitzkrieg</i>	414 BS	Lt Thomas H. Border

17 was not “too much airplane” for any one man, the complexities of its operation were too much for any one’s memory. This plus other precautions, besides a well thought out campaign of history making flights, worked, for the YBs flew more than 9000 hours totaling a distance of 1,800,000 miles (equivalent to 72 times around the earth at the equator) without serious accident. The publicity garnered from these flights sold the aircraft to the public and after Hitler marched into Poland on September 1, 1939 the future of the B-17’s role in WWII was no longer in doubt.

On 17 August 1942 the first mission of the 8th Air Force B-17Es took place, six Aircraft of the 97th Bomb Group attacked Rouen in northern France, and six flew a diversion. The bomb load was 45 x 600 pound bombs. Thus began the four engined heavy bomber offensive against Nazi Germany.

Despite the worst fears, the 12 B-17Es that flew the 8th Air Force’s first heavy bomber raid returned with only superficial damage to two aircraft. Its leaders believed the formations might not have been so fortunate had everything gone according to plan. For the attack the two squadrons had flown one behind the other, bombing by three plane formations. Each flight leader flew approximately 150 yards apart. Col Armstrong, who was in “Butcher Shop” in the first squadron, arranged with Capt. Flack flying in “Yankee Doodle,” the lead of the second, to radio a message when his unit had bombed, at which Armstrong would turn his squadron to the right allowing the second squadron to join to make a large single formation for better defense against possible fighter interception. Having bombed, Armstrong continued to fly straight ahead, waiting for the radio signal. No signal came. Then Major Paul Tibbetts, Armstrong’s pilot, spotted Flack’s formation out to the right. At that moment a number of anti aircraft shells burst between the two squadrons, in a position to where it was estimated the lead squadron would have turned had it received Flack’s ‘Bombs Away’ signal.

Fortresses and aircraft commanders that flew Mission No 1 all were of the early production model E , the serial numbers were prefixed with a 4.

While Col Armstrong is listed as pilot in 97th BG records, Tibbetts was on the plane as well and was certainly the more experienced of the two at the controls of a B-17. Armstrong’s crew were mostly members of Lt Glen Leland’s and the B-17 was that

assigned to Lt Butcher. Of the 111 men who flew to Rouen, 31 were later missing or killed during hostilities. The copilot of “Johnny Reb” was killed four days later and the pilot wounded; the rest of the crew were missing over Lorient on 21 October. Lt William Tingle, copilot of “Baby Doll,” and Lt Harry Erickson, bombardier on “Peggy D,” were also missing on the same Lorient raid. All nine men who had flown “Birmingham Blitzkrieg” were MIA over Tunisia in December 1942.

Maj Paul Tibbets was the pilot of the B-29 “Enola Gay” that dropped the first Atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan in August of 1945 that, with the bombing of Nagasaki a short time later, ended WWII .

The crew of “Prowler “ except bombardier Lt William Lewis who was not present went down over Sicily in April 1943. The bombardier on “Big Punk,” Lt George Ludolph navigator of “Dixie Demo,” Lt Jim Watson; and the tail gunner on “Yankee Doodle,” Sgt Ray Lewis, were also lost over Sicily flying with other crews. Sgt Robert Nichols, waist gunner on “The Big Bitch,” went down with another crew over Italy in August 1943. George Burgess, pilot of “The Berlin Sleeper,” completed his tour and returned for a second as squadron commander in another group in Italy only to be killed in a crash. The Fortresses that participated were, along with other B-17Es, transferred to the 92nd BG on 25 August 1942 for use in operational training. In the spring of 1943 the B-17Es were dispersed among other training units and operational B-17 groups where they served for target towing and transport duties. Those that survived to the end of hostilities were broken up at base air depots in the UK.



The Crew of the Memphis Belle

The Memphis Belle

The story now skips forward to May 17, 1943. It was a triumphant day for Capt. Robert K Morgan , and several of his crew members of the 91st Bomb Group , 324th squadron. They became the first Eighth Air Force bomber crew to complete a tour of twenty

five combat missions. Flying in their Fortress "Memphis Belle," they had beaten the odds and now they were going to return to the United States for a War Bond Tour. From there, they would visit various bases where new crews were being trained for combat before shipment overseas. The ship was a B-17F-10-BO,S/N 41-24485 Marked DFA. The ship had completed only twenty-four missions on May 17, 1943 when some of the Morgan crew finished up their tour. The rest of the crew completed their missions assignments the following month. It was up to another pilot to see the valiant craft through its twenty fifth mission. The honor went to Lt/C L Anderson and crew, who took the Memphis Belle to Kiel on May 19, 1943. Although Belle was not the first to complete a tour, the bomber would receive the lion's share of publicity for the feat on its return to the United States. After a morale lifting bond tour Capt Morgan transitioned to B-29s as a pilot and flew missions to Tokyo. The honor of being the very first B-17 to complete twenty-five missions went to "Hell's Angels" of the 303rd Bomb Group, which returned from its twenty-fifth on May 14, 1943.

Curtis L LeMay who was later to achieve fame for his fire bombing of Japan prepared his Third Air Division, 8th Air Force for take off the morning of August 17, 1943, to bomb the Messerschmitt plant at Regensburg, sixty miles southeast of Nuremberg in southern Bavaria. He knew this plant produced two hundred ME-109s a month, nearly 30 percent of Germany's single engine fighter production, so he was anxious to destroy it.

Bad weather had canceled this two pronged strike at Regensburg and the ball bearing plants at Schweinfurt for several days. Now, the weather still was bad, but if LeMay's division was to land in North Africa in daylight according to plans, the decision had to be made quickly.

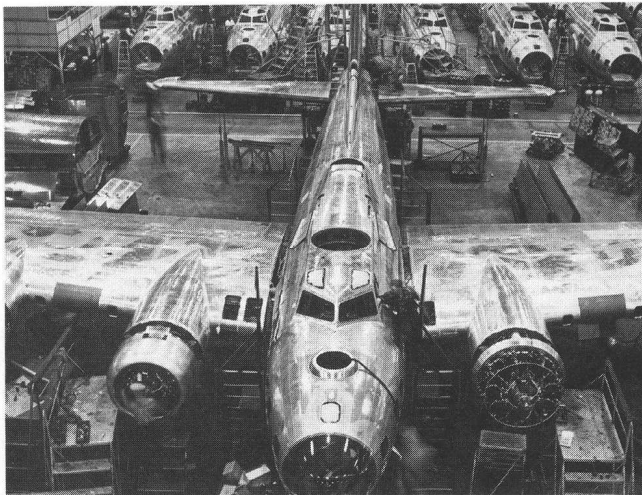
It was an anniversary mission. Just a year before, the Eighth had flown its first raid against German occupied territory. In this mission, five combat wings of the First Air Division, totaling three hundred B-17s, would take off after LeMay's Third Air Division, which would lead the assault and as a consequence absorb the brunt of German fighter attacks. It would proceed from Regensburg on to North Africa. It was hoped that the First Air Division, attacking Schweinfurt, would benefit from the fact that German fighters would be refueling from their attacks on the Third Division. For further protection, eighteen squadrons of Spitfires from the Royal Air Force were assigned to protect the bombers to the limit of their fuel capacities. Meanwhile, Typhoons from the RAF and B-26s were assigned airfield strikes to keep German fighters on the ground as much as possible along the bomber routes. These plans, which revolved around precise timing, had been drafted with care, but they started to come apart right at the start.

At Bushy Park Eighth Air Force Headquarters, Ira Eaker, 8th AF CO kept constantly in touch with his Bomber Command at

High Wycombe. He had the utmost confidence in Fred Anderson despite the fact that the thirty eight year old West Point graduate had been in command for less than two months. Still, Eaker fussed about the delay in ordering the Third Air Division to take off. He had requested permission to lead the mission, but General Devers,

ETO CO, had warned him that if he did so, his next trip would be back to the United States. Hap Arnold CO, of the whole United States Air Force, had made it clear that he didn't want Eaker to fly any more missions because of the danger he might be killed or captured.

Fog on the First Air Division bases held their bombers on the ground. It started to lift at the 91st Group's base at Bassingbourne, although other East Anglia bases were still shrouded. LeMay's Third Division was finally given the word to leave. It wasn't until the division passed over Woensdrecht at 10:17 AM that it encountered its



Boeing factory, Seattle

first flak.

"Fighters at two o'clock, low!" The familiar cry alerted Captain Thomas F Kenney's 96th Group's crew with whom LeMay was flying as copilot. At 10:25, a pair of 190s drove through the first formation, hitting two bombers, and then half-rolled over the lead group.

LeMay had noted prior to this mission that German fighters had developed a new strategy of employing fighters in depth rather than in mass. Earlier, Goring had tried to meet Allied bombers over France or the Low Countries without success. Now, he ordered his fighters to concentrate along a 150 mile corridor, so fighters took off only upon approach of the bombers. When they were out of fuel and ammunition, they landed and another group took over, deeper inside Germany. In this way, earlier groups could attack American bombers again on their way home. Bomber crews enjoyed a grim joke that the Germans escorted them all the way.

Kenney happened to glance once at LeMay, just as he took off his oxygen mask, filled his pipe, and, when it wouldn't start, squirted pure oxygen from the demand system until it flamed up. While the pilot gaped at him, LeMay took a couple of puffs, knocked his pipe out, and put his oxygen mask back on.

While his Third Air Division crossed Holland, LeMay was aware that the Schweinfurt force was still on the ground because of fog. Although his bombers had managed to get off despite fog, he knew that fog was worse inland. He was still not satisfied that this was a justifiable excuse for the First Division to remain on the ground. His own crews had been practicing instrument takeoffs for weeks, so they were prepared to take off from socked in airfields.

LeMay was also disturbed by the failure of two P-47 groups to put in an appearance, to give them protection for at least the first one hundred miles into the Continent. Actually, Major Loren G McCollum's 353rd Fighter Group's thirty two P-47s had over flown LeMay's three combat wings at 10:00 AM and had taken up an escort position at twenty three thousand feet as they approached

the Dutch coast. LeMay simply hadn't seen them.

At Bushy Park, Eaker was filled with doubts whether he should recall LeMay. He knew that unless the 230 plane force for Schweinfurt didn't get off the ground soon they would be too late to take advantage of LeMay's diverting German fighters away from the ball bearing plants.

Lieutenant Colonel Beirne Lay, Jr., a member of the Eighth's headquarters staff, had volunteered for the mission and was in "Piccadilly Lily," a 100th Group plane piloted by Lieutenant Thomas E. Murphy. They were fifteen miles behind the lead 96th Group. His plane was flying at seventeen thousand feet, the lowest and most vulnerable position of all. He watched with approval as the group's twenty one B-17s tucked close for protection as they crossed the Dutch coast, with the 95th Group led by Colonel John K Gearhart leading the 3rd Combat Wing.

Eight minutes after the first flak at Woensdrecht, Lay watched nervously as 190s swept through the 2nd Bombardment Wing, Colonel Elliot Vandervanter's 385th Group, and Colonel Frederick Castle's 94th. He noted over the city of Diest that two B-I 7s started to smoke after they were hit, but they remained in formation. One German fighter also was hit, smoke pouring from its nose and metal flying off as it was hit by the massed guns of the formation.

From twenty-five thousand feet, fighter commander McCollum had seen twelve 190s dive toward the bombers, but he knew it was impossible to intercept them due to their speed and distance beneath his American fighters. Fifteen minutes later, McCollum spotted a 190 and, in a screaming dive, tore the German fighter to pieces with his eight heavy .50 caliber guns.

Now, his fighter group had reached its maximum range and had to return. Meanwhile, Colonel Hubert Zemke's 56th Fighter Group arrived to escort the bombers another fifty miles, as far as Eupen near the German border city of Aachen. Then, they, too, would have to turn back. Both fighter groups had new pressed-paper auxiliary tanks whose fittings had proved hopelessly inadequate. The tanks themselves broke apart easily. In addition, the 56th had flown its first mission only five days earlier, and they were still green.

Zemke was frustrated by the tactics of the German fighter pilots, who refused to engage until the American fighters were forced to turn back. Although he spotted fifteen or so fighters near Hasselt, ten miles from the Belgian German border, the Germans avoided contact, knowing that soon they would be able to attack the bombers without Allied fighter interference.

Near Diest, Zemke watched in horror as a B-17 exploded, plummeting to the ground in a huge ball of fire without a single crewman able to bail out. At 10:30, another bomber started going down near Maastricht. This time six airmen dangled from their chutes. Now, he, too, had to turn back, leaving the bombers without fighter protection. The Germans struck savagely as 109s and 190s darted through the groups firing 20 mm nose cannons and machine guns.

Lay listened with growing apprehension to gunners no longer able to call out individual attacks because there were so many of them. He could hear radio calls from commanders, advising gunners, "Lead 'em! Use short bursts!" The Germans now coordinated their attacks. Some came head on, either slightly above their altitudes or slightly below. Others attacked the rear as the sky was crisscrossed with orange tracer bullets and puffs of smoke from ground antiaircraft guns.

Just as LeMay's 2nd and 3rd Bombardment Wings received the brunt of the fighter attacks, twin engined Me 110s joined the fray, often diving out of the sun, knowing gunners would be blinded.

Meanwhile, the five combat wings of the First Air Division were still on the ground in England. At High Wycombe, Anderson faced a grim decision. The coordinated strategy had already failed. He hadn't dared to call LeMay's Third Division back once it was airborne because it would have had to drop its bombs in the English Channel with the danger of hitting Allied ships. With fog still hugging many of the First Division's bases in East Anglia, he had to decide whether to dispatch them more than three hours late to Schweinfurt. He knew that by the time they reached Germany, Nazi fighters would have refueled and would be waiting for them.

At Bassingbourne, Brigadier General Williams waited impatiently to get the word from High Wycombe to take off. He was so self disciplined and calm in a crisis that he was not upset by the delay. Despite the loss of an eye during the Battle of Britain, where he had served as an observer, the mustachioed Williams had been given the overall responsibility to lead the Schweinfurt mission. A disciplinarian himself, he was fully aware of the tough decision Anderson faced as he strode around 91st Group Operations swinging his swagger stick.

From High Wycombe, Anderson ordered the Schweinfurt groups to depart at 10:40 AM. He felt he had no other choice because the weather over the target was the best it had been for two weeks. Eaker, at Bushy Park, was relieved when he heard the decision. He had not interfered, respecting Anderson's judgment and knowing there was greater loss of morale if a mission was canceled once it was all set to go.

At 1:26 PM. Williams's force crossed the English coast and headed for Schweinfurt by way of Eupen, Aachen, Wiesbaden, and Darmstadt. It was now three and a half hours late. Worse than that, a third of his force had to abort; he led far fewer bombers than he had anticipated. No sooner had the First Air Division cleared the English coast than the Germans alerted their fighters to repel what they suspected was an attack on Schweinfurt.

The division was divided into two task forces, with the first under Colonel William M. Gross. Each force was almost ten miles long, one with 116 bombers and the other with 114, and flying in the clear while clouds still covered their bases in England.

Meanwhile, with LeMay's Third Air Division over Germany, Lay in "Piccadilly Lily" watched German fighters press attacks as close as fifty yards. Once, a fighter misjudged his distance and plowed into a B-17; the impact shattered both planes, and the combined wreckage plummeted to earth with no survivors.

The worst attacks on the rear wing began ten minutes after the last Allied fighters departed for home. About twenty 109s and 190s came in low at the rear of the formation; then, making 180 degree climbing turns, they attacked head on. Some fighters were hit, but a B-17 in the 95th Group and three in the 100th Group fell in flames.

Lay watched with disbelief as a copilot from one of the crippled planes somehow crawled out on the right wing of his bomber through a shell hole in the fuselage. Lay gazed at the man in utter horror because he did not have a parachute. Then, as he watched, the copilot clung to the shattered fuselage with one hand while he reached into the nose section with his other hand to get his parachute. He almost made it, but he lost his grip and his body was swept against the tail and he was hurled to his death. While Lay

continued to watch the plane ahead for possible survivors, the nose of the Fortress rose into a tight stall and it exploded with a force that rocked the rest of the formation.

Murphy, pilot of "Piccadilly Lily," saw that Lay looked numb from the shock of airplanes plummeting to earth as clusters of parachutes followed them at a more leisurely pace, the German yellow chutes mingling with the American white in an incongruous setting below the bloody battle up above. He let Lay fly the airplane to get his mind off the tragedies unfolding around them.

Lay had lost all hope the attacks would diminish as they got deeper into Germany. He knew that the German Fighter Command had recently been reorganized to counter the growing American bomber threat. He had seen intelligence reports that the Germans had even withdrawn two fighter groups from the Russian front to use in defense of their cities and factories.

LeMay's 1st Bombardment Wing, in the lead, had not received the heavy attacks suffered by the rear wings. The lead 96th Group was flanked by Colonel Edgar Wittans 390th Group in the high position on the right and Colonel William B. Davis's 388th Group in the low position on the left.

LeMay's 95th and 100th groups of the 3rd Bombardment Wing continued to undergo persistent attacks, and German fighters swarmed around them. Stragglers, forced for one reason or another to leave the protection of their formations, faced almost certain annihilation as German fighters pounced upon them.

In "Piccadilly Lily," Lay felt trapped by the pairs of 109s that swarmed around them. He jerked upright as a piece of metal flew past their right wing, narrowly missing one of their props. He quickly realized it was the main exit door of the Fortress ahead of them. As his throat constricted, he watched in horrified fascination as a man, with his knees up to his head, hurtled through the formation, barely missing several propellers before his parachute snapped open.

German fighters lobbed rockets now, which exploded with blinding flashes in their formation, incredibly not appearing to do any damage. A quick glance up showed Lay that other German fighters were flying above, dropping bombs fused to go off at their altitude. The sky seemed filled with debris as Flying Fortresses exploded and pieces of airplanes blew throughout their formation, while bodies continued to tumble out of crippled Fortresses, some dropping sickeningly to the countryside when their parachutes failed to open. Lay knew the target was still a half hour away, and with the 3rd Bombardment Wing so threatened, he seriously doubted any of them would get through.

Below "Piccadilly Lily," Major Gilbert Cleven, commanding officer of the 350th Squadron, noted that his plane was one of only three survivors in his entire squadron. His second element had been completely wiped out as fighters bore in relentlessly, shooting more accurately than he had ever seen.

The Third Air Division fought its way to the initial point after fifteen bombers were shot down, but the 131 survivors maintained their formations and refused to admit defeat. As planes were shot out of formations, others moved in to close ranks and provide a solid front of firepower for those remaining.

LeMay's 1st Combat Wing, leading the Regensburg raid, had suffered least with only two losses. He did not realize what had happened to the following wings because they were under strict radio silence. The full extent of their losses would be known later, and he was appalled when he found that most survivors of the fol-

lowing wings were shot full of holes with wounded aboard. The other wings were smaller than his 1st Wing and had borne the brunt of the attacks.

As they turned on the initial point, LeMay could see for twenty five miles in all directions, and the mile square cluster of buildings of the Messerschmitt plant at Regensburg shone clearly. Lieutenant Dunstan T. Abel, lead bombardier for the 96th Group, synchronized carefully on the target, grateful that the fighters did not attack and that there were only two bursts of antiaircraft fire. "Bombs away!" Abel cried.

The entire wing dropped their bombs as they saw the bombs release from the lead plane at 11:45 AM. Leaning over his bomb-sight, Abel watched anxiously for the bombs to hit. When they covered the plant, he let out a whoop, telling the crew that it appeared that nearly every building had been hit.

LeMay's division turned south after they all had dropped their bombs, losing another three aircraft before they reached the Swiss Alps, bringing their total losses to eighteen. The Germans turned back, and the Americans headed for North Africa.

October 10, 1943 marked the first time that the bombers of the 8th Air Force had ever been given a civilian target. The aiming point was the center of Munster, Germany. The city was a railroad hub and it was thought that by striking at the city, many rail workers would become their targets and the rail system in the Ruhr valley would suffer accordingly.

Sixteen groups of B-17s took off en route to the target with the 13th Combat Wing of the 3rd Air Division consisting of the 95th, 100th, and 390th Bomb Groups leading. P-47s escorted the bombers up to the point that they were 9 minutes from Munster. Due to ground fog on their base, the relieving Thunderbolts were not able to make their rendezvous. This spelled disaster for the lead wing.

As the Fortresses pushed on, they faced the greatest concentration of Luftwaffe fighters they had ever encountered. On their first pass they concentrated on the 100th Group which was flying low group in the wing. On the first pass, eight to ten enemy fighters went directly through the Fortress formation from twelve o'clock level. The first attack took three B-17s out of the 100th Group formation. From then on, the enemy continued to barrel through the lead groups in waves while their twin engine fighters stood off to the side and rear and lobbed their rockets into the bombers.

As they came off the target the 100th Group Fortress, "Sexy Suzy, Mother of Ten," piloted by Lt. William Beddow, collided with a Me-109. The crew members only knew that something had hit the left wing and everything was on fire. Four of the crew members managed to bail out of the inferno. Lieutenant Beddow did not survive. This collision spiraled into a second Fortress, "Sweater Girl," which went down as a result of the crash. Its six survivors bailed out to become prisoners of war.

Of the 100th Group's aircraft that came off the target, a few of the remaining aircraft dove for the deck in a vain attempt to escape the fighter attacks and run for home. None of them made it. The only survivor of the thirteen 100th Group B-17s was "Royal Flush" being flown by Lt. Robert "Rosie" Rosenthal. Although one engine had been knocked out, his aircraft bombed the target and then became the target of numerous fighter attacks. The number three engine was hit and had to be feathered, and the oxygen system was almost completely destroyed. Lieutenant Rosenthal managed to bring the aircraft back home on two engines and put it down

in a gathering fog.

While the 100th Group had lost twelve aircraft, the 390th had lost eight and the 95th Group of the 13th Wing lost five. The Luftwaffe decided to knock out the lead wing and they just about did it. The bombing destroyed large sections of the city and knocked out its electrical system completely. The intensity of the air battle is indicated by the high claims made by the crew members of the Fortresses. The B-17 crews claimed 183 enemy aircraft destroyed on the mission. German records show that only twenty four of their fighters went down that day. Of the 313 aircraft dispatched, 77 aborted, 30 were shot down resulting in 306 crew members missing in action. One of the missing was the son of the US Ambassador to Britain Lt John Winant who was taken prisoner.

The highest scoring gunner "Ace" to emerge from the great daylight air battles of 1943 was S/Sgt Donald W Crossley, a 25 year old B-17 tail gunner in the 95th Group. In his 25 missions he received credit for the destruction of 12 enemy aircraft, the only 8th Air Force gunner to run his victory score into double figures. Much of Crossley's success can be attributed to his great interest in marksmanship and skill developed through shooting as a hobby. Before enlisting, when he worked for a steel company in Follansbee, Virginia, his passion for shooting was pursued through membership in three different rifle clubs.

With the original 95th Group combat complement arriving in the UK in April 1943, Don Crossley was tail gunner on Lt John W Johnson's crew. His first two victories were credited the following month and his third on 11 June. On this date the Johnson crew were flying the B-17 "Little Lady" when attacked by fighters over the target. A mechanical problem developed in Crossley's tail guns rendering them inoperative. At about the same time one of the nose guns used by the navigator was hit by enemy fire and damaged. Hearing this over the interphone, Crossley went to the nose, removed part of the mechanism from the damaged gun, and was able to use this in getting his guns back into operation. Shortly afterwards when another fighter attack developed he was able to obtain fatal strikes on an FW-190. Two days later, on the hotly contested Kiel raid, the Johnson crew was flying B-17 "Easy Aces," an appropriate nickname in view of Crossley claiming his fourth and fifth enemy fighters to become one of the first gunner aces in the Group. "Easy Aces" was a reference to a popular radio show of the forties.

After this mission the crew received a new long range B-17F which was named The "Brass Rail" after a well known American restaurant chain. Over the next few weeks Crossley flew on most of the major raids and his score mounted steadily. On another mission to Kiel, 25 July 1943, "The Brass Rail" came under fighter attack and although Crossley was able to claim one of the enemy, the bomber was badly shot up, a cannon shell exploding in the cockpit mortally wounding 'Johnny' Johnson. The copilot flew the bomber home and in subsequent operations became the new crew captain. Over the Ruhr on 12 August, "The Brass Rail" was again under attack and Crossley claimed another double to raise his score

to 11. His 12th and final victory was achieved on his 22nd mission in September 1943, following which he received the simultaneous awards of the DFC and cluster. The 3rd Division planned to use Crossley as a lecturer and instructor in the zone sighting method of firing once he had completed his tour, so that other bomber gunners might benefit from his expertise.

Black Week

October 14, 1943 would become another fateful day in "Black Week" for the Eighth Air Force. The mission was the second attempt to knock out the ball bearing factories at Schweinfurt. The official publication "The Combined Bomber Offensive" stated: All told more than 300 enemy aircraft participated in the battle and these made 700 separate attacks on the bombers during the principal fight.

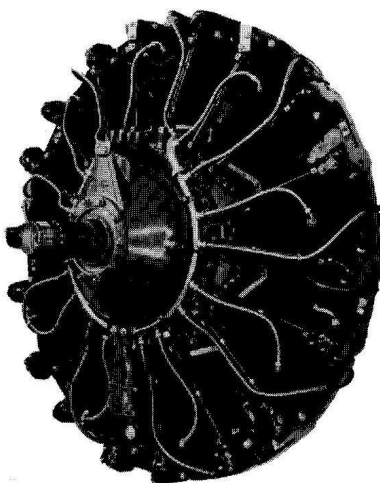
The first enemy maneuver was to attack from the front at very close range with a screen of single engine fighters firing 20MM cannon, and machine guns. Following this screen were a number of twin-engine fighters in formation, firing rockets from projectors suspended under the wings. The rocket firing craft began their attacks at a distance and did not come in nearly so close as the single engine fighters. The Fortress formations were subjected to great numbers of rocket projectiles.

After the single engine fighters had made their initial assault, they refueled and returned to the battle, this time attacking from all directions in an attempt to confuse the gunners in the heavy bombers. Then followed the second effort of the enemy twin engine fighters, which attacked principally from the front and rear. The rocket firing craft seemed to concentrate upon a single combat wing until their ammunition was exhausted. After these maneuvers, all enemy fighters centered their attention on the bombers that had been crippled by the organized attacks.

The 305th Bomb Group was the hardest hit that day en route to Schweinfurt, losing a quarter of the total lost by the Eighth Air Force, fifteen out of eighteen planes. "I watched from my left window as the 305th, flying low and to our left, away from the other groups, lost one plane after another," related Capt. Charles Schoolfield, leader of the 306th Bomb Group formation. "First they got the last plane and then chewed up through the formation until they almost completely destroyed it."

In the fury of the assault it was difficult for Schoolfield, as the group leader, or Lt. Curtis L. Dunlap, flying as tail gunner and formation observer, to keep track of what was happening. When the shooting slackened, Schoolfield was shocked to learn that he had only five planes left. The 306th birds huddled together for mutual protection as they came down the forty second bomb run, tailed only by the 92nd Bomb Group. The 306th dropped its 1,000lb bombs, and sixteen of them landed within a 1,920 ft circle.

Having bombed on a heading of forty five degrees, the planes came around to the left and headed west on a withdrawal route that took them south of Paris and then north toward England. Schoolfield's badly damaged plane staggered along as the leader. At one point, with a fire in the number three engine, Schoolfield



Wright R-1820 Engine for the B-17

had actually pushed the alarm bell switch, but nothing happened, so he gave up thoughts of bailing out and tried to keep the plane flying.

Later, Maj. Gen. Orval Anderson, in conversation with Schoolfield, said that the withdrawal route had been his idea, both agreed that had the withdrawal been along the line of penetration, the casualties would have been much more than the sixty lost by the Eighth Air Force. This represented 20 percent of the planes taking off in the raid. In the annals of warfare, and particularly to those who met an unwanted fate on October 14, the day will be known forever as Black Thursday. Indeed, it was for the ten 306th crews who gave their all on the mission. Of the one hundred men who did not return to Thurlough that afternoon, thirty five died on the mission or later of wounds. Sixty five went to prison camp.

The 305th Bomb Group led by Maj Charles G Y Normand had its troubles as was observed by Captain Schoolfield. Over Frankfurt, twin engine Me-210 fighters appeared astern and again lobbed rockets. By now, the 364th Bomb Squadron had lost all seven of its airplanes. Still, the enemy attack picked up in intensity. Soon all four 366th Bomb Squadron planes, flying the high squadron, fell to the flak and the fighters.

Major Normand watched in horror as plane after plane was shot down. The sky was filled with burning aircraft and the parachutes of the men that had escaped from them. As the remnants of the group turned on the initial point for the bombing, Normand's bombardier called for a separate bomb run. He didn't know that only three planes were left in the formation and one of them was on fire.

Lt. Raymond Bullock flew the aircraft that was on fire, a Fortress named "Sundown Sal." The B-17 had been hit in the left wing by a 20MM shell, which started the blaze. Bullock held the B-17 in formation until the bombs were dropped. Immediately after the bomb run, he left the formation and told his crew to bail out. All became POWs.

In the final tally for the 305th Bomb Group, the 364th Squadron lost all seven of its aircraft; the 365th Squadron lost two; and the 366th Squadron lost four. Two 365th planes returned. Of the 130 crew members lost, thirty six had been killed. The 87 percent loss for the day left the group devastated.

The assessment of damage at the target was originally stated to be total destruction. Unfortunately, this was not true. While considerable damage had been done, in no way did it put the Germans out of the ball bearing business. However, the damage forced the Germans to speed up the dispersion of the industry to the countryside.

The loss of sixty bombers on the mission further swelled the loss figure for October. In all, the Eighth Air Force lost 176 B-17s during this month. Bomber crew morale hit a new low. Never did they think that they would be asked to fight their way to the target and back under such overwhelming opposition. Of course, it was hurting the Luftwaffe as well, but many of their pilots were recovered and back in the air the following day. The one thing that the American Fortress crews had proven beyond a doubt was that they had the guts to press on to their targets regardless of the odds. They were never turned back by the enemy!

There was little comfort for the bomber crews in the message that Chief of Staff Gen H H Arnold released to the press following the Schweinfurt mission. The message read: "Regardless of our losses, I'm ready to send replacements of planes and

crews and continue building up our strength. The opposition isn't nearly what it was, and we are wearing them down. The loss of 60 American bombers in the Schweinfurt raid was incidental."

If the opposition wasn't nearly what it was, the crews of the Fortresses felt they must have been hallucinating! To further compound the odds that the bomber crews had to face, by November 1943, the Luftwaffe had reinforced its fighter aircraft strength in the west to 800. The good news was that drop tanks for the Thunderbolts were finally beginning to become more available, and two groups of P-38 Lightnings arrived. The P-38 would never become the victor that it was in other theaters because its performance suffered in the extreme cold of northwestern Europe, but it could provide deep escort. The best news was that the P-51 Mustang would arrive in England in December. This aircraft, with its superb performance, could also go all the way with the bombers regardless of the target. The days of Luftwaffe superiority were definitely numbered. 320 Aircraft were dispatched, 91 aborted, and 60 were shot down. 594 crew members were missing in action.

As you can see from the above B-17s took terrible pounding before the long range North American P-51s were employed as escort fighters. I am not sure if our beloved B-24s would have fared any better under the same conditions. Yes! the press did treat the 15th Air Force as some backwater outfit, and all of us harbor some resentment. But we have to recognize that the 8th Air Force with two big B-17 divisions and one B-24 division was bigger and older than the 15th, resulting in huge losses. As the song goes the 8th did get the glory, but the 15th away in sunny Italy fulfilled its assignment successfully and we can hold our heads high, as high as any other fighting force in WWII.

The final bombing mission of the 8th Air Force B-17s was accomplished by the 307th Bomb Group going to Pilsen airfield and, to the Skoda Ammunitions plant nearby with a force of 276 aircraft. B-17s were used after this date in the dropping of food parcels mostly over Holland until May 7, 1945. Leaflets were dropped by B-17s up to May 8, 1945. In comparison, the last mission of the 484th Bomb Group was on April 26, 1945.

Production of the B-17 from Douglas, Lockheed, and Boeing was 12,725. Wing Span 103 feet, 9 inches, Length 74 feet 4 inches, Wright R-1820-97 engines delivering 1200hp, Top Speed 287 MPH, service Ceiling 35,000 feet, range 3400 miles, empty weight 36,135 pounds, gross weight 55,000 pounds. An all cargo B-17 was called a C-108. There were more B-17Gs built than any other, this is the model with the chin turret. The 8th Air Force employed the B-17E, the B-17F, and the B-17G.

Books consulted:

- 1) The Mighty Eighth War Diary, by Roger A Freeman Motorbooks International, Osceola, WI
- 2) The B-17 Flying Fortress, by Roger A Freeman, Illustrated by Rikyu Wantanabe, Crown Publishers Inc. NY
- 3) B-17 Flying Fortress, by William N Ness Motorbooks International, Osceola, WI
- 4) Fortress Without a Roof, The Allied bombing Of The Third Reich, by Wilbur H Morrison St. Martin's Press, NY
- 5) Decision Over Schweinfurt, by Thomas M Coffey David McKay Co, NY
- 6) US Bombers 1928 to 1980s, by Lloyd S Jones, Aero Publishers Fallbrook, CA 1928-1980s, by Lloyd S Jones Aero Publishers, Fall Brook, CA
- 7) Flying Fortress, by Edward Jablonski, Doubleday, NY

Alone In A Hostile Sky

By Amos Pollard, 827 Sq

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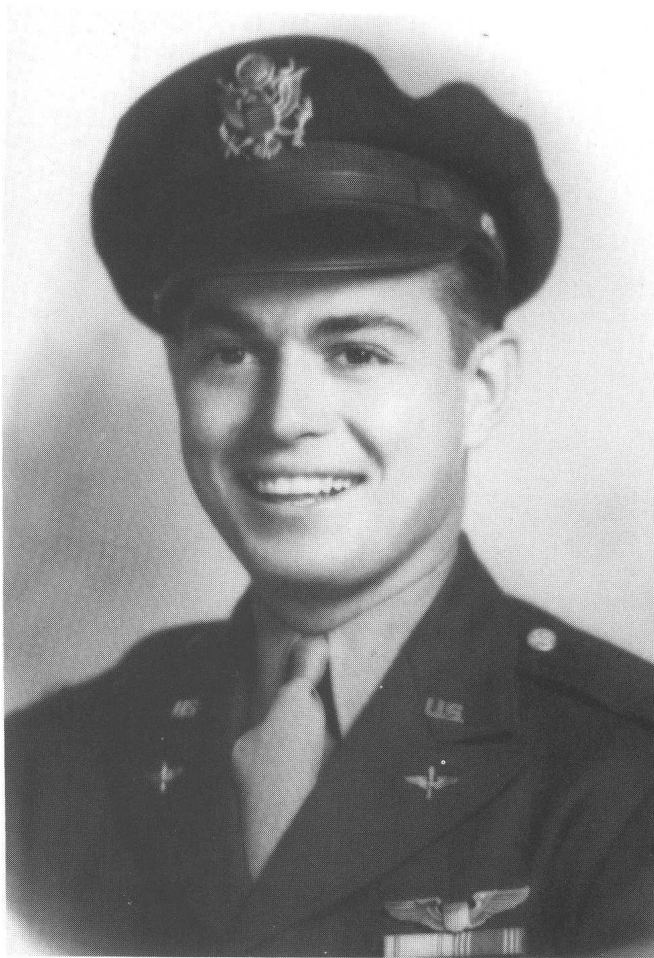
Captain Amos Pollard was only twenty-five, but to the crew (average age, twenty-two, the youngest, nineteen) he was the 'old man'. They had been with him since July, 1944 and he hadn't lost one yet. Now it is 1945, a cold, January morning in Torretta, south of Foggia near the Adriatic on the 'boot heel' of Italy. Amos and his crew are members of the 827th Squadron, 484th Bomb Group, 15th Air Force. His job this day is to take his crew to downtown Munich.

At the briefing, weather, routes, radio frequencies, call signs, are noted. Weather won't be a problem, but the Italian Alps will be if you get into trouble. Estimated target time; 1145 hours. Bombing altitude will be 23,000 feet. That means they'll have to climb the entire route to reach altitude before crossing the IP for the bomb run. "Any questions? Good Luck!"

Amos is considered an old hand now, experienced enough to know how the day will go. He woke up groggy, but he'll perform the flying part wide awake, routinely, carefully, the best he can do. At first he'll be busy with check out, start up, taxi and take-off, but after he settles down on course he'll have time to think about what can go wrong with the plane, about enemy fighters that may be waiting as you approach the target, and again as you leave the target, about the flak over the target.

And he knows that he will transition from being scared to being terrified and finally to an overwhelming feeling of relief when he gets back home, if he gets back home. He won't show any of it to his crew if he can help it for as long as he can help it. But right now it's time to go.

Today he's flight leader for the four squadron group. His call sign is "Callhoun 88." He'll be flying a Mickey, one of two radar equipped B-24s in the outfit. They are called Mickey because the target radars they carry are about as reliable as a kid's Mickey Mouse watch, half the time they don't work. Hell have two extra crew members, a radar operator and a mission photographer. That will make twelve souls aboard for this flight, twelve souls he'll try



Amos Pollard

his best to bring home in one piece.

He leaves the briefing hut, steps into snow melt muddy slush and walks to a vehicle piled hood -to -spare tire with his crew and their parachutes and gear. Stuffed into their flying suits they all look like teddy bears. They reach the big, gangly, four engine B-24 and pile out. While the flight crew climbs aboard, he and Jim Smith walk around the plane for a pre flight check-out with their crew chief. His boys have been working out in the freezing cold all night getting the plane ready to fly, checking engines and electrical, mechanical and hydraulic systems, and loading bombs, fuel, ammunition, oxygen and signal flares aboard. The ground crew is as important to the mission as the flight crew and they know it. Amos lets them know that he knows it, too. It's "their" plane. They just let the crew have it to fly missions. What they try not to show is how much they care about the flight crew. Dog tired from working all night, they'll stay to watch the take off, then get some chow and go to their tents to sleep a while. Late in

the afternoon they'll get up and stand around in the cold, watching, waiting, looking at their watches, hoping "their" plane will get back OK. They'll tense up when they hear the planes returning. They'll count them coming in, note the ones having trouble, note the ones firing flares in the landing pattern denoting they have wounded aboard. If a crew's plane is missing, they will keep a lonely vigil long after the field grows silent, watching the empty sky, hoping their bomber will limp into view.

As flight leader, Amos taxis first with the rest of the group falling in behind. The runway is dirt, no matting, just hard packed dirt. There's the signal from the tower. Pollard moves all four throttles forward and monitors the engine gages to make sure each is developing takeoff power. The big four blade propellers chew into the air and the heavy bomber lurches forward. The wheels drag through patches of mud and standing water and Amos has to play

the big twin rudders to keep the nose pointed straight. Copilot, Smith, calls out the air speed. The needle on the gage creeps up slowly. "Come on, baby!" The bomber is barely off the ground when the end of the runway flashes beneath them.

The squadron unit of seven lumbering B-24s forms into a self defense box. Three other boxes from the three remaining 484th Group squadrons form up on Pollard's unit and begin the long, slow climb to 23,000 feet. This morning, 112 tons of high explosives will fall on Munich. The Germans know it. They'll do what they can to stop it. The men in the planes try not to think about what the bombs will do to people on the ground. Their job is to drop them.

There's been a foul up. The escort fighters fail to show. It's happened before. Just short of the IP the group finally reaches 23,000 feet and levels off. The temperature is thirty degrees below zero. The fuselage is not pressurized or heated. The waist gunners are standing at open ports. The crew wear electrically heated, leather, fur lined suits, but they are still cold. It is not a nice place to be even when no one is shooting at you.

Every man is scanning the sky for enemy fighters. They are absent today, but the flak comes up to welcome the 484th. Black puffs of smoke begin to appear slightly below and ahead of the flight. They look innocent, but each one marks the explosion of a shell into sharp shards of hot metal capable of tearing ragged holes through anything they hit; engines, wing spars, fuel tanks, men. The German gunners soon get the altitude right. Ugly black splotches appear close by as if the sky has contracted some hideous plague.

Just as Amos begins the turn downwind onto the bomb run his number two engine loses power. Jim Smith grabs the engine controls. He quickly adjusts the throttle and mixture and is able to keep it running, but at only partial power. Whatever the problem he won't feather it unless it catches fire; partial engine power is better than none. He assigns Cpl Marvin Goldstein, manning the top gun turret, to keep an eye on the crippled engine.

Pollard hands off the lead to the plane on his left. With one engine sick, Calhoun 88 is losing speed, falling back through the formation. His bombardier, Lt Dan Paul, is no longer lead bombardier. He releases his bombs when he sees the closest planes ahead drop theirs.

By now the entire group has passed Amos. They have cleared the target, he hasn't. Suddenly his number three engine shuts down. Mechanical failure? A piece of shrapnel? Fly the plane! Maintain control! Let the copilot deal with the engine.

The flight engineer, Sgt. August Kovacic, leaves his gun to help Jim Smith try a restart. It's no good. Some kind of liquid is streaming off the wing behind the dead engine. "Feather Number Three!" They have only two and a half engines, but at least they don't have a fire. Speed drops way back. By now Calhoun 88 has fallen so far behind they can't see any of the group up ahead. They are slow and alone and losing altitude, and the Alps are in front of them.

The intercom comes alive. Sgt. Tom Fitzmaurice is the first to suggest throwing all the guns and ammo overboard to lighten the plane. The tail gunner thinks maybe the crew should bail out.

Amos tells them no one is to jump unless he says so, and no one is to throw any guns or ammo out, not yet anyway. He tells them they're still flying, he's got the aircraft under control, and he reminds them of one other thing they're still deep in enemy territory, they may need their guns.

Pollard is no longer cold. He's sweating from an adrenalin furnace deep inside his gut. He's running the two good engines hard and praying they will hold together. He asks his navigator, Lt. Robert Babcock, for a direct course south over the mountains for



The Pollard Crew

home. It will carry them closer to the enemy fighter base at Udine, but Amos figures he doesn't have much choice. He can't hold altitude. He has to cross the Alps now by the most direct route or he won't cross them at all. They are already down to 17,000 and still descending. Soon Amos has to abandon his navigator's course because he can no longer hold the straight line of flight. He must fly around individual mountain peaks because he can't fly over them. He finds a cut toward the south between two peaks and takes it. Then he has to fly east or west until he finds another saddle between peaks, and another. The peaks and ridges seem to be growing around him as the plane continues to lose altitude. If he makes a wrong turn he could become trapped in a bowl with no way out.

Down to 11,000 feet and he just barely clears a ridge. He is just before ordering the guns and everything else they can tear loose thrown overboard when he looks up and can see the Adriatic far ahead! They are on the down side of the Alps! If he can hold his present rate of descent he will make it!

It is at that moment the intercom comes alive with a voice crowding panic, "Bogies! Two Bandits at three o'clock!" Copilot Jim Smith says he sees them too. "They're hanging out there looking us over. I don't know why they don't come on in. We're a sitting duck." Amos gets on the radio, the fighter escort frequency. He hasn't seen a friendly all day, but maybe

"This is Calhoun 88! Calhoun 88 calling anyone that can hear me. Over! This is Calhoun 88. We're in real trouble! Over!" He waits a long few seconds for someone to answer. Nothing but silence. He tries again. And again. Corporal Clarence Causey, Jr. calls, "They're swinging around, skipper, still looking us over," Corporal Carlton Pinnegar says, "Maybe they're new and don't know what their doing."

Pollard thinks to himself, 'Maybe they're pros and are taking their time to determine if any of our gunners are knocked out. They want to come in on a dead gunner.' Jim Smith adds, "I hope to hell they think the radar antennas sticking out of the ball turret are guns. We're naked below."

Amos tries the fighter frequency again. "This is Calhoun 88 in big trouble. Anybody out there?" He thinks it's hopeless, but he keeps calling to give his crew hope. Suddenly a deep, resonant voice booms out, "Calhoun 88, where are you?"

Amos knows his own slow drawl marks him to any listener as a white Southerner. And he knows unmistakably that the voice he hears is that of another Southerner, one of a different color.

"This is Calhoun 88! We're clearing the mountains about fifty miles north of the coast! Altitude 11,000 ft, descending. We're crippled and have two Me 109's closing in on us. Can you help?" "Looks like you got yourself in a pack a trouble, Calhoun. Just where did you boys come up with a call sign like Calhoun anyway?"

Something catches the corner of Pollard's left eye, a tiny speck rapidly growing in size! A moment or two later he looks out his side window and watches a P-51 mustang slide right up on his left wing. The pilot takes off his oxygen mask and grins at Amos with the whitest teeth he ever saw. A moment later a second mustang, his wingman joins the first. The lead black pilot gives Amos a salute and is gone as fast as he arrived.

"You boys head on home, now! We gonna' take care of Fritz." The tails of the two mustangs are painted bright red. Amos has heard of them, the Tuskegee fliers They're based at Manfredonia on the spur of Italy. He doesn't know where they came from. Maybe they were on a fighter sweep over Udine, or maybe they just finished an escort mission. Pollard doesn't care. He's so damn glad to see them he could kiss 'em. The German hunters quickly become the hunted.

Back at Torretta, Pollard's ground crew stands alone out on the field, waiting. Hope is waning when someone shouts, "Look there! Low on the horizon! Others strain to see a tiny speck coming their way! "That's gotta' be Calhoun 88!" Bomber crews pour

out of tents and shacks to welcome home one of their own returning from the lost. They watch Captain Amos S Pollard bring in his crippled plane.

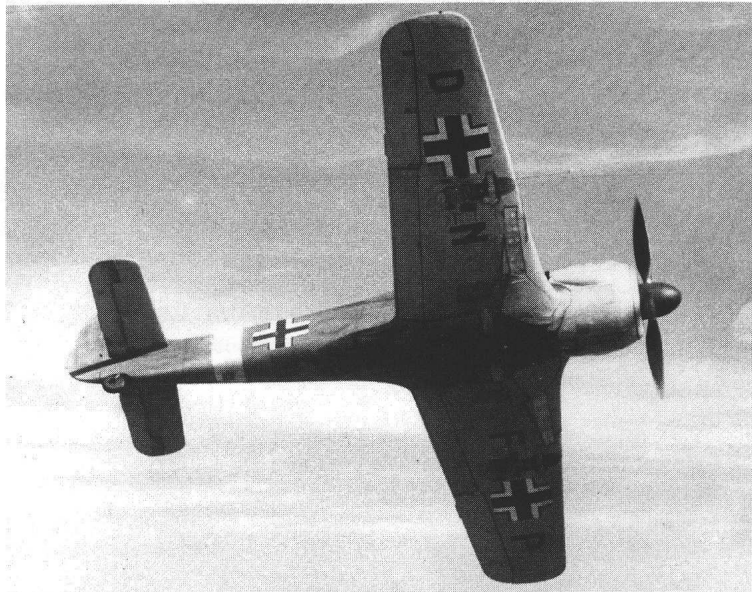
Within a couple of days Captain Pollard and his crew will go out and do it all over again. Before it is over, they will have flown and survived thirty four combat missions.

Epilogue

The 484th Bomb Group began operations in Italy in April of 1944 with four squadrons and a total strength of sixty one aircraft. The war ended a year later. During that time, it took a total of 118 replacement aircraft to keep them at full strength. Captain Amos S Pollard survived the war. So did every member of his crew. He's proud of that fact. Others were not so fortunate. In its year of operations out of Torretta, 484th air crew losses to enemy action (killed,

wounded or missing in action) totaled sixty six crews, six hundred and sixty men , over 100 percent of its original strength.

Of all the missions Amos Pollard flew, the one described above stood out most in his memory. He came from a rural community in Choctaw County, Mississippi near the small town of Mathiston. He had grown up in a segregated South, was serving in a segregated Army Air Force and had never thought much about it. Then, high in a lonely, hostile sky, two black men saved his life and the lives of his crew at great risk to themselves. For Amos, it changed a whole way of thinking. "I'll for-



An FW-190

ever be grateful to those Red Tail pilots. I deeply regret that I never was able to find out who they were to thank them personally. As their reputation grew, bomber pilots began asking specifically for the Red Tails to escort them. I was one of them."

After the war Pollard and his copilot, Jim Smith, stayed in touch and occasionally got together. More than fifty years later, while Pollard was visiting Smith at his home on the coast of Maine, the two took a rowing dory across a small inlet. While they were rowing, James Smith paused and said, "Amos, there's something I always wanted to say to you and just never got around to it. I figure we won't live forever so I might as well tell you now." Amos kept rowing. Smith said, "I just want to tell you that I thought you exhibited one hell of a lot of personal courage back when we flew those missions together.

Amos stopped rowing, looked at his friend and replied, "Hell Jim, don't you know I was scared to death!" "I didn't back then," Smith said, "You set an example of courage for me and the crew. I just wanted you to know. Now get back to your oars before we drift out to sea!"

Mike Porter, 826 Sq Receives a DFC at age 80



Mike Porter, 826 Sq

Retired Air Force Reserve Lt/ Col Myron "Mike" Porter, Pampa, TX, was given the Distinguished Flying Cross last February 12 at the age of 80; the medal was for a courageous action performed almost 57 years ago in World War II. Porter was born in Granville Summit, PA and graduated from Troy High School.

Porter said after the ceremony in which he received the medal that he remembered his commander telling him while he was in Europe that he should be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his aerial flight in 1944, but he went home and forgot about it, only making minimal efforts to remedy the situation.

But much later, a family member didn't forget and persisted. About eight months ago, one of his twin daughters, Jeanna decided that this was a very important award for her dad so she set about acquiring it for him. You can just imagine the amount of red tape involved. And in the end, it was much more significant than if he had received it right after he earned it because his family could be there. Present at the ceremony were his wife, Dorothy, five of their six children and their spouses, five



The Mike Porter Crew, Photo taken in USA, note concrete pavement, before overseas deployment

of their 14 grandchildren and two of their four great grandchildren.

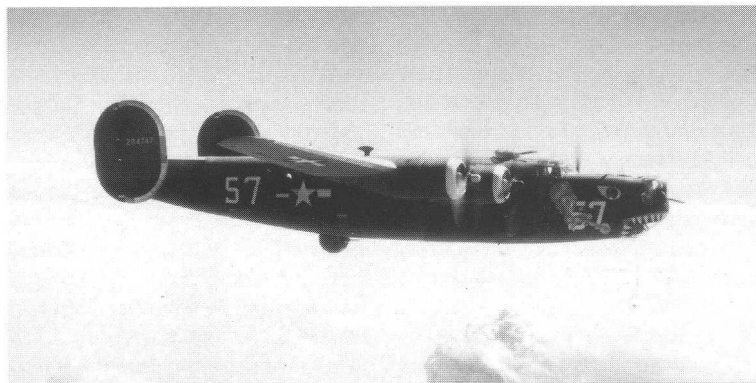
The citation that accompanied Porter's medal gave the following account of his heroic action in World War II: On August 18, 1944, Porter, who was then 23 years old and a first lieutenant, was part of a formation of B-24s on a mission over Freidrichshafen, Germany to bomb a ball bearing factory. The target was bombed successfully but, as they were coming off the bomb run, the airplane was struck by flak that shattered the windshield of the plane.

Porter received injuries to the head and left eye that rendered him unconscious. The navigator administered first aid to Porter who recovered enough to be able to take over the controls from the inexperienced copilot and bring the plane back into formation.

Although the plane was again hit by flak that damaged the No. 2 engine so that the prop had to be feathered, Porter was able to

pilot the airplane back to his home base in Torretta, Italy, and land with the help of his navigator and radio operator.

He is currently the curator of The Freedom Museum, USA in Pampa, Texas, and lots of you readers will be anxious to read about the museum and his memories of the Troy area.



The Plane that the Porter crew is most identified with

DFC s asked for Joe Hebert and Willard Pearson



Floyd R Creasman, 826 Sq. the pilot who put in the request for the two DFCs for the action of June 23, 1944

Editors Note: This letter was received in the Association office just before the 2001 Reunion.

Dear Bud:

Truth or Consequence, New Mexico

The enclosures substantiates the request for the Distinguished Flying Crosses for Joe Hebert and Willard Pearson. The B-24 aircraft was #63, serial number 42-52697 (Salvo Sally II). Nothing came of Creasman's original request for these decorations made in 1944. This was probably because of the hectic war times.

Yours truly,

J Jordan Glew-N, 826 Sq Creasman Crew



J Jordan Glew N, 826 Sq.

The whole crew was : 1/Lt Floyd R Creasman-P, 2/Lt. John D Harper-CP, 2/Lt. J Jordan Glew-N, 1/Lt. Marvin C Rudolf-B, S/ Sgt. Joe Hebert-T/G, Sgt. Willard G Pearson-EG, Sgt. Timothy J Holland-UG, S/Sgt. Ray Hinz-RO, and S/Sgt. Edward McDonnell-BG.

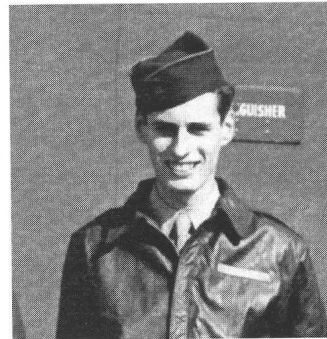


The Official Request

On June 23, 1944 the target of the 484th Bomb Group, 15th Air Force, was Giurgiu, Rumania. Flak was heavy. Upon leaving the target, the pilot reported on the intercom that he had lost rudder control and had to leave the formation.

When the danger from enemy fighters was past, (engineer) Sgt. Willard I Pearson and (tail gunner) Sgt Joe Hebert left their

guns and were able to locate the trouble. Enemy flak had severed a rudder cable. With very little material or tools, these two men made an ingenious repair: (1) they pulled one end of the severed cable from one pulley to get some slack. (2) one man held the cables overlapping them, about ten inches. (3) they included a large bolt in the overlap and enclosed it with several hose clamps, which they cinched up tight, upon



Joe Hebert T/G, 826s Sq.

completion of the repair, engineer Pearson asked the pilot to try the rudder control. Pilot reported rudder control okay.

As a result of the heads up work of these two men, the aircraft was able to return to base and land. It would have been impossible to safely land without rudder control. Obviously, the repair made by these two men saved a B-24 aircraft and possibly the lives of the ten men aboard.



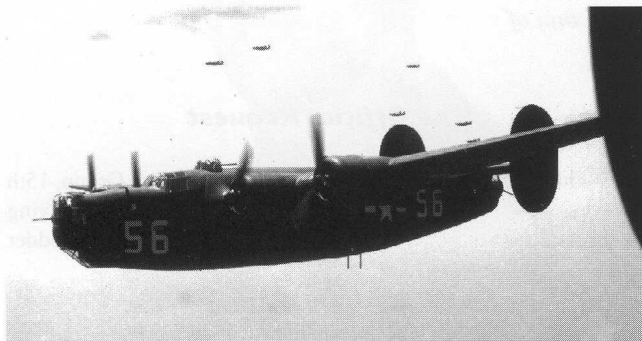
Willard I Pearson E, 826 Sq

Uniontown, Ohio 44685
Editor, Torretta Flyer
Redondo Beach, CA 90277-4453

Subject: B-24 , 42-52715, 825 Sq Nose 46 shot down 6/13/44 over Sillertshausen flown by Pilot Lt Sylfest L Olson.

Dear Bud,

The Torretta Flyer No 38 shows 42-52715 on page 35 and page 36 as No 56 named *Vicious Virgin* . This should be changed to read nose no 46, and assigned to the 825 Sq. Our B-24 was not yet named when we were shot down on 6/13/44 . The name *Vicious Virgin* is probably correct as No 42-94746, 826 Sq, nose no 56. To verify please refer to Flyer No 27 page 19 which shows 42-52715 825 lost near Sillertshausen, with pilot Sylfest L Olson at the helm.



I don't know where the ship named *Victory* came from because our plane was not yet named when we were shot down 6/13/44. I was the Bombardier on Lt Olson's crew of No 42-52715 No 46 shot down on 6/13/44. Bud, you may want to correct the permanent records, no big deal. You have done a wonderful job for the 484th Bomb Group. Thank you very much .

Sincerely,
Glenn T Smith, 825 Sq.

Editors Note; Ok! I will show 42-51715 as nose 46, 825 Sq. Missing Air Crew Report No. 6306 confirms that B-24H 42-52715 was indeed shot down on June 13,1944 as you say. The photos below shows a B-24 with the nose number 56 probably 42-94746 carrying the name *Vicious Virgin* at one time and *Victory* at another time.



Escape Statement of the Charles A Marshall Crew

The Original Documents were marked Secret

HQ 484th BG (H)
APO 520 US Army

Escape Statement, dated 5 March 1945

Pilot, Marshall, Charles A, 1/Lt, 0797570, 484th BG, 825th Sq, MIA 21 Feb 45, RTD, 1 March 45, Missions 23.

Navigator, Cummins, James D, 2/ Lt, 0716287, 484th BG, 825th Sq, MIA 21 Feb 45, RTD 1 March 45, Missions 27.

Bombardier Anderson, Robert F, 2/Lt, 0722560, 484th BG, 825th Sq, MIA 21 Feb 45, RTD 1 March 45, Missions 21.

Engineer, Harford, Charles A, T/Sgt 37701908, 484th BG , 825th Sq, MIA 21 Feb 45, RTD 1 March 45, Missions 21.

Copilot, Gross, John R Jr, 2/Lt 0829005, 484th BG, 825th Sq, MIA 21 Feb 45, RTD 3 March 45, Missions 21.

Escape Statement of crew

Mission was to Vienna, February 21 1945. Thirty seconds before bombs away, three bursts of flak hit the aircraft, knocking out No 2 and No 4 engines, all the hydraulic system and the interphone. The aircraft lost several thousand feet immediately, and as soon as the pilot regained control, S/Sgt Powers upper turret gunner, bailed out and his chute was seen to open. The tail gunner, S/

Sgt Richmond was seriously wounded, and T/Sgt Cataldo-Radio Operator, and Lt Thompson- Navigator, were superficially wounded.

The pilot headed south then southeast, and crossed lake Balaton at about 15,000 feet. The maps an which battle lines and safe areas were drawn had blown out of the aircraft when the crew threw out guns etc. to lighten the load, but as soon as they were fairly sure that they were behind Russian lines, they headed for Yugoslavia. The copilot instructed the crew to rig up a static line to Richmond's chute, and after assisting him out, F/O Lee, Sgt Cataldo and S/Sgt Sandberg (waist gunners) bailed out northwest of Sombor (450 deg 471 min -19 deg 3 min).

The remainder of the crew bailed out shortly after this, the copilot and pilot being the last to go, and all landed in safe territory in the area of Sombor and Subotica (46 deg 08 min -19 deg 40 min).

Lieutenants Marshall, Gross, Cummins and Anderson and Sgt Harford have returned to base. Lt Thompson was last seen in a Russian hospital at Sombor, and the whereabouts of the rest of the crew is not yet known.

Statement of Lt Marshall Landed very hard spraining both ankles. Near small farmhouse, where peasants watched, but unwilling to approach. He called out "Americanski" and one old man then approached. Shortly after a crowd gathered, helped him remove his chute etc., and took him to the farmhouse. He was joined there by Lt Gross, and after they had been fed, four Partisans arrived, and took him in a cart filled with hay to a little village. After a day there they were taken to Division Headquarters at Subotica and eventually

by jeep to Belgrade. There they reported all information to US Mission, and were flown to Bari by C-47.

Statement of Lt Gross: Also landed hard, hurting one ankle, about 200 yards from Lt Marshall. Yugoslavian civilians assisted him to the same farmhouse where he joined Lt Marshall.

Statement of Lt Anderson Landed in farmyard. Civilian arrived who spoke a little English, also a Partisan who asked for identification which he did not have, but the old man identified him as American. Shortly after this the Bulgarians arrived. They took his gun away and searched him.

They took him to Krnjaja 12KM east of Sombor. A Bulgarian Lieutenant spoke some French and they managed a little conversation. This man dispatched a Partisan to get his belongings and the following day took him by truck to Bulgarian Headquarters in Sombor, where they turned him over to the Russians. The Russians also had Lt Cummins and Sgt Harford. Lt Anderson then went to Subotica with a Russian and a Bulgarian Lieutenant.

Statement of Lt Cummins: Landed 30 miles North of Sombor, just inside Hungarian border. Two men arrived on horseback and in showing them his AGO card they took him to their Commissar, who spoke a little French. He convinced the Commissar that he was an American, partly because of the Air Corps insignia on his B-10 jacket. He was driven in a horse cart to Sombor where he met Sgt Harford. They stayed three days in a civilian house and were taken in a truck convoy to Belgrade.

Statement of Harford Had rough landing in a cornfield. The whole village came and he shouted "Americanski". He convinced them he was an American because one man spoke some English. They took him to Sambor by train where he joined Lt Cummins.

Suggestions

1. Although they do not know American Dog tags, most of the Yugoslavs do know that the German Identity disk is round consequently wearing dog tags is important.
2. Several of the crew members had their GI shoes laced on to the cable of the U12 cluster adapter and only one shoe fixed this way came off possibly because the lace was not new. As an addi-

tional safeguard, recommend that the top eyelets of both shoes be securely fastened together, possibly by parachute shroud lines.

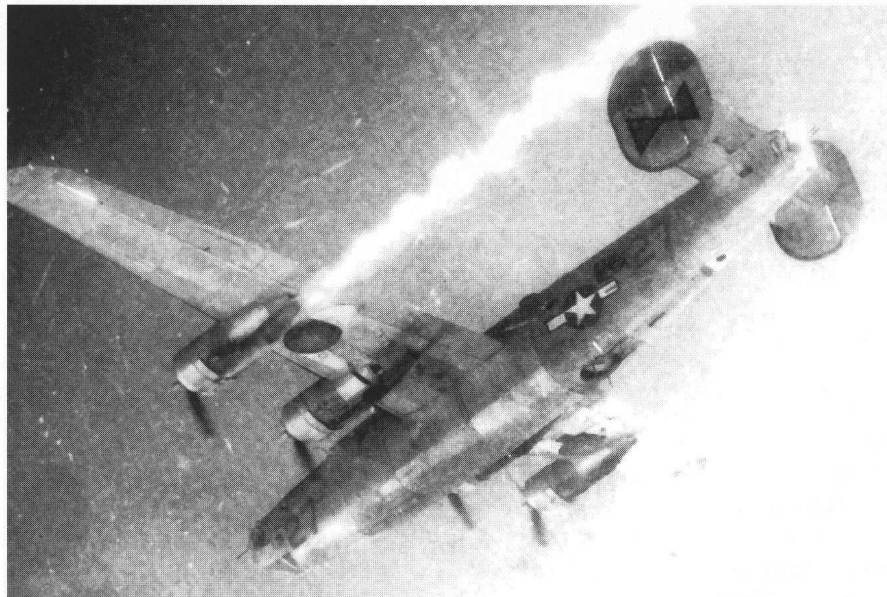
3. Believe it would be preferable to have more one dollar bills and less five dollar bills in the escape purse.
4. Several crew members got the GI s. None of them followed briefed procedure by carrying sulfaguanadine tablets.
5. Three men were infected by lice. None followed briefed procedure by carrying GI insecticide.
6. All crew members believe new "Passport" will be valuable in effecting quick identification.

7. Flying equipment with Air Corps insignia may assist in identification.

8. If crew members can secure additional currency to carry on combat missions, it will almost invariably be useful.

9. There is still a grave shortage of medical supplies in Yugoslavia and Hungary. Carrying iodine swabs, sulfa powder etc. would be highly advisable
John F Holstius,

Captain, Air Corps, Escape Officer.



Something To Think About

1. A penny saved is a government oversight.
2. Living on earth is expensive, but it does include a free trip around the sun.
3. How long a minute is depends on what side of the bathroom door you are on.
4. Some mistakes are too much fun to make only once.
5. If ignorance is bliss, why aren't more people happy?.
6. Ever notice that people who are late are often much jollier than the people who have to wait for them.
7. Birthdays are good for you, the more you have, the longer you live.

The P-400! What Was It?



A Bell P-39 similar to the P-400

Editors Note: The reader may wonder what does a P-400, nee P-39, have to do with the beloved B-24 of the 15th Air Force. Both were available for export to Britain before the United States entered World War Two, the P-39 in 1938, the B-24 in 1939. The B-24 that the members of the 484th Bomb Group are most familiar with was built in just nine months with many of its systems not fully developed because of the urgent need for heavy bombers. The P-39 suffered likewise, it too was rushed into production before a supercharger system could be readied for high altitude performance. Both were preemies of WWII.

In the year 1942 a little known aircraft, an export version of the Bell P-39, the P-400 was to play an almost unknown but important role in the saving of Henderson field in the Solomon Islands when the war in the Pacific had barely begun.

Except for lone, cruising B-17's, the Marines saw few friendly aircraft for almost a fortnight after the withdrawal of the Navy carriers on the night of 8 August 1942. Meanwhile, back-breaking labor was completing the unfinished Japanese air strip, and on the afternoon of the 20th, the stubby little carrier "Long Island," from some 200 miles southeast of Guadalcanal, catapulted two Marine squadrons, VMF-223 with 19 F4F-4's (Grumman Wildcat fighters) under Maj John L Smith and VMSB-232 with 12 SBD-3's (Douglas Dauntless dive bombers) under Lt/ Col. Richard C. Mangrum. These were followed in 2 days by five long nosed Army fighters, P-400's of the 67th Fighter Squadron, under Capt Dale Brannon.

The P-400's which flew into Henderson on 22 August, 1942 inaugurated a route over which many an Army fighter was destined to pass before the Japanese were driven from the Lower Solomons. In none too short hops they had flown all the way from New Caledonia, employing the Atlantic technique, fighters, equipped with belly tanks, shepherded by bombers or transports.

TBF's, (Grumman Avenger torpedo bombers), later appeared

on Guadalcanal. Leaving Blaines des Galacs on 21 August, Captain Brannon's flight of five hopped 325 miles to Efate, 180 more to Espiritu. The following day, with gas tanks topped off after the warm up, the P-400's tackled the 640 miles to Henderson. Gas consumption had been predicated upon low engine speed, a lean mixture, a 15 mile tail wind, and, in Captain Brannon's opinion, a landing powered by the proverbial fumes. Imperfect navigation and enemy fighters were written off.

The P-400's flew on the deck, at 200 feet, through mist and low hanging clouds. In clear spaces, they spread out; when weather loomed ahead, they snuggled under the navigating B-17's wing. A second Fort followed with rubber boats, to be tossed to the pilots if they bailed out. After 3 3/4 hours of flying, all five planes were set down on the Lunga air strip. The following day, Lt Robert E Chilson with 30 enlisted men of the 67th's ground echelon arrived off Lunga in the transport Fomalhaute, and when Capt John A Thompson brought in nine more P-400's on 27 August, the 67th was ready for action.

The 67th Fighter Squadron. If hardships prepare men for hardships, the 67th was prepared for Guadalcanal. Its personnel had sailed from New York in January 1942 in a crowded transport with inadequate water tanks, the men had received a daily ration of one canteen for washing, drinking, and shaving. After 38 days at sea they were rested for a week at a camp near Melbourne, Australia, and on 15 March disembarked on New Caledonia, where the inhabitants, military and civilian, momentarily expected the Japanese.

The 67th's airplanes were not only in crates but of a type only two of its pilots had ever flown. The 67th's new home was a half completed airfield up at Tontouta, 35 miles from Noumea. Its one combination truck and trailer took one of the crated planes to Tontouta every 8 hours, alternately groaning and highballing over the mountainous road. When the crates were pried open, instructions for P-39D's, F's, and K's were found, but none for P-400's; neither were the mechanics familiar with the plane. Still the work of assembly went forward. The men slept under shelter halves, the officers in a farmhouse, 44 of them in parlor, bedroom, and earth-

floored basement. All united in cursing the sudden, unpredictable rains and in fighting the mosquitoes.

Tools for assembly consisted of 10 kits of simple first echelon maintenance tools. Lines were found plugged with Scotch tape; one P-400's electrical circuit had evidently had the attention of a factory maniac: when the flap switch was pressed wheels would retract; when the wheel switch was pressed the guns would fire. Nevertheless, in less than a month 411 planes were assembled with the aid of the 65th Materiel Squadron, and the pilots were checked out with only a single accident. The squadron, finding that the P-400's instruments were inferior, learned how to fly without them. Spare parts all came from salvage; and one plane, "The Resurrection," eventually evolved as a 100 per cent mongrel.

When Captain Brannon and his pilots landed at Henderson, action was not long in coming. The Marine pilots had parked on a little knoll near the Japanese pagoda which served as Allied air operations headquarters. Near it was a flagpole up which a black flag was run when an air raid threatened. There was no real warning system, the first radar did not function until September, but from other sources reports of approaching enemy formations were received.

On the hot, sunny afternoon of the 24th, pilots and ground crews were working around the P-400's when the black flag was hoisted. Already the drone of engines could be heard. Two of the 67th's pilots made a run for their planes, Captain Brannon and Li D H Fincher taking off with the Grummans in a cloud of dust. Thirty seconds later the bombs hit. The P-400's staggered off over the palm trees and evaded the Zeros sweeping down to strafe. The Grummans climbed to 8,000 feet, knocked down all but one of the nine enemy bombers, which may have come from the doomed Ryujo off to the north. The Army pilots happened on a wandering Zero, pumped lead until it exploded.

The Marines, living largely on the Japanese quartermaster, introduced the pilots to life on Guadalcanal. In the green, canopied Marine tents were straw sleeping mats and enamelware eating bowls, both Japanese. Also Japanese food became marine chow, largely fish and rice, the cigarettes, and even the caramels. Socks, always too short, and loincloths were also available by courtesy of the Japanese QM. And across the river, a bare 200 yards away, was the enemy, with his snipers always alert for US officers' insignia.

Until the arrival of VMF-223 and VMSB-232, the Tulagi-Guadalcanal area had been without air resources. Moreover, few supplies had come through to the beachhead. General Vandegrift had thrown a perimeter defense around the airfield upon its capture and was able to set up one battery of 90MM guns and 58 automatic weapon positions against enemy air raids. The F4F-4's were immediately assigned the air defense of the area and the SBD's began to conduct long single plane searches over enemy positions at Guadalcanal and northward up to New Georgia and Santa Isabel. Operating under Marine command, the P-400's soon took up part of the burden. On the 25th, they were up on dawn to dusk patrols over Henderson and on the 26th two pilots flew reconnaissance around the entire Guadalcanal coastline.

By the last week in August, Japanese tactics in the Solomons had begun to take form. In the Buin Faisi area of Bougainville, at Vella Lavella on Kula Gulf and at Rekata Bay on Santa Isabel, the Japanese had bases easily supplied from Truk and Rabaul. By September, enemy men and supplies were being loaded on fast vessels, destroyers or cruisers. These marauders, hiding from the Henderson

based aircraft during daylight, by night came fast down "The Slot" between the parallel lines of islands, landed men and supplies, stood off Henderson Field, shelled it, and were generally safe in the central Solomons by daylight. Thus the enemy in the Guadalcanal bush would be reinforced to the point of mounting a final attack on the beachhead, at which time other Japanese, supported by a sizeable portion of the Imperial Navy, would be brought down from the Mandates as an occupation force. Such actions were feasible so long as the enemy controlled the sea approaches to the Lower Solomons. Once these were lost, as they were in the mid November engagements, the enemy was obliged to rely for reinforcements solely on the Tokyo Express.

Meanwhile, air attacks on Henderson were carried out almost daily from Rabaul via Kahili Field in southern Bougainville and various harassments maintained against the American garrison. These latter were ingenious sleep destroyers. "Oscar," a sub, surfaced nightly in the dark off Lunga, reconnoitered, threw a few shells at either Tulagi or Guadalcanal. After midnight, an asthmatic two engine bomber, variously named "Louie the Louse," "Washing Machine Charlie," or "Maytag Mike," would lay a stick of bombs across the field.

The 67th performed its daily patrols at the dangerous medium altitude of 14,000 feet. The planes could struggle a little higher, but the pilots, without oxygen, could not make long sustained flights at this altitude. The P-400's days as an interceptor were numbered.

Fail to Reach Bombers. On 29 August came the first test. The P-400's were scrambled at noon to meet 18 enemy bombers with the usual Zero escort. Twelve went up in flights of four, climbed to 14,000, and, to quote the squadron's historian, "staggered around, looking closely at all spots within their vision to make sure they were just spots and not enemy formations." The bombers rode safely above, at 17,000 until the Grummans hit them, knocking down four bombers and four escorts. The discouraged P-400's returned to a runway swarming with men. The strip seemed to have sprouted bushes too; as it turned out the ground crews were using them to mark bomb craters. Ammunition was exploding: grass, hangars, and aircraft were afire; and scores of enemy snipers in the trees across the river were popping away.

30 August was a busy day. It began for the 67th at midnight; the SBD's had been sent on a hunt for enemy destroyers and the Army pilots were continuously on the alert until dawn, when their regular duties began. That day these consisted of maintaining combat air patrol over four friendly destroyers at Tulagi. The enemy raid was due at about noon "Tojo Time" as it was known from the regularity with which the enemy appeared at that hour. The coast watchers reported 22 single engine planes coming in from Buka Passage and at 1130 all aircraft came in for servicing.

It was reasoned that the Japanese would not send Zeros down alone, so the single engine aircraft must be dive bombers and their target the ships at Tulagi. Eight Grummans and 11 P-400's were in commission and were disposed to meet the expected attack. Four P-400's were to patrol over Tulagi and hop the dive bombers as they pulled out; seven cruised the towering cumulus at 14,000 feet to engage the enemy as he started down. The Grummans were somewhat above the latter group.

The seven P-400's had been cruising for about 30 minutes and already were feeling lack of oxygen when they were attacked (1), not by dive bombers but by Zeros. The agile Japanese dived down around a cloud, climbed up to take the P-400's from behind

and below. They numbered about 20. The P-400's had started turning into a Lufbery in which there were more Zeros than P-400's when the Grummans dived and the melee became general. The astonishing Zeros were making almost square turns and the Army pilots found the only way to shake them was to head down for a cloud, make a turn on instruments, and come out on top, ready for a pass.

Below, the weather over the sea had closed down to 1000 feet and quarter mile visibility, and consequently the four plane patrol started back. Coming out of a rain squall, the P-400's were attacked by a half dozen Zeros and their formation torn apart. Two of the pilots, Lts R E Wythes and R. E. Chilson, did not return.

Altogether four P-400's were lost, two pilots later making their way to Henderson on foot, after bailing out. Five of the seven returning planes were out of commission by reason of bullet holes. Against these losses, the 67th was credited with four kills. The Marines got 14.

That did not end the day's activities. At 1500, 17 F4F's and a dozen SBD's, with two escorting B-17's, arrived at Guadalcanal. Thirty minutes later, with 18 planes on Henderson, the Japanese dive bombers arrived. Ignoring the tempting array on the air strip, they caught the destroyer Blue a half mile offshore and sank her. Across at Tulagi, the transport Burrows ran aground and, to add to the commotion, nature intervened around 1615 with two earthquakes. That evening the Tokyo Express ran again, giving Henderson a shelling. Through all this, after but 4 days of operations at full strength, only three of the original 14 P-400's survived in commission on 1 September.

The air battle of 30 August proved that the P-400's on Guadalcanal could not be used as interceptors. In addition to the planes shot down, six returned to Henderson that afternoon riddled beyond repair. The 67th had early been aware of the limitations of its planes and the reports of the action of the 30th convinced General Harmon. No Army or Marine aircraft then extant was entirely satisfactory against the Zero, but the P-400's possessed a peculiar disadvantage in that they were unable to reach the altitude customarily employed by enemy bombers. Rate of climb was low, wing load excessive, and the engine extremely vulnerable to hits in the glycol cooling system.

The P-400 had been flown under far from optimum conditions, but its pilots were skilled, and courageous, as Major Smith, commanding VMF-223, later testified. General Harmon immediately asked Washington for P-38 and P-47 squadrons, or the P-40 with the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine. Meanwhile, since the P-39 type was his mainstay in the theater, the General cast about for ways of improving its performance. He considered that since .50 caliber bullets neatly disintegrated the Zeros, the 37MM nose cannon in the P-39 could be replaced by either a .50 caliber machine gun or a 20MM cannon. This would have the effect of lightening

the plane.

Washington showed equal concern over the record of the 67th and the specific dictum of General Vandegrift that the P-400 was "entirely unsuitable" for operations on Guadalcanal. But the war had to be fought with weapons presently available and considerable numbers of P-39s were on their way to Pacific theaters. The recommended solution was stripping the fighter to lighten it. By the end of September, the P-39K minus 650 pounds of its original equipment had achieved a service ceiling of 27,000 feet, and the

Bell aircraft's performance against the Japanese eventually reached heights far above that of the old P-400's, the "klunkers," as the 67th dubbed them.

The P-400 as an Attack Plane Meantime General Vandegrift at Guadalcanal faced the immediate problem, he had the undesirable aircraft on hand and had to find a use for them. The planes possessed good defensive armor plate and armament consisting of a 20MM cannon, two .50 cali-

ber and four .30 caliber machine guns; they could each carry one bomb and their engines operated reasonably well at low altitudes. The Japanese, moreover, had shown no extraordinary talent with flak. As an attack plane, then, the P-400 could use its bomb on shipping and shore installations, its 20MM cannon on landing barges, and its machine guns on enemy personnel.

About 20 miles east of Henderson, the Japanese held the native village of Tasimboko in some strength. The Marines planned to bring fresh troops from Tulagi, effect a landing east of Tasimboko, strike the position from the rear, and retire the same day. In preparation for this operation, the P-400's tried their wings in a new employment.

On the night of 1 September, two enemy transports and two destroyers lay off Tasimboko discharging troops. Foul weather having prevented the SBD's from interfering during darkness, Captain Brannon with five P-400's took off at 0600 to attack landing parties in the area. None were found, but five beached landing craft were sighted. At 0800 four more Army fighters took off; they dropped 500lb bombs on the village and strafed both the landing craft and the village. Back on Henderson, Tojo Time was imminent, and rather than sit out the attack, the P-400's returned to Tasimboko. In their absence 18 bombers, escorted by 21 Zeros, came over Henderson. The F4F-4's reduced their number by three bombers and four fighters, but the P-400's returned to a cratered runway, a burned-out hangar, three fired SBD's, burning gas and ammunition dumps, and a good many delayed-action bombs.

Such expeditions became routine with the 67th, which began to be known as the "Jagdstaffel." The mechanics could always produce a pair of "klunkers" to go out and work over the Japanese. At first, the pilots chose their own targets, landing barges or supply dumps. Later they were sent out to bomb and strafe in the inlets and coves of Santa Isabel, where the enemy maintained jumping off points for reinforcing Guadalcanal, and their bombing eventu-



Export versions of the P-39s awaiting transfer to Russia

ally became so accurate they could be assigned targets quite close to the Marine lines.

Day by day the P-400's went up to Tasimboko while the Japanese bombed or shelled Henderson. On 4 September, with only three Army aircraft in commission and 13 pilots to fly them, word was received that the enemy was putting men ashore in landing barges up on Santa Isabel, 75 miles northwest of Henderson. Led by Maj. Robert E. Galer in his F4F-4, the three P-400's were on their way by 1440; the target was easily located in a small cove. Six loaded landing craft were destroyed by two direct hits with 500 pounders and the boats and men still landing were thoroughly strafed. All together a total of 25 landing craft out of 30 seen in the area were claimed destroyed. That night, however, the Japanese retaliated with the Express, a light cruiser and two destroyers sinking the American destroyer and, transports Little and Gregory off Savo.

On the 5th, after all personnel on Henderson had undergone a dismal night of enemy shelling, the Jagdstaffel and the Grumman uncovered a prime target, 15 fully loaded landing barges about 500 yards off the northwest coast of Guadalcanal. Six Grumman and two P-400's strafed until ammunition was exhausted. An Army pilot may have had this mission in mind when he came back to report that he and his wingman had literally cut a bloody X on the water through which Japanese troops were wading towards land. Two hours later, two P-400's returned to destroy most of the supplies in the landing craft which had grounded on a reef close inshore.

The Tasimboko operation or, rather, a raid-occurred on 8 September. Beginning at 0700, four P-400's and three SBD's bombed the area for 10 minutes, with the object of pinning down the defenders while the assault party went ashore. At 0900 the mission was repeated. At noon help was again requested, the Marines having tackled a rather larger force than had been anticipated, and the P-400's responded at once. Nevertheless, at 1530 the Marines asked that the P-400's cover their withdrawal.

Meanwhile, intermittent thundershowers had made 6 inch mud of Henderson's runway. Three of the P-400's were in commission and the pilots taxied them out. Captain Brannon lowered half flaps, held the brakes, and gave his engine full throttle. The plane crept forward. He wrestled it down the runway and staggered off. Less fortunate, Lt. V. L. Head lurched and skidded trying to pick up speed, muddy spray drenching the plane as it plowed through pools of water. Torque almost pulled it off the strip. Realizing he was, running out of runway, the pilot tried to "hang it on the prop." The old P-400 stalled and hit, broke in three, and caught fire. Lieutenant Head was able to get out, though badly burned.

The third pilot took off through the flame and smoke. For 2 hours, this lone pair of Army flyers covered the Marine withdrawal, doing lazy eights over the beach while the boats were loaded and launched. When the last had got away, the P-400's came in on reserve gas and somehow in the twilight got down on the strip.

By the time the Tasimboko raiders had returned, the Japanese were ready for a major attempt on the Marine positions. Their Express had been running regularly; their strength had been built to a peak. The Marine air establishment at Henderson was being whittled by operational losses and the necessity of daily interception. On 9 September, the F4F-4's were down to 11.

Lunga Ridge In anticipation of enemy thrusts, Marine air strength was substantially augmented on 11 September and addi-

tional planes came in on the 13th. By the 12th the Japanese had prepared a formidable push against the perimeter defense of the airfield. Bombers hit at Henderson by day and cruisers and destroyers from the Express shelled it by night. A particularly heavy shelling occurred during the night of the 13th, supporting a three pronged assault on the Marines. Two of the attacks were held, but the most vicious struck at the Lunga Ridge just south of the airfield, a position held by Col Merritt A Edson's First Raider Battalion. All night the Japanese drove against the ridge. Colonel Edson's men were forced off the crest and down on the other side. Only the inner perimeter defense stood between the air strip and the enemy. Snipers broke through and the field was brought under mortar and artillery fire. Radio Tokyo announced that Guadalcanal was retaken.

The 67th mustered three of its P-400's to aid the Marine counterattack on the 14th. At 0730 Captain Thompson and Lts B W Brown and B E Davis were dispatched to "Bloody Ridge." They did not have to fly to an objective; they simply circled the field, visible at all times to their ground crews except when they dipped behind the low hill. Then the murderous chatter of their armament could be heard. They made repeated passes until enemy rifle and machine gun fire forced two of them down in dead stick landings; the last simply ran out of ammunition. The Marines retook the hill and buried the enemy dead with a bulldozer. It was clear that the Japanese had shot their bolt in the night attack of the 13th. The American lodgment on Guadalcanal had survived another push.

By now, the maligned P-400 had proved itself. General Vandegrift consistently used the plane against any position blocking his Marines. In fact, he even asked for more P-400's. COMAIRSOPAC's chief of staff, Capt Matt Gardner, testified to its effectiveness in strafing troops and landing barges. The Marines preferred to use their SBD's against the reinforcing vessels. The P-400 had found in ground air cooperation its niche on Guadalcanal.

In defiance of technical orders, the 67th developed its own technique of dive bombing. On the plane's instrument panel was the warning: "Do not release bomb when nose angle 30 degrees up or down or when airspeed exceeds 280 m.p.h. The Jagdstaffel discovered that the bomb would release at 70 degrees and clear the propeller arc if a quick pressure on the stick was employed to pull the airplane away from the falling bomb. Dives averaged 300 and sometimes reached 500 in. MPH. Unlike the SBD's, which pushed over at 15,000 to 17,000 feet, the P-400's started their dives at 5000, released and pulled out right over the jungle, zigzagging over the palms to avoid ground fire and returning to strafe where the latter revealed troop positions.

The cover offered by the jungle and coconut groves effectively concealed the Japanese and distressed the Jagdstaffel, which often could not find the target or believe it had caused damage. Marine outposts reported enemy concentrations, which were shown the pilots on a map and indicated by panels in American held territory. The P-400's dive bombed the spot and came back to strafe blindly among the trees. Only occasionally did they catch a fleeting glimpse of a Japanese. However, the infantry, moving in, found bodies in abundance and sometimes silenced mortars, and captured diaries testified to the Japanese trooper's great fear of the "long nosed American planes." The Marine and Navy intelligence officers who briefed and interrogated the 67th employed this evidence to encourage the Army pilots, and the Jagdstaffel took heart. Thus the lowly P-400 helped save Henderson Field and the American position in the Solomons.

Insignias of the 484th Bomb Group (H), with the exception of the 827 Sq they were never officially approved



484th Bomb Group insignia scanned from an original painted leather patch.



Drawing of the 827Sq insignia . It was adopted from the 5th Anti Sub squadron that preceded the 827th Sq.



824 Sq. insignia scanned from an original painted leather patch, note only four rounds in the right bandoleer grouping indicating the 824 Sq



New rendering of the 826 Sq insignia as provided by member, Dick Olson, note the six rounds in the right bandoleer grouping indicating the 826 Sq

**484th Bomb Group Association
1122 Ysabel St. Redondo Beach, CA
90277-4453**

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