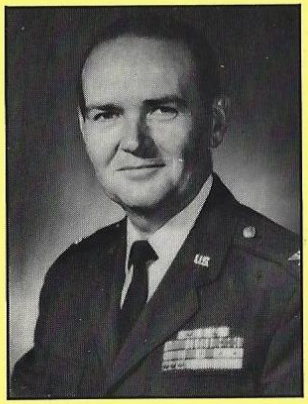
Mission Failure

and

Survival

Charles C. McBride



Charles C. McBride served in the Army Air Forces of World War II as a bombardier. Unable to reach the English coast due to lack of fuel, he and his crew bailed out of their B-24 bomber over Northern France on 1 April 1944 on the return leg of his 15th combat mission. Only he and two others of the crew managed to evade capture and lived five months with French Resistance families until rescued by advancing Allied armies.

Faulty navigation had caused the entire force of bombers to remain over Germany too long, which resulted in two bomber groups straying over Switzerland and bombing the town of Schaffhausen in error.

Several years ago McBride's curiosity about this faulty and tragic mission caused him to begin a detailed search of government records, combined with interviews of some of the participants, to reconstruct the exact sequence of events of the flight. The result is a detailed depiction of an operation whose outcome was doomed to fail, unearthing some facts never previously made public.

After returning to active Air Force service in 1950 at the start of the Korean War, McBride retired at the end of 1974 in the grade of colonel. He and his wife, Agnes, now live in Rolling Hills Estates, California.

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Cover painting, *The Crud Wagon*,
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To the undying memory of more than 400 brave young men of the 448th Bombardment Group who gave the last full measure of their devotion to this country during World War II, this book is humbly and respectfully dedicated.

Contents

Introduction

The detailed disclosure of events that resulted in the bombing of neutral Switzerland in error by United States forces on 1st April 1944 has been undertaken with a two-fold purpose: (1) to confirm a long-recognized fact that modern warfare will inevitably destroy an irreducible number of innocent victims of both the fighting forces and general populace through human and mechanical failures, and (2) finally to bring to light after all these years the actual events of this little-known episode which, at the time of its occurrence, was largely suppressed from public scrutiny because of its sensitivity; from some stubborn quarters, efforts still continue today to try to hide some of the unsavory details of this operation.

The military become casualties of their own actions in many ways, through such circumstances as faulty judgment and strategy, misinterpretation of battle plans leading to faulty execution as they are passed down from the higher to lower levels, to the simple failures of weapons and equipment, *i.e.*, the short artillery round that is fired over the heads of friendly troops but because of an inadequate powder charge falls into the midst of those troops it was intended to support.

While all individuals decry such useless destruction, the combined experiences of World War II and the Korean and Vietnam Wars clearly tell us that the numerous instances of human failures are an unavoidable ingredient of modern warfare. Some of the more famous incidents that come to mind in World War II are the much publicized accounts of the faulty judgment displayed in the crossing of the Rapido River in Italy by the American 5th Army which resulted in

excessively high casualties to the attackers, and the breakout at St. Lo, France, by American ground troops shortly after D-Day which caused the accidental death by aerial bombing of Gen. Lesley McNair, Commander of all U.S. Army Ground Forces.

The process of living today even in a peaceful environment is hazardous enough in the midst of a growing congestion of speedier airplanes and automobiles, but when the setting is transferred to an armed conflict the opportunity for exposure to accidental fatalities is multiplied many times over. This fact seems not to have been accepted on occasion by the general American public as evidenced by the outrages over some of the more recent examples of our own bombing or strafing of American personnel and friendly allies in the Vietnam War.

It is worth remembering, however, that our armed forces exist today for only one purpose: to insure our survival as a nation by protecting our national interests. Whenever it becomes necessary for our country to wage war, then its citizenry will inevitably be called upon to defend these national interests, assuming of course that sufficient time is available. Unfortunately, the armed forces must recruit people from the human race, which, despite all the reinforcing safeguards and preventive measures devised, will still not guarantee the complete elimination of occasional errors and fatal mistakes.

The facts presented here are based on official records and reports, together with the statements of individuals who were associated with this operation, including the writer.

Chapter 1

Prelude to Combat

The Associated Press news release began as follows in describing the results of an Eighth Air Force bombing operation carried out in World War II on 1 April 1944:

> American Liberators bombed industrial and communications targets deep in Southwest Germany Saturday and some of their numbers accidently dropped incendiaries on the border town of Schaffhausen in neutral Switzerland, causing thirty-six to fifty deaths and heavy damage. A United States communique in reporting on the day's operations announced that some bombs had hit Swiss territory, blaming navigational difficulties induced by bad weather.

This is the story behind that mission, which in large part relates to the early experiences of one Army Air Forces bombardment group and its personnel that was formed, trained, and sent to England in 1943 to join other offensive bomber forces in the war against Nazi Germany. The mission conducted on 1 April 1944 did not differ markedly from previous bomber strikes, except for the unique international notoriety it received in the accidental striking of a neutral country with accompanying heavy loss of life and property. From any standpoint this mission could be judged a failure: failure to accomplish the objective, and failure on the part of certain personnel to perform their aerial tasks adequately, which brought death to a number of combatants and civilians alike.

Since the basis of the story lies with one organization, it is fitting to begin the narrative shortly after this unit, known officially as the 448th Bombardment Group (Heavy), was brought into being within the Army Air Forces. Its initial complement of personnel was formed in May 1943 at Gowen Field, Boise, Idaho, and I myself came to the group shortly thereafter in July 1943.

This period was near the mid-point of World War II, which was characterized by a general turmoil and uprooting of the society in striving to provide a near-total war economy. The experience was entirely new to all but the elderly, whose memories embraced a comparable World War I environment of some 25 years previous. It was truly a tumultuous, exhilarating, and often frustrating time for people in their twenties, the likes of which have not since nor probably ever will be seen again during a period of national mobilization. Phrases and names such as gas ration coupons, rent controls, 1A and 4F draft classifications, Pearl Harbor, Solomon Islands, and Midway had become household words, but are now characterized as nearly forgotten signposts of an earlier period of history. Another household word on the lips of the general populace during that period was Patriotism, which of all the exalted phrases has fallen farthest from favor, until today it carries overtones of suspicion and inquiry in the minds of many.

Both the events and people, times, and places of World War II have continued to recede inexorably into the past until today they are conjured up in fond memories with somewhat more difficulty and much less harshness. The once intense feelings and emotions associated with these past events have either now departed or have suffered some mellowness in the process of recall.

In the course of researching historical files and records relating to these wartime days, I have become fully impressed, as on no other occasion, with the fact that they took place so far back in time at the very beginning of my Air Force career. I am now not only a senior military officer but also a senior individual in every sense of the term, with a memory of long proportions.

I had been transferred from a B-25 medium bomber training unit in South Carolina as a bombardier after spending three months there, and was now about to receive a crew assignment in one of the new B-24 Liberator heavy bombardment groups then being formed at Gowen Field. At the time that my wife Agnes and I set out across the

country for Idaho in an old weary 1935 Ford coupe, she was seven months pregnant and in no condition for some of the hassle and discomfort that was to be our lot on the road. The car broke down several times enroute to Dallas, our home, and first half destination. It took almost six days in the July heat to get as far as Dallas, and upon arrival we were both mentally and physically exhausted. One of my first chores on getting home was to trade off the older car for a better and newer one for the remaining trip to Idaho. This was a wise move in all respects and made the voyage seem like an airline flight by comparison.

We stayed in Dallas about five days to visit with family and friends and to renew some of our acquaintance with the town itself. The friends, however, who yet remained in Dallas, were few. Like me, most were now in the military service and spread throughout the world. Since both of us had been gone for almost a year after my entry in the Army Air Forces the previous August, the old hometown during this interval had been transformed into a far different and strange place with tight rationing and price controls, combined with new defense plants which had quickly become a way of life. It was simply not the place I had known so recently in the quiet prewar period of boyhood and youth, nor would it ever again be, even though this fondly-remembered era in mid-1943 had barely begun to retreat into the past.

The assignment at Gowen Field, like all other assignments of World War II, was very temporary, and within five weeks we were headed for Wendover Field, Utah, for the next phase of training. While at Gowen, however, I officially joined the 448th Bomb Group and met the pilot of my crew. It happened by accident one day at the noon meal in the Officers Club. I sat down at a table and began talking to a fellow officer, a pilot, who was also undergoing B-24 flying training and trying to get himself a full crew complement in the 448th. This individual was Charles Knorr, a very energetic and highly-motivated person who I also learned was from Dallas. Since we seemed to be satisfied with the impressions each made upon the other, I agreed at his request to ask for assignment to his organization and crew. The request was duly honored, and Charles Knorr became the first individual I was to know on my combat crew and within the bomb group. He, too, was married, and our wives soon became close friends. All other members to be assigned later were bachelors.

Also while at Gowen, we obtained the co-pilot, a quiet, unassuming, lanky fellow from St. Paul, Minnesota, named Herbert Bunde. Herb, as he was called, was a great lover of the outdoors and enjoyed talking about his hunting and fishing experiences whenever anyone was inclined to listen. He possessed great inner strength and was a thoroughly reliable person in pressure situations, as we were to learn later after entering combat.

The stay at our new base, Wendover, lasted about five weeks, and during this period of our crew training we picked up all the remaining members of Lieutenant Knorr's air crew. A full complement of men in the four-engine B-24 bomber consisted of ten, which included the pilot, co-pilot, navigator, bombardier (all officers), followed by six enlisted men whose positions were radio operator, aerial engineer, ball turret gunner, two waist gunners, and the tail gunner. The names of the enlisted men occupying these positions were Ralph Callahan, William Quigley, Albert Padilla, Stanley Sama, Ernest Schultz, and Jack Cooper. I was to become acquainted with Cooper more than anyone else in the following year under the most unusual circumstances. These men were all near the ages of the officers and were eager and anxious to become accepted in our common cause.

Rounding out the final officer member was the navigator, a powerful robust fellow from Yonkers, New York, named Stanley Baranofsky. Although normally a friendly, good-humored person, he occasionally became very moody and silent during which time it was best to leave him alone. He had served an enlistment in the Marine Corps before entering aviation cadet training to become an officer in the Army Air Forces, and this qualified him as the most uncivilian member of the entire crew. None of the remainder had been in service more than two years before joining the group.

Wendover Field, Utah, located 128 miles west of Salt Lake City in the salt flats of Utah, was for me one of the most desolate and forlorn spots I had ever seen. The base was devoted wholly to B-24 crew training and was apparently under no compulsion to create any semblance of an easy or plush environment. Rather, the conditions of existence on the base were identical to the local surroundings – sparse and lean. The place was constantly in a state of feverish activity with air crew personnel moving in and out as units were formed, trained, and then transferred elsewhere. All buildings on the installation were of the quickly thrown together «tarpaper shack» variety, all

of which seemed to impart a degree of urgency in getting on with the training and out of that miserable place as fast as possible.

The town of Wendover was slightly larger than a railroad whistle stop and situated just inside Utah on a common boundary line with Nevada. It boasted a very unpretentious gambling house on the Nevada side about two city blocks from the front gate of the base.

As for myself, I couldn't wait to leave Wendover because of the personal problems created by the lack of an apartment or even a motel room for my wife. Wendover sported nothing even resembling these things, which left me with no choice but to have her live in Salt Lake City. She lived there all alone in one of the hotels, and the best arrangement I could make under these trying circumstances was to drive in to the city on weekends.

Most of the trip was through the desolate salt flats and around Great Salt Lake into the city. Except for two whistle stop junctions along the 128-mile route, the journey was devoid of any sight of civilization. Coyotes could always be seen a short distance off the highway, and merely added to the desolate, harsh appearance of the area.

With Agnes' time for delivery getting closer at hand, this arrangement was admittedly not the wisest decision we were capable of making. All reason on our part was abandoned in favor of staying together a while longer. Because we realized that we were soon to be separated for an indefinite time, we just ignored the obvious and waited for the inevitable.

Luckily for both of us, it happened on one of those occasions when I was in Salt Lake City on a weekend visit. Agnes' labor pains began on a Sunday morning of 1 September 1943, and we quickly went to the nearby Latter Day Saints Hospital for admittance.

I had remained on constant vigil in the waiting room of the hospital for about two hours and finally began to get hungry. One of the maternity nurses said there was time for me to slip down to a restaurant for some lunch before the baby's arrival. Acting on this advice, I went out to a nearby restaurant and ate. On arriving back at the hospital about one hour later, one of the nurses greeted me in the waiting room with this: «Lieutenant, you have a new baby boy.»

The doctor soon came in and announced that both mother and son were fine. He charged me only $25.00 for his services, which was quite low even for those days. Our nomadic existence and mode of living apparently had made an impression upon him, and when I tried

to offer the doctor more money for his fee, he refused, saying it was done out of patriotism and his appreciation for the contribution I was making in the war.

With the arrival of the new family member, we realized that Agnes now had to return to Dallas to live with her mother in a more normal environment than was possible on the road. Her mother arrived by train a few days later and brought them back to Dallas when they were better able to travel. Such were the trials and tribulations of young love in a chaotic time of war.

While at Gowen Field and Wendover, the 448th Bomb Group was assigned its commander, Col. James M. Thompson, together with his immediate staff, and the commanders of each of the four squadrons. The squadrons were designated the 712th Bomb Squadron (to which Lieutenant Knorr and his crew were assigned) followed by the 713th, 714th, and 715th squadrons. Each squadron possessed 12 B-24 aircraft and 15 crews, or a total of 48 and 60, respectively, for the group. In addition to the flying element, there were the crew chiefs and maintenance and supply technicians comprising the ground support element.

At the time of his assumption of command, Colonel Thompson was 37 years of age and a professional Regular Army officer who had received his commission and wings in 1930. In this exalted role he was unique within his organization, and was also 12 or more years older than the average flying officer. Overall, he presented a handsome though aloof appearance with his clipped mustache and iron-gray hair, and exactly fitted my mental image of such an individual.

Toward the middle of September, the group moved on to another air base at Sioux City, Iowa, for the last phase of its combat crew training. It was here that the remainder of all personnel, both air and ground, were finally assigned to the 448th. Although our stay there was only six weeks, I look back upon it with considerably fonder feelings than upon Wendover. This base actually had a few semi-permanent buildings, the food was excellent, and the setting was in a prosperous agricultural atmosphere of peace and plenty in the mid-west.

All combat crews had to comply with a rigorous training program, and there was little spare time for speculations on what was facing us or for reflecting on past events.

Upon arriving at Sioux City, all flight crews were first given a short two weeks leave before commencement of the training schedule. This

was to be the final liberty before transferring overseas which we all knew would occur immediately after this phase was completed.

The visit home to Dallas was very wonderful in the short reunion it provided with my family. I was relieved to see that my wife and son were now settled in with my mother-in-law as comfortably as possible for the indefinite routine of waiting for my return. When we bade our sad good-byes to each other, we assumed that this was to be our final meeting until I returned from the war, but we were mistaken. There was yet to be another, though a very fleeting visit.

The following month at Sioux City passed swiftly under the stepped-up tempo of training and preparing to move. As the training progressed the crew gradually began to function better together and with more precision. We soon realized that no one individual could act as a maverick in performing his job in the air without running the risk of jeopardizing the entire complement. «Crew discipline» was the key phrase being drummed into us by Colonel Thompson and his group leaders, and it seemed to be producing the desired effects.

Our training, both at Wendover and Sioux City, was conducted in older model B-24s that were too tired and worn out for anything other than training. To say that they were tired is really to understate the case somewhat. Under the stress of continual flying training with much of the emphasis placed on takeoffs and landings under varying circumstances, these old models were something less than 100 percent reliable, and their proneness to accidents or mechanical failure was great. Although the 448th suffered no fatalities in its phase training, there were a number of such accidents in other units co-located with us, which served as sobering reminders that our business was serious and grim indeed.

Toward the end of the training period at Sioux City, the group received new Liberators direct from the factory. Moreover, they were the new model, the B-24H with a nose turret instead of the two mounted flexible guns found in the older planes, along with some other needed improvements. In typical fashion of the time, each bomber had to be given a name, and we selected for ours an unsavory title by the name of *The Crud Wagon.* This title, as I recall, was a unanimous choice of the crew, but really didn't reflect our true feelings for the plane. Actually, we were rather proud of this new model and had grown to respect the B-24 as a distinctive class of bomber. Compared to the B-17, a Liberator was an awkward-looking

aircraft and often the butt of many uncomplimentary remarks by airmen. On the other hand, it did possess some performance characteristics, including speed, that were far superior to the more glamorous and much publicized B-17 Flying Fortress.

The month of October finally came to an end and with it our final training period at Sioux City. The next milestone for the group was «staging» or final preparations for the flight overseas to join whatever war theater might be directed. For the 448th, the staging area was a little airfield at Herrington, Kansas, and we were there about ten days. This period saw a final visit with my mother and father and wife and son. They drove up from Dallas and spent two days with me, which I will remember forever, not only because of the warmth it gave me in seeing them again, but because this was the last time I was ever to see my father. He died less than two months later in December.

Aside from the final visit with my father, the brief period at Herrington was gloomy and forlorn. The weather was especially raw with low overcast skies and biting chill winds that came in with a «blue nose norther» shortly after our arrival and remained for the length of our stay. In addition, everyone was speculating on our ultimate overseas destination, the odds being that a Liberator group such as ours would probably be sent to England where the air war of late was gaining in intensity and ferocity. As for myself, I had become more than a little apprehensive in reading about the newest Schweinfurt-Regensberg daylight raids by the Eighth Air Force during which a record loss of 60 American bombers on one mission had been incurred. As might be expected, the base environment was very austere for transient air crews who were quartered in the tar paper shack barracks. Because the weather was so severe, we were forced to stay inside during the evening, either in the Officers Club or our barracks. Since the club closed rather early, we had nothing to do except return to the barracks and read or write letters till bedtime. The routine soon became oppressive, and on one of the last nights at Herrington, Knorr found a sergeant located permanently on the base who was also a part-time bootlegger in dry Kansas. The four of us bought two fifths of some of the greenest, most rotten whiskey it had ever been my misfortune to taste, and then proceeded to «tie one on.» I was in no condition to remember many details of the evening's celebration which finally ended in a wild melee, followed by the typical alcoholic oblivion.

The overseas outfitting chores finally came to an end, and we happily departed Herrington bound for Morrison Field, Florida, on 13 November to prepare for the mass flight overseas. We were there four days, during which our air crews were given detailed briefings of the routes to be flown, navigation and weather information, and assorted facts for such an undertaking. Here we were informed that the group initially would fly to South America, stopping at several stations enroute, thence to Dakar, Africa. Depending upon our ultimate destination which would be revealed to us after becoming airborne on the first leg of the trip, we were to proceed either across the center of Africa if bound for India or China, or north to Marrekech, Morocco, if bound for Great Britain. The entire trip was expected to take about ten days.

In accordance with this procedure, our overseas journey began one clear morning, and after take off Charles Knorr opened his sealed orders and read our destination to the other crew members over the interphone. «Pilot to crew. I have just opened our orders and we have been assigned to the Eighth Air Force in England.»

Now it was confirmed. I experienced a brief feeling of anxiety on hearing this news, but it was quickly replaced by resignation; our guesses had been correctly made; we were on our way to join the fight in the most difficult of all aerial combat theaters in the world and would need all the luck and skill each of us had to survive. No one made a comment to Knorr's announcement, and the plane droned on to Puerto Rico, the first stop.

Our route overseas from Puerto Rico took us first to Trinidad in British Guiana, thence to Belem and Natal, Brazil, followed by a non-stop flight over the South Atlantic Ocean to Dakar in French Senegal, Africa. From that location, we turned north for a stop at Marrakech, Morocco, then the final leg around Portugal and Spain over the Bay of Biscay to England. This long journey was not without two very anxious moments, both of which could have been fatal to crew and aircraft. The first emergency occurred at the commencement of the South Atlantic crossing, and the second at the end of this leg.

Our takeoff at Natal, Brazil, was made after nightfall, but immediately after becoming airborne an engine malfunctioned with a runaway propeller. An emergency landing was required immediately, which presented the problem. *The Crud Wagon* was overweight by several thousand pounds with a full load of fuel, three extra pas-

sengers with personal belongings, and numerous spare parts and supplies carried in event of mechanical breakdowns enroute. The landing was executed perfectly by Knorr who had become very proficient in flying this aircraft, but the incident was critical and could have resulted in disaster. The engine was repaired and takeoff again made in a routine fashion.

The second near-mishap involved a navigation problem in locating the airfield at Dakar. It was late afternoon when we arrived over Africa and found intense haze present which greatly restricted visibility of the ground below. The airfield was not to be found, and we had only limited fuel remaining after ten hours in the air to locate our destination. The navigator, Baranofsky, had made his landfall at a point below the airfield at Dakar, but fortunately the degree of error was not enough to cause complete fuel exhaustion. The radio compass finally revealed our location, and we reached destination without further incident.

The good fortune of my crew in reaching its goal was not, however, shared among all the group's air crews. Lt. Carroll Key of the 712th, coming in for a landing at Belem, Brazil, encountered a wet runway. He applied the brakes routinely after touchdown but they locked on him, spinning the bomber out of control. During this violent maneuver, the left landing gear collapsed which caused the left inboard propeller to hit the runway. It was wrenched off its hub, then walked into the side of the plane at the spot where the pilot was seated. Key's arm was severed, and although he survived, he got no further to the war zone than this unfortunate spot.

Two additional accidents, occuring separately, resulted in the total loss of the bombers and their combined 26 occupants. Both these tragedies occured during and somewhat later after takeoff from Marrakech, Morocco. The first accident was the bomber piloted by Lt. John Rhodes of the 712th Squadron. Throughout its long overseas journey this crew had detected strong gasoline odors after becoming airborne. Extensive checks had been made on completion of each leg of the flight without discovery of any malfunctions. Finally, on takeoff from Marrakech the plane crashed beyond the end of the runway before completely lifting off. Another bomber flown by Lt. John Grunow, the Assistant Group Operations Officer, had already begun its takeoff roll behind Rhodes and couldn't abort before reaching the flaming wreckage ahead. Grunow flew directly over the

flames and heat of the smoking inferno a few feet below.

The second fatality occurred the next day. Crew No. 42, whose pilot was Lt. Joseph W. Shank of the 713th Squadron, had taken off successfully at night but had to turn back within an hour for Marrakech after experiencing engine trouble. The route of return was faulty, which took the plane too low over the towering Atlas Mountains in the night, and it crashed into one of the peaks with total loss of life.

The final misfortune was visited upon Lt. Robert Ayrest's crew of the 712th Squadron while on its final leg from Africa to England. Due to some inaccurate navigation, Ayrest thought he was headed into southern England when the plane made landfall, and preparations were made for landing at an airfield that contained some familiar-looking four engine bombers. During final preparations for landing and while he was quite low in the traffic pattern, Ayrest suddenly encountered a wall of both light and heavy flak. Instead of the plane being over England, however, it was now over the Brest Peninsula of occupied France that juts out abruptly over the Atlantic Ocean. Ayrest received several hits on the bomber but none to the occupants. He was successful in escaping from the airfield's flak defense and started again on his prior course for England. Upon reaching friendly territory, he was unable to lower the landing gear due to the battle damage sustained, and instead made a wheels-up contact with the runway. No injuries were encountered but the aircraft was a complete loss.

In summary, the group had begun its long three continent flying journey to the zone of directed combat in England equipped with 64 new Liberators and 77 aircrews. It arrived at its destination two weeks later with 60 effective aircraft and 75 aircrews, not an especially enviable record, but in consideration of its inadequate period for crew training, probably as good as the average bomber group of similar experience.

Our arrival in England occurred on 1 December at an RAF Port of entry for such aircraft as ours. Here we remained for three days to await all other enroute bombers. When all planes were assembled at this base, we made the short flight of about 200 miles in a mass formation to the new home.

The homecoming was anything but a joyous occasion. Although we had not expected to move into a first class base with the latest

facilities, the situation that greeted us was far worse than imagined. Our base was located in East Anglia, 15 miles from the town of Norwich on the east coast and was called Seething after a small village located nearby. The 448th was to be its only occupant. It had been constructed by British workmen and was still no more than 50 percent complete when we arrived. The roads were much too narrow and most were unpaved. The living quarters for both officers and enlisted personnel were of the Nissen or igloo type, but on the day of our occupancy, they only had dirt floors and no electric lights, to describe their state of incompleteness. For heat, the little coal burning stove in the middle of the hut was simply inadequate for sustaining any warmth.

And of course there were the ever-present ingredients of mud and damp cold. Since there would be no such luxuries as a base taxi or shuttle bus service in the near future, everyone had to walk to the mess, baths, flight line, Officers and NCO clubs, PX; in short, everywhere! However, bicycles were soon issued in limited quantities which helped somewhat, and those individuals not receiving them either bought, borrowed, or simply lifted them on a permanent basis when circumstances seemed ripe. The cold, wet, and soggy weather was an irritant that I never quite became accustomed to and which immediately comes to mind whenever those old days in England become the subject of conversation.

This thoroughly distasteful and miserable entrance into the European Theater was but a prelude to the grim period my organization was soon to undergo as it prepared for its baptism of fire in becoming a full-fledged combat unit.

Chapter 2

Combat

From 5-22 December 1943, the 448th was fully engaged in learning the local theater refinements of aerial warfare, assisted by the 93rd Bomb Group which was one of the oldest B-24 units in England and located approximately three miles from our base. There were many new things to learn here, such as the peculiar British navigational and radio aids, aerial navigation and bombing procedures in large formations, evasive action techniques to avoid heavy flak defenses, gunnery techniques and weather conditions, to mention a few. These tactics were absorbed by a combination of extensive briefings, classroom instruction, and flying practice missions over England. Although the group had spent at least three months of concentrated 3 effort in the states learning many of these subjects, the peculiarities of flying in a combat environment were quite different, and, moreover, had to be learned rather quickly because the war simply wouldn't wait for a more leisurely pace.

Since the 448th consisted entirely of non-combat experienced personnel, the briefings and classroom instruction periods were conducted by a few select veterans from the 93rd Bomb Group and headquarters staff of the 20th Combat Wing. These combat-decorated men with the Distinguished Flying Cross, numerous Air Medals, and even in a few instances the Silver Star, were victors of the life and death struggle so closely associated with a combat tour of 25 missions in this the deadliest of all aerial theaters of World War II. Here were some of the heroes, or more appropriately, survivors, of the famous B-24 low-level attack on the Ploerti oil refineries in Rumania

flown a few months earlier in August, and of other deep penetration raids into Germany without benefit of friendly fighter escorts.

As they described some of their own experiences to make various points about the do's and don'ts of formation flying tactics, these men were truly the envy of every individual in the 448th, flying and non-flying alike. That they offered indisputable proof that some crews could come through the great ordeal unharmed did provide us some temporary cause for reassurance, though it was soon only too apparent that the road ahead was going to be a most difficult and dangerous one to traverse. The percentage of combat crews to complete 25 missions was quite small in those early days.

I experienced one of the most morbid aspects of combat even before I flew the first mission. In order to save a few steps in walking down to the group briefing room for the day's training instructions, I devised a shortcut across one of the open fields and through a large hangar, thence to the briefing building. In this hangar was a battle-damaged B-17 which had recently made an emergency landing at Seething and was undergoing repairs before it could be flown again to its home base. The tail gunner on this aircraft had been killed on the mission that forced it to land here. As I daily walked through the hangar, I had to pass within a few feet of the tail position and couldn't avoid seeing the dried blood of the dead crewman, which no one had bothered to wipe away. It was ghastly to behold and only served to make the mental preparation for the coming struggle more difficult.

During this brief though frenzied pre-combat period, we were also desperately trying to improve our means of existence on the base by whatever means possible. One of the first things everyone needed was some long-handled winter underwear for protection against the foul weather. This item apparently had not been considered in our formalized and lengthy stateside preparations for overseas movement, and its non-availability in England in the winter was a source of great discomfort, colds, and flu. Since neither our local Quartermaster's Supply or Post Exchange would be stocked with such a necessity for an indefinite period, the only solution for acquiring winter underwear was to buy it when the so-called «Mobile PX» made the rounds to our station, expected any day. It finally arrived about two weeks later which thankfully ended that urgent problem.

The only winter underwear available for sale in the Mobile PX was of the heavy wool, two-piece type. I had never worn wool next to my

Crew No. 7 of the 712th Bomb Squadron, 448th Bomb Group. Shown seated left to right are Herbert Bunde, co-pilot; Charles Knorr, pilot; Charles McBride, bombardier and author; Stanley Baranofsky, navigator. Standing left to right: Stanley Sama, waist gunner; Jack Coopertail gunner; Ernest Schultz, waist gunner; William Quigley, aerial engineer; Ralph Callahan, radio operator; Albert Padilla, ball turret gunner. All members of this crew went down into occupied France flying *The Crud Wagon* on 1 April 1944, except William Quigley who was ill in the hospital that day.

skin because it was too scratchy and uncomfortable. However, I was no longer in a position to be so choosy and put it on immediately without the slightest hesitation or complaint. It required about a month to become completely adjusted to the wool, but in the meantime I was warm again.

And the Nissen living quarters were soon provided with those missing floors and electric lights. The little coal burning stove, however, was not to be replaced with anything better or bigger at the expense of Uncle Sam, so the crew occupants joined together and bought or fabricated more efficient stoves. Little by little, life did become more comfortable, or at least more bearable.

As mentioned, the base was far from being fully constructed, and was still officially under British jurisdiction during this period, even though its American occupants were now firmly in place. Partly because of this situation and other reasons which simply boiled down to a shortage of American items, we were forced to use some local British products such as mattresses and blankets. These were, in a word, horrible, and although better than nothing at all, they offered no comfort whatever and only minimal warmth.

The British mattress, for example, was a monstrosity and actually consisted of three separate squares, called «biscuits,» laid end to end, finished off with a mattress cover. The finished product was hard, drafty, and cold during the night after the fire died out. The blankets, in similar fashion, were extremely heavy and compact and did a rather poor job of keeping a sleeper warm at night, unless he had four or five over him.

The arrival of the 448th in England in December was an occasion shared by two other Liberator bomb groups, the 445th and 446th. These units were to be located within a few miles of our base, Seething, and the addition of these three organizations into the European theater brought to seven the number of B-24 heavy bomber groups. More were on the way and would arrive within the next few months.

At this point a few words of explanation are in order to explain the chain of command used within the Eighth Air Force, since various terms used in this connection are necessary to understand many of the facts to be revealed later. Immediately above the 448th was an organization known as the 20th Combat Bomb Wing (CBW) composed of three bombardment groups, the 448th, 446th, and the 93rd.

The latter group was located at nearby Hardwick, also the location of the 20th CBW headquarters commanded by Col. Jack W. Wood. Two other B-24 combat wings were either then in existence or planned: the 2nd CBW with three groups, and the 14th CBW with two groups. Immediately above these combat wings was the 2nd Bombardment Division, commanded by Brig. Gen. James P Hodges, who was responsible for all B-24 bomber operations in Eighth Air Force. Co-equal to General Hodges' command were two other air divisions but equipped with B-17 Flying Fortress bombers, the 1st and 3rd Bombardment Divisions. The next higher echelon of command was Eighth Air Force, headed by Lt. Gen. James Doolittle. In addition to the three bombardment divisions, he also commanded the numerous P-38, P-47, and P-51 fighter groups whose primary combat function was to provide escort protection for the bombers. There was yet one higher echelon of the Army Air Forces in Europe called U.S. Strategic Air Forces – Europe, abbreviated as USSTAE This organization was commanded by Lt. Gen. Carl Spaatz whose span of control consisted of not only the Eighth Air Force, but the Ninth, equipped with medium bombers, and Fifteenth Air Forces, the latter located in Italy with both B-24 and B-17 heavy bombers. One inflexible rule of organization required that on all combat missions in which we would participate, the 448th always flew as part of the 20th CBW, as did all other groups within their designated combat bomb wings.

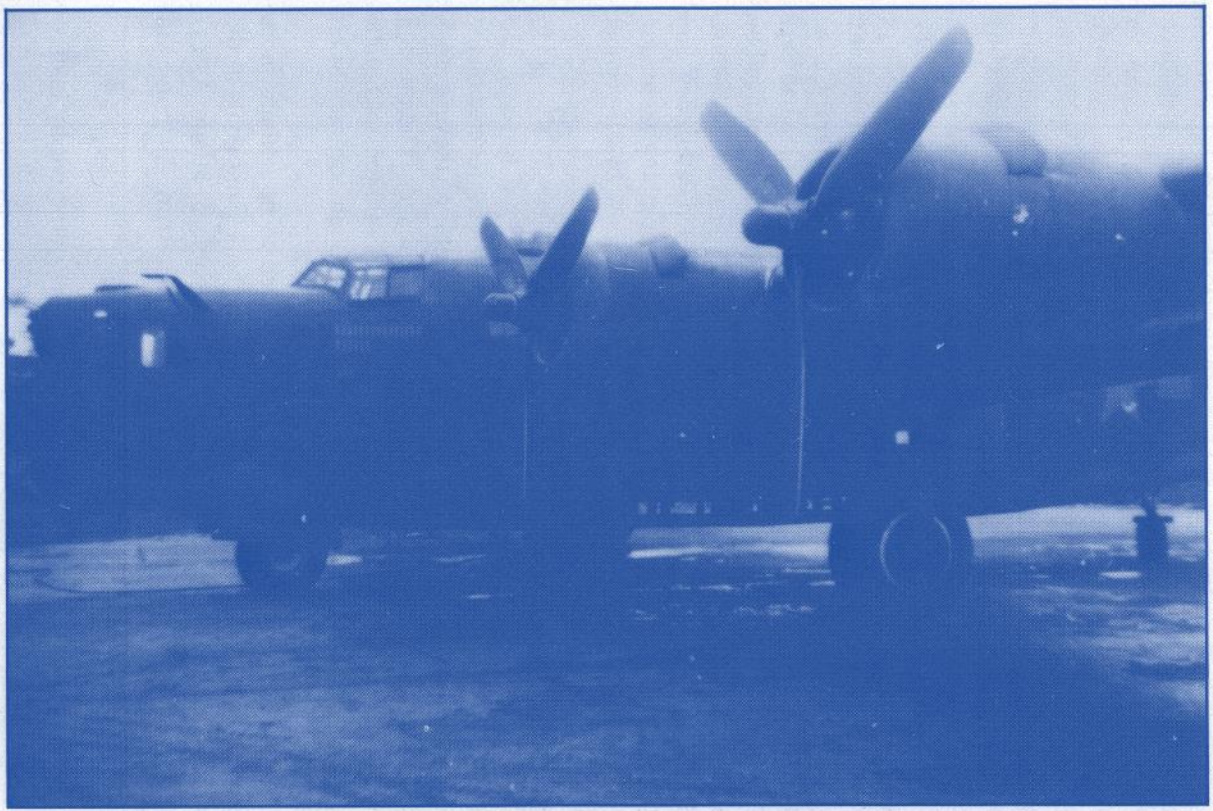
A few words are also in order to describe for the reader the current state of the aerial bombardment offensive being conducted from England when the 448th entered this war theater. In the previous months of August, September, and October 1943, the Eighth Air Force carried out a series of attacks on the German Ball Bearing industry in the vicinity of Schweinfurt, and although the bombing accuracy was quite good, extremely heavy losses were incurred by the B-17s. The mission of 14 October proved to be one of the decisive air battles of the war when 62 B-17s were lost from an attacking force of 228. The heavy losses were due primarily to the fact that this daylight bombing force had flown far inland beyond the range of escort fighters and was attacked viciously by the German Air Force. The point was conclusively proved that unescorted daylight bomber forces, at least of this rather small magnitude, could not long sustain such loss rates, and as a result the deep penetrations were sharply curtailed.

This was a fundamental setback for Army Air Forces strategic planners, since it had been widely promulgated that heavily-gunned bombers flying in tight formations could penetrate with relative impunity to any part of the Reich within the aircraft's range.

In the last three months of 1943, the number of U.S. heavy bomber groups of B-17s and B-24s had been increasing in England, and this growth coincided with a real breakthrough in December when the first P-51 Mustang fighter group with extended range became available to the Eigh[th] Air Force. Already, the P-47 Thunderbolt fighters had been modified for greater range of action, and when additional groups of P-5 Is began arriving in January and February of 1944, the daylight missions deep into Germany were resumed in earnest.
Unfortunately, German Air Force fighter strength was also increasing in the West, and the recent Schweinfurt losses of the Eighth Air Force only fortified the conviction of the American air planners that success of both the strategic bombardment campaign and the great invasion of Europe being planned for the spring of 1944 must be based initially on defeating the German Air Force. American heavy bombers were posed to strike at the far-flung aircraft airframe industry as soon as favorable weather over Germany would permit. The weather, however^ proved to be an ally of the enemy in the winter months of 1943 and 1944, which finally forced the Eigh[th] to turn seriously to radar or blind bombing as a device for continuing the aerial offensive without interruption.

This technique of bombing was not considered equal in accuracy to sighting visually through the bombsight, but rather as a supplement to permit daylight bombers to maintain the pressure of strategic bombardment on Germany's morale and economy. Admittedly, this was also a step backward from the highly-touted daylight precision bombing strategy, but on balance it seemed worth the effort since the alternative was either to bomb low priority targets often with less accuracy, or not bomb at all.

Radar missions would be reserved for targets that showed up clearly on the radar scope, such as city areas located on coastlines or on peninsulas, because the distinction between water and land was much easier to identify. Although large man-made areas could be located with only slight difficulty, specific targets such as factories could not be so identified within these greater industrial complexes, unless they were unusually isolated.



The Crud Wagon shown on its hardstand at Seething Airfield.

Early plans drawn up by the U.S. Army Air Forces in mid-1943 were based upon the experience of the British Royal Air Force in using radar bombing techniques which were compatible with their night operations of area bombing where precision accuracy received far less consideration. The RAF used several techniques, of which their H2S equipment seemed better suited for the missions envisioned by the Eighth Air Force. H2S was a device whereby a beam of transmitted energy scanned the ground below the plane, with the reflected signals presenting a map-like picture on the plane's indicator scope. For example, the dark areas were water, lighter areas represented the ground, and bright areas normally characterized reflecting surfaces of towns.

In October 1943, at the insistence of the Army Air Forces, the Radiation Laboratory at MIT had undertaken an improved version of the British H2S equipment. The new device was soon developed and provided some distinct improvements over the older system. Called H2X, it employed a new and shorter microwave length than had ever been used before. Twenty of the new sets were hastily assembled by the Radiation Laboratory, installed, and flown to England in twelve B-17s. The planes so equipped with H2X were called Pathfinders and constituted the nucleus of this new American bombing technique which was rapidly adopted in the months to follow by all combat bomb wings.

The first radar bombing mission was flown on 3 November 1943 to Wilhelmshaven, Germany, and was carried out by a force of 539 bombers led by nine of the new Pathfinders. That city, located on the German coastline near a river, was easily identifiable on the operator's radar screen by the contrasting water and land images. The mission was quite successful and resulted in more than 1,400 tons of bombs dropped through a solid layer of cloud with enough accuracy to hit and damage the aiming point.

Unfortunately, however, the mission proved to be nothing more than beginner's luck, and created optimistic hopes and goals in the minds of strategic planners that were impossible to attain. As explained in Volume III of the document, «The Army Air Forces in World War II,»

> Hopes based on initial success were not borne out by later missions; here as in most cases involving use of intricate

> instruments, the majority of crews never succeeded in getting maximum results from their equipment. The only justification was the assumption that blind bombing was better than no bombing and it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the «numbers racket» – pressure from Washington to get more planes over Europe – was responsible for some wasted effort.

Success or no, radar bombing rather than visually sighting through the bombsight was the method most used when the 448th became part of the combat forces on 22 December 1943. The procedure required the Pathfinder lead bomber of the formation to drop its bombs when over the precise location as indicated by the radar scope. All other bombers in the formation were to release instantly upon seeing the Pathfinder's bombs falling, so as to form a close pattern of explosive bursts upon the target below. In similar fashion with visual bombing, only the lead bomber aimed its bombs, with all other aircraft dropping upon the leader. In both cases, the lead aircraft was the key to success. If the radar operator or bombardier made a correct sighting and released on the correct target and at the proper instant, the objective would be damaged or destroyed; conversely, if an incorrect sighting or unfavorable circumstance occurred to the lead bomber, then all bombs dropped by the formation would fall outside the target area.

One final comment on the problem of achieving bombing accuracy. The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, the most authoritative work to evaluate World War II results of American strategic bombardment efforts in both Europe and Japan, has this to say:

> Before the war, the U.S. Army Air Forces had advanced bombing techniques to their highest level of development and had trained a limited number of crews to a high degree of precision in bombing under target range conditions, thus leading to the expressions «pin point» and «pickle barrel» bombing. However, it was not possible to approach such standards of accuracy under battle conditions imposed over Europe. Many limiting factors intervened; target obscuration by clouds, fog, smoke screens and industrial haze; enemy fighter opposition which necessitated defensive bombing formations, thus restricting freedom of maneuver; antiaircraft artillery defenses, demanding minimum time exposure of the attacking force in order

> to keep losses down; and finally, time limitations imposed on combat crew training after the war began. Accuracy ranged from poor to excellent. When visual conditions were favorable and flak defenses were not intense, bombing results were at their best. Unfortunately, the major portion of bombing operations over Germany had to be conducted under weather and battle conditions that restricted bombing technique, and accuracy suffered accordingly. Conventionally the air forces designated as «the target area» a circle having a radius of 1,000 feet around the aiming point of attack. While accuracy improved during the war, survey studies show that, in the overall, only about 20% of the bombs aimed at precision targets fell within this target area.

The four officers of my crew, Knorr, Bunde, Baranofsky, and myself were quartered with another crew under command of Lt. Paul Harrison and his three officers, Floyd Drake, Frank Dial, and James Berry. As might be expected, we became much better acquainted in the months to follow as we underwent our baptism of fire together. In general, we were all compatible with each other, which was fortunate indeed in our cramped environment. Our routine required that all air crews be on call for flying at any time, even though we normally knew at least one day in advance when we were to be scheduled. Under these conditions, no one was permitted overnight liberty without prior permission in the event of last-minute rescheduling by the squadron commander of either a crew or an individual on a crew.

Our evening talk fests, which would continue far into the night, ranged from just about everything of any possible interest to a group of young men who had not lived long enough to become too opinionated. Inevitably, though, the subject of combat always crept in at some point. None of the eight people were of a dramatic bent or desired to become heroes, but the pressures and mental anxieties caused by our constant exposure to death created an exclusive bond among us that allowed for somewhat franker discussion of our mutual fears and experiences, including various aspects of the latest mission. Since we all shared in the sights of dying planes in the air, there was naturally less reluctance in holding back some of our personal feelings in discussing various details of these horrible sights.

Since the 448th had approximately 60 bombers and 75 crews, combined with the fact that a portion of the planes were always

undergoing routine maintenance or repairs at any given time and thus not available to fly, each aircrew would be scheduled for only about one half or two thirds of the total missions levied upon the group. Harrison's crew for no apparent reasons seemed to fly on those days when Knorr's crew was standing down, and this made for even more exchange of information and talk over the day's encounters.

One of our humorous conversation pieces concerned Jim Berry's habit of talking in his sleep. Instead of merely mumbling, Berry would utter entire phrases and sentences that were quite distinct to anyone listening. After one of these nightly sessions, Frank Dial would often remark to him the next morning, «Well, Jim, you've been holding out again on me. I heard you muttering all those nice comments about Mary last night. Come on, tell me all about this one; what's she like, really?» Berry of course would not remember having said anything of the sort. He possessed a calm, even-natured temperament and could take any amount of ribbing.

Finally the moment of truth for the 448th was now at hand, 22 December 1943 – its first combat mission. I didn't take part in this one, for which I had no regrets after learning the results. The 2nd Bombardment Division Commander certainly had no intention of breaking us in on one of the easier type raids because the target selected for today, Osnabruck, Germany, was clearly one of the roughest.

All seven Liberator groups of the 2nd Bombardment Division were assigned this mission as were the two B-17 bombardment divisions. Since an almost complete cloud cover was expected over the target area, the mission was to be flown by Pathfinders. Owing to the newness of such techniques and because there were no B-24-equipped aircraft possessing this capability, the 2nd Bombardment Division was directed to release its bombs on B-17 Pathfinder flares. To accomplish this feat, the B-24s assigned to the 2nd and 20th Combat Bomb Wings were to follow the 1st Division of B-17s to Osnabruck while the 14th Combat Bomb Wing's Liberators were to trail the 3rd Division.

This subsidiary role for the Liberator force was only too apparent to the Commander of the 2nd Bombardment Division and his wing commanders, whose combat records and reputations were second to none. A remark made in one of the historical reports of the 20th Combat Wing reflects this disappointment and frustration: «The

difficulties of learning a new technique were quadrupled by the fact that no B-24 Pathfinders were available during the month. We were back again to a state of affairs where the 24s had to struggle to stay behind the 17s.»

A total of 26 bombers took off from Seething that morning under extremely hazardous conditions. A bad weather front moved into the base area just prior to take-off and remained during the period of departure which consumed about 30 minutes. The climb to required assembly altitude of 18,000 feet was made almost entirely on instrument flying procedures, owing to the almost zero visibility and icing conditions present.

The procedure for climbing to altitude required all bombers to circle upward over designated radio beacons located throughout England. At Seething we used one officially known as Buncher Beacon #7, located at nearby Hardwick. It was used by both the 93rd and 448th Bomb Groups. The 446th used its own Buncher #8. During flying periods such as this with minimum or no visibility, the long climb to a visible altitude above the clouds at these designated spots was more perilous than crossing a heavily-defended target in Germany in broad daylight, because of the ever present chance for a mid-air collision. One was to occur in February in the 448th on a morning such as this, with resulting total fatality to nine of the ten airmen.

On becoming airborne, the pilot tuned his radio to the frequency of the buncher beacon which caused the needle of his radio compass to point toward the direction of the station. If he circled around it as he proceeded upward at the rate of 300 feet per minute, the needle would always point to the direction of the buncher. Since each aircraft had taken off at 30-second intervals, it was assumed that altitude separation would be maintained between the planes. In practice this was often not the case, with the result that all bombers were subject to colliding at any time until finally reaching the clear sky. If the bombers had not been controlled in such manner during weather conditions, one could easily appreciate how individual groups of 25 or more aircraft among hundreds within a confined area of 50 miles or less would never be able to assemble properly at their appointed places after breaking out in the clear.

Upon reaching directed altitude for assembly of the formation, each group employed another aid which took the form of brightly-

painted aircraft in bizarre designs. The 448th used a B-24 that consisted entirely of huge black and orange checkerboard squares. This design was of course unique to us, and upon spotting the assembly plane after reaching the directed altitude, each 448th bomber would fly toward it and join up in its designated position. As a further assist, the checkerboard aircraft was required to fire a bright double green flare at 30-second intervals which was again peculiar to our unit.

The individual bomber crewman's working environment in World War II aircraft was difficult and physically exhausting. One of the favorite themes of those days in reporting upon the personal aspects of fighting was a comparison drawn between the typical dog-faced GI's miserly existence in fighting and dying in the infantry in a world of filth and disease versus that of the high and mighty warriors who fought a more impersonal type of warfare far removed from any close contact with the enemy or unclean conditions. Although some of these generalized situations contained elements of truth, the alleged advantages enjoyed by the bomber crews were more than offset by other factors not so well appreciated.

Since all World War II aircraft were manufactured far in advance of the pressurized plane, while at high altitude they did not provide body warmth and ease of breathing. These qualities had to be improvised. Flying in the winter months in England, I often encountered outside and therefore inside temperatures of between -40 and -60 degrees below zero. Obviously one could not long remain alive in cramped bomber quarters under such harsh conditions without adequate bodily protection, and this took the form of electric suits. They were undoubtedly the forerunner of the electric blanket and were fitted with controls to regulate the amount of heat coming into the suit. The first models were of the blue one-piece variety and resembled long underwear. They were worn as the outer garment over the individual's underclothing. This model later gave way to a two-piece style, which was better fitting and an improvement in comfort. Both suits gave the needed bodily warmth to sustain life and seldom malfunctioned while in flight.

The oxygen mask of course had to be worn continually while at altitudes of 12,000 feet or more. It was attached to the helmet and contained a flexible hose about two feet long which plugged in at each crew station to the aircraft's oxygen supply. On extremely cold flights

of long duration, the inside of the face mask would occasionally freeze from the wearer's breath condensing to ice. The ice then had to be loosened and thrown out periodically or it would eventually stop the flow of oxygen to the crewman.

Probably the two most undesirable crew positions on the B-24 were those of the two waist gunners located behind the wing in the mid section. Each waist gun was mounted to fire out of an open window that measured about three feet square. Not only did these two gunners have to endure all the hazards and discomforts just described, but they also faced the icy blast of wind flowing directly through the open windows. These were the crewmen most often the victims of frostbite, a common phenomenon of marginal winter weather, and moreover, very painful and often serious to the victims. Only later did the Eighth Air Force finally modify the Liberators by enclosing the waist windows with transparent plexiglass similar to that used on the power turrets of the top, nose, and tail positions.

Once inside the Liberator, a crewman became fairly fixed in his position. He was tied into the plane by his electric suit and oxygen mask and also by yet another yoke – his radio headset connection which permitted all members to converse with each other in flight. During brief periods, usually in emergency conditions, a crewman could detach himself from his station and go to any part of the plane by attaching a «bail-out bottle» to his mask hose connection. This was a small light bottle of oxygen under high pressure which normally would provide ten minutes or less breathing oxygen while away from the main supply.

On this day of its first mission, the 448th air crews were still an inexperienced and untested lot, and in combination with the very marginal weather conditions, formed half of their 26 bombers over the wrong assembly point upon breaking out of the overcast. As a result, this errant segment was never able to locate the other half of the force and elected to return to base.

Of the 13 effective aircraft who went on to complete the mission, two were lost to enemy action (one the victim of fighters, and the other due to unknown causes). Fighter attacks were begun on the 20th CBW when it neared the target area and continued until leaving the Dutch Coast on the return leg. Total losses for the day suffered by all B-24s were 14 bombers. On balance, it was not a spectacular beginning, but it could have been far worse. The Liberator group suffering the largest

Colonel Thompson, the Group Commander, pins the Air Medal onto pilot Lt. Douglas Skaggs at the first awards ceremony in January 1944.

losses was the 93rd which sustained five.

Two days later, the group flew its second mission, and on this occasion my crew flew its first combat engagement. It was really a «milk run» in the truest sense, much to the surprise of everyone. We were keyed up to the limit for this first one and had expected the worst from flak and enemy fighters, but fortunately nothing out of the ordinary occurred.

At the mission briefing that morning when all information pertaining to the flight was provided to the crews, we were told simply that an assault was to be made on «special military installations» inside the coast of France at an altitude of 12,000 feet. Photographs of the target were projected for all to see, and they revealed a pinpoint facility consisting of a few small buildings located in the countryside. These targets were referred to as «Noball objectives» with little additional explanation. We soon realized, however, from the somewhat guarded information being provided by the Intelligence briefing officers that there was much more involved here than was being provided to the attackers, and our natural curiosity immediately began running the gamut of speculations, both logical and insane. Of more immediate concern, however, was the low bombing altitude of 12,000 feet which was unusually low for the slow-flying Liberator.

Although the mission was flown without so much as one flak burst observed, it was nevertheless significant for two reasons: (1) This was the largest combat operation yet flown by the Eighth Air Force, in which 722 heavy bombers dropped 1,700 tons of bombs on 23 individual Noball targets; (2) It marked the beginning of the Allied aerial campaign known by the code word of CROSSBOW against some 100-odd enemy installations in the Pas de Calais area and on the Cherbourg Peninsula of occupied France. Most of them were ski sites, so-called because all had one or more long, narrow, windowless storage buidings, curved at the entrance for blast protection and roughly resembling a ski lying on edge. Each site contained other standardized buildings and an inclined concrete platform aimed at England. We later learned that they were designed to send rocket or radio controlled aircraft or projectiles against London or Southhampton. Since each was hidden somewhat in woody areas, finding them proved the major problem. This campaign was prosecuted vigorously by both the RAF and U.S. heavy and medium bombers until the German surrender in May 1945.

On this first mission against the Noball targets, the 448th bombers dropped a total of 157 high-explosive bombs, each one of which weighed 500 pounds. Results couldn’t be observed due to the smoke from exploding bombs dropped by other formations.

Although the group suffered no combat casualties, a mid-air collision between two aircraft of my own 712th Squadron occurred while preparing to land. Miraculously no one was killed. Capt.

William Blum, the operations officer, piloting one of the bombers, suddenly pulled up while in the landing pattern and flew into the flight path of Lt. Alan J. Teague and his plane. The maneuver was so sudden that a collision was unavoidable. When the two planes made contact, Teague's Liberator received most of the damage and he immediately rang the bail-out bell to abandon ship. All members except the two pilots left the plane, but they finally brought it under control and made a safe, though dangerous landing.

One of Teague's crewmen, the navigator whose name was Bruce Vaughan, was injured in the mid-air collision and suffered a severe cut on the wrist from one of the propellors of the other aircraft. Despite this wound, however, he landed safely in the countryside and was soon picked up and taken to the hospital. At one point, his doctor considered amputating the entire hand when it appeared that Vaughan's arm was not healing satisfactorily. The navigator was a strong-willed individual, however, and stubbornly refused to permit the doctor to remove the hand. It later healed satisfactorily with no complications except for some stiffness in the wrist, and accordingly, he was returned to combat duty.

Of course, like all good things, the Germans soon began to fortify their Noball sites with increased flak defenses, both large and small caliber guns, which took away some of the «milk run» qualities of these missions, but they continued to be relatively easier than long penetration attacks into Germany. In the first few months of 1944, enemy aircraft would occasionally try to break through our escort fighters on these Noball attacks to get at the bombers. On 21 January, for instance, one B-24 group made several bombing runs over a Noball target because it was partially obscured by clouds, and in the process of doing so was attacked by 20 Focke-Wolfe 190s. Five bombers were lost in the engagement.

After six days of inactivity, the Eighth Air Force scheduled its next mission to Ludwigshaven, Germany, on 30 December to attack the I.G. Farbenindustrie Chemical Works, one of the most important targets in Germany. This was a Pathfinder-directed attack with each B-24 combat wing designated to follow the B-17 divisions and bomb on their flares. Although I did not take part in this one, Paul Harrison's crew flew that day and came back in the evening with some agonizing combat experiences to relate. It was a tough and expensive mission for us, with three bombers lost, primarily to enemy aircraft.

The official explanations offered at the critique of this mission for General Hodges at 2nd Bombardment Division Headquarters three days later were as follows:

> The 448th was the last group in the 20th Combat Wing formation, and after entering the enemy coast was unable to maintain its proper spacing, and began to fall back too far from the remainder of the force. After making the bombing run and turning on the homeward heading, it still was unable to decrease the distance from the other two groups of the 20th CBW, and at that point was jumped by enemy fighters. The attacks continued almost without let-up until reaching the French coast. Attacks came from all around the clock. Many attacked in single file and consisted of both single and twin engine aircraft. Others dived through the group formation while some came up through the clouds as they pressed home their attacks. Still other assaults were made head-on into the bombers with a shallow dive to within 600 yards, then level to within 50 before breaking off.

This was a harrowing experience to endure, and in some instances could drive an individual to panic and breakdown while witnessing such relentless attacks as well as the carnage of dying bombers that followed in the wake. Total B-24 losses that day in the division were nine while our claims of enemy aircraft destroyed were four.

There was one more mission to be flown before the year expired, and that took place the next day against some German Air Force airdromes located in Southern France at Cognac. The commander of the 2nd Bombardment Division was pleased with the good bombing results of both the 446th and 448th groups. On this mission, the 448th led the 20th CBW, and lost two aircraft, one to flak and the other to unknown reasons. The loss to flak was because we took a long bombing run and continued on the same course for a short time after bombs were released, thereby giving the defenses an excellent target. This maneuver was attributed simply to an inexperienced organization still learning some of the tricks of the trade.

Thus, in the few short days since becoming a member of the combat forces, the group had lost seven aircraft. To this must be added the one aircraft and crew lost enroute in Northern Africa when the plane crashed. This was not a very enviable record, especially when

compared to the other two Liberator groups (the 445th and 446th) that had arrived concurrently in England with the 448th . The 445th had already flown two prior missions before my unit's initial participation, and its total losses amounted to five bombers, whereas the 446th had already flown one additional combat operation and its total losses also were listed at five.

The year 1944 started with a mission to Kiel, Germany, with its submarine base and ship building center as the targets. This operation was marked by poor air discipline, assembly of the 2nd Division being very bad, and extremely marginal weather conditions that contributed to an unsuccessful operation in general. This was my second mission and here we saw some light flak, but it was inaccurate and far below us. This attack was by Pathfinder with results of the bombing not being observed.

The next day saw a repeat mission to Kiel, and on this occasion weather permitted visual bombing. The results were generally quite good, but the number of aircraft provided by the 448th was unusually small. Of 13 dispatched, only 11 were able to proceed to the target area, at which time another aircraft turned back because of mechanical difficulties. After bombs were away, enemy fighter attacks commenced and continued steadily for 36 minutes. During this period a total of four 448th aircraft were shot down, a record loss for a single combat flight, and one not to be exceeded till much later.

Following this disastrous event, the 448th was not called upon again until 11 January to engage in a mission, and on this day the target was Brunswick, Germany. Here, because of marginal weather that threatened to close down the bases in England for the returning planes, the mission was recalled and the bombers struck targets in Germany on the homeward journey. Two more group aircraft fell on this mission, one to enemy fighters and the other to unknown causes.

It was at this point that fate seemed to serve up some much needed good fortune for my organization, for between 14 January, and 20 February, 11 combat missions were flown without the loss of a single plane. Excluded from this record was a mid-air collision on 10 February while over England, which claimed the lives of all the occupants. Some of the targets of that period were admittedly of the Noball variety, but others were to difficult and well-defended areas in Germany. There was no compelling reason for the improvement in our record, except of course that we were now becoming seasoned

veterans and could better respond to unplanned situations confronting us in battle. While these were much desired qualities to be acquired in enhancing one's survival, the fickle god of war often gave scant attention to this detail in meting out his awards and punishment to the players. This was to be proved on numerous occasions when certain units would emerge unscathed from battle while others nearby were literally being hacked to pieces. Therefore, in my judgment an assessment of some of the lopsided casualty records of the various bomb groups could only be explained by blind luck.

Life on the station now settled down to a sheer struggle for existence. Gone were any romantic notions of the high and exciting adventures we were undergoing on a routine basis against a strong and resolute enemy. The realization of the deadlines of our combat tasks and the seemingly low odds resulting from any crew being able to complete a combat tour of 25 missions were disillusioning in the extreme. Our meals in the dining room of the Officers Club offered additional evidence of a steadily deteriorating situation when so many empty chairs would be in evidence. Although the new replacement crews now arriving would soon fill these voids, there were periods between the absences of familiar faces and the sight of new arrivals when our dwindling odds became most obvious.

Another grim aspect was the tendency of the majority of crew personnel to write a letter to a loved one, to be held by another individual for mailing «in the event I don't come back.» This was a practice that I simply couldn't perform for purely personal reasons. Probably no one held more realistic views on our probabilities for survival than I did, but for me the writing of such a letter was too close to final admission that one wasn't going to survive. I still hold this outlook, which for example will not let me purchase flight insurance prior to boarding commercial airlines. For me, it is the same as writing the letter «to be mailed in case I don't come back.»

Approximately once every three weeks our crew would be given a short two-day pass, during which we were free to go anywhere off base, provided the distance involved did not result in a late return to duty. On these occasions we vacated the base as if fleeing from the plague, so intent were we to leave behind all the distasteful realities for a brief interlude of relaxation and forgetfulness. The largest and nearest town was Norwich, which normally was our objective.

In wartime England there were few if any luxuries offered by this

town, caused by the country's tight rationing laws. Norwich restaurants offered very meager and unappetizing menus, and scotch whisky was in small supply in the pubs. The department stores likewise had no items of interest or value for sale. We Americans well understood these conditions; the British public underwent far greater hardships and deprivations than anything imagined in America during World War II.

However, Norwich did have a Red Cross Club under American management where one could at least sleep in a comfortable bed with clean sheets in a warm room. I found this to be utter luxury compared to the stoic environment of Seething Air Station. The food here was also quite palatable and various other little items such as a library and a separate room for playing phonograph records gave it the semblance of an oasis.

In mid-February, Seething Air Station was officially turned over to the Americans by the British in a formal military ceremony. The significance of this event meant that the Army Air Forces could now proceed more rapidly with the much-needed construction of sidewalks, widening of roads, and other improvements so badly needed since our occupancy of the base more than two and one half months ago.

Also at this time, the group commander Colonel Thompson and his staff began to inject a degree of social life into the base routine by sponsoring some individual dances for the officers and enlisted men. Local girls from the Norwich area were recruited by the group's Red Cross and Special Services personnel. In one of the group's historical reports of that period, there is an interesting comparison between the English and American girls' qualities. One comment is especially amusing for its thoroughly snobbish tone and unrealistic portrayal of the facts of life:

> During this period, eight dances were held on the base, of which two were for officers and six for enlisted men. The guests for the officers' dances are usually local civilian girls with some commissioned U.S. Army personnel, and those for the enlisted men's dances are usually enlisted British service women, predominantly from the A.T.S. It would be unfair to say of them that the female guests at these dances are not warmly and gratefully greeted. The girls are uniformly pleasant, well-mannered and many are good dancers – some even outdoing

> our own fancy hepcats in their own line; and the men enjoy the dances and look forward eagerly to each one. But one can't blame the men for feeling that there should be a greater representation of WAC's at the dances. In spite of the numerous happy relationships established between men of our own forces and British women, the consensus still is that the average American girl, with her superior educational background and wider sophistication, cannot be matched by her British compatriot. In addition, of course, a WAC necessarily comes from «somewhere back home,» – and a touch of home, although vicarious, is to be much desired.

This haughty language reflected that the writer was positively out of touch with the common views of British girls held by the great majority of men at Seething. These young men in establishing «happy relationships» with British women were most assuredly not comparing their educational backgrounds and sophistication with their American opposites.

In mid-February a change in policy was announced requiring bomber crews to complete 30 rather than 25 missions in order to finish a tour. This was bad news, as I had completed only seven missions. However, the change was soon taken in stride by everyone and forgotten.

Shortly after the crew extension announcement, a momentous period took place in the history of the European air war. The time had now arrived for what has come to be called the Big Week. It began on 20 February and ended on the 25th and resulted in 75 percent of Germany's aircraft air frame industry being either destroyed or severely damaged. In addition, a total of almost 600 enemy fighters were claimed as destroyed by the bombers and escort fighters.

Early in this chapter I related that the American air strategists had indicated the defeat of the German Air Force to be the highest priority of the air war, and that an all-out attack on the aircraft industry was poised for execution as soon as favorable weather could be expected. On 19 February, the weather finally began to open up over the German aircraft factories, and the plan of attack which had been devised in November 1943 was implemented. It projected a series of coordinated missions by the Eighth and Fifteenth Air Forces (the latter located in Italy) against all the priority targets, most of which were situated in

central and Southern Germany. A further reinforcement to success was the RAF's agreement to make its own night attacks coincide with the daylight missions, both in time and place.

On each of the days of Big Week that missions were flown, they were maximum efforts; that is, all available aircraft that could be flown were used. A normal-sized combat operation during that period was about 25 aircraft from each group, whereas Big Week saw the following number of effective aircraft provided by the 448th:

20 February — 36 aircraft
21 February — 37 aircraft
22 February — 35 aircraft
23 February — Mission not flown
24 February — 31 aircraft
25 February — 30 aircraft

The overall statistics for Big Week were indeed impressive. A total of 137 heavy bombers were lost by the Eighth and 89 by the Fifteenth Air Force, while dropping 10,000 tons of bombs. The RAF lost 157 heavy bombers in the process of dropping about 9,200 tons of bombs on five heavy raids against Leipzig, Stuttgart, Schweinfurt, Steyr, and Augsburg. As the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey indicated:

> The seeming paradox of the attack on the aircraft plants was that although production recovered quickly, the German Air Force after the attacks was not again a serious threat to allied air superiority. The attacks in the winter of 1944 were escorted by P-5 Is and P47s and with the appearance of these planes in force, a sharp change had been ordered in escort tactics. Previously the escort planes had to protect the bomber force as their primary responsibility. They were now instructed to invite opposition from German fighter forces and to engage them at every opportunity. As a result, German fighter losses mounted sharply. The claimed losses in January were 1,115 German fighters; in February, 1,118; and in March, 1,217. The losses in planes were accompanied by losses in experienced pilots and disorganization and loss of the combat strength of squadrons and groups. By the spring of 1944 opposition of the Luftwaffe had ceased to be effective.

This latter sentence, however, was a broad assessment that applied to the grand strategy of the war, but when reduced to its impact on individual bomb groups carrying out daily strikes far into Germany, it meant something entirely different. The Luftwaffe continued to be a threat after the spring of 1944, and on those occasions when escort fighters were momentarily not to be found near the bombers, the German Air Force exacted heavy tolls as they ganged up on straggling or errant groups.

I flew two missions during Big Week, on 21 and 22 February. The first one involved a visual attack by the 2nd Bombardment Division on two major German airdromes, but since a heavy cloud layer obscured the target, a decision was made to bomb other nearby installations. The airdromes at Vorden, Hesepe, and Diepholtz were struck with good results. On this mission, we lost two bombers, one to enemy fighters and one to flak.

While engaged in the mission of 21 February, three 448th members of one aircraft were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism and extraordinary achievement. Just before reaching the target area, the bomber being piloted by Lt. Harvey Broxton was viciously attacked by enemy fighters, which disabled one engine and severed numerous control cables. However, by expert handling he maintained his place in the formation and successfully bombed the objective. Broxton soon found it impossible to remain for long in his appointed position with such damages, and accordingly dropped back as a straggler. The enemy fighters then descended on him with renewed fury, knocking out his top and tail turrets, destroying the hydraulic system, and starting a fire in the waist section. Though these savage assaults lasted until he reached the English Channel, the pilot flew his battered bomber back to Seething and made a safe landing.

The second award was earned by Broxton's tail gunner, Sgt. Irving Elba, along with the right waist gunner who was wounded in the first enemy attack on the bomber. After receiving first aid treatment, he rechecked his guns and finding them beyond repair, returned to the waist of the plane. When the fire broke out during subsequent enemy attacks, Elba assisted in fighting the blaze despite his wounds until it was extinguished.

The third recipient of the award was Sgt. Robert Hudson, the aft waist gunner who pulled Elba out of the tail turret and rendered first

aid treatment. Returning to his gun, Hudson discovered the fire, and alternately began fighting off the attacking planes and assisting Elba in putting out the flames. These frantic efforts were continued until he himself was severely wounded by a bursting cannon shell.

The second mission of 22 February was a complete failure for the B-24 division. Our objective was the aircraft assembly and component plants and two adjacent airfields at Gotha, Germany. Our take-off and flight assembly was made under great peril and difficulty in the middle of a snowstorm and thick instrument weather that extended up to the assembly altitude of 17,000 feet, and out along the directed course to the Dutch coast. As a result, the formation became strung out with sections and individual aircraft losing contact with the main formation and abandoning the mission. In view of this marginal situation, the division was recalled back to England. At the time of recall, the 20th CBW was then approximately 40 miles past the Dutch border in Germany, and a decision was made to bomb targets of opportunity rather than returning with the bomb loads. The three groups (93rd 446th, and 448th) then separated for individual bomb runs.

At the time of this maneuver, there was a 95 mile per hour wind at our flight altitude of 17,500 feet with a strong westward drift. Since no allowance was made for this strong drift, the Dutch towns of Enschede, Arnhem, and Nijmegen were mistaken as German towns and bombed. The lead bombardier's report of the 448th covering the bombing of Enschede provides a vivid description of the holocaust visited upon this locality: «We made our run and dropped the bombs on that area at 1:15 p.m. on a heading of 60 degrees. The pattern was good. All except one aircraft dropped on the lead ship. The gunners reported great fires springing up in the immediate vicinity of the factory district, which was the main point of impact that had been picked out.»

Here a few words must be said about the rules on bombing targets of opportunity. Objectives defined in this manner were reserved for Germany only, and specifically excluded were the boundaries of the conquered countries, such as Holland, France, or Belgium. While it is true that missions were planned against Nazi war facilities or installations in these countries, they were designed to destroy specific factories, troop concentrations, or airfields and along designated routes into and out of these locations. Targets of opportunity, how-

ever, were last resort objectives to be bombed on just such an occasion as the above recall of the 2nd Bombardment Division when it became apparent that the weather would deny any success to the planned operation.

The next day Colonel Thompson personally conducted the group's critique of this mission, and was most concerned that it not be repeated again. He had obviously received some criticism from the higher echelons of command for this grave mistake in navigation. An event observed by our group on this abortive mission was a unique phenomenon on the part of an enemy aircraft that attacked the formation. An ME-109 approached head-on dragging a cable. The cable appeared to be about 250 to 300 feet long with an oval shaped bomb, estimated to be ten inches in diameter and fifteen inches long. On this occasion, rocket attacks by enemy aircraft were also experienced by one group.

Since no mission was launched on 23 February, because the weather over Germany offered no opportunity for a visual attack, the following day fortuitously provided the necessary weather relief, and another maximum effort to reach Gotha's aircraft factories was laid on. It proved to be one of the most significant missions of the war for the 2nd Bombardment Division, and resulted in all the principal elements of the target being destroyed. However, it was also one of the most expensive to the attackers which saw 33 B-24s go down, of which enemy fighters accounted for no less than 30.

Another significant highlight was the earning of the Presidential Unit Citation by the 445th and 392nd Bomb Groups for their participation in this mission. The awards were earned for the excellent bombing results turned in by these units in the face of some of the fiercest fighter opposition encountered to date, which saw the 445th and 392nd numbers reduced by 13 and 7 aircraft respectively. In suffering these extensive losses, however, these groups accounted for no less than 17 and 16 enemy fighters destroyed.

An appreciation of some of the agony experienced by the 445th at the height of this battle can be appreciated by reading the mission report of Lt. Nels Kluksdal, who flew as deputy leader of his group:

> Immediately after our 180 degree turn to the right off the target we were attacked by twin-engine fighters from the rear and single-engine fighters head on. The head on attacks contin-

> ued in groups of six or eight Focke Wolfe 190s in trail until our lead ship was hit. His wheels dropped down and the number two engine was smoking. However, he was still in control so I endeavored to stay on his right wing. However, his speed was so slow (140 m.p.h.) that the whole formation overran him. At that time I leveled off and settled down on a straight course. All the ships that had not been shot down up to this point by the continuous fighter attacks flocked in on me. There were fourteen planes in our formation at that time. The second section of the 389th Group lost about half of their section in the first attack. The remaining ships in their section must have increased their air speed terrifically because they left us behind in a short time. There was a lull in the fighter attacks for a few minutes which gave us time to close up our formation. I started a climb on course, having spotted the 14th CBW about ten miles to the rear. As we reached 18,500 feet we were in position low and right of the 392nd Group (part of the 14th CBW). During the climb we had several (four or five) head on attacks by FW 190s. One nose turret was inoperative, so as the fighters tried to position themselves to the side and ahead, we turned into them, thereby forcing them to make a very tight turn for the head-on approach. As the fighters came into range I made a 20 degree diving turn toward them thereby standing them on their noses. I used this type of evasive action on all the attackers. After over two hours without pursuit cover (friendly fighter escort) we finally were picked up by P-38s, P-5 Is, P-47s and RAF Spitfires.

The terse report of bombers lost by the 392nd Group is also worth noting for its visions of death and destruction that were the lot of that unit:

> Seven aircraft were lost to enemy fighters. Aircraft numbers 558 and 102 were definitely hit and seen to explode before bombs away. Number 192 was hit and went down at 1:38 p.m. on the return route (three chutes reported). Four others, numbers 527, 511,496, and 344 were not positively identified but a B-24 was seen in flames at 12:42 p.m. with five chutes reported; another at 1:21 p.m. in the target area with the number two and three engines afire and two or three chutes reported; another at

> 1:49 p.m. going down under control, three chutes reported; and another seen at 1:54 climbing into a stall and burning as the tail fell off, with three chutes reported.

This mission for the 448th was an affirmation that the fortunes of war can fall full force on some units and leave others relatively untouched. It was a very lucky and successful mission for my group which lost only one bomber among the vast annihilation of broken machines and bodies served up by the enemy on that day.

General Hodges, Commander of the Liberator Division, forwarded the following congratulatory message to each of his bombardment groups for their performance at Gotha:

> I am confident that you destroyed Gotha yesterday. PRU [Photo Reconnaisance Unit] reported at a late hour last night they had been unable to obtain photographs of the damage because the target was completely covered with flames and smoke. However a close study and analysis of strike photographs taken by all the groups make me feel confident that we can look forward to the PRU report with great optimism. Our losses are a great blow to us, but it is my hope that a substantial number of them are now prisoners of war. Our only comfort is derived from the fact that their contribution to the war has been a decisive one, and by hastening final victory will save the lives of untold numbers of their comrades in the air and on the ground. Signed, Hodges.

There yet remained one more mission to be flown before the end of Big Week, and that was on 25 February to Furth, Germany, with its Bachmann von Blumenthal and Company aircraft component factory and airfield as the objective. The primary target was hit with excellent results. Approximately 90 enemy fighters attacked the 2nd Division, with total losses being six Liberators. On this mission, the 448th lost one aircraft.

Three additional missions were flown through 3 March with no losses, followed by the longest combat operation to date by the 448th on 5 March to a town in Southern France called Mont de Marsan. On this flight two aircraft were lost. Then on 6 March, Berlin was finally bombed by the Eighth Air Force for the first time in force.

Two days earlier, a remnant of 29 B-17s had gone over Berlin and bombed by Pathfinder with ineffective results. All other aircraft of the force had already turned back because of poor weather conditions. While this occasion did mark the first Berlin bombing, it was on 6 March that an effective number of bombers actually assaulted this prestigious target. The B-24 force had been given an aircraft engine plant at Genshagen, 20 miles south of Berlin, as its objective. Overcast conditions, however, tended to split up the bombers with the result that few bombs hit near the selected areas of attack.

On this mission both B-17s and 24s encountered more fighter opposition than had been experienced since Big Week, despite continuous escort of American fighters. A total of 69 bombers of both types were shot down with enemy fighters accounting for most, but the number falling to flak was much higher than usual. B-24 losses were 16, one of which belonged to our group. Two days later, Berlin was bombed again with accurate results, and on this occasion my unit lost two more Liberators.

No further group losses were sustained on the next three missions, the last one having as its objective the aero engine plant at Friederichshaven, Germany. On this occasion the bombing was fair and a return visit was scheduled two days later on 18 March to finish the job. This was my 12th mission and proved to be the most difficult thus far. The 448th led the entire division, and under the expert navigation of Capt. Earl Parks, the flight plan was carried out flawlessly under excellent visibility conditions.

As we made our turn at the I.R and started the bomb run, I could see the town far below on the shore of Lake Constance which formed the border between Germany and Switzerland. Hundreds of smoke screens were already blowing across the town and toward the lake, obscuring most of the details of the city. Up to this point, not one burst of flak or hostile fighter had been observed since penetrating the enemy coast. It just seemed too good to be true, and it really was. The goodness instantly evaporated as we were engulfed in a treacherous barrage of tracking flak near the target that was bursting squarely at our altitude amid the tightly knit planes. I actually heard several of the shells exploding above the roar of the engines, which was new to my experience. It seemed impossible that we could ride through this inferno for long without sustaining outright destruction. We kept grinding on in a relentless straight line toward the town with the dirty

black balls following unerringly as if they were physically attached to the formation. I had never seen anything to equal such a fiery demonstration as this, and it was downright frightening to behold. Knorr was heard to say on the interphone: «God, look at this flak!»

Finally, for what seemed like an eternity, we released our bombs on the leader and began a steady right turn to avoid the intensity of the fire, but to no avail. The stuff merely followed our movements with no loss in accuracy. I couldn't believe all these aircraft would be able to escape such an onslaught for long. At last one began to waver on the right and slightly ahead about 50 feet away from our plane. The disabled bomber continued to loosen up which was a warning sign to be ready for a wild maneuver, and it was not long in coming. The plane suddenly turned left out of the formation toward Switzerland. All planes in the leading element immediately pulled up steeply to avoid his turn across the line of flight. The crippled bomber was last seen under control and heading for the sanctuary of Switzerland.

We finally began to outdistance the flak and it began to subside slowly as we moved out of the range of fire. Then it was gone entirely and we set course for England. I was never more thankful and grateful in my life for being delivered unscathed out of that shadow of death. Later I learned that the actual bomb run over the target had consumed an incredibly long six minutes of hell.

The pilot of the damaged bomber, Capt. Jack Edwards, eventually landed safely in Switzerland with a dead gunner aboard and a plane heavily damaged by gunfire. He and the crew were interned for six months and then released. This proved to be our only loss that day, but the real inferno was about to take place as the last combat wing, the 14th, approached the target.

The German fighters decided to concentrate on that wing's 392nd and 44th Groups, primarily because these units were temporarily without friendly fighter escort. The engagement that followed was unmatched in favor of the enemy as he proceeded to shoot down 14 B-24s in the 392nd, while seven in the 44th were lost to flak. More losses would have been recorded had not the friendly fighters arrived sooner. This was another classic example of an uneven loss of life borne by a few units while others a short distance away were relatively untouched.

As the 14th CBW came into the target area, the 44th Group was leading this formation. In the middle of its bomb run, the 44th saw

another group pass directly beneath it. No bombs could be dropped of course under such conditions, and the group leader elected to make another run. On both the first and second runs, this unit was literally riddled with intense accurate flak, although its bombing results were observed to be good.

Following behind came the 392nd Group which proceeded over the target as planned after seeing the 44th turn around for a second run.The 392nd's lead and deputy lead aircraft were hit several times by flak which caused the formation to be slowed down to 140 m.p.h. while over the city. The ground fire ripped into this group more ferociously than all preceding units, and when it finally emerged from the target, many of its bombers had been damaged severely. When the enemy fighters then swarmed on them about 20 minutes later, they were fairly easy prey.

After that mission, our squadron commander, Maj. Robert Campbell, decided we had had enough combat flying for a while and granted the crew seven days leave. Next to completing a combat tour, this was the most welcome thing that could have happened, and in normal fashion, we quickly vacated the premises without delay. On this occasion I went to London with Bunde and Baranofsky, and it proved to be one of the most fondly remembered periods of my life, because it provided a genuine atmosphere of relaxation and forgetfulness of the details of war, death, and destruction that now characterized my existence.

It was a period of absolute freedom with nothing required except the pursuit of entertainment that London offered in large quantities. Even though the tight economic restrictions of rationing were felt here as well, the availability of everything of value in London was far above the poverty-like environment of Norwich. I attended two stage plays in the famous Drury Lane district, and several new American movies being shown in the large theaters. Two of them I remember as being Lifeboat and For Whom the Bell Tolls whose titles should properly date the period being described. For a brief moment the war was completely expunged from memory, but all too soon the seven heady days had slipped by, leaving a return to grim reality as our only alternative.

Our return to Seething was marked by some bad news that only made my morale sink lower, if such a thing was possible. The group had lost three aircraft in our absence, including Major Campbell, the

squadron commander of the 712th, a man who held the respect of all, both flying and ground personnel. His aircraft was hit by flak and was seen to explode as the formation flew over Abbeville, France on its homeward leg of the mission. No chutes were observed, and the chances of anyone surviving such destruction was quite low. Campbell's death was later confirmed. The other bad news greeting our return concerned Floyd Drake, who was Paul Harrison's co-pilot. Although he was alive and in the hospital, he had been struck in the face by a tiny fragment of flak and lost his left eye. He was now finished as far as further combat duty was concerned.

After Floyd was wounded, I was told that Frank Dial came up to the flight deck and assisted the radio operator and aerial engineer in pulling him out of his seat and onto the floor. They then broke open a first aid kit and gave him a shot of morphine to ease the pain, and then applied bandages to stem the flow of blood. Drake was taken directly to the nearest hospital a short distance from Seething and was reported in fair condition at the moment.

A few days later, Baranofsky, Bunde, and I went over to the hospital on a day of off-duty to see Floyd who was by this time healing satisfactorily. This was the first occasion for any of us to visit such a place which consisted entirely of American air casualties, and it left an enduring impression upon me. I had both a mixed feeling of thankfulness to have survived unscathed to this point as well as a foreboding of the future that fate might not be so generous before it was all over. This hospital was not a place to inspire confidence in an individual who still had more than half his combat tour to complete.

On being directed into the ward where Drake was located, we began walking down the aisle slowly looking for him. About halfway down a voice called out from behind: «Hey Bunde, what are you doing here?» We turned around and saw a fellow propped up in bed motioning to us. It was Floyd Drake and we hadn't even recognized him as we passed his bed.

As we approached him to have a few words, I still didn't recognize the face. His left eye and half the forehead were covered in bandages and the remainder of the face was swollen so much that Drake no longer was recognizable. But his voice was the same, and surprisingly, he maintained an optimistic outlook on his future. We offered some hackneyed cheery words of condolence in trying to play down the horrible consequence of his bad luck, but he would have

none of it. Instead, I remember how he summed it up. «You know, I'm really lucky, fellows, because I'm out of this war now. It's you guys rather than me that I'm worrying about now.»

I thought I knew Drake pretty well after sharing the same living quarters with him for almost four months, but I was mistaken. In his great misfortune his courage and lack of self-sympathy surprised and also impressed me deeply. Drake's loss in the hut was felt very greatly for a time, but like everything else, the war wouldn't wait on any individual or thing, and again soon consumed our every thought and energy to stay alive and prevail.

Near the end of March, the group commander, Colonel Thompson, wrote a letter to all personnel of the organization expressing his gratitude for the record compiled thus far by his command. Some of his words are worth noting:

> This group has been engaged in combat operations in excess of three months. During that time it has bombed many very important targets in Germany and the occupied countries. In so doing, we have made a material contribution to the ultimate successful conclusion of this war. The successful operation of this group has been possible only because of the cooperation and constant devotion to duty displayed by you at all times. It has been necessary for ground personnel to labor for long hours under many difficulties and hardships in order to enable our combat crews to fly their missions. The combat crews have demonstrated great courage and professional ability in the accomplishment of their missions. The contribution of every man in every department has been essential to our effort.

At the time of his commendation letter, Colonel Thompson probably had flown fewer than ten combat missions. As commander of the entire group, he was not expected to fly as often as regular crewmen, but instead, to command and lead his organization effectively in both an aerial and ground environment. Shortly after the 448th entered combat, Thompson decided to fly at least one mission in every crew position in order to appreciate the specific problems normally encountered by each individual. On one such occasion, he flew in a waist gunner position on a particularly frigid day at flight altitude with rather painful results. The icy blast of air whipping through the

open waist window gave the colonel a mild case of frostbite around his neck and required several days of hospitalization.

With the end of March came another and easy mission, my 13th, to a Noball site off the coast of France. Another month of combat lay in the offing with absolutely no improved prospects for our survival. We were still not to the midway point of 15 missions in the combat tour, although no more than half the original crew complement now remained in the unit. There was nothing to rely upon except good fortune and blind luck in getting through the gauntlet to that far distant goal. But for some, time was fast running out in their quest for continued membership in the 448th as future events would soon affirm.

Chapter 3

The Mission That Failed

The fateful day had finally arrived – 1 April 1944, the most turbulent occasion thus far in the life of the 448th Bomb Group as an organization and that of 43 of its men in particular. When that day began in the early and cold hours of the morning no one could have had the slightest inkling that it was to be unique or significant. Coming events of the next eight to ten hours, however, would either etch this moment of time indelibly in the minds of those who survived or signal the termination of life itself for others not so fortunate.

In retrospect, an examination of the day's events would truly characterize the outcome as fateful. A series of human mistakes and failures had already been set in motion even before the mission became airborne, and these would continue inexorably through the period of execution. Reinforcing the sad results of the operation would be an unholy alliance of deteriorating weather and unfortunate mechanical failures.

By far one of the most unpleasant, though harmless, aspects of taking part in a combat mission was being awakened in the wee hours by the Charge of Quarters as he entered the hut, switched on the light and said «Lt. Knorr, your crew is flying this morning. Time to get up, sir. Briefing's at five o'clock.» Even though one usually knew in advance whether his crew had been selected to fly the next mission, we were never certain when the C.Q. would make his early rounds; and besides, there was always the possibility that the flight might be scrubbed due to bad weather. His abrupt entrance into the quarters, however, followed by the terse announcement provided the decisive

blow that dashed all such fondly-held hopes of prolonging the inevitable, and brought into sharp focus the distasteful realization that one had to crawl out of a warm bed and stagger out half asleep into the raw winter-like morning of almost total blackness.

On this morning of 1 April, the C.Q. had aroused us at 2:30 a.m. because the scheduled take-off time of today's flight was 6:30, one of the earliest departure times I had ever experienced. After a brisk walk to the Officer's Club for a shave and breakfast, we were then ready for boarding the shuttle bus, a G.I. truck, to the flight line.

The first order of business at the flight line was the general mission briefing given to the assembled officers and enlisted crew participants. This provided the first opportunity to learn the identity of today's objective together with all necessary flight planning information which had been accumulating throughout the night as the field order instructions from higher headquarters came in over the group's teletype equipment. Following the general briefing of some 20 minutes duration, the pilots, navigators, bombardiers, and enlisted personnel reassembled separately for further specialized briefings peculiar to their own required duties and skills. At the end of these sessions, the crews then began donning their flight clothing and equipment as the final act of preparations before going to the aircraft.

In the general briefing room behind the speaker's platform was a huge wall map of Europe that was impressive to say the least. The map's chief feature was its red areas depicting the enemy's latest flak defenses. The larger cities in Germany such as Berlin and Frankfurt were shown by immense red blobs indicating the strongest opposition points while lesser targets of value were covered by isolated red dots. For each mission to be flown, the route of attack to and from the target was also graphically displayed on the map by bright red tape. This was the first sight that everyone searched for upon entering the room to learn where they were going and what they could expect. Today it was to be the I.G. Farbenindustrie Chemical Works at Ludwigshaven, Germany, the same target that the group had tried unsuccessfully to eradicate on 30 December 1943, with loss of three bombers. This objective could be classified as well-defended although the 448th had flown against larger and more difficult targets than this on many occasions.

Our general briefing usually opened with a prayer from the chaplain. These were serious moments indeed as all heads were

lowered in deep reverence as they besought the Almighty for protection against their forthcoming engagement with death. Then followed the main points of the field order, including weather, flight assembly instructions, headings to and from the target, flak defenses, enemy aircraft to be expected, and many other items.

In terms of operational complexity, this mission could be classed as relatively simple to execute. After entering the enemy coast below Ostend, Belgium, we were to follow a southeastward heading, free of all large flak areas throughout the length of Belgium, to a point in Germany some 50 miles northeast of the city of Luxembourg (See Figure 1). From here we were to turn almost due east for 55 miles to the Initial Point, then southeast again for the bomb run over the target about 45 miles distant. After completing the bombing, a short left, followed by three right turns were to be executed to reform all wings into their original positions, after which the identical penetration path would be reversed to the northwest on the withdrawal leg. Bombs away were scheduled for 9:57 a.m. for the 448th, with the recrossing of the English coast to occur at 12:03 p.m.

Probably the most significant aspect of today's operation was the fact that the 448th Group was to be the division leader (and consequently the 20th CBW leader as well) with the group commander, Colonel Thompson, flying in the lead aircraft, which was a Pathfinder. It was announced at the briefing that Captains Minor Morgan and Robert Thornton, the former and current group staff navigators of the 448th, would also fly with Colonel Thompson, and the three officers had already departed earlier that morning for Hethel, the base where all B-24 Pathfinder crews and aircraft were stationed. The remainder of this lead crew would be filled out with Pathfinder personnel from Hethel who were specially trained in radar bombing and lead crew techniques.

Coincidentally, the Pathfinder crew selected to fly with Colonel Thompson and his two navigators had been charter members of the 448th until their reassignment some six weeks earlier for Pathfinder training. The leader of this special crew was none other than Lt. Alan Teague whose members had flown their first mission with us on 24 December and met with near disaster in a mid-air collision with another bomber. His crew was still intact as before, with officer members Jesse Hamby, the co-pilot, who had now become a special formation observer riding in the rear of the bomber; Bruce Vaughan,

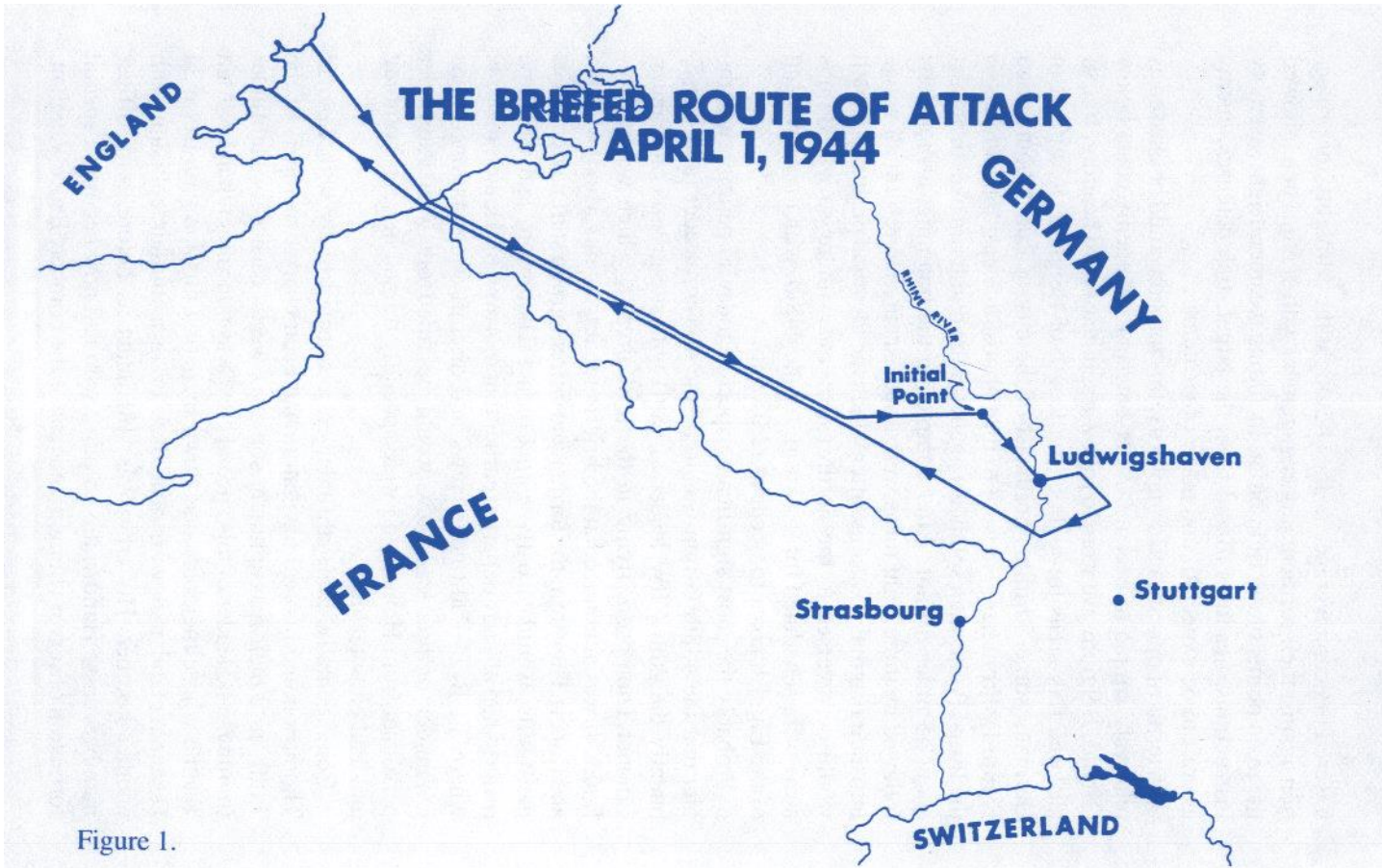

THE BRIEFED ROUTE OF ATTACK
APRIL 1, 1944
ENGLAND
GERMANY
FRANCE
SWITZERLAND
RHINE RIVER
Initial Point
Ludwigshaven
Strasbourg
Stuttgart

Figure 1.

the navigator (who was now trained as the «Mickey» or radar navigator); and John Brady, the bombardier.

As Air Commander of the B-24 division for today's operation, Colonel Thompson was officially charged while airborne with dispatch of all messages, maintaining contact with the fighter escort, maintaining the division's proper position with other attacking units, and command decisions relating to changes of routes, altitude, or position. The pilot flying alongside him in the opposite seat, Teague, was subject to his directions.

The selection of two navigators rather than one to fly with the lead plane was in accord with combat procedures which stipulated that there would be a Dead Reckoning navigator (abbreviated D.R.) and a Pilotage navigator; and further, that they were to be supplied from the same unit as the senior officer selected to command the combat wing. After the results of today's mission had been evaluated, this provision would be changed to require these two members to be integral parts of the Pathfinder crews, since it was a violation of maintaining crew integrity. In this instance, Captain Thornton was assigned the D.R. navigaton duties and was located on the flight deck of the specially-equipped Pathfinder, rather than in the nose of the plane. Captain Morgan was designated Pilotage navigator and situated in the nose turret where visibility was unrestricted.

The D.R. navigator was solely responsible for navigating the mission, while the Pilotage navigator's task was a subordinate one in assisting and verifying the dead reckoning computations whenever possible. The radar navigator's task was also subsidiary, but more specialized. He was situated alongside the D.R. navigator on the flight deck, and was responsible, among other things, for lining up the formation on the proper compass heading toward the target during overcast conditions.

Briefly, Dead Reckoning navigation determines the location of a ship or plane at any given point by computing the time elapsed to travel in specific compass headings multiplied by the speed of the craft. The strength and direction of the wind must also be determined at the altitude being flown for precise location accuracy. The calculated path being flown over the ground is then plotted on an aerial chart. This basic method of navigation can be done quite accurately without reference to the ground, provided the wind direction and velocity are known. Pilotage navigation, on the other hand, involves

continual reference to the ground below, and the identification of objects seen to their location on an aerial map, similar in design to a road map.

The navigation problem faced by bombers flying in large formations under severe combat conditions of World War II, similar to the bombing accuracy problem described previously, was not an easy one, especially during marginal weather conditions. The chief problem in achieving navigational accuracy was determining wind direction and velocity at flight altitudes, despite the more pressing need to vary altitude and direction of flight of the formation on a frequent basis in order to avoid heavy flak defenses and accommodate high- and low-flying groups in the formation when they encountered thick clouds that reduced visibility. When visibility thus became restricted, the tight box-like formations were exceedingly hazardous to maintain because of the danger of mid-air collisions. Difficult at times though navigation had been, it was our general feeling that morning that the combined talents of our lead navigators would be more than enough to solve any such problems on this flight.

The deputy division leader was assigned to Capt. Heber H. Thompson (no relation to the colonel), who was at that time a squadron commander in the 448th. He, along with his navigator, Lt. Arthur Klein, had also departed earlier that morning for Hethel to fly a Pathfinder alongside Colonel Thompson.

Only later in the bright light of inquiry by a board of officers convened by higher headquarters to determine the causes of this mission's failure would it be revealed that both Colonel and Captain Thompson and their navigators had arrived at Hethel too late that morning to take part in the briefing given to the Pathfinder lead crews with whom they were to fly. They had received only the general briefing of the flight at Seething and were only vaguely aware of the Pathfinder details of the mission.

Whether or not the outcome of events would have been altered substantially had they been in attendance for the special briefing is questionable; nevertheless, it was a breach of required procedures.

The bomb load of each aircraft of the group consisted of six 1,000-pound high-explosive bombs, and the number of gallons of fuel being carried was 2,300, or 400 gallons less than maximum. This amount was sufficient for the distance being flown today. A total of 24 bombers of the 448th was assigned for the flight, with estimated

Colonel Thompson and Squadron Leader Elder of the Royal Air Force exchange congratulations as Seething Airfield is formally turned over to the U.S. Army Air Forces. Looking to the left of Colonel Thompson is Col. Jack Wood, Commanding Officer of the 20th Combat Wing; February 1944.

flying time being six hours.

Within the 2nd Bombardment Division, all its eight B-24 groups were to participate against this target, for a total of 192 aircraft. In addition, four B-17 combat wings comprising 246 aircraft of the 3rd Bombardment Division were directed against the objective. Although these were impressive numbers, the number of bombers could have been increased much higher had it not been for the doubtful weather conditions expected over the continent. For protection of the entire bomber force, a total of 17 fighter groups were being dispatched to provide complete escort cover while over enemy territory.

The I.G. Farbenindustrie plant, the target for today, was the largest and most important manufacturer of wartime chemical products in Europe, and extended along the east bank of the Rhine River for a distance of three miles north of the twin cities of Mannheim and Ludwigshaven and for three-quarters of a mile from the river bank. In this unique location, it presented a readily identifiable target for Pathfinder bombing because of the contrasting land and water images it reflected on the radar scope. If, however, visual bombing conditions were found over the target, the visual method of sighting was then directed, because the location of the target offered even better recognition features than radar release procedures.

Early departure from the English coast was planned in order to reach the target area by mid-morning when cloud breaks were deemed most probable. The B-17 combat wings were to depart the English coast at 8:30 a.m., and to avoid congestion, the B-24 wings would depart ten minutes later and some 50 miles above the B-17 exit.

For the 448th, a 6:30 a.m. take-off was ordered to insure that the entire 2nd Bombardment Division would have sufficient time to form its three combat wings into their appropriate positions. Accordingly, the first Liberator promptly rolled down the runaway at Seething at 6:30, and the mission to Ludwigshaven had officially begun.

All 24 bombers of the 448th took to the air as planned, with the last one becoming airborne at 7:00 a.m. However, two developed mechanical trouble before the B-24 division departed the English coast, while a third had to turn back over the channel for similar reasons. Thus, only 21 bombers and two additional Pathfinders for a total of 23 were to constitute the strength of the lead group.

After take-off, the group was directed to form over Buncher Beacon #7 at 17,000 feet altitude, and be joined by the lead and

deputy lead Pathfinders who had also taken off on schedule from Hethel at 6:34 a.m. Our climb to altitude was made without incident. We were in partial clouds until reaching 5,000 feet, and from that point upward there was no visibility problem created by the weather. It was, of course, quite dark at this early hour, and as we slowly climbed through the morning murkiness, we were again looking for the familiar checkerboard aircraft with its identifying double green flares.

On each of my previous missions, I had never ceased to be filled with awe and consternation by the eerie sight of apparent disarray that greeted us upon reaching assembly altitude over the buncher beacon. In the faint glimmer of dawn, innumerable black shapes, some in singles, pairs, and larger congregations in the more advanced stages of forming up, could be seen hurtling through the sky flying a huge circular treadmill in frantic searches to find and link up with their own kin. Occasionally, one of the black hulks, upon seeing his own mother hen off in the distance, would dart by alarmingly close in an inside short-cutting pattern against the circular line of flight which required the ultimate in alertness and response from the pilots to avoid colliding.

To further heighten the eerie effects of this armada in the making were the brilliant multicolored flares to be seen routinely cascading out of the several group assembly bombers at 30 second intervals. Off in the distance was an assembly aircraft in its embryonic formation stage with three B-24s tucked in close behind, but it wasn't ours and the search for the checkerboard continued.

The wonder of it all was that any kind of order could ever be brought out of this jumble of giant airplanes whirling around in the dark sky. It was only apparent confusion to the observer, however, since a bomb group under these ideal conditions of visibility could normally achieve its required formation of planes in less than an hour after the last one had taken to the air. Following group assembly, the combat wing was then joined together in the directed battle order, followed later by the division alignment.

After a few more turns around the buncher beacon, we found the checkerboard and nudged into our appointed position for the final assembly. The group's last aircraft to join the formation was completed at 8:00 a.m. including the two Pathfinder leaders. At this time the outside air temperature was reading minus eight degrees Fahren-

Shown here is the Commanding General of the 2nd Bombardment Division, Brig. Gen. James P. Hodges, as well as the principal members of his staff, and the commanders of the combat wings and groups. General Hodges is shown seated third from left. Colonel Thompson is shown standing, fifth from the left; February 1944.

heit, which was relatively comfortable with the warmth provided by the electric suits.

Today we were flying our own ship, *The Crud Wagon*, which had always been regarded as our property. It was particularly fitting for this occasion because it was to mark the last such flight for both aircraft and crew. This mission for the *Wagon* was its 27th, and the wear and tear of combat flying was beginning to be noticeable in her flying characteristics. She was now not quite so responsive at the controls, having been patched up many times from numerous flak holes, and was earning her name more than at any other time. Even worse, however, was her acquired taste for increased fuel consumption.

An interesting sidelight of today's mission was the fact that one of our members, Sgt. William Quigley the aerial engineer and top turret gunner, had been taken off this flight because of a minor illness, and his position filled with a substitute whose name was Clarence Campbell. We were never to meet Quigley again after today, and he has undoubtedly believed throughout the years, and with good cause, that fate was most kind to him by denying his presence with us on that key date. He went on to complete his combat tour with another crew and was later returned to the U.S.

Moving on down the coast, two of the division's three combat wings were finally in position, and Colonel Thompson departed Ordforness, England, which was the B-24 exit point, at 8:47 a.m., or seven minutes behind schedule. The missing 14th CBW was late in forming but joined the division between the other two wings some 100 miles inside enemy territory. The line-up was then as follows: the 20th CBW composed of the 448th Group in center and leading, followed by the 93rd Group about 1,000 feet below on the left and the 446th about 1,000 feet higher on the right; the 14th CBW spaced three minutes behind the 20th CBW with its 392nd Group in center and leading and the 44th Group flying high to the right; the 2nd CBW in the rear of the division and consisting of the 453rd in center and leading followed by the 389th on low left and the 445th on the high right.

One of the first deviations to the plan of attack occured by the abandonment of the mission by the B-17s soon after penetration of the enemy coast. High clouds over the channel compelled this leading force to descend to lower altitudes rather than climb according to

plan, and even then poor visibility caused the formations to begin dispersing as combat wings and in some cases groups within combat wings were unable to maintain visual contact.

This substantial depletion in the number of attacking bombers, however, had no effect upon the capability of this mission to be carried out successfully, since the entire second force of 192 Liberators was still more than enough to destroy our objective if favorable circumstances permitted. In fact, we actually gained an advantage from a defensive viewpoint by the allocation of all the fighter escorts to the B-24 force rather than sharing them between two bomb divisions.

Though the 2nd Bombardment Division elected not to turn back as had the 3rd Division, we were not immune to the weather. In fact, one of the groups of the leading 20th CBW, the 446th, also withdrew after entering the enemy coast at 9:21 a.m. and returned to base. It will be recalled that this group was positioned in the high right slot approximately 1,000 feet above and to the rear of the 448th which was leading. In this position the 446th began encountering cloud layers that forced its aircraft to loosen the formation because of restricted visibility. A request was then made to the division leader Colonel Thompson, to lower the altitude by 1,000 feet, to which he immediately responded. This altitude change, however, did not offer the promised relief to the high group as the force moved across the English Channel to Belgium. The 446th kept dispersing to the point that its formation was no longer a single entity, and finally when no relief from the poor visibility appeared possible, the group leader withdrew.

Meanwhile, the 448th, accompanied by the 93rd Bomb Group flying low left within the 20th Combat Wing, continued ahead, though not without occasional difficulty from the elements. From this point onward, the weather began to improve somewhat, but the planned execution of the mission now began to deteriorate greatly.

The recorded events of this ill-fated flight as seen through the eyes of the various group participants presented a confusing array of claims and counterclaims. While each of the groups' mission reports contained elements of face-saving and blame shifting to avoid the dire consequences of a thorough inquiry certain to be made by higher authority, the reports were, in fairness to all, written from a unilateral viewpoint. That is, each group reported and interpreted the results of

A typical scene in the lives of maintenance flight line crewmen whose never-ending work on the bombers was conducted out in the open and exposed to the changing and often harsh English weather. In this stark winter setting can be seen two men on the left engaged in repairing a part, while three other crewmen in the rear are discussing their current tasks. On the right is a worker warming his hands over a mobile heater, while behind him are three fellow workers engaged in an engine repair project. Note the tattered tarpaulin draped over the front of the aircraft to provide protection from a biting wind. (Courtesy of George Dupont, 448th B.G.)

the mission from its own relative position and was not permitted to compare the day's action with any of the other groups. This was the responsibility of the commander of the 2nd Bombardment Division in his regular mission critiques held with the wing commanders. His critique of this mission was duly made as well as the referred-to inquiry by Eighth Air Force Headquarters into the conduct of this flight, which eventually resulted in radically-changed operating procedures. This aspect of the narrative, however, is reserved for a later chapter. What follows, therefore, is an attempt to provide the truest interpretation of all facts known and in the order they occured with relation to this bombing mission.

Despite the abandonment of the mission by a sizable number of attacking planes, including the entire number of 246 B-17s and the 446th Bomb Group, the mission still had enough participants to insure success. The first really serious problem to occur, which eventually led to disastrous results, involved the inability of the 93rd Group to maintain its position behind the leading 448th as both units departed the English coast and began their climb to the required altitude of 21,000 feet.

The 93rd reported that it had to increase its air speed from the normal 155 m.p.h. to 165 and 170, and even at times to 185 just to maintain its position. It was not until the Belgian coast was reached that the 93rd finally caught up with the lead group. Even then, so it claimed, it was able to retain its position only by an air speed of 190 m.p.h. Such a high rate was simply too much for the 93rd's second section of nine bombers, which soon became separated and joined other groups.

These facts were not substantiated by the mission report of the 448th, but on the other hand couldn't be denied as wholly untrue. The reason for the difference in relative air speeds was attributed to the wind factor, which is normally swifter at higher attitudes. Since the 448th flew about 1,000 feet above and ahead of the 93rd the wind velocity at the higher level accounted for the greater air speed required of the lower group to maintain proper spacing. This same phenomenon was encountered within the last combat wing by the 445th group. That unit was placed in the high right echelon and kept running ahead of its own lead group. When slower speeds were attempted, the planes of the 445th formation began stalling out. It was at this time that the group leader of the 445th descended to the same

altitude as the leading group element, and the problem was then solved. Unfortunately, this solution was not attempted by the 448th and 93rd groups.

But the difference in air speeds was not the major deviation from plan to occupy Colonel Thompson's attention that day. His most pressing and continuing problem upon entering the enemy coast over Belgium was navigation accuracy. Although our group entered the briefed point on the coast, the lead plane took up nearly a due south heading about 25 miles inland, which constituted the most serious navigational error to occur within the 448th. As we turned south, the formation was soon greeted near the town of Roubaix by some accurate, though moderate, amounts of flak. We were in it for only a brief moment but its effects were to be substantial to the successful outcome of the mission.

Lt. Alan Teague remembered very vividly that a burst of flak exploded rather close under his right wing. The plane gave a noticeable upward surge on the affected side, but no damage could be detected upon closer visual inspection. That burst of flak, however, knocked out Bruce Vaughan's radar equipment. Not realizing at the time that the malfunction of the set was caused by flak, Vaughan continued frantically trying to locate and eliminate the difficulty. Finally, after an hour or so he gave up in desperation and resigned himself to this misfortune. His participation in the remainder of the mission was now at an end. The D.R. and pilotage navigators could no longer depend upon his assistance for any aid. Another bomber in the formation flown by Lt. Jack Black was also damaged in this barrage, but he maintained position until almost the end of the withdrawal leg. His case will be described later.

The D.R. navigator, Captain Thornton, believing he had entered the enemy coast too far north, had simply made a costly error in turning south, which unfortunately was not to be rectified throughout the flight. The faulty heading was maintained for about 30 miles, at which point he directed a more southeast direction to be flown. This decision, however, only partially paralleled the originally-briefed route and did nothing to amend the first mistake. On the contrary, it continued to increase our actual distance from Ludwigshaven with the passage of time.

Here a few words are in order to describe the navigator's problem of determining accurate wind direction and velocity, which played such

Hands, eager to support a wounded gunner as he is removed from the plane to an ambulance through the waist window. *Bag of Bolts* took an awesome lacing from the Germans that day in February, but dropped its bombs on the target and came to a safe landing on its home field with more than 400 flak and bullet holes, and one engine ablaze. The pilot, Harvey Broxton, was awarded the Distinguished Flying cross for his heroism and flying skills.

a key role in the outcome of this operation. The briefed plan of attack contained many items of useful information, including the latest weather forecast of winds to be encountered enroute, over the target, and on the return route homeward. For example, from 18,000 to 22,000 feet, the winds were estimated to be blowing from a north-westerly direction at speeds ranging from 45 to 60 m.p.h. Since these were only estimations, it was the navigator's task to determine the exact wind information for precision Dead Reckoning navigation.

Most of the navigators on this flight experienced great difficulty in computing accurate wind direction and velocity, due to the hazy weather conditions on the ground and in the air, which in turn forced the formations to vary their flight altitudes at frequent intervals.

Granting that the navigators' jobs were greatly complicated by poor visibility over most of this mission, it was a recognized fact that the general direction of the winds over Europe could be relied upon with some degree of confidence. What was so uncertain on this occasion, however, was the velocity of the winds which later proved to be about 50 m.p.h. or more greater than forecasted. In the instance of the faulty route taken initially by the 448th, which placed it far south of the intended path, the direction of the air current was not a contributing factor since it was almost a direct tail wind to the required line of flight.

The 448th at 9:44 a.m. now reached what it believed to be that point on the briefed route requiring a change of direction from southeast to due east. This turn was made by both the 448th and 93rd Groups, but the 14th CBW following next in trail thought the lead combat wing was premature in turning and continued on for «three or four minutes» before making its own swing eastward. The last CBW, the 2nd, also turned at the same point as the 14th. Thus, the division formation now showed the 20th CBW to the left and much farther ahead of the other wing elements. Thanks to the high-speed tail wind, however, and the fact that the lead group had taken the faulty southern heading for the first 30 miles after entering the enemy coast, the entire division was now at least 100 miles farther south and west of the target than estimated or planned.

Soon after the division made its turn to the east, the other groups heard Colonel Thompson announce to his deputy leader that his Pathfinder equipment had become inoperative. The deputy leader responded by saying that his own was also out. The same message

was also repeated by the 2nd CBW.

Now only the 14th CBW had any radar bombing equipment that was still functioning, and since it was the next wing behind the 20th, its lead group, the 392nd, stated in its mission report that «it was now the division leader.» This remark was verified in the report of the 44th Bomb Group, the remaining unit of the 14th CBW.

Just what was the significance of this remark by the 392nd that it was now the Division leader? Insofar as a physical shift of divisional units was concerned, nothing of the sort occured. The leading 448th continued ahead on its easterly heading, accompanied by the 93rd Group in an oblivious manner. The real significance of this declaration was an affirmation by the 392nd flight leader that he was leaving the division formation because of his belief that his unit was better able to locate and destroy today's target. The disintegration of air discipline and effective leadership of the Liberator force was now about to commence in a complete fashion.

The 14th CBW, followed by the trailing 2nd CBW, finally arrived at the Initial Point, or rather what it believed to be the I.R, at 10:15 a.m. and turned to a southeast heading. This was the crucial spot over a pre-selected position on the ground from which the actual bomb run to the target began, and consequently was usually vital to the successful outcome of an attack. Failure to position the formation at the I.R and in the correct directional heading meant that in the case of either a radar or visual sighting operation, the bombardier or radar navigator ran the risk of approaching his target, which he had probably never seen, from another heading where recognizable landmarks and other prominent features appeared out of perspective to the layouts shown to him earlier in the special target briefings. Under such circumstances, the chances were increased that he would either fail to locate or identify his objective or aim at something on the ground which simply resembled but in fact was not the target. In this instance, however, the heading of attack from the I.R was taken as planned; the problem, of course, was simply that the real I.R was approximately 60 miles northward.

Upon turning southeast over the I.R, the 392nd Group announced to all aircraft of the 14th and 2nd CBWs that a Pathfinder run would be attempted. Bomb bay doors opened at the leader's signal, and the two combat wings commenced their bomb runs. Before describing the outcome of this phase of the attack, it is now necessary to return to

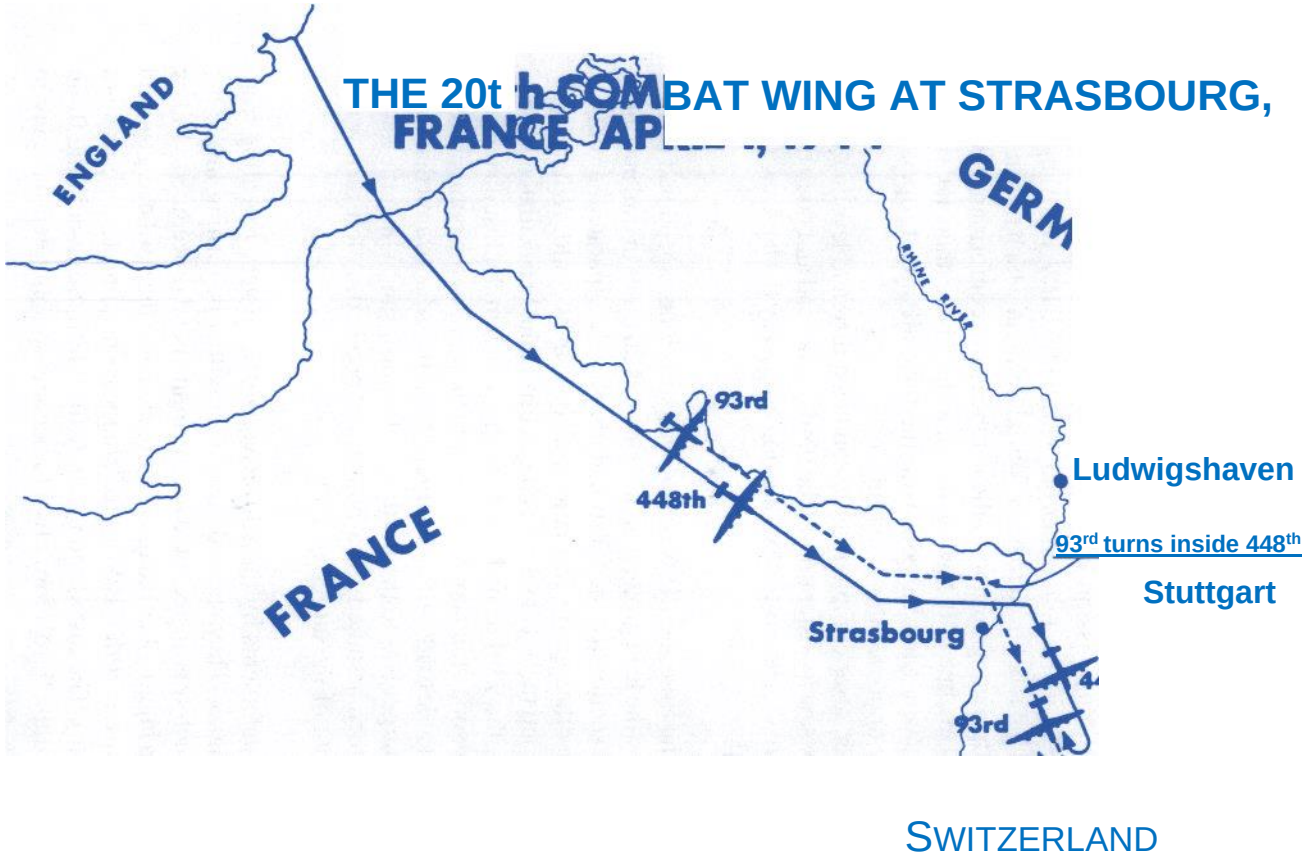

THE 20th COMBAT WING AT STRASBOURG,
FRANCE AP
ENGLAND
GERM
RHINE RIVER
93rd
448th
Ludwigshaven
93rd turns inside 448th
Stuttgart
FRANCE
Strasbourg
93rd
SWITZERLAND

Figure 2.

the 20th CBW and follow its progress in trying to execute the orders of the day.

It will be recalled that after the division turned eastward, its configuration showed the leading 20th CBW to the left and even farther ahead of the other two wings, since they had waited three to four minutes before reaching their computed turning point to the east. Despite his inoperative Pathfinder equipment in both the lead and deputy lead aircraft, Colonel Thompson was still determined to accomplish this mission in his own fashion as he flew ahead.

At 10:02 a.m. (or 13 minutes before the 14th CBW's turn) the 448th reached what it believed to be the Initial Point, at which time it and the 93rd Group swung around to the southeast, in conformance with the briefed plan, but still having no idea they were then far south of Ludwigshaven. Simultaneous with the turn, all aircraft opened their bomb bay doors for this bombing run.

However, after completing the southeast turn and leveling off, the 448th now saw its sister group, the 93rd in the lead and far to the right (See Figure 2). Here is the explanation offered by the lead navigator of that group:

> By the time the I.P was reached, such a fast speed had been taken by the lead group that the 93rd was 20 miles in trail and the second section [of the 93rd] had completely separated, aircraft joining other group formations as best they could. When the lead group turned at what had been erroneously calculated to be the I.P, the 93rd turned inside of them to gain the lost distance. Because of a cloud cover of between 6/io and 7/io, the bombardier was not able to identify the target. It was then discovered that the actual target was to the north. On the north run, which the lead group then assumed, Strasbourg was bombed. A left turn was made out of the target area.

These statements by the 93rd navigator were very revealing from several angles. They showed conclusively that by turning inside the 448th (which was an accepted and recommended procedure to follow by a group lagging behind the leading element) the 93rd had assumed the lead of the 20th CBW on the southeast heading (which was not permissible). The fast speed taken by the 448th throughout the flight had caused the 93rd's formation to become so splintered in trying to

keep up that four of its bombers had actually joined the 448th soon after the southeast turn. Also, particular emphasis was stressed in the navigator's report that the 448th had assumed its rightful leadership after turning back to the north. A complete examination of events that occurred between both groups could not substantiate this later claim; in fact they repudiated it.

There was now growing concern by all group leaders in the division that this mission was rapidly getting out of hand because the planned time of attack was running far behind schedule. The situation within the lead bomber of the 448th since entering the enemy coast had grown steadily chaotic and more confused. At no time could either Thornton or Morgan locate themselves positively, due to a combination of incorrect navigation and marginal weather conditions that denied them adequate sight of the ground. Colonel Thompson was preoccupied with the radio set most of the time, which involved sending and receiving various command messages. At no time did he have any knowledge of his exact location, and was of marginal assistance to Teague in performing normal co-pilot functions.

When the division leader turned southeast at 10:02 a.m. and started on his supposed bomb run, the other two combat wings, led by the 14th, again did not follow the 20th CBW but continued several minutes before they too swung to the southeast. On this leg of the journey, the hazy weather at our flight altitude began to disappear, leaving only broken clouds at the lower levels to prevent observation of the terrain. Ahead in the distance could be seen very distinctly a line of snow-covered mountains, the Alps. Teague's bombardier, John Brady, could see nothing that was faintly recognizable to him through the clouds.

Suddenly, Captain Morgan spoke up on the interphone: «Pilotage navigator to pilot, over. « Since this period was the crucial time of the bomb run that was being executed, it was imperative that no communications be conducted except between the bombardier and pilot in maneuvering the plane over the precise spot for bomb release.

Teague was therefore noticably irritated over this apparent violation of procedure at such a critical point and replied to the voice very sharply: «For Christ's sake, Morgan, what do you want?» Believing this was Colonel Thompson's voice, and in an obviously annoyed state, Morgan thought better of trying to intercede further and remained silent.

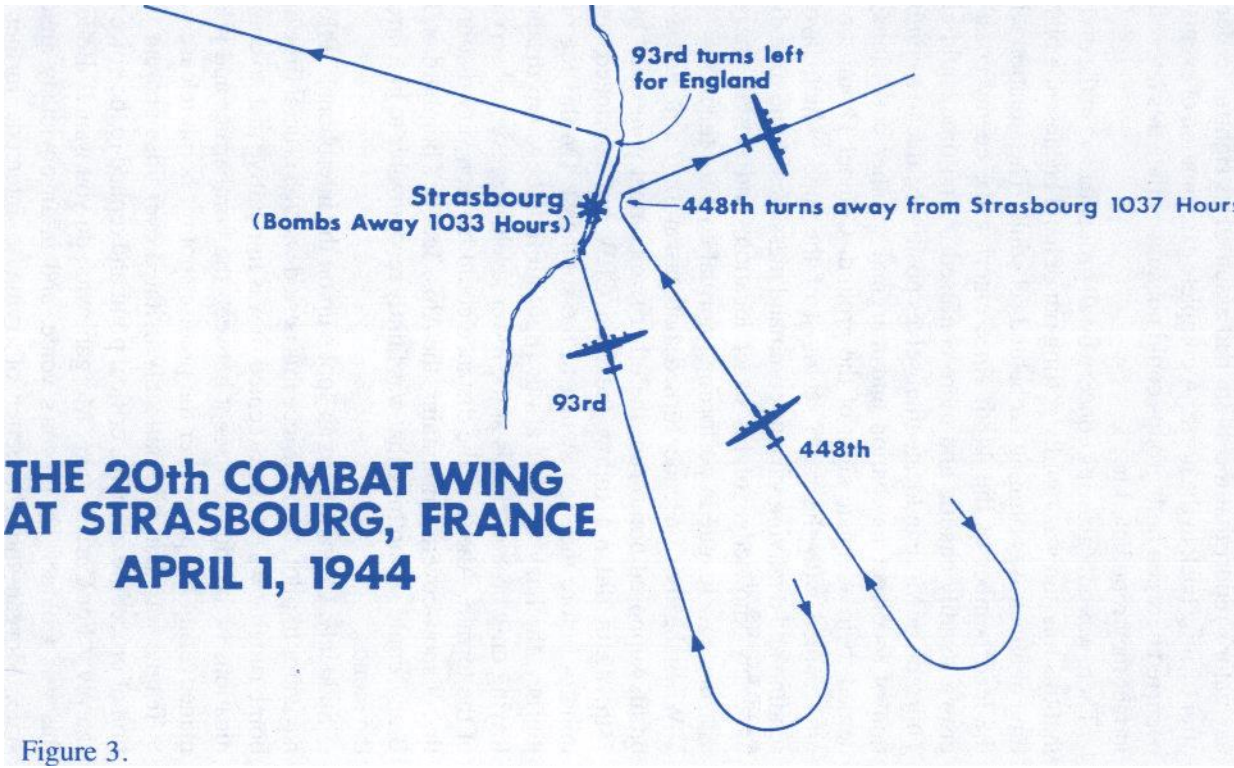

93rd turns left
for England
Strasbourg
(Bombs Away 1033 Hours)
448th turns away from Strasbourg 1037 Hours
93rd
448th
THE 20th COMBAT WING
AT STRASBOURG, FRANCE
APRIL 1, 1944

Figure 3.

After proceeding on the southeast heading for more than 15 minutes and seeing nothing that resembled the target, Teague began to indicate to Thompson that the force had obviously missed its objective because the length of time to fly from the I.P to the target had now elapsed. The division leader responded with several remarks that had no immediate bearing on the critical problem now facing the bombers, and made no move to reverse direction of the force.

Finally Captain Morgan again spoke over the interphone: «I think I saw the target go by on the right.» This remark was made fully ten minutes after he had initially tried to relay this information to the pilots. It was later learned that he had in fact seen a large town to his right, but had been discouraged by the irritated voice that greeted his attempt to convey it to Colonel Thompson. The town was probably Strasbourg.

When Teague could get no positive response from Thompson after several discussions, he began on his own volition a turn of the formation at 10:22 a.m. in the opposite direction. The division commander made no physical or verbal protestation to this act. Although the exact time that the 93rd Group also executed this turn cannot be verified, it appeared from events soon to follow that they had already reversed direction.

I recall this leg of the mission very vividly as we flew north. The sunlight streaming through the sky offered the best visibility of the entire day, and features on the ground could be made out distinctly. Then after we flew about ten minutes in this new direction, a sizable city loomed ahead of us. It had all the characteristics of Ludwigshaven, and was located on a large river. As we drew to within a few miles of it, I coud see a large, dirty, black layer of barrage-type flak hanging overhead at our approximate altitude, and enveloped within the black cloud was an aircraft in flames heading downward in a death spiral. It was an ominous sight to behold, especially when one realized that his own turn had now arrived to cross this heavily-defended area (See Figure 3).

At the last instant, and without any warning whatever, the 448th leader veered away abruptly to the right and started a northeast heading. This turn was recorded at 10:37 a.m. by the deputy lead navigator, Lt. Arthur Klein, and with it the bomb bay doors closed on the lead bomber, signaling termination of this run.

During the long intervening years following this unfortunate mis-

sion, I had been under the mistaken impression that this town was Ludwigshaven and Colonel Thompson had simply avoided bombing it because of the grim evidence of its defenses that appeared before us that day. I now know that the town was not avoided due to any apparent cowardice or weakness on Thompson's part, and certainly not because he or anyone else in the lead aircraft at that moment correctly identified this locality as Strasbourg, France. The deputy lead navigator, however, did indicate in his narrative report of the mission that this city was Strasbourg, but the information was not given to Thompson.

The real reason for the abrupt change of direction of the formation was a verbal message communicated from the leader of the 2nd CBW to Colonel Thompson at 10:34 a.m. asking if his equipment was working, and advising the leader that he was off course. The 2nd CBW leader had difficulty in receiving Thompson's reply, but at that moment made an extremely grave decision to leave that part of the division formation consisting of the 14th and 2nd CBWs. He again called Thompson and advised that he had now turned around from the faulty southeast heading being taken by the 14th CBW leader and had started north. Thompson was also invited to follow if desired. The division leader promptly answered that he would do so at 10:37 a.m. when the 448th turned away rather than bomb this objective.

The gravity of a combat wing leader's decision to leave the division formation can be appreciated by a reading of the regulation of the 2nd Bombardment Division covering such an eventuality:

> The combat wing integrity must be maintained at all costs. The integrity of division formation should be maintained unless the leader of a trailing combat wing believes that the action of the leader jeopardizes the success of the mission, and believes that his own formation can reach and successfully bomb the target. In such event a combat leader may make a decision in the air to leave the division formation and proceed to the target alone.

Strasbourg is located some 65 miles southeast of Ludwigshaven, and the force that had bombed it by mistake because of navigational errors was the 93rd Bomb Group. Its mission leader reported facts concerning this bombing that did not agree with the experience of the 448th just described. Here are the words of the 93rd Group leader:

> A course due south was then taken [from the assumed Initial Point] then a 180 degree turn was made north. A city with heavy flak defenses was crossed by the lead group [the 448th] and it was thought that they had bombed, so the 93rd went into the area selecting the power house and factories as the target. After the bombs were released a left turn was taken, presuming the lead group, having turned right, would make a 360 degree turn as briefed. They didn't, and so the 93rd took a course back to base.

The official time of bombs away was also indicated by the 93rd as being 10:33 a.m. Final results of this bombing revealed that most of the 68 tons of high explosives dropped on Strasbourg appeared to have fallen five miles west of the city, but there were at least 24 bursts noted on and adjacent to a railway line running through a residential area south of the center of the city.

Thus, the mistaken bombing of Strasbourg was laid partially at the door of the 448th. However, not only had my own organization not gone over Strasbourg, but it had actually turned away from it at 10:37, or four minutes behind the group that bombed the city.

Upon turning left after bombing, the 93rd flew home alone, making landfall over the English coast 50 minutes before any other group. It lost two aircraft on the mission and another crashed on landing. In addressing the disparity of facts reported by this unit surrounding its attack on Strasbourg, some of the discrepancy probably lies with the final combat wing which passed over this town on its way to the I.R several minutes before either the 448th or 93rd arrived upon the scene from the south. The most likely candidates were the 453rd and 445th Bomb Groups, whose flight logs indicated they encountered flak over this area at 10:13 and 10:20 respectively. The residual smoke effects of this gunfire probably could still have been present when the 93rd made its bombing run over the town some 13 minutes later at 10:33 a.m. and may have caused that unit to have concluded erroneously that this was the fire drawn by the 448th.

After turning away from Strasbourg and taking up a heading toward the northeast, Colonel Thompson, now firmly convinced of his own crew's inability to locate its position, and realizing that the excessive time already expended over enemy territory was now becoming the critical factor of all bombers to reach the English coast with dwindling fuel-reserves, directed his deputy leader, Capt. Heber

Thompson, to take over the lead. The junior officer quickly acknowledged, and after receiving confirmation from his navigator that the force was indeed over Germany, instructed his bombardier to try to pick out a target of opportunity. During this short interval, the 448th, now the only remaining element of the 20th CBW, was maintaining the same northeasterly heading to try to intercept the 2nd CBW that had broken away from the leading 14th CBW's southerly path. Then at 10:55 a.m. the 448th made physical contact with the 2nd, whose commander immediately placed his wing behind the division leader.

Captain Thompson's bombardier soon located his target of opportunity and prepared to bomb. His mission report reads as follows: «He picked up a town immediately and I decided to bomb visually. Bombs were away at 11:04. Approximately ten minutes later the navigator picked up a check point and we set course for the enemy coast, followed by the other CBWs.»

This town, it was learned after returning to base that afternoon, was Pforzheim, Germany, located 15 miles northwest of Stuttgart. A total of 141 tons of high explosive and 128 tons of incendiary bombs were dropped by the 448th and the entire 2nd Combat Wing. Photographs showed two groups of scattered bursts in a business and residential district in the southern part of the city, with at least three large fires (See Figure 4).

The bombing of Pforzheim provided a classic example of an attack upon a target of opportunity. Later information confirmed that it contained nothing of high military value, and apparently lacked anti-aircraft defenses since none of the attacking units received any fire during their bomb runs. As our bomb bay doors opened in preparation for the run, I could see the probable objective selected for attack far ahead in the distance. It was a small town and looked very innocent in its surroundings below. The only contributions to be served by such bombings were the shock effects they produced on the German populace as a whole, by imparting the certain knowledge that neither their large urban areas nor small agrarian communities were immune to destruction.

As the bombs went out, I leaned far over the side of my seat to observe the explosions, but was unable to get any view because the plane had traveled too far ahead at the time of impact. With release of this weight of our combat load, the plane's fuel consumption could now be reduced considerably for the return leg to England. Had the

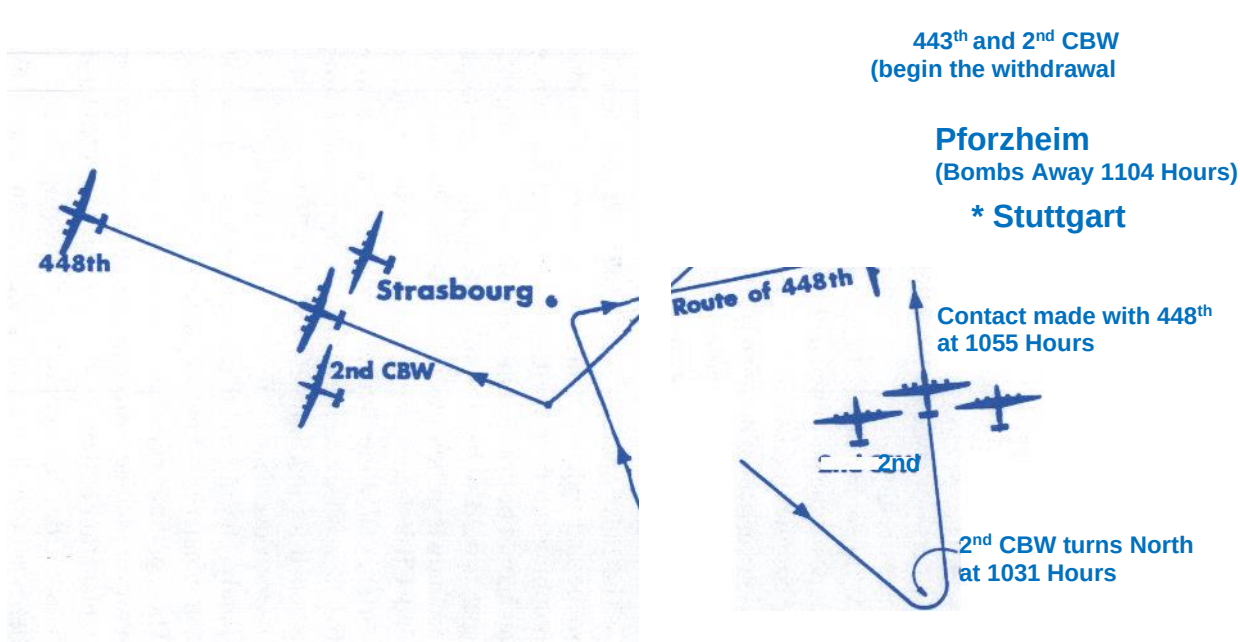

BOMBING OF PFORZHEIM
GERMANY APRIL 1, 1944
Ludwigshaven
443th and 2nd CBW
(begin the withdrawal
Pforzheim
(Bombs Away 1104 Hours)
* Stuttgart
448th
Strasbourg
2nd CBW
Route of 448th
Contact made with 448th
at 1055 Hours
2nd
2nd CBW turns North
at 1031 Hours

Figure 4.

448th leader realized the extreme gravity of the group's fuel situation at that moment, it may have given him greater cause for alarm than any other event occuring thus far, and conceivably could have saved several bombers. Had the group reduced its air speed homeward by only a few miles per hour at lower altitudes, it may well have spelled the difference for some fuel-starved Liberators. Needless to say, such courses of action were not followed for the return leg.

Captain Thompson's remark quoted above with respect to the 448th setting a course for home followed by the other CBWs was incorrect. The 14th CBW was to lead the withdrawal at some distance ahead of the others, followed by the 448th in the center and the 2nd CBW ten minutes behind.

At this point the final outcome of events befalling the 14th CBW resumes at the point where it broke away from the division formation and commenced its run from its calculated Initial Point to the target. Following behind before its own breakaway from the 14th was the 2nd CBW which had decided to release its bombs upon coming abreast of the flare indicators to be dropped by the leading element. The 392nd Group then took over in preparation for a radar sighting.

The radar operator shortly advised that he had the target in his scope and requested interphone silence. The length of the briefed bombing run from the I.P to the target was approximately 45 miles and could be covered in about 12 minutes with the estimated ground speeds used. When the calculated time to the target expired and still no Ludwigshaven was to be seen either visually or in the scope, the 2nd CBW leader at this point became suspicious, and as related earlier, called the division leader, Colonel Thompson, advising him that he was leaving the 14th CBW formation to proceed northward for a hoped-for link-up with the 20th CBW.

Upon overhearing this information, the 14th CBW leader immediately checked with his Pathfinder operator, who reassured the commander that his equipment was still operating and all was well. The bombing run was allowed to continue. A few minutes later, however, the radar steering corrections became very violent, with an explanation offered by the operator to his leader that the image was fading from his scope. Upon hearing this disturbing news, and believing that the recent advice from the 2nd CBW was correct after all, the 14th CBW commander made a left circular turn which placed him on a westerly heading with the intent of getting behind the now-

departed 2nd CBW and bombing on his flares. However, on completing the turn, which was made south of the town of Friedrichshaven, Germany and over Switzerland, the 2nd CBW was nowhere to be seen, so the 14th CBW continued on the new westerly heading for another five minutes.

For the third time, the Pathfinder operator informed the leader of the 14th CBW that he had the target in his scope, which somehow despite the previous disappointments, persuaded the commander to allow another bomb run. During this entire period, the 44th Group had trailed along with the leading 392nd group, and again was informed of the latest decision to make another run.

After a period of about seven or eight minutes, the corrections again became very large, following which the Pathfinder operator belatedly advised that the image had faded from the scope. At this time, there were a few breaks in the clouds below, and the commander asked the bombardier if he could pick up a target visually in his bombsight.

Upon replying that he could do so, the bombardier was directed to proceed on a visual run. This incredible account of the 392nd Group then concludes rather abruptly with more questions raised in the minds of readers than answered. The final portion reads as follows:

> He [the bombardier] attempted to make a visual run, but had a pre-release of his bombs, and the 392nd dropped on him. The leader of the 44th Group had been called on VHF [radio] and told of our decision to make a visual run. Since the 392nd leader had been assured by the Pathfinder operator that he had identified the target and had it in his scope, this was considered sufficient identification of the target to allow the bombardier to make the visual run. As it turned out, this was not the case (See Figure 5).

The above remark pertaining to a pre-release of bombs deserves further clarification. Earlier in the mission it was discovered that the bomb bay doors of the 392nd lead plane would not open completely, and under such conditions the bombs could not be released through a normal bombsight sighting. In order to correct this malfunction, the top turret gunner had removed the bomb bay door safety pins to permit a proper release by the bombardier. However, upon removal of

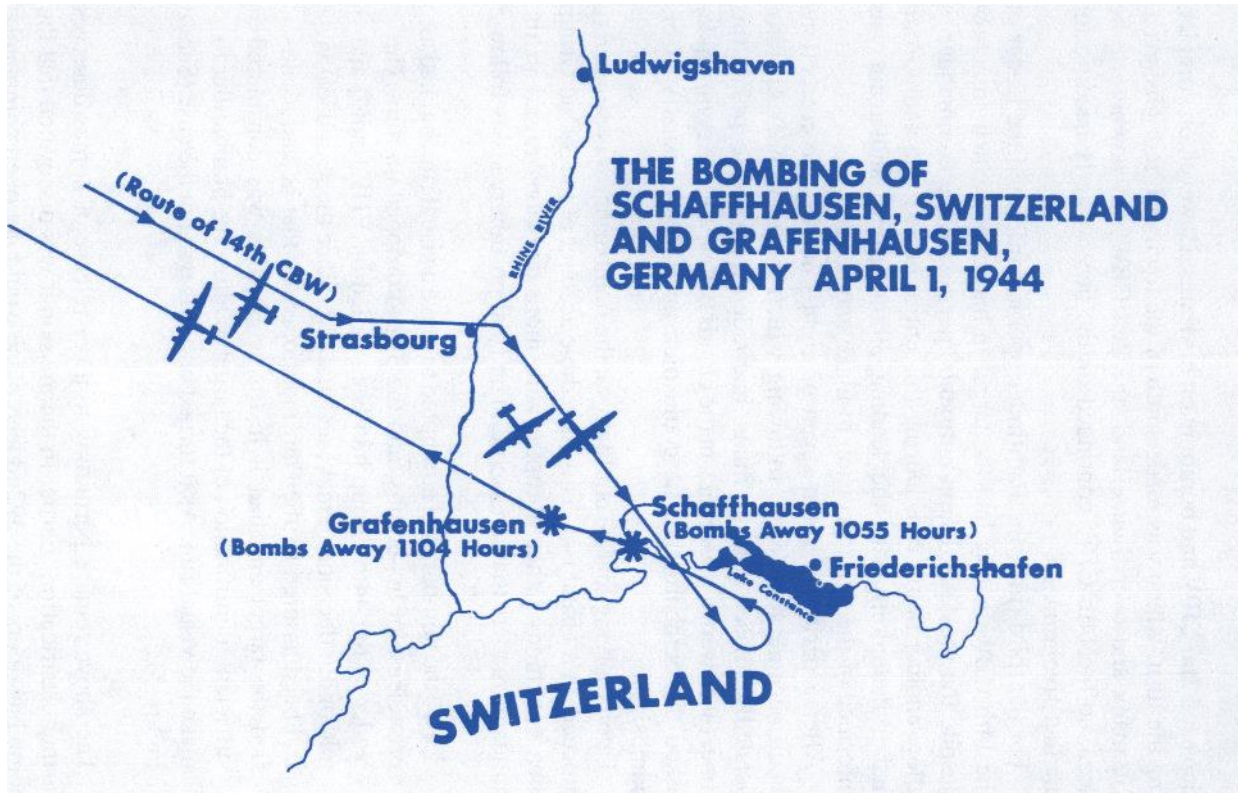

Ludwigshaven
THE BOMBING OF
SCHAFFHAUSEN, SWITZERLAND
AND GRAFENHAUSEN,
GERMANY APRIL 1, 1944
(Route of 14th CBW)
RHINE RIVER
Strasbourg
Schaffhausen
(Bombs Away 1055 Hours)
Grafenhausen
(Bombs Away 1104 Hours)
Friederichshafen
Lake Constance
SWITZERLAND

Figure 5.

the pins, which served as a safety device against pre-releases, the possibilities of such an eventuality were greatly increased. The exact cause of the pre-release was never explained, but in this instance the disastrous chain of human and mechanical failure characterizing today's events were finally reversed to the positive side. Because of this pre-release, most of the bombs were dropped short of the town into a field. Had they fallen onto the aiming point, the casualities and resulting physical destruction would have been far greater.

This unfortunate attack was made in a northwest direction on a city at 10:50 a.m. Following close behind the 392nd was the 44th Group, whose first section of 17 bombers also made a visual run on the same town, same heading, with bombs dropping at 10:55 a.m. This segment of aircraft along with the entire 392nd Group was likewise unaware of its navigational position and that both units had bombed Switzerland.

Trailing behind the leading element of the 44th was its second section composed of nine bombers. The navigator of the lead aircraft, Lt. A.N. Williams, not only had witnessed the erroneous bombing, but moreover, positively knew the flight's location was over Switzerland. He quickly notified his pilot of the information, and as a result, this section of the 44th withheld its bombs, which if dropped would have added another 108 high-explosive and 358 incendiary bombs down upon this neutral country. Lieutenant Williams was the only navigator within the entire division who possessed an aerial map of this part of Europe, which enabled him to recognize the Swiss topography. The nine bombers flew on over the town and back into Germany where they released their bomb load on a small town, Grafenhausen.

The aiming point of the 392nd and the first section of the 44th was of course the town of Schaffhausen, Switzerland which projected north into otherwise German territory. A total of 23 tons of high explosive and 73 tons of incendiary bombs were dropped. All bursts plotted appeared to be incendiaries, but there was considerable damage in this Swiss town. At Grafenhausen, a few bursts were noted in the center of town and additional ones in surrounding fields.

As emphasized earlier, all groups of the division had difficulty with their navigation on this mission, but after the 448th, which must receive the major share of blame because it was the division leader and bore the ultimate responsibility, the next most serious offender

was the 392nd. The narrative report and accompanying flight log and charts compiled by that group's lead navigator, Capt. C.H. Koch, revealed gross errors in computed locations together with various reasons for his inability to obtain a positive location or fix of his lead group throughout most of the flight. These explanations dealt mainly with the uncertain observations of the Pilotage navigator as well as the Pathfinder radar operator as they attempted to provide him routinely with various location information to supplement his own dead reckoning computations. Both the 392nd and 44th Bomb Groups were unique in deviating to a greater degree from the directed or briefed course of flight than any of the other groups on the mission.

Chapter 4

The Long Voyage Home

Although total B-24 losses to be sustained for the day's operation were a modest twelve, the withdrawal phase of the flight was to prove the costliest part with seven falling. Five of these aircraft were from the 448th alone. The officially-listed causes for their loss were unknown, but there was actually nothing mysterious about this preliminary determination – they simply ran out of fuel. The mistakes and errors of today's activities were now to be reaped in full upon the attackers on this most infamous April Fool's Day of foolish days.

At the moment that the 448th set course for England, it was 11:30 a.m. or five hours after take-off, and a long journey of more than 300 miles to the enemy coast in the face of high headwinds remained. In order fully to appreciate the serious situation that now confronted the entire division force, the official time of Bombs Away had been planned for 9:57 a.m., in contrast to the first bombing of Strasbourg which took place some 36 minutes later, and the last bombing of Pforzheim executed one hour and seven minutes behind schedule.

For the first hour and twelve minutes, the group flew homeward at an altitude of 18,000 feet, then began descending to 14,000 feet when clouds and haze were encountered. It was then that Herb Bunde, the co-pilot, made a remark on the interphone to Sergeant Campbell to check the fuel supply. On getting the information, he was heard to say:
«For God's sake, we haven't got enough gas to make it back.» This

news was greated with shock. The interphone was silent for a few minutes while Bunde and Knorr discussed the situation, then the voice was heard again: «Co-pilot to crew. We're going to leave the formation to try to save our gas. Everyone stay alert.»

Although the hazy conditions being encountered at this point were restricting our forward visibility, we knew the English Channel would soon be coming into view. If only the old battered *Crud Wagon* could remain flying a little longer. Horrible visions then arose in my mind of getting over the English Channel and then running out of fuel. These were even harsher thoughts to contemplate than parachuting out over land, because the Liberators' infamous reputation for landing and surviving on water was well known by the crews that flew them.

At approximately 1:20 p.m. Bunde made another announcement on the interphone which was to be his last: «Co-pilot to crew. You can start bailing out. We haven't got any more gas.» His voice was unhurried and matter-of-fact in tone, but also very resigned. There was nothing more to say or do, except, as he said, start bailing out. The end of our combat tour was really at hand this time.

I climbed out of the nose turret and went past the navigator, Stanley Baranofsky, who was making some last minute preparations. He looked at me and shook his head in bitter disgust over our current predicament. I then crawled back to the bomb bay area and opened the bomb doors manually by a handle located under the flight deck. Standing on the catwalk in the bomb bay and looking down upon the earth far below, I knew that was the act that I had most dreaded since taking up flying – jumping out of an airplane. It was going to be hard to do. Baran then came up from the nose and joined me. He yelled up at the flight deck and asked Bunde about our altitude. Herb replied «11,000 feet.» There was no outward nervousness about the big navigator as he deliberately sat down on the catwalk and said, «Well, I'll see you later Mac,» and with that he eased himself out of the plane, feet first. It was over almost before it began. I followed Baran down as far as possible before the plane's forward motion finally prevented further viewing. He was still going down in the same feet first position and had not pulled his parachute ripcord. Baranofsky was the first person out of the plane and was not to be followed by anyone for another five minutes.

I kept looking at the ground passing below, trying to screw up my courage to jump, but since there was no immediate urgency I lingered

on for a few moments. The mental tension of this situation was at its peak, and I realized full well that I was only prolonging the inevitable and would surely die if I didn't leave that plane as Baranofsky had just done. Then suddenly the whole problem was solved by the sound of several rapid-fire noises above the rear of the engines. They distinctly came from the left front side of the aircraft, and almost simultaneously the left bomb bay door closed halfway.

Standing on the catwalk in the bomb bay, I could see only downward, but it was not difficult to visualize the source of these sounds. I knew unmistakably they had come from an enemy aircraft attacking us, and months later this was finally confirmed to me. The attack had scored hits on the hydraulic lines which accounted for the half-closed bomb bay door. This experience thoroughly frightened me and provided all the impetus for jumping. Without further thought I closed my eyes and went out the right side, head first.

The first sensation on leaving the bomber was the rush of air in the slipstream that hit me instantly, followed by a deadly silence as the aircraft quickly sped away. When certain my body had cleared the plane, I pulled the ripcord. It opened promptly with a violent wrench, but the white blossoming appearance above was the most reassuring and beautiful sight I had ever beheld. The hardest task I had ever accomplished had now been done – I had jumped from an aircraft.

On looking downward, I could see five other chutes at least one or two thousand feet below. The other fellows had obviously been able to execute delayed jumps better than I, since we all went out at approximately the same time, but this was of slight concern at the moment. My only fervent hopes and prayers were now being directed to getting down without harm. It seemed as if I was in that chute and hung in mid-air for at least 15 minutes or more before hitting the earth, and the experience was weird and unreal. Occasionally, strong gusts of air would oscillate both the chute and its occupant violently from side to side in pendulum-like swings. During these wild moments, part of the chute would actually collapse momentarily, then billow out again after stabilizing.

Baranofsky's earlier jump, added to the five other parachutes seen and my own meant that three others had not bailed out when I vacated the plane. It flew on for another five minutes or less, during which time the remaining three members parachuted out. At the time they began jumping, *The Crud Wagon* had flown over St. Pol, France, in

the Pas-de-Calais area, which was heavily defended by flak. While floating downward, I could hear and see the bursts in the distance but was unable to locate the object of the firing. Charles Knorr, however, while in his chute saw the plane hit the earth and explode beneath him.

An entry was made in the flight log of Lt. Paul Pflug, lead navigator of the 453rd Bomb Group which was spaced nine minutes behind the 448th as it neared the enemy coast. It read: «1:34 p.m. Flak. A plane hit, six chutes.» This was without doubt *The Crud Wagon* he had observed, which signified for this small group of people the termination of their current roles in the war and the beginning of both different and difficult experiences that would continue to test their capacity for endurance and survival.

With the exception of the bombing of neutral Switzerland, which had no parallel, there were two other events still to occur on this ill-fated operation whose dramatic effects were unduplicated in intensity. One was to end in an atmosphere of failure, while the other could be classed as the epitomy of triumph against all odds.

Colonel Thompson's bomber was one of the five in the 448th formation to experience fuel exhaustion. Teague had been aware of their plight after bombs away at 11:04 a.m., and this concern began to grow as the formation's ground speed was impeded by the strong headwinds. However, he maintained his place in the group formation as deputy leader long after *The Crud Wagon* had throttled back and continued homeward alone.

Finally, it became apparent to both Teague and Thompson that their fuel supply was insufficient to reach the English coast, and accordingly, they reduced air speed and dropped out alone some time after 1:00 p.m. Teague, however, had reached a firm though unwise decision; that of singlehandedly crash-landing and trying to destroy the bomber on the ground rather than abandoning it in the air to certain destruction, along with its secret radar equipment. He readily admitted in retrospect that it was one of the worst decisions under such circumstances, but felt completely confident in his ability to carry out such an audacious feat.

Teague then advised all crew members on the interphone that it was impossible to get back home because of the fuel problem, and prepared them to be ready to bail out. Several minutes later he rang the alarm bell, and the crew began evacuating. Colonel Thompson got out of his seat and went back to the flight deck in preparation for

jumping through the bomb bay. Meanwhile, Teague began steadily losing altitude in executing his plan for the crash-landing. He saw many potential landing areas of flat farm lands as he came nearer to the ground.

Thinking everyone had by now abandoned the plane, Teague was surprised to see Colonel Thompson come back to the cockpit and inquire of Teague why he had not left his seat. The pilot made an excuse by saying he was having difficulty keeping the plane level as the engines would alternately cut out momentarily on opposite sides of the wing. In describing the closing events of his part of the mission, Teague related that the group commander then climbed back into his seat to assist him with the task of flying. During this entire period, of course, the plane was steadily losing altitude, and the pilot still had not informed his superior of his intent to land the craft.

After returning to his seat, the commander remained in it for a brief period, then again got up and announced to Teague: «Well, I'm leaving now.» The pilot replied something to this effect: «You'd better hurry up, Colonel. We don't have much altitude.» Thompson then went to the bomb bay and jumped out, which was the last act he was ever to perform. Although the parachute partially opened, it failed to blossom out fully to break the fall, and he died instantly on hitting the ground. Thompson's death was due entirely to his own poor judgment.

Alan Teague selected his spot on the ground for the crash-landing, and carried out his daring plan without mishap or injury to himself. He belly-landed the plane in an open field near the town of Arras. The plan for its destruction by fire, however, was doomed to failure because of its near total lack of gasoline in the tanks.

Foiled in his attempt to destroy the plane, Teague climbed out the top hatch and surveyed the scene. No one was nearby in the quiet stillness of this rural setting, and apparently the landing had not been observed by either civilian or military people. Soon, off in the distance he saw a military vehicle approaching, and knowing that it could only be Germans searching for his crewmen and plane, he hid from view nearby.

The German vehicle drew up alongside the plane and Teague could see that it was a type of weapons carrier. In the back were several of his crew members with a soldier guarding them. The driver made only a quick visual inspection of the bomber but did not bother to look

inside for any escapees. As the vehicle drove away, the pilot came back to the plane and remained standing. The vehicle was actually out of view of the plane almost immediately after pulling away because the road descended abruptly into a depression of the terrain, then started upward again. When the vehicle reached the summit of the hill, the guard in the rear turned around for a final look at the disabled bomber, and saw Teague standing there. He was captured immediately, and except for this final reckless act, would undoubtedly have made good his temporary and perhaps permanent escape from incarceration.

Colonel Thompson's body was soon found by another group of searching soliders, and was placed on the hood of the car in which Teague and the others were riding. He was buried by the Germans two days later in the village of Ransart. The group of airmen were then taken into a local town where they were turned over to other German authorities for prisoner-of-war interrogation and processing. All except three members of this lead crew had been accounted for, Lt. Jesse Hamby and Sgts. Simon Cohen and John Dutka. Two German sentry guards were soon positioned at the disabled bomber to preserve it for later examination and removal of its valuable contents by aircraft technicians.

Thus ended the sad account of this unfortunate group of captured and killed fliers. The mission they had been selected to lead had turned into bitter failure, and as a result of mistakes they and others had committed, repercussions at the highest levels of command were now about to be felt in attempting to repair and mend the results of today's operation.

Equally dramatic, if not more so than the death of Colonel Thompson and the loss of his lead bomber, was the story of Lt. Jack Black and his 448th crew in their courageous struggle to reach friendly territory against almost superhuman odds. Black's B-24 had received a flak burst after entry of the enemy coast on the penetration leg, which disabled one of his engines. He continued to remain in his designated position, however, by applying more power to the three good engines. Although he could keep up in this manner, it was at the expense of consuming more fuel than normal with four effective engines.

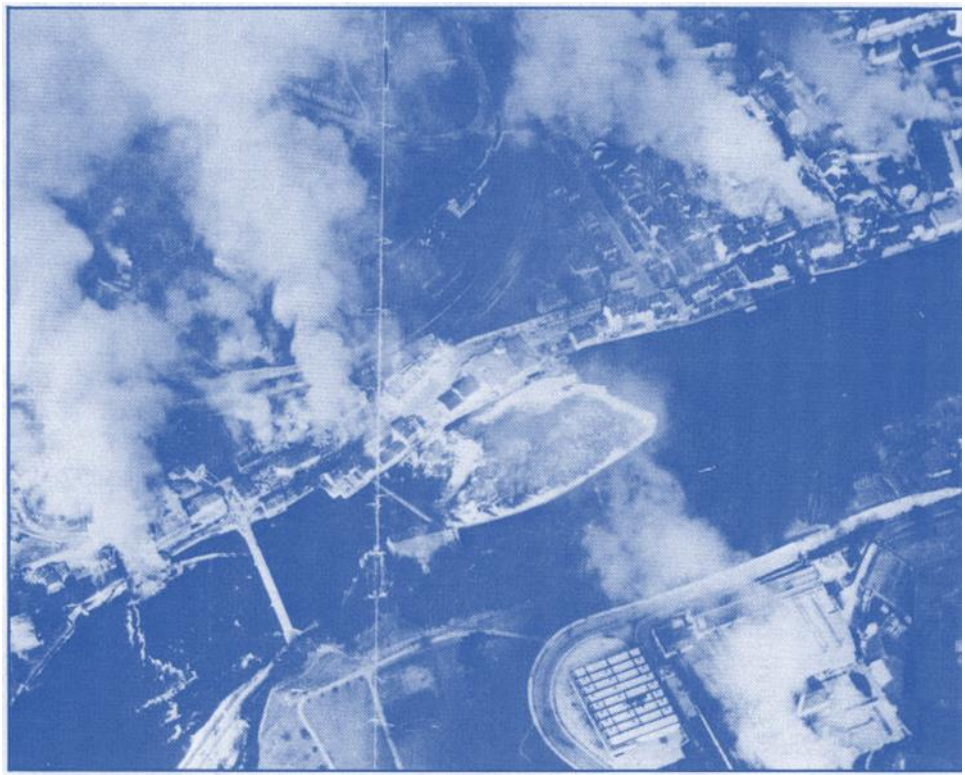
As the formation finally flew over the dangerous Pas de Calais of northern France on its way to England, Jack lost another engine due

to fuel exhaustion. This made it impossible for him to remain with the group any longer, and he began swiftly to descend to lower altitude. At this point he took a quick vote of all his crew members concerning their desires of staying with the plane or parachuting. They elected to remain on board for what was certain to be a crash landing, either on land or water.

Soon a third engine cut out as Black descended to only 4,000 feet. Now the situation was truly desperate since the Liberator simply could not fly on one remaining engine and hold its altitude. Another perilous situation quickly manifested itself when the bomber began drawing intense small arms fire from the ground as it slowly descended. Black later revealed how he could see the tracer ammunition coming up at him in an ever closer stream as he and his co-pilot desperately tried to keep the Liberator aloft. His plane was actually hit several times in the tail section by this murderous fusilade as it kept losing more precious altitude.

Miraculously, the bomber was still flying when the coast line finally loomed ahead a few minutes later. The pilot then announced: «All right, here we go. I'm gonna set her down.» That brief moment when he sat the big bomber in the water proved to be probably the most important moment of Jack Black's life, and certainly the most skillful single feat of flying he would ever perform. Jack recalled to the writer that although the standard B-24 ditching technique involved hitting the water in a nose-high position so that the tail section would make initial contact in order to break the forward speed of the plane, he elected instead to bring it in level so that the belly would receive the full amount of force. When asked why he deviated from the standard procedure, he said he had once made a successful belly landing in a training plane (on land) and had brought the aircraft in completely level as it touched down, and therefore reasoned the same logic should apply to a water landing.

The Liberator was traveling between 80 and 90 miles per hour when it touched water, and Black said it was like hitting a brick wall. Neither he or his co-pilot, Lt. Joseph Pomfret, were wearing shoulder harnesses, since none of the B-24s in the 448th Group were then equipped with them. Instead, they had only the normal seat belts to rely upon in anchoring them in position, and these were not enough for the unique landing they were about to execute. The force of the sudden stop rammed Black's head into the instrument panel causing



This photo was taken by the Swiss Government of the city of Schaffhausen soon after its accidental attack by B-24 bombers on 1 April 1944. It constituted both the front and back cover of the 40th anniversary issue of the local magazine, *Schaffhauser Magazine.*

several deep scalp gashes. His legs were suddenly wrenched at the knees so badly he was unable to walk without a cane for a long period. The co-pilot, Pomfret, was actually thrown out of his seat through the cockpit to the outside.

Dreadful and dangerous though such an experience was for the plane's occupants, the execution of this water landing was flawless, and would have been so considered even with four operating engines. Black was later told that his plane set a new record for the B-24 in remaining afloat approximately 45 minutes after the landing, which was truly remarkable.

Miraculously, the pilot did not lose consciousness on the plane's impact, and though momentarily stunned and suffering from head lacerations, clambered out of the cockpit and down into the cold choppy sea, along with the remainder of his men. There was actually no other choice to make in braving the water's chilling numbness rather than clinging to the bomber and risking being carried under for what they believed would be a matter of five minutes or less.

Now the urgent problem was to break loose the two inflatable rubber dinghies stowed in the aircraft before it sank. The young 20-year-old radio operator, Eugene Dvoraczyk, climbed up on the wing and tried to pry open the hatch cover holding the rafts, but with no success. With total disregard for his own safety, he then went back into the plane, and working under water, finally located and pulled the inside release handle. The hatch cover sprang open instantly and with it the two rafts. Dvoraczyk thought at one moment he was going to drown before reaching the surface, and under ordinary circumstances of a ditching operation, he would probably have lost his life by such an act, due to this plane's unfavorable floating qualities.

During those brief though agonizing moments in waiting for the dinghies to be released, the entire crew had been floundering around trying to hold each other up. The navigator, Lt. Peter Wermert, held the co-pilot who couldn't swim, but soon became so weak that he was forced to release him or go under himself. Pomfret, on being released began crying frantically for help, but sank before anyone could reach him. He never resurfaced.

In the rafts, it soon became apparent that the individual most in need of attention was the aerial engineer, Sgt. Charles Nissen. Black and the others believed he was either seriously injured or was in severe shock, because he would lie face up and stare, and kept biting

his tongue. He died four hours later and was pushed off gently into his watery grave after the Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary were recited. The ball turret gunner had also been injured in the crash landing and was suffering from a broken jaw and collar bone.

The surviving eight members were now faced with these dire prospects: (1) They had landed no more than a half mile off the occupied coast of France and would already have been picked up by the Germans had it not been for the poor visibility. (2) They were to endure cold biting winds and rough seas in their wet clothing with no drinking water and only a small amount of candy emergency rations as they attempted to paddle their dinghies by hand across the English Channel.

Here is a portion of Jack Black's official account of this crew's grim fight for survivial:

> It was during the rainy season and we spread a parachute to catch drinking water. The channel waters were cold and that was fortunate for us because the cold quickly coagulated the blood on our wounds.
>
> We paddled in our dinghies all that day and that night and the following day. The only food we had was some British emergency rations and what little water we could catch in the parachute. The ball turret gunner, whose face was all black and swollen kept wanting water, so we gave him most of what we got. In the dead of night we would hear the roar of German planes going over the channel to England and later we'd hear them come back.
>
> Toward night of the second day, we sighted the English coast, but an attempt to reach land was impossible because the tides were beginning to go out, so we had another night to spend rocking in our dinghy. A mine sweeper passed by but could not see us and we couldn't attract their attention.
>
> Next day about 11 o'clock in the morning two old fishermen who were out getting their day's seining spied us, and one yelled to us. It was like a voice from heaven. Convinced that we were not Germans, they brought their boat over and took aboard those of us who could walk. They went ashore and another boat came back for the remainder of the crew.

In the process of rescuing the downed airmen, however, the

fishermen had to cut their nets, which were permanently lost to them, in order to get the men aboard the small vessels. This selfless act by the skipper, Bert May, was performed without the slightest hesitation when he correctly assessed the gravity of the situation.

For this spectacular feat of flying skill, Jack Black was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Part of his citation reads as follows: «Lt. Black demonstrated superior ability and skill in flying his crippled aircraft as far as the channel. Effecting a spectacular landing with one engine, he performed a ditching so successfully that the ship did not break up. The coolness, courage and skill displayed by Lt. Black on this occasion reflect the highest credit upon himself and the armed forces of the United States.»

Back with the group, at 1:15 p.m. Lt. Clay Mellor was still maintaining his position within the 448th formation but his fuel supply was now reaching the critical stage. He had been assigned a new B-24J for this mission, that had arrived only recently from the states. After take-off, Mellor and his co-pilot discovered that one of the engines was registering a high cylinder head temperature reading, which could only be corrected by applying a richer than normal fuel mixture into the faulty engine. The only disadvantage to such a solution was, of course, the fact that the aircraft was using fuel at a greater rate. Rather than turn back and abort the flight, the pilot remained with the formation under these less than perfect conditions. Even under the unusual divergences to plan that had occured thus far, he was still at his appointed position and approaching the channel. But luck was destined to carry him and the crew no farther to safety.

Mellor called Captain Thompson at 1:15 p.m. and advised that he had no more than 40 gallons of gas. Thompson advised him to make a thorough check once more. Five minutes later, Mellor again called the leader, saying that one engine had cut out and his gas was nearly gone. He asked for instructions and was told by Thompson to begin bailing out. Unlike Alan Teague, however, Mellor then displayed some good judgment by departing the formation and heading southward rather than continuing toward the northwest. He knew that the Pas de Calais area over which they were then flying was infested with German troops and strong anti-aircraft defenses, and more importantly, he also reasoned that the enemy ground forces would be in much smaller numbers to the south and above Paris, thus affording the crew a better chance of escape. His reasoning proved correct, and after flying a few

more minutes southward he was out of the dense troop concentration. When approximately 50 miles above Paris, he gave the order to bail out.

The entire crew abandoned the plane, but one of the enlisted crewmen, Tech Sgt. William Warren, was killed when his parachute failed to open. The same fate nearly happened to Mellor himself as he jumped out and pulled his ripcord. There was no responding wrench to signal opening of the canopy. A second pull finally opened the outer cover and the parachute blossomed out an altitude that he estimated to be 400 feet or less.

Here in Mellor's own words, as contained in his official Escape and Evasion Report, is the account of his most unique experiences in the following four months and eighteen days. This individual possessed both the qualities of resourcefulness and self confidence, combined with some knowledge of the French language, all of which materially aided him while living and fighting with the French Maquis, the armed guerrilla force of the overall Resistance movement. Mellor's narrative begins after the opening of his parachute.

> I landed in a tree about forty kilometers north of Meaux. It was 1:30 p.m., 1 April. I had a laundry bag with GI shoes in it tied to the chute. I put on the shoes and hid my chute and equipment in a hedge. I walked and ran by escape compass [an escape package carried by all crewmen containing some French francs, chocolate bar, maps, and compass] to the south across country, for two hours. I found a barn in a field. Two German officers in a car drew up nearby and I had no exit, except across the open field. They went away; I went to sleep.
>
> Early the next morning I moved on to a village near a wood. I came between two houses. One had wires to it, curtains, and fresh paint; the other had a very poor appearance. A boy came out of the rich house and started to throw rocks at the apple trees nearby. A man came by riding on a harrow, dressed in black and not looking like a farmer. I hid. I stopped a man with a cart, and he was friendly. To everything I said he was in cheerful agreement. Finally I noticed bubbles of spit coming out of his mouth. He proved to be an idiot. Another man came and told me that the mayor lived in the rich house, and I must avoid it and hide in the woods. I went into a briar patch and heard men

beating the bushes. One said very loudly in French, «We will find him, then.» I suspected that his conversation before was in German.

As dark fell I walked into the village of Mayen. I hid in a cowshed. I tried at the church. The man there laughed loudly at me just as heavy boots were heard and a German came by. I hid in a woodshed. The next morning a farmer came in to get a hoe and I asked him for help. He came back with food. His daughter came out, and I asked for a guide to Spain. She thought her uncle in Paris could help me. On the 4th the village schoolteacher, who spoke no English, brought me clothes, and on the 5th of April I went by train to Paris with this girl. Four German soldiers were in the carriage but they noticed nothing wrong.

I met the girl's uncle in Paris and also looked up the father of an old school friend of mine in America. They didn't know what to do, and were very respectable. They had no contacts with the Resistance. Finally, they bought me a ticket to Cercottes, just north of Orleans (so I could avoid a large town and controls), and saw me off very cordially at the Gare du Sud on 6th of April. I got off about dark at Cercottes and hid at a farm.

I went into Orleans early in the morning and approached the proprietors of two cafes, very tactfully. Neither could help. I tried a Gendarme. He said that the Gestapo were very thick in the town and told me to leave quickly. I crossed the Loire River and went south. I nearly ran into a chateau near St. Hilaire full of German officers. Two big Mercedes cars came by with high officials. On the 7th, my birthday, I walked 45 kilometers. I tried the cure of a small town, who called four people on the telephone to find one that might speak English. He made me very nervous. I spent the night at Ligny le Rebeau. On the 8th I went through Chaumont to St. Viatre. On the 9th I stopped at a chateau where the concierge gave me a fine dinner, and said that if the Duke had been in he would have given me a finer one.

On the 10th I spoke to a priest at Chartres, and he suggested that I try the Resistance at Gracay. I went there and was taken care of by some French for a week. On the 16th they came to ask me a group of key questions to prove that I was an American. I got by the test all right.

Attempts were made to get me papers, but by the 1st of May

none had yet been secured. It was thought I might go by plane, but that did not work out. I was given 5,000 francs and much friendly advice. On the 9th the chiefs of the Resistance in both Issoudun and Chateauroux were arrested and all feared a widespread purge of the group. I moved about from house to house, realizing that I was getting too well known. Finally I found a place to stay in Issoudun on 26 May, where I remained until 7 August. I was wonderfully treated. A Polish Jew, clothing manufacturer by trade, and his wife were in the house with me, and had been there for 15 months.

There were many plans for getting me out. There was an ME 109 factory nearby, destroyed by us except for one shed with a plane in it. It was hoped that parts could be got to permit me to take off in the unguarded plane. No parts ever came.

I joined the Resistance one night in blowing up some railroad track. There were nine of us, equipped with Sten guns. The Frenchmen were just kids, 18-21 years of age with no military training and little horse sense. A total of 16 of us were hiding during one period in a farmhouse room, and they began fooling with the guns. One went off and missed me by two inches. They planned to take over the town of Issoudun, and I decided not to join them.

On 10 June the attempt to take Issoudun was made. Just before noon the town was told by the Resistance to assemble in the square. Fortunately, many got the wrong idea and instead hid in their homes. At 1:30 p.m., 15 Resistance fighters came in on one side of the town in an American vehicle. The Germans, equipped with machine guns, came in on the other side. About 400 French in the square jeered the Germans, who arrived first. The Germans shot into the air; the French jeered more. The Germans shot at the crowd. There was a pole in the center of the square, and a boy was climbing it to unfurl the Cross of Lorraine. The Germans shot him down. In the end 11 French were killed and 18 wounded. One German was killed and one wounded, and the one who hit them was the only Resistance youth who fired a shot. He ran into the church and changed into priest's clothing to escape. Two other Resistance fighters abandoned their complete kit in the square and ran away. The Germans came to see the mayor and demanded hostages. He

convinced them that since the French dead were so much larger, the matter was already arranged. The Germans let it pass, and next day the French were as gay as ever.

I met a Polish prisoner of war who was planning to evade through Spain and was anxious to see his fiancee near the Pyrenees Mountains. However, the fiancee arrived suddenly one day without notice at Issoudun after a very hard trip. They went off without me. I heard that the Resistance at La Chatre was very good, and not the sort of thing we had seen. I wrote a note to them, but they replied that I would not be risked in their activities against the Germans.

On 7 August I rode with the Maquis to Chateaumeillant in a big car and lots of guns sticking out, Chicago gangster sytle. On the 15th I rode into Nouan with the inspector of meat and two French. A group of Germans in a truck that was broken down stopped us at pistol point. None spoke French. They ordered us to pull their truck forward about 100 yards, but our driver purposely stalled our car and nothing went off. One Frenchman invited the Germans to send someone with us to the north to get help for the car. They refused. Later, the Resistance came back and wiped out this party.

I went on to La Ferte St. Cyr, and waited until the 17th of August. A girl went out to see if the coast was clear. There was a good deal of activity. The Germans had returned to collect some of their dead and wounded with two ambulances, two armed cars, and four French hostages. Such was the fear inspired by the Resistance in that area. On the 18th only a few Germans were reported, and we left on motor bikes. At Le Caverau we rowed across the Loire, and continued with a motor bike into Mer. There we were met with flags and celebration, The Resistance had the town, and the Maquis were celebrating their victory. I was back with the Allies at last.

Mellor was never able to link up with any of his crewmen in France. However, four of them, Jacobson, Marx, Branch, and Little, fared much better than their pilot by contacting various members of the Resistance who guided them down to southern France and then into Spain. Most of these individuals had been returned to England by early June.

The main formation of the 448th finally reached the enemy coast at 1:34 p.m. and started across the English Channel. The final bomber casualty of the unit met its demise five minutes later, not, however, over the Channel. Piloted by Lt. Kenneth Weaver, this aircraft too had since become a straggler because of its dwindling fuel supplies, but was airborne and only a few minutes to the rear of the formation. At 1:39 p.m. Weaver gave the order to bail out rather than risk a water ditching as Black had done a few minutes earlier. Nine crewmen went out safely, but the tenth, Harvey Dickey, was killed in a manner identical to that of William Warren on Mellor's bomber, when his parachute failed to open. All survivors were captured immediately.

Had I been aware of the odds on the successful opening of a parchute when employed in such dire circumstances, I would have surely jumped with considerably more fear and trepidation on that far- off day, if such is possible. Far better not to know such unhealthy statistics.

One hour after crossing the enemy coast toward England, only five 448th bombers were able to reach Seething, including one flown by Lt. Frank Gibson. He reported that less than 50 gallons of fuel remained in his tanks. All other returning aircraft were forced to land in southern England for gas refills before proceeding to home base.

Chapter 5

Aftermath

The mission was now over – or was it? For 121 men officially listed as Missing in Action, the majority of whom were still alive and about to undergo a frustrating and indefinite period of incarceration marked by idleness and physical discomfort as prisoners of war, this mission would continue to be lived and relived in their minds. Those crewmen who were there because their planes simply ran out of fuel would remember this day with increasing bitterness as the victims of a series of blunders that could have been avoided. Those men falling from flak or fighters could, of course, better endure captivity as more normal consequences of warfare.

There was yet another category of missing in action personnel, smaller in numbers, who would also never forget the details of this day: the luckier ones who by accident or through their own ingenuity managed to evade capture and who were at the moment hiding in such places as haystacks, wooded areas, barn yards, or in French homes whose occupants were supportive of any actions they could take to deny or disrupt the enemy's plans or objectives, including the rounding up of allied parachutists. The lot of these survivors would at times be a relentless struggle, as exemplified earlier by the vivid descriptions of Clay Mellor's many ordeals, as they were shifted about from one hiding place to another by the Resistance, or were forced to fend for themselves as they moved frantically about the countryside, always within easy reach of German troops and subject to capture at any moment.

The mission would also be remembered vividly, at least for a time,

by those fortunate enough to survive and return from the unfortunate mission. These people would be able to read the newspapers and comprehend the seriousness of the unwanted results that had befallen the American government in the process of waging war. Locally, within the groups of the 2nd Bombardment Division, the immediate item of concern was commencement of the official inquiry by Eighth Air Force Headquarters into all aspects of the mission, including plans and execution.

Even as the investigation was getting underway, one formality over the loss of a senior air commander was in order. Despite these extreme wartime conditions when death had become so commonplace to the involved air unit personnel, an official expression of sympathy over the loss of a group commander seemed appropriate, and was duly received from the commanding general, Gen. James Hodges, on 2 April 1944 at the 448th headquarters. The paraphrased note was published in a memorandum and posted by the group for all to read. Although intended as a note of sympathy, it seemed to reflect a public relations message as much as genuine grief. One portion reads as follows: «Over the loss of your courageous leader and comrade you are low this morning, I know. But the same fighting spirit you have displayed from being hurt in bad rounds will bring you out fighting tomorrow, more determined than ever to land your blows where they count, cagier and wiser.»

Before proceeding with the inquiry being conducted by Eighth Air Force, it is necessary to elevate the perspective of this narrative to the highest policy making levels of the War (now known as Department of the Army) and State Departments for a detailed scrutiny of the manner in which an official explanation was finally prepared for what had occured, as well as the method by which settlement of damages would be made to the injured country. The latter consideration, however, was initially suppressed from public knowledge, and rightfully so.

The resolution of this catastrophic event generated several exchanges of diplomatic correspondence which have since been made public, and affords a brief glimpse into the exclusive world of diplomacy, that loftiest plane of professional governmental service which, until the end of World War II, had virtually been reserved for the wealthy. At the same time, an examination of this case shows the difficulty in transmitting accurate details of events from the lowest to

the highest policy-making levels.

In trying to pursue its historic role of preserving neutrality, Switzerland maintained full and active diplomatic relations with both the allied countries and Nazi Germany. In view of the common border it shared with the Reich, as well as its ever-present nearness to the conflict, Switzerland was fully aware of its tenuous position and relative helplessness in the event Germany decided at any time to widen the war by swallowing this little neutral entity. In order to offset this peril, Switzerland tried to make its neutrality of tangible value to both sides in negotiating, for example, exchanges of prisoners of war between the belligerants, and maintaining various informal or quasi-diplomatic contacts between the warring governments. That it was never willfully attacked is evidence enough that its neutrality was worth its existence.

The accidental bombing of this country was extremely embarrassing to the United States. Coupled with an extensive press coverage, the situation demanded quick and logical explanations of the causes leading to this mishap, as well as positive statements by the U.S. Government to reimburse the country for damages to life and property. The first order of business, therefore, was the reporting of the situation in Switzerland to the War and State Departments in Washington as well as concurrent assessments of the mission's results in London by the commanding general of U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe, Gen. Carl Spaatz.

The first notification from Switzerland of the bombing incident was a message written by the American Minister (Harrison) of the Embassy in Bern, the capital, at approximately 3:00 p.m. on 1 April and addressed to the Secretary of State, Honorable Cordell Hull. It read:

> It is officially announced that on April 1, 1944 at 10:30 a.m. in the morning approximately 30 American planes flew over the cantons of Thurgan and Schaffhausen. At about 11:00 a.m. bombs were dropped on the town of Schaffhausen. According to presently available reports several fires are raging in the station district and in the city. Further details will be announced later. All railroad traffic in direction of Schaffhausen has been interrupted. Military Attache [Brigadier General B.R. Legge] leaving immediately for Schaffhausen to investigate and report.

> I shall immediately endeavor to obtain appointment with Foreign Minister [Mr. Pilet-Golaz] for further exploration matter. Details will be telegraphed as obtained.

Later that evening, Mr. Harrison, the American Minister, dispatched over his signature another preliminary message from his military attache, General Legge, who was a member of the Embassy's staff in Switzerland. This message, though dispatched to the Secretary of State, was intended for the War Department. It read: «The bombing of the Swiss city of Schaffhausen by our planes resulted in much damage and many dead. Schaffhausen is still burning and might be taken to be a German town by mistake. Greatest caution should be used by Air Commands England and Italy, also British and they should be so warned.»

A third message was dispatched still later that evening by Mr. Harrison. He reported to the Secretary of State on the outcome of his visit to the Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs, part of which is quoted:

> I called on Mr. Pilet-Golaz at his residence this afternoon to express my regret and sympathy. According to his preliminary information some 50 American bombers flying from the southeast in direction northwest suddenly appeared over Schaffhausen this morning and dropped bombs and incendiaries. A number of important buildings in the center of town were hit, also railway station and railway yards. Some 100 people were killed and wounded, mcluding a high cantonal official killed. Mr. Pilet-Golaz was at a loss for any explanation of what apparently was a deliberate attack. He had sent instructions to Minister Bruggmann [Charles Bruggmann, Swiss Minister in the United States]. He has also given orders that press and radio announcement should be restrained and factual.

On 2 April, in accord with established practices, the American Air Forces headquarters in London issued a communique explaining highlights of the past day's air operations over Europe. The communique, in describing the nature of the objective used these words in announcing the accidental bombing to the public:

«On account of extraordinary navigation difficulties and bad weather some bombs fell by mistake on Swiss territory.» The term

«bad weather» was immediately greeted by an unfavorable reaction from the Swiss public, since it was known that weather conditions in the Schaffhausen area were exceptionally clear on the day of the fatal bombing. The Bern newspaper *Bund* carried an article in the next issue stating:

> Stick to the truth, please! Swiss public learns with greatest astonishment of announcement from official American headquarters in England. Everyone in Switzerland believes bombs fell on Swiss territory because American flyers made a mistake. But attempt by headquarters to minimize severe misfortune and distortion of the facts should be energetically rejected. Also, the American press has played up the «bad weather» theme; bad weather from the Swiss standpoint is important piece of wrong orientation of world public against which we raise protest.

Another article from the *Gazette de Lausanne* dismissed the London communique with this statement: «The excuse of bad weather is worthless.»

It was indeed an embarrassing tactical error for the United States and was typical of the entire character of the mission itself flown the previous day. Obviously, the blunder had to be corrected without further delay. The War Department now began to work closely with State in Washington in developing a plausible explanation to the American public and to the Swiss people. The message was delivered by Secretary of State Hull, who quickly decided to hold a press conference at 12:00 p.m. on 3 April. There was, however, no repudiation in the speech for the excuse of bad weather conditions that had only now begun to alarm the Swiss public. Secretary Hull's brief remarks are quoted in full:

> I desire to express my own and all Americans' deep regret over the tragic bombing by American planes of the Swiss city of Schaffhausen on April 1. I have been in close touch with the Secretary of War regarding this matter and he tells me investigations which he has so far been able to complete indicate that in the course of operations against the Nazi war machine a group of our bombers, due to a chain of events negating the extensive precautions which had been taken to prevent incidents of this

> character, mistakenly flew over and bombed Swiss areas located on the North side of the Rhine. Secretary Stimson has expressed to me the deep regret which he and the American Air Forces feel over this tragedy. He has also asked me to assure the Swiss Government that every precaution will be taken to prevent, insofar as is humanly possible, the repetition of this unfortunate event. General Spaatz, accompanied by Ambassador Winant, has already called on the Swiss Charge d Affaires in London and expressed the deep regret of himself and the men in his command at the accidental bombing of Schaffhausen. Naturally this Government will make appropriate reparations for the damage resulting from this unfortunate event insofar as that is humanly possible. I am informing the Swiss Minister in the foregoing sense and am instructing the American Minister in Bern to do likewise with the Swiss Government.

Meanwhile, on 2 April, the same day as issuance of the imprudent Air Forces communique from London, Gen. Carl Spaatz, commander of the U. S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe, dispatched a classified wire to the War Department for attention of Gen. H.H. Arnold, commanding general of the entire Army Air Forces, as an explanation of what really had caused the accidental attack. The salient details of the mission had been gathered from all intermediate echelons of command as quickly as possible and provided to Spaatz, the most senior air commander in Europe. The facts transmitted to General Arnold, however, bore only slight resemblance to the chronological chain of events actually recorded. Although it is possible they could have been garbled in interpretation and transmission through the various command headquarters, it is more probable that a clever staff officer at one of these higher echelons provided this most credible and logical description of what had occurred on the ill-fated flight. The author simply took liberties with the time sequence of some key events and intentionally remained vague in describing certain other occurrences.The message reads:

> After investigation of B24 operations for 1 April the following comments made concerning accidental bombing of Schaffhausen. Wind encountered was 60 miles per hour in excess of briefed winds from direction of approximately 310 degrees.

> This factor coupled with fact that division leader flying lead pathfinder aircraft was shot down enroute to target is accountable for great variation from briefed course. Deputy leader also in pathfinder aircraft assumed division lead. Special equipment in his aircraft functioned intermittently and while on bombing approach over 8/10 clouds failed completely. Bombardier of lead aircraft seeing a target through hole in cloud and believing it was an identified target released bombs: following group thought they were attacking primary target and bombed on markers released by lead group. These bombs released by second group hit river front and town. Existing directives in all operational units definitely prohibit bombing of any target in enemy occupied countries and within 50 miles of German borders that are not positively identified.
>
> American Ambassador Winant has been contacted for assistance in making necessary arrangements in order to make diplomatic apologies to Swiss Government Representatives in London. It is recommended that an apology be made by the State Department in Washington to representatives of Swiss Government in Washington.

The loss of Colonel Thompson as division leader had indeed proven to be a fortuitious circumstance in providing the most credible of explanations to the War Department. If Thompson's aircraft had actually returned from the flight, doubtless other plausible reasons would have been offered up for the mistake, but certainly none more impressive than these. That his plane nearly reached the English coast on the withdrawal leg before running out of fuel, that «the bombardier of lead aircraft seeing a target through hole in cloud and believing it was an identified target released bombs,» was not the bombardier of the deputy division leader's aircraft, as was strongly implied in the message, and lastly, that Thompson's 448th group was not one of the two groups that executed the bombing of Schaffhausen, were all facts that could simply be rearranged and submerged in the course of resurrecting a tarnished image.

Upon receipt of General Spaatz' wire, General Arnold wrote a message on 3 April to his counterpart in Switzerland, the Commander of the Swiss Air Force, expressing his regret and apology over the unfortunate affair:

> As Commanding General of the U.S. Army Air Forces, I wish to express personally to you as commander of the Swiss Air Force my extreme regret over the sad occurrence at Schaffhausen on April 1. I know that you understand that the bombing of this peaceful and friendly town could only have taken place as a result of error. Causes of this error and responsibility will be promptly and thoroughly investigated. In the meantime, I give you my personal assurance that every possible precaution will be taken to preventing repetition.

But the unfavorable publicity in the Swiss press still had to be dealt with over the bad weather excuse offered on 2 April. The individual voicing the greatest criticism of this contributory reason was General Legge, the U.S. Military Attache in Bern. He sent a strongly-worded wire to the War Department on 4 April recommending that the American government repudiate the unfavorable weather conditions as cause of the error. Part of his message reads as follows:

> Our London communique April 2nd states unfavorable weather conditions were cause of error. This has met with uniform unfavorable criticism in Swiss press and should be repudiated. Light clouds were reported to have partially obscured planes from view of observers in Schaffhausen. This should not be used as reason for error. General Arnold's message best. Stick to that. We should accept full responsibility without seeking reasons to excuse. Earnestly recommend full settlement of damages claimed without discussion or investigation.

This apparently was the deciding factor that prompted Gen. George Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, to suggest to one of his senior staff officers in the War Department that the matter be discussed immediately with Secretary Hull of the State Department. Hull promptly agreed with General Legge's recommendation that the United States should seek Switzerland's bill and pay it at once. The War Department Liaison Section then collaborated briefly with State officials to produce the following message to Mr. Harrison in Bern:

> Please call formally upon the appropriate Swiss authorities to

> say with reference to the tragic incident at Schaffhausen on April 1 your government would welcome information from the Swiss government as soon as possible as to the full amount of the property and personal damage resulting from the accident in order that appropriate reparations can promptly be made to the unfortunate victims and thus at least to that extent help to alleviate their distress. Strictly for your information only: It is the strong feeling of the War Department and of this department that prompt action on the part of this government in meeting without haggling the claims which the Swiss Government may make for the property and personal damage resulting from this accident will redound to our benefit. We wish therefore that you handle the matter in your dealings with the Swiss with this background in mind without however specifically informing the Swiss that we intend to pay their claims without question. We understand that the War Department is informing Legge of the foregoing.

The next day Secretary Hull signed another wire to Harrison, to place at the disposal of the Swiss Government one million dollars with instructions that the funds were for use of the Swiss Government to begin compensating the victims of the accident in such manner and amounts that would be most equitable in relieving distress. Harrison was also directed to state to the host government that additional amounts of money would be made available immediately when his office was so notified.

This magnanimous gesture by the United States went far toward dispelling much of the skepticism and doubt being echoed in the Swiss press, but still left unanswered the two remaining questions posed by the neutral country's government: (1) If bad weather was not in fact the cause of the accident, what exactly happened to create such a divergence from plan? (2) What measures would now be taken by American strategic planners to preclude such disastrous occurrences? It will be recalled that at the previously described press conference, Secretary Hull offered only a vague reference to the reasons for the mishap, since investigations by the War Department had not been concluded, by saying, «A group of our bombers, due to a chain of events negating the extensive precautions which had been taken to prevent incidents of this character, mistakenly flew over and bombed

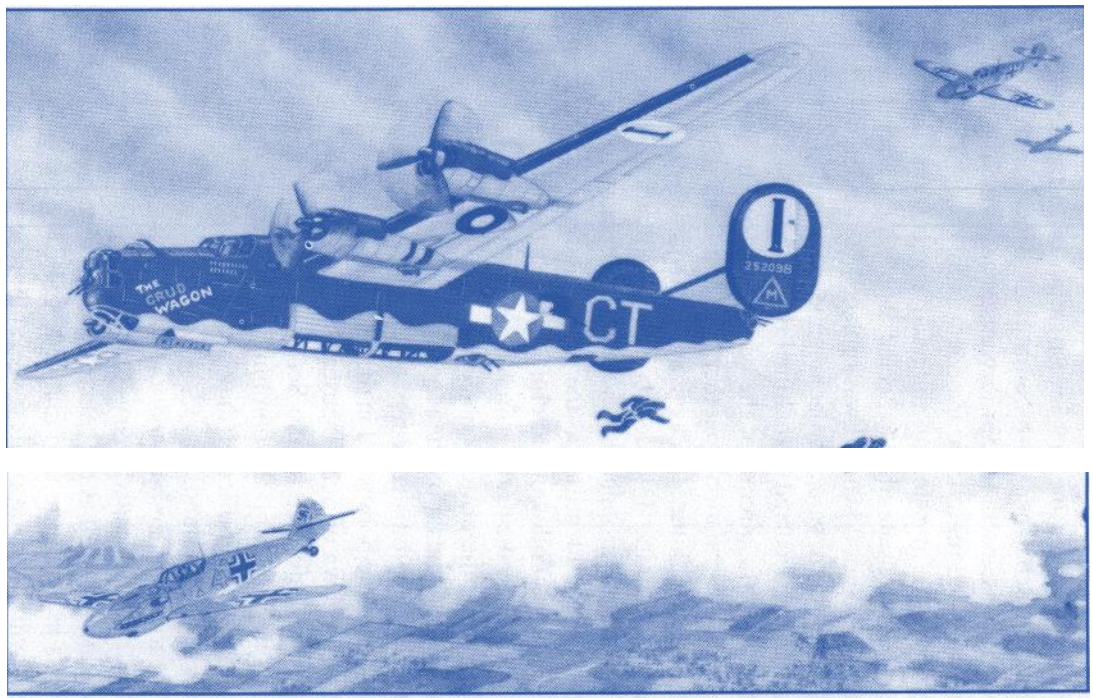
Swiss areas located on the north side of the Rhine.»

These remaining issues of the affair were duly presented to the State Department in a diplomatic note dated 7 April from the Swiss Minister in Washington, Charles Bruggmann. In this correspondence he indicated that a Swiss investigative authority had presented to him its first statement of facts. Included within the report was the finding that the bombardment took place under fair weather conditions, with good visibility and with a light wind. Bruggmann's note made these additional points:

> The penetration of the Swiss air space by American planes resulting in the bombing of Schaffhausen constitutes a most serious violation of Swiss sovereignty and territory. The mistake which caused in broad daylight the partial destruction of a Swiss city is so grave an incident that the Government of the Swiss Confederation cannot consider it settled by its protest and by the expression of regret of the American Government. It is essential that the causes of this tragic error be determined exactly and that effective measures be taken to eliminate them in the future. I am therefore instructed to request that the detailed results of the investigation, which is being conducted by the American authorities, be communicated in full to the Swiss Government, together with definite proposals of precautionary measures for preventing further infringement of Swiss rights.

Bruggmann's note was answered by Secretary Hull on 25 April and brought to a close the diplomatic government-to-government phase of this crisis. The Eighth Air Force investigation of the mission had already been concluded on 5 April, and the report had since been passed to General Spaatz' command, thence to the War Department in Washington. There was nothing within the investigation findings, however, that could embellish or improve upon the original explanation furnished by Spaatz in his classified message of 2 April forwarded to General Arnold. Hull's reply to Bruggmann is quoted in full:

> Sir: With reference to your note dated April 7, 1944 regarding the bombing of Schaffhausen by American planes on April 1, 1944 and particularly to your request that the detailed results of



Copy of the cover painting, presented to the author by Robert Harper in 1986. It portrays the crew of *The Crud Wagon* bailing out over France while under enemy fighter attack.

my Government's investigation into the causes of this accident together with definite proposals of precautionary measures for preventing further such incidents be communicated to the Swiss Government, I have the honor to inform you that the Secretary of War has advised me that investigation of of the accidental bombing of Schaffhausen by aircraft of American Army Air Forces has disclosed certain circumstances which led to this unfortunate and regrettable incident, as follows: «The aircraft engaged in this mission encountered winds more than sixty miles per hour greater than expected. The leading aircraft of the air units was shot down and was replaced by the deputy leader. While the aircraft were approaching the target over almost solid clouds, there occurred a malfunction of special navigational equipment in the aircraft of the deputy leader. The loss of the leader of the formation, together with the unanticipated high wind and the failure of navigational equipment, caused a variation from the intended course. The bombardier of the leading aircraft dropped his bombs and markers on what he believed he had identified as the primary target through breaks in the clouds. Following aircraft released their bombs at the point marked by the leading aircraft, again in the belief that they were bombing the primary objective. «

Photographs taken on the mission show that the majority of the bombs pictured struck in woods outside of the town. The remainder of the bombs fell in the railroad yards and river front areas of the town of Schaffhausen.

I am also informed by the Secretary of War that directives now in effect prohibit the bombing of any targets in Germany not positively identified if they are within fifty miles of the borders of Switzerland.

It is further understood that the War Department communicated to the American Military Attache at Bern full details of the investigation as well as the concrete measures to prevent similar accidents in the future, and that he has already discussed these matters with the appropriate Swiss authorities.

I am sure that you will appreciate the necessity of my urging that the foregoing information be treated as confidential by your Government and not be given publicity either here or in Switzerland.

On 11 October 1944, a second installment of $3,000,000 was paid to Switzerland to assist those in distress as a result of the bombing of Schaffhausen. Then several years later, on 21 October 1949, the State Department in a note to the Swiss Legation offered the Swiss Government 62,176,000 Swiss francs or $53,000,000 which included interest through that date, in full and final settlement of balances due on all claims for losses and damages inflicted on persons and property in all Switzerland during World War II by units of the United States Armed Forces in violation of neutral rights. By a vote of the same date the Swiss accepted the offer and agreed that the Swiss Government would assume responsibility for making the payment of individual claims involved.

Amid all this feverish high level activity between the United States and Swiss governments, one might be persuaded to believe that the concerns of the dead and wounded victims in the town of Schaffhausen had been swept aside in favor of learning the details of how such an operational calamity could occur, and the resulting considerations of timely reparations payments, etc. It is appropriate at this point to examine the grief of a typical family that lost a husband and father in the Schaffhausen bombing on that fateful day. An article prepared by Brigitte Schoch on the 40th anniversary of this event provides a sober glimpse of this family's resulting tragedy. She was only ten years old in 1944, and her article entitled: «My Longest Day» is reprinted from German into English.

> It was a day like today. The sun was shining, the birds were singing, and the air was full of invigorating scents of fresh earth, humid moss and flowering bushes. The promise of spring could be felt in the sweet birch trees in front of our house. Many branches touched the little window next to our front door. Looking out of our bathroom window, the scenery could be compared to a Chinese pen and ink drawing.
>
> We children were sitting in the bathtub, all three with blond hair and blue eyes, having our Saturday morning bath. It was April 1st, the beginning of a vacation, a happy day filled with laughter and fun. Gisela, my six year old sister, tried to tell me I was cross-eyed, and Susanne the two year old imitated her with baby talk.
>
> Outside in the hallway I heard my mother's voice. «Please,

Gust,» she was pleading with her husband who was about to depart for his office on this Saturday morning, «stay at home today. Yesterday evening it was so late when you came home.» My father, in his position of Administrative Advisor, quite often had to attend official evening functions. On these occasions we children were deprived of his bedtime stories which he told in a spellbound unique manner.

The bathroom door opened and my father entered, wearing the same black pin stripe suit he had worn the previous day. Even though he laughed and joked with us, he looked quite formal in his unusual attire. «Oh,» I sighed, «you are not staying home today. Too bad.»

«I shall be back soon, Gigi,» he consoled me, «and then we shall look for anemones in the forest. They are blooming already. How lucky we are to have these three healthy lively children,» he said to my mother. After looking down upon us with a happy smile, he took his departure. As the outside door closed, the overhanging branches trembled quietly outside the window.

Outside, the warm sunshine dried my wet hair. Underneath the barren birch tree I discovered the first violets of the season. I was about to make a little bouquet when suddenly the air raid siren began to blare. I hated this deafening piercing noise even more than the shrill fanatical voice of Hitler that occasionally was heard on our radio. Both these sounds were voices of war which always frightened me. I ran quickly into the house.

Soon the sirens stopped and once again one could hear the birds calling in the nearby bushes. The violets in my hand had the same glow as the blue of the spring sky, and there at the edge of the blue, airplanes appeared, heavy four engine bombers flying in V formations like big scary birds. Under the thunderous noise of the mass formation flight, all of nature's spring voices ceased.

Where, I wondered, do these bombers fly to, where will they unload their deadly cargo? The second squadron roared in at a considerable altitude. We stood at the window and looked in fascination into the sky. Suddenly, tiny smoke clouds rose above the horizon as an ominous symbol, and our fascination quickly gave way to alarm and fear.

«Quick, down to the shelter, children,» my mother ordered as she began closing the outside window shutters. She had barely made it to the basement when a huge detonation was heard. Within an instant shock waves of gigantic proportions shook the house which caused all the windows to clatter wildly. The fear and agitation within me were all-consuming like fire burning in a deep black hole. The third squadron consisting of 24 United States planes was dropping its bombs onto Schaffhausen. This gruesome spectacle took but one minute, then the clacking and clatter was finished. Only the disturbed crying of my youngest sister filled the cold barren basement.

We tumbled outside to see what had happened. Gigantic pillars of smoke rose from the nearby city, darkening the sky, black and threatening. The smell of fire hung in the air. There was only one question of concern to us: was Father safe? My mother attempted to reach him by phone but all connections to the city were disrupted. We sat there staring at each other. The gnawing uncertainty, however, did not keep us idle for long. Together with neighbors we ran past Santis Street to the Munot [a hill overlooking the city]. Burnt scraps of paper were floating overhead. Totally out of breath we reached the pinnacle of the hill and looked down on the burning city.

Mighty flames flared up from old city houses. The government building was engulfed in smoke. After searching intently, we found the window of my father's office. No smoke or fire was coming from it. We were relieved. The people around us looked with quiet seriousness at the devastation caused by the one minute fire bombing. Whole city blocks were in flames. The railway station and two new arcades had been ravaged by direct hits. Along Muhlen Street all the industrial sites were sunk in an ocean of flames. Small blazing fires could be seen on the other side of the Rhine River in Feurthalen.

War, that had continually overshadowed our childhood but never seriously threatened it because of our remoteness, had now become brutal reality right in front of our eyes. Confused and sad, we started back home. Maybe Father had come home in the meantime. Those hopes gave wings to our hurried feet, but on arrival nobody awaited us there. The telephone rang. It was grandfather who called from SJeitheim to tell my mother that

Father was most likely among the injured in the local hospital. My mother ran immediately down to the city to search for my father. Fortunately, the hospital had been spared of the bombs. Doctors and nurses gave their best efforts. The severely wounded were carried on stretchers into the operating room, while those with lesser wounds wanted to be treated immediately. Nobody had time for my mother. She ran from bed to bed, from stretcher to stretcher, looking into everyone's eyes, but the one she was looking for could not be found.

Many of the burning streets were barricaded. There was fear that houses hit by the bombs would collapse. Only support troops, air raid personnel, firemen, policemen, Red Cross workers, cadets, and boy scouts were allowed passage. My mother, driven by fear and uncertainty, crossed the barricades and passed through streets which were littered with glass and rocks. Her destination was the government building which she was trying to reach as fast as her frantic steps would allow. On Sporrengässchen Street she met an elderly acquaintance, a woman who held her hands out toward my mother. «Poor lady,» she said, «my condolences to you.»

A high explosive bomb had ripped a deep crater in the street in front of the government building which had not only taken the life of my father but five others as well. My mother went home all alone. The long steps of the Munot seemed endless.

Gisela, Susanne, and I sat on our little red chairs in our room and waited. Finally, Mother, exhausted and pale, stood in front of us. «Is Papa in great pain?» we asked. My mother shook her head and sadly replied: «He has no pain, children. He is in heaven.» It was inconceivable; we did not believe it.

In the afternoon, our living room became filled with people dressed in black to mourn the passing of my father. I saw Grandfather crying for the first time. It had to be true; Father was dead. I went outside into the garden and was surprised that the violets growing under the bush were still blooming. The birds were still singing, and the birch tree stood unchanged in front of our house. A few burnt ashes and debris which the wind had carried from the flaming city were hanging in the higher branches of our trees, and resembled a brittle silken veil.

Forty years have since passed. Wind and weather, the hot

> summer sun, and the winter snows have all combined to give the grave at the cemetery an antique patina. Moss and vines have partially covered the red gravestone. I placed a little bouquet of flowers gathered by my children on the grave of the grandfather they have never known.

In terms of its overall international significance, the diplomatic phase just concluded far overshadowed the more mundane military investigation of the mission that commenced on the same afternoon as the bombers' return to their bases when the electrifying news of the bombing of Switzerland was first announced. It was officially launched by verbal orders of General Doolittle, Commander of Eighth Air Force. At the insistence of 2nd Bombardment Division Headquarters, the services of Col. E W. Ott, formerly Air Inspector of Eighth Air Force, were requested in order to insure that the inquiry would be both comprehensive and impartial. General Hodges' staff also issued a letter of instruction to Colonel Ott as part of his task. It contained a lengthy list of questions to be addressed which are discussed below. Ott was assisted by two other officers, and the job was promptly completed on 5 April and transmitted successively to 2nd Bombardment Division, Eighth Air Force, then on the USSTAF. At this highest air command level in Great Britian, it was then forwarded to the War Department in Washington. However, as previously seen, the report was not used in framing a State Department response for the causes underlying the accidental bombing.

It was a thorough investigative job and sought to determine the weaknesses of the present system of crew cooperation and understanding, so vital for mission success. A number of personnel shortcomings were glaringly revealed, which were due in part to the introduction of H2X radar bombing equipment and the failure of various crew members fully to understand or appreciate. One of the greatest problems contributing to mission failure was shown to be inaccurate navigation of large bomber fleets flying in formation under combat conditions, especially during bad visibility. Lastly, the poor visibility features provided for the navigator in B-24 H and J aircraft were singled out for criticism, a fact that was long known to any navigator who had flown in them.

Before we proceed into the detailed findings of the investigation team, we should note some interesting facts that were brought to light

in the 14th Combat Wing's official critique of this mission which was held the next day.

It was headed by the permanent deputy commander of the 14th, Colonel Dent, who did not take part in the flight. This combat wing, composed of the 392nd and 44th Bomb Groups, was the unit that actually participated in the bombing of Schaffhausen. Some of the minutes of the critique are quoted below and reflect the viewpoints and personal feelings of those who were most intimately associated with the incident. This and other related information was also used by Colonel Ott and his two assistants.

Colonel Dent opened the critique by reviewing the plan of assembly and the line up of combat wings in proceeding to the target. At this point he turned to the command pilot of the 392nd, who was also the leader of the 14th CBW and asked for his comments.

> *Capt. J. N. McFadden:* «The wing assembled very well. We made division assembly line on time, but the lead wing was three minutes late. At Buncher No. 5 we continued straight so we could get behind the 20th CBW. We crossed the English coast four or five minutes late. We flew across the channel to the left of the 2nd CBW with the 20th leading. At the enemy coast, there was quite a bit of flak. I turned to the left in order to get out of the flak area and hoped to get back into position by going around it, which we did. The 2nd CBW was to our right, although I could not see all their groups. The visibility was very poor all along our route, and we flew more than halfway in at 17,000 feet instead of the 22,000 feet as briefed.»

At this point McFadden repeated his description of the series of fatal bomb runs that his Pathfinder operator and bombardier conducted, which resulted in the mistaken target of Schaffhausen being attacked.

> *Colonel Dent:* «Did you at any time see Lake Constance?»
> *Captain McFadden:* «No sir.»
> *Colonel Dent:* «Did you see the Alps?»
> *Captain McFadden:* «No sir. I did see some mountains on my way out [on the withdrawal leg]. Some of the men in our formation said that they did see the Alps.»

Colonel Dent: «Did the 392nd bomb by group or by section?»

Captain McFadden: «By group, sir.»

Colonel Dent: «How was the fighter support?»

Captain McFadden: «We had fighter support most all the way in. After we made the 180 [the reversal of direction over Switzerland of the entire wing] and came back to bomb the target, we had P-5 Is in support. They gave us close support from the time we dropped our bombs until we were about half way out. P-47s then picked us up and brought us the rest of the way home.»

Captain Slough (Command Pilot 44th Bomb Group): «I heard someone calling out on VHF something that I considered to be very unnecessary. Several times I heard «bombs away, bombs away. Drop your bombs.» Every time I heard that I would call out, «Hold your bombs, hold your bombs.» I personally think it was Jerry cutting in.»

Lt. Colonel Brandon (a Mmember of the 14th CBW): «At the time of your bombs away, did you think that your target was the briefed one?»

Captain McFadden: «Yes sir.»

Captain Koch (392nd DR Navigator): «At Wendling [home station of the 392nd] I was told that there were some last minute changes in the Field Order and I would receive them at Hethel, but when we arrived there, we went directly to the plane and climbed in without any discussion of the changes. The Path-finder navigator gave me some time changes and told me not to expect the same winds as briefed. We crossed the enemy coast behind the 20th CBW. When I asked the Pathfinder navigator for winds, he said he could not give me figures, but that he would give me some fixes. As we flew along the route he did get me some. The wind that I figured from these fixes was for 215 degrees [blowing from the southwest, which was inaccurate] at 55 m.p.h. On our heading east, the Pathfinder navigator told me he had the I.P in his equipment and that he could see it very well. He said he was going to cut the route short so that he would not overrun the I.R We started our bomb run, S'ing more and more as we continued on course. His equipment went out, we made a 180, his equipment came in again and while making this second run, the equipment went out again. The bombardier said

he could see the target so he bombed it visually. After bombs away, I immediately gave the pilot a heading for home and asked the Pathfinder navigator for a wind. He said he could not give me one. I asked the Pilotage navigator to give me a fix, but he could give me nothing definite. I used my briefed metro winds to come home on.»

Captain Slough (Command Pilot 44th Bomb Group): «McFadden flew a very nice formation and looked after us very well. On the way in, according to our DR, we were slightly south of course, but not too far south. The other wings were flying quite a way below us. We were getting higher tail winds. As we went in the ceiling improved. I believe McFadden climbed to about 20,000 feet. There were scattered groups all over the sky. After we made our 180, McFadden told me that his equipment was working again. We continued following the 392nd with our bomb bay doors open. After they dropped, my first section dropped and hit where the 392nd was aiming. The second section realized where we were, held their bombs, continued on for about ten minutes and bombed a small town in Germany.»

Colonel Dent: «Could you see the Alps?»

Captain Slough: «There were mountains to our left and to the south that did not penetrate through the clouds. It is hard to tell at this altitude, sir, how high or how far a mountain is.»

Colonel Dent: «Wings must stay in column unless it is thought that the division leader is going so far off course that he will jeopardize the mission, and then he should be called to see if he knows where he is.»

Captain McFadden: «I realize now that I should have followed the lead wing.»

The critique was concluded by a final statement from Colonel Dent which reflected the gravity of the situation confronting his unit and that of others in trying to explain in a credible fashion the reasons for what had occurred. In a greater sense, however, he was reflecting the tenuous nature of trying to contain an armed conflict within specified boundaries.

Colonel Dent: «I know that we all deeply regret yesterday's incident. I do not think the seriousness of the situation can be

> over-emphasized. The results of bombing a neutral country could be far-reaching. I am not sure that commanders of bombardment outfits realize the power of destruction that is in their hands. Yesterday's unintentional bombing of a neutral was a result of weather difficulties, equipment failures, and personnel failures in dead reckoning and interpretation of the Mickey [Pathfinder radar]. We must analyze this mission carefully and do everything in our power to insure no recurrence. Group commanders will take steps to familiarize their personnel with the use and possibilities of the Pathfinder equipment.»

The questions referred to earlier as posed by General Hodges' headquarters are shown below together with answers furnished by the investigation team.

Question 1: In this investigation it is desired to determine the following facts: The causes for failure of each group and combat wing participating to accomplish the mission.

Answer 1: Faulty Dead Reckoning navigation and insufficient crew knowledge and cooperation.

Question 2: The circumstances which permitted the bombing of cities in occupied and neutral territory by the 93rd, 44th, and 392nd Groups.

Answer 2: Same as answer 1.

Question 3: What instructions were issued to cover bombing targets of opportunity?

Answer 3: Field Order no. 250 of the 2nd Bombardment Division of 1 April 1944 states: «Last resort target: Any military objective positively identified as being in Germany.» This Field Order was received by all groups. The 2nd Combat Wing referred to this remark in its own FO. The 14th and 20th Combat Wings made no reference to last resort targets in their F.O.'s. At the 13 March 1944 division critique, combat wing commanders were instructed to re-emphasize to groups «that bombs will not be dropped in 50 mile area inside of German border unless stipulated in F.O.» It is believed these instructions were adequate.

Question *4:* What instructions were issued to prevent indiscriminate bombing of targets not positively identified?

Answer 4: Same as answer 3 above.

Question 5: What emphasis was placed on the restriction against bombing targets of opportunity without positive identification?

Answer 5: All groups briefed their crews that the last resort target was any military objective positively identified as being in Germany.

Question 6: What emphasis was placed on necessity for wing position navigators to follow the course and advise their pilots of suspected errors?

Answer 6: None in briefing – considered a matter of training and SOP (Standard Operating Procedure). Usually the emphasis comes from the pilot asking navigator where they are.

Question 7: What emphasis was placed on command responsibilities within each Wing to advise the Wing leader of suspected errors in navigation?

Answer 7: None in briefing. A 2nd Bombardment Division Factual Doctrine pamphlet entitled «Leadership in Combat» was then quoted to complete the answer. It read: «Commanders leading combat wings, other than the leading combat wing of a task force, and within visual distance of the preceding combat wing will abide by the decision of the combat wing commander ahead. They will not desert the formation unless it is obvious that the actual course differs from the planned course to such an extent that the target may be missed and/or the advantage of fighter cover lost.»

Question 8: Was the special briefing conducted by the 389th Group for Pathfinder and Air Commander crews considered adequate?

Answer 8: The briefing was adequate for Pathfinder crews, but the Air Commander crews didn't report to the Pathfinder Station (Hethel) on time to receive any briefing.

Question 9: Were Pathfinder navigators and DR navigators briefed to work as a team, and if so, what method of checking each other was ordered?

Answer 9: No.

Question 10: What was the proficiency of the lead DR navigator?

Answer 10: Capt. R.R. Thornton was a Group Navigator who had finished an operational tour in the Pacific Theater and had been on three previous missions in this theater as group or wing lead.

Question 11: What was the degree of proficiency of the Pathfinder navigators who participated?

Answer 11: Four were rated as advanced including the leader

(Bruce Vaughan), one as average, and one was considered unsatisfactory by the commanding officer of the 564th Squadron at Hethel.

Question 12: What knowledge did Air Commanders of combat wings have of their whereabouts at all times, and what action was taken by them to communicate their knowledge to proper ground stations and other wings participating?

Answer 12: *20th CBW Leader* (Colonel Thompson): It is believed he had no more knowledge of his whereabouts than his navigator. They left the English coast approximately eight miles south of course and seven minutes late, and entered the enemy coast as briefed. At about 10:00 a.m. they had deviated from the course sufficiently to be 100 miles south and 30 miles east of the briefed turning point. At 10:55 a.m. the Deputy Leader took over upon signal from the leader, but the precise location at which the lead changed hands is indeterminate. What knowledge the Air Commander of the 20th CBW possessed as to his whereabouts at all times cannot be ascertained since he is MIA (Missing in action). An analysis of the Deputy Leader's navigator's log showed that his gyro-flux-gate compass was inoperative, that he did not know his correct position, nor was he able to identify what they bombed. He thought they had bombed Stuttgart. The leader of the 20th CBW made transmissions to proper ground station concerning reference points A & B and Control Point 1 enroute in, and Control Point 2 enroute out. Examination of list of messages transmitted by Deputy Leader of 20th CBW shows one effort was made to contact other wings to find out if their equipment (radar bombing) was in. No acknowledgment was received.

14th CBW Leader (Capt. J.N. McFadden): The leader did not have an accurate knowledge of his whereabouts over enemy territory. The leader rendered radio position reports to the proper ground station concerning reference points A & B and Control Point 2 enroute in and out. Position reports were rendered concerning Control Points 2 & 3 enroute in and strikes. Record of his radio transmissions shows no effort to communicate a knowledge of his position to other CBWs.

2nd CBW Leader: The leader knew his position just before bombing Pforzheim. He rendered radio position reports to the proper ground station concerning reference point B and Control Point 1 enroute in and Control Point 2 enroute out. [At this point the investigators described how the leader of the 2nd CBW contacted Colonel Thompson, the division leader, and advised him that he was

off course. Also detailed was the announcement by the 2nd CBW leader to leave the division formation.]

Question 13: Were Wing and Deputy Wing Commanders competent to lead?

Answer 13: It is assumed that Group Commanders place competent leaders in lead positions.

Question 14: Referring to the investigation of H2X crews, what is fundamentally wrong with the system that allows such results?

Answer 14: (1) Assignment of some second-rate men by groups for training at Alconbury. (2) DR and Pathfinder navigators were not assigned as members of the same crew. (3) Lack of experience of the good crew members assigned and lack of quality of poor ones. (4) Failure of air commanders and their navigators to be present for special briefing of Pathfinder crews. (5) Pilotage navigators should be experienced in pilotage and checked out in operation of Emerson turret (the nose turret). (6) Failure to inform air commanders and lead navigators of the capabilities and limitations of Pathfinder equipment.

Question 15: What is the understanding between command pilots and DR navigators of their responsibilities and required coordination?

Answer 15: The air commanders and DR navigators on this mission possessed only a hazy idea of the capabilities and limitations of Pathfinder equipment. This is believed to be one of the major factors responsible for the failure of the mission.

Question 16: Was the H2X equipment used to its maximum in fixing the positions of the units?

Answer 16: Yes. Equipment was used throughout the flight. The inexperience of operators, lack of coordination between Pathfinder and DR, coupled with lack of knowledge by DR navigators and air commanders of capabilities and limitations of Pathfinder equipment prevented maximum utilization of data obtained by H2X equipment.

Question 17: Were Pilotage fixes obtained?

Answer 17: *20th CBW* (Deputy Leader): Three pilotage fixes were logged enroute in, and an analysis of logs shows the navigator was mistaken in their identification. Enroute out he logged three, fixes, including crossing coast.

14th CBW: Navigator logged two fixes near coast on way in and the coast on way out.

2nd CBW: Logged five pilotage fixes enroute in and three enroute out.

Question 18: What indications, if any, were obtained from DR navigators in the group lead that units were off course?

Answer 18: Logs show navigators knew they were off course to south and were overtime to target.

Question 19: What attempt was made by group leads to warn combat wing leaders of suspected errors in navigation?

Answer 19: No effort was made by group leaders over radio transmission to warn combat wings that they were off course.

Question 20: What action was taken positively to identify targets?

Answer 20: Navigators' logs and charts and a reconstruction of the routes flown from data therein show that navigators were mistaken in their target identifications. It should be noted that the navigator of the second section, 44th Bomb Group, identified Schaffhausen at the last minute and prevented his bombardier and consequently his section from dropping bombs in Switzerland. He was the only navigator who had a map extending below 48 degrees north. The navigator of the second section of the 389th Bomb Group identified Pforzheim before it was bombed.

Colonel Ott's report was concluded by recommending a total of seven corrective actions which were as follows: (1) That personnel selected for Pathfinder crews be confined to those of proven ability. (2) That the logs and charts of all navigators be critically examined after each mission for adequacy, accuracy, and knowledge of proper navigation procedures. (3) That maps be carried covering the area 100 miles on each side of the briefed route. (4) That all members of the Pathfinder crew be permanently assigned to the Pathfinder squadron. (This provision would eliminate the DR and pilotage navigators who had been furnished from the same unit as the division and wing commander selected to lead the force.) (5) That all prospective formation commanders be familiar with the capabilities and limitations of Pathfinder equipment, and particularly with the responsibilities of navigator members of the crew. (6) That air commanders be required to attend the special Pathfinder briefing. (7) That Pioneer API (airplane position indicators) be installed in all Pathfinder aircraft. (This was a recent navigational improvement that had not become available in sufficient amounts during that period.)

The report given to General Hodges for his review and comment seemed to be a comprehensive, well-balanced document and brought

to light all the inherent weaknesses in the combat groups which were contributing causes for the mission's disastrous results. One small discrepancy, however, was either not detected in the detailed examination of the logs of each lead navigator, or else ignored as irrelevant in the report of findings. It concerned the circumstances described by the 93rd Bomb Group in attacking Strasbourg in error. The reader will recall that the 93rd's explanation was that it «had followed the 448th over this town, thinking the lead group had bombed.» The mistaken target of Strasbourg was accordingly attacked by the trailing 93rd Group, with the actual time of bombing recorded as being four minutes earlier than the time shown by the 448th when it turned away from Strasbourg and began to follow the 2nd CBW.

General Hodges' reactions to the report were contained in his letter of transmittal to the Commanding General, Eighth Air Force, dated 7 April 1944. His letter emphasized several points contained in the findings, including a defense of the lead navigator of the division, Capt. R. R. Thornton:

> The reconstruction of the navigation outlined in Paragraph 5 of the report does not take into consideration the possibility that the DR navigator of the lead aircraft, upon making landfall on the coast of Belgium, may have mistaken Lille for Brussels or made a similar error as to identity of towns shown in the Pathfinder scope which caused him to reverse his air plot and apply corrections to the course based upon this revision of data. Due to such an error in identity he might well have calculated that he was north of course and that therefore the corrections he had been applying for the Met wind [forecasted wind direction and speed provided by the Weather Office] had been too great. If this reconstruction is correct, it would account for his turn to the south-southeast in order to get back on the briefed course and would further account for the course taken up by him at 50 30N 0320E. [A map coordinate or location to indicate the point where the division began to fly parallel to the briefed route].

At this point General Hodges again recounted the prior combat experience of the lead navigator in the Pacific Theater and the record he had achieved thus far as the Group Navigator in the 448th Bomb Group. His letter continues in defense of Thornton's actions:

> It is obvious that this navigator was confident of his position throughout the penetration. He made turns at the proper time in the proper direction and the pattern of his track up to the assumed position of the target closely follows that briefed. Furthermore, bomb bay doors were opened and the code word for overcast bombing was given over VHF at the proper time with respect to the track he was flying.

The division commander then turned to a discussion of the weather conditions that were present on the flight:

> Weather conditions during this operation were particularly unfavorable and visibility was impaired by clouds, haze, and light persistent contrasts throughout the whole trip to the target. The unusually adverse weather caused the abandonment of the mission by another division. After consideration of these facts, one can only have admiration for the courage and determination of the division leader for carrying on with the mission. Nevertheless, the failure of the division to find and bomb its target was the result of navigational errors on part of the lead crew.

Hodges' final point, and one of the most important dealt with in his letter, concerned the difficult problem of positive target identification on Pathfinder missions, and his overriding concerns that additional restrictions might be imposed upon bomber forces by higher headquarters, which would further degrade the possibility of success of such type attacks:

> The question of positive identification of targets on Pathfinder mission is a most difficult one. A unit, which with reasonable certainty, has reached the target area by proper Pathfinder procedure and which is committed to attack under a closely coordinated scheme of maneuver, must press on to its target with determination. The necessity for positive identification of targets which become partially visible at the last moment would lead to hesitancy on the part of air commanders, bombardiers, and navigators at the crucial moment of attack. Pathfinder missions are normally conducted under such conditions and the opportunity for visual fixes is usually so limited that positive

> identification by terrain recognition is often impracticable without disrupting the attack and exposing units to heavy losses. It is strongly recommended that no additional restrictions be imposed upon units as a result of this mission which might cause a decrease in the effectiveness of Pathfinder missions.

On 15 April, the commanding general of Eighth Air Force and his staff had concluded their review of the investigation report and General Hodges' accompanying letter. All recommendations were accepted, and the letter transmitting the findings to General Spaatz' higher echelon of command contained these words:

> It is concluded from an analysis of attached report that the accidental bombing of Switzerland was due directly to navigational errors on the part of the lead navigators in the force dispatched by the 2nd Bomb Division. It is concluded further that these navigational errors were induced by weather difficulties but could have been avoided had there been a proper degree of team work between the various methods of navigation required for this type of operation. It is felt that this is an isolated incident of accumulated error and that training and briefing requirements instituted by 2nd Bomb Division are adequate to prevent recurrence.

It was not until 30 April that the review and comments of this report by the staff of United States Strategic Air Forces in Europe had been completed. In communicating its conclusions back to Eighth Air Force, the USSTAF viewpoint was one of doubt and misgiving that the corrective actions instituted by 2nd Bomb Division were sufficent to preclude future such errors as the 1 April incident. Moreover, a recurrence (though not involving a neutral country) had already been committed the previous day when serious navigational errors were made by both the 2nd and 3rd Bomb Divisions in the attack on Berlin which resulted in heavy losses. Although USSTAF indicated that no further action need be taken specifically with regard to the 1 April incident, it did indicate areas where further improvement in overall operating procedures could be realized. Some of these comments are quoted:

> It would appear desirable that all group leaders, group deputy leaders, squadron leaders, and squadron deputy leaders should be in a position at all times to take over command of the wing if necessary. This would of course require keeping as complete a navigational plot as possible, and logging all radio messages emanating from their own combat wing or from the division ground station in order to check air position relative to control points. A single deputy leader is not adequate for the following reasons: (1) Leader may abort early. (2) On several occasions both the leader and his wing men have been lost to the same flak burst. (3) The chances of mechanical, personnel, or communications failures added to damage by the enemy are great enough that both leader and deputy leader may be out of commission. In this specific instance, the deputy leader of the 29th CBW was only partially effective due to his compass being inoperative. It would appear that he should have been replaced as soon as this fact was apparent, by an alternate deputy leader.
>
> It should be standard operating procedure not to bomb when any doubt has been raised of targets being in occupied country. Doubt was raised in this instance by the leader of another combat wing, although it is not clear whether this message was actually received.

This latter suggestion was, of course, a direct rejection of the strong recommendation made by General Hodges with reference to additional restrictions being placed upon bomber units in the absence of positive identification of targets. As a matter of interest, neither of these suggestions were adopted by Eigh^th^ Air Force, and the current status quo was allowed to stand.

Thus was concluded the immediate aftermath of the 1 April bombing of Switzerland. It was a tragic account of an event that under the circumstances, seemed inevitable. Given the inherent weaknesses and inconsistencies of the system, one is led to the conclusion that had this attack not occured on that particular day and location, another deed would undoubtedly have been recorded in a fashion not too dissimilar to the Schaffhausen incident.

Five days later, on 6 April, another bombing mission by elements of the Eigh^th^ Air Force was executed in a typical matter-of-fact style as

though the affair of April 1 had not occured. Important and unique though it was for a brief period with its focus on international publicity and top level governmental attention, the Schaffhausen bombardment could not and did not deter the waging of aerial warfare for an instant.

Despite the remedial actions implemented by the Eighth Air Force Headquarters to preclude repetition of such accidental acts, they soon proved inadequate to the formidable environmental conditions under which American bombers were operating in the European air war. Inadvertent violations of Swiss air space, mainly by fighter aircraft, were reported routinely through diplomatic channels by the Swiss during the next 11 months. Then on 22 February 1945, Schaffhausen was struck again, leaving 16 persons dead and others wounded.

This incident triggered a strong message four days later from Gen. George Marshall in the War Department to General Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander in Europe:

> After the bombing of Schaffhausen last year we agreed not to attack any but positively identified targets within fifty miles of the Swiss frontier, and continued reports of violation of this agreement makes our position difficult. The most recent example is another bombing of Schaffhausen on February 22nd. I appreciate the difficulty of positively identifying the Swiss border from the air but we must do everything within our power to insure that air crews are properly briefed and impressed with the importance of positive identification of targets near Swiss frontiers before making an attack. Will you please have someone look into this and let me know what can be done toward preventing recurrence of these incidents?

General Eisenhower's response on 28 February revealed that he had issued instructions to his Tactical Air Forces (the medium and light bombers) prohibiting attacks by them under visual conditions on any objective within ten miles of the Swiss frontier and under instrument conditions within fifty miles. Concerning the Strategic Air Forces (the heavy bombers, B-17, B-24) he replied that they

> . . . have been operating since the bombing of Schaffhausen

> under rules which prohibit bombing of any but positively identified targets within fifty miles of the Swiss frontier. The recurrence of these incidents is a matter of extreme concern to this headquarters and the air forces concerned. Under existing conditions, however, there can be no positive guarantee that such incidents will not occur. Weather conditions are such that air navigation is largely dependent upon dead reckoning except in areas contiguous to our front lines where navigational aids can be used. Our air forces are performing thousands of successful missions daily in weather conditions that would normally prevent all flying. We will continue to make every effort to prevent recurrence of these incidents.

Six days later on 5 March, the most embarrassing incident to occur thus far was recorded when nine B-24 Liberators mistakenly bombed the Swiss city of Basle, while six others attacked Zurich causing many casualties and widespread destruction. General Marshall's patience had come to an end, and he promptly directed Gen. Carl Spaatz to go to Switzerland immediately to explain personally to the Swiss government the reasons for this spate of mistaken bombings. Two days later Spaatz arrived in Bern accompanied by his Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Curtis, and reported immediately to Mr. Leland Harrison, the American Minister. There he was told that a meeting with the Swiss authorities was scheduled for 9:00 a.m. the next day.

Present at the 8 March meeting were Mr. Karl Kobelt, Minister of War; Mr. Petit-Pierre, Foreign Minister; Gen. Henri Guisan, Commander in Chief, Swiss Army; General Rihner, Chief Swiss Air Corps; Minister Harrison; Generals Curtis and Spaatz. The Minister of War began by reading a prepared statement thanking General Spaatz in the name of the Swiss Government for making this visit and then proceeded to list in some detail the bombing incidents in Switzerland, beginning with the Schaffhausen attack down to the latest attacks on 5 March. He ended by expressing the hope and belief that this meeting would result in new arrangements to prevent further violations in the future.

General Spaatz then began by expressing to the Minister of War, on behalf of the War Department and the U.S. Strategic Air Forces, the official governmental and his personal regrets for these incidents, and particularly for the Swiss lives which had been lost as a result. He

then continued by giving a brief general explanation covering the difficulties of flying large formations of heavy bombers over great distances and through difficult weather, and explained that since the first attack on Schaffhausen strenuous efforts had been made to prevent any recurrence. These included the prohibition against bombing within 50 miles of the Swiss border unless the targets were positively identified, careful briefing of crews, and a clear statement to our Air Forces of the grave results in any such incidents.

Spaatz then thanked the Foreign Minister for his cordial reception and particularly for the treatment which the Swiss Government had accorded American interned and escaped air crews. He then indicated that the details of further arrangements which were being made by American forces to prevent repetitions of these incidents involved matters which might best be discussed with Generals Guisan and Rihner. Shortly after, the two ministers, together with Mr. Harrison, withdrew.

The American air commander's report, which he addressed directly to General Marshall upon the conclusion of his visit, is quoted below at the point where his discussion was confined to the Swiss generals. A copy was sent to the Secretary of State and to President Roosevelt one week later.

> In the discussion with the military authorities I explained in much greater detail the weather and operational problems with which we were faced, without in any way attempting to minimize or excuse the attacks on Swiss territory. They were frankly told the exact steps which we had taken, including the establishment of a zone for the Eighth Air Force between 150 miles from the Swiss frontier and 50 miles within which there will be no attacks without positive identification of the target, and a zone 50 miles from the frontier within which no attacks will be made by the Strategic Air Forces except on specific authority from me, in which case we would take steps to see that only experienced crews were permitted to participate. I then explained the difference between the problem as far as the Eighth and Fifteenth Air forces were concerned, due to prevailing winds and different distances which had to be flown from their respective bases. For this reason, only part of the zone prohibited as above would apply to the Fifteenth Air Force, but I feel

that the restrictions for the Fifteen[th] are entirely adequate to prevent any trouble.

It was then pointed out that General Eisenhower had issued instructions to the Tactical Air Forces under his control prohibiting any attacks at all within 10 miles of the Swiss frontier, and attacks only after positive identification of the target in a zone extending 10 miles to 50 miles. Generals Guisan and Rihner seemed to be more than satisfied with the steps which had been taken and assured me that information with regard to the prohibited zone would be kept strictly confidential. It was pointed out that if the Germans should attempt to take advantage of the situation to conduct military or industrial operations in the prohibited zone, it might become necessary for me to authorize further attacks.

With the exception of Mr. Kobelt, Minister of War, who was reputed to have been at least somewhat pro-German, the attitude of all the Swiss authorities was very understanding and even cordial. They seemed to be genuinely impressed with our visit and I believe it served a useful purpose.

The Swiss stated that in order to impress public opinion with the efforts being made by the Americans to avoid further difficulties, they proposed to issue a public communique after my departure covering the purpose of my visit in very general terms. This, I assume, has been done. In accordance with your instructions, I am making no statement whatever concerning the visit.

It seems evident to me that with the present restrictions which have been established, plus the fact that the importance of these incidents has been most forcibly impressed on our Air Forces, there should be little danger of any recurrence of such violations of Swiss sovereignty. I need not tell you the deep personal regret I feel at the embarrassment which these incidents have caused our government.

I desire particularly to mention the excellent arrangements for facilitating my visit and preparing the atmosphere for my presentation to the Swiss officials, which were from my point of view perfectly accomplished by Brigadier General Legge, and by our minister, Mr. Harrison.

General Spaatz' prophesy of no further violations of Swiss sover-

eignty proved correct. There were no further incidents with the newly-imposed restrictions on bombing. The European war came to an end two months later.

Chapter 6

Escape and Survival

1

Out of the consuming flames of failure, a small though significant degree of success was yet to be retrieved from the fire's ashes at the last possible moment. The audacity and courage of this last act of the mission was fully equal to any feat that had previously occurred. Three relatively unimportant members of the flight were the performers and by their action deserved without qualification the title of heroes. Their names were Lt. Jesse Hamby and Sgts. John Dutka and Simon Cohen, now carried by the German authorities as escapists from the lead crew of Thompson and Teague.

A description of their jointly executed deed, which occurred two days later on 3 April after the crash landing by Alan Teague, was contained in the official report rendered by Hamby upon his return to allied military control a few months later. The report also revealed some details of his incredible escape from enemy territory, due in large part to the great resourcefulness and self-confidence he displayed throughout the ordeal.

Hamby's narrative begins with his bailing out at an approximate altitude of 6,000 feet upon Teague's order to abandon the plane. Like Clay Mellor who at almost that same instant was also pulling his own ripcord and getting no response, Hamby had to use both his hands to release the chute. He landed in a tree, and the canopy immediately became entangled in the branches. He suffered some minor cuts on one leg and bruises to both legs caused by the chute's straps.

A Frenchman saw the descending chute fall into a tree, and with a knife in his mouth, began climbing up to free it and its occupant. Hamby took the knife from the individual and cut the lines, then dropped to the ground. The rescuer then removed the airman's flight boots because they readily identified the wearer to the Germans as an enemy airman. Both men then ran for about a mile to a place of hiding, where another Frenchman was waiting for their arrival. Like nearly all Americans, Hamby neither spoke nor understood any French, but soon realized by his companions' gesturing that he had landed between two German installations.

After darkness had set in, the airman was then conducted to a nearby farmhouse where he met Dutka, one of his crewmen. Both were then fed, given civilian clothes, and taken to another house. Here they met the third and final evader of their original crew, Sgt. Simon Cohen. At this point the three survivors were told they would leave in two days, but meanwhile must remain hidden from sight to avoid suspicion and capture.

From their place in hiding, they could see their bomber a short distance away resting virtually intact in the field where it had landed. Hamby then became alarmed that the Pathfinder radar equipment might still be on board and intact for compromise by the enemy. He tried to explain this situation to his benefactors, but here the language barrier became insurmountable. The French could not understand this technical point, and had they so comprehended, Hamby would have then requested them to detonate the plane by using one of the hand grenades in their possession. Whether they would have complied with the request is unknown.

Not knowing whether the radar equipment was still inside, the three devised a daring and highly dangerous plan for destroying the bomber's contents. Not only could it be seen, but also two German soldiers were assigned to guard the plane from the civilian populace. One guard was posted at the tail section with a machine gun while the other periodically walked around it in the style of a sentry. The plan was extremely simple: because he was the smallest, Hamby would enter the ship, without notice if possible, and proceed to smash the equipment while the other two took care of the guards. This part of his narrative report describes the results of their scheme: «I went into the plane and smashed the secret equipment with an iron bar. I also broke up things in the radio room. I discovered that the German

soldiers had carried off everything that was loose, but the most secret equipment had been left in the plane. The other two men took care of the guards; I am not sure how hard they hit them, but we had no further trouble from them. We went back to our hiding place but we were afraid to tell the Frenchmen what we had done.»

By this courageous act, Hamby and the two sergeants had inflicted a serious set-back to the enemy's plans by denying them an almost intact set of Pathfinder navigation equipment. Even though the set had been damaged by flak shortly after entry of the enemy coast and failed to operate throughout the remainder of the mission, the actual destruction was minor. The impact of this valuable loss to the Germans was immediately reflected by the treatment accorded Lt. Bruce Vaughn, the radar navigator of the lead crew and now their captive.

Vaughn related that he was held in solitary confinement at the initial interrogation point for airmen, known as Dulag Luft, for a period of 29 days while the enemy tried every means at its disposal, short of physical torture, to gain from him the instructions for use of this special equipment. He was subjected to all the subtleties of interrogation by the highest-trained professionals of this devious art, and, further, was promised special treatment and privileges while in confinement if he would only cooperate.

But Vaughn's strong character and mental perceptions were fully equal to any attempted trickery. When such efforts met with nothing but failure, the interrogations then became more threatening, but the results were the same. Vaughn never divulged the slightest clue to his captors, and was finally released to a regular PO.W. camp in Germany to join its swelling ranks.

Returning now to the plight of the three evaders, the next night was the promised time for them to be moved. However, before they had walked a half mile, several German tanks were seen coming up the roads shooting red, green, and white flares while surrounding the village. This formidable opposition seemed out of balance in favor of the enemy, causing the party quickly to return to the original hiding place. The Germans had not only blocked all roads but were conducting searches of the homes. Hamby then related, «We still did not tell the Frenchmen what we had done, but we suspected why there was all this German pressure.»

Although they remained here for a few days, their French sponsors

seemed to be unable to make contacts to move them. Instead, they were continually promised action «perhaps tomorrow» until the airmen began to fear they would be unable to lend further help. Hamby finally set a definite date by which they should be moved, and then if nothing had since occurred, the three planned to strike out on their own. These French seemed perfectly willing to have the Americans sit around and wait for the invasion, but when Hamby insisted it was essential for them to return to England before the invasion date, they seemed impressed enough. In the end, the French persuaded the trio to remain for three more days, during which time they were provided with false identity papers which were vital for traveling in occupied France. Hamby also used this period for observing some of the personal traits of the French in order to imitate them and remain inconspicuous while on the road.

Although their immediate purpose was to vacate the area in which they landed because it was being searched so thoroughly for them, the long-range goal was to reach the Spanish border at the Pyrenees Mountains, and cross over into neutral Spain. This was the only avenue for escape, at least until the invasion was launched.

The three days finally came and went, but on this occasion one of the Frenchmen was as good as his word, and bought railway tickets for himself and the three airmen. The resulting journey by train with the guide was rather long and composed of two separate trips. The second phase was accomplished on a freight train when the guide contacted some fellow railway workers who arranged to conceal the party in one of the cars.

Continuing on by this means of transport, the group finally debarked at a transfer point near Paris, and quite by accident the guide stumbled upon some valuable contacts. Here he left the Americans in their charge for the remainder of the trip. As was so often the case, however, this new group of Frenchmen was not able to make good the promise of assistance for the three men, and again the project became stalled. Vaguer and vaguer replies were received to their questions of leaving, until Hamby suspected that here, too, the journey would be terminated unless they forced the issue. Then he discovered that another American was being hidden by the same unit of resistance workers and had been there more than six weeks.

Remembering his favorable experiences with the railway workers on the freight train, Hamby was confident he could again make use

Shown together while evading capture in the Pas-de-Calais area of occupied France are three members of the bomber crew of *The Crud Wagon.* Left to right: Stanley Baranofsky, Jack Cooper, and Charles McBride. May 1944.

of this means of transport without any assistance from French guides, and informed the group that he was going to strike out on his own in two weeks unless they were able to arrange transport. In response, he was warned by the French that this would be extrememly dangerous since he was a foreigner and easy to identify in this strange environment. In the meantime, he was safe here, and when the invasion took place their contacts would be restored, making it easier to get them to Spain.

The American officer recognized the wisdom of this advice, but was both overly anxious to leave and still confident of his ability to get through safely. The designated time duly elapsed and still no progress. At this point, 7 May, Hamby parted company with Dutka and Cohen and struck out on a bicycle, rather than using the railways. This part of the journey began near Paris and took him all the way to the Spanish border. It was fraught with physical hardships, privation, and numerous brushes with the enemy. He resorted to the role of a deaf and dumb French civilian in some instances of confrontation. In others, he copied various written phrases in French from a phrase book given to him earlier. On another occasion, he contacted a priest and declared his identity to obtain food and shelter for the night. Not only was he given these essentials, but he also received a detailed road map of the country which immeasurably increased his chances for success.

Now the journey southward by bicycle began to result in some substantial progress. Hamby began to average about 75 miles each day, but the people seemed less inclined to offer assistance the farther south he proceeded. He continued to use good judgment throughout, such as seeking out those homes for assistance that were situated on the edge of small villages and with no telephone lines. Two incidents with the Germans particularly show the danger of capture to which he was continually exposed during his flight to freedom. At one narrow section of the road a German staff car was seen approaching. When it came almost abreast of the bicyclist, one occupant of the car put out his hand as if he was ordering him to stop. This was a signal to Hamby to start the deaf and dumb routine, but suddenly the car made a left turn and the outstretched hand proved nothing more than a signal for turning.

The other occurrence was a soldier blocking his path when he took an incorrect turn into a forbidden area. The German indicated «nicht,» or something similar. Here, Hamby began the deaf and dumb play, and it took him several minutes to realize that the sentry was warning him of maneuvers taking place only a short distance ahead, and that he was positively not allowed to proceed further.

After finally making his way alone to the French border near the Pyrenees Mountains, he was placed in contact with trustworthy French people who had guided many such individuals as himself across the mountains to safety. His trip over the mountains on foot

was an arduous and exhaustive undertaking, but marked by success and freedom. Hamby reached Spain on 30 May and returned to Great Britain on 22 June. He remained there for a short period and then returned to the United States. At the time of his entry into Spain, he became one of a small elite band of evaders to gain freedom by such means.

2

The narrative now returns to my own personal involvement in this operation when all members of my aircraft, *The Crud Wagon* began bailing out over the Pas-de-Calais region of northern France while under attack by an enemy fighter plane. This episode contains no heroics comparable to those of Jack Black or Jesse Hamby, but was nevertheless a most critical moment in the lives of its participants. Fate and good fortune were to be especially generous to me on that unforgettable day.

As the earth grew nearer, I could distinctly make out a little village directly underneath. Standing around the area numerous civilians were looking up at me but making no movements whatever. I no longer saw the other parachutes of the crew. They could have landed a short distance away or several miles from the spot I was approaching.

I was getting much closer to the ground now and could discern brick wall enclosures around the individual properties of the village. It looked like an orchard was now below me and coming up fast – then, bang! Terra firma. I hit the ground feet first, somewhat harder than anticipated, and fell backward. Suddenly the villagers were all around me gaping at the strange apparition from above, but saying very little. They were smiling and obviously friendly, but also quite restrained.

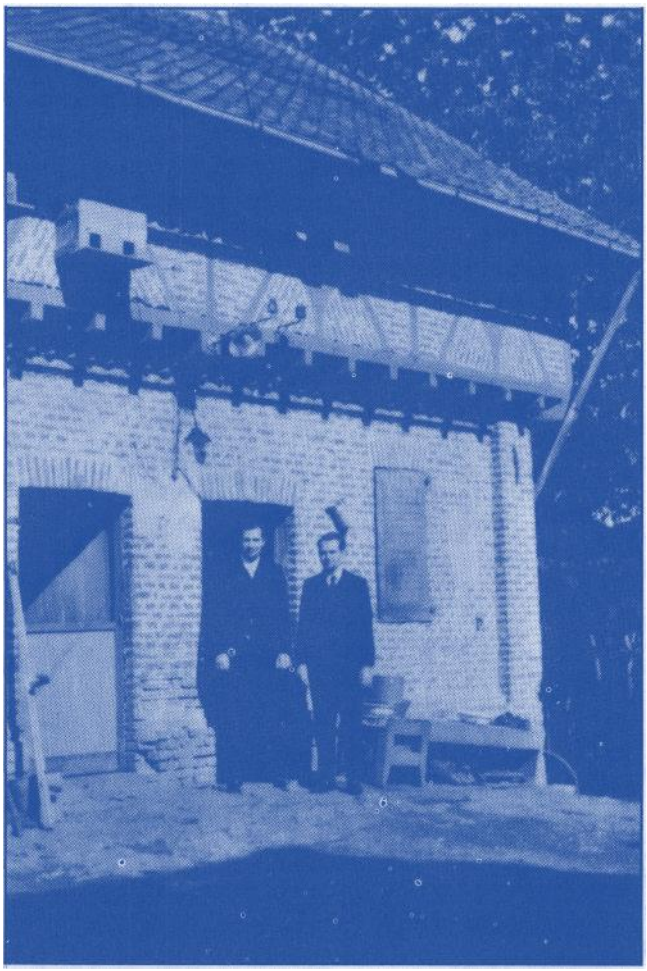
The force of landing was like jumping off the top of a garage, but there were no stunning after-effects, and I arose quickly to my feet. The first act of the populace was to remove the top portion of my electric suit and flight helmet and replace them with a much-worn peasant coat and cap. In this process, my small escape kit containing emergency rations, maps, and French franc notes which had been thrust inside the outer jacket prior to bail-out, dropped to the ground. In this highly charged moment, no notice was taken of the kit falling out. It was not returned and could have been a serious loss, but fortunately I did not need it.

The villagers then started walking me to the town outskirts. Everything seemed outwardly calm and ordinary, but the opposite couldn't have been more true. In less than two or three minutes, everyone had mysteriously melted away, leaving me alone with a young teenage girl. This appeared rather strange, I thought, but continued unhurried in the same direction. Then at the end of the village we were in a fruit orchard of trees, and alongside it was a haystack. She went over and with some urgency indicated that I should climb up into the hay and cover up.

When the girl was satisfied that I had received her message, she was gone very suddenly. I made one attempt to climb to the top of the stack which was about six feet high, but could not conceal myself because of its tightly packed contents. I simply sat down alongside the base and waited for further developments.

Five minutes later I was rudely jolted to a full appreciation of the deadly seriousness of my situation. On hearing some voices to my left, I glanced around and saw, not more than 50 feet away, a large German soldier with rifle in hand walking perpendicular to my sight, accompanied by a Frenchman. He made no attempt to search the haystack, which to this day I have always believed was the most obvious place to look for parachutists in hiding. Moreover, the soldier merely had only to glance to his right as he came alongside my resting place to see me sitting there. Now the full realization of the villagers' conduct was understood; they were frightened for their very lives of being accused by German occupation forces of aiding the enemy in any manner. In the immediate presence of such troops, they had done everything possible to lead me quietly and safely to a place of hiding during these critical initial moments when the search would be most intense. Several days later I was to learn that the Germans took ten hostages at random from the village population because of their suspected assistance to two of the six parachutists who were still at large. I was never able to learn the fate of these unfortunate souls.

My first reaction to this close call with the enemy was to lie down alongside the hay and pull as much of it over me as possible to prevent detection. Much to my relief, the soldier made no further appearances near my place of concealment, and accordingly, I began to relax and await the next move which probably would come near nightfall. During this interval, my mind began retracing the wild events that had befallen me and my comrades on this fateful day. What would the



Shown together in the back yard of the home of Jean Chetiveaux are,

fellows at Seething be thinking upon learning that *The Crud Wagon* and its occupants would return no more to that way of life? How would my poor wife and family react to the news of my «missing in action» status? Would they continue to believe I was still alive or think I was now dead? These were painful reflections to contemplate. Even so, I regarded myself as extremely lucky at that instant since I was still at large and uninjured. Maybe this good beginning would continue.

Toward darkness, another teenage girl who spoke nothing but

French paid me a cautious visit and also brought along some red wine and food, and a note written in English. The note said I was to remain in hiding until it was considered safe to move. In the interim I was to be patient and trust in the judgment of the writer, and also to destroy the note. My first night in the haystack wasn't unduly difficult, since the bed I had made from the straw was moderately comfortable and my clothes kept most of the chill off. However, there was a slight rain sprinkle which dampened things somewhat, and a stiffness finally set in my neck and legs from the shock of bailing out of the plane. It was not a particularly sound sleep.

The next day saw the young girl return two times with food and another note reassuring me that I would soon be moved. I was cautioned not to leave the haystack for an instant for fear of being seen by the enemy. This advice was not needed, however, since I was only too aware of being spotted in the daylight hours. In the dark of evening, I took a short walk around the orchard to work off the growing stiffness and inactivity of the past day and a half.

Toward dusk the next day the girl returned with a note which contained information for following her across some open plowed fields to a place where bicycles would be found for the remainder of our journey. I was instructed to ride behind her about 50 yards to the rear, and in the event she was stopped by German sentries or patrols, to get off the bicycle, inspect it as if it were broken, then slowly turn around and walk it back in the opposite direction. Such a procedure was intended of course to avoid a confrontation by me with Germans. Since they could usually speak French to ask simple questions and I could not, my identity would immediately be unmasked. But the deadliness of the situation lay not in the exposure of my identity to the Germans, but the association of a French civilian caught in the act of aiding an American or British evader. Whereas I would have suffered nothing harsher than the status of a prisoner of war, the civilian would have been shot promptly.

The girl gave me a pair of French shoes to begin the journey since I had been wearing only wool lined flight boots over the electric slippers on my feet. This was the standard footwear gear of bomber crewmen, and neither type would suffice for use on the enemy's ground. Unless an airman had a regular pair of shoes tied to his parachute harness for such an eventuality (and I did not), he was faced with the problem of acquiring adequate footwear in living the role of

evader. The shoes presented to me on that occasion were marginal to say the least, and barely fit. They were old and hard and quickly brought blisters, but were better than nothing. Beggars couldn't be choosy.

The walk across the fields was approximately a mile in length although it appeared far longer because of the difficult walking conditions. In addition to the ill-fitting shoes, the black soil was muddy from recent rains and stuck to the shoes in heavy lumps. Even on this leg of the trip, my guide walked ahead of me to give the impression we were not together, in the event of a challenge.

Approximately 15 minutes into the fields, I saw a German soldier walking along a hedgerow across our intended path. I thought he was a sentry and became terrified that he would stop me as I came nearer. Just as I was on the verge of turning around and making a retreat, he continued walking in the same direction, oblivious of our presence. It was simply a panic reaction; I had become so self-conscious of my new role in this strange environment that I instinctively imagined all soldiers were out looking for people such as me. Apparently there was now no difference in the way I looked from any other male peasant, and I could now dismiss some of the extreme mental sensitivity thus acquired.

In another 15 minutes or so and by now fatigued from the strenuous walk, we reached the bicycles. It was getting much darker, and the guide cautioned me that we must make haste in the journey which she then disclosed was to St. Pol, some five miles away. For at least this part of France, the Germans had imposed a curfew at 9:00 p.m., and anyone caught on the roads past that hour was subject to arrest. I was not completely unfamiliar with the language, having studied it two years in high school six years previous. This was admittedly far from fluency, but the foundation would stand me in good stead in the months to come as my familiarity with French gradually began to expand. In my wildest imagination, never would I have believed while in high school struggling to learn French, the circumstances that now confronted me in trying to use it.

The bicycle trip was made on paved roads, but because of its duration was most exhausting to me. However, no incidents occurred. A few minutes before curfew we arrived at St. Pol, and turned down a dark alley in the residential area of the town. The girl stopped at the rear entrance of a house, went to the door, and rapped twice for entry.

There was a muffled exchange of a few words between the occupant behind the door and my guide; then it slowly opened and we went inside.

The entry room, a hallway, was dark. We were led by a man into an adjoining sitting room, well lit, whose occupants were two women. They appeared to be in their late thirties or early forties. After the introductions had been made, they began to explain in excellent English theirs as well ais my own status and future outlook. I have now forgotten their names but by no means little else, since their story was truly one of the most remarkable ever to be recounted to me. One was a French Canadian and the other native French, married to a British soldier. Both husbands had fought in France and were evacuated to England at the fall of Dunkerque in 1940. Since that time, they had joined the underground resistance movement and were in charge of the local organization within the Pas-de-Calais department. They had participated in aiding many downed airmen such as myself. The French woman began by apologizing to me: «I'm sorry we had to leave you in the haystack so long, but it was necessary to make sure you were genuine. You see, the Germans have occasionally parachuted out of planes in an effort to contact and identify people in our resistance organization. We were pretty sure of you and your comrades because we saw the parachutes and knew that many were caught immediately.»

«Don't worry about that,» I reassured her, «I'm only too glad to be here at this moment and not on a train to a prison camp.»

They then asked me for some details about the procedures for dropping bombs, and I tried to respond to the queries as best I could. They seemed to understand, but were quite upset in general at the heavy frequency of bombings conducted by the American air forces during the past few months. They knew that on some of these missions, towns had been hit causing casualties. It was not difficult for me to understand, since the Noball targets had always required the utmost in skill to identify and attack accurately. The Pas-de-Calais, of course, contained most of these objectives. During this questioning, though, I could not escape the feeling that they were still testing my genuineness. Changing the subject, the woman finally came around to the more important disclosures which were of immediate concern to me.

«One of your airmen, Jack Cooper, escaped from the enemy

soldiers and is now in hiding like you. He ran away from a German who had his hands full in capturing another of your men who landed nearby. The man Cooper is living in Fillievres a short distance away with one of our members. We are going to send you over there tomorrow to join him and you will be there until we can find a better place.»

At this point the women notified me of the taking of ten hostages by the Germans within the village where I landed. I was shocked to learn how deadly this affair had already become. They had certainly provided me with some electrifying news, all right. Cooper's escape was most encouraging. Maybe more would elude capture, although the two were not optimistic. Everyone had been accounted for that landed in the St. Pol area. However, Baranofsky had jumped much earlier than the rest, and could still be at large.

I asked the two resistance leaders about the prospects of getting down to the Pyrenees Mountains 700 miles to the south and over the border into Spain. To this inquiry I was told emphatically, «It isn't possible to do such a thing for you. Several months ago we were actually transporting parachutists to the border, but the heavy bombings of the railways have made it too difficult and risky. Also, some of our resistance leaders in Paris have recently been captured by the Gestapo. It's out of the question. I'm afraid there is no other choice for you except to remain in hiding with us and wait for the invasion.»

The invasion – that fondly-held hope of millions of souls throughout the conquered countries of Europe, would now be embraced by yet another individual as the only means of deliverance from an inflexible enemy. Little did I then realize how eagerly I would await news of the commencement of this momentous event during the following two months. It would become the most overriding subject of my life and that of the people with whom I would be associated.

The household retired immediately after the evening meal. The luxury of sleeping again on a regular bed, combined with my extreme fatigue, produced a deep slumber that was uninterrupted until I was awakened the following morning. After breakfast I was given new instructions for my next journey, including some personal advice by the French woman: «Jacques will escort you by bicycle over to Fillievres. It's about seven miles away, and you are to ride behind him as you did yesterday with the girl. If he is stopped by the Germans, get off your bicycle immediately and pretend it is out of order. Don't

let them connect you with him. And remember this – you are going to see a lot of German troops today, but I know you won't panic and do anything that would cause us to be captured and lose our lives. You are a solider and will know how to keep your head.»

With that send-off we went out the back entrance and were soon on one of the main streets of St. Pol. I was never again to meet these women resistance leaders, but was advised that they continued to conduct their clandestine operations until the time of the liberation several months later. The advice about the German soldiers was, if anything, understated. The entire street was filled with troops as we made our way through the heart of town. The number of uniforms far outweighed the number of civilians. I could hardly comprehend the fact that here in broad daylight was an evading American airman riding a bicycle in the midst of what seemed like the entire German army, and in a seemingly nonchalant fashion.

Jacques was a cousin of one of the women leaders and approximately my own age. He spoke no English and appeared to be a thoroughly seasoned veteran in this clandestine business. No doubt he had conducted many such airmen to nearby hiding places. He displayed no outward anxiety whatever, and led me through the city and out on the highway in an unhurried manner. Here the traffic began to subside, and we were virtually the only ones on the road as the town began to recede in the distance.

As we entered the peaceful countryside, the guide began pointing out the remains of aircraft wreckages at frequent intervals. Most of the wrecks appeared to be of American manufacture and were horribly twisted. These sights were evidence of the stepped-up aerial warfare that was then being conducted throughout this area, as well as the accuracy of the German flak crews.

Approximately 30 minutes into the journey, Jacques motioned toward a complex of military barracks and structures with barbed wire enclosures coming up on the left. He explained that this was a PO.W. camp for Russian soldiers captured by Germany on the Eastern Front. As we drove by, one of the prisoners working near the road stopped and looked at us. Jacques, apparently through habit, flung the man his pack of nearly empty cigarettes. The prisoner eagerly retrieved it and uttered some words of thanks. He was a pitiful sight to behold, ragged, unkempt, with a resigned look of despair. I was later told by some individuals who knew this camp that the

Germans treated these prisoners extremely harshly by forcing them to do hard labor. This man's appearance certainly confirmed it to me.

After almost an hour of steady bicycling, we came into the village of Fillievres, a tiny community of 100 or fewer inhabitants. Jacques stopped at a small house at the end of a lane, and indicated this to be the end of the trip. We went in together, and were greeted by the husband and wife in an appropriately subdued manner. Of course they recognized the guide at once, but began to give me a most detailed visual examination. Finally, the husband, after satisfying himself that all was in order, withdrew from the room for a moment. When he returned, Jack Cooper was at his side.

Chapter 7

Wait and Hope

The 20-year-old tail gunner of *The Crud Wagon* was clad in the garb of a typical French farmer like myself, and we were initially surprised at seeing each other out of uniform. I grasped his hand in a friendly handshake and said: «Damn, but it's good to see you, Jack. I'm glad at least two of us got away. Do you know if any more of the fellows are hiding out?»

«I don't know, Mac, but I kinda doubt it. The women in St. Pol said there was only one more person from the crew that got away, and that's gotta be you,» was his answer.

We then began to share the details of our separate escape experiences with each other, and concluded at the end of the discussion that Stanley Baranofsky provided the only other possibility for being free because of his earlier jump from the plane. Jack said that he himself came down near Albert Padilla, the ball turret gunner. A German soldier immediately captured him but was unable to contain Cooper as well, even though he yelled at him to stop and pointed his rifle toward the fleeing airman, all to no avail. In gaining a few minutes start on the would-be captor, Jack ran further into the safety of the woods, and was hidden by some civilians who had witnessed the whole affair. He had been transferred to this house two days before by the resistance movement.

The master of the house was named Maurice (last name now forgotten), a farmer of little material substance. He was a friendly man, however, and demonstrated a degree of courage far beyond that of the average villager in agreeing to harbor downed airmen in his

home. The French knew only too well from personal experience and official information that the Germans were deadly serious and determined to put to death any individual who harbored or assisted escaped flyers. While a French civilian would render minor assistance to these airmen when so requested, only a few would run the extreme risk of hiding them in their homes.

Maurice and his wife had two children, a boy and girl of 12 and 14 years of age. Since children could not be depended upon to observe the same overriding precautions of an adult, it seemed especially inappropriate to me for this family to engage in such dangerous activities and thereby run the risk of death to all if discovered.

Maurice's house was ill-equipped in space and facilities to house either of us for long. Cooper and I had to share the same double bed for sleeping, which was satisfactory under the circumstances. However, the washing and toilet facilities were primitive to nonexistent. Even a small item such as a toothbrush either could not or would not be provided. Apparently the people in these rural areas used them only moderately. Also, there were no provisions in the homes for taking baths. These were luxuries which could be acquired only at the local bath houses of the village or town, and since our presence at such public places was simply out of the question, the alternative was obvious.

My stay at Maurice's home was for a mere eight days duration, but for many years after, I could scarcely believe that the period had been so brief. It was here that I experienced my first taste of utter boredom and unending monotony. After Cooper had recounted nearly all his lifelong experiences to me, and I to him, we realized that we simply couldn't make enough conversation to fill the long hours that followed. Added to this, there was absolutely nothing to do in occupying our time. I often thought that prisoners serving long jail sentences must have found this part of incarceration the most difficult to endure. We had no books or newspapers to read in English, and Maurice had no radio for receiving the latest news. It was a deadly vacuum into which we had descended with no discernible end. The only published material available was a local newspaper in French containing only German propaganda news. However, the paper did provide an opportunity to remember my long forgotten French lessons as I tried to decipher it each day.

In retrospect, a few shining exceptions to this dreadful suspension

in time took the form of some visits by the local Catholic priest. This individual was virtually the only other person permitted to know of our existence in Maurice's home, and although not a part of the resistance movement, the priest shared many of its secrets. Father Guerle was nearly 70 years of age but looked much younger, I thought. He was only too conscious of our deep frustration and boredom, and with his small English language capability, the priest's visits were bracing tonics to our drab lives. His appearance each day to see us became the highlight of our activities.

Suddenly, on the evening of the eighth day of residence at Maurice's, the cure arrived and announced that I was to leave with him for a permanent change of abode. Naturally, it was a pleasant surprise, since anything would have been preferable to this awful existence. Apparently, Maurice had complained about the cramped discomfort in harboring two evaders in his home. Clearly, something had to be done to relieve these awkward circumstances. Father Guerle explained in his broken English that I was to ride behind him a short distance as on past bicycle forays. When satisfied that I understood, we began the journey. This trip was only about two miles distance to a village comparable in size to Fillievres, known as Wail. I was told nothing further except that the home to which I was being transferred was much larger.

The trip was made uneventfully, except for passing a few German troops. They nodded the customary greetings to the priest in his black gown and hat. He was known to everyone, friend and foe alike, and responded politely with his own remarks. Fortunately, the troops ignored me completely. At the opposite end of Wail, he pulled up at the entrance of a two-story brick house that sat off the main road about 30 feet and on an inclined slope. This structure looked to be a decided improvement over Maurice's home and gave an instant boost to my morale. Things looked more promising already.

I followed the priest inside and he introduced me to the madame, Raymonde Chetiveaux, and to an elderly spinster, a former school teacher named Mademoiselle Ringot. The master of the house was temporarily in the village on business but was expected soon. The entrance room in which we were standing was large, spacious, and very orderly. The two women, of course, spoke no English nor did the master. Since I had eaten no supper at the former abode, the priest asked that I be given some food, a request which was promptly acted

upon by the women.

In the middle of my meal, the head of the household came in, a thin man about my height, but older and obviously curious to see an American airman at such close range. He looked like a highly-strung volatile individual, which in fact he was. The man's name was Jean Chetiveaux, an electrician by trade, who was now a liberated prisoner of war in the employ of the Germans. He had served two years in a prison camp after the fall of France, and was released only because of the usefulness of his skills to the conquerors. Jean literally hated the Germans and to show his great disaffection, had recently agreed to harbor one of the parachutists in his home. I was his first tenant.

After the introduction to Jean was made, the priest held a short conversation with both husband and wife, apparently reassuring them of my authenticity, then took his leave. It was then almost 9:00 p.m., the normal bed time of rural families in that part of the country, and we accordingly made preparations for the night's sleep. My new sleeping quarters were located in a small windowless room off the master bedroom on the ground level. It was little more than a large closet, and because of the awkward situation which would have occurred in passing through the couple's bedroom in the dead of night on the way to the toilet, located outside the house, I was furnished with a container.

This arrangement remained in effect for about a week until Jean decided to do some remodeling to protect my security from possible searches during the night. He closed off the door leading to the smaller bedroom and repapered the entire wall so well that the casual observer could not discern that a door ever existed there. The problem of entering the room after the door became sealed off was solved by an ingenious device of the owner. On the first landing of the staircase, Jean cut out a square section of the wall which was also common to the smaller bedroom on the other side. The hole created by his carpentry allowed me to squeeze through from the landing, and I was then in the bedroom again. However, that part of the removed wall actually became a hinged swinging door, which, when closed, could not be detected except by the closest inspection. A secret room was thus created internally, and it proved a considerable improvement to the overall security of the house. With his temperament, Jean was never satisfied for long, however, in the selection of a hiding place for me; he would continue changing my place of abode in his home until the

end of my tenancy.

The next day, I was made aware of the facts and circumstances surrounding my new-found home in Wail. Jean and his wife were acquainted with all the residents of the village and there had always been much visiting between the families as a routine part of life. With me in the house, however, such a routine began to pose drawbacks. Jean trusted only four or five individuals in Wail with the knowledge of my presence, and as for the others, I was instructed to hide quickly whenever a knock was heard at the door. Unless a member of the household actually could identify the visitor coming up the path to the door, it meant that I had to run upstairs or into my secret room. On hearing the dreaded rapping, Jean would instinctively react like a cat and hasten me off by saying: «Vite, vite! Cachez! Toute-de-suite!» Of course, if the visitor had not been seen approaching the house but was one of the trusted few, the frantic race for cover was all in vain.

Jean also ran more than an ordinary risk of exposure with his new tenant due to the proximity of his house to the living quarters of the head of the local German commander and his staff. They were located almost directly across the road approximately 100 yards away in the village headmaster's chateau, which had been commandeered earlier by the Germans on a rather permanent basis. The owners of the chateau were allowed to remain in residence, but obviously in a small part of the house. The chateau's owner, Pierre d'Hautecloque, was an aristocrat and the largest landowner in the community. Jean and his wife, Raymonde, worked several days per week on one of his farms and shared the proceeds of the crop. Pierre was not one of those trusted ones permitted to see me, but there could be no question that he was aware from the beginning of my presence. Only much later would we be introduced. Small wonder, therefore, that Jean manifested such an unrelenting fear upon the approach of anyone to his door. Even the German soldiers themselves would call upon him at odd times, not to conduct a search of the premises, but to convey work orders for the repair of electric lines and facilities. He was continually on call for such activity by the enemy.

There was yet an additional circumstance working in Jean's disfavor by my tenancy there. This concerned the other tenant of the house, a young female school teacher who lived and took three meals per day there on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Since Jean did not trust her with the information of my identity and presence, it was

necessary that I remain completely hidden from her at all times. In reflecting back on this bizarre situation, it seems impossible that such a thing could have been carried out without mishap, given the size of the house, but it was. After six weeks of this co-habitation under the same roof, the girl changed residences without realizing I had also been a tenant there.

One night I almost ran directly into her as a result of my stupidity. The procedure for eating separate meals in the evening was especially sensitive and required that I wait in my room until the girl had completed dinner and retired to her upstairs room. Once there, she never came down until morning. At that point, one of the regular members of the household would indicate the all-clear signal by either rapping on the wall or calling me lightly. On this particular occasion, I had waited patiently for the signal which was already later than usual, and for no good reason that I recall, my appetite for food was above normal. Believing that perhaps they had temporarily forgotten me, I unwisely went outside the room of my own accord to check the situation. The staircase was located in a small anteroom adjacent to the kitchen where the meals were served, and as I came to the common door between the two rooms I heard the school teacher bidding good night to the family and heading straight for me on the opposite side. There was no time for a retreat to my room or anywhere else. I eased into a dark corner close by the door and remained frozen. She opened it and without glancing in either direction passed within three feet of my position toward the stairs. This was much too close for comfort, and the experience taught me a lesson.

Jean's dwelling was to be my home until the day I was finally liberated by the advancing armies. I was permitted the freedom of any room in the house during daylight hours as well as the back yard which was actually a small courtyard, enclosed on all but one side by the house, barn, and small pens for the keeping of rabbits and chickens. On some occasions I was permitted to walk behind the barn which was an area adjacent to a deeply-wooded forest. For a person in my dire straits, it was the best possible arrangement. I was not forced to go out on the open road and try on my own to get to the distant Spanish border and freedom. Nor was I ever forced to miss any meals and live in filth while waiting for my freedom. These were truly luxuries that were not shared by the average evading American or Britisher, for which I was forever grateful.

Lest the reader now conclude that this was a life akin to Utopia, there were in fact some unpleasantries associated with this kind of existence, most of which were caused by sheer boredom and some short tempers that developed occasionally due to the tension of living in such a highly-explosive atmosphere right under the noses of the enemy. These were only temporary and passing things, however, which never detracted from the overwhelming respect and admiration that I held for this unselfish patriot.

Recognizing there was very little if anything I could do for diversion within the houshold to occupy my spare time, Jean arranged to borrow some books printed in English from a trusted friend in the next town. As part of the package of books was an English-French dictionary which was a valued instrument to me in learning the French language. Along with the books, I was already acquiring very slowly some proficiency in reading the local propaganda newspaper. Of course my favorite diversion was listening to the radio and staying abreast of the war news. The invasion was naturally the favorite topic of discussion on the BBC and the Armed Forces network show produced by the American army in Britain. The days were slipping by,
but oh so slowly. Although I tried to keep such thoughts out of mind, I would occasionally find myself wondering about my poor wife and son. Did she still believe I was well and safe? Were they well and safe? These thoughts were simply too bitter and frustrating to endure for long, because there would be no answers until my deliverance.

Father Guerle, the local priest, was a frequent caller at the house, primarily to cheer me up. I looked forward to his visits greatly, and even with his broken English, his efforts meant so much. He would always depart leaving me with a better outlook for the future.

On another occasion during my first month in France, Jean performed a brazen act of courage one afternoon when he and I bicycled back to Fillievres to visit Jack Cooper for a few hours. My fellow crew member had now been moved to another house which was a decided improvement over the previous one that we had jointly occupied. Cooper's problem likewise was a growing case of confinement and boredom which was unavoidable under such conditions. While here, another American who had recently been shot down and escaped joined our little reunion. We made the round trip without incident, although I became a bundle of nerves as we passed numerous soldiers on the road. It was Jean's own way of openly flaunting his disrespect

of the enemy's overwhelming power of life and death over these people.

Some two or three weeks after this incident, I was given some good news. Jean reported that another American from my bomber was in hiding with the resistance movement and living in a village beyond Fillievres. The description of the man could only fit Stanley Baranofsky, the navigator. His early jump had apparently placed him in an area not as heavily populated with Germans as the one in which we landed. At any rate, Jean announced that he was being brought to this house today for a visit with me, and not only that, Jack Cooper would also be present for a real get-together! This was almost too much to imagine. If I thought the recent visit to Fillievres to see Cooper was flaunting the enemy, this act would surely be comparable to going out in the road and shouting at the top of one's voice that the Germans were filthy pigs.

Jean was as good as his word; in the afternoon several bicycles pulled up in front of the house and the riders got off and started for the main entrance. Looking out the window, I could clearly identify the big navigator, along with Cooper and two civilians, their guides. Baranofsky saw me through the window as he came to the front steps and gave me a comical gesture that in the past had become so typical of him. It was to breathe on his fingernails and then rub them on the lapel of his coat in the style of a big time gangster in the movies. This brought a smile to Cooper's face who also recognized the act. In his French beret and peasant attire, Baran looked so ridiculous and funny, that I couldn't restrain a loud laugh. When the party was inside the door we greeted each other warmly and exchanged the typical remarks.

«You old bastard,» I said, «you're really a sight for sore eyes. Didn't the Germans care anything about you?»

«Good to see you too, Mac. No, I was too smart for 'em. You can't keep a good man down very long, I always say.»

«Well I think it's official now,» I replied. «We're the only three that got away, but the underground leaders over in St. Pol told me everyone got out of the plane O.K. So what happened to you after hitting the ground?»

Baran then proceeded to give me the details of his escape. It was really a simple matter to elude capture, even though he came down in the Pas-de-Calais area. There were no troops in the immediate

vicinity of his landing, which was a wooded area. His chute beame snagged in a tree, but he was able to unfasten the harness and drop to the ground. A few minutes later the navigator saw a Frenchman approaching, and stepping boldly out in front of the man, he declared his identity to him. Satisfied of his genuineness, the man gave a short whistle and 12 men immediately emerged from the woods. They had seen his parachute in the air and had been searching for him to offer assistance. Four of them then led Baran to the outskirts of a village where he was hidden in some bushes. Here he was soon provided with food and drink, and later a man was brought to him that spoke English. This individual assured Baran that there was nothing to worry about.

A few hours later, the evader was taken to a hayloft where he soon fell asleep. Remaining there for two days, he was then placed in a nearby house for only 24 hours. Then once more, Baran was transferred to another home in the same village where his stay was more permanent, three whole weeks. At the end of this period, the resistance movement officially took him under its wing by automobile to the village of Monchel where he was now living.

We spent a most enjoyable hour or so talking about our situation and wondering about the fate of the other fellows that were not so fortunate. The French onlookers also took some pleasure in the occasion in seeing us in such a jovial boisterous mood and knowing that they were responsible for this unique experience. The brief reunion of the three survivors finally broke up when the civilian guides indicated it was time to return to their respective homes. The very audacity of the French in risking their all in order that we three might share a brief get together in the shadow of the German commander's quarters was an experience never to be forgotten.

Within a month after taking up residence in Jean's home, my closest call to being apprehended by the Germans occurred. It was a traumatic event that left me shaking, but on this occasion, contrary to the recent experience with the young school teacher, was not due to any laxness on my part. The event took place in Jean's front yard, or rather side yard, a plot of ground alongside the main street comprising about half an acre. He had traditionally used the plot for growing tobacco, as was done throughout this part of France, and maintained for such purposes a small hot bed at the end of the lot. The distance from the bed to the house was approximately 50 yards.

Raymonde, Jean's wife, asked me to assist her by carrying a bucket of water out to the hot bed. I had done this a few times before, and thought nothing of it. On this occasion, however, it was early evening, and as we walked out to the end of the enclosure, I could see a large German soldier walking slowly along the road parallel to my course and looking rather curiously at me. Instantly, I sensed something was seriously amiss. Raymonde sensed it too, but said something under her breath to reassure me, even though her fright had now become noticeable. Most of the Germans in this area had been here for some time, and many of them were acquainted with all the villagers by sight. This fellow knew that I was a stranger, and coming over to the wire fence separating the growing area from the road, he placed his arms on the wire and just stared at me for several seconds.

There was nothing to do except pretend he was not there and continue as nonchalantly as possible to water the hot bed, then start back to the house. If he had spoken to me at that moment, I'm sure I would have given the game away, so nervous had I become. Raymonde again muttered some words of confidence, as we turned around toward the house. The German continued his gaze on me but finally reconsidered whatever was on his mind and ambled off down the road.

Soon after this near brush with capture Jean told me about another American that had moved into the opposite part of Wail in the custody of a couple that were his closest friends. This house was small and very marginal for harboring an evader. A few days later the American was escorted up to my place on a bicycle and introduced to me. He was the co-pilot of a B-24 bomber that had been shot down on the same ill-fated mission that claimed me, and as a consequence we shared many things in common for later and closer association. His name was Erling Dawes, same age as myself, unmarried, and from a farm and ranching community in Nebraska.

In the immediate area of Calais on the French coast as his plane was about to cross the English Channel for home, it was hit by flak which set the entire right wing on fire. All the crew parachuted out safely, but none too soon as it exploded immediately after. Although he did not know it at the time, Dawes was the only one among his crew to escape capture. For a period of almost three weeks, he struggled valiantly on his own to secure food and shelter in the daylight hours and then traveled on foot at night by using side roads where he was

less likely to be stopped for violating curfew. Dawes' progress in getting out of the local area was only fair, since his knowledge of the roads was nil, and added to this was his steadily growing physical weakness caused by insufficient food and the incessant exertion of walking at night. The last Frenchman that provided him food and a hayloft in which to sleep finally contacted the resistance movement (the same organization managed by the two women in St. Pol) and he was delivered to Wail for safekeeping.

He explained that almost no one had ever called him Erling and he preferred the last name only. So he became simply Dawes to me. With Jean, however, it was different. He couldn't accept the fact that the man wanted only to be called by the last name, but since the Frenchman just couldn't pronounce a difficult name like Erling, he called him Henri instead. Dawes was a balanced, good-natured man which made him a most personable and likeable fellow. We seemed to have no personality conflicts, which was critical during our long joint confinement. He was finally transferred a month later to Jean's home to join the household. Dawes had a fondness for work or any kind of activity in preference to the idleness that was part of this existence. He was to prove his overwhelming value to this little family unit in the next few months.

My sleeping arrangements in the house were altered soon after Dawes joined me. The little secret room was now too small for two people, and Jean's decision was to move us out into the barn under the hay. This also proved an ingenious hiding place. That part of the barn containing the supply of hay was approximately 20 feet long by 12 feet wide with a brick wall three feet high comprising the foundation of the entire structure. Approximately half the length of this space was first cleared by the hay, and wooden poles and planks placed over the brick wall from side to opposite side. Then the hay was replaced over the boards, which effectively created our little room beneath the straw. To gain entrance we simply removed a portion of the straw covering the entrance and descended into a small opening beneath. Jean even installed an electric light and a radio for our convenience. The electric wire leading into the barn was likewise carefully concealed from an observer. Here we remained for almost two months.

Beginning in the month of May, the air war over the Pas-de-Calais was stepped up by both British and American forces as more Noball attacks were executed. Almost daily, we could see overhead large and

medium type bomber formations maneuvering into position to unload their bombs amid the ever present flak. Aircraft in flames, parachutes dangling in the air, the deep explosive sounds of the heavy caliber guns, the crunching sounds of bursting bombs with their earth shocks; these were all part of the panorama that was ours to watch on front row seats. Our front row seats often were actually too close for comfort, since one of the targets always being attacked was directly behind the house in the woods, and no more that half a mile distant, if that much. Although we did not realize it at the time, we strongly suspected it was a Noball installation.

One afternoon a B-26 medium bomber was hit while flying over Wail at approximately 10,000 feet altitude. Looking up at the object of the intense anti-aircraft fire, Dawes and I saw six chutes blossom out directly overhead. We continued to watch them float earthward as if in a trance. Suddenly a thought passed through my head: suppose one of those men lands in the yard or on the house and we're caught standing here? We moved inside quickly but continued to watch the drama unfolding from one of the windows. The closest parachute actually came to rest across the road no more than 200 yards away. Of course, the German troops were waiting for the unfortunate airman who was taken prisoner on the spot. He was marched over to the chateau promptly, after being searched. The American stood at attention throughout some deliberations at the chateau, then was marched through town under guard to a place of confinement for the night. What this fellow wouldn't have given to be in our safe position a few yards away observing the entire display!

But the biggest and most elaborate aerial show was always reserved for the Royal Air Force every time they came into the area, day or night. Our first experience with them came one night while we were in deep slumber under the hay. I awakened only slowly but began to hear a steady sound of guns going off and loud thundering echos and vibrations of bursting bombs. We scrambled out into the backyard to get a better look at the ensuing activity and saw Jean, his wife, and Mademoiselle Ringot looking up into the sky at what was happening.

The sight and sounds that greeted me were far greater than the largest 4th of July fireworks demonstration I had ever seen – there was nothing really to compare with such a spectacular display before me. The dark sky had almost been turned into daylight with numerous searchlights frantically criss-crossing the heavens to ferret out the

night intruders as they flew about in giant circular patterns. Added to this were the flares being dropped by the bombers to illuminate the terrain below and thus afford recognition of the target area. Against this weird pattern of dancing lights were the deafening roars nearby of the large and small caliber guns firing continuously. Red tracer ammunition trails were going skyward from the smaller guns, while at the higher levels could be seen the orange explosions of the larger shells.

The bombers were going for the target in the woods, and each aircraft would make its own bomb run separate from the others. This procedure produced an intermittent rolling sound of thunder and ground vibration as the bombs hit the earth. None of the planes could be seen going down or afire, but occasionally a searchlight beam would find one, and the bomber would begin twisting and turning in violent convulsive motions to avoid the flak or enemy fighters that would quickly follow such an exposure.

The exhibition lasted for appoximately 20 minutes or more, and was quickly terminated when the last attacker departed. Then all lights were extinguished, the guns stopped barking, and all was quiet and dark once more. No fires apparently had been started, since there were no tell-tale glows above the woods. So we all went back to bed, but not to sleep so soon. I could scarcely believe the magnitude of what I had seen and heard. It was one of the most memorable experiences of my life, but unknown to me, would yet be equalled in scope before my liberation.

With notable exceptions such as this RAF night attack and occasional visits with Baranofsky and Cooper, time continued to hang very heavy. The daily routines at certain periods became oppressive with the constant hiding from view with every knock on the door, and the overall lack of activity. All the books finally were read from cover to cover, and ultimate boredom would again reappear. We had only one burning speculation that kept our spirits from sinking further, and that was the invasion of the continent by the allied armies. Everyone, of course, including the Germans, knew it was coming but the time and place were the missing elements. If only it would happen, we could then begin to estimate accurately the length of our confinement. But in the meantime we had to face the boring inactivity. There was not enough here to do in gainfully occupying our long hours of the day.

Since I joined Jean's household, he had provided me with the essential toothbrush, which was sorely needed. Also, the luxury of an occasional bath was solved by the master. There was a wash or utility room on the ground floor which opened out into the back yard. Jean owned a large wooden tub in which the family's clothes were washed weekly, and this provided our bath facility. After the clothes were washed, we had our baths, with heated water from a wood fire, no less. The haircut situation was also resolved by each of us cutting the other's hair with only a pair of scissors and comb. I had never tried cutting hair previously, but after a few tries, the finished job on Dawes wasn't so bad. It was fortunate, however, that he was not to appear in public. Contrary to my inexperience in such matters, my associate had often cut others' hair during his early farm and ranch days; consequently his expertise was somewhat above mine.

On the morning of 6 June 1944 as we crawled slowly out of the hay for another day, Raymonde came running out to meet us, very excited and saying «Debarkement – debarkement!» This meant D-Day! The event had finally happened. Quickly, we entered the house where Jean was listening intently to the radio and in an obviously elated state over this wonderful news. How long these people had been waiting for this stupendous undertaking since the fall of France four years ago! The landings had been executed on the beaches of Normandie some 200 miles south of our location. This was admittedly a long way from the action, but nothing to compare to the distance to the Spanish border. All we had to do now was wait a while longer for the armies to expand their operations into the Pas-de-Calais area, and freedom would be ours.

The radio remained on all day as we eagerly followed initial reports of the landings' progress. It was a day of buoyant hope and inspiration for all. At last we had something meaningful to pursue rather than an abstract date for the invasion to take place for that never-to-be-forgotten moment when liberation and freedom would arrive.

Despite overwhelming superiority in numbers of the allied forces at the invasion point, there would remain much fighting and dying before the land war could be expanded into this highly important though remote area of France. At the end of D-Day plus seven, the initial flush of exuberance had faded somewhat, leaving us reconciled to the fact that unremitting patience must still be the order of the day. «Inch by inch, life's a cinch,» so the saying went. But progress *was*

being made. The allies were now on the continent, and the question now became, when would they arrive in our little village, not when would they land in Europe or France.

During the middle of June, we were to witness at first hand a momentous milestone in the history of World War II, the launching of the first V-l guided missile bombs. As Dawes and I were about to enter the barn for retirement about 9:00 p.m., we heard a strange sound coming from the woods in the rear of the house, somewhat similar to but definitely not the noise of an aircraft. Neither of us had ever heard such a peculiar sound as this from anything that flew, and began looking around more closely for the source. The noises now began to emanate from more than one direction, as the situation began to grow mysterious. Suddenly, coming from the woods in a left to right direction we saw the silhouette of a flying object. It was too far away for any positive identification, but the bright plume of light at the rear clearly was not part of any aircraft we had ever observed. The speed of the craft seemed to be increasing as we watched it disappear over the horizon. We both came to the same conclusion simultaneously. It was Dawes who finally spoke.

«I'll be damned! So that's what all the fuss has been about. That's the thing everybody has been bombing in those Noball targets. And it was flying to England, too.»

I agreed with him. It couldn't be anything else. The guided missile had finally been introduced to modern warfare on this night. Before we turned in for the evening we saw another one heading in the same direction. The next morning our radio report confirmed the whole affair. London was the target of these flying bombs, and 12 had already found their mark. More details of their operating characteristics were revealed in the next few days.

They were launched from semi-mobile platforms that resembled ski tracks whose locations were along the French coast from the Pas-de-Calais southward. Their speed was as fast as or faster than the swiftest fighter planes of the American or British forces. When over the designated target, the motors had been preset to turn off, dropping them onto the objective. Each V-l contained approximately 1,000 pounds of explosive in the nose section, which made them a fearsome instrument of destruction.

As with all new developments, the first V-l's had many imperfections, and fully one third of the launches were failures, primarily due

to the guidance system. I could personally verify this since we saw several arise from the nearby woods and assume a circular flight pattern rather than skimming away in a westerly heading. While none ever flew over our house in the dreaded circular path, the nearest miss came quite close and dropped down off the front road about 500 yards away. I was standing in the back yard and saw the entire performance. Although braced for the concussion to follow, it was far greater than expected and blew me backward slightly with a deafening roar.

We soon discovered another Noball launch site across the main road about a mile away alongside a wooded area. This one afforded us a view of the actual launch phase of the missile. Upon hearing the peculiar noise of the engine starting, we had only to look closely in that direction and see the object quickly rise off the ski tracks and head westward.

As the attacks by the V-ls became more frequent, so too did the day and night bombing visits to eradicate them. These frequent close-in bombings could better be endured, however, than the constant launchings of these insidious V-ls, since at any moment one could easily be killed by an errant missile. The period became grim at one point with the growing tension created by such dangers. On some infrequent occasions, as already described, our tempers would crack a little over minor irritations, but never permanently. We all recognized these to be particularly trying times in our lives, that hopefully would be terminated soon.

The aerial battleground taking shape over our heads finally brought forth an idea from Jean that it would be wise if the household had an air raid shelter. It was an excellent idea, not only from a protective standpoint but also to provide gainful employment to those without a job.

It began as a rather modest undertaking, but gradually was expanded to more elaborate proportions. As its completion the shelter was about six feet deep and three feet wide. To enter it, some steps were carved out of the soil, and covered with boards to lend support. At the bottom, a corridor of about six feet in length was created, then another one leading directly to the left. At the top, we placed reinforcing logs between the opposing walls for added strength. Then as a covering for the entire structure, boards were laid across the slits and the dirt accumulated from the diggings piled over them several feet in thickness. The location of the shelter was directly behind the

barn, and its construction consumed about six weeks of steady strenuous work.

Dawes was the architect and prime mover of this ambitious effort and welcomed the opportunity it presented to become completely involved in the project. In contrast, my own efforts were adequate but never reached the consuming appeal of my partner. The shelter did prove a substantial contribution, though, as well as an object for channeling otherwise idle hours to productive ones.

Shortly after completion, it was put to its maximum use in one unforgettable afternoon. The situation that caused us to huddle within its confines for protection was a low-level attack carried out by the Royal Air Force on the old reliable Noball facility in the woods behind us. This was without doubt the most daring feat I had ever seen, either before or after, and also the closest bomber attack to the village of Wail. It was a gray afternoon in August with a solid cloud cover hanging between 1,000 and 2,000 feet. Jean and Raymonde were out working in the fields about half a mile from the house, and Dawes and I were lying around doing nothing in particular. Off in the distance we began to hear a roar of aircraft engines which was nothing unusual. The roar kept increasing until it became unusually noticeable, and with the rising crescendo, some of the guns began firing intermittently around the area. This was no ordinary formation passing overhead; something big was about to happen. Instinctively, we both started for the shelter, and upon arrival at the entrance began to see the unfolding dramatic action. It was too exciting to go below, so we stood there and took it in.

The big four-engine Lancaster bombers began penetrating through the low overhanging clouds as they raced around in familiar circular patterns, each waiting for his opportunity to attack. All the guns were now going full blast; the big caliber 88 millimeter weapons were booming out at the planes in rapid-fire order. As the shells burst, the inky black smoke would appear at the spot where they had aimed. Then at the height of this murderous din, the bombs started their roll of thundering echoes, and the ground shook so much underfoot that I wondered if the shelter's walls would collapse.

So far no planes had been hit, but the attack grew even more daring and violent in its execution. At the height of the action, Jean and Raymonde came running up to the shelter, out of breath and with the most frightened expressions I had ever seen. They understood nothing

The Day of Liberation, 4 September 1944. Shown left to right: Jean Chetiveaux, Charles McBride, Erling Dawes, and Raymonde Chetiveaux.

about this holocaust that had enveloped them, and asked only to be delivered from it. They promptly went down into the shelter while we continued to watch, awe-struck and hypnotized by the sight. Looking back toward the house, we saw a Lancaster no more than 500 feet high commence his bomb run. He was coming directly over us and headed straight for the woods where the objective lay. We could plainly see the bomb bay doors open and two seconds later the bombs cascading

out. They were released almost above the house, but because of the fast forward speed of the plane, the bomb fall was in no danger of hitting us. On he went through the murderous black sky of bursting flak, still untouched. This one was going to be close, however, and at this point Dawes and I descended to the shelter for protection. The resulting detonation and earthshock from this release of bombs rocked the earth, the shelter, and its occupants more violently than anything yet endured. But the protective walls stood firm against the wrenching of the ground.

Still more bombing and gun fire. The earth continued to rock while outside the noise of battle became a fitting introduction for the arrival of Domesday itself. Finally it began to lessen somewhat and we popped out again to see the show, but there was nothing. The bombers had departed after braving an unprecedented wall of exploding steel and fire in pressing forth to the objective. Unbelievably, no aircraft were shot down, but I never learned whether they finally succeeded in destroying the target on this foray. The raw courage of those men in their performance today, like many other sights witnessed here, would never be forgotten.

The radio's news of the war began to brighten in late July and August. The break-out of the American 3rd Army to St. Lo, France, had occured, and with it a great widening of the land battle. It now became a war of fast maneuver with large land masses overrun daily by the allies. The fighting front now moved to within 100 miles of our little community, and we then realized for certain that the Germans could no longer contain the advance of the liberating forces. It seemed now only a matter of days before we would see the friendly troops.

In early July, I was told that my navigator Stanley Baranofsky had set out alone on a bicycle for the fighting front in Normandie because he could no longer endure the inactivity and boredom of waiting for liberation. Jean considered his actions most unwise and dangerous, because if he were captured the enemy could and would force him by physical torture to reveal the names and locations of his French benefactors. Jean didn't think his chances of success were worth the risk of such an undertaking. He was later proven correct in this assessment. Baranofsky ultimately succeeded in getting through the combat lines to the American forces come 200 miles to the south, but not without numerous confrontations with German troops that nearly exposed his true identity. The net effect of his early departure for

freedom was his return to England only two weeks ahead of me.

A small change to our mode of existence did occur in early August when Jean decided to change our sleeping quarters from the barn back into the house. This change was brought about when he realized we were being slowly eaten to death in the hay by fleas and lice. We were steadily accumulating numerous bites all over our bodies, and although we never complained, Jean began to notice our plight by the constant scratching actions that were taking place. While relaxing in the underground hideaway we could see by use of the light, mice looking at us from their vantage points in the straw some ten feet away. They gradually became bolder and would occasionally run across our living space only a few feet away.

Once the sleeping quarters were changed to the house, the flea and lice problem was solved. What a relief to experience once again a brighter and cleaner environment. Rather than relocating back into the secret room, however, Jean put us upstairs in one of the bedrooms, apparently throwing caution to the winds.

This was not a particularly prudent thing to do, since the only emergency exit was to go out the window some 15 or 20 feet below in event the Germans were to conduct a surprise search of the premises. Fortunately for us, this never materialized. Up to the day of our liberation the Germans never had the slightest suspicion of the presence of any American airmen in Jean's home.

The war news continued to overflow with optimistic reports of more territory taken in the wake of a retreating German army. Paris finally fell on 25 August, an event which the French people regarded as a symbolic and joyful omen of ultimate defeat for the enemy. The fighting was now fewer than 50 miles away with the Canadian Army assigned that sector of France lying in our path. Only a few more days remained before the allied troops would reach us, and as the great day drew nearer, I began to indulge myself in anticipatory thoughts and feelings that had long been suppressed. Just imagine: to be able to walk down the streets of London, to be getting off the train in Dallas for that long-awaited reunion with my wife and son. It was simply too good to contemplate.

For the first three days of September, it seemed that the entire troop strength of the German army in this sector began to retreat northward up the road in front of Jean's home. The lines of marching soldiers and military vehicles seemed endless as they slowly plodded onward.

Several types of armored vehicles and tanks were also part of the retreating mass. At one point on the last day a few of the tanks took up defensive positions alongside our house at the edge of the woods. This was indeed a dangerous situation. If we were going to be in the path of a pitched tank battle, the air raid shelter might be the only means of salvation.

Later in the day, the tanks, fortunately for us, redeployed out of position and began to join the main body of retreating men and machines. Sometime that afternoon we heard the unmistakable sound of a fighter plane on a strafing sortie. Looking out from the back yard, I saw a P-51 Mustang flying low up the line of marching humanity with guns blazing. He made only one pass at the lucrative target and received some ground fire in return. This couldn't have been sufficient reason for him to break off the engagement, so he probably was low on fuel and couldn't remain around any longer.

There could now be no lingering doubts about our imminent freedom which at that moment was churning northward in the form of an army that was sweeping aside all resistance. That night Dawes and I found sleeping a needless chore to fulfill, so keyed up were we in the long-awaited anticipation of liberation which surely would come with the following 24 hours. Of one thing we agreed upon: after being liberated and returned to England, we would not have to return to flying combat because of the policy of retiring evader personnel such as ourselves from combat tours. The reason was the same as the possible consequences that could have befallen Stanley Baranofsky if he had been captured in his flight to freedom. The enemy, through its intelligence network, would know if such personnel had ever received assistance from French resistance fighters and extract the necessary details from these individuals.

The morning of 4 September was bright and clear. After eating breakfast we took up the vigil of waiting and listening for friendly troop activity. Only a handful of German troops were now on the road retreating northward, and these too finally disappeared in the distance. Now for a brief two or three hours there was no foreign army in the locality. It was a vacuum that had not existed here since the fall of France in 1940, and its effects induced a strange silence on the community for a short interim. The entire populace knew that the magic moment was almost at hand.

The first faint din of a large motorcade signalled the approach of

the liberators off in the distance. Then it grew louder and more familiar, the definite sound of vehicle engines. As the noise increased, we would see the approach of a tank column weaving its way up the road from Fillievres, with the villagers literally mad with joy as they ran alongside offering flowers, wine bottles, cigarettes, anything of value, to the tank crews who were quite overwhelmed at the show of sincere gratitude bestowed upon them. The column stopped briefly in front of Jean's house, and everyone wildly piled out the door and into the street. In one glorious instant, an endurance of five long months of fear of capture, furtive hide and seek, aerial bombardment, and enervating idleness had come to an end. Freedom at last! How utterly intoxicating!

We yelled a greeting at one of the soldiers standing in the open turret of a tank. He appeared surprised at the English being spoken and replied: «You're not French, are you?»

«No, we're Americans and damned glad to see you guys, too.»
«How long have you two been here?» he inquired.

«Five months. We were both flying bombers,» I answered.

«My God, that's a long time. You two must have seen a lot.»
«We sure have, but you're the best sight of all. What's your nationality?» I asked the soldier because his accent was neither American or British.

«We're Polish troops. Part of the Canadian Army. We've been in England since 1940 after we escaped from Poland.»

The tank column moved out of town toward the retreating Germans, but had no intention of overtaking them today. It stopped six miles away near the town of Hesdin, which the Germans had also evacuated. Before the column finally departed Wail, a Polish lieutenant had been notified of our presence and came to the house a short time later. He spoke excellent English and was a gentleman in every respect. The officer informed us that he must take care of some details but would return for us before sunset to accompany the column. We agreed to be ready to leave when he called.

Meanwhile, a wild tumultuous celebration in town was now taking place, to which Jean insisted we go. Old bottles of wine hidden for years during the occupation were brought out for this greatest of occasions. All the villagers were now aware of our identity, and couldn't believe we had been so close for so long. We met all of them, began singing the *Marseillaise,* and were soon enmeshed in a carefree

revelry of celebration in living this, for me, the happiest moment of my life. During the height of this event, we paid our first visit to the chateau across the main road, where the owner, Monsieur Pierre d'Hautecloque, had now reclaimed his property and was again the headmaster of Wail. He too was ecstatic with the sudden expulsion of the conquerors and the return of freedom. The whole world was now being viewed through rose-colored glasses.

After the first round of celebrations, Father Guerle came riding up in an open top auto alongside its driver. He explained the car had been hidden during the entire occupation, but was still in excellent condition and ran perfectly. The priest insisted that Jean, Dawes and I go for a short ride. This was fine, and off we went toward Hesdin. Upon arrival there in the town square, Jean made an impromptu announcement in a ringing voice that he had two American parachutists with him, and the townspeople immediately rushed over and surrounded us completely, so anxious were they to see any member of the allied armies. Now, we were the objects of adulation like the tank crews in the Polish unit earlier today. Some of the people that could speak English began asking all manner of questions about our status, wanting to know how long we had been living with Jean, the type of airplane we had been flying when forced down, etc. We very patiently answered all inquiries and indicated we did not deserve any special recognition or thanks. We were but two soldiers ourselves who had only done our duties. Rather, it was the French people who deserved our undying appreciation for befriending us for five months in their homes, feeding and caring for us literally under the noses of the enemy soldiers.

This heady treatment of us as heroes lasted for about 30 minutes in the town square of Hesdin, but at last had to be terminated when I reminded Jean that the Polish lieutenant would be returning to Wail for us within the hour and it was essential that we be there when he arrived. Little did I realize at the time that Jean actually had planned this trip in advance as a diversionary device to delay our departure until at least the following day. He reasoned that we could leave with any unit passing through.

On coming into the house at Wail, Raymonde broke the news to the two of us that the lieutenant had returned for us and then departed when told that we were out visiting the countryside. He gave no indication, moreover, that he would come back for us, either that

evening or the following morning. This was indeed bad news; we had no idea when another opportunity might arise for our departure with any other troops, and we so much wanted to go. The wild happy celebrations of liberation had ended on a note of despair for us that night. Now it wasn't certain when we would depart.

That night of 4 September, however, proved to be the last night we were to spend under Jean's protective roof when the lieutenant again returned early the following morning to inquire about us. We were most impressed at his great concern for our welfare, and naturally most delighted at seeing him. Within one hour after breakfast we were ready to go. On reflecting over the events of this final period of our tenure with Jean, I have always been grateful that things turned out in this manner. Despite our overwhelming urge to be on our way to rejoin the world, consideration and a show of gratitude toward our unselfish benefactor should at least have dictated that we remain overnight with him and his family to share in the joys of freedom. Had we not been persuaded to accompany Jean and Father Guerle on the sightseeing trip, we would assuredly have rushed out of his home that very afternoon. Another fortuitous circumstance was the lieutenant's unannounced return for us the following morning, which gave neither Jean nor his wife the opportunity to reflect upon our certain departure the following day.

The family walked with us down to the road where the officer was waiting in his vehicle. It was a sad and tearful occasion for the family as they bade their final «au revoirs» to us. In return, neither Dawes or I were moved to tears, but did once more convey to them our undying gratitude for the care and protection extended to us in this most trying period. I am confident they believed we were sincerely grateful, which is really all that mattered. With a last embrace for each, we climbed into the waiting vehicle, and waved good-bye until they were out of sight.

A new period of hope, exuberance, and faith in the future had now begun. Life was sweet again.

Chapter 8

Return to Seething

Our ride northward throughout the day behind the tank column was exhilarating in the bright and ever-widening horizons of the quiet countryside. Most of the villages we entered were seeing their first liberators as had we yesterday, and now we were part of the procession on whom the affections were being showered. It was humbling in a sense to witness so much genuine gratitude as the people were displaying. We knew only too well how they felt.

Since there were no American ground forces in this sector of Northern France, the Polish forces were merely taking us along with them in the hope that some contact would be made eventually for our transfer to United States authority. Neither of us cared in the least; it was so wonderful to again be moving in any direction with a purpose.

In the early evening the entire column encamped for the night near the Belgian border. The small support detachment with whom we had been riding had been following within a mile to the rear of the tanks all day, and now all segments of the entire force had joined together for the night. Prior to our arrival, the tanks had stumbled upon some German armor and a small skirmish had ensued. The Poles suffered no casualties, and the engagement was broken off by the enemy's withdrawal.

It was at this location that evening that we were turned over to two British liaison officers assigned to the division. One of them, a captain, was being ordered back to British headquarters the next morning at Cherbourg in the vicinity of the Normandy beachhead landings, and it was arranged that we would accompany him in his

vehicle. There were many American units located in this general area of France.

After eating a very substantial meal, we were then taken to the quarters of the two officers and introduced. After a few minutes of conversation, the senior officer, a major, exclaimed, «Well I must say, you fellows really look like a pair of scarecrows,» and began laughing. We heartily agreed after examining our appearance for the first time in this new environment. We were still wearing the same peasant clothes provided by Jean and had completely overlooked the fact that we offered such a contrast to our uniformed counterparts. The major continued, «We'll do something about those clothes right now. I think it's time you two got back in a uniform.»

The uniforms supplied to us were, of course, British, heavy brown wool, with the two-piece battle jacket and beret, but no insignia. When we shed the French clothing, I realized it was the final act of an existence that was gone forever. The clothes looked very shabby lying in a heap on the floor.

The journey south to Cherbourg consumed two full days. It was uneventful except for the final half day when we entered Normandie and began traveling through some of the towns that had been the scene of the heaviest fighting during the past three months. Caen and Lisieux were two cities that looked almost non-existent except for the rubble. This was my closest view of locales that had been the object of such heavy destruction, and it seemed inconceivable that they could have been reduced so thoroughly to brick and dust.

At Cherbourg, the British captain stopped at an American medium bomber base and discharged us to this unit for processing and return to military control. This unit, however, was engaged in fighting the war and had no facilities or authority for accepting us. Here we were informed that it would be necessary to go to Paris for interrogation at Army intelligence headquarters. Within two hours we were assigned seats on an Air Force C-47 transport and were airborne for that city.

Barely two weeks had elapsed since its liberation when we came into the French capital, and the city was still in a semi-state of excitement and celebration. Despite the extreme austerity and shortages of most everything, the people seemed to be living in a carnival-type atmosphere, oblivious to all but continual joy and happiness. It was brotherly love on the largest scale imaginable.

Upon landing at the airport we were taken downtown and given

some directions for locating Army headquarters. Since no busses or subways were yet running, the only means of transport was by walking, and this we did to an overabundance. We went down the entire length of the Champs Elysée and continued onward, inquiring about the location at frequent intervals. Finally after approximately six miles of walking we arrived at the destination. The resulting interrogation was conducted in a routine manner with many forms to fill out. We were now properly accounted for and no longer in a Missing In Action category. Within a day or so, my wife would receive an official telegram from the Army Adjutant General announcing that I had been returned to military control. These fast-moving events of the past week were pushing the vivid memories of our recently terminated clandestine life rapidly into the background.

Dawes and I were part of a contingent of about 100 evaders going through the interrogation process that day, as the liberating armies were routing scores of our kindred out of hiding places throughout France and Belgium. In talking with some of these men we discovered that our five-month period of evading was only slightly longer than the average time spent in hiding, and for some the period had been a year or longer.

The following morning saw our departure by air from Paris to London. We were taken into the city and given a thorough interrogation and processing, and a complete new officer uniform at government expense. Now life was beginning to assume some of its familiar aspects with these latest developments.

During interrogation, I inquired into the status of my fellow comrades, who presumbably had been taken prisoner. It was quickly confirmed to me that all the remaining seven crew members were prisoners of war. The advice of the French women heading up the resistance movement in St. Pol had proven correct after all. Baranofsky ’s escape through the enemy lines was also divulged to me. In fact, he had been through this same processing center only two weeks earlier.

Immediately after interrogation I dispatched a telegram to my wife which read simply: «Dearest. Am alive and safe. Letter follows.» And one final confirmation to all evader personnel was the declaration that we positively would fly no more combat missions. As related earlier, neither of us had any serious concerns about this matter, but I was still relieved to have the confirmation. Instead, we were going to

be sent home to the United States within a week, or as soon as air space was available. This was of course the best of all good news. How fortunate indeed I was at that moment; to be in England and preparing for home rather than in a dismal unpleasant prisoner of war camp and hoping for nothing less than the end of the war.

One final detail required of all individuals in my category prior to departure for home was a brief trip back to one's unit of assignment to obtain personnel files and related records and to clear up other details with the unit as needed. During the three-hour train ride to Seething, I kept thinking how it would feel to return to the base where it all began and see some of the familiar faces. What about Paul Harrison, Frank Dial, and Jim Berry? Were they even still alive now?

The train pulled into Norwich station in the afternoon. The place looked no different than when last I saw it, nor did the drab town itself. Seething was located 16 miles southeast of Norwich and a taxi was used for this phase of the trip.

As the cab approched the main gate, I could already see some of the familiar buildings and roads that composed the complex, and with this view came a flood of early impressions and remembrances of slogging around in the wet mud and damp cold. Base headquarters was only a short distance inside the gate, and here I alighted, paid the fare, and went inside.

The first familiar face I encountered was Robert Harper, a non-flying officer and one of the passengers accompanying my crew on the overseas flight from the U. S. back in November and December the previous year. He was naturally most pleased to see me, but not altogether surprised since he knew from talking to Baranofsky a few weeks earlier that I was also in hiding in France.

I then began to ask him about the fate of some of the other crews with whom I had flown, and he was able to recall generally what happened to each. He began by saying that nearly every individual crew member flying with the group on the day I became a casualty was gone, either by completing his combat tour or failing to return. Surprisingly enough, however, many of the original crews of the 448th did complete their tours without mishap, more than I imagined. Within my own squadron, the 712th, about half the charter members were able to retire on 30 completed missions no later than mid June.

Then I inquired of Harrison's crew that shared our Nissen hut with Crew No. 7's officers.

«They finished up, too, Mac, and went home back in June. But Frank Dial is still here. He's the Squadron Bombardier. You'll probably want to see him.»

This was the best news I had heard. After officially checking me in with the base, Harper then took me down to the Officers Club where he thought Frank might be located. He was there, all right and as I approached him, he recognized me instantly with a big giant bear hug embrace.

«Mac, you scoundrel! You're a sight for sore eyes. It's good to see you again, you don't look any different to me.»

«Good to see you too, old buddy,» I replied. «I'm surprised to see anyone here that I know. Why didn't you go home with the crew when it finished its missions?»

He then told me he had been promised a promotion to Captain if he would remain over a few months. Also involved in his promotion was the agreement to fly five more bomber missions.

«But you're not going to do anything like that are you, Frank?» I inquired. To me the thought was impossible to take seriously for anyone that had already completed 30 combat missions in a B-24 Liberator.

«Well, I don't know, Mac. The idea is pretty tempting. We haven't had the kind of losses that you knew about in the early days. I haven't made up my mind yet.»

Several months later, after my return to the states, I learned from a mutual friend that Frank succumbed to the promotion temptation and flew the additional missions without mishap. Along with the feat, he received his promotion as promised. But there was more information to be gained by Dial during my visit. He then turned to my misfortune of 1 April, and explained what he had done for me as a true friend.

«When you guys didn't come back that day we felt pretty bad around the hut for awhile. But the information we picked up from the other groups that saw your parachutes looked pretty encouraging. So I took a chance you were OK and wrote your wife a letter explaining that you were probably alive and safe. As it turned out, I'm glad I did.»

«Well, Frank, you can't possibly be as glad as I am right now. I can't thank you enough for doing such a fine thing, and I know your letter has helped my wife a great deal during these five months.»

It had indeed. Other than an official letter from the War Depart-

ment giving only the barest of details, she was forced to rely only upon the encouraging tone of Dial's letter written within two days of my disappearance. When I finally called her after reaching the states, she told me that Baranofsky had also written as soon as he reached England explaining only that he had seen me recently in a safe and sound condition. Information of this type was more valuable than golden nuggets, and has since been reflected in my undying respect for both Dial and Baranofsky.

Frank then told me some of the highlights that had taken place in the group since my departure. Probably the most unique thing to occur was a night intruder surprise attack on the base on 22 April. The group returned late in the early evening from a mission to Germany, and in the near darkness some enemy fighters slipped in alongside the bomber formation and remained undetected by the radar warning network. As the bombers came into the traffic pattern and prepared to land, the intruders struck. One 448th aircraft was shot down while two others were strafed and crash landed. In turn, one of the fighters was brought down by defensive anti-aircraft batteries. Another highlight also occuring in the month of April was the largest single loss of 448th bombers on a single mission, six. The occasion was the attack on Berlin of 29 April which resulted in extremely heavy losses to the Eighth Air Force, attributable mainly to faulty navigation.

After talking to Frank for a few minutes more, I visited the men's room. This was not only a latrine but also contained several individual lavatories with mirrors for shaving. It had been the only place where hot water was available during the early days; consequently everyone used its facilities for shaving. To avoid carrying one's shaving kit to and from the Officers Club daily, each officer left his equipment in a small G.I. canvas bag which was attached by its shoulder strap to the overhanging pipes alongside the outer walls. There were always at least 100 bags suspended from the walls in this room. Upon entering the area again, it reflected the same familiar sight to me, and almost automatically my eyes went to the old location of my own bag. There it was, unmistakably, with my identifying code of M-1207.

I removed the kit from the bag and found absolutely nothing disturbed. It had maintained a silent vigil for me in the same spot for more than five months. Taking into account the heavy turnover of personnel which had occurred within the organization, it was incredible that no one had user} the contents by mistake or assumed outright

ownership of the property. But of course since no actual name was indicated, it had been left intact.

That evening I slept in the same Nissen hut that had been home to me during the first four months of the group's tenancy at Seething Air Station. New faces were its occupants now, but with the same grim outlook for the future that had been the lot of mine and all other bomber crewmen. Nothing had really changed except the new cast of players. When the current occupants learned I had been a former member of the outfit and failed to return from the 1 April fiasco, they became very interested and wanted to know the details. None of these men were even members of the organization at that early date.

One of them said: «Oh, yeah, I heard someone talking about that flubbed-up mission not long ago. Wasn't that the one where the group's commander was lost? What was his name?»

The next day I had a short reunion with our old crew chief, Sgt. Balke Mahler. He was one of the best mechanics in the entire group and was quickly assigned to another plane when *The Crud Wagon* failed to return. Mahler admitted that he was most upset when we didn't return that day and felt our loss very deeply. In this respect, however, he joined a growing club of other crew chiefs on the base that had lost their planes as well as the crews most closely associated with them.

One final act to be performed was a visit, more out of curiosity than anything else, to the group briefing room. To me, this was the spot on the base that held more significance by far than any other place. It was where the day's target for attack was initially made known to all in a deadly serious fashion. Here the enemy's defensive strength in the general area of the target was dramatically revealed in terms of hundreds of anti-aircraft guns and enemy fighters likely to be encountered. Here also was the final assembly point on earth for many men prior to boarding the airplanes for the last time.

As I walked in, the only activity in the big room was a small orientation briefing in progress. A group of about 15 British air cadets in their teens were receiving some general orientation briefings from a captain assigned to the group whom I faintly recognized. He took no notice of me in the rear and continued his briefing.

This room was not even one year old, but because its walls had borne silent witness to the hundreds of individuals who had since come and gone, it had truly acquired more than its normal share of

personal recollections. This for me was the most hallowed spot on the station, and if any ethereal spirits of departed men were yet lingering nearby, they must surely be here. Images of people that had been killed or reported missing while I was still flying came to mind as I stood there; names such as Campbell, Bass, Ayrest, Thompson, Phillips, and many more. Their names weren't even known now by most of the flying complement, nor did it matter in the least. The game was what it had always been; a consuming struggle for daily survival.

The mission of 1 April 1944 was now officially concluded for me. It was in this very chamber that its wheels had begun to turn, and here with my entrance it had come full circle. I had survived a long circuitous route of five months duration consisting of bail-out from *The Crud Wagon,* evasion from capture by the enemy, numerous aerial bombings by both American and British forces, and the ever-present danger of death from errant V-l flying bombs located nearby. No one could have been more fortunate than I.

That afternoon, after receiving the final sign-off of my records from the group, I said goodbye to my few remaining acquaintances and departed Seething for the last time. It was no longer the place I had known as a first generation member of the 448th Group. The people I had known and the experiences shared with them for a few brief months of combat in World War II were now consigned to that ultimate repository of memory.

Ten days later I returned home to the United States for the greatest of all reunions with my wife, son, and loved ones.

Chapter 9

Epilogue

The final detail of this narrative took place 30 years after the events described here. It was equally as emotional and unforgettable an experience as anything previously occuring to me, and again happened in France.

I was on my final military assignment in France prior to retirement from active duty, and decided to make an initial visit to the Normandy beachhead on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of D-Day, 6 June 1974. The drive from Paris is approximately three hours, and on arrival my wife and I began leisurely to visit some of the more famous landmarks in the general area. At Omaha Beach, I saw an American flag high above the cliffs over looking the beachhead, and reasoned from the map we were following that it marked the location of the American cemetery of St. Laurent which we wanted to see as part of the trip. Coming into St. Laurent Cemetery marked the first time I had ever visited an American cemetery located overseas, and was not prepared for the solemn impression it made upon us.

There are more than 9,000 graves in the cemetery and all can be seen in one sweeping view. We had arrived some two hours after the official ceremonies and wreath-laying in honor of this anniversary occasion, and now were the only ones present. The grounds were in immaculate condition, reflecting a simple reverence throughout. On each of the gravesites was implanted a miniature American and a French flag commemorating the occasion. As I began to walk among the white marble headstones, I noted that many of the dead were airmen who had lost their lives either before or after D-Day, and were

not, as I erroneously thought, only ground soldiers who had been killed in the initial assaults on Omaha Beach below.

A thought struck me as I wandered among the graves; could any of these men be from among my old unit, the 448th Bomb Group? I went into the cemetery office to inquire if I could examine the list of buried names. The answer from the attendant was, «Yes, we have such a list. Whose name would you care to inquire about?» One name in particular came to mind as I said: «Do you have a Col. James M. Thompson buried here?»

The attendant then opened a massive book containing the names of all Americans buried in military cemeteries in Europe, and after searching briefly replied: «Yes, here is the name and he's buried right here at St. Laurent. Here is the location of the grave.»

I had not planned on anything like this. Pure happenstance was solely responsible for my presence in gazing down at the final resting place of my old commanding officer. The headstone read simply: «Colonel James M. Thompson, USAAF, Headquarters 448th Bomb Group, April 1, 1944.» There but for the kindness of fate would have lain I those past 30 years.

How truly fortunate I have been to have lived a full life of respect and purpose rather than one prematurely terminated at the height of physical and mental capacities as occured to Thompson at the age of 38 years. Of even greater personal tragedy, however, were the more than 9,000 former young lives surrounding me at that moment that were extinguished with far less maturity than Thompson achieved. Only in such a place as this could one truly appreciate the precious quality of life, and the terrible loss of war.

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Author's Note

Readers of this book and of *The 1,000 Day Battle*, by James Hoseason, will immediately observe several glaring discrepancies between the two works concerning the mission of 1 April 1944. Indeed, these descriptions are so divergent as to cause one to question whether the two authors are actually referring to the same operation.

On p. 103 of his book, Hoseason was silent with respect to any reference of the mistaken bombing of Switzerland by the 2nd Air Division. He also indicated that the briefed target for attack that day was Pforzheim rather than Ludwigshaven. The former locality, which possessed no military objectives worthy of attack, was finally bombed by the 448th and the trailing 2nd Combat Wing as a target of opportunity when the 448th, acting as division group leader, was unable to locate Ludwigshaven due to its faulty navigation.

There are more discrepancies, inaccuracies, and omissions of fact committed by Hoseason which are quoted below with accompanying comments by this writer.

1,000 Day Battle, p. 103: «Col. Thompson was determined that the bombing that day should be accurate and as a consequence no less than three passes were made over the target.»

Comment: Pforzheim was bombed in one pass over this small insignificant target of opportunity.

1,000 Day Battle, p. 103: «At 12:50 PM Lt. Harrison C. Mellor and his crew were shot down and at 1:15 PM Lt. Charles Knoor's Liberator blew up after a direct hit – no parachutes were seen.»

Comment: As explained in my narrative, Mellor and his crew

bailed out due to fuel exhasution. Charles Knorr was my pilot and he too ordered his crew to bail out, due to fuel exhaustion. Knorr's name was misspelled in Hoseason's book.

1,000 Day Battle, p. 103: «First out was the radar navigator, Capt. Morgan who parachuted to safety. The next was Colonel Thompson. Then as the next crew member went through the fore hatch, the aircraft tilted and lurched into a spiral dive. The men inside were trapped. The aircraft continued to rotate and crashed into a hillside. Col. Thompson was killed in his parachute as he made his descent – by machinegun ground fire.»

Comment: Captain Morgan was the pilotage navigator of the lead plane, not the radar navigator. Colonel Thompson was the last one to bail out, leaving the pilot, Alan Teague, to crash-land the bomber. Thompson was killed due to the low altitude of the plane when he evacuated which caused his parachute to open only partially.

1,000 Day Battle, p. 103: «2nd Lt. Kenneth Weaver turned back for Switzerland: he had no hope of making it back to England with his fuel supply.»

Comment: Kenneth Weaver and his crew bailed out at 1:39 p.m. over northern France with the English Channel almost in view ahead. He too was out of fuel.

In summary, it is difficult to dismiss the possibility that Hoseason failed to disclose all the unsavory facts relating to the 1 April 1944 mission, since it was easily the blackest day ever for the 448th Bomb Group, and possibly for the 2nd Air Division as well, at that point in time. Nevertheless, I applaud his efforts in producing such a comprehensive work as *The 1,000 Day Battle.* It has undoubtedly stimulated increased membership in the 2nd Air Division Association and caused many war veterans to take renewed pride in their unique contributions toward winning the air war over Europe.

Hoseason's objective was to depict 1,000 days of air battle, while mine was more limited in bringing to light for the first time the unvarnished facts surrounding only one day of that air battle.

Index

Compiled by Terry G. Colbert

Note: The index is alphabetized word by word in conformity with *The Chicago Manual of Style* (13th Edition), except for numeric military designations, which are grouped numerically at the beginning for ease of reference.