

STALAG LUFT IV

Stalag Luft IV was situated approximately two and a half miles south of Keifheide in Pomerania. It was activated in April 1944 but was never actually completed despite intense German effort due to the pressure of war. The first group of prisoners were transfers from Stalag Luft VI at Hydekrug in east Prussia. The majority of them were Americans, but also included were 800 RAF non commissioned officers. From that day in April, the flow of prisoners was heavy until, upon evacuation, they numbered almost 8500, a number far in excess of that for which the camp was designed. There was continuous construction in the camp, both indoors and out. Indoors, the prisoners were trying their utmost to make their meager quarters more habitable, and outdoors the Germans were feverishly working to complete additional barracks.

The camp was set in forest clearing about one and a half miles square. That particular forest was chosen because the dense foliage and underbrush served as an added barrier to escape. There were two barbed wire fences ten feet high completely surrounding the camp. Rumor had it that the outer fence was electrically charged. Between the two fences was another fence of rolled barbed wire four feet high. An area 200 feet deep, from the fence to the edge of the forest was left clear making it necessary for anyone attempting escape to traverse this area in full view of the guards. Fifty feet inside the fences was a warning wire. A prisoner could expect to be shot first and then questioned if he stepped over this wire. Posted at close intervals around the camp were towers which were equipped with several powerful spotlights and machine guns.

The camp consisted of a Vor Lager for staging and screening new prisoners; administrative buildings; a post office; a hospital, and a building purported to be a delousing center but no one was ever seen going in or out. There were 4 lagers or compounds for housing prisoners. Each lager had 10 barracks, a mess hall and quarters for German camp personnel and the prisoners' man of confidence. This man of confidence was elected by the prisoners and acted as mediator in all camp transactions between prisoners and Germans. The barracks had one wash room, one latrine, and 13 rooms each of which was furnished with wooden slat beds, a stove, table and several benches. The rooms were designed to house 16 men but usually averaged 20 to 25. The extra men were forced to sleep 2 in a bunk hardly wide enough for a child. This one room served as living quarters, church, recreation room, court, library, school and work shop. The prisoners did everything in their power to make their room more livable. The discomfort of sleeping on slats covered with a thin layer of wood shavings was alleviated by stealing barbed wire, removing the barbs, and stretching it for springs. Removeable ventilation boards were cut in the walls for badly needed air. Cardboard from Red Cross and YMCA cartons was used to patch broken windows and to make shelves and storage cabinets for personal belongings. Heat was furnished by one ancient pot belly stove set in the middle of the room. Only the area around the stove was warm so the men built tiny portable stoves to heat the far ends of the room. Oil lamps, made from tin cans, lard or wax and bed webbing were used to supplement the single 25 watt bulb allotted each room.

Each lager boasted a cooler which was a room used for solitary confinement. It was bare except for a wooden bunk and a stool and had no heat, light or sanitary facilities. The most minor of camp regulations was punished by a minimum sentence of 21 days in this cooler. Only bread and water were allowed and no smoking or correspondence privileges. The staff of German personnel consisted of a Lt Col, a group of non-descript medical men, who at any other time or any other place would have been barred from practice on appearances alone. There were also several officers and squadrons of men who always seemed more confused than the prisoners. They had nothing to do but lounge, deny all requests and count prisoners.

THE BLACK MARCH

On Feb 5 1945, the German camp officials were forced to evacuate Stalag Luft IV before the rapidly advancing Russian army could reach the camp. This decision transformed the routine of camp into a bedlam of confusion. Previous to the official declaration, rumors ran rampant among the prisoners. Under the uncertain conditions and with no definite word, the men surrendered their rationality to wild conjecture. Some predicted a mass desertion by the

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Germans, abandoning the prisoners to fend for themselves until they could be liberated by the Russians, or forced to fight their would be liberators or possibly being backed against the wall and mowed down like so much grass. At any rate, the prisoners were left to draw their own conclusions as the frenzied guards and leaders scurried mysteriously about the camp. The suspense was finally relieved when on the night of Feb 3rd, word was passed that the order for evacuation had been received. The time designated was 8 o'clock on the morning of the fifth. This news started an orgy of preparation for both prisoners and guards.

Each prisoner hastily prepared for the trip. Some expected a march of a month or two at most, while others predicted a short jaunt of a few days. The camp was a beehive of activity as the prisoners about, scraping together provisions for the march. Every scrap of food and clothing was packed. The Germans frantically organized schedules for the marching formations of all those physically able to move. The warehouse was opened and red cross food parcels were distributed to the prisoners just before the march began. Only the hospital cases along with a few padres were being left behind. They were left with no provisions and only the most meager rations. Feb 5th dawned cold wet and gray. The big day had come all had dreamed about and planned for and it was a solemn one. Prisoners were torn between elation at leaving the discomforts of camp, and the uncertainty of prospects of hardships yet to be endured on the march.

It was a motly crew that started out that day. Many of the prisoners were wearing 2 or 3 complete outfits of pants, shirts and sweaters, and carried several extra food parcels which had been begged or borrowed or stolen from the red cross warehouse. At the onset of the march, the prisoners rejoiced at the mere freedom of motion after long months, and in some cases years, in the apathetic atmosphere of camp where no one indulged in exercise more strenuous than that required in his daily needs. However, after a short time, muscles unused for long periods collapsed under the strain of hours of marching in the cold wet weather; bones and joints ached mercilessly, and all were seized with fierce attacks of cramps when a halt was called, and tired, pain wracked bodies were finally allowed to rest. The distress was increased by the numbness and swelling of frostbite. Due to the lack of sanitation facilities, the ever present lice which infested every man, introduced typhus. Dysentery marched along with them to add more misery to the already miserable men. Some unfortunates were plagued with all simultaneously, men who struggled to keep up the pace with bodies weakened with the fevers of typhus, bodily disorders of dysentery, frostbite, exposure and complete fatigue.

In the beginning, a day's travel averaged 17 kilometers. The Germans considered this pace too leisurely and soon stepped it up to 20 and 25 kilometers a day. When the quota in miles had been reached, the prisoners were herded into deserted rat infested barns and left to lick their wounds. There was little or no shelter from the freezing cold and wind since many of these buildings were lacking a wall or roof. When the barns or similar structures were unavailable, the nights were spent where the men dropped in ditches, fields or forests. After a night spent in the cold on hard ground with no protection, the comparative warmth of some ramshackle hut was welcomed. Before dropping off to sleep, each man prayed for strength to hold on just a while longer since each sunrise brought new hope. All spiritual and physical resources were mustered at the start of a days march and a little determined spring could be detected in the step of the men, but by nightfall the lines were once again reduced to straggling wisps of crawling men, begging only for a place to rest.

After a few weeks on the march, the old familiar food problem started to hound the hapless marchers. Even those who supplied themselves with extra rations felt the gnawing pains of starvation soon after the last precious morsel was eaten. Bodies which were ravaged outwardly by all the courages of the march were now being attacked from within. The sight of the well fed guards drove many to frenzy. With the fortification of a little food, the prisoners somehow found the strength to endure a days march. But without it, everything seemed futile and the end too far and too indefinite to compensate for the struggle and misery entailed in achieving it. With no prospect of receiving food from the German guards, the men were forced to find food wherever and however they could. Occasionally, they found someone to trade with. More than likely, this someone was a slave laborer no better off. Some, however, had access to food, and after language difficulties were overcome, a trade was made. With no money or anything for barter, these deals were made to exchange food for cigarettes, which many foresighted prisoners had hoarded for just such an eventuality. The amount of food procured in this manner was inconsequential. It could not be stretched far and only served to

THE BLACK MARCH (cont)

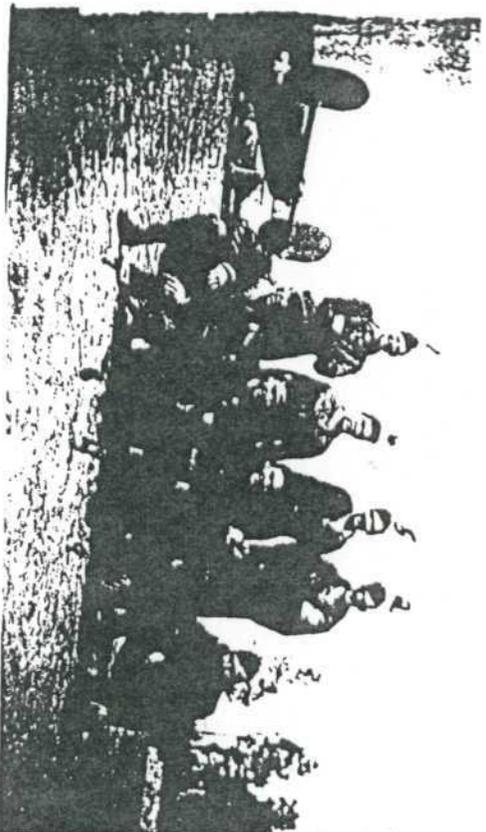
whet the appetite, not satisfy it. Other sources of food had to be found. Fields were dug up in hopes of locating a forgotten root or 2 left from the previous summer. All too often, a prisoner received nothing but cracked and bleeding hands after hours of digging in the frozen ground. Forests were stripped bare in the hunt for acorns and berries. In desperation, many prisoners ate even the bark and leaves. Morale had scraped bottom. Sickness, starvation and despondency could be detected in the thinning lines, as each day, untold numbers were left behind. Some attempted escape on the assumption that nothing could be worse than the tortures of that walking death. The majority of those abandoned in barns and along the way could no longer crawl or drag their weakened bodies in the lines. Some pleaded piteously to be carried until some strength could be regained, but no one could muster enough energy to bear the extra burden and these pleas had to be ignored. Some of these men left behind caught up in the last days of the march, but the whereabouts of many is still unknown. Days crept by in endless monotony. Petty gripes turned to serious complaints. Two long months had been spent marching. All rebelled, but to no avail since there was no alternative, and an attitude of dejected resignation was adopted. The men doggedly plodded along in completely mechanical routines of marching through all the hours of daylight and getting what rest they could in the few hours of night. It was during the third month of the march that a red cross unit was met and the dire food situation was somewhat relieved by the distribution of much needed food parcels. It was a red letter day.

About this time, a change in the routine was noticeable. The ranks of the German guards developed gaping voids. Many of them deserted in view of the obvious end of their reign. The remaining guards became more lenient and almost friendly. They no longer forced the prisoners to march in unfavorable weather. Rainy days were spent in the shelter of barns, and the daily quota of marching miles was reduced considerably. And for extra assurance that the prisoners stay in purgatory was truly drawing to a close, the sounds of the allies' big guns were coming closer, and the number of allied planes overhead was increasing daily.

The night of April 30th had been no different than countless other nights. The men were bedded down under cover in various barns scattered within 10 miles of each other. At dawn on May 1st, the air was suddenly rent with a terrific roar which brought every man to his feet and out into the road to investigate. The sight which greeted them brought their hearts to their throats. The road was aswarm with men from a Canadian tank and paratroop Division which had broken through the German lines and was now being swamped by hordes of hysterically screaming prisoners. The Canadians were happily throwing boxes of rations to the ragged men about them. Most of the boxes went unnoticed by the men who were too entranced with the glorious vision of their liberators. They gazed reverently at the Canadians through eyes blinded with tears of gratification and joy. Nor could they speak over the huge lumps lodged in their throats, but there was no doubt that they were really among friends and finally free. Men alternately cried and laughed as they unashamedly hugged each other. A prayer of thanksgiving welled up in every heart and many fell to their knees to beg forgiveness for doubting him, for what greater proof of his presence and mercy was there than that glorious day.

After the Canadians had passed, the men had yet to reach Luneberg, where in the hands of the British their liberation would be official. Even on this short hike from Zarrantin, their liberation point, to Lunenburg, they were hounded by the fear of recapture since they were marching in no man's land. Upon arrival at Lunenburg, they were transported by trucks to freedom. Some came straggling in as late as May 10 with arms loaded with souvenirs which had been appropriated along the route. The march had been a desperate struggle from beginning to end, but it had been most bitter in the last few weeks. In 3 months, the men had covered approximately 500 miles, which was a remarkable feat when the physical condition of the men and the circumstances of the march are taken under consideration. A tour of Germany on foot, but what a price in human lives and suffering!

CREW TRAINED WITH AND
FIELD CREWSAS WITH



CRESWELL - WARING - HEALY - BOLTON
WILLIAMS - STEVENS CROTEAU - HOYER BURGENT -
PORTER NOT IN PICTURE



HOYER - WILLIAMS - HEALY - CROTEAU - STEVENS
BOLTON - CRESWELL - PORTER - BURGENT -
WILLIAMS NOT IN PICTURE

time to change leaders, and the bombs were dropped without using the bomb sight. This concentration of bombs also fell short. There were a few hits in the storage area of the airdrome (A/D) northwest of the target, resulting in a large gasoline fire.

The Group experienced continuous flak in the target area. The main concentration of anti-aircraft guns was between the target and the M/Y. Immediately after the formation passed over the target, two boxes were attacked by Me-109s. One box was attacked by six Me-109s which made passes from 3 to 9 o'clock. The other box was attacked by four Me-109s which came in singly from 5 o'clock, closing to 600 yards. These attacks were successfully fought off, and claims were made of two Me-109s which made passes from 3 to 9 o'clock. The other box was attacked by four Me-109s which came in singly from 5 o'clock, closing to 600 yards. These attacks were successfully fought off, and claims were made of two Me-109s destroyed. Approximately fifteen other Me-109s were seen over the target area. Ten aircraft were damaged by flak. Twenty seven returned to base with a MLT of 1340. One aircraft landed at Bari to refuel.

29 Jun 44—No mission. The Van Buskirk crew (762) lost their assistant radio operator and one of their other gunners on this day when the Sallard twins, riding a motorcycle near Taranto, collided with a mule-drawn cart. Hector died seven hours after the accident from a skull fracture and chest injuries. Ruben suffered a broken leg. According to Kathleen Van Buskirk, George (her husband and the Sallards' pilot) often told the story that "Ruben was too large to escape from his top turret in an emergency without help, so George had assigned Hector to help his brother get out should it be necessary, realizing that his motivation to do so would be greater than that of any other member of the crew." Unfortunately, Ruben was not able to help save Hector in this situation when the positions were reversed. Ruben spent considerable time in the hospital so he did not return to the Squadron until Oct 44.

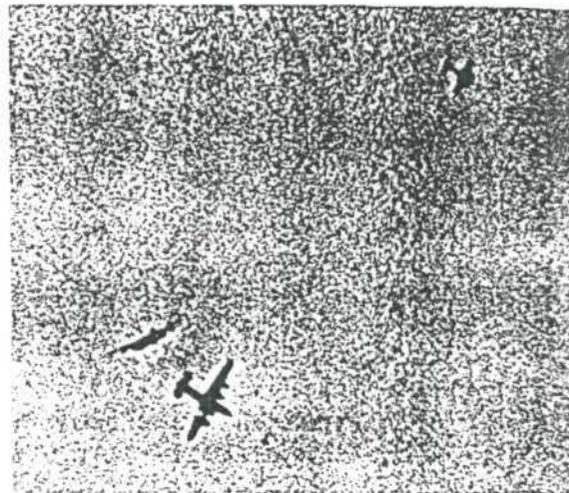
30 Jun 44—The target was the Blechammer South Oil Refinery in Germany, formerly Poland. Of the thirty five aircraft that took off at 0625, there were four early returns. The fighter escort of P-38s was observed by some crews at Lake Balaton.

"Ham" White (760) said the mission was delayed forty five minutes because Wing did not want the planes over the target if it was obscured by cloud cover. Finally they did take off, but north of Lake Balaton at 0945, the Group encountered weather conditions which cut visibility to zero and necessitated turning back, which caused a dispersal of the Group by boxes. A few aircraft attacked targets of opportunity in Hungary and Yugoslavia. Twelve aircraft dropped a total of 30 tons of 500 lb. GP bombs on railroads, the docks at Split, a factory at Pecs, the town of Baldfoldvar, and on the M/Y at Kaposvar. Hits were observed in the M/Y at Kaposvar, on the quay and railroad at the Split harbor, and in the factory at Pecs. Other results were not observed. Fifteen aircraft jettisoned 37.5 tons of 500 lb. GP bombs in the Adriatic.

At 1045 hours, forty five to fifty Me-210s were observed in the Lake Balaton area. Thirty five to forty attacked, concentrating their fire on the high box of the first attack unit. They came in from 7 o'clock high in eight waves of four abreast and closed most aggressively to within fifty yards. Seven other 210s attacked singularly from 6 o'clock and 11 o'clock level. There were two encounters with Me-109s. A pilot, emerging from a cloud, found a Me-110 attacking a B-24, which had one gun inoperative, so he altered his course, intercepted the fighter and shot him down. Three enemy aircraft were claimed to have been destroyed. Four aircraft were

missing from the high box of the first attack unit.

"Ham" White (760) was leading this box, which included Elder Erfeldt (760), Robert Evans (760), Nelson Champlin (762), and Kennon Sorgenfrei (762). In the vicinity of Lake Balaton, White observed that they were in a wide formation as they "topped out" of the overcast. The recall had been issued while this box was in the clouds, causing them to delay their response to same. As they came out of the overcast, twenty five Me-210s came in on the right at 2



460th aircraft being shot down over L. Balaton 6/30/44

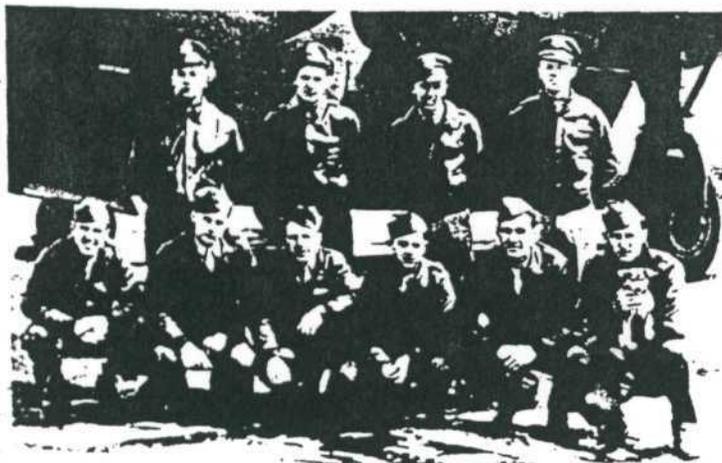
M. Nándor

o'clock and fifteen more approached them at 5 o'clock. Ken Sorgenfrei's eye-witness account reported that the plane in #5 position (Champlin) was hit immediately and peeled off to the right as they came into an open space between two cloud banks. Other eye-witnesses said the #3 engine was on fire and flames were coming from the bomb bay and the waist. Thomas Potts mentioned that he was "not able to tell what happened to the front of the plane after it was broken in two. The tail of the ship glided until (he) was able to bail out after a 10,000 ft. drop." Nelson H. Champlin, Edwin W. Baylor, Richard H. Whitaker, Steve A. Marushok, Howard E. Sexton, Arthur J. Popa, and Howard L. Cales were killed. Marushok (B-13-56), Sexton (D-44-26), and Cales (K-27-27) are buried in the Lorraine American Cemetery in graves indicated. Morton H. Osborne, Eugene T. Potts, Jr., and Dan E. Whistler were POWs. After determining that Sexton had been killed, Whistler parachuted out. There was not sufficient time to get Cales out of the ball turret as the plane was out of control. Whistler was taken prisoner by a Hungarian soldier, who saved him from the pitch forks of threatening farmers. Because he was badly burned, he was taken to a Catholic hospital, where he stayed less than week. Then he was transported by ambulance to a larger Soldiers Hospital in Budapest, where he remained for seven months before being sent to Stalag Luft I. While in the hospital in Budapest, he befriended a Hungarian Count, Yeno Thassey. He and his friend Guedo Gorgi were very good to Whistler and some other Americans. Both of these men now live in New York. Thassey works for Radio Free Europe and is writing a book about WW II, to be published in Hungary, and Gorgi owns a travel agency.

The White, Evans and Erfeldt planes re-entered the overcast, but as they emerged White realized his "#3 engine was missing, and the crew had reported several rounds in the tail section." He saw a Group turning towards home base, so he attempted to catch up with

them, but he could not keep up due to a loss of power. Meantime, in the left waist position, Lacy Powell saw one fighter had peeled to the left and below the wing, and he fired one burst. Tracers indicated he had missed so he corrected and fired again. Tracers could be seen entering the enemy fighter, and photographer James Coble shouted: "You got him!" Powell then assumed everything was all right and that they were heading back to the base until a crew member reported an enemy fighter at 6 o'clock. The fighter circled out of range, then leveled off and "poured on the coal" until within firing range, when he opened up and continued to fire until he hit the tail gunner's position, ignited the bomb bay gas lines, and caused an inferno. Tail gunner Don Stevens had seen the single fighter coming in at them and kept firing, until the next thing he remembered was that he was lying in the fuselage, looking up at the turret. Afraid of being trapped in the turret, he had not closed the doors. That meant that, when the turret was turned to the extreme right or left position, his back was exposed to the wide open spaces, but he accepted that as the lesser of the two evils.

The crew had reported three enemy fighters down or damaged, but the tail and belly turrets were no longer operative. In the next attack, there were several hits on the flight deck, bomb bay and waist, with fire breaking out. Then #3 engine quit, and #1 received a direct hit and exploded. Due to the extent of the fires, White gave the order to bail out, and he set the plane on auto-pilot. Davis and Ghiselli were already on the flight deck. White made his way there to bail out and found Cockroft looking for his parachute, which the co-pilot had mistakenly taken. As Cockroft found a chute, the plane began to nose down. White went back to the controls and attempted to pull the nose up. Returning to the flight deck, White pushed Cockroft through the escape hatch just as an explosion occurred. White was thrown to the flight deck, but later realized that he was falling amid debris. He reached for his ripcord, which was not where he had expected it to be—then remembered he had on a flak vest so he pulled the cord on the vest and then on the chute and began floating down. On reaching the ground, he saw that the legs of his flight suit had burned off and his escape pack with them.



R. Evans and crew J. Conlon

Powell had managed to find a parachute and had dropped out the rear hatch. He too had trouble finding his ripcord as he had attached the clips up-side-down. Fortunately, it worked anyway. A fighter circled him, but it did not fire upon him. When Don Stevens came to, the plane had filled with smoke, the escape door was open, and everyone was gone, so he put on his chute and got out just before the plane exploded. On landing, he became aware of the shrapnel

wound to the top of his right foot and a badly bruised right ear muscle.

On the White crew, Northmore W. Hamill and John H. Blake were killed. It was the consensus of the crew that Blake was killed while still in the ball turret. Both are buried in the Lorraine American Cemetery: Blake in D-22-32 and Hamill in D-22-30. John H. White, Jr., James A. Davis, Francis J. Ghiselli, Jr., Wesley T. Cockroft, Lacy D. Powell, Anselm J. Cattoor, Richard J. Cole, Donald C. Stevens, and James F. Coble were all POWs.

On the Erfeldt plane, "Blue V for Victor", an engine on their left wing caught fire and brown smoke started to come up from the instrument panel. The glass tubes of the gas gauges at the rear of the flight deck had been hit and put on fire. Alan Barrowcliff said it sounded like "hail on a tin roof" when they were getting hit. Then strings of 50 caliber ammunition, hanging down on the flight deck from Lenburg's upper turret, started to explode. Erfeldt told Barrowcliff to call over the intercom and ring the bail-out bell, as they dived to 12,000 feet and leveled off to let everyone jump. Barrowcliff pulled the handle to open the four bomb bay doors in an emergency, but only the forward port door opened, releasing four 500 lb. bombs in that bay.



W. Fleck and crew F. Sarra

Mike Brown was on the flight deck so he could see that the fire in the waist was due to the large hole in the gas tank. He also noted that the flight deck was on fire and so was his chute (chest pack), which was on a ledge under the burning gauges. He put the fire out on his chute and put it on just as John Lenburg, with all his injuries, emerged from the top turret. After a little hesitation, Mike went through the bomb bay, thanks to a nudge from John. Mike fell free until about 2,000 to 3,000 feet, then pulled the ripcord and was thankful that the fire had not ruined his chute.

John Lenburg had seen the formation of fighters ahead of them, but just as he started to swing his turret around to the right, he noticed things were exploding around him. He thought it was anti-aircraft fire from the ground, but the next thing he knew was that something had happened to him. His turret had taken a direct hit and he was knocked out momentarily. All that was left of his sunglasses were the rims, and his flak suit was in shreds. He did not know how long he was unconscious. He recalled trying to fire at a German fighter, but the turret was inoperable. He had disengaged the turret so that he could operate it manually, and had started firing at the fighter, which started emitting smoke and then peeled off. The heat in the turret was unbearable. He felt like he was being suffocated. He pulled the release and dropped out of the turret



N. Jensen and crew J. Michels



A. Johnston and crew H. Bursian

Erfeldt motioned him to get out. He reached for his chute pack, snapped it on, and headed for the bomb bay. He too had fastened his chute on backwards, and the handle was on the left instead of the right. As he floated down, he became aware of the extent of his injuries—burns to his face and hands, pieces of 20 mm in his face, and right jaw split open. A German fighter buzzed him, and John hoped that the pilot “wouldn’t try to cut his legs off with his prop as some of the Japs had done.”

Barrowcliff was singed by the flames from the gas gauges on his first attempt to get off the flight deck to the bomb bay. Next he tried the top hatch behind the pilot’s seat and in front of the top turret. He did not see much chance of getting past the propellers and the rudders from there. Flames were coming out of the back of the plane, and the left wing was on fire. He dropped back onto the flight deck and again he dived through the flames. Something was burning on his right shoulder, and he was aware it might be his parachute. Already partially burned on his hands and face, he decided jumping without a parachute was better than burning to death. For him, the white canopy, fully opened and not on fire, was a beautiful sight. He could see the chutes of John M. Nagle, Jr., Matthew L. Hendricks, Marshall J. Brown, John L. Lenburg, and Elder A. Erfeldt. Leonard Bernhardt had jumped earlier, and he was badly burned. Along with Alan Barrowcliff, these were the survivors. Ralph F. Wheeler (buried Lorraine American Cemetery, C-29-66), Rube J. Waits, Jr., and Martin F. Troy were killed in the plane by enemy fire. Troy is listed on the Wall of the Missing, Florence American Cemetery.

On the Evans crew, Charles Becker recalled that the plane was at behind the #2 engine with the

control of the plane, and they couldn’t keep up with the formation. Two Me-210s got on their tail. The first one was shooting right through the plane, just above him in the bottom turret. That one plane took out the tail gunner and the two waist gunners. He was trying to call the pilot to get the tail up so he could shoot the second plane. The tail raised a little, and he could see the tracers going through the front of that plane. The plane leveled off again, the tail came down, and he had to stop firing because gasoline was pouring into the turret. He got up into the plane and saw the engineer all shot to pieces. The radio operator was dead. Somehow he managed to get a parachute on and got out of the plane, to land in a bean field.

Jerry Conlon was on the flight deck, sitting in the jump seat behind the pilot when there was the sound of explosions. He looked out the little window on the left side and could see German fighters, which he thought were Me-210s. Their left wing was badly damaged. Evans suddenly struck him across the chest with the back of his hand, yelling: “Get out of here!” When Jerry got into the bomb bay, Ralph Berger was attempting to crank open the bomb bay doors without success. He told Jerry to get off the plane and started back to the nose. Berger and Bob Friedman jumped out of the nose wheel hatch. Jerry started back through the bomb bay with Steve Mills behind him. The plane was being hit by machine gun and/or cannon fire, but was flying level. The rear deck was a complete mess. Waist gunners Boles and Marsh were sprawled out with terrible wounds. Horace Barksdale was lying out of the rear turret with his legs still in the turret. Charley Becker was up out of the ball turret and was leaning over one of the waist gunners. Jerry went to the other gunner and examined him. There were no signs of life from any of the three—Cecil R. Boles, Guy Marsh, Jr., or Horace C. Barksdale. After checking the bodies, Jerry jumped from the camera hatch, from which Mills had already jumped. Charley was delayed a bit as he was pinned against the side of the plane when it went into a dive. When it leveled off, he jumped. They were not sure how Robert Evans and Walter W. Rowe died—whether they were wounded before the crash or died from the impact of the crash. Stephen E. Mills, Ralph C. Berger, Joseph J. Conlon, Charles R. Becker, and Robert Friedman were POWs. Cecil R. Boles and Guy Marsh, Jr., are buried in the Lorraine American Cemetery in graves B-23-6 and B-34-6, respectively.

The surviving aircraft in this box was that of the Sorgenfrei crew. It evaded the enemy aircraft by seeking cloud cover and, although considerably damaged by enemy aircraft fire, it returned to base where a crash-landing was successfully made. One man sustained a slight scalp wound.

Most of those who became POWs, escaped the wrath of the locals when they were captured by the Hungarian or German soldiers. The locals were angered by the strafing of fighters, bombing by our planes, and the propaganda that “window” had killed their cows. Many of the survivors had severe burns, bruised and cut legs, facial injuries, and wounds from 20 mm shells. Those from the Champlin and Erfeldt crew were first treated at a Catholic hospital or at the infirmary at the training field of Hungarian cadets, near where some of them came down. The White crew went down in a different area farther south of Lake Balaton. Don Stevens mentioned that the women in that area brought basins of warm water to wash their clothes and to cleanse their wounds, while they were concerned about the men attaching a rope to a tree. They were also treated at a local hospital. Cattoor was taken to attend the funeral of Blake and two others he did not know. Blake was a Catholic and wore a mustache

At the airfield, many of them were searched and their valuables taken. Jerry Conlon noticed they were taking watches and rings, so he put his class ring in his mouth. Steve Mills, who had his wedding ring taken, said he should have given it to Jerry as "his mouth was big enough for two." Stevens lost a Canajoharie High School ring, which had belonged to his wife.

Conlon also told about the dance which Friedman, who was Jewish, performed to convince the captors that he was an American Indian. Alan Barrowcliff said that a Jewish gunner, who was in the same ward at a hospital later, had made the peasants believe that he was an Indian by his resemblance to the Indian on the Indian head nickel he wore on his dog tag chain. Friedman was a gunner.

Eventually by truck and/or train, they ended up at the Federal Prison in Budapest. There some of them had another frightening experience when they were given an injection just above their hearts. It turned out it was a tetanus shot, but they feared it to be lethal when they saw the syringe. Another scare came when they were ordered to remove their clothes for a trip to the shower, but it really was a shower—not a gas chamber. Bed bugs were a common and abundant enemy. Barrowcliff mentioned wearing an extra pair of sox over his hands, which had been burned, for protection. John Lenhart had a bug get into the cut in his eye one night, and thereafter he slept sitting up. To add to their fears, an air raid also took place with the railroad across the street as the target.

Wounds of many were still being treated. Barrowcliff described a nurse or doctor, named Elspeth, who believed the propaganda that the Americans were dropping doll carriages containing bombs to kill the children. She was very rough in her treatment of patients, and when she reached in her pocket to get her scissors, a bird, attached to her buttonhole by a string, flew out. After he saw her treat Mike Brown, he put his hands behind his back to keep her from changing the bandages. "Pappy" Bernhardt was so badly burned, he was described as looking like a "mummy" in all of his bandages. He was in a hospital until he was sent back to the States. Dan Whistler remained in the same hospital with Bernhardt until he (Whistler) was sent to a prison camp in November.

Except for Charley Becker, who hid out in a haystack and was not captured until 4 Jul 44, many interrogations and solitary confinements took place. Becker said they knew all about everything by the time he got to Budapest. When Barrowcliff refused to give any information beyond his name, rank and serial number, they told him where he went to flying school, when he received his wings and commission at Moody Field, GA, and the number of his plane. A pilot told the Erfeldt crew that he was the one who shot that plane down, but Erfeldt would not give him the satisfaction and said they had been shot down by anti-aircraft fire. In an excerpt from the diary of Heppes Aladar, Commander, 101st Fighter Group, Hungarian Air Force, it has been learned that Sgt. Fábián Istvan was credited with having downed the Champlin plane, W/O András Huszár—the Erfeldt plane, 2nd Lt. Ernó Kamay—the Evans plane, and someone named József Bejezy is believed to have shot down the White plane.

Recently Sparky Bohnstedt has been corresponding with Mohos Nándor in Veszprém, Hungary. Nándor has been researching the planes and people involved on 30 Jul 44. He has contacted the people or their relatives in the areas where the planes went down to get their stories, and he has found parts of three of the 460th planes. (Plaques bearing a piece of their respective planes were presented to surviving crew members and two of the widows at the 1995 reunion). By putting the information from both sides together, Sparky

and Nándor have pinpointed the places near where each crew went down: Champlin—Vállus, Erfeldt—Nemesvita, Evans—Szigliget, and White—Kisharshegy.



G. Jones and members of crew recently P. Fergot



J. Joyce and crew C. Larsson

JULY 1944

During July, some crews were being rotated to the States; some were anticipating completion of their fiftieth mission. Replacement crews were arriving to face the ordeal of their first mission, which for some would also be their last. Despite the change in personnel, the 460th surpassed all of its previous records for accuracy in bombing, leading the Fifteenth Air Force and setting a standard never attained by any other group. Of the eighteen missions flown, three were to the Vienna area, three to Rumania which meant refineries at Ploesti, three to Germany including Munich, two to Hungary, and three to southern France. The Group suffered heavy losses: 31 evaded or escaped, 93 became POWs of which two would die of burns or injury after being captured, and 52 were KIA, totaling 176 men. Seventeen aircraft would be lost. The Group would be awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation for the Zwolfaxing Mission on 26 Jul 44.

1 Jul 44—No mission.

2 Jul 44—The target was the Budapest Rakos Marshalling Yards. Twenty eight aircraft were dispatched at 0640. One plane returned early when shell casings from a preceding aircraft damaged the nose and top turrets. P-38s and P-51s furnished penetration, target and withdrawal cover from 0940 until 1140.