

## 1942

## Stateside

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 18 May 1942

Submarine Patrol, Gulf of Mexico

Although generally overlooked, the 44th Bomb Group was in action against German U-boats even before leaving the U.S. It was patrolling the Gulf of Mexico regularly, even during the operational training of our crews. In fact, one 66th Squadron crew was credited with damaging and probably sinking one of these submarines. (See more on this below.)

However, on the morning of 18 May 1942, another 66th Squadron aircraft was lost shortly after takeoff en route to its assigned patrol.

66th SQUADRON:

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 66th Sq., #41-1117, Frawley Crashed after takeoff

66th Squadron Crew:	Entire crew KIA		
FRAWLEY, HERBERT W.	Pilot KIA	2nd Lt.	
EVERHART, JAMES H.	Co-pilot KIA	2nd Lt.	Unknown
TATE, AUGUSTUS H.	Navigator KIA	2nd Lt.	
CRABTREE, MANSFIELD	Bombardier KIA	Sgt.	Meadowview, Virginia
HEPLER, LEWIS J.	Engineer KIA	Sgt.	Valley View, Pennsylvania
WARLEY, ARLO V.	Radio Oper. KIA	Sgt.	
McJUNKINS, RUDOLPH	Asst. Eng. KIA	Pvt.	
SANNEMAN, HERMAN R.	Asst. Radio KIA	Pvt.	Creston, Iowa
ANDREWS, STANLEY C.	Gunner KIA	Cpl.	Elba, New York

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The Technical Report of Aircraft Accident includes the information that the B-24D crashed at 0525 hours approximately one and one half miles south of Barksdale Field, Louisiana. At that time there was a ceiling of 3,000 feet with visibility of about five miles. A moderate rain was falling and a thunderstorm was in effect with considerable lightning northwest of the field. The

plane was carrying depth charges and ammunition in case the enemy was sighted. The plane went down a few minutes after takeoff, exploded and burned, with no one having time to exit the aircraft. All were killed.

These were the first 44th BG casualties of World War II, as these men were attempting to defend the shores of the United States of America while still in the training phase and not fully operational.

In May of 2001, the wreckage of a German submarine was found by an underwater robot off the Louisiana coast about 45 miles from the mouth of the Mississippi River. It is believed to be the only German submarine sunk in the northern Gulf of Mexico during World War II. Known as the U-166, it was found during surveying for a planned underwater pipeline route by the oil companies BP Amoco and Shell Oil. The spot where the submarine was found is not far from the wreckage of the American passenger freighter S.S. Robert E. Lee, which the U-166 sank on July 30, 1942. The U-166 was sunk shortly after that attack by the Robert E. Lee's sub chaser escort, although that fact only became clear decades later when the wreck was found. A Coast Guard plane had previously claimed the kill on August 1, 1942, but this claim probably refers to another U-boat (U-171) that was in the vicinity at the time, but which was not sunk. Records show that the 44th Bomb Group claimed a sunken U-boat on July 10, 1942, but there is no record of another U-boat being sunk in the Gulf of Mexico.

## Operations from Shipdham

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6 December 1942

Abbeville-Drucat Airdrome, Abbeville, France

Due to a recall of the mission which the 68th Squadron crews did not receive, only six 68th planes continued on to attack this airfield, while the other 13 planes returned to base.

68th SQUADRON:

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68th Sq., 41-23786 B, Du Bard			MACR #2920
68th Squadron Crew:	Entire crew KIA		
DU BARD, JAMES D. Jr. ASN 0-410225	Pilot KIA, WOM Ardennes	1st Lt.	Marked Tree, Arkansas
KAITALA, HENRY B. ASN 0-727999	Co-pilot KIA, WOM Ardennes	2nd Lt.	Minnesota
SOMERVILLE, RICHARD V. ASN 0-727054	Navigator KIA, WOM Ardennes	2nd Lt.	Aliceville, Alabama
CRAWFORD, GEORGE A. ASN 0-727320	Bombardier KIA, WOM Cambridge	2nd Lt.	Bisbee, Arizona
DICK, CHARLES S. ASN 31033519	Engineer KIA, WOM Ardennes	Sgt.	Ashland, Kentucky
MEARS, WILLIAM G. ASN 31020279	Radio Oper. KIA, WOM Ardennes	Sgt.	Ashland, Kentucky
BEVERLY, PAUL E. ASN 18045226	Asst. Eng. KIA, WOM Ardennes	S/Sgt.	Wilcox, Arizona

RIZZO, ANTHONY F. ASN 35292580	Asst. Radio KIA, WOM Ardennes	Sgt.	Lancaster, Ohio
LILLEY, ROBERT F. ASN 17035867	Hatch Gun KIA, WOM Ardennes	Sgt.	Belcourt, North Dakota
SMITH, DONALD M. ASN 39094553	Tail Turret KIA, WOM Ardennes	Sgt.	Seattle, Washington

*Note: Crawford is listed on the WOM in Cambridge. The other nine men are on the WOM in Ardennes.*

En route to the target the 66th and 67th Squadrons received radio orders to return to base, but the leading 68th Squadron failed to intercept these orders and continued on with their six aircraft. All six bombed their target and were returning when approximately thirty FW 190s, in waves of two or three, made attacks from 12 o'clock, straight on. Very early in the encounter, aircraft #786 had #4 engine (right out-board) knocked out and #3 was damaged. The pilots valiantly fought to keep in formation due to the inherent dangers a single plane would surely encounter. But due to the lack of power, the aircraft pulled off to the right and was losing altitude. The enemy fighters then proceeded to withdraw from the attack on the main formation and concentrated their attacks on aircraft #786.

After several attacks that also proved damaging to three FW 190s (two shot down and one damaged), two of the enemy aircraft again attacked from dead astern of the aircraft. The tail turret guns were seen to stop firing and pieces of the ship in that area were shot away, and the airplane nosed down toward the sea. The two pilots continued to fight for control as the nose was seen to pull up on several occasions. However, when the plane eventually hit the water, the nose was down, causing the ship to break into pieces and catch fire, quickly sinking. None of the crew attempted to parachute out, electing to stay with their craft and take as many of their enemy with them as possible. For such bravery and gallant action, the entire crew was awarded the Silver Star posthumously.

68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq., #41-23813	VICTORY SHIP		Returned to base
68th Squadron Crew:			
HOLMES, WALTER T.	Pilot Wounded	1st Lt.	
AGER, ROBERT L. ASN 0-727956	Co-pilot Wounded	2nd Lt.	Port Blakely, Washington
STINE, ROBERT J.	Navigator	2nd Lt.	
KLEKAR, HOWARD R.	Bombardier	2nd Lt.	
HILL, ALBERT E.	Radio Oper.	Sgt.	
METSA, TAUNO I.	Eng./Top Turret	T/Sgt.	
CROSS, FRANK E.	RW Gunner	S/Sgt.	
DEBERRY, SAM H.	LW Gunner	Sgt.	
GREEN, GEORGE L.	Tail Turret	Sgt.	
BOWDEN, EDWARD F.	Rear Hatch Gun.	Sgt.	

*Note: Ager returned to duty and became a POW on 21 January 1944. Victory Ship also went down that day.*

A pilot and co-pilot were injured on VICTORY SHIP. The pilot, Walter T. (Tom) Holmes, wrote the following account:

“This was our third raid. We had been in England less than two months, becoming operational on Nov. 6, 1942. Most pilots in the squadron were promoted to first lieutenants on Oct. 6. Our first raid was on Nov. 7 and two days later we made our second raid, on the submarine pens at St. Nazaire, on the west coast of France. It was here that we encountered our first antiaircraft fire (flak). It was similar to lightning; as long as you can see it, it’s harmless.

“Now we get to the third raid in which I participated. We were briefed at 7 a.m. leaving the field two hours later. Our group put up 18 planes. The 68th led the raid on Abbeville/Drucat Airdrome. The 66th and 67th squadrons received orders to turn back and did so. We did not receive the orders and proceeded on, accurately dropping 111 bombs on the target and jettisoning 20 others over the target.

“About the time we crossed the coast of France, opposite the white cliffs of Dover, we ran into trouble. We were attacked by 30 Focke-Wulf 190 fighter planes. These were the yellow-nose fighters, the Herman Goering Group, one of Germany’s most seasoned groups. They flew in two to three at a time from dead ahead. To increase our firepower, our six B-24 bombers were in a very tight formation, as we had been instructed.

“We had three guns on the nose, fired by the navigator and bombardier, but only one could fire dead ahead. [Editor’s note: The 50-caliber was pointed straight ahead. Two 30-caliber guns were installed on each side of the nose at the edge of the plexiglass and were flexible enough to fire to the side.] We also had twin 50s in the top turret, our most effective firepower ahead, as long as the target (or bandit) was above the nose of the plane. The first flight was led by Capt. Tommy Cramer, number 800, with my crew in number 813 on the left wing and number 786, Lieutenant James Du Bard, on the right wing.

“Early in the encounter, Lieutenant Du Bard’s plane was hit, knocking out number three and four engines. Then engine number two lost power and the ship pulled off to the right and lost altitude. Once separated from the rest, many of the German fighters withdrew and concentrated on the crippled plane. All guns on Du Bard’s plane were seen to be firing and three enemy fighters were downed.

“Rather than bail out, the crew stayed on their guns and were still firing when the plane hit the water. Only one engine was running when the plane hit and exploded. This was the first loss in the 68th squadron. Lieutenant Du Bard was from Marked Tree, Arkansas. All on board were awarded the Silver Star. This crew, in their vain attempt to return their aircraft to friendly territory, achieved a notable victory and displayed outstanding courage and spirit, to their ultimate destruction.

“I was unaware that most of this was happening, although I did see the plane leave the formation. We held a very tight and steady formation, about 15 to 30 feet apart, as we felt we could be more effective this way, concentrating our firepower. I noticed an FW 190 some 200-300 yards out at 11 o’clock high firing directly at our plane. We were looking directly down his gun barrels and I thought to myself, “He is going to hit us.” At that time three 20-mm cannon shells hit us at once.

“There was a loud bang, yellow smoke and a flash filled the cockpit. The shell exploded about a foot over my head and I was knocked unconscious for a period of time. My co-pilot, Lt. Robert Ager, was also knocked out and shell fragments struck the legs of the top gunner, Sergeant DeBerry. The first shell hit our number two engine just to my left, causing it to lose power. The third shell exploded into the oxygen bottles just aft of the main cabin.

“There was no way to know how long I was unconscious; however, when I came to, I looked up and saw the water. Realizing we were upside down, I righted the plane and began to look for more fighters. There were none, because we were by then halfway across the English Channel and the FWs had returned to France, probably because of British fighters, although the only planes I saw were four of my own squadron just crossing the coastline some 10-15 miles ahead.

“I was told by the rest of the crew that although our plane had been barrel rolling to the left and diving steeply, the crew were staying on the guns, though some told me later they were unable to bail out because of centrifugal force. We were out of control and really in the Lord’s hands for some six to eight minutes - time enough to fall 6,000 feet. There was a lot of damage in the cockpit - broken instruments, radios and material hanging from the top of the cockpit. The hole in the top was causing a lot of wind and noise.

“Lieutenant Ager, the co-pilot, was slumped down and still unconscious. The bombardier, Lieutenant Klekar, came up from the nose with our emergency kit and gave him a shot of morphine. He offered me one, but since I was now conscious and felt I could fly us home I refused it. Had I taken the shot we would never have got back; the morphine would have knocked me out again.

“The side of my head was stinging and I was uneasy about removing my leather helmet. I really thought the side of my head might come off, so I kept the helmet on and flew for an hour and a half back home. When we arrived at Shipdham, our home base, visibility was about one third of a mile with fog and light rain. Our navigator, Lt. Bob Stine, led us directly to the base. We fired a red-red flare, a symbol of wounded aboard, made a very tight landing pattern, rolled into the first available dispersal site on the taxiway. We were met by the ambulance but had to wait several minutes while they tried to remove the 180-pound unconscious co-pilot from the plane.

“Because my infantry helmet had kept falling over my eyes, I had pulled it off just a couple of minutes before the shell hit. Had I left it on I probably would not have been so badly wounded. As it was, I had bled a lot from the numerous scalp wounds and others across my hands and arms, was weak, and had quite a headache. Three weeks later I was flying again and eventually made over 30 other missions.

“For this raid, I was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Purple Heart, British DEC and the French Croix de Guerre. The greatest reward was from God as He got us all home. Had He not awakened me a priceless ten-man crew would have perished along with an expensive B-24 bomber: the Victory Ship. This bomber, on its 50th mission a year later, was finally shot down.

“Though some were later wounded, though none seriously, every member of this crew lived throughout the war. After a recuperation period of ten months, Lieutenant Ager, the co-pilot, returned to duty, only to be shot down on his third mission.

“I was scared numerous times later, but when I looked down a fighter’s gun barrels, I tried to move someplace else in a hurry. We were hit many times later but never again was I hit personally.

“War is truly Hell and it is such a shame that our youngest and best are always involved. Many others like Lieutenant Du Bard and his crew paid the supreme price, which makes our freedom so costly. We owe them our eternal gratitude.”

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 12 December 1942

## Abbeville-Drucat Airdrome, Abbeville, France

There were no aircraft lost on this mission, but Pershing Rolfe reports that George Delacy had severe frostbite and later it was necessary to amputate his left arm at the elbow.

## 66th SQUADRON:

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66th Sq., #41-23778, Kahl	JENNY/LADY LUCK	Returned to base
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## 66th Squadron Crew:

KAHL, JAMES W.	1st Lieutenant	Pilot
KEY, ALGENE E.	Co-pilot	Capt.
MIKOLOSKI, EDWARD K.	Navigator	2nd Lt.
BRENNAN, EDWARD C.	Bombardier	2nd Lt.
BALSLEY, LUCIUS M.	Gunner	S/Sgt.
SAMUELIAN, HAROLD	Radio Oper.	Sgt.
COLL, WILLIAM F.	Eng./Top Turret	T/Sgt.
SATTERFIELD, CHANNING N.	Eng./Top Turret	S/Sgt.
PATRICK, WALTER M.	Belly Gunner	Sgt.
HAZELTON, WALTER L.	Gunner	S/Sgt.
DELACY, GEORGE W.	Tail Turret	S/Sgt.
	Severe frostbite	

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*Note: Balsley, Coll, and Satterfield were killed in action on 1 August 1943.*

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 20 December 1942

## Romilly-Sur-Seine, France (primary); Villacoublay, France (secondary)

## 66th SQUADRON:

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66th Sq., #41-23788, Key	AVENGER	Aircraft Returned
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## 66th Squadron Crew (partial):

LUND, HILMER G. ASN 37138610	Asst. Eng./Belly gun KIA	S/Sgt.	Independence, Missouri
CUNNINGHAM, CHARLES E. ASN 39826843	Asst. Radio/RW Gun. Seriously Wounded	S/Sgt.	Spring Glen, Utah
STEERS, FRANK B.	Tail Turret Seriously Wounded	Sgt.	Los Angeles, California

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The 44th scheduled 21 aircraft for this mission but there were only twelve of them in the final bombing formation. These twelve, enroute to the target, were attacked by FW 190s just after crossing the French coast. Then, just prior to reaching the target area, a second attack occurred with both FW 190s and Me 109s enemy aircraft, but these too were driven off. The plane piloted by Captain Algene E. Key, the 66th's Squadron Commander, was badly hit even though he took evasive action when facing a head-on attack by FW 190s. Despite these maneuvers, enemy fire of 20-mm cannon struck the rear fuselage, mortally wounding the right waist gunner, Hilmer G. Lund, and seriously wounding both S/Sgt. Charles E. Cunningham and Sgt. Frank B. Steers.

*20 December 1942*

*44th Bomb Group Roll of Honor and Casualties*

Capt. Key continued to the target, bombed and returned safely to base even though the crippled bomber was difficult to fly.

Several enemy aircraft were claimed as destroyed or damaged.