

were sent to Germany, or so I was told by Swanson and the others who I saw in London after we all managed to get out of Italy.”

After spending some time in an Italian POW camp, Teraberry escaped and headed south with a small group of POWs that was made up of Teraberry, two English Sgt. Hurricane pilots, a Sgt. Maj. Aussie, and Mike Siegle from Col. Kane’s 98th bomb group. After several days and nights of walking the group met up with some Canadian soldiers. Eventually, Teraberry and Siegle were ordered to report to 12th Air Force Headquarters in Algiers. From there Teraberry went to 8th Air Force headquarters in Scotland and then he was sent home for reconstructive surgery on his face.

1 August 1943

Ploesti Oil Complex, Romania

The great ground-air battle of Ploesti has been told in numerous publications so there is no need to expand on it here. My intent is mainly to relate the stories of the individual aircraft and crews lost this day as well as those returning with dead or injured crewmembers. At the end of the accounts, I have included Tom Holmes’ recollection of the entire mission.

Eleven aircraft and crews failed to return. Of those, two were interned in Turkey.

66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #42-40182 A, Gentry

FORKY II

MACR #2415

66th Squadron Crew:

GENTRY, ROWLAND M. ASN 0-727983	Pilot KIA	Capt.	Miami, Florida
MOSS, BENJAMIN M. ASN 0-793818	Co-pilot KIA	1st Lt.	New York City, New York
CHORZELSKI, MICHEL ASN T-190738	Navigator KIA	Flt. Of.	Laramie, Wyoming
AYERS, JOHN T. ASN 0-734779	Bombardier KIA	2nd Lt.	Plymouth, Pennsylvania
LIGHT, EDWIN C. ASN 38047888	Engineer KIA	T/Sgt.	Dallas, Texas
GOODMAN, EARL E. ASN 11011586	Radio Oper. KIA	T/Sgt.	So. Attleboro, Massachusetts
WILSON, STANLEY ASN 12060904	Asst. Eng. KIA	T/Sgt.	Brooklyn, New York
BRIDGES, CHARLES T. ASN 10601003	RW Gunner POW, returned to duty	S/Sgt.	Anderson, Indiana
LEISINGER, WILLIAM L. Jr. ASN 37068883	Tail Turret KIA, buried Ardennes (C-12-23)	Sgt.	Yancopin, Arkansas

The last wave of aircraft over target “White Five” consisted of four airplanes led by Rowland M. Gentry in FORKY II. His orders were to bomb from 400 feet at the top of the stepped up formation that had been adopted for the five “Eight Ball” waves. The last wave was well exposed to the German gunners.

Gentry led a V-flight with a plane piloted by Charles Hughes and Spencer S. Hunn on his left and one piloted by George Winger on his right.

In the target smoke, explosions killed two gunners and set two of FORKY II's engines on fire. Sgt. E.C. Light, in the top turret, and the right waist gunner, Charles T. Bridges, remained in action.

On the other side of the target, three German fighters came up at them from the deck. Bridges, the veteran of 53 missions, many with the Royal Air Force, got in his last rounds of battle. The fighters left FORKY II burning in a cornfield with the nose buried in the ground and the tail standing. Bridges staggered out of the wreck as it exploded!

Sgt. Bridges added, "We attacked at low level, gun fire, explosions and all the horrors hidden in Hell were let loose. My crew was shot to bits. First it was Gentry, and then two others. We kept on going after bombing, but after attacks by enemy aircraft, we were shot down, too. My crew fought most valiantly against all odds, and died as men.

"I guess that Capt. Gentry tried to land the plane even though he was seriously wounded and near death himself. Wilson was lying on the floor by the left waist. He was hit by fragments. We were burning and I had to throw out our incendiaries as we were under attack. Just before I passed out, a terrific explosion took place in front of the plane.

"I was trained and in combat before the U.S. entered the war. I was first attached to crews of Royal Norway in Coastal Command. We all had been trained by Canadian and English instructors. Our main planes were Defiants and Hampdens, but later was transferred to Wellingtons of medium size. We were on the first 1,000 bomber raid against targets in the Ruhr area, with all British medium and heavy bombers – quite an event in its day!

"I was transferred to the USAAC in London with two other Americans – DeCrevel and Rastowitz...My back was broken twice – but I am still thankful."

Note: Charles DeCrevel was in SAD SACK II.

So it appears that when Bridges staggered out of that burning and wrecked plane, he did so with a broken back!

66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #42-40777 N, Hughes	FLOSSIE FLIRT		
66th Squadron Crew:	All men interned in Turkey and returned to duty		
HUGHES, CHARLES E. ASN 0-662790	Pilot	1st Lt.	Oakdale, California
HUNN, SPENCER S. ASN 0-730500	Co-pilot	1st Lt.	Provo, Utah
HAUSE, MAURICE E. ASN 0-728480	Navigator	2nd Lt.	Cochranton, Pennsylvania
GOODNOW, EDWARD W. ASN 0-794123	Bombardier	2nd Lt.	Hartford, Connecticut
LUCAS, HOWARD M. ASN 18063852	Engineer	S/Sgt.	Grand Saline, Texas
SHANLEY, EDWARD M. ASN 32230451	Radio Oper.	S/Sgt.	New Haven, Connecticut

NALIPA, STANLEY G. ASN 15324363	RW Gunner Wounded, interned, returned to duty	S/Sgt.	Poland, Ohio
ALBINE, ROBERT L. ASN 13087450	LW Gunner Wounded, interned, returned to duty	S/Sgt.	Connellsville, Pennsylvania
BLAGG, SHELDON N. ASN 35384230	Tail Turret Interned, returned to duty	S/Sgt.	Canton, Ohio

Note: Three crewmembers were KIA on later missions: Lt. Goodnow (21 January 1944), S/Sgt. Albine (20 February 1944), and S/Sgt. Nalipa (7 July 1944).

1st Lt. Hughes' aircraft, FLOSSIE FLIRT, managed to get through the hail of bullets and fire of Ploesti, leaving their two crashed sister ships behind them. They flew alongside some barracks from which soldiers ran out firing rifles, machine guns and pistols. The air gunners mowed them down in bloody windrows. FLOSSIE FLIRT was almost untouched or so it seemed, but when Hunn looked back in the fuselage, he was surprised how bright it was. Ground fire had turned it into a sieve.

1st Lt. Hunn said, "We looked for a plane to tack onto. We picked one and he was shot down. We picked another and he was knocked down, too. A fighter got on our tail – tracers were zooming above and around the cockpit. Hughes and I were giving it all the left rudder we could in evasive action. Our tail gunner reported the attacker suddenly hit the ground like a ton of bricks." Hughes sailed into the sanctuary of a cloud and surveyed the situation: not enough fuel to reach Libya, a large hole in the left stabilizer, a cable hanging by a thread, and both waist gunners, Stanley G. Nalipa and Robert L. Albine, were wounded. They headed for Turkey.

66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #41-24153 L, Lasco	SAD SACK II	MACR #2414
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66th Squadron Crew (with one exception):

LASCO, HENRY A. Jr. ASN 0-731886	Pilot POW, returned to duty	1st Lt.	Chicago, Illinois
KILL, JOSEPH F. ASN 0-735397	Co-pilot POW	2nd Lt.	Chicago, Illinois
STENBORN, HARRY W. ASN 0-667449	Navigator KIA, buried Ardennes (B-24-4)	2nd Lt.	Wellington, Kansas
SCRIVEN, DALE R. ASN 0-733106	Bombardier KIA	2nd Lt.	Boulder, Colorado
RASPOTNIK, LEONARD L. (506th Sq.) ASN 17042564	Engineer KIA	T/Sgt.	Des Moines, Iowa
SPIVEY, JOSEPH B. Jr. ASN 34303915	Radio Oper. KIA	S/Sgt.	Windsor, South Carolina
DECREVEL, CHARLES P. ASN 19061008	Asst. Eng. POW, returned to duty	S/Sgt.	San Francisco, California
SHAFFER, ALBERT L. ASN 19061944	Asst. Radio POW, returned to duty	S/Sgt.	Los Angeles, California
WOOD, THOMAS M. ASN 18015826	Tail Turret KIA	Sgt.	Ackerly, Texas

Note: Sgt. Raspotnik was from the 506th.

1st Lt. Henry A. Lasco, Jr. was the pilot of the third 66th Squadron aircraft lost, flying as left wingman in the fourth wave. This crew was flying their seventh mission. Flying with them this day as left waist gunner was Charles DeCrevel, who had served in the RAF. This crew's story is more complete than for most of the crews and probably is typical for many.

DeCrevel stated that, "Other planes were riding on flak like trucks on a highway. We caught a hail of small-arms fire and something went through my thigh. I was strafing gun crews on a roof top and noted out of the corner of my eye that my interphone box vanished from the wall. I donned my parachute pack and stuck my head out the window. I noted a tree at eye level. I 'heroically' decided to stay with the ship."

Pilot Lasco: "Our target was on fire with very heavy black smoke and fire high in the sky. Colonel Johnson headed into this conflagration and we followed."

Co-pilot Kill: "I wasn't paying any attention to where we were going except to watch a couple of rivets on the lead airplane. I glanced up ahead and thought 'How in Christ's name can we get through that?' I can't push her down, so I hollered to Lasco to get on the controls with me."

The bombardier called for corrections for target, which was the boiler works and tool shed. The back end called that the tail gunner, Thomas M. Wood, was dead. And at 'bombs away' the navigator, Harry W. Stenborn, was badly shot through the chest. He somehow managed to crawl through the ship to the rear, where he collapsed and eventually died.

Lasco shouted, "Number two is out. She won't feather." And the aircraft plunged into the inferno – nothing but smoke and flames. After coming out, this ship joined a formation of six aircraft while the 88s were shooting at them at very short range. The top turret gunner, Leonard L. Raspotnik, and radio operator Joseph Spivey, were hit and the decision was made to head for Turkey.

DeCrevel then began to have grave doubts if anyone was alive on the flight deck. Wherever he looked he could see holes as big as his fist and the left wing was almost scraping the ground. SAD SACK II was vibrating badly and extremely rough to handle.

From seven to nine Me 109s were queuing up to take shots at them as they made level, dead astern attacks. DeCrevel shot down the first one and Al Shaffer, at the other waist position, and standing on one leg (the other almost completely shot off) scored hits on it. The interior of the plane was full of little white puffs, like firecrackers going off. Ammunition was exploding in the boxes and DeCrevel said that he could feel "fingers" plucking at his clothing. "I received shrapnel wounds in the back, head and knee, and was floored by a 13-mm in the butt. The parachute pack in that area saved me."

Lasco continued, "We were very low to the ground, probably fifty feet, when a Me 109 circled around us and came in very shallow at 10 o'clock on my side. I saw his wing light up and felt a tremendous sock on the jaw. I was shot through both cheeks and upper palate. I had no strength. I couldn't see anything."

Co-pilot Kill: "Lasco called for flaps – no flaps. I reached down and started pumping them by hand. We were headed for a cornfield. I glanced at Lasco. He was lying over the control column, all bloodied. I was coming to horizon level. We were left wing low, headed straight in. I kicked hard right rudder and picked up the wing."

DeCrevel continued, "The pilot must have cut all his engines to crash her in – then I heard a scream. The navigator was kneeling on the catwalk and holding on to the open door to the bomb

bay. He looked like he had caught an 88 right in the chest. The flesh was stripped away and I could see the white ribs. I wanted to help him but there wasn't time. We were all dead, anyway. I had made up my mind to shoot it out with that sonofabitch on our tail. I leaned out the window and swiveled the gun parallel to the fuselage and fired inside the fin and below the horizontal stabilizer. We hit the ground and my last view of aerial combat was of our left rudder disappearing in a puff of smoke. I tumbled head over heels in flame and tearing metal and hit the forward bulkhead with a sweet, black THUD. Then, immediate consciousness and a vision of green corn and blue sky from a bed of hot coals. No plane to speak of, just a pile of burning junk. I staggered out of it, trying to run. Looked back – no Shaffer. Go back, drag him out and dump him about fifty yards off.”

Kill: “Lasco was blindly thrashing around, pinned in his harness. All I could do was to tell him I couldn't get out. Both of my legs were broken and the right foot was out of the socket at the ankle. Lasco somehow got loose and unfastened my legs from a tangle of wires and cables. He grabbed me under the arms and dragged me through a hole in the side of the fuselage ... Then he seemed to wander off.”

Lasco: “I went to look for aid for Joe's legs which were bad, and my mouth was not in too good shape. I saw some peasants, but they ran away and then threw stones at me.”

Kill: “Two other peasants jumped me and tore off my watch and ring, emptied my pockets and then belted me a beauty. I guess they figured I was about gone, anyway, what with the legs, a cracked forehead and bad burns. Surprisingly, I didn't go out, although I prayed for unconsciousness.”

DeCrevel: “I drug Shaffer a bit further; then stripped off my smoldering outer gear. Shaffer was hollering like hell. His leg looked like hamburger. No morphine. I gave him a cigarette, told him I'd go for help.”

SAD SACK II's sergeants spent their time in captivity in the officers' camp because Lt. Kill was sharp enough to list all of them as officers. Sgt. Raspotnik died on the way to the hospital; Spivey was hit in stomach and died in the aircraft.

66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #42-40375 G, Scrivner	SCRAPPY II		MACR #1646
66th Squadron Crew:	Entire crew KIA		
SCRIVNER, THOMAS E. ASN 0-728030	Pilot KIA, buried Ardennes (D-10-38)	1st Lt.	Carlsbad, New Mexico
ANDERSON, EVERETT P. ASN 0-885575	Co-pilot KIA	1st Lt.	Quincy, Illinois
PHILLIPS, PHILIP P. ASN 0-662366	Navigator KIA	1st Lt.	Minneapolis, Minnesota
YOUNG, ROBERT E. ASN 0-734863	Bombardier KIA	2nd Lt.	Kansas City, Missouri
COLL, WILLIAM F. ASN 13051982	Engineer KIA	T/Sgt.	McAdoo, Pennsylvania
SATTERFIELD, CHANNING N. ASN 20631208	Radio Oper. KIA	S/Sgt.	Detroit, Michigan
MICKEY, MARVIN R. ASN 18037185	RW Gunner KIA	Sgt.	Plainview, Texas

SCHAPPERT, THOMAS F. ASN 20317133	LW Gunner KIA	Sgt.	Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania
MALONE, HUGH J. ASN 15062923	Tail Turret KIA	S/Sgt.	Bronx, New York

The fourth 66th aircraft lost was that piloted by Thomas E. Scriver. K for King, commanded by Robert E. Miller, led the fourth wave into the dark and fiery target. On his wings were the aircraft of Lasco, as detailed above, and that of 1st Lt. Scriver. But when Miller emerged from the target, neither of his wingmen were there. Several crews reported seeing this plane, along with two others, caught in a terrific explosion as they were approaching their target, and then not seeing any of the three ships later.

Thomas E. Scriver's ship came out in flames with the pilots fighting for a crash-landing. They sledged into a wheat field, but before the slide was spent, the ship exploded into a hundred foot sphere of flame. None of the men that the pilots had so valiantly struggled to save managed to come out of it alive.

66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #41-24015 R, Winger	WING DINGER	MACR #2410
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66th Squadron Crew:

WINGER, GEORGE W. ASN 0-662848	Pilot KIA, WOM Florence	1st Lt.	Columbus, Ohio
BARNETT, EDWARD ASN 0-730337	Co-pilot KIA, WOM Florence	2nd Lt.	Chicago, Illinois
PALMER, FREDERICK H. ASN 0-730291	Navigator KIA	1st Lt.	Palo Alto, California
GRADWOHL, JACOB ASN 19005806	Bombardier KIA	Sgt.	Portland, Oregon
KRETZER, HAROLD ASN 37116421	Engineer KIA, WOM Cambridge	T/Sgt.	Clarks Grove, Minnesota
GOTTS, HOWARD F. ASN 12055796	Radio Oper. KIA, WOM Florence	Sgt.	Stanley, New York
TRAUDT, BERNARD G. ASN 36228769	Asst. Eng. POW, returned to duty	S/Sgt.	Milwaukee, Wisconsin
CICON, MICHAEL J. ASN 33345705	Asst. Radio POW, returned to duty	S/Sgt.	Exeter, Pennsylvania
PHILLIPS, ELVIN L. ASN 19011888	Tail Turret KIA, WOM Cambridge	Sgt.	Salt Lake City Utah

The last of the 66th aircraft lost on 1 August was that flown by Lt. George W. Winger, and whose position in the formation was on the right of Lt. Gentry. Lt. Winger was flying a B-24 that was mistakenly reported to be bright orange in color.

As this formation was on their bomb run, Winger's ship was knocked aside by an explosion, and crossed directly below Hughes' ship. On the other side of the target, Winger was still in the air but his aircraft was now an orange color because its Tokyo fuel tanks were aflame in the bomb bay. The pilots evidently knew that the end was near.

Lt. Hunn said, "Winger climbed steeply to about five hundred feet. It must have taken him and his co-pilot (Barnett) enormous effort to get her high enough for people to bail out." And two

men did jump out of the waist ports, and their parachutes opened as the ship crashed and exploded. Winger and his men had completed 27 missions and were legally “retired” but chose to go on one more mission as it was so important to the war effort.

The chutists, who had received the gift of life from their pilots, were gunners Michael J. Cicon and Bernard G. Traudt. Traudt was a seventeen year-old with a perpetual grin. He landed unhurt, concealed his chute, and crawled under some bushes and went to sleep. He had gotten no sleep the night before. Later he stated, “The other waist gunner, Michael Cicon, and I bailed out at approximately 500 feet, due to the fact that the plane was on fire and the bail out alarm rang. The plane hit the ground before we did, and we did not see any one else get out.”

Lt. John Harmonoski reported that he saw Lt. Winger salute him just before he pulled his airplane upwards!

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #41-24024, Carpenter	On loan from 376 BG	MACR #15859
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Note: Notation from Will Lundy reads: #41-24024 – 34 (Loan from 376 BG)

67th Squadron Crew (with one exception):

CARPENTER, REGINALD L. ASN 0-665663	Pilot Rescued, returned to duty	1st Lt.	Ferndale, Michigan
RUMSEY, EDWIN L. Jr. ASN 0-736373	Co-pilot Wounded, to hospital	2nd Lt.	San Fernando, California
POWELL, JOHN E. (389th BG) ASN 0-16009853	Navigator Rescued, returned to duty	2nd Lt.	Huron, South Dakota
KULLMAN, MARTIN L. ASN 0-733324	Bombardier Rescued, returned to duty	2nd Lt.	Los Angeles California
HUENERBERG, VINCENT E. ASN 31104703	Engineer Rescued, returned to duty	T/Sgt.	Bridgeport, Connecticut
MANQUEN, JOSEPH F. ASN 36146811	Radio Oper. Wounded, to hospital	T/Sgt.	Detroit, Michigan
LOOKER, ROLLIN C. ASN 37207413	LW Gunner Rescued, returned to duty	S/Sgt.	Topeka, Kansas
BROWN, WALTER L. ASN 18063845	RW Gunner KIA, drowned, on WOM Sicily/Rome	S/Sgt.	Cooper, Texas
DURAND, FREDERICK W. ASN 16021949	Tail Turret KIA, drowned, on WOM Sicily/Rome	S/Sgt.	Gile, Wisconsin

Note: Lt. Powell was on loan from the 389th BG, 415th Squadron.

Lt. Carpenter’s aircraft suffered considerable damage over the target and several men were wounded. They were losing gasoline from a severed gas line, and then they encountered an enemy air attack as they approached the sea. An Me 109 had attacked other stragglers and, coming off one attack on them, managed to get in a shot at Carpenter, knocking out another engine. But they continued on out over the sea, losing altitude due to the loss of two engines now. Finally, a third ran out of gas and stopped. The pilots managed to start it again for a few minutes, but only long enough for them to feather all propellers – and they prepared to ditch.

Note: The last name of the pilot of the Me 109 is believed to be Stahl-Burk. (Source: The Dugan/Stewart book on Ploesti)

They hit the water easily the first time, but the plane glanced off of it and hit again some distance away. The ditching tore off the rear fuselage section just aft of the wing. All nine crewmembers were in the nose section as per instructions. Seven men got out of the plane and released the two life rafts. Neither Walter L. Brown nor Fred Durand got clear of the sinking ship. They drowned when it went down.

The survivors floated all night and most of the next day before being spotted by a Wellington of Air-Sea Rescue. This plane dropped them supplies and water, then circled them for nearly five hours until relieved by a second Wellington. Finally, that night at 1930 hours, they were picked up by a motor boat of Air-Sea Rescue Service.

As Radio Operator, Joseph Manquen was observing results of their bombing through the open bomb bay doors, when a shell exploded just below these doors, seriously wounding him. 2nd Lt. Rumsey, co-pilot, who suffered a broken leg, and Sgt. Manquen were hospitalized upon their return.

From a letter by Lt. R. Carpenter: "On the low level Ploesti mission, August 1, 1943, when we were forced to ditch in the Mediterranean Sea, Vincent was the first crewman to go out the top hatch. The aircraft's tail was torn off and it was sinking nose down very rapidly. Vincent swam to the left dingy hatch, which was now under water and attempted to deploy it, but the door was jammed and he could not open it. Rapidly, he swam over to the right dingy hatch and fortunately he was able to open it and deploy the dingy. When I finally got free of the cockpit and came to the surface the first thing I saw was Vincent standing in our one and only dingy pulling all the survivors into it. If it were not for his strength and determination to deploy that remaining dingy we would have all perished. All who survived owe their lives to Vincent E. Huenerberg, the best Engineer a pilot could have. Regrettably, S/Sgts. Walter Brown and Edward Durand were crushed on the flight deck when the top turret tore loose from the fuselage and they were unable to escape."

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #42-40780 H, Jones	AVAILABLE JONES		MACR #2411
67th Squadron Crew:			
JONES, FRED H. ASN 0-389988	Pilot POW	1st Lt.	Century, Florida
DUKATE, ELBERT L. Jr. ASN 0-739924	Co-pilot POW, escapee, returned to base 31 July 44	2nd Lt.	New Orleans, Louisiana
SWEET, ADOLPHUS J. ASN 0-796622	Navigator POW	2nd Lt.	East Northport, New York
BERNARD, ALBERT F. ASN 0-734871	Bombardier POW	2nd Lt.	Brooklyn, New York
SPANN, LEO G. ASN 34330466	Engineer POW	T/Sgt.	Chapman, Alabama
PAOLILLO, MICHAEL A. ASN 32403362	Radio Oper. POW	T/Sgt.	Corona, L.I., New York
BECKER, ROBERT H. ASN 17077406	Asst. Eng. POW, wounded	S/Sgt.	Lincoln, Nebraska
SAVETTIERRE, ANTHONY J. ASN 32495641	Waist gun POW, wounded	S/Sgt.	Brooklyn, New York

SIGLE, MICHAEL P.
ASN 32468414

Tail Turret
POW, escapee

S/Sgt.

Clayton,
New Jersey

Note: Although it has been completely overlooked in our records, this ditching event was the first incident where the entire crew not only survived, but did so without serious injuries.

1st Lt. Fred H. Jones' crew was the second 67th Squadron loss on 1 August 1943. T/Sgt. Leo Spann, engineer, described the mission: "We approached the target down the railroad track at a very low altitude of approximately 100 feet. Our target was already on fire as some other Group [the 93rd] had already bombed it. We went through the smoke and fire, dropping our bombs on our designated spot. We then went down on the deck as low as we could, as those picturesque hay stacks opened up and then revealed their guns – and these guns started giving us hell. They shot out the #4 engine and a shell exploded between the two waist gun positions, wounding both gunners in the legs. I was the engineer and operated the top turret and I had a complete view of what was going on. I saw one plane that had gone in with the wheels up in a field and all of that crew was outside of the plane.

"We broke one balloon cable and I was looking directly at it when we collided with it. I saw another B-24 climb straight up until it stalled, and just as it "fell out" I saw one parachute come out and open just before it hit the ground. I talked later to this boy (Bernard Traudt) as he came into the prison camp where I was.

"We lost speed and dropped out of formation, and the fighters jumped us. With the two waist gunners out, they came in so close to us it seemed we could almost touch them. We figured that we had shot down four of them, and they finally left us, but the #4 engine had frozen up and with a flat propeller, it caused a hellava drag. The propeller would not feather!

"We started trying to gain altitude to clear the mountains ahead. Threw out everything that wasn't tied down – all of the guns, ammunition, equipment, etc. When we finally arrived at the coast, our #3 engine was failing. The oil pressure was almost gone and the temperature was much too high. Lt. Jones asked me how long I thought it would last and I estimated about 30 minutes at the most. We decided to feather #3 engine and see if we could fly with the other two, but they were on the same side! If we couldn't fly, we were going to ditch it on the beach.

"I feathered the prop, Jones and Dukate got the plane leveled out, but we could not maintain our altitude. So we began making plans to ditch. We flew onward for approximately forty-five minutes before we were forced to ditch – the time was about 1840 – at least that is the time that my watch stopped. We all managed to get out of the plane and into our life rafts, even though the tail gunner and the navigator were slightly injured in the ditching.

"The next morning a German submarine came by, started to help us, changed their minds and took off, leaving us. Then, at approximately 1500 hours, a three-engined Italian seaplane sighted us, landed and picked us up and took us to Brindisi, Italy and to the hospital there.

"Later that same night, Jones, Dukate, Bernard, Paolillo and myself were put on a train and sent into the mountains – to an old monastery. Much later, both Sigle and Dukate managed to escape, with Sigle getting back to the States in about two months."

Fred Jones, the pilot, wrote: "We ditched 30 miles south of Corfu. All crew okay. Saw all crewmembers at Camp Lucky Strike May 1945, except co-pilot Dukate, who escaped and Sigle, who escaped in Italy, 1943.

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #42-40267 N, Mitchell	HORSE FLY	MACR #8250
67th Squadron Crew:	Entire crew interned in Turkey	
MITCHELL, EDWARD R. ASN 0-728013	Pilot Interned (later was KIA)	1st Lt. Sioux City, Iowa
DECKER, DONALD R. ASN 0-2044424	Co-pilot Interned (later was KIA)	2nd Lt. Jamaica, New York
SALADIAC, JOHN ASN T-190780	Navigator Interned	Flt Of. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
KIPPLE, JAMES E. ASN 13044894	Bombardier Interned	S/Sgt. Mt. Joy, Pennsylvania
McADAMS, ROBERT C. ASN 14039719	Engineer Interned (later was POW)	T/Sgt. Ensley, Alabama
BRUMAGIN, DELOROS R. ASN 33112937	Radio Oper. Interned	T/Sgt. Wattsburg, Pennsylvania
CASTELLOTTI, JULIO G. ASN 39836622	Asst. Eng. Interned	S/Sgt. San Jose, California
COLLIE, DAVID T. ASN 34180386	Asst. Radio Interned	S/Sgt. Clifton, Tennessee
FLISTER, HENRY O. ASN 36232737	Tail Turret Interned	S/Sgt. Edgerton, Wisconsin

Note: Lt. Mitchell was KIA on 18 November 1943, and Sgt. McAdams became a POW on 11 December 1943. Lt. Decker was KIA on 20 February 1944.

Although seriously damaged, this plane made it to Turkey. All of these men returned to duty in September 1943.

No additional details are available, however Lt. William P. Newbold noted that both Lts. John R. Huddle and Robert S. Schimke [Henderson's crew], were badly injured on this Ploesti mission. So Newbold and his bombardier, Henry R. Zwicker, filled in for them on the next big mission, Wiener Neustadt, on 1 October 1943. Lt. Newbold became a POW and Lt. Zwicker was KIA.

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #42-40371 Q, Reinhart	G.I. GAL	MACR #2412
67th Squadron Crew:		
REINHART, ELMER H. ASN 0-731899	Pilot POW, returned to duty	1st Lt. Oakland, California
STARR, CHARLES L. ASN T-190606	Co-pilot KIA	Flt Of. Cashmere, Washington
TOTTEN, GARELD J. ASN 0-667456	Navigator POW, returned to duty	2nd Lt. Sparta, Michigan
PENDLETON, RICHARD H. ASN 0-661022	Bombardier POW, returned to duty	1st Lt. North Tonawanda, New York
GARRETT, FRANK D. ASN 14067723	Engineer POW, returned to duty	T/Sgt. Lafayette, Alabama
HUNTLEY, RUSSELL D. ASN 10600904	Radio Oper. POW, returned to duty	S/Sgt. Concord, New Hampshire

WOLFE, ROBERT W. ASN 35273527	RW Gunner POW, returned to duty	S/Sgt.	Canton, Ohio
MASH, ALFRED A. ASN 39314376	Asst. Eng. POW, returned to duty	S/Sgt.	Portland, Oregon
VAN SON, GEORGE ASN 16109574	Tail Turret POW, returned to duty	S/Sgt.	St. Petersburg, Florida

1st Lt. Elmer H. Reinhart was the pilot of the fourth 67th Squadron ship lost. It was the last plane away from Blue Target. With part of a wing shot off, Elmer emerged into a crisscrossing of ships, was unable to catch up with any of the improvised formations ahead and so was a tempting target. The Me 109s pounced upon him and shot away most of the tail turret, but George Van Son later crawled out of the debris alive. The attackers incapacitated waist gunners Alfred A. Mash and Robert Wolfe. The radioman, Russell Huntley, gave them both first aid.

The fighters then left this bomber they had mangled but could not shoot down. Engineer Frank D. Garrett reported, "Gas was pouring out of a hole near #3 engine; the tunnel was a wreck; the tail turret was hanging by a thread. The left vertical and horizontal stabilizers were almost shot off; the left aileron was practically gone. And there was a big hole behind #1 with oil streaming out."

Elmer Reinhart said, "I realized that we could never get back to base so I tried to gain altitude." The crew put on their parachutes as the plane heaved and quivered from nose to tail. Reinhart managed to coax 3,500 feet from his struggling craft but disintegration was at hand. Eighty miles from the target, he turned on the automatic pilot and hit the bail out button. He stayed in his seat until the others had jumped, then went into the bomb bay and hurled himself out.

Lt. Reinhart landed in a field of six-foot corn and hid his parachute. The ground suddenly trembled and a black column of smoke climbed into the sky – his ship had crashed. He ran for a considerable distance through corn, wheat and alfalfa much like those at home. Later he was captured and became a POW.

When questioned about his co-pilot, Charles L. Starr, Elmer said, "After giving the bail out signal, I stayed at the controls until Starr was in the bomb bay. Then I went to the bay, too, but Starr was still there. I encouraged him to jump but he wanted me to go first. This I did." Later, Lt. Starr was reported KIA as his chute failed to open properly and was so badly torn up he asked to be shot – as one report goes. But he could have been beaten up first and then shot by the civilians. The truth is not known even now.

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #42-63761 D, Weaver	LI'L ABNER	MACR #2413
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67th Squadron Crew:

WEAVER, WORDEN ASN 0-792187	Pilot POW, returned to duty	1st Lt.	Theadore, Alabama
SNYDER, ROBERT R. Jr. ASN 0-736394	Co-pilot POW, returned to duty	2nd Lt.	Oakland, California
SORENSEN, WALTER M. ASN 0-667446	Navigator POW, returned to duty	2nd Lt.	Winslow, Arizona
REESE, WILLIAM L. Jr. ASN 0-733097	Bombardier POW, returned to duty	2nd Lt.	Columbus, Ohio

SCHETTLER, WILLIAM J. ASN 39092894	Engineer KIA, buried Ardennes (A-12-3)	T/Sgt.	Los Angeles, California
HINELY, JESSE L. ASN 34258126	Radio Oper. POW, returned to duty	T/Sgt.	Savannah, Georgia
BRITTAİN, JAMES A. ASN 14123264	Asst. Eng. POW, returned to duty	S/Sgt.	Black Mountain, North Carolina
BREEDLOVE, PAUL L. Jr. ASN 37223087	Asst. Radio POW, returned to duty	S/Sgt.	Kansas City, Missouri
SUPONCIC, FRANK J. ASN 13025174	Tail Turret POW, returned to duty	S/Sgt.	Cleveland, Ohio

Lt. Worden Weaver was the pilot of the fifth 67th Squadron plane lost. This airplane was leading the third flight following Col. Johnson into the smoke and flames over the target area. They came out of that crematory with three engines damaged and their controls shot away. Forty miles away from the target on the way back to base, Weaver could no longer hold his ship in the air. He belly-landed near Visnia-Dombovitsa, and a wing tip caught the ground during the skid.

LI'L ABNER came to a halt with the nose rolled under the fuselage, the bomb bay telescoped into the flight deck, and the engineer, William J. Schettler, crushed to death inside the fallen top turret. The wreck burst into flames in the bomb bay section, while six men managed to get out through the rear section, but the pilots and navigator were imprisoned on the flight deck. Lt. Weaver seized a crack in the windshield, forced open a hole and wriggled out. But as navigator Walter M. Sorenson followed, his chute harness fouled in the opening and he was stuck halfway out, with the co-pilot, Robert R. Snyder still trapped behind him. The flames spread forward.

One of the men who escaped from the rear, bombardier William L. Reese, Jr. went through the fire and exploding ammunition and cut away Sorenson's harness. Reese and radioman Jesse L. Hinely hauled both trapped men clear. The crew then split up and ran in several directions while a German fighter circled the area, evidently reporting their location and directions. Weaver obtained help from a Rumanian farm boy who led them to a village where some women dipped feathers into a homemade balm and gently brushed it on their seared flesh.

Lt. Weaver later explained that after dropping their bombs and escaping the attacking enemy aircraft, he went back to the rear of his ship to help put out a fire in the tail section, leaving Lt. Snyder alone to fight the controls to maintain altitude. When he returned, the plane was so low it hit the ground – and even as it crashed, Sgt. Schettler was still firing his top turret guns. The turret came loose in the crash and pinned him in it with no escape possible. He had shot down two enemy aircraft. Remarkably, he was the only man killed in action aboard this aircraft. Weaver said that the navigator, Sorenson, told Schettler to leave his top turret, but he stayed there firing at enemy aircraft until the crash.

68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq., #42-40995 Bar-C, Houston	MARGUERITE		MACR #2416 & #3147
68th Squadron Crew:	Entire crew KIA		
HOUSTON, ROWLAND B. ASN 0-727991	Pilot KIA	Capt.	San Andreas, California
GIRARD, LOUIS V. ASN 0-885283	Co-pilot KIA, WOM Florence	1st Lt.	West, Texas
SCOTT, WILLIAM ASN 0-796608	Navigator KIA, WOM Florence	2nd Lt.	Clifton, New Jersey

McMACKIN, CHARLES G. ASN 11047450	Bombardier KIA, WOM Florence	S/Sgt.	Revere, Massachusetts
SCHOER, WALTER B. ASN 39826757	Engineer KIA, buried Ardennes (C-11-6)	S/Sgt.	Holstein, Iowa
SEVICK, STEPHEN F. ASN 12044639	Radio Oper. KIA	T/Sgt.	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
WARD, JOE F. ASN 34107345	Asst. Rad. KIA	T/Sgt.	Slocumb, Alabama
CARLTON, CLYDE W. ASN 14037452	Gunner KIA, buried Ardennes (C-6-29)	S/Sgt.	Lexington, North Carolina
SPEARS, MILFORD L. ASN 37136575	Tail Turret KIA	S/Sgt.	Springfield, Missouri

Captain Rowland B. Houston, flying with the first wave over Blue Target, joined the end of an assembling formation as the B-24s fought to give one another protection from the attacking enemy fighters. Luftwaffe pilot Willie Steinmann, who had shot down one Liberator at the opening of the battle, was flying one of the Me 109s that pursued him. The following quote is from "The Great Ground-Air Battle of 1 August 1943" by James Dugan and Carol Stewart:

"The German ace picked out Houston's ship, which was 'about a hundred fifty feet from the ground. I attacked him from the rear,' said Steinmann. 'I cut back on the throttle, slowed her with flaps, and gave the Liberator a good raking from wing tip to wing tip. I could see tracers walking across the width of the plane and flames coming out everywhere. The top turret man, [Walter B. Schoer] and the tail gunner [Milford L. Spears], particularly the man in the tail, were shooting me up. I closed to within seventy feet!'

" 'My engine caught fire and there was a tremendous quivering. My speed carried me under the left side of the bomber, which was going out of control. The Liberator and the ground were coming together fast and I was in between, with no control. I had an instant to consider what would happen. The best chance seemed being thrown free in the crash. I loosened my harness and opened the latch on my canopy. I don't remember crashing.'

" 'The first thing I knew I was seated on the ground with my pants torn and cuts on my legs. Near me the two planes burned. I got up from the ground and walked away.' No one walked away from Houston's ship."

It is believed that this plane is the one described as, "Aircraft skimmed over the top of woods and fell on the other side, and exploded."

Lt. Houston volunteered for this mission even though he had completed his tour of operations. It was too important for the war effort to miss.

There were many men wounded on those aircraft that returned to base – but not all were recorded. Other than the two on Charles Hughes' aircraft, few others were identified. However, there was one fatality aboard an 68th Squadron aircraft piloted by Captain John H. Diehl.

68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq., #41-23813 V, Diehl	VICTORY SHIP	Returned
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68th Squadron Crewman:

DIEHL, JOHN H. Jr.,	Pilot	Capt.
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POSEY, JAMES T.	Command Pilot	Lt. Col.	
STINE, ROBERT J.	Navigator	1st Lt.	
KLEKAR, HOWARD R.	Bombardier	1st Lt.	
FLESHER, ISAAC A.	Radio Oper.	T/Sgt.	
METSA, TAUNO I.	Eng./Top Turret	T/Sgt.	
WILLIAMS, TRUITT H. ASN 18037355	Waist Gun KIA, buried North Africa (D-1-8)	S/Sgt	Amarillo, Texas
BOWDEN, EDWARD F.	Waist Gun	S/Sgt.	
GREEN, GEORGE L.	Tail Turret	S/Sgt.	

Posey's lead aircraft, VICTORY SHIP, was piloted by a twenty-nine mission man, John H. Diehl. The first wave of five planes was formed like a spread "M". Following them were three more M-shaped waves of Liberators. Drumming closer to the target, Posey saw ribbons of artificial smoke dribbling across the refinery, but this was trivial compared to the inferno that he could glimpse over at White Five (Col. Johnson's target). Alongside the speeding column shells from a 37-mm. gun knocked off part of Posey's tail. They also killed Sgt. Truitt H. Williams, one of his waist gunners.

Two men were wounded on a 66th Squadron plane flown by Capt. Miller, according to a report written by Major Dexter Hodge.

66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #41-23811 K, Miller	FASCINATING WITCH	Returned
66th Squadron Crewmen:		
MILLER, ROBERT E.	Pilot	Capt.
HODGE, DEXTER L.	Co-pilot	Maj.
ZARUBA, LeROY E.	Navigator	1st Lt.
EDWARDS, ROBERT L.	Bombardier	1st Lt.
McDONNELL, MARTIN J. ASN 11036914	Radio Oper. Leg Wound	T/Sgt. Providence, Rhode Island
MURPHY, WILLIAM J. Jr.	Eng./Top Turret	T/Sgt.
ROWLAND, DANIEL W. ASN 16034838	Asst. Rad./RW Gun. Leg Wound	S/Sgt. Alliance, Ohio
NEWMES, ROBERT G.	LW Gunner	S/Sgt.
DUCOTE, CLARENCE J.	Tail Turret	S/Sgt.

While over the target and under intense ground fire, Sgt. Daniel W. Rowland was hit by a bullet in his upper left leg, which almost tore it off, and the radio operator, Sgt. Martin J. McDonnell stopped two .30 caliber slugs in his leg. Sgt. Rowland was knocked down and yelled for Martin to throw him an oxygen mask so he could use it for a tourniquet. But Martin could not go to assist Daniel as the ship needed all the fire power it could muster to attempt to ward off the sheets of gunfire coming up at them. Until help arrived, Daniel was successful in stopping much of the flow of blood. About 20 minutes passed before the ship got sufficiently away from attacks to permit the bombardier, Lt. Robert L. Edwards, and the engineer, William J. Murphy, to help care for the two wounded men. By this time, Sgt. Rowland was quite weak from loss of blood, and McDonnell was having difficulty. So Captain Miller decided to try for Malta for a landing so

that these two could get immediate medical attention – if his fuel supply could take them that far. It did, and these two were left in a good hospital, well cared for.

The 44th BG sustained one more casualty during this August 1 raid on Ploesti, but it did not take place in a 44th BG aircraft. Instead, Sgt. Clarence C. Hood was on temporary duty with the 93rd Bomb Group to help fill vacancies in crews ill from dysentery – and he was a volunteer. The pilot of the crew which was interned in Turkey was that of 1st Lt. Claude A. Turner. At least part of this crew returned to duty, as Lt. Turner himself was Killed In Action on 13 November 1943.

68th SQUADRON:

93rd BG, Lt. Turner

Interned in Turkey with 68th Sq. volunteer

68th Squadron Crewman:

HOOD, CLARENCE C.

Tail Turret

Sgt.

Rensselaer,

Interned in Turkey

New York

Sgt. Hood remained with the 93rd BG after his internment and elected to continue combat flying with that Group until he completed his 16th (and last) mission with them.

To close this overview of 44th Bomb Group losses at Ploesti, here is an account by 68th Bomb Squadron operations officer and pilot, Tom Holmes:

“Even before we left England in June 1943, we knew something big was going to happen that would involve low level flying. Since everything was top secret we were told only that we were going to Libya but we had no idea what a contrast in climate we would encounter and how very hot and desolate this land would be. The temperature would rise to 130 degrees and we would be assaulted by lots of hot wind, dirt, grasshoppers, and scorpions.

“While practicing in the desert we flew very low which we enjoyed but I am sure some of the crew were somewhat upset or nervous about flying into the ground. We did hit two hawks, one hitting the #2 engine prop governor, and a second hawk coming through the Plexiglas window in the nose and leaving blood, guts, and feathers through the entire airplane even to the tail. Luckily, no one in the nose was injured.

“Benina, our airfield, was a large base about 15 miles east of Benghazi where the remains of previous battles fought there were scattered all about: abandoned German planes, trucks, and armored vehicles along with thousands of oil drums everywhere from Cairo west across the desert. We lived in tents and were introduced to rations that we had not previously experienced (dehydrated foods) which were not particularly tasty.

“We continued to practice low level flying and in between flew about 14 missions over Sicily and Italy. We had no ice in the desert and took great pleasure in returning from these missions, drinking ice water frozen at altitude, eating K or C rations and listening to Axis Sally on the radio. To keep from perspiring so much, and to keep our clothes dry, we would remove them for takeoff and dress as we ascended. This may not have been Standard Operating Procedure but it kept us dry.

“To keep the sand from being drawn into the air scoops, we always had to be careful before takeoff to keep our engines at low rpm or turned sideways to the wind.

“We lost our third squadron CO, Tommy Cramer, on 2 July Lecce Airdrome, Italy. John Diehl was promoted to CO and I, operations officer. I had finished my missions and hence did not fly many of the missions while at Benina. I did fly a mission to Rome where we bombed the railroad marshaling yards with strict orders to bomb only our target.

“During the invasion of Sicily in mid-July 1943 we were assigned to bomb the communication center in Catania. As we flew over Sicily we saw the largest armada of naval vessels assembled just offshore that we had ever seen.

“When we were ordered to go to Ploesti the mission was of such importance that we needed every available plane and crew even though several crews had finished at least 25 missions. Capt. Roland B. Houston and crew would be doing #32.

“Even though he was recuperating from a traumatic crash at sea a few weeks earlier we needed pilots so badly that I had to ask Robert J. “Bob” Lehnhausen if he would fill out a crew. He replied that he did not care to fly, but would go if ordered. Because of his circumstances I would not order him to go but since I asked, he courageously consented. He made the round trip, and, at a later time, he, as a Lt. Col., served as Commanding Officer of the 68th Squadron. He survived the war, and returned to his home in Peoria, Ill. He served four years as mayor of that city, proving himself a born leader.

“On the morning of the raid on Ploesti we were up very early for breakfast and briefing and then to the planes for takeoff at 7 a.m. We were eager to get started on this exciting low-level raid after three months of practice and getting ready. All the planes got off okay and headed out over the Mediterranean Sea toward the Adriatic Sea just east of Italy and west of Yugoslavia.

“I observed a very strange event as we were flying at 8,000 to 10,000 just south of Italy over the Ionian Sea. A B-24 suddenly dived straight down into sea. Later we learned it was our lead plane for the entire mission. I could not imagine what could have gone wrong. As usual we were too busy to dwell very long on this unusual event and proceeded on with our mission. For various reasons we had 20 to 30 planes turn back [from the 178 that started]. Most were attributed to mechanical failures caused by the desert sand.

“We flew a loose formation over the water gradually climbing to about 11,000 or 12,000 feet and then turning on a heading of about 70 degrees across the mountains of Yugoslavia and clouds which gave us trouble, but didn’t stop us. Later, we began a slow descent down the east slope to the Blue Danube River, which was a muddy brown, I suppose from rains. As we flew lower we could see the countryside, cities, animals, people dressed in bright colors, as if we were out for a pleasant Sunday afternoon drive.

“Before we knew it we arrived at the IP (initial point) where we changed course and flew southeast for approximately 25 to 30 miles to the target. At this time we were flying very low, passing a downed B-24 on my right. It appeared to have landed wheels up but fairly well intact. The crew was standing beside the plane, waving as we flew by. How I did wish we could land and pick them up.

“Next we came upon a power line and I remember pulling up to get over it thinking of the planes on my wings. By this time the anti aircraft guns were in full swing and many shells were exploding all around us. This was the first time we had ever been this close to 88 mm. guns and the impressive thing was the rapid rate of fire and the flames and bright flashes which seemed to be 30 to 40 feet long out of the muzzle.

“We were now able to see many of the other targets burning. B-24s were coming back, over and through us. One plane, Bar D, flew directly over the top of our planes. I looked up about 100 feet and saw a hole about six feet across between #1 and #2 engines burning fiercely with the metal burning brilliantly around the outer edges. I’m sure he did not go far before crashing. The sky was full of B-24s returning from the other targets. They flew over the top of our planes as we were approaching the target flying extremely low. Our target was less than a mile straight ahead. There were numerous guns around the refinery and they were all firing. We had one or two fixed 50 caliber guns in the nose for the pilot to fire but I do not recall firing them. I was too busy flying toward the target to concentrate on a target for the nose guns. I remember seeing a ground soldier literally explode when hit by some of our 50 caliber guns. He was less than 400 feet away.

“We had the target in sight from about 10 to 15 miles away and now we were rapidly approaching at a very low level – less than 50 feet high. I remember very clearly pulling up to get over the smokestacks on the power house which was my assigned target and I feel sure we put our bombs directly over target. The bombs were delayed action bombs and exploded at intervals of 30 seconds to 72 hours. This was to keep fire fighters away from the refineries.

“After releasing our bombs, we continued on a course that led us to the southwest and toward home. The fighters jumped us on the retreat and several of them flew into the ground as we were still at a very low level. Our gunners were well trained and experienced at shooting enemy planes and they did an excellent job.

“I noticed one B-24 trailing heavy black smoke from the tanks in the bomb bay. He was flying very low and about 200 to 300 yards in front of me. The smoke grew bigger and I knew he could not last much longer. I never did understand why he did not gain some altitude in order to bail the crew out. After about 20 miles he pulled up into a steep climb to about 700 to 800 feet. I was so close behind I had to observe the direction of his nose in order to dodge his plane. I turned to the right as he veered to the left. When he stalled the nose fell abruptly and three chutes opened as the men in the tail were thrown 15 to 20 feet above the tail section. I feel sure they landed okay and probably made their way to the wreckage. The plane passed under our left wing and exploded which I believe ended in the deaths of all the men in the front, six, probably. I never heard any more about this plane or crew.

“We lost #3 engine as our fuel ran out because of a faulty pump. We were not far from the target when this happened so we transferred fuel and restarted the engine until we were off the coast. In the meantime, I ordered the crew to throw everything overboard: guns, ammunition, etc. I remember the long strings of 50-caliber ammo snaking through the air and into the mountains of Yugoslavia. We saved 100 rounds for the top and tail turrets in case we ran into enemy planes. We dropped behind after crossing the coast in order to save fuel. All engines were reduced, both RPMs and manifold pressure. Our flight across the Mediterranean was uneventful. We encountered a number of low cloudbanks and felt that each one would be over landfall but this was not to be until about the fourth or fifth cloudbank. It was nearing dark as we finally crossed the coast and our field was now only about 20 miles ahead. We proceeded directly to the field and landed promptly as we knew we were extremely low on fuel.

“I thought we flew about 14 hours, but later records showed 13 hours and 26 minutes. The next day I was told by the crew chief on our ship, “Wing and a Prayer,” that we had less than ten minute’s fuel. He drained the tanks to be sure.

“We were very tired but elated at the excellent results of our mission. “Blue Target,” which was the Brazi refinery, the largest and latest American-built refinery in Rumania, was 100 percent destroyed.

“We were all saddened by the loss of 50 or more planes in the five groups making the raid, but especially touched by the loss of one in our squadron piloted by Roland B. “Sam” Houston when he and his entire crew were lost. This plane was shot down by German Fighter Pilot Willie Steinman in an Me 109 whose story has been recorded. Houston and his crew were on their 32nd mission.

“All of us felt the importance of this raid and had practiced long and hard to make it. Patriotism was very much alive in America on August 1, 1943, and most certainly in our crews as well.

“All crewmembers were well decorated; our squadron receiving two Distinguished Service Crosses, three Silver Stars, and everyone on the mission receiving Distinguished Flying Crosses. Five Congressional Medals of Honor were awarded for this raid, including our own Group Commander, Col. Leon Johnson, and Col. “Killer” Kane. Three were awarded posthumously. The group received its second Presidential Unit Citation – the first, three months earlier for the raid on Kiel, Germany on 14 May, 1943.

“The official records of the Ploesti raid are recorded well by Webb Todd, a member of the 68th Squadron, in his history of this squadron.

“Most of the events of this raid are still quite vivid in my mind some 58 years later as I write this account. I shall never forget our fallen comrades, and I pray that the price they paid shall not have been in vain. To this day I am thankful I do not have to arise and make another mission. The experience was something we endured with hope and gratitude but never desired to repeat.”

16 August 1943

Airfields and Marshalling Yards, Foggia, Italy

Just 15 days after the horrors of Ploesti, the 44th BG was to suffer another devastating blow. This was the mission to the airfields of Foggia. On previous flights into that territory the missions were “milk runs”, but this day proved far from that. Seven planes failed to return with the losses by Squadrons as: 66th – 1; 67th – 3; 68th – 1; and the 506th – 2.

66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #41-23778 F, Curelli	LADY LUCK		MACR #3150
66th Squadron Crew:			
CURELLI, ROCCO A. ASN 0-670981	Pilot KIA, buried Sicily/Rome (I-5-63)	2nd Lt.	Biddeford, Maine
PAPADOPULOS, JOHN G. ASN 0-743260	Co-pilot KIA	2nd Lt.	Salt Lake City, Utah
ROSSI, WALTER Jr. ASN 0-797402	Navigator KIA	2nd Lt.	Bronx, New York
TURROU, VICTOR T. ASN 0-738948	Bombardier KIA, buried Sicily/Rome (J-2-62)	2nd Lt.	Falks Church, Virginia
GRINDE, JOHN H. ASN 36241507	Engineer KIA	T/Sgt.	Morrisonville, Wisconsin

ZIMMERMAN, WESLEY L. ASN 34312350	Radio Oper. POW, escapee, returned	T/Sgt.	Winston Salem, North Carolina
ELA, DEFOREST L. ASN 31157299	Asst. Rad. KIA	S/Sgt.	Quincy, Massachusetts
SHAFFER, RAYMOND C. ASN 35354093	Asst. Eng. KIA	S/Sgt.	Anderson, Indiana
HUGHES, JOHN R. ASN 32468888	Gunner KIA, buried Sicily/Rome (J-13-57)	S/Sgt.	Bogeta, New Jersey
ZOLLER, HARPER F. Jr. ASN 36529756	Gunner KIA	S/Sgt.	Detroit, Michigan

2nd Lt. R. Curelli and crew were newly arrived replacements, and like several others lost on this mission, were on only their second mission.

The MACR states that this plane was hit by flak over the target. While in a spin, it was attacked by enemy aircraft. Three to five chutes were seen to open. Later Glenn C. Hickerson [the tail gunner on the Austin crew, who was for a time a POW at Bari, Italy until he escaped] stated that all of the crew were killed except Zimmerman, who eventually returned to the 44th BG on 4 November 1943.

Sgt. Zimmerman, radio operator on this crew, sent this description, "Contrary to the MACR report, I do not recall our ship being hit by flak. After passing over the target and dropping our bombs, one of the engines went out due to an extreme oil leak. When this #3 engine failed and we fell out of formation, that is when we were hit by enemy fighters. After several direct hits from the fighters, we tried to get out of the plane, but could not. The main hydraulic system would not operate, and we couldn't get the bomb bay doors open in order to jump.

"At that point, Sgt. Grinde, engineer, went out the sliding door to the bomb bay without a parachute on, to try to open the bomb bay doors manually. This was the time that the ship went into a dive or spin and the sliding door came down and we could not get out. Since I was on the flight deck I don't know if any of the crew in the rear got out before the plane exploded. But when it did explode – which I think was caused by the fire in that burning engine reaching the gas tanks – I was somehow blown clear, and opened my chute and came down safely. I had several small cuts on my head and arms, and was black and blue over most of my body for two or three weeks.

"I was taken prisoner by the Italians and was in several camps before escaping and returning to Africa – and later back to England; and then the States.

"Also, contrary to the reports, I saw only one other chute and that landed several hundred yards from where I did. I went to it and it was Lt. Curelli. He was badly torn up and was dead."

Two men in the town of Ruoti, Italy, stated that the plane seemed to partly explode in mid-air and several crew members were seen to parachute from the plane. When these two men arrived at the scene of the crash and landing parachutists, they saw several civilians taking many articles, such as watches, rings and even identifications papers from the bodies. Only five of the nine bodies could be identified due to these thefts. They were: Lts. Curelli and Papadopoulos; Sgts. Hughes, Grinde, and Shafer.

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #41-23817 L, Bateman	SUZY-Q	MACR #2445 & #02361
67th Squadron Crew	Entire crew KIA, all on WOM, North Africa	
BATEMAN, WALTER R. ASN 0-796281	Pilot KIA, WOM North Africa	1st Lt. Baltimore, Maryland
PROPST, HALBERT W. ASN 0-793136	Co-pilot KIA, WOM North Africa	1st Lt. Cape Girardeau, Missouri
TRAVIS, WILLIAM C. ASN 0-736049	Navigator KIA, WOM North Africa	2nd Lt. Akron, Ohio
ELLIS, JOHN T. ASN 0-676452	Bombardier KIA, WOM North Africa	2nd Lt. Warren, Ohio
CHAPMAN, ROBERT D. ASN 32142986	Engineer KIA, WOM North Africa	T/Sgt. Albion, New York
POST, HERBERT F. ASN 16109394	Radio Oper. KIA, WOM North Africa	T/Sgt. Port Huron, Michigan
CIANCIOLO, MICHAEL A. ASN 34288192	Asst. Eng. KIA, WOM North Africa	S/Sgt. Memphis, Tennessee
AGUIRRE, ADOLPH P. ASN 39251163	Asst. Rad. KIA, WOM North Africa	Sgt. Exeter, California
STEVENSON, JOE A. ASN 32478604	Gunner KIA, WOM North Africa	S/Sgt. Little Valley, New York
SMITH, CHARLES R. ASN 11165246	Tail Turret KIA, WOM North Africa	S/Sgt. Hendersonville, North Carolina

1st Lt. Walter R. Bateman was the pilot on SUZY-Q, the most famous ship of the 67th Squadron which had led the Group on Ploesti. He was new to the Squadron and was on his first mission, as was his entire crew. It seems very ironic that this famous ship should be lost without a survivor and with only one observer seeing her demise. No one reported seeing the aircraft go down until Sgt. William Brady (of the Carpenter crew that went down 1 October 1943) said that he had. About the only mention of SUZY Q is that when they last saw her she was "lying burnt and broken on an Italian beach" believed to be Cape Stilo.

Lt. Egan, bombardier on the Hill crew, stated that he also saw SUZY-Q go down. "Four men managed to bail out, but one man's parachute hung up in the bomb bay. I remember a man hanging by his parachute in the bomb bay – he couldn't get out and the plane was burning all over. We were the lead ship of our squadron, with six ships behind us. All six of them were shot down!"

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #42-41021 T, Hager	BLACK SHEEP	
67th Squadron Crew:		
HAGER, CARL S. ASN 0-669713	Pilot POW	2nd Lt. Glasgow, West Virginia
PIMENTEL, ROBERT E. ASN 0-735107	Co-pilot KIA	2nd Lt. Berkeley, California
BAKER, WALLACE P. ASN 0-734296	Navigator KIA	2nd Lt. Champaign, Illinois
MILLS, JOHN D. ASN 0-676093	Bombardier KIA	2nd Lt. Chicago, Illinois

CURRY, FRANCIS X. ASN 33361905	Engineer KIA, buried Sicily/Rome (I-14-55)	T/Sgt.	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
WOODS, HOWARD C. ASN 37374038	Radio Oper. KIA, buried in Missouri	T/Sgt.	Stella, Missouri
DONES, ISABELINO ASN 32437848	Asst. Eng. POW, escapee, returned	S/Sgt.	Bronx, New York
BLAKENEY, ROBERT W. ASN 11088344	Asst. Rad. POW, escapee, returned	S/Sgt.	Newton Center, Massachusetts
FARLEY, HENRY R.	Gunner POW, escapee, returned	S/Sgt.	Peoria, Illinois
HESS, JOHN M. ASN 13089744	Tail Turret POW (injured), escapee, returned	S/Sgt.	Dunbar, Pennsylvania

2nd Lt. Carl S. Hager was the pilot of the second airplane lost by the 67th. Assistant radioman on this crew, Robert W. Blakeney, related their experiences this day: "We were shot down by German Messerschmitts and FW 190s. Our B-24 tried to reach Sicily but three engines were on fire. We crash-landed on a beach in the Reggio Calabria area of Italy. Five of our crew were killed when the plane exploded before they could get out. They were: Lts. Pimentel, Mills, and Baker; Sgts. Curry and Woods. Five of us were able to get out safely.

"I suspect that the five who were killed died in the explosion and fire that followed – am not sure whether any had been wounded or killed in the fight with the German planes. Lt. Hager was badly burned about the face, ears, hands and arms. They looked to me like 3rd degree burns. He only survived because of his courage, and he always felt guilty and surely responsible for the deaths of his crewmen. John Hess was injured in the crash and he received the Purple Heart later. The rest of us were singed by the fire but O.K.

"Lt. Hager was the only one who got out of the front part of our plane and he was able to crawl through the broken-out pilot's window. The rest of us were in the rear of the plane.

"We were taken captive by Italian soldiers and turned over to the Germans later at Bari in Italy. The officers from the other planes were all sent to a prison camp in Germany. Eighteen of us sergeants (four or five crews) who survived were taken to a German prison camp in Sulmona, Italy. About two months later we escaped and spent some 30 days behind the lines. We broke up into pairs – John Hess with me – and we eventually ran into the Canadian 5th Army just outside of Foggia.

"Certainly someone like Lt. Hager deserves some honor. He never complained. He was in complete shock for almost a solid week! He had no medical attention at all but yet he was worrying about us. I had to help him take his clothes off and I washed his clothes for him for a short period. I will never forget his tremendous courage. His great flying skill saved us in that most difficult crash-landing."

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #41-24229 P-Bar, Smith BUZZIN' BEAR

67th Squadron Crew:

SMITH, LEIGHTON C. ASN 0-665729	Pilot POW	1st Lt.	San Antonio, Texas
MILLINER, JOSEPH S. ASN T-60563	Co-pilot POW	Flt Of.	Louisville, Kentucky

CLIFFORD, THOMAS A. ASN T-190739	Navigator POW	Flt Of.	Upper Darby, Pennsylvania
DEVINNEY, JAMES F. ASN 0-727322	Bombardier POW	1st Lt.	Atlantic City, New Jersey
WINTER, LEROY R. ASN 19064228	Engineer Escapee, returned	T/Sgt.	Orland, California
SPARKS, GERALD A. ASN 6930238	Radio Oper. POW, escapee, returned	S/Sgt.	Meridian, Mississippi
McCABE, ERNEST G. ASN 36303257	Asst. Eng. KIA	S/Sgt.	Pontiac, Illinois
GIBBY, GOLA G. ASN 19055445	Gunner KIA	S/Sgt.	Madisonville, Tennessee
GRETT, GERALD L. ASN 37120507	RW Gunner KIA	S/Sgt.	Urbanette, Arkansas
MARUSZEWSKI, FRANK A. ASN 13038809	Tail Turret KIA	S/Sgt.	Uniontown, Pennsylvania

1st Lt. Leighton C. Smith, flying BUZZIN' BEAR, a plane which was almost as famous as SUZY Q, was the third 67th Squadron ship lost on 16 August. Like SUZY Q, it was lost without many observing her end. But unlike SUZY, there were some survivors.

It was reported that Lt. Smith was having great difficulty maintaining formation due to the heavy flak and the fierce, persistent fighter attacks that were inflicting considerable damage. Shortly after leaving the target, and down to an estimated altitude of 18,000 feet, with the gunners still fighting off the attacks, the plane broke in two.

Lt. Smith reports: "I had difficulty in control. This was caused by fighters knocking out our controls on about the second pass. The difficulty was lateral control. Soon, it was obvious to me that bail out was the only solution. At almost that instant, the bail out signal was given. The fighters hit our bomb bay tank – 400 gallons of 115 octane."

Four chutes were observed, all from the front of the plane, while those in the rear were continuing to shoot down their attackers. None of these gunners got out, riding their aircraft to the ground. Two of these gunners were former ground crewmen.

The co-pilot, Milliner, wrote: "Up the coast of Italy, the formation was a bit loose and relaxed. This changed on the approach to the target as everyone tightened up and prepared to drop their bombs. At that moment, flak started coming up, very heavy and seemed to be concentrated on the lower aircraft. The 67th was flying high cover so it seemed we did not get much flak, however, the flight behind us could have picked up some. This flight consisted of Hager, Batemen, and Curelli. At this moment, my mind maybe wandered and I started thinking about what the mess hall might serve for dinner when we got back. Everything seemed to be okay until the fighters appeared, just after we left the target, and I snapped back to reality. Our guns opened up and small holes started to appear in our wings and engine nacelles on #2 and #3 were taking hits. The fighters were very accurate and determined. The only enemy aircraft I saw were 109s and they were attacking Austin and Whitlock from the rear.

"At this time, I was trying to spot fighters attacking us. No frontal attacks were observed. All came in at 6 o'clock and 4 o'clock. I could not see these, but knew they were there. Small caliber was glancing off my windows at about 45-degree angles – going up. These had to come from the attack at 4 o'clock under the Bear. After the first couple of attacks, the intercom must have gone

out because nothing was coming in. So I took mine off and hung them on the side. I looked back to the flight deck and McCabe was sitting on the deck with a frightened look on his face. I did not have time to question him, but I thought that he was supposed to be at one of the waist guns. At this time, I looked toward Hill and saw him push the nose into a steep dive. Evidently, Smith did not see this and wanted to know where he went. I was sure Hill was not hit very badly and was taking evasive action. At this time I learned over and told Smith to give the Bear everything it had and emphasized "Get the Hell outta here!" Smith throttled forward and I looked to my right and another burst hit from 4 o'clock. I heard a loud pop in the bomb bay and turned to look. McCabe was gone from the deck and at that moment a fire broke at the base of the fuel tank (bomb bay) and started to spread very quickly. At this very moment, an enemy fighter must have unloaded his guns from about 100 feet at 6 o'clock. We even seemed to be keeping up with the wall of lead that hit us.

"The Bear shuddered. I'll swear I could hear it groan. The nose shot up and I looked at Smith. He was trying to make sure his chute harness was okay. At this moment, I grabbed the controls and pushed the nose back down and pushed the alarm bell because I wasn't sure that Smith had hit it. I shouted for Smith to go out the top hatch because I thought the bomb bay doors were closed. The fire was so intense at that time you could not see into the bomb bay.

Smith dived for the door and I saw him disappear into the fire. I was sure, no way, he could make it out of that inferno alive. Miraculously, he did, but suffered second degree burns on his face, hands and neck. His clothes were scorched a bit and surely he was in great pain. Finally, getting my own wits together, and realizing there was no saving the Bear, I reached for the latch on the top hatch. It dropped and immediately the suction from the opening caused the fire to fill the flight deck and up through the hatch. This I did not count on. By now, it was too late to do any counting.

I dove for the opening and hung there for a couple of moments and then swung my feet out on top of the fuselage and toward the rear of the plane. My right leg was hanging over the leading edge of the wing, however, there was no problem getting up and running off the end of the wing just past #1. My clothes were on fire when I left the hatch, but the rush of air put the flames out almost immediately, leaving me with burns on my face, neck, armpits, and legs. My clothes, especially my shirt, would crumble and fall apart. Big blisters had popped on my neck and left it very raw."

"On the ground I met an Italian count that could speak very good English. He had visited the crash site and confirmed the number of men that had perished with the aircraft. He had also watched the air battle from the ground and said that the 'Bear' had spun in from a great height."

Many of the crewmen lost with Buzzin' Bear were from Bill Cameron's original crew. Cameron recalls: "In late March, 1943, there was a desperate search for people to form new crews in the 67th Squadron. In a few days, I soloed in the "Little Beaver." Shortly thereafter, two officers recently transferred from the RAF were assigned to me as my co-pilot, Bill Dabney, and Navigator, Tom Clifford. Five volunteers from the ground crews who had worked on "The Line" were sent off to gunnery school. Upon their return, I had my two flight engineers in Winters and Gola Gibby; two waist gunners, Ernest McCabe and Jerry Grett; and a tail gunner, Frank Maruszewski. A real character, a reject from a B-17 outfit, was given to us as our radio operator, Gerald "Sparky" Sparks. The last to join our crew was our bombardier, "Gentleman" Jim DeVinney. Thus was our crew born – a fine, eager bunch of kids it was!"

With the exception of Capt. Cameron and his co-pilot Bill Dabney, this crew was still intact, but on this date replaced by two new pilots borrowed for this mission as Capt. Cameron had more than completed his tour of duty.

Lt. Smith notes that his original navigator was named Sweet and his original bombardier was Kullman. Both participated in the Ploesti raid (see Fred Jones' crew for Adolphus Sweet and Reginald Carpenter's crew for Martin Kullman).

Later when it was learned that this crew did not return from this mission and I was informed that my close friend, Ernest McCabe, had been killed, I had the very sad duty to post a letter to his girlfriend that he had given to me in the event that he was lost. What a very sorrowful task that was.

68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq., #42-40373 Z, Shannon	NATCHEZ-BELLE		MACR #3558
68th Squadron Crew:			
SHANNON, EUNICE M. ASN 0-665349	Pilot POW	1st Lt.	Cranbury, Texas
HERSH, GEORGE P. ASN 0-670542	Co-pilot KIA	2nd Lt.	Kansas City, Missouri
TEMPLE, GEORGE W. ASN 0-797243	Navigator POW, injured, escapee, returned	2nd Lt.	Newport, New York
COLLINS, ELWOOD E. ASN 0-733533	Bombardier POW	2nd Lt.	Columbia, Pennsylvania
SLATTERY, DENNIS E. ASN 11019806	Engineer POW, escapee, returned	T/Sgt.	Miller Falls, Massachusetts
STRANDBERG, CLARENCE W. ASN 17025880	Radio Oper. POW, escapee, returned	T/Sgt.	Minneapolis, Minnesota
ROTHROCK, CLARENCE H. ASN 39453341	RW Gunner POW, escapee, returned	Sgt.	Spokane, Washington
HELLER, CLAYTON E. ASN 17058569	LW Gunner KIA	S/Sgt.	Concordia, Kansas
SMITH, NICK B. ASN 35456291	Hatch Gun. KIA, buried Florence (E-1-37)	S/Sgt.	Cincinnati, Ohio
VOGEL, ROBERT I. ASN 35310805	Tail Turret POW, escapee, returned	S/Sgt.	Youngstown, Ohio

1st Lt. Eunice M. Shannon captained the 68th Squadron plane lost this day. Observers state that about 30 miles after passing the target and while under enemy attack by fighters, this aircraft was seen on fire, and seven men bailed out.

Navigator George Temple states, "Our plane was about one mile behind when four minutes after the target. We were attacked by 24 yellow-nosed FW 190s. The attacks came in from three, six, and nine o'clock, level, and pressed home almost to our wing tips. The first 20-mm shell hit the flight deck near the radio and set the upholstery and other inflammable material on fire. The next thing I knew, two engines were burning and we started down in a long glide.

"All the way down we were under attack. On the way down Sgt. Smith, on the belly gun, and Sgt. Heller, on one of the waist guns, were killed by this enemy fire. Smith got two enemy aircraft before he was killed. Vogel, the tail turret gunner, got three; Slattery, the top turret

gunner, got two; and one of the waist gunners, Rothrock, got two more [a total of nine enemy aircraft]. At 18,000 feet the pilot gave the bail out signal; our intercom was shot away. Shannon did a grand job of trimming up the ship and gave everyone a chance to get clear before he left his position. We all jumped except the two rear gunners and the co-pilot [Hersh]. I do not know why he did not jump. [Editor's note: Lt. Shannon notes later that Hersh had left his parachute behind his seat.]

"I opened the emergency nose wheel doors and bailed out. I figured I wanted a minute before opening my chute and I was afraid that I would get excited and open up too soon, so as I fell, I followed the second hand on my watch with my finger. When it had been around once I pulled the cord and she opened up nicely.

"I was coming down in a valley with mountains all around me, but the last fifty feet seemed to come up in a rush, and as I miscalculated the slope on which I landed, my left ankle broke. It seemed only a minute until an Italian farmer with a shotgun appeared over the top of the hill. He got me on a mule and took me to a main road where a truck was waiting. The truck took me to the local police station in a town of Atalla.

"They had a doctor who looked after the wounds. With me at this time was Lt. Shannon, who had a minor bullet wound; Lt. Collins; Sgt. Strandberg, who had some 20-mm fragments in his right leg; Sgt. Vogel, who had minor bullet wounds and two sprained ankles; and Sgt. Rothrock, who had a bullet wound all the way through his foot.

"Two months later I was in London. I was the first 8th A.F. man to be shot down, taken prisoner of war, escaped, got through enemy lines in action (in Italy this time) and get back to the 8th A.F. in England. Gen. Ira Eaker's decision to send me stateside set a precedent for the future action after the invasion of Europe."

Note: Slattery and Vogel also escaped and returned to Shipdham on 13 November 1943. Rothrock, Strandberg and Temple also escaped and returned.

Lt. Shannon said that his co-pilot, Lt. Hersh, in the rush and excitement, had left his parachute behind his seat when he rushed to the bomb bay. It was only then that he became aware that he had forgotten his chute, but he was unable to go back because of the raging fire in the radio compartment. When last seen, he was standing on the catwalk. Lt. Hersh refused to share the parachute that Lt. Shannon offered him, saying that it was his own fault, and that he would not jeopardize Lt. Shannon's chances for survival!! One brave man!

Sgt. Strandberg tells of his experiences: "We had dropped our bombs and were heading south towards the instep of Italy's boot when 24 FW 190s seemed to come out of nowhere. I was standing behind the pilot and co-pilot near the radio compartment when I felt the nudge of a boot in my back. I turned around and saw that Dennis Slattery's top turret guns had been hit and were jammed and that the ammunition was piling up in his lap.

"As I stepped back to help him there was a tremendous explosion that shook the B-24. A 20-mm cannon shell had hit the left side of the radio compartment and tore a hole so big that I could have walked out through it. The impact and explosion picked me up and threw me so that I lay up against the right wall on top of the radio table. I was so numbed by the concussion that I had no feeling in the lower portion of my body. I remember feeling with my hands to find out if my legs were still there. As I lay there I could see that one parachute had been hit and had fluffed out. The incendiaries that we were supposed to set the plane on fire with if we landed in enemy territory, had also been hit and were burning.

“The flames were spreading to the tattered upholstery on the side of the radio compartment. By now the numbness in my legs had subsided enough so that I was able to roll off the table and find my parachute. I snapped it on and headed for the catwalk. The bomb bay doors were open and I could see that the big bullet-proof gas tank on the left side of the bomb bay was full of holes and the gas was gushing out. I knew that the fire up front and this fuel in the bomb bay would soon reach each other, so one of the most inviting things I have ever done in my life was to bail out head first.

“On previous missions I had seen German planes going back and forth between Americans as they were parachuting down. I had assumed they were being shot at, so I delayed pulling my ripcord until I was so low that it felt like the earth was coming up to meet me. As it blossomed out, I could see two FW 190s, so I immediately went limp and hung in my harness as if I were already dead. Even so, the two pilots made three passes at me, coming so close that I was sure they were going to clip out the top of my canopy with their propellers. Every time they went by their prop wash would collapse the air out of my chute and I would fall off at a crazy angle before my chute would blossom out again. Later, when I was captured and interrogated by the Germans, I found out that they were having some fun while they were getting a fix on me and radioing my position so that I could easily be located by ground troops.

“I landed with an awful jolt on a hillside in a farm yard and unsnapped my English-style chute harness. As I ran from the farm yard I looked back and saw three women come out of the house, gather up the chute and run into the house with it. I often wondered how many petticoats and quilts they were able to get out of all that material.

“As I ran, I could see Italians converging on me from every direction. Some of them were even on horseback, so I just sat down on a big rock and consulted my escape kit material as I waited for them to come. There was money to bribe them with but how could you bribe that many people? As they stood all around me with axes, pitchforks, rifles, shotguns, and clubs I came across a phrase that was spelled out phonetically in Italian. It said, ‘Tell them you are an American aviator.’

“Up till then they thought I was a German, so it was the worst thing I could have said. It was like somebody dropped a bomb. The peaceful group became an angry mob and I was lined up to be shot. If it hadn’t been for one kind soul who tried to talk reason, and two of his friends who disarmed the nearly hysterical man with the shotgun, I’m sure I would have been killed right there.

“After six weeks in Sulmona, I escaped and lived up in the mountains for another six weeks until I met up with some Canadians in a Jeep, and I went with them.”

506th SQUADRON:

506th Sq., #42-40778 T, Austin SOUTHERN COMFORT

Note: This was the first of many 44th aircraft named SOUTHERN COMFORT.

506th Squadron Crew:

AUSTIN, HORACE W. ASN 0-7933711	Pilot POW, escapee, returned	1st Lt.	Virginia Beach, Virginia
FABINY, ANDREW T. ASN 0-740592	Co-pilot POW	2nd Lt.	Rock Springs, Wyoming
SINGER, PAUL S. ASN 0-736038	Navigator KIA, buried Sicily/Rome (J-12-62)	2nd Lt.	Milwaukee, Wisconsin

FINDER, SHELDON ASN 0-733298	Bombardier KIA, buried Sicily/Rome (J-11-62)	2nd Lt.	Chicago, Illinois
JETT, JOSEPH W. ASN 38097871	Engineer POW, escapee, returned	T/Sgt.	Dallas, Texas
WHITBY, RAY L. ASN 39829592	Radio Oper. POW, escapee, returned	S/Sgt.	Alpine, Utah
LEE, DALE V. ASN 17032710	LW Gunner POW, escapee, returned	S/Sgt.	Bradish, Nebraska
PURCELL, THOMAS O. ASN 16083700	RW Gunner POW, escapee, returned	S/Sgt.	Chicago, Illinois
WARTH, CHARLES J. ASN 15117864	Hatch Gun POW, escapee, returned	S/Sgt.	Cincinnati, Ohio
HICKERSON, GLENN C. ASN 6294273	Tail Turret POW, escapee, returned	S/Sgt.	Temple, Texas

The 506th Squadron had not lost an aircraft in any of these north African missions – until today when two did not return. The first crew was that of 1st Lt. H. W. Austin. The Missing Air Crew Report states that approximately 15 minutes after bombing the target, this aircraft pulled out of formation and lost altitude under continued attack by enemy aircraft. From 3 to 10 chutes were observed before the aircraft itself was seen to explode in the bomb bay section and crash. Both #2 and #3 engines had been on fire.

Sgt. Charles J. Warth, hatch gunner, had these comments, “We came in sight of our target (at 20,000 feet) and saw something else – half of the German Luftwaffe were waiting for us. In just a very few minutes you would have thought the gates of Hell were open, as there were a bunch of us trying to get in – both American and German. SOUTHERN COMFORT took an uncountable number of direct hits from the German fighters who were coming at us from every o’clock position. I know we shot down at least three of them, and very possibly more. But at a time like that, you don’t have time to count who you hit – you just keep trying your best to protect yourself and do as much damage as you possibly can...

“Shortly, we heard the bail-out klaxon sound, three of our engines were shut down or on fire; the bomb bay was a blazing inferno, and we in the rear of the plane were completely cut off from the pilot and the rest of the crew forward. I made it from the tail turret to the camera hatch, turned around and saw the door to the bomb bay vaporize in flame!

“The four of us in the rear wasted no time then in attempting to get out – two going out the waist windows. Hickerson and myself (at least I think it was Hickerson) were at the camera hatch door and we got it open and both of us were out and away in a matter of seconds. In moments of stress, time itself becomes an immeasurable entity. Looking back now, it seems like not a second was lost or a motion wasted.

“After what seemed to be many minutes, the ripcord on my parachute accomplished what it was designed to do, and the chute started opening. First the drogue, then the main chute came to life, and I was able to start breathing again. With the chute lowering me to earth, I had nothing to do but look around and to see what the rest of the world was up to.

“The sky for many miles around was a mass of aircraft – some on fire, some still pressing attacks, others trying their best to fight them off, and everywhere patches of white chutes! Seven of the 44th BG’s Liberators were lost that day, plus over 20 of the Luftwaffe. On the ground you could see German soldiers coming from all directions to pick up any survivors. I kept a wary eye

on a German fighter that circled me quite a few times, and saw the final moment of a gallant bit of man-made machinery – a Liberator named SOUTHERN COMFORT – which was a mass of flame as she spun down, empty now of human life, finishing her own “life” by crashing into an Italian hillside. There was a final blast of flame and noise, as if she had but one desire left and that being to return to the earth as the ores from which she came.

“Lts. Singer and Finder never reached the ground alive. Both of their bodies were found later by the Germans who reported that their parachutes were flak and bullet-ridden, and failed to open properly. The rest of us were captured by the Germans and we were sent to prison camps from which some of us were able to escape from later and return to the States.”

Co-pilot Andrew Fabiny said that soon after he got out of the plane and was floating down in his chute, he saw Lt. Singer pass quite close to him, but his parachute was damaged and was only partly open. Sgt. Lee explained that Lt. Finder did not parachute, as he had been decapitated by enemy fire.

506th SQUADRON:

506th Sq., #42-40606 X, Whitlock	TIMBA-A-AH		MACR #3559
506th Squadron Crew:			
WHITLOCK, CHARLES A. Jr. ASN 0-665748	Pilot POW	1st Lt.	Corsicana, Texas
WILSON, EDWARD R. ASN T-74	Co-pilot KIA	Flt Of.	Kansas City, Missouri
RICKS, ROBERT A. ASN 0-796600	Navigator POW	2nd Lt.	Norfolk, Virginia
WAITE, JOHN K. ASN 0-734766	Bombardier POW	2nd Lt.	Texas
STEWART, EDWIN M. ASN 39090749	Engineer KIA	S/Sgt.	San Francisco, California
MUNDELL, ROBERT F. ASN 17091292	Radio Oper. POW, escapee, returned	T/Sgt.	Walsh, Colorado
KNOX, RALPH B. ASN 16123614	Well Gun POW, escapee, returned	S/Sgt.	Cicero, Illinois
KOSCH, EMIL M. ASN 7024614	Waist Gun KIA	S/Sgt.	Tampa, Florida
DUNAJECZ, HUGO Jr. ASN 32313726	Waist Gun KIA, buried Sicily/Rome (E-8-40)	S/Sgt.	Bronx, New York
BONHAM, ROBERT W. ASN 15125248	Tail Turret KIA	S/Sgt.	West Mansfield, Ohio

1st Lt. Charles A. Whitlock was the pilot of the second of the 506th aircraft lost on 16 August. S/Sgt. Ralph B. Knox, well gunner on this crew, had these comments, “We had only six of our regular crew with us as the other four men were very sick (from dysentery). We took off somewhere between 0630 and 0700 and reached the coast of Italy a little before 1300 hours. The flak started the minute we hit the coast and followed us all the way into the target, which was 25 to 30 miles inland. There was plenty of flak and it was well-aimed. In fact, it was bursting right outside of our waist windows. We hit the target at 1315 and got our bombs away without much trouble.

“We were away from the target about 5 to 10 minutes when it happened. The Group flying off to our left was hit by about 20 to 30 fighters and a few seconds later we were jumped by about the same number – and all Hell broke loose. We were flying ‘Tail-end Charley’ and caught almost everything they had to throw at us. Their first pass didn’t cause any damage and I don’t think that we got any of them. The second time it was different! A 20-mm shell came in and set my ammunition cans on fire and nicked me in a couple of places, but not badly. I got the burning cans out before they exploded. One of our waist gunners had been hit also, but he managed to stick to his guns.

“In the meantime, I had seen the plane flying on our left wing [Austin’s] catch fire and then go out of control. I saw six chutes come out of this plane, but things got so hot again that I didn’t have time to watch it any longer. The fighters were coming in on their third pass and it proved disastrous for us. Two more 20-mm shells came into the back and blew up. Many flying flak fragments got me behind the right knee and above the left ankle – and that laid me out over the hatch door. This burst also killed the already wounded waist gunner (Dunajecz).

“The other waist gunner (Kosch) didn’t look wounded as far as I could see, but there was a look of terror in his eyes, and he was trying to kick the plexiglass out of the well door where I was still lying. It wouldn’t have done him any good to get the plexiglass out as we couldn’t possibly crawl through the opening. We couldn’t open the door because of the gun that was stuck through it. I didn’t have the strength to pull the gun out, and he didn’t have the presence of mind to do it either.

“I finally got to my feet and got him to the waist window and practically threw him out of the ship. I watched him until he disappeared from sight, but I didn’t see him open his chute. Unfortunately, he did not survive.

“I took one long last look around and saw that the tail gunner [Bonham] was slumped over his guns and his turret was swung completely around to the side. I couldn’t have gotten back to him if I tried. The waist gunner was dead, the two left engines were on fire, the area over the wing and above the bomb bay was a mass of flames, and there was not a single gun on the ship firing, so I figured it was time that I left. It was quite a struggle to get out of the window as my legs were practically paralyzed by then and it took all of the strength in my arms to pull myself up, over and out.

“I estimate that we were about 18,000 feet when I jumped. I delayed my opening of the chute until I could almost see the leaves on the trees below. When I pulled the cord on my chute it came loose so easily that I thought that maybe the line had been shot through and it wasn’t going to open. But in a few seconds I felt a gentle tug and when I looked up, I was very relieved to see that the white umbrella was opening as it should.

“It was only about 30 seconds between the time that my chute opened and the time that I hit the ground. Luckily, I came down through some tree branches, which broke my fall and I didn’t hit the ground very hard. It was only a matter of a few seconds until I had my chute off and had destroyed all papers that I had in my possession. I couldn’t walk, so I crawled and rolled down the mountain until I reached the bottom. I started crawling again up the next hill a few feet at a time. It was quite a job and I quickly tired. When I was about half way up the hill I spotted a chute on the side of another hill and I called over there. I found out that my navigator, Robert Ricks and bombardier John Waite were there.

“They weren’t hurt but had been already captured by Italian soldiers. It wasn’t very long after that, that I was picked up and carried to a farm house where I met our other two men. (Sgt. Mundell and Lt. Whitlock).

“When they finally got me to the hospital, they removed most of the shell fragments without any anesthetic, which was really rough to take. Then they put me to bed without any food, and I was very hungry.”

Lt. Whitlock later wrote to Ralph Knox to add, “You probably never did know what happened on the flight deck. You see, after we caught fire I sent the co-pilot (Edward Wilson) back with Stewart (engineer) to try to put it out. As you probably know, the interphone and alarm systems burned out immediately as well as the controls. Since the bomb bay doors would not open, the co-pilot jumped into the bomb bay onto one door.

“Although he succeeded in knocking a door off, he was burned to death and his chute did not open. Stewart went back to his turret and kept right on shooting. Then the fire got so bad I couldn’t see a thing in the cockpit. The radio man, Mundell, left by the top hatch, and then I could see enough to find that the flames were coming through the radio compartment and up into the top turret. Stewart stayed with his guns and was burned to death, also. After that, I also got out by the top hatch, as the plane had no controls and was going down fast.

“I want to apologize to you and the others that are living for our formation that was too erratic to allow good marksmanship for the gunners. However, I do know that you boys shot down several enemy fighters.”

Robert Ricks told Sgt. Knox much later, “Whitlock and I were prisoners of the Italians until they surrendered. Then the Germans took us over and we were prisoners in the Reich until the end of the war. Whitlock and I lived together all of that time and got along fairly well until near the end. Then we had so little to eat that we were too weak to walk around.”

The radio operator, Robert F. Mundell wrote the following account: “The top hatch was already open. The hatch is located directly in front of the top turret – which the engineer operates – so Stewart, the engineer, had to have opened it. But he hadn’t bailed out. He had left the top turret and was now standing on the flight deck – directly opposite the radio operator’s station. He was looking at me with a very calm, dispassionate expression on his face – an expression so out of place, considering the situation we were in, that it lent a certain surrealism to the scene. Then he looked down at the bomb bay – by now a roaring inferno – as if he were considering going out that way. But he didn’t move. He must have intended on going out through the top hatch when he opened it, but for some reason he had changed his mind. I pointed toward the open hatch, motioning that we should leave. Stewart watched me as I started up the steps, but made no move to follow me.

“I reached the top hatch and was halfway out when I got hung up. The top half of me was outside the plane, and the blast from the ice-cold wind was numbing (the air temperature at 20,000 feet is close to zero). The wind had caught my belly pack (parachute) and it was now floating four feet from me – I don’t know where all the slack in the harness came from – and the straps felt like they were going to pull through me. I was praying the chute wouldn’t open before I got clear of the plane. I kept struggling to free myself, but I could feel my strength ebbing in the cold wind. Then I felt a hand push me.

“Whitlock had followed me up the steps and had reached up and given me a shove. It was enough to free me, and out I went. I hit something that skinned my knee, and I remember thinking for a second that I was hung up on something. The next thing I knew, my chute was open. I don’t remember pulling the ripcord – the chute might have opened on its own, or maybe the ripcord snagged on something and caused the chute to open. Whitlock who was about 5’11” and between 155 and 160 pounds told me later that he came out right behind me and didn’t have any trouble, that he dropped down right behind the wing.

“I do remember that it took a long time to get down (I had jumped at 18,000 feet), and I had a front row seat to an air battle for quite awhile. At one point I saw a German fighter heading my way, and I remembered the stories we had heard about some of our men getting strafed in their chutes. Talk about being a sitting duck – there’s not a more helpless feeling in the world! But as he drew closer, he banked his wings and went on by.

“I hit the ground pretty hard but wasn’t hurt. I had landed next to some trees on a small farm. A farmer and a bunch of kids came running up and started examining my silk parachute. They looked thrilled with it and started jabbering (in Italian) and pointing to a donkey under a shed. I thought they might want to make a trade, and I could get on the donkey and get the hell out of there. I don’t know to where, but it seemed like a good idea at the time.

“Then an Italian policeman arrived and put a pistol to the back of my head. I raised my hands to shoulder level – I didn’t hike my arms over my head like the bank tellers in the westerns did when told to “reach for the stars.” With my hands lowered, I might be able to spin around and grab the gun before he could shoot. I was trying to get a better look at him out of the corner of my eye when I noticed an old farmer standing 30 feet away with a shotgun leveled at me. He looked like he was reading my mind. I reached for the stars. But a truck showed up and Whitlock and I were taken into a nearby town of Potenza. I’ll never know what that mob had planned for us.

“Word of our capture had spread. As the truck brought us through the middle of town, a large crowd of people had gathered along the “parade route” and were applauding. There were also a lot of people applauding from the balconies. Somehow I got the feeling they were applauding *us* instead of our Italian captors.

“A little later, they brought in Ricks (navigator) and Waite (bombardier), who had dropped out through the nose wheel doors – an emergency exit for the two men in the nose of the plane. Ricks had seen Knox (well gunner), who had been injured. Bonham (tail gunner) and Kosch (waist gunner) had been killed in the attack. Dunajecz (waist gunner) had died when his chute didn’t open. Wilson (co-pilot) had burned to death trying to get out through the bomb bay, and Stewart (engineer) had remained on the plane all the way to the ground. We had lost five of our ten-man crew.

“Waite had been drinking some wine with one of the Italian guards and was half drunk. He had found out that the guard had lived in Texas, and was saying, “He’s okay – he’s from Texas! Waite tried to get the rest of us to have a drink with them, but none of us did.

“I was put into a small dungeon by myself that night. There was a concrete slab about a foot off the floor that I tried to sleep on, but it sloped toward the floor so much that I couldn’t relax on it without rolling off. I didn’t get any sleep at all. There was a hole in the center of the floor full of excrement, and there were brown finger marks all over the walls (without going into a lot of detail, there was no toilet paper). The stench was awful.

“Three days ago I was drinking wine with Bill Heberd in Oran. Now I was in a dungeon staring at brown finger marks. Even hauling feed didn’t look all that bad right now.

“The next day the Italians put us on trucks (except for Knox, who was taken to a hospital), and we departed – to more applause – for Bari, where we met the other downed airmen from the same raid. There were about 30 of us. The 44th had lost a total of seven planes on the Foggia mission; two were from the 506th. The pilot of the other 506th plane – SOUTHERN COMFORT – was named Austin, and he and his surviving crewmen were there.

“The guy in Benghazi had been right – there had been a raid coming up, and they now had plenty of cots. Seven crews lost meant 70 empty cots.

“The navigator on the Austin crew, a guy named Singer, had tried to get out of going on this mission – he said that he was afraid of flying today. But they made him go anyway. He bailed out when the plane was shot down, but his chute didn’t open. Austin had lost one of his shoes getting out of the plane, so when he came across the body of the navigator he took one of the dead man’s shoes.”

There were wounded aboard another aircraft that landed in Malta.

506th SQUADRON:

506th Sq., #41-24201 Bar-O, Strong	BALDY AND HIS BROOD		Landed in Malta
STRONG, WILLIAM H.	Pilot	Capt.	
DAVENPORT, LYLE S.	Co-pilot	1st Lt.	
FRETWELL, LLOYD G.	Navigator	2nd Lt.	
FLAHERTY, THOMAS A.	Bombardier	2nd Lt.	
NELSON, CLARENCE W.	Radio Oper.	T/Sgt.	
FLEMING, LEMUEL D.	Eng./Top Turret	S/Sgt.	
HAMEL, EDGAR O.	RW Gunner	T/Sgt.	
HAAS, VERNON DALE	LW Gunner	S/Sgt.	
	Wounded		
GERMANN, OLIVER R.	Tail Turret	S/Sgt.	
	Wounded		
ACKERMAN, LONNIE L.	Rear Hatch Gunner	S/Sgt.	

BALDY AND HIS BROOD was being attacking singly and in pairs by German aircraft. They made about 20 attacks. Tail turret gunner, Sgt. Germann first shot down one Me 109 which had attacked from 6 o’clock. It went into a spin and burst into flames. Germann was also wounded at that same time. However, he remained at his guns when the next fighter approached. Again, he fired, hit his target, and this fighter also went down in flames. Sgt. Dale Haas, waist gunner on the left waist gun, caught another Me 109 breaking off from an attack from the rear.

Then Lonnie Ackerman took over the waist position while Haas went back to the tail turret to assist Sgt. Germann. Badly wounded, Haas pulled him out of the turret, laid him on the floor, and then got into the turret himself even though he, also was wounded. Somehow he got the guns working again. Then he and Capt. Strong worked together in their defense. When Haas would see other planes attacking, he would call out their positions as they attacked and Capt. Strong could then take the appropriate evasive actions.

When they got to Malta, they landed so the wounded crewmen could be attended to at the British Hospital. Capt. Strong knew by landing there his three wounded gunners could get immediate attention. An examination of his aircraft showed many large holes caused by large caliber armor piercing shells. Dale Haas stated that he remained at the hospital for a month, and then taken to Benghazi where he boarded another plane to be taken to other hospitals in the U.S. In all, he spent nearly a year in recuperation. However, before he departed, he was awarded seven decorations including the Silver Star.

27 August 1943

En Route Back to England from North Africa

Although there were no further losses on missions from Africa, the 44th BG suffered three more casualties when the three Bomb Groups were returning to England. Both the 93rd and the 44th BGs had loaned ground crewmen to the 389th BG as their ground echelon had not arrived in the ETO before their air echelon was called upon to bomb from northern African bases.

However, on the return from Africa, when one of the 389th's aircraft was approaching England and still over the English Channel, it was lost. This aircraft, a B-24D, was piloted by 2nd Lt. Dwaine C. Lighter of the 389th's 564th Squadron. It carried his crew and several passengers from both the 44th and 93rd bomb groups, as well as ground crewmen loaned to the 389th. This plane took off from Marrakech, French Morocco, for a non-operational flight to England. There was a crew of ten and five passengers on board.

The squadron split up opposite Portugal because of the weather. Every one of the planes proceeded individually. The B-24 piloted by Lighter was attacked by German fighters over the Channel, with one propeller being feathered after the first pass. This aircraft began losing altitude. On subsequent attacks, the rear of the plane was badly hit and then the top turret blew up. The pilot ditched as he already was too low for a bail out. Due to the rough sea, the B-24 broke in two behind the bomb bay, and quickly sank. The area was approximately 65 miles southwest of Portreath.

The pilot and one of the passengers (M/Sgt. Charles Kronberg) survived and were taken prisoner. The bodies of two of the 44th's ground crew washed up on the Brest peninsula, where they were temporarily buried. The body of Sgt. Haaf was never recovered and his name is now inscribed on the Wall of the Missing at the Normandy American Cemetery, St. Laurent, France.

68th and 506th SQUADRONS

389th BG, #42-40767, Lighter

MACR 12266

Note: This aircraft was from the 564th Squadron.

68th Squadron Ground Crewmen:

WEEMS, MANUEL H. ASN 18053822	Ground Crew KIA	Sgt.	Shawnee, Oklahoma
WOOLFE, CHESTER R. ASN 35036742	Ground Crew KIA, buried Brittany Manche (F-15-3)	Sgt.	New Lexington, Ohio

506th Squadron Ground Crewman:

HAAF, HOWARD S. ASN 18081540	Ground Crew KIA, WOM Normandy	S/Sgt.	Fort Worth, Texas
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Note: Sgt. Weems is interred in the Fairview Cemetery, Shawnee, Oklahoma. Sgt. Woolfe is interred in plot F, row 15, grave 3 of Brittany American Cemetery, St. James, (Manche) France.

This plane was reportedly shot down near Cape Finisterre by a JU 88 piloted by Hauptmann Hans Morr.

Note: For additional details on the downing of this plane,, please see "Bloody Biscay: The History of V Gruppe/Kampfgeschwader 40" by Chris Gross.

Mr. J.A. Hey of Hengelo, Holland compiled the following list of the full crew and passengers:

LIGHTER, DWAIN C. ASN 0-520632	Pilot POW	2nd Lt.
REINARD, DALE E.	Co-pilot POW	2nd Lt.
WILLIAMS, SHERWOOD V. ASN 0-729687	Navigator KIA	2nd Lt. Killed in air by 20 mm shell
SCHULTZ, LARS F. ASN 0-735932	Bombardier KIA, WOM Normandy	2/Lt.
SPEECE, CHARLES W. ASN35401619	Radio Oper. KIA	T/Sgt.
SHAVER, THOMAS L. ASN 14120849	Engineer KIA, WOM Normandy	T/Sgt.
POITRAS, ALFRED E. ASN 31152328	RW Gunner KIA	S/Sgt.
STOUT, JOHN E. ASN 35493173	LW Gunner KIA, buried Brittany (E-18-3)	S/Sgt.
HURST, HERBERT W. ASN 31082411	Tail Turret KIA, buried Brittany (K-14-22)	S/Sgt.
MITCHELL, CLAUDE H. Jr. ASN 18036992	Nose gunner KIA, WOM Normandy	S/Sgt.
KELLER, EDWARD L. ASN 14063239	Passenger KIA, buried Brittany (L-12-19)	T/Sgt.
WEEMS, MANUEL H. ASN 18053822	Passenger KIA	Sgt. 68th BS, 44th BG
WOOLFE, CHESTER R. ASN 350336742	Passenger KIA	Sgt. 68th BS, 44th BG
HAAF, HOWARD S. ASN 18081540	Passenger KIA	S/Sgt. 506th BS, 44th BG
KRONBERG, CHARLES L. ASN 37038977	Passenger POW	M/Sgt. Hit by shell in leg

Note: Mr. Hey's list has been supplemented with some additional information provided by Chris Christensen.