

‘Hello! For you the war is over.’ He had lived in Cleveland, Ohio, for 17 years. The Germans told us that the enlisted men from our crew had landed safely and were being interned.”

Sgt. Rudiger reported, “I was still shooting in the top turret when someone grabbed my leg and told me I had to get out. They said that I had passed out. I don’t necessarily agree to what they said but it could be. Everything happened so fast. I was unconscious when I hit the ground but I must have been conscious when I jumped out to pull the ripcord. I remember the plane being on fire and the top turret had gotten black with smoke. I think it was the engines that were on fire.

“This was the first mission that we had the new parachutes. We wore a strap and when we needed the parachute we just had to hook it onto this strap. Otherwise we had the old back type parachute and we threw them in the corner of the plane and we wouldn’t have had time to strap that thing on. But the new kind – all we had to do was strap the chute on when we needed it. I don’t know if I did or if one of the pilots snapped it on me. If you had the ripcord in your hand when you went out of the plane, the wind would move your hand and help pull the ripcord.

“I don’t know where I landed because I had passed out and when I first came to the German soldiers had me. Actually, they thought I was dead at first. They were surprised when I came to.”

8 March 1943

Targets of Opportunity near Rouen, France

The target was to have been the marshalling yards situated on the west bank of River Seine, south of Rouen. Only nine B-24s of the 44th BG departed the base at 1203 hours, rendezvoused with the 329th Squadron of the 93rd BG, and then proceeded to Beachy Head and entered the French coast over St. Valery. As the formation approached Rouen, they encountered a strong FW 190 formation of 30 to 40 aircraft, which attacked head-on. Spitfires and, for the first time, P-47 Thunderbolts flew air strikes against airfields ahead of our mission. Unfortunately the American fighters encountered heavy opposition, leaving the Liberators unprotected. Two 67th planes were lost.

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #41-23784 T, Price	MISS DIANNE	MACR #15570
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67th Squadron Crew:

PRICE, CLYDE E. ASN 0-398584	Pilot KIA, buried Ardennes (C-33-2)	Capt.	San Antonio, Texas
FORREST, ROBERT E. ASN 0-727979	Co-pilot KIA, buried Normandy (A-8-16)	2nd Lt.	Columbus, Ohio
AUGENSTENE, JACOB A. Jr. ASN 0-789432	Navigator KIA, buried Ardennes (C-25-9)	1st Lt.	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
GROSS, MORTON P. ASN 0-727336	Bombardier KIA, buried Normandy (B-17-43)	2nd Lt.	Denver, Colorado
SNELL, DALTON R. ASN 17032555	Engineer KIA	T/Sgt.	Marked Tree, Arkansas
JESTER, DONALD E. ASN 17023590	Radio Oper. KIA, buried Ardennes (C-36-14)	T/Sgt.	Ashtown, Arkansas
GOSLINE, ROY E. ASN 14069419	Asst. Eng. KIA	S/Sgt.	Decator, Alabama

DEVARS, DEANE J. ASN 18035421	Gunner POW	S/Sgt.	Orleans, Nebraska
WYER, IRIS C. Jr. ASN 35376277	Gunner POW	S/Sgt.	Clarksburg, West Virginia
ERHARD, KENNETH L. ASN 13031247	Waist Gun POW	S/Sgt.	Curwenville, Pennsylvania
FLESHMAN, LEWIS J. ASN 12035273	Tail Turret KIA, buried Ardennes (C-33-18)	S/Sgt.	Albany, New York

Captain James O'Brien, with Major Posey as Command Pilot, took off to lead the formation but were forced to abort as a crewmate, John Husselton, passed out in the rear of their plane. They left the formation, radioed the base for an ambulance and landed. Husselton was unloaded and they took off again immediately with only nine men, and caught up to the formation as it was crossing the Channel. He joined the second element position.

67th Squadron ships took over the lead when Captain O'Brien was forced to abort and was looking for the P-47s to take over when Spitfires left their coverage. It was at this moment that the German's FW 190s chose to make their mass frontal attack, catching the American pilots by surprise as they thought the enemy were our P-47s arriving to protect them.

Captain Clyde Price, in the lead, and 1st Lt. Robert Blaine on his right wing, were blasted by a swath of cannon fire as the enemy cut through our formation – and both ships went down almost immediately.

Captain O'Brien states that the sight of all those enemy aircraft attacking so fiercely was enough to "empty the bladders" of every man in the formation. And with the two lead ships gone, it was "Cowboys and Indians" from then on to the target of opportunity, and back to the coast again.

S/Sgt. Kenneth L. Erhart, gunner on Capt. Price's ship, told his experiences: "We were hit by FW 190s as well as by flak, amidships. Needless to say, with oxygen and hydraulic lines damaged, fire was inevitable. The bail out bell was sounded, which by this time, the ship was well aflame. Due to the nose attack, the flight deck personnel did not make it out. I assisted Sgts. Iris Wyer and Duane Devars out the right waist window, and also checked on Sgt. Fleshman, but he was already dead. I bailed out of the right waist window, and, upon hitting the ground, saw Lt. Gross coming down. His whole abdomen was ripped open and he died in my arms, with the German soldiers looking on. Lt. Gross told me to take his watch and give it to his mother, but the Germans took the watch away from me.

"While descending from the burning ship, I was shot at by both FWs and Me 109s! All three of us survivors suffered flak or bullet wounds and burns. Devars and Wyer were captured a day or two later, being unsuccessful in finding help. I was a volunteer from the Armament Section and Roy Gosline was from the Engineering section. Upon being captured, and after Lt. Gross died, the German soldiers turned me over to the Luftwaffe and SS troops. I was taken to a lazarette for treatment of those flak-wounds and burns. Whatever the medication for burns was, I did not suffer scars. I was treated by French doctors and watched by German doctors. From there I was taken by train to Dulag Luft for interrogation, beat around a little, spent approximately ten days in solitary confinement. After that I was taken to Stalag VII-A, Moosberg, Bavaria."

Note: Miss Dianne and some crewmen crashed in Villers-Ecalles. A stone monument engraved with the crew members' names was dedicated in 1997 in this city.

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #41-23988 E, Blaine	DOUBLE PLAYMATE	MACR #4401
67th Squadron Crew (with one exception):		
BLAINE, ROBERT W. ASN 0-423910	Pilot KIA, WOM Ardennes	1st Lt. Plano, Texas
ROETTO, LAWRENCE J. ASN 0-727264	Co-pilot KIA	2nd Lt. Ronett, Unknown
FRAZIER, LEO O. ASN 0-659012	Navigator POW	1st Lt. Oakley, Utah
MAYEN, THOMAS C. ASN 0-726923	Bombardier KIA	2nd Lt. San Antonio, Texas
NORED, GEORGE L. ASN 14060975	Engineer KIA, WOM Ardennes	T/Sgt. Mobile, Alabama
KREISSIG, OSCAR (66th Sq.) ASN 11010544	Radio Oper. KIA, buried Normandy (D-21-34)	T/Sgt. New Britain, Connecticut
WILLIAMS, DON J. ASN 18037070	Belly Gun KIA	S/Sgt. Amarillo, Texas
BRENISER, NORMAN A. ASN 39092835	RW Gunner KIA	S/Sgt. Greshan, Oregon
DORIA, FRANK N. ASN 12039389	LW Gunner KIA	S/Sgt. Shreveport, Louisiana
WHITE, BENJAMIN F. Jr. ASN 11027878	Hatch Gun KIA, buried Normandy (B-10-41)	Sgt. Rockland, Maine
SUFKA, EDWARD ASN 37161475	Tail Turret KIA	S/Sgt. Hillman, Minnesota

Note: Sgt. Kreissig was on loan from the 66th Sq.

Lt. Blaine's aircraft was the second 67th Squadron ship to go down, several minutes after Capt. Price's. Lt. Leo O. Frazier, navigator on this aircraft, was the only survivor and he was, at first, also officially reported KIA. He said: "Due to the fact that we did not have a full crew at the morning briefing, we were not scheduled to go on this mission. However, we finally made up a crew and were assigned to go. And, as a make-up crew, we did not fly our regular position and were assigned to the fourth ship in the last formation. At that time it was called 'Coffin Corner', but it did not bother us as it looked like an easy mission with fighter protection. However, this did not turn out to be correct as we moved positions when the lead ship aborted and we were not met by our fighters, but the fighters of Goering's Flying Circus.

"On their initial attack, they shot down the lead plane and came on through and got our plane as well. I was the only survivor from our crew and when I landed on the ground I was met by a group of German soldiers and was captured. I served the duration in Stalag Luft III POW Camp.

"The reason that we went down is that we were hit by fighters from about 2 o'clock, high, with a cannon shell exploding in the cockpit. I am sure that the co-pilot, Lt. Roetto, was killed instantly, but the pilot lived long enough to press the bail out alarm button. I was the only one that bailed out. What happened to the others I am not sure about, but I was told the airplane (with one half of the tail knocked off) went into a flat spin that caused centrifugal force, preventing the others – if alive – from jumping. I saw the ship after I left the hospital and it had not exploded, even with the bombs still aboard."

This aircraft crashed at Le Plex, near Sierville. Lt. Cameron took over the formation lead, selected a target of opportunity (a railroad yard) and bombed it.

Jim O'Brien recalls this mission: "On the Rouen mission when Clyde Price and Bob Blaine went down in a hail of fire from those 35-40 FW 190s attacking head on, I think the fickle finger of fate interceded to take me out of that lead position. Jim Posey and I, in the "Rugged Buggy" were leading the Group and had just completed the assembly over Shipdham when S/Sgt. John Husselton, the waist gunner, fainted in the back of the ship. Posey and I decided to relinquish the lead and take Husselton back to the base. We deposited Husselton to a waiting ambulance and took off again with the nine-crew members to catch the 44th just as they were crossing the Channel. From the rear end of the formation, we saw the carnage up front. We would have all gone down if it had not been for the Polish squadron of Spitfires that chased away the Germans.

"I had many odd experiences with the fickle finger of fate, but I always felt I owed Husselton something for taking us out of that lead position on the Rouen Raid although there was no joy in the loss of the two 67th crews. It was kind of a Russian roulette we played as stated by John Muirhead in 'Those Who Fall.' "

18 March 1943

Airfield, Vegesack, Germany

Major Howard Moore, replacing Major MacDonald, led the 44th BG on this historic raid to Vegesack. This raid decidedly proved the fire power of the unescorted Liberators and Fortresses. Only nine B-24s from the 44th BG, along with 15 others from the 93rd, followed the B-17s into Germany for a historic air battle in which the 44th BG did not lose a single plane, and managed to shoot down thirteen confirmed, six probables and eight damaged enemy aircraft. The 44th did not escape unscathed, unfortunately, as one crewman from the 66th Squadron was gravely wounded and died on March 29, 1943.

66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #41-23811 K, Miller

FASCINATIN' WITCH

66th Squadron Crew:

MILLER, ROBERT E.	Pilot	1st Lt.	
HODGE, DEXTER L.	Co-pilot	Capt.	
ZARUBA, LeROY E.	Navigator	2nd Lt.	
LAPLACE, ROBERT B.	Bombardier	2nd Lt.	
McDONNELL, MARTIN J.	Radio Oper.	T/Sgt.	
MURPHY, WILLIAM J. Jr.	Eng./Top Turret	T/Sgt.	
LIGHT, EDWIN C.	Belly Gunner	S/Sgt.	
ROWLAND, DANIEL W.	RW Gunner	S/Sgt.	
HAZELTON, WALTER L.	LW Gunner	S/Sgt.	
DUCOTE, CLARENCE J.	Tail Turret	S/Sgt.	
BALSLEY, LUCIUS M. ASN 39175097	Asst. Radio KIA, buried Cambridge (D-6-69)	S/Sgt.	Pierce, Idaho

Note: Edwin Light was killed in action on 1 August 1943.

After days of valiant struggling for life, Sgt. Balsley died from these injuries. Sgt. Hazelton adds, "He and I went to Vegesack as replacement gunners...Lucius was hit in the back over the target while performing as a well gunner in the rear of the ship. We gave him first aid – as much as we could at the time – as the fighters were thick all around us. We didn't know how serious it was until we landed. He was taken to the hospital in Norwich, where he died several days later. The crew visited him on the second night – we all went over. I escorted the body to the cemetery outside of London and was there when he was buried. A very sad day it was." It was Balsley's 12th mission.

22 March 1943

Wilhelmshaven, Germany

The Group put up 12 aircraft for this mission but only 10 of these successfully attacked the target. The airplanes were attacked by enemy aircraft both before and following the bombing. Two aircraft were lost. Three men in the 66th Squadron planes were wounded by these attacks, but survived. They were Lt. P. P. Phillips, Sgt. K. L. Morrison, and Lt. E. M. McEachin. (Phillips was killed in action on the 1 August 1943 mission.)

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #41-23832 N, Warne	MAGGIE		MACR #15585
67th Squadron Crew:			
WARNE, GIDEON W. ASN 0-404099	Pilot KIA, WOM Margraten	Capt.	Elburn, Illinois
BROWN, RICHARD C. ASN 0-727161	Co-pilot KIA, WOM Margraten	2nd Lt.	Schenectady, New York
WALKER, ROBERT K. ASN 0-662399	Navigator POW	2nd Lt.	Newport Beach, California
RAWLS, MALCOLM ASN 0-661659	Bombardier KIA, buried Ardennes (A-39-35)	2nd Lt.	Dozier, Alabama
GANDY, GUY E. ASN 18085234	Engineer KIA, WOM Margraten	T/Sgt.	Davis, Oklahoma
JONES, NORMAN H. ASN 37049716	Radio Oper. KIA	T/Sgt.	St. Louis, Missouri
FALLS, CHARLES E. ASN 14055946	Top Turret KIA	S/Sgt.	Birmingham, Alabama
HAMMOND, CHARLES P. ASN 7000408	Belly Gun KIA, buried Ardennes (C-16-10)	Sgt.	Metairie, Louisiana
GRITSONIS, NICKOLAS C. ASN 16034619	Asst. Radio KIA, buried Ardennes (C-4-23)	S/Sgt.	Chicago, Illinois
KLUG, LESTER G. ASN 14064706	Hatch Gun POW	S/Sgt.	De Land, Florida
MARQUEZ, GABRIEL A. ASN 18029077	Tail Turret KIA	S/Sgt.	Denver, Colorado

This 67th Squadron aircraft was damaged by flak over the target area and slowly lost altitude on the return and fell behind the formation. Lt. Robert J. Walker, navigator on Captain Gideon W. "Bucky" Warne's crew, briefly explained, "We were coming home from Wilhelmshaven when

the ship was badly shot up by German fighters. Shortly after several attacks on us, the ship was shot up so badly that we all had to bail out, in spite of the fact that we were out a bit over the North Sea. We all came down in the vicinity of Alte Mellum island, but into the water. Sgt. Klug and I were the first two picked up by a ship headed for Heligoland – and we were the only survivors. Apparently all others drowned, or died from exposure in that frigid water before rescuers found them.”

Sgt. Klug reported that after coming down in the water, he found that the sea was very rough and visibility poor. He estimated that he had been in the water about a half-hour before he lost consciousness. He did not know how long it was before they found him and pulled him on board ship.

Later, he was taken to a hospital in German Heligoland, and about two days after that he was asked to identify the bodies of five of his crew members. They were: Malcolm Rawls, Nicolas Gritsonis, Charles Falls, Gabriel Marquez, and Charles Hammond. No crewmember had been wounded prior to bailing out.

506th SQUADRON:

506th Sq., #41-24191 X, Fouts	CACTUS		
506th Squadron Crew:	Entire Crew KIA		
FOUTS, VIRGIL R. ASN 0-437434	Pilot	1st Lt.	Los Angeles, California
NAVAS, FRANK ASN 0-730577	Co-pilot	2nd Lt.	Scranton, Pennsylvania
SEAMAN, ROBERT H. ASN 0-663420	Navigator	2nd Lt.	Reading, Pennsylvania
BRENNER, JOSEPH L. ASN 0-727081	Bombardier	2nd Lt.	Chicago, Illinois
NORDQUIST, RICHARD K. ASN 16020714	Radio Oper.	T/Sgt.	San Antonio, Texas
RUSSELL, ELDO A. ASN 18070094	Top Turret	T/Sgt.	Denver, Colorado
DOBBINS, MAURICE H. ASN 16055011	Asst. Eng./Hatch	S/Sgt.	Pekin, Illinois
KLOSE, KENNETH A. ASN 37276328	Tail Turret	S/Sgt.	Buchanan, North Dakota
WIESER, JERRY H. ASN 39247916	RW Gunner	S/Sgt.	Burbank, California
LINDAU, EDWARD W. ASN 36012770	LW Gunner	S/Sgt.	Palatine, Illinois

Note: Lt. Brenner's body was the only one recovered.

On the same Wilhelmshaven mission this 506th Squadron crew, flying its first mission, as well as the 506th's first mission, was observed to be having a difficult time holding its position in the formation. Mission debriefing reports show that the aircraft was singled out for attack by FW 190s. Eye witness accounts stated: “During the first attack from enemy aircraft, ship #191 was hit in #4 engine, which caught fire and the ship began to lose altitude and leave the formation. Shortly afterwards, the #3 engine also caught fire and the ship headed for the Island of Baltrum, in the East Frisian group, off the coast of Germany in the North Sea.”

Eye witnesses from the other crews in the formation reported seeing five chutes open from this aircraft prior to losing sight of this ship. This aircraft was last seen at approximately 10 miles northwest of Baltrum Island.

Grave registration investigations in 1948 pertaining to this crew and comments made in their service records indicate that “the temperature of the waters in the North Sea in March is such that, had the parachutes landed in the waters, life would not have been possible beyond a few hours immersion therein.”

It should be noted that the isolated grave of the bombardier 2nd Lt. Joseph L. Brenner was found after the war near Wilhelmshaven. The reports determined that “while no other bodies had been found, it is reasonable to conclude that the plane crashed in the water and that the men who parachuted from the airplane, as well as those who went down with it, were unable to reach land and that none of the crew survived beyond the date of their disappearance, 22 March 1943.”

Research done by Virgil Fouts’ nephew in German archives indicates that aircraft #191 was claimed as a victory by Lt. Hans Pancritius, a FW 190 Luftwaffe pilot of Staffel 8/JG1, flying out of Leeuwarden, Holland. Lt. Pancritius was killed by a B-17 gunner on 17 July 1943 in Yellow 12, FW 190A-5/U, #7366, 80 km north of Borkum Island in the North Sea. At the time he was 22 years old and Commander of 3/JG11. He had 10 kills to his credit.

While doing his research, Fouts’ nephew also discovered the pilot who shot down Capt. Warne’s B-24. It was Olt. Gerhard Sommer, Staffel 1/Gruppe 1 out of Leeuwarden.

14 May 1943

Kiel, Germany

The primary target area was the center of the Krupp Submarine Building Works at Kiel. We had 21 aircraft ordered to follow B-17 formations who were to drop high explosives and we were to bomb with both 100-lb. and 500-lb. cluster incendiaries or matchsticks, as they were called. The intent was to set fire to the rubble caused by the earlier bombs. This group had only 17 B-24s in their formation when it arrived at the target, following 109 Fortresses. It was the toughest test to date, with the following statistics: 21 enemy aircraft destroyed, 13 probables and 1 damaged. However, the 44th lost 5, 1 was abandoned, 9 damaged, and 12 men wounded and 51 MIA. For this successful mission, the Group was awarded its first of two unit citations.

Note: In addition to the Kiel unit citation, the Group also received a unit citation for the 1 August 1943 Ploesti Oil Fields mission.

66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #41-24014 P	SCRAPPY		Destroyed
66th Squadron Crew	Entire crew survived, all but one returned to action		
REED, JOHN Y. ASN 0-660004	Pilot	1st Lt.	Matamoras, Pennsylvania
WINGER, GEORGE W. ASN 0-662848	Co-pilot	1st Lt.	Columbus, Ohio
PHILLIPS, PHILIP P. ASN 0-662366	Navigator	1st Lt.	Minneapolis, Minnesota
McEACHIN, EUGENE M.	Bombardier	2nd Lt.	Salt Lake City, Utah