

Second North African Tour of Operations

1 October 1943

Airframe Plant for Messerschmitts, Wiener Neustadt, Austria

Exactly two months after Ploesti, our Group attacked this assembly plant and suffered many casualties. The official records reported that we had eight planes lost, but later it was learned that one crew had landed okay at Bari, Italy.

66th SQUADRON:

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

FASCINATIN' WITCH

66th Squadron Crew:

BRIDGES, RICHARD W. ASN 0-794067	Pilot POW, escapee, returned	2nd Lt.	Ft. Wayne, Indiana
PHELPS, DELMAR F. ASN 0-743272	Co-pilot POW	2nd Lt.	Palo Alto, California
STIEFEL, MAX A. ASN 0-801102	Navigator POW	2nd Lt.	Shreveport, Louisiana
SCHULER, WILLIAM M. ASN 0-736730	Bombardier POW	2nd Lt.	Birmingham, Alabama
DISALVIO, ROBERT L. ASN 32144464	Engineer POW	T/Sgt.	Rochester, New York
BRIDGES, DONALD O. ASN 33279989	Radio Oper. POW	T/Sgt.	Hunker, Pennsylvania
GARRETT, KENNETH O. ASN 35431908	Waist Gunner KIA, buried Ardennes (C-30-46)	S/Sgt.	Duling, West Virginia
ROSENSTEIN, JACOB ASN 31145138	Waist Gunner KIA	S/Sgt.	Hartford, Connecticut
SASEK, CHARLES M. ASN 13168268	Belly Gunner POW	S/Sgt.	Houston, Pennsylvania
MERCER, GEORGE W. ASN 16070123	Tail Turret KIA, buried Lorraine (G-6-1)	S/Sgt.	Muscatine, Iowa

Richard W. Bridges, pilot of the first 66th Squadron plane lost this day, recalled the mission: "Our aircraft, which had been temporarily assigned to me... was identified as 811 K, and had two engines (the inboards) which were using so much oil that the Squadron Engineering officer had grounded it. I persuaded him to release it for any mission briefed not to exceed ten hours.

"As the Group started its second climb somewhere over northern Italy or Yugoslavia, my aircraft suffered a sudden and severe loss of power on the two inboard engines. From that time on, I was unable to achieve power settings of more than 18 to 20 inches from those two engines. We saw the Group climb away from us, but continued on below them and ahead, because we were flying faster, straight and level, while the others were climbing.

"Finally, the Group leveled off at the briefed bombing altitude and I was able to nurse 811 K back into its proper spot in the formation, which was #2 on the element leader of the third element. On the bomb run, as a pilot, I was mainly concerned with maintaining formation and I

did not see very much of what was going on except to realize that the flak was very heavy and accurate.

“Shortly after bombs away I just happened to look up at about 2 o’clock, high, in time to see four Me 109s diving on us. I decided later that they had already finished shooting when I saw them. In any event, I believe it was this fighter attack which knocked out the two inboard engines and started a fire in the bomb bay.

“We had two 425 gallon spare fuel tanks (Tokyo tanks) in the forward bomb bay, so this fire in the bomb bay left no alternative for us – we bailed out. All but three of the crew successfully bailed out. The tail turret gunner, Mercer, and the well gunner, Garrett, were killed in the aircraft, probably by the fighter attacks. These two men were replacements for my regular crewmen, Sgts. Rice and Abrams, who had been grounded due to illness.

“Also killed in the action was my assistant engineer, Sgt. Jacob Rosenstein. Six of us survived the bail out and five men spent the rest of the war in German prison camps. I was taken prisoner in Hungary, then moved to a camp in Belgrade. Then the Germans occupied Hungary in March 44; I escaped from that camp in May 44, spent some time with Tito’s partisans, and was finally evacuated by air to Allied Military Control at Bari, Italy, in August 1944.”

William M. Schuler, bombardier, added, “This mission had been planned five or six days prior to 1 October 43, but inclement weather had delayed it. On the 1st, we got the go ahead to fly across Yugoslavia and on up to Wiener Neustadt. Our airplane was an old combat plane with over three hundred hours on the engines, and as we started to climb across Yugoslavia we had to drop out of formation because we could not sustain the rate of climb. Due to the poor mechanical condition of the aircraft, we probably should have aborted.

“The Germans certainly were well prepared as they had moved in a lot of mobile flak guns. They had flak guns on railroad cars and there were approximately two hundred fighters in the target area. They centered their attack on the 44th BG. With the combination of the heavy flak and the large numbers of fighters, the results were disastrous. It was hard for me to determine whether the engine power losses were due to the flak or to damage caused by the fighters – or a combination of both.

“The fighters must have been the single most detrimental element as they were coming in from every clock position. We had three engines knocked out and they were making head-on passes and we were alone. They killed the gunners in the rear of the plane and scored hits on the bomb bay tanks which were temporarily installed to give us extra range for this target. In my opinion, these tanks should have been hung on temporary shackles in the event of a severe attack – and could have been dropped when the fighter attacks began.

“The fighter attacks continued for fifteen to twenty minutes and these were no young, inexperienced Luftwaffe pilots! After I bailed out and pulled the ripcord and was floating down, four fighters headed in directly for my parachute and for a moment I thought they were going to put a few shells through it, but that certainly wasn’t their intention. They were simply curious to see what I looked like as they came within about thirty yards of the parachute, waved, and turned away.”

Charles M. Sasek, the belly gunner, noted: “The plane we were to fly on this raid was red lined due to the fact that two engines on the plane had a large oil consumption and due to the distance

of this raid, there should have been some doubt if this plane should have been used. This was my 20th raid and I think this may have been the 2nd raid for this crew.

“When we could not get into formation over Yugoslavia, I think Lt. William Schuler, the bombardier, was right to think this was the proper time to abort this raid. As we came into the target area, there seemed to be a large volume of flak and numerous fighters. Our tail gunner [Mercer] was dead by now and Jacob Rosenstein was on the floor. Shortly after there was a large explosion around the hatch area, blowing me back against the bomb bay bulkhead and the plane was solid flame from the waist windows to the rear of the plane. By this time, Kenneth Garrett was also dead. I was lucky to find my chute in the flames and got out of the waist window. My feet were caught inside and I was banging up against the side of the plane and don’t ask me how, but Rosenstein somehow got strength enough to get me clear of the plane. He went down with the plane.”

66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #42-72877 A, Hobson

MACR #9022

66th Squadron Crew:

HOBSON, THOMAS B. Jr. ASN 0-791426	Pilot POW	1st Lt.	Columbus, Ohio
CALLAHAN, ARTHUR W. ASN T-190576	Co-pilot POW	Flt Of.	Buffalo, New York
HYDE, THOMAS I. ASN 0-728214	Navigator POW	1st Lt.	Orinda, California
DUNN, ROBERT F. ASN 0-670043	Bombardier KIA, buried Lorraine (A-16-50)	2nd Lt.	Los Angeles, California
CUTSHALL, EARNEST J.	Engineer ASN 34174154	S/Sgt. POW	Biltmore, North Carolina
TUTTLE, RICHARD E. ASN 19064422	Radio Oper. POW	T/Sgt.	Sacramento, California
WILLIAMS, RICHARD H. ASN 12031124	Waist Gun KIA, buried Lorraine (G-3-24)	T/Sgt.	Buffalo, New York
KALLAL, LAWRENCE B. ASN 16051552	Waist Gun KIA, buried Lorraine (E-9-8)	S/Sgt.	Jerseyville, Illinois
POPOVICH, NICHOLAS ASN 15074648	Hatch Gun POW	S/Sgt.	Cleveland, Ohio
MILLWARD, WARREN F. ASN 13092560	Tail Turret KIA	S/Sgt.	Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

The second of the two 66th Squadron aircraft lost was that piloted by 1st Lt. Thomas B. Hobson. Lt. Hobson states, “Bad weather was a great hampering factor, with 10/10th cloud cover up to the target. A small hole in the clouds that was too small for a completely successful bomb run, was found so the bombs were dropped, but with poor results.

“Our intercom was knocked out in the first fighter attack, so we had no contact with the rear or nose section. #4 engine was hit, also in the first attack, and a fire started in the wing behind it. The tail section was hit at this time as well I believe, since the controls became sloppy. A climb to the right began, which could not be controlled with our #4 engine feathered and #3 engine redlined (maximum power).

“During this time, we received two more attacks by fighters lined up abreast, 6 to a formation, and further hits were encountered in the nose and cockpit. Our autopilot controls also were knocked out. We stalled, followed by a spin, which could not be broken by the later feathering of engines #1 and #2.

“The spin was violent until flaps were lowered, permitting the spin to be flattened and gentle, but no recovery. However, free and easy movement was now possible, so I put on my chute and left through the bomb bay, estimating my altitude at this time to be about 5,000 feet. All bailed out except the four who were believed already dead – Millward, Kallal, Williams, and Dunn.”

“Lt. Dunn was last seen by Lt. Hyde to be in good condition, but for some unknown reason he apparently did not jump.

“Tuttle was the first man to leave the ship, followed by myself and later, Popovich. Lt. Hyde was experiencing some difficulty with his chute and finally exited through the nose wheel door, and landed about 1,000 feet from me. The surviving waist gunner (Popovich) landed in the same area, so I assume that he left immediately after the bail out signal, too.

“I landed about 50 feet off of my ship’s left wing, after seeing it hit the ground and start burning all over within a few seconds. The right tail surfaces were almost completely gone, accounting for the lack of control.

“During the several enemy attacks, our ship was continually returning fire. Guns were firing from the nose, ball, and waist positions. Hits were observed on two fighters in the first attack and another one in the second. No hits were seen in the third one.”

66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #41-23936 J, Oakley	QUEEN ANNE		Crash-landed
66th Squadron Crew:			
OAKLEY, WARREN W. ASN 0-746893	Pilot Not seriously injured	1st Lt.	Seattle, Washington
McKENNEY, ELWIN J. ASN 0-735424	Co-pilot Seriously wounded	1st Lt.	Sacramento, California
SNEFF, FRANK B. ASN 0-805099	Navigator Not seriously injured	2nd Lt.	
EDWARDS, ROBERT L. ASN 0-660337	Bombardier Not seriously injured	Capt.	
PISARSKI, CHESTER S. ASN 324008172	Radio Oper. Not seriously injured	T/Sgt.	Huntington, New York
BYERS, JOHN F. ASN 37152814	Eng./Top Turret Not seriously injured	T/Sgt.	Chester, South Dakota
CAROON, KENNETH C.	RW Gunner Not seriously injured	S/Sgt.	
YOUNG, JAMES F. ASN 14000162	LW Gunner Seriously wounded	S/Sgt.	Sanford, Florida
ABEYTA, ISAAC ASN 18068133	Belly Gunner POW	S/Sgt.	Blanco, New Mexico
CARSON, KENNETH G. ASN 17047313	Rear Hatch Gunner POW	S/Sgt.	Pine City, Minnesota

Note: Warren Oakley was killed in action on 22 December 1943.

A third 66th Squadron aircraft suffered casualties before it was forced to crash-land four miles from Foggia, Italy. This plane, piloted by Warren Oakley, was so badly damaged over the target area that two of these crew members abandoned ship before Lt. Oakley somehow again got the aircraft under control and almost returned to base with two other crew members seriously wounded.

1st Lt. McKenney wrote: "I was a pilot flying as co-pilot for Oakley. One of my jobs while flying the right seat was to call out fighter locations to the crew. We experienced some flak as we got near the target area, but no fighters until we were turning into the IP.

"The first ones I saw came in from straight ahead – these being four or five Me 109s, diving in trail. They leveled out, looking right at us and fired. I had my hand on my throat mike and was calling the Me 109's, and saw flame in the nose cannon of the lead bandit. He got us right through the windscreen with a 20-mm cannon shell, which exploded on impact. I caught the explosion on the left side of my head. In fact, still have a piece of that shell in my brain.

"I lost my left eye and it fractured my skull pretty badly. I was a bloody mess, but never lost consciousness. I remember the radio operator trying to wrap gauze around my head while we were catching hell from the fighters. We lost one engine, and later, on the way back, a second one.

"Oakley hit the bell to prepare to bail out shortly after we dropped our bombs over the target. I put a chest pack on and went to the catwalk in the bomb bay. Doors were still open, so I squatted down and prepared to roll out. We were still being hit by fighters and the sky below the plane was a smoky mess, crisscrossed with tracers. I took a last look up into the cockpit and saw Oakley waving me to come back!! He had decided to stick with it.

"Best news I ever had! I laid down under and along side the top turret and got sprayed with shell casings for quite a while. We managed to get out of there and flew for about two hours or so toward the Mediterranean, but when we lost that second engine we were forced to crash-land. Oakley did a great job of landing wheels down in a plowed field about four miles out of Foggia, Italy. (The British had taken this field only four days earlier.) The nose wheel, of course, dug in and we skidded on our nose, but nobody was hurt in the landing.

"I remember worrying that the top turret might break loose and fall on me, but it didn't. I was still conscious by then, but pretty groggy. They helped me out through the top hatch and I slid down the nose to the ground. An Italian in a small sedan stopped on the road by the field and the crew helped James Young and me to his car.

"We were taken to a British Field hospital set up, I believe, in a school building in Foggia. I remember laying in a stretcher on the floor in a hall with a priest bending over me. I tried to talk to him but don't think that any words came out, and the next thing that I remember was being washed to get all of that dried blood off my face, getting me ready for surgery. I had a moustache and it hurt like hell.

"I learned later that two of our crewmen bailed out, but I didn't know them. I knew James Young and visited with him about six weeks later when we both were recuperating."

T/Sgt. Byers destroyed two enemy aircraft, as did S/Sgt. James F. Young.

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #41-23918 O, Bronstein	MARCIA ANN		MACR #2806
67th Squadron Crew:			
BRONSTEIN, GEORGE ASN 0-523516	Pilot KIA, WOM Florence	1st Lt.	New York City, New York
ERICKSON, CHARLES R. ASN 0-742572	Co-pilot KIA	2nd Lt.	Rockfort, Illinois
COHEN, JACOB ASN 0-798753	Navigator POW	2nd Lt.	Malden, Massachusetts
ARCHAMBAULT, WILLIAM S. ASN 0-738953	Bombardier KIA	2nd Lt.	Denver, Colorado
BERKSTRESSER, GEORGE B. ASN 18104589	Engineer KIA, WOM Florence	T/Sgt.	Balmorea, Texas
CLICK, GEORGE ASN 15115001	Radio Oper. KIA, buried Lorraine (K-48-12)	T/Sgt.	Logan, West Virginia
SHEPHARD, JACK P. ASN 36073284	Asst. Eng. POW	S/Sgt.	Benton, Illinois
PREKOPIE, MICHAEL L. ASN 33289063	Asst. Radio KIA	S/Sgt.	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
BOLSTER, HARRY T. ASN 35397686	Gunner KIA, WOM Florence	S/Sgt.	Barberton, Ohio
MANSFIELD, JOE ASN 18000247	Tail Turret KIA, WOM Florence	S/Sgt.	Tiburon, California

The first of the three aircraft lost by the 67th Squadron was piloted by George Bronstein. Only two men were able to parachute from this plane, The MACR does not have any information concerning the fate of this ship and crew. Apparently, there were no observers on the other aircraft as they were far too busy fighting off the multitude of attacks by the enemy aircraft.

However, recently I heard from Jacob Cohen, the navigator. He wrote: "I recall that when we approached the target we were under heavy antiaircraft and fighter attack. We managed to drop our bombs and turned to return home. I could see several fighter planes coming directly at us. It was frustrating because the machine guns in the nose of the airplane where I sat as navigator could not be turned to aim at planes coming directly at us. One of the fighter planes coming at us was so close I could see the pilot.

"Looking to my left, I could see one of our planes going down in flames. Our plane appeared to be in a slow descent. Looking up I see that most of our wing was gone. As navigator, being in the nose of the plane, I could see what was happening behind me and the condition of the rest of the plane. The pilot rang the bailout bell so we (the bombardier and I) opened the bomb bay doors. I attached my parachute and sat down in the open door and let myself slide out. The bombardier was behind me. I found out later that he had been killed.

"Coming down I could hear voices on the ground. A gust of wind caught me as I got to the ground and I hit the ground on my backside. I was soon surrounded by civilians but they did not bother me. I had been injured and could not move. An ambulance came over and took me to a German military hospital. I was the only American there, but they left me alone, and after I could walk, though with difficulty, I was sent to prison camp, Stalag Luft I in Barth, Germany, where we were liberated by Russian guerillas, mainly Mongolians, close to the end of the war."

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #42-41017 L-Bar, Carpenter

MACR # not known

67th Squadron Crew:

CARPENTER, REGINALD L. ASN 0-665663	Pilot POW	1st Lt.	Ferndale, Michigan
PRATT, CARROLL H. ASN 0-743276	Co-pilot POW	2nd Lt.	Santa Monica, California
SELASKY, CHARLES J. ASN 0-795305	Navigator POW	1st Lt.	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
SWENSSON, BERTHEL ASN 0-733113	Bombardier KIA, buried Ardennes (D-37-21)	1st Lt.	Los Angeles, California
PALIGA, FRANK ASN 19071407	Engineer POW	S/Sgt.	Stockett, Montana
IRWIN, JOHN F. ASN 37071188	Radio Oper. KIA	S/Sgt.	Albion, Nebraska
YEATTS, ROY J. ASN 20364881	RW Gunner KIA, buried Ardennes (C-29-13)	T/Sgt.	Farmville, Virginia
BRADY, WILLIAM R. Jr. ASN 12031414	LW Gunner POW	S/Sgt.	Hammondsport, New York
BITTNER, HARRY H. ASN 16063878	Ball Turret KIA	Sgt.	Detroit, Michigan
BRYL, EDWARD B. ASN 10601101	Tail Turret KIA, buried Lorraine (E-14-22)	S/Sgt.	Milwaukee, Wisconsin

The second of the three 67th Squadron aircraft lost was that flown by 1st Lt. Reginald L. Carpenter and co-pilot 2nd Lt. Carroll H. Pratt.

S/Sgt. Frank Paliga, radio operator, wrote these pertinent facts: "I had flown 24 missions with my original crew under Lt. Abernathy, but as I had missed one mission with them. They completed their tour and I was assigned to this crew for my 25th – and last. This was a completely new and strange crew to me, so I tried to get acquainted with Irwin, Bittner, and Brady before the mission. John Irwin told me that he was worried about jumping out of a plane at high altitude in an emergency. He thought that if he pulled his ripcord as soon as he left the plane, he would die from lack of oxygen. But on the other hand, he was worried if he made a free fall for quite a distance, he would pass out from the speed of falling and would not be able to pull the ripcord and therefore die from the fall. His plan was that he would hold his hand over the chest pack and pull the ripcord before he jumped. Then, he would make a free fall and if he passed out, his hand holding the chest pack would go limp and his chute would then open and save him. Unfortunately, he would soon have an opportunity to test his plan.

"On the day of the Wiener Neustadt mission, at approximately 1130 hours, we were heading over the target with the bomb bay doors open ready to drop our bombs when we were struck from 12 o'clock, a little high, by what seemed to be 40 to 50 or even 70 fighter planes. They flew through our formation and shot down and/or crippled a large number from our bomber force. The heavy concentration of enemy planes was a bit more than our gunners could handle. The flak was also very heavy going in toward the target.

"I noticed that we had two engines on fire from my position in the top turret, and soon a third engine fire erupted about that time. The bail out bell rang and John Irwin poked me in the leg to

call my attention to my chest pack that he was trying to hand me. You couldn't wear one in the turret. So I climbed down out of the top turret and took the chest pack that Irwin handed me. At that moment the plane was in a shallow dive. While I was on the flight deck putting on my parachute, Irwin stepped down onto the catwalk in the bomb bay to get ready to jump. When I got to the catwalk, John Irwin was lying face down on the catwalk next to the burning bomb bay gasoline (auxiliary) tanks with his parachute inflated out of the bomb bay and the shroud lines between the catwalk and bomb bay tank. The open chute was pulling him tightly against the catwalk and the burning tanks. I tried to pull on him to free him and drop him out of the plane but the pressure of the inflated chute made it impossible. I was running out of oxygen and jumped, pulling my ripcord as soon as I got out of the plane.

"I never met or heard from anyone from our crew or knew who might have been killed or made it out of the plane except William Brady, our tail gunner. He and I spent the balance of the war in Stalag 17B at Krems, Austria."

William Brady said, "Our [original] aircraft was a brand new one with ball and nose turrets – 4-Q-2. When I had been a regular crewman on Kolliner's crew, I flew with him and Pappy Moore in SUZY Q. And so were several gunners on this ship. I saw SUZY Q get hit and go down..."

"Edward D. Bryl had flown 40 to 60 missions in the RAF and had been awarded the English DFC for those many missions. He was our tail gunner and was blown completely out of that turret and into the tail section. I went back and checked him out but he was already dead. Harry Bittner, ball turret gunner, was hit and killed on the very first pass by the enemy planes and was the first to die. Yeatts, right waist gunner, was hit by bullets and was knocked over against me, and then fell to the floor. I helped him, got him back on his feet, and he then started shooting again. Later, he was again hit by flak or enemy machine gun fire and fell dead.

"Berthel Swensson, bombardier, had obtained a very small dog someplace and took him on this mission. I believe that Berthel was hit by a 20-mm and probably killed, not leaving the ship. I managed to jump out, opened my chute and then felt the explosion as the ship blew to pieces. Many parts fell around me as I went down. All in the rear of the ship were dead. Paliga was burned by the fire in the bomb bay and flight deck."

Co-pilot Carroll Pratt wrote that, "Berthel is believed to have been seriously wounded because the navigator, Charles Selaski had blood over his flight jacket when he landed – and never saw Berthel get out. He could have 'frozen' and could not jump, but more probably was dead or dying at that time.

"After dropping our bombs, we were being damaged by both flak and fighters but it was the fighters that ultimately got us. Carpenter sent me back, along with Paliga, to help put out the fires. We found the bomb bay doors partly open, the fires beyond controlling, so Paliga soon bailed out. Later, I saw Irwin lying on the catwalk and his chute trailing out the door. I got down, put my arms around him in a bearhug, and we both went out. However, the force of that dragging chute tore him from my grasp, taking some of my fingernails with him. I looked back and saw one man coming down with his chute burning and that could have been Irwin – and he did not survive."

Somehow Carpenter survived the explosion, parachuted safely.

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #42-72853 Q, Henderson	COUNT BRUGA	MACR #6452
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67th Squadron Crew:

HENDERSON, CHARLIE P. Jr. ASN 0-665686	Pilot KIA	Capt.	Dallas, Texas
GREYHOSKY, ALBERT ASN 0-791424	Co-pilot POW	2nd Lt.	Cokeburg, Pennsylvania
NEWBOLD, WILLIAM P. ASN 0-791619	Navigator POW	1st Lt.	Langhorne, Pennsylvania
ZWICKER, HENRY R. ASN 0-728529	Bombardier KIA	1st Lt.	Pendleton, Oregon
COOPER, HAROLD E. ASN 38139230	Engineer KIA	T/Sgt.	Denver, Colorado
DAYBERRY, JOHN J. ASN 34259156	Radio Oper. POW	T/Sgt.	Shelby, North Carolina
RAMSEY, IVAN W. ASN 35255507	Well Gun KIA, Florence WOM	S/Sgt.	Wadesville, Indiana
PORTER, JAMES M. ASN 37212157	Waist Gun KIA	S/Sgt.	Formosa, Kansas
CONFER, CHARLIE H. ASN 35371803	Waist Gun KIA	S/Sgt.	Peru, Indiana
WARVICK, ISLEY B. ASN 37290897	Tail Turret KIA	S/Sgt.	Britton, South Dakota

The last of the 67th aircraft lost this day was Lt. Charlie Henderson's. The MACR for this crew is rather short and incomplete, saying only that "A/C #853 was flying in the second element of the low, left section and on the bomb run was seen by his #2 wingman to drop down and slide over to the right, under attack by enemy aircraft. When last sighted in the target area, was on fire in bomb bay section."

Albert Greyhosky, co-pilot, stated that, "As we turned into the bomb run, our flight was forced out of formation by a too-great a bank by the leading squadron. We were low flight in the low formation. Just as we slid out of formation, the fighters hit us head on. Our #3 and #4 engines were knocked out at the same time. Our plane immediately fell into a steep spiral. Capt. Henderson immediately gave the bailout signal and tried to hold the ship from spinning to give the crew a chance to get out. His action resulted in four of us being able to bail out. From the time we fell into the spiral to the time the plane went into an uncontrollable spin must have been very brief because Ramsey, top turret gunner, jumped almost immediately, followed by Dayberry (radio)– I was to have followed but the plane was already in a spin and I was knocked unconscious inside the plane. I recovered when I was already on the ground! But just before I was knocked out, I saw Henderson still holding the controls trying his best to counteract the spin and regain some control."

William P. Newbold, navigator, adds, "We approached the IP, about 50 miles east of Vienna, at 17,000 feet. The time was about noon. As we were making our left turn at the IP, the German fighters struck. It was a nose attack and the fighters came out of the sun in formation. I can't be sure, but I would say there were five or six of them attacking almost simultaneously. Zwicker and I got in a few bursts before they disappeared over the top of our ship."

“There was only one attack. The nose was not hit but, from the feel of it, I would say we were raked from the flight deck on back. Immediately after the attack, our ship veered sharply to the right and down. I observed the right wing and #4 engine to be on fire. Although attempted, there was no interphone communication. Zwicker and I snapped on our chest packs, and I opened the nose wheel door. During these few seconds, we had fallen 5,000 feet and the ship was entering a tight spiral to the right.

“At this point I shook hands with Zwicker and dove out. He was in good shape apparently, and was ready to follow, since the nose had not been hit. When the opportunity to observe came, after a delayed chute opening, I couldn’t tell from which ship I had jumped, as there were several B-24s and fighters going down. I doubt if our bomb load had been salvoed. I saw four or five other chutes at various altitudes and distances from me, but I had no way of telling if they were from my ship or not. From there to the ground I was busy observing the German aircraft which were flying rather close to the chutes. I did not see the fighters fire at any chute, though.

“Upon reaching the ground, I was almost immediately rounded up by civilians with dogs. The civilians were hostile, but the German soldiers who took me from them were not. I might add here that none of our crew carried side arms. Later, somewhere along the chain of interrogation, solitary confinement, hospital, then prison camp, I saw Greyhosky and Dayberry, who apparently knew no more than I concerning the fate of the remaining crew members. Greyhosky’s mind apparently went completely blank as he remembers nothing except waking up on the ground and being taken prisoner.

“It is my opinion that Capt. Henderson, if he was not hit, remained at his position in an attempt to bring the ship under control until it was too late to escape. I saw no midair explosion.”

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #41-23779 G, Taylor	4-Q-2		Returned to base
67th Squadron Crew:	Entire crew missing, but returned		
TAYLOR, EDWARD F. ASN T-121030	Pilot	Flight Officer	Perry, Oklahoma
VAN ESS, RALPH E. ASN 0-735127	Co-pilot	2nd Lt. Wisconsin	Green Bay,
MURPHY, WILLIAM T. ASN 0-801142	Navigator	2nd. Lt. New York	Highland Falls,
TOLBERT, WITHERS V. ASN 0-734541	Bombardier	2nd. Lt.	Lubbock, Texas
BAGGE, WALTER B. ASN 11071279	Radio Oper.	S/Sgt.	Springfield, Massachusetts
BENNETT, MICHAEL J. ASN 33291490	Eng./Top Turret	S/Sgt. Pennsylvania	Fayette City,
DZWONKOWSKI, HENRY J. ASN 35318190	Ball Turret	S/Sgt.	Cleveland, Ohio
HUNT, ROBERT E. ASN 35470700	RW Gunner	S/Sgt. Ohio	Dayton,
MARION, SID T. ASN 34303358	LW Gunner	S/Sgt.	Asheboro, North Carolina
McKINNEY, DONALD W. ASN 35662959	Tail Turret	S/Sgt.	Dayton, Ohio

Note: William Murphy was killed in action on 18 November 1943.

A fourth missing crew from the 67th Squadron was that of Flight Officer Edward F. Taylor, who later was MIA on 1 December 1943. S/Sgt. Donald W. McKinney, tail gunner on this aircraft states, "We were shot up rather badly. The radio and electric systems were shot out as well as #3 engine. We landed at an Aussie fighter base outside of Bari, Italy. We were there for five or six days working on our plane – all but the radio – and then went back to Tunis.

"Most of the Group had gone back to England ahead of us. Our plane was called 4-Q-2. No one had heard from us until we returned to Shipdham. We were listed as MIA. Lt. Taylor, our pilot, flew all the way back to England with a live 20-mm unexploded shell in his chest parachute!!"

No casualties on this crew.

67th Sq., #42-72860 N, Butler	MISS EMMY LOU	Crash-landed
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No serious injuries

Lt. Richard Butler, in Miss Emmy Lou (42-72860 N), crash-landed near Catania with no serious injuries. (Catania is on the eastern coast of Sicily, and was Allied territory at the time of the crash.)

68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq., #41-24009	MARGARET ANN	Landed in Bari
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68th Squadron Crew:

KESSLER, JOSEPH D.	Pilot	1st Lt.	
ALTEMUS, WILLIAM B.	Co-pilot	Fl. Officer	
SAFOS, VANGELO S.	Navigator	2nd Lt.	
VAN DER LINDE, HAROLD	Bombardier	2nd Lt.	
LOPEZ, VICTOR R. ASN 12088339	Radio Oper. Wounded	T/Sgt.	
BAKER, LANNING C. ASN 35350340	Eng./Top Turret	T/Sgt.	
O'LAUGHAN, WALTER E. ASN 16018752	Ball Turret	S/Sgt.	
NOSAL, JOHN A. ASN 17029388	RW Gunner Wounded	S/Sgt.	Omaha, Nebraska
ACKLEY, GORDON E. ASN 17035928	LW Gunner Wounded	S/Sgt.	Mankato Minnesota
STOROVICH, ROBERT D. ASN 37332475	Tail Turret Wounded	S/Sgt.	Norfolk, Nebraska

Note: William Altemus became a pilot. He was killed when his aircraft was shot down on 8 April 1944. Lanning Baker was part of that crew. He survived and was taken prisoner. John Nosal also went down on 8 April 1944 and was taken prisoner. He was with the Townsend crew.

L. C. Baker recalls: "We were hit hard by both fighters and flak over the target area. Vic Lopez, who normally sat at his equipment, stepped down into the bomb bay for some reason and by doing so escaped some of the flying pieces of metal from a shell that exploded in the radio compartment. A piece of something cut the back of my right flying boot but did not touch me. I was in the top turret at the time.

“We took a direct hit of flak between the right waist gun and the tail. The waist gunners, Ackley and Nosal were both badly wounded in the legs. The tail gunner, Bob Storovich, was hit in the spinal area by flak.

“We came out of the battle with all four engines running, but #1 was smoking badly. With three wounded crewmen, no radio equipment, and the hydraulic system shot out, the pilot decided we should get down as quickly as possible.

“We landed on a grass runway on a field near Bari, Italy – not too far from the front – manned by Canadians flying Spitfires. On our approach, we cranked down the flaps and the landing gear saving what hydraulic pressure we had left for the brakes. The Canadians fired flares indicating we should not try to land on such a short strip. With our radio out, we had no way of telling them our problem, so we just proceeded to land.

“We used all the landing strip and then some. Much to the surprise of the Canadians, we did no damage to their strip, but we did tear up a wire fence and leave some deep ruts in a tomato field beyond.

“We immediately got ambulances for the wounded and they were taken to an American Field Hospital somewhere to the south of where we landed. The next day we went to the hospital to visit and determine the extent of their wounds. We were told that Gordon Ackley would have to be sent to the States for special surgery, then, no doubt, he would be discharged. I have never heard just what did happen to him. Johnny Nosal was to remain in a hospital for a couple of months. He returned to the squadron around Christmas time, 1943.

“John finally went back to flying duty and was shot down on the same day I was – 8 April 1944. However, we were not on the same plane. He and I spent the rest of the war at Stalag 17B. Bobby Storovich was paralyzed from the waist down. A small piece of flak damaged his spinal column, causing the problem. We kept in touch until he died in the mid-1950s while living in California.

“The Canadian Spitfire pilots shared what they had with us. They were housed in an old tobacco warehouse that served as a mess hall and sleeping quarters. After our evening meal, we were given stretchers with short legs on which to sleep. The one I was assigned had been occupied by a pilot that was shot down a few days before we arrived.

“Along about dark, the Canadian pilot who had the cot next to me came in carrying a couple of packages. He introduced himself while undoing one of the packages. It turned out that each parcel contained a bottle of Canadian Club. These pilots routinely got one bottle per month. He had received two because the Squadron was short several pilots and by the luck of the draw, he had an extra one. He’d had a hard day and so had I so we made the situation more pleasant by consuming most of one bottle. I had a good night’s sleep but a terrible headache the next morning.

“I returned his hospitality in part by giving him my fleece-lined flying suit along with the boots, one of which had been damaged by the flak. He was most grateful, because he said it was much better than anything he had.

“We eventually were taken to an American Air Base where we were returned to England via Air Transport Command. Whatever happened to the B-24? As far as I know, it may be still sitting there.” (Editor’s note: No such luck; it was repaired and transferred to the Mediterranean Theater of Operations.)

68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq., #41-23816 X, Whitaker	BLACK JACK	MACR #3312
68th Squadron Crew:		
WHITAKER, COLEMAN S. ASN 0-885920	Pilot KIA, buried Lorraine (C-17-3)	1st Lt. Petersburg, Tennessee
SCARLETT, THEODORE B. ASN 0-660006	Co-pilot POW	1st Lt. Erie, Pennsylvania
VIKERY, EUGENE P. ASN 0-794077	Navigator POW	1st Lt. Canajoharie, New York
GUILFORD, GEORGE W. ASN 14035289	Bombardier POW	T/Sgt. Hartford, Alabama
CARLSON, EDWIN L. ASN 13039285	Asst. Engineer POW	S/Sgt. McKeesport, Pennsylvania
BAUMAN, FRANCIS A. ASN 39020115	Radio Oper. KIA, buried Lorraine (C-19-71)	T/Sgt. Los Angeles, California
RICHE, WILSON A. ASN 32143092	Eng. KIA	T/Sgt. Auburn, New York
SMITH, ROBERT M. ASN 13027651	Waist Gunner KIA, buried Ardennes (B-44-53)	M/Sgt. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
DAMICO, ANTHONY ASN 38197204	Waist Gunner KIA, buried Lorraine (A-22-20)	S/Sgt. Maringovin, Louisiana
REASONER, ROBERT J. ASN 34242418	Tail Turret POW, repatriated	S/Sgt. New Plymouth, Ohio

2nd Lt. Coleman S. Whitaker was the pilot of this 68th Squadron aircraft. The MACR states in part, "This aircraft was observed to be hit in the bomb bay by flak shortly after turning away from the target. It fell back, and peeled off to the left, losing altitude; and then it passed directly under another aircraft. It was burning in the bomb bay section. Three chutes came out at this time. It drifted back to the left and passed over the top of another aircraft in the formation, and then swerved to the right and seven more parachutes were observed. The plane then turned to the right and broke into two pieces.

George Guilford, a T/Sgt. bombardier, added these comments, "We were over the target and were getting hit by flak and fighters, but I didn't know to what extent. There were no communications between the crew members at that time. The navigator, Eugene Vickery, tapped me on my shoulder and said, 'I'm bailing out'. I didn't know anything about the rest of the crew at that time. A few seconds later, the plane got a direct hit from flak and went into a nose dive – and I could not bail out. Soon, the plane exploded and blew me out. I was knocked out for a few seconds and when I came to, I was falling – and opened my chute. I could see small pieces of the plane floating around..."

"I was captured as soon as I hit the ground and was carried to the hospital with shrapnel wounds in my neck. At the hospital they told me they had a crew member of mine there – and it was Bob Reasoner, the tail turret gunner. He was severely burned on his face and head. Also, that was when I learned about our plane being on fire. I was hospitalized for two weeks and was then sent to Stalag 17B. I think they repatriated Reasoner a few months later. [Editor's note: It is correct that Reasoner was repatriated.] Carlson was in the same POW camp with me."

506th SQUADRON:

506th Sq., #42-72857 Bar-X, Olson	STAR SPANGLED HELL		
506th Squadron Crew:			
OLSON, STANLEY F. ASN 0-730588	Pilot KIA, WOM Florence	1st Lt.	Salt Lake City, Utah
ROBERTS, EDGAR W. ASN T-357	Co-pilot POW	Flt Of.	San Jose, California
ALLEN, RONALD S. Jr. ASN 0-408633	Navigator POW	Capt.	Wagoner, Oklahoma
HANSON, CHESTER B. ASN 0-667289	Bombardier POW	2nd Lt.	Ft. Dodge, Iowa
GOODSON, WALTER N. ASN 35255236	Engineer POW	S/Sgt.	Evansville, Indiana
HEARNE, ALLIE T. Jr. ASN 18059989	Radio Oper. POW	T/Sgt.	Jasper, Texas
BELL, J. R. ASN 39094739	Asst. POW	Eng. S/Sgt.	San Bernardino, California
FERKAUFF, OSCAR ASN 38157563	Armorer POW	S/Sgt.	Kansas City, Missouri
BUGYIE, STEVE F. ASN 16131104	Ball Turret Evadee, POW	S/Sgt.	Exeland, Wisconsin
McMENAMIN, VICTOR A. ASN 16037239	Tail Turret POW	S/Sgt.	DeKalb, Illinois

1st Lt. Stanley F. Olson was the pilot of this 506th Squadron aircraft. The MACR states: "Approximately 125 to 150 enemy aircraft made vicious attacks on this formation in the target area at 1140 hours. It was hit individually by five Me 109s with nose and passing attacks, very close. This aircraft dropped its bombs and peeled off to the right and was still pursued by five fighters. No chutes observed."

Steve Bugyie, ball turret operator, adds, "I think that I may have been the last one to depart the airplane – and the first to hit the ground. I delayed pulling my ripcord until the last minute and this, according to Vic McMEnamin, tail gunner, may have saved my life. Vic was adjusting his harness when I came out of the ball turret, and he accidentally dropped my chest pack chute down into the turret. I had to crawl back into the turret to retrieve it. Victor claims that he pulled his ripcord right away and saw the ship blow into pieces.

"Due to the flames from the burning bomb bay tank, we do not know who left the plane last. Bell and Ferkauff, the waist gunners, were already gone. It may be that reports of only eight chutes accounts for my being reported as missing in action. I was loose for four days and made about 120 kilometers due west.

"After I got to the ground, my face felt like I had a bad sunburn. The fires were so intense that there was molten aluminum stuck to my face. The molten metal and exploding aircraft may account for the many holes that I had observed in my parachute.

"I did not normally belong to Olson's crew, as I was flying as a spare gunner for that day only. I was the regular assistant engineer with Lt. Bunce. Lt. Olson may have stayed with the airplane too long as no one ever saw or heard of him again. I think that I had 15 missions when I went down."

Due to the flames from the burning bomb bay tank, we do not know who left the plane last. Lt. Olson may have stayed with the airplane too long as no one ever saw or heard of him again. Bell and Ferkauff, the waist gunners, were already gone.

Up in the nose of the ship, Ron Allen could see the fire in the bomb bay, and was preparing to go out through the nose wheel doors. He snapped on his chest harness chute and moved toward the doors. He recalls: ‘Suddenly I was stopped. I had forgotten to disconnect my communications and oxygen equipment. I quickly disconnected them and jumped. The fires singed my wrists, jacket and hair. As I drifted down, I looked up to see my parachute was full of holes. I didn’t know if I had pulled the ripcord too soon. The chute may have struck the ball turret guns as I went by. There was also the possibility that the turret gunner may have put a few holes in the chute since he was still in the turret and firing.’

On the flight deck, Goodson and Hearne were both burned by the fires that were raging in the bomb bay when they jumped. Goodson also had quite a chunk of skin torn loose when he hit the catwalk in the bomb bay.

Norm Kiefer remembers there were a lot of planes, both bombers and fighters that were burning in the target area. Around this time, Ron Allen and Steve Bugyie were drifting to the ground in their parachutes. Ron reports: “I jumped at 11:45 when our aircraft was at 16,500 feet (we should have been at 22,000 over the target). It was 12:00 noon when I reached the ground. I was hungry, tired, and disgusted. I had an escape kit, but it was not intended to be used in this area. It had Francs in it rather than money that was appropriate to this area. I had an apple that I had obtained the night before. That was all I had to eat for three days except for berries that I could scrounge. On that third day, I was in a thinly wooded area. As I was lying down trying to figure out what to do to get across a road, I suddenly heard a stick pop behind me. When I turned to look, I saw an Austrian army doctor. I later learned that he was on leave from the Russian front.

“The doctor was with his family visiting a farm. The doctor could speak English just as well as I could. He sat down and we visited a while. At one point, the doctor said, ‘Well, the war is going to be over in about 18 months.’ He then went back to rejoin the others. He didn’t attempt to capture me. He told his wife about me and they discussed what to do. He brought me something to eat. He then told me that they had decided, for their own protection, to turn me in. We went to the farmhouse and they gave me some warmed milk. Having been brought up on a dairy farm, warm milk just did not appeal to me.

“One of the farm girls said something and the doctor broke out laughing. He slapped me on the shoulder and said, ‘Do you know what she said?’ I replied, ‘I have no idea.’ The doctor then told me, ‘The girl thinks you are good looking.’ There I was, unshaven and my clothing was filthy. What did she see?

“The farmer sent a boy that was about 12 years old for the local constabulary. They put me in the local jail and all the kids from around that town hooted at me. I don’t know whether or not they were making fun of me.”

Steve Bugyie continues: “When I came down, I landed in quite a large pine tree. In order to get down, I had to climb on the shroud lines and broke the top of the tree off. When I hit the ground, I am certain that I was unconscious for a short period of time. When I woke up, I hid in some evergreens. It was fairly late in the afternoon when I heard the whistles of the Germans who were out searching for me. I took off in a westerly direction heading for Switzerland. It was then that I made the rule that I would only travel at night.

“When I stopped, I found a haystack and went to sleep in it. I was startled awake when I heard a blast from an 88-mm antiaircraft gun. There apparently was a German encampment near there. It was daylight, but I went back to sleep and slept most of the day. When I tried to look out of the stack, I couldn’t see anything. It was mostly an open field in front of me.

“As soon as the sun went down, I took off again. I was loose for three nights and four days. By walking and trotting, from sundown to sunup, I was able to make 190 kilometers (about 120 miles). The next to last night I was loose, I couldn’t find any cover so I slept in a small hay field behind a tavern. It was around noontime when I heard some rustling in the grass next to me. When I looked, I saw a water spaniel smelling me. About 50 yards away was a German hunter, an old fellow with a shotgun. I just lay there and the hunter walked on. When night fell, I took off again.

“I was weak from dysentery as well as the lack of food and water. It was on the fourth day when I approached some people. I was hoping that I could get some help. I spoke to them in German. After a brief conversation, they spoke to one of the people in Hungarian, or some other language. I thought they were sending for food. Instead, they went to bring the Home Guard. The next thing I knew, I was surrounded. I was taken back to Wiener Neustadt. On the following day, Lt. Matson, a pilot from the 389th and I were transported to Dulag Luft.”

Operations from Shipdham

4 October 1943

Diversion to Assist B-17 Attack, Frankfurt, Germany

The 8th Air Force operations order of 4 October called for the 392nd to lead two formations of eighteen airplanes each across the North Sea, with feigning attacks toward Wilhelmshaven and toward Emden. The purpose was to draw German fighters from the B-17 formations on their big attack on the factory complexes of Frankfurt, Germany. If shipping convoys were sighted, we were to bomb them. The 392nd flew alone except for one flight consisting of six 44th and three 93rd aircraft. Most of their ships and crews were still returning from action in North Africa.

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #42-72873, Stamos	RAGGEDY ANN II	MACR #5149
67th Squadron Crew:		
STAMOS, ROBERT G. ASN 0-730646	Pilot Returned to duty	1st Lt. Danville, Illinois
METTS, HOWARD W. ASN T-201	Co-pilot Returned to duty	Flight Officer Hampton, Virginia
MUST, JOHN A. ASN 0-801384	Navigator KIA, WOM Cambridge	2nd Lt. Bronx, New York
CAMPBELL, DONALD G. ASN 0-734422	Bombardier KIA, WOM Cambridge	2nd Lt. Brookville, Massachusetts
AUTRY, HERMAN J. ASN 34266826	Radio Oper. Returned to duty	Sgt. Athens, Georgia
KOWALSKI, ANDREW A. ASN 33168900	Eng./Top Turret Returned to duty	Sgt. Reading, Pennsylvania
O'BLACK, JAMES A.	Ball Turret Wounded, shot through cheek	Sgt. Zelienople, Pennsylvania
WOJCIK, EDWARD S. ASN 39094162	RW Gunner Returned to duty	S/Sgt. Portland, Oregon
MILLERBIS, CALVIN A. ASN 39103451	LW Gunner Returned to duty	Sgt. Arcata, California
MORRIS, WILLIAM F. ASN 12138123	Tail Turret Returned to duty	S/Sgt. Canandaigua, New York

Note: Lt. Robert G. Stamos, pilot, was later KIA (11 April 1944) while flying as co-pilot for Lt. John D. Money.

On this diversion, the aircraft piloted by Lt. Stamos, was attacked head-on by several single-engine enemy aircraft and was severely damaged. The two pilots lost control and the plane went into a spin. The two officers in the nose of this ship, Lts. Must and Campbell, followed bail out orders from Lt. Stamos.

However, Lt. Stamos and co-pilot Howard Metts were able to regain control again at 5,000 feet by utilizing the automatic pilot system. Fortunately, other members did not bail out as some were too busy giving aid to a wounded gunner (James O'Black), while others were trying to assist the

pilot and co-pilot with their parachutes. Both the navigator and bombardier drowned at sea and their bodies were never recovered.

Sgt. Autry recalled, “Most of our original crew with Lt. Stamos was on this raid. Our co-pilot was F/O Howard Metts...I am sure that he saved my life! After Lt. Stamos pushed the bail-out button, F/O Metts stayed with the controls until he could activate the auto-pilot...Metts [fought] with those controls until he got the plane out of the spin.

“This was the first mission for our crew since we returned from North Africa...we didn’t make that Ploesti mission, and this is why. After leaving Lands End, England on the flight down, we set down in Lisbon, Portugal. We were interned in Lisbon for about a month until we were able to get a flight out on a regular British Airline.”

This was the first and only mission for James O’Black. Though shot through his cheek, James survived, and returned to ground support work.

Like the other returning crewmembers, Bill Morris was assigned to other crews. He was shot down on the 1 December 1943 raid on Solingen, Germany and was taken prisoner.

506th SQUADRON:

506th Sq., #42-40989, Johnston		MACR #940
506th Squadron Crew:	Entire crew KIA	
JOHNSTON, FREDERICK V. ASN 0-675349	Pilot KIA, WOM Cambridge	2nd Lt. Passaic, New Jersey
DUDRICH, JOHN ASN 0-684699	Co-pilot KIA, WOM Cambridge	2nd Lt. Bridgeport, Connecticut
LARSEN, GEORGE N. (67th Sq.) ASN 0-744855	Navigator KIA, WOM Cambridge	2nd Lt. Deep River, Iowa
FREDRICKS, ADRIAN E. ASN 0-734663	Bombardier KIA, WOM Cambridge	2nd Lt. Sheboygan, Wisconsin
GREEN, DONALD ASN 35462147	Engineer KIA, WOM Cambridge	S/Sgt. Cincinnati, Ohio
ANDRIS, EUGENE E. ASN 16028759	Radio Oper. KIA, WOM Margraten	S/Sgt. Marietta, Ohio
IDLET, PHILLIP D. ASN 17015167	Belly Gun KIA, WOM Margraten	Sgt. St. Joseph, Missouri
PEST, DAVID ASN 14130256	RW Gunner KIA, WOM Margraten	Sgt. Hattiesburg, Mississippi
SHORT, EMERSON D. ASN 35339045	LW Gunner KIA, WOM Margraten	Sgt. Archbold, Ohio
FUNKHOUSER, EUGENE H. ASN 35495933	Tail Turret KIA, WOM Cambridge	S/Sgt. Ft. Morgan, Colorado

Note: Larsen was with the 67th Squadron.

Diversions were usually considered “milk runs”, but this turned out to be anything but that when this formation succeeded in attracting 30 to 50 single-engine enemy aircraft. These “yellow noses” attacked and one of these bandits slashed through the formation. It was hit by the B-24 gunners, which knocked off its wing and it lost control and slammed into the aircraft piloted by Lt. F. V. Johnston. The collision sent both planes down into the sea. There were no survivors from this 506th Squadron crew.

For additional information concerning this mission, refer to the December 1975 issue of the Second Air Division Association Journal, pages 6-7. The article is entitled "We Remember: The Great Diversion Mission" and was written by Myron H. Kielman and Harrison S. Cassell, Jr. of the 392nd Bomb Group. The authors note: "Our low squadron was made up of both the 44th and the 93rd Groups...the fighters worked them over good because they didn't have nose turrets." The 392nd had been operational for about a month and was equipped with new B-24H models.

11 October 1943

Oudna #2, Libya, North Africa

Ten days after the 1 October mission to Wiener Neustadt, we suffered one more casualty due, in part, to that raid. 66th Squadron aircraft #42-40764 was badly damaged on 1 October 43, and was forced to make an emergency landing at Palermo, Italy with one engine out and the wing almost burned through.

The co-pilot, James Kahl, recalls: "I was Deputy Command Pilot on the mission – Lt. Col. Posey was in the lead ship. Just before the target area, he asked us to take over – something about the bombsight. Shortly after, we were hit by fighters and our #1 was set on fire. After bombing, we abandoned the formation to prepare for whatever. Even though the fire kept burning, we were able to land at Palermo, Sicily – a day after the 7th Army had taken it. On landing, there was a circle of red, burnt metal almost the width of the wing – why that rascal didn't blow, I don't know."

The crew spent several days patching up their ship in order to return to base, and when they finally arrived, they found that most of the 44th Bomb Group had returned to England. As their radio was inoperative, they could not call the base to advise their position.

66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #42-40764 M-Bar, Irby	HELEN B. HAPPY		Emergency landing
66th Squadron Crewman:			
IRBY, SHELBY L.	Pilot	1st Lt.	Watson, Arkansas
KAHL, JAMES W.	Co-pilot	Capt.	Winona, Minnesota
STERNBERGER, NATHAN L.	Navigator	Flight Officer	Springfield, Ohio
SAENGER, LESTER E. ASN 0-734982	Bombardier KIA	2nd Lt.	Chicago, Illinois
PARYLAK, JOSEPH	Radio Oper.	T/Sgt.	Providence, Rhode Island
THOMPSON, LESLIE E.	Eng./Top Turret	T/Sgt.	Meridian, Mississippi
EVANS, LUCIUS R.	Belly Gunner	T/Sgt.	Greenville, South Carolina
RICKEY, JAMES W.	RW Gunner	S/Sgt.	Albany, Ohio
COX, JOHN F.	LW Gunner	S/Sgt.	Antioch, California

BRITT, WILLIAM B.	Observer	2nd Lt.	
RENDALL, WILLIAM A.	Passenger	2nd Lt.	Buffalo, New York

Note: This listing shows eleven, but there were others on board who cannot be identified. After the emergency landing, the plane was salvaged.

Norman Ross, who was the navigator on the original Irby crew, noted that the name “Helen B. Happy” was picked for John Cox’s wife, Helen. Ross recalled, “It was a play on words as we were quite sure where we were going, but we would be happy about it. John was a former California state trooper and a heck of a good Armor Gunner.”

On 11 October, Lt. Irby and his crew of 10, along with three other men, took off from Libya bound for Marrakech, Morocco, the first leg of the trip back to England. But shortly after take off and at about 600 feet altitude, all power was lost. The pilots put the plane into a glide to attempt a wheels-up crash-landing. But just when the plane lost power, Lt. Saenger decided to bail out.

Lt. William Rendall, navigator, adds, “We had climbed just enough for Saenger and I to go down to the nose compartment. When we lost power, Saenger put on his chest pack and opened the nose wheel door. I put my hand on his shoulder and when he looked at me, I shook my head – but he had ditched once and did not intend to crash-land. He went out over a slight valley where he probably had his best chance. I climbed up on the navigator’s table and braced myself to the left side because I could see a row of trees coming up. We clipped the tops of the trees and Irby put her down tail low on the first six feet of plowed land – wheels up, no power.

“She plowed a 150 yard furrow through the field, and when I put my feet down, I was standing on bare ground with my head in the astro dome in a crouched position. I was trying to loosen the wing nuts of the astro dome when Irby kicked it in so I could get out. We used gun barrels to pry out the waist windows to get the people out of the rear, many of whom were badly cut up.

“A French Lieutenant raced over in a Jeep and told me that he had seen the chute come out. I jumped into the Jeep and the two of us went back to where Saenger’s body was. Obviously, his back was broken, but I still feel that he almost made it – just a few more feet would have done it. I remember that I sat down in that desert and cried...”

Of the Helen B. Happy crash landing Norman Ross notes: “This was probably the only take off that I ever missed with the crew...All of the crew came back after this crash except for Les Saenger. Of course, he should have rode the ship down, but it was not his way. He was always the most nervous one of the crew and I can remember him saying that if anything went wrong with the aircraft, he was going to get out. The rest of us all returned to Shipdham for many more missions over Germany, but not with the Helen B. Happy...”

5 November 1943

Munster, Germany

The specific target here was the railroad junction that supplied traffic and war materiel through the Ruhr Valley, both by rail and canal. The flak in this area lived up to its reputation, ranging from heavy, accurate, intense to moderate. Flak Alley it was! Many were wounded. The target was hit visually.