

The Wartime Diary of Captain Howard Adams



Capt. Adams' diary was transcribed by his relatives. It covers the time period from October 3, 1942 to February 22, 1943. See the book, "The Writing 69th" by Jim Hamilton (www.greenharbor.com) for more details on the mission of February 26, 1943 when his B-24 was shot down.

About Captain Howard F. Adams, S/N 0-23946

44th Bomb Group – 66th Squadron, stationed at Shipdham, England

Advanced Flying School – Albany, Georgia – January. March 6, 1942

66th Bomb Squadron, 44th Bomb Group – Barksdale Field, Louisiana – March to July 1942

66th Bomb Squadron, 44th bomb Group – Will Rogers Field, Oklahoma – July to September 1942

66th Bomb Squadron, 44th bomb Group – Cheddington, England – October 1942

Commissioned 1st Lieutenant – June 29, 1942; Commissioned Captain – October 10, 1942

Killed in Action, February 26, 1943 – Bad Zwischenahn, Germany

Buried – Ardennes Military Cemetery, Neupre, Belgium, Plot B, Row 33, Grave 5

His name is on the World War II memorial in his home town, Rutland, Vermont, in the new armory.

October 3, 1942

This autumn day finds me in England near Cheddington some 35 miles from London. Three weeks ago I was in Florida on a practice hop. Two weeks ago, I was in Boston, spending the happiest weekend of my life with Laura. We didn't do much, mostly talk, eat a little, drink a bit, and rest. Would that I could have married Laura on that weekend, but the cursed war would not let it be so. A week ago, I took off from Manchester, NH in my B-24D for the wilds of Newfoundland landing at Gander Lake five hours later. A more miserable and bleak place is hard to imagine. No towns, no roads, few people, but much wind and bitter cold, too. 'Twas this weather that held us grounded for two days before our big hop across the Atlantic to Prestwick, Scotland. In the main, it was a rather uneventful trip particularly after my nervousness wore off.

My "old" B-24, "Maisie," was rather sluggish on take-off being loaded to capacity with 3,145 gallons of gas and a mess of luggage and equipment for the those aboard her. On board were my crew, Lts. McLeod – co-pilot; Gotke – navigator; Haman (or Hannon) – bombardier; and Sgts. Vogt – engineer; Jones, L.F. – assistant engineer; Rolfe – radio operator; Mifflin – assistant radio operator; and Brewer – my tail gunner. Sgt. Cotterman was also on board as a passenger.

As we pulled up slowly turning on our course out over the Atlantic it was black as pitch, but soon the full moon came out making a beautiful sight shining through the clouds. It was nearly midnight G.M.T. when we leveled off at 500 feet. Here we stayed for several hours to keep below the icing level. After a bit we started climbing up through the overcast picking up a little ice on the wings on the way up, but when we got to 7,000 feet, it was warmer and clear – the ice soon melted off and we all felt much better. Only occasionally did we see the cold Atlantic beneath up through holes in the cloud layer below us.

About every hour my navigator would call up and give our approximate position and the change in course. Everything worked smoothly as our automatic pilot was doing the work now – allowing me to sit and watch the compass and other instruments and making the necessary adjustments to keep us on course. And so passed the night of September 29-30, 1942, until finally it began to grow light to the east. One of the most beautiful and breath-taking sunrises I have ever seen followed soon after. The air was crystal clear and as the sun rose out of the water, it painted everything a golden color. Soon, thereafter, my navigator called up that we should see land before long and I started gradual letdown. We hit some thick clouds and had to go down to 1,000 ft. to get beneath them. The Atlantic looked cold and gray and after flying for about 15 minutes after our ETA, we saw a mountain that seemed to stick out of the water. So we climbed back up through the overcast and passed over Dernacross, Ireland, changing our course for Prestwick, Scotland. 'Twas here that we saw Bob Miller who had taken off some three or four minutes after we had – so we flew in formation til we arrived at Prestwick where, after flying around a bit to orient ourselves, we dipped a wing and came in for a landing, exhausted, but happy at 11 G.M.T.

After eating dinner, we went to our quarters – a private house where I fell in bed not to wake up til nine the next morning.

October 1, 1942

At noon found us in the air once more – our squadron of nine B-24's headed this time for a field near Cheddington, England. After searching for the field a bit – there being so many others around that it was confusing – we fell into a nine-ship trail and one after another peeled off and came in for a landing. The ground echelon who we had not seen since leaving Oklahoma City on August 24, 1942, gave us a joyous welcome, rushing us off to the Officer's Club for a good meal.

October 7, 1942

Since our arrival here, we have done practically nothing except get accustomed to the English money and left-side-of-the-road driving. We have made our tin huts fairly livable, but they are far from luxurious. Black Jack and poker have been the best ways to pass the time away with occasional trips into the nearby villages of Tring, Aylesboro [Aylesbury], and Layton-Buzzard [Leighton-Buzzard] for a round of ---, etc.

October 10, 1942

Today, we moved again, this time to a field near Norwich, England on the coast of the North Sea some 50 miles from Amsterdam. It was a very short flight of less than 100 miles. The Germans are still closer now, but still no signs of action. Our new field is good, but the quarters are worse than ever – no running water and poor sanitation facilities. It's very cold at night, making it necessary to use four or five blankets. The only incident to mar our flight was a very bad accident at the end of our flight. The British navigator, who was guiding the squadron in Major Key's plane, walked into a spinning propeller inuring his head severely and cutting his right arm. It is expected that he will live, however. Except for a little difficulty in finding the field and Lt. Miller's hard landing which jarred his bomb bay luggage racks loose the flight was very smooth. Several British "Spitfires" came up to look us over, but stayed a respectable distance away. The 67th and 68th squadrons came in a bit later and there was much talk about the trip over the Atlantic. They were scattered all over Ireland and England because of the bad weather. Expect we shall get to work soon. So far, have done nothing but sit around and wait.

October 15, 1942

Still nothing. Several B-17 pilots, navigators, and radiomen from Bovington have been giving us lectures on radio procedure, operations technique, etc. for the past several days. They have been over France several times on bombing missions with quite a bit of success and only three or four planes lost. One B-17 lost most of its tail by flak, but got home safely. Another B-17 was hit by flak starting No. 2 engine on fire and wounding a waist gunner. Order was given to abandon ship as the fire had burnt most of the wing away near the engine and was trailing back as far as the tail surfaces. Waist gunner was pushed overboard by other gunner who pulled the wounded man's ripcord as he left the ship. Was last seen floating down to earth over France. Fire went out soon thereafter and so other men remained aboard and limped safely home. One B-17 on another occasion lost its tail gunner who let a Me 109 sneak up behind him and get in a burst with his 20mm cannon. It practically decapitated the gunner's head. A big bombing raid by the British took place the other night. Hundreds of two and four-engine bombers flew over just at dusk heading for Germany. The British navigator who was hit by the prop the other day has recovered amazingly fast and should be up and around in a month or so.

October 18, 1942

This autumn Sunday finds me sitting in my room listening to a symphony orchestra. Still no flying or no word from home – in fact, no mail as yet. Yesterday Bob Miller, Bill Brandon, Wild Bill McCoy, Kolliner and most of the 66th went into the neighboring city of Norwich. Rode our bikes over to Thuxston and caught a train from there. The division of the train into compartments for about ten people surprised us somewhat. Our first impression of Norwich, a city of about 135,000, was the numerous buildings that had been blasted by bombs or gutted by fire. Several churches, one railroad station, and many stores and apartment houses had been reduced to shambles. The Germans used Norwich for target practice back in 1940 and 1941 and still it is occasionally bombed. After searching for several hours for a place to stay, we finally found a small, shabby hotel of an ancient vintage that

had rooms of a sort for Miller and me. We then went over to the Royal Hotel for dinner of fillet sole which was good, but not much to get fat on. After strolling the streets a bit, we went to a dance at the Samson and Hercules Inn. Scotch soldiers in their kilts, British soldiers and sailors, W.A.A.F.'s, and many U.S. officers and men filled the dance hall. Everyone danced the peculiar British windmill sort of dancing. After the dance, we were so tired we went to bed, to ride back to Thuxston in a taxi this morning. We got our bikes and struggled the rest of the way (4 miles) back to the field, tired and exhausted.

October 28, 1942

Have been quite busy for a change. On the 20th, we flew down to Bovingdon with Major Posey and Lt. Pauly in an effort to fix my plane up with armor plate, more guns, etc. Were supposed to pick up a captain there to go with us over to Burtonwood over near Liverpool, but the weather closed in there so we took off to go back to Shipdham. No sooner had we gotten to 500 feet, than we were in the soup and so we hedge-hopped all the way home to try again the next day with better luck this time. On the 21st, we got off early, picked up the captain at Bovingdon and flew on over to Burtonwood where, to our dismay, we found out that the depot there was far too busy fixing up Col. Roosevelt's B-17's to bother with us. After spending a most comfortable night in a steam-heated building – Bruce Hall (as it was called), we flew back to our home station. The next day the 23rd of October, Lt. Pauly and my crew took off again for Burtonwood, this time to pick up a Capt. Birely and continue on the Langford Lodge, Ireland to another air depot. The weather was bad and so we were skimming the trees at 200-400 ft. every once in a while having to go on instruments even at that low altitude. Tiring of this and fearing I might plow into the hills that were nearby, we climb to 2,000 feet and continued on by instruments – the soup being pretty thick. As the weather didn't clear as was predicted and not caring to play around with the anchored balloons that surrounded Liverpool, I decided that it was best to descend and find a place to land. As luck would have it, we soon came to a big hole in the overcast and directly beneath was a large R.A.F. bomber airdrome. After circling a bit, we came in for a landing. It was a Wellington outfit and so swarms of R.A.F. came out to see our strange four-engine plane. Finding that the weather at Burtonwood was still stinko, we sent over to the R.A.F. officer's mess where we had a very fine dinner and a most enjoyable afternoon as guests of one of their squadron leaders who had tipped the bottle quite often and so was feeling pretty. After a few rounds of drinks ourselves, we sat down to a game of Black Jack, as the rain was still pouring down outside. I took my navigator and bombardier for a shellacking to the tune of a pound and a half. On finding out that we were on a satellite field we took off late that afternoon on a twelve-mile hop over to the main airdrome called Lichfield. Here again, we were made very welcome as guests of the R.A.F., given individual rooms with a "bat-boy" to do our every bidding and a nice, hot supper. We felt quite comfortable. Around eight that night we went to a dance they were having that night but being tired, I soon came home and went to bed.

Early in the morning of the 24th, my batboy woke me up and after a hearty English breakfast we took off once again for Burtonwood. Lt. Pauly went off to get Capt. Birely and after checking in at operations, we all went up to the Officer's Club for dinner. Taking off around two in the afternoon, we headed west out over the Irish Sea for Langford Lodge. Seeing the cold gray water beneath us made us wish we were headed back to the good old U.S.A. On landing at Langford Lodge, we were surprised to see four other B-24's circling to land. Later found out that they were from the 67th Squadron and flown over from Shipdham that afternoon. To our pleasant surprise we were greeted by many civilians from the Lockheed people who were doing repair work on U.S. planes stationed in the British Isles. Slept that night on a glorious innerspring mattress. Major Posey, Capt. Birely and I had a good time (that) night having a few drinks of Irish whiskey and Coca-Cola at "Langford Lodge"

– the name of their Officer’s Club. On the 25th, the weather was too bad to return home and then, too, a deep cut in the tire of my nose-wheel made it necessary to stay over another night. As the 67th ships were supposed to go on a special mission – rumor had it to Greenland – I was to take Major Posey back to Shipdham. That night Capt. Warne and I went down to Langford Lodge where we had a pleasant evening talking with some other American officers and nurses who were stationed there. On the morning of the 26th, the weather proved favorable and so we were off once more landing at Burtonwood to drop off Captain Birley. The industrial smoke and haze from nearby Liverpool was so thick that I had to make four passes at the field before I could hit the runway we were supposed to land on. Finally had to make instrument time turns to do it. What with many balloons and smoke stacks sticking up, it was not very comfortable flying around there. Checking the weather, we found that if we took off immediately, we could beat the front that was going to close in on Shipdham that afternoon. We took off again and as we neared home, the clouds were forcing me to get lower and lower until we were down to 500' once again. After wandering around a bit, we found the field and were home once more with nothing much accomplished. The weather and bad colds kept us on the ground for the next few days. The only thing of any importance was that on October 31st, I received my “Captaincy,” much to my satisfaction.

November 6, 1942

This afternoon I flew over to the 93rd Bomb Ground at Alconbury to visit Joe Tate. Delivered a message to Col. Timberlake from Col. Robinson and soon thereafter bumped into Lown, a former co-pilot of the 66th at Barksdale. As I still couldn’t find Joe I went into operations to get a clearance back to Shipdham. Though it was only a twenty-minute hop, the haze and setting sun made it extremely difficult to see the ground. Just as I was about to leave I ran into Joe. We talked about what had happened since we had separated at Grenier in Sept. Joe’s plane was so shot up in his first raid that he now has a new plane.

November 7, 1942

‘Tis a good thing I came home last night as this morning we went out on our first mission – a diversionary effort intended to draw German fighters away from the main raid. We were supposed to fly within 20 miles of the French Coast and then return. We took off at 10:00 a.m. sharp and some minutes later were again in formation. The 68th had a six-ship formation and Lt. Miller and I trailed along to fill in any vacancies in case any of the others had to drop out. We headed almost due south and started our climb to 20,000 feet, going up through an overcast some 10,000 feet thick. Though Lt. O’Brien of the 68th did a good job in leading, I lost the formation in going up through the overcast and had a hard time catching it again. At about 17,000 the formation started leaving six vapor trails behind it that made it look much as though they were releasing white smoke. The white trails were very pretty streaming out behind against the brilliant blue sky. Above 18,000 it was clear as a crystal and as we got near the southern coast of England, we could see straight to the ground. At the coast, we test fired our guns while waiting for the squadron of Spitfires who were supposed to join us there. My tail and top turrets refused to fire so I pulled away and headed for home along with Lt. DuBard – Miller filling the vacancy. The Spitfires never did show up and so the formation headed for France without them. I started letting down right away and almost immediately was back in the overcast and rain – on instruments. After around three-quarters of an hour we were down to 2,000 ft. and to our surprise all we could see was water underneath us. Quick like a fox, I headed due west for England hitting the coast again in a few minutes. The high winds at 20,000 had been faster than we had anticipated. After searing the countryside for an hour or so we located ourselves and followed a railroad track back to the field and landed. Everyone wanted to know what happened and seemed surprised when we told them nothing.

November 15, 1942

Am now in Belfast, Ireland. Flew over here to Langford Lodge to have some work done on my airplane – new gun installation, etc. I led a four-ship element over on Thursday, Lt. Miller and Lt. Kahl of the 66th and another Lt. From the 68th. We took off at 2:00 p.m. and landed here in Ireland, two hours and ten minutes later. We flew above the overcast most of the way across England, but as we reached the Irish Sea, it cleared up and became a nice sunny fall day. As we approached Langford Lodge, I signaled Miller and Kahl to go into a trail formation and dipped the nose of my dear old “Maisie,” and went into a long dive roaring over the field at over 200 mph at 500 ft. We then pulled up to a thousand feet, circled back over the field where we pulled off one after the other and came in for a landing. After giving instructions as to what was to be done to the ships, we all headed for town and a place to stay – the L.M.S. Hotel. Though I was tired, Miller and I went out to look over the town, finally ending up in the Embassy Club. Around midnight I returned to the hotel tired and weary only to find that I was locked out by huge iron gates that surrounded the entrance. To get in, I had to ring a bell which brought a bellboy to open the gate. I had been up since 4:30 that morning as we had been scheduled to go out on a mission to bomb some transport ships in the river near Bordeaux, France. It was finally called off on account of bad weather and then it was decided to send us to Ireland.

On the 9th of November, I had lent my plane and crew to Captain Nitsche to go on a raid over St. Nazaire, France. But as Lt. Sullivan, a West Point classmate of mine, had blown out a tire on his ship and my crew had bad colds, Sullivan took my plane on the raid. They ran into some ‘flak’ after they had dropped their bombs and my ship was hit making a hole about the size of your thumb in my left wing, but doing no damage.

On the 13th, Miller and I moved up to a larger hotel called the Grand Central. We went out to a U.S. Army PX where I bought a short overcoat and a lot of small odds and ends. That night we went to the Manhattan Club where I met a rather good looking and quite nice girl named Noreen Rodgers, as Irish as her first name, but quite up on anything American and just dying to jitterbug. The Irish girls seem to be much better dancers than are the English. Perhaps they dance more like Americans do. On Saturday afternoon, a bunch of us went out to the Ravenhill rugby grounds where we saw a football game between two U.S. Army service teams. It was a rather exciting game ending up in the Hale beating Yarvard 9-7 by virtue of a long field goal. It was quite a colorful game with a band and quite a few pretty girls floating around. Seemed almost as though we were back home again, except the barrage balloons floating over Belfast reminded us that we were still at war.

November 22, 1942

We finally returned to Shipdham today. The trip back was uneventful as the weather was good. My flight Lt. McPhillamey (804), Miller (811) and I (777) came back together. I hated to leave in a way as we had a good time there in Belfast, but my money sure was getting low. Had a date with Noreen Rodgers that last night there. We went to the Officer’s Club where we danced a little, drank a little, but mostly talked about music we liked. Was surprised to find that she knew and liked opera, the symphony, etc. She has a rather nice singing voice and used to sing to me while we were dancing.

November 24, 1942

Today, we took on a high altitude practice flight leaving Shipdham around 1:00 p.m. and going down off the southern coast of England where we fired our guns. I was a wing ship of the second element of a six-ship formation. All went well until we got down to 4,000 feet on our return. Here, we split up the formation to go down through the overcast. I immediately found a hole but at 2,000 it was closed in again. I searched for another break in the overcast and finally managed to wiggle down to 500 feet

where the visibility was almost nil and so I went back up to 2,000 feet to search for another field. We flew west and south in a vain attempt to find a clear spot, but none was to be had. Finally, we saw some mountains sticking above the clouds and so I headed towards them hoping to find it clear there, but no such luck. All the while we kept our eyes peeled for any airport, but the visibility was just too poor. Once we saw one but it was under construction and, as I came down to around 200 feet to have a look at it, I just missed the top of a hill and so decided to climb back up to a safe altitude, once more heading west. By this time, it was around five o'clock and was commencing to grow dark. A bit later, we came to an inlet – on the western coast of England, but were unable to locate ourselves and so were quite lost. Again, I went down skimming about 100 feet over the water, hoping to find a field near the coast. Finding none, we headed back inland again and it was at this time that I looked out and saw a church steeple on a level with me 100 or so feet away from me. By now, it was really dark and so we climbed up through the soup, which was thicker than ever. We broke through at about 4,000 feet where it was clear as a crystal. The sun was just dying out in the west. Our radio was quite dead, but a searchlight flickering across the sky brought fresh hope. They laid the beam of light along the ground pointing toward the nearest airport (we found out later). We followed its direction and soon came to another light and then another all pointing in the same direction. Pretty soon, we saw three beams intersecting in a point below us and on looking down we saw an airport all lighted up. It was a wonderful sight. As we spiraled down, they shot up some yellow rockets to further attract our attention, but by now the sky was ablaze with searchlights. I flew over the field, went on for a ways and then turned around to come back in for a landing. As both of my landing lights were burnt out, I had to come in without any and managed to set her down on the end of the runway. 'Twas a very, very comfortable feeling to have those wheels safely on the ground again. It was 6:15 p.m. when I cut the engines and black as pitch. I was plenty tired, let me tell you!

December 15, 1942

I lost my diary for a while and so have missed a few days. The next day, November 25th, I found that we were at Colerne, near Bath on the southwestern coast of England. The weather was closed in so we sat around the R.A.F. Officer's Club and played billiards, darts, etc. We were particularly anxious to get home the next day as it was Thanksgiving, but the bad weather stayed with us and also the next day. We went into Bath where we saw a lousy stage show after which we visited some of the pubs and then went back to Colerne in a bus full of soldiers, W.A.A.F.s and officers. Finally, on November 28th, it cleared and we took off. We circled and buzzed the control tower at about 220 mph and headed out on course only to find a R.A.F. Mosquito and Spitfire sitting on our wings. The pilots were some of the officers we had met during our stay there. The Mosquito slow-rolled and the Spitfire, after wagging his wings at us, did a series of "S" turns right in front of us. As the weather was fine, we got home without much trouble.

Nothing much happened until December 2nd – when Lt. Miller and I flew down to Bovington together in Miller's plane. As we were fooling around quite a bit both of us managed to taxi off the runway on going out to take off, but we got on okay. When we got to Bovington, Miller arranged to get his pay from the finance, and I looked over the Spitfire's and North American Mustangs – both very sweet and fast. Miller bumped into a friend who we dropped off at another field on the way back.

On December 12th, we went on a raid to bomb an airfield near Abbeville, France. As my co-pilot was sick, Major Miller (West Point class of 1939), rode with me as co-pilot. We took off at around 9:30 in the morning with 20 100-lb bombs. We took off singly and slipped into formation over the field at 2,000 feet. We headed south and began to climb on up to 20,000 feet. At a point on the southern coast of England, we made rendezvous with three or four squadrons of Spitfires and headed for France. As

we had a strong tail wind, we crossed the channel in a hell of a hurry at 300 mph. But we found our target completely covered with clouds and so had to turn around and come back as we cannot bomb France indiscriminately. It seemed as though it took hours to get back across that channel. Fighters were surrounding us but they were all friendly, though at times, I was not so sure. After that, everything went smoothly enough until we got back to the field where there was a rather thick ground haze. Our six ship formation (A and C flights) came over the field, peeled off and immediately lost sight of the field. We missed the field on our first try and so came around and managed to land by kicking "Maisie" into a steep bank and slipping in over to the runway. On December 14th my copilot, Lt. McLeod taxied the ship off the perimeter track and stuck her up to the hub in the mud. It took our crew the rest of the day to get her out, but old "Maisie" is ready to go again.

December 22, 1942

Now I have time to tell of our first big "doings." On Sunday, December 20th, 21 of our B-24's took off on a raid on an airfield near Romilly-sur-Seine in France some 150 miles southeast of Paris. The 68th Squadron took off at 10:15 a.m. followed by the 67th and our 66th in the rear. I was leading the second element of four planes while Col. Taylor and "Wild Bill" McCoy led the first element of the 66th! After circling the field and gaining formation, we headed due south climbing steadily until we reached 23,000 feet. As we neared London, I could see swarms of B-17's – Flying Fortresses – heading for our rendezvous point on the coast, Beachy Head. As we neared the coast, we started several huge circles to join in one huge formation all the while test-firing our guns. About a dozen Forts and Libs turned back for some reason or other, but some 70 Forts and our 12 Liberators headed for France. The planes were stacked up from 20,000 to 23,000 feet and stretching miles to the front – we tagged on to the rear. In no time at all, we were across the channel and over France, but I could not see much as I was too busy trying to keep in formation. It was a bitter cold – way below zero – but in a few minutes, we all forgot about that as we were attacked by some German fighter (Fock-Wolfe 190's). I closed in behind the first element until we almost touched wing tips, but all of a sudden an FW 190 came down in a screaming dive shooting at Major Key's ship just ahead of me and passing between him and my ship. This was my first sight of a German plane despite the fact that I have been in England almost three months now. He was so close that I could easily see the pilot and the beautiful yellow and silver markings of the plane. I watched him until he disappeared some five or six thousand feet below us but it didn't take long as he was going close to 600 mph. I was too busy to be scared, but managed to call the crew on the interphone and told them to keep their eyes peeled for more fighters. My navigator had fired a quick burst on his .50 caliber nose gun at the FW 190 to no avail. It took all my time and energy to keep in tight formation and so I did not see Paris as we passed almost over it. The Germans kept buzzing around us but I didn't see them. One of them dived on Major Key's ship just to my front and fired his 20 mm which hit one of the gunners (H. Lund) square in the head and that was the end of him. I was unaware of this at the time – in fact, I didn't even see the plane. After what seemed ages, we neared our target. I caught a glimpse of the Seine River winding its way over the apparently peaceful French countryside, but the frequent puffs of smoke around us made it quite plain that we were not wanted. But we kept on our way and soon the red light on my instrument panel told me that our bomb bay doors were open and the time had come for us to deliver the "bacon." After interminable minutes, I heard Lt. Hannan, my bombardier, shout, "Bombs away!" just as I saw the bombs fall from the ship ahead of me. After months of just fooling around, it gave us quite a thrill to see those bombs drop. My radio operator watched them fall and string themselves across the hangars and buildings of the German field 23,000 feet below us. We turned to our left and headed on that long journey home and I prayed that our beloved old "Maisie" would not fail us this time. Minutes ticked by like hours! Every once in a while I would catch sight of an FW diving at our

huge formation and turning away. Now and again, I would hear a short burst from one of our guns and would look over at my tiny co-pilot, Lt. McLeod, huddled underneath his steel helmet. I returned his weak smile and went back to flying which was real work now as my fingers were like ice and my oxygen mask was full of water and ice. Every once in a while my plane would rock viciously, and I knew that the flak was getting uncomfortably close. The gunners in the rear were having a hell of a time with their oxygen masks and hands freezing, but by using several extra masks they got along okay. Being faster than the B-17's we flew back and forth over the top of them, finally working our way up so we were in the middle of the formation which was lucky as the FW 190's were concentrating on the front and rear. We continued our running dogfight and after a wee bit, I saw Paris spread out beneath us. The Eiffel Tower stood out like a sore thumb even from our altitude. It was not long before I saw several squadrons of R.A.F. Spitfires cutting capers high above us. The white vapor trails against the blue sky was a beautiful and comfortable sight. "Maisie" roared along as faithful as ever, but I thought I never would reach the English Channel. Narrow as it is, the channel seems like a gate which the enemy dares not pass. Soon, we started losing altitude very slowly, but as we picked up speed, we soon passed up the B-17's and headed for home feeling very happy and gay at our good luck. We chattered over the interphone like silly school boys – everything we said seemed funny though when our radio operator told us that there were wounded men on Major Key's ship, we sobered up some. As for us, "Maisie" was unscathed and so was our crew. The weather was beautifully made to order and after buzzing the field, I peeled off and landed, very cold and tired. We were questioned by the intelligence officers as we sipped hot cups of coffee. Everyone was extremely polite and the air seemed filled with excitement and endless chatter.

Questions, such as – How many planes did you see? – Did you get any? – Where did your bombs drop? – Where did you meet flak? – Did you see any bombers go down? All these questions were fired at us, and though we were tired and excited, we answered the best we could though food and sleep were all we could think about after our five-hour ordeal. So ended our first real raid!

January 8, 1943

Since our last raid, I have not done much worth mentioning. I forgot to say that not only was there a wounded man on Major Key's ship, but also a dead one, a gunner struck in the head by a 20mm shell from a FW 190. He was Sgt. Lund, the first casualty of the 66th. However, earlier on the Abbeville Raid of December 6 account, I lost a very good friend of mine, Lt. DuBard, who was shot down over the English Channel. As I learned from the others in the 68th Squadron this was the way it happened: The 66th, 67th, and 68th took off to bomb the airfield near Abbeville, but on missing the fighter escort, the 66th and 67th turned back on instructions from the fighters. The 68th continued in to the target, however, dropped their bombs, and turned for home. On the way back, the FW 190's started a series of frontal attacks concentrating on Lt. DuBard, the right wing of the lead element of three. They shot one engine but he managed to stick in formation. About that time a 20 mm burst in the cockpit of Lt. Holmes' ship on the left wing wounded both pilot and co-pilot, Lt. Ager and causing them to fall out of formation for a bit of a while. They poured the coals to her anyhow and got back into formation. Around this time, they got another engine on DuBard's ship, and he began to drop away quite rapidly, losing altitude all the while. At once, all the 190's swarmed around him attacking from all angles. The old B-24 went into a lazy spiral down toward the Channel below with the Huns buzzing around it like gnats. The crews in the rest of the 68th watched their doomed brothers until the B-24 took its final plunge into the Channel where it burst into flames. The whole crew was given up as lost. Though Holmes had one dead engine, he got back safely with the rest of the 68th thereby earning the "DFC" (Distinguished Flying Cross) for himself (slightly wounded).

After spending a quiet Christmas and New Year's, my crew and I took off for London on January 2nd. We caught a truck to Thuxton where we boarded a train for London. We gathered in one of the compartments and played "Black Jack," all the way down just to pass the time away. We caught a taxi for the Savoy and just as we arrived at the hotel, we saw the movie stars Martha Raye and Kay Francis walk out. My co-pilot, navigator, bombardier and I had a wonderful suite reserved for us. We had two double bedrooms – two bathrooms and a sitting room, all covered with mirrors – rather luxurious after our crude quarters at the field.

On January 4th, tired but happy, we returned to Shipdham via Norwich where I bumped into my old friend and classmate, Dick Aldridge. We had a good time batting the breeze about old times and wondering why we were not in Africa, yet. Also, I ran into some pilots of the 44 BG and learned that there had been a raid during my absence on January 3rd. They had bombed the docks of St. Nazaire, France, but on their return a very strong head wind had held them up and blown them off course. The weather was poor in southern England, and the ships started to run out of gas. One by one they started setting down all over the place some on regular airfields, but some just anywhere. Lt. Hilliard of the 66th set his B-24 down on a roadway, cracking it up and catching it on fire. In the crack-up, his co-pilot, Lt. Dale K. Canfield, one of the nicest and finest fellows I have ever known, was killed. Dale was rather quiet unless you knew him, but one of those "swell" kind of fellows everyone likes. Hilliard and Fries, the pilot, and bombardier, were quite seriously injured and the rest of the crew were badly shaken up and bruised. Major Key landed his ship more or less safely as did the others of the 66th. Have learned that Hilliard was just about to set his ship down in an open field when two engines cut out on the same side whipping him into a turning dive. He yanked off the other two engines just in time, straighten out and tried to make for the field, but lacked sufficient altitude. He plowed through a stone wall which he thought was a hedge and then through another wall which buckled the ship up and brought it to a very sudden halt. Dale Canfield was fatally wounded and the others shaken up and cut a bit. Lt. Erwin, of the 68th, was just about to land when three of his engines cut out, and he spun in, killing himself his copilot, Lt. Swanson and also Lt. Davenport, the navigator.

January 21, 1943

Nothing much has happened since my last entry. On January 13th, we went on a diversionary raid over to the Dutch Coast in an attempt to draw some German fighters away from a real raid that was going in further to the south. The three squadrons – around 17 planes – took off and soon were in formation over our field. I was the tail end ship of our squadron and our squadron was the last squadron, so I brought up the rear. It was a glorious sunshiny day and as we started our climb to altitude – 22,000 feet – I tucked myself in amongst the rest of the B-24's of the 66th. Soon we had leveled off and were headed out over the North Sea toward the coast of Holland. As we left the English Coast, the three squadrons huddled closer together for better protection, but even so, there was much jockeying for position. We test-fired our guns and they all worked okay and so did those of the other planes for no one turned back. Occasionally, you could see the glint of the sun on the props of the planes ahead of us and once in a while you could see vapor trails stream out forming long, billowy clouds against the pure blue sky. As the sun streamed into the cockpit a feeling of peace and serenity settled over me as I lazily shifted back and forth behind our leader – "Wild Bill" McCoy. The German fighters and the bark of their guns were remote from my thoughts though the ever present sense of danger kept us all on our toes. Occasionally, a ship slipped out of formation a bit but quickly scampered back in again like a chick running back to the mother hen. The greatest fear of anyone on a raid like this is an unexpected attack by the enemy from out of the sun. I looked back at my radio operator – Sgt. Bowie – and he was calmly sitting there listening for any signals from our home station. To see him you would have thought he was listening to the radio in some code room or office.

My co-pilot, Lt. McLeod, was occupying himself by gazing out the window at some small boats that dotted the sea thousands of feet below us. Soon, I could see the Dutch Coastline in the distance and cast a wary eye over the sky to see if I could spot any black dots that would be Hun airplanes – I didn't see a thing and so concentrated on my flying, giving my instruments an occasional glance. A short while later we started a big sweeping turn back to England, little realizing that around a dozen FW 190's had taken off to intercept us. But as we headed for home in a hurry, they did not give chase, and so our day's work was done. After a bit, we peeled off and landed – all safely home again. After a jaunt over enemy territory, I have always noticed that a feeling of elation seems to take a hold of everyone and there is much kidding and horseplay amongst the crews. It seems to be the natural reaction when the tension caused by the raid is relieved.

February 2, 1943

Quite a bit has happened since my last entry, some things quite pleasant and others quite the opposite. On January 27th we took off on our first raid over Germany, our target being the German battleship the "Admiral Scheer" at Wilhelmshaven. After our usual briefing, we took off around 9:30 in the morning and after rendezvousing over the field, we started our long climb up to 25,000 heading out for the North Sea. I was in my usual spot, leading the second flight, Lt. Miller and Billings being on my wings. Everything went quite well until we reached an altitude of around 17,000 feet where my No. 3 engine began to falter on account of a clogged line to the supercharger, I later found out. Despite the constant surging of the engine, I kept on for a ways hoping that it would settle down, but it only grew worse and so finally I peeled out of the formation and headed for home. We were around 80 miles out to sea and so scooted for home as fast as we could go. I turned once and could see the rest of the 44th disappearing in the direction of Germany. Soon we were back over our field quite disappointed for not being able to go. After dinner, I went down to watch the others come in. I noticed that two of our ships were missing. Later I found out that they were my friend and West Point classmate, Lt. Sullivan, and a Lt. Cargile, both of the 68th. On talking with the others, I learned what had happened. As they neared the German border around 30 enemy fighters came up to meet them – mostly FW 190's and ME 109's. For around a half hour they were under attack and not being able to find their target, they dropped their bombs on a coastal town. During one of the numerous frontal attacks, the Huns scored a hit on Sully's No. 3 engine, setting it on fire, which soon grew in fury as he dropped out of formation. Soon the fire had burnt a large section of the wing away and in no time the right wing folded back along the fuselage and Sully plummeted down for his last landing. The crews in the other planes watched helplessly as his plane disintegrated in the air and fell into the sea like a burning rag. Two men were seen to jump out and float down towards the sea in their parachutes. A third man jumped, but his chute trailed out behind him never seeming to open fully. Their fate is still unknown. A little while later, another FW 190 came in on a head-on attack aiming at Cargile's plane. Either through accident or design, as he went to turn away, his wing clipped the wing and then the right tail fin of Cargile's B-24 knocking both off. The FW 190 seemed to fold up and then go into its last dive. With part of his wing gone, the big B-24 dropped away like a fluttering leaf, finally going into a tight spin – its fate sealed. None of the crew were seen to jump. Capt. Wilkenson, a very swell fellow and friend, was the navigator in Sullivan's ship. As the attack continued, many of our ships were shot up, but no more were knocked down. Capt. O'Brien also of the 68th had a waist gunner and bombardier killed and his navigator wounded. Lt. Kahl of the 66th had his hydraulic system shot out and "Ab" Abernathy had a close one when a bullet came through the cabin six inches above his head. Nearly every ship had a hole in it somewhere, Billings having a shell come through the cabin between him and his co-pilot. Everyone was sobered up by this raid and we're beginning to realize that war is no picnic.

On January 29th, Lt. McPhillamey and I flew our ships over to Langford Lodge, Ireland where some secret radio installations are to be made of Mac's plane. We flew over in the afternoon. I went along to bring Mac and his crew back. We had a very uneventful hop over, landing there around 4:30 p.m. I immediately made reservations at the Grand Central Hotel for the six officers, Mac, Joe Flaherty, Lippert, McLeod, Gotke and me. We caught a ride into town and soon were enjoying the luxury of the hotel in Belfast. After a few we went over to the Embassy Club to a dance, having quite an enjoyable evening. The next morning the weather was so miserable, we could not leave and so we spent a leisurely day, taking in a show and window shopping. That night, we again went to a dance at the Embassy Club. On Sunday morning, the weather was even worse and so we slept late. That afternoon, I made a date with Julie Bowens, a fine Irish girl who works as a waitress in the Officer's Lounge in the Grand Central. I met her about 4:30 in the afternoon. We walked a bit, talked a bit and then went to her home for supper. Julie is perhaps one of the kindest and nicest girls I have met since being over here. Knowing that it would be a treat for me, we had bacon and eggs for supper. It was the second egg I have had in the last four months. The saying scarcer than "hen's teeth" should read scarcer than "hen's eggs" over here. The man and his wife who own the house where Julie boards ate with us. After supper, I helped Julie with the dishes which reminded me very much of my visits home. Later we sat in front of the fireplace and listened to the radio, spending a very quiet, but pleasant evening talking about what we had done with our lives. The next day, the weather improved and we reluctantly had to fly back to England. The very next morning we were awakened at 4:30 to be briefed on another mission this time some railroad yards in Hamm, Germany near the Ruhr Valley, the great industrial center. Around 8:30 I gave old and faithful "Maisie" the gun, and we rolled down the runway on another mission. It was a cold, frosty morning gray with clouds. After joining in formation over our field, we started our usual climb for altitude. At 8,000 feet we went on instruments and went up through the overcast breaking through at around 10,000 feet. As we headed out over the North Sea, we joined several groups of B-17's. Soon, however, I received a call from my rear turret gunner that he couldn't get any oxygen. As we were nearly at 17,000 feet, I was forced to once again peel out and head for home. I walked back to the tail to see if I could find out what was the matter. It was bitterly cold back there some 25 degrees below zero – so his oxygen regular had frozen, cutting off his supply. On landing at the field, we were surprised to see six other ships already back. Soon all of the others were back, too. The weather and severe cold had made it impossible to continue. So ended another day.

February 9, 1943

On 4 Feb. we took off on another attempt to bomb the railroad center at Hamm, Germany. After our usual morning briefing, we took off around 8:45 and joined formation over the field. This time "Maisie" and my crew were in the Number 3 spot on the left wing of Capt. Brandon of the second flight. The 66th, with Wild Bill McCoy and Lt. Col. Snavelly at the helm, was leading the 44th Bomb Group.

At the coast we picked up the 329th B.S. of the 93rd BG and a bit later at 15,000 ft we tucked ourselves in behind and above several groups of "Flying Fortresses." It was very, very cold up there and so, one after the other, our ships peeled off and headed for home! The guns were extremely sluggish and the gunners were practically frozen as it was around 45 degrees C. below!! Soon Capt. Bill Brandon peeled out and I took over the lead of the second element, sticking close behind Big Bill McCoy.

By this time my rudder and elevator controls were frozen so hard that they were useless, but by using my throttles and ailerons, I managed to keep in formation. Around a half hour later, Lt. Miller on McCoy's left wing faded away and so I pull up into his position.

Pretty soon, Lt. Abernethy peels out and his place is taken by Lt. Phillips of the 67th Sq. So now only three ships out of the original twenty or more are left, and it isn't long before McCoy does a sweeping turn to the left and heads for home hell-bent-for-election on account as how by this time we are over Holland – which is very unhealthy territory.

So we streak down through the clouds around 1000 feet per minute at 230 mph, hoping to high heaven that we won't meet any enemy fighters. In an endeavor to keep up with McCoy, I was pulling 45" Hg manifold pressure and 2500 rpm, but still was dropping behind slightly. All of a sudden my No. 3 (engine) starts surging badly, making me yank off the supercharger, and a bit later No. 4 roars all the way up to nearly 100 inches of Hg, pulling "Maisie" way out of formation.

So, until we got down to low altitude, I have to fly on two engines practically. As we near home, I finally catch McCoy and we roar over the field – the first three planes to return. All of us are back safely, but we learn later that the B-17's went on to the target, losing five ships in a running fight with the German FW 190's and ME 109's.

On landing, I found out that most of our twelve machine guns were only firing one shot at a time because of the severe cold! So ended what was chalked up as my seventh raid, which was of some value for it drew the Jerry fighters away from several other raids so completely that no resistance was met at all. Since then, we have been briefed on several other raids, and only yesterday had one called off at the last minute because of the weather.

February 17, 1943

Things have happened plenty fast lately. After three successive days of high altitude practice flights, we were briefed on February 15th on a target in Dunkirk, France. It was a former Jap Togo used by the Germans as a commerce raider – it was docked in the harbor at Dunkirk. At five o'clock in the afternoon we took off behind the 67th Sq. and joined formation over the field where the 329th Sq. tacked onto us. Heading south, we started our climb to 20,000 feet. Captain Cullen, with Major MacDonald acting as his co-pilot, was leading the six ships of the 67th, and Bill McCoy was leading the seven ships of the 66th. I was in my usual spot leading the second element, with Captain Bill Brandon filling in the diamond.

As we headed out for France, we had an almost perfect formation with every ship tucked in close behind the other. With a strong tail wind, we whipped across the Channel at around 325 mph. Soon our bomb bay doors opened and as I knew our target, the ship "Togo," was close at hand. The weather was perfect and as we neared the French Coast, each squadron fell into trail, one behind the other.

All of a sudden, bombs began to drop like rain from the 24 B-24's. Each ship carried ten 500-pounders. I was so close behind Bill McCoy that I was afraid his bombs would hit my plane. Almost the same instant that our bombs fell away, I saw Captain Cullen's ship pull up into a steep climb, fall off on one wing, and go into a vertical dive – its engines still roaring. My navigator, Lt. Gotke, watched it and said it continued its dive straight down for 20,000 feet, crashing into the sea at a terrific speed.

Soon black puffs of smoke started popping up all around us, and so I knew that the German's anti-aircraft guns had made a direct hit on Cullen's ship. Soon after his fatal dive, Captain Fritz Cramer, a friend and West Point classmate of mine, started drifting off to the right over France. Hit by debris from Captain Cullen's ship and possibly flak, he had one engine on fire, one engine dead, and another just windmilling. He was flying on just one engine!

Immediately, his two wing ships faded out of formation to try to help him home. The rest of us turned around and headed for England with the flak bursts still popping all around us. Soon the FW

190's and ME 109's were climbing up after us. They made several attacks on our formation but after we had knocked down several of them, they concentrated on Cramer and his two wing ships. Oliphant and John Diehl, who were now far below us, diving for England. Eight FW's made attack after attack on the three ships despite the RAF Spitfires who were buzzing all around us doing their best to drive off the Jerry fighters.

The three B-24's were fighting desperately to get across the Channel before the FWs got them. They, and the RAF managed to drive off the eight ships that were attacking them. As I looked out my left window, I could see the tracers from my left waist gun streak out in front of the Jerry planes as they dove in for the kill some five or six thousand feet below us. Cramer struggled on in his crippled ship constantly losing altitude. Just before they reached the English coast, two FW 190's dove out of the sun, firing their 20 mm cannons as they closed in. This time they hit the No. 3 engine of Lt. Oliphant's ship. It caught on fire, which soon spread to the gas tanks, causing them to explode, ripping the wing off.

The burning ship and most of the crew fell into the sea. Several were seen to jump out in their chutes and float down into the cold water of the Channel.

By this time, Cramer was down to about 2000 feet with Lts. Poole and Flynn* – his navigator and bombardier and another crew member – parachuted down, landing in the sea. With the greatest of skill, Cramer set his ship down in the water, skimming along the surface, finally coming to rest on the sandy beach. As Lt. Diehl circled around Cramer, and the rest of his crew climbed out and waved, indicating that they were all right.

*2-17-43 – Lt. Poole has not been found yet. Lt. Flynn was drowned.

All the while, the rest of us were heading for home, still in a very tight formation. Coming over the field, we peeled off, one after the other, and came in for a landing. So ended my eighth raid.

Despite our losses, we could not help but feel happy about our safe return. The briefing room hummed with conversation as the intelligence officer, "Red" Wright, shot questions at us about the raid. All the evidence showed that our bombs had given the target a good plastering. Faithful old "Maisie" was still unscratched.

Early the next morning – 4:00 AM to be exact – we were awakened again. This time to be briefed on a raid on the docks at St. Nazaire, France. So, at 8:30 A.M. I gave the gun to Maisie once again and took off to join the formation. Again, we headed south, climbing slowly to 25,000 feet. It got colder and colder as we climbed and by the time we were at altitude, I was frozen. We finally tacked on behind approximately sixty B-17's and headed out to sea at a terrific speed as we had a 100 mph tail wind.

As we went along, my crew test-fired their guns and called in that the tail turret was frozen, the right waist gun and hatch gun were out of action. As my rudder and elevator controls were also frozen, so I decided that it would not be wise to continue, so I peeled off and headed home – over seventy miles away. As we were bucking the wind now, it seemed as though we were standing still. By poking the nose down we picked up a little speed, and slowly the coast of England crept into view. When we got down to 10,000 feet, my tail gunner, Sgt. Brewer, called up and told me that as we had headed out for France, two B-24's in a squadron behind us had collided in midair. Caught in the prop wash of the B-17's, they were thrown together. Later, I found out that it was Lt. Billings and Lt. J.B. Long. Lt. Billings, a friend of mine from Barksdale days, and lately assigned to the 66th, was filling in the No. 2 spot in the 67th Sq.

J. B. Long was flying No. 2 in the second flight of three. As described by a tail gunner of Capt. Moore's ship, who saw it happen, Billings was caught by the prop wash of the B-17's in front of us. He slipped back and over Long's ship. Still in the prop wash, he was thrown into Long's ship – his left wing hitting Long's right wing. The wing on Billing's ship broke off and the two ships seemed to fall together, back to back, and start their long fall.

After a bit, they separated, caught on fire, and then exploded into a thousand flaming pieces. Four fellows were seen to bail out and float down through the clouds. Lt. Miller, who had peeled off from my left wing due to oxygen trouble, saw the chutes and searched for an hour in an attempt to find the stricken men. But as the sea was rough, they could not find any trace of either the men or the wreckage from the two planes.

Our losses now totaled five planes in two days. The rest of the planes continued on to St. Nazaire where they met very heavy flak and ran a running dogfight with the German fighters for over an hour. Though six B-17's were knocked down, all of our B-24's came back safely. Due to a mistake, Capt. Brandon was reported shot down by flak, so we were doubly glad to see him come back. So ended my ninth raid and a very exciting but tiring two days.

February 22, 1943

Last Saturday (Feb. 20) marked the tragic end of a very tragic week. On that afternoon, Capt. Bill McCoy of the 66th Sq. took up Lt. Col. Snively to shoot some landings in Bill's B-24 "Scrappy's Pappy" as he called it. After several landings, they taxied back to the parking area to let the Colonel out, but Bill said he wanted to shoot some more landings with John C Brown, a bombardier, acting as co-pilot. Twenty minutes after they had taken off, the report came in that they had crashed. Hoping against hope that it wasn't serious, Bill Brandon and I rushed down to operations only to be crushed by the news that all of the crew – some eight men – had been killed, including Bill McCoy, Brown and Hook, a navigator with a long time in the 66th.

Despite the fact that all of the fellows on the ship were swell fellows, the loss of Bill McCoy was perhaps the hardest blow yet suffered by the Squadron – or even the group. A big, six foot two, 200 pounder with curly black hair, and a smile a mile wide, "Big Bill" or "Wild Bill" as he was affectionately known, was liked and looked up to by everyone from the Colonel to the lowest private. As a flyer, he took second seat to nobody, for he was noted for his ability to put a B-24 through its paces. On many of our raids, Bill led the whole group and was by far the best of them all at it.

On investigation of the accident, it was found that the whole tail assembly had fallen off from Bill's plane while it was three or four thousand feet up, and so it was impossible for even Bill to land her safely. Immediately on losing its tail, the plane went into a flat spin and dove into the ground at a very high speed, killing everyone on impact. After hitting the ground, it burst into flames and so was completely demolished. This accident brought our total losses for the week up to six.

END OF DIARY

Four days later, while on a raid to Bremen, Germany, Capt. Adams and his crew, along with two other planes ran into prop wash from the leading B-17's, were knocked out of formation where they were attacked by German fighters. Both Capt. Adams and Lt. McPhillamey were shot down, all but two men from Adams' crew were KIA.

CASUALTY MESSAGE

TELEGRAM

OFFICIAL BUSINESS—GOVERNMENT RATES

FROM	WAR DEPARTMENT
BUREAU	AGO
CHG. APPROPRIATION	B.L.C. 3832 <i>jk</i>

AG 201 ADAMS, HOWARD F (28 SEP 43) SPXPC-N 273087 (1) 1 OCTOBER 1943
ASN O-23946

MR WALTER F ADAMS
228 NORTH MAIN STREET
RUTLAND VERMONT

31388

THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES THAT I TENDER HIS DEEP SYMPATHY TO YOU
IN THE LOSS OF YOUR SON CAPTAIN HOWARD F ADAMS WHO WAS PREVIOUSLY
REPORTED MISSING SINCE TWENTY SIX FEBRUARY IT HAS BEEN DETERMINED THAT
HE WAS KILLED IN ACTION ON TWENTY SIX FEBRUARY IN EUROPEAN AREA LETTER
FOLLOWS

OFFICIAL:

ULIO
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

ADJUTANT GENERAL

BATTLE



AEB

