

1944

13 January 1944

Training Mission, Shipdham, England

On this day, 2nd Lt. Glenn C. Hovey and his crew were performing a training mission, readying themselves for combat. This crew had joined the 68th Squadron on 24 December, 1943, and had not yet participated in a combat mission.

68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq., #42-7551 Y, Hovey			Crash-landed
68th Squadron Crew:	Entire crew perished		
HOVEY, GLENN C. ASN 0-676805	Pilot DIED	2nd Lt.	Fairfield, Iowa
PETERSON, CLIFFORD C. ASN 0-806899	Co-pilot DIED	2nd Lt.	Atlanta, Georgia
WEINER, STANLEY ASN 0-674819	Navigator DIED	2nd Lt.	Santa Monica, California
SOWERS, RICHARD J. ASN 0-679676	Bombardier DIED	2nd Lt.	Toledo, Ohio
NELSON, ARTHUR L. ASN 36378877	Engineer DIED, buried Cambridge (C-3-79)	S/Sgt.	Chicago, Illinois
HOFFMAN, WALTER G. Jr. ASN 19176656	Radio Oper. DIED, buried Cambridge (C-5-79)	S/Sgt.	Los Angeles, California
SNOW, CLARENCE W. ASN 37219104	Asst. Eng. DIED	Sgt.	Wathena, Kansas
ROBBINS, ROBERT E. ASN 35369184	Asst. Rad. DIED, buried Cambridge (F-1-108)	Sgt.	Peru, Indiana
POLLMANN, EDWARD C. ASN 35672481	Gunner DIED, buried Cambridge (F-3-17)	Sgt.	Cincinnati, Ohio
TESTA, ARTHUR F. ASN 35520803	Tail Turret DIED, buried Cambridge (C-2-79)	Sgt.	Cleveland Hts., Ohio

This aircraft approached the field at Shipdham for a landing with wheels and flaps down and #1 propeller feathered. The pilot evidently "over shot" the landing, so he passed over the field and banked to the left (into that dead engine). While in this left bank, the aircraft lost altitude and dropped below the level of the trees, regained some altitude and then settled back down and struck a tree with the left wing. The airplane crashed into a small clump of trees and exploded, killing all ten men aboard. Lt. Sowers, bombardier was thrown clear of the ship and was taken to the hospital alive. He died at 0200 hours. Time of accident – 1420 hours.

Capt. Charles Kuch, 68th Squadron lead pilot, added these observations: "I was flying co-pilot with Major George Jansen on a slow-time test check with just three of us, including an engineer. We turned into our final approach and were following another plane which seemed to have a dead engine with the propeller turning. He was pretty low when he started to go around again. Major Jansen notified the tower that they had a ship in trouble.

"The plane started a left turn at a rather low altitude. it didn't appear that the pilots were carrying enough power. The plane started down, still turning. Jansen told them, 'It's too late, Pathway' as the plane struck the ground at a slight angle. We went around, flying over the crash site and helping direct crash and emergency vehicles.

"When we landed, I went with Jansen in his Jeep to the crash site. It was the first one I'd seen up close, and it was a real mess. It was the crew's first flight from Shipdham and Hovey had asked for a plane. I think he flew co-pilot to me on a [training] mission just a couple of days earlier, but no one else [on that crew] had made even one flight here. I can still smell it!"

Various archaeological groups have visited this site since 1972 and a selection of small personal effects are understood to have been found, including coins, keys and an identity bracelet marked "Stanley Weiner 0-674819". The Norfolk And Suffolk Aviation Museum's members visit to the site (1984) in the now replanted pine grove, revealed various burnt patches and some small items of wreckage, including harness and parachute buckles, many exploded .50 cal. rounds date '42 and '43.

14 January 1944

Coastal Military Installations, Escalles Sur Buchy, France

There was no flak over the target, but the enemy sent about 20 fighters up to give challenge. The 44th BG shot down eight of these. Unfortunately, the 67th Squadron lost one aircraft. Plane crashed near Grandcamp, France.

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #41-23779 G-Bar, Goodwin	4-Q-2	MACR #2362
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67th Squadron Crew:

GOODWIN, HENRY C. Jr. ASN 0-675337	Pilot KIA, buried in U. S.	2nd Lt.	San Antonio, Texas
CLARK, RAYMOND C. ASN 0-748571	Co-pilot KIA	2nd Lt.	Savannah, Georgia
PHELPS, JOHN E. ASN 0-747138	Navigator KIA	2nd Lt.	El Monte, California
FOREST, RICHARD P. ASN 0-676584	Bombardier KIA	2nd Lt.	Lynn, Massachusetts
MINDELSON, JOSEPH ASN 17037191	Engineer KIA, buried Normandy (B-7-42)	T/Sgt.	St. Paul, Minnesota
PALYS, JOSEPH E. ASN 31129150	Radio Oper. KIA	T/Sgt.	Ware, Massachusetts
MONKS, JOHN C. ASN 35416592	Top Turret POW	S/Sgt.	Nelsonville, Ohio

CHALAN, ANDY ASN 13145502	Hatch Gun. KIA, buried Normandy (B-21-6)	S/Sgt.	Portage, Pennsylvania
CAPO, JOSEPH A. ASN 33362487	RW Gunner POW	S/Sgt.	New Brighton, Pennsylvania
LEWIS, JAMES E. Jr. ASN 33577302	Tail Turret KIA	S/Sgt.	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The MACR includes an account by M.F. McGearry – “I was flying co-pilot in a ship ahead and to the left of ship #41-23779. The formation was attacked by seven enemy aircraft – FWs and Me 109s, from head on. The enemy passed through the formation with one hitting #779 in the #2 engine, setting it on fire. The plane went into a glide and when I looked around again, the ship had exploded. My right waist gunner and tail gunners saw one chute, believed to be the waist position as they went into the glide – it opened OK. I saw another chute that came out on fire, believed from the nose. No more parachutes were seen. This happened near the town of Duclair, west of Rouen [and Bolbec].”

Right waist gunner Joseph A. Capo had this report on file, “Goodwin announced that the plane had been hit and was on fire, and ordered the crew to abandon ship. Palys, our radio operator, was trying to get out of a very small window on the flight deck, too small for him to even try to fit through! Lewis, tail gunner, was dead and motionless in his turret.”

Smoke got so thick that Capo could see nothing at all. He took off his oxygen mask and was immediately burned by the intense heat. He said that in the spirit of panic that was affecting everyone at that time (e.g. Palys) that he thought he could see more clearly if he removed his mask. But only when he actually removed it did he realize how very hot it was. So he immediately made his exit through the bomb bay doors.

“After I jumped and was on the way down, I could see Germans driving in their vehicles to capture prisoners. When I landed, it sent a tremendous jolt all the way up my spine. As soon as I hit the ground, a French partisan appeared very briefly, jumping out of the woods, saying ‘Pistola, pistola.’ I threw him my sidearm and this man quickly disappeared back into the woods.” Shortly thereafter, Capo was surrounded by Germans.

For the first six months he was a POW, Capo could not speak a word, apparently resulting from the jolt that he got on landing, but it also could have been the result of his throat being burned by those searing flames and heat. John Monks, the only other survivor, said that he saw the ship explode soon after he jumped and he saw Capo shortly afterwards. He also commented that Capo was badly burned about his eyes and face. Neither man saw any other parachutes. Sgt. Capo often stated that he thought Lt. Goodwin was killed when the plane was hit and all communications were knocked out at that same time. The plane crashed near Bolbec, France. All eight men remaining aboard the ship were buried at La Harve, France.

This was the fourth mission for the crew.

20 January 1944

Pilot Suicide, Shipdham, England

A new pilot and crew joined the 68th Squadron in July 1943 while the group was in North Africa, having trained with Col. Crowder's Provisional Group, April 1943, at Tucson, Arizona. This pilot flew his first mission on 25 September 1943 to Lucca, Italy. On 1 October 1943, he flew as co-pilot with Lt. George P. Martin. His third and last mission was on 5 December 1943 again as first pilot, to Cognac, France. Later, he was grounded and on 20 January 1944, he took his own life.

Note: The pilot's name is omitted here, since naming him would serve no useful purpose, however the story is included here to show the intense pressure that pilots and crew faced.

21 January 1944

Although all 44th BG planes took off at the same time, there were actually two target missions involved on this date, with two separate formations. As there were losses in both formations, presentation will be made as if there were two missions.

V-1 Sites, Pas Des Calais Area, Escalles Sur Buchy, France

Once again the weather was poor, with heavy cloud cover over most of this area of France. Normally, this should have been a relatively "safe" mission, being so close to the English Channel, but it turned out to be VERY costly. The 66th and 68th squadrons had their own specific target to hit and were determined to do so in spite of the clouds which were covering the small V-1 launching sites. Bombing altitude was at a very low 12,000 feet.

66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #42-72813 L, Spelts	QUEEN MARLENE	MACR #2252
66th Squadron Crew:		
SPELTS, MARTIN E. ASN 0-680326	Pilot KIA, Ardennes Cem. WOM	1st Lt. Las Cruces, New Mexico
SMITH, WILLIAM L. ASN 0-805997	Co-pilot KIA, Ardennes Cem. WOM	2nd Lt. Battle Creek, Michigan
RODGERS, HAROLD R. ASN 0-684197	Bombardier KIA, buried Normandy (A-11-42)	2nd Lt. Allentown, Pennsylvania
GOODNOW, EDWARD W. ASN 0-794123	Navigator KIA, buried Ardennes (C-14-49)	1st Lt. Hartford, Connecticut
HITES, HAROLD B. ASN 17129255	Engineer KIA	T/Sgt. Merrian, Kansas
HALL, KENNETH H. ASN 35323302	Radio Oper. KIA, buried Normandy (A-9-17)	T/Sgt. Cleveland, Ohio
REEDY, WILBUR R. ASN 17033225	Ball Turret KIA, buried Normandy (B-11-17)	S/Sgt. Grinnell, Iowa
HALL, FRANKLIN P. ASN 14044753	Waist Gun. KIA, Ardennes Cem. WOM	S/Sgt. Leesburg, Florida
GOODEN, RAY C. ASN 33442228	Belly Gun. KIA	S/Sgt. Elkton, Virginia

MAYHEW, RICHARD A.
ASN 19142329

Tail Turret
Evadee, returned

S/Sgt.

Reno,
Nevada

The 66th Squadron lost an aircraft piloted by 2nd Lt. Martin E. Spelts, while attacking Ecalles Sur Buchy. The MACR briefly states that at 1514 hours this aircraft was seen to wing over and dive down, no chutes. It hit the ground and exploded. This loss occurred during the first attack by enemy aircraft and the pilot is believed to have been hit, because the aircraft was not visibly damaged.

S/Sgt. Richard A. Mayhew, tail gunner and sole survivor, told his story, “We were not awakened early, had breakfast and then on to briefing. We were told they didn’t expect us to encounter many enemy contacts. After boarding, I finished my duties of checking all guns and bombs and as I went back to my station as tail gunner, I thought that this would be just another milk run. On this particular mission, the navigator and bombardier were replacements. I did not know them. Lt. Spurgeon was off flight duty due to illness.

“Our squadron was flying the low element of the flight and our ship, QUEEN MARLENE, was in the position known to all as Purple Heart corner. Upon approaching the target, we got a call from the lead ship saying, ‘We missed our target, go around. Go around.’ As we approached it a second time, Lt. Spelts called the bombardier and told him we were on course and he should open the bomb bay doors and take over the ship. ‘I have the aircraft, thank you, Sir,’ as the bombardier answered back. ‘We are on target. Bombs away’, he then said.

“At about that moment, I saw about 5 or 6 FW 190s, or as we called them, Goering’s Yellow Bellies, closing in on us. I yelled, ‘Fighters. Fighters at 6 o’clock, low!’ The sound of their gunfire rang through the aircraft from the underside. The ball turret gunner, Sgt. Reedy, screamed, ‘I’m hit – I’m hit!’ The fighters passed on and made a curve to the right, and returned from above, again fired at us, killing our top turret gunner, Sgt. Hites, and our co-pilot, Lt. Smith.

“Next, I heard someone who I assumed was our radio man, Hall, yell, ‘Hydraulic fluid is spraying over my face!’ Then the navigator, Lt. Goodnow, said, ‘I’m hit! The bombardier is dead. My God, we’re going down!’

“Lt. Spelts’ voice then came through the interphone with, ‘Abandon the...’ That was all – our intercom had gone out. I then looked back into the waist positions and saw the two gunners, Gooden and F.P. Hall, putting on their chutes. I rotated my turret to gain access to the rear section, and fell backward out of the turret. I grabbed my chute with my right hand and opened the lower escape hatch with my left. While I was snapping my chute to the right harness ring, it happened! The ship did a rollover – and I assume there was an explosion because I blacked out.

“When I came to, I was falling free from the aircraft. My chest pack was hooked to the right ring only. I frantically tried to hook the left ring but the harness was too tight. I decided to pull the ripcord anyhow, but the chute didn’t open! I clawed at the cover and managed to open it, and reeled the chute out by hand. It finally opened with a loud crackling sound – and I felt like I was going right through the harness. I blacked out again, momentarily, this time, and when I came to again, I saw pieces of the QUEEN MARLENE falling around me.

“Luckily, I landed in a newly plowed field and I didn’t appear to have any serious injuries. The left side of my face was bleeding – shrapnel, I imagine, but nothing serious – burns, cuts. However, I had lost my partial dental plates and my flying boots were gone.

“Before I could get to my feet, two Frenchmen ran to me, felt my arms and legs for broken bones, and being assured that I was OK, they ran up a small rise to see what happened to the airplane. I followed them and saw the remainder of the ship burning. I did not see any parachutes or anyone else around. There were German military trucks racing to the site of the crash. At that time, it was the policy of the German Army to go to the site of the crash and search an area one mile in diameter.

“When I saw the Germans, I ran back, buried my chute and raced off in the opposite direction to where I met a French farmer with a cart loaded with boughs. I crawled under the wood and hid.” S/Sgt. Mayhew successfully evaded capture and returned to duty 29 May, 1944. He was sent back to the U.S. for skin grafts and treatment. He is now deceased.

68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq., #42-7635 Q, Howington	RAM IT-DAM IT/ ARIES		MACR #2357
68th Squadron Crew (one exception):			
HOWINGTON, HARTWELL R. ASN 0-800356	Pilot KIA	1st Lt.	Cantonment, Florida
CURTIS, HERMAN M. ASN 0-748585	Co-pilot KIA	1st Lt.	Seaport, Maine
KASTEN, RICHARD J. ASN 0-683831	Navigator KIA, WOM Normandy	1st Lt.	Grand Rapids, Michigan
CROWL, WAYNE D. ASN 0-741141	Bombardier KIA	1st Lt.	Centerburg, Ohio
BARLOW, ARCHIE R. ASN 14151313	Engineer Evadee, returned 5 June 1944	T/Sgt.	Hattiesburg, Mississippi
ROSENBLATT, ALVIN A. ASN 12164582	Radio Oper. Evadee, returned	T/Sgt.	Newark, New Jersey
HEITER, NICHOLAS M. ASN 17106849	Ball Turret POW	S/Sgt.	Bridgewater, South Dakota
BLAKLEY, CHARLES W. ASN 39831745	RW Gunner Evadee, returned	S/Sgt.	Parma, Idaho
KLEIN, ALFRED M. ASN 32337637	LW Gunner Sgt. Evadee, returned		New York City, New York
BOGGS, EARL E. ASN 18162560	Tail Turret POW, wounded in ankle and foot	S/Sgt.	Porter, Oklahoma
REEVES, RAY P. (67th Squadron) ASN 18076981	Radio Oper. T/Sgt. Evadee, returned		Alanreed, Texas

The 68th Squadron drew the “Tail-end Charlie” section of our formation and paid heavily for it. The 68th sent out seven aircraft and only three of them returned!

Lt. Hartwell R. Howington, pilot of RAM IT-DAM IT, was hit during the third attack of the enemy aircraft, according to the MACR. It was observed to make a wide circle to the left, smoking, and went into a spin; one chute observed. But the fighter attacks were so intense at this time that no further observations were made or reported.

Sgt. Archie Barlow, engineer, relates his experiences that day, “All of our previous missions had been to Germany or Norway at high altitudes and extremely cold temperatures. This milk run

was misnamed, for sure. We had a mid-morning call out and briefing instead of the usual pre-dawn awakening.

“The target area was cloud covered when we arrived and we were on our third run, trying to get a good visual drop from about 12,000 feet when we first saw the German fighter formations. They made the first pass from off our right wing, then climbed ahead to make the next from about 11 o’clock, high. They must have raked us with several 20-mm hits. One exploded directly on the nose, killing the bombardier and navigator, and turning their compartment into an instant inferno. We think the co-pilot, Lt. Curtis, was killed by that very same blast. Another round must have gone off either on, or very near, the top turret I was manning, blowing off the plexiglass dome and sending shrapnel into my left chest and arm. I grabbed the seat release cable and dropped to the flight deck.

“The right wall above the radio station was on fire and Rosenblatt, the radio operator, was putting on his chute. He yelled that we had other fires in the waist area and had been ordered to bail out by the pilot. A quick glance forward showed the pilot, Howington, fighting the controls and was apparently unharmed.

“I snapped on my chute, opened the door to the nose wheel compartment, and dropped down to be hit by heat and flames blowing back from the nose area. I stepped out on the catwalk, thankfully noting that the bomb bay doors were open and the bombs had been jettisoned. Just then Rosenblatt dropped down from the flight deck. I took one final glance into the cockpit. The pilot was looking back and motioning with one hand for us to jump.

“I actually jumped with the intention of free-falling for two to three thousand feet before opening my chute as we had been instructed to do many times while in training. But that falling sensation was such a shock to my system that I could not have been more than twenty to thirty feet beneath the plane when I changed my mind and gave a hearty yank on that cord. I wanted to know – and immediately – whether or not that chute was good! It was, and the heavy jerk of the canopy’s opening was welcome relief.

“I spent a few seconds trying to stop my wild oscillations, then looked off toward our plane. It was by then some distance off and probably at no more than 2,000 feet altitude. As I watched, it went into a steep glide and hit the ground in a fiery explosion. I saw only one chute between the plane and myself and figured that to be Rosenblatt’s.

“I came down in a plowed field on the edge of a small village, spraining my ankle in landing. An elderly lady, once convinced that I was an American, led me into a nearby wooded area where we soon came upon Charles Blakely, one of our waist gunners. Speaking no English, the lady made us understand, through sign language and by using my watch, that we were to remain there until she returned at 9 o’clock that night. She left, going deeper into the woods.

“Within 15 minutes, German troops were searching for us. Three of them, talking quietly, but looking neither left or right, walked by us on a path no more than fifty feet away. Blakely was wearing a bright blue “Bunny Suit” (electrically heated coveralls) that could have easily been seen. And as we waited for darkness, Blakely told me about a fire in the wing-root area above the bomb bay and that we had also lost one engine and another seemed damaged. The photographer had been the first to jump – from the rear hatch – and Blakely and Alfred Klein, the other waist gunners, jumped once they saw the belly and tail gunners get out of their turrets OK.”

Later that night they were joined with Rosenblatt and Klein, who also had been hidden nearby. And later still, they were told that the pilot had gotten out of the plane, but that he was killed on impact with the ground. He probably had bailed out too low for his chute to fully open. And after a long and eventful trip that took until May, Sgt. Barlow arrived in Spain; June 1st in London, soon on a flight home.

Archie also added, "The mind sure plays tricks on you after 40 years. I think, but am not positive, that our plane was 'QUEENIE', and not RAM IT-DAM IT. I do remember her Crew Chief was Sgt. Lee. Also, we did have an eleventh man aboard that day. He was a photographer, I think named Reeves. He had loaded up in the rear just before take off and I never saw him then or later. When I came through an intelligence unit in London in June 1944, I was told that he, too, had just been through, having gotten out through Spain also."

Note: The name "Queenie" is probably due to the aircraft's call letter (Q).

S/Sgt. Earl E. Boggs said, "There definitely was a cameraman on the plane that morning. When we loaded into the plane, I went in through the rear camera hatch and the camera was raised up into the fuselage. It completely blocked off the tail section, so I had to wait until it had been lowered into position before I could get back into my tail turret. I remember telling the cameraman that if we had to bail out, he was not to raise the camera up into the plane and cut me off back there in the tail with no way to get out. Instead, he should salvo the darn thing.

"When I came out of the turret to bail out, the camera and the cameraman were long gone. I do not remember the man's name but have a listing of our crew that day – perhaps it was Ray P. Reeves.

"I was hit in the right foot and ankle and spent the first month in a German field hospital in France. From there, I went to the interrogation center at Frankfurt. From there, by train, to Stalag Luft 6 at Memel, East Prussia and from there to Stalag Luft 4 near Stettin, Germany. The last three or four months were spent on the road. I was liberated May 3rd by the English. I think Heiter was in Stalag Luft 1."

Boggs was right that it was radio operator Ray P. Reeves who was operating that camera that day. Ray informed me that, "I had been the radioman for Pappy Hill for many missions, including Ploesti and Weiner Neustadt, but was temporarily taken off combat to correct my nose and ear problems in December '43. As I had often operated a hand-held K-20 camera taking photos of our bomb strikes through the bomb bay on our missions, I became familiar with the photographers, etc. While recovering, I spent many hours in the photographic section helping and talking with the officer (Harvell?) My position on Hill's crew in the 67th Squadron had been filled (by Sgt. Chase) so I was asked to fly as a photographer with the large camera at the rear hatch to try to take photos of German military installations to and from the target. My first mission – and last – as a photographer was with this 68th Squadron crew.

"On the fifth circle to bomb, an old Me 109 converted night fighter attacked us, not from the nose, but from beneath and did not close, but fired from long range – and hit us, starting a fire. So I cleared the back hatch and jumped. I was eventually hidden by the French UG [underground], was almost caught by the Gestapo in Paris, was escorted by train and then by bus towards the Spanish border. My guide abandoned me in the Pyrenees, where I nearly froze to death, but walked into Spain and was interned until an American Attaché came for me. To

Gibraltar, to England, and the ZOI [Zone of Interior] on 17 June 44, and “separated” on 24 November 1944.

During the war, Hartwell Howington’s brother received the following letter from a French girl named Gilberte Daumal of Lignieres-Chatelain, Somme, France: “I am an unknown French girl, but you will understand the reason why I dare to write to you. I think you have heard of death of your brother, Lt. Howington Hartwell. I am very sorry to revive your pain and I am deeply moved to tell you a sad story so difficult for me to translate in English.

“On the 21st of January 1944, at 3:00 o’clock in the afternoon, a big airplane fell, touched by anti-aircraft near my small village somewhere in France. I perceived several parachutes in the sky, then with many people I went to see the remains of the airplane, which burned.

“Suddenly, a Frenchman called us. He had uncovered a parachute. I was very afraid to approach near him. I did not want to see his face because I am a girl of feelings. People told me that he was not wounded, but his limbs broken by the downfall, the blood flowed from his ears, nose and mouth. A man who was working in the fields said to me to have seen him who struggled in the air because his parachute did not open. German soldiers were there.

“They put his papers and perhaps jewels but I cannot assure to you I stayed aloof and I saw something which shone on the ground. Quickly I lowered and I picked it up. Cautiously, I looked. It was a wristwatch; there were some drops of blood outside and inside. I kept it in my hand precisely. I did not want that Germans would take it. I tried to learn his address, but I have been forbidden to approach. I just learned his name and birthday, but I swore to myself to send this dear souvenir to Howington’s family. At that time I did not know how very difficult it would be with this insufficient information.

“The day after, I went again to the airplane. One or two airmen who could not jump out were on ground and burned. Germans put their remains into a small coffin. Lt. Howington was also placed in a large coffin. Soldiers carried him in a truck. His body passed in front of me. I crossed myself and the tragedy finished.

“He was buried in the cemetery of Poix at 10 kilometers from my village and I knew his grave very well where I went often to bring flowers and pray for him and his family so far.

“Now I am very sad because his grave is not there. American authority has taken away all bodies and transported them in a village in another district in order to make a military cemetery, but I know the name of this new place.

“During the occupation, I could not make inquiries. I was waiting for the liberation. I learned that a French woman of French forces inside had lodged four American paratroopers who were in the same airplane. Lastly, I went and saw her. She gave four civilian addresses, so I wrote on the 18th of April [1945]. At the same time, I wrote to the American Embassy in Paris, which replied very quickly and could not give Howington’s family address.

“I was beginning to despair when on the 13th of July, I received a lovely letter from one of Howington’s comrades, Charles Blakley. He indicated to me two addresses – yours and Mrs. Howington’s. I chose yours because I suppose, but I am not sure, if his wife knows this bad news. Please show her this letter if you like and tell me how I can send the wristwatch as soon as possible.

“Destiny has confided a mission to me and it is nearly finished. Please excuse my bad English, but you must understand how difficult it is to write so long a letter. Give my regards to Mrs. Howington.”

As she promised in her letter, Mademoiselle Gilberte Daumal returned the watch to Howington’s widow. The women corresponded over the years and later Howington’s widow sent Gilberte material for her wedding dress.

 The second 68th Squadron aircraft lost on the 21st was that piloted by 1st Lt. Gary M. Mathisen.

68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq., #42-7514 O, Mathisen	VALIANT LADY	MACR #2359
68th Squadron Crew:		
MATHISEN, GARY M. ASN 0-735418	Pilot KIA – Body Identified 5 Feb. 1944	1st Lt. Schenectady, New York
BALLANGRUD, NORRIS S. ASN 0-681300	Co-pilot KIA – Body Identified, Location: USA	2nd Lt. Portland, Oregon
CLEARY, JOHN J. ASN 0-678888	Navigator POW	2nd Lt. Long Beach, New York
HOELTKE, DONALD R. ASN 0-678414	Bombardier POW	2nd Lt. Pittsford, New York
DICKINSON, JOHN L. ASN 32453614	Engineer KIA, WOM Ardennes	T/Sgt. Gladstone, New Jersey
ALLEN, RICHARD E. ASN 32456988	Radio Oper. POW, died from wounds in 1947	T/Sgt. East Orange, New Jersey
TYLER, LEO M. ASN 17155940	Ball Turret POW, KIA Poix, France	S/Sgt. Glenwood, Minnesota
ADAMS, VICTOR J. ASN 32323720	RW Gunner KIA	S/Sgt. Brooklyn, New York
OSTENSON, JACK N. ASN 6569189	LW Gunner KIA, WOM Normandy	S/Sgt. St. George, Utah
PLAYFORD, JOSEPH E. ASN 11052136	Tail Turret KIA, buried Normandy (B-10-3)	S/Sgt. Ossining, New York

The MACR briefly says that this aircraft, #42-7514, was hit on the sixth and last attack by the enemy fighters. The time was 1526 hours. This plane was seen to nose up and over the formation with the waist position burning profusely. No one reported seeing any parachutes. This was their 18th crew mission.

Sgt. Leo M. Tyler, ball turret gunner, was (apparently) reported incorrectly as POW. He was later reported killed at Poix, Somme, France by the Department of the Army.

Only three men survived to become POWs: Allen, Cleary, and Hoeltke. Relatives of Donald R. Hoeltke reported that only three men got out of the plane and one of these was very seriously injured (probably Allen). The plane was shot down in the area of Bruay, France. The crash site is located at Neuville-Ferrieres, 4 miles SSW of Neufchatel.

When Lt. Hoeltke hit the ground, he was immediately surrounded by troops with about 18 bayonets shoved at him. There was no possibility of any attempt at evading capture. He was taken in for interrogation according to the usual procedure, but Donald learned that his interrogator had worked in the U.S. for several years, knew Al Holderman of the Gannett News, and had returned to Germany as a private pilot. Later, he was grounded and due to his excellent English, was made an interrogator of English and American POWs.

Lt. Hoeltke's widow stated that he had told her he thought that three men got out and parachuted, but one was critically wounded and could have died. He knew that Sgt. Tyler had been made a POW; their site of capture being about 45 miles south east of Calais, France.

Lt. Hoeltke was later sent to Stalag #1, Barth and remained there until the end of the war. Lt. Cleary's name was not mentioned. (See his account later on.)

Richard Allen wrote the following, not long before his death in 1947: "We were attacked by about 30 fighters over France near Path Colay on 21 January 1944 and shot down. I believe we went over our target about six times but I couldn't be sure. Before we were hit by the fighters, I was flying Radio Operator (my position) when Sgt. Ostenson came up front to fix some trouble with the nose guns. He was our armament gunner. The pilot told me to take over his (Sgt. Ostenson's place) until he came back; that was the left waist.

"I no sooner plugged in my electric suit when the attack began. There were about seven planes in our squadron and I believe six of us got knocked down. When we got hit, I was shot through the leg and received a bullet in my spine. The other waist gunner S/Sgt. Victor Adams was also shot and as far as I could see, he was dead. The plane was all on fire from oxygen burning, and it brought me to my senses and I put my chute on and pulled myself up on the waist window. My interphone was shot out and I couldn't tell if we were going to make it back or not. The plane was vibrating violently. I saw Sgt. Playford run out of the tail turret, and he was all on fire. At the same time, Sgt. Tyler, our ball turret gunner started to come out. It all happened within a few seconds and in that time, the plane seemed to roll over and I let go and went out. I didn't notice whether they had their parachutes on or not. I did not see Sgt. Dickinson as he was up front in the top turret. When I got on the ground, I was picked up and taken to a hospital where I saw my bombardier, Lt. Hoelke, and Lt. John Cleary (navigator) for a few minutes. Lt. Hoelke and Lt. Cleary had bad ankles from the parachute landings. Later, in the hospital, I met a crewmember from one of the other planes in our squadron and he said he saw our planes going down in a spin with flames coming out of the engines."

The following information comes from a document written by a graves registration investigator named Howard E. Ephraim: "Contact was immediately made with the Mayor of Neuville-Ferrieres, Mr. Gonse, who was particularly well informed on all details pertaining to the crash of A/C 42-7514. He stated that he had seen the plane crash, that three men bailed out, and that six men were removed in caskets by the German troops. That accounted for nine of the ten-man crew. He further declared that eight days later a dog, which had been attracted by the odor, indicated an additional set of remains which had been obscured by a sheet of aluminum. A guard had been posted at the wreckage of the plane and eventually all of the wreckage above ground was removed by German ordnance crews. No one at Neuville was aware of the fact that this last remains was removed, hence, it is considered possible that it was buried at the scene of the crash by the ordnance team. This account was verified by Mrs. Lefebre who also gave to the

investigator the identification tag of Jack Ostenson, one of the unresolved casualties in the crash. This tag was found at the scene of the crash by Mme. Lefebre. A few days later, the Germans removed the wreckage. This definitely fixes the identity of the plane as that of A/C 42-7514.”

Lt. Cleary wrote the following account about the events of January 21, 1944: “Gentlemen, your target today is a milk run, a V-1 site, southeast of Neufchatel, France, only ten minutes over the enemy. Area escort provided by the 8th Air Force Fighter Command and British Spits. Altitude, 10,000 feet. Departure point is southeast corner of England. The (44th G) Group flight of 24 ships in two 12-ship boxes, will split into two flights of six each. Flight A, lead by Col. Dent; Deputy Lead Lt. Gilbert. Flight B lead by Lt. Williams, Deputy lead Lt. Mathisen. Good luck men. See you when you return.

“Deputy lead, Flight B crossed enemy coast at Fecamp, on course, at altitude. The boxes have split for the different targets, and all are now in separate flights. I.P. in sight, three minutes to target. Light, scattered cumulus below, visibility .8. No flak, no fighters, all is well. Target in sight, obscured by small cumulus, so fly 360 degrees to let it clear. Time 1500. Flew continuous 360s, target is still isolated, but clearing. Time 1550.

“Suddenly, ‘Waist to crew. Waist to crew. Enemy aircraft at 2:00 o’clock, low.’ Immediately B Flight tightened up the formation and hoped for the best. A quick glance revealed approximately 16 Me 109s and 35 FW 190s. A Flight was approximately three miles ahead and coming off the target. Do not believe they ‘dropped.’

“Then the enemy was up and because we were on the bomb run, they concentrated on us, leaving A flight alone. I knew from the ship’s vibration that all stations were manned and firing, but they are attacking from about 4 to 5 o’clock, low to level, working us over from the rear.

“From the tail turret came the report (1) ‘Spelts going down, (2) There goes Starring. (3) They’ve got Howington!’ We were still on the bomb run and suddenly from the bombardier (Lt. Hoelke) came ‘Bombs Away!’

“I heaved a sigh of relief to know that we were rid of them. Bank away to the left and head home. Then, over the interphone from the pilot (Mathisen). ‘Keep an eye on Sobotka. He’s hit.’ I verified this, noting all reports in the ship’s log, got a visual fix and informed the crew that if we could hold out for five more minutes, we would be clear and over the Channel to safety. I requested the pilot to summon assistance from our escort. He replied that he couldn’t do so. That was up to Lt. Williams in the lead ship.

“Waist gunner then called in that Sobotka was going down, and then from the pilot, ‘They’re coming in again. Let’s get some of the bastards!’ All stations were firing and the ship gave a terrific lurch, banked to the right, and went into a slow, descending spiral as the enemy raked us from the nose to tail. A 20-mm exploded between the cockpit and nose, showering Lt. Hoelke and myself with light fragments. ‘We’ve had it!’ shouted Hoelke, as we checked things, and found all communications out. Our Nose Gunner, by now, had his turret aligned (so he could get out). Hoelke slid past me to the escape hatch, passed me my chute, and with the nose gunner behind me, we prepared to abandon ship.

“I pulled the emergency release, and as the escape hatch flew away and to save time for the others, I stepped out into space, parachute in hand, intending to secure same during my fall. To my amazement, I still hung suspended in space, shoulders even with the fuselage bottom, with

my head in the ship!! I was caught on my extra long interphone extension. Reaching up, I pulled myself aboard and while I cleared my phone, Hoelke reached over and put my parachute on me. As I re-jumped, I heard the nose gunner shout, "My chute! My chute!!" I fell through the air, spinning like a top while experimenting to find the best position. This proved to be on my back.

"I felt like a feather in the air – there was no feeling of resistance, no planes were to be seen except my own, spinning. It crashed in a flaming roar. No other parachutes were in sight, and I felt sick about the other men.

"There was no more gunfire to be heard, absolutely no sound at all. A celestial calm seemed to prevail. but coming to with a start, I pulled the ripcord. From my now upright position, I realized my chute was satisfactory, and the calm, sunlit terrain of France was sweet below.

"As I neared the ground, I could see a farmer calculating my angle of fall, and as I neared there, he was reinforced by a dozen others. Then I clearly saw they were Germans of the Luftwaffe all around, with machine gun pistols. As I turned to keep them in sight, I hit the ground and my right foot buckled under me. The Germans were on me in a flash, spread-eagling me, they conducted a rapid search. Completed, I was assisted to arise. I reached to release my English type parachute harness, and seeing same was in the unlocked position, I grew suddenly weak. The Germans had to support me to prevent my collapsing. Had I but touched that buckle in the air, my parachute and I would have parted company!

"Escorting me to the roadside, I was seated on the bank while a medical orderly administered some necessary first aid. My right foot was severely injured. Cutting away my flying boot, he applied a cold compress and assured me that there were no broken bones. My left arm was injured from a 20-mm, halfway up the arm from my wrist. It was just like a cut from a keen razor. Washing same, he applied a disinfectant and tied up same with adhesive.

"I was then carried by my escort to their headquarters, and so learned that I was back at Neufchatel, having floated in my chute a distance of 35 kilometers from the Channel at Deippe.

"Here I was the object of much curiosity and many would stroll by, then quickly snap a picture with their cameras. I was detained there for two hours, given my first cup of Ersatz, and met my first German Officer. He strode to the phone and having got his connection, yelled back and forth so loud and fiercely, I was sure they could hang up the phone and still continue the conversation. He studied me a moment, and then gave what I realized to be a description of the Group - Squadron insignia on my A-2 (flying jacket). Then, hanging up, he strode to where I sat and barked in excellent English, "What is the strength of your Group in men and ships?"

"I just sat there and wondered if he really thought I would answer that. Evidently not, because as I silently sat there, he spun on his heels, marched out. After this, I relaxed, slept for half an hour, and then I was awakened by the entrance of a German field gendarmerie. He was the first adult-looking man I saw since being captured (all of the others being boys of extreme youth).

"He took me in charge and seeing I could but hobble, he picked me up in his arms and carried me out to a car very similar to a Willys, where I promptly fell asleep again. This was probably much to the relief of my guard and his chauffeur. I awoke in Rouen and was taken to what appeared to be a Catholic hospital.

“Upon being carried inside, I was overjoyed to see Sgt. Allen, my radio operator, who was in action as a waist gunner that day. He was lying on a stretcher, but sat up and gave me some additional information on the crew. Lt. Hoelke, bombardier, had been there recently, and like myself, had but minor wounds. No one else got out of the ship. The plane itself had communications out, hydraulics out, and the tail section was on fire. Richard, although shot through his body and legs, looked okay, and should, I believe, recover. To date, however, I have been unable to get any word of him.

Note: Sgt. Allen returned home but died in 1947.

“Taken to another room, I was treated for my leg and arm, given some vile potion to drink. My guard carried me to Police Headquarters in town where I met Lt. Hoelke and Sgt. Andrew Ross, of Sobotka's crew. Having the office to ourselves, except for a Jerry, who seemed to be acting as C.Q. and who talked to us by means of a German-English-French book of vocabulary, we talked.

“We discussed the situation and came to the conclusion that the nose gunner may have had his chute on the escape hatch and same was lost when I pulled the emergency release; or else he left it at his regular position in the waist, and failed to get back there in time. The Germans had caught us square in the cockpit, getting both the pilot and co-pilot (Ballangrud), then raking the ship back clear to the tail. Like myself, Lt. Hoelke was captured as soon as he hit the ground.

“We were finally served a meal of a hot, hideous soup, Ersatz and bread, which was the national Jerry war loaf. I promptly dug into same and immediately became nauseatingly sick, so that I left the rest of it untouched. The prospect of life on such stuff was distinctly unpleasant, and it was a relief when they showed us to a bed. It was a double bunk, with straw ticks, permitting four occupants in a cell 8' x 10'. I shall be eternally grateful to Sgt. Ross who took off my shoes, wrapped the blanket around me, as I was violently ill.

“An hour later, the lights came on, chain and bolts withdrawn, and Lt. Fred Butler, navigator of Sobotka's crew, was shown in – to complete our happy home.

“I awoke the next day feeling a new man, the shock and dazed condition having passed away. We were given what was to become our standard breakfast – Ersatz and bread. We loafed around the office being an object of curiosity to all the Jerries and French workers. Due to the heat in the room, I removed my A-2 jacket and coveralls. A sad mistake, because shortly thereafter, a guard detail came in and motioned us out, refusing to permit me to take my A-2. I have often wondered if it was recovered by the capturers of Rouen or kept by the Jerries as a souvenir.

“We were ushered into an open truck with six guards, and transferred to the Bastille of Beauvais, a building with a 4 x 8 cubicle containing the usual prison bed, a small stove and a bedpan which stunk to high heaven. The room was daily swept out and stove remade by a British Senegalese, a slim giant who spoke a soft, musical English. He was captured in Africa, had made three escapes – one clear back to Africa, which was now controlled by Rommel. He told me about prison life – mail, Red Cross parcels, etc. Just before we left, he gave me a half can of Corn Beef. It was delicious, as by that time we were famished on the Jerry diet.

“Here, I noticed that the Germans, despite a search, had overlooked my wallet, taking it out and destroying my A.G.O. card and secreted some 12 pounds Sterling in my belt. Lt. (William) Jones, Bombardier from Starring's crew, joined us here.

“After four days at this hostelry. we started on our journey to the "Vaterland" via Paris. All was peaceful and serene in Gay Paree. Everyone seemed well dressed, well fed and fairly content, although we received many a sympathetic glance. We traveled in a compartment to Frankfurt-on-Main and were taken to Oberusal, a small village ten miles from Frankfurt. This was the Jerry interrogation center for captured Allied airmen. After a thorough search, which found the money in my belt, we were again thrown into solitary confinement. Next day, I was given a questionnaire to fill out, giving my name, rank, serial number, and home address. I left the remainder blank, and returned it to the Jerry. I was then informed that I would go to interrogation immediately. So preparing for a third degree of the worst sort, and all set to give battle, I was taken to another building and introduced to my Grand Inquisitor. To my amazement, he greeted me like a long-lost brother and spent the first half-hour discussing his wife and family in New York, as well as the fine times he had at Jones' Beach.

“After that he switched to questioning: Route overseas, Personnel of the 44th BG, Cadet School, O.T.U., bases, and members of the crew. Upon refusing any information, he said that he knew the crew and if I would verify it, he would give me any information he had on them. All this time he was "feeding" me some abominable cigarettes, which being my first in a week, I thought were grand!

“He produced a list of names and positions - and sure enough, it was the entire crew. I acknowledged it, and was told that all were dead except Hoelke and myself. He had no information on our radio operator, Sgt. Allen.

“He then produced a thick manual and spent a half-hour telling me all about my Group, both combat and ground personnel, etc. He told me we were starting to receive the new B-24 H & J's, knew the exact routes for flying overseas, training schools in the States, O.T.U. bases, etc. He concluded by saying, "So you see I actually know more than you do!" He was correct. He then remarked as he dismissed me, "Your Air Force is about to separate from the Army and Navy, similar to the R.A.F. and Luftwaft, and your new uniform is a light blue gabardine." To date, I have heard nothing to verify this.

“I was returned to solitary and usual prison lunch at 1:00 and to my surprise, was again taken back to the interrogator. This time to meet half dozen German navigators who could speak no English. Through the interpreter, they requested info on "G," the reliability of metro info, radio bearings and fixes. I grinned, smoked their cigarettes and explained that we depended strictly on D.R. and Pilotage, if weather permitted. They quickly lost interest and as I was dismissed, the guard was instructed to permit me to wash and shave. I was then told I would move to the Transit Camp in Frankfort for shipment to a POW camp.

“After a week's time, the wash and shave was a heavenly gift and a natural necessity. Later the guard brought a book to my cell and the thought of electric lights was like looking forward to Christmas. He must have been exercising a sadly neglected sense of humor or else sincerely thought an airman could see in the dark.

“That night was my first experience on the receiving end of an Allied Air Raid. The RAF came over, but it was merely a nuisance raid. Thirty Mosquitoes, with a "Cookie" each, (60 tons - some nuisance!). Locked in my cell, I felt like a caged animal. Next day I was transported to a transient camp at Frankfurt and received immediate medical attention, followed by an honest-to-goodness

hot shower and a fine, hot meal of Corned Beef, mashed potatoes, cake, coffee, and cigarettes. Hooray! God's in his Heaven, All's well with the world.

“Here we had an air raid shelter, of which we made much use, especially on January 29th, 1944, when we were the target of the 8th Air Force. I was never so scared in my life. The ground vibrated and the walls shook. Through 10/10ths, the 8th did its work well, blasting the railroads and public utilities. We were without lights and water for eight hours. We were informed by the German authorities that nothing was hit except residential areas and churches, and that the infuriated people had lynched the air crews who were forced down in that locality. That should serve us as a warning against attempting any escapes. We were better off inside the wire.

“That night, we were again in the Shelter, as the RAF came over, but was on its way to Berlin. Many the man here was severely wounded and the hospital and staff was inadequate. There was an English pilot who flew with artificial limbs. These, the Jerries took away every night as an escape prevention measure. Several of the men were severely burned around the face from oxygen aflame. One, a Captain Cook, so badly burned that his eyelids were gone, preventing sleep - only able to relax an hour or so every night. He left for a base hospital and plastic surgery. In the face of all this, my injuries were trivial and I ceased going on sick call.

“While at Frankfurt, I met Capt. Robert L. Ager our Group Gunnery Officer, and Lt. (Henry A.) Wieser Group Bombardier, who came along on the 21st, expecting a milk run, flew with Lt. Cookus in ‘A’ Flight. In leaving the coast, they flew over Calais, were hit by flak. Cookus gave orders to bail out while he stayed with his ship and crash-landed in southern England. Hard luck for Ager and Wieser.

“One afternoon we were issued necessary clothing and a grip containing cigarettes, pipe and tobacco. extra socks and underwear, etc. We also got a Red Cross parcel to last a week, and told we were on our way. We were admonished not to make a demonstration or attract the attention of the public who were still plenty mad, Any attempt to escape and we would be shot.

“Loaded onto trucks with plenty of guards, we were taken to the Depot where we had visual evidence of the recent bombing raid. We were loaded into a freight car on a siding, and as they locked us in, off went the siren heralding the approach of the RAF. There was great uneasiness among the Kriegies and a thorough testing of the locked doors and barred windows. It was obvious we could never get out that way, and it was a sigh of relief we gave when the train jerked into motion and pulled out of the yard.

“That night we passed 20 miles south of Berlin and we could see it was a target of the RAF. The city was a glow of fire and flame. We had four guards in our car, well armed with automatic and machine gun pistols. They informed us our destination was Barth, Germany, and painted a glowing picture of same until we concluded we must be headed for a rest camp with recreation facilities. Later on, they offered us beer in exchange for coffee, and some of the boys did it, getting a very poor grade of beer, which was by now the national brew. This trip was our initial meeting with the Red Cross Food Parcel and with a German ration of bread, potatoes and salt, we were to become excellent cooks.

“After three days and four nights, we found ourselves at Barth, Pom., Germany, greeted by a formidable guard detail and a dozen German-trained dogs. So I entered what was to be my home for next one and a half years: Stalag Luft I.”

 1st Lt. Frank W. Sobotka was the pilot of the third 68th Squadron aircraft lost on this mission to the V-1 sites.

68th SQUADRON:

 68th Sq., #42-7501 P, Sobotka MACR #2360

68th Squadron Crew:	A/C crashed near Beaussault (Grattenoux village)		
SOBOTKA, FRANK W. Jr. ASN 0-799486	Pilot KIA, WOM Ardennes	1st Lt.	Flushing, New York
ROSENBLATT, MILTON L. ASN 0-680721	Co-pilot Evadee, returned	1st Lt.	Miami Beach, Florida
BUTLER, FREDERICK C. ASN 0-676018	Navigator POW	1st Lt.	Pasadena, Texas
TEITEL, ABRAHAM ASN 0-678456	Bombardier Evadee, returned 24June1944	1st Lt.	Brooklyn, New York
SHAEFFER, CLAIR P. ASN 33187932	Engineer KIA, WOM Ardennes	T/Sgt.	Wernersville, Pennsylvania
CAPIZZI, THOMAS F. ASN 32533914	Radio Oper. KIA	T/Sgt.	Bronx, New York
SMANIETTO, AUGUST F. ASN 19062047	Ball Turret POW	S/Sgt.	Santa Barbara, California
ROSS, ANDREW J. ASN 35663111	RW Gunner POW	S/Sgt.	Cold Springs, Kentucky
SHOCKLEY, CHARLES W. ASN 15332970	LW Gunner POW	S/Sgt.	Milan, Indiana
REEVES, CLARENCE D. ASN 13046428	Tail Turret KIA, buried Normandy (A-14-42)	S/Sgt.	Pennsylvania

The MACR had very little information, “At 1524 hours aircraft #42-7501 was hit by enemy aircraft and the bombs were dropped immediately. It was observed to circle off to the left and to begin burning, apparently under control. Enemy aircraft attacks became so intense at this time there was no further chance to observe.”

Lt. Milton L. Rosenblatt, co-pilot, added these comments: “We were attacked by Me 109s while circling to find our target. Both engines on the left side were shot out, putting us in a steep left turn and rolling our plane over on its back. With both Frank (Sobotka) and me on the controls, we managed to right the plane, but couldn’t pull it out of the flat spin it went into. The rudder controls were gone and the instrument panel was shot out. Frank immediately hit the alarm bell switch alerting the crew to bail out.

“After a few seconds, I spotted only four chutes descending. The mess in our cabin, due to the rolling over, was unbelievable. Our chest chutes, usually stowed behind our seats, had ended up in the radio compartment. I retrieved the chutes, putting Frank’s in his lap and buckling mine on. Sgt. Clair Shaeffer was strapped in the top turret, obviously dead, and our radio operator, Sgt. Tom Capizzi was putting his chute on as well. Frank was yelling at us to jump.

“Capizzi and I stood at the edge of the bomb bay, so I jumped and apparently Capizzi froze up. He and Frank rode the plane down. I have no idea what had happened in the waist or nose

sections of the plane, but I know I was the last one out. We were so low at the time I jumped that my chute only oscillated once before I hit the ground.

“I came into contact with the Underground about three days after landing. The only information they could give me about my crew was that Abe Teitel was alive and Frank Sobotka’s dog tags were found in the wreckage of the plane. I have never heard from any of my crew since then, although on my return to the States, I talked to most of their families and gave them as much information as I could.”

Note: Rosenblatt’s full story, including his evasion, can be found in the Summer 2001 8 Ball Tails newsletter.

A French historian named Joel Huard reports that there is a memorial to the Sobotka crew in the French village of Grattenoux near Beaussault, which is southeast of Neufchatel-en-Bray.

68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq., #41-23813 V, Starring	VICTORY SHIP		MACR #2358
68th Squadron Crew:			
STARRING, ALFRED A. ASN 0-743121	Pilot KIA	1st Lt.	Pasadena, California
RHODES, LEWIS W. ASN 0-807052	Co-pilot KIA, WOM Cambridge	2nd Lt.	Lockport, New York
MANEVAL, WELDON H. ASN 0-750204	Navigator KIA	2nd Lt.	Frankfort, Kansas
JONES, WILLIAM C. ASN 0-684165	Bombardier POW	2nd Lt.	Decatur, Iowa
CHANDLER, LAWRENCE W. ASN 36427258	Engineer Evadee, returned 20 May 1944	S/Sgt.	Springfield, Illinois
KASLASKAS, EDWARD A. ASN 13127444	Radio Oper. POW	S/Sgt.	Plains, Pennsylvania
STEELE, ARTHUR M. ASN 19170304	Ball Turret KIA, buried Normandy (B-22-5)	Sgt.	Junction City, Oregon
MITCHELL, ROBERT A. ASN 15323016	RW Gunner POW	Sgt.	Fairmont, West Virginia
CIEPLY, EUGENE B. Jr. ASN 32491716	LW Gunner KIA, buried Normandy (B-11-34)	Sgt.	Broadalbin, New York
SCHILD, ROBERT C. ASN 35338667	Tail Turret POW	S/Sgt.	Monroeville, Ohio

The fourth and last airplane lost on the 21st was the one piloted by 1st Lt. Alfred A. Starring. The MACR states that “At 1516 hours, aircraft #41-23813 was hit by enemy aircraft. Numbers one and two engines were set on fire, but the pilots managed to keep in formation. But when the enemy made following attacks, this aircraft was seen to go down in flames. Seven parachutes were seen to open.”

Tail Gunner Robert C. Schild adds, “I was new to this crew. I flew only two times with them before going overseas with them. Therefore, I was not well acquainted with the crew.

“This was our very first combat mission. We came under heavy fighter attacks by both FW 190s and Me 109s. They eventually knocked out three of our engines and we could no longer stay in

the air. Our co-pilot, Lewis W. Rhodes, was killed on the very first pass by the enemy aircraft. Our pilot, Alfred A. Starring, was wounded as well, probably also on that first attack. As our co-pilot was already dead, Starring found it impossible to stay in formation especially with two engines out. When later attacks knocked out the third engine, we were on our way down.

“At that time, the waist gunners went forward and jumped out through the-bomb bay. But I opened the rear hatch and went out from there just as the plane went into its final spin. We must have been quite close to the ground by then as my parachute had barely opened a few seconds before I hit the ground.

“Our navigator, Weldon H. Maneval, must have jumped from the front end at about the same time as I did, with his parachute opening but not quite quickly enough, and he was killed by the impact with the ground. I was taken prisoner and spent 16 months in Stalag Luft #6 and #4. Robert A. Mitchell, our right waist gunner, survived POW camp but found that he had tuberculosis when he returned home after the war.”

Note: Based on information from Joel Huard, the crash site is in or near the French village of Bracquetuit, east of Totes, which is 25 kilometers south of Dieppe, 2 kilometers southeast of Auffay, France.

Lawrence Chandler, the engineer, evaded capture for nearly four months and returned to duty at Shipdham on 20 May 1944. He was sent home on 25 May.

68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq., # 41-24225, Williams	FLAK ALLEY	Returned to base
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68th Squadron Crew:

WILLIAMS, SAM D. ASN 0-524481	Pilot	1st Lt.
	Seriously injured, hospitalized for months	
REICH, STANLEY J.	Co-pilot	1st Lt.
BELLARD, HAROLD W.	Navigator	1st Lt.
STEADHAM, ROY J.	Bombardier	1st Lt.
LUND, PHILMORE H.	Radio Oper.	T/Sgt.
HOLENBECK, JOHN A.	Eng./Top Turret	T/Sgt.
McALISTER, GEORGE E.	Belly Gunner	S/Sgt.
KENYON, FREDERICK A.	RW Gunner	S/Sgt.
CARSTENS, JOHN H.	LW Gunner	S/Sgt.
VAN DYKE, DAVID P.	Tail Turret	S/Sgt.
DAVIDO, FRANK	Observer/Com. Pilot	1st Lt.

Note: Lts. Bellard and Steadham were KIA on 8 April 1944.

On this mission, the pilot, Sam D. Williams, was seriously wounded by 20-mm from Me 109s.

Tail Gunner David P. Van Dyke noted: “Operations Officer Pilot Frank Davido flew with us as an observer on the 1/21/44 mission on the V-1 rocket site. It was supposed to be a milk run. Heavy cloud cover hid the target. After the first bombing run Col. Fred Dent led us on four more. It was a disaster and about twelve ME 109s hit our seven ships, tail end formation, which we led. The 68th lost four out of seven. Both of our wingmen were shot down and the lower element lost both wingmen and also tail-end Charlie.

44th Bomb Group Roll of Honor and Casualties

“Lt. Sam Williams was shot in the face and Frank Davido, took over. In spite of a wound in his neck, he brought the ship back safely, although it was well beat up. There are calls over the Tannoy for type ‘A’ blood and I am sure it is for Lt. Williams. Just how bad he is, we don’t know at this time.”

Military Installations, Agathe Dialermont, France

The second formation of the 44th BG was led by 1st Lt. Keith Cookus of the 67th Squadron and included planes from the 67th and 506th Squadrons. Their target was military installations south of Calais, France.

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #42-99970 M-Bar, Cookus	LIB-ERTY BELLE	MACR #8714
67th Squadron Crew (three exceptions):		
COOKUS, KEITH ASN 0-675040	Pilot Survived crash-landing	1st Lt. Eugene, Oregon
HOLLADAY, HOWARD K. ASN 0-681418	Co-pilot Survived crash-landing	1st Lt. New York City, New York
CAMPBELL, FRANKLIN A. ASN 0-678607	Navigator Wounded, injured, survived crash-landing	1st Lt.
COLE, WOODROW W. ASN 0-741099	Bombardier KIA, buried Cambridge (D-1-35)	1st Lt. Correopolis, Pennsylvania
ANDERSON, WILLIAM N. (506th Sq.) ASN 0-411678	Command Pilot KIA	Major Taylorville, Illinois
WIESER, HENRY A. (not with the 67th) ASN 0-669253	Observer POW	1st Lt. Hamilton, Texas
AGER, ROBERT L. (68th Sq.) ASN 0-727956	Group Bombardier POW	Capt. Port Blakely, Washington
KOWALSKI, ANDREW A. ASN 3316890?	Engineer Survived crash-landing	S/Sgt. Reading, Pennsylvania
TRECHEL, RICHARD J. ASN 6688765	Radio Oper. POW	S/Sgt. Schenectady, New York
SEIFRIED, EUGENE K. ASN 33107243	Nose Turret Survived crash-landing	S/Sgt. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
FONG, THOMAS ASN 12124529	Ball Turret Survived crash-landing	Sgt. Brooklyn, New York
BOYD, WALTER E. ASN 38179723	LW Gunner Survived crash-landing	S/Sgt. Littlerock, Arkansas
BECKER, HERMAN ASN 32079625	Tail Turret Wounded, trapped, survived crash-landing	S/Sgt. New Jersey

Note: This aircraft crash-landed at Manston, England. Three crewmembers parachuted over enemy territory and were captured.

67th Squadron’s 1st Lt. Keith Cookus was leading this formation with Command Pilot Major William N. Anderson (flying his 25th mission) as well as the Group Gunnery Officer and Group Bombardier along just to observe, as it should have been an easy, short attack. Bombing altitude was at 12,000 feet to assure better accuracy on a very small target.

Keith Cookus wrote this description: “We met little opposition at first. We had cloud cover, anyway. As we were trying to bomb through this cloud layer, it was necessary to make five runs on the target, hoping to get a hole large enough for visual bombing. But we could not be sure, so we turned back with our bombs. We never bomb in France unless we are dead sure of our target.

“As we were crossing the French coast, we found the Jerries had moved in a bunch of mobile ack-ack. They must have been tracking us for quite a time. The first burst was so close I heard it. I started evasive action. There were 12 of us in the formation, but 30 seconds after that first burst, we got hit at 11,000 feet. It happened so fast we were thrown around completely out of control by the smack of the explosions. The Jerries got us with seven direct hits in a bunch! I put the plane into a dive as soon as I got some sort of control and went down as fast as I could to 8,000 feet to get out of the area as quickly as possible – and we were not hit again. But I realized at once that there was not much of my plane left. Those bursts practically blew us to pieces. One of the shells burst right inside the bomb bay, ripping out the catwalk which holds the bottom of the fuselage together. This shell killed the Command Pilot, Major Anderson (506th Squadron), who was standing between the co-pilot and me. It also blew the radio operator completely out of our plane. We never saw him again (Trechel, POW). It wounded Chubby Campbell, my navigator, as well as our tail gunner, Moe Becker. There was a hole in the middle of the plane just as if a big shark had taken a bite out of it.

“Neither Tiny Holladay, co-pilot, or I was touched. Major Anderson had slumped to the floor of the cockpit and was lying in a heap. I couldn’t get any news from the rest of the plane because nothing was working. #1 engine had been blown to pieces – that was the second direct hit. It was hanging in shreds, but I managed to feather the propeller before I lost all of the pressure there. The third direct hit had blown out half of my #2 engine – there was nothing there to feather. I then saw that #3 engine was on fire. The engineer, Kowalski, saw the hit on this engine. The flash of the explosion set it on fire and it was blazing furiously, leaving a long lick of black smoke trailing back, streaked with red. I had to leave it to burn because I could not get back to the English coast without letting that engine run as long as it could. I just left it and looked the other way – but couldn’t forget it because it began to fill the plane with gas and smoke.

‘The Major’s in a bad way, Buck’, Tiny yelled. ‘He’s hit in the legs and through the back. He’s asking for morphine.’ We gave the Major two shots on the way back to the coast, but it was clear that he was in very bad shape. There had been another direct hit in the base of the nose turret. Splinters sailed up all around Sgt. Seigfried, but by some miracle, he wasn’t hit although it blew the top right off of his turret.

“Another direct hit had gone clean through the right wing. The shell – the seventh they had pumped into us – took the right main landing gear with it, and part of it is metal as thick around as your thigh. All of the hydraulics were out.

“I had to keep that blazing engine going to get us home. I couldn’t ditch because we had wounded aboard. I still thought the Major would live. The group bombardier and gunnery officers jumped immediately after seeing half of the middle of the ship was gone, but I had no interphone to tell the others to bail out. We were over the coast and the wind should have taken them back to land in France. (It did.) Both men captured, taken to Rouen along with others downed that day.

“As we were settling down to the job of trying to get home, the bombardier, Junior Cole, crawled up on the flight deck. Junior, a big guy, was covered with blood – his face looked awful. The blast had tossed him around, but later we found out that he had crawled into the bomb bay, holding on with his hands and toes to anything he could find that was still firmly rooted to the rest of the plane. He had been tossing out what he could of the mess of shattered bombs in there. With the emergency release mechanism gone, it was the only way he could rid our plane of these dangerous bombs. He’d cut his hands to ribbons. And his intent then was to advise me that he could not get rid of all the bombs. Then he flopped down, couldn’t see and couldn’t talk, couldn’t move. He died of suffocation later in the crash when he was trapped on the flight deck, before we could free him.

“The ball turret gunner, Sgt. Fong, Chinese, managed to get himself out of the ball turret. How, he did not know. His turret was a jangle of twisted metal like in a train wreck, was filling with blazing hydraulic oil. Fong’s clothing was on fire when he got out and as he crawled back toward the tail, flames and burning oil were blowing back at him. He joined Walter Boyd and the other waist gunner. They were back there in the tail section covering their faces with their gloves against the blazing oil. Luckily, all oil burnt out of the hydraulic system and stopped blowing back at them. All three got bad face burns; Fong’s hands were terrible.

“It was only common sense to bail out. The machine was on fire, it was wobbling like a broken fishing pole, smoke was pouring out of one of the two engines still running, etc. Kowalski picked up his chute and Fong watched him fumble with it. ‘She is still flying, isn’t she?’ he said... We were going along all right, heading straight for England and not losing too much height. Tiny shouted in my ear, ‘Coast!’ At that moment there was a whoosh and a smack that made the plane shake like jelly. I saw that I had no power on #3 – the engine had blown up and was white hot. But it got us home.

‘How’s Anderson?’ I asked of Tiny. He said, ‘The landing won’t hurt him, Buck. He’s dead.’ We had to pick a landing spot quickly, and I went in. I cut my sole remaining engine at 50 feet and switched off everything in sight. I saw that we were going to hit the roof of a farmhouse. We were headed for a belly flop anyhow, so I swung the machine around and slammed it back – we missed the house. We shot across that field with its ups and downs like a piece of soap on a bathroom floor. We ended up in a ditch. I thought that the plane might go up any minute – we had all of those bombs aboard. Our extinguisher had no effect on that burning #3 engine. I tore a hole in the cowling and was stuffing earth, turf, anything I could grab, into the fire to smother it as our men were trapped on the flight deck and we couldn’t get to them. The co-pilot, Tiny, told me later that he had stayed inside trying to help get those trapped men out, tearing at anything to get them free, but he didn’t have a chance.

“Folks began to arrive – farm hands, boys, etc. A civilian car came by and we sent Fong, Kowalski and Boyd to the hospital. It was three long hours of ceaseless work before we finally managed to free the four men who were trapped. Anderson and Cole were dead, but Campbell and Becker were rescued alive. Trapped for 3 hours!!” The crash was at Brambling Down, Wingham, Kent in southern England.”

Lt. James R. Perry, flying right wing on Lt. Cookus, told me, “The reason that his plane was hit is that his navigator had allowed our formation to get off course and we were nearly over the city of Calais! All of their guns were pounding us as we approached and that is when Cookus was

bracketed with flak bursts. I saw one hit in the bomb bay and the doors flew off and what looked like a man fall out, apparently without a parachute on. (Trechel, who survived.) The plane immediately fell out of formation and so I took over, breaking radio silence and told the others to follow me in a tight turn to the right and changing altitude. They were zeroed in on us and had to react quickly as we were under 12,000 feet and easy targets.

“I kept watching Cookus as they dove toward the sea and back toward England. He appeared to be near the water as he was nearing landfall and I thought he ditched, as I saw a large explosion in the water. It must have been his bombs going off when his bombardier, Cole, got his bombs free, as they continued on to land and bellied in. It could have been that Cole got all of them out as there was no explosion when they crash-landed.

“When we returned, we found over 150 flak holes in our plane, and I believe it was Thornton (Lt. Richard L.) on the right wing who had over 300 holes in his. But we had no injuries.

“Several years ago I read in the paper where Cookus, flying out of Eugene, Oregon, crashed into a mountain near here and was killed.”

29 January 1944

Frankfurt, Germany

Again, due to poor weather conditions, our bombers had to drop their bombs via PFF method. Flak and enemy aircraft attacks were moderate but no enemy fighters were claimed by our gunners. However, the Group suffered two planes and crews lost; one each by the 66th and 67th Squadrons.

66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #41-29157 J, Maynard

MACR #2356

66th Squadron Crew:

MAYNARD, GEORGE H. ASN 0-800011	Pilot KIA	1st Lt.	Wellsboro, Pennsylvania
NORQUIST, JOHN E. ASN 0-747876	Co-pilot KIA	1st Lt.	St. Paul, Minnesota
MUNDT, CAROL A. ASN 0-685318	Navigator POW	1st Lt.	St. Louis, Missouri
NIELSON, THOMAS W. ASN 0-676493	Bombardier KIA	1st Lt.	Antonito, Colorado
PORTER, DONALD C. ASN 11042360	Engineer KIA	T/Sgt.	North Andover, Massachusetts
PATTERSON, RUSSELL W. ASN 13151627	Radio Oper. KIA	T/Sgt.	Allentown, Pennsylvania
SWAILE, CLARENCE R. ASN 13041424	Ball Turret POW	S/Sgt.	Wilkesburg, Pennsylvania
O'DONNELL, LOUIS J. ASN 12158116	RW Gunner KIA	S/Sgt.	Bayonne, New Jersey
ARCAMONE, FRANK ASN 32540668	LW Gunner KIA, buried Epinal (B-5-70)	S/Sgt.	Bayside, New York

NICHOLS, DERISE L. ASN 13119510	Tail Turret POW	S/Sgt.	Roanoke, Virginia
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1st Lt. George H. Maynard, pilot of A/C #157, and his crew were listed as MIA. The MACR states: "At 1115 hours, the pilot of A/C #41-29157, was observed to leave his position on Lt. Jewell's wing, and to fly for a time with a Group to the left. Shortly thereafter, fire was reported in the bomb bay of this plane. Two chutes were seen to open as it was disappearing into the clouds, under control, apparently."

Three men were able to exit the falling ship and survive. One of them, tail turret gunner Derise L. Nichols, gave me this report: "We had been briefed three times for this mission and it is believed that the Germans may have got word and were ready of us.

"We were over France and about an hour from target, with all bombs on board, when we were jumped by a flight of fighters and were hit immediately. I was the tail gunner and shells hit just behind me and made very large holes in the waist section. #4 engine was hit and put out of action; so were the controls to the tail section. So the pilots could only control flight with the three remaining engines. With the possibility of getting back to England now so slight, the decision was made to head for Switzerland.

"The bombs were salvoed, but even then with the trouble of trying to steer with the engines, we continually lost altitude across France. We did finally cross the Swiss border, but by then we were less than 1,000 feet. We were shot at and hit by ground fire, and #2 engine was put out of commission as well. Not being able to gain altitude over the rising terrain of Switzerland, we had to circle back to abandon ship.

"Only three of us got out – all from the rear – because we were so low by that time that the others did not have time to get out and open their chutes. We landed about five miles from Switzerland at Mulhouse, France."

Note: The crash site is actually near Ilfurth, France.

The village of Ilfurth placed a memorial stone near the crash site and also put a plaque in the local church. It was dedicated 8 June 1996. A translation of the French text on the plaque follows: "Eighty meters west of this monument, the American bomber B-24 Liberator #41-29157, 66th Squadron, 44th Bomb Group, was shot down on 29 January 1944, returning from a mission over Germany. Seven crew members (George H. Maynard, 1st Lt.; Thomas W. Nielson, 1st Lt.; John E. Norquist, 1st Lt.; Russell W. Patterson, T/Sgt.; Donald C. Porter, S/Sgt.; Louis J. O'Donnell, S/Sgt.; and Frank Arcamone, Sgt.) died for France. Passersby, remember."

Note: For additional information on this memorial, please refer to the 44th BG 8-Ball columns in the Spring 1995, Spring 1996, and Summer 1996 issues of the 2nd Air Division Journal.

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #42-7547 X-bar, Pinder

MACR #2251

67th Squadron Crew:

PINDER, HAROLD H.
ASN 0-800931

Pilot
Evadee, POW

1st Lt.

Burgettstown,
Pennsylvania

GRONO, LAWRENCE W.
ASN 0-680437

Co-pilot
POW, evadee, repatriated, died

1st Lt.

Minneapolis,
Minnesota

BOOMER, DONALD S. ASN 0-738956	Navigator POW	2nd Lt.	Mesa, Arizona
STUBBS, ALVIN E. ASN 0-679687	Bombardier KIA	2nd Lt.	Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
HALL, EARL W. ASN 33288720	Engineer POW	T/Sgt.	Parkersburg, West Virginia
SOFFERMAN, ABE ASN 32436994	Radio Oper. Evadee, KIA, buried in New York City	T/Sgt.	Bronx, New York
LAUCAMP, ROBERT L. ASN 17071305	Ball Turret KIA	S/Sgt.	Tipton, Iowa
ROBISON, JACK C. ASN 15330702	RW Gunner KIA	S/Sgt.	Wabash, Indiana
GREEN, MILAS L. ASN 34036551	LW Gunner POW, wounded	S/Sgt.	Clyde, North Carolina
PAXTON, WILLIAM A. Jr. ASN #12155754	Tail Turret KIA, buried Ardennes (A-12-10)	S/Sgt.	Brooklyn, New York

Also on this mission of the 29th, 1st Lt. Harold W. Pinder and crew were lost. The MACR contained the words of observer James Perry, 1st pilot: "A/C #547, pilot H. H. Pinder, was flying on our left wing. About 1110 hours and just before the IP, one FW 190 attacked and scored hits near the right wing tip. A/C #547 began to lose altitude and fire was seen in the bomb bay. Two chutes opened and the aircraft went below the clouds, under control."

The pilot, Lt. Pinder, wrote the following: "We were met on the coast and on in by both Me 109s and FW 190s. I had never seen them mixed before. At about 1102 hours we dropped out of control after about three separate enemy passes. We took 20-mm hits under the flight deck that cut the control cables. I couldn't get the auto pilot to take over control – probably a hopeless effort, anyway. The aircraft dove out of control. I remember the wing afire and at least the #4 engine knocked out.

"Green was in shock from a 20-mm hit through both lower legs. Jack [Robison] pushed Green out the rear hatch and pulled his ripcord, but he did not get out himself, possibly giving his chute to Green."

"Sofferman and I were able to escape capture and were loose with the Belgian Resistance group for three months. But Sofferman was killed by the Secret Police while trying to avoid capture, and I was taken prisoner – in April 1944.

"#547 did not have a name and I think that this mission, our tenth, was the first time we flew this plane. The plane we flew over (to England) had a shark nose painted on it."

Lt. Pinder was referring to A/C #42-7549, which is believed to be the one featured on the front cover of "Jaws Over Europe," published by Ursel P. Harvell in the early 1980s. Pinder flew two mission in the "Shark."

Pinder reported that four crewmen died in the aircraft: Stubbs, Laucamp, Robison, and Paxton. Six others parachuted. Pinder noted that his co-pilot Grono had died in August of 1944 of tuberculosis after repatriation. He also said that his regular navigator was named Weatherwax, who later became a ground officer.

Donald Boomer wrote: “I landed in the Ardennes, and around midnight that night I made contact with the Belgian underground where I spent six weeks, moving around from one safe house to another. I don’t think I ran into any of Pinder’s crew, but I can’t be sure because I didn’t know any of them very well. The guy I got to know best in the Maqui was an American aircrew sergeant named Shepard or Sheppard. I don’t think he was from the 44th. I never asked. We didn’t talk much in the underground because you could never be sure who you were talking to, and the Krauts had a nasty habit of trying to break into the underground networks with spies who spoke fluent English and pretended to be shot down Americans.

“In the middle of March, with the underground’s help, Shep and I traveled from Liege to the Swiss border near Porrentruy, where at the last minute a German patrol caught us about a half a mile from freedom...I spent 14 months at Stalag Luft I.”

506th SQUADRON:

506th Sq., 42-7509 V, Duffy	GALLAVANTIN’ GAL		Returned to base
506th Squadron Crew:			
DUFFY, WILLIAM M. Jr.	Pilot	1st Lt.	
McCASLIN, JOHN M. Jr.	Co-pilot	1st Lt.	
CALLAWAY, JAMES P.	Navigator	1st Lt.	
RODRIGUEZ, FRANK L.	Nose Gun/Togglier	S/Sgt.	
HERSHEY, RICHARD	Radio Oper.	T/Sgt.	
VICKERS, HAROLD, J.	Eng./Top Turret	T/Sgt.	
SCOTT, WILLIAM D.	Belly Gunner	S/Sgt.	
	WIA		
STEWART, JOHN H.	RW Gunner	S/Sgt.	
DRUMEL, WILLIAM E.	LW Gunner	S/Sgt.	
CHOPP, VICTOR J.	Tail Turret	S/Sgt.	Kalamazoo,
	WIA, lost eye		Michigan

Although not lost in combat, the airplane piloted by 1st Lt. William Duffy was badly damaged and limped back to base. Later it was repaired.

Lt. Duffy explained, “We had gone to Frankfurt – in the last echelon, of the last flight, of the last squadron of the last group of the last Division in the 8th Air Force. We came home alone and landed with one propeller feathered, no brakes, one flat tire, and the ball turret down.

“My crew had gotten us back to the base and I could do no less than put the thing down. Victor Chopp, great and brave man, survived a direct hit on the rear turret, but he lost an eye, and yet never a word of complaint during the flight or in the 38 years that he lived thereafter.

“In some way or another, the ball turret gunner was taken out of that damaged turret before the landing. He, too, managed to survive his wounds.” (This was William D. Scott.)

Lt. Duffy and his co-pilot demonstrated exceptional skill in landing their craft in a tricycle landing without even touching that lowered turret on the runway! Simply amazing!