

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

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

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

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

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

19 April 1943

Ground Crew Incident, Shipdham, England

No additional details are currently available on this incident that resulted in the death of Sgt. Earl W. Hancock.

66th SQUADRON:

66th Squadron Casualty

No details available

66th Squadron Ground Crew

HANCOCK, EARL W.
ASN 32254108

Ground Crew Sgt.
DIED, buried Cambridge (F-5-48)

14 May 1943

Kiel, Germany

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

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

66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #41-24014 P	SCRAPPY		Destroyed
66th Squadron Crew	Entire crew survived, all but one returned to action		
REED, JOHN Y. ASN 0-660004	Pilot	1st Lt.	Matamoras, Pennsylvania
WINGER, GEORGE W. ASN 0-662848	Co-pilot	1st Lt.	Columbus, Ohio
PHILLIPS, PHILIP P. ASN 0-662366	Navigator	1st Lt.	Minneapolis, Minnesota
McEACHIN, EUGENE M.	Bombardier	2nd Lt.	Salt Lake City, Utah
WYGONIK, ADAM C. ASN 36301495	Engineer POW, later repatriated	T/Sgt.	Cicero, Illinois
PERRY, ALAN B. ASN 12003178	Radio Oper.	T/Sgt.	Rochester, New York
GREGORY, CHARLES C. ASN 35268646	Asst. Eng.	S/Sgt.	Dayton, Ohio
SASEK, CHARLES M.	Asst. Radio	Sgt.	Houston, Pennsylvania
BARNETT, THOMAS J. ASN 19079972	Gunner	Sgt.	Procktor, Oklahoma
STEERS, FRANK B.	Gunner	S/Sgt.	Los Angeles, California
BENNETT, RAVELLE A.	Tail Turret	S/Sgt.	Tampa, Florida

Note: Philip Phillips and George Winger were killed in action on 1 August 1943.

1st Lt. John Y. Reed, pilot, relates his experiences: "On this Kiel mission the leading B-17s were assigned to fly at a higher altitude than the B-24s to balance out the relative speeds. The bombing run was further complicated when one of the B-17 outfits got out of position on the bomb run and ended up directly over the 44th's formation. It dropped its load of high explosives right through the 44th's planes! This was scary as Hell, but fortunately, to my knowledge, none of the 44th planes suffered any damage from the errant bombs.

"The particular incendiaries that we carried were packaged in strapped clusters as they hung in the bomb bay, but as soon as they were released, the clusters broke open, filling the sky with a myriad of individual, random altitude sticks of potential fire. Having had experience with the problem of this type bomb before, we flew a relatively loose formation so that the rear aircraft could avoid running into the masses of sticks from the lead planes.

"We came under very heavy fighter attacks in the target area and were quite vulnerable because of our spread-out bombing formation. Just prior to dropping our bombs, I saw an FW 190 peel off at us from about 1 o'clock and slightly high, and as the puffs of bursting 20-mm self-destroying ammo came toward us, it became apparent that the line of fire would put the

successive bursts right into our cockpit. Purely reflex action alone caused me to hit the wheel in a dive to try to get below the line of fire, but unfortunately, the bursts did not quite clear the plane, but hit the top turret directly behind the cockpit. The resulting explosion tore the top turret canopy completely off, and the shrapnel severely wounded Sgt. Adam Wygonik about his head, neck and upper body. The inside of the turret and the gun barrels were pitted from the force of the shrapnel!

“Either the force of the explosion or Sgt. Wygonik must have reflexively dumped his seat lever as he immediately fell out onto the flight deck. Sgt. Alan Perry, radio operator, immediately sized up the situation, left his own oxygen supply, and attempted some first aid to Sgt. Wygonik, who was bleeding profusely from his head and body wounds – and no oxygen supply.

“Sgt. Perry snapped Wygonik’s chest pack onto his harness and put his hand around the ripcord ring, inasmuch as Sgt. Perry intuitively concluded that Sgt. Wygonik would die before we got back to England and medical attention. He intended to roll Wygonik out of the ship as we were still over the target area – and the possibility of immediate medical attention.

“At this point, however, Perry was suffering from lack of oxygen and returned to his oxygen supply to keep from blacking out. But when he was able to turn back to Wygonik, Adam was gone! Apparently either intentionally or otherwise, Adam had rolled off the flight deck, onto the catwalk in the open bomb bay. The bay doors were still open as we were on the bomb run. No one could say for sure that Adam’s chute had opened since all attention was on fighting off the attacking aircraft. We had no way of knowing whether Adam reached the ground dead or alive, though the odds seemed stacked against his survival due to the severity of his wounds and the resultant loss of blood, and the fact that he was without oxygen even longer than Sgt. Perry.

“The plane, as we came away from the target, was severely damaged, with one engine smoldering, loss of top portions of the left vertical stabilizer and rudder, multiple hits from 20-mm fire including the blown-away top turret canopy, and the left main landing gear dropped down. Unable to maintain position in our formation, I dove toward a group of B-17s that were ahead and below us in a shallow dive toward the coast, and managed to hold position behind and below their rear flight. This protected our top with their bottom and rear turrets. After the fighter attacks broke off, we flew pretty much alone back to England.

“When back over Shipdham, we circled and attempted to lower our landing gear using the manually operated crank-down procedure, due to the fact that the hydraulic lines had suffered hits. The gear started down but locked at about 45 degrees and at which point it could be neither lowered nor raised. We couldn’t attempt an emergency landing on the runway due to other activity there, and felt that an attempt to land in the grass would result in the partially down gear snagging and catapulting the plane.

“I bailed the crew out over the field except for my co-pilot, George Winger. We flew the plane back out toward the coast, where I set it on Automatic Pilot. George bailed out first and I was close behind. After SCRAPPY crossed the coast, it was shot down by a flight of Spitfires piloted by Polish escapees. George landed in a freshly plowed field and I came down in the midst of a searchlight anti-aircraft battery right on the coast.”

Yes, Sgt. Wygonik survived and here is his story: “We were on the bomb run, bomb bay doors open, when I received a direct hit from a 20-mm shell in the top turret from a FW 190. I was

blown down to the flight deck badly wounded in face, head, neck, eyes, arms, and hands. Sgt. Perry hooked my parachute on my harness and shoved me out – probably saving my life as I don't believe I could have survived the long time trip home and bailing out over England. I landed in Kiel city near the target area, was soon picked up by German troops and taken at once to a hospital where I was well-treated and confined as a patient for a few days; then sent to Sandbassel hospital just a few miles from Kiel, where I recuperated from most of my injuries. Later I had my right eye removed at a hospital in Vienna, Austria.”

Harvey Compton witnessed the attack and added these details: “Capt. Abernethy was leading. Lt. Reed was on Ab's left wing and Lt. Kolliner was on Ab's right wing. Lt. Reed was having a little trouble holding formation so Kolly and Reed switched positions. On the run in, Reed's plane was hit in the top turret. Must have been a rocket or 30 or 40-mm shell.” He continued, “The plane was also hit in the #2 engine and in the left vertical stabilizer. The top left half sheared off and the left main gear dropped. The plane fell off sharply to the right. I thought they were surely gone. After landing and debriefing, we heard he was coming in. The crew bailed out and were picked up. Reed had a new gunner from the armament shop. He came up to our C.O., Hodges, I believe, threw his parachute down and said, ‘There's your blankity-blank receipt. I quit.’ He went back to the armory.”

John Reed and Alan Perry both were commended for their actions on this mission:

Reed received a DFC. Here is the citation: “John Young Reed, 0-660004, 1st Lieutenant, 44th Bombardment Group (H), Army Air Forces, United States Army. For extraordinary achievement while serving as pilot of a B-24 airplane on a bombardment mission over Germany, 14 May 1943. On reaching the German Coast, the formation was attacked by one of the largest enemy fighter plane forces encountered to date. During the bombing run, Lieutenant Reed's airplane suffered severe damage and on leaving the target enemy fighter planes attacked in force disabling three engines. Displaying great courage and skillful airmanship, Lieutenant Reed with only one engine of his airplane functioning properly dove into a cloud bank and by so doing evaded the attacking fighter planes. On reaching his home base, Lieutenant Reed ordered all members of the crew to bail out as the airplane was in such a condition that it could not be landed or crash landed. He and the co-pilot then flew their airplane to the coast where it could crash into the water without harm to anyone. On arriving at the coast, Lieutenant Reed set a seaward course for the airplane and then he and the co-pilot bailed out. The actions of Lieutenant Reed on this occasion were directly responsible for the safe return of all members of his crew and reflect the highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States.”

Commenting on the citation, Reed wrote: “The write up for my DFC for the Kiel raid was a real comedy of errors, which no one in headquarters ever wanted to take credit for. To my recollection, there were no clouds in the area and, though I'd like to believe that I was a reasonably good pilot, neither I nor anyone else I know would ever claim that “with three disabled engines,” a B-24 was flown from Germany to England.”

Perry received a Silver Star. Here is the citation: “Alan B. Perry, 12003178, Technical Sergeant, 66th Bombardment Squadron (H), Army Air Forces, United States Army. For gallantry in action while serving as radio operator and gunner on a B-24 airplane on a bombing mission over Germany, 14 May 1943. Before reaching the target enemy fighter planes attacked in unusually large numbers rendering the top-turret useless and wounding the gunner, who slipped from his

seat onto the catwalk over the open bomb bay which could not be closed due to damage. Displaying great bravery and skill Sergeant Perry, without waiting to make proper oxygen connections administered first aid and put a parachute pack on the injured gunner, placing his hand in the release handle. Having accomplished this and being too weak from lack of oxygen to render further assistance, Sergeant Perry was forced to return to his radio compartment for a supply of oxygen. When he returned to the bomb bay to give further aid, his comrade was not there. Sergeant Perry then entered the top-turret and attempted to fire the damaged guns thus preventing the enemy from realizing that this highly important position had been destroyed. The bravery, skill and devotion to duty displayed by Sergeant Perry on this occasion reflect the highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States.”

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #41-24278 Q, Brown	MISS DELORES		MACR #16558
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67th Squadron Crew:

BROWN, ROBERT I. ASN 0-727162	Pilot POW	1st Lt.	Norwalk, California
WESTBROOK, HARTLEY A. ASN 0-728041	Co-pilot POW	1st Lt.	Coon Rapids, Iowa
BISHOP, ROBERT H. ASN 0-353495	Navigator POW	Capt.	Knoxville, Tennessee
HAYWOOD, HOLDEN R. ASN 0-727341	Bombardier POW	2nd Lt.	Terra Haute, Indiana
WANDTKE, GILBERT A. ASN 16047953	Engineer POW	T/Sgt.	Manawa, Wisconsin
SUSAN, JOHN L. ASN 6995427	Radio Oper. POW	T/Sgt.	Llewellyn, Pennsylvania
ULLRICH, AUGUST ASN 342142804	Asst. Radio POW	S/Sgt.	Brooklyn, New York
MILLHOUSEN, GEORGE R. ASN 37133211	Gunner KIA, WOM Margraten	S/Sgt.	St. Louis, Missouri
CATE, RICHARD E. ASN 20366318	Gunner KIA, WOM Margraten	Sgt.	Hampton, Virginia
KLINGLER, ROY L. ASN 39303276	Tail Turret KIA, WOM Cambridge	S/Sgt.	Portland, Oregon

Note: It appears that Millhousen and Klingler staying in the aircraft.

This mission was a maximum effort but only three 67th crews could be scraped together. SUZY-Q was being repaired so the third crew was not only “patched” together, it was forced to fly a replacement aircraft named MISS DELORES. T/Sgt. John L. Susan relates his experiences aboard this ship on this mission: “We tried to overtake the B-17s and get above them but the chase was futile. We could not catch them even though we were faster. When we got to the target, we had reached a good altitude but the B-17s were still ahead and above us. The German gunners had a good track on the B-17s and the B-24s were coming in on the same track – and we took on a lot of flak.

“MISS DELORES took a hit and we started to fall behind, as one of our left-side engines was knocked out. 2nd Bombardment Wing had recently issued a directive that Radio Operators could not man the top turret, but should stay at his position on the flight deck. Sgt. “Gib” Wandtke was operating the top turret but the flak burst had also hit Gib, taking some metal in his knee, and he came tumbling down out of the top turret, which was almost directly above me. He motioned to me that I should get into the turret – and I did. But unknown to me was the fact that the flak bursts had also knocked out the Intercom! Everyone, therefore, was on his own.

“When I got into the top turret, we were already a sitting duck as we were falling behind the formation due to that lost engine. And my guns would not fire between the two vertical stabilizers for some reason. I kept cussing as I would bring the guns down to shoot at the six or more following Jerries who were taking pot shots at us from the rear. I don’t know if our tail turret guns were functioning or not. [Editor’s note: They were not.] Then our left wing started on fire – and it was time to start getting out.

“Just when I decided the situation was too precarious, our pilot, Lt. Brown, tried to give the signal to bail out, but he could not communicate with the crew to advise them. We had dropped our bombs and the bomb bay doors were still open. Gib Wandtke, wounded and all, fought his way back to the rear of the plane to warn the gunners back there to abandon ship. When he got back to the flight deck I had found my chest pack chute and was standing on the catwalk at the front of the bomb bay. So I tumbled out, and knowing that some Jerries would attack my chute, I delayed my opening for about sixty seconds.

“When I pulled the cord the altitude was about 8,000 feet and the feeling was very eerie – no sound whatever. A very, very quiet sensation, with only the wind through the shrouds that could be called only a whisper, and was the only sound that I could discern.

“Above, I could see the remaining planes on their way back from Kiel. Back over the bay, I could see many chutes on the way down, high above me. Below, I noticed some boats leaving their wake in the bay. Shortly thereafter, I took off my bail out bottle, my shoes, and loosened my harness as we had been instructed to do over water. Hanging onto the harness by my hands, I approached the water of Kiel Bay.

“There is one problem, however. How do you know how high you are off the water? You have no reference point on water to judge your altitude. Are the whitecaps you can see six inches high or 16 inches? When I thought I was 6 to 10 feet above the water I let go of my harness – but I had miscalculated! Just as I let go, my feet were already in the water, and the shroud lines came tumbling down over my head!

“As I entered the water I went on down possibly 10 feet, but being buoyant, popped right back up under my shroud lines. The parachute canopy also had dropped over my head and my fight to free myself began. I struggled with the shroud lines and the chute until I thought I would never get free. Just then a boat came by and a fisherman took his gaff and pulled the chute from my head. Then he gaffed me and pulled me out of the water like a big fish. He probably saved my life by being there. Other members of my crew, if they did not delay their opening, may have drowned by being blown out to the mouth of the Bay. The first words uttered by the boat crew were, ‘Für Sie das Krieg ist fertig’ – meaning, ‘For you the war is finished.’

“Later I learned that during the battle, Lt. Hayworth, our bombardier, after dropping the bombs, saw a cannon shell coming toward the front of the plane and covered his head with his hands. The shell exploded on the plexiglass nose section and shattered plexiglass blasted against him. When he became a POW, his hands and forehead were peppered with shrapnel and plexiglass. He no doubt saved his eyes by shielding them with his arms and hands. I did not realize that the last three original planes – all except SUZY-Q – in our Squadron had been hit and downed on this mission until the crew members of the other B-24s showed up in my prison camp.” S/Sgt. Susan spent most of his time in Stalag 17. Lt. Bishop was rescued from the bay by a Danish Trawler.

Note: Bishop lived in England for many years after the war.

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #42-40126 T, Roach	ANNIE OAKLEY...		MACR #2441
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Full name: ANNIE OAKLEY “CRACK SHOT”

67th Squadron Crew:

ROACH, WILLIAM A. Jr. ASN 0-791505	Pilot KIA	1st Lt.	Lumberton, North Carolina
TENNEY, ROSS A. ASN 0-728767	Co-pilot KIA	1st Lt.	San Diego, California
KISSINGER, LOUIS L. ASN 0-729632	Navigator POW	1st Lt.	Rio Linda, California
KENNON, WYATT S. ASN 0-661636	Bombardier Evadee, later KIA, buried Ardennes (B-20-2)	1st Lt.	Virginia
GRAHAM, SIDNEY W. ASN 39381894	Engineer KIA	T/Sgt.	Pullman, Washington
STEPTOE, THOMAS E. Jr. ASN 33133951	Radio Oper KIA, buried Ardennes (B-20-1)	T/Sgt.	Manaroneck, New York
LEWIS, CARL R. ASN 33185548	Well Gun KIA	S/Sgt.	Mt. Pleasant, Pennsylvania
ADAMS, RICHARD W. ASN 14120178	RW Gunner KIA	S/Sgt.	Macon, Georgia
HOBBS, HERBERT J. Jr. ASN 34117537	LW Gunner KIA	S/Sgt.	Salisbury, North Carolina
LANDRETH, CALVIN F. ASN 15104217	Tail Turret KIA, buried Ardennes (D-38-20)	S/Sgt.	Indianapolis, Indiana

The second 67th Squadron plane lost this day was flown by the first replacement crew (1st Lt. William A. Roach's), which was on its second mission. Only two members from this crew appear to have bailed out successfully – the navigator, Lt. Louis L. Kissinger and bombardier Lt. Wyatt S. Kennon. Lt. Kissinger was captured and became a POW, while Lt. Kennon evaded capture for a period of time (not recorded) but was later killed. Six charred bodies were found at the crash site, four of whom were identified by their dog tags: Sidney Graham, Herbert Hobbs, Richard Adams, and Thomas Steptoe. Two bodies without tags were not identified.

The lone survivor, Lt. Kissinger, could not be located to obtain his account of his experiences that day.

67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #41-23807 U, Phillips	LITTLE BEAVER	MACR #2748
67th Squadron Crew:		
PHILLIPS, CHESTER L. Jr. ASN 0-421129	Pilot KIA, Ardennes (D-12-2)	Capt. Greenville, Texas
WILBORN, EVERETT W. Jr. ASN 0-729393	Co-pilot KIA	1st Lt. Port Lavaca, Texas
BARTMESS, THOMAS E. ASN 0-726980	Navigator KIA, drowned	1st Lt. Houston, Texas
HILL, WILLIAM E. ASN 0-727342	Bombardier POW	1st Lt. Louisville, Kentucky
DENNY, MICHAEL J. ASN 12055743	Engineer POW	T/Sgt. Shortsville, New York
PRICE, GEORGE B. ASN 12034269	Radio Oper. KIA, WOM Margraten	T/Sgt. Oakhurst, New Jersey
HUBBARD, GAYLORD F. ASN 37120505	Gunner KIA	Sgt. Blackton, Iowa
GLAUBITZ, DALE A. ASN 37087575	Asst. Eng. POW	S/Sgt. Sidney, Nebraska
PHILLIPS, EDWARD W. ASN 18063461	Asst. Radio KIA, buried Ardennes (A-35-28)	S/Sgt. Fort Worth, Texas
FOREHAND, CHARLES C. ASN 20443081	Waist Gunner POW	S/Sgt. Nashville, Tennessee
GRABOWSKI, BARNEY J. ASN 20641515	Tail Turret KIA	S/Sgt. Detroit, Michigan

The third of the three 67th Squadron aircraft and crews to go down this day was the one piloted by Captain Chester “George” Phillips. Sgt. Michael J. Denny, engineer on LITTLE BEAVER, wrote to 1st Sergeant Robert Ryan from his POW camp and he included this information: “Chubby Hill, Glaubitz, Forehand, and myself are the only ones who got out OK. Glaubitz was hit pretty badly, still in hospital in pretty bad shape...Lt. Roach went down before we did – all dead but Kissinger. Brown went down about the same time that we did – all OK but little Klingler, Millhousen, and some new boy (Cate).

“We were hit after we left the target. Two bursts in the back end, also knocked out one engine; then a burst in back of our navigator [Thomas E. Bartmess]. The entire inside of the flight deck was a mass of flames. It must have hit the hydraulic fluid in the accumulator positioned there. We went into a flat spin – had a Hell of a time standing on my feet and putting on my parachute. Tried to put out the fire, but was impossible. Could not get doors [bomb bay doors] open so I had to fight my way back to the rear windows to get out. Bailed out at about 800 feet. Was the last one to leave the plane, and saw it crash and burn.”

S/Sgt. Charles C. Forehand states, “I remember Tommy Bartmess well – he was a very good officer and navigator. He led us over enemy territory for 22 raids and back. We were looking forward to making the 25th mission soon and coming home. The day we were shot down, the anti-aircraft flak was very heavy and accurate, fighters were everywhere we looked. I was flying as waist gunner that day and we were hit by flak, were on fire. After that, things went so fast I

don't know what went on in the front of the plane. That night a German officer told me that three crew members survived, but I never saw any of them or heard from any of them. I was captured as soon as I hit the ground and was a POW for two years."

Lt. William E. Hill, bombardier, included this bit in a letter dated 29 May 1943 that he sent home from his POW camp: "I suppose by this time you know I am a POW. Went on one mission too many this time. I am the only officer from my crew alive, plus three enlisted men – four out of ten! A 20-mm cannon shell exploded right in the nose of plane just behind me. I believe having a steel helmet on my head saved my life. Flames broke out immediately and the plane went into a flat spin. My navigator [Bartmess] was first to bail out and I followed. He landed in the water, but was caught in shrouds of parachute and drowned. Fortunately, I stayed with the plane about 3 minutes longer and landed on the beach. Was almost knocked cold by a blow on my forehead as chute opened and again when I landed. However, came out of it all with only a scratch on forehead, sore spine for a few days and a little shock. Germans treat us fine and we have plenty to eat."

Captain Phillips, the pilot, was killed by a flak burst, shortly after leaving the target. This was probably the same flak burst described by Lt. Hill. 1st Lt. Wilborn, co-pilot, was last seen standing on the flight deck, and could have had time to bail out, but he did not survive for reasons unknown.

With the loss of these three planes, the 67th Squadron was left with only one aircraft and it was being overhauled in Northern Ireland – and one make-shift crew!

68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq., #41-23819 A, Howell	RUGGED BUGGY		MACR #15509
68th Squadron Crew (with one exception):			
HOWELL, MALCOLM C. ASN 0-727992	Pilot KIA, parachute torn, Ardennes (B-37-28)	1st Lt.	Topeka, Kansas
O'BRIEN, JAMES E. ASN 0-435700	Command Pilot POW	Major	Monogahala, Pennsylvania
BLEDSON, JOHN D. ASN 0-726990	Navigator POW	1st Lt.	Clinton, Massachusetts
CRISAN, NORIUS ASN 6994910	Bombardier POW	M/Sgt.	Denver, Colorado
McCABE, KENNETH C. ASN 16001425	Engineer POW	S/Sgt.	De Kalb, Illinois
ERNST, RALPH C. (From 66th Sq.) ASN 6863975	Radio Oper. POW	T/Sgt.	Enderlin, North Dakota
VAN OYEN, HAROLD D. ASN 37144043	Well Gunner KIA, drowned	S/Sgt.	Madison, Wisconsin
MacCAMMOND, JAMES A. ASN 11040993	RW Gunner POW	S/Sgt.	Darien, Connecticut
HUSSELTON, JOHN W.	LW Gunner POW	S/Sgt.	Fairfield, Illinois
CASTILLO, RICHARD M. ASN 35278673	Tail Turret POW	S/Sgt.	Springfield, Ohio

Note: T/Sgt. Ralph C. Ernst was from the 66th Squadron.

The 68th Squadron lost one aircraft and crew – that being the plane flown by 1st Lt. Malcolm C. Howell with Major James E. O'Brien in the right seat as Command Pilot. Major O'Brien has written a detailed account of this day, some of which follows, "The words came down one calm night of May 13th that the Group was to recall all crews for a maximum effort to Bordeaux, France. However, at 0200 hours the field order changed and to load up with 4,000 pounds of new-type incendiary clusters for Kiel, Germany. The obvious question was 'What good will incendiaries do at Kiel?' The explanation given at briefing at 0700 was that the B-17s were going to bomb Hell out of the Sub Pens, Aircraft Factories and Seaport Facilities and the B-24s were to kindle the fires...but it was a long trip without fighter escort!

"With vacancies due to men on leave in London, Lt. Mac Howell would have to fly as first pilot. This seemed quite simple except that poor little Mac had never wanted to be a first pilot – he just wanted to go home to his dear, loving wife. As #41-23819 A (Bar A) taxied out, Mac said, 'If I get back from this trip, I'm going to get stinkin' drunk!'

"As we passed through 19,000 feet above the Frisian Islands, which we were to have avoided, we saw scattered puffs of flak smoke and responded with the usual appreciation of poor marksmanship from ground batteries. My attention was diverted momentarily to Tom Holmes' ship which took a burst of flak and appeared to have some flames coming out of the bomb bay. All of a sudden our ship was rocked with two explosions. One real indication of trouble was the manifold pressure on two left engines, which dropped to 15 psi and there was a sudden drag to the left, which Howell and I struggled to correct. I had thoughts of feathering these two left engines but that would have been a sure give-away to German fighters waiting to come in for an easy kill. We lost communications with the five boys in the rear of the ship, too. The formation had leveled off onto the bomb run and we were still keeping up with them.

"The bomb bay doors opened and the 44th let go with their clusters of matchstick incendiaries, which added even more confusion. The clusters did not hold together for 200 feet before breaking up. As soon as they hit the slipstream they were all over the sky in a negative trajectory, flying back through the formation, bouncing off of wings and propellers. Nothing worked better for the Germans at this point as the formation scattered to avoid these missiles.

"Meanwhile, we had dropped our own clusters of bombs and had plenty of trouble. The cockpit smelled of gasoline and our unspoken thoughts as Howell and I looked at each other were fire and explosion. We had now separated from the formation after leaving the target and I noticed at least two other stragglers off to the right. One of them was from the 67th Squadron and the other was Captain Swede Swanson of the 506th Squadron, which had just joined our Group [in late March] back at Shipdham. There was plenty of company now joining us – FW 190s in formation off to the left and Me 109s off the right wing. "Mac" McCabe, in the top turret, kept yelling through his oxygen mask to dip the wing so he could hit them with a few .50s. Howell and I were just trying to keep the ship flying, not knowing what else to do. We had been through this before and somehow fate had brought us through. In the past we had outlasted German fighters until they turned back over the North Sea, but now we were practically standing still in a 70 mile-per-hour headwind, on a heading of 285 degrees, with lots of German soil still underneath us.

"There must have been at least two Jerrys sitting off our tail and pumping a steady flow of cannon and .30-caliber bullets into us. I heard several .30s zing into the cockpit and bounce off

the armor plated seats. Mixed among these .30s were some incendiary bullets which made a good mixture with the intense gasoline fumes and pretty soon we had a roaring furnace in the bomb bay.

“My first knowledge of the fire was the intense heat all over the cockpit and I leaped out of the seat, breaking my oxygen hose. I pulled open the top hatch to get out, saw the whirling propellers and antenna wires. And I recall my steel GI helmet, which we wore before the invention of flak helmets, blowing right off into the wind as I stuck my head out of the hatch. If there was any time to take a second guess, it was here. I decided on some other exit. T/Sgt. Ralph Ernst, radio operator, desperately kicked the bomb bay door open to make an opening large enough to exit, providing you could make it through the smoke and flame. In the rush, I was looking for my snap-on British-type chest pack and mistakenly snapped on a life raft dinghy! I threw the dinghy pack to the floor and found my chest pack in time to get into the nice quiet of the atmosphere. This final rush quickly ended in peaceful and quiet descent as I looked up to see the secure strings of a parachute canopy lowering me to Mother Earth. But not before the shock of pulling the ripcord and the patient wait for a jerk. But there was no jerk and I was sure the thing had failed, especially with the handle in my hands which had a little 12 inch wire dangling from it. I was sure something had broken. This experience for every novice parachutist can take a few years from his life expectancy!

“On my way down, I decided that I should have my back to the wind so I experimented with the shroud lines trying to turn the canopy so I was facing down wind. All this did was make a violent swing that almost spilled the canopy so that first experiment ended quickly.

“Shortly after I realized I had an open chute, I looked up to see another chute coming down beside me with one nylon panel torn open from bottom to top. I couldn't determine who it was but on the ground I found Crisan, Bledsoe, McCabe, Ernst, Husselton, MacCammond, and Castillo (in a stretcher with his foot badly injured). With the very limited communications allowed, I was able to determine that Crisan, Bledsoe, Ernst, and McCabe did not have a bad chute as they were alive and uninjured. Howell didn't show up, and the first indication of his fate was the first question thrown at me by an English speaking German medic. ‘Do you know a little man in a yellow suit? He is toten (dead).’

“One other casualty was Sgt. Harold Van Oyen, our assistant radio operator and waist gunner. He always had a fear of drowning, even with a Mae West life preserver. When we got our first burst of flak, it not only stopped the two left engines but it blew a hole in the tail end, knocking S/Sgt. Castillo out of his turret and injuring his foot. The other three boys in the rear sized up the situation as hopeless as we had no intercom, pushed Castillo out, pulling his ripcord for him and then bailed out themselves. Van Oyen landed in the Kiel Bay; a German ship picked him up, but he had already drowned in his life jacket.

“Sgt. Castillo was taken to a German hospital and the rest of us were put on a train to Frankfurt where the Germans interrogated all POWs – Dulag Luft I. After another three or four days, Bledsoe and I were sent to Stalag Luft III at Sagan and the NCOs were sent to Stalag 17 near Krems, Austria. For the next 23 months we were POWs.”

S/Sgt. Castillo later stated that the last thing he remembered was a couple of German fighters sitting 20 to 30 yards off the tail of the aircraft and systematically peppering the rudders and tail section with everything they had. He and his rear turret had been knocked out of commission by

these German 7-mm and .30-caliber fire. His ammunition box near his right foot had been hit and wedged against his foot, which was badly mangled. The next thing he could remember was being picked up on the ground.

A second 68th Squadron plane was also involved with casualties. This aircraft, piloted by Lt. George R. Jansen, had crew members seriously wounded. S/Sgt. McCrady was hit by a .30-caliber machine gun bullet in his stomach and died the next day from this wound. In addition, S/Sgt. Robert Reasoner, tail gunner, had a head injury from a .30 cal. bullet, his second combat injury; M/Sgt. Robert M. Smith, right waist gunner had 20-mm shell fragments in his right leg; and S/Sgt. Butler was wounded in his right hand, right arm and chest from .30 cal. bullets. The plane was badly damaged as well, including a flat tire, but Lt. Jansen made a perfect landing to allow his men to receive immediate medical aid.

Tony Mastradone reported that McCrady was “put on a stand-by plane and flown to an American hospital somewhere in England. The late Capt. John Young [the Flight Surgeon for the 67th Squadron], Cpl. Clifford Hiess, and I were on the flight and everything possible was done, but to no avail.”

68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq., #41-24009, Jansen	MARGARET ANN		Returned to base
68th Squadron Crew:			
JANSEN, GEORGE R.	Pilot	1st Lt.	
GIRARD, LOUIS V.	Co-pilot	1st Lt.	
VIKERY, EUGENE P.	Navigator	2nd Lt.	
GUILFORD, GEORGE W.	Bombardier	S/Sgt.	
STRANDBERG, CLARENCE W.	Radio Oper.	S/Sgt.	
HUFF, CORWIN C.	Eng./Top Turret	S/Sgt.	
McCRADY, LEO V. Jr. ASN 17056134	Gunner KIA, buried Cambridge (E-4-91)	S/Sgt.	Kansas City, Kansas
REASONER, ROBERT J. ASN 34242418	LW Gunner Slightly wounded	S/Sgt.	New Plymouth, Ohio
SMITH, ROBERT M. ASN 13027651	RW Gunner Slightly wounded	M/Sgt.	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
BUTLER, RICHARD J. ASN 13044499	Tail Turret Slightly wounded	S/Sgt.	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Note: Louis Girard was killed in action on 1 August 1943. Robert Smith was killed in action on 1 October 1943.

The tail gunner, Richard Butler, wrote the following: “It was a good day for a bombing mission as the sky was clear except for a few scattered clouds below us. Soon after we crossed the coastline and were over the continent, we began to have fighter attacks at irregular intervals before we reached the target city. As we reached the outskirts of Kiel, the fighter attacks intensified and became almost constant. At about that time I saw Captain O’Brien’s ship drop out of formation and lag behind. He was under heavy attack and the fighters were just swarming around them. I was unable to observe any parachutes drop from the plane because of the large number of fighters in the area.

“As we were nearing the target, we had become ‘tail-end Charlie’ because of the loss of Captain O’Brien’s ship. (I think we were flying #2 position and O’Brien was #3). Captain Jansen had called me over the intercom and said, ‘Let me know when the ____ are coming in!’ When I called and said, ‘Here they come!’ He then slipped up under the leadship of our formation and did such evasive action that the gunners of the lead ship said they could almost touch us. They were worried that Captain Jansen would cut the bottom out of their ship with his props.

“It seemed the fighters would never stop coming in on us. Most of the attacks were from 6 o’clock high and were mostly FW 190s that lined up one behind the other and came in. Their tracer bullets coming at me appeared to be like little streaks of light that flashed on and off. On one attack, I suddenly found myself hanging on my back out of the tail turret. I didn’t know what had happened until I got back in position in the turret. At that time, I saw a bullet hole in the turret Plexiglas at eye level just above the bulletproof glass on the rear of the turret. The bullet would have hit me in the center of the forehead, but I was saved because I was shooting at the right and when sighting through the gunsight, I had to bend forward and stoop slightly.

“The bullet had just broken the skin on my head. It felt just like a hard blow with a heavy club. The bullet had torn a slit in my helmet, clipped my headset, and continued on into the aircraft structure. My imagination took over and I could feel the blood seeping on my head. I didn’t dare check then, but it turned out to be my imagination because the blood had remained in the area where the bullet struck me.

“Even after the bombardier had dropped our bombs, the fighters continued to attack in large numbers. It seemed they would never stop their attacks. By this time I had just about given up and wondered why Captain Jansen had not rung the bailout bell. I looked in the waist section to see if the other gunners were still there. I could see they were still firing their guns and it looked like they were up to their ankles in spent 50-caliber cartridges.

“As the fighters had begun their attacks rather slowly, they ended their attacks abruptly. I wondered why and looked around for a reason. The tail gunner is the last to know! There, below, was the coastline of the North Sea. The timing was perfect for us. My right gun was out of ammo and the left gun had a strip of ammo about 18 inches long.

“The safety from the fighters as we reached the North Sea gave us a chance to look around for the first time. When we saw all the holes in our plane, we thought of the new danger of the cold water below and how long we could survive if we had to bail out or crash-land in the water. Also, how long before we could expect to be picked up and would it be in time?

“Anyway, Captain Jansen kept MARGARET ANN going with her #3 engine feathered. All of us in the waist kept a sharp lookout for any other signs of failure, but none appeared and we arrived back at our base at Shipdham. The engineer shot a red flare indicating wounded aboard, and we were cleared to land immediately. Captain Jansen made a perfect landing – he held the plane on the left main landing wheel as the right tire had been flattened by a 20-mm armor piercing shell. When the plane slowed until he could not hold it off the right wheel any longer, he let it touch down and made a curve off the runway onto the beautiful green grass and soft earth of England. The exit of the crew from MARGARET ANN must have set some kind of a record.

“MARGARET ANN was riddled. The ground crew told us later that we had 250 major holes (1/2 inch or bigger) in our aircraft. Most of the fuel tanks had been punctured but luckily, the hits

were above the gas line. There were three holes in the tail turret. The one that hit me on the head; one that came in at a slight angle and knocked the handle off the Plexiglas door behind me (an early modification to keep the cold air off the tail gunner); and one that came through the bottom of the turret and nearly cut the toes out of my G.I. shoes stored under the catwalk behind the turret. In the turret, I wore silk socks covered by wool socks and fleece-lined flying boots. The ground crew traced the bullet that hit me and presented me with the steel point of a 30-caliber armor-piercing bullet.

“I’m sure those of us that still survive will always remember the first American raid on Kiel. All of us in the rear of the plane had been slightly wounded. Besides me, the two waist gunners had been hit by 20-mm explosive shell fragments. The bottom gunner (McCrary) had received internal injuries and died the next day.”

Captain John W. “Swede” Swanson and crew also were lost on this mission. It was only the second aircraft and crew lost by the 506th Squadron since joining the 44th Bomb Group in March.

506th SQUADRON:

506th Sq., #41-24295 J, Swanson	WICKED WITCH		
506th Squadron Crew:			
SWANSON, JOHN W. ASN 0-431385	Pilot POW	Capt.	Warsaw, Missouri
MYERS, DOUGLAS B. ASN 0-730575	Co-pilot POW	2nd Lt.	Joplin, Missouri
SCHIEFELBUSCH, RICHARD L. ASN 0-663417	Navigator POW	2nd Lt.	Jasper, Missouri
BANK, SIDNEY W. ASN 0-727615	Bombardier POW	2nd Lt.	Denver, Colorado
MEARS, WILLIAM J. ASN 37282895	Engineer KIA	T/Sgt.	Knox, North Dakota
WOLF, FREDERICK T. ASN 36233230	Radio Oper. KIA, buried Ardennes (D-10-8)	T/Sgt.	Milwaukee, Wisconsin
CHRISTENSEN, GEORGE E. ASN 37281658	RW Gunner KIA, buried Ardennes (D-8-57)	S/Sgt.	Bisbee, North Dakota
DUNCAN, JOSEPH B. ASN 33281841	LW Gunner KIA	S/Sgt.	Martins Ferry, Ohio
GLEMBOSKI, STANLEY W. ASN 36196961	Tail Turret KIA, WOM Magraten	S/Sgt.	Stanbaugh, Michigan

Note: Apparently only a nine-man crew. Sgt. Mark Morris was assigned this day, not called out.

Doctor Richard L. Schiefelbusch, navigator, gave me this account for this crew: “Sid Banks (bombardier) and I, in the nose of the plane, were aware at first of an order to bail out, which we did by going out through the nose door hatch. On the way down I saw two chutes, one on each side of me. The one between me and the coast line was Banks. I never knew who the other one was. I came down in the Baltic about 10 miles from shore. Later I found out that both Myers (co-pilot) and Swanson (pilot and last one out) came down on land.

“Our plane, of course, was somewhat out of formation as the planes swung around after bombing out over the Baltic preparing to head back to England. We were hit by fighters that queued up ahead of our bombers and came in at us head-on.

“Lts. Myers and Swanson stated that one engine was on fire and that the instrument panel had also been hit.

“I have always assumed that the five who died got out first, but because the plane was over the sea and heading back toward land, those out first had the least chance of being picked up. I estimate that I was picked up about 30 minutes later by a motorized fishing boat. The fishermen were probably volunteer air-sea rescuers who were informal members of a rescue service along the coast line. I suppose they spotted chutes and came out to find all the survivors they could.

“The only crew member I ever saw again (in addition to Myers, Banks and Swanson) was S/Sgt. Stanley W. Glemboski, tail gunner. They must have fished him out of the Baltic. He was simply a body placed in the truck that hauled us to prison from the fishing village. I am sure that there were only five enlisted men on our crew.”

2nd Lt. Douglas B. Myers, co-pilot, also adds, “I believe we had flak damage to the inner starboard engine (#2) which resulted in fire and loss of power. We remained in formation as best we could, to the target and salvoed our load. We were not able to remain in formation after turning west and when alone, were attacked by fighters. We took some machine gun fire in the nose and flight deck areas and cannon hits in the waist area. The controls became unresponsive and we were not able to maintain altitude. Because of the fighter attacks and the enlarging fire, it was determined to abandon our craft.

“Sgts. Mears and Wolfe, respectively the top turret gunner and radio operator, were on the flight deck. One of them entered the bomb bay and removed the empty cartridge casings so that he could open the bomb bay doors. Neither of them were wounded at the time that they jumped. I have no other knowledge concerning the gunners in the waist and tail area but have reasoned that they could have been wounded by cannon fire. I do not know if they were able to or did leave the ship.”

Another 506th aircraft, RUTH-LESS piloted by Lt. Frank Slough suffered considerable damage but upon return to base and entering the landing pattern, could not determine if the tires were flat, so the control tower gave him orders to continue on to Northern Ireland where repairs could be made. There were too many ships in distress at the base to chance another crash-landing. RUTH-LESS landed without difficulty in northern Ireland.

For this mission, the first air battle of Kiel, the Group received its first official unit citation award from the War Department. This was the first awarded in the European Theater of Operations (ETO). Here is an excerpt from that citation:

“On this mission, a single group was, for the first time, fully loaded with incendiaries to be dropped after the lead groups had released their high explosive bombs. Because of the trial of the incendiaries, the 44th Bombardment Group (H), which had been assigned this task, was required to continue its bombing run for some two miles beyond the release point of the other groups in order to bomb effectively. To accomplish this, it was necessary to fly alone, without supporting fire power of other groups, over one of the most heavily defended areas in Germany with a

formation considerably smaller than the minimum for mutual self-protection. The mission was undertaken with full knowledge of the extreme hazards involved. Its successful performance demanded the highest degree of bravery and skill.

“With only 19 B-24s, the 44th Bombardment Group (H) followed three B-17 groups to the target. Fierce and determined attacks by some 120 enemy fighters commenced at the German Coast and continued until after leaving the coast on the return route. After the B-17s had reached their release point and turned away, the 44th Bombardment Group (H) proceeded alone in the face of continuous attacks by swarms of enemy fighters and increasingly concentrated flak. By opening its formation as required to clear the incendiaries of ships ahead, it was rendered particularly vulnerable to enemy attack. Five of its airplanes were shot down on the approach to and over the target. Despite these losses, the group held the necessary formation and continued on its run alone to its bomb release point. Bombing was extremely accurate and the target was blanketed with incendiaries. Widespread fires destroyed or damaged many enemy installations. One additional airplane was lost after leaving the target. This small force was officially credited with 23 enemy aircraft destroyed, 13 probably destroyed, and one damaged.

“The successful fulfillment of this highly dangerous mission was due to the extraordinary courage, skill, and devotion to duty of all concerned, which will always be worthy of emulation. Such heroism reflects the greatest credit on the Army Air Forces.”

For an excellent account of this mission, refer to the 2nd ADA Journals. See the article written by Lt. Col. Fisher in the June 1984 issue (pages 18-19) and continued in the September issue 1984 (page 10).

68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq., #41-23813, Holmes	V VICTORY SHIP	Returned to base
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68th Squadron Crew (partial):

HOLMES, TOM W. Jr.	Pilot
WEANT, W. BAXTER	Co-pilot
GREEN, GEORGE L.	Tail Turret

Note: Holmes mentions that several crewmembers were wounded, including the radio operator who is not named in the account but may be Isaac Flesher.

In 1991, Lt. Col. Tom Holmes wrote the following account of the mission:

“The Kiel Raid took place May 14, 1943, and turned out to be the worst raid I ever made. Before it began, little did I realize how rough it would really be.

“Recently, while recuperating in Beaumont’s St. Elizabeth hospital from my second major surgery in four months, I looked out my hospital window overlooking the lawn and I could see Old Glory proudly waving in the spring breeze and, just beneath, our beautiful Texas flag. It is always with pride that I observe our flag. To see these flags waving there over the Land of the Free tells me it was worth all the effort back in May 1943, when we made the big raid on Kiel in Northern Germany.

“I had been in England approximately seven months and was a captain in the 68th Squadron, 44th Heavy Bomb Group, flying B-24-D Liberators in daylight raids over Germany and France. This raid was one of two Presidential Citation raids. The other was the Ploesti raid over the

Rumanian oil fields which was made at treetop level and one in which we had some awfully heavy loses, about the same ratio as the Kiel raid.

“Awakened about 3 a.m. this particular morning, dressing in cold barracks, we put on winter flying clothes because at high altitude temperatures can be somewhere around 45-65 degrees below zero. No heaters were used in the aircraft because heat would fog the windshield and we could not see enemy fighters as clearly. After breakfast we went to the briefing room to get details on the raid we would make this day. Everything we needed to know including bomber formations, who was flying and in what positions, we wrote on rice paper. In case we should be captured we could eat this critical information so that the enemy would find no evidence of our plans or of how many aircraft was involved. Our group put up 21 airplanes that day, our squadron furnishing six. There were five to six other groups, both B-17s and B-24s making this raid

“We were to bomb the shipping yard and harbor in Kiel. I had no idea we would lose seven of 21 planes, including our new squadron commander of six weeks, Major Jim O’Brien. Jimmy was going along this day to check out his co-pilot Mack Howell, who would be a first pilot from then on. Mack was one of two of the smallest men in the outfit, men we nicknamed “dusty butts” because they had to sit on extra pillows to get up to the height of the controls.

“We took off about 7:30 a.m. The leader began to circle the field to allow all of us to get into the air and join the formation before starting across the English Channel. This was routine. Many times we had to go through clouds and it was pretty rough. Frequently we would circle and join on top of the clouds. We started across the North Sea, staying well off the coast of Holland and off the coast of Germany to avoid anti-aircraft guns.

“We flew well off the coast, past Heligoland, an island off the northern cost of Germany where we turned inland to go straight to the initial point. At this point the bombardier takes control and guides the plane to the bomb release point, one of the most dangerous parts of the mission since the plane has to go straight and level, directly toward the target, thus giving the anti-aircraft guns an easier target.

“This day we carried some new magnesium bombs, also called incendiaries (large clusters banded together in small individual packets). Our ordnance people thought these bombs would drop several hundred feet in a package, then break, and scatter, so they would thoroughly cover the target area. Though that proved not to be the case, they thought the extremely hot magnesium bombs would cause a great many things to burn. (More about that later.)

“Shortly after we turned in over the coast, we began to pick up fire from the German anti-aircraft guns, some of the best in the world. The 88-mm. guns were very effective. Though we were flying at 28,000 feet, which helped a lot, those shells can easily come to that height and explode on contact. Frequently they would explode on a pre-set time in order to scatter a lot of shrapnel into the sky which might bring down some planes.

“It took about an hour and 45 minutes from the coast of England to the coast of Germany and then towards the initial point. All eyes strained to catch a glimpse of German fighters that we knew would jump us anytime after we crossed inland. German fighters scarcely ever surprised us since we could always see them 20-30 miles away. We would see the sun shining on their canopies or something bright that would always give them away.

“This time we were jumped by 125-130 German fighters (my estimate). Once we got to the initial point, we made a left turn toward the target: the ships and harbor at Kiel. Just as we started to open our bomb bay doors, we were hit from the ground by a big artillery shell and there was a loud explosion in the bomb bay, and we were unable to drop the bombs. The doors were pretty well blown off the belly of the airplane. We couldn’t drop the bombs and we couldn’t get rid of them, yet they did not burn. All of the hydraulic system was blown out, which disabled the brakes, flaps, and other controls dependent on the system. We’ll never know why the magnesium bombs did not burn us up. It had to be the intervention of the Good Lord.

“We started in to the target in formation with our other friends in order to protect each other from the German fighters. But a group of B-17s somehow got about 4,000 feet above us at approximately 32,000 feet. As we were on our bomb run I looked off to the left of the wing about 200 feet, and saw a whole string of thousand pound bombs sailing down past us, dropping from the B-17s above.

“This was pretty scary, but fortunately they didn’t hit us. We were just glad they were headed toward the target. When we got to the point of release, instead of our bombs dropping a few hundred feet and exploding, they came out like a basket of leaves and scattered the minute they came out of the bomb bay. We were flying a step-down trail formation and there was absolutely nothing to do but jump them because we didn’t want to run into them and set our plane on fire from our own bombs. Fortunately I had room to hop over them.

“Some of our planes were not that fortunate and ran into them. Some of the bombs lodged in the engines and other places but did not go off or ignite; this was all that saved those planes.

“After releasing the bombs we made a left turn to head back toward the ocean. We were a long way inland and had a bitter struggle with the German fighters as well as anti-aircraft shells that continuously harassed us as we withdrew.

“About that time there was a loud explosion on the right side of the cockpit and I thought my co-pilot, Willie Weant, one of our better co-pilots, was hit, but when I looked at him he gave me a big OK sign with his index finger and thumb, and a broad smile spread past his oxygen mask.

“Some fragments did get past him and hit the radio operator right in the middle of his forehead. There was a lot of bleeding and it looked like the boy was dying. I was awfully worried about him. Later I found the wounds were superficial and real shallow. Outside of being covered with blood he was all right.

“After taking evasive action, we retreated to the coastline. One fighter came in so close and so straight at us I couldn’t see how we could avoid running into him. Occasionally the fighter pilots would be shot and come in out of control, taking one or two bombers with them. But this fighter was coming directly at us from just slightly above and a little to our left. At the very last moment it looked as if there was no way to avoid a head-on collision and I ducked my head to get set for the collision which, miraculously, never took place.

“In a split second we were back on the job, grateful we had avoided the head-on crash. We fought these fighters for almost 45 minutes until we got back out to sea. By this time, they had diminished somewhat and we got back on our course back to England.

“Phil Phillips, an old friend of mine then and now, was flying the Lemon Drop on my right wing and we noticed a B-24 with two engines smoking rather badly. We figured he needed a little protection to get home, so we latched onto him and flew in number three position. Phil flew in number two on his right wing and we escorted him back to England. He was from another group and we never did learn just who he was, but we flew with him all the way back.

“We got in a little too close to the coast of Holland and picked up seven German fighter planes. Out of the seven, two were FW 190s, a single radial engine fighter plane, much like our P-47s. They were armed with 20-mm. cannons. When the leader of the two FWs made a pass at our three planes, one of our gunners nailed him. As he went down in flames his wingman quit and went back home.

“That left us with five Me 210s, twin-engine German Messerschmitts. As we were returning across the North Sea, the three of us were harassed by these fighters. As our tail guns were inoperable and our tail gunner wounded, though not seriously, we stayed at his position. One of the twin-engine fighters saw our tail guns weren’t working and tried to make a run at us from the rear. Sgt. George Green, our tail gunner, told me about it on the intercom. I told him to call out the range and as soon as the Me 210 got close enough, I pulled the plane up into a steady climb, thus giving the top guns a shot and maybe we could get him.

“He called out 1,000 yards, 900, 800, 700, and when he called 600 yards, we figured he would start firing pretty soon, so I put the plane into a gentle climb at about a 25-degree angle...our engineer and top gunner, was turned around, waiting. He fired two short bursts and the second one set the German’s right engine on fire and he crashed in the sea. That left us with four Me 210s to fight, giving us a running battle all the way across the North Sea. Between the three of us we finally were able to shoot down three more German planes, making a total of five of the seven German bandits.

“We were still harassed by the fifth plane, but he seemed uneasy about coming too close and would sit off at long range and lob shells at us. Though he was ineffective we still were unable to shoot him down. He stayed with us until we were within sight of the English Coast. Fearing British fighter planes, he took off from whence he came, somewhere in Holland.

“In the meantime, Major O’Brien and Mack Howell were knocked out somewhere in the intensive fighting from the target area back to the coastline. I was leading the second element that day and, although they were flying in the number three position on my left wing, I was so busy I never really realized when they went down. It was much later that I learned they had bailed out. They lost two engines on one side and were surrounded by enemy planes. O’Brien, the last one out, just barely cleared the plane when it exploded and his face was badly burned and his eyebrows singed when he dived through the fire in the bomb bay. All the crew had to jump through the burning bomb bay, but I think they all made it safely down except little Mack Howell. I feel sure he was dead when he hit the ground.”

Note: The crew, including O’Brien would spend two years in German Prisoner of War Camps. Because of malnutrition O’Brien lost all his teeth and a lot of weight. He died in his sleep at his Pittsburgh, Pa. home on July 25, 2001.

“Once the last German fighter broke away, I asked our bombardier what he could do to get rid of our bomb load. He got a pry bar and went back to the bomb bay where everything was in a shambles, but he was able to pry the bombs out and get rid of our load before we got back to land.

“Once we released the bombs we began to worry about the landing. With our hydraulic system gone, nothing happened when we attempted to lower our gear. We had a backup cable system, so the flight engineer was able to wind the main gear and the nose gear down, but the left main wheel would not lock. It had a strut on it and a yellow indicator on the strut would show when it was locked. Initially, it was not locked.

“We worried with this gear for some 40-45 minutes before finally getting it to lock. We were kicking this gear in and out with the rudder trying to make the weight of the wheel pop it in and make the strut lock.

“Our worries were not over because we found three of the men were wounded, though not seriously. Our usual procedure was to bail out the crew over the field letting the pilot and co-pilot take the disabled bomber up to the wash about 20-25 miles northeast of our base and head it out to sea. They would then bail out and the British fighters would shoot the bomber down to keep it from flying across the channel or getting into the hands of the enemy.

“Since we had three wounded men we decided to make an attempt to land at our home field. Because of the failure of the hydraulic system, we had no flaps and no flap backup. We attempted to come in real low and I was going to try and land in a plowed field just before the end of our runway. Not accustomed to this procedure, I overshot a little and landed on the runway near the end and we landed fairly hot because we had no flaps to slow us down.

“I tried to zigzag the plane all the way down the 6,000-foot runway but unfortunately there was not much wind, and when we got to the end of the runway, we were still doing about 40 miles per hour. There was a taxi way on my right and directly in front about 150 yards out was a rural road and deep ditch. I knew if we went straight ahead into that ditch we would probably break up and burn. Getting out of a burning B-24 is no easy job, especially if it has crashed. So I did the only thing that occurred to me – put full power on number one and number two engines on the left side and turned it to the right. We made a smoking, screaming turn to the right and with the help of the Good Lord, we were able to head the plane up the taxi way, off the end of the runway.

“We later discovered 13 strands of a 16-strand rudder cable had been severed and all the time we had been kicking the rudder hard to get the gear down and locked and down the runway we were fishtailing back and forth trying to slow down, we never realized only three strands were holding. This was just another sort of miraculous happening.

“We were so grateful and so relieved after making the turn onto the taxiway that I reached down (we were still doing 20 miles per hour) and hit the master switches and killed all four engines. Once our engines began to die, I realized I had no brakes and no way to steer and we were heading toward a parked B-24 over on the first dispersal on the left. Watching us land were ground crewman standing around and others sitting on the parked B-24 and in nearby jeeps and I stuck my head out of the pilot’s side and yelled a warning that they should all run as we were coming through with no control. Again, the Lord was with us because the main gear, the one that was not locked, held up and survived the severe right turn, but we also ran off the perimeter to the left and when we hit the soft dirt, it immediately spun the plane around, stopping us just 15-20 feet short of the other bomber, almost in perfect formation position with wings overlapping.

“We had cursed the ever-present mud at Shipdham. It had caused us much distress. In this case, however, “It is an ill wind that blows no good.” This day the mud was a lifesaver. I truly believe

it saved our lives and two B-24s, ours and the one we were about hit and maybe many other men on the ground.

“We were so relieved to get stopped, we got out, and I immediately kissed the ground. I was so glad to get back. The wounded men were taken to the hospital by ambulance and the rest of us were loaded into a truck, to be taken to debriefing where we would try to summarize the raid’s results.

“The damage to the airplane was severe. We had taken one 88 mm. into the bomb bay, a second one had hit the left rudder on the tail, pretty well stripping it off at the hinges. We also counted twenty-seven 20-mm. cannon hits, direct into the plane, but none were vital and none set us afire. We had numerous flak holes and several strings of bullets from fighter planes laced the plane.

“There were several hundred holes in this old V VICTORY, our airplane that day. We had been extremely fortunate to get back at all. It had been a long day - seven and a half-hours - five and half hours engaged in battle.

“Now you can see why I sum this raid up as probably the worst I ever made.”

17 May 1943

Bordeaux, France

The Bordeaux submarine repair shops were the objective of the 44th bombs. This mission was made in two flights for several reasons. The assigned aircraft first flew to Davidstowe, England on the 16th to be closer to the target as well as to have complete secrecy from German spies as well as from their radar. On the morning of the 17th, the aircraft took off for the target, which was to be the longest mission in distance to this date and its execution demanded exacting work from all of the crew members, especially the navigators. It was necessary to fly west, out and around the Brest peninsula, and then back east to target.

The Germans were taken completely by surprise, the target was hit with excellent results, no enemy planes seen and only moderate flak. One of our 66th Squadron crews was forced to seek refuge in Spain, a neutral country.

66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #42-40130 H, Hilliard	AVENGER II		MACR #3301
66th Squadron Crew:	All men interned in Spain		
HILLIARD, RAY L. ASN 0-431193	Pilot Interned	1st Lt.	
DAMRON, ALFRED C. ASN 0-431128	Co-pilot Interned	1st Lt.	Alexandria, Virginia
AUSTON, WILLIAM T. ASN 0-726975	Navigator Interned	1st Lt.	Houston, Texas
SCHWEYER, RALPH ASN 12038908	Engineer Interned	T/Sgt.	Brooklyn, New York
FELSECKER, ROBERT E.	Radio Oper. Interned	T/Sgt.	Calumet City, Illinois

GIBSON, CHESTER C. ASN 33074178	Belly Gun Interned	S/Sgt.	Natrona Heights, Pennsylvania
HOOPER, ROBERT L. Jr. ASN 18104567	Photographer Interned	S/Sgt.	San Antonio, Texas
TRITSCHLER, PHILLIP H.	LW Gunner Interned	S/Sgt.	Nashville, Tennessee
WHITLOCK, GEORGE E. ASN 11037527	Tail Turret Interned	S/Sgt.	Concord, New Hampshire
CARSON, JOHN B. ASN 14043222	RW Gunner Interned	Sgt.	Highland Park, Tennessee

1st Lt. Ray L. Hilliard's aircraft developed engine trouble before reaching the target, but much too far away from England to attempt to return all that distance over water, so he elected to take his chances with a neutral country. This he was successful in doing, all men were interned. However, the entire crew later returned to the 8th Air Force on the eighth of August 1943, after a period of more than two months.

1st Lt. William T. Auston, navigator, added these words, "We had fuel problems caused by our malfunctioning engines and couldn't make the long trip back to England. (Back out and around the Brest peninsula) About our only choice was to go to a neutral country, with Spain being the obvious one. Approaching Spain, we were flying at a high altitude looking for a field and finally saw a fighter base below us. We were losing altitude as we were down to one engine running and came in for a landing on their short runway. Lts. Hilliard and Damron had to set their brakes very hard and we skidded along on the runway because we saw a steam roller blocking our path at the end of the strip! No one was injured – a successful landing. The name of the airfield was Alhama de Aragon, which is located northwest of Saragossa and almost due south of the French coast.

"Later, our crew was loaded into an old bus and we were transported through several villages and cities like Seville and Madrid. Eventually we arrived at Gibraltar where they, at last, made arrangements to fly us back to England."

Sgt. George Whitlock, tail turret gunner, said, "This was my eighth mission. I remember that we were still out over the ocean when two of our props ran away, and we immediately dropped like a rock. We immediately salvoed our bombs and threw overboard everything we could get loose. The pilots got things back under control at about 2,000 feet, I'd guess, and we headed for Spain. We managed to gain some altitude on the way, and landed without any enemy action.

"After about two months, we made our way down to Gibraltar and were there for nearly two weeks – 3rd of August – when we were loaded into a C-47 and flown back to England. A few of us were reassigned to an anti-submarine patrol unit at Talbenny, Wales [the 479th], where we flew eight more missions out over the Bay of Biscay. That unit disbanded, so I was assigned to the 392nd BG until we were shot down in July 1944, and it was a POW Camp for me until the end of the war."

68th SQUADRON:

66th Sq. Casualty	Capt. Diehl's aircraft	Returned to base
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68th Squadron Crewman:

HOGAN, HARRY C. ASN 37009698	Waist Gun KIA, WOM Cambridge	T/Sgt.	Springfield, Missouri
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On this Bordeaux mission, one of the more unfortunate accidents of the war took place. As Captain Diehl was heading his plane across the Bay of Biscay a mere twenty miles from the coast of France, he suddenly heard the excited voice of S/Sgt. Herbert H. Gentry, his engineer, who was manning the gun at the right waist window shouting, "We've lost Hogan out of the window!"

As they were nearly on the bomb run, there was little else to be done except man their stations. It was not until they had started back on the route for home that they discussed what happened. T/Sgt. Harry C. Hogan had been standing by the left waist window when somehow, his parachute accidentally opened and was immediately caught in the speeding air stream and was sucked outside through the open window. Hogan was pulled out through the window to his death, the parachute being torn and Hogan hit both the fuselage and tail assembly before falling clear and then down to the ocean below. He must have been seriously injured by the contacts with the aircraft, so there was little chance of surviving once into the cold water below.

2 July 1943 [right date?]

Ground Crew Incident, Cornwall, England

Shortly after the Air Echelon departed Shipdham on 26 June several of the Ground Echelon were moved to southwestern England to assist the Anti-Submarine Group personnel with their Liberators on patrol from there. Two men from the 68th Squadron were killed when making contact with a German land mine at Mawgen Porth Beach, near St. Eval Air Field, Cornwall.

68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq. Casualties	Killed by mine explosion
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68th Squadron Ground Crew:

CALVIN, WILLIAM A. ASN 7010352	Ground crew KIA, buried Cambridge (D-5-69)	S/Sgt.	Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
CLOSSON, WILLIAM E. ASN31088145	Ground crew KIA, buried Cambridge (D-4-69)	Private	Milton, Massachusetts

[\[Check with Will on this one.\]](#)

2 July 1943

Airdrome, Lecce, Italy

On June 26th, the 44th BG departed Shipdham, having been placed on temporary duty in northern Africa, at Benina Main Airdrome, approximately 20 miles west of Benghazi, Libya. Most of the crews took two days en route. The first target while operating from this base was the Italian Airdrome at Lecce, Italy.

Twenty-four of our bombers departed base but only 19 of them reached the target and bombed, all with excellent results. However, one 68th aircraft was lost shortly before the target, and another one was forced to ditch in the Mediterranean.