

# **SMOKESTACK BLUE LEADER, SLOW DOWN!**

Dewayne Bennett and Les Jackson

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The sky over Oberpfaffenhofen, Germany on April 24, 1944, dawned bright and clear. At 20,000 feet, it was cloudless, frigid cold, a bright blue, and empty. Birds don't venture to this altitude. There was nothing to spoil the tranquility, and there was no hint of the terrible battle that was to be fought there later in the day. The peaceful sky would be riddled with screaming shrapnel, snarling twenty mm and 50 caliber machine gun slugs, black greasy flak. Parts of heavy bombers, and fighters would fall to the ground, along with dangling bodies hanging from parachutes. At sundown all would be clear, cold, and a bright blue, again. Nothing would remain in the sky of the battle fought there.

Early that morning, crews of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force were preparing for a mission to bomb the Dornier-Werke G.m.b.H. and Factory Airfield. Being built here was the Do 335 Mehrzweck-Jagdflugzeug (Multipurpose Fighter Aircraft). The Do 335 was powered by two Daimler-Benz 603 A or 603 E engines, both housed in the fuselage. The front engine drove a tractor propeller in the nose, and the rear engine drove a pusher propeller installed behind the tail unit. It was developed in nine months, and had its first flight on October 28, 1943. It was a unique design, and is important because it is still considered the world's fastest piston powered aircraft. Though it was still in the development stage, the Luftwaffe expected it to become a first line fighter.

Because of efforts like the April 24<sup>th</sup> mission by many brave young men, only 40 of these aircraft were built.

The mission was plagued with troublesome problems, some questionable judgments, and incidents of high heroism. It was considered important enough to win for the 384<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group its second Distinguished Unit Citation.

It all began with the Field Order coming in on the teleprinter about 11 o'clock, April 23, 1944. Charlie Bishop, who did this for many months, started taking the mission off and Station 106 - the 384<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group - came alive with preparations to "Get The Show On The Road." Squadrons started putting crews together, Engineering Officers started counting available planes. Crew chiefs ran engines at full power, testing the output, and made last-minute adjustments. Crew chiefs and their crews could look forward to some sleep if their plane was selected for the mission. Cooks started breakfast, intelligence prepared for briefing the crews, armament loaded bombs and ammunition, and the planes were filled with gas.

Dale O. Smith, Commanding Officer of the 384<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, was called about 12 o'clock and made aware that a mission was on, that General Robert Travis would be leading the 41<sup>st</sup> A Combat Wing, and that he, Colonel Smith, would be leading the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing.

Brigadier General Robert Falligant Travis was born at Savannah, Georgia, December 26, 1904. He was graduated from the U. S. Military Academy at West Point N. Y., and commissioned a Second Lieutenant of

Field Artillery, June 9, 1928. The following September, he entered the Air Corps Primary Flying School at Brooks Field, Texas, and upon completion of the course, transferred to the Air Corps Advanced Flying School at Kelly Field, Texas, from which he was graduated with the rating of pilot in September 1929.

Colonel Dale O. Smith was born in Reno, Nevada on March 7, 1911 and attended Reno Schools and the University of Nevada there for two years before being appointed to the United States Military Academy. He graduated from West Point in 1934 and spent the summer on a Midshipmen Cruise to Europe aboard the battleship, "Wyoming." Returning to the United States, he went to flying school at Randolph and Kelly Fields, Texas.

The mission was all spelled out in the Field Order. It left nothing to the imagination. On this day, however, there was an ominous notation that was to portend disaster in the very near future.

The normal Composition of Force was given. There would be five Combat Wings, the 41<sup>st</sup> A, the 41<sup>st</sup> B, the 40<sup>th</sup>, the 1<sup>st</sup>, and the 94<sup>th</sup>. Each Combat Wing was made up of three groups of 18 to 20 planes. Normally the Combat Wings would have gone into enemy territory in a bomber stream with 4 to 6 miles between each Combat Wing, which contained 54 to 60 heavy bombers. We would have gone in just as indicated in the Composition of Force. However, on this Field Order, in a note just below the Composition of Force, was a simple notation, "41<sup>st</sup> 'B' will guide left on 41<sup>st</sup> 'A'." Below that, "1<sup>st</sup> will guide right on 40<sup>th</sup>."

This simple notation spelled trouble for the First Division, and for the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing in particular. It was a deadly serious order, and because of it, brave, dedicated, young men would die, or be made prisoners of war. It would reflect on the leadership of Gen. Robert Travis, and Col. Dale O. Smith, both West Pointers, Smokestack Leader, and Smokestack Blue Leader, respectively.

This meant that for the first time instead of a bomber stream, we would be going in two Combat Wings, the 41<sup>st</sup> A and the 41<sup>st</sup> B abreast. The 41<sup>st</sup> A to the left and slightly ahead of the 41<sup>st</sup> B, in echelon, in other words. Behind us, the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 40<sup>th</sup> Combat Wings would be in echelon, and the 94<sup>th</sup> Combat Wing would be bringing up the rear alone. This then was the battle order of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division. The 41<sup>st</sup> A Combat Wing was made up of two groups, the 379<sup>th</sup>, and the 303<sup>rd</sup>. This wing, as stated, was led by General Robert Travis. His call sign was Smokestack Leader. The 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing was made up of the lead group of all 384<sup>th</sup> planes; the low group, all 306<sup>th</sup> planes; and the high group, 2 squadrons of 384<sup>th</sup> planes, and 7 planes (1 squadron) from the 303<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group. The 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing was led by Colonel Dale O. Smith, and his call sign was Smokestack Blue.

We staggered through the darkness and over the black, wet roads to the mess hall. Apprehensive and worried about what terrors the day held for us, the breakfast of fresh eggs was not that enjoyable. Still nervous through the briefing, and checking out the day's flight gear, we were finally hauled out to our airplane B-17G No. 42-102430, JD-O, "SPAM-O-LINER." Once in the

cockpit, busy with the checklist, starting the engines, things settled down. All we had to do now was taxi out in order at the proper time, and take off ½ minute after the plane ahead of us.

After takeoff, our squadron leader started a slow turn to the left, and my job was to catch him, and fall into the number 5 spot in the squadron of six airplanes. It was up to the Squadron Leader to find the group of 20 airplanes, and the group leader to find the wing of 54 to 60 planes.

Taxi time was 0835 and Lt. Boger was first off at 0854. Smokestack Blue Leader was late in getting off the ground, due to trouble with his airplane. He was off at 0906 in B-17 42-38014, BK-G and immediately formed up his group made up of 384<sup>th</sup> planes. All thirty planes were off the ground by 0934. Station 106, Grafton Underwood, returned to normal daytime activities.

In the air in squadron formation the radio was alive with calls of, "Where are you?" "Slow down." At 0930 Smokestack Blue leader came on the radio with, "Smokestack Blue Leader to all ships: please observe VHF discipline, no unnecessary transmissions. 251 close it up."

It all came together. Squadrons formed up, then groups, until we were a large unwieldy group of about 58 planes flying in combat wing formation. From here until the end of the mission, the pilots were intently focused on, and concentrating on, holding their position in the formation. The crew was in position, except the ball turret gunner, who would get in his turret over the channel.

We departed the English coast (Beachy Head) 1100 at 15,300 feet. At Beachy head we changed course 40 degrees to the right. This was a change to the right, and had no effect on our position because 41<sup>st</sup> B was on the inside of the turn. We crossed the French Coast at 1118 at 18,300 feet and came back to a heading of 113 degrees. This was a 39-degree change in heading and it was to the left. Being on the outside of the turn, we had to speed up to hold our position. There were some airplanes out of position, left behind by the turn, and starting to play “catch up” by increasing their airspeed. As our leader increased his airspeed to regain his position on the 41<sup>st</sup> A Combat Wing, the heavily loaded planes in the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing fell farther and farther behind.

At 1123, just after crossing the enemy coast, a 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group aircraft 42-31445 was hit by flak. The pilot, Peterson, pulled out of the formation, flames coming from his number four engine. Parachutes started coming out, and about a minute later the plane blew up. Three or four chutes were seen to have opened.

The cussing and shouting started over the radio: “Smokestack Blue Leader, slow down.” This was a pretty good indication that we were in trouble on turns to the left. It was like kids playing crack-the-whip, on turns to the left our group had to speed up, and it caused us to spread out and straggle.

It also became apparent that wiser heads were leading the 40<sup>th</sup> Combat Wing, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Combat Wing. They were supposed to be in echelon formation the same as 41<sup>st</sup> A and 41<sup>st</sup> B. Because of the problem in



the turns, they had fallen back into a bomber stream, or in line behind 41<sup>st</sup> A with a four-mile interval between Combat Wings. The 94<sup>th</sup> Combat Wing brought up the rear. This now left 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing with Smokestack Blue Leader in echelon on 41<sup>st</sup> A Combat Wing, outside the bomber stream to the right. We were all alone out there. We were trailed off and dispersed, fighting to stay in formation, straining our engines, sweating and cussing to keep up - and sitting ducks for any German Fighters who might be up there looking for an easy Group, or better yet, a Combat Wing.

In a report on Planning, Execution, and Results of Mission to Oberpfaffenhofen, Germany, 24 April 1944, directed to the Commanding Officer of the 40<sup>th</sup> Combat Wing (H) AAF, APO 557 is the following paragraph:

306<sup>th</sup> Group, Low in the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing:

All A/C took off on time and made a normal assembly over Molesworth. The lead group departed Molesworth on time with groups in Combat Wing formation. Route over England was as briefed, departing Beachy Head on time and on course. Some difficulty in alignment of the Combat Wings was encountered and the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing was to the right and rear, flying alone throughout the mission. The low group of this wing was further forced out of position due to a straggling low squadron in the lead group . . . . .

Leading the straggling low squadron that forced the 306<sup>th</sup> low group out of position was Lt. Walter F. (Big Dog) Harvey in aircraft 42-31346. Lt. Harvey was leading the low squadron (544<sup>th</sup>) of the lead 384<sup>th</sup> Group of the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing. Lt. Harvey had been checking out new crews,

instructing them in what to expect in combat, checking the pilot out in a fully loaded B-17, and flying missions with them until he felt the pilot capable. On this day, shortly after a normal take off, Lt. Harvey lost a supercharger on one engine. Aborting the mission was not in his nature, and he struggled on, hoping that after he reached altitude he could close it up and maintain his position in the formation. Smokestack Blue radioed him to close it up, but he couldn't do it. Forty miles east of Paris, A/C 42-31346, Lt. Harvey, the pilot, received a direct burst of flak. Fire and smoke were seen in the cockpit. Four chutes were seen to emerge, and three were seen to open. The crew consisted of the following:

P	1st Lt	Walter L. Harvey	EVD
CP	2nd Lt	Robert H. Brown	EVD
N	2nd Lt	Johnson W. Rule	EVD
B	1st Lt	Richard E. Rader	EVD
R	S/Sgt	Stanley J. Sturak	POW
TT	S/Sgt	Dewey C. Smith	POW
BT	Sgt	Charles W. Roberson	POW
TG	Sgt	Charles D. Vann	POW
FG	Sgt	James A. Atkins	EVD
FG	Sgt	Cornelius P. McManus	EVD

Lt. Harvey and Lt. Dick Rader spent 15 or 16 weeks down behind enemy lines. They managed to evade the Germans, and after many close calls hooked up with an American scout outfit that was many miles behind the lines, and were returned to the 384<sup>th</sup> in August 1944.

About 75 miles West of Paris at 1135 hours, 20,000 feet, we turned to a heading of approximately 126 degrees, but this was a right turn and didn't effect 41<sup>st</sup> Bs position with respect to 41<sup>st</sup> A, but allowed some trailing planes

to close up. However, 100 miles East of Paris at 1158 hours, 20,000 feet, we made a 28-degree course change to the left. This correction to the left, caused our 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing to fall miles behind 41<sup>st</sup> A. We were behind the A wing of the following formation.

To compound the problem Smokestack Blue Leader increased his speed to 158 MPH indicated, and that further scattered our 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing.

Those in the rear of the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing were left to straggle, and struggle to catch up with the leaders. There was no radio signal telling of the increase in speed, and groaning engines were the result. There were anonymous radio calls from the pilots, "G--d--- it, Smokestack Blue Leader, slow down." Cries of "Slow down, slow down." Others followed, more profane, and need not be repeated here, but on the same theme: "Smokestack Blue, slow down."

We were a scattered mess, and it would be about an hour and 30 minutes before we were a formation again.

South of Strasbourg at 1246 hours we changed course again. A 13-degree left turn effectively scattered us again when Smokestack Blue Leader speeded up to hold his position on Smokestack Leader's right. We were now well into Germany, and our luck in coming across France without seeing enemy fighters, was about to change. No doubt scattered German Fighter Units had seen this strung-out Combat Wing straggling along, and couldn't believe their eyes. Here was an entire Combat Wing away from the main

bomber stream, all alone, ripe to be plucked. The German Fighters proceeded to pluck the flock.

The first enemy attack came between 1215 and 1230 hours by ME-109s. This attack was driven off by six P-51 which saw the ME-109s with the P-51s dive through the 41<sup>st</sup> B high group. American and German guns were firing, but no bombers were seen to go down.

At 1319 hours passing north of Leipheim, and southeast of Stuttgart, the roof fell in. Approaching the Augsburg area from 1319 hours until 1326 hours we were hit by 50 Me-109s and Fw-190s coming in two, four, and eight abreast head on from 12 o'clock high. Some enemy fighters flew straight through squadrons and groups returning to the head of the formation and repeating the head-on attacks.

From 1319 hours until reaching the target at 1358 hours 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing would be under unrelenting fighter attacks. Before the target was reached, 16 B-17s had been shot out of the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing, and the 306<sup>th</sup> low group didn't have any bombs left. The 41<sup>st</sup> A dispatched 56 bombers and lost zero. The 41<sup>st</sup> B lost 16 bombers trying to maintain a position outside the bomber stream, to the right, and slightly behind 41<sup>st</sup> A. Something had to be wrong in 41<sup>st</sup> B to attract the swarm of enemy fighters that inflicted such damage upon us.

Our leader certainly contributed to our misery. His hard-headed decision to stay in position on 41<sup>st</sup> A, when the other group had fallen into the bomber stream, left us 2 to 4 miles away from the main bomber stream. The

unexpected airspeed increases scattered our formation, and left us vulnerable to the enemy fighters.

The 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> divisions of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force dispatched 754 heavy bombers on April 24, 1944 to targets at Oberpfaffenhofen, Landsberg, Erding, Leipheim, Gablingen and Fredrichshafen. The 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force lost a total of 40 heavy bombers for the day. The 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing alone suffered 40 percent of those losses.

Out of the 18 B-17s in the lead 384<sup>th</sup> group, we lost a/c 42-31346, Lt. Harvey; a/c 42-38158, Lt. MacKichen; and a/c 42-97221, Lt. Brouillard.

The 306<sup>th</sup> low Group lost a/c 42-30586, Lt. MacDowell; a/c 42-31172, Lt. Schwedock; a/c 42-31445, Lt. Peterson; a/c 42-31539, Lt. Ebert; a/c 42-39776, Lt. Coughlin; and a/c 42-31758, Captain Stolz.

The 384<sup>th</sup> composite high Group lost a/c 42-37885, Lt. Broyhill; a/c 42-102446, Lt. Bailey; a/c 42-97477, Captain Langlois, and a/c 42-97372, Lt. Haley.

The 303<sup>rd</sup> high Squadron, high Group lost a/c 42-31669, Lt. Hofman; a/c 42-38204, Lt. McClure; and a/c 42-107200, Lt. Stewart.

## THE ORDEAL OF THE 306<sup>TH</sup>

Fighter attacks began against the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing about an hour before bombs away. At about 1215 hours approximately 15 ME-109s hit the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing and damaged the lead B-17 of the low Group, flown by Captain John Stolz in Aircraft 42-31758. Captain John Stolz managed to keep his damaged B-17 in position. At 1325 hours more ME-109s and FW-190s arrived in strength, and kept the Group under unremitting attack. The Group Leader, Capt. Stolz, was hit again.

This was the disorganized 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing. Strung out, poor formation, howling engines from excessive effort, all due to Smokestack Blue's attempt to stay in formation with the 41<sup>st</sup> A Combat Wing, his increases in air speed were now causing wide and general destruction. We were to be under fighter attacks for the next 40 minutes with an estimated 75 to 200 enemy fighters. The 40<sup>th</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, and 94<sup>th</sup> Combat Wings had pulled into the bomber stream behind the 41<sup>st</sup> A Combat Wing, leaving the 41<sup>st</sup> B alone on the outside of the bomber stream. We were about to start our dance with the devil, and the devil being the many 109s and 190s slicing our formation to pieces.

At 1335 Captain Stolz made an effort to get rid of some weight and he dropped his bombs. In a string of extraordinary bad luck, the entire 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group dropped their bombs when their leader did. This, despite the fact they were 21 Minutes from the target.

Captain Stolz, unable to hold his position, started descending. Incredibly, through miscommunication, poor communications, or no communication, he took his Group down with him. The entire 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group followed him down to 16,000 feet. The Combat Report says: "He finally put his wheels down and left, after telling Deputy Leader, Pilot Somerville, 'Well, I've got two engines. Slim--you know where I'm going.'"

When Captain Stolz took the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group down to 16,000 feet, they lost what protection the two groups of the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing afforded them. In the same vein, the guns of the 306<sup>th</sup> were taken away from the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing, and were 5,000 feet below. The enemy concentrated on the lead planes, and at least 16 passes were pressed home on the 306<sup>th</sup> low group, and 5 planes were lost in these attacks. Fifty brave young men were Missing in Action.

The 306<sup>th</sup> Group reformed under attack, and struggled back to the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing. Back in formation before the target, the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group had 12 B-17s, none of which had bombs. Their run over the target, through the heavy, accurate anti-aircraft fire would go for naught.

Of the five B-17s shot down, Captain Stolz, Lt. Dale Ebert, and Lt. Irwin Schwedock all managed to make it to Switzerland.

## **CAPTAIN ROBERT E. WOODY**

A sight that makes most bomber crews feel happy, if you could feel happy on a combat mission, was the sight of a flight of beautiful, slim P-51 fighter planes near your own formation of bombers. It gave you a feeling of security, and made you proud that they were paying attention to you. To this day I think the P-51 was one of the most beautiful fighter planes ever built. It could go so far and do so much. Our "Little Friends" were there to give us protection, and the P-51 on April 24, 1944 could fly as far as a B-17, do combat, and return to England.

Flying escort on the Oberpfaffenhofen mission was Captain Robert E. Woody, 354<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, 355<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group. Captain Woody was leading Falcon Yellow Flight at 23,000 feet at 1345 hours near Munich, Germany. His wingman, Falcon Yellow 2, was 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. William P. Boulet, and flying Falcon Yellow 3 was 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Norman J. Fortier. Falcon Yellow 4 was a new pilot on his first combat mission. Falcon Yellow Flight was with a box of bombers and had been with them for about 20 minutes.

Lt. Boulet, Falcon Yellow 2, had been monitoring the fighter bomber channel when he heard someone screaming for help. The unfortunate individual had panicked, mashed down the mike button, and repeated over and over his call for help. Lt. Boulet tried to interrupt the caller for a location but the screamer, calling for help, stayed on the radio. It was impossible to get a call through to him.



When the caller shut up, Lt. Boulet again asked for a position report in relation to a prominent lake in the area. Instead of responding with a location report, the caller just took off screaming again for help.

Hearing the word Alps, Lt. Boulet looked to the south, and saw a box of bombers that had been flying by itself. He saw a flight of German fighters go through them from head on.

At 1345, the time Falcon Yellow flight appeared, 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing was Southeast of Munich ready to make a 90-degree course change to the west. We would arrive at the Initial Point (start of the bomb run) at 1351.

Since 1340 we had made two right turns, one of approximately 45 degrees, and one at 1345 of approximately 90 degrees, and it had given some stragglers a chance to catch up and get back into formation, but we were still under savage fighter attacks. We were over the foothills of the Alps. It is very likely that this was the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing as the fighter pilot, Lt. Boulet, had described the formation as: "A box of Bombers that had been flying by itself."

Lt. Boulet switched to channel A and notified Captain Woody and Lt. Fortier. Both had seen the attack on the bombers. Falcon Yellow flight headed for the lone bomber wing.

About 2 miles from the bombers at 22,000 feet a flight of 5 ME-109s was spotted. The ME-109s were flying a close "V" formation coming from the right of Falcon Yellow Flight, parallel to the bombers. The ME-109s made a 90-degree turn to the right and were right in front of Captain Woody's flight.

Lt. Boulet dropped back of Captain Woody to protect him in case he overshot and an ME-109 got on his tail.

Captain Woody had turned his flight toward this lone box of bombers and saw one bomber explode. He advanced his throttle to catch up with the bombers and observed 15 or 20 contrails at 23,000 feet, and saw eight more enemy fighters go through the formation with a 2nd bomber hit and 4 or 5 chutes came popping out. He was angered, and turned his attention to the 5 enemy ME-109s that had just turned in front of him. His amazing Combat Report reads as follows:

We were approaching the bombers from about 9 o'clock at their level and were just about 3,000 yards away from them when I saw one lone E/A playing around near the rear of the bombers. I also saw five more E/As which I identified as ME-109s at 1 o'clock to me making a pass from 8 o'clock to the bombers in line abreast formation with the leader evidently slightly ahead and to the left, so I made a slight left turn and came out behind the 'tail end Charlie' furthest on the right. I waited until I was about 300 yards dead astern of him before I opened fire. I gave him a good burst and saw my strikes immediately all over his fuselage and wing root. The E/A began pouring out black smoke, shuddered as he was hit by the concentration of my fire and fell off on his left wing going almost straight down and burning.

I CLAIM THIS E/A DESTROYED.

I had expected the other four E/As to break as soon as I shot their 'tail end Charlie' down, but they evidently were intent on getting the bombers and

didn't notice my attack, so I moved up on the next E/A. We were now about 1200 yards from the bombers and I knew the bombers would shoot at me if I followed the E/A through their formation but that was the chance I had to take. I quickly squared away dead astern of him about 275 yards away and gave him a good burst. My hits around the fuselage and wing roots just about tore the E/A apart. He, too, shook violently, then began pouring dense black smoke and the E/A lazily fell off on its left wing and slowly fell off going into a spin. There was no question in my mind but that my guns were well bore sighted and that I was hitting with all four guns. It may be boastful to say, but I honestly believe that this pilot was definitely killed instantly, as was the one I mentioned above and the others to follow.

I CLAIM THIS E/A AS DESTROYED.

I lined up on the third E/A. By this time I had gradually closed to about 250 yards and my burst, again from dead astern, hit in exactly the same spots as the two prior E/As. I saw a lot of small pieces fall off the E/A from around his cockpit and it began spewing coolant, and the black smoke again began to pour from the cockpit and all around the fuselage. He fell off and went spinning down.

I CLAIM THIS E/A AS DESTROYED.

By this time we were only about 800 yards from the bombers and the high contrails had disappeared and I began to worry a little. I quickly fell in behind No. 4 and opened up on him from dead astern and a range of approximately 225 yards. This one also lit up like a Christmas tree with parts

flying off. His coolant shot back all around me, and in the midst of it, I could see the dense black smoke. He went spinning down also.

I CLAIM THIS E/A AS DESTROYED.

I pulled up about 200 yards behind the sole remaining E/A, again got the bead on him and observed strikes concentrated in the fuselage and wing roots. Black smoke, oil and coolant poured out, his oil covering my windscreen and canopy. The E/A went straight down and undoubtedly the pilot never knew what happened to him. Before I had fired at this E/A, Lt. Boulet, my wingman, had lined him up, and according to his own report, had given it a good burst.

After shooting down these five E/As, I made a turn to get away from the bombers and I then spotted a lone ME-109 coming in from about ten o'clock at the same level. I turned into him and he started down in a spiral. I turned on the inside of him and gave him a short burst with good deflection, seeing my hits strike on his wings and fuselage, but I ran out of ammunition. Damn it. The E/A then rolled over and hit for the deck.

I CLAIM THIS E/A AS DESTROYED.

I pulled up to reform my flight, calling my No. 3 man, Lt. Fortier, to take over. He took over the flight and I fell into No. 4 position. I saw him go after an ME-109 on the deck firing at it from about 300 yards. I saw this ME-109 crash in flames.

Several other 109s appeared but as I was out of ammunition I felt I would be more of a liability than an asset to the flight. All I did was keep

turning into the E/A and causing them to break and hit the deck.

I have done a lot of skeet shooting but never did I see clay pigeons put on a better exhibition than those 109s.

Falcon Yellow Flight was responsible for shooting down 9 enemy fighters on the April 24, 1944 mission to Oberpfaffenhofen, and probably saved the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing from losing more than the 19 bombers they eventually lost. It was an incredible feat to shoot down 5 enemy aircraft in the air, in one day, and Captain Woody was the first fighter pilot in the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force to do it.

Captain Woody ended his combat career with the distinction of achieving the most air victories in the shortest time than any other 355<sup>th</sup> pilot. Seven in 20 days. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, Distinguished Flying Cross with 2 Oak Leaf Clusters, and 3 Air Medals with Oak Leaf Clusters.

Lt. Boulet was shot down the next day on an escort mission near Brunswick, Germany. He was flying wingman for Captain Woody, no enemy aircraft near and very little flak. He called Captain Woody, said he was hit, looking out the bullet hole, and all he could see was B-17s. He bailed out and became a POW.

Lt. Fortier shot down two enemy aircraft on the April 24, 1944 mission. He was a very good fighter pilot, and later became an Ace.

Becoming a Fighter Ace was extremely difficult. The United States, in all the wars where aircraft were used, have trained about 71,000 fighter pilots. Only 1400 have become Aces.

## THE MACKICHAN CREW

Ed Ledbetter was a friend of Bud MacKichan, and aptly described him in "CONNECTIONS," an outgrowth of "DANCIN' WITH DOLLIES." Ed Ledbetter, Bob Lavin, and Joe Lessig had been B-17 instructors at Dalhart, Texas. When, finally the time came, they were each given a crew, trained at Dalhart, and went overseas together.

Here then is what Ledbetter had to say about Bud MacKichan:

"He was Co-pilot on Joe Lessig's crew. He had been a Big Man on Campus at Michigan State . . . a football hero, a great horseman in the ROTC unit, a killer-diller with the women, a power driver in campus politics and so on.

September 9, 1993: So I remember Bud MacKichan for forty-seven years, up to and including that period in February and March of 1991 when I wrote the first draft of these pages. As far as I know, for openers, these words still serve their purpose.

I still 'think of Mac,' as I did for all these years, 'every time I came across this passage of Scripture:'

I RETURNED, AND SAW UNDER THE SUN, THAT THE RACE IS NOT TO THE SWIFT, NOR THE BATTLE TO THE STRONG, NEITHER YET BREAD TO THE WISE, NOR YET RICHES TO MEN OF UNDERSTANDING, NOR YET FAVOR TO MEN OF SKILL; BUT TIME AND CHANCE HAPPENETH TO THEM ALL." (Eccl. 9:11)"

Lt. MacKichan was leading the High Squadron in the Lead Group of the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing. He was flying B-17 G 42-38158, 547 SO-L. The terse report contained in the Commander's Narrative reads as follows:

"A/C 158 (Lt. MacKichan, pilot) is missing. He received a direct flak burst on the bombing run at 1368 hours, 20,000 feet, the Aircraft blew up in mid-air. None of the 10 chutes were observed. Bomb load of 10 x 500 GP's were released on target."

Lt. O. F. Kelsay, flying number six in MacKichan's Squadron turned in the following report:

"We were flying number 5 High Squadron, Lead Group. At 1358 hours 45° 05' N., 11° 15' E., altitude 20,000 feet. A/C number 158, Lt. MacKichan, pilot received a direct flak hit in the cockpit area. A/C 158 exploded in mid-air. No chutes were seen to emerge."

After the war, American Intelligence found the German KU reports, had them translated and included them in our Missing Crew Reports. The German KU reports included information about B-17s that were shot down and included information on the dead, POWs, and escapees. Included here is KU-1617 about 42-38158 being shot down:

Sternberg 25 Apr 1944

No

Police Post Starnberg

Reg. District Obb.

No. K. 25/2062



To: Airbase Command Heubiberg near Munich.

Subject: Downing of an enemy 4 engine bomber and capture of a crewmember.

Enclosure: 1 certificate.

On Monday 24 April, 1944 at 1400 hours a number of enemy aircraft flew over the territory of Leutstetten. District of Starnberg, from northeast to south direction. One aircraft was hit by flak and it dropped its bombs in the community of Leutstetten. The aircraft crashed in the swamp in Einbettl, community of Leutstten, approximately 300 meters away. As far as known from the crew, 6 men dead. Two crew members bailed out. One crew member came to an apartment and asked for admittance. His name is Claus N. Gustafson, American Pilot, 22 years old. He was arrested by the police and sent to Starnberg. He was not wounded. Another crew member escaped. The shot-down aircraft is an American bomber. Letter P in black on white background. Serial No. 238158 in yellow, and yellow 'L'.

This writer does not believe that Gustafson went to an apartment and asked for admittance. Something must have been lost in the translation of this document. If he did, he probably was in a stunned and dazed condition, from the horrible experience he had just survived. One other crewman survived, and was picked up and became a POW. His name was S/Sgt. Kenneth D. Gray.

Eight 384<sup>th</sup> young men died when 42-38158 was blown out of the sky. It has been over 50 years, and their faces are forever young on what photos

of them remain. Their names lay on Missing Air Crew Reports in the National Archives, and will be there for history forever. They gave their lives for their fellowmen and Country. God Bless them.

P	Mackichan, William Graham	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	KIA
CP	Hartz, William James	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	KIA
N	Walling, Neil Emerson	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	KIA
B	Lynch, John D., Jr.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	KIA
RO	Gray, Kenneth D.	S/Sgt.	RTD
TT	Altendorf, John Paul	T/Sgt.	KIA
BT	Cox, John S.	S/Sgt.	KIA
TG	Pastorella, John Paul	S/Sgt.	KIA
FG	Olstad, Kermit Iver	S/Sgt.	KIA
FG	Gustafson, Claus Norman	S/Sgt.	RTD

## THE EDWARDS CREW

Flying in 43-97477, JD-A, "PORKY'S PIG", was Capt. Floyd C. Edwards, Pilot, and Capt. Robert E. Langlois, Commanding Officer of the 545<sup>th</sup> Squadron. They were leading the High Group in the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing. Just before the bomb run they were hit in the number 2 engine, and smoke and flames shot out of the damaged engine.

1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Joe Laboda, flying Deputy Group Lead wrote the following report:

"We were flying number 2 position Lead Squadron, High Group. A/C No. 7477 was the lead ship of the Group, with Capt. EDWARDS, Pilot and Capt. LANGLOIS, Group Leader, and Co-pilot. A/C 7477 appeared to be in trouble on the bomb run, although able to complete it. Immediately after bombs away, Capt. Langlois called me on the VHF and instructed me to take over the Group Lead. A/C then set course in the general direction of Switzerland."

Even though the Missing Air Crew Report states that the course was set for Switzerland, the pilot actually set a course for England. With the fire out in number 2, and number 1 out they were attempting to reach England. Flying over a small airfield near Maulbronz, a lone fighter plane came up and shot them down.

The crew of 43-97477 consisted of the following:

P	Edwards, Floyd Clinton	Capt.	RTD
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CP	Langlois, Robert Ezra	Capt.	RTD
N	Crist, Vern Warren	2nd Lt.	RTD
B	Alles, William George	1st. Lt.	RTD
R	Hopper, Hugh David	T/Sgt.	RTD
TT	Smith, Roger Carlton	T/Sgt.	RTD
BT	Ordaz, Armando N.	Sgt.	RTD
TG	Fleming, Paul Hane	S/Sgt.	RTD
WG	Folmer, Warren Alexander	SISgt.	RTD
WG	Zink, Chester Harvey	S/Sgt.	RTD

## THE BROYHILL CREW

P	Virgil R. Broyhill	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	RTD
CP	Albert H. Burns	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	RTD
N	Guy E. Earle	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	RTD
B	James E. Grauer	S/Sgt.	RTD
R	Frank L. Pizzi	S/Sgt.	RTD
TT	Sam P. Duncan	S/Sgt.	RTD
BT	Guiseppe M. Piemonti	Sgt.	RTD
TG	James R. Robertson	T/Sgt.	RTD
WG	John R. Wilkins	Sgt.	RTD
WG	Arnold L. Massengale	S/Sgt.	RTD

2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Virgil Broyhill was flying in the number six spot in the lead squadron of the High Group in the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing. He had 8 missions, and having survived 5 missions was considered a veteran Combat Pilot. He was assigned to fly in 42-31885 at one time a 544<sup>th</sup> plane SU-L, "MRS. F. D. R." and now a 545<sup>th</sup> plane, JD-D, "FROSTIE."

It was an uneventful morning other than the apprehension they felt at having been selected to fly the mission of April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1944. They had dressed hurriedly, in the cold, trudged in the dark to the mess hall for breakfast, and then to briefing. When the map was uncovered, and the string slashed all the way across Germany to Oberpfaffenhofen, Germany, they joined in the groans of pain and grief uttered by most of the bomber crews in the room. After briefing they settled down, and quietly went about their duties to get the big bomber in the air, and into its assigned place in the group formation.

When the formation crossed the French Coast, the inevitable flak came up, and T/Sgt. Jim Robertson was wounded in the face and hands. He was

attended to by Arnold Massengale, and when Arnold returned to his position, Robertson elected to stay in the tail gun position.

2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Virgil Broyhill ran the gauntlet of flak and fighter and dropped his bombs on the target, but his airplane was in trouble over the target.

Here is the Intelligence Officers report of the Fighter attacks against the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing:

“First E/A attack 1215 to 1230 hours, beginning near 48 degrees 36’ N, 04 degrees 55’ E, by ME 109s. Attack was driven off by six (6) P-47s.

Second attack began to develop 1250 hours and fighter escort was drawn off in combat. While approaching the AUGSBURG area at 1325 hours this CBW was selected for concentrated attack by estimated fifty (50) E/A, ME 109s and FW 190s coming in two (2), four (4), and eight (8) abreast, some flying directly through squadrons and groups, returning ahead and repeating the attack. E/A were observed taking off from many airfields and joining the attack. ME 110s and 210s were in the area. P-51s were attacking some airfields. E/A attacks continued to come until 1352 hours.

At 1352 hours until 1405 hours formation in intense AA area over target. Upon emerging formation was again met by attacks, roughly falling into three (3) waves and breaking off upon arrival of escort.

E/A attacks were pressed with great skill and determination. Definite squadron plan of attack was employed and either did not break away at all or if so, at very close range in usual belly-up peel-off. E/A displayed ability and desire to fly directly through formation. Almost all attacks were on 12 and 1 o'clock, making use of sun position. Some ME 109s and Fw 190s were carrying belly tanks."

Two engines were damaged. Number one had an unfeathered run-away propeller, and number 3 had lost oil. As he pulled out of the formation, caught in some prop wash, the big B-17 was sluggish and hard to fly. Recovering Lt. Broyhill turned and set a course for Switzerland which was 70 miles away.

Over Lake Constance they were fired on with flak, and fighter planes came up to meet them. They kept their guns trained on the fighters and they escorted them to Dubendorf, where they landed.

The debriefing report filled out by Lt. Broyhill, Pilot; and Lt. Albert H. Burns, Co-Pilot is interesting in that it tells exactly what happened to them. This report was declassified 10-2-97 from the National Archives and states as follows:

"We were right around Augsburg when we got our first fighters and flak. We got another wave of fighters before we went around Munich. When the Wing broke up into Groups at the

bomb run, we were a long way from the formation and received another fighter attack there. Captain Langlois was hit here and his number two engine was on fire. Bailey was also hit at this point. He acted like his ship was out of control for sometime. On the bomb run Captain Langlois did a mighty fine job as he held a steady course right over the target. Flak was intense.

Over the target we were hit by flak which hit the number one oil tank and set it on fire. We could not feather the number one engine, which was windmilling, and number three ran away on the bomb run. We got it back, however, but it ran away again after the bomb run. On the last half of the bomb run the number four engine was off balance, but I don't know what was wrong with it. Due to the windmilling prop, we lost airspeed and could not stay with the formation. The engines that were running were running a temperature of from 250 degrees to 300 degrees. We tried to stay with the formation but we saw we had no chance of getting back, so we headed for Switzerland. We got no flak or fighter opposition on our way to Switzerland. We got flak from both the Swiss and the German side as we crossed Lake Constance. We received medium and very accurate Swiss flak about half way into Zurich. The Swiss fighters came up and shot flares and escorted us into the airfield at Dubendorf, Switzerland. We circled the field once and landed. We had an aircraft right in



front of us that shot two green flares and then he blew up right over Dubendorf. Nobody got out of the ship.

They gave us forms to fill out but we refused to fill them out. We stayed overnight and then went to Berne, Switzerland. We stayed at Berne three weeks and then went to Adelboden. On June 23 we went to Davos. We tried to escape and were put in jail. After we got out of jail they sent us back to Davos where a week later we were repatriated.”

We checked with Virgil Broyhill regarding the accuracy of the above report and he indicated it was fairly accurate.

They were repatriated on April 2, 1945 in a POW exchange, and when he arrived back at the base he ran into a couple people he knew.

The living crew members are: Virgil Broyhill, Pilot; Guy E. Earle, Navigator; Frank L. Pizzi, Radio; Guiseppe W. Piemonti, Ball Turret; and Arnold L. Messengale, Waist Gunner.

They did their duty, and fought for their Country, and Fellowmen.

## THE BARAD CREW

The Barad Crew consisted of the following men:

P	Robert L. Barad	1 <sup>st</sup> Lt.
CP	Gerard A. Heim	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.
N	Robert A. Reinlie	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.
B	Stephen J. Kasmerski	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.
R	Francis P. Doran	T/Sgt.
TT	Edward J. Morris	T/Sgt.
BT	Andrew S. Kemak	T/Sgt.
TG	Edwin J. Kanelewski	S/Sgt.
FG	William L. Cahill	S/Sgt.
FG	Henry G. Bailey	S/Sgt.

This crew survived the violence of the Oberpfaffenhofen mission. They flew the mission, dropped their bombs on the target, performed their duty, and returned to Grafton Underwood. Their bombardier, Stephen J. Kasmerski wrote a low key, matter-of-fact narrative which he has been kind enough to let me use. Flying in aircraft 42-97178, "SWEET MAMA" here's their story:

. . . . The 384<sup>th</sup> thirty aircraft led the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing, with Col. Dale O. Smith commanding and Richard Crown as the lead Bombardier. We were in the high group of the 41<sup>st</sup> 'B' Combat Wing with Captain Langlois commanding.

This will be my 2<sup>nd</sup> visit to this same target. It was on March 18, 1944 when we visited this target. I shall always remember that day. The German countryside was white with snow. As we approached the target the black asphalt of the runways were freshly snow plowed, a beautiful aiming point for the Bombardier.

We were briefed to bomb at 21,000 feet altitude. We were number 4 in the low squadron of the high group. Our bomb load was 36 M4A2 incendiary bombs. Our intention was to really burn out the factory area. We were flying Lt. Helmsley's plane, 'Sweet Mama.' This mission was number 13 for Jim Bouvier, (flying 'Tail End Charlie' in the same squadron in the high group) the 2<sup>nd</sup> mission as 1<sup>st</sup> pilot. Our pilot is Lt. Bob Barad, and Jerry Heim as co-pilot. Bob Reinlie as Navigator, and I were in the nose.

Everything went according to briefing. We assembled over Molesworth, then to our wing assembly. As we were over the French Coast we got a few bursts of flak fire from our left. About 20 miles into France we saw 2 chutes blossom--from a B-17 and a few minutes later the B-17 made a turn and aborted the mission. We were at a loss as to what may have happened. We had a good tail wind and were making a good ground speed. We passed 20 miles east of Paris and could see clearly [see] the Eiffel Tower.

About 60 miles from our target we had FW-190s and Me 109s attack our lead and high squadrons. Our escorts of P-47s tangled with the German planes about 1 o'clock from our position. There was a buzzing melee of dogfights all over the skies. A FW-190 came down underneath us and I could plainly see the stern look of the black helmeted pilot. Sgt. Kemak told me later, he

thought that he may have got a good burst up his tail.

We were on a 90-degree heading north of Augsburg then turned to a south heading. We could see Oberpfaffenhofen to our right. On this southern heading about 20 FW-190s and ME-109s made a pass at us from 10 o'clock. I made a spray burst with my 50 caliber chin turret guns but had no idea if it did any damage. Bob Reinlie was wearing out the left nose gun. Our pilot was taking violent up and down evasive action. Our tail gunner claimed setting a FW-190 on fire, with dense smoke trailing from the tail section.

A 20 mm hit our number 3 engine prop. and sprayed splinters of the shell through the skin of the plane into Jerry Heim's hip and leg. The co-pilot seat caught the full effect of the 20 mm. This shot also knocked out his oxygen line on this side of the plane. Jerry and I had to go on portable oxygen supply bottles. Jerry was administered 1<sup>st</sup> aid for his bleeding. The portable oxygen bottles were continuously being refilled from the left ship line.

The right waist gunner, Sgt. Bailey, sprained his ankle during the up and down evasive action during the attack. I firmly believe this action by Lt. Bob Barad really saved our hides . . . .

Strange things happened to people under combat situations; truth really is stranger than fiction. Fate and the powers that regulate these

situations had decided that Jerry Heim had a future date with this plane 42-97178 JD-N, "SWEET MAMA."

After the Oberpfaffenhofen mission of April 24, 1944 Lt. Heim was placed in the base hospital for his wounds. He recuperated and on July 19, 1944 he was assigned as first pilot on 42-97178, "SWEET MAMA" on a mission to Hollsriegelskreuth, Germany. They were shot down, and Lt. Heim along with 6 others were KIA and 2 POWs.

## THE BAILEY CREW

What thoughts went through the mind of 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Everett L. Bailey in the early morning hours of April 24, 1944 are unknown. Certainly he was tense, and apprehensive about the mission. He was concerned about the aircraft he was to fly, his position in the formation, and especially, he was concerned about the new crew he had been assigned to fly with him. None of the crew had been in combat except the Navigator, Lt. Charles D. Wallach, who had four missions.

Bailey's first chance to talk to the crew was at the aircraft they were scheduled to fly. He assembled them under the wing and explained to them what he expected. Keep alert, stay off the intercom, unless an airplane gets too close in the formation, or if you see fighter planes. He instructed them to call out all fighter planes even our own "Little Friends," and no screaming or shouting over the intercom in the excitement of a fighter attack. He did his best to prepare them for the possible fear and horror of the coming combat mission.

Lt. Bailey was a young, friendly person not yet 21 years old, but with 21 combat missions under his belt. He was experienced, and 4 missions away from finishing his tour of duty. Whatever emotions he felt, while talking to the crew, he kept to himself. He was composed and calm while instructing them on procedures and conduct he wanted.

He was flying "Little Chubb," 42-102446 JD-M from the 545<sup>th</sup> squadron. He was flying number 2 in the lead squadron of the high group in the 41<sup>st</sup> B

Combat Wing. Laboda was flying number 3, Deputy Group Lead, and could take over if Capt. Langlois, Group Leader, was shot down. Lt. Bailey was probably put in the number 2 spot because of his inexperienced crew.

Take off and assembly was routine and soon the bomber stream was lined out for miles headed for the target at Oberpfaffenhofen. It was an awesome sight to see the sun glinting on the wings of the hundreds of Fortresses all in a row except for the 41<sup>st</sup> B flying all by itself to the right of 41<sup>st</sup> A.

Lt. Bailey struggled along with the strung-out formation, and the high indicated air speeds of Smokestack Blue Leader, until the inevitable fighter attack near Stuttgart left him with number 3 and 4 engines out, the nose damaged, and a wounded Bombardier. He slowly pulled out of the formation and elected to go to Switzerland.

There was much fighter activity in the area, and a lone B-17 was an inviting target. A few minutes before he was surrounded by his friends. Looking in any direction there had been big spinning props, and big planes bristling with 50 caliber machine guns. Now the sky was empty, and he felt exposed, naked, and vulnerable. He had a badly damaged plane, all alone in enemy territory, and had to maintain some altitude to get over the Alps. It was freezing cold but vapor drifted off his gloved hand holding the throttles. Lt. Bailey was sweating in spite of the cold.

Switzerland was a neutral country. If you flew into her territory, and landed, the crew was interned for the duration of the war, and the aircraft was

confiscated. The Swiss provided food, clothing, housing, and health care, and generally treated our personnel well.

It was a safe haven for American heavy bomber crews who were shot up, had badly damaged airplanes, had wounded on board, with no option other than a prison camp, or death at the hands of German civilians.

When he finally got into Swiss airspace, Lt. Bailey breathed a sigh of relief, and started looking for a place to land. He was letting down when six Swiss fighters appeared in the sky, and started circling “Little Chubb” like buzzards circling their prey.

Lt. Bailey was having trouble with one landing gear not extending. There were heavy gas fumes in the bomb bay from leaks in the wing tanks. One crew member reported that the ball turret guns were straight down indicating that no one was in the ball turret. Lt. Bailey had given the order to drop the ball turret. While this work was going on he flew straight over the Greifensee in order to drop the ball turret in the water.

It's unlikely that any gunners were in their position, because they felt they were in safe territory.

Lt. Bailey had circled the Greifensee, a lake southeast of Dubendorf. There was an airfield located at Dubendorf, used by the Swiss for heavy bombers. It was apparent that Lt. Bailey intended ditching in the lake rather than attempt a landing on one wheel, and this was why he was dropping the ball turret. The Swiss fighters were wagging their wings and indicating he



land. He circled the lake a second time, and the Swiss fighters moved in. As Lt. Bailey started a third pass, three of the fighters opened fire.

“Little Chubb” was doomed. She was at about 1000’ and burning. Lt. Bailey immediately gave the bail out order. Eyewitnesses said that all four engines were silent when the plane went over their heads, but the number 3 engine was burning badly. Lt. Bailey, Sgt. Hollingsworth, and Sgt. Melazzi bailed out near the Greifensee. Lt. Bailey’s body was found on the shore of the lake. His chute had failed to open. S. Sgt. Newall and S. Sgt. Silag both parachuted out at low altitude, and although burned, and shaken up, both survived.

Lt. Wallach was laying in the radio room. He had been badly wounded in the original German fighter attack, and again by the Swiss fighters. When “Little Chubb” hit the water, Lt. Wallach was thrown about 50 feet from the crash. He was hospitalized, recovered, and later escaped from Switzerland returning to the United States in November of 1944.

Lt. Burry was in the co-pilots seat, and Sgt. Pratt and Lt. Greenbaum were standing between the pilot and co-pilots seats. Lt. Greenbaum had been wounded on the original German Fighter attack. It is believed that he, Pratt, and Burry were killed by the Swiss fighters, and that Sgt. Pratt and Lt. Greenbaum were ejected from the plane at the time of the crash. The official Swiss Air Force Report, translated from German, quotes Radioman, Sgt. W. G. Silag as follows:

“The crew was very surprised to be suddenly fired at. They

tried to save themselves by parachute. Three crew members succeeded; one waist gunner, the flight engineer, and the radioman who jumped last at an altitude of 180 feet.”

The commander of the Swiss Air Force made several lame excuses for shooting down the American bomber obviously in trouble and attempting to land. He claimed that “Little Chubb” had tried to escape, and could have crashed into the city of Zurich. He also stated that American Bombers, three weeks before, had bombed the Swiss town of Schaffhausen on the border with Germany. Public opinion favored the American bomber crew.

It was a senseless, unnecessary, aggressive action that turned the crippled bomber into a blazing torch. Six young Americans paid the ultimate price for their fellowmen and their country.

In 1953 the pitiful remains of “Little Chubb” was raised from the bottom of the cold lake. She was 130 feet down. In the co- pilots seat were the remains of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. James Burry. He was given a hero’s burial in a cemetery near Zurich on September 20, 1953.

It All happened--one April afternoon.

P	Everett L. Bailey	1 <sup>st</sup> Lt.	KIA
CP	James E. Burry	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	KIA
N	Charles D. Wallach	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	RTD
B	Jesse L. Greenbaum	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	KIA
R	William J. Silag	S/Sgt.	RTD
TT	Raymond a. Newall	S/Sgt.	RTD
BT	Anthony T. Melazzi, Jr.	Sgt.	KIA
TG	Sidney J. Pratt	Sgt.	KIA
FG	Richard R. Hollingsworth	Sgt.	RTD
FG	Richard M. Sendlback	Sgt.	KIA

## THE HALEY CREW

The William Bice crew came into the 384<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group with the following personnel:

P	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. William Bice
CP	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. Fred Griggs
N	F/O Dick Patefield
B	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. Don Masterson
TT	S/Sgt. Bob Atkinson
RO	S/Sgt. Bob Scheppers
BT	Sgt. Joe McLimans
TG	Sgt. Bob Conedon
WG	Sgt. Luther J. Kelly
WG	Sgt. Les Jackson

This was the crew that had trained together, got drunk together, flew overseas together, but were not allowed to fly their first mission together. Their Squadron Commander believed they needed more experience on this mission to Oberpfaffenhofen on April 24, 1944. Ralph B. Haley replaced William Bice as Pilot. Bice replaced Fred Griggs as Co-pilot, and Tommy Lott replaced Bob Scheppers as Radio Operator.

They went into combat in aircraft 42-97372, 547, SO-P. "Booby Trap." The crew was inexperienced, and this was the first time Haley had laid eyes on them, and they on him.

The crew now was made up of the following:

P	Haley, Ralph Bernard	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	POW
CP	Bice, William L.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	POW
N	Patefield, Richard Arthur	F/O	KIA
B	Masterson, Donald Joy	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	POW
RD	Lott, Tommy Page	Sgt.	POW
TT	Atkinson, Robert Vernon	S/Sgt.	POW
BT	McLimans, Joseph Emmett	Sgt.	POW
TG	Congdon, Robert Earl	Sgt.	POW

WG Kelly, Luther Irwin                      Sgt.              POW  
WG Jackson, Leslie Hall                     Sgt.              POW  
Lt. Haley was flying in the number 3 spot in the low squadron in the

high group of the 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing. He had managed to stay in formation regardless of the higher airspeeds of the Combat Wing Leader, Smokestack Blue. He had run the gamut of the heavy fighter attacks before being hit at 1328 near Munich. The number 2 engine was on fire, was losing power, and pulled out of the formation.

Les Jackson takes up the narrative:

“We were flying low squadron, high group, 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing. All hell broke loose with head-on attacks, and we lost power and couldn't keep up. Somewhere along the line we took a hit in the nose that seriously wounded Patefield.

When we slipped from the formation, we hit the deck to get away from the fighters. It worked but we couldn't get any altitude to get over the Alps. We all stayed with the plane because we hoped to get to Switzerland. We finally had to take it in. The pilot, Ralph Haley, found a nice level field to crash land in. We rode her down.

Before the plane stopped we started running for the mountains. The more we ran the farther away the mountains got. They finally picked us up. It didn't take long because we crashed behind the Fussen Barracks. The whole Garrison came to get us. They were all (well most all) kids and old men carrying every kind

of armament you could think of. Mostly antiques. They probably didn't have any ammunition because the weapons were so old. If they had they probably would have shot us because they were as scared as we were. They locked us in an old castle until they put us on the train for Dulag Luft.

Then to Stalag 17-B. You may remember the movie. William Holden won the Academy Award that year (back in the 50s). Before it was a movie it was a Broadway Play. Two guys in the camp wrote it (Beven and Trazinski) and got it produced when they got home.”

F/O Richard Arthur Patefield died by the wreckage of “Booby Trap” his life's blood running out on the ground. He had been hit in the groin, and an artery in his left leg. By the time the Germans got him to a doctor he had bled to death. He died in combat, fighting for his Country, and his name should never be forgotten.

Ironically, this American Combat Crew crashed very near the little village of Wies, not far from Fussen. Reichfuhrer SS Heinrich Himmler was born October 7, 1900, and raised in the village of Wies in the Bavarian Alps. He was head of the dreaded SS, and German Police Forces and brought torture and murder to horrifying heights to a world ravaged by war.

What made him important to American Airmen was his infamous “TOP SECRET” order issued to Commanders of Security Police, Ordnungspolizie,

and SS Main Office Chiefs. It was to be handed down to all SS, Police Departments and all responsible officers. It read as follows:

“It is not the task of the police to intervene in altercations between German Volk Comrades and parachuted English and American Terror-Flyers.”

This order caused the death of many English and American Combat Crewmen. It condoned murder and torture of English and American airmen and subconsciously was always in the thoughts of unfortunate crewmen forced to parachute into enemy territory.

May 25, 1945 he [Himmler] was buried in an unmarked grave at Luneburg Heath, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Headquarters Interrogation Centre. His body was wrapped in camouflage netting, tied round with army telephone wire. A lone Army Sergeant put him in the ground, without fanfare, services, or a memorial--alone he headed straight for hell.

## **THE GOWDER CREW**

Charles F. Gowder was a self-reliant individual who deserved all the recognition, awards, and publicity he received. He was one of the true heroes of the April 24, 1944 mission to Oberpfaffenhofen, Germany, and of the 384<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group. It was a miracle that he brought his aircraft back to England, but was unassuming, and quiet about what he had done.

He was a handsome, country boy from Oklahoma, and in 1942 was stationed at Wichita Falls, Texas, Shepherd AAF Base working as a mechanic's instructor. He was 28 years old. His Commanding Officer approached him and asked if he would like to try for the Aviation Cadet program. Gowder told him that he only had a ninth grade education, and hadn't graduated from High School. His Commanding Officer told him, somewhat skeptically, that he could take the College Equivalency Examination, which he did, and passed.

He paid attention, and applied himself to the ground school portion of the cadet training, and was a natural in the airplane. He was commissioned a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. in the Army Air Corps in August of 1943.

Flying in 42-107058, "White Angel", Lt. Gowder had his oxygen supply shot out near the target, and came back to England alone and on the deck. Wounded himself, two dead on board, no instruments, no oxygen, and some of her guns knocked out the plane still flew, and Lt. Gowder elected not to go to Switzerland, but to return to England and fight another day.

Lt. Gowder was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross:

For extraordinary heroism on bombing mission to Oberpfaffenhofen, Germany 24 April, 1944.

Lt. Gowder's aircraft was subjected to repeated head-on attacks and forced to fly through intensely accurate anti-aircraft fire. Despite the presence of wounded personnel and a seriously crippled aircraft, Lt. Gowder though his oxygen system was shot away, continued on the bombing run and released the bombs on the target in coordination with the group leader.

For over two hours, Lt. Gowder and his crew battled against almost insurmountable odds of anti-aircraft and enemy fighters, returning his crippled ship alone all the way from Central Germany to the safety of England.

The trouble started just before "White Angel" reached the target at Oberpfaffenhofen, Germany. Lt. Gowder was flying number 2 in the Low Squadron, High Group, 41<sup>st</sup> B Combat Wing, when a head-on fighter attack killed his Navigator, and wounded his Bombardier. At the same time his oxygen system was shot out, and a few seconds later an explosive shell hit him on the sole of his boot. His foot and leg were paralyzed.

He took the battered plane across the target, and dropped the bombs himself when the rest of the group released their bombs. He immediately radioed that he had lost his oxygen and going to "hit the deck." With all the enemy fighter activity in the area, other pilots who heard his radio call, thought his chances of getting back to England were slim to none.

Gowder explained the wound in his foot by saying the bullet had exploded in his flying boot, and the burns were worse than the pain of the



bullet. Evidently the bullet was pretty well spent, and although he wasn't losing much blood, it still was very painful and hurt his foot.

The ball turret gunner, Sgt. Salvatore Sacco, of Newark, N.J., had been firing at an Me-109, just before the bomb run, and had the satisfaction of seeing the enemy fighter spin out and crash into the ground. Later on the run for the English Channel, after his gun had jammed, a direct flak burst had hit the waist killing Sgt. R.S. Higgins, waist gunner, and seriously wounded Sgt. Sacco.

Sgt. James E. Williamson from Hartford, Arkansas was the tail gunner on "White Angel." During one fighter attack Sgt. Williamson had been seriously wounded in both legs and one foot. He refused to leave his position although Gowder had sent the radio man S/Sgt. F.E. Barnes back to the tail position to get him out.

Sgt. Williamson's citation for the Silver Star tells the story best:

Shortly after the bombing run, the pilot of the Flying Fortress in which Sgt. Williamson was serving as tail gunner was forced to leave the formation due to severe damage inflicted by hostile fighters. During these savage assaults, he managed his guns with exceptional skill and warded off repeated attacks on his position. While returning at tree-top altitude, fragments of a bursting flak shell seriously wounded Sergeant Williamson. The pilot sent a member of the crew to the tail compartment to remove him from the turret and administer first aid. Though suffering extreme pain Sergeant Williamson refused treatment and continued to man his guns against the enemy, leaving

his turret only after the aircraft had returned to England. The gallantry and devotion to duty displayed by Sergeant Williamson inspired his comrades and contributed to their safe return.

Roaring across Germany at tree-top level or below when necessary, it took all of Lt. Gowder's skill, courage, and strength to keep the plane in the air. By this time the ball turret had jammed, the hydraulic system had been shot up, the radio was inoperative, most of the instruments shot away and the automatic pilot was destroyed. All the guns were out of action.

During most of the return trip S/Sgt. Francis E. Barnes, radioman from Los Angeles, had quietly and calmly administered to the wounded. He had made them as comfortable as possible under the circumstances, and calmed their fears as best he could. At 31 he was the oldest man on the crew and proved to be a very stabilizing influence. In the riddled and damaged plane, flying just above the ground he kept the panic down, making it easier for Gowder to concentrate on keeping the battered hunk of metal in the air. The debriefing report by S/Sgt. Francis E. Barnes is as follows:

Shortly before we reached the target, we were attacked by enemy fighters. I manned my gun, until evasive action threw the ammunition out of the boxes in the waist. I found a walk-around bottle and cleared the ammunition from the ball turret tracks. This occurred twice.

Soon after going back to my station, the Co-Pilot called me to administer first aid to the Bombardier. The bomb bay doors were open, so I

had to find a walk-around oxygen bottle, and I went up to the nose. I found the Navigator (2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. V. J. Fazio) lying in the accessory compartment. Upon examining him, I found a wound in his left chest, and decided he was already dead. The Bombardier (2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. J. J. Brooks) seemed in serious condition so I went to help him. I had difficulty in giving his first aid, because though weak and dazed, and in severe pain, he insisted on manning a gun. After quieting him, I gave him some pure oxygen. Then cut away his right sleeve and bandaged his wounded arm. He had indicated his arm was hurting him. After this, I put a bandage on his head wound. The hole in his cheek didn't look deep, so I asked him if he wanted morphine. He refused it first thinking he could get us home by pilotage. But on seeing his pain, and fearing shock, I administered one dose of morphine, then made him comfortable and covered him with a blanket.

At this time the pilot called me to get a QDM from our home base. I went back and let out the trailing wire antenna. When I had monitored the home station, and was about to transmit, violent evasive action made this impossible. Leber (Sgt. R. E. Leber, Waist Gunner) came up and threw chaff out of the radio hatch. After throwing chaff he went to the nose to help Lt. Brooks. About this time a burst of flak came through the right waist. Sacco (Sgt. S. B. Sacco, Ball Turret Gunner) had been manning the right waist gun, having left the ball turret at the Pilot's order. Higgins (Sgt. R. A. Higgins, Waist Gunner) was manning the left waist gun. Both Sacco and Higgins were hit by this burst, Higgins looked in worse condition. I went to him and tried giving

him pure oxygen from a walk-around bottle. I also gave artificial respiration but so much blood and mucus came from his nose and mouth I decided it was hopeless and went to help Sacco. Sacco's right leg was hit in three places. I bandaged the wounds and gave him one dose of morphine. His back hurt him so I laid him down along side the armor plate and covered him with jackets and flight suits.

The Pilot then told me Williamson, (Sgt. J. E. Williamson, Tail Gunner) the Tail Gunner had been hit, and to get him into the radio room. I went back, but Williamson refused to leave his station saying he would remain there until we reached England.

I went back to Sacco. He wanted water so I went to the radio room for the water bottle. A fire had started there, caused by an electrically heated muff catching fire. I threw the muff out the radio hatch and put out the fire, which had begun to burn the floor.

I then went back to the radio room to get a QDM. Both the trailing wire and the fixed antenna had been shot away. The command transmitter was also torn out. I informed Lt. Gowder of this and he replied, 'OK, we'll make it anyway.'

Shortly after this two P-47s appeared to lead us home. Lt. Gowder said we might have to crash land, so I assisted Lt. Brooks, who was attempting to go along the bomb bay catwalk. Then Sgt. Beaugh (Sgt. G. Beaugh, Top Turret Gunner), Leber, and I carried Sacco to the radio room. Williamson came from the tail, and we all took our positions for a crash landing.

After we had landed safely, I helped get Sacco out of the ship, then I helped get Lt. Fazio out.

Finally the “White Angel” found a favorable cloudbank, and headed for it. More flak bracketed them at the French Coast, but then they were over the Channel, and with some P-47s, ‘Little Friends,’ escorting her as they struggled across the 80 miles of water. Lining up on the long emergency runway at Manston, Gowder set the beat-up “White Angel” down, and had enough runway to roll to a stop without brakes.

The record doesn’t show how 42-107058, “White Angel,” was transported from Manston to 2SAD, a repair Depot. It took until May 19, 1944 for her to arrive at 2SAD and she was released back to the 384<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group on June 2, 1944. She was shot down by fighters on September 25, 1944 at Halle, Germany. She went down with the name “White Angel,” flown by Lt. James W. Chadwick with 7 KIA and 2 POWs.

I have a faded fifty-three year old newspaper clipping, yellow and with no identification on what paper it came from. However, it is such a tribute to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Vincent J. Fazio that I want to include it here:

#### **ONE FOR JIMMIE**

We practically watched Lieutenant Vincent James Fazio grow up into manhood, for we never lived very far from his home on East Haverhill Street. It is hard to resign the mind to the fact that young, happy,:

‘Jimmie’ Fazio is dead and that at 27 his body lies somewhere in the British Isles under a plain but significant white cross bearing the simple

legend:

'FAZIO, LT. VINCENT J., USAAF.'

Jimmy went 'over and out' as he navigated a B-17 Flying Fortress on a mission over Germany last month. As all airmen would wish it, his end was quick, for all of them know that when they take off with a full load, this flight might be their last. Jimmy did not know that his fellow crewmen tenderly lifted him from his position at the plane's charts and instruments. He did not hear the mass said for him at his station chapel or the salute that was fired and the taps that were sounded over his grave. For he was far away on his Great Solo Flight.

Today, far off in a land where planes have golden wings, Jimmy Fazio is serving as Navigator for the Great Pilot, where flight is on the other side of the sun and west of the moon, where there's never any ceiling and only one objective--happiness.

When all the boys one day shall have put away their uniforms-- Bill and Lenny and Vinnie and Martin and the rest of the boys who put away mortar and pestle or turned from their ice cream sodas--They'll come back and talk quietly about Jimmy Fazio. And somehow Jimmy will be there among them in the old neighborhood he loved so well.

Lt. Gowder was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. The Tail Gunner, Sgt. Williamson, received the Silver Star. The Bombardier, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Brooks, received the Distinguished Flying Cross. Sgt. Sacco, the Ball Turret Gunner, received the Air Medal for the mission, and an Oak Leaf Cluster for

shooting down an enemy fighter. The rest of the crew each received the Air Medal and four Purple Hearts were awarded. This was certainly the most decorated crew in the 384<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group, and probably in the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force.

P	C. F. Gowder	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.
CP	W. H. Thompson	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.
N	V. J. Fazio	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.
B	J. J. Brooks	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.
R	F. E. Barnes	S/Sgt.
TT	G. Beaugh	Sgt.
BT	S. B. Sacco	Sgt.
TG	J. E. Williamson	Sgt.
FG	R. S. Higgins	Sgt.
FG	R. E. Leber	Sgt.

Only a few of these brave men remain, the rest have passed on.

GOD BLESS THEM ALL.