

DRESDEN - WAS IT REVENGE?

My topic could be "Dresden - the mission that raises a question". Whatever the final judgement, discussions in the years following WWII pointed out that no strategic value could be found in bombing Dresden and negative opinion was justified in published articles revealing Winston Churchill's motives in requesting the missions, four in all. London, Coventry and other English cities had felt the scourge of indiscriminate bombings by the Luftwaffe. Why not now Germany as the war ground down to allied victory. The National Geographic edition of November 1978 contains an article "The Treasures of Dresden", describing the damage inflicted by British and American forces on February 13 & 14, 1945. No mention is made of the mission of March 2, 1945 when the 100 Group had one of the first encounters with the ME 262, the first jet fighter used in actual combat, nor the mission of April 17, 1945, with its self inflicted casualties of the 92 BG.

My diary for the last mentioned mission is a fairly short description of what occurred, but the utter confusion of that day will remain with me for my lifetime. Stations at 0840 hours, taxi at 0900, airborne at 0910 - continental coast at 1132, all automatic entries on what was to be a long day. I was the "mickey" operator flying deputy lead. Since I flew with different crews, I never mentioned the names of the crew members in the diary. Unfortunate, but I never really had time during pre-flight to get them in conversation personal enough for that information.

Our mission was to hit the target, Dresden, with 24, 250 pound demos from our altitude of 21,000 feet. After an uneventful trip over allied territory, we were threatened by a squadron of ME 262's but our fighter escort kept them at a distance. "Buckeye", code for our weather recon planes, had sent back reports of visual conditions, with a slight haze at bombing altitude. We took intervals at the IP at 1439 and started the bomb run in intense flak. The visual conditions had deteriorated to a haze with the consistency of cumulus clouds, caused by the fire storm in the city below. It was now a PFF run and from this point, the confusion began. Lead informed us that their "mickey" was out and that the deputy would take over, **after commencing a second bomb run**. The decision was to 360 to starboard, a maneuver that brought us between two bomber streams, each proceeding in a different direction. Then, to cap what was at best a dangerous situation, a "Buckeye" mosquito barreled through our formation. Finally, we started our second bomb run, a twelve mile, 4 minute ordeal during which a plane in the low squadron went straight up into the lead ship of the high element, taking both down into Dresden. No chutes were seen while they were still visible. Pilot vertigo had to be the reason, since visual conditions were poor to nil at the time. The Elbe never showed clear on my scope at bombs away indicating the heart of the city would be struck. Five friends, Hoffman, Shane, Pruitt, Paul and Huether along with 13 others were lost in the mid-air collision.

To sum it up, Dresden was a city of exhibition halls, art galleries and historic landmarks. A stream of refugees, entering the city from the east while fleeing the advancing Russians, doubled the normal population. Where was the strategic value? Did we sink to the same level as Goering's Luftwaffe with our quest for revenge? These are two of the many questions raised in any discussion of the merits of this mission. I'd be interested in your opinion or anyone who took part in any of the four missions.

Sincerely,
John Fisher (NY)

PROJECT X?

For years I have wondered about a project in which I became involved while serving with the 92nd at Podington. From time to time bits and pieces of information have surfaced which raise questions as to whether they relate to the project or a parallel project. At this late date much information may be lost, but

what is available can be looked at analytically and could be an interesting footnote to history.

The project, the name of which is beyond recall, was first mentioned to me in the spring of 1944. The Germans had commenced using buzz bombs which, until one was recovered intact, were thought to be suicide planes. To counter the Germans someone thought of loading war-weary aircraft with high explosives and have them hit German cities in controlled crashes. The one-way bombers required good engines and automatic pilots as well as a pilot and an auto-pilot mechanic to get them going.

The pilot and auto-pilot mechanic were to run the gas load to the proper level and, at the planned altitude, set the ship on course. With the auto-pilot flying the plane the two man crew was to bail out as the aircraft crossed the English coast. In theory the ship would fly until it used all of the fuel and then go into a glide controlled by the auto-pilot. If everything went just right a German city would be hit with a super bomb.

Before the 92nd participated in one of these flights we heard that two crews had been killed, one crew being Canadian. Somewhat later I was told that the whole project had been scrubbed because the ambassador's son had been killed flying one of the planes. I didn't know it then, but later learned, that the ambassador was Joseph P. Kennedy.

Some years ago an explanation of the death of Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. was circulated. In that version young Kennedy, a naval flyer, was participating in an experiment to have a plane directed to a target city by television. Then, just a few years ago there was a television story that portrayed young Kennedy as a Navy B-24 pilot flying a radio controlled plane-bomb that blew up.

The conflicting stories raise many questions. Exactly what was the project? What was it named? Was there more than one project? I realize that for security reasons we may not have been given all the details of the project, but I wonder if some of the later stories have been embroidered to make the concept of one way bombers more practical.

I would appreciate hearing from any of your readers that could shed light on this obscure attempt to show the Germans that we could equal their buzz bombs.

Sincerely,
John W. Earman

GIESSEN - AN UNUSUAL RESCUE!

On December 16, 1944 Field Marshall Gerd von Rundstedt, recently reinstated as German C in C of the Western Front, launched his counter offensive in the Ardennes. This was a desperate attempt to stop the advancing Allies by retaking the port of Antwerp and splitting their force in two. The terrible weather over western Europe effectively stopped all allied attempts to halt the offensive from the air. Not until December 23rd was the 8th Air Force able to give the ground troops much needed air support and even then only a small force could be dispatched.

However, December 24th brought clear skies over the continent and the 8th Air Force was able to mount a maximum effort attack against airfields and communications targets. This was to be the largest air strike of the war with 2046 heavy bombers dispatched.

For the 92 BG the day was to be marred by accidents, most caused by the continuing bad weather over Britain. One of the 50 aircraft which the group dispatched was B-17G-45-VE 44-8022 which took off on Podington's main runway at 1024 with the following 407 BS crew aboard:

Pilot 1/Lt. Joseph B. McConnell (0-684015)
of Atlanta, Georgia

continued on page 6

GIESSEN (cont.)

Co-Pilot	2/Lt. Alfred J. Greco (0-721059) of Ellsworth, Pennsylvania
Navigator	2/Lt. Anthony Piekarcz (0-557425)
Bombardier	2/Lt. Frank J. Purtzer (0-886658) of Corvallis, Oregon
Radio Operator	T/Sgt. John F. Booth (15126060)
Flight Engineer	k/Sgt. Terry G. Sakyo (32726385) of Westbury, New York
Waist Gunner	S/Sgt. Harold H. Paske (36837635)
Waist Gunner	S/Sgt. Leo A. Labonte (31288202) of Holyoke, Massachusetts
Tail Gunner	S/Sgt. John J. Carravello (13080087) of Philadelphia

McConnell, Greco, Booth, Sakyo and Paske had been assigned to the Group from Bovingdon on September 4th as part of crew FD900A/16403A/40/40. S/Sgt. Paske usually flew as ball turret gunner but was acting as waist gunner as 44-8022 was a P.F.F. ship fitted with H2X radar in place of the ball turret. This silver aircraft was from the 325 BS and carried the code letters NV-H.

After take off 44-8022 climbed up through the fog to take up its position as deputy lead ship of the lead element of the 40th CBW'A' Group's low squadron. The 13 aircraft of the low squadron formed up at 6,000 ft. and joined the group over the Honeybourne Buncher. The 40th CBW'A' Group departed for enemy territory on time flying as the 5th group in the 1st Air Division formation.

At the I.P. the squadrons took intervals for a visual attack on the primary target, Giessen airfield. The lead and high squadrons bombed on the first run. The low squadron made a second run and released its bombs from 21,600 ft. at 1501½ on a true heading of 69 degrees. Despite severe flak opposition each B-17 dropped 38 × ANM-30 100 pound G.P. bombs accurately enough to render the airfield unserviceable.

While the rest of the low squadron made their way back to England and a landing at Bury St. Edmunds, 44-8022 was in trouble having been hit by flak over the target. Eventually the crew was forced to bail out and the plane crashed at Ohey in Belgium. What follows is S/Sgt. Carravello and S/Sgt. Labonte's account of what happened:

LABONTE: 'We were one of the three squadrons of forts detailed to bomb an important airfield at Geissen near Koblenz which was base for the German drive into the Ardenne. On the run in we waited for the bombardier to say 'bombs away' but it never came. I guess there was something wrong. So we did a 360, that's a circle around a target, and then we tried again. This time only half our bombs went out and the bomb-bay doors wouldn't close. I guess they must have frozen. Then number four engine was hit but after kicking the bombs out we made back for home over the Ruhr, Happy Valley we call it, keeping up with the rest of the squadron. Then flak opened up, five bursts hit the ship, putting another engine out of action and holding number two gas tank. The gas was going right through the ship and she was on fire and we reckoned she might blow up, so the pilot gave the order to bail out.'

CARRAVELLO: 'I was one of the last to bail out. Of course we didn't know exactly where we were but it looked as if we might put down behind the enemy lines or at least too close to them for comfort. Down to about 10,000 ft. it was an ordinary jump. Then I began to notice that our P-51 escorts were flying pretty close and I began to sway violently, more than I would even in a high gale.'

LABONTE: 'This P-51 kept coming towards us and every time he passed and pulled away from us there was a great gust of wind and we would blow along in a certain direction. We waved as he went by and he wagged his wings. I guess he knew what he was doing alright. He was pushing us back over our own lines. I lost my boots on the way down and landed in a tree. I couldn't figure out where I was but I buried my chute and set out in the

opposite direction. I spent the night in a wood and damn nearly froze my feet. Next morning I heard church bells in the distance and I thought I might find a priest, who would hide me if this was still enemy territory. But I met a column of British tanks and a British officer said I was heading the right way. I soon found a Belgian house where they treated me real good and brought out a bottle of Cognac.'

CARRAVELLO: 'We didn't know at the time that there was anything remarkable about this but now the whole story is put together we're mighty grateful to the pilots who took such trouble to send us back over our own lines.'

2/Lt. Piekarcz was killed when his chute steamed. T/Sgt. Booth's chute got caught on the horizontal stabilizer dragging him down to his death. S/Sgt. Paske did not jump and died in the crash. 1/Lt. McConnell landed on a fence and broke both his legs while the rest of the crew landed safely.

Further details of this mission can be found on p. 222-226 of 'The Route as Briefed.'

Adrian M. Felle (UK)

EIGHTH AIR FORCE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION FLAP

Your secretary, every year, receives queries regarding a 92nd Reunion (mini) at the time of and in conjunction with the 8th AFHS Reunion. When our organization was formalized the members elected to hold our own reunions every other year. The sentiment was expressed that a yearly event was just too much and required increased travel, planning and record keeping. 92nd members are encouraged to join the 8th AFHS and attend their reunions on their own without 92nd organization sponsorship. Many of us attend 8th AF reunions when they are scheduled in our part of the country. Your officers attended the St. Louis and Orlando reunions and felt they left much to be desired and were somewhat autocratic.

Recently each Unit Contact in 8th AFHS received a report from Claude Murray, a member of the Board of Directors of 8th AFHS, along with his resignation and the reasons therefore. Claude still is a diligent and conscientious worker and member of the society, but he charges the following:

1. In April 1983 an illegal set of by-laws were passed by the board of directors. By-laws or amendments can be passed only by the general membership. Competent legal advice was not sought. The document is poorly drafted and does not provide for amendments.
2. The board of directors now **forbids** any criticism of how reunions are handled.
3. The by-laws state that the editor of the 8th AFHS Newsletter is responsible to the operations manager. These are one and the same person. Also that individual is a member of the board of directors and he is therefore responsible to himself. There is a preception that this person "owns" the 8th AF News and there are other allegations of commercialism.
4. There appears to be a conflict between some of the directors of the Historical Society and the 8th Air Force Museum Foundation. These are two separate organizations. \$15,000 belonging to members of 8th AFHS was given to the Museum Foundation under circumstances which may be legally questionable.

Those of you attending the Houston Reunion of 8th AFHS (October 12-16) might look into this matter and drop your secretary a line on the current state of affairs as the 8th AFHS officers appear to be reluctant to fully air out this matter.

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