

205th Finance

Lt. William Truax
S/Sgt. James L. Little
S/Sgt. Herstrom
Cpl. Clarence J. Ownes

T/Sgt. Kenneth B. Hatfield
Sgt. Charles N. Pink
S/Sgt. Jerald Krupka
Cpl. Jay R. Cooper

245 Medical Dispensary

Cpt. Joseph Messey
S/Sgt. George F. Vernay
Tec. 4 Erwin Shelter
Tec. 4 Carl Weintraub
Cpl. Elliott Miller
Tec. 5 Ross T. Diehl
Pfc. Max Axelrod
Pfc. Howard Sinks
Pvt. Alton Vickers

Cpt. John T. Owens
Sgt. Charles W. Kline
Tec. 4 Forrest T. Dailey
Tec. 4 Joseph Tishler
Cpl. Charles E. Brokschmidt
Cpl. Robert D. Moses
Tec. 5 Raymond W. MacFarland
Pfc. James A. Howden
Pvt. Milan V. Evans

If you have any info about or are in contact with any of the personnel listed in the above units, forward the data to the Secretary. We are continually attempting to update our files. Future newsletters will continue to contain lists that are obtained from Orders published in the 42-45 era.

NOTICES

ATTENTION WWII SWEDISH INTERNEES: At the next 8th AFHS reunion, October 17-28 in Wichita, I would like to see if we can't get a few of us together for a mini-reunion at the same time. I would appreciate those interested to send this notice on to any publication they think might reach some of the guys we were interned with. Any notices sent out should mention that to go to the reunion they have to join the 8th AFHS by sending \$10 to 8th AFHS Membership, 459 NE Terrace, Miami, FL. (Ernest Richardson, 10491 Marcia Lane, South Lyon, MI 48178 (313) 437-0140)

8AF HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Wichita, Kansas 17-20 October 1985. Hotels: The Broadview, Holiday Inn Plaza, The Wichita Royale and Holiday Inn Med Center. Reunion Brochures will be forthcoming from 8AFHS in May.

SEPTEMBER 11, 1944: A PERSONAL REMINISCENCE

by Donald J. Sorensen (407th Bomb Sqd)

"Wake up! Wake up! Snap out of it!" The words snapped me out of a black void that had carried me to the brink of death.

We were in a Flying Fortress, on a bomb run 29,000 feet above Nazi Germany. The words came from the navigator, who saw my foot twitching in a peculiar manner, then noticed my oxygen hose was unfastened. Quickly snapping it together again, he brought me back to consciousness. In one respect, it was too late: We were past the target.

The events of September 11, 1944, began in the pre-dawn chill at our Eighth Air Force Base at Podington, England, when we filed into the briefing room to learn our target was to be the synthetic oil plants at Merseberg, Germany. As a veteran of 30 missions in B17s for the 407th Squadron of the 92nd Bomb Group, I was to be a lead bombardier for an entire wing of more than 50 planes. The lead bombardier's duty was to do the aiming, using a Norden bombsight. When my bombs dropped, it was the signal for the bombs to be dropped manually from the planes behind to blanket the area. From a spot 20 miles or so from the target, where the bomb run would start, the plane would be my baby.

While most of the civilian population of England continued their sleep uninterrupted, we took off into the darkness, roaring over the countryside as the B17s took to the air seconds apart. At about 20,000 feet, we assembled in formation over the coast of England, and the sky armada then set off for Germany.

In the plane, I was busy checking and rechecking my data. Everything must be just right for the mission to be a success.

Occasionally, I glanced out to check our position along the route. Everything was going fine; the flak had done little more than pester us, and the enemy had not sent up any fighters to molest us. About three hours after take-off, the bomb run's initial point appeared, and I gave the pilot the compass heading toward the target. We rolled onto the bomb run, and the plane was in my hands. Peering ahead, I tried to pick up the quarries that were to be one of my check points.

When I suddenly caught a glimpse of the quarries, I quickly bent over the sight — and that was all. With no warning, everything became dark. One second I saw the quarries; the next I was unconscious. It was like a light being snuffed out.

The next thing I knew, the navigator was shaking me and shouting. When I had regained my senses and realized we had passed the target, I gave the pilot the order I had hoped I would never have to say: "We've got to take a second run."

Just as the pilot made the turn, a tremendous wrench on the left wing jolted the entire ship, almost as if Atlas had left his job of holding up the Earth to grab the wing and try to rip it off. I hit the salvo lever as we started to plummet from 29,000 feet. The bombs cleared the plane safely, and down we plunged, with the pilot fighting to gain control. Enemy planes, braving fire from their own ground gunners, moved in for the kill. Finally, at about 15,000 feet, our pilot was able to level off. The enemy planes had left, apparently sure we were doomed to crash.

And I soon learned that a number of our B17s never did get back and that many of their crewmen were killed or had bailed out to be captured. The only craft in our squadron to go over the target were our plane and the deputy lead, flying off our wing. The other planes, with 70 airmen, had become casualties of the intense flak and fighters during the few seconds of the bomb run. "As catastrophic a day as any in group history," an official account said.

Our four-engine plane was so crippled it was a miracle it was still flying. Two engines were completely dead, and a third was damaged so badly it was running on partial power. The aileron control cables were useless, and only by adroitly using the rudders and elevators could the pilot make turns. He was Neil S. Holbrook, who lived in Portland after the war. An anti-aircraft shell had blasted a huge hole in the fuselage, extending from one side of the plane to the other.

While the plane limped along toward friendly territory nearly 350 miles away, I had a chance to think about the failure of the mission. Huddled in a corner of the compartment, I wondered about the role fate had thrust on me. I felt responsible for the mission's failure: The sudden movement when I bent over the bombsight probably had enough force to uncouple the oxygen hose.

When we were over our lines in France and the fear of crashing in enemy territory was ended, Holbrook's voice came: "We're about out of gas — we'll have to crash or bail out." We decided to ride the plane down and braced ourselves for the emergency crash landing as the pilot cut the sputtering engines. Then we hit the ground, bounced and hit it again to plow up a long furrow in the French field. The plane finally came to a halt in two pieces, the tail section at a crazy right angle to the rest of the fuselage.

For a minute there was silence. One man was dead; the radio operator was wounded from the flak; the co-pilot's jaw had been fractured when his face hit the steering column during the landing; and the navigator's leg was pinned under the opened escape hatch in the nose of the plane.

French residents quickly gathered around the wreckage, and two of us took off for a nearby Yank camp to get medical help. The Free French took us to Paris, and U.S. Army authorities got us back to our home in England in two days. By then, I had reconciled myself to the fact that the oxygen hose failure was one of those tragic, but unexplainable, things that happen in a war.

DONALD J. SORENSEN is staff writer for *The Oregonian*.