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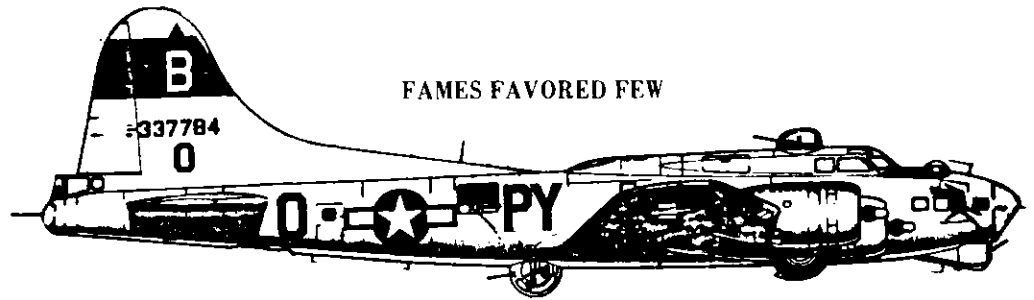
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# 92nd Bombardment Group NEWS



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## "OUR TRIP TO STALAG LUFT III"

*This narrative was written by Bob Broach of Gene Wiley's crew. Gene flew the "Kansas City Killer" and Bob, who is deceased, was the navigator.*

We have just graduated from combat in the E.T.O. and have been retired, upon the invitation of the Ruhr Valley flak crews, to this quiet retreat in the center of the Reich, Stalag Luft III. As Jerry's guests, we are being treated fairly well. Our hosts require very little from us except our continuous attendance. We have many hours to ourselves to remember back over the events leading up to our present position. It is only natural then, at some time or other, each of us is tempted to write these things down. So for my own amusement, this is to be such an account. Maybe some day this will be of interest when we manage to get together for a party and the bottle has passed around several times causing the stories to reach astronomical proportions; maybe not.

The story that is the most vivid in any Kriegie's memory is the one concerning his last mission and the trip to this camp. I have heard dozens of these tales and ours is certainly not essentially different from many others. But for the sake of the records, here it is.

At four a.m. on the morning of August 12, 1943, we were aroused from our soft sacks at our base in England, and driven in a G.I. truck to the briefing room. We soon found we were there to get the story that goes with a trip to "Happy Valley". One look at the Situation Map and each man said a silent prayer. It was to be the first daylight raid into the heart of the Ruhr. This meant that the odds against all of us getting back from such a heavily defended area were very slim. The briefing was conducted as usual with S-2 assuring us that we had nothing to worry about, for only about 3,000 guns could fire on us at one time. We were assigned to our own plane and were to lead the second element of the high squadron, lead group. In addition to our regular crew we were to have Lt. J. Overman as bombardier and Col. D.T. Spivey, a pilot-observer, in the nose. This was the pilot's, Lt. Eugene Wiley, sixteenth mission, my fourteenth, Co-Pilot Wells tenth, Lt. Overman's fifth, most of the enlisted men's fifteenth, and Col. Spivey's first. Our luck had all been good up to this point and several members of the crew felt that it was due to change. So it was.

We were given a very early station time so Wells and I did not have full time for our customary pre-flight naps. Take-off time found me a very sleepy second lieutenant introducing myself to a full colonel in the nose of our ship. The introductions were just completed when the fun began. On the take-off the super-charger on number one engine ran away. The plane lurched sideways and headed across the field at about a 60 degree angle

to the runway. We had not gained flying speed so Wiley was forced to make the take-off across the open field. All of the planes had taxied to their positions on the runway and none were parked in this area. The one obstruction we had to clear was a brick building on the edge of the field. From the nose this offered quite a show and served to wake me up in rapid order.

We made the wing rendezvous, climbed to 28,000 feet, and set out on course. We left the English coast 10 miles north of the briefed position but altered course to enter the Dutch coast at the correct point. All across Holland we encountered only light and scattered flak and a small number of fighters. At the German border this picture changed. F.W.-109's, M.E.-109's, J.U.-88's queued up by the squadron and came in on the formation from all quarters. The lead ship was evidently under attack for by the time we reached the I.P. we were slightly off course and then altered the bombing run to 30 degrees instead of 130 as briefed. The run was short and with an extra man in the nose, Overman did not have the room nor the time to properly operate the bomb sight. He salvaged our bomb load on Lt. Parker's range. Then it happened!

About 30 seconds after bombs away we received a direct flak hit which lifted the entire ship with its impact. Most of the damage was done to the left wing where I could see one very large hole from the nose. Number one engine was the first to go out and it was with a sad feeling that we watched the cowling rip off in the slip stream. Wiley announced over the interphone that he could not feather the prop and with this drag we could not stay in formation. He announced we would hit the deck and make a fight for home on our own. He pulled out to the left and started to dive for the clouds which formed about three-fourths coverage at 5000 feet. The sky was full of German fighters but only two singled us out for attack. We reached the clouds with just one 20 MM hit in the waist which did not injure anyone. By now the whole ship was vibrating very badly but Wiley and Wells still had it under control. The interphone was partially damaged and worked only intermittently, but Wiley and I kept in contact. We took a heading of 300 degrees in order to get back north of the Ruhr and out of range of that damn flak, which by now was so thick the ships could almost land on it. A more westerly heading would have taken us through the whole barrage again. We proceeded on this heading for ten minutes and were ready to turn left and come out over the Dutch coast. At this point number three engine caught on fire and went

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haywire. This may have been caused by a flak hit from one of the airfields we passed over. At the same time the interphone in the rear of the ship went out. Since Grey, the tail gunner, was not longer in contact with the cockpit, he bailed out.

The fire in number three began to spread and within about three minutes the outlook from the nose was anything but good. It was evident that we had to get out soon so Wiley decided to set the ship down with a crash landing. We had lost so much altitude that a jump may have been fatal. The Colonel and Overman and I detonated our equipment and left the nose. We took up stations in the radio room with the rest of the crew. The whole gang was as cool as a bowl of cucumbers and methodically went about arranging themselves for mutual bracing. Daniels, the radio operator, had just finished establishing contact with England in preparation for ditching in case we reached the sea. He broke off contact when we came into the compartment and took up his place on the floor. During this time Wiley and Wells were going through the land procedure as if they were coming in on the final approach at our home base. Then with two engines out, the wing badly damaged and the nose on fire, they made a beautiful crash landing. We knocked down a telephone line, took the tops off a row of trees, then skidded along the ground for about 100 yards. Number three engine was torn loose from the wing and landed back by the wasit. **No one was seriously injured.** The boys in the radio room went out the back and Wiley and Wells climbed out the left cockpit window.

We knew that we were very close to the Holland border but were not certain just which side we had finally landed on. It was not until sometime later that we found we were inside Germany by less than one mile. After finding that everyone was all right we decided to scatter. Sgt. Chisholm and Sgt. Phelps ran off across the fields to the west. Sgt. Daniels and Sgt. Lee followed close behind. Col. Spivey began to walk up the road to the north. Overman, Wiley, Sgt. Groff and I stopped on the road close to the ship to make inquiries of the folks that had gathered near the scene of the crash. But we soon found that none of them spoke English. There was much shouting and arm waving in the direction the men had run so we soon assumed that these natives were not of a friendly species. But it was not until a big krauthead with a pistol and an older man with a rifle impeded our progress down the road to the south that we realized that we were already under arrest. It chapped that we no end to know we had been taken by the home guard. However, the Gestapo arrived in a very few minutes so we had the consolation of knowing they would have caught us if the civilians had not. The area that close to the border is always heavily guarded.

The soldiers lined us up with our hands above our heads and took everything from our pockets. While we were in this position Wiley was seized (as usual for him) by a call of nature and had to take to the ditch for relief. The jerry soldiers accommodated him with paper.

There was so much confusion around and about and that it was not until a half hour had passed that jerry decided that we should put the fire in the ship out. By then the nose and cockpit were gone but the flames had died down at the bomb bay bulkhead. Despite the fact that the wing tanks were still half full, they insisted that we climb up on the wings and shovel dirt on the flames that were licking around the engine nacelles. My right shoulder had been banged up in the landing so I could not handle a shovel. One of the guards took my shovel. After much shoveling they thought the fire was out but we noticed smouldering under the right wing which doubtlessly later reached the tanks. It would have given us great pleasure to see the final explosion but they took us away too soon.

The crash had attracted numerous citizens, many of whom looked none too friendly. A few of them had clubs so we were glad enough when the soldiers decided to move us from the area. The gestapo first marched us about two miles into the lit-

tle village of Aarhus. Here we became the center of much curiosity on the part of the old folks and much merriment for the kids. Many of the children could speak English very well and it was amusing to hear them speak with an accent that was far easier for us to understand than the British variety. We went directly to the City Hall where we found Col. Spivey and all the rest of the boys. The boys had been tracked down by a bunch of kids and captured by folks with pitchforks and rifles. Col. Spivey's route had taken him into the town itself.

They gathered the ten of us together in one of the city office rooms to wait for the arrival of the Luftwaffe troops, for luckily we were Air Force prisoners. It was about two hours before our transportation arrived. The local gestapo used this time in a very poor attempt to interrogate us. They had a 15-year old boy acting as interpreter and he was none too bright. They treated us with courtesy which strengthened our hope that we would be treated as military P.O.W.s despite the "terror gangster" propaganda. From this initial interview all the jerry obtained was a confusion in his own mind as to how Wiley, as a First Lieutenant, could be the aircraft commander with a full Colonel on board. We all agreed to stick to the name, rank and serial number routine. Jerry, with all his arm waving and jabbering, got no more than that, either then or later.

From Aarhus we were taken to Wessell in a Model "A" Ford which ran as if it were using coal oil for fuel for the carburetor went out twice in the 15 kilometer trip. At Wessell we were again taken to the City Hall which was a very modern three-story building decorated throughout with Nazi emblems. We were first placed in what must have been the City Council room. It was a beautifully panelled room with a fine table and high backed chairs. The whole crew was completely at ease and proceeded to make themselves comfortable and go to sleep. An old bald-headed German doctor came in and put a dressing on Phelp's leg, for he had just now divulged the fact that some of that last shot of flak landed in his leg. He had said it was only a scratch before but the doctor found a fair sized flesh wound. We had been in this room about an hour when I was awakened by the shouting of a very fat jerry civilian who must have been the mayor. He was very indignant about our being in his council room in the first place and doubly mad because we were sleeping on his table. Personally, I thought it was an excellent table for sleeping purposes but he was in no mood to discuss the point. The old boy had his way, so the Luftwaffe soldiers took us to a vault in the basement where we remained for the next twelve hours. During this time jerry gave us water but no food. They kept telling us we must wait until we were moved again until we were fed. Since we were all getting a bit hungry we thought it best to forget our troubles and go back to sleep, which everyone except the Colonel, did. He was amazed by our lack of care and our ability to relax. He said we were the sleepiest lot he had ever seen.

About 2300 hours we were taken up stairs and searched again, this time by Luftwaffe officers. They put all of our belongings in a bag and told us they would be returned to us later. They took my G.I. watch and I knew I would never see that again. This search seemed stupid to me in view of the fact that it had been done before. But we soon learned something of jerry's thoroughness the seventh time they effected this identical search.

By this time it was completely dark outside so jerry decided to move us. We were placed in a very large bus and as we took our seats we found Sgt. Grey already there. He had been injured in his bail-out and captured shortly after hitting the ground. His injury was not too serious and we were glad to see him alive. Grey's appearance on the scene rounded out our full crew of eleven.

The bus took us to a Luftwaffe garrison just inside of Rhine. Upon our arrival we were given the first food most of us had seen for twenty-four hours. The rations consisted of dark bread, cheese and imitation coffee. This tasted good to us despite the

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fact that the bread was a substance entirely foreign to anything we had ever eaten. When the food was all gone they took us to individual cells which might have been designed for prisoners of war for they did not resemble a post guard house. Each cell contained a straw bed and wooden stool. None of us wasted any time going to sleep.

Jerry awakened us the next morning with a ration of coffee and sausage. Then one by one we were taken to headquarters where we were questioned by an English speaking noncom. His secretary was a good looking Fraulein and kept her busy trying out the forms for the beginnings of our records. The noncom claimed to have been raised in the States and tried to draw us into conversation which would give him information. I thought he was very dull company and would have much rather talked to the doll, but this was hardly the place to strike up a romance. He too promised that all of our possessions would be returned to us later. After this interview I went back to sleep.

About mid-afternoon we were let out of our cells and allowed to go out into an enclosure adjoining the cell block. At Colonel Spivey's suggestion we took a few exercises but the largest part of our hour was spent talking to the guard who could speak a little English. While we were outside we were given a buzz job by an FW-190. This certainly brought back recent memories to us.

Shortly after this the pilot of the FW and two of his friends paid us a call in the cell block. They could not speak English but with the aid of the guard we carried on a conversation. The FW boy had been up in the operations the day before and could easily have been one of those that we were swapping bullets with. Everyone was in a good humor for we were thankful to still be alive and the jerry pilots were glad to have one less Fort in the air. We learned from these fellows that they did not relish any part of an attack on a B-17 formation. They seemed very interested in trying to find out when we thought the war would end but on this score were non-committal. They were eager to talk about airplanes strictly from a professional point of view but we were limited in what we could say from a security standpoint. One of the jerry pilots had a 50 calibre slug that he had removed from his fuselage and he was very proud of it. They wanted to hear us say that fighters were the big worry of a Fort and they were disappointed to find that flak had done the job for us. It seemed a bit fantastic that such a good natured con-

versation could be carried on by men who just a few hours previously had been doing their damnest to kill each other 25,000 feet up in the air.

Shortly after 6:00 p.m. we were marched from the garrison to a small railway station just north of the city of Rhine. Here we were turned over to the guards who were to take us to our first prison camp. The two guards seemed a small force to take care of eleven men but in view of the fact that we were in a very densely populated area, dressed in flying clothes, unarmed, and with no knowledge of the language, escape was a rather remote possibility. So we went along with the boys with the guns.

As before, we were the center of civilian curiosity. The Nazi propaganda that all American airmen were gangsters must have borne fruit for the expressions on most of the civilians' faces resembled those of people looking at dangerous freaks. It was a source of amusement to smile at some and glare at others to watch their reactions.

Our trip from Rhine to Koln was an uneventful ride in a coach very similar to the English third class car. We could not help but be impressed with the beauty of the countryside and the thoroughness with which every bit of land was put into cultivation. I kept comparing these scenes with tracts along railways in the States and came to the conclusion that on this score we came in second. This was especially true of the right-of-ways through the large cities.

As we passed into the Ruhr we saw increasing evidence of the destruction effected by Allied bombing. The approaches to each city were marked by miles of partially destroyed buildings and there were few railway stations that did not show the marks of a direct hit in the recent past. The spectacle was to be shown to us in vivid focus in Koln itself.

We arrived in Koln at midnight and it appeared that our guards were confused as to our train schedule from there. At first it seemed that we were to catch a bus from one railway station to another so we were marched across the river to a bus terminal. From the very first we could see the destruction within the city and there had been very close misses at either end of the main bridge we crossed. Buildings on all sides were mere shells and looked as bad as those in the worst areas in London.

*To Be Continued*

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