

DIARY OF CALVIN H. FLETCHER

WORLD WAR II – 1944

Got our plane 22373, a day or so before we left Westover Field, Massachusetts. Arrived in Mitchell Field, NY on the afternoon of January 2. Every night went into NYC. Went home with one of the boys on my crew. Stayed seven days in New York.

January 8, 1944

Left Mitchell Field, NY at 10:15 a.m. and arrived in Morrison Field, Florida at 17:45 p.m. on the same day. Wasn't much of anything to do but eat and sleep, and two of the boys went to the drag races. Stayed in Morrison Field for two days.

January 10, 1944

We left Morrison Field, Florida, at 08:00 in the morning and went on a searching mission for one of the crews that was in our Squadron that went down the day before. Someplace between Morrison Field and Borinquen Field, Puerto Rico. The same crew had to bail out once before in Massachusetts.

We arrived in Borinquen Field, Puerto Rico at 15:00 on the same day and found no trace of the missing party.

I used to be stationed at Borinquen Field and it was like going home once more to go there. Saw about four or five fellows, still there, that went down with me in 1941. Also had a swell time while I was there.

January 11, 1944

Left Borinquen Field, Puerto Rico early in the morning at 07:00, arrived in Atkinson Field, British Guinea (?) at 14:15 on the same day. Atkinson Field was close to a town called Georgetown. While we were taxiing down the taxi strip to park for the night we got off the hard way(?) and stuck in the sand and had to be pulled out. It was hot and stuffy and right in the jungles, was really glad to get away from there.

January 12, 1944

Got out of Atkinson Field on the morning of the 12th at 07:45 and headed out over the jungles for Belem Brazil, arrived in Belem at 13:30. Could not put AIRY(?) guard on planes on account of Masyoutown, first good thing I had eaten since I had left Puerto Rico was in Belem and we ate fried eggs, it was the first place we had to pay for our own lodging. It was a fair place but as soon as our wheels hit the ground it began to rain and rained all afternoon until ____ the morning. From Atkinson Field to Gebsem we flew over the Amazon River.

January 13, 1944

Left Belem Brazil on our way to Fortaleza, Brazil. Left at 07:30 and arrived at Fortaleza at 12:35.

On Jan 13m 194, we left Belem and flew over more jungles and landed at Fortaleza, Brazil. We left Belem at 07:30 and arrived in Fortaleza at 12:35 and boy what meals they did have there. While taxiing own the runway or own the taxi strip we got off the hard top and got in to sand again. We stayed from the thirteenth to the fifteenth in Fortaleza.

January 15, 1944

Went from Fortaleza to Eknes Field at Dakar Africa. The farther down we went the worse things got and the darker the people began to get and the worse the air fields got. We left Fortaleza at 14:30 and got to Eknes Field at 14:20. It was a long trip and all over water (?). We flew at a low altitude all of the way.

January 17, 1944

Left Eknes Field at 06:05 and arrived at Marrakech at 14:15. The place was located in Morocco. We passed over the Himalayas. Also we passed over the Igidi Sand Dunes, They were located on the Sahara Desert. Had to fly through a gap in the mountains. We were flying so low that you could look up on either side of the plane and see the tops of mountains. When we got to Marrakech they gave us **four**(?) blankets and put us in tents; they said that if we had any heavy flying clothes that we had better get them too, that it was really cold. I stayed guard on the plane and got what blankets I could find and the extra flying clothes and slept in the luggage carrier and slept very warm. The rest of the crew froze we left the next day, boy what a cold place that was. Just after we got into the air they froze all planes and would not let them take off for a day or two. The boys liked to _____ while staying there.

January 18, 1944

Left Marrakech Air Base in the morning at 08:45 and arrived in Wujelida around Tunis at 16:30. There were so many air lanes there that they all had to double park, was up until after nine that night trying to get supper, and after all of that 14 of us had to sleep in the same plane as they had no place for us to sleep.

January 19, 1944

We left Weyeida at 09:45 and got to Oudna at 10:45. We got to Oudna and got our beds and fixed them up on this floor in straw in a building they called the White House. It was a place that the Germans had one of their headquarters. Also, a German General by the name of Van Arnim was captured. The place was a very nicely built place. All of the building was made of tile. We stayed in Oudna from the 19th to the 23rd.

January 23, 1944

We left Oudna at 09:45 and got to Massicault at 10:45. Had no radio tower at all, the only way we had to tell what field we were to go to was that there were two B-17's at one end of the runway next to the road. When we landed we had to go over and put up our own tents, had to put armed guards on the planes on account of the Arabs, while we were at Massicault a couple of us went out looking for things. Went on some hills around Tunis where they had been fighting pretty hard. Saw an old German Tank out in a field and went down to it. All of the shells had exploded inside of it, boy was it in a mess. We found parts of a German grenade and put it together and Nanning my buddy pulled the string and threw it _____-the operation fell on the ground on his face. Nanning and Howie and I stared up and watched. Nothing went off for awhile, and this Radio Operator got up on his knees and about that time it went off. The dirt must have gone about 30 feet high, then we took off across a hill _____ someone _____ came around looking to see what happened. Went into Tunis a couple of times and took a shower and looked the town over. Went in to a restricted place called the Casbah, boy what a place. It wasn't too safe to go out to too many places on account of there were so many land mines and a few other things around.

February 3, 1944

We left Massicault, Africa at 9:30 and got in Giulia Field Italy at 1:30. Had to keep on the **alcart(?)** all of the way. Flew over the Mediterranean from Massicault to ar(?) over Sicily into Giulia near Faggia. We also had to put our own tents there. We had to hang around **de-icing(?)**. **Gwald** and a lot of other stuff including flying until the Ground Crew caught up. The Ground Crew finally caught up and we still had to practice flying. We did practice flying from February 3 until March 2 and then one night on the first of March they loaded up our plane with fragmentation bombs.

March 2, 1944 – Mission 1

On March first at night I was on guard at the plane and they came out and woke me up and said that the next day would be the real thing. They put twenty clusters of Fragmentation Bombs, we took off at ___ in the morning and formed over the field, went up to a small town called Velletria, Italy, just beyond the Anzio **Beachhead**, saw very little flak, got no flak in our plane on that mission. We dropped our bombs at 11:12. Our Bombardier **salad** the bombs that day and I cannot say if they went off or not. Was not scared until I got almost to the target and then I really got scared. We lost no planes in that raid. We got a report from the front line that that did more for the troops than any other raid.

Flying time on Velletria, Italy on the Anzio Beachhead on March 2, 1944 was 4 hours, 40 minutes.

March 7, 1944 – Mission 2

We got our second mission. We were **carrying(?)** 500 hundred pound bombs, 8 of them. The place was Vititerlie, Italy. It was some air base. Flak was moderately heavy. We got 27 holes in our plane that day. There were fighters around but I didn't see any. Had P-38 escorts and they

got rid of all enemy fighters.

Flying time on Viterho, Italy on March 7, 1944 was 5 hours, 40 minutes.

March 15, 1944 – Mission 3

Our third raid came on March 15, early in the morning and we were supposed to make another one in the afternoon just **above**(?) the morning raids. We got off the ground and were heading for our target up in Italy but bad weather turned us back and our plane had 2 generators out but we were going on to the target anyway.

The morning raid on Cassino was easy. Our plane carried 8,000 pound bombs and they all landed inside of the city. Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker, M.A.A.F. Commander in a shortwave broadcast to America, said today that his Airmen flew more than 3,000 sorties against **Cassino** this morning and dropping more than 2,500 tons of bombs. It was the largest single air attack on any town in the Mediterranean Theater has ever suffered. By noontime the smoke and **stone** dust had cleared away for a few minutes and Cassino had been smashed into a mass of rubble indistinguishable from the jagged, rocky base of Mount Cassino itself.

After the bombing had stopped, the heavy artillery barrage had picked up just where we left off. They pulled the American 36th Division from the town, including the civilians. At 08:30, the first wave of bombers came over. The first bombs struck with quick stabs of red flame from which knife like geysers of black and white smoke and **stone** dust spurted, and then spread and billowed into the air to a height higher than the monastery. Very few of the bombs failed to land either within the streets of the town on Kraut positions. On its perimeter, or immediately South along Cassino's highway 6 Exit, several bombs landed on the monastery itself, from which in the darkness of last night observers had seen German **tracer fire** directed against Allied Troops. By 10:36 **Pompei Heart Valley**, the lowlands lying to the North and West of the town, was choked with smoke and dust which obscured all of Mount Cairo but the snow-covered peak. As each new cloud drifted away, the number of structures recognizable as buildings became fewer and fewer. At the last, Cassino looked like a heap of stones that had come down off the mountains in a landslide. Had no German aerial opposition, had P-38 there ready for them, had fairly heavy but inaccurately placed patter of ack-ack at **10:15**. All of the day's planes got safely home.

Immediately following the final bomb run, the guns of New Zealand, British and American batteries opened up a heavy barrage. Sixteen **waves** of planes went over Cassino that day which is **nestled** at the hills rising above the Rapido River Valley.

Total flying time on Cassino, Italy on March 15, 1944 was 5 hours and 55 minutes.

March 18, 1944 – Mission 4

Today the 15th Air Force was divided into 5 group with each section assigned to attack an airfield in upper Italy. Our group was assigned to demolish the German Airfield at Maniago, located in the Northeastern part of Italy. Just out of Venice which we flew over en route to target, it was

well camouflaged. We had moderate flak but wasn't very accurate. Had a few holes in back of engine wing and flap. Destroyed some aircraft on ground. We were not attacked by German Aircraft and all planes returned safely.

Flying time on Maniago, Italy on March 18, 1944 was 5 hours, 40 minutes.

March 19, 1944 – Mission 5

This was our 5th mission and that day we went up with another crew, our radio operator, nose gunner, ball, tail and myself. The reason was to knock out the ME 109 roller bearing plant, and we had to cross the Alps to get to our target. We took off at _____ and waves of formations of fighter-escorted Flying Fortresses and Liberators of the 15th U.S. AA crossed the snow capped Alps today to strike around Graz and Klagenfurt in Austria, Southwest of Vienna. In a 2 day raid around those parts, our bombers and fighter were credited with destroying at least 122 enemy aircraft on the ground. We encountered little flak but were engaged with over 150 enemy fighters. The bombers accounted for 31 of the interceptors, some of which were rocket equipped, and the fighter escorts knocked down _____ - and myself looking through field glasses saw one B-17 go down in flames and blew up in 2 pieces. In direct cooperation with Marshal Tito's ground forces, P-38 and P-47 escorted Liberators and Flying Fortresses of the 15th U.S.A.A. pounded railway yards and transport at **Knin** and **Metkevic** in Yugoslavia. We carried eight 500 pound bombs.

Our flying time to Klagenfurt, Austria on March 19, 1944 was 6 hours, 30 minutes.

March 22, 1944 – Mission 6

This day was number six for us and our full crew went together again and our target was **Bologna**, the most vital rail city in northern Italy. Hundreds of tons of high explosives were hurled onto the main yards at **Bologna**, by the lightning and thunderbolt-escorted heavy bombers. Crews reported **ground** coverage of the entire area, which is the hub of main Brenner Pass **route** from Austria and East West lines across Northern Italy. Formations which attacked **Verona** were lines from the industrialized areas of Turin and Milan, are linked to Venice and Yugoslavia, caused large explosions in the **warehouse** district and started many fires. Practically no enemy fighters were encountered except at **Bologna**, where a small group was quickly dispersed by **escorting P-38**.

Our flying time on **Bologna**, Italy on March 22, 1944 was 6 hours, 30 minutes.

March 26, 1944 – Mission 7

Our target was the ball bearing plant which we had tried to bomb on about the 19th of the month. The place was located in Steyr, Austria. We had the same kind of trouble on this trip as the one before, bad weather turned us back to Klagenfurt and the weather was too bad to bomb it. We were only about 25 or 30 miles from the target when we turned back to the first time. We encountered light flak and no enemy fighters, had P-47 and P-38 fighters as our escorts. We also returned to the base without firing a shot or dropping our bombs.

Our flying time on Steyr, Austria on March 26, 1944 was 6 hours, 15 minutes.

March 29, 1944 – Mission 8

The raid this day was on a rail center up in the North of Italy and they told us that it was to be a rough one but it turned out to be nothing and our boys really blasted the target. We had no flak and no fighters. We had P-38 escorts; the Germans were to have around 96 gun emplacements in and around this target and a lot of fighters. When we turned off our targets and you could see it the marshalling yards. They were really up in smoke. This bombing blocked all traffic through Turin and Milan and **Balzano**, main junction of the Southern France, Southern Germany and Northern Italy rail circuit. Our raid this day was the marshalling yards at Milan, Italy.

Combat time in Milan, Italy on March 29, 1944 was 5 hours, 40 minutes.

March 30, 1944 – Mission 9

Our target on this date was one that we had tried to take off to once before but bad weather kept us from going. The target today was on the Capital of Bulgaria, Sofia.

U.S. Flying Fortresses and **Libis** blasted rail yards and factories in the capital in what was described as the heaviest attack on a single target ever made by four-engine bombers of the 15th Air Force.

Neutral sources have reported that railways in Bulgaria are **checked** with men and equipment being rushed into Rumania in a desperate effort to check the Russian breakthrough.

M.A.A.F'S Communiqué added that other selected targets in strategically located Bulgarian capital were also pounded. Returning airmen reported good coverage of all objectives. Two especially large fires were spotted in the great freight yards.

This attack blocked all traffic through Turn, Milan and **Bulgaria** main junctions. We got off our course and flew all over the country and went way up in Romania and then back down to our target. Flew over some awfully big mountains and they were covered with snow. Had a heavy flak over the target and saw the enemy fighters.

Combat flying in Sofia, Bulgaria on March 30, 1944 was 7 hours.

April 3, 1944 – Missions 10 & 11

Target for today was on Budapest, Hungary. We were to bomb the rail yards. This was the capital of Hungary and was the first raid of this war on Budapest yards. They also smashed an important aircraft factory just south of the Hungarian capital, which is about 500 miles from Italian air bases.

This initial assault on Hungary opened a new chapter in the aerial operation of Mediterranean

based Allied aircraft. It foreshadowed additional onslaughts on enemy targets in Hungary. The **statite** state which the Germans recently occupied. Hurried troops movement have been particularly heavy through the city's railway yards as German and Hungarian forces were shifted to and from the Russian front. **Hard and intense flak** barrage was sent up over the target. Despite everything the enemy could do, including rockets and aerial bombs used by the enemy planes, extensive damage was reported. We had P-38 and P-47's for our escorts.

Combat flying time on Budapest, Hungary on April 3, 1944 was 6 hours, 20 minutes. Got credit for two missions today.

April 3, 1944 – Uncredited Mission

We started on our second trip to bomb the rail yards of Bologna, Italy, but on account of engine trouble had to turn back about 15 **miles/minutes?** Before we got to our target, we did not get credit for this mission. They had no flak and no fighters, but combat flying came to 4 hours and 5 minutes.

April 13, 1944 – Missions 14 & 15? (Wouldn't this be 12 & 13??)

Again we made a raid on Budapest, Hungary. We had gone to Budapest on the third of this month and hit the rail yards, but this time we were to hit the air field. They had made a double raid on Hungary in 24 hours.

The 15th Airforce heavier today blasted Hungarian airplane factories and airdromes, a few miles out of Budapest. B-17's aimed at the railroad car and machine works, at Gyro, as well as the airdrome and its adjacent ME 109 factory. Gyro is about 70 miles Northwest of Budapest on the main line to Vienna. B-24's assaulted the **Ladal** Airdrome and assembly plant 11 miles Southwest of the Hungarian capital. Other Liberators concentrated on the Vesces Airdrome 10 miles Southwest of Budapest. The Budapest rail network is one of the most vital links in the German supply line, to the Eastern front. A main line passage through the yards to Vienna and Germany and other branches radiate to all parts of Hungary and Southwest parts of Southeast to Italy, Yugoslavia and Romania. It was a pretty rough mission, intense flak and plenty of fighters. Our group lost two planes on this day while crossing the coast. They were flying right next to us.

Combat flying time on Budapest, Hungary on April 13, 1944 was 6 hours, 45 minutes. Received credit for two missions.

April 15, 1944 - Missions 16 & 17 ??

Today we started for Bucharest, Romania and were to bomb the rail yards and other groups were to bomb Ploesti. We almost got to our target and had to turn back on account of bad weather, but we turned and bombed the Nis Railroad Yards in Yugoslavia on the main line between Sarajevo and Sofia. Nis had been a frequent target. Had a little flak and a few fighters but P-38's **took care** of the enemy fighters. On this day the enlisted men on my crew flew with another pilot. The day before our plane, The Texas Lassie, had gone on a mission and was lost.

All of the crew bailed out over in Yugoslavia except the Engineer and he was killed by a ME 109 Fighter. Today the rest of the crew is back in our Squadron. The Navigator had to be taken to a hospital but is here in Italy. *Texas Lassie* was a good ship and that was her 16th mission. She had already taken us on some rough ones but that night we got another one called *Delayed Action*, but **likes a lot being** as good as old *Texas Lassie*. That was this crew's first mission, except the Navigator, Lt. Adams and a good Navigator he is too.

Combat flying time for Bucharest, Romania on April 15, 1944 was 7 hours, 10 minutes.
Received credit for two missions.

April 16, 1944 – Mission 18?

This was the second time in two days that we had tried to bomb Bucharest and failed on account of bad weather. This was the third time that our group had gone and they only bombed it once out of the three times.

This raid was to help the Red Army out and some of our groups got to the target. We turned and went to our **secondary** target.

The raid followed new blows by Liberators and Fortresses of the 15th Air Force at the rail yards of Bucharest, capital of the Nazi satellite state. And in the crucial Ploesti oil region **Turn Severis**. Our target was a key point on the Bucharest line running to Belgrade.

The town lies on the East side of the picturesque Iron Gates Cataract where the Danube flows through steep mountains on its way from the Hungarian plain. No bridges are below this town, and crippling the rail line would force retreating Germans to ferry across "the beautiful Blue Danube". This raid brought an enemy loss of 13 enemy planes and 14 of our own failed to return.

Lightnings and Thunderbolts used a system of relay-escorting. Some flew along with the bombers on the way to the targets, others practiced them during the bombing run, while a final force covered the bombers back to friendly territory.

Combat time on Bucharest, Romania on April 16 1944 was 6 hours, 15 minutes.

April 17, 1944 – Mission 19?

In today's set of raids, P-38 escorted Liberators blasted rail yards in the Bulgarian Capital of Sofia, last hit on March 30.

The last time we went over Sofia, we had plenty of flak and saw no fighters and the town was all up in smoke, but this time we were the last group to go over the target and we still had a lot of flak. And just as we got over the target, four ME 109's attacked us. Our tail **gunner** and ball **gunner** was really pouring the lead to them. They got the first one that came through and he looked as if **he were going to peel off** and then blew up about 200 yards from our plane. The second one came on but the other two high tailed and ran. Am pretty sure that the other one was

damaged, it came by my window at three o'clock, about 150 or 200 yards off. Other ships and myself were still firing at it, and he went off smoking, he flew around to nine o'clock, and **banked** around to fire, and that was the last I saw of him, but later I saw lone chute out in that direction. Think that was ball gunner, will get credit for the one that blew up.

Combat flying time for April 17, 1944 was 7 hours.

April 21, 1944 – Missions 20 & 21?

On this day, it wasn't fit to get off the ground but we started out anyway and got out over the water ahead **ten** and got a call to come back, but no one picked it up so we went on to our target and to turn back. Our flight was attacked by four ME 109's and we had a lot of flak. Coming back down to the town of Belgrade and bombed it from about 13,000 feet and it was the worst bombing that I've ever seen in my time over here, and I hope to say that I never have to go another one like that.

Combat flying time for Belgrade on April 21, 1944 was 7 hours, 20 minutes. Received credit for two missions.

April 23, 1944 – Missions 22 & 23 ?

On this day we had a lot of bad weather over our field but we took off anyway and the farther we went the better things began to look. You could see the target very well when we got over it, and on this day I saw one of the most beautiful pieces of bombing that could ever be done and I do mean the target was torn up from end to end. Our group led the wing that day and we did a great job. We had plenty of flak and enemy fighters today and there was about 15 FU 190's attacked our group from nine o'clock and they came in abreast and cut loose with rockets, guns and everything they had trying to break up our formation but our pilots stayed right in there. The enemy fighters even tried diving into our formation to break it up, but that didn't work. There gunman will try most anything to try and break up your formation, if they can get one plane out by itself they all pounce on it cause a lone plane cannot put out a very high fire power and they really love to get a lone plane out away from the formation. We had hundreds of P-38's and P-47's to escort us to and from the target and they did a god job of it.

Our target today was just out of the capital of Austria, Vienna. Our target was the building and airdrome of **Bad Vaslav** only 17 miles from the Danube River City. This place was also a factory. When we let the target and did a half turn from where I was standing and I could see the target very good, and the smoke could be seen almost as high as we were and were flying about 20,000 feet and you could still see it long after we left our target. We were the first group over and other and other groups followed us up and what they did to it I cannot say but I don't think that we'll ever have to go back to that target.

Combat flying tie for Bad Vaslav, Austria on April 23, 1944 was 7 hours, 5 minutes. Received credit for two missions.

April 29 1944 – Mission 24

On the morning of April 29, we took off for a long trip over Toulon to France. It wasn't such a good day for a mission but we took off anyway. By accident we got above the clouds and went on. One group had to turn back on account of they couldn't get above the clouds. Had a feeling that something was going to happen to us that day as we had all kinds of trouble before we took off we were carrying thousand pound bombs **one aiming point** was to break out the ammunition factory. Other groups hit other places such as railroad yards, arsenal, and submarine pens. Our bombs encountered heavy flak and about 60 fighters. Our fighter escort sent ten of the enemy interceptors spiraling **Eastward** and one of our bombers shot one out of the skies. We were making our run over the target and the number 4 engine had to be feathered as we had lots of oil in it. Followed the formation out as far as we could to keep away from enemy fighters and then dropped out and took our own course to the Island of Corsica. Started to land but then the pilot said that he was going to try and go on to Naples, so on we went. We landed at Naples with one engine out and another one smoking. Stayed overnight and all day Sunday and saw a lot of things. We even had an air raid while were there, saw our boys shouting at them and they were using tracer and search lights, just like the 4th of July. Saw a lot of old German planes that had been all shot up. Most all of the buildings had been blown up by the Germans before they **got out**. Got to see Mt. Vesuvius and you could still see smoke coming out of it. Late Sunday afternoon our C.O. came over after us in a truck and we went back to our camp. All the fellows thought that we had one down, and were sure glad to see us and we were glad to get back too. One the way back we had to go over a lot of mountains, and it snowed, sleeted and rained on us all of the way back.

Combat flying time on April 29 was 7 hours, 20 minutes.

May 5, 1944 – Missions 25 & 26

Today we took off for the Ploesti Oil Refineries in Romania. It was a good day for a mission but over the target they had a smoke screen put up and some heavy clouds but when we got over and left the target you could see explosions, flame and smoke as high as 19,000 feet and after we left the target for as far as 2 hundred miles you could still see the heavy smoke. These oil refineries had an annual capacity of 9,600,000 tons and have been supplying more than 30% of Germany's fuels and now they have been cut to less than 25% of normal.

Our group lost no planes on this day's mission. There were a few fighters in and around but they did no harm. Some groups went over the target before we did. They had so much flak in the air today that I don't see how any one of the planes got over the target. We had P-38's for our encounter, to and from the target.

One of the most beautiful sights for a gunman and the crew is to see a group of P-38 escorts flying in **clouds** and turning up there belly to let you see the twin tail. They fly under and over you, and some of them that are having trouble will come up and fly formation with you for protection until they get out to friendly country.

Combat flying time May 5, 1944 was **8 hours. (*??)**

May 6, 1944 – Missions 27 & 28

Following yesterday's mission we took off today for more rail yard and oil refineries in Campina, **Ram**. We were loaded with **RDX bombs and they were a mean bomb**, and we were carrying 4,000 pounds of them. We had carried these bombs once before on the **Bad Vaslov** mission. Today you could still see the smoke rising up in Ploesti from yesterday's mission. We started on our bomb run and the flak was really heavy about the time the bombardier said "bombs away". Anywhere from 15 to 20 ME 109's came in head on. One of the ships on our right wing got hit and went down and in this ship was a very good crew and close buddies of ours. We had been together for a long time and we ran around together.

Saw these chutes come out and the plane was going toward the ground but the pilot had gotten it under control the last I saw of it. Fighters were coming from everywhere. We passed the target and did a right turn and another one of our ships was in trouble but our tail gunner counted ten chutes open up, so the full crew got out of that ship. Then another one our ships flying Number 2, our lead ship, had to fall out of formation, and had to **feather** Numbers three and four engines, but the last we saw of any of them was after we crossed over the Blue Danube. We had the idea that they would bail out and get back by the help of the **Yugoslav** people, but up to May 16 we had not had any word of them, we last saw these ships out of our squadron.

Flying combat time for May 6, 1944 was 8 hours.

May 12, 1944 – Mission 29

We had been on the ground now for about 6 days. Yesterday they gave out an order for no one to leave the post. So that morning **they told everyone to** stay out to their ships and check every part of it: radios, guns, engines, instruments and ammo. And that the officers and enlisted men's club would be closed. We worked all day getting ready for the big pay off. Everyone figured that we would go over into Germany probably on one of the longest missions that this outfit had ever pulled. Others said that we would make two missions. You could see gunners, pilots, bombardiers, and navigators **cap** ground crew all off in small groups guessing what it was all about. You could hear all kinds of rumors. So last night they called us up for an early briefing, at 9 and the briefing officer told us "All right, men, you've got a big day tomorrow, you are going to make two missions up in Northern Italy". So that _____ everyone's mind and they knew what to expect. He said "up to now you men have done a good job so let's keep up the great work".

The main thing everyone thought would happen was that the invasion would be started. Well, the invasion started all right but it was in Italy and we didn't know anything about it until after we got back on the ground and they told us that our boys had taken Cassino and had advanced on all parts of Italy. We were to go up to a part in Northern Italy. We bombed that harbor and got some very good hits. The group that followed us in did a very good job, they left some **quad** hits on some beats were **locked**. We hit part of the city and some warehouses.

They had all kinds of Allied planes in the air today. No enemy planes were encountered and a little flak. All planes returned safe. The place was La Spizia, Italy. Bad weather kept us from going on the second one which was to be a big bridge.

Flying combat time for May 12, 1944 was 6 hours, 15 minutes.

May 13, 1944 – Mission 30

Following yesterday's missions we were to go back up in Italy to knock out a double rail track someplace Northeast of Bologna. We dropped 1,000 pound bombs.

The bombing wasn't so good today but they got a few hits in. Had no fighters today and light flak. Had P-38 escorts yesterday and today.

Flying combat time for May 13, 1944 was 6 hours, 30 minutes.

May 14, 1944 – Mission 31

Today we were still pounding **Emilia Reggio** Northern Italy. This time was to knock out one of the largest airfields in Italy. They told us today to expect anywhere from 50 to 100 fighters and plenty of flak.

In the meantime our boys on the front lines were still going strong and we were doing our best to give them as much help as possible. We went up the coastline and crossed over in land and headed for our target. It was a clear day and you could see very good. We hit the target and did a very great job. It was the best job that had been done since the Bad Vaslov mission. Had no enemy fighters and no flak, what you call a "milk run".

Flying combat time for May 14, 1944 was 6 hours, 30 minutes.

May 18, 1944 – Missions 32 & 33

Today was no day for anyone to be in the air, but we took off anyway and the further we would go into enemy country, the worse it got. We had to cut off **and on** course time after to try and miss high peaks **of/and?** clouds.

Today's assault on the Balkans was first made in strength for the past few days, but M.A.A.F'S pounding of roads and rails in Northern Italy and enemy positions in the battle area raged unabated yesterday.

Today's mission was in Ploesti, the 3rd time we had been over it. Saw no enemy fighters and they were around. Moderately heavy accurate flak over the target.

Going over the target I and another gunner was throwing out chaff and one time I raised up to throw out a **bundle**, and a piece of flak hit the side of the plane right below my shoulders and went into the window. If it hadn't hit the window it would have hit me in the chest. It made a

hole about the size of a silver dollar. I moved over a notch(?) then. Coming back, we had to fly all over the country, **dodging clouds**, were up as high as 30,000 feet. The only way we got through was they found a tunnel and went through it. It was beautiful but dangerous.

We had P-38's and F-51's for our escort. One of our squadron planes is missing. It was the crew's first mission.

Flying combat time for May 18, 1944 was 8 hours, 20 minutes.

May 19, 1944 – Mission 34

Today we took off for Northern Italy again. Weather was still bad but we had to keep up the pounding for the ground boys. We were to bomb the border of Genoa but another group crossed in front of us and we had to turn while on the bomb run so we went down the coast and bombed the harbor of **Ligham**. Light flak over the target and no enemy fighters. P 38's and 51's were our escorts again. Coming back we hit snow and rain. One of our squadron aircraft is missing but I think they landed over in Corsica. It's bad now when you look around the quadron and you don't see the same old faces that used to sleep in the next tent but all new ones. It's hard to lose your very best buddies.

Combat flying time for May 19, 1944 was 6 hours, 25 minutes.

May 26, 1944 – Mission 35

Today we went back to France. They told us that we would go within 50 miles of the Swiss border and that we would hit plenty of flak and fighters. It was a long trip and a very good day for a mission, we were to hit rail yards in Chambry, France, to knock out the supplies that were going to the French Coast for the invasion.

We crossed the **coast at Nice** and were expecting plenty of flak but didn't get any at all. All the way to the target we were expecting to hit flak at any time. Started on the bomb run, and still we didn't get any. Dropped our bombs and did a good job. Most all of the bombs hit right in the tracks and **round house**.

What had become of the German air force, everyone is saying. We go on long trips like that and see very few, and most every time not any, but sometimes there will be plenty of them.

It will suit me very much if I'll never see one, and I don't think the rest of the boys want to either, you've got enough to sweat out in the flak instead of flak and fighters too.

We had P-38 escorts. No fighters and no flak.

Flying combat time for May 26, 1944 was 8 hours and 30 minutes.

May 28, 1944 – Mission 36

Today we the 304th wing only went to Northern Italy. We flew all over the country trying to bomb a target. The other groups took one look at the weather and then turned back, but our leader went all over the country and still no one knows what we bombed, not even the leader. But we were supposed to bomb the rail yards at Turin, Italy.

They bombed some small town close by and did no **great**. Again we were close to the Spain and Swiss borders and had P-51's for our escorts and no enemy fighters and no flak.

Combat flying time for May 28, 1944 was 8 hours, 05 minutes.

May 29, 1944 – Missions 37 & 38

Today for our first time we made two missions in one day. They were both just across the coast up in Yugoslavia. They were two small towns and they had a lot of troops in and around these parts. Other groups in the 304th wing hit targets in and around the same place. All targets were well hit. We few by other targets that the other groups had hit and they had done a good job too. The last mission we had P-38's for our escorts. Had no enemy fighters and no flak.

Flying combat times for May 29, 1944 was 4 hours, **05** minutes and 5 hours, 05 minutes.

Pnejidor Liuno Yugoslavia??

June 2, 1944 – Missions 39 & 40

Today we went up into **Miskolc** Hungary for a double mission. Wasn't very much to it. We went up to bomb the rail yards. The yards were full of **rolling stack**. They hit the yards very good and some explosions were seen in the yards.

Had very little flak and no enemy fighters. Had P-38's for our escort. On the way back we saw targets that were hit by other groups and big explosions were seen there also. The weather was very bad but the clouds opened up just long enough for the bombardier to see the target.

Flying combat time for June 2, 1944 was 6 hours, 40 minutes.

June 3, 1944 – Mission 41

Today we were to go over in Yugoslavia to a place by the **France if split**, it was to be the **border** and the city. Were not to have any flak to speak of. We were on the bomb run and almost ready to drop our bombs, but then did a 260 degree turn and came back over the target. By that time, they really had due range and speed, but we went on over the target and dropped our bombs and never in my life have I seen flak so close. They shot the formation up something awful, but all planes returned safe. Some landed without brakes, some with two **motors**, everything **happened** that day.

Our plane had no brakes and had to tie **three chutes** to the side of the plane and use them as brakes. Two planes crashed up on landing. We had a big chunk of rubber shot out of one of our

tires, didn't know if it was flat or not. We were shot up some but not as bad as others.

A few days before, our engineer went to France and had to turn back and got all shot up. Started to land and crashed. Three men were killed, all others were hurt. Our engineer was the only one that didn't get hurt. They landed on the beach head. That was our second plane, the "Delayed Action". It went down on its 15th mission. Now we have our 3rd plane, the "Texas Lassie" the 2nd.

Combat flying time for June 3, 1944 was 4 hours, 40 minutes.

June 22, 1944 – Mission 42

A lot has happened in the past few days, we have been to Capri for a few days and had a swell time. Stayed three days in Naples. While we were in Naples they came after our pilot and said he was to go to the **States**. They had us on it too but took us off. We came back and our co-pilot went down on his next mission over Austria. They split us up with all crews. Today we were up in Italy to bomb an engine factory for trucks. They did a good job, weather was bad, had moderate flak and no fighters.

Flying combat time for June 22, 1944 was 6 hours, 30 minutes.

June 24, 1944 – Mission 43

Today we went up into Romania to bomb the round housed and repair shop. The target was close to Sofia. It was a very long mission and just short of a double mission.

The weather was too bad to **think of thinking of** but we went on anyway. Don't know what they did to the target as I could not see it very well but we had no flak and no enemy fighters. Had P-51's and P-38's for our escort.

Flying combat time for June 24, 1944 was 6 hours, 50 minutes

June 26, 1944 – Mission 44

Today we went to Vienna, Austria to bomb some oil refineries. When we left they told us that we would not have any flak but would have plenty of enemy fighters. But we had plenty of fighters and plenty of flak. Had about a 45 minute flight with **JU 88's, ME 210's, ME 110's, FW 190's**. They were all over the sky, but they attacked the group up in front of us more than us. They only made one pass at us last on about 20 of them firing rockets, 20 MM and smaller guns. A P-51 followed them right through firing to **beat the ____**. He got one **JU 88**.

Our escort which was P-51's and P-38's did a good job today. I saw 5 enemy fighters go down, besides what I didn't see.

Our fighters had a long battle and away from our group they were really having a time. I saw 2 **J-88's** go down right in the middle of the runway and P-51's right in behind them. The 51 came

right back and went after _____. Our group lost 1 plane today, it went up in flames about 15 minutes after we left the target. Saw 4 or 5 chutes come out. While going in and leaving the target you could see big explosions in the target and big flames would shoot up.

Flying combat time for June 26, 1944 was 6 hours, 35 minutes.

June 28, 1944 – Mission 45

Today we went to Bulgaria to bomb an air field. Another group was to bomb the field and we were to bomb the **hangers** repair shops. The weather was fair over the target but over the **home base** the weather was bad. For our escorts we had P-51's, P-38's and P-47's. They took us over the target and brought us back. Although we didn't see any enemy fighters in the air, we passed one field that had plenty of them in it. They didn't get off the ground. We hit a little flak en route and slight flak over the target and no enemy fighters. All planes returned safe.

Flying combat time was 7 hours, 10 minutes.

June 30, 1944 – Mission 46

Today we headed for Central Oderta, Germany. It was some place outside of Munich. It was oil refineries. The weather was good down at the base but after we crossed the coast it began to get bad but we went on 12 miles from the Austrian line and decided they couldn't get above the clouds. We had to turn back. It would have been rough, as we were to hit fighters in Austria all the way up and back they knew nothing about how the flak was. Today made my 46 and I believe it's harder for me to make the last 4 than it was the first few. Some of the boys only like 1 and 2. Everyone's nervous and on edge, they can hardly wait to see if it's a rough one or an easy one.

Combat flying time for June 30, 1944 was 7 hours, 15 minutes.

July 2, 1944 – Missions 47 & 48

Today we went to Budapest again. We were to hit rail yards and some oil works. Weather was pretty bad all the way up to the target but around _____ over the target it was clear. We had a plane called the *Fighting Mud Cat* that had already broken a record on flying consecutive missions and it was going to try and break the B-17's record. This was its 39th or 40th mission and they had one of our old crews on it, and they only lacked one mission being done, but the *Fighting Mud Cat* and the crew went down over the target. Most of that crew had already finished. They were very great buddies of ours, and great boys too. All of the crew got out alright. Our squadron lost 2 planes today. Our wing led the 15th Air Force. Our group led our wing, and our leader had our group. We were the first group over the target, and the first group always gets hit the worst. Flak was so heavy that you could go skating on it. Enemy fighters were around but they didn't attack our group, they hit the groups behind us.

Combat flying time for July 2, 1944 was 6 hours, 10 minutes.

July 12, 1944 – Mission 49

Went back to Mirimas, France today. Wasn't any time for a take off. Clouds were over the field and getting worse every minute but we took off anyway. Before we got above the clouds we had already lost about 10 of our planes that had to turn back, but over the target it was clear. Flak was moderately accurate, we didn't lose any planes. Coming back we likely were to never get back on account of cloud banks, low ceiling, rains, hails, and all kinds of bad weather. You couldn't see 100 yards ahead of you but our leader brought his entire group in formation safe. We had P-51's as our escort.

Flying combat time for July 12, 1944 was 8 hours, 45 minutes.

July 16, 1944 – Missions 50 & 51

Today I was so nervous that I couldn't stand up. It was the biggest day of my life. I lardy had 39 and today was a double-up in Vienna, Austria. Had good weather too around the target, then it got bad,. Had a bit of flak on back side of us but the part we went over wasn't so bad. Had plenty of P-51's and P-3's for our escorts and didn't see any enemy fighters. Our group didn't lose any planes. It took me just 22 weeks to get in my missions. We had some rough ones and some easy ones, had a lot of good crews that came over with us, a lot of good boys that I had been with since this group started, and some I knew before we got into the group. A lot of the boys are believed to be safe as POW's. Some we know will never return and others we have hoes that they'll get back very soon.

Combat flying time for July 16, 1944 was 7 hours, 05 minutes.

THE END

"FIFTY ONE"

LIST OF MISSIONS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

March 2	VELLETRI, ITALY
March 7	VITERBO, ITALY
March 15	CASSINO, ITALY
March 17	MANIAGO, ITALY
March 19	KLAGENFURT, AUSTRIA
March 22	BOLOGNA, ITALY
March 26	STEYR, AUSTRIA
March 29	MILAN, ITALY
March 30	SOFIA, BULGARIA
April 3	BUDAPEST, HUNGARY x
April 13	BUDAPEST, HUNGARY x

April 15	NIS, YUGOSLAVIA x
April 16	TURNO SEVERIN, ROMANIA
April 17	SOFIA, BULGARIA
April 21	BELGRADE, YUGOSLAVIA x
April 23	BAD VOSLAV, AUSTRIA x
April 29	TOULON, FRANCE
May 5	PLOESTI, ROMANIA x
May 6	COMPANO, ROMANIA x
May 12	LA SPEZIA, ITALY
May 13	CASTEL MAGOORIE, ITALY
May 14	REGGIO EMBRIA, ITALY
May 18	PLOESTI, ROMANIA x
May 19	LEGHORN, ITALY
May 23	MARINO, ITALY
May 26	CHAMBERT, FRANCE
May 28	VERCELLI, ITALY
May 29	PRIJEDOR, YUGOSLAVIA
May 29	LIUNO, YUGOSLAVIA
June 2	MASSICOUT, HUNGARY