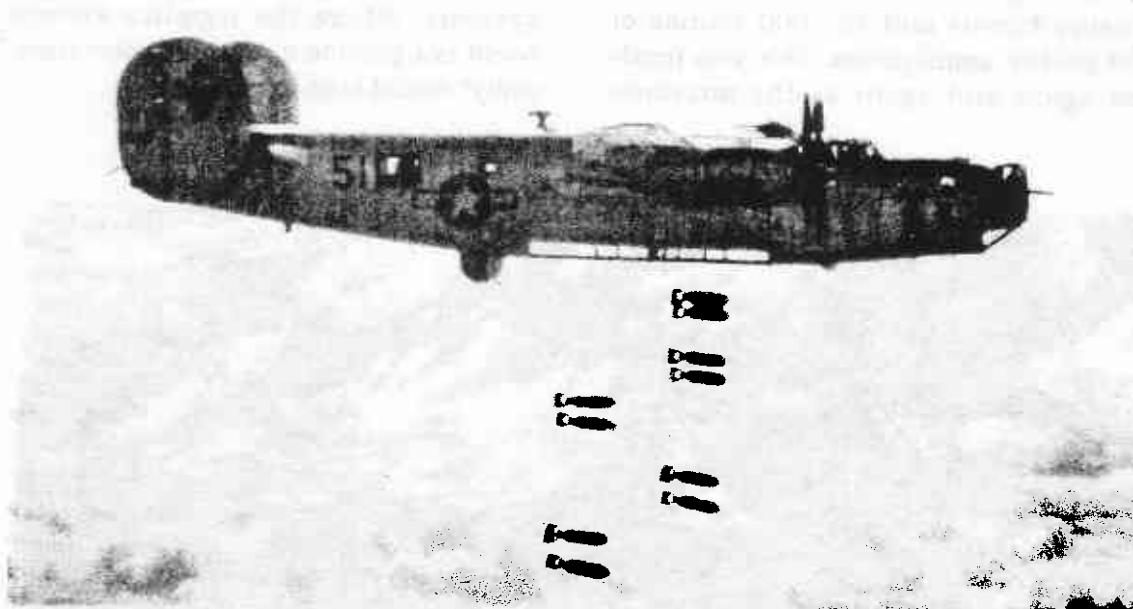


WORLD WAR II
MEMORIAL BOARD GROUP (WMBG)



Flight of the Vulgar Vultures
1943-1945

The First 100 Missions



Our first 100 missions represented a milestone of achievement. There were major successes in destroying enemy targets but not without losses. Each mission is numbered and briefly described for each month starting in February 1944. At that time, the 5th Army was bogged down in southern Italy. They were having problems advancing against Kesselring's Army, poised on the high ground looking down on the Allies. The 5th Army had been bottled up on the Anzio beachhead since January 24th.

The 15th and 12th Air Forces were called on to bomb troop concentrations and supply areas to ease the pressure. We had briefed four or five times to bomb targets in the Anzio beachhead area but weather held us up until the 12th of February when we were able to get the planes off the ground.

FEBRUARY 1944

Mission 1, February 16 Forty-four

B-24's took off to bomb targets in the Anzio area. We were to bomb troop concentrations around Campoleon, Italy. The target was completely covered by clouds and Colonel Cool decided it was too risky to bomb that close to our own lines without visual sight of the target, so we brought our bombs back to base.

Mission 2, February 17 Our target was still the same and this time the entire 15th Air Force was out to help the Armies pinned down on the Anzio beachhead. Twenty-three of our B-24's bombed the area near Fresceti, Italy. Flak was light and inaccurate, and all of our planes returned without casualties.

Mission 3, February 22 Our target was the docks in the harbor of Zaro, Yugoslavia. Thirty-nine B-24's took off with ten 500# GP bombs each. Two aircraft returned early, leaving 37 which dropped 92 tons of bombs in the target area. Flak was light and inaccurate. All aircraft returned without casualties.

Mission 4, February 25 Thirty-one B-24's took off to bomb the Talerhof Airdrome in Graz, Austria. Each aircraft carried ten 500# GP bombs. Flak was very heavy and accurate at the target area; 15 to 20 enemy fighters made repeated attacks. One of our aircraft was shot down with ten men missing in action. We were fortunate as the neighboring Group, the 454th, reported 50 men missing in action.

Our first month of combat was over. We flew a total of only four missions because we had only ten days of flyable weather. During the month, we flew 132 aircraft over the target while dropping 228 tons of bombs. We lost two aircraft and had ten men missing in action. We received credit for one enemy aircraft destroyed and one probably destroyed. This was a good start for a new Group.

MARCH 1944

March began with a spell of good weather. With it we were back to helping the 5th Army troops at Anzio. This was in keeping with Air Force policy of assisting our ground forces wherever possible. The Stars and Stripes Mediterranean edition on the 17th of February reported air support was at a new high. They reported that the Air Arm put their full power against the German forces attacking the Anzio Beachhead. In that light, many of our attacks against marshalling yards were in direct support of the ground forces as we cut the enemy's supply lines.

Mission 5, March 2 Thirty-nine of our B-24's, loaded with fragmentation bombs, took off to bomb the enemy troop concentrations around Cisterno, Italy, for the continued support of the Anzio beachhead. Six of our planes returned early and only 33 aircraft were able to bomb. They dropped 35.5 tons of bombs in the target area. Flak was

moderate to intense and accurate. The crews came away with more respect for the danger of flak since four planes suffered flak damage. All planes returned to base safely.

Mission 6, March 3 Thirty of our B-24's dropped 75 tons of 500# GP bombs on the airdrome at Fabrica Di Roma. Little damage was done to enemy aircraft, but a string of bombs ruined one of the runways. Flak at the target was light and inaccurate. Enemy fighters were observed but they did not make any attack. All planes returned safely.

Mission 7, March 7 We returned to the Fabrica Di Roma airdrome, this time 36 B-24's with the same bomb load. Our aircraft dropped over 89 tons with a good concentration on the airdrome. Flak again was light and inaccurate. None of our aircraft received damage and all returned to base.

Mission 8, March 15 After many stand downs due to snow and rain, we managed to get 40 B-24's loaded with 1,000# GP bombs off the ground. They were to bomb the town of Cassino where our ground forces were held up by Kesselrings's forces. Thirty-four aircraft bombed the primary target but five bombed the town of Vallarotonda by mistake. There was no flak at the target. Our only claim to fame today was that we dropped 120 tons of bombs. All planes returned to base.

Mission 9, March 17 On St. Patty's day we sent 34 B-24's to bomb the aircraft plant at Bad Vaslau. The primary target was cloud-covered so they bombed the alternate, Vienna, Austria, by offset methods. The flak at the target was moderate to intense and accurate. It was easy to tell when you were near Vienna, since the flak increased in intensity. The Group dropped 62.5 tons of 100# incendiaries on the target. All planes returned safely.

Mission 10, March 18 All groups of the 304th Wing were sent to attack the Maniago Airdrome in the Po Valley. Our group managed to get 39 B-24's off the ground. Four aircraft returned early and 35 dropped 41.5 tons of fragmentation bombs on the target. Bomb strikes showed that five enemy aircraft were destroyed on the ground. There was no flak at the target and all planes returned safely.

Mission 11, March 19 The Group was briefed to bomb the aircraft factories at Steyr, Austria. Escort was provided by P-38's to the target area. The Wing leader turned away from the primary target because of bad weather, so the 455th bombed the airdrome at Graz, Austria. The bombing results were poor. Flak at the target was intense and accurate. Eight Me-109's made an overhead attack through the formation. Our gunners claimed one enemy fighter shot down and one probably destroyed. Two of our aircraft collided on the way back to base with all crewmen lost. No parachutes were seen. Twenty crewmen were missing in action. Several other aircraft in the formation suffered damage from the flying debris of the two aircraft that collided.

Mission 12, March 22 The Group was briefed to bomb the marshalling yards at Verona, Italy. One group of P-38's escorted us to the target. Again, our primary target was cloud-covered so we bombed the secondary, the marshalling yards at Bologna, Italy. The group dropped 82.5 tons of 500# GP bombs from 32 B-24's. Flak at the target was intense but inaccurate. No fighter opposition was encountered and all planes returned safely.

Mission 13, March 24 We were again briefed for the Steyr-Daimler-Puch Aircraft Factory. Again, clouds foiled the 36 B-24's that took off loaded

with 100# incendiary bombs. These aircraft managed to drop their bombs on the Rimini, Italy marshalling yards. Bombing had mixed results and all planes returned to base.

Mission 14, March 26 The Group was again briefed for the Daimler-Puch Aircraft Factory at Steyr, Austria. Again, weather turned the Group back and Rimini marshalling yards were again a target of opportunity. This time, only 19 aircraft dropped their bombs. The others either brought their bombs back to base or jettisoned them in the Adriatic. All planes returned safely.

Mission 15, March 28 A maximum wing effort was ordered to attack and destroy the marshalling yards at Verona, Italy. Forty B-24's took off but 17 returned early as they lost the wing formation because of bad weather. Twenty-one of our B-24's dropped 52.5 tons on the primary target. Flak at the target was intense and accurate. Twenty to 30 enemy fighters were observed in the target area but they did not press their attacks since our escort of P-38's drove them off. Eight enemy aircraft were observed to be shot down by our fighters. All planes returned safely.

Mission 16, March 29 The entire Wing was to attack the marshalling yards at Milan, Italy. The 455th put up 40 B-24's loaded with 500# GP bombs. Two aircraft returned early and 38 aircraft dropped over 97.5 tons of bombs on the primary target with very good results. There were no flak or fighters at the target area. All planes returned safely.

Mission 17, March 30 The Group sent 38 B-24's loaded with 500# incendiary bombs to the industrial center of Sofia, Bulgaria. Nineteen of them dropped their bombs by offset method through broken clouds. Thirteen aircraft could not identify the target and brought their bombs back to base. Flak

at the target was moderate to intense and accurate. Bombing results could not be observed due to cloud cover. All planes returned to base.

The Group flew 13 missions in March. We put 447 aircraft over the targets and dropped over 877 tons of bombs on the enemy. We lost 20 crewmen and two aircraft. We claimed one enemy fighter shot down and one probable. Enemy flak damaged three of our aircraft. That's not bad for what we had been through. Weather improved and we were kept busy in the months ahead.

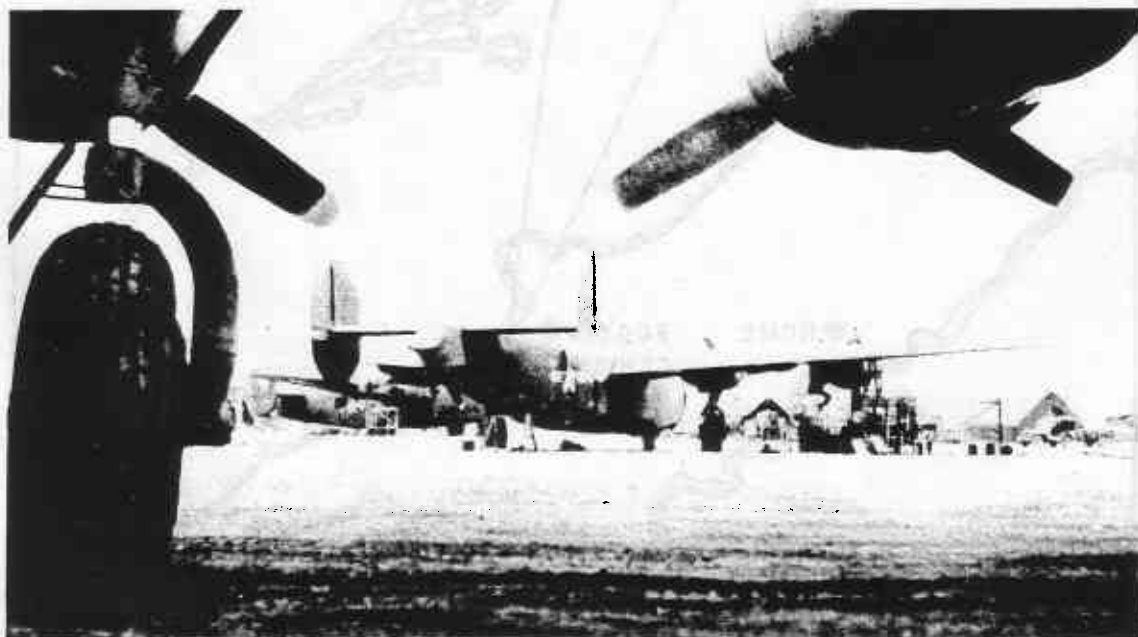
APRIL 1944

April was the beginning of "Operation Pointblank" designed to break the back of German fighter manufacturing. This was a threat to the entire Allied bombing effort. The Germans expected to get some immunity from air attacks by locating many of their biggest assembly and production complexes to the south and east. These were out of range of the British and 8th Air Force bombers based in England.

Several missions had been flown by the 15th Air Force bombers against Regensburg and Wiener Neustadt fighter production and airfields. This would be a month of operations principally against aircraft production and airfields. By its end, production estimates stood at 250 aircraft a month within range of the 15th Air Force vs. a planned rate of 650.

Mission 18, April 2 The Group was ordered to bomb the Steyr Daimler-Puch Aircraft Factory. This mission can best be described by presenting some of the Air Force historical records. These show the amount of planning and documentation which was needed for a combat mission and the evaluation of the bombing results. A mission for the Group starts with an operational order from the 304th Bomber Wing. This is translated into a detailed field order by the Group Headquarters Operations staff.

The following is the Field Order and related papers that resulted from the mission to Steyr.



MISSION ROUTE





1. a. ENEMY DEFENSES:
 - (1) Target is STEYR-DAIMLER-PUCH AIRCRAFT FACTORY. Secondary target is KLAGENFURT AIR-DROME and last resort will be LJUBLJANA MARSHALLING YARDS. Sixty-one heavy flak guns may be expected at the primary target.
 - (2) One hundred seventy-five (175) to two hundred (200) single engine fighters and forty (40) to fifty (50) twin engine fighters may be encountered in the target area.
- b. FRIENDLY FORCES:

Penetration escort: Largest group of P-38's will make line interception with the bomber formation at 44°40"N-15°20" E at 10:00 at 10,000 feet and provide general cover to prudent limit of endurance.

Withdrawal escort: Two groups of P-38's will rendezvous with bomber formation at target at 11:00 and provide general cover to prudent limit of endurance on withdrawal.
2. This group with thirty-six (36) B-24's (plus spares) will attack the STEYR-DAIMLER-PUCH AIRCRAFT FACTORY. The bomb load will be ten (10) 500 pound General Purpose bombs. Fuse setting will be .10 nose and .01 tail.
3. This Group will attack the target in two (2) units of eighteen (18) ships each (plus spares), units being stacked down. The leader of each unit will sight for range and deflection, the leader of each box for range and the others will toggle on the leaders. Bombing altitude will be 21,000 feet. Intervolometer setting will be 200 feet. Rally will be left in a gradual turn losing altitude at a rate of 300 feet per minute. Return to base via turn point to base.
4. RADIO FREQUENCIES:
 - a. Command6440 Kilocycles
 - A.G.L.4585 Kilocycles
 - Interplane "B" Channel
 - Collective call sign.....Large Cup 23
 - IFF to be used in accordance with instructions.
 - b. Group Leader.....Lt. Col. Kenneth A. Cool
 - Deputy Group Leader.....Major Hugh R. Graff
 - Group Navigator.....Captain James Moeller
 - Group Bombardier.....Captain Jack Horner

By order of Lt. Col. Cool:
HUGH R. GRAFF, Major, Air Corps, Operations Officer.

BRIEFING OUTLINE
ANNEX NUMBER 1

Field Order Number 23

1. Number of A/C on Mission40 B-24's
 2. Group LeaderLt. Col. Kenneth A. Cool
 3. Deputy Group LeaderMajor Hugh R. Graff
 4. Second Unit LeaderCapt. Wilbur C. Bechtold
 5. Second Deputy Leader.....1st. Lt. Robert A. Robards
 6. Other Groups on this Mission454th, 456th, 459th Bomb Gps.
 7. Escort on this Mission.....Largest group of P-38's will make line interception with bomber force at 44°40'N, 15°20'E at 10:00 Hours at 10,000 feet and provide general cover to prudent limit of endurance. Maximum P-47's will intercept bombers east of Klagenfurt at 10:50 Hours at 17,000 feet and provide general cover to the limit of endurance. Withdrawal escort will be two groups of P-38's rendezvousing with bomber formation at 11:40 hours and provide general cover to limit of endurance.
 8. Bomb Load.....Ten 500 pound General Purpose Nose .10 sec fuse, tail .01 sec fuse.
 9. Ammunition5,200 Rounds
 10. Fuel Load2,700 Gallons; full oil service.
 11. Stations06:45 Hours
 12. Taxi and Take-Off Instructions: Taxi to south for take-off to north Take-off time 07:55 Hours
 13. Bomber Rendezvous.....1st Combat Wing (459th, 454th) at Guilia at 4,000 feet at 08:45 Hours
 -2nd Combat Wing (455th, 456th) at San Giovanni at 3,000 feet at 08:45 Hours.
 14. Course.....Base to Key Point, ANDRIJA ISLAND, (43°02'N 15°46'E) at 09:29 Hours: to Turn Point (47°36'N, 14°35'E) to I.P. (47°53'N, 14°35'E) to Target.
 15. Target Time11:40 Hours
 16. Return CourseVia Turn Point
 17. Initial Point47°53'N, 14°35'E
 18. Axis of Attack.....337 M.
 19. Bombing Formation.....Group will bomb in nine (9) ship front, attack units stacked down.
 20. Bombardier Information.....Leader in each attack unit will sight for range and deflection, leader of each box for range and others toggle on leaders.
 21. RallyLeft in a gradual turn losing altitude at the rate of 300 feet per minute.
 22. Weather ForecastTarget Able 6 to 7/10 cumulus at 2 thsnd. tops at 10,000 thsnd. 5 to 7/10 altocumulus at 12 thsnd. tops at 18 thsnd., visibility 8 to 10 miles.
- Freezing Level: 4000 feet.
HUGH R. GRAFF, Major, Air Corps, Operations Officer.

In the continuation of the mission narrative there are eight pages written by Major Alvin E. Coons, Group S-2 Officer. The following are excerpts from that report.

"The attack on Steyr was a highly coordinated operation with 13 heavy bomber groups hitting the Steyr targets, three heavy bomb groups carrying out diversionary raids on Brod, Bihac troop concentrations and Mostar. This was the largest operation in point of numbers of planes the 15th Air Force had attempted up to that date. A total of 432 heavy bombers dropped on Steyr with 127 B-17's and 137 B-24's operating against the Walzlagerwerke and 168 B-24's hitting Daimler-Puch.

"AIRCRAFT AND CHRONOLOGY: At 07:55 35 B-24's took-off (12 from 740th, two from 741st, ten from 742nd, 11 from 743rd Squadrons). One aircraft returned early because of a gas leak in the bomb-bay and three returned prior to bombing because of engine troubles which prevented them from staying with the formation. One aircraft which did not go over the primary bombed Rimini. Twenty-six aircraft dropped their bombs on Steyr Walzlagerwerke and returned to base at 15:00. Four aircraft were missing, all shot down by enemy aircraft prior to target.

"ASSAULT: The briefed axis of attack on the Steyr Daimler-Puch was 320°. On the approach to the target it became evident that a cloud would obscure the target so that offset bombing would have to be used. On the other hand, the Walzlagerwerke was clear and had not been hit. It was at this point the Group leader, Lt. Col. Kenneth A. Cool, made the decision to bomb the open and vastly more important target. The attack was carried out on an axis of 330° magnetic.

"The first enemy fighters were encountered at 1030 hours. Between 60

and 70 single engine fighters appeared from the west and south in the vicinity of Nuovo Mesto. They were engaged by the P-38 escort, with violent individual encounters taking place. Another group of enemy fighters was engaged by the P-47 escort at about 1040 hours. With the exception of four to six Me-109's which attacked the lead bomber group, all of these fighters were effectively dealt with.

"Between 1100 and 1115 hours other fighters from Austrian bases were assembled just north of the frontier. Twin engine fighters were concentrated over Graz and the single engine fighters over Klagenfurt. The single engine fighters made contact first and the twin engine fighters followed. Most of these fighters attacked aggressively all the way to the target and back as far as the Klagenfurt area. The total force put up from Austrian bases was about 100 single engine fighters and 40 to 50 twin engine aircraft. Approximately 15 to 20 Me-109's attacked the bombers over Yugoslavia on their return flight. These were aircraft making their second sortie from the North Adriatic bases.

"The total enemy fighter opposition to this operation is conservatively estimated at about 215/220 single engine and 40/50 twin engine aircraft. Including shadowing aircraft, between 260 and 275 sorties were put up against the Wing formation.

"The first enemy fighters encountered by the 455th Group was at 1045. Between 15/20 Me-109's with belly tanks were engaged by the escort but did not attack the formation. The heaviest concentration of fighters was encountered 15 miles west of Graz and continued the attack until the target area. Most of these aircraft were Me-109's, FW-190's and Me-110's. Between 20 and 25 Me-210's and JU-88's attacked the formation through the

bomb run, while large groups of single engine aircraft picked up the attack on the return trip.

"The Me-109's and FW-190's attacked low and level from four to six o'clock then rolling. They were very aggressive and seemed to be experienced pilots. They appeared to be trying to find blind spots on the B-24. Twin engine aircraft made attacks from the rear firing rockets into the formation. The formation was attacked by 15/20 Me-109's over Yugoslavia on its return flight. These attacks occurred at about 1320 hours.

"The attacks on this mission were the heaviest the Air Force had encountered since the Regensburg raid of 25 February and certainly the heaviest the 455th Group had encountered thus far in its operations.

"Despite the severity of the attacks, the Group leader managed to keep his formation together and in the face of intense, accurate flak made and executed a decision to bomb another target than that assigned. In the face of overpowering odds, this Group's formation destroyed a highly important objective thereby demonstrated remarkable courage, determination and a high degree of professional skill and devotion to duty.

"RESULTS OF BOMBING: The assembly, testing, packing and ball and roller bearing Building No. 2 was very heavily damaged. Of the total area of 116,000 square feet, only 43,000 feet remained and that suffered internal damage. Building No. 5, the other assembly and testing plant, was less heavily damaged, but one bay was wiped out. Building No. 3 was two-thirds destroyed. Building No. 6 was half destroyed."

Colonel Horace Lanford, USAF (Retired), provided this account: "I was

Colonel Cool's co-pilot on the Steyr mission. Inbound to the target, we were alerted by the top turret gunner that seven Me-109's were overtaking the Group on our right flank. I observed seven Me-109's fly up to the head of the column, opposite our aircraft, in single file. On reaching the head of the column the seven Me-109's turned into the formation flying seven abreast on their firing run. I immediately called the fighter escort 'Red Dog 1, this is Large Cup 23. We are under attack by seven Me-109's and request assistance.' Red Dog 1 responded 'Wa-l-l (southern drawl), we're kinda tied up ourselves right now but we'll send someone up (up the bomberstream) as soon as we can free someone.' A single P-38 appeared shortly and the Me-109's withdrew. The Me-109's had made three passes at our formation, seven abreast from the right flank and I believe we lost four B-24's as a result of their action."

MISSION STATISTICS

ANNEX NUMBER 2

Field Order 23

2 April 1944

ENEMY LOSSES::

Destroyed

Me-109's15

FW-190's11

Me-210's 1

Total-27

Probably Destroyed

Me-109's13

JU-88's..... 3

FW-190's..... 1

Total.....17

Damaged

Me-109's 3

Total..... 3

The following is a list of the crewmen who received credit for enemy fighters during the mission.

740th Squadron:

T/Sgt. Genero A. Amoruso
1 destroyed 2 probable
 S/Sgt. Albert A. Alt
1 destroyed
 S/Sgt. Charles G. Bolling
1 destroyed
 S/Sgt. Alvin Rosefield
1 destroyed
 S/Sgt. Leo J. Seiter
1 destroyed
 S/Sgt. Willard M. Somers
1 destroyed
 S/Sgt. Leonard W. Zielinski
1 destroyed
 1stLt. Fred A. Gross
1 probable
 S/Sgt. Samuel E. Austin
1 probable
 S/Sgt. Henry H. Kolbe
1 probable
 S/Sgt. Melvin F. Kruse
1 probable
 Sgt. Oscar D. Childers
1 probable
 S/Sgt. John A. Balough
1 damaged
 S/Sgt. George R. Johnson
1 damaged
 Total7 destroyed, 7 probable
 and 2 damaged.

742 Squadron:

T/Sgt. John A. Carroll
1 destroyed
 T/Sgt. William B. Roberts
1 destroyed
 T/Sgt. John E. Warren
1 destroyed
 S/Sgt. Dale E. Dearing
1 destroyed
 S/Sgt. Edward C. Kimberly
1 destroyed
 Sgt. Eddy D. Grauwiller
1 destroyed
 S/Sgt. J.A. Abbondandolo
1 probable

Total6 destroyed and
 1 probable.

743rd Squadron:

2nd Lt. Leo A. Stopa
1 destroyed
 T/Sgt. Abraha Aziz
1 destroyed
 T/Sgt. Emmet Ledbetter Jr.
1 destroyed
 S/Sgt. Duane D. Bush
1 destroyed
 S/Sgt. M.W. Hilgendorf
1 destroyed
 S/Sgt. Donald R. McNeil
1 destroyed
 S/Sgt. Luther B. Minyard
1 destroyed
 S/Sgt. Reid B. Peck
1 destroyed
 S/Sgt. Duane S. Vance
1 destroyed
 T/Sgt. George W. Kloos
1 probable
 T/Sgt. Frank H. Paige
1 probable
 S/Sgt. Albert C. Cracker
1 probable
 S/Sgt. Richard I. Keene
1 probable
 S/Sgt. Clyde J. Kennedy
1 probable
 S/Sgt. Donald R. Petrie
1 probable
 Cpl. Gerald E. Sasser
1 probable
 S/Sgt. Henry C. Paris
1 damaged
 Total.....9 destroyed, 7 probables
 and 1 damaged.

OUR LOSSES: The 741st Squadron which had two aircraft over the target was the only squadron to suffer no crew losses during the operation. Four aircraft were lost: one from the 740th Squadron, one from the 742nd

Squadron and two from the 743rd Squadron.

- a. 740th Squadron: Plane No. 41-29282, flown by Lt. Powers, left the formation at 1100 hours. The left wing and number three engine were on fire. Six crewmen were seen to bail out and their chutes opened. Two more were seen to bail out and their chutes opened just before the plane crashed.
- b. 742nd Squadron: Plane No. 41-29407, flown by Lt. Pardoe, was last seen leaving the formation eight miles west of Celje with the number four prop feathered on a heading of 250. Four enemy fighters were following this aircraft. Five members of this crew successfully evaded the enemy and the full story was pieced together from them. In the course of a running battle which lasted 30 minutes, this crew shot down seven enemy fighters. Yugoslav Partisans who assisted them verified this number. The gallant crew fought the enemy until their ammunition ran out, then all ten crewmen bailed out. Five landed in Partisan territory and after 31 days were returned to their base. The rest were captured by the Germans.
- c. 743rd. Squadron: Plane No. 42-52271, flown by Lt. Brunson, was last seen with a fire in the bomb-bay and waist section. Three crewmen bailed out and their chutes opened. One man jumped from the waist section without a chute. One jumped from the waist with his back type chute on fire. The plane pulled into a stall, took one turn of a spin and then exploded.
Plane No. 42-52224, flown by Lt. Cheeseman, was last seen ten miles west of Graz with a fire in the waist section. Four crewmen were seen to

bail out but two chutes were on fire.

ASSESSMENT OF DAMAGE TO OUR PLANES:

- a. By enemy aircraft: two severe and two slight.
- b. By flak: three severe and four slight.

SQUADRON LEADERS:

First Attack Unit:

A-Box - Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth A. Cool

B-Box - First Lieutenant Alvin I. Fisher

C-Box - First Lieutenant James W. Knight

Second Attack Unit

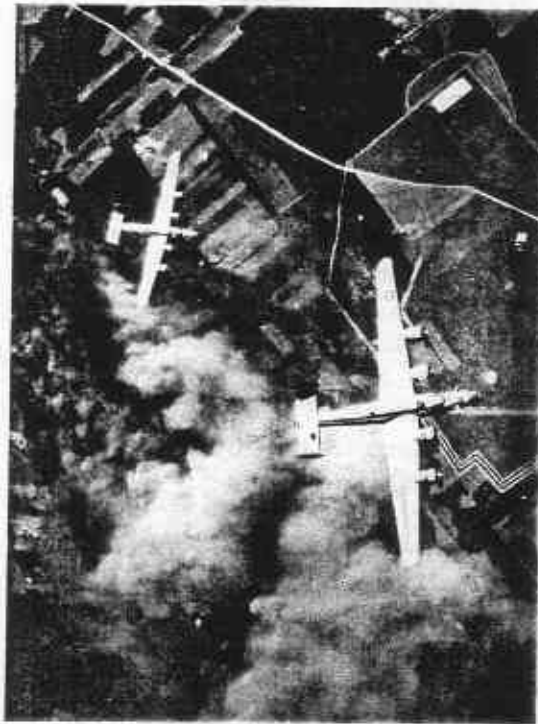
A-Box - Captain Wilbur C. Bechtold

B-Box - First Lieutenant Robert L. Cook

C-Box - First Lieutenant Jack D. Saine

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION:

The Group received the Citation under General Order Number 3225 dated 12 September 1944 for the mission.



HEADQUARTERS
FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE
APO 520

GENERAL ORDERS
NUMBER 3325

12 September 1944

Citation of units.....1

455TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H). For outstanding performance of duty in armed conflict with the enemy. Although handicapped by a shortage of personnel and operating with only (40) percent of their maintenance equipment, ground crews, working for fourteen (14) to sixteen (16) hours daily, maintained a high percentage of operational aircraft during the early months of the group's combat operations. On 2 April 1944, thirty-five (35) B-24's, carrying ten (10) five hundred pound General Purpose bombs, took off on a vital mission to destroy the Daimler-Puch Aircraft Factory at Steyr, Austria. As part of the same operation, four (4) heavy bomb groups from the Fifth Wing were scheduled to destroy the Steyr Walzlagerwerke Ball Bearing Plant ahead of this group. The success of the entire operation was endangered on the bomb run when a group of B-17's were seen in the target area and a low cumulus cloud floated over, completely obscuring the target and the B-17 group. Approximately a mile to the northeast loomed the important ball-bearing plant, the Steyr Walzlagerwerke. The group leader, making a hasty decision, decided to bomb this more vital target which had not been bombed up to this time. Throughout the bomb run, the group was under aggressive attack from approximately seventy-five (75) enemy fighters which used rockets, aerial flak, cannon and machine guns in an effort to disrupt the formation. Despite the heavy, intense and accurate anti-aircraft fire and continued enemy fighter attacks, the group maintained a close formation and scored direct hits on this unbriefed target. The coordination between the attack units resulted in twenty-seven (27) enemy fighters destroyed, seventeen (17) probably destroyed, and three (3) damaged, to the loss of four (4) aircraft by the 455th Bombardment Group. Many direct hits were scored on the machine shops and a large explosion occurred, covering the plant with dense smoke. The tremendous material damage contributed greatly to the curtailment of aircraft production by the enemy at a time of great importance. A later Fifteenth Air Force Monologue on this day's operation particularly mentions the "greatest number of hits" by the 455th Bombardment Group. By their grim determination, their outstanding skill and unhesitating courage in successfully completing this mission through the heaviest of enemy opposition, the officers and enlisted men of the 455th Bombardment Group have upheld the highest traditions of the Military Service, thereby reflecting great credit upon themselves and the Armed Forces of the United States of America.

BY COMMAND OF MAJOR GENERAL TWINING:
R.K. Taylor, Colonel, GSC, Chief of Staff