

Fargo, No. Dak.

Peacetime Profession - None

Missions - 4

Duty - Radio Operator

5. Cpl. John A. Heltzen, 20200705, 741st Sq., 455 Bomb Group.

Born - 11 March 1920

Interrogated 23 Dec. 1944

Enlisted - 3 Feb 1941

M.I.A. - 14 Oct. 1944

Home Address - 4411 Bruner Ave
New York, 66, N.Y.

Returned to duty - 20 Dec. 1944

Peacetime Profession - Truck Driver

Duty - Eng. - Gun.

Interrogation

Lt. John T. Polando and 4 members of crew. Five other members of this crew were returned to duty 30 October, and were processed through AAF Headquarters, returning to Italy via ATC. Lt. Polando, the co-pilot, Lt. Olin H. Moore, navigator, Lt. Robert E Basala, engineer Corporal John A. Heltzer, and radio operator Corporal Carl O. Case, remained behind to fly the plane back when it had been repaired.

This crew, on a mission over Blechhammer, Germany, on October 14, 1944, was flying A/C 42-78359, assigned to the 455 Bomb Group, 304th Wing. Over the target the A/C was hit by flak in the No. 4 engine; this engine lost all oil pressure, and they were unable to feather it. The formation was on the bomb run. The plane was losing altitude, and veering to the right, due to the drag of No. 4 engine. The pilot felt that he could not regain the formation without danger from the falling bombs of the formation, so he continued to veer to the right. When the plane was clear of the flak, the plane was too low, and the dragging engine made it impossible to regain altitude. The pilot then decided to head for the Russian lines, the nearest apparently safe area. Flying to the north of Krakow (50 05N - 20 E) the pilot headed north and east, keeping above the clouds, for 15 minutes. Then southeast for approximately the same length of time. Then due east. Over German lines the plane was fired upon by Germans, and in turn by the Russians. The crew began looking for a place to land. The plane was losing altitude. At 2000 feet the pilot gave additional power to maintain this altitude. The bombardier sighted a landing field

to the right so the pilot made an 180 degree turn and flew over the field with wheels down. The plane was not fired on, as the plane was at approximately 700 feet. Russians showed a flare, and the pilot came in directly for a landing. The pilot had spotted the red star on the planes, and was fairly certain that he was in Russia.

Never in enemy hands.

When the plane landed, the plane was surrounded by Russian soldiers. On the ground the crew discovered that they had landed at Djekovich approximately (50 20 N - 21 30 E). This field was between 20 & 25 miles behind the Russian lines.

(The pilot states that each time they were fired upon, he gave orders to the crew to be prepared for bail out). The crew remained at this base for approximately 2 weeks. They had asked that a message be sent to Moscow and to Italy. They were told that such a message had been sent to Moscow and to Washington. During the time that this crew was at the fighter base (LO) it was kept under constant guard. They were permitted to retain their side arms, and were told that the guard was for purposes of protecting them from the Poles. They were quartered in the Hq. building, all 10 men being quartered in 2 rooms, sleeping on straw mattresses. The local party representative took the pilot down to the field to look over the plane. The crew was not permitted to talk with the local population. At the end of two weeks, a Russian crew in a C-47 from Poltava (U.S. air base) landed and took the crew to Lwow (49 50 N - 24 E) where they remained 1 day and 2 nights. Both nights were spent at Russian barracks at the airfield. They were then taken to Poltava, where they met Col. Hampton, American C.O. of the field. At the end of 5 days, five members of the crew were sent back to Italy by ATC. The rest of the crew was detained to fly an U.S. A/C back to Italy. It was intended that the crew would fly a Mickey ship which had been landed 2 months before by Col. Clark of the 461st Bomb Group. Another plane from the same group was to be flown back by another pilot also from the 461st. When this plane was landed at Poltava, 3 tires were blown out, so this pilot (Lt. McWhorter USA/SKP/183) flew Col. Clark's plane back to Italy. This crew was then told they would wait the repair of their own plane. This was about 30th of October. It was estimated that the repair of this plane would be finished shortly. At the fighter field an engine was changed and the hydraulic repaired. Lt. Polando then picked the plane up, landed it at Iwow, gased it up, and returned it to Poltava. The ship was returned to Poltava Nov. 21st. At Poltava the entire plane was overhauled, plugs changed etc. The first week in December the plane was regarded as being in shape for the flight

back. It was test flown, and the crew awaited clearance from Moscow to take off. Some delay was occasioned by a wait for a Russian navigator and radio operator. All requirements were met by Dec. 13, and the plane took off from Poltava on that date. From Poltava they flew to Makachkla, staying overnight, and took off the following morning for Teheran. Here the Russian navigator and radio operator were dropped. The crew then proceeded to Cairo thence Italy via Benghasi, landing at San Geovanni air base on Dec. 20.

EXHIBIT "C"

1. In approaching Russian lines, A/C should fly at low altitude.
2. Crew members should carry guns. This impresses the Russians, and is a protection to the men.
3. Russians are suspicious of the maps in escape kits.
4. Escape kits should include insect powder, something for G.I.s tooth brush.
5. Emergency rations should be inspected and replaced at specific intervals. The emergency rations of this crew were spoiled and worthless.
6. Some type of passport or identification card, signed by someone in authority should be carried (In Russian, Polish, Yoslav).
7. Crews should be given a general or specific briefing on the location of Russian fields.
8. Stay away from large cities.