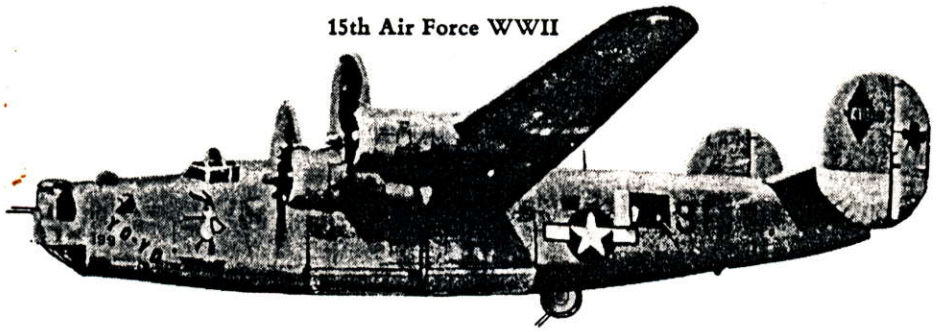
FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE
304th Wing

15th Air Force WWII



"Vulgar Vultures"

455th BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION, INC.

6205 Meadow Court
Rockville, Maryland 20852
(301) 881 1376

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Col. USAF Ret.
Ph: 712/262-7237

November 20, 1991

Dear Ed,

The enclosed show that two of your gunners got credit for shooting down enemy aircraft on the Steyr mission. I thought you might like to have copies. I sent Johnston a copy of the mision material as he had requested. I am still trying to get thigs cought up from the reunion and other activities of the past two years.

BEST WISHES FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON,

Alfred Asch, Col USAF (Ret)

Inc.

Steyr

HEADQUARTERS
455TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)
A.P.O. 520 U. S. Army

2 April 1944

FIELD ORDER)
:
NUMBER 23)

Maps: 1/500,000 of NAPLES, CHIETI, FIUME, GRAZ, MUNICH and BOLZANO.

1. a. ENEMY DEFENSE:

(1) Target is STEYR-DAIMLER PUCH AIRCRAFT FACTORY. Secondary target is KLAGENFURT AIRDROME and last resort will be LJUBLJANA MARSHALLING YARDS. Sixty-one (61) 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 enemy fighters may be encountered in the target area.

b. FRIENDLY FORCES:

(1) None

(2) Penetration escort: Largest group of P-38's will make line interception with bomber force at 44°40'N - 15°20'E at 10:00B at 10,000 feet and provide general cover to prudent limit of endurance. Maximum P-47's will intercept bombers east of KLAGENFURT at 46°36'N - 14° 59'E at 10:50B at 17,000 feet and provide general cover to prudent limit of endurance.

Withdrawal escort: Two groups of P-38's will rendezvous with bomber formations at target at 11:40B 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 settings 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 others will toggle on the leaders. Bombing altitude will be 21,000 feet. Intervalometer setting will be 200 feet. Rally will be left in a gradual turn losing altitude at the rate of 300 feet per minute. Return to base: Via Turn Point (46°40'N-14°38'E) to (44°05'N - 15°00'E) to base.

4. No change.

5. a. Command ..... 6440 Kilocycles
A. G. L. ..... 4585 Kilocycles
Interplane ..... "B" Channel
Collective Call Sign .... Large Cup 23
IFF to be used in accordance with latest instructions.

b. None.

c. (1) None.

(2) Group Leader ..... Lt Col Kenneth A. Cool.
Deputy Group Leader. Major Hugh R. Graff.

By order of Lt. Col. COOL:

HUGH R. GRAFF,
Major, Air Corps,
Operations Officer.

OFFICIAL:

Hugh R. Graff

HUGH R. GRAFF,
Major, Air Corps,
Operations Officer.

ANNEXES:

1. Briefing Outline.
2. Mission Statistics.
3. Operations Order No. 75, 304th Bomb Wing (HV).

DISTRIBUTION:

1 copy each Sq. CO.
1 copy S-2
1 copy S-3

BRIEFING OUTLINE

ANNEX NUMBER 1,
Field Order Number 23.

1. Number of A/C on Mission .... 40 B-24's.
2. Group Leader ..... Lt. Col. Kenneth Cool.
3. Deputy Group Leader ..... Major Hugh R. Graff.
4. Second Unit Leader ..... Capt. Wilbur C. Bechtold.
5. Second Deputy Leader ..... 1st Lt. Robert A. Robards.
6. Other Groups on this Mission. 454th, 456th, 459th Bombardment Groups (H).
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 10:00B at 10,000 feet and provide general cover to prudent limit of endurance. Maximum P-47's will intercept bombers east of KLAGENFURT at 46°36'N, 14°59'E at 10:50B at 17,000 feet and provide general coverage to prudent limit of endurance. Withdrawal escort will be two Groups of P-38's, rendezvousing with bomber formations at Target at 11:40B and provide general cover to prudent limit of endurance on withdrawal.
8. Bomb Load ..... Ten 500-pound General-Purpose, Nose .10 sec. fuse, tail .01 sec. fuse.
9. Ammunition ..... 5200 rounds.
10. Fuel Load ..... 2700 gallons, full oil serv.
11. Stations ..... 06:45 Hours.
12. Taxi and Take-Off Instructions. Taxi to south for take-off to north. Take-off time 07:55B.

ORDER OF TAKE-OFF

1st Attack Unit		2nd Attack Unit	
257	247	253	283
290	239	260	500
221	264	481	224
494	230	879	249
238	259	267	748
2282	407	184	223
351	289	294	081
216	640	204	190
983	261	2271	198
235	482	9271	270
			9282- Not scheduled but added on, crew briefed.

13. Bomber Rendezvous ..... 1st Combat Wing (459th, 454th) at Guilia at 4000 feet at 08:45B. Second Combat Wing (455th, 456th) at SAN GIOVANNI at 3000 feet at 08:45B.

14. Course ..... Base to Key Point, ANDRIJA ISLAND (43°02'N, 15°46'E) at 09:29B; to Turn Point (47°36'N, 14°45'E) to I.P. (47°53'N, 14°35'E) to Target.

15. Target Time ..... 11:40B.

16. Return Course ..... Via Turn Point (46°40'N, 14°38'E) to (44°05'N, 15°00'E).

17. Initial Point ..... 47°53'N, 14°35'E.

18. Axis of Attack ..... 327°M.

19. Bombing Formation ..... Group will bomb in 9 ship front, attack units stacked down.

20. Bombardier Information ..... Lead ship of each attack unit will sight for range and deflection, leader of each box for range, and others toggle on leaders. Intervalometer setting 200 feet. IAS for bomb run 160 M.P.H. Bombing altitude 21,000 feet, target elevation 995 feet

21. Rally ..... Left in a gradual turn losing altitude at the rate of 300 feet per minute.

22. Weather Forecast:

PLAN ABLE

Synoptic Situation: Low pressure with open wave off southwest coast of England. Weak high of 1023 mb in central France will move southeast. Low in Yugoslavia will move east north east.

Wing Bases for Rendezvous: 2 to 3/10 stratocumulus at 2thsnd tops at 5 thsnd. 3 to 4/10 altostratus at 12 thsnd tops at 17 thsnd. 4/10 cirrus at 23 thsnd tops at 25 thsnd. Visibility 10 to 15 miles. Surface wind, 350 degrees 10mph.

Route Out: From Base to Alps: 3 to 4/10 stratocumulus at 2 thsnd tops at 6 thsnd. 4 to 6/10 altostratus and altocumulus at 12 thsnd tops at 17 thsnd. 3 to 5/10 cirrus at 23 thsnd tops at 25 thsnd. Visibility 8 to 10 miles.

Across Alps: 7 to 9/10 cumulus at 2 thsnd tops at 8 to 10 thsnd. 4 to 6/10 altostratus and altocumulus at 12 thsnd tops at 17 thsnd. 3 to 5/10 cirrus at 23 thsnd tops at 25 thsnd. Visibility 8 to 10 miles.

From Alps to Target: 6 to 8/10 cumulus at 2 thsnd tops at 10 thsnd. 6/10 altocumulus at 12 thsnd tops at 18 thsnd. 4 to 6/10 cirrus at 23 thsnd tops at 25 thsnd. Light scattered showers along mountains. Visibility 6 to 8 miles in showers.

TARGET ABLE

6 to 7/10 cumulus at 2 thsnd tops at 10 thsnd. 5 to 7/10 altocumulus at 12 thsnd tops at 18 thsnd. 6 to 8/10 cirrus at 23 thsnd at tops at 25 thsnd. Visibility 8 to 10 miles.

Surface wind 340 degrees 6 to 8 mph.
Surface pressure ..... 30.03 inches
Altitude correction ..... minus 100 feet
Surface temperatu ..... minus 1 degree C.
Temp. at 22500 feet ..... minus 37 degrees C.

Winds aloft:			
	5000 feet	320 deg	25 mph
	10000	340	45
	15000	330	60
	20000	330	70
	25000	330	80

Route back: Same as route out.

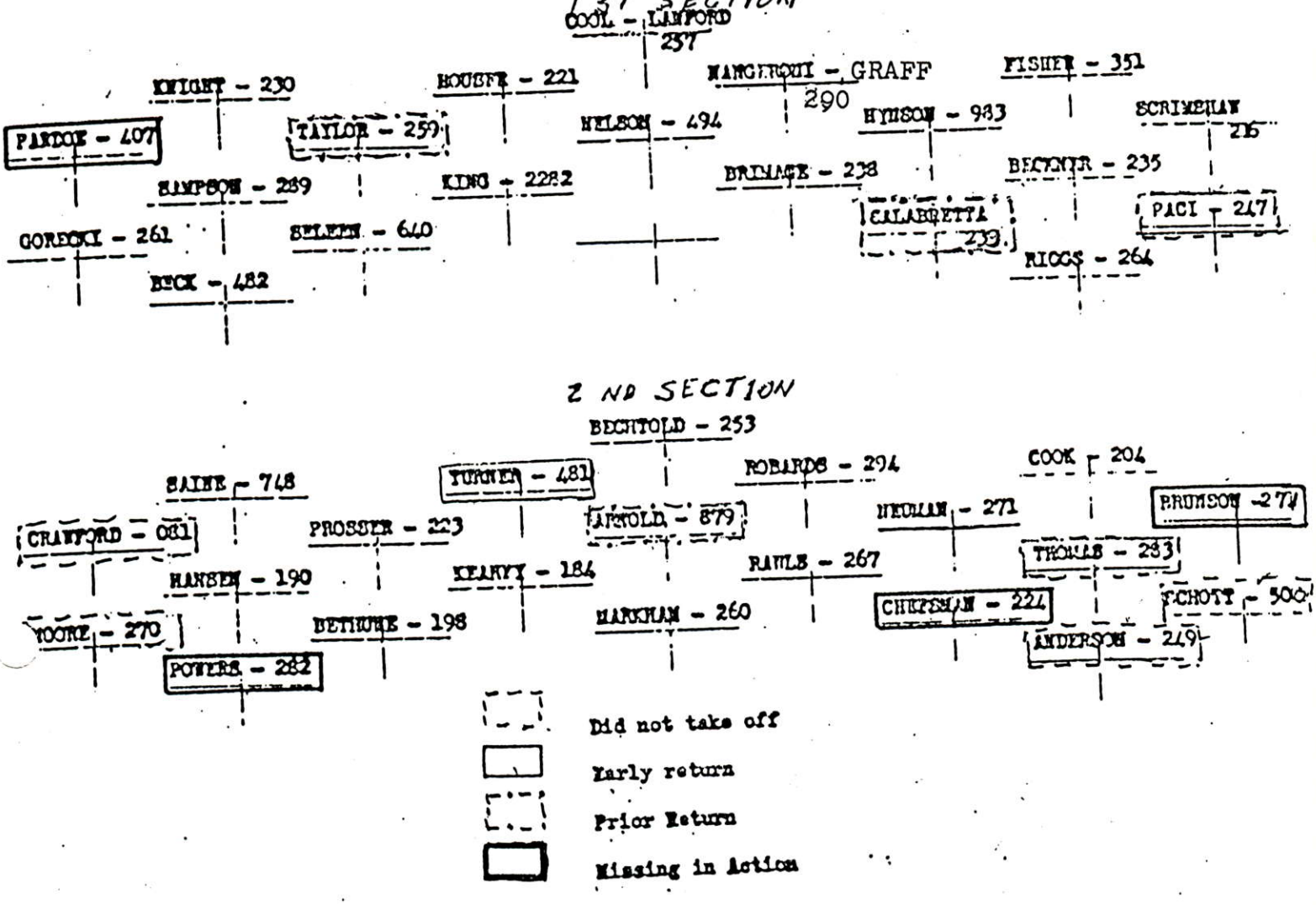
Bases on return: 5 to 6/10 cumulus at 4 thsnd tops at 8 thsnd. 5 to 7/10 altocumulus at 10 thsnd tops at 15 thsnd. 4 to 6/10 cirrus at 23 thsnd tops at 25 thsnd. Visibility 10 miles. Surface wind 350 deg 10 to 12 miles per hour.

Freezing level: 4000 feet.

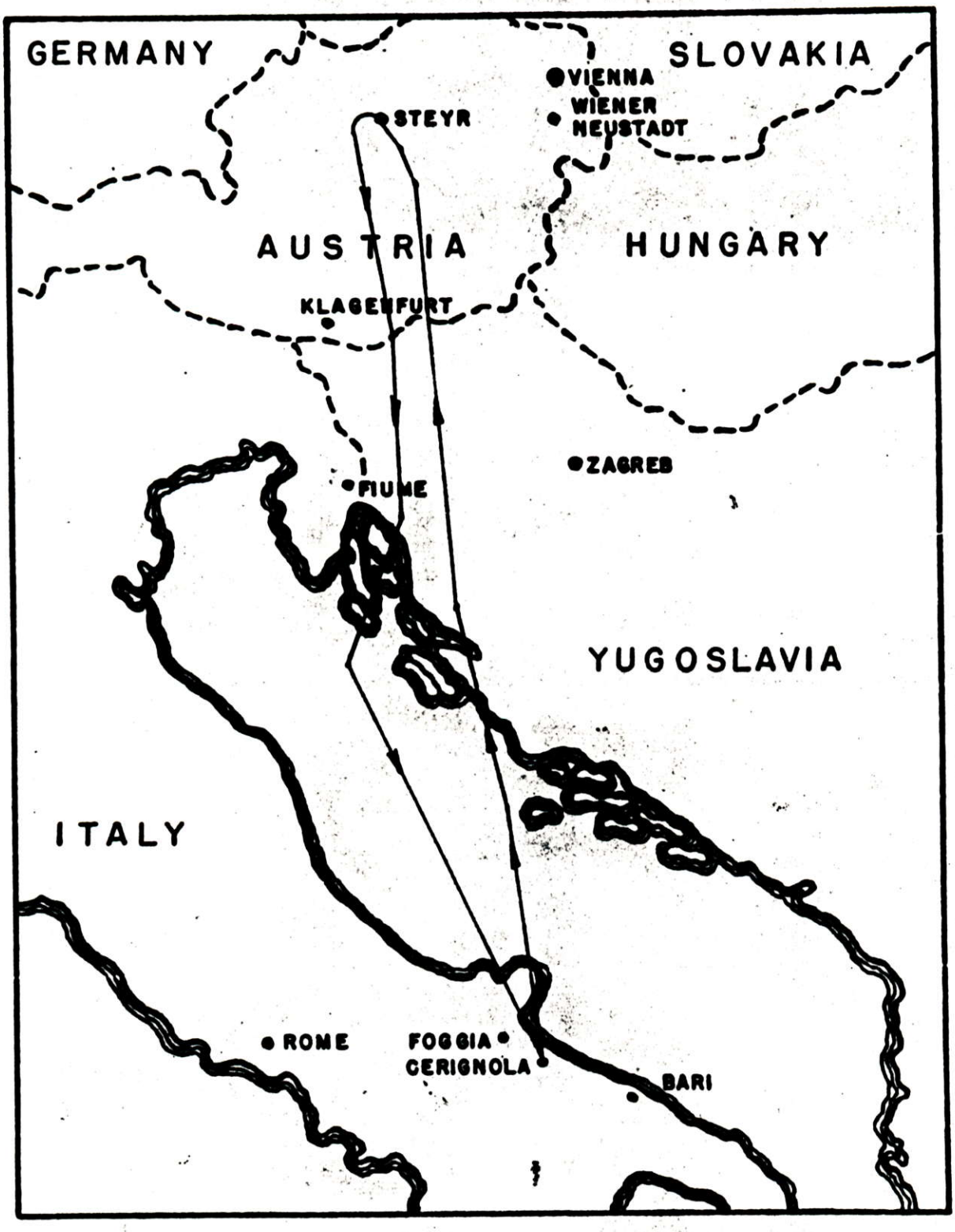
Hugh R. Graff

HUGH R. GRAFF,
Major, Air Corps,
Operations Officer.

453rd BOMBARDMENT GROUP
APO 520
FORMATION DIAGRAM



This is the formation planned and briefed. If ships did not take off or they left the formation, others would leave their position and fill in if the vacated place was more forward in the flight. By doing this, the integrity of the formation was maintained for the mutual protection from enemy fighters.


GERMANY
SLOVAKIA
VIENNA
WIENER NEUSTADT
STEYR
AUSTRIA
HUNGARY
KLAGENFURT
ZAGREB
FIUME
YUGOSLAVIA
ITALY
ROME
FOGGIA
CERIGNOLA
BARI

MISSION STATISTICS

ANNEX NUMBER 2,
Field Order 23.

41 Aircraft Scheduled.

35 Aircraft Took Off.

Ship #247, 741st Bomb Sq., Pilot Paci, 740th Bomb Sq.
Did not take off. Tire blow-out on taxi strip.
Ship #283, 743rd Bomb Sq., Pilot Thomas.
Did not take off. Bad tire on main landing gear.
Ship #500, 743rd Bomb Sq., Pilot Schott.
Did not take off. Magneto inoperative.
Ship #249, 741st Bomb Sq., Pilot Anderson, 743rd Bomb Sq.
Did not take off. Electric suits not available in time for take off. Also expander tube out on left landing gear.
Ship #270, 740th Bomb Sq., Pilot Prosser.
Did not take off. Tail turret inoperative.
Ship #081, 740th Bomb Sq., Pilot Crawford.
Did not take off. Generator inoperative, batteries down, Bomb-bay doors inoperative.

740th Bomb Squadron:

12 aircraft off
11 aircraft over Target
11 aircraft returned
0 aircraft early returns
1 aircraft prior returns
1 aircraft M.I.A.

Flew two ships belonging to 741st Bomb Squadron.

(To be given Sortie Credit)

P/R - Ship #239 Calabretta - Large hole in wing between #3 and #4 engines.

M.I.A. Ship #9282 Powers

741st Bomb Squadron:

2 aircraft off
2 aircraft over Target
2 aircraft returned
0 aircraft early returns
0 aircraft prior returns

(Note: 4 ships of this Squadron were flown by other Squadrons.)

Note: 741st Squadron lost one ship #2271 in action. Ship was flown by 743rd Squadron. Pilot Brunson.

742nd Bomb Squadron:

10 aircraft off
9 aircraft over target
9 aircraft returned
0 aircraft early returns
1 aircraft prior return (To be given Sortie Credit)
1 aircraft M.I.A.

M.I.A. Ship #407 Pilot Pardoe.
P/R Ship #259 Pilot Taylor. Supercharger inoperative.

743rd Bomb Squadron:

11 aircraft off
9 aircraft over target
9 aircraft returned
1 aircraft early return
1 aircraft prior return
2 aircraft M.I.A.

Borrowed three (3) ships from 741st Bomb Squadron.

E/R Ship #481 Pilot Turner. Gas leak in Bomb-bay.
P/R Ship #879 Pilot Arnold. #4 engine out. Left outer wing shot up.
M.I.A. Ship #224 Pilot Cheeseman.
M.I.A. Ship #271 Pilot Brunson

SECRET

UNITED STATES STRATEGIC AIR FORCES IN EUROPE

"AIR INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY NO. 22"

For Week Ending 9 April 1944

RESULTS OF ALLIED ATTACKS

* *

STEYR: Analysis of reconnaissance photographs covering the Fifteenth Air Force attack on this Austrian industrial center on 2 April 1944 indicates that the Steyrwaffen Flugmotorenfabrik Walzlagerwerk Ball Bearing Factory sustained heavy damage. Seriously affected in previous attacks, the ball-bearing and cage plant was almost completely destroyed and only a small part of the roofing at the south end remains standing. Considerable roof damage has been done to the testing and assembly building, a receiving depot and a package and dispatching building. In addition, large huts have been demolished in two labor camps and there are many craters in the vicinity of the factory.

* *

HEADQUARTERS
455TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)
A.P.O. 520 U. S. Army

MISSION NO. 18 (740th, 741st, 742nd, 743rd Squadrons)
STEYR, AUSTRIA.

NARRATIVE REPORT

1. MISSION: Steyr Daimler-Puch and Walzlagerwerke, Steyr, Austria.

2. TARGET: a. Steyr Daimler-Puch Components Plant.
Machine and Assembly Shop - Building No. 2.
Assembly Shop for Motor Transport and Aircraft Components - Building No. 5.
Ball Bearing Shop - Building No. 12.
Foundries - Building No. 18.

b. Steyrwaffen Flugmotorenfabrik Walzlagerwerke. (Numbers assigned correspond to Reconnaissance Photo.)
Assembly, Testing, and Packing Building - Building No. 5.
Bearing Store and Dispatch Building - Building No. 6.
Cage Shop and Paymaster's Office - Building No. 3.

3. IMPORTANCE OF TARGET: On 2 April 1944, Steyr Walzlagerwerke Ball-Bearing Plant and the northern portion of Daimler-Puch Aircraft Factory carried the highest priority target rating in Europe. The damage suffered by the German ball-bearing industry as the result of aerial bombardment, especially against those plants at Schweinfurt, had placed the Walzlagerwerke Ball-Bearing Plant in the top position as the most important plant of the enemy ball-bearing industry. Originally an aero-engine works, this plant was at the time producing great quantities of ball-bearings and ball-bearing assemblies for the German war machines.

4. THE GENERAL PLAN: As part of the Fifteenth Air Force's concerted effort to knock out German aircraft production, all plants, actual or potential, engaged in assembly or in supplying parts were likely targets. The Steyr Ball-bearing plant and engine works had been hit in February but had not been put out of action. Production was continuing in the undamaged portions and repairs were under way.

MISSION NO. 18, STEYR, AUSTRIA (Continued)

The attack on Steyr was a highly coordinated operation with 13 heavy bomber groups hitting the Steyr targets, 3 heavy bomber groups carrying out diversionary raids on Brod, Bihac troop concentrations, and Mostar. This was to be the largest operation in point of numbers of planes the Fifteenth 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.

Escort and target cover were provided by 108 P-38's and 45 P-47's.

5. AIRCRAFT AND CHRONOLOGY: At 0755 hours, 35 B-24's took off (12 from 740th, 2 from 741st, 10 from 742nd, 11 from 743rd Squadrons). One A/C returned early because of a gas leak in the bomb bays and 3 returned prior to bombing because of engine troubles which prevented them from staying with the formation. One aircraft which did not go over the target bombed Rimini.

Twenty-six (26) aircraft dropped their bombs on Steyr Walzlagerwerke and returned to base at 1500 hours.

Four (4) aircraft were missing, all shot down by enemy aircraft prior to the target.

Three groups from the wing participated in the mission with the 459th in the lead, followed by the 454th and 455th in order.

6. ASSAULT: Crossing the Yugoslav coast about 20 miles south of Zano, the attacking bomber formation flew direct to Steyr on a course of approximately 350°.

The briefed axis of attack on 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 that the group leader, Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth A. Cool, made the decision to bomb the open and vastly more important target. The attack was carried out on an axis of attack of 330° magnetic.

Each plane was loaded with ten 500-pound bombs with .1 second nose and .01 second tail fuzes. Bombing altitude was 21,000 feet to 22,000 feet; rally off the target was to the left.

MISSION NO. 18. STEYR, AUSTRIA (Continued)

Enroute to the target, the first enemy reaction to to the operation was made at about 1010 hours when the presence of shadowing aircraft was noted in the area southwest of Fiume.

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 immediately engaged by the P-38 escort, with violent individual encounters taking place. At 1039, about 25 single-engine fighters which were probably part of the same force again attempted to attack the bombers and were engaged from 1040 to 1100 hours by P-47's which had taken over the escort function at 1030. This encounter took place at about 46°00' North Latitude. With the exception of 4 to 6 Me-109's which attacked the lead bomber group at 1115 hours, all of these fighters were effectively dealt with.

It is believed that all of these fighters belonged to units based at the North Adriatic airfields. Photographs of Maniago and Lavariano, the principal bases in this area, taken during the operation just prior to the encounters showed a total of only 25 single-engine fighters present as compared with 76 on the previous cover.

Evidently between 1100 and 1115 hours other fighters from Austrian bases were assembled just north of the frontier. It appears that the twin-engine fighters were first concentrated over Graz and the single-engine fighters over Klagenfurt. The latter made contact with the bombers and escort at about 46°20'N. The twin-engine fighters made contact at about 46°30'N. 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 is estimated at about 100 single-engine aircraft and 40 to 50 twin-engine aircraft. These fighters probably came from fields in the Graz and Vienna areas, with perhaps 20 to 25 twin-engine aircraft coming from fields in the Munich area.

Approximately 15 to 20 Me-109's attacked the bombers over Yugoslavia on their return flight. These encounters occurred between 1315 and 1325 hours between 45°20'N and 44°50'N. The aircraft providing this opposition were probably aircraft of North Adriatic units making second sorties.

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, it is probably true that between 260 and 275 sorties were put up against our formation. Of these, about

60/70 fighters from the North Adriatic operated east of Fiume and were successfully engaged by the bomber escort. It is believed that about 25 percent of these made second sorties. All the other fighters employed appear to have intercepted from airfields in the Vienna-Graz-Klagenfurt area, with the possible exception of 20/25 twin-engine fighters which may have come from Munich.

The first enemy fighters encountered by the 455th Bombardment Group were at 1045 at 45°20'N - 15°20'E. 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, from 75 to 80, was encountered 15 miles west of Graz, and continued the attack until the target area was reached. Most of the aircraft encountered in this area 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 while they were making their bomb run. Large groups of single-engine aircraft picked up the formation and attacked on the return trip.

The Me-109's and FW-190's attacked low and level from 4 to 6 o'clock, doing a pursuit curve, then rolling. The fighters were very aggressive and seemed to be experienced pilots. They seemed to be weaving, trying to pick out the blind spots on the B-24's. The enemy fighters did not take advantage of the fact that the sun was from 5 o'clock but while 2 aircraft made feints from above, a single aircraft would attack from level or below. The twin-engine aircraft came in from a line abreast and peeled off in pairs, making a climbing roll attack and firing rockets.

A majority of the Me-109's were painted silver with black crosses on the wings. The FW-190's were black with white crosses. A few single-engine fighters were observed to be painted with a desert camouflage. One crew reported FW-190's with blue spinners and red spinners which flew alongside of the formation at approximately the rendezvous point with the P-47's.

The fighter attacks on the mission were the heaviest the Air Force had encountered since the Regensburg raid on 25 February 1944. The attack on the 455th Bomb Group was much the heaviest it had encountered thus far in its operations.

Despite the severity of the attack, however, 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. With wounded men on board and the planes riddled from enemy aircraft fire, the group did a superb job of bombing and turned from the target with a tight formation to make its way back through the enemy fighters to base. In the face of overpowering odds, this Group's formation destroyed a highly important objective thereby demonstrating remarkable courage, determination, and a high degree of professional skill and devotion to duty.

7. RESULTS OF BOMBING: The assembly, testing, packing, and ball and roller bearing plant Building No. 2 was very heavily damaged. In addition to the devastation caused by high explosives, approximately an equal amount appears to have been caused by fire, and of the total area of 116,000 square feet, only an approximate area of 43,000 square feet remained and that probably suffered severe internal structural damage. Building No. 5, the other assembly and testing plant, was less heavily damaged, but one bay was more than half wiped out.

Building No. 3, with an approximate area of 150,000 square feet, was more than two-thirds destroyed.

Building No. 6, the bearing store and dispatch building, was severely damaged and nearly half destroyed; the remainder was severely hit that it could scarcely be considered intact.

Other buildings though less severely damaged suffered severe blast effects from near-misses.

8. WEATHER: From the base across the Adriatic, to about one hundred miles from the target, there was no cloud above or below the formation. From about 100 miles south of the target, cloud cover was 3/10 to 4/10 cumulus with tops of 10,000 feet. This coverage continued to the target. Over the target the cover was 3/10 to 4/10 cumulus at 3,000 feet with tops at 10,000 feet. Visibility was 6 miles in haze and smoke. On the return trip the weather was the same as the route out.

9. RADIO: Communications were satisfactory. Calls to escort remained unanswered due to the fact that the escort was heavily engaged.

10. ROUTE: Base to Andrija, 43°02'N - 15°46'E to 44°40'N - 15°25'E to 45°28'N - 15°21'E to Turning Point 47°36'N - 14°45'E to I.P. 47°53'N - 14°35'E to target. Axis of attack 330°. Target to 46°40'N - 14°50'E to 44°05'N - 14°45'E to Base. (See Sketch of Route.)

11. ENEMY LOSSES:

Destroyed	Probably Destroyed	Damaged
Me-109 - 15	Me-109 - 13	Me-109 - 3
FW-190 - 11	JU-88 - 3	
Me-410 - 1	FW-190 - 1	—
Total - 27	Total - 17	Total - 3

12. OUR LOSSES: The 741st Squadron which had two (2) planes over the target was the only squadron to suffer no losses during this operation. Four were lost: one (1) from the 740th Squadron, one (1) from the 742nd Squadron, and two (2) from the 743rd Squadron.

a. 740th Squadron. Plane No. 41-29282, (flown by Powers) left the formation at 1100 hours at approximately 46°40'N - 14°25'E. The left wing and Number three engine were on fire. Six men were seen to bail out and chutes open. Two more were seen to bail out and their chutes open just before the plane crashed.

b. 742nd Squadron. Plane No. 41-29407 (flown by Pardoe) was last seen leaving the formation 8 miles west of Celje 46°16'N - 15°66'E, with Number four prop feathered, on a heading of 250°. Four enemy fighters were following this aircraft.

From five members of this crew who successfully evaded the enemy the full story of this plane was ultimately pieced together. In the course of a running battle which lasted approximately 30 minutes, this crew shot down 7 enemy fighters. Yugoslav Partisans who assisted five crew members to escape verified this number.

The gallant crew fought the enemy fighters until their ammunition was exhausted and their plane riddled with 2[illegible] mm. cannon. With enemy fighters still coming in, and with the plane losing altitude rapidly due to the loss of two engines, the pilot gave the order to bail out. All 10 crew members got out of the plane. Five crew members landed in Partisan territory and after thirty-one (31) days returned to their base. The other five members landed in German-held territory. These men were fired upon by German ground forces. One has since been reported as a prisoner of war. The remaining four were either captured or killed.

(Flown by Brunson)

c. 743rd Squadron. Plane No. 42-52271, was last seen at 45°30'N - 15°30'E with a fire in the bomb-bay and waist section. Three (3) men bailed out and their chutes opened. One man jumped from the waist window apparently without a parachute. One jumped from the waist window with back-type chute afire. The plane pulled up into a stall, made one turn in a spin, and exploded.

(Flown by Cheeseman)

Plane No. 42-52224, was last seen ten miles west of Graz with a fire in the waist section. Four men were seen to bail out but two chutes were on fire.

13. WOUNDED PERSONNEL: Five (5) men were wounded by fighters. One, a left waist gunner was seriously wounded in the chest and upper arms. A tail gunner was wounded in the right knee, a right waist gunner was wounded in the foot, a ball turret gunner was wounded in the rectum, and a top turret gunner received a shoulder wound.

14. ASSESSMENT OF DAMAGE TO OUR PLANES:

a. By enemy aircraft: Two severe and two slight.

b. By flak: Three severe and four slight.

15. COMMENTS: None.

16. AIR-SEA RESCUE: None.

17. SORTIES: Thirty-four (34)

MISSION NO. 18, STEYR, AUSTRIA (Continued)

18. NAVAL AND SHIPPING ACTIVITIES: The following naval observations were made: Cruiser off Selboa Island 44°20'N - 14°45'E at 1320 hours; cruiser in the harbor at Chirisi Lussignano 44°36'N - 14°32'E; two unidentified ships towing barges at 44°45'N - 14°40'E at 1314 hours; one unidentified vessel in the harbor at Baskanova, Island of Krk; surface craft on fire at 44°05'N - 14°35'E, off the coast of Dugi.

19. ENEMY AIR INSTALLATIONS AND ACTIVITY IN ADDITION TO ENCOUNTERS: Observations of enemy air installations were as follows: Airdrome at Rottenmann 47°30'N - 14°32'E, concrete runway, no aircraft; Celje Airdrome, no aircraft; Airdrome north of Zellway 47°12'N - 14°45'E, good runway, snow cleared, no planes observed.

20. ENEMY GROUND COMMUNICATIONS: A twelve-truck convoy was observed moving east at 44°13'N - 15°37'E at 1015 hours; at Baslani Marshalling Yard, 46°01'N - 15°16'E five or six trains were observed.

21. SQUADRON LEADERS:

First Attack Unit:

A-Box - Lieutenant Colonel Kennet A. Cool, O-254001, Group Commander.
B-Box - First Lieutenant Alvin I Fisher, O-739759, 740th Squadron.
C-Box - First Lieutenant James W. Knight, O-745699, 742nd Squadron.

Second Attack Unit:

D-Box - Captain Wilbur C. Bechtold, O-402345, 743rd Squadron.
E-Box - First Lieutenant Robert L. Cook, O-4231414, 743rd Squadron.
F-Box - First Lieutenant Jack [illegible]. Saine, O-803282, 740th Squadron.

ALVIN E. COONS,
Major, Air Corps,
Group S-2 Officer.

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HEADQUARTERS 455TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H) AAF
Office of the Intelligence Officer
APO 520 US Army

INDIVIDUAL COMBAT CLAIM FORM Date 2 April 1944

Claimant GEORGE R. JOHNSTON Rank S/Sgt ASN 39275213

Home Address 1721 E. 5th St, Long Beach, California. Crew Pos. Tail gunner

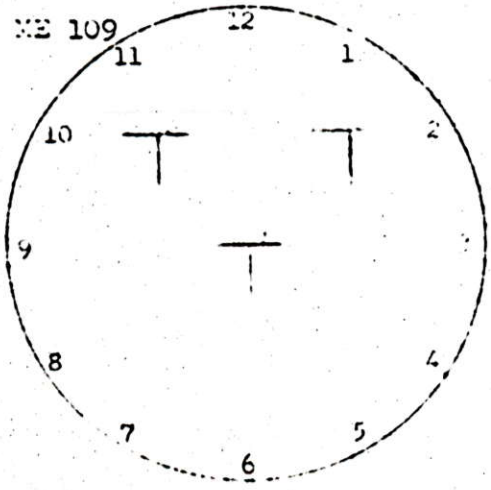
A/C No. 42-29254 Sqdn. 740th Date of Encounter 2 April 1944

Time 1142 Place Steyr, Austria Altitude 21,000 ft

Type Claimed ME 109 Claim: DEST

PROB

X DAM



NARRATIVE:

E/A left its formation for a solitary pass at this ship. Claimant began firing when E/A was 400 yards away and continued firing until ship was out of range underneath. Claimant saw tracers hitting an engine. Sgt Childers, ball gunner, saw a wheel fly off and noted that the E/A began smoking as it went down under. He lost sight of it when new attacks were launched.

/s/ C. E. Riggs
(Pilot)
C. E. RIGGS, 1st Lt, AC

(Interrogator)
LEROY A. BRUA, Capt, AC

/s/ George R. Johnston
(Claimant)

/s/ Alvin E. Coons
ALVIN E. COONS,
Major, Air Corps,
Group Intelligence Officer.

Approved as one E/A:

DEST PROB DAM X

/s/ Kenneth A. Cool
KENNETH A. COOL,
Lt. Col., Air Corps,
Commanding.

CONFIDENTIAL

57
1

0303

C O N F I D E N T I A L

HEADQUARTERS 455TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H) AAF
Office of the Intelligence Officer
APO 520 US Army

INDIVIDUAL COMBAT CLAIM FORM Date 2 April 1944

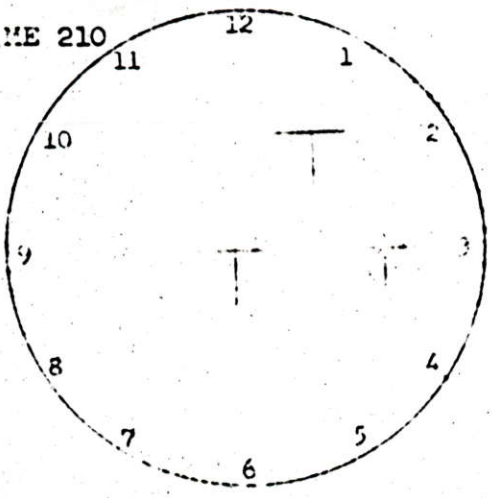
Claimant HENRY W. KOLBE Rank S/Sgt ASN 36327635

Home Address 117 Sherman Pl, Waukegan, Illinois Crew Pos. Ball turret

A/C No. 4129264 Sqdn. 740th Date of Encounter 2 April 1944

Time 1140 Place Steyr, Austria Altitude 21,000 ft

Type Claimed ME 210



Claim: DEST
X PROB
DAM

NARRATIVE:

E/A attacked from about 40° low, climbing toward eleven (11) o'clock. E/A did not fire. Claimant fired 40 rounds per gun from 800 yards and stopped plane at that point, where he rolled over and fell off one wing. He was smoking and port engine on fire. Another enemy plane claimed the claimant's attention. T/Sgt George E. McKnight, top turret gunner, saw plane going down flaming.

/s/ C. E. Riggs
(Pilot)
C. E. RIGGS, 1st Lt, AC

Leroy A Crum
(Interrogator)
LEROY A. CRUM, Capt, AC

Approved as one E/A:

DEST PROB X DAM

/s/ Henry H. Kolbe
(Claimant)

/s/ Alvin E. Coons
ALVIN E. COONS,
Major, Air Corps,
Group Intelligence Officer.

/s/ Kenneth A. Cool
KENNETH A. COOL,
Lt. Col., Air Corps,
Commanding.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

48
1

0299

HEADQUARTERS
455TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)
APO 520 U.S. Army

30 July 1944.

SUBJECT: Report of Ground Crew Effort Prior to the Steyr Raid.

TO : Commanding Officer, 455th Bombardment Group (H), APO 520, U.S. Army.

On the day of the mission, 2 April 1944, the Squadron Engineering Sections were able to report to Group Operations a group total of fifty (50) aircraft operational out of a total of fifty-seven (57) aircraft assigned. Of the seven (7) aircraft non-operational, two (2) were in the Service Squadron for major repair of combat damage and five (5) were awaiting parts.

All Squadron Engineering Sections were operating under serious handicap due to lack of CEL equipment. Two of the squadrons had received only forty (40) percent of their maintenance equipment while the other two squadrons were in even worse condition with but ten (10) percent of their equipment. Critical items such as wing jacks, tow bars, crew-chief stands, "A" frames, were lacking, as was other necessary equipment. Oil drums were used as crew-chief stands and the only available tools were those in the crew-chief's kit.

Due to the twenty (20) percent increase of assigned aircraft above T.O. authority, shortage of maintenance personnel, inadequate maintenance equipment, and extremely poor field conditions, ground crews were required to work from fourteen (14) to sixteen (16) hours a day to maintain this high percentage of aircraft operational. The fact that the engineering and other maintenance sections consistently furnished operations with more aircraft than were required for tactical operations is a direct contribution to the splendid record of this group.

The cheerfulness and proficiency with which these men fulfilled their assigned duties under the most trying circumstances upholds the highest traditions of the military service, reflecting great credit upon themselves and their organization.

Philip P. Crowell

PHILIP P. CROWELL,
Major, Air Corps,
Group Materiel Officer.

HEADQUARTERS
FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE
APO 520

12 September 1944

GENERAL ORDERS)

NUMBER 3325)

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 sevent-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 occured, 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.

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COPY OF TWX

From Colonel Upthegrove's 201 File

3 April 1944.

FROM: GENERAL TWINING, 15TH AIR FORCE

TO : 304th Bombardment Wing (H)

* * * * * *

Operations of the Strategic Air Force from Italy during the past two days have resulted in terrific destruction of Hun aircraft and vital industrial establishments. This will go a long way toward bringing the war to an early end. The Hun Air Force cannot take the punishment, as evidenced by his weak opposition to our attack on Budapest. Pass to all units my highest commendations on the results of these air battles. Our combination of night bombers, day bombers, and long range fighters, represents a fighting force that cannot be beaten.

* * * * * *

Al, if Hugh is writing up the Steyr mission in detail, may I suggest he/you consider the following:

I was Col. Cool's co-pilot on the Steyr mission. Inbound to the target, we were alerted by the top turret gunner that 7 ME 109's were overtaking the group on our right flank. I observed the 7 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 7 ME 109's turned into our formation flying 7 abreast on their firing run. I immediately called the fighter escort - "Red Dog 1, this is Sing Cobra 23 - (Al, please add a call sign that was assigned to our Bomb Grp on occasion). "We are under attack by 7 ME 109 and request assistance." Red Dog 1 responded "Wa-l-l (southern drawl) we're kinda tied up ourselves right now but we'll send some one up (up the bomber stream) as soon as we can free someone". A single P-38 appeared shortly and the ME 109's withdrew. The ME 109's made 3 passes at our formation, 7 abreast from the right flank, and I believe we lost 4 B-24's as a result of their action.

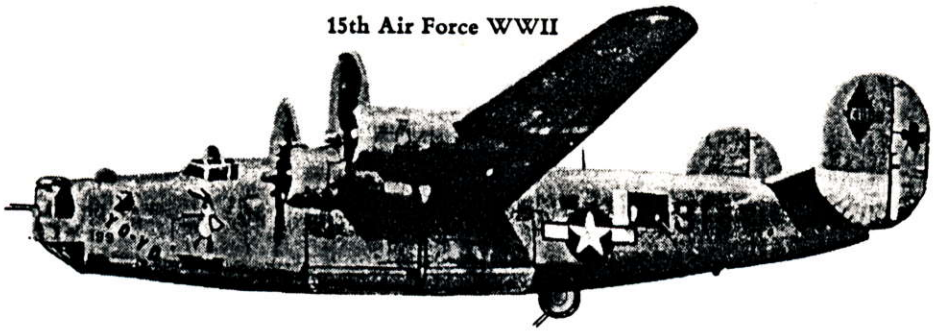
attachment # 7
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13

add in: Victor McWilliams, Pilot of 741 crew shot down over Ploesti 5/5/44 will write his experiences and send to me soon! I will forward, of course. HL

With copies of [illegible] available.

FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE
304th Wing

15th Air Force WWII



"Vulgar Vultures"

455th BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION, INC.

6205 Meadow Court
Rockville, Maryland 20852
(301) 881 1376

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Louie O. Hansen
Col. USAF Ret.
Ph: 712/262-7237

November 14, 1991

Dear Ed,

Enclosed is a copy of the Steyr mission. I note you started out flying the diamond position in "B" box of the first section with Fisher leading the flight. He did a good job of leading that day as the bomb coverage by the first section was great. At one time we were going to include the formation make-up in our book but for one reason or another, it didn't make it. I wish it had.

It was great seeing you and Mrs. Riggs at the reunion. I wish we would have had more time to visit but we were very busy with Association affairs and didn't have much time. Hugh Graff has the ball now and next time Naomi and I can relax.

We have a great Association now and it's bound to get better under the leadership of Hugh. I belong to the 93rd Bomb Group Association and it is almost dead. The 93rd was in existance since early 1942 and remained active in England throughout the war. Because of its tenure, it had considerable more personnel assigned during the war.

BEST WISHES FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

Alfred Asch

Incl.