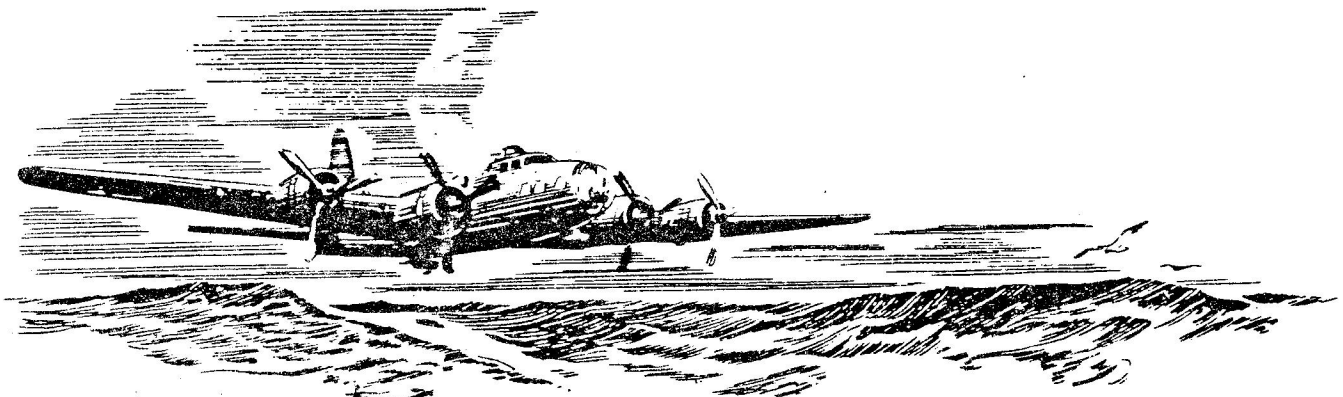
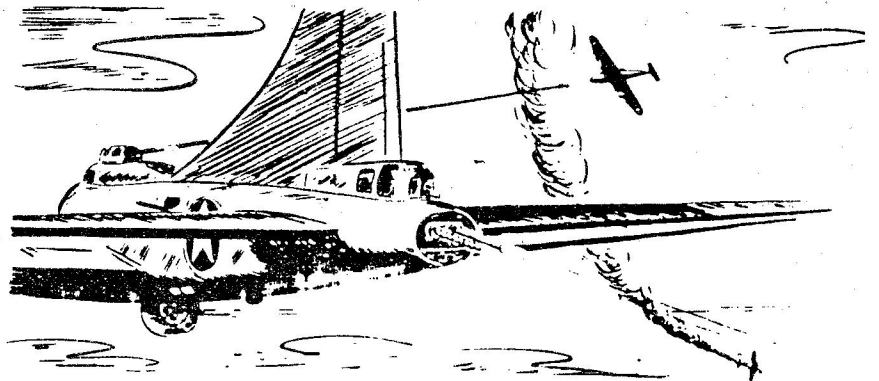
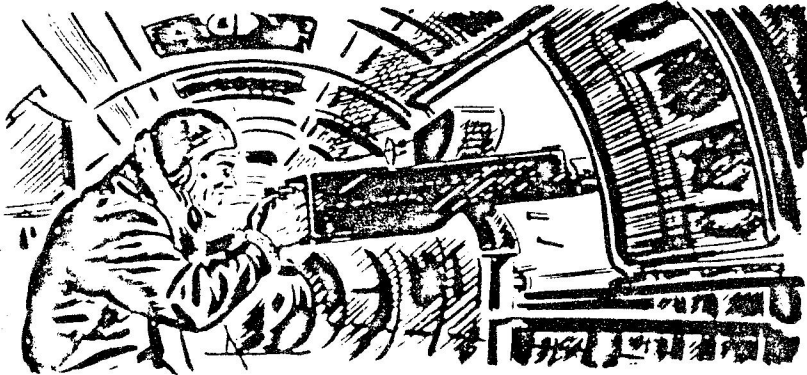


\$1.00

A WWII ALLIED

AIR ATTACK



"A WWII ALLIED AIR ATTACK"

Oschersleben Raid, West Germany; July 28, 1943

Capt. Norville Gorse, USAFR

Plane No. (Unknown)

B Flight 45th Combat Wing
337th Bomb. Sqdn. 3rd Air Division
96th Bomb. Group 8th Air Force

Pilot, 2nd Lt. N. Gorse, 11 raids
Co-pilot & Crew CO, 1st Lt. Wm. Nance, 10 raids
Navigator, 1st Lt. Joe Hudson, 11 raids
Bombardier, 2nd Lt. Bob McGinniss, 10 raids
Engineer, I/S Basil Maxwell, 12 raids
Tail Gunner, S/S Ed Youngers, 11 raids

We were briefed on the Oschersleben raid early Wednesday, July 28th. The mission was: takeoff at 0530 Hours, assemble, fly over the North Sea to a point above the Fresian Islands and turn toward Hamburg; the Hamburg heading was then to be changed to southeast toward Oschersleben.

Over 300 bombers entered enemy territory in a formation which split between two targets, Oschersleben and Kassel. The Oschersleben formation followed a 94th Gp. led Wing and we of the 45th Combat Wing (not yet officially named) were led by the 388th Gp., with the 100th flying low and the 96th high.

Bad weather and heavy cloud cover at the start of the raid caused a large reduction in aircraft, both by aborts and MIA's. Our formation put 28 of an original 100 ships over the target; 15 were from the 94th Gp. and 13 from the 388th. The 94th lost no planes, the 388th 1, the 96th 9 and the 100th an unlisted number. 50 enemy FW190's (1 month's production) were destroyed at the Oschersleben FW190 plant. Postwar German records claim 11 bombers from our formation and 11 from the Kassel target force. Our bomber formations claimed 48 German fighters shot down, the German record admitted 7.

Through discussion and comparison of crew observations, we concluded that these were the initial conditions. Nance and my plane's position had been #3 or the diamond for most of our past missions, which meant I did the formation flying from the right seat. He wanted to fly this one, so we agreed I would be the pilot and fly from the left seat. We were to be #3 in the 2nd element of our lead sqdn., with Capt. Fulton as Sqdn. and Gp. leader. I took off, put the ship in formation and turned the controls over to Nance. We formed on the 388th lead Gp., flew out over the North Sea and turned east at 7° E. Long. and 54° N. Lat., aligning our course with the Fresian Islands. Our Wing was below the 94th led Wing. The assigned altitude was at cloud level, so the 94th flew above it, but not high enough to keep the 45th Combat Wing out of it.

After passing through several cloud formations and open spaces (spreading out after entering the clouds and reforming in the open spaces), the formation circled north in a diversion according to our battle plan. The 96th Gp. Ldr. was hit by a 3 o'clock high attack of JU88 40mm cannon fire which blew away most of his rudder, causing him to fall out of the formation. Lt. Joe Bender (Deputy Ldr.) then signalled the Gp. to form on him, so Nance moved to #3 low on his left wing, while the rest of the 96th left the formation.

Bender's co-pilot, Lew, talked continually to Nance on the radio during the switch. Bender's ship had a 12 ft. long hole from cannon fire in its right wing, and soon lost its #3 engine due to a damaged supercharger. Lew immediately told us they would leave and dropped out of the formation. Our ship was then the only remaining 96th plane.

Nance then turned the controls over to me with instructions to fill the diamond on the lead Gp. high squadron.

A later discussion with Joe Bender and Lew described their flight home as a running fight between them and 5 attacking fighters in which they slipped, skidded and shot down 2 before reaching sea level and scooting back to the base for a one wheel landing.

After a short while, the #2 plane in our element was hit and fell back; Nance called him on the radio several times and concluded they had dropped out, so I moved up to the #2 position. More discussion on the radio and in the cockpit led to Nance wanting to move to the #3 position; we were then on a 0° heading and still flying in and out of the clouds. I told him to stop hopping around, we had already flown in 4 different positions and were surely attracting fighter attention.

I then slid under the lead ship into #3 position and looked at Nance, expecting him to take the controls, when Maxwell, the top-turret gunner, shouted out of the turret that we were being hit in the left wing with 20 mm cannon fire. 3 enemy fighters had attacked us from 6 o'clock high, out of the sun, and were shooting from what looked like overhead. I started evasive action and slid under the lead ship for protection, but not quickly enough to avoid cannon fire through the radio room and out the right wing. Maxwell had time to blow up the lead fighter, but the other two got away. Three more followed us down; Max saw Youngers, the tail-gunner, blow up 1 and he got another.

That ended our approximately 40 minutes of combat on this raid. Nance called the navigator for a heading for home while I pointed the nose down to dive and blow out the fire. Maxwell yelled that the left wing flap was burned away, the main spar was exposed and the left wing was on fire.

Suddenly, large quantities of fuel poured out of the left wing tanks; we felt a large bump when the fuel ignited, and all 4 engines stopped.

Nance started toward the rear exit, collided with Max coming out of the turret, and yelled "Let's get out of here."

I grabbed Nance and Maxwell and talked Nance into staying with the ship by showing him that the fuel coming out of the wing was burning about 3 feet behind it, not the wing; our survival chances in enemy waters were non-existent without a dinghy.

Joe Hudson, the navigator, came out of the nose and said we were 90 kms from the coast and 90 kms west of Heligoland, confirming the need to ditch rather than bail out.

I continued in a redlined airspeed indicator dive, with the flames slowing due to lack of fuel, and asked Nance if he wanted the ditching honor; he said "No, you're in the pilot's seat." and I continued down my flight-path while turning to a 270° heading.

Meanwhile, Ed Youngers, the tail-gunner, came out of the tail after the explosion. 3 of the gunners had bailed out and the ball-turret gunner waited only long enough to wave to Ed before leaving through the waist door. We were still being attacked, so Ed returned to his gun position. He then shot out two of the 3 fighters following us down, which had by then closed to within 150 feet of the tail.

By the time we reached sea level, the fuel was gone and the wing fire looked like it was also out. On levelling to land, I opened my side window and propped it with my elbow to keep it from jamming during the landing so I had an escape path. The warm outside air rushed in, condensed on the cold windshield and turned to frost. I scraped it with my cap and the emblem on its front, then proceeded to set the plane on the water while checking height and water conditions through both the open window and partially frosted windshield. The water was calm with a slight swell, and I landed smoothly. Most of the flames were out when the dinghies were released, but the left dinghy fell into the flaming fuel, which burned a hole in it. Nance, Maxwell and the rest of the crew escaped through the radio hatch while I squeezed out through the pilot's window. Checking our gear, after the six of us boarded our little rubber boat, we found we had paddles, a VERY pistol, hand-powered radio, 2 parachutes, a survival kit with fresh water and chocolate bars,

and miscellaneous other minor items. The plane exploded under water while I was boarding the raft and freed 3 oxygen bottles and empty ammunition cases. We salvaged 2 of the bottles, opened a parachute, made a sea anchor out of part of it, and tied the 2 bottles to a trailing shroud line to measure drift.

The navigator said the North Sea current was counter-clockwise and we would drift toward Jutland; so we pointed the raft toward the North Channel while discussing the chance of an RAF patrol finding us the following morning. He also mentioned that his watch had stopped at 1105 Hours. We began our trip by cranking the hand radio and paddling in 2 hour shifts.

Late in the afternoon of the 28th, a shark struck one of our trailing oxygen bottles. He hit it several times. We clearly saw his mouth, fin and that he was 10 to 12 feet long. He then swam in a wide circle around the raft, coming to within a few feet of the boat, but not touching it. We were still, and he swam away after circling only once. We then continued paddling and cranking the radio.

Early on the morning of the second day, we watched a German fighter climb out over the Fresian Islands. A storm started shortly afterward and stayed with us until the following morning. 15 feet high waves threatened to capsize us, but we avoided that by paddling in the direction they were moving.

Later in the day, British fighters which had bombed Jutland, dove down close to us on their way home, but didn't see us. We had lost our VERY pistol in the storm and arm waving was not enough to attract them. Toward evening we passed a shipping buoy for the North Channel.

That night, a stream of British bombers flew over to bomb Hamburg. One of the ships was shot down in flames overhead, broke into 2 parts and fell close to our raft. The storm and rain continued intermittently. We were partly protected by parachute silk, but drenched from the spray and breakers. Bailing water out of the bottom of the boat was added to the regular chore list. One of Nance's cowboy boot heels had made a hole in the bottom, making bailing an endless job. He had lost the other while swimming between the plane and the boat after ditching.

On the morning of the 30th, the rain stopped. We had drifted east of our former position and were awakened by explosions along the German held coast. 3 JU-52's, each with a mine detector ring under it, were exploding mines with machine gun fire. When one noticed us, it left the formation to return to its base while the others dropped green and yellow sea marker around us.

A DO-24 twin engine seaplane soon returned and landed close to the raft. Two guards stood on the pontoons with machine guns and motioned us to board the plane. After we boarded, one guard watched with his gun pointed at us while the other cut up the dinghy and threw it back into the water. Our leather jackets were taken and inspected by the co-pilot for escape kits; and we were seated in a small compartment with the pilot and co-pilot in front, and the two armed guards behind us.

We were flown a short distance to Nordernay, the 4th Fresian Island from the east end of the south Fresian Island chain, given our leather jackets and a bowl of potato soup, and put into a small room just large enough for 2 bunk beds (3 high) for the night.

The following morning we were awakened early and taken to Frankfort by train for interrogation. The next day, 3 of us left in box cars for Stalag Luft III at Sagan, while Maxwell and Youngers went to Stalag VIIA and Nance remained at Frankfort for a week of additional interrogation. On arrival, we were assigned quarters in Center Camp. We stayed there 1 month while recovering from exposure slowly, and were transferred to South Camp, where we remained for the rest of our stay.

INTRODUCTION:

The 8th Air Force proved the importance of daylight air attacks over Europe to the Allied High Command during July, 1943; that strategy led to Allied Air Superiority and the Invasion of France.

The month started with six attacks on Aircraft Repair and Assembly Plants in France: LeMans, Nantes, LaPallice and Villacoublay. It ended with the 8th hitting sixteen Major Industrial Targets during "Blitz Week," which included: the longest flight, 1900 miles to Trondheim, Norway; and the deepest penetration into Germany, Oschersleben, which was 80 miles from Berlin.

This story illustrates the difficulty one crew had in reaching that last mentioned target.