

# Derdzinski's Report

December, 1945  
Statement of George R. Derdzinski  
Navigator 1034  
457th Bomb Group  
751 Bomb Squadron

On May 28, 1944, 24th Mission, my crew, consisting of:

Pilot - Lt. Clyde Knipfer

Co-Pilot - Lt. Richard A. Bruha

Bombardier - Lt. Stanley V. Gray

Navigator - Myself...and 5 other members were assigned to No. 5 position in the high box of our wing. The target was the airdrome at Dessau, Germany. The weather was perfect; visibility unlimited. The wing was rather spread out due to poor timing on assembly. We observed slight ineffective flak over the French coast on our way in.

After that, the mission was routine and uneventful until we entered Germany proper. At that time our fighter escort chancel reported heavy enemy fighter concentrations ahead. Within a half hour, we observed enemy fighter attacks directed at groups head of us. At approximately the Initial Point, which was 8 minutes from the target, our formation was attacked by a heavy concentration of ME-109's, FW-190's, and JU-88's. They came in at 3 O'clock level, in group formation in what can best be described as an entire formation attacking on a pursuit curve. This was the first time we had observed such tactics in our 24 missions. Needless to say they came in with their "lights blinking" (*editors note - meaning, wing guns firing*) and we returned the compliment.

The ship to our right was hit and smoke poured out of one of the engines, though there was no visible fire. A split second later, our left wing was hit and set afire. Our fighter escort which was too spread out to cope with the unorthodox enemy concentration was rather ineffective up to this time.

As soon as we were hit we left the formation and the pilot gave the bail out alarm and contacted all 9 crew members for confirmation, after which the pilot, the bombardier and the engineer bailed out at approximately 18,000 feet. The plane maintained perfect flight with the left wing still burning. When I prepared to leave the nose, I was surprised to see the co-pilot was still in the cockpit. After a damn short discussion, we decided to try for Switzerland (for all practical purposes Switzerland and Sweden were equidistant, we chose Switzerland because the winds were more favorable for a southern course.)

At this point there were six crew members still in the ship. When the co-pilot made our plan known to the rest of the crew, three members, the tail-gunner, waist gunner and radio operator decided to bail out. The co-pilot, ball turret gunner and I, continued on course unmolested to Switzerland (at 18 thousand feet) with the wing fire showing signs of dying out. Then it became larger again. Finally, with the flame beginning to warm the seat of the ball turret gunner's pants and when gas fumes were evident throughout the ship, the three remaining crew members hit the silk (18 thousand feet) in the vicinity of Fulda, Germany.

On my way down I observed light flak, the first since we had left formation, directed at our ship, which was flying lazy circles on automatic pilot. I landed in a pasture, hid my parachute and made for a nearby woods. About 15 minutes later as I ran I heard voices, gun fire and soon the forest was alive with German civilians and soldiers. I hid in a ditch only to be discovered by a German soldier of the Luftwaffe.

I was immediately marched to a small town just east of Fulda and ushered into the Burgermeister's office. There I saw my co-pilot but we did not recognize each other. The town people came into the office one by one to pass their individual comments and returned to the street until quite a congregation had gathered. A few minutes later, the ball turret gunner, Sgt. Nicholas D. Furrie, appeared with an "escort". Sometime later (we bailed out at about 12:30 PM) the German army or rather a Lieutenant and 6 enlisted men came to claim us. They took us by truck to a quartermaster camp in the city of Fulda. At this point, Lt. Richard Bruha and myself were placed in a cell with a Lt. Kieley, who flew with another group in our wing. We spent two days at this location with intermittent individual interviews by a German officer. There was damn little food. Early one morning we were marched to the railroad station (Lt. Kieley had to be given assistance because of a sprained ankle.)

When the train finally arrived we were crowded into it. We arrived at Du-Lag Luft near Frankfort late that night. We went thru the usual routine there; solitary confinement and persuasive but ineffective interrogation by a German major. After two days, I was shipped along with some 50 other prisoners to an outdoor camp, the name of which I forget, where we received our issue of Red Cross clothing and our first shower and shave since we went down. After some 7 to 10 days, we were finally sent to the permanent camp at Stalag Luft III at Sagan, Germany.

There we found a rather well organized (under the circumstances) group in the west compound commanded by Col. Daar H. Alkire. I was assigned to block 169 where we lived 15 men to a room (there until Jan. 1945).

At that time the Russian advance was in full swing and they were threatening Breslau. We were marched out at 1 AM on a Sunday morning after approximately two hours notice by the German commander. The temperature was below zero and there was a heavy snow on the ground. We were issued a Red Cross parcel each as we left the gate. The entire camp marched to Spremberg, Germany. I don't remember how long it took. The weather was severe, our clothing inadequate, and many of the men including myself suffered from frozen feet and fatigue. The German guards, most of whom were quite old, did little better, As a matter of fact two of them died on this march. Although I had heard of rumors of loss of American prisoners, I do not positively know of any myself.

At Spremberg we were loaded 50 men to a car on the original 40 and 8 cards of the first world war. Some days later we arrived at Nurnberg for a 1 month stay which can best be described as a nightmare. The prison camp was located within 3 miles of the railroad yards, the primary target for our bombers at Nurnberg. The food situation was appalling; even the German soldiers did not get enough to eat. There was no Red Cross food and the railroad yards were bombed nightly and daily by our own Eighth Air Force and the R.A.F. respectively.

At about this time, Red Cross representatives made an appearance at the camp and informed us that our Government had consigned 50 white U.S. Army trucks to the Swiss Government for the purpose of supplying Red Cross food to us. Two weeks later, after his visit, the first Red Cross truck appeared. From that time on we were put on half ration of Red Cross food.

This camp was filthy and crawling with bugs. We were well satisfied upon receipt of a day's notice that we would march toward the Swiss border. It was early in April that the march began and by this time Col. Alkire was issuing orders to the German commander. The weather was warm, the white trucks supplied our food, and we were not required to march more than 8 hours in a single day. It was quite different than the march of the previous winter. After approximately two weeks on the road, we arrived at Moosburg, where we found the camp dirty and full of bugs but adequate food though

never plentiful.

On May 28, 1945, early in the morning, we received the first indication that our liberation was in the offing. The German commander officially turned the entire camp over to our Senior officers. At noon, as two P-51's gave us quite an air show at low altitude, we observed an American tank followed by more coming over a not too distant hill. Although there was some scattered fire in the camp itself, the opposition to the 14th Armored Division, our liberators, was negligible.

A half hour later the American flag went up over the town of Moosburg. Later that same day, other Third Army units moved in. About a week later we were flown to Paris, from there to La Havre (a month stay in Le Havre) and then Home via Camp Kilmer, N.J.

After a 90 day leave I received my certificate of service at the AAFPDC, San Antonio, Texas. My terminal leave was completed on Dec, 12, 1945. At the time of separation I had been in grade as a 2nd. Lt. for 26 months.

George R. Derdzinski