

I happened to watch 'Secrets of the Dead' on PBS and saw an interesting parallel between a mission the 461st was on 7/2/1944 and an event cited in the documentary. It is rather significant when a specific bombing mission can be so closely tied to a political outcome, such as the Enola Gay and Bockscar B-29s on Aug 6th and Aug 9th ending the war. I believe the 461st had a significant event they played a part of - the largest single event freeing people destined to gruesome death at Germany's concentration camps.

I think this is such a noteworthy event that something should be written up on the website so others can be made aware of it. Perhaps even something should be mentioned in your newsletter? Certainly I felt so to spend time typing this all up. Below are my sources and informational summaries about what happened.

I have always thought of my uncle, and those he flew with him, to be heroes. To think they went up against the dictatorship courageously risking their lives as they did is just awe-inspiring. The world would have been a much different place than it is today. I have read stories of how POWs and concentration camp detainees were spared death due to bombings of railroad yards and the result giving people a chance to escape for those fortunate enough to do so; however, I have not seen a single event being cited as being a major player to this extent by a bombing mission performed by the 461st saving lives like this. I mean, think about it, the largest prevention of needless death in WWII concentration camps.

I attribute my connecting the dots between this event and the 461st to Providence that God had me be inquisitive of what the 461st was up to that day and to pause the video. Fortunately, with your website, I was able to quickly see the log book entry for that day. I quickly realized that you guys were over that target doing your thing.

I wish my uncle was alive today so I could share that with him. I know his heart was heavy with the thoughts of all the innocent people who died due to bombing. I know he knew that he had a job to do and he did it, but I know it still impacted him - as it would any decent human being who has a moral conscience. To think that 120,000 people would have met a gruesome fate at the concentration camps is rather amazing, for those people were spared in part because of your bombing. Although it was a team effort from the 2 concentration camp escapees, to embassy/government staff acting fast, the BBC/NY Times media, etc., etc.,... the 461st no doubt likewise played a vital role in influencing the Hungarian government to stand up against Hitler by seeing that bombing firepower from B-24's was nothing to be taken in stride.

I know WWII ended in part due to your collective bombing of all the targets; i.e., not to down play the significance of all the other missions the 461st was on and other such units of all service branches and countries. And, that in itself that is significant and noteworthy. But for a single mission to have such notoriety is rather impressive and ever more personal. Often, being on a mission, you never knew why targets were selected and what was trying to be accomplished. It was just a job and it was done. Questions are not asked and answers hardly ever were given - especially under the circumstances of the time. Well, with the research I uncovered, hopefully for the surviving members of the 461st and their families some closure/insight might be provided them and encouragement given to how well a job they did and why they had to do it - at least for that mission in particular. It's something to feel proud and honored to have had a part in that.

Also, the video shows some of the survivors whose lives were spared; i.e., faces were put to the 120,000. It hit me to realize these are real people - not just numbers on paper.

Kudos to the 461st. Just another reason why they are heroes....

Sincerely,

Eric Knitter

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Here's the video mentioned above. It's rather lengthy (53 minutes), but well worth watching all the way through.

[Auschwitz Secret of the Dead](#)

The video above... specifically the section between minutes 45:55 and 48:30 specifies the aerial bombing.

Background of video:

Rudolph Vrba / Fred Wetzler were concentration camp escapees who routed to Allied intelligence information on the existence of the camps/crematory ovens. On April 25-27, 1944 reports was made of their experiences and routed to British intelligence in June 1944. June 15th BBC broadcast detailed the report via radio and on June 20th New York Times extracts published it in the US. On June 26th, the American government threatened reprisals against the Hungarian government officials and held them responsible.

On July 2nd the US Fifteenth Army Air Force, including the 461st, bombed the railroad marshalling station in Budapest, Hungary. By July 7th, Hungarian President Admiral 'Horthy' Horton stopped all shipment of Jews to concentration camps, thus giving the Swedish, Swiss, Spanish and other embassies time to save 120,000 Jewish people from going to the concentration camps. For whatever the reason, Hungarian Jews were given immediate death sentences upon reaching the camps. No doubt the 120,000 would have met a similar fate.

No doubt the 461st is credited with influencing governmental change by backing up with firepower the will of the American/Allied governments, resulting in the saving of 120,000 people. This is the largest single incident saving of Jews during WW II other than the capture and shutting down of the camps. Amazing how 2 concentration camp escapees were the source of the information and how it got routed up to the right channels. To what extent their report played a direct part in this target being selected may be debatable versus being 'coincidence' that the railroad hub was on the list of targets; however, a slue of 500 lb. bombs being dropped by gobs of B-24s is not debatable - it's a reality that had to be reckoned with by the Hungarians. In this instance, that had very persuasive influence on the Hungarian government decision to stop the concentration camp deportation.

Also, as shown below, the results of the 461st no doubt contributed to a fully documentable instance of 'making Hitler's day'. No doubt many missions did the same. But since the killing of the Jews was Hitler's sick pet 'project', it is easy to envision how upset he would be at anything coming in its way. To think the 461st had their part in something that was so documentable that it made Hitler mad - it's rather amazing to think about it.

[Wikipedia article on Vrba/Wetzler](#)