

BOMB RUN

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A True World War II Experience By Henry McCann
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BERNIE PRESHO, PILOT
765TH SQ.

"Two minutes to our I.P. .Bernie" the navigator's voice cracked over the intercom;"the 484th are already on the run,"It was two minutes before we were to turn on the initial point, take the heading given by S-2 and drive for a touchdown.

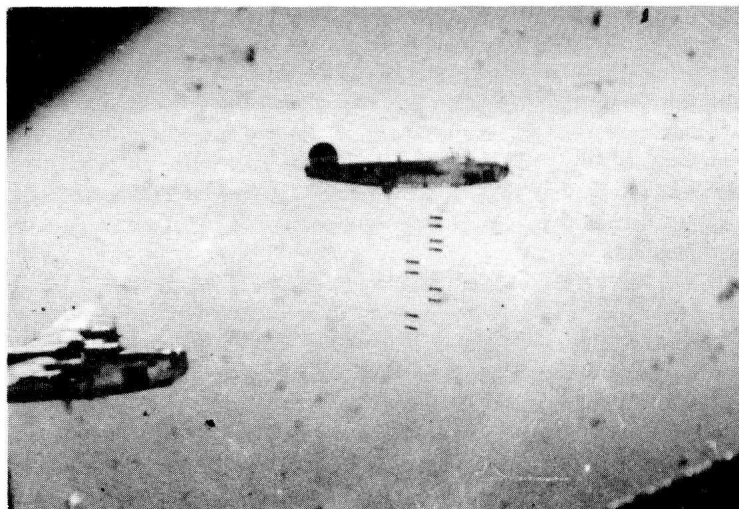
I recalled the words of the briefing S-2 officer:"Your target for today is the Winterhaven oil refinery in the southwest section of the city of Vienna." He was a vigorous slight man with grey crew cut hair. He might have been telling plans for a field day to a group of college students. "There will be a possibility of some four hundred enemy fighters in the target area..." We looked for those fighters then. What a warmth we felt toward our fighter pilots who weaved above us like slivers in the sky!

Off to our right stood our target, the city of Vienna. Other ships were already dropping their bombs on specified targets within the city. Though some forty miles away, the target was discernible by the halo of black balls of smoke-flak.

We were the third group in a three group wing. We felt the roll of our ponderous B-24 and saw the sharper bank of the flight leader as we swung over the designated point and headed down the Bomb Run. This was pattern bombing. Only one bombardier exercises the skill that all are taught. The lead bombardier sights the target, controls his ship and with a contact of indicia in his bombsight releases his missiles. With the first glance of the lead ship's falling bombs every bombardier in the group snaps a switch and sends five thousand pounds of screaming destruction toward the Reichland.

There was a stream of B-24's creeping toward the black blotches in the sky. What a sense of power they inspire! Great birds of war, a tribute to the genius of mankind. These are champions of war. Why should such a tremendous achievement as mastery of the air be turned to unprecedented havoc and ruin? However, these birds of war, manned by youths with forty thousand dollar educations, do not always sow destruction. Human error is always the unpredictable factor.

Would we fail this day too? The tension had mounted incessantly.



We had now begun to close that last thirty miles between us and the target. Bomb runs are not always thirty seconds long. This one would take about twelve minutes. It would take twelve terrifying minutes of the most excruciating mental torture imaginable. Yet it was thrilling beyond comparison.

I stood in the nose of our B-24, burdened with heavy clothing, oxygen mask, head set and mike and a twenty pound flak suit, watching these puffs come nearer and nearer. I had only to flick my switch at the proper second and my duty would be done. Suddenly I felt cold, chilled to the bone. I had been fairly comfortable despite the minus forty six degree temperature reading. I was glad that I did not have to synchronize with the sight this time, and yet to have the responsibility is to feel a major part of this gigantic, complicated weapon, the Air Force.

As the belly of the lead ship yawned slowly open like the jaws of a great beast, I too opened our bomb doors. All there was to do then was to wait and wait. Little was said on the ship's intercom;. "There's something out to the left, three of them," drawled Harris in the waist. "They're seventeens. I saw them" snapped Louis in the nose turret. Then there was silence. Flak makes no noise until it is very close. When you hear it it's too close.

The first group was dropping its bombs. There was a white flash and like a child's toy a B-24 plunged earthward in a flaming spiral. No chutes appeared. Then two more planes, streaming smoke from the engines, were dropping rapidly. Then we were in it.