

Plan Able

Plan Able arrived from Wing headquarters about midnight. The target was the Bucharest Chitilia Marshalling yards. The staff looked it over and began planning the mission. The lead crew which could picture the entire trip from memory were to have another chance, the fourth group effort to put the marshalling yards on the dead list.

Lt Elmore had the late weather report in hand. His prediction for the trip was bad enough to cancel the mission. But it looked like the big planners meant business concluding that the 15th would have to take weather losses if there was still a chance of destroying the vital target.

Not much time lapsed between planning and crew awakening hour. It was wet and dark when the trucks rolled out of the squadron area filled with crews bound for the briefing shack. The mission was still on as the long black ribbon indicating the mission route still stretched across Albania, Yugoslavia thru Rumania almost to the Russian front lines. Two hours remained before take off and most of the crews hoped that the bad weather would cause the mission to be cancelled.

However, two hours later, we took off. The low clouds covering the base prevented a normal group assembly. The crews were improving quickly with each mission so the assembly above the stratus overcast was effected on schedule. But looking out trouble could be seen out toward the Adriatic Sea as we started for the Wing rendezvous area. The high cloud build up at cruise altitude and the low cirrus below predicted a rough journey.

The lead crew had been to Bucharest twice before under extremely poor weather conditions so this mission did not pose any great problem.

Lt Veiluva, the Lead Pilot and Capt. Goree the Group Commander for the mission traded off on the controls at frequent intervals because instrument flying was more tiring in this haze which eliminated the horizon and a poor view of the surface. There was one mile visibility that allowed the Wing men to hold position. Lt De Witt did a superb job of navigating us through the flak areas enroute. The overcast below was still solid.

As we reached the Danube, the undercast began to climb to 20,000 feet. The lead group of the Wing was too low to make it, so they turned the lead over to us and left for an alternate target and home base. About the same time the radio was jammed by other groups advising they were abandoning the mission too. Someone in our group called up and asked if we were going to give it up. When they received our negative reply, he answered, "I don't go for this hero ____."

We went on feeling very lonely. Like the break of a cloudless day, the weather cleared about the middle of Rumania. We were to have a clear shot at the target, the reward for hanging on a little bit longer.

A few fighters began to appear but they weren't aggressive. After their first pass we assured them that we could defend our formation as we didn't have the aid of friendly fighter cover. The target was coming into range and we still had 30 miles to

go.

Rotten luck hit the lead ship. The target was almost discernible, 12 minutes to and the nose section oxygen supply failed. Sgt Puss rushed two large walk around bottles up through the bomb bays to the nose section. This gave new life for Lt. Iconis and Lt. De Witt. It was the zero hour on the bomb run, when Lt Iconis discovered that the pilot's direction indicator wasn't working. He gave Lt. Veiluva, who was flying the ship at the time several oaths over the intercom that sounded like, "Left, God Damnit, Left." What looked like dark clouds ahead turned out to be barrage flak.

History of a Successful Mission

April 7, 1944 by

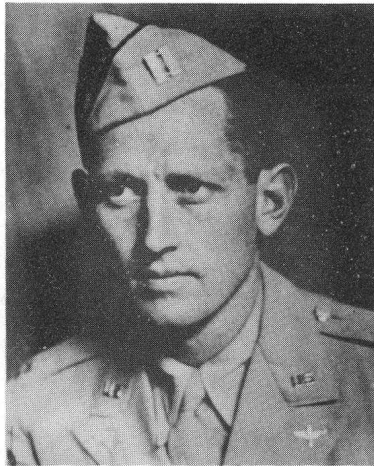
Ed Goree

764 Squadron

"Bombs Away"

The sweetest words ever spoken, "Bombs Away" followed the last course correction from little Ike. Then we started a gentle roll or the maneuver called, "Let's get the Hell out of here."

The flak was near now and the familiar sound of hail was in our ears as the spent shrapnel bounced off the skin of our plane, but it seemed we were successfully evading the worst part by our horseshoe turn. (Or was it luck?)



Sgt. Kurawe called in from the tail to advise us to slow down for cripples. Sgt Zimmerman began reporting that the bombs were knocking hell out of the yards. He could see our first pattern, then the second which filled in all spare openings. With these words of encouragement, the dark trip home seemed unimportant for a minute. There was a solid feeling that comes from being under attack with the target well hit and the cripples all successfully covered.

As we approached the Danube, thunderheads began to take shape once again. This time the problem was in reverse. The group had to get down through the weather and back to the base. McQuillan dropped behind the second section. I could see Koska take B flight out wide as soon as he was called. The flight loosened up and about one hour later we were over the Adriatic in the clear. Everyone was accounted for and it looked as though the work was done for the day.

When we checked the ditching channel on the radio the Mayday calls came in all too clearly, and the long count for the radio fix and then another Mayday call. We contacted Big Fence and they gave us a heading from our position in the middle of the Adriatic to a point due south and 30 minutes away. We told them we could stretch our fuel and take up the search, we turned 180 degrees and started for the indicated spot. We had a hunch it could be no more than an oil slick on the smooth rolling sea. Within one minute of our ETA we spotted something. As we circled low we could make out two rafts with ten men. That was the most successful hunt we had ever been on. A spitfire came out to relieve us and mark the location before heading back to lead the rescue launch. One hour after first spotting the rafts, the launch pulled along side and took the men aboard.

With our fuel low, we headed straight for the field to end a most successful day for all of us.

