

possible and not the escort. Some E/A were reported firing rockets. There is a conflict of reports of E/A attacking the 484th BG, one talks of Me 190s another report shows a force of 25 FW-190s. While the attacks of 17 December probably did not reach that goal because of the weather, and other factors, one being that at best the 8th and 15th Airforces could only achieve 35% bombing accuracy on the best of days. This means only 35% of bombs were dropped in the target area.

The determined defense of the German forces indicated the importance the enemy placed on aviation fuel production as well. Often inexperienced pilots, some from training cadres, were thrown into the defense. With the whole 15th AF, and RAF forces in action, the enemy had to thin his fighter forces between most of the Allied forces, resulting in mostly poor defenses. Allied losses were certainly within acceptable parameters with perhaps the exception of the 461st BG which reported 9 aircraft missing in action one of which ditched, as they were attacked by determined and experienced pilots. But conversely the 461st reported claims of 20 E/A destroyed, two probables, and one damaged. It is known that claims on both sides of the line were often exaggerated depending on how many pairs of eyes witnessed the event, conversely photo coverage of Allied bombing raids was much easier to verify.

A mission's success depended on the weather and meteorological accuracy. Luckily for the Allies, weather moves from left to right so that the weather was first observed by the Allied forces. The adverse weather of the 17 December 1944 attacks precluded the use of PFF bombing. At this time in the development of radar bombing, techniques did not correct for drift over the target when flying over an undercast.

It was known before the 17 December attacks that Luftwaffe pilot training was drastically reduced because of the already shortage of aviation fuels. This would explain the use of experienced and inexperienced fighter pilots coordinated attacks. It is ironic that continued bombing of aircraft factories did not prevent the enemy from having sufficient fighter aircraft at its disposal to defend the country, but the reduction of aviation fuel had a huge effect on the training of new pilots reducing the Luftwaffe's efficiency during the last year of the war.

The Allies placed great importance on finding ways to destroy jet fighter aircraft in the air and on the ground as the jet was considered to be the primary weapon the Luftwaffe could employ to make daytime strategic bombing too costly in the loss of aircraft and crews. In some quarters it is said that if Hitler had known of Whittle's (4) Jet engine developments in Britain at the start of the war, he may have hesitated in attacking Poland so quickly. Luckily the Germans did not realize the potential of the Me 262 and was employed too late to have an effect on the end of the war.

The reason the 484th Bomb Group's losses were so light as compared to the 461st, was given by Sgt. Herb Weinstein of A-2 Intelligence. He spoke excellent German and was able to decode enemy fighter radio transmissions. He was on board Col. Keese's B-24. In his own words he describes what happened.

Quote: " December 17th 1944 dawned early for the men of the 484th Bomb Group. The runners came and woke us at 4:30 in the morning. Why so damn early, usually they didn't come until 5:30 AM. something special must be coming up. I got up shaved, dressed and went to the mess hall for breakfast. Everyone was speculating, where do you think we are going today. It must be a long mission, because they woke us so early. Breakfast was finished

quickly and we sauntered over to the briefing room.

The Colonel was already there, in flying cloth, which meant he was going to lead the mission. The briefing board was still covered and the question was on everyone's mind. Where are we going today?

Finally Major Sawyer, the Intelligence officer, opened the briefing and uncovered the map. Odertal oil refinery is the target, it is located in lower Silesia, past Brno in Czechoslovakia. A long way to go. No wonder they woke us this early this morning.

O.K. men, Major Sawyer began his briefing, today you are going to attack and bomb the last major oil refineries in Hitler's Germany at Odertal, Silesia. This is a major effort by the Wing. The 484th will lead the Wing, Colonel Keese will fly the command ship. The 484th will be followed by the 451st and the 461st. There will be a 10 minute interval between Groups.

Then the usual information as to route, bomb load, take off information, assembly points, weather in route, flak positions, and possible fighter interception was presented.

Take off is at 7:30 AM and expect to land after 4:30 PM. This mission will be a long one, we will need every drop of gas to get back safely.

I will fly in the lead plane with Colonel Keese, and my job is listening to the German radio traffic and with the overheard information determine how many German fighters will try to intercept us and where. I plot our flight plan and routing on my maps, today I better be wide awake.

We ride to our plane and get ready to take off. Everyone goes through their preflight checks, I test my special radio equipment. Promptly at 7:30 the take off flare sends us on our way.

We circle the field until all planes are in formation and we set toward our target. Our flight takes us over the Adriatic sea where gunners test fire their machine guns. So far everything is routine,

My radio is silent, no R/T yet. The German command headquarters for fighter command and radar interception of enemy bomber formations for the southern part of Germany, Austria, Italy, and Hungary are controlled in Munich, Vienna, Udine, and Budapest respectively.

As we get into the range of the radar at Udine my radio begins to squawk. I listen but the R/T even though it mentions our group is of no major concern, we are still too far away.

We veer toward Vienna and the R/T is becoming serious, our flight routing is being continually followed and updated as we change course. As we enter the airspace into Czechoslovakia, Vienna is starting to contact fighter squadrons. Schmetterling Anton, Schwalbe Anton, Falke Anton, Adler Anton, Nachtingall Anton and a bunch of others, so many squadrons that add up to more than 200 planes. Hell, I didn't think that the Germans had that many planes left. From the position reports and the flight heading I calculate that they will intercept us in 25 to 30 minutes, 5 miles approximately, before we hit the I.P.

I call the colonel on the intercom and tell him what I heard and my conclusions and suggest that he contact our fighter escort to meet us as soon as possible. I am excited, in prior missions R/T was easily followed, once in a while were fighter vectored into bombing formations. It had not happened to me. This was my first large scale fighter intercept.

A message from the flight deck informed me that our fighter escort had been contacted. I am glued to my radio, listening to changes being radioed to the German fighters. I hear the command