

*This letter was received from a friend of the Association*

The morning was like any other morning., yet, it was different! A splash of cold water in the face to moisten the parched lips still recovering from the salty mackerel from the night before.

A quick walk in the cool, yet invigorating, moist air to the chow hall. Shoulders back now, breath as deep as you can. We'll be on oxygen again, today. There was the darkened server's isle dishing up the usual dry scrambled eggs and sausage and, in the shadows, pieces of toast so dry that their edges were curled up. Eat quickly now, flush it down with some hot, black coffee before the taste buds can offer their plea of rejection!

Time is relentlessly pushing the hands of the clock 'round. Must get to opt's for today's form. Again, a quick hike though the graying dawn as the moist air gives way to the stirring of a slight breeze. The first rays of the sun start to push the heavens aside as they try to break through. It's going to be a short hop today, otherwise we would still be groping our way in the dark. A crewman is lounging near the door hoping for an early revelation of where we are going so that the men can load the proper amount of ammo for the flight. At opt's they tell us it's 320 miles in and 270 out at 18000 ft. Weather over target should be opening up by the time we get there.

The crew have already pulled the props through their mandatory three turns. Quickly now- Supercharger regulator controls off, mixture controls off, Propellers- fully up, Inter cooler- cold, Gills open and locked, Air Cleaner closed. The click of switches signals action is about to begin!

No. 1 starter begins turning into a growing whine as it becomes energized. A reverse flip of the switch to "mesh" alters the whine of the starter armature as gears engage the flywheel. The crankshaft slowly starts to rotate the propeller, the tips of which swing through their graceful arc silently, at first. There is a cough as the fuel charge in the first cylinder of 9 fires, as the ignition is turned on, followed by irregular explosions as fuel charges, being injected by the primer pump, continue to find their way past the intake valves, into the cylinders. The groveling staccato of exhausted gases and unburned fuel in the form of black smoke exit the exhaust manifold only to be caught up by the turbulent backwash of the propeller blades as they spin effortlessly faster and faster keeping cadence with the faltering firing of the enriched mixture.

Finally, with a surge of triumph, all mighty cylinders fire in their designed rhythm as the throttle meters fuel through the carburetor to the appropriate opened valves. The propeller responds to the conversion of power, the blades becoming a blur in the vortex they create, clawing at the air as they rotate faster and faster.

The dance of the propeller is repeated with the other engines as they, in turn, come alive, roaring, and eventually singing in unison with each other.

Flight Leader stirs slightly, moving forward slowly at first, then faster and faster, wheels turning until their discs become a blur, reflecting the morning light. Suddenly, they no longer share the rotating black tire with the concrete strip but now part the air around them as the giant slowly retracts them, braking them to sudden stillness as they are withdrawn into their wheelwells.

It is now our turn to share the dangerous foreign skies with our leader.

Please, Lord, let us return to this miserable life!

M. J. (Jake) Pierce

Roszbach, Germany

Dear Mr Markel

I obtained your name from the Air Force Museum at Dayton, Ohio. I am a Czech staying in Germany, a history graduate doing research on the air war over Czechoslovakia during WWII, now investigating the Mission of 17 December 1944 to Blechhammer and the Odertal oil refineries.

The mission was comprised of 422 B-24 and B-17 Heavy bombers, escorted by 207 P-51s, and 93 P-38s. The B-24s were attacked by 80 German FW-190s and Me109s over Olomouc territory with the loss of 19 Liberators, including 42-52025 "Arsenic and Old Lace" 765TH squadron flown by Gerald R Smith. Smith's plane crashed near the city of Olomouc with 5 airmen KIA.

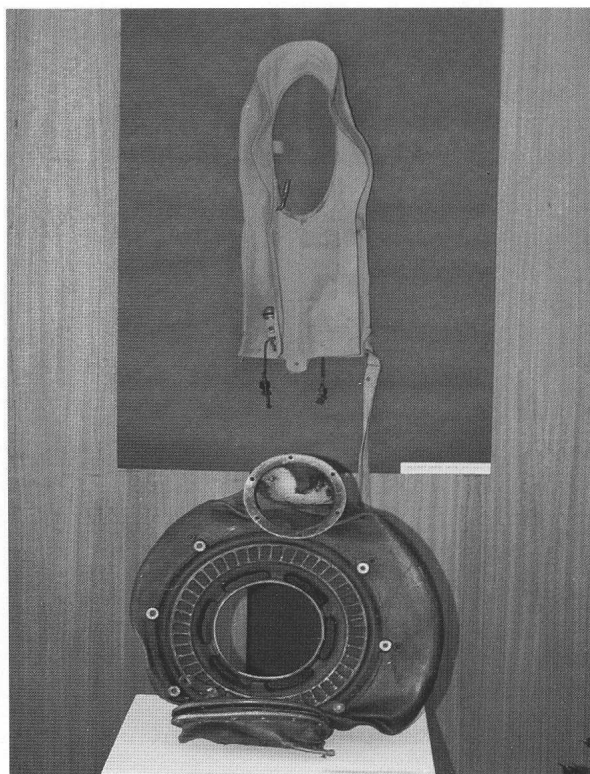
I would like to know the whereabouts of the pilot Gerald R Smith and Co/pilot Francisco L Vrooman. I hope you can help me.

Best of Luck

Michael Sisovsky

ED Note: I replied to Michael's request giving him what information I had at the time. Elsewhere in this issue is information from John Bybee who incidentally is following this same mission. He had written me back in 1991 with information he gathered from Missing Air Crew Records of the 461st Bomb Group. I am publishing his report in this issue because it follows up the Odertal Mission story of the 484th BG published in TF-29.

In a subsequent letter Michael asked for addresses of two crew members of Himmler's crew 824 Squadron that was shot down 17 December, 1944. He enclosed the photo shown accompanying this note.



*A life vest and supercharger taken from a shot down US bomber. The Slavacin Exhibition Sept., 1994*