

**John R Kane, Led the First Bombing of Ploesti Oil Refinery
August 1, 1943 World, War 99, is dead at 89.**

Col. John R. Kane, who won the Medal of Honor for his role in the bombing of a refinery in Romania that supplied oil for Nazi operations in eastern Europe in World War II, died on May 29, 1996, at the Veterans Administration Nursing Home in Coatesville, PA. He was 89.

Colonel Kane, who was known to his men as Killer Kane, led what was considered one of the most dangerous raids of the war against the Ploesti oil fields on Aug. 1, 1943.

Four miles from the refinery, innocent-looking farmhouses erupted in anti-aircraft fire. The gunners aboard Colonel Kane's lumbering B24 Liberator fired back, but the plane, Hail Columbia, lost an engine and took more than 20 hits.

"It was a rough show," he said later. "Above us and around us were Junkers 88's and Messerschmitt 110's. Our guns wouldn't work. We had shot them all out going into the target, raising hell with the ack-ack batteries and machine-gun nests."

But there was an unexpected problem: Flames from the burning refinery singed the plane, dancing through the bomb bay's open doors. Before he could climb out of range, enemy gunfire hit an engine and the underside of the right wing, as well as a propeller on another engine and an aileron.

Still, Colonel Kane managed to pull up and struggle back to a base in Cyprus. "We threw out everything we could tear loose from the ship," he said. "We ditched one empty bomb bay tank, our heavy flying clothes, all our guns that were shot up, frequency-meter tools, a ladder, everything except food, water and the ammunition we would need to fire what guns we could still work."

The plane rose to 7,000 feet, and from there, he said, it was "just a case of flying home."

Except for the landing. Running low on fuel, he descended to a remote island landing strip without realizing that there was a five-foot-high embankment beside the runway. The plane hit the hump. One wheel was knocked out, and the propeller on one engine was knocked off. "We bounced about 50 feet into the air," he said, "and came straight down and managed to

level off and hit the ground with a bang." The copilot ripped off his parachute harness and bounded for the escape hatch, only to turn and say, "Oh, sorry, after you, Colonel."

Colonel Kane pushed him through the hatch and followed. They slid down the plane's nose and kissed the ground.

Colonel Kane was born in Eagle Springs, Tex., on Jan. 5, 1907, and studied at Baylor University and at Washington University, in St. Louis. He wanted to be a doctor but could not tolerate the chloroform used in the anatomy laboratory. He tried to join the Marines as an aviator in 1931 but a recruiter said: "Listen Buddy, you don't want to learn to fly. It ain't no different from driving a truck".

He joined the Army instead and was sent to flying school at what was then Brooks Field in San Antonio. He won a Distinguished Flying Cross for a raid on Naples, Italy in December 1942 that sank a cruiser and a battleship. His plane was blown off course, and it took him 15 hours to return to his base.

Earlier that year, his bomber group had carried out an attack on the Nazis at Matruh, Egypt. Colonel Kane is survived by a son John Franklin Kane, of Havertown, PA.



Col. John R Killer Kane ,center prior to the flight with some of his crew members posing in front of his aircraft, "Hail Columbia". He was later to crash land on Cyprus.

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Books on the Ploesti Mission

Members interested in reading more about the August 1, 1943 Ploesti mission may want to refer to 1) Low Level Mission by Leon Wolff, a soft cover paperback long out of print, 2) Ploesti by James Dugan and Carroll Stewart, out of print but available in some public libraries, 3) Target Ploesti, by Leroy Newby, a narrative of later Ploesti missions flown by the 460th Bomb Group, 4) The Desert Rats, by Michael Hill, The 98th Bomb Group's participation in the August 1943 Ploesti Raid. The above books are in the Association's library, normally not circulated, but are available for loan to members on special request.

"One of the few times I cried in my adult life was after that mission. I cried because of all the fine men we had lost that day and wondered if their sacrifice had been worth it. Freedom always has a price, and we paid dearly at Ploesti."

**John R Kane
Boonville, AR**

Quoted in his letter of introduction, The Desert Rats