
The one February, 1945 Attack on Moosbierbaum

Flight crews of the 484th feared this target because of the heavy defenses, but it was an important target nevertheless because it was one of the last refineries still able to operate during the 15th's war on liquid fuels in 1944 and 1945. But first some background:

On 16 September a letter from Albert Speer to Martin Borman was intercepted. It is paraphrased directly following.

The thought that reconstruction of synthetic oil and refineries were purposeless is spreading among workers since the enemy finds a suitable moment soon after reconstruction, to destroy these installations once again. It is important to know that much production between the enemies attacks has been obtained. This fuel has moreover made an important contribution to our fuel reserves. It must be impressed on workers to start reconstruction immediately after cessions of air attacks.

I ask you to do everything in your field to strengthen the determination of those engaged in the reconstruction and to assist their efforts for the quickest possible resumption of work.

In fact we are in the process of setting up underground installations for aviation fuel, and we are simultaneously developing very small crude oil processing plants so to safeguard this production from air attack.

Because of the necessity of the enemy bombers to see the oil facilities bomber efficiency drops during periods of adverse weather and fog. We too use less fuel during periods of bad weather.

We do not give up hope that we will eventually be successful in regaining mastery of the air. It has been shown that a relatively small number of fighter planes can destroy a large number of bombers. A few quiet weeks will show a considerable increase in our fighter strength.

In spite of the really considerable damage done, in a period of five to six weeks we can restore production to two-thirds of the level attained by the synthetic plants and refineries before the attacks. This production would suffice to cover the fuel requirements of our entire air force.

It is therefore incorrect to regard the reconstruction of these plants as a fruitless task. From a long term point of view, the successful prosecution of the war depends on the reconstruction endeavor. (End of letter)

It is apparent from the letter that a shortage of fuel reduced the efficiency of the German war machine. Tiger tanks were found abandoned with empty fuel tanks otherwise undamaged. Enemy prisoners reported increasing use of horses as prime movers of artillery pieces as the original tractors were out of fuel. It was necessary to use producer gas as against liquid fuel for transport vehicles and the increasing use of horse drawn power was used to transport a whole infantry division.

It was estimated that the Germans used all the fuel they produced without being able to stockpile very much in reserves. By March of 1944 monthly production of 500,000 tons of fuel was estimated and more than 420,000 tons were consumed. This was

the situation when the 15th AF resumed its attacks on Ploesti production. More rigid rationing took effect almost immediately. The 44th German Infantry Division in Italy ceased all journeys not absolutely necessary. Gasoline driven vehicles had to be evacuated or towed away by diesel driven transport on level stretches. The average use of motor fuel had to be reduced to 60% of the previous rate, passenger cars were not to be used, convoy commanders ride trucks or horses and bicycles to visit conferences.

On nine September the Reich Commissar of mineral oils announced the confiscation of all fuels designated for farm tractors and threshing machines with a few exceptions. Training Parachute troops stopped all jumping practice in September. Training flights at Graz were suspended for two months including the Hungarian Air Force. Gasoline allowances for all pilot training flights was reduced to 50% in August. Even the use of civilian vehicles converted to wood gas was prohibited. With the reduction of fuels used by the military, and none allocated to civilian use, the confiscation of fuel found in fighter plane drop tanks became a mad scramble of motorists and motorcycle drivers. The Luftwaffe had to curtail all bombing missions.

Why Moosbierbaum was a target

As early as January 1944 ground reports began coming in which indicated that Moosbierbaum was not just another chemical plant. It stated that some sort of fuel was being produced. This called for camera evidence by photo reconnaissance. Photos were reviewed and conclusions were developed.

A dispersed storage area suitable for the storage of explosives was detected. The Old Works with distillation plants, oil storage tanks, gas holders sulfuric and nitric acid plants, power and boiler houses with plenty of minor installations and rail facilities. The New Works at that time was still under construction. It was felt that it would be possible to make a special spirit here. Ground reports continued to tell of shipments of 51 octane white spirits from Ploesti to this plant, and it was thought that fuel of jet propulsion might be the end product. The unfamiliar equipment stumped the experts.

In May an Air Ministry information sheet revealed that almost all buildings in the Old Works connected with explosives manufacture had been removed while the manufacture of acids was continuing and three distillation units and a possible cracking plant had been installed. The New Works seemed to be taking shape as a magnesium, hydrogen peroxide and light metal plant. It was felt that by 16 June the Moosbierbaum oil refinery was worth considering for an attack with an estimated production of 10,000 tons per month with additional possibility that some sort of hydrogenation was being carried out.

On 26 June 15th Air Force A-2 & A-3 officers found that Moosbierbaum was producing gasoline. An attack was made with considerable destruction and oil fires. During July and part of August photo recon reported repair construction and much movement of trucks and rail cars, but no operational activity until late August. The Old and New Works were hit then.