
17 December 1944

By Peter Kassak

The Fifteenth Air Force attacked on 17/12/1944 with 191 "Fortresses" from 5th Bomb Wing's B-17s, the Oil refinery at Blechhammer-North. Blechhammer-South was attacked by 105 B-24 "Liberators" from 55th Bomb Wing. 231 B-24 "Liberators" from 49th and 304 Bomb wings attacked Odertal for a total force of 527 four engined bombers. Fighter cover was provided by 93 P-38 "Lightnings" from 305 Fighter Wing and 207 P-51 "Mustangs" from the 306 Fighter Wing.

Weather over the Reich area that day was poor, that was one thing that played best for the 15th Air Force. But 15th Air Force HQ didn't know that defense of Reich area was held by JG 300 and JG 301. Other units were in Ardennes as support forces for ground offensive, which were also known as "Schlechtwettergeschwadern," bad weather units.

The Luftwaffe pilots had special training from time to time, when they flew at night using radar. So when radio locators "Freya" detected a large force of bombers headed for Germany, the fighters were alerted. At 10:45 they took off from Juteborg airfield, Stab and III. Gruppe, and from Borkheide airfield.

The Gruppe from Lobnitz started at 11:00. Sturmgruppe from Reinzdorf, and Gruppe JG 300 started up too. Stab and II/Gruppe flew FW-190s A-7 and A-8, the other three units were escorted by Me-109 G-10s and G-14s. About 100 aircraft took off. The German fighters were covered by clouds as they approach the bombers. American fighters were delayed, so the Germans attacked first. The combat began at 11:50 over the Czech in area of Olomouc and Poerov.

The first victims were "Liberators" from the 49 Bomb Wing. The German pilots of the Sturmgruppe dropped their additional fuel tanks, and opened fire. These pilots claimed between the times of 11:53 and 12:03 22 "Liberators". Some of them scored twice. Those were, FW. Zwesken and Maj. Lindenberger. For Maj. Lindenberger, it was a great victory, because as a veteran from WWI he had shot down twelve in the first world conflict.

On this day he claimed two US bombers but ended WWII with just 4 victories. Pilots of III / JG 300 were also successful. Between 11:53 AM and 12:20 PM they claimed ten bombers. Hptm. Peter Jenne shot down two of them.

Lt. Kraft, pilot of a Messerschmitt from III / JG 300 shot down "Liberator" B-24J 42-51835 "red 38", from 825th squadron, 484th BG. But Kraft's Messerschmitt was also hit and had to leave his plane by parachute. After landing German citizens took him on their shoulders and took him to village as a hero.

Utfz. Maier from IV / JG 300 claimed one B-17 in area East of the village Kozli. That was sole success for IV / Gruppe in the battle with bombers. Together JG 300 pilots claimed 33 bombers.

But American losses were only 25 machines.

This slaughter was stopped by American fighters, that came to help their "Big friends". American fighters claimed 23-3-6 shot down, but German losses were even higher. JG 300 lost 43 aircraft 36 of them by fighters and 7 by technical failures. Stab lost one, I / JG 300 also one, II / JG 300 and IV / JG 300 lost 14

machines and III / JG 300 lost 13 fighter planes.

But the American fighters had losses too. Three Focke Wulfs chased and shot down P-38J 42-68073 (black 20) "Coon Dog III" of 2/Lt. David R. Miles. The right engine caught fire, and the pilot bailed out. It was over the village of Vinary, CZ. Most probably it was pilot of II / JG 300, Fw. Dohms, who shot him down. Second lost "Lightning" over Czech was P-38L 44-24666 "Melancholy Babe". Its pilot 2/Lt Ernest V. Rountree probably fell victim to Lt. Pipke from IV / JG 300, who claimed a P-38 shot down in area of Nisa. Together fighter cover lost in this battle 4 P-38s and 2 Mustangs. One P-51 claimed was by Lt. Kohler and another by Obgefr. Golja, but "their" "Mustangs" didn't crash in area of Czech. Other American losses were caused by Flak. JG 301 joined the action against the "viernots". "Alarmstart" for their Gruppen came at 10:55. All planes took course toward southwest heading to the area of Hannover. In this area they met a small box of "Liberators" and their fighter cover made of P47s. I / Gruppe attacked the fighters, III / Gruppe, which flew lower than the other two, attacked the bombers.

Fw 190 pilot Willi Reschke III / Gruppe, 9th staffel, claimed one B-24 and one P-51 in area of Gottingen, and Fw 190 pilot Ofw. Hans Todt III / Gruppe, 8th staffel shot down one P-47 in that same area. Also Jffz. Helmut Brenner from 6th staffel, I / Gruppe shot down one B-24 in area between Hannover and Kassel. Losses on German side were Lt. Walter Tauscher from the 1st staffel, was wounded in combat. He flew Fw 190 A/8 "yellow 10" work number #682001.

Also UMz. Walter Dobeles from 8th staffel was lost. But the cause was unknown., probably due to hits in combat. He crashed in area of Sachau. Opponents of JG 30 are unknown. 15th Air Force probably didn't fly so far, but it is possible, and cover of P-47s could have come from the 9th Air Force which made over 1000 sorties that day.

Editors Note:

The mission of 17, December, 1944 to Odertal Oil Refinery was written up in Torretta Flyer #29 Winter Spring 1996 issue, pages 19-27, and; Torretta Flyer No #30 Fall Winter 1996 issue 10-15 by John Bybee. Thanks to John Bybee's latest letter we now know who shot them down, from what Luftwaffe unit, and where they were based. The following list is quite remarkable in that the fighter attacks only lasted about 22 minutes in the shooting down of 31 aircraft, two of which were from the 484th Bomb Group, and nine from the 461st Bomb Group. Considering the assignment of fighter cover from various 15th Air Force units, the Luftwaffe fighters did accomplish a remarkable record. The Author of this page and the following page is Peter Kassak, a twenty year old biomedical/physics major in Bratislava.

continued on next page