

The Fateful Mission to Blechhammer

The final flight of "S for Sugar"

Lt. Robert A. Scott, USAAF



Ltc Robert A. Scott
2/20/1920 - 9/21/1996
SN 0689377, SSN 549-24-3688

Forward

The following narrative was transcribed from the personal diary of Lt. Robert A. Scott, pilot of the B-24 "S for Sugar" that crashed on the return leg of a mission to Blechhammer on July 7, 1944. Lt. Scott deployed to Italy with the 460th Bomb Group, Fifteenth Air Force in January of 1944, and arrived at the Groups base in Spinazzola, Italy on February 11, 1944. This was his 42nd and final mission with the 460th.

The following crew members were on this aircraft:

Pilot:	2 nd Lt. Robert A. Scott
Co-Pilot	2 nd Lt. Frank E. Mitchell
Navigator	2 nd Lt. Welles V. Adams
Bombardier	2 nd Lt. Emory D. McAtee
Engineer	T/Sgt. Clemens J. Buehner
Asst Eng	S/Sgt. Oren D. Arnold
Radio Opr	T/Sgt. James R. Oliver
Asst RO	Pvt. Lewis F. Lish
Gunner	S/Sgt. Herbert W. Dougherty
Gunner	S/Sgt. Gerald R. Harrington

The narrative was written while Lt. Scott was a Prisoner of War. It ends abruptly on the morning of the day after the crash as he boards a train that takes he and at least four of his crewmembers initially to Zagreb on their way to prison camp.

Co-pilot Lt. Frank Mitchell escaped capture, and with the help of Partisans, returned to his unit in Italy on July 17, 1944 to fly 34 additional missions.

Gerry W. Mitchell

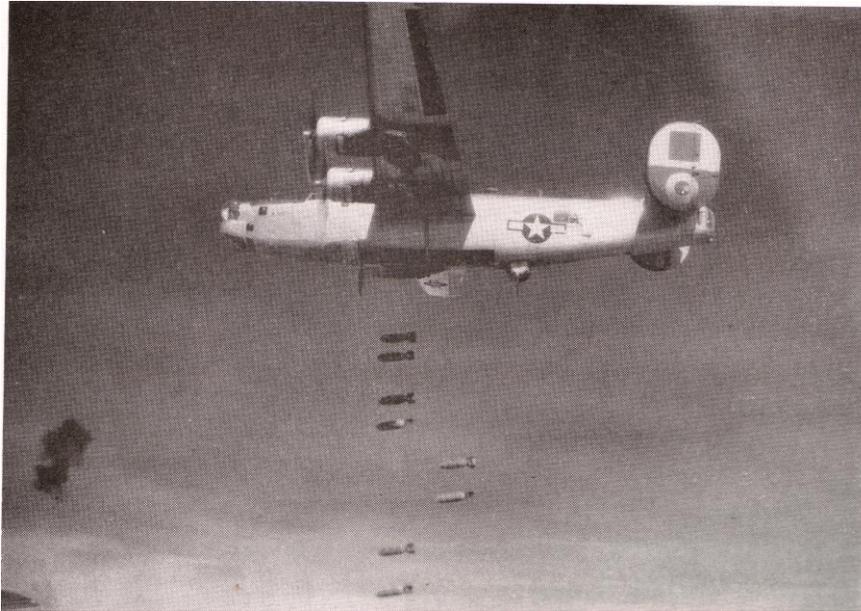
February 12, 2012



Back Row: Scott, Manuel, Burmeister, McAtee
Front Row: Oliver, Beuhner, Arnold, Harrington, Dougherty

Robert Scott Flight Crew

On the July 7th mission, Mitchell and Adams replaced Manuel and Burmeister.



The bombardier in "S for SUGAR" has just released his crew's calling cards on the enemy. The enemy, however, is also saying "Hello" — note the puff of smoke that denotes a flak burst, just below and ahead of the plane.

USAAF Photo from "Pictorial Highlights from the History of the 460th Bomb Group", Capt Edward J. Devney

The Fateful Mission to Blechhammer

Looking back over the months since I left the States, many strange places and events come to mind. But the one closest to mind at this moment was the fateful mission to Blechhammer.

The evening of July 6, 1944, I was up at the club having my weekly can of beer with the boys, when the operations officer, Lt. Fielder, asked me to take our ship "S for Sugar" up for a test hop. It had been just returned to operational status after the addition of a new engine. I said yes and started to find a co-pilot to go with me. Lt. Tully, a replacement co-pilot went with me, along with my assistant engineer Arnold. Taking off late in the evening and spending about an hour in the air brought us back over the field just as darkness was settling in over the field. Having never landed a B-24 after dark, I looked the runway over carefully and called the tower for the runway lights. Making a large traffic pattern, I brought the ship in high and landed smoothly in the first third of the runway. Feeling pleased at the landing and the performance of the plane, I proceeded to the Engineering Office and reported the ship ready for the morrows mission.

Upon my return to the squadron, Lt. Fielder informed me I was to fly the next day with the rest of the crew as Harry would be in Rome for two days. In place of Burmeister and as co-pilot, I was to take a new pilot named Mitchell and his navigator Adams. The rest of the crew intact, we turned in for an early mission.

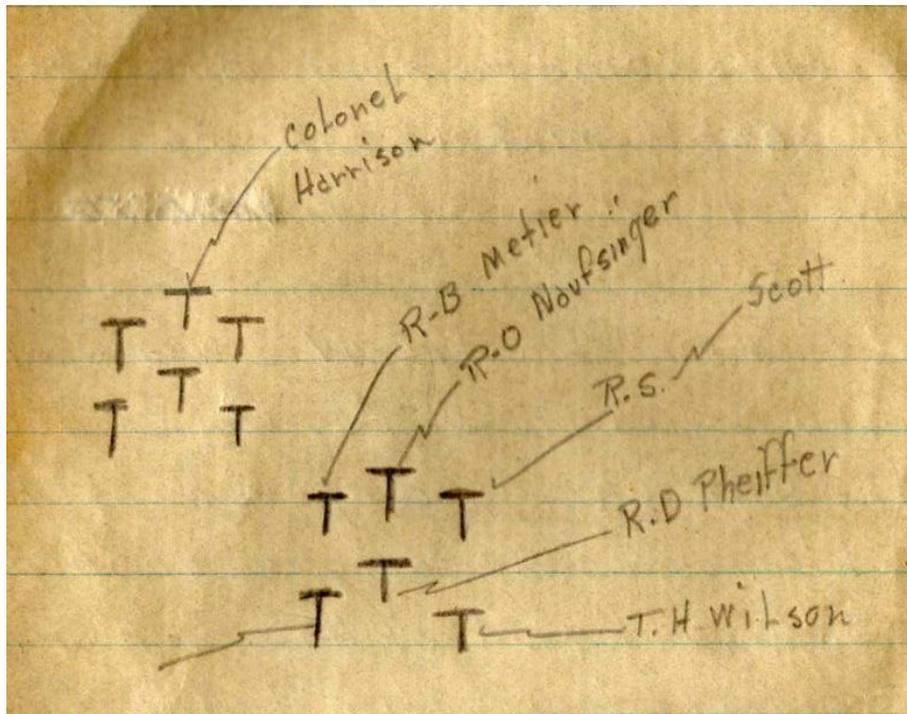
At 2:15, I was awakened and proceeded to dress and hurry up to the mess hall for a quick breakfast before briefing at 0300. At 2:45 I staggered up to the day room with my bag of flying equipment and boarded a truck which took us to Group HQ in time to find a seat by 0300. Silence being called by Major Campbell, the morning prayer was administered by Chaplain Dodel. Briefing started immediately, our target to be Blechhammer. Three hundred flak guns and interception by as many as 350 fighters to be expected. Warnings were given as to saving gas because the mission was to be 9 ½ hours. Fighter escort at a maximum in three separate groups starting at Lake Belaton.

Arriving at the line by truck at 0400, I found S for Sugar preflighted and spoke to the crew chief on repair work just completed. Then I met my co-pilot and navigator for the first time. I gave Adams a complete set of Burmeister's maps covering the mission so that all plotted flak areas would be at hand for use. The usual morning wit had its round, as the boys put on their flying clothes and joked about our chances of getting back in one piece.

I called for stations at 0510 and started the engines after checking the bomb shackles and the tail surfaces. We taxied out at 0515 and took off directly behind Joe Naufsinger at 0520. The takeoff was a struggle due to the heavy load and the sluggish way the ship felt. It must have been my first premonition because I felt the ship was not putting out full power. At any rate, by exceeding maximum power settings, we managed to clear the hill at the end of the runway by a few feet and stagger down the valley till we had flying speed.

We joined the box and took No. 2 position heading for the assembly area. After getting the group assembled, which took about 30 minutes and being pretty soaked from the effort, I turned the wheel over to Mitch. He made several attempts at flying close until once he crossed over the lead plane, so I took the controls again to steady us up. The boys in back were

pleading caution because no doubt we had been very close to a collision, but luckily didn't hit. I cautioned Mitchell on using too much rudder and gave him another try. As we proceeded up the Adriatic, he improved a great deal, although he was flying a loose position.



Depiction of formation from Robert Scott's diary

The ship seemed to perform well enough as we climbed to 10,000 approaching the coast, so I put aside my doubt and told Buehner to start transferring gas from the Tokyo tanks. I warned him and the rest of the crew to be watchful for leaking gas, as we could not spare to overflow any tank. We transferred about 480 gallons to the main tanks without a sign of overflow. We were now at 12,000 feet approaching our rendezvous with our escort, so I warned the crew to be alert and checked the instruments for any sign that would cause trouble as this was the last chance to turn back. Everything being in order except for a vibration in No. 3 engine, I put my oxygen on and prepared for our climb to altitude.

We met our escort as scheduled and started our climb. Everything went well and we held a good position until we reached 18,000. At this point we started using a great deal of power to maintain our position, but Metier in No. 3 seemed to be having trouble also, so we concluded that the Colonel must be using a high power setting. At 19,000 Metier dropped behind and down and we were slowly dropping back, although I was pulling full power. I felt we could stay with the group if we stayed forward but underneath, so I tried leveling off to gain speed.

I had moved forward to my proper position again, but we were at a lower altitude than our squadron and again started to drop behind.

At this point our No. 4 engine started torching and No. 3 started vibrating excessively and seemed to be losing power. I checked the cylinder head temperatures and found it to be dropping. Feeling a drag on that side, I decided to feather it for awhile and then run it at a lower setting. As soon as it was feathered, it was obvious that we had lost even more speed, so

it was unfeathered and set at a cruising RPM. This seemed to work the best, although putting a terrific strain on the other three engines.

During this time, we had penetrated deep into enemy territory and several enemy fighters had been reported. We had been able to hold a position about a hundred yards behind and 500 feet below the squadron. We were now at 22,000 feet and our engines were at maximum power, No. 4 flaming back over the wing and again we were in danger of attack, so I told Mac to salvo six of our bombs. Dropping over a ton helped us very little, so I told him to drop all but one bomb.

We had now reached 24,000 and as I had hoped, we were able to get back into position when the lead ship reduced his power. Our target was close now and enemy fighters were attacking the groups behind us. Adams told me we would hit the target at 10:25, which left us 15 minutes. On the flight deck, we put on our steel helmets and prepared for the barrage which was due any minute.

The waist gunners told me then No. 4 was in flames and it was in danger of burning the wing, so No. 4 was feathered, No. 3 left at low power. I set the trim tabs at nearly full left rudder and left aileron, put No. 1 and 2 in emergency rich and told the boys to hang on as I thought we could stay up till we got over the target.

We turned on the IP and started our bomb run. The flak was at first high and inaccurate but just before the release point it was heavy and accurate. I decided to move over to the squadron on the right in order to be on the inside of the turn as they broke off the target, and as I did, seven heavy bursts hit where we had been. As it was, we had many close hits but our damage was slight.

Turning off the target, the tail gunner told me Metier had been hit several times and had slid under the high box at the release point. As a result, three bombs were dropped through his right wing, carrying away the right aileron and flap. He dropped several thousand feet, but managed to keep the plane from going into a spin by using only his two right engines. He managed to follow us for about an hour before fighters brought him down. Not before he had gotten two of them in the process, however.

We were in the meantime limping along on three engines trying to stay with the group on the route home. By the time, we had reached the region north of the lake on the way back, I could see that we would not be able to keep up when the group leveled off, so I told Mac to check the gas and keep an eye open for groups behind, which we could join as we dropped back. The gas situation was critical as we had 500 gallons and over three hours to go, so we used as little power as possible to maintain altitude along with 10 degrees flaps and idle lean on all engines.

At this time, we saw a group to our right and behind, so we swung off to the right at reduced power to join them. When we were about a quarter of a mile to their left, an enemy 109 dove on us out of the sun, hoping for an easy target unprotected by other planes. The fighter came in high at 7 o'clock pressing his attack to 200 yards astern with 20 mm and 13 mm cone of fire. The tail turret was hit near the gunner's shoulder by armor piercing shells breaking on through to the waist where 20 mm explosive shells wounded the ball gunner in the calf. Scattered fire penetrated the waist camera hatch and sheared off a section of the left aileron. Feeling the

impact on the left wing, I banked and skidded to the right, throwing the concentration of fire off our left wing. Giving momentary full throttle to the 3 engines, we joined the strange group before the fighter could circle for another attack.

I proceeded on with this group slowly losing altitude with two fighters waiting astern for a straggler to drop out. As the lake came into view, we had dropped to 10,000 feet and going lower, a sure bet for automatic anti-aircraft fire. As we thought flak came up low and inaccurate on the north end of the lake. At this point, I pulled off to the side of the group, hoping their numbers would draw most of the fire, but keeping in range in case of a new fighter attack. The flak was quite accurate, giving the group several direct hits and giving us some light damage. The group increasing their speed left us behind again. I warned the crew of fighters and gave the order to have parachutes ready and to lighten the ship. Everything but 500 rounds per gun and life raft to go overboard.

Our fuel was becoming very critical with 50 gallons in No. 2, 125 gallons in No. 1 and 150 in No. 3. Believing the No. 2 gauge to be inaccurate, I told the engineer to stand by on crossfeed and the copilot on the booster pumps if the fuel pressure dropped. Inside of 5 minutes No. 2 started to lose power – the cross feed and booster on No. 3 were put on. Sadly enough, No. 2 failed to get the gas and as it was windmilling I feathered it to lessen the drag. We were now about 80 miles north and east of Zagreb at 8,000 feet on two engines. Having about 50 gallons left in each Tokyo tank, I told the engineer to transfer it using the bomb bay booster. I also told all gunners to clear their turrets and strap on their chutes. Figuring the distance at a little over an hour to the Isle of Vis having about 300 gallons, I told the crew we had a good chance of making it. The engineer having emptied the Tokyo tanks in No. 2, we attempted to start it. After several attempts, No. 2 finally started and so with three engines again we struggled on.

Being alone and near Zagreb was an ideal set-up for fighter attack, but two lone B-24's circling ahead turned in our direction and pulled up on each wing. No doubt they could see our difficulty and hoped to give us the protection of their guns. I was in this three ship formation proceeding south of Zagreb explaining our shortage of gas to the ships on our wing, when our No. 1 and No. 2 engines stopped suddenly. I flipped on the boosters, worked the throttles several times, decided they were through and gave the order to bail out.

The ship was still maintaining its speed on No. 3 engine alone by holding it in a shallow glide. My co-pilot went back and I trimmed the ship for a glide and left the controls about one minute after the abandon ship order. My last glimpse of the instruments showed 140 MPH, 45 in. and 2600 RPM on No. 3, 5000 feet of altitude and a 500 ft/min descent. I strapped on my chute and crawled back to the bomb bay in time to see Arnold and Adams go out just before me. I glanced in the nose and walked to the aft bomb bay to see if the waist was clear. Seeing nothing, I rolled off the catwalk in the rear bomb bay.

I fell head down, looking up to watch the plane. I pulled my chute when I could see I was clear, jerking upright and thanking God for a good chute. Looking north, I could see several chutes floating down beneath me. On my right a railroad and small village spread below and to my left low hills covered with a solid growth of trees. Knowing my chances to be best in the woods, I slipped my chute to the east and saw at the same time the plane making a slow circle to the left in the same direction. Close to the ground, which seemed to be rushing up at an alarming speed, it

was obvious I was going to land on the edge of the woods very close to the wreckage of the plane which had just crashed.

Covering my face with my arms, I passed through the upper branches of a large pine tree, dropping down through the foliage to stop abruptly about 15 feet above the ground. Being directly above a side hill, I managed to get out of my harness and by means of swinging with one hand, I landed on the side hill and fell up hill. Removing my heavy flying boots, mae west, heavy flying pants and helmet, I started up the hill and soon found a place to hide them. Being out of breath from the climb, I then sat down for a moment to plan my next step. Knowing my position to the plane, and hearing rifle shots to the east, with the railroad on the west, I decided to head north and then circle around to the south with the final plan of reaching southern Yugoslavia.

Breaking out my escape kit and distributing the contents about my clothing, I started north with a quick glance at my compass. Passing over the crest through the forest, I traveled quickly down a ravine and across a clearing. Hearing a searching party to the east of me, I decided it was foolish to go much further until dark, so I ran to the nearest growth of brush and proceeded to play possum. The party passed near enough for me to see them clearly and appeared to be a group of renegade mountain boys, well armed. Watching them for several minutes and noticing that there was not a uniform among them, I decided it was possible they were Yugoslav Partisans.

Trying to decide was one of the worst parts of the whole event because I was free at the moment and no doubt would not be observed within the next few hours. But seeing their ragged clothes and total lack of discipline, as resembles Army personnel, I decided to walk out and hope for their help.

That was my last moment of freedom as I was later to realize. At any rate, I stepped into the open near a young fellow armed with an automatic rifle. As soon as he saw me, he brought his gun to bear and after shouting to his comrades, he ran quickly toward me. After making sure I had no weapon, he put his rifle aside and shook my hand, at the same time asking "Inglais?, Inglais?". "No, I replied, American – United States". With a nod, he grinned and replied "gut!, gut!"

Several others had joined us in the meantime and together we moved off down a trail in a general direction toward the scene of the wrecked plane. It was there I was informed by the leader of these men that two of my crew were dead in the wreckage. Of course, I was shocked because I had been so sure everyone had gotten out safely. Never the less, I asked their permission to identify the bodies and was relieved to find only the smoking remains of two flak suits they had supposed to be clothing. We spent about an hour surveying the wreckage during which I was doing my best to find out if they were Partisans or if I had blundered into a renegade band loyal to the Germans. I found the latter to be true within the next few hours.

We left the plane and marched single file down the hill in the direction of the small town I had seen from the air. After a half hours walking, we reached a dusty road about ¼ of a mile from the center of the village. A few minutes later, I met Arnold, the nose gunner, at the gate of a small barracks at the edge of town. He had a bandage on his left hand and had been waiting at the sentry box for us. At least I had someone to talk to now, and we both speculated as to where and what was going to come next. And so we straggled through town 20 or 30 men in assorted

uniforms, but well armed with my gunner and myself in the middle, trying to appear as cheerful as possible.

Of course, the small houses on each side had their quota at each window and the two of us felt the excitement we had caused without knowing what was behind the intense stare that met our eyes. We were taken to a house which served as a headquarters and offered scrambled eggs and sausage with every appearance of hospitality. Later, a rather old woman brought in a yellow wine in answer to a chorus of shouts from the rest of the band somewhat crowded in our small room. A toast was proposed and I was urged to join the round. Feeling affable under the influence of the first food since 2 am, I tipped my glass with all and found it very good. I was only on the second glass when who should walk in the door but Adams the navigator.

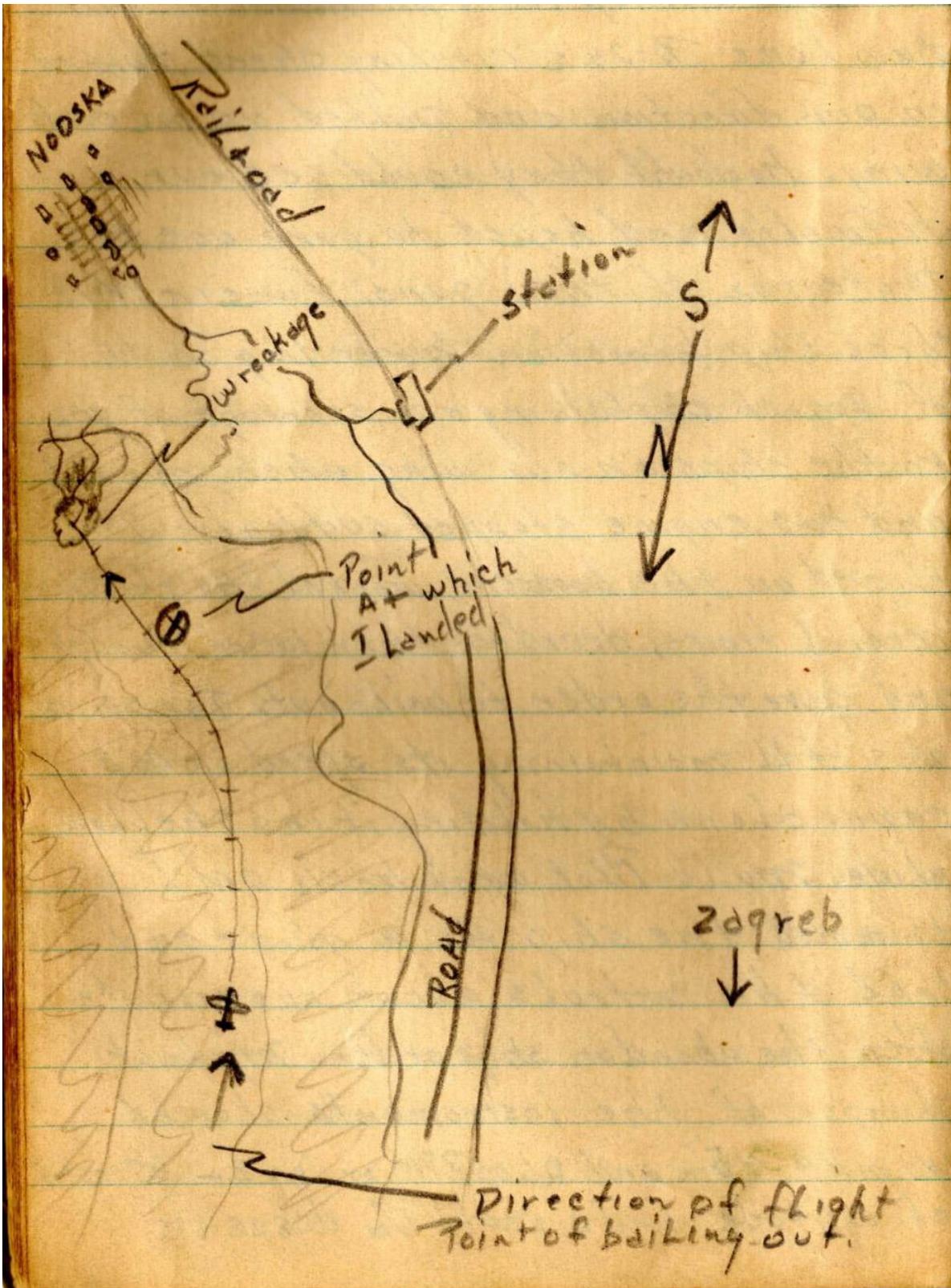
A soldier then appeared in the uniform of the Croatian Army and proceeded to ask us a few questions in English. Not wishing to say anything of value to anyone, we confined our answers to the location of the wreckage and questions as to our own destination. It was only then we began to feel that we were actually prisoners, despite their opinion that in two moons we would be back in Italy.

Later in the afternoon we left with our interrogator by ox-cart for the town of Norsk. Before leaving though, we were joined by Oliver the radio-gunner. That night we spent in Norsk in a first aid station where Dougherty had been brought to set a broken ankle. It was there that Arnold had his ring cut off his hand where it had torn through his finger, and the night five of us slept in the same bed. We talked of our chances then of escaping, but one badly injured man and another with a wound in danger of infection seemed a bad start for any action, along with the guards outside our window. So, we slept intermittently that night, lighting strong cigarettes from time to time and each one thinking what was to come but never letting the others know our thoughts.

The next morning at 5 AM we boarded a buckboard to be taken to a small train depot. We left on a train and

On a separate page in Scott's diary, he indicated that the crew spent the second night at Croatian Army Headquarters in Kutina (13 miles northwest of Norsk) and the third night in a German prison in Zagreb (60 miles northwest of Norsk). The next day they boarded a train to Budapest, arriving on the 11th of July. They spent the night in the train station before transferring to a prison in Budapest on the 12th, where they underwent interrogation. Scott and Adams left Budapest on the 26th, arriving at Stalag Luft III, a prison camp for Officer airmen, in Sagan, Poland on July 28th.

An escape of over 70 prisoners from Stalag Luft III in March of 1944 became the basis of the movie "The Great Escape".



Map of crash site drawn by Lt. Robert Scott