

# Mansfield, J. Norman Jr. Recollections October 1993

[Speaker 1]

We were briefed early in the morning for takeoff into the deep part of Germany, probably Swineford or Frankfurt, somewhere along in there. You don't think Frankfurt is very far until you fly a combat to it, because it's a long way around. So we got out to our aircraft and at five o'clock—expected five o'clock takeoff—started assembling.

Right then we heard a noise and we all looked around and here come some German fighters who were strafing our field. And they kept coming over and strafing and not knowing what to do. We hid in tents and everything else that we could.

And we found out there must be about six of them, or we could count, and they were strafing our runway and anything that they could see, or maybe see us, were beginning to get a little bit of our side. So after a while, we found out that there was about a ten or fifteen minute gap in their passes. So we saw a truck coming without any lights on or anything, of course.

So he stopped and picked us up and brought us back to our respective hangar. And they continued to strafe and so we decided that we would hop out one at a time, the one of us standing at the back of the truck, and look and see when the fighters would make their pass and if it was clear to jump out of the truck and run approximately fifty feet down the sidewalk to the back of the side, what was really the side door of the hangar and open it a very small amount and sneak in.

Well that we did. So all nine of us made it and I was holding the canvas and trying to look for planes too. So when it came my turn, everybody was in the hangar, so I looked around and I didn't see any planes because I could hear them, but I didn't see any coming my way.

So I hopped out and no doubt the plane was hidden behind the canopy of the truck because boy he started letting go with his fifty caliber machine guns. And unfortunately he was either going too slow or too fast, but he was just making a on the concrete right behind me and I could almost feel the breeze of the bullets bouncing off my concrete and moving my boots that close, my pants, and I ran as fast as I could to the hangar, opened it just a little bit and slid in and just as I did the bullets, fifty caliber machine gun bullets ran up the wall, the door, through the wall and up through the roof and it made its pass. So we stayed in there and after a while as daylight came they left. So that put us on standby because it was too late to go where we were going so they had to decide what to do with us.

About three o'clock in the afternoon we had to go to the briefing room and we found that Target was just across the channel to Boulogne. So some of us hit Cherbourg, some of us were scheduled for Boulogne. So we went to Boulogne and as you know that's heavily defended, Target is all up along the coast, Calais and all of them because they had a lot of pillboxes built into the concrete, made out of six feet of concrete, built into the side of the cliff.

So another thing too, somewhere in that area the V-bombs were coming from. We were beginning to feel the effects of those. So we were trying to do away with those along with

some air fuel that the Germans had for the fighters to make it easy for them to scoot across the channel and give us a hard time right over our field.

Because it used to come over every night, the bombers and the fighters, around nine o'clock and do what they wanted to do to England. They were just one of those things that we expected, you almost set your clock back. So we were over there after those fields.

So we ran into heavy anti-aircraft and a lot of fighters and we did have some fighter escort of our own, but they were hindered because of the water. So we dropped our bomb and turned back out toward the water. A lot of our planes that were with us went down into the water and our fighters would circle around there for protection.

But we made it back all right. It was a real rough target for a short length of time of about three and a half hours. And we flew in at a low altitude of 19,000 feet.

It was a burst of flak that was so close that they could see us so easily on a clear day that sometimes our plane would go up about 100 feet in the air from the concussion of the anti-aircraft explosion. So that was a very common thing on all of our targets. Well, that ended my 30 missions.

And with all together, the missions that did not count, even though we were over enemy territory, if we count them all together, that gives us 300 hours for 30 missions and another 20 hours for another 20 missions. If I can make that straight to you, it takes 300 hours for 30 missions roughly. So we got great for the 300, but we did a total of 50.

But only 20 of them did not count. So we'll talk to you a little bit later and try to give you some information as to what happened after we were through and other people took our places. I'll say that this all took place at the 91st Bomb Group Heavy of the 322nd Squadron, which was my squadron.

We had the 322nd, 323rd, 324th, and 401st Bombardment Group, all heavy aircraft. B-17Fs and later the B-17Gs of the 8th Air Force, 1st Air Division. Now, before we go into anything else, you might be interested in some statistics that I have found that might be of interest.

Our group, through the years from 1942 until 1945 when they returned home, they flew 340 missions. They were credited with 9,591 takeoffs and landings. In other words, they dispatched that many planes.

Total bomb tonnage is hard to believe. 22,142.3 tons. Now the aircraft missing in action is 197.

Enemy aircraft claimed was 420 of one type, 127 of another type, and 238 of another type. Now, I understand that during that period of time that they were over there, 6,000 airmen came through there. Out of the 6,000, only 2,000 finished.

So, as we were told when we first came over, that only one out of ten would finish. Only one out of ten would finish their prescribed amount of combat. And that turned out pretty well, to be accurate.

Now, the one thing I didn't say earlier, somewhere along in the middle of our tour, two of our men decided they wanted to rest for a while. They got about 15 missions behind, and only within the last year or two, I found out that those two men were later, after we finished, were later assigned to another, not a group, but another plane crew, and they were shot down over Belgium and were taken prisoners of war. So, our original crew were not together the whole time.

I had forgotten about that. Now, after I left, well, I'll have to say this. I finished on June 2nd.

We were supposed to be off the air base and on the way home within 24 hours, but they called us and told us that the invasion was pretty close and that we would be assigned to other duties for a few months until all the aircraft and everything could be brought over there that they needed for the invasion. So I was sent to Kingsland, and there I enjoyed my stay. I was stationed at Snedisham, which is about 20 miles north of Kingsland.

Each morning, I lived in town, really, in Kingsland itself, not on the base, and each morning I rode the bus home and we passed Sandringham. I could see King George standing over there looking at his gardener. I looked at his gardener, and his gardener was working his roses, and he was standing there with a normal pose with a hand behind him.

So I got pretty familiar. I always rode on top of the double-decker bus, and I rode it there each morning for up from June the 7th, I think I got there, until the 18th of September when I came home by American Airlines. So it was very interesting.

I was an air traffic controller there in an air-sea rescue squadron. And I will tell you one thing real briefly that's interesting. During the time that I was sent out to SOS, I had no idea that I would be assigned to the air-sea rescue and direction-finding station.

So we went to a little tea party on a Tuesday, which was my day off, and I saw two RAF girls in uniform with their insignia on the side of their sleeve. And for a radio operator, a little picture, so to speak, of a strike of light, identified them as radio. So I walked over there, and I knew that there was a direction-finding station attached to our crew, but I didn't see them very often, but only by telephone.

So I asked them what they did, and just one of them told me. The other one had Holland written across her shoulder, and the one I talked to had England, so I talked to the one that I knew could speak English. I asked them if they remembered that particular situation, because it hadn't been too long.

One of them said, yes, I do. And I said, well, what do you remember about it? He said, well, you were sending code faster than we could copy.

And he said, this girl here from Holland, she doesn't speak English, but she was copying the code and passing it to me. So I said, well, did you really slow down, have me slow down to 24 words a minute? She said she did.

And the ironic thing about it was I could never send over, as I said before, I think, 18 words a minute. I thought that was rather ironic running into the person who brought us back with

the various headings until we were over England. So it is kind of strange how incidents come up, and how many people that were over there to run into those two.

My stay at Kingsland was very nice. I lived off the base, as I said, right in the city of Kingsland, a small town, and I was rooming with a boy that had been in the RAF up in the New Hebrides, way up there where it was cold, and he had transferred back to the American Air Force. And he knew every single person in that town.

So we had a nice time, and I really enjoyed it. I formed a dance band again, and we played at the American Red Cross Club when we weren't busy working. I always had, like I said, Tuesday off, and sometimes almost every night.

So that was just about the end of my tour there. And then on August 18th, I flew back with American Airlines. And what was really strange about that, we had a big four-engine C-54 flown by an American crew.

And on that, there was only 17 of us on it. And I don't know what cargoes they had. I didn't see any.

But I in the Air Force, in the 8th Air Force, and then a captain, and I was a fighter pilot, was beside me. The rest were civilians, reporters, and technical advisers for various aircraft companies. And they were going back home.

But it was a lot of fun. They let us perform their duties, which were the duties of a radio operator. There was one on that.

And that procedure was the same as what we had, so he let me contact the various stations because it was the same way. And the 47th pilot was from Birmingham, Alabama. And he flew co-pilot for a while.

It was a long trip. We stopped at Iceland and Greenland and then back down to Newfoundland and then on in home. So we were back home again, and that just about does it.

In my case, I was later assigned to various places like Maxwell Field and then to Smyrna, Tennessee for quite a while as an air traffic controller. And then the war was just about over. And we just looked around for various assignments.

And that just about ends our tour and our duties that concern the war effort. I did leave Smyrna Air Base and I went to Grenada, Mississippi for some reason. And I was there during the time that Japan surrendered.

So right after that, they decided they'd better get rid of all the veterans that had been in combat. So I was sent to Camp Shelby, Mississippi right away. And when we got there, they didn't know what we were there for, and we told them.

And they didn't have enough discharge papers for us. And it was at the convenience of the government because we had finished our tour, and they were trying to then get rid of the older veterans and bring in some young ones, I guess. Anyway, I was discharged on the 30th of August 1945 with these medals to my credit, a DFC Air Medal with four Oakleaf Clusters,

that's four, five Air Medals, and the presidential citation from President Roosevelt and the European Theater of Operation with seven major battle stars.

So I guess that was just about it. I will tell you a little bit, and reminiscing back through part of it, I think about all the things over in combat and how we did get up early in the mornings and how long it took us to get our formations together. And if you figure how many planes did go over and how long it took us to get our formations together, it is a remarkable thing to do.

And I did mention several times about losing planes. I probably didn't mention how it felt to see one of your wingmen just be flying along with you, and all of a sudden a burst of flak would hit them and they would disintegrate right in front of your eyes. And sometimes, if you were lucky, you could see particles of the airplane flying through the air.

They were just no longer there. So those things do hang around in your memory for a long time. So just a few more things I have thought of.

We went after Hitler twice. One time he was supposed to be at the Frankfurt railroad station, maybe at 11.30. We bombed the station, thought we just about wiped out everything. So we returned, and later on, the next day I think it was, we found that he had decided to leave an hour earlier to go back to Berlin.

And we missed him that time. Then another time we were down around the Munich area and were told that his train was to be somewhere between Munich and Berlin, and we were going to try to get him again. So we did see the train, and it seemed to be moving rather slowly, but what we know now is it was stopped.

He had an intuition that something was going to happen, so we understand that he had the train stopped, and there was air raid shelters all along the railroad track, and he had gone down into one of the air raid shelters. And we found that out just as we did the Frankfurt situation, which was the next day. Now another odd thing that we found out, we always listened to Radio Berlin when we got home and settled down, and particularly after the 9 o'clock German planes would go over our base.

But Radio Berlin had the latest news of the targets that we hit. Now the interesting thing about this was that they would tell what targets were hit by our group as well as other groups. Now they would tell what planes were on it, the names of the planes, and really eerie, the names of the men on each of their planes, including the ones that were shot down if they were prisoners of war at that time.

And I will have to say I have heard my name mentioned on Radio Berlin. And we went over into Germany, into Luxembourg, particularly to spend the night in 1980. I was rather reluctant to leave my passport with the desk clerk because I still remembered that probably somewhere my name still was in the German registries.

Kind of a funny feeling. And another thing we heard on Radio Berlin, they said, attention 91st Bomb Group, Basenborn, England, said if you will go to your Red Cross Club building on your base, you will find that the clock in that building only behind the counter, high next to the ceiling, is five minutes slow. So here's the funny part too.

It was kind of late, so I said I'm going to get down there and see before somebody else sets that clock if it's wrong. I wasn't very far away from it. I barricaded about a half a block or maybe a block.

I got down there and I was the only one there. There wasn't anybody working there. I turned the light on, dug on if it wasn't five minutes slow.

So they had spies somewhere. Now I will say this too. A lot of these official films are shown on TV now.

So I will tell you that I think you probably know this. Our group, the 91st Bomb Group, had a triangle A on the tail. And that was ours.

And you'll see that a lot. It seems that a lot of photographers and reporters and such as that did a lot of work for my base. And they did photograph ours.

Now other groups will have a triangle B, C, D, and such as that. And some of them will have a square. And the B-24 will have a round insignia on the tail.

So I thought I'd bring those things up. And as I said, as these things come to me, I will tell you about them. Some funny things did happen.

And I just thought of one thing that you might be interested in. At one time, we were flying. A plane would not fly level.

It was what we called tail heavy. It was not in a horizontal position and flying at a horizontal level. And the pilot asked me to go back to the tail and see if I could find anything that was causing the tail to be lower than the nose.

So we were at altitude, and I got a walk-around oxygen tank and attached it to my oxygen mask and proceeded through the radio room door to the waist and firing the cables on each side all the way back to the tail position where the tail gunner was. So I found nothing. So I said, well, the only thing could be maybe I'll find something in the tail itself.

So when I opened the door to the tail compartment, the tail gunner's compartment, I found out exactly what it was. He had collected a bunch of bulletproof vests, which we called flak suits. Flak is anti-aircraft.

They were made out of magnesium. So we all wore those, and I imagine we've all collected some. But anyway, I told the pilot that the compartment was lined with flak vests, flak suits.

And he said, well, get those back up to the radio room. So I told the tail gunner that I was going to have to take all but one. So I counted 18 of them.

I took them back to the radio room and I lined my radio room with his 18 flak suits, and I think I had two or three myself. So I felt pretty comfortable. So then I asked the pilot how he was.

He said, well, that was a trouble. Now I can fly level. So that was the end of that one.

I felt pretty good on that particular mission. So you see that the planes were really heavily loaded, which brings up a situation that I think I would like to tell you about. Everything I've told you has been in the air.

Now you wonder how planes get into the air and how they land and the problems that exist. And I will tell you that, as you know, England in the early morning is very foggy and the condensation is very heavy. And we took off at two-minute intervals.

And we had a little chart that was drawn up for us as to the time that we were to taxi into position on the main runway. And they had put a hump at the end of the runway for us to take off because the fighter pilots on their bases had found that that gave them that extra lift. So we all lined up and took off into the takeoff position.

And from the time that we saw the plane in front of us take off, we watched our watches. And when two minutes was up, we started taxiing down the runway just as fast as we could go. And, of course, knowing in two minutes there was going to be another plane behind us.

So we were heavily loaded. The plane itself weighed 60,000 pounds and we had a full bomb load and 2,750 gallons of gasoline. So we got up to about 90 to 110 is about takeoff speed for this B-17.

So we came to the hump. We were having a hard time getting ground speed. But we got to the hump and we went up the hump and we started climbing.

And then we started settling again. So as we settled, there was a barbed wire fence that ran across separating the clearing of pine trees that were close by. So as we settled, we heard something underneath.

We hadn't pulled up the landing gear. So we heard something scraping underneath the plane. So we thought we were going to settle right down in that clearing.

But it turned out that when we pulled up the landing gear, we found that we had taken up part of the barbed wire fence, including a post or two. So we retracted our landing gear and went on our mission. And we were told by many airplanes below us that we had some garbage underneath our plane.

And we recognized, we told them what it was, that we had recognized, that we had, through the ball turret, we had a pretty good view of it. Anyway, we took that thing all the way with us, the barbed wire and the two posts, and we brought it back home. And as we lowered the landing gear, it evidently fell out.

But that was the only post, I guess, that had ever gone deep into Germany or Poland and returned. So two posts and a barbed wire fence went over there. Now I'll tell you another incident that I had in two or three in landing.

We had a lot of trouble being in a position with anti-aircraft, which we called FLAC, by hitting our hydraulic system and losing hydraulic system anywhere from a drip to like turning on a faucet. It would all drain. And that would have to do with a lot of the propellers and the lowering of the landing gear and such as that.

Well, in coming back from one of the missions, we found out that we couldn't lower the landing gear. We had to crank the landing gear down. So we all, which is a very hard deal, it's under the flooring of the radio room.

So we cranked it down and got it in position, what we thought was the down and lock, we called it. So we had no hydraulic system at all. So when we landed, we just coasted and rode to a stop.

We were lucky that time. Then another time, we had the same condition except the landing gear was able, we were able to lower it. But at the time we did lower it, we didn't know that we were so low on hydraulic fluid and that depleted the hydraulic system by lowering the landing gear.

So we touched the ground and the pilot put the brakes on and there was no brakes. And no way of reversing the props to help us slow down. So we had to just coast to a stop again.

But we just kept on going past the point of three quarters down the runway. So they had anticipated such as that happening. So they had dug a pretty large ditch at the end of the runway.

So we saw that ditch coming up and crossed the end of the asphalt, concrete, and crossed into the grass and down into the ditch and nosed up and the tail was sticking about 45 degrees up. That stopped us very abruptly. And I hit my back on a table, radio table or something.

But I didn't report that because I only had a few missions left. And then, ironically, during another mission, that same situation happened. And dog gone if I didn't hit my back again on something, probably the same thing.

Because we had to stand up and watch where we were going and keeping everything floating around and such as that. So those things all have come to mind and I think that this just about ends my 20 or 30, 40, 50 missions, whatever you want to call it. So as Walter Cronkite would say, that's the way it is.

And this is, let's see, the date today that I'm finishing this tape is April the 22nd, 1993. So I hope you will enjoy it and it has been a pleasure doing it and digging back so many years in my memory. I have brought these things to surface again.

I think that maybe it will serve as a purpose here for me to look back and see if I've tried to be as straightforward and as accurate as I can. And this is Norman Mansfield, Jr. I didn't see any German fighters because there was a thousand planes up that day. Frankfurt was one of the heavily defended targets and there was a lot of activity.

But we did see, as I said, plenty of flak. Then after we dropped our bombs on Frankfurt, on the way home, we got fouled up somewhere by falling a leader and he took us right down the Ruhr Valley again. And we were flying in a number three position on the left of the lead wing, right next to the colonel.

Well, he got hit in one of his inboard engines and it started to smoke. He started down and we followed him for a while and we tried to help him as best we could to defend him until he disappeared into the clouds. All of us saw some chutes come out of the ship.

So I assume that they were taking prisoners or they did all right. But hopefully they did. So we all got home and counted the flak holes in our plane and we all mentioned that for the second mission we still could smell the ammunition exploding, gun powder, we called it.

So we did pretty good. We got home. That's a couple of missions behind us now.

Okay, our fourth trip was near Burgess, France, near central France. And we started out in bad weather over England and across the Channel. I think I can remember France was covered with snow and we took a deviated course over into Germany and Germany was covered with snow.

But as we went further south, we could see the trees were green and it was really snow was melting and it was kind of maybe early spring, but really it was in the southern part, south central part of France. It was an airfield and there was plenty of Focke-Wulf 190s and we had some P-38s that could follow us that distance. They were limited to their amount of fuel.

So we went over the target at 15,000 feet and we could see what we were doing. And what was happening here is that we went after an airfield where they were training young Luftwaffe pilots. And so we got there about 11.30, which was about the right time for them to be eating. We were supposed to hit the airfield and it was done. As I said, at 15,000 feet, and as we pulled off the target and made our turn to come home, we could still see black smoke. So that was another mission behind us.

Our next mission was Oschersleben. Oschersleben was a very distant target. And we went in at a low altitude at 14,000 feet.

This was considered to be very low for us, the higher the better. So we saw a bunch of fighters and a lot of flak, a lot of anti-aircraft too, which we couldn't decide whether we liked the anti-aircraft or have the fighters that we could see. But it isn't very nice, we found real early in life up there, that when these fighters start shooting at you, that you can see the fire of the bullets coming out of their wings.

So as the enemy fighters attacked us, one of our right-wing, right-waist gunners rather, got an ME-410, which was a pretty heavy bomb. And he was shooting rockets at our formation. And then another FW-190 surprised us all.

It came barreling through and almost went through the cockpit of our plane. So those excellent German pilots were really ruling the sky over their own territory as well as coming to visit us and follow us home at night. So we all made that one all right.

That was on Sunday, February the 20th, again 1944. Many of these targets and experiences are the same. They can vary somewhat.

So I won't go into each one of them. But we are down now to the next one was Leipzig and Hanover and the old faithful Schweinfurt, the SKV ball bearing works down below Berlin. And then on down below that, the foot of the Alps, is Augsburg.

Then we went back to Frankfurt on my eighth mission. And then the number one mission that everybody had been looking forward to sweating out was Berlin. I went to Berlin on March the 8th, 1944.

We lost six ships. At that time, P-38s had been brought over, modified and some new ones brought over. Would give us longer range.

They were carrying wing tanks. And we were able to go a little bit further because we had a half bomb load of bombs and the other half was a self-sealing firestone tank on the other side of the bomb bay, as I said. And we used the fuel out of that first and then went into our wing tanks.

And it was rough. It was well defended and our main target was just the main street of Berlin during the busy noonday hours. Always felt kind of bad about that in a way because it felt like those civilians didn't have anything to do with this war.

But what they wanted to prove to the Germans was that we were able to go to Berlin in the daylight hours. So we had a rough trip all the way in and a rough trip all the way out. And I was very much surprised by this time, this was my ninth mission, that these German fighters had no fear of their own flak.

They would get right up there with us. So here's something else interesting. There was a P-38 pilot I found that feathered an engine as he approached us.

And as you know, P-38 has two engines, two fuselages. Well, he went all the way with us across Berlin and followed us as far as he could backwards, a little bit longer range planes than the others. And I found out later that he was a full colonel and had stayed over there two or three months after his last mission because he was not going home until he went to Berlin.

And that was the height of his ambition. So I'm sure that he got home safely. And then incidentally the next day, my tenth mission was Berlin again on the 9th of March.

And we dropped 500-pound bombs and we had some more escorts of P-38s, P-47s, and P-51s. Prior to that, we only had fighter escorts as far as the lowlands, just across the channel over into France and Belgium and Holland and such as that, and tried to help us across the English Channel. Calais was well defended, and Bordeaux and all of those.

But they did help us greatly. Then another trip back to Frankfurt. The old railroad yards at Frankfurt was always a good target.

That was our secondary target. We dropped 500-pound bombs. And at that time, we still had to have half a bomb load and the other half of fuel within the bomb bay.

So we were beginning to get afraid of these bombs, I mean this auxiliary tank inside the bomb bay. They told us that it would not explode, but we decided to start dropping them. So it was my duty as a paratrooper to get out and take them and open the bomb doors and stand there on the catwalk at altitude and drop them and get rid of them so they wouldn't explode.

That's after we'd used all the fuel from them. So we lost one ship on that one again, lost a whole crew. So that's one ship and ten men on that particular mission.

Then on the 13th mission was Berlin again, which was a secondary target. Again, we dropped 500-pound bombs and a lot of firebombs, small 100-pound bombs. And it was rough.

It was full of flak, always full of flak, and full of fighters just swarming around. And you just couldn't get rid of them at all. So we did have some fighters to contend with, but I don't remember whether at that time we had a fighter escort to mention.

So that gave me at this time about three trips to Berlin in less than a little bit over a month, I guess, and twice to Frankfurt. I will mention this. I don't have it on my, any records that I can think of right now.

But somewhere in 1940, Easter came in 1940, spring of 43, or four rather, on the latter part of March, I believe. And we were scheduled to go to Warsaw, Poland. And we were all fueled up and it was raining, but they said that it would be clear by the time we got to Poland.

So we took off and we flew across France and across Germany. And no, you couldn't see land at all. It was all bogged in, snow, and just completely bad altogether.

So we just kept going and did not cancel the mission. And I listened on my radio because I would know first whether the mission had been canceled from the headquarters in England sent to me in CW. And that never happened.

So we continued as the others on our merry way. So we finally got over the target and it was so dark at that time that we turned on our landing lights at times and all the way we had our running lights, our wing lights on to keep from bumping into each other. And sometimes we did.

You could hear the wings tap each other. So we got over Warsaw and we weren't allowed to drop bombs anywhere except Germany without being able to see exactly where we were going to drop them, where they were going because they were all friendly countries. So as I say, we were circling and we circled and we circled and we just couldn't drop them and the rules required us to avoid the target.

So there was no secondary target. That was the primary target. So we decided then to follow our regular procedure.

So we headed for a return trip along the North Sea. Well, I found out by that time it was even worse over the ocean. And we were bumping into each other and some of the planes and other groups were colliding with each other, getting their wings all tangled up.

And we weren't even afraid of black or German fighters or anything. And so I noticed that some of the planes were going down because they were running out of fuel. But we lost a whole lot of planes out of I don't know how many it was a set day, other groups.

But we did manage to get back and fly all the way back across the North Sea, turning into the channel and coming into the coast of England. So we got home. We had over 11 hours, 11 and a half hours I think to be exact, to our credit.

But we found out the next day that due to the fact that Doolittle had changed the rules, you had to drop your bombs over a target. And if you did not drop your bombs and brought them home, it did not count as a mission. So we had 11 and a half hours of hard work, one of the longest missions I was ever on, and we never did get credit for it.

Well, it gets me up to the 14th mission, which is Munster. We took 1,000-pound bombs, and we had P-38s, P-47s, P-51 escorts. These missions, as I said before, I think, are about the same.

We get up very early in the morning. We have to get our formation together. We usually leave at an altitude of about 19,000 feet.

There's a lower altitude climbing on up to 13,000. This was a long mission, and it was heavily defended as usual, and we didn't lose any airplanes in our group. But we did see a lot of enemy aircraft and a lot of enemy anti-aircraft fire.

Now we'll go to the 15th mission, excuse me, on the 24th of March, still in the month of March. This was designated as a Swineford-Frankford area of primary and secondary targets. And I will tell you a little bit something about that.

There was a dreaded target, and we all had a new airplane, the new Lassie, come home. 673 was the last three digits of the number of the plane, serial number. And we had been flying Black Magic, which was an old B-17L.

And it would run like crazy. It was just a good plane. So we tried out Lassie, and we got over the target and started finding that one of the engines was running rough.

So we were just about the middle, well, we were the middle of our tour. So we decided to go a little bit further. So as we approached Swineford, we had to feather one of our engines because we had gotten a flak strike on the number one engine.

And by the time we could feather the engine, that is to stop the engine from moving, the oil had leaked out and the engine just wouldn't stop. So it got real hot, and it just froze, and it did stop completely. Then the engine next to it was hit after we went over the target by flak.

And then we had to feather it, but it would not feather. It just kept on. We lost a lot of oil on that one.

It kept on going. Because B-24s that were ahead of us were leading. We were the second group behind it.

Just a few planes ahead of us, you might say. So they all went out and did a 360-degree turn because the lead ship, the B-24, said that we were not lined up with the target. So we went way out, did a 360-degree turn, came back, got into formation again through all the flak and the fighters.

And by that time, we were really having a hard time holding the ship still. So we dropped our bombs, which was good. And on our way back home, we started getting lost.

We were headed in the wrong direction because we had had to drop from a very high altitude, about 27,000 feet, I think, back down to about 19,000, which was in very dangerous territory. So the plane kept getting worse and worse, harder to hold, and the pilot put it on automatic control. So we realized that we were going in the wrong direction.

So he asked the navigator several times in which direction home. The navigator seemed to not be able to give him any. So he said, Radio, you navigate.

So I always had a heading of 270 degrees, knowing that it would take us somewhere in the vicinity of England. So I gave him 270. That kind of tore up the navigator up front.

He called back and he said, Lou, I know how to navigate. I know where we are. Lou said, Shut up.

And Homer, who was the navigator's name, said, Radio, navigate. Well, I realized that I was going to have to call for air-sea rescue and fighter escort. So that I did, and I was supposed to do that in a coded language by my CW telegraph key.

So I did load my transmitter up to full power, 1,000 watts, and he answered me right back. I told him that I was in trouble. I was running short on gas.

We were on fire. Two engines out. Needed fighter escort and a heading home.

So I went through the procedure of letting their three stations in England get a bang on us. So I gave the heading, which was 270 as they had given me. So I was right there, which made me feel good.

Again, the navigator, he knew where we were. The pilot said, Shut up, Homer. Radio, navigate.

Nevertheless, all the way back, we made it. We threw out ammunition everywhere we could and the guns, and they all got up in the radio room. So after a while, we saw some fighters coming up to help us.

First the P-38 with the longer range. And then we looked behind us, and here comes another smoking P-17. It got in behind us.

And then every three or four minutes, I would have to call England for another fix, which was another heading for them to give us by holding the key down for a certain length of time and three stations would get a bang on us. Well, we were escorted by the P-38 and swarming German aircraft around us. There were only three of them, and they had to run them off.

And then they got the air pretty clear, and they had to go back home. They were running out of fuel. So there was about a 15-minute gap before some P-40 suffered.

In the meantime, I looked behind us out of the top of my radio room, and here's another, which would be the third P-17, us and two others. And he was in trouble. So he got in behind us, and we tried to grab a formation.

So I had to get another heading. All along, periodically, I had to get a heading, and we navigated our way back. So we ended up getting across the channel by talking to the fighters, and some of them would come up and fly along beside the radio room, so I could talk to them.

And they would go down and see what was ahead of us and come back up and tell us that we were on the right course, and they'd get rid of some fighter guns for us. Very impressive. So we ended up with a total of four stragglers and us made a total of five.

We got across the channel with the P-38s, P-47s, and P-51s helping us. P-51s last. They followed us all the way home.

But as soon as we got over the channel, everybody was in the radio room, of course, and the pilot told me on intercom, on my headsets on intercom, that we were going to have to bail out because we couldn't hold it any longer. So he pushed the button, and I told the boys to bail out. So they all bailed out except the pilot, co-pilot, and engineer, and myself.

So we brought the plane back. One of the crew members landed in a tree, and he broke his ankle or sprained his ankle, and the others all got back after being accused of being Germans by the English people, farmers. So that was the end of that one.

So I will insert this. And when I got back over into Mississippi after the war was over, I did get a notification that I had gotten another DFC. I got a DFC, my first one, before I bring it back navigating the five planes.

Now, I will say, too, that the navigator never did get over being mad at me for the next 15 missions. So that was about the 24th of March. And my next one will be the 28th of March, four days later.

Okay, on the 28th of March, as I said a while ago, I'm going with Reams. And I'm going to group these together because once I have told you just about how rough it is, I will admit it was rough, I'm going to hit just the missions that are most popular. We went to Reams, dropped 500 pounds, and we had fighter escort.

You notice we're getting fighter escort now, going deeper. Reams is pretty close to the coast, as you know. Dropped 500 pounds there.

Then on the 19th of March, we went to Brunswick. Now, that was 100 full of, bomb bay was full of 100-pound bombs. We lost two aircraft out of our group, and we had the three different planes as escorts.

And that was a rough one. There's always a rough one around that area and through there. So we made that back after about seven hours in the air and maybe 1,400 miles of air travel.

Now, my next mission was the 17th, which was the 18th of April, end of April now. That was Oldenburg. 500 pounds to Oldenburg with heavy enemy aircraft and heavy flak.

And I don't mention any fighters. I don't think we had any at that time. Probably was an overcast day, but that was our primary target, and we did hit it.

Now, on the 13th of April, was another swine. That was a priority mission. We had fighters on it, good old fighters again.

Now, we were heavily loaded with bombs, 1,000-pound general-purpose bombs, 500 GPs, 100 incendiaries, and 120 fragment bombs, firebombs, too. So that was a rough mission. As I mentioned before, all the Swineford and some of those missions were down there where they would protect their ball-bearing plants.

And it was a long, drawn-out, you have to fight your way home in addition to fighting your way in because the Germans didn't know where we were going. So we came home pretty late and pretty tired. Now, the next one was on April 17th, which was Calais.

And we know how Calais is. It was always heavily fortified. We found later that the B-bombs were coming from the Calais area, and we carried 500-pound bombs, 100-pound bombs, and 100-pound firebombs.

And we had met heavy fighter coverage of German fighters in our hours. We did have some, but the heavy fighters there, German fighters, hit us first before our fighters arrived. So we were trying to get rid of those B-bombs.

They were beginning to show up. My next mission was on April 22nd, which was Ham. That was a primary target.

There, we launched a crew and 10 men went down and returned after dark because we got a late start for some reason. I don't remember why, but German fighters followed us all the way across the channel. They came across under identification.

We couldn't see them. And they started attacking us after they cleared the coastline, and they followed the various groups, including ours, all the way home. And it was very dark.

They couldn't turn the lights on because the fighters were already there. Our radio was shot out, completely out of order, and our plane was in very bad shape. So Le Hood, the pilot, we got as far as what we thought was our airfield, and we were real low, just about pictured, just about lined up with the runway.

And the only way we could tell, down at the end of this runway, was a burning B-17. So we just surmised that that was our field. So we went into it on a low approach and followed that burning plane as light and kept it straight, just locked it in, and we landed safely.

But it was real late, about nine or ten o'clock at night, and the anti-aircraft over the French coast really lit up the sky like a Fourth of July. Okay, my next mission was the 25th of April. Went to Metz, which was an airfield, a primary target, and as you know, all airfields were pretty well defended, and the German fighters were up off the field and waiting for us.

So we had a hard time with that, and we were glad to get that one behind us and got home after four or five hours in the air. Next one was Cherbourg on the 27th of April. Now

Cherbourg is a peninsula, as you know, sticks way out into the channel and part of the ocean.

We lost one plane on that because we were at 19,000 feet and some at 14,000, and we were heavily loaded with 2,000-pound bombs and 1,000-pound general purpose and 500-pound general purpose, because you could see we just about had our capacity, and we did have fighters, but we saw a lot of flak and a lot of enemy fighters, and we were unable to be protected by our own P-38s, 47s, and 51s because of the difficulty over water and the planes were going down in the water, and that's what happened to one of our planes.

I don't know whether F.C. Rescue got them or not. I don't think so. On the 29th of April was my 23rd mission, and we were back to Berlin, the primary target, and the next day was the 24th mission, next target rather, and it was a primary target, and it was on May the 19th, so we had a gap right in there of some relief, probably rain, or they gave us some time in London or wherever we wanted to go, but on the first mission, first Berlin of the two was the 23rd.

I'll go back to it. We lost a plane on it. It was heavy flak and a lot of enemy fighters, and we lost another plane on the 24th, which was the second Berlin mission I'm speaking of in a row, so we lost two planes in two consecutive days, and that was on the 19th of May.

Now the 22nd of May, we went to Kiel. That was the primary target, and that was real rough. It was visual, and the enemy planes would go up there, flak, and the enemy planes, as I've said before, would come right in our gear, and they'd go through their own flak.

We knocked down many planes. We did not personally, our group did not lose, the bomb group did not lose any planes, but a lot of other planes were headed for Sweden, and the Swedish government was real good about sending a plane to escort you in after you were over Sweden itself. My next mission was the 23rd of May, the 26th mission, which was Saalbrook, and that was the second target because we couldn't hit the primary, which I don't remember which it was.

That is a marshalling yard, and it was well defended, always with flak and plenty of enemy fighters. So we made our way back from there in and back out again without losing any planes at all. Now my 25th mission, wait a minute, my 27th mission on the 25th of May was Nancy Essex.

Now I say Nancy Essex, I mean that area because there were a lot of targets in there. We hit what we could, and it was near Switzerland, and we lost one of our own planes to Switzerland. They went over there.

We saw them disappear because they were on fire, and they hopefully landed in Switzerland, and that target was very visible. There wasn't a cloud in the sky, and that's why it was so rough. Fighters could come up there and just give us a hard time.

Now my next mission was the 28th of May, 1944 again. I went to Tassau. Primary target was an oil target, and we had a lot of planes shot down.

We lost, and our whole bomb, not of our personal bomb group, but in the group that we were attached to, we lost 12 B-17s. It was a very bad target because that furnished the oil from when Romania was out of production. So they were guarding that one.

Now on the 29th, we went back to that same target, Tassau, and that was a primary target. This time we hit an aircraft plane, and some of us went over and hit the oil targets. We lost one plane on that one of our own group, and two more went to Sweden, and I counted six B-24s following the B-17.

They too were hit and were smoking, and as I said probably before, that was another visual day. Good target, but for us to be able to hit on a visual day was very bad and heavy and losses, and the trip home was equally rough, and I have never yet gotten used to smelling any aircraft gunpowder. I can't figure out to this day how it would get into an oxygen system, but we would go the rest of the trip, which was a very long trip home, smelling the gunpowder.

Okay, on June the 2nd, continued out the side of Tate. The invasion was the 6th, so I went to Bula.