

DELORE ATHMANN

FLIGHT JOURNAL

OCTOBER 14, 1944 – APRIL 26, 1945

RADIO OPERATOR AND WAIST GUNNER

B -24 BOMBER

451ST BOMBARDMENT GROUP

727TH SQUADRON

STATIONED NEAR FOGGIA, ITALY

AGE 21

AIR MEDAL WITH 3 OAK LEAVE CLUSTERS

PURPLE HEART

THE 451ST BOMBARDMENT GROUP ACHIEVED THE HIGHEST OVERALL BOMBING SCORE IN THE 15TH AAF. IT WAS THE ONLY BOMB GROUP IN THE ENTIRE EUROPEAN THEATER TO ACHIEVE AN NON-DISRUPTED PERFECT MISSION. THE 451ST BOMB GROUP WAS ON THE MOST HIGHLY DECORATED GROUPS IN THE 15TH ARMY AIR FORCE. 280 PURPLE HEARTS AND 6,300 AIR MEDALS

THE 451ST BOMB GROUP WAS ALSO ONE OF THE MOST BATTERED. IN 216 MISSIONS, 135 B-24S WERE LOST.

12,000 HEAVY BOMBERS WERE SHOT DOWN IN WWII. 6 BOMBER CREWMEN WERE KILLED FOR EACH ONE WOUNDED.

THE 15TH AIR FORCE FIRED 30 MILLION ROUNDS OF .50 CALIBER AND DOWNED 2110 ENEMY AIRCRAFT, 1 FOR EVERY 14,200 ROUNDS FIRED.

This record of events was transcribed from a small pocket size notebook that was carried by my father, Delore Athmann, age 21, while flying bombing missions over Germany, Austria, Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Italy. Not only was he and the other crew members young by any standard, the B-24 was piloted by "old men" that were about 25 yrs. old. How these young guys could even find their targets was an amazing feat in itself and then return to base with shot up planes. Some were lucky enough, like Dad, to bail out before they crashed. These missions lasted 8 hours or more and temps were -40 at times at 25,000 ft.

The Army Air Corps suffered the highest casualty rates of the war. 71% of Heavy Bomber crewmen were killed or missing in action before completing 30 missions. In all, over 100, 000 Allied Bomber crewmen were killed over Europe. Dad flew and survived the 35 missions that were recorded in his journal and went on few that didn't get entered. When visiting one of the last two B 24's still flying at the Fargo Air Museum on August 8, 2013, there were a few crew members of the Confederate Air Force that were very interested in the experiences of this 90 yr. old veteran. They also had a chance to read his journal entries and hear him tell of the experiences of a young airman in 1944.

If you are a direct descendant of Delore, reading this journal should give you a feeling of pride and also give you pause that you are even here to read this. How Dad was able to survive this ordeal? Read Mission 8 and ask yourself why didn't the German pilots shoot? Be sure to read the harrowing accounts of Missions 13, 16, and 17.

In visiting with my grandparents, Ed and Reina Athmann, Delore's parents, they shared this with me. "We got down on our knees by the bed every night and prayed the Rosary in hope that he would remain safe and return home." I feel I know how he made it home.

August 10, 2013

Michael Athmann

Delore Athmann's Fight Diary, Radio Operator and Waist Gunner, B-24 Bomber. Foggia, Italy 451st Bomb Group, 427th Squadron

MISSION 1, Blechhammer, Poland, Oil and Chemical plants, Flak Heavy, No Fighters, P-38 and P-51 escort. Flew "Purple Shaft"

MISSION 2, Linz, Austria, Oil Refinery, Flak Heavy, No Fighters, Flew "Sure Thing", Martin, a gunner, got flak hole by his head. Several hits on plane. Saw plane blow up

MISSION 3 October 17, 1944 Vienna, Austria, Flak Heavy, No fighters seen, P-38 Escort, Flew the Jane Lee, "Was scared as hell" 30 below zero.

MISSION 4 October 19, 1944 Milan, Italy, No Flak, No fighters seen, Machine Shop

MISSION 5 October 22, 1944 No flak, 2 fighters seen, Machine shop

MISSION 6 October 30, 1944 Regensburg, Germany, No Flak, Had to turn back due to weather. Don't know if we got credit for mission

MISSION 7 Nov. 3, 1944 Klagenfurt, Austria, Flew a Solo mission in "Mickey Ship" Made several runs on the target. Two generators went out. We could not pick up the target. Got lost but returned safely to home base and landed with a full bomb load (very stupid) Roby made a perfect landing No credit as bombs were not dropped.

MISSION 8 November 5, 1944 Vienna, Austria. (Double Credit Mission), Ball Bearing Factory, Flak intense, Thousands of bursts, we were lucky and missed most of the flak. Group behind us got the hell blown out of it! Number 3 engine hit and ran away. Could not feather the propeller. We became a straggler. 5 GERMAN FW 109'S ATTACKED US. RUNNING FIGHT FOR 20 MINS. SHOT DOWN 2 AND DISABLED A THIRD, PREPARED TO BAIL OUT OVER YUGOSLAVIA. ALMOST CRASH LANDED ON THE ISLAND OF VIS. FORGOT TO LOWER LANDING GEAR!! POWERED UP AND CAME AROUND, NOSE WHEEL CALAPSED. Returned to base November 6. WILL REMEMBER THIS UNTIL MY DIEING DAY!!! (These 5 planes came out of the sun and made a pass from front to rear so close that you could see the pilots clear as day. The pilot and copilot ducked! They could have shot us down and we never would have gotten off a shot on the first pass. One of the great mysteries of life.)

MISSION 9, November 7, 1944, SARAJEVA, YUGOSLAVIA, rail yards, marshaling area, intense, very accurate flak 2, two men bailed out of one ship. Tail turret gunner got a 5 inch piece of flak out of his turret. Only got 5 holes in the plane

November 8, 1944 A Much Deserved Rest!

MISSION 10, November 10, Linz, Austria, Turned Back to base. No reason given.

MISSION 11, November 11, 1944 Innsbruck, Austria, Solo hop, Marshalling yard, rail area, weather very bad, No Flak.

MISSION 12, November 17, 1944 Blechhammer, Poland, Flak heavy and intense, Oil Refineries Synthetic fuel from coal, good escort, (Red Tails?) No enemy aircraft seen.

MISSION 13 November 20, 1944, Blechhammer, Poland, This is not on the map as a city. It was an area of synthetic fuel and chemical manufacturing and a heavy prisoner of war area. It is located north across the border of Czechoslovak near Krakow and Auschwitz. Blechhammer was near what is now Kosel, Poland.

Flak heavy, Oil Refineries, SHIP RIDDLED BY FLAK, LOST ENGINE #3, THROTTLE ON #1 SHOT OUT. CO-PILOT WOUNDED IN THE LEG OVER TARGET, LOST SECOND ENGINE OVER THE ADRIATIC, THREW EVERYTHING OUT OF PLANE TO STAY AIRBOURN, BARELY MADE THE COAST AND BAILED OUT, EVERYONE WAS OK. INJURED ANKLE, LANDED IN TREES, PRETTY TOUGH "HAD A LITTLE HELP FROM THE MASTER THAT DAY" "A GREAT "POWER" MUST HAVE HELPED US"

MISSION 14 December 2, 1944 Blechhammer, Poland, Oil target, Flak heavy, came through OK, NEARLY CRACKED UP ON TAKE OFF. DAMNED CLOSE. 8 1/2 HOUR MISSION. 42 BELOW ZERO IN THE PLANE.

MISSION 15, December 8, 1944, Graz Austria, Marshaling yards, Flak light, Weather bad, flew with Capt. Word.

MISSION 16 December 12, 1944 Vienna, Austria, Marshaling yards, Rail installations, CAVU over target, 314 GUNS, FLAK EXTREMELY HEAVY, SAW ON PLANE CRASH INTO THE GROUND, NO CHUTES, SAW 4 CHUTES' FROM ANOTHER, 2 SQUAD OF GERMAN FIGHTERS WERE WAITING, BUT DIDN'T ATTACK, 25,000 FT, ALSO SAW 2 B-24 HIT TOGETHER. PLENTY LUCKY TO GET BACK ALIVE. FLEW WITH THOMAS CREW. 48 BELOW ZERO.

MISSION 17 December 17, 1944, Blechhammer, Poland, Flak heavy, TWO FROM GROUP DIDN'T COME BACK, FLEW 42 MICKEY, P-38'S AND P-51 ESCORT. ATTACKED BY 15 GERMAN 109'S AND FW 190'S, 5 B-24'S BLEW UP AND WENT DOWN IN FLAMES AT 4 OCLOCK, IN ABOUT 30 SECONDS, THEN THE ATTACK SWITCHED TO THE FRONT AND 3 MORE B-24'S WENT DOWN. CREW BAILED OUT OF SOME. SAW 2 GERMAN PILOTS BAIL OUT OF BURNING SHIPS BELOW US, WHAT A BATTLE! 9 B-24 LOST, AND 6 FIGHTERS LOST.

MISSION 18, December, 19, 1944, Blechhammer, Poland, Flak heavy and accurate, 16 P-38's and P-51's escorted, 19 flak holes in ship, Very Lucky!

MISSION 19, December 25, 1944, Christmas Day, Wels Austria, Flak light, A Christmas present appreciated by all, Bombed railroad yards filled with gas and oil, really hit the target, tore everything to hell. Flames could be seen for 30 miles.

MISSION 20, December 27, 1944 Venione, Italy, No Flak, no fighters, What a mission! Wish they were all like that. PS. Missed the target!

MISSION 21, December 29, 1944, Passau, Austria, Couldn't bomb the target due to weather, Went to alternate and got lost, went over the Brenner Pass where we were nearly shot down. Flak terrific, Holes through #1 and #2 gas tanks, Gas streaming out! Aborted and came home. ANOTHER CLOSE ONE! WHAT A LIFE!

MISSION 22, January 20, 1945, Linz, Austria, Flak Heavy, P-38 escort; damned good cover (Red Tails?) Only got 5 holes in plane. Flak came through windshield and hit co-pilot inside. (Capt. Fenton) He got away lucky. Only knocked out.

MISSION 23 February 1, 1945, Moosbierbaum, Austria (10 miles west of Vienna) Chemical plant, oil refinery, Flak Heavy, Low and High, We went through between it. Lucky us.

MISSION 24 February 13, 1945 Maibor, Yugoslavia, Flak Heavy, Target was originally Vienna, Austria, Only got 8 holes in the plane. God those bastards can shoot!

MISSION 25 February 15, 1945 Vienna, Austria, Oil, Flak heavy and we didn't get a hole. Can't understand it

MISSION 26, February 19, 1945 Graz, Austria, Oil refineries, chemical plants, Flak light only 22 bursts, went over target at 360 miles per hour.

MISSION 27 March 8, 1945, Hegyeshalom, Austria, (pop. 3600) No Flak, no fighters, Marshaling yard,

MISSION 28, March 12, 1945, Vienna, Austria, Flak Damned Heavy! FW 109's and JU 88's tried to attack. No losses by fighters, several to flak

MISSION 29, March 14, 1945 Wiener Neustadt, Austria,

MISSION 30, March 20, 1945, Wels, Austria, Hit Target

MISSION 31, April 9, 1945, Italy Front Lines, Flak inaccurate, Very interesting mission. Really plastered the German troops with fragmentation bombs.

MISSION 32, April 10, Italy, Front Lines Again. Milk run, This is the life! Rescued Pilot,

MISSION 33, April 19, Bolzano, Italy, Brenner Pass line. Only 22 flak guns, but very accurate. Bridge was target

MISSION 34, April 23, 1945, Brenner Pass, Briefed for not flak, but they really threw it up, got a few holes, 3 FW 109's, but didn't attack.

MISSION 35, April 26, 1945, Between Italy and Austria, Weather bad, NEARLY KILLED OVER ADRIATIC WHEN WE NEARLY HIT ANOTHER B 24. GOD, BUT WAS IT CLOSE. THIS CERTAINLY ISN'T A HEALTHY LIFE!