

MAJOR JAMES B. BEANE RETURNS FROM RUMANIA  
RECEIVES DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS

"Give 'em hell, boys, I'm going down." From a crippled, burning B-24 Liberator of the 15th AAF echoed this cry of Major James B. Beane, 1801 Tamarind Avenue, Hollywood, Calif., leading a group of B-24 bombers over the oil refineries at Ploesti.

Hundreds of earphones picked up his challenge. Seconds later a shower of bombs dropped on the target.

That was on April 5, the first 15th AAF attack on Ploesti. Sunday, five months later, the bombing of Ploesti was over, Rumania was out of the war, and among the hundreds of American airmen shot down on missions to Rumania who were liberated from their prison camp was Major Beane.

When he came back to his outfit, the Distinguished Flying Cross awaited him at the 451st Bomb Group, and had been waiting since April 5.

While Major General Nathan F. Twining pinned the blue battle streamers on the group's blue and gold banner, Major Beane, in the same wrinkled khaki uniform which he wore 25 hours before in Bucharest, Rumania, stood stiffly at attention while the Adjutant read the citation.

Later he had a chance to describe the swiftly moving events which led to a prison camp in Rumania.

"We had just turned on the bomb run when the ship staggered from a direct flak hit. I looked out on the left wing and saw a hole big enough to swim through. The left aileron was jammed, and one engine was shot out.

"We dropped out of formation and began to lose altitude rapidly, we weren't up to the bomb release line, and still had our load of bombs. Even if we were going down we could still do a lot of damage, so I toggled them out, hoping for the best.

"Then the ship caught another burst, and I hit the alarm bell. My co-pilot called over the interphone to bail out. I counted eight chutes opening below us. The ship was deserted, except for the co-pilot and myself. By juggling the control we managed to keep out altitude. It was a long chance, but we figured that with luck we might make Yugoslavia and bail out over there.

"With one wing slanted upward and the other pointed to the ground, we began the long trek home. We might have made it, too, if it hadn't been for the fighters. They like cripples.

"We were just beginning to feel that the danger had passed, when I looked out the window and saw six ME-109s diving in for the kill. The first one made a pass and pumped two 20-mm shells into the fuselage. Everything happened so fast after that, it's hard to remember all of it. I'll never forget some parts, though.

"The second fighter drilled shells through the flight deck, and we could feel the metal pinging into the armor plate of our seats. Another fighter came in from the tail and we could hear bullets rip into the fuselage. We dipped the nose just in time to see some tracers go by overhead.

"The ship was literally falling apart by this time. After a few more passes we were afire. Then we threw in the towel and prepared to jump. While I tried to keep the ship on an even keel, my co-pilot slid out of the cockpit and jumped. I let go of the controls and lunged for the open bomb bay.

"The next thing, I was dangling from the shroud lines, watching the ship spinning ablaze from stem to stern.

"I landed in a small village and was taken prisoner. The next few months were not particularly pleasant, and the food and the quarters were not the best. Our prison was close to the Ploesti factories, too close for safety. With the increased bombing of the oil fields by the 15th AAF during the day and RAF by night, life became a nightmare of explosions.

"During one of the attacks, I was buried under a heap of rubble which a moment before had been the living quarters of 110 prisoners. I crawled out, unhurt, but others were not so fortunate.

"On the day Rumania declared war on Germany, I was in Bucharest with more than 100 other prisoners. When the gates of freedom were opened we were welcomed as comrades. The day before we had been enemies. The people couldn't do enough for us. Wine cellars were thrown open, and every home had a welcome written on the front door.

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