PLAN BAKER RED FORCE = A MISSION TO VIENNA

The target on this mission of October 7, 1944 was a group of oil refineries some 4 miles east of Vienna. The Germans by this time had been retreating steadily from the Balkan Countries, taking their anti-aircraft guns with them. At the briefing for this mission we were told they now had 1000 to 1200 guns defending Vienna, mostly 88MM, with some of a larger caliber. We were soon to sample some of this firepower.

Our crew had been together for several months and none of us had received injuries of any kind until this mission. Bob Donovan was our Bombadier; Nate Firestone, Navigator; Ray Fisher, Radio Operator and Waist Gunner; Ted Gosinski, Top Turret; Harold Graham, Ball Turret; Gus Meissner, Copilot; Lin Miller, Flight Engineer and Waist Gunner; Dick Moreau, Nose Turret; Orville Richey, Tail Turret; and George Tudor, Pilot.

On this mission Gus Meissner flew with Jack Sirney, and Dave Gould our new 725th Squadron Commander flew Copilot for us. Gould had been on one or two milk runs to Rimini, Italy, and he told me he would like to see a little more action. He did!

We were flying a 724th Squadron plane, #69, named Burma Bound. It was a Mickey ship, or Pathfinder, equipped with very early - primitive by todays standards - radar, with which significant ground features such as rivers, large lakes, cities, etc. could be seen well enough on the radar scope to determine our position so that relatively accurate bombing could be done, even though the ground was completely obscured by clouds.

Some of our problems began shortly after takeoff when two of our four generators failed. We now had insufficient electrical power output to operate the radar equipment. This had no bearing on the success of the mission as the target area turned out to be almost entirely clear of clouds. More importantly, this loss of electric power meant we would have only limited use of our gun turrets in case of enemy fighter attacks. Fortunately, no fighters were encountered on this mission.

The real problems began as we started the bomb run which was 22 miles long at 23,000 feet. It would take us 8 minutes to get to the target. There are no evasive tactics on the bomb run, something the Germans are well aware of. The anti-aircraft fire began immediately. It was intense and very accurate.

Within seconds, or so it seemed, a number of things happened. Dozens of pieces of shrapnel from anti-aircraft shells exploding close to us were penetrating the airplane like bullets. These metal shards were shredding the quilted material lining the walls of the cockpit to such an extent the flight deck was full of pieces floating around like chicken feathers. I was flying the plane with my left hand, working the throttles with my right. My gloves had been cut several times by small pieces of flak, then a large piece of shrapnel buried itself in my left wrist, cutting all the tendons to my hand.

This was followed by several more large pieces going into my left leg.

I turned to Gould to say "Gould, you'll have to take over", but quickly saw that Gould was in much worse shape than I was.

A large piece of flak had almost severed his left hand at the wrist. He was holding that arm up trying to stop the flow of blood by squeezing the arm with his right hand. Blood was squirting toward the windshield as well as running down his arm.

When next I looked at him, his face was covered with blood, his oxygen mask was off and he had stuck the oxygen hose in his mouth. A piece of flak had completely severed his oxygen hose. He had presence of mind enough to grab the hose with his right hand and put it in his mouth. Seconds later another piece of flak hit him in the stomach penetrating his flak suit and cutting the skin. We had been in very heavy flak for at least 10 minutes.

Our bombs now had been dropped, but even before we reached the target the formation was breaking up. My impression at that point was of seeing B24s drifting around - some crossing our path, others heading away.

Now to assess the condition of the other crew members as well as damage to the plane. Our Mickey operator had been hit in the hand and leg, our navigator in the face with fragments of plexiglass in his eyes, our top turret gunner in the head. Our #4 engine was dead so I feathered the prop. Our #1 engine was smoking badly but with no sign of fire; however RPM and manifold pressure had both dropped from pre-target settings. We had to shut it down shortly. The manifold pressure on the #2 engine had also dropped indicating probable failure of the supercharger. We had no hydraulic pressure indicated. Some of the hydraulic plumbing had apparently been ruptured.

With the failure of the two generators shortly after takeoff we were left with little electrical power. Perhaps a blessing in disguise, since we were flying an airplane in imminent danger of blowing up. Our flight engineer came across the catwalk in the bomb bay to the flight deck to tell me that gasoline was pouring out of the left wing root into the bomb bay "like it's coming out of a garden hose". The bomb bay doors were open. An 88MM shell had gone up through the left wing, puncturing the #2 fuel tank on its way through. Fortunately, the shell must have been a dud since it did not explode on impact. The flight engineer was able to transfer some fuel from the #2 tank but we had lost most of it. He put this fuel into #3 tank since the #3 engine was our only good engine. He then fed the #2 engine which was still running from the #4 tank, the #4 engine having been shut down.

Now we were returning home with three hours to go. We took care of Gould and the others the best way we could. A shot of morphine helped Gould. Mostly he wanted to smoke. His pack of camels was on the throttle quadrant. With the gasoline still coming out no one could smoke. No one touched any controls, we just sat there. I don't

remember anyone even saying anything, no one used the intercom, but Gould would occasionally point to his cigarettes.

On this plane, with the flight deck filled with radar components, the radio and the radio operators position were now over the bomb bay. Our radio operator, Ray Fisher, was back there with his heated suit plugged in. He said that with all the gasoline coming back into the waist section he was afraid to turn the heated suit off. He sat there for a few minutes but couldn't stand to stay any longer, so he shut his eyes and jerked the plug out of the socket; then went back into the waist section. There probably was no electric power at the socket by that time. But he wouldn't have any way of knowing this. He told me that their clothes became soaked with gasoline. The wind was carrying the gasoline like a white fog from the open bomb bays into the waist section area and out the waist windows. He was so sure the plane was going to blow up at any minute, he had his chute on and sat in the open waist window so if it did it might blow him out. He said he wanted to come forward to see how we were doing up front but changed his mind when he got out on the narrow cat walk through the bomb bays. With the doors open he could see straight down 20,000 feet.

My plan with only #2 and #3 engines operating, was to maintain a steady 100 to 200 feet per minute descent. Based on our altitude over the target and the estimated time back to base, we could afford to sacrifice this altitude to gain more airspeed. Even so, we could not keep up with the group.

We weren't alone. Col. Green and Lt. Voll, two theater aces, flying P51s, escorted us out of enemy territory. They flew so close to us we could count their kills painted on the fuselage of their planes. I especially remember Lt. Voll flying practically under our right wing.

Miller kept me continually posted on our remaining fuel. It became painfully clear we would not be able to make it all the way back to base. The best bet for us would be the island of Vis off the coast of Jugoslavia. That we were in need of immediate medical care concerned me lest none was available there, but our nearly empty fuel tanks left us no other choice. This island - only a little more than ½ mile in diameter - had only recently been captured from the Germans by British Commandoes. It had a small dirt landing strip. We called their radio communications frequency for landing directions, only to learn that another B24 had crash landed and was disabled in the middle of their strip. They had no heavy equipment to push it off. We were advised to bail everyone out and we would be picked up from the water with speed boats. They said several planes had already done this and the men were in process of being picked up.

Some of these empty planes were still flying, doing hammerhead stalls. It was a sight I'll always remember. B24s going almost straight up until they stalled. Then, nosing over and diving until their speed gave them enough lift to again nose up into another hammerhead stall. Each time the dive would take them lower until they plunged into the sea.

I told the radio operator on Vis that we couldn't bail out; seven of us were wounded, we would have to land. Since our hydraulic system was damaged, we had no brakes, so chutes were tied to the waist gun mounts to help us stop after landing. Miller cranked the landing gear down manually, and we landed with no flaps. The sudden deceleration when Fisher and Miller pulled the chutes threw them to the floor. We swerved out around the right side of the B24 and stopped at the end of the strip. We estimated we had at most 10 minutes of fuel remaining. The British had a tent for a field hospital and two medical personnel. The medics were at the plane as we stopped and immediately administered shots of Sodium Pentothal which put us out instantly.

The crew members were given medical attention and patched up. They spent the next day, Sunday, with the Partisans on the island, who they said were a great bunch of people. On Sunday Eve they left Vis by boat for Italy, landing at Bari.

Gould and I had emergency surgery by a British doctor and then were confined to bed in their hospital tent. The next morning he and I had a pleasant surprise. I could hardly believe it, but neither will I ever forget it. For here on this tiny out of the way island a man from the American Red Cross came to see us. He had packages for us. Kits containing personal necessities which had been put up in the states. Also candy bars, gum, cigarettes and writing material. This is what I remember when I hear disparaging remarks about the Red Cross.

Our return to Italy was delayed by bad weather, then finally he and I were put on a British torpedo gun boat and headed for Foggia. Our last thrill of this mission came when the boat caught fire half way to the mainland.

Gould was flown back to the states for surgery and I have never seen or heard from him since. I was sent back to the states on a hospital ship. We docked at Charleston S.C. on Christmas Eve. I returned to active duty in May of 1945. The other injured crewmen were returned to duty at the squadron. Burma Bound was eventually repaired and was on active status when hostilities ended in Europe.

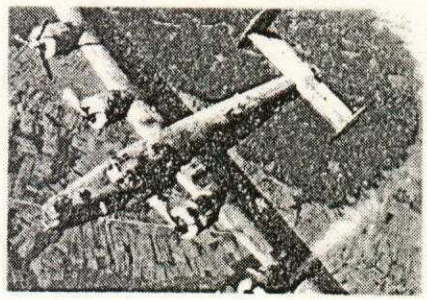
This mission had been a costly one. The information I had was that some of our planes had fatalities on board. Two planes were lost over the target area, and most, if not all, had suffered flak damage to the extent that none of the planes returned to base, putting down at various fields along the return route.

Despite this, we had hit our target well, that was our mission, and we should be justly proud of our accomplishment on Saturday October 7, 1944.

George Tudor
Bristol Road,
Damariscotta, Maine.
July 4, 1988.

EPILOG

During the flight from Vienna to Vis Lin Miller did everything possible to help us get back to base. His knowledge of the plane's systems, especially the fuel and hydraulic systems, allowed him to manage the fuel to our best advantage, and to be ready to handle the problems created by the failure of the hydraulic system. He recognized the complete incapacitation of Dave Gould and assisted me in the cockpit with any request I made. For the important contribution he made to the safe outcome of this flight, Staff Sargeant Lindley G. Miller was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.



This is "Burma Bound" leaving the target at Vienna October 7, 1944

The picture was taken by someone on Jack Sirneys plane flying above us.

FINAL FLIGHT

BY: Bob K.

I sometimes sit and wonder,
as the years go speeding by,
if our lives are shaped and guided
by our comrades from a'high.

We had learned to do together,
and to share our dreams and plans.
We had learned a bit of all the things,
that it took to be a man.

But life was not so kind, it seems,
war takes a heavy toll.
We saw our comrades leave our ranks,
and join the HONORED ROLL.

They died in simple silence,
or in anguish and despair.
They've blazed a route for all of us,
that we may meet "up there."

Some day we'll hear their voice again,
when our bodies cease to roam.
The call will come through LOUD and CLEAR,
"BOX THE STRAGGLER IN, BOYS,
LET'S TAKE THIS FLYER HOME."

HEADQUARTERS
FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE
APO 520

C-UPD-rmb

17 November 1944.

GENERAL ORDERS)
:
NUMBER 4533)

EXTRACT

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Awards of the Silver Star. . . . . .Section II

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SECTION II - AWARDS OF THE SILVER STAR

Under the provisions of AR 600-45, as amended, and pursuant to authority contained in Circular No. 89, Headquarters NATOUSA, 10 July 1944, the Silver Star is awarded the following named personnel, Air Corps, United States Army, residence and citation as indicated:

* * * * *

GEORGE E. TUDOR, 0-806371, Captain, 725th Bomb Sq, 451st Bomb Gp. For gallantry in action as pilot of a B-24 type aircraft. On 7 October 1944, Capt Tudor participated in a mission to bomb an important oil center in Austria. Approaching the target his aircraft was subjected to an intense and accurate anti-aircraft barrage and as a result of this barrage the co-pilot and navigator were seriously wounded, one engine destroyed and two others seriously damaged. Immediately thereafter the airplane was again hit, the pilot severely wounded, the co-pilot wounded again, one gas tank hit, the electrical system destroyed and the hydraulic system rendered completely inoperative. Realizing the imminent danger of explosion, Capt Tudor left the formation in order not to endanger the other aircraft. Despite the serious damage to his aircraft, he flew over the target and released his bombs on the enemy installations. The last bomb had just left his airplane when an anti-aircraft shell exploded in the bomb bay causing more damage to the engines. With only two engines operative, needless of his serious wounds, Capt Tudor brought his crippled aircraft through for a safe landing at base. By his conspicuous gallantry, professional skill and intense devotion to duty, Capt Tudor has reflected great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States of America. Residence at appointment: Walnut Ridge, Arkansas.

* * * * *

By command of Major General TWINING:

R. K. TAYLOR,
Colonel, GSC,
Chief of Staff.

OFFICIAL:

/s/ J.M. Ivins,
J.M. IVINS,
Colonel, AGD,
Adjutant General.

A TRUE EXTRACT COPY:

Malcolm B. Ogden

MALCOLM B. OGDEN,
Captain, Air Corps.