

# **Lt. Lester A. Sorensen**

Army serial number 0761280  
B-17 bombardier, "Mighty Eighth" USAAF  
365 Bombardment Squadron  
305 Bombardment Group "Can Do"

October 22, 1915 - Born in Washington, DC  
Capitol Hill page, US House of Representatives, during High School  
January 31, 1935: graduated from McKinley Tech High School, Washington, DC  
Attended University of Virginia 1935-1937, Charlottesville, VA  
Attended the National Law School for one year, Washington, DC



**Standing: 2<sup>nd</sup> from left: Lt. Lester Sorensen, bombardier; 3<sup>rd</sup>: Lt. Vernon Neufeld, navigator; 4<sup>th</sup>: Lt. Robert Polich, pilot. This B-17G XK-M "31432" was named Reich's Ruin, flew 114 missions, and returned to the US on 07 July 1945**

My brother R. Michael Sorensen and I, Lester A. Sorensen Jr., were so fortunate during our father's lifetime to hear his many stories relating to his service in WWII and the lifelong treasured relationships he made with all of the members of his B -17 crews. These men were truly great patriots, courageous war comrades, flying partners, and fellow PoW's. They and all others who participated in WWII hostilities to defend our country make up a significant part of what is now known as "The Greatest Generation". He is truly our hero.

Upon his untimely death in 1982, after 13 years of battling cancer, we were left with quite a void in the family circle. However, we will never forget what a great person he was and how, through his dedication and love, he contributed more than his share to humanity and the USA, attempting to make the entire world a better place.

One of our most cherished possessions he left us is his very detailed two wartime logs of each and every mission, including flight time, target, ordnance dropped, as well as, in his own words, describing the missions. He also left us a wartime diary, written while interned as a PoW in Stalag Luft III, which includes a detailed description of crew's 29<sup>th</sup> mission when shot down, drawings of the camp, related facilities, as well as barracks and names of many of the prisoners. He also describes his experiences there. These logs and diaries contain the basis of the many stories we were told while growing up.

From his post-war Separation Record dated December 4, 1945, there is a summary of his military occupation as follows: "BOMBARDIER: Served in this capacity in ETO for 14 months. Flew 29 day missions in B-17 type aircraft. Flew 3 missions as lead bombardier for Wing (36-40 planes), 9 missions as Group Lead (12-18 planes) and 11 missions as Squadron Lead (6-9 planes). Located and bombed assigned targets. Inspected and tested equipment prior to mission. Had thorough knowledge of bombsight, machine gun sights and deflection firing problems. Qualified in flexible gunnery. Was responsible for duty performance of gunners on missions and insured the proper care of their equipment on the ground." My brother and I might add that on 4 of his 28 missions he fulfilled the role of navigator, as he was qualified to act as such on flights involving the use of dead reckoning, pilotage, and the use of radio aids. From his log book he much preferred the role of bombardier to that of navigator.

# **Lester A. Sorensen's Journey to RAF**

## **Station 105, Chelveston, England**

**May 26, 1942: enlisted in the USAAF at Bolling Field, Washington, DC**

**July 26, 1943: Kingman, Arizona Army Air Field; completed Flexible Gunnery School**

**October 6, 1943: arrived at Headquarters AAF Bombardier School at Deming, New Mexico**

**December 4, 1943: commissioned as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant upon graduation and completion of Bombardier School**

**Early in 1944: went to Avon Park, Florida, for additional phase training**

**March 22, 1944: left Avon Park, Florida with orders to report to Hunter Field, GA, reporting upon arrival to Combat Crew Center Third Air Force Staging Wing for assignment to their specific shipment numbers**

**March 25, 1944: our father and most of the crew left by rail from Hunter Field, GA, with orders to report to Camp Kilmer, N.J., arriving March 28<sup>th</sup> and placed on temporary duty pending further dispatch to overseas destination through New York Port of Embarkation**

**March 31, 1944: the group left Camp Kilmer by train for New York City and upon arrival, ferried to their ship, HMT Queen Elizabeth. Finally, at 1305 the ship pulled out and was on its way. At some point between Camp Kilmer and New York City, our father's orders were changed from the Third Air Force Combat Crew Center to the Eight AF Combat Crew Center**

**April 7, 1944: arrived in Scotland and boarded trains, leaving Glasgow for Stone, Staffordshire**

**April 8, 1944: the group arrived in Stone at the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Replacement Depot. According to our father, a lot of red tape, paperwork, and waiting for transfer to the air base to which they would be assigned**

**April 29, 1944: the group was assigned to 365 Bombardment Squadron, 305 Bombardment Group. Everyone was excited; what an outfit this was, what with their last 51 missions flown and no loss of planes. The Squadron went on to receive a Presidential Citation. It made him very proud to be a new member of the best Bombardment Squadron and Group in England, so rumors indicated**

April 30, 1944: my father and his crew signed in at their posts and for the next several days, Dad flew practice navigation and bombardier missions in the afternoon and just got ready for their first mission, utilizing everything he had been taught over the last nine months



Lt. Lester Sorensen often spoke about flying the B-17 XK-U

**Chelveston and Lester Sorensen's first 28 missions:  
from his wartime logbook, written prior to becoming a PoW**

**1<sup>st</sup> Mission:** May 7, 1944 – The date of their first mission in the ETO finally arrived and the target was Berlin. As he described, “once over enemy territory we were greeted by wild bursts of flak from the German anti-aircraft guns and increasing to all hell broke loose once over the target.” They were hit by flak 7 times; one shell made a large hole in the vertical stabilizer. Fortunately, there were no enemy fighters around on the trip over. Once over the target and on their return trip to Chelveston, they were escorted by P-51's and P-38's, which was very reassuring to the crew. Dad wrote “he was plenty darn scared at first but after their successful first mission he felt relieved and hoped their success would continue.” They were equally proud of their Squadron for its 56 missions and no



loses. They released five 1000 lb. demolition bombs that day and flew for seven-and one-half hours.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Mission:** May 8, 1944 – It was back to Berlin. Over Berlin, he describes the flak



“as really intense but rather inaccurate; however, once over the target it was very rough.” Near the target they watched a B-17 go into a spin after being attacked by a German fighter plane. On their return trip home, they watched two P-38’s as they shot down a German Me-410 and saw it

explode. He states there were “plenty of P-38’s, P-51’s and P-47’s all over us” to help the squadron get home safely. This was its 57<sup>th</sup> mission with no losses at all. He refers to a big write up in the “Stars and Stripes”, and a recommendation for a Presidential Citation. They released five 1000 lb. demolition bombs on this mission, and flew for eight hours and 35 minutes.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Mission:** May 11, 1944 – Saarbrücken, Germany. Their target was the rail marshalling yards where German supplies were coordinated for shipping and distribution. As they approached the target he describes “the flak was very intense, scary as hell and too close for comfort.” He watched the lead B-17 on their wing go down with nine chutes opening. Once over the target the formation broke up and he states “all hell broke loose.” He describes how “he got a chunk of flak in the chin turret and had it been one foot higher he would have gotten it.” He also states “the lead bombardier screwed up and took us over the target three times for a total of 29 minutes.” He goes on to describe how rough this mission had been, with plenty of wounded on other planes and, heading home, there were three ships missing. When they returned to their base he wrote: “their ship looked like a sieve after being hit by flak”. They released twelve 500 pound bombs on target that day and their flying time was seven hours and five minutes.

**4<sup>th</sup> Mission:** May 13, 1944 – Stettin, Poland – They took off at 0915 and crossed the North Sea and over Denmark and the Baltic Sea. “There was little flak over Denmark; then the fighters hit them. There were about eighty of them and all hell



broke loose.” Captain Davey, piloting the lead ship, was hit. He jettisoned his bombs and fell behind. Another B-17 on their port wing was hit and “it fell as if it were pushed over a cliff.” Our father saw six men jump out. “Two more 17’s went down and chutes were seen to open. P-51’s soon broke up the German fighters firing on us. One more B-17 was on fire and hit the deck. Here we released our bombs. Damage terrific according to photographs. We each carried ten 500 lb. demolition bombs. There must have been 500 B-17’s with us. All in all, it was a hell of a rough day. We got 11 holes in our ship, although they were small ones.” Reflecting on the day, “with losing Capt. Davey, our air Operations Officer, Capt. Baier, Squadron Bombardier and Lt. Potts, Navigator, it was a poor day and we lost too many ships and some swell officers and enlisted men.”

5<sup>th</sup> Mission: May 19, 1944 – Berlin – After five days of bad weather we were alerted for the next morning’s mission. “Up again at 0300 for briefing. Checked over the ship, guns, oxygen etc. Another run to Berlin which Vern Nuefeld, our navigator, called the “Big B.” We crossed the North Sea over Denmark then crossed the Baltic Sea into Germany. The flak was pretty heavy over Denmark but very inaccurate. We saw some black, white and flak together. The weather was good over Berlin with clouds but could see Berlin very well. Berlin was a mess. We carried six 1000 lb. bombs and the bombing pattern was good. The target this time was the industrial area of Berlin which covered a lot of territory. The barrage-type flak over the target area was very accurate and saw one ship go down. Once out of the target area we were met by more P-51’s for our return flight home and near the Baltic Sea three magnificent P-38’s joined in. Not much fighter opposition this time thank God. The rest of their trip home was rather uneventful after flying a 10 hour and 15-minute mission.”



**6<sup>th</sup> Mission:** May 22, 1944 – Kiel – “Up at 0230 and today the target is Kiel,



Germany. All indications at the briefing is it will be rough. We were carrying ten 500 lb. bombs and to bomb at 25,000 feet arriving over enemy territory about 0040. When we arrived over the target the flak was little but very accurate as if it was tracking us. In fact, it was too damn accurate. The ship a few hundred feet on our left took a direct hit and exploded and the ship on its wing also exploded. These two ships were part of our formation. What a sight to see. From all reports no one escaped with chutes. We got a big hole in our right wing. The flak was right in there on each shot, none of the barrage type flak and each of their shots counted. This was one hell of a mission and here's hoping we don't go back. The target took a good shellacking and flight time of the mission was 0735.”

**7<sup>th</sup> Mission:** May 27, 1944 – Mannheim – “Today's mission was to Mannheim, Germany to bomb the marshalling yards. We carried ten 500 lb. general purpose (GP) bombs. As we approached our Central Point for the bomb run our number 4 engine started throwing out oil and our number 3 engine was smoking badly. But, fortunately, not due to flak. We had to break out of formation as we could not keep up speed and altitude with the rest of the formation. We kept losing altitude so we had to jettison our bomb load. We crossed near the target and saw our formation give it a good sock. The flak at that point was very accurate and intense. We were at about 23,000 feet now with an air speed of about 120 mph. We had to give full flaps, but no soap she kept losing altitude. Soon we were at about 13,000 feet. Then we started throwing equipment out. Ammunition, flak suits, helmets etc. to lessen the weight. That made it better. I shot up a German

installation with the chin turret to get rid of ammunition. We called on VHF for fighter protection and P-38's and P-51's escorted us back to England. We were about given up for lost. What a day. Sweat, sweat."



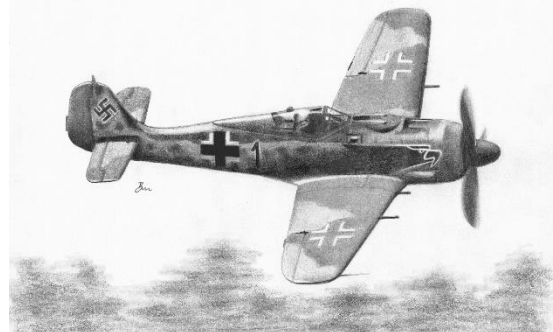
**Lt. Lester A. Sorensen, circa 1944**



**8<sup>th</sup> Mission:** May 28, 1944 – Zwickau – Up again early today. They were briefed for a mission deep into Germany at Zwickau. They carried thirty-eight 100 lb. GP bombs. The target was two buildings and the marshalling yards. “Flak was heavier than hell. It got our wing ship. After we got to our primary target we made three runs on it, then went to the secondary target (Zwickau). Wing ordered us not to bomb, some did and some didn’t. Real RAF FUBAR job. Just then our group was released. I synchronized on the marshalling yards. Crew says I blew the hell out of it. Got the station etc., one locomotive and the main section of the railroads. It was a messed up affair, but our bombs did some good damage to Germany. The mission was damn long and tiresome. We were very fortunate to return with all that flak.”

**9<sup>th</sup> Mission:** May 29, 1944 – Cottbus, Germany – They were up again early. “Well, today we really had it. Three long missions in a row.” They were briefed for a mission to Cottbus, Germany. During the briefing the Colonel “came in and gave us a talk on the importance of blasting the target, a Focke-Wulf (FW) assembly plant.” On the way over they ran into accurate flak over Belgium. “One shot goes off directly in front of us and up. A piece bursts through the upper window, through my leather helmet and burned my head, then knocked Vern Neufeld on the head. No damage done but a hell of a scare. Later, as we approached the target area, it was perfect and ten 500 lb. GP bombs away demolishing the target. You could see the FW’s on the ground scattering to get away from the main buildings. It was hell for the Germans but a wonderful job for us.” Twenty minutes after they left for home they were hit by the Luftwaffe. “Three FW’s broke through and got Lt. Hansen’s ship. He was on our wing in the number two position. His vertical tail was shot away and number 1 and 2 engines were on fire. As he went down, three chutes were seen to open. Our ball turret gunner shoots down one FW and our right waist gunner gets another one. We reassemble then and after ten minutes a B-17 comes alongside but low, half his left wing is shot off and on fire. He then peels off and crashes. Gunner say four chutes opened. Another 17 goes down, as reported by our tail gunner. We change our position as our wingmen are gone.

Fw 190



We then see our lead ship peel off and burst into flames. Polich (our pilot) saw the pilot trying to get out the window. Chutes were opening but they were over the Baltic Sea about forty miles from shore. Eight chutes opened from this ship. Then she went down into the sea.” Over Denmark they hit a great deal of flak but fortunately they returned to their base safely. “The FW’s threw up one hell of a barrage of 20mm fire on the first attack just in front of us. Today is the worst I have ever seen. We lost four ships from our group. Flew 10 hours and 55 minutes.”

Mission 10: June 6, 1944 – “D-Day finally arrived. We were up at 11:30 pm last night and briefed in great secrecy for an important military operation. The invasion. We took off in a twelve-ship formation. The sky was black with B-17’s. Across the coast we went. Bombs had to be dropped by 0720 to aid the assault landing troops. There was no flak over target which was a military installation on the coast. After we left, we had a little flak but inaccurate. No Luftwaffe in sight. What a sight on the channel. Boats so thick you could practically walk across it. Naval ships shelling the enemy coastline. What a picture. You could picture the coastline by the smoke bombs that were dropped. We dropped twelve 500 lb. bombs and then could not close the bomb bay doors. The electric motor for them had burned out and we nearly had a fire, so we proceeded on home with the doors open. We flew six hours and 35-minutes today and were alerted for a mission the next morning, but the weather looked bad. All reports are the invasion is going according to schedule.”





**Lt. Lester Sorensen (left) and Lt. Vernon Neufeld**

**Mission 11: June 7, 1944 – Lorient, France - “Today an M.E. was put up (Maximum Effort). Briefed for the target at Lorient, the Kerlin Bastard Airfield. The weather was not good, and we were briefed for a PFF (pathfinder) mission using additional navigational aids for accuracy. Over the target area the flak was intense and damn accurate. We got a couple of damn good hits in our ship. The chin guns would not work and did I sweat out fighters. No enemy aircraft sighted. Bombs away and demolished installations around the airfield. We carried thirty-eight 100 lb. GP bombs. Our ship had a good many holes. Tank panel put on the left wing plus a multitude of holes patched up. Flew six hours and 15 minutes. Our ship was the “Liberty Lady” – had to have new wing panels put in ship – shot up badly.”**

**12<sup>th</sup> Mission:** June 11, 1944 – Dreux, France – “We were briefed for a tactical target today which was an airfield (Saint André de l’Eure) outside Dreux.” During the German occupation of France, the Germans used this airfield as a major Luftwaffe combat airfield. “We carried thirty-eight 100 lb. GP bombs, but could not release them as there was a solid under-cast and no Pathfinder ship was in our formation. The sky was black with B-17’s and nearly all of the fields in Northern France were bombed. We came back and started sweating out whether we would get credit for the mission. We ran into quite a bit of flak on the islands near the coast. Flying time was six hours and thirty-five minutes.”

**13<sup>th</sup> Mission:** June 12, 1944 – Cambrai, France – “Another night with one hour of sleep. Up and briefed for another airfield in France at Cambrai. We carried 222 fragmentation bombs. That is 37 clusters of 6 each. We picked up the target about 15 miles away but the lead ship had trouble with the AFCE (Automatic Flight Control Equipment) and we could not move into position quickly enough to bomb. The lead tried again on a secondary but could not release. Wing gave orders to the rest of the formation not to bomb. Flak heavy as hell. One B-17 blew up from a direct hit. No chutes opened. Again, we sweat out getting credit for a mission. The Cambrai-Epinoy airfield was the target. Flying time was five hours and forty-five minutes.”

**June 13, 1944:** - “Bad weather again, so no mission. Three hours of ground school then a practice bombing mission. I dropped three bombs with hits at 30’ – 100’ – 75’ from only 4000 feet”.



**14<sup>th</sup> Mission:** June 14, 1944 – Étampes, France – “Up again at 1230 and briefed for a mission to a small airfield south of Paris at Étampes. I had it. I was to go as navigator. What a deal. We carried twelve 500 lb. bombs. Our aiming point was the hangar and dispersal area

section. The bombs blew the hell out of it. Flak was heavier than hell and put a big hole in our left wing. One Me-110 came barrel-assing through our formation



with all guns blazing, just rocking his wings and having a good time. He made just one pass through. Then the P-51's went after him and that was the last of him we saw. On our way back over the coast we got accurate flak and I thought it was all over then. But we made it back O.K. with my navigation. Ha Ha. Then back to the sack until the next morning."



**Lt. Lester A. Sorensen: standing, far right**

**15<sup>th</sup> Mission:** June 15, 1944 – Nantes, France – They were up again at 1230 and briefed for a mission to Nantes, France; their target was the main railway bridge and junction. This was a great shipping center for troops and supplies to the Normandy beaches during the German occupation of France. "We encountered a little flak at Vire, then went on to the target where we caught plenty of flak. Intense and accurate; we got several holes in our ship. One passed about 12 inches from me, then through the left side of the ship. Saw a rocket shot through our formation and explode about 5000 feet above us. What a sight. Thank God it missed us. Our target was completely destroyed. We dropped twelve 500 lb.



bombs. The last two days the 1<sup>st</sup> Division put up 14 combat wings, which is a record. The most they have ever put up was 8. The sky was just full of planes and about every airfield and bridge in northern France was bombed. Our flying time was six hours and 30 minutes today. There are rumors of another mission today. Let's hope not. By the way I went as navigator today. That's got to stop!"

16<sup>th</sup> Mission: June 18, 1944 - Hamburg, Germany – "Up again early and scheduled for another mission as navigator and to Hamburg at that. We were to bomb the dock area and the bomb hits were good. What a deal, me as navigator, but who cares as long as the missions are in. Today over the target area the flak was rough as hell. Intense and accurate. Col. Lawson in the lead ship got a direct flak hit in the waist, the tail section blew off and the ship went into a slow winding spin. No one saw any chutes open. Capt. Dunnigan, the Group Navigator, was among the crew. That flak was right in there and let me tell you I was scared stiff. When you see a ship go down you start shaking. Well we made it back alright and flew six hours and 30 minutes flying time after dropping twelve 250 lb. demolition bombs. We flew number 3 position of the low squadron of the low group, which was the second group over the target. I flew this mission with Lt. Buck."

17<sup>th</sup> Mission: June 19, 1944 – Fruges, France – The crew was up again early and briefed again for a mission into Northern France. The target was a launching chute for the new pilotless plane. The target was south of the town of Fruges. "Again I go as navigator; this is # 4 as navigator. Well the weather is socked in tight. What a day. We reach the enemy coast and no flak, and then on to the target which was socked in. So, no bombing today, and no flak. We return to the base and are informed to stand by for takeoff hoping the weather would break over the target. Flying time was 5 hours. That's all for today. We carried thirty-eight 100 lb. bombs."

June 21, 1944: – "We were up again at 1230 and briefed for another "Big B" mission. At take off our number 1 engine would not rev-up so we land and the prop had to be changed so we were left out. Boy, this was to be a good one. We were sending 1,000 planes and the RAF 900 Lancaster's in a joint attack. We all bitched plenty on missing this one."

18<sup>th</sup> Mission: - June 22, 1944 - Ghent, Belgium – They slept late and then were briefed for a mission to Ghent to bomb the marshalling yards. "Takeoff was at

1600 hours and we were to lead the high squadron. Over the coast there was very little flak and no flak over the target which was a perfect hit. We carried twelve 500 lb. bombs. Very uninteresting and a quiet mission. Would like the rest to be like this one. The bomb pattern was super. Oil supplies in the area exploded. Flying time was five hours and 15 minutes.”

19<sup>th</sup> Mission: June 24, 1944 – Bremen, Germany – “Up again at 0500 and went to briefing and boy what a surprise. Bremen, Germany. We were to bomb the oil works (Oslebshausen – Deutsche Vacuum al and ag) with eleven 500 lb. bombs. I was flying deputy group lead bombardier this time with Capt. Drake in the lead on his last mission. Well over the target the flak was terrific. It looked as black as a summer storm cloud. We lost no ships. Why we will never know. No enemy fighters around and we were covered with P-38’s and P-47’s. The escort was wonderful. We had to bomb PFF so I didn’t get a chance to do much. The bomb hits were good despite the smoke screen. Flying time was seven hours and 40 minutes.”

June 25, 1944: – “Up and on our way to London on a 48-hour pass. We stayed at the Strand Palace Hotel. Bought a bottle of scotch and sweat out the new “buzz” bombs. Up until 4:00 am watching them go over. What a racket, they sound like a roar of a loud outboard motor with a huge ball of fire in the rear. Then it stops and it drops and then the explosion. We saw 3 of them and heard the explosions of 2. The people of London are very worried about them. Some very close to me too.”

June 27, 1944: – They went to the railway station for their trip back to Chelveston after having visited many of the sights in London. Dad did remark how “they saw bomb damage all over London.” In addition, “just as they were ready to leave from the railway station a buzz bomb came directly overhead and stopped about over us and dropped. It exploded a few blocks from us. You should see the people in the station. The whole station shook and the train wobbled all over. Too damn close for comfort. There was damn near panic. I am glad we are at last back where its safe. Now all we have to do is sweat out flak and fighters.”

20<sup>th</sup> Mission: July 2, 1944 – Fleury, France – Finally, after four days the lousy weather and visibility let up, they were briefed for a “NO BALL” target outside the village of Fleury. “Flew Deputy Group Leader again. The weather was very

bad with complete under-cast. Bombed with the new G-H. We were only over enemy territory 30 minutes. Our group caught 3 bursts of flak and no fighters. A very easy mission, would like to put in 12 more like that."

July 3, 1944: – For the next three days the weather was bad and all they did was go to ground school and do some practice bombing; however, they did celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July with "flares and 45's".

July 6, 1944: – "Up early, all the field in a rush. The King and Queen are going to visit our base. A practice mission up for review and the entire combat wing is to take part."

July 7, 1944: – "Up early to leave for a 48-hour pass to Nottingham then back to the base, not much doing the weather bad again for the next three days."

21<sup>st</sup> Mission: -July 12,1944 – Munich, Germany – They were up at 0300, and briefed for a mission to Munich. "Target to bomb usually was the airplane engine assembly plant outside the city and the P.F.F. was the city itself, preferably the marshalling yards. It was a long uninteresting ride to the IP. From there we could see the flak. Heavy, black, barrage and tracking, all types with a dozen or so rockets. We had a FUBAR and did not hit our target at all. The other groups did. I have never seen so many formations over a single target, not even Berlin. I saw a B-17 explode and one go down in a spin. We did not lose a ship. No fighters encountered at all perhaps due to the good support we had from P-38's and P-51's. We had several holes in our ship and carried ten 500 lb. GP bombs and flying time was nine hours."

22<sup>nd</sup> Mission: July 16, 1944 – Munich, Germany – Briefing for mission to Munich. "Yes, another one. I flew Squadron Lead with Lt. Buck. We were the high squadron, high group and second over the target area. FUBAR again. Near the IP the clouds were intense, we climbed to 29,500 feet, circled the target area for 48 minutes opening and closing the bomb bay doors. The lead ships were lost. Gas running low and some ships had to jettison their bombs. We were running low on gas and threw our bombs out. Ships were running wild in no formation at all and how the group only lost one ship when being hit by fighters is hard to figure. Finally, all ships dumped bombs in order to make it home. The lead ship left for Switzerland. Not much flak over the target area that we could see because of the thick cirrus clouds and contrails. Some got hit badly. On our return we ran into

meager accurate flak all the way home. Escort of P-51's was good into the target. None after that until we were near the French coast on our return and then we had P-38's. We had to break away from scramble formation over France in order to hit England as we were nearly out of gas. Four B-17's were ditched in the channel. We saw one crew picked up by Air Sea Rescue. When we reached our base after a long sweat and process we had 20 gallons of gas in each tank. Close. We carried forty 100 lb. incendiary bombs. Flying time was nine hours and 30 minutes. Strictly a FUBAR job. Our two groups didn't even drop on the target area."

**23<sup>rd</sup> Mission:** July 19, 1944 – Daun, Germany – They were up early and briefed for a mission to Augsburg, Germany to bomb an aircraft assembly plant. "I was to fly deputy group lead bombardier. At the assembly plant the G.L. ship aborted (Lt. Polich). No one was at the central points on time so we could not assemble. Finally, after being over Belgium, 9 ships accumulated from other groups. We were at last on our way. After we were way in Germany, several pilots decided to return because of no gas. FUBAR. Our navigator was lost and all others. I got orders to bomb target of opportunity, a small town. Well we did it and



demolished the poor town; it was Daun and was southwest of the Ruhr Valley. There we were straying all over Germany alone, open to the Luftwaffe and finally got four P-47's to escort us to the coast. We

got flak about all the way home, some very accurate but meager. It was a clear day and they could track us with their guns for fifteen minutes before they fired. When we got back the whole field was in a stupor. Col. Mustoe was there and asked a million questions. Everyone was plenty mad but it was a good thing we dropped our bombs in Germany. Later in the afternoon the Colonel held a critique of the whole mess and had each of us explain the complete mission and just what had happened. We were told it was ok if we bombed Germans. That was my chief worry we were in France. All I can say now is God help those poor Germans in that town. I can't see why we had to bomb that town when we had more

available good targets on our way home.” *(our note: refer to Robert Polich video “Red Leader on Fire”, and how devastating this event was).*

**24<sup>th</sup> Mission:** July 25, 1944 – St. Lo, France – They were up again early to fly another mission. “We are going to carpet bomb an area a few miles west of St. Lo on the Normandy front. The American 1<sup>st</sup> Army is opening a drive and we are to begin it with an aerial bombardment. We are the 29<sup>th</sup> of 33 groups to bomb the area this morning. As we approached the area, we could see the artillery barrage against flak installations. They also set up a red snake line as a marker where the 1<sup>st</sup> Army was located. One other group bombed short, wounding many Americans. We bombed from 13,000 feet so the ground was pretty clear. Fighter bombers and mediums were in strafing everything that moved. Our pattern covered our area very well. What a sight. Many a flak concentration went out. We dropped thirty-eight 100 lb. bombs at 100 foot intervals. I flew deputy lead with Lt. Buck. Flying time 6 hours. The entire target area was bomb riddled. What a sight.”



**B-17s, Chelveston**

**25<sup>th</sup> Mission:** August 3, 1944 – Merkwiller, France – Prior to this mission our father got another 48-hour pass and went to London for a day and from there he went to High Wycombe to visit Col. Musser at the 8<sup>th</sup> AF Headquarters. That night they flew to the 4<sup>th</sup> Combat Wing Headquarters for a party given by Col. Castle. “All the big wheels were there.” The next morning Col. Musser arranged for an AT-7 to fly him back to the 305<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group. For the next several days it was back to training with ground school, PFF training and two practice bombing missions. Finally, they were briefed for their 25<sup>th</sup> mission. The target near Merkwiller was a synthetic oil plant. “Our IP was near Stuttgart. We crossed the Rhine River on our bomb run where we had many fighter attacks. I was high group leader today and the 3<sup>rd</sup> over the target. The target was demolished and fire, flames and smoke covered the entire area. On our way in over Kaiserslautern, Germany, we got moderate accurate flak and they downed one ship in the lead group. No chutes were seen to open and the ship exploded when it hit the



ground. Later another 366<sup>th</sup> ship struggled and the fighters claimed him. FW 190's and Me 210's were all over the area. On the bomb run two Me 210's are alongside us the whole run. Sweat, sweat. The crew was on the ball the whole way. It was a nerve-racking mission. Fighter support not very good. As we returned to the field, a new crew was coming in for a forced landing and crashed a few miles from our field killing the pilot, co-pilot, bombardier, and one enlisted man. The rest of the crew are in the hospital with conditions very uncertain. What a hell of a day it was. Our group lost 3 ships. Report came in that Lt. Rutherford, the navigator, had also died."

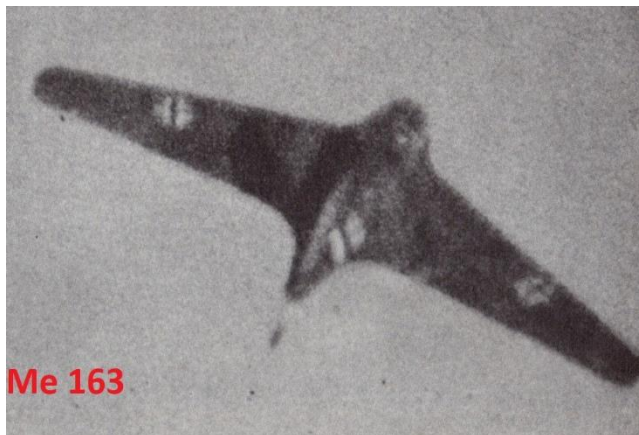
**26<sup>th</sup> Mission:** August 6, 1944 – Brandenburg, Germany – "Up early this morning for a mission to Brandenburg which was our visual primary target. Berlin was the PFF target. I led the division on the second lead of mine. Over the North Sea all was quiet. When we hit the coast between Cuxhaven and Wesermunde we were struck by accurate flak. One 366<sup>th</sup> ship went down and another ditched near the N. Frisian Islands. We went in pass Hamburg then north of Berlin, then south, then turned west to the visual target of Brandenburg. On the approach to the target, the Arado Aircraft Co. that make the jet-propelled aircraft, I saw a P-51 fighter go down and explode. We dropped our bombs and our Group (305<sup>th</sup>) did a good job as we covered the target area. Flak was slight but accurate. On our way out we hit moderate flaks areas. You could see Hamburg burning for 60 miles. The smoke covered all of NW Germany. I was more scared today than ever before and particularly as we entered the coast. Berlin today was wide open. What a day for the 8<sup>th</sup> to give it a good plastering. There were fires and explosions all over Germany. Not a cloud in the sky and we had unlimited visibility. Hamburg was the best sight I have ever seen here."



**August 7, 1944:** – The crew was on seven-day sick leave status beginning this day, and returned to active duty status on August 14<sup>th</sup>. “While we were gone, our squadron lost 6 ships in a raid to Munich. Me 109’s hit them. Mostly new crews went down. The next day we lost in a raid on Caen, France, 3 more ships. Many dead and wounded. No ships available, they are all in for battle damage.”



**27<sup>th</sup> Mission:** August 16, 1944 - Leipzig, Germany – “Well today I put in the roughest mission of all. We were briefed for a primary visual target of an oil field on the outside of Leipzig. I was flying lead of the high group. As we approached the target area, the wing ahead of us was hit by 20 or 30 Bf 109’s. We saw four B-17’s go down, some flaming. I saw 7 chutes open and two others on fire. We had a couple of attacks, then the P-51’s came in and chased them. One ship in our lead group was hit by flak and the tail blew off, then the fuselage. Two chutes opened. We had several other attacks. Flak was accurate and all around the area. Then it came. We were attacked by three Me 163’s, the rocket-powered aircraft. One



ship was hit from a 6 o’clock low attack. The ball turret took a direct hit. The ball turret gunner was hanging by his foot and then fell out without his chute. It feathered its prop and lowered his landing wheels then dropped back. The fighters made a couple of attacks on him. The tail gunner bailed out and the fighters

chased him down and made a couple of passes at him. On the bomb run the target was covered by a smoke screen. We could not pick up the A.P. until later. The lead and low groups did not hit the briefed A.P.; our high group hit to the right of the A.P. Flak was accurate as hell. After turning to the left to get out of flak, the Me 163’s were after us again. They made several more passes. They look like a flounder or sting-ray and seem to hang on you then suddenly rocket away with tremendous speed. It was one hell of a day. I saw eight B-17’s go down, either

exploding or aflame. One of the ships in our group landed on the coast with 2 missing gunners and one dead. We carried five 1000 lb. bombs and flew nine hours. Today is the day you read about in books.”

**28<sup>th</sup> Mission:** – August 18, 1944 – Liege, Belgium – “Up at 0800 and briefed for a mission to Liege. Our target was a railroad bridge which was aiding the enemy in France. We did not take off until 1500. Sky was approximately 2-4/10 cloud coverage. There was no flak on the entire run in and over the target it was meager but damn accurate. Our bombs hit the approach to the bridge and the marshalling yard area. I lead the low group. After we left the target we got into a lot of flak and screwed around waiting for the other groups. We carried six 1,000 lb. bombs and flew five hours and thirty minutes. A good mission.”



**88mm Flak anti-aircraft cannon**

**Life as a PoW, liberation, coming home: refer to “Mission 29”**

# Awards and Decorations

May 25, 1944 – Air Medal

Citation: “For exceptionally meritorious achievement, while participating in sustained bomber combat operations over enemy occupied Continental Europe. The courage, coolness and skilled displayed by this Officer upon these occasions reflects great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States.”

June 18, 1944 – Awarded First Oak Leaf Cluster, to be worn with the Air Medal

July 4, 1944 – Awarded Second Oak Leaf Cluster, to be worn with the Air Medal

August 2, 1944 – Awarded Third Oak Leaf Cluster, to be worn with the Air Medal

Citation: “For exceptionally meritorious achievement, while participating in sustained bomber combat operations over enemy occupied Continental Europe. The courage, coolness and skilled displayed by these Officers and Enlisted Men upon these occasions reflects great credit upon themselves and the Armed Forces of the United States.”

August 23, 1944 – Promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant. Ironically, the day after, he was shot down on his 29<sup>th</sup> mission.

September 15, 1944 – Awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Since he was a German PoW at that time, it was not issued to him until he arrived in Cherbourg, France, at Camp Lucky Strike, on his way back to England.

