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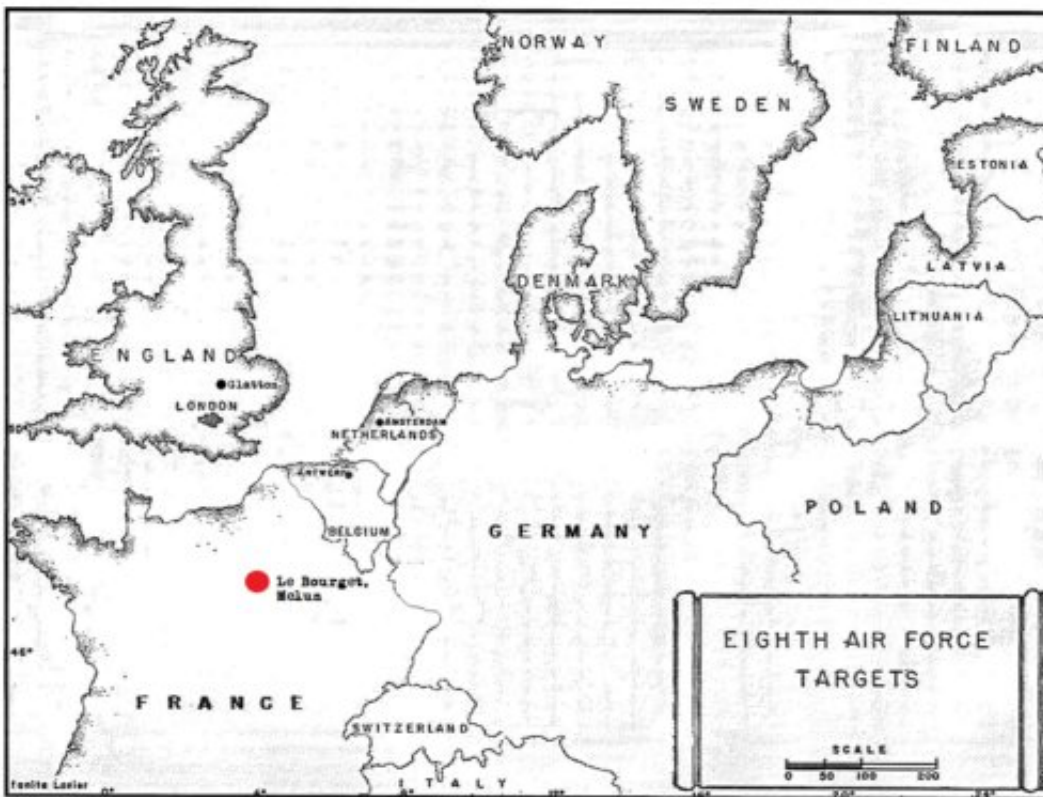
MISSION NO. 66

Missions

TARGET: VILLAROCHE AIRFIELD

LE BOURGET, MELUN, VILLAROCHE, FRANCE

14 JUNE, 1944



Eighth Air Force reconnaissance revealed the Luftwaffe had committed a large number of fighters to the western front with principal bases to be in the larger airdromes in the Paris vicinity. Over 1500 heavy bombers were dispatched against eleven airfields in France and four in Belgium. The 457th committed sixty aircraft to the endeavor. It provided the entire 94th E Combat Wing, composed of thirty-six ships, to attack the Villaroche airfield located 20 miles southeast of Paris, near Melun. In addition, twelve ship high boxes were supplied to the 94th B and D Combat Wings, and were assigned to bomb the Le Bourget airdrome just north of Paris. Fifty-eight aircraft were airborne.

Lt. Col. Raymond L. Cobb was Air Commander of the lead E box with Lt. Malcolm E. Johnson as pilot. Major Theodore C. Hoffman led the high E box with Captain Donald E. Lady as pilot. Captain Wilbur D. Snow led the low E box with Lt. Mark R. Belcher as pilot. Major Jacob M. Dickinson led the high B box with Captain Edward B. Dozier as pilot. Major Fred A. Spencer led the high D box with Lt. Vinton H. Mays as pilot.

The 94th B Wing was third in the 1st Division formation of fourteen Combat Wings. As the Wing approached the target on the bomb run, heavy and accurate flak was encountered. The lead ship took a direct burst of flak under its tail. Just after bombs away a series of flak bursts hit the low squadron, causing serious damage to three planes.

The craft piloted by Lt. Charles R. Blackwell, on his 29th mission, was hit by a burst of flak, which

knocked out three engines, caused the ship to drop out of formation and the crew to parachute from the craft.

The craft of Lt. William F. Rogers, on his 29th mission, took a burst of flak, knocking out No. 4 engine, piercing the gas tank and causing the mount of No. 3 engine to melt. The engine dropped off the plane. The craft dropped out of formation, went into a glide and the crew parachuted to the ground.

Lt. James P. LaPaze's craft took a hit underneath the ship, remained with the formation to the English Channel, where the crew bailed out. Shortly thereafter, the ship exploded in mid-air. Four crewmen, including Lt. LaPaze, were rescued by AirL Sea Rescue.

The 94th E Combat Wing, thirteenth in the Division formation, started the bomb run at Villaroche, abandoned it and started thirty-five minutes of 360 degree turns to the right. While the formation was doing a 360 degree turn, ten to fifteen enemy fighters made a head-on pass through the formation. The Deputy Wing lead plane was hit, knocking out an engine.

As it neared the bomb run, a hit by flak started a fire in the flares behind the cockpit. The rudder control cables were destroyed and the oxygen system was out. The pilot pushed the bail out signal, and thinking all the crew were out, exited the craft through the bomb bay.

The escape hatch in the nose would not open and the crew in the rear did not receive the bail out signal due to the communication system being inoperative.

Captain Raymond A. Syptak, flying as Deputy Wing Commander, took over the controls, brought the plane out of a dive, maneuvered back into position and completed the mission. On the return home a second engine went out, but he piloted the ship back to the Base. For his gallantry in action, Captain Syptak was decorated with the Silver Star. The citation which accompanied his decoration read in part:

"For gallantry in action against the enemy while leading a group of B- 17 Flying Fortresses on a bombardment mission over enemy occupied territory. Just prior to reaching the target, enemy fighters made a savage attack on his aircraft, knocking out one engine, damaging a second engine and completely destroying a large number of instruments. Expertly utilizing the power of the remaining engines, Major Syptak, determined to complete the mission, maneuvered back into the lead position and continued on the bombing run.

Over the target area, a direct flak hit destroyed the rudder control cables, punctured the oxygen supply tanks and started a raging fire inside the plane. Major Syptak ordered the crew to bail out. Unable to open the escape hatch in the nose compartment, Major Syptak, weak from lack of oxygen, struggled back to the cockpit and brought the stricken plane under control, while the

engineer succeeded in extinguishing the flames. When the engineer's clothes caught fire, Major Syptak put out the flames with his bare hands. During the return journey a second engine went out entirely, but despite this added handicap, he piloted the aircraft back to England and made a safe landing. The gallantry, indomitable fighting spirit and superior flying skill displayed by Major Syptak, undoubtedly saved the lives of the crewmen trapped in the burning aircraft."

The engineer referred to in Captain Syptak's citation was the flight engineer, top turret gunner, Technical Sergeant Paul A. Birchen. Working without oxygen he picked up burning flares and oxygen tanks and threw them out of the plane, ripped burning wires from a junction box and beat out flames with his flak suit until he lost consciousness from lack of oxygen. After being revived, he returned to his task of fighting the flames and labored valiantly until the fire was extinguished. He then repaired some of the damage to the rudder control cable, which contributed to the success of the return to England and for the Fortress to land safely. For his gallantry in action, Sgt. Birchen was also awarded the Silver Star.

During the bomb run, the lead ship of the E box, piloted by Lt. Malcolm E. Johnson and with the Wing Commander Lt. Col. Cobb on board, took a direct hit by flak, zoomed up through the high squadron, then spun down out of control before exploding.

While in the process of making the 360, the craft piloted by Lt. Roy W. Allen, the third aircraft in the lead squadron, was hit by fighters, two engines were knocked out and the ship was set afire. The crew successfully bailed out except for the bombardier, who was shot in the air as he descended.

The box lead was taken over by Lt. Benny M. Flowers, but it was too late to sight and drop bombs. The low and high boxes experienced difficulty in finding the target area. The D box approached Paris after the B box. The target appeared cloud covered and a 360 degree turn was made. The same conditions existed so a target of opportunity was sought. However, on the way around Le Bourget, the target was sighted and bombed. Flak was light over the target area but at Dieppe on the way out, flak damage was encountered. A total of 27 aircraft sustained damage.

For the day, bombing results were not good and the 457th had experienced another rough mission. Lt. Charles R. Blackwell was the copilot on the Dickinson crew, one of the four original crews. He was checked out as a first pilot at Glatton and during one period flew ten missions in 17 days. With the help of the French underground he evaded capture and was liberated by advancing Allied troops. Lt. Rogers also evaded capture. Lt. Allen attempted to evade capture and lived with the French underground until~ captured. He was sent to Buchenwald as a spy and saboteur before being sent to a POW camp.

(Compiler 's Note: For Li. William G. Parry account of the mission, and an account of Li. Roy W Allen's capture and experiences see Chapter 19.)

The following crews were lost on this date:

Lt Charles R. Blackwell

Lt William F. Rogers

Lt James P. LaPaze

Lt Malcome E. Johnson

Lt Roy W. Allen

MISSION NO. 66

June 14th 1944

	748th Squadron		749th Squadron		750th Squadron		751th	
	A/C # 458		A/C # 062		A/C # 923		A/C # !	
p	Lt	Mark R. Belcher	Lt	Malcolm E. Johnson	Lt	Edwin S. Jones	Lt	Lt
cp	Col	Wolbur D. Snow	Col	----- Cobb	Lt	Clyde S. Jolley	Maj	Maj
n	Lt	William H. Dupont	Lt	Donald E. Muston	Lt	Fred W. Roberts	Lt	Lt
b	Lt	Clement H. Marsden	Lt	Roy Hoegh	Lt	Howard A. Handran	Lt	Lt
tt	Lt	Irwin Rosen	Lt	William Patry	Sgt	Harry C. Lake	Lt	Lt
ro	Sgt	Eldon B. Krug	Sgt	Randall N. White	Sgt	James A. Martin	Lt	Lt
bt	Sgt	William C. Bolger	Sgt	Milton B. Davison	Sgt	Alfred Beacom	Sgt	Sgt
lwg	Sgt	William N. Barrett	Sgt	Clarence A. Ray	Sgt	Ernest W. Kerr, Jr	Sgt	Sgt
rwg	Sgt	Byron E. Smull	Sgt	Steve Vargo	Sgt	Patsy Varrassi	Sgt	Sgt
tg	Sgt	William B. Bomar	Sgt	Raymond L. Osborne	Sgt		Sgt	Sgt
			Lt	David Wilks				Sgt

	A/C # 662		A/C # 574		A/C # 620		A/C # !	
p	Lt	Leonard P. Soenke	Lt	Marsden W. Mattatall	Lt	Norman W. Breit	Lt	Lt
cp	Lt	Howard B Collins	Lt	John L. Fowler	Lt	R. C. Burkholder	Lt	Lt
n	Lt	Reynold Kohmetscher	Lt	Ralph C. Jordan	Lt	Bert H. Lindstrom	Lt	Lt
b	Lt	Albert L. Thompson	Sgt	Joseph Waszkierscz	Lt	Charles J. Hrubos	Dgt	Dgt
tt	Sgt	Joseph J. Lukasik	Sgt	Axel R. Olson	Sgt	William H. Sokolowski	Sgt	Sgt
ro	Sgt	Walter A. Ginter	Sgt	Milton P. Rudd	Sgt	Melvin R. Smalley	Sgt	Sgt
bt	Sgt	Owen L. McDonough	Sgt	Douglas Ellison	Sgt	William F. Radford	Sgt	Sgt
lwg	Sgt	Prentis A. Cooper	Sgt	Ben H. Collinsworth	Sgt	John A. Roe, Jr	Sgt	Sgt
rwg	Sgt	Earle E. Veeder	Sgt	Gordon D. Hobson	Sgt	Terence T. Camp	Sgt	Sgt
tg	Sgt		Sgt		Sgt		Sgt	Sgt

	A/C # 101		A/C # 034		A/C # 084		A/C # !	
p	Lt	Cornelius R. Woolf	Lt	Wade E. Knudson	Lt	Charles C. Canfield	Lt	Lt
cp	Lt	Kinney Hellums	Lt	Paul W. Gilbert	Lt	Clarence E. Ross	Lt	Lt
n	Lt	Julius Venerofsky	Lt	Andrew Brown, Jr	Lt	Donald H. Snyder	Lt	Lt
b	Sgt	Gerard J. Hyink	Lt	James Duffy	Lt	Charles L. Hilton	Lt	Lt
tt	Sgt	Elie R. Carrier	Sgt	David C. Foltz	Sgt	-----Callahan	Sgt	Sgt
ro	Sgt	John L. Batts	Sgt	Raymond Conway	Sgt	Alvin E. Merriam	Sgt	Sgt
bt	Sgt	Samuel I. Craft, Jr	Sgt	Robert V. Moore	Sgt	Alvie M. Kirkendall	Sgt	Sgt
lwg	Sgt	Roman A. Zelazo	Sgt	Ernest D. Pappalardo	Sgt	Hyman Kalb	Sgt	Sgt
rwg	Sgt	Ernest R. Campen	Sgt	Charles H. Borland	Sgt	Herbert P. Barte	Sgt	Sgt