

KIRBY BROWN'S LAST FLIGHT

The mission on the 13th of September, 1944, was the usual Penetration, target, and withdrawal support, and it was a day of heavy contact with German fighters, the 357th Group claiming 15 destroyed in 4 separate combats. It was not a good day on the other side of the ledger, however, as 5 P-51s were lost. The 364th Sqdn's Lt Goldsworthy bailed into the channel and was promptly fished out by the ever vigilant Air Sea Rescue service, while Lt. Johnson of the 362nd bailed safely near Brussels. The other three, however, Lts Burnett, Valkwitch, and Brown were still listed as missing in June 1945, a month after the war's end.

The probable fate of Lt. Kirby M. Brown has been brought to my attention recently, thru contact with a historian in Germany, a Herr Konrad Rudolph.

I am sure some of our 364th members will remember Kirby Brown. In the 8th AF fighter victory credits listing he is shown with one half a confirmed victory, and one half a probable victory. One of these was shared with our own Nick Frederick. This occurred on the 6th of August, enroute to Russia on the shuttle, when a unfortunate Ju88 blundered into the Mustang formation.

Five weeks later, on the 13th of September, Brown is listed as last seen, shortly after noon, in the vicinity of Bad Frankenhausen. Altho not known for sure, he was probably flying P-51D, C5-J tail number 44-13698, as this acft was lost that date, and it is the same airplane he flew on the shuttle mission.

Herr Rudolph, my German contact, related to me the following story, told to him by a W2 German lorry driver. I will quote him exactly as written. The English is a bit broken, but far superior to my German.

"It was 1944, I have forgot the date. With a lorry I drove from Ziegenhain to Frielendorf. My second man was a French POW. The lorry had no gasoline carburetor, but with a wood gasometer. (wood gasometer have not much power as a gasoline carburetor) On a ascent I had to put the gear slow. Suddenly I saw people jumping in the street ditch. I pull quick the handbrake and we jumped also in the ditch. Sumultaneous impacted machine gun projectiles in our lorry. A U.S. fighter attack to deck our lorry. It collided with a tree and a wing tore off. After that the plane collided with a fence mast for electrical wire and crashed in a field. My secondman, the French POW, wanted to see the crashed plane, ~~we~~ went there and we saw that the pilot was dead. Our lorry was hit 44 times by machine guns and it was useless.

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"The pilot was buried in Trutzhain and after the war transferred to another cemetery. His name was Braun or Brown. U.S. soldiers came after the war here and searched for plane particles with numbers."

From Heinrich George
Lorry driver

Herr George tells us the strafing attack on his lorry took place between Ziegenhain and Frielendorf. These towns are about 7 miles apart, and about 25 miles south of the city of Kassel. The location is roughly 75 miles east of Bad Frankenhausen where Brown was last seen. The mission report says nothing about strafing on that day, but Brown may have become separated during the 2nd of 4 combats, when the 364th sqdn engaged 50 to 60 Me109s, claiming 5 destroyed, with combat from 24,000 to the deck. Finding himself on the deck and seeing George's lorry, he fired on it. Whether he was hit by hostile fire, or was simply the victim of the tree referred to, is unknown. In either case, it was Kirby Brown's last flight.

Both Pete Howell and Merle Allen, current members, were on the mission that day. Possibly they can add something to this story.

Merle Olmsted
Jan '86

SUGGESTIONS:::::

How about having space in the newsletter for short stories under the following heading?

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO (mission target).

O'Bee O'Brien says that there are many short stories resting under those gray hairs of the pilots and others. Many funny incidents took place while "winning the war". Perhaps such incidents took place at the mess hall, at the P.X., the Red Cross Club, out on the flight line, at the Green Parrot Pub or maybe at a de-briefing session, etc.

Let's have some stories from you readers of our newsletter. Most likely O'Bee O'Brien can tell a few stories himself???

QUERY per Historian Olmsted

WHO WAS THE PILOT??? P-51B of the 363rd Fighter Squadron, Code Letters B6-C, Aircraft named "Fightin Bitten"??? Olmsted maintains numerous record collections. Let's help him.

MINI-REUNION:

The group of folks who have been having annual gatherings in the mid-west are meeting again at Carroll, Iowa on the 16, 17 and 18th of May. You may recall that most of this group became glued together when they made the trip to England for the dedication of the Leiston Memorial. Since several of this group are on the committee for the 357th Dayton Memorial project, Chairman Zachariae will be using this gathering to move forward on the development of the architectural plans for the actual memorial design, based on what funds are anticipated to be available to complete the project.

Our 1987 reunion manager, Robert H. ("Smitty") Smith will be at this gathering also. "Smitty" lives near Dayton and is involved in both projects and has been a great help to us.