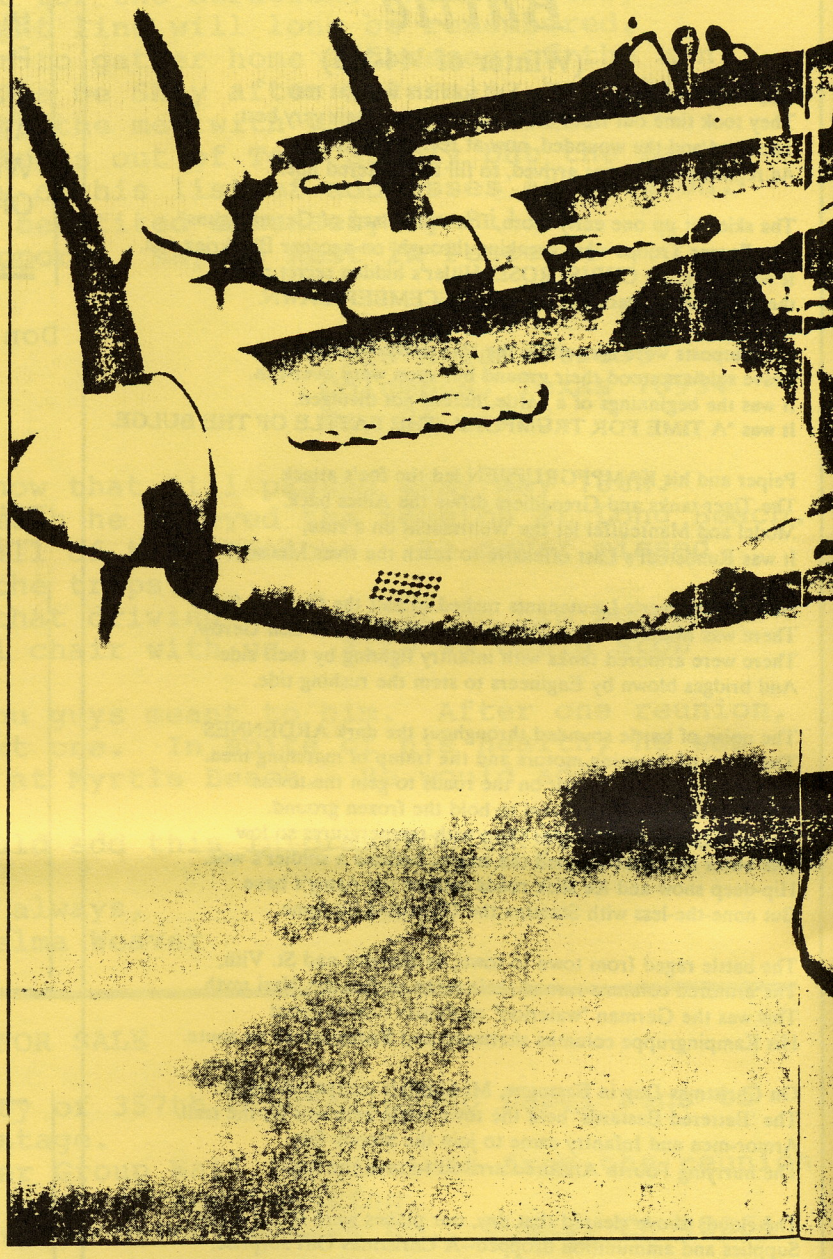
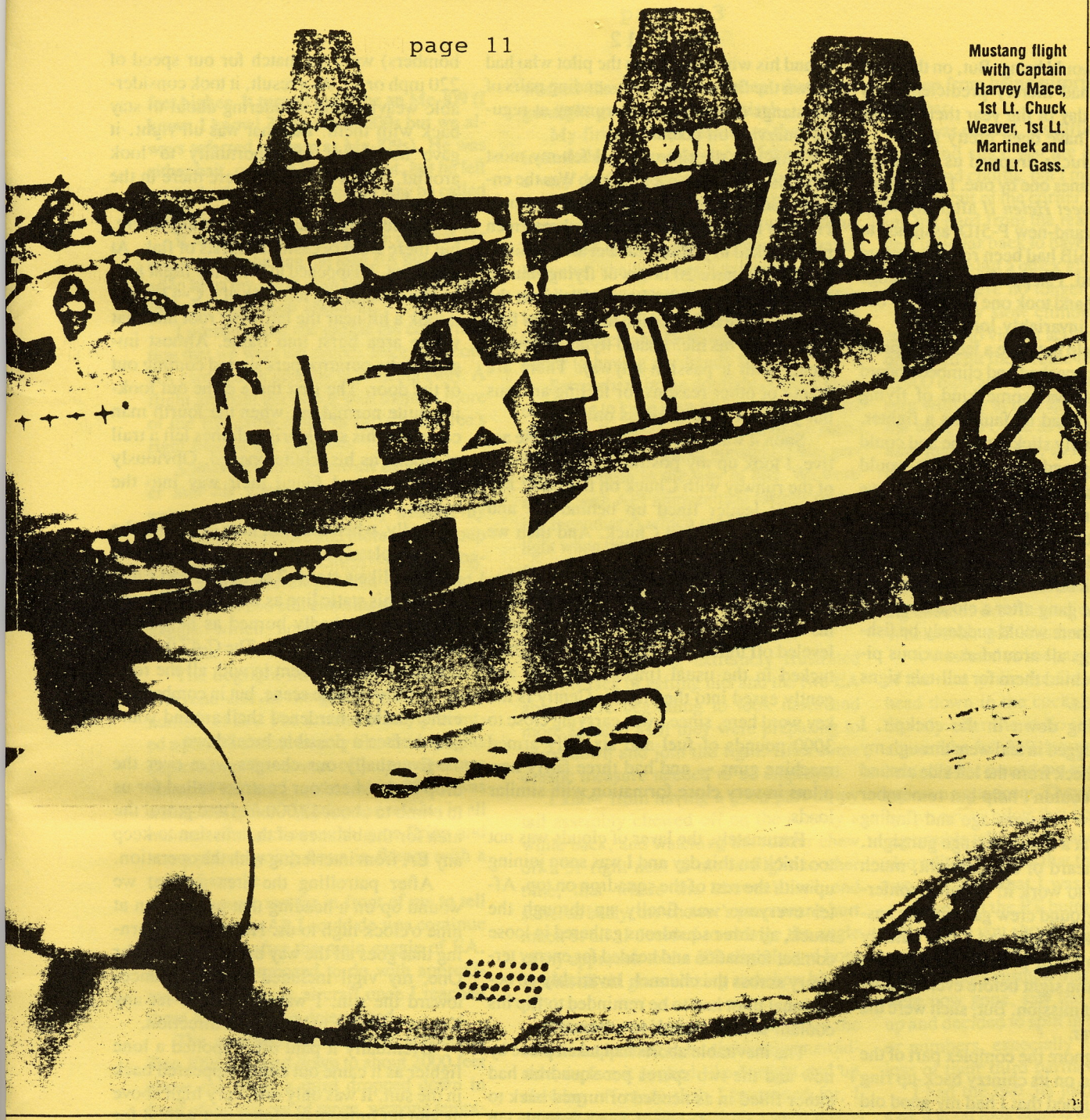
Recalling an eventful flight over Europe

By Harvey F. Mace



MUSTANG MISSION:

18 SEPTEMBER 1944



Mustang flight with Captain Harvey Mace, 1st Lt. Chuck Weaver, 1st Lt. Martinek and 2nd Lt. Gass.

The morning of the 18th started off like every other mission day. The early morning call came from the CQ and I sleepily went through the usual routines of getting the day started. Then it was off to briefing where our duty for the day would be revealed.

At the briefing we found the day's task to be quite an unusual one for us. We would be escorting C-47s carrying paratroopers rather than our usual bomber escort duties.

Operation Market Garden had begun the day before. This was the combined assault by paratroopers and ground-bound grunts that was designed to leapfrog Allied invasion forces of Europe well into the enemy-held territory of Holland.

There was no way of knowing it then but the attempt was doomed to failure by poor intelligence gathering, bad operational decisions, and plain bad luck. On this day, however, none of us involved in the operation expected anything but success. Still, the operation won fame in the post-war era through the book *A Bridge Too Far* and a movie by the same name.

As soon as briefing was over, we gathered our gear and 50-plus fighter pilots headed for the bright red and yellow checker-nosed P-51s that would take us into combat. The colors were those of the 357th Fighter Group, which was composed of the 362nd, 363rd, and 364th Fighter Squadrons. I was a member of the 362nd.

Our base was hardly more than two miles from the English Channel, or North Sea to be more accurate. It was near the town of Leiston, for which our base was named. There was another nearby town named Yoxford and we were tagged with the name of the "Yoxford Boys" by the Germans. They had let us know they knew who, and where, we were the very first night on the base through their propaganda toy "Lord Haw Haw." It was pleasing to me that, after being in combat only a few weeks, he then referred to the 357th as "those *dirty* Yoxford Boys."

On the way to our planes, it was obvious that the usual overcast hung over the East Anglia area of England where we were stationed. There was no way of knowing just how thick it might be. The war-time weather experts didn't have the tools to work with

that the future would bring. But, on the other hand, if they had merely predicted lousy weather every day of the year their batting average would have been pretty good.

Jeeps and trucks dropped us off at our respective airplanes one by one. I had named my airplane *Sweet Helen II* after my wife. It had been a brand-new P-51D, assigned to me after my P-51B had been retired. Before climbing aboard, I stepped over to the edge of the hard spot and took one last leak — our missions were invariably long ones!

I couldn't help but have a feeling of pride every time I approached and climbed aboard the Mustang. It was some kind of flying machine! Oh, it had its faults as a fighter. It was an extremely slick airplane and could quickly reach speeds in a dive that would tear the 51 apart. On the other hand, I have seen over 550 mph indicated while in pursuit of a 109 with no damage to the Mustang. Also, any kind of a hit in the cooling system would put it down. It was almost amusing to watch the gang after a close bunch of bursting flak. There would suddenly be fish-tailing Mustangs all around as anxious pilots searched behind them for tell-tale signs of leaking fluids.

After settling down in the cockpit, I buckled and plugged in and went through my usual cockpit check from the left side around to the right. I couldn't help but remember doing this a few missions ago and finding myself staring at a totally strange gunsight. I hadn't even heard of the gunsight, much less knew how to work it! A quick conference with my ground crew gave me the basics of the new K-14 sight and it was quickly apparent that a lot of practice should have been had with the sight before ever heading out on a combat mission. But, such were the pressures of war.

I chose to ignore the complex part of the sight and turned on its chintzy back-up ring and pip, and wished that I had my good old 100 mil sight back. That's what I had used in all of my gunnery practice, and had won an expert's gunnery medal with.

Soon the crackling sound of Merlins firing up filled the air all around the base. Our British fields invariably had three runways with a full circle perimeter taxiway that had hard spots branching off to either side to park the planes on. Soon the taxiways and available runways were alive with weaving Mustangs as they headed for the active. They looked like a string of ants out on their daily chores.

I had paid my dues flying "Tail End Charley" on quite a few combat missions and was now a flight leader. I assigned Chuck Weaver, a fairly new but accomplished replacement pilot, to fly as my wingman and he was right behind me (Chuck would become an ace before the end of the war). He was followed by my element leader and his wingman. Soon the pilot who had drawn the flag-off duty was sending pairs of Mustangs down the active runway at regular intervals on takeoff.

This was the time when I felt my most anxious moments on a mission. Was the engine going to keep running? How long would I have to fly on instruments with three green pilots tucked in just several feet away? (Some would only have 20 hours of flying time in fighters!) Would there be a collision in the clouds — like the collision that cost my first flight leader his life? I hated flying on instruments with a passion anyway. There are plenty of other reasons for feeling anxious but you just have to press on.

Soon it was our turn to line up on the active. I took up my position on the left side of the runway with Chuck on the right. My element leader lined up behind me and his wingman behind Chuck. And then we were off.

It was my job to make an easy circle below the clouds until my element leader and his wingman had a chance to catch up. I then leveled off until all three pilots were tightly tucked in the usual finger formation and gently eased into the clouds. Gently is the key word here, since I was carrying close to 3000 pounds of fuel and six fully armed machine guns — and had three fairly new pilots in very close formation with similar loads.

Fortunately, the layer of clouds was not too thick on this day and I was soon joining up with the rest of the squadron on top. After everyone was finally up through the muck, all three squadrons gathered in loose combat formation and headed for enemy territory across the channel. Invariably an occasional pilot had to be reminded to flip his coolant shutter switch to automatic.

The inevitable aborts had taken place by now and the two spares per squadron had either filled in as needed or turned back to base. The ground crews did an admirable job of keeping us flying, but occasional mechanical glitches did occur.

As we headed out over the water, I turned the fuel valve over to the drop tanks. This was always a bit of an anxious moment for me. I've had the engine quit as many as 13 times in a row before the drop tanks would feed. It was also a relief to reach the point in time when we could get rid of the drop tanks and start emptying the fuselage tank behind the cockpit. That full fuselage tank made a miserable handling airplane out of the P-51D.

Before long the undercast was fading away, and we were approaching the long stream of C-47s over the enemy-held coast. I had never seen so many C-47s!

Our three squadrons soon spread out around our appointed charges. Even at our economy cruise setting, the C-47s (like the bombers) were no match for our speed of 220 mph or so. As a result, it took considerable weaving and wandering about to stay back with them. But that was all right, it gave us plenty of opportunity to look around, which is why we were there in the first place.

There were no EA to be seen anywhere, but there were occasional bursts of flak. At one point, I happened to bring my flight fairly close along the left side of a C-47 when it took a hit near the left wing root and that whole area burst into flame. Almost immediately, paratroopers started coming out of the door. The first three came out looking quite normal but when the fourth man came out, his smoldering clothes left a trail of smoke as his 'chute opened. Obviously the flames had found their way into the cabin.

Sadly, when the fifth man came out, he was completely enveloped in flames and he dropped like a stone. The flames had eaten through his static line as well and there was no 'chute. As badly burned as he was, it probably was just as well. The C-47 then fell off to the left and went in with all the rest.

A truly terrible scene, but in combat you either build a hardened shell around yourself or face a possible breakdown.

Eventually our charges were over the drop zone where our contract called for us to climb to about 12,000 feet and patrol the area for the balance of the mission to keep any EA from interfering with the operation.

After patrolling the area awhile, we wound up on a heading that put the sun at nine o'clock high to us. Heeding the warning that goes all the way back to World War One, my vigil included frequent glances toward the sun. I wasn't about to let any Krauts surprise us from that direction.

Eventually it paid off. I spotted a lone fighter as it came out and disappeared back in the sun. It was only one, very high above us and no immediate threat so I waited for a little better angle before reporting it to the CO.

What the better angle revealed was an eye opener. It was a gaggle of single-engine fighters that was easily three times the size of our nearly 50 Mustangs. They were too high and far away to identify but they didn't have the look of our side, so I reported them to the CO as bogies. His response was, "Well, let's get up there and take a look," and immediately started a left climbing turn.

Since I had my flight on the extreme right of the squadron, which was on the right side of the group, the climbing turn left my flight dead last on the way up toward the bogies.

I soon spotted a lone fighter that left the gaggle and headed down at our same angle but to the right of us and about a thousand

feet higher. It turned out to be an Me-109 (I know, I know! They are Bf-109s but we always referred to them as Me-109s). He was either bait, or more likely a scout, but he left no doubt that the gaggle could now be called bandits.

It would have been an easy cop-out for me to go off chasing the lone EA but I elected to keep my flight with the group and help face the huge mob above us.

I presume that the gaggle got confirmation that we were the enemy, since two more EA came down directly at us firing away. A flight up front got into it with them as more of the EA came down in two's and three's right behind the first two.

Somewhere along here my element leader and his wingman took off for points unknown to me and obviously without my permission. As more and more of the group in front of me became involved in the dogfight, it soon developed that Chuck and I were the last two still climbing after the main gaggle which now numbered about a hundred.

The dogfight now involved practically everyone else in the group with an equal number of EA. For a moment they presented a picture almost exactly like the dogfights depicted on the covers of pulp magazines about WWI that I read as a kid. There was a mass of fighters twisting and turning in all manner of directions with guns firing and some planes going down in flames with a trail of smoke.

They were too far in front of me to tell who was who. All I could do was continue climbing up after the main gaggle of EA. Just what I proposed to do with approximately 100 enemy aircraft once I reached them had yet to be determined.

The question soon became academic. Two 109s dropped down to about 2000 feet above me while a third dropped down in front of me just out of range, weaving temptingly back and forth. The ploy was obvious. I was supposed to take after the bait so the two shooters could drop in behind Chuck and me and finish us off. At this point, my attention was totally occupied with the three EA and I could no longer monitor the main gaggle, which I never saw again.

I ignored the bait and continued a hard climb up toward the two shooters above. At this turn of events, the bait weaved ever closer until *he* became a threat. He was making lazy "S" turns in my direction and his next pass was going to put him just right for a 90-degree shot. I decided to drop my nose, give the proper lead and quickly fire a killing burst and re-establish the climb before the two above could make a move. At the proper time, I put the plan in motion and it worked like a charm — except that lousy gunsight gave me a clean miss!

My firing at him seemed to thoroughly irritate the guy and he broke into me with a very determined attack. Maybe I wasn't familiar enough with that gunsight, but I did know about dogfighting. I countered his move and quickly gained the upper hand. However, the guy was a journeyman pilot and between outmaneuvering him and keeping an eye on the two above me, who were banking back and forth watching us, I must admit to having my hands full.

Somewhere in the dogfight, Chuck spun out trying to keep up with me and I was now all alone. Between the violence of the maneuvering, and the stupid gunsight, I was getting very little in the way of hits. We were armed with API ammunition (armor piercing incendiary) which made a little flash of light when they hit. The most I could see was one or two isolated flashes from bullets that target shooters would call fliers. Only in this case, they evidently were flying on to the target instead of off.

I was becoming extremely frustrated over my lack of getting hits and the two EA above were beginning to look more and more agitated as if they were preparing to come down and join the fight. I felt some drastic measure needed to be employed.

I know from having a good part of my tail assembly chewed off on the runway a while back, and watching the rudder chew off a 51 right next to me in flight another time, that where the chewee's tail end suffered badly, the chewer's prop wasn't hurt much at all. I decided to change the angle of my approach to the 109 slightly and bore in with all six guns blazing and chew his tail off!

When the point was reached where the collision appeared to be absolutely unavoidable, in fact it looked like I might end up chewing off more than I bargained for, I ducked down in the cockpit to avoid any debris that might come crashing back through the windshield and waited for the contact — which never came!

Apparently, while I was ducking my head down, enough hits occurred on the 109 to force the pilot into an immediate bailout — or could it have been sheer fright? In any case, Chuck had recovered from his spin and looked up to witness the bailout. Unfortunately, he piddled around long enough trying to take a picture of the parachute that he lost track of me.

Immediately after disposing of the 109, I re-established a hard climb toward the two above me who were now looking a little less sure of themselves, but were still banking back and forth looking down at me. As I climbed I had to frequently look all around to keep from being surprised by some other attacker.

It was needed. It's difficult to look directly behind since you are all bound up with straps and chords, but I managed to spot two fighters out of the corner of my eyes bouncing me hard from the rear. They seemed to be a little far back to have been the two 109s from above but a quick glance above showed that they were no longer there.

My very slow climbing speed was not conducive to violent action, so I put the nose down and hit the throttle to try to get as close to 400 mph as I could. I knew that few could turn with me at that speed. The two behind me were too close to turn into, they would have just cut me off, so I just had to sit tight until I felt that they were about to shoot before I made the break. It was a nerve wracking few seconds.

When the time came, I snapped into a hard, head-sagging turn to the left and about halfway around I heard one guy tensely asking another over the radio, "Where'd he go? Where'd he go? Was he a 109?"

It was hard to keep track of the progress of the turn while the Gs were dragging my head down in the cockpit, but I managed. Shortly after the radio transmission, I was around the full 360 degrees and leveling out behind what turned out to be two P-51s from my own squadron. They were being flown by two newer pilots that obviously were having trouble telling P-51s and 109s apart. I was also a little irritated that they hadn't seen the two real 109s that I was climbing after.

I pressed the RT button: "No, I'm not a 109, which you should be glad of since I'm right behind you."

I can only surmise that the two 109s, who were now gone, saw the two 51s barreling up and decided to split in the face of superior numbers, especially after watching the loss of their third partner.

I had the two 51s join up with me and took a good look around to find the sky completely devoid of other airplanes. Time had flown by and, since fuel and ammo were low, I headed for home.

As for who shot who down in the dogfighting, the 357th had done very well. There were claims for 26 EA destroyed for the loss of two of our own. Not too bad for a group who would destroy 56 EA on a single mission later in the war. Incidentally, that was the mission where the great Chuck Yeager and Bud Anderson were near the end of their tours and volunteered to fly as spares for their 363rd Fighter Squadron. Instead of joining the group or returning to base, they decided — as a lark — to go it alone over enemy territory for a little bottle and can shooting — and missed out on the biggest turkey shoot of the war!

THE YOXFORD BOYS AND OPERATION "FRANTIC" PART II

by
Merle Olmsted

(This article is the continuation of the author's account of Operation "Frantic", a WWII shuttle bombing mission to Russia.)

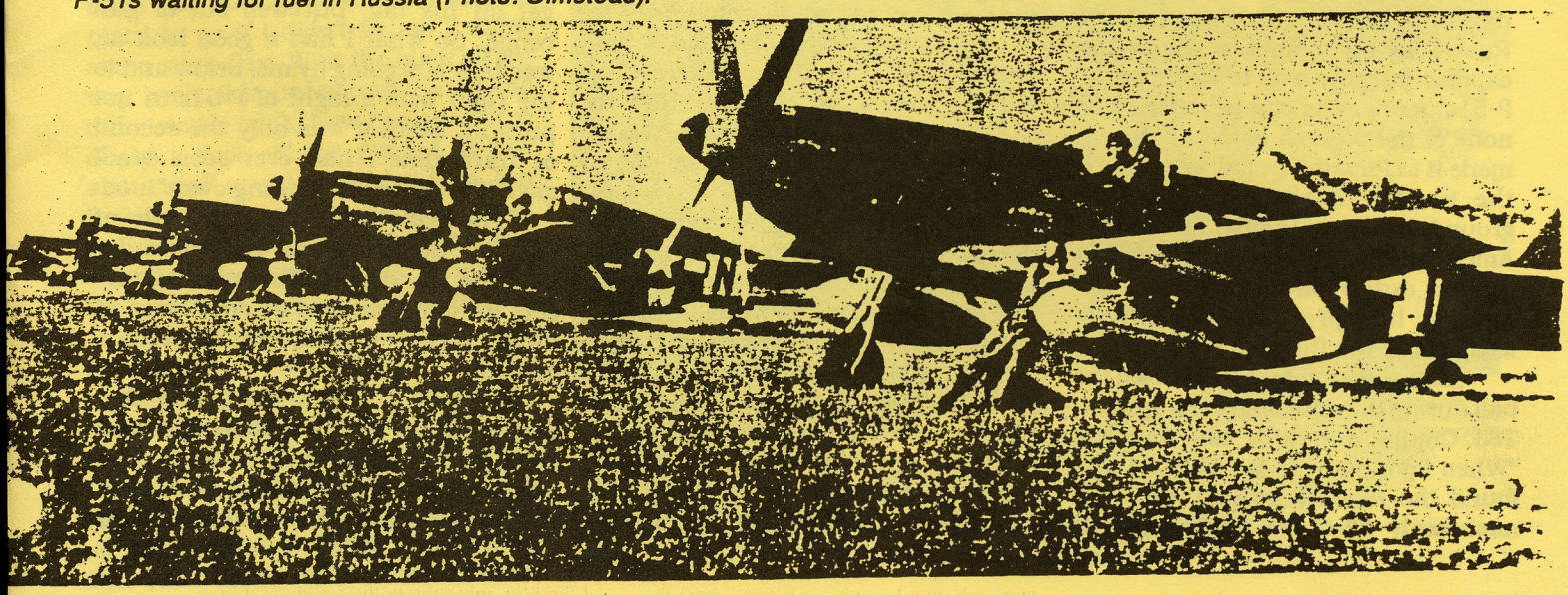
The next day, the 7th of August, the Mustangs flew a long escort with the B17s, another six hours in the cramped cockpits. However, only 37 P-51s were scheduled, so many of the pilots had a day of rest. For Harry Ankeny, it was further opportunity to observe the Russians and their wartime life-style:

"Some of the boys went on a mission this morning into east Germany, 600 miles from the Russian base, where the bombers hit the 2nd largest oil refinery in Europe. Johnny Pugh shot down an Me 109 with 50 rounds of ammunition with his new K-14 sight. That day those of us who were not on the mission just wandered around. I got a shave from a Russian woman barber (cold water and a bit rough). Then we traded some of our English money to them for some of theirs. That evening we had a steak and ice cream in a little club on the field the Russians operated and it was darn good, but expensive. Some of the boys had vodka which cost $16.00 per bottle. they really have a terrific inflation in Russia. Saw a few Russian women who were working in the fields and younger girls with rifles over their shoulders—I was convinced the Russians meant business in this war. Only saw one little village so I could hardly form an opinion just how the average Russian lives. We were in the heart of farm land which was populated by peasants and naturally they didn't have much more than a sod house and livestock wandering around."

For Hollis Nowlin, whose encounter with Gunther Schack on the previous day has been related, the 7th of August started out badly: "The crew chief assured me that all gas tanks were full except for one drop tank and they were unable to get it to latch onto the rack. I thought about not going on the mission, but told the crew chief I would go with what I had. I waited until all the other planes had left and then went to the takeoff runway. The wave-off officer was still there and climbed on the wing to inform me that I had only one drop tank. I told him that I was aware of it and then he waved me off."

There was a six hour mission ahead of Nowlin, and just about 380 gallons of fuel, instead of the normal 485, to bring him back to Piryatin. Nowlin spotted an Me 109 3.5 hours later: "I saw e/a in target area at about 18,000 feet and immediately got behind it and chased e/a down to about 10,000 feet where e/a leveled off. I leveled off about 100 yards behind

P-51s waiting for fuel in Russia (Photo: Olmstead).



him and gave it a short burst and then thick black smoke poured from the e/a and a few pieces fell off. E/a immediately started straight down still streaming great clouds of oily black smoke. I did not watch the results, but went after another e/a. I claim one Me 109 destroyed."

The chase on the second 109 went from 12,000 to the deck with Nowlin getting many strikes. Major John Storch then moved in and hit the Messerschmitt, which was attempting to land. It cartwheeled and blew up. Why did Nowlin pull off and share a certain victory with Storch? In a recent letter to the author, Nowlin says: "Because John told me to move over, my gun barrels were burnt out. We could see my tracers doing chandelles, barrel rolls and end over end tumbles. After we left the 109 burning and started back to base my guns were so hot they would fire without any trigger action. John had me fly line abreast with him for several minutes till my guns cooled off. I told John that I might have a fuel problem, and he asked me to read the tank gages. I told him the left and right tanks had about 30 gallons each and the fuselage tank read empty, but it had not gone entirely dry. John told me to use 30" manifold pressure and 2,000 RPM. We flew for almost two hours back to base."

Throughout the stay in the Soviet Union, Russian ground crews and refueling crews were assigned to assist the U.S. crews. Each P-51 had an American crew chief and a Russian assistant. For some reason, now unknown, none of the American ground crews were part of the 357th crews which flew to Russia in the bombers, and whose express purpose was to maintain the P-51s. As near as can be determined, none of the 35 men of the 357th ever made it to Piryatin, but all remained at the bomber bases and performed ground duties on the B-17s. Who the Americans were who took over the ground duties on the P-51s is unknown, but probably were those assigned to the Russian base.

On this day, someone fumbled the ball during the refueling of the fighters. Ted Conlin describes his troubles: "When I got down to [aircraft] G4-C, I found the Russian ground crew had mistakenly filled my tanks with 90 octane instead of 130. When the Russian 3rd Lt in charge learned of the error, he drew his pistol and threatened to execute the man responsible. I jumped off the wing and my American Sgt and I pleaded with the Russian to relent. He did and it left an impression on me that life in that part of the world was not held in high esteem. The officer explained his action by saying that because of one man's mistake, I could not make the mission—where I might have destroyed many Germans.

"Because of the low octane fuel, my kite was disabled—all the fuel system had to be dismantled, cleaned and reassembled. When the main body left for Italy the next day, I had to return for further repairs to my engine, which was not running on all cylinders."

Colonel Graham led the small escort force on that day, where they encountered six or eight Me 109s in the target area, shooting down two of them. As related in the Ankeny diary, Johnnie Pugh claimed an Fw 190 [actually another Me 109], in addition to the two 109s. Pugh's wingman that day was Flight Lieutenant Eric Woolley, an RAF officer flying a tour with the 357th. Woolley confirmed Pugh's claim: "I was flying Capt. Pugh's wing on 7 August, 30 miles west of Cracow, Poland, at 18,000 feet when I saw him destroy an Fw 190. Capt Pugh closed to around 300 yards before he began firing. He got strikes on the enemy aircraft, which fell 5,000 feet before I saw the pilot bail out."



Russian airmen and 357th ground crew pose with a Russian PE-2 attack bomber. (Photo: Olmstead)

Also in the target area, Harvey Mace, an element leader in Dollar (362) Squadron, was startled to see a lone 109 approaching: "I saw this lone bogey approach from the opposite directior slightly lower than we were, and on our right, between us and the bombers. As he got closer, I identified it as a 109, and I couldn't believe he was passing so close to a bunch of eagle-eyed American fighter pilots without them seeing him—or him them, for that matter! Just as I started a slight push over to make a head-on attack, a flight of P-51s which was well ahead of me (and obviously late in seeing the 109) peeled sharply around to the right to get on his tail, but well out of gun range. So what I had a good look at, was this 109 going by me, below and to the right with a flight of P-51s in hot pursuit. Since it was only the second or third time I had ever seen e/a I gave it a very hard looking over."

The following day, the 8th of August, the force was briefed to depart the Russian bases, bomb oil targets in Romania, and go on to land at Italian bases—slightly over a six hour mission.

Besides Conlin's G4-C the day before, other P-51s apparently had low octane fuel in their tanks. Harry Ankeny had his problems also: "My engine didn't sound too good warming

up, but I was convinced I would take off. Running down the very bumpy field, my engine started to miss and for a minute I expected to have it quit entirely, so I was sweating out a forced landing. During all the excitement I forgot to pull my wheels up and was quite embarrassed to have my wing man come up beside me and motion to me my wheels were still down."

Even worse was Henry Pfeiffer's engine: "My aircraft, C5-E, was one of those refueled with the bad fuel. With run-up checks completed and the other squadron taking off and my flight being one of the last to go, and I might add, on the grass field, several flights would take off at the same time. On my takeoff roll I added power very slowly, in order to keep the flight together. Upon reaching 40 to 45" hg manifold pressure my engine cut out. I eased the throttle back and it started again. Again I added power and again it cut out. Now I was committed and found that I could run at about 40" hg, so decided to go and give it a shot on getting airborne. All the rest of the flight went screaming by like a covey of quail. At this time I caught sight of a P-51 skidding gear up into a revetment, hitting a power unit and on fire. My attention was on the end of the field, I knew I did not have flying speed and something had to be done. I bounced *Pappy's Answer* over the ditch into the next field and kept going, this field being about as long as our landing field, but rough. I noted that the airspeed was picking up slowly, but I was coming to the end with no place to go if I didn't fly, so I added some more flap. With the stick all the way back, it bounced into the air and didn't settle back. Now I was airborne about a foot off the ground at just about stall speed. I couldn't turn, but it was gaining speed, and after about ten miles I had enough speed to start easing up the flaps. Oh, yes, I retracted the gear when I honked it off the ground.

"Now I had to make a decision to go back and try to land or try to find the rest of the group. I looked all around and found them as little gnats about 30 miles ahead and about 15-20,000 feet. I decided to go. I would try to catch up by staying low and under them and slowly climb under them. This worked OK, but I didn't catch them until we reached the target. My only other concern was not to get jumped by a Jerry, because no one knew where I was until I joined up. The rest of the flight was uneventful as I remember, or at least until it was landing time. We were to go to Foggia, Italy, our squadron was to land at San Severo, a PSP (pierced steel plank) strip. I didn't know this and had never landed on one. The landing made all kinds of noise and I thought the gear had collapsed or had been damaged on takeoff. But since the prop did not curl up, I figured I had it made. I was glad this flight was finally over!"

The P-51 that Pfeiffer had seen slide into a revetment and catch fire was that flown by the 362nd Sqdn's Lt Howard Egeland. The 357th at this time was operating a mixed force of P-51B, C, and the later D models. On the shuttle, it was about half and half. Egeland was flying G4-W, a P-51B, s/n 43-6721. Unable to get airborne, he had cracked up as seen by Pfeiffer, wrecking the aircraft with slight injury to himself.

The mission had rendezvoused with the B-17s an hour after takeoff. Harry Ankeny describes the mission that day. "Nearing the target a force of about 30 Me 109s (all silver) came straight thru our flight. We turned into them and every one of them hit for the deck. I followed one down, but left him because I didn't figure it was wise to drop our tanks due to the distance we had left to travel. Capt Moore, 364th Sqdn, went down and got one. Many times after that I wished I had gone on down because I was in a perfect position for a couple of kills at least." After crossing the Danube on the way out, Ankeny took his flight and left the formation, due to his engine still not running correctly, and went directly on into Foggia.

In his mission report, Colonel Graham commented that the flak was "very inaccurate". From his position at a B-17 waist gun, T/Sgt Leo Kiselewski's view of the flak was considerably different:

"After take off the pilot told us we were on our way to the Ploesti oil fields. At that point I got worried, knowing what had happened on other missions to that target. But there we were, up in the sky and not a thing we could do about it! The pilot was very good because I think he knew we were scared and he talked to us and gave assurance it would be OK, and asked

B-17s encounter heavy flak during a raid on Ploesti. (Photo: USAFM)



us to stand by our guns. We did simmer down a bit, but it wasn't very long before we got the word we were going down to tree top level. We did come in very low, then went up to drop our bombs and fly away. We didn't seem to meet much resistance at the oil fields; a little flak came our way, but not too much. We did get a surprise after we left the oil fields. We ran into a few batteries of ack ack guns and they raked us over good. We were on our way to Italy and two engines were shot out. We were flying over the mountains when the order came to throw everything overboard, so all the guns, ammo, spare radio parts, and everything that had weight had to go.

"Then the order came to prepare to bail out. I looked out and all I could see were mountains, and I think the pilot saw the same thing, that we were not high enough to bail out. So the order was changed and an attempt was made to fly over the mountains. It seemed like we could reach out and touch the top of the mountains, when suddenly we could see the beautiful blue green water and what I think was the isle of Corsica [sic]. It was beautiful and for the first time we felt good about the whole mission. We then landed in Foggia and had a good look at our plane. Believe me, it was a pile of scrap, and that is what happened to it—it was scrapped, and we had to wait around for a week to get transport back to England. There was talk that we would go by way of Egypt, but then we got the word that we were going by way of France and over the channel, home to England."

The sojourn in Italy turned out to be the most pleasant part of the trip—"Like a vacation," said Leo Kiselewski. The balmy weather, sunny skies, the blue Adriatic and its beaches, the ample supply of cantaloupe and ice cream, and the hospitality of the San Severo based P-38 group, made it the high point of the whole odyssey. It was also the longest stay—having arrived on the 8th, they did not depart until the 12th.

Only one operation was flown, that on the 10th. However, it was made up of A and B Groups, with the latter departing one hour after A Group, in order to provide the needed support and cover for the operation. Hank Pfeiffer relates the story: "At San Severo we had a very interesting mission to Yugoslavia to escort twelve C-47s to pick up escapees and evaders from a little grass field on a mountain top. We were to give the Goonies complete cover and protection to and from, and while they were on the ground picking up people. Only three C-47s could be on the ground at any one time. My flight had the low coverage, we were to protect them from ground attack and snipers. We got to see the guys loading and the natives waving, it was very inspiring. We had P-51s stacked up to 25,000 feet, if someone had attacked us, it would have been the biggest rat race dog fight of the war!"

August the 12th—homeward bound, with an enroute mission to support the invasion of southern France. Colonel Graham reported:

"Took off from Italian bases at 0700. Bombers one hour late. R/V 10 miles east of Narboone 1100 hours at 23,000. L/F [landfall] Narboone at 1115 hours, at 23,000. Left bombers at La Raile 1250 at 25,000. L/F out Cherbourg Peninsula 1330 hours at 18,000. Bombing results excellent with good concentration of hits on Toulouse AF, the target. Lone Ju 88 encoun- tered in target area shot down at 1145, at 29,000 feet. No other e/a seen."

Although Graham's mission summary indicates a relatively routine operation, all had not gone well. On take off, Captain Maurice Baker somehow lost control. Harvey Mace had already taken off and watched from above: "I saw a guy on the right side of the runway lose it, make a violent ground loop to the left, just missing the element leader, and motor off into the boonies."

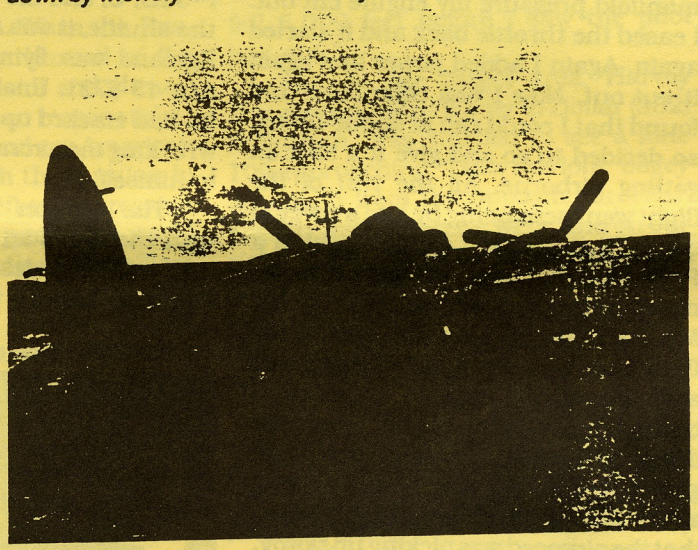
Baker was flying G4-0, 44-13517, which was Captain Robert Becker's *Sebastian II*. Baker had departed home base as a flight leader, but was apparently taking off here as wingman, hence his position on the right side of the runway. The aircraft was wrecked and Baker later returned to Leiston aboard a B-17 named *Big Casino*, wearing a red fez and telling tales about Casablanca and Algiers.

Other than the loss of Baker's P-51, Captain Bryce McIntyre reported he was landing on the beachhead in France, and three aircraft returned to Italian bases due to mechanical problems.

This final mission of FRANTIC V was marred by an unfortunate incident all too common to WW II, and even today as seen by similar occurrences in the Gulf War: the loss of an aircraft to friendly fire.

Other than the main force of B-17s from the 95th and 390th Bomb Groups, and the 357th Mustangs, the 8th Weather Sqdn (L) of the 25th Bomb Group provided two Mosquito Mk XVI aircraft to act as weather scouts. These two crews ranged ahead of the bombers on all missions, reporting weather conditions and other information back to the bomber leader. At approximately 1145 hours, north of the target area, one of these was shot down by a P-51 of the 357th Group.

Rear view of a DeHavilland Mosquito similar to the type shot down by friendly fire as related by the author. (Photo: USAFM)

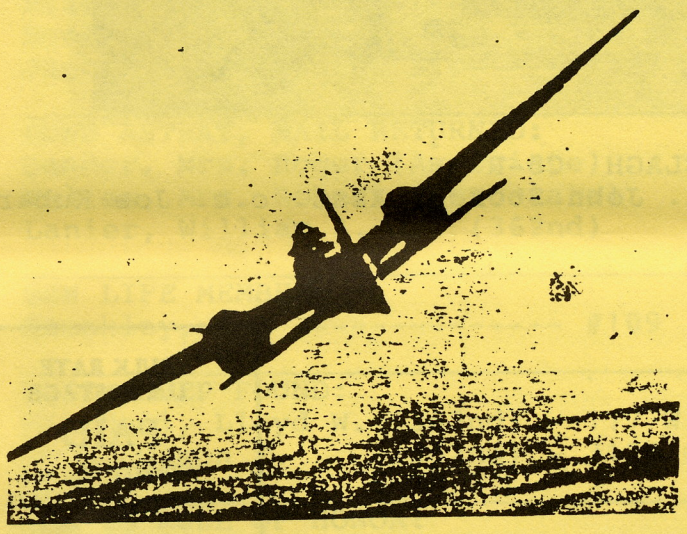


The briefing on 6 August had included the information concerning the participation of the two Mosquito recon planes, but whether this information ever filtered down to the fighter briefing is unknown. Unfortunately, the Mosquito bore a strong resem-

blance from some angles to the Ju 88 series and the Me 410, especially from the rear. Both P-51 pilots were experienced men, were aware of the general similarity, and reported closing in to check for insignia (none seen). Believing the engines to be radials, one P-51 opened fire. This was the machine identified as a Ju 88 in Colonel Graham's report, although it is identified as Ju 188 in the encounter report. The navigator, Lt Elbert F. Harris, bailed out and survived, but the pilot was killed in the crash.

By 1400 hours, the force was on the ground at home base. It had been a fascinating adventure for those lucky enough to take part: they had flown over much of Europe, visited two countries none had ever seen before, and

Rear view of a Junkers 88, showing similarity to the Mosquito which was shot down by friendly fire. (Photo: USAFM)



came back with many stories of their adventures. The Yoxford Boys' part in FRANTIC V was over.

For their part as amateur B-17 crew members, all of the 35 men of the ground crews received the Air Medal—the only enlisted members of the 357th to be so honored.

An excellent overview of the shuttle missions is found in the Foreword of *The USAAF In World War II*, by Craven & Cates, where the authors sum up the results:

"The summer of 1944 witnessed an experiment in cooperation with the Russians that was more enlightening than fruitful, an effort to utilize airdromes in Soviet held territory as alternate bases for heavies from England and Italy. The concept of shuttle bombing, well liked by the AAF, was in this case particularly attractive to Arnold and other air commanders who hoped thus to lay under heavy attack industrial plants in Eastern Germany, to foster closer relations with the Soviets, and to impress them with the importance of strategic bombardment so they might furnish bases in Siberia for B-29 attacks against Japan. Stalin gave full verbal consent on the project but subordinate officials moved slowly and it taxed American patience to prepare three airfields for heavy bomber use. A number of missions were staged from these fields, some with fair success but none of great significance. Certainly none were as brilliant an operation as the German night attack on the airdrome at Poltava which caught B-17s on the ground, destroying 43 and damaging 26. Russian interest, never very warm, cooled perceptibly. The Soviet command limited unreasonably (or so the AAF thought) the choice of targets and the venture fizzled out in an argument over whether heavies from the Russia bases should be allowed to supply the forces of General Bor-Komorowski, beleaguered in Warsaw. Altogether the experiment was of little importance tactically and early estimates that it had fostered better relations between the two allies were overly optimistic. Americans did learn something of the Russian genius for obstruction and one may wonder if the code name for the project, FRANTIC, was chosen with some foreknowledge of the frayed nerves which would be characteristic of men imbued with Arnold's hurry up pace when faced with the Russian slowdown. Other relations between the AAF and Soviets, particularly regarding U.S. efforts to get agreement on a bomb line, were equally frustrating."

We will end with Captain Harry Ankeny's thoughts on FRANTIC V:

"It was a very interesting and educational mission and one I will never forget. Seeing how people actually live in Europe convinced me that there is no place like the good ol' U.S.A."

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Acknowledgments and sources.

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357th Fighter Group operational records in the author's files supplied most of the basic information, with additions from the eminent 8th AF historian, Roger Freeman. The following secondary sources were used:

Glenn B. Infield, "Shuttle Raiders To Russia," *Air Force Magazine*, April, 1972.

Ian Hawkins, *B-17s Over Berlin, the 95th Bomb Group*, Brassey's U.S., Inc. 1990.

Roger Freeman, *The Mighty Eighth War Diary*, Janes Publishing Co, London, 1981. ✪