

"MISERY AND TEAMWORK OVER MISBURG"
THE MISBURG MISSION (445th Bomb Group)
26 NOVEMBER 1944

By: Frank W. Federici and Lt. Col. Vincent Mazza Ret.

When this mission was publicized in the "Stars and Stripes" in February 1945, the caption read, " All In A Day's Work." This caption is appropriate because we all did our respective jobs and helped each other - a normal bomber crew procedure in order to survive.

We finally decided after 52 years (with encouragement from others) that some other bomber crews would like to read about our crew's teamwork and correlate it with their own, especially under such dire circumstances. We also thought that our children and grandchildren, as well as other living crewmembers, would want to know. None of our crewmembers gave any thought to publicizing this mission over the years because our overwhelming thought concerning Misburg was the loss of our pilot, Jim Williams. Now we feel that Jim would concur, so let us tell our story :

The Crew members are:

James A. Williams (Pilot)

Vincent Mazza (Co-Pilot)

Leo J. Lewis (Bombardier)

Frank W. Federici (Navigator)

John C. Christainson (Nose Turret Navigator)

Herbert A. Krieg (Engineer)

Carl E. Bally (Radio Operator)

Edward W. Goodgion (Waist Gunner)

Kenneth J. Brass (Waist Gunner)

Charles W. Bickett (Tail Gunner)

Our crew was assigned to the 700th Bomb Squadron and soon had become a lead crew. Gathered in the main briefing room on 26 November 1944, we soon learned that our target was near Hanover--which meant that we were going to have a rough mission. We became even more apprehensive when we learned that we would be bucking a 150-mph headwind during the bomb run!

We took off, assembled into formation, and took the well-known "American Highway" (the route over the Zuider Zee). We were leading the low left squadron or the lead squadron--we do not remember which.

"MISERY AND TEAMWORK OVER MISBURG"

THE MISBURG MISSION (445th Bomb Group)

26 NOVEMBER 1944

By: Frank W. Federici and Lt. Col. Vincent Mazza Ret.

After the "Zee" we continued on the briefed courses which were generally in an easterly direction north of Misburg. At this time the navigator checked our ground speed which was 375 mph. We flew past Misburg, turned right (south) and then right again to head in a westerly direction on the bomb run with a ground speed of only 90 mph! Some of you Misburg navigators may recall this speed! (We were hanging on "Skyhooks.")

We went into our bomb run routine with the navigator talking on the interphone to the nose turret navigator to pinpoint our location. In turn, the nose turret navigator (who could see directly in front of the aircraft) worked with the bombardier until the bombardier had the target in his bombsight. Once the bombardier had the target in his bombsight there was absolute silence (no use of the interphone) while he controlled the aircraft as he synchronized the bombsight. The bombsight controlled the automatic pilot during the bomb run.

During the early part of the bomb run (before the bombardier had the target in his bombsight) the navigator saw many fighters high at 3:0'clock in a big dogfight and mentioned it on the interphone. They were at about 30,000 feet (hundreds of them – P-51s and ME-109s). We saw five or six trails of smoking aircraft each time we had a chance to look in that direction. We learned after our return to base that 105 German fighters were shot down during that battle. Of course the P-51s were our fighter cover, and this day they were involved in this dog-fight. Meanwhile, the enemy had assigned other fighters to hit our squadron by coming 5 abreast at 11:0'clock.

On the first wave, our pilot, James A. Williams, was hit with a 20mm and killed instantly. The bullet went through his flak suit and embedded in his backpack parachute. The dead pilot slumped over, and the co-pilot, Vince Mazza, immediately took over, with one hand trying to hold the pilot back from slumping over the controls and with the other trying to avoid a collision with other ships in our formation. The biggest problem that the co-pilot was having was that the pilot's flying boots were interfering with the rudder controls. The flight engineer heard this and got out of the upper turret. The co-pilot pointed to the pilot's boots. The engineer saw the problem, but the co-pilot had to apply left rudder momentarily to free the boots (even though it meant turning into the B-24 on our left and then immediately applying right rudder to avoid a collision). The engineer freed the boots from the rudder controls. Our left wing almost touched the waist gunner on the B-24 on our left! Close is only good in horseshoes and hand grenades! The engineer immediately strapped the pilot to his seat.

Then a second wave of enemy fighters came in and a 20mm explosive shell knocked out the nose turret, wounded the nose turret navigator, and blew out all of the plexiglas below the turret and in front of the bombsight. In turn, the bombardier, who had already synchronized the bombsight, was knocked over against the navigator, who in turn was knocked down onto the nose wheel doors. The bombardier's helmet and oxygen mask

"MISERY AND TEAMWORK OVER MISBURG"

THE MISBURG MISSION (445th Bomb Group)

26 NOVEMBER 1944

By: Frank W. Federici and Lt. Col. Vincent Mazza Ret.

were knocked off and he was completely dazed. The navigator, Frank Federici, shook him and with sign language sent him back to the flight deck. The navigator called the radio operator, Carl Bally, and told him to watch for Leo Lewis or have Herbie Krieg, the flight engineer, attend to him. The flight engineer and radio operator shared their oxygen masks with the bombardier until another mask could be brought to him from the waist section of the ship. The waist gunner, Eddie W. Goodgion, was called and asked to also bring blankets and an oxygen mask for the bombardier, whose ears and face were frost bitten. The tail gunner, Charles Bickett, had lost communication with the rest of the crew and was completely unaware of the situation!

Back to the navigator – bombardier area of the ship. Since the bombardier had already synchronized the bombsight, the navigator grabbed the salvo lever, watched the movable indices come abreast of the stationary indices' on the bombsight (bombs away), and salvoed the bombs to ensure that they were released on target. After the bombs were released the navigator helped the wounded nose turret navigator, John Christainson, out of the turret. He was able to crawl back to the waist section of the ship where the left waist gunner, Kenneth Brass, tended his wounded leg. Most of the crew members were "busy beavers" on this particular bomb run with a considerable amount of additional activities which occurred in a few minutes!

The navigator tucked his trousers back into his boots (they came out when he was knocked down earlier). Frostbitten shins were not discovered until our return to base. At this time the navigator recognized the situation of a 200 mph windblast at -55 °C with a possible third wave of enemy fighters. With self-preservation in mind, he pulled out his .45 pistol and looked through the plexiglas hole to fight the enemy's 20mm. cannons! Quite a few profane remarks were uttered, but fortunately our Lord was with us. Another wave did not come.

The navigator recognized that the co-pilot had gained complete control of the ship, and since all four fans were still working, we were able to stay in formation for our mutual protection until we were out of enemy territory in spite of the cold air and wind blast. Any straggler was easy prey for the Luftwaffe. When we were finally able to descend, we were on our own. The navigator noticed that his maps and charts were torn and tangled in the control cables. The copilot was then assured that this was not a problem and that compass headings would be given without maps. This was feasible because this was our 25th mission and the navigator was familiar with all the various landmarks on the way to base.

To avoid much of the windblast, the navigator sat on the navigator table and continued to direct the pilot. It was difficult to stand and function with this gale. Meanwhile, back in the cockpit, our co-pilot's eyes felt like they were freezing and he was having difficulty seeing. To avoid some of the air blast, he looked down and saw his plastic goggles

"MISERY AND TEAMWORK OVER MISBURG"
THE MISBURG MISSION (445th Bomb Group)
26 NOVEMBER 1944

By: Frank W. Federici and Lt. Col. Vincent Mazza Ret.

dangling from the wing flap lever. He grabbed the goggles and put them on. Vince Mazza still believes that this 50 cent item probably saved our lives.

We sighted Great Yarmouth on the coast of East Anglia and continued on to base.

The crew's teamwork brought us home. Our pilot's tube was damaged, causing the air speed meter and altimeter to be inoperative. The navigator fired distress flares out of the top hatch while the pilot maneuvered alongside of another B-24 which was on its final approach. The other pilot recognized that we were in trouble and let us move into his pattern for our landing. Our pilot had been gauging his speed and altitude while flying with the other B-24. Our copilot (now pilot) "greased us in," although it was fast. The flight engineer handled the throttles for the pilot. We learned later that the other B-24 was piloted by Henry Orzechowski. Again, more teamwork.

The copilot had a large double chin (due to frostbite) when we hopped out of the ship; he also had frostbitten wrists. The bombardier's ear lobes became one inch thick from frostbite.

The crew attended the graveside services for Jim Williams and 51 others at the cemetery at Cambridge, England. Five other ships from our squadron were shot down at Misburg. This was a rough one!

Henry Orzechowski suggested to the authors that we should write about this mission. F. H. "Pete" Bradley, who was Charles (Chuck) Walker's navigator, also suggested to this crew's navigator that we ought to submit this story to the 2ADA Journal. We finally did it, "Pete" Bradley and Veronica Orzechowski! We are certain that this would have made Hank very pleased.

"All In A Day's Work"? Not a day we would like to repeat!