

## Kassel Mission Personal Account of William Dewey

*The following is an excerpt from the Kassel mission report (Bill Dewey, Pilot):*

"...On September 27, 1944, I was a 2nd Lieutenant, Airplane Commander of a B-24-J four engine Liberator Bomber, flying my 8th mission from the 445th BG base at Tibenham, England. The mission this day was a maximum effort, with 40 planes in (4) 10-ship squadrons assigned to bomb the rail yards and the Henschel works at Kassel, Germany.

We reached our assembly point and joined the formation of 37 planes (3 aborted), and climbed into our position as left wing of the lead element of the high, high right squadron. For clarification, we were at that time flying 10-plane squadrons, with a group lead squadron, a low-left squadron, a high right squadron, and a high, high right squadron.

Our group of 37 planes flew into its proper position in the bomber stream with the 2nd Combat Wing, and commenced our climb over the North Sea toward the enemy coast. As we made landfall over Holland, there was a solid undercast of low stratocumulus clouds over Europe, which meant that we were to navigate and bomb by PFF (radar).

We reached the group IP, led by the group PFF navigator, dropped our bombs (toggled on our squadron leader's salvo), and were attempting to rally in group formation when all hell broke loose. Our tail gunner, Monty (Ruben Montanez) yelled, "I see fighters, I see flak," and then the entire plane began to shudder and shake, with twin tail guns, and both waist guns firing simultaneously, and from impact of 20 & 30 MM enemy shells.

As our plane continued to shake, my copilot, Bill Boykin, pointed out his side window at B-24's in the other squadrons going down on fire, and enemy fighters exploding. Our intercom went out to the waist and tail within seconds. Our top turret gunner, Charley Craig, reported that there were five enemy fighters on our tail for a few moments. I could see the tail gunner in our squadron and element lead plane motioning to us to tuck our B-24 in closer so he could get better shots at the 109's and 190's.

Then, as suddenly as it all started, it was over, in maybe three to five minutes. Only seven B-24's remained at that moment to form on the surviving PFF plane, so our squadron leader became group leader. Nose gunner Les Medlock reported more fighters coming at us from 11 o'clock low! Thank God, they were P-47's, evidently from the 9th AF, investigating why all the burning planes were falling through the clouds.

I sent Copilot Boykin back to the waist to report on the damage since the intercom was out. When he came back, Boykin, a tough ex-football player and

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former cavalryman, was shaken. The tail turret had caught fire, from direct hits by 20 MM cannon in the first wave of FW-190's, both waist gunners were wounded and bloody along with the tail gunner. There was a huge hole in the right waist ahead of the window, the left waist window was shattered. Control cables to the tail were partially damaged, and the twin vertical rudders appeared frayed and disintegrating. Looking out the copilot's window we could see a 3' diameter hole in the upper surface of the wing behind the No.3 engine, where 100 octane gasoline was splashing out.

The hydraulic fluid fire at the tail turret was quickly extinguished. There was no oxygen and the electric flying suits were inoperative in the waist. Navigator Herb Bailey took over the nose turret while Nose Gunner Les Medlock made numerous trips from the front of the ship through the bomb bay carrying portable oxygen bottles to the two wounded waist gunners and slightly wounded tail gunner, covering them with his jacket and applying first aid.

Fortunately our VHF radio performed perfectly, and I made several calls to the group leader asking him to slow down from 160 mph air speed indicated, because our ship was shaking and shuddering like it was about to break apart. It finally became apparent that we'd have to drop out of formation and slow down, letting down below oxygen required altitude. I made the decision to risk ditching in the channel in order to get the wounded to hospital quicker, switched to the air-sea rescue channel, and called "Colgate". Identifying our plane and problem, Colgate had me give a long count so they could get a radar fix on us. He gave me a heading toward England, and ordered me to report back every 10 minutes.

About an hour later we dropped through the clouds to see the white cliffs of Dover and the super long runways of Manston directly ahead. Next question: with the direct bombardment from up to seven enemy planes, and one exhausting his ammunition on us (gunners reported one 109 flew below us for several minutes waiting for us to go down), would our gear and flaps operate? What about the landing gear and tires?

Divine Providence was indeed with us. The landing gear went down and locked perfectly, full flaps went down, and the tires were fully inflated. My landing was the best I ever made in a B-24 - like we were on feathers. A day we will never forget!...."

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**Luftwaffe Data\***

IV.Sturm/JG 3 with the Fw-190A-8/R-2.

II.Sturm/JG 4 with the Fw-190A-8/R-2.

II.Sturm/JG 300 with a mix of Fw-190 A-8's and Fw-190 A-8/R-2's.

The high cover was given by I.STURM/JG 300 flying the Bf 109G-6.

There were a total of 32 aircraft losses and 18 KIA and 8 wounded. 6 aircraft were damaged with under 60%.

Their ferocity in which the Fw-190's attacked is evident by their claims of bombers destroyed which of course is not correct. 56 B-24's destroyed and 25 shot out of formation. For fact, we do know that IV.Sturm/JG 3 was the first to attack and had no high cover. I would suspect that their claims of 17 B-24's is correct, as they lost no pilots KIA, but had 5 wounded. They lost 6 aircraft to bomber return fire, and 3 damaged.

II.Sturm/JG 4 came second with II.Sturm./JG 300 and the Bf 109 Gruppen coming in at a close 3rd, probably within 30 seconds to a minute of the JG 4 unit. These units probably shot down the stragglers not already shot down by JG 3.

**\*Note:** The Luftwaffe data submitted here was given by a gentleman who lost a cousin flying Fw-190's during the war, and who was possibly lost on a mission flown by the 445th in Nov, 1944.

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