

1. **Introduction A waist gunner's story**

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SPECIAL TO DAILY NEWS

RICHLANDS -- In 1943, Everett Barbee got his letter from President Roosevelt. It was his welcome to World War II.

That's how a gentleman farmer from Richlands became a waist gunner over Europe ' eyeing targets he could barely see while gasping at countryside most only dream about.

Up to that point, life was pretty routine for Barbee, now 86 and a longtime Onslow County clerk of court who retired in 1990. He was born in the Richlands area while World War I raged in Europe. He was one of five children born to Cader G. and Bessie Ervin Barbee. He attended Richlands High School and N.C. State University. As a teenager, he worked with Wallbrook Tobacco Co. in Goldsboro.

When World War II began, he was farming, raising tobacco and working for Wallbrook.

Then, in 1943, he received his letter from the president and everything changed. He was whisked from the farm to basic training in Mississippi.

"Before I finished, they sent me up to Roosevelt Field in New York," Barbee said.

There he learned to shoot the .50 caliber machinegun he would man as a waist gunner on a B-24 bomber in a battery of missions 60 years ago.

"After my first mission I decided to keep a diary of all my missions," Barbee said. "I didn't have anything else to do."

1. **Tough beginning**

On the morning of Dec. 23, 1943, the crew of "Ragged but Right," with their training behind them, took off from Morrison Field, Fla., and headed to the European war zone. About two hours after takeoff, a life raft door blew off and struck the tail, putting a large hole in it.

The crew had to land at Brouguien Field, Puerto Rico, for repairs. After eight days, they took off and leapfrogged down to Natal, Brazil, then across the Atlantic to Dakar, Senegal, across the Sahara Desert to Casablanca and on to Tunis.

That was where the war began for Barbee, he recalled in his diary, which was a blow-by-blow account of the formation of his unit and the missions they flew over Anzio, Bologna and into Yugoslavia.

"I pulled guard one day at our headquarters building. It was Rommel's headquarters at one time. I went inside and it really is a fine building, marble stairway and smooth stone or marble floor, all sort of paintings and decorations inside," Barbee wrote in his diary. "I used his bathtub and shaved while there. First bath in about a week or more."

On Jan. 26, 1944, the 737th Squadron of the 454th Bomb Group, 15th Air Force, moved to Cerignola, Italy. The place would be their home for the next several months.

1.2 First mission

On Feb. 14, 1944, Barbee and the crew of "Ragged but Right" took off on their first bombing mission. The target was Areggo Railroad Center.

During the bombing run, their plane was hit five times by flak.

One of Barbee's jobs was photographer, and throughout his diary he describes taking photos of targets before they were bombed and after the bombs hit.

Throughout his diary, Barbee described the scenery the crew flew over. The view included beautiful valleys and quaint villages.

He never went back to Europe to see those sights from ground level, Barbee said.

On their missions, they flew at about 20,000 feet, where the air was freezing. To keep warm, the crew wore heated gloves, heated shoes, heavy clothes and fleece-lined coats, Barbee said.

1.3 The worst mission

According to Barbee's diary, the 10th mission was the worst. It was a bombing run against a German fighter plant at Bad Voslau, Austria. There was heavy flak and many German fighters were attacking the bomber formation.

"Flak shells, rockets and cannon exploding everywhere. The air was black with smoke," Barbee wrote in the diary.

"We had just dropped our bombs when something exploded right at us, the whole plane shook like having run into a wall. Our plane was out of control for a little while, and we went right smack through our right squadron sideways."

The concussion threw some equipment on the ball turret, and Barbee had to move it so the ball turret gunner could get out.

"When I came back to my gun after helping (Ronland) Beachs, right in front of me was an ME-109 not more than 20 yards away. I could see the big cross on its side and the German pilot.

"I started firing he was cruising on by the same way we were going. I could see my tracers going through his plane. He was gone before I could see too much damage," Barbee wrote.

The bomber was shot up. Gas, oil and hydraulic lines were shot out, and one side of the plane was black with engine oil.

Gas was spraying off the wing and into the bomb bay. One engine was shot out

“I believe there were at least 100 holes through our plane. Ten holes came right near me. Three hit the camera,” he wrote.

When the crew landed at their base, they were the last plane to arrive. They had little flaps and had to crank the landing gear down. Barbee and James McDonald tied their parachutes to the waist gun mounts and pulled the ripcords at touchdown to help slow the plane down. They still ran off the runway.

On July 8, 1944, the crew took off in a new airplane “Ragged but Right” having been lost with a different crew.

Barbee flew his last mission on Aug. 3, 1944.

After his last mission, he volunteered to replace a man who had his hands frozen. His friend, Forest Field, told him he was a fool if he went on the mission. So Barbee canceled.

“The plane took off, cut back on the throttle and the plane dove into the ground and killed all the crew,” Barbee said.

After he was discharged, Barbee returned to Onslow County and began farming again. On August 31, 1946, he married Velma Parsons of Maysville. They have four children and four grandchildren.

Yet, Barbee was not finished serving his county.

He worked as a deputy sheriff from 1958 to 1963 and as the county auditor from 1963 to 1966.

On April 12, 1966, he was appointed clerk of court to fill the unexpired term of Wilbur Justice. He was re-elected and served until his retirement in November 1990. He also served as president of the N.C. Superior Court Clerks Association.

He and his wife, Velma, still live in the house he built in 1951.

2. A Waist Gunners Story Pt II - Feb. - Apr., 1944

February 29, 2004

Everett Barbee 

Waist Gunner

A little more than 60 years ago, a gentleman farmer named Everett Barbee was called from his Richlands home and rushed into World War II.

Just like thousands of young Americans from 1941 to 1945, Barbee found himself in situations for which he had hardly prepared.

With limited training, Barbee and his group was rushed over the skies of Europe. What follows are excerpts from Barbee's diary - a waist gunner's story.

2.1 No. 1 Mission, 14 Feb. 1944

(Target: Arezzo Marshaling Yards)

It is inland and north of Rome, south of Bologna..

Our lines are near Cassino and we have a small strip of land at Anzio. We took off, circled our field a few times while getting in formation, and headed out toward the Tyrrhenian Sea not far north of Naples. We had no escort but did see a few planes around.

We passed Anzio beachhead and could see a city said to be Rome a long way off. We were climbing as we continued on our way. I felt very confident, more than I had any idea I could ever feel. We began to see more planes as we got further north. Some were U.S., some I don't know. Twice we had planes to come fairly close but I couldn't positively identify. A lot of vapor trails across the sky and our own B-24's were streaming vapor miles behind us; sure was pretty and kinda hard to realize we were up there to drop bombs on someone's railroad yard.

Four P-38's came to our formation about 30 minutes before target time and stayed with us until a few enemy fighters showed up near the target. They then flew out to meet them. One NC 109 made a kinda halfway pass at our high right squadrons, no damage either side. Flak shells were already bursting far below us as we came in. Part of our formation dropped their bombs way short. We held ours.

I thought I knew why anti-aircraft fire was ineffective; we were over 20,000 feet and I was feeling right good, when all at once five (5) shells burst up over us. I could hear the explosion. Right then I knew that 20,000 feet didn't mean too much. They then got our altitude and shells started bursting everywhere and it looked to be just about perfect altitude.

I could feel the concussion as the close ones exploded, our right wing went high as our plane was hit there and we were shaken quite a bit. Reckon I was helping to shake that old B-24 myself. We dropped our bombs with good results. Other planes were having the same trouble. We had five hits on our plane. One large hole in the right wing, two smaller ones, one hit the ball turret but only broke the glass and cut out a piece of metal. One hit broke a gas line in the left wing very close to the fuselage. Gas began to spray off the wing and to run into the bomb bay. We turned and lost a little altitude as we came off the target and headed for home.

We landed safe. No one was hurt but our tail gunner, Lopez's hands were frozen. He was taken to the hospital. We don't have near enough heating equipment and that we have don't work well and isn't taken care of as it should be.

Plane #193: Crew Chief Hollyfield, Crew: Edwards, West, Zigman, Waltsmath, Brown, Hay, Lopez, Stevenson, & me. I went as an extra gunner. This isn't my crew.

15 Feb., 1944

Scheduled but bad weather, no mission. Worked around the tent.

19 Feb., 1944

Bad weather, no mission. Enemy planes have been over a good part of the day, but the clouds are real low. The siren has been on a few times. Reckon the Germans would hate to get too close to all this muddy slush we keep waiting to dry up so they stay up high. We can hear the shelling up front at night. I know it is plenty rough up there crawling around.

20 Feb., 1944 Sunday

We were scheduled and stayed at our plane all morning waiting on the weather. The mission was scrubbed about noon today. Very quiet this afternoon except for enemy planes. A few P-38s flew around under the clouds. Went to church tonight. We can hear shelling up front.

22 Feb., 1944

3rd Mission: Sabena

Our target was Marshling Yards inland in Yugoslavia, but because of weather conditions we bombed harbor installations and warehouses on the Yugoslavian coast (Adriatic Sea).

We took off and headed up the Adriatic climbing as we went. We went to Austria's south border intending for enemy fighters to come up. More or less to let them use a little gas and draw them away from the 8th Air Force. As we started inland we drew anti-aircraft fire, but it was too far to our left to do us damage. After turning and heading south, we again drew ack-ack (anti-aircraft fire), this time to our right. We were above the clouds and the flak came up through the layer of clouds, but was far away. Right after (the) flak came one NC 109, but turned and passed without making any trouble. We were having so much trouble keeping up with a bad engine that we dropped our bombs before we got to the target. The clouds seemed to open up a few miles before we got to the harbor and we got a very good run. We were 24,000 feet and flak was very low and our entire wave was over before they got our altitude. The 2nd wave caught some, but it wasn't so very heavy, although a couple of planes were damaged.

When Harry Wilson put his camera down just before we flew over the harbor, he accidentally unplugged his oxygen hose. When I saw the planes dropping bombs I

pinched him to start taking (pictures). He just sat there. After hitting him a couple of more times I went back to him. He just rolled backwards in my arms. I plugged him in and gave him the emergency (air) and he soon came in OK. No pictures, but that's alright, we still have Harry. All our planes returned, mission successful É 7 hours to make mission. Boy am I tired. The Red Cross fed us doughnuts and coffee for the 1st time tonight. I am going to wash up and turn in.

23 Feb., 1944

We got up early this morning. Went up for briefing as always before a mission, out to our plane and took off. We climbed to 23,000 feet and was on our way when we were called back to our base. As we were coming home our own anti-aircraft started firing. I don't know if it was intended for us or not. It was too close to suit me for practice. The rest of the day has been easy. The big guns are going up front tonight.

24 Feb., 1944

Again we took off and again we came back because of weather. This afternoon I gave my guns a good cleaning. Tonight I have been hearing the big guns up front. Those fellows don't have a day off because of weather.

25 Feb., 1944

Our plane is having an engine change so we didn't go today. The formation missed their land marks and poor navigation I would say caused them to pass their target so they just kept on going and finally turned when they saw the Danube River. They had plenty of action. Four (4) planes were lost and most of the others pretty well shot up. I don't know how many men were wounded. One plane's tail was shot up rather bad and the tail gunner was wounded seriously it was said. I didn't go out to see. It is raining tonight. É

26 Feb., 1944

I went into town (Cerignola) this afternoon and saw a movie, "Princess O'Rourke." It was good. No one flew today.

27 Feb., 1944 Sunday

Bad weather, no mission. Got my laundry from the farm house I take it to. It is pouring rain. Our tent leaks and there is water all over the floor. We have just quit playing cards.

Prop our feet up on bomb fin holders and set on cots and let the water run. One of these days I will ditch a little more. The last one is filled now.

29 Feb., 1944

LEAP YEAR

Scheduled, but weather is still bad.

1, March, 1944

I have been scheduled with Lt. Edwards' crew for the past few days. Our plane is out for some work to be finished. I stayed with the crew of 193 "Bubble Trouble" until about 1:30 p.m. waiting for word to take off. The weather is much better and we have taken off and made the mission I believe, but things have to be just right before we make this one. Reckon Headquarters were waiting word.

This is one mission I hope we can make soon for the U.S. boys are taking a beating up there from the German forces. I think this war will last longer than most folks expect. Lyle Taylor, a fellow I knew at Westover is now with this crew. We are having lots more men lost to the squadron because of frostbite. NO EQUIPMENT.

2 March, 1944

4th Mission: Cistierna

Cistierna and Anzio is the same. Cistierna Road is where the Germans' have lots of men and equipment concentrated. We got up early this morning. I was with my regular crew again. We were briefed for Anzio, the mission most of us have been waiting for. We took off about 8:30 a.m. and took our #3 position in the lead. We climbed to 16,000 feet while circling near our field. We had no escort, but most of the 15th Air Force was to work over and near Anzio today.

Our group was leading the wing; we would be on our way home after the bombing while the others kept coming in. As we got nearer Anzio, I was pretty sure we didn't need a fighter escort. A squadron of P-38's was flying in land, probably to strafe, or wait on the German fighters to come. A group of B-24's had P-38 cover off to our left coming back from a mission somewhere. They all turned and flew below us as we were coming up the coast of Italy. We were expecting a fight today and I kept a close watch on every plane I saw that I didn't know for sure just what it was. One of our B-24's behind us had smoke coming from the #2 engine. It finally got so bad it flew out of formation and headed home.

It landed safe. I was to take pictures today so as soon as we turned to come inland I opened the camera hatch and let the camera in place; tested the switch to make sure it

wasn't frozen; it was alright. We were to come in over German-held territory, make our bomb run and turn to come out over our part. As soon as I checked the camera, I looked up front and flak was already bursting. We started hearing the explosions as soon as we were even with the mainland.

I started taking a few pictures in hopes of getting a picture of the gun emplacements, but I was saving most of the film for the target. Someone called FW 190's low at 3 o'clock, but since my gun was on the left, I kept working the camera. I watched the left side as well as I could. Although the German anti-aircraft fire was very heavy, most all of our planes held a good formation. Never have thought so many fragmentation bombs could be carried as were dropped on Anzio today. And I am positive the Germans have some good guns for they had a good barrage of shell fire.

Our plane was hit four (4) times and one of the holes is about two (2) feet long in the wing. We didn't lose a plane over the target, but there are lots of them damaged, and "Old Ragged" will be out until it can get patched up. Someone's plane from our wing caught fire and burned on the runway as it landed. A navigator was killed from another plane. The 459th lost a plane over Anzio. It caught fire and crashed. (This isn't official for the official report hasn't come in.) I know we aren't holding much territory up there for the shells were still bursting around us after we were out at sea.

3 March, 1944 (Cassino)

Target: Airfield near and north of Rome

We had an acting squadron leader at the controls of the lead ship in the low left squad of the second wave. We took off after briefing and climbed to altitude assigned for today over the field and gained target altitude on the way up. We were to have a P-37 fighter escort, but were a little late at rendezvous so we missed them. I was already disgusted with the way our squadron was leading our squad. We had plenty of power, but he just wouldn't stay in there.

The weather was a little hazy and we needed to stay in sight good at least, but we were within 10 minutes of the target when we lost sight of the rest of the group. He then did one of the most foolish things. Turned and flew inland over enemy territory and over a town, and it is known the Germans' have intense anti-aircraft installed in that area.

The four (4) planes we were leading followed us in there. Why they didn't open fire I don't know. Maybe, because of clouds, we weren't seen. It could have been the rest of our group to the left had their attention. We had just seen seven (7) fighters before we lost sight of the rest and another was below us over the town. Finally, we went back out to sea and headed for home with our bomb load. Temperature was 37 (degrees) below zero and one of my heated gloves didn't work; all for nothing; no mission and freeze.

As we came back by Anzio beachhead, the Navy was having its' fireworks going. I could see the flash of Navy guns as they were shelling. Two ships were laying a smoke screen. A few ships were zigzagging back and forth as they worked offshore. There's quite a bit of action up there. The planes that went on dropped bombs, but because of clouds aren't sure of results.

They ran into enemy fighters. We lost one plane, Lt. Goodwin and crew. He flew with us at Tucson, Ariz. And he came to Charleston with us. I also knew Ashby, one of his gunners, but not real well. We were given credit for today's mission so I feel a little better now.

6 March, 1944

Target: Orvieto Air Field north of Rome

American men at Anzio are having lots of trouble with German fighter planes strafing the beachhead. Today we are assigned to blast their field again. We were given two fields, one near the coast and the other inland quite a ways (Orvieto). We were short of planes today and our wave only had 12 planes.

We were #3 in the lead of the second (wave). We had no escort, but the 15th Air Force was working up that way. We took off and headed up the coast of Italy. Soon after we got out over water two of our planes turned and came back home. As we neared our first target a group of 13 to 24 way off to our right got caught in some heavy ack-ack fire, but I didn't see any come down.

Our first target was covered with clouds so we kept going. A few minutes before we got to Orvieto Air Field I could see the enemy fighters down below climbing up to meet us. They got their altitude and made their first attack just before we dropped our bombs. I got in a few shots. We went on in got in some light anti-aircraft fire dropped our bombs on the field and turned to come home. As we came off the target I could see the German fighter planes grouping for another attack. They came in for their second run right after we left our target. Some came in head on from the front others attacking from the sides.

I guess the fellows on the other planes had their own opinions of the German tactics. Some claimed to have shot down some of the fighters. I can't say as I did. I did notice quite a lot of smoke from a couple I was shooting at. Probably using a lot of engine power.

It's hard to describe just how they came in, but most always either two or three would come together sometimes more. Once they came from the front with three low two roiling high. I could see the guns flashing as they were shooting. Wonder how ours looked to them. I shot one case of ammunition at them.

Reckon I wasted a few rounds. The German planes I saw were ME109, FW109 and FW189 some would come between our B-24 and another plane of our 3qdN.9 I would have to hold my fire right when I had closest range, but guess we did right good. We had engine trouble again and came home on three engines. Lieutenant Edwards and crew dropped back and flew home with us. Seems kinda good to have a crew to stick around close after a little trouble has set in and up over enemy territory too. Lyle Taylor, one of my best friends, is in his crew now. I made my first mission with this crew.

March 15, 1944

(7th mission, Cassino)

The weather had cleared last night. This morning was cold and really a pretty day. I was up early this morning. We ate breakfast and went down for briefing (I thought it would be Cassino) and then out to our plane. We were to make two missions today. The 15th air force made an all out attempt of one day to break up troop and equipment concentrated in the town and area. We took off, climbed to 15,000 feet near our field and headed for Cassino. I could see planes all over the sky; it seemed as if we were out for business today.

As we neared our target I could see smoke rising from a very large area the place had already been bombed by U.S. planes. Now our turn. Flak was extremely heavy off to our right, but they never did move over and get our formation in any heavy shell fire. There were a few heavy bursts to our left some light flak came up in our formation, more below us but not near what we would have been in had they shifted their guns over some. There seemed to be nothing at all where most of the Germans were shooting. Course I was kinda happy about that.

We returned to our base and stayed at the plane to eat K-rations while the ground force checked our plane, reloaded the bombs and got things ready. We took off and was less than 10 minutes from our target when the weather just got too bad to go further. We had to see to make sure we didn't bomb our field with a load of bombs. I wonder how our boys are doing up there tonight. Guess I had better turn in.

Part II of Everett Barbee's diary will be published in the Daily News' March 7th issue of "Visions"

3. We keep going

March 07, 2004

EVERITTE BARBEE 

SPECIAL TO THE DAILY NEWS

This is the second part of a day-by-day diary of Barbee's war experiences. Part three will be published on March 14.

March 18, 1944

8th mission, Manigo, Italy

A German air field north and east of Venice. We carried fragmentation bombs and 1,000 rounds of extra ammunition. We took off after briefing and gained altitude on our way up the Adriatic Sea. Today has really been beautiful, one of the prettiest days since being here. We had no escort, but didn't need any as we caught most of the planes on the ground. Only two came up to our altitude that I saw and neither made an attempt to attack us. Others stayed low and lots of planes were left on the field. We headed home after bombs away. No fighters followed further than the sea. We had a new camera man

today and he sure was in the way. I did my best to help him. Even told him it would or should be an easy run. He must have believed me. I almost had to hold him to get his equipment on him. I never quarreled with him for I could be just as dumb myself. He is a nice fellow and will and will probably be alright later on. ... All planes returned (mission success) no one injured.

March 19, 1944

It was said a possible 160 planes were destroyed on the field yesterday.

March 27, 1944

I now have nine missions.

Yesterday the weather was so bad we never could get to our target in Austria, but received credit for a mission anyway. Guess we deserve a break. I flew on the 15th, 17th and 22nd with but a credit, and I don't know how many other times. I had been scheduled most every day with either our crew or Lt. Edwards's crew. His crew is now missing. I almost went with them, but asked for a day off since I had been scheduled every day for so long. They went down on the 21st. Taylor the boy from Westover was with them. 736 Squadron of our group has three of their original planes left. We have lost heavy lately or since starting operations. Lot of fellows I know aren't around any more. Not all are dead; some may be PW or wandering around up there somewhere. Lot of new faces and planes around. I don't think the British Air Force is as active as the U.S. Course they seem to be getting lots of credit.

I haven't seen a British plane over combat or enemy held area, but once. I did see a few spitfires, but not so many as I saw at Casablanca, Africa. Old "Ragged But Right" is getting a little war weary, but nothing really serious has happened yet. It has been bounced around quite a bit from shell fire and concussion...

... A few days ago I was given a 36 hour pass. I visited Bari about 60 miles away. Looked over the harbor that was bombed by Germany in December. A few buildings were damaged, a few destroyed, but the city wasn't hurt very bad. It was a good job of bombing I would say. Italy really is beautiful country. Hope to swim in the Adriatic this summer. There has been lots of sand in the air, said to come from Mount Vesuvius which is on the loose again.

March 29, 1944

10th mission, Milan

Not far from Switzerland. We had P-38 escort. Most of the 15th Air Force was in that vicinity for bombing today. We were the third group over the target in close succession. We were told at briefing to expect heavy flak but there was none that I saw at the target. Some was reported off side, but light. Maybe they are out of ammunition. I did see flak once on the way up, but it was too far away and light. I was taking pictures at the target and couldn't see too much except one side. The weather was very good and I got a few

pictures of air fields on the way up. I could see the target before any of the three groups dropped a bomb, one moment a big railroad center the next was the biggest cloud of smoke I ever have seen in a small area I think. It was about the best bombing I have seen...

(P.S. four of Lt. Edwards crew has been found, two dead, two severely burned)
(Nordwell and West burned, found in Yugoslavia. Taylor hasn't yet turned up, and all this may be a rumor. I don't know.)

April 3, 1944

Target - Budapest, Hungary, Marshling Yards

This is the first time Budapest has been bombed in this war. I had been briefed for here before. We were up this morning about 4 a.m. went up for briefing out to our plane. We took off at 7:10... We were leading the 304th B. Wing and the first bombers to cross Budapest. We circled the field a few times while the rest of our group took off and climbed up to join the formation. We then headed out over the Adriatic Sea climbing as we went. As we were coming inland over Yugoslavia we were shot at by ground forces. The flak wasn't so very heavy but it was right in there. I could hear the explosions and feel the concussion as shells exploded. We kept going. I don't think many planes were damaged at the time. Nothing unusual happened until just a few minutes before the I.P. our C.O. who was leading had two engines to go out on the same side. They dropped their bombs and turned toward home. They lost quite a bit of altitude... We then went on the bomb run... We had a head wind and it seemed as though we were standing still. I glanced back to see how our other planes were making out and it seemed to be worse than our particular spot in the formation... The bombardier was saying, "boy what a target." Hope he slips a little to the right..." I could see an air field outside of Budapest with quite a few German planes on it. One ME 210 I would call it flew low and just outside the shell fire. I would have let a few at it if I weren't afraid I would need my shells later and it really wasn't doing much damage at the time... Finally after what seemed like ages, BOMBS AWAY came. Twice I saw B-24s behind us in trouble smoke boiling and both came out alright. One just as bombs away pulled out of formation with smoke covering the left side coming from number two engine. He feathered the prop and got through.

The bombing looked good and our bombardier said our bombs fell across a line of box cars. Reckon the pictures will tell, but it looked good. One plane crashed about ten minutes from the target. Some of the other crews saw more fighters I only saw one I would even consider shooting and saved my ammunition because of distance then. He had a checkered tail. The 15th Air Force was credited with 140 enemy fighters in this area yesterday... I saw lots of boats on the Danube River. Tugs pulling barges scattered all up and down the river. Any that were moving when I would see them would be moving toward the bank and stop. The Germans are going to supply their Army if they can. I don't think they are near beaten...

7 April, 1944

13th Mission - Bologna, Italy

Marshling Yards, North Italy. This yard has just been completed by Germany and the Italians. The old yards were bombed about six months ago. The new yards were on the east side of town, there was also a dump yard on the east of the town, both looked pretty near the same and like a pretty nice railroad center. We took off after briefing and headed up the Adriatic. P-38 came to us just as we were turning inland and stayed until most of the way back. We were expecting heavy anti-aircraft fire, but very little came up at the target although heavy flak was reported off to our right. I was using a camera so I only saw that came up near us and I did see a little on our left. Bombing looked good to me. I think the yards were pretty well torn up.

12 April 1944

14th and 15th missions, target ME 109 Fighter plant - Bad Voslau, Austria, just south of Vienna

Got up for briefing, eat breakfast then went down and out to our plane (Ragged But Right). We were expecting up to 300 enemy planes today and I think most of them were there. We carried 1,000 rounds extra ammunition... First saw flak in Yugoslavia off to our right a ways, another group got it... We were just nearing Lake Balston when the first P-38 came up about 16 to 18, almost right afterwards the first German planes started attack. They lost their first; it crashed right at the edge of the lake. Planes were swarming around everywhere. FW190 and ME109, 210 and 110 sometimes JU88. Our gunner Howard Carpenter counted 17 twin engine planes making a head on attack. I never took time to count. P-38 had already fought and gone home or somewhere. I didn't see them again. After a few passes we got caught in some heavy anti-aircraft fire. JU88 were outside flak area firing rockets into formation. I honestly believe there were 100 planes right around us. Airplanes all over the sky. Flak shells, rockets and cannon exploding everywhere. The air was black with smoke. We had just dropped our bombs when something exploded right at us the whole plane shook like having run into a wall... Our plane was out of control for a little while and we went right smack through our right squadron side ways. The concussion threw parachutes and ammunition on the ball turret and Roland Buechs was jammed until I could pull them out. When I came back to my gun after helping Buechs out right in front of me was an ME109 not more than 20 yards away. I could see the big cross on its side and the German pilot just sitting there. I am sure he was dead. I started firing he was cruising on by the same way we were going. I could see my tracers going through his plane. He was gone before I could see too much damage. Fields said he came right up under the tail and he didn't see him until too late to shoot...

... Our plane was pretty well shot up, gas, oil and hydraulic lines were shot out and one side of our plane was black with engine oil, gas was spraying up the wing and in to bomb bay. The plane right behind us got a direct hit and winged over and over flame covering it... One German plane exploded almost over us, a single engine. A JU88 started an attack from low at eight o'clock both Buechs and myself were on it. He never got it finished he headed back down. Only slightly damaged, if any... I saw parachutes, some saw more. Bob Fields claimed a German plane that came in high and exploded just as he passed our plane. I have no idea how many they lost, but I feel pretty sure some were shot down by their own anti-aircraft fire... We lost four of our planes including Lt. O'Connor's crew. They trained with us at Charleston. Only yesterday Eddie Trenensky, of his crew and me played baseball or rather practiced together. John Reed, Aldridge,

Maken Rockmire, Lunzford, West and Kelly, these I knew. I don't know if any got out of the plane for we lost our place in formation... All planes seemed pretty well mixed up, Germans too... I believe there were at least 100 holes through our plane. 10 holes came right near me. Three hit the camera, one control cable shot into. The ball turret was hit. The leading edge of the right wing was hit pretty bad and the stabilizers were shot up some... We were the last plane in. We landed with very little flaps. Had to crank (by hand) down landing gear. We run right on off the end of the runway. The ambulance came out, but we didn't need it. Had our pictures taken.

13 April

Again our group went out and lost four bombers. Our plane will be out for about one week for repair. Harry Wilson is missing tonight. He usually flies with us. 24 crews lost to date (not official). Lots of new men around. We had 64 crews to start with.

16 April

16th mission, Turnu Severin, Romania

Our target was Bucharest, Romania but bombed alternate target of Turnu Severin. No opposition today. There was flak going over and coming back but none was close... The town is on the Danube River. We were suppose to bomb the Marshling Yards. It was a nice target with freight cars in yards but our squadron was offside so we bombed the river that had plenty of boats in it. From my position the bombing didn't look very good. Some did fall in yards and there was one direct hit on a river boat some real near misses which I know did damage. Some of the bombs hit in the residential area of a town on the Yugoslavia side. That was bad.

16 April

We lost a plane yesterday it crashed right after takeoff. All crew members were killed. They were said to have had an engine to go out on takeoff and the pilot banked into a dead engine. I looked around the wreck when we got back. I saw it burning after it crashed. (It was a new crew. I only knew their faces.)

20 April 1944

17th mission, Monfalcone - Marshling Yards, Italy

We bombed a railroad bridge just outside of Trieste, Italy. After takeoff we had cloudy weather all the way to the target, only once in awhile there would be a break and we could see a few things. The clouds opened up right after we came over railroad center and we couldn't line up we came out over Trieste, Italy and the harbor was full of boats. Looked like three big liners docked at wharf. There were plenty of other ships also. Again we were not lined up or working right, any way we flew right on out over the harbor and no one dropped a bomb. We kept following the lead. Ack Ack guns from town was shooting at us... We just kept circling around. Finally we split up in our circling a bit.

Our particular plane or bombardier aimed at a railroad bridge as we went inland again. We followed on in and came out over the town some dropped on the railroad yards, some on the harbor. One sub was sunk but very little damage considering all to aim for. Finally three FW190 came and made a few half way passes, but weren't very aggressive. Never did get so very close to our spot in formation although we got in a few shots. No damage. All planes returned...

24 April 1944

18th and 19th missions Marshling Yards, Bucharest, Romania

Took off and climbed to altitude on the way. It was a very good mission, there were no enemy fighters to come up and meet us. I did see quite a few enemy fighters on some of their fields. One field not very far from Bucharest had about 15 planes on it. Flak was pretty heavy at the target and our plane was hit again. I counted 28 planes on a field and in the wooded area around a field soon after we came off the target. Lots of shipping on the Danube River and there are plenty of freight trains parked or stopped between towns. I do a lot of looking through binoculars. Sometime a truck convoy shows up. They usually stop when they hear planes I guess. Sometime I look ahead or way off and can see planes taking off getting them out of the way.

Some squadron lost a plane in Yugoslavia on return. I saw it burning. Our group has really been bombing the Balkans, but I don't think the war can be won by air power alone. The German are still strong in the air and they can really throw up a flak barrage.

29 April 1944

20th Mission, munitions plant at Toulon, France

... We took off and flew out over the Tyhrranian Sea, Anzio, and crossed the island of Corsica, climbing as we went. We leveled off once at 23,600 feet for the bombardier, Capt. Ford to check his bomb right. I could see the French coast in the distant and all around Toulon was a heavy smoke screen. I was to use some anti-radar equipment so as soon as I could see France I got it ready to go also put on my flak suit. As we got nearer the German started with a terrific flak barrage. I guess we were 10 to 15 minutes away and I could see shell after shell exploding... It looked like a black cloud there was so much flak around. We headed again for Toulon lost a little of our gained altitude for speed and went on in. flak was very heavy and our plane was shaken quite a bit. A piece of flak glanced off my helmet just made a slight dent and a bright place on the helmet. I was throwing out anti-radar but I don't think it helped much. There were quite a few fighter planes off to our left, but none attacked us... The plane flying our left wing started down at the target. I didn't see it crash, it dropped bombs before we did. I looked to see about ours and ours were still in. I looked again and the plane was going down to our left. All four engines were turning. I kept watching it. Soon afterwards I saw 10 parachutes, but am not sure they were from this plane. I never did see it crash and the last I could see it was flying low and still circling to the left. I counted 19 holes as I walked around our plane when we landed this afternoon. I don't know how many times it was hit I didn't look very close. (Lt. Salmon crew is missing). This was the first replacement crew to come to our group.

2 May 1944

21st mission, Faenza, Italy

Railroad Bridge North Italy. We got up as usual ate went down for briefing and took off. We had bad weather today. We flew up the Adriatic climbing for altitude on the way up. We drew flak once near the coast, but no damage, we were well out of range. Made our bomb run and the bombing didn't look so good to me. No flak was at the target at all. Two of our bombs failed to release I went into the bomb bay and released them just as we were coming over the water. There was some fishing boats tied up, came pretty close to a couple, but don't think much damage was done. All planes returned.

5 May 1944

22nd and 23rd missions, Polesti, Romania

Took off and climbed to altitude on the way. We were flying number three position in the low left squadron today. We had P-38, P-47 and P-51 for escort. We were first met by enemy fighters over Yugoslavia. Our plane was never under direct fire. I only test fired my gun a few times. I watched through the binoculars while the P-47 did a wonderful job to the German air force. Some twin engine fighters look to be JU88 and a few FW190. We kept going crossed the Danube River and were soon looking down on Romania oil fields. Derrick after derrick could be seen scattered across the country. We were about ready to start the bomb run and up ahead I could see a very heavy flak barrage. Although our group was in heavy flak for a long long time none came so very close to us. It seemed more scattered on our side of the formation. I could see German fighter planes waiting for us to come out, just outside and high above us. I looked down and I saw a gun battery firing away. I could see the flak of guns each time it fired and further up another battery. Men were jumping out of their planes long before bombs away. I counted 14 parachutes in the target area. One B-24 came under us with smoke boiling out as it dove down sideways, did a half circle and climbed at least 2,000 feet up toward us again and was just about 1,000 or 600 yards below us when it stalled like a big wounded bird, burst into flames and broke into pieces and fell to ground with fire covering it all the way down... I kept watching the flashes of gunfire as they shot at us. Flak all around and we kept going. Seemed as though they couldn't move in on our position although we flew through cloud after cloud of black smoke where one had burst moments before. As we came off the target (smoke) climbed to an estimated 19,000 feet, oil smoke from oil refinery, tank cars and storage tanks. Never have I seen so much smoke. Boy that target was hit today. Enemy fighters began their attacks as we came off the target. The high squadrons and ones behind us were under fighter plane attack but we never were under direct attack I wouldn't say. Each time they peeled off before our position. P-51 had a dog fight off to our right I didn't see any results... As we were coming off the target I looked back and I could see parachutes drifting down in the smoke. I expect the men were dead from suffocation before reaching the ground. Returning home a B-24 in a group on our left began to lag a little behind. Three men parachuted. I watched it pretty close with binoculars, then three more men jumped. Its landing gear come down and it was losing altitude. We were hoping it could stay up until it crossed the Danube and into Yugoslavia, but it was shot about 35 miles (away). It caught fire and burst into pieces and fell. I saw three more chutes come out. How they

ever got out is a mystery to me. One of the men I know was falling with the burning plane when his chute opened but never caught fire. He landed near the plane crash. I watched through the binoculars, but never saw him move... Flak was red, white and black. We are safe in our tent tonight. Time: 8 hours 5 minutes

6 May 1944

24th and 25th missions, Target - Marshaling Yards and oil refineries at Campina, Romania, not far from Polesti

Up early, breakfast and briefing, had six 1,000-pound bombs. Took off and climbed to altitude on the way. Crossed the mountains and watched the trains and railroad once in awhile a factory smoke. P-38 joined us over Yugoslavia mountains. Not far from the I.P. we first saw enemy fighters. P-38 went out to meet them. A few came on in and most of their attacks were on the rear squadron. Once in awhile one would get up our way... Just as we reached the heavy flak a B-24 went down, 10 chutes came out. I looked at our rear wave and they were still under plane attack. Once a German fighter made an attempt to come through entire formation and blew up just off our right wing. I think he got a direct hit from his own men below, flak was extremely heavy. Shell after shell was exploding right at us almost. A whole gun battery fired off our left wing for a long time we kept turning to the right and it just stayed out of reach although I could hear shells bursting all around. A whole squadron of German fighter planes pulled up on our left and slightly high. Each had their plane painted yellow from the spinner to the cockpit... They started to fight when we came out. A few shot into formation before we got out of the flak. P-38 came in again and lost two of their planes. Another came under us with a dead engine and stayed under our wing like a beaten puppy, but we were more than proud for what it had done, and still a nice dogfight going up front. I got in quite a few shots as the enemy planes came in and three times I saw German planes go down or start down. I didn't see a crash. I know two landed in an open farm field. I saw no smoke from either, probably out of gas or damaged pretty bad. FW190 and ME109 made at least three mass attacks in our formation but our particular spot in formation was never under direct attack although our plane was hit. Every gunner from our guys should have had some right good shots. Most of my shots were as the planes peeled off from other plane attacks. I am sure there were considerable damage to their planes. Finally what looked to me to be Italian-made planes came up to held the FW190 and ME109. I believe they were Machia 202 I can't be sure. At interrogation Capt. Vickers intelligence officer reminded us of a new type FW190, so it could be the new model. They too were painted yellow from spinner to cockpit... The German planes followed us a long way, but I think they had enough. Looked kinda unusual after they quit attacking they just kinda hung out there out of range... I saw lots of boats on the Danube River and there are plenty of trains all over the country. We need to hit the Danube and stop some of the shipping there. They keep their boats and barges anchored mostly during the day but I bet my last dollar they move at night... The Germans are still plenty strong but we keep going. I often wonder if they think they can keep us out. Sometime I wonder if we are doing as much damage to their supplies and industries as we are told. If so, where do they get all those planes and all that anti-aircraft ammunition.

4. 'Should go home soon I hope'

March 14, 2004

EVERITTE BARBEE 

SPECIAL TO THE DAILY NEWS

Last of a three-part series: Excerpts from Everitte Barbee's day-by-day account of his World War II war experiences - The diary of a waist gunner.

11 May 1944

I have an idea tomorrow is the big day. I don't know if the invasion is coming from England, but something is cooking. Seems to me there is no secret at all about us making two missions tomorrow. The whole group knows, ground crews and combat men. I guess the Italians working on the field do too. I was in town today (Ceriginola) and had a fellow from here to ask me on the street, if we were to make two missions tomorrow. Anyone with any sense would know we can't go far twice in one day. The whole German air force will probably know the target. Guess I better turn in even if I don't sleep. I have my gun and ammunition ready anyway. Never too tired to clean my gun up the night before.

12 May 1944

26th mission, LaSpezzia, Italy

Guess I was wrong yesterday.

Our target was LaSpezzia, Italy. We were to make two missions. We took off at 5:40 a.m.... We flew the Allied line across Italy. It was to be a morale builder for fighting ground men. I watched through binoculars and could see quite a bit of firing along the front. I saw lots of supplies and some moving trucks with supplies toward the front, a large hospital area with Red Cross all around. We came out to sea near Cassino and then continued to gain altitude on up the Teheranian Sea. We did a kinda funny bomb run and drew flak at two different points along shore.... Although there was flak at both targets none came so very close to our plane. I could hear it, but we were never in the worse of it. A group came in behind us and bombed the harbor we first passed over. It looked to be good. Ours wasn't bad, but I have seen better. Coming home there seemed to be lots of activity at Anzio beachhead. There were about 75 war and cargo vessels around. Heavy cruisers were laying a smoke screen. A couple of smaller ships seemed to be on fire, or had been. I saw no blaze, but there seemed to be lots of smoldering smoke. Both were still a bunch of cargo ships, were a good ways out and I believe were waiting to go in. PT boats, I think they were, were moving very fast in and around the larger boats. I believe we could back the Germans out of there. They should let us bomb in and behind their lines again. They straff our boys with fighter planes, I have heard. There was lots of smoke on the beach head itself.

13 May 1944

27th mission, Target - railroad cars on siding outside of Bologna, Italy

Again we flew the lines of the allies, Cassino and come in near Anzio and there is plenty going on at the front, also lots of supplies moving far through the smoke from shell fire.... We kinda strung out in three plane elements to bomb. Three planes for each target. We really got results.... I took pictures today. We had an observation officer with us, his first trip and probably last. I looked out for him coming back. He wanted some movie shots, but couldn't get them so I took his movie camera and tried a few. He fell down and ruined his best take of the day. Too much for him I think, although I really like him. He took my picture standing by our plane.... All bombing looked good. Very little flak. Five enemy fighters, but all kept their distance.... Mission was a success.

18 May 1944

28th and 29th missions, oil refineries at Polesti, Romania

Up kinda early, breakfast, briefing and took off. We took number three position and headed out across the Adriatic Sea. Yugoslavia mountains, and pretty little mountain villages and it all seemed so peaceful. Saw a few boats and barges on the Danube River, most of them were up against the bank. We had P-38 and P-51 for escort and they gave us a great deal of help. Flak was extremely heavy at the target, but wasn't as accurate as I have seen. Some low, some high. That which was level seemed to bear more to our right although a gun battery had our altitude off to our left, but never moved in on us for some reason. One man was killed in the plane next to us number four position. Lt. McNabe's crew failed to return to our base, but I didn't see him go down for some reason. I may have failed to see it through the smoke from shell fire. Too there were fighters waiting us out. They started to attack as we came out of flak. I saw two going down, but did not see either catch fire or crash. I can't say either were lost. They may have landed in an open field I have seen them do that. P-38 and P-51 had a nice dog fight with the German fighters. The Germans do have some good planes, we do too. I don't think this war will be won as soon as some seem to think. I will say I don't think the Balkan raids are as bad as when we first came.... Time 8:15, boy was I tired it is now the day after. Too tired last night to write. We take sandwiches and coffee on raids now and it really helps out. We have an Italian boy that cleans up for us each day. He really is good. Shines our shoes, makes our cots, airs our blankets. He has a can full of flowers on a little box for us after each mission. (There is an) Italian woman to do my laundry and the weather is really nice. Guess we are living good considering everything.

24 May 1944

Target - Air field at Graz, Austria

Everything was running along alright. We had test fired our guns and were getting set to go over the target, when McDonald, one of our waist gunners, kinda reeled over and fell against his gun. It kinda scared me when I looked at his eyes they were so big and strained. I checked his oxygen lines and next to his mask was twisted. I straightened it

and turned on the emergency supply and mashed his mask with my hands to loosen it up. He soon came around alright. Afterwards he said he thinks it was frozen and he could get no air, for the emergency blew ice in his face.... We were attacked by fighters soon after leaving the flak.... Our loss: one bomber....I saw a good-size convoy in the Adriatic today. Fighters followed us a good way home today.

26 May 1944

32nd mission, Sunday, target - Marshaling Yards at Chambéry, France

Gee it seemed like a long mission today. We went up the Tyrrhenian Sea, flew back of the lines, but didn't waste much time, crossed Corsica on over France.... Saw some beautiful scenery, mountains and lakes. It looked so quiet and nice. Even at Chambéry it was nice and quiet, even had no flak at the target. We bombed about church time. I thought of what those people were thinking. The weather was so clear I could see a cemetery on the edge of town. Nice bombing, but a couple did fall in the town itself. Hope it didn't do much damage except to the RR center....

9 June 1944

Came from Capri, an island near Naples. Had a good time. Lived in a small hotel with servants. Three-course meals and all to eat I wanted, waitresses, music while eating, swimming, fishing, boat riding, mountains and cool breezes. I wish I could stay there for the rest of the war. (Rome has fallen, invasion from England) Capri sure is peaceful.

11 June 1944

Target - Giurgu, a little town south of Bucharest, Romania, railroad yards and crude oil

We drew flak once on the way over. We had to turn back just before we got the target with one engine out and another bad. We dropped our bombs as we were leaving the formation. We couldn't hold altitude or keep up. ... We threw out much of our equipment to lighten up the plane but still no altitude. About six boxes of anti-radar, but we tore it all up before dumping. We came out right along side a good-size town, but not a shot did they fire!

16 June 1944

Target - Vienna area, oil refinery

... P-47 joined us over Yugoslavia P-51 came awhile later on and the P-38. They had action before we got to the target. I saw quite a few fighter planes, but we were never under direct fighter attack. We drew flak at four places besides at the target. Flak at the target was intense and we were in it for a long time. 316 guns at Vienna, but all couldn't be brought to bear directly on us. We lost one plane at the target, two failed to return to our base tonight. Just as we were coming off the target a B-24 was going down. I saw nine parachutes open. The plane stayed up longer than any I have ever seen to be

completely out of control. It did a half turn to the left losing altitude, banked sharp to the left, began climbing up toward us, turned again to the left went almost to the ground with smoke pouring. It turned again started to climb, seemed to almost stall as it came up toward our formation... It then went into it's last dive and crashed to the earth with flame covering it. Another B-24 at the target went into a dive, but was pulled out after falling what I would say 5,000 to 7,000 feet. It turned and headed down the Danube River. Once I thought it to be on fire. It looked OK the last I saw of it... One man was killed in another plane, believed to be from a stray bullet from a gun in our own formation. We drew flak twice on return. Once it cam from flat cars on a R.R. I could see them as they fired. Sunday night (church) I usually go.

20 June 1944

Bad weather has held us up recently. Not much doing. There has been rumors of men being shot while parachuting. I haven't yet seen it, but have seen German planes go down near men in parachutes. I couldn't be sure, but can't definitely say I have seen them open fire. Some are never heard from. It has been said Austria and Germans both are killing some of the men after they are down and armed only with a little .45-caliber pistol and could be taken in as POW. I don't know, we aren't so careful about the Austria cities lately, but do try to avoid hospitals. We have lost a lot of men and planes since being here. We have done a lot of damage too....

3 July 1944

Target - oil refineries at Bucharest, Romania

Took off and gained altitude along the way. Just fired our guns over Yugoslavia but saw no enemy fighters that attacked. Did see quite a few on air fields on our way there and back. Flak was heavy at the target... Polesti had a heavy smoke screen it also threw up some anti aircraft fire. Bucharest had a good smoke screen too. Our target was well hit. There were lots of big fires started. Another group bombed oil on the opposite side of Bucharest. I saw some storage tanks, it looked to be burning. I saw a plane take off from a German air field today looked exactly like a B-17 to me. It sure looked queer flying off from there. It isn't nearly so cold now. We had something to eat on return. Red Cross fed us donuts and coffee when we got back.

8 July 1944

Target - M ??ndorf air

Drove just a little southeast of Vienna, Austria. Took off and headed out over the Adriatic Sea climbing as we went. We drew anti-aircraft fire over Yugoslavia, no damage. A few fighters came in view, but none attacked our squadron until we had dropped bombs. When the Germans did come in to attack they were never very aggressive. They only made one complete run through our squadron and only about six got through. Our high right squadron seemed to be getting the worst of things. Two B-24s exploded over or near the target. I was firing at a few long-distant fighter planes and did not see the loss of our two planes and men. I was told of it later. Flak was extremely heavy at the target,

but our squadron was in a fairly good position and got out OK.... The air was black with exploding shells. A group of B-17s were caught in this barrage. I am pretty sure I saw two go down. I can't say for sure. Vision from a distance through shell fire and smoke is bad. It's hard to distinguish things for sure two B-24s had a collision and were lost. I didn't see this from my position....

There was a discussion tonight on losses. According to what was said, our squadron had three complete old crews, (crews that came over with the group), 18 came. We have a lot of new crews that came as replacements. All the men from these crews haven't been killed. A few have only lost a part of their men. Some entire crews were shot down of course. Some of these men will come back I am sure. We have lost a greater number of crews and planes than we originally had I am sure. Our plane, "Ragged But Right," was lost near Vienna, Austria, a couple of weeks ago. We have a new plane now. Today was its' first mission. Today our formation was not complete. We are short of planes in our group, but there are many more planes in Italy than when I came here. Our new plane is really nice.

12 July 1944

Target - Marshling Yards, Miramas, France

We took off and flew low altitude past Cassino, Italy. Never have I seen a city so nearly destroyed and the Abbey where the Germans held out so long just a pile of rubble, I have seen Cassino before but never so close. Also saw Rome again. We turned out to sea and really started to climb, passed over Corsica on to the French coast. When we turned in I could see our target very plain, nearby was an airfield.... Our greatest hazard today was weather. We took off in a heavy cloud and it took a long time to get above it. We lost sight of the other planes and almost had a mid-air collision once. We got in clear weather, not far from Cassino and got the view of the remains. We had worse weather on return. It got so bad until we pulled away from the formation to let down, the rest also separated. After letting down we found ourselves in a valley and had to go back up to get over and to finish up right we went over near our field. We got down to about 30 feet off the ground before we could see. We landed in a hard rain storm with real low hanging clouds.

16 July 1944

Target - Munchendorf , Air Drone, just outside Vienna, Austria, southeast

Bad weather near target, about half hour before we got there it got real cloudy, an under cast. During the time I could see we passed either 5 or 6 enemy air fields. We drew flak twice before we reached the target. P-51 had a right nice dog fight, but I couldn't see it as well and no positive results.... Flak was very heavy at the target. Our plane was hit twice. A bombardier was killed, one gunner was wounded. Two planes lost each one engine, one streamed smoke for a pretty long while before the pilot cut it off. P-51, P-47 and P-38 are really good for escort. I like the P-51 for fighting at our altitude best, course P-38 or P-47 are good. I hardly know which is best. I have never seen but one either plane beaten unless out numbered. The FW190 and ME109 did out maneuver the P-38

at Camzino, near Polesti, but I have seen the P-38 take on German fighters and completely out class it.

21 July 1944

Target - oil refinery at Brux Czechoslovakia

We flew up the Adriatic over the Alps and saw some really nice scenery again today. It is hard to understand why people want to fight when living in such pretty country. Plenty of snow still up there. ... We had good fighter cover and I felt pretty good about it. I saw no dog fights. At the target flak was extremely heavy. I could hear shell after shell explode right near us. We were in some of the worst. I could feel the concussion as each shell burst and our old plane was shaken up quite a bit. It was hit a number of times. I have no idea how many. The plane on our left was hit at the target. Four men jumped out, it started to lose altitude very slowly and flew almost directly below us came out on the other side and exploded in mid-air about 150 yards from our plane. Another plane's engine caught fire, but after feathering the prop and cutting the engine, it got out alright. ... I could see the flash of guns as they fired at us. A lot of our planes were hit. I saw lots of their airfields, factories and warehouses. They can't keep us out, I don't think. They are still plenty strong and don't seem to be short on ammunition at all. I do think they will give up in time....

22 July 1944

47th mission, Polesti, Romania

... Headed out over the Adriatic and Balkans. I looked over some really beautiful country today. It is easy to know just where I was most all the time. I am sure I could return from most anywhere up here, or around Vienna, Austria or France. I could just sit up front and never look at a map and just stay a little to the left or right and come back to our base. Mountain country is pretty to fly over anyway. Woods and all through the valleys small towns scattered about. Not much traffic on the Danube River today and I don't think there are as many trains running as usual. I watched flak from Polesti through binoculars long before we got there. They must have known we were coming and were test firing their guns....

We came in for our bomb run and flak really came up at us. The air was black with exploding shells. I could hear the explosions and feel the concussion as near ones burst. A shell exploded right under us and tore the ply board up from around the waist, ripped gaping holes in the floor and sides, from bottom right on through to top. Cut two control cables in two. Two groups of electric wiring running along the fuselage was cut or shot in two. The tail turret's power line shot out. The inter-phone system went out. A big hole in the left oil line, one in the flap, also right oil line and engine cowling. The left raft was hit. Holes all through the plane and not a person hurt. When the hardest hit come my feet slipped as we were shaken up and I fell to my knees. It felt as though some one had hit beneath a chair you were sitting in with a ball bat.... Most of our planes landed at different fields today. Three came on home we were one of the three. One plane cracked up just off the field killed two of the crew, the others injured pretty bad.... Returning I watched a truck in Yugoslavia going along a mountain road. I watched through

binoculars as it stopped and the driver got out. It is rough at times, but I get a thrill watching a truck convoy, or a train trying to get out of yards before bombs away, or see them flying their planes off fields when they know in time we are coming. Yesterday over Germany I looked down and thought there is where the super race lives. It is interesting to wonder just what is being made when you see a factory smoke stack boiling smoke. A train, truck and barge or boat usually stops when we go over. In cities it is very seldom a person can be seen. I have looked for them many times through binoculars. Sometime out through the country people can be seen. Mule and carts occasionally.

25 July 1944

48th and 49th missions, target - tank and armament plant at Lintz, Austria, Herman Gooring tank facility

We were up kinda early this morning, went down to briefing got details of what to expect, as usual there was plenty. 149 guns, 200 to 350 enemy fighters, only about 40 to 50 enemy fighters showed up.... About one or two minutes after they had crossed our formation and flew out toward Lintz, here come 40 to 50 single engine fighters diving on us out of the haze of the sun. Our tail gunner, F.S. Fields, started shooting and calling over the interphone at the same time. FW190 and ME109 were the German fighters. They attacked in waves 12 to 14 minutes each wave. Our squadron was the first under attack.... I got my gun on one as he started his attack from the rear. He started to smoke I never ceased fire. He turned toward lead and back again as though he couldn't see or know what to do. Smoke was pouring and his plane was almost covered from engine back. He never did explode that I saw, although I expected it. All at once he headed almost straight down. I could see it no longer...Right after this our P-51 had turned back and they all met left and forward of our formation. This was the best view I have ever had of a large dog fight. I watched through binoculars as five German planes exploded in mid-air. Two more I could identify could have been either. The dog fight extended and into the flak area where two more large explosions were made. I don't know for sure if it were planes or what....Just as things were about to quiet down some.... I could hear the explosions as shells begun to burst so close my eyes would blink. I could see the red ball of fire in the very near ones. Flak over us, under us and plenty level. As soon as bombs were dropped we went into a dive to gain speed and change the range, but flak kept coming. After what seemed like ages, but were only a few minutes, we were out.... The target was very well hit in spite of everything. Lots of planes shot up. Said to have been four men killed. This mission was not as bad as Bad Voslau. I have one more mission to go.

3 August 1944

50th and 51st missions, target - Fredrickshauen, Germany - jet propelled plane and rocket factory, adjacent to the air drone

... Joe Pufka from Altoona, Pa. went with us today. Took off, flew up the Adriatic, crossing the shore line near Venice, Italy, and got a real good look at the city. We saw quite a few airfields in this area. Crossed the Alps, Austria, and Germany. We drew flak to our left, but not too near. Saw a few unidentified planes. As we neared the target, we flew over the lake dividing Switzerland and Germany. Then we hit the target. It was a

good run.... There was a four-gun battery firing off our left wing. We were circling right after leaving the lake. The batter never moved over enough for a hit, we kept turning right it stayed about the same distance. A group behind us were attacked by fighters. We got home safe. There was a nice air field in Switzerland just across the lake from our target in Germany.

After landing Lt. Haynie, our pilot, called us together for a few minutes of silent prayer. Showing thankfulness that we were allowed to complete our missions, 51 missions, should go home soon I hope.

Howard Carpenter of New York

Murray Cohen of New York

Philippe Condert of New York

Edgar A. Haynie of Missouri

Murray Ray Tucks of New York

James E. McDonald of Maine

Roland Buechs of Wisconsin

Robert Fields of Kentucky and Texas

Forrest Fields of Oklahoma

Me (Everitte Barbee) of North Carolina