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Sgt Albert R. Meyer, LW, KIA, Roswell, NM
S/Sgt Docile Nadeau, BT, KIA, Fort Keat Mills, ME
S/Sgt Clarence A. Rowlison, TG, KIA, Des Moines, IA
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pps 23-25 " "The 351st Bomb Group in W.W. II", Peter
Harris & Ken Harbour

DECEMBER 22nd 1943 MISSION NO. 63

Thirty four planes took off to bomb the marshalling yards and steel mill at Osnabruck, Germany. The mission was abandoned by the Combat Wing Commander before the target was attacked because of bad weather. Fighter opposition was very weak, consisting of only a few attacks by FW-190s and Me-109s. Light inaccurate flak was encountered at a few points along the route.

Group leaders on this mission were Captain D. Harris and Lt. Colonel Cobb, with Lt. Pullen as navigator and Lt. Baird as bombardier, in the high box. Lt. Carson and Captain Boykin, with Lt. Heldman as navigator and Lt. Spinning as bombardier in the low box.

Lt. Maginn in 42-39778 was forced to ditch in the North Sea when returning with engine trouble. This incident is described by Lt. Maginn:

"Our aircraft, 'Lucky Ball', had just completed an overhaul and had two engines replaced with rebuilt ones. It was our fifth mission and the target was Osnabruck, Germany. The weather was damp and cold with very strong winds blowing from the west. Even though our plane was pronounced in A-1 condition, I was nevertheless concerned about the engines and felt that I

would be much happier with them after they had accumulated some more hours of running time. From the start things went wrong. Two of our regular crew could not go on the mission, so two spares were assigned to fill their positions in the ball turret and tail gun. The mission plan was to assemble over a radio beacon on the East coast, then the Group in formation was to join the other Bomb Groups and start the climb to the proper altitude en-route to the target. For some reason our Group Commander did not join the stream of Bomb Groups crossing the English Channel at the proper time, and it was only when we saw B-24 Groups approaching, and they were supposed to be behind us, was it realized that we were far behind our assigned location in the stream of Bomb Groups. To regain our position the lead aircraft of our Group gradually increased power both to gain speed and altitude. We soon found ourselves running at near full power and we were still falling far behind in our formation, as were many others of our Group. We had not yet reached bombing altitude when the oil pressure on our number four engine started dropping. We took all corrective measures possible, but the oil pressure continued to drop and before it reached the critical point, I pressed the 'feathering' button to stop the engine and turn the propeller blades so that they would provide no drag. By this time we were quite some distance behind our squadron, but the target was not far and I felt that we might still stand a chance to catch up even with three engines running at near full power. However, our position changed drastically a few minutes later when the oil pressure on our number three engine started dropping rapidly and I had only a very short time to try corrective measures before it was necessary to push the feathering button on the number three engine.

Now, with two engines out on the same side, it was no longer possible to catch up, or remain airborne indefinitely for that matter, so reluctantly we turned back. With no targets of opportunity in sight we jettisoned our bomb load into the Zuider Zee, and then also jettisoned most of our ammunition and other unneeded equipment. I trimmed our plane as best as possible to maintain a true course but we continued to lose altitude gradually, even with our number one and two engines running at near full power. At this point I felt we had sufficient altitude and

short enough distance to go to the English coast, and that we would not have to ditch in the sea, but our situation changed a few minutes later.

The tail gunner called out 'Fighter six o'clock high', but could not identify it immediately. In our crippled condition we would have been an easy victim for an enemy fighter so we promptly dove to a cloud cover at about 10,000 feet. Just as we reached this altitude, the gunner identified the fighter as a P47. We levelled off and the fighter came up alongside us and after waving his wings at us flew on ahead. We had lost precious altitude in our dive and then to make matters even worse, the oil pressure on our second engine started to fluctuate and then drop. At about the same time we started to get some flak from the German guns, although I don't recall that any hit us. Anyway we had to take some evasive action which cost us more altitude and, with the oil pressure still dropping on the number two engine, I had to feather it. We immediately jettisoned all remaining expendable equipment including our guns and ammunition, but with only one engine now running we were losing altitude rapidly.

We still felt, however, that we might get to the English coast and crash land wherever possible. Nevertheless, we prepared to ditch, running through the ditching procedure and assembling the crew in the radio room. The radio operator Sgt. Palmer started sending the SOS signal. We were heading for Norwich across the North Sea and with a very strong headwind it soon became apparent we would not reach land, even though the English coast was now in view. I could see that the water was choppy. No chance to land in the trough of a wave as the 'book' says you're to do. We dragged along on one engine until we were just above the wave tops, then I had to cut the remaining engine because it was causing the plane to swerve and I wanted to land as straight as possible. At about 85 mph we hit the water, and for a few seconds both Lt. Brooks, my co-pilot and I blacked out as we were thrown violently forward by the rapid deceleration. I actually thought we were under water, and in fact we were until the nose of the plane started to rise and then I could see that we were floating.

Brooks at once pulled the emergency release cord on his co-

pilots window which allowed the window to fall away, and started to climb out. I opened my window but became stuck in the small opening, so I rapidly backed away and climbed out of the co-pilots window. Just as I stepped onto the wing it started to sink, so both Brooks and I inflated our 'Mae Wests' and went into the water. The shock of the cold water was instantly numbing, but even worse was the shock I experienced when I looked at the rear of our plane. The tail from the radio compartment back was sticking up in the air indicating that the plane had broken in half on landing. This fracture had jammed shut the escape hatch from the radio room and therefore the rest of the crew could not get out. Brooks and I immediately started swimming to the side of the plane to see what we could do. Then gradually the nose and wings started to sink, causing the radio hatch to break open, and one by one the crew scrambled out. I called to Dave Shrom our engineer, to pull the cables to release the life rafts, but he replied that they were jammed and bent and that he was unable to release them. Unfortunately the plane had no exterior release cables so we could not get at the rafts, therefore the men had to take to the water.

We assembled together in the water and watched 'Lucky Ball' sink. Our efforts to remain together proved fruitless - the first big wave came crashing over us, and we could no longer hold on to each other. Palmer assured me that the air rescue squadrons had a 'first class' fix on us and that a rescue boat was probably already on the way. However 30 minutes and finally 45 went by before the boat appeared. By this time we were scattered over a 100 yards of sea making it difficult for the boat to find us all, much less to pick us up.

I'm sure that by this time some of my crew were overcome by exposure, the wind and bitter cold water took its toll rapidly, I had just about given myself up, when the Air Sea Rescue (ASR) boat threw me a line, I caught it and hung on for dear life while they hauled me aboard. Three others were already on the ship and shortly after a fifth was brought into the small cabin in which we were huddled. I then discovered Lt Brooks and Lt Rufeisen and Sgts Schrom, Brooks and myself had survived. Lt McMorrow, Sgts. Butcher, Meyer, Nadeau and Rowlison were not found."