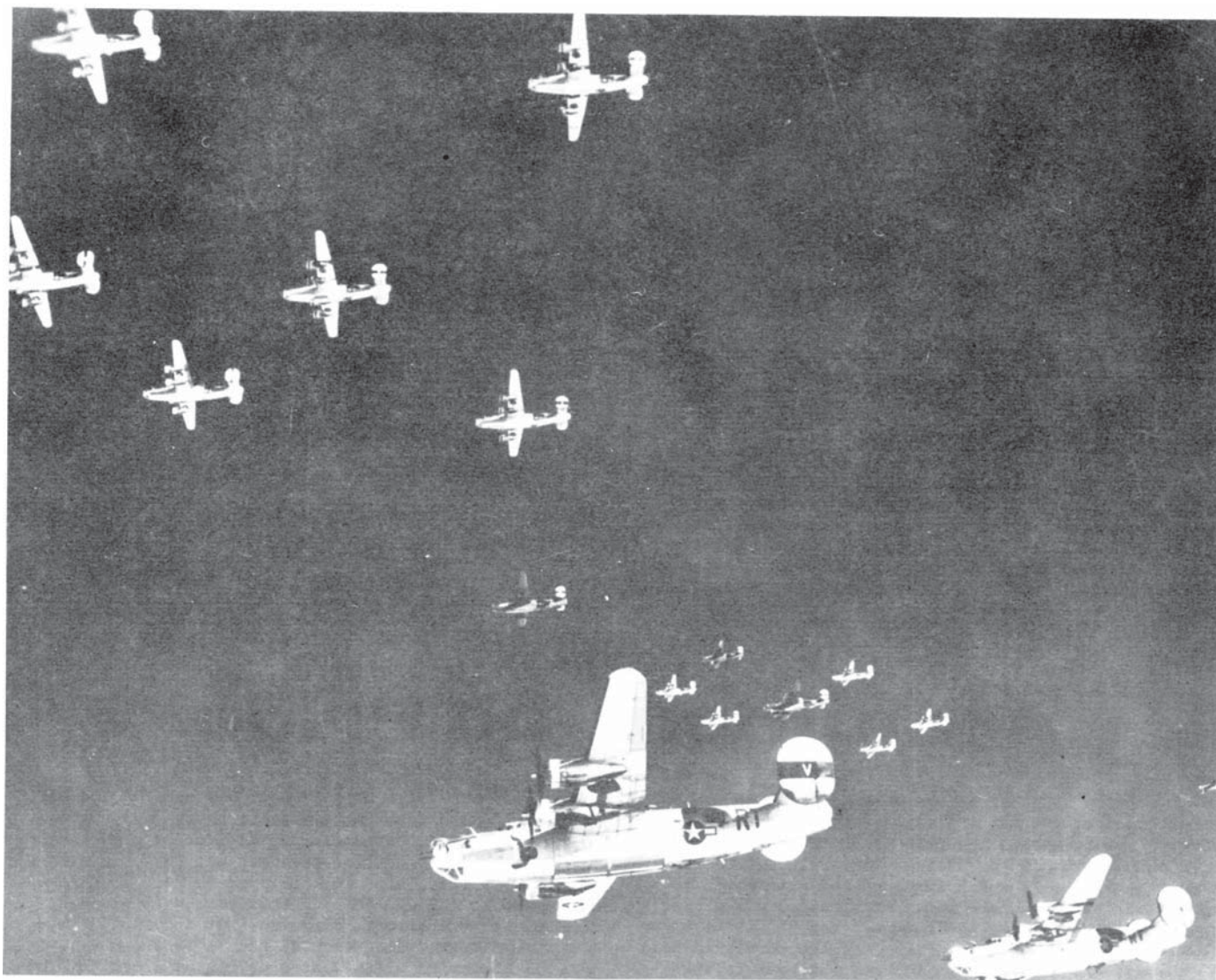




Consolidated B-24Hs of the 446th Bomb Group, 8th Air Force fly toward a German target in Spring of 1944.

Liberator Pilot

By BERNARD L. HUTAIN AS TOLD TO KEEN C. RUST

I was a pilot for a Consolidated B-24 Liberator with the 705th Bomb Squadron of the 446th Bombardment Group (Heavy) when it went overseas in September-October 1943 to join the 8th Air Force in England. Our overseas home was Station 125 at Flixton Hall, located in East Suffolk. From there the Group flew its first combat mission on 16 December 1943. I flew my first mission on 22 December 1943 and my last mission on 28 June 1944.

When we first went into action from England our B-24s carried only Group and Aircraft markings on their OD finishes—a large, white ball on the upper tails and the upper right wing near the tip with the black Group Letter "H" within it, and a small, white Aircraft Letter (a different letter for each aircraft within its Squadron) on the lower tail. With no easily visible way to identify the Liberators of different squadrons, it was difficult and confusing to join up in formation for a mission. So after we had been in England several months

we applied "squadron codes" to our aircraft. These consisted of pairs of large, yellow letters (RT for the 704th Squadron, HN for the 705th, FL for the 706th, and JU for the 707th) which were painted on the sides of the fuselage just aft of the waist gunner's opening. About the same time our planes had differently colored bands placed around the engine cowlings just in front of the cowl flaps to further help identification. The 705th Squadron had a yellow band, for instance. The color bands and the squadron codes made forming up by squadrons a much easier proposition.

About February 1944, the Group adopted new tail markings with the entire outer surface of the vertical tails being painted Yellow, to signify the B-24s as belonging to the 20th Combat Wing. Each of the three groups within the Wing painted a Black Band across the tails in a distinctive manner—vertically for the 93rd Group, diagonally for the 448th and horizontally in our 446th. In the center of the band was painted the Air-

craft Letter. When unpainted, silver Liberators began to arrive, the markings remained the same except the "white ball" on the upper right wing became a black ball with the Group Letter in white within it, and the squadron codes were painted in black on the fuselage.

FORMING AND FORMATIONS

Every mission began with the Group taking off and building itself into a formation for the flight to the target. A pilot's place in a formation was first given to him at the briefing before the mission. This was accomplished by diagraming the formation on a blackboard with names assigned to each position. Take off would then be by squadron order, lead crew first and so on. The big difficulty, of course, was the weather. English weather, in the winter months especially, made it anything but simple to get a formation together in the air. Take off was usually at daybreak when the weather was worst, and the sky was overcast almost every mission with the base generally at 300 to 400 feet and the tops anywhere from 4-5,000 feet to as high as 12-15,000 feet.

Take off was at 30 second intervals and a 36 plane, Group formation would thus take 18 minutes at least to get off the ground. With the low ceilings we had to form on top of the clouds, and the higher the tops the worse it would be. Each group had two radio beacons to use as the pilots climbed up on instruments. They were about five miles apart, and we flew an oblong "race track" pattern in the climb out so we would cross the first beacon at 2,000 feet, swing around in the "race track" pattern, climbing to cross the other beacon at 3,000 feet and so on. Theoretically, this placed eastbound traffic 1,000 feet higher than westbound, and with 30 second take off intervals the planes would be one and one-half miles apart. Theoretically! In practice, of course, this simply did not happen. Each plane had its individual performance, and there was a considerable difference in the ability of the pilots. The net result was that planes could, and would, be anywhere along this "race track" pattern, not hitting the radio beacons at the correct altitude, etc., etc.

It was like playing Russian Roulette, with much higher odds, though. You'd be climbing on the gauges until all of a sudden you hit propwash that was sometimes so strong you would be thrown into an almost vertical position. (One of our 705th replacement pilots was thrown out of control and crashed, killing everyone on board.) Of course, the higher the tops, the longer you were in this churning mass of airplanes. It was always a relief to break out on top.

Once you were up there, above the clouds, you would continue the "race track" pattern to get everyone in formation. However, bomber fields were very closely packed in our section near Norwich, and when you got on top (particularly if you were one of the last ones off) you would see airplanes everywhere, with many groups forming at the same time within an area twenty by thirty miles square, so that it was very easy in the beginning to mistake your Group Leader. The Group Leader would fire flares of a certain color, Squadron Leaders flares of different colors, and you would pick out your leader and then your position by this method. To add to the fun, the leaders (especially in the early missions) would run out of flares before the group was fully formed.

There was almost always a lot of confusion. Some guys would wind up in neighboring groups, sometimes a tail-end-Charlie would get to his leader before the plane he was supposed to fly on, etc., and it took a lot of time and jockeying before the Group could be properly formed. The Group Leader, however, couldn't necessarily wait until everybody was in his proper place as he had to get his Group into position on other groups and into the bomber "stream". So, frequently the latecomers and slow climbers would attach themselves

wherever they could, sometimes, as I said, with other groups. This was especially a problem before we had distinctive squadron markings.

With experience, better aircraft markings and the use of a "Judas" airplane, the job became easier and less confusing in time. The "Judas" airplane was a forming aircraft. The groups eventually learned to use a garishly colored plane on which the group's aircraft formed, after which the "Judas" returned to base. These planes were usually a War Weary, beat-up machine painted in a most fantastic way so there was no mistaking which group it represented. The 446th's plane was called "Fearless Freddie" in honor of our Group Exec. When each group had formed, the groups would then form into wing formation.

Our Group started out using a basic box of six planes which would become Lead Box, High Box and Low Box to form a squadron of 18. In turn, there would be a Lead Squadron, a High Squadron and a Low Squadron to form a basic group of 54. (I vaguely remember that at the beginning, we tried to form a wing composed of a Lead Group, a High Group and a Low Group to make a 162-plane wing formation. All I can remember for sure is that it was the largest formation ever flown.)

It was soon found that a squadron of 18 was unmanageable in that the tail-end-Charlies could not stay in formation; it was like being the end guy in crack-the-whip. As the Group turned or took evasive action the last High-3 or bottom Low-3 of each of the 18-plane squadrons would find themselves either stalling out with closed throttle or being left behind with wide open throttles, regardless of the abilities of their pilots.

To overcome this, we soon went to a basic squadron of 12 aircraft with just 3 High and 3 Low flying off the Lead Box of six planes. One squadron of 12, in turn, flew High to the Lead Squadron and another squadron of 12 flew Low to it. This worked out much better and the individual pilot had an easier time of it to stay in his proper position. Regardless of the ability of the individual pilot, however, the overall quality of the squadron and group formation was directly related to the abilities of the squadron and group lead pilots.

To fly one plane in formation with another is actually very simple and, surprisingly, the closer you get the easier it is. Conversely, the further away you get the harder it becomes to hold your position. The reason is that the closer you are the more quickly you will detect a change in speed or position from your leader. When you are leading the last section in a group formation, you are a thousand feet away from the Group Leader, and he could increase or decrease his speed thirty seconds or more before you would be aware of it, or he could start a turn and you would take five to ten seconds to catch it and then not know how many degrees he intended to turn. If you were by yourself, there would be no serious problem--a quick turn, speed up, slow down fast, and reestablish position--but there are many other interrelated aircraft in a group formation.

The Group Leader has to remember he has all those planes following him, and if he banks too much he will lose the tail-end-Charlies on the outside of his turn and stall out the guys on the inside. If he speeds up too much and too fast, he'll lose his planes. Then if he slows down too fast they will overshoot him.

Both Group and Squadron Leaders always have to decide how much power to add (slowly, slowly), when to reduce power, how much to cross-over, when to stop the cross-over, etc. The Group Leader has to make ever so gentle turns (easy, easy on power changes) because everything he does is so greatly exaggerated by the time it gets to tail-end-Charlie. A strung out formation is mostly the fault of the formation leaders and plain old fatigue. Seven to eight hours of formation flying thru flak and fighters calls for a lot of endurance and skill.

Being a lead pilot calls for much experience, and generally the lead crews had no experience at leading formations until they were called on to do so under combat conditions. Some books and films to the contrary, the Commanding Officers didn't fly the planes. They rode in the co-pilot seat with the co-pilot riding in the tail turret or waist position, and the "lead crew" pilot flew the plane. We had very, very little large formation flying in the 'States, and the pilots who led 'Stateside would usually wind up as squadron COs, Operations Officers and so on, be shot down or finish their tour, so that invariably the guy leading the Group or Squadron or Section would have little or no experience behind him. I myself started out as tail-end-Charlie, then was Section Leader, Squadron Leader and twice Group Leader.

FLAK

After everyone was formed up and the bomber "stream" entered in over the enemy coast there were two unnatural enemies laying in wait for us. One was enemy fighters, the other was flak, and it was the flak which we met with the greatest frequency. In my Mission List (which appears at the end of this article) you might get the impression that nothing happened on a mission unless there is a specific note as to flak or fighters. Actually, we ran into flak on every mission except those on D-Day and once, or possibly twice, on a No-Ball mission--No Ball being the designation for a German missile launching site.

Over Europe we would receive flak damage on practically all of the "tough" ones ranging from a couple of holes to as many as 20-30 holes. The "tough" targets were almost anything in Germany. We used to pray for French targets, because the flak there would generally be of poor accuracy and usually only over the target area itself. Rumor had it that the French manned the guns in much of France and that they deliberately "aimed" to miss. I myself believe this was true (perhaps it was only in the Vichy part of France) because the bursts would be way low and way wide. On the Cognac raid, 31 December 1943, this was true on the way in and on the way out, but over the target the Jerries must have been at it as it was murderous. They put up a "box" barrage between the I.P. (initial Point) and the target, and we had to fly right through the damn stuff. It was something like running a gauntlet, and I don't mind saying I was plenty scared, especially after seeing a B-24 blow up, right in front of us in the box barrage, and knowing we had to go through it, too.

Most of the flak would be "tracking" flak, where they would get you in a radar or other fix and shoot at you as long as you were in range. You could occasionally see them zeroing in on you, finding the range, their first shots going hi - lo - left - right, or whatever, and then coming right into your formation. The bursts would have to be pretty close to you to do much damage, mostly close underneath. I'm not an ordnance man, but I believe most of the shell fragments from a burst would go upwards, some to the side, but not down. At least most of the holes on my plane would be on the lower surface of the wing and the belly. When we received damage on the side of the fuselage, I could see the shell's explosion very close to us if it was on the left side or hear it on the right. They have to be awfully close before you can actually hear the "bang" because I only heard one "bang" that I can remember. When the fragments hit you, you can certainly hear that. When you're really getting peppered its like hail on a tin roof, literally. Sometimes, of course, you would be hitting the fragments with your plane, rather than the other way around. Also you'd hit shell casings from bombers ahead of you, spent bullets, etc.

Our course in would be away and around most known A.A. emplacements, but sometimes there would be no way

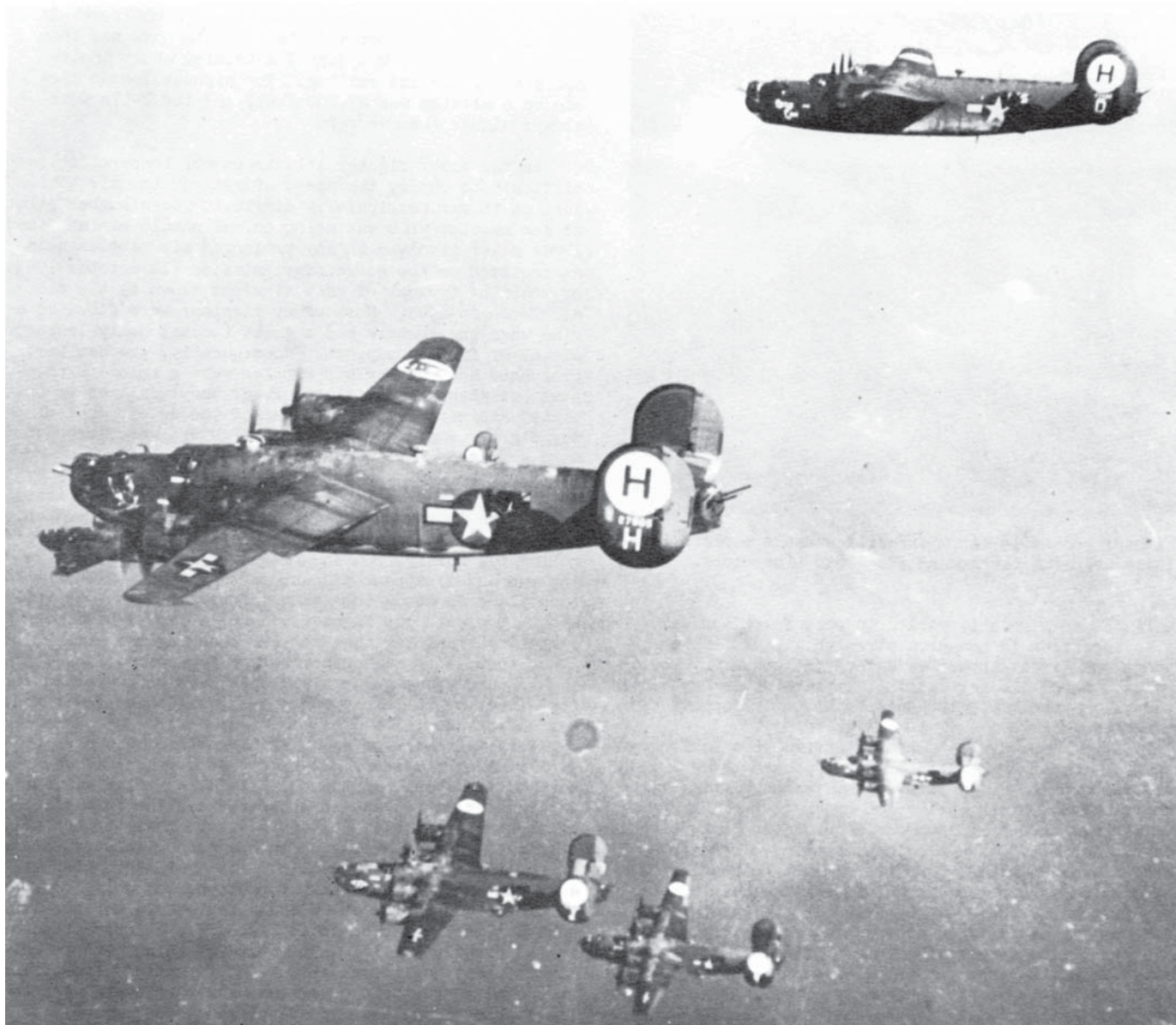
around it where they had mobile batteries. So even though the flak wouldn't be bad on the way in or out, you could always count on some along the route and, sure as hell, expect it around your target (with a few lovely exceptions). Brunswick was by far the toughest of them all, in my opinion. Berlin was hell over the city and vicinity, but as I recall it wasn't too much trouble going in and out. But going to Brunswick was going right down Flak Alley. (That's where the fighters were the worst, too, but we'll get to that later.) My plane was hit by flak pretty badly (20-30 hits) on three missions--once in the radio room, another time the hydraulic system was shot out, and on the Politz mission my Number 1 engine was knocked out. It caught fire, but feathering the propeller and shooting the CO 2 put it out, fortunately. I still have a piece of the flak they dug out of the engine.

To me the worst part of the flak was the feeling of helplessness you had, particularly on the bomb run from the I. P. to the target. That's usually where the flak was the heaviest and, of course, you had to make a straight run in for bombing accuracy. The first mission was the worst, for those first, black oily, ugly bursts introduced you to the reality of imminent death, and war was no longer an adventure but something to be endured and somehow, with luck, to be gotten through. We had a saying that you volunteered for your first mission but after that one, they made you go.

I suppose there were heroes in the 8th Air Force, but if so, I never knew one. We all counted the missions, praying for the easy ones, glad to get each one over with and looking forward to the last one. If the Messerschmitts jumped the group ahead or off to the side you felt for them but thanked God it wasn't you they jumped. We were glad when the target was overcast because that meant the flak would be much less accurate even though our bombing would also be inaccurate. Anything to improve your chances. We did do our best, never turned back, made second runs on the target if necessary, but it was all on the basis of getting the job done and getting the hell home again. I never hated the Germans, never thought that Hitler was a threat to the U. S., and I would say 99% of the guys there felt the same way. Our only motivation was to do what was expected of us for our number of missions and hope to get home alive.

At first we had to do 25 missions to complete our tour, then they raised it to 30, and then to 35. I understood that the number you had to fly was based on the casualty rate. As the loss rate went down, the number of missions went up so that your chances of survival stayed the same. The loss rate in our Group was lower than many other groups--just plain luck. Even so, we lost more than what would have been the original strength of 72 crews. (I believe we had 18 crews in each squadron, but it might have been 16.) Then, too, we would have wounded and dead in the planes which came back. One B-24 came back with a big hole in the belly where the ball turret had been. The gunner had been in the turret, and I looked at the plane later and there were pieces of him all over the inside of the plane. The turret had been extended when they took a direct flak hit or the plane would never have come back. I remember another mission when only 4 flak bursts came near us, yet a 705th Squadron navigator was hit by a piece right in the heart. A "milk ran" for us, but a rough one for him.

In some respects, and as bad as the flak was, the worst part of a mission for me was before you got to the briefing. In the evening prior to a mission you'd be in your normal barrack's routine--reading, writing, playing poker, etc.--and the O.D. or someone would come in, announce a mission and tell you which crews were to go. Things would go silent in a hurry, a few lame jokes and then the "lucky" ones would go to bed, ostensibly



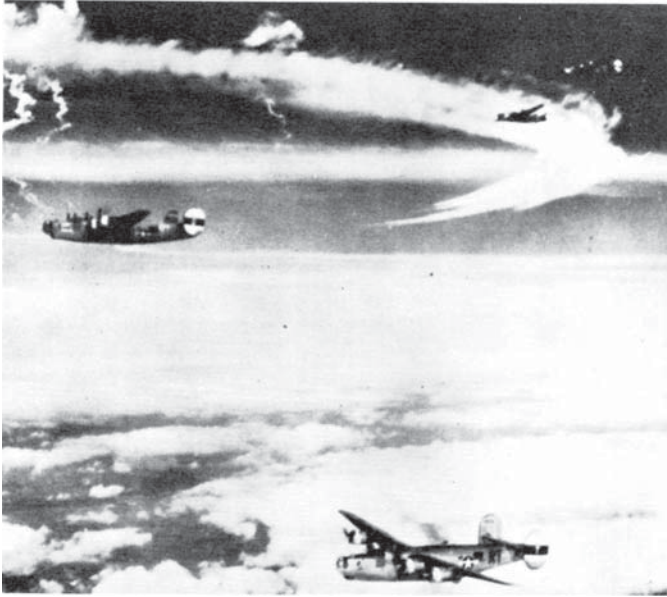
Liberators of the 446th Bomb Group bearing early Group markings which consisted of a white ball to signify the 2nd Bomb Division, black letter "H" to signify the 446th, and an aircraft letter on the lower fin. LAZY LOU, top.

to catch a little sleep before a 3 or 4 AM call. Getting to sleep would be difficult, and the sleep itself would be fitful and restless at best, for this might be your last night alive. Finally, you were awakened before you'd hardly had any sleep. Then you'd get dressed (in a bitter cold, practically unheated due to coal shortage, barracks), walk to chow and take, what was to me, that horrible truck ride to the briefing room. Horrible to me, because as a farm boy I had seen my father load cattle or pigs on a truck to take them to the slaughter house. Every time I got in that truck, I felt just like I was one of the animals being taken out to be killed. I know it sounds ridiculous, but at times I would walk rather than ride, just because of this feeling. Death, of course, wasn't at all that likely, especially as I look back on it now, but flying mission after mission would wear you down until you would believe you never would get through. But it wasn't all nerves and imagination—some 30 planes were shot down from my Group during my time in the 446th.

FIGHTERS

for escorting 8th Air Force heavy bombers was to send RAF Spitfires out to make a "sweep" over our proposed route some 30 minutes ahead of the bombers. This was designed to engage the enemy fighters so that they would be on the ground refueling and unable to intercept our bombers as they crossed in over the enemy coast. As we crossed in, other Spitfire squadrons would be escorting us, and they in turn would quickly be relieved by relays of 8th Air Force P-47s, the deepest relay of which could escort us fairly well into Western Germany. On the deeper penetrations into Central Germany and before we had P-51 escort, they sent P-38s to give us "target support". There weren't very many of them, however, so mostly we were without escort when we reached targets deep in Germany. Beginning in March, the P-51s (which first started giving us escort in late December) appeared in ever-increasing numbers, and they had the range to stay with us as far in as we went.

Escort fighter tactics changed quite a bit during my tour. The P-47s at first used to weave back and forth in pairs right over us (2-3,000 feet higher) then began to work in fours a little further off to the side.



Fighter contrails mix with earlier smoke markers forming a colorful background for 446th Liberators.

The P-51s, as I recall, worked in both fours and way off to the sides in squadron strength giving "close support and "area support". Toward the end of my tour they used the P-51s for "strike" attacks on German airfields along the route in addition to their support of the bombers.

By April and May 1944 enemy fighters were no longer a serious threat to the bombers even though there were still cases of powerful interceptor forces hitting the bombers. Even in the early part of my tour, flak and not fighters caused most of our casualties. But getting back to fighters, Luck more than anything else determined who was attacked. One group might be heavily hit on a mission and another group, five miles away, might miss everything. Some of the crews in the 446th finished their tours without ever seeing an enemy plane, and others, like myself, encountered them six to eight times. It all depended on which missions you were assigned to—the crews flying from December 1943 to March 1944 getting most and the April to June 1944 crews getting the fewer, if any. My six to eight attacks was a much higher percentage than for most in the group—again a matter of luck. The average was probably four to five attacks, mostly hit and run, out of thirty missions.

I would say that the B-17 groups received heavier air attacks and suffered less from flak than the B-24s. They got most of the fighter attacks because, being slower, they were the first ones into a German target and consequently drew the initial fighter resistance and, again being slower, were over enemy territory the longest with their cripples and stragglers being even slower. They would go in first, taking off 30 minutes or so earlier than the B-24s. The B-24s would catch up to them in the target area, pass them up on the way home, and usually be on the ground again by the time the B-17s returned to England.

B-17s, however, suffered less by flak fire because they were able to fly higher than the '24s. The effective ceiling of a B-24 was about 22,000 feet; the '17s could fly formation and bomb from as high as 27,000. Flak accuracy and effectiveness fell off considerably above 22-23,000 feet, and most B-24 formations had to fly between 18-22,000 feet where the flak was still accurate, or I should say more accurate. Above 22,000 the B-24 became too sluggish, particularly with the bomb bay doors open, and it was almost impossible to hold formation resulting in a poor bomb pattern. The

B-24, of course, could go higher than 22,000 feet—I've had one at 30,000 feet and other pilots have had them up to 32,000 feet, but here I'm talking about their operational use and ceiling. The highest I ever flew one on a mission was 23,000 feet, and the B-17s were always higher than we were.

As for enemy fighter attacks on our bombers, it is difficult to convey the speed of most of the air action just as it was particularly difficult for a bomber pilot to see much of what was going on. I should explain that I was never involved in any prolonged air battles such as occurred on the Schweinfurt mission (14 October 1943) or would be typical of most missions flown by the 8th Air Force in 1943. Most of my missions were flown at a time when the bombers had a great (occasionally lesser) amount of fighter support. Consequently, the earlier, prolonged and running air battles were a thing of the past, or when they still occurred, they would be an isolated and rare event. Because of the development of our fighter support, the German fighters were forced to make a flashing "hit and run" attack.

You'd be flying along when suddenly you'd see your fighter escort drop tanks, which was usually our first sign of an impending attack, and then, all of a sudden, seemingly from nowhere, 15 to 20 Jerries would come barreling in, mostly from the sides and rear, make a firing run and disappear as fast as they came. All of this took place in about the length of time it takes to tell about it. With our fighter escort, it would have been almost suicidal for them to keep pressing the attack. Also, there were many other bomber formations they could hit in turn whose gunners wouldn't have been alerted to the attack by the first run and so would have fewer guns trained on them.

Very little of an enemy fighter attack was seen by a pilot from his seat. Most of what a pilot saw on a mission was simply another B-24 because, after all, he was in a formation and in order to keep the formation as tight as possible, he had to devote most, if not all, of his attention to staying in his proper relationship in the formation. The best defense against fighter attack was a close, well-knit formation, not only for the firepower such a formation could represent, but because such a tight formation would discourage a Jerry attack in the first place. In the nature of things, there were always plenty of loose, strung-out formations (sometimes your own) to invite the Jerries, and then there were the inevitable stragglers and cripples.

Getting back to what a pilot saw of enemy fighter attack, I had the experience many times of coming back from a mission and listening to my gunners talk over the mission, and I would get the feeling that I hadn't even been on the same mission. Of the six to eight times I experienced fighter attack, I saw the fighters that were attacking my formation on only two occasions.

I saw a Messerschmitt 109 on my first mission to Osnabruck (22 December 1943) that had attacked from the rear come right under my right wing, - not more than 20 to 30 feet away, and peel off to the right again. He was in my view for, at the most, only two seconds, and all I can remember was that he was painted grey and that I was fascinated and scared to death at the same time. On any of my later missions I doubt that I would have been able to see him, for on that Osnabruck mission our formation as such had ceased to exist (due to poor weather, the effect of contrails and the inexperienced pilot's reaction to flak for the first time) so that there was no formation to fly in. We were just a bunch of planes going in the same direction, with no leader, and the planes were dropping their bombs whenever the mood struck them from above an undercast. I remember that we dropped our bombs when the flak became the worst, on the theory that there must be something down there.

The bombing was so messed up that Flying Officer Joseph Smith was "bombed down" during the wild melee



At left, Captain Bernard L. Hutaing of the 795th Bomb Squadron, 446th Bomb Group. At right, above, Capt. Hutaing looks out the side window of his Liberator as he tightens up formation on another B-24, his left wing tip only a few feet from the other's rudder.

over Osnabruck. With planes flying every which way and even crossing over one another, someone dropped his load of bombs while directly over F/O Smith and tore his wing off just outboard of the No. 4 engine. The bomb didn't explode because it hadn't had time to "arm", but it sliced his wing off and he flipped right over and into the clouds -- the force throwing the nose turret right off the plane.

It was also on this mission that my ball gunner, Sgt. L. C. Duckworth, shot down the first enemy plane to be credited to the 446th Bomb Group—a 109. (Here, I might mention the policy regarding the ball turret guns. We kept them retracted until we entered enemy territory and then lowered them. Approaching the I.P. we would retract the ball turrets until we were clear of the target or heavy flak area and then lower them again until leaving enemy territory. However, this policy was not rigid and different crews would pretty much suit themselves as a matter of practice. Jerry fighters would attack through their own flak, and some ball turrets would be down even under heavy flak conditions. This put the gunner at a distinct disadvantage in getting out in the event of damage or of his plane being shot down. It took a lot of courage to be a ball gunner, cut off from escape and being awful lonely down there.)

After a number of attempts to go to Berlin were thwarted by weather, the skies cleared on 6 March 1944 and Berlin was CAVU when we bombed it for the first time. The flak was very heavy, and there was considerable fighter opposition—the two taking a toll of 69 8th Air Force bombers that day, two of them from the 705th Squadron. Our Group and Squadron were attacked from the rear, so I didn't see them, but I could hear my gunners firing and smell the "cordite" fumes. After returning my two gunners told me of the two planes going down from our squadron. One of them was Lt. Merri-man, one of the original pilots of the Squadron.

The only other time I saw enemy fighters that attacked our Squadron or Group (I saw others, of course) was on the Brunswick mission of 8 April 1944. I'm not really sure how many enemy fighters there were, maybe

15 or maybe 30, but there were a bunch of them. I don't even know where they came from; the first I saw of them they were about three miles ahead of us flying a course that was at a right angle to ours, from right to left. When they were dead ahead of us, they peeled off one by one and came in head-on. They were Messerschmitt 109s.

I was flying lead plane that day, and as they came in I got the distinct feeling that it was me they were shooting at for there were no other B-24s between me and them. You don't know what scared means until you have that happen to you!

As they came in I could see their guns blinking as they fired. I don't know if it was cowardice or what, but I couldn't watch them.... I ducked my head down in the cockpit and flew by instruments FULLY expecting the instrument panel to shatter as the bullets came thru that were going to kill me. I don't know how long I stayed ducked down—it seemed forever, but it couldn't have been more than 20-30 seconds because shortly I was surprised that the instrument panel hadn't been shattered. I stuck my head up again and watched as the rest of them came in. When I had my head up again and saw them coming in I got what I would call "combat fever". I really don't know how to describe it except to say that it's a feeling you could fight them to the death with your bare hands. I was not even frightened any longer. Some atavistic, killing instinct had come over me and, lacking any weapons, I remember yelling or maybe screaming, Kill them!, etc. etc.

Of course, all this happened very fast. I would say that from the time I first saw them until they had all gone thru the formation not more than two minutes had passed, if even that much. Perhaps closer to just one minute. My memory of any detail is pretty hazy, the emotions you experience, shock, fear, rage, come too fast, too strong for you to be a detached observer. But in my hazy memory, I believe that as they closed on our formation, they rolled onto their backs and were inverted as they actually flew thru the formation. My top turret guns and nose guns were blazing away as they came in, but there would be no way of knowing whether any were shot down in the attack. Amazingly enough, my

plane wasn't even hit. Being in front, I would have sworn they were aiming at me but most likely they were not or were very poor shots.

Talking to my navigator later, he said that when he heard the firing he looked out his bubble window to see what was going on, and he saw tracers going by his nose so he backed himself up against the other side of the plane.

Where these fighters went I don't remember. My rear gunners did a lot of shooting on this mission, and the tail gunner received credit for an FW 190, but whether this was before, during or after the head-on attack I don't know. They may have attacked from the rear after the opening head-on attack, but I feel they went right on back through other formations and that the plane my tail gunner shot down was from another force of enemy fighters. As for the rest of the group, this mission, along with Hamm and Berlin, was talked about in the 446th more than any of the others--an indication of a number of casualties.

This mission, and the one to Osnabruck, were the only ones where I saw the planes attacking us. On the other four to six where we were jumped, all I know is that you could hear the guns firing--almost exclusively the ball, tail and waist guns. Enemy fighters didn't actually cause too many casualties--it's hard to shoot a bomber down, most attacks were hit and run and our planes and crews were well armored. We wore steel helmets and flak vests, and armor was added more and more as time went on. I remember I had about a one-quarter inch sheet of steel on the side of the cockpit, the same under my seat and also at the rear of my seat. Eventually our planes were equipped with what we called "coffin seats" where the pilot and copilot sat in what would be one-third of an eggshell made of armor plate.

Getting back to fighters, I can remember five cases clearly when I saw enemy fighters attacking other formations close by. On one of my early missions I saw them jump a B-17 group ahead and above us, and two B-17s spun down into the clouds with the pilot or controls apparently hit. On another mission, possibly my Politz mission, about 8-10 Me 110s made a rocket and cannon attack on a B-24 group about two miles ahead and to the left of us, and four B-24s went down. One was in flames, one smoking and two were out of control. Again the fighters just made one pass from the side and dove right on down with the P-51 escort spotting them and chasing them. What happened to the 110s I couldn't see.

On another mission I saw a single FW 190 make a head-on pass thru the group directly in front of us, but he was hit, caught fire and passed about one hundred feet under my left wing in flames. I saw another 190 on my Gotha mission, make a side pass at a B-24 outfit, and he, too, went down in flames. I was flying lead on this mission, so I had ample time to watch him spin down in flames, burning out before he hit the ground.

Speaking of the Gotha mission, in a way it was my most memorable raid. It was a beautiful, clear day, and my Group was toward the end, if not at the very end, of the 8th Air Force's bomber "stream". The 8th lost 49 bombers in all that day, and you could actually see the path the B-24s of the 2nd Bomb Division had taken into the target by the fire and smoke from the shot down aircraft along the route and by a few of the parachutes that were still in the air. There were at least 20 or 30 planes shot down along this path of destruction, both American and German with no way of knowing which, all either burning or smoking on the ground. The 446th Group lost two bombers on this mission.

The one other time I can clearly remember Jerry fighters, I was coming home alone on the Politz mission with an engine shot out, and I saw a 109 making a series of about four passes at a lone B-17, four to five miles to my left. The Messerschmitt must have run out of ammo or fuel, since he made three to four passes and then flew off and the B-17 continued on its way.

FUN IN A B-24

To answer some questions about the more pleasant side of flying a bomber, there are, for me, only two ways of enjoying it. One is to fly close formation, and the tighter you fly the more pleasure you get out of it. I liked to fly formation with my wing tip about five to six feet from the leader's rudder.

The only other way to have fun in a B-24, for me, was to fly as close to the ground as possible. We trained at this a little in advanced flying school, and I got to like it. I pulled my first buzz job on my home town of Anaheim, California just before we went overseas. I made three passes right on the rooftops, and on my last pass I stuck my wing down between the buildings on Center Street, holding my nose up with the rudders. Overseas, I did most of my buzzing as a way of letting off steam and tension from a combat mission. Instead of landing, I'd break off and head for the ground for about five to ten minutes of fun. I'd do it at other times, too, because I got a hell of a kick out of it. My crew (they must have had good nerves) encouraged me to do it and probably bragged about my ability, for on several occasions some people came over from neighboring groups to have me take them up on a buzz job. I always came back from buzz jobs with tree leaves stuck in the cracks of my bomb bay doors, and when I was over water, my props would throw water spray in the waist windows. Once, just once, I touched the roof of a house slightly with the belly of my plane. One time, for the hell of it, I dove at an M.P. tent encampment, and my crew told me that by zooming at just the right time I'd blown their tents over with my propwash.

My first plane was named "Werewolf" and was shot down while on a mission with another crew. When I received a new aircraft there was quite a bit of discussion, without agreement, about various names for the plane. Then one day I went out to my new plane and found the crew had painted "Barney's Buzz Wagon" on the side. And that was that. We completed our tour in late June and this aircraft was lost sometime later with another crew.

BOMBER COMPARISON

During my period in the Army Air Force during World War II, I had the opportunity to fly all four heavy bomber types, and although I'm not a test pilot, I can recall my general reaction to the types--the Boeing B-17F & G, the Consolidated B-24H & J, the Boeing B-29 and the Consolidated B-32.

I started out with the B-24. The first time I saw one up close was while I was in advanced cadet school, and I climbed thru it and thought it was a monster, both in size and looks. I was rather shocked when I was assigned to them later and would say that of all the planes the Army Air Force had, the '24 was at the bottom of every new pilot's list as far as popularity went. It was bad enough to be assigned to 4-engined bombers, and the B-17 boys considered themselves relatively lucky, while the '24 guys envied them. The '24 was considered to be, and relatively was, a beast. It was hard to fly (this was the big complaint), it took a lot of muscle power to move it around the sky, it responded sluggishly, it was slow to accelerate and, until you mastered it, hard to land. The B-24D also had a crazy-dangerous fuel transfer system (corrected in later models), but the big complaint was that it was tiring to fly and hell to try and keep a good formation with. All the same, there is no doubt it was a better bomber than the '17. It could fly faster, longer and carry a bigger load than the B-17, and with the nose turret models (H and J) it was better able to defend itself.

At first, I hated the beast, but by the time I had two to three hundred hours on it I'd begun to love it. By the time I had five hundred hours, the plane and I were a smooth working 'team'.

In contrast to the B-24, on which I eventually compiled more than one thousand hours, I put in only ten hours on the B-17, so perhaps I shouldn't compare them. However, the '17 was a plane you'd like the first time you flew it. It was light on the controls, responsive, very stable, and it landed easily and slowly. You could call it a 4-engine DC-3 or a 4-engined "Cub" and not be far wrong. In short, it was a delight to fly with absolutely no bad characteristics.

While I'd at first thought the '24 was big I had become used to it, but my initial reaction to the B-29 was the same in turn. I walked along that long, long wing and thought, "It's a monster." And in my opinion it was. It was another B-24—sluggish, heavy on the controls and tiring to fly. But, again like the '24, it was an excellent bomber—fast, long ranged, capable of carrying very heavy loads and able to defend itself. The engines would heat up to the red line very fast and would stay at the red line until you had 200 mph (approximately) and then you finally had adequate airflow to cool the engines. So take off technique was to get airborne, climb to 100-200 feet to clear terrain, level off, accelerate to 200 mph, then resume climb. But as I said, the '29 had all the disadvantages of the '24.

The B-32, on the other hand, was a wonderful plane to fly. It wasn't as light on the controls as the B-17, but it was easy to fly—response was quick and with very little effort, and it had a very stable flight path. It also had beautiful acceleration, in sharp contrast to the B-29, and gave me the feeling of being faster (although both types had very similar top speeds) probably because it was so responsive and quick to accelerate.

MISSION LIST FOR CAPT. BERNARD L. HUTAIN

Mission No.	BLH	Group	Date	Target	Remarks						
						22	95	6-11-44	Beaumont, France A/F		
1		3	12-22-43	Osnabruck	Group lost two B-24s Lt. Jacobsen and F/O Smith	23	98	6-14-55	Orleans/Bricey France A/F		
2		6	12-31-43	Cognac, France A/F	Group lost two B-24s Lt. Allen, 704th Lt. Frascati, 706th	24	99	6-15-44	Tours, France RR Bridge		
						25	101	6-17-44	Laval, France A/F		
3		12	1-21-44	Yurench, France No Ball	Bombed Buzz Bomb site from 10,000 ft. thru very accurate flak. Hit in radio room; Sgt. Dunk hit in shoe	26	102	6-18-44	Hamburg, Germany		
4		13	1-28-44	Yurench, France No Ball	Bombed thru clouds by pathfinder. No e/a seen--two bullet holes in prop.	27	105	6-20-44	Politz, Germany Oil	Had a ground crewman stow away. No. 1 engine shot out by flak and returned to England alone.	
5		15	1-30-44	Brunswick Germany	Bombed on pathfinder.	28	108	6-21-44	Siracourt, France No Ball		
6		19	2- 6-44	No Ball	No bombs dropped.	29	112	6-25-44	Boulogne, France		
7		21	2-10-44	Gilze-Rijen Holland A/F	No bombs dropped. Pathfinder's radar out.	30	113	6-28-44	Saarbruchen, Germany	Final mission of my tour.	
8		27	2-24-44	Gotha, Germany	Lts. Korrells and Supernat shot down.	EDITOR'S NOTE: Herewith we have presented the first of what we hope will be a long and continuing series in the JOURNAL devoted to the experiences of pilots and aircrew. These personal accounts will range through all eras of aviation history, and it is hoped that many-Members will come forth with material on flying experiences which we can present in future issues. The approaches are endless: What was it like to race in the Golden Years? ...to fly early airliners? ...to fly in the services in the '20s and '30s? So, if you know of a story such as this, please get in touch with the Editor.					
9		29	2-28-44	No Ball							
10		31	3- 4-44	Berlin, Germany	No bombs dropped; turned back due to weather at target.						
11		33	3- 6-44	Berlin, Germany	Heavy flak. Two planes shot down.						

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