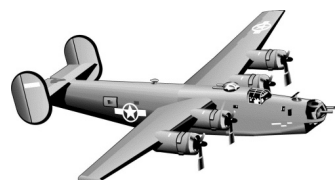




# Flightline



Newsletter of the 780<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron of WWII

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March 2017

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## *Missions, accidents, rest camp retold*

# Watching 'wall of flak' move in

*Editor's note: It's time to make good on a promise I made four years ago. I promised to publish Frank Diederichs' diary entries from November 1944 to February 1945. I got distracted and lost sight of the submission. Here it is, finally:*

**From the Wartime Journal of  
Frank Diederichs, bombardier,  
780<sup>th</sup> BS / 465<sup>th</sup> BG, 15<sup>th</sup> AF**

*November 21, 1944* - Priddy and crew shot down by fighters in Salzburg area. Heard calling for help and ordering bail-out. Left formation at target with #4 feathered. Munich hit by group.

*November 23, 1944* - Thanksgiving Day! A stand-down.

*December 2, 1944* - Today's mission made Vienna look like a daisy patch. Hit Bleckhamer South Oil Field in strength, and the flak gunners hit back just as strongly! Took-off with poor field weather conditions in Dog 8 position, flying White-X.

Doing double duty as Navigator - Bombardier, which is "no buono" (no good) over Yugoslavia, Hungary, etc. Checkpoints for pilotage, even through breaks in the undercast were nearly impossible to find, and D.R. (dead reckoning) was no easier. Thankful for the decent info afforded by Group flimsies and Metro.

Safely past Lake Balaton with ship after ship peeling off and making early returns. Fighters (P-51's) plenty in evidence and greatly appre-

ciated, especially when a bunch of new twin-engine jobs spotted in the distance (3 o'clock). Picked up a little flak near Gyor but no damage. Made bombing altitude 30 minutes before I.P. Noticed the Danube busy and over-flowing. Not much snow except for the Alps, sparkling to the westward.

Turned on run at I.P. Target was smudge-covered but identifiable. Wham -- flak like it seems impossible to go through. Ship in Group ahead blew-up. Another down in a spin. Bomb-bays open, racks set, handle in select, toggle ready, and there I sit shaking in fright watching a regular wall of flak move in. So close that the shock of the shells exploding rocked us around. One piece - 3 inches long and 1 inch wide came thru the waist and hit the ball gunner on the head, tore thru his flak-helmet, but only laid him out - lucky. Another in #1 engine, wing tip, nose turret, beside my head, under the pilot's seat. Bomb's aaway and at the same time, Franklin in Dog-1 hit in bomb-bay. Lost control and nearly rolled into Dog-2. Saw 3 men bail out, bomb-bays flaming, peeled off to the left out of sight. Withington in Dog-4, hit in #4 (engine), feathered it, and pulled out for Russia. Our Box scattered and I'm too shaky to navigate. Picked up Charlie Box to follow. And - of all the Boxes, Dog Box hit the target squarely, smashing the important parts and rolling up vast plumes of black-smoke. Some satisfaction from that.

Still shaken up all the way back. Sweating - and the sweat freezes! Landed after 08:45 hrs.

*continued on page 2...*

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# Your News & Letters

Kathy,

*Here is Dad's contribution to Flightline. It is in memory of the life experiences that Bill Edwards and Dad shared in a world far far away. Also in memory of his and Bill's subsequent lifetime friendship.*

*Hope this helps and that the Flightline newsletter will continue to connect those that served us so bravely during a time of great conflict in our country's and the world's history.*

*I hope everything is going well with you and yours,*

*Dave, George and  
Gloria Kuchenbecker*

Editor's note: Thank you, Dave, for continuing to support the *Flightline*. One positive that came from the war, other than ensuring peace and freedom these last 72 years, is the friendships that have endured just as long. I am so thankful for knowing George and Bill and many others from the

squadron, and their families. The squadron has given us, the descendants, much more than "just" winning the war.

**Thank You**

**George  
Kuchenbecker**

**for your donation  
to the *Flightline***

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*... from front page*

of combat time, tired, scared, punch-drunk! God, I wish this thing would end so we could go home! \*\* (14 missions - 7 sorties)

*December 5, 1944* - Not scheduled. Group hit Bratislava near Vienna. Not much flak. Picked up 30 ME-109's after rally off target. Hit 464th bad. Came into one Box of our Group. Our gunners knocked down 4 for sure, damaged others. Not bad! Tail gunner on Glasgow's crew killed.

Incident just before take-off. Blue "Z" started on fire in bomb-bays while taking-off. Never got airborne. Nose wheel collapsed at the end of the runway and the ship blew up. No survivors, 7 of 10 bombs blew up. Knocked me out of bed and shattered windows in area. Puts the fear in a person about taking-off with full gas and bomb load.

*December 11, 1944* - Left for Rest Camp on the Isle of Capri. Flew to Naples and took excursion boat to the Isle. Stayed at Quisisana Grande Hotel. Visited Tibierian ruins, Certosa

Monastery (1370), Church of St. Michel (1799). Mt. St. Miguel, Blue Gratto, White Gratto, etc. A very nice time. Stayed until Sunday, December 17<sup>th</sup> and then returned to Naples. Over-night at this city - taking in Pompeii, Augusteo Theatre, San Carlo Opera in La Traviata, Arizona Club, etc. and etc.

Monday (December 18<sup>th</sup>) caught plane back to Field.

*December 20, 1944* - Took-off in old "Agony Wagon" (Red H) for Brux. The weather was bad to begin with, and promised to grow worse during the day. Started in Dog 3, but ended up in Charley 6. Everything smooth until we reached Linz on the way up. Then a cylinder blew in #3. Lost oil rapidly and the vibration threatened the right wing. Feathered it, and unable to un-feather due to loss of oil. Attempted to keep up with formation as this area is thick with enemy fighters looking for stragglers. Jettisoned bombs, but still continued to fall back. Nothing left to do, but turn back and hope we'd get no fighters after us. About 15 minnutes after turn, the tail gunner spotted fighters coming in rapidly. We braced ourselves and the gunners got

ready. Our relief was wonderful when it turned out to be 14 P-38's going home as they were short on gas. We called them for escort and they covered us across the Alps and thru the Udine area. Then our #4 supercharger went out and we started sweating. But after a little bad weather, we dragged in and landed safely.

Our Squadron had no losses and hit Brux effectively today. \*\* (16 missions - 8 sorties)

*December 22, 1944* - Up and brief for Brux. Weather very bad and take-off was doubtful. Plans changed after getting to planes and crews recalled to brief for an alternate target. Our truck started up the hill for S-2 - weather rainy and still dark - driver started speeding and suddenly he sideswiped another truck. Springer, in the cab, was tossed out and rolled along the road getting pretty banged up. Himes was hit a bad blow on the head and was cut by glass. I didn't get hurt - just tossed around and a little stunned. Scratched from mission. Himes will be OK.

*December 25, 1944* - CHRISTMAS DAY! A lackadaisical day. Weather bad. Sat around the shack and took it easy.

*December 27, 1944* - Finally scheduled and took-off on a MILK-RUN!! Target - Maribor Main Marshalling Yards in Yugoslavia. Trip up was uneventful. No Navigator, so I did his job. Weather good and the run on the target was fine. Riding in Able 3 and bombs went away on time. Flak in sky - but only moderate and inaccurate. After leaving target, cylinder burst in #3 engine so it was feathered. Dropped out of formation and came home alone. No losses to our Group. Hit the target squarely - saw it knocked to hell. \*\* (17 missions - 9 sorties)

*January 1, 1945* - New Year's Day! Stand-down - luckily. Spent a quiet day, but been having a feeling that we'll be going home before long! And somehow, I know I'll be all right. How about that?

*January 8, 1945* - Took-off for Linz Marshalling Yards. Promises of nasty weather at the Alps.

Grouped up and left "on course" with no trouble flying in Baker 6.

Reached briefed altitude over Northern Italy and ran into the weather. Excessive turbulence in area. Windshield frosted over, haze and vapor-trails. Pilots in #4 and #3 doing a p-poor job and for a half an hour we fought them and the weather. I'll take flak to this kind of flying. Continuously ducking and avoiding collision by inches. All of us are very frightened with the close calls and the turbulence. Himes did a fine job and pulled us through in one piece luckily.

Col. Foster finally gave up and pulled a 180 for a heading to home. Flak in the near vicinity and a few fighters - which looked like ME-210's. Home safely but badly knocked around. Found out we received credit for an ineffective sort and one mission. \*\* (18 missions - 10 sorties)

*No date* - If the weather doesn't clear up soon, we'll be here until 1946 getting 35 sorties in.

Norman's Crew, Withington's Crew safely back from Russia.

Priddy's nose gunner back after a 34 day walk from Villach in Austria where Priddy went down. He says 3 men of the crew were shot by civilians when they reached the ground. He successfully evaded capture and with the help of Yugoslavian partisans walked to Allied territory.

From the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup>, the weather was terrible. Nothing but "hardstand sorties," a week of V.D. lectures, and the tower burned down. On January 31<sup>st</sup>, our Group was given Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery at Vienna and took-off in 2 attack forces to bomb it. Flak at target was inaccurate and scant., although briefed otherwise. We had bad breaks on return. Capt. Liles dropped out of formation near target - no news of him. Medley went in to Vis (Yugoslavia). Weir cracked up on landing - all alive, 2 enlisted men injured badly. 7 ships from Group did not return.

*February 6, 1945* - Liles and good ol' buddy Dyess are presumed lost. It is feared they ditched which is a bad deal. I hope we hear they are all right before long.



Kathy Le Comte  
Editor, *Flightline*  
1004 Williams Blvd.  
Springfield, IL 62704-2832

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## *Flightline*

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### **'March Madness'**

The 2017 NCAA Division I Men's Basketball selections are out. Did you know the 780<sup>th</sup> BS had a basketball team? In the December 2016 issue of the *Flightline*, Harold Miers mentioned that he played for the squadron basketball team at McCook, as well as for the squadron volleyball team. Miers is #62 above, front row, third from left, from 780<sup>th</sup> Memoirs, page 103. The others are: back row, from left: Wallace, Hamilton, Pateck, Moss, Lt. Line, PT Officer. Front: Johnson, Berger, Miers, Henneck. Photo taken Dec 1944.