

## An account of the experience of Arthur Linrud on Mission 115

Our plane took off in early morning midst rain showers and dark heavy clouds. We climbed to somewhere near 6000 ft. before clouds thinned out the sun shone. Considerable time was lost getting assembled into formation due to heavy cloud cover over England.

This was a (maximum effort) raid on one of the largest number of planes to go on a daylight raid deep into Germany. However, later it was learned that one air division did not get off ground and the number of planes flying on mission was reduced by nearly one-third.

Our fighter escort picked us up over the English Channel as we neared the continent, staying high above moving from side to side protecting our top and sides from enemy fighter planes and rocket planes as the formation moved into enemy air space over the continent of Europe. However due to the time lost getting in to our proper formation, their fuel supply soon became exhausted and they returned to their bases in England.

Up until now no enemy planes had been spotted. However, this was soon to change for almost immediately after our fighter escort left for home, enemy planes were seen in the distant sky, in varying numbers, climbing for altitude, getting into proper formation and readying for the attack on the bomber formation. It would have been difficult to get an accurate number count as they were on all sides and high above, coming in to attack.

From my position in the upper turret I had a view of so many that it was quickly a matter of picking out one, getting it lined up in the gun sight, squeezing of several bursts from two 50 caliber machine guns, all the time keeping it in the sight and firing until it swept away past above or down off below; then swinging the turret to pick up another attacking wave as it came in, picking out a plane in the gun sight, firing and following it through and unless a plane blew up in the gun sight view or smoked badly, a gunner never really knew if the plane was damaged or shot down, as there wasn't time to follow them with the eyes and see the results. One thing for sure was, an enemy plane caught in the gunner's sight was greeted with a hail storm of bullets and streamers of red tracers as it came within gun range.

The action continued unabated as the attackers came flying in at high speed canon and guns flashing along the wings. Sometimes, almost without caution, an occasional plane dove through the formation barely missing the bombers. On several previous mission the enemy pilots had attacked cautiously and skillfully, using their tactics to the best of their ability and advantage. Today was different! There was meant to be a fierce air battle, a last encounter for many airmen on both sides.

As the formation moved on deeper into enemy country, damage to several planes became evident. Occasionally a plane, damaged and unable to keep up, would fall behind, then turn and head back, hoping to make it back to the base or ditch in the English Channel, with the crew members being picked up

by air sea rescue. Hover, going home alone with a damaged plane, usually meant further attacks from fighters and a battle until either the fighters planes were shot down or driven off or the damaged bomber unable to fly, had to be abandoned, the crew members bailing out.

Smoke poured from an engine on a plane a ways behind and to our right. The next time I looked, it had pulled away from the formation and was heading down in a dive, on fire and out of control.

Whenever I turned the turret ahead or to the rear to fire at an enemy plane, I could see that the action was everywhere, no part of the formation was escaping the attack.

Suddenly our plane shook violently from impact of an explosion of a canon shell or rocket as it smashed into the rear part of no. 2 engine ripping a hole in the leading edge of the wing and leaving the engine a smoking mess of ruin, This not more than 15 feet from my turret and the pilot seat.

Fortunately our pilot (Lt. Dennis McDarby) was not injured and quickly brought the plane under control but with the damage received, we were unable to keep our plane in formation and dropped down and started to fall back. He called on the intercom checking on crew members (everyone ok) then reported that with the plane damaged as it was, there was no way we could make it to the target with the bomb load and that he was going to dump the bombs and go down to low level in an attempt to fight our way back to a cloud cover at lower altitude to escape the fighters, which continued to press the attack now that our plane was damaged and without the protection of the formation.

Smoke continued to pour out of no. 2 engine area as we turned and dove down. Machine gun bullets hitting the fuselage had the sound effect of hailstones hitting a tin roof. Where smoke had been pouring back before, now flames were red and fanned by the wind quickly spread back to the fuel supply and soon an huge ball of fire trailed back past the tail section of the plane.

A call on intercom, and I got out of the turret to see (co-pilot) Lt. Don Breeden motion me up front by him and pilot (Lt. McDarby) who said, "Go down and remove the escape hatch cover. We'll never get this fire out now."

I picked up my parachute pack, snapped it in place, climbed down, grabbed the emergency catch release, gave the door a kick with my foot. It disappeared as if by magic. Where there had been a metal door a second before, now appeared a hole out into the sky. I turned and was climbing back up into the cabin when I felt a hand on top of my head and I looked up to hear pilot McDarby say, "Bail out. I've already given the order. The wing is going to break off soon. We're coming too."

Backing down again, I hung my feet out the door and sat on the edge glanced into the nose section and saw navigator (William Martin) and bombardier (Harvey Manley) with parachutes on getting ready to follow me. A quick departing wave with right hand before gripping the "D" ring, then tumbling out

into space. The on-rushing cold air alerted a signal for a firm pull on the "D" ring, a sudden slap in the face from the chest type parachute pack as it passed upward and then a jolt as the chute filled with air. Being suspended in the air, the contrast of quietness to the clatter and vibration of machine guns, tension of battle, steady roar of airplane engines for past several hours, was all so different. How it could change so quickly.

The roar of the German plane passing over head to close for comfort, quickly brought me back to reality. Looking around, several chutes were visible in the sky and the ways down and off, my eyes caught the sight of the plane falling out of control, the burning wing had broken off.

The ground seemed to move up to meet me and what before was small dots were now civilians and German soldiers moving about to intercept landing airmen.

I came down in a small field, landing on my feet but falling to the ground from the impact. It was not more than a couple of minutes later, after freeing myself of the parachute and harness and getting to my feet that I heard a phrase that was to be heard often for the next 18 months, spoken by a German officer with a pistol pointed at me. Interpreted by a civilian, "For you the war is over, you are now a German Prisoner of War."

I had landed on the very edge of a small town on the border of southern Holland and Germany, landing among soldiers stationed there. The officer in charge, quickly had me searched by a soldier for side arms and it was hard for him to believe that I had none. Our attention was drawn to a small group of people, about 100 yards off gathered in a circle. We made our way over there and I immediately recognized the tail gunner from our plane (Dominic Lepore) sitting on the ground, his hands covering his head. A 20mm shell had exploded above and behind him in the plane sending many small pieces of metal through the flying cap and into the back and top of his head. This I learned shortly after he started to talk. A nearby bicycle was brought and we set him on it. I walked on one side, a civilian on the other to guide it and hold him on.

Being pushed by the two civilians we made our way into the town and were taken to a building which appeared to be the town hall. In a few minutes a civilian doctor came and attended to his wounds.

During this time a lot of commotion was going on, people and soldiers coming in and out, a lot of loud and excited talk all in a language I didn't understand. Soon more American airmen were brought into the hall. Among them Sgt. Ben Roberts (ball turret gunner), Sgt. Hosea Crawford (radio operator) and Lt. Dennis McDarby (pilot) from our plane.

Lt. McDarby was limping badly from an injury in his ankle and foot. In the next hour or so a few more airmen were brought in, however, no more from our plane crew. Soon an old truck was brought and we were ordered out and in to the back of it to be taken away. Lt. McDarby and Sgt. Lepore were left behind to be taken to a hospital.

The rest of this day was spent riding in the back of the truck with guards keeping a close watch over us. That night we were thoroughly searched before being placed two to a room in an old church school building. The door locked and guards in the hall.

Soon we were brought our supper, thick red bean soup lapped into a tin basin and handed a chunk of bread. Our first food since breakfast, early that morning back at base. Not much of an appetite – too many hours of tension and thoughts of what all had happened.

Next day we traveled on to reach Amsterdam, Holland. Spent a few days in solitary cells in a huge prison. Then put on a train and went to Dulag Luft, at Frankfurt, Germany. Here we were put in small solitary confinement cells and interrogated daily. This confinement, I was told afterwards was usually for two weeks or more, but due to the large number of POW's after the Schweinfurt raid, our confinement had been cut to a week. I was then photographed with my serial number chalked on a board, draped from my neck, issued an American G.I. overcoat by the Red Cross and escorted to a wire enclosed compound to wait with other POW's for transportation to an POW camp.

Late next afternoon a group of us were marched to the railroad yard in Frankfurt. Here we were divided into two groups of about 50 each and given a lecture on the punishment for trying to escape, then ushered to two empty boxcars, told to sit down on the ground, take off our shoes and leave them with the guards at the door as you entered the box car, still waiting to leave.

We spent several hours sitting on the floor (no seats) in the car, still waiting to leave. It was now long after dark, when the air raid sirens sounded. Soon the sound of anti-aircraft guns could be heard. The English bombers were out on an night raid. Next came a different sound of explosion as some bombs exploded in the area. The bombing lasted only a few minutes, the main target was most likely somewhere else as the all clear sounded at the end of another half hour. After several more hours of waiting, we left Frankfurt and traveled east and so after two days with many stops and delays along the way, arriving at Krems, Austria. We left the boxcars and walked two miles to Stalag XVIIIB, our home for the next 17 months.