

# An “Easy” Mission ?

By Frank Kyle

February 9, 1945 ... that was a day the men of Old Buckenham would just as soon forget. It was the 213th mission for the Group. The target was supposed to be the oil plant at Rothensee, but it was “socked in” by clouds, so the railroad marshalling yards at Magdeburg were bombed instead. No fighters were reported, and flak was described as “light.”

As the 453rd headed back to “Old Buck” the usual groups of ground crew took their places along the flight line “to sweat the planes in.”

“Here they come!” (Funny, you could always *hear* them, first.) All eyes turned upward to see the formation roar over the control tower and peel off to start the landing pattern.

“Yeah, those are our guys.” (There’s that familiar white diagonal on black.) “Did somebody get a count?” “Any red flares? No? Good! What’s the count?”

“Thirty four! I counted thirty-four over head just now. Thirty five went out this morning and I didn’t hear of any aborts.” “So who’s missing?” “Dunno! But we’ll find out soon. Cap’n Long said a 732nd crew went into the Channel on the way back ... heard it from Operations.” “Yeah? Who?” “Dunno, I said!”

The first 453rd Lib touched down, followed closely by a second, third and fourth. Oh boy! He came in a little too close, and the pilot had to fight his plane to keep her steady, due to propwash. The next three B-24s landed one behind the other and taxied to their squadron areas.

“Jeez! Lookit these two ... Ohmygod that lower plane’s gonna get rammed! Pleasegodno!!! Awwww #@!!”

In full view of horrified ground crews, the two B-24s collided with a sickening crunch. The lower plane, piloted by Lt. Rollins, nosed down sharply, its vertical stabilizer torn away. The other Lib, piloted by Lt. Glass, struggled to stay airborne.

Boom! Rollins’ plane smashed hard into the turf, agonizingly short of the runway. It burst into flames immediately as ground crews sprinted from all directions to rescue the crew. Fire trucks and ambulances rushed up from the control tower to assist in pulling the crew from the wreck, despite the flames and exploding ammunition. Captain Long, 732nd Engineering Officer, arrived on the scene and directed rescue efforts, but they were too late.

All eleven men aboard Lt. Rollins’ plane had been killed in the crash. The quick reaction by the ground crews was to no avail. To make things even harder to take, Rollins’ crew was on their last mission! They had completed their 35th mission on this day. They would have been rotated home.

It took all of Lt. Glass’ strength to stay aloft as he circled the field to land his damaged plane.

To make things even worse on this jinxed day, it was learned that a 732nd crew had indeed ditched in the North Sea. Lt. Johnson was the pilot. Three of his men drowned when their B-24 sank like a rock when it had to be ditched.

So, the “Men of Old Buckenham” lost 14 good men on a day when they encountered “no fighters and little flak.” Captain Long summed things up when he stood looking at the broken bodies of Lt. Rollins’ crew laid out in the field, barely 500 yards from the main runway: “Dammit! What rotten luck!!!”

An “easy” mission? No! There were no “easy” missions.

