

# Dateline - 4 August 1944

## 453rd HDQ Near Attleborough, England

*By James H. (Ham) Jackson*

The early morning silence was broken by the bearer of the wake up call. "Briefing in 1 hour." He whispered in my ear with sadistic glee. After powdered eggs and cold greasy sausage, I staggered over to the pre-briefing shack. A quick glance at the route map brought me up short. It appeared we were headed for Big B. A closer look proved me wrong by 100 miles. The target was an airplane engine works in Schwerin.

Next stop was full briefing where the same idea hit the other crews. My crew, (Tepfer) was leading the Lo-left. After the time hack, we left for the hardstand where "Miss Lace" sat silently in all her splendor ready to carry us into harm's way. The green light blinked and we headed for buncher 6.

The dawn broke bright and clear and CAVU forever. Formation went beautifully and we lined out in bomber stream over the North Sea. We gave Helgoland a wide berth and made land fall over Denmark, passed close by Flensburg and out into the Baltic. Jerry was going bananas – what are those crazy Yanks up to now? When we turned South, Jerry thought we were headed for Berlin – wrong! About 50 miles into Germany we turned west (total Kraut confusion) and now we were on our bomb run with a picture perfect bomb strike.

We did a 90 degree turn to the right off the target and headed for the Baltic. Group lead did not give us a 90 degree left and right to allow stragglers to catch up. This did give me cause to be uneasy, but we did lose 10 minutes on the bomb run and fighters were reported in the area. This was just too easy and it was about time for the other shoe to drop. Then, FU-BAR, Big Time! Just as I pressed my throat mike to give Tepfer the two minute warning for a 90 degree left turn, the sky rained airplanes. It was every man for himself.

Group lead had turned early and without warning. I lost complete confidence in Group leadership at this point. It took all of 20 minutes to get calmed down and get back into decent formation. By this time we were closing in on Flensburg and the Kraut gunners let us know they had our track. However, this wasn't my big worry. We kept drifting left and 15 miles south of the bomber stream. Now I knew what Group lead was up to. He was going to cut the next corner and to hell with the safety of the troops. Lead made no move to correct course and Helgoland was dead ahead (any dummy could see this, even I saw it). Tepfer warned lead three times and when we got no response, we broke formation and took up position wide right of lead. The sky turned black exactly where we would have been. Lead now had only one plane with him, his deputy lead.

We were now leading the group and heading for Old Buck. We started our decent early and hit our ETA right on the button. Guess who was waiting for us at the hardstand? The old man was somewhat pissed, wanting answers and somebody's blood. The big brass that had led the mission who were his I&I buddies had just screwed up and some poor bastard was going to pay.

Our debriefing was not the usual variety of debriefing. After the expected ranting and raving, the C.O. demanded, just who is the SOB responsible for this GD screw up? Since I ordered the break, I said, I'm the SOB that ordered the screw up. The old man's mouth flew open at my response and the crew promptly fainted knowing that I took no flak from anybody, especially when I am tired, hot and thirsty. They had visions of Leavenworth.

Okay son, let's have your story while you are still alive and it had better be good. He listened to my story without interrupting. Mister, I need some verification. I asked him to call engineering for battle damage report on lead squadron and compare with the other squadrons. The C.O. left the room and friend, you could slice the silence with a knife. It seemed like an eternity before the old man reappeared at the door. He waved and dismissed us. Well, that's the way it was – and you were there. Just another day in the ETO.

*P.S. Oh yes, I nearly forgot – ten days later, Tepfer was a Captain and me, I was a brand new First Louie.*