

Missions for America

*Semper vigilans!
Semper volans!*



07-14 AUG-CTWG Encampment
13-20 AUG-Reg. Cadet Ldrshp School-McGuire
20-21 AUG-TRCS LISP missions
17-20 AUG-CAP National Summer Conference
10 SEP-Multi-Squadron SAREX-Tentative
10 SEP-Wings Over Westerly Airport Event
22-24 SEP-AOPA Summit-Hartford
24 SEP-Cadet Ball-Courtyard Marriott, Cromwell
22-23 OCT-CTWG Convention

The Coastwatcher

Newsletter of the Thames River Composite Squadron
GON
Connecticut Wing
Civil Air Patrol

<http://capct075.web.officelive.com/default.aspx>

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SCHEDULE OF COMING EVENTS

For Future Planning

Cadet meetings normally start with drill and end with aerospace history, current events, and Commander's moment. Blues are worn on the second week of the month and BDUs at other times. Main topics may be indicated on the schedule below. See website for updates.

23 JUL-SAREX
22-23 JUL-Mini-Bivouac
23 JUL-07 AUG-NESA (two sessions)
26 JUL-TRCS Family Picnic
30-31 JUL-TRCS LISP missions

ERRATUM

Col Stidsen has once again found a mistake in an aircraft identification. The plane labeled a Lockheed 14 in the last issue is a Howard conversion of a Lockheed 18.

CADET MEETING NOTES

19 July, 2011

C/1Lt Brendan Flynn earned the Earhart Award and was promoted to C/Capt. He is only the second cadet captain in the history of Thames River Composite Squadron.



Flanked by Maj Lesick, CTWG Deputy Commander of Cadets, C/Capt Flynn displays his Earhart Certificate.

C/Capt Flynn joined CAP in New Jersey where he father was stationed with the Coast Guard. This summer he soloed while attending the National

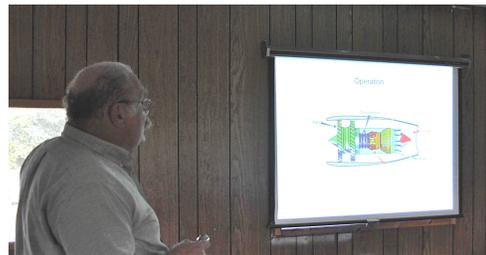
Flight Academy in Augusta, Maine. He has also participated in the squadron rifle training and has achieved sharpshooter bar seven.

Commander Paul Flynn, USCG, Brendan's father, addressed the assembly. Commander Flynn is the commanding officer of the Officer Candidate School at the Coast Guard Academy. The subject of his speech was leadership and he used aviation's "Four Cs:" Climb-Communicate-Confess-Comply as his theme. He stressed the importance of using the Four Cs while developing as a leader but also remembering that a unit is only as good as its members so that the members have a reciprocal obligation to the leader and must practice the "Four Cs" also.



Commander Flynn Makes a Point

Following the promotion ceremony, Mr Robert Reynolds, grandfather of Cadet Timothy Chartier gave a 45 minute presentation on jet engines. Mr. Reynolds has 40 years experience as a maintenance instructor with Pratt and Whitney. His slide illustrated lecture covered the theory of jet turbine and fan jet operation and the components which make up both axial flow and centrifugal flow engines.



Mr Reynolds explains the mysteries of the gas turbine.

TRCS CADETS FLY ON KC-10

Five members of Groton's Thames River Composite Squadron traveled to McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey in order to observe USAF air to air refueling techniques first hand. On Friday morning, Maj. Stephen Rocketto, the squadron's education officer briefed the cadets on the history of air refueling from its conception in 1917 to its vital role in US combat and transport flights today. After a safety briefing, Cadets Michael Herzog of Stonington, Thomas Ray of Groton, Austin VanDevander of Stonington, and Andrew Cathcart of Old Lyme boarded a Douglas KC-10 Extender.

C/A1C Tom Ray completed all of the requirements for the Feik Award and was promoted to C/SrA.

Cadet Ray and salutes Squadron Commander Noniewicz.



McGuire Based Extender on the Ramp at Westover

The Extender is a multi-role variant of the three engine DC-10 airliner. It is capable of carrying 90 passengers, 170,000 pounds of cargo, and 45,000 gallons of fuel. The fuel can be transferred in mid

air through a boom in the tail or by means of trailing hoses stabilized by drogues. The aircraft on which the cadets flew was attached to the 32nd Air Refueling Squadron of the 305th Air Mobility Wing. Although they are based at McGuire, their missions might take them anywhere in the world. After the aircraft took off, the boom operators and loadmasters, Technical Sergeant Maleski and Senior Airman Cathey explained their jobs, their training, and what might be expected over the next four hours of the mission.

The aircraft proceeded north and entered a refueling track over northern New York and Vermont where, five miles above the earth, we rendezvoused with another KC-10 which practiced approaching us from the rear and positioning itself such that our boom operator could insert the refueling nozzle into a receptacle located some 20 feet behind the cockpit of the receiving aircraft. After each successful engagement, the aircraft separated and then repeated the maneuver. If one was not observing the actual operation, there was almost no noticeable movement in the fueling aircraft during each connection and disconnection. During this time, the cadets joined SrA Cathey in his station under the tail and observed him as he maneuvered the boom into the trailing KC-10.



Cadet Herzog captures the moment of capture!

After an hour of practice, the two aircraft switched roles and our aircraft became the receiver. Our pilots had to work harder to place the aircraft in the correct position and the connection was more noticeable, a slight bump. For the next hour, about 15 practice engagement occurred.



Cadet Ray and SrA Cathey



Cadet VanDevander and SrA Cathey at the Boom Controls

We then separated and navigated to a refueling track over New Hampshire to meet with a Boeing KC-135 Stratotanker for more practice. However, the needs of the service resulted in a change in plans and the meeting was cancelled.

The aircraft then turned south and the aircraft commander, Capt. Wadell, the pilot, Capt. Cunningham, and the flight engineer, Technical Sergeant Steele explained the many cockpit controls which allow them to navigate to a fixed point in space and transfer fuel.

Our inbound flight took us by New London County and we turned southwest, landing in New Jersey after a five hour lesson in on of the most critical missions flown by the United States Air Force.

GARDEN STATE SAMARITANS HELP STRANDED YANKEES

While returning from the KC-10 ride in the Manchester van, a defective brake caused us to abandon the New Jersey Turnpike and seek refuge in a Days Inn parking lot in East Madison. Nine cadets and two officers dismounted and considered our plight.

LtCol Magurany contacted CTWG staff and approval for repairs was made with NOC at Maxwell. A tow truck appeared and took the van to a nearby shop which was just closing. No repairs would be possible that evening.

It occurred to us that there was a search and rescue outfit called CAP based in New Jersey. C/SrA Herzog has an "Ap" on his cell phone which by the magic of electronic wave transmission gave us the phone number for the NJWG. Maj Rocketto called and by coincidence got the Wing Administrator, Marianne Ferland, a classmate at Regional Staff College. At that point, Rocketto's puckish sense of humor caused him to consider asking for help but not giving our location; thereby allowing NJWG to exercise not only their rescue capability but also their search techniques. Fortunately, a rare moment of good sense took hold and he gave them our location.

LtCol Richard Oleszewski then came by in a seven passenger mini-van and took LtCol Magurany and four cadets to NJWG HQ at Fort Dix to pick up a 12 passenger van.

Meanwhile Maj Rocketto spoke to the Front Desk Manager of the Days Inn, Ms Harris, and asked if we could use their air conditioned lobby while we waited thus avoiding the heat, tics, and legendary Jersey skeeters. Not only did Ms Harris agree, she had her staff bring out doughnuts for us and opened up her juice machines!

While we waited, C/Amn Tyler Anderson calmly and quietly assisted the younger cadets and provided us with some needed humorous relief.

When Col Magurany returned with the NJ loaner, we mounted up and headed north arriving some 12 hours after our departure from McGuire AFB.

O Flight
19 July, 2011

C/SrA Jeffrey D Bourque flew on his third orientation flight and covered Syllabus #7 C/A1C Andrew P Cathcart flew in the back seat. Major Mode was the pilot.

AEROSPACE CURRENT EVENTS

Dawn in Orbit around Vesta

The US spacecraft *Dawn* has entered orbit around the asteroid Vesta after a four year, 116 million mile voyage from earth. The spacecraft is operating normally and will start its year long mapping mission as soon as the final instrument checks are completed. When completed, *Dawn* is scheduled to travel to another asteroid, Ceres, and gather similar data for comparison with Vesta.

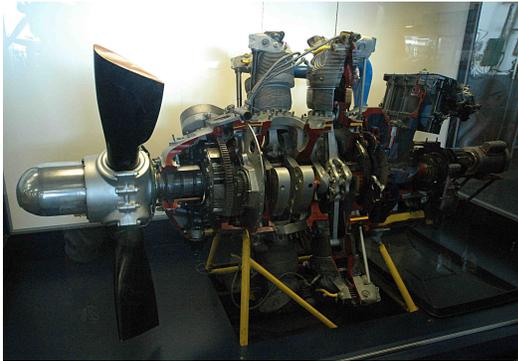
Sikorsky Wraps Up X-2 Test Flight Program

The last of 23 flights was flown last week. Technology from the coaxial rotor, tail thruster aircraft will be incorporated into the design of the

S-97 Raider which Sikorsky will enter into the competition for the new light tactical helicopter proposed by the US Army.

AEROSPACE HISTORY

22 July, 1925-Pratt and Whitney Aircraft Company is founded in Hartford, Connecticut.



A cutaway of the legendary P&W R-2800, the first engine to produce more than a horsepower per pound of weight. The engine powered more than 30 aircraft types including the Thunderbolt, Hellcat, Corsair, Invader, Marauder, and Ventura.

23 July, 1930-First Flight of the Fouga C.M 170R Magister.



An Israeli Aircraft Industries modified Magister, the Tzukit.

24 July, 1932-Alberto Santos Dumont goes West.

25 July, 1930-Chance Vought goes West.

26 July, 1955-Capital Airlines becomes first U.S. airline to operate a turboprop when it adopts the Vickers Viscount.



A Viscount in the livery of Cambrian Airways

27 July, 1909-At Fort Meyer, Virginia, Orville Wright pilots the first official test flight of a US Army airplane.



Signal Corps Aircraft #1, the \$30,000 1909 Wright Flyer. Orville Wright taught Lts Lahm and Humphreys how to fly in this aircraft and in 1920, at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, Lt Benjamin Foulois taught himself how to fly it!

28 July, 1930-Seventy eight hours after departure from Cardiff, Wales, the dirigible R100 moors in Quebec, Canada. Privately financed and designed by a team led by Barnes Wallis, the airship was in competition with the British government's airship R101. When the R101 crashed in France on its maiden flight to India, the government had the successful R100 grounded, stored for a year, and then destroyed!

29 July, 1958-President Eisenhower signs the National Air and Space Act establishing NASA

30 July, 1935-Lt Frank Akers, USN, flying a Berliner-Joyce OJ-2 makes the first hooded landing on the aircraft carrier, USS Langley.

31 July, 1956-A flight of two Sikorsky H-19 Chickasaws, whimsically named *Hop-A-Long* and *Whirl-A-Way* make the first trans-Atlantic helicopter flight. The flight is led by project developer, Capt, Vincent McGovern, USAF and takes 52 flying hours over a period of 20 days.



Hop-A-Long on display at the Air Force Museum

AEROSPACE HISTORY ARTICLE OF THE MONTH

Five Medals of Honor at Lunch Hour

Operation Tidal Wave The Low Level Raid on Ploesti 01 August, 1943

Oil for the Engines of War

Napoleon once quipped that “An army marches on its stomach.” To keep a military force on the move requires a supply train and modern supply trains require oil. When Nazi Germany started World War II in Europe, they did so without an adequate source of oil to run the ground and air machinery which the blitzkrieg tactics demanded. In fact, much of their supplies were transported by horse drawn vehicles and canal barges. Hitler knew that he needed a source of oil and some of the richest oil fields in the world were in Rumania and the center of refining was in a little known town located just south of the Transylvanian Alps-Ploesti-the “rainy city.” But Hitler had to remove

the control that the British and French had over the Rumanian treasury.

Oil had been discovered in Rumania in 1857 and an oil boom developed. Under Queen Marie, a sharp trader, Rumania prospered but when she died, her wastrel son assumed the throne as King Carol. Great Britain and France were paying off Carol to maintain control of the oil production but an ambitious army officer, Ion Antonescu, leader of the Legion of the Archangel Michael for the Christian and Racial Renovation of Rumania, better known as the Iron Guard, became Prime Minister and Carol became his pawn. Antonescu's fascist leanings and racial bigotry made him a natural ally of Adolph Hitler. Hitler saw an opening and Rumania joined the Axis. The British, French, and American oil experts were expelled and Germany gained control of the petroleum resources which they so badly needed.

The First Raid on Ploesti

Rumania may be best know for Count Dracula and pastrami but Winston Churchill stated that the oil resources of Rumania were the “taproot of German might” and a decision was made at the Casablanca Conference to strike at Ploesti. The first bombing came about by happenstance. The United States had dispatched a small force of Consolidated B-24 Liberators eastward across the Atlantic destined for China. Their mission was to strike Japan much as the Doolittle Raiders had done. However, by the time that the bombers reached the Middle East, the Chinese bases had been lost and they were assigned to the Desert Air Forces at Fayid, Egypt.

Their commander, Col. Harry Halverson received orders to strike at Ploesti and on June 11th, 1942, the 13 aircraft left from the 23 which had departed Florida headed for Ploesti. This was the first U.S. bombing mission in Europe and was known as the Halverson Project or HalPro Mission.

The raid was a failure. No real damage resulted and most of the raiders had to land at alternate

bases. Two went to French held Aleppo, Syria, four landed in neutral Turkey where the crews were interned, and seven landed in British held Ramadi, Iraq.

Col Jacob Smart Thinks Out of the Box

The responsibility for the planning for a follow-up raid was given to a brilliant staff officer, Col Jacob Smart. The doctrine for bombardment developed by the Army Air Corps during the 1930s stressed high level precision bombing for which the Norden bombsight, a Navy device, was adopted by the Army. Smart decided that a low level raid would be better able to cripple the refinery complex at Ploesti. The reasoning behind his idea was that the wide spread area which would need to be bombed would take more bombers than were available. On the other hand, the target did not require saturation bombing. The vulnerability of the oil refineries lay in the fact that they depended on a few key facilities: power houses, pumping stations, and the distillation and catalytic cracking units. Destroy them and the refinery was out of business.

However, the only way to assure their destruction was to attack at low altitude which would ensure the accurate placement of the bombs. Smart brought in a collection of experts including former engineers and officers of the Rumanian oil industry to develop the targeting folders for the raid. The results were one of the most meticulously planned missions of the war.

The crux of the problem was navigation and target identification at extremely low altitude. To solve the target identification problem, information on the appearance of the refineries themselves and the approach paths were garnered from multiple sources. Former residents were interviewed and libraries were combed for pictures, even picture postcards, from Rumania. From this data, segmented route maps were produced showing oblique views of the topographic and cultural features which each navigator would see on the

run-in to the target. Models were build of the refineries and special films were made which also showed, in motion, what each target would look like as it was approached. Remember, the raiders were attempting to hit individual buildings.

Assembling the Raiders

The B-24 was selected for the raid since it was the only heavy bomber that had the range to fly from North Africa to Rumania and back. The US 9th Bomber Command in North Africa had two groups of B-24s: the 376th Bomb Group the Liberandos under Col. K. K. Compton and the 95th Bomb Group, the Pyramiders, under Col John Kane. In order to fill out the attack formations, three more bomb groups were transferred from the 8th Air Force in England: the 93rd Bomb Group, Ted's Traveling Circus, under Lt. Col Addison Baker, the 44th Bomb Group, the Eight Balls, commanded by Col Leon Johnson, and the 389th Bomb Group, the Sky Scorpions, led by Col Jack Wood.



The B-24D, Strawberry Bitch, is painted in the pinkish hue of the desert air force. The color was the result of "bleaching" by the sun or the original paint.



A later model B-24J shows the characteristic twin tail, Davis airfoil and roller door bomb bay of the Liberator.

The groups were assembled in fields around Benghazi in Tunisia and started practicing low level flying. A model of Ploesti was constructed in the desert and used to visualize the approaches. The living conditions were spartan and the operating environment was challenging. The fine desert dust got into everything from the mens' eyes to their bunks and food. The dust was so abrasive that engines were changed as often as every 50 hours! While practicing, low level turbulence from the heated desert air and the prop wash of other aircraft made the flights uncomfortable and dangerous. Nonetheless, the fliers took to the exhilarating low passes with enthusiasm.

There were objections to the mission. The Eighth Air Force was unhappy about losing three bomb groups. The mission commander, General Uzal Ent argued vorifiierously against the tactics and was almost relieved. Col Kane did not like the tactics either and he disagreed with the leadership from England on how to manage the aircraft power on the inbound leg. This would lead to problems later.

The Plan

Col. Smarts "brain trust" put together a plan to strike nine of the refineries. The entire force would proceed inbound with the groups in trail, led by Ent and Compton. From Benghazi, they would cross the Mediterranean flying north to the isle of Corfu in the Ionian Sea. They would then turn northeast and cross the Balkans. The final leg would be flown at very low altitude to avoid tracking by the German radars. Three initial points were selected to align the aircraft on the approach to the target: the towns of Pitesti, Targoviste, and Floresti. These towns formed a straight line and were located west of Ploesti.

The Targets

Target White One was the Romana Americana Refinery assigned to The Liberandos led by Col. K.K. Compton.

Col Addison Baker led Section A of the Traveling Circus against Concordia Vega, designated White Two.

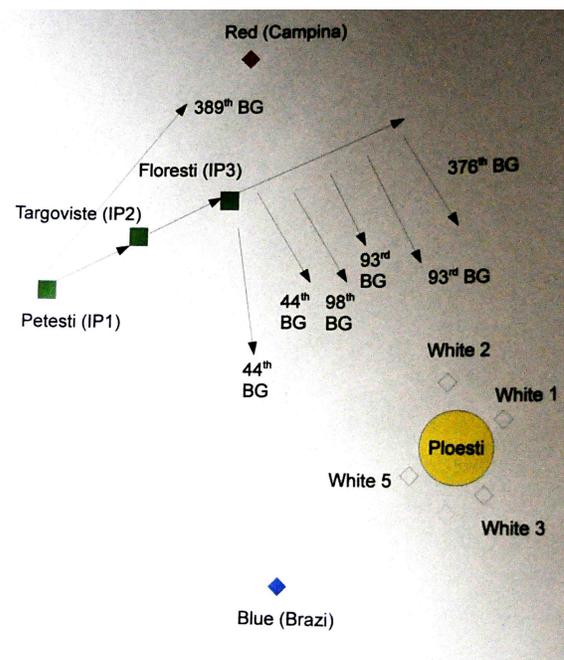
White Three, two adjacent refineries, Standard Petrol Block and Unirea Sperant were assigned to Section B of the Traveling Circus led by Lt. Col Ramsey Potts.

Col. John Kane would lead the Pyramiders against Astra romans and Unirea Orion, White Four.

Section A of Col Leon Johnson's Flying Eight Balls drew White Five, Columbia Aquila.

Blue Target was the Creditul Minier refinery at Brazi, just south of the main refinery complex. Lt Col Posey would lead Section B of the Flying Eight Balls to this target, the largest producer of aviation gas in Europe.

Last, Col. Wood and his Sky Scorpions would fly to Campina, north of the main complex and attack the Steaue Romana works.



The Plan as Envisioned

Intelligence Failures

Notable failures in intelligence gathering and interpretation would contribute to the losses incurred. First, the anti-aircraft defenses were seriously underestimated. After the flea-bite of the HalPro Mission, the German running the Ploesti air defense program, General Alfred Gerstenberg, did heavy lobbying with Berlin and received, over time, so much support, that the region concentrated around the refineries had a greater density of anti-aircraft batteries than Berlin. US intelligence appraised the flak defense at about 100 guns but almost 250 were in place, mainly the storied 88 mm dual purpose gun and the lighter 37 and 20 mm weapons. Moreover, the guns were mostly manned by German crews, not Rumanians. The guns were backed by an outer ring of 150 German and Bulgarian fighter aircraft and an inner ring of another 150 German and Rumanian interceptors. Gerstenberg also had a back-up defense of efficient smoke pots and balloons on cables to obscure the target and discourage low level attacks. His damage control was exemplary. A battalion of crack German firefighters were on station. Blast walls had been constructed around important installations and a system of pipes interconnected the refineries so that if one was taken out of action, another could take up the slack.

Take Off and Run-In

On the morning of the first of August, 1943, 712 Pratt and Whitney R-2800 engines came to life and the raiders taxied out, took off, and assembled into their formation. Ahead of the strike force lay 1250 miles of open ocean and enemy territory and for the lucky ones, a 1250 mile return journey. The ever present friction of war made its appearance. One aircraft crashed when an engine failed on take-off and another one crashed at sea. A third aircraft descended to examine the wreckage for survivors and never could rejoin the

formation. As they proceeded northward, the formation elongated. The lead units, all Eighth Air Force groups flew tight boxes at high power settings. The two Ninth Bomber Command groups, desert worn, flew at lower power settings to preserve the engines and extend the fuel. Col. Kane's disagreement on tactics was causing a break in the linear formation which would later upset the planned simultaneity of the attack.

Weather Splits the Formation

Then weather intervened. As they approached the Pindus Mountains in Albania, towering cumulus were observed. The mountains required a 9,000 altitude and the clouds extended up to 17,000 ft. Compton had his aircraft go to maximum power and climb in formation with the men on oxygen. At 16,000 feet, they weaved through the cumulus and headed for Ploesti.

Kane, leading the Pyramiders, Eight Balls, and Sky Scorpions decided to maintain a conservative power setting and use the Army Air Corps' standard technique for frontal penetration. The circled and formed three plane sets and then each set entered the clouds, they diverged slightly to avoid collisions and reforming when clear. When the entire group was clear, the formation reunited and proceeded towards Ploesti. The distance between Compton's two groups and Kane's three groups grew greater. The two sections were no longer in sight of each other.

As each part of the formation cleared the mountains, they reduced power, lowered their noses and headed for the first initial point, the town of Pitesti. At this point, the vagaries of high speed, low level navigation intervened. The Liberators were traveling at 200 mph and 200 feet. Although they were equipped with route maps and oblique drawings of what they could expect to see, their limited horizon, high speed, and haze made navigation difficult. It was visual flying using headings and times. In addition, the Wallachian

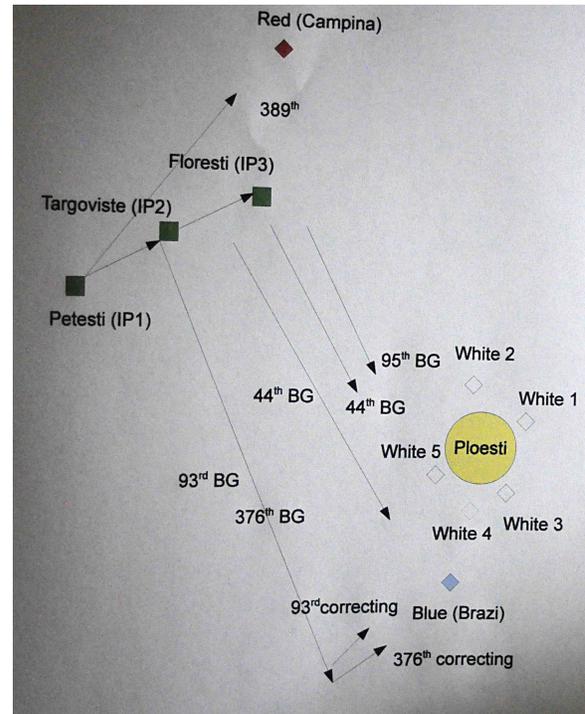
plain over which they were making their approach contained a number of parallel shallow valleys, running from the northwest to the southeast and containing similar looking towns, railroads, and streams!

The Wrong Turn

The parallel valleys and similar topographic and cultural features led to a major navigation error. Compton and Ent in the lead ship mistook Targoviste and turned the *Liberandos* and the *Traveling Circus* 20 miles short of the final I.P. and headed for Bucharest, the capital of Rumania. Navigators in the other ships recognized that a mistake had been made and the carefully guarded radio silence was broken in an effort to contact the command ship. But there was no reply since the command ship was maintaining strict radio discipline. Baker's *Traveling Circus* could not immediately turn towards the target due to the presence of the *Liberandos* on the inboard side. As the two groups separated, Baker initiated a left turn and the well disciplined *Circus* maneuvered with him. Baker had vowed to lead the *Circus* to Ploesti come "hell or high water" and he was a man of his word. Unfortunately, the German defenses had assumed that an attack would be launched from the south and given the distance, a straight line would be followed to conserve fuel. Consequently, Gerstenberg placed his heaviest flak batteries south of Ploesti and Baker was flying straight into them.



The 88 cannon mm fired a heavy shell but was slower to train than the more numerous 37 and 20 mm cannons.



The Attack as Executed

The Liberandos and Circus Attack

Baker was accompanied by Maj John Jerstad. Jerstad had flown his complement of missions and had been headed home when he volunteered for the Ploesti mission. Three minutes short of the target, their plane, "Hell's Wench," was observed to strike a balloon cable and then received a direct hit to the nose. Three more rounds struck, in the wing, wing root, and then the cockpit. The wing tanks and the auxiliary fuel tank in the bomb bay started burning. They jettisoned their bombs to stay aloft and then passed over several open fields, ideal for an emergency landing. As they came up on their target, another heavy shell struck. Hell's Wench climbed to about three hundred feet, cleared two refinery stacks as several crews were observed to abandon ship. Flames filled the cockpit as the aircraft fell off on one wing and crashed into a field. Behind him, the *Circus* salvoed their bombs into White 5. Baker and Jerstad earned the first two Medals of Honor that day.

Ramsey Potts led the B force of the Circus towards the Astra Roman refinery, a target that had been allocated to Kane's Pyramiders. They dropped their bomb and encountered Luftwaffe and Rumanian fighter aircraft as they flew north of Ploesti before turning southward where they had a near collision with a small force of Liberados led by Maj Norman Appold.

Appold Hits Concordia Vega

The Liberandos had broken off to the south and were ordered by General Ent to bomb targets of opportunity. One of their pilots, Norman Appold, who had tested the low level technique in Italy, broke off, taking his section northeastward towards Target White Two, the Concordia Vega. Appold banked steeply and led his small force in at ten feet above ground level. Then he saw a gaggle of Liberators emerge from the smoke and bear down on him from the right. They were some of the Ramsey Potts crews, section B of the Flying Circus emerging from the hell of Target White Four. Appold held on course, successfully bombed Concordia Vega and avoided collisions with Pott's Circus survivors which passed overhead.

Appold had a British flight lieutenant, George Barwell, in his top turret. Barwell was a remarkable marksman whose theories about gunnery made him anathema to his orthodox RAF colleagues so they got him assigned as a gunnery instructor in 9th Bomber Command. It was akin to throwing Brer Rabbit into the briar patch. Although some of the Americans thought him "flak happy," he begged rides on combat missions and requested the most vulnerable ship in the formation, generally "tail-end Charlie," on the theory that this would attract the most German fighters as his targets. Forbidden to fly by his masters in Cairo, he was never listed on a crew manifest. His skill manifested himself and he was welcomed by Liberator crews as a gunner. Appold commented that he demonstrated

incredible skill and with short bursts kept knocking out anti-aircraft site after site and credits him with saving many of the bombers.

Pyramiders and Eight Balls Engage the Flak Train

Some fifteen or twenty minutes after Compton led the first wave in, Kane arrived with the other three groups. The Pyramiders and Eight Balls spread into a broad attack formation and bore in on Ploesti from the northeast, following the rail line from Floresti. But Gertstenberg had a surprise. He had positioned a flak train on the line. The train contained a series of cars which mounted anti-aircraft guns in varying calibers and could fire them while in motion. What developed was something akin to an old fashioned sea battle in which two parallel lines of warships traded broadsides. Kane's group flew down the east side of the line and Johnson's A section of the 44th flew down the west side. The air gunners and flak crews engaged in what amounted to a running gun fight until some fifty calibre rounds disabled the locomotive and the train was left behind.

Kane and Johnson Resolutely Press On to White 5

As Kane led his men towards White Four, the flak intensified and a small group of fighter aircraft also attacked. The raiders had been armed with combinations of 500 lb and 1000 lb high explosive bombs as well as incendiaries which waist gunners disbursed through their hatches. Some of the bombs were set with delay action fuses from 45 seconds to an hour. Even delayed action bombs and the duds started raging fires as they crashed into the buildings and oil tanks with enormous kinetic energy. As a result, successive waves of bombers had to fly through flames and explosions. Kane reported that his aircraft, *Hail Columbia*, was at one point, wreathed in flames from the ground and that the hair was singed off his left arm!

Johnson, in *Suzy Q*, led sixteen Eight Ballers into a wall of smoke and flame above White 5. Flak tore into the planes, killing and wounding the crews, and cutting control cables and hydraulic lines. Five planes went down over the target and the survivors were jumped by Me-109s when they emerged from the smoke cloud.

For their leadership and resolute attack, both Kane and Johnson would be awarded the Medal of Honor.

*Col Posey and B Section of the Flying Eight Balls
Hits Blue Target*

Lt. Col. James Posey, flying in *Victory Ship*, had split his section off from Johnson, on the five minute run in and headed for Brazi and the Creditul Minier refinery five miles south of Ploesti. Blue Target was the chief source of high octane aviation fuel in Europe. The Twenty aircraft spread out into four wave of eight aircraft each in an 800 foot wide attack formation. As the target details grew larger, each aimed for a specific building or installation as shown on the oblique drawings in the bombing folder.

The ships dueled with flak batteries on the approach, taking hits but striking the target as planned. Fighters bounced the formation as they departed but they only lost two aircraft and the target was destroyed.

*Wood's Sky Scorpions Bomb Red Target at
Campina*

The 389th Bomb Group, the Sky Scorpions, were unblooded. They had arrived in England in brand new aircraft and been immediately assigned the Ploesti mission. Their orders were to fly to the first IP, Pitesti, and then break away from the formation and bomb Red Target, the Steaue Romana facility at Campina, north of Ploesti.

Navigation was difficult since low lying clouds covered the foothills and prominent landmarks were not visible and they made a wrong turn which they soon corrected. As the target approached, the group split into different elements, approaching on multiple axes of attacks so as to single out the individual targets which had be pre-selected. Wood's command ship, *The Scorpion*, led one element straight down the middle and made good hits on their target. Anti-aircraft gunners were hard at work and started taking their toll of the bombers.

“Pete” Hughes and the Resolute Ride of Eager Eagle.

On the right side of the formation, Lt. Lloyd “Pete” Hughes's ship *Eager Eagle*, was struck in the left wing fuel tanks and was trailing a stream of vaporized gasoline. A crewman in *Old Blister Butt* radioed Hughes and told him that it looked like he was on fire and Hughes replied “O.K.! I gotta' get the bombs on target.” Hughes would have been justified in pulling out of formation and making a forced landing but rejected the option. *Eager Eagle* continued in formation, a flying bomb, and his bombardier placed his explosives right on target. But the cloud of gasoline was ignited and the flames were trailing back over the tail surfaces. Possible landing sites appeared ahead. Hughes horsed the Liberator over some high tension lines and then over a small bridge. Suddenly, the right wing dropped and struck the ground. The aircraft cartwheeled and exploded. Miraculously, two crewmen survived. Hughes's Medal of Honor citation praised Hughes “high conception of duty” and his decision to not jeopardize the integrity of the formation and the success of the attack by seeking safe haven. His was the fifth Medal of Honor awarded to the Ploesti Raiders, the most ever for a single action.

Withdrawal and Aftermath

There is a saying that on the run-in to the target the crews are working for the government but after bomb release they are self employed. As the various groups emerged from the carnage, they struggled to get home. Some were shot down by German fighters, others, suffering severe battle damage crash landed in enemy territory or at sea. A few landed and were interned in neutral Turkey. The final tally showed that of the 178 B-24s dispatched, 163 reached the target. Fifty four, about a third of the attack force were lost and many of the 111 which returned, many were so badly damaged as to be relegated to the scrap heap as a source of spare parts.

Although an initial success was claimed, further analysis revealed that the production at Ploesti was only reduced by about 40%. White 5 and Blue were totally destroyed and validated Jacob Smart's low level tactics. White 1 and White III were not struck at all. For the rest of the war, the Air Force would wage an ongoing campaign against what became known as *Festung Ploesti*. Gradually, oil production was cut back until on a trickle flowed to the Nazi war machine. The great low level mission was a first step in the reduction of Ploesti and had to wait for the build up of the 15th Air Force in the Mediterranean to finish the job.

Notes on the Fate of Some of the Participants

Col. Jacob Smart was denied permission to go to Ploesti because he was privy to high level strategy policies and the atom bomb project. Later, he did fly again and was shot down and captured but revealed nothing to the Germans. He retired as a full general.

Leon Johnson had a 34 year career in the US Air Force including a tour as commander of the Continental Air Command. He retired as a full general.

Alfred Gerstenberg, the Luftwaffe general whose genius created the Ploesti defenses was captured by the Russians in 1944 and not released for ten years!

The eccentric gunnery expert Flight Lieutenant George Barwell, RAF, was listed on the crew manifest for the Ploesti raid. When his outraged superiors in Cairo found out, they recalled him and had him transferred to the United States as a gunnery training officer. There, according to some reports, he garnered a trunk full of medals and trophies in various shooting competitions. He was the only Ploesti raider who was not decorated!

L'Envoi

Both John Kane and Leon Johnson, the two Medal of Honor winners who survived, attributed their medals to the gallantry of the groups which they led. In an introduction to Leon Wolff's book, *Low Level Mission*, Kane writes:

Other missions soon crowded out the Ploesti episode in our wartime lives, but it was enough to furnish a lifetime of memories to those of us who had flown there. I have always thought that our attack was as deserving of poetic immortality as that of *The Charge of the Light Brigade*...I am privileged to have accompanied those 1700 young men to Ploesti...I salute the living and the dead for their consecration to our nation and to their own self respect regardless of the physical cost. So long as America can produce this kind of men, our way of life will continue to exist. Though the price of liberty comes high, there are days when it must be paid. August 1, 1943 was one of those days.

TRCS FAMILY PICNIC
CHANGE IN VENUE

The TRCS Family Pot Luck Picnic will be held 26 July from 18-- to 2000 at Washington Park in Groton. The park is located by Meridian St., Mitchell St, and Park Ave. The picnic will be at pavilion #5.

All members and their immediate families are invited.

Coordination of food will be handled by Bourque Stephanie Vandevander. Contact Stephanie at steph11@yahoo.com or 860-599-1689.

A CONTINUING SALUTE TO NAVAL AVIATION ON ITS 100TH BIRTHDAY

The US Navy flew the B-24s in the Pacific. They also produced their own variant, the single tailed PB4Y Privateer which was used as an ocean patrol plane by the US Coast Guard. Some examples are shown below.



Retired Coast Guard Privateer Used as a Firebomber

PB4Y in US Navy Colors



PRATT AND WHITNEY MUSEUM TRIP

Report to Casa Woj in BDUs and CAP ID cards at 0730. The visit is expected to take four hours. Lunch will be on the road.



Frederick A. Rentschler, A Founder of Pratt and Whitney Aircraft

