

55BW Mission Summary No. 76, 7 August 1944 (Cont'd)

1. General Summary. On 7 August 1944, between 0615 - 0710B, 108 B-24 a/c of 110 a/c scheduled took off to bomb BLECHHAMMER North Synthetic Oil Refinery. There were 17 early returns.

Group assemblies, line rendezvous, and Wing rendezvous were effected as ordered. Fighter escort was observed at approximately 1015B at (4637N - 1832E), target cover escort at 1130 - 1210B, and withdrawal escort left formation at 1415 near VIS.

90 a/c were over target at 1131 - 1132B. A smoke screen at target was ineffective, and Groups bombed visually. 88 a/c dropped 219 tons of 500 lb. GP bombs fused .1N, .025T from 21,500-22,600'. 2 sorties jettisoned full bomb loads, 1 sortie jettisoned part load, 7 early returns jettisoned full loads 10 early returns brought back full loads to bases.

IAH flak was encountered at target. SAH was encountered at VAGORAC and at (4324N - 1730E), SIH was encountered at BRATISLAVA, LAKE BLEDINJE, KOERCIN, and at (4809N - 1707E).

10, 17, 25, and 80 - 90 e/a were seen by individual Groups. 4, 5, 17, and 32 e/a were encountered. Claims are 2 - 10 - 0.

79 a/c were down at bases between 1514 - 1520, 4 a/c were lost, 3 are missing, and 5 landed at friendly fields.

Route was flown as briefed, except for deviations on route back to avoid unfavorable weather conditions.

Weather: Scattered cloud over bases and ADRIATIC, 4 - 10,000'. 10/10 cloud over DINARIC ALPS, decreasing to 5/10 at LAKE BALATON, further decreasing to 2 - 3/10 over CZECHSLOVAKIA. Clear over target, visibility 20 miles. Return: 4 - 5/10 at VIENNA, 14 - 15,000', increasing to 7 - 9/10 at 14, 15,000' over DINARIC ALPS.

Results:

460th Bomb Group photographs show: Blechhammer North. Strikes cover the northeast portion of the plant in the cooling tower, boiler house, and work shop area. Several hits observed on work shop buildings and strikes are probable on the boiler house and cooling towers.

464th Bomb Group photographs show: Blechhammer North. Pattern extends across the central portion of the target with twelve to sixteen strikes across the carbon dioxide washing plant and conversion unit. Direct hits were scored on the main compressor house, the hydrogenation stalls, and the transformer and switching station. Approximately ten strikes in the oil refinery caused explosions and fires.

485th and 465th Bomb Group photographs show: Blechhammer North. Strikes cover the north central portion of the target. Direct hits were scored on four of eight water cooling towers with near misses on two others. Numerous hits were scored on the Carbon Monoxide and Carbon Dioxide washing plants and on the conversion unit. Additional strikes believed in the central portion of the plant but smoke prevents accurate assessment.

In general it is indicated that while the primary objective, the water gas plant, is not believed to have received enough damage to have put it out of action, it is probable that enough vital installations were hit to put the plant temporarily out of action. The main compressor house, which is necessary for operation of the plant, has been badly damaged. The converter unit and the carbon dioxide removal plant have been damaged by very near misses. The gas separation plant is known to have been set on fire and the adjoining stabilization columns have been hit. In addition to the installations directly connected with the processing which were damaged, the power plant boiler house and generator hall have been damaged considerably. Numerous instances of damage to small sheds, minor installation, and stores are evident. Due to the considerable amount of damage that has been inflicted on other plants of a similar nature the repairs necessary to put this plant back in action will probably proceed slowly with lack of equipment, replacement parts, and labor delaying the repairs.

2. 460th Bomb Group. On 7 August 1944, at 0655 hours, 28 scheduled a/c were dispatched to bomb the Blechhammer North Synthetic Oil Plant in Germany.

The Group assembled in its two attack units without incident and made rendezvous with the 485th over Altamura. The Wing formed over Spinnazzola at 0809 hours, as briefed, with the 460th flying in the #4 position. Fighter escort consisted of P-51s and P-38s. P-51s furnished penetration cover and were picked up at 1026 hours at Lake Valencei. They left the formation fifty miles south of the target. P-38s furnished withdrawal cover being first seen at (4840N - 1740E) at 1210 hours. They left the formation at 1401 hours near Vis.

Eight a/c returned early.

From 21,500', 20 a/c were over the primary target, the Blechhammer North Synthetic Oil Plant at 1132 hours. 19 a/c dropped 47.5 tons of 500-lb GPs. One a/c jettisoned bombs immediately after target time having had trouble in opening the bomb-bay doors. Bombing was done visually, the target being seen clearly from eight miles out. The smoke screen at the primary target was not effective. The A-5 was used on the bomb run by the first attack unit. The A-5 was not used by the second attack unit as it had burned out before reaching the target.

The Group experienced IAH flak for 6 to 8 minutes in the target area. The flak also extended beyond the target area to midway to the Rally Pt., Troppau. Crews report flak at the following locations: SIH at Bratislava, SIH at Lake Blidinje and Kocerin. One of our a/c, on early return, made a left turn around Vrgorac to avoid briefed flak only to encounter MAH flak at Ljubuski (4312N - 1734E).

On route to the target, 6 ME-109s were observed in the Vienna area at 1040 hours. These a/c made aggressive attacks from 6 to 7 o'clock closing to 200 yards. Some 30 - 40 ME-109s were seen between Lake Blidinje and the target. but these e/a did not attack this Group. In the target area, the Group observed about 50 e/a and a running fight began that lasted for thirty minutes after target time. E/A consisted of ME-109s, FW-190s and ME-110s. Crews reported that some of the ME-109s were the old "E" model. About 20 ME-109s attacked the formation from 6 to 7 o'clock low and level. These a/c all made single attacks, aggressively, and closing to 50 to 200 yards. Other encounters took place with 12 FW-190s. These e/a attacked aggressively from the rear and closing to within 50 yards individually. The FW-190s fired explosive ammunition. 4 SEFs were seen in the Zagreb Area on the return route at 1330 hours. These did not attack the formation. The ME-109s were painted black and a bluish gray with gray undersides. Black crosses were outlined in white on the wings. Some e/a were silver, The FW-109s were camouflaged a yellowish-brown with yellow crosses on the wings. The cowlings were painted yellow with stripes radiating out. 2 FW-109s were observed with red bands around the fuselages in front of the tail. Claims: 2 - 6 - 1.

1 of our a/c damaged by flak over the target, was attacked and shot down by enemy fighters at 1150 hours at (4955N - 1750E). 9 parachutes were seen. Another a/c was last observed near Knin with 1 engine feathered.

The route was flown as briefed except on the return, when the formation was 40 miles left of course from the first turn point opposite Vienna.

18 a/c returned to base with a mean landing time of 1515 hours.

- 2 tons

SAH at Vagorac (4313 N - 1712 E)

SIH at (4809 N - 1707 E)

Encounters with e/a numbered 4 reported but evaluation would indicate feints rather than encounters as the closest closure was given as 500

yards. 4 ME-109's came in from 5 to 6 o'clock low, abreast, closed to 500 to

700 yards, peeled off and returned to repeat the unaggressive attack in the same manner, only singly.

3. 464th Bomb Group. On 7 August 1944, 28 B-24 a/c scheduled took off, beginning at 0700B hours to bomb the Blechhammer (North) Synthetic O/R, Blechhammer, Germany.

Group assembly, line rendezvous with 465th Group and "ing rendezvous were as planned.

2 a/c returned early.

26 a/c were over the target at 1131B hours (briefed target time 1121B and 26 a/c dropped 65 tons of 500 lb. GP bombs with .1 nose and .025 tail fusing from 21,200 feet. 1 early return jettisoned 2½ tons at 1100B hours (4907N-1855E), the other returned 2½ tons to the base. 3 spares all returned their bombs totaling 7½ tons to the base.

Recapitulation of bomb tonnage:

Dropped on target -	65 tons
Returned to base --	10 tons (7.5 tons by 3 spare a/c)
Jettisoned	2½ tons
Total for 31 a/c -	77½ tons

The target was partially obscured by an ineffective smoke screen and drifting smoke from bombing of Blechhammer (South). Target visibility was still sufficient to employ visual bombing which was accomplished on A-5.

Flak at the target was IAH and the time in flak at this point was reported as approximately 5 to 10 minutes. Proper evaluation of the time is impossible due to the variance of crew reports. Batteries pinpointed in target area are already located on flak reports. The greatest intensity was to the left of the target. Barrage type fire and black and white bursts were indicated.

SAH at Vagorac (4313 N - 1712 E)

SIH at (4809 N - 1707 E)

Encounters with e/a numbered 4 reported but evaluation would indicate feints rather than encounters as the closest closure was given as 500 yards. 4 ME-109s came in from 5 to 6 o'clock low, abreast, closed to 500 to 700 yards, peeled off and returned to repeat the unaggressive attack in the same manner, only singly.

A total of 13 e/a were reported in the immediate area of the target between 1125B and 1202B hours; 10 ME-109s, 2 JU-88s and 1 FW-190. Rockets were used ineffectively.

Fighter escort was not up to recent standards but still considered good by the crews. 40 to 45 P-51 a/c were observed from 1015B hours (4655N - 1833E). 20 to 30 P-38 a/c were first observed at

1130B hours at the target and intermittently on withdrawal in varying number until the coast of Yugoslavia was reached at 1410B hours.

1 a/c was lost to flak at target. 1 a/c is missing.

24 a/c returned to this base between the hours of 1507B and 1530B.

Photographic coverage of target area bears out observations of crews on location of smoke generators. Approximately 50 located north of and from center to east end of target. 12 to 15 along eastern boundary and approximately 25 along south edge of target from center to eastern edge.

Route was flown as briefed until shortly before reaching Yugoslavian Coast on return when slight deviations were made because of weather.

4. 465th Bomb Group. 22 a/c of 22 scheduled took off at 0615 hours on 7 August 1944 to bomb the Blechhammer North Synthetic Oil Plant.

The group assembled over Andria at 0745 hours at 10,000 ft. without incident. The rendezvous was accomplished over Spinazzola at 0807 hours at 10,000 ft. The escort was as follows: 20 P-51s joined the 55th Wing at 1014 hours at 4646N - 1833E at about 18,000 ft. to provide penetration cover; 15 P-38s intercepted at Vrutky (4907N - 1855E) at 1035 hours and preceded the bombers to the target dispensing chaff bombs; 20 P-51s provided target and withdrawal cover and 10 P-38s joined at 1150 hours at Strami (4854N - 1742E) for withdrawal cover. The fighter escort was said to be excellent and at one point where the bombers were flying over an undercast the escort was seen to be diving down through the undercast to make sure that no enemy fighters were following the formation below the undercast.

1 a/c returned early.

20 a/c went over the target at 1131 hours and 19 a/c dropped 46 3/4 tons of 500 lb. GP bombs (.1 N and .025 T fusing) from 22,300 ft. The bombing was done visually using A-5. 1 a/c jettisoned its bombs because it lost an engine, at 4950N - 1845E, and observers state that a highway was cut. 1 a/c jettisoned 3 bombs at 1035 hours at 4746N - 1831E cutting at highway near the Danube River. The bombs were jettisoned because the a/c could not keep up with the formation.

Flak at the target was IAH.

4 ME-109s were seen between Gyor and Bratislava (4800N - 1730E) at 1220 hours at 21,000 ft. 4 to 6 ME-109s and 1 ME-210 or 410 were seen in the target area at 1131 hours at 22,000 ft. 4 ME-109s attacked the formation at 1220 hours coming in from 11 o'clock high, coming across Able box and Baker box. Crews state that the fighters

took full advantage of the sun and most of the gunners didn't see the e/a until they were right in the bomber formation. One gunner said he saw the 20mm shells bursting before he could see the fighters in the sun and he said that the rate of closure was so fast that most gunners didn't have time to fire a shot. It appeared to some observers that the e/a were aiming at the lead ship and one shell burst about 20 ft. from the lead ship's left wing but did no damage. The fighter escort at the time of the attack was above the bombers but apparently didn't see the e/a coming in out of the sun until they were actually in the bomber formation. The escort immediately chased off the attackers and only the one pass was recorded. It should be noted that the undercast below the formation presented an ideal cover for e/a but no attack came from this direction, probably because the escort kept diving below the undercast to reconnoiter. The attacking fighters were silver and black with tails and noses of yellow. At 1138 one ME-109 made an attack on a group below and behind our group and while flying toward our formation at 5 o'clock low was fired upon by one of our gunners. This ME-109 was not pressing an attack on our formation but rather was recovering from a pass just made on the formation below. Claims: 1 - 1 - 0.

16 a/c landed at the home base at 1525 hours (mean landing time). 3 a/c landed at Vis due to shortage of gasoline. 2 of these returned to the home base at 1730 hours and 1820 hours respectively: 1 crew remained at Vis and is expected to return to the home base tomorrow, 8 August 1944. 1 B-24 from this group was shot down by flak immediately after bombs away (1133 hours at the target). 4, possibly 7 cutes were seen. Captain WILLIAN K. ZEWADSKI flying a/c # 41-28967 called the group leader at 1127 hours at Pawlowice (4958N - 1843E) and said he was leaving the formation. It is believed that he attempted to reach Russia. His # 1 engine was feathered and # 3 was smoking.

The route as flown as briefed.

5. 485th Bomb Group. On 7 August 1944, 30 B-24 of 32 a/c scheduled, took off to bomb the BLECHHAMMER NORTH SYNTHETIC OIL PLANT (Primary Target).

Assembly was over ALTAMURA at 0800 hours at 9,000'. Formation at assembly was satisfactory.

Wing rendezvous was effected over SPINAZZOLA at 0810 hours at 9,000' with the 464th leading, followed by 465th, 485th and 460th Groups. Rendezvous with the fighter escort was effected as briefed. At 1015 hours, approximately 50 P-51s were sighted at 4637 N - 1832 E. Then, at 1212 hours, several P-38s joined at 4840 N - 1735 E, escorting the formation over the target and on withdrawal to approximately 4326 N - 1604 E, leaving at 1430 hours.

6 a/c returned early.

Approximately 25 e/a, consisting of 15 ME-109s, 7 FW-190s, 1 ME-210, 1 HE-110 and 1 JU-88, were observed between the target and LAKE BALATON. 5 e/a attacked the high box of the 2nd wave. Attacks were aggressive from 5 to 6 o'clock low and singly. Our gunners claim 3 of these a/c: 1 JU-88, probably destroyed, 2 ME-109s probably destroyed. Gunners reported that e/a attacking another Gp used the following tactics: 1 a/c would feint at a B-24 from below, drawing fire from the ball turret. At the same time, another e/a would attack ship from opposite direction. 2 B-24s were observed shot down by e/a using these tactics.

Flak over the target was IAH. Crews report that area is defended by more guns than previously reported by E section, Map # 2009, issued 15 July 1944. Formation was in flak for 5 minutes.

SAH flak was encountered for one minute on return at 4324 N - 1730 E.

A/C # 721 received a direct hit from flak after releasing bombs on target. A/C began to lag. 2 e/a attacked this a/c between TRANNA and LAKE BALATON, apparently firing rockets. 8 chutes opened at 1235 hours at 4747 N - 1720E.

24 a/c were over the target at 1131 hours (target time 1121 hours). 24 a/c dropped 59.75 tons of 500 lb GP bombs (.1 Nose and .025 Tail Fusing) at 22,600'. 1 of these a/c salvoed 1 bomb at 5025N - 1810E after it had failed to release over the target. The lead wave used the A-5 auto pilot on the bomb run. The second wave attempted to use the C-1 auto pilot but it went out of operation before bombs were away. Lead ship flew on course to the target from the IP by the aid of PF equipment. Because of smoke cover, the bombardier identified the target only 15 seconds before time of bomb release. The MPI was definitely obscured and as a result an aiming point was selected to the right of the briefed MPI, in sufficient time to get bombs away.

Crews reported approximately 50 smoke generators around the target area. These were located along the North bank of the Adolph Hitler canal, along the west bank of the stream bounding the west end of the target, and along the railroad bordering the target on the south. Due to the wide dispersal of pots and to unfavorable wind conditions smoke screen was ineffective.

20 a/c landed, mean landing time 1514 hours. 2 a/c landed at VIS for refueling and returned to base. 1 a/c landed at 1610 hours.

Route was flown as briefed except that on return, slight deviations were made to avoid thunder storms.

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