

55BW Mission Summary No. 146, 18 Dec 44 (Cont'd).

1. General Summary. On 18 Dec 1944, between 0720-0748A, 118 scheduled B-24 a/c took off to bomb the BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY, North and South Synthetic Oil Refineries. There were 13 early returns.

Group assemblies, line rendezvous, and Wing rendezvous were effected as ordered.

Fighter escort was first sighted at 0941A at (4430-1430E). Other fighters joined formation near IP. Escort, after furnishing excellent cover, departed formation at 1427A near SPLIT, YUGOSLAVIA.

96 a/c were over Primary Target between 1158-1200A (BLECHHAMMER North) and 1205-1207A (BLECHHAMMER South). 94 a/c dropped 187.75 tons of 500 lb RDX and GP bombs fused .1N and .01, .025T on those targets (102 tons on BLECHHAMMER North, 85.75 tons on BLECHHAMMER South) from 24,000-25,600'. 4 sortie a/c dropped 8 tons on targets of opportunity. 6 sortie a/c jettisoned 12 tons, 5 early returns jettisoned 10 tons; 7 early returns brought 14 tons of bombs back to bases.

Results: Bombs away photographs indicate the 464th and 465th Bomb Groups have probably scored strikes in the plant area of BLECHHAMMER North. 460th Bomb Group pictographs indicate possible strikes in the plant area of BLECHHAMMER South. No indication is given by the photographs of the 485th Bomb Group of the results.

Flak at targets ranged from M to I and from I to AH. Other flak was encountered at GYOR (SIH), ZAGREB (IAM), MAGYKANIZA (SAH), ZILINA (SIH) and at (4612-1703) (MAH).

18 e/a were seen by one Bombardment Group. There were no encounters.

89 a/c were down at bases between 1540-1600A. 2 a/c were lost (1 to flak, 1 ditched), 3 a/c are missing, and 11 a/c landed at friendly fields.

Weather caused some deviation from briefed route.

Weather: At take-off 7-8/10 stratus, base 8,000'. Route, scattered thin altostratus clouds at 14,000' over ADRIATIC with 3/10 stratocumulus below. 9/10 to overcast of middle clouds began near VIS and continued to ZAGREB. Tops of this deck was estimated at 16-18,000' and below was 7-9/10 stratocumulus, tops estimated at 10-12,000'. Clear to scattered from ZAGREB to (4715-1718). From here to target, generally overcast altocumulus, tops 16,000'. Target 9/10 altocumulus, tops 16-18,000' with stratocumulus layer below. Visibility was 15-20 miles. Clear 15 miles North of target. On return, similar conditions 6/10 cirrus over ADRIATIC at 23,000' and 6/10 cumulus, tops 3,000'. Base on return, 10/10 stratus, base 5,000A. Visibility 20 miles.

2. 460th Bomb Group. On 18 Dec 44, at 0740A, 31 scheduled a/c were dispatched to bomb the BLECHHAMMER South O/R in GERMANY.

Group assembly and Wing rendezvous were accomplished as scheduled. Fighter escort, P-38s and P-51s, first sighted at 1046A at (4382-1642), furnished penetration and target cover. They left the formation at 1153A at (5000-1728). 4 a/c returned early. 2 a/c jettisoned bombs in the ADRIATIC, 1 a/c dropped bombs at (4950-1725) and 1 a/c dropped 2 tons on a target of opportunity, a bridge at (4904-1723).

On the bomb run, 15 miles short of the target, 1 a/c, a box leader, peeled off from the formation and jettisoned bombs. Of this box of seven, 4 a/c, including the leader, are at friendly fields. It is not positively known whether all 3 of those a/c jettisoned with the leader but it is indicated by observations of the 3 a/c of this box that did return to base, 1 a/c dropped on the box leader, 1 a/c dropped on a factory at (5005-1800) and 1 a/c rejoined the Group and bombed with it. All a/c of this box with the exception of the box leader rejoined the Group after target.

At 25,600', 22 a/c were over the primary target at 1205A. 21 a/c dropped 41.75 tons of 500 lb RDX bombs, .1N and .01 -. 025T fusing on BLECHHAMMER South O/R. On the bomb run, the deputy lead a/c assumed the lead due to radar failure in the lead a/c. After rally, the designated Group leader reassumed the lead. Autopilot was used by both attack unit leaders on the bomb run. PFF was used on the bomb run, the 70-65-60-50-40° angles were given the bombardier. Synchronization was very good and photos show the bombs headed for the refinery. The PFF operator of the Deputy Lead a/c believes bombs hit in the North and East section of the plant. The 2nd attack unit dropped bombs by synchronized PFF, the units being 150 yards apart over the target. Disposition of bomb loads on 5 a/c unknown.

The Group experienced IIH flak over the Primary Target for 2-5 minutes. Black and red bursts were observed. Other flak was reported: SAH at MAGYESNIZA, SIH at ZILINA, MAH at (4617-1703).

18 e/a were seen on the mission: At 1150A, at (4740-1703) 6 possible ME-163s were seen, short contrails, but a/c not positively identified. At 1150A, at IP, 8 ME-109s, OD colored, were seen at 24,000'. North of LAKE BALATON, at 1030A, 2 SEF heading 280° at 15,000'. At 1325A at (4610-1655), 2 SEF at 18,000'.

The route was flown as briefed with deviations due to weather.

17 a/c returned to base with a mean landing time of 1600A. 10 a/c landed at friendly fields.

3. 464th Bomb Group. On 18 Dec 44, 30 scheduled B-24 a/c took off at 0720A to bomb the BLECHHAMMER North Synthetic O/R.

Form up, Group and Wing rendezvous was made as prescribed.

5 a/c returned early, 4 to the base, and 1 landing at a friendly field. 3 a/c returned 6 tons of bombs to base, 1 jettisoned 2 tons. Dis position of bombs of a/c which landed at a friendly field is unknown.

25 a/c were over the target at 1158A (briefed target time 1325A) and 25 a/c dropped 50 tons of 500 lb GP bombs (.1 nose and mixed .01 and .025 tail fuse) from 25,000'.

<u>Recapitulation of Bombs</u>		
25 a/c	dropped on target	50 tons
3 a/c	returned to base	6 tons
1 a/c	Jettisoned	2 tons
1 a/c	at VIS - Disposition unknown	2 tons
30 a/c		60 tons

Bombing was by PFF with PFF equipment working excellently, and coordination between the PFF operator and bombardier very good. The lead a/c picked up the target area on the scope 45 miles away with the approach to the IP and target being made by PFF. The briefed target was identified on the scope during the bomb run. Course determination and range synchronization was made on both the target area and the briefed target.

The last correction for range was made 5 miles and for course 12 miles from the target.

7 range readings were made and 2 course corrections made, the lost being 2°.

The bombardier used meteorological data to determine preset dropping angle and drift.

The Group leader used C-1 automatic pilot, but the leader of the 2nd attack unit was unable to use the automatic pilot due to a malfunction of the elevator controls.

Flak at the target was reported to be MI to MAH, lasting for approximately 3 minutes. Bursts were black and red with some scattered white bursts. The greatest concentration being experienced after the bomb release line on the rally off the target.

Flak was observed at the following points:

BRATISLAVA	S H
4624-1642	I H
MABUKOVEC 4617-1645	S H
MAGYKANIZA	S H

No e/a were observed, but 1 crew reported seeing 15 vapor trails very high at 1212A, just after leaving the target area. 1 crew reported observing 6 to 8 SEF take off from PAPA at 1315A.

Rendezvous was made with 20-25 P-38 a/c at 0959A at (4503-1635), and 50-55 P-51 a/c at 0951A at (4444-1630). Escort was last observed at 1320A at (4710-1705). Escort was described as being very good. P-51 a/c were observed from the 325th Fighter Group, others could not be identified.

24 a/c landed at this base between 1517-1553A. 1 a/c landed at this base at 1719A after having landed at a friendly field for gasoline at 1540A.

Route was flown approximately 15 miles to left of course from SPLIT to TP at JOKA, then as briefed to target and rally. On return from TP at FRIEDEBURG to JOKA route was approximately 20 miles to right of course. From JOKA to base as briefed.

4. 465th Bomb Group. 29 a/c of 29 a/c scheduled took off at 0733A on 18 Dec 44 to bomb BLECHHAMMER North O/R.

The Group assembled at 6,000' at 0820A, and Wing rendezvous was accomplished at 6,000' at 0835A. An escort of P-51s joined at 0955A at the YUGOSLAVIAN Coast. P-38s and F-51s furnished target cover and withdrawal support, leaving at 1427A at SPLIT.

There were 2 early returns: 1 a/c turned back at (4530-1630) because of leaks in the oxygen system and because of malfunction of bomb bay doors; 1 a/e turned back at (4525-1630) because of leaks in the oxygen system. Both a/c returned bombs to the base.

No e/a were seen or encountered.

Flak at the target was IAH. Flak did not begin until bombs away, and the main concentration of flak trailed the formation and never caught up with it. Crews reported seeing a number of bursts of red flak which was mixed with bursts of black flak.

2 PFF operators reported that they encountered no difficulty in navigating to the target. Deputy lead PFF operator reported that his scope was blank enroute to the target, that he had no volume, and that his set worked very poorly until approximately 10 minutes before the IP; his set worked satisfactorily over the target and on the return trip. MORAVSKA/OSTRAVA, MARIBOR, KOSEL, and BLECHHAMMER North and South were used as check points to identify the target by the lead of the first and second attack units. Both attack unit leaders said they thought that drift was killed, and the last course correction was 2°. The following sighting angles were given: lead a/c, 62-58-53-46°, deputy lead, 70-68-65-62°; lead of second attack unit, 70-68-65-62-58-53-46°. There was no confusion between any of the crew members during this mission. On the bomb run, the group came in simultaneously with

the 464th, and consequently it was necessary for the first attack unit to give way slightly to the left. The second attack unit was able to maintain its course, and bombs away pictures from the second attack unit indicate probable hits in the target area.

26 a/c went over the target at 1200A. at 24,000', and 26 a/c dropped 52 tons of 500 lb GP bombs with .1 nose and .01 and .025 tail fuses. The first attack unit dropped bombs by PFF using C-1 automatic pilot. The second attack unit dropped bombs by PFF flying manually. 1 a/c, still missing, jettisoned 8 bombs South of the IP because of the loss of 2 superchargers.

Recapitulation:

Tons dropped on target	52
Tons jettisoned	2
Tons returned by E/R	<u>4</u>
Total tons	58

24 a/c landed at 1550. mean landing time. 3 a/c did not return: Nos. 29414, 51929, and 52491.

Route was flown as briefed.

5. 485th Bomb Group. On 18 Dec 44 at 0749A, 28 B-24 type a/c took off to bomb the BLECHHAMMER South O/R, GERMANY, Primary Target.

Group assembly was over the base as scheduled. The 485th led the 460th at 0832A at 8,000'. Wing rendezvous was effected at 0835A with the order of flight being: 465th, 464th, 485th, and the 460th Groups.

60-80 P-38 and P-51 a/c joined the formation at 0951A at (4430-1630), providing penetration, target, and withdrawal cover. They departed at 1350A at (4440-1630).

There were 2 early returns, bombs (4 tons) were returned to base.

Enroute 3 a/c of Charlie Box fell behind the formation. Being unable to rejoin the formation they continued on course to (4920-1700) there 6 tons of 500 lb GP bombs fused .1 x .01 and .025 were dropped from 23,000' at 1135A. On return these a/c encountered SIH flak at GYOR. At ZAGREB IAH flak was encountered at 16,000' for 4 minutes. A/c #51872 was critically damaged. With #2 engine feathered and with #3 pouring a stream of fuel, the plane went into a gradual dive at which time the crew started bailing out. After the last man had jumped, ten in all, the a/c went into a steep dive through the undercast. It was last seen at 1259A at approximately (4725-1540). Due to a complete undercast the navigator could not positively verify the exact place of trouble. neither ship was equipped with Radar or GEE box equipment. A/c #495 and a/c #335 were both slightly damaged by flak.

23 a/c were over the Primary Target at 1207A. 22 a/c dropped 44 tons of 500 lb GP bombs, fused .1 x .01 and .025 from 24,400'. 1 other a/c jettisoned 2 tons of bombs at the IP at 1153A in order to lighten load after losing on engine. Bombing was by PFF and C-1. The axis of attack was 148°.

Recapitulation of Bombs

	500 lb GP bombs
2 a/c (E/R) returned	16
22 a/c dropped on PT	176
1 a/c (sortie) jettisoned at IP	8
3 a/c dropped at (4920-1700)	24
28 - - - - carried - - - - -	224

No e/a were seen or encountered. Flak encountered at the PT was SIH, increasing in intensity to the left of the formation. No a/c were damaged.

The mickey operators experienced no difficulty in navigating to the target. The lead ship did not pick up BLECHHAMMER North and South until only 30 miles from the target. The 70-65-60-50-40° sighting angles were relayed to the bombardier. The operator believes that the bombs fell in the target area, although he reported that the bombs apparently dropped a little early.

The mickey operator in the deputy lead ship believes that the bombs fell South of BLECHHAMMER. He reported perfect target pick-up as the sighting angles were relayed to the bombardier, the formation began to deviate to the right. The reason for this was unknown though a possible reason was mentioned; that the flux gate compass probably deviated. Both operators furnished navigator with fixes every 35 minutes during flight.

24 a/c landed without incident, mean landing time 1533A in addition to the a/c lost to flak, #51827, a/c #78508 was last seen over the SPUR of ITALY on return. It was later reported to have ditched near RODI. Details of ditching are not available. Seven crew members have been accounted for and 4 members are missing.

Route was flown as briefed.