

454th True Stories

# Who Nose ?



**August Tropper**

**B-24 41-28699**

**15th Air Force 304 Bomb Wing 454th BG 739th sqd**

**454<sup>th</sup>**

[www.454thbombgroup.it](http://www.454thbombgroup.it)

## Introduction

The district of Radkersburg, located in the Southeast of the German Reich, had only minor priority in the events of the air war. At least some bombs, thrown in case of emergency<sup>1</sup>, and a few ground-attacks<sup>2</sup>, was all what happened, because this district was only passed by the US and British Air Forces, when attacking Wien, Wiener Neustadt, Graz, etc., in the last Months of the war. In spite of it, there were two crashes, caused by heavy anti-aircraft-guns and the active defense by German Fighters.

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<sup>1</sup> Chronicle, Family Watzek, Bad Radkersburg (private chronicle)

<sup>2</sup> Talk with Mr. Maritsch, Zelting, December, 03<sup>d</sup>, 1984

## **The crash of a Consolidated B- 24 "Liberator" in Perbersdorf near St. Veit / Vogau on February, 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944**

### **1. The events of air war in the South of Europe from the turn of the year 1943/44 until February, 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944**

As already told, 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force was privileged when getting equipment or crews. At the turn of the year 1943/44, the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force was still a small one, owing six Bomber Groups. This changed in the beginning of 1944: 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force was pre-arranged finally to own 21 Bomber Groups, 7 Fighter Groups and some Reconnaissance Groups. It happened that way, that aircrafts, which should have been sent to 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, were transferred directly from USA, passing Africa, to 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force in Italy.

So 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force got 376<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group on January, 01<sup>st</sup>, 1944; the 449<sup>th</sup> und 450<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group on January, 08<sup>th</sup>, 1944; the 451<sup>st</sup> Bomber Group on January, 30<sup>th</sup>, 1944; the 454<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group on February, 08<sup>th</sup>, 1944; and 455<sup>th</sup> and 456<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group on February, 17<sup>th</sup>, 1944.<sup>3</sup> In the mid of February 1944 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force owed twelve Bomber Groups, distributed to different Wings:

5<sup>th</sup> Bomber Wing: 2<sup>nd</sup>, 97<sup>th</sup>, 99<sup>th</sup> and 301<sup>st</sup> Bomber Group  
47<sup>th</sup> Bomber Wing: 98<sup>th</sup>, 376<sup>th</sup>, 449<sup>th</sup> and 450<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group  
49<sup>th</sup> Bomber Wing (growing): 451<sup>st</sup> Bomber Group  
304<sup>th</sup> Bomber Wing: 454<sup>th</sup>, 455<sup>th</sup> und 456<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group

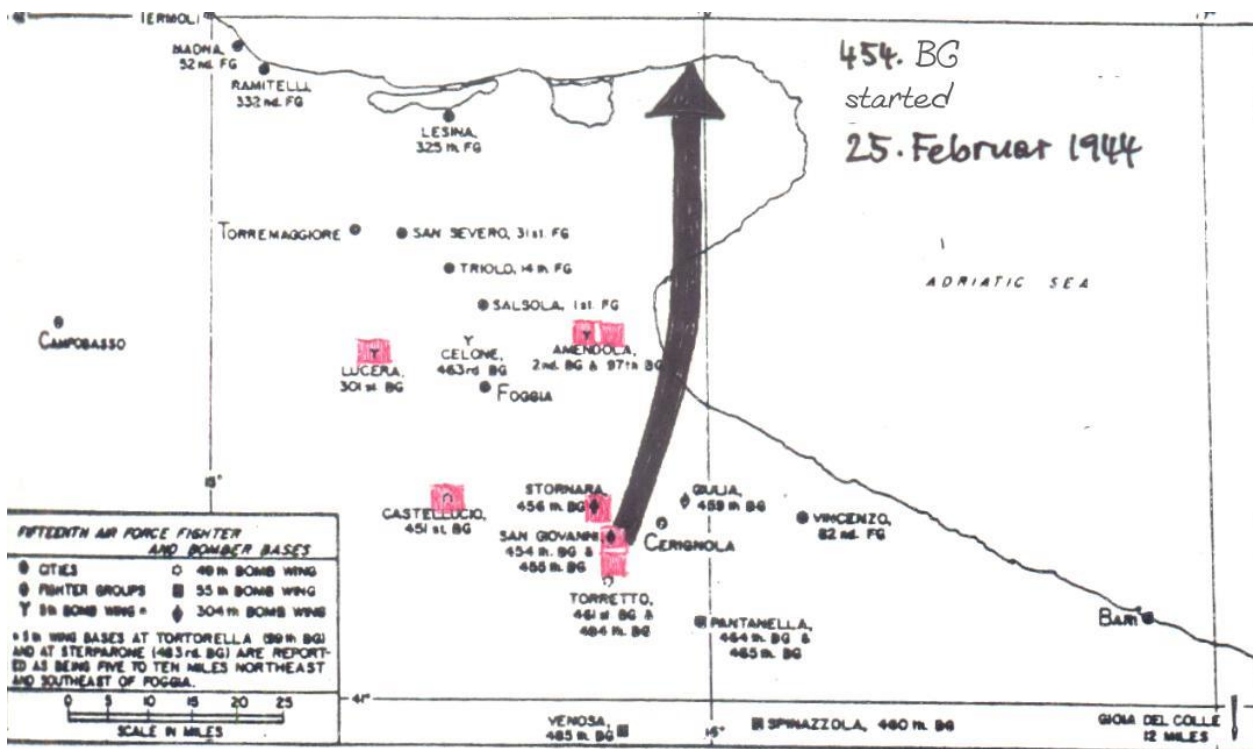
This now so mighty Air Force had following tasks:

- a) to destroy German Air Force in the air or even when grounded,
- b) to participate in the bombing attacks named "Pointblank", to eliminate German aircraft-industries, ball-bearing-factories, oil-refineries, rubber-factories, submarine-dockyards, etc,
- c) to support Army Forces fighting against German troops an Italian soil, and
- d) finally also to defeat the enemy in the Balkan area.<sup>4</sup>

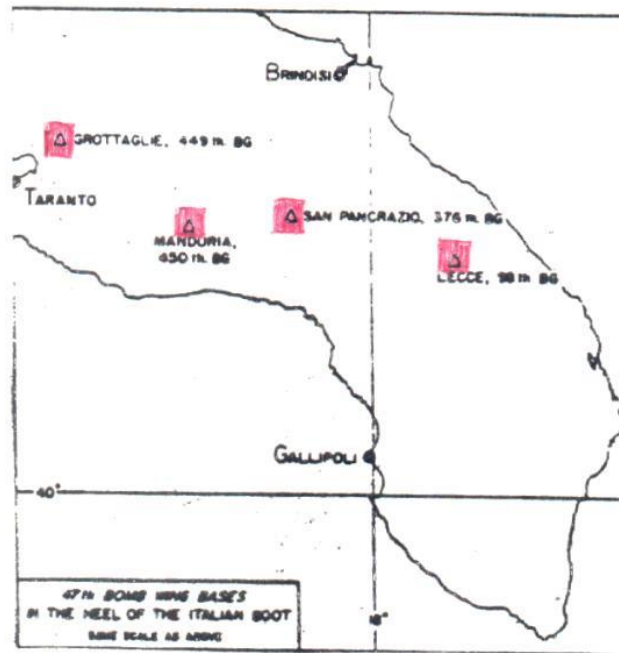
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<sup>3</sup> Combat Chronology, ed. Carter (Washington 1973) 795

<sup>4</sup> Kenn C. Rust, The Fifteenth Air Force Story (Temple City 1976) 7



Map 2: Airbases of 15th Air Force in Italy  
 Source: Kenn C. Rust, Fifteenth Air Force Story, S 18



## 2. "Argument" - the attacks at German aircraft industries from February, 20<sup>th</sup>, 1944 to February, 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944

One of the first bigger tasks, 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force had to step to, was the attempted extermination of German aircraft industries in coordinated actions together with 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force and the aircrafts of the RAF. This military operation had got the nickname "Argument" and should take place in the week from February, 20<sup>th</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944. The planning was made November, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1943, und November, 29<sup>th</sup> 1943, presented by the military planning committee.<sup>5</sup>

The planned attacks were done in time and so Austria was the first time the target of US bombers for some days. While 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force on February, 20<sup>th</sup>, 1944 still had to fulfill tactical tasks in the war on Italy's soil, on February, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1944 she trusted to Regensburg, to exterminate the aircraft industries up there. February, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 1944 were "dedicated" to the ball-bearing-factories in Steyr and on February, 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944 Regensburg should be pound again in a common operation. While the striking force of 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force was on the road to the South of Germany, smaller units were attacking targets of minor priority.

In "Combat Chronology" there is following notice:

*"Continuing coordinated attacks with Eighth AF on European tgts, B-17s with ftr escorts pound Regensburg aircraft factory; enemy ftr. opposition is heavy..... B-24s attack Fiume M/Y and port and hit Zell am See railroad and Graz A/F."*<sup>6</sup>

The units, pounding Regensburg, suffered heavy losses. But 454<sup>th</sup> and 455<sup>th</sup> BG, delivering a blow to minor priority targets, lost six aircrafts, too.<sup>7</sup> So caught by the fact of lacking Fighter escorts against the Fighters of German Air Force.

Glenn Infield wrote in his book "Big Week":

*"Unfortunately the Fifteenth Air Force from Italy lacked escort of sufficiently long range to provide protection during the most distant phase of its mission to Regensburg, and the Luftwaffe took advantage of this fact. Furthermore, since only its Bombers*

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<sup>5</sup> Combat Chronology, ed. Carter (Washington 1973) 695

<sup>6</sup> also, 279

<sup>7</sup> The Fifteenth Air Force Story (Temple City 1976) 15

*equipped for long range missions could reach the target area, the remainder of the task force Italy had to bomb shorter-range targets, such as rail yards and port installations at Fiume, the harbor area at Zara, warehouse at Pola, rail lines at Zell-am-See, and the runways at the airfield near Graz-Thalerhof.*<sup>18</sup>

### 3. The crash on February, 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944

One of these six lost aircrafts crashed in the district of Radkersburg on February, 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944. It was subordinated to the 454<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group and was affiliated with 739<sup>th</sup> Bomber Squadron. Some other units of this GB were the 736<sup>th</sup>, 737<sup>th</sup> and 738<sup>th</sup> Squadron. The 454<sup>th</sup> Group itself flew the first mission on February, 08<sup>th</sup>, 1944, and had its fifth day of missions on February, 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944. In the progress of war, the aircrafts of this unit flew 243 missions. In its active time, the 454<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group, common with the 455<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group, was located in San Giovanni. The Group Commander was Lt. Col. Ainsworth.<sup>9</sup>

The average crew of four-engined bombers of the USAAF consisted of ten members. The four most important positions, as pilot, co-pilot, navigator and bombardier were occupied by officers, the other necessary jobs in the aircraft (radio-operator, engineers, tail- waist- or belly-gunners) were done by non-commissioned officers. The crew of the aircraft crashed down in Perbersdorf, consisted of following members:

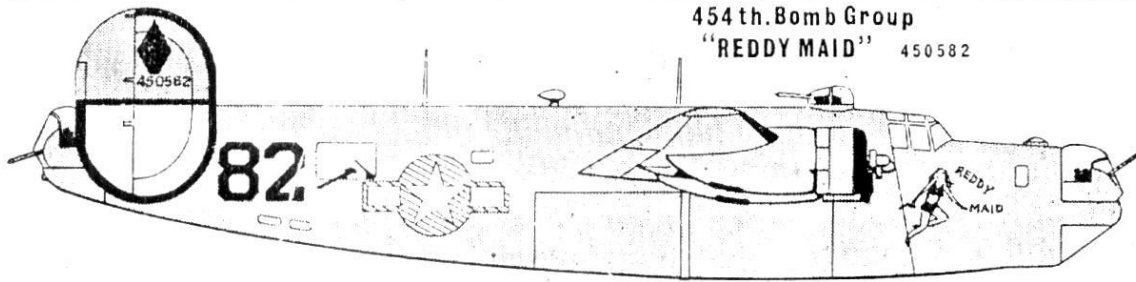
	Name in Full (Last Name first)	Rank	Serial Number	
1. Pilot	Gebel, Howard C.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	0-795385	EUS
2. Co-Pilot	Moore, Raymond E.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	0-684029	**
3. Navigator	Kondracki, Frederick P.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	0-809637	KIA
4. Bombardier	Paone, Fred J.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	0-690861	**
5. Radio Operator	Zielomski, Edmund J.	S/Sgt.	33371463	EUS
6. Engineer	Jandreau, Earnest B.	T/Sgt.	37454499	EUS
7. Ass't Engineer	Remington, Clarence W.	Sgt.	11111301	EUS
8. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Ass't Engineer	Tarte, John W.	Sgt.	20402386	KIA
9. Tail Turret	Williamson, Arnold S.	Sgt.	31317516	EUS
10. Waist Gunner	Gibson, Wilfred A.	Sgt.	16062783	POD

\*\* illegible, there are notes made by hand, so is following a facsimile.

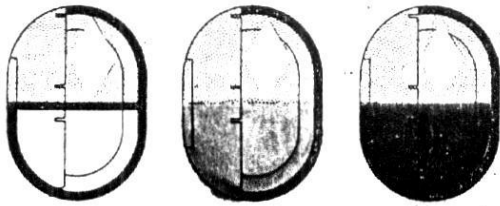
<sup>8</sup> Glenn Infield, Big Week. The week that decided the war - the crucial air battle between General Doolittle and General Galland (Los Angeles 1979) 193

<sup>9</sup> Missing Air Crew Report 3160

304th. BOMB WING 454th. 455th. 456th. 458th. Bomb Groups



454th. Bomb Group  
"REDDY MAID" 450582



454th.

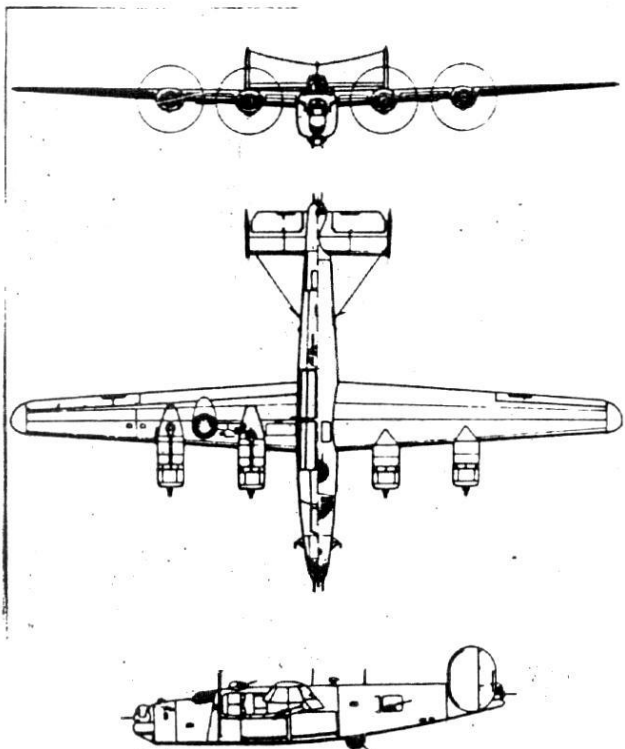
455th.

456th.

Aircraft of 454th BG  
with all its markings

Consolidated B-24 Liberator ] ▶

Engines : 4 × 1200 PS  
Span : 33,55 m  
Length : 21,16 m  
Height : 5,49 m  
Empty weight : 17250 kg  
Max. weight : 26000 kg  
Crew : 10  
Max. speed : 480 km/h  
Ceiling : 8550 m  
Regular range : 3360 km  
Armament: 10 MG, 12,7 mm  
Regular bomb load : 2275 kg  
Short range max. bomb load : 5450 kg



Facsimile of crew listing

Crew position	Name in full (Last Name First)	Rank	Serial Number
1. Pilot	Gebel, Howard C.	2nd Lt.	0-795385 EUS
2. Co-Pilot	Moore, Raymond E.	2nd Lt.	0-684029
3. Navigator <i>Handy</i>	<del>Kondracki, Frederick P.</del>	2nd Lt.	0-809637 KIA
4. Bombardier <i>391/3</i>	Paone, Fred J. <i>371 Handy</i>	2nd Lt.	0-690861 PDD ✓
5. Radio Operator	Zielomski, Edmund J.	S/Sgt.	33371463 EUS
6. Engineer	Jandreau, Earnest B.	T/Sgt.	37451499 EUS
7. Ass't Engineer	Bemington, Clarence W.	Sgt.	11111301 EUS
8. 2nd Ass't Engineer <i>T</i>	Tarte, John W.	Sgt.	20402386 KIA
9. Tail Turrent	Williamson, Arnold B.	Sgt.	31317516 EUS
10. Waist Gunner <i>I *</i>	Gibson, Wilfred A.	Sgt.	16062783 PDD ✓



The crew (except Sgt. Williamson)





Lt. Paone

Sgt. Remington, Sgt. Tarte,  
S/Sgt. Zielomski



Sgt. Gibson

T/Sgt. Jandreau,  
S/Sgt. Zielomski





The crew (except Sgt. Williamson)

One of the surviving USAAF crewmembers, Clarence Remington, bookseller in Rhode Island, reports about it:

*"Edmund Zielomski was the Radio operator in our Plane. He was not injured in the sortie that day.*

*Ernest Jandreau was Crew Chief on our plane and had his left foot shot away in the action, he was repatriated from Hosp. in Graz May, 1944.*

*Howard Gebel was Pilot of our plane, and was severely burned; face, hands, and feet.*

*Arnold Williamson was the Tail gunner (not shown)*

*Raymond Moore (killed in action)*

*Fred Paone (killed in action)*

*Frederick Kondracki (killed in action)*

*Wilfred Gibson (killed in action)*

*John Tarte (killed in action)"<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> Clarence Remington's letter of June, 28<sup>th</sup>, 1983

Those ten crewmembers' level of drill was at a very high rate of skill and the interplay aircraft - crew was very difficult, therefore very thorough training was to do. Clarence Remington writes in his letter:

*"We had all come from our various Basic and Military Technical School training to the Air Base at McCook, Nebraska for our coordination training as an Air Crew flying together on Liberators, Military designation B 24 Model G, we came to know and call them 'flying boxcars' because we felt they were huge and cumbersome, and could carry a large 'load'. At any rate we were assigned to Cadre duty (instructor training of other crew members for other plains in our squadron) until our whole Group was trained."<sup>11</sup>*

#### b) The aircraft

The crashed aircraft was built in common by Ford and Douglas. Ford was producing the aircrafts without any equipment, Douglas in Tulsa, Oklahoma, received them and finished them into operational fighting-aircrafts. The concrete aircraft had the exactly designation B-24 H-10 with its serial number 41-28699. It belonged to a series of 84 aircrafts. All aircrafts of this series were principally engaged in the European Theatre of Operations. Many of them were camouflaged in "olive drab", many others were not painted and kept their polished aluminium. The Liberator's were popular with the pilots, caused by the fact that they could be flown easily, although they seemed to be plump and clumsy.<sup>12</sup>

Very many of the USAAF crews wanted to give their aircraft a personal touch by decorating it with pictures, or embellishing it with their names or the names of their most beloved relations.

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<sup>11</sup> Clarence Remington's letter of June, 28<sup>th</sup>, 1983

<sup>12</sup> Allan G. Blue, The B-24 Liberator. A Pictorial History (London 1979)

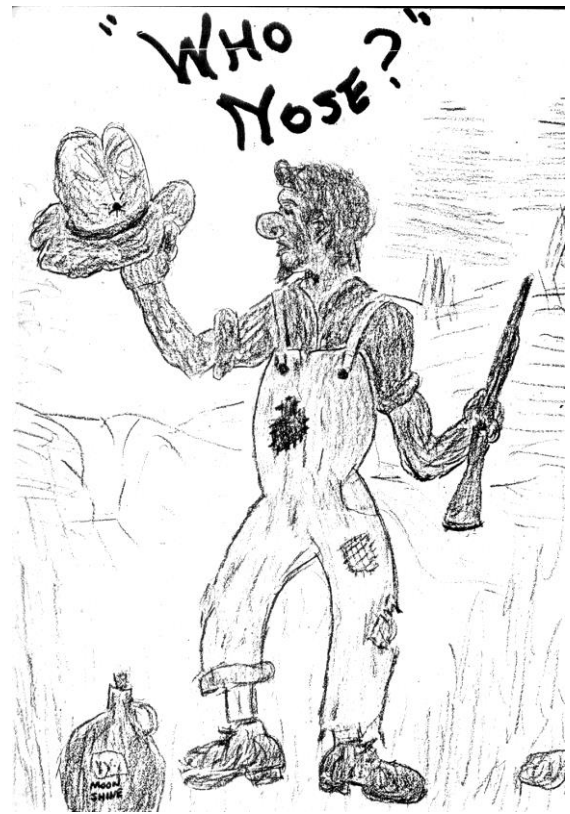
Clarence Remington reports about this:

*"It was then that our plane was given a name, we christened it "Who Nose" in honor of the uncertainty of the issues and the special mechanisms in the nose of the ship which we were guiding and controlling features. Now I see from your letter that you found or know of the tail section of the plane from the fact you have information of the number (identification) 41-28699 which was the only designation of military ident. to show our affiliation, but it was only a code number to confuse the enemy intelligence. This was on the Tail (Vertical Stabilizer) and we painted our private sign on the front fuselage under the Pilot's window - large white letters 'WHO NOSE' and a picture of a little man with a large bulbous nose.<sup>13</sup> The small man with big nose was a copy of a famous - (famous back in those days 1938 thru 1950) cartoon character called 'Lil Abner' and the Artist Mr. Al Capp has been dead many years so copies of many of the funny strips are almost non-existent, - therefore after looking for a long time I have had to draw it myself from memory; but it came out well I think. It was hard to get good detail of his face in the full figure sketch so I drew also a close-up of his features as well as a complete detail like we had put on our plane. He was a 'Hill Billy Mountain Man' - Uneducated back woods inhabitant of the Tennessee foothills - always fueding with his neighbors, shooting and getting shot at, so a drew him with a bullet hole in his hat and the question 'Who Nose'. I hope you find it comes up to your expectations; to answer your question he is not a character from 'Mickey Mouse' Walt Disney Productions, but they became popular at about the same time and were in our Cartoon pages of our newspapers for many years together"<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>13</sup> Clarence Remington's letter June, 28<sup>th</sup>, 1983

<sup>14</sup> Clarence Remington's letter November, 26<sup>th</sup>, 1983



The figure's head; the figure itself was applied at the aircraft's membrane below the pilot's window.

### c) The attack of 454<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group February, 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944 and the crash of "Who Nose" in Perbersdorf

The 454<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group was chosen, to do the raid against Graz-Thalerhof airfield.

Classification: **RESTRICTED**  
 by E. A. BRADUNAS, Lt. Col., AO  
 by F. M. WILSON, Lt. Col., AO  
 Date: **JAN 13 1951**

WAR DEPARTMENT  
 HEADQUARTERS ARMY AIR FORCES  
 WASHINGTON  
 MISSING AIRCRAFT REPORT

IMPORTANT: This report will be compiled in triplicate by each Army Air Forces organization within 18 hours of the time an aircraft is officially reported missing.

- Fld, Italy.
1. ORGANIZATION: Location San Giovanni, Command of Air Force 15th AF, Group 454th; Squadron 739th; Detachment None
  2. SPECIFY: Point of Departure San Giovanni Fld, Italy Course 158°  
Intended Destination Graz/Thalerhof Airdrome Type of Mission Combat
  3. WEATHER CONDITIONS AND VISIBILITY AT TIME OF CRASH OR WHEN LAST REPORTED:  
Clear except for Valleys, 3/10 Stratus to Fiume
  4. GIVE: (a) Date 25 Feb 44; Time 1220; and Location 5 to 15 mi N. Mari  
of last known whereabouts of missing aircraft.  
(b) Specify whether  Last Sighted;  Last Contacted by Radio;  
 Forced Down;  Seen to Crash; or  Information not available.
  5. AIRCRAFT WAS LOST, OR IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN LOST, AS A RESULT OF: (Check only one)  Enemy Aircraft;  Enemy Anti-Aircraft;  Other Circumstances as follows:
  6. AIRCRAFT: Type, Model and Serial B-24-H AAF Serial Number AC-41-28699
  7. ENGINES: Type, Model and Serial B-1830-13 AAF Serial Number (a) 42-64074  
(b) 42-61020 (c) 42-40429 (d) 42-64052

When being running up to target, the aircraft had to pass heavy anti-aircraft-fire and was hit.<sup>15</sup>

Engines damaged by enemy flak, the pilot had to slow down. So it came, that the aircraft left the protecting formation, it could not hold the necessary cruising-speed anymore. German Fighters, facing the bomber formation, took their chances and hit the lonesome aircraft again and again. "Who Nose" blew up in the air.<sup>16</sup>

SUBJECT: Missing Aircraft #699.  
 TO : Commanding Officer, 304th Bombardment Wing (H) AAF, APO 520 U. S. Army.  
 1. Aircraft #699 was flying number 5 position of lower left squadron, second wave on 25 February 1944. The group formation was approximately twelve minutes from IP when heavy flak was encountered. The flak barrage continued for five minutes. As the barrage ceased, aircraft #699 was hit and damaged and peeled-off to the right and fell into a steep spiral. Aircraft #699 was last observed in a steep spiral at 1220 with number three engine on fire.

The Pilot, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Howard Gebel reported:<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> MACR 3160, Report of Eyewitness Sgt. Edward R. Nech, March 06<sup>th</sup> 1944

<sup>16</sup> Letter of Karl-Heinz Faltermeier, Simbach (1987): Crash of Lt. Pohlmann, JG 53, in Ratsch a. d. Weinstraße, February, 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944

<sup>17</sup> MACR 3160, Report of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. H. Gebel to the superior bureau of September, 10<sup>th</sup>, 1945.

I am writing in reply to your letter of Sept 4 concerning the fate of the missing members of our crew,

A. On the 25th of February 1944 at about 1300 o'clock, approximately 50 miles south of Graz, Austria, we were hit by heavy flak. The hit seemed to be on the left side of the ship near the nose compartment. No. 2 engine became inoperative and No. 4 was damaged. The interphone was inoperative but fire was not apparent at this time. While the co-pilot, Raymond Moore, was trying to feather No. 2 and I was attempting to control the ship, we were hit again and Lt. Moore suddenly struck my arm and pointed to the rear. When I turned, the entire flight deck appeared to be in flames and my face and hands were burned. I pushed the alarm bell and I learned later that the tail gunner heard the alarm. I remember reaching behind the seat for my chute, trying to put it on, but that is all. I was blinded by the flames and unconscious for some time. My next recollection was of falling and I pulled the chute. After landing I was immediately captured and taken to a German military hospital in Graz, Austria where I was hospitalized for approximately 2 months.

B. I am sorry to report that I haven't any knowledge of the fate of the missing men. Lt. Kondracki, Lt. Paone, and Sgt. Gibson were in the nose compartment. I could not contact them after we were hit nor could I see because of the smoke and flames. Lt. Moore turned to the flames but I did not see him again. Sgt. Tarte was in the ball turret, and I do not know whether or not he got out. I know that this report is not very helpful, Sir, but it is as accurate and complete as I can recall. From the moment we were hit until the ship burst in flames seemed only a matter of seconds. I do not know whether the men in question were wounded or killed or whether they managed to leave the aircraft. I do not know how I left the aircraft.

If you receive any information I would greatly appreciate it if you would advise me.

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Sincerely,

Howard C. Hebel

Clarence Remington, whose place was in the fuselage of the ship, tells in a letter, his experience around this crash:

"..... after having our new assignment and plane we arrived in Florida shortly before Christmas 1943, this included all the planes of the 454<sup>th</sup> & 455<sup>th</sup> Bomb Groups, not only "Who Nose" but this is principally from our point of view, and with typical unconcern our major problem at that time as I can recall it was not of the War or its outcome, but the fact that we were to be "down South" at XMAS and we would see no snow! But even this was denied us and we had flying orders three days before Christmas, and went to a Marshalling area in CUBA, then in

rapid sequence British Guinea, Brazil and across the So. Atlantic to landfall at Marachec, Africa; then Tunis, and finally a little town south of Naples- San Giovanni I think. This was now well into January 1944 and we immediately began to "go on Missions" -- no more fooling around, this was it - the real thing; no longer keep score or play games, kill or be killed - - - how awful, in retrospect I see no real purpose in the big plane or the little part we had, but we did - it because it was the thing to do - ? - for our Country ? Who Nose ? as always the name comes up, very appropro. For the first few "missions" , Milk Runs ( no opposition or enemy action) to Northern Italy to "clean up" the area and insure the retreat and capitulation of the Italian Armies. The only point of interest was to return by way of Mt. Vesuvius and look down the crater if it was not too smoky. Then the excitement began to climb, much preparation, ammunition fuel, big bombs - a big ONE - a Double (credit for two missions). Feb. 25, 1944 was our (to make a pun) Downfall, I can remember it was no joke then, we were "briefed" to advise us that this was the ultimate - Very High Altitude Flight All the Way, anticipate Enemy action concentrated, - Anti-Aircraft fire and Fighter Luftwaffe support to finish off any crippled bombers so they could return; on Oxygen from the first hour meant no smoking. High Altitude also required freezing protection, we had the newly developed heated (elec.) suits, but still needed the Fur Lined Jackets and Pants.

My heated gloves short-circuited and I put two pair of wool socks on my hands and still was frostbitten in the fingers. At any rate the major part of the Action came as we reached the Austrian border or "Flak Alley" (Anti - Aircraft cannon fire = Flak) as it was called by the Flight Briefing Officer; it certainly was heavy, I remember one of the crewmembers talking over the planes intercomm - "looks like you could walk on the puffs of smoke" so close together; and the ME 109's Fighters right in among it, or so it seemed. At any rate it did not seem to last long, before we felt the plane lurch and falter - we had been hit; I heard the "Bail -out" Horn and turned from my waist position gun to see the top of the ball turret all flames, (Oxygen & Hydraulic Oil Bottles supply) had been hit and just as I turned I felt as if a hot knife pierced my leg and I went down on my right knee near the camera Hatch latch in the floor of the fuselage; so I opened that, then latched the Hatch back open, as I looked up from that Ernie Williamson came out of the Tail Gun



*compartment; I latched on my Parachute pack and tumbled out the door in the floor - all without much thought - if I had stopped to think I don't know if I would have balked or not, but with the plane on fire and coming apart at the seams it was reasonable that it was as safe out as in, so out I went! I had taken off the stockings I had over my gloves and of course the connector cord was not long enough ( I JOKE ) so my fingers were slightly frozen by the time I landed - landing ?? when would that happen - when to open the chute, how fast was I falling, I reasoned we must have been approx. 15,000/18,000 feet by the time I jumped; the engines had been disabled several minutes and the plane couldn't maintain altitude on only two engines in its condition, load, etc; at any rate the problem was to get down to where I would not pass out from lack of oxygen, so I held my breath and figured by the time I had to take another breath it would be time enough to open the parachute, it was; I was still several thousand foot altitude when I stabilized the chute and I could see around me, my first consideration was - who else was there - I strained to see but with white snow on the ground I could see no parachutes below me, and my own canopy hid anything above me, nobody was at or near my level so I was unable to determine if there were any other survivors, I knew from the fire and condition of the ball turret that probably Johnny Tarte was a casualty, ( unless he had rolled out of the ball escape hatch) I also knew Ernie Williamson was ok,*

*or at least had been until I left the plane, so he should have been right above me, but that was all I could figure on as we were separated by the entire bomb-bay area from the front of the plane and anyone in it, it seems I remember someone saying "get him, I'm hit" on the intercomm plane radio just before the "Bail Out" Alarm went off; -- or was that me, then I realized my leg - numb and cold, I had been hit, I looked down and raised it to find out and it moved without too much effort and I could see all of it so it couldn't have been too bad, I put my hand just above my knee where the most sensation was and found a small hole and some blood in my pants leg but through the layers of fur etc. it was hard to tell how severe it was, I didn't feel any blood running down my pantsleg so I assumed it had not bled too much.<sup>18</sup>*

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<sup>18</sup> Clarence Remington's report in his letter of August, 01<sup>st</sup>, 1983

The aircraft was torn to three parts by the explosion, disintegrating to a mass of tiny parts when falling down.<sup>19</sup> Greater parts fall into a wood in the community of Perbersdorf near St. Veit/Vogau. Five crewmembers (2nd Lt. Gebel, T/Sgt. Jandreau, S/Sgt. Zielomski, Sgt. Remington und Sgt. Williamson) were able to rescue themselves by parachute, the other crewmembers died in the crash. These are 2nd Lt. Kondracki, 2nd Lt. Moore, 2nd Lt. Paone, Sgt. Gibson and Sgt. Tarte.

The dramatic scenes were also noticed by many people on the ground. Mr. Scheucher from Siebing told:

*"I was at home, standing outside in the yard, when an aircraft suddenly was approaching from Maribor , it was going up in smoke and fell in spirals towards the ground. The next day we went to the crash's location, but we could not see any dead men, the local police had cordoned off. There were many parts lying scattered about and I took some of them with me. The people there at the crash's location were talking about dead men being there but I did not see any corpse."*<sup>20</sup>

Mr. Arnulf Schrampf watched the following:

*"I was a pupil in the Hauptschule of Leibnitz und had just arrived home from classes, and in the garden I noticed a squadron of aircrafts approaching from Maribor. Suddenly I noticed, that one aircraft was falling back. The other aircrafts went on and turned to Leibnitz. The remaining aircraft was beginning to go up in smoke; smoke was growing on and reached intensity of a condensation trail - the aircraft exploded and fell - as much as I can remember, towards the ground as three big parts. After having had midday meal, I went to the crash's location by bicycle. There is a mass of people present and the surrounding is covered with the wrecks' pieces. But I did not see any dead man."*<sup>21</sup>

The pupil Karl Sixt kept an eye by Mureck on what happened in the air:

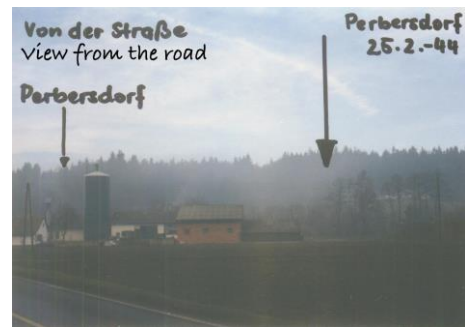
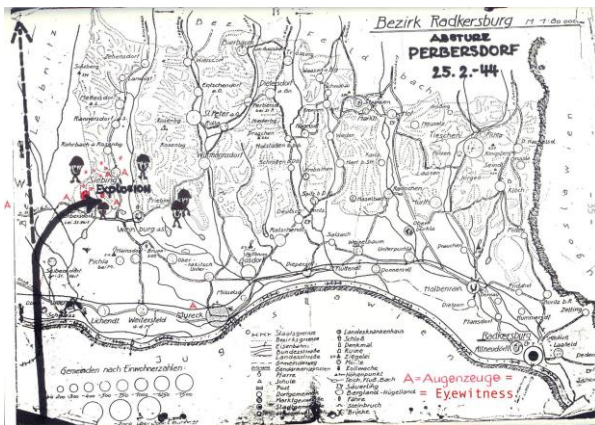
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<sup>19</sup> Report of E. Jandreau in a letter of Remington of June, 28<sup>th</sup>, 1983

<sup>20</sup> Report of eyewitness Johann Scheucher, Siebing 23, recorded Dezember 20<sup>th</sup> 1987

<sup>21</sup> Report of eyewitness Arnulf Schrempf, Graz, Körblergasse 92 (then St.Veit/Vogau), recorded December, 21<sup>st</sup>, 1987

"I was in the Hauptschule of Mureck and suddenly the shots of Maribor's anti-aircraft-guns could be heard. There was hooting of sirens and our teacher, Ms. Fleischhacker lead us to the air-raid protection room. Me and some friends of mine ran away and hid in the shed of the Prisching Company. The aircrafts were moving along above us. Suddenly we could see, crashing down one aircraft, broken in three parts. At the same time we noticed several white points, which were the parachutes. On this day, we still returned home by the bus, but the next day we got out of the bus and did run to the location of crash in the woods of Perbersdorf. It was still everything there: Dead corpses were lying around, one of them held the control-column in his hands, an other was buried by one engine so deep in the earth, that only one foot could be seen. The wood was covered with crowds of cartridges. The dead bodies looked alike terrible: Leather-clothes and fur-boots had been taken off. I was told, some of them were stolen the watches and even fingers were cut off to get the golden rings they had worn. The farmers were tapping gasoline out of a full tank. The wood was destroyed in a large array, and die parts of the wreck were scattered over to Siebing.



The location of crash in Perbersdorf near St. Veit am Vogau

*One crewmember, escaped by parachute, landed on a small hill in the wood behind our house. We had a captured Canadian staying with us; after having shown him the location, he talked in English to the man; but at first one this man did not want to answer and came down the tree after the Canadian was encouraging him for several times. Later on Rural Policemen of Siebing came and took the man with them. - Something else comes into my mind! - Our Canadian offered the American, who was trembling, a cigarette in order to calm down. The American was smoking, and the rural policeman Höffer has seen it. He jumped to him and stroked the cigarette out of the Americans mouth with a punch into the face! This was absolutely unpleasant, and I felt much sympathy to the foreign airman."<sup>22</sup>*

An eyewitness from St. Nikolai/Draßling, Mr. Franz Pucher, experienced the following:

*"The concerned day, I, as a fan of airmen and aircrafts, was standing outside our property to watch the bombers passing by. Looking in the direction of Maribor, I saw the anti-aircraft-guns having begun the combat practice firing. The aircrafts approaching, suddenly there was a great confusion in the formation, I cannot say if it was caused by shots or by an explosion. In any case, one aircraft left the formation and was going down. I believe it was smoking of fire! Suddenly I could not more see the aircraft. I was full of joy! Now, at last, I can watch an emergency landing of such a large aircraft! Embracing the aircraft having been crash-landed in Hütt, I and a friend of mine took our bikes and drove off! But the crash happened not in Hütt, but more than six Kilometers farther in Perbersdorf. Hoping to experience one complete aircraft, we arrived at the location of crash and so I was disappointed, to see only fragments and wreckages. The snow covered ground was covered red; the adults said, this was caused by the gasoline - and there was an unpleasant smell in the air, reminding me of hospital and disinfection. This was not what I was having taste for! GI can remember truly that I saw a wheel of the main landing-gear directly rising on high towards the sky. The rubber was torn and hanging down in many pieces.*

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<sup>22</sup> Report of eyewitness Karl Sixt, Siebing 29, recorded Dezember, 20<sup>th</sup> 1987.

*All that chaos shocked me and poured heavily down my first embraces. I was riding back my bicycle and never again did set one foot on this piece of earth!"<sup>23</sup>*

Mr. Josef Dienstler knows to tell about a horrible incident:

*"I was arriving home from school earlier, caused by the air-alarm. Coming into the yard, I recognize many aircrafts passing by. Suddenly one of these aircrafts was blown up exactly above our farm! My parent ran quickly into the house and took me with them. After a little while we went out again, to take a look, where the aircraft had came down. A Polish workman was staying with us, and we both were running into the wood. We heard loud lamentations from the far! We were running towards the crying and finally arrived a tree, a foreigner lying there on the ground, lacking his left foot and being held in check by two men with rifles. The injured was asking for help with aroused hands. By a team of oxen the men and I took him to the house 'Pircher'. We tried to stop his bleeding with some of his parachute's silk. A farmer doing works in the wood found the foot itself with the boot in summer 1944. In the house Pircher the man was laid down on a 'Sauschragen' (something to put on a pork). The American even offered his golden watch to the men, to be sure to get help. The doctor, Dr. Leschanz, having arrived some times later, was outraging the helpers, because they had lapped the wounds with dirty cloths."<sup>24</sup>*

The American Clarence Remington survived the bomber's explosion and injured dropped towards earth by parachute. He remembered:

*"..... Then the ground which had seemed so far below began to come up really fast and I had no more time to worry about that. By now I was over a large forest of tremendous trees, and now I could imagine Rem - like a cherry on a stick - oh no; but I was lucky and my chute canopy caught in a tree top and I was still 15 - 20 feet off the ground, I managed to swing and get hold of*

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<sup>23</sup> Report of eyewitness Franz Pucher, Leibnitz, Beim Färberkreuz 15 (then St. Nikolai/Draßling), recorded Dezember, 21<sup>st</sup>, 1987.

<sup>24</sup> Aussage des Herrn Dienstler Josef, Weinburg 32, getätigt am 21. Dezember 1987.

*the tree and released the chute harness and as I did I tried to see if I could see any more Parachutes or Planes in Flight or coming down but the sky was clear and still my vision was limited by the large trees so it was improbable that I would see anything. As I turned my attention to the ground it was obvious that it had snowed recently as there was several - a couple -? - feet - inches -? - a lot of snow on the ground between the trees. Now this was a problem how to get anywhere without leaving a trail or evidence of my passing? My brief instructions had been; if downed try to get to the 'Partisans' of either Italy, Hungary, or Yugoslavia, and get back to Allied Control, but soon after I put my weight on my right leg I knew or felt I would not get too far, for even if it didn't hurt much it's continued numbness and lack of coordination made it obvious I would not go far. But try I must so off I went, it was difficult walking in the snow with the fur suit but I was thankful for the fur boots cause my hands felt so cold I knew my feet would be in trouble without them; then I came to a creek which had frozen over after the snow as it was bare ice, and here was the answer to my problem of leaving tracks in the snow; ice - no tracks, good - but what direction did it go? No Compass, it was in my emergency kit in the plane or scattered over Austria. I wondered briefly if any civilians were out looking for survivors and how angry they might be, but I didn't hear anyone or anything so I went on following the creek and of course it went downhill - several miles -? I do not know how far, I came to an abandoned cabin in the woods, woodcutters? No sign, door partly open - empty, cold, uninviting - so long I could always retrace the creek and come back if I required shelter but to stay there now was useless, keep going downhill more; leg beginning to balk now, blood running down inside flannel suit sticking to calf. Thirsty, hungry, Lucky Strike? - cigarettes in emergency pack didn't do me much good wherever they were; brave it up - what now? - who nose?*

*Listen - - ? hear that? Noises, voices, - searchers; creek spreading out into sort of boggy, marshy thicket area there I hid very still rest my leg in case I had to run - no need - the voices faded, was I safe - who nose? Finally I started on, my leg very stiff now, mistake to stop so long; can't walk well, or far at this rate - ah another cabin, bigger - a small house on the hillside and beyond a clearing a road. Here goes - 'Hello, anyone around?' -- knocked on door, small older lady comes out and says something I can't understand, I signal my hand to mouth,*

*thirsty - hungry; 'Ja gut - Englisher? - Amerikanish?'. I understand she is asking my country/nationality so I say 'American', and think maybe it will not be hard to talk and understand when an older man comes out carrying a carafe and small glass, he poured me a little clear liquid - thicker than water, Anisette? Calvados? who nose? whatever it was went right to my throat and burned, pure liqueur - home brew? Good, it snapped me up to reality and I motioned I had to be going; but he said 'Nix' and took me by the arm, I knew by the force of his grip I wasn't going anywhere he didn't; so I resigned myself to whatever was in store."<sup>25</sup>*

The inhabitants of the surrounding communities not always were facing the Americans so correctly, as Clarence Remington has told in his letter. As shows the statement of Mr. Saurugg from Perbersdorf:

*"I was just at home, resting of combat, when the aircraft-crash happened. What I have seen there was horrible: At the crash's location was a girl, playing Nazi-songs with the concertina amidst the dead bodies. This was a spectacle, unable to be forgotten by me. Many days later, inhabitants of Perbersdorf put the dead corpses, which had been burnt and mutilated past recognition, on a team of oxen and took them to the cemetery of St. Veit am Vogau."<sup>26</sup>*

The Police Station in Siebing reports about this crash in the chronicle:

*"February, 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944, a four-engined US - Bomber (Liberator) was shot down over Perbersdorf near St. Veit a. V. resp. blew up in the air and parts of the aircraft were scattered about ca. 5km<sup>2</sup>. Five crewmembers were dead, one had ripped off the right foot at the ankle, one had burnt his face so badly, he had got yellow skin and one had a retained missile in the right upper thigh, two further crewmembers were wanted and captured. One such bomber shall be worth one million Dollars. The dead crewmembers were buried in St. Veit a. Vogau's cemetery. The*

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<sup>25</sup> Aus dem Brief von Clarence Remington vom 01. August 1983.

<sup>26</sup> Bericht des Herrn Saurugg Berthold, Perbersdorf, (inzwischen verstorben) aufgezeichnet im März 1983.

*bomber's heavy guns and the ammunition, which filled one big truck, were immediately recovered.*"<sup>27</sup>

The superior Police Station in Graz mentioned the attack of February, 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944 only with key-words:

*"25.02.1944: Air-attack on Thalerhof -Süd, Alarm by 11:29 until 14:16, 50 aircrafts, by leaving 9 bomb, 10 dead bodies; 7 aircrafts shot down (area Kärnten - Graz)"*<sup>28</sup>

The roman-catholic rectory of St. Veit a. Vogau, in the district of Leibnitz, set the final point to the crash of the "Who Nose":

*"N.N. 5 American airmen (one had a rosary, one was a 'half-breed - mulatto'). There were still more soldiers in the aircraft. The others were saved by parachutes. Cause of death: Their aircraft was burning and blew up.*

*July, 11<sup>th</sup>, 1946, exhumed by American soldiers and token with them.*"<sup>29</sup>

But what happened with the POW's? When uninjured, they were sent to the POW-camps, after scrupulous interrogation (mostly to Germany).. When injured, there were other things to do. Clarence Remington reports:

*"... We went down the road to a small village - I never learned the name, and into a large hall - people crowd around to inspect this specimen - no one angry - curious only without malice. I lost track of the old man I had come with, They all looked alike. older men, young and old women, children but no adult or young males, - all at war, I thought. Then one appeared; Soldier, tall young man, light gray uniform - S S - He asked in English if I was a Commissioned Officer, and my name; I told him in one breath I was Sgt. Clarence Remington. American -- serial number 11111301. He asked if I could walk alone and I*

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<sup>27</sup> Chronicle of rural police station Siebing (heute Mettersdorf), February, 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944.

<sup>28</sup> Chronicle of police station Graz, February, 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944.

<sup>29</sup> List of mortality of rectory St. Veit a. Vogau, volume XV, page 135, February, 29<sup>th</sup>, 1944.



*said yes but slowly, so he helped me out the car. We didn't seem to ride far I couldn't say how long, in the car were Williamson the tail gunner and someone with a gauzemask and heavy grease like salve on his face - it was Lt. Gebel the pilot, he had been severely burned; face, hands and ankles places the fur suit did not cover and protect. We soon arrived at a large brick building in a courtyard of a small city which I soon found out was Graz, it seemed the whole town had been utilized as a medical center, hospital complex I was told; many major buildings were being used to treat war casualty cases, this building I had delivered to was for 'foreigners' - first floor was treatment and operation rooms, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor wards, French and Italians; 3<sup>rd</sup> floor English Airmen and Australian Paratroopers, 4<sup>th</sup> floor American Airmen, 5<sup>th</sup> floor was for Russians and their Allies. We were taken in and treated soon after we arrived and taken to beds in the American ward where there were already 6 or 8 airmen who had been shot down previously to this raid we had been on; we were the first ones to come in from that days action. A few hours later I was shocked to see the orderly wheel in a stretcher with Ernie Jandreau on it, he had lost a lower leg and had been in the operating room for some time; he said the doctors were very efficient and kind to him and had already started to prepare his leg for an artificial prosthesis , needless to say we talked into the late hours trying to determine just what had happened; how we had arrived here, and where we might be going in the near future. As it turned out, Jandreau was released from the hospital first to be*

*processed for repatriation; but he was delayed when Medical experts determined his stump should be prepared differently. Lt. Gebel's burns healed quickly with an amazing treatment that left only minor scars and new baby-like skin on his face and ears, and my wounds proved most troublesome, due to recurring infection it was over 5 1/2 months before I was released and sent to Dulag - Luft in Frankfurt.<sup>30</sup>*

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<sup>30</sup> Clarence Remington's letter of August, 01<sup>st</sup>, 1982.

A Newspaper in Rhode Island, USA, did the final period to this chapter of history. In March 1944 it reports the capture of Clarence Remington:

*"Sgt. Remington, who was reported missing in action after a flight over Austria on Feb. 25. is a prisoner of war of the Germans. the War Department has wired his mother. He was an aerial engineer-gunner on a Liberator bomber of a group operating from Italy since last December."<sup>31</sup>*

### Conclusion

I provided the present report, arranged in two main parts, according to certain general directions: I lacked any dead weight in order to reach the basic questions of the crashes as soon as possible. Therefore I left beside the events of air-war in the South of Europe and the rather complicated process of organization and reorganization of 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Airforce during 1943/44 nearly completely and restrained on facts being connected directly or indirectly to the both crashes. So I tried, outgoing from the general air-war situation, to confine both events - the dates of crashes on January, 01<sup>st</sup>, and February, 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944 - to their individual events, by support of sources. I took the chance to shape the report more full of life by correlating reports of eyewitnesses and chronicles, I allowed the directly involved Remington to retell his experience in his native language, to reach most possible authority. The added pictures and drawings finally shall complete the report.

It was an immense expenditure of time and money, because the first interrogations of eyewitnesses began already in 1983, many observations could not be heeded caused by the fact not being able to verify the truth of them, and the main-eyewitness, Clarence Remington, could be found after having looking for him over two years of searching in different states of the USA. It meant much luck to me, that this "engineer-gunner" reported so widely his experience of February, 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944, and contributed so much to the succeeding in positively doing this report.

Leibnitz, 11. Jänner 1987

August Tropper

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<sup>31</sup> Clipping of a weekly Newspaper Rhode Islands', published March 1944.

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### Microfiches

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### Photos und Drawings

Clarence Remington: 6 photos, 2 drawings

August Tropper: 4 photos, 3 drawings

2 maps (Kenn C. Rust, Fifteenth AF)