

COVER SHEET

Attached report with the following hand-written heading:

Debriefing Report by Delmar Beasley (sic). tailgunner
546th Sqdn 384th Bomb Group. H
Herb Schaafs Crew.

This report is said to have been compiled post-war primarily using letters written by Beasley to his family. It describes events of their mission on 9 September 1944 and the ensuing crash of their aircraft followed by their evasion and repatriation. The document describes the crew members contacting U.S. Army forces (274th Tank Destroyer "outfit") on the night of, and the day following the crash. They returned to the crash site on 10 September and did little more than take photos, as the German military and French civilians had picked over the crash. Then they were passed on to the 90th Infantry Division where they spent the night of 10/11 September. On 11 September, they were driven to an airstrip near Verdun and boarded a C-47 to begin their return to England. After a stop in Cherbourg, they continued on to England, where they were interrogated and spent the night in London, returning to Grafton Underwood on 12 September.

Notes:

- The correct spelling of Delmar's last name is BEESLEY; it was written incorrectly on the report heading.
- The airfield identified as "Babbington" in the text is not known, due to an apparent transcription error.
- 384th Records state the crew "Returned 9-10-44", which may mean "returned to military control", not returned to GU which occurred on 12 September, according to Beasley's narrative.
- Research for the 274th Tank Destroyer "Outfit" indicates that was no 274th Tank Destroyer outfit, unit, company, etc., during WWII. There was a 774th Tank Destroyer Battalion, part of the 7th Armored Division, operating in the area of the crash landing during September 1944. The **274**th Tank Destroyer "Outfit" was likely a typo or misunderstanding on Delmar's part. The rescuing unit was likely an element of the 774th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

Debriefing Report by Delmar Beasley.
546th Sqdn 384th Bomb Group. H. Tailgunner -
Herb Schaafs, Crew.

MISSION #6
SEPTEMBER 9, 1944

Awakened a little before three this morning. Breakfast at three-thirty. The target for today -- a chemical plant producing poison gas at Ludwigshaven, Germany.

We took off at 7:00 AM and almost stalled out on take-off. It was very cold up there -- about forty-five degrees below zero. We reached the target and dropped the bombs without mishap, but got hit by flak immediately after bombs away. Our electrical and hydraulical systems were put out of commission and one engine was knocked out. We had to drop out of formation and kept losing altitude. There were five more direct hits by German eighty-eight millimeter guns. All four engines had been knocked out now. There wasn't time enough to bail out, so we crash landed at about three hundred miles per hour, behind the German lines, in Germany.

We landed in a plowed field not far from the German-French border at about noon. Germans opened fire as we crawled from the plane, so we ran for a woods about three hundred yards away, bullets whizzing past all the time. We made it to the woods okay and split up in twos and threes. Three of us traveled together: Joe Simons, Les Walcott, and myself.

We headed on into the woods and hadn't gone any way at all before we ran into four Germans dressed as women, only about a hundred and fifty feet away from us. We ducked off into bushes to watch them. One had a Red Cross band on his arm, one a pair of stretchers, and the other two had machine guns. They kept shouting for us to come out. We headed back into the bushes and briars in the other direction and laid in a ditch until things quieted down. The Germans must have thought we were armed. At any rate they didn't come in after us. We laid there for about an hour. We tore our escape kits open to get the compasses out, then started out again in a westerly direction, moving along slowly and stopping to listen every few steps. We noticed fresh foot prints and wagon tracks, so we knew that the Germans were all around us.

We kept moving forward through the woods, briars, and vines until we came across a path, which we followed for a little way. It led to a clearing and a building of some sort, so we back-tracked into the bushes and started to circle around it. We hadn't gone far when we came across an old abandoned railroad. We didn't want to cross over it, so we went through the brush along the edge until we came to a small culvert. We crawled into it and laid there for about an hour to rest and decide what to do.

We could hear the artillery pounding away not too far ahead of us, along with the rattle of machine gun and rifle fire. Rain was coming down now, so we decided to move on toward the lines. We crawled on through the culvert and headed out into the thicket. We moved on slowly until we came to a clearing and noticed a few camouflaged guns. We circled around them, keeping in the cover of the bushes and weeds. For the next half hour or so we made our way westward. The next obstacle we came to was a double-track railroad. We crawled through a culvert to get on the other side of the tracks, then cut up across a hillside.

The hill had been partly cleared, so we had to go slowly and keep a good watch in all directions. After reaching the top of the ridge, we stopped to look around and, seeing no one, started down the other side. The whole of that side of the hill had been cleared except for the largest trees. We had almost reached the foot of the hill when we came upon a machine gun dugout. Just below the dugout, along a creek, there was a road. Down the road just a little way stood a small house, with a small hay field in front. While we were looking over the dugout, we heard what sounded like a wagon. Looking down the road, we saw four German officers in a small wagon being pulled by a donkey. They were coming toward us so we ducked into the dugout. The Germans cut off into the open field, though, before getting too close to us. Once they were out of sight, we climbed out and started down toward the road.

When we were about ten feet from the road, we stopped behind a big tree. All three of us were behind the one tree. Just then, we heard someone coming down the road and, looking to our right, we saw a German soldier, with a rifle slung over his shoulder and a green bush stuck into his cap, his mess kit rattling, walking down the road toward us. We all three stood without breathing and the Heinie walked right past us without looking to the right or left.

Before we could get back out of sight into the woods, we heard what sounded to be the cart with the German officers, coming back down through the clearing. We were right near the dugout we had just hidden in, so we jumped into it again. Peeping over the edge, we could see the four Germans in the small wagon come out of the clearing and head back down the road toward the small house. We waited until we were sure they were gone before climbing out of the dugout this time. We figured we had better try to get back into the thicket where we would have better cover.

We headed back up the hill toward some briars and underbrush. We hadn't gone far at all before we came to a small clearing, and noticed that some limbs and bark had been shot off of several of the trees. Looking up and across the clearing, we saw five German soldiers and an officer, spread out and searching for us. We all three dived under one spruce limb

which had been shot off the tree we had been standing under. I raised my head once to see if they had spotted us. They hadn't, but they were spread out and coming straight toward us.

We thought that this was it, and literally buried our heads in the ground. The Germans were almost on top of us -- not more than eight or ten feet away, when the American artillery opened up. The shells came crashing down through the trees and exploded directly above us. I looked up and could see the black powder smoke where a shell had exploded. The Germans, on hearing the fire, hit the ground. They could have been no more than five or six feet from us as the shells burst right above, cutting limbs, leaves and bark from the trees all around. It must really have scared the Heinies because the moment the firing let up, they jumped up and ran right past us and on down through the woods. They almost stepped on our legs as they hurried by, they were in such haste to get out of there.

We lay there, hugging the ground, until we couldn't hear them running anymore. When we raised our heads to look around, the Germans were still running down through the woods. They didn't stop to look back. We were glad of that, too. We decided to get out of there quick, before more of the Heinies came through. We got to our feet and started off to our right, toward some heavier brush. Several times we heard the artillery shells whistling down through the trees and had to hit the ground fast. Limbs and bark would come falling down after every barrage. Our artillery fire was very accurate -- it really had the Germans scared. It had us scared, too, but it was all that saved us.

Between the artillery barrages, we made our way on up through the woods. After going quite far, we came to a small lane winding up through the trees. We could tell by the wagon and foot tracks that it had been used recently. After looking in all directions, we crossed the lane and headed into the thicket ahead of us. The briars and bushes were so thick that we had to part them with our hands before we could get through. We decided that we had better let things quiet down a little before going on, so we found a spot where the underbrush was thickest and lay down to rest.

By now it had stopped raining. The sky was clear and the sun was low in the western sky. We lay there among the briars in what looked to be an ideal place to lay low. What we didn't know, though, was that there was a path just off to one side of us. We hadn't been there long when we heard the Germans coming toward us again.

They came out of the brush in front of us, then headed down the path. They must not have been more than five or six feet from where we lay with our heads buried in the ground. It took about a quarter of an hour for them all to pass by, so there must have been several of them. We didn't raise our heads to look at

them, but could hear them jabbering quietly away amongst themselves, and could hear their mess kits and ammunition clips rattling. They seemed to be in a big hurry to get out of there, but it wasn't any too quick for us. We can be thankful the briars and brush were as thick as they were. If not, the Heinies would have gotten us for sure.

After waiting a few minutes to make sure the Germans were out of sight, we moved forward on the same path the Germans had just used. Carefully, we moved onward until we came to the edge of the woods. In front of us was a large, rolling wheat field. The wheat had been cut and hauled off so the field was bare except for the short stubble. Fresh shell holes dotted the land, and there were numerous foxholes and slit trenches a few yards out from the edge of the woods.

We decided to stay in the woods until it got a little darker. All along the edge of the woods were lately dug foxholes and slit trenches which the Germans had been hiding in only an hour or so before. We kept going along the edge of the woods until we came to a small country road running westerly.

By now the sun had dipped below the horizon, but it was still too light to move around in the open, so we crawled back into the brush to wait for dark. Everything looked so peaceful as we glanced out over that rolling stubble field. The firing had stopped and not even leaves stirred to mar the stillness.

After resting for a few minutes, we decided to push on. We cut across a corner of the stubble field toward the road which ran along the edge of the field. A hedge row ran along the side of the road, so we stayed as close to it as possible. We noticed several land mines planted in a path along the hedge row. The Germans had planted them hurriedly so we spotted them without a bit of trouble. We just went around them and kept moving forward.

After walking for some time, we stopped to look around and listen. We heard the sounds of trucks running and of voices, but we were still too far away to be able to tell whether they were Germans or our own men. We started on again, crawling most of the way. We stood once to look around and saw a single soldier standing off to our right, but could only see him from the shoulders up and couldn't make out whether his helmet was German or American.

Crawling on a little further to a clump of bushes, we heard a jeep come down another road and noticed the white star painted on the side, so we knew that they were Americans. By then we could also hear the men on the other side of the ridge, speaking english.

The problem now was to get up close enough to the camp without getting shot. We knew that they didn't take chances after dark, and we had no way of knowing the password, which we later learned was "Lantern Cornith". It was getting darker all the time, so we decided to just step out into the open, walk up to them, and hope that they would recognize us before opening fire.

We got to them, identified ourselves, and proceeded with them to their camp for the night. They were fifteen or twenty men with a tank destroyer outfit -- really great guys and it was good to be back with friends. They gave us something to eat and drink, which really hit the spot, then gave us each a gun and ammunition because they were expecting a German scouting party back during the night. The infantry had been up in front of them during the day but had pulled back toward evening, so the tank destroyer outfit was out here all by themselves now.

They had the area well covered with machine guns, twenty millimeter cannons on armored cars, and a big three-inch gun. After sitting around talking until well after dark, we decided to try for a little sleep, so gathered up a bunch of straw, covered it with blankets and, with two blankets over us, had our beds for the night. The men alternated standing guard.

It was a clear, dark night; the sky was filled with stars, and it wasn't long before dew started settling and the air got cold. Between the cold and the American artillery behind us, which kept up a continuous barrage through the night against the Germans doing the same on the other side, none of us got much sleep that night -- at least I know I didn't. Some of the bursts from the artillery came awfully close to us; we could hear the whistling overhead.

We got up in the cold at sun up the next morning, but once the sun rose a little, the air warmed and it turned into a beautiful day, with a bright blue sky and not a cloud in sight. A couple of the fellows went in a jeep to a French farm for eggs. While they were gone we heard what sounded to be tanks and, walking to the top of a ridge, we could see a long line of American tanks rumbling along toward the front.

We had a breakfast of eggs, bacon, bread and coffee and at about 9:00, two of the fellows from the plane got in. At noon, two more came in and only two were now missing. We figured they'd be in shortly.

We were in France now, and one could see a long distance in every direction over the pretty, rolling countryside. At about two that afternoon, one of the men spotted through his telescope two men walking along the far side of the stubble field. They had on dark green clothes that looked like our heated suits so we figured they were the two missing crew members and a couple of the tank destroyer boys took the jeep to go out after them.

Wisodahl + Highshoe

With the final two back at camp, all nine of us had come through the German lines without a scratch, to meet up with the same group of Yanks -- those fifteen or twenty men of the 274th Tank Destroyer outfit.

During the previous night and early morning, the infantry had cleared the woods we had come through and driven the Germans back several miles, so it was safe for us to go back to our plane. We all climbed onto a truck and started out. One the way, which took much longer than any of us had thought, we passed through a city that had been liberated earlier that day. The people were all rejoicing and the American and French flags flew from every house. Many of the buildings had been shelled, but most were still in fair shape, though the railroad yards were all torn up.

When we finally reached the plane, there were French civilians -- men, women and children -- all over it, standing on the wings or inside, really looking it over. The old Flying Fortress was really a wreck, though it was a wonder it had held together at all. The Germans had ransacked the plane, and what they hadn't gotten that was worthwhile (which couldn't have been much), the French people had. So, after having our pictures taken while sitting on the fuselage, we climbed back onto the truck and left.

We spent that night with the 90th Infantry Division, which had its camp in a thick wooded area of an old French chateau in a village en route to the landing strip near Verdun. We must have been twenty-five or thirty miles from the area where we had spent the previous night. On the way to the strip, there was evidence of the battle: wrecked German vehicles, burned trucks, shelled buildings, foxholes and slit trenches, and so on. The C-47's were just landing when we got to the field and they quickly unloaded their cargo of gasoline before flying to Cherbourg and then to England.

We all flew in the lead plane, seated all along the sides of the interior, and the pilot flew low, just skimming along above the treetops. The French people along the way could be seen waving. On the way back, they flew over the Argonne Forest and Caen, which looked to be nothing more than a pile of rubble, and several other places of interest.

We got to Cherbourg before noon. There were plenty of K-rations on the plane, so we ate out lunch sitting under the wing of one of the Dakotas. Everything looked so peaceful around there. Supplies and equipment were stacked everywhere. The town had looked to be pretty much of a wreck from the air. Around two in the afternoon, they were loaded up and ready to go again. This time they were hauling shells back to England.

It was a nice warm, clear day. In what seemed to be no time at all, we were out over the channel. Several convoys could be seen heading toward the French coast. We soon crossed the English coast and, a little while later, landed at an airfield on the outskirts of London. We had to fill out some interrogation forms there, and then had to go to the American interrogation headquarters in London. We ate supper there and were then taken to an American Red Cross club for the night.

In the morning we went back to the American headquarters and from there were taken to an RAF base near London, where we were supposed to be picked up by a B-17 sent down from our base. When we reached the airfield, we found out that the landing strips weren't long enough for a Flying Fortress to land on or take off from. so from there, we headed for Babbington -- an airfield just north of London. After some difficulty, we finally found the place. One of our Fortresses was there waiting for us, so we boarded it and flew back to our base. It was late in the afternoon when we got back to the squadron, but we were all safe and sound.

After all, that's what counts.