

My "Swiss Miss" Adventure

by

Lt. Jack McKinney

Date: 18 March 1944

Target: Oberpfaffenhofen (Augsberg, Germany)

Home Base: 384th Bomb Group; 547th Squadron
Grafton Underwood, England

ACFT: B17G Serial #42-37793 Named: Winsome
WINN #2

Crew Members: Pilot 1st Lt. Roger Smith
Co-Pilot 2nd Lt. Jack McKinney
Navigator 2nd Lt. Harry B. Harvey, Jr.
Toggleer & Nose Gunner T/Sgt. John Dudla
Engineer T/Sgt. Bruno Kaminski
Radio T/Sgt. Earl Kendall
Ballturret S/Sgt. Charles Danko
Waist Gunner S/Sgt. Gerald Hamilton
Waist Gunner S/Sgt. Chester Boney
Tailgunner S/Sgt. Jesse Green

Note: Some of this information came from Roy Thomas's book, "Haven, Heaven & Hell"
Part I.

Take off, assembly and departure was normal as was most of the mission until about 10 minutes from the I.P. There had been some fighter activity and light FLAK, but it was directed at other parts of the bomber stream.

Shortly before we reached the I.P., our group was attacked by several German 109's but they were being pursued by our escorting P-51's. Only one pass was all that our group noted and there was no damage to any of our aircraft.

It was about this time that the FLAK bursts increased tenfold and was extremely accurate. As we turned at the I.P. for our bomb run, we took a hit on No. 3 engine rupturing our oil line. We still had some power so we elected not to feather it and we were able to maintain our position -- #5 in the low squadron. Immediately after "Bombs Away," (I use the term "Bombs Away" rather loosely as we were carrying propaganda leaflets in the right bomb bay!) #1 engine was hit and started to burn. Emergency procedures were initiated and the fire was contained but the prop wouldn't feather and started windmilling as was #3 prop. Needless to say, we had lagged behind our formation and there were no other groups in sight. We could only maintain around

120 m.p.h. indicated and were losing altitude at that. It was then we (all crew members agreed) decided to try to make it to Switzerland. We advised our Group Commander what we were doing and he had 2 P-51's escort us partway there. During the next 45 minutes we destroyed all classified items such as flimsies, IFF, etc. We also tossed out our guns and anything else we could to help slow our rate of decent. The Swiss glider base at Altenrhine was spotted and we radioed our group we were landing and to "keep the show on the road." (All 384th peoples will know what this stands for). We made it in safely pulling the gear up after we slowed down. The plane, or should I say #1 and #3 engines, were still burning but all 10 of us exited without serious injuries. Our 11 months of incarceration had begun.

First it was the Chaumont Hotel near Neuchatel where we spent some 10 days isolated from the world and being briefed by General Legges' staff. Although there were about 60 or 70 officers in the same hotel, we were a little suspicious of each other with the exception of our own crew members or those we knew from our group.

Adelboden was the next home for us for some two plus months. Endless bridge games, skiing and photography took up much of our time there and we began to feel more at ease around other internees. Then came the invasion: D-Day 6th of June 1944. Those of us who had been in Switzerland the longest were transferred from Adelboden to Davos and given first choice of hotel rooms in the Palace, others came later. I remember the march from the "Bahnhof" to the hotel. All doors and windows closed, no one on the streets. The town of Davos seemed deserted. Later we were to learn the Germans in town (Davos was where the German legations was located because of the many German citizens who had TB or other comsumptive diseases were hospitalized there) told the Swiss that the American "gangsters" were coming. We got even later by stealing the German swastika off the embassy wall. Not we, but someone did it and we all caught "hell" from General Legge.

The early days at Davos consisted of bridge games, golf, hiking, touch football games and meeting the Davos Swiss. About this time, many plans were being developed to escape from Switzerland and get back in the fight. Most of these plans were placed "on hold" until the landings in Southern France and the movement of Allied Forces up the Rhone Valley to the Swiss border. Some escape attempts were made before this, but most were unsuccessful.

My first escape attempt was made early in October, 1944. Three of us and a Swiss friend rode bicycles from Davos almost to Zurich. All of this at night -- no lights, and all downhill. I was picked up by the Swiss police the next morning

when I boarded a train for Geneva. The others got away. Off to a Swiss jail for several days until I finally told them who I was. Twenty-four hours later I was in "Wauwil." Remember the blood pudding they served us on Thursdays? I do! After being at Wauwil for several weeks about 15 of us were put on a train for an unknown destination. One of the armed guards told us we were going to Les Diableret where our chance of escaping was zero. How right he was, because I tried twice without success.

It was apparent by now that the Allies were winning the war and the end was in sight so we were sent back to Davos. Late in January, 1945 we were told we would be repatriated and to be prepared to move out with little or no notice. Early in February we packed our belongings and boarded a special train at Davos. From there we went to Geneva, walked across the border into France, boarded a French train and went down the Rhone Valley to an airfield just outside Marseilles. General's Spaatz, Eaker and Dolittle were en route to welcome us back but due to extremely bad weather could not land so they passed their welcome by radio. My 11 months of internment was over but the memories, both good and bad, linger on even after some 48 years.