

Combat Diaries of Lt. Charles D. Pfleegor

9th July 1944 Mission #1 Etaples, France

Mission: No ball mission

This was my first mission over enemy territory, and I was very glad it was to be a short one. I flew with Lt. Ryan and crew.

We took off at 1052 in the morning and left the English Coast at 1230, arriving over the enemy coast at 1238. We were flying squadron lead position in the low squadron. Going down the bomb run, we encountered very accurate flak which was tracking us in bursts of four. We escaped without injury to plane or crew. No bombs were dropped due to an 8/10 undercast. We had no fighter support, except for area support about 10000 feet below us. Our flight altitude was 25,000 feet. The trip back was without incident, and landing was made at 1505. Bomb load was 18 250 pounders.

[No diary entry for Mission #2]

13th July 1944 Mission #3 Munich, Germany

For the second day in a row, we hit Munich. There were approximately 1200 planes in yesterday's raid, and about 700 Forts & Libs in today's raid. We took off at 530 forming over the base. 0700 was the zero hour at the coast. Today we flew #5 position in lead squadron of the low group of our wing, being the third combat wing over the target.

Our first flak was experienced over Brussels, Belgium. It was light in our group, but a direct hit was scored on a straggler behind us. The flak hit just in front of the tail and broke the plane in half. The front part reared up, then dove into the clouds about 10000 feet below. No parachutes were seen.

We had minor flak bursts along the route, but nothing heavy until we hit the target. There, directly over the target, flak was very heavy and some chandelier flak was sent up. Luckily, no hits were made on us. One chandelier was sent up that barely missed us. The tail gunner declared it was no more than five yards from the rear of the plane. Bombs were away at 0929. After leaving the target we headed back towards France. About an hour later we picked up a P-38 escort which looked

very good. Just a little later bandits came over but did not attack our group because we were flying tight formation. They picked on the group behind us but were driven off by our escort.

About this time our oxygen in the front end of the plane had run out. We started breathing out of walk-around bottles, filling them from outlets in the tail. A half hour before reaching the enemy coast I ran entirely out of oxygen so went without until reaching the coast. We were still at 20,000 feet.

Just as we reached the enemy coast, our #3 engine ran out of gas. Quickly fuel was transferred from the other engine and we rejoined formation. We checked up and discovered we had just about enough gas to reach the English coast. However, to be on the safe side, we were ready to ditch in the channel if necessary. After flying over water for approximately 40 minutes we sighted the coast and dropped out of formation, landing at a field along the coast. A checkup revealed 2 gas tanks entirely empty, the other two holding only about 5 gallons. We filled up with gas and landed at our own base about 1520. Bomb load was the same as yesterday's.

July 16 Mission #4 Munich, Germany

Once more we flew to Munich after the same target –the BMW Plant--but once again cloud cover prevented visual bombing, so we bombed with PFF equipment using the center of town as the point of mean impact. Today a mistake was made at Headquarters in that we took off an hour earlier than the mission before but using the same zero hour. This made us sweat out our gasoline supply more than ever. The same route was followed as before and very little flak was encountered. Near the target we passed into [illegible] clouds [illegible] climb [illegible] 8000. This was the altitude we bombed Munich from.

Fighter support was very good, mostly P51's and some P 47's.

About a dozen ME 109's were reported buzzing around in the clouds below us but were not strong enough to attack us. Our gas consumption was better than the day before and we landed with an hour's supply of fuel.

Bomb load was 4-500# demos and 6-500# incendiaries. We landed at the base at 1330. Takeoff was 0421.

July 18 Mission #5 Peenemunde, Germany

Take off this morning at [illegible] for targets at Peenemunde, Germany. The specific target was the Experimental Stations used for experimenting new weapons.

We left the coast at 0651 and headed up over the North Sea. Most of the trip was over water. After a couple of hours of over water flying we crossed over the neck of land joining Germany and Norway. We got light bursts of flak but nothing to worry about. We crossed over more water and then turned to make our run on the target. The bombs from [illegible] first wing over [illegible] bursting and they seemed to be squarely on the target. Flak was very intense over the target and the run seemed to take hours, but it was actually about 10 minutes.

When our bombs went away flak was bursting all around us. Here we made a 360 degree turn and came right back over the target again. It so happened that our group (high) had dropped our bombs and the other two of the wing had not, so we had to come over again.

[Illegible] our target [illegible] started back toward England following much the same route as we took to the target.

Near England several ships were forced to ditch, including a P-38. However, all were in contact with Air-Sea Rescue. We landed at 1401 at our base.

July 24 Mission #6 St. Lo, France

This mission today was a nice relief from the past several. We left the base about 1030 in the morning headed south past London and crossed the channel coming in by the Cherbourg peninsula now in American hands. About 10 minutes after entering the coast we were over our target. Flak was very light.

Our aiming point was just over the American lines and results were very good. The purpose of the mission was blasting the German lines preparatory to a big push by the Americans.

We left the enemy coast south of Cherbourg peninsula and arrived back in England without any incident. Bomb load was 18 X 250.

25 July Mission #7 St. Lo, France

Once again we took the same mission, this one even easier. No flak at all was observed over enemy territory. The same route was followed.

Our bombs were dropped 8 minutes before the big offensive was started.

Red flares marked the American lines on the ground and bombs were dropped just the other side of them.

Today 1500 heavies, 1000 mediums, and 500 fighter bombers took part in the raid. Bomb load was 18 X 250.

28 July Mission #8 Merseburg, Germany

We took off this morning on what we thought would be an ordinary mission, but it turned out otherwise. We took off quite early and assembled over the field at 500. Our route took us over the finger islands, down past Brussels, turning up toward Merseburg near Koblenz. Shortly after passing this city, the pilot and copilot changed seats, and before the pilot could reattach his oxygen mask, he passed out. The copilot tried to take over the stick and revive the pilot at the same time. He called for help from the engineer who finally got the pilot's mask working again. In the process we very nearly collided with our wingman but just missed by peeling off. We soon were back in formation and continued without incident to the target.

Over the target the PFF man got mixed up on identifying the target and got the city of Leipzig instead. Our wing was the only one to go over the city of Leipzig, besides target flak wasn't bad, but over Leipzig we really got it. Just after releasing our bomb over Leipzig, the top group, consisting of 12 ships, turned left while the rest of the wing turned right. Flak from the city came up and we had no chaff left to combat it. For the first time they threw up 100 mm shells and had us perfectly cornered. For almost 10 minutes straight we had flak bursting all around us. One shell made a direct hit on our waist window, tearing the armor plate around it all to pieces. Our waist gunner was hit in the arm and chest, but his flak suit saved his life by stopping those that hit his chest.

One piece entered the nose on the right just missing myself and the copilot, and severed an oxygen line. This cut all oxygen off from the bombardier, co-pilot and engineer, so they were forced to go on walk-around bottles for the rest of the trip.

Another piece entered the nose just missing the pilot and knocked out most of the instruments. Still another piece came through the nose and cut through a map case lying just beside me.

The radio operator just missed being hit also. Other flak hit control surfaces in the wings, rudder and tail, damaging them quite considerably. Both wings were badly damaged, the right having the main strut broken.

Finally we got out of the flak and tried to get back into the wing formation. Bandits were reported in the area, and had they seen us there without any support, we would have been “duck soup.”

Besides other flak damage, 5 gas tanks were punctured and two engines hit. Luckily the tanks had just been emptied, and the engines weren't seriously hurt.

We had an uneventful ---through nervous---trip home.

Out of our group of 12, five had feathered engines, but managed to make it home. No ships were shot down, although quite a few crew members were hit.

It took 5 days to repair our ship. We had 32 large holes and 100 or more smaller ones.

July 29 Mission #9 Merseburg, Germany

Today we took off for Merseburg again with a different ship. Our route followed was considerably different, this time being up over the North Sea, then southeast to the target. Today, the bombardier passed out from lack of oxygen and I revived him after working on him for a couple of minutes. At 25,000 feet it would take about 3 minutes after passing out to die.

We did not make the same mistake as yesterday, but hit the target squarely and turned away before crossing over Leipzig.

Target flak was about the same as usual. We suffered a few small holes. We arrived home without further incident.

Bomb load was 10 X 500 incendiaries.

3 August Mission #10 Mulhouse, France

Today's mission was deep into Southern France, the target being only about 10 miles from the German and Switzerland borders. Our route followed the borders of France & Germany, but inside Germany.

The high group (which we are in) bombed a marshalling yard at Mulhouse, but the lead & low groups decided to drop their bombs on the secondary target, the airfield at Metz. No flak was encountered at either target, but a small amount was sent up as we passed Brussels.

Bomb load was 18 X 250 GP.

4 August 1944 Mission #11 Peenemunde, Germany

Today's raid took us back once again to Peenemunde. The route followed was exactly the same as before. The flak over the target might be described as moderate and inaccurate because two groups approached the target at the same time, so the flak was split up between us. However, a ship immediately ahead of us was hit directly in the bomb bays, and it exploded.

5 August Mission #12 Neinberg, Germany

Today's mission was on underground oil storages near Neinberg, Germany. We carried 6 X 1000 pounders which were to fall on top of delayed action bombs from the group ahead. The entire route was visual and no flak was encountered over the target. Altogether the trip was uneventful.

6 August Mission #13(12B) Berlin, Germany

Our target today was an aircraft assembly plant in Brandenburg, on the outskirts of Berlin. Our route in took us up over the North Sea, and into Germany near Hamburg. The weather was clear of clouds, but haze restricted the downward visibility to about 10-15 miles.

We flew in north of Berlin until we were past the city, then turned south and then approached the target from the east. As we were flying south along the eastern side of Berlin, flak opened up on us and accurately tracked us even though we took

violent evasive action. At last we got away from it and proceeded to the IP. Other wings were hitting targets all around Berlin, also.

On the bomb run, we had no flak until the bomb doors opened, and it started all around us. We finally got our bombs away and got out of it. The trip back was uneventful. As we passed Hamburg, great oil fires had been started.

Bomb load was 10 X 500 delayed actions.

11 August Mission #14 Brest, France

Today's mission was a Ground Troop Support mission just on the coastline at Brest. Our route was entirely over water except for about 4 or 5 minutes over the target. Flak was light but accurate. Bombs were dropped on gun emplacements around Brest and results were good. Trip back was uneventful. Bomb load was 10 X 500 G.P.

12 August Mission #15 Paris, France

Today's mission took us to Buc Airfield on the outskirts of Paris. We took off in bad weather and started to climb to assembly altitude (14,000 feet). When we got there we were at the spot where all planes were to make formation, and we were still in the clouds. We kept climbing & climbing until we finally broke out of the clouds at 27,000 feet. Over VHF we were told to go to the point south of London where we were to leave the coast. Here we were to assemble at 14,000 feet. Once more we let down through and finally caught the formation.

Our route took us over our own lines on the way in and near the target, I started to get sick. Just as bombs were away over the target, I passed out from lack of oxygen. Finally the bombardier revived me. Flak over the target wasn't bad. We turned around and followed the same route out. Nothing else was encountered.

Bomb load was 38 X 100.

13 August Mission #16 Rouen, France

Today's target was a bridge across the Seine River south of Rouen. Our route took us into France just west of Caen. As we turned east towards the IP we got some heavy and very accurate flak. Over the target flak was terrific and a hit was scored on a plane just above us. The control surfaces were cut and the plane chandelled up, and dropped straight through the formation, narrowly missing several of us. It dropped on down, doing several loops, slow rolls and every other trick in the books. It still had 6 X 1000 pounders in it and made a big blast when it finally hit.

Our bomb load was 6 X 1000 G.P.'s.

15 August 1944 Mission #17 Cologne, Germany

Target for today was an airfield at Cologne in Happy Valley, the most heavily defended area in Germany. Our route took us south of the city and we bombed on a NW heading. Flak was plenty heavy but we escaped with minor damage. Several planes had engines knocked out and damage was pretty heavy throughout the squadron.

Trip back was uneventful. Bomb load was [sentence unfinished].

16 Aug 1944 Mission #18 Leipzig, Germany

Today's mission was the Daimler-Benz Aircraft Engine factory at Halle, near Leipzig. Our route took us in over the Zinder Zee and then southeast to Leipzig, then, into the target and back home on the same route. We were the 5th wing in the division assembly line, but the 6th was about 10 minutes late, so we were unprotected from the rear.

Just south of Hanover, near Kassel, we were suddenly jumped by 25 to 30 FW 190's. Our high group (which we were in) was the subject of the attack. 20 mm's started bursting around us like flak. Our tail gunner hollered "FW 190's!" and started firing at the bandit attacking our plane. It finally peeled off with smoke pouring out of his engine nacelle. I looked out at the ship on my left and saw a shell hit the right wing. It burst into flame, and then men started bailing out of the waist door. The first four out opened their parachutes immediately, and all four caught on fire. In no time at all the silk had burned to nothing and the men dropped like rocks. The [next] man out delayed his jump and made it OK. On our right a shell hit the waist section of a ship blowing out the side of the plane leaving

a gaping hole from the waist door to the ball turret. The waist gunner fell out, undoubtedly killed instantly. Another plane ahead of us was hit in the wing and a fire started in the wing tanks. The plane dropped from formation and blew up a few seconds later. About this time two .50 caliber shells entered the nose of our ship, one crossing my chest, cutting my interphone lines and rendering communication to other parts of the ship impossible. The other came through near the bombardier's foot, spraying its copper jacket and glass all over. The bombardier was hit just over the right eye, and I was hit just under the right eye, although in the extreme excitement I didn't realize I was injured. I saw the bombardier's eye bleeding and tried to get the co-pilot's attention; thinking the interphone was out all over the ship, I grabbed a walk-around oxygen bottle and started back through the catwalk. In the meantime I had noticed that the two .50 caliber shells had cut our oxygen lines, taking away all oxygen from the engineer, pilot, co-pilot, bombardier and myself. We all had to go on walk-around bottles which normally last about a half hour.

To get back to my story, I crawled back and tapped the copilot. He turned to look at me and I pointed to my right eye and then to the bombardier, trying to convey the idea that he was hit. The copilot, seeing that I was hit, thought I meant myself. He then came down into the nose after me and bandaged the bombardier's eye. It was then I discovered my eye was bleeding. However, it wasn't serious, so I didn't worry about it.

In the meantime our formation kept on towards the target (we had been about an hour away when attacked). Something had to be done about oxygen for the 5 men in the nose because a walk-around bottle wouldn't last forever. All the bottles in the plane were brought forward and as a bottle was emptied it was traded for a full one. The empty bottles were then shuttled back through the bomb bay to the radio room, where they were filled from the rear system. About this time we were nearing the target. On the bomb run I noticed that my oxygen bottle wouldn't last through "bombs away," so I started back for a new bottle. Standing between the co-pilot and pilot I didn't notice that my mask had frozen up. At this time I didn't remember anything until I came to in the radio room but later I found out that I had grabbed another mask and put it to my face, but this one wasn't connected to an oxygen bottle. The engineer, seeing my condition grabbed my arm and started pulling me through the bomb bays. However, I still had my heavy flak suit on, so this had to be pulled off me before I could squeeze through the bomb bay. I finally was revived in the radio room. In the meantime the bomb had been released and

little damage was received from flak. However, in the fighter attack, the bomb door mechanism had been knocked out, so the doors were salvoed, and had to be cranked up by hand.

On the trip back nothing more happened, except when we reached the field we had no brakes for landing, so a parachute was released out the tail just as the wheels hit the ground. This stopped our plane in plenty of time. When we got out of the plane we saw that a blade of a propeller had a hole in it, and the bomb door had a big hole in it, from a 20 mm. Luckily it hadn't set off our incendiary bombs.

Our bomb load was 10 X 500 IB's.

In that fighter attack, which lasted less than a minute, there were only 3 ships of 11 left in the high group. One of the 8 made his way back to the English coast and crash landed with four engines dead. Of his crew, two were dead, one badly injured, and one had bailed out because of a direct hit in his chest by a 20 mm shell. The rest of the 8 were all shot down, most of them exploding from wing fires in the gas tanks.

At the time we got the fighter attack flak was sent up to further break up our formation, but at that time, it was the least of our worries. Our bombers got several of the enemy fighters, as did our escorting 51.

24 August Mission #19 Kolleda, Germany

Today our target was an airfield, only a short distance from Leipzig. Our route in took us only a few miles this side of Berlin, down past Leipzig, and into our target. Our group did not drop its bombs, so went on to the secondary target, an airfield at Goslar. No flak or fighters were encountered, and the mission was a successful one. Our route out took us past Hanover, leaving the enemy coast on the Frisian Islands. Bomb load was [sentence unfinished].

26 August Mission #20 Gelsenkirchen, Germany

Our target today was in the heart of the Ruhr Valley-an oil refinery.

At briefing we were told we would bomb from 29,000 feet because of intense flak defenses. There were few clouds present, but the ground was almost covered by haze. A terrific amount of flak was sent up, but because of our altitude, it wasn't

quite as accurate. Our ship did suffer some damage, however. Because of the haze, bombing results were poor.

No fighters were encountered.

27 Aug Mission #21 Heligoland, Germany

Our target for today was almost the heart of Berlin. It was a terrifically long mission, and the target was an airfield in the city.

We left the English coast at 5000 feet and kept that altitude until halfway over the North Sea. We started to climb to altitude, but upon reaching 14000 feet, we began going through clouds. We were unable to see anyone else, but each time we broke out, the formation was still tight. Once, however, we entered the clouds and when we broke out, our high group was intact, but the lead and low were nowhere to be found. We circled and circled trying to find them. Meanwhile, ships in group, squadron and wing formations were coming back, some looking for others. Finally, the weather scout called and said it would be unable to penetrate the weather. About this time we were on the Danish peninsula, and flak was being thrown at us. Our wing decided to bomb Heligoland, so they climbed to 22,000 and bombed it. Our group, unable to find the rest, came home by themselves. Bomb load was 10 X 500 IB's.

30 August Mission #22 Kiel, Germany

We briefed today for the dockyards in the center of Kiel. Target was expected to be PFF. Takeoff was not until 1230.

Our trip up across the North Sea was uneventful. As we neared the coast the deputy leader (which Cannon was in) aborted because of a windmilling prop.

We entered the coast at the usual spot and as we turned on the IP, light flak (but accurate) was sent up. Over the target (which was PFF) flak was very light & inaccurate, and we suffered no damage. The trip home was uneventful. Bomb load was [sentence unfinished].

8 September Mission # 23 Ludwigshafen, Germany

Target today was an oil refinery and chemical plant at Ludwigshafen, next to [sentence unfinished]. Our route took us in over Caen and down by Paris. We encountered a high front near the front lines and had to climb to 27,500 feet to get over it, and then we let back down to 25000 feet, our bombing altitude. We turned on the IP which was 39 miles from the target and did not do a bit of evasive action on the bomb run. Because of this, the enemy had our altitude, ground speed & course perfect. As we neared the target they put up a terrific concentration of flak. The bursts were heavy with great balls of fire in the center, and were bursting all around. There was no way to turn to get out of it, so the formation broke up and went in all directions. Two ships were lost. One peeled off and exploded, the other crashed in France. Casualties were heavy, almost every ship having injured on board. Our ship was one of the fortunates. This is the mission in which Beasley was badly hurt. We arrived back at the base with only a few ships, the others coming back by themselves because of injured on board. Bomb load was [sentence unfinished].

[Diaries for remainder of Lt. Pfleeger's missions were not located].

