

Reprinted from "The History Of The 446th Bomb Group", by Harold E Jansen
Specially for this Group History the pilot Bill Turner
wrote the following story about his stay with the 446th and
his last mission on 12 June 1944.

THE DEATH OF 'F' FOR FOX, 705TH SQUADRON, 446TH GROUP

Our crew began assembling in February 1944 at the 18th Replacement Wing in Salt Lake City, Utah. From there we were transferred to Gowen Field, Boise, Idaho for combat training. The crew consisted of 2/Lt Clayton O. Addy, co-pilot. 2/Lt John W. Hill, navigator. 2/Lt Blaine Rarritt, bombardier, flight engineer Joseph J. Sabarich, radioman Waldo W. Glass, ball turret gunner Dean Aitkens, waist gunner A.C. Jjrossett and John L. Borowski, tail gunner, Harry Meeker, and myself as 1st pilot.

Following Combat Crew Training we, along with the other crews that had participated in the course were transferred on 21 April 1944 to AAF at Topeka, Kansas by troop train. At Topeka, we were issued a new B-24H from the factory, side arms, ammo for the machine guns and other equipment for overseas duty. It was here that 2/Lt John Hill became ill and we had him in sickbay. On 28 April 1944, we made two local flights to check out the plane. On 29 April 44 we received orders to proceed to Grenier AAF, Manchester, New Hampshire. From this point on no written orders were received until after we arrived in the United Kingdom. We remained overnight at Grenier and then flew to Goose Bay, Labrador at which point we were weathered in for several days and 2/Lt Hill was hospitalized. Finally the weather cleared and the base personnel wanted to provide us with another navigator for our flight. I refused the offer and we managed to get 2/Lt Hill released from the hospital with the promise that he would be readmitted on arrival in England.

Our flight from Goose Bay to Prestwick, Scotland was uneventful. We were to fly at 12,000 feet where we were to have the aid of a tail wind. This did not prove out and we altered our altitude a couple of hundred feet and found a tail wind. Our entire flight until we made landfall, was between an under-cast and an overcast. About halfway across we picked up a radio beam. The Germans reportedly had been also sending out a radio beam which would lead you toward France causing you to run out of gasoline and have to ditch or bring you within range of their fighters so 2/Lt Hill kept busy checking our position and course. The under-cast terminated just before we made landfall over Ireland. It was suddenly clear and sunny and never have I seen such bright green fields as we saw that day. 2/Lt Hill gave me the heading and we flew to Prestwick, Scotland where we landed after having been airborne for twelve hours and fifty-five minutes. We left our plane and the mail we had transported and after a meal we were transported to 8th Air Force Replacement Depot at Stone, England.

On 11 May 1944 we were transported to the 446th Bomb Group. We traveled by troop train making frequent stops to permit those with other destinations to detrain. The train as empty after our contingent detrained at Bungay in East Anglia. We were trucked from

the railroad station, through Bungay to the air base located at Flixton, a few miles from Bungay. The first thing we did was to take 2/Lt Hill to the flight surgeon and he was taken off flying status and after being confined in the base medical facility for a short time, he was sent to a centralized hospital. Due to this, he never flew a combat mission with the crew. Our missions were flown with various substitutes with flight officer Nutkis filling this position on at least three or four missions. The co-pilot and I were assigned quarters in a barrack occupied by other pilots of the 705th Squadron to which we were assigned. 2/Lt Barritt was assigned quarters in another barrack and the enlisted men were quartered together. One of the first things we had to do was to practice takeoffs and landings to familiarize ourselves with the field and the surrounding area which contained numerous air fields with much the same appearance as ours. After seven days of orientation flights as pilot and co-pilot we were ready to participate in our first mission. It was a maximum effort mission against Orly A/F at Paris, France. On this mission 2/Lt Addy was to fly as co-pilot with an experienced crew. I was to fly as co-pilot with an experienced crew. The rest of our crew was to stay behind at the base and would join 2/Lt Addy and me on next assigned mission when we would fly as a crew. I had never seen anything like it. Going into France I could see heavy bombers in formation as far as I could see ahead. Above us were hordes of fighters to protect us from German fighters. We were flying at 20,000 feet and below us at about 12,000 feet was a long line of groups of A-20's and B-26's heading for their targets. When we reached the IP we made about 90 degrees turn to the left and began our bomb run to the target, at which time I looked back and saw bombers following ours as far as I could see. I saw no enemy fighters. There was anti-aircraft fire but we sustained no hits though some shells burst close enough that we could feel the concussion. After dropping our bombs we returned to base in formation and peeled off in turn to land. Outside of seeing some puffs of black when the anti-aircraft shells exploded it had been no different than a training mission back in the 'States'. It was only after we had landed that I learned the plane in which 2/Lt Addy had been riding as co-pilot had not returned and its fate was unknown. With the passage of additional time no word was received so we had to assume they had gone down over France and hope for the best. (See 25 May 1944 mission).

We were assigned a ship in the 705th Squadron with the call letter 'F'. It was painted O.D. except for the tail which was yellow with a black bar running fore and aft at midpoint with an 'H' in yellow. We could not think of a name that all agreed upon so the plane was never named. We did get some red paint and more white paint and we painted the nose resemble an open shark's mouth full of white teeth. Our ground crew was not happy with this. They said it was bad luck; that there had been a plane in the Squadron painted in such a fashion before and that it had been shot down. We should have listened but we didn't. There wasn't much time to do anything except have a few drinks at the club and play some poker. The rest of the time was spent sleeping, attending briefings and flying missions. After I flew as co-pilot to bomb Orly A/F we flew as a crew on the following missions except for the positions of co-pilot and navigator. I estimate that of roughly half the missions we had Flight Officer Nutkis assigned as navigator and 2/Lt Willard Hill as co-pilot which was the makeup of the crew the day we were shot down.

All missions except the last were rather routine except for weather conditions in as much as we had no damage from flak or enemy aircraft. We did fly in some miserable weather on occasions. When an under-cast was expected over the target, a 'Pathfinder' ship equipped with radar was sent to lead the group and we would release our bombs when the lead plane made its drop. Sometimes the weather would be clear when we took off but on return some five or six hours later, there would be fog right down to the tree tops. On such occasions we would let down over the Channel where there would be no obstructions to run into when letting down through the fog. The ground forces would winch the barrage balloons down so there would be no cables to strike and we would fly to our base just above the tree tops. Under such conditions, when the plane was banked, the wing that was uppermost would be out of view in the fog.

Probably the most dangerous flight that we made was for the first mission on D-Day 6-6-1944 (See Mission report of 6 June 1944). Until 12 June 1944 we lead a charmed life. Our plane continued without a hit from enemy ground fire and we did not come under attack from the German fighter planes that we would occasionally see off to the side of our formation. During all these missions we had fighter escorts even when flying beyond their range as the escort would change so that those protecting us had plenty of fuel and ammo for a fight.

The day we were shot down all was changed. From shortly before D-Day our targets had changed from strategic to tactical. Our ground troops were meeting great opposition. When briefed for the mission on 12 June 1944 we were informed that we would form as a group but on reaching the French coast we would split up into various elements and go our individual way to attack the target we were assigned. Also there would be no fighter escort. We were told there would be fighters in the area attacking targets that would monitor a VHF radio channel and if called, they would to come our aid. It was dark when we got up and had breakfast. Afterwards we went to briefing for the mission. After the preliminary briefing, which was attended by the entire crew, a separate briefing was held for pilots, bombardiers and navigators. The enlisted men went to the plane to preflight it. The co-pilot obtained escape kits for the crew and also went to the plane to aid in the pre-flight.

For the first time, things did not go correctly. When I arrived at the plane I learned that 2/Lt Hill was not present. We waited and as the planes began moving out of their dispersal spots and along the perimeter strip to the head of the runway for takeoff, I called our control tower on the radio and told them the co-pilot had not shown yet, that we would taxi out and to send a co-pilot to meet us at the head of the runway. Just as we started moving toward the perimeter strip, 2/Lt Hill showed up and I stopped to permit him to board through the bomb bay. I had to resume taxiing as soon as he was aboard in order to get into our proper order among the ships moving on the perimeter strip. As a result none of the escape kits were distributed among the crew that day. This meant we would have no maps of the areas we would be flying over, no money, no compass and other items that could be useful if we found ourselves shot down and in hostile territory. This was the first

unlucky event of the day. We took off and climbed to 20,000 feet and formed up in Group formation. At the weather briefing, it had been expected that we would have to bomb through an under-cast, so the lead ship for our attack on the airfield was a plane from a Pathfinder Group. This plane was equipped with radar so that the target could be viewed through the cloud cover. At the coast of France, the Group broke up with the various elements going their separate ways to attack their assigned targets. I don't remember how many planes were in our element. It could have been six or nine plus the lead ship, I don't think it was more. We flew into the IP without incident, where we made a left turn and then flew straight into the target. The weather was clear, visibility unlimited and no under-cast. The bomb bays were opened and down below I could see enemy planes taking off from the field we were going to bomb. The second unlucky event of the day was that though the bomb run seemed perfect, for some unknown reason, the Pathfinder planes leading us, did not drop any bombs. It made a wide turn to the left with the formation following and after turning 180 degrees, made another bomb run on the target. Again no bombs were dropped and again the lead ship made a 180 degrees turn to the left. They must have realized that we had been over the target too long, for this was much tighter turn. Our plane was flying low left position which put us on the inside of the turn in the rearmost position and I was unable to stay in proper formation position without the plane stalling out. This was our third unlucky break.

As we straightened out to make our third bomb run, we were a little behind our ideal spot in the formation. On the third run, the lead ship dropped its bombs and we, like the rest of the formation released our bombs. Immediately after our bomb release, we were hit by enemy anti-aircraft fire in the bomb bay with shell fragments striking our right inboard engine causing a rather large oil leak. At this point I instructed the co-pilot to call for fighter help on the assigned VHF radio frequency and also directed radio-operator Glass to put in a call on his command set. I feathered the engine as I did not want it to freeze with the prop in unfeathered position resulting in excessive drag nor did I want it to overheat and possibly catch fire. Looking back, I may have made the wrong decision. It might have been better to have kept the engine running as long as possible and tried to keep up with the formation, as with the engine out we began losing ground. This could have been our fourth bad break.

Our bombs had just cleared the bomb bay when we came under attack from fighters. Sabarich was in the top turret firing his twin 'fifties'. From the position of his turret, they must have been coming in from 4 o'clock high. His guns were firing without interruption and the brass shell casings from the fired bullets were falling out of his turret and rolling around on the flightdeck. I was unable to hear any of the other gun positions firing. Suddenly the top turret stopped firing and at the same time I became aware of how hot it had become. I looked back to see if Sabarich was OK and I saw him out of the turret. He was standing by the radio-operator at the right, rear of the flightdeck. At the same time I observed that the close off for the flightdeck and the navigator and bombardier's compartment was standing open and that the bomb bay was on fire. It was a roaring fire, like looking into the fire box of a boiler. I knew that we had to get out before the plane

exploded.

I assumed that flak had damaged hydraulic lines and leaking fluid had been set afire by the attacking fighters which were ME-109's. What concerned me was that above the bomb bay there was a compartment containing the fuel transfer system and once the fire reached there, it could spread to the wing tanks. As it was, the fire isolated the navigator and bombardier, the four of us on the flight deck and the men in the rear of the plane behind the bomb bay.

I immediately pushed the button to sound the alarm bell throughout the plane and got on intercom. I could not hear the bell and intercom was out so I had no means of communicating with any except those of us on the flight deck. The problem for us was how to get out of the burning plane as the usual way through the bomb bay was cut off by the intense fire. I don't know how Sabarich and Glass stood it at the radio station. Neither of them was wearing their oxygen mask or flight helmets. The navigator and bombardier could in emergency leave their compartment by opening the nose wheel door and dropping out. Those in the rear compartment could escape through the camera hatch in the bottom of the fuselage. The one I was concerned about in the rear was Aitken, the ball turret gunner. If the electrical system was out, he would have to depend on someone cranking his turret into position so that he could leave it. I realized that the only way we could escape from the flight deck was through the top hatch behind my seat, which was intended as an escape hatch in event of ditching; also for use of the engineer for checking clearances when we taxied in close quarters. I had never heard of anyone bailing out through the top hatch and I realized we might strike the tail section, but there was no other way.

I motioned to Sabarich and he came forward. I told him to jettison the hatch door and to bail out. He went back accompanied by the co-pilot and they jettisoned the hatch door. When I next looked back I saw Sabarich back by the radio-operator's station with Glass, neither of them had oxygen masks on and though they both were wearing their parachute harness, neither of them had their parachute snapped to the harness. The co-pilot was standing on the locker below the hatch opening with the upper part of his body extending out of the top. At this point I feathered all engines as a precaution, though from the position of the hatch we should have been clear of all the props. By this time the plane was in a slow, flat spin. I went back and placed my shoulders under 2/Lt Hill and tried to lift and shove him out of the hatch without any success.

I returned to my seat and replaced my oxygen mask and tried to control the plane. Sabarich and Glass remained at the radio station, not hooked up to oxygen for some unknown reason. An ME-109 pulled up on the left side and maintained a position where his cockpit was opposite my position and we stared at one another at a distance of about 50 to 75 feet at the most. He must have been satisfied that we were finished, as he finally pulled up in a climbing turn to the right and out of my view. I left my seat again and went back to 2/Lt Hill standing part way out of the hatch, which was our only means of escape.

Sabarich and Glass remained where they had been. They still had their oxygen masks off and did not have their chutes engaged to the harness which they were wearing. They appeared to be in a daze, possibly from the lack of oxygen. Attempts to push 2/Lt Hill out proved unsuccessful until suddenly the ship lurched and this changed the force and he was propelled out of the plane. I motioned to Sabarich and Glass but they paid me no attention, so I climbed up on the locker and attempted to leave the plane. I was unable to force myself out until the plane gave another lurch, which threw me out. I found myself in a spread-eagled position, face down in space. I could see for miles. Though I was falling I felt suspended, it was a wonderful feeling. I must have made a lengthy free fall, for when my chute opened I received a terrific jerk and found myself swinging in a wide arc, fast approaching an orchard in which it was obvious I was going to land. My chute draped over the top of an apple tree and I found myself suspended with my feet about 6 feet off the ground and no branches strong enough to hold my weight to enable me to take the weight off my chute harness so I could disengage the leg straps. I was able to free the chest strap and the left leg strap, but with all my weight now on the right leg strap I was unable to free it. I kept working with it and finally got enough play in it that I was able to tum the male fitting from the female fitting on the harness, which let me fall to the ground at the base of the tree. I removed my flying boots and 'Mae West' and leaving them there, I took off in what I thought was a southerly direction to find a hiding place.

The fields that I passed through were cleared. I continued until I came to a ravine. It had bushes overhanging the top at intervals. The side that I approached sloped down for about 40 feet at about a 40 degrees angle to a quiet flowing stream about 6 foot wide. On the other side of the stream there was a footpath and beyond it was the other side of the ravine which contained bushes and brush.

The hillside I was on was bare except for trees and tree stumps 15 to 20 inches in diameter. About 150 feet to my left, the path veered sharply away from the stream into brush and bushes. At a slightly lesser distance to my right the path made a sweeping curve away from the stream and disappeared in a stand of trees and brush.

I quickly decided to hide on the bare side of the ravine where one would be least expected to hide. The trees intermingled with stumps appeared to have been planted from five feet to ten feet apart. It was so open and bare that the average person would not expect anyone to try and hide there. I choose a stump about one third of the way down the slope from the top, and where the top was heavily overhung with bushes which would prevent anyone from looking directly down upon me. The hillside was yellow clay. I slid down hid behind a tall stump about a third of the way down the slope. I sat down on the upper side of the trunk as close as I could get to it. I had scarcely got into position when I heard people approaching and I saw German soldiers approaching on my left along the path at the foot of the ravine. There was between 15 and 20 of them. Most of them were just walking along the path but a few were thrusting their rifles into the brush and kicking bushes. As they slowly approached and began passing my hiding place, I heard noise behind me indicating there were soldiers checking the bushes along the top of the

ravine. The bushes were heavy enough to prevent them from reaching the edge where they could have looked down and seen me and I don't think any of them would have expected anyone to try and hide in the terrain that I had chosen.

Both groups disappeared to my right and soon were beyond my hearing. At no time did I hear any shots fired. After waiting long enough to ascertain they were really gone, I removed my pistol from the shoulder holster and discarded the holster and my I.D. papers behind an adjacent stump and then settled down behind my stump to wait out the remainder of the day. Along toward evening, before it was dark, two men appearing to be French farmers approached on the path from the right. They would never have seen me except for their dog. It was a small terrier trotting abreast them on the slope of the ravine. I watched the dog close the distance on a path that would bring him directly to me.

He did not see me or scent me until he was about 12 feet from me, when he stopped abruptly and like a small dog will do, he began barking as loudly as he could. The two Frenchmen looked up to see what he was barking at and they immediately saw me. They immediately called the dog to them and turned and departed in the direction from which they had come. There was nothing that I could do at that point except hope they were friendly and would not report my whereabouts to the Germans. There were no further incidents during the daylight hours and as soon as it got dark I began walking out of the area. When the sun came up the following day, I was concealed in a field about 100 yards from a French farmhouse. I watched long enough to determine that there was just a man and a woman there. I then approached them and they took me quickly inside, where I was given food. The woman applied a putty-like medication to the burned areas on my head and then put me in the attached bam. Later in the day they brought a priest to me who could understand and speak a little English. He explained that after dark someone would come after me and guide me to the next village from where someone else would guide me to the next village.

That evening a young man, maybe 18 to 20 years old appeared. He had an old topcoat and a beret for me to wear over my flying suit and to cover my head. He was frightened and had me follow him at a distance of 15 to 20 feet. When we approached the village he was taking me to, he turned back and told me to go on. It was daylight when I entered the small village and on its outskirts I saw a young girl in front of a small house. I tried to talk to her, but I could not speak French and she could not speak English.

I made her understand that I was hungry and she took me inside where there was a woman who could have been her grandmother. After they fed me, I left and circled around the village until I found a hiding place in the field. That night I resumed my walk toward the beachhead that our troops held. It was rough traveling through the fields, which were surrounded by hedgerows, which caused detours which being without a compass, presented problems. I soon took to the roads and quickly learned that this was not good. In the first place there were curfew hours so being caught out would be enough to get me into trouble. Besides walking along the road aroused every farm dog for miles and their barking was enough to arouse the entire countryside. Also the Germans were patrolling

the roads on bicycles and you could not hear them approaching until they were right on top of you. As a result I began traveling by day and sleeping in the hedgerows at night. I obtained maps of the provinces from farms where I stopped for food. Early on a farmer had given me a bottle of wine and a knapsack to carry it in, so when I was hungry I would go to a farm house after determining it was safe, and ask for bread and wine. They would fill my bottle from their large wooden casks and provide me with a large slice of dark, home baked bread thickly spread with butter. When the days were overcast and I could not use the sun as a guide, I found myself walking in circles at times. The maps helped because I could maintain a fairly consistent course from locating it on the map.

All told I walked 10 days from in Brittany up into Normandy. There were times that I passed German soldiers on the roads but none of them were looking for a flyer so they paid me little attention and never stopped me for questioning. The farther I walked the more concentrated enemy troops became as the Germans were moving reinforcements toward the beach where our forces were located. At this point I met a French youth about 19 years old. He and his friend insisted that I would be captured if I continued and that I should stay with them until our forces advanced and liberated the area. By this time, I realized that there was no way I could contact our forces in time to prevent my wife and family from being notified that I was missing in action, so at last I agreed and for the following six weeks I was concealed and cared for by this youth and his family at great risk to themselves. Twice during this time German patrols came to the family house seeking men and horses for road repair and stealing bicycles. Fortunately they made no search, though we were hidden.

On 30 July 1944 we learned that U.S. forces were approaching. There was a great deal of air activity to destroy a nearby railroad bridge and we began to see German soldiers retreating through the surrounding fields. The next morning there was no doubt about it. We could hear the firing of many cannons and the Germans that we now saw retreating were running and appeared completely disorganized. By evening we heard that the Germans had been driven back over 40 miles and that our forces were in Ponterson. That evening, before dark my friends escorted me into a nearby village where the Headquarters were set up for the night and I made contact with our forces. It was a sad parting with my French friends to whom I owed my life. We did have a meeting in this country in 1963 and my wife and I visited them in France in 1972.

The next day, 1 August 1944 I began a trip to Cherbourg on my way back to base. Once there I was sent to 3rd Army, which meant retracting a part of my trip toward Avranches. The 3rd Army under General Patton was advancing so fast that we had difficulty in locating Headquarters but we finally did. Since I was the first evadee to come through 3rd Army, no one knew what to do with me and it was finally decided that I was to be sent to 9th Air Force Headquarters located at Omaha Beach near Cherbourg. From there I was sent on a C-47 to Heathrow Air Field, London, England. Supposedly arrangements had been made for someone from my Group to meet me, but no one was there so I caught a ride with a C-47 Troop Carrier and after dinner, they flew me to the 446th,

whose first knowledge that I was alive and back was my arrival.

I had made initial contact with our forces on the afternoon of 31 July and I did not reach my Group until the evening of 4 August. A day or two later Lt Barritt, Sgt Borowski and Sgt Meeker rejoined the 446th after being liberated when the 3rd Army continued its drive into Brittany. The three of them landed in the same vicinity and had been hidden by the French. They informed me that the rest of the crew was dead except for Nutkis of whom they had no knowledge. They also informed me that the French people had gone to the site where the plane crashed and there had been two bodies in the wreckage. Their benefactors had searched the area for me and had learned that a person answering my description had been seen but they could not find me or anyone who knew my whereabouts. I suspect that the men who identified me were the two Frenchmen with the dog in the ravine the day we were shot down and I was hiding. Starting that night I began traveling, always trying to mislead anyone I contacted as to my destination and route I was following.

For security reasons 2/Lt Barritt, Sgt's Meeker and Borowski and I were returned to the United States and reassignment. When we returned to Group, 2/Lt John Hill, our original navigator was out of the hospital and flying missions with another crew. 2/Lt Addy, our original co-pilot was still missing. The four of us of the original crew flew home on an Air Transport Command plane. We spent a day and a night in New York city and then we each went our separate ways. I later saw 2/Lt Addy in the States. He also had been an evadee. He had been hidden by people in Belgium and had been liberated when that country was freed. I continued on duty at various stations for about another year by which time the war had ended in Europe as well as the Pacific and got home in time for the birth of our first child.

My greatest worry had been that with the hydraulic and electric systems out that Aitken would have been trapped in the ball turret. I should have known Sgt Brossett would have seen to him getting out, even though it cost him his life. In my evaluation, Sgt Brossett was the outstanding hero for gallantry in flight against an armed enemy.

