

Milk Run?

by William Loughlin (779th)

On occasion the group would put up a "maximum effort". Basically, that meant flying all the aircraft that were in commission. Usually it required each squadron to put up fourteen aircraft and crews. It wasn't often.

On one mission on November 5, 1944, I believe the group and the crews were headed to the Budapest area but I was to fly (co-pilot) with another crew on what was to be a "milk run", an easy mission to a small town in Yugoslavia. The Germans were retreating northward and we were to bomb a road and railroad junction at Mitrovica. The group was sending seven aircraft, mixed among the squadrons. We were to fly the number two position on the right wing of the leader. There was even to be a flight or two of P-38s who would go in and shoot-up the place before we arrived. Sort of a flak suppression mission for the fighters.

Time to start engines and taxi. One aircraft had mechanical troubles and never taxied.

Take-off time. Six ships in the air. Landing gear wouldn't come up on one. Five airplanes head east.

Somewhere before the Yugoslavia coast, one of the airplanes has problems and has to ditch in the Adriatic. Four ships head for the target.

The bombardier and navigator in the lead ship missed finding the target the first time, so we swing around for another run. The fourth airplane isn't with us.

The three aircraft in a "V" head for the target. The German guns were not knocked out and they are putting very accurate fire at our altitude and in the area directly behind the lead aircraft and between the two wing men. It seems to me that we picked up speed on that bomb run to stay ahead of the flak. We picked up lots of holes and pieces of flak nicked the control cables in several places at the waist position. I remember going back to check them. Several strands were cut but enough remained to make it back to base. We never did see or hear from the P-38s. [Ed. of the 464th BG newsletter - The MIA roster lists #42-78521 lost that day. Page #22. Pilot Thomas S. Potts (777th). The loss is credited to "Other". Could this be the aircraft that ditched? Although there is no listing of fatalities - a

rare occurrence with B-24 ditchings. Also, could it be the missing fourth aircraft of which Bill speaks in the go-around to hit the target?]

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