



Flightline



Newsletter of the 780th Bombardment Squadron of WWII

June 2019

To represent group in new 15AF calendar

Famous photo is 465BG aircraft, crew

Perhaps you have seen this photo of a B-24 in flames with its left wing starting to peel off. It was a famous photo during the war, published in newspapers nationwide, and is one of the most recognized photos from World War II even today. But did you know the ship was piloted by the CO of the 781st Squadron, that it carried a mostly 783rd Squadron crew, and that its pilot made a harrowing attempt to evade capture? This photo will represent the 465th Bomb Group in the 15th Air Force calendar that is being created for the 15th Air Force reunion in September (see back page). Here now is the story behind it:

"Blue I", also known as "853", was attached to 783rd Bomb Squadron. On November 21, 1944 it was the lead aircraft for both the 465th BG and the entire 55th Bomb Wing on a mission to the synthetic oil refinery complex in Blechhammer, Germany.

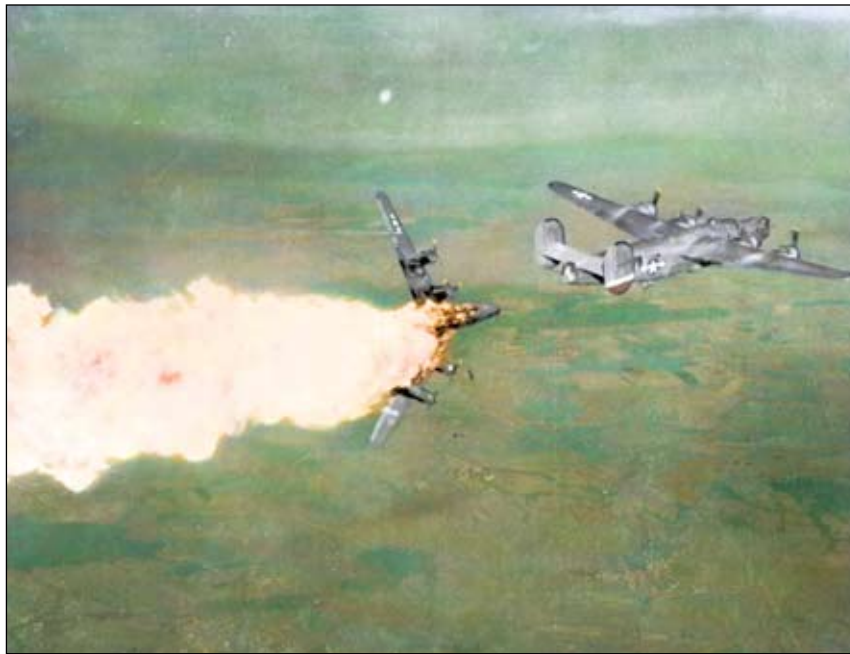
According to the website historicdogtags.com, "Blue I" was a tactical marking, not a given

name. At the end of 1944, 15AF bomb groups were divided into "red" and "blue" forces. "Blue" was better equipped with electronics and was used for long distance missions and for bombing without visual target identification.

"Blue I" was designated lead aircraft for the group and the wing. The lead aircraft carried extra crew, usually the lead navigator and the lead bombardier for the entire group or wing. The ball turret was removed and replaced with a BTO radar.

Lead pilot was Lt. Col. Clarence "Jack" Lokker, commander of the 781st Squadron. His crew came from the 783rd Squadron and consisted of Capt. Milton Duckworth

(co-pilot), Lt. Joseph Kutger (lead navigator for the BW), Lt. Joseph Whalen (radar operator), Lt. Robert Hockman (bombardier), Lt. Grosvenor Rice (nav), Sgt. James Bourne (waist gunner), Sgt. Jack Rabkin (top gunner), Sgt. Paul



This color photograph of "Blue I" was included with press releases and published in major newspapers in 1944.

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Your News & Letters

Kathy,

Sorry to have been out of touch for so long. I am Charles F. Dodge's daughter. I have been getting Flightline for years and always enjoy it so much. My dad has been gone since 2001 - he passed away one day after his 77th birthday. My mom and he attended several reunions; I attended one. My mom just turned 88. I have retired and live with her now in Midland. My new address is:

404 Pinewood Court, Midland, TX 79705. Thanks for keeping the memories alive.

Rebecca Dodge

Editor's note: Great to hear from you, Rebecca! I remember your parents very well from the reunions. This is a great squadron, and I'm glad to keep everyone together as much as a small, quarterly newsletter can do. Drop me a note any time!

*Thank You
Rebecca
Dodge
for your
donation to
Flightline*

...continued from front page

Flynn (tail gunner), Sgt. Edmund Miosky (radio) and Sgt. Lee Billings (engineer).

On November 21, the Lokker crew took off at 0742. The formation formed up at 5,000 feet and set a course to the target at 0841. Over the Initial Point the formation encountered heavy overcast. A few moments later visibility started to improve and suddenly the target appeared. Lokker decided to climb from 22,000 feet to 23,000 feet to avoid the large caliber flak.

Events started to happen quickly at this point. Just before the bomb run Lokker's plane received a direct hit between the number 2 engine and the fuselage. The left wing started falling off, the aircraft rolled over, and the bomber immediately burst into flames. It is this moment that was captured in the photo.

Through the waist window Kutger noticed the wing falling away and that there were mere seconds to leave the plane. He shouted to Whalen to abandon ship but Whalen was either wounded or killed since Kutger saw no reaction in his eyes. Kutger grabbed a parachute with his right hand and jettisoned the bomb load with the left. He then jumped into the bomb bay, at the same time trying to put on his chute. He fell 20,000 feet before finally succeeding. He pulled the handle and after just a couple of swings under the canopy he touched the ground. He was

convinced that no one else made it from the bomber.

Meanwhile, Lokker quickly gave up attempts to save the ship and left through the top hatch. Rabkin, in the top turret, had just removed his seat and was on his way out when the plane suddenly tumbled and he fell back in. He likely was killed in the flames. Duckworth tried to get out through a waist window, but failed when the plane started spinning. He crawled to the top hatch, grabbed the top turret's barrels and bailed out. When leaving the bomber, he noticed Hockman and Rice still in the nose. Hockman managed to put his chute on and get out through the nose wheel bay. Rice had been navigating from the nose turret and was trapped without his chute. Bourne, Billings, and Miosky were in the waist. Miosky was last seen standing over the escape hatch with his chute on. The explosion probably threw him away from the hatch, trapping him in the ball of fire. The same explosion threw Bourne and Billings out. They could not remember the moment they left the ship but on their descent they managed to open their chutes and land safely, albeit severely burned and wounded. Bourne recalled that he was standing at the waist guns, trying to get to the tail gunner. Flynn was trapped in the tail turret without a chute.

Despite the loss of the Lokker lead aircraft, the formation had to complete the mission. The

TAPS



Winson Jones, of Sequim, Washington, passed away July 9, 2018 at the age of 92. He was born November 5, 1925 at Chalmers, Indiana, and was a top turret gunner with the 451st Bomb Group in Italy, completing 35 missions. Winson always considered this experience to be the most difficult challenge of his life, coupled with the feeling that he subsequently was more or less living on borrowed time. After the war he organized four 451st BG reunions. Professionally, Winson was a CPA in Chicago and then a consultant for the Eisenhower administration, notably coordinating the establishment of the U.S. Post Office's electronic payroll system for 500,000 employees. He later moved to Seattle and eventually began a second career as a real estate investor. Winson is survived by his wife, Diane; daughter, Marsha; sons, Michael (Kathy) and Craig (Jennine); step-children, Susan (Sandy) Gordon and David Fisher; and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

deputy lead bombardier finally managed to see the synthetic fuel plant and released its bombs, but the formation failed to leave the target area as scheduled because of the loss of Lokker as the lead ship and serious damage to the deputy lead. Lokker's other wingman was hit soon after the lead ship, went into a dive and exploded. The B-24 flying directly behind Lokker flew through the "Blue I" fireball and "collected" its left main gear. With the tire still burning, it stuck to the nose of the aircraft.

Those killed inside the Lokker aircraft were Whalen, Rice, Rabkin, Flynn and Miosky. Those who bailed out were: Lokker, Duckworth, Kutger, Hockman, Bourne and Billings. Among the survivors, all but Lokker were taken prisoner. After he was liberated Duckworth visited Lokker's widow and told her what happened to her husband, as best he knew. Duckworth said that he and Lokker bailed out and were captured by a German farmer. The farmer took them to his farm and told his wife to guard them while he looked for more airmen. About 1 p.m., the farmer's wife permitted Lokker and Duckworth to escape. They immediately headed towards the Oder River, hoping to make it to Poland to get help from the Polish underground. About 6 p.m., they ran into a patrol of German soldiers who immediately pursued them, firing their rifles. Duckworth was captured since he was far behind Lokker. The last time Duckworth saw



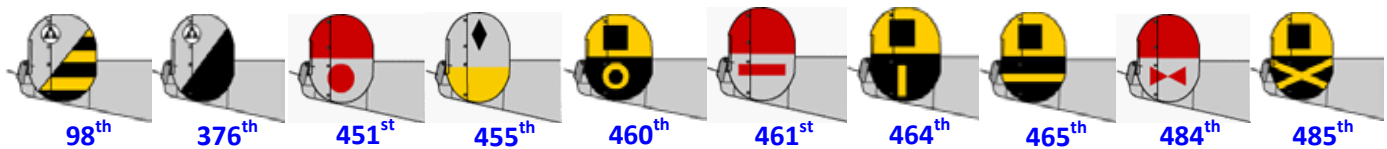
Left: Lt. Col. Lokker in the 781st control tower; right, Sgt. Bourne after the war, looking at the famous photo of "Blue I."

him, Lokker was running into a thick clump of underbrush. Two Germans were then chasing him. That was the last time anyone saw him alive. After the war, captured reports indicated Lokker was buried in Langslieben, Silesia, Germany. His remains were found and returned to his home state of Michigan.

Other websites consulted to write this article were: www.warhistoryonline.com/guest-bloggers/true-story-behind-famous-photograph.html, www.americanairmuseum.com/person/241661, and www.givemeliberty01.com/2017/08/09/the-true-story-of-a-famous-world-war-two-photograph/

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Flightline



• 2019 15AF BOMB GROUPS REUNION •

Sept. 19-22, 2019 • Wyndham Garden Dallas North Hotel • Dallas, TX
Reservations 972-243-3363 • Ask for Kharin Hanes • Mention "Bombardment Groups Reunion"

Thursday, 9/19

Registration • Hospitality Room • Sandwiches, Snacks & Drinks • Optional Informal Welcome Dinner • Brief Welcome & Info Meeting • Hospitality Room

Friday, 9/20

Tour AT&T/Cowboys Stadium • Lunch • Social Hour • Cash Bar & Group Dinners • Hospitality Room

Saturday, 9/21

Ladies Crafts Demo • Veterans Presentations • Veterans Group Photos • All Groups Banquet Social Hour, Cash Bar, Dinner • Musical Entertainment by Ladies Liberty • Hospitality Room

Sunday, 9/22

Optional Church Service • Military Memorial Ceremony • Tour Frontiers of Flight Museum • Informal Farewell Dinner • Hospitality Room

Detailed itinerary at www.465th.org