



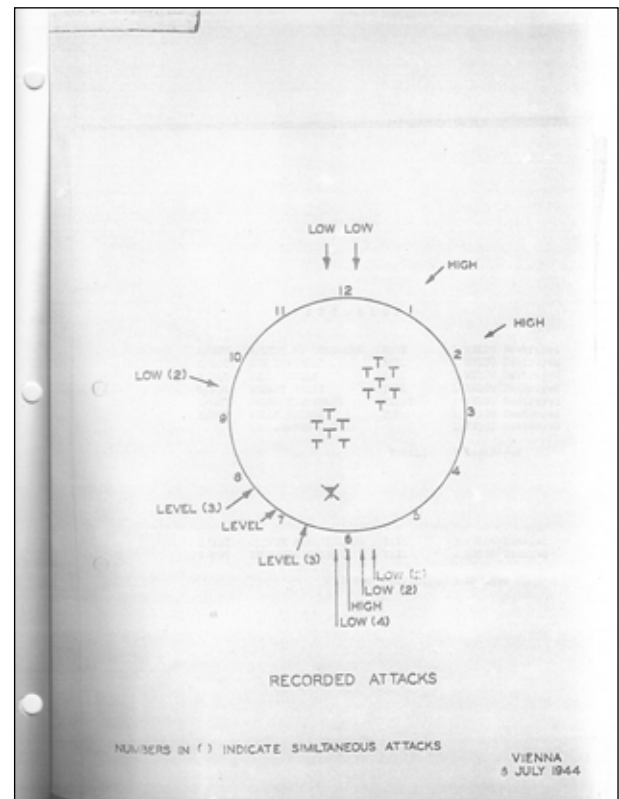
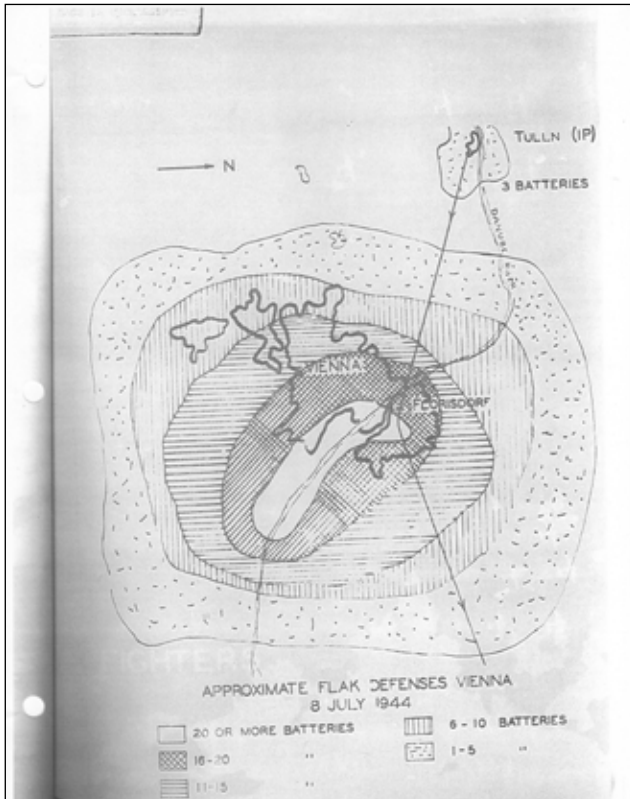
# Flightline



Newsletter of the 780th Bomb Squadron of WWII

March 2013

## *Mechanics, Gunners Demonstrate Exceptional Skill* **Squadron Contributes to Group DUC**



Pictured above are two of the supporting documents for the Distinguished Unit Citation. On the left is a map showing the intensity of flak defenses around the Florisdorf target. On the right is a chart illustrating enemy attacks on the two boxes of 465th BG bombers that participated in the mission.

The 465th Bombardment Group has the distinction of earning two Distinguished Unit Citations (DUC) - thanks in large part to the skills of the 780th Bombardment Squadron.

The DUC was first earned for a mission on 8 July 1944 to the Florisdorf oil refinery in Vienna, Austria. According to the narrative submitted for the citation, the 15th Air Force was in the midst of a concentrated effort to knock out German oil supply and communication cen-

ters. Florisdorf was one of the most important of these centers.

In previous days the group had flown several long-distance missions which grounded many of its planes. Many of these aircraft were original planes to the group and were due for engine changes. Ground crews worked feverishly through the night to get the remaining planes

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# Your News & Letters

Gin Sommers, widow of Frosty Sommers, is trying to get in touch with John McParland. John, if you are reading this, or if anyone has John's contact information, please get in touch with Gin. Her phone number is (608) 742-3941.

Bill Edwards is known for a lot of things: his sweet drawl, his knack with the ladies, his tan, and his Christmas card - which always is a photo of him dressed as Santa on the beach. This year a number of us were concerned when we didn't get Bill's annual Christmas cheer in the mail. The *Flightline* sent a message to Bill's daughter, Debbie Haggerty, on Facebook. Philena Steele also was worried about Bill and had her daughter, Tanya Beitz, working her fingers on the phone and computer. Tanya finally got through to Bill - and all's well. Bill was in the hospital and is back home and feeling much better. We'll all be looking forward to Bill's Christmas card this year. Stay well, Bill!

Speaking of the Steeles, Tanya expressed the desire to have a mini reunion. If anyone is interested in getting together this summer or fall let the *Flightline* know at [johnkath5@comcast.net](mailto:johnkath5@comcast.net) and we'll pass the word on to Tanya.

Here's a note from Frank Diedrichs:

*Dear Kathy,*

*Thanks for the thank-you note and for your continuing the Flightline. Sort of wondering how many of us ol' guys are still around to read it. And, are the progeny of the ol' guys still interested?*

*Seems so long ago - really "historical" in a way - that it makes me curious as to how the new generations really view what to us were great days not only for ourself esteems but for the country! Ah, well - sorry - the musings of an old relic!*

*I remember Vern Larson - I called him "Swede" - don't remember why. Didn't know your granddad - like me, however, as a "replacement" bombardier getting shot-down - he lost his life as a shot-down "replacement." Not a good position!*

*I'm enclosing a few pages from my "wartime journal" for the activities during that fateful December of '44 and January '45.*

*Me retire? Hah!*

*Fond regards,  
Frank Diedrichs  
Bombardier*

(Editor's note: Frank responded to the *Flightline*'s December request for more stories. His contributions will start appearing in the June

issue. I told Frank about my grandfather's brief time and only mission with the 780<sup>th</sup>, and asked if he knew my grandfather's pilot, Vern Larson. In answer to Frank's questions: about 115 people receive the *Flightline*. I don't know all the names on the mailing list but a good bunch are children and grandchildren of 780<sup>th</sup> veterans. Many of these children and grandchildren started attending the squadron reunions. I would say, based on these two facts, that there are many families out there who are interested in your stories. When the squadron disbanded it felt it was important to keep the *Flightline* going as long as possible. If you send 'em, I'll print 'em.



*Language lesson: an Italian boy uses a B-24 as a blackboard to teach airmen phrases, such as "too much."*

...continued from front page

ready. By the morning of 8 July, 22 of the 23 available group aircraft were ready.

In-flight mechanical problems resulted in eight aircraft returning early from the mission. Despite this reduced force, the remaining 14 bombers formed two boxes and continued on, led by Lt. Col. Joshua H. Foster.

According to '780' *Memoirs*, this was Mission 41 for the 780<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron. One

of the eight returned aircraft and five of the 14 continuing aircraft were from the 780<sup>th</sup>.

Over the target, on the bomb run, all 14 planes were "riddled with flak holes from nose to tail." They dropped 34.5 tons of bombs, 64.8 percent within 1,000 feet of the target. Turning off the target, the group then encountered 40-50 enemy aircraft - triple the number of the group itself. One bomber was badly damaged and dropped out of formation. After 20 minutes the fighters broke off after losing seven of their own and three more badly damaged. As late as September 1944 Florisdorf was still unoperational.

Due to their exceptional performance under extreme circumstances during this mission the 465<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group received the Distinguished Unit Citation. The 780<sup>th</sup> supplied more than one third of the group's participating aircraft, and two 780<sup>th</sup> gunners - Billie Palmer of Iowa and Robert Wiley of Indiana - were credited with destroying two of the German fighters.

The Distinguished Unit Citation is now called the Presidential Unit Citation. In order to receive this award a unit must display gallantry, determination, and esprit de corps under extremely difficult and hazardous conditions so as to set it apart from and above other units participating in the same campaign. This unit award equals the Distinguished Service Cross, Air Force Cross or Navy Cross for an individual.

The citation is transcribed on the back cover. Special thanks to Paul Jarvis for sending the *Flightline* the documents pertaining to this award.

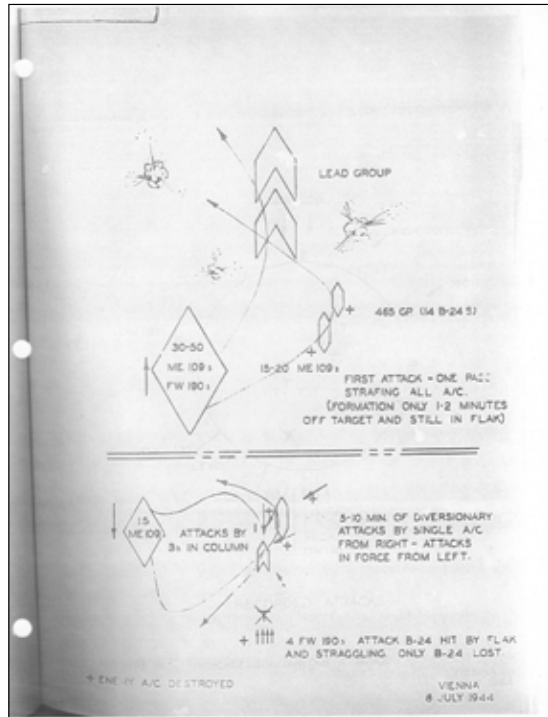


Diagram showing how enemy aircraft attacked group formations and were destroyed.

## TAPS



Eugene Koscinski, 89, passed away on February 5, 2013, in Calabasas, California. Originally of Detroit, he was a B-24 bombardier with the 780<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron. He was a founding member of *Wings Over Wendy's*, a World War II veterans group in West Hills. He leaves his wife, Goldie; three children, Mark, Pat, and Jill; two grandsons; and a brother.

780<sup>th</sup> grandson Joshua Hummel wishes to add: *Thank you to the Koscinski Family for always being so kind and treating me like family. Gene and I met five years ago at Wings Over Wendy's. He was a charismatic, jovial, and compassionate friend, who would always care deeply of any person's stories and life just as the rest of his family. Gene had so many interesting stories of his time working in an airplane factory, owning salons, growing up in Michigan, life during World War II and Pantanella, and his family. I will remember Gene often and fondly. I feel blessed to share in more times with Goldie and Pat Koscinski and for the years Gene and I shared as great friends! God bless. Joshua*

Kathy Le Comte  
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Springfield, IL 62704-2832

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## *Flightline*

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**26 October 1944**  
**CITATION OF UNIT**

**Keep 'em Flyin'**  
The *Flightline* is read  
by more than 110 780<sup>th</sup>  
veterans, families  
and friends. Keep the  
newsletter flying by  
contributing. Drop us  
a line at [johnkath5@comcast.net](mailto:johnkath5@comcast.net), or write  
to the return address.

Under the provisions of Circular No. 333, War Department, 1943, and Circular No. 89, Headquarters NATOUSA, 10 July 1944, the following unit is cited for outstanding performance of duty in armed conflict with the enemy: 465TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP. For outstanding performance of duty in armed conflict with the enemy. During the intensive aerial campaign against the Axis oil and communications centers, the Group was ordered to attack and destroy the Florisdorf Oil Refinery and Marhsalling Yard at Vienna, Austria. A Successful completion of this important mission would deprive the enemy of vitally needed gas and oil supplies for her mechanical ground forces and her air force at a most critical period in the war. Although sustained operations to targets deep in enemy territory has grounded many of the Group's aircraft, the ground crews labored tirelessly and efficiently throughout the night prior to the attack, to ensure that their aircraft were in the best possible mechanical condition for the operation. On 8 July 1944, 22 B-24 type aircraft, heavily loaded with maximum tonnage, were airborne and set course for their destination. Mechanical difficulties forced eight of the bombers to base thus seriously weakening the defensive formation. Undaunted by the seemingly overwhelming odds, molding the remaining ships into a tight formation, the gallant crews continued on course. Approaching the target the formation encountered an extremely heavy anti-aircraft barrage which inflicted severe damage on the Group before it reached the objective. Heedless of the intense and heavy enemy fire, displaying superior coordination and outstanding professional skill, the courageous crews brought their aircraft through for a highly successful bombing run, inflicting grave damage to vital enemy installations and supplies. Leaving the objective, their formation was aggressively attacked by approximately 25 enemy fighters. In the ensuing fierce enemy battle, maintaining a perfect formation to enhance the effective defensive fire, the gallant gunners of the Group accounted for seven enemy aircraft destroyed and three damaged, with their own losses held to a minimum of one bomber. Later reconnaissance revealed that the Florisdorf area was rendered inoperational at a time when the war was approaching a critical stage. By the outstanding gallantry, airmanship and grim determination of the combat crews, together with the outstanding technical skill and devotion to duty of the ground personnel, the 465<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group has reflected great credit upon itself and the Armed Forces of the United States of America.

By command of Major General TWINING  
R.K. TAYLOR  
Colonel, GSC  
Chief of Staff