

Harry Swift Mission Account

This is the information of Harry's mission that I was able to put together. The information was obtained from: Missing Air Crew Reports from the National Archives; "Keep The Show On The Road", by Quentin Bland; Mighty Eighth Combat Chronology and Supplement.

Harry's first (and only) mission was on 22 June 1943. This was also the first mission for the 384th Bomb Group. On the 22nd, the Group was assigned an alternate, comparatively "easy" target (there was no *easy* target; every bombing mission was wrought with danger), the General Motors plant at Antwerp, Belgium. The target of the main strike force on the 22nd was a chemical plant at Huls, deep in the Ruhr Valley of Germany. The 384th mission was a diversionary attack, with the hope of drawing German fighters from the Huls strike force. He flew in B-17 No. 42-30076.

The 384th departed Grafton Underwood at 0619 hours, British Double Summer Time, meeting up with the 381st Bomb Group (also flying its first combat mission) and flew across the English Channel onto the continent. Approximately 10-15 miles from the target, the Bomb Groups were attacked by 60 German Focke Wulf 190 fighters. The fighters came at the 384th Group 8-12 at a time, one fighter after the other. All B-17 bombers from both Groups made it over the target at 0830 hours, at an altitude of 23,000 feet. Visibility over the target was unlimited and there was no cloud cover; 80% of the bombs fell within 500 yards of the aiming point.

Flak over the target was moderate, the 80 mm shells exploding at the correct altitude, but behind the two Groups, causing no damage to the bombers. As soon as the bombers cleared the flak over the target, German fighters came at them again. About half way to the coast eight FW 190s attacked No. 076, setting three engines on fire. The bomber continued on for a few minutes before starting to spiral downward. The centrifugal force was so great, it was difficult for the crewmen to exit the aircraft. In the nose compartment, the bombardier assisted the navigator in bailing out, but was unable to exit the nose door himself. The top turret gunner was the only other crewman to bail out. The tail gunner could not open the tail escape hatch and when he went to the waist hatch, could not get that door open, either. He was trapped in the falling aircraft. Approximately 4 km from Goes, Holland, No. 076 exploded in the air. Five of the crewmen (pilot, copilot, radio operator, ball turret gunner, right waist gunner) still in the plane were blown free and survived, as did the navigator, who had bailed out. The top turret gunner was found near the wreckage, his chute full of bullet holes and a wound to his head that had blown away his face. The remaining three crewmen (bombardier, left waist gunner, tail gunner) were dead in the wreckage.

Crew:

Pilot: Robert J. Oblinski (Chicago, Illinois)

Copilot: Harry R. Swift (Pontiac, Illinois)

Navigator: Richard E. Grandpre (South Dakota)

Bombardier: Douglas H. Turner (Los Angeles, California)

Flight Engineer: Ernest M. Trickett (Grove City, Ohio)

Radio Operator: Oliver K. Reed (Anderson, Indiana)

Left Waist Gunner: George W. Waterman (Passaic, New Jersey)

Right Waist Gunner: William Counihan (St. Paul, Minnesota)

Ball Turret Gunner: George F. Werbanec (Pittsburg, Pennsylvania)

Tail Gunner: Harold J. Cooke (Concord, North Carolina)