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BACKGROUND PAPER

ON

AWARDS RECEIVED BY ENLISTED PERSONNEL: PLOESTI RAID

1. "The War Department announced on November 17, 1943, in a press release, the award of decorations to 1,548 officers and enlisted men of the United States Army Air Forces who participated in the low-level bombardment attack on the Ploesti oil refineries in Rumania on August 1, 1943, which destroyed 42 per cent of the Rumanian refining capacity in a devastating blow at vital Axis war economy." (7:01)

The purpose of this background paper is to inform you of the awards that were received by the enlisted personnel of the Ploesti Raid on 01 August 1943. Included in this paper I'll cover four main areas: (1) the history of the mission, (2) citations received by selected enlisted personnel, (3) the disposition of the enlisted personnel after the raid, (4) the types and numbers of the awards received by enlisted personnel. With this purpose in mind, let's cover the history of the PLOESTI Raid.

2. The history of the PLOESTI Raid (Operation "TIDAL WAVE") can best be covered by showing you why the decision was made to make a

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low-level bombardment mission versus a high-level one, followed by information about the mission, the units involved, finally, the type and number of aircraft used in the mission. Now let's take a look at why the decision was made to make the mission a low-level one. First,

"The essential problem in the PLOESTI mission was how to destroy a number of small, dispersed and well-protected targets with a force of 200 aircraft or less. Analysis of the relative advantages and disadvantages of high and low-level attacks led to the conclusion that one low-level attack, boldly executed, might well result in attaining the desired degree of destruction. At high altitude the same degree of destruction could be achieved but it would require a period of months against ever-increasing opposition.

Advantages of low-level attacks were believed to be as follows:

- a. From low-level relatively small targets can be picked out from their surroundings.
- b. Accuracy after individual

targets are selected is greater than from high altitude, and a higher percentage of bombs dropped will be effective.

- c. A smaller force would be sufficient.
- d. Medium cloud cover would not affect the mission.
- e. If successful, destruction or dislocation of so much refining capacity in one attack would have a powerful influence on enemy morale.

In addition it was believed that a low-level attack would achieve a greater element of surprise. The defenses, primed for high-altitude attack, would be confused and inefficient. There would be little danger from heavy flak and the surprise from a low-level attack might render ineffective a large proportion of enemy ground and air defenses such as light flak, fighters, ballons, and smoke pots.

The principal disadvantages of the low-altitude method were the inexperience of the crews in this form of attack, the fact

that the B-24 was not designed for low-level bombing, and the possibility that crews might not easily be convinced of the advantages of low-level attack.

From existing records it appeared that a high-level attack had practically no chance of completely destroying the target in one mission. In computing the required number of planes to accomplish the objective from high altitude the Operations Analysis Section of the Ninth Air Force estimated that 1,370 planes over the targets would be necessary to provide 90 per cent assurance of hitting each structure at least twice, assuming a circular probable error equal to 1,470 feet. Allowing 20 per cent for turnbacks this estimate would require about 1,700 initiated sorties to achieve the desired degree of destruction. While a high-level attack could be repeated until sufficient hits had been obtained to serve the purpose, considerable time would be required. It was estimated, for example, that one month to six weeks would be necessary to fly nine missions of 120 planes each, while twenty such missions would require two to three

months. If it was granted that successful destruction of the target would justify possible expenditure of the entire force, then the time element and its effect on the war appeared to be a deciding factor in favor of a quick knockout blow through a low-altitude attack." (4:4-5)

Second, the mission itself was a long and treacherous one with ~~many~~ many perils, but due to outstanding mission planning, it was a total success. According to General Timberlake (during the mission, then Colonel Timberlake), in an interview in May 1965,

"The planning was absolutely meticulous, except for one thing. And that was the intelligence of the anti-aircraft guns, the ground weapons they had around Ploesti. For example, we had people who had lived in Ploesti, oil engineers, English oil engineers, develop absolute scale models for every--all of the refineries that we were going to hit. We had these scale models put down on the ground, photographs taken so they could see them as the pilots would see them coming in. We took the town of Ploesti and the six refineries right around it, and we built an absolute model in the desert in Libya. However, we did

not have the intelligence as to the amount of defenses they had around there, and as a result, we lost a lot more airplanes."

(6:10)

With the meticulous planning and practice refined and honed to a fine edge, the day arrived to launch the mission. "August 1, 1943, was chosen as D Day and low-level attack was executed in accordance with Field Order #58, IX Bomber Command." (3:4) "The United States B-24 Liberator bombers flew a round trip of more than 2,000 miles on the mission. They were opposed by heavy machine-gun fire, light flak, heavy 88-milimeter anti-aircraft fire, barrage balloons and practically every type of aircraft the Axis had in the area." (7:1) Third, Operation "TIDAL WAVE" was carried out by the Ninth Bomber Command which was comprised of six bombardment groups flying B-24 Liberator heavy bombers. The six bomber groups that participated in Operation "TIDAL WAVE" were the 44th, 93rd, 98th, 340th, 376th and the 389th. "Thirty seven B-24s from the 44th Bomb Group attacked Ploesti blue, white, and dropped 64,640 lbs of bombs from 120 to 250 ft.." (1:-->) "Thirty Seven B-24s of the 93rd B Group attacked the oil fields at Ploesti. 32 a/c reached the target and dropped 113,300 lbs from 150 to 300 ft." (1:-->) "46 B-24s of the 98th Group attacked the oil fields of Ploesti. 13 aircraft were reported to have reached the target and dropped 55,640 lbs of bombs from 220 to 250 ft." (1:-->) "23 B-24s of the 340th Group departed Hergla L.G. to attack Bonte." (1:-->) "28 B-24s of the 376th Group. Target

Ploesti. 26 a/c reached the target and dropped 62,000 lbs from 125 ft also 10 clusters of incendiaries." (1:--> "29 B-24 of the 389th Group. Target Ploesti. 19 a/c reached target Campina and dropped 67,000 lbs from 200 to 700 ft." (1:--> This was an extensive history of the Ploesti Raid or Operation "TIDAL WAVE". However, it was necessary in order that you will better understand the significance of the number of enlisted personnel that lost their lives during this mission. In a Ninth Air Force report dated August 1, 1943, it couldn't have been said simpler. "In 1st min-altitude bombing by a large formation, 177 B-24s raid PLOESTI from BENGHAZI base. 80 enemy a/c intercept; US losses heavy."

(2:17) With this history in mind, let's take a look at some citations of selected enlisted members who received awards and decorations for the Ploesti Raid.

3. "All 48 states and the District of Columbia are represented by the recipients of the awards, which included 47 Distinguished Service Crosses or Oak Leaf Clusters thereto." (7:01) I cannot possibly cover them all, therefore, I'm only going to present you with ten selected citations of these valorous individuals. First, Frederick W. Durand, a Staff Sergeant, from Gile, Wisconsin, received the Distinguished Service Cross for his devotion to duty.

"FREDERICK W. DURAND, Staff Sergeant,
Gile. Posthumous. As tail gunner of a
B-24, Staff Sergeant Durand manned his
guns efficiently. The bomber in which

he was serving was severely damaged while over the target and three of the engines were incapacitated, making the plane an easy victim for enemy fighter craft. Sergeant Durand stood by his guns to battle the attacking planes, and so skilfully and with such precision manned his guns that he personally accounted for two aircraft shot down. The remainder were driven off. His heroic conduct in the face of withering antiaircraft fire and repeated attacks by enemy fighter craft and his cool precision in his work undoubtedly saved the damaged aircraft from almost certain destruction. (Reported killed in action.)" (7:46)

Second, Alfred M. Zielaskowski, Technical Sergeant, from Newberg, Oregon, received the Silver Star for his distinguished service and ingenuity.

"ALFRED M. ZIELASKOWSKI, Technical Sergeant, Newberg. The B-24 of which Technical Sergeant Zielaskowski was top turrent gunner and engineer was hit by flak. With the bomb-bay doors wide open since the hydraulic system was out, he went back on the cat-walk, amid gasoline fumes and leaking hydraulic

fluid, to repair the damage so that the ship could continue and all four motors could draw gasoline. Sergeant Zielaskowski repaired the hydraulic line and filled it with emergency fluid, so that a landing could be made on an island in the Mediterranean. His ingenuity, skill and resourcefulness, and above all, his cool courage in the face of great danger, were in great measure responsible for the safe return of crew and aircraft." (7:35)

Third, Fred E. Anderson, Technical Sergeant, from Orlando, Florida, received the Distinguished Flying Cross for his heroism and could have possibly received the Medal of Honor.

"FRED E. ANDERSON, Technical Sergeant, 1629½ Perring Drive, Orlando. As top turret gunner and engineer on a B-24, Technical Sergeant Anderson gave a magnificent example of heroism and devotion in the performance of his duty. As the plane entered the target area, a region bristling with heavy antiaircraft guns, Sergeant Anderson was on duty in the top turret. A burst of flak struck the plane, and he was wounded very painfully in the face and knocked from his turret.

Although in acute pain and unable to speak he climbed back to his position and remained there, manning his weapons, until the ship had passed out of the most dangerous zone. Then, when his services as engineer were required, he came down, yielding the top-turrent position to the radio-operator, and remained on duty, checking and repairing the damaged plane until the home base was reached. His performance of duty under fire, when seriously injured, constitutes heroism of the finest type." (7:08)

Fourth, Fred E. Herlevic, Technical Sergeant, from Hamburg, Arkansas, received the Distinguished Service Cross for displaying unfaltering courage and devotion to duty.

"FRANK A. HERLEVIC, Technical Sergeant, Route 4, Hamburg. As engineer on a B-24, Technical Sergeant Herlevic displayed unfaltering courage, as well as technical ability and resourcefulness of the highest order. He was vitally instrumental in keeping the plane aloft as it swept in towards the target at minimum level, accomplishing this in the face of intense flak, barrage balloons, and the opposition

of enemy fighters. His achievement in the presence of almost certain death, when his plane was irreparably damaged by enemy fire, serves as a magnificent example of heroism and devotion to duty. (Reported missing in action.)" (7:03)

Fifth, Malcolm C. Dalton, Staff Sergeant, from Soldiers Grove, Wisconsin, received the Distinguished Service Cross for his skill and dilligence in the face of the enemy with his chance of survival unlikely.

"MALCOLM C. DALTON, Staff Sergeant, Soldiers Grove. As left waist gunner of a B-24, Staff Sergeant Dalton carried out his duties with skill and diligence as the aircraft flew through one of the most heavily defended areas in Europe. His chances of escaping destruction were highly improbable, because the plane in which he served was struck by antiaircraft fire which caused one of the fuel tanks to leak badly, and the target area was aflame with burning oil tanks whose smoke and fire reached higher than the altitude of the plane. Showing unwavering devotion to duty and calm courage, Staff Sergeant Dalton remained at his post, manning his

guns while the aircraft successfully bombed the target. His heroic sacrifice reflects great credit both to himself and to the forces in which he served.

(Reported missing in action.)" (7:46)

Sixth, Edmond H. Smith, Staff Sergeant, from Big Spring, Texas, received the Distinguished Flying Cross for his supreme devotion to duty.

"EDMOND H. SMITH, Staff Sergeant,
802 East 14th Street, Big Spring.
As right waist gunner on a B-24,
Staff Sergeant Smith manned his guns
with great effectiveness against heavy
antiaircraft and machine-gun fire.
When his aircraft, having been struck
by fire from ground installations,
continued its course over the target
despite the fact that gasoline was
pouring from a damaged fuel tank and
that flames from the burning target
area were almost certain to set the
plane on fire, Sergeant Smith, though
confronted with imminent death,
continued to display his accustomed
calm proficiency, helping to insure
that the target was successfully

demolished. His heroic determination and supreme devotion to duty reflect high tribute both to himself and to the forces in which he served.

(Reported missing in action.)" (7:41)

Seventh, Walter I. Brown, Staff Sergeant, from Cooper, Texas, received the Silver Star for his steadfastness and courage.

"WALTER I. BROWN, Staff Sergeant, Cooper. Posthumous. As waist gunner on a B-24, Staff Sergeant Brown displayed courage, steadfastness and cool judgement. When directly over the target, his aircraft was severely damaged by antiaircraft fire which incapacitated three of the engines and rendered the aircraft easy prey for enemy fighters. So skilfully did Sergeant Brown handle his guns, however, that he shot down one of the attacking planes and drove off the remainder. (Reported Killed in action.)" (7:40)

Eighth, Oda A. Smathers, Technical Sergeant, from Charlotte, North Carolina, received the Silver Star for his gallantry and loyalty to his crew members. Another person who could have easily received the Medal of Honor.

"ODA A. SMATHERS, Technical Sergeant, 322 Kingston Street, Charlotte. As radio

operator of a B-24, Technical Sergeant Smathers was severely wounded when a burst of flak exploded beside the plane. The plane, too, was badly damaged, with most of the controls out. When slightly less than half of the 1,100-mile journey home had been completed, two of the engines failed, making the chances of safe return very uncertain. Despite his painful wounds, Sergeant Smathers valorously continued on duty, constantly determining the plane's position, in order that the shortest route home might be taken. He also kept the home radio stations informed of its position, in order to make possible a rescue in case of a crash-landing. Sergeant Smathers' gallantry and loyalty reflect great credit upon himself and the Army Air Forces." (7:31)

Ninth, Zerrill J. Steen, Staff Sergeant, from Portales, New Mexico, received the Silver Star for his gallantry and the inspiration he provided for his fellow crew members.

"ZERRILL J. STEEN, Staff Sergeant, Portales. As engineer-gunner, Staff Sergeant Steen, throughout the mission, performed his duties with exceptional degree of skill and

resourcefulness and with a courage that was an inspiration to his fellow crew-members. The operation involved the longest flight ever undertaken by a mass formation of B-24 heavy bombers, and much of the journey to the target was through enemy territory, bristling with ground defenses. At the target itself, the bombers encountered resistance of the most vigorous sort in the form of barrage balloons, intense antiaircraft fire, and swarms of fighter aircraft. Through all these hazards, Sergeant Steen remained courageously and determinedly at his post, checking his plane and making constant emergency repairs, until fire from the enemy's ground installations made further efforts useless. His gallantry under fire and in great danger are an honor to himself and to the United States Army Air Forces. (Reported missing in action.)" (7:27)

Last, and definitely not least, John J. Dayberry, Technical Sergeant, from Shelby, North Carolina, received both the Soldier's Medal and the Distinguished Flying Cross for saving a crew members life and performing duties not normally accomplished by an enlisted person.

"JOHN J. DAYBERRY, Technical Sergeant,

Shelby. While serving as radio operator of a B-24, Technical Sergeant Dayberry showed great skill and presence of mind in rendering much-needed first aid to his wounded bombardier, applying a tourniquet which undoubtedly contributed much toward saving his life. At the same time, Sergeant Dayberry carried out his duties as radio operator and acted as navigator on the return mission." (7:31)

These selected citations cannot possibly cover all the outstanding and heroic acts accomplished by the enlisted personnel involved in Operation "TIDAL WAVE". However, it does give you an idea of the contributions enlisted members made to the success of one of the most important missions of World War II. With these selected contributions and citations firmly in mind, let's move onto the disposition of the enlisted personnel after the mission.

4. I'll break down the disposition of the enlisted personnel that didn't return from the Ploesti Raid into three categories to include (1) missing in action, (2) Posthumous, and (3) Prisoners of War (POW). This isn't saying the personnel that returned from the mission didn't contribute greatly to the mission. I'm only trying to show how many enlisted personnel lost their lives or were interned for the highly successful Ploesti Raid. First, those that were considered missing in action came from confirmed downed aircraft with the crews disposition unknown or aircraft

that never returned to home base and were never heard of again. According to the report filled in the, History of Operation
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Against Roumanian Oil Refineries, there were "446 crew men killed or are missing in action." (3:4) Of this 446 total, I derived from another source, Decorations Awarded 1,548 Fliers for Ploesti Refineries Raid of 01 August 1943, that 218 of the personnel were enlisted. (7:--) Second, those that were killed in action totalled eleven. (3:--) Of that number seven were enlisted. (7:--) This information was also derived from the same source previously mentioned. Two of the men I presented(SSgt Frederick Durand and SSgt Walter Brown), died when their plane (a B-24D, aircraft #024, letter #34) ditched into the Mediterranean Sea at 1700 hours on 01 August 1943. (5:--) The account of that crash reads thusly:

"This a/c suffered considerable Flak damage over target and several men were wounded. They were losing gasoline from severed line, and finally three engines stopped. Engines went on again for a moment and pilot feathered all propellers and prepared to ditch. Hit the water easily first time, but plane glanced off water and landed some distance away. Tail section was torn off just aft of the wing.

The 9-man crew were all in the nose section preparatory to ditching. 2 men S/Sgt. Walter Brown, right waist gunner and S/Sgt. Frederick Durand, tail gunner, were evidently pinned in the wreckage as they never came to the surface." (5:--)

A tragic ending for two gunners who accounted for three confirmed kills over the target area consisting of two ME-109s by S/Sgt. Durand and one Ju-88 by S/Sgt. Brown. (5:--) Third, according to the, History of Operation Against Roumanian Oil Refineries, "79 crewmen were interned in Turkey." (3:4) Thirty two of those interned were enlisted personnel. (7:--) As you can see, a large portion of the men that were killed, missing in action, or interned, were enlisted personnel. Now that we know what happened to the personnel who participated in the Ploesti Raid, let's move onto the awards received by the enlisted members.

5. The awards received by the enlisted personnel for Operation "TIDAL WAVE" consisted of the Distinguished Flying Cross, Distinguished Service Cross, Silver Star, and the Soldiers Medal. (7:--) The information on these awards was drawn from the War Department Press Release, Decorations Awarded 1,548 Fliers for Ploesti Refineries Raid of 01 August 1943. (7:--) First, the Distinguished Flying Cross was awarded to 841 enlisted personnel for their contributions to the Ploesti Raid, including those who received an Oak Leaf Cluster for the award. The personnel I

presented who received this award were, TSgt Fred E. Anderson, TSgt Edmond H. Smith, and TSgt John J. Dayberry. (7:--> Second, the Distinguished Service Cross was awarded to sixteen enlisted personnel for their outstanding devotion to duty and acts of heroism. I presented you with TSgt Frank A. Herlevic, SSgt Frederick W. Durand and TSgt Malcolm C. Dalton as recipients of this award. (7:--> Third, the Silver Star was awarded to ten enlisted members who through their acts of courage and gallantry ensured their aircraft and crews could accomplish their mission. The personnel who received citations for this award whom I presented were, TSgt Alfred M. Zielaskowski, SSgt Walter I. Brown, TSgt Oda A. Smathers, and SSgt Zerrill J. Steen. (7:--> Fourth, the Soldiers Medal was awarded to one enlisted person, TSgt John. J. Dayberry, for his unselfishness and adaptability in the face of great odds. (7:31) Now that we have covered the awards received by the enlisted personnel for Operation "TIDAL WAVE", we'll move onto the summary.

6. I covered a lot of information in this background paper which included: (1) history of the Ploesti Raid, (2) citations received by selected enlisted personnel, (3) the disposition of the enlisted personnel after the mission, (4) the types and numbers of awards received by enlisted personnel for their part in the mission. First, in the history of the raid I presented you with the reasons a low-level mission was selected over a high-level one. The main reason low-level was chosen over high-level was due to the number of aircraft and multiple missions it would have

taken to complete the mission at high altitude. (4:4-5) Then I gave you information about the mission itself, which included an interview from General Timberlake. He said the mission planning was excellent but they had lacked the necessary intelligence about the defenses around Ploesti which contributed to the heavy losses. (6:10) Finally, I informed you that the Ninth Bombardment Command accomplished the mission with six bomb groups. (1:--)

They were the 44th, 93rd, 98th, 340th, 376th, and 389th Bombardment Groups. (1:--) They utilized the B-24D Liberator aircraft to accomplish this 2,000 mile round trip mission. (7:1)

Second, I presented you with citations presented to selected enlisted members who participated in the Ploesti Raid. Those personnel were SSgt Frederick W. Durand (D.S.C.), TSgt Alfred M. Zielaskowski (S.S.), TSgt Fred E. Anderson (D.F.C.), TSgt Frank A. Herlevic (D.S.C.), TSgt Malcolm C. Dalton (D.S.C.), TSgt Edmond H. Smith (D.F.C.), SSgt Walter I. Brown (S.S.), TSgt Oda A. Smathers (S.S.), SSgt Zerrill J. Steen (S.S.), and TSgt John J. Dayberry (D.F.C. & S.M.). (7:--)

Third, I covered the disposition of the enlisted personnel after the Ploesti Raid which included missing in action, posthumous, and prisoners of war. (7:--)

There were 218 people missing in action, 32 interned as prisoners of war, and seven killed in action. (7:--)

Fourth, I went into the types and numbers of the awards presented to the enlisted personnel involved in the mission. The awards received were the Distinguished Flying Cross, Distinguished Service Cross, Silver Star, and the Soldiers Medal. (7:--)

The numbers of awards were presented as follows:

Distinguished Flying Cross: 841

Distinguished Service Cross: 16

Silver Star: 10

Soldiers Medal: 1

7. Enlisted crew members contributed greatly to the success of Operation "TIDAL WAVE". Without their efforts many of the planes and crews would not have completed their missions nor returned home. For their outstanding efforts and superior performance, 868 of the enlisted crew members received awards for their devotion to duty and in some cases, supreme sacrifices. We owe it to the brave and heroic enlisted crew members of the then, Ninth Bombardment Command, to remember them for their important contributions in ensuring Operation "TIDAL WAVE" was a total success.

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