

Interview with William P. Cassidy at St. Petersburg, FL,
17-18 Nov 1979.

Raymond Check was a quiet person, and a very good pilot.

A party had been planned on the night of his last mission, and his nurse-girl friend was planning to attend.

Check was flying in the right seat, and JW Wilson in the left. This may have been because of its position in the formation.

Check had had several rough missions, and his 25th was expected to be a milkrun. There was fighter cover.

The crew needed a waist gunner, and Cassidy told them as he was getting "ranked" out of his seat, that he needed a milk run as badly as anyone else, and would serve as the waist gunner.

It appeared that a shell fragment came through the top of the cockpit and hit Check in the top of the head. Hydraulic and oxygen lines were also hit.

The radio room door flew open and fire was filling entranceway. The bail out bell rang. The plane was flying o.k., and Cassidy felt it had to be all right.

He motioned for the crew not to jump, grabbed a walkaround bottle and headed for the cockpit. With a back pack on and carrying a walkaround bottle, it was very difficult to get through the bomb bay. By the time he got to the cockpit, the fire had been extinguished.

JW Wilson was flying the plane with his elbows, with Check slumped over the wheel. The plane was still at about 20,000.

Wilson was also burned about the face, and motioned to Cassidy to remove Wilson's oxygen mask. Cassidy did not do this, but Wilson finally got rid of the mask, so Cassidy pushed the wheel forward to force the plane to lose altitude so that Wilson would not pass out. The plane was out of formation.

Wilson got out of the seat and went to the nose, while Cassidy took over the controls.

Dr. Peck treated Wilson and the engineer, and then went through the plane treating other personnel. Everyone except Cassidy and Peck had burns or wounds.

Lost altitude as fast as possible, while heading back towards England. One engine had been shot out completely, one engine was throwing oil, and one engine was o.k.

Radio operator sent out May Day signal, and an Air-Sea Rescue fighter met them over the channel.

Wilson motioned for Cassidy to land, but as the airplane commander Cassidy knew the plane was flying well and decided to take the

Cassedy Interview - 2

wounded home. He thought it would take less time to get treatment at Thurleigh where the medics would be ready for them.

But, the flare pistol had been shot off and the radio for contacting the tower was of no use. Unable to contact tower, Cassedy felt the plane was in no condition to fly a normal traffic pattern and to mix into the rest of the group. Decided against landing on one of the short runways, and concluded he must land downwind into the face of other landing planes. A plane on final (Jones) pulled up and went over this plane.

CHECK'S LAST MISSION - 23 June 1943

Maj. George L. Peck, flight surgeon, flew as observer.

ME 109s out of the sun, hit plane.

28mm hit oxygen line, 2nd 20 mm hit Check in the neck and exploded. Fire began in the cockpit, fed by oxygen.

Wilson tried to fight blaze and fly plane. Hands were badly burned, Blanchette got fire under control. Peck had been flying in nose. Wilson was flying plane with his forearms, as his hands were so badly burned,

Lt. W. P. Cassedy, riding as a waist gunner, told the crew not to bail out even though the alarm bell had rung. The plane was still flying, so he went forward to see what conditions were, helped get Wilson out of the seat after setting up the autopilot, and then flew the plane home.

"It was a wonder a man could stand such pain and fly a plane at the same time," Peck said of Wilson.

Milton Edwards, wounded in arm.

Wm. T. Johnson, wounded in leg

James A. Bobbett, engineer, burned.

Lionel Drew, bombardier, had bailed out when the alarm bell first rang

Russell A. Strong

PUBLIC INFORMATION

~~John~~ Gold Lankers
Miss Patricia
Wm P. Crosby

DAVIDSON COLLEGE

Date

Davidson, North Carolina 28036

704/892-8021, ext. 241

William P. Cassidy
3820 - 46th Ave. So.
St. Petersburg, Fla. 33711

July 28, 1978

Mt. Russell A. Strong
Rt. 1, Jumpside Rd
Laurinburg, NC 28352

This information
was obtained
from his body
day later.

Dear Mt. Strong:

The VA has forwarded your information request.
The four B-17 Groups, the 306, 303,
300, and 92nd, I understand, were operational
in the ETO from about October of 1942.

I was pilot in a provisional Group
(200 men, 20 airplanes) which arrived in
January 1943 as, I believe, the first
replacements which these operational
Groups had had. We flew airplanes over.

My crew and I were assigned
to the 423rd Squadron of the 306th
Bomb^(H) Group. A combat-experienced
Co-pilot took over my crew as the first
pilot. I flew combat, to begin with, as
Co-pilot for Captain Raymond "Pappy" Check.

We flew a plane named "Chinault's Pappy" with shark's teeth painted on the nose, like the P-40s of the Flying Tigers.

Capt. Check was killed in combat on his 25th (which would have been his last anyway) and I was given his flight^{crew} and ground crew. He had been commander of "A" flight of the 423rd Squadron. I was made flight commander of "C" flight.

My 25th raid, the town ended at 25 km, was the first raid on the ball bearing factory at Schweinfurt (August 17, 1943).

I have a large number of pictures, a list of the raids in which I participated, some stories, an Air Medal (3 clusters), the DFC (one cluster), no diary (but some newspaper clippings), and a memory of R. J. Check, Ralph W. Jones, E. W. Ford, L. P. Suggs, Robert Smith, Michael Raskaritch, ~~and~~ Snuffy Smith, and others.

Because of Smeff's actions after becoming eligible for the Medal of Honor, many have said he shouldn't have been given it, but I recommended him for it. I maintain that regardless of what he did later, he deserved it on "that day".

The type of things I remember are incidents about which only an Earnie Pyle would write about, anecdotes, but the part where four B-17s Strayer played in breaking through Hitler's (Smeff's) control of the air over Germany (the occupied continent) has been almost completely overlooked by historians. Our own newspapers gave us credit for bombing towns rather than submarine pens, factories etc.

I have a psychological block against writing, but I wish you great success in doing a piece of work which is greatly needed.

I would prefer to talk with you
in person, and at a time when we
had time for bringing back memories.
I know that will probably be
impossible.

Sincerely,

William J. Cassidy
L/c AF Res Ret. A6793065

Birthdate: Dec 20, 1915
Civilian occupation: Attorney at Law
1938 - 1977
Last Employment: Senior Trial Attorney
(Retired Civil Service) Contract Division
US Dept of Justice
Washington, D.C.
Tel.: (813) 867-9152 (Residence)
St. Pete

William P. Cassidy
3820 - 46th Ave. So.
St. Petersburg, Fla. 33711
Oct 29, 1975

Russell A. Strong
Rt 1, Scotch Meadows Drive
Laurinburg, North Carolina 28352

Dear Russell:

Sorry we were out when you called.
You talked with my mother in law who is
getting on in years.

In your letter you mention your
intended visit to St Petersburg "at the end
of the year". I hope it follows the visitors
we expect during Christmas because we
would enjoy your staying with us
while you are here, if there is no conflict
on time the others are here.

I located Chas. Fatigati. The address is
correct. His home telephone is (813) 525-0934.
He runs a place called Joyland and I expect
to see him there tomorrow.

Sincerely,
Bill

William P. Cassidy
3820 - 46th Ave. So.
St. Petersburg, Fla. 33711

Nov. 26, 1979

Mr. R. A. Strong
522 Jemison
Kalamazoo, Mich. 49007

Dear Russ:

I have received the orders which you returned. Thanks. I hope you enjoyed your stay with us. After you left, a couple of things returned to my memory. One is that, on the flight on which Check was killed, when I entered the bomb bay on the way to the cockpit cabin, the bomb bay doors were open, but before I had gotten through the narrow walkway, the bomb bay doors were closed. From the return of that memory, I conclude the bombardier could have closed the doors before he jumped.

Another returning memory is that, when I took the wheel we were out of formation and traveling in a south southeasterly direction. When I started the descent, to eliminate the need for oxygen, I was also turning the plane to the right. ^{when I took} ~~Col. Wilson left cockpit cabin~~ ^{part} west around to a westerly heading and leveled off at about 12000 or 13000 feet.

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you asked what happened immediately on landing and my memory was blank. Now, I remember dropping from the forward hatch. a number of people rushed up around me. I believe it was Col. Robinson who asked, "what's the situation?", and I replied, "check is dead and all of the others are hurt except the doc and me." The same person asked why I had not declared or signaled an emergency, and I told him that both the radio and flare gun were shot out.

I also let him know that, because of the damaged engine, I couldn't chance squeezing into the landing formation of the group, and that rather than landing crossways of them, I made sure they would see me by landing down wind head on into their view. Someone has told me since that Junior Jones was flying the first landing plane to see me and pull up.

No question has ever been raised, to my knowledge, of the propriety of anything I did on that flight.

Regards,
Bill

C
O
P
Y

16 October 1978

Mr. Wm. P. Cassidy
3820 46th Av., S.
St. Petersburg, FL 33711

Dear Bill,

Tried to call you last night, and succeeded in having a pleasant chat with your wife, but guess you were out on the town!

I have hopes of getting to Florida at the end of the year, and may be able to visit with you then.

IN THE MEANTIME, could I get you to do a little searching around there for some people?

One is Charles Fatigati, an ex-POW, who had an address of 6596 19th St., N, but I was unable to pick up a telephone number on hi, so have not tried to contact him.

Just now I took out the search list, and I guess we've solved the problems we know of those who had St. Pete as a hometown before WW II. But, I may come up with a few names as I am searching some other lists slowly, but should have them looked through in another week or so.

Meanwhile, am off to Washington Thursday for the reunion. I understand 1980 will be in Orlando.

Sincerely yours,

27 November 1979

Dear Bill:

Your good letter came today, reminding me that I had not properly thanked you and Jerry for the excellent treatment accorded me on my visit to St. Pete.

I had an excellent time, some great food, and got much of the information that I wanted.

I got back to Charlotte in good order, and then on to Laurinburg, and a reunion with my wife. From then on it was pretty hectic. I had done such a good job of painting the porch on the house this summer that I had sealed everything and created some moisture problems. Thus, I spent much of the week repairing porch flooring that had buckled. And we had our five sons home for Thanksgiving, and with my typewriter in Kalamazoo I just did not get writing done.

Then, last Saturday my wife came back to Kalamazoo with me and we began some house hunting. Although she flew home today, it isn't quite done, but I hope to wrap it up before I leave for the West Coast this weekend.

I appreciate your further comments, and they help to round out the story of that day.

I rather expect to see John Regan next Saturday, and have a date with Bob Riordan in Dallas on Tuesday. I also expect to fill in with several other men in between.

But all of this travel and moving is slowing down my writing, and I must get back to it soon.

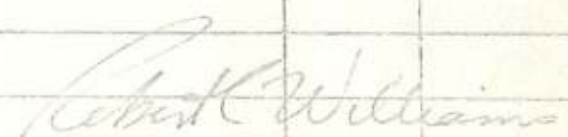
My best to such excellent hosts,

C-O-M-B-A-T M-I-S-S-I-O-N-N-A-L M-I-S-S-I-O-N-S

NAME CASSEDY, WILLIAM P. SQUADRON 423rd Bomb Sq (H)
 RANK 1st Lieut., AC. GROUP 306th Bomb Gp (H)
 DUTY Pilot SERIAL NUMBER _____

DATE 1943	GROUP MISSION NUMBER	INDIVIDUAL MISSION NUMBER	REMARKS	TIME	TOTAL TIME	
Mar.	18	28	1	Vegesack	6:00	6:00
	22	29	2	Wilhelmshaven	6:15	12:15
	28	30	3	Beuen	5:00	17:15
	31	31	4	Rotterdam	5:10	22:25
Apr.	4	32	5	Paris	5:15	27:40
	5	33	6	Antwerp	4:45	32:25
May	1	36	7	St. Nazaire	9:25	41:50
	13	37	8	Maulde	5:20	47:10
	14	38	9	Kiel	7:00	54:10
	15	39	10	Heligoland	6:15	60:25
	17	40	11	Lorient	5:40	66:05
	29	43	12	St. Nazaire	6:00	72:05
June	11	44	13	Wilhelmshaven	5:35	77:40
	13	45	14	Bremen	6:40	84:20
	25	47	15	Hamburg	6:00	90:20
	26	48	16	Tricqueville	3:45	94:05
July	10	52	17	Caen-Carpignat	5:00	99:05
	14	53	18	Villacoublay	6:00	105:05
	24	55	19	Harcois	8:10	113:15
	26	56	20	Manover	7:10	120:25
	28	57	21	Bassel	5:30	125:55
Aug.	12	59	22	Ruhr	5:10	130:65
	15	60	23	Flushing	4:00	134:65
	16	61	24	Paris	4:30	139:35
	17	62	25	Schwainfurt	6:10	145:45

I hereby certify that WILLIAM P. CASSEDY, 1st Lt., AC,
 Pilot, has completed the above combat missions.


 ROBERT C. WILLIAMS, Major, AC.
 Opns. Officer, 306th Bomb Gp (H).

William P. Cassidy
3820 - 46th Ave. So.
St. Petersburg, Fla. 33711

Aug 15, 1978

Mrs. Russell A. Strong
Rt. 1 Scotch Meadows Drive
Laurinburg, South Carolina 28352

Dear Russell:

Thank you very much for your efforts as Historian, your information, the Echoes Newspaper, your telephone call, and the memories you have started in my mind.

Enclosed are a few pictures which I have selected. Others may be of more interest to a Historian.

Maybe sometime I can write out an incident or two. Anyway,

Regards

Bill

Wm P. Cassidy
1981

Without any research toward verification, I have written below what I remember and as I remember it.

Yes, I was on the U. S. 8th Air Force mission (we said "raid") to Schweinfurt on 17th August, 1943. That was my last raid, my 25th. Because of a heavy percentage of losses during that time period, 25 raids completed a tour of combat for U. S. heavy bomber crews in the E.T.O. One pilot who completed twenty-five "buzzed" the field on returning from his 25th raid. That was earlier, and I had said I would blow the "dispersal" tent down when I finished 25; but that was earlier and I had forgotten my remark.

I was a first lieutenant in command of C Flight of the 423rd Squadron 306 Bomb (H) Group. A lieutenant as flight commander? Yes, our Squadron Commander, Major Lambert, promoted no one to Captain while I was in his Squadron. Although the squadron table of organization called for eleven Captains, Major Lambert had two Captains in his squadron when I arrived and two when I left. When Captain Check, Commander of A Flight, was killed, Major Lambert transferred a Captain from another squadron into the 423rd, but that is another story. The Flight Commanders were rotated up, and I was given C Flight.

The concentration of industry, that is, the ball bearing factory, the manufacture of tools and tools to make the tools to make ball bearings, were in existence before World War II, I understand. Anyway, I was told that our Command was surprised when British Intelligence with information from the English underground reminded them that it still existed and was manufacturing 75% of all ball bearings for the German war effort. We had understood that Hitler had deconcentrated his industries.

We were briefed on carrying out this raid several times before we actually took off and completed it. For instance, after the first briefing was finished, we were told clouds had closed in over the target and the raid was called off. Although our bomb sights were unmatched in precision, we had to see the target in order to hit it. Then, we were told that we were going to Schweinfurt later, anyway, and reminded that if anyone let the destination slip out we would probably be met at the right time and altitude by German fighter planes. We knew that but were concerned because a large number of combat inexperienced crews had been arriving since June who might be unaware of the seriousness of a tongue slip up. The Assistant Operations officer came by my dispersal area (where the plane was kept) to tell us the raid was cancelled. He gave us each a "T.S. Card" with spaces where holes could be punched, he said, by the Chaplain. He assured us we were entitled to one punch, each.

On the morning of 17th August, 1943, the final briefing was finished and we rendezvoused at altitude over the Coast. The day was breaking as we crossed the Channel and saw the German fighters, right time, right altitude (ME109; Focke-Wulf 190, I've forgotten) (Maybe, Goering's pet squadron of yellow nosed Focke-Wulf 190's from Abbeville, France). But then we saw that the fighters were following English bombers coming back from a raid the night before. The fighters were too close to being out of gasoline to be able to take us on. We had a peaceful ride for awhile.

Then all hell broke loose. I believe the Germans had more anti-aircraft fire power and fighter planes located near, in and around Schweinfurt than perhaps anywhere. They obviously put everything into the air that would fly. Among all of the aircraft, I also saw an old ME210, with a gunner firing from the rear open cockpit, as I was coming off the target run. He was shooting into my left wing gasoline tank and left it leaking.

My excellent top turret gunner had finished his twenty-five and I was giving an inexperienced new comer his first combat ride. His gun was not firing; we were calling to him to get that plane. Other gunners in our formation must have concentrated on it because the plane split lengthwise as it burst into flames and parted. My new gunner came on the intercom with, "Two planes going down twelve o'clock high!"

He told me later that his gun had jammed and he was out of touch while fixing it. I told him I had finished my 25 and was going home; that if he wished to say the same thing to someone later, he had better practice taking his gun apart and putting it together with gloves on, until he could do it in five seconds flat.

Schweinfurt was a rough time. I burned all my engine valves and No. 4 engine was out, but I was returning with all crewmen unhurt. I was glad. As I approached our base field, I left the formation as I decided to "buzz" it. The field was higher in its middle so I dropped low and came up over the rise toward the control tower, then up into a wing-over letting the low wing pass between the control tower and a hangar. As I came back down from the wing-over, I remembered that I had said that I would blow the "dispersal" tent down (that was where the ground crew chief kept the tools, etc., to work on the plane). I passed very closely over the top of the "dispersal" tent and pulled up so it would get full blast from the prop-wash.

After landing and taxiing to my dispersal area, I saw that the tent had not budged. The crew chief had remembered and had staked it down deep.

Captain Salada, the Operations Officer, was waiting for me in a jeep. As I dropped to the ground and joined him, he said, "Well, Jesus Christ ole man; Well, Jesus Christ!". I smiled but didn't answer. Apparently, some of the persons on top of the control tower who had waited for the Group's return, had to be restrained from jumping off as my plane passed over.

Lt. Col. Robinson, the 306 Group Commander, informed me that a Colonel down at "Wide-wing" (the 8th AF headquarters) wanted to see me. He said he would cut orders sending me back to the States, if I wanted, but only after I had talked to the Colonel.

While acting as Co-pilot for Captain Check, we had met that Colonel at a Publisher's Estate (used as a rest home during WW II) down near South Hampton. The Colonel's name, I do not remember, but his offer was a compliment. He was setting up an Advisory Board, composed of three: one each who had finished tours in heavy bombers, light bombers, and fighters. The Board was to advise Command on tactics. Although I turned down the Colonel's offer (for personal reasons), while I was there, he showed me pictures of the 17th August 1943 Schweinfurt raid results. The pictures had been taken by a high altitude observation plane as quickly as the smoke from our bombing had cleared.

Those pictures showed complete destruction, absolute. I was amazed. I told the Colonel that such was impossible, it just could not be so. I knew about where our bombs had fallen; I believed we had good accuracy on the assigned buildings, but total obliteration was not acceptable to me.

Later, I was told that those pictures had been greatly enlarged, sufficiently to show that the Germans, in the short period of time while the smoke was clearing, had camouflaged the entire area to appear to be destroyed. We did not know what damage we had done. There was no question but the 8th AF had to go back to Schweinfurt. No machine would work without ball bearings, the target was that important.

Because we did not know what damage we had done, I have not been surprised that the 17th August, 1943, raid has had almost no mention, that many people believe the first raid on Schweinfurt occurred in October. I am wondering now if you have found out the results of our raid from German sources, or if not, why a whole book on the Schweinfurt raid of 17th August, 1943.

cc: Russell Strong
Kalamazoo, Michigan

PHONE: BOSTON
(STD Code 0205) 64555

MARTIN MIDDLEBROOK
48, LINDEN WAY,
BOSTON, LINCS. PE21 9DS
ENGLAND.

13th October 1981.

Dear Colonel Cassedy,

May I introduce myself as an English historian who is preparing a book about the 8th Air Force missions to Regensburg and Schweinfurt on 17th August 1943 - a day I am sure you will remember. This book will be a serious piece of military history based on research I have carried out in Germany as well as in the United States but also including the experiences of the ordinary men involved. I have a contract with Scribners of New York and the book will be published on 17th August 1983.

I have been trying to make contact with as many men as possible who took part in those missions. I was given your name and address by Mr. Russell Strong of Kalamazoo and I am writing to ask if you will help me a little with my work by writing just a few notes in answer to some questions which I will set out below.

May I just say one or two things before I go further. I have already carried out a considerable amount of research and have a good knowledge of most of the things that happened to your group on 17th August 1943. I am not asking you to write a long general description of the Schweinfurt mission. What would be helpful is if you could think back to that day and identify any incidents which remain in your mind as being particularly vivid. Such incidents can be at any period between your being woken up that morning and your landing that evening. These incidents may have been major ones, directly connected with the mission, or minor ones, only affecting yourself or your crew. I would like to stress that one or two paragraphs of notes, in detail, on something original, is all I ask of you and that nothing would be too trivial for my interest. Similar contributions from many men will enable me to bring this whole subject to life.

One small request - would you please tell me what your rank was on 17th August 1943 so that I can acknowledge your help properly in my book.

I would be most grateful if you could help by sending me a few notes. I intend to start the writing of this book in December and it would be

Books: THE FIRST DAY ON THE SOMME, THE NUREMBERG RAID, CONVOY, BATTLESHIP with Patrick Mahoney, THE KAISER'S BATTLE, THE DIARIES OF PRIVATE BRUCKSHAW (editing only), THE BATTLE OF HAMBURG.
In German: *Die Nacht In Der Die Bomber Starben, Konvoi, Schlachtschiffe, Der 21. März 1918*
In preparation: THE SCHWEINFURT - REGENSBURG MISSION - (U.S.A.A.F.) 17 August 1943, THE PEENEMÜNDE RAID - (R.A.F.) 17/18 August 1943, THE BOMBER COMMAND WAR DIARIES - An Operational Reference Book
The History of Boston Series: BOSTON AT WAR, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN BOSTON

particularly helpful if you could reply to this letter by the end of December. If you do not feel able to help me for some reason but would like to keep in touch and be informed about the book's publication in 1983, could you please send me a short note telling me so.

I send you best wishes from England.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Whitel

William P. Cassidy
3820 - 46th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33711

Oct 27, 1981

Russell A. Strong
2041 Hilldale
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Dear Russell:

Here are copies of a letter I received and of my experience as related in response. I do not see that my experience will be of any value to a historian, but if they are, then I feel I should report them to you.

If this type of experience is of any value, then of course I have others that should be about of equal value.

Anyway, this is an opportunity to again send you my best regards.

Sincerely,

Bill Cassidy

William P. Cassidy
3820 - 46th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33711

Nov. 6, 1981

Russell A. Strong
2041 Hillsdale
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Dear Russell:

Sarasota is only about thirty miles away from us here, so why shouldn't you and your wife stay with us when you come down for the restaurant opening. I will drive you down there from here.

If that is not possible, then at least stop by for a night before or after the opening.

By the way I am enclosing my seventeen and fifty-one hundredths (\$17.51) for a first edition copy of First Over Germany, a History of the 306th Bomb Group.

Sincerely
Bill

William P. Cassidy

100 Pierce St. Condo 607, Pierce 100
Clearwater, Florida 33516
34616

June 11, 1987

Russell Strong
204, Hilldale
Kalamazoo, Michigan
49007

Dear Russell:

My grandson is apparently going to make
the military a career. He took courses suggested
by ROTC while in college, and now, is:

^{ALAN}
LT. Alan W^M FULTVOYE
458 B DYER Ave.

FT. Richardson, Alaska 99505

His mother was the "Miss Patricia" for whom
I named my B-17. She was 3 years old at that
time. Later, while her husband was on duty with
the Army of Occupation, ^{Alan} he was born in Heidelberg,
Germany - Now, he and his wife tell me that
my first Great Grandchild is due to be born in
late July.

Anyway, I have enclosed my check for
\$20.00 which I hope is sufficient to cover the First over Germany
book and postage ^{to him}, if not let me know the
additional amount. A brief reference to pages
133 and 152 would let him know that

Grandpa was one of the First over Germany.
He is with Army "Special Forces" which, if not "Green Berets";
it is very similar.

Best Regards,
Bill Cassidy

William T CASSEY
DIED June 8 - 1989

100 Prairie St. # 607
Clearwater Fla 34616

Mrs Wm T Cassidy

18 Feb 1991

Dear Russel Strong -

Guess you know that
Bill Cassedy died of Cancer
in 1989 - *Am. do Music* -

Remember you came to see us
in St. Petersburg about your
book -

Wesley sent Bill's Copy to his
son -

Now my oldest son wants a
Copy - He is a WWII Collector -

So please send one to him ~
To his address -

Thank you

Henry Cassedy -

He moved to a Condo after
your visit to Clearwater -

I am trying to sell it as
I am going into the Fairfax
Retirement Home in

Ft. Belvoir VA - Mem all my
sons - It is run by TROA -

Approved Henry Cassedy

Interview with William F. Cassedy at St. Petersburg, FL,
17-18 Nov 1979.

Raymond Check was a quiet person, and a very good pilot.

A party had been planned on the night of his last mission, and his nurse-girl friend was planning to attend.

Check was flying in the right seat, and JW Wilson in the left. This may have been because of its position in the formation.

Check had had several rough missions, and his 25th was expected to be a milkrun. There was fighter cover.

The crew needed a waist gunner, and Cassedy told them as he was getting "ranked" out of his seat, that he needed a milk run as badly as anyone else, and would serve as the waist gunner.

It appeared that a shell fragment came through the top of the cockpit and hit Check in the top of the head. Hydraulic AND oxygen lines were also hit.

The radio room door flew open and fire was filling entranceway. The bail out bell rang. The plane was flying o.k., and Cassedy felt it had to be all right.

He motioned for the crew not to jump, grabbed a walkaround bottle and headed for the cockpit. With a back pack on and carrying a walkaround bottle, it was very difficult to get through the bomb bay. By the time he got to the cockpit, the fire had been extinguished.

JW Wilson was flying the plane with his elbows, with Check slumped over the wheel. The plane was still at about 20,000.

Wilson was also burned about the face, and motioned to Cassedy to remove Wilson's oxygen mask. Cassedy did not do this, but Wilson finally got rid of the mask, so Cassedy pushed the wheel forward to force the plane to lose altitude so that Wilson would not pass out. The plane was out of formation.

Wilson got out of the seat and went to the nose, while Cassedy took over the controls.

Dr. Peck treated Wilson and the engineer, and then went through the plane treating other personnel. Everyone except Cassedy and Peck had burns or wounds.

Lost altitude as fast as possible, while heading back towards England. One engine had been shot out completely, one engine was throwing oil, and one engine was o.k.

Radio operator sent out May Day signal, and an Air-Sea Rescue fighter met them over the channel.

Wilson motioned for Cassedy to land, but as the airplane commander Cassedy knew the plane was flying well and decided to take the

Cassedy Interview - 2

wounded home. He thought it would take less time to get treatment at Thurleigh where the medics would be ready for them.

But, the flare pistol had been shot off and the radio for contacting the tower was of no use. Unable to contact tower, Cassedy felt the plane was in no condition to fly a normal traffic pattern and to mix into the rest of the group. Decided against landing on one of the short runways, and concluded he must land downwind into the face of other landing planes. A plane on final (Jones) pulled up and went over this plane.

CHECK'S LAST MISSION - 23 June 1943

Maj. George L. Peck, flight surgeon, flew as observer.

ME 109s out of the sun, hit plane.

20mm hit oxygen line, 2nd 20 mm hit Check in the neck and exploded. Fire began in the cockpit, fed by oxygen.

Wilson tried to fight blaze and fly plane. Hands were badly burned, Blanchette got fire under control. Peck had been flying in nose. Wilson was flying plane with his forearms, as his hands were so badly burned,

Lt. W. P. Cassidy, riding as a waist gunner, told the crew not to bail out even though the alarm bell had rung. The plane was still flying, so he went forward to see what conditions were, helped get Wilson out of the seat after setting up the autopilot, and then flew the plane home.

"It was a wonder a man could stand such pain and fly a plane at the same time," Peck said of Wilson.

Milton Edwards, wounded in arm.

Wm. T. Johnson, wounded in leg

James A. Bobbett, engineer, burned.

Lionel Drew, bombardier, had bailed out when the alarm bell first rang