

World War II B-24 Liberator Bomber
466th Bomb Group, 785 Bomb Squadron
Crew #8783

Howard W. Greiner, Pilot
Edmond B. Knoll, Co-Pilot
Henry E. Holm, Navigator
John Spissinger, Engineer
Ernest Ratliff, Tail Gunner
Frank Korycanek, Radio Operator
Andrew Swartz, L Waist Gunner
Richard Maki, Nose Gunner
Robert Shaddy, R Waist Gunner

This summary was compiled by Bill Maki, brother of Richard Maki (nose gunner), using the pilot's recollections, the U S Air Force MACR (Missing Air Crew Report.), and copies of the German reports.

The 466th Bomb Group was based at Attlebridge, England. Crew # 8783 made their first bombing run over Germany on March 1, 1945 without any problems. On March 2, they were assigned the German Tiger tank factory in Magdeburg. Take off was scheduled for 7 a.m.. 1200 heavy bombers and 800 fighter escorts headed to their assigned targets. Crew #8783 was in a squadron of 12 B-24's headed south east at an altitude of 24,00 feet. Their plane's position was called "Tail end Charlie" or "Coffin Corner." About 50 miles from Magdeburg they headed north to start their bombing run. They ran into a lot of flak but made their bomb drop and turned back towards England. The plane was hit by flak and had to drop altitude to about 14,000 feet. They lost oxygen, the radio, the intercom system and three engines. Alone at the lower altitude, the plane was attacked by a German, FW-190 fighter plane.

The engineer came forward and reported a fire. To quote the pilot, "*I turned the flying over to the co-pilot and crawled down into the bomb bay. Looking up into the wing I could see fire by the gas tanks. On a B-24 you have a whole group of transfer hoses above the bomb bay and these had been cut and there was gasoline on the bomb bay doors. It was easy to see that this thing could explode at any time. I shouted to the engineer to go to the waist and have them all bail out. I gave him the order and then I went back to the flight deck grabbed the co-pilot's arm and told him to abandon ship. I went down to the nose and got the nose gunner and we jettisoned the nose wheel door and the two of us bailed out.*"

The navigator was in the waist trying to help the injured tail gunner when the engineer and the radio operator came back with the order to bail out. The navigator went forward to get his chute and found the co-pilot still in his seat trying to keep the plane under control. He told the co-pilot to bail out and then went out of the nose hatch thinking the co-pilot would follow him. The tail gunner was badly wounded by flak and his chute was damaged. He was lying near the left waist window under some blankets. The radio operator and the engineer tried to find a spare chute but couldn't because of the flames and smoke. The engineer saw the two waist gunners sitting by the escape hatch, which he had opened, but they looked dumbfounded.

After an explosion the radio operator dove out through the rear escape hatch. The engineer followed him out after a second explosion but the other three did not get out. As the navigator was floating down with his chute he thought the engineer and radio operator left the plane as it exploded, because he saw two chutes open. The co-pilot, the tail gunner and the two waist gunners perished with the plane. It seems likely the co-pilot made no attempt to bail out. The plane crashed near the small town of Lübbecke, a few miles west of Minden.

The pilot broke his leg and ankle when he hit the ground. Richard's boots jerked off when his chute opened (he had to do a lot of walking without shoes or boots). Some German soldiers and members of the Forest Service captured them. The Soldiers had the pilot put his arms over their shoulders so they could help him get to the burgermeister's house in the village of Petershagen, north of Minden. They were held there until they could be taken to the town of Minden for interrogation by the local command. As the pilot was leaving the building he met the nose gunner, Richard, being led in and said, "Well they got you too." After the radio operator and engineer were captured they were taken to a German Prisoner of War Hospital at Ibbenburen because they suffered from severe burns.

An older German soldier and two young soldiers were ordered to take the Pilot, Navigator, Richard and five other prisoners to the town of Oberursel, just north of Frankfurt. Oberursel had the interrogation center for Dulag 1 and the prisoner of war hospital was located in Hohemark.

They had to do a lot of walking, so the navigator and Richard supported the pilot as they hobbled along. They sometimes rode in trucks, slept in barns, traveled by train and more walking. The German soldiers traveling with them had to protect the prisoners from some of the angry civilians, especially in train stations.

The pilot did not spend time in a prison camp but ended up in the German Hospital at Hohemark. He was liberated by the U.S. 3d Army's 5th Division Reconnaissance Troop on March 29, after a German medic slipped thru Nazi lines with word that there were prisoners at the hospital. No information has yet been found as to where Richard was imprisoned. He wouldn't talk about it after he came home except to say he wasn't physically abused and that a lot of the food had maggots and otherwise was pretty bad. He said the guards had to eat the same food.

On his questionnaire, Richard said he saw the pilot in Frankfurt for the last time and after he was liberated he met the navigator at Camp Lucky Strike in France. Camp Lucky Strike was used to take care of liberated prisoners of war until they could be sent on their way to the U.S.

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The Mission Report and the Group Gunnery Officer Report stated: The enemy aircraft made one pass and Greiner's plane was seen with one landing gear down, smoking and losing altitude. Several crews report he made it back, with fighter support, as far as Dummer Lake where it exploded.

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The pilot, Howard Greiner, at the age of 76, wrote an autobiography titled, "Flying High Over Iowa." He devoted a few chapters to his WWII experience.