The 344th Bomb Group had the honor of leading the Ninth Air Force into action that momentous day, our objectives being three heavy enemy coastal gun batteries on the Cherbourg Peninsula, and situated on the beaches at Beau Guillot, La Madeleine and St. Martin De Varrville, each approximately four miles distant. The Group furnished fifty-six B-26 planes, flown in three boxes of three flights each, each flight of six planes, and two spare airplanes to accompany the formation. Each Box had been assigned one of the forementioned targets.

News of the Invasion electrified these war-seasoned flyers and a look of determination spread from face to face as the plan was rapidly unveiled.

Following briefing, all proceeded to their planes and began last-minute preparations before take-off. Engines were warmed and at precisely 0412 hours June 6, 1944, the first plane piloted by Major Jens A. Norgaard, formation leader, roared down the runway and into the air. Every twenty seconds thereafter, the remaining fifty-five planes in succession soared behind him and circled into formation for the flight across the channel, and times to be at their targets at 0609 hours or twenty-one minutes prior to the landing craft operations of the allied ground forces on the beaches.

Bombs found their marks exactly as planned and then the 344th turned right and streaked across the Cherbourg Peninsula on its return trip home via the route between Guernsey and Aldernay Islands to England. Our planes had silenced their targets.

Interrogation revealed the first picture of this new battleground. Such scenes as Naval action directed against shore batteries, countless numbers of our fighters and bombers in the air and gliders towed across the channel filled with Airborne Troops.

The mission was not without loss, for as one of the flights made enemy landfall, flak from the enemy was encountered. One plane of the 497th Squadron piloted by 2nd Lt. James B. McKamey was struck in the right motor, which caused a fire that appeared to envelope the bombay section of the plane. Three parachutes were seen to leave the plane as it pulled out of the formation and turned left out over the channel. Before its burden of bombs could be jettisoned safe and allow the plane to be ditched in the water where rescue of its crew could be affected, the plane exploded in mid-air. Members of Lt. McKamey's crew were F/O J. F. Kechley, Co-Pilot; Sgt. J. M. Scott, Tail Gunner flew as bombardier; S/Sgt. S. J. Zuniga, Radio Gunner; S/Sgt. M. H. Larini, Engineer Gunner; Sgt. H. L. Finn, Ord. Munitions flew as tail gunner.

In the afternoon of June 6, 37 planes went to Amiens to again attack the marshalling yard. 24 ships bombed with fair to good results. The flak was accurate and 20 of the planes received minor battle damage.

On June 7 two missions were flown, the first against gun positions at La Pernelle/Barfleur and the second to the marshalling yard at Argentan, both attacks being excellent in execution. During the latter attack we lost one plane to enemy action, the plane crash landing on friendly soil. Three crewmen were wounded and three planes battle damaged.

The following day a small railway bridge and railway embankment at Lessay was the objective with good to excellent results accomplished. One ship only was battle damaged.

On June 10 two missions were flown to destroy choke points at Valognes and road junctions at St. Lo. The Valognes attack was successful but the enemy defenses against us were accurate. One plane of the 496th Squadron was destroyed and six crewmen were reported missing, one crewman wounded and five planes battle damaged. The missing crew are as follows: 2nd Lt. H. L. Burdette, Pilot; 2nd Lt. D. W. Edwards, Co-Pilot; 2nd Lt. A. L. Collins, Bombardier; Pvt. J. G. Gisavage, Engineer Gunner; S/Sgt. M. H. Porter, radio Gunner; S/Sgt. S. Billings, Arm Gunner.

On June 11 we proceeded to Conde sur Noireau but made no attack, the target being obscured by weather. However, seven planes were battle damaged by flak.

The following day weather improved slightly and the formation returned to Conde sur Noireau to strike the bridge at that point. Results were only fair. No injuries or losses resulted this date.

June 13 two missions were flown. The marshalling yards at Lissieux and Mezidon were struck with excellent results. In the afternoon a choke point at St. Pierre sur Dives with fair to good results. Eight planes were slightly damaged.

From June 14 through 29, our efforts were brought against a bridge at Beaucency, gun emplacements at Quinville, Railway bridges at Chartres and Laval, railway tracks at Melerault to St. Lubin, construction sites at La Belle Hotesse, Prouville and Authieux, strong points and fortified areas at Cherbourg, railway facilities at Beuvais and a bridge at Oissel.

Our attacks at these points were all very successful and materially aided the ground forces in gaining their advances against the enemy. The two strongest defended positions were the strong point at Cherbourg where three men were wounded, eleven ships battle damaged and an attack by enemy fighters which were warded off by our gunners and the Oissel mission, one man having been killed and eleven receiving wounds, along with 24 ships battle damaged.

344th Bomb Group
Pilots Form

Box I R/T Call Sign: Pawnbroke
Box II R/T Call Sign: 11
Box III R/T Call Sign: 11

VHF CALL SIGNS AND CHANNELS

1. Fighter Escort
   Navigator
   BMF 2376

2. Fighter Control
   Farnham
   B

3. (Other) Group
   Parade
   C

4. POWER FORWARD

5. Air Sea Rescue Channel
   Plan to Plan Communication
   Emergency Loading Points:
   Greenwell
   Triston
   Shellpinkle

6. Emergency Hailing VHF
   Greenwell
   Triston
   Shellpinkle
   Parade

Group R/T Call Signs:

Squadron R/T Call Signs:
   494
   495

Splasher Beacons 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16

Time: 0800-2000
Color: RR

AUTHENTICATION
Challenge: 1147
Feather Code: VEBT

Indexable 347 BPR
Indexable 348 BHK

Bunker Beacons
   Ford 1033 KC 909
   Chestnut 1066 KC 909

IFF will not be used except when actual distress and then turn on the emergency switch.

344th Bomb Group
Lead Plane - D-Day Mission
6 June 1944 A.M.
From: 03:55 to 07:45

IX BOMBER COMMAND
99 BOMB WING
344 BOMBARDMENT GROUP
495 BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON

“MARY JO”
Aircraft Model: B-26-B50 MA
Aircraft Serial No. 42-95876
Squadron Identification: Y5S
Crew Chief: T/Sgt John C. Wilder

CREW

PILOT –
Formation Leader
Major Jens A. Norgaard
Iowa City, Iowa

CO-PILOT –
Deputy Grp Commander
Lt. Col. Robert W. Witty
Cleveland, Ohio

LEAD BOMBARDIER
Group Bombardier
Capt. James P. Parish
Montgomery, Alabama
(Died from wounds received on mission of 24 July 1944)

LEAD NAVIGATOR
1st Lt. Louis Offenberg
Portland, Maine

ENGINEER GUNNER
S/Sgt. Kenneth L. Hobbs
Denver, Colorado

RADIO OPERATOR
T/Sgt. John R. Leach
Poplar Bluff, Missouri

GUNNER

TAIL GUNNER
S/Sgt. Jules S. Theobald
Toledo, Ohio

NAVIGATOR
2nd Lt. Loris D. Griffke
Cottonwood, Minnesota

WAR CORRESPONDENT
Ivan H. Peterman
Died January 18, 1978
in Drexel Hill, PA