

# Explosion in Mid-Air

*In the Honor Roll section of the Archives there is the following paragraph about the loss of Aircraft #42-97088 and the crew of Lt Jack W. Gazzale*

Plane s/n 42-97088 was forming up in formation over England when it's wing tip appeared to burst into flame. Several of the crew bailed out and shortly thereafter the plane exploded. The pilot, Lt Jack W. Gazzale, was blown clear of the plane and parachuted to the earth as did five other members of his crew. Three of the crew were killed in the explosion and Lt Fred Oglesby lost his leg from an injury."

Two weeks ago I happened to converse with Jack Gazzale (the first time ever) and he has given me a more detailed account of what happened on that fateful day. He wrote down his memory of this event some years ago and has kindly given me permission to post it here. The following is an account of that mission and what he and his crew experienced:

---

On July 11th, 1944 we were just forming up on a mission to Munich, the fourth largest city in Germany. Our target was to be a jet aircraft plant located in the city and over 1200 heavy bombers were dispatched to the target. This was the Group's 86th mission and my 11th mission.

Our crew was made up of me, Jack W. Gazzale (Pilot), Jim Philips (Copilot), Fred Oglesby (Navigator), Ralph Hipsman (Engineer), Everett Broadie (Nose Gunner), his brother Robert Broadie (Tail Gunner), Bob Ehlert (Ball Turret Gunner), Burt Chenkin (Radioman), and William Becker (Waist Gunner).

At approximately 0930 and about one hour after takeoff and still forming up over England, the crew began to smell fuel. Suddenly the left wing was engulfed in flames and exploded, sending the aircraft into a severe spin preventing anyone from moving to an exit. Seconds later the main fuel tanks and possibly the bomb load exploded and the aircraft disintegrated. I was blown from the plane still strapped in my seat and Oglesby and Evertt Broadie (in the nose) were ejected through the nose section, severing Oglesby's left leg. Oglesby related that, as he fell toward earth unconscious, he became aware of something slapping him in the face and it was his boot and the severed leg. He pulled the ripcord and noticed his blood soaked parachute deploy before passing out again.

Witnesses on the ground reported seeing me plummeting toward the ground still strapped into my seat and at the last possible moment, unbuckling my seatbelt and pulling the ripcord. I received only minor injuries, but the trauma of injury and lost crew members was devastating.

Oglesby, bleeding profusely from his severe injury, was in a way, lucky. He landed in a tree beside the road just as an ambulance and crew came by on their way to a hospital with plasma. They and some farmers immediately removed Fred from the tree and applied emergency first aid, although they were unable to save his leg, he did survive and died only last year. Jim Phillips, Ralph Hipsman and Everett Broadie were lost in this crash.

The debris covered a five mile long path with an engine at the beginning and the largest piece, the tail section, at the other. Some debris fell on a B-24 base, causing a departing B-24 to abort it's takeoff after being hit by some of the debris.

Fred Oglesby and I are Colonels in the Confederate Air Force and I have the distinction of being a charter member of the High Sky Wing. Oglesby was a member of the Arizona Wing, which operates the B-17 "Sentimental Journey", whose markings are those of the 457th Bomb Group.