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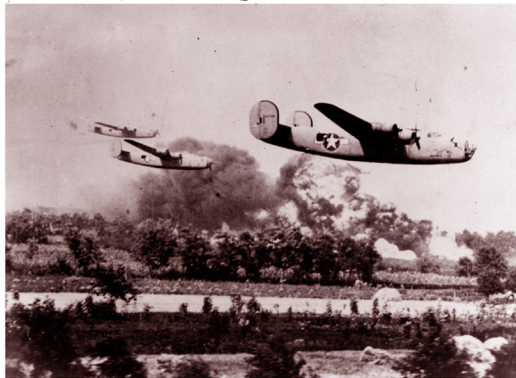
Ploesti Aftermath

"A big job magnificently done"—that was the verdict of Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur William Tedder, commander of the Allied air forces in the Mediterranean theater, on the great raid by Liberator bombers against the Rumanian oil center at Ploesti (pronounced Ployesht). He paid the tribute in a message of congratulations to Maj. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton, commander of American forces in the Middle East, on Aug. 4, three days after the raid and with the full returns in.

The official Allied version of the losses was given by Secretary of War Stimson at a Washington press conference on Aug. 5—the first since his return from Britain and Africa. Praising the "deliberate gallantry" of the men who had so daringly carried out the greatest low-level air assault in history, he revealed that out of 177 Liberators which took part, fifteen or twenty were shot down and as many more were missing, while eight came down in Turkey. That was a "very high proportion" of losses, but he declared that the raid was considered a success in view of the "most damaging blow" that had been struck.

One of the few eyewitness accounts of the damage was obtained by James Fleming, NEWSWEEK and CBS correspondent in Ankara. After interviewing a traveler who had just arrived in Turkey from Ploesti, Fleming wirelessly the following report:

"The bombers came over the target area at midday in intermittent waves at a terrifyingly low level, and they bombed over a stretch of several miles in the region of Câmpina and Ploesti. Tremendous damage was done to the best refineries which are located on the main road from Ploesti to Bucharest. These installations were the newest and best in the area, and they are completely out of operation.



U. S. Army Air Force Radiophoto from OWI

Fires billow from refineries as Liberators bomb Ploesti

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"There was terrible damage by fire to acres of oil storage tanks and derricks owing to the inability of fire-fighting apparatus to approach the blazes which gave out an intense heat. The surprisingly inadequate equipment made the fire fighters' performance comic. Delayed-action bombs were used, and the biggest explosion came on Monday morning hours after the bombing.

"The Ploesti railway yards are a shambles where loaded tank cars exploded and burned. Transport is now getting through the area by slow and improvised routes. Only military targets were hit. No civilians aside from workmen have been allowed in this area for more than two years. The capacity of the refineries has been nearly cut in half, and there is no prospect of rebuilding soon because of the nature of the equipment. Some fires were still burning five days later, and explosions continued through Wednesday. American bomber crews must have been very well trained concerning the targets inasmuch as the most vital were the hardest hit. The workers were terrified and the military authorities were forced to use stern measures to get many to return to work.

"The planes came over the targets in groups of about 36 at a time. The Ploesti and Câmpina air-raid alarm sirens did not sound until after the first attack. Late reports say that the Ploesti death toll is now more than 500."