

Everett J. Robson Crew 817th Squadron

Name	Pos	MIA	POW	Evadee	Hometown (1944)
Everett J. Robson	P	*	*		Fort Smith, AR
Harold R. Stock	CP	*	*		Pasadena, CA
Richard L. Hansler	N	*		*	Milwaukee, WI
Daniel S. Jones, Jr.	B				
Albert W. Van Oestrom	E	*	*		Niderland, TX
Phillip M. Nance	R	*	*		Tower Hill, IL
Aloys C. Suhling	RW	*		*	Hamburg, IL
Harold E. Beam	LW	*		*	Hoopeston, IL
Gordon W. Sternbeck	BT	*		*	New Holstein, WI
William N. Barry	TG	*	*		Lynn, MA
Other					
Gus J. Kroschewsky	B	*		*	San Antonio, TX

The crew had combat training at Ardmore, OK, and transferred to Kearney, NE, on 30 June 1944. About 14 July 1944, they departed Kearney in a new B-17. By early August the crew was flying combat missions.

The crew was MIA on a mission to Blechhammer in B-17 44-6412 on 13 September 1944. Five of the crew were captured and five evaded capture, returning to duty more than six months later. The following condensed version concerning the evadees is from records at Maxwell Air Force Base:

"The plane piloted by Everett Robson was severely damaged by a bomb that exploded beneath the formation in the target area. The damaged aircraft, dropping away from the formation, was attacked by four enemy fighters which succeeded in knocking down the plane, forcing the crew to bail out near Jablonka, Poland.

"On 23 March 1945 Kroschewsky, Beam, Sternbeck and Suhling returned to base. The three enlisted men plus Hansler landed in a wheat field and nearby woods, while the remainder of the crew apparently was captured immediately.

"Peasants harvesting the grain paid

little attention to the landing crewmen, and as a result, the men were able to conceal themselves quickly to evade search parties. Slovak border guards in the area actually saw all of them but made no effort at apprehension. Crew members believed that the then-current wave of pro-Allied optimism over the breakthrough in France explained their attitude.

"That evening the four, still scattered about within a two- to three-mile area, came out of hiding and were approached by civilians who offered food. By the following night all four had been brought together, and were told the Germans had picked up all the other crew members.

"Within a few days they were brought in contact with the Polish partisans. The crew requested that they be turned over to the Russians, but feelings between the Poles and Russians was such that their request was refused.

"On 25 September the four sent a radio message to Italy via the partisan radio requesting help. The response, radioed the same day, was 'stay with the Poles and find an airfield.' On 16 October the partisans brought Kroschewsky to join the rest of the crew. In the meantime, a Ca-

nadian and Scot of the RAF had joined the party.

"Another radio message was sent on 25 October, and they were again told to find a field, which they managed to do several days later. The Poles, however, would not permit them to send a message to Italy until a partisan officer had checked the field. This, it developed, was never done, and the group wandered about in the Gorce section of the West Beskid Mountains, never staying with any one family more than a few days.

"The crew members made repeated efforts the following weeks to send a radio message to Italy, but was unsuccessful. Early in January 1945, a B-24 crew shot down on 18 December joined them.

"On 18 January Russian planes came over the area on a strafing mission, and news of a big offensive was circulated. Three days later Hansler and the navigator from the B-24 crew went out to contact the Russians, who had by that time reached Tymbarok. A Russian patrol was found at this point and after preliminary interrogation, Lt. Hansler was kept with the Russians as a hostage while the other officer, who could speak Polish, went out with a Russian colonel to get the two crews.

"On January 22 the two crews, the Canadian, the Scot and a Belgian who had joined the group in December, were marched by the Russians to Lipnica. During the following two weeks, with Russian guards always accompanying them, they were shifted back and forth in the vicinity of Nowy Sacz and Kapusany. A Russian general interrogated them on 14 February and told them they were 'prisoners of friendship' and said they could not leave until the American consul in

Moscow made arrangements. At Nowy Sacz they had been severely restricted, but after the interview the food improved slightly and more cigarettes were issued. Russian uniforms had been given them to replace the rags which most of the men had been wearing for many months.

"Hansler had become ill on 2 February from malnutrition and was hospitalized at Nowy Sacz. On 21 February the hospital was moved to another and unknown location, and this was the last time the crew saw Lt. Hansler.

"All the Americans received orders to go to Odessa on 22 February. The following day they arrived at Lwow, where they were quartered for two days in a first class hotel and then placed on a train for Kiev, arriving there on 26 February. The next day they arrived at the repatriation camp for prisoners of war at Odessa where travel by boat to Naples was arranged."

This news release was prepared by public relations at Sterparone:

"Lt. Kroschewsky, a B-17 bombardier of the 15th Air Force, has just been officially credited with destroying a German fighter plane six months after the victory took place. To substantiate his claim, Kroschewsky produced a piece of the fighter and the name and some personal data about the late pilot. The unique story unfolded at his B-17 base today is as follows:

"On 13 September 1944, while on a mission to destroy an important target deep in enemy territory, Lt. Kroschewsky's plane was jumped by a host of German fighters. His plane was seriously damaged, but, manning the chin turret guns, shot down an ME-109.

"A few minutes after the Nazi plane crashed, the B-17's condition became so serious that the crew was obliged to bail

out. Upon hitting the ground, the bombardier succeeded in locating the wreckage of the German fighter he had shot down. With great foresight, he hacked off a neat square of the fuselage, and obtained from the dead pilot's papers the flyer's name, and other personal data, which he copied down.

"After six months of exciting adventure, Lt. Kroschewsky returned to his home base in Italy. He told his story, produced the remnant of the fighter's fuselage and information that its pilot had been one Captain Wilhelm Ekhardt, and was officially credited with an enemy fighter destroyed "by Sgt. Bernie Yudain."

Note: Kroschewsky, who went overseas with the Don C. Wood crew, was wounded at the time he shot down the ME-109.

