



The 463rd Bomb Group flew their first mission as a group on March 30, 1944. On May 18, 1944 the 463rd received a bombing mission to bomb the German oil refineries in Ploesti, Rumania. The Germans had positioned 2,000 smoke generators around the oil refinery to help conceal them from overhead bombing. They also had the heaviest anti-aircraft firing battery concentration in the world. The 463rd Bombing Group sent 35 bombers on the mission and lost 6 airplanes. Lieutenant Bearse piloted one of those downed bombers and he died with his crew on May 18, 1944. Due to the importance of that bombing mission and the heroism displayed throughout, the 463rd Bombardment Group received a Presidential Unit Citation, which reads as follows:

"The 463rd Bombardment Group is cited for outstanding performance of duty in armed conflict with the enemy. Assigned the mission to attack and destroy the Romano Americano Oil Refinery, Ploesti, Romania in an effort to reduce the total Axis oil production to a critical point in her military requirements. The ground crews worked enthusiastically and with grim determination to have their aircraft at the peak of mechanical perfection to insure the success of this mission despite the damages and losses suffered by their group through a sustained period of operations. On 18 May 1944, thirty-five B-17 type aircraft, heavily loaded with maximum tonnage, were airborne, and despite adverse weather conditions, rallied with the wing formation and set course for their destination. Under continued adverse weather conditions encountered enroute, the visibility became so limited, with dense cloud layers reaching to 30,000 foot elevation, all other units returned to base. Undaunted by the seemingly overwhelming odds, the 463rd Bombardment Group continued on alone through the dense cloud coverage, which rendered compact formation flying extremely hazardous. Despite intense, heavy, and accurate enemy anti-aircraft fire encountered over the target, the gallant crews, displaying outstanding courage, professional skill, and determination, though many of their airplanes were damaged severely, maintained their tight formation and brought their ships through the enemy defenses for a highly successful bombing run, inflicting grave damage to vital enemy installations and supplies. Rallying off the target after the bombing run and while unprotected by friendly fighters, the group was savagely attacked by approximately 100 highly aggressive enemy fighters. In the ensuing fierce engagement, while battling their way through the heavy enemy opposition, the group lost 7 bombers; however, in the gallant defense of the formation, the gunners accounted for 28 enemy aircraft destroyed, 30 probably destroyed, and 2 damaged. With the arrival of friendly fighters, the remaining bombers proceeded for a safe landing without further damage. By the extraordinary heroism, airmanship, and grim determination of the combat crews, together with the highly technical skill and intense devotion to duty of the ground personnel, the 463rd Bombardment Group has upheld the highest traditions of the military service, thereby reflecting great credit on themselves and the armed forces of the United States."

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF WAR, GEORGE C. MARSHALL, Chief of Staff of the Army