741ST BOMB SQ. HISTORY



VOL III

A PARTIAL HISTORY OF THE 741ST BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON

455TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP

JULY 6, 1943 THROUGH MAY 1945

Horace W. Lanford, Colonel, USAF (Retired)
Ph.D. The Ohio State University, 1964
Professor Emeritus, Wright State University,
Dayton, Ohio, 1988

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Volume I and Volume II 11/20/91
Volume III

Registration Number 516664

Volume III is dedicated to:

Major General William Berg

Brigadier General George McCord

Lt. Col. Bernard Keogh, Distinguished Service Cross

Major Lewis D. Nixon, Republic of Korea GOLD STAR CHONG MOO MILITARY MERIT (USAF equivalent--Distinguished Service Cross)

and to all the personnel of the 741 Squadron who performed so well their duties in WWII.

Volumes I and II were dedicated to:

Senator George McGovern

Major General Eugene Hudson

Dr. Harold Schuknecht

741 Squadron History
Volume III

THE REPLACEMENT CREWS

Volume III of the 741 Squadron History is dedicated to Major General William Berg, Brigadier General George McCord, Lt. Col. Barnard Keogh, Distinguished Service Cross, Major Lewis D. Nixon, Republic of Korea GOLD STAR CHONG MOO MILITARY MERIT (USAF equivalent--Distinguished Service Cross) [Admiral Chong Moo was a Korean naval hero who defeated a Japanese invasion force that was attacking Korea in approximately 900 A.D.], all former 741 Squadron members who won the Silver Star, and to all the members of the 741 Squadron who performed so well their duties in World War II in Italy. Replacement crew pilots continue to "pop up" from many sources, viz., reading the 455th Group History, letters from replacement crew members inviting attention to crew members not included in the 455th "Roll Call," letters from crew members inviting attention to crews that were physically at Cerignola in the 741 Squadron but are not shown in any historical document, and so it goes. I am completely dependent on members of replacement crews for information. Then the mistakes of putting it together are mine! Months of coverage in the 741 "War Diary" are missing--August through December 1944 and March through whenever in 1945, if my memory serves me well. The 455 Group will send me all the unclaimed "unidentified" crew pictures they have. I will send these pictures, in turn, to members of replacement crews with whom I am in contact. I have asked someone from each replacement crew identified for photographs and experiences. Some identified crews have no members in the 455 Group Association so contact cannot be made. A good project for some volunteer(s) would be to search out the current addresses of these crew members and get them in communication with the rest of us. Even "Returned-from-the-dead" Barney Keogh did not know the existence of the 455 Bomb Group Association until <u>after</u> the October '91 reunion--and Barney lives in Boulder, Colorado!

International Commodore Andrew Mitchell, International Yachting Fellowship of Rotarians (1991-93), said that it had always been his opinion that every man should experience at least one great moment in his life.

I am very fortunate to have experienced a number of what I regard as "great moments" in my run-of-the-mill career. However, a truly great moment to me will be when the History of the 741 Squadron is as nearly complete as I can make it.

The history of the original 18 crews of the squadron is fairly well documented through the first 100 missions. (The document "The First 100 Missions [of the 455th Bomb Group] surfaced when Col. Phil John of Group Headquarters passed along a copy to Jim Smith of the 741, living in San Antonio TX, as was Phil John. Jim Smith passed a copy of the First 100 Missions to Gene Hudson, who passed a copy to Hugh Graff, Group Historian, and to me.) Colonel Bill Large, of the 454th Group and later 304 Wing Headquarters, provided me a history of the 256 missions flown by the B-24s of the 304th Wing, the "7 Days of Hell," and a description of the "Hollywood" missions supporting the 5th and 8th Armies.

I am indebted to the same people who provided so much information to me in the development of Vols. I and II, viz., Al Asch, Hugh Graff, Tom Ramey, Bill Large of the 454th Group, and the many crew members who contributed

experiences. Some experiences and information were taken from the Squadron War Diary, written by John Van Lent, and the Medical History of the 741, written by Dr. Hal Schuknecht.

The response to my request for assistance in developing the history of the replacement crews has been excellent. And it's a good thing! There are no records available (at least to me) of the replacement crews. So far, the 18 original crews have been documented reasonably well, the 6 crews formed by co-pilots of original crews, not so well documented, and the 57 or more (or less) replacement crews have been identified and documented, such as it is, by reliance on the group of replacement crews as a whole for photographs and experiences.

Here is an example of how quickly the 741 spirit wore off onto the new crews. "It was certainly a pleasure receiving a letter from my World War II Squadron Commander. I shall be more than happy to assist you in compiling data for Volume III of the History of the 741st Bomb Squadron. You must, however, realize that I was under your command for only three days: July 3, 1944, to July 7, 1944." (Underlining added.) Dave Loughrie was substitute co-pilot on Ralph Chadwick's crew, MIA 7/7/44, Odertal Synthetic Oil and Coking Plant, Germany.

The 741 Squadron did some good things that are not readily apparent. As reported earlier, in Vol. I, I won the large farm building in our area on the toss of a coin with Dave Thayer, CO of the 743rd. We immediately made offices of many of the "rooms" in our building, cleaned out tons of debris from the largest space or room and built the first enlisted club in the group, with tile floors and marble bar. The next largest room was converted into the first officers' club of the group, with tile floor, marble bar with sandblasted 741 on it, field telephone, radio receiver, piano, nice furniture, etc. The officers' club room had a passageway (stoop-down, if I recall) leading to a small room which was converted to a "game room," complete with dice table covered by a GI blanket. I took over the aviary on the roof of the building, knocked out the bird roosts, filled in the bird-entry holes, and six (6) of us, I believe, lived up there. A 743rd EM, an accomplished pianist, would entertain us for hours on the piano--free--to stay in practice.

When we arrived at Cerignola, only the aircrews got tentage--at least the pyramidal tents. The ground personnel got nothing--and some scrounged pup tents or even lived in the plywood baggage containers used in the B-24s flying from the States. We built a mess hall as quickly as possible to allow use of the mess tent as a barracks. I think Hal Schuknecht was responsible for the hot water arrangements in the squadron areas--for shaving, etc. These things weren't there--or inherited--they were built from the ground up--in February and March--the winter months. At one point we had only 1 heated flying suit per crew. If you want to know the meaning of suffering and misery, just listen on the intercom to the description of the exposed gunners--at 24,000', of how cold they are! Many Purple Hearts were given for frostbite.

Our maintenance and a/c in commission rate was very good. The 741 Squadron and one (1) other squadron in either the 756 or 759 BG were the consistent leaders in maintenance records put out by the 304th Wing Headquarters. Generals Spaatz, Eaker, and Twining, did not inspect the 741 by lottery! (I missed the inspection by the Generals--they were originally

due the 20th of June--we were up, had inspection and roll call at 5:00 am, but for naught. No date was given for the rescheduled visit. I went to Capri. The Generals visited on July 4, 1944--I returned to the Squadron from Capri that night.)

Barney Keogh writes "...we're...still walking toward the sun-set. I'm sure that we both, even yet, hope to make a few good marks in the sands of time before we disappear foever over the horizon." I am the most fortunate man alive! This fact becomes more apparent every day! I have had the opportunity to make a few good marks in the sands, however shallow, and hope to make the best of this opportunity to document some of the good marks made by our brothers in arms. Please help me give it a good try. Dave Loughrie (in the 741 for three (3) days) writes "...I am glad you are working on the final volume of the 741st, since our time is certainly growing short." My gait toward the sunset has rapidly increased. Let's get on with this!

Methodology

I have included in Volume I and Volume II and as attachments in Volume III copies of all orders pertinent to the 741 Squadron that I can find. I personally had a good number of early orders and Russ Welch provided me with a large number from his files. Most of my photographs were included in Volume I. Hal Schuknecht provided a large number of photographs used in Volume I. The photographs included in Volume III come from William Crim, Joe Havris, Art Johnson, Russ Welch, Eddie Fedorshak, and an unidentified person who gave me a large number of photographs at the 1991 Colordao Springs reunion. Crew photographs have been provided by Hugh Graff of the 455th Group Association, by a few individual former crew pilots and crew members, by Buck Fedorshak, and by Jim Scott.

I have reviewed the microfilm of the 455 Group and the 741 Squadron History from the Maxwell AFB Historical Research Agency. I am still short a number of combat crew photographs and perhaps seven (7) months of the 741 Squadron "War Diary." Because of this seven (7) month gap in history, there is the possibility that a number of crews assigned to the 741st are not mentioned at all. I have submitted seventy-eight (78) names to the 455 Group "Roll Call" section of the Group History. One of these names was the crew pilot only, there being no record of the other nine (9) men. War Diary of 5/22/45 says "New crews coming in every day."

I have sent out questionnaires to a number of former 741 squadron members. Some responded, some did not. I have requested, directly, crew photographs from former crew commanders. Some responded, some did not. My base for questionnaire and direct mail is, of course, the 455 Group Association. And, the 741 Squadron is lowest of all the squadrons in numbers of 455 Group Association members.

Jack Reeder did not respond to my request for a letter to former members of the 741 Squadron. Russ Welch did. Francis Doring is deceased, as is Anderson.

It appears that the fact that the 741st Squadron hosted a cocktail party (10/4/91) for all attendees was worthwhile in many respects. One, I discovered the large number of replacement crews not mentioned in Volumes I and II of the squadron history. Two, we proved that we could put on a fantastic party with no knownbudget in advance, no accurate count of expected attendees, planning and arrangements a distance of 2000 miles from the party site, and a room too small for all reunion attendees to come in at the same time. Whatever the difficulties, the party proved a good mixer for the reunion and helped prepare the stage for a successful reunion. The party made possible the mixing of members of original crews with replacement crews and this in turn has greatly facilitated the development of this Volume III.

Note the title of the history series--"A Partial History of the 741st Squadron." Considering the circumstances, I believe we are off to a good start. More frequent reunions would facilitate the task. Perhaps more capable hands will undertake to "fill in the gaps."

As mentioned elsewhere, this "Squadron History" began when Al Asch and Hugh Graff asked me to write the 741 history for the 455 Group Association History. The project grew and grew--like Topsy!

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Major General William W. Berg, one-time Assistant Secretary of Defense, Manpower, and one-time Sqdn. Executive Officer, 741 Bomb. Sqdn.



Biography

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE
OFFICE OF INFORMATION
COMMAND SERVICES UNIT
BOLLING AFB, D.C. 20332

AV 991-4291
AREA CODE 202/574-4291

MAJOR GENERAL WILLIAM W. BERG



Major General William W. Berg is Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff, Programs and Resources, Headquarters U.S. Air Force.

General Berg was born on March 14, 1918, in Logansport, Ind., and was educated in the local public school system, graduating in 1936. He is a graduate of the University of Maryland with a bachelor of science degree and George Washington University with a master of arts degree. He also has completed the Air Force Advanced Management Course in the Graduate School of Business Administration at the University of Pittsburgh, and the residence course at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces.

His military career began when he enlisted in the 11th Infantry Regiment at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indianapolis, Ind., in November 1936, where he served for three years. In January 1942 he again enlisted in the Army and in June 1943 graduated from Officer Candidate School with a commission as second lieutenant.

During World War II, General Berg served four years in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations as a member of the Fifteenth Air Force. He remained in Europe as a member of the Occupation Forces and returned to the United States in 1947.

Following tours of duty at Pope Air Force Base, N.C., and Mitchel Air Force Base, N.Y., he attended the University of Pittsburgh for a year. General Berg was sent to Europe in 1952 for another four-year tour of duty where he served as Assistant Chief of Staff, Personnel, for the Twelfth Air Force, the major tactical air element of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces (NATO).

Upon return to the United States in 1956, General Berg was assigned to Headquarters U.S. Air Force, at the Pentagon. He served first as Chief of the Selection Board Secretariat and later as Chief of the Officer Promotion and Separation Policy Branch in the office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel.

He attended the Industrial College of the Armed Forces in Washington, D.C., from August 1961 to July 1962. General Berg next was assigned to the office of the Secretary of Defense where he held the position of Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy.

O V E R

(Current as of May 15, 1972)

(Local reproduction authorized)

In August 1968 General Berg returned to Headquarters U.S. Air Force as Director of Manpower and Organization in the office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Programs and Resources. In April 1972 he assumed duties as the Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff, Programs and Resources.

His military decorations and awards include the Distinguished Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Army Commendation Medal with one oak leaf cluster, and the Italian Cross for War Merit.

General Berg is married to the former Vera Moscatelli of Trani, Italy. They have two sons, George and Walter; and two daughters, Lucy and Caroline.

He was promoted to the temporary grade of major general effective May 1, 1968, with date of rank January 14, 1964.

Brigadier General George McCord

I have no portrait of General McCord nor do I have a biography.

I received a crew picture and numerous other photographs from General McCord which I forwarded on to the 455 Group Historian in the belief that copies would be made and the photos returned to me for use in the 741 Sqdn. History. Unfortunately, a serious health problem has prevented this action.

I should have copied the photos when they were in my possession but I was obsessed with the thought of holding down the cost of Volume III. What a mistake I made!

My sincere apologies to General McCord and the rest of you. Perhaps the photographs will arrive from Group some day and can be added in. I hope so.

HL

1/25/93



"Red" Keogh

Distinguished Service Cross

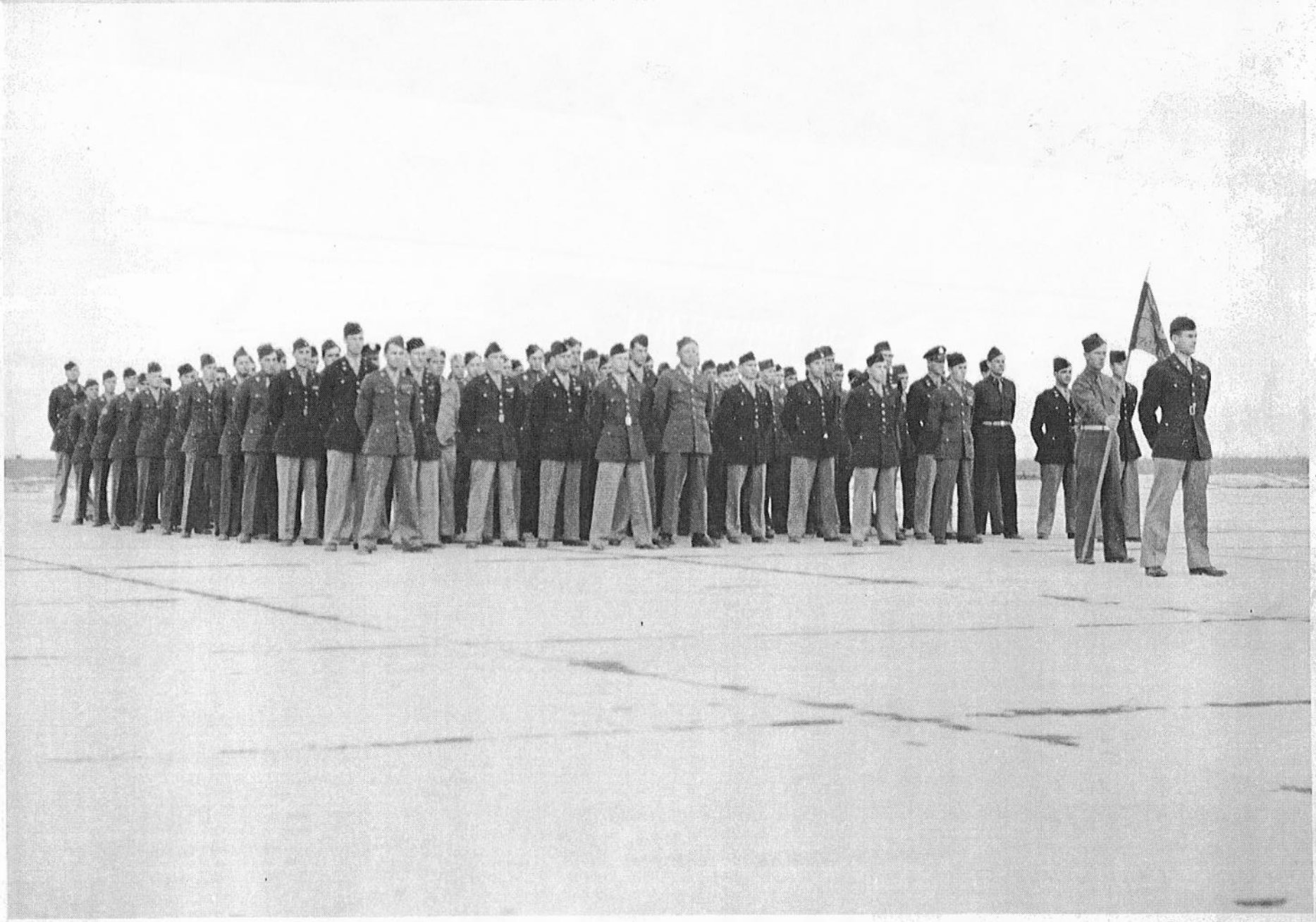


Major Lewis D. Nixon
Republic of Korea GOLD STAR CHONG MOO MILITARY MERIT
USAF equivalent — Distinguished Service Cross

Pictures are missing of our beginning at Clovis, NM, our TDY to AAFSAT (Army Air Forces School of Applied Tactics), our month at Alamagordo (Lanford once made repeated trips to Post Office in railroad station to pick up small package containing part for grounded B-24--before the days of the logistics airline. The part came in on a Sunday night. The airplane was flying Monday morning). From Alamogordo (remember the picnic at the White Sands National Park?) we went to Salt Lake City--where our photographic narrative begins. From Salt Lake City through Chicago--overnight--where Lanford and Liberty could not start an engine. Conference with aircraft engineer and on-board maintenance passengers resulted in decision to make high speed taxi run down runway at Chicago Midway Airport and start engine by unfeathering propeller. Procedure worked, we braked to a stop, returned to ramp to pick up passengers, thanked tower, and proceeded to Langley.

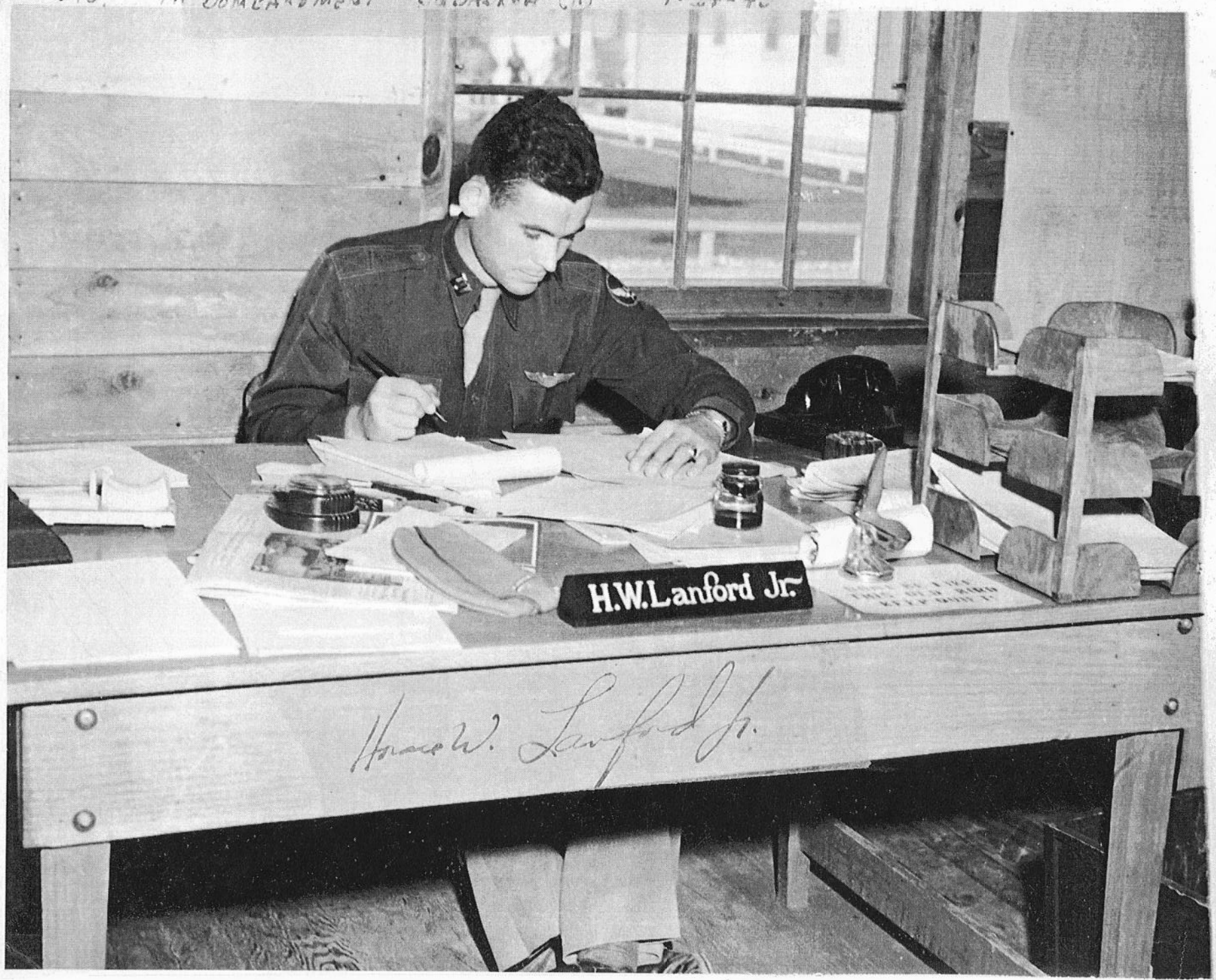
(Gene Hudson topped this when stranded at an abandoned airstrip in North Africa. He couldn't start the putt-putt so he "borrowed" a running putt-putt from another aircraft, started his engines, returned the putt-putt to the owner-aircraft, and flew into Djieda where we trained a month.) Our stay at Djieda was necessary because the Germans bombed Bari Harbor or Naples in December 1943, sinking ships with steel planking and gasoline pipeline equipment destined to make Cerignola operational.

9-20-43



741 Bomb Sqdn (H). First Review, Salt Lake City, Utah, 9/20/43. Sqdn at 1/2 full strength of 489. (Joe Harris)

C.O. 741 BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON (H) 7-28-42



14

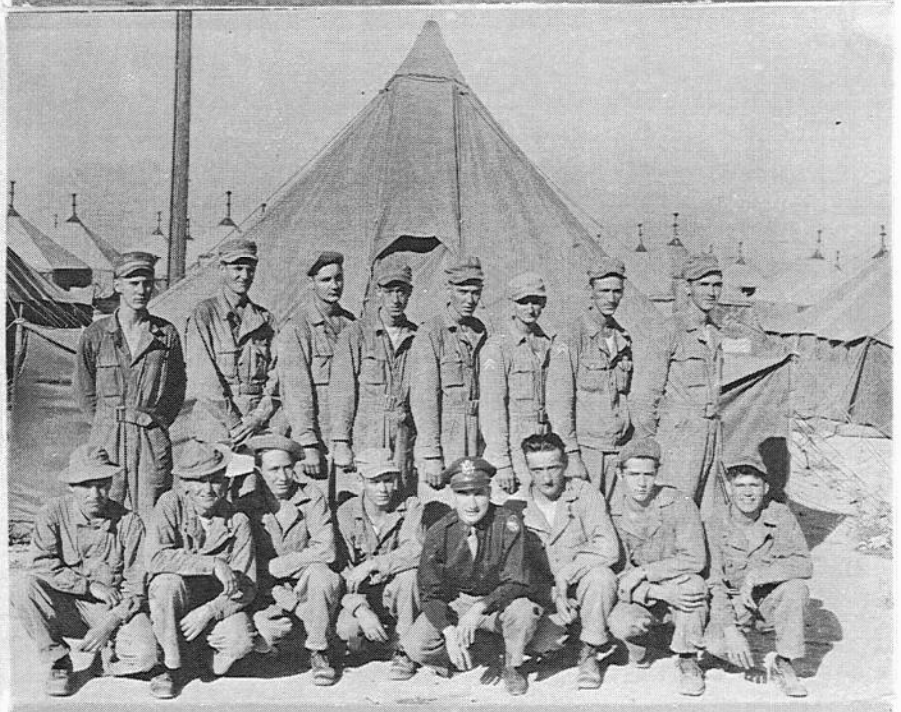
(49 yrs ago) The original C.O. of the 741st. Salt Lake City Utah 9/28/43 Put this together tonight 9/24 1992

SCENES AT LANGLEY FIELD

Engineering Section



Ordnance Section

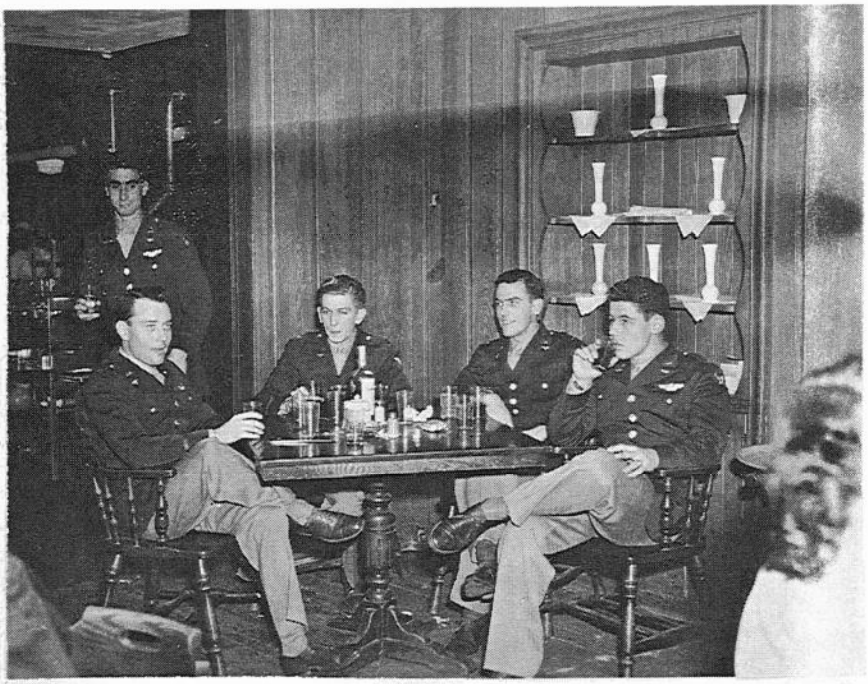


Communications Section



Lt. Liberty briefing 741 Sqdn. personnel at Langley.

Langley Officers' Club
L to R:
Capt. Welsh
Lt. R. McWilliams (?) Nav.
unidentified
Lt. Mehegan - Armament
Lt. Bailen - Bomb.



741 Operations
L to R:
Cpl. Sullivan
Cpl. Fedorshak
Lt. McWilliams
Lt. Liberty
Capt. Welsh
Lt. Massey

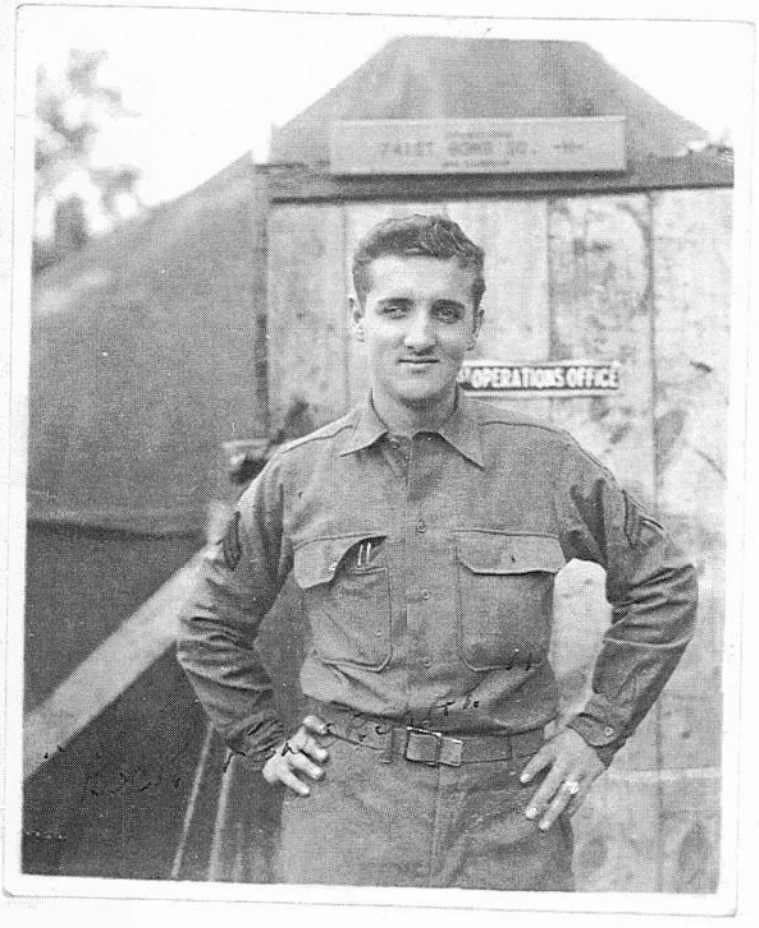


AND IN ITALY
Gen. Twining
454th Col. Ainesworth
455th Lt. Col. Snowden
(in between) Col. Ken A. Cool
2nd from right
Red Cross "Maggie"





Langley Officers' Club
Is Capt. Welsh "crooning"?
Lt. Liberty likes it!



At Cerignola
The one and only
"Buck" Fedorshak



B-24D, Langley Field, November 1943. Lt. Bowers flying off Lt. Hudson's wing.

WAR DIARY

GROUND ECHELON 455TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP

December 13, 1943---Embarkation day. Took train ride to Newport News. Boarded Liberty Ship "William T. Barry," better known as HR 758 at 1300.

December 14, 1943---Getting arranged on board ship. Still in harbor.

December 15, 1943---Finally pulled out of harbor, during storm.

December 16, 1943---Full speed ahead to catch up with convoy. Collided with DE at 2330. Wind blowing approximately 45 miles an hour. Hole knocked in bow of ship that 6 by 6 truck could be driven through. Decision made to return to port.

December 17, 1943---Back to port. Debarked and took trucks to Camp Patrick Henry. Morale increased 100%.

December 18 to 23, 1943---Had wonderful time. Everybody drinking their last PX beer and seeing movies.

December 24, 1943---Embarking again. Songest held in hold of ship.

December 25, 1943---Christmas on board ship. For some, first away from home, but everybody takes it in stride.

December 26, 1943---Abandon ship drill took 4 minutes, twice what it should. Personnel witnesses burial at sea.

December 27, 1943---Weather turns bad. Volleyball court laid out in hold of ship.

December 28, 1943---Weather changes again, perfect day. Everybody takes sunbaths.

December 29, 1943---Another perfect day. Deck looks like laundry as everyone washes clothes.

December 30, 1943---Windy day. Aircraft carrier joins convoy.

December 31, 1943---Show presented on board ship. Song entitled "Aboard the William T. Berry," written by Cpls. B. W. Hutchins, J. Oliker and Pvt. L. C. Costa steals show. Everybody has jolly time.

January 1, 1944-----New Years. Everyone gathers around radio to hear Orange Bowl and Rose Bowl football games. French station drowns out Rose Bowl at crucial stage.

January 2, 1944-----Final destination revealed as Italy.

January 3, 1944-----Personnel given partial payment of $10.00. Poker games abound. School of flying fishes sighted.

January 4, 1944-----Barracuda volleyball team composed of Sgts. Keen, Kremnick, McKelvey and Cpls. Fappiano, Granzow, Haldeman and Hutchins win opener.

January 5, 1944-----Weather stormy. Everybody playing Italian game called "Mora," taught by Italian fellows.

January 6, 1944-----At torpedo Junction. Everyone on alert.

January 7, 1944-----Only 700 miles from Gibraltar. Everybody restless to see land again.

January 8, 1944-----Another beautiful day. Nice for sunbathing.

January 9, 1944-----Torpedo nets lowered.

January 10, 1944----Everybody on deck before dawn sweating out "The Rock." Finally sighted through fog.

January 11, 1944----Mediterranean seems like another world. Like a placid lake. Everyones spirits soar. Wending way along African coast.

January 12, 1944----Shuffle board court put up on deck.
January 13, 1944----Still hugging African coast. Sea still very calm.
January 14, 1944----Leave African coast. Bari, Pfc. J. Addante's birthplace, announced as destination.
January 15, 1944----Frequent air and submarine alerts. Two today. Half of convoy leaves us.
January 16, 1944----Sicily and Mt. Etna sighted.
January 17, 1944----Spent night in harbor at Augusta, Sicily.
January 18, 1944----On way again. Barracudas captureundisputed volleyball championship by beating 742nd's "C" Flight Sharks.
January 19, 1944----Docked at Taranto, Italy. Debarked and spent night at British transient camp. Nobody slept.
January 20, 1944----Entrained for the north. Everyone impressed by the country with the orange groves, rolling land all nice and green in January. Spent night on the train at Cerignola Campagne. Cpl. R. H. Granzow happy. Spent his 25th birthday on terra firma.
January 21, 1944----Arrived at San Giovanni, our permanent base. Lt. Col. John, Major Coons, M/Sgt. Smallwood and T/Sgt. Smith await us. Mail at last. Slept in the barns that will serve for the S-2, S-3, and S-4 offices.
January 22, 1944----Tents issued. Everybody busy getting them up.
January 23, 1944----Stoves set up. Everybody going to bet at dusk as there is nothing else to do.
January 24 to January 31, 1944----Period of great hubub. Office getting set up and preparations being made to receive air echelon.

Additions and Corrections to Volumes I and II

Addition:

Humphrey Hosmer, Navigator on M/Gen Gene Hudson's crew, describes the Easter Sunday, 1944, mission to the marshalling yards outside the city of Milan, Italy.

Correction:
To Attachment #6, Vol. II, pps. 37 & 38.
Add under Mission 80, 742nd Sqdn. dtd 7/17/44 Lt. Brimage. (insert between Lt. Bush and Lt. Danekak. Then change 742nd total from 15 to 16 crews. Then change Group total from 52 crews to 53 crews.

Corrections:

(to Vol. I): 741 Squadron Commanders
add, Capt. Gordon R. Anderson (June '45)
1st Lt. Robert E. Basala (July '45)

(to Vol.II): Attach. #6, "455 Crew Losses ..."
add, Mission #80 7/17/44 Lt. Brimage MIA
then change 742 total from 15 to 16

Addition:

From column in STARS & STRIPES, "Keeping in Touch"

"... One of the best-liked Joes ever to hit the squadron, Capt. Winfield Bowers, is still at Chanute Field, taking a six months course in Engineering ..."

Ed. note: Win Bowers is now (11/30/92) building his own airplane with his son and one other individual. He

A MEMORABLE DAY

I would like to share with you a memorable day. Early one morning, about a half century ago, I was lying on a canvas cot, under a pyramidal tent, surrounded by olive trees, on a knoll amongst the wheat fields of southeast Italy.

As I lay asleep, my senses picked up the movement of foot-steps swishing through the heavy, dew laden grass, and they stopped next to my cot. A tug on my shoulder and a voice spoke out, "Lieutenant, it is time to get up".

I arose and dressed in the uniform of the day; cotton khaki T-shirt, cotton khaki boxer shorts with the three buttons, a blue grey heated flying suit, G.I. suntans and coveralls. I wore heated boots under my sheepskin lined overshoes. After getting dressed, I threw my G.I. shoes, with their lacings tied together, around my neck, grabbed my briefcase and parachute bag, and went off to the mess hall.

After breakfast I piled into a truck with other airmen on our way to the briefing room, which was a converted wine cellar. As I descended the stairs, I

glanced at the big map, on the north wall, which covered southern Europe. I noticed the blue string going from our base out over the Gulf of Manfredonia, along the Adriatic Sea, and into the Po Valley. The briefing was thorough, covering the bomb load, E.T.A. at the target, course, weather, opposition etc.

After dismissal, we started a mad scramble to the trucks waiting outside, next to the Chapel of San Giovanni. Our crew was dropped off at at B-24H # 476. This is the plane that carried us across the Atlantic Ocean three months earlier, stopping in Africa, before landing in Europe.

Quickly the crew lined up, each grabbing a propeller blade, rotating it through each engine, in order to distribute the oil, before starting up the engines. I climbed over the nose wheel , in order to get into the navigator's compartment. I erased the old lines on my mercator chart, and plotted the new course and target. It is easier to do this while the plane is on the ground, than when it is airborn.

At the appointed hour, a red flare from operations burst into the air. It started the whine of energizers,, which culminated in the roar of Pratt and Whitney engines.

One by one, the planes lined up on the taxi way, awaiting their turn to take off.. Once airborn, we circled the field and got into formation, as per briefing. With this accomplished, the formation headed for the Gulf of Mafredonia, climbing on course as we progressed.

Below, and on our left, lay the spur on the boot of Italy.. Most of it is made of limestone, with many caves and grottos along its shore. Directly ahead was the Dalmatian Coast, and it was now time to change our course to a northwest direction, up the middle of the Adriatic Sea.

We had now reached our bombing altitude of 20,000 feet. The day was clear, not a cloud in the sky. Looking to the east, the horizon was white against a cobalt blue sky. Yugoslavia was still locked in the grip of winter. To the west, the Apennine Mountains were shrouded in a purple veil. Below, and to the right was the island of Vis, a haven in case we ran into trouble.

Using the intercom, I said, "Navigator to crew- directly ahead of us, along the shore, you can see

a gold jewel glistening in the sun. It is the domes of St. Mark's Cathedral in the city of Venice, St. Mark is the patron saint of Venice, and it was in his mother's house that the Last Supper was served. "

A quick flashback to my boyhood. At the age of nine, I was feeding the pigeons in St. Mark's square. The family guide pointed to the four bronze horses over the portals of the cathedral, and told me that, during the big war (W.W.I.), the horses were removed so that they wouldn't be damaged . I wondered if they had been moved again.

It was time to change course to a heading due west. Below us lay a lush,velvet, green valley with silver strips reflecting the bright Italian sun.The Po Valley, with all its tributaries, was before us.

As we approached the I.P., Sam Bakanauskas, our bombadier, came up into the nose, turned on the bomb sight, lit up the bomb control panel, opened up the bombay doors, and said, "Where is the target?"

Over the intercom, I said, "See the railroad track coming from the northwest, the one from the southeast, and the one from the northeast? Where they meet-that is your target. Do you want me to go down and

put a circle around it?" Sam has had that question fired at him so often that he ignores it.

I climbed up onto my table to get out of the way. P.D.I. on pilot(Hudson) to bombadier (Bakanauskas), "The plane is all yours.." The rest of the crew was quiet and still except for the bombadier. The lights on the control panel started to go out, one after the other.

Over the intercom came,"Bombs away." Dowm off my table I climbed, and looked out the bubble window. Thirty-seven seconds later, orange flashes could be seen exploding in the marshalling yard outside the city of Milan.

A small incident in a big war had just been completed. It had taken all our attention, and now the time had come for us to look out for ourselves.

Just ahead, rising out of the Po Valley, defying our passage, were the rugged peaks of the Alps Mountains. We passed up the challenge, and turned slowly to the left. As we did the antiaircraft guns at Genoa began to open up, but we never came within their range.

We continued our left bank until we were over the Apennine Mountains, the backbone of Italy. By this time the sun had just passed our zenith, and we were headed back to our base.

"Navigator to crew. Below at ten o'clock is the city of Florence. This is the area where the Renaissance was launched, taking Europe out of the Dark Ages. Notice the covered bridge crossing the Arno River. It is called Ponti Vecchio. It contains a passageway connecting two palaces on either side of the river. It is one continuous art gallery.

The large building, of different colored marble, is the Florence Cathedral. The hexagonal building is the Baptistry. On three of its sides are great bronze doors, with panels that depict stories from the Old Testament.

At this point one of the gunners pressed the command button on the intercom, overriding our 'Cook's Tour', to report, "Those Renaissance are shooting at us."

Pilot to crew, "Did anyone get a shot at the ME 109 that just went by us?" No reply.

I took inventory. We could no longer see the east coast of the Adriatic, but we could see the west coast of Italy.

Navigator to crew, "Look to the right and follow the coastal plane to the foothills of the Apennines. and below at two o'clock, is the little town of Assissi. This was the birthplace and home of Saint Francis, a man who preached a sermon to the birds, cultivated a rose

without thorns, and in his later years, suffered the Wounds of the Crucifixion."

This memorable day, which you have just shared eith me, my crew, and my squadron, was Easter, 1944.

B- 24H Peel Off
741 st Bomb Squadron
455 th Bomb Group (H)
15 th Air Force

Humphrey B. Hosmer

Humphrey B. Hosmer
Navigator A.C. #42-64476
U.S. Army Air Corps

add: The Distinguished Service Cross was awarded to Lt. Bernard M. Keogh.

The Republic of Korea GOLD STAR CHONG MOO MILITARY MERIT was awarded to Major Lewis O. Nixon. (USAF equivalent = Distinguished Service Cross)

The list of recipients of the Silver Star Medal listed in Vol. I should be increased by these names:

Lt. John R. Brashear
2nd Lt. John Kroplin, Jr.
Victor McWilliams
Capt. Robert C. Christensen
2nd Lt. Harry F. McCracken
2nd Lt. Howard O. Vralsted
T/Sgt. Frederick L. Dendy, Jr.
T/Sgt. Frederick Q. Huggins
S/Sgt. William G. Logue, Jr.
S/Sgt. Stanley W. Lundquist
S/Sgt. Alfred Puslat
S/Sgt. Harold L. Watson

The list of recipients of the DFC listed in Volume I should be increased by these names:

Peters, Harold P., 1st Lt.
Arendt, Harry S., 1st Lt.
Blount, Harry O., Jr., 1st Lt.
Benson, Rudolph L., 1st Lt.
Bone, Donald L., 1st Lt.
Burkholder, Leonard W., 1st Lt.
Clark, John L., 1st Lt.
Clayton, Joseph C., 1st Lt.
Darling, Robert N., 1st Lt.
Doring, Francis G., Maj.
Douglas, Jim C., 1st Lt.
Goetz, George R., 1st Lt.
Graf, Donald B., 1st Lt.
Graham, Richard K., Capt.
Girard, Francis J., 1st Lt.
Head, James A., 1st Lt.
Feurriegel, Karl T., 1st Lt.
Jirschele, William S., 1st. Lt.
Josey, Finis H., 1st Lt.
Kent, Louis F., S/Sgt.
Lewis, Angus L., T/Sgt.
McCord, George E., Maj.
McNiff, John T., 1st Lt.
McGovern, George S., 1st Lt.
McWilliams, Robert c., Capt.
Oxler, John E., 1st Lt.
Painter, Charles W., 1st Lt.
Perill, Rodney S., 1st Lt.
Pinkly, Lester G., 1st Lt.
Redding, Horace D., 1st Lt.
Soderstrom, Edward C., 1st Lt.
Surbeck, Howard A., Capt.
Vince, Earl J., 1st Lt.
Walsh, Joseph F., Jr., 1st Lt.
Bowers, Winfield S.
Wendt, Gus
Condra, Paul T.
Welsh,Russell J.
Nangeroni, Louis L.
Hudson, Eugene L.
Bundy, Herman A., T/Sgt.
Fortson, T/Sgt.
Kujawa, Leonard A.
Stuart, Linden, Capt.
Muth, Gordon C., 2nd Lt.
Regnier, Robert R., 2nd Lt.
Padgett, Leo C., S/Sgt. (Posthumous)
Swann, Gordon F., S/Sgt.(Posthumous)
Bakanauskas, Sam, 1st Lt.
Crowley, Robert M., 2nd Lt.
McCarthy, Paul A., 2nd Lt.
Bialas, Casmir E., T/Sgt.
Gross, Hugo R., T/Sgt.

DFC (continued)

Abbott, Jack E., S/Sgt.
Bowles, William, Jr., S/Sgt.
Townsend, Hubert L., S/Sgt.
Gorski, Harold, 1st. Lt.
Crim, William R., 2nd Lt.
Disbrow, Bill L., 2nd Lt.
Scott, James W., Jr., 2nd Lt.
Merfield, John E., T/Sgt.
Vicinski, Stephen, T/Sgt.
Beauvais, Raymond R., S/Sgt.
Magnuson, Dale F., S/Sgt.
Vincent, Kenneth J., S/Sgt.
Weeks, James E., S/Sgt.
Blackman, Mark S., Sgt.
Bosler, Erwin M. 1st Lt.

The list of recipients of the SOLDIERS' MEDAL listed in Volume I should be increased by these names:

McCord, George E., Maj.
O'Mara, Robert E., Cpl.

The list of recipients of the BRONZE STAR Medal listed in Volume I should be increased by these names:

Allen, James R., Sgt.
Burford, Sam I., M/Sgt.
Chadwick, Rodney, M., S/Sgt.
Clayton, James J., T/Sgt.
Fedorshak,Edward G., S/Sgt.
Havris, Joseph, S/Sgt.
Helberg, Donald R., S/Sgt.
Kosco, John, Jr., S/Sgt.
Martsching, John W., T/Sgt.
Paquette, Harvey B., M/Sgt.
Eggemeyer, Victor H., T/Sgt.

The list of recipients of the PURPLE HEART Medal listed in Volume I should be increased by these names.

Lt. Victor McWilliams
Lt. Paul T. Condra
T/Sgt. Verl D. Maxson
Lt. John R. Brashear
T/Sgt. Dale Fortson
S/Sgt. Elton L. Smith
S/Sgt. Burgess B. Lindsay
S/Sgt. Jack E. Abbott
Sgt. Mark S. Blackman
T/Sgt. Elmer A. Kelley
2nd Lt. Gordon C. Muth
2nd Lt. Robert A. Regnier
S/Sgt. Hubert L. Townsend
2nd Lt. Carl E. Higginbotham
S/Sgt. Dwight Curl
S/Sgt. James E. Weeks
Sgt. Mark S. Blackman
H. L. Major
Lt. Lt. William R. Crim
Sgt. Arthur G. Markowski
T/Sgt. Paul L. Baker
S/Sgt. Thomas P. Conroy
S/Sgt. Stanley J. Pascavage
S/Sgt. Robert W. Baker
Sgt. Francis E. Kavanaugh
Sgt. Charles R. Husman

(1)

(about 5 January 1992 (H))

12502 99th. Av. NE.
Arlington, Wa. 98223

Dear Horace;

What you have done for Our old Group is Just Wonderful. The reunion and history book is great. You are appreciated.

I was a Waist & nose Gunner on Condra's crew. Most of us Joined him at Boise, Id. Then spent some Time at Scottsbluff, NE., Then To Langley.

We all Loved and Trusted Paul and would willingly fly right into hell with him. He only had one weakness he couldn't hide. He loved To Buzz.

We were stationed at Scottsbluff and our ball Gunner, Dale Magnuson's, home TOWN was Plentywood, and Dale wanted To fly over his Dad's Ranch.

Anyway, it had come a big rain down there and as the water came up, so had the cows, horses ect. They were gathered around the barn on high ground.

Paul put the left wing down about 100 ft. Above the barn in a very tight left turn. You could see livestock running from the barn and jumping in the water.

At Langley, all crews had to make a 500 mi. over water training f/t. Ours was on a cloudy Rainey day. When we reached the turn around pt. we spotted a small sail boat. Paul just had to buzz him a few times and I guess if they had a gun they would have probaly shot at us.

The day we left mitchel field for over seas was a dandy. Right after Takeoff There was The STATUE of Libert, So guess what happend? The Tower chewed him out for That one.

I remmber you had a plane down for some major rework in SAVANNA and was having Trouble finding a pilot To Test fly it. Paul agreeded TO Take it if you would allow him To buzz. So in desperation you agreed TO one buzz.

Paul and a SKELLETON CREW was gone an hour or so and every one had forgot about it. Suddenly, There was a Terrible roar and out of The Tent flap I saw a B-24 STREAK by and it was So low it was between The olive

Trees and headed for the Sq. operation Tent, which had a row of Trees To itself.

He pulled The nose up right over your Tent and we heard a lot of hollering and cussing down There.

We all came down and re-drove The Tent pegs and picked up papers That had been scattered.

Paul died in 1956 when he picked up a .22 rifle out of a closet. The bullet entered his eye and into The brain. He still had over 30 small pieces of flack in him from April 3, 1944, but was healthy and able To run his own business in Springdale, Ark. Jo, his widow, still is owner and works part Time.

I Think it would be best if we Let our ball Turrent

gunner write you his report on the April 3rd, 1944 mission as I was knocked unconsious for a few minutes. a piece of flack tore a hole in the top of my leather flying hat. It didn't bring the blood, just a goosegge and I didn't report it with all the other trouble we were having, it was verry minor.

I went on to fly seven more missions after that with a renegade major that was transfered to us from a P-47 sq. He flew the B-24 like it was a P-47, dropping the gear on final ect. was more than I could take.

I went to the 459th. HQ. sq. and set up a gunnery school and indoctrinate replacement crews.

(over)

Best Regards
Dexter (Smokey) Sandefer

Addition/Correction to Lt. Christensen's Crew, Volume I

From 741 War Diary, June 13, 1944:

"Another aircraft (pilot - Lt. Robert C. Christensen), tailend Charlie of the group formation, was jumped on by 15 E/A shortly after they crossed the Adriatic into Yugoslavia, and in the ensuing action Sgts. Gordon F. Swann and Leo C. Padgett were killed. Sgt. Hubert L. Townsend, aerial photographer, took over the dead men's guns and personally accounted for two fighters. Sgt. Casimir Bialas also claimed a fighter. With the ship badly crippled, Lt. Christensen showed lots of guts, judgment and skill, maintaining his position in the formation and proceeding to the target over 100 miles away, realizing full well it would have been suicidal to detach himself from whatever protective cover he could receive, in his position, from the formation ahead. At the target further damage was inflicted on his ship by intense flak barrage but he brought it through safely, but severely mauled. At the home base he made a skillful landing without the service of his nose wheel. It was a shaky crew that night."

Lt. Christensen was awarded the Silver Star.
The remainder of the crew were awarded DFC's (see next page).

(2) AWARD OF THE DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS

On July 14, 1944, pursuant to GENERAL ORDERS NUMBER 1846, Headquarters Fifteenth Air Force, dated 14 July 1944, the DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS was awarded the following named men:

LEO C. PADGETT, 18217745, Staff Sergeant, (Posthumous)
GORDON F. SWANN, 32361378, Staff Sergeant, (Posthumous)
SAM BAGHDIGIAN, O-688655, First Lieutenant
ROBERT M. CROWLEY, O-694339, Second Lieutenant
PAUL A. MCCARTHY, O-818178, Second Lieutenant
CARLTON B. [illegible], 36331797, Technical Sergeant
HUGO R. GROSS, 32669776, Technical Sergeant
JACK E. [illegible], [illegible], Staff Sergeant
WILLIAM POWERS, JR., 15323106, Staff Sergeant
HUBERT L. TOWNSEND, 16151594, Staff Sergeant

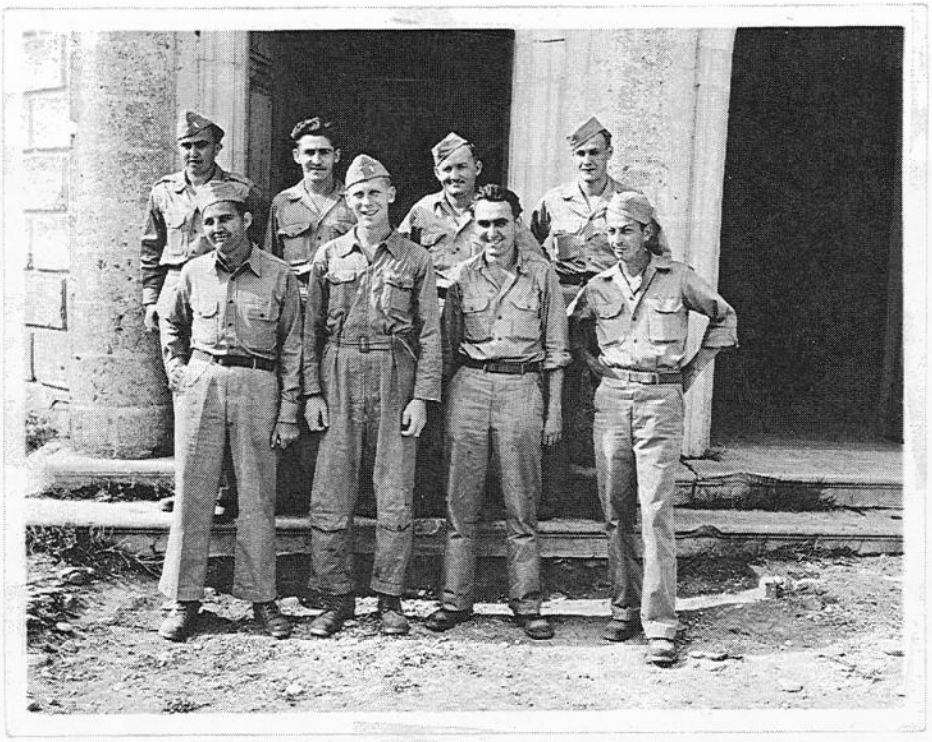
For extraordinary achievement in aerial flight as crew of a B-24 type aircraft. On 13 June 1944, this courageous crew participated inaa bombing mission against a vital aircraft-engine factory in Germany. One hundred miles from the target approximately twenty enemy fighters attacked the formation, and in the ensuing battle their aircraft was severely damaged, the ball turret gunner killed, a waist gunner was hit by an enemy shell, and although fatally wounded, continued to fire his guns until he fell dead. The photographer immediately took over the waist gun and continued the fight against the enemy. The tail gunner was severely wounded but gallantly remained at his post, and with the other gunners, succeeded in beating off the enemy fighter attacks. Although the aircraft was severly damaged, the pilot and the co-pilot continued through to the target. Heavy anti-aircraft fire, together with repeated attacks by enemy fighters, but despite these difficulties they carried on, completing a highly successful bombing run. Leaving the target area, this gallant crew was without oxygen for lengthy periods due to the damages in the oxygen system, but they continued to perform their duties. Despite the grave damage inflicted on their aircraft, the wounds and fatalaties among themselves, the aircraft returned safely to its base. By their gallantry, courage and devotion to duty, these men, in spite of the tremendous damage and injury inflicted upon themselves and their aircraft, they have reflected great credit upon themselves and the Armed Forces of the United States of America.

-8-

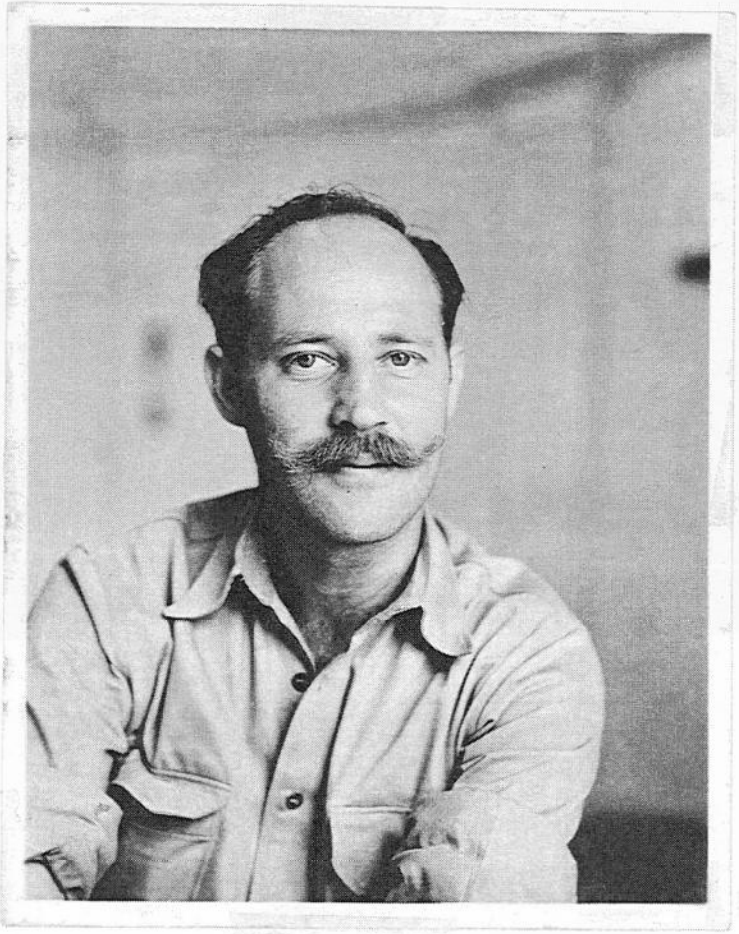
Sworn

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Above:
I believe this is Lt. Vic McWilliams' crew after return from POW camp in Roumania.



Capt. Norgard

Original crew pict

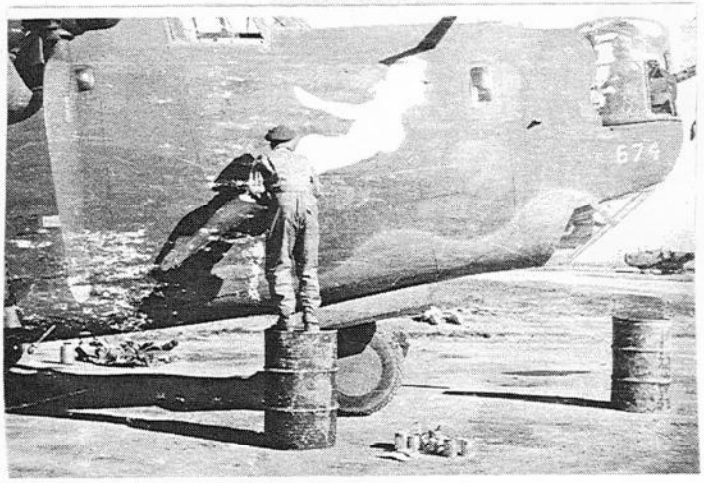
Lou Nangeroni's Original Crew - courtesy Art Johnson



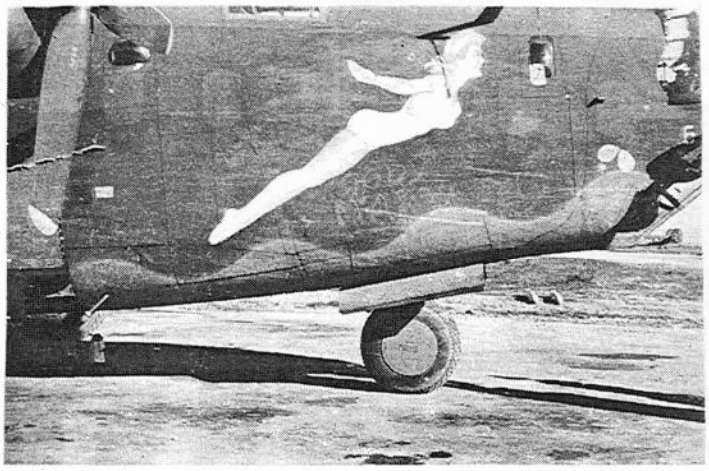
A/c, B-24-H, "Form 1," flown over by Crew 26, Cerignola, Italy, 1944



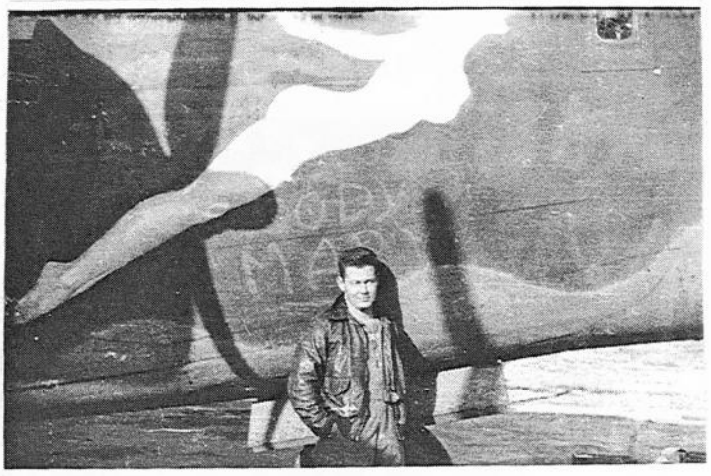
Nangeroni's crew & passengers on flight overseas.
Back row: John Straw, Bill Whitman, George Kline, Lou Nangeroni, Paul Roadman, Jack Blum--next 3 are Sqdn maintenance personnel.
Front row: Russ Fry, D. D. Fulbright, Anthony DeLuria, Ashley Howell, Art Johnson.
Each airplane flown over by the original group carried 14 people.



B-24-H, Nose #674, Serial #42-52246. Made by Ford at Willow Run. "Form 1." Painted by George Kline.



Picture completed. (Vargas Girl) at Djieda, Tunisia

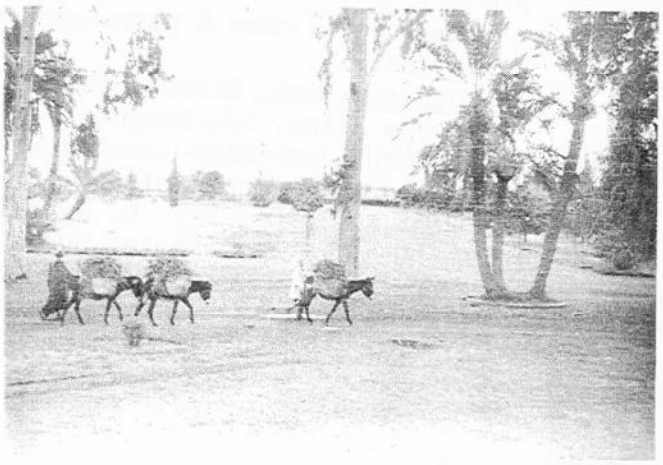


Bill Wittman

A/c transferred from Group upon arrival at San Giovanni



left:
Airbase workers in Dakar, Africa, Dec. 1944



Marrakesh, Morocco
Dec. 1943



Art Johnson
Marrakesh, Morocco
Dec. 1943



Marrakesh, Morocco, Dec. 1943

Djeida, Tunisia (courtesy Art Johnson)
Dec. 25, 1943 - Feb. 1, 1944



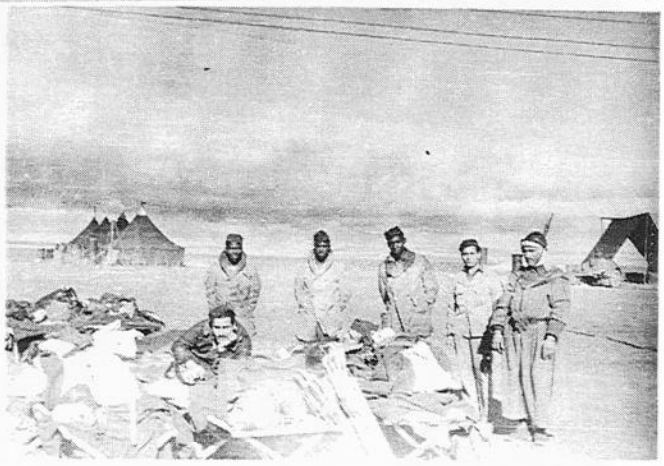
B-24 over tent area
Dec. 1943



Russ Fry and Paul Roadman in front of living quarters - Dec. 1943



More living quarters at Djeida, Tunis, Tunisia - Dec. 1943



Arab guards watch 741 personnel pack to leave Djeida for Cerignola, Italy - January, 1944

B-24H, #476, flown to Italy by Lt. E. L. Hudson, pilot, and Lt. J. H. Smith, from Langley Field, December, 1943. Sgt. Julius Gilone, crew chief. Note patches to left of figure where flak took out Lt. Smith's seat and hand hydraulic pump. Belgrade, Yugoslavia.



To the replacement crews:
- to those who made it
- and to those who didn't!

Poem written by some English school children following a visit to the Brittany Memorial, an American cemetery, in France, some time before June 1957:

Let them in, Peter: they are very tired.
Give them couches where angels sleep.
Let them wake, whole again, to new dawns fired
With sun, not war. And may their peace be deep.
Remember where the broken bodies lie.
And give them many things they like.
Let them make noise.
God knows how young they were to have died.
Give them swing bands, not gold harps, for these are boys.
Let them love, Peter--they had no time--
Girls sweet as meadow winds with flowing hair.
They should have trees, bird songs, hills to climb,
Tastes of summer and ripened pear.
Tell them how they are missed; say not to fear.
It is going to be all right with us down here.

From "Here Rest in Honored Glory..."
National Geographic Magazine, June, 1957,
page 749.
by permission.

The Replacement Crews

All the Replacement Crews were not new crews. Six original co-pilots took over experienced crews. Some pilots, new to the squadron, did not actually become the pilot of a crew but rather flew in an "instructor" capacity. Some of the crew pilots, as well as crew navigators and bombardiers, were promoted to squadron lead duties or perhaps on to Group. Forgive my spelling of bombardier all through the History as "bombadier."

There is no claim that <u>all</u> crews that passed through the 741 Squadron are included. There is no claim that all pilots listed as crew commanders actually were. There are seven (7) months of the squadron "War Diary" missing. Al Asch looked through the Bolling AFB microfilm records and found this so and I looked through the Maxwell AFB microfilm records and found the same thing. Some of the crews I've listed were found through the "War Diary"--so, with seven (7) months missing, it is quite possible that some crews are missing. I "have fought a good fight" in my search for crews--photographs and rosters. I feel I have done the best I could--<u>under the circumstances</u>! I am very grateful to those crew members (and others) who have supplied crew photographs and rosters--and photographs of other activities. I have become good friends of people I haven't yet met through their cooperation in letter-writing. Perhaps if we have <u>annual</u> reunions we can "sanitize" and improve the written history. But that chore is for more capable hands than mine!

It is amazing that my experience parallels that told me by others--that I can remember the names of some people I have not seen in 48 years but can't remember the name of my next-door neighbor. I have re-lived some very satisfying moments. The preparation of Volume III of the squadron history has been a long, arduous, and satisfying task. Enjoy!

From "Stagrag"

"Al" Caffrey--in his column "Found in the Wastepaper Basket"--of the 741 Sqdn. newspaper reports "...a total of 69 crews have been assigned to this squadron since Feb. '43..."

HL comment: Feb. '43 must be Feb. '44. Date of writing must be approximately Feb. '45 because Al congratulates "our new 1st Sgt. - Francis "Papa" Beeson and our two new Capts. - Graham and Brown." And says "sure are going to miss Major Welsh, Lts. Barney Gleeson, Mac McGahran, Stew Knapp, and Sgt. C. Fisher - who've finished up their tour and are headed for...the USA.

HL further comment: I think Maj. Welsh returned to U.S. in January '45. Now, regarding the 69 crews assigned from Feb. '44 to January '45--are those new crews (not counting crews taken over by original co-pilots [6]--or does it include the original 18? I have a "total" of 58 new crews, including 6 headed by original co-pilots. This assumes the two Grahams came with crews.

Totals: 18 original

I have 58
- 6 original co-pilots
52

Does anyone know with certainty how many replacement crews came to the 741st?

See Group Charts on losses and gains of crews and Losses and Gains of aircraft. (Note: It was quite common for a new crew arriving in a new aircraft to lose the aircraft for transfer to another group whose aircraft losses had been higher than the 455th. See "Non-combat transfers of 48 aircraft February through September, 1944.) No records available after this date.

From 455 Gp microfilm; Aircraft

Average Aircraft Status

1. Since this organization arrived in Italy a total of eighty-five A/C have been lost and salvaged from all causes. Of these six were lost through training accidents.
2. A total of twenty-two complete or partial crews have been saved from these accidents, and in most cases only minor casualties have been received by the crew members. This twenty-two crews does not include any personnel who were lost to MIA.
3. The gains and losses have been as follows:

	GAINS		LOSSES					
			Combat			Non-combat		
MONTH	NEW	RECONDITIONED	E/A	FLAK	OTHER	TRAINING	TRANSFER	OTHER
Feb	0	2	0	0	2*	1**	10	0
Mar	11	4	0	0	2	0	5	0
Apr	18	2	10*	2	2**	1***	4	0
May	17	4	3**	5*	1	1***	4	0
June	12	2	1**	2	3	0	7	0
July	17	7	5	4*	9**	2***	3	1****
August	13	4	1	5	3*	1**	7	0
Sept	16	1	0	1	7*	0	8	0
TOTAL	109	26	30	19	29	6	48	1

Feb. *A/C #211 Pilot COOK crash landed at SAN SEVERO after running out of gas.
**A/C #498 Pilot KNIGHT crashed on a training mission at MANDURIA after running out of gas.
April *A/C #982 Pilot COOK crashed into gas trailer and burned after landing with much E/A damage.
**A/C #221 Pilot BETHUNE crashed on T/O on operational mission.
**A/C #235 Pilot BECKNER crashed on landing because of a collapsed landing gear.
***A/C #247 Pilot CURTIS crashed on a training flight after losing an engine.
May *A/C #280 Pilot BRASHEAR ditched.
**A/C #278 Pilot SCHOENE crash landed at FINELLA Field being badly shot up by E/A.
***A/C #665 Pilot KEANEY crashed on T/O because of blown tire.
June *A/C #855 Pilot CHRISTENSEN crashed on landing being badly shot up by E/A.
July *A/C #250 Pilot AMBROSEN crashed on landing because of no flaps or brakes.
*A/C #208 Pilot RILEY was shot up and crew bailed out near SAN SEVERO.
**A/C #494 Pilot CRUM crashed on landing.
**A/C #351 Pilot RUSSELL crashed on T/O after nose wheel tire blew out.
**A/C #234 Pilot REYNOLDS crashed on landing at GIOIA after running out of gas.
**A/C #381 Pilot LACKNER crashed on T/O because pilot thought his ship was airborne and retracted gear.
***A/C #419 Pilot SWANNER crashed on landing due to strong cross wind which forced A/C off runway and blew nose wheel tire.
***A/C #501 Pilot GROSSER crashed landed on test hop as controls were inoperative.
***A/C #105 was salvaged after being run into by another A/C when it was in hardstand.
August *A/C #326 Pilot FELDER was salvaged when MLG strut broke on landing.
** A/C #402 Pilot REYNOLDS was salvaged after taxiing accident at night.
Sept *A/C #[illegible] Pilot ARIGHTSON crashed near base after running out of gasoline.

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From 455 Gp microfilm: Crews

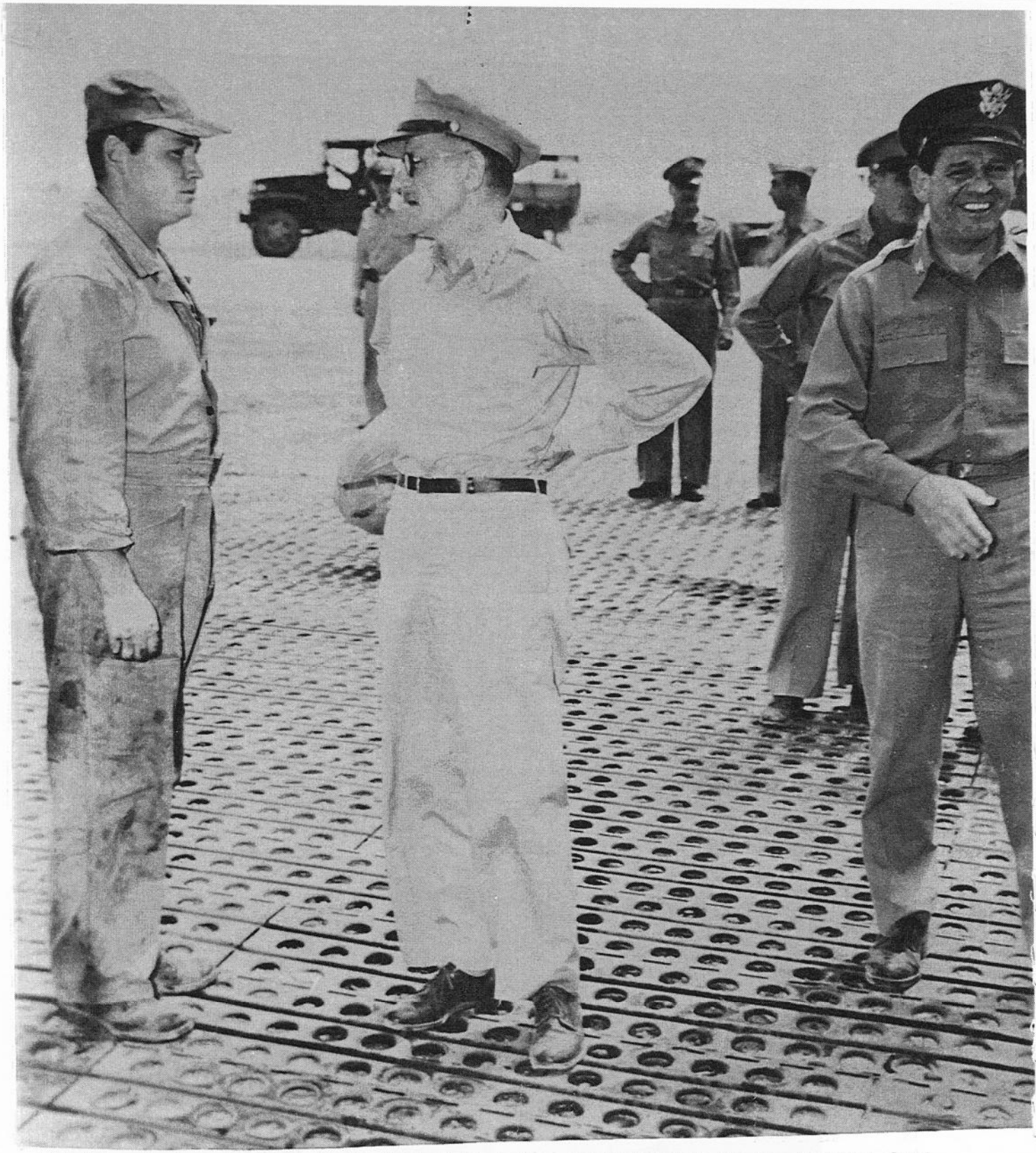
Losses

Month	P.	F/E	Injured in Action	Injured not in Action	Prisoners	I. & E.	Killed and M.I.A.	Total losses	Less crews	From injury	Less	Total gains	Balance
Jan													67
Feb	1							1					68
Mar	2							2	2			3	71
Apr	10	2	2	3		2		20	7	1		2	99
May	8		1			2	3	14	10	3		19	84
June	6			3			11	20	13	2		15	99
July	22	1	1	2			17	43	35			35	91
Aug	8	1			1		10	20	16		1	19	90
Sept	7					1	6	14	25	1	1	27	63
Total	62	5	4	8	1	5	49	134	119	7	2*	139	63

Note: These figures are based on pilots and copilots as they are the operating crews. As one or two pilots may be wounded or lost to show a crew lost. For further information on gains and losses see Summary of Crew personnel Gains and Losses.

* Less losses and gains of crew personnel for more information on additional personnel returned and I. O. D.

53



7/4/44 - Master Sergeant D. D. Fulbright being congratulated by Lt. General Carl A. Spaatz on the excellent job he and the other 741 personnel are doing. (Two (2) Sqdns. in the 304th Wing were inspected.) Also shown is M/Gen. Twining (background) talking with Lt. Col. Phil John, 455 Gp. Exec. Officer. Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker also inspected. (I was told 17 stars were in the inspecting party. HL)

One of the major events of the 741's Italian tour of duty!!!

(The crews were only as good as the ground personnel!!

REPLACEMENT CREWS

Crew Pilot's Name	Photo	Roster
Arja Adair	Yes	Yes
Charles Adams (?)	Yes	No
Harry Arendt	No	Yes
Robert Asa	Yes	Yes
Don Bailey	partial (5)	Yes
Bob Baker	Yes	Yes
Tom Bates	No	No
Victor Beehlor	Yes	Yes
Rudolf Benson	Yes	Yes
Donald Bone	No	Yes
Douglas Brown	Yes	Yes
L. E. Brunson	Yes	Yes
Leonard Burkholder	No	No
Ralph Chadwick	No	Yes
Ed Cole	No	No
Earl DeVee	No	Yes
Bill Disbrow	Yes	Yes
Kenneth Fetty	Yes	Yes
Maxwell Gates	No	Yes
Harold Gorski	Yes	Yes
Don Graf	Yes	Yes
Andy Graham	No	No
R. K. Graham	No	No
Harry Grosser	Yes	Yes
Charles Hammond	Yes	Yes
Samuel Hannssard	No	Yes
Frank Hosimer	Yes	Yes
B. J. Hutton	Yes	Yes
William Jirschele	Yes	Yes
Finis Harrell Josey	Yes	Yes
Bernard Keogh	No	Yes
Robert Lackner - Teel co-pilot	Yes	Yes
Marcus Loftis	No	Yes
Paul McCarthy	Yes	Yes
George McCord	No	Yes
George McGovern	Yes	Yes
J. E. McKibben	No	No
John Merritt	Yes	Yes
Maxwell Moore	No	Yes
Henry Moreman	Yes	Yes
Joseph Morgan	No	No
Lewis Nixon	No	Yes
Joe Ogan	No	No
Donald Oleson (?)	No	No
Charles Painter	Yes	Yes
John Polando	Yes	Yes
Horace Redding (or Redman?)	No	No
+ Lestes G. Pinkley	No	Partial (7)

Crew Pilot's Name	Photo	Roster
Philip Root	No	Partial (5)
Walter Shostack	Yes	Yes
Jim Smith	Yes	Yes
Harley Snider	No	Yes
Ed Soderstrom	Yes	Yes
Linden Stuart	Yes	No
Howard Surbeck	No	Yes
Harry Wade	No	partial (4)
Gus Wendt	Yes	Yes
Lt. Wynne	No	No
Harold Zabawa	No	Yes
Seven (7) Unidentified crews	Yes	No
Maurice R. Smith	No	No
70 crew pilots plus seven unidentified photos	37	43
Total 70	38	44

Lt. Arja Adair's Crew



Front row, L to R: Fred Dendy; Stanley Lindquist; Harold Watson; William Logue; Alfred Puslat; Fred Higgins.
Back row, L to R: Harry McCracken; Arja Adair, pilot; Wrolsted; Raymond Hewitt.

A trip into the past - Montrose man revisits World War II

BY TOBY ANDERSON
Staff Writer

There's a saying that we become a different person every day, shaped and reshaped by the time and experience of living. The changes may be imperceptible, but sometimes an old photo will jolt us backward like a time machine, into the sounds, faces and feelings of our own history.

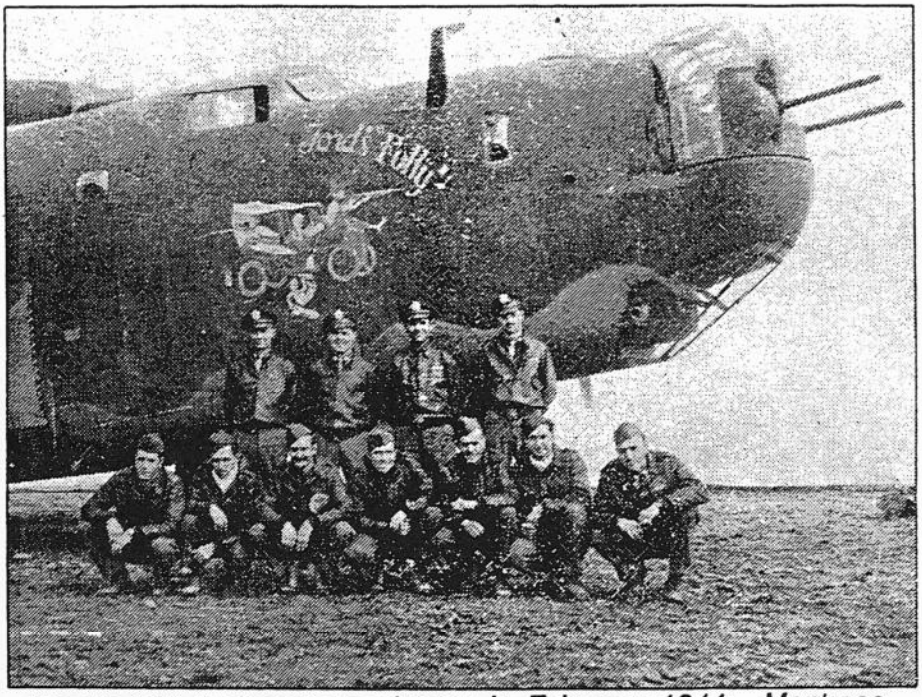
For Arja P. Adair of Montrose, his trip into the past was a visit to a person who used to be, in a world that is gone - but remembered in books and war memorials. The piece of history he revisited was not just his own, but part of the history of his country at war.

Adair is retired from a New York business; he and his wife divide their time between Montrose and Bradenton, Florida. He had a footlocker full of papers and a head full of memories, all pretty dusty, but waiting to be brushed off and re-examined. When he pulled it all together for this writer, the dining room table was covered with neat piles of documents, notes, brown photos, and the unmistakable clip of papers representing a military service record. Adair was brimming with the memories as if they had happened last week.

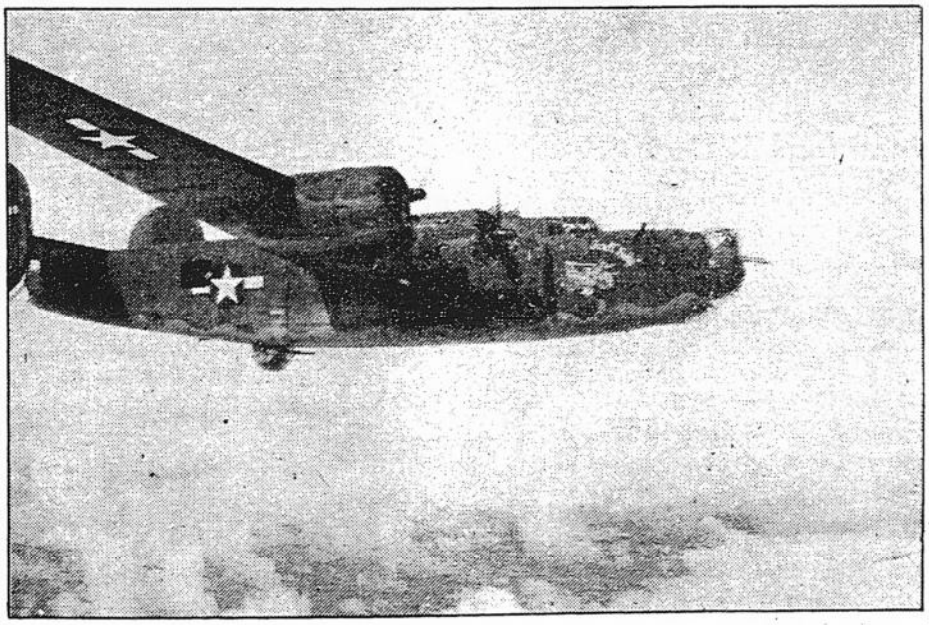
He was a bomber pilot in World War II - fifty missions over central Europe, seven medals or citations for outstanding performance of duty, and a discharge after four years of the high-speed, high-risk existence that is the soldier's routine. After that came a wife, family, business career, and the daily hammering that life uses to reshape a young person into a "seasoned" one. "The war," as it is known to the people who experienced it, was a long, long time ago.

Then one day last winter a friend called his home in Florida to say there was an old B-24 bomber at a nearby airfield and didn't he used to fly one in "the war?" Adair took his wife, Hank, to the Sarasota field, where the spruced-up, shined-up and revved-up relic was being shown off as a sort of traveling museum. He'd talked about the B-24, but wanted her to see what the behemoth really looked like. They peered into the cockpit, climbed into the bomb bay and talked to the crew. He told one of the flyers he had piloted a B-24.

The next day, Adair had a phone call from a man who said his name was Ed Sherrick and who lived a few miles away in Bradenton. He said he had visited the B-24 in Sarasota about half an hour after Adair was there and the crewman had told him a pilot named Adair had just left.



"Ford's Folly" Liberator and crew in February 1944; Montrose resident Arja P. Adair, co-pilot, in top row, left end; ball turret-gunner Ed Sherrick in bottom row, 2nd from left.



B-24 Liberator "Ford's Folly" - 1944.

To Adair, the man's name was familiar, but the connection was inconceivable; Ed Sherrick was the ball turret-gunner in Adair's first B-24 crew that flew 25 missions from a small airfield in southern Italy. A few days after Adair was relieved of duty and sent home in June, 1944, the plane and crew were lost in a bombing raid over Styr, Austria. He was on his way home when he heard that both his planes - the one he took over to Italy, and the one he later flew for another 25 missions - were lost in the same night. Forty-two planes were sent out and 13 came back. Ed Sherrick, it seemed, had survived, and lived six miles from Adair's winter home.

It was Sherrick who told Adair about the trip being planned by the "455th Bomb Group Association" to revisit their old airstrip in southern Italy and take in a few other sights such as Rome, Venice and Florence. The trip was planned for May. Adair happily signed up, and he and Hank joined 13 other former "Army Air Corps" men and their wives on the 16-day adventure into the past.

The airstrip which was their base was in Cerignola, a small town near Foggia in the "ankle" of the "boot"

❑ (cont'd on page 15)

From page 15

WWII.....

❑ (cont'd from front page)

which shapes Italy. The men lived in tents and ate in a mess hall that still stands. Adair took color photos of a wine cellar - a semicircular, stone-lined hole in the side of a hill - that served as their "briefing room." He said there were wooden benches where the crews would sit while someone explained where each mission was going, what to expect when they got there, and "debriefed" them when they returned.

Adair also took pictures of the field that was their mile-long runway, where the B-24's lumbered into the air with 3,000 pounds of bombs and 3,600 gallons of fuel, for a 12 to14 hour round trip to the industrial targets of the central "axis" countries - Germany, France, Hungary, Rumania, Austria and northern Italy.

The B-24 was not easy to get into the air. Adair said there was a small valley beyond the runway; as the planes lined up waiting to take off, he would see the ones ahead of him disappear over the end of the runway as they dipped into the valley, until they could pick up enough speed to get above the horizon.

The B-24 was a mid-war development, intended to improve on the old B-17 by increasing speed, range and bomb load. To gain these improvements, it sacrificed stability and maneuverability. Known as the "Liberator," it was originally made by Consolidated Aircraft, then later by Ford Motor Co. Adair said that at one time Ford's Willow Run plant near Detroit was turning out a Liberator every 55 minutes. Adair's first plane was named "Ford's Folly," and a sketch of a rattletrap car with bombs falling out was painted on the nose.

The Liberator was 66 feet long with a wingspan of 110 feet. With six 500 pound bombs and a full load of fuel it weighed 60,000 pounds. Powered by four air-cooled, radial,1,200 h.p. Pratt & Whitney engines and three-bladed propellors, it had a range of about 3,310 miles. Maximum speed was 300 m.p.h., but Adair said they normally cruised at about 250. Top safe altitude was 25,000 feet, and they went in over the targets at about 21,000.

Adair went into the Army (before the days of the separate Air Force) and learned to fly in 1943, at several bases in Texas and New Mexico. By Christmas of that year he and the other nine men of the "Ford's Folly" crew were on their way to their base in Italy, via Miami and Brazil. They spent a month in North Africa waiting for completion of the airstrip at Cerignola. Adair was co-pilot in that crew.

Beginning in February, 1944, they were flying regular missions out of the Cerignola base. After 25 missions as co-pilot of "Ford's Folly," Adair was promoted to First Pilot and transferred to a new Liberator. He finished his 50-mission tour of duty in June, 1944, and came back to the United States for other assignments until his discharge, in 1947, with the rank of Major.

Forty-six years is a long time, but the experience was vivid and the memories are fresh. Adair said he's planning to get the photo of "Ford's Folly" framed, so he can hang it up somewhere. He just might want to show it to Ed Sherrick when they get together in Florida this winter.

The above article is from the Susquehanna County Independent October 17, 1990

Capt. Charles Adams' Crew



Can this be Capt. Adams (back row, far right)?

Capt. Charles S. Adams, pilot
T/Sgt. Thomas J. Heatherly (crew position unknown)

No photo available.
No crew roster available--only as listed above.

From War Diary dated 10 August 1944:

"July 22, 1944 ...

Capt. Adams landed with only 30 gallons of gas left."

Harry Arendt's Crew

(No Photograph Available)

Arendt, Harry S., 2 Lt - Pilot
Hanna, Joseph G., 2 Lt - Co-Pilot
Park, Arthu, 2 Lt - Navigator
Birdsell, Arvil C., 2 Lt - Bombadier
Ponton, Harry L, Cpl. - AEG
Crump, Clay K., Jr., Cpl - ROG
Kochanket, Edward J., Cpl - AAG
Collins, Albert R., Cpl - AG
Dorn, Russell F., Cpl - AG
Cober, Charles E., Cpl - AG

(No crew members are members of the 455th Bomb Group Association)

Robert Asa's Crew



Robert Asa, pilot
Ted Weidner, co-pilot
Vernon Gilson, navigator
Marion Culver, bombardier
Luther B. Teeter, top gunner
Vernon D. Rowden, left waist gunner
Thomas F. Farrow, right waist gunner
Marshall Bruce, tail gunner
Francis E. Crowe, nose gunner
Vernon J. Jenson, ball turret gunner

Don Graf flew as CP to Asa on Graf's first five missions.

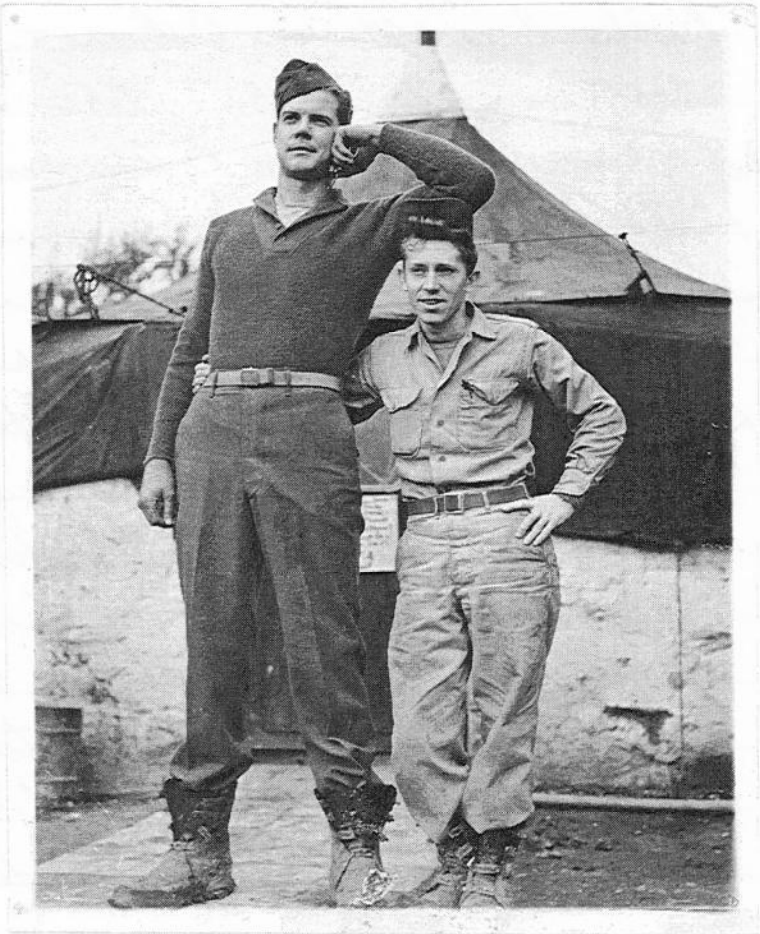
Zabawa flew with Asa's crew on their first mission (Budapest).

See letters from crew members attached.



Lt. Theodore G. Weidner has just been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal.

The long and the short of it --



Tallest man in 741 - Sgt. J. D. Stewart and, right, Sgt. Edward G. Utley

Sgt. Stewart was the Crew Chief of Yo Yo

Sgt. Utley was just lucky!

MEMORANDUM
WESTINGHOUSE FORM 2478 K

1162 Wimbleton Dr
Raleigh, N.C. 27609
919 782-3555

TO

LOCATION DEPT. NAME DATE

Oct. 4 1992

SUBJECT

Dear Horace,

Thank you for your interest in our Crew. I was talking to Marshall Bruce and Vernon Rowden last night. Marshall told me that he also recieved a letter from you and he is having a picture made to send to you. Our crew was as follows.

Pilot - Robert Ass - (deceased-) accidental fall.
Co-Pilot - Ted Weidner - (deceased-) Cancer
Navigator - Vernon Wilson - Sandy, Utah
Bombardier - Marion Culver - Topeka, Kansas
Top Gunner - Luther B. Teeter - Albemarle, N.C.
Left waist - Vernon D Rowden - Tyler, Texas
Right waist - Thomas J. Farrow - Raleigh, N.C.
Tail - Marshall Bruce - San Diego, Cal.
Nose - Francis E. Crowe - Warren, Ohio
Ball - Vernon J. Jenson - (deceased) St. Paul, Mn: Heart attack

after exchanging letters and Christmas cards about two years we lost contact due to moving around. In 1988 my wife and I made a trip to California and I found Marshall Bruce in San Diego. Since then together we have found everyone except Francis Crowe and I'm still looking for him.

We found Rowden in July 1992 and my wife

FROM

LOCATION DEPT. NAME L.J.

MEMORANDUM
WESTINGHOUSE FORM 2478 K

TO

LOCATION DEPT. NAME DATE

SUBJECT

and I visited him and his Wife Lou in Tyler, Texas.

We went Over seas on a boat and didn't have a plane assigned to us untill Yo-Yo Came. We flew it on its maiden mission and all our other missions untill we finished. It was a great bomber.

Our fist mission turned out to be our worst. It was July 27th to Budapest, Hungary. We were attacked by the yellow noses. Most of our planes were lost, we downed two of them a 109 and a 190 and we made it back home. We had a few more bad ones but most were milk runs related to our first one.

I hope this finds you in good health and happy.

Thank you again for your interest.

Sincerely,

Leon Farrow

Notified of Ambroses' interest

FROM

LOCATION DEPT. NAME L.F.

On our first mission Lt. Harold Izabawa flew as our 1st pilot and we had lots of flak and lots of fighters I was tail gunner flying tail end Charlie. I got credit for an FW 190 and Thomas Farrow got credit for an ME 109. They both went down at the same time and Farrow said they almost ran together on the way down. He was R. waist gunner and could ~~watch~~ watch them longer than I could.

After a few missions Lt. Weidner started flying as 1st pilot for replacement Crews and ask me to fly tail for him if my crew was not scheduled to fly. So I got my share at Tail end Charlie. And finished my missions before

the rest of my crew. I later saw Lt Zabawa go down over the Adriatic and never heard if he made it back. He was from Florida and I often wished I had his folks address so I could tell them what a fine man I thought he was. After our 1st Mission he tried to get us for his crew but Asa put up a fight and kept us for his crew.

I was at the base the day the Me 109 landed with Lt. Col. Gunn. That was exciting when we heard what happened. I have a picture of the plane.

On one mission to Ploesti I was flying tail gunner for Lt Weisner with a new crew when we got away from the target and he ask us to all check in. I was the only one to answer from the back so he asked if I would check on the Waist Gunners and Camera Man for him

4

I went up + checked and they were All passed out. Their Oxygen Mask were frozen. I put my mask on them one at a time until they were all revived.

We finally got a plane we could call our own. We called it Yo-Yo. Yo Yo always comes back. It had Bugs Bunnie with a yo yo on it. I'm sure you remember it. It always came back with less holes than any plane in the squadron. One day it was the only plane to make it back to our field. Some had been shot down some had to land elsewhere due to lack of gas etc. A big guy from my home town in Texas was our Ground Crew Chief. His name was J.D. Stewart. He was head and shoulders taller than any one in the out fit. They said when he saw the one plane coming back he said that Yo-yo. Yo Yo always comes back.

I don't know if you were back to the out fit after being shot down

When a bunch of planes blew up on the flight line are not. We had flown a number of days in a row and were supposed to sleep in on this day. At about 500 Am I think we started hearing explosions. 50 Calibers and bombs blowing up. A large piece of bomb went thru our tent. I never did know what caused that. I think about 5 planes blew up. We at first thought we we being Bombbarded.

I am having a better Crew picture Made for you which will be ready About to 30th of this month Mean time I will send this one which you do not have to send back but I would like to hear more from you.

I do not know the Charles S. Adams you Mentioned in your letter.

Best regards,
Marshall Bruce

Robert Asa's Crew

Vernon D. Rowden — Phone 903-561-1023
133361 C.R. 1208 — (Radio operator)
Tyler Texas 75703

Thomas Farrow — Phone 919-782-3555
1162 Wimbledon Dr. — (R. waist)
Raleigh, N.C. 27609

Luther B. Teeter — Phone 704-982-6158
Rt 4 B 546 — Engineer (Top turret)
Albemarle N.C. 28001

Gene Gilson — Phone 801-942-3732
2503 Barcelona — (Navigator)
Sandy, Utah 84093

Marion Culver — Phone 913-266-7384
3131 Downing — (Bombidier)
Topeka Kansas 66605

Jensen, — Deceased
Robt. Asa — Deceased — Pilot
Theo. Weidner — Deceased — Co. Pilot

From Marion Culver:

1

As Crew No FN-348-AQ 71, we completed our combat crew training at Davis-Monthan AAF, then to Topeka AAF by troop train, where some crews picked up B-24s and flew them overseas. The rest of us including our crew, proceeded to Fort Patrick Henry.

After about three days there, we left Newport News on the Grace Liner, Santa Rosa. We were very lucky, and had no incidents before putting in at Oran, where we were directed to go to Naples, since Oran was full. However, one of the convoys leaving Newport News behind us reportedly was hit by German submarines, and had some losses.

From Naples, we went by troop train to Gioia, Italy, where a 455th B-24 picked us up and flew us up to the 455th Bomb Group at San Giovanni, where our crew was assigned to the 741st Squadron.

We flew our first mission against Budapest, Hungary on July 30, 1944 (a steel manufacturing plant). We had Lt. Zabawa flying as pilot in place of Lt. Asa. As we got to the target area, Goering's "yellow nose" fighters, ME 109s and FW 190s (90 to 100, according to intelligence estimates) seemed to hit us from all sides. The B-24 ahead of us to our left took direct hits in its fuel tanks and was set afire. Some men bailed out. German fighters were so close, I saw bullets from our top turret make sparks as they bounced off the armor plate on the bottom of an ME 109. Our tail turret jammed as a fighter came in on our tail and I saw his cannon shells exploding very nearby. About this time, our Tail Gunner, Marshall Bruce, called out "I got one!

He had gotten the tail turret back into operation, and had blown up this fighter at very close range. We were under fighter attack for some time after we left the target. We lost several B-24s, and were credited with destroying or damaging 17 or 18 German fighters. I said to myself after that mission, I don't know if I can take fifty missions (the requirement then) like this.

If anyone who flew any combat missions tells you he didn't get scared, look out because he'll lie about other things, too.

We flew one mission against Ploesti; three to Munich; two to Vienna; two to Blechammer refineries; one to the Athens, Greece, area; one to Belgrade, Yugoslavia, - where we saw crew #AQ 77 (Lt Rogers) get shot down, and I think they were returned to their unit the next day.

On one mission to Munich airport to hit aircraft manufacturing facilities, Col. Snowden was leading his first mission after assuming command. As he explained the next day, he misread the ops order and instead of coasting in at 19,000 ft, we coasted in at 21,000 ft, obviously costing us time and fuel. Therefore, we missed our target time and were on collision course with another group when we reached the target area, requiring a 360° turn in the target area. We started another run on the target only to find another group was ahead of us, necessitating another 360° turn to head in again. For the third time there was another group ahead of us, and since we were getting low on fuel, we all headed for home, jettisoning our bombs. One B-24 called us for a heading to Switzerland, which I provided, since I was flying as bombardier and navigator. After we reached the Italian coast we lost sight of

the other B-24s of our squadron. Some of the B-24s landed in northern Italy, and some ditched in the Adriatic. S/Sgt Teeter was an excellent Engineer and we were watching our gas very closely. Since we were overflying other 15th Air Force fields, we felt safe in trying to make our base. Finally, we had the field in sight and made a straight in approach. One engine quit on final approach, another engine quit on the landing roll, and the third engine quit as we turned off to our hardstand. As you know, the B-24 held about 2700 gallons, and they needed more than 2650 gallons to refuel our plane! We were the only ship in our squadron to get back to our base that day. I was told I (we) had been recommended for the DFC, but I did not hear anything more on that.

During one stretch, we flew 13 missions in 14 days — against refineries and aircraft manufacturing facilities. Needless to say, we were all exhausted!

Sometime during this time, 15th Air Force changed our mission requirement for rotation to 35, with each sortie counting as one mission. However, one mission on which we got fired on and credited with a mission, they later took credit away because we had gotten into bad weather and returned, salvoing our bombs. However, one group did get through the weather and bombed the target, so they took the credit away from all the other groups that did not bomb the target.

George McGovern's bombardier was sick one time, and since George and I were good friends he asked me if I'd fly with him on a mission, and I agreed. We were flying Deputy Squadron Lead, and when the Squadron

Leader dropped out, we took over as Squadron Leader. However, because of clouds in the target area, we all dropped on the Group Leader's radar.

I think we finished our missions in November. The rest of the crew returned to the U.S., and I went to 15th AF Hq in Bari as OIC of the 15th AF Lead Crew School. I stayed there (in Operations) until the end of fighting in Europe, when they sent practically everybody back to the U.S.

For an update on Crew FN-348-AQ71, I stayed on active duty, and after a 5-year stint as MSgt Weather Forecaster, completed navigation and radar training, was assigned to Forbes A F Base, Topeka (SAC) and flew 3000 hours as a B-47 navigator including during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and retired 30 April 1963. Robert Asa, pilot, died in a fall from a cliff in late 1946 or early 1947; Ted Weidner, co-pilot, died about 1980-I think it was cancer; Vervin R. Gilson, navigator, is a professional engineer in Sandy, Utah; Luther B. Teter, engineer, lives in Albemarle, N.C.; Thomas Farrow, waist gunner, lives in Raleigh, N.C.; and Marshall Bruce Jr. lives in San Diego, Ca. I don't know about the rest of the crew.

One more comment: I think the target we feared most toward the end was the Brux Refinery Complex in the Berlin area, because of the intense flak and the fighters-including jets (ME 262s) and rocket ships. The day after we finished, I went to briefing just to see where the group was going - Brux! Weather forced scrubbing that day, but they went there 10-14 days later, and had significant losses to fighters, including ME 262s.

Don Bailey's Crew



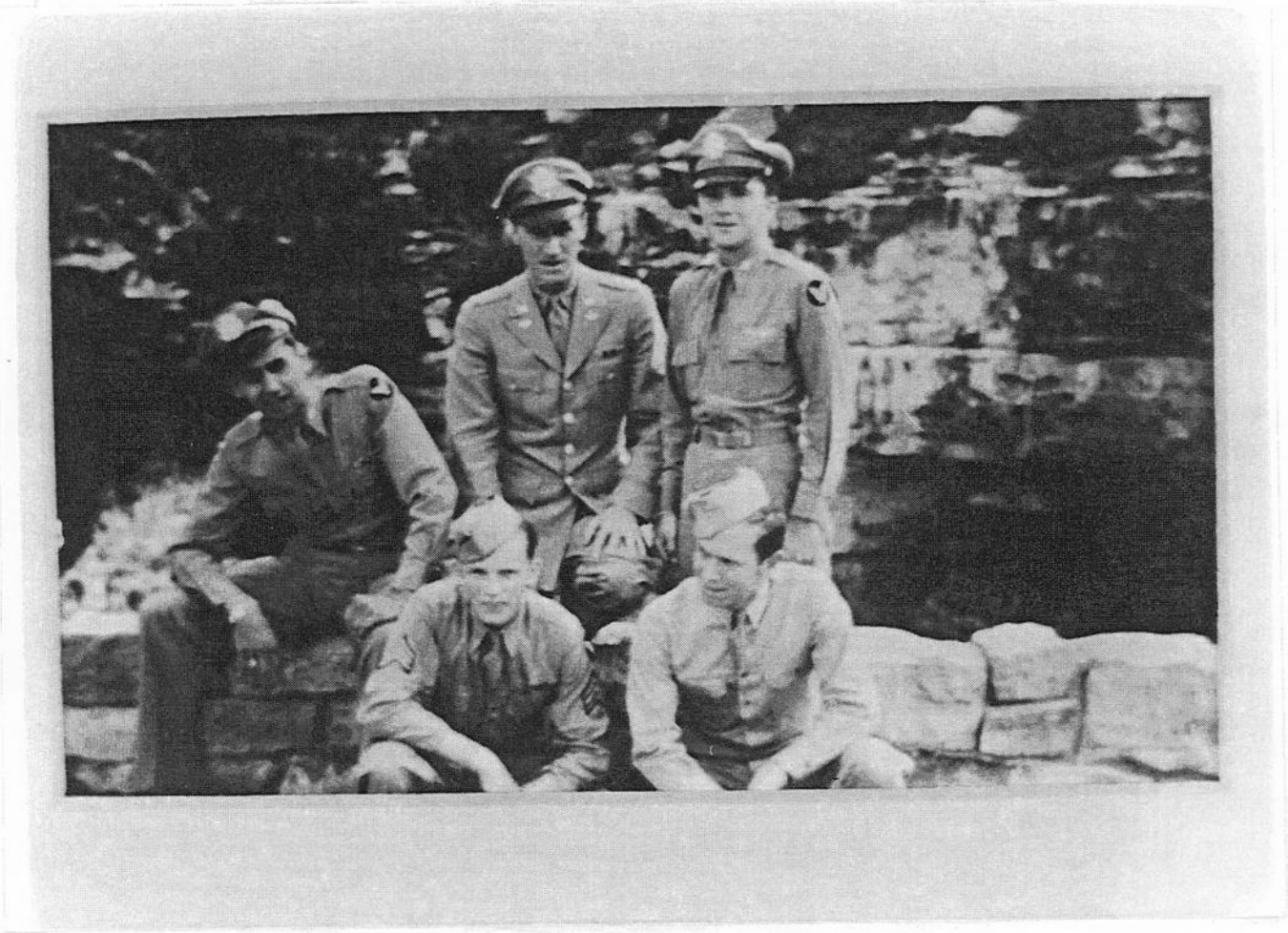
Don Bailey, Lt, with Lt. Smith, his usual co-pilot

2nd Lt. Donald M. Bailey, pilot
2nd Lt. David R. Loughrie, co-pilot
F/O Owen C. Flynn, navigator
2nd Lt. Jack M. Flechsig, bombardier
S/Sgt. John P. Pell, engineer
S/Sgt. Leonard Phillips, radio
Sgt. Louis Herman, AG
Sgt. Joseph W. Hamel, BG
S/Sgt. Harold R. Emmons, BG
Sgt. Alex C. Wakzak, BG

(Loughrie is only crew member who is a member of the 455th Group Association)

This crew took Lt. Hosimer on his first 5 missions.

Don Bailey's Crew



Kneeling in front, L to R:
John Pell
Louis Herman

Back, L to R
Don Bailey
Jack Fleschig
Dave Loughrie (4-day Dave) - Dave was shot down with Chadwick's crew after 4 days in squadron.

Bob Baker's Crew



L to R (rear):
Lt. Baker, Lt. Carson Hughes, Lt. Johhn Matrangos, Lt. August Altese,
L to R (front):
Sgt. A. Swinney, Bopp, Thomas Abbye (~~Spc~~), Walter M. Kelly, James R. Allen, Aplin.

Lt. Baker's crew was our first replacement crew. I believe the person manning the nose turret was killed on the first mission of this crew. The others completed their missions and returned to the U.S. I believe this crew was asked to fly more than their required missions due to the shortage of replacement crews at the time.

Lt. Tom Bates' Crew

No crew photo
No roster



Lt. Tom Bates, pilot, Lt.
and Lt. Dick Armellino

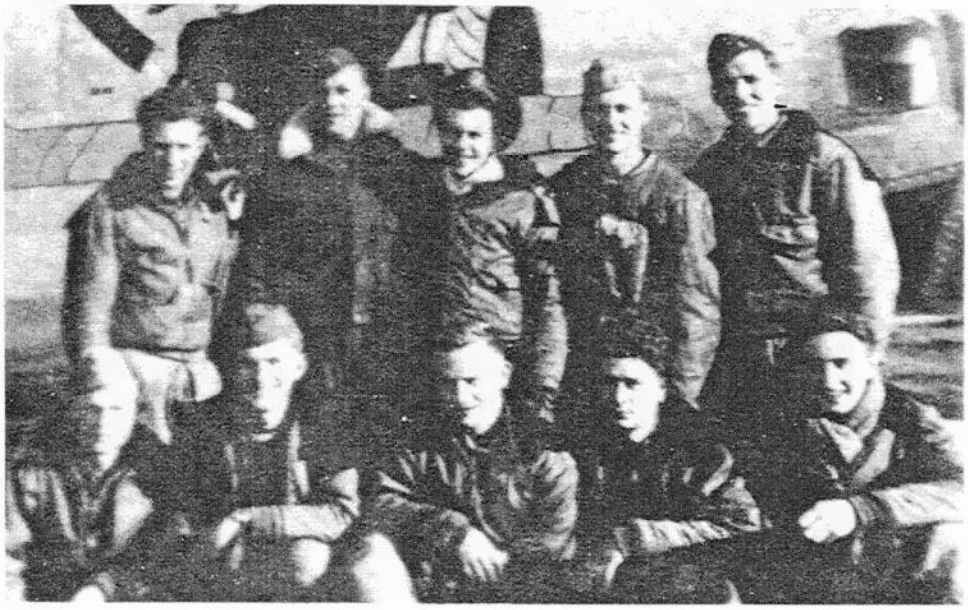
Lt. Victor Beehlor's Crew



Front row, L to R: Cpl. George R. Simmons, tail turret; Sgt. Billie V. Miller, top turret; Cpl. Jack L. McDowell, radio operator; Cpl. Jesse G. Guerro, nose turret; Cpl. Jesse K. Schaffer, engineer; Cpl. William T. Saydek, ball turret.
Back row, L to R: 2nd Lt. Herman J. Dosenbach, navigator; 2nd Lt. Gordon B. Cumming, co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Victor E. Beehler, pilot; 2nd Lt. John K. Kelly, Jr., bombardier.

This crew left Dow Field, Bangor, Maine, about 12 February, 1945. Their flight path to Italy was Gander Lake, Azores, Marrakesh, Tunis, to Italy. Their new B-24 was turned in at a depot. They did not bring a new B-24 to the 455 Group.

Rudolf Benson's Crew



Front row, L to R: James Duncan, ball turret; Edward Yankovich, radio operator; John Madden, nose turret; Warren Buchanan, tail turret; William Dickinson, waist gunner.
Back row, L to R: Francis Donahue, engineer; Rudolf Benson, pilot; James Provan, navigator; Robert Goodman, bombardier; Frederick Hill, co-pilot.

Donald L. Bone's Crew



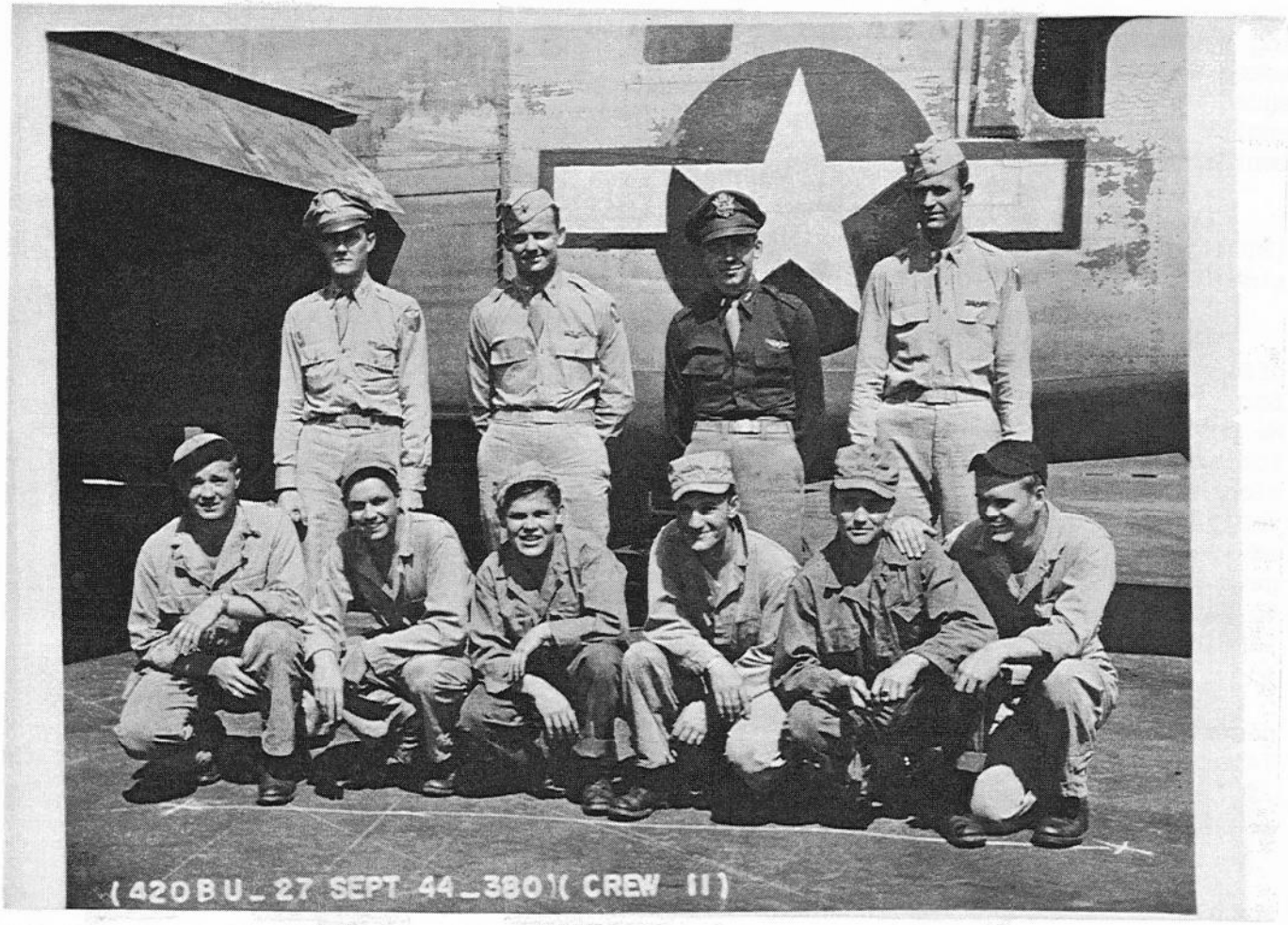
Donald L. Bone, 1st Lt., pilot
Julius. C. Phillips, 2nd Lt.
Andrew J. Kemp, Sgt.
Howard A. Ginsburg, 2nd Lt.
Henry Lerche, Sgt.
Joseph Doyle, Sgt.
Thomas E. Boyd, Sgt.
Allen M. Dalian, Sgt., engineer (?)
Darnall Wayneth, Sgt.

Shot down near Mirna (Dolenjsko Valley), Yugoslavia, December 20, 1944. Left Yugoslavia by airplane December 27, 1944, presumably from Gersiei (this information from "Allied Airmen and POWs Rescued by the Slovene Partisans" - see attachment).



Lt. Bone, 2nd from left.

Lt. Douglas W. Brown's Crew



L to R:

1st Lt Douglas W. Brown - Pilot
Jr-Lt James Howarth, Jr. - Co-Pilot
1st Lt John E. Oxler -Navigator
1st Lt James A. Head - Bombadier
S/Sgt Walter Burkhart - G
T/Sgt Robert S. Woodward - ROG
Cpl John Eldridge - G
S/Sgt Nick Maggio - G
T/Sgt John Dunham - AEG
S/Sgt Harry Dupree - G

Mission #174, Dec. 29, 1944 - 26 B-24s took off to bomb industrial targets in Austria. An 80 m.p.h. wind (head wind) over the Alps caused the group to abandon the primary target. 16 B-24s went to the third alternate target, Rosenhiem Marshalling Yards. Flak at the target was moderate but accurate which accounted for one aircraft being lost. My B-24 received heavy damage to the wings--we were losing fuel rapidly. We left the formation over the Adriatic and headed for land. We bailed out in the mountains over Pianola, Italy at 10,000 feet. All ten of my crew got out OK. We all received some injuries, but nothing serious--four crew men spent a week in a Rome hospital. On Dec. 31, 1944, a squadron truck picked us up at the front Hdqtrs in Aquila, Italy, and took us back to our group. (We spent New Year's Eve in Rome!) The plane we bailed out of was "Ten Hits and a Miss".

In the early months of 1945, the B-24 named Bugs Bunny (YO YO) was approach-

ing a record number of combat hours on an engine. Crew chief M/Sgt. Leininger asked me and my crew to fly the plane on missions, setting the record. The engine ended up with a record number of combat hours of 692 hours and 45 minutes. The engine held the record for length of combat service in the 15th Air Force BombardmentGroup.

On June 24, 1945, my crew and five B-17 passengers took off and flew our B-24 (BTO) to Africa, Azores, Newfoundland, and then to Bradley Field, Conn. Flying time 32 hours 20 min. We landed at Bradley Field on 6-28-45.

On our take off from the Azores we had #3 prop runaway and had to abort take off. We were able to take off 5 hours later for Newfoundland. We were briefed for CAVU but we went on instruments at 10,000 feet twenty minutes after take off. We never saw the sun or the water during the flight. We had bad icing conditions for about 2 hours. We hit Gander Field right on the nose due to excellent navigation by my navigator Lst Lt. Harold Peterson! It was an instrument flight the whole way! When we called Gander tower they said the field was closed and advised us to go to Goose Bay. I told them we didn't have enough fuel and they gave us permission to land. We landed in zero-zero conditions. A jeep came to park us and we even had trouble seeing the Jeep! That was the only blind landing I ever made and the last one!

We left our B-24 (BTO) at Bradley Field, Conn. and it was then ferried to the desert for storage. Lt. Col. Frances Doring was my C.O. Before he came to the 741st he flew P40s with the Flying Tigers. He was a good man.

Besides being a pilot I was also the squadron Armament Officer.

Douglas W. Brown

Note navigator on trip to U.S. was 1st Lt. Harold Peterson.

Congratulations to Doug Brown and his crew on their record, and congratulations to Master Sergeant Reno P. Leininger for his remarkable maintenance record--an aircraft engine with 692 hours and forty-five minutes of combat hours--the record for length of combat service in the 15th AF Bombardment Groups!

A number of pilots have commented on what a fine leader and man Francis Doring was!

L. E. Brunson's Crew
(from "Cerignola Connection," Summer 1992)



Front row, L to R: Bruce Johnson, Nose Gunner; J. C. Evans, Engineer; A. G. Brennan, Radio Operator; A. Z. Boyce, Waist Gunner. Back row, L to R: L. E. Brunson, Pilot; R. P. Becker, Bombardier; E. B. Kent, Navigator; A. S. Baker, Tail Gunner; J. G. Hetmanek, Ball Gunner. (Whittaker, Co-Pilot, not in picture)



M. K. Whittaker, Co-Pilot, at pilot's window. Baker and Kent on top.

Lt. Leonard W. Burkholder's Crew

No photo available.
No crew roster available--reported as "a lead pilot."

Ralph Chadwick's Crew (shot down 7 July 1944)

POW Ralph M. Chadwick, pilot
POW Howard O. Vralsted, regular co-pilot (shot down with Keogh's crew, 26 June, 1944)
POW David H. R. Loughrie ("4-day Dave"), co-pilot (substitute), shot down 7 July 1944.
POW John N. Grimm, bombardier, shot down 7 July 1944
Robert M. Crowley, navigator (completed tour)
POW Horace R. Anderson, ass't engineer and tail turret, shot down 7 July 1944
POW Philip J. Daly, radio operator and nose turret, shot down 7 July 1944
POW William A. Delaney, armorer and ball turret, shot down 7 July 1944
POW Adrian Earl, ass't armorer and waist gunner, shot down 7 July 1944.
POW Sol D. Schindler, ass't radio operator and waist gunner, shot down 7 July 1944
POW Norman M. Steinhauer, engineer and top turret, shot down 7 July 1944

Dave Laughrie

"4 Jay Dave" Laughrie

Almost fifty years have slipped by since the crew with which I went through Combat Training at Biggs Field, Texas, were assigned a brand new B-24-J at Topeaka, Kansas. We named her "Hell's Belle." Our bombardier, Lt. Jack Fleschig, painted her name and picture on the nose of the plane. Our whole crew thought we would fly her into compat. Little did we know that it would be assigned to another organ-iaztion as soon as we landed in Italy. We were assigned to the 741st Bomb Squadron of 455th Bomb Group on 3 July 1944.

We flew one practice mission, which as I recall, was at Bari. This was done on t July 1944. On the next evening our crew ehcked the alert board and since we were not scheduled to fly the next day, we decided to to Foggia tosee a Bull Fight. When we returned to our quarters Jack Fleschig checked again to see if we were going to get to fly in the morning. Sure enough, we were, but the pilot, Don Bailey, was to fly with one crew; Owen Flynn, our Navagator and Jack Fleschig fly with a different crew and I to fly with Lt. Chadwick's crew. I was excited, because I always wanted to fly since I was a very young boy. My Dad, who had been a pilot in World War I, would spend hours, when I was young, telling me about flying those old Jennys.

Well, my time had finally come. After the mission briefing I met Lt. Chadwicks crew. Of course the only crew member I had a chance to know at all, was Lt. Chadwick and that was'nt very well, since when I joined the crew we were all busy getting ready to take off.

After we were in the air and Chad had joined the formation, he turned the plane over to me and let me fly formation for several hours. When we neared the target, which was a synthetic oil and coking plant at Odertal, Lt. Chadwick told me he would spell me at the controls until we hit the IP, thwn he would let me fly over the target. Just after we dropped our bombs, I said to Chad, "look at that big flock of birds." "Birds hell!. thats flack! Just about then the plane rocked as we were hit. A fragment came through my window and just missed my head. the inboard engine on my side was knocked out and we dropped

back from the formation. Lt. chadwick took over the controls and we rejoined the Squadron. Just about then our other inboard engine was hit. Our air speed fell rapidly and we fell out of formation for the last time. Chad told me we were going to have to "hit the silk" and he alerted the crew and told them to "bail out."

I aked Chad if I couldgo back on the flight deck and put on my shoes, since I had just worn my flying boots and had taken my shoes off. While trying to put on my shoes I almost passed out, so I tied the strings together which permitted me to hold them when I jumped. I then hooked on my chest parachute, since I had been unable to obtain a backpack since leaving Topeaka. About then Lt. Chadwick came back to the bomb bay and said "Lets go, David." I then preceeded him out holding my shoes by their laces in my left hand and pulled the rip cord with my right. I must have made a ridiculous sight with my chute oscillating and me clutching my rip cord ring in my right hand and clingins to my shoes in my left hand. As soon as the chute stopped swinging back and forth I carefully placed the rip cord ring in my flying suit and swung my shoes over my right shoulder. I half enjoyed the next few minutes drop to the ground as I viewed the Czech countryside. I landed on the outskirts of a small village. My chute swung me into the lawn of a small house. As my chute swung me into the yard my head hit the side of the house and I was momentarily stunned. After taking off my chute and harness, I was putting on my shoes when severla people came running. One had a gun. I raised my hands. When they gestured at my side arm, I surrendered my 45 to them. An old lady asked in broken English if she could have my parachute. When I said "sure: she was very excited.

My captors then placed me in the back of a convertable; had me stand up with my hands held behind my neck as they drove me through the town. After this, they took me to the town jail, which only had one cell, where I was placed and would spend the next night. The next day I was taken to a larger town and placed in a cell with my Engineer and several other gunners

on our crew. I did not recognize them since I had only seen them for a minute, or so, when I reported to the plane. Shortly, however, our Engineer, Norm Steinhauer, convinced me we all were on the same crew. After that, we had a nice conversation. Soon we were separated; I was taken to Dulag Luft and I don't know where my crew members were moved.

After being interrogated at Dulag Luft, I was sent to Stalag Luft III, where I was kept as a POW until late January of 1945, when we were marched out of that camp in a bitterly cold snow stom and moved to Stalag VII-A. During the move, as I recall, we stopped at three different small towns and then finally crowded into 40 & 8 box cars and taken to Stalag VII-A. Here I was kept until April 29,1945, when General Patton's 14th Armored Division liberated the thousands of POWs from many nations being held at Stalag VII-A. I have heard that there were about one hundred thousand POWs held at that camp, from many allied nations,at the end of the war.

WAR DEPARTMENT
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

IN REPLY REFER TO:

iw

AG 201 Loughrie, David H. R.
PC-N NAT164

23 July 1944

Mrs. Laura C. Loughrie
2810 Chelsea Terrace
Baltimore, Maryland

Dear Mrs. Loughrie:

This letter is to confirm my recent telegram in which you were regretfully informed that your husband, Second Lieutenant David H. R. Loughrie, 0-821,306, Air Corps, has been reported missing in action over Germany since 7 July 1944.

I know that added distress is caused by failure to receive more information or details. Therefore, I wish to assure you that at any time additional information is received it will be transmitted to you without delay, and, if in the meantime no additional information is received, I will again communicate with you at the expiration of three months. Also, it is the policy of the Commanding General of the Army Air Forces upon receipt of the "Missing Air Crew Report" to convey to you any details that might be contained in that report.

The term "missing in action" is used only to indicate that the whereabouts or status of an individual is not immediately known. It is not intended to convey the impression that the case is closed. I wish to emphasize that every effort is exerted continuously to clear up the status of our personnel. Under war conditions this is a difficult task as you must readily realize. Experience has shown that many persons reported missing in action are subsequently reported as prisoners of war, but as this information is furnished by countries with which we are at war, the War Department is helpless to expedite such reports. However, in order to relieve financial worry, Congress has enacted legislation which continues in force the pay, allowances and allotments to dependents of personnel being carried in a missing status.

Permit me to extend to you my heartfelt sympathy during this period of uncertainty.

Sincerely yours,

J. A. ULIO
Major General,
The Adjutant General.

FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE
Office of the Commanding General
A. P. O. 520

4 August 1944

Mrs. Laura C. Loughrie
2810 Chelsea Terrace
Baltimore, Maryland

Dear Mrs. Loughrie:

Your husband, Second Lieutenant David H. R. Loughrie, O-821306, participated as a co-pilot on one of our Liberators in a combat mission to Odertal, Germany, on July 7, 1944.

Interrogation of the returning crews revealed that in the vicinity of the target, anti-aircraft fire partially disabled David's bomber. The ship continued its flight gradually losing altitude. Five parachutes were seen leaving it before it left the other crews' field of vision. I wish it were possible for me to tell you that your husband is safe, but in view of these facts, we can only wait and hope for the best. I assure you that you will be advised promptly if there should be any change in David's status.

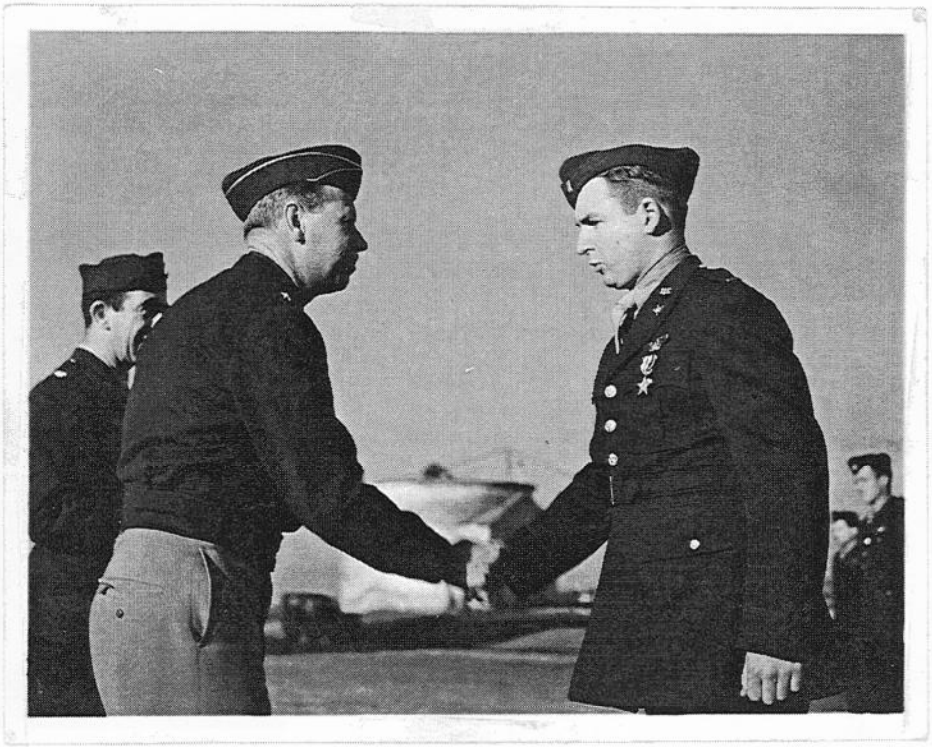
Your husband has always exhibited many of the splendid qualities associated with our finest flying officers. He was respected and admired by all who knew him. His many friends here join me in extending heartfelt sympathy.

Very sincerely yours,

N. F. Twining

N. F. TWINING
Major General, USA
Commanding

Lt. Cole's Crew (Ed. Cole)



Is this Lt. John Kroplin, Jr.?

No photo available.
No crew roster available. T/Sgt. B.W. (Vic) Daley, engineer.*

Questions: Did Lt. Cole win the Silver Star? Lt. Cole is not listed in 455 History "Roll Call."

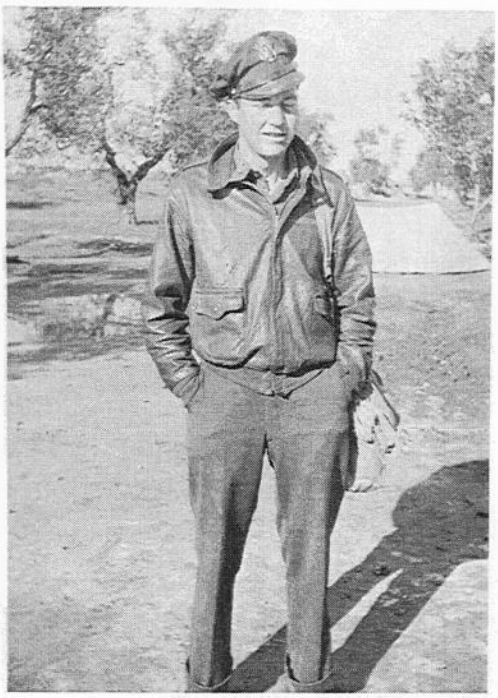
Was Lt. John Kroplin, Jr., the co-pilot of Lt. Cole's crew?

I believe Lt. John Kroplin, Jr. did win the Silver Star.

* Source: "Keeping in Touch" from 741 Sq dn. newspaper.

Earl W. Devee's Crew

No photograph available



Earl DeVee

1st. Lt. Earl W. Devee, pilot
2nd Lt. Donald V. Maes, co-pilot
2nd Lt. Stewart S. Knapp, navigator
2nd Lt. William T. McGahran, bombardier
T/Sgt. Sam H. Taylor, Jr.
S/Sgt. Michael F. Ryder
Cpl. Earl N. Lewis
Cpl. Frederick H. Forgione
Cpl. William H. McCarter
Pvt. David M. Himmelfarb

Bill Disbrow's Crew



Front row, L to R: James Weeks, Waist Gunner; Raymond Beauvais, Belly Turret Gunner; Robert Caldwell, Tail Turret Gunner; Herbert Cornell, Radio Operator.
Back row, L to R: John Merfield, Engineer; Bill Disbrow, Pilot; Don Keegan, Bombadier/Navigator; Kenneth Vincent, Waist Gunner.

Kenneth D. Fetty's Crew



Front Row, L to R: John Curtis (original crew pilot, killed in engineering test flight, Cerignola, 1944); Ken Fetty, new crew pilot (co-pilot unknown); Don Picken, navigator; Richard Higgins, bombardier.
Back Row, L to R: John Rickey, Frank Kowley, Fredrico Coriddi, Robert Davis, James Bain, Daniel Connell.

Maxwell Gate's Crew
(shot down over target (Budapest) 7/24/44)

Maxwell Gates, Pilot (deceased)
John Schweigert, Co-Pilot (deceased)
Bob Emick, Navigator - mbr. 455 Gp. Assoc.
Ed Salek, Bombadier
Stanley Pastorine, Radio/Gunner - KIA
Joe Weinstein, Nose Gunner - KIA
Orrin Miller, Ball Gunner - KIA
Bailey Maxwell, Waist Gunner - KIA
Art Mello, Tail Gunner - KIA
George Luster, Eng. Gunner - mbr. 455 Gp. Assoc.

See Bob Emick's recollection of the mission and life as a POW in attachments.

Also in the attachments is a copy of a "Speech Before Former POWs Of Stalag Luft III," 23 May 1987. This speech tells the story of Emick's (and other POWs of Stalag Luft III) release.

Begin

Budapest, Hungary 7/27/44 - Target - Manfred Weiss Armament Works (Same old airplane flown on 7/26). We were finding it difficult to stay in formation at 25,000 feet with this airplane. But didn't want to abort again. We were then attacked by many ME109s and FW 190s at Lake Balaton in Hungary. Things were very noisy with every gun shooting and yelling over the intercom where planes where coming from. Soon all shooting in the rear of the plane stopped, probably as those people were shot. Our pilot then lost control of the plane as the cables to the rudder were severed and then the incendiary bombs we were carrying burst into

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flames. The bail out button sounded. I opened the door between the bomb bay and the flight deck and the flames came through like a flame thrower or torch. I covered my face and ran onto the bomb bay but forgot my chute (We always wore the chute harness but not the chest pack chute we were issued). I scrambled back to the flight deck, found my chute, hooked one side and again went to the bomb bay but had trouble hooking the other side. At this time the pilot came thru to jump and hooked the other side for me and then we both jumped. The parachute opened but my flying boots came off and then things were as quiet as could be. This was between 10 & 11 AM.

— POW Experience —

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I was still very high in my parachute when an ME 109 circled me so close I could see the pilot's face. Later on a pilot visited the hospital to see if anyone was there from the plane he described as mine. My face was all bandaged and by then my eyes were swollen shut. I later learned five aircraft from our group was shot down that day per exhibit IX. Our bombardier claims we shot down two fighters.

I landed on the side of a hill going backwards and hit it very hard. When gathering up my chute at least two sections were scorched brown from the fire and the cover itself was half burned away. I hid my chute in some heavy underbrush, got out my escape kit and started walking West keeping in the trees or along the tree line when by a field.

Some time later while walking along a tree line a group of three civilians and I spotted on another

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At the same time across the field. They motioned me to come to them and Im thinking they aren't making any noise so maybe they intend to help me. We meet in the middle of the field and without any advance warning one of the men knocked me down with his shovel. Lucky for me soldiers arrived and took charge. We walked to road and got into a small truck and drove to a little town. There I met a few other flyers from different crews and then a larger army truck took us to train station in a larger city. (Bicske)

A train arrived and they brought more flyers including the other four that survived from our crew. We were taken to Budapest arriving about dusk. By now my eyes were beginning to be swollen shut from my burns and my arm was hurting. At the hospital two (apparently orderlies in white jackets) sat me in a waiting room and attempted to determine my position on the airplane. They made examples of shooting, dropping bombs and flying the plane. I kept shaking my head no but couldn't make them understand I was a navigator

I was then taken to what I expect was a doctor where they cut my leather jacket off my burned arm and treated my face and arm with a vaseline type of grease, wrapped both in ~~grease~~ toilet paper and found me a bed. I have no idea how long I was bandaged, probably a week, but eventually they removed the toilet paper and I could see a little. It got better each day and finally I could see well enough to know that I was well off in comparison to the others. Time in the hospital went well except for a

few instances. As I was in better condition than most, two of us were assigned with a guard, to bring soup each day from a kitchen A short distance from the hospital. I got a pair of sandals at this time made from old tires and kept them until I got to Sagan. On one of these occasions the air raid siren sounded and the two of us with one guard went into a shelter with many civilians who didn't appear to be very friendly. On another occasion the British came over at night and we watched the search lights catch planes, immediately the guns would zero in with the plane attempting to avoid the lights but not always sossess-ful. We also watched another 15th A-F raid come over in waves and saw some go down. We always had new patients after each raid

Then the Russians, who were now in Romania, started to bomb at night. I'm sure they had no specific target other than the whole city. We actually seen bombs being rolled out of transport planes. With this came Russian prisoners and things in the hospital deteriated. The Russians apparently had never seen a modern toilet and wouldn't sit on one. As a result things became filthy. ~~And it also the same~~.

At the hospital I remember being taken for a shower in a large basement shower room that was open to the public. Also the Hungarian government paid us in their money by rank. We could only give it to our guards for whatever was available which wasn't much. Someone was probably making money on this. I was really surprised at this as I understand Hungary did not sign the Geneva Convention on treatment of POWs.

At about this time a few of us was transferred from Hungarian control to German control and we were taken by bus across the Danube to the South to a large stone prison. Each of us was put into solitary confinement in approximately a 4'x10' cell with a cot, straw mattress, pail, desk and a window about 7' off the ground. By now I had a green fleece lined jacket with a fur collar from one of the wounded in the hospital that didn't make it. We were told not to look out of the window and everytime I tried a guard would hammer on my door. They sure kept close track of us through a small hole in the door. Other prisoners who were in that room scratched their name on the walls. One I recognized from my class.

During this confinement I was taken two times for interrogation by two different officers who spoke perfect English. After giving them the usual name, rank and serial # they would pull out a file and proceeded to tell me my life history from graduating from high school thru Navigation School. They also informed me of my group, squadron, superior officers, etc which I listened to without any comment. They remarked about my short career as a navigator and how lucky I was to be alive. Most of my file was made up of newspaper clippings. I'm sure they were assured I had no large secrets to hide.

During this time in solitary, perhaps three weeks, I devised a game of solitare. On the desk was a sheet of paper but no pen or pencil. So - I tore it into 52 squares and with my wings put one to four holes in the corners for each suit. I then put from one to

thirteen holes in the center for Ace thru King. It took many hours with good concentration to play A game of solitare.

Finally the 8th day came to move And they took US outside for picture taking (Exhibit XXI) And then marched About 50 of us to A box car. I believe this is when our status changed from MIA to POW AS ~~Mrs~~ Mom And Dad were notified in December 1944. This is Also the time I became Acquainted with ERSATZ bread (made from SAWdust). They gave each of us 1/2 loaf And closed the door of the boxcar. Their boxcars are SMAller than ours And it became obvious we could not All Sit or lay down At one time. It Also had A pail in one corner that everyone tried to Avoid. We set up A system of moving every hour Around the boxcar from the middle. That way everyone had his turn from the best spot (window) And worst spot (PAIL) No one made A big deal out of this and we cooperated very good. As this was everyones first experience with ersatz bread many (incl me) had A problem of DIArehA.

on the oder River side of Berlin

We had three experiences on this trip to SAGAN (Zagan) in Poland/Germany. The first WAS in the Vienna RR yard during An American Air raid. The guards and locomotive left us in the locked box car. The second WAS when we were leaving Vienna, After repairing many tracks, we were Attacked by American fighters who made A habit of shooting up trains. Luckily we were only one boxcar Among many And had no CASUALties. The third WAS when we pulled into A RR station (Prague) And the door WAS pulled open by the guards who grABber two of us

by the collar and pulled us off the train. It happened to be my turn to be sitting there at the time, not a good spot because it was very drafty. We were taken a few blocks to get a large milk can of soup to carry back to the POWs.

We arrived at Stalag Luft III (Sagan) approx. the 1st part of October 1944. We were immediately deloused, showered, and issued GI clothing. Woolen khaki pants and shirt, knit cap, GI overcoat, socks and finally a pair of shoes. We were given our suntan uniform back for us to wash later. We were then assigned to a barrack and a combine within the barracks. Each combine had 12 men (4 men in 1943) made up of 4 Bunks 3 high, a table, & chairs and some cupboards for storing whatever. Our beds had "mattress of burlap full of straw and one blanket. In the winter we slept with all the clothes we owned on or covering us. Each combine existed as a separate unit in that food items were equally divided to each combine. The 12 men were then responsible to each other to prepare food, keep quarters clean, standing in line to get food, water, supplies, etc. Each combine made their own pots, pans, disks, etc all from the empty cans from Red Cross packages. I remember each day our portion of bread would be cut as equally as possible and then we would pick a card to determine the order in which we could pick our slice. As I remember we did not have any problems with the combine system and everyone got along reasonably well.

The inner camp was run much as an Army post according to rank and rules were made for the benefit of all, Individual trading with the guards was not

allowed by our own people. Any trading was done by a select few for the benefit of all. In this way they obtained camera's, film, radio parts, batteries, etc that helped us all. The camp consisted of five compounds each with from 2,000 to 2500 men. I was assigned to Center Compound the oldest. PR

After my prior experiences it was not hard to exist in this camp except for the lack of food and always being cold. There was a library of books received by POW there since 1941/2. We had playing cards, home made chess sets, sporting materials baseballs, basketballs, footballs etc and we were allowed to walk around the perimeter of our compound. There was a barracks converted into a church on Sunday, singing groups and the men put on very good plays. I was there to see one play "Arsenic & Old Lace" and one variety show. We had "Appels" twice a day when the Germans counted us while in formation by barracks. We devised many ways to make the count come out wrong and so there would be many recoonts taking a lot of time in the cold. However, the POWs felt we were ahead because we didn't have a warm place to go to and the German's did. PR

The Germans supplied us with ersatz bread and cold calaraby soup which was horrible. The rest of the menu depended on receiving Red Cross Parcels. As the war went on and German transportation had problems in moving anything, and with more POWs daily, our parcels became fewer & fewer. PR

Each compound had a hidden radio that the German's continually searched for but never found. Many times at Appel we would be kept outside while they (we called them goons) searched for the radio's and 14

tunnels. The movie the Great Escape" was made on the basis of an escape from the North compound in StalAg Luft III and resulted in the deaths of some 50 POWs who were recaptured. I believe three people made it back to England. Very few people knew of the location of the radio. Two people listened to BBC and German news, they then told the leader of each barracks who in turn told each combine separately in whispers. We were aware "goons" would crawl under the barracks or hide all day in the roof listening to us

Christmas was a hi-lite of the camp as each PR combine got an additional 3 packages of Red Cross parcels. Each combine competed in making special dishes which were displayed before being eaten. We also had a Christmas program, caroling, etc PR

Through our news reports it was apparent we were close to the Russian front, Airplanes were flying low over our camp and returning quite quickly with some smoking from battle damage. We saw our first jet aircraft at this time. Meetings were held by our superiors on how to prepare if the Russians came or if the Germans decided to move us. They recommended everyone stay together and follow orders to hold casualties to a minimum. There were many who wanted to overrun the camp by attacking the guards. This would be possible due to our numbers but surely would be costly. In case the Germans moved us we were advised to save as much food as possible and to make a knapsack from an extra shirt to carry it in. I used my suntan shirt by sewing the tail shut and then sewing the sleeves to the bottom and buttoning up the front. P

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On January 28, 1945 just after midnight we were informed the Germans were moving us West AS soon AS possible. We put All our foodstuffs on the table and AGAIN by cutting cards took our choice of the items left. When there was less than 12 items teams of 2 or 3 people took one item to be shared later. I was fortunate to have A supply of cigarettes (I didnt smoke) to later trade with the Germans and POW's Our compound was the last ~~to~~ leave Aboot 3/4 AM in very cold weather and snow falling heavily. By the second or third day our packs became heavy So Another non smoker And me traded some cigarettes for A sled And took turns pulling it. Many others were Also doing this. PK

Nights we stayed mostly in barns but we Also stayed in one church And Also in A pottery factory which was the best ever because the ovens were still warm. Many years later our group collected money for A stained glass window in the church. Most of our food came from what we carried but occasionally we did get some bread And soup. We also traded with some of the farm families who apparently had A surplus. Along our route we passed Another group from the North compound, among thousands of POWs, ~~I~~ met my pilot and co-pilot. The co-pilot spoke German and they had A large bag of potatoes And they gave me some. PR

Our walk finally ended in Spremberg where we were put in A large garage in the middle of An SS Army camp (very scary). We were immediately notified to stay clear of them, especially those POWs who had Atendacy to to tell them "For you the WAR IS OVER". That was what

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we were told by the old men who were guarding us.

At a Stalag Luft Re-union in Seattle they had a map that showed our march included these cities

Sagan, Hermsdort, Halbau, Friewaldau, Leippa, Preibus, Wendesch-Miesta, Muskau, Graustein, and finally Spremberg. PR

From Spremberg I got another ride in a smelly, cold boxcar to Stalag VIII A in Mooseberg, Germany, About 30 miles from Munich. At Mooseberg we got deloused again but this time no showers just a spray can of powder. We were again assigned to barracks but this time more crowded, no organization, each man for himself in trading with the guards. Groups of men teamed up to make a Kriegie Stove from powdered milk cans to prepare a hot meal. Wood was very scarce so everything started to disappear. First the latrines, then the floor joist, then the roof (berms) joist and finally parts of our beds. When you entered a barracks the whole floor moved up and down and they became unsafe. We were finally moved to tents that just had roofs, no sides, and straw floors. Lucky it was now April and it was getting warmer. Sanitary conditions were very poor with little water, in fact the Germans did not come inside the camp for Appels. PR

There were many rumors at this time of what the Germans would do with about 150,000 POW of all nationalities now at the camp. It was rumored Hitler gave order to shoot everyone, another we were to be moved into the Alps as hostages. We watched two raids on Munich at this time, bombers came in a steady stream. Probable a 1000 plane raid. Things

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were very bad as far as food and cleanliness was concerned. PR

On April 29, 1945 our troops arrived and had a short but fierce fight to drive the guards and SS troops away. The story of our liberation was described by the Major in charge from a speech he gave in Seattle per "Exhibit XVI". General Patton visited us in the tents and inquired where they kept the officers. He was furious to hear we were all officers. The liberating forces had to leave immediately but left much food and advised us to stay in camp as we would be moved as soon as possible. Everyone ate too much and many became sick. Sanitary conditions became intolerable. For entertainment, I guess, a few groups formed a contest of who could consume a whole box of food first. Each group had about 6 people of which who volunteered to do the eating, two would prepare the food and the others would feed the eater and assist him in walking the perimeter while he ate. A time limit was set and much betting took place (IOU's). I don't know if payment was ever made. The eaters really became sick many times during and for some time after this contest.

People started to leave camp when no-one came to move us out. Three of us left and shortly came to an allied road block where they were taking all means of transportation from civilians. They gave us some motor bikes and we took off for Munich. At the outskirts of town we heard much shooting and found we hadn't taken the City. I remember getting some food at farm houses and sleeping in barns at least twice. We finally came to the gate of the DACHAU Concentration Camp and were turned away by American soldiers

Of coorse we didn't know what took place there at the time. We returned to Mooseberg and found nothing changed. I traded the motor bike to a POW for a German Army Officers' Cap, which I still have. PR

Eventually we were moved by truck to a German airfield. While waiting for planes to come for us we explored the buildings and found what was once a school room to train navigators. I found a navigational aid computer and have donated it to the Kalamazoo Air Museum. While at the airport a German ME 109 aircraft landed and the pilot surrendered. It caused some excitement as we didn't know his intentions at the time when flying over the field. PR

We were finally picked up by C-47 transports and flown to France and then trucked to Camp Lucky Strike, one of many set up to process POW's. There we were immediately deloused, took a real good shower and were issued new GI clothing. As I remember the mess halls were open 24 hrs a day and we could eat as much or as often as we wished. A dream come through, although probably not a good idea by the authorities. Many overate and again became sick. I can't remember receiving any medical treatment at this time except for those with obvious physical problems.

We left the Port of LeHavre, France on a General class troopship with about 1/3 POWs and 2/3 Air force people that were to set up facilities for air crews flying back to the States via South America. So our route was to the South, ~~and~~ we left the last of the regular personnel off at Port of Spain, Trinidad. The rest of the trip was made in comparative luxury.

And again we were fed as much as we wanted. We sailed from France on May 18th and arrived at Ft Dix, NJ on June 4, 1945.

I immediately called home and in a few days took a train to Scranton. Eleanor, Mom, Dad and many others were there to meet me and were amazed that a former POW got off weighing about 160 lbs, 20 lbs more than I weighed before.

Eleanor and I were married July 14, 1945 and I had a 60 day leave which was extented another 30 days. I then had to report to San Antonio, without dependents, for "so called rest and discharge. It was very crowded there and there was absolutely nothing to do. After a few weeks they issued an order that those not wanting to wait for a physical exam could be discharged and sent home. I took advantage of this and in November 1945 Eleanor and came to Detroit to get my job back. The discharge was dated December 12, 1945

I do not remember ever having had a physical exam during this whole period. I recently requested my records on this from the VA and they showed only dental work performed before going overseas. I do think we were not treated fairly after being liberated and many other POWs with problems now find it impossible to prove claims for disabilities.

"The End"

Crew

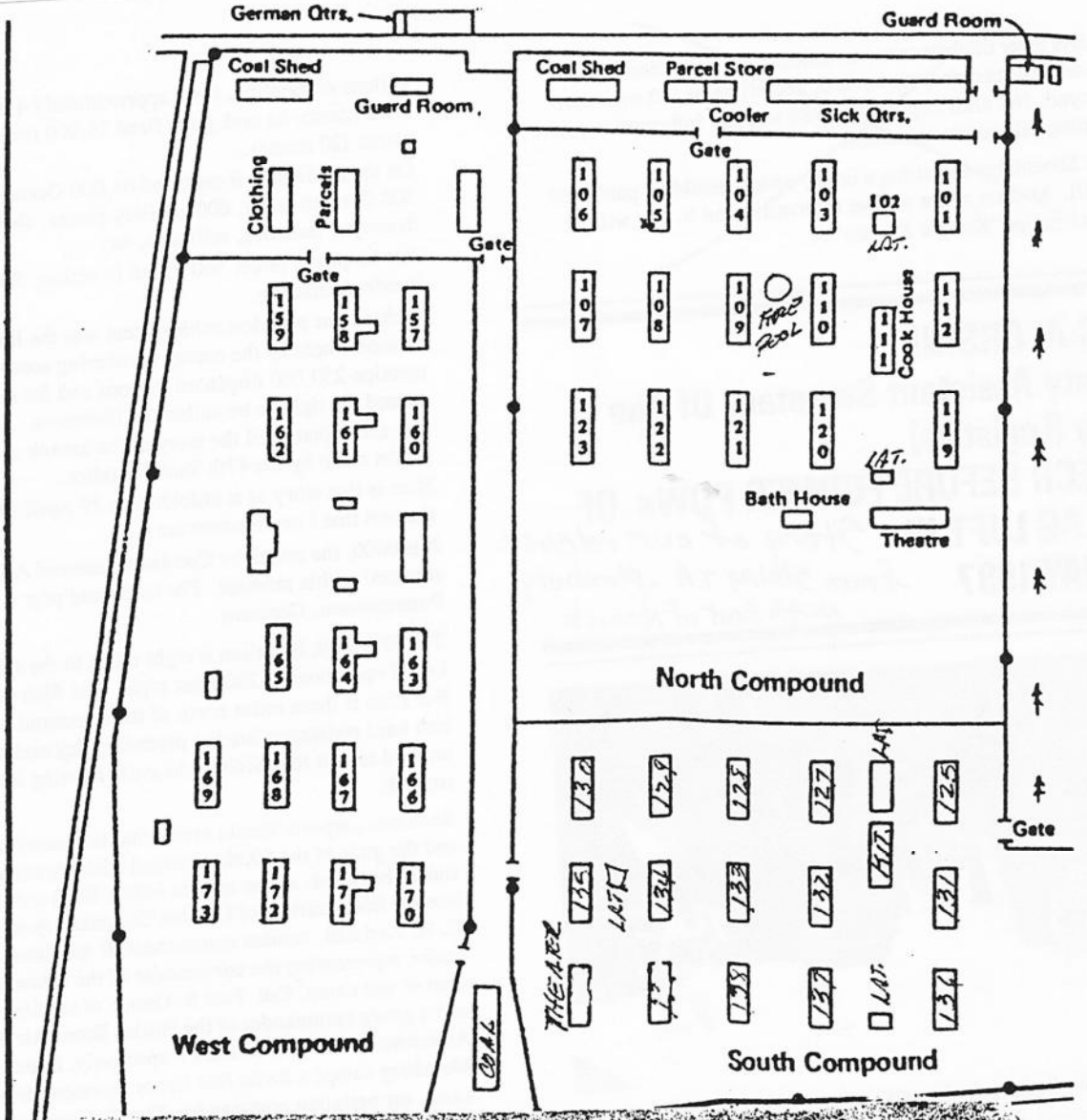
Pilot - Maxwell Gates - Grand Ledge, Mich — Visited him in the 60s Dec'd 1972
CoPilot - John Schweigart - Weehawken, NJ — Dec'd 1989
Navigator - Bob Emick - Scranton, Pa.
Bombardier - Ed Saleck - Minneapolis, Minn - Visited him in 1960
Radio-Gunner - Stanley Postorine - Racine, Wisc - KIA
Nose Gunner - Joe Weinstein - NY, NY - KIA
Ball Gunner - Orrin Miller - Avalla, Pa - KIA
Waist Gunner - Bailey Maxwell - Twin Falls, Idaho - KIA
Tail Gunner - Art Mello - Fall River, Mass - KIA
Engineer/Gunner - George Luster - Chelsea, Mass — Visited him in Fla in 1990

Combine Roomates

James Rumford - Chesaning, Mich → We visited Jim at his home in Arkansas and met them at the reunion in 1990 at Norfolk, VA
Robert Harvey - Chicago, Ill
Charles Meadows - NY - NY
Sam Siegel - Newport News, Va
Sam Zive - LA, Calif
Morton Osborn - Fox Chase, Phila, Pa
Mickey Schowzeit - Brooklyn, NY
Vincent Hogan - Iowa City, Iowa
Bill Langenfeld - Oshkosh, Wisc
Al Johnson - Raleigh, N.C

I haven't had contact with any of the others.

Tom Williams - Dunlap, Ill - On Rumford's crew different combine





Name: Emick

Vorname: Robert Frederick

Dienstgrad: 2.Lt.

Erk.-Marke: 8003 Kgf.Lg.d.Lw.3

Serv.-Nr.: 0-719035

Nationalität: USA

Baracke: 42

Raum:

K. Liebig-Sagaz

Ten days after the Japenese surrender, "X" was ordered to disband. All records were burned, and all items left over were destroyed. Not until September, 1986 was any information given regarding this covert operation.

Lloyd Shoemaker is writing a book, which should be published this fall. As soon as we receive information on it, you will be notified in the "Kriegie Klarion".

ERIC A. ORSINI
Deputy Assistant Secretary Of The Army (Logistics)
SPEECH BEFORE FORMER POWs OF STALAG LUFT III
23 MAY 1987

Story of our release from Stalag 7A - Moosburg North East of Munich



Eric A. Orsini, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army, and Chaplain Daniels, Former POW

You asked me to discuss events leading up to the release of allied prisoners of war from the POW camps such as Moosburg. What I will relate are events as seen from my perspective which may differ from yours and really that's the story of war. There is no one story. I would venture to say there are over 450 stories of Stalag Luft III in this room.

First let me tell you something about the 14th Armored Division which was involved in these missions and which like many divisions in WW II had no previous war history; it was born of an America that had been attacked by the fascist states in Europe and Asia. The 14th was an armored division, made up of 3 combat commands (regimental equivalents) somewhat larger than a wing. Each command consisted of a tank battalion of 54 tanks, an armored artillery battalion, an armored infantry battalion, recon troops, medics and combat support and combat service support troops. It was a self-contained force that could fight for 1 to 3 days without resupply. It was manned by men from every state in the union. Its cadre consisted of a few West Point officers, reserve officers and in the main 90 day wonders like myself. The enlisted ranks had a sprinkling of regular army non commissioned officers but the rest were draftees.

The division had a life of three short years to include basic training and deployment, but in that short period the division's vehicles traveled an average of 2000 miles, used four and a half million gallons of gasoline, fired approximately 4 million rounds of small arms ammo, its tank guns fired 36,000 rounds and its artillery pieces 120 rounds.

On the credit side it captured 64,000 German prisoners of war, 500 German tanks, 600 artillery pieces, shot down aircraft, destroyed factories, railroads, etc.

But we paid a price: 560 killed in action; 2000 + wounded; hundreds missing.

Perhaps our proudest achievement was the liberation of allied prisoners held by the enemy numbering some 200,000 not to mention 250,000 displaced persons and for this, the division earned the right to be called the liberators.

You asked that I tell the story of the assault on the Moosburg prison camp by the 47th Tank Battalion.

Here is that story as it unfolded on 29 April 1945, as I saw it and the best that I can reconstruct it.

It is 0600, the attack by Combat Command A is due to be resumed at this moment. The command post is located in Puttenhausen, Germany.

The 47th Tank Battalion is eight miles to the southeast where it halted operations at 2300 last night. The 68th Armored Infantry Battalion is three miles north of the command post, having run into hard resistance late the preceding day and having been ordered to halt in Mainburg to avoid running into a known night ambush.

Soon now, reports should arrive that the battalions are moving, and the guns of the 500th Armored Field Artillery Battalion should be heard. at one minute before 0600 a strange group strode into the headquarters of Combat Command A to meet Brig. Gen. C. H. Karlstad, combat commander. It consisted of a German major, representing the commander of the Moosburg allied prisoner of war camp, Col. Paul S. Goode of the United States Army and a group commander of the British Royal Air Force, the senior American and British officers respectively, imprisoned in the Moosburg camp; a Swiss Red Cross representative; and Col. Lann, my battalion commander. The German major brought a written proposal from his commander for the creation of a neutral zone surrounding Moosburg, all movement of Allied troops in the general vicinity of Moosburg to stop while representatives of the Allied and German governments conferred on disposition of the Allied prisoners of war in that vicinity.

The German proposals were rejected and the party was given until 0900 to return to Moosburg and to submit an unconditional surrender offer—or receive the American attack at that hour; a CCA staff officer was dispatched to General Smith at 4th Division Headquarters.

The German command would not submit an unconditional surrender, instead German SS troops moved outside the city and set up a defense perimeter. They opened the fight and we were ready for them. Every tanker, infantryman, truck driver, clerks and cooks took up arms.

By 1030 the SS were lying dead in the fields and along the roads, grey-white faces and open mouths, twisted and staring sightlessly at the cold, blue sky above; and American medium tanks were roaring through the cobbled streets of the ancient city.

The 47th had split in two columns, one led by Maj. Kircher, our S-3, and the other by Col. Lann, our commander; and Gen. Karlstad went into the city with the 47th. Gen. Karlstad, the combat command commander, picked up a German officer as guide, and with Lieut. Joseph P. Luby took off for the prison camp proper.

The jeep mounted a .30 caliber machine gun; as it swung up, there were several score armed German guards outside. Luby

rolled into their midst, his peep stopped, and with his hand on the gun called: "Achtung!" The group surrendered.

General Smith, the division commander, arrived at the camp shortly thereafter; an American flag was raised at a church steeple of all places.

Official estimates of the total Allied prisoners freed at Moosburg were 110,000, including an estimated 30,000 Americans, officers and men. Besides a series of seven prisoner of war camps, the division captured a German garrison of 6000 men at Moosburg.

Once the sharp, pitched battle by the SS was over, the German defenses crumbled. The 600-man 47th Tank Battalion took 2,000 prisoners; the 600-man 94th Reconnaissance Squadron took 2,000 more. Division total for the day was set at 12,000.

Scenes of the wildest rejoicing accompanied the tanks as they crashed through the double 10-foot wire fences of the prison camps. There were Norwegians, Brazilians, French, Poles, Dutch, Greeks, Rumanians, Bulgars. There were Americans, Russians, Serbs, Italians, New Zealanders, South Africans, Australians, British, Canadians—men from every nation fighting the Nazis. There were officers and men. Twenty-seven Russian generals, sons of four American generals. There were men and women in the prison camps—including three Russian women doctors. There were men of every rank and every branch of service, there were war correspondents and radio men.

Around the city were thousands of slave laborers, men and women.

All combined to give the 14th Armored Division the most incredible welcome it ever received. The tanks were finally slowed to five miles an hour as they went through the camps—the press of men in front of them was so great. Men, some of them prisoners five years, some American Air Corps men prisoners three years, cried and shouted and patted the tanks.

"You damned bloody yanks, I love you!" shouted a six foot four Australian and threw his arms around my driver.

A weary bearded American paratrooper climbed on a tank and kissed the tank commander. Tears streamed from his cheeks. The women had flowers, and they threw the flowers on the tanks and in the peeps. Italians and Serbs, tired and drawn, jammed around the vehicles, eagerly thrusting out their hands to touch their liberators, weeping.

An American Air Corps Lieutenant kissed a tank.

"God damn, do I love the ground forces," he said.

"You were a long time coming, but now you are here!"

There were no words to express the feelings of these men.

As the German guards were formed in columns of four and marched away, each man carrying two or three loaves of black bread, some of the tankers took the bread from them and tossed it over the fences to the Allied prisoners and they also tossed their own K rations and C rations.

There were strange reunions, TEC/5 Floyd C. Mahoney of C-Company freed his own son, a lieutenant in the Air Corps.

In roaming the town, the 47th and the 68th uncovered almost a score of arsenals, loaded with German machine guns, pistols, rifles, Panzerfausts, all sorts of small arms.

The tanks of S/Sgt. Claude E. Newton, S/Sgt. William T. Summers, Lieut. Hack and Lieut. Boucher led the chase through town; Moosburg was not all the battalion wanted. In fact the primary objective was a bridge across the Isar River that we wanted intact, but this bridge was blown as Sgt. Newton's tank moved into the first span. We knew you fellows were in the camps but we felt once we secured the bridge we could come back to you.

Among its own men liberated, the 47th found TEC/5 William Weichelt, Corp. Laufor Cobbledick, TEC/5 Edward Kulawiak, Corp. Gilbert Maines, PFC. John Nestorek, TEC/5 John Wertz, PFC. Verle A. Kruger, and Corp. Robert D. Hills.

German prisoners taken included boys of nine, fully uniformed and armed, and girls of 17 and 18—also uniformed and armed and capable of shooting you just as easy as a regular.

By night, the division was established along the Isar, and behind it were unbelievable scenes—ile long columns of German prisoners being marched to the rear, a light tank in front of the column and a light tank in the rear—each with its lights on full blast—and fields with 2000 Germans in a bunch, being guarded under lights, while among them lay the burned out German vehicles caught in the fight that morning, the German dead lying in grotesque positions as graves registration officers moved among them preparing for burial—all the bloody incredible litter of a battle-field just passed, under the bright lights of the overwatching vehicles.

And through the streets roamed streams of Allied prisoners newly freed and not quite sure what they wanted to do, but wanting to do something.

They broke into liquor—schnapps and champagne and cognac and wine—cellars and kitchens and wine shops and warehouses.

They got into food—chickens and pigs and lambs and geese, potatoes and eggs and ham and bread—in pantries and kitchens and living rooms and stores.

There was rape that night and pillage, and plain and fancy robbery, and the German civilians hid indoors. (To my knowledge no Americans were involved.)

Through that seething jam the American Army was trying to move back more German prisoners of war, columns four men wide and half a mile long and at the same time arrange your trip home.

Up through the mad bacchanalia the combat troops were trying to move, tanks and endless lines of silent infantrymen from the 68th Armored Infantry Battalion, faces set and hardly seeing the weaving scene about them, eyes straight ahead and with the trick men have who are going into combat of catching their lower lip and holding it caught between their teeth.

The dying nation dissolved into a snarling, giggling montage of human shapes, like a color fantasy on a movie screen where the eye is not able to see nor to understand, but only to snatch at endlessly shifting swirling jumbles of shapes of the wildest human emotions.

British ex-prisoners of war rode bicycles through the towns—freed prisoners took most of the bicycles and motorcycles and autos with which Germany was so well supplied. Slave laborers, men and women stood by every road, making a "V" with their fingers and grinning and throwing flowers.

"Endlisch frei, enlich frei," said one, and a private first class of the French army introduced himself and gravely said: "It is very fine that our governments understand each other, and our generals and ministers, but I would like to tell all the American Privates First Class that I am eternally indebted to them and eternally grateful."

The next day, the 47th and the 68th established bridge heads across the Isar at Moosburg, still encountering small arms, tank and mortar fire, falling in the town; the 998th Treadway Bridge Company (once part of the battalion) put in a bridge over the Isar River and General Patton visited your compound.

(OVER)

1942, my first sergeant, Samuel Kalb, left from Knox, KY for Camp Chaffee where the 14th armored division was to train prior to deployment overseas. The night before, Sgt. Kalb had dinner with two close friends, Sol Hersh and Dusty Rhodes. Sol and Dusty were then in the armored force, but not for long. Dusty became a fighter pilot and Sol a co-pilot in a bomber. Sgt. Kalb continued to correspond with both until 1944, July to be exact, when Sam told me his friend Sol was missing in action.

On the morning of 1 may 1945, after the assault on Mooseburg, Sgt. Kalb came to my command post and said; Captain look who I found. And there stood Sol Hersh with Lt. James Hill and Frank Kirby. Well we broke out the champagne. I had my mess sergeant fry eggs and spam. We talked, we laughed and grown men cried. But it felt good to know for all the grief we were doing something noble. And then a messenger came in and told me to be prepared to move out, word was there was another bridge over the Inn River and by that there is another POW camp at Muldorf.

Lt. Harold Gorski's Crew

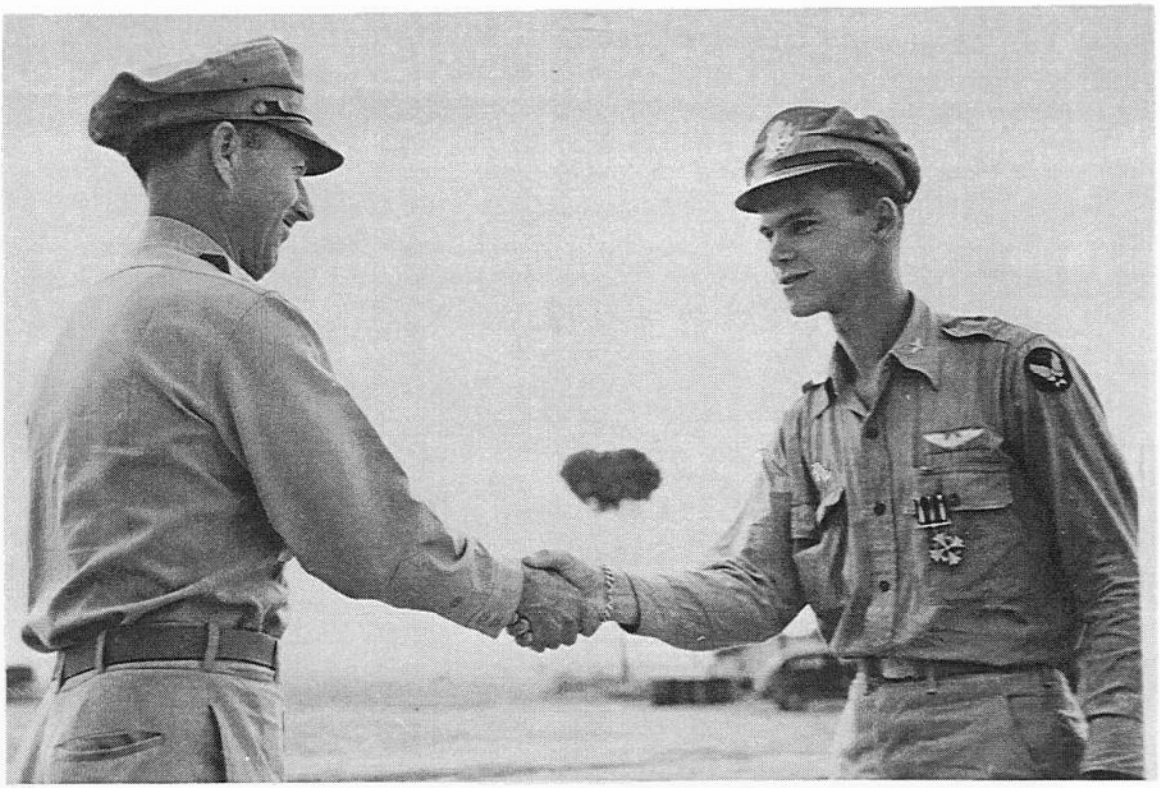


Top row: Bill Crim, Navigator; Jim Scott, Bombadier; Bill Disbrow, Co-Pilot; Harold Gorski, Pilot; Steve Vicinski, Gunner.
Bottom row: Ray Beauvais, Gunner; John Merfeld, Engineer; Dale Magnuson, Gunner; Mark Blackman, Gunner; Kenneth Vincent, Gunner.

This crew had quite a tour! Harold Gorski was awarded the Silver Star while the co-pilot on Paul Condra's crew. This entire crew was awarded DFCs as a result of a mission with Harold Gorski as pilot.

Raymond Beauvais, John Merfeld, and Kenneth Vincent continued missions with Bill Disbrow as Pilot. Bill Crim was shot down with Nixon and Lanford, and Lanford and Disbrow served together in an all-weather night fighter (F-61s) organization in Japan in the Army of Occupation.

see following pages



Jim Scott, Bombadier, receiving DFC from Brig. Gen. Fay Uptegrove, 304th Wing C.O. (Jim also survived a forced landing with Lt. Robert Lackner, pilot, near Ancona, 8/28/44. The airplane landed between German and Allied lines and both sides fired artillery at the airplane to destroy it.

See attached letter from Dale Magnuson describing 2 missions involving Harold Gorski and crew.

see attached recollections by Bill Crim

Some recollections by Bill Crim

26 June 1944 Moosbierbaum-Pilots Gorski and Disbrow
I had tucked the pilots into their flak suits and helmuts and had mine on. It was tense-up time with Bratislava ahead left and the IP beyond. We had nice lazy looking cover-just right. "Two o'clock high getim getim"-It was Gorski. I saw a twin engine fighter in a climbing turn left. At that instant his relative speed to ours was zero, just like he was motionless at that moment. Then swoosh he and several others came back over us from front to rear. I looked up-no cover. They had taken off after the T/E. We felt a bit naked. Turned out with good reason.
We were closing on the IP when up front overhead left to right came a "cloud" of single engine fighters. By a cloud I mean a whole passel! No formation but just like a flock of blackbirds looking for a place to roost for the night. They disappeared from my sight, right rear. The intercom exploded like it always does at first. Then it calmed down (like it always does) and the Tail guys started verbalizing the S/E activity. We turned on the IPand the attack came, seemed like from all angles but mostly from the rear. It lasted all the way to target-a battle royale!
All guns firing, intercom talking E/A location, and that damned top turret going off right above my head! What a din! I looked right and watched the tail of the ship we were flying off of disintegrating from 20mm cannon. The ship went down and to the right out of formation. The top turret over my head stopped firing. Ilooked at him and he was trying to charge his guns. I looked below him and said a bad word; the bottom third of his cartridge bags were hanging over his footrest-empty! I got his feet off, pushed on the bags, the spent shells came down, and he was back in business. I looked out left behind Gorski and couldn't believe it. A 109 was flying rear toward front - through our formation! I saw the black cross, hell I saw the pilot! He was going through not exceptionally fast but he was flipping his wing 90 deg. left and then 90 deg. right and everyone trying to tag him. I saw three more come through the same way. We were getting hit but so were they. The ones that were badly hit would turn left one or two hundred yards, do a half roll and the pilot would fall out. Their shroud lines seemed much shorter than ours and their canopies were all colors but white-blue, red, pink, green, etc.I could see five all at one time. Things eased up at the target-now came the flak-bombs away-and we were through-we hoped but not to be.
More E/A attacked on the downhill side of target but it seemed less aggressive. And too, Gorski had a little more room for evasive action. He racked that ship up like it was a primary trainer,back and forth. I don't think anyone hit another plane-it was rocking that much. Anyway, they soon left us alone.
Time for damage assessment-one man wounded, huge hole in right wing, lots of skin missing in rear, oxygen bottles loose from manifold system. I don't recall any particular engine damage. There was control cable damage and hydraulics gone. We landed with chutes out the waist windows(my second time; first was with Gus Wendt after Munich).On the final approach back home, because of our wounded man, Idemonstrated my expertise with the Very pistol. Supposed to be a certain color but I said what the heck and fired the whole box before we hit the end of the runway. When we finally stopped rolling, the ambulance crew were immediately there, as they always were. The rest of us jumped out and ran like hell, which was standard in like cases, and then came back timidly when nothing ontoward happened.
Now how soon can we have that Doc Shuknecht shot!

See attached letter from Dale Magnuson

Jan 2, 1992

Horace Sanford

Dear Horace

In response to your letter of Dec 16
I'll try to send information requested on
Paul Condra and Herold Gorski missions
as I was with them from start to finish

April 3, 1944 over Budapest Hungary
We were hit with flack at Bombs away
over the target with three burst which
rocket the aircraft very vilant the number
3 and 4 engines were knocked out and No 4 was
on fire the fire extenguer worked and put the
out. Our radio and inter Com. produced a
lot of smoke and was inopoal the radio
Operator came back to the waist section the
first thing was to get the Ball turret retracted
and get rid of all weight we could. At the
same time the IFF blew up with a lot of
smoke in the waist it was later discovered
that a 20 MM shell caused this where it
came from nobody knows.
Lt Condra was wounded very severe and
was awarded the DFC
Lt Ackerman was KIA
T Sgt Mapes was wounded
Lt Gorski received the Silver Star
on the approach to base No 2 engine lost
all oil pressure but a good landing was
made

The nose and turret was very badly damaged
others on the crew were Lt Roy Jones
T/Sgt Edward Pietruszewski, S/Sgt Louis Von Achen
S/Sgt Dexter Sandefer S/Sgt Eugene Woodard and
S/Sgt Dale Magnuson

Was good to be back.
(page 1)

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1 of 2

June 26, 1944

The mission was to Moosburbaum Austria
1st Lt Harold Horski pilot
2 Lt Bill L Disbrow Co pilot
2 Lt William R Crim Navegator
2 Lt James W Scott Bombardier
T Sgt John E Merfeld engineer
T Sgt - Steven Vrcinski radio opperator
S Sgt Raymond R Beauvais tail gunner
S Sgt Kenneth J Vincent Waist gunner
S Sgt James E Meeks waist gunner
S Sgt Hal F Magnuson Ball turret
Sgt Mark L Blackman Camera

This is the crew for this day all recieved the DFC

Every thing went well we were hit with Flack over the target with one very hole in the wing back of 3 and 4 engine not serious exept a cut fuel line that was loseing some fuel

The fighters hit coming off the target they seemed to be every where then we were hit from 5 o clock high with 20MM and small Caliber bullits that hit our Hydraulic tank and 3 gunners in the waist I very serious a 20MM went off on vincents flack jacket and only caused scracher on his rear but all four engine were running the Airplane had a lot of damage in the rear section The Hydraulic fluied came in my turret that brought me out I snaped on my parachute went to the waist window there was a 190 less than 50 yds along side he just blew up with a long Burst all the waist gunners were laying on the floor we did catch up with the Groups as there was just us left

page 2

on landing we had no hydraulic the wheels and flaps were cranked down by hand parachutes were tied to the ball turret mount and pull off about half way down the runway coming to the end a ground loop was made comming back along the side of the runway there was two large draining ditches that probably scare us worse

The picture I had of this crew was sent to Bob Armstrong more than a year ago I wrote about 2 months ago to get them back up to now I haven't heard from him but the check for his book came back fast.

Ill stop here as there were 40 other mission and I dought if you want to write another volumes.

Hope you have a good Year
Hale

Hale Magnuson
Box 6
Keystone Ne 69144

this little poverty town has about 30 people

If those 2 volumes are ready dunn me for them and Ill send a check

Don Graf's Crew
9/44 to 3/45

-see next page-

Front row, L to R:
Harold Powell - tail gunner
Richard Hass - radio operator
Arthur Zegeer - ball turret

Middle row, L toR:
Wallace Hammond - engineer
Harold March - armorer
Louis Lyons - nose turret

Back row, L to R:
Fred Carpenter - co-pilot
Norman Stewart - bombadier
Harry Blount - navigator
Donald B. Graf - pilot

This crew joined the 741st in September 1944 and returned to the States in March, 1945.



Andy Graham's Crew

A. Graham is shown in Group Roll Call as 742 Sqdn.

741 personnel refer to A/G as "lead pilot," Blue Force, Ass't Sqdn Ops. Officer

This shows he was in Gp Headquarters.

--at least he has not been omitted.

No response to letter. HL

From Group Microfilm:

"CAPTAIN ANDREW D. GRAHAM, 0-796377, has the duty assignment of Assistant Group Operations Officer. Captain Graham enlisted in the Army 17 March 1941 and was commissioned 14 January 1943. Prior to enlistment Captain Graham's occupation was that of a Millwright at the E.L. DuPont Co. He resides at Goshen, Virginia."

From Group Narrative for June, '45, A. Graham is shown as 741 Sqdn. Operations Officer. 6/2/45.

R. K. Graham's Crew

No photo available
No crew roster available



Rumored to have been in Sqdn Ops or lead pilot.

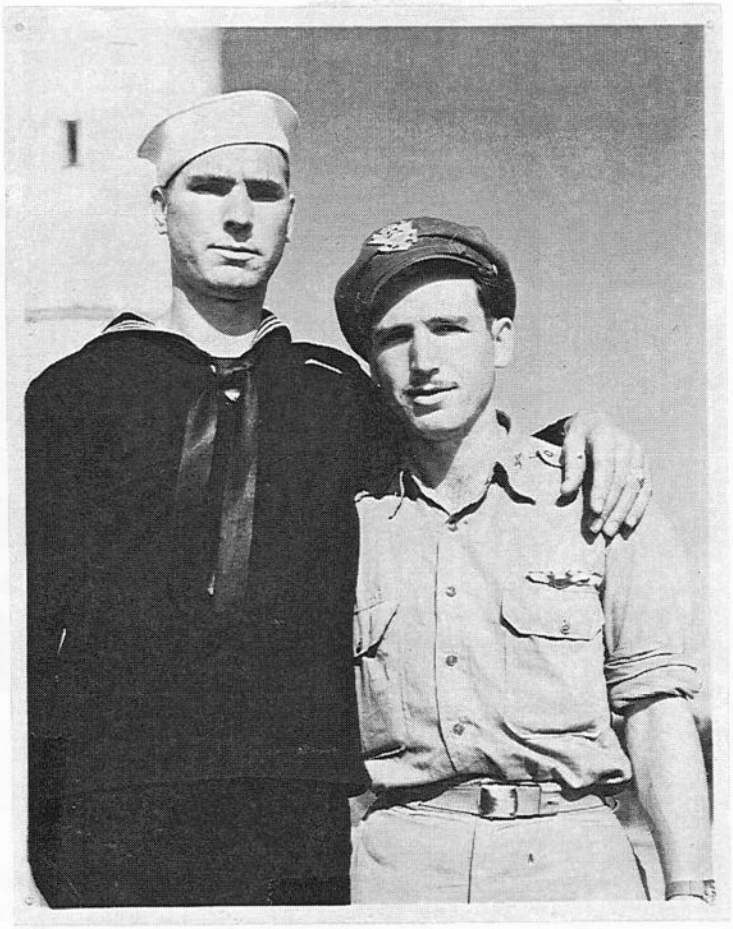
Was Sqdn Operations Officer on 4/11/45.

Photo supplied by Eddie Federshak 11/20/92
back row: L to R, Vern Gilson, Linden Stuart, R.K. Graham
front row: L to R, Sullivan, Manning, Federshak

Harry J. Grosser's Crew



Front row, L to R: Phillip Clark, waist gun; Virgil Hankins, tail gun; Robert Armstrong, ball turret; Leonard Cole, nose gun; Kenneth Strohbusch, radio operator; Herman Bundy, engineer.
Back row, L to R: Thomas Hassan, navigator, Joseph Walsh, bombardier; Robert Morgan, co-pilot; Harry Grosser, pilot.



2nd Lt Robert J. Morgan meets his brother, Gunners Mate 3/c Franklin J. Morgan, at Cerignola

Lt. Charles Hammond's Crew



Front row, L to R: Frank Squires, Waist Gunner; Marvin Wise, Ball Turret Gunner; Robert Averill, Radio Operator; Webb Patterson, Engineer; Earnest Pearson, Tail Turret Gunner; J. B. Vanaman, Nose Turret Gunner.
Back row, L to R: Frank Pokora, Navigator; Charles Hammond, Co-Pilot; Richard Deeble, Pilot; James Eturd, Bombadier.

I do not know Lt. Hammond's co-pilot.

Lt. Hammond took over Lt. Deeble's crew when Lt. Deeble was returned to the States in an "interrupted" tour. Lt. Deeble, and others, were returned to the States for a short R & R with the expectation that they would be returned to the squadron to assume leadership positions on their return. The Army Air Corps saw fit to send them to the Pacific Theater instead of returning them to Italy.

2nd Lt. Samuel F. Hannssard's Crew
MIA 7/22/44
Ploesti Romano Americano Oil Refinery, Roumania

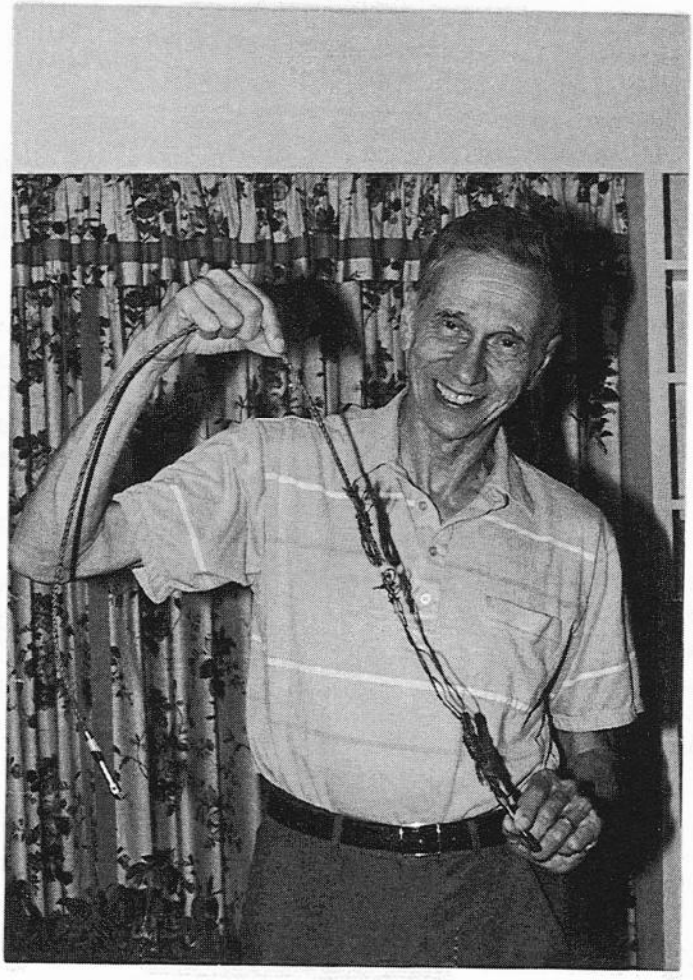
Lt. Samuel F. Hannssard, pilot
Lt. Norman E. Lisk, Jr., co-pilot
Lt. Arnold D. Luxenberg, navigator
Lt. Marion A. Wilson, bombardier
Pfc. Cline M. Hodson, radio operator
Sgt. Louis H. Wente, top turret and engineer
Pfc. Frank T. Kilbane, Sr., waist gun
Sgt. Stanley R. Sheldon, waist gun
Sgt. James L. Knittle, ball turret
S/Sgt. George W. Lingo, tail turret

It is reported that Lt. Hannssard's aircraft went down in a collision with another aircraft.

Frank Hosimer's Crew

Front row, L to R:
H. Gales, tail turret;
Burton Hewitt, nose turret;
Donald Daniel, waist gun;
Marvin Kuhn, waist gun;
Lorrain Despain, ball turret;
Back row, L to R:
Charles Fisher, top turret;
Charles Thatcher, bombadier;
Richard Armellino, co-pilot;
Stan Vogelfang,navigator;
Francis Hosimer, pilot.
Note: Bill McGahran, not shown, became bombadier when Chuck Thatcher went to Group.





Frank Hosimer with the repaired rudder cable (see next page)

The Repaired Rudder Cable

We were flying a mission over southern Austria. My copilot for that day was a first pilot who was flying his first mission.

There were no fighters to worry about. I had my camera with me and intended to take some pictures if I had a chance. There was a bomb group off to the left about a mile away that was getting hit with some heavy flak. They were over the target and we were just getting in position, so there was no flak near us. I started to take some pictures of the planes with the flak around them.

Suddenly the copilot started working the rudder pedals frantically, but the plane wasn't responding at all. He was letting me know we had no rudder control. Apparently a stray piece of flak had cut our rudder cable.

I held up one finger to let him know I'd be with him in a minute and finished taking the picture I had just started to take. I knew there was no immediate problem. Just that we'd not be able to fly a tight formation and we'd have to work out something before we'd be able to land.

I put my camera away and took over control of the plane. I wiggled my wings to let the other pilots know I had a problem and flew a loose formation. I tried to set the autopilot to see if that would give us back rudder control, but the autopilot wasn't working right at all so it was no help.

By the time we got back to the base, our engineer, Charles Fisher, had spliced the cable back together with some pieces of bomb arming wire. Then we were able to make a normal landing, just being very careful not to use any excessive force on the rudders.

I don't think I would have attempted a landing with no rudder control although I would have talked it over with the tower before bailing out. Anyway, our engineer saved us the problem of working out a solution. He brought me the repaired section of rudder cable after it was replaced the same day. I still have it in the attic after all these years and recently took a picture of me holding the cable(photo is enclosed).

Frank Hosimer

Lt. B. J. Hutton's Crew



Standing, L to R: I. J. Benjamin, Ball Turret; P.J. D'Amelio, Nose Turret; F. P. Brienen, Radio Operator; J. D. Culver, Waist Gunner; D. J. Hester, Tail Turret; N. H. Dawkins, Flight Engineer.
Kneeling, L to R: G. G. Barnes, Navigator; B. J. Hutton, Pilot; J. D. Hass, Co-Pilot.

See letter, next 2 pages.

Topeka, Kansas November 26, 1991

Horace W. Lanford Jr.
5840 Cloudstone Court
Naples, Florida 33999

Dear Horace:

This has reference to your letter of Nov. 19 in regard to mine of Oct. 22. Enclosed is a picture of my crew as shown on page 231 of the Group History Book. For identification standing left to right I. J. Benjamin, Ball Turret, P. J. D'Amelio, Nose Turret, F. P. Brienen, Radio Operator, J. D. Culver, Waist Gunner, D. J. Hester, Tail Turret, N. H. Dawkins, Flight Engineer, Kneeling L to R, G. G. Barnes, Navigator, B. J. Hutton, Pilot, J. D. Haas, Co-pilot. In checking the "Roll Call" in the back of the history book I find that Benjamin, D'Amelio, Breinen and Hester have been omitted.

Our tour was rather short and uneventful compared to those of early crew's. None of us were MIA or POW. Our most serious experience, other than heavy flak at Linz, Regensberg, Vienna, and Steyr, was losing an engine to flak damage and being unable to transfer fuel on mission #13 on March 26, 1945. We came home with some flak holes a number of times but no real damage. As a crew we flew 12 Missions. My co=pilot and I had an additional five missions as co=pilots before taking the crew on a mission.

Marcus Loftis and his crew were physically at Cerginola with the 741st at war's end. He and I were promoted to First Luietenant's on the same orders dated April 14, 1945.

On further review of the "Roll Call" I find Horace Redding listed as a 1st Lt., however he was a Captain when the war ended. When I arrived at the 741st January 26, 1945 Welsh was Squadron Commander. The lead pilots were Charlie Painter, Bill Jirschele, Horace Redding, and R. L Benson. R. K Graham (Red Force) was Operations Officer and Andy Graham (Blue Force) was Assistant Operations Officer. A Major Stewart was second in command and functioned as a lead pilot. Major Doring, later Lt. Col., succeeded Welsh and remained until wars end. Major Doring was a fine leader with lots of experience. I think he started flying about the time some of us were in diapers. My first taste of cognac was helping him celebrate becoming a Lt. Col.

Charlie Painter and Andy Graham can probably provide you with more information than I about some of the later times in the 741st. Huffman use to tell the story about Horace Redding's crew ditching at Viz. Horace nicknamed "Horse", because of his size was having the water pumped out of him when Huffmam came aboard the rescue vessel. Wish I remembered the details because at the time it was very funny.

I hope that some of this rambling has been helpful in your efforts to write the Squadron history. It's to bad that so many years have passed and that the records are so incomplete. It's a shame we didn't have time for this forty years ago but we were all to busy trying to earn a living and raise our families. If I can be of any further help please let me know.

Best regards

B. J. Hutton
3415 S W Jardine Terrace
Topeka, Kansas 66611

P.S In my first letter I misspelled Redding's name. I left off the G.

Lt. William S. Jirschele's Crew



Front Row, L to R: S/Sgt. Fred C. Francis, Gunner; S/Sgt Arthur F. Hollaway, Radio Operator; S/Sgt. George C. Hofer, Engineer; S/Sgt. Angelo Marcotrigiano, Radio Operator; T/Sgt. Louis F. Kent, Engineer.

Back Row, L to R: J. L. Clark, Navigator; William S. Jirschele, Pilot; Lloyd Reynolds, Co-Pilot; Norman Stewart, Bombadier.

Did this crew really have 2 radio operators and 2 engineers?

F. Harrell Josey's Crew



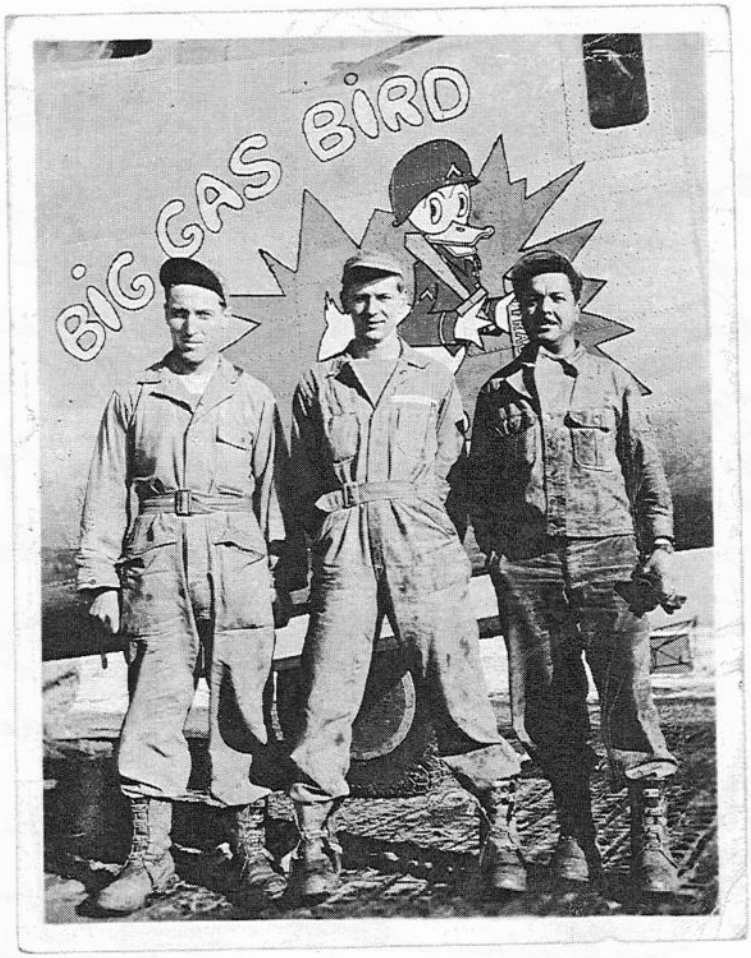
"Lt. Finis H. Josey and crew. Front Row, L to R:
S/Sgt. Stanley Skarzenski, waist gunner ...;
T/Sgt. Charles A. Mallory, radio operator ...;
S/Sgt. Michael J. Steslow, waist gun ...;
S/Sgt. Milton E. Montgomery, tail gunner ...;
T/Sgt. Angelo J. Bisinelle, Engineer ...;
S/Sgt. Joseph R. Kiernan, ball turret gunner ...;
Back row, L to R:
1st Lt. Eugene R. Kerr, bombardier...;
1st Lt. Finis H. Josey, pilot ...;
1st Lt. Raymond F. Ringwald, co-pilot ...;
1st Lt. Donald P. Bathelder, navigator ..."



Is this Don Bathelder?



First on left, Lt. Josey



Ground Crew for "Big Gas Bird"
names unknown

ANIMAL MEDICAL CENTER

BOX 231 - HWY 12

STARKVILLE, MISSISSIPPI 39759

(601) 323-2547

JOEL D. JOSEY, D.V.M. F. HARRELL JOSEY, D.V.M.

Sept 16, 1992

Dear Horace

Good to hear all the good things the 455th has been doing. I didn't find about the organization until this past fall and hopefully maybe I can attend the reunion next year - I have completly lost touch with all my old war buddies - I have been able to come up with some pictures and very old addresses of my crew - also a picture of a group of pilots that were with the 741st when I took there but I can only identify one by name but I do have his old address.

I graduated in the Class of 44-C and some two months later I was on my way to Italy as co-pilot. The 1st pilot of our crew was a Capt. Stewart - We flew our plane the "Gig (B) GAS Bird" over from the States. Actually we had named it the "Gig Ass Bird" but some where up and down the line we were required to make the change to "Gig Gas Bird" See picture enclosed of plane and also picture of our ground crew - none of which I can name - After flying 5 missions I was moved up to 1st pilot and Capt Stewart was moved up to Squadron headquarters - I think he was eventually Squadron commander since he volunteered for a 2nd tour I'm not sure what happened to him

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JOEL D. JOSEY, D.V.M. F. HARRELL JOSEY, D.V.M.

Our entire crew stayed in tact for our entire 50 missions other than that our Co-pilot was usually someone from a broken up crew. One of our Co-pilots was Lt. Donald L. Bone that you asked about in your letter. He walked out of Ugo not once but twice with partisan help. Lt. Bone's old address was 1650 Waverly Ave. Memphis, Tenn. He is also in the pilots picture - 2nd from left. I am on the extreme left next to him. At that time I was the youngest pilot in the squadron. The names and the old addresses of my crew are on back side of enclosed crew picture. Also names on back of squadron pilot picture - I am also sending other items that might be of interest to you. Please return when finished with.

As far as the DFC - I was recommended for it on 2 different missions and did not receive it until I got back to the States. Still not sure which one we received it for. One of the missons was to Rumania - possibly Ploesti. its been so long I have forgotten. Anyway we took a lot of flack over the target and lost 2 engines due to flack - We elected to limp back rather than bale out - Managing to land on a strip on the Isle of Vis - held by the partisans

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JOEL D. JOSEY, D.V.M. F. HARRELL JOSEY, D.V.M.

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(2) The other Mission was to Southern France or Germany. Over the target we took a lot of flack in the bombay area. Several gas lines were severed by flacks and the bombay was drenched with gas. The engineer - Sgt. Bisnella immediately started trying to stop the loss of gas as we came off the target but right away we lost an engine and then another ~~right away~~ due to loss of gas supply.

My Navigator - Lt Batchelder, as usual, had a course plotted to Switzerland and tried his best to persuade me to take that heading which I admit tempted us all. As our plane continued to loose altitude on 2 engines the prospects of having to bale out over the Alps convinced me not to take a heading for Switzerland.

The decision was made to fly along the ~~Italian~~ Eastern coast of Northern Italy as long as our gas would hold out and then bail out over the coast. We were down to about 2000 ft when I gave the order to prepair to bale out. About 30 seconds lapsed and then I heard this "little voice" on the intercom (from the waist) "Lt Josey — Joey's parachute harness and his parachute pack both have rings (no snaps). I immediately I said try to secure the parachute harness to the pack with your belts."

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As we were still loosing altitude, the decision was to scrap the bale out order and prepare to ditch the craft along the shore line. We were so low that we were being shot at from the ground by small arms fire.
During all this time the Engg. was continually trying to reroute the gas lines and transfer some fuel from the aux. gas tanks to the 2 failed engines. Suddenly the 2 dead gas-less engines roared into action. Sgt. Bisindle- the Engg- had done it!
We are at about 1000 ft — the navigator comes on the intercom saying there is one of our fighter strips just behind the North Italian front lines that is just 5 min. away - So we head straight on for the fighter strip and land right along with the fighters. As the plane stops all 4 engines quit - out of gas -
We abandoned the plane right in the middle of the runway - all the crew scrambled out to the ground and began kissing the ground - actually —
A jeep from the fighter group came tearing out yelling get that plane off the runway so the fighters can land —
They don't have enough gas to go around.

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JOEL D. JOSEY, D.V.M. F. HARRELL JOSEY, D.V.M.

We said you get it off, as its out of gas and the bomb bay is full of gas fumes. We continued to hiss the ground as they towed the "Big Gas Bird" off the run way. The good Lord was with us that day!

Happy ending of a true story —

So much for stories — As you can see from my letterhead I am a practicing Veterinarian and have been since 1951 — I also have a son in practice with me since 981 — along way from flying the "Big Gas Bird"

I am very much interested in recieving all your publications on the 74th Squadron

Thanks for writing me —

Sincerely,

F. Harrell Josey DVM

Lt. Bernard M. Keogh's Crew
MIA 6/26/44
Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery, Austria



No photo of crew available.

Lt. Bernard M. Keogh, pilot
Lt. Howard O. Vralsted, co-pilot
Lt. Harry F. McCrakon, bombardier
T/Sgt. Fred L. Dendy, radio operator
T/Sgt. Fred Q. Huggins, top turret gunner
S/Sgt. Harold D. Watson, waist gunner
S/Sgt. William G. Logue, waist gunner
S/Sgt. Stanley Lundquist, ball turret gunner
S/Sgt. Alfred Puslat, tail turret gunner

This aircraft was rammed by enemy aircraft--B-24 later exploded--Keogh awarded DSC, all crew members awarded Silver Star.

All crew members originally believed KIA but all survived in POW camps.

October 29, 1991

Dear Horace,

About eight or ten days ago, I got a call from Gus Wendt. Gus said that he had been talking with you and that you were of the opinion that I had disappeared forever, along with aircraft and crew. Gus further indicated that you might enjoy a letter, a phone call or some form of contact from me, so I have elected to exercise this dusty typewriter and my dusty typing capability. The last time I had contact with you was some 47 years ago. The last contact I had with Gus, I believe, was in Okinawa in approximately 1949 or '50.

The last mission I flew in your squadron (455th Gp) was on June 26, '44. On that, my 43rd mission, my aircraft was shot down. According to Gus, the majority of my crew was reported as "non survivers", including myself. My aircraft was hit quite severely by several fighters. My crew seemed fairly well agreed that we positively shot down five of their aircraft. Fortunately none of my crew (9) was hit by bullets. Power loss was almost complete. With two engines on fire and the loss of a prop on #4, I elected to stear the "old bird" out of formation, drop the gear and order bail out. A crew member said later that he saw the airoplane explode as it was headed down. I did not see it.

As for myself, I had on a parachute "chest pack" harness; the pack itself was somewhere back on the R. O. deck. As you remember, the 24 was next to impossible to fly with that chest pack between you and the control column. Knowing the capability of an "on fire" B-24 to explode and almost disappear in mid-air, I was most anxious to get back, find and snap on the chute pack and leave the plane before it left me. When I got down to the "cat walk", the engineer was standing there

looking down. A friendly knee in the rump got him moving and I left right behind him. I would guess that we were somewhere between 16 and 18 thousand feet at that time. In one way, that was a very expensive targate. So many chutes were in the air that it looked like a paratroop invasion; or it looked like that to me at the time.

.....

/s/ Barney Keogh

THE SHOOTING DOWN OF A 455TH BOMB GROUP PILOT

Preface

Col. Horace Lanford, (USAF Retired): I had not heard of or from this man for some 47 years. Then I got a call at home in Boulder, Colorado, from another friend of mine who, as I remember than, was ranked Capt. 'Gus' Wendt. Among other things 'Gus' told me that my "old" Squadron Commander, then ranked Maj. Lanford, had for these many years believed that I had perished when the aircraft I was flying (B-24) had been shot down and had blown up enroute to "down". Further, he advised that Lanford was anxious to make contact with me. The contact was made.

Col. Lanford strongly urged me to write up the complete history of that particular bombing mission, giving every detail possible from start to finish, including capture, prison life and the whole "ball of wax". He further implied that he would possibly, with editing as required, use part or more of this brief story at the next reunion of the 455th Bomb Group to be held at a later date in St. Louis.

I want to note here that while in Prisoner of War Camp, correspondence from home stated that I had been awarded the "Distinguished Service Cross". This award could only have been possible as a result of a recommendation written up by our Sq. Intelligence Officer, Capt. Van Lent with an endorsement by Maj. Lanford and final approval by Commanding General of the 15th Air Force.

As a result of this referenced award, this one time member of the 455th Bomb Group was selected as one of eight active duty personnel to accompany the permanent members of the American Battle Monument Commission on their trip into France, dedicating and memorializing several of our largest battle field Burial Grounds (see: June, 1957 National Geographic Magazine - "Here Rests in Honored Glory"). I note this only because it was the result of the 455th Bomb Groups' Action.

I feel no regrets about having gone through the rigors of being a POW. I feel fortunate to have gotten home. It is for them who lie under the white marble crosses in France, England and Italy that makes me look off into space and shiver.

Bernard M. Keogh
L/Col. (USAF Ret.)

END ONE VACATION IN ITALY - START ANOTHER IN GERMANY

After having completed 43 combat missions, I was sent to Capri Island, just off Naples, for a short period of "R & R". Capri was pleasant and a nice change from the life in our group's tent city, but after three or four days I became bored with doing nothing, so I caught a supply boat back to Naples and then hitched a ride on a truck convoy back across the mountains to the Adriatic side; thence on to our group just out of the small town of Cherignolia (sp ?). Just seven more missions to fly and then back home to the USA!

I was then flying in the 741st combat squadron (H) as a casual pilot. The squadron commander was Major Horace Lanford. He had been a close friend of mine since a period prior to the formation of the 455th Bomb Group. At that time, I still remained a 1st Lt.

Shortly after getting back, we were briefed on a particular mission. The target was a fuel refinery just out of Vienna, Austria near a little village named Moosenbierbam (sp?). I do not remember that there was anything exceptional about the target; however, our wing was flying four complete groups on the target which gave it a position of importance. What we didn't know then, but what we found out later, was that this mission had been briefed at some period one or two weeks earlier. The mission hadn't flown (a stand down) for some reason -- probably weather over the target area. In the interim, other missions were flown and other aircraft were shot down. On one such aircraft, a navigators briefcase was captured intact with the complete mission data on the Moosenbierbaum target.

I had flown with one or two of the enlisted crew before, but I didn't remember having flown with the co-pilot or the bombardier. There was no navigator on the crew. The crew consisted of the co-pilot, bombardier, engineer, top turret gunner, two waist gunners, the tail turret gunner and myself ... An eight man crew.

Regrettably, I cannot remember the name of a single one of these crew men, but I know that most of them had considerable combat experience.

THE MISSION

The take-off, the formation assembly and enroute climb was normal. Before climbing to oxygen level, the crew was advised to put on oxygen masks; those who

wished to put on their "flack jackets" should do so at this time. As for myself, I had never worn the "flack jacket" paraphernalia as I felt that it would encumber my ability to act fast (or to react) as the case might be. I had always laid the chest section of the jacket on the seat to protect flack penetration from below. The co-pilot decked himself out completely with his flack gear. Other than that, I cannot speak for the rest of the crew.

As we neared the target area, I called the crew as always, making sure they were in their gun positions and told them to go ahead with procedure to charge and test fire their guns. This was done. As I remember, a flight of six or seven P-38 escort aircraft were reported escorting us as we turned on the initial point and headed directly toward the target. Our bomb-bay doors were open and we were on track to the target. It was then that I saw at two o'clock and slightly above us, the largest flight of enemy aircraft heading into us that I have ever seen or even imagined I would ever see. Without any hesitation I broke the "sacred" radio silence, picking up the radio "mike" and broadcast in the clear: enemy aircraft - two o'clock high - estimate one hundred and twenty-five. How I came up with that number I don't know, but it was something to grab at and I guess that it adequately served the purpose. It appears that the downing of that crew that I mentioned earlier and the capture of that navigator's briefing kit, had served the Germans nicely. They had gathered every fighter they could spare plus some of their aircraft which were not qualified for that altitude (23 to 24,000 ft.). They seemed determined to knock us out and foul up our run before bomb drop.

In no time at all our guns were going and the usual Focke-Wulf - 190's and Me-109's were zipping by. In another second or two I saw a Me-110. This bird was little more than an advanced twin engine fighter trainer and was not designed to fight at that altitude. I saw what I'm sure was a couple of JU-87's. This bird was designed as a dive bomber and low level strafing machine. Nonetheless, they were giving us everything they had. Our B-24 had been hit several times, but I didn't feel any power loss. One or two of the rear gunners elatedly called over the intercom system -- "I got one - I got one - I saw him blow up". By the time this show was over, our gunners had verified five kills. The air was full of enemy aircraft going by us from the rear then turning and coming back from front and side. I remember how distinctly I saw a FW-190 making a frontal attack. Black smoke was whipping back from his guns and then his propeller

appeared that it just decided to leave his aircraft. The prop zipped out ahead of the plane; its rotation rapidly slowed down and then took a downward turn. The aircraft went on by with either a dead pilot or one in desperate need of power.

I do not remember any flack coming up. Just before "bombs away" time we were hit again with a heavy burden of German 20 MM machine gun bullets. I then felt the power starting to give out. "Bombs away" time came and just after that I noticed an engine fire on the port side. More reports of "I got one" and then a report from someone of an engine fire on the right side. The cockpit was starting to get a bit foggy with hydraulic fluid spray. At that point I could care less what the source of that spray might be. By that time I had also seen a couple of B-24's wing over and go down, one blew up in a big ball of flame. It appeared that four black smoking lumps went falling down out of the sky followed by a junk-yard of pipes and tubing. I knew that I couldn't get the plane back home; it was falling back badly so I turned out and away from the formation, placed the landing gear handle in down position and ordered "BAIL OUT".

I must have been the only one in the crew without a parachute on. I had been given a chest-pack chute for that flight in as much as my regular back-pack was out for re-pack. Flying a B-24 in the pilot or co-pilot position was nearly impossible with that chest-pack between you and the control yoke. Reaching around the pack to the wheel just wasn't normal and there was only a few inches of play between the pack and the wheel. I had the chute harness on and my pack was laying somewhere back on the flight deck among the spare flight jackets, flack-jackets and spare personal clothing.

The co-pilot had left and I was about to leave when there was a crashing and grinding sound; the old B-24 seemed to move sideways about thirty feet. I was at a loss to imagine what that was, but immediately after that there was a high frequency roar and the plane seemed to be vibrating in a harmonic with that roar. As I look back on it now, and with what information I later gained, it seemed that an enemy fighter had rammed me. Sitting in the front seat, there was little to nothing I could see to the rear or quarter rear. Now I would guess that a propeller shaft had sheared, and that an engine was running away at about 6,000 RPMs. If the shaft had sheared ahead of the nose case thrust bearing, the prop would have come off the engine. If it had sheared behind the thrust

bearing, the engine would have run away while the prop windmilled in the wind. At any rate, I do not know to this date whether I had lost an engine (as was reported), lost a propeller or what the exact circumstance was. With an airplane destined to go down, it just doesn't make a lot of difference. It was that high frequency howl that terrified me. I assumed that seconds were few and precious before the plane exploded or just came apart. Out of the corner of my eye I had seen the top turret man come down on the deck and now was the time for me to leave and to do so just as damn fast as I could. I got back on the flight deck, tossed some junk out of the way, pulled out my chest pack, snapped it on the harness rings and bounced down to the bomb-bay cat walk. I did not even consider fooling with the auto-pilot. There was no time to waste on that. The top turret sergeant was on the cat walk looking down at the thousands of feet below us. His back was to me and, as I observed, his chute was on. I gave him a friendly knee in the rump and a shove and he was out. With one motion I checked my leg straps and stepped out into the air.

THE JUMP

I have nothing substantial on which to base this guess, however, I would guess it was about 17,000 feet when I happily saw the last of that airplane and pulled the rip-cord. I still remember looking at the "D" ring and lanyard in my hand. I gave it a little toss out and there it sat, hanging in the air just out of my reach. A second or two or three must have passed and then the chute popped open. That lanyard and "D" ring then took off like a bullet heading straight down for Germany. The shock of the chute didn't seem significant but the greatest surprise was the immense quiet. I heard some explosions below and some machine guns going and even felt the little shock-wave ripples as they seemed to lightly tug or nip at the chute canopy. These noises seemed a thousand miles away. The quiet was calming. Throughout the sky were parachutes galore. One would think that it was a paratroop invasion. The target, it appeared, had been hit squarely. It was a fuel refinery producing fuel for their "secret" Me-263 jet fighter that was supposedly to go into production soon. There were flames and smoke soaring skyward for thousands of feet. I remember being significantly concerned, for a while, as it appeared that the drift of my chute would take me over the heart of the fire. As I got closer to the ground, I could determine that I would miss the fire by a mile or more. Finally it seemed as though I was

no longer going down but the ground was starting to come up to meet me. That was the signal to get ready to hit the ground and proceed on to another unwanted adventure.

CAPTURE

June 26, 1944 was a bright and shiny day in the Vienna, Austria area. There was no breeze and the parachute and contents came straight down on sod ground about ten or fifteen feet off the edge of a grain field. The chute canopy drifted lazily out over the grain field and spread out like a huge blanket. My legs were folded under me and were hurting considerably. My thought was that I had a broken leg. I unbuckled the leg straps and wiggled the toes. All parts seemed to work nicely so I got up on my hands and knees and began crawling to the grain field with the thought in mind of bundling up the silk and hiding in the grain field. Why did I have that in mind and what was I to do then? I didn't have the foggiest notion. I heard some loud shouting and then, up over a little raise, a rather large fellow in a dark blue uniform type cover-all came a running. As the fellow got closer I could see that he was a kid only eighteen or nineteen years old. I could also see that he was holding a three-tined pitch fork as though it were a rifle and fixed bayonette. As he got closer, he didn't seem interested in slowing down. An uncle of mine, having served in World War I, had told stories about Germans surrendering; as they came up out of the trenches with their hands up they were shouting "Kamrad" (comrad). Since I had no intention of starting a "one man front" in the heart of Austria, I promptly got up on my knees with hands held high and shouted loudly "Kamrad". He finally stopped a few feet from me and went through a few jabbing motions with that damn hay fork. Then he started shouting "der waffen - der waffen" (the weapon). Apparently he knew that many U.S. air crew members carried Colt-45's and he wanted to be sure that I didn't have one or, possibly more likely, he wanted a souvenir for himself to show off to the "home folks". He finally encouraged me to "auf staend" (up stand), bundle up my chute silk and take off toward two or three guys about a hundred yards or so from us. There seemed to be some difficulty and as we got there I saw it was a little fat German guy in some kind of a uniform and he was holding a revolver on the other two guys. One of those guys was my top turret gunner, passively defending himself against a civilian fellow who was pummeling my sergeant with his fists. I dropped my parachute and

stepped between them, shoving the German guy back a bit. He took a few disorganized swings at me and then I turned quickly, grabbing my shirt collar and jumped in front of the little fat guy; I then very sternly shouted "Offizier" (Officer). The little fat guy snapped to attention and then began, as it appeared, to admonish the civilian. In doing so, I head the word "offizier" being sounded several times. At any rate, it stopped the scuffle and we three (my captor had left) walked to a country dirt road and were picked up by a fellow with a horse drawn wagon. This wagon had in it another German guy in a "Volks Krieg" (folks/people's war) uniform along with a number of our captured airmen on board. We proceeded to a large farm house with a good many out buildings associated. There we got out and joined about twenty or thirty other captured crewmen.

I might point out at this time that I knew a few simple words of German. Having spent my first 15 years in southwest North Dakota among first generation German immigrants, I couldn't help but learn a word or two. Good old "m ah one and m ah two m" Lawrence Welk and his German polka crowd lived in that same vicinity.

At this farm house we were given to stand in a large grassy area in the back yard. We (my top turret man and I) came in contact with the ball-turret gunner and the tail-turret man. In conversation with them and from what previous conversations they had made while being rounded up, it was determined that our crew confirmed shooting down five German aircraft. I heard nothing of the co-pilot except that one of our guys had talked with someone else and they had seen our co-pilot being herded around with another bunch.

The ball-turret man had not heard the bail out signal or the voice "bail-out". He told me that his electrical power had been cut to the turret and the glass was so shattered that he could not see out. He did what was logical. He hand cranked the turret up, opened the lid and as he looked out, he saw the tail end of one of the guys bailing out through a large gaping hole in the right waist of the plane. He was all alone there and he quickly solved the problem by bailing out through the large hole which had then been conveniently provided.

I forget now whether the bombardier was in that crew of captured airmen or whether I had run on to him later, but I knew that he was O.K. This, then accounted for the crew if the sighting of the co-pilot was correct. With the bashing that airplane had taken, it was a miracle that someone hadn't been hurt.

At any rate, I knew that the bombardier had bailed out through the nose-gear door. In doing so, he had bumped his head on the gear strut which, as he told me later, had drawn blood. He was later recommended for a Purple Heart award by Brig. Gen. Arthur Vanaman who was senior U.S. Officer at Stalag Luft III.

In due course we were loaded aboard several old trucks and were taken to what appeared to be a military post and were off-loaded at what appeared to be a "sorta" hospital or dispensary. Enroute to this place the trucks had made a number of stops, picking up small units of our downed airmen. There was a number of lightly wounded and a few severely wounded and a couple of dead airmen who they had, for the time being, just wrapped in parachute silk. A great number of men had been burned by explosive heat. These had skin burned off their faces and any place the heat of explosion could get to which was not protected by clothing or an object in the way of the heat flash. I gave particular attention to a Lt. David Brothers of the 742nd Squadron. I had known him as an original crew man assigned to our original group. He was in the truck laying on some parachute silk and his whole back side was a matting of blood. He was in terrible pain. I helped to get him into a room where they were placing the injured. I helped to uncover the wounded area. A large caliber bullet or flying object of some kind had traveled from side to side through his rump, leaving a hole in one buttock, tearing askew some of the tail bone and removing a portion of the other buttock. When I looked at this mess, I believe I saw some intestine below the turned up tail bone. At this point I looked around and saw two or three Germans in white jackets who appeared to be doctors. They were so busy it was next to impossible to get their attention. I managed to thump one on the shoulder, getting his attention. I pointed to the man (Dave) groaning and said "morphine". Hurry! I had not yet learned the German word "schnell". He went with me and had a look at Lt. Brother's problems. He shook his head disparagingly and then said "ja. - morphine". He then waved me away and I was taken up a flight of stairs to a large auditorium type room. There was a very large group of our troops there. We were highly amused by a German cadet officer there who was intent on showing off his power by making two of the German G.I. guards parade around like tin soldiers. After each maneuver he would turn and smile with self delight. When he wasn't looking, the German G.I.'s would give him the good old fashioned "finger wave". In due course we were advised that we would soon go. I got one of those German characters to allow me to make a quick trip down to the injury

room. When I got there I found Lt. Dave Brothers sitting up and smiling at me as though he didn't have a care in the world. It was obvious that he had been given a good shot of the morphine. He asked me about his tail end. I told him that it was quite serious and that his tail bone had been injured badly. He asked me if he would live and I advised him with confidence that he'd come through it O.K. He gave me his mother's address and asked me to write her and let her know that he was all right. The match book which held the address was taken from me on the next search. I saw a crew man standing beside me trying to get my attention; he had no skin on his face, no eye lashes or no eyebrows. He was trying to smile. I couldn't identify him and I apologetically asked him who he was. "You know me, I'm Cpl. Abendenello". Yes, indeed I knew him. He was a dark skinned man and a fine tail gunner; again, from the 742nd Sq. I had flown with him on several tough missions. I made a weak joke or two with him and then returned up stairs.

We were then taken somewhere nearby to a garden level building with jail cells. We were turned over to a new set of guards and went through the routine search. Where they placed all the fellows was not known to me. I was placed by myself in a fairly roomy jail cell with two blankets and a cot. It was late in the afternoon and before long a bowl of soup came along. With the exception of a patrol guard, that was the last of the Germans for that day. At no time did I see a single officer or enlisted man cower, whimper or complain. There was no evidence of fear or cowardice. A certain number of the guards made threatening gestures, but they were met with a "steady on" gaze. Our guys would not bluff.

June 26, 1944 had been a long day.

I remember that large units of us prisoners were taken and marched about a mile through Vienna. I remember walking on a bridge over a river with a sign identifying it as a Danau (Danube). The "beautiful blue Danube" appeared to me to be about the same color and texture as "the muddy Mississippi".

A train took us to a prison encampment about two or three hours from Vienna. This was a special place specially designed as a temporary holding facility and interrogation facility. There were long rows of solitary cells with a narrow corridor between rows. The cells were scarcely large enough to hold a very small, no springs cot with a thin straw mattress. As I remember it was about 12 to 14 days. We all had one common but pressing problem: Our systems were not attuned to the German "black bread". The cells were provided with a

turn handle near the "peep hole" door. When the handle was turned a little arm fell horizontally just outside the door which signaled a guard that a bathroom trip was urgent. If this guard wasn't parading a parade of others to the bathroom, he might find time to come over and inquire of one's particular needs. To go to the bathroom, one was issued two squares of thin, shiny and slick bathroom tissue. Pleading for more was normally ignored. We found out that the bombing aircraft out of England, while bombing the Schweinfurt ball-bearing plant, managed to scatter a number of bombs over Germany's number one plant for producing toilet tissue. "Gee, thanks! May I have another square of toilet paper"? The problem was significant. Even when we got to our permanent camp, one guarded his tissue or roll of TP and never moved it from it's hiding place unless it was in use. Many carried their roll with them morning, noon and night. At any rate, in this confinement area we quickly learned to wipe and fold; wipe and fold, etc. until the unused patch was about the size of a postage stamp. After that, one had better be done or be damn careful.

In due course I was interrogated. The interrogator was a German Major who said that he had, a few years back, trained in an exchange program with the Canadian Air Force. We found that we had common knowledge about one thing. When he asked me if I knew the name of a flower plant which was on his desk I responded that it was a geranium. He seemed to brighten right up and said that they called it the same name; he then said "geranium", only the "g" was pronounced as the "g" in garage.

He asked when I thought the war would be over; I said the allies would surely win it no later than November. This answer seemed to kindle some anger in him and he quickly stated that "we will win the war"! Then he became a bit pensive and said - "Just suppose we don't win the war; I sure hope that the Americans beat the Russians into Berlin: <u>We hate Bolshevism</u>!

We were then moved to an outside holding area and were issued a pair of trousers, a shirt, some underwear and some toilet articles. These came in a small box which was held together by a small canvas strap. The box was retained as storage in our "patch" under the bunk beds and, for me, the canvas strap had a very important part to play later.

By this time I had lost track of date and month. Some of the people I knew were gone and many new people were added. We were placed on a train and taken to our permanent camp, Stalag Luft III.

KRIEGSGEFANGENEN (Prisoner of War)

Stalag Luft III was located on or near the Oder River near the town of Sagan (20 - 25,000 people). This location was about 90 miles southeast of Berlin in east Germany or Silesia. Luft III was an officers POW camp. From start to finish, the Germans maintained a strict separation of enlisted and officers where and whenever possible. Space had been made for this new contingent of personnel. A committee was assigned by our staff people to brief, interrogate and assign incoming folks to barracks. Each man was positively identified. The Germans had tried to run in a "ringer" several times in the past but it just didn't work, and they ended up with "egg" on their face. Each barracks was divided in two parts with a wall and door separation. Each had its senior officer who was referred to as the "Fuehrer". By arrangement of bunk beds (now three tiers tall and later to become four bunks tall) each half was sectionalized further into living groups which we called combines. These combines functioned like living units - sharing and dividing all food. Cooking and cleaning was scheduled by the combine and meetings and planning were normally attended by an appointed individual.

A radio? Yes! Who had it? Where was it? Did we get BBC news every evening? Yes! Did we relay the news every evening? Yes! Did the Germans know we had it? Yes! Could they find it? No! Being a German air force run camp, the Luftwaffe scheduled and made several searches for the radio they said we didn't have. They didn't find it so the Gestapo searched for it and didn't find it. Then the allmighty SS searched for it and they didn't find it. Since the highest level of German intelligence and enforcement couldn't find it - they solved the problem by declaring "It does not exist".

When we first came into Stalag Luft III and we were positively identified, we were told that there was a radio in camp but that was the last time we were to hear the word "radio" mentioned and that we were never to mention the word. From hereon out the word "Johnnie Walker" would replace the word "radio". I never asked or knew where the radio was until after the war was over.

WE MOVE

It was never mentioned by the German news media that the German ground forces ever retreated, however, they repeatedly "withdrew to more strategic positions". Late in January 1945, we began to hear the big guns of battle. The

Germans were withdrawing to more strategic positions along a front which included Stalag Luft III and the Russians were rapidly filling the space vacated.

That early evening we were told that we'd be marched out. By 3 - 4 o'clock a.m. we were out on a road moving west. A group of German guards had been rounded up with a contingent of guard dogs. These dogs were large chesty Doberman Pinschers.

Our senior officers and every "Kregie" in camp knew that the camp would have to be moved or we would be overtaken by the Russians. Neither of these conditions were anticipated with delight. Each of us had to prepare ourselves for such a contingency. We had all made small back packs and each of us had learned to make an "old Army Blanket Roll". The blanket roll was the best vehicle to convey our two blankets, a pillow, whatever clothes that were not on our back and what food that had been or would be given to us. That night after the alert, we were each issued a Red Cross parcel. This parcel consisted of 11 pounds of items such as soap, a small game (cribbage board/checkers/cards/etc.), canned food and cigarettes. Cigarettes and the small concentrated chocolate "D" bar were probably the most important items in the entire box. There were but a few Germans in Germany who couldn't be bribed. From them we could get items which were forbidden to us by German law - certain short supply items as salt, a fresh egg or two, and I even saw a skinned rabbit come flying over the fence to a recipient who seemed to be standing at an exact spot: He fielded that rabbit like a professional.

ESCAPE PLAN ONE OF TWO SUCH PLANS

Our first "leg" of the trip was a 60 mile march west to the town of Spremberg. On this march a long time friend of mine, Johnnie Strikatinko and I, had agreed that, if the right situation presented itself and if the odds were greatly in our favor, we'd attempt an escape. We'd work out way back into the Russian lines and then, with Russian help, we'd get down into Russian Georgia, across the Black Sea and into Turkey. Once there we'd check in with our consulate and back to the USA. Johnnie was a fine and energetic fellow of Polish descent and from Battle Creek, Michigan. He could speak fluent Polish, some Russian and could get along quite well in German. Our second night out we were billeted in a barn. For this march, I had been put in charge of a flight of about 60 "Kriegies". This, of course, was not counting the German overseer and

his damn dog. It appears that in the morning when we were getting our flight together, Johnnie had asked the guard if he could use the old "two holed" toilet which was between the house and the barn. The guard agreed. This squad, along with the long line of squads, moved out when the confusion had settled down. The German guard had forgotten about the guy sitting in the "two holer" and when the long dreary line of POW's had moved west, Johnny "Strak" (as we called him) stepped out of "little" house, pulled his stocking cap down low over his ears and, of all the thousands of people escaping west, Johnnie went slowly and carefully, walking east. Just about a month before the war was over I saw Johnnie marching down the road leading into our camp. He, along with a contingent of others, had been marched 125 miles from the Nuremberg "Kregie" camp to our Moosberg camp. George Patten and his "Merry Men" were headed for Nuremberg and the POW's had to be moved. In later conversation with Johnnie, it appears that he had selected a small, vacated German farm house in which to spend the night. Shortly after selecting this house, two German soldiers who were withdrawing to more strategic positions, also selected the same house in which to spend the night. In the morning, Johnnie was returned to German control and back to one of the three "Kregie" camps in the Nuremberg area.

ESCAPE PLAN # TWO

I was slightly more involved with another escape while on this move. In this case I was only to implement the escape but not to participate. Our move on foot was terminated at Spremberg. The whole crowd of POW's was to be crowded into a unit of 40 x 8 box cars. Remember the 40 x 8's? 40 Hommes or 8 Chavoux. Yes, 40 men or 8 horses. They were designed by the French for general use in World War I. The fact that they were designed by the French and were then about thirty years old, were both factors which piled doubt on them as an effective transport. On one side of the 40 x 8 was a sliding door. On that same side was two small windows, one forward of the door and one aft. To contain what was loaded on these old dandies were soft iron bars over the open port windows and the sliding door which could only be opened from the outside. To determine how many folks were to be loaded into each car was simply solved by dividing the number of cars into the number of "Kregies" to be transported. 64 were loaded. Out of the space so desperately needed, a small wooden pen had been affixed. This was just inside the sliding door. In this pen was placed one pitch-fork

full of hay, one German buck sergeant and one machine pistol. The machine pistol was intended for exclusive use by the German "Unter Offizier".

It was so crowded that all men could not sit or squat down at the same time. A system of taking turns was arranged. The same consideration was made by laying down. By laying on our side so that we were snugged back to front, we could sleep about half the men. The guard wouldn't share the luxury of his pen.

The situation was intolerable when it began and it was getting worse. The Germans had mistakenly placed an Army Infantry Captain in Luft III which was supposed to be exclusively an Air Force camp. They made the mistake with reason. The Captain had been riding in a light plane acting as a fire director and spotter for an artillery unit. They had the word that the Germans hated those spotters so much that, if captured, they would shoot them on the spot. With that in mind, this Army Captain, when flying as a spotter, would wear Air Corps insignia; then if captured, he would plead that he was an air crew man and that he knew nothing of artillery or fire directing. This little Cessna type plane was shot down and before long he was captured. (Before I go further with this phase of the story, let me now advise you that I shall not use names of this Army Captain or his associate; the situation ended up in an adversary situation and there is the remotest chance of embarrassment to participants). This Army Captain was a full ten or twelve years older than we fuzzy cheeked men of an average age of 22 to 26 years of age. He was very adept at letting us "junior" airmen know how much more experienced and knowledgeable he was about most everything than we "fly-boys" could possibly be. He got to be a pain in the ass is what he was mostly.

A First Lieutenant navigator had taken up with this Captain and together they were going to escape. In that he was so knowledgeable about living off the land, he and the navigator could live in veritable luxury while working their casual way into the welcoming hands of the allies. It was the beginning of the second night on the train and the Captain was moaning in whispered tones about what he would and could do if he and the navigator could just get out and away. I had slept in a very cold church steeple four nights before with a Lt. Heinberg. Heinberg had been a member of our combine back at Luft III. In talking with others, I knew that he had a hacksaw blade secreted away some place, but he would not admit to it and, being Jewish, should the Germans find it out, they might elect to shoot him. I was getting up to my eyeballs with the Army Captain and

his silent navigator. I asked the Captain if he and the navigator would each give me a blanket and a can each of "Bully-Beef" if I would provide them a route of escape. They looked at each other in amazement and agreed, but first, how would I do it? I told them that I had access to a hacksaw blade; I could cut one end of a window bar (about 7/16 - 1/2 inch rebar), bent it back and there would be plenty of room then for them to slip out between. They both made a visual and simulated measuring check and agreed that they could quite easily do it. "What if the guard woke up?" Answer: "We'd have someone near to monitor and give a signal". The quiet attention they were getting delighted them and they got to be every bit as important as they thought they were. My job had just started. I made my way to where Heinberg was and approached him about using his hacksaw blade. He almost denied that he had one, then he said that he wouldn't lend it to me because of this "Jewish thing". Then I told him about the blanket and the "Bully-Beef" deal I had with them and that I'd split the loot with him just for the use of the saw blade. With one blanket and one can of "Bully-Beef" shining in his eyes, he said we had a deal under the condition that if caught, I would swear that the blade was mine so that he would in no way be involved. The deal was made. Out of the bottom lining of his coat came about a seven inch broken blade of a commercial iron cutting saw. Where he got it was of no interest to me. Soon I was busy stroking the center bar covering the window. With very short strokes of about four teeth per stroke, it took about thirty minutes to cut the bar. In fact, the little noise of the saw was well concealed by the rattle of the wheels on the rail. I grabbed the bar and gave it a good bend inward and back. There was more than ample room for them to get out. I then told them to skin off a blanket and to grubb out a can of "Beef-Bully" each. Then the picture and complexion of their escape seemed to change significantly. They couldn't go then because the train was going too fast. I agreed that the train had many periods of fast and then slow, depending on the condition of the road bed and crossings. We'd wait until the train slowed down. Well, when the train had slowed down, they would be looking over toward the little German buck sergeant and then let me know that he looked to be a bit too restless and that he might very easily wake up about the time they were crawling through the bars. I agreed to wait for another period of slow movement. Fast and slow came and went a number of times with them using the same excuse each time. I finally woke up to the fact that they probably never had the guts to go out. I had been the pigeon

to risk my tail cutting the bar and making way for them. They had risked nothing and I was the "boob" who could have been shot if the guard had opened an eye and caught me in the cutting act. By that time, light of day was starting to show. I was so damned mad at them I wanted to punch them in the mouth. In a surge of anger, I reached down, grabbing their two blanket rolls and chucked them out the window. I knew and they knew that with those blanket rolls went their food for at least a week and a half and their blankets for who knows how long. Decision time came rapidly; no sooner had the blanket rolls hit the cinders than a decision was made without a word or without checking the speed or the guard. Like a pair of athletic jack rabbits, the Army Captain and the Air Force navigator, in that order, bounded through the opening and was no longer seen. That is, they were no longer seen by us until some time later. I made my apologies to Lt. Heinberg for the loss of his portion of the "loot", but I offered him all of the share I got.

With a little help, we bent the iron bar back into approximate alignment. With a shove here and a pull there the bar looked almost aligned to its original position. Now to cover and conceal the raw cut. I had in my blanket roll the little canvas strap which I had mentioned earlier. I also had a small tin cup with a hook type handle. I wrapped the strap around and around the break in the bar, covering the cut. I than put a little loop on the strap and hung the little tin cup on it. What a nice place to hand a tin cup!

The Army Captain and the Air Force navigator had put on a fancy act, but it was nothing compared to the act put on by the Germans later in the day when they counted us out of the box car at Munich.

At Munich we were to be taken to Moosberg (Stammlager VII A). The "Kregies" were brought out of each box car, one car at a time and carefully counted and assigned over to the receiving authorities. Our turn came. Out we came and were formed up in rank and counted. The count came out at 62. Obviously the count was incorrect because the inventory paper showed 64. The outgoing door had been locked from the outside and there were no cracks or holes in the car that were big enough to get a butterfly through. No one could break through the iron bars, so we must have another count. Count again came out at 62. The buck sergeant and the receiving sergeant got up into the box car and looked around to see if they possibly couldn't find two more "Kregies". They came out shouting at one another. Then the receiving German left and came back

with a German Lieutenant. He would surely straighten this matter out. Once more they counted 62. After a little butt chewing, the three of them got back up into the box car, parading up and down a few times and out they came proclaiming loudly that two prisoners could not possibly evaporate. How would they report this to their superiors? The Lieutenant left and came back with a big wheel; an Oberst. The German Lt. Col. talked quietly for a while. We were lined up one more time and counted. Back up into the little 40 x 8 went the four of them, parading up and down looking at four bare walls and a bare floor. Out they came and the Colonel bellowed at the poor little buck sergeant and it appeared that he blamed him for an incorrect count. There was then a little messing around with the inventory forms and it appeared that a few corrections were made. As they paraded away to get on with the next box car, I could almost see the little canvas strap and the little tin cup smiling with their secret.

STAMMLAGER VII A

This POW camp, about 20 miles northeast of Munich, had been an internment camp in the 1930's for the radical group called the "Brown Shirts". The "Brown Shirts" were the forerunners of the NAZI movement. When Adolph got a bit more sophisticated and graduated from this rag-tag bunch of ruffians, he turned around and imprisoned thousands of them. In so doing, a large number of barracks, compounds, barbed wire and postern (guard) boxes were made. Adolph justified his action simply by stating that the "Brown Shirts" had become counter productive. Now the camp had been reconditioned to accommodate the thousands of Americans, English and certain other allied prisoners. As we know, Germany was being compressed more and more between the American-English on the west and Russia on the east.

For a while after the first few weeks of February, 1945, we enjoyed a little elbow room, however, that was short lived. General George Patten kept on the move and the Germans started evacuating camps from the Nuremberg area, moving the POW's down to the Munich area. This was a walk of about 125 miles. The Germans no longer had the luxury of box car transport for two reasons: their box cars were few and there was hardly andy place left to go. March and April saw many large groups of very tired "Kregies" moving into our area. As many of us as possible would stand as close to the main gate as the guard wire permitted, watching for someone we might know. There was always some shouting to someone

they recognized. One day I recognized Johnnie Strikatinko and I gave him a shout. He wasn't billeted in our compound but I got his story of hard luck from someone who knew him in the Nuremberg camp. Billeted in our camp was Lt. Dave Brothers; he was the man who took the 20 mm (or equivalent) in his tail end. When I could talk with him in barracks, he slipped down his trousers and showed the repair job the German medics had accomplished. The repair job was rough but effective. There was a place on the tail bone that refused to heal satisfactorily and remained with a bandage pad. He appeared quite pleased that he could show me the repair job. He also appeared quite distressed when I told him that I was very pleased to see that he had made it. "Damn you, Barney," he said. "You promised that I would make it OK." I then admitted that my remarks had been made more as hopeful encouragement.

Some days later, another surprise. Another group of POW's were being marched in from somewhere. There, like two dejected heroes, shuffled the Army Captain and the Air Force navigator. Those two were not assigned to our compound but some others were. It was from them that I got the dramatics of their story. It seems that they fared very well for a couple of days until their food ran out completely. It was when they were reduced to the Army Captain's ability to live off the land that things went real sour. They get desperately hungry for a few days and then it appeared that "Lady Luck" had turned their direction. In a clearing off a wooded area they saw a farmer stacking hay. The horses had been unhooked from the wagon and were tied to a wagon wheel. The farmer was up on top of the stack squaring it up for the next load. There, just sitting on the wagon tongue in all its big black, beautiful glory was a very large lunch box. Their plan to steal this "Yogi Bear" type free lunch was short, fast and simple. They would crouch low, keeping as best they could, the hay rack and the horses between themselves and the laboring old farmer while they were sneaking to get the "goodie" box. They knew that many of the rural Germans, while working by themselves, kept a gun with them. Germany, by this time was full of a number of foreign nationals who had been conscripted to do farm and menial labor. Many of these had abandoned their assignments and were roaming the country with no specific place to go. They were trouble makers. Knowing this, these two brave troubadours had deduced that if the farm fellow had a gun, it would not be by the hay stack but it would be in or at the hay wagon. Possibly it was the fault of the horses; as they got closer, one of the horses got wind of them, turned its

head and voiced a gentle nicker. Mr. farmer looked up and saw them. He gave a shout. These two officers did just as they had so strategically planned. They were to run forward, grab the lunch box then turn and disappear in the nearby brush and woods. Now, "Lady Luck" turned against them. The farmer had a gun, but it wasn't in the hay wagon, it was laying beside the hay stack. Farmer slid down off the haystack, grabbed the gun and just as our brave lads grabbed the lunch box he leveled the gun and loudly proclaimed those fearsome words "Haenda Hoch" (hands up). Oh well, some days are like that. Even a well planned and beautifully executed escape plan can go discouragingly wrong.

LET'S GO HOME

On April 28th, small gun and some cannon fire was heard. That night most gun fire stopped. We wondered what went wrong. Well, nothing went wrong. About sunrise on April 29th the heavy guns had been moved in and they opened up. Soon we heard machine guns not too far away. Many of our guards left the outside fence patrol. The fence corner postern (guard tower) box guards left. Some of the outside guards threw their guns over the fence into the compound, climbed up over the fence and through the accordianized barb-wire and made it known that "now we are your prisoners". There was a heavy skirmish in the town of Moosberg but it soon quieted down. We observed the German flag in the town square being pulled down from its pole. Of course, we were wondering what was going on. Very soon we found out. "Old Glory" was run up the flag pole amidst a few squirts of machine gun fire. Then all hell broke loose in the compound. There were shouts of elation, whooping and jumping. Some just sat down and cried right where they were standing. The few German guards who had joined us seemed equally as happy. They too had tears in their eyes. Such a relief. The days, months and years of war were over. Our worries, our doubts, our waiting was over. It was time to sit down and take a large breath of new, free air.

General George Patten came in himself the next day. With him was a Congressman, bravely making political hay while the Germans were surrendering about as fast as they could. With the Congressman were his news staff and photographers. It would appear that this Congress fellow would certainly like to make it appear that he, along with the other soldiers, was assuredly one of the conquering heroes of the day. Somehow they rounded up a small podium. Gen. George quickly got up and welcomed us back into the hands of the allied powers.

The Congressman then got up with a hand full of notes and proceeded at his oratorical best. After a few sympathetic comments about us poor POW's, he launched into the trials and tribulations and deprivations of the poor folks at home. What with rationing and all, the home folks had to reduce their meat consumption, their fuel consumption and some were reduced to black-marketing to get adequate automotive tires. At first there were a few muffled boos and then the boos got louder. This stalwart Congressman just raised his voice and kept going. Shortly, "Three-Star-George" stepped up on the podium and loudly said to one and all, "We've got to go". He placed a firm and positive grip on the Congressman's arm and marched him off the podium into a waiting personnel carrier.

We stayed right in the compound for another five days. Then a division of trucks came in and took us up to a once popular German fighter base at Englestadt. We slept right in the open for three days and then C-47's started coming in. They got those C-47's coming in and going out like horses on a merry-go-round. In due course, we found ourselves in France at a hastily prepared camp called "Camp Lucky Strike". At Camp Lucky Strike we were fed chicken, chicken and more chicken. The medics had told the Quarter Master and the food service people that chicken would be easily digestible for our poor POW stomachs. We ate so much chicken that we could almost fly without a refresher course. We were issued clothing, toilet articles and, not to be overlooked, MONEY. About six days went by and we were transported to Le Havre, placed aboard an army transport ship and in another fourteen days, we sailed into port in Boston and off loaded and transported to Camp Miles Standish. HOME AT LAST! That evening the G.I. mess hall served us up a beautiful big meal of <u>CHICKEN</u>.

"Barney" Keogh,
Ex "Kregie"

(See following pages for crew photographs and roster, courtesy of Ormond Buffington)

Jim Scott flew with this crew as the replacement bombardier on August 28, 1944.

See attached letters for Jim Scott's experience on the forced landing at Ancona on 28 August, 1944.



Lt. Teal with "Dammit" - see "Dammit" in Vol. I with Lt. Nixon

- or, is this "Pooch", the crew mascot?

Was Sgt. Raymond "Wild Bill" Cody a crew member of Lt. Teal, as reported?*

* Source: "Keeping in Touch", from 741 Sqdn. newspaper



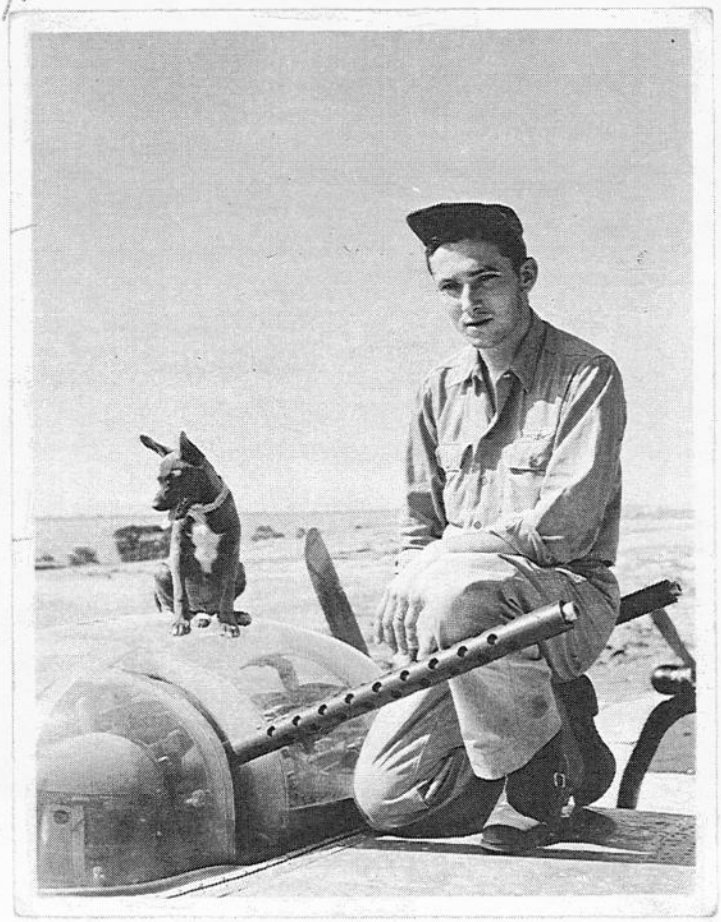
Lt. Robert Lackner and crew

Photo - previous page

back row, left to right: Lt. Robert Lackner - Pilot; Lt. Teal, co-pilot; Lt. Newby, bombardier (KIA); unidentified, navigator (did not leave Charleston with crew)

front row, left to right: unidentified (did not leave Charleston with crew), S/sgt. Thomas P. Conroy; S/sgt. William Dixon; T/sgt. Donald F. Bauer; T/sgt. Ormond H. Buffington; unidentified (did not leave Charleston with crew).

below: T/sgt. Ormond H. Buffington with crew mascot - "Pooch". "Pooch" was bought in Cerignola for 400 Lira - or $4.00 - right?



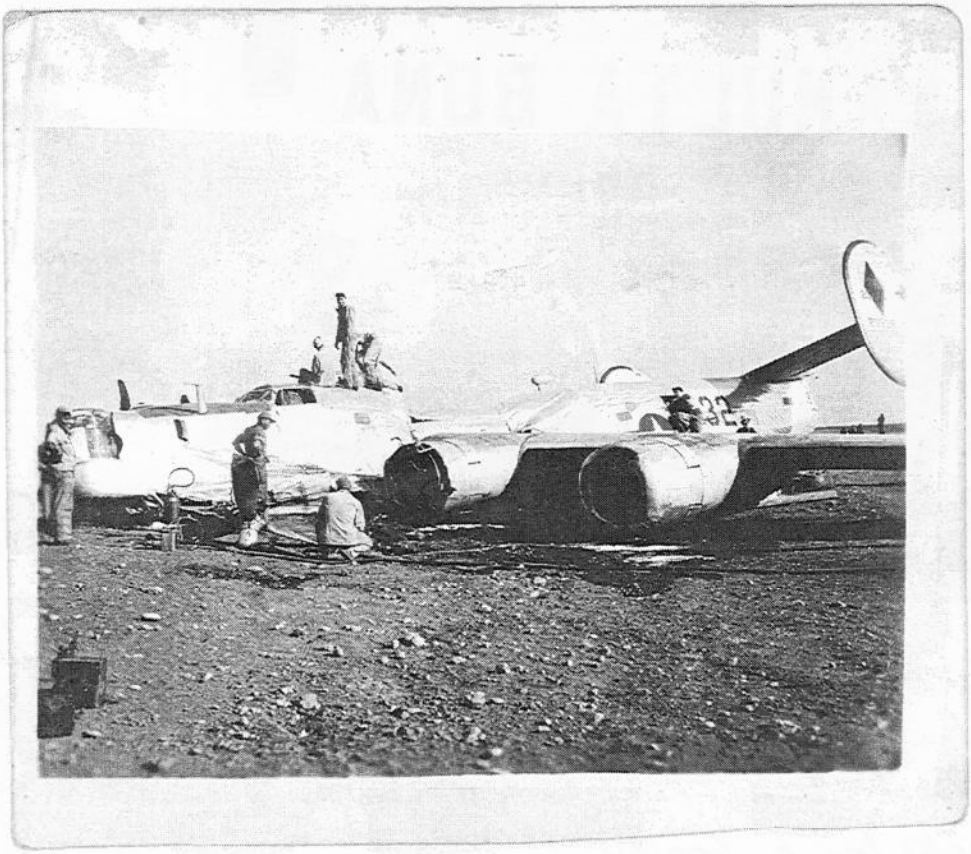


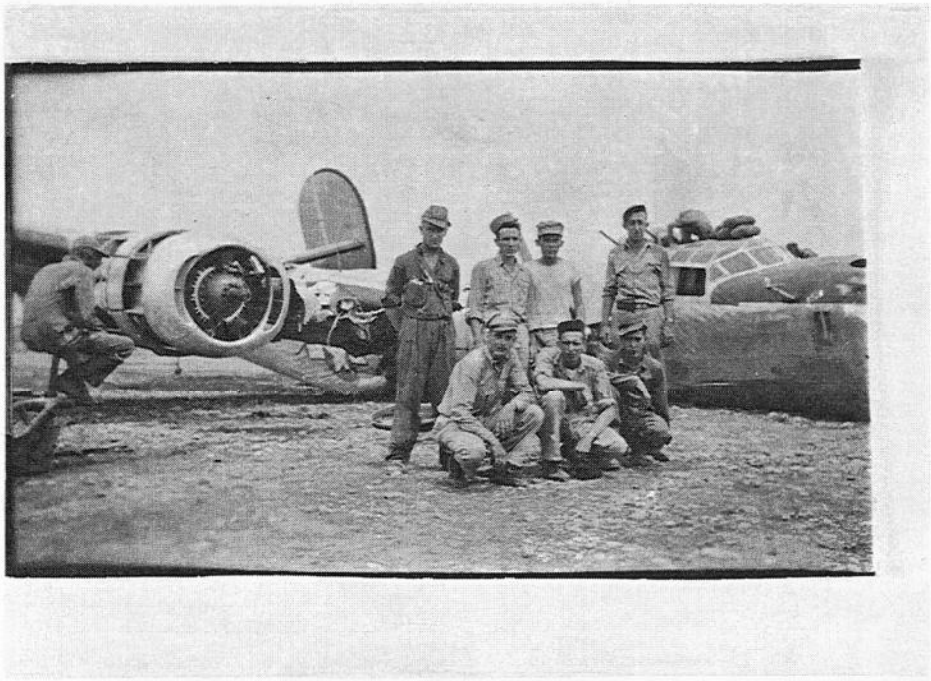
Above: left to right: S/sgt. Andy DeLozier; T/sgt. Donald F. Bauer. T/sgt. Ormond Buffington; S/sgt. Thomas P. Conroy; S/sgt. Mitchell R. Strickland. "Pooch", in Buffington's arms, was brought back to the U.S in a barracks bag by Conroy.

Below: A misinterpreted signal resulted in premature retraction of the landing gear on take-off. Lt. Lackner's skill in controlling the aircraft probably resulted in fewer fatalities than did occur. In accident on 7/2/44, Lt. Brier, navigator was fatally injured.



below: another view of the crashed aircraft.





above: what was left of Lackner's crew after the crash.
back row: left to right: T/sgt. Donald F. Bauer; T/sgt. Ormond Buffington; s/sgt. M.R. Strickland; s/sgt. Thomas Conroy.
front row: left to right: co-pilot Teal; Pilot Robert Lackner; s/sgt. William Dixon.

AS WE WERE RETURNING FROM SOMEWHERE AND HAD JUST CROSSED THE COAST AT THE TOP OF THE ADRIATIC, OUR FINAL ENGINES STARTED POOPING OUT. AS WE WERE DUMPING WHATEVER WE COULD TO LIGHTE THE PLANE AND DISCUSSING DITCHING PROCEEDURES, THE NAVIGATOR SAID THERE WAS A FIGHTER STRIP AT ANCONA, ITALY. WE ALL AGREED; WISHFUL THINKING I GUESS, THAT THE STRIP WAS PROBABLY ABANDONED AND WE SHOULD ATTEMPT TO LAND THERE. ANYTHING WAS BETTER THAN DITCHING, SINCE OUR BOMB BAY DOORS WOULD NOT CLOSE. BARELY MAKING IT TO THE STRIP, WE SET DOWN. WHEN WE RAN OUT OF STRIP WE WOUND UP PLOWING THROUGH SOMEONE'S VINEYARD, WE ALL GOT OUT OF T PLANE AND WERE DISCUSSING WHAT TO DO NEXT WHEN ARTILLERY FIRE BEGAN O ONE SIDE AND SHORTLY THEREAFTER FROM THE OTHER SIDE, ALSO, A MAN HAD EMERGED FROM A HOUSE WE HAD NARROWLY MISSED GOING THROUGH THE VINE- YARD AND WAS APPROACHING WITH VERY UN-FRIENDLY GESTURES. I REMEMBER ASKING SOMEONE TO TRY TALKING TO THE MAN WHILE I WENT TO SHOOT THE BOMB SIGHT. WHEN I GOT OUT OF THE PLANE ONE OF OUR SARGENTS WAS WAITING FOR ME AND WE MADE A MAD DASH FOR A DITCH WHERE THE REST OF THE CREW WERE WAITING. SHORTLY THEREAFTER A JEEP WITH A TRAILER MANNED BY A MAJOR & A SARGENT WITH U.S. SIGNAL CORPS INSIGNIA CAME ROARING UP FROM THE SOUTH. WE ALL PILED IN AND OFF WE WENT. IT TURNED OUT WE HAD LANDED BETWEEN THE BRITISH AND GERMAN ARMIES. NEITHER SIDE HAD ANY INTEREST IN THE FIGHTER STRIP, BUT THEY BOTH WERE DETERMINED TO STOP THE OTHER FROM HAVING OUR B-24. LATER WE WERE TRUCKED SOUTH TO AN AIRFIELD AND FROM THERE FLOWN BACK TO OUR BASE.

171 /S/ Jim Scott

Marcus Loftis's Crew

2nd Lt. Marcus L. Loftis
2nd Lt. Paul E. Kotke
Cpl. August C. Szvdajski
Cpl. Ollie J. Sparks
Cpl. Herbert W. Landau
Cpl. Sherman Totten
Pfc. Robert W. Hermesmeyer
Pfc. Jack L. Hardwick

McCarthy's Crew
(No Photograph)

This is the crew that went down over Moosbierbaum on 26 June 1944.
See next page for original crew photograph.

Lt. Paul A. McCarthy - Pilot
Lt. Walter V. Anderson - Co-Pilot
Lt. Thornton H. Jackson
Lt. Charles M. Miller
T/Sgt Edward O. Shotwell, R/O
T/Sgt Carl W. Stover - Top Turret
S/Sgt Michael Rishko - W/Gunner
S/Sgt Donald N. Kerr - Ball Turret
S/Sgt Hugh E. Moore - W/Gunner
S/Sgt Kenneth L. Bennett - Tail Turret

From Charles M. Miller:

Lt. McCarthy was flying the number 3 position in the high flight of the second section on the mission to Moosbierbaum on 26 June 1944.

The formation was attacked by (estimate) of up to 100 fighters--some attacking the high flight of the second section from the 4 or 5 o'clock direction. Lt. McCarthy's airplane was hit on the right wing and the right wing was on fire when the crew left.

The nose guns would not fire because of no power to the firing solenoids. The gunner could not locate the problem. Lt. McCarthy's aircraft was hit on the first attack. 455th gunners claimed 35 enemy fighters destroyed (by A/C that returned--10 B-24s missing).

Charles Miller left the aircraft at approximately 20000 feet. A German ME109 came by close to Miller in his 'chute on the way down, and Miller reports--would you believe--the pilot waved at him!

After Lt. Miller landed by parachute he hid in hedge rows for about 7 hours. He could see tracks of hobnail boots all over the place so he headed for a heavily wooded hill. On the way the cover ran out and he went over a yellow jackets' nest on his belly. He said this did not help! Next, there was a big ditch with water. He says he knows it was big because it was about 4 feet more than he could jump. Soon he was up to the edge of the hill (good cover) trees. He started to climb but came up to this high fence (so what the hell)--keep going--they will have to get over it too. His problem was that this was not so. He climbed into a German Army Camp!

Charles Miller says he has no complaint of the treatment by the Luftwaffe--but the SS and the Gestapo were BASTARDS!

In describing the suffering of forced marches, Miller sends the jacket of Maybe I'm Dead, by Joe Klass (a fighter pilot shot down over Tunisia and a POW for 25 months), published by The Macmillan Company, 60 Fifth Avenue, New York 11, NY:

(see next page)



The crew is identified as follows from left to right:

Paul A. McCarthy	Pilot
Walter V.Anderson	Co-Pilot
Erwin M. Bosler	Navigator
Myron Nolish	Bombardier
Daniel R. Cavano	Engineer

Front row:

Dwight Curl	Radio Operator
John F. Cleinman	Armorer
Raymond D. Cody	Ass't. Armorer
Howard C. Jones	Ass't. Radio Operator
Edward Huych	Ass't. Engineer

Right:
Lt. Bosler receives DFC from Col. Snowden



Photographs courtesy Erwin Bosler.

1	E	M	C	K	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	V

Personalkarte I: Personelle Angaben

Kriegsgefangenen-Stammlager: .....

Beschriftung der Erkennungsmarke:
Nr. 6685
Lager: .....

Des Kriegsgefangenen

Name: Miller
Corname: Charles M.
Geburtstag und -ort: 8.3.20 Ohio
Religion: prot.
Vorname des Vaters: .....
Familienname der Mutter: .....

Staatsangehörigkeit: U. S.
Dienstgrad: 2. Lt.
Truppenteil: USAAF Komp. usw.: .....
Zivilberuf: Student Berufs-Gr.: .....
Matrikel Nr. (Stammrolle des Heimatstaates): 0-454 658
Gefangennahme (Ort und Datum): Wien 26.6.44
Ob gesund, krank, verwundet eingeliefert: .....

Lichtbild



Nähere Personalbeschreibung

Größe	Haarfarbe
177	braun

Besondere Kennzeichen:

Fingerabdruck des rechten(!) Zeigefingers



Name und Anschrift der zu benachrichtigenden Person in der Heimat des Kriegsgefangenen

Mr. F. C. K. Miller
430 E. Sherman St.
Paul/Minn.

MILLER, CH. M. 6685

Wenden!

Personal-Beschreibung:

Figur: mittelschlank
Größe: 1,77 m
Alter: 8. 3. 20
Gesichtsform: oval
Gesichtsfarbe: gelblich
Schädelform: oval
Augen: blaugrau
Nase: gerade
Haare: braun
Bart:
Gebiß: gut
Besondere Merkmale: Kl. Narbe am re. Unterarm
Deutsche Sprachkenntnisse:

Schrift ...

Here is the epic story of one of the great marches of history, a march made in forty degrees below zero by ten thousand American airmen, prisoners in Nazi Germany, during the final desperate months of the war.

In January 1945 the Russian offensive had reached within fourteen miles of the somber prison camp at Sagan. The prisoners' dreams were agonizingly close to being realized. Then, with only four hours notice, they were ordered to march west, away from freedom into more months of captivity.

Out into the night, therefore, the long, winding column began the march. Some men proved to be heroes; in some the moral fiber snapped. Under the unbearable ordeal some sank down by the road and died. Some few rose to the heights of sacrifice. To all of them as they huddled in the icy winds, memories returned at intervals, heartbreaking memories of days when they were free and proud and owned the sky.

Maybe I'm Dead is a novel of overwhelming force and narrative drive, a book in the noblest tradition, great with human compassion and understanding. Man is its hero; its impact is unforgettable.

Jacket design by Leo Manso

ENCL. "B"

hel

WAR DEPARTMENT
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

IN REPLY REFER TO:
AG 201 Miller, Charles M.
PC-N NAT152

13 July 1944.

Mrs. Irene K. Miller
430 East Summitt Street
Kent, Ohio

Dear Mrs. Miller:

This letter is to confirm my recent telegram in which you were regretfully informed that your son, Second Lieutenant Charles M. Miller, 0-454,658, Air Corps, has been reported missing in action over Austria since 26 June 1944.

I know that added distress is caused by failure to receive more information or details. Therefore, I wish to assure you that at any time additional information is received it will be transmitted to you without delay, and, if in the meantime no additional information is received, I will again communicate with you at the expiration of three months. Also, it is the policy of the Commanding General of the Army Air Forces upon receipt of the "Missing Air Crew Report" to convey to you any details that might be contained in that report.

The term "missing in action" is used only to indicate that the whereabouts or status of an individual is not immediately known. It is not intended to convey the impression that the case is closed. I wish to emphasize that every effort is exerted continuously to clear up the status of our personnel. Under war conditions this is a difficult task as you must readily realize. Experience has shown that many persons reported missing in action are subsequently reported as prisoners of war, but as this information is furnished by countries with which we are at war, the War Department is helpless to expedite such reports. However, in order to relieve financial worry, Congress has enacted legislation which continues in force the pay, allowances and allotments to dependents of personnel being carried in a missing status.

Permit me to extend to you my heartfelt sympathy during this period of uncertainty.

Sincerely yours,

J. A. ULIO
Major General,
The Adjutant General.

Encl "C"

FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE
Office of the Commanding General
A. P. O. 520

July 29, 1944

Mrs. Irene K. Miller
430 E. Summit Street
Kent, Ohio

My dear Mrs. Miller:

Liberators of this Air Force were sent on June 26, 1944, to destroy enemy installations at Moosbierbaum, Austria. Your son, Second Lieutenant Charles M. Miller, O-454658, was the bombardier on one of the participating bombers.

After reaching the target successfully Charles' plane was intercepted and damaged by German fighters. Only three parachutes were seen leaving the rapidly descending plane. Since members of the adjoining crews were able to observe only a part of the bomber's descent it is possible that more parachutes were used without being seen. I wish I could tell you that your son reached the ground safely, but in the absence of supporting facts I can only join you in the hope that we will in due time receive the news for which we long. I assure you that you will be promptly advised of any change in his status.

By his courageous participation in dangerous missions Charles has made a substantial contribution to the present successes of this air force. On behalf of a grateful nation I extend sincere sympathy.

Very sincerely yours,

N. F. TWINING
Major General, USA
Commanding

George McCord's Crew

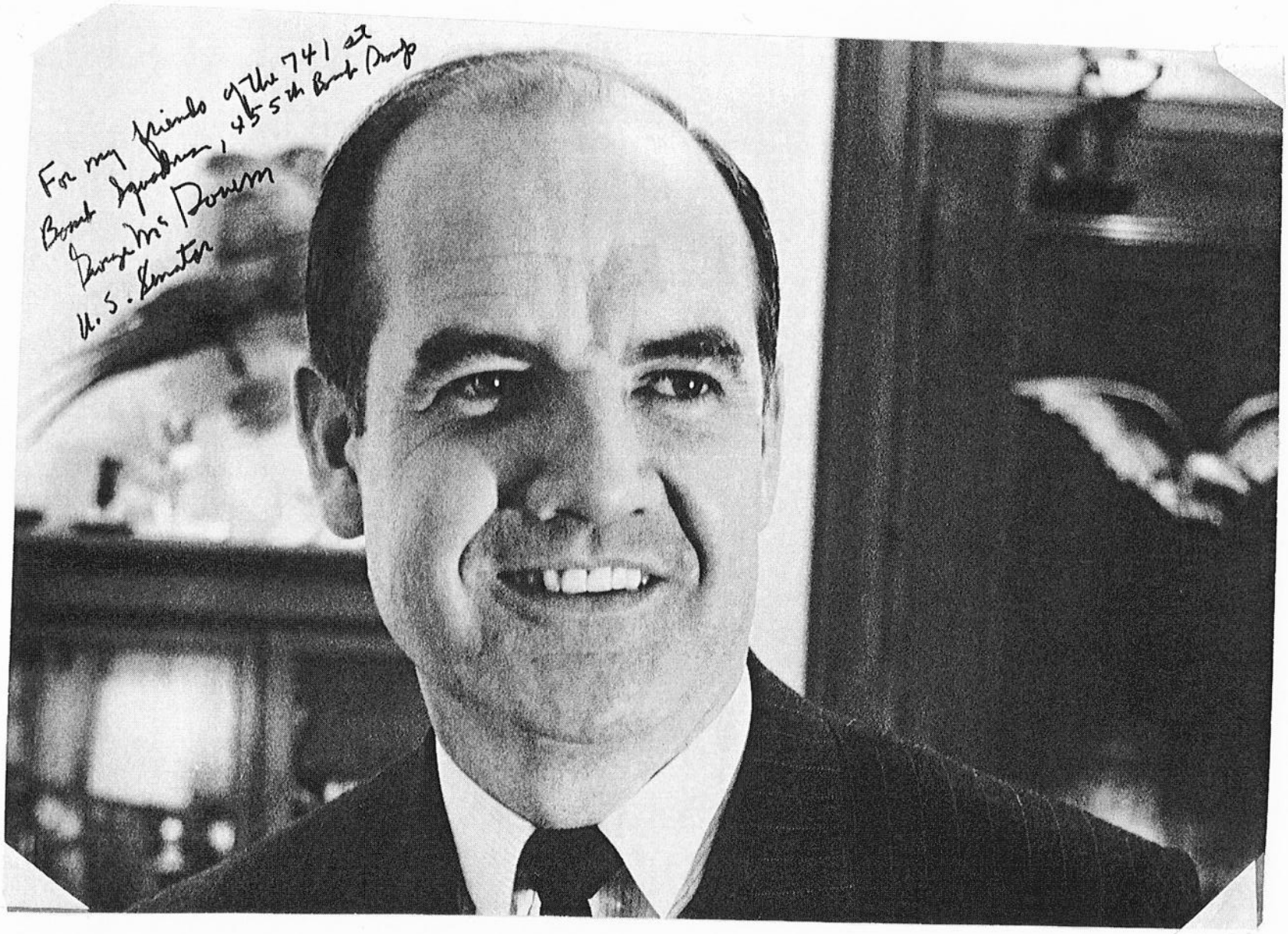
George E. McCord, pilot
Howard D. Shaffer, co-pilot
Brendan E. Gleeson, navigator
Alvin J. Brown, bombardier
T/Sgt. Elvin A. Davis, Armorer Gunner
T/Sgt. Charles E. Pilcher, engineer
Herschell H. Hamer, waist gunner
Earl J. Schramer, waist gunner
Robert J. Adams, waist gunner

Lt. George McGovern's crew



Front row, L to R: Michael Valco, engineer; William Ashlock, waist gunner; Isadore Siegel, tail turret gunner; William McAfee, ball turret gunner; Robert McConnell, nose turret gunner.
Back row, L to R: Ralph Rounds, co-pilot; George McGovern, pilot; Bill Eames, navigator/bombadier; Kenneth Higgins, radio operator.

See "Dedication" in Volume I and "Attachments" in Volume II. Lt. McGovern has had a distinguished career as a United States Senator and Presidential Candidate.



Senator George S.McGovern

J. E. McKibben's Crew

Joseph E. McKibben, pilot
A. J. Kemp
George Hofer
others are unknown

crew arrived at 455th early Spring 1945.

Lt. John Merritt's crew
- on return from Yugoslavia. MIA: October 7, 1944 - target: Vienna
(This picture was taken November 26, 1944)



Left to Right: John Merritt, pilot; Keith Martin, bombardier; Don Maes, co-pilot (replacement); Carl Rudolph, navigator; Nick Corbo, engineer; Elliott Cunningham, ball gunner; Arnold Dupree, waist gunner; Robert Wheeler, radio operator;[Art Johnson, assistant engineer and nose turret gunner is not in photo. Art took the photo. Harry Carver, tail gunner, was MIA when crew returned. Harry was captured and sold to the Germans. POW until WWII's end. Was OK after the war.]



Jim Merritt - Pilot



Carl Rudolph - Navigator



Art Johnson - Ass't Eng. - Nose turret



Nick Carbo - Engineer



Elliott Cunningham - Ball Gunner



Arnold Dupree - Waist Gunner

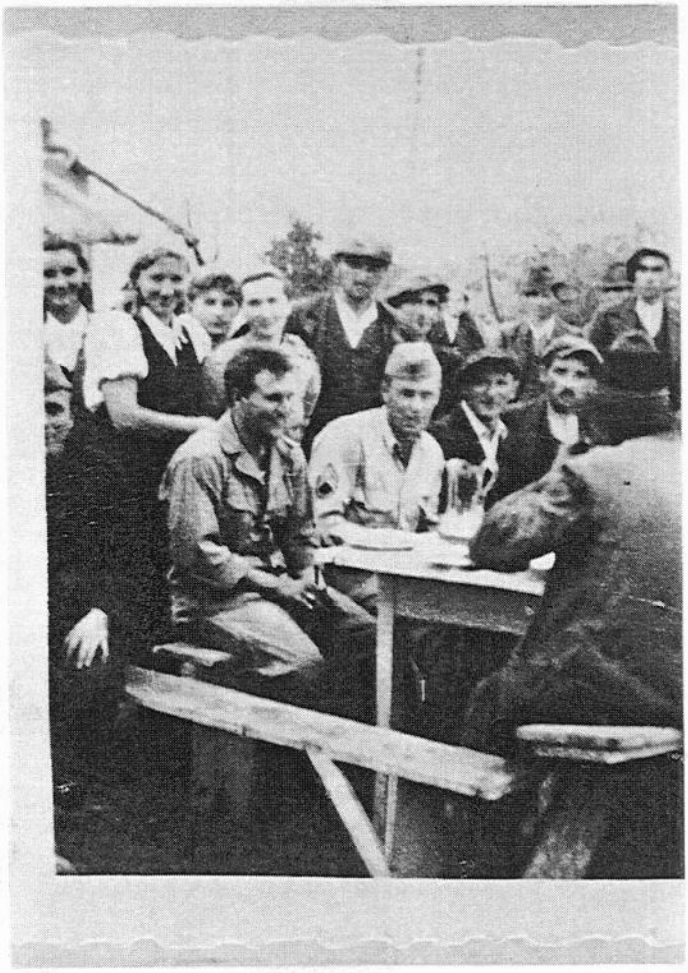


Photo at left; Oct. 1944.
seated at table, left to right:
Elliott Cunningham, Art Johnson,
B. P. Magdich, and unidentified
Yugoslavians.

Harry Carver, tail gunner, was MIA when crew returned. Harry was captured and sold to Germans. He was POW until end of WWII. OK after war.

Photos courtesy Art Johnson and Jim Merritt.

See attch: "Return to Koprivnica"

By permission of Edi Selhaus who will soon have a book out containing this story.

GOODBY, LIBERTY BELLE

I would not have been able to write this book without John Hribar's invaluable help. When he retired he helped us locate many of the American airmen rescued in Slovenia during World War II. He also joined us in collecting various data and stories of their experiences. To do this he invested much effort and substantial funds; therefore, his efforts are acknowledged in the first chapter of this book.

Thanks to John, I started to receive many more stories concerning rescued American airmen. Among them I received one with the following contents:

"Your name was referred to me by Mr John Hribar of North Port, Florida, USA, who is trying to reunite Yugoslav Partisans with Rescued Fifteenth Air Force fliers."

"My father was a B-24 pilot who with the crew spent 49 days in the company of Yugoslav Partisans. Recently he and I have been collaborating on a research project about those 49 days. This project might eventually lead to a book."

"In trying to collect as much information as possible about their time in Yugoslavia, I am attempting to locate those members of the crew with whom my father has lost touch since the war. I would also, of course, be interested in locating any Partisans who may have aided in their escape. Here is some relevant information on the crew and its time in Yugoslavia."

"Plane: B-24 "Liberty Belle" - 304th Wing, 455th Bomb Group, 741st Squadron."

"Events: Shot down during the October 7th raid on Vienna. Crew bailed out in the area of Koprivnica. Tail gunner was captured, but the rest of the crew was rescued by Partisans and made their way out of Yugoslavia via Sokolovac, Topolovac, Sv. Ivan Zabno, Dubrava, Cazma, Garesnica, Lonja, Prevsac, Glina, Kladusa, and Obrovac. Arrived in Zadar on November 24, 1944 and, after several days aboard a British Royal Navy ship, returned to the Fifteenth Air Force.

Members of the crew:
Carver, Harry; Hoosick, New York
Corbo, Nicholas J.; Withersbee, New York (current: Renssalaer, New York)
Cunningham, Elliott L.; Worthington, Minnesota
Dupree, Arnold D.; Laurel, Mississippi
Johnson, Arthur R.; Sterling, Colorado (current: Fair Oaks, California)
Martin, Keith E.; Los Angeles, California (current: La Canada, California)
Maes, Donald; El Monte California
Merritt, John I. Daytona Beach, Florida (Current: Verona, New Jersey)
Rudolpf, G. Carl; Aldan, Pa.
Wheeler, Robert F.; Yucaipa, California.

I would be very interested in learning of the existance of any Partisans still living who assisted in the escape of the Liberty Belle crew. It is possible that sometime in the next two years my father and I will visit Yugoslavia to retrace his steps and to seek out any surviving Partisans who assisted him.

I would also be interested in knowing about other former American airmen who have been in touch with you and about any of them who may have returned to Yugoslavia .

Thank you very much for any assistance you might be able to give me on this project.

Sincerely,
J.I.Merritt"

I was very happy to receive that letter. It allowed me to simultaneously fulfill my wish to research the history of rescued Allied airmen as well as contacting the people on the other side of the ocean on the same subject.

I offered my assistance and enclosed some photographs of resued airmen as they were departing from the Partisan landing strip in Bela krajina.

Jim Merritt works at Princeton University, New Jersey, where he, as did his father, obtained his degree. Jim was satisfied with my answer and was enraptured with my photographs. He showed them to his father, after which they were even more enthusiastic to come to Yugoslavia - much sooner than they had originally planned.

Jim also let me know that he obtained some books on Yugoslav conditions during World War II. He mentioned that the book by Fitzroy MacLean was very helpful to him. He also started studying the Serbo-Croatian language in order to be able to make use of it while visiting Yugoslavia.

He had come in contact with some of the crewmen and would send me some of their statements to assist me in making additional contacts in Yugoslavia. From the American Fifteenth Air Force archives he found statements that the crewmen had given at the debriefing after returning to their base. His father was to meet some of his wartime buddies shortly and would probably learn some new information as they reminisced about their experiences.

In Jim's letter of October 1985 he sent word of their scheduled arrival:

"I am writing to tell you of recent developments in my writing project concerning my father's experiences in Yugoslavia in October and November 1944."

"Most important is a decision on my part to come to Yugoslavia this year - in October, which would be 42 years to the month that my father and his crew parachuted into your country. I have made some preliminary arrangements with Pan American Airways on this matter and have also written to the Yugoslav State Tourist Office in New York City for their assistance. Over the next several months I will be putting these plans into final form for the trip to Yugoslavia with my father and members of the crew. We would expect the trip to take place during the approximate period of October 5-14 and to follow a route between Koprivnica and Zadar, with stops along the way."

"As discussed in my earlier letters, it would be very interesting - in fact, crucial to my project - to be able to meet with the Partisan veterans who were active in Croatia at the time and with specific individuals who assisted my father and his crew along their route. For example, October 7 is the anniversary of their parachuting into Croatia. Some of the Partisans in the Koprivnica area who assisted in their escape from the Ustashi and the Germans must still be living. Since their Liberator bomber crashed in a fiery explosion on a hillside, there must be people who remember that, too."

"I wonder if any remains of the plane can still be found, and if we could visit the exact location where it crashed?"

"There presumably are other people still living who assisted them along their route: in the Mikloush-Cazma area, for example, where the British Military Mission had a station; in Garesnica, where they spent one week; and in the Glina-Topusko area, where they spent about ten days before moving to Obravac and Zadar. (Topusko, of course, was headquarters of both the Croatian Partisans and the British Military Mission of Croatia, headed by Randolph Churchill. Another British officer there was the late Evelyn Waugh, the well-known novelist, who provides a great deal of information about day-to-day life at the mission in the published diaries)."

"As I said, I am hoping that the Yugoslav State Tourist Office in New York City will help me arrange my itinerary. The success of this trip, however, very much depends on our being able to meet with former Partisans and to have as a guide someone who is knowledgeable about the territory and the history of Partisan action in Croatia, and who can speak English. (Within our group there will probably be persons who can speak German and

French fairly well, but no one with fluency in Serbo-Croatian)."

"I very much appreciate your earlier offer to asist me in my efforts. My question now is, would you be able to accompany us for at least part of our trip and to help in the capacities outlined above? If not, would you know of someone with the appropriate credentials who could? Of course, we would pay for these services and for any expenses incurred on the trip."

"In the interest of helping you find anyone who assisted my father's group, I am enclosing an itinerary of their 1944 route and a list of Yugoslavians known to have helped them. It would be most wonderfiul if any of these persons were still alive and able to meet with us. Perhaps, Mildred Matech, for example, is still living in Yugoslavia and could repeat her role as an interpreter."

"It is very important for me to hear from you regarding any success you may have had so far in locating persons who assisted my father's group and to know whether you could accompany us for all or at least part of our visit to Croatia in October."

"Looking forward to hearing from you soon - and, I hope, to seeing you in October!"

Upon receipt of the letter I immediately requested help to locate individuals and information supporting the rough outline of the story supplied by Merritt.

In ARENA, one of Yugoslavia's most popular magazines with a large circulation, I published a notice requesting that eye witnesses to the Liberty Belle parachutists' landing send their addresses to the editor and business office. I did the same with the local newspaper in Koprivnica. The editor of GLAS PODRAVINE, Dragan Desnica, was so enthusiastic with the prospects that he took sponsorship of the effort. A series of articles entitled "Shot Down Over Koprivnica" were printed in response to my request.

While Jim Merritt had much success in locating the Liberty Belle's crewmen from all parts of America, I impatiently waited to see the effect of my appeal for reader's assistance.

It had been my experience after ten years of researching data for events that occurred 40 years ago not to expect success.

But this time, to my surprise, I was snowed under with new data as I received almost a hundred letters. They were from Italy, Germany, Austria,Switzerland and even from the USA. Actually, a lot of the letters were not directly supportive of the event in Koprivnica, but they supplied me with interesting information about the adventures of American airmen in other places.

x x x x

Meanwhile Jim sent me two of the most valuable stories - testimony of his father's two crewmen, who were questioned after their return to Allied control.

All aircrews upon returning from that particular mission were asked, "When did you last see Merritt and Liberty Belle, ship #425?" This debriefing was standard operating procedure. Their answers on Oct 7 served as the official account until Merritt's crew returned. The initial conclusion formed by G-2 (Intelligence) was:

"One aircraft is missing and was seen at 13:47 hours at the target. It left the formation by peeling off to the left. A/C was in no apparant trouble. Personnel casualties were ten crew members missing in action."

Those men who had brought back the original report trooped out of that building not as happy as when they first entered, for another crew was gone. They also wondered if they would be next.

The first account after they returned was written by Arthur R. Johnson. He reported to intelligence everything that had happened before parachuting. Here is his story.

"For us crewmen aboard Libert Belle it was a different story after 13:47. We had our hands full and it was our lot to embark on an experience not soon forgotten, so turn back in time and I'll take you aboard the Liberty Belle on the 7th of October, 1944.

"We took off at 10:00 hours and after forming into the formation we headed northeast across the Adriatic. By the time Yugoslavia unrolled beneath us we were up to 15,000 feet. Off to our right there were a few bursts of flak, gentle reminders to keep our distance. All went well and after two hours we started to climb to our pre-selected altitude. At 13:00 hours we were at 21,000 feet, which was our bombing altitude. Far ahead to our left on the horizon we could see a black cloud. We knew that was Vienna and that we would have to fly through that black cloud. No fighters, just flak, and plenty of it, but we came through with only a few holes."

"I was at the left waist gun and with one hand I held my gun, the other I tossed out 'Window' or 'chaff'. It was metallic paper used to confuse the enemy radar detectors when directing their anti-aircraft guns. The bombardier had released the bombs and we were turning away from Vienna. Below me I could see smoke rising from the Winter Haven Oil Works and I knew that our bombs had hit their mark. We had flown through the worst of the flak, and though still watchful, I sighed a bit for this was my third time in the vicinity of Vienna and I knew about where the flak would begin and end. This time, the barrage hadn't ended. One of the enemy's guns had our range down pat as, just after I sighed, four explosions in quick succession jarred me."

"That was the moment that I had prayed would never come and now, after 26 missions, here it was. The gun was knocked out of my hand and I hit the floor hard. The right gunner did likewise. I didn't realize that my oxygen hose had pulled apart but, but only for a moment, as it was time to get out. Luckily, I kept my head set and the pilot's voice came over the intercom. 'Is everyone O.K.?' By that time my flak suit was out of the window, my oxygen mask off of my face, and I was back on my feet. I signalled the tail gunner and hollered at the ball gunner and then pressed the 'mike' button to call the pilot."

" 'Pilot from left waist - everyone's okay back here. #3 engine throwing oil and smoke, #4 dead, holes in flaps and wings, over.' In just a matter of minutes, even seconds, all of this happened and more, for later we were able to piece together what had actually happened."

"The first burst of flak exploded directly in front of the plane and the force of the explosion took the top off of the nose turret. The second burst came through and cut the nose wheel and tire in two and, in general, made a mess of the bombardier's compartment. It cut the interphone lines to the nose of the plane and also the oxygen lines. The bombardier wasn't hurt. The third burst ripped up the underside of the right wing and exploded in #4 engine."

"That accounted for the holes through the wing and flaps. It caused a temporary loss of control by the pilot, but after falling from 18,000 feet to 10,000 feet, the pilot and copilot regained control of the aircraft once more. They used flaps in order to compensate for the loss of airfoil section; the copilot was kept busy keeping the propellors at the correct speed, for the first burst had damaged all of the prop governors. The fourth and last burst entered through the bomb bay and cut through the wing root. It made a hole big enough to crawl through and that metal is approximately two inches thick at that section. The ball gunner was about a yard away and was not scratched. That was just a portion of the damage to the plane."

" Immediately we began to strip and throw out everything that was loose such as ammunition, guns and flak suits. That helped, but with only one engine pulling full power it was not enough to overcome the drag caused by the flak damage. We flew for an hour and then the pilot called on the interphone to bail out. Each one of us checked our parachutes to make sure

that they were tight, and then came the word: 'Bail out and good luck!'."

"The nose gunner, bombardier, engineer and navigator went out through the bomb bay. The right waist gunner was the first out of the camera hatch in the rear and, to speed him up, we pushed him. Then in quick succession, the tail gunner and the ball gunner left and I was all alone in the back. The pilot and copilot were up front. I faced the front of the ship and put my head between my knees and out I went. Of course, that was but a second or two after the ball gunner left. The slip stream caught me and I went end over end. By the time I had slowed down a bit I had pulled my rip cord. One long pull. I was jerked straight up and down as the silk billowed open and I breathed a prayer of thanks for that. The pilot and copilot left just after I did; by the time I was able to get straight, they were also floating down. Ten billowy parasols floating earthward. So far we were all okay. The plane did a 360 turn to the left with its engines winding up and then it hit the earth. Seconds after we saw the smoke and flame, the muffled roar reached our ears and then all was quiet. Deathly quiet."

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Navigator Carl Rudolph described the end of "Liberty Belle" thus:

"All this time we headed south, west of Lake Balaton and then over the border to the nearest Partisan area in Yugoslavia. The last check point I remember was the junction of two rivers (the Mura and the Drava), which marked the boundary between Yugoslavia and Hungary. Ten minutes later we passed a few miles west of Koprivnica and bailed out in the hills. Martin was the first out, then Corbo (flight engineer), myself, Maes and last, Merritt."

"My chute snapped open on the second tug, and then I was hanging in a straight line with the rest as the 'Liberty Belle' sped away. Two more 'chutes popped after me - then the plane slowly banked to the left and appeared as though it might be coming around after us, but it continued to turn and finally plunged into the side of a mountain in a ball of flame. We had ring-side seats for that sight - and so ended the combat career of the Liberty Belle."

What happened to Arthur Johnson after he landed? Resuming his story, this is what he related:

"By the time the plane hit, the first man was on the ground. I came down in the top of a high tree and after climbing to the lowest limb, was still about 30 feet from the ground. I could just reach around the rest of the tree trunk, so I slid down and fell the rest of the way. What should I do now? We had been briefed for such an occasion. My chute was out of reach so I could forget retrieving it. Down the hill I could see the edge of a small town, so I started walking, but just for a short distance, for I heard someone coming. I had loaded my .45 and placed it on 'safety' as I hid in the bushes with my gun ready for use. A man came along the crest of the hill watching both ways and how he spotted me I don't know, but he did. He didn't take his gun from his shoulder where it was slung, so I guessed that he was a Partisan. He whispered: 'Amerikanski?', and after I nodded, he motioned to follow him.

We kept along the crest of the hill at a quick pace and then down towards the west. We met another Partisan accompanying the ball gunner and the navigator. The Partisans tried to talk with us and by signs we were able to get across that there were ten of us. We took off with one guide. We all had our .45's and our guide unslung his gun and motioned single file and quiet. After two hours of fast walking and trotting we came to a break in the trees and our guide motioned us to follow low and fast. We crossed a

couple of hundred yards to a corn field and stopped there to rest. Our guide pointed backwards and said 'Germanski' and ahead 'Partisani'. We knew then that we had been in German territory but were now in a Partisan sector.

After about another hour's walk we came to a group of houses, and were taken to one we judged to be headquarters. There we met the rest of the crew except the tail gunner. By speaking what little German we knew and using sign language, we made them understand we didn't want to go on until we found out what had happened to the tail gunner. Orders were given which we didn't understand and then we were taken to a home and given the first taste of Yugoslavian food. Black bread and soup, and that was to be our main diet for the next seven weeks."

"We were tired and glad to sleep even if it was on the straw spread over the dirt floor. The next morning at three we were roused by an excited Partisan and we knew that trouble was brewing. 'Germanski', 'Germanski' was all that we could understand. We tightened the laces on our shoes and followed him into the cold, misty, early morning air. It was foggy and pitch dark so in single file and close to one another, we played follow-the-leader. By the time it began to get light we had covered about six miles over some pretty rough country. We hadn't spoken a word in that time and so when our guide stopped we began to question him. The Germans were coming to look for us. We still hadn't found out what had happened to the tail gunner. It was Sunday morning but we weren't going to church for we still had four hours to walk before we rested and had something to eat."

"At about 10:30 we climbed a hill and just over the crest there was a small town. Perhaps I should say, what was left of a town. It was but a skeleton. Ugly walls jutted heavenward marring the beauty of the landscape and those few houses that had a roof on were hardly fit to live in. The Germans had dive-bombed the town and then strafed. This, we were to find out later, was the picture that was to greet our eyes each time we entered a town. Here we met a Partisan that could speak some English. This old lady had walked some fifteen miles since the night before in order to speak with us. From her we learned the story of this one town. We saw the remains of the house her relatives had lived in. They had died in the bombing. Her story could be repeated thousands of times and all would be strikingly similar. Unnecessary destruction of a helpless and conquered people by the Germans."

"That afternoon the ball gunner and I went with a Partisan to another town. He gave us an idea of what we could expect. Only three days walk and then a plane would come to pick us up. We were all encouraged. At this town they held a Partisan Congress and I had the pleasure of speaking a few words. Our interpreter, Mr. Magdich, was very gracious to us and gave us the highlights of the various speeches. I told them that we appreciated their help to all American and Allied airmen and that in Italy the Allied Government was doing all they could to secure supplies to be dropped into their sectors.

That night at six o'clock we started our journey which we hoped would end in just three days. We didn't know that it would rain and with it our chances of getting out soon. By seven o'clock it was raining and we were a bit down. By ten we were covered with mud from top to bottom and kept moving even though it was so dark that we couldn't see our hands in front of our faces. It was still drizzling. We had been going up-hill on our hands and knees at times and sliding down the other side only to continue uphill once again. At about eleven we crossed a railroad track and at midnight we stopped at a house reached by taking a step forward and sliding two backwards and ended up crawling on our hands and knees. We had some hot soup and though wet and cold we laid down on the floor; before long we were asleep.

At one o'clock the Partisan scout returned and we started to walk again. It had stopped raining and the moon was shining so it made the going easier. By four in the morning, Monday, October 9, we met up with a wagon train that

was taking some things to the airfield. Although we welcomed the ride, it had started to rain, making it impossible at times for the horses to move, so we alternately walked and rode until daylight. It was raining steady again, so the wagons stopped for awhile. We were tired, but after a rest we continued until almost noon. We came to a small town where we had a chance to dry our clothes, especially our shoes and socks. At two we were off again, thankful that it wasn't raining and that we were partly dry. We also had something in our stomachs: a couple of apples, some bread and a drink of water."

"By nightfall we had crossed into another corps area so we had a new guide; however our old one also stayed with us. We stopped to rest the horses and gave them something to eat. All night long we kept moving; part of the time we would ride and then at other times we would leave the wagons in order to circle around a town. This kept up until it was just getting light. We were on the wagons and were told that the airfield was just a few kilometers away. But our gay spirits soon hit rock-bottom for tracers started coming over the hill. More trouble. The wagons turned around and went back to the small town. The Partisans unloaded the wagons in a shed and then the empty wagons hurriedly left. Our guide took us to a house and told the lady to prepare something to eat. In about a half an hour he came back and we left in a hurry. We back-tracked a couple of miles and then started to circle around the area where the gun fire was heard and where there was still occasional rifle fire. From our guide we learned the 'Ustashi' had moved in and taken both the town and the airfield, therefore we continued to the next town.



1- One of the crew members giving a speech to Partisans

About noon we were almost at the town when we arrived at a farm house. Our guide sent us up into the loft of the barn and told us to lie down. We were glad to, for we were still chilled and our clothes were wet. The sun was warming up the air a bit so we went to sleep. About two in the afternoon our guide returned and we had a good dinner of cottage cheese, hot bread, and real country butter and then we were off again. That was the last stop we made until about six.

That night we came to a fair-sized town. There we were entertained like kings and were told it was about 20 kilometers to the next town where the

airfield was located. From nine p.m. to about three a.m. we rode in a wagon while it rained and drizzled. We were rewarded though, for when we got to this town we found it was headquarters and they were prepared for us. We had steaks, and did they ever taste good. We were glad to stretch out on the straw spread over the floor and get some sleep. We were bedded-down in five rooms of the barracks and were thus undisturbed for a few hours.

We awakened about 10 a.m. and wandered outside to see what kind of a town we were in. Wednesday morning the sun was shining brightly and it felt good to let it warm our bones."

"At about noon an interpreter came from the airfield and we started what we hoped would be our last mile - it was actually about five. There we were met by an English captain who saw to it that we had a place to sleep and took our names and some additional information. He left us with the promise that this information would be radioed to Italy immediately. We felt better."

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"We stayed at this field for the rest of the week hoping that the rain would stop and permit rescue aircraft to land, but no luck. Men from two other crews joined us on Sunday the 15th and on Wednesday we headed south again in hopes of making the coast. From Sunday night till Wednesday when we arrived at this airfield we had traveled approximately 75 miles measured in a straight line. By road we had covered about 150 miles. We didn't know at the time what we were to encounter; if we had, we probably would have given up long before we started. Ahead of us were two 36 mile forced marches, part of the time under fire. There were 26 of us that made those miles, and each mile saw 26 men wishing it was the last. Rain, mud, cold, little food, no sleep; it all added up to make each step harder to make. The first march carried us over the main rail lines between Belgrade and Zagreb (after the Partisans had blown up the train and track) and over two rivers. It started at six in the evening and at noon the next day we stopped across the river. Most of the time we were in danger of being attacked. The second march started after one night's sleep and it took us across another river and two railroads after we traveled one day and one night. I don't know what happened the last eight hours of that march. The flu had caught up with me and was doing its best to put me out of action. We were still 200 miles from the coast after walking most of the previous 250 miles. Fortunately, the next 200 miles we were to be transported by truck. On the 22nd of November we reached the coast and were taken aboard a British Flak Cruiser. On the 24th we crossed the Adriatic by P.T. boat and on the 26th we were back in our squadron ready to come home. Behind us were seven weeks of experiences that were fast becoming only dreams."

Carl Rudolph's account was similar to Arthur Johnson's to the point when the crewmen were being divided in Dubrava. John Merritt and Carl Rudolph had the good fortune of staying with a local doctor. On or about the 24th of October he and his companions joined a small army of Partisans and moved out of Miklous later that afternoon. The following interesting passages are from Carl Rudolph's account:

"As usual, the weather turned bad and it rained the whole night. The night was so dark I could not see my hand in front of my face. We walked along with hands on each other's shoulders in order to keep in contact. Early on the morning of the 25th we reached Popovac and slept in a house on the floor. The next morning I awakened with chickens walking all over me, the ones that lay eggs. We didn't have eggs for breakfast, however, but ate some pig lard mixed in corn meal - not very appetizing."

Early on the morning of the 26th they were on the move again and reached Srp Selisce in the afternoon. The following day the Partisans killed a cow and they enjoyed the steaks so much that even the sound of machine-gun fire had little effect since they were stuffing their mouths with steaks.

Rudolph mentioned Garesnica, the town they reached by night, "..and remained there for approximately a week. Our stay here was uneventful except for a chicken dinner I had one afternoon at a local farm house. Another day we heard some shots but it was only a few soldiers chasing an escaped pig which was about to be slaughtered."

He also wrote about Merritt's hand that had become infected for which he was sent to a hospital near Topusko, about five miles west of Glena. Merritt stayed there about a week and came back with his hand in good shape and in much better humor.

Arthur Johnson concluded his account with these lines: "Today I look back on these experiences and know that through no power within myself I am at home. God in a marvelous way kept His guiding and protecting hand over us."

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After Janez Žerovc looked through all of the information received recently from various parts of Yugoslavia and had selected the most important items for our "Liberty Belle" chapter, we paid a visit to the individuals who had supplied us with the information so that we could verify and check their statements. It was only after this effort was satisfactorily completed that we decided to invite the Merritts to come to Yugoslavia to visit the plane crash site.

It had taken us more than a year to get everything ready before we finally shook hands with the Merritts at the Hotel Intercontinental in Zagreb on September 2, 1986.

Yugoslavia at last! Destination: Koprivnica.



2- Father and son on the outskirts of the town

While Jim drove their rented car his father studied the villages, hamlets, scattered homesteads and people with much interest. He was impressed by the sight of endless fields of corn ripening under a flawless September sky. In 1944 the countryside reminded John Merritt of Piedmont, Virginia, and now his son remarked likewise. John did not remember Vrbovec, Dugo selo, or Krizevci, because 43 years ago he walked past them at a safe distance, avoiding the strong enemy outposts.

The editor of the local newspaper, Dragan Desnica, informed the townpeople of our arrival. Among those present were Partisans, including Branko Vitanovic, who was the commander of this area during the war and whose responsibility it was to take care of the Allied airmen. Our visit was not an official one, it was just a relaxed meeting with the Allies who shared the same destiny with the Partisans so many years ago. Journalists and photographers of several newspaper editorial offices and a TV news crew were present to record an exceptional meeting in a cordial atmosphere.

Jim Merritt described their meeting with all these people in his article published in the Princeton Alumni Weekly. "Edi Selhaus' articles have made my father a celebrity, and his appearance is a media event. Newspaper reporters and photographers and a TV news crew follow us into a meeting hall where we assemble around a large table with officials of the local veterans

organization and the first of several former Partisans who assisted in the crew's rescue. After exchanging war stories, we toast the occasion with a round of 'rakija', an indigenous plum brandy with the clarity and potency of pure grain alcohol. 'I am very grateful for the assistance we got here in October 1944', my father tells them. 'Without it, we might not be here today'."

Branko Vitanovic, who was commander of the Kalnik area, said:

"There were many Allied soldiers crossing our area. Some of them were escapees from German captivity, others were airmen. A lot of them came from nearby Slovenia by courier connection. They were Englishmen, Americans, Frenchmen, and Russians. Some of them were also wounded. I remember a wounded American airman who was not from your bomber. He died and was buried in Poganjac. We helped all of them with clothes, food, and medical treatment. But our prime purpose was to escort them safely to the next area. I remember the crewmen that bailed out over Koprivnica quite well. 'Tito - Partisans' were the most frequent words we uttered as we did not know any English. One of them gave me his Colt in exchange for an Italian Beretta."

"Tell the airmen in America that the Partisans of Kalnik area send them greetings hoping to see them here in Yugoslavia. We will receive them with hospitality as we had received them long ago, but this time, to our pleasure, it would be in different circumstances."

More people and cars started to accompany us and the reporters, anxiously waiting for the meeting between the rescuers and the Liberty Belle crewmen. At Suka's house four generations of Suka's women - his aged, black-shawled mother-in-law, and his wife, daughter, and granddaughter - were waiting for us. Milan Suka was among the first Partisans who ran towards the parachutists to help them. It is true that Milan and John did not recognize each other, but from the ensuing conversation during which details of the 1944 event were described, it was obvious that they were talking about the same things. Their greetings, handshakes, laughter and pleasure was followed by the surprise of the evening: the hostess served the guests real "podravski struklji" (similar to hot strudel). They were baked and this was a dish that none of the guests had ever forgotten. Everybody who had described dramatic moments of the past war did not forget to write down: immemorable "struklji" in Yugoslavia, in times when there was scarcely any food for survival.



3-First meeting between John Merritt (l) and ex-Partisan Zarko Gudek (r).

Next, the entourage visited Zarko Gudek in Koledinac where festivities were being prepared in honor of the Merritts arrival. Zarko and John looked at each other for a moment and then they flung themselves into a warm embrace. Zarko exclaimed:

"How are you, my comrade, I'm so happy to see you here among us, so glad you managed to visit us so that we could reminisce about those hard times, but at the same time good times, when you in America and we in Yugoslavia fought for the same cause."

Everybody was listening attentively while Zarko was recalling the events of October 7, 1944:

"I and my comrades came from Vrhovec and rested on the peak of the mountain above Subotica. As we curiously watched the waves of American bombers returning from Austria, I noticed a plane that was flying well behind the others and much lower than the rest. Anticipating that the plane would probably crash on or near the border between Ustashi and Partisan territories I stationed my men strategically for a rescue attempt.

Moments later some parachutes ballooned in the air, so I turned to my comrade, Feliks Kucan, who I knew was the fastest. I ordered him to run quickly to our headquarters to get some extra help lest the parachutists fall into enemy hands. Feliks did not have to run all the way for he met a group of his comrades half way there. When they returned, I organized them and asked the natives to cooperate with us. There was hardly any time left as we heard that the enemy was close. In record time all nine parachutists were collected except for the tenth one for whom we were a little too late. It was the tail gunner, Carver, who fell into the Ustashi zone and was captured."



4-Partisan Zarko Gudek at the time of the rescue.

Then Zarko left the guests alone for awhile, but soon he returned with a gold lapel pin that is a facsimile of Tito's signature. He pinned it onto John's jacket, saying: "Tito! Tito was a word of recognition, so let this lapel pin be yours in memory of the statesman who was also respected and appreciated in the USA."

In the "Princeton Alumni Weekly" Jim Merritt wrote: "The late communist leader is Yugoslavia's George Washington and Abraham Lincoln wrapped into one, and as in almost all of the houses we visit, an official portrait of him hangs on the wall. My father is a staunch Republican - In October 1944, when Partisans shouted at the Americans 'Roosevelt! Roosevelt!' he would shout back 'Dewey! Dewey!' - and no lover of the communist system. Nonetheless, he finds much to admire in the courage of the Yugoslavs, who alone among the East European communists declared their independence from Moscow following the war."

"You are the only country I know that told both Hitler and Stalin to go to hell," he tells them now. "What other country can say that?"

At parting, Zarko's strong arms embraced John. John then hurried to his car and unpinned from his jacket a badge representing "Liberator", the plane he had flown in, and pinned it to Zarko's shirt.

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The news of the American's arrival at Koprivnica spread throughout the area, reaching many who had been in contact with them during the war. There were so many invitations to people's homes that it was absolutely impossible to visit all of them. As several American Liberators had crashed in this area, it did not matter which specific airmen were visiting; the only thing that mattered to them was the fact that they were Americans. But on the other hand, Merritt could not refuse visiting those persons who he first made contact with during the war. One of them was Milka Drazina from Podravska Subotica who, before their arrival, described her initial contact with Merritt to Janez and me:

"It was beautiful, sunny weather and we were in the middle of the grape harvest. The grapes were plentiful. Among the vines people were laughing and singing merrily, as cheerful as everybody usually was during the vintage season. We were already used to the airplanes flying above us. We liked watching them because they represeneted hope for us, for our people, and the end of the war seemed to be so very near. After another hour we heard the planes once more, but this time something unusual happened: one of the airplanes was flying low and soon afterwards we heard it crash in the nearby forest. At the same time we caught sight of some parachutists. One of them (possibly bombardier Keith Martin) landed right in front of Kosuta's wine-cellar, which he entered after he got rid of his chute. In the cellar was a large vessel full of fermenting grape juice; he ladled some of the new wine with a small pail and drank some of it. He was a tall and handsome man. The other (radioman Robert Wheeler), who landed not far from us, had cut his hand. His wound was treated and bandaged by a native woman who was picking grapes. They were young boys, a little excited but glad that everything turned out well. We kept smiling at one another and repeating the words that the Americans used when they spoke to us."

If they really come to Yugoslavia, she said, you ought to bring them to this place. "We would be most happy to see them again. Give them our best regards," she added at our parting.

Milka anxiously awaited for them on the threshold of her home, hoping to recognize the Americans that she met so long ago. When they finally arrived, she stretched her arms towards John. They faced each other for a moment and then embraced each other heartily.

Then Milka brought a piece of iron from somewhere. It was the object her father had found in the woods where the plane had crashed. They all had a look at the souvenir that Milka had kept in her house for 40 years. When John confirmed that the piece of iron really belonged to the crashed plane, she felt happy. Like the others, she asked Jim and John to tell the rest of the crew that they were all invited to come and visit her.

Our next stop was Bjelovar where we were expected by a physician, Dr. Lidija Jezek-Chytil. Carl Rudolph and John Merritt found safe shelter during the war in the house of her father, who had died several years after the war. The elder Dr. Chytil spoke excellent English and was a Partisan sympathizer. He was pleased to host the two airmen who brought additional news from the outside world. That particular evening had included the luxuries of a hot bath and the only decent meal during John's 49 days in Yugoslavia.

Lidija took the day off for this occassion. Although she was only 10 years old, she remembered and related many details from that first meeting. John Merritt praised the good doctor and was grateful for his help in risking his own life as well as the lives of his family.

Lidija showed them a big map on which her father, after listening secretly to the radio news, used to draw the Allied fronts in the east and the west. She surprised everyone when she placed a tiny pocket compass in a brass casing in front of John Merritt. It was the gift that John had given her father more than 40 years ago. At parting, Lidija was invited to come and visit the Merritts if ever she came to the USA.

Our next destination was Gazma, center of Croatian resistance, where the Liberty Belle crewmen stayed for several days. It was also the location of an airfield originally used by Partisan airplanes prior to use by Allied aircraft. But at that particular time, as if pre-ordained, the planes could not risk landing because the ground was too soft due to several days of continuous rainfall. We found a cottage where the British Military Mission was headquartered. John Merritt and his comrades had reported there every day, eagerly trying to find information on their departure time.

We visited Glina, a liberated town near Sisak, where the Americans also stayed for a few days, and where John Merritt talked to Randolph Churchill (the son of the late prime minister Winston Churchill) who commanded a joint Allied mission. John Merritt also recalled seeing a movie film starring Robert Young at Glina.

Photographers, reporters, journalists and TV cameramen followed us continuously. They were rewarded when we came to a place called Vrhovec - where the crewmen first realized they were safe after parachuting and where they spent the first night. People in their vineyards and fields stopped working in order to greet John Merritt. They all assembled around us: the old and the young. At the sight of 10-year-old boys, John said: "Unbelievable and yet true - we Americans could not believe that even such boys could fight, carry heavy arms, and continue battle after battle.."

One of the persons present motioned to a small house and told us an old cowshed previously stood there. The Americans were supposed to have hidden there on their first night. John stepped aside from the group and viewed the fenced yard as he tried to remember the place, but replied he really could not remember if that was the place where they had stayed overnight. He had some recall after Tina Pariz told him some details.

There were both old and new stories, including some that were obviously invented. Jim wrote everything down in his notebook, remarking that if all of the data were in accordance with what the crewmen stated, there should be some truth in them.

The villagers were loafing about despite the fact that their work-day had been interrupted. Some offered to accompany us to the site of the crashed plane. John and Jim became almost impatient - they wanted to get to the crash site as soon as possible. No wonder, for that was the prime purpose of their journey, which had been planned several months in advance.



5- L-R: Janez Žerovc, Jim & John Merritt, Branko Rerak at the crash site

We all agreed on the villagers' proposal to take Drago Handzek and Branko Herak from Vrhovec with us. Our convoy of cars drove along a steep logging road that led us deep within a lovely beech and oak forest. We parked our cars at the end of the road and followed Branko and Drago on foot. We hiked along the ridge through an undergrowth of grass and ferns and, after a few minutes, paused at the top of a ravine.

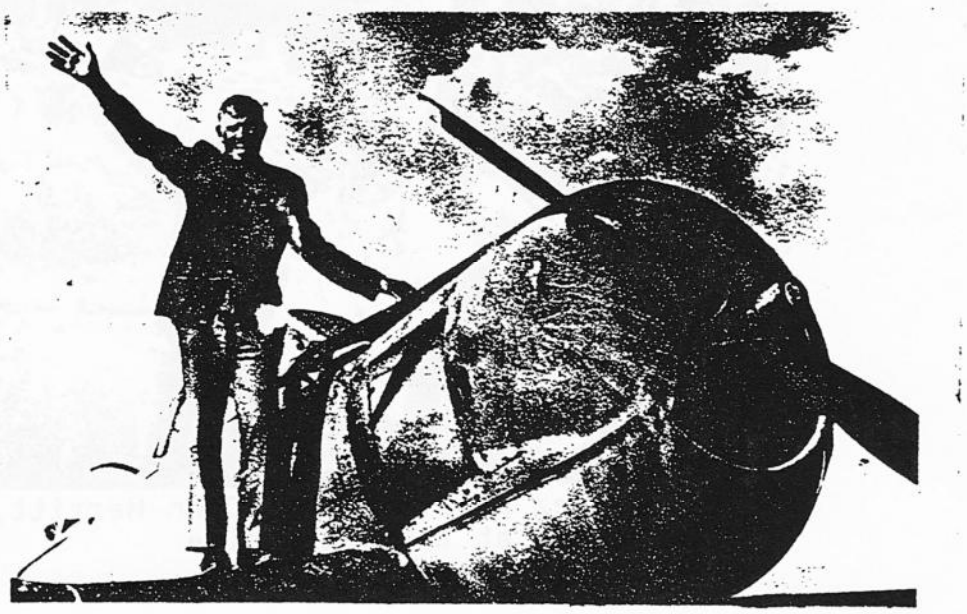
John and Jim were silent and I perceived that John was excited. He could not hide his excitement even as he tried to pretend to keep cool. We stopped at a place where the forest thinned. At that point our two guides exclaimed in unison: "We are there. This is the place where the plane crashed!" We stood still in silence; we examined the crash sight for any traces of the wreckage that would confirm that statement. Then Branko told us that the last large part of the bomber, a wheel, was removed some years ago.

Janez interpreted what had just been said. John listened attentively without moving. God knows where his thoughts were at that moment. To the repeated question, if there were any doubts, he finally answered: "Yes, I'm sure we are at the right place." Then he waved toward the trees that were perhaps half the height of the other trees which reached upwards of 60 feet in the surrounding forest. Soon afterwards, everyone was among the bushes, shrubbery, and trees, looking for the tiniest remains of the plane. The only one who did not search for anything was John. He stood at one of the trees and stared past us for a long time. No one, not even his son, wanted to disturb him. As I watched him I felt I knew what he was thinking; yes, more than 40 years ago he was really lucky: first, that he did not die in the plane, and second, that he had landed among the Partisans. While everyone was feverishly searching, John remained motionless and buried in deep thought. I do not know if he believed in God, but I think he was praying, giving thanks for being endowed with good luck. His son Jim was only six months old when his father first met the Partisans; and now he was here to write his father's story.

My thoughts turned back to the times when I was a Partisan in Skofja Loka woods, in Primorska, Bela Krajina, amidst the merciless war. "Eddy," I said to myself, "you too were lucky, otherwise you would not be here today."

John snapped out of his thoughts as I approached and became the old John that I gotten to know during our trip. There was, however, one change he could not hide - his eyes were moist. Then he smiled again and, slapping me on the back, said: "Eddy, it's a nice day today, isn't it?"

After returning to America Jim Merritt wrote of their impressions of their stay in Yugoslavia with a long article in the October 29, 1986 issue of the Princeton Alumni Weekly.



John Merritt's Farewell to Yugoslavia in 1986

Art Johnson's MIA experience with Merritt's crew:

The war experiences as written in 1945 by Arthur R. Johnson upon his return to the United States following seven weeks of being "Missing In Action" from October 7, 1944 to November 25, 1944.

"Carol Tower - Carol Tower this is Green Light Baker Box. Give landing instructions.-over"

"Green Light Baker Box this is Carol Tower. Here are your instructions---Wind 300 degrees - ten miles - circle field once - form pattern to the left - over."

"Carol Tower - This is Green Light Baker Box - Roger -Wilco and out"

Six planes with sixty hungry, tired men; but before they could eat and rest they had a lot of work to do. Immediately they were taken from the area where the parked their respective planes to Group Briefing Room, and there they told intelligence all that had happened in the preceding seven hours. Here is their story: We took off at 1000 hours and after forming into formation we headed northeast across the Adriatic. By the time Yugoslavia unrolled beneath us we were up to 15, 000 feet. Off to the our right there were a few bursts of flak. Gentle reminders to keep distance. All went well and after two hours flight we started up to "Altitude". 1300 hours and we were at 21,000 feet which was our bombing altitude. Far ahead to our left on the horizon we could see a black cloud. That we knew was Vienna, and we would soon fly through that cloud. No fighters-just flak, and plenty of it but we came through with only a few holes.

"When did you last see Merritt in "Liberty Belle" Ship # 425?"

That question was asked of every man that flew in that formation and the conclusion that C-2 formed is as follows;

> "One a/c is missing and was last seen at 1347 hours at the target. It left formation by peeling off to the left. A/C was in no apparent trouble. Personnel casualties were ten crew members missing in action."

Those men who had brought this report back trouped out of that building not as gay as they were when they came in, for another crew was gone. They were hungry, but they couldn't eat. They were tired but they couldn't sleep. Why? They wondered if they would be next.

For those ten men from 1347 hours on, they had their hands full, and it was there lot to embark on an experience not soon forgotten. So turn back in your thinking with me and I'll take you aboard "Liberty Belle"-Plane # 425 on the 7th of October 1944 at 1347 hours. I was at the left waist gun and with one hand I held my gun, the other I tossed out "window" or "chaff". It was metallic paper used to throw off anti aircraft guns. The bombardier had released the bombs and we were turning away from Vienna. I could see below me smoke rising from the "Winter Haven Oil Works" and I knew our bombs had hit their mark. We had flown through the worst of the flak, and though still watchful, I sighed a bit for this was my third time in the vicinity of Vienna, and I knew about where the flak began and ended. This time it hadn't ended. One gun was still putting it up and it had our range down pat, for just after I sighed, four explosions in quick succession jared me.

That was the moment I had prayed would never come, and now after 27 missions here it was. The gun was knocked out of my hand and I hit the floor hard. The right gunner did likewise. My oxygen hose pulled apart, but I didn't realize it for a moment, but only for a moment for there was something to do if it wasn't too late, and if so, it was

time to get out. Luckily my headset stayed connected and the pilots voice came over it. "Is everyone okay?" By that time my flak suit was out the window and my oxygen mask off my face, and I was back on my feet. I signaled the tail gunner and hollered at the ball gunner and then pressed by mike button to call the pilot.

"Pilot from left waist--every one okay back here. #3 engine throwing oil and smoke--#4 dead, holes in flaps and wings over."

In just a matter of minutes, even seconds, all of this happened and more. For later we were able to piece together what had happened.

The first burst of flak exploded directly in front of the plane and the force of it took the top off the nose turret. The second burst came through and cut the nose-wheel and tire in two and in general made a mess of the Bombardier's compartment. It cut interphone lines to the nose of the plane and also the oxygen lines. The bombardier was wasn't hurt. The third burst ripped up the under side of the right wing and exploded in the #4 engine. That accounted for the holes through the wing and flaps. It caused a temporary loss of control by the pilot but after falling from 18,000 feet to about 10,000 feet, the pilot and co-pilot had control of the plane again. They used flaps in order to compensate for lose of air foil and the co-pilot was kept busy keeping the props at the right RPM, for the first bursts had damaged all of the prop governors. The fourth and last burst entered through the bomb bay and cut through the wing root. It made a hole big enough to crawl through and that metal is approximately two inches thick at that place. The ball gunner was about a yard away and was not scratched. That is just a portion of the damage to the plane.

Immediately we began to strip and throw out everything that was loose. Ammunition, guns, flak suits, just everything that was loose.

That helped, but with only one engine pulling full power is was not enough to overcome the drag caused by the flak damage. We flew for an hour and then the pilot called on interphone to prepare to bail out. Each one of us checked our parachutes to make sure they were tight and then the word "Bail out and good luck".

The bombardier, engineer and navigator went out the bomb bay. The radio operator had come back to the waist to help throw things out so was the first out the camera hatch and to speed him up we pushed him. Then in quick succession the right waist gunner, tail and ball gunner left and I was alone in the back. The pilot and co-pilot were up front. I faced the front of the ship and put my head between my knees and out I went, of course that was but a second or two after the ball gunner left. The slip stream caught me and I went end for end. By the time I had slowed down a bit I had pulled my rip cord--one long pull. I was jerked straight up and down as the silk billowed open and I breathed a prayer of thanks for that.

The pilot and co-pilot left just after I did for by the time I was able to get straight, they were floating down also. Ten billowy white parasols floating earthward--we were all okay so far.

The plane did a 360 to the left with its engines winding up and then it hit the earth, seconds after, we saw the smoke and flame. The muffled roar reached our ears and then all was quiet--deathly quiet.

(2)

We were at about four thousand feet indicated and the hills were about fifteen hundred so it did not take long to get down. By the time the plane hit, the first man was on the ground. I came down in the top of a high tree and after climbing down to the last limb, I was still up about thirty feet. I could just reach around the tree so the rest of the way I slid and fell.

What should I do now? We had been brief for such and occasion. My chute was out of reach so I could forget it. Down the hill I could see the edge of a small town so up I started but just a short distance I heard someone coming. My 45 I had loaded and placed on safety and now I hid myself in the bushes with my gun ready for use. A man came along the crest of the hill watching both ways. How he spotted me I don´t know, but he did. He didn´t take his gun from his shoulder where it was slung, so I guessed him to be a partisan. He whispered "Americanski" and after I nodded he motioned to follow him. We kept along the crest of the hill at a quick pace and then down towards the west. We met another partisan and the ballgunner and navigator. The parisians tried to talk with us and by signs we were able to get across that there were ten of us. With one guide we took off. All of us had our 45´s and our guide unslung his gun then motioned single file and quiet. After two hours of fast walking and trotting we came to a break in the trees and our guide motioned us to follow low and fast. We crossed a couple hundred yards to a corn field and there stopped to rest. Our guide pointed back and said "Germanski" and ahead Partisane". We know then that we had been in German held territory but were now in a Partisan sector. After about another hours walking we came to group of houses, and were taken to one we judged to be headquarters. There we met the rest of the crew except the tailgunner. By speaking what little German we know and using sign language we made them understand we didn´t want to go on until we had found out what happened to the tail gunner. Orders were given which we did not understand and then we were taken to a home and given the first taste of Yugoslavian food. "Black bread and soup", that was to be our main diet for the next seven weeks.

We were tired and glad to go to sleep even if it was on straw spread over the dirt floor. At three the next morning we were roused by an excited partisan and we knew that trouble was brewing. "Germanski" was all we could understand. We tightened the laces on our shoes and followed him into the cold misty early morning air. It was foggy and pitch dark so in single file close to one another we played follow the leader. By the time it began to get light we had covered about six miles over some pretty rough country. We hadn´t found out what had happened to the tail gunner. It was Sunday morning but we weren´t going to church for we still had four hours to walk before rest and something to eat.

At about ten thirty we climbed a hill and just over the crest there was a small town (now identified as Topolovac). Perhaps I should say what was left of a town. It was but a skeleton. Ugly walls jutted heavenward marring the beauty of the landscape and what few houses that had a roof on were hardly fit to live in. The Germans had dive bombed the town and then strafed. This, we were to find out later, was the picture that was to greet our eyes each time we entered a town.

Here we met a partisan that could speak some English. This old lady had walked some fifteen miles since the night before in order to speak to us. From her we learned the story of this one town. We saw the remains of the house where her relatives had lived. They had died in the bombing. Her story could be repeated thousands of times and all would be strikingly similar. Unnecessary destruction of a helpless conquered people by the Germans.

That afternoon the ball gunner and I went with a Partisan (now identified as Tomo Blazic) to another town (Ivanec Ludbreski). He gave us an idea of what we could expect. Only three days walk and then a plane would come pick us up. We were all encouraged. At this town they held a partisan congress and I had the pleasure of speaking a few words. Our interpreter, Mr. Magdich, was very gracious to us and gave us the highlights of the various speeches and business. I told them that we appreciated their help to all American and Allied airmen and that in Italy the Allied government was doing all they could to secure supplies to be dropped in to them. We were proud of the fight you are carrying on "Viva Yugoslavia".

That night at six o´clock we started our journey which we hoped would end in just three days. We didn´t know that it would rain and with it our chances of getting out soon. By seven o´clock is was raining and we were a bit down. By ten we were mud from one end to the other and had kept on the go even though it was so dark that we couldn´t see our hands in front of our faces. It was still drizzling. We had been going up hill on our hands and knees at times and sliding down the other side only to go up again. About eleven we crossed a railroad track and at midnight we stopped at a house reached by taking a step and sliding two back and ending up on our hands and knees. We had some hot soup and though wet and cold we lay down on the floor and before long were asleep. At one o´clock the partisan scout returned and we started on again. It had stopped raining and the moon shown so it made the going easier. By four in the morning, Monday, October 9, we met up with a wagon train that was taking some things to the airfield. We welcomed the ride though it started to rain making it impossible at times for the horses to move, so we walked and rode alternately till daylight. It was raining steady again so the wagons stopped for awhile. We were tired by after a rest, on we went and kept on till almost noon. We came to a small town and there we had a chance to dry our clothes, especially our socks and shoes. At two we were off again, thankful that it wasn´t raining and we were partly dry. We had something in our stomachs; a couple apples, some bread and a drink of water.

By night fall we had crossed into another corps area so we had a new guide but our old one stayed with us. We stopped to rest the horses and give them something to eat and we also had a bit to eat. All night long we kept moving part of the time we would ride and then at times we would leave the wagons and take off around a town. This kept up until it was just getting light. We were on the wagons and were told the air field was just a few kilometers away. Our gay spirits soon hit rock bottom for tracers started coming over the hill. More trouble. The wagons turned around and back to the small town we went. The parisians unloaded the wagons in a shed and the empty wagons hurriedly left. Our guide took us to a house and told the lady to prepare us something to eat. In about a half hour he came back and we left in a hurry. We back tracked a couple miles and then started

to circle around the area where the gun fire was heard and where there was still occasional automatic rifle fire. From our guide we learned the "Eustaci" had moved in and taken the town and the air field so we were going to the next one. About noon we were almost around the town when we came to a farm house. Our guide sent us up in the loft of the barn and told us to lie down. We were glad to for we were still chilled and our clothes were wet. The Sun was warming up the air a bit so we went to sleep. About two in the afternoon our guide returned and we had a good dinner of cottage cheese, hot bread, and real country butter, then we were off again. That was the last stop we made until about six. That night we came to a fair sized town. There we were entertained like kings and were told it was about 20 kilometers to the next town where the airfield was located. From nine until about three we rode in a wagon while it rained and drizzled. We were rewarded though for when we got to this town we found it was headquarters and they were prepared for us. We had steaks and did they taste good. We were glad to stretch out on the straw spread over the floor and get some sleep. We were bedded down in five rooms of the barracks so were undisturbed. About ten we woke and wandered out to see what kind of town it was. Wednesday morning, the sun was shining brightly and it felt good to let it warm our bones. About noon an interpreter came from the air field and we started what we hoped would be our last mile---it was actually about five. There we were met by an English Captain who saw to it we had a place to sleep. He took our names and some additional information and left us with the promise that this would be radioed to Italy immediately. We felt better.

Rain kept us from leaving and so for the rest of the week we stayed at this field waiting but no luck. Parts of two crews joined us on Sunday the 15th and on Wednesday we headed south again in hopes of making the coast--to much rain to bring a plane in. In a straight line from Sunday night till Wednesday when we arrived at this airfield we had covered about seventy five miles. By the road, we had covered about one hundred and fifty miles. We didn't know it at the time, for if we had we would probably have given up, but we had ahead of us two 36 mile forced marches to make, part of the time under fire. There were twenty six of us that make those miles. Each mile say another twenty six men wishing it were the last. Rain, mud, cold, little food, no sleep all add up to make each step harder to make. The first march carried us over the main rail lines between Belgrade and Zagreb, after the Partisians had blown up the train and track, and over two rivers. Most of that time we were in danger of being attacked. It started at six in the evening and at noon the next day we stopped across the second river. The second march started after one nights sleep and it took us across another river and two railroads after going one day and one night. I don't know what happened the last eight hours of that march. The flu had caught up with me and was doing its best to put me out of the way. We were still two hundred miles from the coast after walking most of the two hundred miles we had traveled. Fortunately the last on hundred miles were covered by truck.

On the 22nd of November we reached the coast and were taken aboard a British Flak Cruiser. On the 24th we crossed the Adriatic by P.T. boat and on the 26th we were back to our Squadron. Behind us were seven weeks of experiences that were fast becoming only dreams.

We had met and talked with the youngest person in the Partisian Army. He was only a boy of thirteen and had been in the army since he was nine years old. At that age he, with several others including his father, was herded into one of the village churches and then the Germans threw hand grenades in on them and machine gunned them. Before his father had died he told his son to fall to the floor and then escape if possible. That night he crawled to safety and escaped to the hills to join the Partisan army.

Old men were in that army who could hardly walk. Young women as well. Every one that was physically capable and many that looked as if they were not capable seemed to be in the army.

Today, I look back on these experiences and know that through no power within myself I am home. God in a marvelous way kept HIS guiding and protecting hand over us. My favorite portion of the Bible is the 91st Psalm. It was an inspiration to read this chapter and know that through faith it was so. Prayer at the time of trouble was essential but I feel that prayer before is more essential. Loved ones and friends at home that carried the burden of prayer are now reaping their reward by the return of loved one´s, for God´s guiding and protecting hand is over all. "Not my will, but thine be done" should always be our prayer. Words are to feeble and inadequate to express the thanks and gratitude for the prayers and burdens you carried and we who have returned, share your sorrow for those our buddies, we left over there.

There are many experiences that could be told and each one would end the same way. "All things are possible through Christ which strengtheneth me". It is my prayer that through these few, here related, your faith and trust in God shall be increased.

With permission of J. I. Merritt, author and ed. of "Princeton Alumni Weekly."

Return to Koprivnica

Jim Merritt '42 revisits the site where his B-24 crashed in World War II and meets with the former Partisans who helped him and his crew escape German-occupied Yugoslavia

J.I. MERRITT '66



The ex-pilot examines remaining parts of his plane

IN THE EYES of a son, a father's war stories take on the quality of myth. Growing up, I heard my father speak often of his last mission as the pilot of a B-24 bomber and of his 49 days as a downed airman in German-occupied Yugoslavia. During that entire period he was listed as missing in action. I was six months old at the time and with my mother in Texas, happily oblivious to it all.

For most of my life I knew the story only in its barest outline. The mission that day—October 7, 1944—was to bomb the oil refineries at Vienna. Anti-aircraft fire over the target was intense. The plane was hit by flak and three of its four engines were knocked out. Losing altitude quickly, it dropped behind the other formations returning to their bases in southern Italy, and limped across the Austrian border into Yugoslavia. My father and the other nine crewmen bailed out at an altitude of about 2,000 feet, parachuting into an area which they knew from intelligence reports to be controlled by Partisan guerrillas fighting for the Allied cause.

On the ground, the Partisans gathered all of the crew except for the tailgunner, who fell into enemy hands and spent the remainder of the war as a POW. The rest were sequestered in a barn for the night and awakened early the next morning for a pre-dawn dash to a more secure area. For the next seven weeks they made their way across Yugoslavia, mainly on foot or in horse-drawn carts, and usually at night to avoid detection by patrols of Germans or their quisling Yugoslav allies. They engaged the enemy several times, once while crossing a railroad when the Partisans blew up a train, and later when an ancient Junker Trimotor lumbered overhead and strafed them with machine gun fire.

On Thanksgiving Day they reached the newly liberated port of Zara and from there returned by boat to Italy, where the Air Force deloused and debriefed them; best of all, it decided they had been through enough for one war and returned them to the United States.

* * *

On New Year's Eve two years ago, my family and I were having dinner with my mother and father when the topic of Yugoslavia and the war came up again. I had just finished writing a book, my first, and had been pondering what topic I might find for a second.

"I wonder if there's something in this Yugoslavia business?" I said to my dad. "How much more do you think we could find out about what happened over there?"

The notion intrigued him, although we would be starting from the slimmest of knowledge bases. My father had stayed in touch with only two of his nine crewmen and during his stay in Yugoslavia had kept no diary or notes.

Neither of us had any idea how far the project would eventually take us. Over the next 20 months I would manage to collect a wealth of archival materials and to contact and interview all but two of the other crewmen, plus several other downed airmen who had joined them later in their journey. And last month, my father and I flew to Yugoslavia where we visited the site of his plane crash and met with former Partisans who had rescued him 42 years before.

OUR RESEARCH got off to a good start with Carl Rudolph, who had been the navigator in my father's crew. Rudy and my father have both lived in northern New Jersey since leaving the service at the end of World War II. Every year, they celebrate with their wives the October 7 anniversary of their last mission, sometimes going out to dinner dressed in their old uniforms.

When Rudy visited my parents' house to swap war stories with my father in

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Jim Merritt '66, the university's director of development communications, is a frequent contributor to PAW.

my presence, he brought along several artifacts, including the brass handle of his parachute ripcord and a Partisan cap given to him 42 years before. (Rudy had removed the red star, worrying that if captured by Germans he might be shot as a guerrilla.)

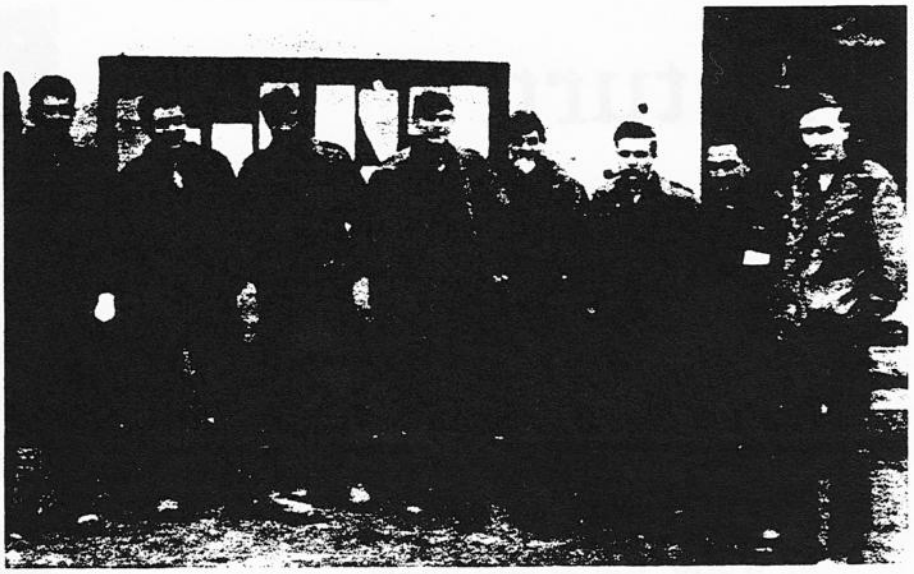
More important, he had with him a sheaf of faded legal pages covered with pencil writing—an account, entitled "The Walk Back," of their Yugoslavian ordeal written within a month of their return. He also had a map of Yugoslavia annotated with the route, dates, and highlights of their trek. It was the first time he had looked at these materials in perhaps 30 years, and poring over them opened a floodgate of memories for both Rudy and my father.

Additional information was soon forthcoming. I wrote to the Air Force Archives in Huntsville, Alabama, and within two weeks received photocopies of the debriefing reports filed on the crew's return to Italy. The National Archives in Washington provided additional documents, and in Firetone Library I found books describing the military and political scene in wartime Yugoslavia. Within a few months of starting my research I had a much more complete picture.

The bomber assigned to my father's crew on October 7 was named the *Liberty Belle*. It had crashed near Koprivnica, a provincial city in eastern Croatia close to the Hungarian border. From there the crew, joined by other downed airmen, had made their way gradually southwest to the Partisan-held town of Glina. Here they enjoyed the largesse, such as it was, of a joint Allied mission commanded by Randolph Churchill, Winston's obstreperous son. The mission also included the novelist Evelyn Waugh, whose diaries complain of Randolph's chronic drunkenness as well as the increasing numbers of American airmen the mission had to feed and shelter. (At that point in the war, an average of 14 heavy bombers were crashing each month in Yugoslavia.)

The political picture was awesomely complex, and few if any of the American airmen who found themselves in Yugoslavia understood it. Basically, they landed in an occupied country engaged in a murderous three-way civil war. (The 1.7 million Yugoslavians killed in World War II represented 11 percent of the population; of these, half died at the hands of other Yugoslavs.)

A centrist group known as the Chetniks supported the exiled King Peter. Opposing them were the Partisans under Tito, who would emerge as the postwar leader of a communist, nonaligned Yugoslavia. Although the Chetniks and Partisans regarded each other as the enemy, they occasionally joined forces to fight the occupying Germans. At other times, the Chetniks collaborated with the Germans in fighting the Partisans. In Croatia, the quisling Ustachi were in alliance with the Germans, fighting both the Chetniks and Partisans while simultaneously waging genocide against Serbians and other minorities in their territory.



Crew of the *Liberty Belle* after escape to Italy (Merritt on left)

Although I had made some progress, I knew that to flesh out the story further I would have to talk to other members of my father's crew. How to find them? Inquiries to the military records office for current addresses brought only a bureaucratic response—stating in effect that any information, even if known, was protected by privacy laws. Relying on the addresses contained in archival documents, I placed personal classifieds in local papers of communities where they had lived in 1944. To my astonishment I received two replies, one from upstate New York and the other from California. In both cases the men had long since moved away but still had relatives in their former hometowns. These two, in turn, were able to locate three others.

> "Before long I had made contact with eight of the 10 members of the *Liberty Belle* crew, plus three airmen from other crews that had been with them."

Before long I had made contact with eight of the 10 members of the *Liberty Belle* crew. (The remaining two have continued to elude me, although I have indirect evidence that they are still alive.) On a gray day last January I drove from my home near Princeton to Rensselaer, New York, to interview flight engineer Nick Corbo and the captured tail gunner, Gil Carver. Two months later, I flew to California to meet with the four crewmen living there—waist gunner Art Johnson, radioman Robert Wheeler, copilot Don Maes, and bombardier Keith Martin. Most were in their early- to mid-60s and recently retired from occupations that included electrician, postal worker, engineer, farmer, and teacher.

In addition to the eight *Liberty Belle* crewmen, I also located three airmen from other crews that had been with them in Yugoslavia. One of these lived in northern New Jersey and managed a catering business just a mile from my parents' home in Verona.

FROM THE BEGINNING of the project, my ultimate goal was to go to Yugoslavia with my father and retrace his route or at least visit the principal sites along it. Above all, I wanted to locate the site of the plane crash and recover some pieces from it if any remained. My father was doubtful.

"I don't see how we could ever find it," he said, pointing out that they had crashed in a remote wooded area. "We only had the foggiest idea where we were, and we were too busy getting the hell out of there to find out." I knew from the debriefing reports that the plane had gone down approximately 10 kilometers west of Koprivnica. According to the map, there were several villages in that general area, and perhaps by going to Yugoslavia we could find some older residents of

those villages who could guide us to the crash site. I remained concerned, however, that any such trip might turn into a wild goose chase. What we needed—and soon found—was someone in Yugoslavia to do the advance work for us.

Knowing of our project, a friend of my father showed him a notice in a veterans magazine about a Florida man named John Hribar, who was trying to locate former airmen who had parachuted into Yugoslavia. Writing to Hribar, I learned that he was a Yugoslav-American acting as an agent for a certain Edi Selhaus, a retired photojournalist in Ljubljana, the capital of the Yugoslav republic of Slovenia. It turned out that Selhaus had actually written a book about the rescue of American airmen in Slovenia. Furthermore, over the last decade he had succeeded in reuniting several airmen with their Partisan rescuers.

After I wrote him, Selhaus placed notices in newspapers and followed up with a series of articles about the *Liberty Belle* crew based on materials I had sent him from my own research. The response to the publicity was astonishing. Some 65 people wrote to him, not only from Croatia but from Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg, and even the United States. (Yugoslavians keep in touch, and local readers had sent copies of the articles to their émigré relatives.)

On his own initiative, Selhaus and a fellow enthusiast named Janez Zerovc visited Koprivnica to interview respondents, many of whom had vivid recollections of the plane crash and the crew's escape. When he sent me photographs—of former Partisans who had rushed to the airmen's rescue as they descended in their parachutes, of a woman who had been working in a vineyard where several of them had landed, and of a farmer holding a gear the size of a dinner plate removed from one of the *Liberty Belle*'s engines—I knew what my dad and I had to do.

EXHAUSTED from jet lag, my father and I stared dully from the Pan Am window as we approached the Zagreb airport. The hazy countryside looked more or less as I imagined it, a quilt-work of farm fields and woods interspersed with tile-roofed houses. I was thinking about the week ahead of us, not quite believing that we were actually in Yugoslavia, and trying to ignore a host of nagging concerns.

> "I worried, too, about how my father and I would get on with each other, given the uncertainties and inevitable tensions of a trip like this."

The trip's success or failure would rest largely on Selhaus and Zerovc, whom I had never met. Zerovc would be our interpreter; his native language was Slovene, and I had to assume that his knowledge of both English and Serbo-Croatian was adequate. I worried, too, about how my father and I would get on with each other, given the uncertainties and inevitable tensions of such a trip. Our relationship has always been good, but our interests and personalities are very different, and it had been nearly 30 years since we last spent time alone together.

A group of Yugoslav Partisans in December 1944



EDI SELHAUS

While I pondered these matters, the plane touched down and taxied to the terminal. My father was thinking what this airfield must have looked like 42 years ago, with Messerschmitts taking off from it.

The next morning, Edi Selhaus and Janez Zerovc took the train from Ljubljana and met us at our hotel in Zagreb. My concerns began to vanish as soon as we met them and reviewed our plans for the next several days. They had obviously done a great deal of work and were well organized. Moreover, it was immediately apparent that they were terrific guys whose company, in fact, we would come to enjoy immensely.

Like my father, Edi was in his mid-60s and semi-retired—a big man with a ready smile and slightly disheveled appearance. As a press photographer he had shot more than 2 million pictures in the course of his career, including some 4,000 as a Partisan photographer during the war. Janez was about my age (42) and the more taciturn of the two. He worked as an engineer in a tool-and-die factory and was a pilot by avocation, with a consuming passion for flying and World War II aviation.

Janez had sought out Edi more than 10 years ago after learning of his research into the rescue of airmen by Slovenian Partisans. With several like-minded enthusiasts he formed the Liberator Club, an organization dedicated to scouring the Julian Alps for the wreckage of B-24s and B-17s. They found many places where bombers had gone down, although little remained of them after 30 years. In every case, Janez told me, local villagers had descended on the wreckage "like ants," scavenging nearly everything. Pieces of wings and fuselages became roofs, gates, and barn doors, or were hammered into cooking utensils and plates.

The four of us proceeded in our rental car to Koprivnica, a two-hour drive through rolling hills and endless fields of corn ripening under a flawless September sky. In 1944 the countryside had reminded my father of Piedmont Virginia, and so it seemed to me now. Any differences between now and then related to prosperity. We drove on a paved road and passed tractors, and in the villages we noticed dogs. In 1944, all the roads were dirt and even draft animals were in short supply, having been commandeered for the war effort or slaughtered for food. One *Liberty Belle* crewman remembered a mother tilling a field with her daughter hitched to the plow. As for dogs, my father didn't see a single one during his stay—they had all been eaten.

THE TRIP begins in earnest on our arrival in Koprivnica, a provincial town dominated by a food-processing plant (the largest in Yugoslavia) with a giant wooden chicken outside it. Edi's articles have made my father a celebrity, and his appearance is a media event. Newspaper reporters and photographers and a TV news crew follow us into a meeting hall where we assemble around a large table with officials of the local veterans organization and the first of several former Partisans who assisted in the crew's rescue. After exchanging war stories, we toast the occasion with a round of *rakija*, an indigenous plum brandy with the clarity and potency of pure grain alcohol. "I am very grateful for the assistance we got here in October 1944," my father tells them. "Without it, we might not be here today."

We assemble outside for photographs, then proceed into the countryside to talk with others who played some role in the rescue and escape of the *Liberty Belle* crew. The people we meet on this and the next two days include:

- HILKA DRASINA, who on the day of the crash was making wine in a hillside vineyard with other women and children. They had watched, amazed, as two of the airmen floated down in their midst. The women gave the airmen wine and fruit and tended to the injured hand of radioman Robert Wheeler, who had cut himself while bailing out. She was 25 years old at the time and married to a Partisan fighting in another part of the country. Now widowed, she has a sweet smile and reddish-brown hair with no gray in it. Inside the house, she proudly shows us a display of her late husband's wartime medals. "He was a good soldier and a good farmer," she says. "I am all alone now, but this is the happiest day for me. I have been waiting 40 years to meet one of these Americans again."

- MILAN SUKA, a member of one of several Partisan units that formed a defensive perimeter against the Ustachi units bent on capturing the airmen. (As the crewmen descended in their parachutes, they heard ground fire and saw soldiers scurrying about and shooting; one of them assumed it was a training exercise.) We gather in the small family room of Suka's house for *rakija*, coffee, sliced ham, tomatoes, and strudel. Four generations of Suka women—his aged, black-shawled mother-in-law, and his wife, daughter, and granddaughter—are crowded in the doorway, looking on as we talk. Suka tells my father how pleased he is that all of his crew survived the war. "After you left this area, we talked many times about your escape and always wondered what had happened to you."

- ANDRIJA CELESCEK, another ex-Partisan, who was part of the brigade that escorted the crew south to Partisan headquarters at Casma. A small, erect man in a suit and tieless white shirt buttoned at the collar, he meets us in the local newspaper office. When I ask him one of my standard questions—Why did you join the Partisans?—he smiles. "That is a funny story." He tells us that he began the war as an Ustachi conscript and was later assigned to a Croatian unit attached to the German occupation force. There was little love lost between the Ustachi and Germans, whose alliance was largely a matter of convenience, and like most of his countrymen, Celescek deeply resented the German presence in Croatia. When he went home on a five-day leave, a German soldier was sent with him to make sure he didn't desert. Celescek plied his guard with *rakija* until he passed out, then stole his pistol, hopped on a bicycle, and peddled to the nearest Partisan recruiter to enlist. When the German awoke, he found himself a prisoner of Celescek and his new Partisan comrades.

> "The Partisans had formed a defensive perimeter against the Ustachi units that were bent on capturing the airmen descending in their parachutes."

- DR. LYDIJA CHYTIL, a physician in the town of Bjelovar. She was 10 years old when two American airmen—my dad and Carl Rudolph—had dinner at her home as a guest of her physician father. The elder Dr. Chytil spoke excellent English and was a Partisan sympathizer who followed the progress of the war on BBC broadcasts; it pleased him to host the two airmen who brought additional news from the outside world. The evening included the luxuries of a hot bath and the one decent meal my father ate during his 49 days in Yugoslavia. Forty-two years later, he is sitting at the same dinner table again, this time with the doctor's daughter, her physician husband, and their son, a pleasant young man in his third year of medical school at the University of Zagreb.

Their apartment is furnished with heirlooms and is comfortably bourgeois, and my father gladly accepts the scotch they offer in place of the ubiquitous *rakija*. Dr. Chytil reminisces about her father, who died several years after the war, and shows us an item that has remained in the family since 1944. It is a tiny pocket compass in a brass casing. About the size of a candy lifesaver, it came from Rudy's escape kit. He had presented it to her father in gratitude for his hospitality.

Perhaps our most memorable meeting takes place at the home of Zarko Gudek, who was chief of intelligence for the Partisans in this area when the *Liberty Belle* went down. Prior to our trip, Edi sent me a portrait of Gudek taken at the end of the war; in his Partisan uniform, he stares resolutely at the camera while holding a machine gun taken off a dead German—a central casting version of a guerrilla fighter. The young soldier in the photograph is still recognizable in the vigorous older man who greets us at his farmhouse. He wears a hearty grin and a striped shirt over his prosperous girth, and

Merritt and his rescuer Zarko Gudek at the end of the war





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Merritt's entourage confers on best route to the crash site, which they find in a wooded ravine (right)

he fairly envelopes us in his handshake. (I notice that one of his index fingers is missing and also that he walks with a limp—the result, I learn later, not of some wartime action but of a farming accident.)

Gudek vividly recalls the events of October 7, 1944, which resulted not only in my father's rescue but in the advancement of his own career. His six-man intelligence unit had been in the area for several days assessing Ustachi strength. That afternoon, they watched the waves of American bombers returning from Austria and noticed—well behind the others and at a much lower altitude—the crippled *Liberty Belle*. Anticipating that the plane would probably crash on or near the border between Ustachi and Partisan territories, he stationed his men strategically for a rescue attempt. Moments later, a line of parachutes bloomed behind the plane as it banked into a steep turn and exploded on the ridge above them. With the other Partisan unit in the area, they held off the attacking Ustachi and collected the airmen.

Unfortunately, they were unable to rescue the tail gunner, Carver, who fell into the Ustachi zone and was captured. "We tried to get to him but it was too late," Gudek tells us. "I was very angry about this at the time, and I am still very angry today." (One of the revelations of our trip is just how lucky the rest of the crew had been in escaping Carver's fate. He was the first man out of the plane, but in the confusion of the moment the second man, Wheeler, delayed jumping for some seconds—long enough, apparently, for the *Liberty Belle* to pass into the Partisan zone.)

Recognizing his initiative, the Partisan command presented Gudek with a medal and invited him to join the Communist Party. He shows us his membership credentials, a little red booklet engraved with a picture of Tito. "This was a great honor for me," he says. "The greatest."

We go inside for coffee and the obligatory toasts with *rakija*. Gudek presents my father with a gold lapel pin that is a facsimile of Tito's signature. The late communist leader is Yugoslavia's George Washington and Abraham Lincoln wrapped into one, and as in almost all the houses we visit, an official portrait of him hangs on the wall. My father is a staunch Republican—in October 1944, when Partisans shouted at the Americans "Roosevelt! Roosevelt!" he would shout back "Dewey!

> " 'You are the only country I know that told both Hitler and Stalin to go to hell,' Merritt—a staunch Republican—tells the former Partisans."

Dewey!"—and no lover of the communist system. Nonetheless, he finds much to admire in the courage of the Yugoslavs, who alone among East European communists declared their independence from Moscow following the war.

"You are the only country I know that told both Hitler and Stalin to go to hell," he tells them now. "What other country can say that?"

ON THE THIRD DAY of our visit to Koprivnica we drive into the hills to find the site of the plane crash. The rain of the previous day has given way to a perfect morning, and our spirits are high as we ascend the gravel road winding through corn fields to the village of Vrhovec. Our three-car caravan includes the editor of the local paper and a reporter and photographer. We stop at a farm to look at several parts of the *Liberty Belle* inherited by the woman of the house from her uncle. These include a large gear, which I recognize from one of the photographs Edi sent me, and a metal tube resembling a piece of drainpipe and identified by my father as part of the landing gear strut.

We hope the stop will be a short one —both my father and I are itching to get to the crash site—and we are dismayed when protocol again requires us to go inside for the inevitable round of *rakija*. (Most of the farmers brew this limpid lightning in backyard stills. By now I am getting to like the stuff, even at 10 in the morning.)

At another farm farther up the road, we inspect the barn where the *Liberty Belle* airmen were supposed to have hidden on their first night. It evokes no specific memory on my father's part, however, and we take the word of the old peasant woman that the Americans had indeed stayed here. Before proceeding to the crash site, a lengthy discussion ensues on how best to get there. Our guide for the day, a local man who was 15 years old at the time of the crash, has one idea while several of his fellow villagers have others. Arms wave and the Serbo-Croatian flies.

This is a Mediterranean culture, I tell myself, and we have to take it on its own terms. My father, who is perhaps the least Mediterranean person I know, waits with admirable patience for the debate to conclude. Finally we are on our way again, straining up a steep logging road through a lovely beech and oak forest. Where the

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Return

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road ends, we park the cars and hike along the ridge through an understory of grass and ferns, and after a few minutes pause at the top of a ravine.

Our guide indicates that we are at the site. Although nothing of the plane remains—we are told that the last large part, a wheel, was removed some years ago—it is apparent that the woods here have been cleared sometime in the past. The surrounding forest is much more dense, with trees reaching upwards to 60 feet, while those in the ravine are perhaps half that height.

I follow Janez into the ravine while my father and the others remain on the ridge. Although the chances are remote, I am hoping to find some small and overlooked part of the plane—I would be satisfied with nothing more than a rusty nut or bolt. Midway down, I stop to rest and look back at the others who have remained behind. The noonday sun filters through the trees and warms my back. A breeze comes up, and my father's voice mingles with the rustling of leaves as he describes to Edi the last moments of the *Liberty Belle*. From my vantage I try to imagine the scene 42 years ago—the screaming bomber ripping through the forest, the fiery explosion, and the parachutes descending toward the trees.

Janez, meanwhile, continues to search, his eyes glued to the ground with the single-mindedness of a bloodhound trying to pick up a scent. I am back on the ridge now with Edi, who tells me in his halting English, "Janez is optimist. We work 10 years in these projects—always he finds things." But today it is not to be.

The lack of physical evidence notwithstanding, the spot *looks* right and jibes with the testimony I have collected. My father is satisfied we have found the site of the *Liberty Belle*'s crash. "My memory of this part is clear," he says. "This is pretty much what I expected to find." I am satisfied too. Although we have other places to visit, this moment is surely the highlight of our trip. Savoring it, I reflect on how fortunate my father and I have been in sharing this extraordinary experience.

Before leaving I try to explain to Edi the pun behind the name "Liberty Belle." Somehow, I succeed—Edi is fluent in Italian, whose word for pretty is "bella," and he also knows of the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. Comprehending the joke, he smiles. "Here is the last place for this beautiful dama." □

Lt. Maxwell R. Moore's Crew

741 Microfilm shows evidence of crew picture. If it ever shows up, the crew roster is as follows:

L to R; back row: 2nd Lt. Maxwell R. Moore. pilot; 2nd Lt. George H. Kohl, co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Herbert A. Mardis, navigator.

Front row: Cpl. Daniel Brisbois, engineer; Cpl. Hewton L. Ward, radio operator; Cpl. Joseph H. Riggs, waist gunner; Cpl. William L. Cumback, tail gunner; Cpl. John P. Olsavsky, ball gunner; Cpl. Benjamin F. Miner, photographer.

Lt. Henry Moreman's Crew



Standing (L to R): 1st Lt Henry "Grady" Moreman - Pilot
1st Lt Kenneth O. Pearson - Co-Pilot
1st Lt Anthony M. Corsello - Navigator
1st Lt Russell DiMateo - Bombardier

Kneeling (L to R): S/Sgt Henry "Tex" Hutchings III - Nose Gunner
T/Sgt J. W. "Jay" Alford - Engineer
S/Sgt Francis "Packey" McPartlan - Ball Gunner
Sgt Earl C. Toll - Radio Operator
S/Sgt Richard J. Bales - Tail Gunner
S/Sgt Ira Floyd Nutter - Waist Gunner

Lt. Joseph Morgan's Crew

No crew photo available.

No crew roster available.

741 War Diary, January 3, 1945:

"Lt. Joseph Morgan and crew returned from North Italy where they had bailed out over friendly territory the other day."

Lt. Nixon's Crew on 7/21/44 (MIA, Brux)

Lt. Lewis D. Nixon, Pilot
Major Horace W. Lanford, CP and Command Pilot, Deputy Group Leader
Lt. Thaddeus Brniak, Navigator
Lt. Edward S. Bramson, Radar Navigator
Lt. William R. Crim, Navigator
Lt. Sam Bakanauskas, Bombardier
Sgt. Vincent Siemon, Radio Operator
Sgt. Archie Markoski, Tail Gunner
Sgt. William Ludwig, Armorer
Sgt. Perry L. Curtiss, Waist Gunner
Sgt. Carl Loiocano, Top Turret Gunner and Engineer

Crim, Lanford, and Markoski returned to Italy in 5 days; Nixon and Siemon returned to Italy in 2 weeks; rumor has it that Brniak was killed after landing; the others were POWs.

With another crew, Nixon landed on Ancona 8/23/44.

Lew Nixon's account:

NOT A GOOD DAY

July 21st, 1944, started one of my bad days at the usual ungodly time of sometime before dawn. Breakfast of eggs, S.O.S., (still one of my favorites), black tar coffee, and then to the old stone stable that had been converted into our briefing hall. Our Wing's target was a big manufacturing plant at Brux, Czechoslovakia. I can't remember what they made there, but I do know it was over five long hours away up the Adriatic Sea, over Yugoslovia, Austria, and into central Czechoslovakia.

After the briefing, we were off to the chute shack where I got my first inkling that this wasn't my day. After hearing all the wild stories of trying to escape if your're shot down, I had decided to be prepared, by sewing a small bag to my parachute harness and putting in a couple pairs of socks, some packs of cigarettes, matches, and a spare lighter. When I went to my rack where we stored our gear, some "character" had taken all my gear including my special harness and chute. Man, I was madder than hell, so I went over to the corner of the shack and grabbed a harness and old chute from the equipment rejected pile and stomped out of there.

In June and July, our Squadron had been hit pretty hard and in order to fly a twelve ship Sqd. flight, many crew members were selected to fill a vacancy in a scheduled crew. Of the four officers in our original crew, I was the only remaining one left on flight status. On this flight, I was assigned to fly with our Sqd. C.O. Col Lanford. Amazing but true, all of the original enlisted men of our crew had survived and were on this trip.

I can remember the long trip to the target was quiet and tiring. On the target run, the flak got thicker and thicker and more accurate. Just after we dropped our bombs, we took a hit on # 3 engine and things began to get pretty exciting. We gradually drifted out of the formation and started the long trip home by ourselves. Then number # 2 started to cut in and out, and we were now a sitting duck. I've thought many times how lucky we were not to be hit by fighters.

Near the Austrian/Yugoslavian border, we flew over an unmarked heavy flak battery at around 13,000 feet and all hell broke loose again. (After the war, I've talked to B-25 and B-26 medium bomber pilots, and they said to stay away from 12 to 14,000 foot bomb runs as the flak was altitude deadly.) We were the only plane over the battery, so they really had a field day. I know that we took at least 2 or more hits, another hit on or near # 3 engine and one just in front of the instrument panel. This hit blew the instrument panel all over Col Lanford, myself and the cockpit. I've got to tell you a humorous story on Col Langford. He had the wheel when the hit came, and when the wing started to drop, naturally he started turning the wheel to bring up the wing. After a full rotation of 360 degrees, he looked at me in complete disgust, spun the wheel and said, very calmly, "S. O. A. B ".

We had no control of the plane and it was starting to slow roll. The auto-pilot panel was just hanging by a piece of aluminum and a few wires, and with no controls, I figured that we had nothing to lose, so I flipped the auto pilot switch on and "walla" - it worked; at least for a few minutes. The old wounded bird wobbled back to almost level flight, and we still had a chance of going home. We staggered along for a few precious minutes, and then the auto gyro's ran down, so we were back to #1 and #4 engines to bring up the wing that would start down and the beginning of an "out of control roll." Carl Loiocano, our Engineer and Top Gunner. broke up this routine by announcing that the right wing was starting to break up and that we could explode any moment. Guess what, "time to sample the outside air". Col. Lanford gave the order to bail-out and the scramble began to get everyone out.

I'm really not clear what happened the next few minutes. I do remember a voice from the rear and I thought it was from Curtiss, the Waist Gunner," Hey skipper we're all going out in the rear". I talked to Carl Loiocano a week ago after getting Gus's letter with the addresses, and he cleared up one thing I've wondered about all these years. I had always thought the plane blew up just as I bailed out. Carl's version is as follows. "Quote", you and Col. Lanford were scrambling around up in the cockpit looking for something. I saw that you didn't have your chute harness or chute snapped on, so I helped you get them snapped on and went out the bomb-bay. What Col. Lanford and I were trying to get was the escape bag I had tossed behind my seat. One of us finally grabbed the bag, and we each took an escape kit and headed for the bomb-bay. The plane was bouncing and rolling around, and I had a devil of a time getting down to the bomb-bay. Finally,I got to the bomb-bay catwalk, and heard a "big bang", the plane started a complete roll, and I was pinned to the catwalk by centrifical force. I'm pretty sure now, that what I heard, was not the plane blowing up but the wing blowing off the plane. I've heard many times that when you are really scared, you can have super strength. I remember reaching up with both hands, and grabbing some pipes that ran along the bomb-bay, and putting both feet on the catwalk, and pulled with my hands and pushed with my feet. Man - I came out of the bomb-bay like I'd been shot out of a cannon. I found the chute ring and started to pull the ring, when " Holy Jesus", I remembered that I had on an old greasy condemmed chute. To make it more interesting, I heard a " SWISH - SWISH ". I looked up and saw the burning right wing was about 500 feet above me and slowly making a neat little swishing circle. I delayed pulling the chute ring for maybe a minute and then pulled the ring; "Gott in Himmel" it popped open, and believe me I knew when it popped open. Remember I didn't have my own chute and I had never adjusted the harness straps. The leg-straps must have been down to my knees, so when the chute popped open,the straps snapped up to the "family jewels" and it was " Canary talk time" for the next few days.

As I floated down, I saw the plane hit about 5 miles away, and a few moments later, the wing hit near a wooded area about a mile away. My chute opened around 5,000 feet, so I didn't have too long to "enjoy the beautiful scenery" before crashing down into about a 50 foot tall tree. I learned another lesson, "always miss a big tree when you are parachuting". Sometime later, I came to, and I was swinging in my chute harness up to my chest in a stream about 10 feet deep and about 20 yards wide. My head and knee hurt like the devil, so I just hung there for awhile to kind of get my thoughts together. I felt something running down my forehead and cheek, Yep-bleeding; touched my forehead and a stick was up there where it shouldn't have been. I pulled it out and that wan't too good either. The blood started gushing out; so being very calm, collected and remembering my Red Cross expert training, I promptly stuffed the stick back in the hole.

Finally, I decided to get out of the water; un-snapped the chute and drifted downstream until I washed up on the bank. When I tried to stand up, I found out my right leg was pretty screwed up. I did a fairly good job of re-setting my right knee, and made a sprint out of my undershirt and a few sticks. Then I cut a decent crutch with my boy scout knife (now called a MacGyver knife), and headed south, and maybe "home someday". I"m quite proud that I still have the chute ring, the escape kit compass, and the gold seal $5 dollar bill.

I played cowboy and Indians for the next few weeks, staying almost all of the time in the edge of the woods, or in the corn fields, and slowly made my way south. No food just berries and water. One afternoon, I picked up an automatic 9 mm Mauser and 6.35mm small Hungarian pistol along the way in a cornfield, but that is another story. My luck finally changed one chilly afternoon, when it had been misting and I was hungry, cold and miserable. I decided to risk a decent night in a barn" that I was not too far away. I climbed up into the loft and fell asleep in the warm dry hay. Sometime later, I was awakened by a small boy, about 8 years old who was climbing up into the loft. When he saw me, he was frightened and fell back to the ground. His leg hit a wooden side brace and snapped. He was crying out to his mother and it was all my fault. I climbed down, picked him up and met his mother near the back porch. God, I felt terrible. After he told his mother what happened, things calmed down. I had seen a doctor set a broken leg a few years before, so there was no choice but to try and set the leg. When the father came home, he took off on his horse for a doctor about 20 miles away. His wife made me some warm corn mush, and then went back into her bedroom and took a small beaded picture of the "Virgin Mary" from the wall and insisted I take it. I still have the picture to remember this weird day in my life. The father and the doctor got back about dusk, and after examining the boy's leg, the doctor decided not to re-set the leg, so I guess I didn't do too badly.

About 10 PM that night, five of the meanest,tough-looking guys I've ever seen showed up. "The underground Partizanski fighters". When the farmer had gone for the doctor he had also contacted the underground and told them that there was an Americanski flyer at his farm. One of the group could speak a little British and since I was very educated and could speak both American and British, my stock went way up. See, I'm not so dumb. I never told them that they were the same. Well, almost the same. I followed the group out, and we all left together to sleep in a small shed someplace not too far away from the farm and a new adventure began.

The underground fighter's job was to ambush German soldiers and to terrorize the area. The group moved to a new place in the woods each night, and I found out from the British later on that the German soldiers were terrified of these roving band of killers, and they had a real morale effect on the Germans. I had no choice but to accompany the group on two missions at night, and earned a Partizanski cap on one rather violent and scary night. The group was given credit for "21 Germani morta" that night. In a few days, their forward tour of duty was finally over and we started south to the hidden Partizanski headquarters somewhere south of Zagreb. A few days later after reaching the headquarters hidden in the hills, the British flew me out at night in a slow wooden-fabric two- engine plane to Bari, Italy. The British kept me "under wraps" for a couple days while grilling me on every detail of my vacation trip in Yugoslavia before turning me over to the U.S. hospital in Bari. I spent a couple weeks there getting over some hepititis, malnutrition, some minor knee work and putting some pounds on my skinny frame. I weighed all of 96 lbs when I checked in at the hospital because of all of that "good chow" during this excapade. The doctors finally released me and I was sent back to the 455th late in September for a few more missions. In mid October, I was assigned to another crew, and after a few missions I had another very close to "another bad day mission"in mid November. The briefing sounded like a real milk- run and so "away we all merrily go". The target was a seaport near Genoa and it looked innocent enough. On the bomb run we ran into heavy accurate flak from a new battery of 155's that had been brought in at night on some barges. They caught us completely by surprise and our bomb run was not too effective. In fact, I suspect that most of our bombs must have hit from the Mediterrean to the English channel. Several of the planes took hits and our plane only took one small hit just under the bomb bay, but as luck would have it, "it was just enough." A piece of the shell "about the size of a golf ball" went through the transfer lines in the bomb bay and gas started to pour out. There appeared no way to stop the flood of gas pouring out of the gas lines and out of the open bomb bay. The navigator called out there was a small British airfield south of the lines which wasn't too far away. So -"we gamble again."

We went to full throttle and 2500 RPM on all four engines, started a gradual descent and headed south as fast as the old bird could fly. In a few minutes, one of the tanks ran out of gas; our # 2 engine quit and we feathered # 2. We now had three engines left. A few more minutes and # 4 quit and we had to feather # 4. We now had two engines left. The Navigator reported that we were crossing over the front lines and should be near the field in 10 or 15 minutes. A few more minutes and # 3 quit, so we feathered # 3 and we had only one engine left. We went to full throttle, full RPM, full manifold pressure and # 1 was just screaming. We were losing about a 1,000 feet a minute and we were below 10,000 feet, so time was running out. Someone spotted the field and we were going to get one shot for the approach and landing. We planned a high circle approach; drop the gear just as we turn on a very close final and hope the gear would come down and lock. I didn't figure the gear would drag us as much as it did, and we crunched through the top of some branches with the gear on the final turn and squeek in to the short grass field. It turned out that it was a British Bristol Beaufighter squadron's airfield.

" The good lord was sure good to us on that day."

The British were great hosts. They furnished anything that would help repair the fuel lines and helped the crew wherever they could. We enjoyed the evening with their crews, swapped stories and a little "good Scotch". Next day we checked the plane thoroughly, dumped anything we didnt need, and made a full power short-field take-off. It wasn't too bad, but naturally we all sweated out the little grass field take-off. The two hour flight home was very pleasant and for some reason, no one was talking. We were all buried in our own thoughts of our present situation, and we were just thankful that we all would get back to the base with no one even scratched.

In mid December, the Group Headquarters sent me home. I guess I had cracked up my "quota of planes." I got home to California two days before Christmas. So as we all know,

Combat is a "piece of cake" if you live to come back home.

Continued on next page

Horace, I can't remember whether you or I left first. I can remember that the plane was pitching around quite violently when we started down to the bomb bay. I think, that I started first with you right behind me. I think?, that I started to the rear of the bomb bay so that you could bail out of the front opening. I think?, that I got my chute caught in the center of the bays on the two bulk-head supports, and that I had a heck of a time getting loose. Since you and Crim landed fairly close together and Carl could only count 10 chutes, I figure that you thought that I had gone out and you then jumped. The hang up on the catwalk further delayed my jump and then when plane started to roll and pinned me down, it must have been quite a few more seconds before I got out of the bomb-bay. When I saw the wing so close. it really scared the heck out of me and my delaying pulling the ring, would explain why Carl only counted 10 chutes. He was looking up and I was quite a few thousand feet below. The most important thing for both of us was the fact that we both worried about and made sure that the entire crew got out before we became concermed about ourselves. I know that we both held the code of the pilot is the resposibility for the crew, and frankly, I am Damm proud that we both acted the way we did..

Lew Nixon describes an adventure with the Partisans:

The Brave and Friendly Partizanski

In July, 1944 our crew of eleven was forced to bail-out of a badly damaged and disintegrating B-24 near the Austrian and Yugoslavian borders. Fortunately, all of the crew made it out of the plane succesfully. However, at this point, fate took over and each of us had to follow his own path.

After W W II was over and various stories drifted back, a pattern slowly developed. The fortunate crew members that were contacted by the Partizanski were warmly greeted, well taken care of and returned to Italy in few days or weeks. The opposite was true of the members that were contacted by the Chetnics. They were turned over to the Germans to spend the rest of the war in various prison camps.

After my semi-successful jump which included a plunge through a large tree, I decided to try and make it on my own to the middle of Yugoslavia where we had been briefed that the Partizanski controlled a major part of the area. I wandered around in a general southerly direction for a few days hiding in the woods and corn fields until one afternoon a German soldier tracked me down. Frankly the German Corporal was pretty dumb because he made no effort to conceal himself. I was amazed at the deadly impact of the heavy old 45 Cal pistol we all carried. The German soldier had 2 pistols, a rapid fire automatic Luger 9MM, and a small 6.35 MM Bulgarian clip pistol. I still have the small pistol as a reminder of the encounter, but gave the Luger and my 45 Cal to the Partizanski later on.

A few days later, fate brought me in contact with six Partizanski members of a forward patrol. This patrol came from the Partizanski controlled area near Zagreb. The leader, whose name was Joseph, his wife Maria and four other men. (They were the ones who found me). The patrol's assignment was to harass and terriorize the German units under movement outside of the German controlled areas. The group moved each day to a different spot in the woods and slept in their clothes huddled to-gether for warmth on a pile of leaves. One afternoon they took me to a train bridge that had been dynamited. It was quite evident their timing had been very good as part of the train was still in the ravine and they were quite proud of their work. A couple days later, while we were arranging our bed for the evening, a look-out spotter came running into camp guesturing " be quiet, Germani, Germani, 10 fingers, plus 10 fingers, plus 10 fingers, were close by. Six Yugo's, and one scared Air Corp fly-boy took off in a big hurry. I guess the next event was the more scary part; at least I thought so.

About thirty minutes later, we found ourselves in an old stone quarry and our backs to a granite cliff about 40-50 feet high. My God, when I saw that cliff, I knew we had bit the apple until I found out that our frantic run to the quarry was part of an escape plan. One of the four men had been raised in the area and had played many times at the quarry. He knew of a fairly steep path up the cliff and we all were up on top within a few minutes. A while later dusk set in and we quietly waited up on top for our pursuers to arrive. As darkness fell, the Germans moved in and attacked the cliff with machine guns. We followed Joseph's instructions and waited. He always carried a sack of grenades which he dispersed to his men and he handed one to me so as not to hurt my feelings. When the Germans moved in closer to examine the bodies at the bottom of the cliff, over the top went the grenades. We waited quite awhile until we heard no sounds so one of the men climbed down, found a flashlight and counted the bodies. We then started a long steady hike until almost dawn. Seven exhausted people finally took a much needed rest for a few hours before starting another long hike through the day. This pace continued for another two days and they finally told me that we were back in Partizanski territory and to relax, smoke, and talk. After arriving at the Partizanski camp they gave us time to take a bath (in a cold stream),clean up and join some Yugo leader who was at the camp. They had a dinner party with the best food I had tasted in a long time and lots of their liquid clear dynamite called (I think) Drava. They presented me with a Partizanski cap with the Red Russian Star on it and a slip of paper with the Red Star stamped on it that said "July 1944 25 Germani Morta ". I still have these two momentoes someplace in a foot locker where they have been for over forty years.

The next night, a small flimsy British two engine plane that was similiar to our Cessna AT-17 landed in a pitch black night on the grass field and brought me back to Bari, Italy.

I've often wondered how many 15th Air Force crew members owe their lives to these people that risked their lives and homes to protect, nurish, and arrange our return to our Italian home away from home.

" GOD BLESS THEM ALL ".

By permission of Edi Selhaus who will soon have a book out containing this story. HL.

A PLAY OF FATE

My name is Bill Crim. I was a navigator on a B-24 Liberator bomber crew during World War II.

The year was 1944. Our base was San Giovanni Aerodrome, just outside of Cerignola, Italy - home of the 455th Bomb Group, 741st Squadron.

On the 21st of July, our plane was to lead the group in a strike against enemy targets. The previous night we had our evening dinner at the mess hall and spent some time at our club before going to bed. We lived in a 6-man tent in an olive orchard.

Early that morning we were awakened by the regular wake-up crew at about 4:30 o'clock, got dressed, and went to breakfast. Afterwards we gathered our flight gear and boarded the trucks which took us over to the group headquarters briefing room. Our briefing room was an old underground cellar which had many chairs and a stage where the briefing was presented to all flight crews who were to fly that day from the 455th airfield. Four (4) squadrons were present. (The briefing room also served as a movie theater in the evenings).

This day, the briefing officer drew aside the curtain and disclosed the target map: Brux, Czechoslovakia.

There were the usual exclamations from all of us as to the size of the flak designations enroute and also at the target. We were briefed on the I.P. (Initial Point) and the specific target; also, the most likely place to expect fighter attacks and where to expect the heaviest flak.

After the briefing we dispersed to our special areas to pick up our specific target kits, eg. maps, velometer settings for the specific bomb load, radio codes, frequencies, etc. for the navigators, bombardiers, and pilots. Then to the parachute lockers and to the trucks that were to take us to the "hardstand" (parking place) on the airfield where our crew's assigned plane awaited. At the hardstand we placed our individual gear such as parachutes, kits, etc. on board the aircraft while all of the turrets and guns were checked /charged.

We spent some time at the edge of the hardstand, smoking and talking, while the pilots (Lanford and Nixon) conducted their preflight inspection of the plane's exterior (the walk-around inspection of wheel housings, pitot tubes, tail, engines, etc.).

There was a ground crew assigned to every aircraft. They had already fueled the plane, loaded the bombs, and started and ran-up the engines. All of this was accomplished while we were asleep or being briefed. They also loaded the oxygen, ammunition, and placed the flak suits and helmets on board.

After a time we boarded the plane and made preparations for flight. On this day we had a radar-equipped plane since we were leading the group. This meant that, in addition to our normal crew, we had a radar navigator on board, which made him the 11th crew member (The radar navigator's job was to signal when to drop the bombload in the event that the target was covered with clouds). Crewmember assignments were: Pilot (Nixon), copilot/group flight commander (Lanford), navigator (Crim), bombardier, nose turret, top turret, ball turret, tail turret, waist gunners (2), and the extra radar navigator.

We awaited the flare from the tower to designate "the mission is 'on' - start engines". Sometimes, due to bad weather or other intelligence information, the mission was "scrubbed" by shooting a different colored flare, but not today!

We started to taxi towards the take-off area about 7:00 AM, with each aircraft proceeding in turn, depending on their formation position after the take-off. We arrived at the end of our runway, ran the magneto checks, and off we went!

We started to climb and simultaneously formed-up the formation at the same time. It happens occasionaly at this point that some pilot will make a decision to abort the mission because of problems and today was no exception. One plane was siphoning fuel because of a faulty cap or the ground crew left the cap off. The plane left the formation and returned to the base after the pilot determined the landing load to be safe. On most aborted missions they will drop their bombs in the Adriatic Sea and burn up fuel before landing.

On this day we gained altitude going up the Adriatic, putting on our oxygen masks at 13-14,000 feet. All stations (turrets) reported periodically to the pilot if they observed any peculiar action concerning other planes or our own.

While over the Adriatic, each aircraft in the total formation goes through a period of test firing its guns. Formation position must be rigidly maintained during this period
or we will find ourselves flying through empty cartridges discharged overboard from the aircraft ahead. It is a bit testy at this time because inexperienced gunners on other planes may inadvertantly hit our plane. It had happened on two previous occasions. Nothing, but nothing, can rile up a crew more than getting gunfire from one of your own planes!

After we crossed the coastline, the shipping concentrations were reported to me as the navigator. I made notes on a continual basis throughout the flight. The crew members reported railroad marshalling yard data (so many railroad cars, how many tracks in width, etc.) along with the location and the time, I then recorded all of the information in the logbook. Any other noteworthy data sighted on the ground that may be of use to the intelligence section back at our airbase was also recorded.

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The bomb raids had intensified from early March. One of the worst air-raids was on March 19, when they were sent in four groups to bomb factories in Steyer in Austria. But, due to dense cloud layers above the target they had to turn to alternate targets: 234 bombers were re-directed towards Klagenfurt and dropped their cargo upon the Luftwaffe airport, while another 76 bombers attacked industrial targets in Graz. Collectively they had dropped 772 tons of bombs. No less than 12 Liberators were destroyed above Graz; two of them were shot down by enemy fighters and two crashed due to a mid-air collision caused by one of the planes which had its tail shot up and lost directional control while flying close formation.

It was even worse on April 2, when the 455th Group, along with 125 aircraft from other groups, bombed Steyer a second time. They were attacked by no less than 76 Messerschmitts and Focke-Wulfs. Above the target they met fierce and accurate flak. Four bombers were shot down immediately. They were destroyed by a combination of machine-gun and cannon fire during the first fighter attack followed soon afterwards by the flak massacre. By the time the last bomber left enemy territory, 20 of the 280 planes were shot down over the target area and another 30 barely limped home. In consolation, the gunners from the 455th Group on that day accounted for 27 enemy fighters destroyed, 17 probably destroyed, and three damaged.

On June 26th, the 455th Group experienced another catastrophy when they bombed five oil refineries in Moosbierbaum near Vienna. They had not reached their target when 12 two-engined Me-110's attacked with rockets and heavy cannon fire. Two B-24's were destroyed in the first attack. Just prior to reaching their target 60 Me-109 and FW-190's attacked and split their serried ranks. Some of the heavily loaded bombers were set aflame and fell trailing black smoke. But the enemy fighters were also paid in blood as they flamed like torches and disappeared from the sky.

The attack did not last long, but it was furious and merciless. One of the German fighters in that violent mess crashed into a Liberator and fell without its wing; the bomber, on the other hand, although set on fire, persisted with the group up to the target. Another two continued flying trailing flames up to the target where they managed to release their bombs. A minute later they exploded, one after the other....no parachutes were seen in the vicinity!

Gunners from the entire bomber formation claimed that they had shot down 36 enemy fighters, but of the 36 planes from Bill's group that had started, 10 did not return home.

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All of the crew were now on the alert for fighters and I reported any flak encountered on the way to the target.

On this day we encountered no fighters in the air - lucky day (we thought!). I saw Pilzen pass by on the left side. We were close and expected to drop the bomb load at an altitude of approximately 27,500 feet. I had previously made a note of when and where we had crossed the Danube river. We turned towards the I.P. The pilot alerted the crew via the intercom of our position and to be especially alert. Things were starting to grow tense but everyone was ready. As we approached the I.P., I helped the pilots into their flak suits and helmets and put on my own. Everyone aboard did the same (except the turret gunners who were already set). We reached the I.P. and turned towards the target. We were now on the bomb run. I stood on the flight deck in front of the top turret between the pilot and the copilot because there was nothing for me to do now but observe. I was always tense on the bomb run because I was the only crew member who was idle: the pilots are gripping the controls, the gunners are handling the guns, the "mickey" radar navigator is looking through his scope, the bombardier is sighting in on the target and I stood there in my flak suit and my helmet, looking out of the glass enclosure as if we were out for a practise flight. There is nothing so useless on a heavy bomber than a navigator on a bomb run. It is a helpless feeling and on that day I was experiencing my 38th time of having this stupid feeling of worthlessness on the bomb run. Ce la vive!

We felt the blast of the cold air as the bomb bay opened. I looked back and saw the ground through the open doors. I also saw the bombs in their racks ready to be released. They looked cold and deadly. I was already looking forward to getting this thing over with so that we could turn and head for home - when we could break out the frozen Spam sandwiches and hot coffee - when we could smoke a cigarette at high altitude using the oxygen mask to keep the cigarette lit. (This was prohibited and dangerous but we did it anyway and enjoyed it.)

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Krim...A Partisan camp of the military-political staff for the broader Ljubljana area.

It consisted of some tents and dwellings constructed of branches amidst the shrubs and fir trees and located in a small ravine 150 yards below and some 750 yards distant from the top of Mt. Mokrc.

It is Friday, 21 July 1944.

The whistling of a blackbird announces the approaching dawn. There are still myriads of stars in the clear sky, although they are beginning to loose their brightness with the nearing dawn. In the woods it is still

pitch black. A ridge of hills is faintly illuminated in the distance but on the other side over the Ig gorge the peak of the mountain Krim is starting to cast its outline against the dark background.

The blackbird is heard again. It is answered with short, sharp whistles by another bird in some dense shrubbery behind Frank Kovac's tent. Very soon it will be dawn.

Instinctively, Frank bends and wraps himself in his shabby uniform that offers him little comfort in the morning coldness. Half awakened by the birds singing he pulls his coat over his ears and once more sinks into a pleasant slumber.

He used to lie idle until breakfast whenever he felt safe and didn't have anything special to do in the early morning hours. He especially liked to sleep after a fatiguing day especially when he was on his feet until late at night. His duties led him all over the Krim area as far as Ljubljana and onward to Velike Lasce, to Bloke and even further to Notranjsko.

Frank was a courier and, as his routes required him to travel to all of these places, he had also been involved in many military skirmishes.

This particular day Frank was assigned an easy task: he was supposed to be the link between Mokrc and Krim and it would take him at least four or five hours to cover that distance.

The reveille of the awakening forest birds was growing louder and louder. This usually announced a fine, sunny day as one after another, they started to sing their individual melodies.

The light of the early morning was getting brighter as dawn approached. Frank yawned and thoroughly awakened as he sucked in the cool, humid morning air. In addition, the "cricket" in his stomach started to rumble louder and louder. He arose slowly and thrust his head out of the tent. He noticed more dew than on previous days.

"It could still be very fine and warm," he thought to himself. He had always been able to forecast the weather for the day based upon the amount of dew that he observed.

There is plenty of time till breakfast. He descends to the "kichen" where the cook has already started her everyday duties. He brought some water from the nearby spring and also made a fire with some wood.

Having finished his "kitchen" chores, he proceeded to clean his rather new gun - a Mauser rifle that he was especially proud of and which was valuable. It was a police rifle made in 1943 and he had confiscated it while attacking the police station at Ig. It reminded him of the hardship two years ago when he, a thin 14-year-old boy, was imprisoned at Ig and accused of co-operating with the Partisans. He took good care of the gun in order to fight for better times.

The top of Krim flared up with golden yellow light and shortly afterwards the smaller Mokrc was also bathed in sunlight as was the meadow that was named "Under the Cottage".

Now everybody was up. Frank put his rifle away and glanced at the kitchen more often - the hunger pangs dragged him to the cauldron. (He had to hurry in order to stop at other places before arriving at his destination at eleven o'clock where he would pick up mail and propaganda material.)

He was not very keen about the food for breakfast: once more the meal consisted of hard-boiled barley mush larded with brown flour soup that was hardly salted. After he was on his way and deep in the woods he occasionaly stopped at remote homes and received something better and stronger for his stomach. However, he had a feeling that things wouldn't look too promising on that day. By noon he would be well on his way and have to forage for himself to appease his hunger since he expected to have only the newly-warmed barley soup waiting for him in the evening.

He did not feel very well as a result of not eating enough food. However, deep down in his pocket there was a crust of bread - for dessert.

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It was nine minutes past the hour and getting warmer. Frank came out of the information officer's tent and, with an ill-tempered gesture, put on his cap. Because of his thick black hair he did not like to wear his cap; in fact, he liked it most when his cap was tucked behind his belt.

He wanted to start going on his way but it seemed a little too early. It was only about two miles by footpath at the edge of a hayfield to the lower post where he would have to wait for some propaganda material that was scheduled to arrive at 11 o'clock.

The Partisans that had been relieved of guard duty were silently stepping around the tents towards the kitchen. Secretary Matija, who was responsible for handing out the mail, noticed that the boy trying to straighten his cap was evidently nervous and ill at ease.

"What is it, Frank, did you get out of the wrong side of the bed?" he asked.

"No, comrade Matija," replied Frank,"I only want to get going so that I can stop at the workshop a little longer. I think that I will have enough of a load by the time I get there!"

"What's the rush?! You will be sick of Krim in today's heat. Oh well, go ahead but watch for the Quislings. They are becoming more and more active. Be careful downhill around Gola, and watch out! And stick to the woods!"

"O.K." Frank answered curtly and in a better humor as he tried to hide his anxiety about the warnings.

He then picked up his rifle and a bag. For a not-yet 16-year-old boy, a half hours distance was only a short walk. But Frank was also cautious even on such a seemingly safe stroll.

He no sooner left his tent when he immediatley disappeared into the thick woods. He stayed close to the tall fir trees and started descending along a hardly discernable path towards some grass patches which sloped rather steeply in the direction of a box-canyon under the northern face of Mokrc. Still lower was the print shop for the political staff.

Moisture from the dew licked at the lower parts of his boots as he approached the shrubbery at the edge of the new-mown field. He scanned the area to be sure it was safe since he would much rather descend along the pathway next to the woods for the next few hundred yards than crawl among the dense shrubbery in the woods.

He reminded himself not to make any noise as he listened to the bird's singing and carefully observed the bushes below him. The birds would be flying restlessly if there was anything strange or unusual occuring. So far, everything seemed quiet and safe.

He slid down the grass path, squinting in the brightness of the morning sun as he constantly kept his eyes on the surroundings in front of him. The path curved slowly to the left through some shrubbery before it crossed a slight ridge and descended into the valley.

Further down and to one side and nestled against the slope was the village Gola. Not a soul was in sight. Frank noticed some white smoke in the distance beyond the slope. Frank stopped once to listen for strange sounds; he didn't hear the village dogs barking, nor the usual gunfire from the Turjaska road where attacks against the German transports were commonplace.

Frank sat down for a minute to calm down, fix his cap and tidy up. He had nearly lost his cap while crawling through the shrubbery. It would have been a pity to lose it, especially the five-pointed red star given to him by Partisan Vasilij. Suddenly he heard a hollow, hardly audible rumbling sound coming from far away. Instinctively, he listened to the new sound as it grew louder and louder, spreading over the countryside. No, he thought, that sound is not gunfire, it must be airplanes. He quickly guessed that

the sound was coming from Allied aircraft. The Americans will beat the Germans again, he thought as he smiled to himself and continued onward.

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When the rumbling of the bombers faded away behind the hills far in the north, Frank returned to the path which led into a gorge which was overgrown with shrubbery. He walked slowly, since he wasn't in a hurry to go anywhere. It was just past 10 a.m. and it was only a few minutes walk through the hazel trees to the work-shop.

As a matter of fact, that particular path did not excite him. Early that morning he thought about the possibilty of taking another route - towards Turjak. That way he could have stopped at his mother's, who was in Zapotok on the other side of Kurescek Hill. She worked as a cook there, and surely he could have gotten something more substantial and tasty to eat. Now he was certain that he would hardly have the strength to climb up and down Krim.

Secretly he consoled himself that he might come across some cherries - if only the blackbirds and sparrows had not picked them. He always looked forward to early summer in the higher elevations when the cherries ripened later.

Thinking of cherries, he stepped between the smaller tents in the camp and stopped for awhile in front of a bigger one. Yes, Herman the technician was sorting today's mail.

He sat down under the trees on the soft tufts of grass that were nicely warmed by the morning sun. His thoughts returned once more to the ripe red cherries, and sweet too. He nearly fell asleep when an acquaintance of his addressed him rather loudly and invited him into his cottage. A huge pile of material for the Borovnica area was waiting for him in a shabby rucksack.

"It is so, so heavy today" he remarked as he tried to guess its weight.

Well, it was not too heavy, he thought, although he would have to hurry up to Krim, where he had to make a connection at 1 p.m. It was a few minutes past eleven when he heaved his rucksack over his shoulders and left the camp with a short "zdravo (so long)".

It was still cool and fresh in the woods but he gradually became warmer as he climbed uphill towards the ridge of the mountain. Soon afterwards he stepped once more onto the beaten track cut through the woods, eventually ending in patches of high tufted grass. No one had cut the grass in this area for over two years. The region was remote from the nearest villages and the enemy very seldom ventured to this wilderness.

Frank stepped briskly as the sun shone upon him with all of its beauty and warmth. He got thirsty and, as he knew there was a spring alongside of the wooded path, he turned to the place where he and his brother hauled timber to the valley some time before the war.

He took a few more steps over the grassy border by the woods and he arrived at the spring. There, he relaxed a little and refreshed himself. How cozy it is here, he thought. He glanced upwards at a cart-track below the lip of Mokrc to a bare stump located at the point where the cart-track curved from sight. Yes, he thought, that is the spot where I will sit down and rest for awhile.

Slightly stooped, he stepped uphill and inhaled deeply once more before he finally reached the top. He veiled his face against the blinding rays of the sun which penetrated with full strength to the sloped fields. Here at the top he liked to look at the surrounding countryside.

He stared at Sive Doline below and beyond the slant borders of the woods as they ended somewhere near his native village.

The beauty of the day overwhelmed him. For awhile he stood and listened. Not far from the path a jay gave a shriek, and behind him in the trees a

titmouse chirped with tzi-tzi-pee, tzi-tzi-pee. Blackbirds twittered pleasantly as they flitted among the hazel trees. What a concert! And, what a day!

Amidst this rapture an unusual sound coming from the direction of Krim suddenly attracted his attention

"That must be a plane!" High up, almost above the top of Krim, he noticed a plane flying towards him. It was a 4-engined bomber. It must be an Allied aircraft, he thought, since he knew the planes, but they usually flew at higher altitudes and in larger formations. However, this one appeared to be much lower, and it appeared that there was smoke coming from its right engine!

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Meanwhile, the flak was getting thicker. We could hear it now under the bomb-bay as the enemy on the ground tracked us. It came closer and closer. Thwack! Thwack! Thwack! There is no more deadly sound that I have heard before or since! Bombs away - and we were hit. The inside of the flight deck turned black from the dust shaking loose. Momentarily, we couldn't see anything. As the air cleared, we saw that we had sustained a hit directly behind the #3 engine. The plane lurched and we dropped out of formation. The pilot feathered what was left of the engine. Our controls were badly damaged and we gradually started to loose altitude. The pilots struggled to keep the plane aloft by throttle control - adjusting engine power to raise or lower a wing. We started to track the formation which was above us by now. The second plane had taken over the lead. We were out of the flak. Everyone was nervous, ready to bail out on command. The command didn't come. We assessed all of the damage. No one was hurt, thank God!

Our copilot, Lanford, switched on the intercom to tell us that we will try to reach the Adriatic so that we could ditch the aircraft. He told us there was a chance that we have sustained extensive damage to the main wing spar. He also told us of the control problem. They couldn't sustain absolute directional control and the aircraft continued to gradually lose altitude.

There was nothing to do but stay alert and wait - and sweat! We had never ditched before. With damage, does the plane sink immediately? I never learned to swim very well. Do these "Mae Wests" really work? Would we come in close to the Isle of Vis? (Vis is an Allied-controlled island off the southern shore of Yugoslavia). I looked around and saw one man with his Mae West over his chute harness. He never would have been able to get it off! Evidently he did not have it on when we started the mission. He quickly changed it!

The formation had gone ahead by now. Luckily, no fighters were after cripples like us.

As we approached the Klagenfurt/Villach area, the pilot informed us that we were going to fly close to Klagenfurt and may receive some flak. Our altitude was fairly low at that time, about 18,000 feet. Sure enough, all of a sudden all hell broke loose. Thwack! Thwack! Thwack! We were hit again. The air on the flight deck was black once more. Metal was flying! Again we were lucky that no one was hurt badly, but control of the plane was worse. The pilot announced that we wouldn't ditch and that we should get ready to bail out when we heard the alarm bell. The flight attitude of the aircraft was getting beyond control.

In a short while, the bail-out bell sounded and we started leaving the plane. There were five of us scheduled to leave from the flight deck area: first the top turret gunner, then the radar navigator and myself, followed by the two pilots. I turned at the bomb-bay door to look back at the pilots. Nixon and Lanford seemed to be arguing what to take with them. I

went back and shouted "Let's go!" They came [illegible]

The plane was in a shallow dive at about [illegible] back chute which made it easier to get [illegible] Although I shouldn't have done it, I pulled the [illegible] jumped and sustained a helluva jerk like some[illegible] around my neck. I became aware of a swishing [illegible] parachute canopy was oscillating from the left [illegible] and back again. Each time: swish, swish. I [illegible] was stationary and that I was swinging like a pendulum [illegible] lines. This soon stopped and I became aware of complete silence except for a droning noise. I looked and sighted our airplane in a dive. [illegible] the right wing buckled up (the Brux flak had hit the main spar). The plane immediately went into a spiral dive. I watched it fall all the way until it crashed into the ground. Then a funny thing happened out [illegible] I heard the sound of the dive and the crash after I had seen it happen.

I turned and counted the parachutes. Eight below me, two above me; so everyone had gotten out and all of the chutes had opened successfully. I was impressed with the deathly silence, especially after listening to the engines for several hours. The stillness was awesome. It seemed as if I wasn't nearing the ground but just suspended in space. The countryside was very green and pretty.



63-Airman landing in the top of a tre

As I neared the ground I soon heard what I thought were rifle shots but eventually realized that no one was shooting at us. It was actually coming from the burning airplane's guns where the ammunition was burning and exploding. As I came closer to the ground I could see a deep canyon and it seemed as if I was going to go into it. I pulled on my chute risers in order to slow down the drift but became concerned that I might collapse the canopy, so I stopped. What I thought was a small bush turned into a big tree which I missed and landed on a pathway near the very edge of the canyon. I was stunned as I hit the ground, going over on my back, but the shock of landing passed quickly. I hid my chute in the bushes and went over the edge of the cliff a short ways to distance myself from the path. My escape kit map confirmed that I was close to Ljubljana which I already knew before jumping.

At that morning's briefing we were told that if we were ever in Yugoslavian territory to seek the Partisans in the high country so I decided to turn uphill. I was really acting like a Boy Scout, avoided making any noise and moving slowly, watching and listening for any signs of life. I was pleasantly surprised to find in my escape kit, in addition to the map, a chocolate bar, $60 in gold-seal [illegible] compass, matches in a waterproof container, and a few [illegible]

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Frank had not watched the approaching bomber for more than a minute when he suddenly saw two white balloons emerge from the plane. At first he thought that they were meteorologic balloons as he had seen them somewhere previously. But he soon found that they were used to save the lives of airmen as the bomber started to spin towards the earth.

The airmen were drifting towards Gola. He was about to rush towards them when he realized that they would be drifting much further from the village, probably towards Zelimlje.

The plane approached like a huge, frightening apparition as it circled over him in Sive Doline. One or two engines continued to drone so that the echoes resounded from the nearby summits. Just as the plane reached one of the mountain slopes, a part of its right wing broke-off together with an engine and a propeller and whirled as if it were a huge leaf towards the other side of the valley.

The noise of the airplane filled the air in Siva Doline. Suddenly it was quiet after the craft crashed into the densely wooded gorge. Frank was only a few hundred yards distant from the point of impact.

A deathlike silence gripped the countryside. Frank could not comprehend all that had transpired in the last few moments. At first there was an unbearable noise and then everything was quiet as if nature had reverted to complete silence.

Terror stricken, he glanced at the gorge as broken glass and metal rained down from the site of the violent crash.

What should he do? He remembered the airmen...only two of them...where were the others? Perhaps they were trapped in the wreckage and needed help, he thought.

He grabbed his rucksack and, taking long strides, raced down the slope to a small plain behind which was a densely wooded ravine. In no time at all he arrived at the first of the fir trees sheared by the plane. The entire area appeared as if it was devastated by a storm. A short distance away he encountered a part of the undercarriage and wheels. Among the clipped trees he spotted the entire tail-plane with a part of the fuselage - as if it had been sliced by some huge shears. A few yards further lay the rest of the aircraft.

The right wing was missing but the left wing was still attached to the fuselage. Smoke emerged lazily from the engines as verified by the hot stinking puff that reached Frank. However, there was no evidence of fire.

Frank approached the wreckage.

Everything was calm and quiet, only compressed gases escaping from the engines were heard. There were no other sounds. Hydraulic fluids leaked from the severed lines and the smell of oil and gasoline permeated the air. Frank stopped in front of the broken shell of the fuselage - it seemed like a monster to him. Where are the other airmen?

A ladder-like object protrudeed from the dark, yawning interior of the fuselage; Frank hesitated for a moment before climbing inside. Everything was scattered around the metal floor and broken instruments hung from the walls and ceiling. The left waist gun was wedged in the twisted window frame with the barrel bent and stuck half-way into the earth. Ammunition belts were strung from the ceiling and some cartridges were scattered on the deck. Then there was the large yellow rubber raft that broke loose from its compartment during the crash and filled with air. There was no trace of the airmen anywhere.

Suffocating fumes started to emerge from the front of the plane and the sound of crackling flames was heard outside of the plane's cabin.

Frank, half-bent, was staggering inside the crashed aircraft when he heard rapid bursts of gunfire nearby as spent bullets started to rain onto the fuselage. He exited as quick as lightning and hid himself in the

nearest shelter for he was convinced that he was being attacked by the Germans or the Quislings.

It was only some moments afterwards that he noticed the fire between two of the engines had ignited the scattered ammunition belts and caused the explosions. After he realized what had happened, he returned to the airplane, picked up some cartridges and put them into his pocket. He also walked to the other end of the plane to look for other crew members, but no traces of any of them were found. At that point the fire spread and started to burn intensely.

He eventually left the dangerous site as he realized that he was still on duty and had to hurry on with his task. It had taken him a long time to inspect everything around the crash site and also inside the plane. His comrades above on the slopes of Krim were surely waiting for him at the preselected time. He had to hurry up and not linger any more as he had a long way ahead of him.

He gritted his teeth as he climbed along the steep wooded slope along the shallow mountain creek and quickly arrived at the edge of the Ig ravine. He stood there for awhile and removed his two hand grenades to bury them so that they would not interfere with his descent into the ravine. He did a good job of hiding them as he knew the site very well and should have no trouble finding them on his return trip.

Taking some deep breaths of air he broke into a run as he emerged from the wooded edge and descended along the goat trail into the ravine. He continued to run as it was already noon and he had to cross over Mt. Iska and traverse a steep slope on the other side of the river.

He crossed the river bed in three or four long leaps and then climbed another 400 yards uphill. His destination was not much further, since the rendezvous was selected to be above Gornji Ig at Mackova field.

Rado and Orac were waiting for him. Still red in the face from his quick pace, he greeted them and started to tell them about the crashed bomber under Mokrc. He showed them the cartridges and a big knife that he had found in the demolished fuselage. While the messengers inspected the "trophies", Frank was tempted once again by the thought of the nice, red cherries in the trees a little lower near an uncultivated field. Orac was interested in the bullets and Rado was constantly eyeing the fine large knife.

"Boys, let's have some cherries!" said Frank as he turned to them and added: "Rado, will you climb up there and cut some branches?"

x x x x

As I was making my way uphill, I suddenly heard voices. I worked my way behind a rock for protection, seeking the source of the voices. Then, through the trees, I saw three men. One of them was in a wild cherry tree cutting branches and throwing them to the ground. He then descended and all three squatted down eating the cherries. I could see a red star on their caps. We were knowledgeable enough to know that the Partisan symbol was a red star. But the immediate question was how to contact them without being shot. Each had rifles that were taller than they were. I decided to whistle and, when I did, the three Partisans disappeared down into the tall grass. I hesitated and wondered what to do next, but finally decided to keep whistling as I approached the clearing. As I did so, the three heads re-appeared and I walked into the clearing.

x x x

Frank had his rifle pressed against his face and aimed at the source of

the whistle. A bullet was in the gun barrel and the safety was released. Meanwhile, for the sake of precaution, the other two couriers had rushed over the edge of the cliff and down towards the village to place the mail that they were carrying in safe hands, since it may be the enemy and it was much better to disperse. They had reacted the way they thought best without much talking.

Frank remained. He was determined to engage in dangerous action with the enemy, but the worry and anguish weighed heavily upon him.

"What if they are Germans?" he thought, remembering that it was only a year ago at this very place that the Germans ambushed the Partisans. It was terrible; much blood was shed.

His position was not the best one for shooting. Therefore, he removed his cap and put it behind his belt. Like a streak of lightning he rolled over towards the lower field. He proceeded to crawl on his hands and knees in the dense weeds and raised his head a little as he prepared to shoot.

A long whistle was heard once more emitting from the area of the trees, followed a few seconds later by another one. Simultaneously he noticed a tall figure in khaki uniform step forward somewhat hesitantly.

"Hande hoch (hands up in German)!" shouted Frank, so loudly that it echoed back from the opposite steep slope.

The unknown person raised his arms half-way and stopped. Frank arose slightly and aimed directly at the figure. He wondered if he should shoot. If he was an enemy, he must do it at once - but the man was bare-handed! With his finger on the trigger, Frank hesitated for a second or two...

"American!" the stranger uttered in a deep voice as he raised his arms above his head. Frank lowered his rifle for a moment - his subconscious was struck by the connection between the stranger and the crashed plane.

"Tito...pilot...Partisan!" shouted the stranger in short intervals as he took a few steps forward. Then Frank stood up and put the rifle on the ground as it was now clear to him that the man was probably the pilot who had bailed out of the damaged bomber.

The airman stood still a few yards in front of Frank, riveting his gaze on the cap stuck behind Frank's belt. His eyes opened widely and his mouth stretched into a broad smile.

"A Partisan?" he addressed the boy as he appeared relieved and came closer to embrace him. Frank shook the boney hand and greeted him heartily. He confirmed that he was a Partisan and tried to make himself understood that they were in a safe place. Simultaneously he wanted to tell him that he knew about the plane as confirmed by displaying the cartridges he had picked up and taken with him.

At that point Frank whistled and the two boys came back. The meeting was cheerful and friendly. Eventually, they strode towards the cherry tree and resumed eating the cherries. The airman dug into his pocket and brought out a large bar of chocolate, which he broke into three parts.

As Frank knew some Italian words, he immediately started to speak to the airman because he was curious to obtain more information about the stranger.

"Tu, soldato? (Italian-Are you a soldier?)" he asked him point-blank.

"Yes, soldier...American," he confirmed.

"Oh, tenente (lieutenant-in Italian) - porocnik (lieutenant-in Slovene)," responded Frank in satisfaction as he introduced himself:

"Io sono Frank, e tu? (I am Frank, and you? - in Italian)," asked Frank.

"I am Bill...Where are the Germans?" asked the airman, worried about the enemy posts.

"Oh, yes,...Germani-Tedeschi! Over there," and he pointed in the direction of Ljubljana.

They talked somehow for awhile. When the airman found out that he was in no danger for the time being, he showed with gestures that he was thirsty. He took his plastic bag from his pocket and handed it to the courier Rade.

"Water?!"

Rade understood him and rushed towards the village where there was well

water next to a house.

Bill began to trust Frank more and more as he had an inner feeling that he could rely on this bright lad.

"Where - dove sono io?" he himself tried to speak Italian. From his pocket he pulled a folded map which was printed on silken material.

"Krim!" answered Frank as he stretched his arm in front of him and farther up the steep slope. At that point, the airman stood with open mouth, speechless. He finally stammered:

"Crim?...I am Crim..!" and pointed to himself full of surprise but firmly, still wondering how on earth the boy, who had never seen him before, knew his name.

Once more, he asked where he was as he spread his map.

"Yes, Krim!" assured Frank, since he still didn't understand what the problem was. He bent over the map and pointed to the peak where Krim was located.

The airman still did not understand him and therefore wanted to emphasize the point.

"Io Bill Crim...and you?" he curiously pointed to Frank as he asked his name for the second time.

"Frank!" he answered immediately, trying to make it clear that the mountain over which the airman had bailed out was called Krim.

"Monte Krim, hier," replied Frank as he used yet another German word and pointed to the peak of the mountain on the map.

Although he couldn't quite grasp the significance, it finally dawned on Bill that he had parachuted onto a mountain with the same name as his. Unbelievable, he thought, as he pulled some more small articles out of his pocket and shared them with the young Partisans. Meanwhile, Rade had brought plenty of water for all of them. They then took leave of one another.

There was no shortcut across the Iska and also along the ravine so they proceeded uphill. Bill walked with difficulty and gasped for breath on the terribly steep slope. They both rested. Sweat poured down Bill's cheek as he grabbed for branches to prevent sliding down on the stones underfoot. Wisps of heather did not provide much support and he was almost angry at Frank for leading him on this wild mountain slope. They eventually reached the top of the ravine and stopped for a moment as Frank retrieved his hidden grenades. They then proceeded downhill towards the Sive Doline.

The sun had already set when they entered the camp called "Pod Bajto". Frank introduced the airman to his comrades. They shook hands. At the same time they told them that another airman had been found at Zelimlje and was at the headquarters of the town of Velike Lasce under Golec. As it wasn't far, Crim wanted to meet his friend that very same day.

It was getting dark when they stepped inside the camp. The fire was burning between the tents and there was a crowd of people talking lively to one another around the fire. Crim caught sight of a pair of G.I. shoes sticking out of a pup tent - the other airman? Crim decided that whoever it was should continue sleeping until morning.

The next day, Crim's meeting with Major Lanford (C.O. of the 741st Squadron) was a happy one as they had experienced some hard times and in spite of everything were safe and sound. Although they were happy, they were uncertain of their prospects and were worried about their fellow crewmen during the jump. Lanford had observed Capt. Nixon for some time until he drifted over the woody ridge and down into the valley. Maybe he wasn't too distant...But where were the others that were the first to bail out west of Krim? They had lost track of them somewhere on the opposite side. (We later found out that the pilot of the Liberator, Nixon, landed near Turjaska Road near a village where the natives found and hid him.)

It was late in the afternoon when they reached the plane wreckage. Bill stared silently at the remnants of the once-mighty bomber for some time. He kept shaking his head until the boy grabbed him and directed him to the

opening in the fuselage. The airman muttered something which reflected both his surprise as well as his being tired. He looked for the last time at the place where the mission for this plane had ended so badly.

(Lanford was concerned that the bombsight might not have been sufficiently destroyed - it was a secret instrument at that time and must not be found by the Germans. To their relief they found nothing of the bombsight in the wreckage. They did find a young deer who had been killed by the plane crash).

x x x

Three days passed. The Partisans took both airmen to Bloke in Novi Vas where they met up with the third crew member, the tail gunner. From there they were driven by automobile to the Partisan airstrip near Nadlesk in Notranjska. There they met one other member from their crew. On July 24th they all flew on a special allied plane to Bari, Italy.

Bill wanted to talk with Frank and bid farewell before his departure from Mokrc but the boy had already departed to perform other duties - he rushed through the woods and grassy ridges around Krim carrying important messages. He hadn't forgotten Bill; he constantly carried the compass and map that Bill had given him and used them frequently.

A month or so later Frank found Bill's chute hidden near the plane. A life jacket was also close by. All of these items reminded him of the exciting meeting he had when he first met Bill. He gave all of the items to his comrades back at the camp except for two panels of the silken parachute - these he kept as a present for his mother and sister; anyway, he told himself it would be useful in these hard times.

The raging flow of the war dragged Frank Kovac in its current. He roamed across the Krim woods and meadows under Mokrc many times and survived many hard battles before the cherry tree blossomed again the next year and liberty was in sight.

x x x

Ljubljana, August, 1981

The telephone rang in Edi Šelhaus' flat. It was William Crim - Bill - on the line and he was calling from Ljubljana. (Edi's initial reaction was that Franc Skraba, from Kranj, was calling. Some years prior when he was writing a book titled "Stotinka Srece", Franc had called and provided some brief data about his experiences during the past war.)

Later, when Edi called Frank Kovac he told him that he had a surprise for him - Crim had returned and was visiting him! Frank was surprised; there were a few moments of uncertainty and questions followed by a short break on the other end of the line, a crackling sound...then a deep voice was heard:

"Hello, Frank! Crim here!"

Frank greeted him, said a few words awkwardly and still was not sure that the person on the telephone was the right one. How could they assure each other that they were the persons who met during the past war? How about asking a direct question about that significant event?

"Do you remember that meeting on Krim during the war?" he asked Bill.

"Yes,...Hande hoch!" stated Bill clear and affirmative.

He also remembered words when they talked about his rank; it was "tenente" and the Germans were Tedeschi.

"What about 'cesnje' - cherries?" Frank questioned further.

"Oh, yes, cherrytree boy!" the former airman laughed, and so Frank allayed any suspicions he had about the identity of the visitor. They then made an appointment for a meeting.

An hour or so later they met at the Union Hotel in Ljubljana, shook hands and embraced each other. It was their second meeting, 37 years after the first one between Bill and Frank - an airman and a messenger boy - whose paths had crossed during the war. Destiny had joined them once more. For the former it was a life saviour for sure and for the latter it was a humane deed to help a war comrade in need.

The meeting was hearty and warm. Even in their wildest dreams they could not have expected to meet again after that quick leave from each other under Golic.

After the war William continued his service in the Air Force and later was employed by the Aerospace Industry on Air Force and NASA projects. During that period he often recollected the brave and fateful moments of the past. He had already forgotten the names and some of the details but he had not forgotten the boys from the cherry tree. And later when he returned to the USA he related his exciting war story many times to his children; of how he saved himself from the downed bomber and how he met the Partisans at the cherry tree in the mountains, someplace far away.



64- Airman Bill and ex-Partisan Frank meeting 37 years later

Some 35 years had passed, and William started to plan a visit to Europe, to Yugoslavia. Uncertainty had left many open questions: about places, people, conditions. But the wish to meet his former rescuers had became stronger and stronger.



65- Bill Crim with a native on Krim

Crim overcame his skepticism about visiting this foreign country and traveled to Slovenia with his wife.
Crim returned a year later, in September. Frank took all of them towards Krim - to Siva Doline, where Bill's plane had crashed, and further on to the top of Mokrc, where the 40th anniversary of the Sercer brigade foundation was being celebrated.

When Crim saw the friendship of old-timesoldiers and heard the songs sung at the camp fire, he was touched and tearful at the sight of such a display of eternal friendship and warm interrelations between human beings.
"How great these people are!" he thought

and kept staring at the dancing comrades as they embraced one another.
As he approached a group of ex-Partisans, somebody stepped in front of him and studied him. Finally he exclaimed:
"William, is that you?"
At first Crim looked at him curiously, and then he recognized him. It was comrade Kovac-Branco Jerat, the former

commander in whose tent Crim had spent the second night among the Slovene Partisans.

The days of pleasant meetings passed too quickly. He had to return to Colorado due to business.

He called again two years later. He was in Germany on business and took advantage of his close proximity, coming to Kranj to visit his friend Frank for a short stay.

X X X

Bill Crim returned once more in 1987. He stayed in the vicinity of Mokrc at Krim and among the friendly people who helped him in 1944.

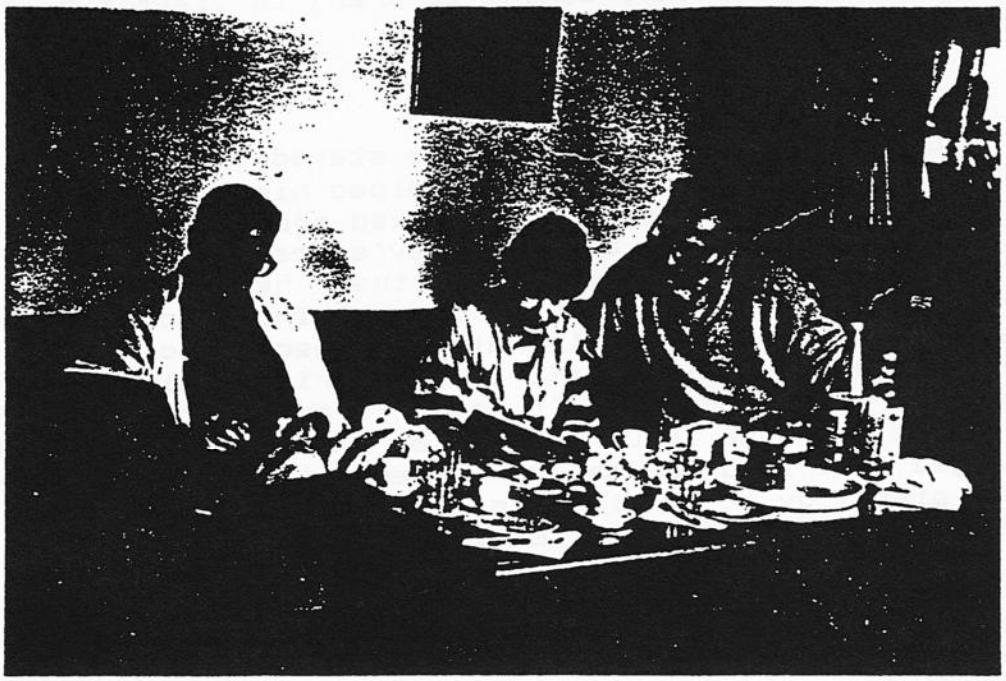
He met with Edi several times as they talked about the earlier events. He stated that during the second or third day's stay at the Partisan camp he wrote all of them a letter of gratitude for their help. He still wondered if anybody had read his letter and what, if anything, had happened it. A few days later in 1944 he had traveled with his escort to Notransko, where the Partisan commander gave him a gift of an American Colt .45 that USAAF airmen carried with them. Crim didn't have his own at the time because he had forgotten it at the base in Cerignola (or had just left it behind). The pistol had changed ownership in Nadlesk where it was exchanged for an Italian Beretta pistol by a Partisan named Beni. Once more he had a question - more for himself than for Edi: how did the Partisans come into possession of the .45 that was given to him?

His airman's uniform also caused some amusing scenes, owing more to a misunderstanding than any actual hint. He wished to remove the wires from his electrically heated flying clothes. He gestured this information to a female Partisan - he did not wish to undress in front of her - and then pointed towards the bush where he was supposed to undress. Meanwhile the Partisans misunderstood him and his two gestures and thought he meant something else. Well, later on when Bill returned alone with the wire in his hand, they all laughed heartily. Was that female Partisan Marija Kovac?

Most of all, Bill remembered how the Partisans took care of the airmen and how they shared the scarce food unselfishly among themselves. Even more; during their travel to Bloke the messenger boys offered them a larger portion of their meal, keeping only a handful of cherries for themselves. He stated that he was deeply moved by that incident; so much so that he and Lanford cut a piece of bread and an egg and shared the tiny bits with all the persons in the group and thus ate the frugal meal together. (Bill often told the story in the USA about how the Partisans gave them "the shirt off their backs!"

Only one exciting event occurred on the way from Krim to Nadlesk. As they drove from "Bloska Planota" in a horse and buggy they were suddenly surprised by machine-gun fire. It rattled from somewhere, with bullets whistling over their heads and cutting some branches from nearby trees. They immediately jumped from the buggy and raced to a house close by for shelter. They drew their Colts and prepared for action. It turned out to be a false alarm caused by a Partisan who carelessly triggered the burst while cleaning his gun.

Yes, he would never forget that horse and buggy. During that first visit he immediately recognized himself in the picture that had been taken during their drive towards Notranjsko. "Buggy, buggy", he repeated several times; how wonderful it would have been to sit in it again. So Franc Skraba fulfilled his wishes. He invited him on a trip to Bled where they hired the same kind of horse and buggy as they had previously ridden many years ago.



66- Thelma and Bill Crim with the author, Edi Selhaus, in Ljubljana.

Bill Crim:

The saddest mission I experienced was to Wels Airdrome 30 May 1944 when "Full House" stalled out and swerved underneath us as we dropped our frags. The intercom was silent all the way home.

I experienced a stall with Nixon piloting one time. I became aware of a problem when Nix said to the co-pilot on intercom"Can't he see we're in trouble?". We were flying off the right wing of the box leader. When I looked out we were about a plane length ahead of the leader and Nix was working the throttles, the flaps, and any thing else he could and was he mad! "The damn fool better speed up or we'll all stall!"And just then we stalled. It threw me up and then down, I guess. Iremember looking out straight ahead and saw nothing but the ground! A scary but thrilling experience-mostly scary. Between both pilots they got back to level flight; I don't know how far we fell but it was plenty for me. Nix came on and said (He was half bawling) "If that SOB doesn't wantus flying with him, I'll go find somebody who does." And we did. We climed back to altitude and Nix joined up with the next box going by and we went over the target with them. I don't think we knew what outfit they were but it didn't matter. I always felt good about flying with Nixon. See over - 2 pages.

We had just turned on the IP to Ploesti once and had just opened the bomb bay doors. I was watching the box to our right when all of a sudden, their box leader salvoed his load. Nothing out of any other. Down below it was overcast and we couldn't see the ground at all. A short pause and then a ship further back in the box dropped. Pause. Then another; it was interesting to watch and imagine great minds at work trying to figure it out and then deciding to let loose. I know that box went over Ploesti empty after stringing bombs all the way from the IP to the target. It just goes to show you and the folks back home that we were not always perfect!

One day we were getting out to the hardstand because of a last minute plane switch or something. We piled off the truck with our gear and were trying to get in one last cigarette when one of the crew came back off the plane and said "Hey, there's only two flak suits and two helmuts on board!". Of course consternation in the ranks! Time to get aboard-what to do? I don't remember who the pilot was (conveniently) but he made the decision to split up the suits in pieces and go ahead with the mission. Well, the pilots deservedly each got a helmut. (I have always wondered to this day that if he didn't have that nice steel coffin seat around him, would he have volunteered us to go? Nawwww. Course he would have--Well, we split the suits and in that process I finally got an idea of what my net worth was to the crew-you guessed it-Igot the part that in civilian life guards the baseball catcher's crotch! I didn't keep a very good log that day. Others later said I seemed a bit surly but I was most of the time thinking what part of me I was going to protect at flak time. Well, wouldn't you? I finally made my decision-I went across the target holding the darn thing smack on top of my head. I'll admit I was lucky to have that piece, however, because I think two selfless souls in the tail didn't have anything for protection. Luckily we came home without a scratch.

Bill Crim Remembers . . .

15 August 1944 Beachhead Southern France "D" Day

This mission was very interesting but very frustrating. Take off and formation flying at night was hazardous, although we did have a few practice flights in preparation. At daylight we did get to see the landing craft circling the ships as we approached the beach. A grand sight! The beach was cloud-covered, however, so we couldn't drop. A flight of B-17's were on our left abreast and at the same altitude. Our plan was to turn left after bombing but the 17's kept straight and level long after we would have dropped. I thought maybe they were using Mickey or were going to drop off of us. Anyway they finally did let loose a and acouple of the bombs must have collided because not far below them there was a huge ugly ball of flame and black smoke. I remarked over intercom that if that was flak, I was going to turn in my suit. Nobody thought that was funny--except me of course. On the way home Lanford flew by Monte Cassino. It looked like some giant had upended a wheelbarrow full of caked sand!
The frustration from this mission was the fact that we lost some good men from the Wing in practice and themission morning and didn't get the satisfaction of bombing the beach.

Bill Crim and I spent a 5 day R&R together in Yugoslavia. HL

Nixon asks Crim:

Do you remember the night after it had been raining for a couple days and we had stood down for a couple days and it was still raining, we along with several other fellows decided to hang one on at the club. Well, sometime late in the evening we started to stagger back to the tents in the totally back-pitched night. You decided to lead the way so away we all went. Near our tent, you found one of the bomb trenchs'. Not too bad except that the 3 or 4 foot deep trench was completely full of water. Talk about one "madder than Hell" miserable "Hofficer". One of the fellows tried to pull you out and went in to keep you company. It took several of us to get you both out and by then we were all wet, muddy and cold. Needless to say it was a good thing we didn't have a mission the next day.

Nixon has a high regard for Carl Loiocano:

The most outstanding, loyal, smart, dedicated, and reliable airman was by far, Carl Loiocano. So that is why I thought so much of him.

Re: Stall story – Nixon to Crim:

.... . .-.. .-.. --- That short story you told about us stalling out and pitching over. I think you were the only other person that realized how close our box came to losing 6 planes and about 60 crew members. When we started to stall and change direction, the only thing I could do was either slide left and take five planes with us or full right rudder, let her stall, then dump the nose almost vertical. The ole bird hung to-gether even with 1/2 gas load, (12,000 lbs) and 10,000 lbs of bombs. Crim ole man, have you really thought how lucky we were to come home in one piece.

Weren't we all? HL

Lt. Joe L. Ogan's Crew

No photo

No roster