CERIGNOLA CONNECTION

455th Bomb Group Association Newsletter

Spring 1996

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

After many months of eager anticipation the five days at the Group reunion passed so quickly, and the months since then just as rapidly. It was such an honor to have been selected to be president of this great 455th Bomb Group Association. I wish again to thank and express my appreciation to all of you for your offers of help.

I have always felt that the most important job I ever had was the one I had flying with our Bomb Group. Even though we had the bad and the sad times of combat missions, we also had many good times and made many lasting friendships that continue to this day.

Many military veterans have told me that they have not attended reunions because they have not remained in contact with members of their organizations and would know no one. I always tell them that they may not know anyone but there are no strangers! Everyone there has shared the same or similar experiences and has something in common; something different from civilian organizations.

We hope to have our 1997 reunion site selected by early spring. If at all possible we hope you will be able to attend. You will have a great time.

Best wishes and good health to you all in 1996.

C. E. Riggs

REUNION DATE SET!

The 455th Bomb Group Association will hold its reunion September 24th through 27th 1997 at the Holiday Inn Dayton Mall, Miamisburg, Ohio (located next to Dayton).

Our first tour on Thursday 25th will be to the U.S. Air Force Museum. The day includes the IMAX Theater, plus three buildings with aircraft, other exhibits and movies. A party will be held that evening at the Holiday Inn. For Friday and Saturday, we have more tours in planning.

On Saturday evening, 27th, a super banquet will be held under/among the aircraft in the USAF Museum. You will want to attend this great occasion!

Save these dates of September 24-27, 1997, for attending this next reunion.

THERE'S LIFE IN THE OLD 455th!

In 1961 the 455th was activated again as the 455th Strategic Missile Wing. On 25 June 1968, the 91st Strategic Missile Wing replaced the 455th SMW as the missile unit at Minot AFB. When the 91st replaced the 455th, the 740th, 741st, and 742nd Missile Squadrons were reassigned from the 455th to the 91st.

The 740th has recently adopted the nickname "The Cultured Vultures". They have modified the old 455th patch, they will wear this patch as a squadron morale patch.

If you, or anyone in the 455th Bomb Group Assoc. have any questions feel free to contact me at (701) 723-2858.

Eric Dekraai, SRA USAF
Historian
Department of the Airforce

FINAL FLIGHTS

Our hearts are with and sympathies go to the loved ones of the 455th members

S/Sgt. Albert D. Alt (08/02/95) Ball Gunner, Harry Prosser/I. Miller's crew, 740th B. Sq.

1st Lt. Erwin M. Bosler (12/31/94) Navigator, 741st B. Sq.

1st Lt. Jack A. Compton (01/31/94) Navigator, Jack Saine's crew, 740th B. Sq. (Correction of list, Spring 1995)

M/Sgt. Albin T. Dahlstrom (11/12/95) Chief, Ground Communications, 740th B.Sq.

2nd Lt. Henry L. Manning (07/27/95) Bombardier, George O. Keahey's crew, 743rd B. Sq.

S/Sgt. George Burkhardt III (08/24/95) Waist Gunner, Jack H. Thomas' crew, 743rd B.Sq.

S/Sgt. James W. Connelly (01/19/96) Tail Turret Gunner, Bill Loffer's crew, 743rd B. Sq.

Lt. Col. Donald Melton (07/11/94) 1st Pilot, 743rd B. Sq.

Lt. Col. Richard L. Brimage (10/22/95) 1st Pilot, Plane "Rusty Dusty", 743rd B. Sq.

1st Lt. Orville I. Lee (01/05/84) 1st Pilot, Plane "Menacing Messilina", 743rd B. Sq.

1st Lt. Charles A. Denton (12/26/91) Co-Pilot, Orville I. Lee's crew, 743rd B. Sq.

S/ Sgt. Earl B. Kohnke (09/02/79) Radio Operator/Gunner, Orville I. Lee's crew, 743rd B. Sq.

S/Sgt. Victor P. Jones (12/23/95) Cryptographer, 743rd B. Sq. and Hq.

1st Lt. Charles B. Thatcher (05/20/87) Bombardier, Francis Hosimer's crew, 741st B. Sq.

1st. Lt. Harry D. Wade (03/26/92) 1st Pilot, 741st B. Sq.

1st Lt. Lee Troy Smith (03/15/96) Navigator, William H. Zimmerman's crew, 743rd B. Sq.

A Correction

455th Group Tail Marking.
Ed: This correction was submitted by one of our readers, and corrects what is printed in the unit history "Flight of the Vulgar Vultures." Your editor really doesn't remember any more. At my age now I probably would join up with the wrong squadron. The submitted correction is as follows. The history version is in the winter 1995 issue of the Cerignola Connection.

Each group and squadron had distinctive tail markings for their airplanes. This was coordinated by the 304th Bomber Wing. The 455th had a black colored diamond shape on the upper half of both vertical stabilizers and yellow painted lower stabilizers and rudders. The squadron symbols were on the upper rudders–black vertical rectangle 740th, black four leaf clover 741st, black horizontal stripe 742nd, black diagonal stripe 743rd. The aircraft numbers were in black on both sides of the rear part of the fuselage. These markings were especially useful during rendezvous to insure joining the proper group formation when flying a mission.

A Thought!

What greater gift can you give your dad or father-in-law than to sign him up as a member of the 455th Bomb Group Association. Malcolm Wilcox did that for his father-in-law Eugene Nunnally (Turret Gunner, 743rd Bomb Squadron, Mike Mullineaux's crew). Eugene would like to hear from former members and friends and can be reached through his son-in-law at: M.B. Wilcox, 3617 White Fern Rd. Beech Bluff, TN 38313. He is in bad health and a note would cheer him up.

Help Wanted!

Your editor has original character art of the following (last known 1944 addresses)–
James Norrell Brown
606 S 13th
Laramie, WY

Rossel J. Pederson
1402 3rd Ave No
Ft Dodge, IA

Robert Mottitt Jr.
121 Greenwood Rd.
Sharon Hill, PA

If you can trace these former members please let your editor know.

Is My Face Red!

Typo's can get you in trouble. Spring 1995 issue, Cerignola Connection, Song Lillie Marlene, last verse, second line – "Who then will love you, who will make you"
add the word yearn, te who will make you yearn.

Several readers have brought this to your editors attention. At least they are reading the Cerignola Connection.

DUES

Annual dues of $15 are payable November 1 of the preceding year. Life memberships, $100. Make your check payable to the 455th Bomb Group Association and mail it to **Lou Hansen, 455th Bomb Group Association, P.O. Box 286, Spencer, Iowa 51301**.

We would like to hear from you!

Contributions and pictures may be sent to your Editor, **Tom Ramey, 1211 Montclaire Ct., Appleton, WI 54915**. All material will be returned after publication. When sending photographs, please apply your address label on the back of the photo in order that these may be identified after publication and then returned to you.

If you have a special "war story" and it need not be flying or combat, but a squadron or group happening, send it in. This makes interesting reading for everyone.

It's Never Too Late!

Despite your editors plea for photos of the San Antonio, Texas reunion, none were forth coming. If you have some you would like to share with other members, please send them in along with caption reference. I'll return them after printing. (put your address label on the back of each one.)

Help!

Your editor faithfully returns photos after publication of the Cerignola Connection. Some have been returned for discontinuance of forwarding. Address used was from mailing labels on back of the photos. Returnees –
James D. Mehegan
Maurice Fuller
also original photos of:
Multa Bona and airmen
Maid in USA
If you can help let your editor know.

Multa Bono

In the winter 1995 issue of the Cerignola Connection, page 6, we asked for identity of the airmen pictured. O.H. Buffington provided the legend:
L to R, Andy Delorn, Donald Bauer, O.H. Buffington, (Dog named Pooch), Tom Conroy, M.R. Strickland, William Nixon.

Daisies Won't Tell!

The flower chosen as a national symbol in remembrance of all former POWs is the Daisy. The

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Military Code of Conduct, required of every military person engaged in the defense of the United States, states that only name, rank and serial number are to be voluntarily divulged to the enemy. American folklore has long deemed that "Daisies won't tell", making it a sincere tribute to the memory of those who have endured hardships in silence.

The Chaplain's Corner



Our Thanks To Thee

There is so much in life for which we cannot pay,
The things we take for granted in our journey day by day.
From early in the morning until the day is done,
We ought to count our blessings and name them one by one.

Health, peace, happiness, love of kin and friends,
Birds, trees, flowers, seas – a list that never ends.
Summer, autumn, winter, spring, each brings something rare,
And we accept what comes our way without thought or care.
We really ought to think a bit of what we have and why,
There is so much belongs to us – the stars, the moon, the sky.
the very air we breathe each day, the food upon the board;
And the only way we can ever pay – "Our thanks to Thee, O Lord."

Ed–Somewhere in our membership we must have a Minister who would like to volunteer and give your editor a submission for this corner, twice a year. Your editor has been filling in up to now.

THE OPTIMIST

I passed a sand lot yesterday,
Some kids were playing ball,
I strolled along the third base line
Within the fielder's call.
'Say, what's the score?' I asked.
He yelled to beat the stuffing,
'There's no one out, the bases full,
They're winning forty-two to nothing!'
'You're getting beat, aren't you my friend?'
And then in no time flat
He answered: 'No, sir, not as yet!
Our side hasn't been up to bat!'

First Presbyterian Church
Reynoldsburg, OH

Milt Kaplan Writes –

I am a member of the 455th B.G. Assoc., Inc. from the 743rd Squadron. I had attended the reunions of Colorado Springs and Fort Worth, but unfortunately could not be at the next two. However, I am looking forward to the next one.

The reason for my writing this letter is to inform you about one of our members. He is Dr. Walter Frankel, who had been the Group Dentist. I recently saw him at his retirement home in Boca Raton, FL. I met him 15 years after the war in Peekskill, NY where he had lived. I live near there, and we became friendly. In fact, we used to go out to dinner together with our wives and mutual friends.

Two years ago, while traveling in Italy with his wife, he suffered a massive stroke. It has left him in a bad physical condition. His wife, Evelyn, has been taking excellent care of him. She is a wonderful woman. His son, Bruce, has also been very supportive.

When he learned that I was going to visit him, he got up at 7:30 in the morning to prepare for the visit. We reminisced about our time in Italy during the war and times after the war. He is an avid reader and follower of the Cerignola Connection and some of the members of the group whom we both knew. It really meant a lot to him to having me visit him. I felt badly for him and his wife. I plan on visiting him again when we return to Florida next year.

It would be nice if he could receive some mail from those who knew and remembered him. Also, try to make sure he continues receiving the Cerignola Connection.

Ed: Dr. Frankel's address is:
5700 N.W. Second Ave
Apt 501
Boco Raton, FL 33487

Help In Obtaining Missing Medals

As WWII came to an end, large numbers of service members were transferred, discharged, etc. with their service records apparently being closed out some time later. In many cases they returned to civilian life unaware of medals and decorations being authorized after the fact and never awarded or presented to them.

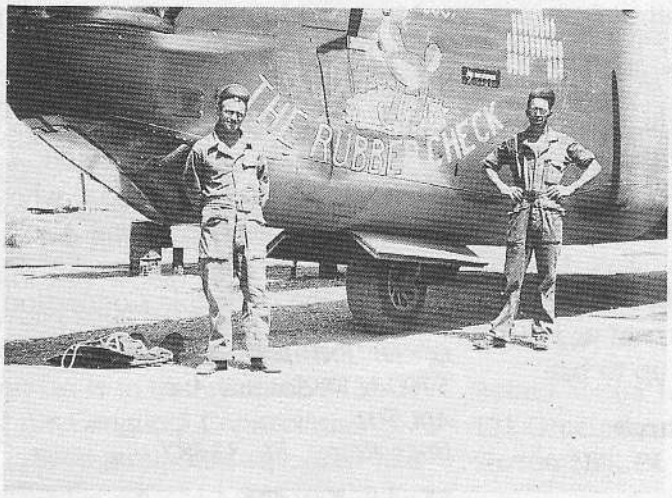
If yours are among the missing you can submit a standard form SF-180 request to the National Personnel Records Center along with a cover letter, discharge certificate and a notarized "next-of-kin" statement. The minimal paperwork effort and few months wait is well worth the results! This procedure supposedly applies to all veterans and next of kin for missing or replacement medals through the Civil War to the present.

For those interested: **Medals of America–1929AH Fairview Road, Fountain Inn, SC 29644** supplied a booklet of directions, forms, correct phraseology and sample cover letters as well as a catalog of medals and decorations available.

To obtain a Standard Form SF-180 write to the following:

National Personnel Records Center
(Military Personnel Records)
9700 Page Boulevard
St. Louis, Missouri 63132

HATS OFF TO THOSE WHO REALLY KEPT THEM FLYING!



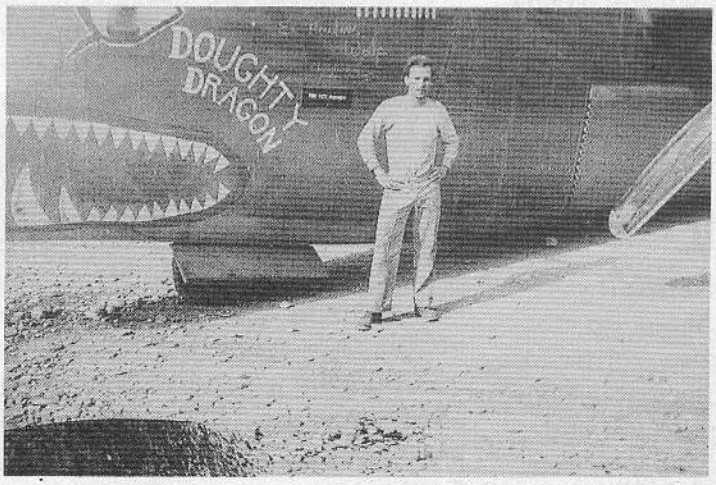
Reno Lerninger far right, crew chief with John Martsching "His planes just kept coming back"

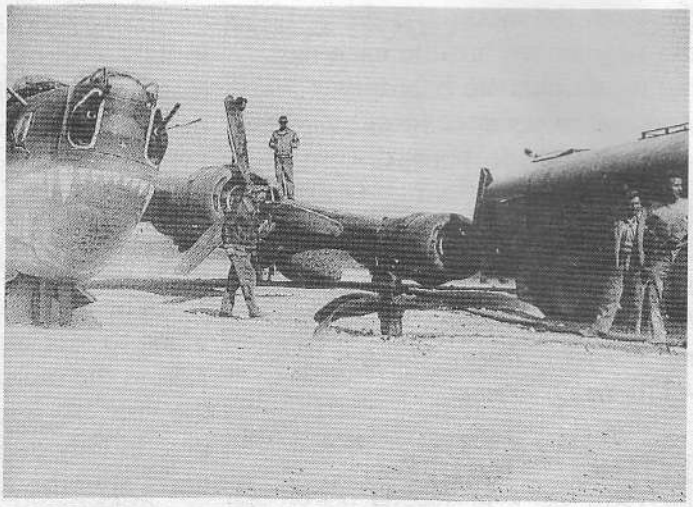


741st BSM Section, L to R: Stanley Domitz, L. Harold Riddle, John Martsching



Front row, L to R: Reno Lerninger, Crew Chief; Albert Hagemann, Line Chief; Kay Coleman, Crew Chief; Raymond Hewit, Crew Chief. Back Row, L to R: John Martching-BSM; Elmer Bush, Crew Chief; Americo Liberatore, Crew Chief; Henry McGrath, Eng. Clerk





Who?

A Great Idea From John Davis!

I normally am not this prompt in answering letters, but your letter gave me an idea that I wanted to share with you. In your letter you mentioned working on the Cerignola Connection as one of your projects. I really enjoyed your letter. While having some idea of parts of your background, of course most of it was entirely new to me. I found it to be tremendously interesting. In our visits at the reunion, we talk to some of the people but with many only for a matter of minutes and with the others only a little concerning their present situation, activities etc. It's only a very few that I find that I know any real background on, or what they've been doing since retirement. I think our members really would enjoy knowing what happened to the others after leaving the service.

Would it be feasible to have have members submit what they have been doing all these years. It would be enjoyable reading.

John Davis

Ed-I shortened John's letter but it's a great idea. In several early issues of the Cerignola Connection I published Tom Mitchell's recap of member contacts. Let me know what you've been doing since the end of WWII, a little about yourself. It will get in print.



Whatever happened to old what's his name?

Ed Riggs, our president was the first to respond to my request for a recap of the years since WWII. Let's keep those cards and letters coming. We want to hear from you!

"I left active duty at the end of 1945 and returned to college graduating from Wichita University (now Wichita State) in June, 1947, with a major in Economics. I worked 30 years for Getty Oil Co., retiring from the Tax Division, Finance Dept., in 1977.

When I left active duty, I stayed in the Active Air Force Reserve retiring in 1969. I had several jobs that ranged from flying a plane to flying a desk. My last assignment was as a Liaison Officer with the Candidate Advisory Service, Air Force Academy.

Marge and I have two fine children. Our daughter, Linda Boyd (a college graduation present!) lives here in Tulsa where her husband, Fred, is a senior vice-president with F&M Bank and Trust Company. She has a son and daughter and two step-sons.

Our son, Col. Gregory Riggs, PE, Ph D, is a 1972 graduate of the Air Force Academy. For the past two and one-half years he has been Base Civil Engineer and Cmdr of the Civil Engineering Squadron at Nellis AFB, Nevada. Greg and Brude have three daughters.

That's a brief history and probably more than you wanted to know. I do want you to know how much I enjoy and appreciate your fine work with the Cerignola Connection."

THE STORY OF HANS VON SWARTZ

This is the story of one American airman who flew under the name of Hans Von Schultz.

When the Nazis took charge in Germany, they began their systematic persecution of all German Jewish citizens. Dr. Swartz took his family and what they could carry with them and escaped through Switzerland and then to the United States.

The son of Dr. Swartz, Hans Von Swartz, joined the U.S. Army Air Force. (After fifty years my memory of the correct spelling of his last name may not be accurate.) The Army S2 changed his name to Hans Von Schultz. He joined the 455th Bomb Group and flew his missions under this assumed name. His job was to monitor all the German Luftwaffe fighters, Staffels, and German ground stations in general.

Our plane, 448754 #22 "Big Gas Bird," had his special radio equipment installed on the flight deck, over the bomb bay, in the rear of the plane. Our plane flew on the left wing of the lead plane in our squadron. Hans would monitor the German planes and stations and then pass along this information to the Group Commander and our "Little Friends."

Hans agreed to teach a class in German for the 741 Squadron. We met in the mess hall. The first class had 15 or 20 in attendance. After a few weeks the interest waned and it was down to just the members of our crew. Hans taught us German songs, how to count and various German idioms and words that would be most helpful to us in case we were shot down. He was very accommodating and willing to spend as much time as we wanted in order to learn the German language.

As the war wound down, the German fighters had little gas to engage our bombers. With our fighter escort, P51's, P47's and P38's, they were not capable of attacking us. They would use a lone plane, Me-262, to determine the target we were heading for. Hans would monitor these transmissions and report them to the Flight Commander.

Now for the rest of the story...We finished a mission one day and Hans jumped out of the rear hatch and announced he had completed his missions. He stated he could now tell us his real name. He told us his name was not Schultz but really was Swartz. He stated only S2 knew his real name. A few days later, as we prepared for a mission, he came to our plane again. He stated he had made a mistake in counting his missions and he still had one mission to go. He was, to say the least, most apprehensive flying with the only crew that knew his real identity. We teased him some and he was very uncomfortable now that he had revealed his real name. We finally assured him that he was not to worry. We promised him that there was no way we would ever say anything if we were captured. With this assurance, he settled down and the mission went well. We were hit with some flack but there was not much damage to the plane. Needless to say, he was extremely happy and relieved to have his 35 missions completed safely.

Paul T. Peters, R. Waist Gunner
Bomb Strike Photographer
Lt. Lester G. Pinkley's Crew

A PHONE CALL THAT WAS AN ANSWER TO A MOTHER AND DAD'S PRAYER



When Lt. John T. Polando's crew failed to return from their mission to ODERTAL, on October 14, 1944, the customary M.I.A. wire was sent to the families of all the crew members in the U.S.A. One of the members of the crew was Jerome J. "Jerry" Maisano. The story of their planes loss of two engines to flack, landing behind Russian lines, return via Turkey and Cairo, Egypt to Italy and return to our base is well documented in the history of our 455th Bomb Group. Now, here is the rest of the story that pertains to "Jerry" Maisano.

One evening I was walking by the 741st Squadron mess hall when Jerry Maisano came around the corner of the building. We let out a yell and hugged each other. We had spent most of our time in the Army Air Corps together. This was the first that I knew that he or any of his crew were alive. We went into the mess hall and had dinner and he told me the story of what had happened to his crew on the 741-Sq 455 Bomb Group Bombing Mission number 133 to ODERTAL.

That night after my reunion with Jerry, I wrote a letter to my parents in Detroit. I related the story about meeting Jerry and that we had dinner together. Jerry had given me his parents address and phone number so our parents could talk and get together. When my mother received my letter, she immediately called and talked to Mr. and Mrs. Maisano. They became very excited. They had received the M.I.A. wire from the the 15th Army Air Force that their son was missing in action. Mr. and Mrs. Maisano wanted to know the date of the letter but that was not enough. My mother gave them her address and they drove over to her house right away. They wanted to see the letter, hold the letter, and check the date of the letter. The last information they had was that their son was missing in action, but here was a letter with a more recent date which proved to them that he was still alive. They all rejoiced in the news that their son was alive and well.

The two families kept in touch for the rest of the war in Europe. Both Jerry and I made it home safe and sound. I don't think my mother and Mr. and Mrs. Maisano ever forgot the great joy and elation and excitement of that meeting.

Paul T. Peters
R. Waist Gunner
Bomb Strike Photographer
Lt. Lester G. Pinkley's Crew

John Martsching Remembers!

As for remembering "Yo Yo" you can see that I certainly do! Reno Leininger who was her crew chief was a tent mate. He and I were together on his first ship "Rubber Check" when we flew from the states. We were good friends. During the fifties he came to our farm in Iowa and lived with us until we moved to Oregon in 1964. We operated a repair shop on the farm. He is now living at Route 2 Box 8, Dexter, MN 55926. This past summer he had heart surgery and a light stroke. He is recuperating slowly and we had a note from him at Christmas time.

I have to comment about the article by Win Powers in Cerignola Connection and Sortie.

Albert Hagemann was 741st line chief not Al Hademann. We were tent mates and became good friends. He and I had quite a bit in common, he was a Nebraska farmer, I farmed in Iowa and our heritage was similar. We visited him and his wife Bonnie in Nebraska in the eighties. We had corresponded since our discharge. Al died seven or eight years ago and we still kept in touch with Bonnie but we didn't hear from her this past Christmas. She was in ill health a year ago.

Al was a skilled mechanic. While he supervised the crew chiefs, he wasn't always looking over their shoulders. When they needed help he was there to help and to see that they had what they needed to do the job. He respected their abilities and expected the best of them and they knew it.

As for a special engine change crew, I never knew of one and I'm sure I would have known about it because of my close association with Al and the crew chiefs, four of them were tent mates. Al's part in the engine changes was to see that the crew chief had what he needed to work with, that a new engine was at the change site along with extra stands and the necessary hoisting equipment. He was always available if his expertise was needed and he usually assigned an extra man to help. The only time I knew of him taking charge of a repair job was when a plane of ours landed near Salerno. He took a crew and went there and made the necessary repairs so the plane could be flown back to the outfit.

The credit for the fast engine change should go to Reno Leininger who also was an excellent and skilled mechanic. He trained his crew as to what each would do and the procedure that would be followed when an engine change became necessary as he knew that would probably happen.

When the pilot radioed in that he had an engine failure and was returning Al and Reno both were alerted. I heard about it at the same time. Al found an extra helper for Reno who got his crew together. As soon as the plane was parked and the props quit turning, stands were in place and work began. Al saw to it that all the necessary hoisting equipment, etc. was in place and a new engine was on the site. The new engine was started up, there were no leaks and the ground check was ok.

When Sgt. McGrath, engineering clerk called 741st Headquarters to report planes ready for service the next day he included it. The operation officer who knew Mac well said, "Mac, have you been drinking, that plane came in at noon with an engine out." Mac's reply was "Sgt. Leininger says it will be ready to go and when he says that it means it will be." A few minutes later a jeep arrived in a cloud of dust with the operation officer. He hit the ground, looked around and said "where is that plane?" Mac said, "up there slow timing" pointing toward the sky.

News must have moved fast – the next afternoon a car from 15th Air Force Headquarters at Bari arrived with photographers and reporters. They talked with Reno and his crew. After they left Reno said to me "they haven't seen anything yet." His last engine change took just over two and a half hours.

Much credit should go to the crew chiefs. When a plane was assigned to them, it became their plane. It was almost like it was a part of their family. Not only did they do their very best to keep it in shape but insisted the same of all their crew and everyone else who worked on it. Since my crew and I were responsible for the autopilots and bombsights for all the planes of the 741st, at one time or another we worked with each one of the crew chiefs. They always read the log book after each mission and if any of our equipment needed attention we were notified immediately. When a plane did not return the crew chief not only mourned for the air crew but also for the plane that had been his pride and joy.

John Martschtng



Russ Felzer!

Through a little luck, the kindness of a few people, I made contact with Lou Hansen and joined the 455th Assoc. last month. I had not been aware of the group prior to this.

It all happened after I posted an inquiry on the Veterans file on American Online. I received 4 responses. One led me to Lou and my membership, another was the 455th Group History Book. The gentleman, John Workman, whose father was in the 459th Group, had purchased the book. He found that the Air Force Assoc. was going to publish a 459th history, so he kindly sold the 455th book to me. Lou sent me the 1995 newsletters and I congratulate you on a job well done.

We flew "Censored". On August 23rd, my 22nd mission (Group's 101), we got hit bad after we dropped our load. They shot out one engine, hit our tanks and knocked out our hydraulic system. Needless to say, it was a scary time. I'll never forget the scene of our chief engineer, John Cichon standing in the bomb bay entrance

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to the flight deck, with gas dripping on him, shrugging his shoulders in an "I don't know what we can do" gesture.

The smell of gas permeated the plane. Everyone was thinking "what do we do" when I asked over the intercom, if anyone had a match, I wanted a cigarette. I thought our co-pilot Ridgely, was going to shoot me. He shouted, "You dumb s-o-b do you want to blow us up? When I started to laugh, everyone else did, and we all settled down.

We were out of formation, flying alone over the Adriatic, hoping to make it back to base. With our hydraulics gone, we decided the only way we could make a safe and successful landing was to tie parachutes to the side gun mounts for braking action. Halfway home, over the Adriatic, Ridgley started hollering, "we'll never make it, let's bail out!" With my parachute already tied to the mounts, I hollered, "no one is bailing out, we're going in!" Everyone concurred.

We made it to the base, Cichon hand cranked the landing gear. I was to give the signal over the intercom to throw out the chutes on landing. I shouted "NOW" when our wheels hit, the chutes went out, we rolled about 100 feet and the chutes billowed. We stopped and everyone scrambled out, fearing an explosion. In the aftermath, pilot Hall, Cichon and I received DFC's for this mission.

Ed: Russ and your editor were on the committee for the first 455th BG Reunion in Milwaukee, this several years after WWII. I never saw or heard from Russ until his letter came this February. Let's hope more members will come in from American Online. It's great to renew old friendships.

MEMORIES FROM JOHN MARTSCHING

An article in the Sortie (15th Air Force Publication) about the 455th Bomb Group brought back many memories.

The principle behind the actions of the 455th was, there was a job to be done and everyone would do their best to get it done. I am sure this was the same with all of the Fifteenth Air Force.

I was a member of the original Cadre formed at Clovis Air Base in the summer of 1943, that became the 741st Bomb Squadron of the 455th Bomb Group.

We were moved to Alamogordo, New Mexico for a short stay, then went to Salt Lake City where we received most of our personnel. From there we went by troop train to Langley Field, Virginia.

As I understood it we were the first Heavy Bombardment Group to be trained by the 1st Air Force. It was all hurry up and push to get in as much practice bombing and experience in navigation and cross country flying as possible.

Most of the planes we received were end of the line models that had been parked for some time and required a great deal of servicing. Some had to have the bombsight and auto-pilot equipment almost completely replaced before they could be used for practice bombing. We even received one that had been a sea search plane that could not be used at all for bombing but was used for navigation and cross country flights.

We had a group Bombsight and Auto-pilot Maintenance shop with all four squadrons working out of it. Each squadron's personnel took care of their squadron's planes. I was section head for the 741st squadron. There was supposed to be an officer and three noncoms for each squadron's bombsight maintenance section but there was only one officer in the group at that time, Lt. L. W. Taylor. The group worked well together and there was much cooperation.

When our training at Langley was completed, we received new planes and those of us who flew overseas went to Mitchell Field, New York for our overseas processing.

We left Mitchell Field December 18 and flew to Florida. From there it was to Puerto Rico (we were supposed to go to Port Au Prince but had to detour around a storm) then along the coast of South America, with overnight stops, to Brazil where we were held up by bad weather. We finally got clearance to leave and left Natal and landed at Dakar on New Year's Eve. This trip was about the range limit for a B-24. We were lucky and had good weather all the way. When we sighted the coast we could see the airfield — good navigating. From Dakar we flew north with overnight stops at Agadir, Marrakech and Oran before joining the rest of our outfit about twenty miles from Tunis at a makeshift air field.

We spent the rest of January, 1944 waiting for a place to go in Italy. On the 1st of February we crossed the Mediterranean and entered Italy at the instep. On landing at a field near Cerignola as soon as we turned off the runway, we got stuck in the mud.

Our ground personnel who had gone over by troopship convoy were waiting for us and really seemed happy to see us. They were camped in an olive grove, sleeping in pup tents and had nothing good to say about the weather in Italy. We who flew in had no pup tents so we were put in a big empty hospital tent. The next morning half of it was flooded. We were issued the regular pyramidal tents, one for each eight men. After a little looking around we decided to put them near the flight line where our planes were parked. I don't think anyone asked permission or authorization to do this but it worked out well as it put the crew chiefs within walking distance of their planes.

Continued on Page 9

Continued from Page 8

We soon got the bad news that the ships with our equipment and supplies were sunk by the last German raid on Bari. Even rations were a little short in supply for a while, a lot of dried food was used but we had an exceptional mess sergeant of Italian descent who was adept at trading for fresh produce.

Now was when the resourcefulness, ingenuity and some unnamed qualities of the men of the 455th went to work. Some equipment was obtained by regular requisition, a sometimes slow process. Some was obtained by other methods. There was a big supply depot near Bari. If an inventory was ever taken I wonder how they accounted for what wasn't there?

When we arrived in Italy, I learned that the 455th now had four Bombsight Maintenance Officers.

After a short time and before we got squadron B.S.M. shops set up, all B.S.M. personnel were put on detached duty at Group Headquarters. Captain L.W. Taylor was made officer in charge and the other three officers transferred to duty elsewhere. We set up shop in one end of a large building near the old castle that was used for Group Headquarters. It took a lot of cleaning up and we had to put in a dividing wall. The necessary tools and test equipment started to come in. I will never know why it was all checked out to me. Could it have been because my serial number started with a one? Our original equipment lists called for a jeep for each squadron. We finally got a war weary one that evidently no one else wanted. Here again, know how, and ingenuity kept it going. When we needed to go to Bari for parts or to the repair facilities there we checked out a vehicle from the group motor pool. The 741st flight line was closest to headquarters so we did a lot of walking.

The group shop worked out very well just as it had at Langley. Although each squadron took care of its own planes if some unusual problem came up everybody helped. Our orders said we were allowed a certain percent tolerance for error. By unanimous agreement it was decided that did not apply to our shop. We all realized that there might be a time when lives might depend on our work. This was brought very much to our attention one day. After one mission one entire Air Crew from the 741st came to the shop and told us that after their manual controls were destroyed they came back and landed on auto-pilot. We had found, according to technical orders, that the planes could not be landed on auto-pilot. After some investigation we found the reason was not enough elevator control and found a way to correct it and made the change on all the planes.

The plane mentioned earlier was repaired and put back in service. On the next mission it received still more damage and couldn't make it all the way back but again landed on auto-pilot near Foggia, too badly damaged to salvage.

Some time during the summer of 1944 we received orders for each squadron to select and train another enlisted man. This brought the shop count up to sixteen enlisted men and one officer. The 455th B.S.M. shop was rated as one of the best in the 15th Air Force. Someone in the higher ranks must have thought so because six of the enlisted men were awarded the Bronze Star Medal.

When we first set up our tent, cots were not available, so rather than sleep on the ground we found some boards and made forms then laced them with 'requisitioned' field telephone wire for springs. We built a stove that burned 100 octane gas piped in from a tank the refuelers kept filled. As time went on we acquired boards from bomb crates and floored the tent, then we ripped out the seams on two sides and built a wall thus increasing our space. Albert Hagermann, our line chief and I were always on call so a field phone sat on the floor between our beds. A P-38 wing tank was found, cleaned out and mounted on a stand then filled with water which was piped in to a wash basin made from an oxygen tank. Electricity was wired in and a speaker was hooked up to the radio in the communication shack nearby. We heard a lot of music and one day were complimented by Axis Sally.

This is just a little of one man's experience in the 15th Air Force. I am proud to be able to say that I was a part of it. I am still in touch with Sam Speakman who was 741st photography section head and Reno Leininger who was crew chief on the plane I went overseas on.

I would be happy to hear from any other member of the 455th Bomb Group.

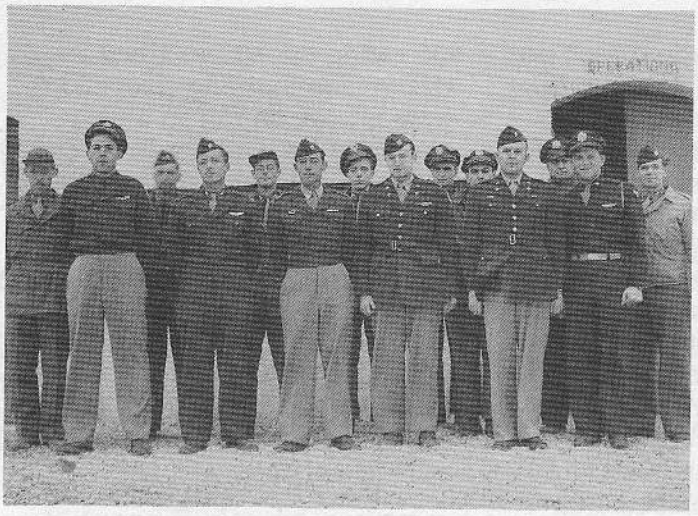
Thank you for inviting me to join the Fifteenth Air Force Association.

John W. Martsching
3000 NW Roosevelt Drive
Corvallis, OR 97330-1164

*Ed: 455th Group Bombsight and Autopilot Maintenance Personnel Capt. L.W. Taylor, Group Officer; A. Woolworth; * P.W. Treadwell; * E.O. Heath; L.S. Nolan; Stephen J. Spitalski; Gene Sturgill; Leroy Simpson; Joe Carvara; * D.H. Starr; Robert Harding; J.W. Shoots; C.W. Powers; * John W. Martsching 741st; Leland H. Riddle, 741st; Stanley Domitz, 741st; John D. Starrett Jr., 741st*
**Squadron Section Head*

Thought For The Day!

You may have treasures and wealth untold,
Chests of silver and chests of gold.
Richer than I, you will never be.
I had a mother who read to me.



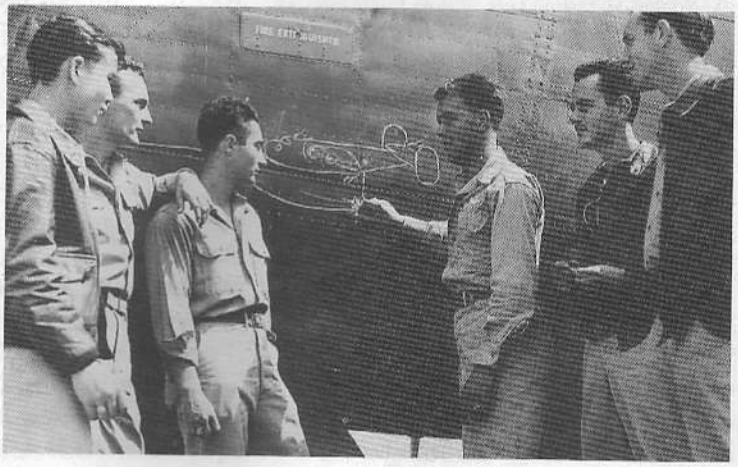
743rd H.Q. Staff Officers, September 1944
Front row: Includes Lt. Col. Thayer; Capt "Doc" Kollar; Lt Fuller Harrington; 1st Lt. Sol (Russ) Felzer, newly appointed Squadron Navigator.



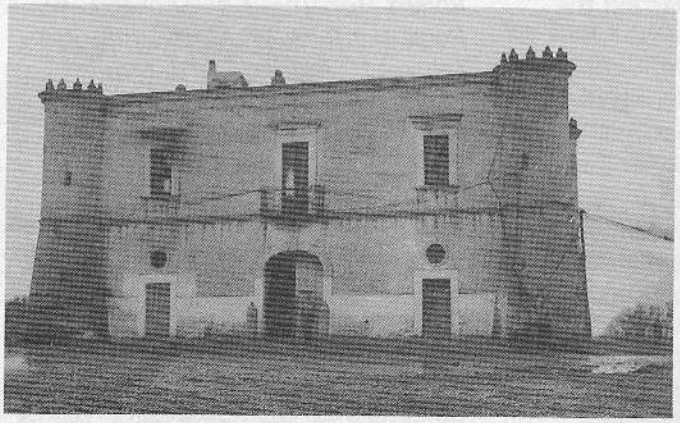
USO Troupe entertained at 73rd's Officers Club Thanksgiving, 1944.
From left: Benny Meroff, famous Chicago band leader; 1st Lt. Sol (Russ) Felzer, O.C. president; Mr. and Mrs. Gwynne, comic and dancer; Capt. Kollar; Mrs. Benny Meroff and unnamed lady, dancers and Lt. Col. Thayer.



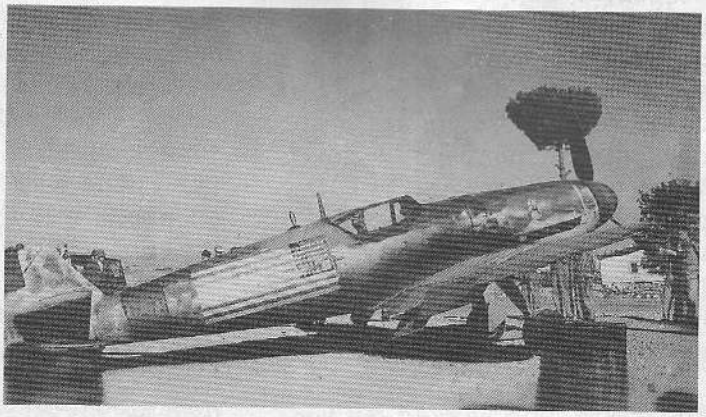
Hanging out after a mission!
Lt. Pinkley's Airmen, 741st Bomb Squadron
L to R: Charles Glaeser, Nose Turret Gunner; E.A. Craven, Tail Turret Gunner; Paul Peters, Waist Gunner; Ted Skroback, Ball Turret Gunner; Red Coyle, Waist Gunner-Radio Operator; plus 2 boys from Cerignola.



Airmen who flew with Lt Kelly June 26, 1944, the only plane from 742nd to return from Moosbierbaum target. They were illustrating some of the fighter attacks on side of plane for Air Force records.
L to R: Cpl Kenneth D. Lacey, Ball Turret Gunner; Cpl James R. Thomas, Flight Engineer/Tail Gunner; Sgt Howard Blumberg, Right Waist Gunner; Sgt Chester R. Pratt, Left Waist Gunner; Sgt William F. Pelkey, Top Turret Gunner; Cpl Anthony C. Brodeur, Radio Man/Nose Turret Gunner



Main operations building of the 455th Bomb Group. Red Cross is the door on the left. Briefing room middle door. (Photo courtesy Ken Lacey)



Me-109 in which Romanian pilot returned Col Gunn to Cerignola. The flag paint was still moist when it landed.

NEW NOSE ART!



Eugene Nunnally, 743rd Squadron stands guard





Photos from the album of M.D. Wilcox



Rusty Dusty crew identified!
Front Row, L to R: Sgts Schiavo, Russell, Amborsini, Tuthill, Hill
Back Row, L to R: Lts Janoski, Keiselbach, Spier, Mc Cawley
742nd Squadron

Valiant Is The Word For "Glammer Gal"

Not so many days ago, December the third to be exact, a half silver and half olive drab B-24 rolled out of the Service Squadron and down the landing strip and rose gracefully into the skies.....upon which hangs a tale.

She had just undergone a stripping that would cause Gypsy Rose Lee to don her robes and hang her head in disgrace. Minus her turrets, oxygen system, bombs, etc., she resembled some sort of secret weapon.

It was on another December 3rd, that she made her first appearance in the 740th Squadron. The year was 1943, the place was Langley Field, Virginia. There, ship Number 198, as she was known then, was placed in the capable hands of M/Sgt. L.O. Bolken.

Sgt. Bolken crewed her to Italy, and for that matter has been crewing her ever since. It was on or around April 2nd, 1944 when she was laid up for repairs following the raid on the Steyr Ball-bearing factory that she was christened, "Glammer Gal." When she returned from the Steyr mission, her pilot brought her in for a landing with daylight showing thru her fuselage in dozens of place. The Jerries had thrown every thing they had; but once again "Glammer Gal" limped back home. However she flew again, and now after her 77th mission over enemy territory, she was tagged, "Battle Weary" and the stripping process began.

It would perhaps, make a novel ending to our tale if we would say that "Glammer Gal" was almost traded off when she first arrived in Italy because of super-charger trouble. We kept her, however, and now after 740 some odd hours she has the same super-chargers and also the very neat picture on the fuselage. Her fighting days are over now but I'll bet that if "Glammer Gal" could talk, she would tell some very exciting tales of dog fights and her experiences in flak alley. Goodbye to Combat "Glammer Gal" — You and the crews you carried have done a grand job. We'll say, "Good Luck" for Sgt. Bolken too because we know full well of the deep affection he has for you.

Sgt. E.S. Grear - IL CASTORO ARDENTE

The Flying Sgt.

Did you ever see a dream walking? No? Well, I never did either. Wait a minute tho, while I ask you another question. Did you ever see a First Sergeant sprout wings and fly? If you haven't before, you soon will. Word has just reached our ears that we are trading our First Sergeant Chas. Adams for 2nd Lt. Chas. Adams. Our Sergeant is now on flying status and is acting First Sergeant for the Squadron. As soon as he can put in ten missions, he will receive his commission. He deserves the break and we're all pulling for him.

From IL CASTORO ARDENTE

A Tale Of Escape And Evasion

The following is an account by William (Bill) L. Rogers of the 740th Squadron about his crew being shot down over Yugoslavia and picked up by the Chetniks. This is a typical experience for those crews going down and falling into the hands of the Partisans and Chetniks. Bill emphasizes the part his radio operator played to assist in the escape of the crew: "Jim Barker was the radio operator on a replacement crew for the 740th Squadron. His life in the Squadron revolved around the six-man tent, which he shared with other crewmen, the mess tent, writing home, and flying combat missions. Our crew had flown 16 combat missions over Rumania, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, northern Italy, southern France, Bucharest, Ploesti and 'once-is-enough' to Fredrickshaven. The mission on 8 September 1944 was to destroy the three bridges across the Danube River in the City of Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

"Belgrade was a relatively short distance from our base. The Group arrived within eyesight of the IP at least 4,000 feet below the assigned bombing altitude. The lumbering formation was led into a 360° turn to gain more altitude. Precious little added footage had been earned when the whole nightmare surfaced again with at least 40 bombers making a second very slow full circle turn to the right! Still in the shadow of the target, the mission was modified from the 20,000 feet specified to only 18,500. There was frenzied recomputations by the lead bombardiers for their bombsight settings as we pressed on to the IP and target to bomb at 18,500 feet. After 'bombs away' the next maneuver was to execute a turn to the right and get the hell out of there! Being a flight leader for the first time, I held my heading for an additional 30 seconds to insure all B-24's in the flight had dropped their bombs for good coverage when all hell broke loose inside our plane. We received a direct hit from a battery of four German 88mm anti-aircraft guns. I gave the signal to bail out by ringing the warning bell while in a steep turn to get away from the flak and then issued orders over the intercom, 'BAIL OUT!'

"Jim Barker was one of the last to leave the airplane and he was met by German soldiers who had sped from Belgrade to capture those just shot down. Barker always carried chewing gum, cigarettes, and candy bars in his flight jacket when on a mission. He landed on a highway just as the Germans arrived. Rather than putting his hands in the air, he slowly dragged out those goodies – chewing gum which the Germans accepted greedily and looked for more, then the candy bars and finally the cigarettes came from Barker's jacket, in a ploy that was potentially explosive, he detained his captors as long as possible. Fortunately, this distraction, which was an overt ruse, was successful even though Barker did not know its benefits until much later. In Barker's bold manner, he risked his own safety so that others of the crew could escape capture. Because of his delaying

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actions, the Serbian Chetniks underground 'Freedom Fighters' were able to whisk away other members of Jim's aircrew to secure areas. Seven members, including the co-pilot William (Bill) B. Crawford, were back in Italy within eight days. (Bill gave this account of their escape: "The crewmen were hidden in two-wheeled ox carts covered with corn stalks and straw. They slept in farm houses and barns and were fed by the local people until arriving at an airfield near the Adriatic Sea where they were picked up by a C-47 escorted by P-51's during daylight and flown to Italy.")

"As pilot, I was the last to leave the crippled B-24. I felt a warm surge in my right leg as I bounced down to the bomb bay catwalk to bail out. I did not have time to remove my flak vest, mae west, and my oxygen mask hose was flapping in the wind as I opened my parachute. I felt a sharp pain in my injured leg but was able to wiggle my toes; there was hope. After painfully hitting the ground on a small hill, my waist gunner, Gerry Wagner, appeared and we heard voices saying 'Chetnik.' Because of the briefings that crews downed in Yugoslavia should seek Tito's Partisans since the Chetniks would kill Americans, here was a dilemma. Gerry suggested that he would go to the main highway below to get the Germans who were believed to provide medical aid and decent treatment for prisoners. However, the same voices behind the hill were saying 'docteur.' I reasoned that no one would administer medical care to someone and then kill them so we waited for them to arrive. They were friendly and offered their assistance for medical care and escape. I was grateful that Wagner stayed although not knowing that the Chetniks continued to be pro-Allies.

"I was placed in an ox cart but could not stand the pain in my injured right leg from the bumpy road although there was a layer of corn stalks for my comfort. The rescuers switched to a wood siding from the cart, using my parachute fabric as a cushion, and positioned three wooden poles under the siding for six men to carry me to a small village of Ripanj. While a Chetnik doctor attended my wound the best he could, the German searchers entered the other end of the village. Again, the Chetniks carried me to a more secluded spot in an abandoned school house where we stayed for three days.

"Within this short period of time, almost 3,000 friendly Serbian people came to see a genuine American despite the loss of civilian lives caused by erratic bombing that was supposed to destroy the bridges. One of those 'friendly' visitors snitched and informed the Germans of our location. At about midnight, I was placed on a metal cot into a small panel truck which took us to a Serbian peasant's house where no German soldier dared venture inside. I was placed on a large round table in the kitchen where chickens scurried back and forth on the dirt floor.

"The next day, we were passed on to a grocer's home where we had a separate bedroom which was used for downed airmen. While there, the Chetniks had to retreat back into their Ravna Cora mountain stronghold. I declined the invitation to go along because it took six men just to carry me. I was not discovered by the Germans and two days later, a Partisan Lieutenant showed up to provide a means for escape to Italy. The first few days of travel was via a four-wheeled wooden wagon with corn stalks as bedding and drawn by a team of horses. Besides the driver, who went the shortest route cross country, a lone Partisan soldier with a rifle walked silently about 30 feet behind the cart. On the third night, I slept in a Partisan hospital and then was loaded into a railroad freight car early the following morning together with about 50 other wounded men and women. The straw on the floor was infested with lice and ticks. I traveled all day and night lying mostly flat on my back because of my injured leg. About noon, the door opened to the box car and a man's head popped inside and yelled, 'Are there any Yanks here?' An American officer helped me from the box car and I had a most welcome hot bath, new clothing and a wonderful home cooked meal. I was then flown to an American general hospital in Bari, Italy on 17 October 1944. Soon thereafter I was evacuated medically to the U.S. on a Liberty ship converted into a hospital. Thankfully, I fully recovered."

Capture by the German soldiers was the prelude to extended suffering that Barker prefers to forget. He was hustled through Budapest and Vienna to uppermost Germany where he remained captive five months in Stalag Luft IV prior to being forcefully evacuated in mid-winter because of the Russian offensive. Barker marched nearly 800 miles during the debilitating three months which followed. During the 'Black Hunger March,' the worn, hassled prisoners of war had to sleep in barns and open fields plus enduring the bombs and strafing by their own Allied Air forces. For a seemingly endless five or six days, Jim and other POW's had no food or drink except melted snow. He was freed at Bitterfield, about 15 miles south of Dessau, Germany. He had withered away a third of his normal body weight and required two months hospitalization in France before being able to travel. He convalesced for two months at home and remained a patient in a military hospital for another 60 days where he was presented the Purple Heart and other decorations. Jim fully recovered.

Back in his own Squadron, Bill Crawford took command of his depleted crew with a replacement co-pilot and other crew members and flew combat mission number 18 to Munich only 18 days after their escape. He and his crew completed the required missions early January 1945.

* * *

Some Fought to the End

The fighting spirit of our crews is legend. Some may call it just plain "guts!" The gunners rode in the back of the open B-24, many times in sub-zero weather, without question and never flinched at the incoming fighters. Some blazed away at the enemy fighters until the end. This is an account from the Air Force Historical War Diary of the 741st Squadron: "Lt. Keogh's airplane was rammed head-on by an enemy fighter over Moosebierbaum, Austria on 26 June 1944. Despite the loss of one engine sheared off and second afire, this gallant crew, well-disciplined, exemplified their devotion to duty by continuing to defend their aircraft and enabled it to make a bombing run in which excellent hits were observed on oil storage tanks, power plant, communications and other installations. One of the crew, S/Sgt. Alfred Puslat, tail turret gunner, was singled out for praise by returning airmen. His guns kept blazing until the last, even as the plane flamed and dropped into an heroic oblivion." The Silver Star was awarded to the next of kins for Lt. Keogh and his crew listed as missing in action: 2nd Lts. Harry F. McCracken and Howard O. Vralsted; T/Sgts. Dendy L. Frederick, Jr. and Frederick Q. Huggins; and S/Sgts. William G. Logue, Jr., Stanley W. Lundquist, Alfred Puslat and Harold L. Watson.

It is believed the German fighter pilot was out of control from damage from our guns or he miscalculated his attack. Nevertheless, it was not uncommon for the most skilled German fighter pilots to dive through the formation, coming dangerously close to the bombers with their guns blazing to disburse them. This was especially the case to hit the formation prior to reaching the target to try and disburse it. Some German pilots would roll their airplanes on their backs and go through our formation flying upside down. The determination of our crews kept the formation together. There is no single case where our bomber forces turned away from the target because of enemy opposition.

The Isle of Vis

The Isle of Vis was a haven for crippled bombers and fighters that could not make it to Italy from bombing targets in Austria, Hungary and the Balkins. It is one of the three most western Dalmation islands in the Adriatic Sea, nestled between Bisevo and Susac. Vis is, a rock island, had no fresh water but boasted of a natural and protected harbor for ships. The runway was gravel and only 3,500 feet long located in a valley. The island was a junkyard of wrecked B-24's, B-17's, B-25's and other types of aircraft. They had been bulldozed off the runway and stripped of usable spare parts and equipment. Some airplanes were repaired and flown back to their bases. On occasion, there would not be room for a crippled bomber to land and the crew was asked to bail out over the airfield and let the airplane crash in the sea. In the early stages of our combat, the island was frequently bombed by German Stukas. To invade the island would have been very costly for the Germans, thus it provided a safe emergency landing space for the Allied airplanes. While at Vis, downed flyers feasted on Yugoslavian wine and Spam until their transportation back home arrived which was a small high-speed supply boat or a C-47.

THE 455TH BOMB GROUP IN COMBAT

(a continuing series)

Mission 10, March 18, 1944 All groups of the 304th Wing were sent to attack the Maniago Airdrome in the Po Valley. Our group managed to get 39 B-24's off the ground. Four aircraft returned early and 35 dropped 41.5 tons of fragmentation bombs on the target. Bomb strikes showed that five enemy aircraft were destroyed on the ground. There was no flak at the target and all planes returned safely.

Mission 11, March 19 The Group was briefed to bomb the aircraft factories at Steyr, Austria. Escort was provided by P-38's to the target area. The Wing leader turned away from the primary target because of bad weather, so the 455th bombed the airdrome at Graz, Austria. The bombing results were poor. Flak at the target was intense and accurate. Eight Me-109's made an overhead attack through the formation. Our gunners claimed one enemy fighter shot down and one probably destroyed. Two of our aircraft collided on the way back to base with all crewmen lost. No parachutes were seen. Twenty crewmen were missing in action. Several other aircraft in the formation suffered damage from the flying debris of the two aircraft that collided.

Mission 12, March 22 The Group was briefed to bomb the marshalling yards at Verona, Italy. One group of P-38's escorted us to the target. Again, our primary target was cloud-covered so we bombed the secondary, the marshalling yards at Bologna, Italy. The group dropped 82.5 tons of 500# GP bombs from 32 B-24's. flak at the target was intense but inaccurate. No fighter opposition was encountered and all planes returned safely.

Mission 13, March 24 We were again briefed for the Steyr-Daimler-Puch Aircraft Factory. Again, clouds foiled the 36 B-24's that took off loaded with 100# incendiary bombs. These aircraft managed to drop their bombs on the Rimini, Italy marshalling yards. Bombing had mixed results and all planes returned to base.

Mission 14, March 26 The Group was again briefed for the Daimler-Puch Aircraft Factory at Steyr, Austria. Again, weather turned the Group back and Rimini marshalling yards were again a target of opportunity. This time, only 19 aircraft dropped their bombs. The others either brought their bombs back to base or jettisoned them in the Adriatic. All planes returned safely.

Mission 15, March 28 A maximum wing effort was ordered to attack and destroy the marshalling yards at Verona, Italy. Forty B-24's

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took off but 17 returned early as they lost the wing formation because of bad weather. Twenty-one of our B-24's dropped 52.5 tons on the primary target. Flak at the target was intense and accurate. Twenty to 30 enemy fighters were observed in the target area but they did not press their attacks since our escort of P-38's drove them off. Eight enemy aircraft were observed to be shot down by our fighters. All planes returned safely.

Mission 16, March 29 The entire Wing was to attack the marshalling yards at Milan, Italy. The 455th put up 40 B-24's loaded with 500# GP bombs. Two aircraft returned early and 38 aircraft dropped over 97.5 tons of bombs on the primary target with very good results. There were no flak or fighters at the target area. All planes returned safely.

Mission 17, March 30 The Group sent 38 B-24's loaded with 500# incendiary bombs to the industrial center of Sofia, Bulgaria. Nineteen of them dropped their bombs by offset method through broken clouds. Thirteen aircraft could not identify the target and brought their bombs back to base. Flak at the target was moderate to intense and accurate. Bombing results could not be observed due to cloud cover. All planes returned to base.

The Group flew 13 missions in March. We put 447 aircraft over the targets and dropped over 877 tons of bombs on the enemy. We lost 20 crewmen and two aircraft. We claimed one enemy fighter shot down and one probable. Enemy flak damaged three of our aircraft. That's not bad for what we had been through. Weather improved and we were kept busy in the months ahead.

APRIL 1944

April was the beginning of "Operation Pointblank' designed to break the back of German fighter manufacturing. This was a threat to the entire Allied bombing effort. The Germans expected to get some immunity from air attacks by locating many of their biggest assembly and production complexes to the south and east. These were out of range of the British and 8th Air Force bombers based in England. Several missions had been flown by the 15th Air Force bombers against Regensburg and Wiener Neustadt fighter production and airfields. This would be a month of operations principally against aircraft production and airfields. By its end, production estimates stood at 250 aircraft a month within range of the 15th Air Force vs. a planned rate of 650.

Mission 18, April 2 The Group was ordered to bomb the Steyr Daimler-Buch Aircraft Factory. The attack on Steyr was a highly coordinated operation with 13 heavy bomber groups hitting the Steyr targets, three heavy Bomb Groups carrying out diversionary raids on Brod, Nihac troop concentrations and Mostar. This was the largest operation in point of numbers of planes the 15th Air Force had attempted up to that date. A total of 432 heavy bombers dropped on Steyr with 127 B-17's and 137 B-24's operating against the Walzlagerwerke and 168 B-24's hitting Daimler-Puch.

The first enemy fighters were encountered at 1030 hours. Between 60 and 70 single engine fighters were engaged by P-38 escort, with violent individual encounters taking place. Another group of enemy fighters were engaged by P-47 escort at 1040 hours. With the exception of four to six Me-109's which attacked the lead bomber group, all of these fighters were effectively dealt with. Between 1100 and 1115 other fighters from Austrian bases were assembled north of the frontier. Twin engine fighters were concentrated over Graz and single engine fighters over Klagenfurt. These fighters attacked aggressively all the way to the target and back as far as the Klagenfurt area. The total force put up from Austrian bases was about 100 single engine fighters and 40 to 50 twin engine aircraft. 15 to 20 Me-109's attacked our bombers over Yugoslavia on the return flight.

Total enemy opposition, 215 to 220 single engine aircraft and 40 to 50 twin engine aircraft. Including shadowing aircraft, 260 and 275 sorties were put up against the wing formation.

The first enemy fighters encountered by the 455th was at 1045. 15 to 20 Me-109's with belly tanks were engaged by the escort but did not attack the formation. The heaviest concentration of fighters was encountered 15 miles west of Graz and continued the attack until the target area. Most of these aircraft were Me-109's, FW-190's and Me-110's. Between 20 and 25 Me-210's and JU-88's attacked the formation through the bomb run, while large groups of single engine aircraft picked up the attack on the return trip.

The attacks on this mission were the heaviest the Air Force had encountered since the Regensburg raid of 25 February and certainly the heaviest the 455th Group had encountered thus far.

As a result of the raid the assembly, testing, packing and ball and roller bearing plant was heavily damaged.

MISSION STATISTICS

Enemy Losses:
Destroyed
Me-109's...15
FW-190's...11
Me-210's...1

Probably Destroyed
Me-109's...13
JU-88's...3
FW-190's...1

Damaged
Me-109's...3

Our losses: The 741st Squadron which had two aircraft over the target was the only Squadron to suffer no crew losses during the operation. Four aircraft were lost: one from the 740th Squadron, one from the 742nd and two from the 743rd.

Continued on Page 18

Continued from Page 17

Presidential Unit Citation:

The Group received the Citation under General Order Number 3225 dated 12 September 1944 for the mission.

Mission 19, April 3 This Group along with all the groups in the 304th Wing attacked the main marshalling yard at Budapest, Hungary. Twenty-eight B-24's of our group, loaded with 500# GP bombs, attacked the marshalling yards. The flak at the target was intense and accurate. Enemy fighters were sighted but did not press their attack. Casualties were one bombardier killed in action, one navigator seriously wounded, and one pilot and four gunners slightly wounded by flak. All planes returned to base.

Mission 20, April 4 This group and all other groups in the 304th Wing attacked the marshalling yards at Bucharest, Rumania. Thirty-four B-24's of our Group dropped 85 tons of 500# GP bombs with good results. Several strings of bombs were seen to fall in the target area, although the results were obscured by smoke from previous bombing. Flak at the target was moderate and accurate. Fifteen to 20 Me-109's and FW-190's made unaggressive attacks on the formation and were driven off. All planes returned to base safely.

Mission 21, April 7 Four hundred sixty-nine B-24's and B-17's of the 15th Air Force attacked the marshalling yards at Treviso, Mestre, Bologna and Ferrara. Our target for 32 aircraft was the marshalling yards at Bologna, Italy. The Group dropped 64 tons of 100# GP bombs with good results. We met no enemy fighters and flak was slight and inaccurate. All planes returned to base without incident.

Mission 22, April 12 Thirty B-24's of this group dropped 65 tons of 100# GP bombs on the airdrome at Bad Vaslau, Austria. This airdrome is in the vicinity of Vienna and when you go into that area you can expect fighter opposition. Between the IP and the target, the Group was attacked by 50 to 60 enemy fighters trying to break up the formation. They were not successful as the group gunners claimed seven destroyed, five probably destroyed, and three damaged in the air. Flak was very intense and heavy but did not get to our Group and all planes returned to base.

Mission 23, April 13 This group and other groups of the 304th Wing attacked the Tokol Airdrome at Budapest, Hungary. Thirty-six B-24's took off loaded with 100# GP bombs and 36 of the aircraft dropped them on the target. Flak at the target was moderate to intense, and accurate but the group sustained little damage. Thirty to 35 enemy fighters attacked during the bomb run. Our gunners claimed two destroyed, one probable, and we claimed nine destroyed on the ground. No losses for the group.

Mission 24, April 15 We went back at the marshalling yards at Bucharest, Rumania. This time we had 36 B-24's loaded with 500# GP bombs. We also had our friends with us in the form of P-38's. They kept the enemy fighters away, but we hadn't found a way to stop the flak. We came through with minor damages and all planes returned to base.

"The B-24 was an easy airplane to fly. It was easy to land and take off, but at high altitudes in formation it was another kind of plane. With the high wing loading, it became sloppy on the controls and it was difficult to hold in position." – *Pilot's comment*

Mission 25, April 16 Forty B-24's took off to bomb another Rumanian target, the airdrome at Turno Severin, not far from Bucharest. We again were loaded with 500# GP bombs. We should have run into stiff fighter opposition but they surprised us. Flak was light and inaccurate, and the fighters never showed; a "milk run" for a change.

Mission 26, April 17 We were back to Sofia, Bulgaria. The bomb load was 100# incendiaries. The weather turned bad and the formation split up. Only 29 of the 37 B-24's bombed the target. The remaining airplanes brought their bombs back to base.

Mission 27, April 20 We sent a maximum effort of 42 B-24's to bomb the Monfalcon, Italy shipyards with 500# GP bombs. What should have been an easy target turned out to be a real rough one. We were jumped by 30 to 40 single engine enemy fighters. We lost one airplane and ten men were missing in action.

"In the early part of our missions we were without fighter escort after we reached the head of the Adriatic. For that reason, enemy fighters were a real thorn in our side. They could always pick on a straggler or someone out of position in the formation." – *Pilot's comment*

Mission 28, April 21 We went to the well once to often as we headed for the marshalling yards at Bucharest, Rumania. Thirty-four B-24's dropped 85 tons of bombs but ran into a hornet's nest of enemy fighters. We claimed five enemy fighters shot down and seven damaged, but we suffered the loss of four planes and 40 crewmen missing in action. We were jumped by over 40 enemy fighters, not a good day.

Mission 29, April 23 We were briefed for the Bad Vaslau airdrome south of Vienna, Austria. Our bomb load for the 26 B-24's was ten 500# RDX bombs. These are very high explosive bombs. Both the flak and the fighters were not up to Viennese standards. We escaped without damage and did a fine bombing job on the target.

Mission 30, April 24 Thirty-three B-24's loaded with 500# GP bombs took off to bomb the marshalling yards at Bucharest. Although the flak was heavy and accurate, we managed to come through with a few holes and all planes returned safely.

Mission 31, April 25 We were back to bombing airfields in Italy.

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This time it was the airfield at Turin. Flak was light and no fighters challenged us. All planes returned safely.

Mission 32, April 28 Our bombing efforts were still in Italy. Thirty-three B-24's attacked the harbor at Porto Stefano. Flak at the target was moderate but one of our airplanes was hit and lost control. It ran into another in the formation; we lost two planes and 20 crewmen missing in action. There were two parachutes seen but that was all from the 20 crewmen.

Mission 33, April 29 We took off to bomb the Aircraft Industrial Complex at Toulon, France. This was our first raid over French territory and we ran into enemy fighters as we approached the target. Our bomb load for the day was 1000# GP bombs and the 30 B-24's dropped 85.5 tons on the target. Flak was heavy and accurate. We saw six enemy fighters but suffered no casualties. All planes returned to base.

"Flak in the area around Toulon is very heavy and accurate. It was rumored that there is an anti-aircraft training school in the area and the instructors are practicing on us." – *Pilot's comment*

Mission 34, April 30 We ended the month with a raid on the marshalling yards at Milan, Italy. Thirty B-24's dropped 500# GP bombs on the target with good results. The flak was very heavy but inaccurate, perhaps that is why our bombing was so good. All planes returned safely.

April was our busiest month to date as we flew 17 missions with 648 planes over the target. It was also our costliest as we lost 15 aircraft and 110 men missing in action. The group dropped over 1,313 tons of bombs on the enemy. We claimed 53 enemy fighters shot down, with 42 probables and eight damaged. So we did inflict some damage on the enemy fighter force but in our eyes, not enough to compensate for our losses.

MAY 1944

Mission 35, May 2 Thirty-six B-24's loaded with 1000# GP bombs took off to bomb the marshalling yards at Verona, Italy. The target was completely covered by clouds and all the planes returned to base without incident. All crews received credit for a mission.

Mission 36, May 5 Thirty-six B-24's were scheduled to take 500# GP bombs to bomb the marshalling yards at Ploesti, Rumania. It was enough to make you catch your breath when you saw that long red line of the flight path on the map of the briefing room go all the way across the wall to all those flak guns!! The target was covered with smoke but the lead bombardier got a good sight on the target and we were able to drop our bombs. The fighters pressed their attacks and we lost one aircraft to them. Flak at the target was very intense and accurate. We chalked up our losses at one aircraft and ten men missing in action. One crew member reported that the flak was so thick we could have walked on it.

Mission 37, May 6 That line on the briefing room map was still pointing in the direction of Ploesti, although this time it was the marshalling yards at Campina, Rumania. This is between Ploesti and Bucharest. Thirty-four B-24's loaded with 500# GP bombs struck the target, Flak at the target was intense and accurate. Fighter attacks were very heavy by as many as 50 enemy aircraft. We lost one aircraft to fighters and many more damaged by flak and fighters. We had one crewman killed and ten crewmen missing in action.

Mission 38, May 7 We were back to Rumania for the third day in a row. It couldn't get any rougher than that. This time, 36 B-24's would drop their bombs on the marshalling yards at Bucharest. The flak was intense as always at this target and 15 fighters made repeated attacks on the formation. We came through unscathed, with no casualties and all planes returned to base.

Mission 39, May 10 We headed in a different direction, the aircraft factory at Wiener Nuestad, Austria, just south of Vienna. Thirty-nine B-24's carrying ten 500# GP bombs attacked the target. The enemy fighters were there in great numbers and the flak was very intense and accurate. Ten of our planes received heavy and 27 slight damage. One crewman was severely wounded and three others slightly, but we managed to bring all planes back to the base.

Mission 40, May 12 We were briefed to bomb communication targets in northern Italy. Thirty-one B-24's found the primary target covered by clouds and we bombed the harbor at Spezia, Italy instead. Eight of our planes brought their bombs back to base as they could not see the target. There were no casualties.

Mission 41, May 13 Thirty-three B-24's loaded with 1000# GP bombs attacked the marshalling yards at Bologna, Italy. There was no flak at the target and we brought all planes back to base without any casualties.

Mission 42, May 14 The push was on by the 5th Army for Rome and we helped by sending 41 B-24's to drop 9, 840 twenty-pound fragmentation bombs on the airdrome at Piasenze outside of Rome. There was light flak at the target and no fighters. Crews claimed a "milk run" as all planes returned to base without incident.

Mission 43, May 18 We were back in the oil business. We went with 41 B-24's loaded with 500# GP bombs to bomb the refinery at Dacia Romano, Rumania. This time the flak took its toll as we lost three aircraft to flak and 30 crewmen were missing in action. We bombed by pathfinder for the first time and saw many fires burning in the target area; a good mission but a heavy price was paid.

Mission 44, May 19 We sent 36 bombers to bomb the harbor at Genoa, Italy. The flak was light and not very accurate so it turned out to be an easy mission for a change.

Our Aircrews Took Care of Each Other

The closeness that developed among our aircrew is indescribable. They assisted each other during combat, many times at the risk of their own lives. A good example of this is the citation received by Wesley A. Poore of the 743rd Squadron for the award of the Distinguished Service Cross: "For extraordinary heroism in action as navigator of a B-24 type aircraft over vital strategic enemy installations on 18 May 1944. Prior to reaching the target, intense enemy fighter action and accurate anti-aircraft fire rendered one of the engines of his aircraft useless, thus forcing it to drop from the protection of the formation. Despite the crippled condition of his aircraft, he skillfully guided the pilot to the target for a successful lone bombing run. Immediately upon releasing the bombs, severe damage from aggressive fighter action forced the aircraft to lose altitude rapidly. When the order to abandon aircraft was given, Lieutenant Poore observed one of the crew members with a damaged parachute. With characteristic selflessness, Lieutenant Poore exchanged his own parachute for the damaged one. After being assured that all members had parachuted to safety, Lieutenant Poore strapped the damaged parachute to his harness and jumped from the plane. By manipulating the shrouds with his hands, he was able to safely descend to the ground. Lieutenant Poore's exemplary actions have upheld the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States of America."

Wesley gave us a little different version but nevertheless does not change his concern for a fellow crew member. He indicated that Sgt. Nelson's parachute was not damaged but rather it would not fit his harness. Wesley's parachute fit so he clamped it on Nelson's harness and he bailed out. In doing this, Wesley did not know whether Nelson's parachute would fit his harness. Through a make-shift arrangement, he was able to attach the parachute to his harness at his hips, most improper for a chest pack. Also, the pilot, Lt. Thomas Markham, was the last to leave the stricken airplane. All crew members were captured by the Bulgarians that same day except Markham. He was captured later and executed by the Bulgarians. The crew returned safely to Italy in September 1944 with the group that escaped through Turkey led by Hugh Graff.

Wilmer Wallack's Story

The following is a story of the experiences of Lt. Wilmer S. Wallack and his crew of the 740th Squadron: "The early morning hours of 21 April 1944 began for our crew as other mission mornings had before with the unpleasant wakeup call about 4:00 a.m. The normal grunts, groans and pleasantries were tossed at the disturber of sleep in a not too complimentary manner by the four officers who occupied the four-man tent. Similar activities were underway by our six enlisted crew members in another part of the Squadron area. Breakfast, mission briefing and launch of the first aircraft at about 8:00 a.m. occurred routinely. However, the crew would be called upon this day to utilize to the maximum extent their training and skills to survive the rigors of high altitude combat operation.

"The target was the railroad marshalling yards at Bucharest, Rumania deep within German-held territory and defended by heavy concentrations of flak guns and large numbers of German and Rumanian fighters. It was a major effort with 17 bomb groups being launched by the Air Force. My crew was made up of the following: end Lt. Ben B. McInturff, co-pilot; end Lt. Michael Constantino, navigator; end Lt. Jack L. Hager, bombardier; S/Sgt. Merlin Lodge, engineer; S/Sgt. John L. Moore, Jr., radio operator; S/Sgt. Joseph E. Abbink, ball turret gunner; S/Sgt. James P. Cronin, waist gunner; S/Sgt. Harry J. Gaynor, waist gunner; and S/Sgt. John F. Franco, tail gunner.

"Following assembly of the groups into their flight formations, we headed over the Adriatic Sea with fighter escort on a course for Bucharest. As we crossed the coast of Yugoslavia at 10,000 feet, a heavy build-up of clouds was forming and the formation flew between layers and changed course frequently to keep aircraft clear of the clouds as the Group continued its climb to 20,000 feet. Our 'tail-end-charley' position in the second section of the formation and the varying rates of climb to stay clear of the clouds, required us to use excessively high power settings to stay with the Group. We were unable to do so and fell behind the formation. It seemed unwise for us to return to home base alone as we were too far into enemy territory and enemy fighters had been sighted; rejoining the formation was our best alternative. Because of the solid cloud-cover over the targets, the Air force issued a recall for the bombers to return. The 455th and three other groups failed to receive the recall and continued on to the target without fighter escort.

"About 20 minutes from the IP we had an electrical failure on the supercharger of the #3 engine, reducing the power and conse-

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quently, the airspeed. I ordered Hager, our bombardier, to salvo the bombs to lighten the ship in hopes of building up our airspeed and rejoining the formation. My intent was to cut across the flight path of the Group and to rejoin it after the bombs were dropped and the formation turned from the target to return to base. The flak was moderately heavy and accurate, and we were hit by shrapnel in the #1 and #2 engine superchargers which caused a further loss of power and we fell farther behind the Group formation. We also took a direct hit between #1 and #2 engines. Luckily, there was no fire. Any protective cover from enemy fighters the Group formation would have given us was no longer within reach; we were on our own.

"As we left the flak area, we were attacked by seven enemy fighters equipped with cannons. They fired their cannons during repeated attacks but stayed out of range of our 50 caliber guns. They hit the #2 engine and we had to feather it. We took numerous hits in the rear of the fuselage and a large part of the right vertical stabilizer was shot away making directional and horizontal control difficult to maintain. Our gunners were out-gunned by the enemy cannons but prevented the fighters from coming into closer range with a steady stream of machine gun fire.

"I put the B-24 in a steep descent to enter the undercast and lose the fighters but the clouds were farther below than I had estimated. The fighters continued attacking and hit the #3 engine which we feathered and continued for the clouds. By this time, the gunners in the rear had exhausted their ammunition and our aircraft was just barely under control. I ordered Cronin and Gaynor to assist Abbink in retracting the ball turret and helping him back into the aircraft as he could not exit it in its extended position. In their continuing attack, the fighters completely disabled the #1 engine, causing the propeller to overspeed (runaway). We could not feather or stop it and were rapidly losing altitude. We used full power on our remaining good engine, #4, to maintain altitude and control the aircraft but it was hopeless, so I ordered the crew to bail out. Franco and Gaynor were hit by shrapnel from two shells that exploded in the rear of the aircraft with Franco's injuries being the most serious. Cronin and Abbink fastened (snapped) Franco's parachute on him and dropped him through the camera hatch; Gaynor, Abbink and Cronin followed. Loge and Moore went out the bomb bay doors with Constantino and Hager going out the nose wheel door. This left Mac and me with the aircraft as we fought to keep it flying.

"Seeing the parachutes, the fighters closed in and raked the ship with their smaller caliber guns. One burst shattered the co-pilot's side window and windshield. I yelled at Mac to leave and I would be close behind. As Mac left his seat, I shifted to the far right side of mine and held full right rudder and aileron with my left foot and hand. The ship passed through the first layer of clouds and I kept full power on #4. I looked back to see if Mac had cleared the bomb bay. He was hanging on to the front edge and then I saw his hands disappear so I proceeded to leave the crippled ship. The altimeter showed 12,000 feet so there was time. With #4 engine power full on, the ship went into a flat spin to the left, throwing me against the radio table and onto the flight deck floor. I managed to crawl to the rear of the bomb bay on the cat walk and dove head first out the aircraft. Our active combat and the B-24 was no more but the fate of our crew was yet to be determined. What awaits our destiny?

"I passed through the last layer of clouds and came down in a newly plowed, muddy field about one-fourth mile outside a small village, 20 miles south of Bucharest. Thinking I might avoid capture, I headed in a direction away from the village. I was spotted and two shots were fired over my head which brought me to a halt with my hands raised. I was captured by four soldiers from a small garrison in the village and about 25 villagers. I was searched, taken to the village, interrogated and held in a small headquarters type building. Shortly afterwards, Hager, McInturff, Abbink and Loge were brought in. Constantino, Franco, Gaynor, Cronin and Moore were picked up and taken to another village some distance away. Some village women brought us sweet cakes and tea as we sat on benches under a large shade tree. Villagers gathered around, some solemn-faced and some smiling, making comments and gestures that were not unfriendly or threatening.

"After sleeping on the floor of a small building, we were taken to Bucharest in a large, horse drawn, high two-wheeled wagon by four guards. We were carried in a street car from the outskirts of the city to the Queens Guard Garrison which was being used as a temporary holding point. While on the streetcar, McInturff was given 1,500 Rumanian lei by a young matronly woman for cigarettes and other small personal items. Both the Rumanian and German military had administrative offices within the garrison. We slept in our clothes for the first seven nights without mattresses or blankets. Constantino and Moore came in on the 23rd of April while Franco, Hager and Cronin were held at a hospital for treatment. Franco's multiple shrap-

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nel wounds were serious, Gaynor and Cronin's less so but infected and painful.

"After having been interrogated several times, we were taken to our permanent POW camp where we joined other POW's. The food was bad and there was not enough of it. It consisted of unflavored beans, coarse, dry grain bread, and goat- and perhaps even dog- flavored soup as indicated by pieces of jaw bones with teeth in it. One night we were brought a field pot of plain cooked barley which looked and tasted like glue. Constantino, of Italian descent, could carry on a fractured conversation with the Rumanians. After dark, he got one of the guards to help him carry the pot back to the kitchen in the middle court yard and exchange it for a pot of barley soup seasoned with a small amount of meat, potatoes, tomatoes and onions. He did this without the senior Rumanian personnel being aware of it. We had a feast.

"The weather was damp and cold much of the time during April and into May and there was no heat in the buildings. We only had one blanket each so we slept in our clothes to stay warm and stayed under cover most days. Some of us caught colds and had sore throats, and at least one POW had to have his tonsils removed at a Rumanian hospital. There was very little medication at the camp but shots for diphtheria were given to all POW's in the compound. My three crew members who were wounded by flak returned from the hospital but Abbink looked bad and there were still pieces of flak remaining in his throat area the doctors did not get.

"The Air Force continued to bomb the oil facilities near our camp during the day while the British bombed at night. Some bombs fell dangerously close with one landing in the courtyard which damaged one side of the building and blew all the windows out. We spent a lot of time in the basement and under bunks during air raids by the Allies. On some occasions, we were locked in our rooms during bombing attacks and crawled under our bunks with our hands over our heads.

"King Michael of Rumania visited our camp in April and we filled out POW forms for the Red Cross. A small canteen was set up for Rumanian and German use, but available to the POW's if they had money to buy sweets, cigarettes and other small items. We sold watches, rings and crash bracelets to the canteen owner to purchase these items. This boosted our morale!

"On the 29th of April, two POW's escaped but were captured and placed in solitary confinement. The cooks, kitchen help, latrine orderlies and barbers were Russian trustees and quartered apart from other POW's. The food continued to be bad and there was not enough of it. We spent time cleaning the lice from our blankets and clothing and on one occasion, we were furnished blow torches to burn the lice from our bed springs. Shower baths with warm water were infrequent and we were without water altogether on many occasions. During water outages, sanitary conditions became intolerable, particularly in the toilets. We took sun baths by laying across sidewalks alongside of the building which made the Germans walk in the street to get around us to their administrative offices. They ordered the Rumanian guards to run us back into our rooms. We 'badgered' the Rumanian officers about who was in charge. This provoked them and they ordered the guards to take us back to the sidewalks for sun bathing. The Germans got very upset but did nothing. We played the Rumanian guards against the Germans every chance we got.

"We were moved to an abandoned secure school house converted into a POW camp which was farther from the oil targets. From this, we got a warm shower, clean clothes and a better facility with no Germans. It was the same food but better prepared. The officers occupied one side of the camp, the enlisted men the other. Some British airmen were brought in as well as American flyers. The camp soon became crowded as day and night bombing increased against Ploesti, Brasov and Bucharest with more downed airmen. Outside recreational activities increased, even basketball play. An International Red Cross official came to check on us but didn't promise any improvements nor were there any. At times, the Rumanians would give us funds when we did not receive our Red Cross packages, permitting us to buy a few necessities from the canteen. We were permitted to write one Red Cross card each week or ten days.

"With the camp filling with POW's, we were moved to a hospital which was only 600 yards from the Bucharest marshalling yards, an important target to the Allies. Prior to the move, the food rations were decreased with bread cut out of the diet, leaving nothing but weak soup and beans with very little meat. The stepped-up bombing of the marshalling yards continually kept us on the alert and in the basement. Bombs dropped all around the building and a large fire started in a big apartment building across the street. Numerous other fires were visible.

"POW's from the 1 August 1943 low level Ploesti raid joined us 3 August 1944. They smuggled in a radio which we set up each evening and tuned in to the British

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Broadcasting Company (BBC). When not in use, it was taken apart in five or six pieces and each piece given to a POW. When the radio was to be used, these individuals dropped their piece off in a room, the radio reassembled and first-hand news fro BBC was received. Battle front information was posted on a large wall map. It became evident our information was more accurate than the Rumanians' and our status map really 'bugged' the Rumanian officers, especially the Colonel.

"As the oil facilities were destroyed and the Russians were getting closer to the area, the food and treatment improved and we were under just the control of the Rumanians. Letters from home arrived more frequently and more Red Cross parcels were received. On 11 August, the Rumanian Premier reportedly offered his resignation to King Michael. The Rumanians started gaining control of the city from the Germans on 23 August 1944. We raised Rumanian, American and Russian flags as the POW choir sang the Star Spangled Banner. Although the gates were unlocked, we were ordered to stay in camp because of street fighting with the Germans. Several POW's attempted to leave the city but found it surrounded by Germans.

"The Germans did not give up easily. During the night of 25 August, we had eight bombing raids by them and most of the next day. The bombing of their airfield by the 15th Air Force stopped this. We were soon to be back in Italy."

* * *

Rumanian Doctors Saved POW's Life

Victor McWilliams, first pilot of the 741st Squadron provided this account of a mission he and his crew flew over Ploesti on 5 May 1944: "The takeoff and flight to Ploesti was uneventful. This was our third trip there and the only thing different was the amount of flak. It was much worse this time; the puffs of smoke from the exploding shells were so close together it looked like there was no way through them. We took an almost direct hit on the right wing, knocking out numbers three and four engines. The plane pulled to the right and started a spiral downward. I reduced power on numbers one and two engines to about one-third to straighten out the plane and salvoed the bombs. My waist gunner, Harry McDowell, reported the airplane was on fire. I ordered him and others to get the ball and tail turret gunners out and bail out! One member in the forward section of the airplane was reluctant to leave but a little nudge convinced him.

"I was preparing to leave but I knew I had been hit in my left wrist and leg with shrapnel. At about 12,000 feet, an Me-109 pulled alongside and the pilot motioned for me to get the hell out of there. I thought it was decent of him. When I stood up, I knew my leg was practically severed between my knee and ankle. I nevertheless left the airplane and landed in a tree; I had problems getting down from it. A little old lady was standing there crying and wringing her hands. A man in uniform arrived and pointed a pistol at my head until he discovered I was seriously injured and he left for help. Two others soon arrived and put me in a car. About five miles down the road, it had a flat tire. Soon a crowd of people arrived and peered inside to see a downed American flyer. Another car arrived and took me to the Bucharest hospital.

"There were two Rumanian officers and two doctors in the operating room where they took me. They questioned me about the empty 50 caliber shell I had for storing morphine shots for inflight use. I had trouble convincing them it was not an explosive. I was asked if I needed a shot and responded that since they had given me one I would be all right. I gave them my name, rank and serial number and passed out. My left leg was amputated by the Rumanian doctors about two and one-half inches below the knee.

"I awakened the next morning in a room with another American. I said something to him and he looked surprised and said, 'You are supposed to be dead. They brought you in here last night and said you would be dead before morning!' I had lost a lot of blood and the Rumanians said they had none for a transfusion.

"I miraculously survived and saw many more bombing raids except this time, on the receiving end. The hospital took a direct hit and they later moved us to another location. To show there is humor in all things, the dust was so thick one couldn't see anything and someone down the hall shouted, 'Open the doors and windows and let this dust out!' There were no doors or windows left in the bay. I was moved to a school house and it was there that I saw the rest of my crew, and was overjoyed that they all survived."

* * *



B-24-ROG!

If this car passes you, it's Bill Green. He says it stands for B-24 Radio Operator Gunner. He's had many episodes of recognition, pleasant conversations at service stations plus horn honking and waving drive-bys on the freeways. Bill was an original crew member of the Mickey Lynn on her first 50 missions.

From Your Editor

Keep sending in your war stories and other contributions. I'll get as many in the next issue as possible. If you are sending photos, put your name and address label on the back so these can be returned to you. If you have copies of group or squadron newsletters these are welcome and make enjoyable reading for everyone. Make a copy, or I'll return your original.

Association Address Change

455th Bomb Group Assoc., Inc.
P.O. Box 286
Spencer, IA 51301

Please send all Group Association mail and dues to Lou Hansen at this address.

When addressing your editor regarding the Cerignola Connection to:

Tom Ramey
1211 Montclaire Ct.
Appleton, WI 54915

****The Cerignola Connection is published twice yearly, occasionally more often. All mistakes, errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, names and references are strictly the fault of the computer and not of the editor.*

455th Bomb Group Association, Inc.
P.O. Box 286
Spencer, Iowa 51301

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ALLAN C. JOHNSON
17 JOHNSON AVE
HUDSON, MA 01749