CERIGNOLA CONNECTION

455th Bomb Group Association Newsletter

Spring 2002 – Editor, Tom Ramey, 1211 Montclaire Ct., Appleton, WI 54915 (920) 731-2500

Dues

455th Bomb Group members we value your membership, annual dues are payable November 1 for the following year to be current through November 1, 2002.

Dues are only $15 a year. A life membership can be obtained for $60 – then you don't have to worry if you are current or not. If you have 10 consecutive years paid, your life membership is only $25.

To continue the Association and publish the Cerignola Connection we need your help. Check when you last paid and then mail your check to: **455th Bomb Group Association, 5100 John D. Ryan Blvd. #542, San Antonio, TX, 782-45-3535.**

Thank you

Your New Association Officers -Board of Directors

Officers

President – S. Sgt. Francis L. Lashinsky – retained - 740

Vice President – 1st Lt. Stanley M. Iverson – retained - 740

Secretary – T.Sgt. Carl R. Loiocano – retained - 741

Treasurer – Lt. Col. Gus H. Wendt – retained - 741

Directors

1st Lt. Jack F. Blum – New - 741

Col. Roderick W. Clarke – retained - 741

Col. John F. Davis – retained - 741

S/Sgt David J. Frawley – retained - 742

Lt. Col. William B. Gemmill – New - 740

Maj. James D. Gould – retained - 743

1st Lt. Edward C. Mleak – retained - 742

Maj. John W. Nash – retained - 742

Capt. James H. Smith – retained - 741

S/Sgt. Elfred J. Specht – retained - 743

Executive Director

Gus H. Wendt Jr. – retained - Lt. Col - 741

Final Flights

Dave Brothers 1/12/2002
Bombardier, 742nd Squadron

Robert Dearment 11/6/2001
Navigator, 740th Squadron

Scott Jerald Grahm 12/12/2001
Engineer Gunner, 742nd Squadron

Joe B. Hunter 9/2001
743rd Squadron

Glen L. Kirby 3/28/2001
741st Squadron

William Crim 10/20/2001
741st Squadron

Jim Shumard 10/24/2001
Pilot, 743rd Squadron
Former President, 455th Bomb Group Association

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

January 12, 2001

Today I lost another very dear friend. To add Dave Brothers name to the final flight column is very difficult. On this heavenly flight I'm sure that God has a very special place for a very special guy.

He was always smiling, cheerful and giving. He made you feel the same.

I met Dave as a POW on a forced march out of Sagan, Germany, in sub-zero temperatures and a blinding snow storm. I was limping along at the end of the column when Dave came along pulling a little sled he had made. He said "are you alone buddy, let's get through this together." From that moment on we became friends. He shared what little he had managed to hoard and scrounge before the march. Through two forced marches, infamous 40 and 8 cattle car ride, and all the other prison camp conditions he was a constant encouragement to survive. He and his dear wife Ruth have been friends ever since.

Left Over from the Holidays

Christmas Thought

Three Wise Women Would Have…

Asked directions
Arrived on time
Helped deliver the baby,
Cleaned the stable,
Made a casserole,
Brought practical gifts and
There would be Peace on Earth.

St. Louis Reunion – 2001 Gus Wendt Reports

The 2001 reunion was a success. 271 members attended with their wives. Attendees at the four day event totaled:

15th Airforce	1
Widows	4
455th Hdq	4
740th Sqd	31
741st Sqd	38
742nd Sqd	26
743rd Sqd	21

There were 152 guests. Wives, children, invitees. 4 widows were in attendance. We have 110 widows on our roster and hope that more widows will attend the next reunion. A special banquet table will be set up for them.

Two sight seeing tours were conducted, downtown St. Louis and Old St. Charles, the original capital of the state of Missouri.

At the general membership meeting, the members voted to have the next reunion somewhere in Florida. A committee was appointed to explore the various locations and recommend a location to the president. The fall 2002 issue of the Cerignola Connection will indicate the location chosen.

2001 Reunion Revisited

Photos, Credit, Elmo Henske



"Play it again John" John Davis entertains in the hospitality room.



Stranded! The last of the abandoned group, waiting to be rescued after the tour bus failed to show up for return to the hotel. Carl and Barbara Stracker, Appleton, WI, 743rd Sqd, on right.

Through The Eyes of a Child

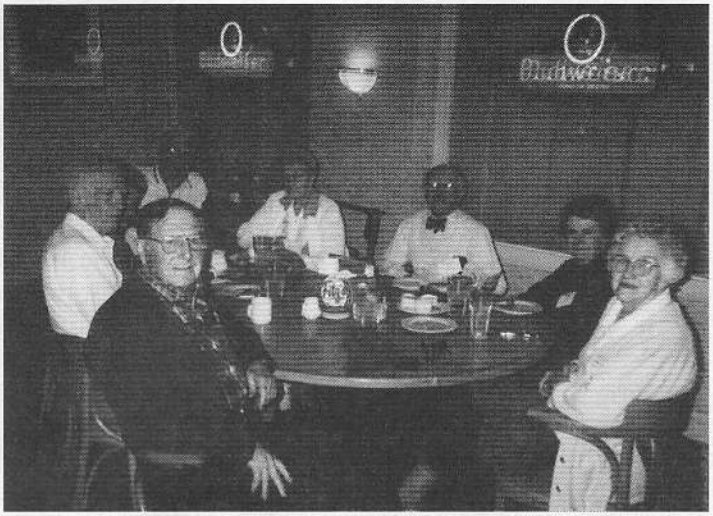
A kindergarten teacher was observing her classroom of children while they drew pictures, and walked around to see each child's artwork. When she got to one little girl who was working diligently, she asked what the girl was drawing. The girl replied, "I'm drawing a picture of God." The teacher paused and said, "But nobody knows what God looks like." Without missing a beat or looking up from her drawing, the girl replied, "They will in a minute."



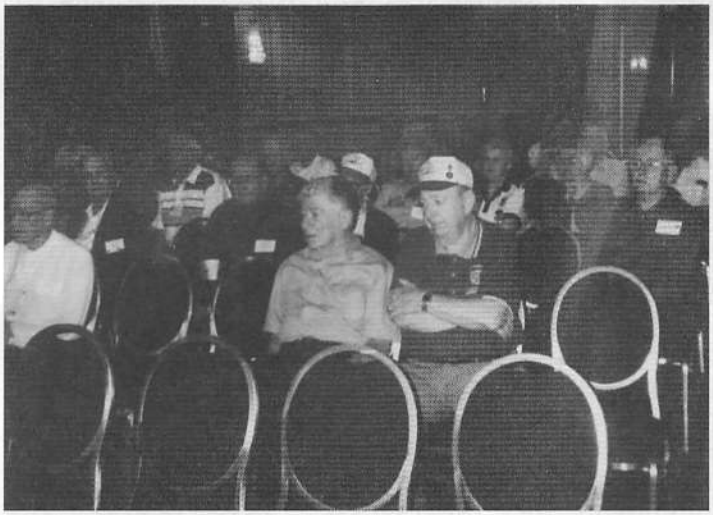
"When they run out of beer here we can always go on to Milwaukee." Ted and Jane Tronoff with Erma Lee and Elmo Henske preparing to sample the Amber Bock and Michelob in the Budweiser hospitality room.



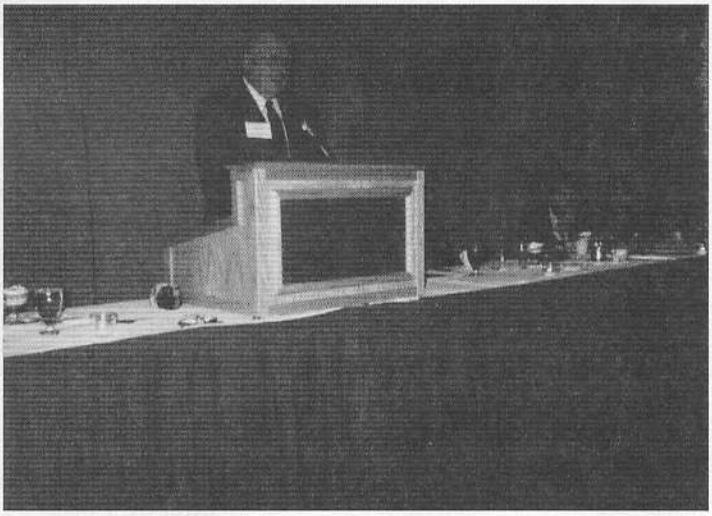
The 455th also has pretty ladies tending bar in the hospitality room



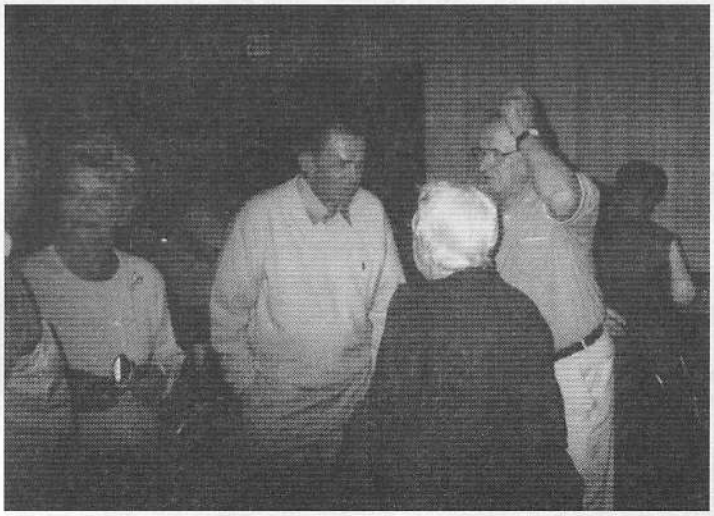
"If we drink sitting down we can hold more!" Elmo Henske, Charles and Peggy Painter, Ed & Anne Soderstrom, Ted & Jane Tronoff, Erma Henske. Budweiser hospitality room.



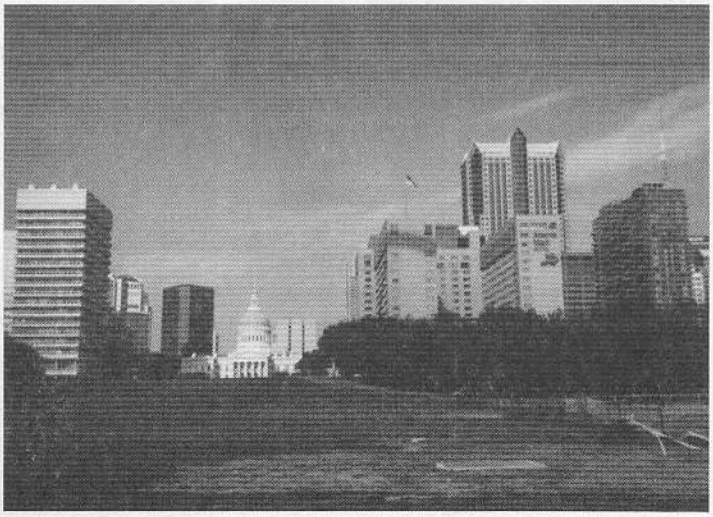
"I thought they were going to show a movie." Attendees at Saturday morning business meeting.



"Now before our guest speaker, I"m going to have my dessert." Frank Lashinsky, President, Master of Ceremony for group banquet.



"I thought Generals bought S/Sgt's drinks!" Dorothy and Frank Lashinsky visiting with General and Mrs. Hudson in the hospitality room.



And a good time was had by all! St. Louis reunion – 2001.

May 10, 2001
455th Bomb Group Association
15th Air Force

Dear Members and Fellow World War II Veterans:

It is a pleasure to offer my thanks and congratulations for reaching the "Defender" donor level for the National World War II Memorial Campaign. You have helped to preserve the legacy of the entire World War II generation for years to come.

This memorial cannot tell our nation or the world what it feels like to grieve over a fallen comrade or what it was like for millions of families back home waiting for news from the battlefronts around the world. It will not express the way we all felt when the moment finally came to face the enemy in combat or the way American families felt when the blue star in the window turned to gold. It could never adequately repay the debt of gratitude that this country owes an extraordinary generation of Americans who helped save the world. The memorial will be, after all, it is only stone and mortar.

It can, however, remind generations to follow that freedom comes with responsibilities and one of those is a willingness to fight to preserve it at any cost. It will serve as a testament to the spirit of America and what a free people can do when united in a just cause. It will help to complete the story of our democracy told by all the monuments and memorials on our national mall.

Thank you all for the support you have given to this most worthwhile and long overdue project and for your distinguished service during World War II.

Sincerely,
Bob Dole

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Protectors Gifts of $25,000 - $49,999

Italian American War Veterans of the United States
Marine Corps League
Reserve Officers Association of the United States
Service Club of Indianapolis
The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA)
Tuskegee Airmen, Incorporated (TAI)
Vietnam Veterans of America
State of Alaska
State of Arkansas
State of West Virginia
Branson Veterans Task Force

Defenders Gifts of $10,000 - $24,999

2nd Air Division Association
25th Infantry Division Association
31st Infantry "Dixie" Division
40 et 8 Voiture
41st Infantry Division Association
87th Infantry Division Association
446th Bombardment Group
455th Bomb Group Association, Incorporated
Army Aviation Association of America
Jewish War Veterans of the USA
Military Order of the Purple Heart Service Foundation
National Timberwolf Association, 104th Infantry Division
Polish Legion of American Veterans, USA
Society of the Third Infantry Division
Sons of the American Legion
USS Intrepid Association
Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge
Yankee Division Veterans Association

Life

We convince ourselves that life will be better after we get married, have a baby, then another. Then we are frustrated that the kids aren't old enough and we'll be more content when they are. After that we're frustrated that we have teenagers to deal with. We will certainly be happy when they are out of that stage. We tell ourselves that our life will be complete when your spouse gets his or her act together, when we get a nicer car, are able to go on a nice vacation, when we retire.

The truth is there's no better time to be happy than right now. If not now, when? Your life will always be filled with challenges. It's best to admit this to yourself and decide to be happy anyway. One of my favorite quotes comes from Alfred D. Souza. He said, "For a long time it had seemed to me that life was about to begin – real life. There was always some obstacle in the way, something to be gotten through first, some unfinished business, time still to be served, or a debt to be paid. Then life would begin. At last it dawned on me that these obstacles were my life." This perspective has helped me to see that there is no way to happiness. Happiness is the way. So, treasure every moment that you have. And treasure it more because you shared it with someone special, special enough to spend your time...and remember that time waits for no one. So stop waiting until you finish school, until you go back to school until you lose ten pounds, until you gain ten pounds, until you have kids, until your kids leave the house, until you start work, until you retire, until you get married, until you get divorced, until Friday night, until Sunday morning, until you get a new car or home, until your car or home is paid off, until spring, until summer, until fall, until winter, until you are off welfare, until the first or fifteenth, until your song comes on, until you've had a drink, until you've sobered up, or until you die to decide that there is no better time than right now to be happy. Happiness is a journey, not a destination.

Thought for the day:

Work like you don't need money,
Love like you've never been hurt,
And dance like no one's watching.

455th E-Mail Roster

Below is a listing of e-mail address' of 455th members that were sent to us for publication in the Cerignola Connection. *Indicates a new listing since last published in the Cerignola Connection. If you want your e-mail address included in this roster, please send it to:
455th Bomb Group Assn, Inc.
5100 John D. Ryan Blvd. #542
San Antonio, TX 78245-3535

* William A. Arnold (743) Apalachin, NY. **jarnold77@juno.com**

Harry W. Anderson (740), San Antonio, TX. **pomganny@aol.com**

Gene V. Benson, (740) Livingston, Mt. **dayflyguy@mcn.net**

Jack Blum (741), New Port Richey, FL. **jblum 15677@aol.com**

* Winfield S. Bowers (741), Mount Dora, FL. **winbow20@aol.com**

Marlin L. (Bud) Brown, (742), Lake Placid, FL. **barbud@htn.net**

Robert Caldwell (741st), Prescott Valley, AZ. **rc7306@aol.com**

Howard Cooper, Staton Island, NY. **howgladcoop@worldnet.att.net**

Robert (Bob) Collette, St. Petersburg, FL. **dotybob1@juno.com**

James A. Cowden (742), Tascaloosa, AL. **jcowden@earthlink.net**

James P. Daly (740),Aberdeen, NJ. **panadaly@aol.com**

Jack Dekker (743), Grand Rapids, MI. **jdek457@aol.com**

Theodore Deppe (741), Bloomington, IN. **tdeppe@indiana.edu**

Curtis Diles (740), Dayton, OH. **budynez@aol.com**

Paul H. Ditchett, (742), Safety Harbor, FL. **paul546@juno.com**

Bob Emick (741), Battle Creek, MI. **rfemick@aol.com**

James A. Fedewa (743), Dunnellon, FL. **jcfedewa@cs.com**

William B. Gemmill (740), Spring Hill, FL. **wgemmill@tampabay.rr.com**

William C. Graves (742), Jacksonville, FL. **wgraves210@aol.com**

Lou Hansen (743), Spencer, IA. **lohansen@nwiowa.com**

Harvey Hewit (743), Haverford, PA. **lhhew@aol.com**

Eugene M. Hurley, (742) Calvert City KY. **ghurley@apex.net**

Thomas L. Kablack (742), Crown Point, IN. **techmart@mail.icongrp.com**

Milton Kaplan (743), Scottsdale, AZ. **mkaplan@bestweb.net**

Erling Kindem (742), Farmington, MN. **erlingk@aol.com**

Jack Lancaster (742), Clovis, NM. **mandj@3lefties.com**

John L. Larma (740), Omaha, NE. **jlarma@uswest.net**

George L. Liddle (742), Sun City, CA. **olgeorge@ez2.net**

* Dave Matheson (742), Harrison, AR. **ihatebugs@cox-internet.com**

C.E. McMullen (741) Tomball, TX **ememullenjr@aol.com**

Vic Murray (743), Longwood, FL **vemurray@earthlink.net**

Robert E. Newberg (743), West Des Moines, IA. **newy7aces@home.com**

Charles Oltarzewski (740), Gallatin, TN. **murphB24@aol.com**

* Peter Payant (743) Phoenix, AZ **pbpayant@home.com**

Roland J. Pepin (741), Johnstom, RI. **pep4400@aol.com**

Jack Phelps (740), Dallas, TX. **B7606@ix.netcom.com**

Wesley Powell (740), Seabrook TX. **wesjulia@gateway.net**

* Bob Probst (741), West Columbia SC. **rtprobst@aol.com**

Sid Schoengold (740), Monroe, TWP, NJ. **harsid1@juno.com**

Gus R. Seefluth (742), Lebanon, OH. **gus@go-concepts.com**

Walt Shostack (741), Dayton, OH. **shirlystack@compuserve.com**

* Edward G. Spencer (740) CT. **ebne2r@webtv.net**

Charles E. Stark, (740), Pittsburg, PA. **Carchar@aol.com**

(Dr.) Stanley Vogelfang (741), Houston, TX. **stanvog@aol.com**

A Must See!



One of the must-see attractions at the March Field Air Museum, especially for those who have been associated with the Fifteenth Air Force in its 58-year history, is the 15th AF Wall.

This memorial was financed by the 97th Bomb Group Reunion Association and dedicated in 1998. A fitting centerpiece for the wall is a bronze sculpture of Lt. Gen James H. Doolittle, first commander of the 15th Air Force.

We extend a cordial welcome to all 15th AF veterans to visit the museum to see this and the many other attractions. World War II units are urged to evaluate the possibility of holding their next reunion in the Riverside area.

If you would like information about how you can get your group recognized on the 15th AF Wall, please call the Museum Foundation Office at 909-697-06602.

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Crews



Front row, L to R – S/Sgt Eugene E. Scerbo, Nose Turret Gunner; S/Sgt. Arthur R. Boucher, Upper Turret Gunner; T/Sgt. Charles Crowley, Engineer; S/Sgt. Paul E. Brown, Armor Gunner; S/Sgt. Henry C. Belcher, Radio Operator; S/Sgt. Dana J. Kehheher, Tail Turret Gunner.
Back Row, L to R – 1st Lt. Walter Gunn, Pilot; 1st Lt. Walter H. Barton, Co-Pilot; 1st Lt. Allan C. Johnson, Bombardier; 1st Lt. William J. Fregoe, Navigator, 740 Squadron.



Front Row, L to R – Harold Powell, Tail Turret Gunner; Richard Hass, Radio Operator; Arthur Zegeer, Ball Turret Gunner.
Middle Row, L to R – Wallace Hammond, Engineer; Harold March, Armorer, Waist Gunner; Louis Lyons, Nose Turret Gunner.
Back Row, L to R – Fred Carpenter, Co-Pilot; Norman Stewart, Bombardier; Harry Blount, Navigator; Donald B. Graf, Pilot.

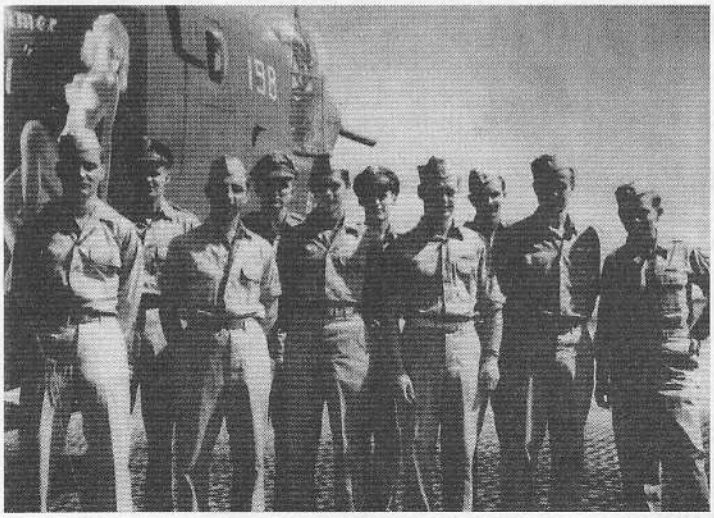


L to R – Hank Everhart, Roy Chlan, Roger Caple.

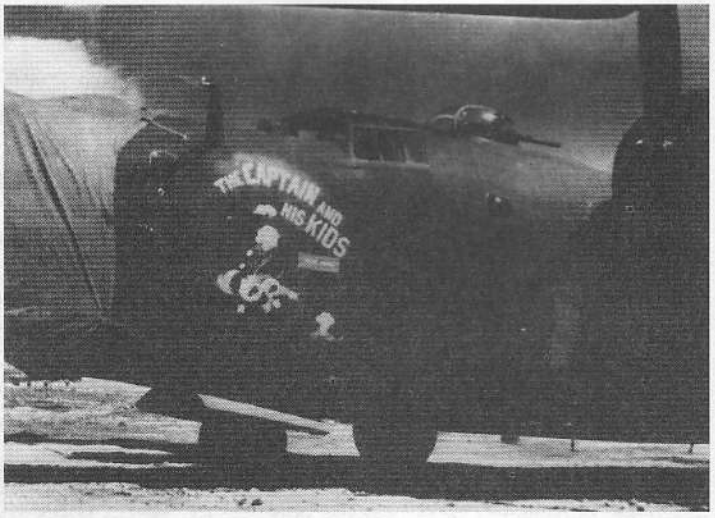
Roger Caple Writes –

Our crew was assigned to the 743rd Squadron. Our pilot was Martin Maurer, Roy Chlan, Radio Operator; Hank Everhart, Tail Turret Gunner; and Roger Caple, Navigator.

Chlan, Everhart and Caple are believed to be the only surviving members of the crew. All three attended the last reunion.



Unknown



Plane without a crew! Is it yours?

Szymon Serwatka Writes From Poland

Thank you very much for your short letter and the two issues of the Cerignola Connection. They were very interesting reading, indeed. For example, in the Spring 2000 issue, page 7, I read about Fred Czerwionka who could have been in the crew lost on December 17th 1944 over Hungary during a mission to Odertal. As you may remember from my letter of November 23rd 2000, missions to this target and to Blechhammer are of great interest to me.

Piotr Wisniewski, a friend of mine and an Aircraft Missing In Action Project (AMIAP) member is planning a trip to the USAF archives in Maxwell to retrieve documents that we need for our research project. I will appreciate very much if you could give us hints as to where we should look for information on the 455th BG mission reports for the following dates:

7 JUL 44	Odertal
7 AUG 44	Blechhammer South
22 AUG 44	Blechhammer
27 AUG 44	Blechhammer
13 SEP 44	Odertal
13 OCT 44	Blechhammer
14 OCT 44	Odertal
12 DEC 44	Blechhammer
17 DEC 44	Odertal
26 DEC 44	Auschwitz (Oswiecim)

We shall have our Project Website updated soon with a lot of interesting information. But you can view it also today at **www.samoloty.ip.pl/amiap/**

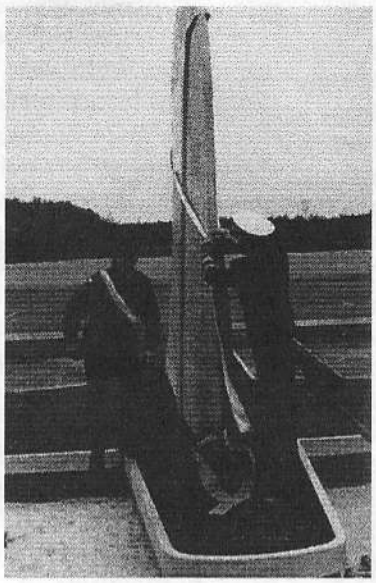
Best wishes from Warsaw,

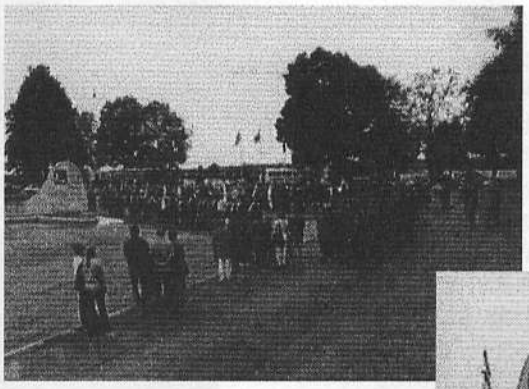
PS I am also sending information on the American Airmen Memorial – I was involved in building it.

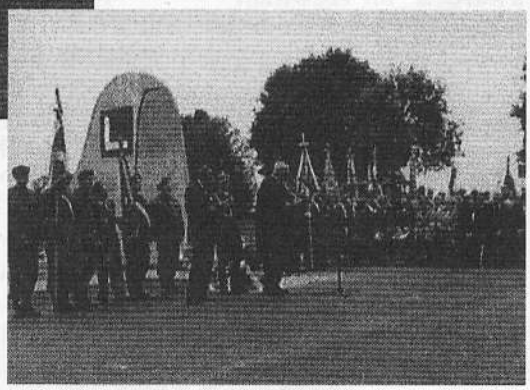
Szymon

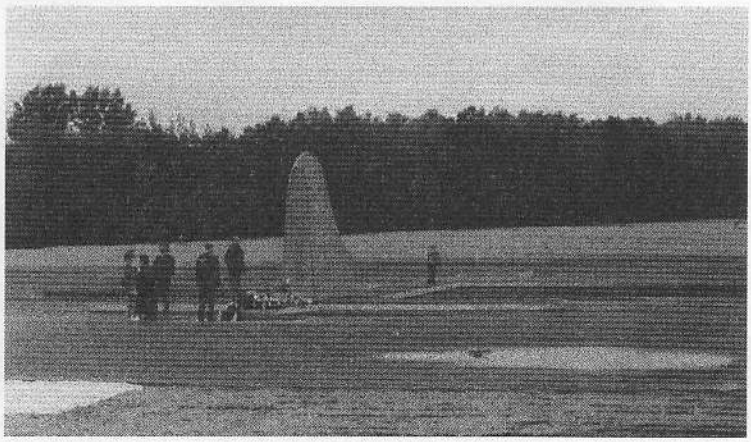
American Airmen Memorial

Dedicated to 41 802 USAAF flyers who gave their lives in battles over Europe in WWII erected in Woroniec, Poland on July 9th 2000.









Can You Help?

My uncle, SSGT Theodore J. (Todge) Olszewski (742nd Squadron) never talked about his WWI experiences. Interestingly, after returning to the US after the war, he would never fly in an airplane! Unfortunately, his official military record was destroyed in the 1973 fire in St. Louis, and his personal records/memorabilia were misplaced upon his death in 1983 (he was a widower left with a teenage son).

I would now like to pull together whatever information I could about his service with the 742nd Squadron for the benefit of his 2 grandsons. The family is aware that SSGT Olszewski served with the 742nd Squadron in Cerignola sometime during the summer of 1944. He was awarded "air crewman" wings and we believe he served primarily as a gunner. He completed his required 50 "missions".

I have recently located 2 photographs that were in the possession of his deceased sister. The first is a crew photo (SSGT Olszewski is the 3rd from the left in the front row) in front on a B-24 bearing the number 198 and the name "Glamour Gal" plane. The second shows him (5th from the left) in flight gear (lighting a cigarette) in front of a B-24 bearing the number 494 which appears to have crash landed. A cousin (who was 8 years old at the time) recalls that his uncle had "crash landed", probably twice during his missions.

The family would greatly appreciate it if anyone could provide any information as to the identification of the Pilot or crew members of "198" or "494". It is hoped that by knowing the pilot, I might be able to piece some information as to the missions in which my uncle took part. With the fine mission history of the 455th now published, I would hope to be able to provide his grandson's with information about a grandfather they never knew! Thank you!

CDR Mark D. Flora, USNR
12666 W. Iowa Drive
Lakewood, CO 80228







Still prettier than a B-17

Peter Kassák Writes From the Slovak Republic



Many thanks for the issue of Cerignola Connection Fall 2001. I was happy to receive it and to read an article of Bob Newberg. And I wondered, that there were reprinted addresses resp. emails of some of the members of the 455th BG. Assn. Now I would like to ask you, if it is possible, please, send me any contacts to these men or their families:

Edward J. Botten Jr.
David Fuchs
John B. Campbell
James F. Pittman
Frank E. Bivens
Clarence L. Madsen Jr.
Jake Shaheen Jr.
Benedict H. Raczka

It would be great to contact them or their families and ask them for some support for my project in way of information and photo stuff. Thanks.

I was also very unhappy to read that Lt. John N. Grimm passed away on August 1, 2001. I was looking for him for more than half a year to contact him and ask him some questions. Never mind. GOD BLESS HIM! But please, I would like to ask you for the address to his wife or family, where I could send my deepest honors to them and ask them for some picture of John Grimm from war times to complete my collection. He was shot down on July 7, 1944 over Czech, but made it to Slovakia and was captured here on July 13, 1944. Then was in POW camp, and when SLovak National Uprising started, he and other 4 men went alone to the woods, but were captured in mid November 1944 by Germans. So his war story is closely bind to Slovakia.

I am looking forward to your answer and to your help in which I believe.

With Best Greetings
Peter Kassák

Ed –

Many thanks to all of you who have submitted photos, stories and other material for inclusion in the Cerignola Connection. Filling 24 to 28 pages twice a year with human interest, photos and helpful articles is a monumental task. Keep them coming!

Remember to place your address label on the back of submitted photos so they can be returned after printing. I try to track down unclaimed originals but not always with success.

Articles published are as submitted with little or any change. If there is an error – it's the computer, not the editor.

I always look forward to your suggestions on how to improve our newsletter. Feel free to comment.

The Grand Finale – A True Story



On Lake Isabella, located in the high desert, an hour east of Bakersfield, California, some folks, new to boating, were having a problem. No matter how hard they tried, they couldn't get their brand new 22-ft. Bayliner to perform. It wouldn't get up on the plane at all, and it was very sluggish in almost every maneuver, no matter how much power was applied.

After about an hour of trying to make it go, they putted over to a nearby marina, thinking someone there could tell them what was wrong. A thorough topside check revealed everything in perfect working order. So, one of the marina guys jumped in the water to check underneath. He came up choking on water, he was laughing so hard.

Remember, this is true...

Under the boat, still strapped securely in place, was the trailer.

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Chaplains Corner



Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me;
Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.
With God as our Father, brothers all are we.
Let me walk with my brother in perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me, let this be the moment now.
With ev'ry step I take, let this be my solemn vow:
To take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally.
Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.

While Storm Clouds Gather



While storm clouds gather far across the sea,
Let us swear allegiance to a land that's free,
Let us all be grateful for a land so fair,
As we raise our voices in a solemn prayer:

God Bless America.
Land that I love
Stand beside her, and guide her
Thru the night with a light from above.
From the mountains, to the prairies,
To the oceans, white with foam
God bless America
My home sweet home.

~Irving Berlin~

Clever Signs

Some of the most clever signs we've seen have been posted in front of churches. Here are just a few...

"Try our Sundays. They are better than Baskin-Robins."

" Come in and pray today. Beat the Christmas rush."

Forty-Nine Missions
In One Hundred and Seventeen Days
7/12/44 to 11/5/44

Ed: The following article is extracted from the autobiography (permission granted) of Gene V. Benson. It is interesting. I thought you would enjoy reading it. Gene was a Bombardier with the 740th Squadron.

Our crew was assigned to the 740th squadron of the 455th bomb group, 15th Air Force. We had a tent to live in and a bare folding cot to sleep on. That was it. There was no pillow, no mattress, nothing. The Sergeants had exactly the same deluxe accommodations. It was still a lot better than the troops had in France. I'm sure the infantry would have welcomed it. The invasion had taken place earlier in June and we were getting reports on what was happening. We practiced all kinds of missions for about three weeks and then we were combat ready. They took our new B24 and gave us an old beat up one and that was the one we flew for the next month or so.

Our first combat mission was on July 12th to a marshaling yard in Miramas, France. We encountered very heavy flak, lost an engine, and had to land at a fighter base well north of our home base. The fighter base was the home base of the Tuskegee Air Men and we had never heard about them. They were a great bunch of guys. They fed us, refueled us, helped us get the engine started and sent us off to home. We never saw them again on the ground, but looked for them on missions. They were great escorts and as far as I know, they never lost a bomber to enemy fighters. We went on to fly 49 missions the next four months. We flew from July 12th, which was the Miramas raid, until November 5th, our last mission which was to Vienna. We bombed targets in ten different countries in Europe, all of course occupied by the Germans. Flak damage was constant and severe and we went through several B24's but never got our new one back.

Charles Jenkins was a really superb pilot and always got us home to Italy. Somehow he did, not always on our own base, but back. We lost Dolson Meaker early on so we had a series of copilots. They were all okay, and Jenkins made first pilots out of those that survived. The only good food we ever got in those four months was army bread and orange marmalade. Everything else was K-rations or C-rations. We did get fresh donuts from the Red Cross ladies after each mission. We supplemented our diet with cigarette trading to the Italians, trading cigarettes for olive oil, eggs, melons, and potatoes. They were not always available but frequently enough to keep us going. Packages from home, when they made it over, filled out our larder. We had fresh beef once in the four months. That was the 100 mission bash.

Later in our tour it was announced that several planes on mission as a trial were to get the new "Air Force in flight ten men meal." We were elated and we were chosen. We took no army bread with us on that flight. We were not to open the large box until the target was bombed and we were headed home. After bombs away, I would be the least busy person so I was elected to open the box and distribute the wonders it contained. It was October and the temperature outside the plane was 45 below zero. We were all ready for food. When I opened the box, the first thing I saw was a printed list of directions that stated; bring the water to a boil. We didn't have water; we didn't have a pot, and it was 45 below zero at that altitude and you couldn't have boiled water with a blow torch. That took care of the warm course. There were a few frozen crackers you could work on and a few frozen apricots you could suck on and that was it. Nobody said much. They were too tired and disappointed, but when we landed, the crews that received this largess, threw the remains of the boxes out the bomb bays on the hard stand and walked off. We reported our findings at briefing and that was the last any of us ever heard of the "Ten men in flight dinner." Back to army bread and marmalade and the old survival tactics. If you didn't have a sense of humor in that mans army, you were lost.

At this point I should mention how Harry Jordan really saved my life. Most of our B24's had two 50 caliber guns mounted in new nose turrets that were, I believe, made by Consolidated. They worked well. Early on, Harry and I had sent our waist gunners back to the waist and took turns manning the front turret. The sight and navigation equipment were in the area just behind the turret so it was logical. This particular turret was not working well and since I was supposed to be a turret expert, having been to advanced gunnery school, I was chosen to fix it. The turret was a late model upright piece of machinery with two 50 caliber guns, boxes of ammunition, optical sights, a bunch of flak vests, a seat, and wide area of fire up and down and side to side. There was a release mechanism at the base, so on the ground the gun could be manually swung from side to side and up and down for service. In the air, of course, it would only be operated by the seated gunner inside the turret using power. The power was supplied by motors and servos, that sort of thing. We were at mission altitude and I wasn't going to get into the turret until I knew it was functioning properly. I stood in front of the bomb sight and reached in through the small entry door to see if I had power. At that point, the release mechanism popped and the turret began to turn on its axis. I had about one or two seconds tops to get my upper body out of there and no leverage to shove out. Harry, standing behind me, reached in and grabbed my collar and yanked me out physically as the turret swung to the left and completely closed

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the opening aperture. Any part of me that would have still been in the turret would have still been in the turret, and the rest of me all over the bomb sight. I sort of thanked Harry and he sort of mumbled something like, he would have had to have broken someone else in, and that was it. It was a terrifying incident but in those days almost everything was sort of terrifying so you had to find the humorous side of it. We flew to the target, bombed it, and flew home without incident. Our poor plane looked like a whipped dog with his tongue hanging out and down on the side. The gunners were alerted that we had no gun protection in the front. We were the lead air craft. So they were told to keep an eye out. When we landed, our ground crew chief said, "Well it looks like it did it again, this time we will really get it fixed." I said, "I hope so." Harry shook his head and we went off for donuts and coffee as usual.

As time and missions went by and because I was better with the Sperry bomb sight than I was with the Norden, I was to lead missions where the Sperry worked best. The Norden worked fine on large targets like oil refineries and on air fields, but I think the Sperry was better for small targets like a bridge or a factory. Others agreed with me and that's the way we went. Before we were finished, I had eight squadron and two group leads. I was in the lead plane and the others dropped at my release. I was on my second group lead with senior officers running the plane. The pilot I think was a major and the navigator a captain, both from the group. I didn't like to fly with another crew away from mine, but that's the way it was. It was October 14th, 1944 and the target that was left was a synthetic oil refinery at Odertal Germany. We had been to Bleckhammer, Germany near by on three other occasions and both targets were synthetic oil refinery bases. Together they had over thousands of 88's and 105 anti-aircraft guns. The Germans were pulling back all over Europe and were taking their guns with them. They were especially concentrated on what was left of their oil capability. We were told by a briefing that they were down to 7 percent of normal. I was on the sight, half way through the bomb run, leading the group when we got hit. That burst, or one of the others, took out an engine, damaged another engine, and wiped out the bomb sight. The manual bomb release mechanism at my left was also knocked out and I soon found out that the pilots emergency release lever failed. We started to lose altitude and fell out of the group. I got a portable oxygen bottle and a screwdriver and headed back to the bomb bays. I told the engineer, whom I did not know, to get oxygen and get a screw driver and join me. The bomb bays were open, the wind was howling, and we were still at altitude and freezing. The engineer joined me but he was covered with hydraulic fluid and was slipping on the narrow walk way, I really was worried about him. We were carrying six 1,000 pound high explosive bombs and to release them manually we had to turn the two screws on the individual shackle on each bomb simultaneously. We worked together and one by one got the bombs out starting at the bottom. I know it was only a few minutes but it was horribly cold. Our hands were frozen in spite of gloves. We got them out, started to regain some altitude and flew to Italy. As we were flying alone we were picked up by two P47's. Charming guys who escorted us to the Adriatic. The Major, our pilot of the moment, nominated me for the Distinguished Flying Cross and I did the same. I wrote up the engineer for one. I received mine three weeks later, just before we left for home. I hope the engineer got his. I never found out. That was our 44th mission and we had a few more to go.

The last mission I flew was with my own crew to Vienna on a squadron lead to an oil storage depot. This was on November 5th, 1944. We flew through the heavy flak like the pros we had become and when we turned off the target I thought "I will never go through anything like this again and damn it if I didn't miss it."

Tail Lookout

by Henry B. Everhart
S/Sgt 743rd Squadron

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Ed – Henry Everhart writes an excellent coverage of a crews tour of duty in Italy, WWII. Enjoy!

Of four notebooks I kept from April 1 until July of 1944, two were confiscated by military sensors prior to leaving Italy, July of 1944.

Refer to notes from the period of April 2, 1944 to July 6, 1944 made by Charley Gulley which was given to Roger Caple by Charley's widow, Pat. Charley was born 1922 and died 1991 in Kentucky.

The following notes were copied from original hand written notes I made at the time the events occurred in 1944 while with the 15th Air Force in Italy.

The 455th Bomb Group and our 743rd Squadron were located several miles outside of Cerignola, Italy. The field had one landing strip. The existing buildings looked as though they have been here a long time. The largest building must have been a large barn that the group used for briefings. Smaller buildings may have been the farmer's houses and out buildings. We lived in 6-men tents that were set up between the olive trees. A large common shower was constructed for bathing. It was a series of 50 gallon barrels sitting on beams overhead. The barrels were heated with wood under them. Pipes were connected to the barrels that had a chain you pulled to get a spray of hot water for bathing.

The summers were hot and dusty...the winters were a wet penetrating cold with rains that pro-

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duced a very slippery mud that was like ice.

April 29, 1944

Took off 8:30 A.M. to bomb Toulon, France. Again the guns jammed on me. Had to use the foot firing mechanism, my left solenoid was out. We hit the target with 100 lb. bombs

One ship went down...I saw only three chutes...saw one FW 190 fighter. Ray saw him first and started firing at him. The 190 started to come in at 5 o'clock on my turret and gave him a burst...heard the waist gunner do the same. After a few short bursts he turned and went into the formation behind us.

He was still within range, so I kept on firing at him. He made a pass at the waist gunner in that formation. My tracers seemed to go in front of his nose. I fired at him until my guns jammed...worked like hell to clear them...but the ammo would not feed in, charged them but the ammo would go only part way into battery! Looked for the fighter and saw him about 600 yards out...pointing his nose toward me...half-scared he would come on in.

Took my glove off and worked on the guns again...seemed like an hour had gone by...looked for the 190...did not see him...he must have peeled off. Felt somewhat better. Worked on the guns some more but had no luck so decided to quit. Cleared my guns. When we got back to the base, I had an armorer work on the guns that night.

April 30, 1944

Got up 11 A.M. I had ear problems and Ray threw up five times on the mission yesterday. So we went to see the Flight Surgeon. He looked at my ears and grounded me for two days and gave me two pills and said to come back that evening.

We are supposed to test hop our new ship. Went down to the ship...went over the guns. Decided to name the turret "JO" after a gal in the states. Went back to the tent and then to see the doctor. He gave me some nose drops. I got some oil, brushes and swabs to clean my guns with. Our crew is supposed to fly tomorrow...tail end Charley.

May 1, 1944

Saw Doc today. Got back on flight status. Going on a mission tomorrow. We are to fly tail end Charley again. All the crew are looking forward to flying in our new ship.

May 2, 1944

Got up 5 A.M. Supposed to raid northern Italy. Took off 8:30 A.M. We got out over the ocean and No. 3 engine blew a cylinder head. We dropped out of formation and had to get rid of ten 1000 pound bombs in the ocean. We turned around and went back to the base. About 1 P.M. the rest of the squadron came back. They were almost to the target and were called back to the base. Tigert was flying copilot with another crew on that run and on their way back they sank an enemy vessel.

Ray, John, Ernie, Joe and I went to Cerignola. Went to the Red Cross Center. Saw this cute Red Cross gal who sang there. She had a nice voice.

We got back to the base at 6 P.M. I missed some steak they had for supper...got salmon instead. Went to a movie...saw Bob Hope in "Let's Face It"

May 3, 1944

Got up at 11 A.M. Ray and I went to town and saw "Son of Monte Cristo". Returned to the base at 5 P.M. Went over to Operations and found out I had been promoted to S/Sgt. First time I got two letters! One from Dad and another one from Patricia.

May 4, 1944

Went to town with Ernie and Ray. We met John wandering around town. Tried to find some paint brushes...no luck. Came back to the base, ate chow and went right back in town. We listened to a five piece G.I. band play. A trumpet, sax, base fiddle, piano and drums. We got back to the base about nine. Some guys raised hell half the night.

May 5, 1944

They woke us up 8:45 A.M. Told us to be down to the ship at 9:15. We might go on a mission tomorrow.

Wish they would tell us sooner! Fried two eggs in my mess kit on the stove One egg that was just right and pretty...I dropped it on the floor in the dirt! So I fried another one. Ate two oranges and some nuts for breakfast.

Waited about a half hour for a truck. We were late getting down to the ship. Pilot was pissed off. Swabbed the guns out and we took off.

Going to bomb some oil refinery and storage tanks in Ploesti, Romania. When we came near the target I saw some escort. An enemy fighter was prowling around the engine and burst into flames. A couple of enemy fighters continued to fire at them. A B-24 broke formation and fell away...an ME 109 followed him. More fighters came around and made more passes at the B-24. Saw three men bail out and saw them floating down near a town on a river. After passing this town I then saw more chutes floating down. Then hunks of balls of fires falling... followed by a B-24 spinning down engulfed in flames...watched it hit the ground and explode. One man in his chute landed about 100 feet from the wrecked ship. Thought for a minute he was going to land right in the wreckage. Other crews said they saw all 10 men bail out.

Flak is now heavy as hell...the skies turned almost black. The enemy fighters continued to attack despite the heavy flak. So many fighters to fire at...so much going on...cannot remember much details.

Could hear the flak burst and split...almost a crushing sound...a crunch...dragged out splitting crack.

The crew said the flak bounced the ship around...I was too damned busy to notice. My guns

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worked great without jamming. Finally got out of the flak area...seemed like hours!

The enemy fighters were still around...they seemed to be having a holiday...wonder where our escort fighters were? The fighters finally disappeared and let us alone.

The sky is still black. I took a look at the target area...a lot of black smoke was coming up from the target to about 17,000 feet.

We got back to our base at 5:30 P.M. We were rewarded to a delicious chicken stew with carrots.

Went to the ship and cleaned my guns. Hydraulic fluid all over the place! Pressure switch leaked...control unit must have leaked, but didn't bother looking for the leak now. Came back to the tent. Found out we are going on another mission tomorrow in our new ship. It will be the ship's first mission. Went to bed at 11 P.M.

May 6, 1944

Started on a mission this morning in our new ship. Tried to raise the landing gear but could not as a hydraulic line had burst. Hydraulic fluid all over the bomb bay. We go over the ocean and dropped our 500 pound bombs. Since we had no hydraulic pressure and no brakes, the pilot told everyone to get in the tail end of the ship to weigh the tail down and drag it to help us to stop. We opened the hydraulic emergency fluid valve. The ship hit the ground and the tail end dragged on the runway and the whole fuselage of tail section was wiped out. The ship was totaled.

May 7, 1944

Finally got off on a mission in another ship. Bombed a railroad marshaling yard in Bucharest and blew the hell out of it! We flew in the last formation, almost "tail end Charlie" Sweating out the pilot's flying...rough as hell...got bounced around the turret quite a bit.

When we came over the target the flak was light and inaccurate. I saw an ME 109 sitting out of range at 4 o'clock...then started coming in on us...the waist gunners and I fired on him as he came in...he then changed his mind and dove on the ship below us.

My ammo had jammed in the right booster motor. Now had only one gun left to fire with. When I saw no fighters around, I started to clear the gun...worked on it for a while...finally got it cleared and feed the ammo back into the gun...by the time I had everything working...there were no damned fighters around! We dropped our bomb load and headed for home. We were almost out of enemy territory and passed over a small town...they threw up some flak at us...way off.

May 12, 1944

They woke us at 3 A.M....takes a lot of will power to get out of the sack this time of the morning. Got to the ship at 4 A.M. Checked the guns...they are dirty as hell! I turned the power to check the solenoids...pressed the trigger and the round goes off...scares the hell out of me...and blew a hole in the turret cover. A "live" round was in the right gun chamber!! The last guy never bothered to clear and clean the guns...ammo cans are empty...had to refill them...everything done in haste. The pilot started taxing the ship...and John is still outside...got him on board and took off at 5:45 A.M. going to bomb a canal, docks and and marshaling yard...all in one place at La Spezia, Italy. Got over the target...made a run...then the formation made a 180 degree turn...and...made ANOTHER run on the target...but, this time DROPPED our bombs...some light flak came up...so far, no fighters. Somehow, thought we would catch hell today. On our way back to our base, I turned on the radio and got some nice music. A gal singing "That Old Black Magic" Don't know who broadcast it. We returned to our base at 12 noon.

Ate lunch and slept until 5 P.M. Got my mail...one from Dad, another from Kink addressed here. More mail from Mom, Aunt Bessie and Dad again. Wrote Jo a long 6 page letter.

May 13, 1944

Got up at 11 A.M. Checked on the mail...none for me. Charley, Ray, Freiheit, and Maurer got mail. Took Ray's mail to him in the hospital. He has yellow jaundice from some bad sweet potatoes he had eaten. Came back to the base. Slept until 4 P.M.

May 14, 1944

Up at 10 A.M....checked the mail...got a letter from Aunt Nellie. Took a letter to Ray at the hospital. The hospital is supposed to move nearer to town.

Got our passes at 1 P.M. John, Ernie, Charley, Joe and I got on a truck and went to Bari. A rough 2 1/2 hour ride...got there at 4 P.M....went to the Red Cross Canteen to see if we could get something to eat. We did manage to get some cookies, ice cream and something that was supposed to be orange juice...but still hungry.

We went across the street to the Red Cross building and Service Club in hopes we could find some place to sleep. An Italian gal gave us a map of Bari and directions. John said she spoke English...I didn't hear what she said.

We take off to find the Sad Sack Hotel and we wandered around...but can't find it. Stopped some guy and asked him...he said in the next block. Noticed his 15th Air Force patch on his shoulder and asked him where he got it...said he was going there now...so we went with him.

Joe and Charley went on to the hotel. We go into this tailor shop. There were four girls there sewing patches on...none of them looked over 16 years old.

One gal was tight...the other gals said some Americans brought in some cognac and she got drunk from it. She was cute as hell! The others looked under nourished. The gal who was tight was laughing all the time we were there...just before we left she was very quiet...her husband was there and must have bawled her out for being drunk, smoking and flirting

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with the soldiers. She seemed independent as hell. I finally got the patch sewed on my blouse. We left to find the Sad Sack Hotel...after a little search we find it...but the office was closed! It looks like we are out of a room...or worse...a place to sleep...and we are a good 90 miles from our base. We go back to the Red Cross to see if we could fine Joe and Charley. No luck...no where in sight.

We decide to head back to the field...it is now 7 P.M....John, Ernie and I hop a truck. It takes us to the edge of town. We get another ride as far as the Eight Army Rest Camp. We wait another half hour and got a Limey truck that took us as far as Barletta.

It is now dark...we walk to the center of town...we got on another small truck full of half drunk G.I's. The truck did about 60 MPH all the way...some ride! We got to Cerignola at 9:30 P.M....another truck takes us to our base...I am hungry as hell...but nothing to eat! John swipes a head of cabbage from the mess hall, cuts it up and boils it in his mess kit...tastes good!

Tigert is alert officer tonight...he almost drives his jeep into the tent. He finds two boxes of K-Rations for us...but fell asleep on my bed...with my clothes on...before he opened the rations...I woke up at 5 A.M....got undressed and got back into bed.

May 17, 1944

Got up at 5 A.M. Supposed to be at briefing at 7 A.M. but it was called off. They are to test hop our ship. Went down to the ship and checked my guns to see if they had fixed the spring...as usual, no. The back plate cover was in the same place where I had left it the day before.

The pilot and Joe came out and took the ship up for a practice mission. John got some tin from the frag boxes to make a floor for the waist area. Went up to tech supply for a file, sheet metal cutter and a screw driver. John works on the frag box, straighten it for the floor. I am trying to make a punch for my gun lock spring by carving a handle out of a block of wood and filing a nail to a sharp point. Put them together...looks like an ice pick. Our ship returns. Take the left gun out and work on the lock spring...seems to work OK. Put it all back together. After chow, Ray, John and I put the metal floor down. In the waist. We then had to cut a hole in the side of the tail turret to get to the body lock spring.

May 18, 1944

We were awakened at 5 A.M. for a briefing...we missed the briefing...missed the trucks. The pilot, Capt. Bechtold, said we should walk down. An armor truck came by and took us to our ship. This is the first time we will all go on a complete mission in our crate.

Take off at 9 A.M. going to bomb oil dumps in Ploesti, Romania again...means heavy flak. Checked the turret and guns after we got in the air over the Adriatic Sea. They worked beautifully.

Everything went smoothly all the way to the target. As we were near the target I noticed "Boom a Rang Betsy" had dropped her bombs through the bomb bay doors. They were flapping in the breeze, but she went on over the target with us. Flak started coming up...they were off at first...then they got our range...wow, that was the heaviest and most accurate flak I have ever seen...continuous burst one after the other. One burst was right under the elevator...felt the concussion of it. Checked to see if I was all there. Hard to believe I could not see any holes in my turret...then heard the bombardier say we had a hole in the No. 4 engine cowling and was losing oil. Heard the waist gunners shooting and said there were 6 ME 109s on "Betsy". Our escort came to the rescue and got rid of the fighters.

Over Yugoslavia we had to feather No. 4 engine. We got back to the base at 3 P.M. We found out our gas tanks were almost empty except for No. 3 engine. It had only 50 gallons left. Tokyo tanks were full!

Joe didn't know about a valve that had to be opened before transferring fuel...so no fuel was transferred. The No. 4 engine fuel line was shot out...means a cylinder head change. The only hit we got!

May 19, 1944

At 3 A.M. some guy came in and wakes us up to tell us we are flying this morning...after telling us last night we were not going on a mission! I ate a hamburger for breakfast. Went to briefing at 4 A.M. We are going to bomb Genoa, Italy. We took off at 6 A.M. as we came to the target, we had a lot of escort! P-38s all over the sky! Flak was light and way off...the way I like it. No enemy fighters today...it's a milk run!

There was a heavy under cast and we could not see the target. On the way back I saw P-51s, Spitfires and 6 B-25s. We then hit some rough weather...quite a rough ride...our formation was all over the sky! We were overtaking our leader. Four groups flying side by side. We got back to the base at 12:30 P.M. I now have 13 sorties and 9 missions.

May 20, 1944

Woke up at 10 A.M. After lunch I went down to the ship. John got two long ammo cans for the waist position of the ship. The sheet metal men were going to put them in and should make John and Ray happy. Our crew chief is still working on the blown engine cylinder. Found out the ship got a flak hole in the induction system.

Ray and I went in to town to see Bing Crosby in "Going My Way" First time I saw him since I left the States.

May 22, 1944

Got up at 6:30 A.M. Went to briefing at 7:30 and took off at 11 A.M. We flew in a "new" ship the squadron got...it looks more like a "lemon". They changed targets at the last minute. Are going to bomb some ship docks in Genoa, Italy The mission was a milk run. Very little flak and no fighters. Our squadron was the only one to hit the target. I saw four large ships

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sitting in the harbor docks.

Our bomb bay doors got jammed and would not close. Ernie's ball turret wouldn't come up. They worked on it for an hour...they had to hand crank it up with cables and they lost one of the handles...it dropped out of the ship. We landed at 6 P.M. It was late by the time I finished cleaning the guns. We are going to fly our own crate tomorrow in the No. 4 position in the lead flight.

May 23, 1944

Got up at 4:30 A.M. Supposed to raid northern Italy. Got out to the ship at 5:30 and No. 2 engine would not run smoothly and No. 1 engine would not start...so we didn't get off on the mission...was a milk run anyway. Went back to our tent area. Got a letter from Aunt Nellie.

May 24, 1944

We got off on a mission at 6 A.M. this morning to bomb an airfield near Vienna, Austria. Ran into some flak about an hour before our target. The flak guns looked like fireflies lighting up.

There were quite a few guns along the river. As we came to the target the formation was circling all over the sky. We didn't hit the target. Flak was heavy and accurate as hell. There were no enemy fighters as we had plenty of escort. One of our ships went down. All the guys bailed out. We returned to our base at 1 P.M. We got six flak holes. Two in the fuselage, one in the top turret, one in the bomb bay and 2 in the wings.

May 25, 1944

Got up at 7 A.M. and briefed at 8 and took off at 10 A.M. Our target is an airfield we are going to bomb with frags in northern Italy. We got to the target at 1 P.M. No flak so far. Two ME 109s attacked a ship behind us before we came to the I.P. (Initial Point of start of the bomb run) At first I thought they were P51s. I fired at them until my guns jammed. Found out later the ammo link chute jammed.

We did a nice job on the airfield. We landed at 4 P.M. I cleaned my guns and had an armorment man fix the chute and gun solenoid. We are not flying tomorrow.

May 27, 1944

They got us up at 3 A.M. Briefed at 4 and took off at 6 A.M. We are going to bomb another airfield in Marseilles, France with 40, 100 pound bombs. As we came to the target at 10 A.M. Flak started coming up...didn't seem to be much of it or close at first...then all of a sudden I heard and felt something hit and came up through the bottom of my turret between my feet. My turret just happened to be straight and not set on an angle. If it had been turned a little sideways, the flak would have hit my foot.

Looked like we did a good job on the airfield. I saw a couple of JU 88s flying around the field. They must have taken off from the airfield just before we got to the target and there were no enemy fighters around. On our way back to our base, I listened to some good music on the radio. We landed at 3 P.M. Later, after we landed, I saw a hole under my turret and found a large piece of flak on the floor of my turret.

May 28, 1944

They got us up at 5 A.M. Briefed at 6 and took off at 7 A.M. We are going to bomb a railroad yard in northern Italy with 500 pound bombs. As we came to the target, there was an under cast covering the target. We went to an alternate target in Genoa, Italy to bomb the harbor that was full of ships. We hit several ships. Flak was light, but accurate. We got a few holes in the bomb bay. No enemy fighters today...lucky as my left gun wouldn't fire again. We landed at 1:30 P.M. Later I went down to the ship to clean my guns but they took it to get two new crews. Will have to wait until tomorrow to clean the guns.

May 29, 1944

They got us up at 3 A.M. I had to clean my guns before taking off. Briefed at 4 and took off at 6 A.M. Today we are going to make several bomb runs in Yugoslavia. When we got to the coast of Yugoslavia, I tried to fire my guns and the bolt in the left gun stuck to the rear. Could not get it fixed, so didn't worry as we did not expect any fighters today and we do not have any escort today.

My heated suit rheostat isn't working...don't need it anyhow as we are only going up to 15,000 feet. We came over the target...made a dry run the first time...lucky there was no flak...did a 180 degree turn and came back and dropped the 40 100 pound bombs on a concentration of German troops.

We made several direct hits on a bridge and covered the town fairly well. We landed at our base at 11 A.M. I told the crew chief about the problem with my left gun and had my electric suit checked out.

Came back to the ship and checked my guns and they were fixed and reloaded. Took off again at 2 P.M. Went back just east of the same town with the same size bomb load.

The first formation before us dropped their bombs and we again made a dry run on the target...we did a 180 degree turn before we dropped our bombs on the target. There was no flak but we did have 30 P-38 escort. We landed at our base at 6 P.M.

Went to chow and we got cold hot dogs right out of the can while the dagos had a steak for supper. After cleaning my guns at 10 P.M. I went to bed. We are not going to fly tomorrow. Thank God. I now have 21 sorties and 16 missions. Got a letter from Jo.

May 30, 1944

I slept until noon. Went to chow...not too good. Wrote a 3 page letter to Jo. After supper Ray and I went into town. When we got in town we saw John and he said he walked all the way in from the base. We went to see the movie "Miracle of Morgan Creek" I saw it in th States at Westover Field. We got back to the base at 11:30 P.M. No missions tomorrow.

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June 1, 1944

Another crew flew our ship today. I am tired anyway...have flown five mission in a row. I loafed around all day. Ray and some of our crews went to the Isle of Capri for R & R for a week. I never made the list...guess I was enjoying the war too much. Our squadron has been flying for the past ten days straight.

June 2, 1944

Didn't fly again today. The same crew who flew our ship yesterday flew it again today. On the way down to the landing strip, as I got to the end of the landing strip, a B-24 had landed and came to the end of the strip and I expected it to stop and turn off...but he kept coming to the end of the strip and went off the end of the runway into a shallow ditch. Everyone scrambles out of the ship. An ambulance arrives and carries the tail gunner out on a stretcher. The crew had come back from a rough mission and two ships were shot up very badly.

June 3, 1944

I went down to the ship to check on my tail guns. They are dirty as hell! I cleaned them and found the problem causing the bolt sticking to the rear was some teeth from the elevator gear had broken off and was in the bottom of the receiver.

The oil body lock spring would jam against the broken teeth and held the bolt to the rear. The spring was chewed up. I went to lunch and came back and started washing the tail end of the ship when some guys took the ship up to get a new crew. When they returned John put his girlfriend's name on his side of the ship. He named it "Martha"

June 4, 1944

They got us up at 3:30 A.M. Briefed at 4:45 and took off at 6 A.M. Today we are going to bomb a target in Hungary.

Engine No. 4 started smoking on take off. We broke formation and went to the Adriatic Sea to get rid of our bombs. Came back to our base at 7 A.M. I went to my tent and slept until noon. In the afternoon Ray, John and I went to town and saw a movie with Ann Miller in "Reville with Beverly". Got back to the base at 6 P.M.

June 5, 1944

They got us up at 3 A.M. Briefed at 4. We got halfway through the briefing and they canceled the mission. Everyone pretty well pissed off. Went to the mess hall and ate breakfast.

Slept until noon. John, Ray and I decided to go swimming at the beach near Barletta. We went to the orderly room and found out we were to stand a formation at 5:30 P.M. We decided to go to the beach anyhow and hoped we would get back in time.

When we got to the beach...it was dirty as hell with piles of manure on the beach that smelled awful. The sand looked like mixed salt and pepper. I didn't want to stay there. John jumped in the water. I put my trunks on and stuck my foot in to test the water...too cold. I laid on the beach...which took a lot of will power. John and Ray walked down the beach. When they got back they said a little girl about ten years of age asked them if they wanted fig-a-fig (to have sex). We saw a show given by some French performers. Some nice looking broads. One had a very good singing voice. They sang a few American songs.

We got back to the base in time to eat chow. We stood in the formation while Lt. Caple and Lt. Tigert got their Air Medals. This was the first time I did any marching since I left Salt Lake City, Utah.

June 6, 1944

Got up at noon. Went down to the ship to check to see how clean my guns were...OK. Went to Tech Supply to see if I could get a new electric heated suit. They said some would be in that evening. Ray and I went into town. I took my civi cowboy boots, I had bought in Brazil, in to have the heels fixed. The old guy gave us a small glass of wine.

We went up to the Red Cross. There was a good looking blond Italian gal there who was about 5'2 and eyes of blue...WOW!

An Italian guy slaps her on her rear end...and Ray moaned about his actions. When we got back to the base, I checked with Tech Supply and did get my electric heated suit.

June 9, 1944

They got us up at 3 A.M. Briefed at 4 and took off at 6 A.M. we are going to bomb an aircraft engine factory in Munich, Germany. The 454th are bombing an anti aircraft factory near there. There are 3 airfields in the area.

After we got over the sea I test fired my guns and they would not fire. I let the pilot know of the problem. I kept trying to clear them and worked on them for about an hour...without success.

As we came into enemy territory and we were about to cross over the Alps the pilot had to feather No. 1 engine. We dropped out of the formation...the tail vibrated and shook like hell. We no sooner were out of the formation when a ME109 jumps our ass. He made a pursuit curve at first and came around again. He must have noticed my guns were not firing and he came straight in toward me. I could see his tracers flying all around us.

I could hear Joe, in the top turret, and Ernie, in the ball turret, firing at the ME 109...a hell of a racket! All I could do was to track the fighter and hope he would go away. As he came in again the center of the nose lit up like a blinking light from the 20mm cannon and the wings were like blinking Christmas lights from his guns. A lot of smoke was coming from the fighter's guns and engine as he approached and peeled away. He did not seem to be hitting us and then came in at 3 o'clock. The waist, top and bottom turrets were firing at him. He came around and came at us from the tail again...straight in. He came in very close...felt if I had a base ball

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bat...I could have hit him. I could clearly see his face as he went under me. The fighter was a light and dark mottled tan and green with black square crosses on his wings and a swastika on his rudder.

We dropped our bombs on a power plant. A few minutes later another ME 109 appears from below. He makes a pass...peels off and came back.

We finally got away from the coast when some ships in the harbor started firing at us but missed. Our pilot put us in a dive to get down to the water at 1,000 feet to keep the fighter above us.

We land at our base at 11 A.M. ...just in time for lunch. We had a hole in the left waist gun position and a deep crease on the bottom of the ship under the tail. Supposed to fly tomorrow in our own crate.

June 10, 1944

They got us up at 4 A.M. Briefed at 5 and took off at 8 A.M. We are going to bomb an airbase in northern Italy near Bologna. Checked my guns over the sea...perfect! Got to the target at 10 A.M. There was moderate flak and was way off. We did not see any fighters. Everything went smoothly on our way back to the base until we got over the Adriatic Sea.

We were flying along nice and peaceful when all of a sudden we peel off from the formation in the middle of a turn and did a 90 degree bank...and went straight down. Didn't know what was happening! I saw the formation go up above us...the horizon did a flip flop and was vertical!

I had to push myself out of the turret with my feet...I still had my flak suit on...had to pull it off and then crawled to my chute but could not lift it...bent down to the chute to snap it together but had a hard time snapping the chute to my harness due to the g-forces. I crawled to the hatch and waited for a signal to bail out. Then felt a strong force pushing me to the floor and knew we were pulling out of the 7,000 foot dive. When we leveled out I took the chute off and got back in the turret.

We did a 180 degree turn, but were going the way we came from and did another 180 to head for home. A group of P-51s appeared and escorted us part of the way home. First time I ever saw that done and was glad to see them. We got back to our base before our group did. When we got together on the ground, the Colonel said to our pilot..."Hey hoss, we saw the bottom of your plane up there today."

The pilot had vertigo and kept banking the ship until we were 90 degrees...and rolled over into a dive. The stress was so great, on the ship, that it twisted the rudder several degrees from the wings. Every pilot who flew the ship after that said they had to fly it into the ground to land it. My ears rang for days. Flight Surgeon grounded me for a week. Had hearing problems from then on.

June 11, 1944

They got us up at 3 A.M. Briefed at 4 and took off at 6 A.M. We are going to bomb a target with 16 guns near Bucharest, Romania. We got to the target about 9 A.M. Flak was moderate but accurate. Just as we got over the target, my oxygen mask fell off my face as the straps on the right side came loose. I was trying to juggle holding my mask on, turn switches on, open my oxygen valve and talk at the same time.

All of a sudden an ME109 came out from under the ship. Didn't hear anyone call on the intercom there were fighters around. With one hand I am trying to operate the turret, take aim on the fighter, talk on the phone and pull the trigger. By the time I could fire he was 600 yards away. I gave him a burst and heard the waist and ball turret gunners firing.

I then smelled smoke! I called on the phone about the odor and no one seemed to know where the smoke was coming from. Then Joe said it was the life raft burning! They told Caple to pull the release cable. I then saw it go flying past me overhead. I saw the red flares burning in the raft which was burned in half and the other raft was fully inflated and gliding down toward earth.

Everything quieted down for a while. Over Yugoslavia, about half way to our base a B-24 was by itself at 5 o'clock high. As I was looking at the ship, I saw an ME109 diving at him from the rear. I called out the fighter and I fired several bursts at him...he disappeared from sight. We landed about noon.

No. 1 engine's electrical system was shot out by flak. Flak also hit one of the flares in the life raft which destroyed it. The ship is grounded.

June 16, 1944

They got us up at 3:30 A.M. Briefed at 4:30 and we took off at 7 A.M. We are going to bomb an oil refinery near Vienna, Austria. We are flying in our own crate today...At least I have a good turret and guns. I had to retime the solenoid after I test fired the guns. The intercom is screwed up...can hardly understand anything.

When we got over Yugoslavia No. 4 engine started throwing oil. We drop out of formation...did a 180 turn and headed for our base. Am a little relieved as I did not like going through a mission without an intercom...but we have bombs we have to get rid of. The pilot and bombardier are looking for a target.

I felt safe enough to take off my flak jacket...laid it on the floor behind me...I turn around to my guns and look around to see...FLAK...I grab my flak suit...wrap it around me the best I can...then heard a ripping and tearing sound of flak going through the fuselage.

We drop our bombs as the flak explodes very close under the ship. In a few minutes all is quiet as we get farther away from the target except for the drone of the engines that is almost drowned out by the rushing, freezing air whistling through the ship. I again reluctantly take off my flak suit. Looked at our

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target and saw smoke rising up from a warehouse.

All was quiet for a few minutes...then more flak explodes near us again. I put my flak suit on again...as it burst around us with a fiery red glow turning into a bright yellow flash...then I see the flak bursting in black puffs of smoke behind us in the distance as we get farther from the target. Again all is quiet as we lose sight of the land and leave enemy territory.

We got back to our base about noon. We looked at the damage and saw where a piece of flak went through the fuselage and into the elevator...another one came into the waist gunner's area and landed next to Ray and into my ammo cans behind the tail turret. It scared the hell out of Ray. Another piece of flak went through the left rudder.

Our bombardier dropped the bombs without a bomb sight! He used his foot to gauge where to steer the ship and when to drop the bombs. Our ship is now in the graveyard having the engine changed. The rest of the squadron came back at 11 A.M. They were shot up quite a bit also.

June 22, 1944

They got us up at 3 A.M. Briefed at 4 and took off at 7 A.M. We are going to bomb a motor pool in Chivasso, Italy, which is almost to Turin. Test fired my guns and the left solenoid was out and could not adjust it. We had a few puffs of flak coming up near the target. No flak or fighters at the target. On our way back to our base we flew over rome, Italy. Landed at 1:30 P.M.

June 23, 1944

They got us up at 3 A.M. Briefed at 4 and took off at 7 A.M. We are going to bomb some railroad yards near Budapest, Hungary. When we got to the coast of Yugoslavia we ran into some bad weather and were called back to the base. We circled around several times before we headed home. Looking for another target.

June 24, 1944

They got us up at 3 A.M. Briefed at 4 and took off at 6 A.M. We are going bomb some warehouses in Budapest. Test my guns over the sea and they are OK. Ran into some flak at the coast of Yugoslavia. Came to our target about 9:30 A.M. Seemed to cover the target fairly well. No flak or fighters today...milk run. Got back to our base at 1 P.M. Cleaned my guns in the afternoon. Ray came out to see us. He is still in the hospital with his eye problem.

June 25, 1944

They woke us up at 2 A.M....a hell of a time to get up! Briefed at 3 A.M. didn't bother to go inside the briefing room...just looked through the door opening. Could see the course map to France. We are to bomb a bridge above Marseilles, France. We took off at 5 A.M. Everything went smoothly on the way up.

When we came to the coast of France I never saw so many escort P-47s, P-51s and P-38s. They kept weaving back and forth...but I still kept a watch for enemy fighters. We did a few turns approaching the target.

The craziest thing I have ever seen were two B-17s flying around by themselves...in no formation! Ground flak guns were tracking them. It looked as if the anti aircraft guns could not keep up with them!

This scene looked funny as hell. Here we are a large formation...and they are firing on two little B-17s all by themselves! Saw scattered burst of black smoke from the flak. The ground gunners seemed confused as what to shoot at. Our planes were going everywhere...in different directions! The B-17s were making single runs on their targets. Lucky we had plenty of escort!

Just before the I.P. the waist gunner calls out "a fighter at 3 o'clock...coming in!" The waist fired a few bursts...then Charlie yells out... "they are OUR escort!!" The waist stopped shooting...the fighter peels away anyhow. The fighter turned out to be a FW 210!

I saw four fighters at 7 o'clock low...looked to be ME 109s. I called John and he said they are P-38s. Intercom is all screwed up...could hardly hear. The fighters turned out to be ME 109s. They hit somebody else.

We dropped our bombs and a hell of a lot of smoke came up. Well...we didn't get any flak on the bomb run but when we made a turn away from the target...they let us have it...and it was accurate!! We did evasive tactics...and it worked...we could see where we were and the flak burst there...We did almost 90 degree turns, banking to the left and then to the right...avoiding the flak. We made tight turns and the flak still followed us around...then the damned formation split up...and spread all over the place...what a mess!

First time I ever saw that happen. Bet the Germans were laughing their heads off! We finally got out of the flak after banking to the right. The formation finally came back together again. Saw the escort, weaving back and forth over us.

Finally got over the coast...and relaxed a little. The rest of the trip went smoothly and we landed at 1:30 P.M. Looked at the ship and we didn't even get a flak hole.

June 26, 1944

Got us up at 2 A.M. Briefed at 3:15. Going to bomb an oil refinery at Moosbierbaum, Austria. Supposed to fly in our ship but it had a magneto drop, so changed over to 161.

Took off at 6 A.M. Everything went well until we approached the I.P. of the target...saw about (20) P-38s...should have been twice that many. At the I.P. I looked out and couldn't believe my eyes...there were enemy fighters EVERYWHERE! 210s, 110, ME 109s, and JU88s. It looks like a set-up!! They knew we were coming! They were hitting the second section behind us. They didn't come too close to us but I shot at what I could that was in range. Then saw P-38s

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come in and take after the German fighters.

I couldn't fire too much as I was afraid I would hit our escort. The flak started to come up. The German fighters still continued to attack. I didn't put my helmet on until the fighters disappeared. Put the helmet back on for a minute...then the flak stopped... but the fighters were back again.

B-24s started going down right and left behind us. German fighters all over us...but no escort in sight anywhere! The fighters still didn't seem to be too close...then saw two come over my head but could not get a shot at them as they went to the formation behind us. They had made a frontal pass at us. This time they came in at 6 o'clock high. Joe, the top turret fires at him...he breaks away at 5 o'clock and the waist fires at him as he passes by. He was smoking heavily as he disappeared.

I saw a fighter low at 6 o'clock, coming up to and behind us at our level at about 400 yards out and started coming in at me...started firing with a long burst...he seemed to stop...then quiver...then rolled over into a dive and a spin. Saw a small amount of smoke coming out of him. Fired at a couple more fighters when I noticed the ship on my left put out a big flame...and go into a dive. I saw only two chutes come out of that ship.

I saw ten B-24s go down. Nine behind us and one next to our ship. It seems the Germans knew we were coming and were ready for us. The fights lasted about half an hour. During the attack, while busy shooting...my electrical jack box came apart...and my gun sight went out.

Finally we were away from the target area and on our way back to the base. It was a long haul from Vienna to Italy.

We flew over Yugoslavia with it's jagged snow capped mountain peaks that looked like sharp church steeples. A place where I would not want to bail out. We landed at 1:30 P.M.

June 28, 1944

They got us up at 3 A.M.... again...briefed at 4...are to bomb an airfield near Karlove, Bulgaria.

Took off at 6 A.M. When we got over the Adriatic, I test fired my guns...worked great.....for once! Caple didn't fly with us today...only the lead ship had a navigator. When we got to the target, we circled the target enough times to allow every enemy fighter to get off the ground.

There wasn't any flak on our bomb run and dropped our bombs OK. We made a turn...then light flak came up. Somebody said there were enemy fighters around...low at 3 o'clock. They must have hid in the clouds...I didn't even see them...the P-38s must have chased them away. Saw quite a bit of smoke coming up from the airfield...guess that peeved the German pilots...wonder if they were able to land. Got back to the base at 1:30 P.M.

I am very hungry...we missed lunch and went to the mess hall and got something to eat...don't think the mess Sgt. liked it too well. Slept until supper. They had chicken for supper and was looking forward to getting some. Bill and Ray ate at 5 P.M. and I had to wait until they came back. They didn't come back so I took Joe's mess kit and went to the mess hall at 7. When I got there, they were out of chicken...was mad as hell! They had COLD hash out of a can!...didn't eat it but did find some cherry pie and ice cream.

June 30, 1944

They got us up at 4 A.M. Briefed at 5. For once I ate breakfast. We took off at 7 A.M. We are going to bomb an oil refinery about 100 miles south of Berlin, Germany...a long haul and expect plenty of fighters. This target has never been bombed yet. We had been briefed on this target two times before, but it was called off. Ray did not show up this morning, so we took off without him. Joe took the right waist position and Lt. Freiheit took over the top turret. Lt. Caple will toggle the bombs off at the bomb run.

We hit some rough weather near Vienna, Austria, which is about an hour from our target. We circled around three times...waiting for instructions to return to our base...and give the Germans time enough tom come after us...well, they did. The clouds broke up the formation and a German fighter shot down two B-24s with one pass. Enemy fighters were all around but they didn't bother our squadron. We got back to the base at 12:30 P.M.

I tried to sleep some but it was hot as hell and the flies were out in force...so I got up and went to the ship and cleaned my guns. Came back to the tent and drank four cans of beer before dinner...taste good. We are flying No. 2 position tomorrow.

July 2, 1944

They got us up at 4 A.M. Briefed at 5. We took off at 7 A.M. We finally have all of our crew together for once. We are going to bomb an oil refinery in Budapest, Hungary.

Guns are in good shape. Had some good music on the radio. The ships in back of us seem too close. If they stay that way over the target am concerned my spent shells would hit them during a battle with fighters.

As we came to the target, enemy fighters appeared. "Red Ridin' Hood" Feathers No. 1 engine and was dropping back...but as we were coming to the I.P. she got back into formation with us. Ramey was flying it...he did a damn good job keeping up. On the I.P. run, the flak started to come up...it was heavy and very accurate. Just before we dropped our bombs all the ships seem to go in different directions! 161 almost turned over but straightened out and dropped his bombs. We finally dropped our bombs and took evasive action from the flak.

As soon as we got out of the flak enemy fighters jumped the group behind us. Saw some P-51s take off after the German fighters. I

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watched several dog fights behind us.

The German fighters gave the B-24s behind us hell...could see the 20mm shells from the ME109 bursting all through the formation. I saw a ME 109 explode when the tail gunner fired at him as the fighter attacked them. Saw 5 B-24s go down...but only two chutes open up.

Then two ME 109s jumped our formation. One was at 7 o'clock while another was at 7 o'clock high. I watched both...then the one at 5 o'clock high started to come in...everyone opened up on him at the same time...tracers were flying around all over the place. Tracers seems to go right into his nose. He came straight in to about 400 yards and pulled up to go over us...exposing his belly...we poured it into the bottom of his plane...he disappeared out of sight. the enemy fighters were all gone. My guns never failed this time. The rest of the mission went smoothly and we landed at 1:30 P.M. We learned "Red Ridin' Hood" crashed on an island near the coast of Yugoslavia.

July 6, 1944

They got us up at 5 A.M. Briefed at 6. When I checked the guns they were dirty as hell! I took them apart and found they are dry as a bone! I detailed stripped and cleaned them. We took off at 8 A.M. Our target is an oil refinery in northern Italy near Yugoslavia. No fighters are expected. We are flying in ship 330. This is it's first mission. We are flying No. 2 Deputy lead position, leading the whole wing and the 15th Air Force. Another navigator has the nose turret. Gulley stayed in the waist position to throw out chaff. When we got near the target we saw plenty of our escort. P-38s and P-51s. The new tail turret and guns work well.

Just before the bomb run the bombardier opens the bomb bay doors a little bit and the bombs fell out (he must have released them) and broke the doors. The bombs fell into the ocean before we got to the target we used a new anti radar system. there was light and inaccurate flak...so the new system must have worked. No fighters were seen. The target got good bomb coverage...even without our lost bombs...quite a bit of smoke came up from the target. Two seaplanes were seen in the harbor. The ride was a little rough today...we bounced around quite a bit. We landed at 12 P.M. Capt. Bellemere flew with us as co-pilot.

We have to go to a formation at 6 P.M. as a crew is being decorated D.F.Cs. because they cracked up "Sweating It Out" and survived. I now have 29 missions and 36 sorties.

Heard we are to go back to the States next week. I am flying tomorrow with 4 new guys and a new co-pilot. Ernie, John and Caple are not flying.

July 7, 1944

They got us up at 4 A.M. Briefed at 5. Target is an oil refinery about 80 miles south of Breslau, Germany. We got to the ship and found it had no radio contact or interphone system.

We ditched that ship for another one...but...ALL the guns were dirty, no flak suits or chaff! So we couldn't take off. Our pilot Lt. Bechtold was pissed off and so were we. No mission today.

I went back to the tent area and slept until noon. After lunch, Ray and I went to Foggia to see the live stage production of Irving Berlin's "This Is The Army Mr. Jones". I would not have had the opportunity to see this show in the States, but we did...here in Italy. The show was GREAT! We got back to the base at 5:30 P.M....just in time for boiled beef for dinner.

July 8, 1944

They got us up at 4 A.M. Briefed at 5 and took off at 7 A.M. The target is an airfield 12 miles south of Vienna we had bombed twice before with frags. Everything goes smoothly up to the I.P. We keep weaving back and forth. We finally drop our bombs just before the flak starts to come up. The flak was off and a little low...but was hitting the group below us...who got the worst of it. Then they honed in on us. They had us bracketed...it was very close! Our anti radar system must not be working!

Some one called out fighters... saw some milling around but were not coming in at us. Our P-51 escort took care of them. The flak kept on us for quite a while. I saw a B-24 blow up in a large puff of black smoke after we left the target. Freiheit said he saw it also.

While over the target I was busy and was opening and closing my turret doors. During the excitement I must have disconnected my oxygen hoses.

I started feeling strange. I could not figure what it was. My vision was out of focus and had a grid of black lines and dots moving across the field of vision and I was hearing this buzzing sound in my head. I had a hard time concentrating on what I should be doing. Something told me to look at my oxygen hoses. I looked at the box the hoses connected to and saw the hoses were laying disconnected at my side.

I realized I had very little time before I blacked out. I had a choice of calling on the intercom to get the waist gunners to come help me or try to plug the hose back in the box myself.

I knew it would take a few minutes for one of them to disconnect their hose, put a bottle to them and try to get to me. If something happened to them, it would be two of us gone. I decided I had better try to reconnect my hose and then call for help. I was getting gray areas of vision. I got a hold on the hose and with great effort, I remember aiming for the connector at the box and pressing the hose to the box. The next thing I remember was waking with my head laying on the gun sight cradle. I lay there a few minutes, collecting my thoughts. I do not know how long I was out.

I could feel the oxygen rushing into my veins...a feeling I have

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never experienced before. I stayed on pure oxygen for quite a while.

I did not call the crew to let them know what happened as there was nothing they could do now. I was tired and weak for the rest of the day.

We were still over enemy territory. A B-24 from another group was near us and sent up red flares but seemed to be OK. I lost track of him as we came to the coast. We landed at 1:30 P.M. Cleaned my guns in the afternoon and made another formation at 6 P.M. for some guys getting medals.

July 9, 1944

Stand down today. It's rumored we are to go home...not definite, but would like to finish my 50 missions so I would not have to come back. About 3:30 P.M. they tell us we are leaving tomorrow morning...always wait until the last minute...so I start packing...everything is in a mess. Turn in a lot of equipment. It's now 11 P.M. Most of the guys are down at the Enlisted Mens club trying to get drunk... am in no mood for it myself.

I have flown 30 missions and had 20 more to go. Our pilot told us the Headquarters said we were next in line in rotation to go home, but we had to agree to return to Italy to finish any mission we had not flown up to the 50 required. I objected and said I wanted to finish my 20 mission the THEN go home for good. The pilot said..."you know the Army...they will not return us once we are in the States" I was not convinced, but thought there may be that possibility and gave in to go home and hope for the best.

July 10, 1944

We are all getting packed and loading. John ran down to the ship to take pictures of our ship the "Piecemaker and her Ten Aides".

I was busy getting signatures on a dollar bill before we left...and during our ride half way to headquarters, I noticed I did not have my bags on the truck. I was able to get a ride back to the tent area. I got a surprise...Ernie had left his bags there also. I was able to get another ride back to the truck with our bags. We are now on a long ride to Naples, Italy to board a ship for the States.

Instead of boarding a boat, we are brought to another camp...an infantry camp. We spent two days in this camp and found out we were not supposed to be here! We put our bags on a truck and they take us to an Air Corp Base. We finally board the troop ship for the USA.

We returned to the States and went on leave for 30 days then reported to Atlantic City, NJ for reassignment. While we were there, a heavy hurricane hit New Jersey. The hotel we were in was on the beach and the basement and bottom floors were flooded.

Everyone was told they could stay in the States...except...Ray Chlan and I!! When we got back to Italy at our base, we were informed the maximum number of mission required now was 35. So...Ray had 10 missions to go and I had 5 missions to finish.

There are only three of us left from our crew as of March, 2001. Ray Chlan, b. March 31, 1924, Roger Caple, b. Aug. 10, 1922 and Henry B. Everhart b. Feb. 25, 1924.

The Social Security Death Index on the Internet list the rest of the crew are deceased as below: Pilot, Martin Maurer b. Ohio, 1920, d. 1991: Co-pilot, Harold Tigert, b. Texas, 1920, d. 1994; Biloxi, MS. Wilton Freiheit, b. July 25, 1917, d. Sept. 1981, Minneapolis, MN; Eng. Top Turret, Joe Ferbanis, b. NY, 1911, d. 1990; Nose Turret, Charley Gulley, b. KY 1922, d. 1991; Waist, John Vojtko b. PA, 1924, d. 1989; Ball Turret, Ernest Oslowsky, b. NY, 1920, d. 1990.

GUN POSITIONS:

NOSE: Of all the positions on the ship...this is the last place I would want to be. It's like sitting on a cloud with no visible support...it's scary...then when fighters come at you head on...I'd dive for cover! No wonder Charley would YELL out in a high pitched scream...FIGHTERS AT 12 o'clock HIGH!

TOP TURRET: This is the king of the hill. You can see everything...except the bottom of the airplane. That's why they put the Flight Engineer up here...to keep an eye on everything. But he also can see all those fighters on the level...coming in at him...from all directions!

BALL TURRET: This is worse than the nose...you can't see anything except the ground through a little window...and you are hanging in space...snap that thin screw that connects you to the ship...and...you're gone...way...way...down!

THE WAIST: Think about standing up for a thousand mile ride that takes six or more hours...in a minus 60 degree F freezing wind in your face at 300 M.P.H. Where do you go to get comfortable?

TAIL TURRET: Now this is the place...you are at the very END!

OBSERVATIONS: 1944

The Italians are a gregarious people who seemed not too concerned about "tomorrow". Music is very much a part of their lives. I remember several of us were waiting to catch a ride to the next village on any truck that might come along. When children see any soldiers close by they will flock around them and beg for candy or what ever they may have. As we were getting on the truck I heard this beautiful operatic voice singing a familiar Italian aria as he was dancing around the truck with the help of a crutch as he had just one leg. I could not believe such a mature voice was coming out of this young boy of about 12 years of age. As the truck took off in a cloud of dust, his voice could still be heard fading away in the distance. I have often thought of him and wondered if someone would take an interest in him and develop his talents for the world to hear and sensed he was hoping for the same thing.

The mode of living I imagine is

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not too different than it has been for centuries. The main highways are paved between the major cities but the roads between the small villages are unpaved dirt roads that have high banks on both and at least one side because they have been worn down from centuries of use.

Now modern modes of transportation, such as busses, trucks and automobiles, are used widely by those who can afford them. Horse drawn carts loaded with goods are a common sight on the roads. The large cities are more up to date but compared to the United States, Italy is fifty years behind in industrial progress.

Most of the buildings are built from the material locally available such as rocks, bricks and mortar for houses as they have been for centuries. The large cities have many modern steel buildings.

During our second "tour" in Italy, after being rotated to the States for 60 days, Ray and I were assigned to a flight on one of our B-24s to pick up some crew members who were in Rome for rest and relaxation (R&R).

Ray was the radio operator and I was the flight engineer for that flight. We landed in Rome about 9 A.M. and was told by the pilot to return to the airbase at 4 P.M. for the flight back to Cerignola. We took advantage of this opportunity to see a little of Rome.

The center of Rome has several circular intersections which makes it hazardous for pedestrians...similar to Washington, D.C. One very unique part of Rome was that the public "rest rooms" that were on the sidewalks and were not too private. I do not know if this was typical or this was the only one. Men and women went in the same "door" which was just an opening to the sidewalk. There were dividing partitions that went almost to the sidewalk.

After looking around a while, it was about 2 P.M., we decided to get back to the airbase. We got to the base at 3:30 P.M. We checked in at operations and were told our ship had left earlier because a Colonel, who was one of the service men we came for, did not want to wait until 4 o'clock to go home...so they took off without us. They told us to come back each day to see if there was another ride back to the base. We checked in each day for three days before we got a ride. Each day we took in some sight seeing and visited the famous tourist attractions. We went for a Roman holiday!

We visited one palace in Rome. I was impressed with the tapestry hung on the walls instead of being painted. It was a silky multi-colored fabric of green and gold with silver filaments woven through it. The ceilings were about two stories high. The building was several hundred years old as are most of the large mansions and public buildings.

Another building that impressed me was not in Rome but (where I was being treated for both pulled sacroiliac lower back muscles when going up the side of the troop ship with too many duffel bags and almost fell in the water 100 feet below in Newport News, VA) was the field hospital for our base that was located in Cerignola. It also was a large building that, I think, was a mansion. It also had high ceilings and fine tapestry on the walls.

When we got back to the base we were listed as AWOL.

We were fortunate we had a fellow crew mate, Andy Oven, who was also a lawyer in civilian life in Tallahassee, Florida. He interceded for us at headquarters and got the AWOL charges dismissed.

Southern Charms

Ed – Southern Charms is an excellent book of poetry written by Royce Hilliard, S/Sgt. 743rd Squadron. Permission has been granted to reprint selections of these poems from time to time in the Cerignola Connection.

Air Force Prayer



O, Lord we thank you for
the men who fly,
For fighting soldiers aren't
afraid to die,
For men whose heart is tough as
steel,
Whose courage makes the enemy
reel.

For pilots, brave and true,
For wills their task to do,
For men who guide the planes,
Through the fog, mist, and rains.

For men who work upon the
ground,
Their skill is good and sound.
For Air Force men everywhere;
For them, we ask this prayer.

And, last of all to thee we praise
For guiding hands along airwaves,
For Presence with us every day,
O, Lord, this prayer we ever pray.

The days are now numbered
But still it is clear
It's only a short while
That I can remain here.

But I shall ever love you
Tho I'll be far away
I'll be fighting, ever fighting
For you and the good ole U.S.A.

Flying Cadet

"Contact" the starter cries,
The blade begins to whine,
He revs it up until you hear
A deep full-throated chime.

The wheels begin to move,
It inches forward on the run,
And as the power is applied,
It heads faster into the sun.

Its wheels bounce on the sod,
The body clears the ground
The whirring blade shakes the rod
As both hit on the rebound.

Faster, faster runs the cadet
As he seeks to keep the pace,
For the bouncing ole lawnmower
Is really running a race.

Tonight

Tonight, between the miles
That lie between us two,
I catch myself again in flight,
to heaven, home and you.

Look up again, my love,
Look up to sing and shout,
My hope is built above,
My dreams scattered about.

My heart takes wing,
My soul is all ablaze,
My song forever shall ring
Across the ocean waves.

Tonight, these words I say
To you, my dear, apart.
I'll forever keep your face
Deep within my aching heart.

Wake Up America

With eyes heavy with sleep
and minds that do not care,
With an easy-going pace we keep
Upon our ever downward stair.

Drifting...as in a stream of life
That must always downhill go,
Forgetting that shoals lie ahead
For those who fail to row.

And still, we pursue our course
With listless minds and hearts
Forgetting important laws and
source,
God's message still imparts

A way of life to live.
rules for playing the game.
rules that seem almost forgotten
in this day of gain.

Wake up, America. God calls
today as in the past
Shall silence greet him as of old
And men, their hearts turn cold.

Shall our course be still platted
By the hand of Fate?
Shall this nation still be spotted
With the winds of hate?

Shall sin still rampant be
Overcoming all along the way?
Will darkness cover earth and sea
Instead of light for which we pray.

God give us courage
In this day of strife,
Strength to lift our standard
Above this lowly ebb of life.
Lift it higher, Christians, higher
Until at last the world may see,
That Christ's great will and power
Reigns again in the land of the
free.

A Soldier True



We live in deeds today,
Tomorrow's life is far
away,
A soldier's work is here,
His thoughts with those dear.

Across the miles so far
There ever beams our guiding star.
Our work here is better done
Because at home, the race is run.

The army we may not like,
But still we work for stripes,
Things in normal life we shirked
But in everything we worked.

Here today, gone tomorrow,
Why work now or bother
About the things we do
all that matters is we're true.

True to those who trust us,
True to those who care
True in every act and deed
True to buddies over there.

We shall fight the fight
We shall win the race,
Because we have within a light
That light shines upon our face.

Someday?

Someday when noise of strife is
over
And the shouts of war are done,
Then will come the day of peace,
That day, O God, must surely
come.

Someday the winds of hate
Will close their tempestuous roar,
then will our nation free itself
Of greed from shore to shore.

Time is waiting on our act
Of love and brotherhood to man...
Come, men of God, our colors
Must be flown atop the mast of sin.

Strike now. 'Tis time we marched
Against the evil of our foe....
Rise up, Men of God, sons of men,
Let us forward to victory go.

Walk In The Forest



I walked in the for-
est today
Plucked a flower by the way,
The warring world was forgotten
As I knelt on the trail to pray.

The birds in the trees were
singing,
The sheep on the hills were feed-
ing
And across the pathway a bunny
On his way, was stealing.

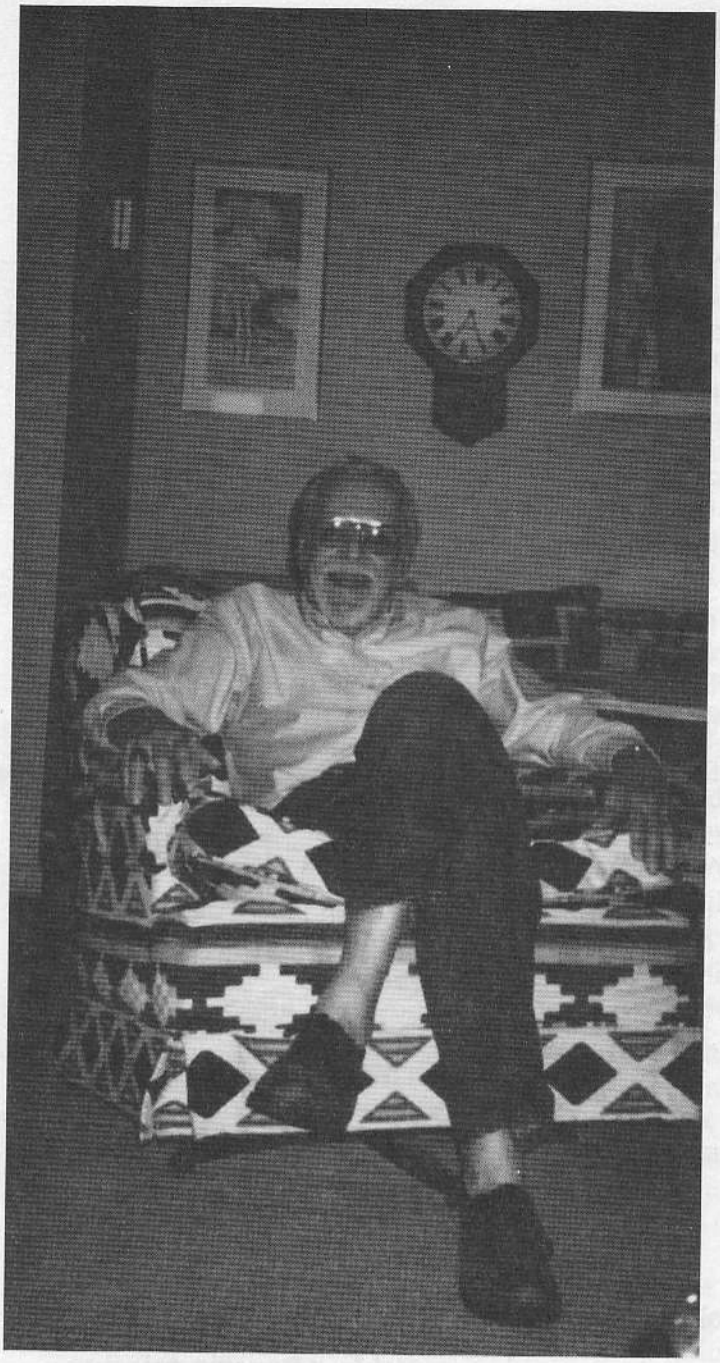
Then, I remembered...lifted my
heart
To the Lord in heaven and said:
"Dear God, please forgive a world
of men
and grant that peace shall reign
again."

May this coming day mean more
To us than it has in years gone by;
May this mad world at war stop
Just this once and listen to our
cries

For help and succor in this day,
God be merciful to our hardened
hearts...
And, help us just once to pause
and pray,
That the peoples of the world may
find their way.

Group History Book Available in New Format

Not a hard bound book as previous, these are no longer available. After two printing runs it was decided not to rerun the book again. Still many of you are asking where they can find a book. To solve this dilemma, a copy shop copy of the original history, in a spiral bindings is being made available. Same text, same photos. If we can get enough commitments together for a "copy shop" run, we'll make these available. $27 in the mail. Let your editor or Gus Wendt Know (Gus Wendt, 455th Bomb Group Association, 5100 John D. Ryan Blvd., Apt. 542, San Antonio, Texas 78245). You will be billed before shipment.



Got a minute! Let me tell you about the big war!

Austrian Cousin

My mother, Kate Bauer (Stracka), came to the United States in 1906 from Graz, Austria at the age of twelve. She always told me about the cousins back in Austria and wrote and read letters during World War I and World War II from a first cousin, Ernst Wauch. Gifts were also sent. I also spoke German "Muttersprache" until kindergarten and still can speak it like a five-year-old.

A 1st Lieutenant pilot, age 20, I flew a B-24 Liberator out of Cerignola, Italy in 1944 and 1945 with the 15th Air Force 455 Bomb Group, 743 Squadron and always had Ernst Wauch's address, a map, and phone number in my walking boots in case we were shot down over Graz. We were hit many times, and in the worst case lost an engine, but always got back to base, I was going to try to meet Ernst before they put me in a prison camp. It never happened.

We now go to 1977 and my mother is 82 years old, and my wife and I took her on a trip to Graz, Austria to meet Ernst Wauch and visit with the relatives. She got to see the church she was confirmed in, and the school she attended, and her girlfriend Mittsy's Gasthaus. Ernst was now retired as a quality control "Ingenieur" in a ball bearing steel mill and lived about five blocks from the mill. We were having wine in his living room when he told us that in spring, when he was working in his garden, he hit a rock. He had thought he had all the rocks out of his garden. As he dug down to remove the rock, he found the tail fins of a 500 lb. bomb. He called the bomb squad, and they evacuated the area and removed the unexploded bomb. Ernst filled my "wein" glass and his, and then pointed and shook his finger at me, and said "War das du, Karl?" (wa that you, Carl?) We laughed and finished the "wein".

We now go to spring of 2000. I just opened a letter from Gudren Unbauer, a blond of age 25, the granddaughter of Ernst Wauch, and a medical school graduate from Graz. She is coming to the USA for a visit and will be staying with my family.

Carl Stracka

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