

**The United States Army Air Corps Career of**  
**John William Mattheis, Jr.**  
Fifteenth Air Force  
461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (H)  
764<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron  
1944-1945

**Crew #17-2**

**Pilot: Charles Saur**, Lives in Sparta, Michigan 49345. Wife is Jean who refuses to fly. Charles attended Michigan University. Charles took over from his dad and managed their hardware store in Sparta, Michigan. Charles was a very good pilot.

**Co-Pilot: Herbert Frank**, Born in Iowa and now lives in Ft. Worth, Texas 76132. His second wife is Lanice. Stayed in the service after the war and flew tankers. They use a large motor home for travel. Lanice is a button collector.

**Bombardier: Frank Rosenau**, W. Redding, Connecticut 06896. His wife is Pat. Frank was born 25 March 1923 and died 8 September 1997. I believe he had MS. He regretted dropping bombs. They never came to any reunions. He worked at a newspaper. We visited him once after the war in Connecticut in the early 1950s. In later years he seemed to avoid crewmembers because of his view on dropping bombs and health. Frank was the medical officer on the crew and took care of me until we landed at Foggia, Italy.

**Navigator: Kenneth K. Kase**, Scarsdale, New York 10583. His fourth wife, Sandy, is a school principal. Ken was born 6 October 1924 and died 4 November 2003. Ken was a lawyer. We visited Ken in the early 1950s and he took us to Yankee Stadium and to see Mark Froot our former lower turret gunner. Ken and Sandy came as often as possible to reunions and had a good time. Sandy was a really nice lady.

**Engineer & Waist Gunner: Garland Mattingly**, was from Loogootee, Indiana but died in Indianapolis, Indiana 46256. His wife was Mary. Garland was born 1919 and died 29 April 1993. He sold building supplies. He had been in the CCCs before joining the Air Corps. He worked on planes on the line for several years. Matt was a great guy and because of his age, we called him "Pappy". They came to all reunions while he was alive. My mother and his mother communicated during the war and after.

**Radio Operator & Waist Gunner: Oral C. Craig**, was born in Texas and died 15 May 2005 and lived in Okemah, Oklahoma 74859. His second wife was Judy. O.C. became a lawyer and a judge. He lost his left arm on a bombing mission 13 February 1945 to Vienna Central Repair Shops, Austria. Later he became blind. In the service he had been a radio instructor. He had a daughter, Kay, by his first marriage and a grandson. We all called him O.C. He came to reunions by himself and really enjoyed them.

**Tail Gunner: John W. (Slim)(Bill) Mattheis, Jr.**, Born in Connersville, Indiana 28 September 1925 but his home town was Cambridge City, Indiana. His wife, Betty Lou McCullough, from Cambridge City, Indiana. Wounded in his left chest and left arm on a mission to northern Italy 18 November 1944. He now lives in Maple Grove, Minnesota 55369. Worked at Danners Inc. as an assistant manager, manager, district manager and an assistant vice president of store operations for 35 years. Retired in 1983. Had one daughter, Connie Jo. She married Al LaTendresse and they have two daughters, Melissa Joann and Lindsey Elizabeth.

**Top Turret Gunner & Armorer: Wallace W. Thomas**, born in Texas and living in Ben Brook, Texas 76126. His second wife is Natalines. We all called him Wally and he loves to play golf. They came to several reunions.

**Ball Turret Gunner: Mark Froot**, lived in New York. Born 30 October 1925 and died February 1975. We visited him in the early 1950s and he told us he was in the plastic business. He was married at that time and lived in an apartment.

**Nose Gunner: George F. Zobal**, born 1923 in New Jersey and lives now in Boynton Beach, Florida 33437. His wife is Doris. They had two children, son Robert, who lives in Minnesota, and a daughter, Dale, who lives in New Jersey. George worked for Exxon Oil. They have a son-in-law, Steve, and grandson, Andrew. George has had both knees replaced. George and I were the stay at the base guys on the crew and ran around together. They came to nearly all reunions. George took over my tail gunner position after I was wounded. George and I were both trained in the tail turret, but since he was larger than I was he was assigned the nose turret.

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The Japanese attacked the United States territories in the Pacific on Sunday, December 7, 1941. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the United States Congress declared war on Japan the next day. I was sixteen at the time and a junior at the Lincoln High School in Cambridge City, Indiana. By taking a few extra courses I was able to graduate in three and a half years of high school. I was graduated in May of 1943 at the age of seventeen and went to work in Connersville, Indiana as an aircraft assembler.

Like many young men at the time I was afraid the war would be over before I was old enough to serve in some branch of the armed forces. I had tried to get my parents, John and Loucille Mattheis, to sign my enlistment papers since I had become seventeen years old. Finally the day before my eighteenth birthday mother signed the papers for me to take the test to enter the United States Army Air Corps. Little did I realize what was in store for me.

I received my enlistment papers to report to Indianapolis, Indiana to take the Air Corps mental test. I passed the mental test and went the next day to Stout Field in Indianapolis, Indiana to take the physical examination. Malcolm Bowman, a friend of mine, went with me but failed the eye examination so never got to serve. I had problems meeting the weight requirements. I was five foot eleven and three quarters inches tall and the minimum weight for this height was one hundred and forty pounds. They told me to go out and eat and drink as much as I could and come back. I consumed as much as I could and went back in and weighed the necessary one hundred and forty pounds. I was going into the United States Army Air Corps.

I returned home and volunteered for the draft. The draft board sent me a letter to report to the Cambridge City, Indiana draft board on December 9, 1943 to go to Indianapolis, Indiana to take the army physical. After we got to the place in Indianapolis, they realized that I had already passed the Air Corps physical. They told me to go sit in the bleachers until the rest of the group had completed their physicals. In mid-afternoon they called me to join the group and we were sworn into the United States Army.

I returned home to await the local draft board's call to report for induction into active service. After about a month, I received my papers to report January 11, 1944 to the draft board. Several of us were taken by bus to Fort Benjamin Harrison at Indianapolis.

At Fort Ben we were issued Army clothing and told regularly to police the area for trash and cigarette butts, gotten up at three in the morning to be on K.P. all day till late at night and any other dirty job they could find. They were making sure they got the best of the Air Corps men while they could. Mother, Dad and younger brother Jerry and Betty Howell, came over to visit me on Sunday. After a week at Fort Ben we boarded a train to go to our basic training camp at Greensboro, North Carolina.

All the men who passed the Air Force entrance test went into, the Air Corps as possible candidates to become officers. On a large bomber there was a crew of ten, four officers, pilot, co-pilot, navigators, bombardier and six enlisted men as gunners.

When we arrived in Greensboro, North Carolina most of us decided the place had been miss-named. There seemed to be dirty red mud everywhere. There was nothing green to be found.

At Greensboro we spent our time taking mental and physical tests, getting shots, learning to march the Army way and watching educational movies. Out of over four hundred men being tested only twenty passed to begin training to become pilots, navigators, and bombardiers. The rest of us headed for basic gunnery school. Later we heard that the ones who passed the test ended up working on the flight line washing planes. We had one full dress inspection while we were in Greensboro, but I was in bed with the flu so didn't have to participate. We camped out a few nights and they had us do some infantry field problems. At the rifle range we qualified with the M1, Carbine, and the forty-five automatic.

At the end of approximately thirty days the men who had passed the test for basic gunnery training were promoted to Private First Class and loaded in a troop train for an unknown destination. The train cars were old converted wooden boxcars with seats-and windows, and we were dressed in winter clothing. After three days we arrived in hot Laredo, Texas on the Mexican border, where we were scheduled to take our Basic Aerial Gunnery instructions.

The first week at Laredo we spent doing general duty such as K. P. and going out in the desert to dig up plants to bring back to decorate the base. There were lots of rattlesnakes in the desert and some of the permanent people at the base would kill the rattlesnakes, cut off their rattles, and sell the tails to local people in town.

I got a terrible sunburn when I went to sleep while lying in the sun. If you can't do regular duty in the service because of sunburn, you can be court marshaled. I was lucky that a buddy slipped me into the back door of the base hospital for some treatment.

Gunnery training in the AT-6s (AT stands for advance trainer. B for bomber. P for pursuit) was

cancelled the week that I started Basic Gunnery School. Thank goodness for that, since most of those pilots weren't happy with their jobs and liked to make the gunnery students suffer for it. They gave students really wild rides. The planes we flew in were AT-18s and the B-24D Liberator.

My first ride ever in an airplane was in a B-24 Liberator on a gunnery mission where live 50-caliber ammunition was used to shoot at a long cloth sleeve. Air Corps women pilots usually flew the towing planes for these sleeves. The tow plane had the sleeve attached to a cable and would fly well ahead of the plane with the gunners aboard. The cable and the sleeve would be released gradually so that each gunner could fire their gun at the sleeve. The ammunition in each firing position had a different color of paint on the tip of each projectile so that the paint would show on the sleeve. After the plane landed everyone went over and counted their hits on the sleeve. You were supposed to have a certain percentage of hits to qualify as an Aerial Gunner.

On this first airplane ride when I was already scared to death, the instructor told me to get in the tail turret. This I did, when all of a sudden there were loud noises and the plane started to shake. I figured the plane was going to crash, so I jumped out the turret and ran up to the waist area. The instructor asked me why I wasn't in the tail turret, so I told him I thought the plane was going to crash. After he got through laughing, he told me to get back in the tail turret and stay there. The firing of the guns caused the noise and the shaking from other gunners' positions.

On other gunnery mission we would have cameras attached to our guns to track attacking AT-6s and P-40s. The film would be reviewed to see if we were tracking the planes correctly. When flying, everything in the world seemed right. The beautiful white clouds looked like you could get out of the plane and walk on them and the sky was never so blue.

Our gunnery class group spent six very busy weeks. We learned aircraft identification, disassembling and assembling several types of guns, evaluating gun malfunctions and repairing them, shooting BBs from gun turrets at model airplanes, shooting skeet and many other things. Our class was divided into two sections and one section flew in the morning and had ground school in the afternoon, and the other section did the opposite. Some guys failed to qualify as Aerial Gunners because of air sickness or not being able to pass the ground school or gunnery courses.

The weather in Texas was very nice in the spring of the year. One day a couple of my friends and I rode a bus to downtown Laredo and walked over to old Mexico. We did a lot of looking around and I bought a pair of shoes. Unfortunately, these guys were killed later when their B-24 bomber was shot down on a bombing mission over Germany in the fall of 1944.

I really enjoyed shooting skeet. We fired at least twenty-five rounds a day at clay discs. Several times they strapped us in the back of a pickup truck and would drive us around a winding course to shoot skeet coming from all different directions. Some of the guys would fail to get the gunstock onto their shoulder in the right position and would end up with very sore black and blue shoulder and arm.

One evening we were taken directly from the mess hall and told to go directly to our barracks, get a blanket from our bunk and report outside our barracks in ten minutes. When we reported they loaded us into trucks and took us out to the airfield. They assigned us two to a plane and

told us to lie down on the wings. There was a storm approaching the coast and the planes had been flown to our field from Corpus Christi Air Field for safety. We were to hold down the planes if the storm came inland that far so the planes would not be damaged. Guess who they considered the most important?

After successfully completing our six weeks of Aerial Gunnery School, I was promoted to Corporal and given a ten-day delay enroute to our next air base, which was Lincoln, Nebraska. We were to report at the new base on June 6, 1944. That was D-Day in Europe. I remember waking up the morning of the sixth and hearing about the invasion on the radio.

They promised us that the train we were to take north from Laredo was the fastest transportation available, but it seemed to stop at every other telephone pole. We were supposed to go to Chicago, Illinois and then get another train down to Richmond, Indiana. Cecil (Red) McCracken and I got off the slow train in St. Louis, Missouri and caught another train directly to Richmond, Indiana. I hitch hiked from Richmond to Cambridge City, Indiana, my hometown. It was good to be home! I traded cigarettes to my farmer Uncle Raymond Shank for tractor gas for my dad's car. Many years later my Uncle Raymond died of lung cancer. Gas was one of the many things rationed during the war.

After the short leave Red and I caught the train together to go to Lincoln, Nebraska. Red and I hadn't known each other before we went into the Air Corps but were together in most duties in the service. We tried to be assigned to the same aircrew but were not allowed for some reason. We stayed at Lincoln only a short time. They loaded us on a train headed to Overseas Training Units (O.T.C.) at Davis Monthan Air Field at Tucson, Arizona, where we were put with our crewmembers immediately. Our crew consisted of ten men: George Zobel from New Jersey, nose turret gunner, Mark Froot from New York, ball turret gunner, Garland Mattingly from Indiana, engineer and waist gunner, Wallace Thomas from Texas, armor and top turret gunner, and another guy who was supposed to be our radioman and waist gunner who suddenly disappeared one day. O.C. Craig from Oklahoma was later assigned to our crew as radioman and waist gunner. We met our pilot Charles Saur from Michigan., Co-Pilot Herbert Frank from Iowa, bombardier Frank Rosenau from Connecticut. Kenneth Kase from New York was later assigned to our crew as navigator. We enlisted men did everything together. Our bunks were together in one group, we ate together, played together and flew together. I was next to the youngest on the crew, Froot's birthday was in October and mine in September. I picked up the nickname of "Slim".

The first night at Davis Monthan we went into the mess hall and on each table was a large pitcher of milk. I figured this was going to be a great base. I poured out a large glass and found it was buttermilk. What a letdown.

At our first formation we were told by an officer that we could have a delay enroute to go home after our training was finished, if we agreed to take classes and fly seven days a week. Everyone agreed to this at once. Again our group was divided; we either flew in the morning or afternoon and took classes the other half of the day.

We flew practice-bombing missions, live gunnery at a sleeve target, camera gunnery when we used gun cameras at attacking fighters, formation flying, night flying, high altitude and

navigation. We flew all over the southwestern United States, especially the Grand Canyon, San Diego harbor, Phoenix, Arizona.

Garland Mattingly, who was our plane engineer and eight years older than myself came from Loogootee, Indiana. All of us on the crew called him "Pappy" because of his age, and since we were both from Indiana he acted as my older brother. Our mothers corresponded by mail while we were in the service. Mattingly had been in the Civilian Conservation Corp. before he joined the Air Force. He had worked on "the flight line before volunteering for flight duty. Mattingly was a very well qualified flight engineer. He enjoyed going into town every night he was off duty. He drank a lot, chased the women, and played cards. Many were the morning when George Zobel and I would drag him out to the plane and give him pure oxygen to sober him up. Mattingly used to furnish me money to get into a blackjack game, so when I got a blackjack he would get the deal.

O.C. Craig lived about the same fast life as Mattingly. O.C. had been a radio instructor before volunteering for flight duty. Wallace Thomas had been raised in an orphanage and had been in the service a while before being assigned to our crew. Wally was the only married member of our crew and his wife was at Tucson with him. I never knew what Mark Froot did when he was off duty. George Zobel had been in the infantry before transferring over to the Air Corps. George and I ran around together. Our lives were very tame compared to the other guys.

George Zobel and I had both been trained for the tail turret, so they called us in to see who got the tail turret and who went to the nose turret. Since I was a little shorter and not as heavy, they assigned me the tail turret and George the nose turret.

Our crew had very few discipline problems with ground officers, but if we did, we would tell one of our officers and he would clear the problem up with the ground officer.

Our crew had a few close calls while flying on training missions. Once we got in the prop wash of another plane as we were taking off and almost barrel-rolled close to the ground. Another time on takeoff the right wing gas tank cap started spraying out fuel, and we had to land quickly before it caught fire and get it repaired. On a navigation mission coming back at night from San Diego, California, we ran into a storm and must have gotten lost, as we were running low on fuel. There were several of us by the escape hatch in the rear of the plane ready to parachute out if the engines suddenly stopped.

The weather in June, July and August in Tucson, Arizona is really hot. On the ground the planes were so hot you could hardly touch them. We wore the least amount of clothes allowed when getting in the plane on the ground, but as the plane climbed in attitude it got colder and colder. It was quite a contrast. We only had one rain during the time we were there, that I can remember, and it flooded the whole base for several hours. They didn't have rain often enough to put in sewers so the water had to soak into the ground or run off into ditches.

Near the end of August we finished our O.T.U. training. I was promoted to sergeant, and we were given a ten-day leave enroute to our next base in Topeka, Kansas. They told 118 that any crew that had a crewmember return late from leave would not be assigned a new plane and that the crew would have to take a ship overseas. You can bet most crews made it back on time but a

few didn't and had to go overseas on a ship.

Red McCracken and I again took a train home to Indiana. I had fun on leave but the prospect of my going overseas and into combat caused the folks to be uneasy. Red and I returned a day early to Topeka, so we wouldn't foul up our crews flying oversea in a new plane.

As expected, all our crew returned on time and we were assigned a beautiful new silver B-24J Liberator Bomber. In the bomb bays were extra fuel tanks and cases of K-rations. Several crews had pictures and names painted on the planes thinking these were the planes they would fly on missions when they arrived overseas but this wasn't to be. The new crews were assigned to older planes when they got overseas and older crews with missions took over the new planes. They wasted their money and as far as I know none of the planes were now being painted the olive drab color like the old Liberators were painted. This was supposed to make them faster.

We were only in Topeka a few days, but the Kansas State Fair was on and most of us went broke on our last fling before going overseas. Red McCracken was still in our group but was on a different crew. We saw each other every day.

At last our beautiful new silver B-24 Liberator was given a takeoff time for the beginning of the biggest and scariest adventure of our lives. We flew out of Topeka, Kansas late in the day on September 16, 1944 for Dow Field, Bangor, Maine. Part of the way we flew at night, and the lights of the cities and towns were beautiful. I still can see them in my memory.

The next day we flew to Gander Field, Newfoundland, where we stayed for three days because of storms over the Atlantic Ocean. The enlisted men slept in our planes in sleeping bags and the officers went into the base and slept in barracks. Since most of us were broke, we asked for advancement on our pay. After much begging and promising not to gamble the money away, we were given a small advance in pay.

We left Gander Field, Newfoundland, mid-morning on September 20, 1944 for Lagen Field, Terceira Island in the Azores, which was west of Gibraltar out in the Atlantic Ocean. On the map the Azores looked very small and we were, hoping our navigator, Kenneth Kase, knew his profession. We hit them right on the nose. They were beautiful to see after all the ocean we had been flying over. On the way over we were told to watch for German subs, but we mostly tried out each other's turrets or slept.

Again the enlisted men slept in the plane and the officers went into the base. About, five o'clock we saw men that were assigned to the Azores base permanently heading into town with musical instruments. We asked and were told, that in the Azores for several months you had to serenade a girl you wished to date before her father would allow you to get near to her, even then she had a chaperon. We questioned if it would be worth the effort.

One night while we were there a guy on horseback rode up to our plane and asked if we wanted to buy a bottle of Portuguese brandy. We said yes and he said he would be back and rode off on his horse. Later he returned and knocked on the plane, asking us to open the rear hatch. He handed us the bottle of brandy and we handed him the money. He started to leave, when suddenly he said, "I believe someone is out there. Loan me your flashlight." We handed him the

flashlight, he jumped on his horse and off he went flashlight and all. We never saw that flashlight again.

On September 22, 1944 we left the beautiful Azores for Marrakech, French North Africa. According to O. C. Craig, Ken Kase our navigator got a little worried and called Craig to see if he had a radio fix on Marrakech. Craig told him "no" but Craig had a fix all the time. He just wanted to worry Kase a little. We again slept in the plane and were told not to leave the air base. Mattingly and Craig did leave the base and almost got caught. They had to climb over the air base wall to get back into the base. Marrakech was hot and dirty. We were glad to leave.

We left Marrakech on September 25, 1944, to go to El Ouaina, Tunisia, North Africa. Again we slept in the hot plane. Everything was very dirty. Two days later, on September 27, 1944, we left Tunisia, North Africa for sunny Italy. We were told not to fly over or near any ships in the Mediterranean Sea because the Navy was gunnery happy. They shot at anything that came close. We landed at the Gioia Airport on the southern tip of Italy and were told to report at once to operations. We got on the truck with our bottle of brandy and were told the brandy would be taken from us at operations. We decided rather than let them have the brandy we would drink it before we got to operations. This was the first time I felt the effects of too much liquor.

We checked into operations and were given a pass to go into town. The town had narrow cobblestone streets and wasn't very clean. The people seem poor and begged for chocolates, soap, cigarettes and offered to take you home to have sex with a beautiful senorita. We came to where there was a long line of GIs standing in line around a building. We asked and were told it was a house of prostitution.

We arrived in Gioia, Italy on September 27, 1944, just one day before my nineteenth birthday. It certainly had been a year filled with new experiences and adventures. We again slept in our airplane. While we were waiting for assignment, a new Liberator came in for a landing and crashed. All the crew got out, but the plane burned. No one, that I could see, tried to put out the fire.

After being at Gioia for a few days Cecil (Red) McCracken's crew was assigned to a bomb group, but my crew was not assigned yet. It was a real sad parting, because Red and I had been together since January when we both entered the Air Corps. We didn't know if we would ever see one another again until the end of the war, if we were lucky enough to make it home.

On October 7, 1944 my crew was assigned to the Fifteenth Air Force, 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group and 764<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron near Cerignola, Italy. We flew out north from Gioia in the same B-24J that we had flown over from the United States. We landed at our new 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group air base and turned over the plane and the K-Rations to the ground crew. We were driven in the back of a truck to our new 764<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron. I looked out of the truck when we got to the squadron and there was my old buddy. Red McCracken standing in the chow line. Red and I were both assigned to the 764<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron. It's a small world after all.

We enlisted men were assigned to a six-man tent. The guys who had lived in the tent had been shot down on a bombing raid a few days earlier. This doesn't exactly give you a sense of permanency. We were given the crew number of 17-2. Our tent had six army cots and a half-barrel in the center for a stove. A metal tube from the half-barrel inside was connected to a full barrel out back of the tent that was filled with 100-octane gas. The gas would drip into the half-barrel inside the tent for heat. We used to soak our clothes in metal containers of 100-octane gas



under our beds. After a while we would take the clothes outside and hang them up and they would be clean and dry in minutes. One time when I was taking out my clothes to dry, they touched the stove and the whole tent went up in flames. Several of us lost some clothes, and I got some minor burns on my hands and arms. Tents burning down and guys shooting up the area with their 45s were not unusual occurrences.

Our new tent had limestone walls part way up and a brick floor. We had gotten a bad mark for our dirty dirt floor in our previous tent. We had an Italian man who was a veteran of the Ethiopia war, whom we paid very little, come by and clean our tent and made our beds every day. (This Italian man had been a soldier in the Italy's war with Ethiopia and had been wounded. He was very proud of his service in the war.) We were moving up - in the world. All our letters had to be censored by an officer.

The town we visited when we went off base was Cerignola. It was a small dirty town with narrow cobble stone streets. Some of the town-women would get in big vats of grapes and stomp the grapes into liquid. The kids were running in the streets begging for chocolates, cigarettes, or anything else you might have to give them. They would offer to sell you good meals at their homes or sex with a pretty senorita. It was very depressing. They did have a good Red Cross Center in the town where you could get something to eat and a dish of ice cream.

Some of the guys would get drunk and shoot up the squadron area. There were holes in most tents. Sometimes we would load our 45s with buckshot and go in the woods close to camp and shoot lizards. O.C. Craig was a good guitar player and singer. He would sometimes serenade the crew. Mattingly and Craig played lots of cards. Mattingly and Thomas got into a stupid fight out back of the tent one night over nothing. Once our crew was assigned to guard the squadron at the main entrance. Our shower baths were several large metal barrels suspended on 4 by 4's above the outdoor bath area. It was hard to get hot water for a shower. Our toilet was a wooden building over a slit trench out in a field.

Cecil (Red) McCracken's crew flew a mission to Vienna, Austria, before we flew any missions. When he returned from that mission Red had really "got religion". Red was normally a charged up person but for a few hours there was no cussing or drinking around him. Those six hundred or more flak guns had really made an impression on Red. Of course, Red didn't let it last very long.

Most bombing missions started the night before, when the list of the crews to go on the mission was posted on the bulletin board at the squadron office. Many trips were made up to operation each evening, until the list was posted or we were told there would be no mission

If your crew was scheduled for a mission, you usually went to bed early, because someone would come to your tent and wake you up sometime between three and four in the morning. After awaking we would clean up as best we could in the morning and headed to the mess hall for breakfast. Breakfast before a mission was the best meal they could give you. Sometimes we even got real eggs.

We dressed as warm as possible, even in long johns, and went to operations in a group. In the front of the room was a large map covered by a cloth. When everyone was there, an officer

would remove the cloth and there would be a string leading from the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group to the target for that day. If it was a target the guys knew was dangerous, there would be lots of comments. The Fifteenth Air Force, which we were attached to, was mostly bombing factories and oil supplies. We were given information on secondary targets, the number of guns at the target, how many and what fighter groups were to be our escort and information on how to escape if we were shot down. If the Black Squadron to and from the target escorted us the guys were glad. The Black Squadron flew P-51 Mustangs and provided good protection. Their squadron never lost a bomber to enemy fighters during the war.

After the briefing we were loaded in trucks and taken to the flight line. There we picked up our flying gear: parachute, flak suit, and flying wear. Then you grabbed another truck that took you out to your assigned plane. On each mission you were usually assigned a different airplane but all airplanes we flew were B-24J bombers.

Each gunner on our crew had a secondary job that he had been trained to do on the plane in case another person was injured. My extra job was to help Garland Mattingly, the flight engineer, to preflight the plane. I also had to check out the tail turret to see if the turret and guns were operating correctly other than firing of the guns.

Normally we had everything checked, loaded and ready to go by 700 AM. We had heard they wanted to hit targets at the noon hour to cut down on killing of workers. We never knew if this was true or not.

The airplanes were loaded as heavily as possible. The amount of weight in bombs was determined by the gallons of 100 octane gas needed to reach your bombing height, reach and return from target. The total weight was always the same. On low-level missions the airplanes used 90-octane gas.

Operations would shoot a green flare in the air to signal for the pilots to start the engines and taxi to assigned take off positions. A red flare was the signal that the mission was canceled. Any error on takeoff could be fatal. On takeoff the pilot was to have the plane to a certain speed by the time he reached a certain runway marker. If the plane wasn't up to the required speed, the pilot was to abort the takeoff and return the airplane to its ground area to have it checked for the problem.

On take-off according to Air Corps regulations, men riding in the rear of the airplane were to sit on the floor with their backs against the bomb bays. It didn't make much sense, when the bomb bay was filled with bombs and you were worrying about your back. On takeoff I always said the Lord's Prayer and we were always in the air by the time I had finished the prayer.

Everyone kept their eyes open for problems as we gained altitude to get into formation. Many accidents happened during this phase of the mission. Then we would get our equipment organized and get in our turrets. At 10,000 feet the pilot would inform us to put on our oxygen mask. Sometimes going to the target the airplanes would drop tin foil strips to foul up German radar. The B-17 was capable bombing from 30,000 feet or higher but the B-24 on a good day bombed at 26,000 feet or less. It was sometimes forty degrees below zero or colder at the altitudes we were flying and that didn't take in account the wind chill. We had a plane check thru

our intercom often to be sure everyone was all right. Sometimes the oxygen system would fail and a person would pass out. When we reached a certain location the pilot would give the gunners permission to test fire their guns. Hopefully they would work. If any of the guns failed to fire, we had to try to repair them. When you touched any metal at those temperatures you had to wear nylon gloves because bare skin would attach itself to the metal. It was the pilot's decision whether to continue or return to base when any guns failed to fire.

There were normally seven planes to a squadron and three or four squadrons to a group. The twenty-one or twenty-eight planes tried to fly as close together as possible for protection from enemy fighters. We were told enemy fighters went after formations of planes that were flying the poorest formations.

When we reached our bombing altitude and target area the lead pilot would start the formation on the bomb run. Then each pilot would give control of the plane to the bombardier. The Germans would begin shooting at us with 88mm or 105mm shells. The white puffs of smoke were 105s and the black puffs were 88s. The Germans would shoot the 105s at the higher B-17s. Each shell was set to explode at a certain altitude or on contact. This was when the flak got the worst. We had to fly straight and level. The shells would get so close that when they exploded into flak, they caused such a turbulence that the plane would bounce around. You had a feeling that you were just a setting duck during this time. Some targets had as many as 600 or more flak guns shooting at us. Sometimes they would shoot flak up in a block over the target area and the plane would have to fly through it. Other times the flak guns would be shooting at the airplanes from the beginning of the bomb run until the airplanes were out of range. When we were on a bomb run I was praying as hard as possible. The only day I wasn't praying was on the day I was wounded.

The Bombardier would sometimes drop the bombs on the target by sighting through the bombsight and other times he would drop the bombs when the lead airplane dropped theirs. A percentage of the bombs dropped were timed as delayed exploding bombs. As soon as the bombardier dropped the bombs he would call "bombs away" and the airplane without the bombs would rise in the air. The pilot would again take control of the airplane and the formation would bank either right or left to get us out of the flak area. Going to the target we were flying for Uncle Sam, but after the bombs were dropped we were flying for ourselves and eager to get to the safety of our base.

They issued us canned K-Rations to eat on the mission for lunch but by noon they were so frozen that it was better to throw the cans at the Germans. The electrical suits we wore were usually defective. You had to keep turning them off and on to keep them from burning up. When the waist gunners opened the waist windows to put their guns out, it really got cold back in the tail turret. I was so large with my flak suit on that the tail turret door couldn't be closed. After the first guy used the relief tube in the back of the airplane, it would freeze up and the next guy who used it would get all wet. All crewmembers were issued 45 automatics to carry on missions in case they were shot down.

After a mission we usually arrived back at our air base around three in the afternoon. The first thing we would do was to go over to the Red Cross trailer and get coffee and donuts. We then would return to our airplane and clean our guns and turrets. Then we went to operations to turn

in our flying gear, sometimes a de-briefing, get a shot of whiskey and head back to our squadron area. This made a real long day and we were very hungry. Sometimes dinner was nearly over by the time we arrived back to our squadron. Crews were never supposed to fly more than three days in a row.

On one of our missions an 88mm German shell went through the main spar on our left wing and did not explode. We were scared that at any moment the wing would collapse and we would crash. We were lucky the shell didn't hit anything that would stop us from flying back to base. When we got back over the airfield, the pilot offered a choice of bailing out or landing with the plane. We all stayed with the plane and after we were down to nothing in the fuel tanks we landed with no problems. The pilot, Charles Saur, never made a better landing. Ground crews took one look at the plane and towed it away to be used for spare parts and then scrapped.

When you had to move around the plane at high altitude, you attached a small oxygen bottle to your oxygen mask. If you didn't, you could pass out from lack of oxygen. On one mission our engineer, Garland Mattingly, had gone from his waist position to the front to transfer gas between tanks before the bomb run. The transfer completed, he started back to his gun position in the waist. After several minutes O.C. Craig, the other waist gunner, called up front to inquire where was Mattingly. About this time the bombardier, Frank Rosenau, open the bomb bay doors to drop the bombs. Someone on the flight deck told Craig that Mattingly had left for the waist several minutes ago. Craig looked in the bomb bay and there was Mattingly lying spread eagle face down on the foot-wide catwalk 25,000 feet up in the air, with no parachute. Before Craig could tell anyone, the bombs were dropped. By some miracle none of the bombs hit Mattingly. Rosenau unknowingly closed the bomb bay doors catching Mattingly's leg in the door. Craig and Rosenau attached oxygen bottles to their oxygen masks and went into the bomb bay to get Mattingly. Rosenau signaled the Pilot Saur to open and then close the bomb bay door while Craig held Mattingly and pulled his leg inside. Rosenau and Craig got Mattingly to the waist and gave him oxygen to revive him. Mattingly's walk-around bottle had run out of oxygen. Mattingly said he knew what was happening but couldn't do anything about it. He was one lucky guy.

I only saw two German fighter planes that I knew for sure were enemy during all my missions. These two came from a lower level past my tail turret, followed by two Mustang P-51 American fighters. They went by so fast I had no chance to fire at them. I believe the P-51s shot the German planes down to the north of our formation. A long distance from the formation we saw fighter planes, but they were so far away we couldn't tell if they were German or our own.

One of the reasons I was so scared on most missions I was on was because of our nose gunner, George Zobel. When we were on the bomb run George would call out "Flak dead ahead, it's so thick I don't think we can get through it". In the tail turret you are facing the back and have no idea what your plane is going to be flying through. A statement like this give you the thought that you had best prepare to meet your maker.

Sometime overseas I was promoted to Staff Sergeant. Rank meant very little in the Air Corps except for money. Flying personnel received their grade pay plus one half-grade pay and five percent overseas pay.

At the time I was in Italy, I believe, we were told that we had to fly 35 regular missions or 50 missions when counting those over the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel as two. Because of distance, missions over

the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel counted as two missions. According to Charles Saur, our pilot, these are the missions I flew before being wounded:

October 17, 1944 1<sup>st</sup> Mission Linz, Austria  
October 18, 1944 2<sup>nd</sup> Mission Vosen, Austria  
October 20, 1944 3<sup>rd</sup> Mission Milan, Italy  
No Credit Turned back by weather, Yugoslavia  
November 1, 1944 4<sup>th</sup> Mission Augsburg, Austria  
November 5, 1944 5<sup>th</sup> Mission Vienna, Austria  
November 6, 1944 6<sup>th</sup> Mission Vienna, Austria  
November 11, 1944 7<sup>th</sup> Mission Linz, Austria  
November '17, 1944 8<sup>th</sup> Mission Vienna, Austria  
November 18, 1944 9<sup>th</sup> Mission Villafranca, Italy

On November 18, 1944, we went on a bombing mission to Villafranca Airdrome in northern Italy. It was supposed to be a milk run (easy target). Before our bomb run fighter planes were to strafe the field and knock out all the flak guns. We were then to drop regular and anti-personnel bombs. And then the fighters would strafe whatever was left on the field that we missed. We had been told the enemy had only three 88mm anti-aircraft guns at the field. The day was clear, sunny and a beautiful winter day for that time of the year.

Everything that morning had gone well. We had our normal pre-mission procedures working like a clock. We took off and joined our formation and reached 10,000 feet. I put on my flak suit, hooked up my electric flying suit, started my oxygen and made sure the tail turret was working properly. The pilot gave us permission to test fire our guns, and everything was going great. We watched out for enemy fighters and enjoyed the scenery. We arrived at the start of the bomb run and the Pilot Saur gave the control of the plane to Frank Rosenau, our bombardier. The bomb run was smooth and I heard no reports of flak, so I wasn't praying like I normally did on the bomb run. I was looking around and enjoying the view when all of a sudden an 88mm shell exploded just off to the right side of the plane by my tail turret. I was hit by pieces of flak coming thru the side of the turret and passed out for I don't know how long. When I came to, I had lots of blood on me, so the first thing I thought of was getting help. We had heard stories of gunners bleeding to death after being hit in their turrets and no one else knowing it until too late. The door of my turret was open so I tried to drop backwards out of the turret into the main fuselage, but my flying boot caught on a bar that ran across the lower part of the turret. I finally got my foot out of the boot and disconnected myself from the intercom and oxygen. I stood up, and Mattingly waved for me to get back into the turret. Just before I passed out, Mattingly saw all the blood and rushed back to help me to the waist and laid me down.

The next thing I realized my mask was hooked up to the oxygen and the intercom. Rosenau, the medical person on the crew, was giving me a shot on morphine. They put a tourniquet on my left arm that they loosened often. The pilot called the group leader that we were breaking from formation and heading for home with wounded. Another plane joined us as we broke formation and we took off at higher than normal speed for home. I remember waking and talking to the crew at times on the way back. Ken Kase came back to see how I was doing and leaned on my chest to get a better look at my arm. This really hurt and I yelled for him to get off me! They started looking and found a hole in my flying suit over my left chest. I had a compound fracture of my left arm just below the elbow, two wounds in my left arm, one about six inches long with

muscle missing, and another gash four inches long. Another piece of flak missed my flak suit and entered my left chest, lodging in my left lung.

I came to when we landed at the airport at Foggia, Italy. Medics came on the plane and cut part of my flying suit away on my left side to examine my chest wound. They then removed me from the plane on a stretcher by way of the right waist window. I remember being loaded in the ambulance but remember nothing else until I woke up briefly in the operating room where a cast was being put on my left arm. The next thing I remember was the next afternoon when all my crew and Red McCracken were in the room to see me. I sure appreciated the visit but probably wasn't much into conversation. I was in a ward with several guys.

Later (I don't know if it was hours or days) when I woke up and couldn't breath. From what happen later I would guess I was bleeding inside and the blood collapsed my lung. I let out a scream and people came from everywhere. One guy arrived with a large oxygen tank on his back and put an oxygen mask on me. The next time I woke up I was in a room by myself. (Later I found out they put you in a room by yourself if they thought you were going to die) Whenever I woke up, there was always someone sitting beside my bed. I always had IV tubes in my right arm. A nurse told me before I left Foggia Hospital that I had received eight pints of blood and over three hundred penicillin shots. I had so many shots I couldn't sit down later without a pillow under me, and the Novocain, I was told, in the penicillin gave me the hives.

There were many doctors that came in the room to examine me, but they used medical words I didn't understand, so I had no idea of what was happening. They started coming in every afternoon to put a 5-inch needle in my chest and another needle inside the first needle to draw out blood. Putting that first needle in my chest not only hurt my chest but they sometimes would hit a nerve and then it would also hurt in my leg or groin. It certainly wasn't a pleasant experience.

After a few days a doctor came in and told me they were going to operate on me and take the flak out of my chest the next day. This really upset me because I had no reason to believe they hadn't taken the flak out the night I came into the hospital. We talked a while and everything was all right when he left. The doctor, Lt. Col. Ristine, had been the head of the Harvard School of Medicine at Harvard University, so he surely knew what he was doing.

I don't recall much about the next few days but was told the operation went well. I supposed they would go in the hole the flak made but they cut me from left shoulder blade all the way around to the front of my chest. I still had the cast on my broken left arm and had lost lots of weight. Sometime in the early part of December they started getting me up in a wheel chair. I had to sit on pillows because I was so thin and my rear was so sore from all the penicillin shots. I seemed to be getting a long good and asked them to please let me go to a ward where there were other people. I was tired of only seeing four walls in the room by myself.

While I was in the private room in Foggia in December 1944 an officer came in and asked me if I was me and I told him "Yes sir". He started reading aloud something from a piece of paper. I figured I was going to have to pay for the tent I had burned down. Finally he stopped reading and said, "You are awarded the Purple Heart". I wish I knew what he had read.

They finally put me a ward with several other guys. They would not let me smoke until I had cleaned up all my meal trays for one whole day. That wasn't hard with the other guys in the room helping me.

Soon after moving into the larger ward I started having a high temperature and feeling real sick. They had continued giving me penicillin shots and I developed a bad case of hives. They put me on sulfa drugs for a few days to cure the hives. They knew I had an infection in the chest, so they took me to the operating room and put a tube in my back just under the skin. The tube was attached to another rubber tube that then was attached to a bottle on the floor. Every time I moved the tube in my back would move and cause me pain. I had to lie either on my right or left side. They hoped this tube would drain some infection out of my chest, but I don't think it got anything out. By this time bedsores were developing.

The guys in my crew and Red McCracken visited me as often as they could. Several wrote very nice letters to my parents, especially Red McCracken and Garland Mattingly. The Red Cross volunteer girls would read my mail to me and write letters for me. The nurses were very good to me. There was an older nurse, Miss Walsey, whom we called "Mom", who was exceptionally nice to me. We corresponded later when I was out of the service. On New Year's Eve before their dance, the nurses came up to our ward and showed us their pretty dresses. There were earphones on the beds that we could put on to listen to the news, especially the war, the Battle of the Bulge, and music. The song "I Walk Alone" was played over and over again. That didn't help me to feel any better.

There were lots of serious cases in the hospital. Several times they brought in badly burned men who just lived a short time. After a while pain killers just would not ease the pain for some wounded men. It was easy to get hooked on painkillers and sleeping pills. There was a guy who screamed at night for someone to kill him and if no one had the nerve, give him the gun and he would kill himself. Nights in the hospital were the worst times.

After about six weeks, near the beginning of January 1945, they came in one morning and took me down to an operating room and removed the cast from my arm. The cast had gotten so loose from the weight I had lost that it could be taken off without cutting the cast. I then found that they hadn't even sewn up the wounds on my arm before they put the cast on the night I came into the hospital. I guess they didn't think I would live, so why waste time. The arm sure looked like a terrible bloody mess. The doctor gave me a shot in the arm and with me lying there watching, sewed up the wounds.

In a day or so they came to me and told me they would be flying me to the hospital in Bari, Italy the next day. Early the morning of January 8, 1945, they came and disconnected me from all the bottles and loaded me on a cart. I told everyone goodbye and thanked them for their care and was taken downstairs. They put me on a stretcher and put me in an ambulance. We went to the Foggia, Italy airport and I was loaded into a C-47 that was especially equipped to hold stretchers.

After a very short flight we landed at the Bari, Italy airport. They unloaded me, put me in an ambulance, drove to the hospital and took me to a ward with other patients. They must have drugged me, because I had a hard time staying awake the rest of the day. Early the next morning they started giving me all kinds of test. They punched, poked, did x-rays and asked me all kinds of questions. I was really tired and feeling terrible. They continued this process for a couple days.

Early the evening of January 12, 1945, a doctor came to my bed and told me he had "some good news and some bad news". The bad news was my arm had not healed right and would have to be broken and reset at a later date. The other bad news was that I had a bad infection in my left

lung and they were going have to, operate on my chest the next morning to remove part of a rib and put a tube in, so the infection could drain out. I guess by this time, not feeling good to begin with, I was ready to call it quits. Then he said he had some good news. If I allowed the operation and did as they asked, he would promise to have me on my way to the states within ten days. At this point and with the good news I didn't care what they did, as long as I was headed home.

Early the next morning of January 13, 1945, they came and took me directly to the operating room. The doctor I had talked to the night before assured me everything was going to be fine. They put me under with sodium pentothal, but during the operation switched me to ether. When I awoke in the afternoon I was really thirsty and asked for water. They asked if I had had ether and I told them no. They gave me water and I got very sick. The next day they let me walk down the hall to the bathroom, first time in couple months without using a bedpan. I got to the bathroom but had to sit on the bathroom floor until someone came and got me back to my bed.

As the doctors had told me, they removed part of a rib on the left side of my back and inserted a rubber tube into the lung. They had fixed adhesive on my back so a pad could be put over the tube and the pad changed at least twice a day without changing the adhesive tape. The adhesive tape had strings in it that were tied over the pad. The idea was for the infection to drain and the hole to heal from the inside out. It was a slow process and I didn't get rid of the tube until March 1945.

Every day I tried to move around and do more than the previous day, but I still wasn't feeling good. I just couldn't get my appetite back. I weighed over 150 pounds before I had been wounded but now weighed less than 120 pounds and wasn't eating. On January 19, 1945, the doctor came in and told me I would be on my first leg home tomorrow when they would fly me to the hospital at Naples, Italy. He had kept his promise. Early the next morning January 20, 1945 they came to the ward, put me on a cart, took me downstairs. They put me on a stretcher, put me in the ambulance and we went back to the Bari, Italy airport, where I was loaded into a C-47 and off to Naples, Italy we went.

When we landed at Naples, Italy airport, I was taken to the Naples hospital and put in a ward. A nurse in the ward told me I would be on a ship and headed for the United States in a couple days. That was great news! I still continued to try to get up and move around a little bit each day. I hadn't been paid since November 1944, and the money I had was from selling my cokes and beers to other guys in the ward. I believe we got five cans of whichever we wanted each week. I usually took the beer, because I could get more money for the beer.

I still wasn't feeling too good at only 117 pounds. I had lost over 30 pounds and seemed to always have a temperature. I was still taking pain and sleeping pills. They changed the pad on my back at least twice a day. It was unbelievable how much yellowish green black smelling goop had drained from the tube onto the pad every time it was changed. I was still weak and made the mistake of trying to walk down to the P.X. I made it down to the P.X. all right but couldn't make it back to the ward. They had to send a wheel chair down from the ward to get me. That was the last trip out of the ward at Naples. They grounded me.

On January 27, 1945, a doctor came in and told me they would be loading me on a ship tomorrow morning for the .trip back to the good old U.S.A. We again went through the



procedure of the cart, downstairs, stretcher and ambulance. When we got to the ship, they took me up to the top area of the ship. I believe the ship's name was the U.S.S. General Richardson. It must have been some type of transport, and I was in a small hospital area. There were no more than twenty patients. They told us that the ship would be returning to the states with no other ships. We asked about the German U-boats and were told the ship was capable of out running the U-boats. We asked what would happen if the U-boats were already out there waiting on us. We got no answer to that question.

We left the harbor at Naples, Italy January 28, 1945 in the evening, entered the Mediterranean Sea and headed for the Rock of Gibraltar. At Gibraltar we turned south for a while and then started our run across the Atlantic Ocean. It took us about 12 days to make the crossing.

When I got on the ship I still wasn't feeling very well. After a couple days all of a sudden I started to feel the best I had felt for a long time. The doctors said it was because the infection was beginning to clear up in my chest. We couldn't get seconds on any one item on our meals; we had to take another complete meal. At times I was able to eat three complete meals. I seemed to be hungry all the time. We had little to do on the ship. I tried to read and a guy tried to teach a couple of us how to play pinochle but I had little interest in either.

On February 9, 1945, we arrived outside of the harbor at Norfolk, Virginia, in the early morning. They sent out a harbor pilot who was either drunk (which was rumored) or he didn't know how to handle a ship of this size. After lunch they sent out another harbor pilot and we got right in to the dock. They came on the ship and loaded me on to a stretcher, and as they were taking me down the gangplank, a navy guy offered me five dollars for my shoes that were hanging from the stretcher. I told him, "It's a deal!" and I was five dollars richer. At that time I had no use for the shoes and the five dollars looked pretty good since I hadn't been paid since November of 1944.

We arrived at the Patrick Henry Hospital at Norfolk, Virginia where I was wheeled into a ward with about eight other guys from the ship. The first thing they asked us was, "What do you want for supper tonight?" I ordered hamburgers and a quart of cold milk. Man, did that taste good. I think I called home that night and it was great to talk to my folks in Cambridge City, Indiana. It had been a long lonesome journey for a nineteen-year-old.

The next day an officer came into our ward and asked each of us to fill out a form, as they would send us to whatever hospital we requested. I requested, to be sent to the military hospital at Indianapolis, Indiana. I called mother and told her I would soon be transferred to a hospital at Indianapolis, Indiana near home.

That same day they paid me all my back pay, \$344.40, which still included flying and combat pay. I was really rich! I sent some of the money home and again made a trip to the P.X. I made it both ways this time but must have overdone it because I was running a slight fever again. I was told I couldn't leave the ward unless I used a wheel chair. That evening Red Skelton, who was station at that time at Norfolk, came into our ward and put on the guzzler gin act that I saw years later on his TV show. He really gave the officers who were standing around the ward a bad time. He was good entertainment.

The next morning the officer that had come in the day before and offered to send us to any

hospital we wanted came into the ward. He told me he was sorry, but because of the nature of my wound I was being sent to Fitzsimmons General Hospital in Denver Colorado, where there were specialists in chest wounds. I was very upset and told him to go to some not so nice places. He could only say he was sorry, but for my own good I had to go to Denver. I would guess that wasn't one of his or my better days. I was broken hearted. I had been in the hospital for nearly three months. I called mother and gave her the news and asked her if she could come out to Denver. Mother worked in a bomb box factory while I was in the service.

On February 13, 1945 I again left the hospital on a litter to board a hospital train for Denver, but this time we were traveling in deluxe accommodations. It seemed that anytime we stopped in a railroad station, people would give us cookies and talk to us. They made us real proud by what they would say and how they treated us. It was great to be back in the good old U.S.A!

We arrived at Denver, Colorado Fitzsimmons General Hospital and went through the same procedures of unloading and loading again. The next few days they did lots of x-raying and other testing to see how we were healing. The tube in my back was partly clogged, slowing down the drainage, so they took the tube out, cleaned it and put it back in my back again. They said they didn't believe breaking my arm and resetting it would improve its use. A schedule was set up to begin physical therapy that next day. Since I had left Italy I had gained eighteen pounds.

Mother came out to Denver on a Greyhound bus and spent a week with me. The Red Cross helped her to get to Denver and let her stay in the Red Cross house on base. They were always very good to mother and myself. Mother could visit me five or six hours a day. It was sure good to see her and for her to know I was going to be all right.

I spent lots of time in therapy. They put my arm in a whirlpool and after some time would take it out and exercise and massage it. They did this twice a day. They put us in a room and gave us artificial sunlight to get rid of the hospital white. They still changed the bandage on the tube in my back twice a day. As the hole in my back healed from the inside they would cut off a piece of the tube to make it shorter.

About the last of March the tube was permanently removed from my back and I was transferred to an area called the Reconditioning Center. This was an area where you followed their therapy suggestions and you could do some of your own. They had golf, bowling, softball and all kinds of things we could do with supervision. I was on the field playing softball when the death of President Franklin Roosevelt was announced. No one knew anything about Harry Truman who was now the new president. It was quite a shock, because lots of us knew of no other President than Roosevelt. That was April 12, 1945.

About the fifteen of April I was given a thirty day convalescent leave to return to Indiana. There were three of us from Reconditioning Center headed out on leave in the same general direction at the same time. We decided to go to Lowery Field in Denver to see if we could hitch a free ride home. A military plane was going to Dayton, Ohio and we could get a free ride to there. Two of us were in the Air Corps and the other guy was in the Army. We boarded the plane and had some real rough weather. By the time we reached our first stop in Topeka, Kansas the Army guy was so sick he was turning green. We decided the Army guy couldn't stand to fly any further, so

we got off the plane and rode a bus home. One guy was from Ohio and the other was from West Virginia. We made an agreement that we would all ride the bus together back to Denver at the end of our leaves.

It was good to be back in Cambridge City, Indiana where I enjoyed all my friends, family and girlfriend. We all had a great time together. My folks had a small flag with a blue star in the window. Downtown all service men names were listed on a large board called The Roll of Honor which stood near the library. Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945, while I was home and I made a speech at Lincoln High School and rode the fire truck in the parade. I also gave a speech at the local American Legion. It was nice to be honored in that way.

After our thirty-day leave was about up, the three of us caught a Greyhound Bus going back to Denver. We got off at several towns on the way to see the sights and rest. It took us four full days to travel the 1,100 miles from Cambridge City, Indiana to Denver, Colorado. That was a lot of sitting partly because of the thirty-five mile an hour speed limit.

When we got back to the Reconditioning Center, I was sent up to the hospital to be checked over. Most of the guys spent no more than seven days in the Reconditioning Center and were shipped out. I got back in May and didn't leave till the last week of June or first week of July. I had to go up to the hospital once a week to get checked over, but other than that, I only had to make out the duty roster for the barracks every day. I was free to do anything I wanted to do but was encouraged to get plenty of exercise.

I spent my time doing lots of different things. I started playing golf and bowled almost every day. They had Italian prisoners setting pins, and we would throw a bowling ball at them if they were to slow. They would really get mad.

My transfer to Fort Thomas, Kentucky finally came. I left Denver on the Denver Zephyr, a very fast, streamline train. We traveled about 1,022 miles in fourteen hours. That's moving right along! I had a lower berth on the train and some guys going to training camp to be officers had uppers. They were really upset that a lowly Staff Sergeant got a better berth than future officers. At Chicago, Illinois, I caught another train to Cincinnati, Ohio and took a bus to Fort Thomas, Kentucky.

At Fort Thomas I was assigned to a barracks and told to report to the hospital the next morning for a complete physical. I got the physical and was interviewed by an officer for quite some time. When I reported back the next morning, I was given a schedule of exercise classes. In addition I chose ballroom dancing, drafting and a couple other classes. They planned to keep us busy during the day.

Nearly every night some of the guys and I went into Cincinnati. There was a special deal for service persons to attend Cincinnati Reds baseball games, so we went often. Every weekend on Friday I rode a bus to Cincinnati, boarded a bus or train to Richmond, Indiana and then hitchhike to Cambridge City. I did the opposite on Sunday afternoon to get back to Fort Thomas.

One day I was called into an office at the hospital and was talked to by the doctor. He said I had a very serious wound that had healed well but that I should be careful how I lived. He then shocked me by telling me I would be discharged from the service in a few days. I had always

figured that when I was well I would rejoin my old crew again and we would go fight the Japs. We talked quite a while about my discharge and the future. When you are nineteen years old, you think you're going to live forever.

During the next few days I was given a complete physical again, checked by the dentist and signed a lot of papers. During the time I was in the discharge area the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Japan surrendered. WWII was over and there was a great celebration!!! I got my medical discharge as a Staff Sergeant on August 23, 1945 at Fort Thomas, Kentucky. I had spent about ten months on active duty and ten months in the hospital and reconditioning.

In all the places I was hospitalized I could not have had better care. The Red Cross volunteers, doctors, nurses, ward personnel, and everyone else were just wonderful to me. I owe lots of them my life.

While I was at Fort Thomas, Kentucky, in May of 1945 my old crew flew a B-24 liberator to the United States by way of South America. As soon as they arrived back in the states each of them was sent in a different direction. What a sad ending to a great crew.

After I was wounded George Zobel replaced me in the tail turret. O. C. Craig and myself were the only ones wounded in our crew. O.C. was hit with flak on a mission February 13, 1945 to the Vienna, Austria Central Repair Shops. O.C. had his right arm blown off just above the elbow. The B 24 they were flying that day had the radio room above the bomb bays rather than behind the pilot as most B-24s did. In a regular B-24 he wouldn't have gotten a scratch. They flew him directly back to the hospital at Foggia, Italy. He asked for the private room I had occupied when I was at that hospital but they said they only put persons who were expected to die in private room. O.C. told them to forget about the private room. They flew him back to the States within two weeks of his being wounded. His biggest worry was how he was going to dance with the girls with only one arm.

Cecil (Red) McCracken returned to the States in May 1945, and had not received a scratch on any mission he had flown. On his first furlough home he was riding a motor scooter and a woman hit him with a car and broke his collarbone. He had just healed from his broken collarbone when he was home lying on the bed watching his brother clean a gun. The gun went off and shot Red on the mouth. It sure messed up his mouth but didn't kill him. Red has never been to a 461<sup>st</sup> reunion, partly because most of his crewmembers have died.

I know that the war, delivery of the telegram December 3, 1944 that I was wounded and the not being able to visit or call me in the hospital in Italy was a very stressful time for my family. My dad, brother, Jerry, and especially my mother suffered more than I did. As you get older and have children and grandchildren of your own you realize what that time must have been for them.

Mark Froot, the ball turret gunner died in New York in 1975. Garland Mattingly died in Indianapolis, Indiana April 29, 1993. Frank Rosenau died in Connecticut September 8, 1997. Kenneth Kase died in New York November 4, 2003. Oral C. Craig died in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma May 15, 2005. Our Pilot Charles Saur still lives in Sparta, Michigan. Herbert Frank,

Co-Pilot, lives in Fort Worth, Texas. George Zabal, nose gunner, lives in Boynton Beach, Florida. Wallace Thomas, top turret gunner, lives in Ben Brook, Texas. Cecil McCracken lives in Goliad, Texas.

Over the years our crew has always stayed in contact with one another. Thru Christmas cards, visits on vacation, phone calls and our own crew reunions we continue to communicate. In 1989 the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group had a reunion in St. Louis, Missouri. Eight of our crewmembers and six wives attended that reunion. Mark Froot who passed away in 1975 and Frank Rosenau who was too crippled to attend were the only members of our crew missing. Since the 1989 reunion, I believe, at least one of our crewmembers has made it to nearly every 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group reunion. Age is catching up to us and membership to the reunions has gone down in number of veterans attending. The Group is attempting to continue the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group by getting the young generation of sons, daughters, and grandchildren of the group involved in our organization.

John William Mattheis Jr. 11550  
Crew #17-2