The 461st

Liberaider

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One More Mission: A Journey From Childhood To War

By

Jesse Pettey

This is a story of a boy growing up in East Texas during the depression and flying 35 bombing missions over Europe during World War II as a young man. It has now been released by Xlibris Publishing Company.

Go to: www.xlibris.com/One More Mission.html or www.xlibris.com/JessePettey.html to read an excerpt from the book.

Inside this issue:

Cerignola, Italy	*1*
Spare Time	*1*
Taps	*2*
Mail Call	*3*
Deadstick Landing	*6*
New Website	*12*

Cerignola, Italy

The title of this article isn't all that impressive. Everyone knows that the 461st was stationed at Torretta Field just outside Cerignola, Italy. What follows is one chapter from a soon to be published book by Jesse Pettey, 766th Squadron, entitled "One More Mission: A Journey from Childhood to War" According to Jesse, the book should be available about the first of the year. Many thanks to Jesse for sharing this chapter with us. It makes me want to go out and get the book as soon as it's available.

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CERIGNOLA, ITALY

With our papers processed and the "Shady Lady" modified and ready for war, we received an order dated 30 July 1944, attaching us to the 766th Bomb Squadron, 461st Bomb Group, 15th Air Force. We were ordered to fly our B-24 from Gioia to our new assignment near Cerignola, Italy.

From studying a map, Cerignola is a small city located just below the spur of the boot of Italy near the Adriatic Sea. It was a small impoverished town surrounded by numerous B-17 and B-24 bomber groups located on numerous farms in the area. We were informed upon our arrival that tents were temporarily unavailable and that our crew would be billeted in a building that had at one time been a barn. The 766th Squadron had converted farm buildings into operations offices, mess halls, and recreational clubs. The barn that served as our temporary home was a huge building with concrete floors that had formerly housed cattle. Farmers in Italy maintained their cattle in huge buildings where they are fed and milked. There are no open fields of grass for

(Continued on page 4)

Spare Time

Spare time in a time of war? I think Walter Stewart, 766th Squadron, gives us a fresh look at some of the things that went on outside the war. Thanks, Walter, for this different view of your tour of duty.

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The Air Force wasn't always conditioning planes, flying, bombing, landing safely – not even in the Army Air Corps, nor as part of the 461st's main work, whether in this country or overseas.

(Continued on page 11)

Taps

Please forward all death notices to:

Hughes Glantzberg
P.O. Box 926
Gunnison, CO 81230

Missing No Longer

764th Squadron

Name	Hometown	MOS	Date of Death
Bella, Paul	Fanwood, NJ	612	2001
Jones, Henry A.	Greenwood, IN	750	May 28, 2000
Lucas, Mac	Sisters, OR	1092	February 2001
Souther, Hubert W.	La Habra Hts, CA	1092	September 2001
Spencer, James H.	Jackson, MS	1092	March 2001
Stradley, Telford V.	Greeley, CO	612	February 8, 2001
Viliesis, Paul P.	Roswell, GA	1092	December 25, 2000

765th Squadron

Name	Hometown	MOS	Date of Death
Bentel, Charles G.	Pittsburgh, PA	748	1988
Blandford, Carl H.	Hagerman, ID	750	September 28, 2001
Cipriani, Vito	Bedford, OH	747	October 15, 2001
Eggers, Norman L.	Madison, IN	757	May 22, 2001
Marion, Joseph F.	Aliquippa, PA	1034	January 13, 2001

766th Squadron

Name	Hometown	MOS	Date of Death
Arney, Charles L.	Norwood, NC	612	December 24, 2000
Flynn, Daniel	Sumter, SC	612	February 21, 2000
Knox Jr., Walter L.	Mendon, NY	1034	February 2001
McIntyre, Donald F.	Kewadin, MI	757	November 4, 2000
Phillips, Roy E.	Gainsville, FL	1092	August 10, 2000
Stemple, Glenn	Oakland, IA	7530	2001

767th Squadron

Name	Hometown	MOS	Date of Death
Bush, Kelton G.	Albany, NY	1092	July 31, 2001
Dahlen, Graydon E.	Boulder Creek, CA	612	November 2001
Dykes, Gerald Y.	Davenport, IA	060	February 13, 2001
Fessenden, Richard	Meridian, MS	502	March 1, 2001
Fitzhugh, Ovie D.	Dayton, TX	748	July 7, 1997
Hunt, William S.	Wexford, PA	748	December 21, 2000
Stauffer, Clarence E.	Tamarac, FL	1092	November 25, 2001
Strots, Buren H.	Tahlequak, OK	612	March 13, 2000
Walsh, Harry L.	Atlanta, GA	1092	May 14, 2000

Mail Call

Hi,

If anyone is interested, here's the website where I have made available the photo and proper id of the crew of the Red Ryder.

http://members.tripod.com/~Jackey/RYDER/b24.html

Raymond H. Bourgeois was my wife's youngest uncle; her mother's youngest brother. My mother-in-law, and some of her sisters are still living, but as you can imagine, are well into their 90's.

Thanks - Jack Coffee

==========

Dear Hughes,

I was pleased to hear that you have accepted the editor/ webmaster job and I want to help wherever possible. To start with, I am the nose gunner shot down during the Odertal Mission on 12/17/44 and featured with Gerry Smith on the website video/interview.

Last year, my wife and I plus two other 461st veterans traveled to the Czech Republic with Rob Hoskins where we were royally welcomed. My descriptive article was printed in the Liberaider. During this visit we met members of the Czech Flying Club who sponsored the event which included Jan Hlavacka. Jan was contacted by a Czech Television Team who want to produce a book and a TV documentary about the Odertal raid. I am acting as US contact person and would be pleased to share information and details with you. Please let me know what you want to do. I can send you copies of correspondence or answer your specific questions.

I will also send you copies of recent newspaper articles which you may decide to include in the Liberaider. You are fortunate to have George Dickie as assistant editor since he has a world of editing experience.

Regards,

Hjalmar Johansson, 467 Sq.

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I am glad I found this website to gain information about my father, Andrew Douglas Franklin, Sr. 15th AF 49th Bomb Wing, 764th, BTG. Thanks a lot! Do you have a hint as to how I might gain more individual information about him. He was shot down on July 25th, 1944. I am not sure but your information lists the Fertile Myrtle as going down on the 8th. I do believe he flew with a different crew that day to get his 50th mission done. Any info. would be appreciated.

Could you please inform me of any websites that could lead us to a MACR for my father, Andrew Douglas Franklin, Sr. serial no. 14094810; MOS 748; assigned to crew #2 piloted by Harold Blanchard. We believe him to have been shot down over Linz, Austria on 25-July-44.

Karen F. McGlaun

Karen,

I've found a little more information for you, but not a whole lot. I was able to determine that S/Sgt. Andrew Franklin was assigned to the 764th Squadron on 10/18/43. His Serial # is 14094810. His MOS was 748. He was assign to crew #2 piloted by Harold Blanchard. In the October 1944 history file, Sgt. Franklin is listed as a POW having been shot down on July 25 over Linz. As you already determined, he evidently was not flying with Blanchard at the time as Blanchard was not shot down at that time. There were eleven planes lost in the 461st on July 25 and none of them were flown by Blanchard.

I think the best place to start looking for information would be

http://www.461st.org/missing_air_crew_report.htm.

This is one of our pages and tells you how to go about getting information. I haven't used this yet so I would be interested in your results. If you get some useful information that we don't have, I would also be interested in that.

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(Continued from page 1)

them to graze since all the land is used for farming. Without water inside the barn, it was necessary for us to shave and bath outside with cold water. Our steel helmets served as a water basin filled with water supplied from an outside cattle trough. Farm laborers generously saw to it that our water canteens were constantly full of wine that was fermented in huge tanks located in a building only a few feet from our barn. Since the water from the cattle trough was not potable, many of us used this wine to rinse our mouths after brushing our teeth. I was only beginning to understand that there was no beauty in war – as Emerson said, "one must carry beauty if it is to be found".

On August 3, 1944 Dave flew his first mission as copilot to Friedrichafen, Germany. Operational headquarters lost little time putting him with an experienced crew so that he might acquire some familiarity with combat flying before leading our crew on our first bombing mission. While waiting for Dave to fly his first two missions, I read, played cards and loafed at the officer's club during the day. At night, flight officers slept in sleeping bags on the concrete floor next to their enlisted crewmembers. The barn soon became uncomfortable – its novelty had long since worn off while we impatiently waited for a tent.

"Lieutenant, I want to see you outside," a major snapped.

He had walked into the barn on an inspection tour and observed me playing cards with some of my enlisted crewmembers. Once outside, he began reprimanding me for fraternizing with enlisted men. He growled in my face,

"Lieutenant, don't you know that you are not to fraternize with enlisted men? Don't you know that?"

He paused for a second and continued, "I should report you to the commanding officer and place you on OD for the next two weeks. You know that don't you?" He paused again for effect as I answered,

"YES SIR!"

I was completely bewildered. Because of a military custom that forbids one from making excuses, I politely listened and withheld an urge to ask him how I might avoid fraternizing with the enlisted members of my crew. We worked together in a confining airplane and slept together in a barn. At the conclusion of his harangue, he saluted and smugly walked away satisfied that he had properly censured me. I did not ask, not did he offer any suggestions about how I might properly distance myself from my crew – nor do I know today. It is a tradition of long standing that military officers do not live or fraternize with enlisted personnel; however, after the introduction of the military airplane, flyers regarded this custom as rather antiquated because of the need for officers and enlisted airmen to work together as a crew. The safety of each crewmember in an airplane is contingent on the abilities of the other crewmembers to coordinate their tasks together. As a result, after graduation, officers on flying status generally ignored all but the most basic military customs. That was not, however, the deposition of officers in other branches of the military service. Some could be very rigid in their interpretation of military customs, particularly those who had graduated from ROTC (reserved officers training corps) and other military academies. The major I encountered that day was not an officer on flying status.

A few days later we were notified that our crew would be issued two tents: one to accommodate the officers in an area reserved for officers and the other to accommodate the six enlisted men in another location. We were eager to begin making a floor of concrete blocks for our tent but our intentions were temporarily postponed – war came first and foremost.

ON THE EIGHTH day of August, my name appeared on the operations headquarters information board. Orders stated that I was scheduled to fly a combat mission the following morning, 9 August 1944, as copilot with Dave Thomas and that we were to report for briefing at 0500 hours. All other information about the mission was a secret and would be revealed only at briefing the following morning.

I was struggling from a deep sleep as I heard a voice say,

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

"Wake up Lieutenant! First and only call for breakfast!"

The Officer of the Day sergeant seemed to call from far away. I crossly reacted to his annoying voice that was propelling me into an awareness of a dark musty canvass tent and a hard cold uncomfortable cot. One of the responsibilities of the duty sergeant was to wake officers on stand-by status two hours before flight briefing. We must have time to shave, dress, eat breakfast and be transported to headquarters where briefing would take place. It was 0300 hours, two hours before a 0500 briefing.

After breakfast we were transported by truck to the briefing room at headquarters. We sat crowded together on benches in the back of a canvas-covered truck and despite the rough road and uncomfortable seats, most of us fell asleep during the ride. Most often, I was only partially awake when I entered the briefing room, but I was jolted fully awake whenever the briefing officer began describing our target. The briefing area was a room large enough to accommodate fifty or more chairs for pilots, and a stage sufficiently large to display several maps and a blackboard. Often the commanding officer would make a brief introduction about the importance of the impending mission; however, the briefing officer stepped up to the maps with his pointer and without delay announced,

"Today, your primary target will be to destroy the oil refinery at Almasfuzito, Hungary".

He uncovered a large map with pins and red markers indicating the route we were to fly. Maps disclosing the secret target of the day were covered as we entered the room but uncovered when the briefing officer was ready to reveal the target. Colored markers represented the route we were to fly to and from the target while colored pins represented locations of anti-aircraft gun emplacements and fighter bases. The briefing officer announced the altitude we were to fly, at which checkpoint on the map we were to turn toward the target, and the heading we would fly over the target to drop our bombs. He announced that the mission would be led by Lt. Colonel Knapp, Captain Strong, Lt. Coles and Lt. Sullivan. Although they shared the same name, the leader, Lt. Sullivan, was not our bombardier, Lt. Sullivan. It was to be the final mission with the Fifteenth Air Force for Lt. Coles and Sullivan.

"We do not expect heavy flak or fighter attacks today and the weather will be mostly clear for the entire flight. Lt. McCain will later brief you on the weather."

The word, "flak" was often used to describe the explosion of an anti-aircraft shell that produced a small black cloud of smoke. The expression originated in Germany as an abbreviation of the German words, flieger-abwehr-kanone (FLAK), translated as "airplane defense gun". It was introduced into the vocabulary of the Allied Air Forces and used extensively during the war. A moment before the target was announced, we became alert and leaned forward in anticipation of the briefing officer's announcement of the target. If it were a well-known dangerous target, the room would be filled with groans. If it was an unknown one or a previous 'milk-run', as easy targets were called, the room would remain silent as the officer continued his remarks. I felt relieved that our target of the day drew only silence; however, one could never be certain that any target would be a 'milk-run'. Enemy fighter groups or heavy flak often appeared where there had been none before. Our briefing officer continued to brief us on our secondary or alternative target that would become our target if we could not reach the primary target, usually because of poor weather. He instructed his assistant to distribute copies of maps, takeoff time, rendezvous point, the serial number and location of the airplane we were to fly, and other essential information. Takeoff time was to be 0700. We were dismissed with instructions to gather our equipment and that a jeep was waiting to transport us to meet our crew at a designated airplane. We had about an hour remaining before takeoff to assemble and organize our equipment when we arrived at the aircraft. I arranged my flying clothing and gear on the ground in the order that I would employ them. First I zipped a pair of electronically heated coveralls over my khaki uniform. Then I attached my .45 caliber pistol and holster under my right arm. I stepped

(Continued on page 8)

Deadstick Landing at Vis

By
I. B. Bloxom, Jr.

I have a picture of myself standing by the #35 plane. The plane is propped up and is being repaired. The picture prompted me, as best I could, to tell you the mission the #20 crew and myself flew that caused all the damage to the plane.

As best as I can remember, this particular mission was to Vienna Austria. When we got to the target, we were in heavy weather and met with great quantities of flak. Nobody knew where we were going because of the weather and we were going to try to separate so there wouldn't be a collision, but we found that we had a plane coming directly at us and to avoid a collision, I dumped the nose and peeled hard to the left. Unfortunately this made the plane go into a spin. We fought to regain control all the way down to approximately 1500 feet. The co-pilot and I managed to pull the plane out of its spiral but it threw all the bombs, all except one, through the bomb-bay doors. The locks on the landing gear evidentially broke because the gear came down. At that level we had a lot more visibility than we had at high altitude and we happened to see the target not too far from us. We decided to make a run on it and experiencing no flak, dropped our one bomb in the target area. We looked for the group for a while but could not find them. Unknown to us, they had aborted the mission and headed back.

Then we found out that we only had 400 gallons of gasoline left. The chances of us making it back across the Adriatic were very small and we had mountains to pass over on the way back. So we increased our altitude and we began to jettison all heavy equipment aboard the plane. I told the crew to throw everything out; ammo, flak suits, guns, anything that had any weight to it and anything that wasn't crucial to flying, in an effort to lighten the plane. On the way back two engines ran out of gas. Fortunately we had a little altitude and I felt we could make it back over the mountains back to the coast. I then called the crew on the intercom and explained we would not be able to make it back to the main base, but I would try to set down on the coast of Yugoslavia if possible. I gave the crew the option of bailing out. But they decided since I planned to stay with the plane that they would stay with the plane also.

As we approached the coast I had made the decision to try to land belly-up on the beach, but as we got there we found the Germans coming out of the woods like ants and they were firing at us with pistols and rifles, all hand-carried guns, no heavy equipment. We nevertheless felt like it wasn't a place we wanted to put the plane down. As a last chance, we figured that if we had to ditch we would try to make the Island of Vis. This was five miles off shore. Keeping what altitude we could, and as close as we could, we made it out to the island. We didn't know if it would be German held or Yugoslav-Partisan's, because this seemed to change on a weekly basis. Fortunately for us, it was held by the Yugoslavs that day. There was no landing strip on the island and I believe it was an English Major in charge of the Partisans.

Anyway, as we came in, we came in a little bit high intentionally, and on the approach, the gasoline ran out in the other two engines. We had enough altitude to coast in and we landed with the brakes on because we knew we didn't have enough dirt runway, just a path over a field of hard soil. The area we landed in was small mountains or foothills and on the approach there was a "V" shaped opening between these foothills. As we landed with the brakes on, there was a turn up at the end of about 2500 feet on the side of a small foothill to the right that didn't look too rough, so we hit the right brake and went on up

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)
the hill until the plane lost it's momentum and we put on the brakes and there we sat.

The Partisans on the island told us they were going to try to get us gasoline and asked me what the minimum amount would be to get the plane off, if I could, and get it back to the base in Italy. I told them I thought I'd have to have at least 600 gallons. These guys and women (they had both in their army) took a boat and at night they went back and forth and brought back 600 gallons of gasoline a little at a time in 5-gallon cans. I don't know what octane it was, but it worked! It took two days and nights for them to get 600 gallons of gas aboard my plane. We were preparing to take off and attempt to get across the Adriatic and back to Cerignola where our base was, when we found out that my co-pilot Dell Moudy had yellow-jaundice. The Major in charge of the Partisans told us he had a Russian plane coming in a couple of days. He suggested we leave Dell there and he would send him to the hospital aboard the Russian plane. So we left Dell with the Officer who promised to fly him out.

I put my engineer in the co-pilot's seat; he was a tough little guy. He said he didn't know how to fly, but he'd do the best he could if he had to. We then headed back to Cerignola and fortunately we made it back across the Adriatic. We were flying at a speed of over 200 miles an hour because we had stripped the plane down to where it didn't weigh much more than a kite!

When we arrived back at Cerignola, oddly enough, my crew chief was sitting at the tarmac and I couldn't believe how long he had been there, but he never gave up on us coming back. After everyone got on the trucks and went back, we stayed there trying to figure out why we had so much trouble getting back, because the rest of the planes got back with no gas problems. After we checked things out, we found that everything on the plane ran fine, but we found that the plane had Seiko carburetors but all the B-24's I had ever flown had Stromberg-Carlson carburetors. So I told my crew chief to find me four Stromberg-Carlson carburetors. I don't know where you're going to find them, but find them. I want them on there. He agreed.

This is the story as best I remember about myself standing beside the old #35. I can see 55-gallon oil drums behind it propping the nose up to where the landing gear had to be repaired because we had to keep cranking it up on the way back. It wouldn't work hydraulically. The bomb-bay doors had to be replaced and other damage had to be repaired so for a few days we had to use another plane until we got ours back. I think it was about a week before it was fully repaired.

The only other thing about this mission that was really rather humorous is the C.O. chewed me out for us throwing out the Norden Bomb Site to lighten the plane. But I felt like with all the planes that had been shot down or captured, that mine was just one more bombsite and they had that a long time ago. So with that we got out ok.

No matter how much madder it may make you, get out of bed forcing a smile. You may not smile because you are cheerful; but if you will force yourself to smile, you'll end up laughing.

You will be cheerful because you smile. Repeated experiments prove that when a person assumes the facial expression of a given mental mood - any given mood - then that mental mood itself will follow.

The 461st Liberaider
461st Bombardment Group (H)
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Inactivated: 27 August 1945
Incorporated: 15 November 1985

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(Continued from page 5)

into leather sheep-lined trousers as I slipped the suspenders over my shoulders, placed my feet into sheep-lined boots sufficiently large enough to cover my shoes, and slipped into a heavy leather sheep-lined jacket. Over this layer of clothing, I buckled a seat cushion parachute and harness. I would later place a spare chest chute behind my seat which could be snapped onto my harness if a need arose to bail out of the aircraft, but the main parachute was designed to be used as a seat cushion and was permanently attached to the harness. Finally, I placed a sheep-lined cap with an attached oxygen mask and earphones over my head. I would later place a pair of leather sheep-lined gloves behind my seat to be used at colder altitudes. Next, I placed an extra pair of boots, a spare chute, gloves, metal helmet, and flak vest behind my seat. The helmet and flak vest was to be employed whenever we encountered enemy fire. The pilot and copilot seats were encased in iron and called 'coffin seats' because they suspiciously resembled an iron coffin. In order to protect the pilots, thick cast-iron plates about one foot wide had been attached to each side and above each seat. Another plate was installed behind and underneath the seat so that we were virtually seated inside an upright iron coffin. It might have been good protection from flying fragments of anti-aircraft shells, but observing a coffin each time we entered the cockpit did little to buoy our spirits.

While I made an instrument check inside the cockpit, Dave made an outside inspection of the airplane. Flight engineer, John Ribovich, checked to see that all equipment was in order and securely stowed away. He started the generator to provide power for instruments and interior lights until the engines were started and the generator was no longer needed. The navigator crawled into the nose section to arrange his navigational tools while the bombardier examined the five hundred-pound bombs hanging in the bomb bay. Russ, the radio operator, was tuning his radio bands and the gunners checked their guns. Dave and I began a pre-flight engine checklist in time to start the engines and begin our taxi a few minutes before 0700.

At the completion of a pre-flight checklist, we began to start the engines. I turned to look out my side window and thrilled to the sight of sixty B-24s around us, creating a landscape of over two hundred turning propeller windmills. The noise was deafening. It was almost 0700 as we quickly went through a taxi checklist before moving into line for takeoff.. Sixty huge bombers taxing from every direction must patiently wait in a traffic jam for a signal to move onto the taxi strip. I had never before witnessed such a huge traffic jam but when we were finally allowed onto the taxi strip behind our formation leader, we moved rather briskly toward our takeoff position. We were instructed to complete the takeoff movement as we turned onto the end of the runway and to accelerate our forward movement as we turned onto the runway. It was imperative that we move quickly in order to conserve fuel for those aircraft waiting behind us for takeoff and those in the air waiting to rendezvous with us before heading toward the target. To launch and assemble sixty airplanes in the air was a very complex operation and sometimes required an hour or more. We consumed about ten percent of our 2750 gallons of fuel while taxing, waiting for takeoff and rendezvousing.

Our formation leader lifted from the runway ahead of us when I observed a control officer standing beside the runway on a command jeep holding a flag. Waving the flag, he signaled the airplane waiting for takeoff to begin rolling forward as the aircraft ahead cleared the runway. When our turn came for takeoff, he signaled us to start our roll. Dave replied with a traditional thumb and first finger forming an O before pushing the throttles forward. The control officer responded with a raised thumb in a "good luck" signal as we slowly gained speed down the runway. With five thousand pounds of bombs, twenty-seven hundred gallons of fuel, a full supply of ammunition, and a crew of ten airmen, our overloaded B-24 laboriously shuddered off the ground the last few feet of the entire runway. During briefing, we were instructed to fly an assigned heading and to rendezvous with the group over a designated site on our map. Upon joining our formation, our leader continued to circle over the area waiting for our formation to be completed by those who were delayed. The group leader also continued to circle waiting for all squadron formations to form into a larger group. Bombers

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

covered the sky like a cloud of disturbed bees from a honeycomb.

We had been assigned the number four slot that was directly behind and below the formation leader. Positions number two and three would fly off the right and left wing of the leader. Number five and six would fly just above our right and left wing, and number seven, would fly behind and below us. Poor weather was an impediment to locating the formation leader after takeoff. We could keep our leader in sight as he left the runway under normal visual conditions, but with many airplanes in the sky and poor visibility, we could only circle the rendezvous area searching for him until some crew member was able to recognize the numbers painted on his aircraft. It was important that we find our leader, but it was even more essential that we avoid crashing into other aircraft. The sky was a dangerous place to be in those days, and not entirely of the enemy. We lost almost as many airplanes in air collisions or hurried overloaded takeoffs as we lost in enemy encounters. Subsequently we found our formation leader, snuggled into position, and waited for our group leader to turn in the direction of our target. As we climbed toward our assigned bombing altitude of twenty-five thousand feet, we maintained a loose formation. Sustaining close formation for six or eight hours would exhaust even the super-strong. Flying the number four slot was exceptionally tiring because we were exposed to propeller turbulence created by the lead plane in front of us. The turbulence made it difficult to maintain a stable position so that our wingmen could fly near us. Many times the weather would create additional turbulence.

Soon after leaving the rendezvous area, an order was given to clear all guns. All too often, machineguns jam from extreme temperatures and from other causes; consequently, it was judicious to test-fire them before flying deep into enemy territory. The entire formation fired several bursts from each gun sending a cascade of shell casings tumbling into the air below. Our slot in the formation, below and behind the three leading B-24s, made our airplane more vulnerable to colliding with shell casings ejected from above; consequently, we lagged behind the leader until the firing ceased.

We headed over the Adriatic Sea to the coast of Yugoslavia and deeper into enemy territory. Germany controlled the military defenses of Yugoslavia, and although we avoided flying over known gun emplacements, we were occasionally surprised. I ordered the crew to their gun stations after crossing the Yugoslavia coast in preparation for any surprise fighter attacks. When we approached our IP (initial point) and prepared to turn onto our designated bomb run heading, weather conditions ahead were ideal. There were only scattered clouds and the ground was plainly visible to our bombardiers while they adjusted their Norton bombsights. We saw some flak at a distance but no German fighters were in sight. To protect us from enemy fighters, a group of American P-51 fighter planes had greeted us over the coast of Yugoslavia, and like a swarm of flies, they were nervously scurrying in every direction. Nothing was more pleasing to me than sighting a group of American fighter planes waiting to escort us into enemy territory. Dave and I began to don our flak vests and metal helmets.

Flak vests were made with overlapping metal strips sewn into canvas and tailored into a vest. Barely impeded by the thin aluminum covering of a B-24, shrapnel from exploding anti-aircraft shells was an ever-present danger to a bomber crew. A flak vest offered some body protection and our flak helmets somewhat shielded our heads. The iron coffin seat also partially protected the pilots' back and sides, but our legs and face were completely exposed. Whenever flak was exploding nearby, I would pull the vest up over my nose and the helmet down over my eyes leaving a small opening from which I could see ahead; nevertheless, I received little comfort. I felt as if I was naked.

As we approached the target, waist gunners scattered bales of chaff out the waist windows. We deployed chaff, narrow strips of metallic foil that deflected enemy radar, in an attempt to interfere with the accuracy of their anti-aircraft guns. After our gunners had dispensed the chaff, the entire sky seemed to sparkle like diamonds from the sun reflecting from dancing floating strips of foil. Dave said to the bombardier,

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

"Pilot to bombardier, you're on PDI."

PDI are initials for Pilot Directional Indicator, an instrument that connects the autopilot to the bombsight and allows the bombardier to control the airplane with each adjustment of his bombsight. As he maneuvers the cross hairs of the bombsight to the center of the target, every adjustment moves the controls of the airplane, inexorably moving it to the precise spot that will send the bombs to the center of the target. The pilot may override the PDI at any time and always resumes control when the bombardier releases the bombs. Bombardier Sullivan had been ordered to release the bombs by "sight" but Dave suggested they pretend that he was controlling the airplane while he practiced sighting through his bombsight. Flying in close formation, it was necessary for the pilot to be in constant control of the aircraft. Only the lead bombardier normally employed the bombsight and other bombardiers released their bombs with a toggle switch the instant they saw the bombs drop from the lead airplane. This method of bombing was known as "pattern bombing". Bombardier Sullivan made small adjustments to his bombsight while he practiced maintaining the crosshairs of the bombsight centered on the target, but shortly before we arrived dead center over the target, he abandoned his bombsight and concentrated on the bomb bay of the lead airplane. When he saw the bombs appear in the bomb bay of the lead airplane, he released our bombs with a toggle switch and said, "Bombs away!"

The moment the bombs were released our aircraft, 5000 pounds lighter, lifted as if a burst of air had pushed it upward. It was the first time I had been in the immediate area of bursting anti-aircraft bombs, and although we encountered what was considered light flak, numerous small black clouds appeared around our airplane. Because of the noise from aircraft engines, they seemed soundless and harmless, but an experienced pilot once said to me, "You should not worry about the black clouds you can see. The ones you cannot see are the ones that will get you." Nevertheless, I flinched each time I saw a puff of black smoke appear near us.

An instant after "bombs away", the formation leader made a steep vertical turn to the right while losing altitude and gaining speed. Maintaining a close formation, we locked our airplane onto his airplane as he turned and dived away from the target. The maneuver said to me, "Now that we have dropped our bombs – it's time to get the hell outa' here!" By rapidly changing altitude and speed we were no longer a stationary target, as we had been during the bomb run. While turning away from the target, I had an unobstructed view of the target beneath us. The oil refinery was sending up black smoke from burning oil almost to our altitude – a billowing, twisting, gray mushroom cloud that looked like a tornado in reverse.

Enemy anti-aircraft gunners ceased firing at us as we turned away from the target. We could then relax and level out for an uneventful return flight. This had been my first mission; one that we called 'a milk run' with few casualties and little damage to our bombers. During our peaceful return journey, I contemplated the difference between a 'milk run' and a 'big one', a term used for any mission that encounters heavy flak, enemy fighters, and suffers many casualties. I concluded that to be dead, there was no difference between these missions. One is no less dead if killed during a 'milk run'.

Our formation leader flew directly over the runway at an altitude that allowed each pilot to peel away from the formation into a landing pattern. I did not see flares fired from any aircraft that signaled a request for landing priority because of wounded crewmembers; however emergency staffs were always on standby to meet us upon landing. There was ever present the danger of landing accidents. I would later see much of this.

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

Theodore Roosevelt

(Continued from page 1)

Some group personnel got into action, whether on base or off. Going back 58 years to 1943, what did you do off duty? Did you work on a car or study a correspondence course or maybe play in a dance band on weekends? Well, here's one activity that a few of us participated in, and this was taking down barracks and other buildings. It was November 1942 for several dozen of us new to the A.A.C. who were struggling at Peterson Air Field just east of Colorado Springs, Colo. Our assignment for more than a day was to go into a Civilian Conservation Camp in the San Isabel Mountains 75 miles south of Colorado Springs. Its 80 or so buildings had been built by the C.C.C. during the Great Depression years, but by World War II it had been abandoned. As seen by the photo, below left, we tore apart a number of barracks, saving the walls and partitions plus some roofs. For 20- to 25-year-olds, this was flabbergasting – we were "hired" to be in airplane-related jobs, and here we were tossing crowbars around!

Then came overseas beyond-the-call-of-duty things to do. You remember Cerignola and Torretta Air Base, certainly. Cooking, repairing planes, planning flight routes, flying the mission, administering. But digging ditches? Sure, to put the old Italian ranch site into condition for several hundred crew members, mechanics and others to live at Torretta, our favorite 461st leaders had us out in snowy-rainy weather of February, 1944 digging a ditch for water or sewer lines. Instead of training my eye and fingers to trace a map or take a photo, this order put the ol' back into back-breaking slugging and slosh reminiscent of the 1930s.

At Torretta there was more than planes and Air Corps people. When off duty, we could see something different. Some of us went to Foggia and Bari for relaxation. And then some only had to walk a few hundred feet to see the shy yet curious animals. Remember the mare which in spring, 1945 showed off her colt, maybe even daring us to come any closer? None of us in or near the photo tent can ever forget Lady. This light-brown female dog showed up to give birth to 5 puppies right there. We adopted Lady – petted, encouraged her, fed her and welcomed her to stay around. And she did. She made a spectacle of feeding those pups where we could watch and feel good about helping her. She most frequently lay down so most or all could suck at once. Note how she stood while the fatty fellow took his nourishment, haunching on his rear legs and wagging an appreciative tail.

No doubt, though, the 461st's help in summer, 1945 by flying in food and medical supplies to a P.O.W. hospital and camp (was it at Spittal or in Yugoslavia?) gave us the most satisfaction. We had an opportunity to help toward the end of the war, and the 461st was there.

Our bomb group had another side to it that carries many memories.

An elderly man in Phoenix calls his son in New York and says, "I hate to ruin your day, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are divorcing; forty-five years of misery is enough."

"Pop, what are you talking about?" the son screams.

"We can't stand the sight of each other any longer," the old man says. "We're sick of each other, and I'm sick of talking about this, so you call your sister in Chicago and tell her," and he hangs up.

Frantic, the son calls his sister, who explodes on the phone. "Like heck they're getting divorced," she shouts, "I'll take care of this."

She calls Phoenix immediately, and screams at the old man, "You are NOT getting divorced. Don't do a single thing until I get there. I'm calling my brother back, and we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don't do a thing, DO YOU HEAR ME?" and hangs up.

The old man hangs up his phone and turns to his wife. "Okay," he says, "They're coming for Thanksgiving and paying their own air fares. Now what do we tell them for Christmas?"

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A grandmother is giving directions to her grown grandson, who is coming to visit with his wife: "You come to the front door of the apartment complex. I am in apartment 14T. There is a big panel at the door. With your elbow push button 14T. I will buzz you in. Come inside, the elevator is on the right. Get in, and with your elbow hit 14. When you get out I am on the left. With your elbow, hit my doorbell."

"Grandma, that sounds easy, but why am I hitting all these buttons with my elbow"?

"You're coming empty handed?"

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We're on the web!
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New Website

The 461st Bombardment Group has a new website with a new look and feel. Hughes Glantzberg, son of the "Big G", has agreed to take over the website. The old address, www.461st.com, implied that we were a company. The new address, www.461st.org, implies we are an organization which is more appropriate. If you happen to go to the old website, you should see a redirect to the new website. I have noticed one problem with the redirect. If you attempt to click on the new address, it will give you an error because it was incorrectly posted. Hopefully this will be corrected before too long, but in the mean time, just copy the address into your browser or type it in. If you have any problems getting to the website or see any errors on the website, please let me know. I hope to make myself available for changes as much as possible. The easiest way to contact me is via E-Mail at hughes@hugheshelpdesk.com. If you aren't on the Internet, you can still contact me at P.O. Box 926, Gunnison, CO 81230 or give me a call at (970) 209-2788. All I ask is that you use the phone number sparingly as it is my cell phone so there are limits. The new website has only been up for about a month and we've already had over 300 hits. A number of people have contributed changes to the website. I appreciate this. I may be doing the work, but I need your input to make it work. Keep the notes coming!