



*The 461st*

# Liberaider



Vol. 19, No. 2

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SOMEWHERE IN THE USA

## The Soldier

It's the soldier, not the reporter, who gives us freedom of the press.

It's the soldier, not the poet, who gives us freedom of speech.

It's the soldier, not the campaign manager, who gives us the freedom to demonstrate.

It's the soldier who salutes the flag; who serves beneath the flag; whose coffin is draped by the flag; who allows protesters to burn the flag.

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## A Manuscript

By  
George T. Henry

I was trying to make room. I have been in the photography business since I graduated from college and after I had parted from B-24s and WWII.

I was going through old clutter and making more shelf space for new clutter. As I gradually filled wastebaskets I can across this old, green cardboard, somewhat mildewed suitcase. It was under a layer of old sorted negatives

that, believe it or not, were put on top of this old suitcase so I would know where they were.

All of a sudden I said to myself, "What in the world is in there?" I opened the latches – they still worked – and there, sitting on top of WWII orders of base changes, directions of who I was and where I should go, and other related material were two manuals. One manual was how to operate the B-24, and the other was maintenance of the B-24.

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## My Story of the Linz Mission – July 25, 1944

By  
S/Sgt. Kermit C. Harrison  
765<sup>th</sup> Squadron, 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group

We had just completed our bomb run over Linz, Austria when fighters coming from the rear, passing under us, set us afire. This was the first actual plane attack that I had a chance to shoot back at the fighters. I was busy shooting at the enemy planes and I got two of them (German fighters). I was busy shooting at the enemy when the pilot, Ken Githens, gave the orders to abandon ship. When I finally decided it was time to

leave the plane, I got out of the turret and found I was the only one still in the plane. The bombardier and navigator were just opening the nose wheel door to bail out but it was jammed so they had gone out through the bomb bay so I forced the nose wheel door open. Later Githens said he thought he saw me come out about 15 seconds before the plane blew up. He figured I was wounded so badly I couldn't get out and he left the plane.

As I turned the first time, I bailed out and saw the plane, Sleepytime Gal,

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# Taps

May they rest in peace forever

Please forward all death notices to:  
Hughes Glantzberg  
P.O. Box 926  
Gunnison, CO 81230  
hughes@hugheshelpdesk.com

or  
Bob Hayes  
2345 Tall Sail Drive, Apt. G  
Charleston, SC 29414-6570  
BOB461st@aol.com

## Missing No Longer

### 764th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Demjen, Frank J.	Martinville, IN	1092	June 4, 1992
Fischer, Harold D.	Wakefield, NE	748	Mar. 3, 2002
Granger, Urban	Kanakee, IL	612	Apr. 23, 2002

### 765th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Buxton, Charles A.	Fruitland, FL	748	Apr. 27, 2002
Curtain, Joseph S.	Annapolis, MD	746	Mar. 7, 2001
Ender, Loel E.	Milwaukee, WI	060	Mar. 16, 1997
Farris, John L.	Marshville, NC	060	Jan. 1, 2001
Smith, Van V. Jr.	Casselberry, FL	612	Nov. 25, 2000

### 766th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Crystier, John R.	San Diego, CA	1092	Dec. 18, 1990
Cumming, Isaac I.	Boise, ID	683	Dec. 17, 2001
Edinger, Robert F.	N. Versailles, PA	612	Jul 21, 2001

### 766th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Ellers, Norman L.	Charleston, IL	1034	Jan 1, 2002
Reitnauer, Cedric A.	Boyertown, PA	888	2002

### A Gunner's Vow

Author Unknown

I wished to be a pilot,  
And you along with me.

But if we all were pilots  
Where would the Air Force be?

It takes GUTS to be a Gunner,  
To sit out in the tail

When the Messerschmitts are coming  
And the slugs begin to wail.

The pilot's just a chauffer,  
It's his job to fly the plane,

But it's WE who do the fighting,  
Though we may not get the fame.

If we all must be Gunners  
Then let us make this bet:

We'll be the best damn Gunners  
That have left this station yet.

## Rules of the Air

Every takeoff is optional. Every landing is mandatory.

If you push the stick forward, the houses get bigger. If you pull the stick back, they get smaller. That is, unless you keep pulling the stick all the way back, then they get bigger again.

Flying isn't dangerous. Crashing is what's dangerous.

It's always better to be down here wishing you were up there than up there wishing you were down here.

The ONLY time you have too much fuel is when you're on fire.

The propeller is just a big fan in front of the plane used to keep the pilot cool. When it stops, you can actually watch the pilot start sweating.

When in doubt, hold on to your altitude. No one has ever collided with the sky.

A 'good' landing is one from which you can walk away. A 'great' landing is one after which they can use the plane again.

Learn from the mistakes of others. You won't live long enough to make all of them yourself.

You know you've landed with the wheels up if it takes full power to taxi to the ramp.

The probability of survival is inversely proportional to the angle of arrival. Large angle of arrival, small probability of survival and vice versa.

Never let an aircraft take you somewhere your brain didn't get to five minutes earlier.

Stay out of clouds. The silver lining everyone keeps talking about might be another airplane going in the opposite direction. Reliable sources also report that mountains have been known to hide out in clouds.

Always try to keep the number of landings you make equal to the number of take offs you've made.

There are three simple rules for making a smooth landing. Unfortunately no one knows what they are.

You start with a bag full of luck and an empty bag of experience. The trick is to fill the bag of experience before you empty the bag of luck.

Helicopters can't fly; they're just so ugly the earth repels them.

If all you can see out of the window is ground that's going round and round and all you can hear is commotion coming from the passenger compartment, things are not at all as they should be.

Good judgment comes from experience. Unfortunately, the experience usually comes from bad judgment.

It's always a good idea to keep the pointy end going forward as much as possible. Keep looking around. There's always something you've missed.

Remember, gravity is not just a good idea. It's the law. And it's not subject to repeal.

## AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL 461<sup>st</sup> VETERANS

Hello, my name is Dave Blake. My Dad was a pilot in the 765<sup>th</sup> during the last half of 1944.

May I ask, how many family members or friends have you told your war stories to? I remember hearing a few stories as a kid but never asked many questions. Later in life I still did not ask questions. Even when my Dad and father-in-law (also a B-24 pilot, 8<sup>th</sup> AF, 491<sup>st</sup> BG) got together I did not "butt" into their lively wartime conversations. I have always been interested when I would hear a story but simply never thought to ask about it. Well both of these fine men are gone now and I cannot ask them all of the questions I have. I have read accounts of so many of my generation saying, "Well I didn't think he wanted to talk about it". Or "he never said much about the war". Come to find out, most of us have simply not asked our fathers, grandfathers or uncles about the war, and would have been given tons of information had we only asked! It seems that you men are typically modest and won't "bore" people with these stories unless you are asked. Please do your loved ones a favor, even if they don't know it at the time. **Tell them!** Better yet, write it down too. There could well come a day when they will be darned glad you did. It would be worth much to me to be able to go back, ask, listen and just soak it up! If your family and friends are not interested, tell me your stories! Thank you for the incredible job you did. Thanks to you men and countless others just like you I can sit here and write this in complete freedom! May God richly bless you.

Dave Blake  
648 Lakewood Rd.  
Bonner Springs, KS 66012

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Both of these manuals were in pretty good condition, as I don't think anyone connected with the B-24s ever read them; I know I didn't.

Anyway I wondered if I could get any hindsight if I just read the introduction. I opened the cover of one of the manuals and, reading only a couple of paragraphs, discovered that we really didn't need a huge air force. Just a few B-24s that could go out and bomb their targets and on their way home shoot down half of the German air force.

I was surprised too! Let me pass on to you what the manual says as to the powers of this great plane.

“One B-24 was separated from formation over target and attacked by 14 ME-109s. Through skillful maneuvering and use of firepower this crew shot down 8 of the enemy fighters in a running battle of 100 miles and returned safely to base.

“In another instance a B-24 with the tail turret out was attacked in a running battle. Enemy fighters knew the vulnerable spot and as they approached from the rear the airplane was maneuvered so that the top turret gunner could fire at them. Nine enemy planes were shot down in this manner.”

From the Pilot Training  
Manual B-24 – The Liberator

As you can see, only two individual B-24s, flying home after becoming disabled, shot down 15 German planes. Now that's not bad and seems to be just as good as maybe a squadron of fighters taking on the rest of the German air force.

Anyway, in trying to find out if any of these manuals had been saved as historic pieces, I was asked to reminisce on a couple of my experiences in the 461<sup>st</sup> as I flew from my base in Italy.

Thank God for summer vacations. Without those I probably would have become an officer in the infantry. I was in my second year at Coe College in my hometown of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Coe was one of

the chosen colleges that had a ROTC program and the military personnel to run it. ROTC was required of all male students. I was proficient on the rifle team, and making good grades when along came WWII. At that time all the military were briefed and the program had a purpose. Those that wished could sign up for the advanced course and at their graduation could become 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. In the infantry. I just supposed that was the route I would take, basically because it was there. Along came spring and I happened to mention to one of the military officers at Coe that I would not be going to summer school because I was going to vacation at our cottage at the lake. I had done this all my summers and I didn't want to stop now. Was told that if I didn't go to summer school I could not continue in their advanced program.

Well I still wanted my summer off so I went to Des Moines and enlisted in the Air Corps. Then I took my summer off and went back to Coe in the fall. I was finally called up the following semester, became a cadet and got my commission in the Army Air Corp and not the infantry.

Again, thank God for summer vacations.

Graz was our target on my second mission. As you join a squadron you start at the back of the formation and work your way forward. I was back as the #9 plane in a ten-plane formation. Graz didn't have a huge number of guns but it was known that their gunners were as good as any in the German army.

It was a clear day, but we had been given a new weapon, a radar-jamming device and we were trying it out for the first time. Our squadron flew over Graz, dropped our bombs and returned home. We had used our new gadget and it had worked just like it was supposed to. We had few bursts of flak and not even close to our altitude. We had the war won! All we had to do was fly to our targets, jam their radar, drop our bombs and fly home.

Mission number 3 was back to Graz. I was number 9 again. It was cloudy and overcast. We felt good because we had our new toy. We approached Graz and

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### Part III

all of a sudden a red burst of flak at our altitude about 100 feet in front of us. Oh-oh! We started our bomb run. Planes were aborting to the left and to the right. I started moving up, first to number 6 position and almost immediately to number 3. We now had four planes in our formation and we were not on target. Again --- Oh-oh! We had to make the run again! We had started with ten planes and now the four that were left went around again. This time we dropped our bombs and within seconds, before our bomb bay doors could be closed, the lead plane received a direct hit in the bomb bay. A big hole appeared as all the radio equipment disappeared thru the side of the plane. Some damage was done to the controls but the plane flew on.

What happened to all the planes that left the formation? I was told later that they were all able to land someplace; some in Russia; some in Yugoslavia and a couple made it home. What had happened to our wonderful radar-jamming machine? Well, it seems that the gunners had learned well. They had learned to zero in on the machine and were able to get our exact altitude and location. So much for technology.

### Part II

It was summer; it was hot and we were still wearing our winter wool outfits. We kept waiting for the notice to be posted that summer was really at hand and that it was hot and that the 461<sup>st</sup> could change into their cooler khakis. Day after day it didn't happen so my co-pilot and I decided that our uniform for the day would be the lighter outfit.

We put on our khakis but everyone else still had wool uniforms on. We weren't sure exactly what would happen, but we sure got the once-over by all. Day one – nothing happened. Day two – nothing happened. Day three – a notice appeared on the bulletin board that no one would change into summer uniforms until the order to do so was issued. Day four – we were back in our winter uniforms. Day five – the order was issued to go to summer uniforms. We did!

I was flying number 3 position as we were assembling our formation after takeoff. Everything was normal as we started on our way until I noticed a slight drop in oil pressure on an inboard engine. Upon visually checking the engine I discovered that it was throwing some oil around the cowling. Being very patriotic and knowing how difficult it was to replace oil in a B-24 in flight, I called the lead plane and reported my finding. The lead plane was very patriotic too so he called the P-40 that supervised the flights as they assembled for their mission. Lo and behold, out of nowhere, a P-40 was flying, as if in formation, under my engine and inspecting it thoroughly. The report came through my radio, "It looks OK to me." And away we went on the mission.

We had been gone maybe an hour with the oil pressure gradually decreasing when all of a sudden, with no oil pressure at all, the engine quit. Now here I was in a perfectly good airplane with a load of bombs that I really didn't want to take home with me so I radioed the lead to see if I could continue to target on three engines. He said OK, so on we went.

Now a B-24 flies well on three engines. I had no trouble as we were increasing altitude and got nearer the target, but I had miscalculated how high I could fly and maintain formation without putting a heavy stress on the other engines. We had reached about 21,000 feet on the way to 24,000 when I found my other engines were getting to a point where they might be overextended and might also quit. Having not read my B-24 manual, I didn't realize how well we were equipped and how we could shoot down 8-10 enemy planes as we headed for home on less than the normal four engines, so I turned back when we still had at least three.

As we headed for home, we still didn't want to bring our bombs back so we looked for a target of opportunity. Well, we didn't want to stretch our luck too far and make the Germans mad at us. So when we saw some railroad tracks we followed them from above and dropped our bombs on the tracks. Having no bombardier (only planes #1 and #2 had them) we

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disintegrate. I took a free fall as they had instructed me and when I opened my parachute I could see the rest of the crew way above me. I was oscillating so terribly in my chute that I prayed the chute would stop oscillating. Fortunately it did stop and it seemed as though I wasn't dropping at all until I got near the ground. There was just the whistling of the wind through the shrouds. When I got near the ground, it seemed it was coming at me 100 miles per hour.

I landed in a large fir tree. My parachute let me down below the branches and I thumped against the trunk of the tree. There I was stuck about 50 feet above the ground. I could pick myself up with both hands but I had lost so much oxygen that I couldn't hold myself up with one hand. I had to hang in my parachute harness until my body acquired enough oxygen and strength. Then I could pull myself up and hold myself with one hand and unbuckle the chute with the other.

I tried to hook my legs around the trunk to hold me but when I let loose I shinnied the tree to the ground and landed on a rock. I took off my flak suit and helmet and as I started to leave, there was a stray bullet that went singing through the forest. I immediately turned in the opposite direction. Down the creek I ran. As I jumped over a bush a little deer ran out from under me. Gee, it was little!

There was timber on the creek. Out away from the creek there was farmland. Everything was either timber or farmed. I ran until I was out of breath, then stopped and walked until I heard voices. I crawled into a bunch of bushes and in the middle of it there was a large stump. I backed up against the stump and took my wallet out and buried it and anything that had my identification. I could still hear voices. Pretty soon I saw a bunch of women and girls picking wild raspberries. I had crawled into a raspberry bush. They picked and went home for dinner. While they were picking I heard a motorcycle go into the farmhouse across the creek. When the women left they went in the direction of this farmhouse. Evidently they had seen me. It was just a little while until they were back with a soldier calling

to me... "Hello, Hello". They brought the soldier right back to the bushes and went on down the creek. But they didn't look in the bushes where they had been picking so I escaped being captured that time.

I waited until dark before I came out. I made a practice of traveling by night and sleeping by day. I climbed into a tree to sleep. I spent my days in the forest. It didn't take long in a tree to get all the sleep I could get. One day while in the forest sitting on a rail fence I got a flicker of something out of the corner of my eye. I fell off the fence backward and rolled down into some brush. Pretty soon there was a guy by the fence seeing what had made the commotion but he never found me.

Another day I spent watching as Army camp drill. Then I got started following a railroad that was probably a bad thing, but I was able to locate where I was on my map. One evening as I came out into a meadow I heard an airplane and I knew it was an American plane. I stood out in the meadow and it came down right over me. It was a B-17 with two motors shot out. They were evidently hedge hopping back to Italy. I could see the gunner plainly in the waist of the plane. I waved to them wishing I could hitch a ride but they didn't see me. Another time I crawled into a wheat field that was ripe and pretty soon I could hear people talking. They were harvesting the wheat by hand.

I was eating what I could as I lay in the wheat field. I had to keep moving back up the field as they kept getting closer to me. My main diet was raw potatoes that I gathered in the fields. I was trying to make my way back to Yugoslavia.

Once while walking on a road I heard a vehicle and saw it coming around the bend. As it turned out I fell into a bomb crater and I could see the eyes of the men looking at me.

I came to a river that I thought might be the Danube. There were some boats chained down. There was a



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town or city down by the bend in the river. I tried to make a raft but when I put it in the river it fell apart. Some men were fishing across the river. I had to wait until I thought they went home for dinner. I broke the padlock on a chained boat by smashing it with a large rock. I got across the river only to find one man had not left. When I got ashore I ran with the chain up the bank and into a field. No one came after me.

Another time I was on a road that had bridges over it. There was no road up to these bridges. I stayed there during the day as it was a good place to hide.

After following the railroads there was a little man who would come to me every night and travel with me. When I would get tired I'd lie down on the side of the track and rest and the little man would shake me and say it was time to get going again. As we would come to Y's or branches in the railroad, he would tell me which way to go. He traveled with me several nights. When we would come to a bridge he would tell me when the guards were out of the way so we could cross.

He was supposedly a conductor on the railroad. He made the run to the Yugoslavia border and he had a plan to get on the train on his run, and then to get me across the border. One night we were going along and two other fellows joined us. When we came to a branch in the tracks they were going one way and I asked the little man which way to go. He got on the other side of me and said we were to go the other way... "Don't go with the two men. They will get you in trouble".

I got caught out in the open the last day that I walked. I was passing through a little village at day-

light. There was a tunnel just beyond where I could go into the forest. As I went past the depot, the telegraph operator came out and either set a dog on me or called it off. After I passed through the tunnel there was a man working in his garden and a woman milking a cow. They saw me and I went into the forest as soon as I could.

I was getting further into the Alps. The potatoes were smaller if I could find any at all, but there was a bean patch that was about mature so I figured that night I could probably get some of them and maybe some potatoes.

I went into the forest and climbed a tree and slept for about two hours. When I awoke I decided to climb to the top of a mountain to see what I could see on the other side. Do you know what I saw from the top of the mountain? Another mountain.

So the spud patch drew me back the way I had come. When I reached the bottom I came to a load of logs that had been left in the forest. As I sat on these logs the sun came out and began to warm me. My clothes began to steam so I decided this would be a good place to dry them out. I undressed and laid them on a log and sat and turned them as they dried.

Pretty soon I got warm and laid down in the sunshine and went to sleep. The next thing I knew there was an officer standing over me hollering, "Rouse, rouse!" meaning, "Get up, get up!" He was more afraid than I was. If he could hold his luger still it looked big enough that I could have crawled into it. He made me dress and took me down to a farm.

He got the farmer and made me undress again as he held his gun on me. The farmer took my clothes and

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

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went over every seam to see if he could find any messages or identification. They figured I was a saboteur that had dropped into their country. The farmer sent his daughter to get a schoolteacher to come and interrogate me. She had been residing in New York and had gone back to Germany to study and then was caught in the war. She tried to get me to tell her where I was from but all I gave her was my name, rank and serial number.

They eventually sent for a doctor who was the only one that had a car. They transported me into town where they locked me in the basement of a home. There I lost track of time but I believe I stayed there three days. Each night the women brought me sour milk and bread and told me not to tell anyone. Then the army showed up and took me to an army camp where they put me in solitary confinement.

Here I completely lost track of time. There was no window, no light. I spent quite a bit of time here, but I mostly slept. Officers would come and wake me up and rant and rave because I would only give them my name, rank and serial number. They made no attempt to feed me but finally one night a man dressed in white, perhaps the cook, brought me a little piece of black bread. Later I was put on a train and sent to Linz, Austria where I had been shot down.

Here again, I was put into solitary confinement but this room had a small window at the top of the wall. I could stand on a radiator and see out into the sky. It was at an airfield and every day at 10:55 they would start to fire up their aircraft. I would climb onto the radiator and look out. Immediately a P-38 reconnaissance plane would come into sight. The fighters would go and try and catch it. They had been constructing a Goering Tank works at Linz that the Allies had been watching under construction.

The day the first tank was to roll off the tank works, the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force mounted a major attack and this was the target that we bombed when we were shot down. This went on every day I was in confinement.

After they had gathered six of us on the same raid into Linz, they sent us to Frankfurt on the Main that

was their main interrogation center for all Air Force. Again, it was solitary confinement. This time they didn't ask any questions but told us the following:

What field we flew off from

Ship number

Name of plane

The crewmembers

The only thing they didn't know was where I came from. They had no record of my entering the service. They knew the names of the fellows and their positions and how many missions had been flown. I was asked if I smoked and I said no. There was a boy and a girl who came in and the officer asked me if I would give them my cigarettes. I said yes. I had to give them to the couple, as the officer wasn't allowed to do so. He told me that before the year was up I would be interrogating him, which proved to be right.

They chastised me for not turning myself in so that I could be with my crew. I was sent to the same camp, Stalag Luft IV, but not to the same compound. The camp was northeast of Prussia. It was near Crosty Gow, a city in northern Poland. Food in the prison camp consisted of kolarabi soup once a day. Once in a while we had potatoes in it and once in a great while barley. We rarely had any meat and when we did I swore it was dog. We got a fourth of a Red Cross parcel a week. This consisted of dried fruit, raisins and chocolate bars, a can of dried milk, a package of cigarettes and coffee (one ounce instant). I traded marmalade, chocolate, cigarettes and coffee for raisins and some kind of high-grade wafers.

They brought in British airmen who had been POWs for five years. They had made a radio and listened to BBC every night and would then give us a report on how the war was going. To avoid being detected we started fights and made a lot of noise out in the area where they were trying to receive a broadcast.

We stayed here until March 8, 1945 when the Russians had taken Stettin and the Germans marched us to Stettin Bay. They put us on barges and we

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crossed over to the other side of the bay. They put us on the march. They did not feed us.

From then on as the Russians made a drive we were marched to the western front and then when the western Allies made a push we were marched to the eastern front. I crossed the Elbe River five times. When the Allies found us we had protection. After we crossed a bridge I watched the fighters destroy it. There were 10,000 in the group I was marching in. Toward the end of the war we crossed the Elbe on barges and as soon as they got all of us across the fighters came in and sank the barges. One day the Germans infiltrated an army into our columns and when night came they separated from us. We had been patrolled very heavy that day. As soon as they separated the two columns from us the fighters literally destroyed the Germans. At night we slept in barns. Some of us stood looking at the pigs and thinking how good one of these would taste. Then a stray bullet came in and hit one of the pigs, disintegrating it. I dove for cover under a small pine tree thinking I was alone. When things quieted down there were five of us under this little tree.

We were locked in the barn for the rest of the night. Food was practically non-existent while we were on the march. What food we did get was potatoes and if the farmer wasn't using his boiler they would boil them for us. These potatoes were in mounds that had been covered with straw and dirt for storage.

Some time during the day, after dressing, we would be sitting on one of these mounds and stuffing our pockets with potatoes. We all carried a Red Cross parcel on our backs. We tried, as best we could, to keep this full of potatoes. While on the march we got two half parcels from the Red Cross. Fighter planes wounded a horse and the guards were unhappy about this. We had horse meat.

After March 15, 1945, guards were traded and we got old crippled soldiers to guard us. Word was passed down the first night that if we wanted a fire we had to get our own wood. The former guards wouldn't allow us to build a fire. From then on we had a fire at night and enjoyed cooked potatoes in-

stead of raw ones.

On May 4 the German command told our ranking non-coms that they were going to turn us loose and we could do what we wanted. They were going to turn the guards loose to go home. We decided to sit tight in the farmyard as a group until contact would be made with the American or British. Some men wanted to leave but I had been out for about sixteen days and I knew how hard it was.

The German Commanding Officer and two sergeants dressed in white sheets and took off to try to contact the Allies. That morning about 11:00 a British half-track came to the barnyard and told us where a British kitchen would be set up. This was approximately 26 kilometers away. We immediately streamed out. I got in there about dawn. There was a British MP in the square directing us to the field kitchen.

After we had eaten, any bed or anything we wanted was ours. The two companions that I was walking with, Thibedeau and McGonigle ended up in a dairy. Clean straw for the three of us. Turning 10,000 men loose, there was no chance of finding a bed. The next morning I woke up early and went out and milked six clean cans full of milk. I brought them back and woke up my partners and we had fresh, warm milk ... the first we had in ages and the best we ever tasted!

Then we went back to the field kitchen and had a British breakfast. Then we got instructions to march to meet a column of trucks. A bridge was blown out between safety and us. We walked to where the trucks were and while we were walking we ran into a German army that was trying to surrender but they couldn't catch up to us as we turned and ran. When we got to the village a patrol was sent out to accept their surrender.

We were taken to a British camp where we were deloused and given new British uniforms. We stayed there for four to seven days and then we were put on trucks and taken to Brussels. There they put us into hotels and turned us loose for a night on the town! The next morning we were turned over to the Ameri-

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cans.

The Americans deloused us again and gave us American uniforms, and then took us to Le Havre, France. They put us in another camp where we were restricted for approximately three days. We ate turkey and vegetables. They gave us some money but they wouldn't let us buy anything. It was a nice diet camp. The only luxury was eggnog that the Red Cross passed out every afternoon. There was never enough to go around.

Before we were put on the Liberty Ship to go to the U.S. we were taken to Camp Lucky Strike that is 25 miles from Paris. I never got to Paris. We were not allowed to have any candy ... just a turkey diet. The Liberty Ship had seen service in the channel between Britain and France. They were sending it back to the U.S. to dry dock. We were loaded double and it took us just over four weeks to cross the ocean back to the U.S.

Before boarding the Liberty Ship we were given \$200 in French money. We were given another \$200 for a total of \$400 and you had to have this money when you boarded the gangplank. When we got to the top of the gangplank we exchanged it for American money. We were still on our turkey diet. We landed at Newport News, Virginia. The ship only went four knots per hour and we had to stop once for boiler repair. I slept outside in a lifeboat. We were supposed to change beds half way across the ocean but I continued to sleep in the lifeboat.

This is an experience I don't want to go through again.

## Fliers

Published in The Air Force Escape & Evasion Society Spring 2002 Communications

Come on and join the Air Corps,  
And get your flying pay;  
You don't have to work at all...  
Just loaf around all day.  
While others toil and study hard  
And soon grow old and blind,  
You take the air without a care,  
And never, never mind.

Our pilots do a lot of stunts  
And do them well, of course;  
And if you think that isn't hard,  
Just try to loop a horse.

Come on and get promoted  
As high as you desire,  
You're riding on the gravy train  
When you're an Army flier.

But just when you're about to be  
A general, you find  
That your engines cough, and your  
wings fall off,  
But you will never mind.



Often our photographers were successful in taking pictures at low altitude - low over land, water or clouds.

In this case, our B-24s rallied over Mt. Melfi in central Italy.

## Mail Call

Reference is made to Martin Rush's article on single ship missions in Europe to targets in your 1998 edition of the Liberaider. I would like to add to his comments on a similar mission flown by my crew on December 2 & 3, 1944. Such missions were to be flown only when the weather was forecast over the target and en route to the target as clouds enveloped the sky so as to be safe from German night fighters or we would be sitting ducks if the weather was CAVU.

At our base we had 2 ILS's one lined up on the runway and one lined up to intersect the first ILS and to be used to start our descent to the runway. The ceiling was 800 feet when we left and forecast to be the same on our return. We practiced these approaches many times prior to our mission. I had been an instructor at Columbus A.F. Miss. Prior to getting into B-24's and this was the reason I was selected for the mission as I had a lot of instrument experience. On the night of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December, 1944 we departed the base and were in weather all the way to a few miles from the target. The target was an aircraft factory at Augsburg, Austria (close to Munich, Germany). Weather was forecast to be 25,000 feet at the target. Everything went well until we left the Alps. We broke into the clear about 50 miles from Augsburg. We had a radar ship that could identify targets through clouds. The radar operator and bombardier coordinated their actions to insure the target was hit.

We were supposed to bomb at 21,000 feet. We broke out of the clouds at 18,000 feet and there was no weather above us. We didn't like it one bit being in the clear but proceeded on to the target. Our radar operator got good ground readings and in about 5 minutes we hit our I.P. Our crew saw the bomb flashings through the clouds as we hit our target. They looked like lightning strikes. I turned right in a descending turn and at that time while turning right we saw bullet strikes on our No. 1 engine. German fighters had found us and if I had not turned sharply they would have hit us in the fuselage. They shot out

the engine and set it on fire. Also unfortunately they destroyed the feathering device and the propeller rotated in the opposite direction creating tremendous drag on the left side of the aircraft. This forced us to almost cut all the power to our No. 4 engine or we would be in a spiral to the left. Also we had to reduce power on our No. 3 engine. My co-pilot was able to put out the fire in the No. 1 engine with the engine fire extinguisher. We dove into the clouds and were thus free from the fighters. With only two engines operating we began losing altitude and was concerned about the mountains in the Alps. I told the crew to throw all the stuff they could find overboard including the waist guns to lighten the ship.

Fortunately we had Big Fence, the radar facility at Bari, Italy. We contacted them and we were lucky as they picked us up on their radar and directed us around the highest peaks of the Alps. We constantly lost altitude and the co-pilot and I had to use both feet on the rudder control to keep the ship flying straight because of the tremendous drag of No. 1 engine. The front line of the German and British 8th Army was about 20 miles north of Rimini, Italy. We knew if we could reach Rimini we could put the ship down in a field, as we knew we couldn't make it back to any airfield and we wouldn't be captured. We did not want to bail out either. As we neared Rimini on the east coast of Italy we were at 1,000 feet but in clouds. We were happy in the clouds as the Germans in the front lines couldn't see us and shoot us down. Pretty soon Big Fence told us there was a big field west of Rimini that they believed we could land on. We broke out of the clouds at 500 feet and saw Rimini. We turned right and saw the field. Evidently it had been an old flying field. A rough runway still visible. I headed to it and made a rough landing. The nose wheel partially collapsed, but nobody on the ship was seriously hurt. A few bumps and bruises. We found we were in the Canadian sector. I asked our radio operator to contact 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force and our bomb group if possible to give

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them our status on his liaison set. He did this. We weren't sure if he got through. We spent about 3 days with the Canadians until finally mechanics arrived and fixed the aircraft with a new engine and repaired a strut on the nose wheel. We were able to take off from the field after the Canadians leveled off the field and the ruts. We flew back to our group and were given 7 days of liberty which we enjoyed in Rome. I received the DFC for the mission.

My navigator was Lt. Joseph Suozzi and my bombardier was Lt. Thomas Oliver.

Lt. Col. Bertrand J. Arents  
USAF Retired

\* \* \* \* \*

I'll get to that in a moment. For those of you too young to recognize the name: Bill Mauldin, who is now 80 years old, was the finest and most beloved editorial cartoonist of World War II. An enlisted man who drew for Stars and Stripes, he was the one who gave the soldiers hope and sardonic smiles on the battlefields; Mauldin knew their hearts because he was one of them. Using his dirty, unshaven, bone-weary infantrymen characters Willie and Joe as his vehicle, Mauldin let all those troops know there was someone who understood. A Mauldin classic from World War II: an exhausted infantryman standing in front of a table where medals were being given out, saying: "Just gimme th' aspirin. I already got a Purple Heart."

Baby-faced and absolutely brilliant, Mauldin became a national phenomenon. Talk about a boy wonder: By the time he was 23 years old he had won a Pulitzer Prize, been featured on the cover of Time magazine, and had the country's No. 1 best-selling book, "Up Front." Yet he remained the unaffected, bedrock genuine, decent and open guy ... His fellow soldiers loved him.

And he stayed that way -- right down to the baby face -- all the way into his 50s and beyond. I was brand-new in Chicago, 22 years old and a beginning reporter, when I walked by the old Riccardo's restaurant one night, and there was Mauldin having a drink

at one of the outside tables with his friend Mike Royko. Mauldin had seen me around the hallways; he motioned me over and invited me to join them. I sat down and tried to act as if this was nothing exceptional at all, as I looked around me at the table and thought to myself: You're six weeks out of Bexley, Ohio. That's Bill Mauldin. That's Mike Royko. This is a dream.

He was always so nice to me; he volunteered to write the foreword to one of my first books. We sort of lost touch after he moved to the Western part of the U.S. full time, and I guess that when I thought of him it was still as the eternally boyish, eternally grinning, eternally upbeat Mauldin.

And then the message came the other day from the 3rd Infantry man.

Bill Mauldin needs help.

He suffered terrible burns in a household accident a while back; his health has deteriorated grievously, and his cognitive functions are barely working. He lives in a room in a nursing home in Orange County, Calif., and sometimes days at a time go by without him saying a word. He was married three times, but the last one ended in divorce, and at 80 in the nursing home Mauldin is a single man.

I spoke with members of his family; they said that, even though Bill hardly communicates, the one thing that cheers him up is hearing from World War II guys -- the men for whom he drew those magnificent cartoons.

Which is not what you might expect. Mauldin was not one to hold on to the past -- he did not want to be categorized by the work he did on the battlefields when he was in his 20s. He went on to have a stellar career in journalism after the war, winning another Pulitzer in 1959. Many Americans, and I'm one of them, consider the drawing he did on deadline on the afternoon John F. Kennedy was assassinated -- the drawing of the Lincoln Memorial, head in hands, weeping -- to be the single greatest editorial cartoon in the history of newspapers.

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But it's his World War II contemporaries he seems to need now. The guys for whom -- in the words of Mauldin's son David -- Mauldin's cartoons "were like water for men dying of thirst." David Mauldin said his dad needs to hear that he meant something to those men.

He needs visitors, and he needs cards of encouragement. I'm not going to print the name of the nursing home, so that this can be done in a disciplined and scheduled way. A newspaper colleague in Southern California -- Gordon Dillow -- has done a wonderful job organizing this, and he will take your cards to the nursing home. You may send them to Bill Mauldin in care of Dillow at the Orange County Register, 625 N. Grand Ave., Santa Ana, CA 92701.

What would be even better, for those of you World War II veterans who are reading these words in California, or who plan on traveling there soon, would be if you could pay a visit to Mauldin just to sit with him a while. You can let me know if you are willing to do this ([bgreene@tribune.com](mailto:bgreene@tribune.com)), or you can let Gordon Dillow know ([gldillow@aol.com](mailto:gldillow@aol.com)).

Bill Mauldin brought hope, and smiles in terrible hours, to millions of his fellow soldiers. If you were one of them, and you'd like to repay the favor, this would be the time.

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Bob Greene comments on the news of the day Thursdays on the "WGN News at Nine."

\* \* \* \* \*

Dear Hughes,

I just accessed the newsletter. Thank you for getting it all together. You have recorded priceless pieces of history. Every man's story is so important! I am glad that my grandchildren and children have a place to come to get the story of their ancestor in WWII.

Thank you for all the hard work on the web site and newsletter, etc.

Sincerely, Patricia Sheafe Piggee



This is a watercolor painted by Don James of the 461st Bomb Group over Linz, Austria on that grim day of July 25th, 1944, when the 461st was all but wiped out. The original of this painting is in the Museum of Flight, Seattle.



S/SGT Donald James being presented his first air metal by his commanding officer, Colonel Glantzberg, at the Torretta Field, Italy.



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probably weren't too accurate. Anyway, we made a lot of dust and probably bent a rail or two there in the middle of nowhere.

The flight home was uneventful and our three engines performed flawlessly. Our navigator was right on the money and we landed at our base before the rest of the squadron returned. Of course we were called in to debrief and to see why we returned early, and I was really glad that I had a good reason and that there was no question as to why a new engine was needed.

#### Part IV

As you think back, there are other memories that pop up.

It was a winter night. It was cold. We lived in our square cement-based tent like all crews did. This unit would house each crew's officers. The beds were around the walls with the 55-gallon oil drum in the center that would burn 100-octane, kerosene or diesel oil depending on what was available. The container for the fuel was outside and a copper tube and an on and off spigot regulated the amount of flow. For a hot fire we opened the spigot, the flame burned hot and the 55-gallon drum gave off a lot of heat. At night we turned down the spigot so we could sleep at a cooler temperature.

We had been playing cards and the cards were spread out on the table. My co-pilot had gone to bed and was sleeping. My navigator and I were lying in bed talking. I reached over and turned down the valve on the diesel oil that was burning with a hot flame. Our stove cooled down and we were nodding off when I happened to look over and saw that the flame had gone out but the diesel oil was still dripping on the hot platen. That had all the essence of an explosion, so I reached over to turn off the spigot. I was right about the explosion. Just as my hand reached the drum opening, flame shot out the door and across the floor. The 55-gallon drum jumped a couple of feet in the air, and, with the explosion, our tent was filled with soot so thick that you couldn't see across the room. The spread-out of cards on the table was cov-

ered by enough soot that the cards themselves could not be seen. My co-pilot, who was sleeping at the time, just rolled over.

My hand happened to be in the path of the flame and was burned a little. It was only a slight burn but the whole hand was red and sore. I was going on a mission in the morning and didn't want to go to the first aid station at this time of night, about 11:30. Before we were briefed in the morning I did have my hand looked at. They put a new miracle drug on the burn, wrapped my hand and fingers and off I went to the briefing and then on my mission.

We wore silk gloves under our leather gloves, so I put on my silk glove over the bandages and then the leather. We had an eight-hour mission that day, and I had many other things to think about than if my hand hurt. It didn't. We got back to base and the first thing I wanted to see was the shape of my hand. I took off my gloves, unwrapped my hand and my first experience with sulfa was unbelievable. There was no redness or soreness in the hand at all. The minor burn had healed and at that time I became a believer in the unbelievable.

#### Part V

One day when I wasn't flying and didn't have sense enough to stay inside and out of the rain, I was hailed down and politely asked if I could ferry a plane on a Red X (that means it should not be flown) to Foggia where the repair depot was. Of course I said, "Yes, I'll be glad to." In that the rest of my crew including my engineer was gone, an engineer from some stray crew was requested to join me.

Now I had never met this man and he had never met me, and now we were a team. I figured that with any kind of luck I could get the plane to Foggia and get it down without cluttering up the runway; so off we went. Now I had taken my map, folded it so that the fold would bisect our base and our destination so I had a heading, and in almost no time there we were. Now all we had to do was land. As all pilots know, when you don't have an exact known altitude for a traffic pattern, you eyeball it. I did that and discov-

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ered that I was a couple of hundred feet high as I started my final approach.

Now I wish to digress a little. As I learned to fly a B-24, I was taught to land at 120 MPH and this worked very well as I trained and went thru my check rides. Toward the end of my training, with my crew on board, I came in for my landing and as I lifted the nose for a normal landing my plane experienced a high-speed stall, and, while nothing was damaged, we did hit the runway harder than usual. At that time I decided that I would make new rules and land at 140 MPH instead of the normal 120.

Now let's go back to Foggia. I am high on my final approach. I have an engineer who has never flown with me, and we have a broken nose wheel. I had also found out that a B-24 will not fly faster than 140 MPH if it has full flaps. So here is this engineer, crouching between me and the seat where the copilot normally sits, reading the airspeed as has been instructed to do. The only problem of course is that he is reading 140 MPH and not 120 as he has always done. We are diving at the runway with very little power and, again we are in a plane with a broken nose wheel. With his white knuckles clutching the back of the seats saying 140 and then looking at me with fear all over his face because he knew this stupid pilot had probably never flown a B-24 before.

As we approached the edge of the runway at 140 MPH, I eased the nose up. The main wheels came down and the nose wheel stayed up until it settled as the speed decreased – one of the smoothest landings I had ever made. We were on the ground. The engineer disappeared from behind the seats and at the end of the runway opened the bomb bay doors and disappeared, probably telling to this day how lucky he was to be alive. Another plane was behind me, picked me up and flew me home. Maybe the engineer walked as he was nowhere to be found.

## Part VI

The war was over. We sat around our base waiting for our orders to go home. And we sat and we fretted and we waited.

About a month after VJ-Day we got our orders but first all navigators had to take a night cross-country flight. I don't know the reason for it but it was scheduled on a certain night; and with me were a bunch of navigators – six or eight or ten – I really don't know how many for sure. We had to fly to the Isle of Capri and return to our base. No problem. We took off after dark and hit the Isle of Capri on the button. The navigators just gave me a heading and there we were. It was time to return and we would be in bed by midnight. The navigators chose to come up the coast to a river, up the river for a period of time, turn off to a specific heading and there would be our base.

Well, up the coast to the river, up the river, turn on our heading and sure enough there was our base. Whoops, wrong base! We were in contact with the tower but they couldn't see us either. We found several other bases (there were many in the area) but then gave up and back to the coast, up the river, took our heading and still no base. Being in contact with the tower all the time, I suggested that they turn on their search light into the sky so that maybe we could see it. They did and it was nowhere to be seen.

OK. Back to the coast, up the river, to our heading and to the field with the searchlight. Again all of our navigators missed and the tower was getting worried. We had lots of gas but they were getting tired and sleepy and they couldn't just go off to bed and let one of their B-24s just roam around the sky looking for home.

Anyway, it was back to the coast, up the river, take a heading, and there was our base just like the navigators said, searchlight and all. Everyone was happy. The tower people could go home as they had their B-24 back. We could go to bed as we were also getting a little tired as it was now after two in the morning. And, best of all, we were qualified to fly back to the USA as all navigators had now passed their night cross-country requirement.

Several days later we were assigned our planes, given our instructions and off we went for our last mission – home! I had been assigned #64. It was the

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plane in which I had taken my first mission and the poor thing was war weary, but it still flew. I guess that three of the engines had been replaced because they were almost new. The other one was old and oil soaked. We were flying the southern route thru Dacar, Africa and across to South America and up to our final destination – in New Jersey, I think.

Anyway, we went to the take-off point and couldn't raise the tower on our radio. We could hear them but we sent no signal. The tower was in no mood to keep us around just because we had no radio signal so off we went to the USA. Now, as I have said, old #64 was, well, old. The engines were, well, OK. The three new engines were heating up but running, and the old engine was not heating up but stayed soaked in oil. My navigator, Ted Pike, put us on location at airfield at Dacar, and then the tower would call us and our radio still didn't work. However, each time they would call us, I'd wiggle my wings so finally they caught on and in we came. I always worried that they wouldn't let us take off with no radio, but that never happened.

We left Dacar in the blackest of night with no moon and no horizon. Two of the planes didn't make it back into the air and crashed on take-off, probably trying to fly visual.

Anyway, we headed to the west, out over the ocean, and the engines kept functioning (that's always nice) but after about an hour our gyrocompass malfunc-

tioned as well as the autopilot. Fortunately, when in training, I used to fly by compass only just for the fun of it and to keep from getting too bored. I had had a lot of practice and it was no big deal except I had to fly the plane by hand with no autopilot. Again, with compass headings only, we were right on track for our landing in South America. We waggled our wings and made our landing.

Again, no one seemed worried about our not having a radio and off we went to our final destination in the US.

As you know, when we flew in Italy from our bases, our runways were 5000 feet and our taxiways were little wider than our wheel widths. We all became semi-masters of using engines only when taxiing and using brakes only when we wanted to stop. When we finally put down in this huge airport, Hunter Field, Georgia, the taxiways were wider than our runways and the runways were larger than anyplace we had been. We waggled our wings for communication and were now on the ground and heading for tie-up. It was a long way to taxi and, as I tooted down the taxiway, the tower came to me for one last time. It said, "Will the B-24, #64, that is about to take-off from runway 15 please hold your speed down a little."

We were home as was #64. However #64 was headed for the scrap heap and we were starting our life again as civilians.

## 461st Bombardment Group (H) Membership

This article is primarily aimed at spouses, widows and children of those who served in 461st Bomb Group (H). According to a change approved at the business meeting in Shreveport in 2000, the following is now true:

"Membership in this organization shall be open to all who were members of or attached to the 461st Bomb Group (H) during wartime. Spouses, Widows, (AND CHILDREN) of those who served in the 461st Bomb Group (H) during wartime are eligible for membership. All other persons interested in the goals of this organization may become Associate Members. As-

sociate Members may attend meetings, and other activities and will receive the organization's mailings. Associate Members may not vote. The membership year shall be the calendar year for all members.

Dues for children are \$10.00 per year. Dues for Associates are \$10.00 per year."

With this in mind, if you are as interested in maintaining the history of the 461st BG as I am, contact Ed Stevenson (address is on page 7) and send him your dues. Let's keep this organization alive!

## The Air Force Song

Off we go into the wild blue yonder,  
Climbing high into the sun;  
Here they come zooming to meet our thunder,  
At 'em boys, Give 'er the gun! (Give 'er the gun now!)  
Down we dive, spouting our flame from under,  
Off with one helluva roar!  
We live in fame or go down in flame. Hey!  
Nothing'll stop the U.S. Air Force!

### *Additional verses:*

Minds of men fashioned a crate of thunder,  
Sent it high into the blue;  
Hands of men blasted the world asunder;  
How they lived God only knew! (God only knew then!)  
Souls of men dreaming of skies to conquer  
Gave us wings, ever to soar!  
With scouts before And bombers galore. Hey!  
Nothing'll stop the U.S. Air Force!

### *Bridge: "A Toast to the Host"*

Here's a toast to the host  
Of those who love the vastness of the sky,  
To a friend we send a message of his brother men who fly.  
We drink to those who gave their all of old,  
Then down we roar to score the rainbow's pot of gold.  
A toast to the host of men we boast, the U.S. Air Force!

### *Zoom!*

Off we go into the wild sky yonder,  
Keep the wings level and true;  
If you'd live to be a grey-haired wonder  
Keep the nose out of the blue! (Out of the blue, boy!)  
Flying men, guarding the nation's border,  
We'll be there, followed by more!  
In echelon we carry on. Hey!  
Nothing'll stop the U.S. Air Force!

## **JUST A COMMON SOLDIER**

### **(A Soldier Died Today)**

by

A. Lawrence Vaincourt

He was getting old and paunchy and his hair was falling fast,  
And he sat around the Legion, telling stories of the past  
Of a war that he had fought in and the deeds that he had done,  
In his exploits with his buddies; they were heroes, every one.

And tho' sometimes, to his neighbors, his tales became a joke,  
All his Legion buddies listened, for they knew whereof he spoke.  
But we'll hear his tales no longer for old Bill has passed away,  
And the world's a little poorer, for a soldier died today.

He will not be mourned by many, just his children and his wife,  
For he lived an ordinary and quite uneventful life.  
Held a job and raised a family, quietly going his own way,  
And the world won't note his passing, though a soldier died today.

When politicians leave this earth, their bodies lie in state,  
While thousands note their passing and proclaim that they were great.  
Papers tell their whole life stories, from the time that they were young,  
But the passing of a soldier goes unnoticed and unsung.

Is the greatest contribution to the welfare of our land  
A guy who breaks his promises and cons his fellow man?  
Or the ordinary fellow who, in times of war and strife,  
Goes off to serve his Country and offers up his life?

A politician's stipend and the style in which he lives  
Are sometimes disproportionate to the service that he gives.  
While the ordinary soldier, who offered up his all,  
Is paid off with a medal and perhaps, a pension small.

It's so easy to forget them for it was so long ago,  
That the old Bills of our Country went to battle, but we know  
It was not the politicians, with their compromise and ploys,  
Who won for us the freedom that our Country now enjoys.



Should you find yourself in danger, with your enemies at hand,  
Would you want a politician with his ever-shifting stand?  
Or would you prefer a soldier, who has sworn to defend  
His home, his kin and Country and would fight until the end?

He was just a common soldier and his ranks are growing thin,  
But his presence should remind us we may need his like again.  
For when countries are in conflict, then we find the soldier's part  
Is to clean up all the troubles that the politicians start.

If we cannot do him honor while he's here to hear the praise,  
Then at least let's give him homage at the ending of his days.  
Perhaps just a simple headline in a paper that would say,  
Our Country is in mourning, for a soldier died today.

## Webmaster Comments

Maintaining the 461st Bombardment Group website has been a real joy to me. I have received so many letters and E-Mail from folks supplying information. I have managed to correct a number of errors that existed in the information we have thanks to those of you willing to take the time to write. And the new information I've received is amazing. Some of the stories I'm getting are printed in this issue of the Liberaider. Some are posted on the website. I can't thank everyone enough for your tremendous support. I could not have done it without you. You supply the information and all I do is format it for the website and/or the Liberaider. Thanks.

I have started something new on the website recently. For those of you who have not had the time to take a look, I have started posting biographies. The first was one I wrote on my father, Col. (at that time) Frederick E. Glantzberg, the commanding officer of the 461st Bombardment Group from October 1943 to September 1944. I included this in the previous issue of the Liberaider for two reasons. First, I thought everyone would be interested in

reading about Col. Glantzberg and what he did before and after his time with the 461st Bomb Group. Second, I would like to encourage everyone to take a few minutes to sit down and write something about yourself. Use my father's bio as an example. You don't have to be a polished writer. Just put something on paper (or into your computer) and send it along. I'll do some editing if necessary and post it on the website. My father's bio is linked from the main page of the website, but that's just as an example. The rest will be linked from the Roster section of the website.

By now, I'm sure many of you have noticed the Gold Site Award the website has received. This isn't something that is given out to every website. Websites must meet certain standards before being considered for this award. I feel getting this award is a major tribute to the men of the 461st Bombardment Group who are willing to share their experiences with others. In addition to this award, I get numerous letters from people who have visited our website and found it very informative and useful.

## Biography of Hjalmar Johansson

Hjalmar Johansson was born in Hollywood, California. He enlisted in the United States Army Air Corps during World War II, and was a nose gunner on a B-24 bomber. In December 1944, Mr. Johansson's plane was shot down over Czechoslovakia and he was held as a German prisoner of war for five months. Mr. Johansson currently resides in Montville, New Jersey with his wife, Mildred.

### **Please tell us about your background.**

I was born in Hollywood, California. Unfortunately, my father died when I was 5 months old. My widowed mother had no money, no insurance whatsoever and she, my brother, and myself and ended up in New York City on East 69th Street. The only thing she could do to earn a living during the depression was run a rooming house, so she rented out rooms, scrubbed with her hands, and took care of her two boys--she brought us up real well.

When the war started, I was still in high school. I graduated when I was 17, and since I couldn't get into the Army until I was 18, I worked and went to engineering college in the evening. At 18, I got into the Army Air Corps. I wanted to be a pilot pretty badly--I built and flew model planes and dreamed of being a pilot my whole childhood. And finally at the University of Pittsburgh during my cadet training I got to the point where I actually piloted a Piper Cub. At that point, the Army decided that they needed gunners instead of pilots. So the Air Corps eliminated our entire class, and I was given the choice of transferring to the infantry or being a gunner. I opted for the Air Corps, and sure enough I was assigned to a heavy bomber crew of B-24's that, at the time, were one of the largest bombers in use. I was shipped over to Italy for a few weeks of training. Shortly after, I went on my first mission, which ended up being a one-way trip!



### **Can you describe what that mission was like?**

I was assigned to the 15th Air Force, 461st bomb group, Squadron 767 as a nose gunner. Our first mission was to bomb the Odertal oil refinery in what is now in Poland. Our planes left Torretta, Italy, and after being badly damaged by flak we were attacked by German fighter planes. Over half of our group was shot down. Twenty-nine guys--my buddies, were killed on that raid alone and at least that same number were captured or missing in action. It was a rough deal, it was a long flight, and we never actually reached the target. We were hit by flak, which knocked a big hole in the wing, taking out the number-four engine. Shortly thereafter, the number-three engine went out--that's the two engines on the right side--making the plane lose altitude.

Our plane was in trouble. It was difficult to steer, and we dropped down below the rest of our formation. The German fighter planes jumped on us because we were a cripple. They wanted to see us alone and out of the formation--it was hazardous for them to attack a formation at full strength, and they would go after the weakest plane. At least a dozen of them circled us alternately attacking the nose and the tail. We were just being shot full of holes.

As a kid, I enjoyed building model airplanes, particularly the flying models. One of my favorites was the ME-109, a German fighter plane. It was a very sleek, swift plane, high performance--a dandy looking plane. Unfortunately, in this experience, I didn't like them as much, because they started coming in on my nose turret on that mission. We were badly damaged, and those ME-109's were coming right at me. As a

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nose gunner, I was shielded by a thin Plexiglas bubble--that was all there was between me and the bullets. Those ME-109's--instead of being marvelous, sleek, lovely-looking aircraft that I remembered--turned into tarantulas. The machine guns in their wings flickered like little red lights and they resembled angry little eyes that were boring in on me. I just wanted to reach out, get my guns going, and smash them. I knew they were hitting the plane. So, my attitude toward the ME-109 changed considerably that day.

### **When did you know the plane was going down?**

Finally, the fighter planes left us. Either they ran out of ammunition, fuel, or they'd just had enough of us. I think I got one--I knocked part of his wing off as he went by, but they go by so fast that you don't really have time to be sure. We were heading east toward the Russian front lines, knowing that there was no way we'd make it back to Italy--it was too far for our crippled bomber. The pilot rang the bailout bell and I went out. That was *some* experience. We never practiced jumping out of a plane, it was too dangerous, and so it was my first jump. All of a sudden coming down in my parachute there was total silence--after all the noise of the machine guns, the anti-aircraft, and the roaring engines--now, coming down there was just silence. Our entire 10-man crew bailed out successfully, which was rather miraculous. The pilot, copilot, the crew chief, and the top gunner bailed out maybe 15 minutes after we did. Romanian Partisans picked them up when they hit the ground and thus they avoided becoming prisoners of war. Unfortunately, I didn't have that good luck. I landed in a field and within two hours I was picked up and taken prisoner by the German Army. The Germans took us west to an interrogation center where things got a little bit rough.

### **What happened after you were taken into German custody?**

They started out by demanding all sorts of information; who we were, where we came from, and the names of my crewmembers; because they wanted to make sure they had captured all of us. They also wanted to know what targets we were bombing, what armament we carried, how many bombs, and how many planes in our squadron. I gave them my name, rank, and serial number, and that was all they got out of me. They said, "Oh we have ways to make you talk," and sure enough they shut me away in a little black solitary cell, absolutely dark, just big enough for a bed. It then became psychological warfare, where they'd come in at a moment's notice, shine lights in my face and ask the same questions over and over. I kept giving the same answers, and they said, "Well that's all right, you'll just have to stay here for the rest of the war." The thought of that was disheartening to say the least. After about four days of that, they transferred me to the next camp where I was reunited with my crewmembers, and I got to see the blue sky and the sun. What a treat!

### **What happened next?**

The Americans and the British armies were approaching from the west. This was early 1945, having been shot down in December 1944. The Allies were closing in on the Rhine River and we knew it--we could hear approaching artillery fire and planes going over, and we didn't see any opposition being mounted. We thought, "Oh boy, we're gonna be free men soon." When you're a prisoner, the only thing you can think of is getting out of prison somehow or another.

Unfortunately, before the Allies could liberate us, the Germans put us in boxcars and sent us east on the railroad. Apparently the German high command thought they should keep some hostages, since they knew the war was going badly. We ended up in boxcars, like those in some of the holocaust films you see. We were supposedly being sent to another Air Force POW camp. There were 60 of us crammed in half a boxcar. Six guards took the other half of the car. We didn't have enough room for all to sit down--it was that crowded. So we all took numbers, everyone was assigned a "one" or a "two," and we took turns sitting down. There were no toilet facilities whatsoever, just cardboard boxes, which they would sometimes open

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the doors and dump out. There was no food. We begged for water at every stop. Sometimes they said, "Oh, the English have bombed the water supply--there is no water." This was their little joke. When we got to Berlin we were under attack by the English, who were bombing the rail lines. The Germans locked us in our train cars and left us exposed, saying, "I hope you enjoy your friends the British, they're coming to visit you and bomb the rail lines." The guards would then go down into air raid shelters. We just sat in the box-cars, which would roll from side to side, due to the concussions. There was no place to hide. You just hoped the bombs wouldn't hit you. After several days of that, they took us south to an all-purpose prison camp. We were dumped into Stalag IIIA in a town called Luckenwalde, Germany.

### **Can you describe the conditions at the prison camp?**

This was a camp that held thousands of prisoners of all nationalities. We were held in the most primitive of conditions. I was kind of lucky; we were in a barrack, while the others were out in tents during that very cold winter. Although we had no heat in the barrack--and it was terribly cold--we were three to a bunk and we huddled together, keeping warm that way.

Conditions were pretty rough. We were infested with fleas and lice. Without hot water, I had only one shower in five months. I didn't need a knife or fork, just a tin cup and spoon, and that was all you needed. Whatever food came, it was ladled out into your cup, and you took whatever they gave you. In the prison camp there weren't any mice or other small animals running around--they would have been put in the soup pot immediately. What we ate or didn't eat was of primary importance. When your stomach is empty all you can think about is food.

German bread was supplied to us in small quantities. It was a very dark, hard, dense bread made, we were told, with sawdust, which helped to preserve it. It would actually keep for months without molding. We caressed and portioned that little piece of bread into the thinnest slice imaginable and then you would spend a long time thinking of what you were going to eat out of your Red Cross Parcel, how you would slice and savor it. It was in a way like a religious experience. If you had bread, you were going to stay alive. The prison diet supplied about 1,000 calories a day, which is starvation rations. My weight dropped from 150 pounds to about 110 pounds when I was finally liberated. Food became all encompassing. Usually in the service when men got together they ended up talking about their favorite girlfriends, and the pinup girls, and the pictures they painted on the side of the aircraft. In prison camp, we talked about food. We had tough, battle-hardened sergeants talking about how their mothers made meatballs--how she rolled the meat, and put the spices into it, and put the gravy on top, and everybody stood around just drooling. Sex and women were far behind.

### **What happened when you were liberated?**

The Russians liberated me in May 1945. I kept records, a diary of my time as a POW, and still have that diary, and a lot of other memories. Paper products were non-existent so I salvaged empty cigarette wrappers and used it for my diary. I believe the reason I can remember events as if it were yesterday is because they were made on me at the very impressionable age of 19, and under circumstances that were less than casual. It was pretty traumatic. Of course memory can play tricks on you. I've heard people recount stories and they improve the story as the telling goes on. I don't think that's true of my experiences. It was part of what I did; part of what happened, and I reacted at the time appropriately. Now, I can retell the stories, and though it's in the past--I can turn the pages of my diary and refresh and relive the actual experience.

### **What did you do after the war?**

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Interestingly, after I came back from the Service, I went to college on the GI Bill and earned two degrees in engineering. I wound up designing, building, and selling oil refineries, which is ironic, considering I was shot down on a mission to bomb an oil refinery. I actually ended up selling oil refineries to the Germans. Being carefully selective, I used to amuse some of them by telling them that we blew up the old ones so we could build them new, state-of-the-art refineries. I did a lot of traveling as Vice President of international sales with the company I worked for. I logged about 4 million air miles total, traveling to every country you can imagine, 66 in all. I went to China right after Nixon and Kissinger opened it up and visited Baghdad regularly, so I got to know a lot of Iraqis. I lived and worked in Paris for five years and London for a year.

In 1947 I married a young lady whom I met in church. We sang in the choir together and we are still singing harmoniously 54 years later. I have three children and one 23-year-old grandson, Erik who lives in Hollywood.

**You recently returned to Europe. What was that experience like?**

I actually went on a trip back to Czechoslovakia. A Czech airman's association that wanted to honor Americans who had helped liberate their country sponsored it. Several of our hosts [had been] young children who were on the ground, and witnessed the battle in which I was shot down. Private aircraft flew four other Americans and me to a town called Prerov, where we were wined and dined and taken care of by the Czechs. We ended up in our oil refinery target--which is now in Poland--and met the Polish people running the refinery.



Two German pilots also participated in the festivities and gave versions of the events of December 17, 1944. One of them, General Gunther Raal, was the number three Luftwaffe Ace, credited with 175 aerial victories. General Raal is a very unusual and interesting person. He was one of the most celebrated fighter pilots of the Luftwaffe. He now helps train German Air Force personnel in the USA, all part of a cooperative NATO effort. He and I got along quite well together and we agreed to meet again as soon as possible. We concluded with the comment that it was more enjoyable drinking beer than shooting at each other!

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## Freedom Is Not Free

By  
Kelly Strong

I watched the flag pass by one day.  
It fluttered in the breeze  
A young Marine saluted it, and then  
He stood at ease.

I looked at him in uniform  
So young, so tall, so proud  
With hair cut square and eyes alert  
He'd stand out in any crowd.

I thought, how many men like him  
Had fallen through the years?  
How many died on foreign soil?  
How many mothers' tears?

How many Pilots' planes shot down?  
How many foxholes were soldiers' graves?  
No, Freedom is not free.

I heard the sound of taps one night,  
When everything was still.  
I listened to the bugler play  
And felt a sudden chill.

I wondered just how many times  
That taps had meant "Amen"  
When a flag had draped a coffin  
of a brother or a friend.

I thought of all the children,  
Of the mothers and the wives,  
Of fathers, sons and husbands  
With interrupted lives.

I thought about a graveyard  
at the bottom of the sea  
Of unmarked graves in Arlington.  
No, Freedom isn't free!!