



# The 461st Liberaider



Vol. 22, No. 2

DECEMBER 2005

SOMEWHERE IN THE USA

## 461st 2005 Reunion

by  
Glenda Price

Wednesday, October  
19<sup>th</sup>

This was arrival day for many. We arrived so late that we went straight to bed to rest up for our first day of the reunion.

Thursday, October  
20<sup>th</sup> – Udvar-Hazy Air  
and Space Museum

Thursday AM – Ac-  
quaintances old and

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Had to go to War

by  
Thomas L. Yates

The other day I was watching an old movie about Mark Twain and I thought how nice it was for him to just sit and write about the things that he knew and imagined. I then thought about my father who never wrote much except a memo about World War I during the time he was in France while fighting there. Although his writing wasn't the best it was quite legible. As all this went through my mind I wondered if my family and their families would have

any interest in some of my activities and some random thoughts about the things that I remember before and during my time in the United States Army Air Corp.

I was in a car going to La Feria, which is a small town just to the west of Harlingen, and with me were my brother and E.C. McManus. At that time we heard the news of the bombing of Pearl Harbor over the car radio. I remembered telling them that they would go to war and being three years younger I would stay in Har-

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## Chapter Five World War II Experiences

This is the last in a series of articles by Bob Jones. This first one covers time during his training prior to going overseas.

by  
Robert K. Jones

As I sit writing this I note that it is July 25, 1995 and 51 years since that fateful day over Linz. Tonight Peg and I are going out to celebrate "Chop Day", as we Kriegies affectionately referred to that day when we had been shot down. I'm surprised at the few details I remember and most of them may hardly be worth recording.

Enough of that! I'll now get back to prison camp details, which really don't make very interesting reading but can fill a few rainy day moments. I may as well go into how we got things that were not in the German or Red Cross rations. The main way was to ask the designated POW trader for our compound to get the item and specify how many cigarettes you could provide. The trader spoke German fluently? And was the only POW authorized to even speak to the guards beyond a curt greeting such as Goot Morgan! If I wanted yeast or leavening or season-

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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

We've had a computer crash since the last Liberaider was published and lost the TAPS information. We are trying to recover this, but will have to forego the TAPS section this time around. Hopefully we will be back up and running by the time the June issue goes to press. We will list all the losses for the entire year at that time. If you reported a loss in the past six months, please help us by reporting it again to help us get all the names.

## **The Island of Vis, Yugoslavia**

by

William J. Kelleher  
Ex Captain, USAF

The Island of Vis lies a very short distance off the coast of Yugoslavia in the Adriatic Sea. There is a series of islands along that coast.

Late in 1944, Tito's forces that were allies of the U.S. occupied the island. There was a short runway on Vis and there was a small contingent of U.S. Air Force service personnel. The British and U.S. fliers used the field for emergency landings.

Steven Ambrose wrote the story of Senator McGovern's war time experience as a B-24 pilot flying missions out of Italy. In the book, the author states that any bomber that had that had landed on Vis was still there because the runway was too short (2,200 feet) to allow a bomber to take off. I, too, flew 35 missions out of Italy in a B-24 bomber. Our targets were spread across southern Europe from Athens, Greece to Lyons, France.

In late 1944, while on a mission to a target in Austria, we were hit in a wing by anti-aircraft fire. There was a fuel tank in that wing and we started losing fuel through the hole. When we were over the target a shell exploded very close to the plane and I could hear the shell fragment hitting the plane. The sound was the same as the noise created by a handful of gravel thrown against a corrugated steel wall. Apparently it was that shell which caused the wing damage.

To conserve fuel I had to reduce power to the 4 engines, which meant that we were left alone as the rest of the Group continued to return to Italy.

It was soon apparent that we would not have enough gas to make it back across the Adriatic.

I then decided to get to the island of Vis where I could safely land the damaged plane. Well, as usual, that did not turn out to be an easy task. There are many small islands in the Adriatic along that coast of Yugoslavia. They are all small and all looked the same. Our gas was low; I was flying south and on my left I suddenly saw a short runway on the mountainous island right next to me. We were about 3,000 feet. So, I reduced the engine power, put down the landing gear and the flaps and made a diving 180 turn back towards the island and that runway. I was concerned that we were about to run out of gas. The landing came off perfectly, though I had to step pretty hard on the brakes to avoid running off the end of the runway. The area was loaded with remains of other planes, both fighters and bombers, whose landings had not been so successful as ours.

The ground crew replenished our fuel supply and Jack, our flight engineer, was able to set up the fuel transfer system so as to circumvent the damaged tanks. While there were numerous flak holes in the plane there was no damage bad enough to prevent flying it.

The ground personnel felt that the runway was too short for a B-24 to take off. Not only was the runway too short, but the foothills started rising not too far past the end of the take-off.

I felt that starting as far back as we could and standing on the brakes, while giving it full power before starting the take off and utilizing the wing flaps, I could clear the end of the runway and the foothills. With a quick sign of the cross, I released the brakes and the plane literally leaped and roared down that steel mat runway. It was touch and go, but we cleared the hills and turned across the sea to complete one more thrilling trip. I wrote to Stephen Ambrose, the author of the "Wild Blue" and told him that contrary to his book there was at least one 4-engine bomber that did take off from Vis.

The luck of the Irish held out again.

### **Tech Sgt. Dalton R. "Bob" Verner**

Bob enlisted in the United States Army Air Corps on November 28, 1942. He was the radio man and waist gunner on a B-24. He was assigned to the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force, 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group, 764<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron stationed near Cerignola, Italy. He was wounded on November 1, 1944 by enemy gunfire near Graz, Austria. The other waist gunner, Sgt. Ernest Jones was also wounded. At the time Bob was wounded they offered the Purple Heart to him, however he refused, thinking his mother would worry more knowing he was injured.

Thanks to the letters that were written by living crewmembers, Bob received his Purple Heart on August 18, 2004. The Pilot was Captain George Miller who is now a Colonel and retired. A "BIG THANK YOU" to Flight Engineer Sgt. Dwyer A. Green, Tail Gunner Sgt. Norman Carter, Ball Turret Gunner Sgt. James Kochis for their letters and support.

Bob completed thirty-five missions before returning to the United States. His discharge date was July 16, 1944.

Bob is happy to have received the Purple Heart even if it is 60 years late!

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new arrive and mingle for breakfast and to board the shuttle buses to the Udvar-Hazy Air and Space Museum. Shuttle buses ran every 30 minutes in the morning and hourly in the afternoon which made for a very convenient way to tour the air and space museum at your own pace.

The U-H Air and Space Museum is huge even by air and space museum standards. A trip up the observation tower offered a 360° view of the area surrounding the museum as well as a bird's eye view of the facility itself.

Inside the museum, the areas are divided by decades and wars. Of course we want to see the WWII area first. We got to see a P-40 and other fighters. The Enola Gay has been restored and has a prime spot in the display. One of the tour guides mentioned that Paul Tibbets, the Enola Gay pilot, would be at the museum on Friday as part of his bomb group reunion.

Disappointingly, there is no B-24 other than models and prints. They sure are scarce!

The space shuttle Enterprise is in another wing of the museum along with other space related craft and equipment. Hours could be spent and many miles walked in this huge facility. No museum tour is complete without a brief trip to the Museum store for some one-of-a-kind souvenirs!

#### Thursday PM

From our group, the younger generation went from the museum to tour some of the DC Mall area. The rest of us rested up and got ready for the hamburger/hot dog dinner. It was just what was needed after a long day of touring/walking. The hotel put out a great spread reminiscent of picnic fare with awesome cookies. Tables filled up and we ate with different new bomb group members, one of whom was attending his FIRST reunion. Way to go!

Friday, October 21<sup>st</sup> – War Memorial Tour

#### Friday AM

Friday morning was gray and drizzly but the veterans and families were eager and ready to go. We started out later than anticipated due to delays in the buses arriving because of traffic delays. This wouldn't be the only traffic related delay experienced but it may have been the shortest!

First stop for our bus was the Iwo Jima Memorial just outside of Arlington National Cemetery. It portrays the famous raising of the American flag on Iwo Jima, after one of the bloodiest battles in the Pacific arena. One of my uncles was wounded in that battle so it was of particular interest to our family.

The second stop was at the much anticipated WWII Memorial on the Washington Mall. And it was worth the anticipation. It is a beautiful memorial in a picturesque setting. The 4000 stars (depicting the 400,000+ casualties), reflected in the pool above which you see the Lincoln Memorial at the other end of the Mall, is gorgeous. The rest of the memorial is well laid out, an impressive, fitting tribute to our military men and women who served and died.

Next stop was the Lincoln Memorial from which we proceeded to walk to the Vietnam War Memorial and then to the Korean War Memorial. The Vietnam Memorial is a sobering tribute to those fallen during that conflict and particularly affecting to those of us who grew up during those turbulent years. The addition of some bronze statues depicting Caucasian, Hispanic and Afro-American men and women soldiers was very interesting.

The Korean memorial depicts military men in stainless steel rather than the traditional bronze and was quite stunning. The reflecting walls mirror these 19 stainless steel men and also has photographs of people and events sandblasted into it, a very extraordinary display.

Our guide then directed us to the FDR Memorial which I had not even heard about previously. This

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Memorial was worth the time. It, too, is a great tribute, well planned and truly inspiring with its layout and inscriptions. It depicts FDR's four terms and ends with Eleanor Roosevelt picking up where FDR leaves off upon his death during his fourth term, a thought provoking display for sure!

By now, we were running behind for lunch so off to Union Station we went but found ourselves in a traffic snarl around the Capitol where streets were blocked off due to a bomb scare. More traffic and more delays but we get to Union Station where we have just under an hour to get some lunch and return to our bus. No time for shopping here.

We boarded our buses for the trip back to the hotel but hit the start of rush hour so we spent a lot of time with the commuters on the freeway not moving far or fast! Bob Hayes got the cocktail hour/dinner each delayed an hour so we had a little time before the evening's event since we got back at 4:45 instead of 3:00, as originally planned. I heard that another of the buses broke down and was even later getting back.

#### Friday PM – Dinner and Dance

The dinner and dance started with cocktails at 6:30 and dinner was starting to be served at 7:30. The music was great and quiet enough that visiting could be accomplished without shouting. We were fortunate to have at our table, Frank Boring, who is an oral historian and is working on recording the video and oral histories of the WWII veterans. He was flown in at the expense of Bill Huizenga from Michigan to record the 461<sup>st</sup> bomb group. He had interviewed several members over the weekend. We can't wait to see how the interviews turn out.

The dance was great with a perfect mix of 40's and 50's music. Bob did a fantastic job, as usual, arranging all the details for this romantic evening event. We retired ready to face another day of touring.

Saturday, October 22 – Arlington National Ceme-

tery and Georgetown

#### Saturday AM

The buses were on time this morning (no rush hour commuter traffic on Saturday!). It was another rainy, gray day. We wound our way past the Iwo Jima Memorial to Arlington Cemetery. There we had a little delay as a ticketing snafu occurred but we finally disembark to make our way to the trams to tour the Arlington National Cemetery. The trams made 3 stops, the JFK memorial, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and Arlington House, former residence of Robert E. Lee. There was a tour guide on each of the trams so it was easy and informative to hear and see all that we wanted concerning the Arlington National Cemetery. A stop during the changing of the guard was imperative and it was moving, as always. We toured the Arlington House and some walked to the JFK gravesite, too as we made our way through the cemetery.

The buses then took us to Georgetown for lunch and some quick shopping. Kudos go to the driver negotiating the narrow, busy streets.

We headed back to the hotel enjoying the traffic as usual and also taking a circuitous route as our bus followed another who took a wrong turn and had to back track to the hotel! Many catch a little nap as we head into the hotel.

#### Saturday PM

The squadron dinners were held in four different rooms in a far wing of the hotel. The Italian buffet was yummy and worth the walk! Friends had ample opportunity to visit and reminisce although we missed some who had to leave early due to issues with Hurricane Wilma. We had a great time. Half of our family including myself had an early flight out on Sunday so we were unable to make the breakfast and after hearing about the Color Guard and Chaplain coming, wished we could have stayed. I am sure it was an awesome way to end the 2005 Reunion. See you next year!

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lingen and make some money.

It never turned out that way.

In April of 1943, I got my greetings from Uncle Sam and it wasn't long until I was at basic training at Sheppard Field at Wichita Falls, Texas. Now I was raised in Texas, but this was red dirt and hot as all get out. I have never been in such a disagreeable place before or since. I then was sent to Biloxi, Mississippi, for mechanic school. This was my last choice but it was a lot better than what I had just experienced. It was wet and cold that Christmas of 1943. I didn't want to be a mechanic, my brother always did my mechanic work for me when we were growing up. I didn't feel I had the talent for the job.

The first phase of study was Tools. Tools was a week or ten-day study of identifying and sizing tools. I didn't try very hard for I didn't like what I was doing. After a break one day I noticed a bulletin stating that if one failed this initial course he would be transferred to the infantry. Would you believe that I finished second in my class for the entire course and was rewarded with a ride in pistol Packing Mama, a celebrated B-24 which was brought back to the States to help with the war bond effort at home.

After mechanic school I was sent to gunnery school at Harlingen, Texas. Now this was my hometown and I thought how nice it would be to go home for some of Mom's home cooking. The first person I saw was Bud Breedlove. Bud was the sergeant in charge of the new arrivals. I had known Bud since high school but he informed me that no one was to get passes to go to town for some time to come, but my brother was stationed there and he got me a pass from his commanding officer. My brother was stationed at the gunnery school for three years. David joined the Army Air Force to be an airplane mechanic and they put him in clothing supply just temporarily for three years.

One night after working in the mess hall pulling kitchen police, I went over to the dayroom where I found David playing pool with two other soldiers. I didn't say anything so as not to disturb their game and one of the guys asked me if I wanted to join them. They asked me to follow Sgt. Yates. They didn't know we were brothers so I picked stick and when David shot if he didn't make the shot he didn't leave it difficult. We didn't do badly that night

and helped the always dry wallet. I never did go back to play pool.

After graduating from Harlingen Gunnery School we were to be promoted to the rank of sergeant and get a delay in route from Harlingen to Fresno, California. I thought how nice it was going to be to walk to the front gate catch a bus ride into town and then spend a couple weeks at home. We didn't get promoted, we didn't get the delay in route, and we were sent on a troop train directly to Fresno, California. Fresno was not ready for us so to keep us busy we were put through another basic training with all the hikes and infiltration courses.

One night when we were guarding a peach orchard and one of the guys brought some ammunition for the 45 caliber pistols and we were firing away when an officer came to tell us we were going on leave. I thought at first we were going to be racked back for the unauthorized firing of the 45's. I didn't have any money so I called my dad and he wired me some to come home. After enjoying my first leave since being in the Army I reported back to Fresno and, at that point in time, I learned I was part of a crew. Our crew boarded a train along with many other crews and went to Walla Walla, Washington. The base had been closed for the winter so we opened it.

When we first assembled at Walla Walla, I learned that I was to be the aerial engineer. I protested for I didn't feel I was qualified to be a flying mechanic. The protest was of no avail and I had to go through with it. I learned how to transfer gas, how to feather props, how to change out amplifiers and how to do the many other necessary flight maintenance tasks, all in the classroom, but not in the air in actual flight. I went up once with a flight engineer and watched him, the next time he explained the things he was doing, and the third time he said, "It's all yours." At that time I hoped that my pilots had more training.

My first pilot was a sandy haired young man who was kind of an All American type, but he fell from a truck and broke his arm, so we lost him from our crew.

Our co-pilot was a P-51 pilot who did not want to fly the B-24 and he made little attempt to learn. We got a First Lieutenant for our crew. Lt. Lee P.

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Ward had been an instructor at the base but it seemed that while on a training mission he was at mid-ship for some reason or other and the pilot got lost over Pendleton, Oregon. Lt. Ward took the controls and with the radio not working during a stormy night he flew low over the town. An army officer seeing the problem gathered a number of cars together and lined up their headlights to light up a landing strip on the golf course. Lt. Ward landed the four engine monster on the course at night in a thunderstorm but because he was negligent, he was busted to a combat crew and then he inherited us or we him.

I feel that at this time I need to tell about Lt. Ward. He was a product of Texas A&M, but we didn't really hold this against him. Lee seemed to be snake bit. I didn't know him before the problem at Pendleton, but once when we were leaving San Francisco, he wanted to fly under the Golden Gate Bridge but there was a dense fog and we couldn't tell if a ship was passing underneath. After a few circles he finally decided not to do it. He was the type of person that if we had a beautiful day he would bounce the plane allover the runway as if it was too much bother to pay attention to what was happening.

Once when we were landing in Marrakech, Africa, we were in a terrific thunderstorm and a 50 mile an hour cross wind, he set the plane down like a baby. He went to an A&M party near our base in Cerignola, Italy, and I believe Major General Twining was there, and Lt. Ward evidently celebrated too much and couldn't fly the next day. The operations officer had to fly our crew on the mission. Lee knew this would go against his record and he had been a First Lieutenant much too long. To compensate for his actions he volunteered to fly green crews on their first missions. You might have guessed, his plane was hit and he bailed out north of Trieste. I saw Lee in about 1960 in Houston and he told me that if I had been his engineer

he could have flown the plane to a friendly base. He said the green engineer did not know how to transfer gasoline in the manner that would have given them the necessary fuel in the proper engines.

Lt. Ward retired from the Air Force as a major, attained a law degree, and was with the district attorney's office in Houston. Lee always had a bad cough and I wonder if he is still alive today. I guess I should check on him before long. I failed to mention that Lee managed to evade being captured for about forty days and then some supposedly friendly Italian group turned him over to the Gestapo. He was in the Nuremberg Prison for about seven months before the war was declared over in May of 1945.

I had mentioned earlier that I was sent from Harlingen to Fresno, from Fresno back to Harlingen, from Harlingen to Fresno, Fresno to Walla Walla. When we finished at Walla Walla the Inspector General found out that the radio operators had not had any leave so they were granted 15 days' delay in route to San Francisco. They couldn't do anything with the rest of us so back to Harlingen I came and then to San Francisco. Mostly we traveled by train so I became very familiar with that section of our nation. When we were getting ready to take the B-24s out of San Francisco the officers were instructed to stay for a briefing and the engineers were to pre-flight their planes. We went out but it seems that none of us had pre-flighted a plane before. I had watched on several occasions and had started these R1830's at Test Blocks many months before in mechanic school. To my surprise, and maybe to the taxpayers, I was able to go through all pre-flight procedures. After some engineers saw that I had accomplished the task, they asked me to help them with their planes. I really felt smart that day.

We flew across the nation from west to east stop-

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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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ping in Arizona, Tennessee, and New Hampshire. After a couple of days in New Hampshire we went over to Gander, Newfoundland. We were weathered in there for about a week. During this time someone stole my leather A2 jacket. I had written some letters and whoever it was had my letters censored and mailed. I sure liked that jacket. It was kind of a symbol of being a flyer. We flyboys thought we were special people in the war. When we were headed for New Hampshire we flew over Torrington, Connecticut, which was the home town of our ball gunner, George Rainey. We wanted to send a message to his folks so we rigged a parachute from a handkerchief. We circled several times to get attention and then dropped the chute. I don't remember George saying anything about them getting the message.

The weather let up a bit and early one August morning we took off from Newfoundland and headed for the Azores. It was beautiful for we were flying just above the clouds and when the sun came up it seemed to filter the rays of light through the peaks of the clouds. We were fortunate to have an excellent navigator for we hit the Azores head on. We stayed there over night and then we were off to Africa. We landed in Marrakech in one of the worst electrical storms I have ever experienced. This was the time that Lt. Ward put the ship down soft as a baby. After that we went to Tunis and then we went to Bari, Italy. We left our plane there and were transported to Cerignola in another plane. After the loss of Lt. Ward we were assigned a new pilot. He was Second Lieutenant Michael K. LaRock who had been a co-pilot on another crew.

Mike was a nice appearing young man who had a certain air about him. He had great confidence in himself as a pilot and trusted others to know their jobs. Now our original co-pilot was back with us for he too had fallen from a truck and had broken his arm and we had to this point used other people for the job. The rest of the crew was kind of experienced by now but the pilots were rather new to their jobs.

I recall that when we were all green and on our first mission with Lt. Ward, we had an experienced pilot flying as co-pilot. He asked me, "How do you transfer gas." My answer was "How do you do it out here." He told me he liked half of the auxiliary wing tanks transferred on the way out and the other half on the way back. He said he didn't like just fumes in the tank. I had never transferred gas in flight but only in the classroom. If transferred in-

correctly one or more engines would cut out and the pilot would not be able to keep the plane from moving out of its present slot in the formation. With wing men this could be disastrous. I thought of the classroom, made the transfer, listened and watched, and, to my delight, everything went as it should.

On Michael's first mission with us we drew a long mission to Poland. Planes are much like cars, in that some give good gas mileage and some get very poor mileage. We had a plane that drank more than the usual 200 gallons of gas an hour. On the way to the target I informed Lt. LaRock that we would not have enough gas to get back to our base. He informed me that this was his first mission as a first pilot and he was going there and back even if he had to get out and push or something like that.

On the way back we lightened our ship of almost everything unessential and then through radio communication we found out that there was an emergency landing strip on the Island of Vis just off the coast of Yugoslavia. We weren't the only planes to have fuel problems. This little landing strip was cratered in among some mountains and this caused an updraft. Because of the updraft the B-17's couldn't get down soon enough to use the entire needed runway and would end up hitting into one another. The B-24's didn't have this problem for it had the gliding ratio of a rock. Before landing Mike kept asking me if we could circle one more time. Since the gauges are tube type and fluctuated with the movement of the plane it is difficult to get an accurate reading, so I kept telling him it was a risk. When we finally landed I took a stick reading of the tanks from the top of the wings. I had put most of the gas in number three engine for it is the one that operates the hydraulic equipment. I found that number three engine had about 30 gallons and the others varied from 5 to 20 gallons. It was nice to be down. Mike complained that his heated suit didn't seem to work. When he unplugged it the cord came off in his hand. The cord had been cut clean as a whistle, probably by a piece of flak.

Something I did not tell the others is that I thought I had messed my pants. I knew it was freezing weather and I thought I would end up with frostbite in an embarrassing spot. I finally got the nerve and time to check, and, to my relief, there was nothing there. It was hard to check an item of this nature for we wore a lot of clothes. First we wore our regular under clothing, then long winter underwear, then our winter olive drab, the heated suit, the fly-

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ing coveralls and lastly the insulated flying gear. There was a Scottish soldier stationed on the island and I listened to him tell of the people there. He felt we would have trouble with them in the future.

There was also a rumor that Marshall Tito was there but I never saw him. The women would carry large bundles of sticks on their heads and walk as easily as if they were not there. They were a strong, sturdy people. Many unusual things happened to the different crews of our squadron and to us.

Once when the operation officer had to fly our crew and we were near Prague, the supercharger to one of the engines went out and the spare would not help. At this time we had to abort, and while returning we came close to a previous target that we were unable to bomb because of poor weather. We decided to give it a try but had no bombsight so the bombardier used the windshield wiper and we hit the target solid. That day we were one of the camera ships so Sgt. Dumdie filmed the hit. Because of the hit we got credit for the mission. Otherwise, if you didn't drop bombs you got no credit for the mission. When I mentioned that we had no bombsight it is because we pattern bomb. All planes drop off of the lead plane and when it drops about 27 other planes drop at the same time. You can imagine the devastation of this many tons of bombs and there were usually three other groups of 28 planes doing the same thing on the same target.

One day, when we were getting ready to bomb a Vienna target, we came in from the north to divert flak fire. As we opened the bomb-bay doors there was a malfunction and our bombs also dropped, so there we were in formation and no bombs. We didn't know what to do so we stayed in formation and nothing was ever mentioned about it. Who knows, we may have been the only ones to hit the target. One time before Lt. Ward was shot down, two officers of our crew were infected with some kind of skin irritation and couldn't fly so Lt. Ward got himself a three day pass to go to Foggia, Italy. I didn't see how he could go and we not, so I went to the Flight Surgeon and got the rest of us three day passes to Foggia. We ran into Lt. Ward in Foggia and he said there was nothing there and he was going to hitchhike to Rome so we joined him. After hitching rides on several truck we arrived in Naples and then a GI came by in a U.S. trucks and said he was wheeling and dealing to Rome and ask us if we wanted a ride? We arrived in Rome about four in the morning. We could not go to the regular Air

Force hotels for our passes were only good for Foggia and not Rome.

Our nose turret gunner, William T. Glover was very persuasive and later got us on tours to everything of importance, even an audience with the Pope. I don't know what religion Sgt. Glover was but he had bought a rosary and he fought his way to Pope pious XII for his blessing. We lost our radio operator and came home without him. When we got back from hitching rides all the way from Rome we found that Centanni was already at the base. It seems that he met a friend in Rome who was a P-51 pilot and the guy flew him back to our base.

The radio operator actually thought we had tried to kill him back at Walla Walla while on a practice bomb run. He was going through the bomb-bay on the catwalk with an aerial camera and the bombardier opened the bomb-bay doors. Seeing what was happening I jumped down off the flight deck and overrode the bombardier's switch with utility valve, but when the light went off in the bombardier's panel, Lt. McVicars pushed the switch again. Again the doors opened and at this point I pushed the utility valve and held it closed. Only then he could go back safely. I don't blame him for being scared and angry for he was holding on the bomb racks with one hand and the camera in the other. He had no chute and the doors kept opening and closing under him all the time.

I wrote brief statements of all my missions. We hit some targets and missed others. We flew in the winter time and the weather was as much a threat as some of the targets. We hit a snow storm at 23,000 feet and it was as fine as powder. My turret, the top turret, had a small flak hole in it and the powdery snow came in and coated the entire Plexiglas on the inside. About that time I heard the pilot ask the ball-turret gunner if anything was below us and he replied he couldn't see to know if it were clear. The next thing I knew we were descending at a rapid pace. All our gauges were out but we judged we were about at 5000 feet. We heard later that seven planes spun in that day. All deicer equipment was removed from the planes when they reached their overseas base for it slowed them down a bit and the glycerin was inflammable.

I remember my first mission. It was to bomb an airfield at Athens, Greece. It seemed that the Germans were trying to get their troops out of the area by tri-motor transports and we wanted to isolate

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them there. There was light anti-aircraft shells exploding around us and the fire in the middle of the shell was as big as a barn. It was frightening. The co-pilot who flew with us this day was an experienced combat pilot and he called back to the waist position to throw out the chaff. Now chaff is like Christmas tinsel. This material fouls up the radar which guides the flak guns. Our crew was so green that they didn't know it had to be removed from the cardboard boxes and they dumped box and all. I don't believe that anyone knew about it except the Germans. At least they already had their Christmas tinsel a bit early. I believe the worst of all the trips was the one to Munich in October of 1944. We were in the flight that was to hit the target and then rally right drawing the fire. Then the rest of the planes in the group rallied left and were a little more protected. As a result the #4 plane of our group, which is the center plane of the formation, caught a direct hit. When 2800 gallons of 100 octane gets a direct hit it is a tremendous burst of fire and parts of the plane and crew went in all directions. We were flying in #3 position, which is to the left and ahead of #4, and the power of the blast moved us ahead and outward. Planes in the #5, #6, and #7 positions were all damaged and were not able to get back over the Alps. We throttled back to lend protection for a while, but the planes just couldn't maintain altitude. Crews of those planes all bailed out into the Alps and we never did hear of their outcome. This was the first time and the only time I ever saw a jet plane. I didn't even know they existed and it was strange to see a plane with no propeller. It was way above us and just scouting for ground guns. I knew I couldn't reach it but I was so mad about the incident that I sent a few rounds his way. We did take a shot in one of the wing tanks, but after investigation it didn't seem to be a major leak. Gas was coming from the outside of the wing to inside the bomb-bay and there was nothing I could do. A funny thing happened while I was doing this. I did not take a walk around bottle with me but would take a deep breath of oxygen from the supply on the flight deck. After several trips I was trying to plug in my oxygen hose to the intercom system. It didn't seem to work and finally by bombardier seeing what was happening made the plug-in for me. Lack of oxygen will cause an action of this kind. After this trip no one wanted to go back to Munich again. I might point out that I was always afraid, but in control.

Every time we went down the runway on a mission I would make an act of contrition and then say a Hail Mary to take care of me. I have to tell you

about my tail gunner. He was from Greenville, Texas. He had pilot training, but washed out. He was a slender person about six feet tall with curly red hair. He had a Texas drawl and said that he did not believe in God. He had a pearl handle six gun that he carried with him. We shot some skeet together and did other types of shooting. He was an extremely good shot. He always wanted to encounter enemy fighters and one day he got his chance. He shot down a German FW-190 and saw his shell kill the pilot. It made him realize that he didn't want to do any more killing. He never wanted to see another enemy aircraft. Melvin used to say that in the next war that there would be three in the tail turret for it would take two to hold him in there.

In about 1948, while I was attending Southwest Texas State College in San Marcos, I saw a green Cadillac parked across the street from my dormitory. Low and behold, there was Melvin J. Moore wearing an officer's uniform. He said he always wanted to be a pilot and this time he went to Officers Candidate School first and now he was at Randolph Field in San Antonio taking pilot training. I once asked him to whom he prayed when over a target and he didn't answer me. I can say one thing that he had better morals than anyone else I knew over there. This guy knew he was coming home for he sold everything he could get his hands on and sent money home to buy a building for a car dealership.

The war was fought by the youth. The oldest person on our crew was 28 year old George Rainey. You might have guessed that we called him "Pop". One of the best nose gunners was a youngster who turned 18 while flying his tour. The finest lead pilot was only 20 years old and I was told that his commanding officer had to send in a wavier on age so as to promote him to the rank of captain.

Another experience that comes to mind is the one we had as a result of aborting a mission when we were near Linz, Austria. Our navigator, George Wilson, often flew with lead ship as a dead reckoning navigator and our crew was assigned others to fly in George's place. I don't remember this replacement's name, but the story was that his wife was ill in the States and he wanted to hurry and finish his tour to get back home to her. In that he flew often he was fatigued and during this flight he slept while going to the target. We fly in formation and really didn't need a navigator but we again had supercharger trouble and had to abort. We dropped

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down and headed back by ourselves. This was something we don't relish doing for we are all alone without the protection of the group or escort. Anyway the navigator got out his flimsy which gives all the weather information and headed us home. The clouds were solid under us so we could not see the terrain. We didn't want to drop down through the clouds for Yugoslavia had some hard mountain ranges in that region. At one point a British Spitfire pulled up on our wing but our radio operator couldn't get the radio working so we couldn't communicate with him and he peeled off.

Finally we got a break in the clouds and one of the officers was able to identify an island. They had been searching the wrong coast for the island was the Isle of Capri off the Italian coast in the Mediterranean and not in the Adriatic off the Yugoslavian coast. When we finally located our position we were in the middle of the Mediterranean and Mike asked me how much flying time we had left and I informed him about two hours. At this time I listened to the discussion of the crew. If we went to Spain we would be interned and not have to fly again or we could head north and take a chance on France. We headed northward and flew low level until we reached a city on the coast. Mike turned the plane on one wing and flew the plane down a street between two buildings and then I heard someone say, "We are in Nice, France." At this point Mike decided to put on a show for the people of the city. He buzzed the short runway and the short wooden tower.

There was a P-39 parked there and these were loaned to the French toward the end of the war. Lt. LaRock put one wing up and over and up and over the light posts which were on the seawall. At one time the plane was so low that the props were kicking up sea spray in the bomb-bay. Finally we landed on the all-too-short runway. I checked on the gas supply and was told that they had a limited supply and could not afford to share with us. I went into Nice after checking my ship and not having any luck with the gas. While I was walking *in* front of the Negro Hotel, the hotel we buzzed, I heard a whistle. I looked up and there on the balcony was Mike with two lovely women, one on each arm. Did I tell you that Mike could speak both French and Italian? After a couple of days I was able to get 200 gallons of gasoline. You should have seen that French man pumping gas from a barrel with a hand pump and the gasoline was spraying everywhere while a lighted cigarette dangled from the corner of his mouth.

I moved away from the operation for it looked dangerous to me. Anyway we left for Marseille and we carried a couple of French officers with us. Again we put on a show. I don't know if these officers had flown before but it looked like they were turning green. We got more gas at Marseille but all the lodging was taken. I heard someone say, "Lets go back to Nice," and away we went. In the meantime Lt. LaRock had got word back to our base as to our whereabouts and he was given instructions to come home at once. We left Nice, again we gave them another salute and headed home. As we approached our field we were notified that it was iced in and that we could not land. Mike informed them that it was clear at Rome so we went to Rome for a few days.

Finally we got home and we were immediately grounded. We were investigated for taking leave without permission. I was not involved, but several meetings took place over the incident. The reason all of this took place was that the flimsy sheet had the wrong information. It stated that we were to have a head wind and we had a tail wind, thereby putting us in the Mediterranean rather than the Adriatic. We had at times talked about unloading our bombs and it was a good thing we waited until we knew exactly where we were.

Finally all was forgiven and our officers were informed it was going to be as if the incident never happened. We were the oldest crew there and had not had any rest camp and the officers had not been promoted since being there. We didn't get rest leave and the officers were never promoted. I wouldn't take anything for the experience of being in Nice. The girls wore their hair in many different colors and their bathing suits were of the bikini style. Also I was amazed at how warm the sea was at Nice and how cold in southern Italy on the Adriatic side. I didn't mind being grounded for I really never did like to fly or go over targets anyway.

Being grounded didn't last long enough and soon we were back to the job at hand. Sometimes things happened that were not explainable. The officers of the squadron lived in tents along a "L" shaped dirt camp road. It started out that one or more officers would be lost from each tent in rotation. Some crews were a little closer in friendship than with others. The officers of our crew and Lt. Faulkner's crew had a good relationship; maybe it was that they lived next tent to each other.

After Lt. Faulkner's crew was shot down, and I'll

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tell you about his crew later, then our officers started preparing themselves for getting shot down. We enlisted men didn't seem to think we were involved for we made no extra preparations. We were all furnished escape packets of nine five dollar bills, a candy that didn't spoil, messages in about four languages, the American flag, first aid materials and several other things. Lt. Ward got up a special packet of lipstick, women's hosiery, cigarettes and anything else he could use in trade. As I related in a previous story about Lt. Ward, after he bailed out he did manage to stay away from the Gestapo for about 40 days.

I mentioned Lt. Faulkner's crew and sometimes we called them Lt. FLAKner's crew. This crew had so much bad luck that it was incredible. They had crashed so many times that I can't relate the story for fear I can't tell them in the proper order. On one of these crashes they lost their regular bombardier with a broken back and many others were in and out of the hospital for broken bones, cuts, and bruises. When they went on a mission it seemed that they caught most of the flak. Their ship would always come back with holes everywhere. One day our crew turned back from a mission while we were over the Adriatic because the cylinder head temperature on #3 engine was extremely high. The hydraulic system works off this engine and it was my decision to return to base. Well, this just isn't done and the commanding officer and the line officer took the ship up immediately. Wouldn't you know the engine didn't act up. The pilot and I were reprimanded for our action.

The next day Lt. Faulkner's crew drew that ship and before they reached the Adriatic that engine blew and they had to return to base. After that we were exonerated. I had told you earlier that Lt. Faulkner and his crew were shot down. This was a raid to Vienna and we weren't on this raid but later when they returned they told me of their experiences. They got hit coming off the target and the pilot kept the ship in the air with the use of trim tabs as the control cables were shot out. The engineer was able to get the crew members to get their chutes on and push them out of the bomb bay. He wasn't sure that all were conscience at the time. Some were hit pretty bad but the radio operator had his head blown away. After all were away the ship burst into flames. They were rescued by Mihilovich's Chitnicks. There were also some Russians at a tavern where they stayed and these Russians kept taunting our group.

After a while the co-pilot went over to one of the Russians and floored him with one punch. They said that after that there was no more trouble. Faulkner asked the Chitnicks to be turned over a friendly group of Yugoslavians. Now this was a problem for the Yugoslavians and the Chitnicks were at war with one another but American money talks and the situation was soon straightened out. It took about a month or so for all this to take place and they came in the gate looking like hell. I thought surely they would be sent home but that crew didn't have much luck. They were patched up and sent back in the air to finish their missions. Remember the radio operator who was killed, well, he was a pickup operator for their guy refused to fly any more for he had enough.

My son, Mark, was reading some accounts of my missions and noted that I had told him that when we were to bomb a ball-bearing factory in Milano, instead we had bombed the University of Milano. Another time a crew member of another crew was temporarily grounded because of a venereal disease when his crew members flew their last mission. He was really put out that he was not going to finish with them, but his crew never came back. They exploded over Vienna. How do you figure that?

When the winter Olympics were held in Sarajevo it reminded me of our many targets in Yugoslavia. Sarajevo was one of our targets along with Zagreb. Once while bombing Zagreb a shell hit so close to the plane that I felt the heat and thought the plane was on fire. I slid out of my top turret without releasing the seat and this can't be done. Anyway I looked around and found a hole about the size of a Texas grapefruit. My waist gunner had been looking out the camera hatch and when he lifted his head his face was covered with soot. We were lucky that this shell burst downward and not upward. When I was in Sheppard Field for basic training we had different days for different parts of our training. All days of training were in a master schedule and some were for close order drill, physical education, obstacle courses, road runs, 20-mile hikes, aircraft recognition and many other things.

A friend of mine, also from Harlingen, found out the schedule for the days of aircraft recognition. When these groups started for the theater we would sneak in their formation. It was a lot better in the theater than on the drill field. When I came to Harlingen Gunnery School we also had aircraft recognition and I was told that I had made the highest

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grade of anyone who had attended that program. Little did they know that I had more practice than most. Once when we were coming off a target in Austria, my pilot wanted to know if any of us could see the escort. Our plane was in the front of the formation so my sector of observation was forward but I swung my turret around and spotted the escort. I replied that they were at seven o'clock. A few moments later I heard my tail gunner blasting away and tracers were buzzing over my head. It seems that the best student in aircraft recognition had mistaken German FW-190's for P-51's.

Another time when we were coming off a target the pilot called out to the whereabouts of our escort and the reply was "Here we are, boss, just six little blue birds". There were some squadrons of black pilots flying both P-51s and P-38s out of Foggia. We always liked this escort for if we got into trouble and had to start home alone one of them usually peeled off and came back with us. I heard later that this group of pilots received many citations for their actions and accomplishments.

I have told this "Believe it or not" story that I kept the whole 15th Air Force down while I had breakfast. As it happened I was not scheduled to fly one morning and all of the sudden I was awakened by the operations officer. He said I was needed to fly as an engineer with lead ship as their regular engineer had suddenly taken ill. Now I'm a breakfast person and there is no way I can function without it and also I didn't want to get shot down with no food in my stomach. I told the officer I had to have my breakfast so he told me to get my gear ready and he would go to the mess hall and get some food. He brought it back and I sat on my cot and had my breakfast. I really now don't remember the menu but it must have been sufficient.

After eating I got in the Jeep and we went to where the lead ship was parked. I had not flown lead before and had to be checked out on the auxiliary power plant. Lead plane has a radar unit for navigation which was called a Mickey. Lt. Wilson was there flying as a nose turret navigator so I asked him where we were going and he said Munich. I knew why the lead engineer suddenly got sick. This is one place I had no desire to go but we had cloud cover and the run was fairly easy. The officers gave themselves an accommodation for the trip but the enlisted men got zilch. Doesn't seem fair does it?

I was present at a rather strange situation quite by

accident. I had not realized that many guys did not know how to drive for they were city boys and had no need to drive. Here in Texas we all drove at an early age. Anyway an officer wanted to go to the flight line and there was no one to drive him so I offered, in fact I was delighted to drive anything again. As we were nearing the field we saw a plane coming in with no rudder or stabilizer on the left side. As we pulled up where others were viewing the landing, they remarked what a great job the pilot was doing. When the plane touched down it hurried to a parking place and shut down the engines. The pilot hurried out of the plane for he too wanted to see the plane who had only one stabilizer. Little did he know that it was he that the tower was talking about. It seemed that his plane had mechanical problems and was late taking off. He tried to take a shortcut and went through a dark cloud. This turbulent cloud put the plane in a spin causing the bombs to be thrown through the side of the plane and shear off the rudder and stabilizer. You don't pull a B-24 out of a spin, but this pilot did.

After they got control one of the officers went back to the waist position and all he found there was a spilled chute. Now we all carried an extra chute so this was not alarming. At the time he landed he really didn't know what happened to members of the crew but later we learned they chuted behind enemy lines but made it back safely. During the war and in stories about the war the fighting man was given all the publicity, and rightfully so, but technology played a greater part than the average person knew about.

One of these devices was a radar jammer called a Panther. As it was explained to me it seems that the German radar could pick us up before we left Italy and when we got closer this radar was transferred to the smaller radar unit which fed information to their 88 mm anti-aircraft guns. We had two defenses, one was the chaff and the other was the Panther. Every seventh plane had a Panther operator and each operator had assigned range on the kilocycle band. As we were on our bomb run we dropped out the chaff tinsel and the Germans had to readjust their radar to see through the chaff, then they had to adjust their kilocycle setting. The Panther would find his new position and jam him again or another operator would find the new setting on his assigned range and he would do the jamming. This series of hunt and seek would go on until we dropped our bombs. If there was a total undercast this was very effective and even if there were no

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clouds it was better for us if they shot visually than with radar. This gave the planes a better chance of survival and this meant the planes had a better chance of hitting their target. I never did go to Ploesti, Romania.

These raids were winding down just as I was getting ready to participate. I did go to Bucharest, Krakow, Poland, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, and many other places in the area. I got so I could look down and give our location provided there were no clouds. When I think of Ploesti, I think of my last mission, supposedly last mission. I was flying just as an engineer with a major and, it was the last mission for both of us and we were scheduled to fly in the "Tailend Charlie" position.

I questioned the major's position for with his rank surely he could have had a better position, so I thought. He said, "Sergeant, I flew this position on the Ploesti raids, they went over the target and I went around." I'm sure this was not true, but he made me feel better.

We were to hit a target near Florence and it was coordinated with other flights and when it was our time to drop our bombs there was a flight just beneath us so we went to the Adriatic, got rid of our bombs and came on home. It wasn't our fault we didn't drop but operations had a problem deciding if we should get credit.

They scheduled me to fly the next day with an officer I knew pretty well. He had been a co-pilot and was trying out as first pilot maybe someone thought he needed an experienced engineer. This was a low altitude mission and the Leaning Tower of Pisa was an identifying marker. We lost an engine so we feathered the prop and shut off gas to that engine and came on home. It was a short run so the loss of the engine was not a problem.

When I got back I was notified that the previous mission counted and this was just an extra mission. I really think this was done on purpose just to help the new first pilot feel a little more comfortable. I mentioned hitchhiking to Rome. We arrived there real early in the morning and we had no place to go. At that time of the morning there were large wine trucks that made their deliveries so we got on the back and toured Rome until daylight.

These were very large trucks which would seat about four or five guys across the front. We registered in a small hotel, which was against regula-

tions, but with no Rome passes we had no choice. That day we went walking and stopped at an off-street level wine cafe. There were always a lot of working girls around.

Some of them were peeling sour oranges, dipping them in olive oil, and then eating them. Sounded awful to me but with the help of some white wine these oranges began to taste better. One of the girls name was Maria Elena, easy to remember because of the song. She was as pretty as Sofia Loren; in fact, most of the Italian girls were attractive. Most of the people of Rome spoke several languages. In trying to communicate with these girls we finally found that we had our best communication in Spanish. Many of these girls were of fair skin, light hair, and blue eyes. I don't remember how long the Germans were in that area.

Anyway that night we went to the American Bar and Maria Elena was there with two soldiers. Bill Glover went over and told these guys that Maria Elena was infected and they moved out at once. The next day we happened by that little cafe again and Maria Elena was there and was she mad. She really gave us a tongue lashing in Italian and when she finished I recited the Gettysburg Address as quickly as I could knowing that it would sound like cursing to her. It must have for they started throwing the oranges at us. Later we hired a guide for the price of a carton of cigarettes and a few other things.

We visited the Catechumens and some of the ancient ruins. We also saw the Coliseum and the Vatican and as I have already mentioned, that we had an audience with Pope Pious XII. While in Italy our base was a farm house and the barns and the buildings that go with a farm. I don't know where the farmer lived, but he brought his oxen to the watering trough there at the barn. The barn had a brick floor and we built a stove for heating from a 55-gallon drum and used 5-gallon cans stacked to form a chimney. The chimney was about 30 or 40 feet high to reach the top of the roof. One morning, Bill and I decided to light the fire. It was kind of dark and we couldn't see how much gas we were releasing in the barrel so we threw in the match and it sent fire way above the roof. It was like a rocket taking off for outer space.

Later on we got a tent of our own and our crew really enjoyed the privacy. We also heated our tent the same way and sparks often burned little holes in the canvas. The Provost Marshall came in almost

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daily, when we weren't flying, and told us that we needed to repair the holes. He had a saying that sticks with me, it was, "I'm Sheriff Mitten and I ain't shitten". We saluted him once a month for he was the payroll officer and it was regulations to salute the person who pays you.

The other night some of us were talking about WW II American generals and General Patton's name was mentioned. I told about the time we flew oil, ammunitions, and gas to Lyon, France. You may have read or seen in the movies that he pushed further than his supply line reached so during this emergency we stripped some of our planes drastically including the guns except the top turret. We loaded our bomb bay to the hilt and with only a pilot, co-pilot and engineer we made the deliveries. We didn't need a navigator for all we had to do was miss Marseilles to the west and follow the Rhone River to Lyon. We were told that the front lines were only 14 miles to the east. I don't remember being told what to do if attacked, but I don't think I would have hung in there very long with that type of cargo.

I was lucky overseas. I could get in a dice game and come out winner most of time. The money we had was invasion money and even the change was paper. In fact it looked like play money and didn't seem to have any value. Gambling was the only recreation available to us.

During the last few months of the European war we were each putting up \$2.00 in a pot to buy war bonds. Then we had a drawing for the \$500 bond and then there were some \$100s and \$50s and \$25s. I wasn't at the drawing and the guys came in and told me I had won the big one. I didn't go immediately to collect but waited until my mission was over the next day.

The next months I won other bonds. One time I bet a guy \$25 that my nose gunner would win a bond and he did. After I got back to the States I got in a game and I put down \$10, and never got the dice. I put down another \$10 and the same thing happened. I decided my luck had changed. We didn't need much money. Cigarettes were a nickel a pack and six was the limit for the week; candy bars were a nickel, but there was a limit of three. I don't remember the price of beer, but the limit was three. Occasionally we could buy soap, tooth paste and a tooth brush.

Once in a while we could buy razor blades. We

were not required to shave but when the whiskers interfered with the oxygen mask we didn't have to be told. Most were too young to shave anyway. Sometimes when we had been flying all day, had finished talking to the G2 officers about the mission, got our shot of whisky and were finished cleaning our guns, we would get on a truck and head for the camp. Once in while we would see black smoke coming from our camp and this meant hot showers. Drums of water were heated with 100 octane and there was great excitement with the anticipation of this luxury.

Sometimes we went into town and got a shower at the Red Cross, but it was cold with a slow drip. Seems as if they could have done something with it. They also sold you a dip of ice cream, only one dip. We didn't go to Cerignola very often for the road was dusty and in the back of a truck the dust is pulled in from the road. When we did go we would get a haircut and a shave from an Italian barber who was about 12 years old. I had always hoped these kids weren't vindictive, especially when that straight edge was at your throat.

Also, when we were in Rome the barbers were very young and for a dollar one could get a haircut, shave, mud pack and a manicure. We were big spenders so we shot the works. Most of the time when flying a mission the crew didn't have time to go to the bathroom.

There were a few occasions though when some did have to go and in the waist position there was a funnel and a tube but in the front there was only the bomb bay. You had to have good kidneys to fly. Toward the end of the war we finally got smart and had some sandwiches prepared by the mess hall. They froze while in flight but they sure did taste good when we were at lower altitude and safely on the way back to our base. Catholic mass was held every Sunday just three or four miles from us. We caught a truck most of the time, but sometimes we just walked.

I was sitting in church and in walked Michael K. LaRock. I had flown with him all this time and never knew he was Catholic. I asked him about his presence there and he said that the next day was his last mission and he wanted all the help he could get. Most of the time our missions were to Munich, Linz, and Vienna.

One night we were assigned a night harassment

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mission to Innsbruck. Our crew didn't want to go, and especially me. One plane at night with no night experience and no radar in a plane that could barely fly 180 miles per hour seemed awful foolish to me. We just knew we would get hit so we planned our escape route to Switzerland.

While we were on the runway ready for takeoff, the tower sent up a yellow flare, meaning to wait, and a few minutes later the red flare was fired and this meant to stand down or cancel. I think my prayers were immediately answered. I can say in all sincerity that the raids on which I participated were not destructive to cities themselves. We had instructions to hit marshaling yards, oil depots and viaducts. Only once or twice did we drop incendiary bombs and that was to help the ground troops near Bologna. I don't think John Glenn felt better when he finished orbiting the earth than I did knowing I wouldn't have to ever do that again.

It was always a great feeling to land from a mission, open the top hatch, and upon landing sit on top of the plane. Engineers were required to look out the hatch or ride on top to alert the pilot of things not visible from the cockpit. When sitting up there it was as if we were saying to everyone, "We did it again world."

I was sent to Naples on May 1, 1945 and boarded the Mariposa on the 11th. While in Naples on the 7th, we heard a lot of shouting out in the streets and we later learned that the European war was officially over. Of course, my war was already over, but I felt better about the trip across the Atlantic. We arrived at the New York harbor on May 20th, and it was as if we had won the war by ourselves. We received a greeting from ships with bands playing and other ships had water spouting everywhere. We were impressed with the people of New York and never had any idea that such a reception was in the offing.

On July 22, 1945, I was given an honorable discharge and it certified "Thomas L. Yates, 38460982, Technical Sergeant, 766<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron, is hereby awarded this certificate as a testimonial of Honest and Faithful service to this country". When I started writing a few things about my war experiences I never thought that I could write this extensively. The participation in combat was one of the greatest times of my life. I know I did things that thousands of others had done, but to me it was my experience, my contribution, my memories, and my special corner of my life. Yet, when it was

over, it was over.

We each went our own way and maybe it shouldn't have been totally that way. I never heard from some of the crew. I did see Lt. Ward on two occasions in Houston. I did see Melvin Moore that one time in San Marcos and I had a letter from Staff/Sgt. Dumdei. I remember that Lt. Mazza was from Pittsburgh and I think Michael LaRock was from Philadelphia. Lt. George Wilson was from New Jersey and Lt. McVicars was from somewhere in Montana. Bill Glover was from Charlotte, North Carolina, and Pop Rainey was from Torrington, Connecticut. I mentioned that Melvin Moore was from Greenville, Texas, and Anthony J. Centinni was from New Orleans. When I was in New Orleans I thought of trying to reach Centinni, but I thought that he might still be mad at me for the Walla Walla incident.

In all reality I thought that some of them might remember that I was from Harlingen, Texas, and come see the Confederate Air Show. This show has most all of the WWII aircraft, even the B-24. If by some quirk members of the crew could get together, I wonder what would stand out in their minds. During my tour of duty I was awarded eight battle stars of the Rome-Arno, Southern France, Air Combat Balkans, Northern France, Rhine land, Central Europe, Northern Apennines, Po Valley. Also, I received the Air Medal with three oak leaf clusters, EAME Campaign Medal with eight Bronze Stars, and would you believe, the Good Conduct Medal.

I wasn't yet 21 years old and couldn't even vote, but I had defended my country to the fullest probably without realizing its importance. Though this is a chapter in my life has long passed, there is hardly a day that has passed that I don't think about the events, the people, the situations, the humor, and the tragedy of war. I'm sure that my story is shared by many thousands throughout both theaters of World War II. Although my experiences were private to me, I doubt if stories of others would differ greatly. As other wars, both declared or not, have come about since those early '40s, I have felt a kindred spirit with all those fliers who have flown into the clouds of flak and to take on waves of fighters as the target is sought.

When I see the vintage airplanes restored and flown, or even the super-sleek jets of today, I remember all the ground crews and their efforts to put the planes in the air each day. Now, as I see news reports of the latest conflict, I realize the importance of the people at home who rally behind all fighting forces.

## 461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (H) Association Membership

For membership in the 461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (H) Association, please print this form, fill it out and mail it along with your check for the appropriate amount to:

Ed Stevenson  
166 Sandy Acres Drive  
Quitman, LA 71268

If you have any questions, you can E-Mail Ed at ESteve68@aol.com.

The 461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (H) Association offers three types of membership:

- **Life Membership**– Men who served in the 461<sup>st</sup> during World War II and their spouses are eligible to join the Association for a one-time fee of \$25.00. This entitles the member to attend the annual reunions held in the fall each year, receive the newsletter for the Association, The 461<sup>st</sup> Liberaider, and attend and vote at the business meetings usually held at the reunion.
- **Associate Membership** – Anyone wishing to be involved in the 461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (H) Association may join as an Associate member. The cost is \$10.00 per year. No renewal notices are sent so it is your responsibility to submit this form every year along with your payment. Associate membership entitles you to attend the reunions held in the fall each year and receive the newsletter for the Association, The 461<sup>st</sup> Liberaider. You are not a voting member of the Association.
- **Child Membership**– Children of men who served in the 461<sup>st</sup> during World War II are eligible to join the Association as a Child Member. The cost is \$10.00 per year. No renewal notices are sent out so it is your responsibility to submit this form every year along with your payment. Child membership entitles you to attend the reunions held in the fall each year, receive the newsletter for the Association, The 461<sup>st</sup> Liberaider, and attend and vote at the business meetings usually held at the reunion.

Type of membership desired:	<b>Life ?</b>	<b>Associate ?</b>	<b>Child ?</b> Father's name:		
First Name:			Last Name:		
Street Address:					
City:		State:		Zip:	
Phone number:			E-Mail address:		
Squadron #:		Crew #:		MOS:	
ASN:					
Check No.:			Amount:	\$	

# Oral History of World War II

Frank Boring, Documentary Filmmaker and Oral Historian working with the Grand Valley State University in Michigan, is attempting to document the stories of WWII veterans.

Frank attended our 2005 reunion in Washington, DC along with his staff. Together they created several videos of interviews with 461st veterans and gave out Biographical Data Sheets such as that on the next page. These data sheets will be used to attempt to set up interviews with veterans in the future. Several members of the 461st have already sent in completed data sheets. I thank you for these, but we need more. If you took a data sheet at the reunion, please fill it out and mail it in as soon as possible. If you didn't get a data sheet at the reunion or have misplaced yours and wish to participate, please cut out the next page, fill it out and mail it in. Mail your completed form to

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



## Montville Students Hear Unnerving Stories of War

### Veterans recount chilling memories of the Holocaust, battles and life as a POW

by  
Sarah N. Lynch  
Daily Record

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MONTVILLE -- Perhaps it was just a recording, or perhaps the sounds that Hjalmar Johannson heard from his dark room in the military barracks were real.

Johannson could never be sure where the noises were coming from, but one thing was for certain: The pattern of sounds he heard as a prisoner of war in World War II repeated itself over and over.

It started with marching feet, followed by a man's voice shouting orders in German.

Then, it was the "click-click" of rifles and the sounds of shots fired.

Soldiers would periodically barge into his room and shine a light in his eyes, trying to squeeze information out of him and get him to utter words other than his name, rank and serial number.

"I never really knew if they were killing someone," said the Montville resident, who served in the Army Air Corps as an aerial gunner. "It was psychological warfare."

#### Student eye-opener

This was just one of many chilling recollections told to a group of Montville High School students on Wednesday as part of a special Veteran's Day program to educate the teens about the realities of war.

With the support of social studies supervisor Alan Lucibello, Johannson approached the school about the possibility of setting up a special Veteran's Day presentation after he participated in a similar program last year at Randolph High School.

His motivation? The ignorance when it comes to American history is "astounding," he said, and textbooks too frequently promote an atmosphere of boredom.

"Reading about history in a textbook can be deadly, and you're memorizing a bunch of names and dates," he said, noting that it would be preferable to have students learn about the past through oral histories or newspaper clippings -- "anything that makes it live."

#### Eyewitness power

"Even though we're (the veterans) inarticulate and can't express ourselves properly, we were there," he said.

The result of Lucibello and Johannson's collaboration included a large assembly in the morning featuring veterans from World War II, Korea, the Cold War and Vietnam. In the audience were also three veterans from the war in Iraq.

Johannson and Holocaust survivor Bernard Cytryn gave presentations in the morning, telling everyone that the two met last year at a similar veteran's event in Randolph High School only to discover that during

the war, Johannson was involved in liberating Cytryn in a 1944 raid against the Germans.

Cytryn had been a slave laborer at the Odertal refinery, and on the day the Americans arrived and bombed the refinery, German soldiers were beating him because he had eaten a rotten potato that someone threw out a window.

But then, he heard something.

"I heard Zzzhh," Cytryn told the audience. "I realized it was America planes ... I looked out and the sky was black. There were planes - like birds."

Overhead, Johannson was flying a B-24. He bombed the Germans before his plane was hit and he was forced to parachute to the ground where he was taken prisoner. But Cytryn told the students that he credits Johannson and the other Americans with saving his life that day and ultimately liberating him.

#### Chat groups

Following the assembly, small groups of students met with individual veterans to ask questions and watch the veterans from all the foreign wars interact and tell tales.

Some told stories about being wounded or being captured. Others told some humorous tales.

One high school girl said that the students rarely get to learn about the Korean War, and Korean veterans piped up and explained the basics of the conflict and the history behind it.

"I definitely enjoyed it," said 16-year-old Jaspreet Banga, a junior and advanced placement history student. "I don't think that Veterans Day is appreciated here. It means two days off from school."

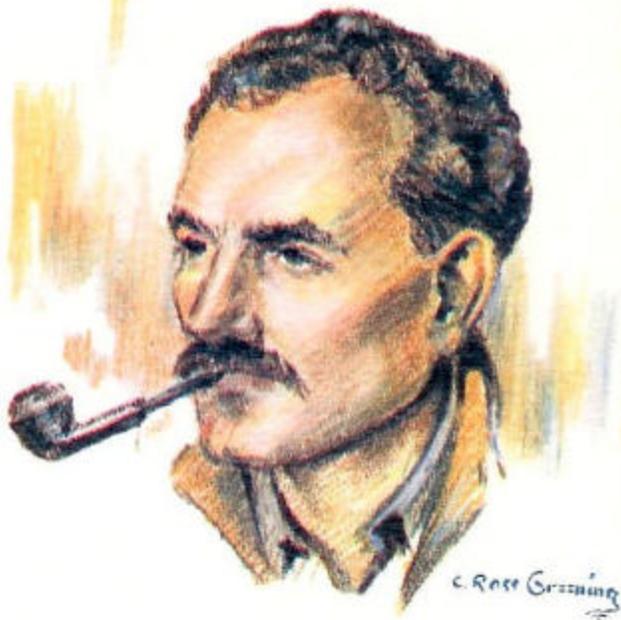
"Now, I'm able to understand where Veterans Day came from and how we're affected, and I'm able to fully understand what all the veterans did for us."



World War II veteran Hjalmar Johannson, gives the keynote address talking about his time in Germany and his life as a prisoner of war.

*(Continued from page 1)*

ings he could probably get it and I had lots of cigarettes. As I recall I was one of three in the room who did not smoke and some had trouble getting by on 5 packs a week which each Red Cross parcel contained. As you will note and as I've said before almost all of our thoughts and actions were centered on food. On the German black market a cigarette was worth the equivalent of one American dollar and a bar of American bath soap was worth in the range of \$5. The reason for the rigid control over trading had to do with the principle of not giving 'aid and comfort' to the enemy. This was, in spite of the fact, that the enemy could and in some instances did rob the parcels prior to issuing them to us.



Colonel H. R. Spicer

Col. Spicer, from San Antonio, Texas, was the most popular officer of field grade in Stalag Luft I. His amiability and cheerful loquacity made a hit with his fellow-officers, but this same spirit rankled his captors. For voicing his opinion of them at an evening roll call in late November 1944, Col. Spicer was court-martialed by them. Rumors of a death sentence were squelched when the Colonel was given solitary confinement for the duration. The spirit with which he bore his punishment only increased the respect and admiration every officer in camp held for him.

There were naturally some violations of the trading

regulations and one violation in January 1945 led to one of the most important incidents of our stay. The POW Commander of our compound was Col. Spicer, a large imposing West Pointer and fighter pilot who had been shot down a short time before me. He, like many of the men including myself, sported a heavy handlebar mustache, which seemed to impress the Germans greatly. He was very well liked and respected by all of we POWs as well as by the Germans. One afternoon he called a meeting of everyone in the compound. All 2500 of us stood in front of the raised open-air podium next to the Wheel's headquarters barracks while Spicer berated us about illegal trading with the Germans. The German guards in the compound stood around listening too. At any rate after reiterating the problem several times and pleading with all to cease the practice he finished with, as I recall, "I, for one, would be willing to stay here forever if they would just kill every German in Germany." All of the prisoners cheered and thought nothing of it until next morning, when a group of guards came into the compound and marched Spicer out to the cooler, where he spent the rest of the war in solitary confinement.

He was charged, officially, with "insulting the German race" which carried a death sentence if convicted. As much as it seemed laughable to us, they were dead serious. They did convict him by military Tribunal, and sentenced him to be shot. This did stir up we POWs but there was nothing we could do except watch and wait. The Germans seemed in no hurry to carry out the sentence and kept him in the Cooler for quite a while with an almost continual string of visitors at 10 minutes each. Finally the Germans transferred Spicer to a different prison near Berlin and from then on our only information was by rumor we heard that he was to be exchanged for a German Col. held by the US under the same sentence for a similar offense. The war ended before the exchange was consummated.

The next time I saw Spicer was many years later when in Albuquerque, where I was in the operations office when he landed in his private P-51 as big as ever and looking none the worse for wear with that handlebar mustache spread all over his face. He went

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back out to his P-51 and took off, simply telling the tower when asked, "This is Spicer, heading west".

I should tell about our clothing, which in my case was something else. When shot down I was wearing the gabardine heated suit and GI boots and underwear. At the Dulag they took away the heating insert but at least left me the shell. When we got to the Stalag and after delousing and shower we were issued new clothing that was supposed to be US Army standard issue uniforms which our country had supplied through the Swiss Red Cross. Since I was not as large as most of our men the German Guard Quartermaster issued me a blue British NATO Blouse and overcoat with Olive Drab trousers. It looked like hell and to my loud complaint they told me that I could get another issue when my size came in. The war ended and I was still in blue with a large bust. They issued some kind of GI underwear and T-shirts and two pair of socks and it was still holding together when I got back to civilization ten months later. We had no way to launder clothing or take a bath although we tried occasionally. That stuff was washed not more than once a month and was still wearable. Just proves what I say about wearing out our clothing by washing. In our compound we had no showers as such but I did try to take a whole bath at the washstands once a week. Not as often as some whom I considered overly fastidious, to the point where I wondered about their sexual orientation. The latrine had no warm water, which made it very difficult to get excited about personal cleanliness. All drinking and cooking water had to be carried from the latrine to our room in a 4-gallon bucket that each room was issued. Trying to cook and have water to drink and wash up dishes would have been impossible without the utensils we made from Klim cans. Klim was powdered whole milk, which was packaged in one-pound cans, and was a major item in our Red Cross parcels. I saved every Klim can and by hard work and some very rustic tools managed to make various sizes of cooking pans and water containers. They didn't last too long so the task was unending.

After the initial delousing we were marched to Compound one every three months for delousing and a welcome semi-warm shower. I was fortunate to only

get lice once and managed to get rid of them without too much trouble at the next delousing. I don't know what they used but it looked and smelled like lye! Each man had two bed sheets and the Germans exchanged one for a clean one every month. There was a roll of American type toilet paper in each Red Cross parcel, which was a real boon. The German ration included some TP but I never got desperate enough to use it except for cleaning up tables and floors etc. (I have since found similar toilet paper in areas of Europe and even talked to people there who liked the stuff because it had "fetch") I had a towel and wash rag of some type which they also exchanged for clean ones about once a month but I don't remember any details.

I tried to shave about every other day, which was not a problem except for lack of hot water. To get any hot water I had to take a pan of water in from the latrine and heat it and then go back out to the latrine and shave. (The latrine was 50 feet from our barracks) We had plenty of shaving hardware as provided by Gillette in the Red Cross parcels. I never envied the frontline GIs who never had it as good as we did as far as cleanliness was concerned.

In the vein of this thinking I must detail my closest brush with death. I had been napping one afternoon as was my habit and woke with a desire for a BM, which was also my norm. At any rate I grabbed my roll of TP and proceeded down the hall and blithely out the door toward the latrine, which was about 50 feet away. I was about twenty feet from the barracks when a voice behind me said "Hey Jonesey don't you know there's an air raid on?" Before I could answer or even come to a stop a bullet went whizzing past my ear and I'm sure I made it back to the door in one jump and slid through as another Kraigie held the door open at some hazard to himself. Looking out afterward it was easy to see that the guard, who had shot, was very shook up and distraught. He was looking at his rifle like it had done it by itself. I, however, was the one in error and was lucky that I got only a mild chewing out from my fellow POWs. It could have been much worse since the bullet went through the side of the next block and very close to another POW. Most everyone including myself blamed me

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for the incident for we had very explicit instructions to stay in the blocks during air raids. I obviously was unaware that the alarm had sounded so had some excuse. Following that incident we initiated a system to be certain that everyone was aware when the air raid alert signal sounded.

Stalag- Luft I was on the Barth peninsula about 130 miles north of Berlin and 75 northwest of Stettin. The USAF and MAP often used the Peninsula as a navigational turning point and this caused us to have many air raid warnings. When I was first interned we could and did go out and watch the Air Force fly by 20,000 feet up and cheer and yell to the increasing anger of the guards and German hierarchy. They finally ordered us to stay indoors with doors and windows closed and no waving or cheering during air raids. One afternoon prior to this order we were treated to a real good Air Show when, as we were watching 5 or 6 training planes from the local training base doing basic maneuvers over our heads, there suddenly appeared three British Mosquitoes, which came in from seaward without any warning and shot down three of the trainers and went back out to sea without us ever getting a siren. The Germans were furious as we cheered.

A favorite sport of all was talking when we should be listening which led to many bets with odd stakes like the one where we all tried to convince the guards that the war was over so a POW Colonel could win his bet. Several bet losers went swimming in the sump pond but one of the best was on Christmas day after evening roll call and before we were dismissed the doors of the Wheel block opened and two Kreigies came out followed by another carrying a wash basin and warm water and a towel over his arm. They mounted the podium and with all due pomp and circumstance the one dropped his pants and the second washed his ass with soap and water before the other to the accompaniment of cheers and jeers placed a big smacker on the washed spot. It seems that in the heat of argument in early September when Patton was rolling the one man had said, "If we aren't out of here by Christmas day I will kiss your ass in front of the entire compound". The Germans just laughed and shook their heads at the antics

of crazy Americans.

I must relate something about the men in the same room with me for some nine months. Of the 24 I can only remember 5 or 6 very well but I will try to tell some things that I think were of interest. The most impressive and strangely my best friend, although he was a leader in teasing me was a big man named Messerschmidt. (I can't for the life of me remember his first name.) He was 6' 4" and initially weighed 225 with the perfect yes-shaped build that very few of us had. I guess that the best reason that I can't remember first names is because we didn't use them, only last names or nicknames and few of the latter. At any rate Messerschmidt was a former steel production foreman from Pittsburgh. He had worked in a coal mine when first out of high school and then went into steel production. I don't know how old he was but probably around 24 and rated my admiration. He didn't have to take any guff from anyone but he also didn't dish out any. Why we got along well is beyond me but we did, and I think, to my great benefit. It was always a pleasure to watch the way the guards treated him. They obviously admired him if only for his huge stature and mustache in addition to his name, which was like a household word in their circle. When ever they had to call his name for roll call or some other reason they would always stop, look up and ask "relative of Willie" and chuckle. He and I talked for many hours about farming from my side and steel and mining on his side. He worked out a lot with calisthenics and used to tease me for not doing the same, to which I always replied that it was silly and I could do anything he could in that line. He was fond of doing sit-ups on the end of a beach while I sat on his feet and made fun of him. He was never able to do 100 at a time and I goaded him into betting me that I couldn't do a hundred. The bet was five chocolate bars, which he dearly loved. At any rate I immediately did the hundred and when finished bet him I could do a hundred more. I was glad he didn't take the bet but it certainly got his attention and respect.

Another good friend was Boychuck (shortened by his Russian father from a family name of Boychukoffski or such). He too was tall but thin and was of Russian,

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Jewish ancestry and from Brooklyn. He was a typical outgoing Brooklynite, New Yorker who was always able to converse at length on any subject, and even ones he knew something about. He was always trying to hang a nickname on each of us and I feared that he would succeed when he came up with "can-o-woims Jones" but it was too hard to say so passed me by in a few days. His background was such that he had better command of Russian language than any one else in camp. He was used as an interpreter when the Russians relieved us. He somehow succeeded in keeping the Germans from knowing he was Jewish. I played Gin Rummy with him a lot and we walked around the compound some. I will mention that many of the men didn't play cards much, even when we had lots of cards after Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Another of my roomies was Costantino who was a wheeler-dealer from Boston and about my size. He was the one who advised me that the best thing to do if we survived the war and got home was to use our GI bill benefits to go to Harvard or Yale and then use that base of operations to meet and marry a rich girl from Vassar or such and live the good life from then on. He was probably right but I never was too smart. We were all Second or First Lieutenants but rank was ignored and most didn't have any insignia. When we flew our combat missions, I either wore second Lt. insignia or none at all so after capture I told the Germans I was that rank and it reduced the hassle.

I don't even remember the name of the guy who burned the potatoes but we were friendly enough. He just didn't know how to cook and had no sense of responsibility and no taste. All of the men served their stints at kitchen police without complaint and it was really easy since they only worked two days out of twenty or so. One other man who I counted a friend was named Meiniere. He had an older brother in our compound who was a Major and lived in the "Wheel" block. This gave our room good access to what news was available which leads to another item of interest.

**NEWS! RUMOR! SECURITY! MORALE!**

The co-pilot of our crew lived in our room also and I got to know him fairly well. He was 2nd Lt. Captain Emory Jones and had come on the crew when Fisher was made first pilot. His name continued to bug the guards as it had just after we were captured. He was from San Antonio, Texas and was a great guy who, like most of us had never done anything of note until he joined the Air Corps. Some will say that is nothing of note but we universally thought it was. I never did know how or why the pilot of our crew, Robert Fisher got himself in a room in the "wheel shed" but he did so I did not see very much of him.

There were some other men in the compound who I feel are worthy of mention; Major William Burke who was leading our 461<sup>st</sup> Group on the day we were shot down and one of the few men I've seen from the Stalag since we were repatriated. He was a real good man and was a fair-haired type with the 461<sup>st</sup> until that fateful August 25<sup>th</sup> day. When I went to the 46<sup>th</sup> Recon wing at Little Rock in 1958 and went to meet the Wing Commander it turned out to be Col. Burke so we exchanged a few reminiscences.

Another was Major Barriers who was one of the toughest little men I've ever met. He was about 5' 10" and weighed no more than 150 but in an exhibition boxing match with Col. Zemke, who had been a West Point heavy weight boxer, he cut Zemke to ribbons and never got hit once. He was also the one of our group who went out to meet and lead the incoming Russian troops to our position when we were first freed. He was misunderstood to the extent that the Russians ran him about 5 miles at gun point before they found out what he had set out to tell them. No one else in the camp could have survived that treatment.

Then there was Major McGee C. Fuller who was a slightly built man of about 130 pounds but proved to be the heaviest eater I've ever met. For entertainment we put on a pie eating contest one nice Saturday afternoon and the Headquarters Barracks, "Wheel Shed", entered Fuller to the loud laughter of we spectators when he sat down amid the group of big hulking entries from the other blocks who had been in starvation "training" for days. Our pies were

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chocolate filled crusts made from K-2 biscuits and oleo and if possible were heavier eating than my previously described cake. There were 11 entries and they sat down at a large table with their mouths watering and each with an 11" by 15" by 2" deep pie in front of him. When the signal was given they all started in pushing the pie in with their hands and trying to stow it away as fast as they could. All except for Fuller who sat and calmly cut his pie into 12 pieces, which he ate rapidly. For the first half of the contest he was somewhat behind the competition but by about midway though their pies about half of the entrants had either gotten sick or quit to go to the latrine that was disqualification. As they proceeded all ultimately vomited save Fuller who by now was laughing at the rest and far ahead when his last opponent vomited along side him and Fuller, laughing, went on to finish his pie. He was a proven champion and the jeering spectators laughed on the other side of their faces. His prize was a huge chocolate pie. He was another kriegie that I ran into later when he joined our B-36 crew at Travis as Second Pilot and we had many laughs with our friends and families about that incident.

Another character who merits mention in this chronicle is Haven B. Fairchild. He was a tall (6'1") emaciated looking type who made me wonder how he ever got into the Cadet program. He was from Hollywood and had a high-pitched voice such that no one ever referred to him other than as "Fairy". If the reader has seen "Stalag 17" he will understand if I say the character who played the Kriegie intelligence officer must have been modeled on Fairchild. He was married to a girl named Molly and was always going around *singing* "Just molly and me and baby makes three in my blue heaven". He lived in the room next door in our block and was the designated Intelligence officer and dispenser of the clandestine news from BBC. He really put his heart and soul into his work. We could expect him to appear at our room every day at about 5 PM to dispense the latest bits from the radio for that day. Men from other rooms would congregate in the hall outside in hear him. We had to station our men around the block to watch for and alert us if "goons" or "ferrets" approached. With much pomp, Fairy would read from his single page,

all that was worth knowing about the conduct of the war and where it was heading.

Peggy and I stopped in Hollywood on our way from Randolph AFB to Travis AFB in 1952 and contacted Fairy and his family for a few minutes and she can verify that he was still the same "Fairy" and that my description is no exaggeration. Other POWs who had known him told that he was a very aggressive pilot who really loved to fly combat but was shot down on his fifth mission with no Germans to his credit. However we referred to him as a German Ace and he



Col. Hubert Zemke

Col. Zemke was C. O. of the 56th Fighter Group, a Thunderbolt outfit based in England. From Missoula, Montana, Col. Zemke had nineteen and a half victories in the air and eight and a half on the ground - the twenty-eight making him the ranking American ace in the E. T. O. (The halves were shared victories with his wing man.) North of Hanover on October 30, 1944, the Colonel's ship split apart in a thunderhead but he parachuted safely to the ground to become a prisoner of war.

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couldn't deny it since he had 5 American planes to his credit. It seems that when he was in training two of Joe Foss's Marine pilots making practice passes on Fairy's plane collided. On two other occasions he had crashed training planes and somehow was exonerated by good luck or political pull. At any rate he lost his fifth American plane when he was shot down, strafing a flak tower.

Col. Hubert Zemke was the Senior-ranking officer when he came into the Stalag, outranking the senior British officer who had been in compound I for several years. The Germans placed General officers in a special prison near Berlin. Zemke was of Polish descent and had led a fighter group in England for a

couple years before being shot down. He was rumored to have rejected promotion to Brig Gen. several times because he hated the Germans so much and could not have flown any more combat as a General. With all his experience he was only 28 at the time he



When I started this issue of the Liberaider and brought in this article, I realized that I was missing at least some of the article. I contacted Bob and he said he would search for the remainder of the article. I may get it before I go to press, but I want to publish this article either way as I feel it provides good insight into life at Stalag I. I hope you agree.

## My War Time

By  
Paul Shaffer

This is a history of ten, plus one individual, who came together and lived through a trying time in our history.

Each of us were trained individually in their own specialties according to our MOS, which was a number assigned by the US Air Force, indicating which type of training we had completed.

Frederick Gray	B-24 Pilot	West Orange, New Jersey
Norman Schlap	B-24 Pilot	Eagle River, Wisconsin
Paul Shaffer	Bombardier	Johnstown, Pennsylvania
Robert Brina	Navigator	Brooklyn, New York
Ralph Vinson	Flight Engineer and Waist Gunner	Texas
Frank Hawthorn	Radio Operator and Waist Gunner	Ohio
John Peebles	Ball Turret Gunner	Montana
Woodrow Smith	Nose Gunner	West Virginia
Edward Klepper	Top Turret Gunner	New York
Armand Turgeon	Armorer and Tail Gunner	New Hampshire
William "Bill" Waggoner	assigned after Gray's injury	Little Rock, Arkansas

We were formed as a B-24 Bomber crew at Lincoln, Nebraska after going through tests and psychological exams to determine that we would be able to competently perform together as a crew.

After our preliminary training at this base we were sent to Davis Monthon Air Base located at Tucson, Arizona. At this base we completed three months of "Phase Training" in the function and use of the plane and its equipment. We did this by completing training missions all over western United States practicing flying, navigating and running practice bombing runs over selected targets. One mission that was memorable to us was a flight from Tucson to Los Angeles, California. Our target was the Coliseum Stadium.

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Fred flew the mission according to Brina's directions, and five minutes from the Stadium I engaged the auto pilot, adjusted the bombsight and dropped the imaginary bombs and watched the bombsight until the bombs would have hit. All-in-all, the flight was perfect, the navigation was excellent and the bombsight was adjusted for a good hit on the target.

After this training, we were sent to Topeka, Kansas where we picked up a new B-24 which we flew to our combat base at Cerignola, Italy. This was about 20 kilometers inland from Foggia and Bari on the east coast, on the Adriatic Sea. During the flight, starting at Topeka, we were required to calibrate the equipment to make sure that everything was functioning correctly. Our first leg was to New Hampshire where Fred flew over Turgeon's home. Our first landing was at Grenier Field, New Hampshire. After this overnight stop our plane was gassed, and we then flew to Gander Lake, Newfoundland. During this stop we were required to layover because of bad weather. During this layover, the crew had nothing to do but sleep, rest, or canoe and/or fish, since the field was in the middle of a forest with no cities or towns nearby. We had come prepared for fishing as our parachute harnesses were equipped with emergency hand line, hooks, sinkers and lures to be used if needed. Of course we decided that this was an emergency and we used them. Our next flight was a long one! Halfway across the Atlantic Ocean. To the Protégées Azores Islands. During this, over water trip, we were instructed to scan the ocean for signs of German U Boats, with binoculars which we were issued. None were sighted. After we landed, we were told that we should not walk around and sit on the stone fences because they were infected with rats that might bite you and infect you with a terrible disease, Bubonic Plague. Our plane was then gassed and the next morning we took off for the next long leg over water, to Marrakech, North Africa. We stayed overnight in French Army officer's quarters and we had to explain to some of our crew that bidets were not urinals. A few of us did wander through the native quarters and we were amazed at the sights. After that night, we took off for Tunis on the North Africa coast across the Mediterranean Sea from Italy and then to our base near Cerignola.

Here began our introduction in the deadly business of combat bombing. Upon our arrival, since I was the only officer in the Squadron who had Gunnery Training, I was assigned the position as Squadron Gunnery Training Officer.

On August 27, 1944 we flew our first mission to Venzone Viaduct in northern Italy and we returned safely to our base. With great relief, we had safely completed our "baptism under fire". Two days later, August 29, we bombed the marshalling yards at Zagreb, Hungary and returned. On September 2, and the day after my birthday, we bombed a railroad bridge at Mitrovica, Yugoslavia. On September 3 we dropped our load on the ferry slip at Smederovo, Yugoslavia. On September 5 we dropped our bombs on the east railroad bridge at Sara, Belgrade, Yugoslavia. About this time General George Patton was making his spearhead drive across Europe, and his supplies couldn't keep up with his progress, especially gas! General Nat Twining, our Commanding General, instructed our group to empty out our planes, install two

rubber gas tanks in our bomb bays and fly them loaded with gas, which was hand pumped into 50 gallon steel drums when we arrived at Lyon, France, and the gas was then unloaded by ground crews.

Since the flight crew had nothing to do during the unloading, Fred and I started wandering around the air field and being nosy, we entered one hanger, and stopped. The smell was horrible. There were piles on the floor, covered by tarps, which we discovered were bodies of adults and children who the Germans had machine gunned down, while standing in front of a trench which they had dug. They had done this and left Lyon three days before we got there. The German official who had ordered this was Claus Barbie! In another hanger we discovered a German messenger motorcycle which Fred and I decided to load in our empty plane and take it back to Italy with us. We flew two more of these supply missions.

On September 24 we flew our last mission (which we didn't know at the time) with Fred. This mission was to bomb the airport at Athens, Greece, which the Germans were using for their planes. On this mission we destroyed five German planes and badly bombed the runways. The next day, our group (not our crew) bombed the submarine pens in Athens Harbor. For these two missions, any crews could apply for a Greek medal which was authorized for "Assisting in driving the Germans out of Greece." I received my medal and Citation (in Greek) about the middle of 2001. Talk about slow delivery!!!

After this mission, Fred had an accident with the motor cycle at the small arms firing range, and because of his injury he was taken to the hospital. Now we were a new crew without a pilot until October 3, when William (Bill) Waggoner was assigned to us as our new pilot. I would, many years later, find out that Fred, after recovery was assigned as, first as Assistant Flight Operations and later to Flight Operations Officer.

Our new pilot was 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Bill Waggoner who had been a co-pilot on the last Polesti Oil Refinery mission at the time. On that mission most of the planes were shot down and Bill was on one of the two planes from our group which had returned from this mission.

On October 4, 1944 we were awakened, ate breakfast and went to a briefing, where it was explained that our target was the marshalling yards at Munich, the main route out of Italy, for the retreating Germans. "No fighters were expected, but heavy flak was expected!" Because of the distance we were going to fly, we would be given credit for a double mission which would be my 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>. This is the first double mission that our bomb group would fly. Our group took off, formed into formation, and headed north. Shortly after 12 o'clock, as we were nearing the target, Sgt. Smith reported that one of our engines was leaking oil. Sgt. Vinson, our flight engineer, checked, and the engine was feathered. Since we were so close to the target, Norm, our co-pilot suggested that we should finish the mission and "get the hell out of there!" We continued the bomb run, and dropped on target. Almost, at that mo-

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ment we were hit by an 88mm explosion which knocked out our number two and three engines. With the number four feathered that left us with only the left outboard engine running. At that, the pilot started the number four engine that had been feathered. With only number one engine that the pilot was sure of, we had to turn left, when all the other planes turned right as planned.

Everything began to happen fast! "Paul, get rid of the bombs!" "They're gone!" "Bob, find us a place to land! Paul, get up here. I need help!" Climbing from the nose, I knelt between the pilot and co-pilot. "Put down the flaps." "They're not down! Put them down and set on the handle!" He then called out to the crew, "If you want to jump, do it now! I'm gonna take it in." After we were down, I discovered that we had all stayed with the plane. We were losing about 1000 feet/min and starting at 25,000 feet that doesn't leave much time!

Brina called that, "There's a German airfield just past a little lake," which William sighted and we prepared for an emergency landing. It never occurred to me that I was doing a job that the co-pilot would normally do, until Bill landed and, while getting out of his seat, said, "I'm going out and make sure we're not on fire. Take care of Norm." At that I looked at Norm and saw blood and knew then that something was wrong and I checked him and discovered that, in the explosion of the flak that knocked out two of our engines, he also had been hit. Immediately I went to get a morphine needle to give him a shot, to prevent him from going into shock. As I uncapped the needle and prepared to give Norm the shot, I felt something against my back and heard the German word, "Nicht!" At gun point I was taken out of the plane, where I joined the balance of the crew standing outside. Years later, after meeting with Norm's sister Margaret, I was told that Norm had been taken by the Germans to a nearby hospital and he had died three days later because of a blood clot moving to his heart. All those years I had felt guilty because I did not give him the shot of morphine. We all were taken to a bomb shelter and questioned, and told to take everything out of our pockets. Two things that I had were, a Baby Ruth candy bar which I was told, "Keep it, you'll need it," from the questioning officer, and a flimsy which was an onionskin sheet of paper that had all of my bomb sight settings, which were classified as Top Secret. I took a chance that I would not be searched and did not take it out of my pocket since they had not searched any of the others.

We were, after questioning, taken to their regular mess hall and given, what I thought was their regular meal of, cooked cabbage and some small potatoes. That was the last regular meal that we got until we arrived at the prison camp in Barth, Pomarania in northern Germany. After the dinner we were put on a guarded truck and taken to a local prison, Landsburg Prison which eventually, proudly we were told, here was the prison in which the Fruhrer, Hitler, wrote his "Mein Kamph"! After spending the night there, during which I had chewed up the flimsy and swallowed it, we were put on a train and taken to an interrogation center in Frankfurt. When we were loaded on the train, the guards that accompanied us wouldn't allow us to converse with each other. Arriving at Frankfurt the crew was separated from each other, and I was placed in a cell with two other strangers. Back at our base

we had received instructions as to what to expect in the event that we were captured. One was that if put in a cell with strangers you should expect that the stranger probably was a disguised German who spoke perfect American English. I spent three days and on the third day the guard got me from the cell and took me to an office in which was a German Captain seated at a desk in front of a window. He told me his name and said, "Lieutenant Shaffer, you just bombed Munich and my wife is in Munich and I don't know if you killed her!" My response was, "I'm fighting for my country the same as you are!" He said, "But, you're German. Why aren't you fighting for the Vaterland?" "I'm American, not German!" At this he got angry, called the guard and I was taken to a smaller cell with a straw mattress on the floor. The window panes were painted over and you could only hear the street traffic. Here I spent another three days alone with a small peep hole opening every hour to check me. Again a guard opened the door and said, "Come!" And I was taken to the Captain. Back at the base, in the lecture, we were also told that the questioning officer was always two ranks over you. But in reality they were probably enlisted men who spoke good English, dressed as officers. The captain said, "We don't want any secrets! We know everything about you. The Italians are the best spies we have! Every time you are transferred to a new base in the United States the Army puts your picture and the details of the transfer in the paper and we have people in the U.S. who collect this information and it is sent to us. He went on to tell me who my parents were; where they lived; who my officers were back in Italy. In two instances he was wrong. He said I was a student before I went into the Army. Wrong! I was married when I went into the Air Force. And one of the officers he listed was killed on a mission about a month ago. Insignificant errors now, but at the time and under the circumstances, it was a little hope that they were not as smart as they proclaimed to be. After some more questions, and my response each time "Name, Rank and Serial Number" angered him again and back to my cell for three more days. The next time I was taken back to him, he said, "Lieutenant Shaffer, I'm going to bring another man in for him to identify you. I want you to look out the window and don't look at him or say anything to him." The door opened, in walked the guard with Bob Brina. The Captain said, "Lieutenant Brina, do you know this man?" Bob gave only name, rank and serial number. The Captain said, "Guard, you can take Shaffer back to his cell." I can only imagine what this was all about because I didn't see Brina until 40 years later at a Bomb Group Reunion. And since we had so much to say to each other, the subject didn't come up. I think that it was a ploy to convince Bob that I had spilled everything and was ashamed to look at him, making it easier to get Bob to talk. But knowing Bob, I knew that wouldn't happen.

Then I and four prisoners, which I didn't know, were put on a train, given a piece of sausage, a half loaf of black bread and told that was all the food we would get during our trip, the length of which we didn't know, because we weren't told where we were going. We were guarded by four armed guards. During the trip, we were at times required to leave the train and stand with our guards because an air alarm had been sounded at that location. If that train had been strafed or bombed we would all have been killed standing alongside it. I couldn't understand the reason for

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it. On one occasion, we were in the Berlin station when the alarm sounded. We were taken off the train, in the station and stood on the platform, surrounded by the four guards. While we were standing there, a group of Hitler Jugend (youth) in uniforms, approached us and spit on us. The guards laughed.

We eventually arrived at our destination, Stalag Luft Ein. The prison was at Barth, Pomerania, located on the shore of the North Sea just across from Norway and Sweden. Barth was due north of Berlin and our camp was used by the Eighth Air Force as a turning point for the bombing raids on Berlin. Frequently, after Berlin raids we would see contrails of planes flying to the neutral country because they had been hit by flak (or other reasons). Although we were not aware of it, but miles west of our camp, was a peninsula where Penemundi's base was located. This is where the Germans were sending the V-2 bombs to England.

The camp was located on the seashore. We were told, "Don't try to escape over the sand because it is all mined! The camp was also divided into four separated compounds. These compounds were divided by high fences with a locked gate and we were not allowed to travel between compounds. All crew members, Brina and Waggoner, each of us, were in a different compound. And I never saw either one while we were held as prisoners. At the reunion, about 40 years later, Brina and I met, so I now knew that Brina was at the same prison, but I never had a chance to talk to Waggoner, because he had died of cancer years before the reunion. I was located in the North Compound and Brina had been in the East. I had a roommate that I will never forget his name, William E. Trees. How did I remember so long? Because we always told him he was all W.E.T.

Our barracks was divided into eight large rooms. Each room had a table and benches, a small coal burning heater and four triple bunk beds. Each bed had a burlap mattress filled with straw and one thin cotton blanket. Each room was allotted four brick sized lumps of coal each day for heat. These were both for heating our room and any cooking we might have to do. Of course, food was scarce so we didn't need to cook much. When I was shot down, I weighed approximately 170 or 175 pounds. Once we were given a small meat ball about the size of a dime. It was from a horse carcass which had been brought in. We supposed that it might have died of old age. When we were repatriated, I weighed 122 pounds. Since we were so far north, it started to get cold in November and started to warm in April. Otherwise, when it was warm, we played football or soccer and when it was cold we stayed in and bragged and lied a lot.

Our camp was surrounded by a high double wire fence. Inside this fence were three foot high posts, about ten feet apart, fastened to the top of the posts was a single strand of barbed wire. We had been warned that if we touched or climbed over we would be shot. Outside the fence, about 20 or 30 feet apart was a high guard tower, which was manned around the clock. We were also told that, if and when an air raid alarm was sounded we had to remain inside until the all clear was sounded. The penalty for disobeying was being shot! Only one incident that I'm aware of happened when two of us not hearing or not remembering, stepped through the door. One was shot and died. The other shot went through

our barracks, passing over one of us, lying in bed and out the other side of the building. The person who was shot did not die and his wound was taken care of, by a doctor, who was also a prisoner. Adjacent to, but outside the compound, was a brick three story building where the Germans had established a school to teach anti-aircraft gunners. At this time the students were all females. Knowing that we were prisoners they would, stand at a distance to tell us that someone like them had shot us down. In the end of the war, we had the last laugh. Because when we were released by the Russians, we went to the empty building and ransacked it for anything we could find. In that search, I found a German Lugar pistol, which I planned to take home as a souvenir.

On Christmas, we were allowed to have a party in our barracks.



Col. F. S. Gabreski, Oil City, Pennsylvania, was the leading American ace in the E. T. O. when fate caught up with him July 20, 1944. He had twenty-eight victories - tied with Hub Zemke, his old C. O. in England and his C. O. at Stalag One.

Holder of the D. S. C., the Silver Star, D. F. C., the Croix de Guerre, the Polish Cross of Valour, no Luftwaffe product was hot enough to get "Gabby." He got himself! Strafing a Jerry airdrome he depressed the nose of his ship to fire at an ME-109 taking off. He was so low his props hit the ground! In the resultant crash landing he was unhurt. Evading capture for five days he wound up in a fist fight with a couple of Hitler Jugend and was overpowered by an onslaught of reserves. Sent to Stalag One Gabby was made Group C. O. of North Compound Three.

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They gave each barracks a small keg of beer. They weren't being generous! According to the Geneva Convention, prisoners were to be paid the same as the equivalent rank in their army. We never saw any of the money, although they told us it would cost us the pay that they were supposedly holding for us. All of it! Since that time I did discover that German prisoners, being held by us, were being paid our rates and living the "life of Riley". Many German prisoners, at war's end, liked America so much that they stayed here and became citizens. I didn't see that happen to any of us!

Our enlisted men, because the Germans were very rank conscious and did not put officers and enlisted men in the same camp, were sent to a camp in Poland. This camp was named Stalag Luft Fier.

Toward end of the war, the German officer in charge of our camp called a meeting with Colonel Gabreski, our senior officer. The German was an Austrian Major. In the meeting Gabreski was told that the Russians were coming. His orders, by the Fuhrer were to shoot all of us! "He was an Austrian and didn't believe in killing prisoners in cold blood!" He also said that they, the officers and the guards, were going to leave with us locked in the camp and if we didn't do anything to try and stop them, they wouldn't shoot us. We went to bed that night. Every night we were locked in with outside wooden shutters closed and locked and German trained guard dogs were released inside the compound. During the hot weather there were a few ill prisoners and the Germans decided to let the shutters open at night. But the dogs were still released. The barracks were built off the ground and the dogs could not jump in the windows. But they tried, if they saw a prisoner at a window. Our bunks had wooden slats and the first night the windows were open one of us would stand at the side of the window and tease the dogs. When the dog jumped the slat would hit him across the nose and he would run yelping.

One of us knew that if a dog was hit across the nose hard enough they lost the sense of smell. That trick did not last long! When the dog handlers discovered this was happening the shutters were again closed and locked.

When we got up the next morning, we discovered that the shutters were still locked and the dogs were in the compound. The opening of the shutters was always our wake-up call but there were no guards around and we couldn't break out because of the dogs. So we waited inside. A few hours later there was a crash and we saw an American GM 6x6 smash through the main gate. Driving was a Russian woman driver and a male Russian passenger, followed by another truck filled with soldiers. The dogs were eventually shot and the barrack's doors were opened and we were free again!

Shortly after, a Russian general, Marshall Zukov arrived, and was taken to Colonel Gabreski, who was our senior Allied officer in command. A slightly funny situation occurred at this meeting. Zukov couldn't understand English, and Gabreski couldn't speak Russian. Gabreski called for a Second Lieutenant, who could speak Russian, but the Russian would not accept a lowly Second Lieutenant as an interpreter. Gabreski immediately promoted him to a Lt. Colonel and the talk went on until Zukov left. The senior insignia was immediately returned and the man was returned to

being a lowly Lieutenant. Upon leaving, Zukov ordered a group of his men to remain and protect us from the Germans living nearby. He also ordered the squad to get us food from the countryside. They very shortly arrived with a wagon load of potatoes and a small herd of cows, on the hoof. Gabreski asked for "anyone who knew how to butcher." I had learned how to butcher hogs while spending my summers on my grandfather's farm. I and a small group of volunteers then went to work after the Russian guards shot the cows. We worked for a couple of days cutting up the meat so each of us had a real meal of meat. The previous meat, which we received while in prison, was a horse carcass that the Germans brought into the camp and cut up for "hamburg". Each of us prisoners got a meatball about the size of a dime. Once, in seven and a half months! We thought that the horse had probably died of old age. Evidently it was not diseased, because none of us died from eating it.

Of course, being free, we went into town and wandered about, and watched the Russian army move through the town. It was a sight to see. They were traveling on any vehicle and any mode of transport imaginable. American trucks, wagons pulled by horses, men riding on the trucks, wagons and even bicycles. I saw a Russian, riding an old decrepit bicycle pull over, to a German holding a new bicycle. The Russian came up to this man, threw down the old cycle and grabbed the German's newer one. The German held onto his bike and the Russian pulled out his pistol and shot him. He took the bike and took off on it. At that we decided it was time to go back into our prison.

The squad that was assigned to protect us was something else. They all looked to be Asian. Evidently they didn't carry much food with them. After clearing some mines from the seashore, by throwing hand grenades onto the sand, they would throw grenades into the water; the killed fish would float to the surface. They would wade into the water, collect the dead fish and they would eat the fish "Sushi style", raw. I did not see this happen, but it was reported to me by a fellow prisoner.

Zukov also had told Gabreski that they were going to put us onto trucks and drive us to the Black Sea and American ships could pick us up. Gabreski told Zukov that our physical condition was bad and many of us would die on the trip. He requested that Zukov notify General Twining of this fact. Without knowing if the message had been passed on, we waited! And waited!

As time passed some kreigies, as in Krieg ge fanganen (prisoners of war), decided to take off for the west. Some time after the war I had met one who had taken off on his own. In our discussion, he told me that it had taken him and his buddy longer to get back than it had taken those of us who waited. They were also shot at by the Germans, Russians and even the Americans during the trip west.

We had waited almost a month until B-17 planes flew into the Barth Airport, loaded us and took off for France. On the trip back the pilot of our plane asked if we wanted to see what we had done to the Germans. He flew up the Rhine valley and we saw that the entire valley was destroyed.

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Arriving in France we were loaded on trucks and taken to Camp Lucky Strike which was a RAMP (Recovered Allied Military Personnel) camp. Here we were told the reason for the delay in getting back. Marshall Zukov notified of his plan for us and General Twining said that was unacceptable. They discussed (argued) the problem until Twining got exasperated and told Zukov that they would either give permission for the planes to pick us up or "He was going to bomb the Hell out of them!" and permission was given.

From these trucks we were taken to a long tent where we were told to strip and put our clothes into large garbage cans to be burned. We were then taken to the next section of the tent, which was a shower section, and told to scour ourselves. We were then sprayed with DDT to kill any lice. We didn't do much showering in the prison because the water was cold and in the winter we had little heat. We were next taken to the last part of the tent, where we were given GI fatigues.

After this cleanup we were taken to a mess tent and at the door we were cautioned that because our stomach had shrunk in size, we could not eat much. My weight had dropped from about 175 pounds to 127 pounds in seven months. We were told of a prior person who couldn't stop eating and who had to be taken to the hospital where his stomach ruptured and he died. I don't know if the story was true but it worked with me! I was careful with how much I ate even though I wanted to eat more!

After eating we were told to go to the tent area and pick out a bunk and wait there because we would be called out to get uniforms. Two of us from the same prison camp went into a tent and there were three others in the tent, also waiting. We introduced ourselves and told where we were from and we continued to make small talk as you usually do with strangers. Eventually all the tents were called out and all of us were taken to another group of tents and there we were given uniforms according to our rank. After we were dressed in our uniforms we were told to return to our tent which we did but the other three got there first and when we got there and went in the three, who were enlisted men, stood up and came to attention. We told them to sit down and one of them said, "But you are officers!" I told them that we were the same people who they had sat with and talked to before without standing at attention. After that we got along fine.

A short time later, my buddy and I thought, since we were in France, not far from Paris, that we would like to see Paris. We went to the Commanding Officer's office and requested a couple of days leave to visit Paris. The major told us that, since our physical condition was such he had to deny the request. Soon after, my buddy and I decided to go AWOL (Absent WithOut Leave) and hitch hike there which we did!

When we got there we went sightseeing. The Champs Elise, The Eiffel Tower, at a distance, sat at a sidewalk café and had a drink of wine. After some time we decided that we should find us some place to stay the night. We stopped at hotels and inns. Since I was the only one of us that had studied French it was up to me to ask, "Avec vous les chambre pour ces soir?" And the response

was, "so you have papers (leave papers)?" When I said no, there was always a denial. We were then stumped! Where were we going to sleep? We kept looking and we soon passed a garage that had a sign, "Stars and Stripes garage". We went in and asked the sergeant if he could tell us if he knew where we might find a place to sleep because we had no leave papers. He told us that the three cars had back seats and if we wanted to we could sleep there. We took up his offer and we slept there. The next morning upon arising we went looking for some breakfast. When we received our uniforms we were given ten dollars of "walking around script". We had a bad cup of imitation coffee and a plain roll. After eating we started walking again. Some time later a GI truck passed us and a loud speaker announced, "All RAMP personnel get on the following truck and return to your base." We traveled around until the truck was full and then headed back to camp. Evidently we weren't the only ones who wanted to see Paris. And when we got back there was no penalty. We also saw other trucks returning.

The next day a meeting was called and General Eisenhower told us that a ship had arrived to take us back to the United States. He also told us that recovered prisoners would sleep below decks on hammocks. He also said that any 25 pointers who volunteered could return, but they would have to sleep on deck in sleeping bags. There was no lack of volunteers and the ship was soon filled. We were also informed that because of the load and limited kitchen facilities we would only get liquids for breakfast and one complete meal sometime during the afternoon.

The next day we were put on trucks, taken to the harbor and loaded on a ship, the U.S. ship, General Beuttner, and eventually we set sail for home. Throughout the trip we had about four days of rain and when we went out on deck, I felt sorry for the deck sleepers wringing the wet sleeping bags. Many grumbles were heard but in the long run they were happy to get home.

Below deck, one thing that was done to occupy the time was showing our souvenirs. Back at the prison after the Russians freed us, we had scrounged the Ack-Ack school next door to the camp and I had found a Lugar pistol which I had taken out of my duffel bag to show, and then put away. On one of my trips on deck, I returned to discover that someone wanted it, and stole it.

We finally arrived at Hampton Rhodes, Virginia, and then home, for sixty days R and R. During the rest and recuperation the Pacific War ended and the U.S. had no use for excess bombardiers. After the rest I was sent to Miami for reclassification and reassignment to a bombardier base as an instructor for Chinese cadets. The U.S. had an agreement to teach the Chinese cadets how to use the Norden bomb sights. An interesting sidelight, because the Chinese had a custom that said that if you returned home, as a failure, you were required to commit suicide. Therefore, we could not grade them less than a seventy percent on any test. When I had a lecture, I had a Chinese interpreter with me. But, when I had practice dropping bombs, the AT-6 had no room for anyone but the pilot, me and two cadets. My instructions were then hand motions, head nods or shakes or pull out my hair. Six months of this and I required discharge, and was discharged and sent home.

## Mail Call

Greetings,

Do you know anything about Sgt. Robert Turner, 766th Bomb Squadron, 461st Bomb Group, 15th Air Force? Shot down over Austria—MIA—Declared dead June 26, 1944—age 23 years. My deceased sister's fiancée.

Doris Porter

Doris,

I had a little difficulty finding any information on Robert Turner. I assume we're talking about Robert M. Turner and not Robert W. Turner. He was assigned to the 461st in October 1943 which makes him one of the original cadre of men to go to Italy. I show him as being assigned to the 765th rather than the 766th Squadron. My records do show that he was a gunner on the Zive crew #59-0 on June 26 when that aircraft, "Heaven Can Wait", was shot down. I'm attaching the Missing Air Crew Report (MACR) #6399 that details the loss of this aircraft and crew. Hopefully you have Adobe Acrobat Reader and can read this report.

Hughes,

To send a request over the internet one night after all these years of "wondering" and to come downstairs the very next morning and have 25 sheets of documented answers to my inquiry is quite astounding.

At first, because the statistics I sent regarding the Squadron didn't match up with the ones you had, my first thoughts were "maybe this is not really about Bob". But my husband, who had copied it all off for me and had read it, quietly said "keep reading".

I know now I was inwardly clinging to the hope that "maybe" he was alive and ok "somewhere". But then as I read on and it listed his mother and her address then I knew. This was about "our Bob". I subsequently melted and sobbed thru the rest of the reading.

Grateful for the facts but crumbling as I read what he experienced and what the other crew members experienced.

There is no way I can express the gratitude in my heart for what you did for me in providing this information. I have wondered all these years what "it" must have been like and even thought of the "what if's"...that maybe somehow, somewhere Bob might still be alive...amnesia? Etc. etc.

Thank you. "Our Bob" is a hero as are the two that tried to rescue him and the other crew members that went down but survived.

Because of so many heroes of yesterday and today we live in a free America.

Thanks again. You did a wonderful thing for me in bringing closure.

May God bless you in a very special way.

Doris Porter

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The purpose of this letter is to add information to what is known about

Mission No. 180, date February 21, 1945.

On this date the 765<sup>th</sup>. Squadron was scheduled to lead the group on the mission to Vienna. The remnant of crew 33R plus replacement members, such as radar operator, bombardier, navigator, and others were selected to fly the mission. Major Robert K. Baker, 765<sup>th</sup> Squadron Commander occupied the co-pilot seat commanding the group.

It was a dark chilly morning to be wandering through the maze of tents to wake the crew for duty.

After consuming green powdered eggs and coffee we

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were assembled in the briefing hall where the black string indicating the target area caused many furrowed brows. Mission 180 was to bomb the South Station in Vienna, Austria. It was noted in the briefing that the Russians had taken the City of Pecs, Hungary, along with an airfield which might be useful for an emergency landing. We were cautioned to use the name "Amerikansky" and to show the artful card incased in plastic, telling who we were in five different languages. We were also told that "stoy" is the word in Russian for stop, and "nyet" means no. All these things just mentioned turned to be very useful.

The take-off and the assembly of the group went as well as could have been hoped for. As we approached the IP, the flack protection was already in place; we then took up the heading to the target. Immediately we were in intense flack all the way to the target. Some one said our bomb run was fourteen minutes long. That was the longest fourteen minutes of my life. We were on PDI flying manually only a few seconds from bomb release when a shell hit the horizontal stabilizer just behind the right shoulder of the tail gunner. The force of the shell tearing the large gaping hole in the tail threw the plane in a severe nose down attitude. Before we could recover, a shell slammed through the #2 engine nacelle causing a diving turn to the left due to the dead engine. There was a fire ahead of the engine firewall which went out shortly after the engineer got the fuel shut off. To make bad matters even worse, the prop would not feather which resulted in a run-away. The bombs on board were salvoed, and we were in a tight left turn losing altitude at 1,000 feet per minute.

The group released their bombs while we were beneath them. The bombs being dropped were much too close for comfort, coupled with the inability to get out of the descending turn to the left. I remember having all the right aileron and right rudder that I had strength to apply, even with both feet on the right rudder pedal. The crew in the waist was at the bomb bay doors ready to bail out, but I told them to wait to see if I could get off the target.

Obviously the two choices were to bail or to hope to

reach the landing strip at Pecs. By turning on the auto pilot and engaging the rudder servo, we were able to get out of the turn. About the time we reached the 12,000 foot altitude, the windmilling prop stopped when the engine seized after the engine speed showed 3500 rpm. on the tach. and running without lubrication for some time. The deafening roar subsided and the drag became manageable to the point we could maintain altitude.

Our first look at the air strip at Pecs was a shocker. It looked to be about 2500 feet in length, and was neither concrete nor black-top. It turned out to be something like cinders. There was a road machine on the strip rolling the surface. To complicate matters further, at one end of the strip a house was built very close, and on the other end a high railroad fill ran as close as about 20 yards intersecting the landing path. A fire was burning at the side of the field which looked like the burning remains of an airplane. Smoke from this fire indicated a no wind condition. The decision was made to make final approach over the house in case it might be occupied and get demolished at the end of the landing roll. We fired the appropriate flare as a friendly recognition and proceeded with the gear-down landing attempt. Brakes were fully applied the moment of touch-down, and the plane came to a stop with just barely enough room to turn off the runway without the wing tip scraping the railroad fill. When the runway was cleared, we cut the engines and started to exit the plane. By the time our feet were on the ground, a Russian officer along with a small group of soldiers with rifles aimed at our belt buckles appeared. It was then we knew why we were briefed to use the term "Americanski". When tension relaxed a little, it became apparent that there was a need for an interpreter. A man came that could speak English and German which still made it necessary have another person capable of speaking German and Russian. After the Russian officer had all our names on paper, the English speaking man took us to an infirmary where we spent the night.

During the daylight hours the following day, we were under the supervision of this same man. We were provided with food and we were taken to a

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Turkish bath. Under cover of darkness, we were placed in the back of a Model A, Ford truck to be transported to a destination unknown to us. This truck had side boards much like a grain hauling vehicle but no cover or top. Our flight clothes were barely enough to keep us from suffering from the cold. Some time in the middle of the night we arrived at a small town we later learned was Casavoly, Hungary. The place where we stopped was in total darkness with the only illumination being the dim head lights of the truck. The driver hammered on the courtyard door with the butt of his revolver until a man holding a kerosene lamp appeared at the door. Very few words were exchanged between our driver and the man of the house. Five of us were ushered into a room inside the house, and the Russian driver continued on with the other five airmen. Later we learned the other airmen were taken to the house where our benefactor's mother and father lived. None of our crew could speak the language of the householder. We finally got the message across that we were American airmen and had the misfortune of being forced to land at the town of Pecs. We were given beds to lay our weary bodies down, but sleep didn't come easily.

The householder's name was France Reese. Other occupants of the house were his wife, her mother, and little Maria, who was about three years old. France, who very quickly became known as Fred, served our breakfast of boiled potatoes and sausage each morning. The escape kits that were issued to each of us contained forty-eight American Dollars. Fred willingly shared his substance with us in exchange for a few of those dollars. We live with Fred for two weeks, possibly even more, without any clue what was about to happen next. Almost daily some one from the Russian Army, which was housed close by, would come by to check on our well being without giving us any news

as to when we may be leaving. The uncertainty was difficult to withstand, because we knew we were burdensome to Fred and his family.

One sunny morning, a thirty-two Model, Ford V-8 truck, arrived in front of Fred's house along with

quite a few on-lookers comprised of locals and Russian soldiers. This was it, but what? Our illustrious tail gunner, Sgt. James E Carter, had all this time become quite a spectacle with the Russians. You see, Carter forgot to wear his issued pistol the morning we took off on the mission to Vienna. Instead of the pistol he was to have on his person, he grabbed the flare pistol along with the canvas bag of flares as he left the plane. He made it a practice to exhibit the pistol in his inside left hand pocket of his flight jacket with the zipper pulled up beneath the big hand grip which was fully exposed for all to see. The Russians were all amazed at the size of our side arms, but they were flabbergasted at the flare pistol. Their one-word comment of it was "rocket".

Since this was departure day, Carter was begged for a demonstration of the flare pistol.

What the heck, Carter was more than willing to oblige. He opened the breech, held it up to the sun and peered through the barrel, after which, he ran his handkerchief through the barrel and proceed to load it. In front of a crowd of curious on-lookers, he braced himself against the building as if to be staggered by gigantic recoil. He pulled the trigger and all that happened was the soft bloop of the flare and the arch of the red-green balls. What a let down for his audience! The embarrassment of the whole act was the flare had set a small fire on a thatched roof which was quickly extinguished. The theatrics being ended, we were loaded on the awaiting truck to be taken to a railroad siding where a box car awaited our occupancy for travel to a destination unknown to us. The box car that was being prepared for us was nothing like what one might expect. It was much smaller than those we were accustomed to in the States. The couplings were chains which allowed a lot of slack when accelerating, and there were only four wheels under each car which made for a bumpy ride. There was only one sliding door and no windows. When we first glimpsed the car, someone was on top of the car with an axe hacking out a neat hole for a stove pipe. Indeed we had a pot bellied stove for heat, but no wood was provided. The fuel was what could be picked up along the tracks. The inside furnishings, aside from the stove, was a pile of straw

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in each end of the car for our bunks. We spent a little more than one full day on this train before we reached the City of Timosera, Romania.

The railroad yard and surrounding buildings were nothing but rubble, thanks to the allied bombers. I don't know what industrial plant had been in operation there, but it had been turned into trash. We were divided into smaller groups and taken to some of the locals in the city to be cared for. The nose gunner, Sgt. Edward Liebe, and I were taken to a luxurious apartment building where a middle aged couple whose name was, Strona lived. We saw very little of the lady of the house except for meals. She said her husband was occupied in textiles and was traveling at the time. After getting cleaned up the best we could and eating, we were taken to big hall down town where a reception was being held in honor of our presence. It was a full dressed gathering with the ladies in their finest and the city fathers were in their swallow tailed coats with sashes loaded with medals. I felt like an illegitimate step child at a family reunion having worn the same clothing for more than two weeks and badly in need of a shave. Major Baker was the toasted hero; the rest were just along for the ride. The morning paper, which I have a copy of, headline reads "AMERICAN AVIATORS IN TIMOSARA". The article is quite lengthy, but I have never heard it translated.

The next morning after breakfast, Mrs. Strona escorted us the barber shop for the works. The two of us were turned over to a young man who spoke very good English to show us the town. As we leisurely strolled along, some of the locals were added to us to the point of becoming quite a group. We approached a building down town having about four floors where all of the floors were down in the basement. The buildings on either side of this were not damaged. Our guide paused to state "We call this the Americans little mistake for, when the plant was bombed that you saw at the railroad yard, one bomb went astray and it landed down town". There were several conversations going on among those who were on-lookers that made me wonder if we were in for a lynching. When I asked what was being said by the on-lookers, our guide replied "They said these

fellows look just like any other average men." Later in the day, Liebe and I were taken to a gathering of Mrs. Strona's acquaintances for a coffee. Not many questions were asked that we could understand; it just seemed like a little friendly get together. A middle aged man setting close by with his coffee in front of him leaned forward and took a drink from the cup without picking up the cup. Mrs. Strona explained that the man wasn't guilty of bad manners it was because he was in the factory when it was bombed and he was trapped in the rubble for days before he was found. That being said, the man demonstrated how shaky his hands were.

Our trip from Timosara, Romania to Bucarest, Romania was much more pleasant than the other train rides. This train was much more up town in that the seats were in pairs facing each other and in little compartments much like the accommodations in the movie, Orient Express. This train didn't poke along like the others we rode in. In Bucarest, we were housed in an infirmary, but not for medical reasons that I know of. We were allowed to walk around the city during the daytime on our own. It was something like three days before we were told to make ready for departure. We were given that type of inspection that you would not expect to be given by a Lady Doctor. The next day we were alerted for departure only to be disappointed. The following day we were loaded aboard a C-47 for Bari, Italy for debriefing—critique—interrogation etc.

The first procedure was a thorough delousing followed by a bath and clean clothes. We were debriefed separately and, I might add, thoroughly. We had to give the names of every person with which we had personal contact and the nature of the conversation or connection. I had many questions to answer about the condition of the plane we had to leave with the Russians even to the signing of the charge off sheet. If my memory serves me correctly, that figure was \$288,000.00.

The last leg of the journey was in a B-17 to Torretta field. Mission 180 was my 24<sup>th</sup>. Mission and my last in the Squadron lead plane. I flew 5 more missions after that, but in the tail-end-Charley slot.

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Walter Cronkite would close with a statement something like, "That's the way it is." Since my name isn't Walter, my statement is, "That's the way I remember it after 60 years."

Lawrence O. Woodruff  
woodyl@valornet.com

\* \* \* \* \*

Hughes,

My Dad (Don Robinson) called you a few weeks ago and informed you of the death of one of his crew, Edward Zehfuss. He was an armorer in the 461st BG, 764th SQ. He was part of the crew with my Dad on a B-24 that went down on January 31, 1945 and the crew became POW's. I found his obituary and date of death. Please publish this death in the next issue of the Liberaider.

Thanks,  
Jeanne Hickey

From Pittsburgh Post Gazette - /Published Thursday, September 09, 2004/

**ZEHFUSS EDWARD F. SR.**

On Monday, September 6, 2004, age 82. Happily married for 59 years to the late Helen M.; beloved father of Edward F. Jr. (Linda), Donna Belkot (Ted) and Kathleen Keller (Butch); brother of Pat Jullian and the late James Zehfuss and Mary Keller; grand-

father of Renee and Christopher Belkot. Friends received at BRUSCO-NAPIER FUNERAL HOME, LTD. Broadway & Shiras Aves. Beechview 2-4 and 7-9 pm Wed. and Thurs. Mass in St. Pamphilus Church, Friday at 10 am. Mr. Zehfuss was a proud veteran of WWII and was awarded the Purple Heart and other numerous medals of honor and also was a POW.

\* \* \* \* \*

Just a brief word of appreciation to you for getting the last copy of the Liberaider to me so soon after I sent you my change of address. I have been reading it and enjoying it, just as I have all the past copies I have received. Again, thanks.

Jay W. Jackson

Please be sure to keep me informed on your current address so you won't miss any of the Liberaiders.

\* \* \* \* \*

My son, Anthony James Delanzo, did a poster on the 461st and his great uncle James Delanzo. It made me proud to see a another young person excited to learn about the sacrifices these people made for us. Thank you for the great information available to my son. He is very proud of these people.

Sincerely  
James Delanzo

## James Whitcomb Riley

On the  
Passing of the Back House

When memory keeps me company and moves to smiles or tears,  
A weather-beaten object looms through the mist of years,  
Behind the house and barn it stood, a half a mile or more,  
And hurrying feet a path had made, straight to its swinging door,  
Its architecture was a type of simple classic art,  
But in the tragedy of life it played a leading part.  
And oft, the passing traveler drove slow, and heaved a sigh,

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To see the modest hired girl slip out with glances shy.

We had our posy garden that the women loved so well,  
I loved it too, but better still I loved the stronger smell  
That filled the evening breezes so full of homely cheer,  
And told the night-o'ertaken tramp that human life was near.

On lazy August afternoons, it made a little bower  
Delightful, where my grandsire sat and whiled away an hour.  
For there the summer mornings its very cares entwined,  
And berry bushes reddened in the steaming soil behind.

All day fat spiders spun their webs to catch the buzzing flies,  
That flitted to and from the house where Ma was baking pies.  
And once a swarm of hornets bold, had built a palace there,  
And stung my unsuspecting Aunt – I must not tell you where -  
Then Father took a flaming pole – that was a happy day –  
He nearly burned the building up, but the hornets left to stay.  
When summer bloom began to fade and winter to carouse,  
We banked the little building with a heap of hemlock boughs.

But when the crust was on the snow and the sullen skies were gray  
In sooth, the building was no place where one could wish to stay.  
We did our duties promptly, there one purpose swayed the mind,  
We tarried not, nor lingered long on what we left behind,  
The torture of that icy seat would make a Spartan sob,  
For needs must scrape the gooseflesh with a lacerating cob,  
That from a frost-encrusted nail was suspended by a string –  
For Father was a frugal man and wanted not a thing.

When grandpa had to “go out back” and make his morning call,  
We'd bundle up the dear old man with a muffler and a shawl,  
I knew the hole on which he sat, 'twas padded all around,  
And once I dared to sit there – 'twas all too wide I found,  
My loins were all too little and I jack-knifed there to stay,  
They had to come and get me out or I'd have passed away.  
Then Father said ambition was a thing that boys should shun,  
And I just used the children's hole 'til childhood days were done.

And still I marvel at the craft that cut those holes so true,  
The baby hole, and the slender hole that fitted Sister Sue.  
That dear old country landmark; I've tramped around a bit,  
And in the lap of luxury my lot has been to sit –  
But 'ere I die I'll eat the fruit of trees I robbed of yore  
Then seek the shanty where my name is carved upon the door,  
I ween the old familiar smell will soothe my faded soul,  
I'm now a man, but none the less I'll try the children's hole.

# Tail Gunner Dan's Search for Crew 9345

**By Rick Vitelli**

From the November 1994 issue of the On Call magazine published by the Long Island Lighting Company—now known as the Long Island Power Authority. Permission granted by Bert Cunningham.

Dan Flynn didn't know it then. but his decades-long search for the nine members of his B-24 bomber crew began at the end of World War II in a place called Cerignola, Italy. It ended successfully 48 years later in a "little old farmhouse" in Wakefield, Ohio.

But let's get back to the beginning.

In 1945, Dan Flynn was a tail gunner, one of thousands of American airmen serving in the European Theater of Operations. Serving with the native New Yorker as part of "Crew 9345" were guys from California, Indiana, Vermont, Rhode Island, Virginia and Kansas.

Miraculously, all 10 crew members survived the bombing missions they flew over Northern Italy and Austria during the last stages of the war as part of the 461st Bomb Group, which was based in Cerignola. They rotated stateside in 1946, with a promise that they would keep in touch with each other. But they never saw each other as a group again.

Dan returned home to Ozone Park, Queens, and went to work for the Long Island Lighting Company in 1952 in the Sub Maintenance Department. Like other veterans, he settled into his peacetime life. He completed his college education, married Lois Fleury, bought a Levitt house and had a son, Robert.

But long before Ma Bell's jingle became popular. Dan reached out and stayed in touch with several crew members.

"I've attended four of the Group's five reunions and I've kept in touch with some of the crew from time to time, but never all of them," says Dan. "I

always asked about missing members without much luck and as time went by, I became more determined to locate each of them."

When Dan retired in 1989, he had more time and became more determined to find his entire crew, which started their training together in Wyoming. "I kept in touch with the flight engineer, the bombardier and two of the gunners and from time to time, met and then lost track of the others.

"Eventually I contacted everyone except the co-pilot. Each time I contacted one of the missing, it renewed my determination to find the last one. Nine of us had survived. Could the tenth one still be alive after 50 years? It didn't seem likely, but I had to find out.

Last year, Dan completed his search when he found co-pilot Donald Ward in his hometown of Wakefield, Ohio. Last September Dan, accompanied by Lois, who was just as interested in the quest as her husband, went to Ohio for an emotional reunion. "Don was living in a little old farmhouse," says Dan. "He was tickled pink when he saw me."

Dan used the Military Records Center, GI insurance and VA records, among many other sources of information, to locate Crew 9345. Many of the crew were still living in, or near, their hometowns.

On October 15, the 461 Bomb Group held a reunion in Virginia. Six of the original crew were able to attend the celebration. "We all had survived the war," says Dan, "We were lucky guys. When we saw each other, it was like 'time had stood still.'"

The journey that had started nearly a half century earlier was over.



The members of Crew 9345: Charles Brothers, pilot, Indianapolis, Indiana; Dan Flynn (2<sup>nd</sup> row, 2<sup>nd</sup> 1.), tail gunner, Ozone Park, New York; James Knadler, nose turret gunner, San Bernardino, California; Robert Kurth, flight engineer, Long Beach, California; Howard Pelc, navigator, Highland, Indiana; Howard Shields, ball turret gunner, Alta Vista, Virginia; Angelo Siciliano, upper turret gunner, Westerleigh, Rhode Island; Donald Ward, co-pilot, Wakefield, Ohio; Hugh Whitham (holding 1-year-old daughter, Sandra), bombardier, Randolph, Vermont; and Warren Winnie, radio operator, Wichita, Kansas.



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We're on the web!  
Visit  
[www.461st.org](http://www.461st.org)

## Webmaster Comments

I want to thank everyone who bought a copy of the 461st Website CD at the reunion this year. The money I took in should just about cover the expected cost of printing and mailing this issue of the Liberaider.

We have now passed 75,000 hits on the 461st website since I took over in 2001. WOW! I'm impressed. I had no idea there would be that much interest in the 461st website when I took it over. And it's all thanks to you for submitting material. I get comments all the time about how nice our website looks. I couldn't make it look nearly as nice if I didn't get material from the members (both veterans and children).

I'm happy to report that the host continues to outpace our growth. The website is currently right at 300-meg in size. This still amazing me especially when I think that I started with only 50-meg and

thought that would be more than enough. Today the host is giving us 10-gig of web space. For those in the know, this means that I could put up more than thirty time as much information as is on the website today. Needless to say, keep the information coming.

Since the last issue of the Liberaider, I have created some new E-Mail accounts for the 461st. I think they are self-explanatory. Regardless of who fills each position, the address will remain the same. The new addresses are: [president@461st.org](mailto:president@461st.org), [vice-president@461st.org](mailto:vice-president@461st.org), [treasurer@461st.org](mailto:treasurer@461st.org), [historian@461st.org](mailto:historian@461st.org), [webmaster@461st.org](mailto:webmaster@461st.org), and [editor@461st.org](mailto:editor@461st.org). I'm checking my addresses regularly, but it may take a while for the board members to become familiar with the use of their new addresses so you might use the old one as well until you see a response from the new address.