

## 2014 Bomb Group Reunion

This year our Bomb Group Reunion was in Oklahoma City, OK and attended by two new Groups, the 451<sup>st</sup> and the 455<sup>th</sup> (along with a small handful from the 376<sup>th</sup>) in addition to the 461<sup>st</sup> and the 484<sup>th</sup>. We had over 200 attendees!

Thursday, September 18<sup>th</sup> was arrival and check in day. As per usual, we had a well stocked hospitality room. The registration table was well manned by Bob and Peggy Hayes and ably assisted by Win Jones and

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## Edward A. Kussler

Bombardier  
Galven #78-2  
767<sup>th</sup> Squadron  
461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group

### Pre-World War II

I was born in Morris, Illinois on December 10, 1924. Morris was and is a small town situated along the Illinois River approximately sixty-five miles southwest of Chicago. As I was growing up, Morris had a population of nearly 6,000 people. A mixture of Scandinavian, German, Irish, Polish and Italian people lived in and around Morris. Along with the river, the Illi-

nois and Michigan Canal passed through Morris as did the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad. The railroad connected Chicago with Rock Island, Illinois and with points further west. The canal was constructed in the 1840s and served towns along the canal with a means of moving goods and people into the Chicago area.

My parents were immigrants from Germany who had both come separately to the United States. My mother's maiden name was Marie Rumpf and she came from Bad Frankenhausen in Thuringia, Germany. She had three brothers that

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## John R. Modrovsky

Ball Turret Gunner  
Smith #6409  
765<sup>th</sup> Squadron  
461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group

Both my parents, Anton and Amara Modrovsky were born and raised in the town of Drahovce, Czechoslovakia. My parents immigrated to America in 1915 and settled in Coatesville, Pennsylvania where many more of our people immigrated before them. Coatesville was a small town and most of the people worked at the

steel mill. My sister, Elizabeth, brother, Joseph, and I were all born in Coatesville. Because of the depression, the mill had to cut the amount of hours my father and others could work so much so that we had difficulty paying the rent on the house we lived in and to be able to purchase enough food to live on. Because of the shortage of work my father on his days off worked on a neighboring farm for a very little money, but he was provided with a good sup-

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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  
editor@461st.org

## **764th Squadron**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>DOD</u>
Brockman, Perry F.	San Antonio, TX	612	06/17/2014

## **765th Squadron**

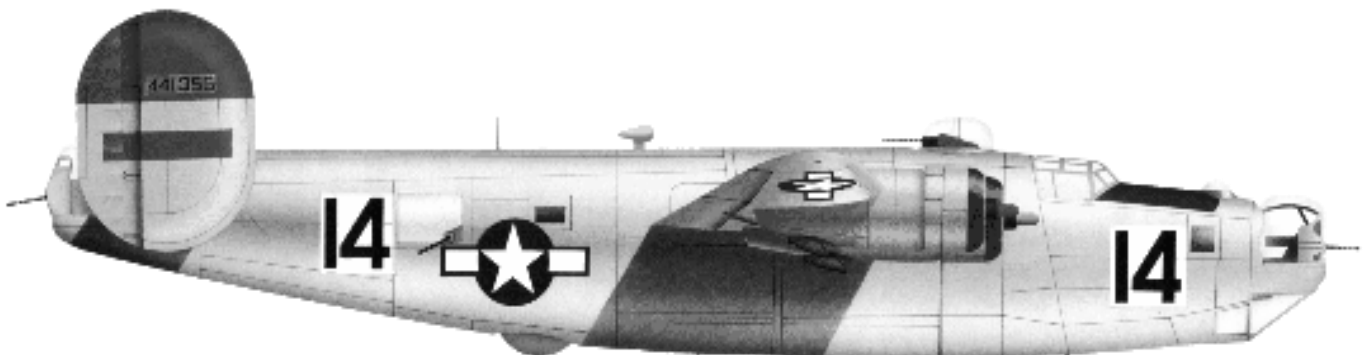
<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>DOD</u>
Rickert, Albert J., Jr.	Fredricksburg, VA	712	06/21/2014

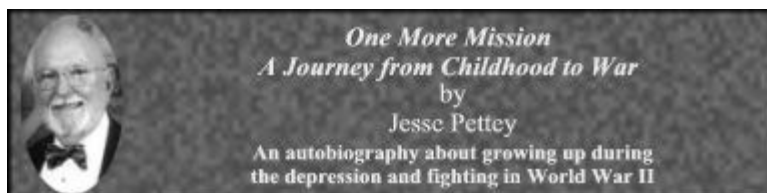
## **766th Squadron**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>DOD</u>
Stevenson, Edward E.	Quitman, LA	748	09/21/2014

## **767th Squadron**

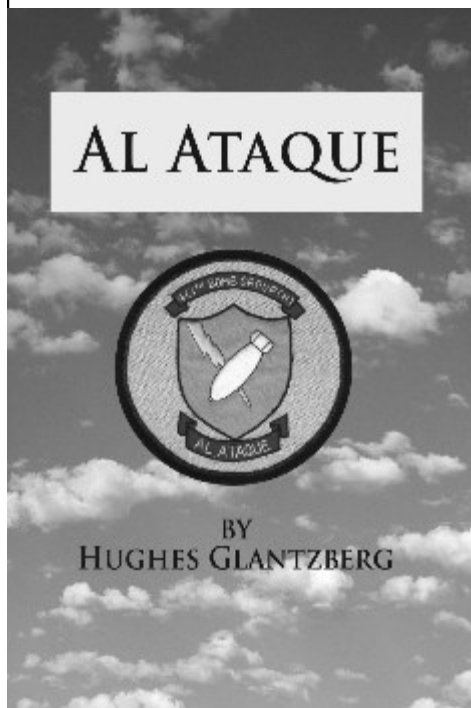
<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>DOD</u>
Weaver, Hugh C.	Ft. Worth, TX	1092	07/29/2014





With a special interest in World War II and the 461st Bombardment Group in particular, I found this book excellent. Most of the men who fought during WWII were in their late teens and early 20s. It's amazing to be able to read about their activities. Liberaider Editor

Available from Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble and Xlibris (at a 15% discount) (<http://www2.xlibris.com/bookstore/bookdisplay.asp?bookid=11013>).



## Al Ataque

History / General

Trade **Paperback**

Publication Date: Nov-2006

Price: \$26.95

Size: 6 x 9

Author: Hughes Glantzberg

ISBN: **0-595-41572-5**

413 Pages

On Demand Printing

Available from Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, Ingram Book Group, Baker & Taylor, and from iUniverse, Inc

To order call 1-800-AUTHORS

Trade **Hardcopy**

Publication Date: Nov-2006

Price: \$36.95

Size: 6 x 9

Author: Hughes Glantzberg

ISBN: **0-595-86486-4**

Al Ataque is an excellent book that describes the preparation a bomb group goes through before being deployed overseas as well as the problems of shipping over five thousand men and supplies along with some eighty B-24 aircraft from a stateside base to a foreign country. The book details the establishment of Torretta Field which was used by the 461st for the duration of the war in Europe. The 461st Bomb Group flew two hundred and twenty-three combat missions between April 1944 and April 1945. Each of these is described in the book. Personal experiences of veterans who were actually part of the 461st are also included.



## Music Bravely Ringing

by

Martin A. Rush

767th Squadron

This is the story of a small town boy who, during WWII, wandered onto the conveyor belt that turned civilians into bomber pilots. Initially awed and intimidated at the world outside his home town, he began to realize that this was an opportunity to have a hand in stimulating and challenging dealings larger than he had expected. He had a few near-misses, but gradually began to get the hang of it. His story is that like the thousands of young men who were tossed into the maelstrom of war in the skies. He was one of the ones who was lucky enough to live through it.

This book is at the publisher now and should be available early in 2008.

(Continued from page 1)

his daughter Marsha of the 451<sup>st</sup>. We had an informational meeting at 7:00.



Wyndham Garden Oklahoma City Airport Hotel

461<sup>st</sup> President Hughes Glantzberg introduced himself and then introduced Dave Blake, the Reunion Coordinator, Dick Olson of the 484<sup>th</sup>, and Win Jones representing the 451<sup>st</sup> and the 455<sup>th</sup>. He then recognized Ed Lamb and “children” Keith, Mark Lamb and Karen Liles who all worked diligently to get activities organized in OKC. Karen provided printed name tags on an emergency basis after the ones that were mailed to Dave did not arrive until AFTER the reunion. They were all key in getting the tours set up as well as the Airport Welcome Desk and the Honor Wall built that was in the hospitality room, which was modeled after the impromptu memorial that grew around the Murrah Federal Building after the 1995 bombing.

Dave Blake then talked briefly about the weekend itinerary. Win Jones talked about the Bomb Group and squadrons and how it is important for the Bomb Groups to continue to team up in order to be viable. Win then talked about some in house programs that would be conducted at the hotel for those who were not taking the tours. There would be several programs of one hour or less with speakers on various subject related to WWII.

Friday, September 19<sup>th</sup> – We departed from the hotel for a bus tour of Tinker Air Force Base. Tinker is home to some Army corps in addition to Air Force and they are known for their radar technology. From there, we had lunch at the Cimarron Steak House.

This place is known for its western memorabilia including buggies hanging from the ceiling! It was difficult to be bored here as there was always something new to see every time you turned your head.

The next stop was the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Museum which had exhibit indoors and outside. Due to possible inclement weather forecast for Saturday, The Patriot Guard Riders chose this day to provide a motorcycle escort for us back from the museum. It was a ride to remember. They were very gracious and we enjoyed chatting with them when we got back to the hotel.



45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Museum



The Patriot Guard Riders ready to escort the tour.

After enjoying the hospitality room and relaxing we were ready for cocktail hour at 6:00 PM. We had a great dinner and enjoyed time with our individual Bomb Groups.

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Saturday, September 20<sup>th</sup> – We departed from the hotel in 3 buses for a “See OKC” tour that traced the story of Oklahoma City from its interesting beginnings including the land rush. The bus tour of the renovated “Bricktown” area was really interesting. There are huge murals, several districts each with a specialty such as arts, food, and entertainment. We then headed to the National Western Heritage and Cowboy Museum where we started with a great luncheon buffet. We were then able to waddle and work off some of that food by exploring the museum. There were breathtaking sculptures and everything western imaginable. You could spend many more hours there.

A great dinner was served this evening and we then enjoyed hearing Dr. Doug Watson, as Will Rogers, perform. He was great.

Sunday, September 21<sup>st</sup> – We remembered those who didn’t make it home from Italy and those we have lost in the past year. Chaplain Captain William Mesaeh, Jr. led the Invocation as well as performing the address. Greg Lamb led the music with the help of Keith Lamb’s daughter-in-law and several attendees. They offered superb leadership! We then said goodbye to those who were unable to extend their weekend.



Just a few of the bigger-than-life statues commemorating the land rush of 1889.

Those who chose to stay took a guided tour of the Oklahoma National Memorial and a self guided tour of the adjacent Museum commemorating the 1995

bombing of the Murrah Federal Building. This was a powerful and sobering tour. The Memorial was so moving and the remembrances of those lost cannot be done justice with words. It was amazing.

There was a final dinner and final farewells were made then and the next morning.

R.T. Foster Art was commissioned to do a painting for the veterans. Each veteran received a print of the painting and copies of the painting are available through the artist website—<http://tinyurl.com/l5mpx3q>.

See you all next year!!



Murrah Federal Build Memorial





Murrah Federal Building Memorial



Hospitality Room at the Wyndham Garden Oklahoma City Airport Hotel.

**2015 REUNION**  
***Kansas City, Missouri***  
**Thursday, September 24<sup>th</sup>—Sunday, September 27<sup>th</sup>**  
***Hilton Kansas City Airport Hotel***

We will headquarter at the Hilton KCI airport hotel. This hotel has been newly renovated and was done very nicely. The complimentary airport shuttle (an actual stand up bus) runs every 15 minutes, 24 hours. Room rates will be \$99 per night plus tax and will include a full, hot breakfast buffet for up to two people and two drink coupons per day. Parking is free.

Kansas City has direct flights in from 37 destinations nationwide!

Again this year we will gather along with the 451<sup>st</sup>, 455<sup>th</sup> & 484<sup>th</sup> Bomb Groups in order to keep our group a strong, viable size.

In conjunction with the tours this year presentations by veterans and round table discussions with veterans and others in attendance will be offered in the afternoons at the hotel.

Plans are tentative at this time but a likely tour option is the Truman Presidential Library, which is VERY well done. Another strong possibility is the National World War One museum, which by all accounts is a world class museum located on the grounds of the Liberty Memorial in Kansas City. The tours will be “short and sweet” in order to get back to the hotel early enough for those who wish to participate in the in-house activities.

Also again this year, the Association will pay for our 461<sup>st</sup> veteran’s registration fee and the Friday, Saturday and Sunday evening group dinner costs.

Look for complete details and registration form in the June 2015 issue of The Liberaider. You can also keep up with developments by visiting your website, [www.461st.org](http://www.461st.org).

***Dave Blake***

The 461st Liberaider  
 461st Bombardment Group (H)  
 Activated: 1 July 1943  
 Inactivated: 27 August 1945  
 Incorporated: 15 November 1985

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 The Liberaider is published twice yearly on behalf of the members of the organization.  
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preceded her in coming to the United States and two sisters that remained in Germany. My father came from the Black Forest area of Germany. His village was near Lahr, a town near the Rhine River that is the border between France and Germany. His name was August Kussler and he also had an older brother that came to the United States many years prior to him. His sister, Tressa, remained in Germany. My parents became naturalized citizens and spent most of their married lives in Morris. August did not serve in the military during World War I because of an ulcerated leg that had resulted from a childhood accident. He worked in the Morris Paper Mill as a printer from 1923 until his retirement in the 1960s.

I had two older sisters and one younger sister – Elsa, Helen and Maxine. As this is being written Maxine is alive and well and living in Morris. My two older sisters are deceased. I attended public schools in Morris. Grades one through eight were at the Morris Center School and my high school years were at the Morris High School. The high school was an ancient building of Civil War vintage. I graduated from high school in June of 1942 and was yet six months shy of my eighteenth birthday. I started college in September of 1942 at Northern Illinois State Teachers College. It is presently known as Northern Illinois University. In December of 1942 I reached my eighteenth birthday and at that time I enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps Reserve cadet program. The reserve units were called to active duty in March of 1943 at the end of my second quarter at Northern. Three friends from Morris High School, Wayne Erickson, Bob Barnard and Tom Heggen, had started at Northern with me. Barnard stayed in college only a couple of months before he enlisted in the Army. Wayne enlisted in the Air Corps reserve unit and was called to active duty with me. Tom Heggen stayed in school for the complete year and then enlisted in the U.S. Navy. All four enlisted rather than wait to be drafted into the military.

After German troops invaded the Czech Sudetenland and then the rest of Czechoslovakia and Poland, the war in Europe was more of a concern to U.S. young people and to the country as a whole. Issues were debated as whether the United States should provide military assistance to England after France and England went to war against Germany because of the German invasion of Czech and Polish territories. Sentiments were quite mixed on this issue in the

United States but eventually the isolationists gave way to supporting the war effort in Europe.

## World War II Years

The bombing of the U.S. naval fleet at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 brought the United States into the war without any hesitancy. Our country geared up for war and it was not long before the manufacturing might of the United States began sending military aid to our allies. Although there were military defeats during 1942 and early 1943 the tide began to turn as 1943 wore on. Huge amounts of bombers, fighter airplanes, tanks, naval warships and ammunitions were deployed along with millions of men and women to fight the war against Germany and Italy in Europe and against Japan in the Pacific. Food, clothing and medicines were also delivered around the world in tremendous quantities and this was another big part of the war effort on the part of the civilian population of the United States. The entire country had buckled down and become deeply involved in the war effort.

As I went into active duty with the Army Air Force in March of 1943, I had the goal of becoming a pilot. It was not the only possibility for me but it seemed to me to be the most exciting. I spent a few weeks at Keesler Field near Biloxi, Mississippi in basic training. The entire group that I was with came together through similar circumstances. Most all had been students in mid-western colleges and had joined the Army Air Corps Reserve and then the reserve units had been called to active duty. After basic training at Keesler Field, we were sent in groups of a few hundred men to various colleges around the country for a college training period of a few months. My group went to Spring Hill College near Mobile, Alabama. While there we had rigorous physical training and more military training that expanded on the basic training that we had had at Keesler Field. Our academic training was provided through the teaching staff of the college. While at Spring Hill we had ten hours of dual pilot instruction in small single engine planes. The instructors were civilian flyers that had done many years of barnstorming around the United States prior to the start of the war. Most were probably too old to have been accepted as flyers in the Air Corps, but they were admired by the young cadets. Hardly any of the cadets had even been in an airplane before so it was quite exciting for us. After a

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shortened three months at Spring Hill, we were sent to the Air Corps classification center near San Antonio, Texas. Here we went through the physical, psychological and academic testing to determine if we were qualified to continue with training to become pilots, bombardiers or navigators. Most cadets wanted to go to pilot training and hoped for that. Some had learned during the ten hours of dual pilot instruction at Spring Hill that they just did not have the coordination necessary to be pilots. Some cadets washed out of the program at this point and of those that were successful, most were classified for pilot training. I was part of this group but then was offered the opportunity to switch to bombardiering if our tests showed that we were qualified. Among my group of close friends who had opted for the change, I was the only one to be changed over. As a result, I went to pre-flight school for bombardiers and navigators and my buddies went on to pilot pre-flight training. My pre-flight school was at Ellington Field near Houston, Texas. Again we had rigorous physical training along with academic training and schooling in military sciences that was aimed at training cadets to become competent officers in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Pre-flight school ended in November of 1943 and our next step was training in aerial gunnery. We were sent to the gunnery school near Harlingen, Texas for the six weeks of gunnery training. We did practice firing of many kinds of weapons but concentrated mostly on .50 caliber machine guns that were becoming standard equipment on U.S. bombers. Although the weather was not good, we did fly several practice missions where we fired at targets that were being towed by other planes. We spent Thanksgiving and Christmas of 1943 at Harlingen.

After a short leave my group of cadets reported to Big Spring, Texas for advanced bombardier school. This program lasted for about four and one-half months. We spent many hours each week in classrooms studying the intricacies of bombing and navigation. Bomb trainers were used in big hangars for practice bombing runs. They provided practice bomb runs that were quite realistic to the real thing. Bombing ranges had been constructed around Big Spring and we did a lot of practice bombing from twin engine AT-11 trainers. Our bombs were 100 pound practice bombs that had a small charge that gave off smoke at detonation. A pilot and two cadets was the usual crew for a practice mission. One cadet took pictures of the bomb hits of the cadet that was using

the bombsight. Occasionally an instructor bombardier would also be along on the mission to give first-hand tips to the cadets. The Norden bombsight was the instrument that we trained with and the bombsight that was considered best and the one that was becoming standard equipment on all U.S. bombers. Along with bombardiering we also had navigational training. We flew various missions around west Texas going from one city to another doing our dead reckoning and other navigation exercises. In May of 1944 the Big Spring class of 44-7 graduated and the cadets got their bombardier wings and the gold bars of a second lieutenant.

The next step was to be assigned to a crew on either B-17s or B-24s for heavy bombardment. A small number of the new bombardiers were assigned to medium size bombers such as the B-25 Mitchell bomber. Our crew formed in Lincoln, Nebraska and was assigned to fly B-24s. The pilot and co-pilot had just completed their training in flying B-24s at four engine training schools. The crews consisted of ten men. The pilot, co-pilot, bombardier and navigator were the four officers on the crew and the engineer, radio operator, nose gunner, tail gunner, Sperry ball gunner and the upper turret gunner were the six enlisted men on the crew. The engineer and radio operator had also been trained in aerial gunnery. Most of the enlisted men on the crew were sergeants or corporals in rank. All had been trained in aerial gunnery and some had additional skills such as radio operator or engineer.

For our flight training as a crew we were sent to the air base at Pueblo, Colorado. We began our flight training there in June of 1944. While there, we flew many practice missions. Again we dropped 100 pound practice bombs on bombing range targets that were set up in the uninhabited areas around Pueblo. We also flew practice navigation missions both in daylight and at night time and many hours were spent flying in formations to get us ready for what we would encounter when we got overseas.

A big event in my personal life occurred while I was in Pueblo. My high school sweetheart, Mary Jo Weimer, came out to see me and we were married on August 9, 1944. My pilot, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Robert Galvan, was my best man and his wife, Gloria, was my bride's matron of honor. Our parents came to Colorado for the wedding and the crew came to the ceremony and

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reception. In August of 2001, Mary Jo and I celebrated our 57<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. However, I had a rather short married life before our crew was sent overseas. After a short leave from Pueblo, we reassembled in Topeka, Kansas with the plan to accept a new B-24 and fly to our overseas destination. A shortage of planes changed our plans and instead of flying we were sent to Hampton Roads, Virginia by train. From there we shipped overseas on Liberty ships. They were used extensively during World War II for transporting troops and material. We sailed as part of a large convoy and as we neared Europe part of the convoy split off to go to England and the rest of us went into the Mediterranean. We went past Sicily and then moved into the Adriatic Sea and went into the harbor at Bari, Italy. The trip had taken nearly one month and we arrived in Italy during the first week in October of 1944.

Our crew was promptly assigned to the 767<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron of the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group in the Fifteenth Air Force. At that time the bomb groups were deployed at various airfields around Foggia and Cerignola in southeastern Italy. Some of the airfields had been used by German air squadrons earlier in the war. After joining the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group we did some practice flying during October and then flew our first combat mission to Milan, Italy to bomb a machine tool works on October 20, 1944. It turned out to be an uneventful mission but we still were plenty anxious about going on our first mission. During November of 1944 we had a fair amount of bad weather and mission flying was greatly curtailed. During the month our crew flew six combat missions.

On November 1<sup>st</sup> we went to the Graz, Austria marshalling yards. This was mission 123 that was flown by the 461<sup>st</sup> Group. This was an alternate target that was selected because of inclement weather at the primary target. The bombing was not great but our bombers developed a healthy respect for the anti-aircraft gunners in the Graz area.

On November 5<sup>th</sup> our crew was part of the raid on the Florisdorf Oil Refining plant near Vienna. Bombing was done by pathfinder radar because of cloud coverage. Results were unobserved and the flak damage was extremely light for the Vienna area.

On November 7<sup>th</sup>, our crew went to the Ali Pasin

Most marshalling yard near Sarajevo, Yugoslavia. We had heavy flak and sixteen planes were hit by flak. Our crew chief later reported 27 holes in our B-24. Bombing results were reported as both good and poor.

On the November 17<sup>th</sup> mission to the Blechhammer South Synthetic oil refining works our crew left the formation after developing engine trouble and returned to base. We had put in 2:40 minutes of flying time for naught.

On November 18<sup>th</sup> we went to the Villafranca Air-drome in northern Italy. Three concentrated patterns hit at least 12 enemy airplanes and also fires were started in several revetments around the field. It was a visual bombing run and results were good.

On November 20<sup>th</sup> our group flew another mission to Blechhammer South. It was the fifth mission there by the group and for the first time visual bombing was permitted by the weather. Results were good. The first attack unit dropped bombs too early and was off the target but the rest of the formation was in the center of the target area and a lot of destruction was observed. Flak was heavy over the target and two crews were bailed out over Yugoslavia on the way home and one crew ditched in the Adriatic near the Italian coast with loss of several lives.

In the last ten days of November of 1944 several missions were grounded because of bad weather.

The first mission in December of 1944 was again to Blechhammer South. Some cloud cover and the effective use of smudge pots by the Germans baffled the navigators and bombardiers and results were not good.

On December 6<sup>th</sup> our crew went to the Maribor South marshalling yard in Yugoslavia. Weather was horrendous again and bombs were dropped in a hit or miss pattern and our crew were fortunate not to hit another plane in the poor visibility over the target area. We ended up returning to base as a single plane after flying a long way south over Yugoslavia before we crossed the Adriatic to our Torretta Field base near Cerignola.

The next evening, of December 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, our crew was again called to fly a mission. It was to be a two

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plane pathfinder raid on the Main Railroad Station in Innsbruck, Austria. The other plane aborted the mission after an engine caught fire and we went alone to the target. Our plane, piloted by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Robert A. Galvan hit the primary target but it took two passes over the target to release the bombs. We had turned off the autopilot on the first pass because visibility was so good we thought that a manual bomb run would be more successful. The bombs were not released on the first pass because the autopilot had been shut down. We did a 360° turn and came over the target the second time. If we had had a Norden bombsight in the plane we could have synchronized on the target and made a visual bomb run because the visibility was so good even though it was the middle of the night. The pathfinder equipment on this plane was configured to operate with the Sperry bombsight. I had never see a Sperry bombsight prior to the briefing given me by the squadron bombardier prior to take off for this mission. Group records show that the primary target was hit on this mission.

During the week of December 11 to 15 of 1944, I was in a training class for bombardiers in Bari, Italy and missed flying two missions with my crew.

On December 16<sup>th</sup> I had returned to the squadron area and took off with my crew to the Brux Oil Refinery in Czechoslovakia. We were forced to abort the mission because of a malfunction of the oxygen equipment. The mission bombed through heavy undercast and because of this cloud coverage the flak was light and only one plane was lost.

Our crew was again scheduled to fly on December 17<sup>th</sup> because we had aborted the day before. The 461<sup>st</sup> took off with 31 airplanes for the Odertal Synthetic Oil Works that was located in what now is southern Poland. There were five early returns and of the 26 remaining planes only 15 reached the target. Upwards of 50 ME-109s and FW-190s attacked the Fifteenth Air Force formations and ten B-24 bombers of the 461<sup>st</sup> were shot down and five planes were damaged. Three men were killed, two were wounded and ninety-three missing in action. Our crew of ten men was one of the missing crews. We were able to stay in the air for about 45 minutes as we flew on a heading that was taking us toward Russian held territory in Hungary. We salvoed our bombs and threw out some equipment to lighten our load. Our engineer, Purvis Lee Stacks, and our tail

gunner, Arthur Piccoli, were the two wounded men on our plane. Because of their injuries, our pilot, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Robert Galvan, decided to make a crash landing if at all possible. We descended through the clouds while flying over the Carpathian Mountains and fortunately found a snow covered plowed field for the attempted landing. The injured men had been given first aid and made as comfortable as possible for the crash landing. Although our electrical systems and the hydraulic systems and two engines were completely inoperable our pilot made a superb crash landing with the wheels down for the attempt. Our co-pilot for this mission was Lt. Eldred Helton who was flying his first combat mission and he did a great job in helping Galvan with the landing. Our regular co-pilot was Oliver Maggard and he was flying with Helton's crew in another B-24. They were also hit and were forced to bail out. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Charles Lang was the first pilot on that crew and the nose gunner was Sergeant Hjalmar Johansson. I later met Hjalmar in September of 2000 on a trip to the Czech Republic.

Our first concern after the crash landing was to evacuate the airplane and then get medical help for our two injured crewmen. We did not know whether we had landed in German held or Russian held territory. It turned out that we were near the town of Roznava in Slovakia and were very close to the Hungarian border. Hungarian troops were fighting with the Germans and were in control of the area that we had landed in. Hungarian soldiers took us prisoners and provided transportation into Roznava where the two wounded men were taken to a Catholic hospital where they were given medical attention. It proved necessary for Piccoli to have his foot amputated because of the wounds to his foot. Stacks had a machine gun bullet wound through the mid-section of his body. I do not know what medical treatment he received here. Russian troops liberated the two injured men in late January of 1945 and they were both returned to an army hospital in Italy to begin their recuperation.

The balance of our eight crew members stayed with the Hungarian soldiers. After two nights in Roznava the Hungarian soldiers marched to Dobsina which was located approximately twenty kilometers to the north of Roznava and they took us along. The soldiers took up residence in a house near the center of town and kept the eight of us their prisoners. We had meager food rations but the room we were kept

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in did have a wood burning fireplace for warmth. We slept on the floor and had fairly good relations with the Hungarian soldiers. There were German troops in Dobsina but for some reason that we did not understand they did not turn us over to the Germans but instead kept us as their prisoners. Various other people were held in the room with us periodically. There was a White Russian that was with us the whole time that we were with the Hungarians. We also had a Serb with us for a few days and then a group of Hungarian Jews were with us for a few days. It seemed to us that the Hungarian soldiers were hiding the Hungarian Jews from the Germans and were helping them move on through the area to avoid captivity by the Germans. We spent Christmas of 1944 as prisoners of the Hungarians in that first house that they had moved into in Dobsina after our hike from Roznava. Two or three days after Christmas we all moved to another house that was located near the edge of town in a more rural setting.

As we could hear artillery fire that seemed to be coming ever closer we planned an escape from the Hungarians. Our plan was to leave at night after an outdoor latrine stop. We would wait until the guard fell asleep and then make our exits. In the room with the eight of us were four Romanian officers who were being held by the Hungarians and the White Russian. I think Boris suspected that we had something planned as we had been looking at maps that he had in his possession.

Tom Stevenson, nose gunner, and Tome Lyon, upper turret gunner was the first pair to leave the room. They got away and were free for several days. They got some help from some people who hid them out in an abandoned mine. Eventually they were caught, however, and became prisoners of the Germans.

Roy Wilhite, radio operator, and Albert Jones, ball gunner, left next and also got away. They were recaptured by German soldiers on the second day and returned to a jail in Dobsina.

Fred Smythe navigator and I, Ed Kussler, bombardier, left together and got away before the guard awoke. We stumbled over the Romanians in the ante-room and got outside and then up into the hills. It was extremely cold and there was a lot of snow on the ground. Smythe was from Victoria, Texas and had hardly ever seen snow before. Also, he had only

his felt shoes from his heated flying suit and the heavy fleece lined boots that went over the felt shoes. This was not too great for walking but he managed to keep up. Fortunately I had my G.I. shoes and they were much better for walking in the snow. Smythe and I came very close to finding Russians on this Eastern front. We slept in a hayloft of a Slovakian family on the second night. We watched the house for a while in the morning hours and then approached the house to seek some food and other help. The head of this family was a railroad man and he was helping the Germans run the railroads in this part of Czechoslovakia. We spent most of the day there and left the house as it was getting dark. They had given us some food to eat and some to take with us. We also got some directions for avoiding where more Germans were and this was very helpful. The lady of the house and her daughter had been baking and preparing for an evening meal while we were there. There were German officers coming to their house for dinner that evening. So we, of course, had to clear out and we did so. We moved fairly well that night as we kept away from villages and barking dogs and got ever closer to the Russian lines. We actually had little idea what to do if we had met some Russians but decided to worry about that later. As daylight approached, we moved to higher ground and away from roads and houses. That afternoon we observed a house for a while and decided to approach the people there for some food and perhaps some overnight lodging. The people were Hungarians and they wanted us to leave right away because German soldiers were billeted in their home and would be returning soon. The lady did give us some food and the man gave us some directions for heading toward where the Russians were coming from. We left their house just as it was getting dark and then circled back and got in their hayloft. This was New Year's Eve and it was surely the coldest one I had ever experienced. The hayloft had big openings to the elements but we burrowed down into the hay and slept for several hours. Before we fell asleep someone came out to the barn for something but did not discover us as we held our breaths until the person left. We left the hayloft around 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning and walked for several kilometers before it started getting light. It seemed to us that we had gone as far as the Hungarian had indicated but still had not run into any Russians. With daylight we again got away from roads and open spaces and moved on in more secluded areas. We came to a stream that we

*(Continued on page 13)*

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walked along to find a place to cross. We made it across and as we climbed the bank away from the stream, we were hailed by two soldiers who had their weapons trained on us. We stopped and as they approached we could see that they were German soldiers. They were amazed to find two American airmen on New Year's Day on the eastern front where German and Russian troops were lobbing mortars at each other. They took us back to their mortar encampment and we realized that we were now prisoners of the Germans.

After a day or two with the German troops where we were interrogated many times we were returned to Dobsina and placed in the local jail. After a couple of days in the jail we were reunited with Wilhite and Jones and the four of us were taken by bus to Popgrad. From here we were taken by train to Bratislava. We had two old German guards that escorted us on our way to Germany. We were taken to an interrogation center that was located a few miles from Bratislava and again went through some intensive interrogation. We felt that the Germans knew more about us than we knew about ourselves so giving only our name, rank and serial number did not bother them too much. The same two guards then escorted us to Vienna where we became a part of a larger detachment of American flyers who had either bailed out of their planes or had crashed landed as our crew had done. All were POWs and all were on our way into Germany as guests of the Third Reich. The same two German guards were with us on the train as we moved through Linz, Regensburg, Wurtzburg and Nuremburg on our way to Frankfurt. From there we were taken to Wetzlar, Germany where nearby was located Dulag Luft.

Most all Air Corps prisoners were processed through Dulag Luft. We again had more interrogation with some time in solitary confinement. After Dulag Luft, Smythe and I were part of a large group of flying officers that were put on boxcars for transport to a permanent prison camp for captured flying personnel. Enlisted men were in other boxcars on the same train. We were headed to Stalag Luft I at Barth, Germany which was located in north Germany along the Baltic Sea. The train got as far as Berlin where we spent three days and nights in the boxcars in a Berlin marshalling yard. During these three days the RAF heavy bombers came and bombed Berlin on two of the three nights. The boxcars shook from the con-

cussions of the bombing but none of the boxcars were hit. As the air raid sirens went off prior to the raids, the guards left for bomb shelters after locking us in the boxcars. After a total of ten days in the boxcars we were taken to Stalag III A in Luckenwalde, Germany instead of Stalag Luft I. This camp was approximately 40 kilometers south of Berlin. It had, at one time, been a concentration camp for political prisoners. Now it was a prisoner-of-war camp with nearly 17,000 prisoners. Russian, French, Poles, Norwegian, Italian, American, Balkan people and men from all parts of the British Empire were being held at Luckenwalde. The contingent of American flying officers that I was with were moved into a compound with British Empire personnel and a good size group of Polish officers who had been prisoners of the Germans since 1939 or 1940. Nearby was a compound of Norwegian captives that we could see but could not communicate with to any great extent. The commanding officer of the Norwegians was Major General Otto Ruge. Shortly after we arrived at Luckenwalde many American ground force officers were moved into our barracks. They had come from Oflag 64 near Schubin, Poland and been marched through terrible winter conditions to get to Luckenwalde. They had very little shelter on the trip and their food rations were also very meager. It was around the first of February of 1945 as we settled into our barracks at Stalag III A.

For the next month and a half our food rations were only what was given us by the Germans. Each day we had a couple of cups of hot ersatz tea, three or four small potatoes, a ration of soup or gruel and a chunk of dark bread that was approximately 1 1/4" thick. Each cubicle of 18 men received a loaf and a half to split 18 ways. Much care was taken by the carver to assure 18 equal size pieces. During the second week of March the Germans began issuing Red Cross parcels to the prisoners. One parcel per two men per week was the issue that we received. We received the Red Cross parcels until nearly the end of April. We hoped that liberation would come before the parcels ran out.

Our barracks were made of wood and brick and had brick floors. The walls had a series of small windows and there were two or three briquette burning stoves in the center aisles but there were no briquettes. A washroom area with some cold running water separated the barracks into two halves. The

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washroom had one inoperative toilet so we used outdoor outhouses for toilet facilities. There were 180 men in each half of the barracks and that group was split into 10 cubicles of 18 men. Each cubicle was formed by shaping three triple deck side by side bunks with an open sitting area in the middle of the formed space. This area was the social center of the cubicle for card playing, cooking, eating and talking. Cubicle 1 of our barracks had the ranking American officer, Lt. Colonel Roy J. Herte, and his second in command, Lt. Colonel Walter M. Oaks. Herte was in poor health and Oaks performed most of the duties of the commanding American officer. There were approximately 525 American officers in our compound and another 4,500 enlisted men in another part of the camp that were living in more primitive conditions. Herte and Oaks were not permitted to have official contact with the enlisted men. A Catholic chaplain, Captain Charles Glennon was not permitted to hold mass in the enlisted men's section. Also in Cubicle 1, we had Edward W. Beattie, Jr., an United Press correspondent who had been captured in France in September of 1944. He had lived in Germany prior to the war and had performed foreign correspondent duties for United Press. He was the chief interpreter for us in our contacts and negotiations with our German captors. His book, "Diary of a Kriegie", is one of the best books for describing life in a German prisoner of war camp. The illustrations in the book were sketches that were made by Beattie while in the camp and they add immensely to the book.

As Luckenwalde was quite close to Berlin, we were treated to several air raids on Berlin by the American daylight bombers and by the RAF at night. Our German guards were annoyed when we cheered and they would finally herd us back into the barracks.

As April of 1945 progressed, we realized that the war would not last very much longer. We received BBC radio broadcasts on hidden radios and passed the news around among us. We also had and maintained a large war map in the vestibule of our building. It was quite accurate as to the positions of the allied armies and of the German defenders. The senior allied officers in camp developed plans to take control of the camp when the German guards eventually pulled out. Russian tanks and troops approached our camp on April 22, 1945 and POWs at Luckenwalde considered this as our liberation day. The German

guards left and we set in motion the plan for governing the camp. The Russian troops that liberated us had been fighting and chasing Germans since the battle of Stalingrad. Allied leaders wanted POWs to stay in the camp so that there could be an orderly transfer and exchange of prisoners. After several days of waiting and with nothing happening to get POWs moving toward home, a lot of POWs in our camp started out on their own to reach American troops. The Americans had stopped at the Elbe River and Wittenburg was the closest point from Luckenwalde on the Elbe so that is the direction we headed for. The group that I was with spent one night with Russians on our way to Wittenburg and then met up with a group of GIs that had crossed the Elbe. They had some vehicles and we climbed on board and crossed over the river in the hands of the Americans. It was a great feeling to put it mildly.

From here we were moved quickly to Hildesheim, Germany and then flown to France. I landed in Reims on May 6, 1945 and was there for two days. The German surrender took place there while we were there but I was not in on the festivities. From Reims we went by train to Camp Lucky Strike in Le Havre. Here we were deloused and given fresh clothes and, of course some good GI food. We embarked on a troop ship for return to the United States and the view of the Statue of Liberty as we passed into the New York City harbor was the most welcome and thrilling sight imaginable to me and all the other returnees on the ship.

At Camp Shanks, New York we were separated into various contingents for shipment to army bases around the country which were nearest to our home destinations. Fort Sheridan, just north of Chicago, was my destination and the two day train ride provided time for my coming-home-anxiety to build. I had only been away from my wife and family for nine months but I had packed a lot of activity and excitement into that period of time. In passing through Fort Sheridan, I did notice German POWs working in the mess halls. They were certainly well fed and appeared to be content with being prisoners under those circumstances. Rather different than what was endured by American prisoners in German prison camps.

All members of my B-24 crew were returned alive to the United States. The two injured crewmen re-

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ceived medical rehabilitation in this country and became productive citizens. Lt. Galvan stayed in the military but, unfortunately, died in an Air Force plane accident in the mid-1950s.

## Post World War II Period

The war in Europe was over and the war in the Pacific against Japan was also nearing its end during the summer of 1945. During August I was on recuperation stay in Atlantic City, New Jersey when the second atomic bomb was dropped on Japan. Japanese surrender was very imminent and it became evident that large numbers of flyers could and would be discharged from the military. By early October of 1945, I had received my discharge from the Army Air Corps and was looking forward to resuming my civilian life with my wife. One of the very good benefits for returning veterans was the G.I. Bill of Rights that our Congress had passed into law before the war ended. For me the chief benefit was financial aid for college enrollment and study. I chose Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana and enrolled in their school of engineering and began study there in November of 1945. The financial benefits included tuition for the university's courses and money for books and other necessary supplies. We also received a living allowance that paid the rent for our housing while we were in school.

I graduated from Purdue in February of 1949 with a degree in the Production Management option of Mechanical Engineering. Our first daughter, Valerie, had been born in July of 1947 so she was a year and a half old when I entered the job market. I was hired by Rand McNally and Co., the map making and publishing firm, whose headquarters were in Chicago, Illinois. I spent eleven years with Rand McNally during which time our second daughter, Bobette, was born in 1949 and then a son, Thomas, came along in 1954. We lived in Chicago during my first few years with Rand McNally and then moved to Deerfield in 1952 when Rand McNally moved their headquarters to Skokie, Illinois. Both Skokie and Deerfield are northern suburbs of Chicago. As this is being written, Mary Jo and I are approaching our 50<sup>th</sup> year in Deerfield. When we moved here in 1952, Deerfield had a population of around 4,000 people and as we approach 2002 the town has grown to just about 20,000 people. It has been a fine place to raise our family and still our children and our grandchildren

enjoy coming back here for visits.

Our daughter, Valerie, married John Rohrbaugh who had grown up in Ohio and attended schools in Ohio. He attended Heidelberg College for his under graduate degree and then went to the University of Illinois for his PhD in psychology. That is where Valerie met John and they were later married at St. Gregory's Episcopal Church in Deerfield. After their wedding they moved to Los Angeles where John did post doctorate study at U.C.L.A. They then spent several years at the University of Nebraska in Omaha after which they moved on to the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. From there they moved to St. Louis where John is affiliated with the Medical School of Washington University. That is where they reside in the summer of 2001 as this is being written. In Los Angeles, Omaha and Bethesda, Valerie did business librarian work. In St. Louis, Valerie is employed by the Arthur Anderson Company as a business information retrieval specialist. Their oldest son, James, has finished under graduate college with a degree in Political Science and Economics from Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana. He is employed in St. Louis by the World Affairs Council. Their younger son, Thomas is about to begin his sophomore year at Elmhurst College in Elmhurst, Illinois. He loves chess and been successful in accumulating grand master points in competitions that he has participated in. In the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade he was the junior champion of the state of Missouri.

Our daughter, Bobette, met Charles Dobson while they were students at the University of Tennessee. They married and the ceremony was held at St. Gregory's in Deerfield. They currently live in St. Charles, Illinois and Charles is employed by the Pactiv Corporation. He works on national accounts and is able to work out of his home but as a result has to do a fair amount of traveling. Bobette works as a reading specialist in a West Chicago grammar school. Their oldest son, Casey, has just graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York and is now beginning a five year commitment in the army service. He will be in the Air Artillery arm of the U.S. Army. Their son, Eric is about to begin his senior year at St. Xavier University which is located on the far side of Chicago. He is majoring in business and he has pursued his passion for basketball during his college years. He probably will be

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the point guard on the 2001-2002 St. Xavier squad. Their daughter, Brooke, is a sophomore at Northern Illinois University in Dekalb. This is the same school I entered after high school and spent two quarters there prior to entering military service. Brooke did her freshman year at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, KY. She is an avid volleyball player and thought that Northern Illinois would be a better situation for her so she made the switch from Kentucky to Northern.

Our son, Thomas, lives in Cedarburg, Wisconsin with his wife, Karen, and family. Tom and Karen have a very active five year old son named Eric who will be starting kindergarten as this next school year begins in the fall of 2001. Tom has two other children, Alex – age 13 and Hannah- age 12, who live in Greendale, Wisconsin with their mother. Tom and Karen have Alex and Hannah regularly for weekend visits.

It has been very rewarding to Mary Jo and me to share in the growing up experience of our eight grandchildren.

I continued working for Rand McNally until the spring of 1960. After eleven years with them, I was offered a position with the Monarch Printing Corporation. After serious debate, I decided to make the switch to Monarch. It was a small commercial printer located near the original Rand McNally building in the south loop area of Chicago. Monarch grew over the years by acquiring several small printing companies. We became a good size company with about 150 employees and operated at 1130 West Adams Street until 1982. During my years at Monarch I went back to school in the evenings to work for a MBA at Roosevelt University in Chicago. I received my degree from Roosevelt in January of 1976. I had become a vice president at Monarch and was a part of the management team. In October 1982, Monarch merged into the Bradley Printing Company. A three way merger took place where Monarch Printing and Imperial Printing merged into Bradley Printing and we became the Bradley Printing Corporation and were located in the Imperial building on Mannheim Road in Del Plaines, Illinois. After being at Bradley for about a year I moved into printing sales. One of the salesmen from Monarch days retired from Bradley and I received some of his accounts to service. This worked out well for me and within a year my

commissions were enough to cover my monthly draws of salary. I enjoyed my selling career as it got me out of the office for my calls on clients and prospective clients. I continued selling until my retirement in January of 1995. I had been in sales for twelve years and overall had spent nearly forty-five years in the graphic arts industry. It was a rewarding industry to have been a part of and would choose the same business if I had to do it all over again.

## Present Day

During the late 1980s and early 1990s Mary Jo and I traveled to Europe several times. We visited Holland, Denmark, Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Hungary and the Czech Republic. We still enjoy the trips as we reminisce with the albums we put together after each trip. In June of 1994 we spent two weeks in Hawaii in celebration of our fiftieth wedding anniversary. Valerie and John and their two boys joined us on Maui for the second week and overall it was a very memorable vacation. At about the time of my retirement from Bradley Printing, we had the opportunity to buy a condominium apartment in Sarasota, Florida. It is a small two-bedroom apartment that is in a beautiful location on the shores of Sarasota Bay. We started the routine of living approximately eight months in Deerfield and four months in Sarasota each year with the months in Florida being January, February, March and April. In 1998 we sold our home on Rosemary Terrace in Deerfield. We had designed our home with an architect and moved into the house in 1958. We had spent forty years in the house when we sold it in 1998 and moved to an apartment in the Coromandel development in Deerfield. The arrangement of having two apartments makes it easier for us to pack up for our trips back and forth to Florida. We have friends at both ends and always look forward to our next trip going one way or the other.

In September of 2000, I was invited to accompany a small group of veterans of my 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group on a trip to the Czech Republic. Those that made the trip were survivors of the December 17, 1944 air battle over Moravia in the northeastern part of the Czech Republic. Our 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group along with several bomb groups of the Fifteenth Air Force were on our way to bomb the Odertal Synthetic Oil Works in what is now southern Poland. We were attacked

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## **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:

Dave St. Yves  
5 Hutt Forest Lane  
East Taunton, MA 02718

If you have any questions, you can E-Mail Dave at [treasurer@461st.org](mailto:treasurer@461st.org).

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 \$15.00 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 \$15.00 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:		Life <input type="checkbox"/>		Associate <input type="checkbox"/>		Child <input type="checkbox"/>		Father's name:	
First Name:				Last Name:					
Street Address:									
City:				State:				Zip:	
Phone number:				E-Mail address:					
Squadron #:				Crew #:				ASN:	
Check No.:				Amount:				\$	



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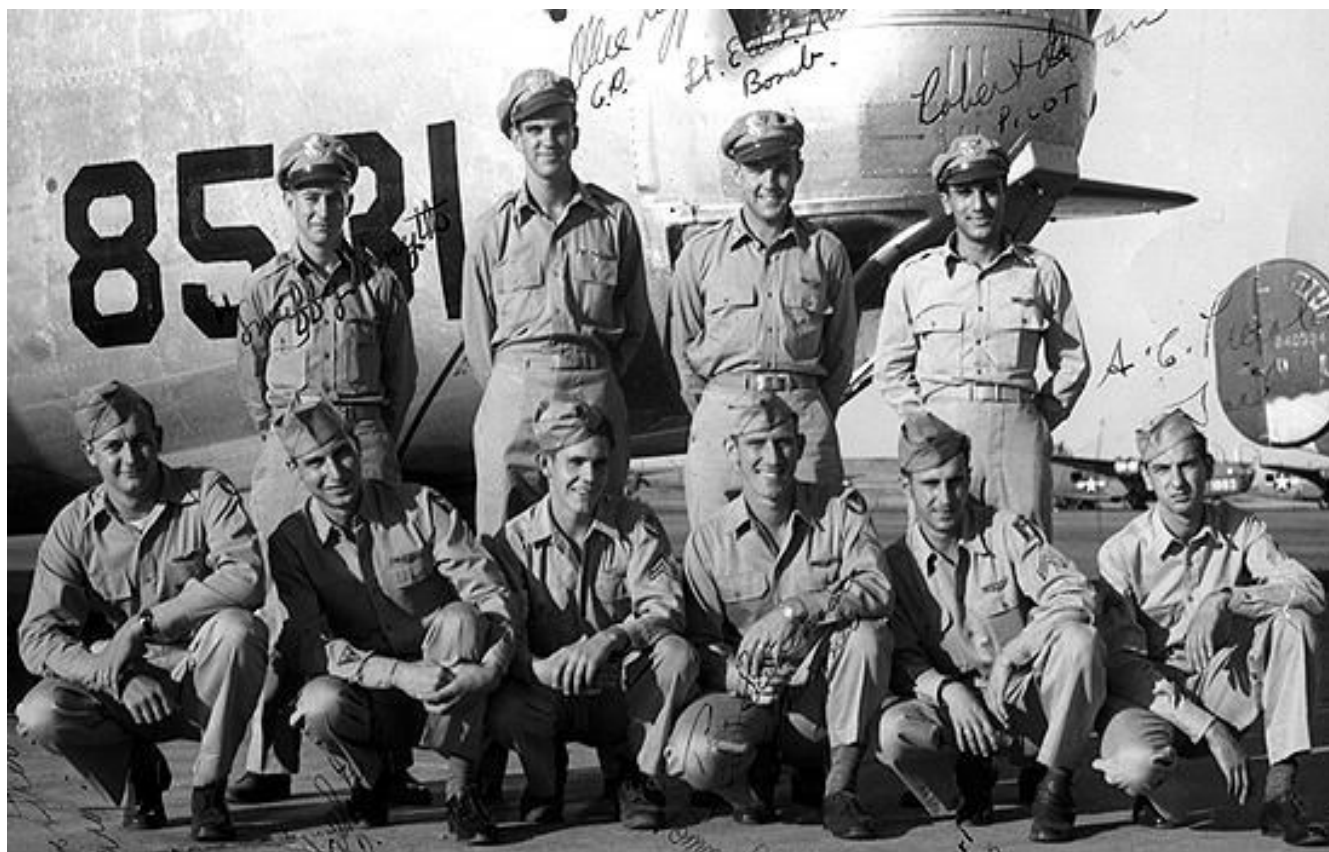
by German fighter planes as we approached our target and a huge air battle took place. Twenty Fifth Air Force bombers were shot down and nearly fifty German fighters were lost to machine gun fire from the bombers and from the American fighter escorts. Two hundred American airmen were killed or missing in action. The Czech Airmen's Society was instrumental in arranging the trip to Prerov in the eastern part of the Czech Republic. The Czech Airmen's Society enlisted the help of the Czech Military, Czech Airlines and other interested parties to sponsor this wonderful trip for the American survivors of the air battle which took place over their homeland. The six men that made the trip are as follows:

Hjalmar Johansson of Montville, New Jersey  
 John R. Modrovsky of Spring Hill, Florida  
 Orville Hommert of Granite City, Illinois  
 Thomas Qualman of Winter Haven, Florida  
 Rob Hoskins of Murfreesboro, Tennessee  
 Edward A. Kussler of Deerfield, Illinois

The Czech people were tremendous hosts and their generous hospitality was well received by the American veterans. The Czechs showed their appreciation

for what the American flyers had done over fifty-five years ago. Liberation from the German oppressors was most important to the Czech people and they still wanted to and did show how much they appreciated our efforts. I feel very pleased to have been a part of this trip.

However, it was unfortunate that Mary Jo did not make the trip to the Czech Republic with me. We have shared so much together that I regret her missing the emotions and thrills of the trip to Prerov. She has some health problems and the trip would have been difficult for her. I realize that I have been very fortunate to have good health through the years since World War II. Hernia surgery is the most difficult health problem that I have had to suffer through. I do realize that so many of my World War II contemporaries have passed on and that the remaining survivors are thinning rather quickly. However, I still enjoy life immensely and hope to continue on for many more years. The Czech trip brought back many hazy and nearly forgotten memories that have helped put my entire lifetime into greater perspective. Mary Jo and I want to stay around for a long time to see all of our grandchildren reach adulthood and begin having families of their own. We can't hope for much more, so that will be our goal as we move along in the new twenty-first century.





## **Playtime in Wartime**

by  
Robert M. Kelliher  
Crew #89R  
765<sup>th</sup> Squadron

Much of my thousand hours of flying were serious business, and some parts of that were very high tension ordeals. In spite of that, or because of that, some of us pilots took liberties to mix some pleasure with business.

- In training in the U.S.A., and overseas, in the Fifteenth Air Force based in Italy, there was quite a lot of detouring to sight-see on practice missions.
- In Italy, on flights to the air-to-ground gunnery range, at near-ground level to hedge-hop trees, farm houses, etc., and spook the livestock.
- Ocean level flights to hedge-hop over fishermen's sailboats in the Adriatic. Never quite blew them over. They clung to the mast and gave us the one-finger salute.
- Memorable detour to circle low around Stromboli Volcano on a night flight. Awesome to look down into the inferno cauldron. Fearsome preview of hell?
- Frolic on a few occasions, after formation-flying practice that was a 'rat race'. It was a 'follow the leader' game in a high speed series of steep-banked turns and climbs and dives, ending with a 'hot pilot' peel-off landing back at the base. I had the impression that high command didn't object too much about their pilots showing some spunk, initiative and devil may care.
- After the war ended, I was briefly at Hondo, Texas as mission pilot for student navigators. Got a B-24 to 'show time engines' – flew with pilot pal to L.A., weekend double date with two aspiring Hollywood actresses. Nice time, but scarcely dinky airport.
- With Hondo base too soon closed down, I was one of the pilots assigned to fly obsolete B-24s to the scrap yard – and smelter – at Kingman, Arizona. I 'got lost', and so veered north across the Painted Desert, at low altitude to 'navigate by pilotage landmarks' and sight-see along the Grand Canyon at rim level to Hoover dam as a turning point. Memorable awesome sight! Also memorable, but sad, at Kingman was the vast acreage of parked WWII aircraft, many emblazoned with nose art of impressive quality. All too soon they became 'lost art' in the smelter.

461st BOMB GROUP  
FINANCIAL STATEMENT  
FOR THE TWELVE MONTHS ENDED OCTOBER 31, 2014

Cash Balances - November 1, 2013

Checking account	<u>\$7,665</u>
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Income

Reunion income	33,496
Dues and memberships	200
Other	<u>7</u>

Total Income	<u>33,703</u>
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Expenses

Reunion expenses	33,053
Liberaider expenses	<u>1,120</u>

Total expenses	<u>34,173</u>
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Net loss for period	<u>(470)</u>
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Cash Balances - October 31, 2014

Checking account	<u><u>\$7,195</u></u>
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## Let Me Go

In memory of

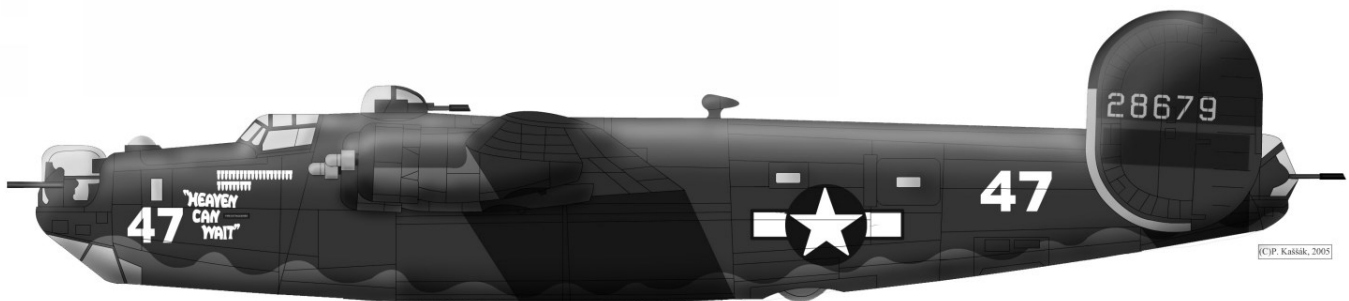
**Robert Frederick Kerth**

When I come at last to the end of the road  
And the sun has set for me  
I want no rites in a gloom-filled room  
Why cry for a soul set free?

Miss me a little, but not too long  
And not with your head bowed low.  
Remember the love that we have shared  
Miss me – but let me go.

For this is a journey we all must take  
And each must go alone  
It's all part of the master plan  
A step on the road to home.

When you are lonely and sick at heart  
Go to the ocean we know  
And bury your sorrow among the waves  
Miss me – but let me go.



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ply of eggs, butter and milk, a chicken once a week and some meat when a pig was slaughtered. Knowing that things were not getting any better, he wrote to a good friend from the old country who lived in New York City. In the letter he got back from his friend he was told to move to New York. There were jobs available and the pay, although not great, was steady and it was enough to live on modestly. It was a big decision to make for a man with a family, so in 1925 he decided to make the move. During the years ahead things were tough, but we managed to survive. In 1931 my second sister, Josephine was born. This made it more difficult, but when you are poor another mouth to feed isn't a crisis, we managed. By this time my older sister and brother were old enough, 15 and 14, to work after school to help out. I was 8 then and made a few pennies from time to time running errands and occasionally sweeping out stores. Everybody helped. In June of 1942 I graduated high school and I was inducted into the service on January 14, 1943. I took some tests and the results were good and it got me into the Air Force. After basic training, I was sent to aerial gunnery school, then to aircraft armament school and then I was sent to a crewing area where air crews are assembled. Once the crew (10 men) was assembled we were sent to a combat training area where we picked up our own brand new B-24J named "Arsenic and Lace." We all fell in love with her immediately and she now had ten lovers who would risk their lives to protect her. Unlike many previous combat crews who went over to Europe by boat we became part of a new idea whereby both plane and crew flew over together. This way one didn't have to wait for the other to arrive at the Processing and Replacement Center. Replacement crews and planes were in great demand and the squadrons got their replacements faster and thus could maintain maximum efforts in

bombing enemy targets. We were lucky our first ten missions, but on December 17, 1944, our 11<sup>th</sup> mission, our luck ran out and we were shot down by the Luftwaffe JG-300 Squadron. Our "Miss Lace" was badly damaged and she blew up and her remains came down in Czechoslovakia near Olomoue-Neredin. Five members of the crew perished and five were lucky enough to survive. I am one of the survivors and although I was captured by the Germans and was interned in a Prisoner of War camp Stalag Luft I, Barth, Germany. Thank God I am still alive today to tell my story.

When I became a civilian again after my discharge, I even made a joke about my experience. Every Sunday after Mass we would usually gather at one relative's house or another for a Sunday visit and dinner. It was only natural that I would be asked this question, "Johnny, you fought in Europe, didn't you?" I answered yes. "While there did you ever get a chance to visit the old country, Czechoslovakia?" And my answer was, "Yes, I dropped in once." I never mentioned to them that I had to parachute to save my life. I always got a little chuckle out of my answer. It's easy to make jokes about one's experiences after the fact because if you don't let go, you will become a grumpy vindictive person. Ending the suffering and trying to forget the bad memories as soon as humanly possible and just look ahead to a better life in the future. The past is history; the future is hope and happiness. I hope that when you read about my misadventure, bad as it was, that I survived because of pride in my ethnic background and that I was an American fighting for freedom for all oppressed people of the world.

It's 3:00 AM on Sunday, December 17, 1944 when we were awakened by our nemesis, a ser-

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geant whose duty it was to wake up the crews who were scheduled to fly a mission. After throwing half a dozen items at him we rubbed our eyes clear and looked around at each other. Our tent, our home away from home, was occupied by six enlisted members of the crew. Since we knew the routine, having done it so often, we sauntered out of our tent and headed for the crown jewel of bath houses. Here we washed our faces to wake up and brushed our teeth to get rid of the bad taste in our mouth. After taking care of the important necessities, we went over to the mess hall for breakfast. Breakfast sounds good, but when we have to fly high altitude missions, it's usually dry cereal, toast no butter and coffee. Anything that contains any form of fat, butter, etc., could make one uncomfortable when flying at a high altitude. If you eat heavily and are airborne and you start to feel queasy, you are in trouble. We usually have a bucket for such emergencies, but sometimes you fail to reach it in time and you wind up redecorating the interior of the aircraft. At high altitude except for the one who released his breakfast suddenly and openly it doesn't have an immediate affect because we are on oxygen and our masks cover our faces including our noses. However, once we are returning to our base and flying below 10,000 feet, our oxygen masks come off and the after effect of a previously ejected breakfast becomes quite evident. Thank God for the two waist gun windows where fresh cold air rushes in steadily and helps dilute the nauseous aroma from the earlier accidental mishap. Once we landed and after the briefing of the mission, our generous donor has the privilege, although unwanted, to clean up his earlier donation. While at the briefing, our ground crew supplied several buckets of treated water, a brush and mop for our donor to clean up his earlier mistake.

Now a flash back to the mess hall. Most of those having breakfast this early are the crews flying the missions. There is a lot of laughter and joviality, but actually it's a ploy to hide the fact that they are worried and/or scared, but don't want to show it. It's no sin to be scared when you know that you are going out to face possible death. However, scared or not, they still go out and do their job the best they can. Who can expect more than that? It's the job they are trained to do, so they take a deep breath and go on with it.

After a short briefing, each man gets his blessing from the man who represents their fate and/or religion. We then mount trucks with all our flying gear and wait at the planes tarmac for the officers each of who have separate briefings. During our wait, we smoke a couple of cigarettes and also check over our equipment. Being the armorer gunner it was my duty to check the bombays and make sure that the bombs were installed properly. Finally the officers arrive and we receive a quick briefing of what is expected of us. Once we are airborne we find out what the target is. Then it's too late to complain that you are not feeling so good and would like to go on sick call.

After takeoff and we are flying over the water, we test fire our guns several short bursts. As soon as we reach 10,000 feet, we go on oxygen and remain on oxygen for most of the mission. As a ball turret gunner, I do not remain in my turret after test firing my guns. I raise my turret back up into the plane. I do not get back into my turret until we are about a half hour from the target. On most lengthy missions this is required because if the ball turret is in the slipstream under the belly of the plane it causes a drag which then requires the pilot to use more fuel to compensate for this. Since the ball turret is inside the plane, I

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have been trained to lower it, enter it and be ready to protect the plane in case of an attack by fighters within a minute or so.

The mission by the Fifteenth Air Force on December 17, 1944 can be written up as perhaps one of the biggest and most fiercely fought air combat battles of World War II in Europe.

General Adolf Galland, head of the Luftwaffe Fighter Command, sensing that the war was soon to come to an end and that Germany would lose, decided to hoard petrol and save his best pilots, planes and ammunition for what he called Der Grosse Schlag, "The Big Blow." This big blow was delivered on December 17, 1944 over the skies of Czechoslovakia and Poland when 100 of his best fighter planes pounced on the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group. Heavy losses encountered on both sides.

From our standpoint we were told at the briefing before the mission that the Germans would not be able to send up any fighters because they did not have the fuel. They said that this would be a "milk run" (a mission where there would be very little or no fighter opposition and minimal anti-aircraft action). Our own intelligence must have been asleep at the switch on this one and/or the Germans kept General Galland's Der Gross Schlag the best kept secret of the war. It became an aerial bloodbath and the Germans threw everything at us but the kitchen sink.

On this mission the fighters attacked 3 and 4 abreast and came directly at us from the rear. They were only about 100 to 150 yards behind us and this is unheard of based on their previous tactics. Previously they would dive at us from above and out of the sun which made it hard for the gunners to pick them up quickly. They would dive out of the sun and rake the planes with 20 mm cannon fire and

keep on diving. Once they were out of range of our gunfire, they would go back up above the bomber formation and make a similar attack and then head for their air field. Flying abreast and at the same level is almost like a suicide mission because more guns can zero in on you much easier and do more damage. Plus it is much easier to hit a target coming directly at you than one that is diving at you from the sun at 400 miles per hour. As for them, they would also be able to do more damage coming straight and level with the target. There is no doubt in my mind that their orders were to shoot down as many planes as possible regardless of personal risk to themselves.

The next two days, December 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group bombed the same target and encountered only minimal anti-aircraft fire and no fighter opposition. It seems that Der Grosse Schlag was one big all-out effort and the end of the mighty Luftwaffe.

This particular mission was to the Blechhammer Oil Refineries, Odertal, Poland. We were attacked by 100 Luftwaffe Fighter planes before we got to the target. The reason was to destroy as many bombers as they could before they could reach the target. During these attacks, our B-24, 'Arsenic and Lace,' was badly damaged by the enemy fighters and never did reach the target. Thank God our pilot, Lt. Gerald Smith, who knew how badly damaged we were and that we couldn't reach the target area, jettisoned our bomb load. If we still had our bombs when the plane blew up, it would have been a much more powerful explosion and we all would have perished. Thanks to his quick thinking 5 members of the crew were able to survive the blast. The survivors were pilot Gerald Smith, co-pilot Vro Francisco, navigator Milton

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Klarsfeld, tail gunner Clifton Stewart, and yours truly John R. Modrovsky. Eventually we were all captured and spent the remainder of the war as prisoners of war in a German prison camp. The five members of the crew who perished were bombardier Arthur Carlson, engineer and waist gunner Elston Howard, top turret gunner Morris Goldman, nose turret gunner David Brewer, radio operator and waist gunner Abraham Abramson. By the grace of God I am only alive today because my guns jammed forcing me to come out of my turret while we were being attacked. As I reached the deck, both waist gunners were lying in a heap. So I took over both waist gun positions and fired at the enemy planes as they came within range on either side. Suddenly I saw the red flashing light, the signal to bail out. Our tail gunner left his position and was coming forth to bail out of the waist window. He leaped out, but I waited just a moment to check and be sure that both waist gunners were dead. I started to turn one over by pulling his arm and it came off in my hands. He had been hit in the chest with a 20 mm shell. Both were definitely dead. Under normal conditions seeing a sight like this, I might have freaked out, but in all the excitement I was lucky enough to keep my wits about me. Amen for that. Stopping to check my comrades to make sure that they were dead almost cost me my own life, but I had to be sure before I left the plane. So I approached the waist window and dove out head first. Just about the time my feet cleared the window, the ship blew up and the force of the blast partially dazed me. I was free falling (descending without an open chute) end over end feeling like I was on a soft cloud. I saw the rip cord ring in my hand, but because I was dazed, I couldn't bring my mind to communicate with my hand to pull the ring all the way out so that the parachute could open. We bailed out at approxi-

mately 27,000 feet give or take and I just kept free falling not realizing what was happening. Then somehow my rip cord came free and my parachute opened. When a parachute fully opens after you have fallen some distance, just for a brief moment you suddenly stop in midair and your body is jolted. This jolting action brought me out of my dazed condition and I looked around wondering what happened. Within a minute or so the whole picture of what had happened became clear to me. The clouds were still below me and once I break through, what will I find waiting for me – a forest where I could land in some trees which is always dangerous; a lake or river etc. which can also be very dangerous; a town or hopefully an open field which would be safest. After breaking through the clouds at about 5,000 feet I was heading toward a forest with a nice big flat open area. By manipulating my shroud lines I was able to maneuver the parachute toward an open field. I landed safely with no problem. I gathered up my parachute and ran into the nearby forest. Luckily no one saw me descend. Once out of sight I rolled up my white parachute and covered it with snow – a perfect camouflage. Since it was just past noon, I looked around the forest area for a safe place to hide temporarily. Luckily I found a pheasant blind and hid under it. I gave myself about a half hour to let my heart which was pounding a mile a minute to get back to a normal beat and permit me to appreciate a sigh of relief. I was still shaking a little because I never had an experience like this in all my young life and honestly I wasn't prepared for it.

After I composed myself I took the compass and the maps of Europe printed on large silk handkerchief from my escape kit which was in a leg pocket of my flying suit. I had a general idea where I was because I heard our navigator telling the pilot that we were approaching the target area just before the Luft-

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waffe attacked our formation. I found this on the map and assumed that this was the general area I was in. From there I had no other choice but to head east toward the Russian lines which were still far away, but you have to start someplace. Unless I was lucky enough to be picked up by a partisan group, I seriously doubted that I would make it, but I had to try. When it got dark I came out of the woods ever so cautiously and began heading east. I don't know how many miles I had traveled before the dawn was upon me so I had to find a place where I could hide during the daylight hours. I located a small treed area and proceeded to enter it and find a spot where I could hide. Shortly after entering the area I heard several dogs barking as if they were hunting some prey. Little did I know that I was the prey and since they were much faster than I, it was no contest. They forced me to back up against a large tree and they kept snapping at me. I took off one of my flying boots and kept swinging it at them. Within minutes two policemen with shotguns came along and my earlier doubt about being able to make it out was now a reality. At first I hated to be captured, but now for the first time I knew how a hunted animal felt when it was being stalked. The police took me to their station and had me sit on a chair in the corner of a big room. When they looked at my dog tags, my identification and saw my name, Modrovsky, they immediately asked me if I was Czechoslovakian. The chief policeman spoke some broken English. At this point I pretended that I did not know how to speak the language which I did, but decided to play dumb. They finally accepted the fact that I couldn't and left me alone. They were speaking freely believing that I could not understand what they were saying so I just listened and knew exactly what their plans were for me. The police chief got on the phone and called the Germans informing them that

they had captured an American airman. Early that afternoon they came and picked me up. There was an officer, two riflemen and a driver. We drove for about 2 hours and stopped in an open area. I got out of the ambulance, the pickup vehicle, and stood wondering what was going to happen. One of the riflemen took out a shovel and handed it to me. Immediately this horrible thought flashed in my mind that they were going to take me out in the field and have me dig my own grave before shooting me. Then I became confused because they also took out a stretcher and two large brown paper bags. We then began to walk deeper into this open area like we were going nowhere. I knew that I was really scared when I kept asking questions and then more questions. The German officer just told me to keep walking and to stop asking so many questions. We walked about another quarter mile and I saw a huge hole in the ground almost like a crater. There was wreckage in the middle about 15 feet deep. It turned out to be a German fighter aircraft which had been shot down on my mission the day before. It seems the pilot never got out of the aircraft and we were there to pick up his body. We finally found it a short distance from where the plane crashed. We placed it into two brown bags and put it on the stretcher and tied it down with the straps attached to the stretcher. We carried it back to the ambulance and placed it inside and I had to sit inside with it. The body was pretty stiff from the cold, but began to thaw slowly once it was placed inside the ambulance.

After an hour or so it had thawed enough to start emitting an odor. The odor began to get stronger and I began to feel ill. I threw up several times then started banging and kicking the door because I wanted out to get some fresh air. With all the noise and screaming I was doing they finally stopped the ambulance

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and let me out. Once the odor from within the ambulance started coming out they all started backing away. I asked the officer to please let me stand between the two riflemen on the rear platform which was on the outside of the ambulance. When he saw the multi-colored look on my face he agreed and we went on our way. I, for one, was breathing a lot better. We finally arrived at our destination and no one could be happier than me. I was taken to a building and given a small bowl of soup, a piece of brown bread and a horrible cup of coffee which tasted like varnish. I was then taken to a small cold and damp room in the basement. Sometime during midafternoon they came and took me outside the building where an automobile was waiting. This was my transportation to where I would be taken next. I waited outside with the chauffeur, a soldier. Shortly a tall distinguished officer approached and entered the vehicle spreading himself out across the back seat. There was a small wooden box on the floor which I occupied. It was directly across from the officer who turned out to be a colonel. While we were riding he began to question me about what I did before the war. The answer was easy. I told him that I was a student. Then I asked him what he did before the war and he said, "Ach, I was an engineer." With this answer I made my first stupid mistake because not realizing where I was and the position I was in, I said, "When we get through with you, you will have plenty of work rebuilding." I hardly got the last word out of my mouth when his arm came up from his lap and hit me right across the mouth splitting my lip which was caused by a big ring he was wearing. I began to bleed and the driver had to stop the car to get out and pick up a hand full of snow which he gave me to hold against my mouth to try and help stop the bleeding. It was then that I got the message, speak only when asked to speak, you're

on the other side of the fence now. The freedom you have enjoyed and taken for granted has just been taken away from you. Simply put you are a prisoner of war and don't you forget it. After riding for a couple of hours we arrived at a Luftwaffe base where I was dropped off. That evening I was taken to the officer's mess and was told to help out in the kitchen. As a non-commissioned officer and according to the Geneva Convention I am not supposed to do any manual labor. I was cold and hungry so I did what they told me to do for two reasons. 1. So that they don't take it upon themselves to start beating me. 2. Being hungry I thought they might feed me and/or I might be able to steal food if the opportunity should present itself. I was given the dirty job of cleaning out the grease pits. I would take two pails with greasy slimy water and then carry them outside and dump them into a ditch outside the building area. At one point while carrying two pails of dirty water, I slipped on a greasy spot on the floor and crashed into a German officer who was walking by knocking him down and spilling some of the slimy water over him. He got up and started to scream and began beating me around the head and face and kicked me when I was down on the floor. Because he was an officer, the kitchen staff continued to make my life miserable. They then returned me to my cell without having given me any food or drink. After several hours had elapsed since the incident, an interpreter came and told me that because I attacked a German officer that, at a trial which was held (without me being present) that I was found guilty and it was decreed that I would be executed by a firing squad in the morning. The shock of that statement hit me like a bolt of lightning. I began to tremble, partially lost my voice and at the moment I never felt so alone in all my life.

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They say when you think you are going to die your mind does tricks on you. After being told that I would be executed in the morning, I kept pacing back and forth, back and forth. At one point I suddenly had a vision, a flash back in my life which I cannot answer to this day. There was my mother pointing her finger at me like she was scolding me for something that I had done. I was about 4 years old then. What really puzzled me is that of all the things which I have done in my life to this point and if I were to digress about my life, this single uneventful moment would never even be remembered. After going over this in my mind a thousand times I can only assume that when we are in trouble, the one person who really protected us whenever the need was our mother. So I guess that's what I was really looking for – her protection at this critical time. God bless mothers.

Needless to say I couldn't sleep all that night and the next morning felt so weak, cold and totally exhausted from the events which took place in the kitchen that I had to be helped to walk to the place of execution. They had me stand in front of a stone wall with my hands tied behind my back and tied to a post facing 6 riflemen and they didn't even bother to offer me a blindfold. The officer in charge called out the orders to proceed with the execution. The riflemen raised their weapons and on command pulled the triggers. Simultaneously I was gripped with the worst feeling that I have ever experienced. Lucky for me, their guns were loaded with blanks because this was a mock execution just to see how I would react. They were all laughing – it was just a big joke. I was so exhausted from this horrifying experience that I just collapsed to the ground, my body trembling, my heart was beating a mile a minute, and I was scared and confused, but very thankful that I was still alive. It took quite a while for me to

stop shaking. Mostly I had witnessed fear as I could never imagine so much so that I began to tremble whenever a soldier came in my direction and/or raised their voices. Needless to say I have had many, many nightmares from then on. Even to this day, I still have bad dreams about this dire event and wake up in a big sweat. I can only say in all honesty, that I wouldn't wish this experience on anyone because it was a very, very sordid and inhuman joke.

The next day after the mock execution incident I was taken by a rifleman through the town on the way to the railway station. En route to the station townspeople noticed that I was an American airman prisoner and began to call me names. Then one hit me with his fist and within a minute or so about half a dozen began hitting me, spitting on me, cursing me and throwing stones and sticks at me. The guard just backed off and let the people do as they pleased. It was the first time I had witnessed mob violence and/or been the target. It was scary to say the least. Suddenly I was hit in the head with an object and I fell to the ground face down. I wasn't hurt, but since I was down I was going to stay down. I laid as motionless as possible making it look like I was unconscious. I guess the people didn't think it made sense to beat a dead horse. They disbursed and then the guard turned me over and tried to revive me. I made it look good and appeared to still be groggy from the beating. When I appeared to be able to walk we proceeded to the station and shortly after boarded a train and went to our next destination. Here I was put into a small room at the station. Several hours later another rifleman came and we boarded another train to our next destination. Here I had to walk through the town so he could lock me up for the night. In passing through the town the mob scene started all over again. After

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the revival scene we reached the lockup for the night. I asked him for something to eat and he just ignored me like I was not there. Early the next morning while it was still dark the rifleman came and got me up and we proceeded to walk towards the station. Luck was on my side for a change because it was only about 4:00 AM and there were very few people on the street and those that were seemed to be heading home or going to work.

Thank God no one really noticed me nor cared and we reached the station without another incident. While on the train and about noon time the rifleman pulled out a piece of sausage, bread and wine. As he cut into the sausage the smell of garlic almost drove me crazy. It was criminal to do this to another human being knowing that I had not eaten for several days. I begged him for just a little piece and maybe a sip of his wine, but he just ignored my plea. He said that these were his rations for two days and he would not share them with anyone especially a prisoner. He kept on eating and the garlic smell kept getting stronger and stronger so much so that I actually considered attacking him just like a wild animal would do. Later on I realized how my animalistic instincts took over and I never thought that a civilized human being could succumb to this. Later that day we reached the town of Wetzlar, Germany which had a prisoner of war camp, Dulag Luft I. Actually it was an interrogation and relocation center for this area. Here I was actually given something to eat and drink without having to beg for it. I almost forgot what food tasted like. It was very simple – soup, bread and coffee, but to me it tasted like a banquet. The next day I was brought to a major's office for interrogation. He questioned me about my squadron, where it was located and other data most of which only the officers of the crew knew about. I just kept giving him

my name, rank and serial number. After asking the same questions about three times and getting the same answers three times, he began to lose patience and said that for the last time answer the questions because if you don't, I will have you taken out and shot. When I heard this, I flashed back to the firing squad incident and totally lost control of myself. I jumped up out of my chair screaming at the top of my lungs, "MY GOD NOT AGAIN." There were two riflemen in the room and when they saw this outburst they began hitting me with their rifle butts, knocking me down and then dragging me out of the office by my feet. I was dragged to a cell and left on the floor. It took me several hours to gather my wits about me. I was never called back for another session. Simply put, I must have scared the hell out of the German officer. The next time they came to get me they put me with a large group of prisoners and we were taken to the railroad station and put in boxcars and our destination was Stalag Luft I located in the town of Barth, Germany. This became my permanent camp and final destination.

I was assigned to barracks No. 18. The compound had about 30 such barracks. There were 24 men assigned to each room. The rooms did not have beds. Instead we slept side by side on large shelves. One half of the room had three such shelves from floor to ceiling. Six men slept on each shelf. The other six slept on three small shelves in another corner of the room. The room also contained a table about 10 feet long with two benches. There was a small stove in one corner of the room which could be used to burn coal and/or wood if you could get any. Actually we were allowed two briskets of pressed coal dust. This, when lit, would burn for about a half hour or so. We had to use it sparingly just to heat water for coffee, tea or

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powdered soup which we received whenever we got Red Cross parcels. The rest of the time you had to look around for anything that could burn or improvise. With these kinds of conditions we were always cold and hungry. It is strange how a body can get acclimated to such cold conditions and still survive over a period of time. I guess when you have no other choice you make do with what you have and what you have to put up with. Let's face it, we did not have a choice. Since Stalag Luft I is right off the Baltic Sea the winters were extremely cold and windy. The only time you would go outside was roll call and/or when you have to go to the latrine. Otherwise you stayed inside. Someone in my room was able to get hold of a deck of cards and they were in constant use as long as anyone was awake. Most of the time we tried to sleep because if you were able to do so it took our minds off our present situation.

Mostly our main concern was what time we would be fed. The menu was one sided, potatoes, rutabaga, beets and anything else that was lying around. Most of these came in the form of a soup, and black bread which was half sawdust, but when you are hungry you will eat anything that is filling. The one real cruel thing they did is that once a month they would give us oatmeal to cook about the equivalent of a small bowl. The cruel part was that they mixed ground glass in with it, some of it was powder fine and almost impossible to separate from the oatmeal itself. So now you had two choices. 1. Throw it away which, believe me, was very, very difficult under the circumstances. 2. Take a chance, cook and eat it and possibly develop internal bleeding if the small glass should start to cut up your inner stomach. Since medical attention and service was practically nonexistent and internal bleeding would require a possible transfusion or two you would

be in real trouble. Our big moment was when we received Red Cross parcels. They contained real food including some vitamins. Unfortunately, even here we were cheated by the Germans. According to the rules of the Geneva Convention each prisoner was to receive one parcel per week. If we were given a parcel per week life would have been much easier. Instead, we received 4 Red Cross parcels per room and with 24 men in each room this came out to one parcel for six men per week. There would be arguments about how to divide the parcel 6 ways. Also once the food was divided equally most of the men would gulp it down in minutes and the feast was over for another week and complaining would go on for another week. Friendships were difficult to establish. It seemed to come to every man for himself, attitude. Time seemed to pass slowly and I found it helpful to recite nursery rhymes under my breath to myself. Most are happy and make you recall better days. Finally on May 13, 1945, I walked out of my barracks for roll call and found the compound empty, the gates were open and the guard towers deserted. The Russians were only a couple hours away and faced no resistance and the Germans abandoned the camp because they probably feared what the Russians would do to them for the cruel and inhuman treatment they used on the Russian prisoners at the camp. Within the hour word got around that the Germans had abandoned the camp. Almost immediately groups were formed by some to go to the town and raid it for food and/or anything else they could find. This happened before the allied officers now in charge could put out a set of rules to follow in order to maintain civility. Some groups located the warehouse where the Red Cross parcels were stored and it was almost full. The Germans had been cheating by withholding the proper distribution of the parcels. The groups that initially

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located the warehouse were out of control and each one would take as many parcels as he could carry back to his barracks, not to share, but to stuff themselves. If a roommate asked for something out of the parcel, the rude answer was, go get your own; the typical every man for himself attitude. Hunger does strange things to the human mind, but it is still hard to fathom after the fact. The above statements do not represent the majority of the prisoners, but rather the minority. Several days later planes were sent in to pick us up and fly us to St. Valerie, France to a camp called Lucky Strike, named after a popular American Cigarette. Here we got the medical attention we sorely needed and plenty of good food to eat. We were told to eat slowly and not to over stuff ourselves and that there is plenty of food. Because we were prisoners and they knew what we went through so they kept the mess tent open 24 hours. This way we didn't have to try to over stuff ourselves. We could eat, digest the food and then go back and eat again. Naturally everyone was anxious to go home as soon as possible, however, some of us had lost a lot of weight and looked like zombies and had to be kept back until they could put on enough weight to look human again. Those who were in pretty good shape were the first ones to be sent home.

After being honorably discharged from the service I really wasn't sure what I wanted to do. Having entered the service only months after I graduated from high school I really had no idea what I was best suited to do for a living. I tried several different types of jobs never kept them very long. I finally took a job with an Army Audit Agency where I met a lovely young girl who also worked there in the same office and we began to date. After keeping company for a period of time, I asked her to marry me. She agreed on one condition and that was only if I went to college

(which I was entitled to because of my military service). She said that I needed a good education to be able to make a good living for our future family. We married in May 1948 and I started college in September. She agreed to work for the four years until my graduation. I graduated four years later with a degree in money and banking. I started to work in a bank as a clerk and after a number of changes to different banks each time for a better position, I finally settled for one bank and retired 25 years later as a vice president in 1986. We have three grown sons and all are successful at their jobs. We also have three wonderful grandchildren. This past May 2001 we also celebrated our 53<sup>rd</sup> wedding anniversary in Florida where we have lived since retirement.

One of the most pleasant memories which I cherish dearly was when I was privileged with four other veterans who were part of the air battle over Czechoslovakia on December 17, 1944 to visit the Czech Republic as their guests this past September 2000. Being of Czechoslovakian parentage I was elated when informed that I was chosen along with four other for this wonderful visit. The Czech people showered us with love and respect. Who could ask for anything more. America is still talking about putting up a monument honoring the veterans of World War II, 56 years after the war and it's still just talk, not action. The Czech people have already put up numerous monuments honoring American airmen. It's true that their monuments may be smaller than the one America is contemplating building, but by the time it is financed and completed most of us will be dead. Also there is a saying that it doesn't matter how big or expensive a gift is. It's the thought behind it. Amen to that.

## **Folding the American Flag**

The traditional method of folding the flag is as follows:

1. Straighten out the flag to full length and fold lengthwise once.
2. Fold it lengthwise a second time to meet the open edge, making sure that the union of stars on the blue field remains outward in full view. (A large flag may have to be folded lengthwise a third time.)
3. A triangular fold is then started by bringing the striped corner of the folded edge to the open edge.
4. The outer point is then turned inward, parallel with the open edge, to form a second triangle.
5. The diagonal or triangular folding is continued toward the blue union until the end is reached, with only the blue showing and the form being that of a cocked (three-corner) hat.

## **Meaning of Flag-Folding Program**

The flag-folding ceremony represents the same religious principles on which our great country was originally founded.

The portion of the flag denoting honor is the canton of blue containing the stars representing states our veterans served in uniform. The canton field of blue dresses from left to right and is inverted only when draped as a pall on the casket of a veteran who has served our country honorably in uniform.

In the U.S. Armed Forces, at the ceremony of retreat, the flag is lowered, folded in a triangle fold and kept under watch throughout the night as a tribute to our nation's honored dead. The next morning it is brought out and, at the ceremony of reveille, run aloft as a symbol of our belief in the resurrection of the body.

## **Symbols for the Folds of the Flag**

The first fold of our flag is a symbol of life.

The second fold is a symbol of our belief in eternal life.

The third fold is made in honor and remembrance of the veteran departing our ranks, and who gave a portion of his or her life for the defense of our country to attain peace throughout the world.

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The fourth fold represents our weaker nature; as American citizens trusting in God, it is to Him we turn in times of peace, as well as in times of war, for His divine guidance.

The fifth fold is a tribute to our country, for in the words of Stephen Decatur, "Our country, in dealing with other countries, may she always be right, but it is still our country, right or wrong."

The sixth fold is for where our hearts lie. It is with our heart that we pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The seventh fold is a tribute to our armed forces, for it is through the armed forces that we protect our country and our flag against all enemies, whether they be found within or without the boundaries of our republic.

The eighth fold is a tribute to the one who entered into the valley of the shadow of death, that we might see the light of day, and to honor our mother, for whom it flies on Mother's Day.

The ninth fold is a tribute to womanhood, for it has been through their faith, love, loyalty and devotion that the character of the men and women who have made this country great have been molded.

The tenth fold is a tribute to father, for he, too, has given his sons and daughters for the defense of our country since he or she was first born.

The eleventh fold, in the eyes of Hebrew citizens, represents the lower portion of the seal of King David and King Solomon and glorifies, in their eyes, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The twelfth fold, in the eyes of a Christian citizen, represents an emblem of eternity and glorifies, in their eyes, God the Father, the Son and Holy Ghost.

When the flag is completely folded, the stars are uppermost, reminding us of our national motto, "In God We Trust."

After the flag is completely folded and tucked in, it has the appearance of a cocked hat, ever reminding us of the soldiers who served under Gen. George Washington and the sailors and Marines who served under Capt. John Paul Jones and were followed by their comrades and shipmates in the U.S. Armed Forces, preserving for us the rights, privileges and freedoms we enjoy today.

The source and the date of origin of this flag folding procedure is unknown, however some sources attribute it to the Gold Star Mothers of America while others to an Air Force chaplain stationed at the United States Air Force Academy. Others consider it to be an urban leg-

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end. It is provided as a patriotic service to all.

Traditional grave site military funeral honors include the silent folding and presentation of a U.S. flag, three rifle volleys and the playing of "Taps."

The clarification includes the following:

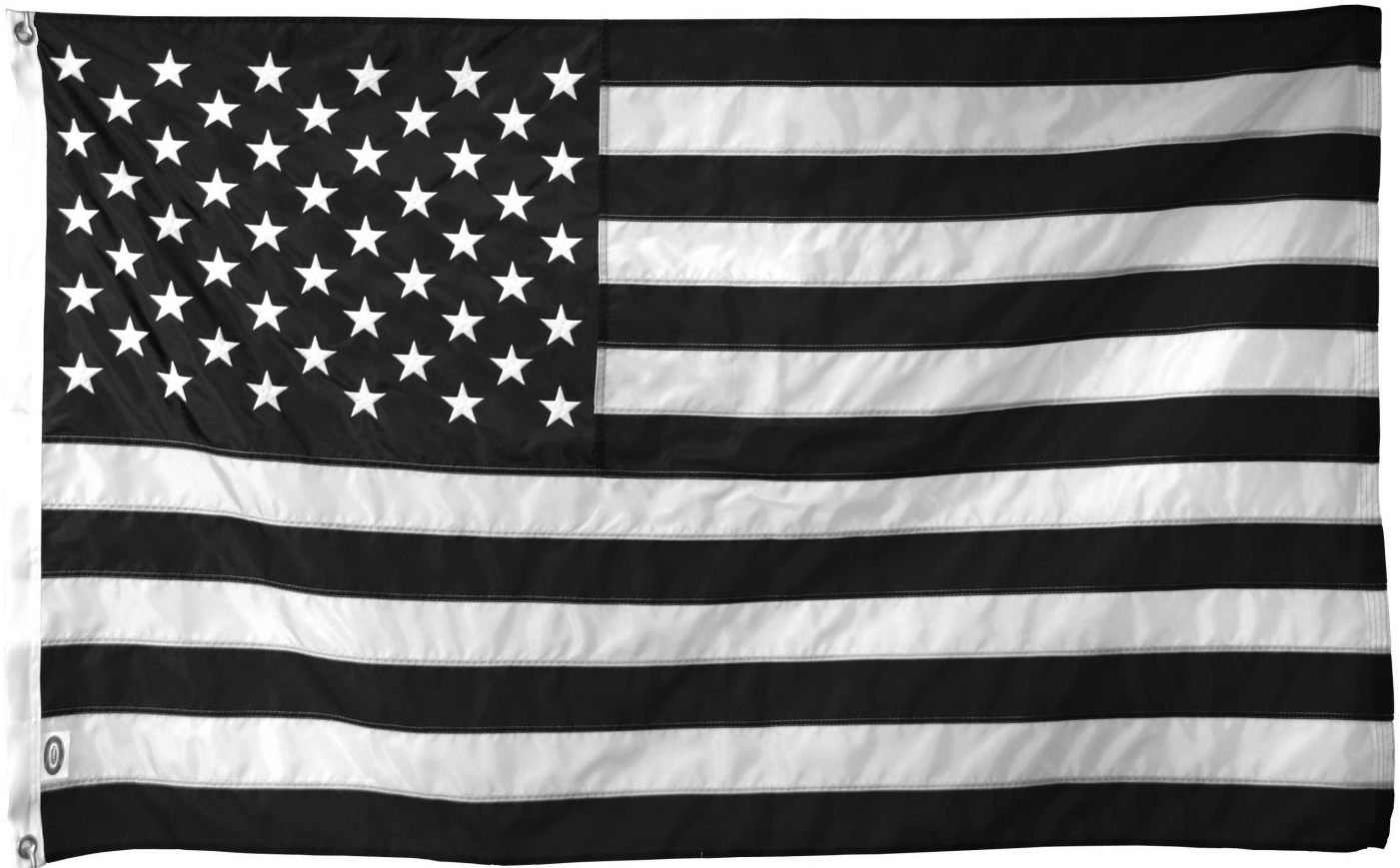
Volunteer honor guards are authorized to read the 13-fold flag recitation or any comparable script;

Survivors of the deceased need to provide material and request it be read by the volunteer honor guards; and

Volunteer honor guards will accept requests for recitations that reflect any or no religious traditions, on an equal basis.

Veterans with a discharge other than dishonorable, their spouses and eligible dependent children can be buried in a national cemetery.

Other burial benefits available for all eligible veterans, regardless of whether they are buried in a national cemetery or a private cemetery, include a burial flag, a Presidential Memorial Certificate, and a government headstone or marker.



## My Impression of a Combat Mission

by  
S/Sgt. Wm. F. Kane  
Radio Operator/Waist Gunner  
Weber crew #19-2  
Italy – November 1944

Rain drums down on the already soggy tents. The shadow stillness of the night is shattered by the growling of a lonely Jeep as it stops in front of various tents, the occupants of which are flying today's mission.

Inside of the tents men roll over sleepily and snatch a few extra winks. Finally the lights come on and boys drag themselves from the warm beds into warm clothes and begin straggling to the Mess Hall.

The odor of hot coffee is intermingled with a sporadic conversation, the main topic being today's target. The scene changes in about fifteen minutes and the crews are milling around in front of Operations. The general atmosphere is more cheerful now. The men warmed up with coffee begin to wake and start the eternal kidding and catcalling back and forth; a good example of the irresistible American spirit.

A low grumble heralds the approach of the big trucks laboring up the muddy rutted road. A temporary lull as the men clamber aboard the panting muddy trucks. The long ride to Group Briefing is a mixture of favorite slightly smutty stories, griping, the American soldiers' privilege, and frequent short silences as each man busies himself with his own thoughts or perhaps prayers.

Briefing over – once again the trucks move on Personal Equipment, another mad jumble; men talking about the target, but never disclosing its identity. Here and there a sober face makes one wonder if perhaps that boy has

seen this target before and maybe lost buddies there.

The tension is building up in everyone and is mirrored in the set faces of crews as they climb into their respective silver war birds, decorated with various gaudy insignia and names according to each crew's whim.

There is a terrific din now as pilots gun each engine, making last minute checks. Finally the long drawn out roar at regular intervals tells everyone that the plane is airborne. Once in the air the tension relaxes after watching every turn of the big wheels as the heavy ship strains to lift its huge load from the ground.

Once in their element the ships wheel gracefully as the various elements and groups are forming. Finally the course straightens out and the beautiful formations start the long trip with men-made hell waiting at the end. As the miles of friendly territory slide under the shining wings, the planes strain for altitude and tighten the already close formations which are the big ship's life insurance.

Inside the various specialists are busy with their tasks; the gunners keep checking and re-checking their guns, wary watchful eyes searching the sky for fighters as the enemy coast slides into view. Tension begins to build up again; it's evident in the tight unnatural voices and stale jokes traversing the intercom as the crew starts its chatter. The initial point is reached uneventfully – no fighters this far. The pilots voice cracks into the headsets – "Starting the bombing run guys, everyone on the ball now." Some prayers are probably said, a few fingers crossed. This is it – the rugged jarring suborn defense our airmen have been facing over these targets.

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Now we're in it. The black puffs aren't too close and they look harmless and ineffective, but the waist gunners keep throwing out the silver tinsel to throw off the radar guns. The glad cry, "Bombs Away." "Thank God," flashes through everyone's mind as the deadly heavy bombs are on their way. Seconds, like years, pass, and we're clear of flak. The group rallies along the prescribed course – reforming their tight defense, as now is the time fighters usually hit.

Chatter comes back over the intercom as the gunners busily scan the sky – every man looking around and counting – counting. No one down – so far, so good – we're lucky. Here and there one sees evidence of the flying steel spurred on by the hate of the enemy. Here a gaping hole in the fuselage – off to the right a feathered propeller standing straight and still in front of the mutilated engine. The miles and minutes go by – once again the pilot's voice, "Coast line boys, keep watching, we're not clear yet." The blue sea down there looks good, the tension, so long a passenger, begins to leave as the formation loses its altitude gradually. Finally our coast is heralded by the pilot, the boys come out of their turrets, the tight uncomfortable, but lifesaving oxygen masks come off; cigarettes lighted, and here and there a glad relieved smile. The intercom chatter is light and airy now. On the compass the navigator has some good music blaring and ten American faces are jubilant with the sheer joy of just living.

The field is sighted and the tiresome circling starts with the planes peeling off at regular intervals as the boys in the tower work feverishly to get the tired crews down as quickly as possible.

Finally the job is finished. The ships park and the ground crews swarm over the still hot engines because each particular plane is their

own marvelously cared for baby.

The crew comes tumbling out, jabbering and stretching and slowly climbing out of heavy equipment which is then thrown on the waiting truck.

Equipment turned in, the trucks loaded to capacity, start around the rutted road and finally grind to a stop at a large group of trucks.

A long queue of men is slowly filing past a small white stand presided over by "Betsy," our American Red Cross girl, who is handing out hot coffee and donuts. The grins are broad now, the everlasting kidding goes on in a never-ending undulating wave of sound, "Where's Jerry," "a milk run," "fifteen more like that takes this kid home." The trucks with their precious loads of human cargo begin to leave for the various squadrons. Mess and mail are the important things now. The crews tumble off in front of Operations and move with considerable alacrity to their tents.

Later, both the enlisted men's and officer's bars are crowded, always discussing and comparing this mission with others. Time moves on slowly as the black night closes in. Figures hurry in and out of Operations to see if they are on the board for the morning. The rain begins to fall softly and an almost peaceful sort of quiet settles down as the men enjoy God's gift to the young, they sleep deeply these boys content of a tough job well done.

The rain is drumming on the tent roofs now and here and there a boy lies awake and wonders if perhaps the heavens aren't crying for the boys who, on a certain date, didn't quite make it. Somewhere in Hitler's Germany the white crosses and tangled remains of their silver ships are mute evidence of their faith in life as we from the Land of the Free live it. The skies weep on.



**CONSULAT GENERAL DE FRANCE  
A CHICAGO**

**FRENCH LEGION OF HONOR MEDAL:  
FRANCE EXPRESSES HER GRATITUDE TO WWII VETS**

US veterans who helped in the liberation of France during World War II could be eligible to receive the French Legion of Honor Medal in the future. Created to celebrate extraordinary contributions to the country, this medal is France's highest distinction. \*

To be eligible for this outstanding award, he/she has to fit strict criteria:

- Applying veterans of the Ground Forces, Air Forces, Navy, Coast Guard must have fought on French territory in one or more of the four main campaigns of the Liberation of France: Normandy, Southern France, Northern France and the Ardennes. Actions taking place in Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg or other border/European countries will not be taken into account.
- To provide written documentation, which is normally a copy of his/her military separation order, DD-214, will help verify their military history during combat.
- The veterans must provide citations for previous military awards such as Congressional Medal of Honor, the Silver Star Medal, the Bronze Star Medal, the Purple Heart Medal or higher distinctions. These awards will indicate meritorious actions during combat operations.
- To be considered, these citations must have been issued during WWII or the close aftermath and must relate to events (outstanding actions, wounds, having been taken prisoner of war, etc.) that took place on the French soil only.

Copies of these documents should be forwarded with the request for consideration for the French Legion of Honor to the closest French Consulate in the US. The French Consulate in Chicago serves the following 13 states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin. The Legion of Honor Committee in Paris must approve these French medals after appropriate review. Please note this process can take several months.

\* The Legion of Honor medal is not awarded posthumously.

## Blechhammer 1944

I was a 16-year old flak gunner stationed a few miles west of the Heydebreck refinery complex from September 1944 to February 1945. My position was that of windage gunner on Dora II and we witnessed two B-24s crash in the Mechnitz area, one of them the **Purple Shaft**.

As a naturalized US citizen since the sixties I have made contact with a number of residents of the village and obtained copies of church records of the fallen crews. I also attended the military funerals and honors accorded one of them.

The cemetery at Walce and local one in Mechnitz, now named Mechnica was tended lovingly after the burials right up to the time that the bodies were repatriated.

One friend of mine, now retired police commissioner in Hamburg, was the only survivor of one huge B-24 raid on the industrial complex with over 200 bombs levelling his battery on a day that he was away on leave.

Thanks to my research we were able to locate a radar officer whose ship was badly damaged by the combined fire of the eighty-eights positioned along the river Oder and the Heights near the historic Annaberg. Most of the crew survived and were detained south of Crakow.

His name was Emil Petr from Nebraska who went to Natal in northern Brazil in the sixties and was still living there two years ago. I helped with the translation of his story from English to Spanish which was then translated into Portuguese.

I don't know the name of his ship. The purpose for my writing is that I would like to

give assurance to the relatives of the fallen airmen that in the region of Upper Silesia where I did my duty as a young soldier, no transgression against the survivors were committed. The losses we had among my school mates and later comrades at arms were laid to rest side by side without regard to nationality.

We honored the dead just as we, as Americans, now honor them.

Feel free to ask for more information. I just signed up as a member of the Army Air Force Forum and am still finding my way.

Sincerely,

Gunther Vogel Langlois, Oregon

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*There's no evidence in my files that the "Purple Shaft" that belonged to the 767th Squadron ever crashed. It was hit by flak and severely damages on a mission to Weiner Neustadt, Austria, but there is nothing about this aircraft crashing on a mission to Blechhammer, Germany. I suspect that the "Purple Shaft" mention in this note belonged to the 460th Bomb Group.*

*Editor, Liberaider*

## President's Corner

### Absolutely Fantabulous!

I was rather disappointed when we found out we couldn't go to Branson, MO for our reunion this year, but with the cancellation of major airlines into Branson, it just didn't seem right to ask our veterans to ride a bus for a couple of hours into and out of Branson. We will keep Branson on our list of possibilities and may decide to try again in the future.

Our next choice for the 2014 reunion was Oklahoma City. I had not been to Oklahoma City so I had no idea what to expect. Fortunately, Ed Lamb of the 484<sup>th</sup> BG lives in Oklahoma City and he and his family helped our Reunion Committee put together a reunion that will not long be forgotten.

To begin with, in addition to the 484<sup>th</sup> BG, we had the 451<sup>st</sup> and 455<sup>th</sup> BGs join us for the first time this year. As I'm sure most of you are aware, the 451<sup>st</sup> was the third bomb group that made up our 49<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing. The 451<sup>st</sup> and 455<sup>th</sup> had already been meeting together, but decided to join us for 2014. We had hope to keep our numbers up around 150 in order to get a good deal on tours and dinners. As it turned out, we exceeded all expectations by having over 200 people in Oklahoma City. The hotel was sold out. The 451<sup>st</sup> and 455<sup>th</sup> brought with them a couple of new ideas we had never tried before. These added to the comradery of the reunion.

Activities included several tours that were well attended. Those who didn't feel up to the bus rides were given the opportunity to participate in presentations and discussions at the hotel led by the 451<sup>st</sup> BG. I went on all the tours so I can't say how these in-hotel activities were attended, but I heard they went over well. Tours included Tinker AFB, the

49<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Museum, a driving tour of Oklahoma City with a stop at the Land Rush where we could stretch our legs and wonder through the bigger than life statues dedicated to this event, a visit to the Cowboy Museum where we had lunch and not nearly enough time to see everything in the museum, and a visit to the Murrah Federal Building Museum. One of the highlights following our stop at the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Museum was to be escorted back to the hotel by the Oklahoma City branch of the Patriot Guard. This was an exciting conclusion to our tours on Thursday.

Because there is so much to see and do in Oklahoma City, we added an unofficial tour of the Murrah Federal Building Museum Sunday afternoon and a dinner that evening. Although a number of people decided to call it quits following the Sunday morning Memorial Service, we still had two bus loads of people Sunday afternoon.

Another highlight arranged by the Lambs was a welcome desk at the airport to help those flying in to find their way to their luggage and ground transportation. The welcome desk was manned by the Patriot Guard.

The Saturday night banquet was capped by a presentation by Dr. Doug Watson who was in the roll of Will Rogers for the entire evening.

After spending a fantastic reunion in Oklahoma City, we decided our next location will be Kansas City and the Reunion Committee is already working on that one. It's difficult to say for sure at this point, but we may be joined by a couple of more groups from the Fifteenth Air Force. Stay tuned for another gathering of the clan.

## 461ST BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)

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## Webmaster Comments

I need your help! In putting together this issue of the Liberaider, I used every piece of material I could find. I think this is a pretty nice issue. Unfortunately there's no material left for future issues of the Liberaider. When I took over as Editor of the Liberaider, one of my criteria was that I be given material to work with. Everyone has been fantastic in keeping that material coming. Nearly every issue of the Liberaider has been forty pages. In a couple of cases, I've had to cut a few pages, but the Liberaider still went out twice a year pretty much on time.

Now I need to ask for help again. I need some material. I feel the veterans have done an outstanding job of telling their stories. I can't imagine I can expect much more from them. At this point I feel we need some stories from the children. I'm sure there are stories out there. Perhaps your father or grandfather told you a story about what went on back during WWII.

How about sitting down at your computer and retelling that story to share with me so I can continue the Liberaider. Some of you already have shared the stories you heard as you were growing up.

I'm going to go through the website and see if I can find some material that perhaps not everyone has found on the website that might be of interest to the readers of the Liberaider. In the past, I've also found some material not directly related to the 461<sup>st</sup>, but still about WWII. For example, I've recently told the stories about preparation for invading Japan toward the end of WWII and about Tinian Island where the B-29s carrying the bombs were launched. This issue has an article about folding the American flag.

Can you help? Send me your suggestions.