



The 461st

Liberaider



Vol. 21, No. 1

JUNE 2004

SOMEWHERE IN THE USA

Who was the first member of the 461st Bombardment Group to fly a combat mission in Europe and when was that mission?

The answer may surprise you. Follow this article to see the answer.

(Continued on page 3)

Going Over

This is the third in a series of articles by Vahl Vladyka. This third one covers his assignment of a crew and B-24 and his movement from the States to his assignment to the 461st at Torretta Field near Cerignola, Italy. Future articles in this series will include "Over There", and "Coming Home".

By
Vahl Vladyka

some 150 in all, was granted about eight days leave prior to going overseas. We had lost all or parts of three ten-man crews in accidents, one airplane having flown into Mount Washington, New Hampshire, in bad weather, the other two involving less serious crashes, but incurring fatalities nevertheless.

In mid-November of 1944, upon conclusion of our operational training at Westover Field, Massachusetts, every surviving air crewman in our flight,

Still underweight from the ten pounds I had lost from an already lean frame during my September tonsillectomy,

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**461st
Bombardment
Group (H)
Association
2004 Reunion
See page 18 for
details and sign-up
information.**

Chapter Two

WWII Experiences

This is the second in a series of articles by Bob Jones. This second one covers time during his training prior to going overseas. Future articles in this series will appear in this space in subsequent issues of the Liberaider.

By
Robert K. Jones

landscape I had seen. It was barren and rough with just a few scrub bushes scattered around and a dirt road through the town to the BOQ where we bedded down for the rest of the day and night.

Arrival at Dakar in French West Africa was a major relief for all of us but especially for me since it was by far my longest flight so far and one in which navigation was critical. We parked the aircraft where designated in what seemed to be the bleakest

We left the plane guarded by very tall and black Senegalese troops in brief but colorful garb. They looked tough and inspired confidence that the plane would be there when we got back. The town area, which we rode through in a GI 4X4, appeared to be about the size of Arlington, NE. It

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Taps

May they rest in peace forever

Please forward all death notices to:
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P.O. Box 926
Gunnison, CO 81230
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764th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Buswell, Lee H.	Hollis, NH	200	Mar. 16, 2004
Henderson, Herman	Petersburg, VA	747	Apr. 26, 2002
Lundberg, Donald E.	Sheridan, WY	612	Mar. 19, 2004
Sweezy, Robert C.	Waterford, OH	748	Jan. 1, 2003

765th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Bowen, Jack A.	Charlotte, NC	1034	Jan. 22, 2004
Derudder, Peter	Minneapolis, MN	1034	Aug. 1, 2002
Harrison, Kermit C.	Provo, UT	612	Dec. 22, 2003
Powers, Donnie E.	Derby, KS	748	Aug. 1, 2003

766th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Winne, Warren R.	Wichita, KS	757	Oct. 2, 2003

767th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Frederick, Arnold F.	North Huntington, PA	748	Nov. 1, 2003
Leigh, Joseph C.	Seminole, FL	748	Jan. 19, 2004
Raines, Alvin L.	Central, MO	612	Jan. 1, 2002
Seberle, Harold	New Port Richey, FL	4820	Mar. 29, 2004
Witmer, Lawrence D.	Lebanon, OH	748	Feb. 6, 2004

(Continued from page 1)

Colonel Frederic E. Glantzberg flew the first combat mission on February 14, 1944 with the 376th Bombardment Group. The mission report follows:

HEADQUARTERS
376th Bombardment Group (H)
APO 520, U. S. Army

15 February 1944

SPECIAL NARRATIVE REPORT NO. 4.

MISSION: 14 February 1944 – Mantua M/Y (Secondary Target).

I. CHRONOLOGY

34 B-24's took off at 0805 hours to bomb Verona East M/Y. The target was covered by 10/10 overcast so the formation proceeded to Mantua M/Y the secondary target. 13 A/C returned early, one is missing. 20 A/C dropped 45 ¼ tons of 500 lb. (.10 and .025) GP bombs on secondary target at 1325 hours from 20,000' to 22,500'. 5 A/C jettisoned their bombs and 11 A/C (including one A/C that jettisoned 4 bombs) brought their bombs back to base. 31 returned to base at 1615 hours. One A/C missing. One A/C landed at Bari and later returned to base, another A/C landed at Castel Voltarno and returned to base on 15 February 1944.

II. ROUTE AND ASSAULT

Rendezvoused with 450th Group at Manduria at 0925 at 5,000'. Then rendezvoused with fighter escort at Capri at 1025 hours at 10,000'. Continued on course to I.P. (Brenzone) and then to primary target Verona East M/Y. Finding 10/10 undercast at the target the formation proceeded to Mantua M/Y, the secondary target approaching from an axis of 270°. Fighters were not seen again after their battle with E/A in the target area. Returned route was followed to coast at 43°14'N 13°47'E to Lake Varano and base with difficulty due to weather.

III. RESULTS

Majority of bombs overshot target, falling in the lake just to the northwest of the M/Y at Mantua. A few scattered hits were observed in the M/Y near and on the locomotive sheds and in the arsenal area. Bursts were also seen on the RR tracks at the southwest corner of the M/Y and here and there in the town. A very short bombing run and clouds caused a good bomb pattern to overshoot target. A ground haze prevented accurate observation.

IV. ENEMY RESISTANCE

A. 4 ME-109's were observed in target area in distance. 4 of the ME-109's made one half hearted attack from 9 o'clock firing rockets which fell about 500 yards short.

B. Flak: Light accurate and aimed flak was encountered at Verona, Mantua, Ancona and Bologna.

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and wearing an ill-fitting, cheaply made uniform purchased in the PX a few days earlier, after my quarters and all my possessions had burned, I was not the spit and polish officer I previously had presented to my parents on earlier leaves, but I was welcomed with open arms, as always.

During the preceding weeks, I had flown nearly every day, with night flights until midnight every third day, six or sometimes seven days a week, sandwiched around half-days of ground school and several hours of physical training five days a week, and I was in need of the rest I enjoyed for the next few days. In fairness all my fatigue was not caused entirely by arduous duty, for during the War years, most flying personnel destined for combat seemed driven to touring every club and bar in nearby towns, and I was no exception.

Most of my time at home was spent with family and one or two friends. Ralph Miller, one of my theater cronies, also was home on his last leave prior to departing for duty in France, Germany and Czechoslovakia as a crewman and later first sergeant of a 155 mm "Long Tom" artillery battery, and we naturally had to check out "our" theaters to ascertain that things were not going to the dogs during our absence. We also made the obligatory stop at the Lillie Mae Confectionery for malts and hand-made candy.

Upon conclusion of my leave, I took a taxi to the depot to catch the eastbound midnight Chicago North Western passenger, having learned on my first leave the folly of allowing family and friends to accompany me to the train station. During the War, coaches (as distinguished from Pullmans) were on a first-come, first-served basis, and on this particular night, every seat was filled. Latecomers such as I sat on suitcases, enlisted men's barracks bags, and officers' B-4 bags all the way to the Windy City. Somewhere between Marshalltown and Westover, one of my trains was late, causing me to miss connections and resulting in my return to duty some eight hours past the midnight deadline. Fortunately no one had signed the duty roster after 2357 hours the previous night, so I was able to sign in ostensibly at 2358 and avoid being AWOL. Reflecting on this later, I real-

ized my concern was unfounded: what were they going to do to punish me, send me to combat!

About this time, my memory is a little fuzzy on these dates, we experienced three crew changes. Because it had been decided that bombardiers were essential only on lead and deputy lead aircraft, combat groups were carrying a surplus of these officers, resulting in all bombardiers in our flight being detached from our crews and reassigned to stateside duty. Our bombardier, Norman ("Tex") Poer, told me a few years ago that none of them went to combat in World War II, although he stayed in the Army Air Forces, later Air Force, for a career.

The second crew change involved our radio operator. A little known fact outside the Army Air Forces was that no one ever was forced to fly a combat mission during World War II. Anyone having a change of heart would be removed from flying status and reassigned, usually to the infantry. After our original radio operator "unvolunteered" himself, Donald Oakley was assigned to our crew, and with his technical skills, affability and overall intelligence, he quickly blended into the group.

Our third change involved our nose gunner, who also did not enjoy flying. He was replaced by George Johnston, who rounded out our crew.

Our crew as finally constituted included the following, listed in the order of ages.

Robert Curland, 27, a Baltimore bachelor school teacher drafted into the infantry before Pearl Harbor and a sergeant in the California desert maneuvers with Patton; had volunteered for aviation cadet training and won officer's commission and wings as a navigator.

Clifford C. Hanel, 24, married, with two sons; from Port Huron, Michigan; a meat cutter prior to being drafted; volunteered for both gunnery and armorer schools and consequently supervised maintenance of all guns on our aircraft; flew in the ball turret.

Donald Oakley, 23; enlisted as an aviation cadet, but after that program was terminated in 1944, entered

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and completed radio operator school at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where he met and married his wife; also completed gunnery school and manned a waist gun in enemy territory.

George R. Johnston, 22, from Leavenworth, Kansas; married, with one son; drafted into army and volunteered for gunnery school; nose turret gunner.

John Ross Mc Donald, 22 (in that November); from Holyoke, Massachusetts; single, but engaged; a student at Amherst University, before enlisting in the aviation cadet pilot program; co-pilot.

Vahl Vladyka, 21; single; ticket taker in Marshalltown, Iowa movie theater; acting sergeant in the cavalry, commissioned in the infantry and served as a tank platoon commander before entering pilot training; completed pilot training in April 1944 and B-24 transition school the following August; pilot and airplane commander.

Ernest A. Rota, 20; student and part time apprentice in mortuary at Napa, California; fluent in Italian; enlisted as aviation cadet, but after that program was terminated, completed aerial engineering and gunnery schools; single, but engaged; flight engineer and waist gunner in combat.

Ralph J. Benso, 20, from Danbury, Connecticut; student and linebacker at Georgetown University; also had worked in aircraft factory building Navy F4U fighters prior to being drafted; had volunteered for and completed aerial gunnery school; top turret gunner and assistant engineer.

Walter E. Noll, Jr., 19; single; Marshfield, Wisconsin; drafted just out of high school; volunteered for flying duty and completed gunnery school; the smallest man on our crew and consequently a tail gunner. Excellent athlete, with great coordination, enabling him to fly our airplane on course and altitude despite no training.

With my working background in movie theaters, I quickly seized the opportunity to nickname our new radio operator "Annie", an "Annie Oakley" in show business parlance being a free pass to a show. Don

demonstrated his good nature by smilingly accepting that sobriquet, by which all we survivors still call him.

On November 22, this ecumenical crew of four Roman Catholics, one Jew, and four Protestants (more or less) boarded a troop train, along with the rest of our flight, and made the brief trip by rail to Mitchell Field, Long Island, New York. I use the word "ecumenical" advisedly, for I never heard of anyone on the crew ever hinting at disparaging the religion of another; to the contrary, everyone expressed great respect for the others beliefs.

This was a remarkable group of men. Although I never have been able to locate George Johnston, all the rest have been married but once and, with the exception of Bob Curland, who married at a later age and died young, have celebrated golden wedding anniversaries. All have lived productive lives and raised families.

Mitchell Field was the site of a B-24 depot, where airplanes newly arrived from the factories were given last minute checks and assigned to crews to be flown overseas. While awaiting orders, flying officers were assigned to open barracks, and according to one of my letters home, the place resembled a laundry, with hand washed clothing hanging from hastily strung clotheslines. Outside, it was cold and rainy. Non-stop poker games abounded.

My most vivid memory of those few days center about the two nights we were granted passes to visit New York City. Although I had stopped there overnight in the previous August while en route to Westover, I was anxious to return for additional sightseeing.

Several of us took the Long Island Railroad on successive days for what seems like a 40 minute ride, and after detraining, we made de rigueur visits to Times Square movies and stage shows, several night clubs, including The Aquarium, Eddie Condon's in Greenwich Village, and Roseland, the ten cents a dance hall made famous in movies and song. Somehow or other, we missed the art museums and opera.

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On the 25th, we were assigned a shiny, brand-new B-24L-II-FO Liberator, serial number 44-49589, fresh off Henry Ford's assembly line at Willow Run, Michigan. This model was distinguished by its lack of a tail turret, this heavy piece of armament having been supplanted in the L model with much lighter, power-assisted, flexible twin .50 caliber machine guns manned by a kneeling gunner, his back open to the waist area. This change pleased both pilots and tail gunners, for it lightened the airplanes tail-heavy characteristics, and gave the gunner quicker means to disengage and bail out in the event of trouble.

We noted with some trepidation that the rubber deicer boots normally found on the leading edges of the wings were absent, and we were not convinced, when told that they had been removed "to save weight". An experience endured by a friend about this time proved that our apprehension was not without foundation.

On a familiarization flight later that day, we toured the Upper and Lower New York Bays, with their connecting Verrazano Narrows; made a circuit around the Statue of Liberty on what then was named Bedloe's Island; and, although I was not aware of it at the time, passed by the Bayonne Refinery of Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, my future career employer, our flight lasting an hour and twenty-five minutes.

On the 28th, after last minute checks of matters mechanical by Ernie, Moose, and the ground crew and of the radios by Annie, we loaded our personal baggage into the plywood bins affixed in the front bomb bays and stashed eight crates of the dreaded K-Rations ("a meal in a Cracker Jack box") in the waist area. We gladly would have traded the K-Rations for deicers; however we dipped into the former many times in the next six months. Ernie worked his weight and balance slip stick one last time, made a few last minute load adjustments and debatably pronounced the airplane flyable.

Thousands of pilots might have disagreed. By this stage of the War, the B-24 (and the B-17, too) was obsolete, given development of the B-29 and B-32



Cliff Hanel, George Johnston, "Moose" Benso, "Ernie" Rota, "Annie" Oakley, "Wally" Noll, "Bob" Curland, self, "Mac" McDonald. Photo taken in Italy about March of 1945.

by the United States and jet engines by the Germans and British. Additionally, the Liberator, originally designed to gross 56,000 pounds on takeoff, by now had been modified, most notably by addition of two turrets and two 300 gallon auxiliary wing fuel tanks, to gross out (an appropriate phrase) at 64,000 pounds, 8,000 pounds over original design, but with no commensurate increase in horsepower. One would have thought that, after building more than 18,000, the most numerous warplane ever, they could have "got it right", quoting Eliza Doolittle of *My Fair Lady*. After takeoff we climbed to safe altitude, determined in those years by the pilot, rather than by some ground gripper (non-flying personnel in the Air Forces) in a darkened air traffic control closet. Guided by Bob's precise navigation, we made our way in three and a half hours over bleak, wintry New England to Dow Field at Bangor, Maine.

Our five nights at this last, double meaning "jumping off place" (as my mother called unappealing locales) is a total blank in my memory, except for the fact that it was at this post theater I saw for the first time, but certainly not the last, the classic movie "Laura", with Gene Tierney, Dana Andrews and the inimitable Clifton Webb.

However, I vividly recall being handed a large manila envelope of sealed orders, told to take off and

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head northeast and open the orders after we had been airborne thirty minutes. By this time, there was no doubt that we were going to the 8th Air Force in England or the 15th in Italy, and the opened orders confirmed that it was *buon giorno* for us. Our next stop was Gander Field, Newfoundland, four hours and twenty minutes from Dow, this third day of December, 1944.



Chance meeting with Moose and his friend at Aquarium nightclub on Times Square.

As we made our final approach to the Gander runway, we were horrified to observe that glide paths had been cut through a forest of three-foot diameter conifers, leaving six-foot stumps to serve as a Cuisinart of any hapless crew whose airplane might lose power on takeoff or landing. We made mental notes not to lose power!

After our arrival, a cold front passed through, leaving sunny, but frigid weather. The front then moved out into the Atlantic and stalled, stranding us in Gander for the next eight days. We were in comfortable quarters, with passable mess, a good PX, and nightly

movies, but we were antsy to be on our way. However, those eight days may have saved us from the Odertal mission, about which more later.

Sharing the room across from Mac, Bob and me were two service pilots and their navigator, en route to France in a stripped B-24 carrying a load of gasoline for General Patton's Third Army tanks. Service pilots were experienced commercial pilots, often airline variety, often overage, who had not been through Army flight schools, but had volunteered for duty as transport or ferry pilots. Later Senator and presidential candidate Barry Goldwater was a 34 year-old service pilot performing trans-Atlantic ferry service. They never were allowed in combat, but their volunteer service freed up thousands of army trained pilots for such duty.

They carried the prized green instrument card in their wallets, evidencing considerable experience flying on instruments in bad weather. Consequently, they were granted permission to take off, despite the stalled front, and Mac, Bob and I went down to the flight line to see them off. Moose was standing guard duty on our airplane that evening, and the four of us chatted, as our friends taxied out to the runway, ran their checklist and started their takeoff run. They cleared the end of the runway and the menacing stumps safely, but when they had achieved about 300 feet of altitude, the airplane exploded, scattering 100 octane gasoline and metal and other fragments over the surrounding landscape.

We somberly returned to our room, but with the equanimity required of wartime flyers, we remarked that it was "tough" and went about our business.

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

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Finally on the 11th of December, we holders of white instrument cards were given clearance to depart for the Azores Islands, with takeoff about midnight, giving Bob benefit of the stars for celestial navigation. With dense air as a natural consequence of the cold, we made a safe takeoff and flew into the darkness blanketing the Atlantic Ocean, arriving at Lagens Field, on the island of Terceira, some seven hours and forty minutes later.

Mostly on dead reckoning and celestial navigation, Bob had directed us to this tiny island through bad weather, during which I logged an hour on instruments. We later learned that one of the other airplanes attempting the crossing that night had failed to appear, but we never were given any details.

This field's two runways were oddly placed and converged at an acute angle, and as I turned on final, a voice sounding as if emanating from David Niven or Laurence Olivier calmly called on the radio with typical British understatement, "I say, old boy, you're landing on the wrong strip, you know". Since the gravel and steel mat strips had no painted compass bearing numerals, I didn't "know", but I quickly corrected and managed a landing on the proper runway that we could walk away from (Old pilots said that any landing you could walk away from was a good landing.).

Our overnight stay left only the memory that several of us removed the fishing line and hooks from our emergency packs and fruitlessly fished for an hour or so in the surf pounding the rocky coastline near the field. In his diary, Mac observed that the weather was semi-tropical, the food poor, that we added Portuguese dollar bills to our "Short Snorters" (All fliers venturing beyond the bounds of the United States built strips of taped together foreign currency, called Short Snorters, carried folded or rolled in ones pocket. In theory, the one at a bar with the shortest Short Snorter bought the drinks.), and were glad to leave the next day.

Next morning, December 13th, we took off in bright sunlight for Marrakech, French Morocco, again on dead reckoning. Bob, alone in the nose, utilized a

drift meter to calculate the winds, about as accurate as sighting over ones big toe, and with the aid of octant sun shots, he was able to track our latitude throughout. However, the only fix obtainable on longitude was with an octant sun shot exactly at noon, the same method used by 18th century sailing navigators after invention of the chronometer.

The Liberator was notorious for its *hunting* characteristic: that is, even on autopilot, the nose would vaguely wander back and forth, in the manner of a hunting dog on scent, and pilots maintained headings by averaging the extremes of oscillations, sometimes as much as three degrees. Somewhere between the Azores and Africa, meticulous Bob called on the intercom and demanded a "one degree correction to the right". After a burst of shrill laughter, I informed him that if he thought he could hold the Liberator to that close a heading, he could come up and fly the airplane and I would go down to the nose and navigate!

Mac's diary mentions that unlimited visibility of the day enabled us to see the Atlas Mountains from 100 miles offshore.

Half an hour or so later, we made landfall on the African coast, at a small bay easily identified on the chart, where we noted and broadcast to the crew that we were only one and one-half miles off course, a remarkable piece of 1000-mile over water daylight navigation by Bob that by now we were finding customary.

Our safe crossing of the North Atlantic in December contrasted to news I later received. Arnold Zohn was my classmate in advanced flying training and tutor of gin rummy at Smyrna, in later life operator of a flying service on Long Island. While flying from Scotland to Marrakech, he had encountered icing off the coast of Portugal, and without deicer boots the aircraft steadily lost altitude, despite application of takeoff power. Luckily, at 300 feet above a watery grave, warmer lower air melted the ice sufficiently for the slipstream to blow it from the wings, and they made a safe passage to their destination.

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Within days another classmate, King White, of the truck manufacturer family, ran out of fuel between Greenland and Iceland, and his crew and he fell to their deaths in frigid waters, victims of conflicting instructions from the ground.

A half-hour after crossing the coastline, we landed on a rough, 5000-foot dirt runway at Marrakech, Winston Churchill's winter painting retreat and location of the opening scenes of Alfred Hitchcock's second version of "The Man Who Knew Too Much." The sight of Arabs and black Africans moving about the field drew the attention of nine provincial young men, only one of whom, Bob, had been out of the confines of North America.

After arranging guard duty for the airplane, we were taken to our respective quarters for the night and admonished not to try to leave the field.

Bob, Mac and I found ourselves in pre-war married French officers' quarters, consisting of two spacious rooms and private bath. Mac and I stared at an oblong white porcelain vessel installed near the commode and muttered, "What the hell is that?", or words to that effect. Worldly Bob, who had made a starving student's tour of Europe in the late 1930's, informed us that it was a bidet, and when we naturally wanted to know its use, he expertly explained that it was for douching! It was many years later I learned that Europeans of means considered American use of toilet paper primitive, a sentiment I now find reasonable.

Shortly after supper and the early winter sunset, we decided to accept the challenge of the city being off limits, so we commenced walking in the general direction of the city. By that time it was pitch dark, and we nearly jumped out of our GI underwear when challenged by an armed sentry, a Senegalese so black that only his tan uniform was visible.

Mac, who had studied French in school, briefly conversed with him, gave him a cigarette and lighted it, gave him some more cigarettes and five francs and informed Bob and me that our new friend would arrange escort for us to a hole under the field perimeter

fence. A minute or two later, we were handed over to three Arab guards bearing carbines, and we then were escorted to the exit and given instructions on the route to the bright lights.

After a mile walk, we fell in with an affable Free Frenchman, with whom Mac conversed the remaining four-mile hike. Once in the center of town, we hired two Africans on a sort of bicycle sightseeing vehicle and toured the downtown area for the next half-hour, experiencing sights, sounds and smells unfamiliar to our senses.

Our next move was our big mistake. Observing a large, lively bar, we paid off our motive power and entered the din, fully expecting to find Rick, Ilsa and Victor Laszlo (For those not movie fans, Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, and Paul Henried in Casablanca.). Bellying up to the crowded bar and noting with approval the well-endowed Euro-Arab barmaid, we ordered drinks and had just taken the first swallow, when the boys in khaki and white webbing appeared. In short order, we were respectfully hustled into the back of a GI truck and ignominiously hauled back to the field. After some fast talk by Bob, our escort decided not to turn us over to the provost marshal, but instead gave us the drumhead sentence of proceeding to combat the next day.

Our next day's six-hour flight to Tunis took us near or over cities and towns with historic and exotic names of Casablanca, Meknes, Oujda, Oran, Algiers and Hannibal's ancient Carthage, the ruins of the last clearly visible as we passed over. White buildings of the inhabited areas contrasted sharply with the brown of the desert, easing Bob's task of pilotage navigation.

A hundred or so miles after takeoff, we thought Mac had suddenly gone berserk. With Casablanca off our left wing, he switched off the autopilot and applied left aileron and rudder, sharply banking our airplane to the left. As I grabbed the wheel and jumped on the rudder pedals, I crossly asked what he was doing, and he responded, "I just thought we would drop into Rick's Cafe Americain for a drink."

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After landing at El Ouaina Airfield, we made the by now routine guard and quarters arrangements, then went for a walk around the aircraft parking area. We immediately became aware that there had been a war in this area. Buildings had been bombed and shelled, and anti-aircraft and other shell fragments littered the ground at every step. However, when we encountered four landmines left by the Wehrmacht only 100 yards from our parked airplane, we decided we had enjoyed enough exercise.

We reported our find to Operations, and about an hour after settling into our quarters in a large, white, brick hotel formerly occupied by French officers, we heard explosions, presumably bomb disposal people at work.

I vividly remember seeing a parade in town, featuring General Charles de Gaulle, standing hand on windshield in an open 1940 Packard touring car, and escorted by about 40 of some sort of foreign legion cavalry, mounted on beautiful gray horses. Except for one trooper near the center of the group sporting a flaming red face and flowing red moustaches, most were quite swarthy, contrasting their faces with their white shirts and breeches and burnouses flowing down the backs of their horses. Their leather boots and Sam Browne belts were black, as were their high Moroccan saddles and bridles, and each man wore a sabre and carried a carbine at the ready. Their entire appearance left one with the impression, quoting Damon Runyon in *Guys and Dolls*, ... "they were not ones to be trifled with!"

Our stay in Tunis lasted three nights, allowing time for two tours of the city. Mac noted in his diary that it was fascinating. He mentioned a colorful Arab funeral; crowds of refugees from Europe; hordes of children roaming the streets, many trying to sell the services of their sisters; and dirty restaurants and night clubs. He especially mentioned Arab men in colorful robes, dutifully followed by two or three veiled women, contrasting the scene to American women.

Mac also wrote of the booming black market, where one could have sold for four dollars a pack of cigarettes costing five or six cents in our PX, and that we

visited the native quarter, where the stench of human waste permeated the air, and we felt unsafe without our .45 pistols.

Late on the morning of December 17th, we took off for a three hour 55 minute flight to Gioia, Italy, main depot of the 15th Air Force. Our course took us over Cap Bon, on the northernmost tip of Tunisia, where the last of Rommel's Afrika Corps had surrendered; skirted around Sicily, because of weather; and on to the instep of the boot of Italy, where Bob pointed out the naval base at Taranto, home base of Mussolini's fleet.

Bleak and muddy Gioia introduced us to life in a pyramidal tent. Our two days there were uneventful, except that we saw *Deception*; a good film based on the life of the Bronte sisters. Mac wrote that we put several of our boys to bed one night, after they had located and generously patronized a bar, first taking the precaution of collecting their .45's and trench knives.

On the 19th, a Liberator from our base picked us up and delivered us to Torretta Field, our home base for the next six months. After securing our personal baggage, we were driven three miles to our squadron area: two huge baronial barns, with four-foot thick stone walls, surrounded by a few smaller buildings and several dozen pyramidal tents. By this time, it was completely dark.

After checking in at squadron headquarters, where we met our operations officer, Captain Robert Baker, our enlisted crewmen were guided to their tent area and Mac, Bob and I to another. The charge-of-quarters (night clerk in civilian parlance) ushered us into our darkened tent with his flashlight, much as I had ushered patrons at the Capitol Theater. The tent obviously was occupied; clothing hung on racks, shoes were placed under canvas cots, and personal effects were strewn about. Our escort matter-of-factly informed us that the officers formerly occupying the tent had been shot down at Odertal two days earlier, their gear would be picked up the next day, and if we hurried, we could still make supper mess call.

We had arrived at the war.

Mail Call

Your December issue of the Liberaider was well received by the Westfall family. I have told them about your superior web-site on the 461st, all are so appreciative of your efforts.

One of the family sent me the attached photograph of Coy. My guess is that this was taken at Andover in the fall of 1943. Any way for his comrades to confirm?



One Nation Under God,
Lorn W. Westfall

* * * * *

Reference an article on page 33, 3rd down on right side of the Dec. 2003 issue of The Liberaider, regarding a Joseph J. Repko.

I was a member of Wilson's crew (Bomb). It was the 1st mission for the Group—mid-air collision—Zumsteg/Wilson over target at Bichac, Yugoslavia, 4/2/44.

Lt. Repko was killed. Sgt. Ives was apparently the

only survivor of Zumsteg's crew. All of Wilson's crew bailed out and became POWs, except Lt. Loftus—his chute never opened.

Lt. Ross, Sgt. Ulrich and myself are the only ones still alive, that I know of, from Wilson's crew.

Emil L. "Whit" Whitney, Lt. Col. Retired
6847 South Hill St, Littleton, CO, 80120
303-798-0648 Whit@idcomm.com

* * * * *

I can verify for you that crew #22 flew "Our Hobby" for the 765th Bomb Squadron. We were an original crew. We trained together and flew the new aircraft to Italy in March '44. The aircraft commander was Lt. John K. Specht.

We started our bombing missions on 2 April. We flew two routine missions on April 2nd and 4th. The mission we flew on 6 April was not routine. Over Belgrade, Yugoslavia we took flak in the bomb bay cutting off all communications, severing fuel and hydraulic lines. About half of the bombs were stuck in the bomb bay after a jettison attempt. We must have had some wiring to the bomb bay damaged. The bomb bay was a mess. The three men in the nose of the aircraft, navigator, bombardier and nose turret gunner must have looked at the bomb bay and decided to bail out over the Adriatic Sea. Their names are on the wall in Florence, Italy as missing in action.

My position on the crew was flight engineer and top turret gunner. I got most of the fuel leaks stopped by turning valves, but the hydraulic reserve was about empty and we had no fluid for gear and flaps and we had armed bombs in the bomb bay so that left us no choice but to bail out, but not in the water. The airplane was flying good and we decided our best bet was to fly over our squadron area and drop in.

Our squadron commander was flying co-pilot on this

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mission so he could find out what it was all about. He got more than expected.

As we came a few minutes from our squadron area and bail out time I went to the rear of the aircraft to tell the guys there that I would be the first one out and when they see me gone they should follow right behind me. Everything went smooth and we landed less than a half mile from our squadron area. Ours was a good luck day and we were very grateful.

Everett McGaugh
901 S. Jay Street
Chandler, AZ 85225

* * * * *

To answer your question about "Pretty Mickey", I picked up that ship in Westover Field, Massachusetts. With my full crew of 10 men aboard (I was first pilot, my co-pilot was Art Wilson) I flew to Gander Newfoundland, then across the Atlantic to the Azores off the coast of Africa. My navigator, Lenny Goldman did a great job of navigating. We had a foot of ice on the airplane nose and the wings began to ice up. We lost several airplanes on that flight. I am sure it was due to ice. When we broke out of the clouds, into the sun, a foot of ice began to break off the nose and hit the tail of the airplane with a huge bang and shudder. I thought the tail would break off.

We flew to Tunis then to Cerignola Italy. I never flew "Pretty Mickey" again. Since "Mickey" as you know, is a radar ship, it was used by the lead crews for more accurate navigation to the targets. I was only a new kid on the block so I got stuck with all the older ships, like old 69. It was a terrible ship to fly, poorly rigged and all the instruments jiggled back and forth. I was too dumb to abort so I always finish the mission. I found out that I was the only pilot that flew a full mission in that ship. Every other pilot aborted. So eventually I refused to fly old 69. They tried to give me that ship when we were scheduled to go back to the states. I refused. They later gave me a B-24 L model with servo boost controls. What a beauty. I loved it, like power steering, easy to fly.

I had 2 years of engineering college when I went into the Air Force. I knew a lot about engines. I always returned with more fuel left than anyone else in our group. The crew chief would always ask me (in good humor) if I really did fly the mission, when many pilots had to make emergency landings at alternate fields because they were running out of fuel.

Anyhow, that is the story of "Pretty Mickey", the radar ship.

Dave Steinberg
steinbergelectronic@usa.net

* * * * *

My father, Staff Sgt. Edward F. Steelandt, was the Radio Operator/Side Gunner on the TA's final flight. Would love to have dad's name included in any articles you write regarding the fateful flight. Dad volunteered for flights when his crew was "off", so that he could more quickly reach the required number of missions in order to come "stateside".

It took a long time to get Dad's story from him. He loved to go to the tool grinder in the workshop area of their old three car garage and sharpen and clean his axes, hatchets, sickles, etc. That was Dad's way of relaxing and escape, especially when stressed. Mom said that Dad never could handle much stress after the war. In fact, Dad never flew again until my sister, brother and I "treated" them to a Las Vegas flight/hotel package around 1980/9181. Mom said that Dad just about broke her hand during take. Fortunately, he loved the return flight. That was Dad's only peacetime flight. He died in February 1984.

Here is the story that I pulled out of my father. As children, my brother & I loved to look at Dad's medals, usually when he was at work. We knew where they were stored in a truck in Mom & Dad's bedroom. We considered him to be a WWII hero, though he certainly did not. Dad hated fighting, or conflict of any kind. Strangely, he loved John Wayne war movies. I suspect that he did because they weren't very realistic. When the movie "The Longest Day" came out, I thought that I was doing Dad a great favor by taking him to it. You can imag-

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ine how terrible I felt when I looked over at him during the movie and saw that he was crying. That was one of the only two times that I can remember ever seeing my father cry. After the show, he said that it was a bit "too real" in some scenes. We never talked about it again and I better appreciated John Wayne movies thereafter.

Here is Dad's story, as burned into my memory:

Military Intelligence had told them that there were very few enemy fighters in the target area that day. However, they got hit by a lot of enemy fighters before they even got to the target. Dad said that their fuselage got shot up and they had to leave the group and head back to a base. He said that they had to fly over the Alps and the pilots thought that they had get ready for a possible crash landing. So, over the Alps they got rid of their bombs, windows and jammed open the bomb bay doors. They were then ready for a tough landing on land. However, they ran out of fuel over the Adriatic Sea. He said that there were ten foot whitecaps and that they were probably doing 150 mph when they hit. I think that Dad said that the pilots tried to land between the waves, not head on. Not sure about that.

Before impact, dad had had a "death-grip in the 50 caliber welded to the side window". He said that he then picked himself up off the floor and saw that the 50 cal was no longer there. He said that he was lucky that it has fallen out, not on him. Dad stepped out onto the wing [where it normally wasn't] and thought that he was the first one out. When he saw several crew members already in the water swimming away from the plane, he realized that he must have knocked out for a few minutes.

During the battle, Dad had given first-aid to the Tail Gunner. He had caught a bullet through the "cheek" [his posterior] during the battle. Dad now wondered whether or not that wounded tail gunner had gotten jammed in on impact. So, he went back into the plane. He saw that the pilot & co-pilot had died on impact, then found the tail gunner and pulled him out of the plane. Dad said that he "pulled the cord on both their 'Mae Wests' and they both

swam away from the sinking plane before it had a chance to pull them down". They treaded water for about 45 minutes until a fishing barge picked them up. [Interestingly, in all the conversations that I had with Dad about WWII and that battle, he never mentioned something that my brother recalls Dad telling him once. Dad told Dan that at one point he was just too exhausted and began to let himself go under the waves. Then he saw Mom's face and found the strength to fight harder and keep swimming.] He was awarded the Soldiers Medal for saving his crew-members life.

I don't know anything else - from Dad -about that day, though I recall bits and pieces of other events that he described during 17 years of occasional questions from me.

Just did a little Google search and found the Liberaider. Nice work. Well done. Had discovered it a year or so ago, but I hadn't returned to actively look for Dad's WWII experiences since then.

Dad lived his life as a very modest and humble guy. But Mom, Jeanette, Dan and I would be quite proud and happy to have you print Dad's story. Here are a few more details for your article:

Dad received the Purple Heart and life-long back problems as a result of 17 Dec 1944. Also, he was older than most when he entered the US Army Air Corp. Dad was twenty-seven years old when he enlisted in mid 1943 and, subsequently, was two month past his twenty-ninth birthday when his plane went down.

My sister, Jeanette, had just been born in January and Dad was exempt from military service because his work was at the Rock Island [Illinois] Arsenal. But Dad was bothered and uneasy knowing that his friends were in harms way, while he was safe because his machinist job was at an arsenal facility. His Belgian-American pride and sense of duty led him to enlist in the armed services in July 1943.

Steve Steelandt
steveo3@chartermi.net

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* * * * *

In 2000 and last year My wife and I, responding to an invitation from grateful Czechs, returned to the Czech Republic with other veterans and were treated royally. To show a little appreciation in return I have agreed to help my Czech Historian friend Jan Mahr complete his book. Going through my files I found a couple of letters which were helpful.

To start with, Jan Mahr is trying to identify the pilots of the 29 or 30 ships which headed off to bomb the Odertal Refinery on 12-17-44.

According to one report in the December 1997 Liberaider, 30 took off, 5 aborted or returned early, 10 were Missing in Action leaving many unidentified and unaccounted for. We are trying to identify these pilots as well as the take-off/formation positions of all concerned.

Non-Returnees MIA or KIA Total 10

This is the easy part since MACR and other data reveal the following were involved. Capalbo, Crossman, Ford, Galvan, Hailey, Lang, Sidovar, Smith Gerry, Smith Ken, and West. (Since I was on Lang's ship I can confirm his participation).

Others who reached the target or returned early .. Total 20

Some of the following were involved and their identities confirmed others are just possibilities. Can anyone shed any light on the situation?

Captain Mixson

Miller, Warren 764 Sqd.

Summers, Leslie "Shady Lady" # 52 ??

Taylor, James 764 Sqd #23

Stevens, Roland Sqd 764

Chalmers, Robert Sqd 765

NB: There are conflicting reports whether the total was 30 or 29 ships. Which five pilots were included as the five early returnees?

"Shady Lady" continues to be a mystery as she was noted to have been piloted by Walter Holland 451/727 Sqd. In the June 2003 Liberaider (p-32) ,

Jesse Pettey noted there were at least two "Shady Lady's" but his crashed near Pesaro, Italy (with another pilot at the controls) on 8-24-44 well before 12-17-44. Does that mean there were three "Shady Lady's"?

Thanks to information supplied by John Bybee and Hughes Glantzberg the following is the latest information on Mission #151.

"A" Flight Lead Squadron #764

#1...William Garrett with Mixson in C/P seat

#2, #3, # 4.....???

#5....James Taylor (#23)

#6....???

#7.... Ken Smith ...dropped out early.

Possibilities for the missing include Roland H. Stevens and Clair Alexander.

"B" Flight 765 Sqd.

#1 Ford

#2 Chalmers

#3 Crossman

#4 Smith Gerry

#5 West

#6 Summers, Leslie.

Formation deteriorated approaching target when Creedmore, James T (464/779) joined formation.

Other pilots who could have been involved are Welton, Thomas B. who reached the target and returned to Italy and Cooper, Leo T.

"C" Flight 766 Sqd.

Included but unable to assign positions are Sidovar, Nicholas (MIA), Hawkins, Malcolm C. (MIA), Herbert, Donald, Hall Michael F., and Garner, Jay M.

"D" Flight 767 Sqd.

#1 Lead...Miller, Warren

#2 Galvan, Robert (MIA) (#67)

#3 Hailey, Max (MIA) (#77)

#4 ???

#5 Lang, Charles (# 66).

#6 Capalbo, Frederick (# 69)

(Continued on page 30)

Pursuit of Honor

By
Valerie Berrios
Suncoast News Staff

World War II veteran receives long-awaited medals for service in the U.S. Air Force Henry Baker recently sat in the living room of his home in Holiday and recalled memories of his time in the Second World War.

He also recalled the decorations he earned but is only now receiving, nearly 60 years later.

Baker, now 82, and who once owned a jewelry business in Holiday, volunteered for the U.S. Armed Forces in 1942, while living in Hamilton, Ohio. He figured joining what was then the U.S. Army Air Corps would allow him to quickly move up in ranks.

And indeed, Baker eventually earned the title of Captain during his time with the 766th Bombardment Squadron, an element of the 461st Bomb Group, nicknamed the "Liberaiders".

Completing 50 missions, Baker and his group flew over Yugoslavia, Italy, Hungary, Austria, Romania, France, Germany, Czechoslovakia and Greece from April to August 1944.

Although the group had many successful missions, the Liberaiders also endured their share of tragedies, as are inevitable in times of war.

During training at Hammer Field in Fresno, Calif., a plane from another squadron disappeared over the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The following day a plane from the 766th Squadron set out to search for the missing aircraft and reportedly crashed in the vicinity of Hamilton Lake, Calif.

Two decades later a pair of geologists traveling through a stream in Kings Canyon National Park discovered fragments of the first plane lost.

After military divers recovered the remainder of the bodies and wreckage, a memorial was held for the crew at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington,

D.C.

And during the group's first mission, two planes collided over their target in Yugoslavia.

Baker's own B-24 Liberator aircraft was shot by anti-aircraft fire while flying another mission. After the crew saw a pink burst coming from its plane, they knew immediately it was hit.

Baker, having difficulty breathing glanced at his air regulator and noticed it was not blinking, as it should have been. He then felt the hose attached to his oxygen mask and noticed a shell was embedded in it. He dug out the shell then stuck the hose in his mouth so he could breathe.

The hit, Baker admitted, could have done some major damage, but he chose to focus on the positive. "It didn't hit me," he said with a shrug during a recent interview.

Baker's plane had another close call during a mission to bomb a steel mill in the Isle of Elba, Italy. Because the crew received information that there would be no opposition in the area, the plane came in low.

Flying in at about 14,000 feet rather than the usual 22,000 to 24,000 feet, the crew hit their target but endured heavy flak. The plane began losing altitude because two of its four engines were knocked out.

"We felt we wouldn't make it back to our base," recalled Baker.

So the pilots decided to land at a runway in Santa Maria, Italy. However, the aircraft overshot the runway and ended up in a ditch. Fortunately no one was seriously injured.

Baker admitted hard landings were par for the course in the Air Force. But he stressed, "Any landing is a good landing as long as you walk away from it."

Baker said he got through the missions by focusing on the end result. Once the crew was over a target, the mission, which averaged eight hours in length, was halfway over. But the long missions also meant

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an injured crewmember would have to wait about four hours before receiving medical attention, he said.

Another wartime experience that stands out in his memory occurred during his days off from active duty. He spent a week touring Rome with an Italian guide. One of the visits was to the Catacombs, where early Christians were buried.

Across the street from the site, Baker noticed an 8-foot-tall fence, with a sign attached that read, "No Allied Personnel Allowed." People going in and out of the gate were visibly upset, some dabbing their teary eyes.

Baker looked to his guide for an explanation. The guide informed him that as retaliation for an ambush in which 33 German troops were murdered, a German commander vowed to murder 10 Italians for every German killed. He then charged a Roman jail and gunned down about 500 prisoners, who had supposedly committed minor crimes.

The mourners were relatives of those who were slain, according to the guide.

The next day Baker and his guide witnessed a mob of about 100 to 200 Italians drag a man down the street and throw him off a bridge. Two men then jumped in a rowboat and hit the man with an oar in an attempt to drown him.

When Baker asked the guide what was happening, the guide said the man being attacked was the Italian jailer of the prison where the massacre occurred.

"The Italian people blamed him," explained Baker, for allowing the German commander into the prison.

"It became a big story," he stated. In later years the event inspired a war movie "Massacre in Rome," starring Richard Burton.

Baker said that soon after he got out of the Air Force, he was told the awards he earned would be sent to him. But that day never came.

"Weeks turned into months and months turned into years and you forget about them," he said.

The issue cropped up again only after he was afflicted by health problems. A friend asked him whether he received benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Because he hadn't, Baker decided to take the necessary steps.

Then during the process of sending out his paperwork, he was informed he was entitled to several awards, including the Distinguished Flying Cross; Purple Heart; Air Medals; the Presidential Unit Emblem; Campaign Medal; and Honorable Service Lapel Button.

Joe Walt, senior vice commander of VFW Post 10757 in Tarpon Springs, said he has only read about veterans receiving their awards many years after their time in combat.

He recommends veterans in this situation inquire through their service officer, write to the VA or check with their nearest VA hospital in order to get the matter resolved.

George W. Johnson, commander of Dunedin VFW Post 2550, said most of the veterans who join the group have received their awards. The VFW checks the records of its members, he added, to ensure all receive their well-earned honors.

Johnson said being a part of an organization such as the VFW, American Legion or the AMVETS, might make the process go more smoothly.

Although the nearly six decades have passed since Baker was in the war, he is happy to have finally received his awards, of which he names the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medals the most meaningful.



My First Mission

By
Edwin Burkhardt

On December 17, 1944, I began an unforgettable episode in my life. Our crew was going on its first bombing mission in a B-24. We had been stationed near Naples, Italy, for about one month, had trained in the United States on B-24's, and were now assigned to the 764th Bombardment Squadron, 461st Bombardment Group, of the 15th Air Force. For the previous two weeks we had been flying dry run missions in and around the boot of Italy and now the big day was here. Our crewmembers were:

Kenneth Smith, Pilot
Chet Rudel, Co-Pilot
Frank Hoky, Navigator
Robert Trumpy, Upper Turret Gunner
Homer Hymbaugh, Engineer
Charles Foss, Radio Operator
Roland Morin, Sperry Ball Turret Gunner
Urban Granger, Tail Gunner
Harry Edmiston, Bombardier
Edwin Burkhardt, Nose Gunner

We ate breakfast in the Mess Hall at 4:30 a.m. Many of the bomber crews scheduled to fly that day had already completed many hours in actual combat missions. In the briefing room at 5:30 a.m. we met our co-pilot, Chet Rudel, an experienced combat pilot who would fly with us in case of trouble. We were informed that take-off time would be 7:00 a.m. Our target was an oil refinery at Odertal, Germany, a new target for the bomber group. We were not expected to run into any fighters since Germany was having trouble putting fighters in the air because they had few pilots left. Therefore, if fighters were sent to intercept the mission, their pilots would be young and very green. We were to circle the airfield in Italy and get into formation. Being the newest crew, we flew in position 7 for protection. The pilots were instructed to keep the planes in tight formation for added safety against enemy fighters. We were further informed that we might run into heavy flak in a few areas, especially around the target.

As the nose gunner, I sat in the turret looking off in the distance and to both sides of the plane. Now and then I saw a P-38 off the right side. For a while it seemed as if we would make it to the target without trouble. We had been flying in formation about 4 ½ hours, at an altitude of 31,000 feet, when, out of the silence, one of the gunners called over the interphone system that it looked like a Folke Wulf 190 was coming at us. I immediately started to rock a little. Minutes seemed like hours. Nothing more was heard on the interphone radio. Then to my left I saw the Folke Wulf coming in on us, exactly as we had been told during training. As he flew past us, I fired a couple bursts of shots. Something came off his wing, but he did not go down. What would happen next? Not a sound was heard through the intercom. As I sat wondering, I felt a tap on my shoulder and looked around to see Harry Edmiston, the bombardier, motioning for me to get out and put my parachute on. I immediately backed out of the turret and clipped the parachute to the harness. Harry and I tried to open the nose wheel door but it would not come open. Then the alarm bell went off. Harry indicated we had better head toward the bomb bays. On our hands and knees we crawled to the catwalk in the bomb bays. Ken Smith, the pilot, had apparently dropped the bombs when our ship got into trouble.

Now I had to do what I always swore I would never do. I stood on the catwalk watching Harry floating down through space. I'll never know if I actually jumped or was pushed by someone behind me, but I do remember falling and looking for the plane. We were instructed in training never to pull the ripcord until we could see the tail of the plane. I clearly remember seeing the plane, pulling the ripcord, looking at my extended right hand to see if the rip cord came loose, and watching the rip cord ring fall as I released it. The plane looked very small when I finally saw it and had a stream of fire longer than the plane trailing behind. Looking around was an unforgettable feeling. The chute opened with a terrible

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May 17, 2004

461st Bomb Group Reunion 2004

Hello Liberaiders,

We are pleased to announce our 23rd Annual Reunion will be held in Louisville, Kentucky. The event is scheduled for October 6th-10th, 2004

Our host hotel this year is the Holiday Inn Hurstbourne. This hotel is conveniently located and boasts a AAA Three Diamond rating. If arriving by air, the hotel offers complimentary airport transportation. Registration will begin Wednesday, with Thursday open for relaxing or exploring the city on your own.

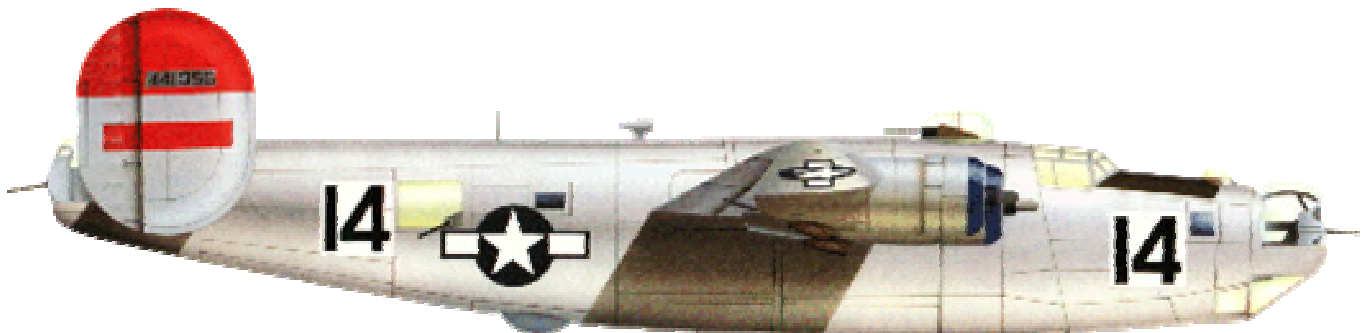
Friday, October 8th we plan to tour the Kentucky Derby Racetrack and Museum and downtown Louisville. Afterwards, we will have lunch aboard the Star of Louisville while cruising the Ohio River. That evening we plan a cookout at the hotel.

Saturday, our bus tour will take us through the scenic Lexington Bluegrass Country and to a working Horse Farm. Later we will have lunch at the historic Holly Hill Inn. Saturday night we will have our Dinner and Dance. As usual the reunion will close with the Memorial Breakfast Sunday morning.

Enclosed you will find hotel reservation information, as well as the event registration form. Please don't hesitate to call Kelly McKenzie at Charleston Travel if you have any questions. I look forward to seeing you in Louisville.

Sincerely,

**Bob Hayes
President, 461st Bomb Group**



461st Bomb Group-Reunion 2004

HOTEL INFORMATION

DATE: October 6-10, 2004

LOCATION: Holiday Inn Hurstbourne
1325 S. Hurstbourne Pkwy.
Louisville, KY 40222

ROOM RATES: \$77.00 plus 14% tax, per room per night
(1 king bed or 2 doubles)

RESERVATIONS: Call 1-800-465-4329
The agent will ask for a booking code.
Our booking code is: **B46**
Major credit card required for guarantee.

PARKING: Free

AIRPORT SHUTTLE: Complimentary, 5:30am-10:00pm.

Be sure to make your room reservations prior to September 23rd, 2004

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jolt. I left the plane feet first but spun completely around as the chute opened. As I descended, I swayed back and forth and became very nauseated. Then I entered the clouds, wondering what would happen when I reached the ground. It seemed as if I hit the treetops as soon as I passed through the clouds and landed about a quarter of the way up a mountain. As I looked around, I could see people moving in a tree between me and the valley some distance away. I quickly removed the parachute harness, rolled it and the parachute into a ball, and buried it in the snow. There were about eight inches of snow on the ground. I decided I had to head toward the top of the mountain as fast as possible, still wearing my sheepskin flying boots. After a while, the boots got awfully heavy, so I took them off, hung them over my shoulder, and went on with just my G.I. shoes on. (For the rest of my journey I wore only my shoes until my cold feet necessitated putting the boots on.)

I kept going up the mountain until I saw a steel tower about 300 yards ahead. Afraid that it might be a watchtower similar to those used in the United States to look for forest fires, I changed by course and walked a wide arc around the tower. As the sun began to set, I realized that I was exhausted and would have to find a place to sleep. I found a spot in a thick stand of pine trees and started breaking off branches. After kicking the snow out of the way and backtracking to disguise my trail, I lay down on the bed of pine branches. At about this time, I noticed a man in uniform coming toward me. I rolled up in a ball and listened to his footsteps in the snow as he walked around the area, but he never found my hideout. I don't know how he missed me, but I remember thinking that the good Lord had saved me from sure capture or death. I didn't sleep very well that night. I thought the tent back in Italy was cold, but it sure would have been nice to be back there under those G.I. blankets.

As daylight came, I again headed toward the top of the mountain. I didn't have any idea what country I was in and wondered if I was headed in a safe direction. Anyway, the uniform the fellow was wearing last night certainly looked like those of the enemy that I had seen in pictures. If this happened to be un-

friendly territory, it was better to take no chances.

I got out my escape kit to look at the compass. I thought our target was north of Italy, so I decided I should go south as much as possible. I had no idea where I might end up on such a course. When I reached a spot I thought was near the top of the mountain, I saw a village in the distance. We had been warned during training in the States to stay away from villages, so I spent the rest of the day and the following day walking around the village.

During the third day I ran into an old man. We tried to communicate but failed. I still couldn't determine my location or even what country I was wandering in. By the end of the third day, I felt weak and decided to eat one of the two candy bars which were a part of our escape kit. Then it started to rain and my clothes got wet. For the third night in a row I made a bed of pine branches and tried to sleep.

As morning came, the rain that had made the night miserable was replaced by sun and a beautiful day. Once again I started on my way wondering where I was going. About noon on the fourth day I was walking through a very thick wooded area when I saw a buck with a large, beautiful rack. I thought about the hours that I had spent hunting in Pennsylvania without ever seeing a deer as pretty as that one. As I stood there daydreaming, I suddenly heard someone whistle. I turned and faced three men about twenty-five feet away, two of whom had machine guns pointed at me. There was nothing to do except raise my hands above my head. Then they came toward me.

As they approached, I could hear that they spoke a language I didn't recognize. In searching through all my pockets, one of them noticed the star on my shoulder, on the insignia printed on our flying suits. He started yelling, "Ruski, Ruski", and I decided to yell back, "American, American". Evidently they caught on, because they dropped their guns and started to pat me on the back. They then motioned for me to follow them. They took me into a small village and finally into the back room of a barn. A little old peasant woman later came with a loaf of

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brown bread covered with mold and a can of sour milk. The brown bread tasted good but, as hungry as I was, I still found the sour milk hard to drink. During the evening, others came into the room, but I was unable to understand anything that my three captors or any of the others were saying. To me their conversations sounded like the language I heard while visiting Plymouth, Pennsylvania, a town near Wilkes-Barre where many Polish immigrants had settled. It seemed as if at least eight or nine people came and went during the evening while I sat there filling my stomach for the first time in four days. Later on the three men motioned for me to lie down on some straw. All four of us stretched out and went to sleep.

The next morning we got up at daybreak. Through their motions I realized they wanted me to follow them. We hiked for a couple of hours and then went into a cabin on the side of a mountain. Here I met the first of many Jewish families who were hiding out from the Germans – a middle-aged man and his two daughters. The man could speak a little English. From him I learned that I was in Slovakia and the three individuals were Russians who had escaped from a German prison camp. The Jewish family had been hiding out for a couple of years, moving from place to place. Two members of their family had been killed by Germans only a few months earlier, when they were caught hiding in another section of Slovakia. I was told the Russians wanted to be friends and would try to help me escape but that it would be a long, hard journey. We were near a town called Trencin, Slovakia, and the entire area was occupied by the Germans. Sometime in the near future the Russians would take me to the Partisans. I didn't have any idea what the word "Partisans" meant but decided the man's lack of knowledge of the English language would preclude further explanation. I was also informed that another person would take me to the Partisans – that the three Russians would not be able to leave the area until later. We spent the night in the attic of the Jewish family's cabin.

Every time I met someone that I had not seen before, I became the main topic of conversation. They all came up and felt my clothing and looked me over,

making remarks which I was unable to decide were good or bad. When they felt the material in my uniform, the word used was "prima", which I learned later means "good" or "excellent". I found it hard to make myself understood and am sure they, too, were bothered by our inability to communicate. One big problem was learning that the English word "no" meant "yes" in the Slovak language.

The morning after staying with the Jewish family, I met a fellow about my age. He spoke to the Russians for a few minutes and they motioned that I should go with him. Although the sun was shining brightly, it was apparent that we were climbing to a much higher altitude because it got colder and the snow got deeper. Toward evening, my legs became very tired, stiff and cold. I had been forcing my legs to move for the last hour and was afraid that they would give out. Through motions I attempted to inform my guide that I was tired and needed to rest. He in turn motioned back with the machine gun, indicating that he wanted to know if he should shoot me and go on his way. Suddenly my stiff, sore legs seemed able to move again.

About three hours after dark we arrived at a large cabin on top of a mountain where the snow must have been two or three feet deep. I was exhausted and glad to get inside the building. Here I met my first group of Partisans. The group was headed by a Slovak captain. I can't recall the number of people in the group, but I do recall that there were two women – one who seemed to stay with the captain at all times, and the other, a radio operator, who had two men to help carry her equipment. I also met two Canadians in this group, Lt. Stuart May of Weston, Ontario, and Lt. Jack Ritch of Edmonton, Alberta. It sure was nice to finally be able to talk to someone. The Canadians had been with the Partisan group since October 17, 1944, when they crash-landed in a Mosquito. They had been moving from place to place, mostly to keep from being shot or captured by the German SS troops. They had had many close calls and didn't expect things to improve any. We stayed in this area for about a week.

The Canadians warned me that living conditions with

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the group were horrible and that body lice made it much worse. I didn't have any idea what body lice were, but just a few days later I found out that these creatures could make my nights a lot more miserable than my previous nights in Slovakia had been.

Every day around noon the radio operator set up her equipment and sent coded messages to Russian-occupied territory. The code was carried on tapes and the tape was destroyed after each message was sent. When the ammunition, explosives, and code tapes were about used up, she would send a message asking for additional supplies. At night the Partisans built three fires on the top of the mountain to form a triangle and the Russians flew in the needed supplies in small planes, dropping the bundles between the three fires. The supplies never consisted of anything more than ammunition, explosives, codes and tobacco. All of the food we ate was stolen or given to the group by Slovakian peasants. I believe most of the food was stolen from the poor people as we marched and moved from place to place.

On one occasion, about a week or two after joining the Partisans, they stole a pig weighing about 150 pounds. We were on a hillside when they decided to butcher the pig. After the pig was cut up in pieces, the SS troops apparently spotted us. Machine gun fire echoed and we ran for cover. I saw one of the Partisans drop the hind leg of the pig as he ran by. Flight Lt. Stuart May picked up the leg and the three of us took turns carrying it as we ran up the hillside. Any time that we were chased by the Germans, we headed for the highest part of the mountain, making it dangerous for the Germans to come up after us because the Partisans could set up their machine guns and shoot anything that moved below them. For days afterward, we ate pieces of pork cooked over an open fire.

The captain decided we would spend the night in the forest on top of the mountain where it was very cold and the snow was about four feet deep. We built small fires on top of the snow, but they wouldn't burn very well because, as the fires got hot, the snow melted and the fires sank down. Fortunately the snow had a hard crust on it to hold us up. If anyone

broke through the crust, it took a couple of others to help him get back on top.

Many nights we slept like this, with our feet toward the fire. At least once I edged too close to the fire and eventually burned holes in my shoes.

We spent several weeks with this particular group. Stuart May, Jack Ritch, and I helped the radio operator carry her equipment as we moved back and forth over the same territory. During this period the Partisans sent their men out at night to blow up trains and do what damage they could with the small amounts of explosives they could get. The Canadians and I felt helpless because we could not speak the language and because we began to lose hope that we might get through the German lines into friendly hands. It seemed that in the last few weeks the Partisans were unloading the radio equipment from their backs to ours. After some discussion among ourselves, Stuart, Jack and I decided we would refuse to carry their equipment any more. At first we worried about this decision, but as time went by it proved to be a very good one. The captain apparently got angry over our refusal and told us that we were going to be transferred to another Partisan group.

A member of this new group, a Slovak, could speak fairly good English. From him we learned that we were only about twenty miles from where my plane had crashed. He said he learned from two Frenchmen that two members of my crew were badly wounded and in a hospital nearby and that the rest of the crew had been sent to a prison camp, except for two whom the Germans claimed were killed in the plane. They also said that Slovak peasants had buried one of our crewmembers whose body was found in the wreckage of the plane. From what he told me, I concluded it was Roland Morin, the lower Sperry Ball turret gunner. I just couldn't believe it; I didn't think our plane was hit that badly before we parachuted. To prove to me that the Frenchmen were right, they promised to show me pictures of the two fellows in the hospital. About four days later, they returned with pictures of the two men in the hospital. One was a picture of Charlie Foss, our radio operator. The other I didn't recognize. [Forty years later, I

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realize it must have been Chet Rudel, our co-pilot, who I had met on the morning of our departure.] This confused me and I figured I would have to wait until I got home to find out the truth.

The question still remains: Would I ever get out of Slovakia? It seemed like we had hiked hundreds of miles in the mountains since I parachuted on December 17 and now I was just twenty miles from the spot where the plane had crashed.

About a week after joining these Partisans, we stopped off at another farm house near the top of another hillside. Most of us were lying around on the dirt floor in two rooms of the house. Suddenly we heard the cry of alert. From past experience we knew immediately that German soldiers were approaching and we should take cover. As we headed for higher ground, we heard machine guns from the top of the hill. This time the SS troops had surprised us and were above us. The two Canadians and I lay flat on the ground behind a huge rock. Machine gun fire kept up for about thirty minutes. Then silence. Pretty soon we got the signal to go on up to the top of the hill – where about twenty SS troops had surrendered to the Partisans. They turned over their guns, ammunition, and some of their clothing. All twenty of them pleaded for permission to join the underground group. Surprisingly, the captain allowed the Germans to join us. Many times during the next few weeks the Partisans sent these Germans into villages to secure supplies. We found out that on one occasion two of them were sent out at night but never returned. Nobody knows whether they returned to the German army or were shot by the Germans while on their assigned mission.

Another time, we stopped to rest in a wooded area. During such stops the captain assigned men to stand guard duty on each side of the group. The Partisans included the following nationalities: Slovak, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, Serb, Tatar, Russian, and German. This time one of the men assigned guard duty was a Hungarian. I don't know exactly what happened on this particular day, but while we were resting the captain must have sent two of the Germans into a village to get him some tobacco. As

they returned, the Hungarian guard saw them approaching, got excited, and fired two shots in the air. Of course, the shots caused a mad scramble for cover. When we got the all-clear signal, the captain called us together for an explanation. After some discussion, the captain walked up to the Hungarian, using profanity I had often heard, pulled out his revolver and shot the Hungarian in the temple. Then he ordered two other Partisans – also Hungarians, who appeared to be buddies of the dead man – to dig a hole and bury him. As soon as they had buried their friend, we were signaled to move on. We wondered how the captain could be so cold blooded, but after being with this camp for a while, we should have realized that his very existence depended on stealth, and the sound of rifle fire for no good reason could alert German troops to our location.

Sometime near the first part of March we were told by the Partisan who spoke some English that the captain had decided to go through the lines into Russian-occupied area. He said that this would be very dangerous but that he had concluded that his work in German-occupied Slovakia had been completed. On our journey we would have to cross some very high mountains which were bitterly cold. We were warned that on one of the peaks we could not stop for rest or we would freeze to death.

For the two Canadians and me this was welcome news. Many times we wondered if we would ever get out of Slovakia. We spent hours hiking over rough terrain, always using the route that was nearly impossible for human beings to travel. As we approached the top of the highest mountain, the snow became deeper and deeper and the temperature dropped lower and lower. It had been a hard journey that day and most of the group were dead tired. The captain reminded us once again that it would mean freezing to death to stop for a little rest. It took hours and hours to get over the top of that mountain. There was nothing but snow and wind. Snow stays on that mountain even during the summer months. At dusk we had descended far enough down the other side of the mountain to safely take a rest. The captain waited for everyone to gather, but ten members of the group never showed up – frozen to death when

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they couldn't keep going. Some of the Partisans had picked up the guns of their fallen comrades. The Canadians and I had refused to carry a gun, since we were warned in training that carrying a gun in enemy occupied country might cause us to be shot instead of taken prisoner of war. However, the captain decided that each of us would now have to carry a gun.

Whenever the group was climbing mountains or moving from place to place, we always walked in single file. A couple of the Partisans who were familiar with the terrain went first, then the captain and some of his close advisers. The two Canadians and I were somewhere in the middle of the group. We always seemed to go in that order. The Slovak Partisan who spoke English was ahead of Stuart May, Jack Ritch followed Stuart, and I followed Jack. We were to keep moving in the moonlight until we came to a farmhouse some distance below. One obstacle ahead of us was a precipice that dropped about 70 or 80 feet. Just before we reached the cliff, one of the Partisans got between Jack Ritch and me. When Ritch hit the bottom, his rifle hit a stump with a thud, causing the gun to fire. The bullet hit the Partisan in the stomach as he slid down the incline behind Ritch. After we all assembled at the bottom, it was decided that there was nothing we could do for our bleeding comrade. So the captain again took his revolver and shot him in the temple to remove him from his misery. Once again, by some act of God, I was spared. I've never figured out how the poor fellow got ahead of me.

When we arrived at the farmhouse, we were told we would get some sleep but to be ready for an early start. That night I noticed that my left foot was slightly frost bitten and it got pretty sore. One of the women living in the house fixed a solution for me to soak it in. Quite a few of us were suffering from frostbite, so the captain let us stay for a few days. I was quite relieved because my foot was very sore and swollen. This was especially worrisome to me since I had seen the captain's method for removing anyone who hindered the group's progress. We finally got well enough to move on but were warned by the Slovak that much danger still awaited us because we had to cross a closely guarded railroad and

pass through a small German-occupied village.

Around noon we could see the valley and in the distance a dual railroad track with an armed guard riding a bicycle back and forth. Alongside the railroad track was a rather deep and wide creek. When we got to within a hundred yards of the track, the captain halted the group and sent two of the Partisans ahead to place a tree over the creek so we would not have to wade across. Somehow they managed to do it without making noise and attracting attention. As soon as the tree was in place, we headed for the track and sneaked up behind the guard. When he turned around, one covered his mouth and the other took away his gun. Then the rest of us hurried across the creek.

The Partisans forced the German soldier to come along with us, pushing his bicycle in the snow. As usual, we headed for the hills on the other side of the track – with the snow getting deeper and the poor German sweating from pushing his bicycle while a machine gun pointed at him all the way. After several hours, we halted. I believe the German did plead to join the Partisans, but he was ordered to give the captain his watch, his coat, his jacket, and exchange shoes with one of the Partisans. After the shoes were exchanged, the Partisan who had been pointing the machine gun at the German was ordered to fire. Then we moved on, leaving the bicycle with the German body.

The partisan who spoke English told us that we would continue our march all night, stopping only to rest occasionally. He also said that we would be approaching the front lines in the morning and, if all went well, we would get into Russian-occupied territory sometime during the afternoon.

About dawn we came to a mountain covered with dug trenches. We heard many rifle shots and now and then the whistling of bullets. We didn't see many live German soldiers that day as we ran along, but there were many dead bodies in and out of the trenches in the wooded areas. Sometime during midday we stopped. The captain and the Partisans were talking to men we had never seen before. I later

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learned this group of men was a scouting Russian patrol and that the captain figured we had completed the most dangerous part of our trip.

About dusk we arrived at another farmhouse that was used by the Russian army as an outpost. We had now completed our journey through the German lines. We were told we could rest until morning and then move on to a town called Szolnok in Hungary. At Szolnok we would be placed in contact with the Russian army headquarters.

It was March 20, 1945.

The following morning we departed and traveled across land that showed signs of intense battle: many piles of dead horses, half-destroyed tanks and trucks.

Approximately two days later we arrived at the Russian army headquarters in Szolnok. At this spot the Partisans turned us over to the Russian army. I have no idea what happened to the various other members of the Partisans. As I look back upon this moment, I feel bad that I was unable to give proper thanks to the captain and the Slovak Partisans who had helped us through so many very dangerous and discouraging days. That night and for two additional days, we were interrogated by a Russian officer and ate our meals in their mess hall. During the interrogation, it seemed the Russians were very interested in German trucks that carried an automatic rocket dispenser on the back. It must have been an effective new weapon utilized by the Germans. Of course, I could not help them in this regard since we had never gotten close to any of the German facilities. Occasionally we had heard repeated explosive action that could have been caused by such trucks.

On our first evening in the mess hall the two Canadians and I sat at a huge table filled with Russian officers, eating potato soup. All of a sudden everything became very quiet. We looked up and found the Russians had stopped eating and were staring at us. It seems they were amazed that we could eat our soup without the loud slurping noise made while gulping down theirs.

Here I was introduced to Russian vodka – a clear liq-

uid that burned for ten minutes after swallowing it. In fact, during the next few days I dumped my drinks out a window on two or three occasions rather than hurt their feelings by refusing their offer. We heard a young officer brag about how well he could handle his liquor, emptying a bottle about the size of our pint. Shortly thereafter he became loud and obnoxious. The officer in charge ordered some assistants to tie his hands behind his back and throw him out in the snow to sober up. He was left out there for a couple of hours.

From Szolnok, we were taken to a refugee camp that had been set up by the Russian army. One of the first things I noticed at this camp was that the Russians did not use men for jobs involved in the refugee operation. All of the persons involved were female, including the medical officers. Here, we attempted to get rid of our body lice. Our clothing was taken from us and destroyed – all of it. (I did manage to keep my nylon gloves and the earphones from my flying helmet.) A woman wearing a Russian army uniform took us to a large room with a dirt floor where fifty-gallon drums rested on three or four stones approximately a foot thick. In the space under the barrels were wood fires heating the water in the barrels. Nearby were a number of metal washbasins. We were instructed to remove all our clothing and bathe with the hot water, to which another liquid was added after we each ladled a washbasin full. As we attacked the lice, word passed through the building that “Americanskis” had arrived. The next thing we knew, the two Canadians and I were surrounded by Russian women. Here we were, after months without being able to take a bath, and now our bath was being interrupted by Russian women who apparently wished to see if we looked any different from Russian men. Soon the women were ordered back to their assigned duties.

Next came a medical examination by a female doctor – my first encounter with a female doctor – including the short-arm inspection that we had many times during our training in the U.S.A.

After the medical examination, we were issued underwear, a Russian army uniform, and Russian army

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boots. We were then informed that three other Americans who had recently been freed would be joining us. All three were officers who had parachuted on December 12 about 150 miles from where I did. I no longer recall their names even though I have a picture taken after we reached Odessa. Two of them were also evades. A Russian soldier was assigned to the group as a guide – his duty being to get us to Odessa, Russia, as soon as possible. It was explained that during the Potsdam negotiations Russia had agreed to release all Americans through the center set up at Odessa and there would be no exceptions made. I believe it was on the following day that Stuart May was hospitalized with Pneumonia.

The next day we were introduced to the Russian soldier, a veteran of many battles, wounded eight or ten times in the fighting between Russia and Germany. We gathered he was suffering from battle fatigue and was assigned this new duty as a period of rest. He could speak only a few words of English, but one of the things he told us as we started on our new adventure was, “You will like Odessa, just like New York City.” It also became apparent that we could not complete this trip in a couple of days. We soon realized that our guide had been instructed to use any means possible to get us across Hungary and Romania, and into Russia. We walked down highways, dirt roads, and pathways. Sometimes we hitched rides on military trucks, and once in a while we were placed on passenger trains. During our travels it became more and more apparent that the Russians used only women in all the operations away from the front lines. The men were at the front lines fighting against the Germans.

The guide helped me keep track of the route we took by marking the map in my escape kit, so I can list the various towns that we traveled through in Hungary and Romania. We had come through the German lines near Liceneo. From there we proceeded through or near the following towns:

In Hungary: Salgotarjan, Hatuan, Jasbereny, Szolnok, Karcaq, Debrecen, back to Karcaq, Kisujszallas, Turkeue, Mezotur, Endroot, Mezobereny, and Bekescaba;

In Romania: Arad, Deua, Orastic, Alba-Iulia, Blaj, Sighisoarn, Hagbiz, Maerus, Brasov, Ploesti, Braila, Galati, Reni, * Bulgarioa, Ciadar, Lunga, Romanesti, Carudjica, Bahmutes, Carbuna, Cainart, Zaim, Tighina, and Tiraspol.

The town names listed are taken from the escape map printed in 1943. According to the World Book Encyclopedia, the towns from Reni on are now in Russia. Most of those listed after Reni have apparently been given other names since the new boundaries were formed.

Shortly after entering Romania, we stayed one evening in barracks that were part of a Romanian airfield. Here we met a contingent of American Air Force personnel who were assigned to this airfield. One of the officers was a colonel who thought he could arrange for us to be flown back to the States from this point. We later learned this would be impossible since the Russians would not agree to release us. A day after we left the air field, two of the Americans discussed taking things into our own hands and going back to the air field to arrange for our return to American military control. The other American and I disagreed with their plan, stating we did not wish to upset our Russian guide with such action. That night the two of them left the group while we were sleeping. They were brought back to the group by female military personnel slightly beaten up. From then on, we traveled without any further difficulties among our group.

One day we were at a railroad station and, when the train pulled in, the cars were quickly filled to capacity. Some cars even had people standing or sitting on the outside. Since our Russian guide couldn't get us on the train, he arranged with some military police-women to remove passengers from one of the cars. This they did by rough force and a threat to shoot any resister. Jack Ritch and I, the Russian guide, and the other Americans then boarded the car. None of the passengers was allowed to get back on, and we went on our way in a nearly empty car.

I finally arrived in Odessa but had no idea what the

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date was. Mother was notified at 9:20 a.m. April 6, 1945, that I was returned to military control. This telegram indicates that Washington, DC, received this information at 7:55 p.m. on April 5, 1945. I believe that is the date I arrived in Odessa. We arrived early in the morning and, seeing a pig and some chickens on the streets, I jokingly remarked to the other Americans that Odessa was like the guide told us it would be – “Just like New York City.”

Upon our arrival in Odessa, Jack Ritch was turned over to Canadian military officials and I never saw him again.

In Odessa I was given Air Force clothing and interrogated by the American intelligence officers about my escape from German-occupied territory. I was told that there were strict rules regarding the release of escape information to the press and given copies of the military regulations on the subject to read. We were informed that in a few days we would depart from Odessa by liberty boat. The boat was at the dock, loaded with sugar and steel railroad rails. For about two days we watched women laborers unload the sugar and steel rails from the boat.

During my short stay in Odessa I became friendly with the captain of the boat. After questioning me about my experience, he asked what foods I would like prepared for a good meal. I told him that steak was my favorite dinner, with lemon meringue pie for dessert. That evening he fixed a steak dinner and served lemon meringue pie for dessert. I was sick with a very upset stomach for a couple of days following that rich food after months of moldy bread and sour milk. Upon learning that I was worried whether my mother had been informed of my whereabouts, the captain told me to write her a letter and he would censor it and send it on before we departed from Odessa.

A few days after our arrival in Odessa, the boat departed by way of the Black Sea, and through the Bosphorus, for Istanbul, Turkey.

The captain notified me and the two other Americans who were also evades that he would take us as close as he possibly could to an American military installa-

tion which would arrange our trip back to base. We were informed that for intelligence purposes all evades were required to report back to their squadron for additional duty. There were a total of twelve American soldiers or airmen on the liberty boat. The three evades would have to be dropped off at a port which could arrange our return to our home air base. The other nine individuals were POWs and could not be assigned back to combat duty.

We were at port in Istanbul, Turkey, for approximately one day, but I gather that no arrangements were possible at that port. From there we continued on through the Straits – the Sea of Marmara and the Dardanelles, the outlet of the Black Sea – which was reportedly heavily mined by the Russians. All vessels were piloted through the Straits by an expert Russian captain, and ours came aboard as we entered the Bosphorus and departed the ship immediately after we passed through the Dardanelles.

While we were on the Mediterranean Sea, the captain of the liberty boat was radioed and criticized for not having the flag at half-mast. Thus we learned that President Roosevelt had died.

On arrival at Oran, Algeria, we were informed that we should report to the U.S. Army Headquarters to arrange our return to our bomber squadron. As I recall, the other two American evades had been flying B-17's from a base located somewhere other than Italy. We were released from the liberty boat without any papers to identify us. On arrival at the military base, which was a P-51 fighter airfield, we were put in contact with the Provost Marshal. After being questioned by three officers, we were told that nothing could be done until after they wired our bases for identification and travel orders. I spent about 20 days in Oran playing cards and writing letters to friends whose addresses I was able to remember. For a former official of the Civil Service Commission I typed a letter and kept a copy of it just in case he never received it. I still have my copy of the letter I sent to him, dated May 5, 1945.

After waiting so long, I was finally put on a B-17 and flown from Oran to Bari, Italy. From Bari, I was

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flown to Naples by the Transport Command of the Royal Air Force. The air passage authority issued to me for the flight to Naples is dated May 21, 1945.

Back at my home base, the 461st Bombardment Group, I was promoted from Corporal to Sergeant, issued the Air Medal, and interrogated by a number of officers for the fourth time. Needless to say, after my long stay in Oran, this last interrogation seemed a bit unnecessary. I was also given orders reassigning me to the 764th Bomber Squadron. A few days later I was informed that, instead, I would be returned to the United States. On June 19, 1945, my mother was notified by telegram that I would return to the United States within the near future. I returned home on the West Point and was sent first to Fort Dix, New Jersey, and then to Miami Beach, Florida, for a complete physical examination.

While undergoing the medical examination (medical orientation), Homer Hymbaugh, our engineer, who was in Miami for the same purpose, learned that I was there and looked me up. From him I learned a few more facts about the crewmembers. Homer told me that the only member of the crew killed was Roland Morin, the Sperry Ball turret gunner. Three members of the crew had been hospitalized in Germany:

Chet Rudel, co-pilot, broken back

Robert Trumpy, upper turret gunner, broken ankle

Charles Foss, radio operator, 50-caliber bullet wounds in the right arm and torso

He and the others were detained in various prison camps. Our visit was rather brief, but I did give him some of the highlights of my stay in Slovakia. At this point, I figured out that the second "dead" crewmember was me.

After a few days of favorable laboratory tests, I was granted a 60-day recuperation leave at home on my way to my new assignment in the Air Force, which

was to be Mitchell Air Force Base on Long Island, New York, with possible training on B-29's for reassignment to the Far East. During the 60-day period at home, both VE day and VJ day occurred.

After the leave, I went to Mitchell Field and was assigned to the separation headquarters involved in discharging from the Army Air Force individuals who had the required points to be discharged.

On November 19, 1945, I was discharged and spent the rest of 1945 at home in Hunlock Creek, Pennsylvania. I returned to work at the U.S. Civil Service Commission in Washington, DC, on January 3, 1945.

When I got back to work, I found that my boss had received my letter from Oran and my mother had forwarded to him the letter I wrote from Odessa. In turn he sent them to a Washington newspaper, where they were printed. It's a good thing that the war had ended or I might have been in trouble for revealing the details of my escape.

While I was on my 60-day recuperation leave, I found out that Charlie Foss was in a hospital at Framington, Massachusetts. My parents and I visited him one day during this period. His right arm was in very bad shape and he did not give me many details regarding his situation. I later visited him at the Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, DC, and on two occasions in 1948 or 1949 he visited my home in Silver Spring. Both times he appeared to be very despondent over the fact that his right arm would have to be amputated.

Other than the exchange of Christmas cards with Homer Hymbaugh and Robert Trumpy, I had no further contact with the crewmembers until December 15 and 16, 1984, when Bob Trumpy arranged a reunion. At the reunion, I learned many details about my crewmembers' hospitalization and imprisonment and the damage done to our B-24 by the German flak and fighters.

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I will ask Hughes Glantzberg to post a "Mail Call" item in the next Liberaider requesting corrections and input from all who were involved in the Odertal raid.

Hjalmar Johansson
Hjalmaroj@aol.com

* * * * *

I send this email in appreciation for your efforts during WWII. Why am I sending this now, is that my Godfather was in Lt Beatty's Crew. His name was Valgene Schultz and I have his funeral information and burial site at Arlington, but had no previous information concerning what transpired in 1944. Thanks to your endeavors you have added many facets to a foggy picture that has become more clear.

The thrill of seeing the crew with which my Godfather flew was a special blessing to my heart. Thank you for all your efforts in compiling such a historical record.

I followed my Godfather's steps and was a decorated (Army Commendation) Vietnam Veteran.

As a fellow veteran Thank You, Thank You and may the God who protected you thru the ages grant you many years and many blessings.

A Godson who has been truly blessed,

Maurice H. Hagen
hagen_maurice@hotmail.com

* * * * *



I am Stanley Swarczewski's eldest daughter. Stanley passed away on May 30, 1985. I'd sure like to hear from anyone who knew him.

Renata Kicmal-Swarczewski
renata.swarczewski.ilob@statefarm.com

Be A Part of History—Again!

WWII Registry—National WWII Memorial

The memory of America's World War II generation will be preserved within the physical memorial in Washington, DC and through its World War II Registry of Remembrances, an individual listing of Americans who contributed to the war, whether a veteran or someone on the home front, is eligible for the Registry. Names in the Registry will be forever linked to the memorial's bronze and granite representations of their sacrifice and achievement.

U.S. Government databases have already included most of those killed in action during the war.

All of us now have the opportunity to honor those who served—in uniform and in civilian service, overseas or at home, man or woman. It's as simple as a phone call to the WWII Memorial Registry, toll free (1-800-639-4992).

You may view the Memorial Registry via the Internet. Names may be searched and added through this website—www.wwiimemorial.com.



Strangers We Meet

By
Walt Farmer

Have you ever walked the streets of Jackson and wondered about the anonymous person you just passed? Did that athletic looking woman ever compete in the Olympics or did that man just get out of jail for spousal abuse? Was that tall person over there ever a professional basketball player or did that non-assuming individual receive a Purple Heart in WWII? We pass these heroes and villains everyday on the streets of Jackson and elsewhere, never knowing their story, their heroism, their shortcomings, their life out of our sight. Even those we know very well, do we know them at all? For years I've greeted a friend around town, often at the post office or at some meeting: swell guy, tall, always smiling, but who was he?

Jim VanNostrand is a rather unassuming individual but always quick with a hello and a smile. It belies a life history similar to many of us, but as with all of us, singularly different and notable. He was born in Cleveland, OH in 1920, where he grew up and took an interest in photography and studied journalism for 2 years at Penn State. World War II was brewing in those years and Jim entered the Army and trained with the infamous 10th Mountain Division in 1942. The opportunity presented itself and he moved the Signal Corps over to the Army Air Corps and learned the skills necessary to be a photographer, a combat photographer with the 765th Bombardment Squadron, 461st Bombardment Group, 49th Bombardment Wing of the 15th Air Force. That meant combat missions in Europe in the B-24 Liberator bomber. Considering all the stories on the History Channel about those days, flying missions on any bomber wasn't something one hurriedly volunteered to do but Jim had become an American fighting man and that's the lot he drew. The commanding officer of the 461st stopped by the Photographic Section one day and asked for volunteers to fly on missions and take photographs of the bombings. Jim was the first man to step forward.

Mostly flying out of Torretta Field near Cerignola, Italy as a 24-year-old kid, he ultimately flew 29 missions over Europe with targets in France, Italy, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, Poland and eastern Germany. As a combat photographer or pilot or tail-gunner, flak and guns from enemy fighters didn't discriminate when they tore into the airframe. He was stationed right behind the waist gunners, in a type of well, with a camera and a 50 ft. roll of 9 x 9 negative film that only made for 13-15 highly detailed photos of a target area. Starting out there would be at least 36 aircraft in his unit, with perhaps over 100 aircraft per mission. The combat photographer flew in the plane dubbed "tail-end Charlie" to get the best shots after all had dropped their bombs, and one of which most of the German anti-aircraft gunners had zeroed in on at their fixed bomb-run altitudes.

Many a mission in his 15 months of flying duty ended with a crippled ship trying to land safely and Jim saw more than a few that weren't very lucky. He related this story about one mission and an island called Vis off the coast of Yugoslavia, now a Croatian resort community. It had an emergency airstrip that consisted of metal mats over a mud runway and his unit had at least 10 planes too shot up to make it back over the Adriatic Sea to Italy. They were running out of fuel while waiting for a ground signalman to give them the green light that the field had been cleared of a previously crashed plane. As they were getting ready to bail out, they got the green light and made a hard landing. Their welcome was a 2-night stay in a cave with 10 other crews and partisans from Marshal Tito's regime before they were evacuated.

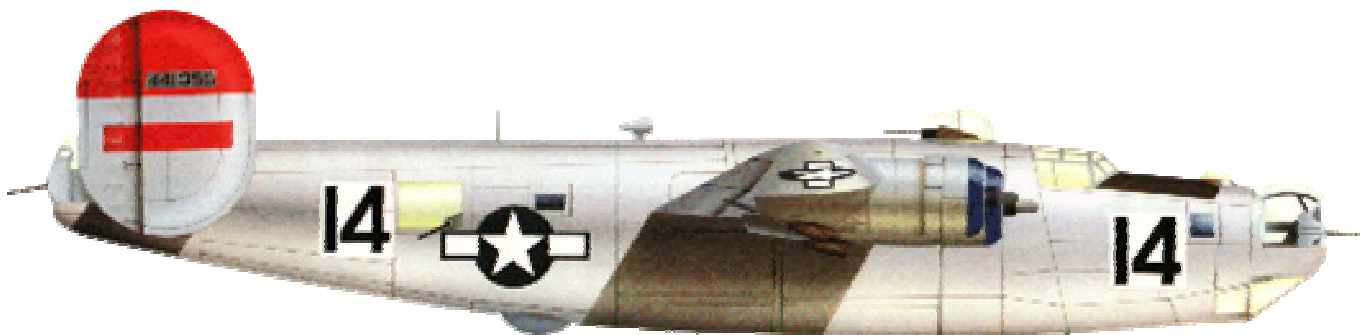
All the while, he took photos of targets, mostly just after the bomb run was over and the plane's bellies had emptied their loads. Those photos were vital in assessing damage and whether the run had been successful or whether another assault would have to be made to finish the job. Crucial targets such as Ploesti, where the Germans had their enormous oil fields and fuel storage facilities, had to be struck numerous times and

huge numbers of allied lives and planes were lost in the effort. Jim, was there, twice.

He was there over Friedrichshafen where zeppelins had been built and during the war, the Germans had an aircraft factory. He was there over Brux in Czechoslovakia where the Germans had slave labor at an armament factory and built trucks. He was over Toulon in France, where his Group knocked out eight German submarines in their pens. He came home at war's end with the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with 2 Oak Leaf Clusters, and the memories of war, friends, lost comrades and the need to get on with life. Some of Jim's photos during the war are at this web address: <http://www.461st.org/Torretta.htm>

T/Sgt. VanNostrand went back to Cleveland and continued as a photographer. Then to Seattle and to San Francisco doing commercial fashion photography before becoming a proof-reader for the L.A. Times. In 1952 he worked for the Sun Valley ski-patrol, back to Seattle where he managed a steel wire plant for a while, then almost on a whim, he came to Jackson in 1962. He managed Wyoming Outfitters on the Town Square for 34 years while becoming the first president of the Jackson Hole Figure Skating Club which began not at skating rinks, but on area ponds. He's been a part of the ham radio club and helped start the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation here. He regularly works at the Visitor Center, describing the region to our tourist guests, few of which ever have any idea of whom the helpful older man is that's greeting them. He's currently the Sgt.-At-Arms for the American Legion Post which just drew his name for a subsidized trip to Washington, D.C. for the dedication of the WWII Memorial on May 29th. Jim had a quadruple heart bypass in 1999 and prostate cancer recently, but is still going strong and the smile today is just as quick as it was long ago.

The kinds of people we share our world with are mostly unknown to us. This is but a glimpse of one of our neighbors, long-time resident, volunteer, veteran and just a good guy. If you pass him on the street, think of the other aging veterans from WWII this time of year as the Memorial in Washington is being dedicated. Salute them in the Old West Days parade where they will all be honorary Grand Marshals, even though Jim will be in D.C. this year. Courage isn't always defined by a heroic act or getting wounded or receiving a medal, sometimes it's just for standing up. It's a long way from WWII to today's war on terror in Afghanistan, and Jim VanNostrand, is very proud to be an American veteran. We should be very proud of him as well.



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was made up of thatched mud huts and I heard it was really over 200,000 population.

The next morning we briefed for a flight to Marrakech in French Morocco and took off at about 8 AM for an uneventful 7 hour haul across barren desert and about 150 miles of the Atlas Mountain range before arriving about 3 PM. We were beginning to get more used to working on an as needed schedule instead of the 0800 to 1700 routine we had been used to. Since we wouldn't be flying out the next day and in spite of being tired we 4 officers elected to walk around the town and sightsee for a change.

We were tempted but did not go into the "Medina" or Arab Quarter but were content to watch the Faithful bow to the East when the Carillon sounded at 6 PM. There were a lot of little booths and "hole in the wall" small businesses trying to entice us to spend our dollars. Our BOQ was a very nice and comfortable formerly civilian hotel, which was a welcome change from the tarpaper shacks we were usually relegated to.

The next day we flew on to Oran, Algeria which was a short flight so we had much time to kill that afternoon. This time we sampled the Arab Quarter or Casbah as we called it after the movie title. It was a very rough and tough area where one could easily get lost and carved up if not very careful since the Arabs did not like Americans or anything non-Islamic. They were reputed to be violently jealous of their women. We all had .45s on our hips and unwarranted confidence in our ability to use them. However we didn't need them and got out after about an hour of gawking without any problems. Incidentally the Casbah was "off limits" and that was one of the very few times in my career that I was ever "off limits".

Next morning we got up for another short flight to Djedida, Tunisia, which was about 30 miles west of Tunis. Most of the 484th Bomb Group arrived about the same time as we did. We had to take up residence in a tent area, which was segregated officers from enlisted men and separated by squadrons for the next month or so because our assigned field at Cerignola, Italy was still being constructed. We had armed

guards patrolling the area to keep the local Arabs from robbing us. They would slash the tents and grab our goods that were highly prized by them. The Arabs were also reputed to be actively aiding the Germans, if only because they hated the French so much.

Our crew flew several practice missions while at Djedida and I had to go into the Tunis airfield one day to run a mission in the Celestial Navitrainer they had set up there. Other than that we just killed time. One nice day we 4 officers got a Jeep and went to a battlefield about twenty miles southwest of our field where, we found a lot of burned out tanks (Both sides) and big guns and other junk that had been left behind about a year earlier.

On another day we managed to get down to see the Carthage ruins area which was very interesting.

Here we were exposed to another problem, which bears comment. That problem was paper MONEY, of which many types were in use. We could use US gold seal greenbacks but not red, blue or green seal bills since those were for stateside use only and authorities didn't want the Germans to get any, to pay their spies. We also had Military Payment Certificates (MPCs), French Francs, Italian Lire and British Pounds to cope with which made poker games a mess, but we managed. We could buy on the local Black Market, an ounce of Channel No-5 for \$5 in American blue seal money but couldn't get it for any price in gold seal money.

One weekend Bob, Ed, and I went to Tunis and had a good time at the local USO. We even got a sumptuous meal of Chicken Croquettes and wine at a civilian restaurant without a ration card or using our .45s, which we were afraid we might need since we were low on cash. The next morning, Saturday, as we three were returning from Tunis to the base in a GI 6X6 truck it was involved in a minor accident. It looked like we were in for a long delay so we caught a ride in the back of a British lorry. The driver assured us that he knew where Djedida Air Base was and would drop us there. About two hours later we managed to stop the driver who insisted he thought we'd said some similar name and we were almost

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there but more than 50 miles past where we wanted to be and were now only about ten miles from Bizerte.

The driver offered to take us to the BOQ at Bizerte and we agreed since there was little alternative. That night, in the officers club, there was a big welcoming party for a large contingent (at least a hundred) of Nurses who had just arrived from the states by ship. We were welcome and in great demand at the party and naturally enjoyed it highly.

The next day we started hitchhiking to get back to the good old 484th before they sent MPs after us. We were very fortunate to catch a ride with a British Commodore in His Majesty's Navy who we were informed was on the Admiral's Staff and was headed for his Villa on the Carthage coast. His chauffeur driven Rolls-Royce was very comfortable and he was most gracious to us but he spent the entire trip complaining about navy pay scales. It seemed that an American Petty officer was paid twice as much as he. As he dropped us off Fisher told him that we had never heard of an American Petty Officer who had a Rolls Royce or a Villa on the Carthage Coast. We got back to the base at Djedida and nobody but Pappy had missed us.

About the end of the third week, we and several other crews got orders to proceed to our assigned base at Torretta, Italy near Cerignola, Italy to be replacement crews in the 461st Bomb Group. The 461st was the unit that the 484th was to share the airfield with and they had been in place about a month and taken some losses on their early missions. We were not at all happy about the situation since being replacements was not considered to be a very good assignment.

The flight up to Italy was over the Mediterranean to Sicily and across to Messina then on to Salerno and inland to Torretta, which was about 25 miles southwest of Foggia and about 50 miles northwest of Bari which were fair sized Italian towns. I was not very occupied with navigation so was able to look around and see some of the area we were flying over where some important land operations had been fought.

I didn't realize until many years later when I was recalled for the Korean fracas that all of the flying time from Lincoln until Torretta was not logged on the my Form-5. This was no biggie for me but I'm sure the pilots were very unhappy. It probably amounted to well over 100 hours

We were welcomed but not very enthusiastically to the 461st Bomb Group which was made up of the 764th, 765th, 766th, and 767th Bomb Squadrons plus Ammo, Maintenance and Supply Squadrons. Our crew became Number 78-0 in the 767th Bomb Squadron Commanded by Major James Knapp who commandeered our nice new silver airplane as his own and had his wife's name painted on the side of the nose. Knapp was a West Pointer and a very able pilot. He had been an instructor in the states before volunteering for combat duty in order to get a promotion. (He made Major General ultimately). Whenever he flew lead missions with our crew I was assigned as nose gunner since I was a highly qualified gunner and did double duty as pilotage navigator which meant I had to provide the lead navigator with ground positions as possible. I flew as navigator/gunner about four times and luckily saw very few dowdy planes and only fired the guns in anger one time.

Our 767th Operations officer was Capt. McQuillan who was a very good and able officer and one of the very few people from the 461st that I have seen since returning from Stalag Luft I. The Squadron Navigator was Leonard Coles and the Squadron Bombardier was Capt. Faherty.

The 461st Bomb Group was commanded by Col. Glantzberg, with Col. Hawes as Deputy Commander, Capt. Leffler was group Bombardier and Captain Pruitt who I got to know a little because of flying with him once in a while was the Group Navigator. The Group facilities were housed in a large old farm building that had been a stable in the bottom floor and living quarters on the top floor. The staff had cleaned up the bottom floor and used it as offices and lived on the upper floor.

About 200 yards from it was our 767th Bomb Squad-

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ron buildings which were converted cattle and horse barns which became our Briefing room, some offices, a navigation planning room, a small Chapel, a mess hall, and most importantly the officers club which usually had some booze, wine and beer.

Our housing like that on all the bases outside of Foggia consisted of 12X12 tents, which accommodated four officers or six enlisted men. The tents were clustered together in separate officer and enlisted sections but without any formal alignment. The enlisted men on our crew had a tent about two hundred feet from ours.

All the tents had a baseburner type stove in the center with the chimney out the top. They were meant to be fueled by wood or charcoal. The fuel we used was very high-octane aviation gas that we ran from a barrel outside of the tent in a gravity fed 1¼ inch copper tube into the door of the stove. A pinch valve in a rubber tube section of the line, which controlled the flow. It provided a lot of heat, which was very welcome, since the nights were cold. We had to take the 55-gallon barrel out to the fuel dump every other day to get it filled. It was a hazardous system and we had a few exploding tents but no serious injuries that I know of.

In our tent we had four GI cots and four footlockers plus some makeshift racks for hanging our clothes which made things pretty crowded. The floor was earthen which made things very dirty initially. We four officers obtained a GI 6X6 and drove down to Canosa (a little town halfway to Bari) to buy enough hollow red tiles to floor the inside area. That really helped.

We arrived on the 11th of April 1944 and flew a couple of familiarization flights before our first combat mission to Bologna on the 17th. From there on we were on a schedule of flying two days in a row and then taking the third day off before repeating the schedule. However weather precluded following that routine too rigorously for the first month or so. We briefed for a lot of missions that didn't fly.

In the meantime Pappy was still agitating to get out of four engines and into fighters to the extent that

after aborting two missions with no good reason, the Operations Officer finally removed him from the crew and made him co-pilot on another crew. We were assigned another pilot named 2nd Lt. Minsberg who was highly esteemed in the group and was slated for higher things, which he attained. He was a very good pilot who did every thing right and according to the book but was very nice about it. He was now our tentmate but still maintained close ties to his former crew. Pappy did not get to fighters but appeared to be happier about the situation.

One of our first missions was to bomb the sub-pens at Toulon in south of France which was a long haul and we came home with a dud 20 MM shell lodged in the radio table about 5 feet from where I had been standing during the mission. I was very scared on all of the missions but after the first three or four I got so I didn't think about it until after the danger was past. I never did think or worry about the fact that we were bombing and probably killing people. The targets were just that and inanimate to me.

Some defenses over the targets were very strong with flak being the major item but it was very impersonal and usually not too bad in our area of operations. There were a number of reasons for this:

1. After the early Ploesti raids it seemed that the Germans had pulled some of the guns back to defend the homeland.
2. The use of windows (each plane dropping millions of little tin foil strips as it made the Bomb run) which floated downward confusing the gun aiming devices so that the shells didn't explode at our altitude or position.
3. There were not very heavy fighter defenses in our target areas.
4. Almost half of the German flak shells were duds.

We had good fighter escort to most of our targets and the German fighters stayed out of range most of the time. We returned with minor flak damage on many of the missions and did have fighter attacks in the

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Ploesti and Weiner Neustadt and Southern France areas but our gunners had not shot at very many and I think we only had one kill and 2 probables until our last mission.

Another early mission, was to Lyon France, which was close enough to Switzerland that we could look out and see Geneva under our wing. We had had enough combat already that it looked very enticing to simply land there and sit out the war in that safe haven. Some crews that developed problems from flak or fighter damage did that and were envied by the rest of us.

Our group had very good luck from the time we joined it until the 25th of July since it had relatively few combat losses. We had lost 2 planes to operational problems and only about 7 or 8 to Combat so we had gotten to think we might complete our 50 missions. Two crews had actually finished and were waiting to go home by the time we were shot down.

Some missions were more interesting than others were and easier to remember. For instance we flew a mission to bomb German troops in Yugoslavia and drop food and medicine to the Yugoslavian types that were opposing Tito.

One mission we got too close to an unfamiliar installation near the Iron Gates of the Danube on the way back from Ploesti and received much more flak damage than we had sustained over the target. Most of the rest of the planes in the group were worse off than we.

Another time on the 26th of June the unit was ordered to land at a base about 20 miles south of our base in a valley running east-west because there was excessive wind in the area at right angles to our north-south runway. The unit lost two planes that day due to a combination of combat damage and trying to land in that wind. One of the crews elected to bail out near the base rather than try to land. They had several fatalities and the rest were injured when the wind caught their parachutes.

Bombing accuracy was usually pretty good. Usually the unit flew in formations of 24 to 36 planes in four

or six flights and each plane toggled its bombs on the lead planes drop. Accuracy was measured by how many hits were within a 500- or 1000-foot diameter circle. On one mission to Bomb a target near Vienna the lead plane for some reason dropped several miles short and so the entire group dropped on the leader such that we had a very high percent in the 500-foot circle but the only thing damaged was field mice.

Another mission that I remember was to bomb a railroad bridge near Verregio in Italy and we did a beautiful job of getting 75% hits in a 500-foot circle centered on the bridge but not a single hit on the bridge. We were told that some P-47s went up the next day and wiped the thing out.

One of the most unusual things for any navigator happened to me one sunny afternoon when we were stood down and the other officers on the crew had gone into town. I was writing a letter when a pilot, Lt. Bowyer, from another crew poked his head in the door wanting a pilot to go with him on a slow time flight test following an engine change. He was unable to find any other pilot so finally got me to agree to go as copilot, which was a very bad breach of regulations on his part.

On the way to the hard stand in a GI 6X6 we passed the security squadron and seeing a large group of guards lulling in the sun, we stopped and asked if any one wanted to go for a ride in a B-24 and immediately had about fifteen black GIs on the truck and soon they were in the aircraft. We got airborne and the pilot asked me to show the fellows the ins and outs of the plane and especially the guns and turrets. I was an expert in all the turrets and we didn't have any ammo so it was no hazard.

I showed them how to operate the nose, top, and tail turrets and even got several of them to operate them because they were very interested. I finally got to the ball turret which was really a complicated item to try to operate but I showed them how to jack the thing down so it was hanging on the 4 support rods and then I got in and ran it around and up and down a few times and came back out and asked who wanted to be first to get in it. They turned several shades

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lighter and all headed away from the turret declining all the way. It was very funny but I don't know what I'd have done if one had taken me up on it. No way could I have let one of them into that turret.

We got back from an hour and a half flight and they were most appreciative and got off the truck yelling to their buddies about their experience and from then on there was often a group of them trying to hitch similar rides whenever they could. Anyhow that is how it happens that I have 1:25 of co-pilot time logged in my Form-5 on the second of June 1944.

On one of our practice missions when we were new in the 461st we were assigned to calibrate the air speed meter of a plane and to do this we had to fly as low as prudent over a measured 5 mile course over a flat area just inland of the sea near Taranto, Italy, while I timed the runs and recorded the actual ground speed which should be the same as the true air speed at that elevation. The pilots loved that sort of thing but even they were a little sheepish when we got back and had straw hanging on the guns of the ball turret. I was terrified!

On two of our missions we flew out of our way by request of headquarters to over fly Monte-Cassino and Anzio just to give the ground troops a show to improve morale and demonstrate to them that the Air Corps was working. I never envied any ground fighters and was happy that I was not among about ten of our Squadron personnel selected to exchange places for a few days with an officer of similar rank on Anzio as a morale measure. Our people were very happy when they got back in one piece but strangely enough the exchanged ones who had flown a couple missions with us were very willing to go back to Anzio.

As I've said before, we didn't have very much entertainment on the base and we stuck pretty much with our own squadron. The schedule precluded doing very much since we were supposed to fly two days out of three. We (the three officers) (because Minsberg still considered himself part of his old crew) went to Bari for overnight once but it was hardly worth the effort. I went to a dance at the USO there

and there were only a few girls who were much in demand and I was not much of a dancer so that was a loser.

All road travel was very hazardous since there were not any bridges standing so that a vehicle had to detour around or ford every stream.

I went to Foggia twice and once saw a very good USO show with Marlene Dietrick. It was so crowded in an old church like structure that I was perched in a part of the building framework for about 2 hours to see the show! But worth it!

Another time in late June the crew had a 3-day R&R to a rest camp on the inside of the rim of an extinct volcano, Mt Vulture which was reached by a very tortuous route in a GI 6X6.

The facility was an old Monastery, that records said was built in 1080 AD. It was perched about 100 feet above the half-mile Diameter Lake inside the old crater. Once we got there it was a great place to rest, there being nothing else to do. The quietude was almost oppressive. One day as I lay on a rubber raft looking upward I noted a formation of about 24 bombers directly overhead at about 10,000 feet. I pointed them out to others and none of us could hear them at all

I did a little canoeing but that is very boring and we were glad to leave. The return trip was such a hazard that most of us were very glad to get back to the safety of the base and combat flying.

We had another R&R for 3 days to Capri and it too didn't impress me much. It took one day of hard travel to get there and another to get back and I only seem to recall many other GIs in a very beautiful setting with nothing to do but sit around or swim.

I went into Cerignola about three times and can only remember it as a slight change of scene. The most interesting thing was the availability of very good toasted almonds, which were hawked on the streets at ten cents for a cone shaped container holding about a pint.

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When we first got to our tent there were no decent light bulbs although there was Italian 150-volt power to the tent. That first evening I wrote a letter to mother asking her to send me as many bulbs as she could. I gave the letter to a transport plane navigator who was flying back the next day and hoped I might get a bulb by the time I left. As luck would have it and some fluke I received a package of four bulbs less than 5 days later that lasted us until we were shot done. Normal turn around on correspondence was about 6 weeks.

The tile floor of our tent led to one incident of note because little red Salamanders or Efts would run around on the tile after we turned the lights out, making the most eerie scratching noises that didn't help sleeping. Ed being a little flaky (my evaluation) became very irritated with them and finally about midnight one night quietly said, "I'm ready, Bob, turn on the light". Bob turned on the light and there was a deafening blast of a .45 and the lights went off and we went back to sleep. However there was much noise and fuss outside as other crews tried to find out what had happened. In the morning, Ed picked up and disposed of a dead Eft. It's a wonder that's all he hit.

Another incident involving Ed and his .45 was on a late spring morning that our crew was stood-down (not flying) at about 8 a.m. there was a lot of noise outside our tent that woke us. As soon as Ed realized that it was Italian gibberish he grabbed his gun and charged out the opening of the tent shooting 4 or 5 shots into the air. I ran out in time to see about 20 Italian farmers running away as fast as they could.

We were back to sleep about 30 minutes later when there was a scratching on the tent and the group adjutant was there with an interpreter and the group of farmers. It seemed that the farmers were opening up a sealed granary that we were camped atop. They had hidden what grain they could from the Germans but now they needed to get it out to use for seed. Ed calmed down and they went back to work.

I proceeded to watch some of the most primitive thinking, seeding and harvesting methods that I have

ever seen. Later in early July I watched their reaping and threshing procedures which were more than 50 years behind our area of the states. They cut the grain with scythe and cradle and used straw to tie it into bundles. Their thresher was a box like machine about 4 feet by 10 feet by 3 feet with the cylinder and separator inside turned by a horse-drawn power drive mechanism. There was no blower or feeder so those operations had to be done by hand making for a very labor-intensive operation but it did get the job done.

Being a Nebraska farm boy I couldn't help but observe the farm aspects of the area. I didn't think much of the soil and rocks in the area and was surprised that they raised as good crops as they did with the antiquated methods. I also saw few olive trees there at that time but when I went back 45 years later it seemed a lot better, possibly because they had built a small dam and reservoir on the stream south of the base and may have been irrigating some.

I am still not a wine expert but I thought the "Dago Red" that we purchased in a wicker bound 5-gallon jug for \$1.60 was pretty good. We kept a jug in the tent all the time and it helped entertain during poker sessions etc.

I have neglected to mention food so far so I guess now is the time. We had a 767th Officer's mess that was not very good since about all the cook could do was try to dress up C-rations. All of us got very tired of spam but I still think it was much better than some of the other fare they fed us. I refused to eat powdered eggs but didn't miss them since I didn't like eggs back on the farm where they were good.

The one redeeming feature of the mess was that someone had found an ice cream machine and an Italian who could make very passable ice cream out of the supplies available. We had ice cream almost every evening. Next door to our mess was the officers club and bar which was named the Yankee Doodle after a much-admired Powell street watering hole in San Francisco. (The 461st had trained at Hamilton AAF just north of SF) It had liquor or beer sometimes if anyone had made a supply run lately but there was always conversation and comradery.

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Unlike later, I drank very little in those days so the lack did not mean much to me. The main and best liquor was that dispensed by the Flight Surgeon at a debriefing following each mission. Debriefing was where each man was individually and as a crew, interviewed as to exactly what happened when and where during the mission because memories fly away in a few minutes to say nothing of what happens in 50 years.

One thing I forgot to mention was the horrible condi-

tion of the runway when we arrived. The runway and taxiway had just been dozed level and approximately smooth but with rocks the size of my head lying all over. Over this had been poured heavy road tar and a little sand to settle the dust. It was rather hazardous to operate off of this runway and we had many cases of damaged aircraft from flying rocks etc. The prevailing winds were such that we took off from the north to south 90% of the time. There was a cliff and a 400-foot drop off very near the south end of the runway, which was a big help in getting airborne with overloaded B-24s.

Guns or Gas?

On 17 December the 461st Bomb Group was on its way to Odertal. To minimize drag and conserve fuel for the long mission the ball turrets had not been lowered, but gunners were instructed to stand by to lower them when an attack was sighted or when the IP (Zuckmantel) was reached. Near Muglitz (49°47'N, 16°56'E) just south of the IP, the group was attacked from the south by 40 to 50 ME-109s and FW-190s. 30 E/A were credited to the Group and ten bombers were lost, 5 more were damaged, and 1 was forced to jettison, later ditching. On the way home, between Blechhammer and Vienna, the Group leader was checking planes over the radio when a German voice, seemingly familiar with our call signs, broke in to ask, "Where are the rest of your planes?" laughed, and signed off.

The attack lasted 15 minutes with aggressive and apparently experienced pilots using both rockets and 20 mm canons. Passes were mostly made in pairs, from 5 to 7 o'clock low, with breakaways also low. Of the 30 victories credited to the bombers, the returning aircraft scored as follows:

<u>Position</u>	<u>Claims</u>	<u>Rounds fired</u>
Left waist	4-0-0	1,560
Right waist	4-1-0	1,520
Nose turret	1-1-0	2,415
Tail turret	6-2-0	3,670
Top turret	3-1-0	2,090
Ball turret	<u>3-0-0</u>	<u>1,365</u>
Total	21-5-0	12,620

It is easy to see that the ball turrets were not able to get into action quickly enough to contribute their full share of fire power. They had the advantage of computing sights and the most favorable position for this type of attack, yet every other position that could bring guns to bear toward the rear outscored them, and even the single guns in the waist position fired more rounds than the twin guns in the ball turrets. It may also be significant that other formations traveling the same route that day, with ball turrets lowered and ready, were not hit. Low attacks and breakaways were apparently exploiting an observed weakness.

Probably in no other case has such a deep penetration been attempted with the ball turrets still retracted. It is realized that on long missions the choice between maximum protection and fuel conservation is difficult. Various points have been recommended for lowering the turrets, depending on circumstances, but higher echelons have been loathe to issue directives on this subject. The above considerations may aid in the decision.

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We're on the web!
Visit
www.461st.org

Webmaster Comments

The 461st website continues to grow on almost a daily basis. Although I have structured the website to make it easy to find your way around, it can take some time to navigate around and find the information you're looking for. When you use a dial-up connection, browsing the website can take a lot of time. Several of you have purchased copies of the 461st Website CD. These CDs contain everything that is on the website at the time the CD is created plus additional information that was removed from the website. I thank you for your support. The funds I've received will help pay for the website and the Liberaider. Remember, for \$25.00, you can have a 461st Website CD. When I first thought about this, I wondered if people would be interested knowing that the website changes on almost a daily basis. I addressed this by only charging \$15.00 for an updated copy of the CD. By having a CD of the website, you will have instant access to everything on the website without having to go online and you will be helping to support the future development of the website. If you are interested, drop a check made out to Hughes Glantzberg in the mail. Be sure to include your mailing address, E-Mail address and your phone number in case I need to get in touch with you.

I have some good news about the website space. We have been fortunate enough to get some additional space. In the last issue of the Liberaider I told you we were pushing the 150-meg maximum size and I expected the site to grow still more. The company hosting our website has increased our space to 250-meg and cut the cost to a quarter of what it cost last year. This means we once again have plenty of room to grow the website.

I'm still looking for suggestions on what to do on the website. If you have a suggestion about what you'd like to see on the website, please take a few minutes to write me and let me know. I'll do my best to fill each request as time and space permit.