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Dear Ms. White,

In the last letter I apologized for writing instead of typing. In this letter I'll apologize for not being able to remember exact dates, and maybe not getting the events in chronological order (the last may be first, or second, etc.). But here goes:

As far as I know, none of the crew members knew each other before each of us was sent to Westover Field, Massachusetts to be assembled into a crew and learn to fly together and perform our particular functions. This occurred about September or October 1944, which was when I first met Bill Byers and the rest of the crew.

Before that, each of us went through the training necessary to carry out his function, and there were many schools on military bases throughout the country. I don't know where Bill received his pilot's training, but I think he flew both B-17 bombers and B-24 bombers before he became part of our crew as co-pilot. Our navigator wanted to be a pilot, but his eyes weren't good enough, so he was sent to navigator's school (he was a graduate of Wharton School at University of Pennsylvania, so he was put in a program to become a commissioned officer, while we who were mere high-school grads remained enlisted men).

I went to aircraft gunnery school at Tyndall Field, near Panama City, Florida. There were several gunnery schools throughout the U.S. and none of us had met any of the others prior to being assembled as a crew at Westover Field. The engineer, radio operator and navigator each went to gunnery school in addition to the special training on the ground to learn the working of .50 caliber machine guns, and in the air to operate turrets and aim and strike moving targets, and repair malfunctioning equipment.

At Westover Field we practiced formation flying, bomb runs (with flour instead of explosives in the bombs) and gunnery practice with cameras/film instead of bullets. After a month or so of this we were given a furlough to visit our families before going overseas. Upon returning to Westover Field we were assigned to a brand new B-24 which we were to ferry to Italy. (By this time in November 1944 the Allies had driven the Germans and Italians out of north Africa and up to

northern Italy, and there were several U.S. air bases in central Italy. The one we were headed for was near the little town of Cerignola.)

In late November 1944, we took off in our new plane, stopping in Grenier Field, New Hampshire, Presque Isle, Maine, and Gander, Newfoundland. The plane had been specially fitted with extra gas tanks, which completely filled the bomb bay in the belly of the aircraft. The extra gas was necessary because we then flew over the north Atlantic to Wales in Britain. I've forgotten the name of the air field there in Wales. After a brief layover (we didn't get to meet any English girls) we flew across the English Channel and down the west coast of Europe across the Gibraltar Strait, landing in Marrakesh north Africa. A not-so-amusing incident occurred off the coast of Portugal, which, you may recall, was a neutral country during WWII. Apparently, our navigator was a few miles off in his calculations and we strayed into Portuguese air space. They warned us off with a couple of anti-aircraft shells, so we scooted back over the Atlantic. From Marrakesh, we flew across the Mediterranean Sea to Cerignola Air Base arriving in December 1944.

More to com.

Best wishes
Bruce Thompson