



*The 461st*

# Liberaider



Vol. 32, No. 1

JUNE 2015

SOMEWHERE IN THE USA

## Reunion Information

In 2015 the reunion will include the 451<sup>st</sup>, 455<sup>th</sup>, 465<sup>th</sup>, 484<sup>th</sup> and 485<sup>th</sup> bomb groups in addition to the 461<sup>st</sup>. It will be held in Kansas City, MO. This will be our first visit to this city and promises to be one of the best reunions we've ever had. Check out the details on page 18 and sign-up information on page 20.

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## Toward Sanctuary

William J. Barnes, Jr. was the pilot of crew #53 in the 766<sup>th</sup> Squadron. His aircraft, Dwatted Rabbit #53, was ditched off the southern coast of France on Mission #60 to the Marshalling Yard at Nines, France. All members of the Barnes crew were lost. The following is the report on this mission:

“By the 12<sup>th</sup> of the month several of the crews had

completed their fifty sorties. Upward of 100 combat crew members had been sent back to the United States on a rotation basis. Other crews were at rest camps. The number of crews available, consequently, was limited. For this mission it was decided to fly a formation of four flights

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Staff Sergeant James G. Erwin

(Prepared by Jim's Stepson; Colonel Mark L. Brown, U.S. Army (Retired); in July 2007 [and updated in December 2009] based upon all known official records, reports, Jim's personal notes/letters, letters and articles written by fellow crewmembers, and my personal memory of Jim's recollections)

Army Air Forces Basic Training Center at Kessler Field, Mississippi to begin pre-aviation cadet basic training on 1 Dec 43. Jim's Army Serial # is 36 767 696.

### **DATE(S)**

29 Oct 43

### **EVENT**

Jim is inducted into the Army Air Corps.

26 Nov 43

Jim enters active duty at Fort Sheridan, Illinois for processing and Shipment to the

Dec 43 – Jan 44 Jim completes six weeks of basic training.

Jan – Feb 44 Jim completes six weeks of aerial gunnery training at

*(Continued on page 28)*

# *Taps*

May they rest in peace forever

Please forward all death notices to:

Hughes Glantzberg  
P.O. Box 926  
Gunnison, CO 81230  
editor@461st.org

## 764<sup>th</sup> Squadron

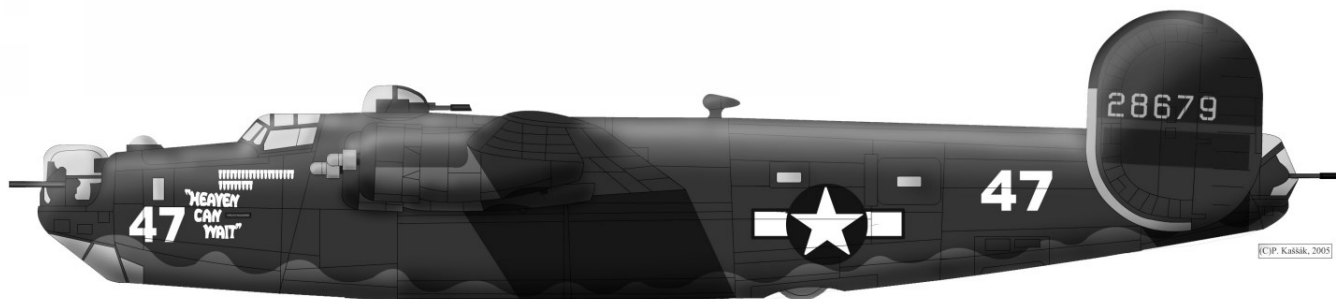
<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Falcone, Vincent R.	Orange City, FL	757	06/09/14
Schulte, Arthur F.	Rice Lake, WI	888	04/01/11
Stein, Harry A. Jr.	Okemos, MI	757	05/02/14
Szalkowski, Clement R.	Waukesha, WI	757	02/20/15

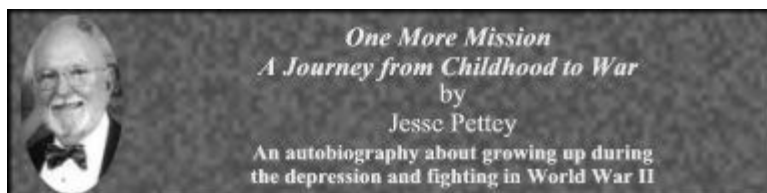
## 765<sup>th</sup> Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
McKenzie, William A.	Kettering, OH	748	07/25/11
Mixson, Marion C.	Tampa, FL	1092	05/19/10
Presho, Burnis E.	Oceanside, CA	1092	01/18/15

## 767<sup>th</sup> Squadron

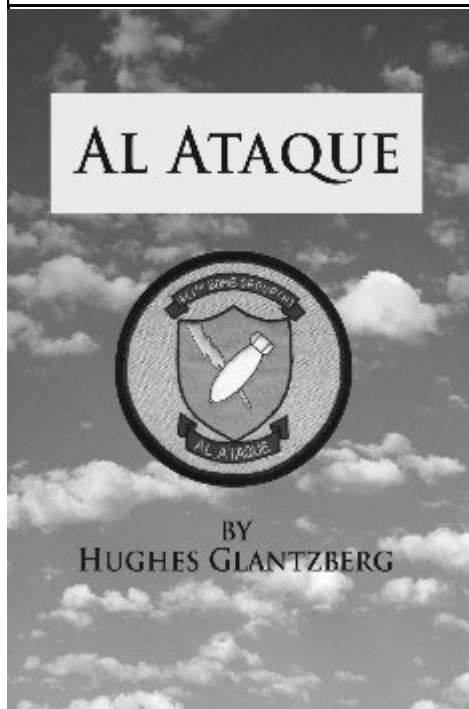
<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Bowyer, Edwin W.	Oceanside, CA	1092	08/27/13
Olson, Rolland T.	Chicago, IL	1092	
Ray, Howard T.	Atlanta, GA	1092	
Ritchel, Russell H.	Winston-Salem, NC	748	12/13/14
Smith, Albert E.	Hemet, CA	1034	09/22/14





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

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



## Al Ataque

History / General

Trade **Paperback**

Publication Date: Nov-2006

Price: \$26.95

Size: 6 x 9

Author: Hughes Glantzberg

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

413 Pages

On Demand Printing

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

To order call 1-800-AUTHORS

Trade **Hardcopy**

Publication Date: Nov-2006

Price: \$36.95

Size: 6 x 9

Author: Hughes Glantzberg

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

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



## Music Bravely Ringing

by

Martin A. Rush

767th Squadron

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

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

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instead of the customary six flights.

“For the first time in its history the 461<sup>st</sup> Group was really hit on the bomb run by a formation-concentration of enemy fighters. Twenty-eight enemy fighters hit the last flight of six planes and knocked down four of them. Three of the planes went down over the target at Nimes, France, and the fourth apparently failed in an effort to ditch within the sight of Toulon. The planes lost over the target were those piloted by 1st Lt. Richard S. Fawcett, 2nd Lt. Frederick L. Dunn, and 2nd Lt. Chester A. Ray Jr. Lt. Fawcett's plane was in bad shape when last seen. From all three planes, never the less, chutes were seen to open. 2nd Lt. William J. Barnes, the youngest officer in the Group, was pilot of the plane which attempted to ditch in the Gulf of Lyon.

“The fighter attack split up the bomb run with the result that the mission was scored only 24 percent on the big Marshalling Yard. Seven enemy planes were shot down. It was apparent to all that evil days had at last caught up with the hitherto invincible 461<sup>st</sup>.”



The following is from a book published by Bill's family and friends in 1945.

*This is a sacred book. Give it no casual care.  
Please treat it as if it were Bill coming into your  
home. In a way it is Bill. Honor it as you would the  
man himself.*

*A collection of just a small group of the letters written by Bill Barnes to his family and friends during the time he was in the U.S. Army.*

(Continued on page 5)

<i>Dates in the Life of William J. Barnes, Jr.</i>	
<i>June 27, 1924</i>	<i>Born in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania</i>
<i>1926 to 1939</i>	<i>In Englewood, New Jersey</i>
<i>1939 to 1941</i>	<i>Two years in the Choate School</i>
<i>1941 to December 1942</i>	<i>Freshman and part of the sophomore years at Haverford College</i>
<i>January 13, 1943</i>	<i>Began his active service in the U. S. Army at Camp Dix, New Jersey. The sudden termination of voluntary enlistment found him with his papers not quite in order for enlistment in the Army Air Corps. He came home, requested immediate selection by his Draft Board, and was sent off in the next group from Englewood on January 6, with one other eighteen-year-old.</i>
<i>November 3, 1943</i>	<i>Awarded his Pilot wings, and commission as Second Lieutenant, at Stuttgart, Arkansas.</i>
<i>December 1943 forward</i>	<i>With the 766<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron, 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group, Fifteenth Air Force, Italy.</i>
<i>July 7, 1944</i>	<i>Promoted to First Lieutenant (He probably had not learned of this at the time of his last flight.)</i>
<i>July 12, 1944</i>	<i>Lost in action over Southern France.</i>
<i>Persons Mentioned in His Letters</i>	
<i>Mom and Daddy</i>	
<i>Kitty and Molly</i>	<i>His sisters, older than he.</i>
<i>Richard</i>	<i>Usually "Richie", his younger brother</i>
<i>Boof</i>	<i>Miss Ruth Malliet, R.N., in the family through his Daddy's office, during all the period of Bill's memory.</i>
<i>Beans</i>	<i>His Haverford roommate and continuing pal; as of November 1944: Naval Air Cadet, C. W. Matlack.</i>
<i>Bob</i>	<i>Robert Boardman – Choate chum and steadfast friend.</i>
<i>Trig</i>	<i>Trygue Sween – Englewood chum at all times – entering the service as a Marine at about the time of Bill's induction.</i>
<i>Johnnie</i>	<i>John W. Taussing, Jr., Englewood next door pal, now a Marine.</i>
<i>King</i>	<i>J. Kingsley Noble, another Englewood pal – now in U. S. Coast Guard.</i>
<i>The Head</i>	<i>Dr. George St. John of Choate School.</i>
<i>Dean Mac</i>	<i>Dr. Archibald MacIntosh of Haverford College.</i>
<i>Mr. Niehaus</i>	<i>Mr. H. Dayton Neihaus, his Physics Master at Choate, through whom Bill first learned to enjoy reading.</i>
<i>Betty</i>	<i>A fictitious name of a girl to take the place of a girl's name that occurs in his letters, but whose real name it</i>

*When Bill went away he did not expect to come back. He hoped to come back – as the time for coming back*

*(Continued from page 5)*

*seemed to be approaching a great eagerness to come burst over him – but he seemed to know that the thing he was doing contained in it all that he was going to have in life.*

*We all understood this feeling of his, and we had a very definite kind of bargain with him. If he did not come back we would do our best to help him carry on his living here.*

*We cannot believe that those who have made the greatest sacrifice will be penalized by an ending of their living. Rather we believe that Bill's life has just burst out into full bloom. And so to help us at home, and all who belong to that inspired company who know his beautiful life, we are putting together this little collection of parts of Bill's letters written during the short year and a half while he was in the Army.*

*It will help because it is almost the only way those of us here at home know the Bill of 1942 grown into the one of 1944. All of this rapid growth took place away from all of us, and we must add these letters to what we previously knew to see him as he stepped from a cramped cock-pit into the spaciousness of God's free Life.*

*In making our selections for his letters our worst error would be to pick unwisely so that he would seem unreal. What we want desperately to keep is Bill, Bill as we know him, not any celestialized resemblance. We speak of unusual beauty as being un-earthly, but we prefer to think that people on earth can be beautiful, to a superlative degree.*

*Maybe that is just quibbling, for it is probably true that heaven and earth are not far apart at all, that heaven is always right at hand. Bill was a boy's boy – in the rough and tumble he roughed and tumbled. He also had a spiritual quality that sometimes made you catch your breath. Heaven can have few lovelier things than Bill's smile.*

*Bill's awful struggle was the inevitable struggle between cleanness and dirtiness. His cleanness made him suffer when exposed to dirtiness in any form. The worst criticism we have heard of him from an Army associate is just, in effect, that Bill was disturbed by evil. Implying that Bill's attitude was the opposite this critic assured us that his own philoso-*

*phy was: "I am not my brother's keeper."*

*We have no clear proof that Bill was killed. First he was reported "missing" then, after elapse of time, "killed in action." Suppose by some miracle he should have escaped from that plane, which was hit by gunfire in the air and then wrecked and engulfed by a landing in the sea – suppose he should again walk in among us. Would he be embarrassed by finding these letters printed and in the hands of his friends? We'll risk it.*

*For Bill has completed a chapter in his life. He is a great spirit, now. Fundamentally it will not make much difference whether we see him in his pilot uniform or not. Bill himself will be here all right. He was glad when he went away that he could leave with us some nice photographs of himself. He knew they helped. And he'll understand that this is just a talking picture.*

*There is one other question that we must expect to hear raised – it is implied in some of the counsels we received on ways to manage our sorrow: wouldn't it be better to leave these letters in their envelopes and let time and forgetfulness soothe our grief? All that is living in the hearts of Bill's family cries out: "No!"*

*There is only One other than Bill, Who has died for us, to Whom we will acknowledge any greater indebtedness, and it is only when we have forgotten Him that we have suffered real defeat. That which was in His life was likewise in Bill. If we keep Bill with us the way Bill had Him, we shall be all right, for They together will be with us.*

*We want with all our hearts that Richie will not have to go to war – but we want much more deeply that Richie will have what Bill had, so that nothing, absolutely nothing, can hurt him. And what we want for Richie we are sure Bill wants for everyone who reads these letters.*

*Parts of Bill's first letter after entering the Army, written on the reverse side of some mimeographed "Army Emergency Relief" notices.*

Sunday, January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1943

Dear Mom,

*(Continued on page 7)*

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Just a matter of time now. I'm still at Camp Dix, but hoping (like everyone else here!) to leave soon. I have my uniform, have had all my Army exams, etc., my interview and have already done my first K.P. duty. I worked from 8:00 P.M. Friday to 5:30 A.M. Saturday. We did everything Private Hargrove did plus! Potatoes, garbage, pots and pans, stoves, fires, scrubbing floors and walls – everything. It wasn't bad though – not too bad, I mean. I was awfully tired, but they gave the day off, and, after I had seen the Aviation Cadet Board about 8:00 I went to bed. The Board doesn't work on Saturdays or Sundays, so if I'm still here on Monday I go and take my mental and physical. Here's hoping!

\* \* \* \* \*

They won't send anything but paper parcels from here, so I'll have to wait till I get out of here to send my things home. Meanwhile I'll have to carry all that junk around. I still brought much too much to start with.

Please excuse the paper and the scratchy pen, too, but it's all I have available right now, and later I won't have the time. All in all complaints are few, considering the exceptional circumstances around here. When I get to basic training I imagine those conditions won't exist. Of course, then I'll be alone which will be hard on me, as usual, for a while, but why cross unknown bridges before they hatch!

Sunday's just another day around here. Up at

5:30, eat, clean up the tent for inspection, off to special detail, eat, drill, etc., etc., etc. If not in body, though, I'll be home in spirit. How I'd like to be with Betty for André Kostelanetz this afternoon and home for cold ce-real supper and a game with Richie afterwards. There's a job to do, though, and I wouldn't have any fun being home until I'd earned my rest. Fourteen days here puts one in line for a 36 hour pass on the weekend. Much as I'd like to be home, though, that doesn't equal staying here so I'm praying to be shipped soon. Maybe if I get in the Air Corps, that'll speed things up.

So far I've taken advantage of two Army cut rate privileges. I got a pint of ice cream last night at the P.X. (Post Exchange) for 15¢!!! And to think that I've paid 90¢ a quart outside. Then I went to see Paul Muni in "Commandos Attack at Dawn" for 15¢. Boy, was that ever a corker. You'll like it. The combination of Commandos and Paul Muni would be enough for you without it's being even as good as it is. Brand new, too!

We had a short talk from the Chaplain Thursday. I imagine he's a peach when you're in trouble and need help. Then we had an all too convincing movie on Sex Hygiene. If I get hoodwinked now after all the resistance I've built up, - I'm hopeless. That picture was far more than enough to keep me good even if I had no other reasons. But it certainly makes one hate the sanitary conditions in a

(Continued on page 8)

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

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place like this and pray to get away fast.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gotta stop now. Say hello to Kitty, Richie and Daddy and give them my love. Heard anything from Haverford? Mail may get to me, if I'm still here long enough – but don't send anything important or any packages till I get shipped. I'll sign off now with

Love to all,  
Bill

*AFTER Camp Dix Bill spent several weeks in Atlantic City working hard to get his Aviation Cadet assignment – along with his regular "G.I." duties. It took some pretty hard swimming against the current to avoid being swept away with the gang, but he won out.*

*In his letters from Atlantic City he several times spoke about the patience and competence of his sergeants. He illustrated the patience of one with this account. A large group of the men had finished breakfast and were being marched through a dark corridor, still before dawn, on the way to their drill, when they were halted and allowed to be "at ease". Bill found himself beside a window seat and plunked himself down on this. In disposing of his long legs his feet came to rest on another stomach on the floor. After some time a voice down the corridor asked as to the whereabouts of the sergeant. Bill passed the question along: "Where's the sergeant?" The reply came in a sleepy voice from right under his feet: "Who the hell do you think you're standing on?" He had found his long suffering sergeant!*

*From there he went to Nashville for further processing, and the following letter was written there.*

Nashville, Tennessee  
February 20, 1943

Dear Mom,

It was very nice to get your letter with fresh news from home. I got Kitty's and Molly's long and ever so nice letters a couple of days ago when they finally came through from At-

lantic City. I really have very faithful letter-writers there at home and my pals are keeping up their end of things, too. It seemed like a long wait, though, that first week when we couldn't get any mail at all.

I sympathize with you all and your zero weather. Has it cleared up and warmed up any yet? Goodness, I hope people don't keep falling all the time. Don't any of you get hurt now.

Another day has passed now. I wrote the above just after breakfast, and now I have a few minutes before supper. Every meal is "chow" in the Army, but I get sick of the word.

Anyhow, we've waited a long time, but the last few days have been very busy. We've taken all sorts of tests. I think we have the make-or-break physical tomorrow. Everything counts on that, I think. They called the tests we've taking "psychs" (psychological). They sure were today – all sorts of tests to find out about our coordination, steadiness, and speed of reaction. I can't tell more about them now since they are among the many "Restricted Information" groups that we are forbidden to discuss even with each other. I'm not too happy about them in general, but if I get through the physical I'll feel fairly safe.

Well, back from chow now, and I can continue. I wrote on the envelope of my last letter that I needed hangers. In case you didn't see it – I repeat. If you can get a hold of them and don't mind losing them, I would prefer wooden hangers with cross bars. They're practically impossible to get in the Army, but most everyone does get 'em somehow sooner or later. The metal ones are next best but the G.I. stuff is so heavy that they bend all out of

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shape and sometimes even pull out the hook and fall down!

I can really say nothing about the training around here, since we either sit around and go on special details or we take tests which we can't talk about. I can say that I was rather skeptical about any bunch of tests proving much toward your abilities for pilot, navigator, or bombardier. Having taken them, I have a great deal more respect for the Army standards. I can see that they could make a lot of difference, although they might be wrong. I know I can fly, and if anything stops me from getting to pilots' school for a crack at it, I'll be greatly disappointed and I'm sure the whole Army couldn't convince me that any test I've taken proved I couldn't fly. However, we'll have no such conflict arises. As I say, I think everything now hinges on the physical coming up.

We live in barracks – as you asked, although I think I've already mentioned the fact. The weather has grown considerably more agreeable here now. We're going around in shirtsleeves in the day time, and although the nights are still cold, they are much nicer. The lack of freezing weather blesses us with considerably less coal smoke, which is really appreciated.

I tried to keep from mentioning it last week, but I was really very sick last week. That accounts a great deal for the low spirits, and also the lack of concentration power was in a great part due to all my different painful ailments. I am now practically recuperated. I only have to blow my nose once in a long while, my throat is only *red* hot now and my neck is within two sizes of its old, correct size! I do hope I haven't too many bad signs showing when I take my physical. I have an idea that it may come tomorrow, but then

again, we may wait for a week for all I know.

Thank you for the candy you say you sent. It has not arrived as yet, but no doubt will, sometime next week. It will be very happily received. You really shouldn't, but it's very nice and will keep me away from the P.X. I just splurged there this afternoon and bought an "Esquire" since it is full of articles on lots of things to read, and it also has some much needed humor to cause a few dusty laughs to be uncovered and shaken out.

I have a nice gang to live with, in general, and have lots of acquaintances by a smile or a wink spread out through the squadron. I am increasingly appreciative of my height and whatever other deceptive appearance it is that keeps me out of the occasional squabbles that come up every so often. Maybe it's just that I don't talk my way into trouble, but at any rate, I'm treated with the respect I would expect someone twice my age to get. It's all very nice anyway. In the same line, there isn't a soul yet that has guessed that I was under twenty, which is all very flattering to my childish way of thinking.

Please do thank Kitty for her swell letter and the poems. I like them very much and will try to write her soon to tell her so. Richie's card also came through, and I thought his cartoons were exceptionally well done. I still sort of chuckle when I think about them. Boy, those records Kitty tells about make me homesick. I'd like to hear how the new needle works, too. But, oh, how I'd like to hear those records! I won't get a furlough till and if I get my wings – and bars! If I get wings, darn it, I can get bars, too. Just call me Captain!

It's nice to hear about the fellas at Atlantic City. Do tell me more when and if you hear more. I haven't heard from any of the gang

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(Continued from page 9)

back there.

\* \* \* \* \*

I had a bull-session with one of my neighbors who seemed like an awfully decent, quiet individual, the other night. He's built very well, but is not too heavy. He has a very original face – kinda round with a funny puff to the cheeks and eyes with a peculiar sparkle in them of a dark brown color (the eyes!). After a while I asked him what nationality he was. He's American, but of Windish descent! I asked him to repeat himself and finally decided my ears weren't deceiving me. It seems the Windoks are a separate part of the Croats who are in turn part of the Slavic mess one calls Jugoslania! You can imagine how interesting that was to me. He's from Pennsylvania near Bethlehem, I think, where he says there's a little settlement of Windish people with their own churches, etc. That's just one example of the interesting people we have in the Army. There was a Chinese boy who claimed, interestingly enough, that the Chinese attitude on other nations was something like this:

"England no good – they kill women and children under their noses – China no forget!

"Amellica no good – no help when say help – also still supplying Japan with goods – U.S. Government no know, but Amellica businessman – you know! – And Japanese pay good – no – Amellica no good." (I rather gathered we still had a chance – feeble as it may be – to redeem ourselves – and at least there was no active and sullen hate as there was for the British!)

"Well," I said, "how about Germany – how do they rate?"

"Oh!" he said – for the first time with warmth

– "Germany good, Germans China friend! China no fight Germans!"

"Well," I said, to finish one line first, "you do dislike Japan, don't you?"

"Oh, yes. – Me grab anything to kill Jap!" There was real hate there and fiery rage as far as I could see through the usual Chinese dead pan.

I gathered that he felt that the Chinese felt the Germans were best, and he'd never fight them. He was kinda funny about that. He said he'd surrender right away if he saw a German! I couldn't tell whether he was scared or just wouldn't hit a "friend." I guess America was the next most popular country, mostly because Chiang-Kai-shek cooperates with us, and he gets infinite respect and obedience, although he's sort of an idol almost as revered and perhaps awe-full as the emperor is to the Japs although not quite the same.

I thought that was no end interesting and would love to have probed more deeply into the situation, but had no further opportunity.

Do write and tell me what – if anything – you got for Molly's birthday. I saw a pin in the P.X. which was kinda nice, but not too "Mollyish".

Please remember that I'll be very glad to receive things like cards and air mail stamps (which, by the way, are unavailable here) but I really have no place to keep extra stuff, so bushels of fruit, etc., are definitely inappropriate, although I appreciate the sentiment and thank you. Maybe when I get to pilots' school I'll have a place to put things like that. I have no desire to draw the spotlight on myself in this bunch as the prize sucker or the bully boy of the lot by throwing a general feed, nor do I want to appear extravagant or

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let on that there might be more backing me up than some of the others have financially as well as otherwise. I know it's your way of expressing your love, and I hate to say anything, particularly as I'd love to receive and gorge myself on it as I used to do in college and at school, but things are different now. I'm making a place for myself in the Army of the kind that I want, and every hint that I have more money than some to be called at any time I want it, or anything that would hint that I was nothing but the kid I am when the thought hadn't occurred before, - all that would be definitely unwanted by me, so think of me that way, please, and try not to send too much stuff. I want to go through these next months with the same lacks and hardships that the others have to go through, and when and if I become an officer there'll be time enough to splurge then and show my rightful dignity and pride, with my commission as the excuse! I don't know whether you get my point, but it's well-meant, and don't think I won't be happy to see a box of cookies or something every so often, which I can hoard and nibble at, with whom or without whomever I please! I know fellas who write for \$50 every two weeks or so to keep them going, but I'm going to see whether I can keep going on the GI or bust. I know help is always at hand, but let's see what happens for a while. Things are still O.K. and quite in hand. I'd better close this book now - but I'll try to write again tomorrow - or soon anyway. Oh - heard from Trig - he's been sick but at it again and getting along O.K. I'd love to hear any fresher news about him that you or Richie may have gotten. G'nite!

Lots of love to all,  
Bill

P.S. Do say hello to King for me and I'll

write him. - Incidentally, those postcards were just cards. We're well out of town in a regular Army camp of tremendous size. I've seen no more of Vanderbilt than you. - Oh - yes - restrictions are still heavy so telephoning is still forbidden. We still have more than a week of quarantine! Will call when I'm loose! Guess that's all!

Love,  
Bill

*From Nashville, with his pilot's classification, he went to Maxwell Field, in Alabama, where as a Zombie he had very little idle time.*

Maxwell Field, Alabama  
March 5, 1943

Dear Daddy,

I just started to write a note home when we were called out for our first mail call here, and I found your nice, long letter there and one from Mom, too. I probably won't be able to write as long a letter as I'd like to in reply because I've never been so rushed as I am now so there is no time for anything extra.

I'm awfully sorry I've been so vague about my daily routine and the importance of tests, etc., but I'm still not used to figuring what's military information and what's not, and that has made me perhaps over-cautious. It might sound funny, but really all I've had so far is "Just the beginning", as you said. We have physicals every 2 or 3 months. Nashville was still a weeding out spot, so that they were still making final decisions there whether to let a man go on or disqualify him. It was pretty nearly the same as the one in Atlantic City, but most of the others hadn't had such a stiff one before.

At any rate, I'm now at pre-flight where a

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washout is a washout and whether I make it or not depends entirely on me now, unless I have some exceptional unknown physical defect which shows up later, which I'm sure is not so.

We "Zombies" get hazed thoroughly as part of our training. We must wear oversize insignia and keep it sparkling. We had to scrape the paint off our belt buckles and polish them to a shine. Our shoes must be shined with polish before every "formation" (chow, "Academics", calisthenics, drill, etc.). We must shave every day whether we need to or not. We must clean our fingernails all the time. We must learn all sorts of things to spiel off to the upper-classmen at tongue-twisting speed upon being ordered. Whenever outside, we must walk the rat line (the gutter) in single file to get to our places in formation. The upper-classmen then "dress" on us for formation when they come out 5 minutes later, and we get it if they're out of place. Our rooms are ready for inspection before classes, which means we must be up at 4:30 in order to shave and get everything done and fall out at 5:45. Tomorrow comes the big Saturday morning inspection (S.M.I.) which is devastating so they say. One scrubs and scrubs and still gets gigged. I am afraid I can't say what our studies are, but they're interesting and I hope I can do well in them. Maybe I can tell you about them later.

I'll try your point system when I get a chance – maybe Sunday, but I'm afraid there won't be time here. I'm afraid my writing will be very scanty for a while. Gotta run now – I'll write Sunday, I think. Thanks again for the wonderful long letter.

Lots of love,  
Bill

P.S. I have written Dr. St. John, and gotten another letter from him – (while at Nashville). He says Choate's proud of me and is using me as an example. I am very proud of that – and of your praise, too. I'll try to live up to it.

*Including his account of a review by the President, at Maxwell Field.*

Maxwell Field, Alabama  
April 15, 1943

Dear Mom,

How awfully long since I've written, eh? I'm terribly sorry. There are just so many things to do, and I'm a little more tired than when I started, so I don't jump so quickly toward that pen and paper in a spare moment. I had been counting on a little longer talk than we had last Sunday, too. It was swell to hear your voice and Richie's and I'm very thankful just for that, but we didn't get a chance to ask or answer many questions, did we? I am *so* sorry Daddy got called out, too. Ain't it always the way! I was lucky at that since I think the operator did me a favor in getting my call through so soon, and I'd been waiting ever since right after lunch. I guess the thing to do is for me to call some night when I get the chance and hope to catch you all in. If not, we won't make it long and I'll have to wait.

Things have really been cooking around here – as per usual and worse. I understand we're going to leave for Primary a week ahead of schedule so we don't have a lot more than one week of classes (day and night), and we ought to be at Primary in two weeks from all indications. That's when we start to fly, so you can imagine how impatient I am getting.

Got a letter from Trig the other day. He's at

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Texas A. & M. now studying radio in the Marine School of Aviation. Evidently he's going to be an Aviation Cadet after all, and there seems to be some rule in the Marines that they must have some second rating that they can fall back on if they wash out, so he's taking radio for four or five months. If you've heard any clearer or further information, I'd like to hear it. I hope he makes it O.K. He certainly ought to. He has what it takes.

Today is another one of those days which should be very memorable, but has been so rushed and systemized that I've almost forgotten its importance. You see, we were reviewed by the President today! You may see some pictures in a paper or newsreel of him at the ceremonies here.

Our part of the affair was very short and unimpressive. The whole Cadet body was massed on the apron in front of the hangars according to Wing (Division), Group (Regiment), and Squadron (Battalion). The President was in that big shiny open cruising Chrysler we saw at the World's Fair and was followed by a long line of dull-finished Army officers' cars. There were some big shirts among them, two special ones in the car with the President, but I didn't recognize them.

The main part of the show was the air review which was really quite splendid. First there was a review of a tremendous bunch of basic training planes, and then a whole pile of AT-6s (Advanced Trainers) took off from our field and then passed in review, dipping their wings in salute as they passed the President. It was quite a thrilling sight. I was particularly absorbed in the close formation take-offs that the ATs made. They just seemed to go on and on forever, one trio after another. And they certainly got their wheels up quickly. It was very pretty to watch. It was quite a thrill

to watch the BTs arriving from miles around, too. They just formed a big circle and kept milling around like a herd of cattle, getting bigger and bigger all the time and suddenly coming over the field in excellent formation when the signal was given. Of course, the big circle was far away, but we could see them anyway – hordes of little specks in the sky.

The biggest thrill to me was yesterday during the practice when we could get away with gazing after it was all over, and I watched those ATs peel off one by one to come in and land. They were peeling off for most of an hour before they all got in and I never tired of watching them. I certainly will be disappointed if I can't do that some time.

One might think we'd delay things a day for all the classes we missed, etc., on account of the review for the President – but no – we just went to classes last night instead! To top things off we had a final on Naval Forces which is a tough course to begin with and we've cut off a couple of hours on it already. In spite of it all, I think I got 100 on the darn thing anyway. That'll help, if it comes through. We'll soon see.

Well, you might say, at least since we're on extra hours studying and did all that drilling, etc., they'll take it easy on calisthenics for a day or so any who. But no – we don't miss any of our schedules here for anything – we just came back from a 7-mile run all around the airport! It didn't bother me at all, though, so you can see that little Willie is being well taken care of. I'm sleepy, yes, but still fairly on the ball, although maybe a little more critical than at first – but if I can run 7 miles – or shall we say jog – but at a fast pace – and sprint at the end and still not be winded or shaky or anything – I guess I'll live a while

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longer!

Thanks for the newspaper. It hasn't had too much of personal interest lately, but it's fun to read any who just 'cause it talks about home and I guess I'll see lots of familiar names in it as the days roll by. Thanks, too, for letting me reverse the charges on the call.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gotta stop now. Sorry I haven't written. I'll try to keep going better. Have been a lot of time coaching on physics and also helping Jersey Zombies with their troubles. More soon. —

Lots of love to all,  
Bill

*Something about his standings in his studies at Maxwell Field.*

Maxwell Field, Alabama  
April 29, 1943

Dear Mom,

Doesn't time fly, though! Well, classes are all over now and pre-flight is about to become a memory. I know where and when I am shipping strangely enough, but that is restricted — so you'll have to wait till you hear from me to find out about it.

Strangely enough my upper class subjects have been doing very well until this last week when spirits, ambition and all the rest suffered severely for a while and marks correspondingly — of course, just when the marks were finals and counted half the final mark. Still and all I survived without too much damage. I had 100% average through a month's physics, tests every other day — so you can see how well-trained I was by Mr. Niehaus, in spite of my doubts at the time. I

messed up some simple arithmetic on the final though that spoiled a perfect record and gave me 95 so for all my work I only got a 97.5 for the course — but then — things are in a fine state when one complains about the last 2 ½%, aren't they! But so near to perfect is exasperating when just a little adding or something spoiled things. Enough of that, though. Physics was the important course — the others with Physics all added up to a 95.67 average, and for purely selfish purposes of pride I go on to say that my final pre-flight average comes to something like 96.33. I have had my hey-day now where my training made it easy for me — now we shall see what I can do with engines and things that most of the other fellows know about. I can't begin to say how grateful I am for all the wonderful education I've had in the past — no matter how dubious I was in the past as to its merits. There's absolutely no one I've bumped into yet that I'd trade pasts with now. Choate and Haverford are two in a million, and you can't imagine now how much I think each day of each of them and of the wonderful parents who were able to pick them out and make it possible for me to go. Choate is still something of a luxury of the aristocracy in one way of thinking, but it has given me a pride and feeling of being on equal terms with anyone that I couldn't have gotten from high school. And Haverford is a never-ending source of friends. And the stiffness of both of them has been no end of help.

\* \* \* \* \*

I'm sorry this letter is so confused. It rather shows my state of mind right now — excited and depressed — and tired all rolled into one. Here's hoping flying will change things as I'm sure it will.

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I'm getting a swell tan now as summer weather has already started here. We've been wearing shorts and no shirts during calisthenics this week and my face and neck are exposed many hours a day – and I guess things'll be even hotter where I'm going and since this is still only April.

\* \* \* \* \*

I happened to notice in the back of a recent "Life" a picture of a .45 ready for action and stripped – I thought you might be interested to see all those parts and think of the fact that in one morning at gunnery school we had to learn the names of those parts and be able to assemble them – and do the same with several other guns – which were less intricate, however, except the big machine guns. But all that in one morning was a pretty tall order, I thought. That's our pace, these days, though.

\* \* \* \* \*

Have to stop now – will try to write Kitty soon – and all of you. 'Bye now –

Lots of love,  
Bill

*From Avon Park, Florida, an early letter showing how his skiing helped his flying. He puts in his strong urging about Richard's education, including his wish that any funds we might have planned for Bill's future use be now used for his brother. Only part of his letter is included.*

Avon Park, Florida  
May 16, 1943

Dear Daddy,

Golly, I haven't written you in a long time. I'm so sorry, 'cause I know how much you want to hear from me – but then the other letters are to you, too, and I don't have time for much writing as you know. This weekend,

however, I've been much more at ease in my mind because of a good flight yesterday to finish off the week, so I've been spending my time catching up on letters sadly overdue. We had Open Post last night while I wrote Mom and Molly. Everyone was gone so it was nice and quiet for concentration. From all reports Avon Park is absolutely of no use as a refuge on Open Post, and I didn't miss a thing by not going out.

\* \* \* \* \*

One of the most important pieces of news from home that I haven't commented on is about Richie and Choate. Naturally I'm especially interested in that and wonder if any decisions one way or another have been reached. How lonesome a household it will be without even Richie around. But with Richie alone so much of the time when you and Mom just plain have to be out – it certainly looks like Choate would be the best thing for him if it's possible. I imagine expense is a considerable problem and I don't know much about that but may I make this suggestion. Use my share – what's left, that is, for not finishing college – for him. There are a lot of things that coax me to urge this. In the first place, there is at least a 50-50 chance that I'll never have the chance to finish college. Then there's the possibility of a flying career after the war that would probably run into a paying job without further education expenses. And Richie's education is so important. As I've written before in these last few months, I can't begin to express my gratitude for all the wonderful education I've gotten whether or not I liked it 100% then. And I may never get to use mine. But if I can, I will use it for all the things I'm fighting for now. Richie's beyond the danger zone of fighting age, though, but will soon be a powerful part of our American community, and if he can get on the right beam through Choate,

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that'll be no end of important. Another thing to add to my argument is that I'll probably have a good collection of War Bonds to help me if I should want to go back to college – and I could probably get a job for a while. I know that all doesn't fit in with your ideas, since you want to see us all the way through, and if you can – O.K. – but I'll be just as grateful – but if such thoughts had occurred to you and you were holding some money in reserve for me thinking it only fair, I want you to know I'd like to have it used for Richie's advantage if necessary. I am old enough to keep myself going now if a bad depression should come – while he won't be – and any special education he can get extra now which will be behind him when such a possible difficulty might arise I think is highly to be desired.

\* \* \* \* \*

As for flying, - I just love it. I'm having as good a time here as anyone, I guess, and if I can just stay here, I'll be very happy. I guess I'll probably solo next week some time, although nothing's been said about it. One usually solos around 8 or 9 hours and has until 12 or possibly 14 to do it. I have 6 hours and 10 minutes now – so I ought to solo within the next 6 days, I think, with luck. I can do all the required maneuvers, including landing and taking off all by myself now, so it's just a matter of practice for perfection. I get no end of thrill when he lets me zoom around. He calls it coordination exercises, but I call it zooming. I guess I'm not supposed to like it much and am supposed to work away from them – but I just swoop around and sit into them – something like the feeling of a slow stem-christi in skiing – and have the time of my life. He nods his head and says "O.K.", so I guess it's O.K.. I think I mentioned getting sick after 45 minutes of joyriding my third time up, but I've been O.K. since and

no one seemed worried or surprised about that one time. We were practically "blackened out" several time, so I really did get the works and the newness of it all after a little contemplation seemed rather ghastly, I guess, in spite of my confidence in the plane and the pilot. Now I can do spins practically without even losing color as I seemed to at first, and I haven't been sick at my stomach but that once. It really is a new feeling, though, that one has to become accustomed to – to have one's stomach and eyes and everything sink and just seem to press right through the seat. It isn't bad now, though.

I must close now, so I can write a note to Richie, too, before I set to work on Ground School work for tomorrow. I hope you're getting a little rest every now and then – and best of luck with your garden and chickens. I don't know how you can find time for them, too, with all you have to do anyway. I hope everything comes up nicely though. Wish I could help eat it – but I'm afraid November is the soonest I can hope for a furlough. 'Bye now –

Much love,  
Bill, Jr.

*More about his first flying, sports, etc.*

Avon Park, Florida  
Saturday Nite, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1943

Dear Mom,

First I'll try to answer some of your questions before I forget them. To begin with – you guessed practically right on the F T D only I think it's Flying Training *Detachment* instead of *Division*.

Next – my instructor. For some reason or other I kinda think it best to leave the name

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out. I don't think it's a secret or anything, but there's no reason forming unknown "enemies" for him if I should be washed out. It probably would be 100% my own fault if I wash out, and you might never have further contact with him – but I think you see my point. And the name isn't very important anyway. Besides, he's from New Jersey, too – although the more central or southern section I think – but you might just happen to know him or someone who knew him – and all personal connections are strictly to be avoided, as I see it. So let's forget the name. I'll tell you about him, though. He's tall and heavily built but not "Johnny-type" – quite. He has a very round rather jolly face although rather young and attractive when serious. He can fly the blazes out of that plane, and from the first ride on, I've had perfect confidence in him, and feel safe in anything he or I do while he's there. He's quite quiet and doesn't blow a fuse like the traditional instructor – of which there are a great many here. He has been letting me go along slowly and seemed to have my number perfectly right from the start. Now we're even with or ahead of average, because after I got started – I went through the different things pretty fast. Today I'm feeling particularly contented because we shot a couple of landings and take-offs today and I made them all – with help on the first one, but before we came back, he was just sitting up there in front with his arms up on the cockpit cowling and I was doing it all! More fun! The hardest thing is keeping attitude constant and RPM too, while in the landing pattern. The pattern is what they stress here and is really the whole landing. Molly can probably tell you what a landing and take-off pattern is, although I guess the actual rules and design are different according to each local airport's preference. – Anywho – definite progress was made today, and I hope before next week's out to be assuming

the privileges and distinctions of the long revered solo-flier! Anyway, my instructor will know when the time has come, and so I leave it all to him. Another thing which might ease your mind, although I know you have faith in flying – we always wear parachutes and are thoroughly instructed in their use and care. Besides which those Stearmans are very solidly constructed, so that no one ever gets hurt in them – or hardly ever. I don't think this field has any casualties on its list. It's one of the best schools – where the West Point Flying Cadets used to come. All in all right from the start I've had perfect confidence in the personnel and equipment and its care here and want you to, too. Incidentally we got it officially the other day – 59% of the last class washed out! So I'm really going to have to be on the ball all the time to get through here.

Another thing – don't worry about the moccasins etc., any more. I thought of them, too, on the way down. But we only swim in this one lake here, and that is very clear and not very big. There are houses around most of it and the part we use has a good sandy beach all around – all of which is highly "unconducive" to snake comfort and hide outs. Our walking, too, is confined to the drill-athletic field and the area in between the hotel and our barracks – and of course the tar surfaced Airport – all of that also being highly "unconducive" to snake habitation. However, you know me and snakes, and I'll be careful, you may be sure, if ever I should get in a likely snake habitat.

We've developed quite a spirited bunch here from old I-9 at Maxwell, and we do most everything together with amazing results. We've really got the Officers gaping around here. We drill and sing and play like something they've never seen here, I guess – or

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## **2015 REUNION ITINERARY**

### **Thursday, September 24, 2015**

Arrival and check in day. The hospitality room and registration table will be open all day with heavy hors d'oeuvres served in the afternoon and evening. No evening meal is planned.

7:00 PM – All group informational meeting in the Kansa room (next door to the Hospitality room).

### **Friday, September 25, 2015**

9:30 AM – Depart hotel for tour of the National World War One Museum at Liberty Memorial, with lunch at Museum Café. (This museum and memorial is the only one of its type in the country and is extremely well done! It also offers panoramic views of KC.)

12:30 PM - Depart Liberty Memorial for return to hotel

2:00 – 4:00 PM – Veteran led presentations and discussions in Kansa A&B room.

5:00 PM – Social hour before dinner.

6:00 PM – Individual Group Banquets. 451<sup>st</sup>/455<sup>th</sup>/465<sup>th</sup> in Wyandot room; 461<sup>st</sup> in Osage A room; 484<sup>th</sup> in Osage B&C room, 485<sup>th</sup> in Sioux room.

### **Saturday, September 26, 2015**

9:00 AM - Depart hotel for tour of the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and museum. Lunch at the Library's indoor Atrium overlooking a beautiful outdoor courtyard.

12:15 PM – Depart Truman Library for a quick stop to view (from the outside) the Truman home. National Park Service rangers will step on each motorcoach to give an overview of the home's history. (Our group will be far too large to tour inside the home. They only take very small groups inside.)

12:30 PM - Depart the Truman home for return to hotel.

2:00 – 4:00 PM – Veteran led presentations and discussions in the Kansa A&B room.

5:00 PM – Social hour before dinner with cash bar.

6:00 PM – All Groups Banquet, Roger Locher, featured guest speaker in the Shawnee Ballroom.

2:00 – 4:00 PM – Veteran led presentations and discussions in Kansa A&B room.

5:00 PM – Social hour before dinner.

6:00 PM – All Groups Banquet, Roger Locher, featured guest speaker in the Shawnee Ballroom.

### **Sunday, September 27, 2015**

9:00 AM – Memorial Service

NOON – Depart hotel for lunch and tour of Steamboat Arabia museum.

3:30 PM – Depart Steamboat Arabia Museum for return to hotel

6:00 PM – Casual Farewell Banquet in the Wyandot room.

**No cost to veterans for Registration fee, Group Dinner, Banquet or Farewell Dinner.**

**2015**

**REUNION HOTEL INFORMATION**

**Kansas City, Missouri**

**September 24 – 27, 2015**

**Hilton Kansas City Airport Hotel**

**8801 NW 112th Street, Kansas City, Missouri, 64153**

**Phone 1-816-891-8900 Ask for In-House Reservations**

**Group Booking Code is: BOM**

**If You Prefer, Reserve Online:**

**<http://tinyurl.com/puf96ur>**

- **Our host hotel has just finished a multi-million dollar renovation and it turned out very nicely. I think you'll enjoy the beauty and comfort of this hotel and a staff that seems to go out of their way to work with their guests. They truly enjoy hosting military groups like ours and are actively seeking more groups like us.**
- **The complimentary airport shuttle (an actual stand up bus) runs every 15 minutes, 24 hours. It is helpful to call the hotel from a house phone in the airport to let them know you've arrived. There are bus stop type shelters outside that say Hotel/ Courtesy shuttle. From there you can wave down the Hilton shuttle when you see it.**
- **Room rates will be \$99 per night plus tax and will include a full, hot breakfast buffet for up to two people and two drink coupons per room, per day.**
- **Parking is free.**

**Bomb Groups Reunion**

September 24-27, 2015

Kansas City, Missouri



Please complete and return this form by August 27, 2015. However, late registrations will be accepted. Cancellations may be made with a full refund if you find later that you cannot attend so please, get this form in soon.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Group \_\_\_\_\_ Squadron \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse \_\_\_\_\_ Family/Guest Names \_\_\_\_\_

(Note: Please enter names as you would like them to appear on the name tags)

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Registration Fee \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$15.00 per person Subtotal \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
# of persons including Veteran (DO NOT include cost for Veteran)

**Friday, September 25th**

**Tour National World War I Museum and Liberty Memorial. Box lunch at the Over There Cafe.**

\_\_\_\_\_ @ \$39.00 per person Subtotal \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
# of persons including Veteran (INCLUDE cost for Veteran)

**Individual Bomb Group Evening Dinner**

Grilled Salmon \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$40.00 per person Subtotal \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
# of persons including Veteran (DO NOT include cost for Veteran)

Roast Pork Loin with Apple Chutney \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$40.50 per person Subtotal \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
# of persons including Veteran (DO NOT include cost for Veteran)

Ravioli \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$29.50 per person Subtotal \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
# of persons including Veteran (DO NOT include cost for Veteran)

**Saturday, September 26th**

**Tour Truman Presidential Library & Museum. Box lunch at Library Indoor Atrium.**

\_\_\_\_\_ @ \$30.00 per person Subtotal \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
# of persons including Veteran (INCLUDE cost for Veteran)

**Combined Group Banquet/Program**

Kansas City Strip 10 oz. \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$52.50 per person Subtotal \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
# of persons including Veteran (DO NOT include cost for Veteran)

Chicken Oscar \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$41.75 per person Subtotal \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
# of persons including Veteran (DO NOT include cost for Veteran)

Vegetable En Crouete \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$36.75 per person Subtotal \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
# of persons including Veteran (DO NOT include cost for Veteran)

**Sunday, September 27th**

**Tour of Steamboat Arabia Museum. Box lunch at their atrium cafe.**

\_\_\_\_\_ @ \$43.00 per person Subtotal \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
# of persons including Veteran (INCLUDE cost for Veteran)

**Farewell Combined Group Dinner**

Grilled Herb Pork Loin \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$30.25 per person Subtotal \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
# of persons including Veteran (DO NOT include cost for Veteran)

Southern Style Cornmeal Crusted Catfish \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$31.00 per person Subtotal \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
# of persons including Veteran (DO NOT include cost for Veteran)

Vegetarian Lasagne \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$25.50 per person Subtotal \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
# of persons including Veteran (DO NOT include cost for Veteran)

EMERGENCY CONTACT: \_\_\_\_\_

GRAND TOTAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

Could You Use a Wheelchair? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS REGISTRATION FORM AND MAIL ALONG WITH YOUR CHECK TO:

Bomb Group Reunion. Attn: Dave Blake, 648 Lakewood Road, Bonner Springs, KS 66012-1804

## **A NOTE FROM THE REUNION COMMITTEE CHAIR PERSON**

I believe the tours that await you in Kansas City are first class venues that you will really enjoy. For some, there may be more walking involved than you'd care for but rest assured, the venues have wheelchairs on hand and we will also be carrying some on the tour buses. Please don't hesitate to ask for a ride as we'll be more than happy to accommodate you!

First, on Friday, September 25<sup>th</sup> we will see the World War One Museum at Liberty Memorial. This is the only Memorial of its type in the country and has been designated by Congress as the nation's official WWI museum and monument. The museum is extremely well done and nationally renowned. It offers a great insight into the war that many of our Bomb Group veteran's fathers fought in and illustrates that "some things just never change"! Atop the museum is the WWI Monument that was dedicated by President Coolidge and the Allied Commanders in 1921 in front of 150,000 people. The 230 foot tall tower offers panoramic views of downtown Kansas City and the surrounding area. You can take an elevator to near the top of the tower, although there are 45 stairs to get all the way up to the observation deck for breathtaking 360 degree views. We will have lunch in the Over There Café before returning to the hotel.

The next day, Saturday, September 26<sup>th</sup>, we will visit the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum. You will see first-hand how this humble and simple man from Independence, Missouri led our country and made some really difficult decisions after the death of FDR during the height of WWII. You will be amazed at the simplicity and unpretentiousness of the "most powerful man in the world". This is a great museum that our Veterans and wives will especially relate to. We will have lunch in the indoor atrium that overlooks the outdoor courtyard where the graves of the Trumans are located. We will then go the mile or so to view the Truman home from the outside, where he and Bess lived from the time they married until his death in 1972. A National Park Service Ranger will board each bus to give an overview of the home. Their home, although quite large by yesteryear's standards is remarkable in its simplicity and that of the surrounding residential neighborhood where the President took daily walks with no Secret Service protection.

I hope you will be able to stay over on Sunday, September 27<sup>th</sup>. For those who can stay, we will take a tour of the Steamboat Arabia, a cargo and passenger steamboat that ferried supplies and people up and down the Missouri River, aka Big Muddy. This boat sank in 1856 and settled to a depth of about 45 feet of mud after the river channel changed over the course of time. It was discovered and a real treasure chest of ship parts and artifacts were retrieved. This is truly a fascinating museum and offers a great insight into the clothing, tools, kitchenware and many, many other items of life in the mid-1800s. We will have lunch in the museum's Atrium Café.

In addition to the tours we will have individual group dinners that Friday evening. The 451<sup>st</sup>, 455<sup>th</sup> and 465<sup>th</sup> will meet together as one group and the 461<sup>st</sup>, 484<sup>th</sup> and 485<sup>th</sup> will each have their own group dinner. On Saturday, we will all join together for a formal Group Banquet. Our featured guest speaker that evening will be Roger Locher, an F-4D Weapons Officer and Pilot who was shot down over North Vietnam in 1972. Locher spent a record 23 hair-raising days evading capture before being rescued and returned to friendly territory. Locher says he will consider it an honor to relate his story to our group. He is the nephew of 484<sup>th</sup> member, Dick Yunghans. On Sunday morning after breakfast we will have our Memorial Service to commemorate those who didn't make it home from Italy and also the dear ones we've lost since the last reunion. Then for those who can stay over Sunday, we will have an informal Farewell Banquet that evening.

The lunches we will have during the Friday, Saturday and Sunday tours will be box lunches with some minor variations each day. This might sound a bit boring but they are quick, easy and will allow us an economical lunch without the time and effort of making an additional stop somewhere else.

I think you'll enjoy what is planned and get another healthy dose of Midwestern hospitality. Please remember that it is very helpful if you can get your registration form in early. It helps in managing the hotel room block and also helps plan transportation for the tours. As always you can send your form in and receive a full refund for any reason at all should it become necessary.

*Dave Blake*

Reunion Committee Chair

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

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

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

If you have any questions, you can E-Mail Dave at [dstyves@pmn.com](mailto:dstyves@pmn.com).

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

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

Type of membership desired:		Life: <input type="checkbox"/>	Associate: <input type="checkbox"/>	Child: <input type="checkbox"/>	Father's Name:
First Name:			Last Name:		
Street Address:					
City:		State:		ZIP:	
Phone Number:		E-Mail Address:			
Squadron:		Crew #:		MOS:	ASN:
Check No.			Amount:		

(Continued from page 17)

Avon Park, Florida

June 17, 1943

not since West Point was here anyway. We click especially well in sports and have licked the pants off our D-7 rivals – the other Squadron represented here from Maxwell – and today we took over the upper-class, too. This is all in all sports – football, basketball, baseball, volleyball, obstacle courses, etc. We're really on the ball. Specially 5 of us in basketball. I got 2 of our 3 touchdowns in football, too! It's too bad, but it appears that most of the D-7 are Yankees and a very sad bunch at that, so my I-9 rebels are feeling quite conceited and lordly and are holding their own now in the Civil War. I've long since given up arguing and merely take their riding with a smile which seems to be a satisfactory victory for them, although we still get off into humorous and quite absurd arguments every day – but definitely in the spirit of humor – and just for something to do. So I am accepted in the gang although still scornfully admitted to be "Yankee Barnes" through and through – not one bit "converted" as they claim is the only course for us poor disillusioned Yankees down here.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gotta drop into bed now – maybe some more tomorrow. Flying is certainly strenuous. Say hello to Johnny for me, and ask him please to write while he's got some comparatively spare time. I'll try to write him soon, too. Sorry about the pictures – I have it in mind all the time and will do my best.

Love to all,  
Bill

*Written on his birthday, with plenty of cheerful thanks for presents before he discloses what he fears has been a failure in an important check-ride. Suddenly that awful spectre stands out before him, being washed out. Following the letter in the telegram that beat the letter to us.*

Dear Mom,

I cannot wait another day to send a word of thanks to you all for your wonderful presents. The watch looks just like new and I'm ever so grateful for all the time that must have been put on it. I'm afraid they still missed something, though, 'cause I couldn't get the winding knob out to set it for a long time. Finally I did, though, when something seemed to click into place, but somewhere along the line this morning the knob disappeared altogether, so I seem to have kept up my jinx record on that poor old watch. I'll try to get it fixed somewhere – or send it back if I can find something to send it in. Anywho it did run beautifully until I lost the winding knob this morning and is very beautiful, and I so want to thank you both ever so much for fixing it up so elegantly.

Please thank Richie, too, for all his deeply appreciated assortments. Chewing gum is no end of help in relieving tensed-up energy while in tight spots, flying. And the little pencil is ever so handy. I can fasten it to my fatigues in the buttonhole of my open collar. It's just the right size for use around the plane. It came in specially handy on my map and navigating on my first solo cross-country trip today, which covered some hundred odd miles. So don't let him feel that his gifts were not appreciated.

Molly's bracelet is beautiful and I am wearing it now. It's just as well no A-C was put on it or anything since things are becoming extremely doubtful for your next-to-youngest prodigal. It is really beautiful, though, and I'm very proud of it and ever so grateful.

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And of course I don't have to go into details on how Kitty's collection of pictures hit the spot. For little Willie – six months away from home and family – and down south, too – those pictures fill a spot that nothing else can in my heart. So many times I have wanted to see your faces once again, just for a moment even, to pick up a little courage, and now I have you all right here all the time to reinforce my memory.

I shall try to write each of you very soon and thank you personally, but needless to say the middle of the week doesn't give much time.

Aha – they just called me to the O.D's desk to pick up a package, and I found your cute pipe and tobacco. Thank you ever so much for that, too. As always, there are so many new things to thank you for I'm always afraid I will forget something. That'll last me forever since I don't smoke much anymore, but it's nice to have around on a weekend or when I'm too tired to do anything – even to go to bed – and just sit in a stupor and smoke a pipe. Thanks again – for everything.

In spite of all your lovely presents and letters, I'm afraid I must report that the 17<sup>th</sup> itself was not a happy day. We'll call the 16<sup>th</sup> the happy day you were wishing for me since that's when your presents arrived, and things went fairly well that day.

Perhaps I was over lonely since it was my birthday, but something was definitely stacked agin me from the moment I fell out of my upper deck this morning on. Yesterday I was supposed to have my 40 hour check with the Army, but the schedule was crowded and it was postponed till today. This morning, however, I was told that I wouldn't get it today either, since their schedule was still too full. So I did my cross-country solo accord-

ing to schedule. I was then approaching 50 hours and as yet had spent no time on the maneuvers for the 60 hour check, so I figured I'd take an hour doing my new acrobatics solo, and then take another hour working on the 40 hour stuff again, as usual. So up I went rather tired and in a rush about things generally – wishing I had the fool check-ride out of the way. Anyway – I got up my nerve – and took on my first solo loops and snap-rolls! Boy, oh boy, it takes a pile of nerve to do that first one all alone. But I “dood” it – and pretty well, too – so for an hour I did loops and snap-rolls working more for experience and having a few behind me than for any particular perfection as yet. Needless to say, in spite of my safe-altitude and sufficient knowledge of controlling the plane – when I came down I was pretty well tensed up. To add to my woes I had to land downwind which took two tries to do, and considerable luck and perspiration were used up at that.

So I was pretty much a tired bunch of nerves when I finally pulled up on the line, only to be told to hurry since the Army had changed its mind and was waiting to take me up. Well, with this ample description of my “status quo” at the time, one needn't go further in forecasting the results. I drew a little sawed-off runt of a Lieutenant who's new around here for my checker. He was as much a bundle of nerves as and he thrashed around like a baby up there in front right from the start. He showed no confidence in me at all which was most annoying since it added a new obstacle to be overcome. Any 2-year old would know that a cadet with a clean record of 40 hours could at least take the darn thing up and put it down. – Certainly an Army checker ought to know that. But he acted like a scared rabbit.

Well we went up and did practically nothing

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at all. Chandellas – yes – and I got them perfectly. Then he gave me a couple of stalls (simple) and steep turns and a spin which are all 20 hour stuff – a couple of forced landings which were pretty bad – and then home! No elementary 8s, lazy 8s, pylon 8s, advanced stalls or spins – nothing that I had been working on. The combination of my temper and nerves and a strong noon-day wind finished the job completely by making my altitude and RPM jump all over the plane, especially in turns. I landed pretty well and as we rolled to a stop, I could contain myself no longer and asked the little runt if he *dared breathe now!* Naturally that did it – since one doesn't hand sarcasm to a Lieutenant anywhere – especially a check-ride. Tried to make it sound like a good natured joke, but I doubt if it went over that way. On the way in he asked if I was married! That shut me up – The poor guy was actually scared and was thinking of the wife and kids back home – and his insurance – I'll bet!

Needless to say the net result of this is that I've flunked my 40 hour check. We'll see tomorrow how seriously, but anyhow I'll have to take another ride soon, which may be an elimination ride.

I'm sorry I had to send all this as a report of my birthday, to which you had all given so much devoted attention, but I thought you ought to know all was not well – far from it – and that washing out is no longer on the chance side, but the probability side of the fence. I'll appreciate it if you just don't write about it, though, 'cause I know you'll all be pulling for me and it will only be more weight on the shoulders if you try to encourage me. I'm not quitting at all and will do my best to beat the check. I'd hate so to let you all down. Anyway, there's a peachy Lieutenant who'll probably give me my elimination

ride if I get it, so you can be sure I'll have all the breaks and no mental hazard with him. Please just wait till you hear from me. I'm confident still that it will be good news, since this was the *bad, bad* day, but I'll put all my unbeatable Choate spirit training, Haverford grind-spirit, and Barnes determination in it.

Love to all,  
Bill

## WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

June 19, 1943

Disregard Gruesomosities Letter of Seventeen Check passed Letter Follows Love to all

Bill

(Gruesomosities)

*A pretty nice letter to his younger brother and part of a lovely one written the same day to his mother.*

Avon Park, Florida  
June 20, 1943

Dear Richie,

What say, Small Fry? I hear you paid a visit to Choate recently – and are planning to pay a longer one before long. Jeepers, how time flies! You have a wonderful experience ahead of you, though. There are hard things to get used to – you'll be away from home and in a new kind of surrounding not like any you've been in before unless I miss my guess. But there'll be loads of nice things, too. And although it's awfully hard and I didn't always succeed myself, try to remember all the good things and don't let anything get you down. One thing you'll fit into wonderfully is the organized and well-equipped athletic schedule. You ought to do very well and the sooner you learn to play hard and

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clean but quietly without trying to play grandstand – the sooner you'll get where you want to be in sports. It won't take you long to get into the groove, though. The studies ought not to cause any real trouble either, as long as you really work when you're supposed to. One of the most important things, too, is Chapel, but I guess you'll only find that out from personal experience. I never could quite picture what it would be like before I went and feared it would be annoyingly overdone. But you'll soon get to like it. It's a pretty chapel and the Head is a wonderful speaker. He talks about anything that happens to be on his mind, always trying to make your load a little lighter or easier to carry. Don't let anyone tell you he's old-fashioned or anything – 'cause he's right on the ball in a highly refined way and really knows his oats. He just lives for that school and each and every student in it, and although you may never have much of a long talk with himself, you'll find he, like Daddy, is a wonderful person to talk to in your mind and after a while you'll get so used to his simple dignity and straightforward love for the welfare of everyone that you'll be able to almost figure out what his answer would be to most any problem – and no matter how hard it is to follow that answer – you won't go wrong if you do follow it.

Goodness, I got into quite a sermon, didn't I, as though you were leaving next week or somepin'. It's exciting to think of your going there, though, and even though you get blue sometimes as anyone does anywhere, you'll have some wonderful experiences there.

I wish I could take you for a ride one of these days and show off all my new tricks. Maybe I'll be able to someday, though. Maybe it'll be one of the smooth, big, fast planes you have in your scrap book.

And, goodness, don't let me forget to thank you for the candy and pencil you sent me for my birthday. The pencil is just perfect for flying, too. I can fasten it to my open collar buttonhole and use it on cross-country when it's awfully hard to dig through safety belts and parachute straps into a pocket for another bigger pencil. Thanks a lot, keed!

Gotta run to chow now – Do write and tell me about your trip to Choate and how you like the idea of going there.

'Bye now. Lots of love,  
Bill

Avon Park, Florida  
Sontag, den zwanzigsten

Dear Mon,

I guess you've got all the latest news by now from the rest of the family, and from my letter of the 17<sup>th</sup>. I am so sorry that had to have its anti-climax, but we'll hop that's the last piece of gloom I'll have to send.

\* \* \* \* \*

I've talked mostly acrobatics as far as flying goes lately, but I still get many other thrills up there, and I really spend very little time on acrobatics. As a matter of fact that one ride before my check is the only time I've really worked on them which is just another of the fickleties of fate.

Yesterday, though, I went up early for a quick half hour before I was scheduled to go up with my instructor. The sky was pretty heavily clouded above and to the east, but it was pretty clear to the west. The clouds were the big cumulus billowy variety and very low – only one or two thousand feet up, so things were pretty gloomy down on the airport. I beat it upstairs quickly, though, before any-

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one could decide rain was coming and ground us and sailed off into the smooth air to the west to work on zooming, holding altitude and RPM constant and a few lazy 8s. I had only a little time and soon turned toward home. I was confronted then with one of the most glorious spectacles I've ever seen. The sun was still very early morning low and was just peering over a solid bank of lovely billowy clouds in the east, creating the most wonderful light and shadow effects with tints of pink and blue mixed into the light and dark. I just couldn't help thinking of Waterville covered with snow. It just looked like a lovely snowy, mountainous wilderness in the bright early morning, and I yearned so to clamp on a pair of skis and go swishing up and down those slopes with big billowy semi-transparent clouds of snow flying up on every turn. It was a tremendous thrill anyway to climb up into a hole in the side of one of them and zoom inside, leaving everything behind me – out of sight completely. There were banks of clouds on all sides and below and overhanging above. I just wound around and up and down in these little passages looking below for an opening so I could see what direction traffic was in at the airport hidden straight below. Finally I got a short glimpse way down through a little opening below and after a long time I found a small oval-shaped opening that looked like a green-watered pond in this white mass with the ground as a bottom. So down I zoomed and once again the crowded, complex world surrounded me. I hate to come down from trips like that, but I guess I can hope for many more, and such moments are more highly treasured, I guess, since they are so short and fleeting.

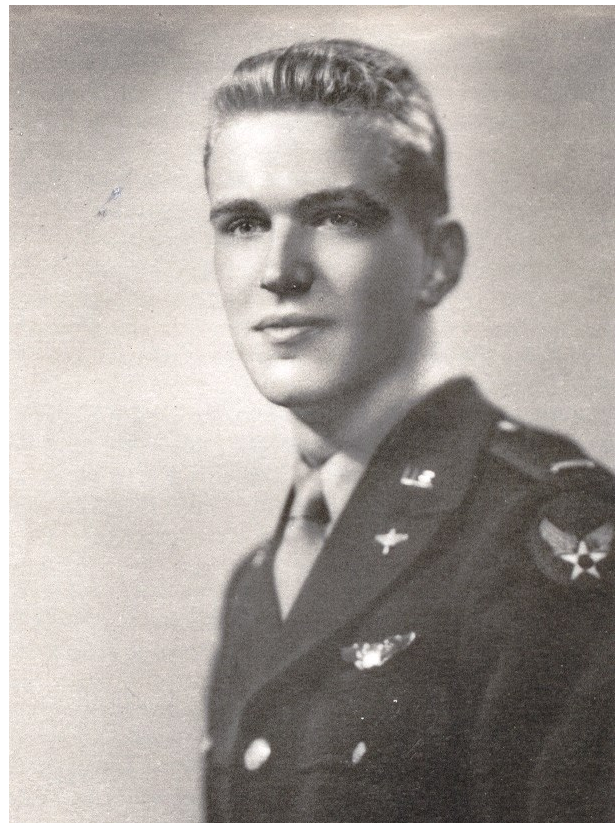
They're certainly meat for a poet or a composer, though, and I wish I could put some of those beauties and thrills in poetry or music

to be made permanent and to let other share the wonder of it all.

Must stop now, but more soon –

Lots of love,  
Bill

*There is more to the Barnes story, but enough for this issue. I'll continue this story in the next issue of the Liberaider.*



*(Continued from page 1)*

Tyndall Field, Florida and is awarded MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) 611 – Aerial Gunner.

About Apr 44 Jim is promoted to Private First Class (Pfc).

About Jun 44 Jim is promoted to Corporal (Cpl).

About Jun-Jul 44 Jim visits family members, to include his Dad, on pre-deployment leave.

17-23 Jul 44 Jim transits to North Africa.

27 Jul 44 Jim's 11-man air crew is assigned to the 766<sup>th</sup> Squadron, 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group (H), 49<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing, Fifteenth Air Force, Italy. The air crew consists of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Arthur E. Farnham, Jr. (Pilot), 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Paul W. Lawrence, Jr. (Co-Pilot), 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Robert W. Eckman (Bombardier), Thomas M. Connolly, Jr. (Engineer/Top Turret Gunner), **Cpl. James G. Erwin (Nose Turret Gunner)**, David M. Holdsworth (Gunner), Franz F. Holscher (Ball Turret Gunner), Carol J. Sanderson (Left Waist Gunner), Henry J. Shay (Tail Gunner), Roscoe E. Teal (Gunner), and Billy J. Walsh, Jr. (Radio Operator/Gunner). The 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group (H) is co-located with the 484<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (H) on Torretta Airfield near Cerignola, Italy. A photo of Jim's aircrew (Farnham #42R) are available <http://461st.org/Crews/766th%20Crews/farnham.html>. Ship #40 is pictured in the background of the photo.

6 Aug 44 Jim flies his first combat air mission on 461<sup>st</sup> BG Mission #76 to Strike the Miramas Marshalling Yard, France in support of the coming Allied invasion of Southern France. The aircraft flown is Ship #57 and the bomb load is nine 500 lb bombs. When landing the B-24 nose wheel is crushed. Jim would later relate in an Oct 88 letter to fellow crewmember Carol "Sandy" Sanderson his recollection that after their plane landed, Colonel Glantzberg (Group Commander) came running over to ask "What happened?" Not realizing who he was talking to, Sandy responded "What do you think happened!" and when Sandy "saw who he was talking to he almost died..." Escort was provided by P-38s and P-51s. The flak was very heavy and accurate. The target was hit and completely destroyed as seen from the air. Flight Time: 7 hours, 55 minutes. Bombing altitude: 22,000 feet.

9 Aug 44 Jim flies on Mission #78 to strike the Almasfuzito Oil Refinery, Hungary. The aircraft flown is Ship #42 and the bomb load is nine 500 lb bombs. Conditions on the attack were ideal – clear weather, no enemy fighters, and "not too much flak." The bombing score was 62% on target (very good).

10 Aug 44 Jim flies on Mission #79 to strike the Ploesti Xenia Oil Refinery, Rumania. The aircraft flown is Ship #55 and the bomb load is nine 500 lb bombs. The target is covered with a smoke screen so the bombing results could not be scored, but are most likely disappointing. Thirteen aircraft receive holes from flak. P-51s flew escort. The flak was like one big cloud, and was very accurate. Flight time: 7 hours, 25 minutes. Bombing altitude: 21,000 feet. Jim later relates in an Oct 88 letter to fellow crewmember Carol "Sandy" Sanderson "The number three mission to Ploesti was exciting when we went into a dive and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Farnham yelled at 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Lawrence flaps, flaps and then took over the flaps himself & leveled the plane off."

13 Aug 44 Jim flies on Mission #81 to strike coastal gun positions in Genoa, Italy. The aircraft flown is Ship #55 and the bomb load is four 1,000 lb bombs. The results are poor – "It seemed

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impossible for the Group to identify the assigned gun positions from the air.” No fighter escort provided. Encountered no enemy fighters, but ran into very accurate flak. Missed the target. Flight time: 6 hours, 45 minutes. Bombing altitude: 21,000 feet.

14 Aug 44 Jim flies on Mission #82 to strike coastal gun positions near Frejus/St. Raphael, France. The aircraft flown is Ship #52 and the bomb load is four 1,000 lb bombs. Conditions for this mission were ideal. 64.5% of the bombs fall within 1,000 feet of the gun positions. “A few weeks after this mission, a member of the Bomb Group who visited the scene of this target returned from France with the information that where the coastal guns had once been located there was nothing but the biggest crater he had ever seen.” Encountered no fighter or flak opposition. Target hit with very good pattern. Good mission. Flight time: 6 hours, 5 minutes. Bombing altitude: 18,000 feet.

18 Aug 44 Jim flies on Mission #85 to strike the Alibunar Airdrome, Yugoslavia. The aircraft flown is Ship #40 and the bomb load is 32 fragmentation bombs. Jim notes this as his “Next to last mission in Ship #40.” “Nine enemy aircraft received direct hits and three others received near misses. A total of fifty-five enemy aircraft were counted from the photographs taken by the Group. With good weather and neither enemy fighters nor anti-aircraft defenses, all planes in the Group formation returned safely to the base without damage or casualties.”

23 Aug 44 Jim flies on Mission #88 to strike the Markersdorf Airdrome, t. Polten/Vienna, Austria. Double credit is given to aircrews for this particularly dangerous mission. The aircraft flown is Ship #51 and the bomb load is probably 32 fragmentation bombs. “Seven enemy aircraft on the airdrome were hit and three others received near misses. Forty two enemy aircraft parked on the airdrome can be counted in the Group pictures.” “...Enemy fighter opposition was encountered. Upward of seventy ME-109s and FW-190s were seen between Lake Balaton and the target. As a result of repeated attacks, five of these were destroyed, six probably destroyed, and one damaged. The cover provided by P-51s on this mission was exceptionally good. There was no flak at the target.” “For the second time since the Group had been operating in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations, a strange airplane joined the bomber formation on this mission.” “...A black B-17 with white vertical stabilizers and elevators joined the formation and flew wing position for approximately thirty minutes. At the end of that time it fired upon the formation and then turned away when the fire was returned.” Jim notes in his Oct 88 letter to “Sandy” Sanderson that “Mission #7 & #8 Group Mission #88 was the only fighter attack I remember as we approached Markersdorf, Austria. It was the black pilots in the P-51s (aka the Tuskegee Airmen) that saved us as the ME-109s & FW-190s shot up ‘A’ flight. We were in ‘C’ flight! Also I remember the B-17 that joined us on this flight as mentioned in the official historical report.” P-51s & P-38s provided escort. Approximately 15 minutes before the IP, German fighters shot down ten B-24s in the group in front of the 767<sup>th</sup> Squadron and one from the 767<sup>th</sup>. No flak until the bombers left the target. Flight time: 6 hours, 50 minutes. Bombing altitude: 21,000 feet.

24 Aug 44 Jim’s pilot “2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Arthur E. Farnham Jr. and a skeleton crew washed out the “Kissed Off Kids” (Ship #43) in a practice flight when compelled to crash land it in a field near the base.” The aircraft had completed 50 missions with other crews “previous to this accident. This was the first plane ever lost to the Group on a practice mission since the beginning of combat operations on 2 April 1944.” Jim states in an Oct 88 letter to fellow crewmember “Sandy” Sanderson that “The truth of what really happened was never reported or Farnham would have been locked up!” Jim told this story to me several times. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Art Farnham offered Jim the opportunity to go with him on this practice flight. Jim politely declined.

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Since the flight would be conducted in friendly airspace, the gunners (like Jim) were not required. As later related to Jim by one of the crewmembers who participated in the flight, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Farnham was trying to impress them with how safe the B-24 aircraft was by repetitively shutting down, and restarting, the four aircraft engines in flight. Apparently, something went wrong and one or more of the engines would not restart, resulting in the crash landing. The Navigator (Mel Hans) was paralyzed in the crash-landing and would remain a paraplegic until he died eight years later. When Jim visited Mel in the hospital, Mel told him that he didn't want 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Farnham blamed for the mishap, so the story of what "really happened" was apparently never told by those who participated in the flight to whoever may have investigated the cause of the crash. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Bob Eckman comments decades later in his article "Bail-Out!" published in the December 2006 edition of the 461<sup>st</sup> Liberaider, that "Art Farnham had been pretty shaky since the crash landing and blamed himself for the accident. He lost some of his self-confidence and it affected the entire crew, including me." Note the "Kissed Off Kids" is later salvaged and placed back into service as Ship #49. The aircraft subsequently crashes due to flak damage near Vienna, Austria on 21 Feb 45. There is a picture of the nose art on the "Kissed Off Kids" on the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group website.

- 12 Sep 44      Jim flies on Mission #100 which is a supply transport mission to Lyon/Bron Airdrome, France. The aircraft is loaded with "18 Gas Drums, 900 Gal Gas, 6 Barrels Oil, & Ammunition." This is one of seven supply missions flown by the Group 10-22 Sep 44 to help supply Allied forces advancing in Southern France.
  
- 13-22 Sep 44   Jim flies on one other supply mission to Lyon/Bron Airdrome, France (Mission #s 101-105). The specific mission # is unknown.
  
- Mid Sep 44      Jim and his aircrew receive the Air Medal in recognition of their first ten successful combat air missions with Mission #7/8 to Markersdorf, Austria being counted as a double-credit mission. The Air Medal is awarded for "Heroic actions or meritorious service while participating in aerial flight."
  
- 25 Sep 44      Jim flies on Mission #107 to strike submarines evacuating Germans in the Athens area, Greece. The aircraft flown is Ship #40 (which Jim notes as his last in #40) and the bomb load is nine 500 lb bombs. "The score of the mission was 24% in the target area. The only crew lost to combat by the Group during the month was lost on this mission. This plane left the formation before reaching the target but failed to return to base." Target: dock installations. No fighter escort provided as it was not needed. Flak was weak. Newton's crew went down and crash landed on an island that the British had just captured. They returned to the 767<sup>th</sup> Squadron later. Flight time: 6 hours, 40 minutes.
  
- 26 Sep 44      Jim writes: "Dear Dad, It seems like yesterday that I left you at the train station in Tennessee but I know by the number of things that have happened since that this is not so. Our crew has flown combat missions from one end of Europe to the other. A few days ago we received the air medal for the missions carried out so far. Since I arrived in Italy, I have visited several cities: Rome, Naples, Foggia, Bari and many smaller towns. Rome is still a beautiful city. This city by some miracle escaped any serious damage. War has left many homeless and hungry people in Italy. The United States and her Allies will have a big job this winter keeping these people from serious exposure and starvation." Jim closes: "...Well I guess you wondered where I disappeared to well, you know what a hell of a writer I am and as usual I'll promise to write more in the future." "...PS: You may wonder also why I am

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still a corporal, well you know the Army, they'll promise you anything – but try and get it. Our crew now has the big total of eleven missions.”

- 1 Oct 44      2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Arthur E. Farnham Jr. (Jim's crew's Pilot) and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Robert W. Eckman (Jim's crew's Bombardier) are awarded the Soldier's Medal. The Soldier's Medal is awarded for "Heroism not involving actual conflict with an armed enemy." My guess is that the medals were awarded to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lts Farnham and Eckman for courageous acts coincident with the 24 Aug 44 practice flight crash landing.
- 4 Oct 44      Jim flies on Mission #108 to strike the Munich West Marshalling Yard, Germany. The result was "a superior bombing mission but was marked by disastrous losses over the target. The Group was the second of sixteen Groups of the Fifteenth Air Force over the West Marshalling Yard at Munich." Despite the loss of seven planes out of the formation during the bomb run, the bombing was superior. Seventy percent of the bombs dropped were plotted within 1000 feet of the briefed aiming point." "...Sixteen of nineteen planes which returned from the target were damaged by flak but there were no casualties. A total of seventy two officers and men were missing in action in the seven planes lost to the intense, accurate, and heavy flak over the target. The losses over this target were the heaviest ever sustained by the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group from flak." Jim relates in a 1988 letter to fellow crewmember Franz Holscher that "Seven out of nine aircraft in our 766<sup>th</sup> squadron were shot down. Only our crew and the lead crew got home that day! Even though I was shot down twice on later missions, I'm sure this was my toughest target."
- Oct 44 – Mar 45 Jim flies on ten of the 92 missions (Mission #110 – 202) flown by the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group 7 Oct 44 – 25 Mar 45. Which missions he flew during this period is indeterminable with the official records and personal notes available. I do recall Jim mentioning several of the cities bombed during this period as targets he flew over. These include Vienna, Austria (Bob Eckman's article suggests three missions); locations in Yugoslavia; Augsburg, Germany; and possibly Innsbruck, Austria. Also, fifty-four other missions are scheduled Oct 44 – Mar 45 but not flown mostly due to unfavorable weather conditions. I recall Jim mentioning that on one of his missions (perhaps one of these ten), his plane was badly damaged and had to make an emergency landing in the "Po Valley" of Northern Italy, just inside of the Allied front line at the time. Jim said the plane had two feathered engines and that one of the two remaining operational engines was spitting oil over the wing and the other was vibrating badly due to flak damage to the propeller.
- Nov 44      Jim develops a skin disease called scabies. Scabies is "a contagious skin disease caused by a parasitic mite that burrows under the skin to deposit eggs, causing intense itching." Because Scabies is contagious, Jim is quarantined in the Cerignola hospital and removed from flight status pending his recovery. I recall Jim saying that, at the time, he wasn't disappointed by the news of his "grounding" because, as his recent 4 Oct 44 mission to Munich Germany) had demonstrated, staying on the ground (even in a hospital) was a lot healthier than flying in combat.
- 19 Nov 44      Jim's crew flies on Mission #137 in a B-24 named the "Strictly G.I." to strike the Vosendorf Oil Refinery, Vienna, Austria. Cpl. Roscoe Teal fills in for Jim as the Nose Turret Gunner and a replacement radio operator/gunner (Sgt. Percy A. Peterson, who is killed on the mission by a flak burst) fills in as a waist gunner. "Despite nine-tenths under cast which necessitated pathfinder bombing the flak was extremely accurate. Eight of the twenty-six planes over the target were hard hit by flak, one was lost, one man was killed, and another was wounded.

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The plane that was lost was flown by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Arthur E. Farnham Jr.” Jim’s crew is declared “Missing in Action.” The aircraft loss is classified “FLK-CR (Flak Damage- Crashed) near Duboj” in Bosnia, Yugoslavia. There is a photo of the nose art on the “Strictly G.I.” on the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group website.

About Dec 44 Jim recovers from scabies and is returned to flight status. Since his crew is Missing in Action, Jim is used as an individual replacement to fill by-mission vacancies in other crews. During one mission, Jim is used as a waist gunner (vice his usual position as the Nose Turret Gunner). Jim told me that he did not like being a waist gunner because of the freezing cold and constant wind blowing in his face. Jim preferred the nose turret.

27 Dec 44 Jim’s crew under the command of 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Arthur E. Farnham, Jr. returns to duty. According to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Bob Eckman, in an excellent account of his experience entitled “Bail-Out!” that was published in the Dec 06 edition of the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group Newsletter, The Liberaider, the “Strictly G.I.” lost two engines on the same side of the aircraft when returning from Vienna, Austria 19 November rendering the aircraft uncontrollable so the crew had to “bail out” at an altitude of 16,000 feet over Yugoslavia. With the assistance of “Chetnick” underground fighters, and a team from the OSS (Office of Strategic Services), forerunner of the CIA, the crew (and 13 others) were eventually airlifted out of Yugoslavia by DC-3 transport aircraft with 36 P-51s and a full Group of P-38s for fighter cover and brought back to Italy.

23 Jan 45 Jim’s crew’s pilot (1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Arthur E. Farnham Jr.) is awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross which is awarded for “Heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight.” I believe 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Farnham earned the award in recognition of his courage (noted in Bob Eckman’s article) in going all the way to the tail of the out-of-control “Strictly G.I.” to ensure all other crewmembers had exited, and that Sgt. Percy Peterson was indeed killed by flak, before he bailed out of the aircraft himself.

About Feb 45 Jim is promoted to Sergeant (Sgt).

About Mar 45 Jim is promoted to Staff Sergeant (S/Sgt).

26 Mar 45 Jim flies on Mission #203 to strike the Straszhof Marshalling Yard, Austria as an addition to the crew piloted by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Randall L. Webb. This would be Jim’s 22<sup>nd</sup> (and final) mission. The bomb load is 100 lb bombs. “The bombs smothered the west choke point of the yards and started large fires. Flak at the target was described as slight, inaccurate, and heavy but two planes, including Jim’s, failed to return to base and two others were hit. En route to the target the plane flown by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Lloyd R. Heinze was last seen at good altitude with an engine on fire near Pecs, Hungary. The plane flown by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Raymond D. Spehalski left the formation after being hit by flak. Pilots were later told over the intercommunications system by escort fighter pilots that they had seen eight chutes open from the plane before it crashed.” Jim is among those reported as Missing in Action. The loss of Jim’s plane is classified “MF-C/L (Mechanical Failure – Crash Landed).”

Mar & Apr 45 Jim and his new crewmembers slowly make their way back to Italy through Eastern Europe and the Ukraine, USSR. The best reference I have concerning this experience is in a detailed Nov 88 letter to Jim from fellow crewmember S/Sgt. Frederick J. McGrath: “...Had 2 worn-out engines feathered, losing altitude, Strauss (2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Edwin F. Strauss, the Navigator) spotted Pecs (emergency landing field). We had not been to target as we still had the bombs

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in the bomb-bays. Flew past Lake Balaton to Pecs, with heavy weight of the plane, the nose wheel collapsed & much dirt & cinders came into plane. I was crouched in the waist area of the plane & thru dust & all, we could not get out fast enough, but Thank God we did. Right away Russians wet the plane & I helped throw dirt on plane to hide silver aluminum sunglare in daylight. Taken to tavern & got Stein of Hungarian Beer (will never forget the taste), then to farmhouse & ate cubes of well-done beef browned to good taste, very tender and potatoes. Then we enlisted men and Russians all sat around this big civilian table to drink a jug of vino, one glass supplied, you had to drink-up and refill & pass it to next person, around the table. 3 or 4 times around & I was drunk on the home brew wine. Helped into a feather bed, I slept like a log. Woke up with no hangover...odd I thought at the time. Then got into Ox-carts (stand-up) to trucks and to train, put 2 crews per box-car, straw to lie on. Had Pot Stove for heat and case of Russian c-rations, Beef packed in lard (made in Iowa, lend-lease to Russia). I found an old helmet along R-R tracks & had engineer of train sterilize with live steam & we used this for cook-pot. Pot Stove fire melted lard & cooked Beef. We also had box of Brown Bread (I liked it). The Co-Pilot, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Walter O. Reil, had a Bowie Knife, only thing that would cut through the hard crust. Gathered twigs off trees which we used for forks (Boy Scout knowledge). The Hot Beef Stew (found some scallions in field along tracks) softened the Brown Bread & we all devoured it. Bill Jones (Jonsie) (S/Sgt. William T. Jones) & I met Russian Colonel on train and his pass time was checkers. Bill & I played many a game with him to pass long day time hours. Also met OLGA, head-cook and head-nurse, and we also did "public relations" work & toured train (with her) to hospital cars where wounded Russian soldiers were stacked on tiers of cots (red blood on bandages showed new injuries). We shook hands with the wounded, pointed to the American Flag on arm patch, "AMERIKANSKI" became the magic word. For their morale, could not be better, and Olga fed us for our efforts. We went thru Budapest, Hungary, later Bucharest, Romania, & on to Odessa, USSR. There were many air crews there, and British troops as well. Then we had to live on Pickle Soup (cucumbers sliced), more Brown Bread and Tea. But we did. Remember the 20' x 20' x 6' deep pit latrine everybody used? Logs were straddled over top for a "perch." An English-speaking guide took small groups of us on a walk-tour in Odessa to monuments & statues in town. We slept on wood-slat bunks with lumpy mattress, but were better than floor of box-car. As the days went by, then we heard that Pres. Roosevelt died. That worried me, for up to that point, I thought we would all eventually get back, but I had some doubts. Then one day we were told to pack-up, a British Troop Transport had docked to take us back. Out the Black Sea, by Turkey & Greece, and back to Italy. We marched in ranks and sang at "the top of our lungs" to ship. A Brass Band greeted us at Naples, Italy."

Note: The recollections in Fred McGrath's letter to Jim correspond very well with what I remember of Jim's own recollections. However, Jim often emphasized one observation that Fred McGrath does not mention and that was the astonishing degree of "Russian Front" ground combat destruction and debris observed along the rail line as the group of American airman made their way across the Ukraine toward Odessa, USSR. Jim speculated that because a rail line would be an important terrain objective, that the Russians (and Germans) fought particularly hard and destructive battles in the areas he observed.

16 Apr 45

Jim is issued an "Identity Card for Ex-Prisoner of War (POW)" in Odessa, USSR and Jim is listed as a former POW on the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group website. However, Jim and his fellow crewmembers were not really POWs since the US was not at war with the USSR. My guess is the card was issued for purely administrative reasons by the Red Cross as a matter of routine and, perhaps, to help facilitate repatriation processing later in Italy.

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- 21 Apr 45 Jim's mother (Mrs. Bessie G. Erwin, 5471 Ellis Ave, Chicago) receives the following telegram from the War Department in Washington DC: "THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET THAT YOUR SON SSGT ERWIN JAMES G HAS BEEN MISSING IN ACTION OVER HUNGARY SINCE 26 MARCH 1945. IF FURTHER DETAILS OR OTHER INFORMATION ARE RECEIVED YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED---THE ADJUTANT GENERAL."
- 25 Apr 45 A condolence letter is sent by the Fifteenth Air Force Commanding General to Jim's mother – "My Dear Mrs. Erwin: I can understand the shock you must have felt the day you received word that your son, Staff Sergeant James G. Erwin, 36767696, is missing in action. Unfortunately, I can give you no assurance as to his safety, but I feel that the meager facts we have relative to his recent mission will prove helpful to you. The B-24 Liberator on which Jim served as aerial gunner, was on a bombing mission to Straszhof, Austria, on March 26, 1945. Shortly after the plane had become disabled, the pilot radioed that he was going to follow the formation until they reached friendly territory. The ship was last seen flying under control and maintaining altitude over Pecs, Hungary. Your son's personal possessions have been assembled and will be sent to the Effects Quartermaster, Army Effects Bureau, Kansas City, Missouri, from which point they will be forwarded to the designated beneficiary. As a tribute to the fine service he has rendered his country, Jim has been awarded the Air Medal with One Oak Leaf Cluster denoting a second award. I share your pride in his accomplishments. The War Department will notify you immediately should there be a change in his status. Very sincerely yours, N. F. Twining, Major General, USA, Commanding."
- 28 Apr 45 Jim and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Randall L. Webb & crewmembers Jim crash-landed with in Pecs, Hungary (including S/Sgt. Frederick J. McGrath), are reported by the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group as "Returned to Duty."
- 3 May 45 The Chicago Times reports Jim ("Erwin, James G., S/Sgt., son of Mrs. Bessie G. Erwin, 5471 Ellis") on a list of those published as "ARMY MISSING – EUROPEAN REGIONS."
- 10 May 45 Jim's mother receives the following telegram from the War Department in Washington, DC: "THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS PLEASURE THAT YOUR SON S/SGT ERWIN JAMES G RETURNED TO DUTY IN ITALY 28 APR 45 --- THE ADJUTANT GENERAL."
- 4-10 Jun 45 Jim transits back to the USA and, following leave, is subsequently assigned as a clerk with the Army Air Force Separation Base (Provisional), Las Vegas, Nevada for one month.
- 20 Oct 45 Jim is honorably discharged from the Army Air Corps. He is credited with one year and twenty-eight days of US continental service, ten months and 23 days of foreign service, seven combat campaigns in the European Theater of Operations (Rome Arno, No Apennines, Po Valley, Southern France, Rhineland, Northern France & Air Combat Balkans), and twenty-two combat air missions. Jim earns the following military decorations for his service: The **Air Medal (with One Oak Leaf Cluster)** for "Heroic actions or meritorious service while participating in aerial flight"; the **Army Good Conduct Medal** for "Exemplary conduct, efficiency and fidelity during three years of active enlisted service with the U.S. Army (1 year during wartime for first award)"; the **American Campaign Medal** for "Service within the continental U.S. for one year 1941-46"; the **European-African Middle Eastern Campaign Medal (with Seven Campaign Service Stars)** for "Service in the European-African-Middle Eastern theater for 30 days or receipt of any combat decoration 1941-45"; the **World War II Victory Medal** for "Service in the U.S. Armed Forces 1941-46"; the **Army Air Force Air Crew Member Badge**; the **Marksman Qualification Badge** (for .45 Cal Pistol); and the **Honorable Discharge Lapel Button**.

## **Bet you didn't know....**

Early aircraft's throttles had a ball on the end of it, in order to go full throttle the pilot had to push the throttle all the way forward into the wall of the instrument panel. Hence "balls to the wall" for going very fast. And now you know the rest of the story.

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During WWII, U.S. Airplanes were armed with belts of bullets which they would shoot during dogfights and on strafing runs. These belts were folded into the wing compartments that fed their machine guns. These belts measure 27 feet and contained hundreds of rounds of bullets. Often times, the pilots would return from their missions having expended all of their bullets on various targets. They would say, I gave them the whole nine yards, meaning they used up all of their ammunition.

\*\*\*\*\*

Did you know the saying "God willing and the creek don't rise" was in reference to the Creek Indians and not a body of water? It was written by Benjamin Hawkins in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. He was a politician and Indian diplomat. While in the south, Hawkins was requested by the President of the U.S. to return to Washington. In his response, he was said to write, "God willing and the Creek don't rise." Because he capitalized the word "Creek" it is deduced that he was referring to the Creek Indian tribe and not a body of water.

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In George Washington's days, there were no cameras. One's image was either sculpted or painted. Some paintings of George Washington showed him standing behind a desk with

one arm behind his back while others showed both legs and both arms. Prices charged by painters were not based on how many people were to be painted, but by how many limbs were to be painted. Arms and legs are 'limbs,' therefore painting them would cost the buyer more. Hence the expression, "Okay, but it'll cost you an arm and a leg." (Artists know hands and arms are more difficult to paint.)

\*\*\*\*\*

As incredible as it sounds, men and women took baths only twice a year (May and October). Women kept their hair covered, while men shaved their heads (because of lice and bugs) and wore wigs. Wealthy men could afford good wigs made from wool. They couldn't wash the wigs, so to clean them they would carve out a loaf of bread, put the wig in the shell, and bake it for 30 minutes. The heat would make the wig big and fluffy, hence the term 'big wig'. Today we often use the term 'here comes the Big Wig' because someone appears to be or is powerful and wealthy.

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In the late 1700's, many houses consisted of a large room with only one chair. Commonly, a long wide board folded down from the wall, and was used for dining. The 'head of the household' always sat in the chair while everyone else ate sitting on the floor. Occasionally a guest, who was usually a man, would be invited to sit in this chair during a meal. To sit in the chair meant you were important and in charge. They called the one sitting in the chair the 'chair man.' Today in business, we use the expression or title 'Chairman' or 'Chairman of the Board.'

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Personal hygiene left much room for improvement. As a result, many women and men had developed acne scars by adulthood. The women would spread bee's wax over their facial skin to smooth out their complexions. When they were speaking to each other, if a woman began to stare at another woman's face she was told, "mind your own bee's wax." Should the woman smile, the wax would crack, hence the term 'crack a smile'. In addition, when they sat too close to the fire, the wax would melt. Therefore, the expression 'losing face.'

\*\*\*\*\*

Ladies wore corsets, which would lace up in the front. A proper and dignified woman, as in 'straight laced' wore a tightly tied lace.

\*\*\*\*\*

Common entertainment included playing cards. However, there was a tax levied when purchasing playing cards but only applicable to the 'Ace of Spades.' To avoid paying the tax, people would purchase 51 cards instead. Yet, since most games require 52 cards, these people were thought to be stupid or dumb because they weren't 'playing with a full deck.'

\*\*\*\*\*

Early politicians required feedback from the public to determine what the people considered important. Since there were no telephones, TVs or radios, the politicians sent their assistants to local taverns, pubs, and bars. They were told to 'go sip' some Ale and listen to people's conversations and political concerns. Many assistants were dispatched at different times. "You go sip here" and "You go sip there." The two words 'go sip' were

eventually combined when referring to the local opinion and, thus we have the term 'gossip.'

\*\*\*\*\*

At local taverns, pubs, and bars, people drank from pint and quart-sized containers. A bar maid's job was to keep an eye on the customers and keep the drinks coming. She had to pay close attention and remember who was drinking in 'pints' and who was drinking in 'quarts,' hence the phrase 'minding your Ps and Qs'.

\*\*\*\*\*

In the heyday of sailing ships, all war ships and many freighters carried iron cannons. Those cannons fired round iron cannon balls. It was necessary to keep a good supply near the cannon. However, how to prevent them from rolling about the deck? The best storage method devised was a square-based pyramid with one ball on top, resting on four resting on nine, which rested on sixteen. Thus, a supply of 30 cannon balls could be stacked in a small area right next to the cannon. There was only one problem....how to prevent the bottom layer from sliding or rolling from under the others. The solution was a metal plate called a 'Monkey' with 16 round indentations. However, if this plate were made of iron, the iron balls would quickly rust to it. The solution to the rusting problem was to make 'Brass Monkeys.' Few landlubbers realize that brass contracts much more and much faster than iron when chilled. Consequently, when the temperature dropped too far, the brass indentations would shrink so much that the iron cannonballs would come right off the monkey. Thus, it was quite literally, "Cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey." (All this time, you thought that was an improper expression, didn't you?)

## The Ball Turret Gunner on a B-24

For a comparatively short period in the long sweep of the nation's history, some American airmen served as ball turret gunners, a hazardous occupation that threatened a short life expectancy. There were no ball turret gunners in World War I, and there have been none since World War II. Ball turret gunners are therefore an exclusive group. Out of some 16 million U.S. service personnel during World War II, maybe 30,000 were so employed. I was one of them.

For those not familiar with the terminology, a turret in an aircraft was simply a movable gun position, and a ball turret was, as the name implies, a sphere or ball. It could swing a full circle, 360 degrees in azimuth, and raise or lower its guns from 0 to 90 degrees vertically. This deadly orb, sometimes called the belly turret, was used to protect two types of American heavy bombers, the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress and the Consolidated B-24 Liberator, from enemy aircraft attacking from below. No other Allied or Axis aircraft employed ball turrets.

The turret carried two .50-caliber Browning machine guns, which, located alongside the gunner's head, were ear shattering when fired. The guns were triggered from thumb buttons on the turret's dual control levers (much like today's video games), and these buttons energized firing solenoids on each gun. The levers also controlled the movement of the turret. Since the B-24 was rather low slung, the turret was retractable; it was lowered for combat and raised for landing into the rear compartment by a hydraulic pump. A winch also allowed the waist gunners to raise the turret if the hydraulic system was shot out and the ball turret gunner was unable to extricate himself. If the turret could not be retracted, it would make a furrow down the runway when the plane landed, and the gunner, if still inside, would, we said, have to be "washed out with a hose."

Vision inside the turret was limited to an 18-inch round view plate between the gunner's feet. From

20,000 feet and at 175 mph, by the time the bombs reached the ground the plane had traveled far enough past the target that the bombardier could not see his bombs strike. The ball turret gunner, however, had a ringside seat to the explosions—cloud cover permitting—and one of his duties was to report on what he saw, unless he was busy firing at enemy fighters. He also had a ringside seat to see anti-aircraft guns firing up at his plane from far below and their shells bursting all around.

At 5 feet 10 inches, I found the turret quite cramped, and riding on my back in a curled, almost fetal position for five or six hours was extremely uncomfortable. The guns and ammunition cans took up most of the room. The can for the left gun held 600 rounds, the right about 550—the difference caused by the curvature of the turret. This load would last about 90 seconds if fired in one long burst. Such a burst, however, would also burn out the barrels, so gunners were careful to only fire in short bursts.

Although we carried extra ammunition, only the tail gunners and the waist gunners could reload in flight. The extra ammunition was sometimes useful because the shells were packed in a sealed, moisture-proof metal liner inside a wooden box. If on a long mission a man had diarrhea or just had to go and could not get to one of the two relief tubes on the plane, he could lift out and open up the metal liner, dump the ammunition on the floor, peel off several layers of clothing and straddle the liner—an indelicate and ludicrous procedure, but a necessary and effective one. He would then open the bomb bay doors and toss out the can, a strange sort of bomb for the people below.

The seat inside the turret was a small steel shelf, the only armor present. The turret was equipped with an oxygen regulator and outlet where the hose to the oxygen mask plugged in, and a 24-volt DC outlet where the heated suit plugged in,

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as well as a rheostat to control the suit's temperature. There was also an intercom box where the headset and microphone cords plugged in—the microphone being in the nose of the oxygen mask and the headphones in the gunner's helmet. Beneath the gunner's right toe was the intercom push-to-talk switch; beneath his left heel was the spring-loaded range pedal for the Sperry computing gunsight. Operating the turret often required the simultaneous use of both hands and both feet.

The gunsight, mounted in front of the gunner's face, was in fact a mechanical analog computer, a sophisticated device for the time. The gunner would set in the wingspan of the fighters he expected to encounter and then track the attacker smoothly in azimuth and elevation and raise the range pedal as the fighter closed in. The gunsight would take care of bullet drop and lead, and also tell when the target was at 1,000 yards—firing range. All the gunner then needed to do was press either thumb button, watch the tracers and listen to the loud racket. In practice, however, enemy aircraft flew by so fast and wild that smooth tracking was impossible. We would just track incoming enemy fighters as best we could, bang out two or three quick bursts and then start looking for the next one.

Because the turret was so cramped, I could not wear a parachute or flak vest. Instead, I wrapped my parachute in the flak vest—flak holes in a parachute are not good—and placed them on the plane's floor near the turret where I could reach them easily. The door to the turret could be opened only when the guns were pointed straight down; when the guns were elevated into firing position, the door, which was also the backrest, was outside the aircraft. That was scary. If for any reason it came open, the gunner was gone—there was no seat belt. Because the turret created considerable drag, my pilot did not want it lowered until we neared enemy territory. When he gave me the go-ahead, I would use a hand crank to point the guns down, unlatch and open the door, and open the hydraulic valve, which lowered the turret. I would then disconnect my cords and hose from the nearby wall outlets, step down

into the turret, reconnect my cords and hose, latch the door at my back, turn on the hydraulic and electric drive motors, and bring the guns up about halfway. The last step in this procedure was to "charge" the guns, that is, to pull the handles at my feet to bring the first round of ammunition into the chamber of each gun.

Once the turrets were ready, each gunner would fire a short test burst, being careful not to aim at other planes in the formation. From that time until we returned to friendly territory, I rotated the turret continually and raised and lowered the guns, scanning the skies for enemy fighters. As we approached the target, where the flak was heaviest, I would point the guns down, open the door, slue the turret around so the ammunition cans were facing the front, between the bursting flak and me, and sit erect with my head inside the plane. I would then sit there cringing and shaking, listening to the "wump-wump" of the explosions and the rattle of shrapnel on the aluminum siding, and wondering if the next one would be "the one." As we left the target I would swing the turret around so that the cans were facing the rear, trying to wring out the last ounce of protection. If someone reported a fighter, however, I would close and latch the door, bring up the guns and start looking for the target. I could not do anything about the flak, but I could do something about the fighters.

Although there are statistics that show the casualty rate for ball turret gunners was less than for other air crewmen, the position was still the most unpopular on a bomber. Sitting alone in the hardest-to-exit position, suspended in space below the plane, seemingly more exposed to flak and fighters, and having no visual contact with your comrades all combined to create a terrible sense of isolation and vulnerability. The science of warfare took a giant leap forward when the ball turret became obsolete.

World War II Magazine  
Jesse N. Bradley  
702<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Squadron  
445<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group  
8<sup>th</sup> Air Force

## President's Corner

How many of you were POWs during WWII? I know of a few veterans who were and thanks to a couple of them, I have something rather unique to share with you in this issue. As I'm sure most of you are aware, POWs were treated rather poorly. Most lost a considerable amount of weight as a result of the rations they were given in the prison camps. One of the things they were given was called "Black Bread". It doesn't sound too bad—perhaps something a little darker than wheat bread. I've been given the recipe for Black Bread. Does anyone want to give this a try?

### Black Bread Recipe

Former prisoners of war of Nazi Germany may be interested in this recipe for World War II Black Bread. This recipe comes from the official record from the Food Providing Ministry published as Top Secret Berlin 24.X1-1941 from the Director of Ministry Herr Mansfeld and Herr Moritz. It was agreed that the best mixture to bake black bread was:

50% bruised rye grain  
20% sliced sugar beets  
20% tree flour (saw dust)  
10% minced leaves and straw

From our own experiences with black bread, we also saw bits of glass and sand. Someone was cheating on the recipe.

If you decide to try this recipe, please leave out the glass. I understand it's not good for whatever ails you. ☺

I keep hearing from people that we haven't had an election in a few years. I'm not sure we really need one as everything seems to be running along rather smoothly, but our By-Laws do call for an election periodically. As a result, I've asked Linda Titus to take on the task of organizing an election. As our numbers continue to decline, finding more than one person to run for a position is getting very difficult so I told Linda to just see if she

could find people to fill each position so we can present a slate of officers at the reunion this year. I told her she can ask the current officers if they are willing to continue in their current position if she wants in order to make her job easier.

A teenager told his mother, "Mom, there are a half dozen men downstairs with vacuum cleaners. They all say they have an appointment to give demonstrations."

"Great!" she said. "Put them in different rooms and tell them to get busy."

A little girl was at her first wedding and carefully observed the entire ceremony. When it ended, she asked her mother, "Why did the lady change her mind?"

Her mother asked, "What do you mean?"

Well, she went down the aisle with one man and came back with another one."

A salesman was about to knock on a door when he saw a little boy walk by.

"Is your mother at home?" he asked.

"Yes," the boy said. So the salesman knocked again, with no answer.

"I thought you said your mother was home," he told the boy.

"She is. But I live across the street."

Love may not make the world spin around, but it certainly makes a lot of people dizzy.

## 461<sup>ST</sup> BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)

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## Webmaster Comments

Let's see, what can I say in this column this time? Actually there isn't all that much going on. Some of you are aware that I've expanded my work as webmaster to include other Fifteenth Air Force organizations. It was natural to do the 484<sup>th</sup> several years ago because the 484<sup>th</sup> shared Torretta Field with the 461<sup>st</sup>. And I had a lot of help because Dick Olson supplied me with a lot of material. Since then, I've also picked up the 451<sup>st</sup> to complete the 49<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing. In addition, I'm doing the 455<sup>th</sup> and 460<sup>th</sup> Bomb Groups. Essentially, any organization that was part of the Fifteenth Air Force can call on me if they don't already have a webmaster. I've even discovered that the Fifteenth Air Force itself did not have a website so I took that on as well. If an organization has its own website, I simply link to it. If they don't have some-

thing, I create something so I have a place to put information I get when the time comes. All of this can get expensive, but telling the stories of what went on during WWII is important to me and a number of people seem to appreciate my efforts. The trick is to keep my work with the 461<sup>st</sup> separate from the other organizations. This is the main challenge as all of the organizations are so closely related. The 461<sup>st</sup> seldom flew a mission by itself. In most cases, the 451<sup>st</sup> and 484<sup>th</sup> flew missions with the 461<sup>st</sup> and occasionally there was a maximum effort where the entire Fifteenth Air Force hit the same target. I guess what I'm saying is that if you want to know what went on during WWII, you need to explore not only the 461<sup>st</sup> website, but the Fifteenth Air Force as well—[www.15thaf.org](http://www.15thaf.org).