For the second “freshman mission” the group went back to Yugoslavia. This time the Marshalling Yards at Drnis. Lt. Col. Hawes was the formation leader while Col. Glantzberg flew as second section leader. Flying with Col. Hawes in the lead plane the group operations officer and the four squadron were flight leader, 1st Lt. Floyd Woodard, Capt. Pruitt and Lt. Leffler. In addition to Major Burke and the four squadron commanders, Capt. William Bock and Capt. David McQuillan, the two squadron operations officers that had not flown on the first mission were on this mission. To the haze, experienced on the second mission, was added an 8/10ths undercast. As a result of the haze, the undercast and the tan background below, the target was missed completely. For the first and only time during these early days no pictures of the bomb drop were obtained.

The formation was the best flown thus far. However, mistakes were made. The group failed to let down during a 360 deg. Turn in order to bomb below the overcast; it failed to get on the step before the bomb run; it didn’t cover a cripple on the way home; and it failed to get under the overcast on the return trip across the Adriatic.

The day was hazy and the group lead had difficulty indentifying the target against the tan background of early spring. The mission wasn’t as successful as the first one had been and the crew members began to realize that targets were not easy to identify and hit.

Note: These two missions did not make an auspicious start for the fledgling 461st Bomb Group. See the related article on Page 3.
WE HAVE A “MOVING” PRESIDENT

Frank and Millie have flown the land of “fruits and nuts” and landed in Sunny Tucson, AZ. Trouble is they flew myersonic and got there 3 months before their house was ready. Temporary address: P.O. Box 36600, Tucson, AZ 85740. Temporary phone: (602) 887-7681

* * * * *

ACTIONS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The board approved a donation of $500 to the Collins Foundation toward the restoration of a B-24. (See the associated articles on pages 10 and 15)

The board approved the formation of a committee to establish a memorial in the name of the 461st Bomb Group at the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB, Dayton, Ohio. The chairman will be Edward Izzo (765). The committee will research the project and make their recommendations to the board.


TIDBITS

Webster’s Dictionary:

Tidbit—A titbit
Tidbit—A choice morsel; a tidbit

Now you know! We print only the best!

SERGEANT PILOTS—The Army Air Corps Enlisted Pilots Association is attempting to locate men who trained as aviation students with the Army Air Corps and flew as sergeant pilots in 1942 or trained as enlisted pilots with the Royal Canadian Air Force and transferred to the Army Air Corps as sergeant pilots. Contact Leonard Sweet (618) 537-6261.

DISCHARGE CERTIFICATES—To obtain a copy of your discharge certificate (DD214) or equivalent) or other documents from service records complete and send Standard Form 180 to National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis.

CHECK YOUR LIFE INSURANCE—All military retirees who have civilian life insurance should double check to determine if the policy is still valid. Some benefits of private insurance companies decrease in value when the member retires, providing lower dollar amounts to beneficiaries. The decrease in value varies between companies.

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I WAS AN AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHER
By Jim Van Norstrand (765)
(with a few editorial changes)

The last lines of the article on Mission #1 in the October 1988 issue of the Liberaider read: “Bomb strike photos give incomplete coverage of bursts”. Those words may have been what started a series of actions that led to the creation of an added crew member called “Aerial Photographer” - my job. (See page 1 of this issue for results of Missions 2 and 3).

I remember the day very well that Big G strode over to the photo lab and lined us all up out front and said, “Men, we’re not getting bomb strike pictures of the target, so we’re adding a man just to get those pictures. I can’t order you but I’m asking for volunteers”. Just like somebody pushed me from behind, I stepped forward and several others followed. That put me on flying status.

As I was the first one to volunteer, I flew the first mission as “official photographer” and extra crewman. As I recall, I wasn’t very well accepted. I could understand that as the regular crews were very close. Only after I’d flown five or ten missions did I begin to feel at home. Since I flew with a different crew almost every time, it took a while to fit in but things got better.

I recall the first mission vividly as I’d had no check-out or training as a flight crew member. I didn’t really know how to hook up the oxygen mask until a waist gunner helped me; then there was the flak suit and so on. I learned gradually. Once I got started I wanted to finish my missions as did everyone else, but it took me almost a year to complete my tour. I’m glad I volunteered, tho, as it was much more exciting than the photo lab could ever have been.

* * * * *

THINK REUNION ‘89

Come talk about those “exciting” days in Italy, some 45 years ago.
ITALY REVISITED—1988
By Frank O’Bannon

Friday, September 30, 1988

Came dawn and eighteen men leaped from their beds, donned their armor, gulped down a hasty breakfast and mounted their steeds for the fray they were about to encounter. For this was “Return to Cerignola Day”. For Len and Grace Cole, Gerry and Ann Huizenga and Frank and Millie O’Bannon this “Return” would be a review of the 1982 tour. For Paul and Alvina Bella, Bill and Lois Dietrich, Dick and Dorothy Durand, Paul and Betty Ferguson, John and Norma Lazier, John and Jean McGarr, Joe and Ann Mullahery, Vern and Gwen Nelle, Barb O’Bannon, Gail and Verna Peterson, Burnie and Bonnie Presho, Ed and Wilma Schrader, John and Gladys Simeroth, Harold and Dorothy Watson, Bill and Muriel Wilkins and Ed Callahan this would be a really big day.

A short drive from Foggia, over the same road that we used in 1944, brought us in front of the Cerignola City Hall. We were joined by Dr. Domenico Rinaldi, Vice Mayor and Alberghina Giovanni, Chief of Police, who acted as our escorts during our visit. With Officer Difilippo Salvatore leading the way we were off to the areas of the Group. It was apparent that the police had scouted our areas as they knew exactly where we wanted to go! The roads are all paved and well taken care of—well—almost. The lane between Group headquarters and the 765th Squadron has not been improved in the least. The wives can now appreciate just what it was like to go from one squadron area to another back in those old days.

The runway is gone! A super highway now runs thru that area at about the half way mark. The permanent buildings in each area look as if time had stopped and waited for our return. One by one we visited each of the sites. The men walked all over reminiscing. Many of the wives noted teary eyes, probably due to specks of dust in their husband’s eyes.

Group headquarters is still used but the land around it has many weeds that were not there in 1982. We were able to get into the buildings but the briefing room building was locked up. Across from the headquarters building you can see some evidence of our being there. A small garden has several pieces of pierced steel planking (PSP) attached to posts to serve as a fence. This was the only item we found that related to our stay there.

The 764th area was approached by a new road that runs along the ridge to the west of the old road. The lit-
tle creek now has a dam across it which forms a lake that covers the old road.

The other three sites were the same as when we were there. While at the 765th area an Italian man drove up and talked to a couple of our men. He said that as a small boy men from the Group used to give him chocolates and caramels. Regretfully we did not get his name or picture.

We had requested the Mayor’s office to help us locate some of the Italians we knew back at the time of the war, but time had marched on. They knew where our people had gone but we were unable to talk to them. The Huizenga’s were able to get a picture, taken during the 1982 tour, back to the Italian family that had befriended them at the 766th area.

All of the buildings and improvements that we made during our stay had been removed immediately after the war. There are olive trees, vineyards and cultivated fields now where there used to be tents (like those shown above). The Mayor told us that the Baron’s fields were split up after the war and given to the people of Cerignola.

The aging warriors, in their rusting armor, settled down to review their latest conquests, to dream of past battles and to make plans for getting the rust off their armor for their grandchildren’s sake.

MEMBERS OF THE 461st BOMB GROUP (H) 1943-1945
VISIT THE SICILY-ROME AMERICAN MILITARY CEMETERY
October, 1988

On their way to Rome, the group visited the Sicily-Rome Cemetery to place a wreath in memory of our men lost in combat. The group believes that every gravesite of a 461st member who is buried there was visited by a member of his respective squadron. A group insignia was forwarded to the cemetery for display.

Back Row L-R: Richard Durand (764), John Simeroth (765), William Dietrich (765), Vernon Nelle (764), Leonard Cole (HQRS), William Wilkins (765), Burnie Presho (765), Paul Bella (764), Ed Schrader (764) and Paul Ferguson (767)

Front Row L-R: Harold Watson (766), John Lazier (764), Frank O’Bannon (764), Gail Peterson (765), Joseph Mullahey (HQRS), Gerald Huizenga (766) and John McGarr (767).
Highpoints in the day’s mission are these shots with ground and aerial cameras.

Top left: The Libs await their turn to take off.

Top right: The formation on its way to the target.

Center left: “Bombs Away!”

Above: Like a sheepdog, our P-40 heads a straying B-17 back into formation.

Lower left: Flak bursts all through a formation of our Liberators.
Your Choice - One's Hot, One's Cold

"Soup's On" for the Italian Alpine troops camped nearby.

"He eats it" (and says he likes it), says Cpl. Robert Zewe, 28th gunner and he lifts a heaping spoonful as proof. Maybe, says Clark the cook, left, but after watching men's reactions to C rations for over a year, he has his doubts. Before he came into the army, Zewe cooked and canned the stuff in Pittsburgh's H. J. Heinz factory. That might explain it. Then, too, he's only been overseas a few weeks.

Oklahomans

Pride of the 80-odd men in the 461st who hail from Oklahoma was the "Tulamericans," the last of the B-24s to come from the Douglas Aircraft factory in Tulsa. Bought by bond sales to the factory employees, she arrived in this theater, covered from nose to tail, with signatures and addresses of Oklahoma subscribers.


On her twentieth mission, December 17, the ship was ditched in the Adriatic after a furious battle over the Oderian oil refineries.

Illegent of Rank

Standing on group headquarters roof, watching the planes take off, are, from left to right, Colonel Lawhon, General Lee, Lt. Gen. McMahon, commander of all American forces in MTO, and, right, Maj. Gen. Twining, 15th AAF boss.
A G.I.'s Impression of Italian Scene

By Sgt. Arthur E. Foley

As we drove into the city of Italy, which was to be our home for months to come, we were impressed by its beauty. When we found ourselves in such a picturesque country, the excitement was not long in coming.

We awoke the next day surrounded by Italian marble. The marble was ideal to decorate buildings, but the marble was not to be let alone. The marble was often carved with scenes of every day life. The marble was often carved with scenes of every day life.

We drove into the center of the city and were greeted by the marble. The marble was carved with scenes of every day life. The marble was carved with scenes of every day life.

On the way back to our hotel, we saw a group of children playing in the streets. The children were dressed in the traditional costume of Italy. They were playing in the streets.

As we continued our drive, we saw a group of women carrying baskets on their heads. The women were carrying baskets on their heads.

In the market, we saw a group of men selling fruit and vegetables. The men were selling fruit and vegetables.

We ended the day by visiting a museum. The museum was filled with works of art. The museum was filled with works of art.

Scenes like this are familiar to us at home only in connection with our Community Chest drives. In Rome, sidewalk poverty is neither unusual nor remarkable.

Familiar Roman Views

To many Liberaiders, Rome was one of the best rest camp spots. At left above, Victor Emmanuel's 'Birth day Cake' Memorial looms up behind the ruins of ancient Rome. In the center — the Tiber Terrace, AAF Rest Camp club. At the right, the Tiber, with the Dome of St. Peter's in the center background and the Castel St. Angelo to the right.
Here’s How 767th
Grew To Manhood

"By Capt. Dan H. Fenn, Jr.

On April 21, 1943, at a base in England, an infant was born. About all it had was a name conferred by its dispenser, 767th Bombardment Squadron.

But it wasn’t long before this child of war began to develop a persona and take on names of its own. To show how this child of war grew to an all-mighty member of that fighting family, the USAAF, the following snapshots, from its days in England, are presented:

SCENE I: A barracks at the Idaho base. 9:30 A.M. A short little man with a bald head, sporting two shiny golden bars and a solemn look with the OCS insignia still on his hat, is the first to note the small object in the hands of a child. "Sgt. Fisher, Pfc. Lafal... Don’t you think we should open the orderly room now? It’s ten o’clock!" But suddenly an enormous man with a smile comes about him, and the road-tracks of a campaign begin on his shoe. In the barracks a stampede ensues to check the time, with the two new arrivals, the child and the man with the bars, being the last to arrive.

SCENE II: A dusty spot somewhere with a glimpse of a character who is beginning to arrive, first in Middlesbrough, then in a steady stream. The same captain who was there before, unable to set out comfortably, is now able to set out comfortably, after a showing of all American muscle, skill, kill, and get there. The skipper (L. Col. N. L. Lewis) takes the call and arranges things and assures them that there are plenty of ratings and a few...Prominent, among the new arrivals there, is Skrewy’s Lieutenant Harry Sullivan, Bob Butler, Ed Jeffreys of George, Tom Galli, Ooho of George, etc. All of them are out of various A.A.P. tech schools. Suddenly the call for good drinking in the dining area, and the wheels roll in the direction of Florida, with their stripes and wings. Things are obviously beginning to happen.

SCENE III: The background changes a little, a height, beautiful background surrounded by glorious mountains, peacocks appears. It’s an...other field in Utah. That stream of figures hoping harrassed bags and gas masks has become a festal scene suddenly a horde of second lieutenants and their retainers of generals sweep across the stage. The crows have arrived. As the men come in from the left, they pour out on the right into another sign that says: "Welcome Home!" The crowd is made up of A.A.P. techs, and a group led by Duke Pfeifely, and featuring Cleve Kermida, Floyd King, Tony Fish, L. Col. James N. Baumgart, and Capt. Royce B. Glenn.

FIN - EESH, LINE TAXI!

Fin-ehh Line Taxi! The 76th ground personnel really can’t wait to get done with the space-time battle. For the past months last fall, the pride of the line, this unauthorized aircraft was kept hovering by emissaries from the field, pilots and lieutenants, from British airfields. The R.A.F. swapped a section of fuselage for an American baseball bat.
I hope Jim’s words mean something to you. UTC must be some special kind of time used by hams. Quoting directly from the first paragraph, Jim’s letter says, “Gentlemen, set your clocks! Local times will be set forward in October. Our nets will accommodate the change”. I hope Jim has a “fall-back” position.

REUNION PLANNED — This information will be received too late, I believe, but it is worth noting. A reunion of pilots rescued by Chetniks or partisans in Yugoslavia during World War II was being planned for either December 22, 1988, Yugoslav People’s Day, or May 21, 1989, Yugoslav Air Force and Air Defense Day. Contact Col. Fradan Ikonomovic, Military Attaché, Embassy of Yugoslavia, 2410 California St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008-1679.

AIR FORCE GUNNERS ASSOCIATION — P.O. Box 568102, Orlando, Florida 32856-8102

YOU’RE INVITED TO A CELEBRATION!! - The 50th anniversary of the first flight of the B-24 “Liberator” that helped liberate Europe and the pacific. The gala will be held in San Diego on Sept. 20 to 24, 1989. Contact the Coordinating Committee, Liberator Cele Bration, Suite 112, 3940 Hancock St. San Diego, CA 92110.

DO YOU HAVE A PICTURE OF THE “ALL AMERICAN”? (See article on page 15)

The Collings Foundation is trying to obtain pictures of the “All American” B-24 of the 765th Squadron. They received a picture from Bob Chalmers but want to know if any more exist. We would appreciate it if all group photographers and members of the 765th would search your files and submit any photos you might have.

We will also ask for donations to the Collings Foundation to help pay for the restoration. The “All American” was one of “Ours” and we should be high on the list of contributors. More later.

MAIL CALL

Editor’s note: On page 8 of my first venture into publishing the 461st Liberaider, I inserted a small article entitled “Little Known Fact”. It stated that Sgt. William G. Rollins (767) got the first Purple Heart awarded to a 461st member. It was for action on 21 April 1944.

I received three letters about this article. To save space I have paraphrased the information submitted.

FROM WILLIAM ROLLINS (767) Nov. 21, 1988

Bill wasn’t aware he got the first Purple Heart. He said because of his “hit” he couldn’t finish the last three missions with his crew. He flew his last mission with another crew on 22 July to Ploesti. Because of strong crosswinds at our base on their return they were diverted to another field. Bill says that after that mission he asked if he could hitch-hike back to the field. He figured he had pushed his luck far enough.

FROM JAMES LOVE (767) Nov. 14, 1988

Jim provided some info on the collision of the B-24s on the first group mission. However, I was interested in his comments about the Purple Heart. His crew was shot down over Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 16 April. Six of his crew were able to get out before the plane blew up. Jim is certain the other four were killed. One of the surviving members was S/Sgt. Bureen Storts. To Jim’s knowledge Sgr. Storts was awarded the Purple Heart for that mission. He did not receive it until he was released from prison camp.

FROM STAN KOSIERORSKI (764) Nov. 13, 1988

Stan was a tail gunner on one of the original crews. He mentioned flying on the first few missions to Yugoslavia. His ship was shot down on Mission #7 to Budapest, Hungary, 13 April 1944. He wrote these words, “Our plane was hit by flak. A gaping hole and fire in our left wing caused us to drop out of

(Continued on page 11)
formation. The pilot told the bombardier to get the crew to bail out. I started to get out of the tail turret just as a German JU-88 blew it up. I was very lucky because I was laying back half way out when his bullets ran up my left hand. If I was sitting up I would have gotten them right in the stomach. We all bailed out and were captured by local peasants. I, as well as other members of our crew, received the Purple Heart for our actions on this mission.

Based on the information presented in these letters I have to believe that my “Little Known Fact” was erroneous data. A lesson learned. There is no need to know who was first to receive the Purple Heart but I would like to think it/they went posthumously to those who were killed in the crash of the two planes on the first mission.

* * * * *

YOU’RE COMING TO THE REUNION!!

GREAT!!

Now I’m not Col. Glantzberg (see page 3 article on aerial photographer) but as editor I would like a volunteer.

I would like someone to write an article summarizing the activities at the St. Louis reunion in October. This doesn’t have to be a lengthy epistle or a literary masterpiece but should cover the activities and as many anecdotes as you feel appropriate. It is meant to document the reunion and to get the word out to the members that we do have a good time and it’s worth the effort (and money) to come.

Make use of your literary talents and see your name in print, nationwide!! Who knows where it might lead. This year the Libraider, next year the NY Times. No Pulitzer prizes guaranteed! Give it some thought, please.

* * * * *

DID YOU KNOW YOUR LEADERS?

In preparing the material for this copy of the Libraider, especially the page 1 articles on our first missions, I became aware that I didn’t really remember who was running the store back in 1944. So, using the mission descriptions, I made up a crude organization chart of the “major players” in the 461st Bomb Group. There were blanks that I could not fill in so I’ll turn to those of you that have better memories or records than I do. Here is my chart. Complete it for me please.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>764th</th>
<th>765th</th>
<th>766th</th>
<th>767th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commander</td>
<td>Glantzberg</td>
<td>Goree</td>
<td>Applegate</td>
<td>Dooley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Commander</td>
<td>Hawes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations Officer</td>
<td>Burke</td>
<td>Tallant</td>
<td>Bock</td>
<td>Franklin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigator</td>
<td>Pruitt</td>
<td>Dewitt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombardier</td>
<td>Leffler</td>
<td>Stiles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Your Editor recognizes that there were many more “major players” than are shown here. After all, my family thought I won the war single handed. However, for brevity I left off my name and those of all the rest of you.
MISSION NO 50
by Gerald J. Mayfield
765th Squadron

On July 20, 1944 crew #36 of the 765th Squadron landed with most of the crew completing the required 50 missions and earning a return trip stateside. The exceptions were Dennis, Bombardier; Mayfield, Engineer; and McCree, Radio Operator.

On the next mission I was scheduled to fly as a fill in engineer with another crew, some undoubtedly fill ins also. Col. Glantzberg, our group CO was to be the pilot. Col. Glantzberg never flew milk runs so I anticipated a difficult mission.

The briefing for the mission of July 22, 1944 was not good news at all. Col. Glantzberg was to fly 15th Air Force lead on a mission to Ploesti, Rumania, one of the heaviest defended targets within range of the 15th AF. At the briefing we were told that 1100 anti-aircraft guns of 88 and 105 mm caliber would be counted on to give some opposition. What an understatement. I had flown three previous missions to Ploesti and one to the refineries port of Ploesti, and was very familiar with the smoke pots that screened 100 square miles of target area. We were assigned to a new B-24J pathfinder aircraft that aimed the bomb drop by radar. With all that smoke we needed something. Pathfinder aircraft usually carried the radar scanner in place of the ball turret, meaning we had two less guns for fighter defense. Pre-flight was normal, but without the comradeship of our well knit crew #36 where everyone’s strengths and weaknesses are know. It was like being alone with nine other men.

Crew #36 had been to Cairo on R & R and a fortune teller told the bombardier that he would be wounded and some of this crew were offering 10 to 1 odds that it would happen on this mission. It was enough to make one a little more apprehensive than the usual pre-mission dreading.

Combat equipment was loaded including the “jewel” pots, these being standard steel helmets that airmen sat on when the flak got too thick. One tended to pucker from your feet up to your crotch, hence the name “jewel” pot. Of course the pilot and co-pilot could not afford this luxury.

Take off, climb and cruise were normal as we watched the 15th AF form behind us. It was quite a majestic sight. We proceeded on course to Ploesti. I checked the fuel supply equipment and my position at the right waist gun. My job was to transfer fuel from the out board reserve or “Tokyo” tanks after the bomb run when we were out of flak range. By burning this off in a designated manner, weight and balance was improved and helped to prevent an outer wing panel from being blown off if it was hit by subsequent anti-aircraft fire while still containing fuel. The other consideration was that the so-called engineers at Consolidated Aircraft forgot to install fuel quantity gauges for these tanks.

As we approached the target at around 26,000 feet we found the smoke screen in place. We hit the IP and turned toward the target. From the right waist I saw two flak bursts bracket the right wing and some-
one in the nose called three bursts directly in front of our ship and at our altitude. Almost immediately a flak shell burst in the vicinity of No 4 engine setting it on fire and leaving a big hole on the top of the ring wing where the right “Tokyo” tank was located. It was burning too. The No 3 engine quit also.

The airplane started down out of control in the middle of the flak field. The bail out bell was ringing and Col. Glantzberg ordered bail out. Suddenly the side slip pulled the fire out of the engine and fuel tank. I started yelling on the inter-phone that the fire was out. We had been trying to ride out the aircraft until we were out of the flak field before jumping. Col. Glantzberg got the plane under control at around 4,000 feet on the No 1 and 2 engines and asked for a crew count. We were all still hanging on. He headed for Turkey. After observing No 3 engine and finding it still there and apparently undamaged it was restarted and purred like a kitten for the rest of our journey. We discussed the fuel situation because if we were to try to return to Italy we would need the fuel from the No 4 tank and any left in the right “Tokyo” tank that had been on fire.

Because of the fuel system design on the B-24J, I had to remove the fuel line and plug another over the bomb bay with a 50 caliber round in order to use the fuel in the No 4 “Tokyo” tank.

On we went at tree top level leaving Turkey and turning back to Italy without seeing another aircraft either American or German. Everything was thrown out, including our beloved “jewel” pots to lighten the load. Two and a half hours later and after the rest of the Group landed we limped in for a good landing at our base at Torretta. As we rolled to a stop fuel was leaking all over the aircraft. We didn’t need a bail out bell to tell us to get the hell out once the aircraft stopped. The aircraft was junk, after just one mission, and my 50th.

When I got back to my tent, my crew were preparing for R & R in Rome which had just come under Allied control. Col. Glantzberg had me passing information and instructions to new crews on the procedure we used to get our plane home. I never did get to Rome for R & R.

For this mission received the Distinguished Flying Cross. I didn’t find out about this until 39 years later when I attended the 461st and 484th Bomb Groups reunion in Williamsburg, Virginia and saw the orders awarding the decoration.

Crew #36 departed Morrison Field, Florida February 1, 1944 flying our aircraft to South America, Dakar, North Africa and to Italy. We flew out first mission April 2, 1944 and during May, June and July of that year the 765th Squadron lost 22 aircraft and crews. Crew #36 returned stateside on the troop ship General Bliss and arrived in New York on September 1, 1944.

At the Dayton, Ohio reunion in 1982 I was telling Leonard Cole (he worked at Group Hdqrs.) about our mission to Ploesti. Mayfield was listening and I was informed that he was the Flight Engineer that had plugged the fuel line with a fifty caliber machine gun shell that enabled us to return to Torretta.

I remember this mission as if was the hardest a plane had been hit while I was flying as Group Navigator of the 461st Bomb Group. This particular day was what I would call a routine start of a mission except it was a new airplane with the navigator seated behind the pilot. The radar operator, Lt. Gizelba, was seated across at the radio operators position with his back to the co-pilot. We were leading the 461st Group of the 49th Wing as well as the 15th Air Force against the Romana American Oil Refinery at Ploesti, Rumania.

We arrived at our initial point a few miles southeast

(Continued on page 14)
of Bucharest, Rumania, and the bombardier took over. A normal bomb run was two or three minutes long before bombs away. We usually dropped the bombs and took a standard rally of a 45 degree to the right loosing 1,000 feet in altitude as quickly as possible to confuse the anti-aircraft gunners. The planned route for the day was to go north of Ploesti and turn west and return to base. I cannot remember our altitude exactly on this mission but it was 19,000 to 21,000 feet. As we started the bomb run I was seated at a table that I used in the navigation of the plane. I turned around to look forward between the pilot and co-pilot and could see the flak was very heavy.

As we approached the point where we were due to release the bombs, I saw four bursts of 88mm flak exactly in line at our altitude. I thought we were safe from that battery of anti-aircraft artillery, but where the 5th burst came from I do not know. This burst hit our No 4 engine and set it on fire. It appeared that to feather No 4, both No 3 and No 4 were feathered, which put us into a spin to the right. The spin threw me back in my seat as the bail out bell sounded. I can remember how hard I pulled on the table to get in a position to try to bail out. A drift meter against my leg would not let me get to the aisle and bail out through the bomb bay. Also fire was all under the bomb bay.

At 9,000 feet the pilot pulled us out of this spin over the town of Ploesti and immediately began calling for a heading. I gave him one to Turkey as it was the closest neutral country. As we got on course to Turkey we found ourselves alone and quite crippled. Just the type of meat marauding German fighters were looking for. The rest of our Group was going north or west back to our base. We were fortunate that day that the Luftwaffe did not follow us. It was at this point in our journey that Mayfield plugged the fuel line with a fifty caliber shell.

South of Bucharest the pilot decided we could make it into Yugoslavia and asked for a heading back toward Torretta. After weighing the possibilities of bailing out over Yugoslavia, trying to make it to Turkey or ditching at sea, calculations showed we had enough fuel to make it back to the base.

Approaching Torretta we found that the bomb dump was on fire with a 50 knot cross wind from the west. All the other planes of the 461st and 484th Bomb Groups were diverted to other bases with more of an east/west runway. But, Torretta was closer and our fuel supply by now was very low. We landed going to the north on the west side of the runway and came to a stop finally on the east side off in the dirt. The jar of the landing jarred something loose and opened a fuel line filling the flight deck with deadly fumes. My thought was to make it this far and then get caught on fire a second time was too much for all on the flight deck. That was one speedy evacuation.

The following day the crew chief brought the fuse from the 88mm shell that was found stuck in the No 4 engine. I in turn gave it to Col. Glantzberg as a souvenir of the mission.

*     *     *     *     *

OUR STORY OF PLOESTI
by
George D. Dickie, Editor

We were there on 22 July 1944. I’ll call it “Crume’s crew” because I don’t remember our crew number. Lyle Crume was our pilot and, at least for that period in my life, is the reason I am still alive. He really knew how to get the most out of the B-24.

All went well until we hit the IP and then things went to hell quick. We decided to be good soldiers and follow our leader. I saw Col. G’s ship get hit and go into a spin. Moments later we followed. One of our right engines was hit and both right engines had to be feathered. At the same time one of the main fuel lines in the bomb
bay was severed. With the doors open the fuel was whipped into a white mist which prompted someone to call “fire”. I was on the nose wheel door ready to go when the pilot corrected the call. The pilot got the ship under control and then everyone on the flight deck took turns trying to get a screwdriver jammed into the fuel line to stop the leak. The fumes were so strong that they could not breathe and could only stay as long as a single breath would last. Eventually they were successful and things settled down a little. As with Col. G’s ship we were able to restart one of the engines which permitted us to gain back enough altitude to get over the mountains in Yugoslavia, but not by much. We were shot at by light anti-aircraft guns as we crossed over some ranges. I, as navigator, was doing all I could to determine our position and chances of getting back to the base. Wow! Was I confused. Not only did the aerial maps leave something to be desired but we were not briefed on the possibility of having winds aloft at around 100 knots. I kept calculating our ground speed at about 80 to 90 knots and just didn’t believe a B-24 would go that slow. I finally believed my calculations and told the pilot. We decided we had enough gas to get to the Adriatic Sea where we could then decide whether to try to go across or ditch near the Island of Vis. When the time came we decided to go for it but we weren’t at all that confident. As we crossed the coast of Italy and approached Torretta we saw all the smoke from the bomb dump fire and we were running on “empty” and a few prayers. Lyle Crume greased that aircraft onto the runway with that very heavy crosswind just as though nothing was wrong. I don’t remember exactly how much fuel we had left but my recollection is that at least one engine died on the way back to the revetment.

I don’t know which crew made it back first but I’m sure that both crews sat down and told the good Lord how pleased they were with him that day.

DO YOU REMEMBER THE “ALL AMERICAN”? She was a B-24 in the 765th Squadron, 461st Bomb Group. If my information is correct she was flown by Bob Chalmers on 25 July 1944 on a mission to Linz, Austria. The Group was attacked by 25 FW-190 and 125 ME-109 fighters. Eleven 461st B-24s were lost over the target and four more on the way home. The “All American” made it back and was credited with shooting down 14 German aircraft. The largest number of planes shot down by any aircraft on a single mission during World War II. On 4 October 1944 the “All American herself went down over Yugoslavia.

SHE IS BEING BORN AGAIN!!

The Collings Foundation of Stow, MA is completely restoring a B-24 from rivets to gun shells. She is scheduled to roll out on 15 July 1989. She will be flown from Kissimmee, FL to San Diego, CA to participate in the 50th birthday celebration of the B-24 on the 23rd of September. This aircraft will be named “All American” not only to honor her predecessor but also in memory of all the people that built, flew and maintained this great aircraft 45 to 50 years ago. For they too were “All Americans”.

The Collings need financial help. If we can raise $109,000 we can have the 461st recognized on the side of the ship. She was ours! We should be on it! $20 apiece would do. Let’s go for it!
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