

This is a partial account of my dad's story while serving as a B-24 Nose Gunner, European Theater, WWII, in my dad's words [Roy J. Wieland] as transcribed from a letter to an officer on his original crew, Navigator Daniel L. Levin, 5 March 1991.

This is in honor of all the men that lived this terror in the air, on the ground and at sea.

S/Sgt. Roy J. Wieland
Aerial Gunner
Fifteenth Air Force
461st Bomb Group
764th Squadron
Crew 14-3
Torretta, Italy, 1944-1945
Nose Gunner, B-24 Liberator

Dear Danny,

I can't thank you enough for the epistle covering your '1000 Days'. It filled in so many blanks for me and I've wondered for 46 years not only what transpired with you chaps after I was shot down, but all that went on at Torretta that I'd never heard before.

Perry Brockman filled me in briefly during a very short visit to my fire station in the early '50s. I was a Los Angeles City Fire Fighter for almost 28 years, but more about that later.

Before I forget it, let me tell you what I learned after the war. When we were at Davis Monthan, we had Captain Silver in the orderly room who scheduled all of our ground classes, etc. He was a peach of a guy. He once got a 3-day pass [illegally] for me so I could go visit my best buddy at Luke Air Base in Phoenix. We were restricted to 50 miles from Davis Monthan and I didn't want to get him into trouble, but he insisted that I go and rescheduled all of my classes. Anyway Danny, he was like a father to us. He set up a writing system and said he'd answer any letter he got from us.

Well, I was sent back to Davis Monthan in October 1945 for discharge from George Air Force Base in Victorville, Ca. I should have gone in September, but someone in scheduling at George went Snafu and goofed.

Well, here was Captain Silver still at Davis Monthan processing men out now. He was so glad to see me and he was very, very sad. He had kept up his writing campaign and of the 60 crews we trained with, 44 of them went down on missions. He didn't know about Oly Olson going down over Vienna with another crew or me going down over Linz. He was really shook up. He was a guy who became very close to the men. He tried many times to ship out with the guys but his age was against him and they made him fly a desk. I was glad to get a chance to talk to him and see him again.

Just before I bailed out over the Po Valley/Apennine Mountains on April 15, 1945, I found out that the 764th had gone through 60 aircraft. We were assigned 15, so we had our share.

Getting back to Davis Monthan & Tucson, the El Con Hotel is gone. It was torn down years ago and today a shopping mall called the El Con stands in its place. The old

Spanish style water tower out front is the only thing left of the old hotel. A few years back, a new El Conquistador was built in the northwest area of Tucson and it is gorgeous.

Danny, we never called the Pit at the Santa Rita the 'Passion Pit'. We always called it the 'Panther Pit' and we always went there for a glass of good old 'Panther Piss'. The old blue movies on Miracle Mile lasted for years after WWII, and then finally gave way.

Dancing and who could get the emptiest beer glasses on a booth table were the things of "higher" interest there.

Tucson used to be all desert from the railroad underpass on Broadway to Davis Monthan, except for the El Con and Broadway Village which is still there.

Now, it's solid city, businesses and homes. It all goes way beyond Davis Monthan by a good 10 miles.

When I returned to Tucson in October 1945, the Air Base was loaded with B-29s. Not one old B-24 in sight. I wanted to climb aboard one for one last look. Well, it finally happened last October at the 461st reunion.

Just outside the fence on the south side of Davis Monthan is the Pima County Air Museum. In the late 70's the Indian Government decided to give back a patrol plane the U.S. had given them after WWII. It was a B-24J in perfect shape. It still had all its guns, etc. A crew of old WWII guys volunteered to fly it to Tucson from India. The Air Force provided fuel and stops all the way back. The Pima County people tell me it could be ready to fly in just a few hours.

They decorated it with the 461st tail colors and for the first time since they got it, they opened it up for all the old 461st guys. It was really weird crawling up into that plane with all those old guys.

"I don't remember this S.O.B. being so small" said one very heavy set guy like myself. I could hear my bones creaking and cracking along with a lot of others as they squeezed under the bomb-bay doors and through the hatches. It was like being in a time warp.

I was there with a guy named John LaZier. John recognized me at check-in. I wouldn't have known him. John & I bailed out together at Linz. He was a member of L.R. Toothman's crew. Their navigator was a thin, red headed chap named Paul Ashworth. He passed away in the late 50's after becoming an M.D. He was wounded so badly I never thought he'd walk again. Shrapnel hit him in the right cheek of his buttocks and we were looking at his hip joint. Thank god we had plenty of morphine with us. I had pockets full to give him. But I'm getting ahead of my story - back to Torretta. John LaZier and a group of 36 from the 461st went back to Torretta in 1988. They had extensive video footage of the area including Cerignola. The old buildings are still there, but due to land reform, the people now own what they farm & the whole base is vineyards & orchards. John also went back to Amstetten, Austria and Hollenstein, Austria, which is in the Alps. Amstetten is in the Danube Valley. The old barracks we were held prisoner in is still there. It's preserved as a WWII monument of sorts.

Anyway, they promised to bring the videos to Rapid City next August. That should be really interesting. Back to Tuscon.

I didn't know that Oly had survived Vienna until I saw the roster last October in Tucson. I wrote to him and a couple of months ago he called me. He's in Florida right now, retired. He spent 3 months there every year to get away from the Minnesota cold. He had to admit he couldn't exactly remember which one of the enlisted guys I was. I told him I was third from the right in the front row. He was kind of embarrassed. I told him "forget it. I've lost so many names, etc." And that's why your "1000 Day" deal was so super. You either have a photographic memory or you kept a daily log or something, Danny. I had completely forgotten the names "Gioia Del Calle" and "Torretta".

And another thing was Captain Levin. We enlisted guys bought Chi-Chi or Tufa Block, as it was also known, paid the "gooks" to pave the floor and build walls for our tent, too. All the enlisted people did. We took a driver and a 6x6 south of "Dirty Canosa" and watched the gooks hand cut the block from the hillside with maddock-like tools and a precision swing any good golfer prays for. I personally supervised each block loaded and you should have heard the gooks scream when I wouldn't take the half or busted block.

They knew it had to be cut around the doors and windows but they couldn't bend me. And we had something you guys didn't. We had Clyde Bowsby. The guy was a genius at building something out of junk, or nothing. He built the neatest door for our tent with a locking latch, complete with a Plexiglas window. Then he made window frames out of old crates.

Clyde spent half of his time over at the old bone yard scrounging stuff off of old B-24s. He kept coming back with an array of old shell casings, aluminum tubing, anti-aircraft shipping cases from shells and a couple of 55 gallon drums. He built a stove complete with stack and damper. The windows were a work of art with Plexiglas and plastic, a few bottles, etc. They were works of art and we used to joke that we better never tell you guys or you'd change tents with us! Ha! We all tried to help, but Clyde knew exactly what he wanted to do and he asked us just to help when asked. He was something else - a really nice guy. He was awfully quiet and very shy. I'm sorry I didn't rediscover his whereabouts until last September. I spoke with his widow at that time and she had told me that he had passed away August 15, 1983 of cancer.

I haven't forgotten you, Danny. You've been very much on my mind. I've just had so much other stuff going on; I just never got around to writing until now.

About a month ago, I talked to Perry Brockman. Perry is going to try to make Rapid City as is Oly Olson.

You never knew it, Danny, but I used to worry about you getting shot down and captured by the Germans. I was so damned glad when you got #35. And you always were in on the roughest ones. I didn't get to go to Blechhammer, that December '44 mission. I sat it out because they didn't need a nose gunner or enlisted bombardier. Ernie and Crew didn't get back from the mission until the following day. We sent 36 bombers up there and 14 came back.

Ed Chan, a navigator in the 766th and his crew were shot down over Blechhammer and were taken prisoner. Ed is chairman of the 461st Roster update. He has helped find dozens and dozens of 461st members. You probably know him from St. Louis.

Anyway, Danny Levin, --I want to thank you personally--- just for being the guy you are. One reason I stayed on Ernie's Crew was you. I never met a kinder, nicer, gentleman than you. You used to insist on helping us load ammo in the heat of summer even though it wasn't an officer's job. Your excuse and I remember it well, was, "I want to learn all I can about your jobs. We have to work together as a team".—All without ever once telling us you'd already been through gunnery school. I didn't know that until I read "1000 Days". It's so characteristic of you, Danny Levin. I thank you for the times you guided us out of harms way and I can think of several.

The other reason I stuck with Ernie's Crew was Ernie's ability as a pilot. He was the best. I only flew with one guy who was better and he was that captain who flew into the 764th from the C.B.I. flying an old olive drab B-24D {like we flew occasionally at Davis Monthan}. Oh, I liked the guys fine. Oly was a lot of fun, but Rosulek & Ernie didn't like me. In fact, I don't think Ernie liked any of us, but what a hell of a pilot he was. And Bob was a damned good bombardier. I was there to take orders, not give them. I had terrific respect for you and Oly as officers but those other two were first class p...s at times. But—we had a job to do and we did it.

Of course you know I bailed out April 15, 1945 bombing in support of the American 5th Army in the Po Valley. A Lt. Brown was pilot. We were flying an old radar ship, red-lined at 600 hours and it had almost 800.

All the systems started burning up. We had a 45 minute doors-open bomb run from Leghorn to target and drag on this old crate were just too much. It was old #16 I believe.

We had lost our formation going up through heavy clouds, so we flew all by ourselves. We had so little power left--- we were running on the Mags only. No intercom. We flew over the smoke pots and markers on 3 engines. Had to salvo the bombs, no power to drop with and then we were catching flak like crazy--- turned and headed for our own lines.

I'll never know if we salvoed in the right place, but I tried.

We now had two engines & the word was passed to bail out. The Engineer asked me to go back and tell the guys in the waist to bail. I took my chute off & squeezed through the bomb bays, opened the rear hatch, screamed at the guys already around the rear hatch.

I put the D rings in the snaps on my harness, saw the guys bailing out in the front bomb bay and I dove out.

The chute opened with a terrible jerk and I was hanging from one riser. I thought I broke it and I could hear the webbing in the other riser creaking under my weight. I kept trying to pull myself up, hand over hand to the chest pack before the riser broke, but I couldn't do it.

It was then that I discovered that I had only engaged one D ring and snap. The other riser was still safely stitched to my harness. Was I ever relieved. I wound up one way and then back the other. I had no control over the chute. I came down in an Army quartermaster camp, in a mine field.

Lt. Brown had one engine left and finally managed to bail out. His chute caught in a tree and swung him backwards into the trunk, breaking his back.

We were taken to Florence and then flown back to Torretta by B-25 the next day.

I was called to operations and told that I could get off flight status if I so desired because of my forced bail-out. I refused because it was mission #25—I only had 10 to go—and I knew I'd never fly again if I didn't get right back in a B-24.

Boy, did I regret that on my way to #26. We got a made-up crew with a new green Pilot, Co-Pilot, and an even greener Flight Engineer. The Engineer didn't know enough to transfer fuel before we got to altitude and never asked anyone. The whole squadron was flying down valleys in the Alps like sitting ducks while this guy transferred fuel and the Pilot drove both 5 & 6 in the formation, clear out of formation {we were tail-end Charlie, #7}. I was never so scared in my life. I was sure this clown was going to get us all killed.

Two of the guys on board were flying their 35th and boy, they were cussing this guy out on the intercom. He was going to have us all court-martialled [I kept my trap shut]. Instead, The Colonel "blue-goosed" this guy for 10 hours a day, several days in a row. The pilots that had to fly with him were really pissed, but we got a 55 gal. drum of frozen ice cream each day they flew.

Then came April 25, 1945.

I flew with Lt. Toothman's crew. It was their 15th mission and my 27th. All I had to do was pull the fuse pins, set up the intervalometer with Air Speed and sight-bomb off the lead ship. I got shot down on the last mission the 15th flew past the Alps, or so I've been told.

It was a very clear day. We were after the Marshalling Yards at Linz. We knew flak was going to be intense. I had on a flak vest, a helmet and was straddling the two .50 caliber cans for the nose turret with my helmeted head jammed up in the astral dome.

We were to drop from 27,500 to 25,000 feet from the I.P. to the target. I believe we were flying in #3 position. I saw an 88 burst ahead of the lead ship but on an exact level with my eyes and the 12 o'clock position, then a second 88 exploded in just half the distance.

As if on a cadence with a metronome, a third 88 exploded just above the cockpit and a fourth 88 exploded in the tail turret, blowing it off the plane. The third shell entered the chin of the ship, passed through my straddling legs and ripped through the cockpit, between the pilot and co-Pilot, exiting the top before exploding above the ship.

Suddenly, all the Plexiglas in the astral dome exploded outward. My flak helmet flew up and back. The plane flipped over to the left and went into a power dive. Apparently I dropped the bombs by depressing the hand-held button during this time of the explosion.

I felt like some one had hit me in the back with a baseball bat, only harder. We were all pinned by centrifugal force. I could not back out of the astral opening. I went for a bear-headed ride outside the fuselage as the ship dove 10,000 feet.

Somehow, Dooney Scogins, the Flight Engineer, managed to get from the upper turret to the co-pilot, who was dead and sit down in his lap. All Plexiglas in the forward part of the plane, including the pPilot's windshield, was gone. The pilot, Lt. Toothman, had shrapnel wounds, breaking his left leg in three places and his left arm in two. He and Dooney somehow pulled that plane out of that power dive. I just knew that we were all dead. I

could hear a high-pitched whine until it was more like a scream as we dove straight for the ground. The Navigator, Paul R. Ashworth, was sitting on the floor of the nose compartment by the salvo lever preparing to salvo if necessary. He had a soft-ball-sized piece of buttocks missing and one hip joint in plain site. I didn't find this out until we were captured on the ground.

The Norden Bomb-sight was missing and all Plexiglas was gone except for the nose turret. We pulled out, we assume, at around 7,000 or 8,000 feet. We flew in a stalling position, half the controls gone, gas pouring off the wings, the plane attempting to climb and then immediately stalling.

We got almost 20 miles away from Linz trying for the Russian lines. The doors on the nose turret were jammed with the inside hull doors. To this day, Danny, I'll never know how we did it, but Paul & I knew we had to get the nose gunner out. We both grabbed hold of the hull door, gave a terrific yank and tore the piano hinge from its mountings.

We then got Doug Morrison out of his turret. He was the calmest, coolest bastard I ever saw in my life. He just smiled and said, "What took you guys so long?" I, to this day, don't think that guy had a nerve in his body.

When I bailed out at 4,000 feet, I realized I was being fired at from the ground near an old farm house. Two of my shroud lines suddenly burst apart. A P-38 came out of nowhere and circled. I pointed wildly at the farm house and held my hands out in front of me, making machine gun gestures. He got the message as I disappeared behind a small rise in the ground. He made a low level run, stopping the enemy shooting as I hit the ground.

This time I had both D rings securely engaged. I was also the first to bail out.

Almost immediately, as I landed in this plowed field, I started running for a dense forest I had spotted from the air. I never made it. A German truck with more gun muzzles than I had ever seen, all pointed at me, came over the hill.

I surrendered and was taken on the back of a motorcycle to a school house which had been converted into a field hospital--- no beds---just hay on the floor. The last guy out--- Scoggins, was picked up almost 10 miles away.

After my capture, I was held in the field for about half an hour and counted 33 B-24s going down in flames. I put my head down and quit counting.

Just then, right overhead, I saw a B-17 in a flat spin, on fire from wing tip to wing tip, coming down in this same field. It suddenly exploded, the wings and forward fuselage in one piece, the waist and tail in another.

Pete DiGrasso of Boston was the ball turret gunner. He was pinned in the hatch just forward of the tail, trying to bail out. The explosion blew Pete out of the tail section and downward toward the ground. His chute opened immediately, but coming down, right on top of him was the burning wings and hull.

Just before it got to him, a second explosion split the wings and hull into three pieces, splitting from each other and away from Pete. They were all around him, but missed him completely. He didn't have a scratch on him. What a terrific little guy he turned out to be.

He was the only survivor. He used to talk of ----“Skull—laaa - Squa waaa” all the time. [Bostonian accent?]

So, Pete was taken prisoner and brought along with the rest of us. That night, the Wehremacht brought in stacks of dog tags and asked us to identify them if we could. There were no names there that we knew. A lot of good men died that day. I remember thinking as I stood on the ground, “Oh no, there goes that telegram home, and here I am, OK.”

Then I thought, and you’ll find this hard to believe, “Thank God Danny finished his missions and didn’t land in these devil’s hands.” I just thought, Danny, that when the AA got done with us later, I damn well knew I was glad you made it.

We were put in front of a firing squad later, saved by a Belgian colonel who out ranked the SS troopers. Another 2 minutes and we would have been dead.

I’m getting ahead of my story. The mission, as Perry Brockman told me the day he visited me at the fire station, which Jerry Mills, who was flying as toggelier with another crew, was forced down on the Isle of Vis due to engine trouble. When they got into the engine, they found shards of a steel flak helmet that had knocked that engine out, and when another engine went out, they had to land.

We both believe that it was my flak helmet that did old Jerry and his crew in.

Also, just before I spotted the approaching flak bursts, we were hit with an attack by the first operational jet fighter of WWII. It was a solid propellant plane that could take off and get to altitude quickly, make one pass at our bombers and make a dead-stick landing, all in 7 minutes. It rolled through our formation firing 40mm cannon. I never did find out if this guy hit anyone.

Joe Hoskins, who was our tail gunner that day, had just gotten out of his turret and gone to the camera hatch to start the camera rolling. He was a bald guy who looked a lot older than he was. Anyway, just as he started the camera, we were hit with two 88’s and his turret just disappeared. Joe is deceased now and has been for a number of years.

Back on the ground, we had come down over a little town called Grein, north of the Danube and northeast of Linz.

The following day we were trucked to another little town where we were interrogated by a red-headed S.S. officer. Earlier in the day, this guy jumped on the back of our truck as we passed through a small German town and in perfect English said, “Hey Joe, where are you fly-boys from? I spent a lot of time in the states”.

We gave him name, rank and serial number. One by one we were grilled by this same SS guy behind a farm house. He asked me, “VEE-LANDT- Why do you fight against the Father-land?”

I told him I’m an American and “Frig your fatherland”, only I didn’t say frig. {I still was too dumb to know this jerk was SS or what a murderous bunch they were} It’s a wonder I wasn’t shot right there.

Anyway, the SS turned us over to an Austrian Anti-Aircraft outfit at Amstetten, Austria. Our navigator & pilot were hospitalized in Amstetten. Baker the radio man had a broken

ankle. The Austrians got him some crutches, somewhere. Anyway, we didn't go to a regular prison camp. We were hidden in a big room in this barracks. Baker spoke English and French. A Polish soldier attached to the Austrians spoke Polish, French and German. Baker spoke French to the Pole who spoke German to the Austrians.

Turns out the Austrians hate the Germans with a passion. The commanding officer, an Austrian Colonel had a home up in the Alps 50 miles south of Amstetten called Hollenstein. He secretly begins slipping his troops, a few at a time from Amstetten to Hollenstein. Unbeknown to us, the SS has ordered the Austrians to send us up to a Stalag, but the Austrians had different plans for us. The Austrians were very, very good to us. They shared all of their meager rations with us, including a 5-lb chunk of limburger cheese. We put it under our parachutes in a locker but to no avail. It still stunk up the room.

An older man, Fritz Preibeish, a barber from Vienna, was our self-appointed protector, patron saint, father figure, etc. He was a heck of a guy and after the war we sent food and clothing packages to him for his family and kids in Vienna.

Anyway, the Saturday night before the end of the war in Europe, May 5, 1945, the doors burst open at 2 AM to our room. A bunch of Austrians with machine guns burst in.

We were thrown German Wehrmacht uniforms and ordered to put them on. We told them no, that the SS would shoot us as spies and it was strictly in violation of the Geneva Convention. They said, "Would you rather be shot by the SS later or by us now?"

We put on the uniforms. 9 Americans and 3 Austrians were jammed into a small van - Austrians in the front and the rest of us in the back. We were told we had many check points to get through. We were to put our heads down and pretend to be asleep at each check point. They were all manned by the SS. We had to go through one SS town that was a stronghold. All personnel there were SS.

Two miles from Amstetten this van crapped out. There's nothing worse than a bunch of jabbering Austrians who are not mechanics. So we sat and waited like sitting ducks. We had been given one pistol and one hand grenade. We were told to throw the grenade in one direction shoot anyone who opened the back door of the van, then scatter and run for our lives. We'd be on our own. If caught, we'd be killed.

After several hours, a big 6x6 with a tow bar showed up. Someone had gotten word to the C.O. and he had sent a truck back for us. We weren't allowed to get out of the van. We only had on caps and jackets. We had on American flight gear from the waist down and there were informants on every corner. So, we were towed through all our check points.

The three others, Fritz and the two Austrians, had burp guns hidden between their legs. They were armed to the teeth.

In absolute mental agony we went creeping along on crowded roads in that van. A kid named Brown, a real ding-a-ling who was captured after bailing out of a disabled B-24 used to fly spies in behind enemy lines at night, had joined us in Amstetten shortly after capture. He had diarrhea and in one SS stronghold, he insisted on getting out of the van. Fritz tried to stop him, but he ran into the woods. He came back a few moments later whistling while we sweat bullets. Little did we know his little jaunt would get several people killed and get us involved in a fire fight and firing squad.

Someone reported Brown to the SS who in turn sent a couple of troopers to check all vehicles on the road to Hollenstein. We had now been in this van for almost 12 hours. We couldn't pee or nothing. Traffic suddenly backed up and we were in a jam.

Fritz dispatched an Austrian to go ahead on foot. We heard shots—he came back & Fritz told us that he had to shoot the SS and dump their bodies in the bushes. We then went into Hollenstein. It was such gorgeous country and we were too damned scared to enjoy it.

The C.O.'s chalet was a narrow, tall multi-storied, quaint, very picturesque home, four stories tall. We were given a large fourth floor room with bunk beds. Pete DiGrasso, Bud Acheson and myself went downstairs to the van to retrieve our uniforms, parachutes, etc.

We had stripped off the German stuff right after getting out of the van and out of site. I went upstairs and was called to the C.O.'s office. I was given a bottle of beer and was told that the Austrians planned to fight guerilla warfare, kill all the SS in the area and surrender the area to the American troops.

They showed me on a map where our troops were and the Russians advancing from the opposite direction. None of us knew at the time about the demarcation line, or that the American 7th Army had reached it before the Russians.

The Austrians did not want the Russians to be in control—they much preferred the Americans.

As senior non-com I had to speak for the group. I told them that we were prisoners of war and under no circumstances would we join forces with the Austrians in a guerilla war - that we were their prisoners and we would be in deep trouble with our own government. They said they were sorry to hear that and that they would respect our wishes. They said we were no longer prisoners and were free to go, although they could not guarantee our safety anywhere outside of Hollenstein.

I went back upstairs and told the guys what they had said. All of a sudden all hell broke loose outside. Machine gun slugs started coming in the windows and hitting the ceiling of our room.

Bud Acheson got halfway up a stair inside a set of French doors when someone opened up on him from outside. Slugs chewed up the stairs behind him. He threw the clothes he was carrying and charged up the stairs. He said DiGrasso was still in the truck and probably killed. Pete leaned down in the van for a match to light a cigarette when the SS opened up. The van had 50 holes like a zipper from front to back. DiGrasso dove on his belly, squirmed under the truck in the mud and went snake-style on his belly up the road where a Belgian trooper had captured him.

Two SS troopers had commandeered a battalion of Belgian troops who also were forced into the Wehrmacht. They were mostly 15 and 16 year old kids commanded by a full Belgian colonel.

Anyway, we could hear these troopers sliding against the walls with their burp guns as they approached our room. The Austrians had all split and ran into the forests. We were all alone.

Two young SS guys stepped into the doorway after Baker yelled "Comrade!" and slid the lone pistol out the door on the floor. They lined us up against the wall, flipped off the safety on their weapons, when in walks the full Belgian colonel. He ordered the SS men out. They wanted to kill him too, but he was a high ranking officer and they were enlisted men, so they obeyed.

We were moved to another barracks building in Hollenstein & held there Sunday and Monday nights.

Tuesday morning, we awoke to find the Belgian troops all gone. A mountain of rifles, hand grenades etc, all left behind. We could look across a broad canyon and see bumper-to-bumper troop trucks, captured jeeps, oxen pulling carts, civilians and German soldiers all walking together or obviously running from something.

The inn-keepers told us that the Belgian troops had left at 2:30 that morning with no warning. We huddled and tried to decide what to do.

We had Baker on crutches, Scoggins with shrapnel in his leg, plus our pilot and navigator in the hospital at Amstetten. A local policeman volunteered to try and guide one of the men through to the American lines, 25 miles to the west. Bud Acheson volunteered to go for help. He put on the overseas cap of our dead co pilot and left with the local gendarme.

This was 7:30 in the morning. We waited most of the day, agreeing that if Bud was not back by 4 PM, we'd strike out on our own, armed to the teeth.

4 PM came and went and we went to the town square with rifles, grenades, etc., ordering everyone in earshot to throw down their arms. A German 6x6 under canvas tarp sitting on the edge of the square responded by all kinds of weapons being thrown out of the truck.

Then, a voice from within the truck, in perfect English said, "Hey you GI's, here are our guns. Come ride with us to your lines to surrender. We have wine and cheese we wish to share with you. The war was over this morning at 2:00 AM. Germany has surrendered".

And then he said "I spent 14 years in the states in Chicago. I am a naturalized citizen. I made the mistake of coming to Germany just before the war began and I was forced into the German army. Please, you have nothing to fear from us. THE WAR IS OVER!"

This was the first we knew that the war was over. This German then said, "The Russians are coming up that road on the opposite wall of the canyon. They'll be here very soon. Come, we must go now or be captured by them."

That decided it. We all climbed into the back of this truck. Joe Hoskins stood at the back of the truck looking forward down the road. We hadn't gone a mile out of Hollenstein when Joe let out a scream, "A flag! A flag! An American flag & jeeps and, good god, there's Bud and American soldiers!"

I want to tell you, Danny, that flag was the prettiest sight I ever saw in my whole life.

Major Browne, Bud Acheson and a squad of 12 men driving 4 jeeps with water-cooled 30's had come 25 miles behind enemy lines to rescue us. God, but those foot guys were tough, courageous men. We were just about hugged to death by them. They were as glad to see us as we were to see them.

We transferred into the jeeps, and in less than 3 miles, Pete DiGrasso had recaptured an American 6x6. We traveled along the Ems River and were fired on from across the river, but kept going. We recovered 6 more jeeps. The infantry guys stopped all kinds of trucks with German soldiers and ordered them to throw out their weapons. I sat in the back of a jeep armed to the teeth with a burp gun, 2 grenades and knee deep in Berettas, p-38's, and all kinds of hand weapons. These guys were trying to get us some lugers, but no luck.

This buck Sgt. next to me said, "Hell, you guys got to have some souvenirs to take home".

I kept several hand guns which I later gave away to some ex-POW's I met who had been prisoners for a couple of years and had absolutely nothing.

We finally arrived back at Styne which is where the 7th Army waited for the Russians. An SS Division appeared at the bridge over the Ems leading into Styne and demanded to surrender. The commanding General turned them down flat, saying they would only get across by swimming the Ems. He had the bridge mined and brought up tanks after the SS commander said they would fight his way across. He and his troops did not get across although some tried to swim the river and drowned. But back to our story.

We were introduced by Major Browne to Col. Green, the C.O. Col. Green saw that we were quartered in civilian apartments and then had a dinner for us that evening. He kept calling me Captain and I'd say "oh, I'm not a Captain, Sir". But he just ignored it and went right on. We toasted the Air Corps, the Infantry, Motherhood and anything else we could think of. It was that overseas cap that Bud wore that morning. It was an officer's cap with piping and no insignia. Col. Green thought every flyer in the Air Corps was an officer. We didn't have the heart to tell him in front of his staff, so we went along with it.

The next day, a truck and driver was arranged and we started to bid Col. Green, Major Browne & the others goodbye and thanked them for all they had done for us.

We handed Col. Green a bunch of letters we had written the night before and if he would have them censored and sent on their way. He said "Oh, you can censor your own. We do it the same way the Air Corps does. Officers censor their own." "But Sir," I said, "none of us are officers. All of our officers are in the Amstetten Hospital or dead."

He put his head back and howled with laughter. "Son of a bitch—You mean I put on a formal inter-service dinner for a bunch of enlisted men?!" ---"We didn't have the heart to tell you, Colonel." "That's OK guys, the jokes on me. Wait till I tell my wife this one!"

We went by truck to headquarters for the Commanding General of the 7th Army at White Hoven, Austria. The General greeted us, said he was glad to have us back and if we needed anything, just holler. God, those 7th Army guys were good to us.

Dooney Scoggins and I confiscated some cognac from a truck the 7th Army guys stopped. We got several bottles and 50 cases were soon all gone.

It was then I saw some of the political prisoners. God, I felt like crying. The 7th Army guys described a Jewish camp they liberated. They were really choked up. I honestly don't know how some of those poor folks could walk. They were way past skin and bones. One of the medics told us that many were too far gone & they wouldn't be able to save them. It was really sad.

Anyway, Dooney and I walked up to the manager's apt. right after viewing this and demanded a place to stay. The manager told us in sign language he had nothing for us.

Dooney pulled out a pistol, cocked it and said, "Wow, this thing needs cleaning". The manager looked like he was shot out of a cannon. He couldn't get some keys fast enough. We let ourselves into a nice apartment. Don't know where the owners were. Anyway, we slept under big down comforters that night. I went to sleep first while Dooney was cleaning his guns with a kit he found in the apartment. An explosion woke me suddenly and I came up with a pair of pistols, ready to fire. It was Dooney. His gun fired accidentally. The slug made a hole in the hardwood floor, 3 inches from my ear. I told him to knock it off and go to sleep before he got me killed. It was interesting that no one came to see who fired the shot.

Pete DiGrasso stayed in another apartment and came to chow the next morning wearing a pair of #13 wing tips. Pete only stood 5'2" or 5'3" as I recall.

We were trucked that day to a Luftwaffe field just outside Munich. It was to become a center for all returning POW's. When we got there, there were fewer than 4,000 troops and POWs. This field looked like a big farm. The hangars were built like big dairy barns, the runways were all grass and the barracks were all built under tree cover. The barracks were insulated with dozens of layers of what was like brown wrapping paper. We found that we could tear it off in single sheets, roll up in it and be fairly warm.

The American Armies had moved so quickly across Europe that supply lines couldn't keep up. We were on tight rations for a few days. That's how the Red Ball Express came into being. They finally caught up to us and by now we were 10,000 and counting.

Each day MATS flew in a formation of C-46's to fly us to Rheims, France. Each night we sat around a giant bon-fire and each man in turn related how he had come to be there. They were incredible. Half of us should have been dead and weren't.

One day we were told, a quartermaster depot had been set up nearby and we could get some GI issue stuff. I got my first and only Ike jacket there. It was a size 39. An odd size but I lucked out. I still have that jacket complete with 15th patch and decorations. I plan to donate it to the 15th Air Force Museum at March Air Force Base in Riverside, California.

Finally, our turn came one morning and we were flown from Munich to Rheims. These MATS pilots thought they were hot stuff and were flying very tight formation flying. It made all of us nervous as hell. These guys weren't that good and were we glad to land. The plane landing behind us was greeted by General Eisenhower himself. We got to gather round and watch. He was a hell of a commander. One GI asked him why he couldn't take a German burp gun home as a souvenir. Eisenhower told his Adjutant to OK the request over his name. He then wished us well, God speed, got into his command car and departed. Somehow Pete DiGrasso didn't come with us. I wonder if he still has those #13s.

We were sent to a port battalion for processing. I walked over to an outdoor showing of "National Velvet". I wore my two souvenir pistols. When I came back to the tent all the guys were gone and the few of us left had been ripped off of all things of value. I had most of mine with me. I found the guys I had been with—Bud—Dooney—Baker, etc,

had been put in a freight train and sent to Camp Lucky Strike. A tent camp of 100,000 men a few miles north of Le Harve.

The next morning, an infantry Lt. who was also left behind got us on a very classy passenger train with officers only—so once again, our 2nd Lt. promoted 4 of us to Commissioned Officer status, and that's how we got to Camp Lucky Strike. I never saw any of those guys again until John LaZier spotted me last October in Tucson, April 16, 1991.

Sorry for the delay, Danny, but I'm a brand new grandpa. My youngest son, Darren and his wife, Mary, presented me with a 6 lb, 12 oz baby grandson. We dropped everything here and rushed to California and got there just minutes after the birth. My grandson is one month old as of yesterday and now weighs 9 lbs. Then I had to take off for Tucson and my doctor and a blood test. Still holding my own, nicely.

But back to Europe. Camp Lucky Strike was northeast of Le Havre, France. It was a tent city of 100,000 men. We were given still more shots [no military records] and deloused for the fifth time. I ran into an old classmate from my hometown who was captured during the Battle of the Bulge. He was ahead of me in processing and shipped out to state-side before I did. He promised to call my folks and let them know I was OK, and as it turned out, that was the first word that they had that I was OK. I was only a couple of days away from getting home when they got the telegram telling them that I was returned to Army control. It didn't say I was OK or wounded or what. Strange----- the Army.

The only other word they had was from a colonel at group telling them I was MIA. I always thought it a little strange that Ernie or the Squadron Commander didn't write and tell them what they knew. If they did, my folks never got it. It really didn't surprise me about Ernie [pilot]. He was a hard man to know.

Anyway, they finally hauled us to Le Havre and it was so strange. All buildings close to the wharfs were rubble. The only thing standing untouched in the midst of the rubble was a giant marble monument to the heroes of WWI.

We boarded the General Buckner, a troop transport with 7,000 men and crew and sailed the next morning. We could see the White Cliffs of Dover in the distance. We were supposed to take 3 ½ days to Newport News, VA but they really poured the coal to that baby. They said it could outrun the fastest subs during the war, and we were in sight of the harbor at Newport News the sunrise of the fourth day. We had crossed in under 80 hours. The sea was so calm we had to eyeball the bow for two or three minutes to see it move up or down slightly.

We disembarked to Camp Patrick Henry, a gorgeous camp. I saw the story of GI Joe with Mitchum and Burgess Meredith, got more shots, new uniform, blankets—hair cuts and absolutely terrific chow. We had learned to get by with two meals a day at sea. We were packed in like sardines on hammocks. One fart and the fight was on. And it's true--- the Navy really does eat beans for breakfast.

We'd get done with one meal and line up for the next, and they played Glenn Miller Army Air Force records all the way back. I was sure I'd died and gone to heaven.

After Patrick Henry, we were loaded on a train full of POWs all bound for California. Someone took chalk and decorated the outside of the train with big signs "EX-GERMAN

POWS”, “RETURNING EUROPEAN HEROES”, etc. Never did find out who? At every small town crossing in America people turned out by the hundreds. We were headed for Camp Beale, Marysville, Ca. Quarts of beer and milk were passed through the windows of the train, again and again. We were each given a bucket. We held them out the windows and people donated goodies. Golly, it was great.

We stopped outside a place called Wendover, Utah. This was June of '45. We were to wait for another train which was to give us 2 carloads of Marines and Sailors to pull to Marysville. We all got off the train for a stretch. There was a high chain link fence around some sort of military facility. We could just barely see some buildings off in the distance. But inside that fence was an armed soldier with rifle and bayonet every 25 feet.

“Get the hell away from that fence or we’ll shoot” we were told. One of us said “hey man, what the hell’s eating you? We’re on the same side!” The soldiers reply was “Never mind. Get back on that train or we’ll shoot.”

We got back on the train, wondering what the hell was so special about this place. A couple of months later the A-Bombs were dropped and Japan quit. It was a few days after that that I read one bomb had been assembled in Wendover, Utah and it all -----?

Well, we got to Marysville. I was issued 30” waist trousers [I’m 52” now] because that’s what fit at the time. I hitch-hiked to Sacramento, caught a greyhound to L.A. and rode the old P&E trolley to Alhambra.

I’ll never forget the welcome from my folks as long as I live. I came in the back door of the house and my Dad tackled me. My mom, who was very reserved, was all over me too, and so were my sisters.

I was on a 72-day leave and then I reported to Rest Camp at Santa Monica, California for a couple of weeks. I was shipped to George A.A.F.B. at Victorville, California [90 miles from home] and they should have sent me right on to Davis Monthan. They finally did in October and I was discharged Oct. 23, 1945. I lacked a month and 8 days of having 2 years on active duty. I entered active service on Dec.1, 1943 at Ft. Macarthur, Calif. Good old San Pedro, where I would spend many a happy year as an L.A. City Firefighter starting in July of 1949.