

the dreaded hypodermic needle. I swear it appeared to be about 2 feet long and 4 inches in diameter. It was a size I had never seen before but, I was assured it was only a tetanus shot. Next I was ushered into the auditorium where there were about 2 dozen airmen, none of whom I had seen before. It was now about 3:00 p.m., and I sat there wondering what next. About every 15 to 30 minutes, two or more airmen would be brought in. The room was slowly filling up and yet, no one I knew appeared. I was beginning to wonder, "Christ! Did I jump out too soon?" It had been done before. Maybe I'd panicked and left a crew now on its way home. Then I thought back — looked at my flying suit! (I was quite a sight!). My flying suit was in shreds, blackened from the fire, holes completely burned through in spots. I finally convinced myself I couldn't possibly have been burned like this and the plane still be flying.

About 4:00 p.m. they brought us some black bread and coffee (irsatz) which couldn't eat. I didn't like the taste of either, and I wasn't hungry. Later on I would have given anything to have that glorious piece of black bread - which was soon to come to taste like rich cake. My eyes were now beginning to swell shut and I could hardly see. The pain was beginning, and I was slowly comprehending that I was burned worse than I thought. My helmet and oxygen mask had protected my head and face, with the exception of the area around my eyes. My goggles were on my head, riding high on my forehead - they were too uncomfortable to wear (sound familiar?), so my eyes had been burned, and not having access

to a mirror I couldn't see the extent. About 5:00 p.m. an orderly came up to me and said that when it got good and dark they would put me in an ambulance and take me to a hospital. I think it was about 8:00 p.m. when they led me to the ambulance.

I was met by a sound I will never forget — the voice of Tom Noesges bombardier, who was lying on a stretcher with a broken leg. It was a voice out of heaven. Not only was I among friends again, (the auditorium by 8:00 p.m., had filled almost to capacity and I still hadn't seen any one I knew) but my worst suspicions were allayed. I now knew for certain that I hadn't jumped too soon. I believe Tom was as glad to see me as I him. I know, for myself, it was a grand and glorious reunion. We were taken to a train and eventually ended up in a hospital in Brunn, Czechoslovakia, where we received our initial treatment. I remember quite well being given a bath upon arrival, by female nurses, and not being able to see, my embarrassment was well hidden. Tom Noesges and I were in the same room with two other Americans. Shortly thereafter (about 2 weeks later) I had recovered enough to travel, and one of the other prisoners-of-war and myself were taken to a regular POW camp for interrogation — leaving Tom Noesges at the hospital.

The aircraft of Crew #14, a B-24 Bomber, 15th AAF, 49th Wing, 461st B.G., 765 Sqdn., flying out of Cerignola, Italy (near Foggia), was shot down by enemy fighters over Troubky, Czechoslovakia at 12:01 p.m. December 17, 1944, upon being hit by enemy 20mm cannon

shells from either FW190 or ME109 German aircraft, it immediately caught fire and within minutes exploded. The main portion of the aircraft, with 6 bodies, crashed near the village of Troubky. 4 airmen were able to parachute to safety.

Those who gave their lives were:

WEST, Thomas K 1st Lt. Pilot  
 DEIBERT, Thomas E. S./Sgt. Top gunner  
 MERGO, Joseph G. S./Sgt. Tail gunner  
 DOE, Roy L. Sgt. Nose gunner  
 GAUL, Frederick H. Sgt. Waist gunner/-  
 Flight engineer  
 YESIA, Frank C. Cpl. Ball gunner

They are buried in a mass grave near Troubky, Czechoslovakia and have a marble monument with a bronze plaque, donated by the villagers of Troubky, to commemorate the day these American boys gave their lives so that Czechoslovakia could be free.

The four survivors are:

QUALMAN, Thomas 2nd Lt. Navigator  
 NOESGES, Thomas 2nd Lt. Bombardier  
 KASOLD, Edward 2nd Lt. Co-pilot  
 ROSS, Trefry A. S/Sgt. Waist gunner/-  
 Radio Operator

These men were returned to the United States following cessation of hostilities in Germany in June 1945. They are now living in various parts of the United States. Tom Qualman is in Georgia; Tom is in Illinois; Trefry Ross is in California; and Edward Kasold's whereabouts are unknown.



2nd Lt. James English (right) bombardier of crew #17-S12 with an unknown companion (left), both of the 766th Bomb Squadron, 461st Bomb Group, taken in a night club in Rome during July or August of 1944. (JAMES ENGLISH PHOTO 766TH SQ.)