

Letters to the Editor

William G. Blackburn
Attachment To Membership Application

Shot Down Information. On March 23, 1945, we flew on a mission to Vienna, Austria, our target being the Kagren Oil Refinery. We encountered heavy flak and our aircraft suffered extensive damages. However, we proceeded on our bomb run and I suffered a flak wound to my right upper arm which severed my right median nerve and apparently the artery in my right arm was at least partially severed.

Other crew members were unable to stop the bleeding and were unsuccessful in administering the morphine painkiller, probably because of the cold temperature and lack of blood circulation in the affected area. In any event, because of my uncontrolled loss of blood and severe flak damages to the aircraft, we elected to land at a Russian held air base in Kecskemet, Hungary. Upon landing the plane, we were met by Russians, including medical personnel, and a nurse was able to almost immediately stop any further bleeding.

I was hospitalized in a converted Hungarian school building for several weeks and was later transferred by the Russians to be with five other injured American airmen in a school building in Szeged, Hungary, which had also been converted to a hospital.

During all the time we were guests of the Russians, we were in contact with American military personnel stationed with the Allied Control Commission in Budapest, Hungary. We requested that the Russians release us to return to Italy to rejoin our various military units, as the Allied Control Commission informed us that it would be a simple matter to return us to Italy on regularly scheduled ATC flights to Budapest from Italy. However, the Russians stated that they had an agreement with the USA to repatriate all American military personnel in their custody by their own procedures and they explained that any Russian personnel in custody of the Americans would be repatriated by the Americans in accordance with the American procedures. After waiting impatiently for several weeks, without results, the six of us who were patients at the Russian Hospital in Szeged were able to make arrangements with the Allied Control Commission personnel to "escape" from the Szeged Hospital and successfully avoid detection by the Russians by hiding in an Allied Control Commission vehicle which had been dispatched to Szeged to pick up a load of plate glass. Once we arrived at the Allied Control Commission Headquarters in Budapest, we were safely out of the custody of the Russians and within about a week we were able to catch an ATC flight back to Italy. I am still not certain why the Russians delayed in permitting us to leave their custody and return to Italy by our own methods, but perhaps it was due to their cumbersome communications of front line military operations with the Russian high command in Moscow. My concern grew after the war was over on or about May 8, 1945, and the Russians still failed to release us to return to our American military units.

Although I received considerate treatment and good medical care from the Russian personnel, it took approximately three months for me to successfully return to Italy. Due to the injury which I received, I was never able to resume active military duty as a pilot.

Millville, NJ
Dear Bud:

Reading the "Torretta Flyer" number 31, I went through General Arnold's second report to the Secretary of War dated 2-27-45, which was quite interesting, particularly where it applied to things that were quite familiar to us, like steel landing mats, flak suits, pressure tanks, heated suits, oxygen masks; etc. (I thought that something important fell off the plane when we came down for the first time on those runway mats in Dakar, Northwest Africa and my flak suit took a beating on my last mission, but saved my hide).

However, in rereading this report, I took a closer look at the Jet Propulsion section, page 8 of the "Flyer".

Due to a problem where we lost our pilot while training on B-24's in Pocatello, Idaho, that crew was split up and transferred to temporary duties in Wendover, Utah. We flew in a squadron of Martin B-26 medium bombers that were modified to tow banner targets for in flight gunnery practice by heavy bombers; usually the B-24. Being in a "hot" ship like the "Marauder" and being shot at closely by 50 caliber MG's was not a fun time. (We had to pull the fuse for the low speed warning signal because we usually had to cut back our speed in flight so the other guys could get a decent shot at our towed target!)

The overall range of all participants was restricted because of the Muroc Lake area. We always assumed that it was because the early B-29 super bombers were based there, even though we were all familiar with the aircraft in general.

Now, General Arnold's report poses the likelihood that the first jet powered fighter, the Bell P-59A, "Aircomet", was being tested in secret at that dry salt base. I remember reading, some years later, that the P-59A was transported to Muroc covered with a tarpaulin and having a fake propeller stuck on the nose of its fuselage.

After some experiences in ends-of-earth Wendover; (like getting lost in the desert on a reluctant horse, swimming in a pool that doubled for ditching practice from a cut down B-17 fuselage and losing two friends in a takeoff crash when the magnetos cut out on the starboard PWA R-2800 engine), the entire former B-24 crew was returned to combat training. We stayed separated, and I ended up in Colorado Springs as a member of Squadron 827, eventually being chosen to join Major Haldeman's crew; thence on to Harvard, Nebraska and points East.

