



The 461st

Liberaider



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SOMEWHERE IN THE USA

COY JUNIOR WESTFALL

Serial Number
15337761

**24 July 1922 - 25
July 1944**

by

Lorn W. Westfall,
Houston, Texas

This is a story of a World War II hero, Coy Junior Westfall, a 7th cousin, once removed. Common ancestors are Johannes & Maritje (Cool) Westfall. His Westfall lineage is:

(Continued on page 16)

Inside this issue:

<i>Operational Training</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Induction</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Coy Junior Westfall</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Dress Parade Over Bari</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Mail Call</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Meanwhile, Back to the States</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Webmaster Comments</i>	<i>40</i>

Operational Training

This is the second in a series of articles by Vahl Vladyka. This second one covers time during his training prior to going overseas. Future articles in this series will include "Going Over", "Over There", and "Coming Home".

By
Vahl Vladyka

Westover Field was a new experience, for it was a permanent army air field, built between the two World Wars, and named for Major General Oscar Westover, commander of the Army Air

Corps from 1935 until his death in a crash in 1938. It was huge by comparison to anything I had known. Most of the buildings were permanent, and streets were laid out in an orderly fashion, as in a 19th century, midwestern American town. We were not so fortunate with our BOQ, however, since we found ourselves back in one-story, temporary barracks, but this time with compartments separated by highly flammable beaverboard partitions that extended above our heads, but not to

(Continued on page 5)

Chapter One Induction

This is the first in a series of articles by Bob Jones. This first one covers time during his training prior to going overseas. Future articles in this series will appear in this space in subsequent issues of the Liberaider.

By
Robert K. Jones

My orders were to report to Harvard Army Air Field on the northeast corner of the little town of Harvard, Nebraska for combat crew training on or about the 4th of January 1944 so on that day, Dad and Mom took me and my gear to Harvard, which was about ten miles east of Hastings, NE. We

arrived in time to have lunch at the Officers club before they returned home.

I proceeded to get signed in at the orderly room of the 484th Bomb Group. I was informed that I was to be in the 826th Bomb Squadron and was assigned to a certain crew. I also was assigned to a bed in a private room. (Very different from what I was used to in cadets) The room was about 10-feet by 10-feet in size with a GI cot and a baseburner as the only furnishings but it was to be my pleasant

(Continued on page 34)

Taps

May they rest in peace forever

Please forward all death notices to:

Hughes Glantzberg
P.O. Box 926
Gunnison, CO 81230
hughes@hugheshelpdesk.com

or

Bob Hayes
2345 Tall Sail Drive, Apt. G
Charleston, SC 29414-6570
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764th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Bensfield, Joseph E.	North riverside, IL	932	Aug. 8, 2003
Carter, Arthur D.	San Antonio, TX	1092	Nov. 24, 2002
Giddings, Vernon W.	Desert Hot Springs, CA	612	Apr. 14, 2003
Hardee, James L.	Atwater, CA	750	Jul. 25, 2003
Keeler, S. D.	Zepher, TX	911	Jul. 15, 1995
Pearce, James F.	Toledo, OH	1034	Nov. 2002
Roth, Jerome R.	Dunedin, FL	1034	May 5, 2003
Smith, Kennth B.	Indianapolis, IN	1092	Mar. 12, 2003
Tiffany, Donald E.	Glenfield, NY	1092	Aug. 5, 2002

765th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Crawford, Alvin Glenn	Houston, TX	612	Nov. 2, 2002
Hulsey, Wlber C.	Huntsville, AL	612	Apr. 22, 2002
Josephs, Jerome	Wyncote, PA	757	Aug. 10, 2001
Kadow, Howard W.	Irvington, NY	1035	Oct. 28, 2001
Karpinski, Edward	Coatesville, PA	901	Nov. 10, 2002
Prien, Kenneth W.	Sacramento, CA	1034	Mar. 20, 2003
Showalter, William C.	Denver, PA	748	Jun. 20, 2002
Smith, Gerald Robert	Garden Grove, CA	1092	Aug. 5, 2003
Ward, Elmo E.	McMinnville, OR	747	Jun. 15, 2003
Weaver, Arthur D.	Toledo, OH	612	2003

Taps

May they rest in peace forever

766th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Breuil, James F.	N. Miami, FL	911	Apr. 1, 2002
Burke, William	Miami, FL	1096	Jan. 4, 2003
Caldwell, Lyman Bruce Jr.	Bowling Green, FL	747	2003
Hoskins, Robert S.	Murfreesboro, TN	1092	Jun. 5, 2003
Jones, Harry J.	Knoxville, TN	686	Jan 12, 2003
Juzwicky, Stephen	Niagara Falls, NY	747	Dec. 11, 2001
Keeney, Thomas H.	Belton, MO	1092	Sep. 23, 2001
Lucas, Lloyd John	Wayne, OK	821	May 12, 2002
Owens, Robert F.	Merrionette Park, IL	1092	Mar. 4, 2003
Sterrett, Robert Eugene	Peoria, IL	1092	2003
Thompson, Robert Kruger	San Rafael, CA	1092	Aug. 20, 2003

767th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Capporelli, Joseph	Boise, ID	911	May 25, 2003
Crinkley Robert A.	Eastsound, WA	1092	Apr. 25, 2002
Hart, George H. Jr.	York, SC	612	May 5, 2003
Haynes, Harry L.	Kerrville, TX	612	Apr. 16, 2003
Keifer, Lowell D.	Borger, TX	612	Oct. 18, 2002
Mollart, George	Yerington, NV	612	Aug. 24, 2003
Owens, James O.	Chicago, IL	1092	Nov. 24, 1996
Skroski, Frank	South Deerfield, MA	612	Jun. 17, 2003
Wright, Walter B.	Cambridge, MD	612	Dec. 12, 2002
Zenovieff, Pete	Bryte, CA	555	Jan. 27, 2003

Dress Parade Over Bari

By
Guyon L. Phillips
461st BG 767 BS

It didn't take long to find out that life in the peacetime Air Force would be another world indeed. The morning after VE Day, we were called out and told to fall into formation for announcements. I'd have thought they would assemble everybody into the Briefing Room (previously a stable – no windows).

You have to remember that was Southern Italy, and more like peasant farm country. We lived in tents with dirt floors; had outside privies and for handling number one, just use the open terra cotta pipe standing in the middle of the compound. Uptight GI protocol one day after the war was over in Europe seemed totally out of place. My gosh, I hadn't stood in formation since getting my wings.

While the war was going on, the primary focus was effectively planning and executing bombing missions with a minimum of red tape. Suddenly we had lost our primary reason for being, and Group Staff reacted quickly by substituting a return to the GI military we thought we had left far behind – more about that later.

General Twining's headquarters for the 15th was in Bari on the Adriatic coast. It was decided there would be a multi-group effort with the 15th AF HQ as the simulated target. As we assembled into group formations, a Lone Wolf – one of those gray Mickey ships used for radar bombing through the clouds – appeared and immediately got on the horn telling stragglers to pull it in and tighten it up.

I was flying #3 on the left wing of the leader, and began to notice that the pilot of #2 kept drifting in and out of position. It was obvious he was not comfortable – or able – to fly close formation. I'd known pilots who had a near miss in formation, and never really got over it – the harder they tried, the more they over corrected and just resigned themselves to fly loose formation, and take the criticism that followed.

Before long, #2 drifted out even farther. It was then I noticed that Lone Wolf began sliding closely under me, and I could see what he was up to – he was going to take the #2 spot. To me, that was a show-off move and one that could be a disastrous multiple mid-air if #2 suddenly pulled back. Sure enough, Lone Wolf pulled into #2, but in a tighter than normal formation – that did it. Not only was it a show-off move, but also now we were going to get a lesson on formation flying.

It wasn't very smart for me to do so, but I got on the horn and said, "Here's somebody who's going to show us how to fly formation." After Lone Wolf put his wing in extra tight, I put mine in even tighter. He did it again, and I moved in even closer. My wing tip was almost in the waist window of #1, and the gunner was waving me to back off. I reckon I was surprised Lone Wolf didn't order the pilot to identify himself as the one who got on the radio. After a few minutes in ultra-tight formation and without saying a word, Lone Wolf pulled away and #2 returned. Mark one up for the little guy who wouldn't be bested in formation flying.

Meanwhile, on with the dress parade – the mock bombing run over General Twining's HQ went uneventfully. After the mass fly-over, groups dispersed for the route back to home base. Well, Torretta Field – west of Cerignola – was home base to the 461st and 484th. As our group reached the vicinity of the field for a pass-over and peel-off, I noticed another group converging on a collision course from the right. I called #1 and told him we had a group closing in on us, but got no response.

It didn't take long for me to see that I was going to have to find a safe exit. The other group had managed to pull slightly ahead and the scramble began. I couldn't go right, I didn't dare go left for fear others behind would do the same, I sure wasn't going down into a blind spot – the only alternative was up, so I pushed up the throttles, lowered 10 degrees flaps for stability, and pulled up into a near stall as I called out on the intercom to watch underneath. After a few hairy moments, the air cleared sufficiently to level off and look around. I finally spotted #1, and pulled onto his left wing for another pass over the field for a peel-off.

The next day, a bulletin appeared on the board that all pilots were guilty of breaking formation and not regrouping before peel-off and landing – if there was a problem, I thought the CO would call us together and tell us first hand. For that infraction, all pilots would report to Squadron HQ and perform clerical work for half-a-day. Although I had sought out my leader and got on his wing before break off, I chose not to even dignify such an impersonal and GI order with a rebuttal.

This reinforced my impression – from the earlier order to fall out for formation just to hear orders for the day on VE Day-plus one – that a peacetime Air Force just wasn't that attractive anymore.

(Continued from page 1)

the ceiling.

Officers in training were quartered two to a room, which later in the fall were to be heated by a potbellied stove fueled by coal. At that moment, however, coal-fired heat was far from our minds, in the then-present record 100-degree weather. It was disappointing to find ourselves in quarters very much the same as those we inhabited in advanced flight training at Blytheville. I wrote home that I did not like the base, because everything was "spread out all over creation"; another of my lifelong lapses into the world of hyperbole, but it was a long walk to most points on the base where my presence might be required.

My biggest disappointment came when I learned that Bill, and all the others with whom I had learned to fly, had departed the preceding day for the Replacement Training Unit at Charleston, South Carolina. I received some encouragement when I asked if I could be sent to join them, but another pressing matter intervened.

* * *

I previously had come to the conclusion that I must not go overseas with my chronically infected tonsils, so on my second day, I reported to sick call, where I inquired about a tonsillectomy. I was ushered into the Spartan wartime office of a nose and throat specialist who wore the gold oak leaves of a major, in the wartime medical corps an indication of the doctor's age, rather than his command experience. This gruff "old guy", probably about 40, glanced down my throat and announced, "Go get your shaving kit and report back to the hospital. The die is cast...."

On the following morning, wrapped in a hospital gown and with my empty stomach rumbling in protest, I took myself to the doctor's office for one of my life's most unpleasant experiences. My kindly old surgeon, indicating an iron chair in the corner of the room, growled, "Sit there, and put your head back in the corner, so it won't wiggle." On command, I opened my mouth and in horrified fascination watched him approach with local anesthetic in a pis-

tol grip hypodermic needle the size of which veterinarian Dr. Hackenbush (Groucho Marx) might have used on his horse patient in "A Day at the Races".

Midway through the operation, my scalpel expert severed a small artery, and as he wrestled interminably attempting to tie it off, he barked, "Don't cough!" By then my mouth and throat were filled with blood, and, reflexively responding to the power of suggestion, I immediately coughed and sprayed blood all over his face, eyeglasses, and white surgical cap and mask, whereupon I learned that he really had been a pussycat up to that moment.

My gentle Hippocrates finally finished his gory task and bundled me off to my ward in the care of an orderly. I learned that Westover followed the logical methodology of Smyrna, where patients with boils were placed in the same open ward as those dying from burns.

Along my side of the long, narrow, one-story building were about 20 hospital beds containing patients recuperating from nose and throat surgery, mostly the former, for it was deemed essential that air crewmen be able to breathe through their noses while wearing oxygen masks. Along the opposite wall reposed a like number of patients trying to forget for a moment that they had just been circumcised, the army stern in its belief that men sent to combat should be able to retract their foreskins sufficiently to permit proper hygiene.

It quickly became apparent the army grouped us with a purpose, i.e., the nose and throat patients would quickly forget their discomfort, when they watched their comrades gingerly walk to mess hall or the latrine while holding the front of their hospital robes away from their post operations.

I was unable to eat solid food for about a week, during which I lost 10 pounds from an already lean frame, but the nurses were sympathetic with ice cream, and one even rubbed my back with alcohol to prevent bed sores. This pretty lady in white (nurses

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

wore white in those days) hinted that she dearly would love to ride in a B-24, but I regretfully had to inform her that such privileges were restricted to the brass.

I was amazed when a doctor removed the packing placed in the nostrils of the patient on my left. I watched in fascination, as bloody gauze seemed to emerge in a never-ending stream, for it filled a washbasin.

Eleven days later and ten pounds lighter, I finally was discharged from the hospital. I immediately reported to my commanding officer, repeating my request to be sent to Charleston, but he informed me that I now was two weeks behind that group, and it would be impossible to make up that much training. It was a pleasant change to have a C. O. who expressed regret and sympathy about my problem.

* * *

Back in barracks with flying officers awaiting assignment, I became acquainted with a likeable pilot named Laval Tremblay, with his black hair, brown eyes, and ethnic name, apparently one of the considerable number of New Englanders of French-Canadian descent. On our first weekend, Laval invited me to accompany him to nearby Holyoke, where his mother, sister and current girlfriend were visiting relatives.

While I have no recollection of this event, I wrote home that we enjoyed a family dinner with very nice people, following which, Laval, his girlfriend, his sister, and I went dancing, and on the next day, his cousin took Laval and me golfing.

Laval and I became good friends, and on a weekend a few weeks later, I vividly recall that he took me to Worcester for Sunday noon dinner at his mother's house. The family apparently was reasonably prosperous, for the house, though not ostentatious, was comfortably and tastefully furnished and in a good neighborhood. I assumed that his mother, a gracious lady of middle years, was divorced or widowed, for no mention was made of Mr. Tremblay. Mrs.

Tremblay seemed astonished when I remarked that the sliced tomatoes served with dinner tasted as if they were vine-ripened — not the grocery store type picked green in distant regions. She said she never had heard that sort of comment from any of Laval's friends. On the strength of my 1940 experience as a field hand on the Marshall Canning Company farm gang, I assured her that I knew my tomatoes, if not my onions.

* * *

After a brief period of uncertainty, I was assigned to a flight of 18 crews, and also met my fellow crewmembers, except our navigator, "Bob" Curland, who did not join us until early in October. In the next chapter, "GOING OVER", I will recount the identity and descriptions of co-pilot "Mac" Mc Donald; navigator "Bob"; engineer "Ernie" Rota; ball turret gunner and armorer "Cliff" Hanel; tail gunner "Wally" Noll; bombardier "Tex" Poer; top turret gunner and assistant engineer "Moose" Benso; and late arrivals George Johnston as nose gunner and radio operator "Annie" Oakley, so I will not repeat myself here.

Our original nose gunner and radio operator fell by the wayside during our training and were shipped out, presumably to the infantry. The nose gunner developed "chronic airsickness" in early October, and the radio operator developed "ear trouble" just before we finished training. My personal, but unvoiced, diagnosis was fear of flying, which should carry no stigma, for it simply happens to some, the way acrophobia happens to me.

Mac proved to be all that one could hope for in a co-pilot, except for lack of experience. Like Gig Young, in the good wartime film, *Air Force*, he had aspired to be a fighter pilot and had gone to single-engine advanced school, following which he found himself dumped in the right seat of a heavy bomber. It was not easy, going from single to four-engine work, and many in such circumstances were resentful, but Mac accepted his lot with equanimity. He was Irish through and through, but he had few of the characteristics attributed to that ethnic group by a lifetime of John Ford movies, being neither belliger-

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

ent nor a hard drinker. Soft spoken and a little reserved, we got along extremely well and never crossed words during our time together. He was a couple of months older than I and, although a Roman Catholic, had finished public high school in 1940, the same year as I. He had attended Amherst University briefly, and he earned his degree there after the war.

Ernie was outstanding in his job; he had attended army schools both for flight engineers and gunnery and had earned sergeant stripes, a rarity, since almost all crewmen in our flight were corporals. Ernie also was a quiet man, but he could be aroused when prodded. I recall him once nose to nose with Moose, who used a then popular threat, "I'll drive you!", and Ernie responding, "You couldn't drive a tack!" At that point I intervened and told them to go about their business. Ernie was the biggest man on the crew and Moose was the ex-football linebacker, so it may have been a case of both being glad I was present. Since Ernie was at my right shoulder on all flights, I naturally got to know him better, and we have renewed our friendship in person many times since the war; most recently meeting in Waco for lunch, when his wife and he were in Dallas in 1999 for a family reunion and in 2000 at our crew reunion in Annapolis.

At Westover, Moose assumed the mantle of "Peck's Bad Boy", drinking hard and getting into fights while in town, but he was dependable on the job, so I never mentioned his off duty escapades. One of the men told me that he returned to barracks late one night somewhat worse for wear, and when he was unable to turn the doorknob, he drove his fist through a door panel and opened it from the inside! After the war,

Moose went back to Georgetown University, and after a knee injury ended football, he served as a night shift police officer in the nation's capitol building until graduating from college. He married a cheerleader, became the owner of his own successful business, and fathered four children. All four plus eight grandchildren were in attendance and offering a warm welcome, when Merijane and I first visited their home in the late 1980's.

Wally and Cliff were in the waist area most of the time in flight, and we really did not become well acquainted until many years later. In 1950, while we were living in Fort Des Moines veterans housing, they showed up at the door one day unannounced. I was touched that they would drive all the way from Wisconsin to see me, but I was poor company, since I had undergone oral surgery that morning to extract an impacted wisdom tooth. During his last difficult years with diabetes, especially after amputation of one leg, Cliff phoned me frequently (and I him), just to visit, and Wally and I have had several pleasant times together in recent years. Wally joined the National Guard after the war and retired as a major. At age 66 he shot his age in golf! Wally's son and his wife spent four days with us in 1997, and Karl, a physician, said that he had grown up listening to tales about me recounted at the family dinner table.

* * *

Our flight commander was a broad shouldered six-footer, one among a multitude in our armed forces bearing German names. Captain Schweigert, a veteran of the air war in Europe, was businesslike, but not unreasonable or unfriendly, and most were happy

(Continued on page 8)

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

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(Continued from page 7)

with our lot having him command us. We rarely saw him, other than at daily briefing, where he passed out assignments from an elevated stage and informed us what was expected for the day's training.

We met in a briefing room in a corner of one of the huge permanent hangars, nine crews on each side of a center aisle, with airplane commanders occupying aisle seats, and their respective crews in the same rows, about 180 total. Each crew had an instructor, all combat veterans, who sat in the rear and joined their students after briefing. Ours was a first lieutenant named White, a blonde, probable Scandinavian, fortunately of gentle demeanor, since he stood about six feet two inches and weighed perhaps 220 pounds.

We learned that we would fly mornings, afternoons and nights, in sequence, with ground school scheduled for mornings or afternoons when we were on the ground. We also continued the ever-present physical training. While we ostensibly were free on two out of three nights, it sensibly became only one out of three, for on the morning after one of our two free nights, we always had a very early call to fly.

* * *

Much to our regret, Tex and I violated this unwritten rule one night, arriving back at the field just in time to shower, shave, eat breakfast and go to briefing. As luck would have it, we went to twenty plus thousand feet that day and spent four hours in oxygen masks. When Wally and Moose reported over the intercom that Tex was trying to sleep in the waist area, I ordered them to keep him awake at all costs, partly out of concern that he could die from hypoxia (called "anoxia" then), and partly because I felt it unjust that he could sleep and I could not. The night before was the occasion we crashed a lively party, where he poured a pitcher of ice water out the open window of a seventh-story hotel room, shouting to the unsuspecting pedestrians below, "**BOMBS AWAY!**"

Since Tex did not go to Italy with us, I have not described him previously. He was 19 years old, native of Brownwood, Texas, and until assigned to West-

over, never had ventured beyond the borders of the Lone Star State. He was six feet five inches tall and very slender, causing me to wonder how he ever passed a flight physical. His twang left no doubt in anyone's mind about his origins, and his speech was full of the funny little "folksyisms" practiced by rural and small town Texans of that era.

On one long night flight, we were told to fly to a point on the map described only by latitude and longitude, and then return. Our destination was a spot in the Atlantic Ocean in the Bermuda area, the idea being to see if our navigators could get us there and back on celestial navigation. Pilots and bombardiers had extensive training in all forms of navigation except celestial, so Tex was ordered to watch the ground (called pilotage navigation) during the part of our mission over land, and check that Bob kept on course.

Tex promptly stretched his 6'5" onto a padded sort of bench on the flight deck and went to sleep, regaining consciousness just as we arrived over New York City. According to Bob, Tex grabbed his aeronautical chart, looked at the sea of city lights, snaked his way down to the nose area, and plaintively uttered, "Bob! What's the name of that town down there?"

I had been assigned to share a cubicle (I will not dignify it by calling it a room) with Mac, my co-pilot, but his home and fiancée were in nearby Holyoke, so I saw nothing of him during off duty hours. After he joined our crew, Bob also disappeared each free night, and his destination remained a mystery, until I saw a documentary a few years ago, in which it was explained that Jewish people near wartime military bases freely opened their homes and places of entertainment to Jewish service men. I did not know, or even think, about Bob being Jewish, until I learned it by chance en route to Italy. Tex and I had a few outings together, but most of my time off base was spent with Laval and two young ladies we met at an amusement park.

I truly missed friends with whom I had spent ten months in flight and transition training: Francis "The Hairy Ape" Sugrue, "Moon" Volmut, Johnny Wil-

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

son, and all the rest, and Bill especially. It also was a letdown that local people did not make us feel so welcome as the people of Nashville. It is a cinch the girls were not as pretty or as accessible. And maybe, after two years, I was homesick for family and friends at home.

* * *

Our airplanes were a step up from the old B-24 D's and E's flown at Smyrna. B-24 J's were produced in more than double the number of any other of the eight models produced in quantity, 6,678 in all, more than a third of total Liberator production. It was in this model, and no other, that all our operational training took place.

We made our first flight, mentored by Lieutenant White, of course, on September 8th, and I had a lot of catching up to do, for I had not been in the air since July 25th. Harking back to my training as an enlisted man and ground officer, I was somewhat upset when Mac informed me that he had told the enlisted men on our crew to call the four officers by our first names, for I feared that this familiarity could adversely affect discipline at a time when it might be needed most. As things turned out, the character of our men was such that my fears proved groundless, for in the ensuing ten months we were together I had occasion only once to use strong language seriously to a member of our crew. On that single occasion, at the height of the Innsbruck debacle, the subject of my attention was the only crewmember I have been unable to locate.

At first it was a rude shock trying to take off and land an airplane outwardly similar to those in which we trained at Smyrna, but several thousand pounds heavier by virtue of the added turrets, ten .50 caliber machine guns, and six or seven more human bodies. Lieutenant White flew with us only five times, from September 8th to the 17th, following which he pronounced me ready and threw me to the wolves. I was not nearly so ready as appearances might have indicated, but during the next two months, we all managed to learn enough together to qualify as ready to be thrown to the real wolves.

In all we made 50 training flights, logging 141 hours 15 minutes of flight time, during which I shot 66 landings. Fourteen of these flights were in the nighttime.

* * *

It is a sad fact that many men who became pilots, and navigators, too, during the war were not intellectually or emotionally suited for the job. A considerable percentage of our losses were caused by "pilot failure", where someone failed to observe safe flying rules we had spent a year memorizing. Mistakes such as flying into bad weather, dragging in final approaches at low altitude, "hot dogging", and other lapses of judgment took their toll, while in some cases, it simply was lack of necessary motor skills. Other deaths occurred because pilot and navigator did not know where they were, a problem that Bob never let arise. It was he alone in our flight who recognized that the higher ranking lead navigator was leading us into trouble over Innsbruck.

During a 1997 visit in Wisconsin with Wally Noll, now a retired major in the Wisconsin National Guard, he recalled details of an accident that occurred shortly after our crews were assembled. Because I had completely forgotten this incident (or blocked it from my conscious mind), I asked Wally to send me a written account, which follows. The portions in editorial brackets are my comments by way of explanation.

I had a friend named Cliff Nordby from North Dakota. We had gone through gunnery school together at Tyndall Field, Florida. He was assigned to Lt. Acey's crew.

You [self], Mac and Ernie were scheduled for night training, shooting landings, etc.

Cliff Hanel and I asked to come along and rode in the waist. *It was our first time in a B-24.* I guess Nordby did the same thing with Acey — *he wasn't required to fly on that training mis-*

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

sion. [Emphasis added.]

We saw the flames from the crash at the end of the runway, and I guess we had to fly around awhile until they cleared the wreckage. They [crash investigators] thought the pilot [after takeoff] raised the flaps instead of the landing gear, and they stalled out. Does this sound right with you? [Yes, very likely.]

Anyway, I had a bad feeling about who it was, and after we landed, sure enough, it was Acey's crew. I walked cross-country to the hospital and was told that everyone was dead.

This is the sort of story that haunts every veteran with whom I have discussed such matters. Since Nordby barely knew his new pilot and knew nothing of his abilities, why did he violate the army truism of "Keep your mouth shut, your bowels open, and never volunteer"? Why did this happen at the time Nordby was along just for the ride? In the unlikely event there was mechanical, not pilot, failure, why did it happen to Nordby and Acey and not to Wally and me? We all have carried along this sort of baggage for the past 55 years.

My flying records show that my first five flights at Westover Field, between September 8th and 16th were with my instructor in the right seat. However, the flight on the 16th was my first *night* flight at that base. This undoubtedly was the date about which Wally wrote. Because we all were new to "J" models, it is likely that Acey also was riding with his instructor, which makes it more difficult to fathom the cause of the crash. If his instructor had not been along, then the flap/landing gear mix-up sounds more logical. But instructors were subject to human fallibilities, too — just not as often.

I do recall that I assigned Mac the task of raising the gear and flaps after takeoff (this may have been standard operating procedure), who was to do so *only* on my command, and then *only* with Ernie's hand on

his. As a safety measure, the gear lever had a wheel-shaped head and the flaps lever a rectangular one; nevertheless, accidents because of this mistake did happen. I once saw a pilot wearing a military police brassard around his arm and walking a beat in Cerignola, Italy, and when I asked about the circumstances, I was told he had been permanently grounded for this cause. His crew and he survived only because of the presence of a deep valley at the end of the runway, which permitted the airplane to recover flying speed.

I vividly remember the fact that we lost all or parts of three of our 18 crews at Westover to such errors. One crew flew into Mount Washington, New Hampshire in bad weather, killing all ten on board, and some of another crew died in the accident recounted above. I have forgotten the details of the third, but I do recall that it was an avoidable accident with fatalities.

* * *

On September 9th, the day following our first flight, a major hurricane struck the southeastern part of the United States and raked its way up the east coast, consuming seven days in the process, according to historians on the Weather Channel. I note from my Form 1 file that I did not fly on the 13th, 14th, or 15th, so I assume those were the dates the big blow hit New England. All the airplanes that would fit were packed into the cavernous hangars, while instructors flew the surplus to safety at Selfridge Field, Michigan.

We trainees battened down the hatches and prepared for worse than we received. On the night the hurricane was supposed to peak, Laval appeared in my cubicle and announced that we were invited to a party being thrown by the nurses in their quarters at the base hospital. (Does this sound like a *MASH* script?) Donning our hats, galoshes, and "slickers", as waterproof coats then were called, we walked about a mile in a downpour and enjoyed a drink or two in a sedate gathering. I was doubly disappointed

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10)

by the absence of the pretty nurse who, during my convalescence, rubbed my back with alcohol. Perhaps she was looking for a colonel to take her riding in a B-24, but the more likely explanation was duty. Neither the hurricane nor the party lived up to advance billing.

* * *

I feel that Laval's calling in postwar life must have been social director on a cruise ship, for he never was at a loss for ideas of entertainment. On an evening in late September or early October, he appeared bearing intelligence concerning the possibilities of attractive girls frequenting the amusement park at Hartford, Connecticut. With no private transportation, investigation of this report required a bus ride to Springfield, a 30-mile train ride to Hartford, and another bus to the park.

Once there, we toured the house of mirrors, the fun house, and two or three of the typical rides of the day, all of which were pretty tame after lazy 8's in a B-24. Up to that time, we had not sighted any interesting, unattached females, let alone a *pair*. Finally, as we stood in line for the modest roller coaster, we found ourselves directly in front of two girls one could take home to meet mother, and we struck up an acquaintance without difficulty, pairing off for seats on the ride.

So began a friendship with a young lady that lasted until we left Westover. On some of my free nights for the next few weeks, I helped keep the transportation business solvent, bussing to Springfield, taking the train to Hartford, and bussing again to East Hartford, for a pleasant time with a nice girl. On occasion, she would come to Hartford, where her friend lived, and the four of us would go dancing or to a movie, but Laval soon tired of all the surface travel and dropped out of the circle. It was for the best that my time at Westover soon ended, for the lady was taking our friendship much more seriously than I.

* * *

On several of our training flights we made practice bomb runs on a target range some distance from the

field. The 100-pound practice bombs were fashioned of sheet metal, painted blue to denote their purpose, and filled with sand and a small portion of black powder — just enough to make a telltale puff of white smoke so that accuracy could be observed. The target was a small wooden building centered in a large white circle.

As pilot my job was to get the airplane to the correct altitude, follow Bob's compass headings to the initial point (abbreviated "IP"), then take up a heading in the general direction of the target. At that point, "Tex", our bombardier, working through the Norden bombsight and the C-1 autopilot, controlled the direction of flight, until the single bomb was released automatically. On the four or five-minute bomb runs, pilots mostly sat with folded hands and, through minor adjustments of throttles, merely kept the airplane flying at constant airspeed and altitude.

All this practice proved to be a huge waste of time and gasoline, for in combat only the flight leader's airplane was on bombsight control, and I never flew a mission in that capacity. On all other airplanes in the flight, the bombardier, if present, or otherwise the navigator, kept a sharp watch, and when bombs appeared from the lead airplane, he "toggled out" his airplane's bombs by flipping a single switch.

We also were introduced to formation flight, although I must say that I never really learned that trade in B-24's until after a few combat missions. Most of my problems resulted from over controlling: adding and reducing power too frequently and too abruptly and overcorrecting with flight controls. I imagine that Wally, back in the tail, must have felt as if he were on a carnival ride.

We also had practice gunnery missions, with pilots back from Europe flying P-47 Thunderbolts through our flights, while our gunners attempted to "shoot them down" with gun cameras. I am happy to report that we never had to put this practice to use.

We knew we had a lot to learn, and, strangely, it became easier on combat missions.

* * *

(Continued on page 12)

(Continued from page 11)

While on our eight-hour celestial navigation training flight to the Bermuda area on the night of October 22nd-23rd, we left land shortly after passing over New York. Once over water, Tex was able to resume his rest, while Bob guided us to a dot on the chart about 100 miles west of the principal island of that group. If there were a Bermuda triangle, we certainly were not aware of it. I am of the opinion it is a geometric block in some navigators' minds.

This also was a training mission for our soon to be departed radio operator, who practiced his assignment by sending periodic messages in Morse code to Westover documenting our position. The antenna for that particular low-frequency radio was a 50-foot wire lowered by a small hand windlass at the radio desk and weighted with a steel prolate spheroid some ten inches long.

At one point, I no longer could hold my eyes open and, with the airplane on autopilot, I put my head down on the radio desk for a 15-minute nap, while Ernie engineered from the pilot's seat and Mac was in charge. We had reached a point of mutual trust.

Nearing the Upper Virginia coast on our return, our "Sparks" handed me a message that Westover was experiencing one of its frequent foggy nights, and the field therefore was closed to all traffic. We were instructed to land at Mitchell Field, on Long Island, and await clearance to Westover.

By the time we reached our new destination, weather also had obscured the New York area, so I therefore made my first and only approach under actual instrument conditions. When we at last broke out of the clouds about 500 feet above ground level, all were relieved to see our airplane on course for landing between the lights of our assigned runway.

About 0500 we were roused from our slumber in operations office chairs and informed that Westover Field now was open. As we flew the downwind leg of our home field traffic pattern an hour later, one of our gunners exclaimed over the intercom about "a big fire is burning down there" on the base, but the other crew members and he could not identify the building in the dark. As we entered our operations

office, we were greeted by the OD with news that the fire was in the BOQ occupied by all officers in our training flight, and we officers were instructed to go there directly.

The news was good and bad. The good news was that no one was burned or suffered smoke inhalation while asleep, since we all were dallying about at Mitchell Field. The bad news was that an overheated stove had ignited a beaverboard partition, gutting the building and destroying or damaging beyond use virtually everything we owned. The bad news later became worse, when we were informed that statutory law provided that soldiers in such cases could be recompensed by the government *only* if they were present and fought the fire.

With all my travel to East Hartford and the date being a few days before payday, I naturally was without funds, other than eating money. To make matters worse, my personal banker, Bill Washburn, was in South Carolina, so I wrote home for the scant funds in my bank account, noting that even my checkbook was destroyed. However, the next day I wired my parents to ignore the request, because I had made other arrangements.

I had been informed that I could borrow money from the Red Cross, but when I applied, I was told that funds were not available for loans in such cases. With a conspiratorial look, the Red Cross person then told me that money *was* available for servicemen to go home to see an ill parent, so I became a co-conspirator, lied, and promptly received a \$100.00 loan. I paid off the final \$25.00 installment at a Red Cross office in Cerignola, Italy. (That \$100.00 loan equaled \$1,000.00 or more in today's currency; remember that a new Buick could be purchased in 1941 for less than \$1000.00.)

All 72 of us were moved into an empty enlisted men's barracks, where we took stock of our losses and filled out forms we had been told would be rejected. I had found my wallet where I left it, under a wet mass of burned feathers, formerly a pillow, and after the contents, including my father's picture in work clothing, were spread on my bed and air-dried,

(Continued on page 13)

(Continued from page 12)

they once again were useable, though smoke stained. My expensive beaver winter coat and billed dress cap, wool trousers and shirts, best dress shoes, wool blouse, raincoat, everything on coat hangers, all were ashes. All I owned was on my back and in my charred, but intact, footlocker.

I was wearing GI wool trousers and shirt that had been issued at Fort Riley, plus my cloth GI flying jacket and baseball cap, but these and the contents of my footlocker were all that remained. When I opened the latter, I found underwear, socks, handkerchiefs, and toilet articles; and also a fresh box of Lillie Mae candy sent from home, which I shared with my comrades in disaster.

With my loan in hand, I made my way to the post exchange, a sort of GI Wal-Mart, where I purchased an inexpensive blouse, matching dark dress trousers (called "greens", as distinguished from "pinks"), and a shirt or two. I also bought a cheap trench coat, with zip-in lining, which could double in cold or rain. I was wearing my second best dress shoes, and with my GI shoes sent from storage at home, I resolved to make do, saving aside enough of my meager funds for train fare for my final leave. I did not require high quality uniforms in Italy, and when I returned home in June of 1945, my summer uniforms were safely stored from the time we had gone into winter clothing at Westover.

A post script to this sad tale: while in Italy, I received a letter from Washington, D.C. dated February 7, 1945, addressed to my home in Marshalltown, informing me that my claim had been denied. It was TS and *c'est la G D guerre!*, again. In November of 1945, a week after I returned home from separation from service, I received a check, also from Washington, in the amount of \$286.00 (\$2,860.00 today), in reasonable settlement of my claim. I heard or read somewhere that a special act of Congress was required to settle all such claims that arose during the war. In the following summer, that amount just about financed a honeymoon in New York.

* * *

Near the end of operational training, residual infec-

tion from my missing tonsils returned to haunt me, with the final appearance in my lifetime of a boil, once again in the form of a sty on my eye. This was a very upsetting development, for we all had been promised a final leave before going overseas, but *only* if we first completed all training requirements. Each day, as I tried to keep away from the sight of Captain Schweigert, the eyelids swelled closer together, until finally the eye was completely closed. At briefing that morning, Schweigert finally spotted me trying to hide at the wrong end of our crew's row of seats, and he ordered me to sick call.

As I cursed my luck, especially since it would affect my men as well as myself, I once again made my way to the medics for another lancing and draining procedure. Antibiotics were still rare and in short supply, resulting in all those available going to wounded men in combat. My only recourse was to let nature do the healing with hot compresses and rest, and my doctor felt the hospital was the only place for that.

I fretted about the slow healing process, but one evening's entertainment did a bit to take my mind off my problem. It is well documented on today's television that people from the entertainment world contributed a great deal of time and talent to entertainment of service men during the war, and I was a beneficiary of one form of that charity during my confinement.

Baritone Conrad Thibault and soprano Margaret Speaks, names not remembered today, but once famous on radio and stage, traveled from New York to give our ambulatory patients a fine 90-minute program of operetta and light opera classics. I was fortunate to obtain a seat in the fourth or fifth row of the hospital recreation hall, and in our enjoyment of the moment, time passed all too rapidly.

After about three or four days, I finally was sent back to duty, and we were able to complete our work in time for leave.

* * *

Mac and several of the other crewmembers were Ro-

(Continued on page 14)

(Continued from page 13)

man Catholic, and before one of our early flights, they asked if I had any objection to placing a Saint Christopher medal above the compass. Since Saint Christopher was the patron saint of travelers, I agreed, of course, finding no fault with covering all bases, and from that flight on, the medal was always in place. I have read that Saint Christopher medals are no longer recognized by the Church, but it was a satisfactory arrangement at the time.

After completing all our training requirements, including my final check ride to confirm my white instrument card, we spent the last few days boring holes in the sky. At some earlier date, we had decided to hold retreat ceremonies on occasions when airborne at 1700 hours, and by intercom I taught all of the crew the bugle calls for that ceremony. When the hour arrived, everyone would press his mike button, and we would go through the bugle call in unison. This was followed by a shout of "boom", such as a fieldpiece being fired, and finally we hummed the National Anthem a cappella, all the while consuming 200 gallons of aviation fuel per hour.

On one late afternoon, we flew through the most vivid, complete, and perfectly formed rainbow I have ever experienced. On another day, after passage of a cold front, we could see the entirety of Cape Cod from our 10,000-foot vantage point some 40 miles westward.

In those years, it really was *the wild blue yonder*, for we flew where and at what altitude we pleased, with no air traffic controllers butting in, and no recriminations, so long as we did nothing dangerous, or if we did, so long as we did not get caught. We stayed out of commercial airways as much as possible and were responsible for looking out for other aircraft; we took that responsibility seriously, even those back in the waist area. This was in an era when there probably were more airplanes in the air at a given time than ever before or since. When Franklin Roosevelt promised that Americans would build 50,000 airplanes a year, he was scoffed at, but our generation actually surpassed that figure by a large margin.

* * *

On November 12th, we made our last flight at Westover and shortly thereafter were granted ten days leave. I traveled by the usual rail coach class and spent a quiet time at home, mostly with family. Ralph Miller, my friend from theater work and a first generation American of German parentage, was home on furlough at the same time, and he, too, was scheduled to go overseas on return. We spent some time together, and he then went to France and Germany in a 155 "Long Tom" artillery battery. Many years later he told me how hard it was that, as acting first sergeant, he had been required to shell the village where his grandfather resided, but the old gentleman survived the ordeal. Only few days before I wrote this I received word of Ralph's sudden death.

* * *

Back at Westover, we had a sedate going away party for the crew at a nearby lakeside cabin owned by Mac's family. Female attendance was encouraged, but the only girls present were Mac's fiancée and my friend. No one was in a very festive mood, and the party broke up at an early hour.

At the last minute, we were informed that bombardiers would not accompany us to our next duty station, but, typically, no reasons were given. Only after we arrived at our group in Italy did we learn that the 15th Air Force had a surplus of bombardiers, since experience had established that navigators on airplanes *not* leading flights could toggle out bombs as well as bombardiers. This practice also reduced weight.

While I enjoyed his company, I honestly cannot state that I really missed Tex's services, the "what is that town" caper being an example. It was funny then and now, but it would not have been amusing in combat. In about 1992, I located and conversed by phone with Tex, learning that he never went overseas during "the late unpleasantness", but that he had stayed in the army and air force 20 years and then retired. He exclaimed on the phone, "You made my day!", but, typically, he never responded to my letter and photos I later sent.

(Continued on page 15)

(Continued from page 14)

On November 24th, we boarded a troop train at the field and set forth to revisit Mitchell Field, this time our port of embarkation for foreign service. We still had no word as to our ultimate destination, but educated guesses settled on Europe, since it was felt that we would be entraining for the west coast if we were headed for the Pacific.

In our army's stilted language for radio usage, the word "repeat" was forbidden, because in the army of our British ally, that word meant, "Fire another volley at the same target." In lieu thereof, we were taught, when repeating ourselves, to use "I say again...." So, I say again, like Gary Cooper's Sergeant York, I "had enough of this here practysing", and I was ready to be on my way.

G.I. Joe's Serial Number

GI Joe's serial number tells you how he entered the Army and approximately where he enlisted or became a selectee.

For instance, take a look at the serial number of the soldier across the street. You notice that his serial number begins with the digit one. Then you know he enlisted in the Army of the United States some time after July 1940. Had he enlisted prior to that time, he would have had a number 6 as the first digit, denoting enlistment in the United States Army – making him what the GI calls "Regular Army".

In case his first number is a 3, he came into the Army of the United States through selective service. If his first number is a 2, he was a member of the National Guard.

If he entered the Army through selective service or enlisted after July 1940, the second digit of his serial number will be the same as the number of the service command in which he was inducted or enlisted. There are nine service commands in the nation.

For example, if GI Joe enlisted in the Army of the United States from the Ninth Service Command, he will have "19" as the first two digits of his serial number.

Another sidelight of the serial number is the alphabetical letter. An "A" precedes the number of an enlisted member of the Women's Army Corps; "L" precedes the number of the WAC officer; "O" begins the serial number of a male officer; a Warrant Officer prefixes his serial number with a "W"; and the Army nurse has an "N" before her serial number.

In the Army, animals too have serial numbers. Horses and mules have their identifications tattooed on their ears. A similar process is used in marking carrier pigeons of the Signal Corps. Dogs have a prefix "K" and wear their numbers on tags.

Serial numbers of enlisted men in the present army were set up in 1940. The regulation established numbers 11,000,000 to 19,999,999, inclusive, as the serial numbers of the Regular Army.

Numbers of the men in the National Guard were set as 20,100,000 to 20,999,999, and men who entered the service through selective service have numbers from 31,000,000 to 39,999,999, inclusive.

Some men inducted in recent months have serial numbers with 4 as the first digit. These men are from service commands in which the "3" series has been exhausted.



Often our photographers were successful in taking pictures at low altitude - low over land, water or clouds.

In this case, our B-24s rallied over Mt. Melfi in central Italy.

(Continued from page 1)

- (p) Waitman Coy & Greek (Jones) Westfall
- (gp) William Henderson & Elizabeth (Anderson) Westfall
- (ggp) John H. & Marinda (Green) Westfall
- (gggp) Andrew & Mary Elizabeth (Hyer) Westfall
- (ggggp) Zachariah & Hannah (Woolf) Westfall
- (gggggp) Cornelius & Elizabeth (Westfall) Westfall
- (ggggggp) Abel & Antjen (Bogard) Westfall
- (gggggggp) Johannes & Maritje (Cool) Westfall
- (ggggggggp) Juriaen & Marretje (Hansen) Westfall



“The Crewman” by Gil Cohen

He was born on Monday, July 24, 1922 in Harper District, Roane County, West Virginia. He died in the air over Austria serving his country on Tuesday, July 25, 1944 at the age of twenty-two years and one day. Coy left a sister (15) and his dad (50) and mother (46).

He was not the only Westfall answering the call to arms in the years of World War II. There were other Westfalls serving as soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen. His story is one of many of that era who made the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of Freedom. Coy came from humble surroundings to join many thousands of others in a strange way of life; kill or be killed in defense of our country. He would not be a farmer, teacher or merchant as were so many of the clan.

Little is known of his personal life in the military however records exist by which it may be known where he was and something of his surrounding conditions during his last several months. Traced are his squadron and bomb group, military bases and his fatal flight. Special thanks to Hughes Glantzberg of Gunnison, Colorado and Denise Blake of Maxwell AFB for their assistance in bringing some light to family and friends on Coy’s sacrificial time in military service.



Coy Junior Westfall was a **Flight Engineer**, Military Occupational Specialty (MOS Code) 748, Army Airplane Mechanic–Gunner, on a B-24 bomber. A Flight Engineer performed pre-flight inspections of his aircraft and acted as liaison between flight crew and ground maintenance personnel. While airborne, Engineers monitored engine performance (oil pressure, manifold pressure, cylinder head

temperature, fuel flow, etc.) of four Pratt and Whitney fourteen cylinder R-1830-43 Twin Wasp radial engines of 1,200 horsepower each. Flight Engineers visually observed and reported landing gear and flap positions to the pilots during take-offs from waist gunner windows then crawled through the bomb bay back to his stand-up station behind the two pilots. Prior to landings he would make the reverse movement. During

(Continued on page 17)

(Continued from page 16)

flights he operated the top turret (twin fifty caliber machine guns) to repel enemy fighter aircraft.

Coy's aircraft was a **Consolidated B-24 Liberator** four-engine bomber. His last one was serial number 41-28850 with tail number 44, a B-24-H-15 built in Tulsa, Oklahoma by Douglas Aircraft as one of 189 in the production run. Consolidated Vultee



had licensed Douglas (with North American Aviation and Ford Motor Company) to assemble its bomber design. A total of 18,482 B-24's were built from 1939 through 1945 in five different factories. Coy's was painted olive drab with light grey on all bottom surfaces. It arrived in Italy as a replacement aircraft on 16 April 1944.

Coy was assigned to **Crew 56** of Squadron 766 of Bomb Group 461(H) of the 49th Bomb Wing of the 15th Air Force. Official members of that crew, all assigned on 18 October 1943, were:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Serial</i>	<i>MOS</i>	<i>Position</i>
Joseph B. Hesser	0682863	1092	Pilot
John E. Rosen, Jr.	0812661	1092	Co-Pilot
Joseph A. Sullivan	0749799	1034	Navigator
Robert M. Hacker	0752811	1035	Bombardier
Coy Junior Westfall	15337761	748	Engineer/Gunner
Raymond F. Vana	16077362	748	Engineer/Gunner
Robert H. Kimble	33080791	748	Engineer/Gunner
Samuel E. Childress	14001438	757	Radio Operator/Gunner
George T. Tyler	18056723	757	Radio Operator/Gunner
David E. Proud	36458929	757	Radio Operator/Gunner
Joseph F. Kripple	36269002	612	Gunner
Paul L. Letendre	31266273	612	Gunner

A flight crew consisted of only ten men. This list shows alternates, substitutes and/or replacements for all gunner positions (Engineer-Gunner, Radio Operator-Gunner, Ball Turret Gunner, Left Waist Gunner, Right Waist Gunner and Tail Gunner). From time to time, others of the squadron or group would substitute on special missions or when illness or injury of a regular crewman prevented his attendance.

The **461st Bomb Group** was officially formed on 01 July 1943. It was authorized four squadrons



(Continued on page 18)

(Continued from page 17)



of twenty-four airplanes each. Squadron numbers were 764, 765, 766 and 767. Although the group was authorized to operate a hundred bombers the average number ready to fly on any day during combat tour was about forty-five. All bombers and fighters of the World War II era used colorful paint schemes to identify their group and squadron. The rudder and tail fin of bombers carried primary markings of the bomb group. All squadrons of the 461st had **tail markings** of red upper area with a horizontal red bar lower on the rudder and fin. The **official crest** of the group was a sky blue shield with a yellow lightning bolt crossed with a falling aerial bomb. Airplanes of Coy's squadron 766 were distinguished from the others by a yellow painted cowl ring. Their official nickname was "Liberaiders", a play on the words *Liberator* (the airplane) and *Raiders* (their occupation). By War's end the Liberaiders had placed 190 bombers into service and flown nearly 7,000 sorties; over 60,000 airplane hours were recorded with 110 ships lost in combat. Presented to the Axis, FOB delivered and freight prepaid courtesy of the 461st, were 11,000 tons of bombs.



Coy came to **Wendover Field, Utah** for assignment to a Bomb Group on 18 October 1943. The base is nestled at the foot of the mountains on the state lines of Nevada and Utah where once ended Great Salt Lake. As far as the eye could see not one tree or a blade of grass could be found. From the air one could see nothing but mountains to the west and north and only ditches of water running through the salt flats to the east and south. The group's 250 officers occupied wooden buildings while about 1,000 enlisted men lived in tents. Dispensary and mess halls were more permanent structures. For much of the war Wendover was the Army Air Forces'

only bombing and gunnery range. Heavy bomber crews (B-17's, B-24's and B-29's) from all over the country converged on the burgeoning airfield during WWII for training before being assigned to overseas bases. Twenty-two outfits passed through including Col. Paul Tibbet's ultra secret 509th Composite Group. In late 1943, while Coy was there, there were approximately 2,000 civilian employees and 17,500 military personnel at Wendover. For entertainment there was a bowling alley, a theater, a beer parlor and a PX on the base. Men were allowed a forty-eight hour pass every two weeks.

Training in formation flying and gunnery practice was to have occupied the men after settling in. But, only eight bombers were available to the group and these were in service only half of the time due to lack of maintenance materials, oxygen for high altitude flying and fuel.

On 29 October 1943 the 461st left Wendover for Hammer Field near Fresno, California. Ranking officers flew in the eight bombers while the rest of the outfit rode on four **troop trains**. The trip by rail took about 36 hours. Packed seventy-six men to a car, it was a crowded and exhausting ride. While at Wendover, the unit was a part of the 2nd Air Force but at Hammer it became part of the 4th Air Force. Both the



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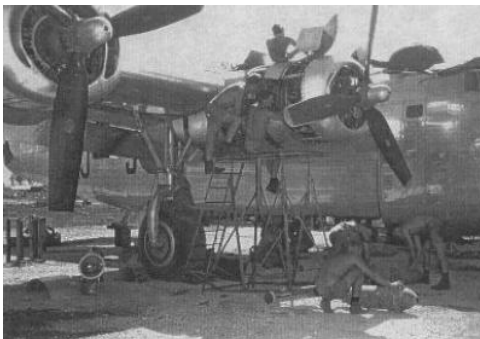
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2nd and 4th were stateside training commands. It would be later that the 461st would join the 15th Air Force in Europe in combat status.

At Hammer Field the bomb group began receiving more of its long awaited airplanes necessary to facilitate training and subsequent deployment to an overseas combat assignment. By 6 November 1943 the group had twenty-three bombers while another three arrived later in the month. Additional personnel in the month swelled the ranks to 376 officers and 1,683 enlisted men by the end of November.

Housing facilities for enlisted men were far superior than at Wendover Field, Utah. Formerly, a B-25 outfit had occupied Hammer Field and several of their smaller bombers were still parked near the control tower. Despite this, the base was totally adequate for final instruction and training flights. Mornings almost always brought fog onto the field but it usually dissipated well before noon.

Officers and men were told repeatedly that this final training was all-important. Long hours of work and little rest were normal; the men had to be better than their enemy at the game of warfare. Personal appearance was emphasized, saluting superiors required and discipline maintained. Alcohol was allowed but never drunkenness. Keeping one's mouth shut was the order. What the 461st was doing, where they were going and anything else about them or their airplanes was nobody's business. In two months the group would receive its overseas assignment.



Many of the airplanes assigned to the group were found to be in poor mechanical condition. Often a third of the aircraft were not flyable. Many required engine changes and other long periods of **maintenance**. Coy and the other Flight Engineers hit this new job running. Inadequate supply of B-24 parts, including prop governors often kept planes grounded. Bad weather also plagued operations. Planes had to take off early in the mornings before fog rolled in and land after it had cleared. The orphaned B-25's remained near the control tower.

On 20 November 1943 one of the bombers developed engine trouble during a formation training flight. Seven men parachuted to safety but three others rode the craft to a forced landing. The plane broke up but two men quickly escaped. Attempts to retrieve the badly injured co-pilot failed as the wreckage burst into flames. Lieutenant Edward Drucker was thus the first fatality of the 461st Bombardment Group.

During December and January seventy fully trained crews of ten men each developed. Many more airplanes arrived during the month until each crew had its own bomber. Coy worked long hours working maintenance orders on his airplane while also being on its flight crew. He, like other Flight Engineer-Gunners, knew every nut, bolt and rivet of his Liberator.

Receiving orders for the 461st's assignment to a combat theater the unit's air echelon departed Hammer Field at Fresno in mid-January, 1944. First leg was north to Hamilton Field (Marin County), California. The flight let down over the Golden Gate Bridge, a first time sight for most of the men. Two or three days later mass flights of the bombers went back south to Army Air Base Palm Springs (Riverside County), Cali-

(Continued on page 20)

(Continued from page 19)

fornia. This leg flew right over their former station of Hammer Field at Fresno. Refueled, they went on to Sky Harbor Airport at Phoenix (Maricopa County), Arizona. On the 18th the group began arriving at Army Air Base Midland (Midland County), Texas. Two days later (January 20th) arrivals are recorded at Army Air Base Memphis (Shelby County), Tennessee. First over-water flights for all of the crews brought them to Morrison Field in Trinidad, British Virgin Islands on January 25th. Then, on to Army Air Base Belen, Brazil (January 26th), and Army Air Base Fortaleza, Brazil (January 27th).



Two days later (29th) the squadron crossed the Atlantic arriving at Army Air Base Rufisque (Dakar) in French West Africa. Next day the group flew to Army Air Base Telegma, Algiers. Two days later (February 2nd) the flights arrived at Army Air Base at Djeseida, Tunisia. Next day, 3 February 1944 Squadron 766 began touching down at Army Air Base Oudna, Tunisia. Almost three more weeks transpired while at Oudna finalizing plans to occupy their permanent operating base in southern Italy, Toretta Field near Cerignola, Italy.

During all of these flights Pilots and Co-Pilots exchanged stations with Navigators, Bombardiers and Flight Engineers. Flight leaders would often reset the formation allowing others to lead and fly right-hand and left-hand positions in the flight. Closing up and spreading the formations was also carefully practiced. This was their first sustained formation flying at high altitudes without familiar landmarks for navigation. In less than a month they had seen four continents of the world.

Sixty-two airplanes, transporting 620 officers and men, were flown from Hammer Field, California to the Army Air Base at Toretta, Italy without the loss of a single life and with the loss of only one airplane. This loss was in a taxi incident where a copilot pulled up the landing gear instead of the flaps. From 31 December 1943 to 30 April 1944 four months elapsed before all personnel of the Group (2,000 officers and men) were completely moved from Hammer Field to Toretta Field.



Ground personnel went from Hammer Field via troop trains to embarkation on the east coast. On 12 January 1944 they left Camp Patrick Henry near Newport News, Virginia and boarded **Liberty Ships** *Arch Bishop Lamy*, *George S. Hanly*, *William Rawle* and *John Jay*. Thirty-one days later all four of the freighters used as troop carriers arrived at Naples, Italy. They had traveled in 'convoy' with a hundred or so other ships, a quarter of which were destroyers and cruisers defending. It was not until 23 February 1944 that all of the ground personnel were in place at the Group's base at Toretta. Training and organiza-

tion took place for most of February and March.

Toretta Field is about twelve kilometers south of Cerignola in Italy. This base was mostly a tent city with only a few farm buildings converted to offices. Parallel runways were soft and often muddy on the ends

(Continued on page 21)

(Continued from page 20)

and there was a significant rise at about the midpoint. Remedy was to apply PSP (pierced steel planking) to the ends after hauling in many loads of gravel. Toretta Field was very primitive compared to bases back in the States.



Cerignola, located near the 'heel' of the Italian boot, has a distinctive cathedral built in the late 1800's that served as a landmark for aircrews on their way back from bombing missions.



Civilians living on the farmlands of the area were given menial jobs around the base. Communication with them was difficult due to their lack of any education as well as the language barrier. Incidents of pilferage were common.

Bombing missions were flown on oil refineries at Ploesti (Romania), enemy airfields at Weiner-Neustadt (Austria), submarine pens at Toulon (France), rail yards in Northern Italy, enemy airfields at Belgrade (Yugoslavia) and various other strategically important targets. What a way to learn the geography of Southern Europe!



But new hazards began to claim men of the 461st. Frostbite from -40°F at high altitudes, collisions, flak shells bursting all through the formation and, most deadly, enemy fighter planes. Losses of personnel and aircraft became commonplace as the Bomb Group accomplished its duty. Friends were lost on almost every mission. Parachutes seen coming from shot up bombers meant capture and imprisonment with possible mistreatment by their captors. Often, airmen came back severely wounded who would or wouldn't survive. One insanity was to count flak and bullet holes in the airplanes upon return from a mission to see who's had the most. None of this nightmare was ever reconcilable. The question of would our airplane be hit and go down evolved into when would our airplane be hit and go down. Sleep was never easy or

restful.

By the third week of July some 'old-timers' were rotated home after completing their fifty-mission requirement. That meant new pilots and flight officers for the Group. The 461st was thus assigned a few easy targets such as enemy troop concentrations having few or no flak guns defending. On Monday, 24 July 1944 Coy celebrated his 22nd birthday on one of those easy missions. Five more flights after this one and he could furlough home to peace in the hills of Roane County, West Virginia.

On the next day, Tuesday, 25 July 1944, Major William Burke, Commanding Officer of the 766th Squadron, flying as Co-Pilot in Coy's plane, led a four flight formation of twenty-seven airplanes in an attack on the

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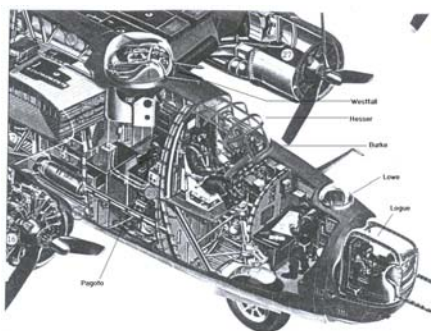
heavily defended Herman Goering Tank Works at Linz, Austria. This was mission number sixty-nine for the 461st Bomb Group and the forty-sixth for Coy. They knew it would not be an easy one.

Wake-up at 0400, breakfast of powdered eggs and greasy bacon, sign receipts for parachute, survival kit and a .45 pistol then a jeep ride out to the hardstand to check out his bomber. Full of fuel and bombs, Coy's Liberator looked well including the radar 'mickey' carried only on a few ships. The crew arrived later in a truck; there were some strangers to the normal crew as one or two regulars stood down on this mission. Fleece-lined clothing, including overboots were donned then all aboard. Take-off was at 0600 hours with rendezvous and form up and out over the Adriatic to the east. Airplanes of the 484th Bomb Group, B-24's also based at Toretta, lead the raid with the 461st sandwiched between them and ones from the 451st, another B-24 outfit. North-northwest along the Yugoslavia coastline with landfall over the Croatian area of Yugoslavia. Zagreb was passed at about 0800 hours where some light but inaccurate flak was encountered. Along the way, six bombers of the 461st turned back due to mechanical problems.

North across Austria to the Danube and a few minutes on to the north of Schwertberg they droned. After making a left-hand turn to the southwest their world went crazy. The three groups did not turn with coordination so they became spaced by a half-mile. With the target in sight and bomb bay doors opened, the formation was attacked at 1108 hours by twenty-five twin engine Messerschmitt 110's and over a hundred single engine enemy planes, Messerschmitt 109's and Focke Wulf 190's. Taking advantage of the loose formation flown by newly assigned pilots, the half-mile gap between units and the fact that most of the bombers did not have their ball turrets down on the bomb run, the 110's came up under the formation launching rockets upwards while 109's and 190's made repeated passes firing 20mm shells into the bombers from above.

The 109's and 190's were attacking in groups of seven or more firing from behind the middle group. Coy's Liberator shook and rattled all over as it was hit repeatedly by machine gun fire on the first pass of the fighters. As Coy swung his top turret around to fire on enemy planes a 20mm slug hitting him in the chest killed him instantly.

Fuel lines were severed in the forward part of the bomb bay and a fierce fire erupted. The interphones and electrical circuits were disabled. A second pass by enemy fighters mangled the outboard right wing and much of the tail surfaces. Seeing the fire and damaged wing, bombardier William Logue jettisoned the bomb load. Pilot Joseph Hesser hit the alarm button but it did not ring; he held the ship steady while others began bailing out.



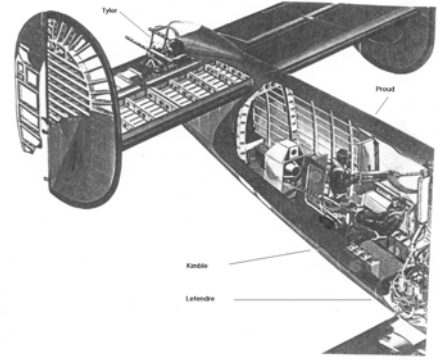
Copilot William Burke was first out jumping through the bomb bay followed by radar operator Joseph Pagota. Bombardier William Logue went forward and jumped from the nose wheel door followed by nose turret gunner Joseph Sullivan and navigator Samuel Lowe. Ball turret gunner Paul Letendre and tail gunner David Proud went out through

the camera hatch. Left waist gunner George Tyler and right waist gunner Robert Kimble bailed out through the rear escape hatch opening their parachutes upon exit. Flames from the ship ignited both canopies; they were killed upon impact with the ground.

(Continued on page 23)

(Continued from page 22)

The stricken bomber veered off to the left and began a rapid descent. Within a minute of bailout Old 44's main spar buckled from the heat with its wing collapsing. At 1111 hours the wreckage crashed into the ground. Lieutenant Hesser's body was found in the wreckage along with Coy's. Survivors of the crew were all captured within a few days.



They had been four and a half miles above the countryside between the cities of Schwertberg and Linz in north central Austria. In the melee ten other 461st bombers were shot down and four damaged aircraft crashed while attempting to return to their home base in Southern Italy. Not one airplane of the 461st made it to the targeted tank factory. That day one hundred and thirteen airmen did not return to base of the 461st; sixteen of them were on their fiftieth (final) mission before going home.

German military and local police records show forty-eight prisoners of men of the 461st who parachuted to relative safety. Major William Burke, First Lieutenant Samuel Lowe, First Lieutenant William Logue, Second Lieutenant Joseph Pagoto, First Lieutenant Joseph Sullivan, Staff Sergeant David Proud and Staff Sergeant Paul Letendre spent the rest of the war as guests of the Nazi Luftwaffe Stalag system. All were liberated nine months later when the war ended.

German military records show bodies of Coy Westfall, Joseph Hesser and an unidentified airman of the crew were recovered and buried by local citizens in the cemetery at Schwertberg. Coy's parents immediately received a telegram from the War Department reporting him as Missing In Action. Later, a letter arrived in Harmony, West Virginia notifying Coy Senior and Greek that their son had been Killed In Action.



After the war, Coy's body was recovered from the Schwertberg cemetery and laid to rest in grave 12, row 36, plot B of **Ardennes American Cemetery** near Neupre, Belgium. This World War II cemetery is located at the southeast edge of Neupre (Neuville-en-Condroz), which is about twelve miles southwest of Liege. Liege can be reached by express train from Paris (Gare du Nord) in about six hours. Taxis and limited bus service to Neupre and the cemetery are available from Liege.



The approach drive leads to the memorial, a structure bearing on its face a massive American eagle and other symbolic sculptures. Within are the chapel, three large wall maps composed of inlaid marble depict combat and supply activities. Along the outside, inscribed on granite slabs, are the names of 462 American Missing who gave their lives in the service of their country. The ninety

(Continued on page 24)

(Continued from page 23)

acre cemetery contains the graves of 5,328 American military dead, many of whom died in the "Battle of the Bulge." Their headstones are aligned in straight rows that compose the form of a huge Greek cross. The north side, overlooking the graves area, bears the insignia in mosaic of the major United States units that operated in Northwest Europe in World War II.

Today, more than a half-century later, Toretta Field does not exist. A major highway cuts diagonally across where two runways once launched and retrieved thundering B-24 Liberators. Vineyards, olive trees and wheat fields have replaced the tent city homes of the 461st and the 484th. Except for one piece of PSP used as a gatepost for a home garden, there is no trace of the high emotions and conflict existing here in 1944-45. Now, only three B-24's remain in flying status of over 18,000 assembled while less than a dozen are on static display at military bases and museums around the country.

Coy Junior Westfall and all of the others did not die in vain. The disastrous event on July 25, 1944 for the 461st was followed by a series of 154 successful bombing missions. These missions destroyed German transportation, manufacturing facilities and military emplacements throughout Nazi occupied areas. Lieutenant John Rosen, who became Command Pilot of a new Crew 56 vindicated his fallen comrades as each mission under his command was 'one for the boys' killed or missing. Nazi Germany was beaten so thoroughly that it surrendered unconditionally ten months later. In another four months, on the other side of the world, Japan capitulated. Over sixteen million American soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines placed their lives at risk to produce that victory. The world was thus freed of tyranny's threat at the price of the lives of Coy Junior Westfall and 291,556 other Americans.

Coy's military honors and decorations include the Purple Heart, World War II Victory Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal and an Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters.



MEANWHILE, BACK TO THE STATES

By
Guyon Phillips

After VE Day, the question for those of us in Southern Italy was "what happens next and when". One way or the other, we figured that redeployment to the Pacific was most likely.

First, we were surprised to get a few days in Rome for sight-seeing. The Eternal City, with the Arch of Romulus and Remus - the huge dome of St. Peter's with its seven altars in the Vatican (plus 150 other churches) - the Catacombs where Christians hid out under persecution - the Coliseum where gladiators fought to the death and innocents were given over to lions before cheering crowds and ruthless emperors - the ruins of the timeless Roman Forum - the ancient Pantheon, with its circular temple with the hole in the dome as a worship center to all the gods.

Later on a warm and clear blue Sunday in late May, we flew a four-ship formation from Cerignola to Wolfsberg, Austria to make a supply drop at a prison camp which had held Allied POW's. We moved into en trail as we dropped down below low parallel green mountain ridges. Supply bundles were to be dropped on a field marked by yellow panels -the ballistics were such that we had to make the drop at 145 mph at only 200 feet, a critical speed at low level so I dropped 10 degrees flaps for stability. With the navigator at the bombardier position giving me corrections - no way could I see over the nose - we made our drop. We passed over the camp low enough to see the faces of men, and you couldn't help but wonder how long some of them had been there, or whether some were from our outfit.

Then I learned that some of our bundles had lodged in the wooden crates the British had rigged up for us. That meant making another pass - the problem was that we had to make a dumbbell turn at the end of a box canyon, as if it wasn't hairy enough already at low speed and low altitude. After another pass for the drop, we were on our way back to Cerignola. Each of the planes carried several of the ground crew, to give them a look at things from the air - they had a great time.

We settled into loose formation and set back to enjoy the scenery. Even after six years of war, the Austrian villages were picturesque. Little shops were joined together with different roof lines, all in light fresh colors ranging from cream to tan to dusty orange in a row, all beside a small stream paralleled by a road and railroad. Here and there a large castle appeared on a green ridgeline - you wanted to stick around and take in the view.

Word soon came down that those crews with less than half their thirty missions were being put on Green Project - a priority to fly a squadron plane back to the States for redeployment. Since long over-water flights utilized celestial navigation and our navigators hadn't used celestial for quite a while, night flights were set up for practice. One evening another pilot and I, plus our navigators and his engineer, took a plane up to altitude, but before the navigators could get set up, a cloud cover rolled in and we were done for the night.

The other pilot had the left seat, and we decided to shoot a couple of landings before calling it quits. After rolling to a stop, we switched seats and I took off for a routine traffic pattern and final landing for the night. With cloud cover, it was a black moonless night and no city lights for a horizon. The runway

(Continued on page 26)

(Continued from page 25)

lights - seldom used - were weak and dim even in total darkness. We went through the routine checklist on the downwind leg. Procedure called for a crewman to take the Aldis Lamp to the waist and check for the yellow lug on the struts to assure the gear was indeed down and locked. I called out the usual "Gear Down And Locked?" to which the engineer answered "Gear Down And Locked".

There was no wind of any consequence and I made a routine final approach. As I touched down, I felt the right side give a bit, and corrected to level the wings. Then it happened - the right wing hit the ground. When that happens, your first instinct is to avoid ground-looping to the right, so I showered down on the left brake. We had landed on the left of twin runways, and I remembered there was a sunken area in between. It had to be nothing but soft earth, and no place I wanted the plane to go - I had previously seen what soft earth could do in chewing up an airplane plowing across a field.

The noise was deafening as we ground along down the gravel runway. The instrument panels were mounted on springs to keep needles from sticking, and the green fluorescent gauges seemed to be bouncing all over the place. By locking the left brake, the nose slammed down, crumpling the nose gear. Now it was left wheel, nose, and right wing as we continued to grind along.

Before we came to a halt, I could picture broken fuel lines, hot exhausts and sparks from the gravel, all ready to light us up. As we slid to a stop, I told the other pilot to cut the switches and "let's get the h--- out of here". After the deafening noise, it was eerily quiet - then we heard the siren of the crash truck. The engineer climbed out the top hatch and held a flashlight until we all got on top. We scrambled down the wing and took off running, still expecting the plane to blow. You couldn't see two feet in front of you, but I never ran harder. Later, when I got back to my tent, I gave the Good Lord a prayer of thanks that it didn't blow - yet it sure missed a good opportunity to do so.

The next morning, we went out to the plane, still angled a bit right but still on the runway after it tried to ground-loop. I took a look inside - the left rudder was still pushed in all the way, the yoke was turned all the way left, and the four throttles were angled from #1 all the way back to #4 all the way full, and my headset was hung neatly over the shaft of the yoke - all those things you do by instinct - and I even found that I still had the throat mike around my neck.

A Group Staff officer later informed me that if they weren't shutting down, they would probably charge me with pilot error. Pilot error? Was I supposed to take the Aldis Lamp back and check the gear myself? I thought about that later, and figured I probably saved the government the expense of bringing another war-weary plane all the way back to the States, just to have it flown to Arizona to be bull-dozed into the mounting scrap heap.

A few days later, we were assigned a squadron plane to return to the States. It was another war-weary, and my flight engineer told me that two engines had just been overhauled - the problem was, all four were due for major service - instead, only #2 and #3 were reworked. We took it up to calibrate the instruments and check fuel consumption, and found fuel consumption was higher than normal - not a big problem with the range of a 24, but not a welcome thought either with long over-water flights ahead.

The first leg of the return route would be Cerignola to Marrakech, French Morocco where we had stopped over en route to Italy. Two things I remembered about Marrakech - the medina (or walled city) where the Arab and his camel drank together from a small walled-in pool ahead of his wife and children. The other was, that there were three classifications of water - one to drink, one to brush your teeth with, and the last for a shower with the warning not to get them mixed up. Oh yes, there was a standing order not to be caught within the walled city after 6 PM - there were

(Continued on page 27)

(Continued from page 26)

some stories you wouldn't want to hear about what might happen to you after dark.

The next day, I was told the weather was OK for a flight by way of the Azores to Gander, Newfoundland - the alternate route was south to Dakar, French West Senegal, then across the South Atlantic and the equator to Natal, Brazil. Without hesitation, I decided on Dakar - facing the prevailing westerlies over water to the Azores and Newfoundland with two tired engines was not a viable option.

To head south to Dakar required spiraling up to 10,000 feet over Marrakech to clear the Atlas Mountains. The flight was uneventful after topping the mountains - from there, it was what you would expect over the western edge of the Sahara Desert. It was a foreboding expanse as far as the eye could see, and not a living thing in sight - no place you'd want to go down.

We took off from Dakar the next morning before dawn, and the runway seemed to run right up to the shoreline - we were over the Atlantic Ocean before the wheels were up for the 1800 mile trip. There were two times I got on the intercom to the crew before takeoff to share a brief prayer - one was before leaving Goose Bay, Labrador for Keflavik, Iceland at 3:30 in the morning in a blizzard over the cold North Atlantic - the other was before the takeoff at Dakar. There was something ominous about long over-water flights in a B-24 with its high wings; it simply wasn't a plane you ever wanted to have to ditch.

Droning along at 10,000 feet, we purposely leaned out the mixture to conserve fuel because of the fuel consumption. Of course, that caused the engines to run hotter, so we kept a watchful eye on the cylinder head temperatures - keeping them just below the red line. Just when things became monotonous with nothing but the even pitch of the engines and the endless expanse of the ocean, one of the engines would cough and cut out and I'd

have to push up the mixture for it to catch up again. Then the prop would run wild before the governor would bring it back to cruise - that happened several times, and the crew away from the flight deck would come up from a nap in a cold sweat. It kept all of us loose for sure.

Since the South Atlantic was a primary route for the military, there were three picket ships spaced along the way for rescue purposes - this gave you some sense of security, but not much. About two hours out of Natal, we ran into some extremely severe tropical thunderstorms. We were getting bounced around heavily and as it got darker in the clouds, you couldn't see your wingtips even though it was still daylight. This went on quite awhile when a hole opened up beneath, and I could see we were passing the shoreline. It was a comforting thought to know the ocean was behind us.

Now the fun began - keep in mind that this was still in the days of radio range instrument approaches with the A and N quadrants to sort out. The problem was crackling static from lightning, and the difficulty in picking up a clear signal. Making a long story short, I finally identified my quadrant and picked up the monotone of the approach leg and worked my way to the fan marker before letting down. Rain was beating on the windshield, and of course we had no wipers - that meant I had to open the little triangular-shaped window at the upper left to see anything. It was set at an angle where rain blew past and not into the window - most awkward trying to check for the ground through my little window, and still keep an eye on the instruments until you broke through the clouds.

At no more than 500-600 feet, we finally saw the rain-slick runway with a narrow grassy area on the left, and beyond that a ramp with a number of the ATC C-47's and other planes on the ramp in front of hangars. The approach was routine until I got down to about 100 feet - then a severe cross-wind

(Continued on page 28)

(Continued from page 27)

started to push us left of my runway. I tried to kick it back, but it was no use - the wind was too strong. As much as I wanted to put it on the ground after eleven hours, it was too risky to force a landing with the hazards to the left, so back up into the soup and do it all over again. After another radio-range approach and a normal letdown, it was one of those smooth landings on a slick runway when one wheel skids in softly, just an instant before the other. It was good to be on the ground.

The heat and humidity was stifling as we taxied in, but we got word from the tower to keep all windows and hatches closed until Brazilian inspectors could come aboard - once aboard, they cut loose with aerosol sprays to fumigate the plane - it was least twenty more minutes of muggy heat plus the pungent insecticide before we could get out for a breath of fresh air.

The next leg was routine - a flight up the coast of Brazil. Not much to remember, except that it was a clear day and nothing but dense jungle green on the left and the South Atlantic on the right. The eye-catcher was the mouth of the Amazon. We all knew the Amazon was one of the world's mightiest rivers, beginning at the eastern slopes of the Andes across the widest part of the continent. Instead of a wide mouth emptying into the ocean, there were multiple river branches spread out in a delta - it took quite awhile to pass the width of the outlet. Our landing was at Paramaribo, Surinam (Dutch Guiana), which seemed to be a small settlement in the middle of nowhere. After mess that evening, we walked a short way to explore a real jungle first-hand. In less than a hundred yards the thick tropical growth seemed to close in, not only around but also overhead - if you weren't careful to stay oriented, every direction looked the same with no defined path. We decided we had seen all we needed to see of a real jungle.

The next day we were off on the next leg, and that was to Trinidad. Within less than an hour, one of the tired engines gave up and oil began to pour

heavily from #4. It was obvious the engine was gone, and while I wanted to make Trinidad, I knew we were heavy with fuel and it made no sense to go out over water with three engines. Our obvious alternate would be Georgetown, British Guiana (now Guyana). I radioed the tower, and they replied that the wind was calm and they would hold the field for us - just pick any runway. We let #4 run, while keeping a watchful eye on the oil pressure. As soon as the needle dropped just a bit, we feathered the prop so as not to let the engine freeze up and put unnecessary drag on that side. Fluffy summer cumulus clouds had already built up over the steamy tropics to 30-40 per cent broken, so I was careful to weave around the towering columns to stay visual. Flying a 24 on three engines is not an emergency, but with the weight of the fuel and twelve men plus baggage, it was more than a routine situation. I knew we wanted to bring it in a little faster than usual, yet put it down early and not waste runway- going around would not be an option.

Georgetown seemed to be accessible only by river traffic and by air - no roads or highways in sight. The field was a round clearing in the jungle, with runways like spokes on a wheel - just take your choice. I called the tower and picked one for a straight-in approach. Everything was normal, but I kept a little extra speed to avoid having to drag it in over the fence with three engines. Intent on hitting the first part of the runway, I failed to notice the olive and green camouflaged vehicles, bristling with antennae, just short of the strip - obviously part of the instrument landing system. I could tell the wheels would come dangerously close to my new-found hazard, so I pushed up the three throttles to assure clearance - to my surprise, the heavy old bird didn't lift an inch. I was sure my wheels had to brush the antennae before we settled down on the runway.

As soon as we got out of the plane, Bud Adams, a bombardier who flew back with us, ran up and gave me a bear hug like I had just saved his life. I

(Continued on page 29)

(Continued from page 28)

learned earlier that he was on a crew that was hit, and barely made it to Russian lines to avoid capture - he told us he wasn't sure which side the Russians were on, based on the treatment they got. He was still shaky about going down in a plane.

We were stuck in Georgetown for five days while another engine was flown down from Miami. That gave some of the locals time enough to rifle our bags for cameras and anything of value. We didn't learn about the thievery until we were back in the States, and then it was too late.

Our next stop was Borinquem Field, Puerto Rico, and the thing I remember about the trip was the turquoise waters and the cream-colored sandy shoals of the Caribbean - what you would think of as a tropical island paradise. Since Puerto Rico was a U.S. protectorate, we felt we were practically home.

The final leg was on to Hunter Field in Brunswick, Georgia. I had hoped we'd be routed to some place in Florida. My initial orders to the AAF were to Miami Beach, and it would have been extra special to see Florida again. It was a beautiful sunny day when we landed in Brunswick, and a thrill to be back in the States. After taxiing in behind the "Follow Me" jeep to a spot away from the hangars near a perimeter fence, we joyfully disembarked from the Lib for the last time, and I remember kneeling down to kiss the ground of the old USA again.

As I got up and looked around, we saw four girls beside a parked car on the other side of the fence watching us. It would have been nice to go over, but a truck was already waiting for us to load up and leave the tired old bird that had brought us home. That was my last time to fly the Lib. While it was the last plane I ever wanted to fly, we made our peace with each other and had become friends. I never knew anybody who said the 24 was an easy plane to fly.

Our crew hardly had time for a proper fare-

well - we were processed and sent in all directions almost immediately. Now, fifty-eight years later, I seem to remember our time together more vividly than most anything else from that far back. I am still in touch with four of our original crew, while five have passed on.

It's no secret that I had wanted to fly nothing but fighters from day-one, but I was yanked out of single-engine advanced for twin-engine just a few weeks before getting my wings. They decided they wanted the tallest out of my class for four-engine - it took longer legs to get full rudder-travel on 24's and 17's. While I still wish today I had had a chance to fly Mustangs or Thunderbolts, the challenge of being responsible for a bigger plane and a crew of ten was a valuable experience that forced you to grow up in a hurry. You have to figure things work out for the best.

God bless our crew - those who have checked out, and those of us still here - all staying in touch.

Guyon Phillips	Pilot	Greensboro NC
Grady Culbertson	Co-Pilot	Rock Hill SC
Graham Kerr	Navigator	La Habra CA
Fred Noegel * **	Bombardier	Augusta GA
Walt Dubina**	Engineer	Newark NJ
Ed Elliott**	Asst Engineer	Morris NY
John Gruber**	Radioman	Buffalo NY
Mike Keuziak	Nose Gunner	Milwaukee WI
Bob Sundeen	Ball Gunner	Hilton Head Island SC
Walt Bailey**	Tail Gunner	Cullman AL

(**) Deceased

(*) Original crew - did not deploy to Italy. The Second Air Force had a rule that Bombardiers would repeat Combat Crew Training to perfect their skills. Although we had set a record in bombing accuracy with a circular error of 216 ft. with 76 drops and 100% pictures from high, medium and low altitude, my appeal to the CO went for naught - he said his hands were tied. Fred later went to the Pacific with the 5th Air Force.

Little Known Facts of World War II

By

Col. D.G. Swinford, USMC, Ret.

1. The first German serviceman killed in World War II was killed by the Japanese in China in 1937. The first American serviceman killed was killed by the Russians in Finland in 1940. The highest ranking American killed was Lt. Gen. Lesley McNair. He died as a result of amicide by the US Army Air Corps. So much for allies.
2. The youngest US serviceman was 12 year old Calvin Graham, USN. He was wounded and given a Dishonorable Discharge for lying about his age. His benefits were later restored by act of Congress.
3. At the time of Pearl Harbor the top US Navy command was called CINCUS (pronounced "sink us"). The shoulder patch of the US Army's 45th Infantry division was the swastika. Hitler's private train was named "Amerika." All three were soon changed for PR purposes.
4. More US servicemen died in the Air Corps than served in the Marine Corps. While completing the required 30 missions your chance of being killed was 71%.
5. Generally speaking there was no such thing as an average fighter pilot. You were either an ace or a target. For example, Japanese ace Hiroyoshi Nishizawa shot down over 80 planes. He died while a passenger on a cargo plane.
6. It was a common practice on fighter planes to load every 5th round with a tracer round to aid in aiming. This was a mistake. Tracers had different ballistics so (at long range) if your tracers were hitting the target 80% of your rounds were missing. Worse yet tracers instantly told your enemy he was under fire and from which direction. Worst of all was the practice of loading a string of tracers at the end of the belt to tell you that you were out of ammo. This was definitely not something you wanted to tell the enemy. Units that stopped using tracers saw their success rate nearly double and their loss rate go down.
7. When allied armies reached the Rhine the first thing men did was pee in it. This was pretty universal from the lowest private to Winston Churchill (who made a big show of it) and Gen. Patton (who had himself photographed in the act).
8. German ME-264 bombers were capable of bombing New York City but it wasn't worth the effort.
9. German submarine U-120 was sunk by a malfunctioning toilet.
10. Among the first "Germans" captured at Normandy were several Koreans. They had been forced to fight for the Japanese Army until they were captured by the Russians and forced to fight for the Russian Army until they were captured by the Germans and forced to fight for the German Army until they were captured by the U.S. Army.
11. Following a massive naval bombardment, 35,000 US and Canadian troops stormed ashore at Kiska, in the Aleutian Islands. Twenty-one troops were killed in the ensuing firefight. Casualties would have been worse if there had been any Japanese on the island.

Thanks to Col. D.G. Swinford, USMC, Ret.

A Small Joke

A General retired after 35 years and realized a life-long dream of buying a bird-hunting estate in South Dakota.

He invited an old friend to visit for a week of pheasant-shooting. The friend was in awe of the General's new bird dog, "Sarge."

The dog could point, flush and retrieve with the very best, and the friend offered to buy the dog.

The General declined, saying that Sarge was the very best bird dog he had ever owned and that he wouldn't part with him at any price.

A year later the same friend returned for another week of hunting and was surprised to find the General breaking in a new dog.

"What happened to ole "Sarge?" he asked.

"Had to shoot him," grumbled the General.

"A friend came to hunt with me and couldn't remember the dog's name. He kept calling him Colonel. After that, all he would do was sit on his ass and bark."

I'm the kind of guy you love to hate. I'm always in a good mood and always have something positive to say.

When someone asks me how I'm doing, I reply, "Absolutely fantabulous! If I were any better, I'd have to be twins!

Seeing this style might make you curious enough to ask, "I don't get it! You can't be a positive person all of the time. How do you do it?"

I might reply by saying, "Each morning I wake up and tell myself I have two choices today. I can choose to be in a good mood or I can choose to be in a bad mood. I choose to be in a good mood.

Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim or I can choose to learn from it. I choose to learn from it.

Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can

choose to accept their complaining or I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life."

"Yeah, right, it's not that easy," you protest.

"Yes, it is. Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice.

You choose how you react to situations.

You choose how people affect your mood.

You choose to be in a good mood or bad mood.

The bottom line: It's your choice how you live your life."

Attitude, after all, is everything. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." After all today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday.

Mail Call

Dear sir,

I am trying to find out any information on my Grandfather James H. Cain. I would like to talk to anyone who knew him. You have a lot of information on your web site, but I'm looking for more. He was with the 461st as a Pilot and was shot down over Genoa Italy. His crew was #19. Hope you can help, or lead me in the right direction.

Thank you sincerely,

Ross D. Jantz
ross.jantz@alaskaair.com

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If you enjoy war-time coincidences, this might interest you:

Several weeks ago, while reviewing links to my book website, ONE MORE MISSION, from other B-24 websites, I accidentally came across a photograph of a B-24 named the SHADY LADY. The nose art work was identical to the painting on my aircraft, also the SHADY LADY -- yet it was a different airplane.

In 1944, I was ordered to fly a new B-24 just off the assembly line from San Francisco to Goia, Italy, where it was to be outfitted for combat, and then to fly it on to our air base near Cerignola, Italy. The airplane would then be our personal airplane for bombing missions. While it was being outfitted with guns, bomb rack, and other instruments during its stay at Goia, our air crew decided to hire a sergeant who was stationed in Goia to paint a photo of a SHADY LADY on either side of the nose of our aircraft. At that time, crews were very attached to and proud of their airplane. We flew her on eight missions before another crew, assigned to fly it on 8/24/44, crashed it near Pesaro, Italy. They were shot down by flak.

Imagine my surprise when I found a photo of a B-24 with the same nose art but with a different serial



number and assigned to a different bomb group. How was it possible that a strange and different B-24 would display the same nose art -- that a photo of it would be submitted to the "B-24 Best Website"? I E-Mailed the person who had submitted the photo and asked if he had any information about this aircraft. He replied that he collects B-24 nose art, mostly from the 10th Air Force, and had no information about this airplane. He could not even remember how he had acquired this photo. See his photo below (I do not recognize the man in the photo, perhaps he is the sergeant who painted it):



I again went to the website where the photo is displayed and discovered that the B-24 had been attached to the 451st Bomb Group, 727th Squadron of the 15th Air Force. I was assigned to the 461st Bomb Group, 766th Squadron of the 15th Air Force. Upon further research, I found that the 451st Bomb Group was stationed in Goia, Italy and had flown many mis-

(Continued on page 33)

(Continued from page 32)

sions with my bomb group. It then became apparent to me that -- not only was it possible but more than likely -- the same sergeant, who was also stationed in Goia, had painted both airplanes -- no doubt using the same stencil for both. Of course, he was not supposed to do that since we had paid him to paint our aircraft with an original painting and had believed it was original for all these many years. But during wartime, who would ever discover his betrayal of our trust? I did but, not until 59 years later!

Jesse Pettey
www.jpettey.com

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I am trying to find out if Crew 22 was the crew for "Our Hobby" or not. My great-uncle was in the 765th--Jack Aiken--and was on the crew with John K. Specht. Supposedly, my great-uncle flew on "Our Hobby" and the "Ruptured Duck." My dad has just received a photo where they are on the left side of the aircraft. If I can get more info, I might be able to get him to scan it for your site since the crew page has no picture of any of them. Also, "Our Hobby" is neither listed as an original nor replacement on your site. Do you know which?

You may also find this story interesting since the site does go in some detail about Specht's aircraft going down in April 1944. I'm not sure if my story is when this happened or not. My father said his father told it to him--since Jack would not talk much about the war. It seems that his squadron had a monkey as a mascot and it was on board when an awful explosion occurred during one of the missions. Jack--a tail gunner--was knocked out for a little bit and tried calling the other members when he came back around. No response. He went looking around and the only thing on the B-24 was the monkey. He found out later that the crew thought he was dead and had bailed out! Jack decided to grab the mascot monkey and make a jump. When the wind rushed across the monkey at the door, he went crazy and bit Jack on the face. Jack decided the monkey had just sealed his fate and tossed him into the front of the aircraft and he promptly bailed out. He carried a scar on his face until his death from the monkey mascot.

Chris Aiken

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Hi. Picture arrived today.....but where, when, and who took it? Would love to know and say thanks to him. Thanks for sending them to me.

All the best,
Tom Moss

=====

This was interesting. I was stumbling through "Google" and came across some photos on your website. My father is in them. I never knew they were on the Internet. Do you have any more photos ?

Thanks,
Sheryl Muse Coombs

=====

Hello. My wife's uncle was Joseph J Repko. He was killed on April 2, 1944 on the first mission. From what I have found out it appears 2 planes collided over the target area that day. I was wondering if you have any information about this.

Thank you for your prompt response to my request. The information you gave me was very helpful. If there is any way you could copy MACR#4086. I would be more than willing to send you the money for copying and mailing before you did any of the work. I know this is a lot to ask but my father-in-law is eager to get as much information as he can about his brother. Thanks again. You are providing a valuable service to the families.

I was able to read and copy the information. I gave all this to my wife's father who is most appreciative of your assistance. It means a lot to him to have the information about his brother's service to our country and the circumstances of his death. As I was reading the reports and first hand narratives I was reminded of the sacrifice made by all those who served. Thanks again for all you have done.

Take Care,
John Reuther

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(Continued from page 1)

home for the next few weeks.

The next morning I went to a large tarpaper shack, which was the base theater, along with about 250 others (100 Officers and 150 enlisted) and met my new crew. I was also introduced to the other 23 ten-man crews that made up the group and the senior Officers who would lead us in crew training and

Pilot	2 nd Lt. Marlon G. Morgan of Beaumont, TX
Co-Pilot	2 nd Lt. Robert H. Fisher of Idaho Falls, ID
Navigator	F.O. Robert K. Jones of Bennington, NE
Bombardier	2 nd Lt. Edward M. Mancourt of Detroit, MI
Engineer	Sgt. William B. Hill of Oakboro, NC
Radio	Sgt. Ivo L. Dillon of Nashville, TN
Top Gunner	Sgt. Anthony J. Kadin of Minneapolis, MN
Nose Gunner	Sgt. Anthony W. Lucera of Shreveport, LA
Tail Gunner	Sgt. Sigmund H. Grzywinski of Wyandotte, MI
Ball Gunner	Sgt. William Jelens, Jr. of Wilton, NY

combat operations. It was announced that the European Theater of Operations, (ETO) was to be our destination for our combat operations.

Our crew consisted of ten men as follows.

The Senior officers which we were most closely associated with were Captain Paine, who was Squadron Commander of the 826th Squadron and about 25 years old but a veteran of over 35 missions in Europe, and the Squadron Operations Officer, Captain Trotter of about the same age and experience.

Other than meeting my new crewmembers and navigators of other crews the main thing I got out of that meeting, was that we were going to combat in Europe as an operational unit by the first of April. The Wing Commander welcomed us with a resound-

ing promise that if any one of us did not want to go into combat with the unit; they could step forward now and be excused. Any such volunteers could be assured that they would be in combat before the unit was, but in the infantry. No one stepped forward!

The Operations Officer went over in some detail all of the myriad of things that we had to accomplish, including much flying time, much live ammo firing and much navigation training before we left the states.

Pappy Morgan was married and had his spouse in a room in the only hotel in Hastings. I never did understand how he had gotten into the cadet program in the first place since he was married before and during his cadet stint which was a prohibited status which was supposed to result in ground duty only status. At any rate he must have pulled some political strings and he let it affect his thinking to the extent that he often assured us that he was not going to fly these miserable four engine B-24s in combat. He really felt he was going to get transferred to fighters before we left the states. He went through the motions and was a very good pilot but his heart was set on fighter operations. He kept trying and all he got was little sympathy and our crew a bad name.

Fisher was another green youngster like the rest of us and was also a good flyer and reasonably motivated.

I should explain my Flight Officer situation since it affected my future career more than anything in my life. If I had been inducted prior to 15 Aug 1942, I could not have come under the Flight Officer Act. The act created the rank of Flight Officer, which was the same as a Warrant Officer in the army but was a brand new and unknown rank when I and about 10% of my class were graduated with that rank instead of a Commission as 2nd Lt. We had all the rights and privileges of 2nd Lt., but were required to serve in grade for at least 3 months before being promoted to Second Lieutenant. A promotion involved having to be sworn in again since Flight Officer was an Enlisted Rank. No one was ever able to determine

(Continued on page 35)

(Continued from page 34)

how the selections were made but it really messed up many careers. The 484th group tried its best to thwart the 3 month requirement in order to get all of we Flight Officers promoted prior to leaving the states since enlisted personnel got 20% overseas pay instead of 10% for commissioned Officers. More on this later.

The crew went through the training that consisted of learning all we could about the airplane and our positions as well as a little bit about all the other positions and how they related. (Later in Italy I actually made a full stop landing, as did each of the other men on the crew in order to be able to do it in an emergency.) My Form-5 says that we flew only 20 practice missions for 92 hours and that seems like a very small amount of training prior to combat operations. The pilots had been at Harvard a couple months before the rest of the crew joined them and had flown another 100 hours in B-24s but not necessarily together.

Some of the missions were interesting and I will try to detail a little about them. One snowy day we went to an air to ground gunnery range near Alliance, NE and I was as scared as I've ever been when we flew down a valley and the gunners fired at targets that were on the hillsides and above us. We flew too low to suit me and when the pilot completed the first run and turned around for the next run, he said to the copilot, "You can take it this time and make it about 50 feet lower". I came unglued and yelled that I wanted to bail out first. Those frustrated Fighter jockeys always wanted to duck around ground obstacles and see how close they could come.

Another night on a practice-bombing mission, we were carrying "Blueboys", which were blue canisters filled with 100 pounds of sand and ten pounds of TNT and made nothing but a bright flash on impact. I navigated us to the range and the Initial Point (IP) and gave the pilot and bombardier a heading to the target, which I could see 30 miles ahead. I sat back to relax a minute while they did their thing.

It should have been about a 5-minute bomb run but after about 10 minutes I became aware that Ed was

still bent over the sight so I took a look over his shoulder to discover that we had over flown the target (a poorly lighted circle and cross) and he was actually lined up on the center of Broken Bow, NE. I was able to abort the run and get us headed back to the target. I will say that it was understandable since the middle of town did look just like a target. We weren't the only ones to have that problem and I heard later that one crew actually did drop a blueboy on the town. At least we rectified our error and I earned some respect from the crew.

The weather was so bad that we had much trouble getting in some training requirements especially our required celestial training legs. On one flight we went to Denver and flew a daytime celestial leg to Grand Island over a continuous undercast and I had all the crew trying to get any kind of visual fix on the ground but to no avail. As luck would have it, just as my ETA came up we had the first sight of the ground since leaving Denver and there was the Grand Island airport directly below. From there on I could do no wrong navigation-wise as far as the crew was concerned and they expounded to all our fellow crews about how good their Navigator was.

About, mid-February, Ed Mancourt, the Bombardier, was married to Anne who came out to Hastings with her best girlfriend and future "Maid of Honor" by train from Detroit two days before the event. Ed being unable to con anyone else finally asked me to do him the favor of squiring the bride's girlfriend for a couple of nights to get her out of his hair.

It was the best good-Samaritan act I ever did. She turned out to be a real beauty and I was the envy of all that had turned down the deal. When I went to pick her up to take her to the only nightclub in town, she greeted me with open arms and two bottles of Black & White Scotch which we took with us and sat them on top of the table while we drank and ate. The booze attracted many friends who like myself hadn't seen anything but rotgut whiskey for years. The girls had gotten a case of B&W from Canada and brought it with them. I had a ball and the girlfriend didn't bother Ed and Anne.

(Continued on page 36)

(Continued from page 35)

The wedding was all planned and practiced at a Hastings church to occur at 8 PM on the appointed day with Pappy to give the bride away and Bob Fisher as best man and I as the usher, but just as we were going out of the bachelor officers quarters (BOQ) to catch the bus to town, an airman called Pappy back for an important phone call.

When he came back, he told us that he, Bob, Hill and I had to be on the Burlington Zephyr train in Harvard at 6 PM that evening bound for Tonopah, NV to ferry back a war-weary B-24. The wedding party went on in Hastings without us. We got on the train with two other minimum crews and even had seats to Denver but no sleeping accommodations. The officers went together to the conductor to try to con him out of three berths for the enlisted men and were told that there was nothing available but there was the Burlington RR Company's Vice President's private car on the rear of the train with 24 berths and only 6 people.

We went to talk to said VP and were welcomed enthusiastically and invited to use his facilities and to join in the poker game in progress which I did until we reached Denver at about 6 AM. Meanwhile all the men on our crews had free berths. At Denver we caught a train to Cheyenne, WY. There we got on the Union Pacific Challenger to Wells, NV. It was the most hectic train ride I've ever had except in Germany. There were only chair cars which were so completely filled with military personnel and wives and children that there were no seats available so I spent the 18-hour trip walking and standing and visiting in the aisles and even trying to sleep standing up in the men's restroom.

I was very happy to get off of the Challenger at Wells where we boarded another train to Mina, NV. This narrow gauge train consisted of an engine, a baggage car and a chair car, but at least it wasn't crowded and I slept well in the chair car. At Mina we boarded the ultimate in rail transport. It was a trolley type unit that was 1/3 engine, 1/3 baggage and 1/3 passenger area and naturally narrow gauge. I really didn't think it would make the 100 miles of very steep terrain we went through, but we finally got to

Tonopah and out to the base. Tonopah was the only habitation between Reno and Las Vegas and the base was about as big as the town.

All of the permanent personnel that I met there were very unhappy to be so far in the boondocks. (Throughout the Air Corps during the war it was rated on a par with Pyote, TX and Wendover, UT as the least desirable stations in the continental US.)

We found the war-weary plane that we were to ferry back to Harvard and checked it over and were prepared to leave early the next morning. With nothing better to do we decided to go to town and sample the gaming tables. Our luck was all bad so by the time we caught a ride to the base we had less than \$5 between us but this was no worry since we would be back at Harvard where money would be available by nightfall the next day.

We went out about 6 AM and cranked engines and started to taxi out when we found major problems that couldn't be repaired in less than two days. I spent the time sitting in the officers club playing solitaire and listening to the tales of woe and other complaints of the permanent personnel and their wives. I even had to eat in the GI mess since it was free and I was broke.

We finally got on our way and I still remember the large signs around the base saying "Beware-Soft air" which meant that the 7000-foot elevation caused the takeoff roll to be at least one-half again as long as we were used to. The runway was long and we made it with only a slight sweat.

On the ride home I got in two very good celestial legs and further enhanced my status with the crew and myself.

By now we were even further behind in our crew requirements and the weather set in in earnest to the extent that I was able to get a 3-day pass and go home to family and Edytha. Somehow as I was about to leave to go back to Harvard I found out that my crew was weathered out of Harvard and in Omaha so I called squadron headquarters and got permission to join and return with them.

(Continued on page 37)

(Continued from page 36)

As it turned out we couldn't get back for 3 more days so we balled some more in Omaha. By the time we got back to the base we were so far behind on our requirements, as were all the other crews that it was ordered that the entire squadron would pack up and go to a better climate in New Mexico until the weather improved.

The day we went out to fly to Alamogordo AAF we found snow up to the bottom of the aircraft wings (over ten feet) so everybody on the base, crews and civilians alike, cleared the snow with scoops etc. as necessary. We finished about 5 PM and went home to get an early start the next day only to come out at 6 AM and found the snow back higher than ever so we had to do the same thing again but this time as soon as the aircraft were clear enough to do so we took off at about 6 PM and practiced Squadron Formation flying at night on the way to Alamogordo, NM.

About 2300 as we were heading south toward our destination and about 100 miles from Alamogordo, all hell broke loose as we found ourselves in the midst of the largest collection of searchlights I've ever seen. It was so bright you could see the men on the next plane better than in broad daylight. It seemed that we had blundered over the prohibited airspace over White Sands and were about to get shot down if we didn't get out ASAP.

My recollection is that the maps we were using were not properly marked and annotated and the area was very new so we were forgiven but it was an anxious few minutes. We at least found decent weather at Alamogordo and so we spent ten days there, flying about eight hours every day. I only got into town once and it was hardly worth the effort.

When we finally got back to Harvard it was early March already and we were still unprepared for future combat activities. We were terribly behind the schedule given out in early January. We were able to go through all the multitude of personal affairs that were required such as uniform and clothing inspections, shots, physical exams, wills and allotment, etc that weather did not interfere with but the flying re-

quirements had to be dispensed with.

Finally on the 17th of March we flew to Lincoln AAF for more processing and to pick up our brand new B-24-J that had less than 20 hours on it. The crew made two short familiarization flights in it that were great after the filthy war-wearies we were used to.

Lincoln AAF was on the northwest corner of the town and only about 5 miles from the city and University of Nebraska where more activity was centered than we had seen for a while. Morgan and Mancourt had their wives bedded in the Cornhusker Hotel and Fisher was similar with a girl from Idaho who had come over to see him. I was the only Officer on the crew who was not engaged in making fond farewells so I managed to find a couple of coeds to make my leaving memorable.

One of these was Peggy Renard who at great risk to her reputation went up to the hotel and partied with the others and me. My parents also came to the base one noon and had lunch with me and bid their last good-byes.

On the 20th we flew our new plane to Morrison AAF near West Palm Beach, FL for Final Overseas Processing and a 100-hour inspection. On the 22nd we departed at about 3:30 AM on the big adventure, heading for Europe with first stop at Trinidad. About the time we were over Miami I spotted what looked like a huge blaze on the southeastern horizon that I pointed out to the rest of the crew who decided it was a ship on fire, which we reported to the ground and they didn't even laugh at us although after another hour of flight, I found out it was the planet Venus.

About the time we were passing Puerto Rico the Instructor pilot with us who was the Squadron Commander, Capt. Paine, detected a problem with an engine and elected to stop at Borinquen Field and get it checked. Earlier as we departed the US coast we had opened our sealed orders to find we were ultimately headed for a base at Cerignola, Italy. At any rate we got the engine checked and determined it was OK. That took just long enough to pick up a couple cases of good Ram and 50 GI blankets before we were on

(Continued on page 38)

(Continued from page 37)

our way again to Waller Field in Trinidad where I even got into town but just to ride through in a jeep.

The next day we proceeded to Belem a city on the Amazon in western Brazil and arrived there after flying for hours over water and out of sight of land and through heavy towering thunderstorms which we would normally have tried to go over or around. We had been briefed that avoiding them was impossible and they weren't as severe as similar clouds in the US. The seemingly endless expanse of water was merely the Amazon in flood stage. It seemed like we spent at least two hours flying over the Amazon.

We stayed in Belem over night in BOSS very near the end of the runway and practically over run by the jungle and this is where I witnessed the first fatal accident I'd ever seen. A B-25 crashed on an emergency landing about a quarter mile from our billets and we ran over to help only to be able to see the two pilots trapped and screaming in the flaming cockpit with no one able to get near enough to help. Fire fighting equipment was not as good then as now but probably modern equipment couldn't have saved them.

The next day we went to Fortaleza, Brazil where we stayed 2 days while mechanics pulled a 500-hour inspection and we loafed. I can't remember going to town but I remember that I bought a pair of the Brazilian accordion pleated type boots somewhere, probably the PX. They were some of the most comfy shoes I ever owned. I can't remember that we were restricted from going off base on these stopovers but we must have been since we didn't go off base that I

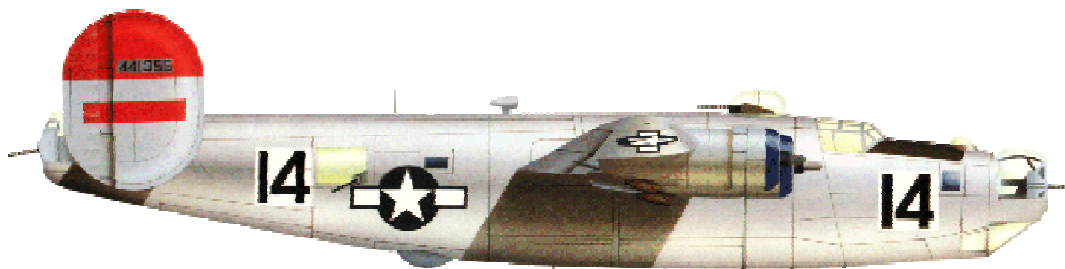
know of except at Trinidad.

We departed Fortaleza at about 11 PM in order to navigate at night as much as possible and to assure landing at Dakar, West Africa in daylight since there was no runway lighting there. For the first five hours we flew in heavy rain and I couldn't see above or below so all I had was dead reckoning with no drift readings to navigate by. Again our pilot was Capt. Paine and for a lot of the trip he and I were the only ones awake.

About midnight I looked out to see the leading edge of the wing and the propeller tips wreathed in sparkling fire. About the same time Paine called my attention to it before I could alert the rest of the crew. It was the first time I had seen or heard of St Elmo's Fire and I can say that it's real exciting and scary.

About 6 hours out we cleared the low clouds but still had the heavy overcast which precluded my getting any celestial fix until after daylight when we broke into the clear with about 3 hours to go and no good navigation to date.

I might mention that the B-24 had glass tubes on the bulkhead behind the pilot, which served as fuel gauges and had a reputation for being wrong. At any rate, three hours out of Dakar they were all reading empty but since we couldn't do anything about it we just bored on and finally about an hour out we picked up Dakar radio in about the predicted position. All of us were so glad to be there that there was never any comment about the quality of navigation. Incidentally we landed with about 500 gallons of fuel remaining according to the dipsticks.



The Focke Wulf FW-190 'Sturmbock'

Nicknamed the '*Sturmbock*' (Battering Ram), this version of the FW-190 was specially modified to attack American heavy bomber formations from short range and from behind. Because it needed to be able to fly through heavy return fire from enemy bombers, the *Sturmbock* was fitted with additional armour plating around the cockpit and the ammunition boxes, and with extra panels of laminated glass on the sides of the cockpit. In place of two 2cm cannon usually carried in outer wing positions, the *Sturmbock* was fitted with two MK 108 3cm cannon – low velocity weapons but with a high rate of fire. The 3cm high explosive shells were extremely destructive against aircraft at short range, and on average three hits were sufficient to bring down a heavy bomber.

The *Sturmbock* modifications added some 400 lbs. to the weight of the FW-190 and brought about a corresponding reduction in performance. Because of this, each *Sturmgruppe* was to be accompanied into action by two *Gruppen* of standard fighters to fend off the American escorts.

The FW-190 *Sturmbock* formed the equipment of the *Sturmgruppe* unit preparing to go into action, and made possible radically new fighting tactics. Flying in close *Staffel* formations each of about a dozen aircraft, the fighters were to deliver massed attacks on the American heavy bomber formations. The extra armour around the cockpit of the FW-190 would enable its pilot to survive in the defensive crossfire from a score or more bombers, close within a hundred yards behind the bomber chosen as target and deliver a *coup de grâce* with heavy cannon.

As well as special aircraft and special tactics, the elite *Sturmgruppe* units were manned by volunteer pilots. Before he was accepted into a *Sturmgruppe*, each pilot had to sign an affidavit which stated:

I, _____, do solemnly undertake that on each occasion on which I make contact with an enemy four-engined bomber I shall press home my attack to the shortest range and will, if my firing pass is not successful, destroy the enemy aircraft by ramming.

It was made clear that signing the affidavit meant that failure to carry out its conditions would render one liable to trial by court martial on the charge of cowardice in the face of the enemy. No man was forced to sign, however, and there were no recriminations against those who did not wish to do so; they simply did not join the ranks of the *Sturmgruppe*.

Freedom Is Not Free

By
Kelly Strong

I watched the flag pass by one day.
It fluttered in the breeze
A young Marine saluted it, and then
He stood at ease.

I looked at him in uniform
So young, so tall, so proud
With hair cut square and eyes alert
He'd stand out in any crowd.

I thought, how many men like him
Had fallen through the years?
How many died on foreign soil?
How many mothers' tears?

How many Pilots' planes shot down?
How many foxholes were soldiers' graves?
No, Freedom is not free.

I heard the sound of taps one night,
When everything was still.
I listened to the bugler play
And felt a sudden chill.

I wondered just how many times
That taps had meant "Amen"
When a flag had draped a coffin
Of a brother or a friend.

I thought of all the children,
Of the mothers and the wives,
Of fathers, sons and husbands
With interrupted lives.

I thought about a graveyard
at the bottom of the sea
Of unmarked graves in Arlington.
No, Freedom isn't free!!

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www.461st.org

Webmaster Comments

With the increased size of the website, it has become obvious to me that it can take some time to navigate around and find the information you're looking for. When you use a dial-up connection, browsing the website can take a lot of time. As a result, I am now offering the entire 461st website on CD. For \$25.00, you can have a CD with all the 461st information. When I first thought about this, I wondered if people would be interested knowing that the website changes on almost a daily basis. I'm addressing this by only charging \$15.00 for an updated copy of the website. By having a CD of the website, you will have instant access to everything on the website without even having to go online and you will be helping to support the future development of the website. If you are interested, drop a check in the mail. Be sure to include your mailing address, E-Mail address and your phone number in case I need to get in touch with you.

As I told you in the last issue of the Liberaider, the

website is now right at 150-meg in size. I'm currently trying to hold that as a maximum, but expect to push the website to 200-meg within the next couple of months. I have enough information to easily fill that much space. Most of the projects I mentioned in the last issue have been completed, but the one that remains is a large one. I have only begun to post the Missing Air Crew Reports on the website. With each MACR roughly thirty pages, they will take up quite a bit of space. They will also take up quite a bit of time as I have to manually enter all the information for each MACR once I figure out how to read them. The quality of the MACRs I'm getting is not all that good, but I'm making progress with this project.

I'm also looking for suggestion on what to do on the website. If you have a suggestion on what you'd like to see on the website, please take a few minutes to write me and let me know. I'll do my best to fill each request as time permits.