The 461st

Liberaider

Vol. 23, No. 2 DECEMBER 2006 SOMEWHERE IN THE USA

461st 2006 Reunion Seattle, WA

by
Glenda Price

Thursday, October 5

This was the arrival day for many. I heard some folks who arrived early enough took a tour of the Boeing museum or did other activities.

The registration table was manned most of the day and the annual meeting took place in the evening.

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Inside this issue:

"BAIL-OUT!"

by
Robert W. Eckman
0-717763
766th Squadron, 461st Bomb Group
Crew # 42R

Prologue

After his wife and children had gone to sleep, Yugo closed the curtains on the windows and locked the door to the small bedroom. He reached under the bed and took out a package wrapped in a blanket and handed it to me. I opened it and found my .45 caliber semi-automatic pistol. Yugo was returning it to me after 23 years!

How he first got the weapon, and what had happened in those 23 years, and what has happened since, is the story I am about to tell.

Dedication

To brave men, and brave women everywhere, especially Gene Thomas,

(Continued on page 6)

SHOW BUSINESS SOLDIERS

by
Vahl Vladyka

In the late winter and early spring of 1940, I worked three nights a week as second usher at the old Capitol Theater, then across the alley west of the present site of the Orpheum. On one weekend during this period, we were to show "**The Fighting 69th**", a Warner Brothers World War I film about the famous New York Irish National Guard regiment, whose history traced back to our Civil War. In commemoration there is a statue of an Irish wolfhound on the Gettysburg Battlefield.

Ever on the lookout for free publicity, Milt Troehler, then resident manager of the Capitol, Strand, and Family Theaters, phoned the local commanding officer of Company H of the Iowa National Guard and asked if he could borrow three army uniforms, to be worn during the run of the picture by doorman (ticket taker) Jimmy Lloyd, first usher

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Taps

May they rest in peace forever

Please forward all death notices to:
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editor@461st.org

764th Squadron

Name	Hometown	MOS	DOD
Jennings, William E.	Orland Park, IL	757	05/02/06
Luke, Jesse J. Jr.	Cushing, OK	748	02/15/06
Moran, Henry L. Jr.	Chicokee, MA	612	09/22/06
Pealer, John W.	Cedar Rapids, IA	684	03/11/06
Stevens, Harvey A.	Clayton, NY	1092	04/18/06
Thomas, Wilburn H.	Middletown, OH	747	01/25/06

765th Squadron

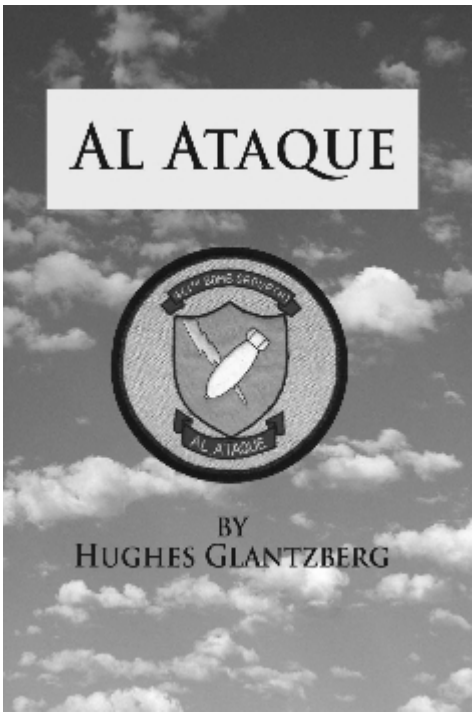
Name	Hometown	MOS	DOD
Carr, Rudolph C.	St. Augustine, FL	1092	07/0/04
Dietrich, William F.	Reading, PA	1034	04/15/06
Mezera, John F.	Reno, NV	612	03/29/06
Ormiston, Floyd R.	Purcell, OK	748	06/01/06
Rubenstein, Harold L.	Northbrook, IL	612	08/06/06

766th Squadron

Name	Hometown	MOS	DOD
Bentrewicz, Carol J.	Brooklyn, NY	747	0/0/06
Ehrenfeld, Sherwood W.	Palm Beach, FL	1034	7/0/05
Gebicke, Lee H.	Pawley's Island, SC	901	05/12/06
Hawkins, Wiley R.	Redondo Beach, CA	748	05/02/06
Singbiel, Elmer C.	Houghton Lake, MI	612	04/20/06
Speranza, John E.	Highlands Ranch, CO	747	10/09/06
Vernon, Robert R. Jr.	Atlanta, MI	612	5/0/01
Wood, Robert A.	Atwater, CA	1092	03/08/06
Yagersz, John W.	Parma Heights, OH	612	1994
Yaw, Myron T.	Ocean Shores, WA	748	08/24/06

767th Squadron

Name	Hometown	MOS	DOD
Beegle, Charles F.	East Tawas, MI	1092	02/04/05
Hoermann, Harry E.	Dallas TX	911	07/11/06
Jaffee, Edward M.	Little Neck, NY	754	11/01/05
Lang, Charles V. Jr.	Ocean Springs, MS	2161	04/17/06



Al Ataque

History / General

Trade **Paperback**
Publication Date: Nov-2006
Price: $26.95
Size: 6 x 9
Author: Hughes Glantzberg
ISBN: **0-595-41572-5**

Trade **Hardcopy**
Publication Date: Nov-2006
Price: $36.95
Size: 6 x 9
Author: Hughes Glantzberg
ISBN: **0-595-86486-4**

413 Pages

On Demand Printing

Available from Ingram Book Group, Baker & Taylor, and from iUniverse, Inc

To order call 1-800-AUTHORS

Al Ataque is an excellent book that describes the preparation a bomb group goes through before being deployed overseas as well as the problems of shipping over five thousand men and supplies along with some eighty B-24 aircraft from a stateside base to a foreign country. The book details the establishment of Torretta Field which was used by the 461st for the duration of the war in Europe. The 461st Bomb Group flew two hundred and twenty-three combat missions between April 1944 and April 1945. Each of these is described in the book. Personal experiences of veterans who were actually part of the 461st are also included.

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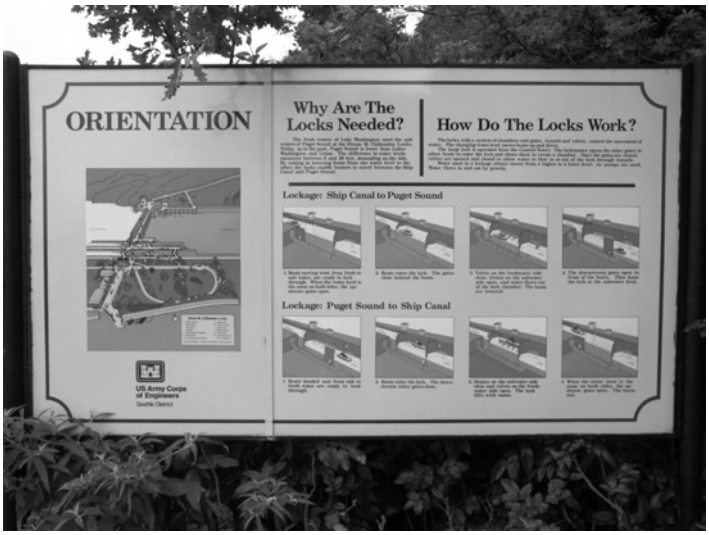
Friday, October 6

Friday's activities started early. The morning looked pretty rainy but settled down to a light mist and later just overcast. The buses for the city tour took off a little after 8:00 am. Our bus went by the Boeing facilities and then past the Seattle Seahawks football stadium, Qwest field, and the Seattle Mariners baseball stadium, Safeco field. We then drove through the downtown Seattle area, noting the steep hills. Starbucks headquarters was pointed out as were several landmark skyscrapers of the Seattle skyline. We drove past the Space Needle and performing arts area. We then made a stop at the Hiram M. Chittendon Locks. Boats and fish move between Lake Union and the Puget Sound. We saw a boat being moved from one side to the other. The filling and emptying of the locks does go pretty fast. The grounds were beautiful with flower gardens, shrubs and interesting trees.



Hiram M. Chittendon Locks

We went by the Fisherman's Terminal where the commercial fishing boats are docked and through the Queen Anne neighborhood, an older neighborhood with gorgeous views overlooking the bay. We then were dropped off for an hour for lunch at Pike's Market. Here there are vendors of all kinds as well as places to eat. The famous fish market where the fish are thrown is located here. Unfortunately, no fish were sailing while we watched (but we did get to sample some great smoked salmon)). There were wonderful flower stands and I saw several bouquets among our members. Time here was short, unfortunately.

The next stop was the Argosy Boat tour of Elliot Bay. We had a great tour guide and saw many interesting sights. We had great views of the Seattle skyline. We

The Seattle Space Needle

Space Needle as seen from the Argosy Boat tour

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saw a grain ship being loaded. The loading process takes about 5 days, running 24 hours. The ship is loaded when the red part of the hull (about the lower 2/3) meets the water line. We also saw the immense container ships being loaded and unloaded. These ships turnaround in 24 hours, a task that looks impossible. The crane operators have their work cut out for them! This position is much coveted and when it is achieved, the crane operator has a lifetime position. Wow! We also saw one California sea lion "sunning" himself on one of the buoys. The cruise was great.

That evening was the squadron dinner. It was held in one dining area with the squadrons grouped together by table proximity. All the squadrons had representation.

Saturday, October 7

Saturday morning we got to sleep in a little and the day was sunny! We headed toward the Snoqualmie Mountains. We saw some fall color although it looked like it was a little early for full color. We stopped shortly before lunch for a quick picture opportunity of the mountains and a stretch of the legs. We then had lunch at the Summit Lodge. From there, we headed to our next stop at Snoqualmie Falls and the Lodge there. The falls were spectacular and for those who had time, a quick look in the lodge was fun, very pretty. We headed back over the Lake Washington floating bridge that connects Mercer Island with the shores of Lake Washington. This bridge is built on concrete blocks which are filled with air and "float". A few weeks after the reunion, Snoqualmie Pass was closed due to record early snows in the area and there was even a picture of Summit Lodge on the Weather Channel. Also, in early November, record rains and wind forced the floating bridge that we crossed to be closed for awhile.

Saturday evening was the Dinner Dance. We had a nice cocktail hour with cheese and fruit appetizers. The buffet was excellent. The music provided was a nice mix of slow and fast, good 40's and 50's tunes. The Bomb Group members were properly documented with a picture taking session.

Veterans attending the reunion

Snoqualmie Falls

Sunday, October 8

The Memorial Service and Breakfast started at 8:30 am with group singing and an address by a pastor Malcolm Brewer, a family friend and former pastor of Barbara Alden and Linda Titus.

The names of the Bomb Group members who died this year were read. A special tribute to Wiley Hawkins was given by Richard Reichard.

Many were able to get in some last minute visits and farewells while waiting to go to the airport. We hope to see you all again next year.

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Marv Stoloff and Franz Holscher. Their courage and friendship inspire me to describe an adventure we shared.

It was 1:15 in the afternoon when my parachute opened. I was 16,000 feet above German-occupied Yugoslavia, and was about to begin an interesting adventure that still continues, 45 years later.

To tell the story, I have divided it into segments:

The Mission November 19, 1944

Forty-one Days Through December 1944

The Trial 1946

The Letter 1951

The Return 1967

The Continuing Story 1991

The Last Chapter April to July 1993

Notes July 1993

The Mission

0600 hours 19 November 1944
766th Heavy Bombardment Squadron,
461st Bombardment Group
49th Bomb Wing
15th Air Force
Torretta Field, Cerignola, Italy

It was the beginning of a very bad day.

The first thing we looked at when we entered the briefing room was the large map of central Europe that covered the wall in front of us. There was a long, narrow, length of black twine that traced the route that we would take to reach our target that day. It started at our base near Cerignola, Italy, took planned detours to confuse the enemy, while it wound its way to our ultimate destination, Vienna, Austria. We knew the target well. We'd been there before. It was one of the most heavily-defended cities in Europe.

The briefing officer almost sounded bored as he began with: "Gentlemen, today the 15th Air Force will attack, with maximum effort, oil targets in the Vienna area. The 766th Squadron will lead the group." Our crew sat together, we were:

1st Lt. Art Farnham, Airplane Commander
2nd Lt. Gene Thomas, Pilot
2nd Lt. Marvin Stoloff, Navigator
S/Sgt. Tom Connelly, Flight Engineer and Top Turret Gunner
S/Sgt. Franz Holscher, Ball Turret Gunner
Cpl. Carrol Sanderson, Waist Gunner
Cpl. "Shorty" Shay, Tail Gunner
Cpl. Roscoe Teal, Nose Turret Gunner
and myself, 2nd Lt. Bob Eckman, Bombardier/Navigator.

One crew member was not with us and missed briefing. He was a new replacement radio operator and waist gunner, Percy "Pete" Peterson.

Our crew was to fly number three position in the second formation. We were the number two deputy "lead" and could move up to the leader position if anything happened to numbers one and two.

After you have been to as many briefings as we have attended, they all begin to sound the same. You hear about times to start engines, taxi, take off, assembly, and rendezvous. There will, of course, be enemy fighters and the target is defended by "heavy, intense and accurate" anti-aircraft fire. We listened and noted the special codes for the day, and when and where we might expect to receive our fighter cover. We heard again that the Germans have some limited jet and rocket-powered interceptors and hoped we would have some of our own soon. After we got the weather and synchronized our watches we split up and I went to the special briefing for bombardiers. Each specialty got the details for his position.

After the briefings were over, we rejoined our crews

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for the truck ride to the plane. We made an important stop to pick up our escape-kits, parachutes, helmets and flak suits. At the airplane, we gave everything a pre-flight inspection, and in about thirty minutes we were ready to go.

Peterson still wasn't there. He was our fourth crew member replacement. Mel Hans, the original navigator, was paralyzed in a crash-landing in August. He was a paraplegic now, and would remain so until he died eight years later. Marvin Stoloff took his place when we returned to duty following that accident. Jim Erwin was our original nose gunner. He had picked up an infection and was replaced that day by Roscoe Teal. This was his first mission with us.

Paul Lawrence, our co-pilot, was replaced by Gene Thomas who was ready to become an airplane commander. He had been assigned to our crew to check on our pilot, Art Farnham. Art had been pretty shaky since the crash-landing and blamed himself for the accident. He had lost some of his self-confidence and it affected the entire crew, including me.

Our new radio operator was replacing Billy Walsh. Billy and I were in the waist section of the B-24 when we hit the ground in the crash-landing. He decided that he would not fly anymore and was assigned to ground duty.

We had several one-mission replacements until some people were transferred in from the Eighth Air Force. That was when Peterson was assigned to our crew. Today was to be his first mission.

I talked with Marv and Art and suggested that if Pete didn't show up that I fly the waist-gun position when we were over enemy territory. Marv normally would navigate up to the target area, then we would trade places. I'd handle the bomb run, and do the navigation home. I was a combination navigator/bombardier so that was no problem. Today we were flying the number three position, did not even have a bombsight, and were going to release our bombs when the leader dropped his. Marv knew how to do that. They both agreed and that became our plan.

A couple of moments before we had to start our engines, a jeep from operations pulled up with Peterson. He was just in time to climb aboard.

Here is what had happened to Peterson. The people who woke us up for a mission did it by tents. The officers on a crew all lived in the same tent and the enlisted men all stayed together in theirs. That made it easy on Operations; they just woke up the right tents and the crews were complete.

The problem this morning was that Peterson was brand new and wasn't living with our crew, and Operations had missed him. He woke up all by himself, just in time! I have often wondered what it was that awakened him that morning and put him where I might have been. If he'd only slept a little longer...

We taxied out behind the first two B-24s ahead of us and waited, watching the tower for the green signal flare that would announce the start of the mission. The signal came while the leader was standing on his brakes and racing his engines. He was getting maximum power for takeoff then released the brakes for his 6,000 foot trip down the runway. Exactly twenty

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

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The 461st Liberaider
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seconds later number two did the same thing and we followed twenty seconds behind him.

I learned early on that you "sweat-out" a mission one problem at a time. "Sweatout" is a gracious way of saying that you are very worried. If you have ever seen a B-24 blow up on takeoff, you know that's the first thing you "sweat."

A B-24 with a crew of 10 men, ten 50-caliber machine guns and ammunition, plus twelve 500-pound high-explosive bombs, and gas tanks that are topped off after the engines are checked, needs every inch of the 6,000 feet of runway to be able to fly. Just as we reached the end of the runway, our airplane staggered off the ground.

We flew straight out, gaining our required altitude. We flew our prescribed minutes, then made a careful 180° turn to the left. By the time we passed by our airfield again, our flight of seven was in its formation, and would be for the balance of the planned eight-hour mission. We slowly gained more altitude as we circled and met the other formations who formed our group.

The next problem was the assembly. There were many airplanes, flying in tight formations, following a strict timetable, growing from squadrons to groups to wings, and finally to the line formation of the 15th Air Force. In clear weather it isn't easy. When you run into clouds it can be tragic. On a previous mission two of our crews, (we knew them well) collided in mid-air and everyone was lost in a matter of moments.

Some of the other bomber groups in the area wouldn't takeoff until later. For the Germans on the ground at the target, the raid would last several hours, but each of us would be over Vienna for only 10 or 15 minutes. That's long enough.

After assembly there was time for me to relax for a few minutes. Over the Adriatic the gunners test-fired their machine guns, and I pulled the safety pins from the bomb fuses. We were now ready to do our thing. For a time our only worry was the weather. We were going in and out of high clouds, and that can be dangerous to our health.

Engine problems had caused our leader to abort. When he lost power in one engine, he couldn't keep up, so he went home. The leader had aborted and our crew was now flying deputy-lead.

The plan was to penetrate enemy territory at a weak point. We looked for a place that had few, if any, defenses. The enemy was always looking for us and moving their guns where we least expected them to be. It was a high-stakes poker game, and the rules changed every day. Meanwhile, we sweated-out flak and maybe some fighters.

The deeper we got into enemy territory, the more we needed fighter protection. Our cover, P-38s, P-51s, or P-47s fly much faster than we do, but they can't fly as long. So they takeoff later than we do and meet us where we most need them, deep inside enemy territory.

You always sweat-out the rendezvous with your fighter escort. Without fighter protection the slow-moving bombers have a difficult time defending themselves, and against massive attacks, it is almost impossible.

We were lucky. By mid-1944 the German Air Force had been crippled so they were careful. Because they were outnumbered, they would carefully pick and choose their targets. When they saw a group unescorted and flying poor formation, they would attack that group in strength. By outnumbering the bombers two or three to one they inflicted huge losses on their unfortunate victims.

So far things were going well for us. Our escort of P-51s were on time and we felt better. As we approached the initial point, Marv, our navigator, and I exchanged positions. After the bomb run I would stay up in the nose section and navigate home.

Vienna was not a new target for us. This was our fourth trip there. It was a well defended target, with flak everywhere, and enemy fighters waiting for us before and after the bomb run. I was expecting the

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worst.

But what a surprise! We were more than three-quarters of the way down the bomb run and I hadn't seen a single flak burst! I thought "My God, we're going to get a free one, they must all still be asleep down there!"

Then it happened! A direct hit in our waist section that killed Pete instantly and wounded Shorty, Franz, and Carrol. Another burst hit below the flight deck and started a small fire. That was a couple of feet away from me and luckily, Tom who was also wounded, was able to put it out quickly.

We lost altitude as Art and Gene tried to fly an airplane without adequate controls. I looked out of my window and thought what a lousy soldiers' town Vienna must be for an American airman. It looked like we would have to jump at any moment.

I fired a salvo of the twelve 500 pounds of RDX, the highest explosive we knew about then. And I hoped that they wouldn't hit any innocent people below.

Roscoe Teal, our nose gunner, was in front of me in his turret. As a precaution, before we started a bomb run, I always opened both of his doors and lifted him onto the ledge of his seat, so that in case of a problem, I could pull him out quickly. We had a problem, so I pulled him out.

I had thought that I was scared, but he calmed me down. He wasn't shaking like you would think a scared man would shake. Every five seconds or so, he would convulse. One big shake, then quiet. A few seconds later, he'd do it again. But when I asked him to go back to the waist section, he did it without hesitation. He grabbed a portable oxygen bottle, hooked it up to his mask and crawled through the tunnel, then through the bomb bay and helped give first aid to the wounded. Bravery is doing what is necessary even though you are frightened.

Art and Gene seemed to have the plane under control, at least temporarily, so I went about my business.

We couldn't set up the auto pilot because of battle damage. Had we been able to, it would have given Art and Gene some much-needed help. I stayed in the nose trying to navigate home. We were in the air for almost another hour, all alone. On our way south, we passed some of the worst enemy fighter areas in Europe, without incident!

This is how Gene Thomas remembers it:

> *"We lost #3 engine right away along with the rudder control including trim tab. The main elevator control was also shot out, but we did have elevator trim left. The aileron was okay so we were able to maintain pitch control with the elevator trim and directional control by holding the right wing high, banking into the two good engines.*
>
> *"It was hard physical work to hold that wing up and Art and I were both on the wheel for the rest of the flight. We were slowly losing altitude, and I remember we were sweating-out whether we could clear the mountains and make the coast.*
>
> *"Eventually, the #4 engine began to fail, and we knew that there was no possibility of maintaining control with only two engines on one side, and no rudder control. We rang the "bail-out" bell and when the crew left, throttled back the #1 engine and I left, followed by Art."*

When Gene left the flight deck, Art followed, but before he jumped, Art went all the way to the tail section and back to insure that we were all out and confirm that Pete was dead. It was a brave thing to do.

I was already out of the airplane when Gene and Art jumped.

Forty-one Days

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I didn't hesitate for a moment to jump out of the airplane. About three months ago we rode another B-24 into the ground and I wasn't anxious to do that again. The bomb bays were open and I just stepped out at 18,000 feet.

We were always briefed to do a free-fall if we jumped over enemy territory. To delay opening the parachute until the last minute minimized "hang time" and helped an escape. As I tumbled through the air, I did a 10-count and decided to see if the parachute would work. If it didn't, I wanted the maximum time to plan something else. When I pulled the ripcord it felt as if nothing happened. Like a slow-motion movie, time seemed to stand still.

On some occasions parachutes were known not to open. The procedure was to reach in and pull the canopy out by hand. I was in the process of doing that when I saw the stream of white silk come out and shortly felt a tremendous jerk. It was like being on the end of a "crack-the-whip" line three miles up in the sky. At first I thought that I was caught in an updraft. Then I realized that what I felt was the tug of my harness as I descended at the rate of 1,000 feet per minute.

It was very quiet. Within moments I counted eight other parachutes so I knew everyone who was alive got out. Then I noticed that the airplane had begun a slow turn about five miles away and maybe three thousand feet above me. The turn became an ever-widening circle, and another thought struck me. Is it possible that the plane could come right through the group of parachutes? You bet it's possible, but a few worried minutes later I saw that it was at last below us. I watched it gradually wind into smaller and smaller circles and although it seemed to fly forever, it finally hit the ground and exploded into a ball of fire.

It took almost 15 minutes before I landed. As I came closer to the ground, I heard gunfire and saw people running. Fortunately, I landed in a farmer's newly-plowed field. The ground was relatively soft and that lessened the impact. At that time I weighed about 190 lbs. stark naked, but when you add two sets of underwear (one set was a pair of "long-johns"), plus my uniform, army high-top shoes, an electrically-heated flying suit, bomber jacket and pants plus a weapon and miscellaneous equipment, I weighed quite a bit. We used small 24-foot parachutes so I came down fast.

As soon as I hit the ground, I rolled over and began to take off my chute harness. Then I saw what I thought were a couple of nuns. They were dressed like the B.V.M.'s who taught me for eight years in grammar school, except that they weren't in black. I decided that if my luck held up I could spend the rest of the war in a convent and not in a P.O.W. camp. I called to them, but they were frightened and ran into the woods.

Then I saw a group of men coming toward me carrying rifles. They didn't have uniforms, but they all had caps with the same insignia. The leader was about 30 feet from me and I drew my .45 pistol. He called "Russki?" and, although we were allied with the Russians at the time, I did a very smart thing.

I hollered back "No, American!" That saved my life. I pointed to the flag that was sewn on my sleeve, and he jumped for joy. "Roosevelt," he said with a huge smile on his face. As a young man from the 48th Ward in Chicago who had only recently cast his first-ever vote (absentee) for the president, I hollered back, "You bet, I'm for Roosevelt, too!"

These were "Chetniks." They were a part of the first underground fighters in Yugoslavia. After the Germans overran the country, Draza Mihailovich, who was an officer in the Royal Army, took the remainder of his troops into the hills and formed the first organized resistance. King Peter, who escaped to London, named him commander-in-chief of his forces.

All this happened while the Communists in the country sat on their hands. Later it was a different story. As soon as the Germans invaded their "ally" Russia, the Communists became anti-German. Politics being what they are, what little help had gone to Mihailovich went to Tito instead. Except the help was

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many times what it had been. It wasn't until several years later that the western allies realized what Stalin was all about.

Both the Chetniks and the Partisans were fighting the Germans, and they also were fighting each other. When the Chetniks saw us coming down in parachutes, they thought we were Russian paratroopers invading their space. Had I said yes to the question "Russki?" I wouldn't be writing this now.

No one spoke English, but they convinced me that we needed to get away from where we were in a hurry. We walked, ran, and jogged for a few miles until we came to a safe house. It was late afternoon when we arrived at the small farmhouse and the first person I saw was "Shorty" Shay, our tail gunner. He had some minor injuries from flak but was in pretty good shape. We were both excited to see one another and very happy to be alive.

A couple of hours later there was more excitement when Tom Connelly, our engineer, arrived with only an injured leg. The next one to arrive was Roscoe Teal, our nose gunner. We all enjoyed the reunion, and eagerly ate the food and drinks offered by our benefactors. After hours of communicating with sign language and a combination of German, Serbian and my high school French, we finally went to sleep fully-clothed except for shoes -- all four of us in the same bed.

The next morning, after some warm goat's milk and dark bread, Tom and I left with some Chetniks to go to the plane and bury Pete. When we were within a mile or so of where the plane hit, we were warned that it wasn't safe ahead. A "Ustashi" patrol was in the area looking for us. The Ustashi were Croatian sympathizers who fought both the Chetniks and the Partisans and committed atrocities against any German enemy.

We returned to the farmhouse. Shortly after our return, we were reunited with Marv Stoloff, our navigator, and Franz Holscher, our ball-turret gunner. Later, we met Carrol Sanderson, the waist gunner, and Gene Thomas. We didn't catch up to Art Farnham for a few more days.

It was time to move to an area considered safer and one that was a minor local headquarters. We had an escort of uniformed soldiers in addition to the armed peasants who made up a major part of the Resistance. There were a couple of commissioned officers on horseback with us. We walked and also rode in ox carts and I even had the chance, along with Franz, to ride one of the horses.

That night, we slept in a safe-house and spent some time enjoying a new-found drink -- Slivovitz. It is made from plums, looks like vodka, and is smooth going down, but kicks like a mule! We were enjoying our new friends and the prospect of evading the Germans.

We had all landed in the same general area, but there was some local fighting going on that slowed things down a little bit. Now that our crew was almost complete, we were anxious to travel to the headquarters to see if help was available for our escape.

We were in a very primitive part of the country. Oxen were used as farm animals for plowing and hauling things in carts. Except for the mounted officers we didn't see a horse the entire time that we were in Yugoslavia. There was no electricity, and all plumbing was the outhouse-type -- when they had one. Water came from a well, and food was very scarce.

We ate lots of boiled cabbage for the next several weeks. There was virtually no meat, but we did have warm goat's milk in the mornings with a slice of dark bread. Between the light diet and all the exercise, I lost about 20 pounds in six weeks, but except for a slight case of malnutrition, I never felt better in my life.

It was dangerous because the Germans occupied the country, but they couldn't be everywhere. They were in every important part, and controlled the cities, the highways, the rail lines, and whatever else they deemed critical. However, they couldn't be in every house, on every farm, hill or mountain. That was to our advantage. So although we were in danger, we never had to fight the war 24-hours-a-day like in the

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old Errol Flynn movies.

To sum up our situation: we were in a strange country, we didn't speak the language and we knew no one. We had no food or transportation except our feet, and we were 300+ miles from the sea, where we could begin a very long 100-mile swim home.

We needed help almost right away. If we didn't get it in a day or two we wouldn't survive. We were lucky and landed in a rural area where the native people had temporary control and we were relatively safe. The Germans may have known we were around, but it would have taken some real effort to find us. Luckily, they were busy moving troops north to relieve other divisions who would shortly begin the "Battle of the Bulge."

We finally got to the local headquarters and found the only English-speaking person in the area. That was when we learned where we were and who we were with. We also learned that they had a short-wave radio and had advised Mihailovich's headquarters that we were with them. It looked like help might be on the way.

It was suggested that we split up and stay at different houses for safety. We decided we'd rather stay together, even though it meant all of us sleeping on the floor of a small bedroom on a blanket of straw.

That is when we met the Panic family and my good friend Yugo. Marko Panic was the head of the house. His oldest son Milosh was married and had a young son and lots of aunts and a brother named Yugo. Yugo was my age and a bachelor, and like all Serbians, was filled with great respect for Americans. They all thought we were Supermen.

All through the war, they witnessed the Germans as they beat Belgium, Norway, France, then drove the British into the sea at Dunkirk. Although they had some problems with the Russians, they would have reached Moscow if people like the Chetniks didn't tie down four divisions in Yugoslavia who were needed at the Eastern Front. The British did finally turn the corner in North Africa, but only after severe losses.

Everything seemed to change when the United States entered the war. First it was the 8th Air Force flying out of England, on daylight missions that brought the war back to Europe. Then the American invasion of North Africa that drove the Germans and the Italians out. Then Sicily, southern Italy and of course, "D Day" in northern France followed by southern France. The Germans were pushed back to the Rhine and it looked like the end was in sight! Of course, it wasn't just the Americans who won those victories, but we got most of the credit in the eyes of the oppressed people of Europe.

We were still with the Panic family when the Germans made their final effort at the Bulge. For a while, because of the weather, things looked bad. But thanks to a major effort led by General Patton, and clearing skies, we won there too!

We stayed with the Panic family for almost a month. We knew that an OSS (Office of Strategic Service) team was south of us at Mihailovich's headquarters. They had been ordered out of the country, but Nick Lalich, the team leader, wanted to travel north to us, and take us out with him.

Meanwhile, Franz and I took advantage of the opportunity to explore the local area. We did it everyday. We were in better physical condition than the others, and were very good friends. We liked each other from our first meeting. As a bombardier, I was the armament officer in charge of bombs, guns and turrets. As a Staff Sergeant, Franz had been trained in armament and acted as my assistant. He also rode in the Sperry-ball turret, which takes a special kind of courage.

We were often together on short-term leave, but because of the difference in our rank, we weren't always welcome at the same places, like the Officer's Club or the Non-Commissioned Officer's Club. We found a simple solution. At the Non-Com Club I took off my bars and became a private and his guest. Later I would give him a set of bars, and we enjoyed life at the Officers' Club. Of course, he couldn't wear

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a shirt with his stripes when we did that.

I had collected a total of three .45 caliber semi-automatic pistols while I was overseas. When we crashed the B-24 in August, all equipment was written off, even though I still had mine. In fact, I had two because of an accident that happened on our first mission. The nose wheel collapsed on landing, and we skidded on our nose and off the runway -- quite exciting, lots of confusion and another gun written off.

In early fall the Air Force took away handguns from everyone except bombardiers. There had been a number of cases where airman had been shot after bailing out over enemy territory with the excuse given that they were armed. I was able to keep mine because I needed it to destroy the still-secret Norden bombsight.

No one was pleased to be disarmed, especially Franz. So I gave him one of my 45s. The other I gave to Tom Connelly, our engineer. He was Irish, a fighter, and wanted to be prepared. The three of us were the only ones with weapons, and enjoyed the satisfaction of having an extraordinary weapon resting on our hip. The issue shoulder holster also could be used around the waist, so we carried them like cowboys.

Most days, after our ration of warm goat's milk and black bread, Franz and I would go out to "work the territory," armed and ready for whatever might happen.

We made many friends as we visited the small farms in the area. We met one couple who invited us on a picnic that involved climbing a mountain. At the top we looked down into the town of Doboj. The Germans were present and in fact had some fighter airplanes stationed there. It was a most unusual day and a special memory for us.

Remember the song "Missed the Saturday Dance"? We didn't. Some of our new friends invited Franz and I to a special celebration with singing, dancing, drinking and much merriment. We were the only non-Serbians there and must have made one hell of an impression. We didn't miss a dance or a drink all night long. In fact it became a little testy when some of the "locals" became a little jealous of our success with the ladies, so we finally decided to call it a night. But what a night it was!

All the walking and climbing was great exercise. Although we all had dysentery and were malnourished, Franz and I were in great shape. Several of our crew members and other evadees and escapees were not in condition to travel far, and that is what convinced the Air Force to try to come and get us.

Nick Lalich made that happen. We met Nick in late December when he came to our area with his radio operator and an escort of Chetniks. When I first met him he was a first lieutenant and had Signal Corps insignia on his collar. I asked, "What in the hell is a Signal Corps officer doing here?"

He then told me about the OSS (Office of Strategic Service). It was the forerunner of the CIA. During the war it was a free-wheeling group of special people. They came from all walks of life, all different backgrounds and did special things, like sabotage, intelligence gathering, resistance organizing, and dirty tricks of all kinds against our enemies worldwide.

They recruited from all walks of life including the armed services. Their ideal candidate was a second-generation American, who spoke another language at home and knew the customs and culture of the parent's homeland.

Nick was 100 percent Serbian, tall, strong, good-looking and a fine officer. He was asked to volunteer for a dangerous assignment, to jump into occupied Yugoslavia and head a special team. He couldn't wait. First he went to "jump school" then "dirty tricks school." Soon after his special training, his team landed in Serbia. They fit in perfectly.

They were in daily touch by radio with headquarters back in Bari, Italy. Among other duties, they gath-

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ered allied personnel who were on the loose – escaped POWs and evadees like us. They were mostly airmen, but also some others who had been captured and escaped, and were looking for a way back. Nick arranged an air evacuation from near Mihailovich's headquarters. On his last mission he was ordered to leave, but refused to go. He had just learned that we were down and he was our only hope. He decided to come north and get us.

By this time, there were 21 of us, including a few that Nick picked up along the way. Some were in pretty bad shape and couldn't go much farther. He convinced headquarters at Bari, Italy, to make an air drop of badly-needed medical supplies, food, clothing and arms. They suggested a cow pasture as the drop site because we felt that with a little luck a very good pilot could land a C-47 there. Unfortunately, we had lots of rain and fairly warm temperatures and the ground was too soft for a landing at that time.

Bari agreed to a later drop and the location and picked a typical Air Force "PR" day to do it -- December 25th, Christmas Day!

The mission had a dual purpose: To drop supplies, and to eyeball the field and the approach and make a judgment about landing there later. It wasn't so hard to land, but takeoff would be a problem.

The time came and we were all in place to witness the air show. First we saw a squadron of P-38s buzz the area. They were there to keep the Germans honest and out of our way. Then we saw the B-25. It came in very low with its bomb bays open and started to drop canisters attached to colored parachutes. We had plenty of help as we collected them. Then the B-25 made a final pass, and a judgment and headed home with his escort.

We brought the canisters to headquarters and got a surprise when we opened the first one. Right on top, ahead of all the "goodies," were some special packages -- "pro-kits." Lots of them! It was an inside joke between one of the guys back at Bari and his good friend Nick. Nick couldn't wait for that night's radio transmission when he began his report with "What in the hell do you guys think we're doing over here?" It was a great laugh for everybody.

About a week earlier we had gone into the forest and chopped down a pretty little pine tree. For decorations, we used "chaff" and strung berries we had picked.

Chaff came from small cardboard packages containing long ribbons of tinsel-like material that were thrown out by bomber crews on all missions. When the package hit the air stream it usually broke open and the tinsel separated and floated down slowly. The clouds of light metal confused the enemy radar by producing false signals and making it more difficult to identify an airplane on the screen. (Oddly enough, after all of the spectacular advances in electronics in the past 46 years, it is still used and is still effective today!)

The tree looked great in our small room and I borrowed Nick's camera to take a photo of him and our crew. A few years later Nick gave me a copy. I still have it among my many souvenirs.

The Serbs are Orthodox and celebrate Christmas in January. When they learned that December 25th was our Christmas they prepared a special feast. It's hard to remember all the things we ate, but I will never forget what we drank -- Slivovitz, and plenty of it.

With our new friends we toasted each other, our countries, our leaders, freedom, liberty, Roosevelt, Mihailovich, victory in the war, and many, many other worthwhile causes. Slivovitz is refreshing. It tastes like spring water, but it has a delayed reaction. I began drinking at the age of 18 and had some experience. Shorty, Sandy, and Teal had never tasted a drop. Marv and Gene were beginners and even today, are light drinkers. They weren't that night.

I should have felt sorry for them in their condition, but I couldn't feel anything. I do remember going up the hill to our farmhouse, sometimes on my hands and knees. They went up the hill slowly, climbing up on the palms of their hands!

The next morning was dreadful, but as bad as I felt, the rest of them were in worse shape. We all recov-

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ered, but I think we created some permanent teetotalers that night.

It was freezing cold now, just what we needed to be able to use the field for a takeoff. In two days we reported the good news but Bari didn't oblige. They wanted us to either march to the Adriatic and meet a submarine or cross through the battle line and come out with the Partisans. We didn't want to do that and anyway, some of our people couldn't travel much more.

Nick finally convinced them that it could work. December 28th was the day. The Chetniks went out in force and sealed off a perimeter several miles around the field. They could hold it, but only for a limited amount of time. We said some good-byes and headed for the field.

When things got started it was quite a show. First, 36 P-51s arrived flying at low level. They went up and down the roads looking for trouble. They went to the airfield at Doboj to strafe the runways and keep the Germans on the ground. While the flying circus did their thing, two DC-3s came in for short field landings. They touched down, slowed down, made a quick U-turn, and came over to where we were. They kept the #2 engines going, opened the door and started handing out the supplies that they had brought for our friends.

It was over quickly. We were hustled into the planes, but not before we gave away everything we didn't need for the trip home. Boots, gloves, hats, jackets, equipment of all kinds went to our rescuers.

I had already given my prize possession, my .45 pistol to my friend Yugo. He was absolutely thunderstruck when I did. He was an excellent marksman because he had to defend himself and put food on the table. But his greatest moment of shame came one day when I let him try the gun. He carefully placed a target on a tree stump and walked a distance away. In his best pose, he aimed the gun and squeezed the trigger. The gun jumped in his hand.

The recoil of a .45 is like nothing else in the business. Even the experts find it a difficult gun to learn to shoot. Its merit lies in the fact that it is almost indestructible, works wet or full of mud and will knock down anything you hit, no matter where you hit it.

Poor Yugo, he was so embarrassed! But he was a good sport, ready to learn how to master this strange and powerful weapon. I also gave him the three clips of ammunition so he had 20 rounds available, if the need should arise.

We said our last good-byes and climbed into the plane. No delays, no tower instructions, no traffic pattern to worry about, just stand on the brakes, wind 'em up, then let her fly. In minutes we were headed toward Italy. When we reached our flight altitude we were surprised to see another full group of P-38s that had been flying top cover in case the Luftwaffe had their own plans for our airlift. They escorted us all the way home.

The rescue team in Bari met us when we landed. We thanked them and everyone else we could find. It was a very great risk to a lot of people and equipment just to get back 21 of us. But it was in keeping with the Air Force motto, "We take care of our own." If necessary, they would have sent twice as many planes to get any one of us regardless of our rank! I found great comfort in that knowledge a few weeks later when I returned to operations and flew another 17 missions.

The hospital was our first stop. A hot shower was step one. Then delousing and another hot shower. When you have gone for six weeks, with only one exposure to hot water, and that one was in a pail you could barely fit into, you can appreciate a simple bath or shower. It remains today as one of my favorite treats.

The first regular food was wonderful! We smoked Camels courtesy of the Red Cross. After a good night's sleep and debriefing, we took physicals and were treated for anything that ailed us.

Soon we were on our way back to our squadron. Marv and I were the only ones who finished a complete tour. I think he had only seven or eight to go. The rest were only halfway through. Earlier if you

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were shot down and got back, they sent you home. The new rule was 42 days. We were gone 41 days. A good example of "Catch-22," the system of changing the rules, after the game had begun.

Teal and Art were grounded, as was Connelly. Gene, Marv, Franz, Shay, Shorty and I went back to combat.

I was so anxious to get it over with, that I had the flight surgeon get me assigned to a different crew in each of our three squadron flights. That way I was on almost every mission the squadron flew from then on. I flew as a bombardier on one crew, a navigator on another and as a combination of both on the third. During one period, I briefed every day for thirty days but only got about six missions in because of the bad weather.

When I finished in spring, I said my good-byes not knowing then how that one mission would come back into my life; not once, but several times. And it keeps coming still.

The Trial

Tito and his Partisans announced that they had captured Draza Mihailovich on March 25th, 1946. It had taken six divisions 17 months to find him.

They accused him of being a war criminal, and said he would be given a fair trial, then executed!

A reporter for the *Herald American* lived in the same apartment building that my parents and I did. He called me and asked if I was one of the many hundreds of airman who had been reportedly saved by Mihailovich. When I said yes, he asked if he could have an interview the next day. I said yes.

When my story and picture appeared in the Monday evening editions, it helped create a movement in Chicago. A number of other airmen who shared the same experience came forward to share their opinions that Mihailovich was innocent of the charges.

The Chicago Tribune picked up the story as did other dailies across the country. Every weekly magazine followed suit.

I received a telephone call from someone at the Serbian Defense Council who asked if I was willing to help save Mihailovich, and of course, I said yes. The Council had gathered the names of several other airmen and suggested we meet at their Chicago headquarters.

When we met we quickly agreed to form the "Committee to Save Mihailovich." Our purpose was to insure that he received a fair trail, and witnesses in his behalf be allowed to testify. We were a few of the willing witnesses.

Our first goal was to get the maximum amount of publicity for our cause and raise some money for his defense.

Publicity was not a problem. It was a good story and a lot of Americans already knew what our government had yet to admit, that the Communists were really not our friends. Our supporters included many prominent citizens, people like Senator Robert Taft, and other political leaders. We appeared at rallies, did radio interviews, and captured a lot of space in the newspapers.

We decided to take our case to Washington and get help from President Truman. With the money we had raised and financial help from the Serbian Defense Council, we chartered a DC-3 and took off from Midway airport in Chicago.

Our first stop was Detroit where we picked up a few more rescued Americans, then flew to Toledo, Ohio for the same purpose. Nick Lalich joined us in Toledo and stayed with us throughout the trip. At each stop the press was there ready to interview us, and add to public support.

There were 20 of us who made the trip representing more than 600 Americans who we knew had been rescued by the Chetniks. When we arrived in Washington we were met by Senators Taft (Ohio), McClellan (Arkansas), Wiley (Wisconsin), and Rivercomb (West Virginia). All agreed to help us and indeed they tried.

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461st Bombardment Group (H) Association Membership

For membership in the 461st Bombardment Group (H) Association, please print this form, fill it out and mail it along with your check for the appropriate amount to:

Dave St. Yves
5 Hutt Forest Lane
East Taunton, MA 02718

If you have any questions, you can E-Mail Dave at treasurer@461st.org.

The 461st Bombardment Group (H) Association offers three types of membership:

- **Life Membership** – Men who served in the 461st during World War II and their spouses are eligible to join the Association for a one-time fee of $25.00. This entitles the member to attend the annual reunions held in the fall each year, receive the newsletter for the Association, The 461st Liberaider, and attend and vote at the business meetings usually held at the reunion.
- **Associate Membership** – Anyone wishing to be involved in the 461st Bombardment Group (H) Association may join as an Associate member. The cost is $10.00 per year. No renewal notices are sent so it is your responsibility to submit this form every year along with your payment. Associate membership entitles you to attend the reunions held in the fall each year and receive the newsletter for the Association, The 461st Liberaider. You are not a voting member of the Association.
- **Child Membership** – Children of men who served in the 461st during World War II are eligible to join the Association as a Child Member. The cost is $10.00 per year. No renewal notices are sent out so it is your responsibility to submit this form every year along with your payment. Child membership entitles you to attend the reunions held in the fall each year, receive

Type of membership desired:	**Life** ☐	**Associate** ☐	**Child** ☐ Father's name:				
First Name:		Last Name:					
Street Address:							
City:		State:		Zip:			
Phone number:		E-Mail address:					
Squadron #:		Crew #:		MOS:		ASN:	
Check No.:		Amount:	$				

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We held press conferences at the Mayflower Hotel that were well-attended and properly reported in the national and local press. Then we went one-on-one. For an entire week we met with Senators, Congressmen, the State Department, anyone who would listen to our story. We told everyone that all we wanted was for our Government to get permission for us to testify at Mihailovich's trial as defense witnesses. That's all we wanted and we would accept any verdict if it was based on an open trial. We knew he was innocent; all he needed was a fair trial.

Our biggest disappointment was Truman's refusal to see us. Keep in mind that this was before our country realized that the Russians were not our friends but our long-term enemies. This was before the "Cold War," the "Berlin Wall," etc. Our leaders were still courting the Communists' favor and would not do anything to breach what they thought were good relations.

We tried to see Jimmy Byrnes, the Secretary of State, but he was in Paris at a peace conference. We did see his assistant Dean Acheson. He promised to send a "strong note" to Belgrade, and he did. I'm not sure how strong it was because Tito's government rejected it.

At the end of the week, we left for home, discouraged but not defeated.

More publicity followed and the pressure continued. In New York City the American Civil Liberty Union conducted a mock trail that lasted a week. Many airmen, including our navigator, Marvin Stoloff, and Nick Lalich testified in Mihailovich's behalf. Those findings were sent to Belgrade and ignored.

The trial was a farce. A sleepy, apparently drugged, Mihailovich did little to defend himself. He was found guilty -- to no one's surprise.

A firing squad executed him less than 48 hours after the "trial" ended.

From the beginning it was a lost cause. But it was well worth fighting for, and I'd do it again in a minute!

The Letter

A reporter from *The Chicago Tribune* called me on Sunday, June 10, 1951. He said that an Associated Press story came off their teletype and my name had been mentioned.

He confirmed that I had been on an air crew that had been rescued after being shot down in Yugoslavia in 1944. The story coming over the wire was an announcement that the U.S. Government had agreed to pay a peasant family $500.00 to cover a "promissory note" that nine American airmen had given to them.

It had taken quite a while to have this approved both in Belgrade and Washington, D.C., because technically it was not legal.

When we were briefed on missions, we were always told that we could compensate anyone who helped us evade capture or escape from the enemy. The Air Force even gave us $50.00 in old greenback dollars to use as we saw fit. They also told us that at our discretion, we could give promissory notes for any reasonable amount and the government would redeem them when the war was over. That is exactly what we did, so what was the problem?

It seems that the fine print in this policy limited the "rewards" to citizens of enemy countries. The government did not include allies even though the enemy occupied their country!

We never heard about that limitation so when it came time to leave the Panic family, we insisted that they accept a letter that all of us signed, telling the United States to pay them $500.00. They had already refused to accept any of the escape money we offered. They only took the letter when we reminded them that no one knew what might happen, and sometime in the future, it may come in handy.

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Things were pretty tough for them during and after the war. Finally, in desperation, they contacted our embassy office in Belgrade.

You can imagine the red tape they went through. Initially they were sent away. No one had ever seen anything like this before. Someone thought to contact the signers of the note, and they reached me through my parents' home.

They asked for details and I prepared a multi-page deposition; had it typed, signed, sworn, and witnessed before I sent it to Washington. The rest of the crew did the same.

Now the slow process of approval started and it did not end until it was finally approved by the Secretary of State! Everything went back to Yugoslavia for handling. It still was not easy because when Ambassador George Allen finally met with the Panic family, they wanted dollars, like the letter said, but could only receive dinars, the local currency.

Finally someone had a brilliant idea. Why not take the money in CARE packages? The Panics quickly agreed.

Later, when I was in touch with Ambassador Allen, he confided that each CARE package had a value in the grey market of about $50.00 in local money and the Panics had received 100 of them in exchange for the note. In the U.S. they only cost $5.00 each.

CARE was delighted with the choice because of the publicity it gave them at a time when they were trying to get donations. Their local office called me with a request for more information. I met a smart young lady who had the idea to do a story about my experiences and sell it to a network.

She made the whole thing happen. In a week or so NBC had committed 30 minutes of prime time, 8 p.m. on a Friday night! It would be a public service show without commercials, just a pitch for CARE.

Remember that this was in 1951, the days before network television. It was coast-to-coast, live from Chicago, Illinois!

The writers had interviewed me at length and came back with a script for approval. The story was centered around me, but had some dramatic enhancements. We cut most of them, but they insisted on leaving the rest.

The show went great. I even got some fan mail. When the story was over, I came on for a live interview and gave a pitch for CARE. It really was a success, and CARE asked me to do more. I did another radio interview and a couple of other things before I ran out of gas.

All's well that ends well! The Panics were partially rewarded for the risks they took and the kindness they showed us, and CARE raised lots of money.

I also learned something about the media from this experience. My story appeared in several daily newspapers, a national magazine, and of course, was reported on radio. I learned that what you see in print is not always what was said to reporters. In fact, I have been involved in several different situations that were covered in the media, including *Time* magazine, and every one had inaccuracies! The moral is: don't believe everything you see, especially if it is in print.

They were still talking about the CARE packages in Yugoslavia when I returned there in 1967. They were impressed that our country honored our promise to them.

I was also impressed that it almost took an act of Congress to get these wonderful people a small amount like $500.00 while our government has given our enemies billions and billions of dollars.

But nobody ever said that life would be fair.

There's more to this story, but I'm out of room in this edition. The rest of Bob Eckman's story will be in the June 2007 issue of the Liberaider.

461st Bomb Group (H) Inc.
Election Ballot
For
President and Vice President
Term: February 1, 2007 thru 2008
Reunion

Life Members and Child Members **only** eligible to vote

Your name: _____

President

☐ Alfred St. Yves

☐ _____

☐ _____

Vice President

☐ Leonard Bathurst

☐ _____

☐ _____

461st Bomb Group (H) Inc.
Election Ballot
For
President and Vice President
Term: February 1, 2007 thru 2008
Reunion

Life Members and Child Members **only** eligible to vote

Your name: _____

President

☐ Alfred St. Yves

☐ _____

☐ _____

Vice President

☐ Leonard Bathurst

☐ _____

☐ _____

Return your ballot to:

John Taphorn
4311 School Section Road
Cincinnati, OH 45211

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Russ Presnall, and me. Jimmy was 18 years old, Russ 16, and I 17 at the time. Consent was freely given, on condition that Company H could set up a recruiting desk in the theater lobby during the four-day run of the show.

Russ drove the three of us to the Memorial Coliseum, where we were met at the door by a member of the unit, presumably the supply sergeant, who escorted us to the basement supply room. I was not acquainted with this man, and I do not recall his name, but I remember that he was very cordial and enthusiastic about the idea. He fitted us with enlisted men's Class B winter uniforms, meaning wool shirts and trousers, neckties, and campaign hats, plus web pistol belts and empty holsters.

He also explained that the enamelware insignia affixed to the hats were of the famous 42nd "Rainbow" Division, and that local guardsmen, *and the 69th New Yorkers as well,* had been part of that division during the war, the latter becoming the 165th Infantry Regiment after being federalized for the conflict.

As we gathered up our loot, he casually said, "Would you like to have a machine gun to set up in the lobby?" With our boyish interest in anything that fired a cartridge, we gave an enthusiastic affirmative response and then watched him remove the Model 1917 water-cooled weapon from its tripod, so we could reassemble it after delivery to the Capitol.

I have often wondered how many state and federal statutes we violated that day, possessing and transporting a concealed, fully operable machine gun in the trunk of Russ's car.

The photo was taken by a Times-Republican photographer, and it appeared in the newspaper, making our boss very happy for a few days. The photographer gave each of us a print, but I lost mine in one of my 28 moves since war's end. This one belongs to Russ Presnall.

Two years later, local ushers and ticket takers would be wearing uniforms of our own. Serving in the armed forces in World War II were: Roy

L. to R. – Russell Presnall, Vahl Vladyka, and Jimmy Lloyd

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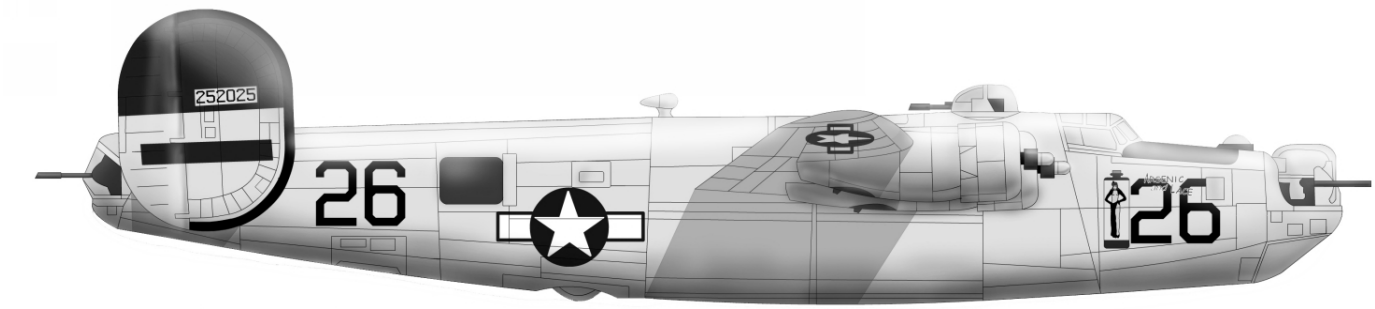
Asher (Pacific Theater and career naval officer); Roger Bothell (Guadalcanal and *eight* other island invasions); Jack Clemens (*eight* battle stars while on the battleship "Washington"); Glen Fields (Army Air Forces pilot – theater unknown); Burton Haglan (first of our group to enlist – on Navy warships in both oceans); Ralph Hoggatt (8th Air Force pilot and career officer); Ralph Miller (artilleryman in France and Germany); "Bob" Perisho (15th AF aerial gunner); "Russ" Presnall (Marine Corps medic); Armon Reynolds (15th AF pilot and career officer); Clarence ("Art") Wood (Rapido River battle veteran in 36th Division in Italy); and the author (15th AF pilot). All but one experienced serious combat, and at war's end, that one was preparing to participate in the invasion of Japan. According to the late Paul Norris, Ralph Hoggatt became Marshalltown's most decorated serviceman. There were a few others, but I lost track of Jimmy Lloyd and those few, so I do not know of their service experience.

Why so many combat veterans from such a small group? Historians of World War II seem to agree that only about one serviceman in ten ever fired a shot in battle or were shot at. Maybe we were inspired by films such as "**The Fighting 69th**", from whose *real-life* ranks came Medal of Honor winner "Wild Bill" Donovan, later leader of the Office of Strategic Services, our intelligence agency in World War II; Father Francis Patrick Duffy, veteran of three wars and the most decorated chaplain ever (DSC, DSM, French Croix de Guerre and Legion of Honor); and the poet known to every American schoolboy, Joyce Kilmer, who was killed in action.

William Keighley, who directed the film, had no military experience, but he enlisted after Pearl Harbor. Jeffrey Lynn, who portrayed Sgt. Joyce Kilmer, was in the army in Italy when I served there.

I still hum the music from the picture – *The Minstrel Boy to the War Has Gone, Garryowen,* "The infantry, the infantry, with the dirt behind their ears…", and "… the 69th for me", and it is going through my head as I write this.

Fade to black.



Tail-End Charlie

by
Guyon Philips
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49th Bomb Wing, 15th Air Force
Torretta Field, Cerignola, Italy

When the orders came out, I immediately saw that we would be flying #7 in a seven-ship box – Tail-End Charlie. It was typical to put a new crew at the rear since that spot was easier to fly, and you'd create less of a problem if you couldn't keep it in tight. The downside, was that your fanny was exposed to a favorite rear-end attack by fighters, and you knew it.

The mission for 25 April 1945 was to hit the marshaling yards at Linz, Austria. Linz had a history I was unaware of – it was heavily defended, and the 15th had experienced more than nominal losses in missions over the previous year. A little known fact was that it was Hitler's hometown and that had to be another reason for greater defense against attack.

We were out about an hour when #6 began smoking from his #1 engine. After a few minutes – and nothing on the radio – he peeled off for home, and I moved up to #6. Upon moving up in ranks, you didn't feel like a rookie any longer. Within another hour or so, what do you know - #3 developed the same problem and off he went. Now I'm really moving up in the world – up to the left wing of the leader where you could see what's going on up front.

Droning on, we reached the Italian Alps which looked quite small and unspectacular from 25,000 feet. Before Walt Dubina, my engineer, got up in the top turret, he appeared at my side and handed me my flak vest, the bottom of which I tucked carefully over sensitive areas. Then he handed me that special steel helmet with the hinged ear-pieces to fit over your headset – biggest helmet I ever saw.

Seems like we'd hardly left the IP (Initial Point for the bomb-run) when the black puffs began to appear, right on our level – none higher, none lower. They had the altitude nailed. Of course we had thrown out our chaff to confuse their radar, but all it did was to give them what they needed to zero in on us.

Bearing on, the puffs became thicker and thicker. Of course I'm glued on the lead ship for a tight bombing pattern, but I would sneak a peak now and then as the flak became more intense. I was focused on #1 and holding tight when a burst – with the black puff still intact – passed between me and the lead ship. I jumped, and when I did, the big helmet dropped over my eyes and I had to take my right hand off the throttles and shove it back up. That caused me to slip slightly out of formation, but I quickly goosed it back up tight again.

After bombs away, we made a steep right turn to get out of there as fast as we could. With the bomb-bay doors open, you felt like your drawers were down, and you were naked and exposed. Actually, those doors were so flimsy; I knew they offered little or no protection.

Later, my gunners told me they saw several fighters make a pass at us, but that our Mustang fighter escort ran them off without incident. Mustangs – that brought back memories - I was in Single-Engine Advanced on my way to Mustangs or Thunderbolts, when they jerked twenty-six of the taller guys and sent us to Twin-Engine – they wanted longer legs to train for the four-engine B-17s or B-24s.

The only things I remember about the return flight was being on-the-step - gradually losing altitude and flying very fast – but not fast enough for me to get away. Someone said that the greatest feeling was "to be shot at and missed", and it sure felt good.

After reaching Torretta for formation peel-off and landing, I picked up word on the radio that one of our planes was in trouble. We learned that Doc Demmond of the 765th had his left wheel to drop off the strut when the gear was lowered. He circled the field several times and most of his crew bailed out.

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We understood he was given the choice to head the plane out over the Adriatic and bail out, but he chose to bring it in.

He retracted his main gear, but the nose wheel was locked in the down position. Everybody gathered to watch, and he couldn't have done a better job in easing the big bird down on the gravel runway, finally sliding just off the end – a job well done. We never figured how you could lose a wheel off a strut.

At critique, we learned that one of our planes had been hit by flak and gone down – the pilot's name was Toothman. There was no report of anyone seeing chutes. Some thirty years later, I ran into a young man in Virginia by that name. Now Toothman is not your everyday name, so I asked if by chance he had any relatives who might have been in the Air Force. Turned out that Larry Toothman had indeed been his uncle. Later I had contact with John LaZier and Roy Wieland, two of Larry's crew, and was able to get more of the story after all those years. Larry's co-pilot was killed by the hit, but the other nine of the crew got out, only to be taken prisoner for the brief period before the Allies reached the area. Larry was severely injured, but survived - was told he passed away in 1984. Later I enjoyed meeting LaZier at the Dayton Reunion of the 461st.

One of the planes that had aborted dropped his bombs on what he considered a target of opportunity. The CO reprimanded him for taking the chance of hitting Allied forces which were so close to the target area, to which the pilot replied, "I figured they weren't ours when they started shooting at us".

Then my name was called. I stood up and was told that I had retracted my gear too quickly after takeoff. For some strange reason, we were always told to ease back on the yoke at 110 MPH and just let the plane fly itself off the ground. It didn't take me very long in pilot transition to find out that the plane was sluggish and underpowered, and that a gust or wind shift could drop a heavy plane back on the runway. I had long since decided to keep the plane on the ground until 120, knowing that when you pulled back it would lift off cleanly and for good. Needless to say, I passed up the opportunity to expand on that point with the CO.

That was the last combat mission for the 461st. Within a couple of weeks, those with less than half their missions completed were put on priority Green Project to fly a squadron ship back to the States for redeployment.

A lot of training time went into getting us ready for combat – I flew my first mission as co-pilot on a milk run up to the Po Valley to knock out bridges over the Adige River to block the retreating Germans, so my crew got in only one mission before it was all over in Europe. Again, we were there long enough to know what it was like to be shot at, and the good feeling to know that they missed. Six of my crew have passed on, but I am still in touch with the others. Sixty years have gone by quickly, but the memories are still there. We had a good crew – we were a team.

Name	**Position**	**Hometown**
Guyon Phillips	Pilot	Spartanburg SC
Grady Culbertson	Co-Pilot	Spartanburg SC
Graham Kerr	Navigator	Winchester VA
Fred Noegel *	Bombardier	Cochran GA
Walt Dubina	Engineer/Top Gunner	Newark NJ
Ed Elliott	Asst Engr/Waist Gunner	Morris NY
John Gruber	Radioman/Waist Gunner	Buffalo NY
Mike Keuziak	Nose Gunner	Milwaukee WI
Bob Sundeen	Ball Gunner	Duluth MN
Walt Bailey	Tail Gunner	Cullman AL

(*) 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 set a record in bombing accuracy with a Circular Error of 216 ft. - 76 drops with 100% pictures from high, medium and low altitude - my appeal to my CO went for naught - he said his hands were tied. Fred later went to the Pacific with the 5th Air Force, but we caught up with each other after the war. Wish we could have stayed together, because we were a team.

Dress Parade Over Bari

by
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Torretta Field, Cerignola, Italy

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 this 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 single plane appeared – a Group Staff pilot flying one of those gray Mickey ships – as a rover I called Lone Wolf. Mickey ships were equipped with radar for bombing through the clouds, and painted gray for easy identification by others in the formation. Lone Wolf immediately got on the horn telling stragglers to pull it in and tighten it up for close formation.

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 which 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 now we were going to get a lesson in 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, but I think he knew. 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 flyover, 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.

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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 re-grouping 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 breakoff, 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.

Meanwhile, Back to the States

by
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49th Bomb Wing, 15th Air Force
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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.

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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 were not 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 for a change – they had a great time.

We settled into loose formation and sat 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, and 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 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 other pilot's 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 immediate 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 the morning after.

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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 fuel consumption, and found that 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 – and there were some spooky stories about things that 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 – with the alternate route 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 an arid and 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 before dawn the next morning, 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 over the cold North Atlantic for Keflavik, Iceland at 3:30 in the morning in a blizzard over the cold North Atlantic – the other was before the takeoff from Dakar across the South Atlantic. There was something ominous about long over-water flights in a B-24. With its high wings, it simply wasn't a plane you'd ever want to ditch. I had seen films of test ditching a B-24, and it wasn't pretty – we were told to expect casualties.

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 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 us 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

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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 on the radio 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 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 it was 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 at 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, Dutch Guiana (Surinam), 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 on 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 the engine would not freeze up and put unnecessary drag on that side. Fluffy summer cumulus clouds had already built up over the steamy tropics to over 30 per cent broken, so I was careful to weave around the towering columns to stay visual. Flying a B-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 normal, yet put it down early and not

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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 learned earlier that he had been on a crew that was hit, and barely made it to Russian lines to avoid capture. Bud 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 that trip was the turquoise water 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 Savannah, 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 Savannah, 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 B-24 was an easy plane to fly.

Our crew hardly had time for a proper farewell – we were processed and sent in all directions almost immediately. Now, sixty 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 three of our original crew, while six 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 B-24s and B-17s.

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 just 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.

(Continued on page 31)

Name	Position	Hometown
Guyon Phillips	Pilot	Spartanburg SC
Grady Culbertson	Co-Pilot	Spartanburg SC
Graham Kerr	Navigator	Winchester VA
Fred Noegel *	Bombardier	Cochran GA
Walt Dubina	Engineer/Top Gunner	Newark NJ
Ed Elliott	Asst Engr/Waist Gunner	Morris NY
John Gruber	Radioman/Waist Gunner	Buffalo NY
Mike Keuziak	Nose Gunner	Milwaukee WI
Bob Sundeen	Ball Gunner	Duluth MN
Walt Bailey	Tail Gunner	Cullman AL

(*) 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 set a record in bombing accuracy with a Circular Error of 216 ft. - 76 drops with 100% pictures from high, medium and low altitude - my appeal to my CO went for naught - he said his hands were tied. Fred later went to the Pacific with the 5th Air Force, but we caught up with each other after the war. Wish we could have stayed together, because we were a team.

Mail Call

Hughes,

This photo shows the staff of each of the squadrons plus the Group without the group Commander. It was taken in August of 1943 at Gowen Field, Boise, ID.

In September, (without a group commander, only a deputy), we went to AFSAT,(Air Force School of Applied Tactics) After a month at the school we went to Wendover, UT. A few days after our arrival we met our Group Commander, Lt. Col. Carter. A few days later a full bird Col. shows up, your father. I have a photo of your father with the man he succeeded and that is at Wendover. The Group left there and moved to Hammer Field, Fresno, CA.

Several changes were made. Maj. Smith was replaced with Lt. Col. Hawes. 1st Lt. Sandlin, 765th Squadron was replaced by Capt. Dooley, Capt. Glenn was replaced by Maj. Knapp. Capt. Darden

(Continued on page 33)

Squadron and Group Officers w/o Group Commander at Gowen Field, Boise, Idaho 1943.

Seated L-R: Murphy, Benjamin S. (765th Bomb); Darden, William H. (766th); Sandall, John C. (765th CO); Grogen, Edwin W. (Grp Exec); Smith, Robert E. (Deputy Grp CO); Scott, R Foster (Grp Adj); Burke, William (Grp Oper); Leffler, George V. (Grp Bomb); Glenn, Royce B. (767th CO); Witte, Albert O. (764th CO); Joyce, John P. (764th Exec)

Second Row L-R: Stiles, Richard H. (766th Bomb); ?????; ?????; ?????; ?????; Dubal, Robert (765th Bomb); ?????; Iconis, John D. (764th Bomb); ?????; ?????; ?????; Wagener, John A. (Grp Comm)

Back Row L-R: ?????; ?????; ?????; ?????; ?????; ?????; ?????; ?????; ?????; ?????

(Continued from page 32)

and 1st Lt. Witte were kept. You are aware of the deaths of both men, I think.

John Iconis
764th Squadron

Hughes,

On Dec. 23, 1944 a transport plane was needed to go to Naples, Italy to pick up some personnel to be returned to the Torretta Field. Capt. Vanderhoven was requested to Pilot the plane to Naples and Lt. Ahlberg volunteered to go as Co-Pilot.

After they flew to Naples in the morning of the 23rd and after some sightseeing, they loaded up the 10 people in addition to the 5 who originally went to Naples, and started the return trip to Torretta.

Colonel Glantzberg and Lt. Col. Carter

The British Air Force personnel who were in charge of the Naples Airport briefed the Pilot on the weather conditions involved in the trip back to Torretta and stated that the weather over the Cerignola area was "Broken Clouds" and not too bad.

After taking off from Naples and proceeding over the mountains East of Naples the weather turned worse and when the plane arrived over the Foggia area it was overcast. After contacting "Big Fence", they were told to go out over the Adriatic, find a hole in the overcast, let down, and come back to the base underneath the overcast. By the time they got back close to the base it was dark and after crossing the Adriatic Coast at 1000 feet elevation on a heading of 270°, due west, no one remembered anything after that until they woke up in the 34th Field Hospital in Cerignola. The first thing remembered by the survivors was being asked "Where was the wrecked plane?" No one knew where the wreck was until daylight the next day, and then the people who died were found at the wreck.

The aircraft appeared to be on a heading of 360°, north, when it crashed into the ground.

The poor weather information received from the British in Naples was indirectly responsible for the wreck and the direct cause was an altimeter malfunction.

I hope this will give you the complete description of this unfortunate happening. The real cause of this wreck has never been brought forward before now.

Capt. Vanderhoven always felt responsible for this wreck, but it really was not his fault.

Capt. Ted Ahlberg
766th Squadron

To the members of the 461st,

My name is Anna Tiffany and my grandfather was Donald E. Tiffany from Glenfield, NY. He was in the 764th from 1942 to 1946. Grandpa never spoke

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of his war days and he passed away August 5, 2002. My dad is a WWII buff and I am trying to locate anyone who knew grandpa and are willing to share stories about him. I am also trying to locate some of his crew. They are:

Donald Lundberg
William Kimball
Donald Van Buren
Nicholas Collins
Robert MacDiarmid
Thomas Mance
Charles Rothwell

I am also trying to find John Underwood. Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Anna Tiffany
P.O. Box 644
Croghan, NY 13327

Hughes,

Every time we flew, and I flew thirty missions, I was frightened by the rendezvous to get into formation for the mission.

When we had a very heavy bomb load I had to sweat out the take off at Torretta's runway, which was too short. The plane would drop off at the end of the runway and gain air speed as it fell into the valley and then begin to fly up. The ground crew would watch each take off with crossed fingers until he plane climbed above the runway.

Once the plane was airborne it had to get into formation with all the other planes that were flying around. On a clear day this was scary, but on a cloudy day this was pure horror.

30 x fright = gray hair and nightmares.

David Feldman
766th Squadron

Hughes,

It was the 69th mission , 25 July 1944 and the target was the Herman Goering Tank Works in Linz Austria. It was heavily fortified. Ed's plane had been hit by flak, and it lost its hydraulics. A couple of the guys had to manually lower the landing gear. They did not know that the right landing gear had been damaged when it was hit by flak. They thought it was just the hydraulics. Ed gave the men a chance to bail out over the Adriatic instead of the mountains, but they all decided to stick with him and the plane.

They had to use parachutes to slow the plane down. As Ed landed, the right landing gear collapsed so the plane ground-looped from the runway. It landed fast, and hot. Luckily it didn't explode.

Although the parachutes worked to slow the plane down enough, it did not totally control the landing. The plane ended up 300 yards off the runway, and did not blow up because there was no gas left. The decision, by the flight surgeon, was that it was Ed's last mission.

The plane was totaled. Ed, who had received the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross), on his first mission, received the Purple Heart for this one.

Noreen Trenner

Ed Trenner's aircraft after returning from the Linz mission on 25 July 1944.

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Dear Mr. Glantzberg:

I was the Co-Pilot for Crew #2 of the 764th Squadron, 461st Bomb Group from November 1943 until July 9, 1944 when I was sent home for a 30-day R&R. I was suppose to go back for another tour taking a new crew on some missions. Orders were changed during my R&R and I never did go back to Italy.

On February 29, 1944, the group was ordered to deliver ten planes to the 376th Bomb Group to replace lost aircraft shot up a couple of days earlier on a raid to Schwein-Furt or Regensburg.

Captain Witte, the 764th Squadron CO, was chosen to lead a flight of twelve aircraft to the 376th Bomb Group to deliver the ten aircraft so they would be back at combat strength again for additional raids.

When the time came for this flight to take off, Lt. Strumski and I were out at our aircraft, the "Ignatz", as we wanted to go along. Captain Witte said, "No" as they would be bringing back the crewmembers of the aircraft being transferred to the 376th Bomb Group.

Captain Witte, Lt. Blanchard (Pilot of crew #2), Lt. Maxfield (Navigator), Sgt. Lamartina (Engineer) and Sgt. McNaight (Radio Operator) where the only crew #2 members to fly that day. All the other members of crew #2 had to stay behind to make room for the other crewmembers on the return flight. Captain Witte was the Pilot and Lt. Blanchard was the Co-Pilot.

According to the official history of the 461st, "The formation ran into bad weather and split up. Captain Witte was fatally injured when his plane crashed in the storm near Martina Branca. Other fatalities of the skeleton crew were the co-pilot, Flight Leader 2nd Lt. Harold C. Blanchard; the navigator, 2nd Lt. William Maxfield; and the engineer, S/Sgt. Frank N. Lamartina. The only survivor was the radio operator, Sgt. Ansel B. McNaight, who was critically injured."

Lt. Britton became the Pilot for crew #2 since he had more flight hours than I did. Lt. Strumski transferred to crew #1, Lt. Armante became our Bombardier, Lt. Levine became our Navigator, Sgt. Hagan became our Radio Operator and Sgt. Nelson became our Armorer.

During the time that I was the Co-Pilot for crew #2, we had a really good team for a crew like us. All members did an excellent job during the 32 missions I flew. Additional credit boosted this to 42 missions.

Crew #2 was shot down on the July 25th mission to Linz, Austria when the group was really badly shot up. Only nine aircraft made it back and only three of these were ready to fly the next day.

I had tried to transfer to a P-38 Fighter/Bomber group but your Dad would not allow it as he needed 4-engine pilots.

Sincerely your,
Ralph L. Merrow, Sr.

The Isle of Vis—A WWII Adventure
by
Ned A. Vahldieck
Capt. USAAF Retired
461st Bomb Group (H), 766th Squadron

Some time ago, I obtained a book named "Wild Blue" written by Stephen Ambrose. I had read it with some interest, since books on B-24 war stories are rather rare. This one was interesting for the most part, but did contain a number of inaccuracies --- most notably, that "any 4 engine bomber that landed on Vis during WWII stayed there, because the runway was too short for takeoff".

Well, I was a B-24 Pilot and my crew and I landed on Vis in the fall of 1944 and after some delay for repair and other preparations we did successfully take off from that tiny little strip and safely returned to our base near Cerignola, Italy.

The mission on that fateful day was another one of those "Maximum Efforts" that was scheduled frequently. I think the target was Munich or Moosebierbaum --- I can't recall exactly. The 461st was second or third group over the target that day, which meant a little heavier flak than usual. After a successful bomb run, the formations took some evasive action and left the target area seemingly without incident.

However, just after we cleared the Alps and started to let down for our cruise down the Adriatic toward home, a big problem hit us. Our fuel transfer system had been damaged in such a way that prevented movement of fuel from any auxiliary tank into the main tanks. A B-24 fuel system is designed in such a way that it can only feed gas into the engines directly from the main tanks. Now, in our case that meant that even though we had fuel on board, we could not access it for our engines. There was no way to make it home.

During pre-mission briefings, Vis was always mentioned as a safe haven for planes that could not make it home, and was a very acceptable alternative to ditching or bailing out. Decision time --- and I opted for Vis. We were now south of the enemy fighter zone and felt secure enough to drop back by ourselves, slow down, and start conserving fuel. Our Navigator, Lt. James, vectored us to the emergency landing site, and we headed straight for it.

Landing on Vis was exciting to say the least. It had a short steel mat and gravel runway that had been bulldozed into a shallow valley surrounded by hills and small mountains. The layout required a steep approach, slow airspeed and had only a little room to roll after touchdown. We hit the very end of the runway and immediately stood on the brakes big time. We skidded hard right to exit and happily the landing gear held up just fine. We were directed to a hardstand of sorts and a man greeted us that could have been right out of central casting - a full bearded guerilla fighter with crossed ammo belts across his chest, a rifle slung over his shoulder and a revolver tucked in his belt. He had a very commanding presence to say the least.

We all got out to meet our hosts, and we found that underneath that gruff exterior was a nice friendly guy. After explaining our problem and why we had to land we started work on a solution. Then he asked me, in fractured English if he could please have my 45 automatic (we always carried on missions). It seemed like little enough payment for taking care of us.

After evaluating the damage, our flight engineer Sgt. Guyette somehow got enough gas back into the main tanks to sustain the engines long enough to get home. With a little outside help, he had rigged up a temporary fuel transfer capability that was good enough to do the job. We reduced weight on board as much as seemed reasonable - flak jackets, waist guns, extra ammo --- heavy stuff like that. After some delay, we were ready.

Then came the take off. It was to be the only time, other than training exercises, that I ever executed a short field take off maneuver in actual combat conditions. We taxied to the very end of the field -- every extra foot we could gain was important --and turned into position. Standing hard on the brakes we advanced full throttle, full rich mixture, full flaps, and held her there while all four Pratt and Whitneys red-lined, and then some. That beautiful old bird shook and rattled like you wouldn't believe, and sprang forward when we were ready. Very quickly out of runway, it was necessary to pull up sharply, almost in a stall, to avoid trees and other obstacles. Then we proceeded to weave through the valley a little, holding full power longer than normal so we could gain enough air speed to maneuver better. After clearing the island we were over the sea again and climbed to appropriate altitude. A very relieved crew settled in for a happy trip home.

My older brother, Capt. Nathan Vahldieck, who was stationed in Bari, had unexpectedly driven up to visit me on the day of this mission. When I had not returned with the rest of group, he was understandably pretty upset. They told him I was missing in action over the target, and could give him no other information as to where we were. I guess our communications weren't so hot then.

Anyway, after a full debriefing and a long explanation of my experiences to my brother, things returned to normal. My plane was eventually fixed up, and I finished my full tour of 35 missions.

At the time this whole incident didn't seem like much of a big deal. But then someone hadn't told me that it couldn't be done!!!

REFLECTIONS ON THE DEATH OF MY FATHER

by
Ken Carter

Albert O. Witte, Captain, U.S. Army Air Corps, was killed on February 29, 1944, when the B-24 bomber he was flying in crashed into a hill near Martina Franca, Italy. He was 26 years old, a year and a half out of West Point, recently promoted to Squadron Commander of the 764th Squadron in the 461st Bomb Group of the 15th Air Force. At the time of the crash he was leading a formation of eleven other B-24's on a routine delivery mission of the aircraft to another Bomb Group in Italy. He was also my father.

In the ensuing years since that fateful day I had done nothing to try to learn of the circumstances regarding the crash. Letters written to my mother by his superior officers and colleagues in the Bomb Group and newspaper articles all attributed the crash to bad weather. There had been no mention of any survivors of the crash, which, according to the news articles, had taken place in North Africa.

This past May one of my half-brothers told me that he had gone to a search engine on the internet and entered my dad's name. I asked him why he had done this since he is not related to him. Such a search was something that had never entered my mind, and he told me he was just curious about what he might learn. What he did learn shocked me to the core: there was a survivor of that crash. But that was all he found out, and he suggested I might take the search further.

For the bargain fee of $25 I was able to obtain the 8-page official U.S. Army Air Corps accident report of the crash. Not only did it confirm that there had been a survivor, Sgt. Ansel McNaight, the radio operator, but it went on to say that my father was the co-pilot of the plane, not the pilot as I had believed for so many years. Further, the crash had occurred in Italy, not North Africa. As surprising as these details were, one finding was shocking beyond my ability to understand: 40% of the cause of the crash was due to bad weather, but *60% of the cause was attributable to "careless operation"*! This breakdown appeared on the report's cover sheet with no further explanation. Beneath that was another form, "Description of Accident". It offered no explanation for a conclusion of "careless operation".

The official "Description of Accident" is, to say the least, most succinct, and contains no analysis or even a description of the cause of the crash. Three officers, all field grade, signed off on the Description. None of them had witnessed the crash. The report was filed the day following the accident and is dated, surprisingly, *30* February 1944. It states:

> *Aircraft 42-52393 was leading a formation of 12 aircraft through bad weather at less than 50 ft. above the terrain. The formation split up at less than 50 ft. above the terrain.*
>
> Aircraft 42-52393 was found at the crest of a small rise in the terrain, approximately 2 minutes from the point at which the formation split up.
>
> The position of the wrecked aircraft (393) indicated that the pilot attempted to stay [in] contact under instrument conditions and was unable to pull up over the rise, hitting the crest at a flat angle, destroying the aircraft.

The terseness of this report and its unsupported conclusion of careless operation struck me as needlessly callous and dismissive in its tone. The four men who were killed would not be able to provide any insight into whether carelessness played a role in their deaths. Nor could Sgt. McNaight: he had died of natural

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causes in 1995, probably never knowing of the existence of the report or its conclusions. I felt that I had to do something to, at the very least, mitigate the harshness of the report. Of course, I also wanted to discover that my father was in no way careless in the operation of the aircraft. In the report the pilot is listed as 1st Lt. Harold G. Blanchard, with my father assigned to the co-pilot's position, but the report does not identify who was actually at the controls or who was careless.

I began by going to the website of the 461st Bomb Group. From there I was able to contact Anne McNaight, the daughter of the surviving radio operator. Her father, she told me, had never talked to her about the circumstances that led to the crash. He had, however, taped a presentation he had made to the local Rotarians in the late 80's. In his talk he brought up the crash, saying that the weather on that day was forecast to be suitable for the flight. Without making any reference to the weather conditions they actually encountered he said he hasn't trusted a weatherman since. As the weather conditions began to deteriorate, he was asked by the pilot to check why the radios weren't working. The pilot wanted to "'break up this formation. I can't contact the other planes'". Sgt. McNaight, who had been in the tail turret "because we were supposed to maintain radio silence", went to the waist of the plane and found nothing wrong with the radio frequencies or fuses. Shortly after giving this report he "felt the plane going up, and when I came to it was scattered all around me, the entire plane." There is no mention in the official report that the radios were not functional.

The flight of twelve aircraft originated because the 451st Bomb Group, located further south in Italy, had lost a number of aircraft in combat. The 461st was transferring some of their B-24's to the 451st and would be bringing back some bomber crews on the return flight. According to the official report the weather for the flight was overcast with a ceiling of 1,000 feet and visibility of 12 miles in moderate rain. Not mentioned in the report are the observations of other pilots who were part of the formation. 1st Lt. Frank O'Bannon, pilot of the number 3 plane states that radio silence was the order of the day. It is likely that because of this the lead plane, affectionately named *Ignatz* by her crew, was not aware that its radios were out of commission. Without warning the weather deteriorated to instrument conditions and the formation changed from VFR to IFR. Add to these conditions the hilly nature of that region of Italy and the chances of a tragic occurrence multiply.

One possible scenario of what followed is: the flight approaches a range of hills and quickly the altitude of the lead plane, *Ignatz*, drops to 50 feet as the terrain rises and the visibility becomes zero. The pilot, Lt. Blanchard, reacts by trying to contact the others on the radio to break formation and climb higher. But the radios are silent. There is no contact. He cannot increase the altitude of *Ignatz* because to do so could jeopardize the aircraft behind him. 1st Lt Frank O'Bannon, primary pilot of the number 3 plane remembers that his position was 25 feet high off the left wing of *Ignatz* when they lost sight of it. In seconds *Ignatz* strikes the ground belly first and breaks into pieces. If they had been one foot higher in altitude the plane would have missed the hill altogether as did all eleven of the others. The weather improves slightly allowing the remainder of the flight to complete the mission safely.

There is nothing in the official accident report to dispute this scenario.

The weather conditions at two reporting stations in the vicinity, Taranto and Brindisi, report overcast skies with rain showers. Two of the pilots in the formation, Frank O'Bannon and Vernon Wastman, confirm the lack of visibility to the extent that they lost sight of the lead plane and a third, Walt Galloway, wrote in his diary for that day that they were hit with "the worst storm he had ever been in". In a letter to my mother written the day after the crash, 1st Lt Thomas Couch, the Statistical Officer for the Group, writes that some of the members of that formation, following the flight, remarked that "they ran into some very heavy weather and were forced to a dangerously low altitude in order to maintain visual contact".

Frank O'Bannon confirms the lack of radio contact, stating that for safety reasons, they climbed out of

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the formation and headed out to sea, dropped to 1,000 feet and became VFR once again. It is logical to assume that the other aircraft in the formation made similar movements once the altitude decreased to 50 feet since only *Ignatz* crashed. It is possible that *Ignatz*, in the final second or two, took a similar evasive maneuver since Sgt. McNaight reported feeling the plane going up just before losing consciousness. Then again, that feeling could have come from the impact of the plane's belly on the crest of the hill.

The first paragraph of the Description above states that the lead plane was leading the formation at 50 feet above the terrain, but it does not state at what point the altitude became 50 feet. One conclusion that could be reached from this statement is that the formation had been flying at that altitude for an extended period of time; however, in all likelihood it was at that altitude for only a few minutes as it approached a range of hills the pilots could not see, and the altimeter did not show, until the situation became dangerous. An analyst reading the first sentence could conclude the pilot of the lead plane was careless in leading the formation at an altitude of 50 feet, even though the pilot had no choice.

The second paragraph of the Description states that the aircraft was found two minutes from where the formation split up. It does not distinguish whether the crash occurred two minutes *before* the split-up or two minutes *after*. Such a distinction is critical to clearly knowing what happened in those final two minutes. If *before* the split-up, it is conceivable that the action taken by the pilot was *heroic* rather than careless. Heroic in that the pilot, in the split second after he saw the hill, chose to maintain altitude, opting for certain death rather than jeopardize one or more aircraft to their rear by climbing out immediately in front of them. But then, an analyst could conclude that the pilot was careless in that he failed to react to a certain collision with the ground by climbing out, regardless of the inherent danger to other aircraft in such a maneuver.

If the crash was two minutes *after*, the pilot of *Ignatz* would have had no way of knowing what the rest of the formation had done since the visibility was zero and the radios were silent. He could have reasonably assumed that they were still in formation and frantically and heroically tried to contact the other aircraft with their back-up British-made Bendix radio. But time ran out. Whatever action was taken by the pilot under these circumstances, any conclusion that it was "careless operation" shows remarkable insensitivity to the high caliber of the men flying the aircraft.

Finally, the third paragraph of the Description leaves little doubt that given another foot or so of altitude, *Ignatz* and her crew might have flown safely over the hill. She hit "the crest of the hill at a *flat* (italics mine) angle". Apparently only her belly initially struck the crest. Had it been her nose striking, the impact would have been such that Sgt. McNaight could not have survived.

Unfortunately, given the careless, confusing and incomplete wording of the official accident report, an analyst, especially one far removed from the accident itself, could understandably conclude that careless operation was involved in this tragic accident. Furthermore, it is significant and puzzling that nowhere in the report is there a mention of *why* the operation was deemed to be careless.

I write this on Veteran's Day, 2006, very grateful for the help given me by members of the 461st Bomb Group and the children of other members. The information and insight they provided me allowed me to understand the circumstances that existed those many years ago and led me to a totally different conclusion of what really happened on that fateful day. Most of all, I hope that the men who so valiantly crewed on *Ignatz* would be pleased with my modest attempt to set the record straight.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank the following individuals for their memories, information and inspiration I needed to complete this paper:

Patrick Carter
Anne McNaight
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Thomas Couch
Hughes Glantzberg
Ralph Merrow
Frank O'Bannon
Vernon Wastmen

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We're on the web!
Visit
www.461st.org

Webmaster Comments

Another year has come and gone and the 461st website continues to grow. I've added even more content as I continue to get new material. More pictures and detailed information has been added as I continue to get contributions from the men of the 461st as well as from the children who find information.

I don't know about you, but I feel there's so much information on the website that finding something specific can be quite difficult. I do have a search function on the main page that allows people to enter a word or a phrase and see all the places that contain information on that subject. Even with this it can be difficult to find something you might be looking for. I feel the most interesting part of the 461st is its history and the personal stories of the men who served. As a result, I've written a book that contains a lot of information about the 461st. Check out the ad I've placed on page 3 of this issue. By the time you get this issue of the Liberaider, the book should be available. I'm just waiting for confirmation that it's available at this point.

There are a couple of things I'd like to call your attention to in this issue of the Liberaider. First is the Ballot on page 20. Please take the time to cast your vote. We need everyone to participate. It's your Association. Second, on page 31 I've included some information about the next reunion. The only things we have so far are the dates and the city. The Reunion Committee has done a fantastic job of getting this information to you this early. Look for more information in the next issue of the Liberaider and/or on the website.