



*The 461st*

# Liberaider



Vol. 24, No. 2

DECEMBER 2007

SOMEWHERE IN THE USA

## 461st 2007 Reunion St. Louis, MO

by  
Glenda Price

Thursday, September  
27

This was arrival day for most. Dave, Bruce, Mary Jo, Linda, Marilu and Barb did a great job setting up the hospital-ity room, putting hospital-ity packets together for the attendees, including a mug and brochure with the

*(Continued on page 4)*

## “BAIL-OUT!”

by  
Robert W. Eckman  
0-717763

766<sup>th</sup> Squadron, 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group  
Crew # 42R

*I must apologize for not publishing the second chapter of Robert's article in the June 2007 issue of the Liberaider. That was my mistake and I appreciate the reminders I've received. Here's the rest of Robert's article:*

## The Return

I have always been fortunate to have interesting jobs. But one of the more interesting was the job I had at Norge.

Borg-Warner was an international conglomerate that owned among other companies, the Norge Corporation. We made and sold all kinds of major appliances. I was hired to be their Director of Merchandising. It was a good position.

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## Last Flight of Crew #14

### Prisoner of War Story

#### Across Europe Homeward Bound

As lived and recorded by  
Trefry A. Ross  
S/Sgt.

Radio Operator, right waist gunner

December 17, 1944  
15<sup>th</sup> AAF, 49<sup>th</sup> Wing, 461<sup>st</sup> BG, 765<sup>th</sup>  
Squadron  
Flying out of Cerignola, Italy - near  
Foggia.

(Written December 17, 1976. 32 years

have elapsed so my narrative may have a few discrepancies; although, I doubt it, as it seems like it happened yesterday, and most of the happening is quite vivid in my memory.)

“Alright you guys, out of the sack. Come on, let's go! Keerist! You wanna sleep all day! Come on, let's go! Jesus, watta bunch!” My eyes open slowly, and staring at me in the dark is the orderly with his flashlight. It's 3:00 AM and time for another flight over enemy territory. I lie there trying

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# *Taps*

May they rest in peace forever

Please forward all death notices to:

Hughes Glantzberg

P.O. Box 926

Gunnison, CO 81230

editor@461st.org

## **764th Squadron**

<u><b>Name</b></u>	<u><b>Hometown</b></u>	<u><b>MOS</b></u>	<u><b>DOD</b></u>
Hipps, Lloyd C.	Tabor City, NC	751	9/11/2007
Kehr, Glenn L. Jr.	Hanover, PA	238	8/25/2007
Lackmann, Leonard	Moorhead, MN	612	3/20/2007
Lang, William G.	Philadelphia, PA	852	7/10/2007
Strumski, Joseph J.	Fresno, CA	1035	5/4/2007
Taphorn, John J.	Cincinnati, OH	901	10/13/2007
Wilson, John F.	Double Springs, AL	1092	6/6/2007

## **765th Squadron**

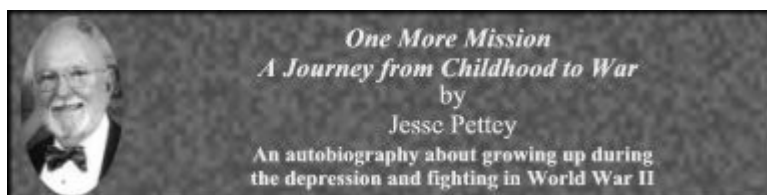
<u><b>Name</b></u>	<u><b>Hometown</b></u>	<u><b>MOS</b></u>	<u><b>DOD</b></u>
Haelewyn, Rene	Grosse Pointe Woods, MI	757	5/17/2007
Hetzel, Eugene R.	Brookfield, WI	612	9/20/2006
Lynn, Walter L.	Essex, CT	748	10/16/2006

## **766th Squadron**

<u><b>Name</b></u>	<u><b>Hometown</b></u>	<u><b>MOS</b></u>	<u><b>DOD</b></u>
Bessen, Roy A.	Trout Creek, MI	748	12/31/2006
Draper, Hal D. Jr.	Garnerville, NV	1035	3/22/006
Hall, Mitchell F., Jr.	Birmingham, AL	1092	8/23/2007
Mazza, Gregory E.	Bethel Park, PA	1092	6/12/2007

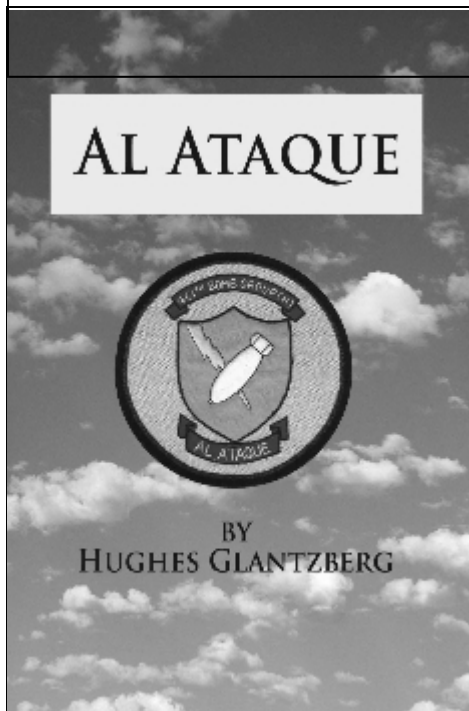
## **767th Squadron**

<u><b>Name</b></u>	<u><b>Hometown</b></u>	<u><b>MOS</b></u>	<u><b>DOD</b></u>
Herbert, Donald J.	Canoga Park, CA	102	6/12/2007
Urban, Kenneth A.	Pewaukee, WI	748	5/29/2007



With a special interest in World War II and the 461st Bombardment Group in particular, I found this book excellent. Most of the men who fought during WWII were in their late teens and early 20s. It's amazing to be able to read about their activities. Liberaider Editor

Available from Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble and Xlibris (at a 15% discount) (<http://www2.xlibris.com/bookstore/bookdisplay.asp?bookid=11013> ).



## 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**

413 Pages

On Demand Printing

Available from Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, Ingram Book Group, Baker & Taylor, and from iUniverse, Inc

To order call 1-800-AUTHORS

Trade **Hardcopy**

Publication Date: Nov-2006

Price: \$36.95

Size: 6 x 9

Author: Hughes Glantzberg

ISBN: **0-595-86486-4**

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.



## Music Bravely Ringing

by

Martin A. Rush

767th Squadron

This is the story of a small town boy who, during WWII, wandered onto the conveyor belt that turned civilians into bomber pilots. Initially awed and intimidated at the world outside his home town, he began to realize that this was an opportunity to have a hand in stimulating and challenging dealings larger than he had expected. He had a few near-misses, but gradually began to get the hang of it. His story is that like the thousands of young men who were tossed into the maelstrom of war in the skies. He was one of the ones who was lucky enough to live through it.

This book is at the publisher now and should be available early in 2008.

*(Continued from page 1)*

schedule of events. Thanks Dave for the brochure, mugs and T-shirts available for sale in the hospitality room. The registration table was manned most of the day and the annual meeting took place in the evening after a hotel sponsored wine and cheese hospitality hour. Thanks, Crowne Plaza Hotel.



Friday, September 28

Friday's activities started with a bus tour through Forest Park, site of the 1904 World's Fair. While there we drove by the world class St. Louis Zoo, the St. Louis Art Museum, the Muny, an outdoor amphitheatre and other buildings and statues as the tour guide told us some of the history of the city and the 1904 World's Fair.



Gateway Arch Riverboats

We then arrived at the Gateway Arch riverboat, the Becky Thatcher, for our luncheon cruise. We had the boat to ourselves and enjoyed a river cruise with a buffet luncheon. After the cruise, we made our way to the Arch. Many of us enjoyed a trip to the top of the arch. It was a beautiful, clear day and the view was fantastic. We were able to go through the Archway museum and enjoy a little shopping at the Arch museum store before heading back to the hotel. We had time to rest up before the squadron dinner.



The Arch as seen from the Riverboat

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. The buffet dinner was good and we had a good time visiting with new friends and old.

Saturday, September 29

Saturday morning we had to get up a little earlier but it was another nice day. We headed toward the Anheuser Busch brewery via a downtown tour. We heard about how St. Louis enacted a building code to only allow brick buildings after a devastating fire burned most of the town down in the 1800's, thus, the predominance of brick buildings in the older sections of town. We then arrived at the Brewery and did some shopping and viewing of exhibits while waiting for our tours. The brewery was very impressive, a collection of large brick buildings with beautiful architecture and art deco elements. We were

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lucky enough to have the Clydesdale team be present to see also. The stable was a piece of art itself with stained glass windows and chandeliers! We were able to sample some of the product too. I think everyone had a good time.



Anheuser Busch brewery

Next stop was Union Station where there were some shops and several restaurants. Those that wanted did some shopping and had lunch. The buses were very accommodating and took those that so wished back to the hotel. Another group made an extra stop



Lt. Commander Joe Robinson

to the Cathedral to enjoy the beautiful architecture there.

Saturday evening was the Dinner Dance. We had a nice cocktail hour and the dinner was excellent. The music provided was a nice mix of slow and fast, good 40's and 50's tunes. Lt. Commander Joe Robinson, U.S. Navy, retired gave a short speech about the Tuskegee airmen and their role in WWII. The Bomb Group members were properly documented with a picture taking session.

Sunday, September 30

The Memorial Service and Breakfast started at 8:30 am with remarks by Al St. Yves and group singing led by Barbara Alden and Linda Titus. Thanks, Barb and Linda!

This year there was a table in memory of the Missing Man. This is in remembrance of those who did not come home from Italy and those who have since departed our ranks. Thanks to Dave for this new tradition.

Ed Baumann then spoke about his memories of his squadron's Mission #7 during the war. It was an excellent story and tribute to those who didn't come back as well as those who did.

A variety of people then read the names of the Bomb Group members who have passed away this year.

Chaplain, Major Janis Dashner then spoke to the group. She is stationed in the St. Louis area and she has served in Iraq. She is now working with those who have returned from the war. She had a good message and she urged the Bomb Group members to help those returning from the Iraqi war with their support and understanding of the trials of war and combat. The sharing of these events spans all generations and the newest generation of war is very much in need of this kind of support.

With the closing remarks by President Al, we said good-by for another year. We hope to see you all again next year in Dayton, OH.

*(Continued from page 1)*

I was in charge of all national and local advertising. I also planned and ran all national and regional conventions and sales meetings. In addition, I developed all merchandising plans, promotions, etc.

The biggest promotions we ran were the incentive trips. If a dealer bought enough of our products, we'd take him and his wife to all kinds of exotic places. Our competitors did the same thing, and we turned our dealers into sophisticated travelers who wandered all over the world. We were always looking for a more glamorous destination than our competitors offered.

My job was to find the best places in the world to send our customers, so that they would buy our product, not the others. I could only solve the problem by traveling around looking for interesting destinations. What an assignment!

I was not making that much money, but I was almost embarrassed to take my paycheck. For example, I flew to Dublin, Ireland, then to London, England, to set up a trip. It took a week, but what a week!

Dublin was much like Hawaii, except for the weather. The people there were so friendly that if you stopped someone to ask directions, they took you by the arm, and led you to your destination, even though it was in the opposite way from where they were going! Ireland was great. Super people, excellent food, and great traditions.

But how about London? That was the time that London was the center of the world. In 1963 they invented the mini-skirt and became the fashion center. The Beatles invented our new music, and London was the music center. The song goes "England Swings" and it did! My daughter was impressed when I told her that I sat next to Ringo Starr at a disco on my first visit.

I love London. Samuel Johnson said, "The happiness of London is not to be conceived but by those who have been in it." London has everything. History, tradition, pageantry, great food, fine shopping, the world's best theater, and they all speak English!

Even if the weather is bad, it is still great, because if it did not rain or you did not see fog, you would be disappointed. Try that on in the Caribbean!

Later, I spent another 30 days in London being sure that our ten charter loads of dealers had a good time on their week-long visits. Tough break for me.

That was standard for me as I toured around looking for nice places or running the actual trip. In the three years that I had that job, I spent almost 33 percent of my time in some of the most exciting places in the world. Thank you, Norge!

My only regret was that my wife Mary was only on one trip -- to Hawaii, a place we have visited several times since and a place that we will never forget.

We next planned a trip to Israel then on to Athens. I knew that Yugoslavia was not very far and thought about a return visit. There was some reason to be concerned for my safety and for Yugo's. We were both on the wrong side of a civil war that our side lost. We were anti-Communist and the other side won. Should I go back?

I sent a letter to our State Department explaining my history and asked their opinion. Because of the Letter and the Trial, I had a bad history in the press, at least from the Communist's viewpoint. I thought that I could be highly visible at a time I might not want to be.

The State Department sent me a charming letter saying how many friends we have in that country and how safe I would be. On the second page, they suggested that I check in with the Air Attaché on arrival, tell him my exact day-to-day itinerary, and check back in with them, when I returned safely to Belgrade. I had a moments pause, but went on with my plan.

We had kept in touch with Yugo over the years. I wrote and told him of my plans so he could head me off if he wished. He was delighted and looked forward to my arrival. Then I wrote to the crew members and asked each of them to send me pictures of themselves and their families, and a letter telling

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Yugo what had happened to them since they last saw him.

The letters and pictures came and I assembled them into a scrapbook.

It was time to start the trip. I always went a week early to insure that everything was ready for our dealers when they arrived. Jack Wolfe, the vice president of sales and our travel agent went with me. Our first flight took us from O'Hare Airport in Chicago to Athens, Greece. Athens is the birthplace of our culture and our form of government and a beautiful city.

We arrived during "Mardi-Gras," the season before Lent. The celebration lasted for a month there, unlike the three days that are observed in New Orleans. Everyone was happy, and as you visited the small cafes, people sang, danced and threw confetti and paper streamers at each other. It was very festive and lots of fun.

Our next stop should have been Tel Aviv, but we had other plans. We wanted to see the Christian side of Jerusalem but that was under the control of Jordan.

The Six-Day War was going to begin in another seven weeks. Of course, no one except the Arabs knew that at the time. Jerusalem was a divided city with Jordan controlling that part of the city that held most of the Christian historical sites. Israel would allow people to enter from Jordan, but no Arab state would allow you to enter their country from Israel.

Our plan was to land on the Jordan side by first going to Beirut, Lebanon for two days. Beirut was then

the Paris of the Middle East, a fantastic city that deserves more than a short visit. We saw as much as we could in our brief stay. We visited the government-run casino located about 20 miles from town. They only had one, but that's all they needed; it was magnificent. The show they put on made all the shows I had seen in Las Vegas look like amateur night in Kingman, Arizona!

We left to go to Jerusalem and enjoyed seeing all the wonderful sights there. When it came time to enter Israel we had to go through the Mandlebaum Gate. It was the only access point between the two hostile nations. We exited Jordan and our luggage was hand-carried by Arabs to the center of the square where they left it and returned to their side of the border. Then, Israeli porters came out, picked up our bags and carried them to their side.

Every country you enter or exit requires a passport and a visa. As you come and go each country stamps your passport, which is a permanent record of where you have been and for how long. Each country asks you how much money you are carrying and asks again when you leave. The numbers are recorded on a form that is stapled to your passport and torn out when you exit.

Israel gave you an option when you came in. If for any reason, you did not want their stamp on your passport, they would instead stamp your money receipt. That way when you left, the receipt would be removed and nothing would indicate that you had ever been in their country.

We had them do it that way because our dealers were

*(Continued on page 8)*

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

**Officers:**

Al St. Yves, President, 4307 71st Place, Riviera Beach, FL 33404  
Leonard Bathurst, Vice President, 2330 Alluvial Avenue, Clovis, CA 93612  
Dave St. Yves, Treasurer, 5 Hutt Forest Lane, East Taunton, MA 02718  
Glenda Price, Secretary, 1621 Devoe Drive, Lincoln, NE 68506  
Frank, O'Bannon, Historian, 9260 N Fostoria Dr, Tucson, AZ 85742-4884

**Directors**

Nye E. Norris, Hdqtrs Sqdn, 559 S. Waverly Street, Columbus, OH 43213-2756

Open, 764th Sqdn,  
Open, 765th Sqdn,  
Edwin Baumann, 766th Sqdn, 5327 Littlebow Rd, Palos Verdes Peninsula, CA 90274-2362  
Billy Harris, 767th Sqdn, Route 1, Box 101, Culloden, GA 31016

**Alternate Directors**

Lee Cole, Hdqtrs Sqdn, 1928 Bluffview Point, Osage Beach, MO 65065-2487  
Donald Johnson, 764th Sqdn, 8513 Underwood Avenue, Omaha, NE 68114-3514  
Peter Godino, 765th Sqdn, 2535 E. Saginaw Way, Fresno, CA 93726  
David Feldman, 766th Sqdn, 140 Woodlake Drive E., Woodbury, NY 11797-2314  
Cy Surber, 767th Sqdn, 345 NE 43rd Avenue, Des Moines, IA 50313

**Director at Large**

Jim Fitzpatrick, San Diego Magazine 1450 Front Street, San Diego, CA 92101

**The 461st Liberaider**

Hughes Glantzberg, Editor, P.O. Box 926, Gunnison, CO 81230

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Permission is granted to use articles provided source is given.

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coming from the U.S. directly to Tel Aviv. If for any reason they were diverted because of weather, mechanical problems, or even an accident, we needed to be able to go where they were. Quite likely it would be Cairo, another Arab city. So we did not want our passports to show Israel as that would prevent our entry.

However, I was not thinking long-range when I did that. I now had no proof of where I had been for the time I spent in Israel.

We drove to Tel Aviv and checked into our hotel. Everything was ready there and our dealers arrived two days later. Israel is another fantastic country. Our customers, many of them Jewish, could not have been happier.

For the next several days we visited Jerusalem, Acre, the Dead Sea, the Jordan River and Caesura, where 80,000 crusaders died in two years taking this city in 1189. Jericho, and most of the Jewish historical sites were also on our planned route.

Remember the Profumo Affair? It caused a fall in the English government when it was revealed that high ministers were playing around with expensive "call girls." One of those ladies moved to Yafo, just south of Tel Aviv, and opened the greatest disco named "Annabelle's." She was, of course, Annabelle, and we spent several innocent but fun-filled evenings there.

We finally left for Athens for another wonderful week of touring. Our group of customers loved it there, too.

On the final night in Athens, good friends of mine, the Walter Benarioes and their nephew Alan and I had a farewell dinner on the roof-top restaurant of the Hilton Hotel. They took me to the airport and I left for Belgrade.

It was quite late when I arrived at the hotel there. I just went to bed and thought about the next day.

After breakfast I took a cab and reported into the Air Attaché's office. Next I picked up a Volkswagen

rental car and maps, and then checked out of my hotel.

It was a fairly long drive to the largest town near the village where Yugo lived. On arrival I found that no one there spoke English. However they were all very interested that an American was staying there. That night I had many visitors, some of whom were so direct that they asked me if I were "CIA." I began to doubt the wisdom of this visit, but finally went to bed hoping for better times.

The next morning I checked out and looked for directions. Someone indicated that there was another hotel so I went there. It was larger than mine and when I went to the desk and asked slowly, "Does anyone here speak English?" The clerk answered, "I do. How may I help you?"

He gave me the best directions and told me how to contact my friend Yugo. I felt better for the first time in 24 hours.

When Yugo and I met it was very emotional. After a hug and a kiss on the cheek we settled into a frenzied attempt to talk in two languages. It was too bad that we each only understood our own.

He introduced me to his wife and his daughter and son. We looked around his small country property and met the farm animals. We ate and drank and were having a very good time even though we could not communicate in the same common tongue.

The day went quickly and so did the evening. Later when his wife and children were fast asleep, he closed the curtains on the windows and locked the door to the small bedroom. Then he took out the package wrapped in a blanket and gave it to me.

I unwrapped it to find the .45 Colt pistol that I had given him 23 years earlier. I was both shocked and delighted. I wanted that gun so bad I could taste it! When I checked the magazine I found two unfired cartridges. If I was to be caught with that weapon, I did not want it to be loaded, so I slipped out the two rounds and gave them to him. The gun I hid in my briefcase.

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Yugo had arranged to have an interpreter who spoke both languages with us for the balance of my stay. He was a Serb who had moved to Boston after the war and lived there for several years. He spoke perfect English so the next day the language barrier was broken.

We went everywhere. We saw the farmhouse where we stayed, met all the family that was still alive, then to the pasture where the Air Force came to rescue us and the field where our plane hit and buried itself in the ground.

For five days we lived and relived the events of November and December of 1944. But all the while, every time I saw anyone who was a soldier or looked like a soldier, I figured that my time was up.

At that time Russia and the United States were playing a game. The Russians had a great many more spies than we did. Their hot set-up was to capture a phony spy and later trade him off for one of the real spies that the other country had caught.

I knew, and every one else knew, that I was not a spy. But here I am, a person with a questionable history, and ten days missing on his passport.

Maybe they could pick me up and trade me for someone that they would really like to get out of a U.S. prison.

When it came time to leave, I packed my bags and said good-bye. We could not leave one another with only a handshake. It took a hug and a kiss on each cheek and a tear in our eyes to express our true feelings. I learned a lot from that. Europeans express their emotions freely. We Americans are too reserved. I learned to express my feelings and to shed tears when I felt that way. I wept when I left Yugo. So did he.

The drive back to Belgrade was routine. The first order of business was to advise the Air Attaché's office that I was back. They seemed pleased.

The next stop was the airport and to go through the routine of clearing the country through customs,

which I was most anxious to do.

I was carrying several bags, one of them was a vinyl carry-all that had a zipper entrance on one side. The other side also had a zipper, but it only accessed an envelope-sized section that held a matching colored smaller-sized envelope briefcase. I used that briefcase to carry my files that were related to the trip. There were several different files and among them I placed one upside-down to cover the .45. A quick look did not disclose anything. Those were the days before metal detectors were used to screen all passengers boarding an airplane.

They seldom check baggage as you leave a country. They didn't that day and for good reason I was pleased. The bag with the gun came aboard with me and was placed under the seat in front of me. As we took off a feeling of relief engulfed me, but not for long.

The trip to Rome wasn't nonstop. There was a scheduled landing in Zagreb that I wasn't aware of at takeoff. When the plane began to descend before we had reached Rome, I thought that someone knew about me and had called for an interruption of the flight to get me off and put me in jail.

When we landed I looked for the police. There were none around. The crew announced that we would be there for thirty minutes so we could leave the plane and enjoy the airport facilities. Naturally, I declined the offer. I was the only one to stay on the plane pretending to sleep, while my foot covered the bag that held my .45. Shortly, people began to board, and we took off again. Next stop Rome.

My major problem was solved when we left Yugoslavia. There I could be arrested and might never return to the U.S.A. Once in an allied country, I could explain my problem and the gun, and at least have a sympathetic ear that would listen. But my bags were never checked -- not in Italy or in London, my next stop after a few days in Rome.

In Rome, I stayed at the Excelsior. To me, it was, and still is, the best hotel in Rome. The first time I was there I came as an officer in the U.S. Air Force

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at a rate of fifty Lira a day. U.S. troops were issued their money in script printed by our government at a rate of a penny a Lira. That equaled fifty cents in our money, for a night at the best hotel in Italy! This is just one of the many ways the Air Force "took care of its own."

When Rome fell, the United States was there. The U.S. made it happen. Every service rushed in to find some nice places to have their people stay while in Rome. No one beat the Air Force when it came to finding the best places. They picked the Excelsior for their officers to enjoy the pleasures of Rome.

Of course, I paid much more than 50 cents a night on my return visit, but I enjoyed it. Especially when I met friends from years ago.

When it came time, I exited Italy and flew to London. I did that on purpose because London had the only non-stop flight to Chicago. I wanted to go through U.S. Customs as close to home as possible. I had to go in and out of English Customs, but I did so without incident. Now I was headed home. Next stop: O'Hare Airport, Chicago, Illinois.

I always flew first-class overseas. It cost the company more, but they allowed it on long trips. What a difference! There were only 20 or so people on that entire airplane, so you can imagine the service we received.

We finally approached Chicago and prepared to land. We did and I went to the baggage area to reclaim my luggage and go through customs. I had five bags for them to check. With all of the foreign travel I'd been through, no one had ever examined anything so I felt secure.

The customs agent I met must have had a bad night. The first thing he did was ask me "Where did you buy your watch?" I had an Omega that my wife gave me when we lived in Columbus, Ohio. I told him it was a gift and he said, "Where is your receipt?"

That ticked me off and started a bad relationship. I won that argument, and also the next one. He questioned my reflex camera claiming that must have

been purchased in Europe. Finally, I showed him the "Made in Rochester, New York" label and he gave in, but became even angrier.

From there on he tried to prove a point. He searched everything I had. He opened gift-wrapped packages, almost destroyed a sailing vessel gift for my son, Mark, and was trying his best to find something wrong.

Finally, he came to the one bag that I was worried about, the one with the gun. He unzipped one side and found the dirtiest laundry I could find to place in there. He was not too interested in that. He looked at the other side, saw the zipper, and concluded that it went into the same area, and never looked where he should have looked! He missed his chance. It would have made his day if only he had taken the time to search the briefcase thoroughly. But he didn't and I was relieved.

I scrambled with my bags through the doors to meet Mary and my children. We hurried home and after distributing the gifts that I had for them, I said, "Here's Daddy's souvenir -- my gun from WWII."

Scotty's and Mark's eyes became as wide as saucers. They were almost as impressed as I was to have that keepsake home with me.

I still have it, and I still feel that way.

## **The Continuing Story**

In the fall of 1988, I received a telephone call at my office in Phoenix from a man who introduced himself as Dan Silaski. He was calling to ask if I might consider selling our parts department at Noble. I explained that I did not own the company, however, the owner, Dick Crook might have an interest and suggested that we arrange a meeting.

The meeting was scheduled and we met Dan. The sale did not take place because we found that we could not transfer the franchises, but we stayed in touch.

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Several weeks later Dan was in our building, and I invited him to come in my office to chat and have a cup of coffee. We discussed a wide variety of subjects and for some reason, Dan casually mentioned in the middle of a sentence that he was Serbian. I let him finish his thought then said to him, "Being Serbian, does the name Draza Mihailovich mean anything to you?"

He almost wept when he told me that his father, and Prince Paul and Draza were classmates in school prior to the war. Then he asked me how I knew about him. I explained my adventure in Yugoslavia in 1944, and he was excited. We found that we had a mutual friend in Nick Lalich, and he wanted to hear more about my experiences.

As soon as he returned to his office he set up a conference call with Donna Gallagher, a local Serbian lady who is an admirer of the general. We agreed to get together soon.

Dan had given me Nick's address in Baltimore, and when I arrived home I typed a letter to him, but before it was mailed, a tragedy struck.

On Tuesday, December 13th, we received the news that our son, Scot had been killed in an automobile accident the night before. Mary, Laura and I traveled to New York on our sad mission to arrange for a funeral mass and to bring Scotty home. Meanwhile, Peggy flew to Phoenix to handle things here and to try to locate our other son, Mark, whom we hadn't heard from for some time. She found him and arranged his flight home.

It was so comforting for us to see both of them when we arrived back from our sad mission. We had a memorial service for Scot at our parish, Saint Thomas the Apostle Church in Phoenix.

After I returned to work, Dan told me that there was a National Serbian Golf Tournament scheduled for March of '89 and that many of the Chetniks would attend. He thought that Lalich might be there, and I was asked by Donna Gallagher to attend and perhaps speak.

I wrote to Nick giving him the sad news about Scot and a brief update of my life since we last met in Washington, D.C.

I also mailed an overdue letter to Jim Erwin, the nose gunner from my original crew explaining why my letter was late. Jim's wife, Ann, phoned me when the letter arrived with the news that Jim had suffered a stroke and was in bad shape.

The combination of Jim's condition, my son's death and the fact that I knew that I had an incurable cancer sparked an idea. There were only five of us left from that mission and time was not on our side. I contacted Franz, Gene, and Marv to suggest a reunion during the golf tournament and after a few phone calls it was set. Sandy could not make it.

Following the end of the war, the only crew members I saw were Paul Lawrence, our first co-pilot, Mel Hans our original navigator, and Franz Holscher our original Sperry-ball turret gunner. Only Franz was with me on the mission of November 19, 1944.

Paul was from California and he and his dad came to Chicago several times on business and we always got together. I visited him twice in California. He later became active in the 461/484th Bomb Group Alumni organization.

He and Franz located me in Phoenix just in time for me to grab an airplane and meet them in Los Angeles for the first reunion of the groups in '79 or '80.

Mel Hans was our original navigator. He became a paraplegic as a result of a crash landing we had while on a practice training mission in Italy in August of 1944. He had been transferred to Hines Veterans Hospital in the Chicago area where he met and married his wife. While he was there, I visited with him a number of times. He was later transferred to Kansas and died a year or two later.

Franz and I saw each other through the years because his travels took him to Chicago on a number of occasions.

When I was getting ready to return to Yugoslavia in

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1963 I wrote to everyone I could locate and had them send me current pictures and a brief history of what they had done since returning home from the war. I put all the pictures and letters into an album and gave it to Yugo when I visited him. Except for an occasional Christmas card, that was my only contact with most of them.

We decided to try for a crew reunion in 1987. Paul and his wife Sally, Marv and his wife Ethel, Gene and his wife Connie, and Jim Erwin without his wife, came to Phoenix for a short but most pleasant weekend. It was the first time the ladies had met and they were good friends immediately. We had a super time and promised to do it again soon.

Franz hadn't been able to make it, but he and his wife Jean did visit later to attend a business seminar and we enjoyed dinner with them one evening.

While I was arranging for the second reunion, our company was going through a major change. The owner, Dick Crook, had told me in early 1987 that he planned to leave the appliance business in December of '88. That gave me ample time to plan my future. I called a few friends who are in our business and suggested that they might want to buy the company. Within two weeks there were nine different people involved in four combinations of buyers.

A deal was struck with two people from North Dakota and the papers were signed. Unfortunately, they had a great deal of difficulty in arranging their financing, and at the last moment we had to move the company to a new location while awaiting the transfer. It finally took place on February 8, 1989.

The major consideration of the deal was that I was to continue as the president for at least one year. It turned out that the new owners only wanted to make the transfer, get the lines, and then reduce the overhead by eliminating me. I should have seen it coming but didn't.

By coincidence, our reunion was planned for the weekend following the transfer. I was busy that Thursday meeting the crew. First, I picked up a rental mini-van for the week. I drove it to the airport

to meet Marv who was alone because his wife Ethel couldn't make the trip.

Marv and I had some coffee then went over to the other terminal to meet Gene and Connie. With a brief stop to qualify Gene and Marv as drivers for the van, I gave them directions to the motel and went back to meet Franz and Jean. On arrival we drove to the motel and set the schedule for the next few days.

That night we gathered at our house for a party and much conversation. This group had never been together before, but within moments it was like "old home week."

Early the next day the five of them drove to our house in the van and all of us took off for a brief tour of Arizona. We stopped at Montezuma's Castle to inspect the Indian ruins, then off to Sedona.

We took lots of pictures and I used a camcorder to record the events. We stopped at the beautiful chapel in Sedona then went to Tlaquepaque, the Mexican village created in the middle of Sedona. After some shopping and a delicious lunch we drove up the mountain to Flagstaff before returning to Phoenix and another party at our house.

On Saturday we took a tour around Phoenix to see the many new developments in process and wound up at Steamers for a super seafood lunch. Then a quick tour of the new Phoenician Resort and back to the house and the motel.

That night was the Awards Dinner for the Serb golfers. I spoke after dinner so that I could in turn introduce my guests. They made a big hit with the Serbs, and we ended the evening on the top floor of the Hyatt Hotel watching the lights of the city while enjoying cocktails.

On Sunday we had brunch at one of our favorite restaurants, the Briarwood in the Park. I had invited Major Feldman and his wife to join us and also asked my daughter Laura to come and meet our friends. Feldman and I had met the night before. He had also been rescued by Mihailovich during the war.

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Following brunch and after a photo session at our house, we began to separate. Gene and Connie left around two in the afternoon for their return to California. Franz and Jean took off for the Grand Canyon, and Marv visited some friends who lived in the Valley. I took Marv to the airport the next morning and it seemed lonesome that night.

Franz and Jean met us for lunch the next day before they caught their flight for home. It had been one of the most pleasant weekends of our lives.

Of course, the major topic of conversation was the mission we shared and each one brought some souvenirs of the experience; photos, books, etc. I have always been a saver of everything but money, and my collection of mementoes fills a big suitcase. I still have a section of my parachute, including the pilot chute that pops out first to pull the main canopy from the pack.

We looked at photos, escape maps, letters, mission orders, and other papers while we recalled those events with a fair amount of poetic license, as I may have taken in telling my stories. It was a great time for all and I know that I enjoyed it the most.

There is a strong emotional bond that is formed between men who share the fear and excitement of flying together as a combat crew. Perhaps it exists in all branches of service. I hope so. It creates a friendship not everyone has the opportunity to enjoy.

Donna Gallagher, whom I mentioned earlier, sponsored a "Parastos" for Draza Mihailovich in June of 1989. A Parastos is a special memorial service following a regular Liturgy in the Serbian Orthodox Church. She did the same thing last year and wanted me to talk at the luncheon following the service.

Not one to turn down a chance at center stage, I accepted. So did Major Feldman and we were the featured speakers that Sunday.

So the story continues. I still haven't seen Nick Lulich because his wife is ill and not able to travel or stay home alone. Nick continued in government service as a member of the CIA. The CIA was formed

from the members of the OSS. Many of its most remembered agents came from there, including Bill Casey who died recently with the full story of the Iran arms deal safely stored in his memory.

What is next? I don't know, but I have to assume that this shared adventure will continue to come back into my life. It always has, at moments when I have least expected it.

If I am able, I would like to take Mary to Yugoslavia to meet Yugo and his family. That may not be possible because of the costs involved, but it would be nice. If we go, we could combine a visit to Medjugorje the village where it is believed by some that the Blessed Virgin Mary has appeared to several young children.

November 19, 1990, will mark the 46th anniversary of our mission. That morning started like all mornings flying combat. Our adventure was only one small part of the Second World War. But to those of us who were involved, it remains fixed in our memories as one we cannot forget.

What ever happened to the gun? I still have it and it remains my favorite souvenir. I have promised it and other military memorabilia to my daughter Peggy.

On Sunday, June 24, 1990, Mary and I attended another memorial service for Mihailovich and I had the opportunity to speak again in his behalf.

See what I mean? I am certain that this is not "The End."

## Epilogue

Pete Peterson was buried by Chetniks close to where our airplane crashed. His body was recovered after the war and returned to his parents in Black River Falls, Wisconsin for burial there.

Art Farnham stayed in the service after the war. He served on a non-flying status until he retired as a Lieutenant Colonel and later died of a heart attack in

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Florida in 1984.

Tom Connelly returned to Boston. He retired in 1987 and died shortly afterward.

"Shorty" Shay returned to the Midwest, and died in 1986.

Carrol Sanderson returned to farming in Ohio and still lives there. Although we have had some mail contact, he has been unable to attend the two crew reunions. We haven't seen each other since 1945.

I lost touch with Roscoe Teal after I left Italy and so did everyone else.

Paul Lawrence, the original co-pilot who did not fly the mission of 19 November '44, died of a heart problem in 1987 in California.

Jim Erwin suffered a stroke in December of '88 and died the following year.

Franz, Gene, Marv, Sandy and I are still alive and plan to meet again at a future reunion.

## The Last Chapter

The last sentence I wrote in *Bail-out* was, "I am sure that this is not The End."

That prediction was written in the early fall of 1989. The Iron Curtain had been lifted slightly, but the Berlin Wall had not yet fallen. The Soviet Union was intact, and although the Cold War was thawing, the world was still a dangerous place. The sudden collapse of the Soviet Union gave a brief promise of peace, but events worldwide have since reminded us that peace is indeed a fragile blessing. There was no way to know then of the tragedy that would soon follow in what we now call "the former Yugoslavia."

*News item: The Wall Street Journal, April 22, 1993: "The U.N. disarmed the Muslim defenders of Srebrenica and declared that the Bosnian town's demilitarization was complete. But a U.N. spokesman said many of the Muslim fighters may have fled to nearby*

*hills. Meanwhile, fighting raged in central Bosnia between Muslim and Croat forces despite an announced cease-fire."*

As I started to write this, conventional wisdom said that the next city in Bosnia/Herzegovina to fall will be Sarajevo, the capital. Although this will not bring peace, it would mark a major victory in this grief-stricken area for the Serbs.

The Serbians have resisted all efforts for settlement that do not recognize them as the principal remaining power in the Balkans. For more than a year, reports on television, in newspapers, and in magazines have detailed horrible stories of "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia. This follows similar events a year earlier in Croatia, when that nation state also chose to become independent. After a year of bloodshed, an uneasy peace was established there.

There has been widespread murder, pillage and rape, and other atrocities, first in Croatia and now in Bosnia, as these three peoples -- the Croats, the Serbs and the Muslims -- fight each other for control. These different nationalities have separate histories, cultures and religious beliefs, but were combined into one Kingdom, Yugoslavia, following the First World War. This conflict is nothing new. It is a continuation of the wars between these people that have been fought there for more than 1,400 years. Today's violent action is taking place in the same area where my crew and I lived for six weeks in what we then thought were difficult times!

To hear and see war news from the towns and villages where our crew lived almost fifty years ago, is especially sad. For example, for several weeks, while the city of Srebrenica was under siege, a limited number of wounded women and children were evacuated to the comparative safety of nearby Tuzla. Tuzla is the town where I met my friend Yugo in 1967 on my only return to Yugoslavia.

The story of that visit is detailed in the chapter identified as "The Return." It was on that trip that Yugo

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gave me the .45 Colt semi-automatic pistol that I had given him as our crew escaped from the area in 1944. Yugo had suggested Tuzla as a meeting place in 1967 because it was near the small town where he was then living. I had flown from Athens, Greece to Belgrade where I rented a Volkswagen for the balance of my journey.

I stayed in a small hotel in Tuzla overnight and contacted Yugo the next morning. We then spent several emotional days revisiting the scenes of our past adventures.

I have not heard from Yugo Panic for several years. My last letter was never answered. Yugo and I are the same age. His wife is about five years younger and his son and daughter must now be in their middle or late thirties. If they are still in that area, they have certainly been involved in the conflict. There are few safe places in Bosnia.

The area where they lived in 1967 appears to be under Muslim control for the present. That would be bad news for Serbians.

Whatever has happened to them, there are others I wonder about. Yugo came from a large family. His mother was still living when I was there last, but his father had died a few years earlier.

The Panics and their children all lived together in 1944 in their small farmhouse where our crew was hidden from the Germans. Within a short distance from there, we knew dozens of other Bosnian Serbs and some Muslims who were living together in peace, cooperating with one another, helping in the combined efforts against the Axis.

Another city that is often mentioned in war reports is Doboj. It is a transportation center in northern Bosnia on the Bosono River. Our crew spent almost four weeks in Panic's small farmhouse only a few miles away from Doboj, which was on the other side of the small mountain that separated us. The Germans held Doboj then and we often heard the U.S. 15th Air Force bomb the city using fighter bombers, P-51s. Now that area is the scene of local battles to control supply lines.

Our crew was finally evacuated from an improvised airstrip. It was simply an open farm field near the village of Boljanic, about 30 miles northwest of Tuzla. The 15th Air force did the rescue, directed by the OSS, with the help of the Chetniks. This area is now the scene of a two-way fight between Muslims and Croats. Even now, although the Croats and Muslims often join sides against the Serbs, there are no permanent alliances between any of them.

Unfortunately, most of our media coverage to date is heavily weighted against the Serbs. Newspapers, magazines and television reports blame them for all the "ethnic cleansing" taking place. Little is ever said about the acts of terror being committed by the Croats or the Muslims. The people who are criticized most by the media, and many of our politicians, is a group of nationalist Serbs identified as "Chetniks."

It was the Chetniks who saved our lives in 1944! For centuries, this name has been given to recognize Serbian guerrilla fighters motivated by strong nationalist feelings. Throughout history, the name "Chetnik" was given to any group of Serbians who gathered on an ad-hoc basis to correct an injustice.

The Chetniks are not the only Serbian forces. The other is made up of other Serbians, who are also natives of Bosnia and they were fortunate to inherit equipment from the regular Yugoslavian army that was stationed there before the trouble began. A number of them were in the old Yugoslav army. They are supported with arms, food and medical supplies by a former Communist, Slobodan Milosevic, who also serves as the elected Serbian President and is headquartered in Belgrade.

Of the two groups, the Chetniks are by far the most dedicated and brutal. They have a long history of fighting invaders over the years. Both groups appear unwilling to compromise on any issue that separates the Serbs from what they consider their deeded and titled homeland. To them it is the Muslims and Croats who are the outsiders.

The outside world finds it difficult to understand all

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that is happening in the former Yugoslavia ("land of the South Slavs"). To better understand today's problems, perhaps it will help to review what happened after the end of the First World War.

The Allies created this country at the end of that war. They brought together six different republics, five separate nations, three unique languages, three opposite religions, and two alphabets, and combined them all into one nation. This area is no stranger to war and civil unrest.

Italy fought WWI on the side of the Allies. It was their influence that caused the Allies to make Albania semi-independent but also a protectorate of Italy. That was the beginning of a new source of friction. It also began the import of Macedonians and other outsiders into Kosovo, the traditional center of Serbian culture and history.

There was continued unrest in Kosovo following this as the Serbs began to lose some of their influence in the area. New hatreds were begun in this holiest of Holy Places of the Serbian people.

There are hundreds of years of mutual hatred between the Roman Catholic Croats, the Eastern Orthodox Catholic Serbs and the Islamic Muslims. This religious hatred is neatly summed up in the cartoon by the artist Boro (Len Borozinski) that appeared in *The Phoenix Gazette* on Sunday April 25th, 1993.

Yugoslavia is located in an area that was once a part of the Holy Roman Empire that covered most of the civilized world in the first century A.D. Diocletian, who was the Roman Emperor in 305 A.D. decided to divide the empire into two parts so that it would be easier to govern. The dividing line ran roughly north and south and split the former Yugoslavia in two. The eastern capital of Constantinople took control of what we now call Serbia (Serbia then included Bosnia), Montenegro, and Macedonia. The language was Greek and the alphabet "Cyrillic" under this Byzantine rule. What we now call Croatia and Slovenia spoke Latin, used that alphabet, "Latinica", and looked to Rome for their political, religious and cultural direction.

The Slavs first came to the area having been pushed there from their homelands by Asian marauders in the sixth century A.D. It wasn't until the ninth century that the first states, Croatia and Macedonia were formed. Serbia was the next new force and they quickly rose to dominate the Balkans, extending their rule all the way beyond Corinth, Greece before they were invaded in the 14th century by the Turks. Prior to that, Serbian culture, which was heavily influenced by the Eastern Orthodox Church following its separation from Rome, rose to its peak. Artists from every discipline created a period of renaissance that even today draws scholars to admire the architecture, fine paintings, and writings.

A decisive battle of that time was the Turkish defeat of the Serbian Army on the fields of Kosovo in 1389. Even though the Bogimal King Tvrtko of Croatia sent an army of support, Knez Lazar the Tsar of Serbia, lost the battle known in local poetry as one of the bloodiest of all time. "Blood was as high as the horse reins and the rider's waist" according to the famous Serbian ballad, "The Maiden of Kosovo." (As translated by Robert Martinovich of St. Petersburg, Florida.) The maiden is remembered in Serbia as their "Florence Nightingale" for her work in attending to the wounded at that battle.

The war continued for another 200 years before the Turks finally won. But it is "Kosovo" that the Serbs remember best and still promise to avenge. Kosovo was the center of their culture and the seat of their religion. The population was virtually all Serbian.

When the Turks finally conquered the area they brought with them the religion of Islam. They also changed many of the fine old eastern Christian churches into mosques and converted some of the Slavs to Islam, a new faith for them. They became Muslims and many continue today. It was under the cruel rule of the Turks that Serbian hatred grew. Kosovo became the "Mecca" for Serbians who vowed to some day reclaim their position of power. This is what they now fight for -- "A Greater Serbia," a return to the old historic borders.

It is interesting to note that a blood-colored poppy

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## **461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (H) Association Membership**

For membership in the 461<sup>st</sup> 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](mailto:treasurer@461st.org).

The 461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (H) Association offers three types of membership:

- **Life Membership** – Men who served in the 461<sup>st</sup> 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 461<sup>st</sup> Liberaider, and attend and vote at the business meetings usually held at the reunion.
- **Associate Membership** – Anyone wishing to be involved in the 461<sup>st</sup> 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 461<sup>st</sup> Liberaider. You are not a voting member of the Association.
- **Child Membership** – Children of men who served in the 461<sup>st</sup> 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 <input type="checkbox"/>	Associate <input type="checkbox"/>	Child <input type="checkbox"/> Father's name:	
First Name:		Last Name:			
Street Address:					
City:		State:		Zip:	
Phone number:		E-Mail address:			
Squadron #:		Crew #:		MOS:	
Check No.:		Amount:		\$	

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grows on the plains of Kosovo today. Serbian tradition holds that it cannot be transplanted, will not take root, or grow anywhere else on earth.

By 1800, the Ottoman Empire controlled most of Serbia, Bosnia and the lands to the south. Croatia and Slovenia were already under the sometimes benevolent, sometimes cruel rule of the Hapsburg Empire to the north. They reinforced the Catholicism of Rome. There were bloody battles of resistance there, too.

Cruelty is certainly not new to the area. In 1573, a leader of a Croatian peasant resistance movement, Matija Gubec, was captured by the Austrians and executed by having a red-hot iron crown placed on his head!

It was during these times that long-lasting hatreds were set permanently into place. The Serbs, the Croats and the Muslims were violently opposed to each other on religious and cultural grounds. Many Croats and the majority of the Serbs and Serb Muslims hated the Austrians. The Serbs and the Croats both hated the Turks. The Muslims, even though they shared a common religion, were not always supportive of Turkey because of past grievances. All three displayed their emotions in the brutal battles that continued between them.

It was in Sarajevo in 1914 that a nineteen-year-old Bosnian Serb, Gavrilo Princip and fellow members of "MLADA Bosna" ("Young Bosnia") simultaneously assassinated the Arch Duke Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian crown and his wife the Arch Duchess. Austria had made Bosnia a puppet of theirs, and the Duke, having a summer palace in Sarajevo, picked June 27 for an unwelcome visit, perhaps not realizing the significance of the date. It was the 525<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo! The Austrians used this event as an excuse to declare war on Serbia thus beginning the first World War.

Serbia suffered the highest casualty rate of any combatant in WWI. They lost 23 percent of their total population and 56 percent of their men! Serbia fought with the Allies while Croatia and Slovenia sided with the Germans.

Once again the South Slavs fought one another. While there was little battlefield action in the north, Serbia and Bosnia were the scenes of constant fighting in the war.

When the Germans invaded Yugoslavia in World War Two, it was much different than their other recent quick-invasion victories. They were faced with their first organized resistance movement, the Chetniks, led by General Draza Mihailovich. Later, Tito, the Communist leader, started his Partisan resistance group after Germany broke their alliance with Russia and invaded their former ally. Tito had been brought back to Moscow in the '30s and was trained there to become a local leader of the Communist party in his home country.

A total of 1,700,000 Yugoslav lives were lost in WWII, equal to one-ninth of the small country's total population. War and its pain are not new to these people.

Although Tito was a Croatian, a number of his fellow Croats sided with the Germans. Croatia became the "Quisling" country in the area. There were several organized Croatian units fighting along side the regular German army along with some Muslim units who were doing the same thing.

During the Second World War, the most cruel fighters were the "Ustashi," a group of Croatian German sympathizers who were among the most brutal forces in Europe. They aimed their atrocities against three groups; the Serbs, the Gypsies and the Jews. It made no difference if someone was young or old, a combatant or a civilian, a man or a woman. If an American flyer had the misfortune to fall into their hands, he wouldn't become a prisoner of war. The best that could happen would be an early execution. Torture and execution were the norm.

Tito and his Partisans won the civil war against the Chetniks that took place during WWII. He won it because Great Britain and the United States were convinced by the USSR to direct all of their help to Tito and withhold the support of Mihailovich. The USA was anxious to appease and help their new

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friends, the Russians. At the end of WWII, the country was reformed again into a single country.

Tito took command of the newly formed republic and held it together in spite of all the old jealousies. The strong hand of his dictatorship suppressed any of the old ethnic jealousies. During the winter Olympic games in 1984, which were held in Sarajevo, the world used that country as an outstanding example of how different people can get along. How ironic!

The Bosnian Serbs recently rejected a peace plan offered by the U.N., that has the support of the Bosnian Muslims, the Croats and the United States. The proposed settlement would create a series of political island communities in Bosnia, each one to be dominated by one of the three factions.

The Serbs believe that this will isolate their people and make them targets for extermination. They argue that this was their country before Tito forced the immigration of Croats into Bosnia. Almost all (65 to 75 percent) of present day Bosnia was originally owned by Serbs. They literally held the deeds to almost all of the land area. The U.N. may try additional sanctions against Serbia, but it is doubtful that this will effect a lasting solution.

The United States, led by a president inexperienced in world politics, now must consider the next step. Every effort of his to date has failed to earn the support of the Europeans. I believe that any hostile action taken from the air will only lead to involvement of our forces on the ground.

Those who point to our quick victory in the Persian Gulf, as a reason for us to intervene, do not understand the differences between fighting a third-rate army in a land war in a desert, and fighting in an irregular terrain against a highly motivated defender who is on his home ground. That home ground is 90 percent mountainous, with thousands of places to hide. The terrain very much favors the defenders. I say to these people who would have us intervene: If you liked our experience in Viet Nam, you'll love a war in Bosnia!

Is there any solution to the problem? I believe so.

First of all, the United States should not get involved in either a ground or air war. Perhaps we should simply look at a map of the world in 1918, the end of WWI. That map reflected past history and prevailed until 1941. It will show that Bosnia was a part of Serbia then, and I believe it should be now. Why not support a return to the old historic boundaries?

Bosnia/Herzegovina may be only the first step. Unless a reasonable solution is found there, the turmoil may move to Kosovo then Macedonia. Before WWII, Kosovo population was 65 percent Serb. It was approximately 8 percent in 1992.

The several hundreds of thousands of Serbs who were exiled from there were replaced by Macedonians with the encouragement of Tito. So much for "ethnic cleansing." When the time seems appropriate, the Albanians will sponsor a movement to declare Kosovo an independent country.

Serbia will resist that change. That action should force intervention by both the Greeks and the Turks. Russia, Germany and the other European countries will not be able to stand idly by when that happens. It was the Germans who first inflamed the problem when they unilaterally recognized the Slovenes and Croatia when they opted to become independent in 1991. The Germans were instrumental in having the U.N. also recognize the two as independent countries.

The Germans have a long history of fighting their hated enemy, the Serbs and will not stop now. Meanwhile, the Russians will continue to sympathize with their old allies, the Serbs.

The search for national identity will not stop in the Balkans. Several former Soviet states have already broken away from their union. More may follow, probably not without bloodshed.

Can religious wars be prevented? We have not yet seen a solution to the age-old dispute between the Arabs and the Jews. Northern Ireland continues to be an ongoing battle between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Religious wars continue in India, and indeed all over the world. It is a paradox that people

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still kill one another in the name of their loving God. If the role of the U.N. is to keep peace, they are failing.

The problem in America is that apparently, the United States doesn't know what to do. We face international danger with a poorly qualified leader. Our only hope is that Clinton will mature into his responsibilities.

I pray for the world.

## Acknowledgements

I have drawn heavily from my own personal experiences and many discussions with my good friend, Dan Silaski. I have also borrowed from these resources:

Serb World U.S.A., a monthly magazine published by the company of the same name with offices at 415 E. Mabel, Tucson, AZ 850705

Yugoslavia a book edited by the Yugoslavia Illustrated Magazine Review, printed by GRAFICKI ZAVOD HRVATSKE, 26 FRANKOPANSKA\_ZAGREB, YUGOSLAVIA. 1966. This magazine was an official press of the Yugoslav government under Tito, much like Pravda was in the old Soviet Union.

Kosovo a book sponsored and published by the Kosovo Charity Fund '92, Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Western America, Alhambra, California.

Various editions of daily papers including *The Arizona Republic*, *The Phoenix Gazette*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

In addition many details have been confirmed by the April 18, 1993, and the April 26, 1993, issues of *Newsweek* magazine published weekly by a company of the same name at 444 Madison Avenue, New York City, New York 10022.

**January 5, 1991**

Bail-out was written as a part of a project I started in 1988. I wanted to provide my family with a partial history of my life and the events that I witnessed. The other articles are shorter and reflect my feelings and memories as I remember them growing up in the 20th century.

Perhaps everyone believes that he or she has lived in the most exciting period of history. I certainly do. My early memories include a taste of the Prohibition Era, and the Great Depression. They also include the beginning of the war in Europe, the attack on Pearl Harbor, my involvement in WWII, the atomic bombing of Japan, post-war America and the dawning of the space age.

I have voted in presidential elections beginning with Franklin D. Roosevelt. Tom Dewey was my next choice, but a loser. I have since regretted that I did not vote for Harry Truman, or JFK or Barry Goldwater. Perhaps I am really a democrat in the FDR mold. I "Liked Ike" in 1952 and worked full-time to help his election. That was my major involvement in politics, a field that would have been interesting to enter.

Nixon disappointed me. Even today I consider him to have been one of our better presidents, especially in foreign affairs, but one who made the tragic mistake of not simply admitting his involvement in the Watergate scandal.

Ronald Reagan and George Bush have had my support. I think that Reagan did much to point America in the right direction following the malaise in the post-Vietnam period.

I watched the Korean War from the sidelines but very nearly was a participant. My Air National Guard unit spent two years activated in Europe and I wanted to be there with them. I had resigned my commission a month earlier because my new job with Westinghouse involved heavy travel. Because I

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## Notes



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was newly married and wanted to build a career, I elected not to rejoin. If I had, no doubt I would have remained in the military and been a part of the Vietnam War.

The civil rights movement is another strong memory. Martin Luther King, Jr., lived in Chicago for a time and I saw him lead demonstrations down State Street. I also saw the riots that nearly burned down the west side of that city.

Sometimes I think that I made a mistake when I passed up the chance to go to college following the war. As a veteran, I was entitled to five years of tuition and expenses based on my service. I had been a good-to-sometimes-poor student in high school and my grades were less than attractive. I applied for admission to Northwestern University in Evanston and was turned down.

I thought that this was the end of any college opportunity not knowing their standards were among the highest in the country. A short time later, I took enrollment tests at the University of Chicago, another highly selective school, and found that they were anxious for me to enroll. I decided not to because of a job I had that paid \$300.00 per month. The Depression experience reminded me that this was a splendid position, and maybe it was for those times.

I have been reasonably successful in my career. I have often thought of how far I might have progressed with a college degree. The major corporations that I have worked for were all college-degree oriented. In spite of this handicap, I rose well above my peers. What might I have done with better credentials. Who knows?

The key to success in learning is to be interested in the subject material. While in bombardier/navigator school my grades placed me in the top 10 percent of my class. Later the courses I took in night school in communications and acting were interesting and I did quite well in them. There was a brief period when I considered enrolling in the drama school at the Art Institute in Chicago. Although they encouraged me, I again decided to be practical and stay with a career in business.

The best decision I ever made in my life was to ask Mary Elaine Zimmer to marry me. She has been my strong supporter in everything I have ever tried to accomplish. She is a fine-looking woman and has kept her good looks and graceful figure. Beyond that, she is a loving person, completely unselfish and a wonderful mother to our children. Her strong faith and optimistic outlook on life have helped me through some difficult times.

She was the one who never let down on her determination to adopt our four children. All through the long years of interviews, investigations, and what seemed like endless waiting, she was the strong force that wouldn't give up. We were rewarded with two daughters, Laura and Peggy, and two sons, Scot and Mark. Our family has been the center and the joy of our lives.

An interesting turn in my life was the decision to buy a computer in the spring of 1988. All of my life I have enjoyed writing. I was limited because of my poor spelling and the lack of typing skills.

When I bought my computer I also enrolled in a word processing course at Gateway Community College. I was too impatient to study touch typing but instead developed a reasonable skill with the "two finger" style.

My success at Gateway encouraged me to take other computer classes. Suddenly I had the urge to earn a degree. Some of the WWII college credits earned at the University of Tampa while I was a cadet, transferred. So did the 24 credit hours I earned at Mesa Community College's Certified Peace Officer Academy in 1979. Almost all of these transferred credits only counted as electives. Last fall I took a course in psychology and communications.

Now I am taking courses in modern literature and in mythology. After this semester I will have 56.5 credit hours toward a degree in general studies. That is only 7.5 hours short of total degree requirements. However, I have far too many electives and will still need many more hours than that to meet the requirements for graduation.

But I intend to do it, graduating in December of 1992 at the grand age of 70!

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There is a certain urgency that accompanies older age. You begin to measure the things still to be done against the total time that may be available. This calls for establishing a set of priorities. My "want list" beyond praying for Mary's good health and long life include the degree and writing as much as I can into my journal.

Beyond that I fantasize that I might earn a four-year degree at Arizona State University, then a pilot's license, and finally decide what I want to do when I grow up.

In any event, my life is more interesting now than it has ever been. I look forward to the future, but enjoy each day one at a time. What a blessing!

### **July 4, 1993**

I first learned that I had inoperable cancer in September of 1988.

Although there was no hope for a cure or a remission, the disease was not immediately life threatening. In many ways, learning that you have a terminal illness can be a benefit. You face your own mortality knowing that you still have some time left to prepare yourself and others for what will happen.

I am lucky that I had almost four years of feeling normal. I was able to operate a little consulting company of my own, for fun and profit, following the end of my career with Noble. There was also enough time to continue my education and enjoy life. I took the courses I needed and enjoyed them all. For some of them, I had to go to Scottsdale Community College because they were either not offered at Gateway or the times conflicted. Last fall I was enrolled in my final class at Scottsdale, planning to transfer that credit to Gateway in time for a June '93 graduation.

About the time class began, I needed additional daily radiation therapy to ease the pain in my lower back. Two previous treatments earlier that year for my hip and shoulder were uneventful and had caused no side effects. Because this new series of treatments were longer, they tired me out. I wasn't ill, just tired. So tired that I had to withdraw from class after five weeks and try again later.

I did that. Feeling better, but now walking with a cane, in January of '93 I went back to Gateway. After six weeks of classes suddenly I took a turn for the worse. One night I fell in our bedroom, without any apparent reason, when I was on my way to bed. Mary couldn't lift me but after a call to our son Mark, the two of them were able to get me into bed. I slept well and the next day expected to go to school.

By late morning, I called my instructor, Ms. Gail Shay, and explained that I would be absent and asked for the next homework assignment. Over the weekend I finished the work but realized that returning to school was now out of the question.

Mary brought all of my homework down to school along with my letter explaining my condition. I finally faced the fact that my lifetime ambition to earn a degree was not to be realized.

Ms. Shay surprised me with a phone call late that week. She said that she had discussed my situation with the Dean and the President of the College and that they had given her special permission to allow me to finish the class from home!

The next week I received a packet of future assignments along with a touching "Hope You Are Feeling Better" card, signed by every one of my young classmates! They not only offered their moral support, but also offered any help I might need on the required assignments.

I was now confined to a wheelchair. Fortunately, this class was an exercise in critical thinking, critical reading and writing. Although I missed the lectures, I knew the subject and was able to do my own research. Writing has always been fun for me so finishing the course was not as difficult as it may seem. There were many days when I just couldn't concentrate or felt too bad to do anything. But I managed to continue with the strong encouragement of Mary and our daughter Laura and the rest of the family.

On the evening of May 14th, 1993, I realized a dream. I received my degree, with honors, at Gateway!

Laura and Pete were there along with my granddaughter Mackenzie. Peggy came over from California,

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Mark was there and my sister Marion (AKA Martha) flew in from Boston for the big event.

Everyone at Gateway extended themselves to make the evening very special for me. They had made arrangements for Mary to sit next to me in the front row after she pushed me in my wheelchair at the head of the student procession. I was recognized as the "senior" graduate at the young age of 70 as the ceremony opened. When it came time for the students to receive their diplomas, Doctor Phil Randolph, the President of the College, personally came down from the stage along with Doctor Robert Huddleston the Dean, to present me with mine.

What a thrill! I couldn't see very well through the tears.

After the ceremony Doctor Randolph came down to escort me as Mary and I led the faculty and class out of the auditorium. I had the opportunity to thank Ms. Shay who came over to congratulate me. Several of my classmates were there to offer their support. It was quite an evening.

*The Phoenix Gazette* had a feature article about me in the next day's paper. It was most complimentary and to my surprise was 99 percent accurate. Their talented writer, a Ms. Lisa Davis, had interviewed me earlier that week and wrote a heartwarming story that featured a color photograph of Mary and me as I was receiving my diploma. Later, Doctor Randolph sent me a personal note of congratulations for my perseverance and noted that he was honored to have given me my diploma.

Several friends called after seeing the story to offer their congratulations. Most of them had not known that I had cancer simply because that is something that you do not bring up in a regular conversation.

Realizing that many people were also unaware, I took that opportunity to tell them by simply mailing the photo copies of the story.

It is amazing how many nice people there are in this world if you just give them a chance to be themselves. We were flooded with cards, notes and calls of congratulations. Mary's friends in the church Sodality even sent me a beautiful plant with flowers and a silver

balloon to mark the event.

At least one of the goals I set for myself when I learned that I had cancer had been accomplished.

Before all this happened, in October of '92, I received a surprise telephone call from Roscoe Teal. No one on the crew had heard from him since we last saw each other in 1945. He found my phone number in a directory of our 461st Bomb Group Association a few days earlier and we were both delighted to get back in touch. Roscoe was our nose gunner on the day we were shot down, and he was the only remaining crew member that we had not located.

We quickly brought each other up to date. When he came out of the service, he went to radio/electronics school and later started his own repair business. After selling the business he joined a television manufacturer and retired several years ago. After two divorces, he married Darlene thirty years ago. She was a widow with five children and they have had a happy marriage. Like me, Roscoe has cancer but hopes to visit Phoenix sometime soon.

Franz Holscher and Gene Thomas and I have always kept in touch by mail and phone. Gene and his wife stopped by three years ago following a trip to Tucson. The Stoloffs visited Phoenix last fall and we talk on the phone once in a while but it has been some time since I have had any contact with Sandy.

In 1991 a rebuilt B-24J, the "All American," visited Phoenix. It is the only fully combat-restored B-24 still flying. The Collins Foundation rebuilt it as part of their project to preserve that part of American history.

When I went to see it, I took some time to ask anyone who looked my age if they had ever flown in a B-24. In a little over two hours I found 40 others and that summer we had a cook-out in our backyard. We have since met several times as a group and enjoy reliving WWII.

I still have not heard anything from Yugo or the others in Bosnia who helped us almost 50 years ago. My good friend Dan Silaski has offered to help find him through his contacts in the Serbian Orthodox Church. Meanwhile, Dan is a regular visitor and the two of us

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talk on the telephone with Nick Lalich, the OSS agent, who is alive and well. He lives in Baltimore but lost his wife late last year.

I am now in the late stages of cancer and unable to leave the house even to see a doctor. Hospice of the Valley took me on as a patient three weeks ago. They are a special health agency dedicated to helping people like me with home care.

They provide visits by a registered nurse who monitors my health weekly. Terry Bache is my nurse and has already become our good friend.

Hospice works with a patient's regular doctor. All final decisions are made by him. Meanwhile, Terry suggests proper medication and her suggestions have been marvelous.

Previous to her visits, I was on a liquid morphine that had to be administered every four hours. That meant poor Mary had to get up at midnight and again at four o'clock in the morning to give it to me. Now, at Terry's suggestion, I'm on special time-release pills that I take twice a day, permitting Mary at least a chance for more regular sleep.

Hospice specializes in pain relief and they are on the cutting edge of this technique. They also provide other services designed to assist the patient and their family with practical things like living wills, regular wills, counseling, and relief for the "at-home caregiver" who might need an occasional respite from the daily routine. They do all this free for people who have no insurance or other assets. It is a most worthwhile charity for anyone to consider at gift-giving time.

As I approach the end of my life I know that I have been uniquely blessed. I had a loving mother and father whose example helped me all through my life. My sister Marion and I have always been close and good friends. I was most fortunate to have Mary as my wife, lover and my very best friend. Our children have all been a source of joy for both of us. Even though the death of our son Scot was tragic, it served to bring all of us even closer together as a family.

I have no regrets and only one worry. I will not be here to take care of Mary as she has taken care of me.

She is entitled to many blessings for all that she has done for me and others. I pray for her happiness, health and security, as I also pray the same for the rest of my family.

My belief in God is comforting. It is based on simple reason. However unreasonable it may be to believe in a Supreme Being, I find it much more unreasonable to believe that there isn't one. The more I study and learn about the universe and its order, the more convinced I am that all this could not simply happen by accident.

I believe in the "Big Bang Theory" and also in the "Theory of Evolution." There is too much evidence to believe otherwise. However, all this simply confirms my faith in a Supreme Being.

I find it difficult, if not impossible, to believe many of the stories contained in the Bible. However, there are fundamental truths in the Bible and many of the other world's religious writings. These the world should not ignore. Most of the problems we see in our country today are the direct result of a decline in our religious values without the substitution of any other comparable ethical standards to take their place.

The Catholic Church has been a steady anchor in my life. My parents were deeply devoted and gave me my fundamental beliefs. The good nuns of the order of The Blessed Virgin Mary reinforced those beliefs during my eight-year grammar school education. The priests and brothers of St. Vincent De Paul added more when I attended De Paul Academy for four years of high school.

Mary is a devoted Catholic and we raised all of our children in the faith. As I have traveled around the world, I have always felt close to home, knowing that there was a Catholic Church nearby where I would be welcome and at ease. This was especially comforting when Scotty was killed in New York and we traveled there to bring him home.

I feel sorry for those who have no beliefs to strengthen them. I advise them to inquire within themselves.

And so this all now comes to an end. I have enjoyed my life and for good reasons; it has been filled with good friends and many adventures. I look forward to the greatest adventure of all.



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Having just moved into his new office, a pompous, new colonel was sitting at his desk when an airman knocked on the door. Conscious of his new position, the colonel quickly picked up the phone, told the airman to enter, then said into the phone, "Yes, General, I'll be seeing him this afternoon and I'll pass along your message. In the meantime, thank you for your good wishes, Sir." Feeling as though he had sufficiently impressed the young enlisted man, he asked, "What do you want?"

"Nothing important, sir," the airman replied, "I'm just here to hook up your telephone."

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vainly to remove my body from my warm sack; and sack it was. In order to keep warm we (the enlisted men anyway) used to crawl into our mattress covers – which in essence were sacks - this way we could keep a little warmer. The original “Italian sleeping bag” you might call it. Anyway, I’m lying there listening to “Putt-putt” get a razzing from Frank. Putt-putt is Fred Gaul, the flight engineer, and called Putt-putt because one of his jobs is to fire up the little gasoline engine (like a power mower) which powers the airplane until the engines are started. Frank Yesia, the ball gunner, is a wise guy. Frank is from Cicero, Illinois, home of the gangsters, and although Frank is far from the so-called “tough-nut”, he is still held in awe by a few of us as having come from that tough part of Chicago - Al Capone’s old stomping ground. Anyway, he’s needling Putt-putt, the youngest of the crew, and the “goat”. We all have a good laugh and finally manage to shake ourselves from the sacks.

Our enlisted men’s tent was comprised of six men: Thomas Diebert, S/Sgt., top turret gunner; Joseph Mergo, S/Sgt., tail gunner; Roy Doe, Sgt., nose gunner; Frank Yesia, Cpl, ball gunner; Frederick Gaul, Sgt., flight engineer/waist gunner; and myself, right waist gunner/radio operator. We were a close knit crew. I think we were possibly the most congenial crew in Italy. We all got along great. The officers, who lived in a separate tent in another part of the airfield, were considered by us as “regular guys”. They were a good group. I know this “camaraderie” was not universal. I firmly believe we had a unique crew, and it was a shame it all came to an end this 17th day of December 1944.

So here we are, struggling into our clothes, each man dressing as he saw fit - it was an informal uniform we wore - we weren't going to stand inspection or bow before the CO, so we chose the most comfortable and warmest clothing each preferred. I usually wore my OD's (wool shirt and pants) for warmth. We later picked up our electrically heated suits, parachutes and oxygen masks at the flight line. We finally get dressed and stagger over to the hall for breakfast. One thing I can say about combat crews and combat flying - we never wanted for a warm place to sleep or good things to eat. It was hell over the target but, before and after, we had it pretty dammed good! So

here we are, eating our eggs and bacon, plenty of it, along with coffee and toast, and razzing each other about last night. Wow! What a night that was. First, I’d like to explain how it was when we weren’t flying. One night we had movies or played ping-pong. The next night the Enlisted Men’s Club was open. So, on alternate nights it was either movie, or the Enlisted Men’s Club. The movies weren't bad, held outdoors, usually an old Betty Grable or Bob Hope movie, but anything was ok as long as it had a few laughs in it. The Enlisted Men’s Club was just the mess hall - after 8:00 PM. It was a bar, period, but the drinks were cheap enough - 50¢ each, or three for a dollar. Needless to say, we all ordered three at a time. There wasn’t much choice - I can’t remember for sure what else there was, but I know we always had 101 proof British Rum and grapefruit juice from the kitchen. It made a potent drink and, at three for a dollar, it didn’t take many to relieve our frustration and anxieties. So, at breakfast this morning we were discussing the last night’s events. It wasn’t much - after six, nine, or twelve rum and grapefruits we were feeling no pain. Roy Doe was singing over and over, “Roll me over in the clover, lay me down and do it again, roll me over in the clover, lay me down and do it again ---”. I can still see it as plain as yesterday - and hear Roy singing. It wasn’t long before he was out of it, so we got the stretcher and lugged him home to the tent. Knowing 3:00 AM was going to come around quite soon, we all joined Roy and flaked out. So here we were a few hours later, eating like nothing had happened, (I wish I could do that now) and razzing each other.

Breakfast over, we had to go to the general briefing for the flight and then we went to our respective special briefings. My Radio Operator briefing usually consisted of frequencies for the day, and I picked up my chaff (aluminum foil) which I threw out over the target to foul up the enemy radar. Next stop was the plane. Each man had a specific job to do - a general pre-flight. We checked our guns, loaded them - - I checked the radio equipment, etc. We put on our electrically heated suits - which were thin suits, similar to thermal underwear, laced with wiring, and had a plug which we plugged into a jack on the airplane. Over the electrically heated suit we put on a heavy jacket and pants which protected the relatively thin and fragile electric suit and was heavy enough to pro-

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tect one from the cold in the event of an electricity failure - even though it seemed as if you were freezing to death. So here we were, all dressed up and no place to go - as it were.

Tom Qualman, the navigator, comes by and says, "Well, it looks like we're sitting around here for while. The magneto on #3 is kaput and we'll have to wait for it to be fixed." Before long we are wondering if we are going to make it. You'd think we'd be tickled pink to be able to abort even before leaving the ground but, as I had said before, we weren't a "normal" crew. Even when we had first arrived in Italy we wanted to fly the very next day, but training and other events took precedence over foolish actions. So, even after a good number of missions, we were still itching to fly. Finally came the order to get ready. We were going to fly! If we could get off and catch up with the rest of the group, we could go. Keerist! You'd think we were going on a picnic instead of a deadly bomb run.

We're off, climbing through the grey overcast to find the sun at 20,000 plus. Where is everyone? Jesus! - We're all alone, We'll never make it -- but we try. Soon, far out over the Adriatic, we spot the rest of the group and try to catch up. We are heading for Blechhammer - the oil refineries - the dreaded target - No. 2 on the list, right after Berlin. The second toughest, and the longest distance from Foggia. All of a sudden I'm feeling cold. What the hell, my electric suit must be going out. Keerist! It's freezing! About this time, I look out the left waist window and see the group way off to our left. I'm wondering to myself what the hell they are doing way over there, and here we are flying tail-end Charlie when we should be right wing (as we had worked our way up) but, having left the ground late due to magneto trouble, we had to settle for what we could grab and that was easing into the slot at the ass end.

I couldn't help but think about what we had been through, all the previous missions, all the flak, all the tension, watching the others go down, fail to come back, working our way up from tail-end Charlie to right wing. Boy! Only one more to go and we would be squadron leader! I recalled the first few days when I talked with some of the crews that had been here for

awhile. We were talking about R&R (that's short for "rest and rehabilitation"). It was a known fact that our rest camp was on the Isle of Capri, on the far side of Italy from where we were. So, I innocently asked - "Well, how is it on the Isle of Capri - how's the wine - what are the girls like?" He laughs, and remarks, "Who knows? No one has ever lasted long enough to get their 25 missions in and go!" It didn't take long to find out what the score was. Day by day crews didn't come back - and now we were heading for the same fate, although we didn't know it then.

So here I am, freezing to death I thought, and wondering how come we're all alone - when over the intercom comes Joe's voice, "Fighters! Here they come!" Almost immediately his exclamation was followed by the sound and reverberation of his guns. I'm looking out the waist window but can't see any fighters as they were to my rear and high, but it wasn't more than three or four seconds from the time Joe yelled when it sounded like rain on a tin roof, and the 20mm shells from the fighters were ripping through the roof of the plane, missing Putt-putt and me by inches, and exploding into the forward part of the plane. The oxygen bottles on the deck near the bomb bay doors blew up and caught fire. I was encased in a sheet of flame, my clothes were on fire. The aircraft took a violent lunge upward. I was knocked flat to the bottom of the plane and momentarily stunned. You see, Putt-putt and I, being waist gunners, just stood up - we were not sitting in a seat or turret, strapped down with safety belts - so with any violent maneuvers of the aircraft we found ourselves hanging on for dear life or being thrown around like rag dolls. Now I was on my knees looking for my parachute, the interior of the plane was a mass of fire. I found my chute (it was a chest pack and I had to snap it on the harness which I was wearing). It seemed like hours - I couldn't lift it - it felt like a ton. Little did I realize then that we were in a flat spin, and I was under negative "G" forces.

I finally managed to get the chute snapped to the harness and then, just as I dove head first through the waist window, I saw Putt-putt standing there watching me and assumed that he followed. I hadn't wasted any time once I was able to move. I just knew I had to get away from the fire. I didn't even take the time to disconnect my oxygen mask, intercom, or

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electrical suit. In the ensuing dive through the window I just ripped everything loose as the slack in all the wires was taken up. My oxygen mask was torn from my face. Due to the centrifugal force I didn't clear the side of the aircraft and my left foot was caught on the window sill. I kicked back with my right foot and suddenly I was free - - falling through the bright sunshine. Pulling the ripcord was an involuntary act - I don't remember actually doing it. God, it was quiet - so peaceful - so still. I looked around - - nothing - - - no chutes - - - no planes - - - the overcast was way below, no ground in sight, bright sun overhead and clouds below. I couldn't get over how quiet it was; then I began to panic - - it felt like I was just hanging there. There was no sense of motion - nothing close to relate a downward drift to. I just knew I was stuck. How the hell was I going to get down! All of a sudden I found I couldn't breathe! I was in pain! I didn't realize it then, but I was suffering from lack of oxygen. It was a horrible feeling. I couldn't stand it. I wanted to end it - - now! I tried to unsnap my chute. I couldn't do it because of my weight. I wanted to unbuckle my harness and free myself so I could fall free and quick to relieve my misery, but I couldn't get the harness unbuckled either - because of my weight. It was approximately 12:05 PM - - at about 26,000 feet - - I passed out from lack of oxygen.

The next thing I knew, I was under the clouds and coming down near a village. I could see various buildings - - a church spire quite prominently. There was snow on the ground and I saw that I was about to come down in a plowed field on the edge of town. I could see some figures running to where I was about to land. I was coming down backwards. I reached up to shift the risers of the chute to try and turn around -- when I hit the ground. I hadn't realized how fast I was descending and hit the ground unexpectedly, and immediately folded up like an accordion. It was probably a lucky thing as I did not brace myself, but landed like a limp rag and, therefore, did not break any bones. I lay there for a few seconds getting my breath back. I wiggled my toes to make sure my back wasn't broken -- it had felt like I had broken every bone in my body. Just as I struggled to my feet I remembered the figures I had noticed running across the field. By now they were close upon me. I

could see they were German soldiers. They were shouting and yelling, "pistola, pistola" and making gestures by holding their hands under their right armpit. They wanted my Colt .45 automatic pistol. We had been issued the pistol and shoulder holster, but were advised not to carry it as it was very unlikely we would be in a position to use it. Generally, the situation was such that an armed airman was treated badly by the Germans - as opposed to better treatment for an unarmed airman. Anyway, the German soldiers were having a foot race to see who could get to me first and get my pistol. I suppose I should say, at this point in my story, that I could have "John Wayne'd" it and pulled out my .45 pistol and shot the first five or six soldiers - - like in the movies -- and then stood there while the rest shot me full of holes; but then I wouldn't be here writing this story - would I? You see, I had landed just across the road from a German army camp, and had literally thousands of soldiers to welcome me to their country. The first soldier to reach me was disappointed to find no pistol, so he took my helmet instead. The helmet and my parachute was all they took. I was not molested in any way.

I was then escorted to the Commandant's office, where I received a cordial welcome and had a nice chat with the Commandant - who, by the way, spoke fluent English. I had bailed out at 12:01 PM. It was 29 minutes later when I hit the ground - 12:30 PM when I had first glanced at my watch. It is now almost 1:00 PM, and the Commandant has offered me a cigarette and a glass of brandy. I'm sitting there petting his big Irish setter and feeling relaxed and free. It is just beginning to penetrate my senses that the war is over - - for me anyway - - selfish though it may sound. I tell the Commandant my name, rank and serial number - discuss my home and family, and exchange a few pleasantries. No military or vital security information was discussed whatsoever. After a few moments, I noticed him looking at me rather oddly, as if he were worried about something. He picked up his phone and made a short call. About this time my eyes were beginning to feel rather strange - a tight sensation - no pain, but a feeling as though I couldn't blink my eyes. A moment later the door opened and a doctor entered. He gave me a

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brief examination and spoke to the Commandant in German. I did not know what he said. The doctor left in a few minutes, and no sooner had he gone than two soldiers, in full uniforms, with Schmeiser machine pistols, appeared and the Commandant said they would escort me to town. He wished me well, we shook hands and I was off. The town center was about three miles away, and we walked. We had walked several hundred yards before my thoughts brought me recollections of stories we had heard about the Germans. The farmers would stick you to death with their pitchforks - - the doctors had enormous hypodermic needles to fill you with poison - - the soldiers would march you to a remote spot in the forest and shoot you - - and on and on -- my imagination ran rampant with all the thoughts. I was positive these two soldiers were going to kill me. They spoke no English and I no German. They would motion and point with their machine pistols the direction I was to take. Right into the woods, along a narrow and isolated path - - this was it - - I just knew it! At first they were along side , one on each side; presently, they were talking among themselves and were slowly getting behind me. The slower they walked, the slower I walked. I wasn't about to let them get behind so they could shoot me.

Well, it wasn't long before the path widened and we were on a road. A few houses appeared and then the town. I was taken to what looked like a school (at any rate, it was very similar in appearance to the grammar school I had attended when a child). They took me into the kitchen - a huge area that had been turned into a makeshift first aid area. I received another brief examination, and then appeared the dreaded hypodermic needle. I swear it looked to be about two feet long and four inches in diameter. It was a size I had never seen before, but I was assured it was only a tetanus shot. Next I was ushered into the auditorium where there were about two dozen airmen, none of whom I had seen before. It was now about 3:00 PM, and I sat there wondering what would be next. About every 15 to 30 minutes, two or more airmen would be brought in. The room was slowly filling up and not one I knew appeared. I was beginning to wonder, "Christ! Did I jump out too soon?" It had been done before. Maybe I'd panicked and left

a crew now on its way home. Then I thought back -- looked at my flying suit (I was quite a sight!). My flying suit was in shreds, blackened from the fire, holes completely burned through in spots. I finally convinced myself I couldn't possibly have been burned like this and the plane still be flying.

About 4:00 PM, they brought us some black bread and coffee (ersatz) which I couldn't eat. I didn't like the taste of either, and I wasn't hungry, later on I would have given anything to have that glorious piece of black bread - which was soon to come to taste like rich cake. My eyes were now beginning to swell shut and I could hardly see. The pain was beginning, and I was slowly comprehending that I was burned worse than I thought. My helmet and oxygen mask had protected my head and face, with the exception of the area around my eyes. My goggles were on my head, riding high on my forehead - they were too uncomfortable to wear (sound familiar?), so my eyes had been burned, and not having access to a mirror I couldn't see the extent. About 5:00 PM, an orderly came up to me and said that when it got good and dark they would put me in an ambulance and take me to a hospital. I think it was about 8:00 PM, when they led me to the ambulance.

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

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### **EPILOGUE**

The aircraft of Crew #14, a B-24 Bomber, 15th AAF, 49th Wing, 461<sup>st</sup> BG, 765th Squadron., flying out of Cerignola, Italy (near Foggia), was shot down by enemy fighters over Troubky, Czechoslovakia at 12:01 PM, December 17, 1944. Upon being hit by enemy 20 mm cannon shells, from either FW-190 or ME-109 German aircraft, it immediately caught fire and within minutes exploded. The main portion of the aircraft with six bodies, crashed near the village of Troubky. Four airmen were able to parachute to safety.

Those who gave their lives were:

West, Thomas K.	1st Lt.	Pilot
Diebert. Thomas E.	S/Sgt.	Top Gunner
Mergo, Joseph G.	S/Sgt.	Tail Gunner
Doe, Roy L.	Sgt.	Nose Gunner
Gaul, Frederick H.	Sgt.	Waist Gunner/Flight Engineer
Vesia, Frank C.	Cpl.	Ball Gunner

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

The four survivors are:

Kasold. Edward	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	Co- pilot
Noesges. Thomas	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	Bombardier
Qualman, Thomas	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.	Navigator
Ross, Trefry A.	S/Sgt.	Waist Gunner/Radio Operator

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

### **IN MEMORIAM**

*From Duluth Newspaper about 1946*

A monument dedicated to the memory of a Duluth youth and five of his companions will show the world that Czechoslovakian patriots have not forgotten how American soldiers fought and died for them. The Duluthian, Sgt. Roy L. Doe, the late son of Mr. and Mrs. L. K. Doe, 128 South Sixth-third Avenue West, will be one of the dead heroes honored on August 15, 1946, when the monument is unveiled in the village of Troubky, Czechoslovakia. When the war department released the meager information regarding the death

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of their son.....(copy of paper unreadable).....rectory of father Nepustil. The Germans ruthlessly stripped the dead fliers of all valuable personal possessions and equipment, and orders were issued to bury the six bodies in a ditch beyond the cemetery.

IT WAS AT THIS POINT that father Nepustil and the Czech patriots vowed to show their appreciation for the sacrifice the Americans had made for them.

After urgent pleading by the townsmen and the village priest, the German command relented and gave permission for a military funeral for the six fliers. Obtaining the willing help of the local casket maker, father Nepustil had individual coffins made

*From a Volin, So. Dakota newspaper approximately 1947. (There was a picture of the monument, i.e., a large upright marble slab, upon which is a bronze figure of Fred Gaul depicting the way he was found on the ground – which has not been reproduced for this book.)*

THIS MEMORIAL DAY PHOTO taken in Troubky, Czechoslovakia, was received recently by Mrs. Walter Koon of Volin from Colonel William H. Bowers, air attache with the American Embassy in Prague. Col. Bowers and his wife, accompanied by his assistant, T/Sgt. Bobrovicz and his family, visited the community cemetery in Troubky to lay a memorial wreath on the grave of Mrs. Koon's son, Lieutenant Thomas Kurtz West, and his crew members who are buried there. The Czechoslovakian Air Force furnished an honor guard of airmen for the occasion, and Col Bowers and Sgt. Bobrovicz placed the wreath on the grave as representatives of the U. S. Government and U.S. Air force.. The small Moravian village is about a six- hour drive from Prague. The colonel writes: "The grave is very well kept and continuing care is provided to it by the cemetery caretaker and the people of Troubky - who take pride in the memorial to your son and his crew mates. Flowers are planted on the grave and a candle is frequently kept burning."



Memorial to the West crew in Czechoslovakia

## Mail Call

Hughes,

Thanks for the story of the old man and the young ladies. Had been going through my copy of your "Al Ataque" and found some passages I had missed the first time through, among them the date that several of us "replacements" joined the 765th. I thought it had been the first of December 1944, but you gave me credit for November. Thanks. On page 344, Mission 181, 22 February 1945 you had recorded six planes were damaged and three men wounded. Yep, those three were my Navigator, Ralph Naven, nose gunner Chick Krause, and yours truly. Flak burst right out there about 11 o'clock level, can still see the red ball in the middle of it. A millisecond later Chick called out, "I'm hit." About the same time my left foot was slammed off the rudder pedal as if someone had hit my foot with a baseball bat, and Ralph came up on deck holding his bloody forehead where some shards from the Plexiglas astrodome had hit him. Prior to those very quick seconds, the lead ship called they were leaving the formation, as I recall, an engine had been shot out. As the deputy lead I moved over into position and just moments later we were hit. Got Chick up on the flight deck for first aid. A piece of flak had penetrated his nose turret, laid open the sleeve of his flying suit to the bare skin, then took the end of his left thumb off at about the first joint below the nail. A bit later my foot began to ache quite a bit, and as I moved my toes back and forth, it hurt, and there was a definite "squishy" sensation. Better have a look see so with the co-pilot flying the ship, I pulled off my boot and sock to find a bloody mess where my big toe had been. One of the guys bandaged it up as well as he could, and in due time returned home. Landed first at Foggia Main where we dropped off Krause for medical attention. The doc there looked at my foot and said my local flight surgeon could take care of me. We reboarded the plane, checked the gear first because the hydraulics had been shot out - gear was manually cranked down prior to landing. We fired up for the quick trip back to Torretta, gear down all the way, co-pilot made a nice landing, and I was transported

to the medics office. He looked at my foot,- he had been an obstetrician in practice before the war, and right away sent me to the field hospital at Bari, several very rough miles away. There I stayed for the next several weeks while the surgeons fixed up my foot, made some skin grafts, and when I was pretty well healed up, sent back to the squadron. The entire crew was then sent to Capri where we enjoyed a couple of weeks away from the war. Went back on operations shortly thereafter and flew only a few more missions until the war was over in Europe. Weeks later, we flew our Mickey Ship, #30, back home to the states, via the South Atlantic. On that same mission, Vahl Vladyka had his right main wheel shot out, and when he landed, the ship veered off the right and came to rest. Everybody out in good shape, as I recall.

Stan Staples



Hughes,

My father told me about the American presence in Cerignola during the second world war. He had a little bar, named "DRINKS", in which he sold wine and other liquor to the Americans and he became friends of a lot of soldiers. He also told me about these man, strong and friendly, and very much appreciated his friendship and his wine too. I have some photos of my father together with some Americans.

My father told me what a fantastic period it was!!! In spite of the war, he really enjoy those years. He appreciated the foods - like chocolate, butter and tinned meat and sugar - because they were poor.

I found your website and I had to write about my father, when he was young.

Thanks for your kind attention and good luck!

Antonello Specchio

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"Drinks" in Cerignola



Hello,

Another member of crew 75 has departed. We are down to 3 now - Anthony Delcollo, of OR; Harry Huggard of FL; and me, Pete Henspeter, of Mesa, AZ. Kenneth Urban of Pewaukee, WI, which is about 10 miles west of Milwaukee, passed away on May 29, 2007, while he was asleep. His six daughters were at his side at the time. He was a member of the 461st Bomb Group, 767th Squadron, crew 75, which was piloted by Harry Huggard and Ralph Keedle. His position was nose turret gunner.

We were on a trip to Weiner Neustadt, Austria. I don't know what position we were flying this day, but it usually was tail end as our plane was called "The Purple Shaft". This was our 18th mission and we encountered heavy flak. Kenny got hit in the foot, so that was the end of his flying, he was in and out of the hospital many times and it never was good after that. Harry, the pilot, told me that the #3 engine got a direct hit and it stopped completely and the #2 was only at half power so #1 and #4 had to take us home. Whenever we got in trouble, Lt. Murphy, navigator, would always say Switzerland heading was \_\_\_\_ degrees, but Kenny's foot needed help, so we headed home. We shot off a red flair and the ambulance met us at landing. I don't know what I

was doing except transferring fuel to #1 and #4 as they were very busy.

Pete Henspeter  
Engineer/Top Turret Gunner



Dear Hughes,

I took part in one of the supply missions from Torretta Field to Lyon, France and return. I remember the take off. I was assigned to start up the "putt-putt" and shut it off when we were airborne. I was below the flight deck near the nose wheel when I heard a voice chanting "We're not going to make it. We're not going to make it." as we thundered down the landing strip runway. When we finally lifted off, the voice stopped which was a relief.

When we landed at Lyon we taxied down to our parking area and began unloading our cargo of 55 gallon drums of high octane gasoline, 9 500 pound RDX bombs and boxes of ammunition for General Patton's army engaged in the Battle of the Bulge.

While all this was going on I noticed a fighter plane warming up close by and facing the runway where our bombers were landing and taxiing down near us. I was all alone and watched as he fighter plane revved up his engine and taxied in the direction of the parking bombers. Lo and behold he goosed his engine and tried to take off in the direction of the oncoming bombers. As he started to leave the ground he headed toward an oncoming B-24, misjudged his distance, and peeled off the #4 engine of the B-24. The fighter aircraft shot straight up for about 500 feet and suddenly came straight down and hit the ground head first. A short time later the pilot raised the canopy over his head and jumped out of the cockpit and landed on the ground and walked away.

We had a nice flight back to our home base and I thought I had a busy day.

Les Toleen  
766<sup>th</sup> Squadron





Crew 46 Hammer Field, Fresno 1943

Top L-R: English, James (B); Coffee, Joseph (N); Larsen, Hilmer W. (CP); Baumann, Edwin (P)

Bottom L-R: Griffith, Joseph R. (TG); Forester, Robert L. (AG); Galin, Herman W. (NG); Laughlin, Robert D. (R) Millet, Sidney M. Jr. (FE)

## **Part One**

### **Incident # 1:**

One day in the fall of year 1943 while we were undergoing training as the newly formed 461st Bomb Group, Colonel Glantzberg selected me for a formation flying check ride. As was his custom, he flew with each crew under his command to ascertain first hand how well the pilots could fly close formation. This day he decided to fly with my crew as my co-pilot and we would rendezvous with another B-24 flown by another pilot and crew. That other pilot in command was Paul Mowery. Our check rides went well. I would fly formation with Mowery as the lead plane, sometimes I was directed to

fly on Mowery's left wing then on his right after which we would reverse rolls and Mowery would fly on either our right or left wing while the Colonel observed how well we performed, and I'm sure he mentally graded us. When the Colonel was satisfied with our performances we were directed to return to Hammer Field and land. Mowery was to lead the way with our plane in trail position. Mowery touched down and was rolling on the runway when suddenly about halfway to the end his plane veered abruptly to the right and came to a violent stop at the side of the runway and was standing almost vertically with the nose buried in the dirt and its tail in the air.

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Both Colonel Glantzberg and myself witnessed the whole event. He exploded with an expletive then immediately called the tower and told them to send a staff car to meet him at the end of the runway. I landed and stopped and he got in the staff car and raced to the accident scene. As it turned out, no one was seriously injured and the cause of the accident was a collapsed nose gear. Mowery was not blamed for the accident. In fact, Colonel Glantzberg had a very high opinion of Mowery and the accident did not alter that opinion.

### **Incident # 2:**

This incident is humorous while at the same time illustrating some of the strain crew members were under during pre-combat training at Hammer Field.

There was a shortage of officer accommodations at Hammer Field, Fresno so some crew officers slept in a upstairs open floor barracks. Among these officers were my crew and Mowery's. In fact, the eight of us had bunks across from each other, Mowery and his officers on one side of the isle and with my three officers and myself on the other side.

One night after we had all been asleep for a while Mowery's navigator, George Reed, had a nightmare and started screaming in his sleep, "We are going to crash! We are going to crash!"

Most of us were instantly awoken by this outburst. Mowery opened his eyes and the first thing he saw was a red clearance light outside the barrack window and he immediately yelled, "There is not enough altitude left to pull it out!"

Upon hearing this, Mowery's co-pilot, George Owens, hopped out of bed and frantically waved his arms beneath it shouting, "I can't find my parachute! I can't find my parachute!"

Talk about the power of suggestion! Someone turned on the lights and we all had a good laugh.

### **Incident # 3:**

This mission was the Groups seventh mission and was against the Duna A/C Plant in Budapest. This was the mission where the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group earned its first Unit Citation. We carried RDX bombs which unlike TNT bombs, would explode even if a fuses were defective. On this mission Colonel Glantzberg flew in the lead plane of the second section so that he could observe how

well the first section flew in formation. As a result I believe he was in a position to witness everything that I am about to relate. 1st Lt. Charles Bauman, was flying the deputy lead position in A-Flight of the second section, and thus was in the number 2 flight position. Mowery was in position number four and I was in the number 6 position. Shortly before we reached the target two ME-110s fired unguided rockets at our formation and one of them struck Charles Bauman's left wing essentially destroying much of it thus causing his plane to roll to the left and smash against the right side of Mowery's B-24. Both airplanes quickly disappeared from my horrified sight and I assumed that all crew members on each ship were goners.

Some months later I learned part of the rest of the story as told below.

One day while a Prisoner of War in Germany I chanced to meet a fellow prisoner who was none other than, George Reed, the Navigator of Mowery's crew. He told me what happened after the collision of the two planes. He said that Mowery's co-pilot, George Owens, was killed instantly from the impact. All other crew members bailed out but Mowery was so close to the ground when he jumped that his chute did not fully open and he was killed when he hit the ground. The other eight members were relatively uninjured but were quickly captured by Hungarians and transported to a civilian jail somewhere in Budapest.

That very same night the British launched a night bombing mission on Budapest. All of the city including the jail was blacked-out. As the bombs fell, one of the jail guards went berserk and came to the American's cell and sprayed bullets throughout the blacked-out space. Fortunately, because of the air raid, all Americans were laying flat on the floor and none was hit.

Talk about jumping from the frying pan into the fire!

### **Part Two**

My crew #46 was on the Group's seventh mission which was over the Duna A/C Components Factory Budapest Hungary on April 13, 1944. Crew members aboard were Baumann, Edwin (P); Larson, Hilmer W (CP); Coffee, Joseph L.(N); English, James (B); Griffith, Joseph R. (TG); Forester, Robert L (AG); Galin, Herman W. (NG); Laughlin, Robert D. (R); Millet, Sidney M. Jr. (FE). We

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flew to the target area in group formation without difficulty. My plane was in position 6 of A Flight of the second section. As we neared the target we experienced some air action.

"Two ME-110s have slipped in under our fighters!" a quiet voice interposed on the intercom. "They are far out at seven o'clock low but they seem to be heading this way." It was Tech Sergeant Forester, as usual not the least excited by the danger that surrounded us.

"Keep an eye on them!" ordered co-pilot Lars Larson. "But keep scanning for others, too."

We bomber crews did not have much fear of the Messerschmitt 110s because these twin engine airplanes were too large and without sufficient maneuverability to be highly effective air to air fighters. We crew members could not know, of course, that these particular enemy planes were equipped with air-to-air unguided rockets.

Suddenly in front of me the sky seemed filled with falling debris. Out of the corner of my eye I saw what appeared to be a body fall in front of our aircraft but it probably was an engine since it hurtled downward with great speed. I was still mildly shocked by the brief but unexpected storm of debris when I was horrified to see an almost instantaneous disintegration of the wing tip section of the number 2 airplane in my flight. One moment number 2 was roaring along as a complete airplane and then without any warning or visible explosion it was minus thirty feet or so of its left wing. I could not know it at the time but a rocket from one of the ME-110s had found its mark. This bomber was piloted by 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Charles Bauman.

Fatally crippled, the bomber rolled suddenly to the left as the greater lift of the intact wing exerted its force. The roll was swift and inexorable. I believe there were eleven men on that plane (an intelligence officer was aboard) and were about to die. As the right wing of the rolling plane swung upward it appeared to me that the stricken craft was about to cross over the formation and sweep back into our number six position. Responding quickly, I pulled back hard on the control wheel in order to lift our ship clear of our buddy's crippled craft. But as I and the other stunned crew members watched, the doomed B-24 reached a vertical bank and then plunged heavily into the right side of the number four airplane piloted by Mowery. This B-24 was in the number 4 position. The impact was devastating and both aircraft plummeted quickly out of

sight leaving the four remaining planes of the flight scattered in a loose formation. The rocket hit was probably a one in a thousand shot.

Before I had recovered enough to pull back into a tighter formation, my left wing dropped alarmingly. I swiftly applied full right turn on the control wheel with a coordinated rudder movement but there was no response from the bomb laden aircraft. Our plane continued to roll to the left and my efforts to counter the roll were to no avail. A sickening thought overwhelmed my conscious mind. The all too fresh vision of the smashed wing on the number two ship appeared to explain our own situation. My mind jumped to the conclusion that our plane had also lost part of its left wing.

"This is it! We've had it! Here is where we buy the farm!"

These thoughts coursed through my stunned mind as the picture of what was now transpiring became fantastically clear. As had happened to the number two aircraft in our flight, so also our plane had lost a large segment of left wing! Now it was rolling uncontrollably and soon we would plunge heavily into the ground. Lars, as well, was in a state of shock from what he had just witnessed but because he was not now flying the plane, he did not realize the loss of control that I experienced. He sat in his seat, momentarily overwhelmed with shock, staring straight ahead. Other crew members had also observed the sudden loss of two of the planes in our formation, especially the nose gunner, navigator and right waist gunner, but because they could do nothing to control our craft, their reactions were those of horrified spectators.

Through all this I still fought the controls in an obviously futile attempt to right the rolling aircraft. Not consciously of course, but instinctively, as my pilots training had conditioned my brain to respond. My stunned thoughts were on our certain fate, but my physical reactions were continuously directed toward regaining control of the recalcitrant aircraft.

I was in this state when abruptly an amazing thing happened. Our plane refused to plunge to the ground. Instead, slowly but steadily, the left wing rose until I once again had full control. Although still under some shock I soon realized what had taken place. In pulling back on the control column I had forced the plane to climb which in turn had allowed us to penetrate the slip stream of the

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number three aircraft in front of us. The powerful vortices generated by that heavily laden bomber destroyed lift on the port wing of our plane resulting in the uncontrollable roll to the left. Finally, however, the roll plus loss of total lift caused the plane to lose sufficient altitude to pass under the turbulent wake of the number three plane and once more control was restored to normal.

But I had no time to speculate on this misinterpretation of previous events. It was necessary for me to get back into a tight formation as soon as possible. I shoved the throttle hard forward and slipped below and inside the number 3 plane and then aimed for the recently vacated number 4 slot. Simultaneously the number 5 plane eased forward to occupy the now empty number 2 position.

"Fighters on our tail! Closing fast!" Sergeant Griffith's excited voice erupted from the intercom. I quickly accelerated my efforts at closing the gap on the number one airplane. I moved the plane well into the number 4 position just behind and slightly below the lead ship. I could clearly see the busy tail gunner of the ship in front as not more than ten feet separated the two aircraft at their closest points. Both the ball and tail turret guns on the lead plane were firing over the top of the our plane. Ejected cartridge cases from both turrets swept back toward our trailing B-24. Almost miraculously the ones from the tail turret coursed above our airplane while those from the ball turret poured by underneath in dramatic testimony to fear induced skillful formation flying.

I could feel the vibrations induced by the various fifty caliber machine guns on our B-24 as the gunners fired repeated bursts at the pursuing fighters. The Axis pilots had eagerly pounced in for the kill as soon as they had observed the bomber flight scatter after the rocket hit. But so quickly did we Americans regroup that, by the time these fighters closed to within good machine gun range, the bombers were flying as one. We were so close that from the fighters vantage point we seemed almost to touch. Now our combined fire power was formidable. Eight two gun turrets were tracking and firing repeatedly at the closing enemy.

It was during a particularly heavy burst from the tail turret of the number one bomber that I saw the head of our navigator, Joe Coffee, appear in the plastic bubble astrodome, the night time window to the stars used for celestial navigation. Coffee stared intently at the lead ship and then slowly withdrew his head back into the nose

compartment. Then almost as if by prearranged signal, a shower of spent fifty caliber cartridge cases from the tail turret swept back at our plane directly toward the pilots compartment windshield. Both Lars and I involuntarily ducked our steel helmeted heads. A good measure of the accuracy of our formation flying was the fact that the spent cartridge cases shattered only the center panel of the windshield half way between myself and Lars. Instantly a chill blast of air rammed through the broken center pane. As I quickly looked up and eased the plane downward slightly I noted that the astrodome was also shattered.

"Report damage." I ordered over the intercom. A feeling of concern for Joe Coffee was quickly dispelled by the navigators excited report.

"Navigator to pilot! I'm okay but the astrodome is gone!"

"Nose turret to pilot, my plexiglas is broken but the glass slab is only scratched." Sergeant Herman Galin drawled.

The slab he referred to was the two inch thick bullet proof piece of glass that protected the nose gunner. This heavy flat slab was enclosed within a streamlined aerodynamic faring of transparent plastic that the airmen called Plexiglas.

I expelled my breath in a sigh of relief for the fact that neither men nor aircraft had received serious injury. I felt somewhat chagrined that I had placed this aircraft in a position to be struck by the ejected shell cases. However, damage to the plane was minor and while the frigid draft blowing in the nose and pilot compartments caused some discomfort, the effect on the crew's ability to complete the mission was negligible.

"Tail turret to pilot, the bastards are turning away! We scared them off--I hope! They closed to about six hundred yards then veered away!"

The rest of this mission was anticlimactic. We flew unscathed through flack and dropped our bombs over the target and then flew home without further problem. I believe that Colonel Glantzberg, who was flying in the lead plane of the second section, witnessed the incident because at the after flight briefing he commended the pilot of the number 5 airplane and myself for our quick reaction and good flying after the loss of the two aircraft in our flight.



Here is the picture of #19, taken at Dakar on June 3, 1945 while on the way back to the USA. The people in the photo include Perry Brockman sitting against the wheel, Clyde Bowsby standing in front, and Dan Levin (the navigator) sitting in the pilot's seat. If you take a close look at the 19, you will see a number of patches as a result of flak hits. This is also the same plane mentioned in Mission #163 to the Brod Railroad Bridge that caught fire. Dad put out the fire and Maj. Mixon told him that he has been watching him because, if he went out the bomb bay, Mixon was going to be right behind him.

#19 had joined the squadron shortly after Dad (Oct, 1944) and was originally designed as a night intruder and Mickey ship. The props had been coated with a black tar, which was supposed to aid in de-icing. After a pilot complained that he couldn't stay in formation with all the tar on the props, they were immediately cleaned off. Dad had also been told he could expect to take the plane out on night missions because he had so much more flight time than other pilots when he joined the squadron, but they stopped flying night missions shortly thereafter.

Dad told me that, while Trommershausser was away, he had to go up to Group for a briefing on what to do to get home. They were told that under no circumstances was anyone to buzz the field when they left, or they would be brought back for court martial. Dad told Trommer-

shausser, but he just smiled. Sure enough, when they left, Trommershausser buzzed the field. When they landed at Gioia, they were told Torretta called to have them sent back for court martial, but they had talked them out of it and they were allowed to continue on home.

The whole crew went home except for the co-pilot who was shot down flying with Lt. Baird and the nose gunner who was shot down flying with Lt. Toothman in Miss Lace. Both were captured, but survived the war.

I would add one point here. There had been a directive that the Engineer be assigned to the waist position because of the tendency for the top turret to get hit. Dad tried that for a few missions before putting the Engineer back in the top turret where he could get at him if needed. On one mission a fuel line was punctured by flak and the bomb bay filled with gas. He needed the Engineer to shut off fuel to the correct engine immediately.

Well, this is about all I know about the plane. Hopefully someone may know more, or even have a tail number. I know it's a long shot, but you never know.

Thanks for your help,

Chuck Parsonson  
c\_parsonson@yahoo.com



Shaw crew #63-1 in 1944

**Standing L-R:** Budimir, John D. Jr. (LWG); Flanagan, John (N); Shaw, Stockton B. (P); Harley, Leo M. (TG); Benbow, Robert 'Bob' (RO/RW)

**Kneeling L-R:** Lolli, Alfred M. Sr. 'Al' (B); Kimsey, Alden F. (Asst. RO/BG); Lilly, Gilbert M. 'Gib' (E/TT); Seiler, Donald L. 'Don' (Asst. E/NG)

Just a note. We would love to come to the reunion. Don is still on his feet, but his hips and legs are too weak to make the trip. Here's a picture of his crew, "Cerignola, Italy 1944-1945". Don remembers the little bar "Drink". He was 18 years old at the time. We were in the Tarrytown reunion in 1987 and found most of the crew and we have met many times since – two times at the museum in Dayton, OH and also at Niagara Falls. What nice people you all are.

We really regret not being able to come to the reunion this year and see everyone. Here's the picture of he crew taken in Dayton, OH in 1989.

Have a great time in St. Louis. We will be thinking about you all.

Margaret Seiler  
Mechanicsburg, PA



Shaw crew #63-1 in Dayton, OH in 1989

**Standing L-R:** Budimir, John D. Jr. (LWG); Flanagan, John (N); Shaw, Stockton B. (P); Harley, Leo M. (TG); Benbow, Robert 'Bob' (RO/RW)

**Kneeling L-R:** Lolli, Alfred M. Sr. 'Al' (B); Seiler, Donald L. 'Don' (Asst. E/NG)



## 461ST BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)

P.O. Box 926  
Gunnison, CO 81230

Phone: (970) 209-2788  
Email: [editor@461st.org](mailto:editor@461st.org)



We're on the web!  
Visit  
[www.461st.org](http://www.461st.org)

## Webmaster Comments

The 461st website is becoming stable. I'm receiving less and less material to post there. There is still a lot that could go on the website so if you have something that might be of interest to others, please send it in. I can't promise I'll post it, but if I can find a place for it, I will.

I continue to receive material for the Liberaider, but I can always use more. The most common note I receive is "I have \_\_\_\_\_. If you think it is worthwhile, I'll send you a copy." There's no need to ask. I welcome any and all material. The stories you men have are invaluable. No one else can tell your stories and your stories need to be told. Every story, no matter how small or insignificant you think it is, is a piece of the history of the 461st. Putting all these stories together makes the history of the 461st more complete. Please take the time to send in your

story and contribute to this vital history.

We now have a number of children in the Association. This is great. It means the Association will continue for many more years. But the children have stories to tell as well. You've listened to the stories your father told you as you were growing up. You can share those stories with others by sending them in to me.

We now have another book about the 461st in the works. "*Music Bravely Ringing*" is written by Martin Rush, a pilot in the 767th Squadron. He took a fresh look at his experiences. He tells of his enlistment, training and finally deployment. I worked with Martin in getting his book ready for publication and I can tell you once you start reading it, you will find it hard to put it down. His book is now at the publisher and should be available early next year.