



The 461st

Liberaider



Vol. 25, No. 2

DECEMBER 2008

SOMEWHERE IN THE USA

461st 2008 Reunion Dayton, OH

Thursday, October 9,
was arrival and
check in day.

The registration table
was open all day as
was the hospitality
room with refresh-
ments and display
table. Hughes' slide
show was also run-
ning in the hospital-
ity room.

A brief meeting was
held at 7:00.

(Continued on page 4)

Diary of Thomas Noesges

Thomas M. Noesges
Bombardier
1944
Fifteenth Air Force
49th Bomb Wing
461st Bomb Group (H)
765th Bomb Squadron
Crew 38-1
Torretta Field
Cernigola, Italy

Saturday, 4 November
Augsburg, Germany
Railroad Marshaling Yards
26,000'; -39° C.
96 heavy anti-aircraft guns, flak intense
but inaccurate
No enemy fighters
Escort: 105 P-38s
Undercast 10/10 at 12,000' over target
Duration: 8 hours 25 minutes
Bomb load: Six 500# RDX
Credit: 2 missions

(Continued on page 9)

The Flight Engineer

by
W. J. Kelleher
Ex Capt. USAF

My crew included a flight engineer that was a cut above most commissioned men. Initially, his rank was sergeant but I had him promoted two grades higher by the end of our 35 missions. Jack was from Oakland, CA where he was a member of the fire department. Although he was a 23 years old, he was a handsome guy with black curly hair, bright blue eyes and a cool confident air about him. He was the accepted leader of the other 5

enlisted men in the crew - the nose gunner and assistant flight engineer, the top turret gunner, the belly turret, the radio operator, and the tail gunner. Here are 5 incidents, which occurred, during our missions in which Jack played significant roles.

The Pitot Tube Story

There was a small tube that protruded from the B-24 up towards the nose of the plane. When the plane is in flight the air rushing into the small opening at the front of the plane creates pres-

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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>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>DOD</u>
Best, George S.	Philomath, OR	612	09/12/2008
Bray, Earle R. Sr.	Roslyn, PA	888	03/01/2007
Levin, Daniel I.	Canton, PA	1038	07/30/2008
Peterson, Gail M.	Spencer, IA	1038	06/27/2007

765th Squadron

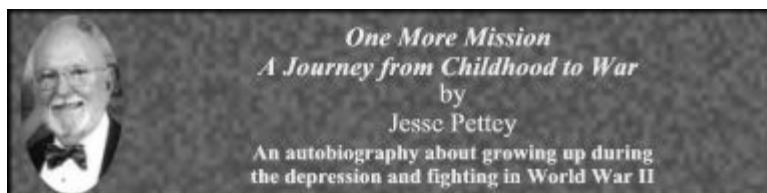
<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>DOD</u>
Naven, Ralph E.	Pekin, IL	1034	09/17/2007
Scanlon, Robert L.	Wyandotte, MI	748	10/04/2004

766th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>DOD</u>
Blatz, Paul E.	Ivins, UT	1034	07/03/2008
Peace, Robert C.	Reyoldsville, PA	612	04/30/2002
Yates, Thomas L.	Harlingen, TX	748	04/10/2006

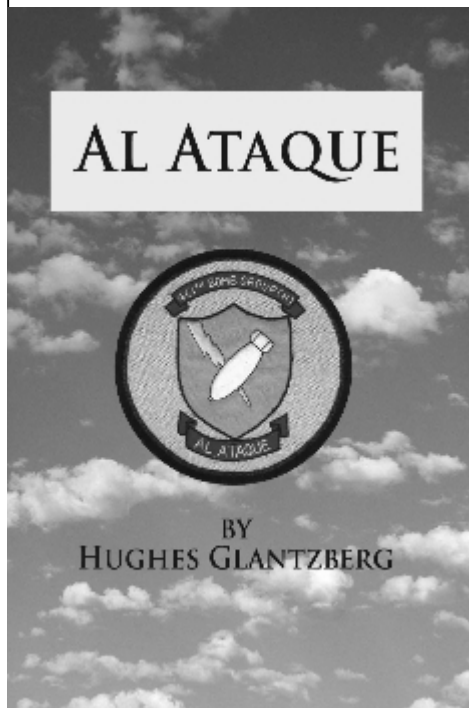
767th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>DOD</u>
Grimstead, Edward G. Jr.	Venice, FL	1034	
Safe, Carl A.	Palm Desert, CA	813	05/20/2007
Waning, LeRoy E.	Nobleboro, ME	612	07/10/2008



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)

Friday, October 10

This was an early day for those who wanted to take the opportunity to climb into the restored B-24 at the Air Force Museum. Three buses took off at 7:40 for the museum. The veterans were able to climb into the B-24. There were photographs taken and, afterward, the families enjoyed being able to peek inside the plane and take pictures.



Veterans visiting the Strawberry Bitch B-24

The rest of the day was spent by many exploring the rest of the museum or at least as much of the museum as possible. We spent the entire time allotted there but felt like we only lightly sampled what was available. Some took the tour of the presidential planes and restoration area that was on a separate part of the base. Others enjoyed the IMAX offerings available.

Friday evening was the Squadron Dinner which was held in one room as was done last year. The hotel put out a great buffet and we enjoyed the company of our table companions. A majority of the members were still visiting long after the food had been cleared.

Saturday, October 11

The buses left at 9:00 on this day and the first stop was the Wright Cycle Complex and the Wright-

Dunbar Interpretive Complex. The Cycle Complex was interesting as it displayed the importance and popularity of bikes at the turn of the century. The Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center had many remarkable exhibits and a really interesting movie which chronicled the Wright brothers' journey from start to finish in developing the airplane. It was a great film, very enlightening and really brought their efforts to life.



The Dayton Aviation Heritage Center

We then stopped for lunch and shopping at the Webster/Second Street Public Markets. It was a fairly small complex but fun to walk through and everyone had plenty of time for lunch.



Second Street Public Markets

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Next stop was a trip to the Huffman Prairie flying field where the Wright brothers flew and perfected their flying machine. It was interesting to see their rebuilt shed where the planes were housed and the catapult that launched the flying machines.

Last but not least was a stop at the Esther Price Candy Company where many purchased candy after trying generous samples of a variety of chocolates. Yummy!

That evening was the Group Banquet with a sit down dinner. The music was from the 40's and soft enough so that more visiting could be done without shouting. During the Group dinner, Martin Rush told funny stories about making it this far in life and about the importance of making people feel good about themselves. He is the author of a book about his WWII experiences, Music Bravely Ringing. After dinner, there was music and dancing and many folks enjoyed the opportunity to visit late into the evening.

Sunday, October 12

Our last function, all too soon, was the Memorial Breakfast which was another buffet. Al spoke

briefly and thanked everyone for coming and those who helped put the weekend together. The Wright Patterson Air Force Base Color Guard Unit presented the colors. Gene Brock led us in song. Jesse Pettey recounted his Christmas/New Year's holiday in 1944/1945 from his book, One More Mission. Mary Jo Hayes and Jim Watson read the names of those no longer with us. Retired Air Force Chaplain, Rev. Dr. David Cottrill gave an address and closing prayer. And Al St. Ives spoke briefly and hopes to see us all next year.



Sunday morning Memorial Breakfast

It seemed like the weekend was over all too soon. In a flash, we were saying goodbye to new friends and old friends. See you next year in Tulsa!

Minutes from General Meeting September 28, 2007

Al St. Ives called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm with the Pledge Allegiance to the Flag.

He introduced the Board of Directors:

Vice President – Leonard Bathurst
 Treasurer – Dave St. Ives
 HQ – Nye Norris
 764 – John Taphorn (sick w/pneumonia)
 765 – Open
 766 – David Fellman
 767 – Billy Harris

Glenda Price was appointed the Recording Secretary.

Minutes will be published in the Liberaider.

Treasurer's report will be published in the Liberaider.

The Historian is currently Frank O'Bannon. Hughes Glantzberg was nominated/appointed as Assistant Historian.

Reunion Committee Chair - David Blake

Editor – Hughes Glantzberg

Dave Blake spoke about the weekend agenda and where people were to meet before the tours, etc.

Hughes Glantzberg spoke about the website, Liberaider, historian package from UPS, some document boxes, 461st material he obtained and another box.

He went through the history of the Liberaider. The first copy was December 2001. It was 12 pages. June of 2002 was 24 pages. It has been 40 + pages since then. Dave Blake prints the Liberaider and

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gets it mailed out.

New Business

The By-Laws were printed in the December 2006 Liberaider. 710 letters were sent out. 36 responses approved and 1 response was negative. The By-Laws were approved.

Audit of Treasurer—Al is checking with Bob Hayes about auditing the financials.

The 765th will have to nominate a new representative.

Al St. Ives introduced his crew chief, Ross Crecelius.

He introduced his VP, Len Bathurst.

He talked about communicating their stories, etc.

One member (I didn't get the name) spoke against the By-Laws. Children of members can vote but he wanted to offer Life Membership to the children. There was some discussion and the dues of \$10/year were mentioned.

Next year's reunion was discussed. Cities mentioned include:

Memphis, TN
Dayton, OH
Tulsa, OK
Omaha, NE
Little Rock, AR

Memphis was the first choice with Dayton second.

Respectfully submitted (very late!),
Glenda Price

Minutes from General Meeting October 9, 2008

Al St. Ives called the meeting to order at 7:08 pm in the Sycamore IV room at the Holiday Inn North – Dayton, Ohio.

As per the approved changes to the By-Laws, all members and their offspring are now eligible to vote and hold office.

Bob Hayes was introduced and discussed the upcoming two years. While officers are elected on even years and the Board is elected on odd years, the current officers were appointed last year in 2007. A motion to keep the current officers and Board through 2010 was made by Bob Hayes and seconded by Hughes Glantzberg. There was no further discussion. The motion was approved.

Hughes Glantzberg was introduced. He talked about the Liberaider and the possibility of bequeaths or pledges to the 461st to help grow the current treasury.

David Krause asked about changes to the By-Laws, specifically, the possibility of children of members being able to pay a one time lifetime membership fee. Bob Hayes addressed the concern and whether it was economically feasible in light of children's ages. No

action was taken.

Dave Blake spoke about the sites and next year's selection of Tulsa, OK. During his visit to this city (Wichita, KS and Kansas City, MO were also explored), when he went to the Tulsa Air and Space Museum, he saw an exhibit being developed specifically dedicated to the B-24, Tusamerican, the 461st Bomb Group and the 765th Squadron. He thought this was also too relevant to not bring Tulsa to the top of the list.

Vice-President Len Bathurst was introduced. He spoke about the duties of the board and being grateful for the work of the Board and committees. He thanked the membership and committee for the opportunity to continue with the reunion.

Hughes Glantzberg was given the floor again. He made mention of the three books advertised in the last Liberaider. All are available at the reunion along with the opportunity to have the authors sign their books for buyers.

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,
Glenda Price

A Note from the Reunion Committee Chairperson

First of all, I would like to thank everyone who attended the reunion this year in Dayton and also those who wanted to attend but could not. I hope all of you had as much fun as I did. By all accounts the reunion went as smoothly as one can. I look forward to seeing you all again in Tulsa, Oklahoma next October 8-11. A highlight of our reunion next fall will be a visit to the Tulsa Air and Space Museum where we will see the exhibit dedicated to the B-24 "Tulsamerican", the 461st and 765th Squadron. The Tulsamerican was the last B-24 built at the Douglas plant in Tulsa and was paid for by the employees of Douglas through a war bond effort. This exhibit is impressive and is being expanded in the coming months. The staff at the museum there is excited about the prospect of a visit from the 461st. So make plans now to attend next year for what will hopefully be a special time in Tulsa.

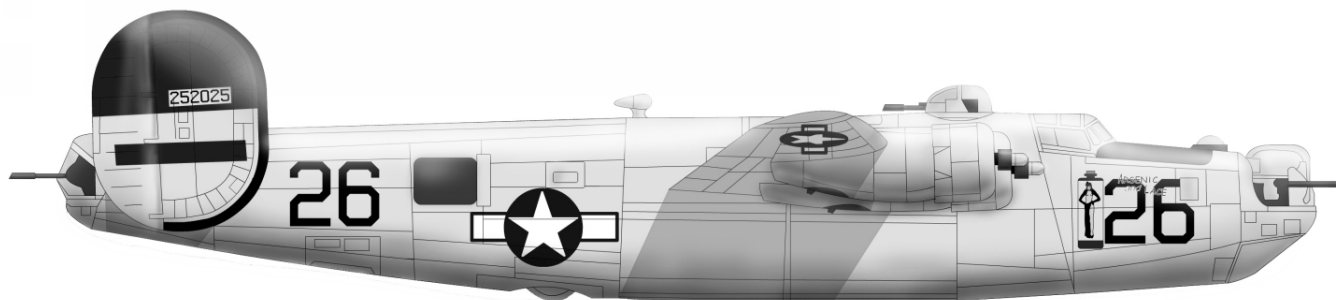
Also, several notes of thanks are in order. Some of you no doubt noticed the brand new American display flag that was used for the first time in Dayton. Prior to this reunion, the group did not have an American flag to display along with our Group flag. This new flag, pole and stand was purchased and donated to the Group by Bruce VanRietten, one of our

newer members (he's also a member of the reunion committee) and we owe him a real debt of gratitude as these display flag sets are not cheap to buy! Also special thanks are due Linda Titus and Barbara Alden who were on duty running the hospitality room just about any time the doors were open and to Mary Jo Hayes for the lovely table decorations. Likewise we thank Martin Rush for sharing his humor with us at the Saturday evening banquet and Jesse Pettey for sharing some of his experiences with us at the Memorial Breakfast. Last but not least, I'd like to thank Hughes Glantzberg for donating a notebook computer to the Group for use in planning and running our reunions. It will be most helpful.

I plan to create a "scrapbook" of pictures from the reunion in Dayton for you all to look at in Tulsa next year. If you have any digital pictures that you think are particularly good, I'd appreciate your emailing them to me at daveblake@rocketmail.com.

See you in Tulsa!

Dave Blake
Chairperson
Reunion Committee



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

Officers:

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Leonard Bathurst, Vice President, 2330 Alluvial Avenue, Clovis, CA 93612
Dave St. Yves, Treasurer, 5 Hutt Forest Lane, East Taunton, MA 02718
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The 461st Liberaider
Hughes Glantzberg, Editor, P.O. Box 926, Gunnison, CO 81230
The Liberaider is published twice yearly on behalf of the members of the organization.
Permission is granted to use articles provided source is given.

President's Corner

The Vice-President expressed my feelings pretty well. Please read what he has to say below. I want to thank everyone for a great reunion this year and hope we all meet again in 2009 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Many events are planned. Our youngsters are doing a great job. See you all in Tulsa.

Al St. Yves

Vice-President's Comments

Once again the 461st Bomb Group (H) Association came through with an excellent gathering of our families.

On behalf to the Veterans who served during the WWII years, and determined that memories, and experiences, of the men who served with the 461st should live on, I want to thank all who participated in helping to make the Dayton Reunion a major success.

A special thanks to Dave Blake who provided leadership for his Planning Committee, which worked tirelessly throughout the entire 2007-08 year.

Without the determination of the younger generations to organize the entire function; which included the development of the logistics and plans a year in advance, research the cities with sites and tours that would appeal to our attendees, find hotels which could best accommodate our group with special facilities, plan our diversified meals, and be willing to spend their precious hours to make certain that our needs would be met, the 2008 461st Bomb Group (H) Association Reunion would not have been the gathering we experienced. Words cannot express our appreciation, and gratitude, for your contributions to our organization.

There was sufficient flexibility to accommodate the various age groups of the participants. The hospitality room, meeting rooms, dining areas, and

recreation facilities were always available and convenient. The shuttle and bus services made transportation convenient for our attendees.

Agendas and programs were well organized, spaced to accommodate our time, and encouraged members in attendance to freely join in, and participate in the discussions throughout the reunion.

As a result of the exchanges of ideas, committees and groups will be sharing, and assuming responsibilities for the reunion to be held in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 2009. Plans are already underway, and the Planning Committee is urging your input.

We encourage each of you, and your family members, and friends, to make plans early to join us in Tulsa.

Once again we wish to express our special thanks to each of you who participated in the 2008 461st Bomb Group (H) Association Reunion in Dayton, Ohio.

Keep well!

See you Tulsa!

If anyone attending the Sunday Morning Memorial Breakfast found a 461st Cap containing several pins (Squadrons, Silver B-24, Air Force, etc.), several Program Agenda, and the story poem read by the Chaplain, I would appreciate having them sent to me. I will be happy to re-pay the postage and handling charges.

Lynn and I were seated at the front/center table during the Service.

Thank you.

Len Bathurst

(Continued from page 1)

Sunday, 5 November

Vienna, Austria

Florisdorf Oil Refineries

24,000'; -37° C.

326 heavy anti-aircraft guns, flak very intense but inaccurate except when leaving target; two holes in ship

Nine FW-190s sighted; no attack

Escort: 48 P-51s

Thin 10/10 undercast at 10,000'

Duration: 7 hours 50 minutes

Bomb load: Seven 500# incendiary clusters

Credit: 2 missions

Tuesday, 7 November

Sarajevo, Yugoslavia

Railroad Marshaling Yards, Ali Pasin Most

22,000'; -23° C.

19 heavy guns; possible additional railroad guns; flak not too intense but very accurate; 1 hole

Expected one squadron of FW-190s; none sighted

Escort: 48 P-51s

Weather over target: 3/10

Duration: 4 hours 45 minutes

Bomb load: Nine 500# RDX

Credit: 1 mission

Friday, 17 November

Vienna, Austria

Florisdorf Oil Refinery

24,000'; -36° C.

326 guns; 88mm and 105mm; flak intense and accurate; no hits on our ship

No enemy fighters sighted but our escorts shot down JU-88 spotter

Escort: 52 P-38s

Weather at target: 8/10 undercast

Duration: 6 hours 55 minutes

Bomb load: Six 500# RDX plus two 500# booby traps

Credit: 2 missions

Sunday, 19 November

Vienna, Austria

Vosendorf Oil Refineries

26,000'; -40° C.

326 heavy guns plus guns to south of city; flak very

intense and very accurate; two holes in left wing near #2 engine

No enemy fighters; JU-88 spotter shot down by our escort of 96 P-38s

Weather over target: 10/10 undercast

Duration: 7 hours 35 minutes

Bomb load: Six 500# RDX

Credit: 2 missions

Saturday, 2 December

Blechhammer, Germany

Oil Refineries

25,000'; -37° C.

150 Guns; flak intense and very accurate; first bursts were right on us; no hits

No enemy fighters sighted

Escort: 70 P-51s to target; 55 P-38s over target;

50 P-51s off target

Weather: 6/10 undercast over target

Duration: 7 hours 55 minutes

Bomb load: Six 500# RDX plus two 500# booby traps

Credit: 2 missions

Wednesday, 6 December

Maribor, Yugoslavia

Marshaling Yards

22,000'; -39° C.

25 guns; flak light and inaccurate

No enemy fighters

Escort: 36 P-38s

Weather: Flew in cloud layer 6,000' thick; escort not sighted; break in clouds directly over target

Duration: 6 hours

Bomb load: Eight 500# RDX

Bad icing on windows

Credit: 1 mission

Friday, 15 December

Linz, Austria

Marshaling Yards North of city

24,000'; -30° C.

46 guns; flak moderate and inaccurate

No enemy fighters sighted

Escort: 36 P-38s

Weather 10/10 at target; bombed PFF

Duration: 7 hours 40 minutes

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Bomb load: Eight 500# RDX

Credit: 2 missions

Sunday, 17 December

Blechhammer, Germany

Odertal Oil Refineries

26,500'; -42° C.

1200 guns; 88mm and 105mm

Attacked by between 50 and 100 FW-190s and ME-109s

Escort: P-38s and P-51s

Hit by enemy fighters and exploded at 1200 hours shortly before turning on IP near Troubky, Czechoslovakia

03:00 Sunday, 17 December 1944, Cerignola in southern Italy. Everybody up for mission number nine (actually 14 or 15 counting the doubles). "Pappy" Tom West is usually the first out of the sack. Eddie, our co-pilot is last, Navilemoque and I are somewhere in between. For most of us this is the most difficult part of combat. Not the most dangerous; just the most difficult. Not much is said as we dress, slip into our rayon socks covered by the GI woolen ones and our GI shoes. Rayon or silk under wool is the warmest combination. We gather our heavy flying jackets and pants and head for the mess hall still in silence. Probably anxious for our destination and hoping for a short one since our last one was to Linz, Austria just two days ago where we hit the marshaling yards.

The conversation picks up a little as we devour our pancakes, scrambled eggs, bacon and toast washed down with a mug of strong coffee. We all four light up our favorite brands of cigarettes as we waddle to the briefing room. It is now 0430 on a cold, damp morning. As we enter the room we look immediately to the board to see what our gas load will be for today. This will tell us the length of our mission. We gulp...2700 gallons. It's got to be Berlin or Blechhammer—the #1 and #2 targets in Europe for us. The briefing officer enters and uncovers the map. The red lines run to Blechhammer. Our last trip there was two weeks ago with duration of 7 hours 55 minutes. That's too damned much time over enemy territory which enables their fighters to

take off from different bases and attack us. Also a long way back to our field in the event we are crippled.

It's the oil refineries again...at 27,000 feet, 150 anti-aircraft 88s pointed at us in anger. Not to mention the ME-109s and FW-190s who will be up there looking for us.

The one thing you must remember about every man on our crew, and perhaps every man on every air crew, is that we are all volunteers for this duty. None of us were forced to fly at all, much less in combat.

We are given our IP (Initial Point) which is usually a town or specific point on the map from which we start our bomb run on the target. The object of this is to mislead the Nazis to believe we are heading for a target other than our objective. I do not think they are so easily deceived. We are also given an alternate target the name of which I cannot remember.

The briefing over, we head for the parachute building to pick up our chutes. Pappy and Eddie get their seat packs and everyone else gets a chest pack. With the seat pack you always have the chute with you. With the chest pack you wear the harness and keep the chute as close as possible but you must snap it on with two "D" rings before it can be used. We also get our electric suits, flak vests and helmets with the ear flaps. We look like a pack of Cocker Spaniels.

We see the enlisted men for the first time this dark and miserable morning as we walk to our plane on the line. They are the finest bunch of guys of any crew we have ever seen or heard of. Their constant bantering and teasing kept all of us loose in some pretty tight situations. We all talk of the big party the ten of us are going to have on Christmas Eve when we open all the packages of food and goodies from home which we have been hoarding for the past couple of weeks.

I tell Roy Doe, our nose turret gunner, to check the ammunition in his boxes to make sure they are full.

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10)

His reply, "Why always me...is my name the easiest to pronounce?" Incidentally, it's not easy to write about an air crew of ten men when four of them are named Tom. I don't feel comfortable calling people by their last name.

Our plane is getting a new magneto in #3 engine so we will be delayed in taking off and will have to do our best to overtake and join the squadron in formation to the target. After about half an hour we get the OK from our ground crew chief. Mergo, Yesia, Ross and Gaul climb into the aft section of the ship and Deibert and Doe join us in the forward section.

We taxi to the end of the runway where we get a quick green light from the control tower. We're off and climbing...no circling for a rendezvous as we normally do. Qualman gives us a heading and we start to look for the rest of our group. It takes us 20 or 30 minutes to find them and fall into our slot in the formation. We're on the way to Blechhammer on the Oder River along the German-Poland border.

My electric suit isn't working properly so I grab my oxygen tank and crawl through the tunnel from the nose back toward the bomb bay and up on the flight deck with Pappy and Eddie. Everything is going smoothly with not a sign of trouble either from our plane or the Germans. Three hours go by and we're approaching the Czech-German border...only half an hour to our IP. I'm getting ready to go back down in the nose and get on the Norden bomb sight.

Suddenly radio silence is broken by Joe Mergo, our tail gunner. "Here they come...7 o'clock high." Joe gets in a long burst at the attackers with his twin 50s. All hell breaks loose in a matter of three seconds. Shells are exploding everywhere inside the plane. Those 20 millimeters made me feel like I was inside of a popcorn popper. I'm standing on the lower level just below the upper deck when Tom Deibert's feet dangle from his foot rest in the top turret just above me. I pull the emergency release cable under his seat and as he falls I see he took a direct hit from a 20 mm shell.

The plane lurches upward and starts to fall over to

the right. Qualman is coming through the tunnel from the nose. I don't know how he can move. The centrifugal force is pinning everything to the floor. Eddie is out of his seat and heading back towards me. Pappy is up but can't find his chute. The controls are shot out...our main oxygen tanks behind the bomb bay are on fire and the flames are licking at the bombs.

I reach behind me into the bomb bay for the emergency handle to open the bomb bay doors so we can jump out. The hydraulic system is out. I try to crank the doors open manually but they jam after opening only about a foot...not enough to allow us to get out. In terror and frenzy I begin to jump on the doors.

The next thing I remember is falling through space...face down...trying to snap the second "D" ring to my harness. It doesn't take long. With a chest pack chute you do not want to be face down when the shroud lines rip out of the pack. They could change your looks in a hurry.

I casually hold out my right arm until I'm flipped over on my back and looking up at the sky. I see the rest of the squadron fading away in the distance with the German fighters diving through the formation. All I can hear is the whistling of the wind as I float down toward the earth. It's an eerie sensation of weightlessness. My senses are coming back and I'm aware of the pieces of airplane falling not too far from me. One of my gloves blows off and without thinking I reach out for it. It's a hundred feet away before I know it.

Now I'm starting to think about opening my chute. Don't want to do it too soon because we heard the German fighter pilots had instructions to shoot at us as we came down and the longer you hang there the more time they have to make several passes.

I knew from our weather briefing that the cloud cover in this area topped out at three thousand feet so I decided to wait until I went into the clouds to open my chute. Since we were at 27,000 feet when we were hit, that would be a free fall of about

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24,000 feet. Roughly 5 miles at 2 miles per minute.

I'm into the clouds now and my chute opens on the first pull of the rip cord handle. In a few minutes I break through the clouds and see the ground. I'm heading towards a forest of barren trees...in the worst possible attitude for a landing. I'm coming in backwards and oscillating like a pendulum. I'll probably break every bone in my body. Remembering the parachute training (classroom only) we all had to undergo, I reach up and grab my shroud lines and try to twist them around. The chute almost collapses. Enough of that. I let go and immediately land in the trees on the edge of the woods.

As I hang there suspended between two trees about 30 feet from the ground, I see the fuselage of our plane land about a mile from me. It was almost exactly noon when we were hit...it is now 1205. I can see people running to the wreckage of our plane. It won't be long before they see my big white umbrella in these naked trees. This is Czechoslovakia, but there are German soldiers here and they don't take kindly to the guys who are bombing their cities and their families.

I don't dare to try to get out of my harness 30 feet up in the air so I pull my Scout knife from the outer pocket of my jacket and cut one of the shroud lines at the top of my chute and tie it to the loop on the knife. I throw the knife over a sturdy branch about 15 feet away. It wraps around the branch several times and I pull myself into the tree. After getting out of my harness I stop to get my breath and look over the situation. It doesn't look good. I wonder how many of our men got out. I don't see any other chutes.

I look down from my perch. It's a long way down even considering the distance I just fell. There are no branches to use as a ladder so I "bear hug" my way down about five feet and rest. Suddenly I become light headed and weak. I can't hold on any longer. My grip loosens and I slide straight down the tree trunk. As I hit the ground, my left ankle saps inward at a 90 degree angle. All hope of es-

cape is gone now.

I'm aware of a cold sensation on the back of my neck and feel back there. I bring my hand back and it's covered with blood. No pain so it can't be too serious. I pat myself on the head and discover a tear in my helmet. Just a little scratch I must have got in the plane but enough to cause weakness when I tried to climb down the tree.

My first thought is to bury the Colt 45 I carry in my shoulder holster. We were instructed to use the gun only to barter our way to safety not to try to fight the war with it. I scratch a hole in the six inch layer of snow and put the gun under it.

After crawling through the forest for some two hours, I am overtaken by a small band of Czech civilians. The first thing they do is take my first aid kit and my morphine which I refrained from using until the pain in my ankle got unbearable. Otherwise they were very courteous and understanding. They lifted me onto a two wheel cart and took me to a little town named Troubký where they carried me into a house and gave me some black bread and lard.

They spoke to me in German and although my comprehension was not yet good, they managed to convey to me that they must turn me over to the Wehrmacht or suffer reprisals. They assured me that the soldiers in their locality were decent men and they would not harm me but would give me medical attention under the Geneva Convention Rules of Warfare.

Around 1800 that night the German soldiers came to get me. At first they thought I was a spy because my clothing was so expensive it couldn't be an Army uniform. The only thing that saved me from being shot was the insignia on my shirt collar and my silver wings. They took me to a barracks type of building and told me an ambulance would soon be here to take me to a Lazzaretto (hospital) where they had very good doctors who would repair my

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ankle. While I waited for the ambulance, a German in the uniform of a sergeant of the Luftwaffe approached me and offered his hand in friendship. "I am the one who shot your aircraft," he said in perfect English. "I am sorry for you and your friends, but for you the war is over." I asked what type of fighter he flew. "Focke-Wulf 190," he answered. I offered him one of my cigarettes. He accepted and together we smoked and sat in silence for a brief minute. He saluted me and left.

The ambulance came and took me for a three hour ride to what proved to be Brno, Czechoslovakia. I was carried on a stretcher to the operating room. All my clothing was taken from me and I went into surgery at midnight. Exactly 12 hours from the time we were first hit.

I awoke the next morning in a bright clean hospital room. My left leg was propped up on a little platform type of elevation. It was also in a cast. This was to be my abode for the next five months, the first three of which are lost from my memory (with the exception of what I have written in the little Wehrmacht Werkbuch Diary which was given to me).

I do remember the meals which consisted almost exclusively of a small portion of black bread, small portions of a kind of sausage, chicken broth with intestines (no meat), ersatz jam and ersatz coffee. That was it. I lost 60 pounds in those five months. Most of it from the fever caused by the infection in my ankle.

On 9 April it was decided that the Russian army was getting too close to Brno since they bombed our hospital the day before and I was hit in the forehead by a piece of glass from my window on the second floor. They loaded all the patients including me and a wounded Russian soldier who I spoke to in German, aboard a hospital train and headed toward the American lines.

The first time we were strafed by our own P-47s, the car in which I was riding caught fire and although I was close to the door, I was the last one carried out.

No thanks to a six foot three SS Major who looked at me in such a way as to say "I would like to shoot you now." The locomotive was blown up and we had to wait overnight for another one.

I don't recall the exact date of Hitler's birth, but on that April day aboard the train my captors gave me a short fat cigar to celebrate. I inhaled and it nearly killed me.

On 24 April, the last day on the train, our P-47s strafed us again. Again our locomotive was knocked out. We were in a railroad marshaling yard parked along side of several flat cars with brand new FW-190s on them. The "Jugs" came in so low strafing those 190s they couldn't see the Red Cross markings on the roof or sides of our hospital train. One of the German wounded patients on the train was evacuating his kidneys in a glass bottle during the attack. A .50 caliber slug shattered the bottle during the process covering him with glass and you know what...he didn't get a scratch. I added a few choice new German words to my vocabulary.

That night we left the train in Budweis and were driven to another hospital where I remained until the very early morning of 9 May. At 0300 hours we were loaded aboard ambulances, trucks, weapons carriers, and some wounded were strapped to Tiger tanks. A Russian plane dropped a flare over us and lit up the whole convoy like it was broad daylight. They were getting closer.

I was placed in the lead ambulance along with an SS captain, and given a bushel basket full of lard (in cans), black bread, cigarettes and cigars. One of the doctors requested that I tell my American friends of the good treatment the German hospitals had given me and that I should ask my comrades for more petrol for the convoy so that they could travel deeper into Allied territory. The SS Captain was from Romania and seemed to be a decent sort of guy. He was somewhere around 40 years of age. He claimed to be a family man with 4 children. He was in the lead ambulance with me in the event we ran into any bands of SS troops who were, at this stage in

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the war, killing any Wehrmacht soldiers who were surrendering. His presence would deter any such action against our convoy...they hoped.

Somewhere around 0900 we approached American troops blocking the road. We had no sooner stopped than the rear doors on the ambulance were yanked open. An Army Captain and half a dozen noncoms stared in at me. What a sight I must have been. Down from 165 pounds to 105. No haircut for five months. No decent shave for a week. My pink shirt still coated with dried blood from the scalp wound. I was unable to speak...so they did. "Hi, Mac. How's it going?"

The words just wouldn't come out in English. All I could mutter was, "Sehr gut." I don't think they doubted my nationality but it sure must have sounded strange to them. They took me from the ambulance and put me into an Army ambulance. Before we drove away I found out my liberators were General Terry Allen's 104th Timberwolf Division of General Patton's 3rd Army. I forgot to ask them for fuel to help the German convoy get further away from the Russians.

I was subsequently taken to the 110th Field Evacuation Hospital in Austria, to the 198th General Hospital in Paris and from there to the Azores, Newfoundland and Mitchell Field in New York on a C-54 hospital plane. After three days in New York I was flown to Gardner General Hospital in Chicago and home.

In the small village of Troubky, Czechoslovakia in a corner of a little Catholic cemetery stands a black Italian marble monument 12 feet tall and 8 feet wide with a life-size bronze likeness of Fred Gaul, our "Put-Put" engineer, descending in his parachute which did not open. Alongside the monument is an 18 foot flag pole of the same material with a cross at the top. The people of Troubky vowed to fly the American flag every July 4th and December 17th in memory of the six young men buried here. An inscription on marble slabs in Czechoslovakian and in English reads:

Here repose American heroes after their last start
Wanderer read and announce to all
We gladly died for that you live and are free
Don't forget us.

Two other marble slabs list the names of the men buried here:

Sgt. Fred H. Gaul
Sgt. Roy L. Doe
2nd Lt. Thomas K. West
Cpl. Frank C. Yesia
S/Sgt. Joseph G Mergo
S/Sgt. Thomas E. Deibert

Not listed are the survivors:

S/Sgt. Trefry Ross
2nd Lt. Edward Kasold
2nd Lt. Thomas Qualman
2nd Lt. Thomas Noesges



Memorial to the West crew #38-1

(Continued from page 1)

sure which is shown on the air speed indicator on the instrument panel of the plane. As the air speed of the plane changes so does the air pressure in the tube and consequently the air speed indicator readings. The air speed readings are, of course, vital in flying the plane. When the plane is not in use a small canvas sleeve is pulled over the pitot tube to prevent dirt or small stones, etc. from getting into the aperture and clogging up the tube thereby distorting the air speed readings. Before takeoff it is the responsibility of the flight engineer to remove and store the canvas cover. It is also the responsibility of the pilot to inspect the entire exterior of the aircraft to be certain that the plane is ready to fly.

As we prepared to start our plane and taxi out for take-off on our 26th mission, Jack failed to take the canvas cover off the pitot tube and I did not notice it when inspecting the exterior of the plane. The needle on the air speed indicator rests at an indicated 50 MPH so it didn't start to move until the plane's speed actually exceeds 50 MPH which happens well after the takeoff run starts.

On that day, as our ground speed increased, I glanced at the indicator to see if we were approaching the 90 to 100 MPH at which speed I start to raise the nose and leave the runway. I was initially surprised to see the needle was still sitting at 50 MPH. It did not concern me as I figured that we were gathering speed and the needle would soon move up. I checked it again in a few seconds but it was still at 50 MPH and the end of the runway was fast approaching.

The runway, constructed of steel mesh, lay on the bare ground. The plane was fully loaded with 500 pound bombs, hundreds of gallons of fuel, thousands of rounds of ammo and 10 crewmen. I had to immediately decide to cut back the power of the four engines and slam on the brakes or continue the takeoff in spite of the fact that I had no way of knowing my airspeed. I decided that if I tried to stop the plane at that point we would surely end up running off the end of the runway, and cart wheel into a fiery explosion.

I kept full power on and held the plane on the runway right down to the end so that way I reached maximum speed. I had to avert stalling the plane, yet I had to climb to get over the fast approaching foothills. I had enough experience and feel for the plane that I was able to climb slowly enough to avoid the fatal stall without the use of the air speed indicator.

The rest of the squadron was assembling in the back of the area so my plan was to attempt to get close enough to them that I could fly at their speed rather than to guess my own speed.

I told Jack what the problem was (i.e. that I was not getting an airspeed reading). At the time, I still did not know that the pitot tube cover was still on. Jack, however, instantly recalled that he had not removed the cover. He left the pilot compartment where he had been standing at my seat and he went down below into the nose of the plane from where he could see the pitot tube through a small window. He knew what he had to do. After we discussed it on the intercom he smashed the window and was able to stick his arm out far enough to reach the canvas cover and pull it off. The airspeed indicator shot up to about 160 MPH. Needless to say, we all breathed a large sigh of relief. Jack covered the broken window with canvas and tape and we went on to fly the mission with no further mishaps.

The Mission to Budapest

On our 5th or 6th mission our target was the railroad yards at Budapest. They were protected with many anti-aircraft guns and we anticipated heavy flak. I can remember looking down at the city and seeing the river flowing through it, dividing Buda from Pest.

As soon as we started the bomb run, they zeroed in on us. We continued our approach through the black explosions when suddenly Jack hollered into the intercom, "I'm hit, I'm hit". He had been manning the machine gun at the left window located to the rear of the plane. The radio operator was handling the machine gun at the right window so he was right next

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to Jack. Jack was on the floor after being hit and Rene' (the radio operator) was trying to make him as warm and comfortable as possible. In the meantime, we had reached the target and released our bombs. As we dove away to escape the flak, Harold, the Bombardier, left his station in the nose of the plane. I closed the bomb bay doors and he crawled into the back where Jack was lying. Jack had an ugly wound in his thigh from a chunk of steel (flak) that had entered one side of the plane, hit him and exited the other side.

Harold had the First Aid supplies and gave Jack a shot of morphine, put a tourniquet around his leg, covered the wound with sulfa and a bandage. We completed the mission and had many holes in the plane but no serious damage.

Instead of returning to our home field, I went to the larger base at Foggia, Italy where the hospital was located. An ambulance met our plane, which took Jack to the hospital. After 4 weeks of recuperation and treatment he returned to duty. I was very happy to have him back on the crew, as were all of the other crewmembers.

The Fuel Transfer Incident

One of the confusing aspects of operating the B-24 was the fuel transfer system. It consisted of a number of separate fuel tanks and the flow of fuel to reach the four engines was controlled by a series of switches, valves and pumps. One or another engine might consume more fuel than the others, necessitating the flight engineers to transfer fuel so that tanks feeding individual engines were maintained in balance.

On a mission to Weiner-Neustadt, Austria we encountered heavy flak and the wing area where a fuel tank was located was damaged causing a loss of fuel available to the engines on the right side. After bombing our target, the formation headed back to southern Italy. To reach Italy we had to fly across the Adriatic Sea.

When we had crossed about two thirds of the water,

Jack determined that the right side engines were about to run out of gas so he started to re-route the fuel from the left side tanks. Now, frankly, I never did pay much attention to the fuel transfer system since it was Jack's department and I never touched it.

Well, something went wrong while Jack was transferring the fuel from one of the tanks to another and the entire system shut down cutting off fuel simultaneously to all four engines. The B-24 may be graceful to look at but without power it glides like a 35-ton rock.

As soon as the engines cut off, the plane slowed down drastically and I had to lower the nose to maintain our airspeed above the critical stalling speed of roughly 90 MPH. Fortunately, we were still about 20,000 feet when the engines quit so that I had a few minutes to decide what to do next – i.e. have everyone bailout into the Adriatic or to attempt to belly it in on the water (it would sink immediately).

When the engines quit, Jack, of course, was still at the panel of fuel transfer controls. He soon realized what he had done and made the necessary valve changes to re-route the fuel to all four engines. We were all extremely fortunate that all four engines coughed back into operation with no damage to any of them.

By this time, we had dropped down from about 20,000 feet to about 3,000 and the rest of our group was far ahead of us. I did not take any action against Jack or even chew him out. I did, however, ask him to re-read the manual on the fuel transfer systems. I was sure we would have no further problems.

A Bomb Run On 2 ½ Engines

The target was the oil refinery at Blechhammer, Germany. It was a long ride up there and the farther we traveled, the more the tension built in the alert, wary crews. We started the actual bomb run about 5 or 6 minutes before reaching the target. I was flying the lead plane in our squadron of seven B-24s. Just before reaching the target we took a flak hit in the #4

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461st Bombardment Group (H) Association Membership

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

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

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

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

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

Type of membership desired:		Life <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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engine and started losing power. The oil pressure was dropping so I had to feather that engine before liquid congealed. The propellers on a dead engine create considerable drag, necessitating increased use of power in the remaining engines and excessive fuel consumption. Feathering or turning the blades to minimize the air resistance will conserve fuel.

To maintain our airspeed, I did have to increase the power to the other three engines. When I did this, the oil pressure in the #3 engine dropped dramatically. I told my deputy flight leader in the #2 plane to take over. I dropped below and behind the other planes. I know that we could not make it back to Italy on two engines. Since the oil level in #3 was down to zero and #4 was still warm, I restarted #4 and had an indication of enough oil pressure to run it as long as possible at reduced RPMs.

We headed for home - 2 good engines and one cripple, but we still had a load of 500 pound bombs. We had an alternate target that was right on our route back to Italy. Rather than dumping it in the Adriatic, which we had to cross, we decided to go for the alternate target. When I announced this to the crew on the radio intercom, Jack moaned "You're not going over that target on the 2 ½ engines are you?"

Since the Budapest mission, when Jack was wounded, he was always frightened and nervous when we approached the flak over our targets. The discipline in the aircrew had to be 100% so it was out of order for Jack to voice his objection to my decision. Frankly, however, he did cause me to question for a moment if I was doing the wisest thing. I felt, though that we had an obligation to go after that alternate since we had been unable to drop on the primary target.

We made the run, encountering light flak and dropped right on target. Surprisingly, we were able to hold our altitude and made it back to good old Cerignola without further incident. I was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for this mission.

It was a bright sunny day in December as our group of 28 planes at 22,000 feet suffered our way through the flak at Muldorf and dropped our bomb loads on target. Hearing the bombardier shout "Bombs away" was always a most welcome sound because we could turn and dive to get out of the flak coming up at us.

This time, however, just as I started to lead the group off the target I felt a sharp impact in my left buttocks. I had to concentrate on flying. There were 27 planes following my diving turn. As soon as we got leveled off and were heading home I call Jack over the intercom "Jack, I've been hit. Come up here and check to see if there is much blood". He rushed up to the flight deck and as he approached me from behind he saw the windshield next to my face had been hit and was shattered. He later told me that he thought "My God he's been hit in the face!"

I raised up in my seat and told him to check for blood in my seat cushion and rear end. There was nothing - no blood, no hole in the seat cushion. I was amazed because I surely had felt the whomp in the butt.

The mystery was solved when we got back to our base. The floor under the pilot seat was protected by a sheet of steel about 1/8" thick, maybe thicker. It was substantial. The pilot seat was a steel bucket with a 3" to 4" cushion. A piece of steel flak roughly 1 ½" by ½" had gone through the bucket seat and was imbedded in the top fabric of the seat cushion. When it hit me there was still enough force for me to feel a definite impact but not enough to come out of the cushion or injure me. Needless to say, I took a lot of ribbing particularly from Jack about my concern for my injured butt.

On some of the crews, there was dissention and unpleasantness. We, however, were very fortunate in that we were all compatible. Each crew member knew his job and performed willingly. Jack's personality was a major factor.

How Much Blood Is In My Seat?

REUNION 2009

TULSA, OKLAHOMA

October 8 – 11, 2009

The 27th Annual 461st Bomb Group Reunion will be here before you know it!
It's not too early to reserve your room for what we believe will be a special time in Tulsa.

HOTEL INFORMATION

RADISSON TULSA

10918 East 41st Street, Tulsa Oklahoma 74146

The hotel is conveniently located at the intersection of US HWY 169 and 41st Street, near Interstate 44.

Call the hotel directly at (918) 627-5000 for reservations.

Our group booking code is: XXXX

Our discounted room rate is \$79 per night plus tax.

Free Airport Shuttle to the hotel is provided.

Your reunion committee is busy making plans now for what we believe will be a great time in this lovely Midwestern city.

Our reunion will feature a visit to the Tulsa Air and Space Museum and Planetarium. This museum has an impressive display regarding The B-24 "Tulsamerican", the 461st Bomb Group and Torretta Field Italy. The Tulsamerican was the last B-24 built at Tulsa's Douglas Aircraft plant in 1944. The aircraft was bought and paid for through war bonds purchased solely by the employees of the Douglas plant. Most if not all of the workers there autographed the plane before it began a short stint touring the country promoting the sale of war bonds. At that point the aircraft was assigned to the 461st Bomb Group, 765th Bomb Squadron where she flew combat missions until that fateful day, December 17, 1944, the Odertal mission, where she was shot up by fighters and ditched near Vis with Lt. Eugene Ford at the controls. Details are sketchy at this early date but your reunion committee is working to make our visit to this museum a special time for the 461st.

Of course other activities will be planned as well, so be sure to look for more details in the letter of invitation that will be mailed in the Spring and complete details and the reunion registration page in the June issue of The Liberaider.

You won't want to miss out on experiencing hospitality Tulsa style!



**461st BOMB GROUP
FINANCIAL STATEMENT
FOR THE TEN MONTHS ENDED OCTOBER 31, 2008**

Cash Balances - January 1, 2008	
Checking account	\$3,910
Vanguard investments	<u>18,864</u>
	<u>22,774</u>
Income	
Interest and dividends	729
Unrealized loss on investments	(1,635)
Reunion income	11,420
Donations	350
Dues and memberships	<u>1,285</u>
Total Income	<u>12,149</u>
Expenses	
Reunion expenses	11,157
Postage and mailings	292
Travel	<u>237</u>
	11,686
Transfer to Liberaider account	<u>1,000</u>
Total expenses	<u>12,686</u>
Net loss for period	(537)
Cash Balances - October 31, 2008	
Checking account	4,288
Vanguard investments	<u>17,949</u>
	<u>\$22,237</u>

Journal of a Radio Operator

by
Vincent J. Aversa
765th Squadron
Submitted by
Richard C. Aversa (nephew)

Friedrichshafen, Germany, 3 August 1944

Bombed fuel plant for jet propulsion aircraft. Only light inaccurate flak was my introduction to Ack-Ack. Expected heavy flak and was briefed for fighter opposition. Naturally, I was scared, but more surprised on my first.

Miramas, France, 6 August 1944

Not exactly a mission. We flew within one hour of the target and had to abort the formation (turn back). No. 2 engine was feathered (dead) because it was throwing buckets of oil. We returned home without mishap but had to be on our toes. Last week, one of our bombers aborted and was shot down by fighters over the Po valley. Practically in our back yard.

Blechhammer, Germany, 7 August 1944

Again we had to abort. Let me say frankly, this was really "sweating em out". It was a long one to eastern Germany. We encountered the daily flak over Yugoslavia and finally had to turn back 40 minutes from our target. Of this mission I can truthfully say, "I Shit". We had No. 3 feathered and No. 2 was going out. Then all of the generators went dead. That killed every radio in the ship. A ship without interphone is like a person without blood. It's our life-line. I can't say much more or this memoir will turn out to be a book. Almost got the pants shot off us over the Adriatic. The instruments were out so our pilot landed by instinct. He did a swell job, but since our gear couldn't lock hydraulically, our left wheel collapsed. We skidded all over the airdrome and wrecked the plane. No one was hurt but mud from the ball turret recess came through and plastered us all. The name of that ship was the "Plastered Bastard" and even in its dying moments, plastered us. Now I'll brag, "We really 'Plastered that Bastard'."

Almasfuzito, Hungary, 9 August 1944

Our target today was an oil plant. Maybe you've read about the new RDX Bomb. I'm telling you, that plant won't be producing any more oil. The target was between Vienna and Budapest. We expected light flak and that's all we saw. Also expected fighters but saw none but ours – P-38s and P-51s. Another very surprising mission now that we're down, but we certainly sweat em out. That's plenty rough.

Ploesti, Romania, 10 August 1944

We've all heard of Ploesti (flak alley) way before this. I know now; plenty of flak and plenty accurate. In this area, the flak is considered the most accurate of any of our targets. We also expected fighters and also in this region, they have the best fighter groups. Here they have Romanian pilots that are nuts. Needless to say, we saw no enemy fighters, but we knew they were near. Our escort, P-51s and P-38s, kept them away. Our lead ship had 40 holes in it, and 3 shells exploded in the plane. Two men were injured but only slightly. We had a few holes and they shot our hydraulic system out. We finally landed safely, and again, our pilot was superb. I'm very glad this one is over.

Genoa, Italy, 12 August 1944

Today was really hit one I'll never forget. We, among other groups, were concentrating on softening the South French Coast for a new invasion. We expected light flak and, by chance, fighters. We met no fighters - we met only light flak. Why do I say I'll remember today? This mission I saw my first B-24 vanish in a "clap of flak burst". It's sickening to say the least. I can't write much more.

Genoa, Italy, 13 August 1944

We raided more coastal gun emplacements near the same town. We had to penetrate the same flak defense but we screwed them today. We used very forceful evasive tactics and the guns couldn't find us. We only saw about 5 or 10 bursts of flak. Quite

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different from yesterday.

Genoa, France, 14 August 1944

Well, once more we raided the new pre-invasion coast. Everyone seems to think that a new invasion is in immediate future. We saw a lot of convoys in our last few missions, and an invasion seems very probable. Again we hit coastal gun emplacements and I can say, the Navy won't have to worry about those guns. We really blasted 'em. We expected to encounter 28 heavy guns of flak but we weren't even fired upon. This is known as a "milk-run".

Ploesti, Romania, 17 August 1944

Well, if you had paid attention to my other briefs, you'd know the nickname of this place. Today was no exception. The flak was really fast and furious. A piece came thru the waist, but nowhere near me. We were behind schedule from the start, so we had to pour on the coal. As a result, we just made it back home. I don't think we had enough gas left to clean lipstick off a shirt. What else can be said? All in a day's work.

Szolnok, Hungary, 20 August 1944

Today we raided an aerodrome near Budapest. Here they had gathered about 60 twin-engine bombers from the Russian front for security reasons. We expected stiff fighter resistance, for this place has been the mainstay of Germany's fighter defense. However, happily, we met no fighters and light flak. The flak was inaccurate but one bomber went down in flames. We carried the very sensitive "Frag" bombs and we don't know just how it went down. I followed it part way down and saw three parachutes. Our 10th mission today and for that we merit the air medal.

Vienna, Austria, 22 August 1944

Today marks another annul in my firsts. Today, I saw enemy fighters, I saw them shoot down B-24s and I saw B-24s shoot them down. Boy, let me tell you, our P-38 is certainly tops. Today we were in

the lead element; echeloned up and down, to our sides are B & C, respectively. The enemy doesn't have too many fighters so they only attack the formation which is the loosest. We had a beautiful group today, but C flight took the brunt of the attack because of their poor formation. I saw 3 B-24s go down and many more enemy fighters. We shouldn't have lost that many for these B-24s pack a terrific wallop. It's really a sight when you see an enemy fighter and a B-24 blazing at each other; then out of nowhere, a P-38 hurtles out of the blue and when you look for the enemy fighter, only a puff of black smoke is visible. Man, I love those P-38s. Their name, "Lightning", suits them perfectly. I thought Ploesti was "flak alley". We had 312 heavy guns on our target today, and when you read about "flak so thick you can walk on it", you can think of Vienna, because I will. Wow, it was black.

Ferrara, Italy, 24 August 1944

We went to northern Italy to blast a bridge. This was no ordinary bridge. It was 1,600 yards long and 50 yards wide. A combination railroad and highway. Over this bridge must pass the bulk of German Armies soon to retreat from Italy. This target was extremely well defended by 82 heavy guns. It was very accurate flak and really came close. We weren't hit except for a piece that glanced off near the waist. Why don't they give up?

Bucharest, Romania, 26 August 1944

As you know, about this time, Romania had declared war on the Germans. Last night, the Germans bombed the Romanian capital and intended to ruin their capital. This morning, we also bombed near the capital, but instead bombed a German airfield from which their planes had raided Bucharest. It was a large field and could be used to base troop-carrying gliders. Bucharest was defended by 114 guns but this morning, all were silent. The Romanians now have complete control of the capital. Things are looking up now.

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Szolnok, Hungary, 28 August 1944

A tongue-twister but we had to raid it. The Romanians have turned the Germans and are running them out. Another bridge was our target today and we really hit it. A swell mission, light flak and mission accomplished.

Szeged, Hungary, 29 August 1944

We bombed a huge marshalling yard today and although fighter opposition was expected, we saw no enemy fighters. There was no flak at the target and we really ruined that place. A munitions train was parked in it and what an explosion. A regular "Fourth of July". Just another one.

Ferrara, Italy, 1 September 1944

The Fifteenth Air Force today concentrated on crippling Germany's lines of escape and communication facilities in Italy, Yugoslavia and Hungary. We went to northern Italy today near the target we had bombed before. Our target was weathered in so we hit a bridge the Germans could use out of the Po valley. Hardly any flak but one piece did go through the waist above our heads. Not too bad, considering.

Smederovo, Yugoslavia, 3 September 1944

Today, three groups of B-24s raided three ferry installations across the Danube. These were to be used again by retreating Germans. No flak and no fighter opposition. We circled the target after we dropped the bombs and all three ferries were knocked out. Not a bad mission.

Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 6 September 1944

While the Germans are scrambling to escape from the Russians in the Balkans, the Fifteenth Air Force is hitting all routes of escape. Today we hit a railroad bridge on the Yugoslavian side of the Danube. The flak was moderate but a little too accurate. We did hit the target but a lot of our bombs hit the city. With these RDX bombs, I know we killed a few thousand civilians. It doesn't make sense, but its

war.

Lyon, France, 13 September 1944

Our group has been converted into carrying gas and munitions into France. Yesterday, for I'm writing this on the 14th, we flew to Lyon. It was an uneventful trip over and my first opinion of France is good! I think its beautiful country and Lyon is a nice city. We took off in cloudy weather and got over Italy in the dark. We couldn't find our own field and finally landed in a nearby airfield. We had a lot of sweating to do, but we finally put down okay. This morning we flew back to our home base.

Lyon, France, 17 September 1944

Another cargo hauling flight. Uneventful, so that I almost forgot about it. We did have extremely bad weather and couldn't reach Lyon - instead we landed at Marseilles-waited for the weather to open - flew our cargo back.

Pinzano, Italy, 4 October 1944

We hit a railroad junction bridge today and, as you can see, it was the first time we flew for a long time. The mission itself was an easy one, but, since it was our first for a long time, we weren't too much at ease. We circled the target four times to make sure we hit it. That's not good. Another one from fifty.

Vienna, Austria, 7 October 1944

This city is another of the Nazi's heavily defended targets. If you'll recall, this isn't the first time I flew to Vienna. I didn't fly with the crew today but replaced another Radio Operator. The sky over Vienna was full of B-17s and B-24s. We made our bombing run but didn't drop our bombs because the target was completely destroyed. The flak was intense and, I don't care who it is, they can never fully describe the sensation one feels when over flak areas. Again, I saw enemy fighters. We didn't get hit but I saw them hit another group to our rear. I don't think they did much harm because we had a powerful fighter

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escort. We finally did bomb a marshalling yard near Vienna with devastating accuracy. I'm glad this one's finished. Vienna is a "hot spot".

Castelfranco Veneto, Italy, 10 October 1944

We were scheduled to fly deep into industrial Germany today, but at the last minute, we were sent out to bomb a marshalling yard near Venice. This is one of the main roads leading from Germany and Austria to her battling troops in Italy. Wiping out this rail center would have disrupted severely Germany's already crimped supply lines. We didn't even see our target let alone bomb it. We came back with bombs and indeed the government will soon wage another bond rally. Oh well, it's one more.

Bologna, Italy, 12 October 1944

We raided a storage depot from which armies of Germany are being fed and supplied in Italy. We bombed at H+1 hour. That means one hour after the ground assault on the city has begun. We had so many planes up there the flak gunners didn't know who to shoot at. The outcome of the battle for Bologna may be the turning point in the Italian campaign. A mission like this, where the Air Force is directly aiding ground forces is called a tactical mission. This is No. 25 for me - only 25 more to go. Fascinating, what?

Vienna, Austria, 13 October 1944

Need I say more? Yes, I must. As you recollect - this is Friday the 13th. It really lived up to its name. We'd barely got started when two ships collided in mid-air; killing 8 out of 10 of the crew in one ship. Then we hit Vienna, I should say Vienna hit us. I won't waste good paper telling about the flak hits on our ship, but maybe some day, with a couple of drinks in me, I'll talk. We made it back today, but I know of at least 3 crews that won't. I still can't understand, and I know I never will, how flak can hit everywhere but where the crew is. I'll say again, I'm glad this one is over.

Blechhammer, Germany, 14 October 1944

This target, located in eastern Germany, is really a rough one. Not only had we to expect heavy flak and fighters, but also, bad weather and gasoline. We got into Germany and about 25 miles from our target when we turned off our target. It was so cloudy, you couldn't see the next plane in our formation. That's bad. We finally hit a marshalling yard near Vienna. Deep in Germany is suicidal; let alone waltzing around looking for a target. The flak was moderate but plenty accurate. We really had to scurry after we dropped our bombs.

Linz, Austria, 16 October 1944

This center harbors the "Private Industries" of Hermann Goering. The group raided his pet airplane factory but not without paying dearly for their complete destruction of the factory. In that group, seven planes from our squadron flew along; only two crews came back; one plane returned. The crew on that plane shot down 15 Nazi fighters and the whole group shot down 52. However, today was a different story; we just flew over and bombed Goering's pet fuel plant. He's not going to like that. We still have to sweat out the mission and it's only God's will that brings us safely home. I saw 10 men leave a doomed B-24 today in a very cool order. Well, this one's over so it was easy. As usual, we had our usual dose of flak. This may sound as though I'm now getting used to it, but I'm not. I've realized all my futile words can't fully describe its effect. Another one under the belt, by His will. Oh yes, on our way to our target, we saw Hitler's own private mountain retreat - the famed Berchtesgarden. It really is an impressing site but I'll bet he doesn't spend much time there now.

Vienna, Austria, 17 October 1944

This wasn't exactly a mission considering the damage we didn't do. We really had a hot target picked out for us today. It was really in the core of the flak area. Weather stopped us about twenty-five minutes from our target. We hunted around for another half hour trying to find our alternate targets, but everything was closed in by weather. Our flight was caught in prop wash and I looked out the waist win-

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dow to see another B-24 hurtling at me. Again, by the Grace of God, we missed. This target was in a heavy fighter area and we did our more than usual amount of sweating. We brought our bombs back and landed with them. That's no picnic.

Vienna, Austria, 1 November 1944

Well again we raided Vienna - this time we flew right down 5th avenue to hit a tank ordinance depot. The flak was terrific and the group was marked up a little. We bombed by radar on account of the clouds so we don't know the results yet. Today it was 47° below and we ran into snow. The weather was awful and we almost got hit several times by loose-flying aircraft. No one likes to fly in this weather but we almost had to today. We started out to Germany once; after 5 hours in the soup we turned back. We started out yesterday for Yugoslavia but turned back 5 minutes from the target - couldn't see it. I sure hate to fly in this weather.

Augsburg, Germany, 4 November 1944

Today we hit one of the main shuttling depots the Germans use for their distribution of troops to the Russian and Italian fronts. Around this area, a large portion of her fast-dwindling Luftwaffe is stationed. We had a grand escort of P-38s that flew right in with us. I was busy over the target and didn't see all of the flak but our bombardier said it was the blackest wall of flak he's seen. I doubt if it was that bad, but I say again - you can't fully describe that sensation. I'm really sweatin 'em out but who isn't. Our formation was beautiful today and that's what we all like to see.

Vienna, Austria, 6 November 1944

Well, here we go again. This city is really a huge industrial and railroad depot of Austria. 314 guns here to protect them along with their air force. Again, we buzzed down the main street of Vienna. We met today their new gun - 128 mm. However, a few of our planes were hit so close that the explosion left burns on the plane. If their flak was as it used to be, we might have had a few bombers missing. We didn't loose a one and a few holes were all we suf-

fered. No matter - I still hate Vienna. I prayed today, as I always do and I know without our Lord's protection, guidance and good graces, things would have been very different.

Sarajevo, Yugoslavia, 7 November 1944

This was supposed to be a mediocre run to a marshalling yard used by the Germans evacuating from Greece. It wasn't a mission as rough as usual, but anything can happen. However, with the help of God, we made our run safely and although the bulk of the bombs were not effective, the target was hit by some. Another one along the long road.

Blechhammer, Germany, 20 November 1944

Well, as you should know, I came back from a vacation in London last night and flew again on combat. Today was really a rough one and I'm not kidding. I flew with another crew and I really "sweated it out". I was as scared as I ever want to be over the target and I know God alone was with us. The flak was so heavy and accurate no one knows how we ever got through it safely. We didn't lose a plane over the target and we really plastered it today. Almost every plane was hit and a few came back with a few wounded. This was the longest mission for me - 9 hours aloft. We contacted new flak today called "Rocket flak". It comes up in a tracer and it's awful. A lot of our planes had to land elsewhere because of fuel shortages. I came back and I prayed as I never prayed before. I know now it's only thru God's guidance, protection and His good graces that we've come so far safely.

Munich, Germany, 22 November 1944

Munich is a horrible place. It's Vienna's sister city and twice as nasty. To add to that, clouds and zero visibility added to our danger. We almost cracked up a couple of times. I guess we didn't see most of the flak that came up at us on account of the clouds. I prayed, prayed hard, the whole mission and I know without the guidance, good graces and protection we would have had a harder time of it. With the grace of God, the crew and I have completed another mission in safety. God, and God alone keeps us safe - I

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know.

Blechhammer, Germany, 18 December 1944

The missions are really getting rough. I don't mean it that way, wholly. It's partly my imagination and partly because I'm getting on to the last ones. Yesterday, the group went here and got the heck shot out of them by fighters. They shot down 4 out of our 6 – a grim repetition of the old Linz raid. When I saw our mission this morning – well, some other time. I haven't flown combat for about a month and this was a sordid re-introduction. Well, it turned quite nice. Not much flak and though we saw fighters, we had multi escort planes. It's a hard way to learn.

Venzone, Italy, 28 December 1944

Here's the one that I've been looking for since I came overseas. This was my last mission and it was an easy one actually but sweating comes more easily as the end draws near. Not a puff of flak and though enemy fighters were reported in our target area, they didn't bother us. As I've said before, only by the

grace of God was I able to finish. Only with His guidance, protection and good graces was I able to finish. The Lord has been very good to me and the first thing in my mind as we landed was "Thank you, Dear Lord"

After the war S/Sgt. Vincent J. Aversa returned to his wife in western Pennsylvania. He raised three sons, all successful in their chosen fields.

He dedicated time to coaching football and baseball to young boys.

Several jobs as a machinist lead him to his final occupation as a vocational instructor. Vince taught machine shop to high school boys for several years. He was regarded as an excellent teacher and was instrumental in placing dozens of young kids in local jobs.

Vincent never flew again and on one occasion, found it quite difficult to sit through a showing of Memphis Bell.

Vincent J. Aversa lost his battle with cancer on July 15, 1994.

Three men are sitting stiffly side by side on a long commercial flight.

After they're airborne and the plane has leveled off, the man in the window seat abruptly says, distinctly and confidently, in a loud voice, "Admiral, United States Navy, retired. Married, two sons, both surgeons."

After a few minutes the man in the aisle seat states through a tight lipped smile, "Admiral, United States Coast Guard, retired. Married, two sons, both Judges."

After some thought, the fellow in the center seat decides to introduce himself. With a twinkle in his eye he proclaims, "Master Gunnery Sergeant, United States Marine Corps, retired. Never married, two sons, both Admirals."

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."

Staff Sergeant James G. Erwin

(Prepared by Jim's Stepson; Colonel Mark L. Brown, Jim's 10-man air crew is assigned to the 766th Squadron, 461st Bomb Group (H), 49th Bomb Wing, Fifteenth Air Force, Italy. The air crew consists of 2nd Lt. Arthur E. Farnham, Jr. (Pilot), 2nd Lt. Paul W. Lawrence, Jr. (Co-Pilot), 2nd Lt. Robert W. Eckman (Bombardier), Thomas M. Connolly, Jr. (Engineer/Top Turret Gunner), Cpl. James G. Erwin (Nose Turret Gunner), David M. Holdsworth (Gunner), Franz F. Holscher (Ball Turret Gunner), Carol J. Sanderson (Left Waist Gunner), Henry J. Shay (Tail Gunner), Roscoe E. Teal (Gunner), and Billy J. Walsh, Jr. (Radio Operator/Gunner). The 461st Bomb Group (H) is co-located with the 484th Bomb Group (H) on Torretta Airfield near Cerignola, Italy. A map of the airfield location and photo of Jim's aircrew (Farnham # 42R) are available on the 461st Bomb Group website (www.461st.org). Ship # 40 is pictured in the background of the photo.)

29 October 1943

Jim is inducted into the Army Air Corps.

26 November 1943

Jim enters active duty at Fort Sheridan, Illinois for processing and shipment to the Army Air Forces Basic Training Center at Kessler Field, Mississippi to begin pre-aviation cadet basic training on 1 December 1943. Jim's Army Serial # is 36 767 696.

December 1943 – January 1944

Jim completes six weeks of basic training

January – February 1944

Jim completes six weeks of aerial gunnery training at Tyndall Field, Florida and is awarded MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) 611 – Aerial Gunner

About April 1944

Jim is promoted to Private First Class (Pfc).

About June 1944

Jim is promoted to Corporal (Cpl).

About June—July 1944

Jim visits family members, to include his Dad, on pre-deployment leave.

17—23 July 1944

Jim transits to North Africa.

27 July 1944

6 August 1944

Jim flies his first combat air mission on 461st BG Mission #76 to strike the Miramas Marshalling Yard, France in support of the coming Allied invasion of southern France. The aircraft flown is Ship #57 and the bomb load is nine 500 pound bombs. When landing the B-24 nose wheel is crushed. Jim would later relate in an October 1988 letter to fellow crew-member Carol "Sandy" Sanderson his recollection that after their plane landed, Colonel Glantzberg (Group Commander) came running over to ask "What happened?" Not realizing who he was talking to, Sandy responded "What do you think happened!" and when Sandy "saw who he was talking to he like to have died..."

9 August 1944

Jim flies on Mission #78 to strike the Almasfuzito Oil Refinery, Hungary. The aircraft flown is Ship #42 and the bomb load is nine 500 pound bombs. Conditions on the attack were ideal – clear weather, no enemy fighters, and not too much flak. The bombing score was 62% on target (very good).

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10 August 1944

Jim flies on Mission #79 to strike the Ploesti Xenia Oil Refinery, Rumania. The aircraft flown is Ship #55 and the bomb load is nine 500 pound bombs. The target is covered with a smoke screen so the bombing results could not be scored, but are most likely disappointing. Thirteen aircraft receive holes from flak. Jim later relates in an October 1988 letter to fellow crewmember Carol "Sandy" Sanderson "The number three mission to Ploesti was exciting when we went into a dive and 2nd Lt. Farnham yelled at 2nd Lt. Lawrence flaps, flaps and then took over the flaps himself and leveled the plane off."

13 August 1944

Jim flies on Mission #81 to strike coastal gun positions in Genoa, Italy. The aircraft flown is Ship #55 and the bomb load is four 1,000 lb bombs. The results are poor – "It seemed impossible for the Group to identify the assigned gun positions from the air."

14 August 1944

Jim flies on Mission #82 to strike coastal gun positions near Frejus/St. Raphael, France. The aircraft flown is Ship #52 and the bomb load is four 1,000 lb bombs. Conditions for this mission were ideal. 64.5% of the bombs fall within 1,000 feet of the gun positions. "A few weeks after this mission, a member of the Group who visited the scene of this target returned from France with the information that where the coastal guns had once been located there was nothing but the biggest crater he had ever seen."

18 August 1944

Jim flies on Mission #85 to strike the Alibunar Airdrome, Yugoslavia. The aircraft flown is Ship #40 and the bomb load is 32 fragmentation bombs. Jim notes this as his "Next to last mission in Ship #40." "Nine enemy aircraft received direct hits and three others received near misses. A total of fifty-five enemy aircraft were counted from the photographs taken by the Group. With good weather and neither enemy fighters nor anti-aircraft defenses, all planes

in the Group formation returned safely to the base without damage or casualties."

23 August 1944

Jim flies on Mission #88 to strike the Markersdorf Airdrome, St. Polten, Austria. Double credit is given to aircrews for this particularly dangerous mission. The aircraft flown is Ship #51 and the bomb load is probably 32 fragmentation bombs. "Seven enemy aircraft on the airdrome were hit and three others received near misses. Forty two enemy aircraft parked on the airdrome can be counted in the Group pictures." "...Enemy fighter opposition was encountered. Upward of seventy ME-109s and FW-190s were seen between Lake Balaton and the target. As a result of repeated attacks, five of these were destroyed, six probably destroyed, and one damaged. The cover provided by P-51s on this mission was exceptionally good. There was no flak at the target." "For the second time since the Group had been operating in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations, a strange airplane joined the bomber formation on this mission." "...A black B-17 with white vertical stabilizers and elevators joined the formation and flew wing position for approximately thirty minutes. At the end of that time it fired upon the formation and then turned away when the fire was returned." Jim notes in his October 1988 letter to "Sandy" Sanderson that "Mission #7 & #8 (Group Mission # 88) was the only fighter attack I remember as we approached Markersdorf, Austria. It was the black pilots in the P-51s (aka the Tuskegee Airmen) that saved us as the ME-109s & FW-190s shot up 'A' flight. We were in 'C' flight! Also I remember the B-17 that joined us on this flight as mentioned in the official historical report."

24 August 1944

Jim's pilot "2nd Lt. Arthur E. Farnham Jr. and a skeleton crew washed out the "Kissed Off Kids" (Ship #43) in a practice flight when compelled to crash land it in a field near the base." The aircraft had completed 50 missions with other crew(s)

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“previous to this accident. This was the first plane ever lost to the Group on a practice mission since the beginning of combat operations on 2 April 1944.” Jim states in an October 1988 letter to fellow crew-member “Sandy” Sanderson that “The truth of what really happened was never reported or Farnham would have been locked up!” Jim told this story to me several times... 2nd Lt. Art Farnham offered Jim the opportunity to go with him on this practice flight. Jim politely declined. Since the flight would be conducted in friendly airspace, the gunners (like Jim) were not required. As later related to Jim by one of the crewmembers who participated in the flight, 2nd Lt. Farnham was trying to impress them with how safe the B-24 aircraft was by repetitively shutting down, and restarting, the four aircraft engines in flight. Apparently, something went wrong and one or more of the engines would not restart, resulting in the crash landing. The Navigator (Mel Hans) was paralyzed in the crash landing and would remain a paraplegic until he died eight years later. When Jim visited Mel in the hospital, Mel told him that he didn’t want 2nd Lt. Farnham blamed for the mishap, so the story of what “really happened” was apparently never told by those who participated in the flight to whomever may have investigated the cause of the crash. 2nd Lt. Bob Eckman comments decades later in his article “Bail-Out!” published in the December 2006 edition of the 461st Liberaider, that “Art Farnham had been pretty shaky since the crash landing and blamed himself for the accident. He lost some of his self-confidence and it affected the entire crew, including me.” Note the “Kissed Off Kids” is later salvaged and placed back into service as Ship #49. The aircraft subsequently crashes due to flak damage near Vienna, Austria on 21 February 1945. There is a picture of the nose art on the “Kissed Off Kids” on the 461st Bomb Group website.

12 September 1944

Jim flies on Mission #100 which is a supply transport mission to Lyon/Bron Airdrome, France. The aircraft is loaded with “18 Gas Drums, 900 Gal Gas, 6 Barrels Oil, & Ammunition.” This is one of seven supply missions flown by the Group 10—22 September 1944 to help supply Allied forces advancing in

southern France.

13—22 September 1944

Jim flies on one other supply mission to Lyon/Bron Airdrome, France (Mission #101—105). The specific mission # is unknown.

Mid-September 1944

Jim and his aircrew receive the Air Medal in recognition of their first ten successful combat air missions with Mission #7/8 to Markersdorf, Austria being counted as a double-credit mission. The Air Medal is awarded for “Heroic actions or meritorious service while participating in aerial flight.”

25 September 1944

Jim flies on Mission #107 to strike submarines evacuating Germans in the Athens area, Greece. The aircraft flown is Ship #40 which Jim notes as his last in #40 and the bomb load is nine 500 pound bombs. “The score of the mission was 24% in the target area. The only crew lost to combat by the Group during the month was lost on this mission. This plane left the formation before reaching the target but failed to return to base.”

26 September 1944

Jim writes: “Dear Dad, It seems like yesterday that I left you at the train station in Tennessee but I know by the number of things that have happened since that this is not so. Our crew has flown combat missions from one end of Europe to the other. A few days ago we received the air medal for the missions carried out so far. Since I arrived in Italy, I have visited several cities: Rome, Naples, Foggia, Bari and many smaller towns. Rome is still a beautiful city. This city by some miracle escaped any serious damage. War has left many homeless and hungry people in Italy. The United States and her Allies will have a big job this winter keeping these people from serious exposure and starvation.” Jim closes: “...Well I guess you wondered where I disappeared to well, you know what a hell of a writer I am and as usual I’ll promise to write more in the future.” “...PS:

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You may wonder also why I am still a corporal, well you know the Army, they'll promise you anything – but try and get it. Our crew now has the big total of eleven missions.”

1 October 1944

2nd Lt. Arthur E. Farnham Jr. (Jim's crew's Pilot) and 2nd Lt. Robert W. Eckman (Jim's crew's Bombardier) are awarded the Soldier's Medal. The Soldier's Medal is awarded for "Heroism not involving actual conflict with an armed enemy." My guess is that the medals were awarded to 2nd Lts. Farnham and Eckman for courageous acts coincident with the 24 August 1944 practice flight crash landing.

4 October 1944

Jim flies on Mission #108 to strike the Munich West Marshalling Yard, Germany. The result was "a superior bombing mission but was marked by disastrous losses over the target. The Group was the second of sixteen groups of the Fifteenth Air Force over the West Marshalling Yard at Munich." Despite the loss of seven planes out of the formation during the bomb run, the bombing was superior. Seventy percent of the bombs dropped were plotted within 1,000 feet of the briefed aiming point." "...Sixteen of nineteen planes which returned from the target were damaged by flak but there were no casualties. A total of seventy-two officers and men were missing in action in the seven planes lost to the intense, accurate, and heavy flak over the target. The losses over this target were the heaviest ever sustained by the 461st Bomb Group from flak." Jim relates in a 1988 letter to fellow crewmember Franz Holscher that "Seven out of nine aircraft in our 766th Squadron were shot down. Only our crew and the lead crew got home that day! Even though I was shot down twice on later missions, I'm sure this was my toughest target."

October 1944 – March 1945

Jim flies on ten of the 92 missions (Mission #110 – 202) flown by the 461st Bomb Group 7 October 1944 – 25 March 1945. Which missions he flew during this period is indeterminable with the official records

and personal notes available. I do recall Jim mentioning several of the cities bombed during this period as targets he flew over. These include Vienna, Austria (Bob Eckman's article suggests three missions); locations in Yugoslavia; Augsburg, Germany; and possibly Innsbruck, Austria. Also, fifty four other missions were scheduled October 1944 – March 1945 but not flown mostly due to unfavorable weather conditions. I recall Jim mentioning that on one of his missions (perhaps one of these ten), his plane was badly damaged and had to make an emergency landing in the "Po Valley" of Northern Italy, just inside of the Allied front line at the time. Jim said the plane had two feathered engines and that one of the two remaining operational engines was spitting oil over the wing and the other was vibrating badly due to flak damage to the propeller.

November 1944

Jim develops a skin disease called scabies. Scabies is "a contagious skin disease caused by a parasitic mite that burrows under the skin to deposit eggs, causing intense itching." Because scabies is contagious, Jim is quarantined in the Cerignola hospital and removed from flight status pending his recovery. I recall Jim saying that, at the time, he wasn't disappointed by the news of his grounding because, as his recent 4 October 1944 mission to Munich, Germany had demonstrated, staying on the ground (even in a hospital) was a lot healthier than flying in combat.

19 November 1944

Jim's crew flies on Mission #137 in a B-24 named the "Strictly G.I." to strike the Vosendorf Oil Refinery, Vienna, Austria. Cpl. Roscoe Teal fills in for Jim as the Nose Turret Gunner and a replacement radio operator/gunner (Sgt. Percy A. Peterson, who is killed on the mission by a flak burst) fills in as a waist gunner. "Despite nine-tenths under cast which necessitated pathfinder bombing the flak was extremely accurate. Eight of the twenty-six planes over the target were hard hit by flak, one was lost, one man was killed, and another was wounded. The plane that was lost was flown by 2nd Lt. Arthur E. Farnham Jr." Jim's crew is declared "Missing in Ac-

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tion.” The aircraft loss is classified “FLK-CR (Flak Damage- Crashed) near Duboj” in Bosnia, Yugoslavia. There is a photo of the nose art on the “Strictly G.I.” on the 461st Bomb Group website.

About December 1944

Jim recovers from scabies and is returned to flight status. Since his crew is missing in action, Jim is used as an individual replacement to fill by-mission vacancies in other crews. During one mission, Jim is used as a waist gunner (vice his usual position as the Nose Turret Gunner). Jim told me that he did not like being a waist gunner because of the freezing cold and constant wind blowing in his face. Jim preferred the nose turret.

27 December 1944

Jim’s crew (under the command of 1st Lt. Arthur E. Farnham, Jr.) returns to duty. According to 2nd Lt. Bob Eckman, in an excellent account of his experience entitled “Bail-Out!” that was published in the December 2006 edition of the 461st Bomb Group newsletter (The Liberaider), the “Strictly G.I.” lost two engines (on the same side of the aircraft) when returning from Vienna, Austria 19 November rendering the aircraft uncontrollable so the crew had to “bail out” at an altitude of 16,000 feet over Yugoslavia. With the assistance of “Chetnick” underground fighters, and a team from the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) (forerunner of the CIA), the crew (and 13 others) were eventually airlifted out of Yugoslavia by DC-3 transport aircraft (with 36 P-51s and a full group of P-38s for fighter cover) and brought back to Italy.

23 January 1945

Jim’s crew’s pilot (1st Lt. Arthur E. Farnham Jr.) is awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross which is awarded for “Heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight.” I believe 1st Lt. Farnham earned the award in recognition of his courage noted in Bob Eckman’s article in going all the way to the tail of the out-of-control “Strictly G.I.” to ensure all other crewmembers had exited, and that Sgt. Percy Peterson was indeed killed by flak, before

he bailed out of the aircraft himself.

About February 1945

Jim is promoted to Sergeant (Sgt).

About March 1945

Jim is promoted to Staff Sergeant (S/Sgt).

26 March 1945

Jim flies on Mission #203 to strike the Straszhof Marshalling Yard, Austria as an addition to the crew piloted by 2nd Lt. Randall L. Webb. This would be Jim’s 22nd (and final) mission. The bomb load is 100 pound bombs. “The bombs smothered the west choke point of the yards and started large fires. Flak at the target was described as slight, inaccurate, and heavy but two planes including Jim’s failed to return to base and two others were hit. En route to the target the plane flown by 2nd Lt. Lloyd R. Heinze was last seen at good altitude with an engine on fire near Pecs, Hungary. The plane flown by 2nd Lt. Raymond D. Spehalski left the formation after being hit by flak. Pilots were later told over the intercommunications system by escort fighter pilots that they had seen eight chutes open from the plane before it crashed.” Jim is among those reported as Missing In Action. The loss of Jim’s plane is classified “MF-C/L (Mechanical Failure – Crash Landed).”

March and April 1945

Jim and his new crewmembers slowly make their way back to Italy through Eastern Europe and the Ukraine, USSR. The best reference I have concerning this experience is in a detailed November 1988 letter to Jim from fellow crewmember S/Sgt. Frederick J. McGrath: “...Had 2 worn-out engines feathered, losing altitude, Strauss (2nd Lt. Edwin F. Strauss, the Navigator) spotted Pecs (emergency landing field). We had not been to target as we still had the bombs in the bomb-bays. Flew past Lake Balaton to Pecs, with heavy weight of the plane, the nose wheel collapsed and much dirt & cinders came into plane. I was crouched in the waist area of the plane, and thru dust and all, we could not get out fast enough, but thank God we did. Right away Russians

Mail Call

I received the following from Frank DeVoe and although I've seen it before, I thought I would pass it on. Thanks, Frank.

Piggyback Hero

by Ralph Kenney Bennett

Tomorrow they will lay the remains of Glenn Rojohn to rest in the Peace Lutheran Cemetery in the little town of Greenock, Pa., just southeast of Pittsburgh. He was 81, and had been in the air conditioning and plumbing business in nearby McKeesport. If you had seen him on the street he would probably have looked to you like so many other graying, bespectacled old World War II veterans whose names appear so often now on obituary pages.

But like so many of them, though he seldom talked about it, he could have told you one hell of a story. He won the Air Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Purple Heart all in one fell swoop in the skies over Germany on December 31, 1944. Fell swoop indeed.

Capt. Glenn Rojohn, of the 8th Air Force's 100th Bomb Group was flying his B-17G Flying Fortress bomber on a raid over Hamburg. His formation had braved heavy flak to drop their bombs, then turned 180 degrees to head out over the North Sea. They had finally turned northwest, headed back to England, when they were jumped by German fighters at 22,000 feet. The Messerschmitt Me-109s pressed their attack so closely that Capt. Rojohn could see the faces of the German pilots. He and other pilots fought to remain in formation so they could use each other's guns to defend the group. Rojohn saw a B-17 ahead of him burst into flames and slide sickeningly toward the earth. He gunned his ship forward to fill in the gap. He felt a huge impact. The big bomber shuddered, felt suddenly very heavy and began losing altitude. Rojohn grasped almost immediately that he had collided with another plane. A B-17 below him, piloted by Lt. William G. McNab, had slammed the top of its fuselage into the bottom of Rojohn's.

The top turret gun of McNab's plane was now locked in the belly of Rojohn's plane and the ball turret in the belly of Rojohn's had smashed through the top of McNab's. The two bombers were almost perfectly aligned -- the tail of the lower plane was slightly to the left of Rojohn's tailpiece. They were stuck together, as a crewman later recalled, 'like mating dragon flies.'

Three of the engines on the bottom plane were still running, as were all four of Rojohn's. The fourth engine on the lower bomber was on fire and the flames were spreading to the rest of the aircraft. The two were losing altitude quickly. Rojohn tried several times to gun his engines and break free of the other plane. The two were inextricably locked together. Fearing a fire, Rojohn cut his engines and rang the bailout bell. For his crew to have any chance of parachuting, he had to keep the plane under control somehow..

The ball turret, hanging below the belly of the B-17, was considered by many to be a death trap -- the worst station on the bomber. In this case, both ball turrets figured in a swift and terrible drama of life and death. Staff Sgt. Edward L. Woodall, Jr., in the ball turret of the lower bomber had felt the impact of the collision above him and saw shards of metal drop past him. Worse, he realized both electrical and hydraulic power was gone.

Remembering escape drills, he grabbed the hand-crank, released the clutch and cranked the turret and its guns until they were straight down, then turned and climbed out the back of the turret up into the fuselage. Once inside the plane's belly Woodall saw a chilling sight, the ball turret of the other bomber protruding through the top of the fuselage. In that turret, hopelessly trapped, was Staff Sgt. Joseph Russo. Several crew members of Rojohn's plane tried frantically to crank Russo's turret around so he could escape, but, jammed into the fuselage of the lower plane, it would not budge. Perhaps unaware that his

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voice was going out over the intercom of his plane, Sgt. Russo began reciting his Hail Marys.

Up in the cockpit, Capt. Rojohn and his co-pilot 2nd Lt. William G. Leek, Jr., had propped their feet against the instrument panel so they could pull back on their controls with all their strength, trying to prevent their plane from going into a spinning dive that would prevent the crew from jumping out. Capt. Rojohn motion left and the two managed to wheel the huge, collision-born hybrid of a plane back toward the German coast. Leek felt like he was intruding on Sgt. Russo as his prayers crackled over the radio, so he pulled off his flying helmet with its earphones.

Rojohn, immediately grasping that crew could not exit from the bottom of his plane, ordered his top turret gunner and his radio operator, Tech Sgts. Orville Elkin and Edward G. Neuhaus to make their way to the back of the fuselage and out the waist door on the left behind the wing. Then he got his navigator, 2nd Lt. Robert Washington, and his bombardier, Sgt. James Shirley to follow them. As Rojohn and Leek somehow held the plane steady, these four men, as well as waist gunner, Sgt. Roy Little, and tail gunner, Staff Sgt. Francis Chase, were able to bail out.

Now the plane locked below them was aflame. Fire poured over Rojohn's left wing. He could feel the heat from the plane below and hear the sound of 50 cal. machinegun ammunition 'cooking off' in the flames. Capt. Rojohn ordered Lieut. Leek to bail out. Leek knew that without him helping keep the controls back, the plane would drop in a flaming spiral and the centrifugal force would prevent Rojohn from bailing. He refused the order.

Meanwhile, German soldiers and civilians on the ground that afternoon looked up in wonder. Some of them thought they were seeing a new Allied secret weapon -- a strange eight-engined double bomber. But anti-aircraft gunners on the North Sea coastal island of Wangerooge had seen the collision. A German battery captain wrote in his logbook at 12:47 p.m.:

'Two fortresses collided in a formation in the NE. The planes flew hooked together and flew 20 miles

south. The two planes were unable to fight anymore. The crash could be awaited so I stopped the firing at these two planes.'

Suspended in his parachute in the cold December sky, Bob Washington watched with deadly fascination as the mated bombers, trailing black smoke, fell to earth about three miles away, their downward trip ending in an ugly boiling blossom of fire.

In the cockpit Rojohn and Leek held grimly to the controls trying to ride a falling rock. Leek tersely recalled, 'The ground came up faster and faster. Praying was allowed. We gave it one last effort and slammed into the ground.' The McNab plane on the bottom exploded, vaulting the other B-17 upward and forward. It slammed back to the ground, sliding along until its left wing slammed through a wooden building and the smoldering mess of came to a stop. Rojohn and Leek were still seated in their cockpit. The nose of the plane was relatively intact, but everything from the B-17 massive wings back was destroyed. They looked at each other incredulously. Neither was badly injured.

Movies have nothing on reality. Still perhaps in shock, Leek crawled out through a huge hole behind the cockpit, felt for the familiar pack in his uniform pocket pulled out a cigarette. He placed it in his mouth and was about to light it. Then he noticed a young German soldier pointing a rifle at him. The soldier looked scared and annoyed. He grabbed the cigarette out of Leek's mouth and pointed down to the gasoline pouring out over the wing from a ruptured fuel tank.

Two of the six men who parachuted from Rojohn's plane did not survive the jump. But the other four and, amazingly, four men from the other bomber, including ball turret gunner Woodall, survived. All were taken prisoner. Several of them were interrogated at length by the Germans until they were satisfied that what had crashed was not a new American secret weapon.

Rojohn, typically, didn't talk much about his Distinguished Flying Cross. Of Leek, he said, 'in all fair-

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ness to my co-pilot, he's the reason I'm alive today.'

Like so many veterans, Rojohn got unsentimentally back to life after the war, marrying and raising a son and daughter. For many years, though, he tried to link back up with Leek, going through government records to try to track him down. It took him 40 years, but in 1986, he found the number of Leeks' mother, in Washington State. Yes, her son Bill was visiting from California. Would Rojohn like to speak with him? Some things are better left unsaid. One can imagine that first conversation between the two men who had shared that wild ride in the cockpit of a B-17. A year later, the two were re-united at a reunion of the 100th Bomb Group in Long Beach, Calif. Bill Leek died the following year.

Glenn Rojohn was the last survivor of the remarkable piggyback flight. He was like thousands upon thousands of men, soda jerks and lumberjacks, teachers and dentists, students and lawyers and service station attendants and store clerks and farm boys who in the prime of their lives went to war.

He died last Saturday after a long siege of sickness. But he apparently faced that final battle with the same grim aplomb he displayed that remarkable day over Germany so long ago. Let us be thankful for such men.



I received the following from Frank O'Bannon shortly before he passed away.

Wisdom from the Military

'If the enemy is in range, so are you.'

Infantry Journal

'It is generally inadvisable to eject directly over the area you just bombed.'

U.S. Air Force Manual

'Whoever said the pen is mightier than the sword obviously never encountered automatic weapons.'

General Macarthur

'You, you, and you ... Panic. The rest of you, come with me.'

U.S. Marine Corp Gunnery Sgt.

'Tracers work both ways.'

U.S. Army Ordnance

'Five second fuses only last three seconds.'

Infantry Journal

'Any ship can be a minesweeper. Once.'

'Never tell the Platoon Sergeant you have nothing to do.'

Unknown Marine Recruit

'If you see a bomb technician running, follow him.'

USAF Ammo Troop

'Though I Fly Through the Valley of Death, I Shall Fear No Evil. For I am at 80,000 Feet and Climbing.' At the entrance to the old SR-71 operating base Kadena, Japan

'You've never been lost until you've been lost at Mach 3.'

Paul F. Crickmore (test pilot)

'The only time you have too much fuel is when you're on fire.'

'If the wings are traveling faster than the fuselage, it's probably a helicopter -- and therefore, unsafe.'

'When one engine fails on a twin-engine airplane you always have enough power left to get you to the scene of the crash.'

'Without ammunition, the USAF would be just another expensive flying club.'

'What is the similarity between air traffic controllers and pilots? If a pilot screws up, the pilot dies; If ATC screws up, The pilot dies.'

'Never trade luck for skill.'

The three most common expressions (or famous last words) in aviation are:

'Why is it doing that?', 'Where are we?' And 'Oh Shit...!'

'Airspeed, altitude and brains. Two are always needed to successfully complete the flight.'

'Mankind has a perfect record in aviation; we never left one up there!'

'Flying the airplane is more important than radioing your plight to a person on the ground incapable of understanding or doing anything about it.'

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'The Piper Cub is the safest airplane in the world; it can just barely kill you.'

Attributed to Max Stanley (Northrop test pilot)

'There is no reason to fly through a thunderstorm in peacetime.'

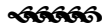
Sign over squadron ops desk at Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ, 1970

'If something hasn't broken on your helicopter, it's about to.'

'You know that your landing gear is up and locked when it takes full power to taxi to the terminal.'

As the test pilot climbs out of the experimental aircraft, having torn off the wings and tail in the crash landing; the crash truck arrives; the rescuer sees a bloodied pilot and asks 'What happened?' The pilot's reply: 'I don't know, I just got here myself!'

Attributed to Ray Crandell (Lockheed test pilot)



Editor: I am working on a history of Hammer Field in Fresno, California, where the 461st Bomb Group trained in 1943. I would appreciate hearing from anyone who served here, in the form of anecdotes, memories, comments (good or bad) about the base or town, for possible inclusion in my book. I also am interested in photographs, especially those showing activities or base aircraft. All materials will be preserved and returned.

My address is:

George F. Gruner
4727 East Alamos #117
Fresno, CA 93726
Phone: (559) 292-2816
E-Mail: gfgruner@AOL.com



Dear Hughes and Dave,

I received my copy of the "Liberaider" a few days ago, and I just wanted to tell you how enjoyable I found it. The articles were well chosen and well written. I especially found the "Cerignola" piece of interest, for it gave me some insight on what we in

the 765th were missing. That the three squadrons near group HQ enjoyed electric lights and a water supply adjacent each tent were luxuries unknown in the 765th. We finally got electric lights about a week or two before we came home.

I also did not know that those three had showers down in the valley south of the runways, and that one could also bathe in the stream that supplied the showers. We once went two weeks without showers, which must have been very aromatic to visitors.

On the other side of the coin, we at the 765th had only one field grade officer within three miles, which permitted a more relaxed atmosphere, and unless my memory fails me, no "Officers Club" dues.

The Romania and Willow Run articles were also very interesting. The airplane we flew to Italy was fresh off the assembly line at Willow Run, and she was a beauty to look at and fly. Unfortunately, we did not get to take it all the way to our Group.

The only article that fell short was on the penultimate page, written by some guy with an unpronounceable name.

Thanks for all your volunteer efforts. We are very grateful.

Vahl Vladyka



Hello,

I just found your website today, and it is awesome! Well done! My name is Dawn Ralph and I am compiling information for my family regarding my uncle, Robert Wayne Bell. My mother was just a small child when word of Wayne's death came to the family. He was killed in action on March 9, 1945. He was a tail gunner and his plane collided in the clouds with another plane as they returned from a bombing mission. We are obtaining his military records from the government. Also, I decided to search for his squadron on-line today. In time, I will compile a biography of Wayne for you to add to your

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website. If you have any advice in regard to my search, then I would be happy to have it. Also, if you knew my uncle, then any information or stories about him would be much appreciated. We realize that all of the stories may not be family friendly, yet we would appreciate them all.

Thank you very much for your assistance.

Please pass along to any surviving military members how much we appreciate their service, sacrifice, and sharing of their stories.

Sincerely,
Dawn Ralph
dralph32@yahoo.com



The following is Vahl Vladyka. Thanks V2.

'Twas The Nite Before The Mission

Twas the nite before the mission
And all through the Group
The wheels and the Big Wigs
Were grinding out Poop.
The bombers were parked
On their hardstands with care,
Waiting for armament
Soon to be there.
The flyers were nestled
All snug in their beds;
While visions of milk runs
Danced in their heads.
When out of the darkness
There came quite a knock;
We cursed the O. D.
And looked at the clock.

"Briefing will be in two hours," the caller calmly said....
Well, that mean we'd have forty more winks in bed....
Time marches on and then, gapping and sighing, we leap
From the sack to make with the flying.

We rush to the mess hall
Quick as a flash.
We eat cold powdered eggs
And hideous hash.
Then the long bumpy ride
To the Group Briefing Room,
Where the Big Wigs preside
And dish out our doom.
The target is told,
The first six rows faint-
For lo and behold!
VIENNA it AIN'T!!
The Brain has slipped up ,
My poor achin' back!
We're bombing a place
That throw up no flak!
So it's back in the truck
And off to the line;
The road is now smooth,
And the weather is fine.
The crew is at Station,
The check list is run;
The engines run smoothly,
As we give 'em the gun.
Then suddenly the pilot
Calls in despair:
"Look at the Tower!
They just shot a flare!"
We dashed to the window
With heart full of dread;
The pilot was right,
The darn thing's RED!
So it's back to the sack
And we sweat out our fate,
For there's a practice formation
At a quarter paste eight.

An Air Force chief master sergeant and a general were sitting in the barbershop. They were both just getting finished with their shaves, when the barbers reached for some after-shave to slap on their faces.

The general shouted, "Hey, don't put that stuff on me! My wife will think I've been in a whore-house!"

The sergeant turned to his barber and said, "Go ahead and put it on me. My wife doesn't know what the inside of a whorehouse smells like."

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wet the plane and I helped throw dirt on the plane to hide silver aluminum sun-glare in daylight. Taken to tavern and got Stein of Hungarian Beer (will never forget the taste), then to farmhouse and ate cubes of well done beef browned to good taste, very tender and potatoes. Then we enlisted men and Russians all sat around this big civilian table to drink a jug of vino, one glass supplied, you had to drink-up and refill and pass it to next person, around the table. Three or four times around and I was drunk on the home brew wine. Helped into a feather bed, I slept like a log. Woke up with no hangover...odd I thought at the time. Then got into Ox-carts (stand-up) to trucks and to train, put two crews per box-car, straw to lie on. Had Pot Stove for heat and case of Russian c-rations, beef packed in lard (made in Iowa, lend-lease to Russia). I found an old helmet along railroad tracks and had engineer of train sterilize with live steam and we used this for cook-pot. Pot Stove fire melted lard and cooked beef. We also had box of brown bread (I liked it). The Co-Pilot (2nd Lt. Walter O. Reil) had a bowie knife, only thing that would cut through the hard crust. Gathered twigs off trees which we used for forks (Boy Scout knowledge). The hot beef stew (found some scallions in field along tracks) softened the brown bread and we all devoured it.

Bill Jones (Jonsie) (S/Sgt. William T. Jones) and I met Russian Colonel on train and his pass time was checkers. Bill and I played many a game with him to pass long day time hours. Also met Olga, head-cook and head-nurse, and we also did "public relations" work and toured train (with her) to hospital cars where wounded Russian soldiers were stacked on tiers of cots (red blood on bandages showed new injuries). We shook hands with the wounded, pointed to the American Flag on arm patch, "AMERIKANSKI" became the magic word. For their morale, could not be better, and Olga fed us for our efforts. We went thru Budapest, Hungary, later Bucharest, Romania and on to Odessa, USSR. There were many air crews there, and British troops as well. Then we had to live on pickle soup (cucumbers sliced), more brown bread and tea. But we did. Remember the 20' x 20' x 6' deep pit latrine everybody used? Logs were straddled over top for a "perch."

An English-speaking guide took small groups of us on a walking tour in Odessa to monuments and statues in town. We slept on wood-slat bunks with lumpy mattress, but was better than floor of box-car. As the days went by, then we heard that Pres. Roosevelt died. That worried me, for up to that point, I thought we would all eventually get back, but I had some doubts. Then one day we were told to pack-up, a British troop transport had docked to take us back. Out Black Sea, by Turkey and Greece, and back to Italy. We marched in ranks and sang at the top of our lungs to ship. A brass band greeted us at Naples, Italy."

Note: The recollections in Fred McGrath's letter to Jim correspond very well with what I remember of Jim's own recollections. However, Jim often emphasized one observation that Fred McGrath does not mention and that was the astonishing degree of "Russian Front" ground combat destruction and debris observed along the rail line as the group of American airman made their way across the Ukraine toward Odessa, USSR. Jim speculated that because a rail line would be an important terrain objective, that the Russians (and Germans) fought particularly hard (and destructive) battles in the areas he observed.

16 April 1945

Jim is issued an "Identity Card for Ex-Prisoner of War [POW]" in Odessa, USSR and Jim is listed as a former POW on the 461st Bomb Group website. However, Jim and his fellow crewmembers were not really POWs since the US was not at war with the USSR. My guess is the card was issued for purely administrative reasons by the Red Cross as a matter of routine and, perhaps, to help facilitate repatriation processing later in Italy.

21 April 1945

Jim's mother (Mrs. Bessie G. Erwin, 5471 Ellis Ave, Chicago) receives the following telegram from the War Department in Washington DC: "THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET THAT YOUR SON S/SGT ER-

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WIN, JAMES G HAS BEEN MISSING IN ACTION OVER HUNGARY SINCE 26 MARCH 1945 IF FURTHER DETAILS OR OTHER INFORMATION ARE RECEIVED YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED---THE ADJUTANT GENERAL."

25 April 1945

A condolence letter is sent by the Fifteenth Air Force Commanding General to Jim's mother – "My Dear Mrs. Erwin: I can understand the shock you must have felt the day you received word that your son, Staff Sergeant James G. Erwin, 36767696, is missing in action. Unfortunately, I can give you no assurance as to his safety, but I feel that the meager facts we have relative to his recent mission will prove helpful to you. The B-24 Liberator on which Jim served as aerial gunner, was on a bombing mission to Straszhof, Austria, on March 26, 1945. Shortly after the plane had become disabled, the pilot radioed that he was going to follow the formation until they reached friendly territory. The ship was last seen flying under control and maintaining altitude over Pecs, Hungary. Your son's personal possessions have been assembled and will be sent to the Effects Quartermaster, Army Effects Bureau, Kansas City, Missouri, from which point they will be forwarded to the designated beneficiary. As a tribute to the fine service he has rendered his country, Jim has been awarded the Air Medal with One Oak Leaf Cluster (denoting a second award). I share your pride in his accomplishments. The War Department will notify you immediately should there be a change in his status. Very sincerely yours, N. F. Twining, Major General, USA, Commanding."

28 April 1945

Jim and the 2nd Lt. Randall L. Webb crew, crewmembers Jim crash-landed with in Pecs, Hungary (including S/Sgt. Frederick J. McGrath), are reported by the 461st Bomb Group as "Returned to Duty."

3 May 1945

The Chicago Times reports Jim ("Erwin, James G.,

S/Sgt., son of Mrs. Bessie G. Erwin, 5471 Ellis") on a list of those published as "ARMY MISSING – EUROPEAN REGIONS."

10 May 1945

Jim's mother receives the following telegram from the War Department in Washington, DC: "THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS PLEASURE THAT YOUR SON S/SGT ERWIN JAMES G RETURNED TO DUTY IN ITALY 28 APR 45 --- THE ADJUTANT GENERAL."

4—10 June 1945

Jim transits back to the USA and, following leave, is subsequently assigned as a clerk with the Army Air Force Separation Base (Provisional), Las Vegas, Nevada for one month.

20 October 1945

Jim is honorably discharged from the Army Air Corps. He is credited with one year and twenty-eight days of US continental service, ten months and twenty-three days of foreign service, seven combat campaigns in the European Theater of Operations (Rome Arno, No Apennines, Po Valley, Southern France, Rhineland, Northern France & Air Combat Balkans), and twenty-two combat air missions. Jim earns the following military decorations for his service: The **Air Medal (with One Oak Leaf Cluster)** for "Heroic actions or meritorious service while participating in aerial flight"; the **Army Good Conduct Medal** for "Exemplary conduct, efficiency and fidelity during three years of active enlisted service with the U.S. Army (1 year during wartime [for first award])"; the **American Campaign Medal** for "Service within the continental U.S. for one year 1941—46"; the **European-African Middle Eastern Campaign Medal (with Seven Campaign Service Stars)** for "Service in the European-African-Middle Eastern theater for thirty days or receipt of any combat decoration 1941—45"; the **World War II Victory Medal** for "Service in the U.S. Armed Forces 1941 - 46"; the **Army Air Force Air Crew Member Badge**; the **Marksman Qualification Badge** (for .45 Cal Pistol); and the **Honorable Discharge Lapel Button**.

Luck

by

David Feldman

Crew #59, 766th Squadron

I don't remember the date or the mission number, but it was at a time when the Germans were pulling out of Yugoslavia.

We were to hit a bridge in northern Italy to bottle them up. I was the navigator on the lead ship of the 461st and Jack Cummins was the bombardier. This was his 35th and final mission before going home.

All went well until we reached the IP when Jack took over with the bomb sight. As he bent over I goosed him and wished him good luck going home. This act distracted him but when he got back to the bomb sight he saw a bridge that he zeroed in on. We destroyed that bridge.

It seems that the original bridge was destroyed by groups that went in before us. The bridge that Jack hit was parallel to the targeted one, and was the last bridge still undestroyed across this river.

Jack received a DFC for this.

A goose in time saves nine!



Standing L-R: Barnhart, Robert M. (P); Danko, Andrew (CP); Feldman, David I. (N); Milby, Michael H. Jr. (B)

Kneeling L-R: Yiengst, Lester F. (TG); Lubianetsky, Stephen J. (TT); Morton, Henry H. Jr. (BG); Hamrick, Myles Y. (RO/WG); O'Toole, Lawrence W. (A/G); Lund, Verne S. (E)

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

Webmaster Comments

It's hard to believe that it was seven years ago that I agreed to take on the 461st website and the Lib-eraider. A lot has happened over the last seven years. The website has grown at an unbelievable rate. At first, this growth presented a problem as the space available was limited. Time and time again I ran into the limit provided by the host. Today the host has essentially made unlimited space available to the 461st at a very reasonable price. The problem now deals with the Website CD I've offered for the last few years. Because of the amount of material I've been receiving, I can no longer offer the Website CD. The website just won't fit on a standard CD any longer. My solution is to now offer the Website DVD. A standard CD can hold about 700-meg worth of information while a DVD can hold nearly 5-gig of information. By switching to a DVD, I should be able to continue to offer website information well into the future.

I might point out that earlier this year I found an al-

bum my father had from his time with the 461st. It was a treasure trove of photos. Some of them already existed on the website, but a lot of them were new. I decided to post all the photos on the website. It turned out to take 17 pages to hold all the photos without overcrowding each page. If you haven't taken a look, please do so. While you're at it, please look at the caption on each photo. I've managed to place captions on a lot of the pictures, but need help with a number of them. If you can supply a caption for one of the photos (or any photo anywhere on the website for that matter), please let me know.

As I've learned more and more about the 461st, I'm come to realize that the 461st didn't win the war by itself. The 461st was part of the 49th Bomb Wing that was part of the Fifteenth Air Force. Checking the Internet, I could find no website dedicated to the Fifteenth Air Force. As a result, I started one to show how the 461st fit into the Fifteenth Air Force. Check out www.15thaf.org.