



The 461st

Liberaider



Vol. 12, No. 1

June 1995

SOMEWHERE IN THE USA

“THE BOMB YOU HEAR WHISTLING DOES NOT HIT YOU”

A REPORT CONTAINING MEMORIES AND FACTS ABOUT
THE AIR WAR IN THE AREA AROUND VIENNA AND
WEINER BEUSTADT.

BY FELIX RAMEDER, EBERGASSING, AUSTRIA

(See Page 3)



Lobau Oil Blending Plant, Vienna, Austria

The 461st LIBERAIDER
461st Bombardment Group (H)
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Inactivated: 27 August 1945
Incorporated: 15 November 1985

CORPORATE HDQRS: 1407 W. 4th St. P.O. Box 5160, Spencer, IA 51301

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CONGRATULATIONS!!!

Dorothy & Frank
Our Very Best Wishes
On your Marriage

Karel Hagerstrand Wildman, Eric C. Hagerstrand,
Sigrid Hagerstrand Jordan

and

Barbara L. O'Bannon, Thomas C. O'Bannon,
David J. O'Bannon

Wish to announce the Marriage of their Parents

Dorothy Edge Hagerstrand

to

Frank Clinton O'Bannon, Jr.

at

New Bremen, Ohio

on

February 15, 1995

Only best wishes for a long healthy marriage will be accepted.

Warning!!! You May Be Rasked

Members, when interacting with others, you should be aware of a highly contagious and sometimes addictive practice that is on the rise across the country. It's called RASKING. You may be RASKED without even knowing it so be on the alert. Learn to know when you have been RASKED and retaliate!

What is a RASK you may ask? It is a "Random Act of Senseless Kindness".

You have been RASKED if:

- Someone calls you just to see how you are and if you need anything.
- Someone returns something you lost in the supermarket.
- A car stops in traffic to let you cross the street.
- Etc.

What should you do if you are RASKED?

Retaliate! RASK someone else. Two or three RASKS are even better.

Above all, don't sit around waiting to be RASKED. Taske charge and commit your own.

It's very easy. Try it, you'll like it!

* * * * *

Editor's note: The above has been paraphrased from an item in my church's newsletter.

The following two notes were sent to the Treasurer along with their 1995 dues payments.

22 February 1995

"50 years ago today two of my crew and I were hit by flak and received the Purple Heart."

Nose Gunner—Charles R. Krause
Navigator—Ralph E. Naven
Pilot—Me

R. Stanley Staples 765th B.S.
Mission #181 Kempton M/Y, Germany

9 March 1995

"What better way to observe my 50th anniversary of bailing out of our B-24 over Yugoslavia than to pay my dues! Thank God I'm here and able to be a member of the 461st."

Leroy Grebe 764th B.S.
Mission #190 Graz, Austria

The Bomb You Hear Whistling Does Not Hit You

By Felix Rameder, Ebergassing, Austria

Editor's note: The following is Part I of Felix's story about living near Vienna during World War II. It is printed in his own words with practically no editing. This portion of the story ends on November 2, 1943 with the bombing of Wiener Neustadt by the 15th Air Force. The 461st Bomb Group was still in training at Hammer Field. They started their move to Italy after Christmas 1943 and flew their first mission to Austria on April 23, 1944 (Mission #13) when they bombed the Bad Vöslau Aircraft Factory. Their first mission to Wiener Neustadt came on May 10th, Mission #21.

Preface

The air war I saw as a 13 year old boy in the so called Vienna area was such an enormous event that one man hardly can describe it exactly and report about it correctly. Therefore I will try to report also about experiences of other people who told me about them soon after the air attacks. I am sure that still today my report about the events on the ground will be interesting for the former bomber crews who flew 20,000 to 25,000 feet high in the sky above those occurrences on the ground.

This area around Vienna in which I still live and the industrial area around Wr. (Wiener) Neustadt have already been in World War I a major industrial location. Immediately after Hitler occupied Austria in 1938 many already closed down production were newly equipped to produce war material and existing ones were converted for the same purpose.

On March 25, 1938, Feldmarshall Göring visited Austria. During this visit on March 26, 1938, at a major parade he announced that Austria's economy will be completely incorporated in the German armament concept. On May 14, 1938 Göring is again in Vienna and turns the first sod to start the construction work for the airfields in Schwechat and Zwölfaxing.

On March 28, 1938 Göring visits the aircraft production facility in Wr. Neustadt, which is turned into German property as of May 16, 1938. Under the name Wiener Neustädter Flugzeugwerke AG this production facility will finish its first ME-109 end of March 1939. Till yearend 1939 they will produce 119 ME-109, which equals a fourth of the total German aircraft production of this year. From 1940 on 3 production facilities (Wr. Neustadt Plant 1 and 2 and Fischamend Plant 3) produced the fighter ME-109.

Till end of 1944 the Wiener Neustädter Flugzeugwerke AG builds 8,545 planes. In July 1943 before the first attack on August 13, 1943 they build 280 planes.

Also, from 1940 on the production facilities in the Vienna area were completely converted to war material production. They produce everything from the hand grenade on to locomotives, guns, engines and trucks. In 1942 the war material production in this area is increased by moving armament works from Germany to Austria, e.g. Heinkel factory in Schwechat. The Vienna area grew to a major armament concentration.

From 1940 on 14 airfields were built in a short period of time. Till 1943 they were mainly used to train pilots. Only on April 6, 1941 the raids to Belgrade (former Yugoslavia) were flown from the airfields Zwölfaxing, Schwechat and Wr. Neustadt.

Air Defense

Until the beginning of 1942 no remarkable air defense measures were taken. During 1942 the increased activity of American and British bombers in Germany led to the opinion that maybe someday or some night bombers will fly from England to Austria. Therefore the air defense was strengthened. In January 1943 already 28 flak batteries with 112 guns (104 guns 8.8 mm and 8 guns 10.5 mm) were stationed in Vienna. At this point of time no fighters were available this area except those at the fighter school Vöslau.

Six months later they found out that their efforts targeted the wrong object of protection as of August 13, 1943 the Wiener Neustädter Flugzeugwerke were bombed by 61 B-24 coming from Bengasi/North Africa. 3 batteries with a total 18 8.8 mm guns were stationed in Wr. Neustadt. They could only fire an aimless barrage and hit no bomber.

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

Naturally this air attack resulted in quick reactions of the Luftwaffe and flak. Till October 1, 1943 when the next attack happened several more batteries with 58 guns 8.8 mm and 23 guns 10.5 mm were stationed in Wr. Neustadt.

In September 1943 the Luftwaffe moved the fighter group JG II/27 equipped with ME-109 to the airfield Fels am Wagram. In November 1943 the fighter group JG II/53 (ME-109) was moved to Seyring and the fighter group JG II/ZG1 equipped with ME-110 (destroyer) was moved to Wels.

Therefore the second air attack to Wr. Neustadt on October 1, 1943 was not a milk-run sortie any more for the US bombers from North Africa.

Two task forces attacked the ME-109 factory:

1. 389th BG, 44th BG and 93rd BG (from the 8th AAF) took off between 0700 and 0720.
2. 98th BG and 376th BG took off between 0730 and 0750.

The 98th BG failed to rendezvous and returned to base. The 376th BG proceeded to the target alone. Only two planes of the 98th BG continued on course and found a section of the 376th and flew with them to the target.

The first task force bombed the target between 1150 and 1154, the second force containing the 376th BG and two planes of the 98th BG bombed the target between 1210 and 1212.

On this day the defense from Wr. Neustadt was horrible. The lead group of the first task force, the 389th BG, reported no enemy aircraft encounters. But the 93rd BG encountered 15 to 25 ME-109 and the 44th BG reported encounters of 55 to 75 ME-109 and 20 to 25 FW-190. The FW-190 came from a Hungarian airfield and Graz airfield. The 376th BG reported uneager attacks by 3 JU-88 and 5 ME-109.

But the flak at the target was intense, accurate, aimed and barrage type. Heavy flak was encountered from the I.P. at Sopron to the target. In total 10 B-24s of the 3 groups were shot down. The 44th BG had the worst losses. 26 B-24s took off and only 9 landed at 1753 at home field. 8 B-24s were lost over target area. The comment from Colonel Posey: "Worst flak

I ever saw." The second task force, the 376th BG, reported flak over target very heavy and very accurate.

The next air raid to Wr. Neustadt on October 24, 1943 was no success for the US bombers because the area was covered with fog. Only the 301st BG flew into the Wr. Neustadt area and bombed the railway station Ebenfurth 4 miles away from Wr. Neustadt.

The fourth raid to Wr. Neustadt was flown by 74 B-17s and 38 B-24s and was the first raid of the 15th AAF to this target. This raid on November 2, 1943 brought again heavy destruction for the two factories in Wr. Neustadt but also heavy losses for the attacking bombers. Through heavy attacks from fighters and very intensive and accurate flak 11 US bombers crashed around Wr. Neustadt.

After this raid the transfer of the war material production to smaller factories producing only parts started. But this transfer of war material production to 24 factories took several months.

After these raids it was a fact that also Austria was included in the air war. Until summer 1943 a lot of people thought that the Americans would not bomb Austria. There was a common saying about this belief: "Bombs on Berlin, Roses on Vienna" (In German: Bomben auf Berlin, Rosen auf Wien). Now huge efforts were started to make all that up what had been neglected in the previous months. An air reporting system was established. New fixed flak batteries were built and staffed. Fighter squadrons were transferred to the Vienna area. Air shelters were built and an improved air alarm system for the civilian population was put in place. In Vienna at the beginning of 1943 three flak towers and three radar towers were started to build. Beginning of 1944 everything was ready and this is how it worked:

The Vienna area was divided into 3 flak defense districts: Wr. Neustadt, Vienna and Moosbierbaum. Fighters assigned for protection against bomber formations were brought into action from the airfields in the Vienna area depending upon the approaches: Seyring, Götzendorf, Fels am Wagram, Eisenstadt, Parndorf, Markersdorf and Vöslau as well as from airfields in Bavaria, in Germany, in Hungary and even from airfields in Silesia (Jever).

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

Air Raid Alarm

When approaching over the Mediterranean Sea the bomber formations were located by radar sets installed on the peninsula Istria, a part of Croatia today. The bomber warning was then transmitted to other aerial region control systems all over the land also equipped with radar sets.

The civilian population was informed about the air raid alarm by an interruption of the radio program. A warm, deep and calm woman's voice said: "Attention, attention we are bringing an aerial situation report. Heavy enemy bomber formations are approaching Carinthia-Styria." Later on there was again an announcement, "Enemy bomber formation over Lake Balaton." Then suddenly you could hear a cuckoo's call on the radio for one minute. This cuckoo's call was only sent when there was a high probability of an air attack. A few minutes later they gave pre-alarm where the sirens were hooting 3 times high and 3 times low. If the bomber formation continued to fly in the direction of Vienna then they gave main alarm. The sirens were hooting 12 times high and 12 times low. The radio program was terminated. Only announcements about the location of

the bomber formations were broadcast. These announcements were encoded. To decode them we had to use a map that was divided into grid squares. So if you listened to the radio and heard the announcements you could look at the map and see in which square the bombing formation flew and in which direction. See the map below.

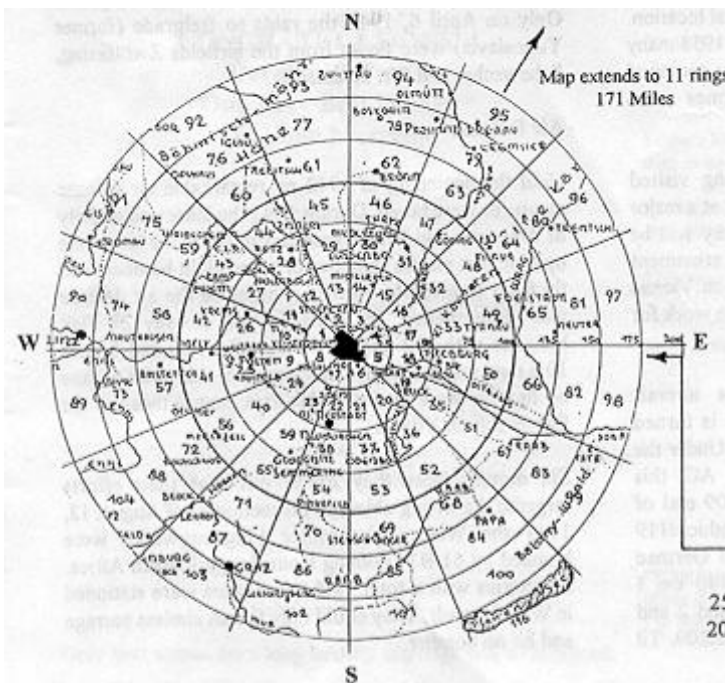
Air Attack Warning

When the bomber formation was located within 15 minutes flight time from a probable target, air attack warning was given for this area. But often air attack warning and bomber formation reached the target at the same time. In Vienna after the announcement "Bomber formations approaching from Carinthia-Styria" you could see many people, mostly women and children wandering to midtown where the flak towers stood. Only flak towers gave safe shelter. Today these flak towers stand but they are used for storage purposes.

At the beginning of the air raid warning things always happened in the same way. After the hooting of the sirens a tremendous quietness lay upon all places. Most people went down to the basements

(Continued on page 6)

461st Targets in Austria



<u>Target</u>	<u>Map No.</u>
Vienna Area	1 to 8
Korneuburg	2
Wr. Neudorf	7
Moosbierbaum	10
Wiener Neustadt	22
St. Polton	25
Graz	87
Linz	90
<u>Check Point</u>	
Lake Balaton	116
Ebergassing	5 or 6

SCALE

25 Kilometers = 15.5 Miles

200 Kilometers = 124 Miles

(Continued from page 5)

and started to wait. Some courageous people stayed by the building, the windows of which were opened widely, and watched the sky to see whether the bomber formation is approaching or not. From the aerial state announcement and from the state map one knew from which direction the bombers must come. When there was a clear day you could suddenly see many tiny glittering dots often with vapor trails already from a distance of 30 miles. If this was the case the bombers would reach you in 10 minutes. Ebergassing, the village in which I am still living, is situated 10 miles southeast of Vienna. During the war it was right on the outer flak ring around Vienna. Therefore the flak began to fire when the bombers were approaching Ebergassing.

It was always the same picture, the flak shot a barrier and the bombers flew through it. It was a real sight. First the roaring of hundreds of engines, then the cracking of the flak guns, the bursting of the shells in the sky and the crashing of one or more planes. When a plane went out of formation and down you could hear a sound just as if the plane would howl. This howling was probably caused by the engines working with full power. Then the waiting if the crew could bail out. When a target near Ebergassing was bombed I could hear the whistling of the bombs and if we could hear this sound we considered ourselves lucky. There was a common saying, some kind of rule: "The bomb you hear whistling does not hit you."

After twenty minutes everything was over until the next aerial state announcement informing about a bomber formation approaching which could be followed again by the announcement and the aerial state map. If no other formation was approaching within half an hour they gave the "All clear" signal. The siren was hooting in a continuous tone for 1 minute.

This Is How I Experienced Air Raid Alarms:

August 13, 1943

It started on this day. The 9th AAF flew her first air raid to Austria. We had daylight saving time which meant that the clock was put 2 hours ahead at the beginning of the summer. About half past 1 o'clock a.m. I was fishing in a brook besides the carpet factory in

Ebergassing when I heard the loud noise of engines in the air. I looked up to the sky to the south and saw some planes flying to the west. They flew high in the sky and I could not recognize the type. Shortly after that I heard a dull rumbling. The earth was shaking. I thought that this would result from the practice firing of the German Army. But suddenly the sirens in the factory were hooting. I did not care and kept on fishing. Ten minutes later the director of the factory came running to the brook where I was fishing and shouted to me that I should go home at once because there was air attack warning. So I ran home. But my mother was working out on the fields about one mile away from the village. So I ran to her. I met her in the open fields. She pointed to the direction of Wr. Neustadt which lies approx. 20 miles away and said that there was bombing. I saw 3 huge clouds of smoke rising 10,000 feet straight up in the sky drifting towards west. In the evening of this day our neighbor who was working in Wr. Neustadt told us about this attack.

He was assigned to the flak. They had their 3.7 cm flak gun in position on the roof of a workshop building. Short after air attack alarm many people were still walking slowly across the airfield to the air shelter. He said planes approaching in V formation from the south. The leader of the flak position looked through his binoculars and shouted, "They are Americans!" The flak crew was only able to shoot a few shells to the bombers. Then they had to seek shelter because the bombs were coming down. Some bombs broke through the rook on which the flak was in position and exploded in the workshop building. The attack came as a surprise to the people also to those who did not reach the air shelters. These were many casualties.

October 1, 1943

Also at this second air attack the air raid alarm system was not fully in place in the whole area. On this day, it was a Friday, I was still in school when shortly before 12:00 o'clock a.m. the earth was shaking as if there was an earthquake. Soon after that we heard a dull rumbling and the sirens hooting. We ran out of the school building to a bus stop from where a bus usually drove us the 3 kilometers home. This bus stop was situated on an elevation where already a few people were standing looking to the direction of Wr. Neustadt. From there for the first time I saw the maneuver of an air attack. The people said that the first wave of air-

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

craft had already dropped their bombs but in the east you could already see the second wave approaching. And indeed there I saw a number of glittering dots in the sky approaching a light gray cloud. At this point I knew that these planes were enemy planes. Suddenly around these glittering points you could see shells exploding. The number of shells grew constantly and left a lot of small dark clouds in the sky. The planes flew through these clouds and were partly hidden by the flak clouds. Then for the first time I saw a plane crash down. A big burning dot with a long tail of smoke was tumbling down to earth in a wide bow. Short after that a second one was coming down burning less than the first one and again the rumbling of the far away bomb hits. The flak clouds grew lighter and broader covering the sky over Wr. Neustadt from where 2 huge clouds of smoke rose high in the sky. But then it was quiet again. Even the people at the bus stop said no word except for the school boys who discussed about all the strange new things they had seen.

Today I know that the second wave was the 44th BG.

October 24, 1943

This day was a Sunday. Air raid alarm was announced but there was heavy fog over the whole area. I heard and saw nothing. Later in the day I was told that the railway station Ebenfurth 5 miles away from Wr. Neustadt was bombed.

On Tuesday, November 2, 1943, it was a clear day. But as air raid alarm was announced all the pupils had to go together to a big sugar beet storage cellar right next to the school building that had been adapted to serve as an air shelter. Only when the air raid alarm was over I could go home. When I came home I heard that the target of this air raid was again Wr. Neustadt. But everybody knew that Wr. Neustadt would not stay the only target. A lot of people of Ebergassing who worked in the Messerschmidt works told us what happened there. Now the fear to be hit was added.

None of the simple people knew where the bombers came from as everything was confidential. It was strictly forbidden to listen to "enemy radio". Suddenly war had reached your own home. Everybody feared what would come next.

After November 2, 1943 for a long time there was no

air attack, no aircraft was seen. No exact reports about raid to other areas were available. Many people thought that the Vienna area would not be bombed again. But then the year 1944 came.

To be continued

MAIL CALL

Dear George, January 1995



First—Thanks for the wonderful job you are doing producing the "461st Liberaider".

We were shocked to hear of Millie O'Bannon passing. What a super lady she was. What a terrible loss for all of us but particularly for Frank. God bless her and Frank.

I had further bad news when I found out that Oscar Scogins, Jr. had passed away also. Oscar or "Doonny", as we called him, was the engineer on Larry Toothman's crew. I was flying with Toothman as an "Enlisted Bombardier" on April 25, 1945 when we were shot down over Linz, Austria. I was not a regular member of the crew but became good friends with this crew after we were captured.



Standing (Left to Right)
L. Toothman, Pilot; W. Jones, Co-Pilot;
V. Edmonds, Bombardier; P. Ashworth, Navigator

Kneeling (Left to Right)
O. Scogins, Engineer; J. LaZier, Gunner;
J. Hoskins, Gunner; H. Acheson, Gunner;
R. Baker, Radio Operator; D. Morrison, Gunner

(Continued from page 7)

"Doonny" saved Larry Toothman's life. He stayed behind and put Larry's chute on Larry so he could pull the rip chord with his left hand. Larry's right arm was broken in two places and his left leg in one place by Shrapnel. He then helped Larry to the bomb bays and they bailed out. Bill Jones, the co-pilot, was killed by the same shell burst (88's).

John LaZier, our waist gunner, just heard from an Austrian gentleman last summer during the celebration of D-Day (50th Anniversary). He had discovered our plane wreckage and Lt. Jones body. The town's people buried Jones in a church cemetery. The mayor of the town was forced to flee the town because the Nazi commander found out about it and put out a death warrant for the mayor.

This Austrian gentleman had found John LaZier's name and home address in the wreckage in 1945. I believe all the publicity about the 50-year D-Day celebration aroused him to attempt to contact him.

Through this man, John was able to contact the family of Fritz Preibisch of Vienna who was in the German army and hated the Germans with a passion. Fritz took beautiful care of us, even if he almost got us killed at the risk of his own life. Fritz is deceased. We all sent him food packages after the war. The Russians always stole his tobacco products but maybe we helped out a bit.



"Miss Lace" shot down at Linz, Austria
25 April 1945. Lt. L.R. Toothman, Pilot

Anyway, I'm sorry "Doonny" didn't learn any of this. I talked to him about a year ago and I got a letter from him.

I intend writing to the Austrian gentleman and to the Preibisch family. I'd love to go back there some day. Maybe I will, who knows?

Thanks for everything, George.

Roy J. Weiland
P.O. Box 21865
Bullhead City, AZ 86439-1865

Editor's not: The "Liberaider" has gone international!! Between the article by Felix on page 3, Roy's letter above and the letter below. We are on the map!

* * * * *

Dear Mr. Peterson,

May 8, 1995

Many thanks for the membership card. Can you tell me please, when the Group information magazine will be published? I am very interested to learn all about the bombing missions flown by the 461st Group during WWII in Austria. Especially over Linz on July 25, 1944 and April 25, 1945. Do you know has anybody written in a magazine, published during the last years, about these bomb raids mentioned? If so, be so kind and send me copies. I would reimburse you for the costs of this journal and for postage, etc.

I thank you in advance for your effort and your help.

Sincerely yours,

Karl Affenzeller
Buihtastrasse 5
A-4240 Freistadt
Austria—Europe

Editor's note: Karl, a rather brief write-up of the 25 July 1944 mission to Linz was published in the last issue of the "Liberaider". I have enclosed a copy

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

(see page 31) along with the current issue. The 25 April 1945 mission is the subject of the previous article. You will also be interested in Felix's article starting on page 3 of this issue.

* * * * *

766th SQUADRON ALERT!!!

The Family of One of Your Members Needs Your Help!!

Were you at Torretta Field at Christmas time in 1944? Do you remember the crash of an aircraft on 23 December that was bringing men back to base that had been on R&R at Capri? Ten officers were killed, the pilot, co-pilot and three enlisted men survived, some with serious injuries. S/Sgt. Sol Kaplowitz, a gunner from crew 58-2, was a survivor. He was separated from the service at Tilton General Hospital, Fort Dix, NJ 19 May 1947 with a 100% disability. He died 18 March 1994.

His family is having a problem with the Veterans Administration and his son has written asking if he could be put in touch with anyone who knew his father. The following is a list of other members of his crew:

Hager H. Burton	Columbus, OH
Ralph E. Cline	
Lee J. Moremen	Deceased 1976
Robert E. Moritz	KLOD
Robert W. Patton	Deceased 1989
Karl D. Rimer	Burbank, CA
Albert Townsley	Rolling Meadow, IL
James H. Wilson	Deceased 1991
William Zebroek	Mountain View, CA

The surviving pilots were: Capt. Gerald L. Van Der Hoeven, Santa Ana, CA and Lt. Theodore R. Ahlberg, Vancouver, WA. One of the other enlisted men was S/Sgt. Gerald S. Huizenga, Zeeland, MI. All three were members of the 766th.

If any of you are still alive and can help, please call his son now!! If any other members of the 766th

think they can provide information on Sol or the crash please contact the family ASAP. What a wonderful opportunity to commit a RASK (page 2). The Kaplowitz family needs a good RASKING. Please help.

Contact:

Robert J. Kaplowitz
Todd Road—Box 785
Goldens Bridge, NY 10526
(914) 232-7907

Editor's note: The above information was culled from a letter from Robert Kaplowitz and from a letter Frank O'Bannon sent to the family.

Note that the letter below, selected by chance, is dated exactly 50 years from the date of the accident noted above.

* * * * *

Dear George,

23 December 1994

Enclosed is a snapshot taken last summer. I got new license plates for my car in August and asked for the number 765461 which I received in a few days. Several persons have asked me about the 461st Bomb Group. They were stationed with other bomb groups in the Foggia area.

I was on the ground crew of the original "All American" of the 765th Squadron.

I have missed several reunions on account of having a heart attack in 1992.

Sincerely,
Vito Cipriani



(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

Dear Mr. Dickie, January 22, 1995

I don't know you but I was very interested in the December 1994 issue of the Liberaider. Possibly I can clear up the mystery of the disappearance of Lt. Bloxom's plane. I was the bombardier on that plane.

To tell the story, as it were, I will begin with our leaving Manchester, NH on July 11. We were held up for a few days in the Azores awaiting an engine part. On July 20 we were assigned to the 764th Squadron. In the afternoon we were given an orientation flight. It was our understanding the squadron had experienced some heavy losses shortly before our arrival so the next morning we were on the board for Mission #66 and went to Brux. Except for a few flak hits it was a relatively uneventful mission even though it was our first. In the afternoon I was sent to a training class on radar bombing. On the morning of the 22nd we were again up for a Mission #67. Lt. Bill Paradise was assigned co-pilot-pilot since he had combat experience. We also had a photographer aboard giving us a complement of eleven in aircraft "Lucky Seven".

Shortly after crossing the Adriatic we experienced difficulty with engine #2, I believe it was, and were forced to feather. Being a new crew we were reluctant to turn back for fear of being accused of cowardice. Probably not a good decision. As we approached the target I opened the bomb bays and prepared to drop. About this time we had a direct hit on another engine, not only knocking it out but completely eliminating our electrical system. I am not sure what caused the electrical condition. As you know a B-24 was not noted for its ability to stay up on two engines. We were losing altitude very fast. I came back to the flight deck Blox asked me to tell the fellows in the rear to bail out. So I took off my parachute so I could get through the catwalk and told the men to leave. I then went back to the front of the ship to put my chute on when the engineer mentioned that they were going to try a crash landing. Looking down at the ground that seemed like a good idea. I crawled through the catwalk to the bombsight and put a couple of shots into it with my 45 to disable it as much as possible. I hurried back to the flight deck and threw myself down on the floor just as we hit the ground, wheels up of course.

Whatever maneuvering for a landing Blox had to do it had to be manual since we had no electricity. There were 5 of us left in the plane. I believe it was the engineer who acted as co-pilot-pilot, the radioman, and another enlisted man, Bloxom and me. Several days before, our radioman had discovered that his chute harness was merely basted and the final stitching not completed. We traded it for another. It is our thought that our navigator, Lt. Armstrong may have had a similar defect in his harness since the men who saw his body related that he had no harness on and his pant legs were torn. We felt that as his chute opened the harness gave way at the top and threw him backwards ripping the pants as the harness came off. He was the only one killed and one of the nicest kids I had ever met, no smoking, drinking and no women. It was tough to lose a good friend.

We landed in a wheat field near the little town of Alexandria. We tried desperately to burn the plane, but you never saw 100 octane gas so inviolate. Shortly a small Romanian training plane landed with a man in shorts and a T-shirt. We later found out he was a Lt. In the Romanian Air Force. He told us to extinguish the fire, which of course we had to do.

We were now the guests of the Romanians in a building that had formerly been a school in the heart of Bucharest. We were always afraid when the sirens went off that the 15th was going to drop in. We did have a few close calls with the British at night. We were picked up by B-17s with plywood in the bomb bays and brought back to Italy on the 31st of July. We landed at Bari and were greeted by General Twining who broke down as he began to talk. After several days we were sent back to the squadron and Blox and I met with the Ops Officer. I don't remember his name but he poured us each half a canteen cup of his own liquor. Since we were the only crew returned from the 764th he closed the Officer's Club and our crew were allowed to use it for a party. Lt. Rosenberg who had been our co-pilot-pilot during training brought along a bottle which he had scrounged from somewhere and shared with us. I understand he finished his missions as first pilot. Sometime toward morning the Ops Officer came down in a weapons carrier and distributed us around the field, some in the hospital, and put us to bed. I understand that this man, a Captain, was later killed by a bomb from above hitting his plane while on a mission.

Even more than clearing up the mystery of the disap-

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10)

pearance of "Lucky Seven" I want to express my admiration and appreciation for the skillful job Lt. Bloxom did in bringing us down safely. I learned later that 9 times out of 10 in a crash landing the top turret crashed down on the flight deck. I was right under it. Had that landing been very rough I am sure I wouldn't be writing this letter. Bloxom was a fighting fool. He had been a fighter pilot instructor when he was reassigned to bombers. He wasn't too happy with this and sometimes flew like he was still in a fighter. After we got back to Italy he wanted to fly a P-38 with me as the bombardier. He would have loved that low level stuff. Since we had been POW's the Geneva Convention prevented us from staying in the theater. Our orders were "not to be assigned outside the continental United States". I don't know how he did it but I heard he flew one of the first C-54s into Tokyo. Again my heartfelt thanks to "Blox".

Best regards,
Bill Braun, 764th B.S., Crew #4887

Editor's note: Thanks for your story Bill. The only reasons I can think of that you didn't mention the target for Mission #67 was the Romana Americana Oil Refinery at Ploesti, was that it was only your second mission, you had only been in the squadron 2 days and nobody told you about Ploesti. You had a short, exciting tour of combat. I know that mission well. It almost took my life. For other stories on Mission #67, including mine, look for the May 1989 issue of the "Liberaider", Vol. 6 No. 2.

* * * * *

Dear Mr. O'Bannon, 20 July 1994

My father, 2nd Lt. William R. Diggs, served with the 15th Air Force, 49th Wing, 461st BG, 767th BS from approximately March 2nd 1944 until May 24th when he was shot down.

Unfortunately I was never to know him. He was killed flying an AT-6 when I was still a child. I wonder if on my behalf you would be so kind as to in-

quire of your members if anyone remembers him. Perhaps they would be willing to share their memories of him during that time with me.

I am told that only one B-24 remains air worthy today, perhaps a handful of 17's and 25's are still flying. I dread the day when they can only be seen (and not heard) in some museum. To see and hear one of those great machines 'alive' is the difference between encountering the tiger in the wild and a stuffed tiger.

Yet, it was all so long ago. The thunder that once filled the skies over Europe is heard far off in the distance of time now. But oh! Gentlemen, with what a bright flash have you illuminated the pages of history! That brilliance no one will forget.

Sincerely,

William E. Diggs
1128 Clay Street
Woodstock, IL 60098-2809

Editor's note: His father was shot down over Wiener Neustadt on Mission #30. His plane lost an engine due to flak over the target, he dropped out of formation and was not seen again. Our Group Directory shows he was the pilot of crew #71. There is some confusion about the names of the crewmembers (more than 10 and two Walkers as bombardiers). But here are the names. If any of you read this, take the time to recall the time period and get in touch with the son. This is an opportunity to commit another RASK. Don't pass it up.

Crew #71

Diggs, William R.	Pilot (Deceased)
Heald, Robert L.	Co-Pilot
Gavora, John, Jr.	Navigator
Walker, Horace A.	Bombardier
Walker, William R.	Bombardier
Myers, Michael	Engineer
Estrada, Raymond P.	A/C Maint.
Brusso, Robert F.	Radio Operator
Laclaf, Densal E.	Gunner (Deceased)
Linhares, Carl J.	Gunner (Deceased)
Lizotte, Robert A.	Gunner
Phillips, Otis H.	Gunner (Deceased)

* * * * *

(Continued on page 12)

(Continued from page 11)

Dear Mr. O'Bannon, December 19, 1994

I am acquisitions editor for a Christian publishing company, The New Leaf Press. Next year, we will publish a book by a man who has been to Turkey's Mt. Ararat seven times to look for Noah's Ark. He will make his eighth trip next summer

I am looking for two things:

- 1) Several vets we've talked to remember seeing an article in Stars and Stripes, concerning the Ark. It was on the front page of a Mediterranean edition, given to the 12th and 15th Air Force, sometime during the summer of 1943 (the date may be incorrect, but it is the most likely). I'm looking for that copy. If it has landmarks that our author can use, he can pinpoint the location of the Ark. I understand Mt. Ararat is enormous, and even a 450-ft.

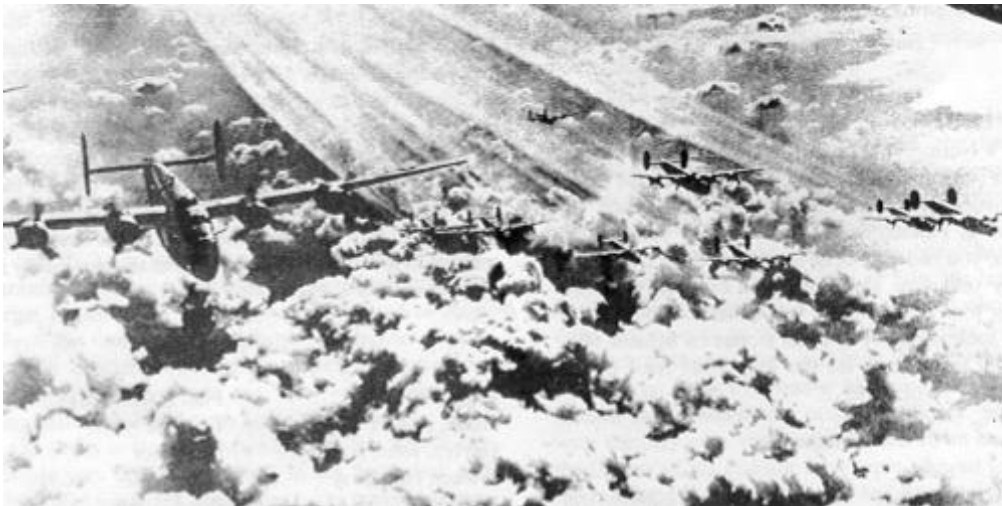
long ship would be a needle in a haystack.

- 2) Last month, I spoke with a former pilot who says he saw the Ark on Ararat on a flight in 1944. *He also saw photographs in the possession of U.S. pilots at airbases in Tunis and Naples.* He doesn't remember any names, but says several pilots were fairly open about what they saw. Were you there, or do you know anyone who was? I also know that a lieutenant in North Africa had photographs. He was possibly with the 324th, but that's the extent of my information on him. I have no idea if five pilots had photographs, or 100.

If you have any information that would be of help, please get in touch with me. Our toll-free number is 1-800-643-9535.

Sincerely,
Jim Fletcher, Editor

NOT FORGOTTEN



AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION SPECIAL AWARD AWARDED TO FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE

In recognition of the fiftieth anniversary of the magnificent efforts of the members of the United States Army Air Forces' Fifteenth Air Force as they achieved one of the strategic air power's greatest triumphs—the destruction of the oil fields of Ploesti—in spite of fierce and determined defenses which took a heavy toll. This five month aerial campaign, carried out by the fighters and bombers of the Fifteenth, sustained by the ground echelons, severely curtailed the gasoline and oil supply of Axis Aggressors and directly led to their eventual defeat.

HISTORY OF THE 461ST BOMB GROUP

CHAPTER XI UP AND DOWN THE BOMBING SCALE WITH NEW CREWS, AUGUST 1944

(A) Narrative History.

The month of August brought its first anniversary of the 461st Bombardment Group. The anniversary date was actually Friday, 11 August. On that day each squadron celebrated the occasion with a party for its enlisted men and another one for its officers. The Headquarters party for officers was held the evening of the 13th of August. This particular party was unique in that it was held on the "Liberaiders' Flight Deck" or the terrace of the headquarters building. Among the guests were the 49th Wing Commander, Colonel William L. Lee; the 451st Group Commander, Colonel Robert E. Eaton; the 484th Group Commander, Colonel William B. Keese; and approximately twenty South African nurses of the British Army from Trani.

Combat crew members who had completed their missions began in August to leave the Group for return to the United States. As a preliminary to their departure they were assembled in the briefing room for a farewell from Colonel Glantzberg. Each officer and enlisted man was given a copy of the "First 50 Missions of the 461st Bomb Group (H), April 2 – June 26, 1944" as well as a copy signed by Colonel Glantzberg of the Group's "Cheek Twitcher" certificate. This particular certificate was signed by 1st Lt. William B. Marshall, a bombardier who had completed his tour of duty.

One of the individuals returned to the United States was Captain David P. McQuillan, the Operations Officer of the 767th Squadron. He left the Group on the 11th day of August after exactly one year of service with the Group. His departure was both singular and ironic in that he was the last of the original command or executive pilots of the Group, and the only one of the original eleven command or executive pilots of the Group to complete a year of service in the same position in the Group. Captain William J. Franklin Jr., the original Operations Officer of the 766th Squadron, still remained with the Group but during part of his year of service with the Group he had been Assistant Squadron Operations Officer.

Captain George V. Leffler, the Group Bombardier, was grounded early in August following his mission to Budapest on 30 July. He became the first Group flying staff officer to complete a tour of duty in this theatre. He was replaced by 1st Lt. Jack H. King who had originally been the bombardier on Captain Strong's crew and who was first designated as the Assistant Group Bombardier. Shortly after this both Leffler and King were promoted.

On 15 August the Group participated in its second "D" Day operation with the bombing mission to the landing beaches in Southern France.

The first bond raffle in the Group was conducted by Special Forces on 15 August. \$2,320.00 dollars worth of bonds were sold.

On 23 August S/Sgt. Joe Louis visited the Group and addressed the officers and men who had assembled in the Group Theatre to greet him. (See photograph at top of page 14)

On 24 August Captain Joseph J. Mente, the Special Services Officer, began a daily broadcast at noon of current events.

The second party of the month of August for the Group officers was held on the 30th of the month. One of the features of this party was the awarding of the Silver Star to Colonel Glantzberg by Colonel Lee.

(Continued on page 14)



S/Sgt. Joe Louis

(Continued from page 13)

(B) Operations.

The Group flew a total of 20 combat missions during the month of August. Combat crew members logged a total of 4064 hours. Of the 586 planes that took off, 54 were early returns. The average number of aircraft on each mission was 29.3. Of the 1220 tons of bombs that were airborne, 1059 were dropped on targets.

Bombing accuracy during the month was most erratic. The scores ran all the way from that of 0 on mission No. 81 to that of 73.9 on mission No. 91. The Group ranked thirteenth in the Air Force for the month with an average score of 42.2 per cent.

Aircraft losses during the month were comparatively light: one being lost to fighters, three to flak, and four to other causes. Enemy fighters were encountered on both August 22nd and 23rd on missions against targets in the Vienna area. Sixteen of these fighters were destroyed, six were probably destroyed, and one was damaged.

In early August, Colonel Glantzberg asked the Group Communications Officer, Major Wagener, for information and a recommendation on radio bombing which would permit all planes in the formation to drop their bombs on the lead plane by use of radio. Major Wagener requested Master Sergeant Wilford L. Irwin and Corporal George Kufta of the Communications Section of the 764th Squadron, and Sergeant Marshall Johnson of the 765th Communications Section to work with him on the project. The investigation of this committee carried the personnel to Corsica and to other places where experimentation had been conducted on radio bombing. Presently the 461st began experimenting on combat missions with this manner of bombing.

On 18 August on Mission No. 85 against the Alibunar Airdrome in Yugoslavia one flight in the formation dropped their bombs by radio with satisfactory results. Two days later the method was tried again, this time with two flights using the experiment. The results obtained by the first flight were satisfactory but bombs in the second flight were intermittently scattered all the way from the IP to the target. While Major Wagener and his committee were working to improve their techniques the Wing and the Air Force became interested in the experiment. Higher headquarters directed that plans, methods, and diagrams that had been devised in working this scheme should be sent to Headquarters of the Fifteenth Air Force for study. This ended the experiment by this Group on radio bombing at least temporarily and possibly permanently.

On the 24th of the month, 2nd Lt. Arthur E. Farnham Jr. and his skeleton crew washed out the "Kissed

(Continued on page 15)

Off Kids" in a practice flight when compelled to crash land it in a field near the Base. 1st Lt. Ralph T. Seeman, to whom the plane had originally been assigned in the United States, had completed 50 missions in this plane previous to this accident. This was the first plane ever to be lost by this Group on a practice mission since the beginning of combat operations on 2 April 1944.

The experience level of combat crews of the Group during the month of August was the lowest in the history of the Group since it began combat operations. Of the seventy crews that were members of the Group at some time during the month, an average of fifty were available for combat. Seven of the eight crews lost to combat during the month were crews with only a few missions. Not more than one crew was lost on any one mission.

A total of forty-seven new complete crews were assigned to the Group during the month. Shortly after each shipment of new crews arrived at the Group all of them were called to the Group Briefing Room by Colonel Glantzberg. The Colonel's senior staff officers and the squadron commanders were repeatedly required to attend these meetings. In his remarks to the new crew members, the Colonel stated that the purposes of the meeting were three in number: (1) To provide him with an opportunity to welcome personally each new officer and enlisted man to the Group; (2) To present his senior and command staffs to the new personnel; and (3) To outline the policies of the Group to new arrivals. Thus, during the month, a policy was definitely established and rigidly adhered to of welcoming every new crew to the Group and of bidding farewell to all old crew members leaving the Group.

NEW CREWS JOINING THE GROUP DURING AUGUST 1944

764th Squadron

2nd Lt. Sol Sklanski
2nd Lt. John L. Underwood
2nd Lt. John L. Turner, Jr.
2nd Lt. Edward A. Nahkunst
1st Lt. John G.L. Oliver
1st Lt. George H. Miller
2nd Lt. Hubert W. Souther
2nd Lt. Donald E. Tiffany
2nd Lt. Lloyd D. Emmert
2nd Lt. William M. Powell

765th Squadron

1st Lt. David E.A. Johnson
2nd Lt. Willard R. King
2nd Lt. Bernard J. Mohan
2nd Lt. John B. Moore, Jr.
2nd Lt. Robert T. Blake
2nd Lt. Leo F. Cooper
2nd Lt. Burnis E. Presho
1st Lt. Robert K. Baker
1st Lt. Robert T. Chalmers
2nd Lt. William N. Beatty
1st Lt. Frederick A. Gray, Jr.
2nd Lt. William J. Kelleher

766th Squadron

2nd Lt. John R. Wren, Jr.
2nd Lt. Albert W. Townsley
2nd Lt. Arthur H. Trier
2nd Lt. Girard L. Vanderhoeven
2nd Lt. Harold F. Ehrlich
2nd Lt. Arthur E. Farnham, Jr.
2nd Lt. David J. Thomas
1st Lt. Stockton B. Shaw
2nd Lt. Howard C. Wilson
2nd Lt. Thomas J. Sobieski
2nd Lt. Robert R. Friedersdorf
2nd Lt. Robert D. Falkner

767th Squadron

F/O Paul H. Millikin
2nd Lt. Thomas G. Moore
2nd Lt. Ralph K. Newton
2nd Lt. Floyd C. Stockton
2nd Lt. Edward K. George
2nd Lt. George R. Podwolsky
2nd Lt. Gordon W. Rosencrans
F/O Truman L. Horn, Jr.
1st Lt. Bertrand J. Arents
2nd Lt. Donald J. Herbert
1st Lt. Robert W. Hess
2nd Lt. Nicholas Rawchuck
2nd Lt. Harry L. Walsh

Mission #74
2 August 1944

Target: Avignon Railroad Bridge, France

As had been the case in certain previous months, superior bombing marked the first mission of a new month. Lt. Colonel Knapp led a four flight formation against a railroad bridge across the Durance River south of Avignon. Lt. King became the first bombardier in this group to really hit a bridge hard when 73.1 per cent, almost all the bombs of three flights, cut the railroad bridge in two different places near the south end.

Mission #75
3 August, 1944

Target: Zahnradfabrik Aircraft Factory, Friedrichshafen, Germany

The primary target for this mission was the Ober Raderach Chemical Works at Friedrichshafen, Germany. Because of nine-tenths cloud coverage in the target area, the Group was forced to bomb by the pathfinder method. Being unable to satisfactorily pick up the primary target on his instruments, Lt. Marangelo selected the first alternate target which was the Zahnradfabrik Aircraft Factory at Friedrichshafen. The target was hit, but many of the bombs fell short into the water. 2nd Lt. Robert E. Schweisberger and his crew became the first of the many new flight personnel who failed to return from a mission during the month of August.

Mission #76
6 August, 1944

Target: Miramas Marshalling Yard, France

For this mission the strategy of the Fifteenth Air Force, which at the time was not being revealed to Group personnel, continued to anticipate the invasion of southern France. The target was a large Marshalling Yard in the comparatively small town of Miramas, France. With excellent weather, no fighter opposition, and not much flak at the target, Major Goree and Lt. Cran turned in an excellent mission

with a score of 52.7 per cent. This was the first five box formation flown during the month.

Mission #77
7 August, 1944

Target: Blechhammer South Oil Refinery, Germany

The mission for 7 August was the south plant of the Synthetic Oil Refinery at Blechhammer, Germany. Although weather was CAVU over the target, it was necessary to bomb by instruments because of the very effective smoke screen put up by the enemy. Photographs of the bomb strikes were taken, but it is impossible to plot coverage. No fighters were seen or encountered, but twelve of the nineteen bombers over the target were holed by flak. The plane piloted by 2nd Lt. Robert E. Sterrett was last seen in the target area with two engines feathered. He and his crew became the second new crew to be lost during the month.

Mission #78
9 August, 1944

Target: Almasfuzito Oil Refinery, Hungary

The veteran team of Lt. Colonel Knapp, Captain Strong, Lt. King, Lt. Coles, and Lt. Sullivan came through with their second superior mission of the young month when they scored 62 per cent on the oil refinery at Almasfuzito, Hungary. Conditions for the attack were ideal -- CAVU weather, no fighters, and not too much flak. Although Captain Strong and Lt. Sullivan did not know it at the time, this mission marked the completion of their tour of duty with the Fifteenth Air Force. This made the nineteenth mission which they and Lt. King had flown in the lead plane of an Air Force, Wing, Group, or Second Section Formation.

Mission #79
10 August, 1944

Target: Ploesti Xenia Oil Refinery, Roumania

Back again to the guns out in the fields at the old familiar target, the Xenia Oil Refinery, Ploesti. Back

(Continued on page 17)

(Continued from page 16)

again to the smoke screens, high towering black clouds from the burning oil, and to pathfinder bombing. The results: no score; photographs which show nothing but smoke; thirteen planes with holes in them. Crew members who had become accustomed to results like those at Blechhammer and at Ploesti frequently wondered how much or how little damage they were really inflicting on these targets.

Mission #80
12 August, 1944

Target: Genoa Gun Positions, Italy

For weeks members of the group who visited Rome had been returning with rumors of another invasion of the continent of Europe. When the Group was suddenly swung from its oil targets to fly a tactical mission against coastal gun positions south of Genoa Italy, on the 12th of August, many believed that the time had come for the fulfillment of these rumors. The weather for this mission was ideal, there were no enemy fighters, and not a great deal of flak. The target, however, which was approached over land was most difficult to identify. Only 6.4 per cent of the bombs were dropped on the target. The plane flown by F/O James H. Cain blew up over the target and several pieces from the destroyed plane were brought back to base lodged in the wings and fuselages of other planes in the formation. It is believed that the plane suffered a direct hit on the fuse of a bomb.

Mission #81
13 August, 1944

Target: Genoa Gun Positions, Italy

Having failed to knock out its target on the 12th of the month, the Group tried again on the 13th with even poorer results. It seemed impossible for the Group to identify the assigned gun positions.

Mission #82
14 August, 1944

Target: Gun Positions near Frejus, France

When the Group was assigned its third consecutive tactical mission against coastal gun positions, speculation ran rampant as to when the invasion would start and as

to whether or not it would be aimed at the Genoa area of Italy or at the Marseilles area of France. Lt. Colonel Knapp, flying this mission with a new flight leader crew, turned in his third consecutive superior mission of the month when 64.5 per cent of the bombs were dropped within 1000 feet of the assigned coastal gun positions on the beach near Frejus, France. Conditions for this mission were ideal. A few weeks after this mission, a member of this 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.

Mission #83
15 August, 1944

Target: Frejus Beach, France

During the afternoon of the 14th, the "hot information" on the big push came down through channels. "H" Hour of "D" Day was to be the break of dawn the morning of 15 August. The invasion was to be aimed at the southern coast of France. Missions of the Fifteenth Air Force in the support of the invasion were four in number: (1) To cause maximum destruction to enemy coast and beach defenses within the assault area; (2) To isolate the battlefield by destruction of remaining rail and road bridges across the Rhone River up to its junction with the Iser River as well as those across the Iser and Durance Rivers; (3) To block defiles and rail lines running through the Alps from Iser River southward; and (4) To drop propaganda leaflets from the water's edge to about 30 miles inland.

The field order for the mission revealed that many of the Groups were to hit their targets at the break of dawn. This was the explanation of why the planes of the Groups of the 304th Wing had been for weeks disturbing the sleep of the 461st Group with their constant night takeoffs, formation flying, and landings. Target time assigned to the 461st was 1210 o'clock. The target was a section of beach in front of the town of Frejus and just to the left of a concentration of friendly troops which were scheduled to be ashore.

As soon as Colonel Glantzberg saw the field order and the annexes which accompanied it, he made his decisions rapidly. The Group would attack its target with five boxes staggered to the left. The Colonel

(Continued on page 18)

(Continued from page 17)

would lead the first box and a squadron commander would lead one of each of the other four boxes. All Group and Squadron Operations Officers, Navigators, and Bombardiers would fly. Lt. Colonel Hawes, the Deputy Group Commander, would be the only flying officer of the Group and/or Squadron Staffs not to fly. Captain John Specht, probably the most outstanding original flight leader left in the group, would be the lead pilot; Major Marian Pruitt, long believed to be without equal in the Fifteenth Air Force, would be the lead navigator; 1st Lt. Jack H. King, formerly the bombardier on Captain Strong's outstanding crew and currently the hottest bombardier in the Group as well as acting Group Bombardier, would be the lead bombardier; 1st Lt. John W. Coles, a squadron navigator and a veteran of many missions on which he had done pilotage from the nose turret of the lead plane, would be the pilotage navigator; 1st Lt. Leonard C. Gizelba, the prima-donna of the Mickey operators, would fly in the lead pathfinder plane.

The decision of the Commanding Officer to permit all but one of his flying staff officers to participate in this mission was an outstanding example of the methods he continually used in making every deserving officer and man feel that he was an important personage in this Group. Special briefing was held in the afternoon which was attended by all flying staff officers as well as by all of the flight leader crews who were to participate in the mission.

Conditions for the mission could not have been better. In the complete absence of enemy fighters and flak, with CAVU weather, with all Flights in formation, with many friendly vessels in the water near the target, and with many friendly troops on the ground near the target, the Group did an excellent job of spraying the assigned section of landing beach with 100 pound general purpose bombs. On the top rack of each plane were two bombs which carried propaganda leaflets addressed to the enemy personnel. All crews returned to the base without incident.

(Continued on page 19)



Invasion of Southern France, Frejus Beach, France

(Continued from page 18)

Mission #84 **17 August, 1944**

Target: Ploesti Romana Americana Oil Refinery, Roumania

With the invasion of southern France from the Mediterranean now successfully under way, the Fifteenth Air Force swung back for targets to sources of German oil. The target assigned to the 461st Group was the Romana Americana Oil Refinery at Ploesti, Roumania. This target was the largest and most important of all the vital oil installations at Ploesti. This was the target that the Group had failed to reach on 22 July when the formation was stopped short of its objective by flak.

This mission was the seventh to be flown by this Group to Ploesti. Although no one knew it at the time, this was destined to be the last mission to be flown by this Group against this first priority target which had long since been recognized by all United Nations as one of the most important and well defended target areas possessed by the enemy. On 30 August, 1944 what was left of the Ploesti oil supply and industry was captured by the Russian Army.

Despite the fact that it took a lot of explaining on the part of some of the twelve pilots who were early returns from this mission, in many ways the mission was the most successful ever flown by this Group against a Ploesti target. The 19 Planes that made it over the target dropped 45.6 per cent of their 146 five hundred pound RDX bombs within 1000 feet of the briefed aiming point. Numerous hits were scored in the tank farm at the northwest corner of the refinery; one string of bombs fell across the center of the refinery with four direct hits on the storage tanks in that area which resulted in large fires; and the distillation units, the boiler house, and some of the administration buildings were also hit.

No fighters were encountered. With CAVU weather at the target, the master anti-aircraft gunners, who had been getting plenty of practice all summer, were up to par with their effort. As a result, fourteen of the nineteen planes over the target were hit and the one flown by 2nd Lt. Thomas C. Moore failed to return from this mission.

Most of the twelve planes which returned early from the mission were those which had been flying in the rear positions of the various flights. When Lt. Colonel Hawes was compelled by mechanical failure to abandon the lead position in the formation, the lead was taken over by the Deputy Leader, Captain Ryder. This was the first mission that Captain Ryder had led. Due to his inexperience plus the fact that his plane was not accurately calibrated, he maintained too high an air speed en route to the target. As a result, the "tail-end Charlie" planes were unable to climb and maintain position in the formation.

* * * * *

Humor

If you didn't start the day with a smile, it's still not too late to start practicing for tomorrow!

* * * * *

A guide was showing the Niagara Falls to a Texan. Guide: "I'll bet you don't have anything like this in Texas."

Texan: "Nope, I reckon we don't, but we got plumb-ers who could fix it."

* * * * *

"Did you take a bath today?"

"Why, is one missing?"

* * * * *

A man on a bus asked, "Are you enjoying the bus ride?"

"Yes."

"Then why are you riding with your eyes shut? Are you sick?"

"No. I'm okay. It's just that I hate to see a woman stand!"

* * * * *

Yesterday is history
Tomorrow is a mystery

Today is a gift
That's why we call it the "Present".

Editor's note: Life works in mysterious ways. In the December 1994 issue of the "Liberaider" I printed the official description of Mission #67 to Ploesti on 22 July 1944 (see page 30). That description states that the planes flown by 2nd Lt. Clarence Bloxom and 2nd Lt. Elias Moses left the formation after leaving the target and disappeared. Both planes were on their second combat mission. Almost 51 years later, within a period of a few months, I have received letters relative to these crews and that fateful mission.

On page 10 of this issue I have printed the letter I received from Bill Braun, bombardier on Clarence Bloxom's crew of the 764th Squadron. A very interesting letter about a very unfriendly mission.

Below is a letter from Robert D. Fisher in which he enclosed pictures of the diorama he had made of Lt. Loses B-24 from the 766th Squadron. I had talked to Bob Fisher back in January and sent him what information I had on the plane and the mission. George E. Hicks, Director of the Airmen Memorial Museum, Suitland, Maryland also collaborated on the design and background information for the diorama. There is a brass plaque that accompanies the diorama. The inscription on that plaque is shown below.

Here is Bob Fisher's letter:

Frank C. O'Bannon
P.O. Box 36600
Tucson, AZ 85740-6600

10 May 1995

Sir:

It's with great pleasure that I send you these prints and negatives on my presentation of the A/C of Lt. Elias Moses and crew. I was commissioned to make this model for presentation to Robert Vernon, Jr. by his daughter.

Your assistance was greatly appreciated, and a reasonably accurate depiction would not have been possible without your help. Should anyone else like copies of these photos, consider the negatives as yours and your organization.

A special thanks to you and, George Dickie, and

Elias Moses for technical assistance, and to the Airmen Memorial Museum.

Sincerely,

Robert D. Fisher

The plaque contains the following inscriptions:

“FINAL PREFLIGHT”

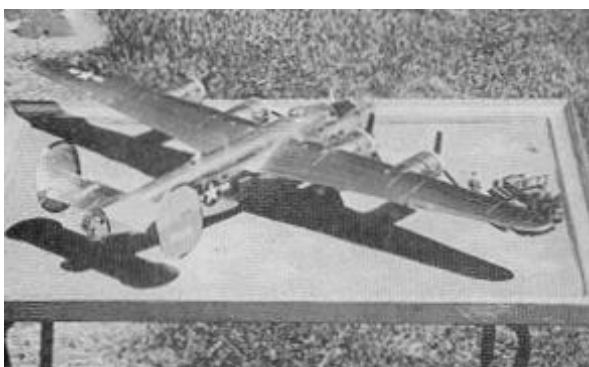
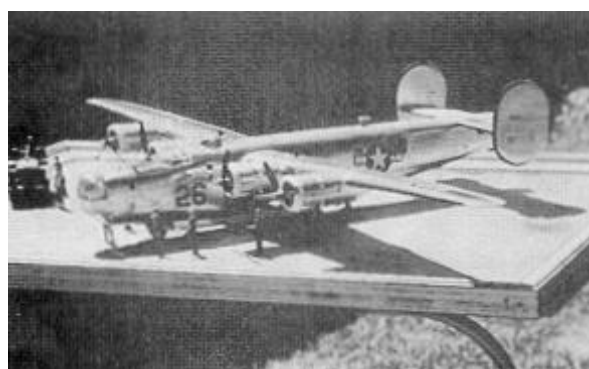
A/C lost to flak over Ploesti, Rumania
22 July 1944
Crew #7/25-1 taken POW

15th Air Force
49th Bomb Wing
461st Bomb Group
766th Bomb Squadron
Based at Torretta, Italy
Circa. 1944

Crew:

Pilot—Elias E. Moses
Co-pilot—Thomas H. Kenney
Navigator—Sherwood Ehrenfeld
Bombardier—Howard K. Hollingshead
Engineer—Jack C. Morledge
Gunner—Robert R. Vernon, Jr.
Gunner—Charles E. Humphreys
Gunner—Paul F. Junge
Gunner—Charles F. Sooy
Gunner—John W. Yagersz

Editor's note: Sorry the pictures can't be in color. With the minute detail in the model you would swear that it is the real thing. Congratulations, Bob, you did an exceptional job.



Men Returning From Detached Service
December 1994 to June 1995

HDQ Alex, Charles G., 269 Commonwealth Ave. #2, Boston, MA 02116

765 Schear, Robert L. 14826 Hwy 155 S, Tyler, TX 75703
 Struve, Gerard H., Box 403, Poy Sippi, WI 54967-0403

766 Bagwell, Alton R., 2237 SW 103rd St., Oklahoma City, OK 73159
 Crystler, John R., 2538 C St. #7, San Diego, CA 92102
 Ledendecker, Carl, 103 Hummingbird Lane, Glasgow, KY 41141-1455
 McRill, Paul C., 4802 219th St. SW, Mountlake Terr., WA 98043
 Wingo, James H., 909 S 18th St. #1, Ft. Smith, AR 72901

767 Beckman, Jason M., 100 Biscayne Blvd. #106, Miami, FL 33132
 Fitzpatrick, Lee J., 8033 Sunset Blvd. #274, Los Angeles, CA 90046
 McDonald, Herbert S., 3535 E. Cook #29, Springfield, IL 62703
 Serijan, Nuby M., 12646 Ventura Blvd., Studio City, CA 91604
 Windham, Samiel H., 440 Taylor Rd., Downingtown, PA 19335

Reunions

Editor's note: You may not get your copy of "The Liberaider" in time to respond to some of these reunions but they are reported here so that you will know the organizations are active if you have an interest.

4304 Denton Circle
 Waco, TX 76710-2125
 (817) 776-4847

* * * * *

Casper WWII Commemorative Association
 Casper Army Air Field Reunion
 10-12 July 1995
 Contact: Jean Ludwig 1-(800) 852-1889
 Casper Area Chamber of Commerce
 P.O. Box 399, Casper, WY 82602

4th Annual Reunion
 George Field Association
 7-9 September 1995
 Lawrenceville, IL 62439-0301
 Contact: Allie DeLoria (618) 943-2307
 Merton, Wheeler (812) 383-4771

* * * * *

Forbes Air Force Base
 Topeka Army Air Field Reunion
 25-27 August 1995
 Contact: Forbes Reunion
 P.O. Box 19142, Topeka, KS 66619-0142

31st Annual Reunion—485th Bomb Group
 13-17 September 1995
 Scottsdale, Arizona
 Contact: Lloyd Proudlove, 8922 East Wood Drive
 Scottsdale, AZ 85260, (602) 451-0558

* * * * *

27th Annual Reunion
 376th Heavy Bomb Group Veteran's Association
 30 August to 4 September 1995
 Double Tree Hotel, Overland Park, KS
 Contact: Bill Barnes

48th National Convention
 Of the American Prisoners of War
 19-23 September 1995—Des Moines, Iowa
 Contact: Larry Dwyer—(319) 263-5249
 Carroll Bogard—(515) 424-4870

TAPS
MAY THEY REST IN PEACE FOREVER

December 1994—June 1995

<u>SQD</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Serial Number</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
HDQ	Brinker, George F.	Cheshire, CT	890	33432252	3 Jan 95
	Ellenbaum, Frank H.	Punta Gorda, FL	8219	0869219	18 Nov 94
	Hudson, James L.	East Point, GA	590	34768411	14 Dec 94
764	Arvanites, George E.	Irvine, CA	501	32617733	24 Apr 95
	Davidson, Walter W.	Newburgh, NY	901	32853236	Dec 94
	Gibson, Willie	Wilmington, OH	748	15339626	14 Dec 94
	Goodhue, Edward F.	Lynbrook, NY	750	32269572	20 Apr 95
	Markel, James R.	Califon, NJ	1034	0723407	12 Mar 95
	Schank, Carl R.	Wheeling, WV	757	35278875	19 Jan 95
	Wellborn, Robert L.	Louisville, KY	1035	0753093	23 Feb 95
765	Adamson, Howard E.	Norwalk, CA	748	39554671	2 Sep 92
	Devore, Ernest W.	Clay Center, KS	060	37229207	15 Jan 95
	Izzo, Edward R.	Winter Springs, FL	747	32678927	1 Aug 94
	McLemore, Wallace H.	Vidalia, GA	748	24827720	26 Dec 63
	Smith Gerald V.	Freehold, NJ	888	32496747	15 May 93
766	Centanni, Anthony J.	New Orleans, LA	757	18138088	17 Nov 94
	Gray, Kenneth E.	Miami, TX	748	18184926	5 Apr 95
	Maxson, Frank B.	Rawlins, WY	4823	0862889	4 Jan 95
	Munrow, Jack E.	St. Louis, MO	687	17077020	1 Dec 90
	Noyes, Colby H.	Ft. Worth, TX	1092	0833195	19 Mar 94
	Short, Herman, E.	Richmond, KY	237	35700351	8 Jan 94
	Sidovar, Nicholas	Austin, TX	1092	0823998	Mar 95
	Zamperni, Elio P.	Distant, PA	343	33162949	27 Jul 93
767	Aldredge, Ausbon E.	Fairfield, CA	1092	0803770	28 Apr 95
	Amos, Miles E.	Vidalia, CA	1035	0772129	12 Dec 92
	Blundy, Walter H.	Portland, MI	555	36269366	14 Oct 50
	Caldwell, Richard L.	Milford, OH	612	35663859	19 Feb 91
	Jewell, Roy J.	Mishawaka, IN	1092	0671660	Nov 93
	McDaniel, Donald S.	Huntington, WV	612	35769285	31 Mar 94
	Mosiniak, Richard D.	Minneapolis, MN	750	37164310	15 Feb 95
	Newton, Ralph E.	Austin, TX	1092	0701949	94

Mabel Chan, wife of Ed Chan, 766th B.S., died 26 May 1995 after 51 years of marriage.

WARTIME HEROICS BY PILOTS OF THE 461ST BOMB GROUP

Sharing of information through newsletters from various Groups uncovers many interesting facts. In the December issue of the "Liberaider" (page 16) I found a very interesting article, moreover a letter, from our Group Commander, Colonel Robert E.L. Eaton, as sent to the Wing Commander, Colonel William E. Lee, 49th Bomb Wing. With the kind permission of the 461st membership, and of Frank C. O'Bannon, President, I would like to reprint this letter as regards our Group and that of the 461st Bomb Group. (It should be remembered that the 451st, 461st and the 484th were the Bomb Group components of the 49th Wing—smallest [but mightiest] Wing in the 15th Air Force.)

The letter, and follow-up response is as follows:
(for letter see page 16 of the December 1994 issue of "The Liberaider".)

It should be added that Wesley McClure was originally the co-pilot for Dale W. Miller (726th). Apparently at this stage of his proficiency he warranted a crew of his own. It is regrettable that we, as of this date, have not uncovered the whereabouts of Wes, for he may have enjoyed the tribute that was bestowed on his ability and that of the 461st crews that came to his aid. We would appreciate hearing from the crewmembers that may have been with Lt. McClure that June 26th and moreover the whereabouts of McClure.

It was with pleasure that I can read of the heroism of these particular combat crews from the pages of "The Liberaider". But it was with sadness that I also noted the passing of Mildred O'Bannon, wife of Frank O'Bannon. Together they fashioned the remnants of the 461st into a sizeable and formidable organization that they could be proud of. Frank was lucky to have had Millie as a partner, one that was truly interested in maintaining and enhancing their Group. On behalf of the 451st Bomb Group I offer my deepest condolences to Frank and his family.

Editor's note: Thanks to the 451st newsletter "Ad-Lib" for its comments.

* * * * *

A 764TH SQUADRON ALERT

Do you remember Eugene C. Starkey, Jr.?

Mission #80 of the 461st Bomb Group was flown on 12 August 1944 to bomb gun positions south of Genoa, Italy prior to the invasion of southern France. The mission is written up on page 17 of this issue of the "Liberaider". As indicated, the plane flown by F/O James H. Cain (crew 19-0), blew up and the entire crew was killed. Eugene Starkey was the bombardier on that crew. His body was found and he is interred in a military cemetery near Florence, Italy. The original pilot for the crew was Leroy G. Russel but he had been promoted to Operations Officer and did not fly on this mission. The members of the crew were as follows:

James H. Cain	Pilot
Robert L. Hoffman	Pilot
Calhoun J. Hall	Navigator
Eugene C. Starkey, Jr.	Bombardier
Shannon N. Seiber	Engineer
Richard M. Kehoe	Radio Operator
Thomas J. Dinaro	Gunner
John P. Hansen	Gunner
Myron D. Laybourn	Gunner
Wilmer G. Poling	Gunner

John P. Starkey, Eugene's brother, wrote to Bombardiers, Inc. for assistance in contacting members of the 764th Squadron who might be able to provide additional details on the mission and/or personal information on his brother. If you remember the mission or Eugene Starkey please contact his brother at the address below:

John P. Starkey
134 E 132 Terrace
Kansas City, MO 64145
(816) 942-6525

John Starkey believes that the plane his brother was flying in was "Fertile Myrtle". Can anyone confirm this or tell him "If, when and where 'Myrtle' went down?"

Editor's note: I thank Bombardiers, Inc. for carrying an article on John Starkey's request in the June issue of their newsletter "Crosshairs". If any of you can respond, please send me a copy of the information.

CHAFF **From Your Editor**

Did you know that the total number of personnel assigned to the 461st Bomb Group during World War II was -

5,362

The membership committee has been able to account for -

4,626 of them

And we are working hard to locate the 736 unknowns

That is an awesome record! We owe a lot to our "Tracer Of Lost Persons" Ed Chan, our chief Frank O'Bannon and their various helpers. Congratulations you guys That's a record you should all be proud of.

* * * * *

The second paragraph of the 461st Narrative History on page 13 mentions the existence of a "Check Twitcher" Certificate. Would someone please loan me one along with some background information so I can show it in the December issue. It sounds like there is a story behind the certificate.

* * * * *

I got a note from Jack Gunn of the 765th Squadron. He said that his eyesight is deteriorating rapidly and asks that I consider using larger type in the future for the "Liberaider". As we all get older more and more of us are going to be in that position. I don't believe that we would be able to finance a meaningful "Liberaider" printed in bold type. However, I would like to get a feeling for how many of you are having trouble reading because of loss of vision. I can't promise a solution but if you let me know how big a problem it is I will consider our options.

* * * * *

Please send me your letters and other material for the "Liberaider". It's your newsletter! It's only as good as the stories you send. Keep them coming!

* * * * *

If you have any bomb strike photos I would like to borrow them to make copies for illustrations in the "Liberaider". They should be good clear pictures where the bomb pattern and primary features of the target are distinguishable. I need some for the missions between #85 and #175. The official photos are about 9 x 9 inches. I need to be able to read the notations on the top which give the mission number, the date and time, altitude, target, etc. I promise to return them after I have made copies of those I can use.

* * * * *

Miscellaneous

God put me on earth to accomplish a certain number of things. Right now I'm so far behind, I will never die.

* * * * *

GRANDMA MOVED TO FLORIDA

"Are you going to spend summer with your grandma and grandpa," the one boy asked his best friend?

"Heck no!" was his reply. "We always spend our summers with grandma and grandpa, but they did a real dumb thing."

"What did they do?"

"Grandpa got retarded and they moved to Florida."

"Now they live in a park with a lot of other retarded people. They live in tin huts. They ride bicycles too, funny things with three wheels."

They all go to a building they call the wrecked hall, but it is fixed now. They all do exercises in a row, but not very well.

"They play a game with big checkers and push them around on the floor with sticks. There is a swimming pool, but I guess nobody teaches them, because they just stand there in the water with their hats on."

"My grandma used to bake cookies for me, but nobody cooks there. They all go to restaurants that are fast and have retarded people's discounts."

(Continued on page 26)

(Continued from page 25)

"When you come into the park where they live, there is a doll house with a man sitting in it. He watches all day so they can't get out without him seeing them."

"I guess everybody forgets who they are because they all wear badges with their names on them. Grandma says that grandpa worked hard all his life to his retardment. I miss the cookies and I wish they would move back, but I guess the man in the doll house won't let them out."

* * * * *

AGING IS WHEN...

Everything hurts and what doesn't hurt doesn't work.

The gleam in your eye is from the sun hitting your bifocals.

You feel like the night after and you haven't been anywhere.

Your little black book contains only names ending in M.D.

You get winded playing chess.

You begin to outlive enthusiasm.

You're chasing a woman but you can't remember why.

A dripping faucet causes an uncontrollable bladder urge.

You look forward to a dull evening.

Your favorite part of the newspaper is "50 Years Ago Today".

You're 17 around the neck, 42 around the waist and 96 around the golf course.

Your back goes out more often than you do.

You have too much room in the house and not enough in the medicine cabinet.

* * * * *

**DON'T FORGET WE NEED YOUR LETTERS,
PHOTOS AND MEMORIES!!!**

THE GIFT OF FRIENDSHIP

Friendship is a priceless gift
That can't be bought or sold,
But it's value is far greater
Than a mountain of gold.
For gold is cold and lifeless,
It can neither see or hear,
And in the time of trouble
It is powerless to cheer.
It has no ears to listen,
no heart to understand,
It cannot bring you comfort
Or reach out a helping hand.
So when you ask God for a gift,
Be thankful if he sends
Nor diamonds, pearls or riches,
But the love of real true friends.

* * * * *

MEASURE OF A MAN

NOT How did he die?
BUT How did he live?
NOT What did he gain?
BUT What did he give?
These are the units to measure the worth,
Of a man as a man regardless of birth.
NOT What was his station?
BUT Had he a heart?
AND How did he play his God given part?
Was he ever ready with a word of good cheer,
To bring back a smile, to banish a tear?
NOT What was his church?
NOR What was his creed?
BUT Had he befriended those really in need?
NOT What did the sketch in the newspaper say?
BUT How many were sorry he passed away?

Author Unknown

* * * * *

THE HALYARD MISSION

By Lt. Com. Richard M. Kelly, USNR

The two OSS parachute instructors at a secret training camp in Virginia stared in amazement at the huge bulk of a man approaching the plane.

"That big guy isn't going to jump, is he?" asked the first incredulously.

"Well, if he does, I won't take any bets that he'll ever do it again! He must weigh twice as much as those other guys."

The "big guy" who caused this comment—and much more—was George Musulin, who was far heavier than the usual weight accepted for paratrooper duty. The heaviest paratrooper accepted prior to his arrival had been 185 pounds, the official limit for Army paratroopers. Yet the five-foot-eleven former University of Pittsburgh tackle, from 2820 West Liberty Avenue in the Smokey City, has been permitted to take the training entirely on his own responsibility.

Some months later, this same courage and willingness to assume unusual risks was to surprise his superiors and win him high honors when, in spite of all warnings, he jumped blindly into German-occupied Yugoslavia to organize and execute the greatest mass air evacuation of shot-down allied airmen from behind enemy lines in the history of warfare.

They didn't think he could do that, either, but doing the difficult and the supposedly impossible was a specialty of this former steelworker and physical education instructor of Major General William J. Donovan's Office of Strategic Services which conducted America's secret and highly successful clandestine operations all over the world in the past war.

Musulin, the son of immigrant Yugoslavian parents, had been inducted into the Army as a private in May, 1941. While on maneuvers in Virginia, he had been approached by an OSS representative and asked if he would volunteer for "dangerous work behind the lines in the European theater." He accepted and soon found himself undergoing the rigorous training with which the OSS equipped its men for their highly dangerous work.

In addition to his unusual physical attainments,

Musulin's mastery of the Serbo-Croat language impressed his instructors with his particular aptness for a mission to Yugoslavia. This was exactly what Musulin had wanted. He had heard a great deal about the country where he had numerous relatives, and for many months had been thrilled by the gallant fight against terrific odds being put up by the fabulous General Draja Mikhailovich who at that time was being hailed in the Allied press as the greatest underground fighter in all of occupied Europe.

Musulin completed his parachute training quickly—training that was punctuated by his instructors' jovial bets, every time he was due to jump, as to how many panels in his chute would break! He outlasted both the cutes and the bets, and was handed his commission, along with orders for a flight overseas to Cairo, Egypt.

He was four months in North Africa; and then, on October 18, 1943, he took off from Bengasi in Libya, bound for central Serbia. Into the heart of this small country he was dropped at midnight, the third American officer to parachute into Yugoslavia. His assignment—to assist a British team which functioned as Allied liaison with the Chetnik army.

He was to be received by elements of General Mikhailovich's forces; and his first sight of them as he lay waiting in the darkness brought him to his feet with a start. For standing there in the flickering light cast by the ground flares, they had a storybook look—long wild hair, bushy beards, ragged, nondescript clothing, their weapons an odd assortment that varied from modern pistols and rifles to mountaineers' axes and knives.

As they stared at him silently, surprised by his great bulk, Musulin broke quickly into Serbian, introducing himself as an American officer of Serbian parentage, and held out a tentative hand. The Serbs' reaction was immediate—here was one of their own; they were wild with excitement, and Musulin's one difficulty now was to convince them that his presence would not necessarily bring about the immediate liberation of their country and the end of the war.

Musulin's duties involved liaison with the First Chetnik Corps, transmitting intelligence on German troop

(Continued on page 28)

(Continued from page 27)

movements, spotting targets for our bombers, training the underground fighters and receiving occasional supply drops. It took only those first few days at the encampment for Musulin to realize that these supply drops, at this stage of the war, were but a pitiful trickle of arms. For the most part, the Chetnik forces' fighting weapons were remnants from the equipment of the old Yugoslav army.

He learned that this First Corps had been busy before his arrival—they had a record of numerous acts of sabotage against the Nazi line of communication. It was this record that brought a strong German punitive force into the area and caused the evacuation of Musulin and his corps just forty-eight hours after his arrival.

The next seven months was a time of wandering; for with the Germans continually after them, they could not make a permanent encampment. They traveled over the mountains, living on the land, sharing the people's hardships; and Musulin saw copious evidence of German atrocities—hundreds of villages burnt, their population wiped out. The misery and suffering of the people was far greater than he could have ever imagined any people could take; yet he knew from what he saw that their will to resist was unbroken, and their support of the underground fight was strong and unwavering.

It was during this time that he met and learned to know General Mikhailovich, at whose shifting headquarters he spent considerable time. He was on friendly terms, too, with numerous Chetnik leaders—a most important factor in his future work.

Following the Teheran Conference in December 1943, when Roosevelt and Churchill decided to back Tito in place of Mikhailovich, support from the Allied headquarters began to taper off. During the spring of 1944 the Yugoslavian civil war was going full blast, and Tito's Partisan's attacked the Chetniks but were thrown back. Several months later the Allied Mission received orders to evacuate and on May 29, 1944, the entire party, with forty Allied airmen who had been picked up by the Chetniks, was flown out from a secret airfield built in the mountains by the Mikhailovich forces.

Just before leaving, Musulin had received word from the Chetniks that another party of twelve Americans

had been picked up, and he immediately requested permission to stay behind and get them. Headquarters denied his request, and he was flown back to his base in Italy. The decision had been made at the highest level that Mikhailovich was to receive no more Allied support, and though the Chetnik leaders were in tears at Musulin's departure, the orders must be obeyed.

Back at the OSS base in Bari, Italy, Musulin learned of the progress of the war and in particular of the Allied policy in relation to General Mikhailovich. He was shocked to find that his beloved Chetniks were accused of collaborating with the Germans, against whom he knew they were waging a relentless war. Worse than that, distressed American airmen were being briefed to bail out only in Tito Partisan-dominated territory and not in Chetnik areas, because Mikhailovich was said to be turning shot-down Allied airmen over to the Germans. This OSS officer, who had just left the Chetniks and had taken forty Allied airmen with him knew this to be false; but he found himself a weak minority against the all-out support being given Tito and his charges against the Chetniks.

On the other hand, he discovered that both the United States and Great Britain had numerous missions attached to Tito's forces. These missions were receiving all-out military support. Airmen who were forced to bail out in Tito areas were promptly aided by these missions and returned to their Italian bases; whereas with the departure of Musulin's mission from Serbia, there existed no comparable machinery to aid American aircrews forced to bail out in Chetnik zones.

And this knowledge made Musulin fighting mad. American Air Corps boys, he argued, were entitled to rescue wherever they were, regardless of American or British political policy with regard to the Yugoslavian civil war. Furthermore, he knew that Mikhailovich was not turning over airmen to the Germans and to prove it, he would parachute blindly into Serbia!

These potent arguments availed little against the tide of Tito feeling and the official policy laid down by London and Washington, but events in other quarters soon gave unexpected support to Musulin's daring proposals.

As the summer of 1944 opened up, the American bombing offensive against German oil facilities and communication lines was stepped up to an over-

(Continued on page 29)

(Continued from page 28)

whelming tempo. Balkan targets, particularly the Ploesti oilfields and other rich objectives began receiving special attention from the 15th American Air Force, headquarters for which were at Bari, Italy. The mighty Allied air effort elicited a frantic and costly German reaction. The toll from German fighters, and particularly their massed radar-directed anti-aircraft guns around every target, was heavy. More and more of the returning bombing crews reported seeing planeloads of their squadron mates bailing out of crippled ships in northern and central Yugoslavia, where the Chetnik underground operated. Major General Nathan Twining, Commanding General of the 15th Air Force, became vitally concerned. He wanted something done to rescue these crews.

Meantime the Yugoslav embassy in the United States picked up a message from General Mikhailovich stating that he had a number of American airmen in various areas under his control, and requesting that American personnel be sent in to organize their evacuation. He agreed to receive the mission and render every assistance.

While this situation was developing, Musulin's OSS chief in Bari, Lt. Nelson Deranian, USNR, told him to go ahead and organize a team for the dangerous mission he was pressing to undertake. This was all that "Gov", as the big University of Pittsburgh extackle was known, needed. Knowing that the chances of a prearranged reception were slight, and that there was no accurate information on recent German moves in the area since the last reliable Allied radio link with the Chetniks had been severed, he decided to select for his team men who had proved themselves in this rugged duty.

His choice fell on Master Sergeant Michael Rajacich of Washington, D.C., as his second in command; and youthful Arthur Jibilian, an expert Navy radio man, also from Washington D.C., to handle his communications. Both of these men spoke the Yugoslavian language, knew the people and the problems of operating behind German lines. Together with Musulin, they prepared the necessary supplies and worked out the details for their dangerous project.

The Halyard team finally was organized on July 5, 1944, and placed under the operating supervision of

a specially established 15th Air Force section under Colonel George Kraigher, who was assigned by General Twining. Musulin was designated as Commanding Officer of Air Corps Rescue Unit, Team 1, which was known as ACRU....

Direct radio communications with Mikhailovich did not exist, but there was an old roundabout, inadequate and probably insecure radio link which now brought additional confirmation of Musulin's claims that there were large numbers of Americans in Chetnik hands. This communication was suspected on two grounds: First, it came from the Chetnik leader, who had been disavowed by the Allied high command; secondly, it was no longer considered secure from German interception. In spite of these serious implications and the doubts of his superiors, Musulin and his men decided to attempt the drop to a pinpoint designated by this radio. More than once during the ensuing attempts, they had reason to wonder if the doubters were right or not.

The dangers they faced were extreme. The radio messages were so roundabout and so delayed that the rendezvous had to be set days ahead. Musulin knew very well that the military situation in occupied Yugoslavia was very fluid. An area that might be Chetnik-controlled when they set the rendezvous, might very well be overrun by the Germans the very next day; and in as much as the Germans always lit flares to attract allied planes, he could never be sure but that torture-bent Nazis would receive him.

Furthermore, the flights were made in unarmed C-47's without escort, which made them sitting ducks for German fighters based at an airfield only ten minutes' flying time from the pinpoint—fifty miles south of Belgrade. To add to the suspense, several planes had recently been shot down at night in the same general area.

Weather cancelled out their first effort on July 8th. Again the long process of setting a rendezvous and the try on July 19th. This time they reached the pinpoint, but no signals were visible. Could it be a trap? They flew about and turned homeward.

They tried again on July 25th. It was a 350-mile trip each way from the American airfield at Brindisi at the foot of Italy. As they crossed into Yugoslavia, they ran into a heavy anti-aircraft barrage and the

(Continued on page 30)

(Continued from page 29)

Halyard team hooked up their chutes ready to bail out. Moments of waiting, the nearness of death, their utter helplessness—and then there was no sound but the peaceful hum of their own motors. They had flown through the barrage safely; now to find the signal. But there was no signal. Again they circled despairingly, then headed east for home and another discouraging report: “Mission unsuccessful”.

The tension was telling on everyone’s nerves, but the next night they would have one more chance, for this rendezvous had been arranged for successive nights, lest anything should go wrong on either end. This time they met no barrage.... They neared the pinpoint—and there, lighting up the countryside, were the red glows of the fires. The signals? Quickly they checked—these signals were wrong. Musulin stared downward in desperation. Maybe the code had been confused—should they take a chance? Suddenly a blinding glare illuminated the plane and the anxious faces of the men—German flares bursting about them! From the ground came the flash of heavy small arms. This was either a trap—in which case night fighters and possibly ack-ack could be expected within a few moments; or they were completely off their pinpoint and had almost dropped into a nest of Germans.

Their reaction was instantaneous. In a few seconds the plane was headed back, the anxious pilot straining for every ounce of speed, the men tensely keeping a lookout for the threatened night fighters. Twice they thought they spotted them, and twice they eluded them, and then some hours later they were back at base, a weary and disheartened group. As Musulin jumped from the plane and headed for the OSS dispatching station, he was fighting the bitter thought that Halyard Mission was doomed from the start....

In a little Chetnik encampment far behind enemy lines a group of discouraged men waited. Many of them were sick and wounded; some wore tattered clothes and were shoeless; all of them were sick at heart, for these men believed themselves abandoned. They were men of the United States Army Air Force, shot down over a Chetnik underground area, awaiting a rescue that they now began to feel would never come. Among them was Lt. Richard L. Felman of New York City. His B-24 “Never a Dull Moment”, had been shot down by MR-109’s on the way back from a strike at the Ploesti oil fields. He remembers those days sharply now:

“We had been briefed by intelligence that if shot down in Yugoslavia, we were to look for Tito’s Partisans and avoid the Chetniks, who were rumored to be turning Allied airmen over to the Germans. I bailed out on the 9th of July and found myself in the hands of the Chetniks whom I had been told to avoid. They said they would take care of me. I was suspicious, but in a few days I was convinced they were on our side. One incident in particular, made me feel sure of them and of their sincerity.”

“They told me that one of our crew had been killed when the plane had crashed, and that the Germans had stripped his body and buried it. After the Germans had left the immediate area, a band of Chetniks dug up the body and gave him a reverent funeral service. They took pictures of the ceremonies, and then gravely presented them to us with the request that we send them on to my crewmate’s family.”

“There had been ten of us who had bailed out—we were all located and brought together by the Chetniks. The Germans had seen us hit the silk, and immediately demanded that the local people surrender us. The peasants stood fast: they refused. The reprisal—their village was burned to the ground.”

“Within two weeks after I had landed, our group of Americans had grown to about seventy-five, all of whom were constantly protected and aided by the Mikhailovich forces. Every day the Chetniks would come and tell us how they tried to arrange for American planes to come in, but when nothing happened, the boys really began to feel low. Some of the fellows had been down for five months, and about that time they felt as though they had had it. We kept on hoping, though we knew that only Tito was receiving Allied support.”

“Finally our senior office, Lt. T.K. Oliver, a West Point man, and son of Major General E.L. Oliver, went up to Mikhailovich’s headquarters and borrowed one of his radios. With it he began to broadcast in the clear on a rare frequency, in the hope that some Allied monitoring station would pick up the message. Day after day he tapped out the words: *‘We are 250 American airmen . . . Many sick and wounded. Please notify the 15th Air Force to come and get us.’*”

“We began to get answers—but they were all questions. Whoever was receiving was suspicious and

(Continued on page 31)

(Continued from page 30)

rightly so, for they not unreasonably feared we were Germans, or Americans operating under German duress. They must be made to realize that this was a legitimate signal from distressed Americans.”

“Lt. Oliver devised an ingenious and unique system of encoding and decoding. Using the Army serial numbers of various airmen, nicknames, intimate Air Corps slang which his West Point roommate back at the base knew that Oliver had used, items of wearing apparel effected by individual officers (a certain colored scarf for example), the painted insignia on various planes, details of officers clubs at his air base and other similar data which could be known only to a very few people, he managed to establish working communication. This improvised code, though sent in clear language, accomplished two things—it completely shrouded the meaning from the listening Germans, and it convinced the monitoring station who was picking us up that we were probably legitimate.”

“Finally a message came that made even the sick men look up and smile: ‘Prepare reception for July 31st and subsequent nights.’ That was all we needed—I’ll never forget that feeling of relief. We got busy preparing that reception and then sat back to wait. The 31st finally came. General Mikhailovich himself and about one thousand of his ragged troops came to visit us at our encampment near the tiny air-strip from which we expected to be evacuated. He held a review of his troops in our honor, and then talked to us through an interpreter. He told us how much he loved America and how sorry he was that he had not been able to do more for us, though his people had given us the best of everything they had. He assured us that he had eight thousand deployed over a twenty mile area around our air-strip with orders to hold off the Germans at all costs until we were evacuated.”

That night at ten P.M. we were all down at the field. We waited for forty minutes silently. Exactly at 10:40 came the sound of motors, but we were afraid that coming so late it might be a German plane, so we decided not to light up the flares, since that might give away the whole show. Nothing happened the rest of that long night—nor on the next. Our spirits hit rock bottom.”

“Then on August 2nd we were all down at the field again. At 10:10 P.M. we heard plane engines in the

distance. We couldn’t be certain that it was an American plane, but at that point we were willing to risk anything, so we lit up the flares and the wind tee. About thirty seconds afterwards we could hear the plane turning to head back over our strip. We were going to get a strafing from the Germans, or would this be a rescue from our own boys? We all crouched in the bushes watching.”

“The plane circled for about ten minutes, then came in very low over our strip. As it zoomed over our heads, we could see the big white star of the Air Force under the wings. With one voice the men let out a loud yell—the most terrific cheer I have ever heard went up in those Yugoslavian mountains. It was just like Ruth hitting a homer with the bases loaded in the World Series. The sight of an American plane was the first tangible evidence of rescue that we had seen since landing, and the boys nearly went crazy.”

“Next thing we knew, Chetniks came running up, hauling packages which had been parachuted from the plane. Then I heard a tremendous commotion in the darkness, a whole crowd of Chetniks—men, women, and children were shouting and cheering: ‘Captain George, Captain George!’ A few seconds later three men came up to us. The one who was in the lead was the center of a mob of Chetniks—they were kissing him and cheering him with tears in their eyes. He was in an American uniform, and he was one of the biggest chaps I’d ever seen. He walked over to us and put out his hand. ‘I’m Lt. George Musulin,’ he said.”

For Musulin, the sight of the gratitude on the faces of these pathetically eager American airmen was enough. He had been right in begging for this mission; all the discouragement of the five previous attempts was now wiped away in this moment of initial success. He thought of the new hope he’d felt when T.K. Oliver’s messages had begun to come through.

“Those messages,” he said, “gave me new faith in Hal-yard Mission, especially when the location of his signals was plotted as coming from the same area south of Belgrade to which I had been planning to jump. It seemed to confirm what I had been saying all along. It also confirmed our roundabout messages from Mikhailovich.”

“I had been pretty disturbed when the first rendezvous

(Continued on page 32)

(Continued from page 31)

we'd set up with Oliver on July 31 failed. As a matter of fact, I had been prepared that night to jump in without a reception and take my chances with the Germans. By that time the three of us on the team were nervous wrecks. I was very worried about getting our mission off and about the morale of the team. I kept thinking about the plight of those airmen, and I knew that their danger would increase with every flight we made to the area. The terrific tension of those long dangerous flights, the strain of being constantly alerted at the airfield, the unnerving knowledge that each successive flight might mean being shot down, or a jump to death, had us all pretty groggy. We had nearly had it a dozen times, and we weren't even inside yet. I haven't enough praise for Mike and Jibby, who kept taking it and were still game for another trip on August 2."

"This time when we thought we had reached the pinpoint area, fires broke out below us. After so many disappointments it was hard to believe it when they seemed to be in the right pattern. But that was all we needed. We circled a few times, dropped our package, and then I found myself diving through the air. As usual I had a terrific shock when the chute opened and caught my weight. I remember thinking that no matter what lay ahead, thank God we were at least on our way."

"Our drop was not too good, in that we landed two miles away from our pinpoint, due to an error in dispatching. Fortunately, all of us were uninjured. I landed in a cornfield, Mike in a tree and Jibby in a mud-bank. I picked myself up and ran over, to find Mike hanging by his shrouds a few feet off the ground. An old woman was kissing him and telling him that we were with General Mikhailovich's forces."

"I cut him down quickly, and then some peasants brought up Jibby. We were very relieved to learn that we were with the Chetniks, because even though T.K. Oliver's messages seemed very authentic, we had no certainty that he had not been under clever Nazi torture which had elicited all that information, and that we might be headed for the same treatment."

"Pranjane, where we just landed, was where I'd spent a great deal of time in my previous seven and a half months with the Chetniks, so I knew a great many people there, and received a very touching and sincere reception from them. They quickly led us to the small clearing where the airmen were waiting. We

received a tremendous ovation from them, and their unrestrained joy in meeting us made all the trouble and risk we had had getting there well worth while."

"The Americans were like kids when they saw us. I introduced myself to them and assured them we'd soon have them back to their bases. They were sure glad to get the cigarettes and chocolate we'd brought—their first in many long weeks. Some of them were in pretty bad shape, and before sending them back to their quarters for the night I told them that we had some medical supplies which would be distributed to the worst cases in the morning."

"Shortly after dawn, I held a conference with the senior American officers—Captain L.C. Brooks, Lt. T.K. Oliver, Lt. R.J. Hefling, Lt. K.A. Pfister, FO J.W. Barrett, Lt. W.J. Kilpatrick and Lt. J.E. Buchler. I learned that there were approximately 250 airmen in the vicinity, divided into six groups with an officer in charge of each. They were quartered in small groups at homes of various Chetniks in an area of about ten miles around the strip. There were about twenty-six wounded and injured in the lot. They were being treated by an Italian doctor who had escaped from a German prison camp in Belgrade and was working with the Chetniks."

"With the medical supplies that I had brought in with us, we set up a small hospital and gave them the best treatment we could under the circumstances. A large number of the airmen were barefoot and inadequately clad in fragments of Air Corps uniforms and peasant attire of all sizes and description. Many had long hair and beards except for a few incongruous items of G.I. Clothing, looked very much like the weather-beaten, tattered Chetniks who had been looking after them."

"Jibilian managed to make radio contact with our base in Bari the first day, and I reported our safe reception and the presence of over two hundred airmen, many in need of food, clothing and medical supplies. In response we received a promise of an immediate supply drop, and a commendation from Major General Twinning for the 'fine work' so far."

"As soon as I had the airmen straightened out as well as I could with our limited means, I held a conference with my old friend Captain Zvonko Vuchkovich then of the First Chetnik Corps, who was in charge of the Mikhailovich troops in the area. It was just

(Continued on page 33)

(Continued from page 32)

two months since I had left the zone, and I was anxious to check on the German strength, for I realized how precarious our situation was. What I learned from the Chetnik leader was far from reassuring. Only twelve and a half miles away in the town of Chachak was a garrison of forty-five hundred Germans. Just five miles from our clearing was another garrison of two hundred and fifty. Our principal security lay in our mountain location, the guarding Chetnik troops, and the wonderful support of the Serbian population."

"I knew very well, however, that we would stand little chance if the Germans ever got wind of our presence and the projected evacuation. Should they attack us in strength with their superior armament and planes, the Chetniks would be forced to retreat through the mountains, and I knew that very few of our airmen could survive such a retreat. We would have to get these men out, and get them out fast!"

"After conferring with Captain Vuchkovich on the German dispositions, I went over the security arrangements of his own troops, on whose protection the whole operation depended. He explained to me that on General Mikhailovick's orders he had set up an outer and inner ring of defenses in the mountains around our air-strip. In addition, his men had roadblocks set up on the side of every road the Germans would have to use to interfere with the evacuation. His plans were that when the actual operation took place, these roadblocks were to be quickly set up and manned by troops, who were under orders to hold at all costs until the job was completed. These plans seemed very good to me; and knowing the Chetniks, I felt sure that they would be carried out. But just to reassure myself as to the probable strength of these outer and inner perimeter defenses, I sent Sgt. Rajacich to check them."

"The thing that impressed me most about the set-up was the truly amazing security of the Chetnik soldiers and peasants. The American airmen had been assembled from an area covering many thousands of square miles. Thousands of people knew of their presence in the area. They had been brought together at great risk and at a high cost by the Chetniks. Men had been tortured to death, and villages destroyed, by the Germans in an effort to locate them. These poor suffering people, who had been deserted by the American and British governments, and who were under merciless attack

from both the Germans and Tito's Partisans, would have received more money than they could ever dream of earning in their entire lives by tipping off the Germans to the presence of the Americans. But in spite of all that, no one American was betrayed. Their sense of honor and secrecy for the welfare of their beloved Americans was so great it didn't look like they even discussed their presence among themselves. Without this heart-shaking loyalty, our entire mission would have been fruitless, and not one airmen would have had a chance to escape."

"After assuring myself as to our defense situation, I next applied myself to the air-strip, which was by long odds our biggest problem. This strip—if you could call it that—was a small narrow plateau well up in the mountains. It certainly didn't look as if a plane could ever land and take off from it. The strip was only one hundred and fifty feet wide and approximately eighteen hundred long. There were woods on one side, and a sheer drop on the other. At one end of the strip were some large trees; at the opposite a huge depression. Added to these nearly prohibitive limitations, was the fact that high mountain peaks were all around the strip at varying distances of a mile and a half to two miles."

"I discussed the strip with the Air Corps officers and they were very skeptical of any planes being able to use it. By considerable work we could improve it and lengthen it by about seventy-five yards, which would give us the absolute minimum for C-47 operations. Immediately I asked the Chetniks for assistance, and three hundred laborers and sixty oxcarts were assigned to work on extending the strip. Stones and dirt were hauled from some nearby streams, and with every man pitching in, the strip was gradually improved."

"I was still afraid that the 15th Air Force would not approve of the strip, even with these improvements, so I dispatched Captain Brooks and Lt. Oliver to search for other fields. Another party made up of Lt. Kilpatrick and FO Barrett took off on a similar mission in another direction. Several days later both parties returned with reports of other fields, both better than our strip at Pranjane, but they were fourteen hours walking distance from our present location, and would also involve shifting our defenses very considerably. Because we did not think it practical to attempt to move our sick and wounded over such a distance, we decided to use the Pranjane strip."

(Continued on page 34)

(Continued from page 33)

"On the night of August 5th our first supply drop came in. With it we received a large number of shoes, food, clothing and additional medical supplies. The arrival of these supplies improved our situation immensely. Many of the men had been barefoot for months, and their long walks through the mountains had their feet in terrible shape. Many of the Chetniks were in the same or worse condition, yet they wouldn't take any of the clothing themselves. That's the way they were about everything. Our hospital was able to help them, however, and it was pitiful to see their appreciation for the smallest kindness when they were risking everything they had for us."

"I was pushing the work on the airfield as fast as I could, because I realized that every hour's delay made the danger of discovery by the Germans more likely. Finally, by the eighth of the month it looked as if the job would be finished the next day, so I had Jibby radio that we would start the evacuation the next night. Confirmation of my plans came through from base, and it looked as if the next night would be the big test."

"Fortunately the weather on the ninth was perfect. It looked as if our luck was running good. I had requested six planes, and given orders for seventy-two airmen to be ready at the air strip at ten P.M. We had issued numbers to everyone. The sick and wounded received the lowest numbers, and after that the priority was established on the length of time each man had been behind the lines. Some had been in Yugoslavia for over five months. We made no distinction between officers and enlisted men."

"The number per plane was kept down to twelve because of the danger of taking off from such a short runway. Before I left, it had been settled that the incoming planes would be stripped down of all excess material and would carry half a gas load, little more than enough to complete the round trip. Even with these precautions and as anxious as they were to get back to Italy, many of the pilots doubted that it could be done."

"Everything seemed in readiness late in the afternoon. Mike and Jibby were out at the airstrip completing the laying out of the flare pots which would mark the airstrip and the wind direction. About six P.M. I was riding a horse out to the strip to make a final check when I heard plane engines."

"The second I heard them, I knew they were German. I

dived off my horse and took cover in a ditch by the side of the road, expecting to be strafed. But they paid no attention to me—they headed instead for our strip. There were three of them, flying in a loose formation—one a Stuka, one a JU-52 and the third marked with a Red Cross. My heart was in my mouth; I watched them approach the strip; then, to my horror, they buzzed it, circled around and headed back off in the direction of their own airfield."

"Bitterly I got back on my horse and galloped out to the field. There were Mike and Jibby, and when I saw the look on their faces I knew that they shared my worst fears. The job must have been blown. Somehow the Germans had found out, and all our precarious preparations had come to naught at the very last minute."

"Worst of all, it Italy the planes were probably already taking off, because they were due in about four hours. Even had we been able to contact our base by radio immediately, it would be impossible to stop them because the message would never get to the airfield in time. There was nothing we could do but sit and wait for everything to blow up in our faces."

"I looked over the field. Sheep and cattle were peacefully grazing over the airstrip—I had figured that would be a good cover for our activity. It was a lush pastoral scene that in a few hours might be the center of war. Some sign of our plans must have been visible to those planes. Had anyone tipped off the Germans? There was absolutely no way we could tell."

"Jibby was afraid that the Germans had detected his radio, which had been in frequent communication with base arranging all the details of the evacuation. If they had made a fix on his set, maybe these planes had flown over to investigate the area. It seemed too coincidental that they had just happened to fly across our strip. Would the German night fighters be waiting for our unarmed and helpless C-47's when they came within a few hours? Were the nearby German troops getting set for an attack which would frustrate all our plans and lead to the capture and death of so many of these airmen who had been through so much, and were now so confident that I could get them out safely?"

I was nearly sick with frustration. To think that this had to happen at almost the last minute! More than my

(Continued on page 35)

(Continued from page 34)

own personal feelings of disappointment, my tremendous responsibility for the lives of the two hundred fifty airmen and crews of the incoming planes weighed heavily on me. I would be to blame. From the beginning I had been largely responsible for the organization of Halyard Mission. It was the toughest spot I had ever hoped to be in, and I don't mind telling you we started to pray—and boy, I mean we prayed!”

“There didn't seem to be another thing we could do. Fortunately, none of the airmen had been anywhere near the airstrip when the Germans buzzed it. At least they didn't know about our fears, and the three of us decided not to tell them. There didn't seem to be any point in getting them all in a sweat at the last minute, when there was nothing we could do about it; and if by some miracle things went off as planned, so much the better.”

“One check that I was able to make was on the nearest German garrison. Maybe if our plans were known to the enemy, there would be some sort of unusual activity in Gorni Milanovac. I knew that the Chetniks had a secret telephone line into that town to warn them if the Germans were sending patrols out after them. Immediately I asked for the latest report from this source. Word came back after some delay that the German situation in the town was normal. It was now getting toward nine o'clock, and this slight assurance gave the three of us some encouragement, but we didn't stop our praying.”

“By ten o'clock the designated first seventy-two airmen assembled at the strip. I had a Chetnik soldier stationed at each flare, ready to light them up on my signal. The airmen were all in top spirits, but unfortunately we of the Halyard Mission were not able to share in their exuberance. We waited there in the darkness for another hour and then in the distance we heard airplane engines. Everyone strained his ears and then the airmen began to cheer—they sounded like American planes.”

“Jibby was standing by me with an Aldis lamp to blink the proper identification signal. As they circled over for the first time he blinked 'Nan' and to our great joy received the correct reply, 'Xray'. So far, so good—at least they had found us, and there had been no German interference. Now to get them down and off again. I gave the order to light up the ground fires and then shot up the green flare, our signal that the landings were to

commence.”

“The first plane started down with his landing lights on and headed toward our strip. The airmen were cheering and shouting, but as that plane came in the noise died down. Everyone was holding his breath and more that a few praying. Down and down he came, and then just before he put down his wheels, he gave it the gun and roared off, having overshot the field. The next plane, however, made a perfect landing and pulled up at the end of the strip. The rest of them were to stay aloft until I had the strip cleared, but they disregarded our signals and kept coming right in. I was afraid that there would be a pile-up at the end of the strip, and had some Chetniks and airmen wheel the first plane down into a sloping depression off to one side at the end. This was done just in time, because the wings of the next plane just passed over the top of this first one as it wheeled about to taxi to one side. It missed by inches, and I could see that these night landings were too dangerous. The lightest mix-up, and the whole show might be ruined.”

“Two of the planes brought additional medical supplies and equipment. In one of these was Captain J. Mitrani, a Fifteenth Air Force medical officer, and two medical technicians. In another plane was Lt. Nick A. Lulich of the OSS, who had come in to lend a hand with the evacuation work. When Nick landed, he told me that there were only four planes instead of the six we had expected—two of the planes had developed engine trouble and had been forced to turn back. This was a great disappointment to twenty-four of the men, but I promised them I would get them out the next morning.”

“Quickly we loaded up the planes, and it did my heart good to see the happiness of those men as they went aboard. Most of them stripped off their shoes and clothing and tossed them to the Chetniks. The pilots of the C-47's, who were the best in the 60th Troop Carrier Command, were pretty worried about the take-off, but there was nothing for them to do but try, as they couldn't stay where they were. Naturally, I didn't tell them my fears about the German night fighters, but I did give them the complete lists of all the airmen who were to be evacuated, and told them that I wanted the rest of the planes to come in the very first thing the next morning. My fear of German intervention and the many evident dangers of attempting further night evacuations led me to this decision, which I put in writing to Colo-

(Continued on page 36)

(Continued from page 35)

nel Kraigher.”

“All this took but a few minutes, and I soon had the planes loaded and set to take off. One pilot wanted to fill up his plane with a lot more, but I finally persuaded him that he would have his troubles getting off with the twelve men he already had aboard.”

“About twenty minutes after they had landed the first plane started down the strip to take off with its precious cargo. We were all pretty tense, but she took off nicely without a hitch. The rest followed, one of them brushing a tree in the process, but all got off safely. It was just about forty minutes after we heard the motors that we heard them die away in the distance as they headed back to Italy. The first part of our job had come off successfully. There had been no incident—no German interference. We all thanked God and prayed that the rest would go off as well.”

“Immediately I sent couriers to all the rest of the airmen ordering them to be at the airstrip no later than eight o’clock the next morning. All the rest of that night Jibby kept busy at his radio trying to contact base to get confirmation for the arrival of the planes with fighter cover in the morning. His efforts were unsuccessful, but we went ahead with all the plans anyway, and just before 0800 on the morning of the tenth we heard a tremendous roar of engines in the distance. Our first thought was that it was another huge bombing mission to the routine Balkan targets, but as the planes came closer, a shout went up from some of the assembled airmen. They had recognized the unmistakable lines of six lovely C-47’s in the center of a swarm of fighters. Could this mighty show of air strength be the answer to our hurried plea of a few hours before?”

“The planes headed directly toward us, and the advanced waves of the P-51’s began stunting overhead. Now there could be no doubt about it—the whole show was just for us. To team Halyard, to the airmen, to the Chetnik soldiers and the Yugoslav peasants, it was the most inspiring sight we had ever experienced. The cheers were tremendous, and the show that those boys put on was deserving of the acclaim with which it was received.”

“Most of the twenty-five P-51’s broke off from the protective umbrella formation with which they had been covering the six transports and started a strafing sweep

of all roads and German installations which we had pinpointed in the area. Another section gave the German airfield at Kraljevo, about twenty-five miles away, a thorough going over, to give the impression that it was a normal air strike.”

“The C-47’s began to come in at five minute intervals. As each plane put down, we of the Halyard team sweated out every landing. The minute each plane taxied to a stop, it was surrounded by screaming women and girls, who showered the planes, their crews and the embarking Americans with garlands of flowers. The airmen going aboard were shouting boisterously, and as each group of twenty entered their designated plane, they would peel off their shoes and most of their clothing, and toss it to the cheering Chetniks.”

“The pilots and crews of the evacuating planes were caught up with the excitement of the occasion. All of them wanted souvenirs—daggers, guns, Chetnik caps and *opankas*, the Serbian sandals made out of goatskin. None of them was in any hurry to leave, and I had trouble getting them to take off to clear the strip for other planes. Those pilots of the 60th Troop Carrier Command who took those planes in and out were the hottest flyers I have ever seen. Some of them even ground-looped in landing, to slow up and stop before they reached the end of the strip. It seemed to me that most of them had ‘more guts than brains’ and I certainly hand it to them for the job they did.”

“While all this was happening on the ground, the P-51’s were putting on a breath-taking exhibition overhead. None of us on the Halyard team had much time to watch this demonstration, as we were directing the landings, loadings and take-offs—every one of which had us holding our breath; but in a few minutes we had six planes off again and circling slowing to gain altitude. Slowly they formed into a clumsy V formation, and then with their roaring fighter escort sweeping around them, they dipped their wings in a final salute to their Chetnik friends and headed back to base and safety.”

“Just before nine o’clock a second wave of twenty-five P-51’s came over with another six transports. The whole happy performance was repeated—with one exception. One of the last planes disobeyed the instructions of Lt. Nick Lalich, who was acting as ground-control officer, and got his left wheel stuck in some mud at one side of the strip. This could have been criti-

(Continued on page 37)

cal, for I knew that the fighters would have to leave in a very few minutes because of their limited gas supply. If the plane was left behind, it would surely be spotted by the Germans. While the rest of the planes circled overhead, I hastily selected a ground crew of one hundred Serbs, and in twenty minutes of hard work we had him dug out and on his way. Except for that slight mishap, the entire operation went off without a slip."

"In two hours 241 men were taken off the 'Missing in Action' list. With the Americans went six British, four French, nine Italians, seven Yugoslavs and twelve Russians. Our total achievement for the night and the morning was 289 highly skilled Allied personnel. When the last plane had disappeared behind the mountains to the east, we of the Halyard team shook hands with each other. After all our danger and trouble, we relaxed for the first time in five weeks with the wonderful feeling of an important job well finished."

"Later the same day we retreated ten miles into the mountains, because it didn't seem possible that the whole operation could have escaped the attention of the Germans on the other side of the mountain only five miles away. Our OSS base wired us congratulations, as did the 15th Air Force; and we were particularly pleased to receive a unit citation from Lt. General Ira Eaker, ranking American airman in the Mediterranean theater. Our greatest satisfaction, however, came from the realization that we had accomplished the job we had set out to do."

"That night five more Americans were brought to our mountain camp, and they were plenty mad when they realized that they had just missed a ride to safety. We spent several days away from the strip and then when the Germans made no move against it, we decided that the fighters had done such an effective job of strafing that the enemy must have all dug in and our evacuation had escaped their observation."

For the next few weeks we kept collecting additional airmen whom the Chetniks would bring to us. We received several supply drops, and one night laid on a reception for another OSS team under the command of Lt. Colonel Robert H. McDowell, whom I introduced to General Mikhailovich with whom he was to operate."

By the end of August we had accumulated another

large group of airmen, and on the nights of the twenty-sixth and the twenty-seventh we evacuated fifty-eight more Americans—and two British officers who had been 'captured' by the Chetniks in an arrangement with some Partisans. On this second flight, I was evacuated under orders from OSS headquarters to work with the Air Force in preparing new escape maps and proper briefing for American airmen who might be forced down in Chetnik territory."

"Our total for the whole month of August amounted to 383 Americans, and the work in subsequent months carried out under Lt. Lalich's direction brought the grand total to 432 Americans and eighty Allied personnel. This work was hampered by Tito's forces, which finally drove the Chetniks from the Pranjane airstrip while they were awaiting another evacuation."

Lt. Musulin received the Legion of Merit for his leadership on Halyard Mission. Several hundred American Air Force officers and men who were rescued from the Germans by General Mikhailovich's Chetniks, have submitted statements to the United States State Department as testimony in behalf of the Chetnik leader, who was on trial for his life in Belgrade for having collaborated with the Germans.



General Mikhailovich

Editor's note: This winter I visited Karl Pfister in Jupiter, Florida. Karl and others on Bob Hefling's crew, 764th Bomb Squadron, were evacuated from Yugoslavia as part of the Halyard Mission (see page 32, upper right). There are probably more members of the 461st Bomb Group that were involved. Is there anyone that was part of this mission that is willing to tell their personal story? I would love to hear from you!

CHRONICLES of a World War II B-24 LIBERATOR BOMBER CREWMAN By Mervin Dumdei, 766th BS

On September 9, 1942 I went to Des Moines, Iowa and there I enlisted in the Army as an Aviation Cadet. The Army Air Corps called me to active duty on February 23, 1943 and assigned me to the San Antonio Classification Center (SACC), which is now known as Lackland Air Force Base.

As we neared San Antonio, a rumor started that the first thing that would happen when we got off the train is that we would get shots with a hooked needle! When we pulled in to the station a cold rain was falling, but just the same we were all lined up along side the train where the medics were waiting. Right there they gave us our typhoid-tetanus shots and a "short arm" - looked at each recruit's penis to see if he had a venereal disease. Several guys fainted and were "washed out" of the cadets and assigned to the regular army.

We were all asked what classification we wanted to be placed in, such as pilot, bombardier, or navigator. Most of the men wanted to be pilots, but I chose bombardier first and navigator second because I knew that all of us couldn't be pilots. Many of the men (or should I say boys since almost all of us were under 20 years old) washed out because they either failed the physicals or couldn't stand up to more rigorous basic training regimen. The basic training was much tougher for cadets than regular army since we were all supposed to become officers and "gentlemen" when we finished cadet training. It was tough—I remember one day I was running down the stairs of our barracks to get to a formation. Our squadron CO, one Lt. Rice, who was a '90 day wonder' from OCS, happened to be coming up the stairs. As I flew down the stairs, I neither noticed him nor stopped to salute. He, on the other hand, was a whole lot more observant and yelled, "Mister, didn't you forget something?"

Now in cadets, you never make an excuse, so I said, "Yes, Sir!" and saluted. Just the same, he made me stand in a brace for fifteen minutes. (A brace is very rigid attention.) Even worse, for missing the formation, I was given ten demerits—thirty demerits meant walking one hour at attention, with a rifle, on the ramp.

After I was classified to attend bombardier school, I was assigned to Ellington Field near Houston for preflight training.

From Ellington, I was sent to Laredo Air Base for Gunnery school. All bombardiers and navigators had to know how to handle a hand held .50 caliber machine gun from the nose of the plane.

We left Laredo for the Midland Bombardier School in army trucks. On the first night of our three-day trip, we stopped at the navigator school in San Angelo—it was the only time we ate a regular meal; the rest of the time we had sandwiches. Once we arrived at Midland, they lined us up on the ramp and swore us to secrecy on the Norden bombsight—a top secret weapons system at the time. The classes on bombsight maintenance were really a tough time for me.

But Midland had more to offer than bombsights, it had a blonde bombshell too, named Mary Potter whom I dated. Unbeknown to me, my bombardier instructor was also dating her. Apparently she told him that she wanted to date me instead of him.

So the next time I reported to the flight line for bombing practice, he raised hell about it; he told me to cut it out at once! By then, it was only nine days until graduation and commissioning as a lieutenant. But I was young and cocky, so I told him that he wasn't much of a man if he couldn't keep his woman and she must like me better than him. He slugged me—knocked me down on the concrete ramp and I hit the back of my head hard. I didn't plan to hit him back because I knew that they would wash me out; but when I felt blood on the back of my head, I completely lost my temper and proceeded to beat him up really good.

Another officer and cadet saw the whole thing and reported it to the commandant of cadets. At the hearing, he lost his commission and I was washed out which cost me my impending commission. All 109 members of my class graduated nine days later. All of them walked out of a side door of the hall so I could get the dollar from each of them for the first salute.

From Midland I was transferred to Scott Field, Illinois in charge of six other washed out cadets. We arrived at St. Louis on Thanksgiving Day, 1943. We

(Continued on page 39)

(Continued from page 38)

were pretty dirty after three days on the train. There a lady met us at the station saying she needed seven men to go home with her for dinner since she had seven SPARs (Coast Guard Women) coming for dinner. But I told her that we were all too dirty and first needed to shave and shower. She sure was insistent and told me that we could shave and clean up at her house. So I finally gave in and accepted and put the other guys on notice to mind their manners if they wanted to stay in town that night at the YMCA.

At dinner I sat across the table from this pretty redhead and a fellow named Tyson sat next to her. Of course, we were both trying to line up a date with her for later. And I wasn't taking chances so I asked Tyson if he'd like to spend the night in St. Louis or out at the base—he got the message. So I made the date with the redhead to go bowling later. Her name was Jane Baker and on April 23, 1944 I married her.

Since I didn't like radio school, I missed a lot of classes. Then the Air Corps decided to send me to Truax Field in Madison, Wisconsin for radar school. Janie and I planned to get married in March, but the only way I could get leave for the wedding was to volunteer for overseas combat duty, so I volunteered—they gave me ten days leave to be married.

After just three weeks at Truax, I was transferred to Hammer Field in Fresno California where they assembled air crews for the B-24 bombers. I was assigned to Lt. Johnson's crew as a gunner/photographer. I don't remember many of the men on that crew except "Red" Moore and a fellow named Mickey Warner.

We were sent north to Walla Walla, Washington for additional training. While we were there, the entire crew except Red and I were killed in a night training mission—by the toss of a coin, he and I were picked to stay on the ground.

One of the hardest things I ever had to do was to go with two officers to tell the next of kin that their loved ones were dead. I remember Lt. Johnson's wife sat in a rocking chair—she didn't cry nor even say a word. She just rocked. I also remember escorting Mickey Warner's body back to Detroit. On

the way there all that I could think about was "What am I going to say?" When we reached his parent's house, I just knocked on the door and told his mother and father, "I've brought your son home." I hope I never have to do it again.

With my next crew, our bomber went overseas and into combat:

Lt. Lee P. Ward	pilot
Lt. Gregory Mazza	co-pilot
Lt. Andrew McVicar	bombardier
Lt. George Wilson	navigator
Sgt. Tommy Yates	engineer/top turret gun.
Sgt. Anthony Centanni	radio op & waist gun.
Sgt. George "Pop" Rainey	ball turret gunner
Sgt. Melvin "Red" Moore	tail gunner
Sgt. Bill Glover	nose gunner
Sgt. Mervin Dumdei	photographer/waist gun.

Prior to flying to Europe, we were all given fifteen day delay in-route furloughs, after which we reported to Hamilton Field near San Francisco. We took off on August 23, 1944 for Kingman, Arizona. The next day we flew to Dyersville, Tennessee. Since we had parked next to the supply building, Red Moore and I opened one of its windows and loaded two mattresses and ten blankets into the waist of the plane—we still didn't know where we were going, but thought that we might need them.

From Dyersville we flew to Grenier Field, New Hampshire. After being weathered in at Grenier for three days, we were airborne again for Gander Field in Newfoundland, Canada. For the next week, the weather was terrible and we were grounded. The weather finally lifted and we took off. When we were three hours to sea, Lt. Ward opened our sealed orders and told us that we were headed for the 15th Air Force in Foggia, Italy. That meant our next stop was the Azores (off Portugal).

From there, we flew to Marrakech, Morocco where we landed in a severe thunderstorm, and then proceeded on to Tunis, which is on the northern tip of Africa. The first night in Tunis, Bill Glover and I went down to the latrine—it was a long building with the toilets in a long row, but without private compartments. Glover and I sat down and we were reading Stars and Stripes when an Arab girl came along and sat down on the stool next to Glover! We looked at one another, and Bill said, "You reckon we're in

(Continued on page 40)

(Continued from page 39)

the right place?" but she did what she came to do, got up, flushed the toilet, smiled, and left. We found out later that this was normal in Tunisia. As we got ready to leave, Bill pulled his chain and flushed the toilet. Suddenly he yelled, "There's HOT water in this damn thing!" It left him a little red, but not burned.

On September 9, 1944 we arrived in Gioia, Italy. The Luftwaffe came over the first night, but didn't drop any bombs. Our anti-aircraft fire made a lot of noise, and I could hear the shrapnel falling back to earth. The next morning several of the tents had holes in them, but I never heard that anyone had been wounded. From there, we were carried on another plane to the 461st Bomb Group, 766th Squadron, which was located five miles east of Cerignola, Italy.

We were billeted on a farm about two miles from the corrugated steel airstrip. The farmhouse served as the squadron headquarters, enlisted men's mess hall, officer's mess hall, and officer's club. The briefing room was in another building and a different building served as the enlisted men's club. The stables, which were next to the house, is where we lived for the next few weeks. Later we moved into tents, but they weren't all canvas—the first four feet up from the ground as solid wood with a tent atop the frame.

As for food, it was pretty monotonous: usually powdered eggs and powdered milk for breakfast, some kind of spam or corned beef for lunch and supper. Our bread

was baked in Cerignola. We would take the mess sergeant out of a few loaves of bread and would toast it over heating barrels. But as bad as our food seemed to us, the Italian people were so starved that they would fight over what was dumped in the garbage behind the mess hall.

A local Italian boy whom we called Mike would take our clothes to town to be washed. We supplied the soap plus a little extra for the Italian family that did our laundry.

While we were quartered in the stables, all of the crew slept on the floor on their blankets; all except Red and I, that is, who slept on our mattresses—courtesy of a certain supply warehouse in Dyersville. But when we were moved to our tents, the Army provided folding cots for us to sleep on. We rigged hangers on the walls where we hung our uniforms. As for the rest of our clothes, they were kept securely locked up in our foot lockers at all times because the Italians or somebody would steal anything that was left out. (GI shoes were bringing \$65 a pair on the local black market.)

Our squadron commander was Major Phillips. We also met a fellow named Bill Doran whose records had apparently been lost, so he didn't fly any missions until the war was almost over. Bill was kind of a con man of sorts, and for some reason he and I became good friends. He knew how to get the best tickets for all the USO shows: one time he worked a deal for us to meet and escort Helen Hayes and Ralph Meeker when they were going to play "Ten Little Indians" at the USO in Cerignola.

To be continued.

461st BOMB Group (H) 1943-1945, Inc.

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