

The 461st



Liberaider



Vol. 16, No. 1

June 1999

SOMEWHERE IN THE U.S.A.



MEMORIAL DEDICATION
ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY
21 JUNE 1999 (SEE PAGE 15)

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

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1999 Reunion Gail M. Peterson and Don C. Johnson

"Liberaider"

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The "Liberaider" is published twice a year on behalf of the members of the organization.

Permission is granted to use articles provided source is given.

FROM YOUR TREASURER

Bob Casey

FINANCIAL REPORT

We have investments of \$51,000 which earn 5% per year (\$2,580). Dues income will drop over the years due to the payment of Life Memberships and normal membership attrition. Investment income will be our main source of funds in the future. The money is invested in Vanguard's Short Term Bond Fund and Vanguard's Money Market Fund. Both of these funds are relatively safe and low risk. We will try to have the investments carry our Group until we all reach 100 years of age at about 2025.

A FINE RESPONSE

Members seemed to like the new program of a Life Membership for \$25.00. Since the offer was made, over 70% of the members sending in dues elected not to bother with annual payments.

Your Treasurer thanks all for their cooperation and invites those who are not Life Members to live the care free existence of no an-

nual dues payments by sending in their twenty-five bucks NOW!!!



PERSONAL MEMORABILIA OF YOUR EXPERIENCES DURING WORLD WAR II

As Editor of the "Liberaider" for many years, I have received many requests from family members for information about their father who served in the 461st Bomb Group. Where possible, I have sent the names of crew members who could provide personal information about the individual in question. Now that we have E-Mail and all sorts of websites the number of requests has multiplied.

Our new President received such an E-Mail request recently and was able to provide the name of the pilot of the crew in question. It turned out that the pilot was in poor health and was about to throw away all his records of involvement in the 461st Bomb Group. Instead, they will now be in the hands of an interested member of the "Younger Generation" who will study them and hopefully pass them on to his children.

This brings up the broader question of what do we all do with the official documents, photos, letters, etc. that each of us has stored away in some file if no member of our family is interested in preserving them. The answer is to send them to Frank C. O'Bannon, our official Historian. He will review the material and add it to all the other information he has acquired over the years. He will also provide the appropriate information to Rob Hoskins who has developed the 461st Bomb Group website.

SO PLEASE !!!

Don't throw anything away. Send it to Frank O'Bannon and, if it duplicates any information he already has, let him throw it away.

Help us preserve the memories of "Our War" so that future generations will know the horrors, futility and costs of armed conflict.





MAIL CALL

Editor's Note: Because of the magnitude of material available for the December 1998 issue of the "Liberaider" we did not include and "Letters To The Editor". Therefore the following "Mail Call" includes letters received over the last year. If you have any stories, comments, bitches to make send them in. We haven't received a large number of letters during the last year.



June 30, 1998

Dear George,

I got the June "Liberaider" today. I was surprised to see the letter from Bob Kelliher written March 22. Bob was my pilot in training and we flew two missions together from Italy. I volunteered for a 3rd mission on December 15th with a different crew to Linz, Austria and ended up MIA for 35 days. While I was in the hospital recovering, Bob, the engineer, and radio operator ended up in the hospital after crash landing February 13, 1945. We never flew together again. I flew 12 more missions with different crews and June 10 flew back to USA with another crew. I have lost contact with Bob and would like to have his current address. We had some good times together before my near fatal mission December 15, 1944. Thanks for the address—I'm enclosing an envelope for your convenience.

I've been retired since 1983 but am still enjoying good health. My wife and I have a Sons of Norway Convention in California, August 12—16th so I doubt I'll be able to make the 20-23 Reunion in Boston. My son is employed at the GenRad Corp. in Concord and lives in Lunenburg. I'm familiar with the area as we have visited him 3 times. It would have been interesting to see former AF buddies again.

Sincerely,

Leroy M. Naves
1025 Highland Pl.
Bismark, ND 58501

July 1, 1998

Dear George,

I certainly enjoy the "Liberaider" and we appreciate your decision to continue as editor through the rest of "Our War".

I read with great interest of the June 1998 issue concerning "Mission No. 164 of 20 January 1945, Target: Linz North Main Marshalling Yard, Austria. I was Navigator—Observer in the 765th Bomb Squadron and your account of the intense heavy damage caused by the accuracy of the anti-aircraft fire at Linz reminded me of my most poignant loss of the war. My bombardier, Del Kimball and I shared the tent with 2nd Lieutenant James R. Yancey and his Navigator, Bombardier and Co-Pilot.

As we were making our bomb run my plane was in the number six position of our squadron and Lt. Yancy's plane was hit in the #3 engine, and then the wing on that side of the plane fell away and the plane went down in a tight spiral and exploded in air. I never did see any parachutes open. We dropped our bombs on target and made it back to base without further incidents. However, that night in our tent we were very tense and dispayed by the events of the day.

I can't make the reunion this year but I hope you and everyone in the 461st Bomb Group have a great time.

Sincerely,

Homer L. Newsome
Navigator, Crew
#22-2



May 7, 1999

Gentlemen:

Not too sure if you were advised of the passing of Alex J. Gwozd of the 764th Squadron on October 8, 1998.

His remains have been interred at Arlington National Cemetery.

Wish I could attend your June 21 Dedication at the cemetery, but my travel pans will get me there earlier that month.



Mail Call (Continued)

He was sure proud of his Group and especially proud of being and American.

Sincerely,

Betty L. Gwozd



March 22, 1999

Dear George,

Congratulations on the extra-interesting issue V15, #2 of the "Liberaider". Especially appreciated the work that must have gone into the Aircraft Losses record. It confirms my recollections. We (Capt Miller's crew) got to Cerignola in October 1944, and while there was enough flak, we didn't see a German fighter until December 17. But that was the day the Ardennes offensive started. Jerry had been saving his gas coupons, and we saw plenty that day. (See December 1997 "Liberaider", page 30.)

William Dilworth
767th Bomb
Squadron



March 16, 1999

Dear George,

This is to compliment you on the current issue of the "Liberaider". It's chock-full of items I never expected to see like the Group Losses; Band news; Operations in detail; Reunion news; All American schedule, etc.

By the way, at the Tarrytown reunion, Bill Harrison, 767th Squadron and I first heard of the plans for the All-American rebuilding and looked up home and hanger of the Collings Foundation at Stow, Massachusetts. Two mechanics were working on this olive drab hulk of a B-24. Till I saw the finished All-American, I could hardly believe the wonderful restoration job he'd done.

On the Statue of Liberty tour, I spoke with one of the waist gunners who flew on the original mission of the 461st All-American plane.

If you need some "filler" for a future issue, I could send you the story of the ham radio group I started after the 1st reunion at Torrance, California. It's called the Air Force Flyers Club. Just advise.

Look forward to Omaha Reunion, sorry to have missed Boston.....

Sent in my Life Dues, good idea!

Regards,

Jim Van Nostrand



March 15, 1999

Hello, George:

Believe this will be my second letter to you over the past 13 years just for a comment or two that might be of interest to you.

First though, please keep up the excellent work that you have been doing as Editor of the "Liberaider". Always enjoy reading it which always brings back so many memories—of course—good and bad ones.

By the way, the original Merrow was brought to Massachusetts back in 1650 as a "bonds man" since he was a POW fighting against the British since he was a Scotchman then. He was sold for 25 English pounds and worked in the Saugus Iron Foundry for 5 years to pay that bond debt off. My father was born in Stoneham, Massachusetts in 1891 whereas my mother in Providence, R.I. in 1891 and then my sister in Providence, R.I. in 1915 and I in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1916. Of course my wife s from Providence. So much for our history.

I do not have a computer, just my old typewriter to communicate with. However, with a friends computer a contact was made with L. Delameter, 764th Bomb Squadron, crew #7 bombardier who wrote to me a couple of times. He sent me an original report concerning the raid to Linz, Austria on July 25,



Mail Call (Continued)



24 March 1999

1944 which was a disaster based on the official plane count plus crews lost during that raid. The lead plane was commanded by Major Burke. The report that he sent me was dated December 11, 1945 that was made by Captain William H. Logue who was questioning the lack of any awards to a Lt. Joseph B. Hesser, pilot of the lead plane commanded by Major Burke. Am sure that you've heard plenty about that raid too from those who actually made it.

I was with crew #2 of the 764th Bomb Squadron from Nov. 1943 till I was sent home on July 9, 1944 after I had flown 31 sorties (credited with 41 missions). Crew #2 was shot down at Linz, Austria, 2 killed and the rest were made POWs for the rest of the war. There are only 3 of us left of the original, Joseph Strumski, Ken Kendle and myself.

In the States, I was assigned to Westover Field as a Combat Crew Pilot Instructor for a couple of months and then was transferred to Maguire Field, Fort Dix as an Instructor pilot for the G.C.A. training group till I was released from active duty in August '45

Now you have some history of me and I do enjoy reading about the other persons experiences. It does cause some "flash backs" of memories—good or bad, of course.

So, George, keep up the excellent work as you have done in the past. With ol' age creeping up on me now, I'm sending in my check for the "Lifetime Membership" just in case my memory might fail me. I had sent in my check for 1999 membership expecting a membership card but after reading the last issue, found out that they don't send it out any more. However, my check hadn't cleared my bank account as of this date. Hope to hear from either Treasurer as to what might have happened to the check.

George, take care, especially of your "better half".

As ever,

Ralph L. Merrow
P.O. Box 233
Dillard, GA 30537

Dear Frank,

This letter is for the purpose of making corrections to group history as erroneously reported in the December 1998 issue of the "Liberaider" newsletter.

My crash-and-burn near base on 13 February 1945, upon return from Mission No. 173 to Maribor was not the result of failures of No. 1 and No. 2 engines. Any observant pilot reader would wonder why a safe normal landing couldn't have been made, that close to the field, if No. 3 and No. 4 were functioning properly, with hydraulic system working for flap and gear operation, and with craft lightened after bomb load drop and five hours of fuel consumption. What happened was as follows:

Nos. 1 and 2 engines and propellers were working properly, but Nos. 3 and 4 were the problem. No. 3 engine was o.k., but had to be shut down, and the prop feathered, because of damage from the surprisingly intense flak over the target. Among other things, flak had severed hydraulic lines in the "basement" of the flight deck, and that sprayed fluid had started fires upon contact with electrical stuff. Several efforts to crimp the hydraulic lines closed were made by my valiant flight engineer, Art Yarbrough, but when the crimps didn't hold, No. 3 had to stay shut down, with it's prop feathered.

At traffic pattern altitude, and as we approached the base, the No. 4 propeller ran away, was uncontrollable, and continued to "run away", at the limit of the tachometer, even after all "life support" to its engine had been cut off. Total loss of power on the right side, compounded by extreme drag from the "disc" of the runaway prop, necessitated rapid nose down loss of altitude to avoid a stall and flip over. From our low altitude, there was no time to either try to re-start No. 3 or to go through manual operation of the flaps and landing gear and set up for a no-break landing if we could get to the field. Fortunately a plowed field near base "presented itself" and we made a good belly landing. The plane did break up, though, when the runaway prop dug in and twisted it around, with fire starting.



Mail Call (Continued)

My navigator on that mission was Donald Williams. He was flying with me in place of my regular navigator, Perry Keatley, who was in Don's place on Bob Barnes crew, in deputy lead. Don was killed in the crash, perhaps due to the switch in crews leading to misunderstanding communications during crash landing procedures with a different crew, since all of my regular crew survived, although some with injuries of various degrees of severity.

I think the "461st BG Aircraft Losses" table, as listed on P. 20 of the "Liberaider", should include No. 39 (no aircraft name) as FLAK-C/L near base on 13 February 1945 flown by 2nd Lt. Robert M. Kelliher.

I continue to be a lot more puzzled about the "Perpetual motion" aspect of the runaway propellers. I had had another experience with a runaway that pulled me off the strip after a landing, and have heard of several more. One of them resulted in the bail-out of my bombardier, Roy Naves, along with Clarence Marshall's crew, when a runaway prop that couldn't be stopped shook the plane apart. They had to abandon ship over the then Yugoslavia, and the Partisans eventually shepherded them back to the "safety" of continued active duty in the 461st.

I'm sending a copy of this letter to George Dickie, and if he can publish the gist of it, maybe some of the old group can cast more light on the mystery of the runaway props that kept on a-going, a-going and a-going.

Thanks, Frank, for all that you have done, and best wishes to you.

Sincerely,

Bob Kelliher
765th Squadron

Editor's Note: How about it, do we have any experts on runaway propellers, either pilots or ground crew, that care to comment?



October 5, 1999

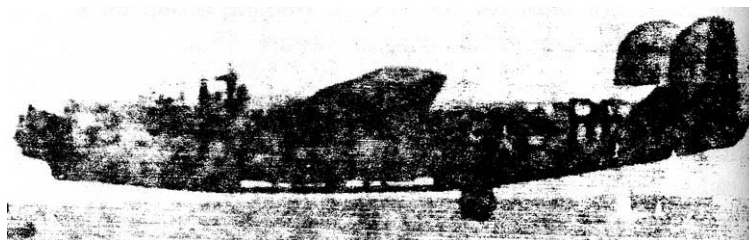
Dear George,

Enclosed are selected copies of pages from a soft covered book we bought at a museum we visited during some reunion. I copied the first and second pages with the address of the publisher, in case you want to order a copy for your archives. Included is a picture of a B-24H showing the radar dome similar to the one that Dan Levin, (764th), operated on George's ship piloted by Chuck Saur (764th). Toward the end of the war some B-24's were sent over with hand-held twin 50 Cal. Guns instead of the regular tail turret. George remembered flying one mission with these guns. None of the people we spoke with at the Boston reunion remembered the radar dome (except Dan Levin) or the 50 cal. Guns in the tail.

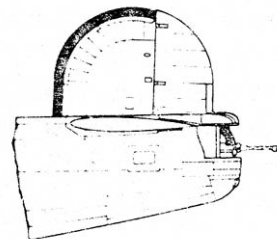
Best wishes,

Doris and George Zobal

Editor's Note: How about it, Dan. Can you add any details about the radar dome? Did they use these for the pathfinder missions described on pages 20 to 26?



A B-24 equipped with a retractable BTO (Bombing Through Overcast) radome in place of the ball turret.



Open, hand held twin .50 caliber gun mount.

One Man's Junk Is Another Man's Treasure

by Bill Goodspeed, Museum Historian
National Museum of Naval Aviation

Spring cleaning is an annual ritual that many of us perform. It is a time of renewal, that moment every year when we get rid of our old junk to make way for newer items, many of them destined to become junk as the years pass. The end result of this process is an overflowing trash can by the curb or that uniquely American enterprise known as the garage sale, which is where our story begins.

I was at my desk a few months ago when a gentleman appeared at my office door holding a paper bag. It seemed that a relative from out of state had been at a garage sale and happened upon an aviation related item. Knowing he lived in Pensacola, the home of the National Museum of Naval Aviation, the relative mailed the item to the gentleman thinking that the museum might be interested in it. After relating this story, the man opened the bag and pulled out a small writing pad, which bore the scars of time in the form of rusty staples and yellowed paper. Written across the top page in fading ink were the stanzas of a poem expressing love for someone a long way away. With my curiosity peaked, I proceeded to flip through the pages of the pad, and soon happened upon a date, Friday, 28 July. Reading the words I was taken back in time to 1944, and placed in an Army Air Forces B-24 flying a mission against a target in Greece. What the man's relative had unearthed at that garage sale was the diary of an anonymous young World War II airman.

Continuing to read through the diary during the ensuing days, I embarked upon a fascinating trip through history. A tail gunner in the 767th Bombardment Squadron based at Torretta, Italy, the diarist recounted in vivid prose the feeling of flying through curtains of flak and seeing bombers literally fall from the sky. The familiar names Ploesti, Budapest and Friedrichshafen, remembered because of the savage air battles that occurred in the skies above them, appear throughout the text like signposts, letting the reader know that the author stared death in the face on numerous occasions. In addition to its portrayal of combat, the diary recounts liberty in Italy, "helmet baths," and Spartan living conditions, and serves as a private forum for the griping that is the right of every G.I.

It did not take me long to appreciate that the library had been the recipient of a fortuitous discovery. Though a tale of silver wings instead of those of gold, the diary will become a part of the library's special collections, where it will not only be a valuable window to the past, but also an example of the old adage "one man's junk is another man's treasure."

From: **FLY-BY**, Fall Innsure 1997, Naval Aviation Museum Foundation

MEMORANDUM

January 27, 1998

TO: Bill Goodspeed

From: Bob Porcreva

Subject: Diary—WWII B-24 Tail Gunner

On my visit to the Air Force Historical Research Agency at Maxwell AFB on January 16, 1998 I was not able to determine the identity of the diarist because the 767th BS history was not available. However, perusal of the parent 461st BG history determined the full name and home of record (1944) of the pilot. From this I was able to contact Mrs. Hazel Stockton, widow of Colonel Floyd C. Stockton USAF Ret., who sent me a crew list as follows: (my entries are in italics and were provided by Fernando Berumen)

2nd Lt. Floyd C. Stockton (*Pilot—deceased*)
2nd Lt. Stanley Knox (*Co-pilot*)

2nd Lt. Richard S. Hammond (*Navigator*)
2nd Lt. Clyde M. Gourley, Jr. (*Bombardier*)
S/Sgt. Paul P. Ancelli (*Flight Engineer*)
S/Sgt. Melvin D. Wagner (*Radio Operator*)
Sgt. Fernando Berumen (*Nose Gunner*)
Sgt. Jack S. Schooley (*Bottom Turret Gunner*)
Sgt. Chester C. McCauley (*Tail Gunner—deceased*)
Sgt. James Cornwell (*Top Turret Gunner*)

In addition to the basic crew information Mrs. Stockton provided the following information:

Frank C. O'Bannon, Jr. President of the 461st Bomb Group (H) 1943-1945 (Inc)
9260 N. Fostoria Drive
Tucson, Arizona 85741-9448
(602) 797-1439

Paul P. Ancelli
47 Western Avenue
Westfield, MA 01085

F. Berumen
5422 Hersholt Avenue
Lakewood, CA 90712

A copy of Col. Stockton's obituary and a copy of the "Liberaider:. (Attached)

With this information I contacted Fernando Berumen, Alternate Director—The 461st Liberaider Organization and the nose gunner of the diarist's crew. He stated that with the information that I provided, the diarist was S/Sgt. Chester C McCauley, the tail gunner of the crew. He believes that Sgt. McCauley died sometime in the 60's.

February 11, 1998

Lt. Col. Frank C. O'Bannon
President, 461st Bomb Group (H) 1943-1945 Inc.
9260 N. Fostoria Drive
Tucson, AZ 85741-9448

Dear Col. O'Bannon,

I am enclosing a copy of the review of the tail gunner's diary as well as a related newsletter article and a memo that I provided to the Naval Aviation Museum's Historian. I appreciate the opportunity to provide your organization with this information and feel a special kinship to the personnel of the 461st BG. The hours that I spent reviewing the diary and perusing the Group's historical documents at Maxwell have been a humbling experience, especially the monthly listing of downed crews.

I am a retired USAF pilot (1957-77) and a volunteer at the National Museum of Naval Aviation at NAS Pensacola, Florida. If I can be of any further assistance to your organization please feel free to contact me at the museum or at my home address.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Porcreva

Diary of a World War II B-24 Tail Gunner

This diary describes the events of a World War II tail gunner who completed 52 combat missions with the 15th Air Force, 49th Wing, 461st Group, 767th Squadron (Heavy), APO 520, NY, NY. He departed Newport News, VA on the "Santa Rosa" on July 1, 1944. His ship was part of a convoy that included British (Jamaicans), French, AAF ground crews, U.S. Infantry, and AAF combat air crews (the diarist was trained as an aerial gunner at Scott and Harlingen AFB's). He gave a detailed description of life on a troop ship and states that he personally counted 31 ships in the convoy. He discusses the rumors that are rife in the milieu of passage. The "Santa Rosa" arrived in the Bay of Naples on the 15th of July 1944 after a uneventful crossing (*no enemy action*). After disembarking at Naples, Italy he proceeded to Bagnoli and then to Torretta, Italy to join his B-24 combat unit.

The diary covers the time period from June 30, 1944 to March 23, 1945. The entries for the combat missions begin on July 28, 1944 and end on March 19, 1945. The diary does not cover every mission and the entries are uneven toward the end of the time period as the diarist had injuries to his writing arm and hand. The name of the diarist is unknown at this time but the diary does mention names and facts about his crew and commanding officers. It is sufficient that all of the combat mission entries were verified in the Army Air Forces Combat Chronology, 1941-1945. The diary includes the following information on crewmembers and commanding officers:

Lt. Col. Knapp	Squadron Commander
Col. Glantzberg	Group Commander
Major Donovan	Squadron Commander
Capt. Stockton	Pilot
Capt. Sullivan	Flight Surgeon
Lt. Knox	Co-Pilot
Jack Ancelli	enlisted friend on "Santa Rosa"
John Koester	enlisted crewmember that went through training with diarist at Harlingen and Scott AFB's and became a POW.
McGrath, Brice, Jones	Crewmembers of other crews who were shot down and mentioned in the diary.

The diarist mentions aircraft tail numbers frequently but only mentions the last 2 numbers. For example he mentions #66, #63, #71, #64, and #71. Type in italics is remarks by the reviewer. The roman numerals used after the diary dates coincide with the numbers used by the diarist in most but not all of the entries. AAFCC stands for the Army Air Forces Combat Chronology.

Diary Entries

The reviewer has used his judgement in abridging the following diary entries. For the complete entry see the original diary.

June 30, 1944 (I) Left Camp Patrick Henry by train to Newport News, VA and boarded the "Santa Rosa" (*cannot yet determine details of this troop ship*). He states that the troops already aboard consisted of British (colored from Jamaica), French, Army Air Force ground crews, a few U.S. infantry and Army Air Force combat crews.

July 1, 1944 (I) Convoy departs Newport News. A few details on convoy composition.

July 2, 1944 (I) About a dozen planes flew over the convoy (TBF? And F\$F?).

July 3, 1944 (I & II) The pilot of the diarist's crew (*no name given*) celebrated his birthday. The sea is rougher today and his pilot doesn't like the sea. He counted 31 ships that he could see. He describes the difference between the lifestyles of enlisted and officers aboard ship in some detail.

July 5, 1944 (II) He is part of a detail to clean the crews mess at midnight and 4 am. He enjoys this as a break from the boredom of the ship's passage and enjoys the extra food and coffee that is available. Rumor is that they are sailing down the east coast until the Bahamas then will head east to the Mediterranean where they expect some action from enemy subs and planes. The British troops will get off at Algiers and he will disembark at Naples joining the 15th AF.

July 8, 1944 (III & IV) Starts complaining about the crowded conditions and poor food. Also has not had the opportunity to clean his uniform, etc. Convoy laid down a smoke screen but did not know if it was for practice or real. He muses about the romantic nights and wishes he could share this with a girl. He believes they are approaching the Rock of Gibraltar (*he mentions getting info from ships crew throughout the diary*). He is not allowed on deck and he believes that they are now in dangerous waters. He finally is able to bath with a helmet full of hot water out of the coffee urn.

July 9, 1944 (V) Several ships passed in the night that were well lighted and he speculated that they are probably neutral country ships.

July 12, 1944 (V & VI) Passed the Rock of Gibraltar during the night. He mentions that Jack Ancelli (*this name is mentioned several times in the diary without specific details of his relationship to diarist*) has started a diary. He hopes that the colored troops would be left at Oran, they smelled like a bunch of billy goats. He mentions that a cruiser leads the convoy now, ammo has been passed out and everyone should be in quarters by 2200 and lights out at 2300.

July 13, 1944 (VII) Passing Algiers. He describes the coast line in some detail and mentions that they will head north to Naples.

July 14, 1944 (VIII) It's 7 am and he can see the coast of North Africa to starboard. During the night he speculates that another convoy joined and he counted 50 ships. Still off the North Africa coast but expecting a turn to port toward Naples. Yesterday a couple of planes were sighted. He states that they were reported as 51's and 39's (*P-51, P-39*) and Spitfires.

July 15, 1944 (IX & X) Anchored in Bay of Naples. He describes Mt. Vesuvius and hopes to disembark soon. Complaints about the contaminated water in the bay (*may be the result of the convoy holding herbage during passage for security reasons, then dumping in the destination harbor*) and the smog over Naples.

July 17, 1944 (XI) Disembarked on the 15th. Describes the bomb damage in Naples. He remarks that the people have plenty to eat and drink and they are selling it to the GIs. He is now in a staging area (Bagnoli) and mentions that the people liked the German occupiers better than the US troops. He states that US bombing killed 5000 civilians in Naples in about 15 minutes. He is quartered in a college that was built for underprivileged students in 1940 and used by the Germans as soon as it

was completed.

July 20, 1944 (XI) Still in Bagnoli. Rumors that they may go to India or China.

July 23, 1944 (XII) Left Bagnoli on the 21st. Went through Pompeii, Salerno, and other unknown towns. He describes the beaches and swimmers along the way. He rode third class rail. It took 30 hours from Naples then a truck ride to an airfield where he witnessed his first crash, a B-24 with #4 "feathered". He climbed in a B-24 called "Tail Dragon" and had a thirty minute hop to his base.

July 23, 1944 (XIII) Took a gunnery test today on position firing. We were finally issued a tent, brand new, and after a lot of grunting, laughing, and sweating we got it erected. We are now members of the 15th Air Force, 49th Wing, 461st Group, 767th Squadron (Heavy), APO 520, NY, NY. He describes the typical meal as mostly cucumbers, onions, and tomatoes with an occasional piece of green watermelon.

July 27, 1944 to July 28, 1944 Pages of poetic verse:

At this time point in the diary, it contains 7 pages of poetic verse that describes his feelings both romantically and militarily. It is a rambling style but very effective in describing the complex feelings he must be experiencing. The reviewer assumes that the verse is his work but he does not acknowledge the fact.

July 28, 1944 Mission to Florenz (*Florina, Rumania in the AAFCC*), Greece. He states that the pilots, Stockton and Knox, had a difficult time in getting the B-24 off and used all of the runway. He calls them a "damn good team". Engine trouble prevented them with keeping up with the formation and they were losing altitude rapidly. They had t brak formation and return. He was upset because the flight would not count as a mission. *Mission listed on page 409 of the AAFCC.*

July 30, 1944 Mission #3—had engine trouble and they could not keep up with the formation. They "salvoed" 8-500# bombs in Yugoslavia. Crew sighted 15 enemy fighters but had no contact. They turned back in Hungary and came back alone.

July 31, 1944 The diarist is relaxing today and interestingly describes enlisted club life; drinking, singing, and just relaxing. He was awake at 0500 hr., dressed, had chow, and drew equipment. He was issued a flak helmet and it was very welcomed although uncomfortable to wear. After briefing and preflight of the airplane he took off at 0750. Mission was to bomb 2 oil refineries at Bucharest. It was known that there were 70 ack ack in the target area. He muses that he was the last element over the target in the last squadron and the last plane in the squadron and he is the tail gunner! The anti-aircraft batteries had plenty of time to get the range. The flak was bursting at their level all around and thick enough "to walk on". His hydraulic system (gun turret) was leaking and throwing fluid all over the place and he had to use manual control of the turret. They had taken many hits and "plastered" the target but returned successfully. *Mission listed on page 412 of the AAFCC.*

Aug. 3, 1944 (XVII) Mission to Fredrickshaven, Germany. Initial target was a chemical plant but because of overcast the target was changed to a marshalling yard. The bombing performance was poor based on looking at aerial photos after the mission. He observed several dogfights, P-38's, P-51's, and ME-109's. He believes that several types of twin engine aircraft, MR-110's—210's and 410's were also involved but was too far away to make positive identification. He de-

scribes the dogfights in some detail. *Mission listed on page 415 of the AAFCC.*

Aug. 5, 1944 XIX Mission cancelled to Ploesti but diarist did not know why. (*AAFCC has no entry for this date*) He talks about the Ploesti missions as “double distilled hell”. (*He spells Ploesti as Polesti*) He is flying #66 again a brand new plane with only 2 missions on the airframe. Only one flak hole and let’s stay lucky.

Aug. 6, 1944 XX These Sunday missions seem to be rough as a cob and twice as long. He describes in some detail a mission in France. He states that the entire 15th AF appeared to be here also that the flak was very heavy and that 2 of the 7 are not back. He wonders how long their luck will last. (*AAFCC lists this mission on page 418—“Close to 700 B-17’s and B-24’s operating against targets in SE France” - - -*)

Aug. 7, 1944 XXI Mission to bomb Blechhammer, Germany. This counted as a double mission due to distance. He stated that the flak was intense and did not see how any planes survived. Some didn’t. (*AAFCC lists this mission on page 419—“353 B-17’s and B-24’s bomb 2 synthetic oil refineries at Blechhammer” - - -*)

Aug. 9, 1944 XXII (*The diarist may have used the wrong date for this entry. He mentions a mission to Ploesti but the AAFCC on page 420 mentions that B-24’s from 15th AF bombed Budapest not Ploesti on the 9th of August. The 10th of August AAFCC agrees with his entry that 450 heavy bombers hit 6 oil refineries in the Ploesti area.*) He describes this mission as one of their toughest assignments. He stated that there “just ain’t no more milk runs”. At Ploesti, a dense smoke screen was used but the B-24’s bombed by instruments. He also mentions in the diary that the enemy was using smoke screens but that the crews were circumventing the defenses by “blind bombing”. (*Impact, Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence, Washington, DC September 1944, Vol. 2 No. 9. states: “Various measures were adopted to deal with passive smoke defenses which could completely “black out” the entire target area in 20 minutes or less depending on the strength of the wind. Attempts to circumvent the defenses were made by “blind bombing”. This was done in two ways, by H2X (RADAR) and by offset methods (bombsight).”*)

Aug. 10, 1944 XXIII The stress of these missions is seriously affecting the diarist emotional health. He writes that “I don’t feel much like writing tonight” and then describes as B-24 explosion and burning crew members diving out of the aircraft. He again describes the flak as “hellish black puffs of death”, nine bombers failed to return. *AAFCC on 8/10/44 lists 414 HBs attacking, 952 tons dropped, 16 HB losses, and 1 enemy aircraft destroyed in the air.*

Aug. 11, 1944 XXIV Today is a down day. The diarist spirits are up! Party time! The squadron (767th BS) is one year old today.

Aug. 13, 1944 XXV Mission is to bomb gun installations in Genoa, Italy. He states that it’s a tough target to hit—sits back from the harbor. He vividly describes a B-24 exploding after release of the bombs. The carnage is described and the diarist believes that the explosion was not caused by flak but sabotage. *AAFCC on page 424: almost 500 B-24’s and B-17’s attack gun positions around Genoa, Toulon, and Sete, and strike at bridges at Pont-Esprit, Avignon, Orange, and Crest.*

Aug. 15, 1944 XXVI He describes a mission to bomb gun emplacements. He describes the invasion force, destroyers, landing barges, cruisers, battle wagons, and 7 flat tops. *AAFCC on page*

426: *Fifteenth AF's HB mass night raid, 252 B-17's and B-24's after predawn takeoff pound beaches in Cannes-Loulon area in immediate adv of Operation Dragoon (Invasion of Southern France).*

Aug. 16, 1944 XXVII A relatively leisurely day, no mission.

Aug. 17, 1944 XXVIII He describes an aborted mission while over the Adriatic Sea. That's 26 aborts and only 12 completed missions for #64 "Our Baby". The target was Ploesti. He states that it didn't make me mad that we didn't go. He describes a crew next to them (?) that went down in the Adriatic, a German boat was seen going after them, they are now POW's for the duration. One of the fellows, John Koester and I went through Scott Field and Harlingen, TX and have been together ever since. He expresses his concern for the ground crews problems in maintaining the aircraft. The planes are blowing up on the ground, "hell, it's murder". *AAFCC on page 428: that 250 B-24's escorted by P-51's bomb 3 oil refineries and T/O's in Ploesti area.*

Aug. 18, 1944 Frag bombs today, 38 clusters. A Jerry airfield in Yugoslavia. *AAFCC on page 428: 89 B-24's, with fir cover, bomb Alibunar A/F.*

Aug. 19, 1944 XXIX No mission today. He describes his living arrangements. I'm pretty well fixed in my corner of the tent, etc. He describes in detail all his accouterments and describes the packing of missing crews effects, he ponders whose gear will be next to be packed. He is proud of his Irish ingenuity in arranging his corner. He mentions a photo on his desk of Johnny Miller taken at Harlingen.

Aug. 20, 1944 XXX Mission was an airfield just out of Budapest. He mentions that they destroyed fifty Heinkel 111's, twin engine bombers, hangers and runways. He describes two patches of flak, one B-24 blew up in two pieces, three parachutes opened, the war is over for still another crew. He muses that "Gunner today, goner tomorrow". He also relates an off color remark concerning his aerial gunner wings. *AAFCC on page 430: 460-plus B-24's and B-17's, some fir-escorted, bomb A/F and M/Y at Szolnok, and oil refineries at Dubova, Czechowice and Auschwitz.*

Aug. 23, 1944 XXXI Diarist was injured while ground cleaning his guns. He fell through the escape hatch and required four stitches. He was grounded and was concerned about the rest of his crew. He describes a mission over Vienna in which the crews experienced flak and enemy fighters. *AAFCC on page 432: 472 B-24's and B-17's supported by P-51's and P-38's bomb S industrial area of Vienna.*

Aug. 24, 1944 Still grounded. McGrath, Brice, and Jonesy's crew went down today. Hell, if any of us finish it will be a miracle.

Aug. 29, 1944 XXXII I'm flying again, had the stitches taken out of my head. Bombed two marshalling yards, a town and a bridge in Hungary. In my opinion a fairly easy raid as far as flak and fighters go. This 7.5 hour mission was miserable because his heated flying suit did not work and he nearly suffered frost bite. His fingers were numb from the frostbite. *AAFCC on page 437: 550 HBs strike comm. Tgts in Po Valley and in the Hungarian Plain, Moravska-Ostrava M/Y, oil refineries and industrial area including tank works, Szolnok and Szeged M/Ys, and railway bridges at Szeged.*

Sept. 3, 1944 XXXIII His fingers are still numb and he hopes they are not permanently injured. A new crew took their plane (71) and when they returned they crash-landed. The plane was damaged extensively and is not salvageable. All but one of the crew walked away from the accident. The diarist relates that five B-24's blew up when the engines started. They suspect sabotage and he philosophizes that he would not like to die that way but hopes it will be over enemy territory fighting like a bastard.

Sept 5, 1944 XXXIV Had a dry run today, a heavy overcast over the target and we had to bring back, 5-1000 pounders. He relates that he is very nervous, worse than he has ever been. He forced himself to climb into his gun turret and sit perfectly quiet and then after an hour he was okay again. He wasn't scared just highly nervous. He says he needs rest and a big drink, thinks he will go to Isle of Capri for a few days next week. I'm Staff Sergeant now, will wonders never cease. I will make about \$173.00 a month—not bad at all! *AAFCC on page 443 states that HBs dispatched to Yugoslavia cannot bomb tgt because of total cloud cover.*

Sept. 9, 1944 XXXV Diarist wonders what's up—they haven't flown but twice in twelve days and they are putting luggage carriers in the bomb bays. He speculates that they may be going to India. He describes an Italian feast day at Cerignola in detail. Some of the girls look very pretty when they get cleaned up. A surprising number of red heads and blue-eyed people—the Irish must have landed here at one time. He describes the feast day in some detail. He has some derogatory comments about the colored troops and describes a scene of white and colored troops waiting in a line at a bordello in Bagnoli. He mentions that he is going to Foggia.

Sept. 12, 1944 XXXVI Didn't get to Foggia but went to Cerignola instead. He describes various gifts that he bought for his mother and Betty Lou, Birdie, and Marlene (*sisters?*) He mentions a Capt. Henry in connection with a three day pass. All the other officers have all flown to Rome. The enlisted men can't go there only Bari, Foggia, or Naples. He expresses his frustration at laying around and not flying. He states, "We will never get our fifty missions at this rate, look out S. Pacific and Tokyo, that's where we will finally end up."

Sept. 16, 1944 XXXVII Flew to Lyons, Fr. Carrying aviation gas, oil, empty drums, and ammunition. He says that the airplane was overloaded by 26,000 lbs. One ship was shot down by enemy fighters.

Sept. 17, 1944 XXXVII Finally gets his three-day pass. Started for Naples, but at Foggia the other five fellows turned back, but he went on. He didn't have much money and didn't care where he went. He got to Ariano Irpino, built on top of a mountain with narrow winding streets. He describes the topography in detail. He met Maria on Wednesday and stayed at her home until Friday. He describes in detail the food, parents, and Caruso recordings. He recounts sleeping with Maria while her mother cooked for him and while her papa went after vino and fruit.

Sept. 24, 1944 Flew a combat mission today. At this rate I will never get 50 missions. Bombed an airfield at Athens, Greece. 36-100 pounders at 23,000 ft. The heated flying suit did not work and suffered frostbite again. He complains about chronic numbness in two fingers and increasing deafness. *AAFCC: 362 B-24's with fighter escort bomb Eleusis, Kalamaki and Tatoi in Greece.*

Sept. 29, 1944 Only seventeen completed combat missions. He is up for an Air Medal with a cluster. He has a new CO, Lt. Col. Knapp, the West Point Bastard has left for the states but will

return and be Group Commander of the 451st like our own Col. Glantzberg. Col. G is a damn fine flyer and a very well liked man. Our new CO is Major Donovan. A regular sort of fellow but hell on inspections. Imagine having to have your shoes shined in all this mud.

Oct. 21, 1944 Haven't written for quite a while, my right hand and arm ar pretty bad and makes writing very difficult. *The diarist handwriting is ragged but readable.* This has been a tough month. He promises to write more often. He mentions that Newton's (?) crew got back from Greece after being shot down after 26 days.

Nov. 27, 1944 Because of my hand injury I have not written for some time. Capt. Sullivan M.D., wanted to ground me and send me to a hospital in Bari. I finally talked him out of that, but he did ground me for a while as he studied and treated my frost bitten hands. I'm 7 missions behind the rest of the crew. He describes the decorations received by the pilot, co-pilot, navigator, and bombardier. We sure have been limping home all shot to hell. We are the only old crew left. Being a pathfinder crew we get all the German hops. You can damn near let the landing gear down and taxi on the flak.

There is a big gap in time between late November and the last entry in late March 1945. There are no gaps in the sequence of the diary entries. He gives no reason for the lack of entries except his injuries and the increase of stress of the missions.

March 23, 1945 I finally finished my missions on March 19. Ended up with 35 sorties, 52 missions and 253:45 combat hours—not a bad record. I'll leave here for Naples about the first of April. Lay over there for a boat, then back to the states. *This is the last entry in the diary!*

Robert S. Pocreva, Reviewer
Volunteer—National Museum of Naval Aviation

MEMORIAL DEDICATION ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

On 21 June 1999 seven members of the 461st Bomb Group Association were present at Arlington National Cemetery to dedicate a memorial in Honor of the men of the 461st Bomb Group (H) who fought valiantly during World War II. The memorial consists of a bronze plaque and a "Golden Rain" tree (see Page 1). It is located on a very beautiful site overlooking a sea of grave stones extending as far as the eye can see.

The Memorial Service began with a Fly-By of the B-52 at precisely 1:00 M. At that time a five member Color Guard presented the Colors including the original 461st Bomb Group Flag. Continued on Page 40



B-52 FLY-BY

**461ST BOMB GROUP (H) 1943-1945 REUNION
OMAHA, NEBRASKA
21—24 OCTOBER 1999
HEADQUARTERS: OMAHA MARRIOTT HOTEL, OMAHA, NEBRASKA**

HOTEL RESERVATION

HOTEL RESERVATIONS ARE TO BE MADE BY YOU DIRECTLY WITH THE OMAHA MARRIOTT HOTEL. Each reservation must be accompanied with a NON-REFUNDABLE deposit equivalent to one nights stay (\$78.81 including tax and fees). They may be made in two ways:

1. Send in the attached registration form (page 19) with check or credit card number.
2. You may call the hotel Reservation Department directly, (800) 228-9290 and give them your credit card number. In order to get the reduced room rate YOU MUST IDENTIFY YOUR AFFILIATION WITH THE 461ST BOMB GROUP.

THE CUT-OFF DATE FOR HOTEL RESERVATIONS WILL BE 28 SEPTEMBER 1999. Late reservations may not be able to be accommodated by the Marriott and the reduced room rate may not be honored.

Your Reunion Committee requests that you make your reservations NO LATER THAN 15 SEPTEMBER so that we will have a little more time to check the number of attendees to make sure we are going to meet our room commitment to the hotel.

The hotel will honor the reduced room rate for the nights of Wednesday, 20 October thru Sunday, 24 October.

REGISTRATION FORM

Your completed REUNION REGISTRATION FORM (enclosed) will be recorded and numbered upon receipt. As in the past, the form must be accompanied by a check covering the costs of the various events you wish to attend. The CUT-OFF DATE for the return of your form and check is 15 SEPTEMBER 1999. Cancellations will be fully refundable except for the Registration Fee provided the Committee has not been obligated to pay funds prior to receiving the cancellation notice.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The hotel has ample parking space for those that drive. If you are coming in an RV you probably have the latest information on available campsites. If not, contact Don Johnson for suggestions at (402) 391-5453.

The A&B Shuttle Co. provides public airport transportation. If you are arriving at Omaha by air, call A&B toll free at 1-877-359-6624 the day before you leave home and give them your flight number and scheduled time of arrival. They will have a vehicle ready to take you to the hotel after you get your luggage. The actual schedule will depend on how many 461st members will arrive about the same time. The charge is \$8.00 per person one way.

The prices for the Squadron Dinner, the Banquet and the Memorial Breakfast include tax and gratuities totalling 24 percent. For your information, we have included a small amount in the tour fees for each day to cover the gratuity for each bus driver. You should not feel obligated to contribute any more for the bus service.

PLEASE fill out the REUNION REGISTRATION FORM and send it along with your check to the address shown AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. There is a lot of accounting and planning work that has to be done and we need your input as early as we can get it. The CUT-OFF date is 15 SEPTEMBER 1999 but please send it in sooner if you can.

PLEASE NOTE: There will be a \$10.00 late fee charged for any tours or meals that are booked after arrival in Omaha, so make your reservations by 15 September or earlier.

REGISTRATION DESK HOURS

The Registration Desk will be manned during the hours shown below. In case of emergency, contact the front desk of the hotel and/or page Bob Hayes,

Thursday	21 Oct.	12:00—5:00 PM 7:00—9:00 PM
Friday	22 Oct.	7:30—8:45 AM 4:30—5:30 PM
Saturday	23 Oct.	7:30—8:30 AM 5:30—6:30 PM
Sunday	24 Oct.	7:00—8:00 AM 10:00 AM—12:00 PM

We will have a Seating Chart for the tables at the Annual Banquet at the Registration Desk. You may sign up for a specific table provided you have the names of the people in your party and a paid-up ticket for each person at the time you sign up. We will put the table number on each ticket. You do not have to sign up for a complete table. First come, first served. Remember we are all friends and members of the same organization.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

THURS. 21 OCT

Noon—5:00 PM Registration desk and Hospitality room open at 12:00 noon.

5:30 PM Dinner on your own.

FRI. 22 OCT

9:00 AM Depart Marriott Hotel, loading Northeast doors

9:30 AM Tour of Offutt Air Force Base with “Step On” Guides

11:30 AM—12:00 PM Lunch at Officers Club

1:30 PM—3:30 PM Durham Western Railroad Museum

4:00 PM Return to hotel

4:30 PM—5:30 PM Board of Directors Meeting

6:30 PM Cash bar available before dinner

7:00 PM Squadron Dinners

SAT. 23 OCT

8:45 AM Depart Marriott Hotel, loading Northeast doors

9:30 AM Tour the Strategic Air Command Museum

11:30 AM—12:30 PM Lunch—Mahoney Park

1:30 PM—3:30 PM Boys Town tour with “Step On” Guides

4:00 PM Return to hotel

4:30 PM—5:30 PM Annual Meeting

6:30 PM Cash Bar before Dinner

7:30 PM Annual Dinner and Dance (8 piece band with Offutt AFB Color Guard)

SUN. 24 OCT

8:00 AM Memorial Service (Chaplain, Lt. Colonel Edward Fedor, Offutt AFB)

8:30 AM Breakfast
Bon Voyage

REUNION REGISTRATION FORM

PLEASE FILL IN THIS REGISTRATION FORM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AND SEND IT ALONG WITH YOUR CHECK TO THE ADDRESS BELOW:

461st Bomb Group Reunion
c/o Robert T. Casey
121 S. Wilke Road, Suite 600
Arlington Heights, IL 60005-1500

NAME _____ SQUADRON _____
(Names as you want them on your name tags)
SPOUSE _____ CHILDREN/GUESTS _____

* INSERT ONE OF YOUR *
* ADDRESS LABELS HERE *

DATE OF ARRIVAL _____ DATE OF DEPARTURE _____

HAVE YOU MADE YOUR HOTEL RESERVATION? _____ HOW MANY ROOMS? _____

LIST OF EVENTS

Thursday	21 Oct.		
	Registration Fee	# of Persons _____ @ \$10.00	Total Amount \$ _____
Friday	22 Oct.		
	Offutt AF Base		
	Lunch—Officers Club		
	Western Railroad Museum	# of Persons _____ @ \$27.00	Total Amount \$ _____
	Squadron Dinners	# of Persons _____ @ \$21.00	Total Amount \$ _____
Saturday	23 Oct.		
	Tour SAC Museum		
	Lunch—Mahoney Park		
	Tour Boys Town	# of Persons _____ @ \$29.50	Total Amount \$ _____
	Dinner/Dance	# of Persons _____ @ \$30.00	Total Amount \$ _____
Sunday	24 Oct.		
	Memorial Service		
	Breakfast	# of Persons _____ @ \$13.00	Total Amount \$ _____
	Total amount submitted by check		Total Amount \$ _____

461ST BOMB GROUP
OCTOBER 20-24, 1999
\$69.00 PLUS TAX VALID WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY
FRIDAY, SATURDAY AND SUNDAY
PLEASE PRINT

PLEASE RESERVE _____ ROOM(S) FOR _____ PEOPLE
ARRIVAL _____ DEPARTURE _____

PLEASE INDICATE THE NUMBER OF ROOMS REQUESTED BY EACH OF THE FOLLOWING BED TYPES.

_____ KING SMOKING _____ KING NON-SMOKING _____ 2 DOUBLES SMOKING _____ 2 DOUBLES NON-SMOKING

A LIMITED NUMBER OF NON-SMOKING AND DOUBLE ROOMS ARE AVAILABLE ON A FIRST COME, FIRST SERVE BASIS

CHECK-IN TIME IS 3:00 PM CHECK-OUT TIME IS 12:00 PM

ESTIMATED TIME OF ARRIVAL: _____

NAME: _____ SHARING WITH: _____

STREET ADDRESS: _____

CITY, STATE: _____ ZIP: _____ PHONE: (____) _____

CREDIT CARD # FOR GUARANTEE: _____ EXP DATE: _____

****ONE NIGHTS DEPOSIT OR CREDIT CARD
REQUIRED WITH THIS RESERVATION****

****RESERVATIONS ARE SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY IF RECEIVED
AFTER THE DATE OF TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 1999**

A Limited Number of Rooms Have Been Reserved For Your Group

Once this "Block" is filled, Rooms and Rate are Subject to Availability.

****If You Are In Need Of Dates Other Than Those Listed Above, Please Call Hotel Directly****

PLEASE FORWARD THIS FORM TO:

OMAHA MARIOTT HOTEL
10220 REGENCY CIRCLE, OMAHA, NE 68114
ATTN: RESERVATIONS DEPARTMENT
(402) 399-9000 (MON—FRI 8AM-5PM)
(800) 228-9290

HISTORY OF THE 461ST BOMB GROUP

CHAPTER XIX THE END OF THE FIRST YEAR OF COMBAT, MARCH 1945

A) Narrative History

While on a routine visit to the Fifteenth Air Force, Lieutenant General Joseph T. McNarney, Deputy Commander in Chief of the Mediterranean Theater of Operations, visited the 461st Group on 21 March 1945. Accompanying him were Major General James M. Bevens, Deputy Commander of the Army Air Forces in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations; Major General Nathan F. Twining, Commanding General of the Fifteenth Air Force; and Brigadier General William L. Lee, Commanding General of the 49th Bombardment Wing. After touring Group Headquarters and watching the formation take off on a combat mission to Graz, Austria, the party inspected the set up of Squadron 766. Later the party returned to the 767th Squadron Officer's Mess for lunch.

Letter of Commendation

HEADQUARTERS FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE
APO 520 US ARMY

23 March 1945

SUBJECT: Commendation

TO: Commanding Officer, 461st Bombardment Group (H), APO 520, US Army.

1. The following message has been received from the Commander-in-Chief, MAAF, Lieutenant General Ira C. Eaker.

“Have just returned from conference with the Theater Commander. He indicated to me that he is highly pleased with his three days with the Fifteenth Air Force.

“General McNarney, as an experienced air force officer, has a keen analytical judgement of air matters. I am certain that you and your organization deserve highest praise and credit for what you showed the Theater Commander, which, although normal with you, cannot be exceeded, if equaled, by any air force.

“My congratulations to you and your people.”

2. The efforts of all personnel of this air force in demonstrating to the Theater Commander our method of operating are highly commendable. I was proud of the Fifteenth Air Force.

/s/ N.F. TWINING
Major General, USA
Commanding.

B) Operations

As has been stated elsewhere in this History, the Group flew its first combat mission on 2 April 1944 in attacking the marshalling yard at Bihac, Yugoslavia. In its first full year of combat in the Mediterranean Theater

of Operations the Group flew a total of 205 missions against targets located in nine different countries: Austria, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Roumania, and Yugoslavia. During its first three months of operations the average bombing scores were the highest of any Group in the Air Force. The first superior mission flown by the Group was that against the marshalling yard at Ferrara, Italy, on 7 April 1944. The Group participated in the D-Day drive against the Germans in Italy on 12 May 1944 and in the invasion of Southern France on 15 August 1944. Well known targets attacked by this Group include those at Athena, Augsburg, Bad Voslau, Belgrade, Beziers, Blechhammer, Bologna, Bolzano, Bratislava, Brux, Bucharest, Budapest, Ferrara, Fiume, Friedrichshafen, Giurgiu, Graz Innsbruck, Linz, Lyon, Mossbierbaum, Munich, Odertal, Pitesti, Ploesti, Porto Marghera, Rogensburg, Trieste, Toulon, Verona, Vienna, Wiener Neustadt, and Zagreb.

During the first year the 4,674 airplanes of the Group over briefed targets amassed a total of 42,090 combat hours. Bombs dropped on briefed targets totaled 9,642 tons. In air encounters with the enemy, gunners of the Group claimed 129 enemy fighters destroyed, 44 probably destroyed, and 16 damaged. During the year the Group lost 106 airplanes on combat missions. Of the 903 casualties suffered by the Group, 436 are missing in action, 195 have been returned from missing in action, 177 are prisoners of war, and 95 have been killed.

The Group has been awarded two War Department Unit Citations. The first citation was for an attack on the Duna Repulepgyar Aircraft Factory at Budapest, Hungary, on 13 April 1944. The cluster to the citation was awarded for an instrument-bombing mission against the Creditul-Minier Oil Refinery, Ploesti, Roumania, on 15 July 1944. Individual decorations to personnel of the Group include: 3 Awards of the Legion of Merit, 10 Silver Stars, 264 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 27 Oak Leaf Clusters to Distinguished Flying Crosses, 12 Soldier's Medals, 58 Bronze Stars, 2,619 Air Medals, 3,709 Oak Leaf Clusters to Air Medals, 261 Purple Hearts, and 8 Oak Leaf Clusters to Purple Hearts.

For the month of March the Group had the smallest percentage of early returns and non-effective sorties in the Air Force. The fact that only 4.4 sorties in every one hundred were non-effective constitutes a new record in the history of the Engineering Section and speaks well for the engineering efficiency of the Group.

The Group flew a total of 20 combat missions during the month. Combat airplanes logged a total of 4,739 hours. Of the 631 planes that took off, 573 were over briefed targets. The average number of aircraft on each mission was 31.5. Of the 1,117 tons of bombs that were airborne, 1,010 tons were dropped on targets. In all, seven planes were lost in combat during the month: two in a mid-air collision, two to flak, and three for other reasons. Bombing accuracy during the month ranged from 19.6 per cent to that of 69.3 per cent on Mission No. 195. The Group ranked thirteenth in the Air Force in bombing accuracy with an average of 42.7 per cent.

NEW CREWS

A total of ten new crews were received during the month of March.

764th Squadron

Captain Gordon E. Gilbert and crew
2nd Lt. Alcibiades Skalomenos and crew
2nd Lt. Robert C. Arnholt and crew
2nd Lt. Lawrence R. Toothman and crew

765th Squadron

2nd Lt. Robert Caran and crew
2nd Lt. Robert J. Bruning and crew
2nd Lt. John J. Stanko and crew

766th Squadron

2nd Lt. James M. Ridenour and crew
2nd Lt. Charles L. Brothers and crew
2nd Lt. John R. Tebbens and crew

MISSIONS**Mission No. 186**
1 March 1945**Mission No. 187**
2 March 1945**Target: Moosebierbaum Oil Refinery, Austria**

The first mission of the month was a double header with the oil refinery at Moosebierbaum, Austria as the target. The Red Force, led by Colonel Lawhon, got through the bad weather over the Alps and reached the target. In the Lake Balaton Area the impassible weather made it necessary for Colonel Lawhon to abandon the briefed route. Instead of attempting to take his formation under the weather, he did a 360 to gain altitude and swung far to the right and east of the Russian bomb line in an effort to find a deck low enough to get over. The formation was lost by the time it got up above the weather. The radar navigator, Lt. Loverin, finally picked up Vienna, which he used in orienting himself at the initial point.

By this time the formation was an hour late. The combination of bad weather and another formation immediately ahead of Colonel Lawhon's Red Force made it impossible to drop the bombs on the first run. Despite the flak, the formation made another run on the target and Captain Churchill, finding a hole with only three-tenths cloud coverage, bombed the target visually. The Red Force was one of four out of forty-two formations in the Air Force scheduled to attack the target that bombed visually.

Photographs show that a concentrated pattern of bombs fell at the north edge of the refinery. Several direct hits were scored on the distillation plant, the compressor house, the cracking unit, and the hydraulic acid plant. Other bombs fell on the railroad siding and still others in the building area at the west edge of the refinery. The mission was scored at 33 percent.

The Blue Force, led by Major Mixson, was unable to find a passage under, above, or around the weather in the Lake Balaton Area and returned its bombs to Base.

Target: Linz North Marshalling Yard, Austria

Major Poole led Mission No. 187 in attacking the North Marshalling Yard, Austria, on 2 March. Because of cloud coverage at the target, the formation was compelled to bomb by instruments. Photographs of bombing show the target obscured by smoke some bombs outside the target area. Twelve of twenty-five planes over the target were hit by flak none were lost.

Mission No. 188
3 March 1945**Target: Komarom Marshalling Yard, Hungary**

Canceled

Mission No. 188
4 March 1945**Target: Graz Main Marshalling Yard, Austria**

The mission of 4 March against Graz Main Marshalling Yard, Austria, found Major Rider leading a large formation. The bombs fell across the target area with twenty-five strikes on cars in the yard and other rail installations. An overhead pass was hit, while still other bombs fell on the tracks between the Main marshalling yard and the freight yards. The mission was scored at 26.7 percent.

Mission No. 189
5 March 1945**Target: Linz Benzol Plant, Austria**

Canceled

Mission No. 189
6 March 1945

Target: Vienna Schwechat Oil Refinery, Austria

Canceled

Canceled

Mission No. 189
7 March 1945

Mission No. 191
11 March 1945

Target: Muhldorf Marshalling Yard Germany

Canceled

Target: Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery, Austria

Canceled

Mission No. 189
8 March 1945

Mission No. 191
12 March 1945

Target: Vienna Florisdorf Oil Refinery, Austria

Target: Hegyeshalom Marshalling Yard, Hungary

Both a Red and a Blue Force were dispatched on 8 March to attack the marshalling yard at Hegyeshalom, Hungary. The Red Force, led by Major Mixson, dropped 42.6 percent of its bombs within 1000 feet of the briefed aiming point which included the roundhouse. The score of the Blue Force led by Captain Thackston, was 29 percent.

On 12 March Captain Trommershausser led a large formation attacking the Florisdorf Oil Refinery at Vienna, Austria. A ten-tenths cloud coverage over the target necessitated pathfinder bombing with unobserved results. On this mission the Group had the unique experience of bombing a Vienna target without suffering any damage from flak.

Mission No. 190
9 March 1945

Mission No. 192
13 March 1945

Target: Graz Marshalling Yard, Austria

The primary target for Mission No. 190 on 9 March was the marshalling yard at Bruck, Austria. Because of bad weather over the primary target, which was to have been a visual target, the Red Force was compelled to select an alternate pathfinder target. Captain MacDougall, leading the formation selected the Graz Marshalling Yard. The bombing was done by instruments with unobserved results.

Target: Regensburg Main Marshalling Yard, Germany

On 13 March Major Mixson led a four-box formation in attacking the marshalling yard at Regensburg, Germany. Again the bombing was done by the pathfinder method and again the results were unobserved. There was no flak at Regensburg.

Mission No. 193
14 March 1945

Major Poole, leading the Blue Force, also abandoned the primary target and attacked the marshalling yard at Graz with unobserved results. One flight of the Blue Force became separated from the formation in the bad weather in the Klagenfurt Area. Being unable to find the Blue Force, this Box joined the 451st Group for a run on marshalling yard at Graz but did not drop its bombs.

Target: Wiener Neustadt Marshalling Yard, Austria

Mission No. 193 on 14 March was a planned visual mission against the marshalling yard at Bruck, Austria. Bad weather still prevailed. Lt. Colonel Hardy, leading a six-box formation, was compelled to find an alternate target that could be bombed by instruments. The target selected was the marshalling yard at Wiener Neustadt, Austria. The bombs were dropped through a solid undercast with unobserved results. This proved to be another target at which there was no flak.

Mission No. 191
10 March 1945

Target: Almasfuzito Oil Refinery, Hungary

Mission No. 194

15 March 1945**Target: Wiener Neustadt Marshalling Yard, Austria**

The marshalling yard at Wiener Neustadt, Austria, was again hit by pathfinder bombing as an alternate target. The briefed target had been the Schwechat Oil refinery at Vienna, but it could not be bombed visually. This time Major Poole took thirty-six planes over Wiener Neustadt without experiencing any flak.

Mission No. 195**16 March 1945****Target: Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery, Austria**

On 16 March the Group wrote "finite" on the oil refinery at Moosbierbaum, Austria. With ideal weather and only slight interference from non-effective smoke screens, the thirty-four planes in the formation hit the

northeast portion of the refinery. The photographs show that a very concentrated pattern of bombs fell on that section of the refinery. Direct hits were scored on the distillation unit, the liquid air plant, buried oil storage cylinders, and oil storage tanks. The score for the mission was 69.3 percent, the highest score made by the Group during the month of March. Twenty-five of the thirty-four planes over the target were hit by flak and three men were injured. Captain Trommershausser was the formation leader.

Mission No. 196**17 March 1945****Target: Bratislava Rangier, Marshalling Yard, Czechoslovakia**

Canceled

Message of Commendation

To: All Concerned

"My congratulations to the 461st Bombardment Group for the excellent bombing of 16 March 1945. Please pass to all participating my personal commendation."

Brig. Gen William L. Lee
Commander, 49th Bomb Wing

Mission No. 196**18 March 1945****Target: Linz Main Marshalling Yard, Austria**

Canceled

Mission No. 196**19 March 1945****Target: Muhldorf Marshalling Yard, Germany**

One hundred pound general purpose bombs were used by the Group in attacking the marshalling yard at Muhldorf, Germany, on 19 March. A great deal of damage was done to the target, but the bomb pattern was scattered over a comparatively large area. Of the thirty-five planes led over the target by Captain Thackston, only one was hit by flak. Unfortunately, however, a man was injured in the damaged airplane. Colonel Lawhon, flying in the tail end position of the formation, finished his tour of combat duty with this

mission.

Mission No. 197**20 March 1945****Target: Wels Main Marshalling Yard, Austria**

Lt. Colonel Hardy led a six-box formation in attacking the Wels Main Marshalling Yard, Austria, on 20 March. Again 100 pound general purpose bombs were used. Despite an eight-tenths cloud coverage at the target, the bombing was done visually. As had repeatedly been the case during the month when the Group was attacking marshalling yards of secondary - importance, there was no flak at this target.

Mission No. 198**21 March 1945****Target: Graz Marshalling Yard, Austria**

For Mission No. 198 on 21 March the marshalling yard

at Graz turned out to be the alternate target selected for pathfinder bombing. The primary target had been the Bruck Marshalling Yard, Austria, but Major Poole, the formation leader, abandoned it because of poor visibility. One thousand pound general purpose bombs were used on this mission.

and Oil Refinery was selected. The lead "mickey operator", Lt. Levin, sighted on the marshalling yard, but most of the bombs carried across into the oil refinery that was believed to already have been destroyed. The intense, accurate, and heavy flak in the target area holed twenty of the twenty-seven planes on the bomb run and wounded one man.

Mission No. 199
22 March 1945

Mission No. 200
23 March 1945

Target: Vienna Florisdorf Oil Refinery and Marshalling Yard, Austria

Target: Vienna Kargan Oil Refinery, Austria

The primary target for Mission No. 199 on 22 March was the Kargan Oil refinery, which is situated due east from Vienna. Because this was believed to be the only active enemy oil refinery within bombing range of the Fifteenth Air Force, this target was rated as a first priority target. Bad weather and poor visibility in the whole Vienna area, however, made it impossible to attack this target visually. Since it could not be picked up by the mickey operator, Captain Trommershauser, leading the formation, was compelled to select another target for pathfinder bombing. The Florisdorf Marshalling Yard

Mission No. 200 was flown on 23 March 1945 with Captain Trommershauser again leading the formation. Again the target was the high priority Kargan Oil Refinery near Vienna. Despite good visibility the mission was scored only at 19.6 percent. Failure to knock out this target was a bitter disappointment to the Group because it had been hoped by all that Mission No. 200 would be one of outstanding success. Part of the poor bombing might be attributed to the fact that the lead bombardier, Lt. Rosulek, was wounded just before bombs away.

Message of Commendation

To: All Concerned

"The Commanding General is gratified to be able to pass the following message from General Arnold to General Spaatz relayed through General Cannon:

"Noted in your message dated 24 March outlining results achieved during the period 16 to 22 March. Results are source of great satisfaction to all. Such smashing aerial attacks coordinated with relentless ground pressure can only result in complete victory. Please pass for me to all echelons of the 15th Air Force my personal commendation."

Thirteen of the thirty planes over the target were hit by flak, Lt. Rosulek was wounded and one plane was lost. The lost plane, which was flown by 2nd Lt. William R. Baird, had lost a propeller and had an engine on fire when last seen coming off the target.

The target was the marshalling yard at Ceske Budejovice. Captain Thackston led the formation against this undefended target. The patterns around the two aiming points were scattered but both of them carried completely across the marshalling yard. The two roundhouses and workshops were caught in the patterns as well as the passenger station and the freight yards.

Mission No. 201
24 March 1945

Mission No. 202
25 March 1945

Target: Ceske Budejovice Marshalling Yard, Czechoslovakia

Target: Wels Airdrome, Austria

On 24 March the Group bombed again in Czechoslovakia on the first mission in a long time to this country. The formation leader of the month of March, Captain

Trommershausser, turned in his second superior mission of the month in dropping frags on the Airdrome at Wels, Austria. A splendid pattern fell across the airdrome area, continued into the hangers at the southeast edge of the airdrome, destroyed and damaged several enemy airplanes, and started explosions along the service apron.

Even the success of the mission, however, failed to completely erase the disappointment that attended it. The briefed primary target had been the Kbely Airdrome at Prague, Czechoslovakia, one of the hottest nests of the enemy's jet propelled Me-262 airplanes. Captain Trommershausser had led twenty-nine airplanes to the Kbely Airdrome, which is located at 500 08' north latitude and 14° 33' east longitude, only to have to abandon the target because of mechanical failures. On the bomb run the interphone system on the lead plane went out. Without this the bombardier and the pilot were unable to coordinate the bomb run. The target was located so far from the Base that Captain Trommershausser did not dare expend the gasoline required to make a 360° circle for another run to the target. As the formation turned away from the target, the crew members saw many enemy airplanes parked on the airfield.

Mission No. 203
26 March 1945

Target: Straszhof Marshalling Yard, Austria

Using 100 pound general purpose bombs, Major Poole led the mission of 26 March which brought excellent results in the bombing of the marshalling yard at Straszhof, Austria. The bombs smothered the west choke point of the yards and started large fires. Flak at the target was described as slight, inaccurate, and heavy but two planes failed to return to the Base and two others were hit. Enroute to the target the plane flown by 2nd Lt. Lloyd R. Heinze was last seen at good altitude with an engine on fire near Pecs, Hungary. The plane flown by 2nd Lt. Raymond E. Spehalsky left the formation after being hit by flak. Pilots in the bomber formation were later told over the intercommunications system by escort fighter pilots that they had seen eight chutes open from the plane before it crashed.

Mission No. 204

27 March 1945

Target: Vienna Southeast Communications, Austria

Canceled

Mission No. 204
28 March 1945

Target: Ybbs Marshalling Yard, Austria

Canceled

Mission No. 204
29 March 1945

Target: Vienna North Station, Austria

Canceled

Mission No. 204
30 March 1945

Target: Graz Marshalling Yard, Austria

Mission No. 204 on the 30th of the month was a four plane "lone wolf" mission with the Vienna North Marshalling Yard as the primary target. Finding that the weather over the Alps was much better than had been briefed, Lt. Miller, who had taken over the lead, decided to abandon the primary target and to hit the marshalling yard at Graz as an alternate target. Using visual means the small formation dropped its bombs with excellent results. Three of the four planes were hit by flak but all returned to Base.

Mission No. 205
31 March 1945

Target: Linz Benzol Plant, Austria

The target for the last day of the month was the benzol plant at Linz, Austria. This was a planned pathfinder mission. The planes dropped their 1000 pound general purpose bombs with unobserved results. Four planes were damaged by flak and three combat crew were wounded. The plane flown by 2nd Lt. Cleone C. Conner, Jr. left the formation at the head of the Adriatic a short distance from landfall while enroute to the target, but failed to return to the Base.

HAVE YOU VISITED MOOSBIERBAUM?

While reviewing the history of the 461st Bomb Group for March 1945 in preparation for the June 1999 issue of the "Liberaider" I noticed some interesting things.

1. Scheduled missions were cancelled on 11 of the 31 days in the month (winter weather was still nasty).
2. Of the 20 missions that were flown, the bombs were dropped visually on 10 and the Pathfinder method was used on the other 10 (more poor weather).
3. Since the war was winding down and most of the oil refinery targets were severely damaged or destroyed, the 15th Air Force had to revise its list of strategic targets. The type of targets selected for the month of March and the number of missions flown to each type were as follows:

Oil Refineries	5
Marshalling Yards	13
Other	2

Marshalling yards became prime targets at this time because the Germans were withdrawing on all Fronts and an effort was being waged to slow down or prevent retreat of the soldiers and their equipment back to the Homeland.

As I reviewed this material I noticed that only 3 of the 5 oil missions were bombed visually and 2 of these were to the Moosbierbaum Oil Refineries in Austria (see Missions 186 and 195 on Pages 22 and 24). Since I have a large notebook that contains an aerial photograph of every mission the 461st Bomb Group flew (including the Pathfinder missions) I hastened to find these two pictures. Because of the large number of bomb craters in the area surrounding the oil refinery, I looked back in our history to determine when we had last bombed Moosbierbaum. It turned out to be Mission 174 which was flown on 14 February 1945. I became intrigued by these three pictures and thought you would be also. Therefore, they are reproduced on the following pages. The write-up of Mission 174 was printed on Page 33 of the December 1998 issue of the "Liberaider" and is reprinted below so that all 3 missions and pictures can be compared.

Mission No. 174 14 February 1945

Target: Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery, Austria

Another double-header mission, this time with the Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery as the target for both Forces. Despite the scattered clouds and the partially effective smoke pots, the Red Force, led by Major Phillips, bombed visually. The aiming point was hit but only 7.1 per cent of the bombs were plotted within 1000 feet of the briefed aiming point. Only two planes were hit by moderate flak.

The Blue Force was led by the new Operations Officer of the 765th Squadron, Captain Thackston. This formation bombed by pathfinder. This formation escaped flak damage over the target.

Moosbierbaum was a tough target! Can any of you 461st members provide any interesting anecdotes regarding these missions?

RED
FORCE

Bombed visually. Only 7.1% of bombs
within 1000 ft. of aiming point.

Mission No. 174
14 February 1945

Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery, Austria
(see description on previous page)

The target shown for the RED and
BLUE FORCES are assumed from the
description of the mission and
the written summaries of
Missions 186 and 195 which
are described on pages 22
and 24.

The direction of North
is also assumed from
mission summaries.

N

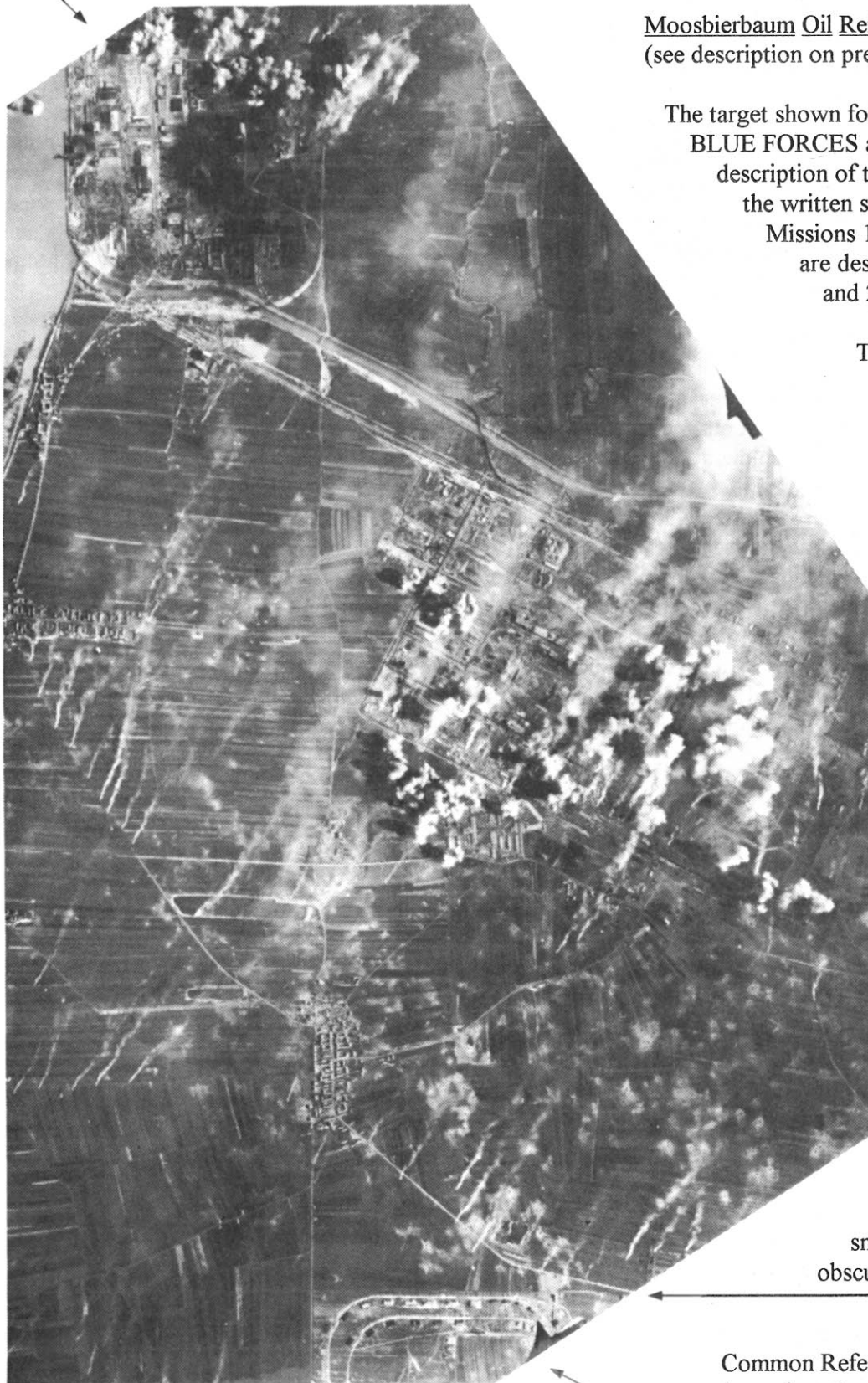
BLUE FORCE

They bombed by
Pathfinder. The
bombing results
were unrated.

Note relatively
few bomb craters
in this area on
February 14th.

Note ineffective
smoke pots used to
obscure target.

Common Reference Installation
used to orient these pictures.



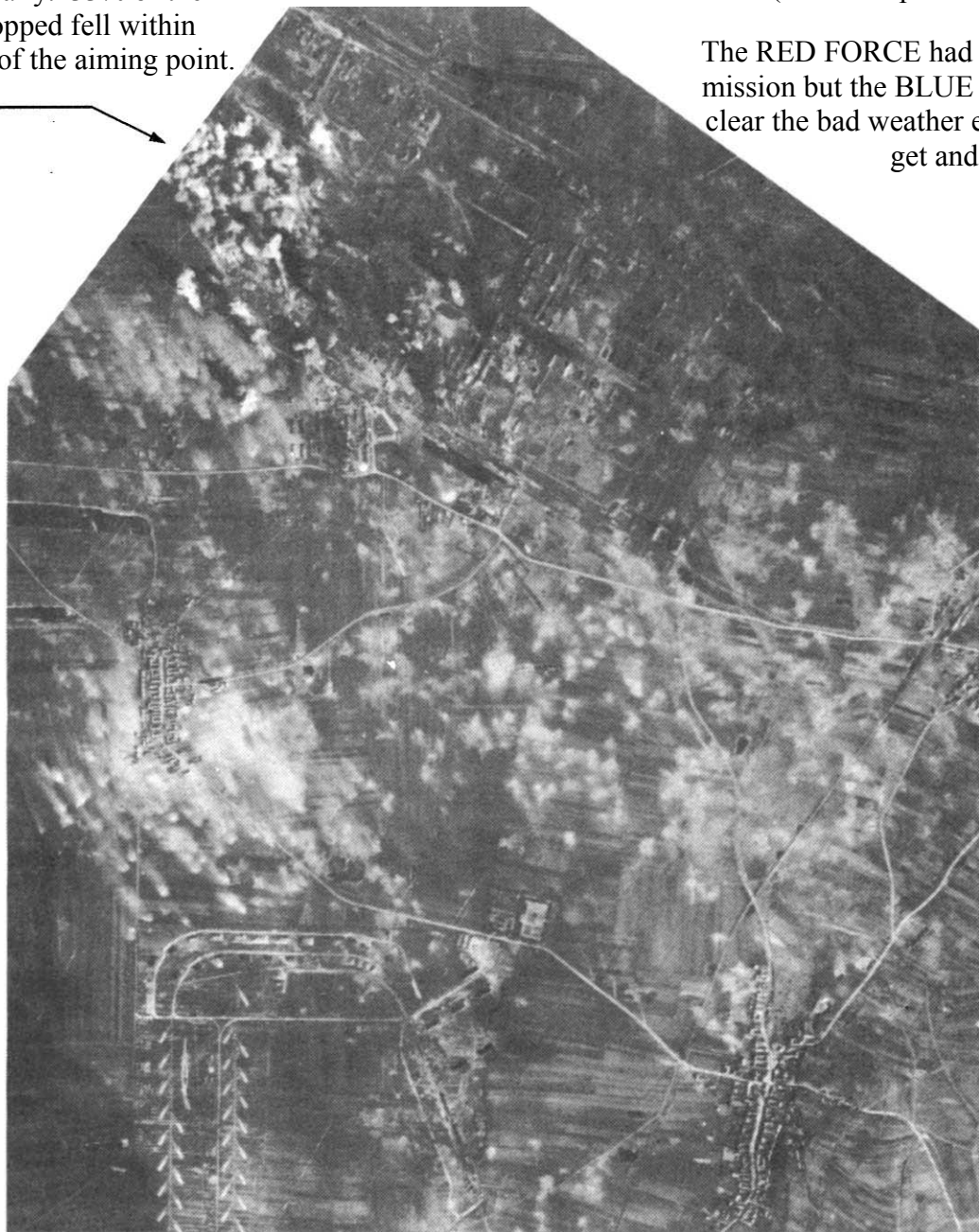
Mission No. 186
1 March 1945

Moosebierbaum Oil Refinery, Austria
(see description on Page 22)

The RED FORCE had a very successful mission but the BLUE FORCE couldn't clear the bad weather enroute to the target and returned to base.

RED FORCE

Once it reached the target area, this formation was able to bomb visually. 33% of the bombs dropped fell within 1000 feet of the aiming point.



Curiosity Question

Can any of you Pilots, Navigators or Bombardiers that flew to Moosbierbaum identify the feather shaped objects below the Reference Installation?

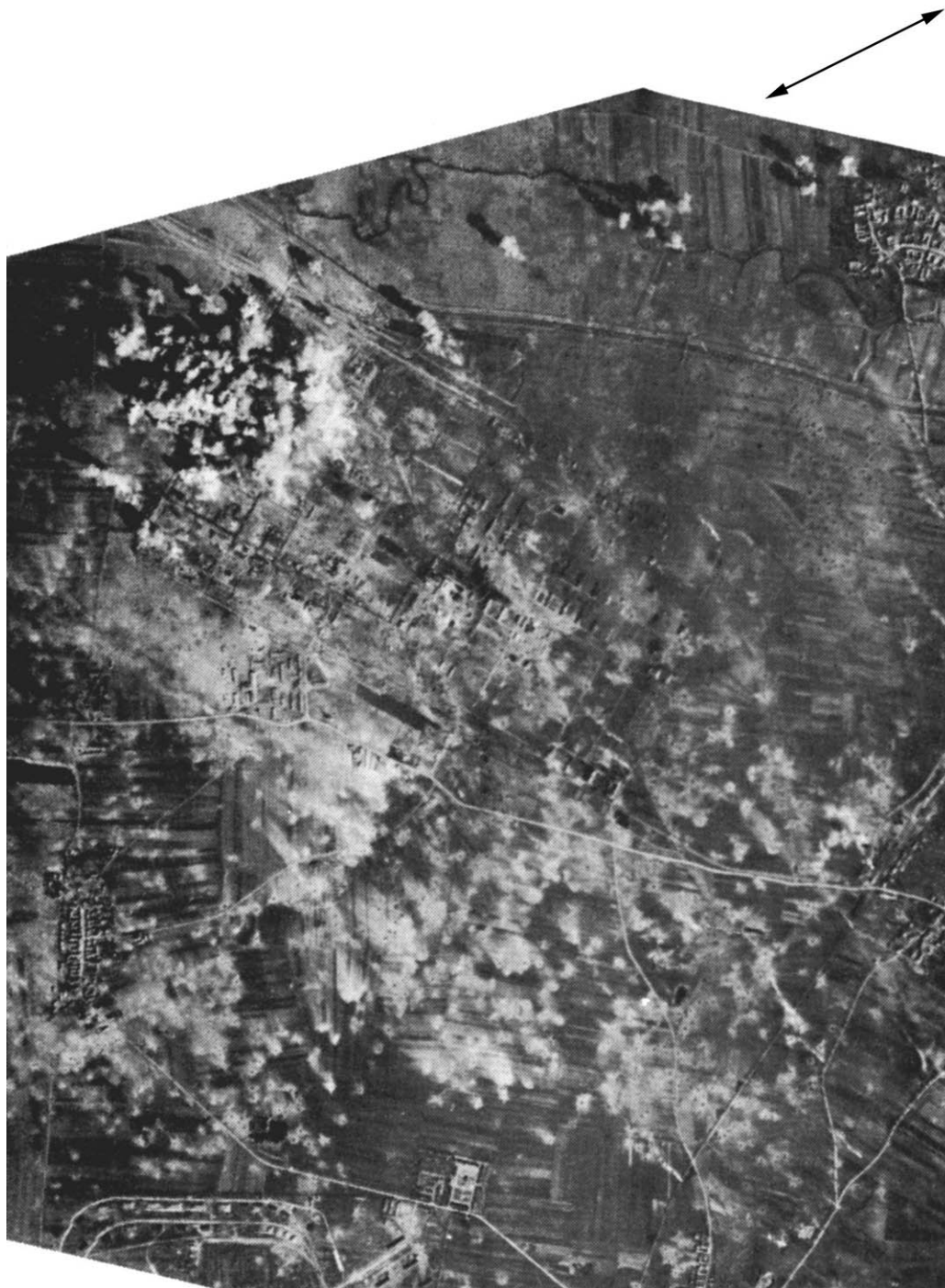
Mission No. 195

16 March 1945

Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery, Austria

(see description on Page 24)

This was an excellent mission for the 461st Bomb Group. 69.3% of the bombs dropped fell within 1000 feet of the aiming point. Note the increased number of bomb craters in the lower part of the picture as compared to Mission 174. This could be attributed to inherent errors in Pathfinder bombing during poor weather conditions.



Apparent Flight
Path

Some bombs fell
short or long
depending on
the direction of
flight.

TAPS
MAY THEY REST IN PEACE FOREVER

<u>SQ</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
764	Bloxom, Clarence W.	Bakersfield, CA	1092	17 Feb 1999
	Cullen, George E	New Holstein, WI	901	4 June 1999
	Gwozd, Alex J.	Hallandale, FL	748	9 Oct 1998
	Maness, Max	Bisco, NC	612	16 Jan 1997
766	Dovin, Robert J.	Hollister, CA	612	16 Mar 1999
	Springfield, Gordon J.	Albuquerque, NM	687	9 Dec 1998
767	Inman, Jack K.	Fairfield, OH	747	7 Mar 1999
	Innes, Ian Ross	White Bear Lake, MN	748	6 July 1998
	Knapp, James B.	San Antonio, TX	1092	18 Feb 1999
	McCauley, John W.	Chambersburg, PA	1092	9 Oct 1998



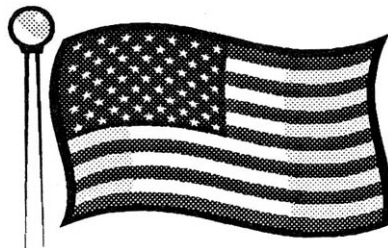
MAJOR GENERAL JAMES B. KNAPP



KNAPP

General Knapp, age 83, died on 18 February 1999 in San Antonio, TX after 33 years of military service. He graduated from West Point in 19439. He commanded the Air Corps flying school at Stamford, TX before becoming the Commander of the 767th Bomb Squadron, 461st Bomb Group in Italy during WWII. He was promoted to Commander of the 451st Bomb Group in Italy. He flew 43 bombing missions in the B-24 Liberator. Among his many other achievements he became Chief of Operations, Mediterranean Allied Air Forces; Commander, Goose Air Base, Labrador; Chief of Staff, Strategic Air Command; Commander, 16th Air Force, Torrejon Air Base, Spain; Senior Member, Military Armistice Commission, United Nations Command in Korea, and at his retirement in 1972, he was Commander, Technical Training Center, Chanute Air Force Base, IL.

“WELL DONE GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT”



55 YEARS TO CLOSURE

Gerald R. Smith - 765th B. Sq.

This is a story that begins with the events of Sunday, December 17th 1944 on a disastrous mission by the 15th Air Force, US Army, based on the Adriatic Sea in southern Italy. We were trying to put an end to the German Odertal synthetic fuel refinery in southern Poland and thus destroy Hitler's most productive remaining fuel sources. The Luftwaffe Fighter Command was equally dedicated to prevent us. My Squadron, the 765th, never got to the target, and only one B-24 Liberator, piloted by Captain Chalmers, managed to survive the intense Luftwaffe attack over the Czech Republic and return to base. My experiences of that day can be heard on the four audio segments on the 461st web site, and will not be repeated here except briefly as a necessary prelude to this article.

I was the pilot of Number 26, "Arsenic and Lace", of the 765th Squadron, the 461st Bomb Group and fortunate enough to survive along with four other crew members. We five sat out the rest of the war as prisoners in Stalag Luft I and compared notes on the events of that black Sunday. We had then, and for the next fifty odd years, no answers to the following:

- 1) What happened to the bodies of the five dead crew members we had left behind?
- 2) What happened to the dozen five-hundred pound bombs I had dropped through the doors of the burning bomb bays?
- 3) Where did the remnants of our bomber crash?

These questions have haunted my thoughts continuously for well over five decades. This all changed beginning in May, 1998, and this story is based on the events of the past year. It is perhaps how the well known radio commentator, Paul Harvey, might say:

**"- AND NOW I KNOW
THE REST OF THE STORY"**



The crew of "Arsenic and Lace" pose for a photo after a Stand Down due to weather.

I first heard of the web site for the 461st Bomb Group in May, 1998 and logged in. I then learned that the 461st had an Association and that there were annual reunions. I made contact immediately, paid my dues and attended the '98 reunion in Braintree, Massachusetts with my daughter, Claire.

Germaine to this story, that first contact with the Web Site made reference to a young Czech author who is documenting the air wars fought in the skies over his country. Rob Hoskins, web site manager, had included E-Mail from this man, Michal Sisovsky. It is still posted. The Sisovsky mail gave me goose bumps when I read that I was one of the specific people he was trying to contact. He even referenced my aircraft by name, "ARSENIC AND LACE".

I had some difficulty making contact with Michal by E-Mail and finally used the postal service, mailing a letter to him a month before the reunion. Michal responded with a long hand written letter that I received in early October, 1998. He included detailed maps of the region where most of our planes crashed on the Odertal mission that day, including mine. I was astounded by the information he has already assembled from various sources. I was dumb-struck by the old black and white photograph of a large and impressive memorial erected in the military section of the principal cemetery in the city of Olomouc, the city where I had spent my first night in a German jail.

Interred at this memorial were my five lost crewmen and seven more Airmen from a 15th AF B-17 that crashed the next day, December 18th.

The photo showed a tall column erected at the head

with the United States flag depicted, and a permanent top wreath. The entire memorial was covered by fresh flowers, and at the foot was another large wreath and what appeared as a ribbon woven throughout, described as parachute cord from "Arsenic and Lace". This memorial was dismantled in late 1946, when the U.S. Military exhumed the bodies for reinterment in a military cemetery at Avold, France. Michal also told me of Memorials erected in outlying towns near Olomouc, one in particular to my friend and fellow pilot from the 765th Squadron, Tom West and the members of his crew that perished with him. I felt compelled to accept Michal's invitation to visit his country which I did in late April, 1999.

I had a general description of Michal, which was not needed. When I emerged from customs at the Prague Airport, I encountered the usual large crowd but focused promptly on a young man wearing a beautiful A-2 leather flight jacket with the 15th AF patch on the shoulder!!



Gerry Smith (left) with Czech historian Michal Sisovsky at the memorial to Tom West's crew at a cemetery in Olomouc, Czech Republic.

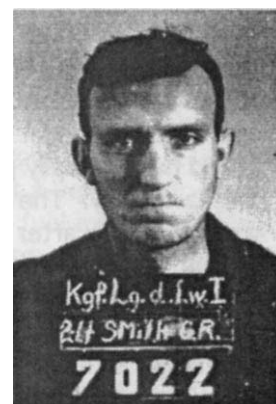
THE LAST MINUTES OF ARSENIC AND LACE

I was weary, helped along by the ten hour time difference from California. After a few good Czech beers and early dinner at my hotel I crashed for a long night. Michal is now living in Prague, and not far from my hotel. We met again for the following afternoon and evening to plan our ten-day visit. Michal presented me with a detailed artist's color rendition of "Arsenic and Lace" that included the Nose Art; Squadron aircraft No. 26; The 461st tail markings;

and the actual Serial Number on the tail!! My daughter Claire, age 20, flew in from New York the next afternoon. We did some sight seeing in Prague and then set off for Olomouc in my rented Opal Diesel on April 30th.

The real story is about to start, but first let me briefly refresh your knowledge of the Czech people and their history. The Czechoslovakia that we have known is now two separate countries, Slovakia to the east and the Czech Republic to the west. Nobody seems to have a good reason why, but it seems that they were separate entities many centuries ago before falling under Austrian rule for four centuries, becoming known as Czechoslovakia.

Kriegsgefangener Gerald R. Smith. The German photographer tried to coax a smile from him with a Mickey Mouse doll, but got quite the opposite result as you can see.



The Hapsburg/Austrian rule came to an end in 1918 and they became a free country. Their freedom was short. In less than two turbulent decades, Hitler marched into the Sudetenland and occupied the country. Men and women were conscripted into military and forced labor.

In 1945 with the defeat of Germany, the people of Czechoslovakia again gained their freedom. This time instead of two decades, they only tasted of it for two years before falling under the Russian banner of Communism.

With the collapse of Russia and her eastern Bloc in 1991, these people are again free and under self-democratic rule. They are now a proud member of NATO and their young people, like Michal, are filling the universities, and determined to stay free.

Their Republic is only eight years old, but the history of what America and its Allies have contributed to the two past brief periods of freedom and now this third chance, has been kept alive in their households through several generations despite communist suppression of true history in the schools. They will not forget our deeds on their behalf.

Now, to get on with the story: we were flying in bright sunlight over a solid white undercast with the top at ten thousand feet and the bottom at only about seven hundred feet above ground. I lacked visual knowledge as to our exact position that day, and there were conflicting reports in post mission records. I wanted to nail down the time-line geography for that day.

We had been on an assigned north-northwesterly heading that would have us passing about eight miles to the west of Olomouc. However, our Squadron had been wide right of the single course line and we would have actually passed over the western edge of this large city. The Luftwaffe had initiated their attack shortly after our crossing of the Austrian border, about fifteen miles east-northeast of Brno. Captain Chalmers' debriefing report after the mission had placed Arsenic and Lace in the vicinity of Muglitz when he saw my plane lose the right wing following a fierce fire in the bomb bays and a burning No. three engine.

Chalmers' location did not fit, but then, how could he be sure of what was happening to five other bombers, where and when, while looking after his own plane under a heavy attack by over 100 German fighters, as stated later by the commanding general of the Luftwaffe!!!

With the known actual crash site of Arsenic and Lace on the outskirts of Olomouc I was able to rule the Muglitz report out during the next few days.

**Chalmers' location did not fit,
but then, how could he be sure...
while looking after his own plane
under a heavy attack.**

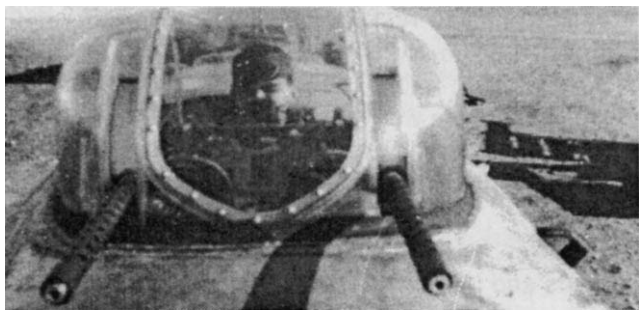
After the FW-190 Fighters' 30 mm cannon hits had fired the bomb bays into an inferno, I issued the verbal order over intercom to abandon ship. Cliff Stewart, tail gunner; and John Modrovsky, ball turret gunner, were the first able to bail out from the tail, leaving the two dead bodies of Abe Abrahamson, radio operator; and Edwin Howard, flight engineer, behind. They touched down, after free fall, several miles south of Olomouc which ties with the wreckage site. I personally had gone in a head-first dive through the burning bomb bay about five minutes later. I left the dead bodies of Art Carlson, my bombardier, and Morris Goldman, upper turret gunner, behind on the flight deck.

I had pulled Vro, my co-pilot who should have been long gone, from his seat and told him to follow me as I went head-first through the fire in the forward bomb bay. I was banging against the center cat-walk and the bomb bay doors that were partially open from the weight of the 500 pound bombs that I had previously released. I lost consciousness for a few moments before opening my chute at about five miles up. That altitude would require about thirty minutes of descent time which, with the westerly strong winds reported, should have put me at a touchdown point about eight to ten miles east of Olomouc.

**I personally had gone in a headfirst
dive through the burning bomb
bay...**

Michal had the actual crash area general information, and the collaboration of the Olomouc Feature Editor of their largest newspaper. They had printed notice of my pending visit, asking eyewitnesses to the crash of Arsenic and Lace to come forward. We met on our first morning with this Editor in his office. I was told that the Olomouc edition of their paper would carry a major article replete with photos. We then reviewed the responses to the Editor's (Peter's) request for witnesses. Of the fifteen responses, which had been checked out by Peter, two were selected.

A date was set for 2:00 PM the next day for all to meet at the entrance to the huge cemetery in the Neredin suburb of Olomouc. Both selectees, a man and a woman, had been about ten years old at the time



Morris Goldman (KIA 17 December 1944) at his post in the top turret of Arsenic and Lace.

and had lived directly in the general flight path. Both were now about sixty-five, the man a newly retired medical doctor and the lady a retired widow now living in a smaller town some distance from Olomouc. We met at the appointed time in the stone paved entry to the cemetery, and while introductions were in progress I became aware of the burden on Michal Sisovsky in his role as our interpreter, and that role was to continue throughout our stay. For openers, while waiting for the delayed Editor, the Doctor got my attention, by pointing to the paving stones at his feet next to the curb of the roadway, and telling me, through Michal, that a propeller blade from one of my engines had created a five foot deep hole at that point!! Then Michal told me that the lady witness had traveled from her new home by train and bus to this meeting, carrying a bouquet of flowers for me! With the arrival of Peter the Editor, we proceeded into the cemetery to visit the site of the former memorial to American dead in the military section. The military section is centuries old and honors all who gave their lives for Czechoslovakia.

There are graves for many foreign soldiers, predominantly Russian with a red star on each head stone, who lost their lives driving the Germans from this land. I recall seeing a few British stones, one listing the names, ranks, and date for a Lancaster Bomber crew. There was one very large and tall memorial with a tall spire carrying the Russian red star on top. The Doctor explained that the large memorial I

The Lady witness had traveled from her new home by train and bus to this meeting, carrying a bou-

have described earlier for my crew members, had been next to this Russian monument. We next visited another section of this vast cemetery, where Arsenic and Lace had made her last contact with earth.

To understand what I am attempting to describe, you must be able to mentally envision, as I have, how my bomber made its final approach back to earth and the succession of events. The plane had been on a north-westerly heading, after abandonment, and stayed on that course. Fire, explosions, and aerodynamic forces caused a rapid metamorphosis.

She shed her wings, engines, propeller blades, turrets and bodies. The heavy bombs had gone long before. In the end, at this cemetery, there was only the fuselage still containing the center section of the wing with its remnant load of 100 octane spewing fire and smoke. As if using the vehicle roadway between beautiful grave sites as a runway, it made its last landing (albeit a very steep approach), accompanied by a fuel explosion brought about by the impact. The Doctor stated that you could smell the fuel for a mile around; that no one was a casualty; that the only damage at this location was flame damage to a few small trees that fully recovered. The "Whump" from the fuel blast had tipped head stones back at grave sites on each side of the roadway.

The Doctor pointed out two beautiful large chapels left undamaged at each end of the service roadway, with the landing (Impact ?) point halfway between! He also made note that the other two so far unmentioned



The fuselage section of Arsenic and Lace landed on this small lane, narrowly missing two chapels and

survivors, Vro Francisco, Co-pilot, and Milton Klarsfeld, Navigator, had landed nearby. One actually touched down in the cemetery and the other just a short distance outside. This all fits. Milt had been trapped in the nose section, and Vro had refused to go through the burning bomb bay. The final explosion in the fuselage, probably at only about 1,500 feet, had expelled the nose turret and had also blown both of them clear of the fuselage and opened their parachutes!

The Doctor wanted me to clear up a mystery for him. He had learned the names of my crew but had retrieved from the wreckage a heavy duty flashlight that survived in working order and bore the name REGAN? I explained that Sgt. Regan was my ground crew chief who looked after my plane between missions, supervising damage repairs, maintenance, and the Readiness preparation for the next mission!!

At this point we left the cemetery in a small caravan of three cars and traveled about two miles to an open field area on the final approach of Arsenic and Lace. The cemetery was visible a good mile away. The witnesses kept up a running tale of where engines, bodies, and major debris had come to rest. We then drove to a point midway between where we were and the cemetery. This was a small, old, and modest residential neighborhood. The Doctor had lived here as a child and it was from here that he had viewed that final approach from his old home. He then took us a block down the street to a corner lot where, until recently, there had stood the neighborhood beer pub. He stated that the nose turret of Arsenic and Lace had gone through the roof of the single story building, then the attic space, but had only half penetrated the ceiling. He had personally seen this turret hanging there over the beer tapping spouts. The body of David Brewer came to rest not far from this location.

We thanked everyone for their time and contributions, and said goodbye to all except the lady witness who had come by train and bus. I drove her to her new home in the hills to the east of Olomouc. It was in this same general area a day or so later, while trying to find the small village where I had touched down, that we were kissed by Lady Luck!! We had been told in a village several miles to the south of where

we were, by an eye witness to the crash of Lt. Fred Capalbo's plane, that he couldn't tie any specific village to my 54 year old description.

However, he told us that a book had been published at war's end in 1945 that recounted such events for all the communities surrounding Olomouc. He himself was a small community newspaper publisher. He had personally never seen the book, that there were few printed, but that he had heard of an older man in the area to the north who had a copy. So we put this search on our shopping list. Michal was tireless in the pursuit of this book and while I drove, he was in and out of the car asking questions of strangers. He finally came up with a possible lead to our quarry. We found the old man's house to learn that he had died. We were told that the man's son could perhaps



Czech civilians inspect the wreckage of ship #69, 17 December 1944. Pilot Frederick Capalbo (767th) was made prisoner along with Edgar A. Squires, Roger A. Koontz, Jeff L. Hamilton, Jr., Gordon C. Behling. John A. Villars and Richard McGuire were KIA.

have the book. We went to the son's home. He was at work. We learned that he ran a family business - a small lumber yard. We found the lumber yard. I was very tired and stayed in the car while Michal went in the small office building.

Five minutes later Michal came bursting out the office door with a husky middle aged man who wore a big grin on his face while waving a book on

high!! Michal was so excited that his English almost failed him as he told me that this was THE BOOK! The man wanted me to have it but could not give it to me.

Local custom required that he sell it to me, which he did for \$10 US.

Co-pilot "Vro" Francisco was blown free of the falling fuselage at about 1500 feet. The explosion deployed his parachute.



That evening back in Olomouc, Michal and Peter, the Feature Editor, pored through the book which of course was written in Czech. This book shed no light on my search for the village I was seeking BUT - There were three pages, including pictures, telling of where my salvo of twelve five-hundred pounders had struck! The bombs were not armed, but with all that weight and velocity they could wreak much more havoc than wrecking balls. They had fallen together and wiped out a farm house, the usual adjacent farm buildings, the farm family garden plot, and finished in a bordering vacant field. No fire was started, and no one killed. One man was injured but recovered!

That night in Olomouc I went to bed exhausted about 10:30 PM. I awoke about three hours later, bolting straight up in bed, widely awake, almost physically feeling the mental joining in my mind of the two separate experiences, over fifty-four years apart. I now had all the answers to the long unanswered questions. I am still wide awake.

**I HAVE EXPERIENCED
AN UNFORGETTABLE CLOSURE!**



1999 photo of the tavern struck by the nose turret of Arsenic and Lace. The turret lodged in the roof of the building, coming to rest just above the beer taps.



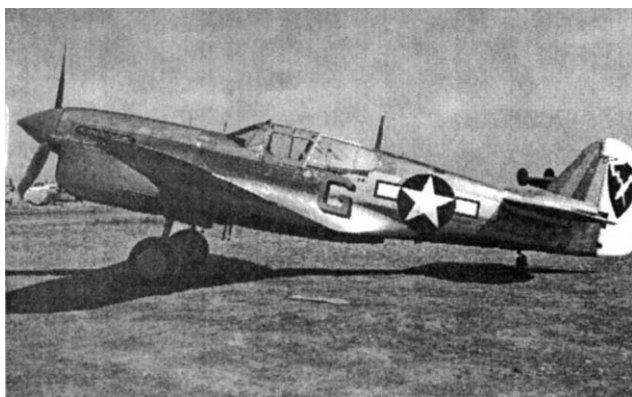
Gerry Smith with a young lady who witnessed the crash of Arsenic and Lace. They are standing in the lane where the fuselage came to rest.

An expanded version of this article with additional color photographs is available on the 461st Bomb Group Web Site.
(www.461st.com)

Information Please?

There has been fantastic response to our request for photographs and personal accounts for us in the documentary and the website. The loan of large collections from Jim Van Nostrand and William Stewart, as well as essays, diaries, and photos from dozens of Liberaiders and their families, has helped us establish an excellent pool of resources from which to draw.

We still have gaps in our coverage, so we still encourage you to participate if you would like to. Here are a few of the questions that have arisen...



This P-40F was used by Col. Glantzberg to shepherd early formations. Can anyone advise us to where it was pinched from, and what became of the second P-40 below? If any color information or serials are available the information could be used by the artist who is developing color renderings for the 461st commentary. Who maintained these birds?



Gene's Hare Power—Could this be the aircraft referred to in the Losses Index as "Genoa Hare Power" (44-48993), lost 21 February 1945 with Dewey McMillian in command?



Rough Rid'er—Jim Van Nostrand flew as Aerial Photographer aboard this plane on the Ploesti mission of 17 August 1944. He recalls it as a 765th Squadron aircraft. Does anyone have any further information? A serial number would be helpful.

LIBERAIDERS!

*The History of the 461st Bomb Group
Fifteenth Army Air Force*

There has been much progress made on the documentary film that has been "in the works" since the reunion in Braintree last August.

The project has been divided into four "phases" roughly corresponding to different versions of the video that will need to be developed on the way to an eventual home video product.

The first phase involves producing a five minute "Demo Version" which will be sent with copies of the project proposal and budget to prospective donors and investors. This package should be ready for shipment by the third week of August 1999. This version will feature several interview clips and short segments from the rough cut of the "promotional Version" which is Phase Two.

Phase Two will produce a fifteen minute version for use in marketing the video to network and cable outlets such as The History Channel. This will be a high quality production involving interviews, wartime photos and film footage, color artwork by aviation artist Jim Caiella and will be professionally narrated. We hope to debut this version at the reunion in Omaha, and we will be taking it to the B-24 60th Anniversary Celebration in San Diego in December.

Phase Three will produce the version which will actually go to broadcast. The length will be around 45 minutes to allow for (ugh) commercials to fill a full hour broadcast slot. This will be the most intensive phase of development because at this stage we will have a product which can compete with the type of documentary programming so popular on cable television today.

Phase Four will produce an expanded home video version which will allow us to draw in more depth from the interview footage we have been accumulating. This version should top out between sixty and ninety minutes and may be accompanied by a companion publication.

When members of the 461st Bomb Group came together to dedicate the plaque at Arlington National Cemetery, another "second generation Liberaider", Bill Huizenga, offered to help with

the fund-raising portion of the project, so we look forward to hearing his ideas. Bill is the son of Jerry Huizenga from the 766th Squadron, and is an aide to Congressman Peter Hoekstra of Michigan.

Besides the generous support of Group members and their families, we have received a great deal of help from scholars and researchers around the globe. For pinpoint information on the 25 July 1944 mission to Linz, we have the indepth research of Austrian Karl Affenzeller. In the Czech Republic, Michal Sisovsky has been an enthusiastic ally in digging into the events of 17 December 1944, both in the air and on the ground. In Italy, Vittorio Argento has offered to interview residents of the Cerignola area who worked on the base at Torretta in exchange for our help on the World War Two documentaries he makes for the RAI media network in Italy. In California, Chris Thomas, who has written extensively on Hammer Field, has loaned us a set of microfilms containing the Group and Squadron Histories.

Charlie Joesten, who assisted the website team at the 1998 reunion, will be helping with project management issues, proposals and grant applications.

Jon Norris and Rob Hoskins will be filming interviews again at the reunion in Omaha. There are many topics that deserve more thorough coverage, so if you could be available for an interview please contact Rob so he can begin to construct a schedule.

If you would be interested in the five minute "Phase One" video and a copy of the proposal, please contact Jon Norris at:

Electravisio Creative Film and Television
P.O. Box 121152
Nashville, TN 37212
E-Mail—evisioentv@aol.com

You may contact Rob Hoskins at:

310 Tyne Avenue
Murfreesboro, TN 37130
Phone: (615) 896-2059
E-Mail—rudieaka@aol.com

Our President, Bob Hayes opened the service with a synopsis of the 461st Operations in Italy and noted the two prior Memorials that we dedicated at the Air Force Academy and Wright Patterson Air Force Base. He then introduced Chaplain Edward Brogan, a USAF Colonel from the Chaplains Service at nearby Ft. Meyers, VA

Colonel Brogan conducted a very meaningful service noting that we were there as a tribute to all the 461st members who had died and to honor those still living. He was aware of all the targets we bombed and noted that our very first combat mission was to a marshalling yard at Bihac, Yugoslavia and that fifty-five years later Bihac was again bombed during the war in Kosovo. He commented on the fact that our original membership was diminishing with time and it was significant that some of our Associate members (son's and daughter's of our members) like Rob Hoskins and Bill Huizenga have shown interest in carrying our banner into the future. After Col. Brogan's final prayer and a moment of silent prayer a buglar, located off in the distance, played Taps. It was a tearful ending to a wonderful tribute to our departed comrades.

Speaking of tributes, we owe a big one to Carl Peter, 767th Squad., for making all the arrangements for the dedication ceremony. High on the list of accomplishments was the fly-by of a B-52. Although the Air Force kept saying "NO" Carl kept after them until they committed a B-52 to the project. The fly-by required FAA approval which caused the closing down of all the local airports while the B-52 was in the area. Although there were four other B-24 Group memorial plaques together in a nearby area, Carl was able to secure an especially beautiful site for our memorial. The selection of the tree species was GREAT and is the only Golden Rain tree in Arlington National Cemetery.

Carl must have called in some "Chips" from his Washington friends in order to pull off this very special ceremony. The following military retirees were on hand as Carl's guests: Rear Adm. Edward "Whitey" Fieghtner; Naval Captain Frank Ault; Commander Dan Belvin; AF Colonel Robert McDonald and AF Colonel William Beazin.

The 461st attendees included: 764th Sq.—T.V. Stradley and family; 765th Sq.—Walter Fries; 766th Sq.—Robert V. Hayes, Gerald Huizenga and son William; 767th Sq.—Carl Peter, Kelton Bush and George Dickie. Associate members Rob Hoskins (creator of the 461st website) and Bill Huizenga were on hand to help.

Cover Photo: L to R: Carl Peter, Colonel Edward Brogan and Bob Hayes.

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