



The 461st

Liberaider



Vol. 23, No. 1

JUNE 2006

SOMEWHERE IN THE USA

Last Flight of Crew #14

As lived and recorded
by
Trefry A. Ross

December 17, 1944

15th AAF, 49th Wing,
461st B.G., 765th
Squadron

(Continued on page 23)

**461st
Bombardment
Group (H)
Association
2006 Reunion
See page 18 for
details and sign-up
information.**

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THE FORK IN THE ROAD

The following is the first of four articles by Guyon Phillips, pilot, 767th Squadron, 461st Bomb Group. we knew they would assign us for their own reasons – personal preference had to be only a dim hope.

by
Guyon Phillips

Two weeks into Single-Engine Advanced at Craig Field in Alabama – Spring 1944 - everything was on schedule, just as I had hoped for. Along the way in flight training, we were given a chance to state a preference for Single vs. Multi-Engine but

When orders came at the end of Basic for Single-Engine, it was almost too good to believe. The North American AT-6 had 650 hp – 200 more than the Vultee Vibrator – plus retractable gear for the first time in trainers – it was a sweet little airplane. I developed a good relationship with my instructor, Lt. Adams, right away, and had respect

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Korneuburg - Memories of 1944

by
Erhard Kohlgruber

When I read the newspapers today, I am reminded of my wartime experiences. There was confusion even after the departure of the Germans and invasion of the Russian troops.

In 1944, I lived in a house 500 meters from the Korneuburg Oil Refinery in Austria. I lived with my grandmother, my mother, two younger sisters and an aunt and her two sons. The parents of my aunt

lived in another part of Korneuburg several kilometers away from the oil refinery.

My grandfather, who was a medical doctor, built the house around 1905. He passed away in 1929.

My father had been a soldier in Greece. He was captured by Allied troops in western Austria.

I was born in 1932 and was attending high school in Stockerau about

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Taps

May they rest in peace forever

Please forward all death notices to:

Hughes Glantzberg
P.O. Box 926
Gunnison, CO 81230
editor@461st.org

764th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Andrues, Hershel R.	Hayward, CA	757	04/28/06
Craig, Oral C.	Okemah, OK	757	05/15/05
Lovin, Everett E.	Eclectic, AL	612	02/23/04
Paradise, William	Las Vegas, NV	1092	03/05/05
Redger, Cecil	Denver, CO	901	01/17/06
Trammershausser, John	Tallahassee, FL	1092	12/03/05
Trout, Jasper D.	Temple, TX	612	04/01/05

765th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Cody, Jack R.	Hemet, CA	4000	12/28/05
Hasenkampf, Herman Jr.	Slidell, LA	1035	09/15/05
Holbrook, Marvin J.	Sergeant, KY	747	12/18/05
Kadow, Howard W.	Irvington, NY	1035	10/28/01
Mayfield, Gerald J.	Williamsburg, VA	748	03/05/06
Smith, Woodrow W.	Alum Creek, NV	612	09/04/05

766th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Anania, Louis A.	Des Moines, IA	612	11/09/05
Connolly, William G.	Bourne, MA	747	09/08/05
Grano, Ralph H.	Brick, NJ	1092	01/17/05
Mann, Franklin R.	Comer, GA	748	11/21/05
Saffels, Joseph C	Unknown	888	04/15/72
Webb, Willis L.	Panama City, FL	1092	11/15/05
Wilkin, Bruce M.	Fresno, CA	1092	04/13/06

TAPS (Cont.)

767th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Ambrozich, Edward C.	Joliet, IL	612	01/23/06
Berumen, Fernando	Lakewood, CA	612	12/23/05
Carlson, Donald J.	Minneapolis, MN	1034	02/20/06
Fox, Robert E. Jr.	Houston, TX	747	02/12/06
Jones, Captain E. Jr.	San Antonio, TX	1092	02/14/06
Kiewlen, Edward R.	Meridan, CT	612	10/19/05
King, Jack H.	Oklahoma City, OK	1035	04/02/06
Robinson, William W.	Ridgway, PA	612	03/18/06
Thullesen, George	Woodbridge, NJ	809	02/05/05

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for his professional ability. It was after a good ride one morning at Craig that the bottom fell out.

We were assembled in front of the barracks to march over to the mess hall, when the Tact Officer began reading names off a list – 26 in all, including mine. With no explanation, we were told to clear with Supply after mess and that we were shipping out – that's all. What an incredible turn of events. There I was, finally in Single-Engine and headed to P-40 Transition after getting my wings, afterward to be assigned to a P-51 Mustang or a P-47 Thunderbolt – then came a totally unexpected fork in the road.

It was mid-afternoon when the word drifted down – we were being reassigned to Twin-Engine. The 26 on the list were the tallest in the class, and they wanted the longest legs for full rudder travel on Multi-Engine bombers.

Well, that meant we were all going to be meter-readers, and if you were upside down, it would be time to bail out. When we got to Twin-Engine School, we were already two weeks late in the training schedule, and had some catching up to do. If that were not bad enough, we were chided as a bunch of would-be fighter pilots and told we'd get plenty of single-engine time – learning how to handle the

twin-engine Beech AT-10's with a simulated engine failure.

Maybe it was then a 20 year-old grew up a little. I wanted the wings very badly, but circumstances beyond my control had led me down a different road. I soon concluded to heck with it, just accept the worst case scenario – that if I got my wings, I'd be a Flight Officer and not get my commission – I'd be a Co-Pilot and not go to First Pilot School – and finally I'd be assigned to fly a B-24 Liberator, the last plane I'd ever want to fly. Well, maybe two out of three wasn't so bad – I did get my commission, I did receive orders to go to First Pilot School at Chanute Field, but it was to Transition School in the slow and lumbering Lib.

I completed 110 hours transition in the Lib, but it was like sitting on the front porch flying your house. You couldn't trim the son-of-a-gun, and had to horse it around all the time. There I was, headed to Combat Crew Training, and the sensation was that the plane was flying me and not the other way around – what a way to start with a crew of your own. I was over two weeks into training at Boise, Idaho with Lt. Crownover, a very competent Instructor Pilot, before I began to get any confidence and feel I was controlling the airplane for the first time.

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That being said, I well remember the first time I took our crew up on a training mission without the Instructor Pilot. Two things were on my mind as we trundled out to the airplane in our bulky fleece-lined flight suits – first, I knew I had to earn the respect and confidence of my crew and that being called Aircraft Commander meant nothing if the crew didn't trust your flying ability. Second, I gave a silent prayer that we wouldn't lose an engine or have some other emergency. Getting it back on the ground without incident was a great feeling of relief. It was only a few weeks later that I found I had sprouted a few gray hairs at the ripe old age of 21. You grew older faster in that kind of experience.

Colonel John R. (Killer) Kane, our CO had been one of the Group Commanders on the August 1, 1943 Ploesti mission hitting Hitler's oil supply in the Rumanian oil fields. At the time, we had little information about the Ploesti raid just a year earlier. Word was they had very heavy losses on a questionable low-level mission over such a long distance, trying to keep 178 planes together that close to the ground. They didn't arrive in proper sequence at the Initial Point, and it was chaos. We flew several of the "desert pinks" from Colonel Kane's group – those B-24 D's without nose turrets and in desert camouflage. Incidentally, one of those D-models in desert pink is the only 24 at the Air Museum in Dayton – I had hoped they would display a classic J-model with the nose turret. The Lib never got due credit for its contribution – there were more 24's built than any other plane, but it was treated like a red-headed stepchild.

We took a lot of pride in ourselves as a crew. I made sure we had a plan for completing the most training mission assignments for each man on every flight. We were successful in staying at the top of the list on missions accomplished while at Boise, and got extra time off at Thanksgiving and Christmas when other crews were flying. Bad weather in the Snake River Valley between the Sawtooth and Owyhee Mountain Ranges kept us on the ground more than a few times. We regularly gave the briefing meteorologist the raspberries, because he was rarely right predicting the weather for the day.

Most training time was spent on formation flying, air-to-ground gunnery and on bombing ranges. Bombing was from high, medium and low altitude including night bombing - we dropped 100 pound black powder bombs onto targets with a bullseye. My job was to give Fred Noegel, our Bombardier, a stable platform with constant speed, altitude and direction – controlling these three variables required total concentration. At the initial point when fully stable, the Bombardier took over with the Norden Bombsight - the Pilot's job was to fly the PDI (Pilot Directional Indicator).

To record the accuracy of a drop, the Navigator had a camera in the bomb bay. I learned that some Bombardiers would tell the Navigator to fake a camera malfunction when he knew it was a poor drop. I told Fred and Graham Kerr, our Navigator, we weren't having any of that –we were to get pictures of every drop – good, bad, or indifferent. By the end of Combat Crew Training, we had set a record of 216 feet circular error for 76 drops with 100 per cent pictures - we were proud of that. The highlight was a direct bullseye from 15,000 feet on our first high altitude drop. For effect, there was a wooden shack on the bullseye, and when Fred saw the boards fly, he yelled out on the intercom, "I got a shack, I got a shack". We all got a boot out of that. The Second Air Force had a rule that all Bombardiers would repeat Combat Crew Training. With our record, I appealed to our Group Commander to keep Fred, but he told me it was cut and dried and out of his hands.

Winter in Boise meant heavy overcasts a lot of the time in the valley between the mountain ranges. Climbing up and flying formation above the clouds was no problem, but you had to be on your toes letting down with peaks of the nearby mountains pointing up through the cloud layer. Once breaking through to the underside, you had to blink your eyes to adjust to the twilight of early darkness and a few twinkling lights below. During our time there, there were four planes that went down, three of which went into the mountains.

After Boise, we were on our way to Topeka, Kansas for staging overseas. We were given a new B-24 M,

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just delivered from Willow Run, Michigan with only 8 hours flying time. It handled beautifully compared to others we had flown, and we were real proud to have our own plane. Someone at Willow Run had taken a black grease pencil and written under the nose turret, "God Bless This Plane And The Men Who Fly Her". We thought that was kind of special - a good send-off as we prepared to fly overseas.

The first leg was to Grenier Field in Manchester, New Hampshire. While waiting five days for decent weather for the trip to Goose Bay, Labrador, Pilots were given extra time on instruments in the Link Trainer. Before leaving Grenier, I was given sealed orders to be opened only after takeoff - orders which would tell us where we were being assigned. We knew it would be to England with the Eighth Air Force or to Italy with the Fifteenth. After opening the orders, I got on the intercom and told the crew we were headed for Italy. Years later, I learned what a great contribution the Eighth made, and with such heavy losses. I've read that they lost something like 48,000 men - more than the entire Marine Corps. Many of those losses came before long-range fighter escort - with reserve tanks - could accompany bombers all the way to the target.

The trip to Labrador was in good weather and uneventful - I remember going across the St. Lawrence Seaway, and being surprised how wide it was. The other thing I remember is the wide variation between True North and Magnetic North in that part of Canada - a substantial difference that had to be considered in your compass heading; otherwise you're way off course.

Putting it down at Goose Bay was a new experience. Everything was snow-covered, and runways had been plowed smooth with large snow banks wing-high on each side. I decided to put it down at the very beginning of the runway, knowing that braking would be tricky - once it touched down, I held the nose high as long as possible for added drag. When the nose wheel finally came down, I tapped the brakes lightly but felt no braking - I glanced out the left window to see the wheel lock and skid each time I touched the brakes. I continued to pull back on the

yoke for added drag while tapping the brakes more heavily, but avoiding locking them in a continuous skid. When we slowed sufficiently to turn off at the end and started taxiing in, we saw a 24 with its wing bent from an encounter with a snow bank.

The base had a bleak appearance, with snow piled up to the second story on barracks buildings. Temperature got down to 40 below at night and up to only 10 below during the day. I was concerned about the plane sitting out over night under those conditions, but they had large canvas covers over the engines, which made me feel a little better. Another five days were spent waiting for decent weather before the jump-off to Iceland. It took no imagination to realize the Labrador Current was very, very cold, and ditching a high-wing Lib was the last thing you'd ever want to do. Two minutes in the water would be all anyone could handle. The Briefing Officer told us what a good job we were doing flying the North Atlantic route in winter, and they had never lost but one plane. That may have sounded good to him, but it didn't help our outlook about the flight over Greenland to Iceland that time of the year.

It was at least 40 below when we took off in a light blizzard at 3:30 in the morning. Twice in my time with the crew I got on the intercom to say a prayer before take-off - this time before taking off over the North Atlantic, and later taking off in the dark from Dakar, French West Africa, across the South Atlantic. Long over water flights in a Lib weren't something you looked forward to. Climbing through the clouds, we were getting bounced around like crazy before we broke out on top. Then the first thing we saw was the brilliant display of the aurora borealis - the Northern Lights - with bright shafts of red and light grey across the sky. A few hours later at dawn, another spectacular sight came as we saw the sun rise in a clear cold sky over the ice cap of Greenland - a vast expanse of nothing but snow and ice. I was glad we didn't have to use the emergency base at Bluie West II, with its narrow uphill approach on the southwest coast they briefed us about - yet it was good to know it was there, just in case.

As we reached the warmer waters of the Gulf

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eleven kilometers northwest of Korneuburg in 1944. To get to school, I daily walked the railroad tracks with several of my schoolmates.

Prior to 26 June 1944, there was nothing exceptional that happened, but that day changed everything. During school, we received a “fliegeralarm” (flier alarm – warning of enemy aircraft) and were sent to the basement of the building for several hours. When the all-clear was sounded, we were told to go home so I walked to the railroad station. There I heard that Korneuburg had been bombed and the railroad was interrupted for a day or so. I then started walking to Korneuburg by the road. After several kilometers a red cross vehicle stopped. I was asked for my destination and they

took me to Korneuburg. This ambulance was ordered to help in that region and I was told that the town was terribly hit in the bombing that took place and there were a lot of people dead and seriously wounded.

When the ambulance dropped me off, I walked in the direction of my house and saw, for the first time in my life, destroyed buildings and parts of human bodies just dug out of the rubble and covered with dust. Coming closer to our home I could see the house, but for about 100 meters around, three buildings were destroyed and there were a lot of bomb craters – one on the road crossing near my home. On the road near our former neighbor’s house were parts of the bodies of two wives and

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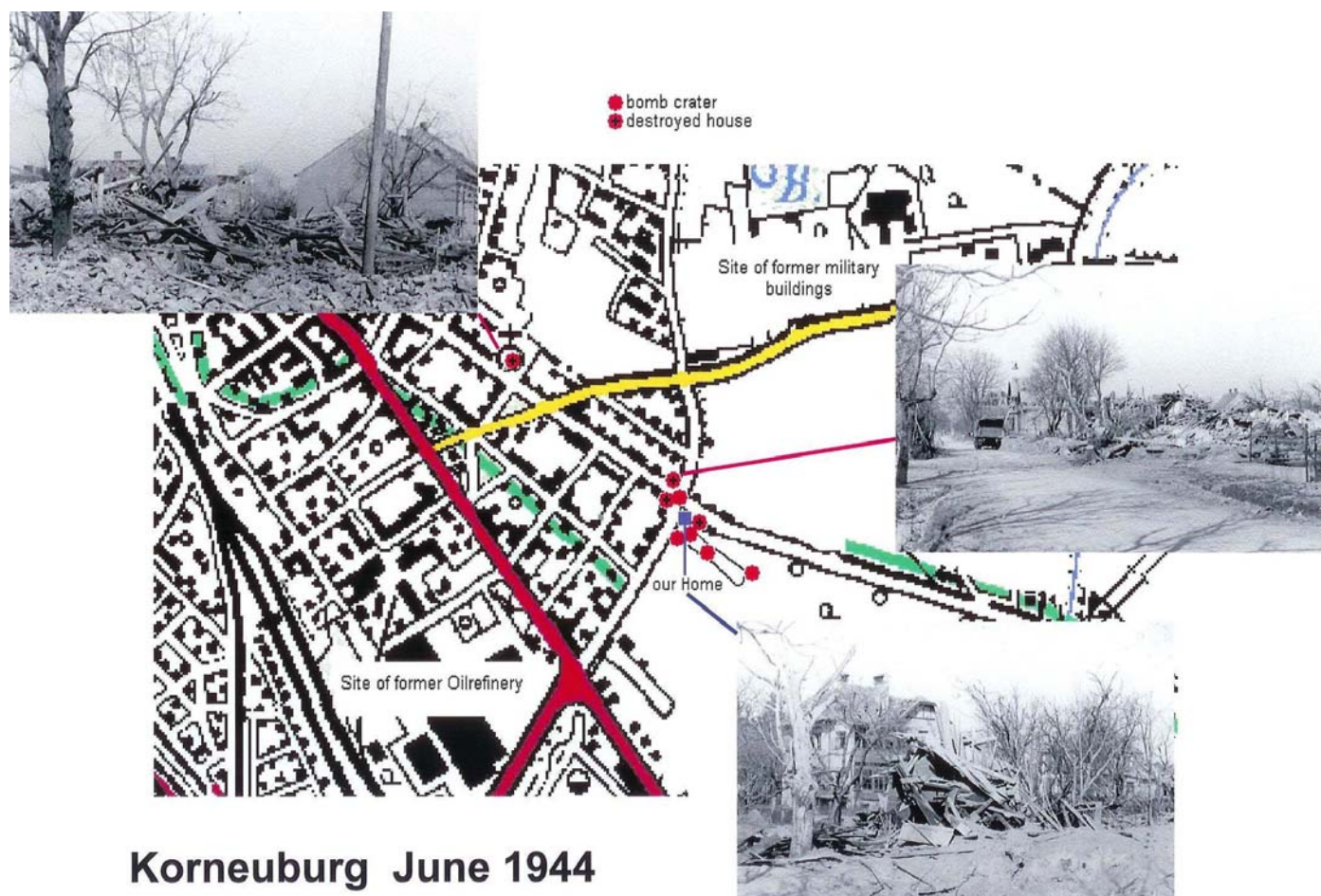


Figure 1. Overview, shows where the following photos were located.



Figure 2. Remains of the Evangelist church. View from the Bisambergerstrasse out of town.

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two children (Haselberger family). They had been placed there by men who had been ordered to dig them out. POWs were later ordered to dig for bombs which had not exploded while military personnel guarded them.

My family was very lucky. Everyone survived in the basement of our house. The fear as the bombs were hitting our neighbor's house was horrible. It was a miracle that our house stood with only minor damage, in the midst of a sea of bricks, debris and wood rubble. Bricks from the Haselberger house

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

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The Liberaider is published twice yearly on behalf of the members of the organization.
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Figure 3. Our house. In the foreground are parts of the destroyed Haselberger house.

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were thrown into our garden with some even inside the house. Neither my mother nor my grandmother ever spoke about it to me. The bomb

strikes, as near as I remember, are shown on the map and photograph. After this attack on the oil refinery, we decided that in the case of further at-

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Figure 4. Road crossing Bisambergerstrasse/Emperor Avenue from our house. Korneuburg city in the background.

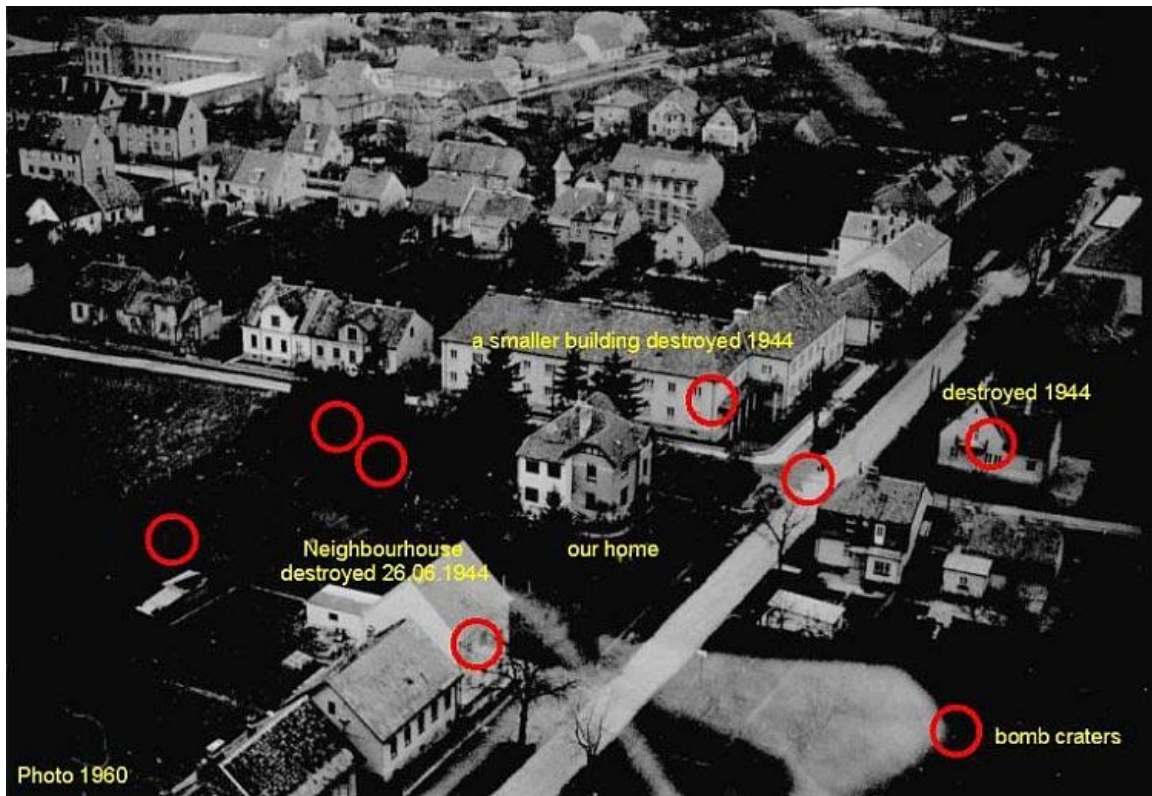


Figure 5. The crossroad from above picture in 1960. Some of the destroyed houses were rebuilt.

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tacks, to leave our house and use the basement of the parents of my aunt who lived on the other side of town.

more impacts. Prisoners of war were forced laborers to dig in the ruin of the adjoining house for the neighbor family. Gradually, parts of two adults and two children were placed by the roadside. To me it

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In our garden, near the house, there were four



Figure 6. Bomb strike photo of the 461st Bombardment Group for attack on the Korneuburg Oil Refinery at on 26 June 1944.

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is grotesque as I can still remember these people coming over to our cherry tree.

The 461st Bombardment Group participated in this mission with 32 B-24 bombers. The mission summary and bomb strike photo are on their website (www.461st.org). On 26 June 1944 67.5 tons of bombs were dropped over Korneuburg from approx. 7500 meters altitude. One aircraft was lost due to anti-aircraft fire. Three men from the crew of this bomber survived.

In the debriefing following the mission, the score on the oil refinery was given as "poor".

The Korneuburg Oil Refinery was the target of further bomb attacks except that we were in a differ-

ent part of Korneuburg when the air raid alarm was sounded. We were at our relatives at the other end of Korneuburg. I experienced a second attack on 8 July 1944. The impacts were over a kilometer distant, but the hissing and whistling of the bombs coming down followed by the detonation and pressure wave could still be felt and got on our nerves. I cannot remember having any real fear. It was more like being impatient waiting for the next impact and hoping that it would soon stop. After this attack, the sight of the bodies that I saw on the way home raise fear in me.

Although some of the bombs fell in populated areas, we were lucky again and our house remained spared. It is still in our family estate.



Figure 7. Bomb strike photo of the 461st Bombardment Group for the attack on the Korneuburg Oil Refinery on 8 July 1944.

(Continued from page 5)

Stream, it was total cloud cover beneath as we left long contrails behind in the clear skies overhead. Working our way down on instruments, we broke through the grey overcast to find no snow or ice around Keflavik, on the southwest coast of Iceland. Temperature stayed above freezing; with mud so deep you could lose a flying boot if it wasn't zipped to the top. Native Icelanders had skin that was pale and ghostly white – it was as if they never saw the sun. At the briefing the night before takeoff, I couldn't help but wonder how the Colonel screwed up to get an assignment like that.

The next leg was southeast across the North Atlantic to Scotland in the British Isles, and down to Valley, Wales on the southwest corner of Great Britain. We were told to be on our toes as we checked in at several checkpoints, and to use the IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) signal - you realized you were finally getting closer to the combat zone. Flying down the Irish Sea, I saw the Isle of Man, and recalled I had heard that was where Harris Tweeds originated. About all I remember about Wales was the rolling green countryside and the warm dark beer the natives seemed to relish – to me it was more like medicine, but you didn't let on.

Leaving Valley, it was only a short distance to the southwest tip of Great Britain called Land's End – we were leaving an English-speaking country for a totally foreign experience. As we rounded the Iberian Peninsula, we were careful to keep a 12-mile distance from Portugal, which maintained its neutrality so we were told.

Passing the mouth of the Mediterranean, we were soon over French Morocco in North Africa. The landscape took on a decidedly different look – definitely desert country. Landing at Marrakech, we knew we were in Arab territory. Marrakech had a walled city known as the Medina, and you were told not to be caught inside the Medina after six o'clock – there were reports of some weird things happening to Americans that got careless. A typical scene was an Arab and his camel drinking from a public watering trough, while his wife and children waited behind.

At the barracks, we were told there were three kinds of water – water to drink, water to brush your teeth but not swallow, and water for a shower – just don't get them mixed up. We were glad to move on, this time along the North African coast to Tunisia. I remember only one thing about Tunis, and that was a visit to Carthage with a guide. History tells us that Carthage was a key strategic point, taken and retaken a number of times during ancient days of the Roman Empire. I also remember the ruins of an ancient open-air theatre in-the-round, which would have preceded the concept in England years later.

The last leg was a short jump-off across the blue Mediterranean to Gioia, in the gulf region of Italy. Passing near Sicily, it was easy to pick out Mt. Etna, a volcano but inactive at the time. As soon as we landed, we were told the new M model we had flown over was no longer ours – too bad, because we had gotten attached to the plane with our own nose art. Grady Culbertson, Co-Pilot, had sketched an American Indian princess that was painted with the name "Sweet Sioux". Reckon we knew better than to expect to keep our own plane at that stage of the war.

In a couple of days, we were shuttled to our base with the 461st Bomb Group at Torretta Field west of Cerignola - about 20 miles southwest of Foggia near the spur of the Italian boot in Southern Italy. We shared the base with two other groups, the 451st and the 484th.

We knew the worst of the war was past history in March 1945, but we also knew the Germans were desperate and the war was still on. Tents with dirt floors, Army cots with GI blankets (forget sheets), powdered eggs, outdoor privies – Southern Italy was peasant farm country - yet we were in a lot better shape than the GI's with rifles in foxholes.

After brief combat orientation and before my first mission, we got word that FDR had passed away – our president from 1933 to 1945 – a sad time for all of us, and the end of an era. In just a few weeks the war was over, but not before we got our exposure to combat, and to see what flak looked like – a bed of lethal black clouds right on your level that you had to

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(Continued from page 11)

plow through from your Initial Point to the target. I remembered reading something Winston Churchill once said, and that was there's no better feeling than to be shot at and missed. Within another two weeks, we knew we were some of the lucky ones that would be going home in one piece.

I never lost my dream of being a fighter pilot. Over 50 years later, I had a chance to get into a P-51 Mustang at a fly-in in Greensboro. It was an incredible feeling – I felt like I was strapping on the airplane, and ready to barrel through the sky – I felt like I was a part of the plane. Through the years you realize you have to accept things in life as they come, yet I have often wondered how different things might have been, had it not been for that fork in the road at Craig Field in Alabama.

Fred Noegel, Bombardier, did not deploy to Italy – Bombardiers were required to repeat Combat Crew Training. Fred later was assigned to the 5th Air Force in the Pacific (Deceased 2002).

461 st Bomb Group 767 th Squadron	
Guyon Phillips	Pilot
Grady Culbertson	Co-Pilot
Graham Kerr	Navigator
Walt Dubina	Flight Engineer / Top Turret
Ed Elliott	Assistant Engineer / Waist Gunner
John Grubar	Radioman / Waist Gunner
Mike Keuziak	Assistant Radioman / Nose Turret
Bob Sundeen	Armorer / Ball Turret
Walt Bailey	Assistant Armorer / Tail Gunner

THE WORLD WAR II WAR BRIDES ASSOCIATION is looking for more WAR BRIDES!

Our membership is made up of foreign-born wives and husbands of U.S. military personnel who married during the WWII era and since WWII.

We currently have members from 22 different countries!

Spouses of War Brides/Grooms, their children and their grandchildren may also become members.

We hold monthly luncheon meetings in some areas of the country.

Our annual reunion is held at different locations throughout the United States.

Our Association publishes a very informative and interesting bimonthly newsletter called the War Brides Courier.

The WWII War Brides Association urges you to consider joining so many of your sister brides in fellowship and joyful memories of your heritage, joys and adjustments in your adopted country.

Our next War Brides Reunion will be held in
San Antonio, Texas in October of 2006.

If you know of a foreign-born war bride, please give her this notice or have her contact me for more information.

Ms. Erin Craig
President
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PO Box 1812
El Centro CA 92244-1812
Phone: (760) 352-4191
Email: Classicalmuse@sbcglobal.net

Mail Call

I thought the following was worth including in the Mail Call section though it's rather long. I hope you agree.

Mary Jane Smith
Deleted
Deleted

"MEMORY FROM SIXTY YEARS AGO"

Date: 12-05-03

Dear Eddie:

1943 – A seventeen year old girl fell in love with a handsome flyboy. It was Christmas, and they were leaving Fresno soon for dangerous places un-named.

She had little money, and her parents were dead. Her three brothers were all in the service. YOU, dear heart, lent her \$100 so she could buy her handsome flyboy an Onyx ring, with a very small diamond.

That was me, and, I have owed you one hundred dollars for the last sixty years!! Please... please.. Don't charge me interest. I couldn't afford it!! I've never forgotten!! Each Christmas I meant to send you the \$100, so now here it is. We still have the body of the ring; the stone is cracked, the diamond gone; but it's the sentiment that counts.

Best wishes for all the holidays, the New Year. Thank you then, now, and always.

Love,
Mary Jane

Ed Trenner
B-2 Juniper East
Yarmouth, ME 04096-1439

Reminisce from Ed Trenner

I was an Air Force Pilot, commissioned in 1943 and

assigned to the 461st Bomb Group, 764th Bomb Squadron, flying B-24 four-engine bombers.

We were stationed at Hammer Field, Fresno, California. One night we were assigned to practice a "night flight mission" unexpectedly. A party had been scheduled previously at the base rec area and the officers were expected to attend. We had promised to be there. Since the exercise did not include any bombing practice, I suggested we leave Lt. Jack Smith, our bombardier, back at the base so he could attend the gathering. That night he met Mary Jane!!! It was the start of a super relationship that has lasted more than 59 years of marriage!!

Soon after Christmas, we were off to Europe re-assigned to the 15th Air Force. We flew 47 bombing missions. Our bomber, named "Swee'pea", crashed back at Cerignola, Italy on July 25, 1944. Jack and I were together on every mission we flew.

Mary Jane and Jack were married in Trenton, New Jersey (his home town) on Nov. 2, 1944. They raised a large family and have lived in Fresno these many years.

Mary Jane's note reminded me of the ring for Jack. What a special surprise. Our navigator, Al Markovitch from Exeter, New Hampshire, was Jack's best man at the wedding. Our co-pilot, Bill Paradise, flew 45 missions with us. He was called on to substitute as a first pilot on what was his 46th mission. His ship was shot down over Romania with no word. When I returned to my home in New York City, I went to visit Bill's wife and mother in Staten Island expecting to commiserate with them over his missing-in-action status. That morning, the Red Cross had sent notification that Bill was in a prison camp in Bulgaria and that he was freed by the Soviets!! It turned the day into a big party. So many stories. The Air Force concept of keeping flight crews together as a "team" really worked.

(Continued on page 14)

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Call it “reminisce”, but Mary Jane’s letter led me to ponder many things.

I was typical of the men volunteering for flight training. I had never been in an aircraft until my first hour at Americus, Georgia Air Base. We were told that if we did not solo within 8 hours of training, we were washed out of the program.

My first “cross-country flight”, solo, in a Stearman bi-wing two-seater, was to three small towns near the Mississippi. Six months later, we flew the Atlantic from Belem, Brazil to Dakar, Africa in a 34-ton B-24 aircraft.

We got an R & R (Rest and Relaxation) for one week at the Isle of Capri. We loaned our officer’s uniforms to our six enlisted men so we could all be together in the officers’ hotel. Mt. Aetna (nearby) began acting up so we got an extra three days on Capri. The boats were not running so we could not be taken back to the mainland.

Col. Glantzberg, our Group CO, pinned the Distinguished Flying Cross, Purple Heart and Air Medals on me before we returned home.

Mary Jane gave me a small black toy lamb, which we hung up in the cockpit. We all touched it “for luck” every time we flew.

I remember that I was an unexpected twin (a “preemie” weighing in at 2 lbs. 11 oz.), born in 1921 on the kitchen table in our home in New York City. This makes me feel pretty good about my life’s achievements.

August 17, 2005

Dear Hughes:

Nice talking with you last week. I did call Bill Paradise’s son in Las Vegas, where Bill resided when he passed away on March 5, 2005.

Bill was “lost” on a flight to the Ploesti area on July 22, 1944. We (crew #18) were designated as “stand-by” crew. When a pilot was needed, they came to

our barracks and woke Bill up instead of me. He certainly was qualified to be a first pilot, but it was an error. He should have awoken me.

We had tried to stay together as we hoped to reach 50 missions together. There were no reports of his status from that flight so we had assumed he was killed.

As I told you when we chatted last week, I went to visit Bill’s wife and mother in Staten Island (one of NYC’s boroughs), and just as I arrived from Manhattan (another NYC borough), Bill’s wife, Edna, received a telegram from the Red Cross explaining that he was alive and in a prison camp. I cannot tell you the JOY that overwhelmed everyone. Our gloom turned into a huge party. Ultimately Bill was freed by the Russians.

One of his worries at that time was that there was no protection on the ground from the B-24s unloading their bombs over the camp. They were not allowed to dig trenches nor protect themselves in any way. Unlike today, bombs, once armed, had to be released. If a target was under clouds, we aimed at the city and dropped. Now planes can land with bombs loaded.

July 25, 1944 was the day we (crew #18) crash landed back at Cerignola. I was given the Purple Heart for injuries I received on that day. Your dad pinned the DFC, the Purple Heart and the air medals on me. I earned five of those.

Reunion update: Markey, navigator, is not well. His wife is sick. He cannot make the reunion. Jesse Luke from Oklahoma, flight engineer, is very ill. Manuel Weber, our radio man, was injured on our 13th flight and lost the use of his right arm. He now has serious eye problems. Jack Smith, bombardier, is in rehab with serious back problems.

So I am the only healthy one from crew #18. I cannot know if we (wife Noreen) will go. I am heading for my 84th birthday this December 2005.

It is interesting that three friends who were in primary training wound up on the same crew. I was the

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pilot and two who washed out as pilots but trained as navigator and bombardier.

Dear Editor:

I was the pilot of a B-24 in WWII that served in combat in the 15th Air Force and flew out of a small town near Foggia, Italy. As a crew, we flew 47 missions crashing back at the base in Cerignola, Italy on July 25, 1944.

My reminiscence relates to the method of getting crews formed to fly combat. The B-24 that I flew had a crew of ten men. After getting my wings I was sent to four-engine school in Tennessee where I had two months of special training.

This story speaks of the time our crew formed in Boise, Idaho.

Pilot training was in three phrases – primary, basic and advanced. My first primary training was at Smyrna, Georgia. Among the class called “43-F” were two other student cadets – Jack Smith from Trenton, NJ and Al Markivitch from Exeter, New Hampshire. We became friendly. A student pilot must complete every phrase perfectly or he was dropped out. Both Jack and Mark were washed out and could not continue in the pilot program. Jack got air-sick at low altitude and Mark landed too high off the ground three times too often. I continued on, won my wings and became a pilot.

I completely lost track of my two buddies. Since all three of us had qualified to take pilot, bombardier, or navigator training, they were able to go on to other schools. Jack, unbeknownst to me, went to bombardier school. There, they found out that if he was put on oxygen right at ground level, he did not get sick. He graduated as an excellent bomb thrower. Mark selected navigator school, where he prospered as well. All of us were busy in our separate schools and completely lost touch.

After getting my wings, I became an officer and was assigned to the Fourth Air Force training in the far west. The first stop was Gowen Field in Boise, Idaho to get the squadron formed with crew assign-

ments. My first chore was to meet the three other officers and six sergeant gunners. I went inside the Headquarters and stood looking over the list of officers that were being assigned to crews and was amazed to see the names of my two friends on the bombardier and navigator lists. What to do! Since the concept of a crew as a “team” was Air Force policy, what better than having people who knew one another on the same crew.

After trying to figure out which officer could be approached to ask, I finally looked around headquarters while all the brass squadron commanders were busy and spotted a non-com with more stripes than I had ever seen who seemed to be in charge of things. Approaching him to ask how to request getting Jack and Mark assigned to me, he just smiled and said, “Lieutenant, you are lucky! You have come to the only one who can change those lists and, I think it would be great to have three pals as the basis of a crew.” Then, lo and behold, the very next day, they were both assigned to me and my team.

As it turned out, we were one of four of the original 18 of our squadron crews that completed their missions. In its first year, the 15th Air Force lost 1,700 fliers.

After all these years, Mark, Jack, myself, and three of my sergeants are still in touch. I think that that master sergeant in Idaho gave us a great start. As for the crash back at the base, that would make a great survival story!



Merijane and I were watching the San Antonio Spurs game last night, when I went through some sort of involuntary brain scan. For no apparent reason and with no stimulus whatever, I suddenly recalled an incident I should have included in Chapter 12, “*Afterward*”, of my World War II memoir.

You may recall that this chapter included an account of my two months at Long Beach Army Air Field, just prior to separation from service, and that my roommate's name was Robert Rogers.

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Vahl Vladyka

Addendum



On a Saturday night before payday, "Bob", and I were in our room on the base. I conclude it was before payday, because the only reason we would have remained on base on a Saturday night would have been lack of finances. About 2000 hours, I decided in desperation to check out the officers club, but "Bob" elected to stay with the book he was reading.

As I neared the enlisted men's club in dim light from their clubhouse, I heard sounds of a scuffle, punctuated by sharp utterances in Spanish and responses in English. A step or two later, I made out figures of a standing female and two males on the ground, one supine and the other straddling him and holding both his arms fast to the earth.

I walked up to the group, identified myself and rank, and asked, "What's going on here". The man on top, an African-American sailor, spoke up and told me that he was bringing the young Hispanic lady to the dance, when they were accosted by the prone Hispanic soldier, who claimed to have been a spurned suitor of the girl. About this time, I became able to discern that the soldier held a knife in one hand pinned to the ground by the sailor.

At this point, I ordered the soldier to release the knife, which I then kicked away from the two men. I then asked the sailor if he was capable of holding the soldier until I could summon military police, and when he gave an affirmative response, I went into the club and directed an NCO to call the MP's.

Through all this, the dance band in the enlisted men's club played on.

I then returned to the scene, and within five minutes the MP's arrived and took the soldier into custody, following which I made my way to our officers club.

After that interlude, the remainder of the evening was pretty dull.

Dear Sirs:

My father's life came to an end on Nov.15th. It was truly a sad day for our family and our community. His greatest pride, other than his family, was the service he gave during the Big War, as he called it, as a young pilot of one of the Liberators. His lifelong love of flying kept him young and happy. Because of Parkinson's, dementia and other health problems, he lost the ability to enjoy his passion - restoring and flying a number of WWII aircraft. He belonged to many associations, Warbirds of America, etc. He helped start the Air Force Museum in Warner Robins, GA. He retired from the Air Force Reserves in 1972, I believe, and had received the rank of Lt. Col. He was buried in his ceremonial uniform with full military honors in our family plot in his hometown of Columbus, GA. My sisters and I sang his favorite song, *Beyond the Blue Horizon*, at the end of the service. We never knew that that was the song associated with his bomber group. The service that he was pressed into at such an early age made a remarkable impression on him and made him the strong, daring and brave man that he was. His life was a success and he made an impression on many, many people. After dementia took away most of the reality in his world, he continued to fly sorties, of which he could remember many of his comrades and even what the weather was like on those days, long ago, in the Big War. I hope there is a place in your magazine for my father's passing to be recorded. Although he was just a young, scared, quickly-trained pilot, who may have not been recorded as anymore than a number, to him he succeeded in the missions asked of him and he lived with the memories of loss, survival and ultimate defeat of the enemy.

Thank you for your time and please contact me if there is anything I can submit to you to have his memory honored. I know he would have liked to say "Keep 'em flying" or nod goodbye to his surviving crewmembers.

(Continued on page 21)

461st Bombardment Group (H) Association Membership

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

Ed Stevenson
166 Sandy Acres Drive
Quitman, LA 71268

If you have any questions, you can E-Mail Ed at ESteve68@aol.com.

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

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

Type of membership desired:		Life: <input type="checkbox"/>	Associate: <input type="checkbox"/>	Child: <input type="checkbox"/> Father's Name:	
First Name:			Last Name:		
Street Address:					
City:		State:		ZIP:	
Phone Number:		E-Mail Address:			
Squadron:		Crew #:		MOS:	
ASN:					
Check No.			Amount:		

Charleston Travel and Cruise Center

1525 Sam Rittenberg Blvd., Charleston, SC 29407

800-868-0132 843-556-8646 843-556-3365(fax)

May 16, 2006

Dear Liberaiders,

This year's reunion will be held October 5-8, 2006 in Seattle, Washington, a very beautiful and interesting city.

We will be staying at the Marriott Sea-Tac Airport Hotel, which has recently been completely renovated. The rate will be \$109.00 plus tax. I have visited the hotel and I am confident our stay there will be a pleasant one.

We have arranged two tours with Gray Line of Seattle. On Friday we will tour the city and have an hour cruise on Elliott Bay:

We will depart the Marriott Hotel at 8:00am for a city tour of Seattle. The tour will include The City Center, Sports stadiums, Univ. of Washington, the Fishermans Terminal, the Queen Anne neighborhood, Space Needle, the Ballard Locks and more. We will arrive at the famous Pike Place Market at 11:00am for lunch on your own. At 12:30pm we will depart for the Argosy Cruise Terminal for a 1-hour Harbor Cruise, returning to the hotel at 3:00pm

On Saturday we will have a scenic mountain drive:

We will depart the Marriott Hotel at 9:45am for a Scenic Mountain Drive. The tour coach will proceed over Highway 18 towards I-90 E to the Snoqualmie Mountain Pass. We will have picture taking opportunities at the summit before arriving at the Summit Lodge for a "Burger Bar" lunch. Afterwards we will head to the Snoqualmie Falls and then over the Lake Washington floating bridge, returning to the hotel by 3:00pm.

Those who would like to visit the Boeing plant will be able to make those arrangements on their own when they arrive. Also Hertz has a desk in the Marriott lobby.

Thirty airlines serve the Sea-Tac Airport. I found it very easy to fly in and out.

We look forward to seeing you in Seattle!

Sincerely,

Bob Hayes

President, 461st Bomb Group

461st Bomb Group-Reunion 2006

HOTEL INFORMATION

DATE: October 5-8, 2006

LOCATION: **Seattle Marriott Sea-Tac Airport**
3201 South 176th Street
Seattle, WA 98188

ROOM RATES: \$109.00 per room per night plus tax

RESERVATIONS: (206) 201-2000 /OR/ (800) 314-0925
Tell them you are with the 461st Bomb Group.
Major credit card required for guarantee.

PARKING: Free

Seattle Sea-Tac Airport Shuttle: Free shuttle operates 24hrs/day

461st Bomb Group*October 5th – 8th, 2006*

Seattle, WA

Please return this form no later than August 28th, 2006

NAME _____ SQUADRON _____

SPOUSE _____

CHILDREN/GUEST NAMES _____

(Note: Please enter names as you would like them to appear on name tags)

NAME(S) FOR NAMETAGS _____

ADDRESS _____ CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____ PHONE _____

Registration Fee _____ @ \$10.00 per person subtotal _____

of persons

Oct. 6th**Seattle City Tour including Argosy Harbor Cruise (Lunch on your own):**

_____ @ \$54.00 per person subtotal _____

of persons

Oct. 6th**Squadron Dinner: *please choose from list below:***_____ *Roasted Pork Loin Chop* _____ *Dijon Chicken* _____ *Chili Seared Chicken*

_____ @ \$37.00 per person subtotal _____

of persons

Oct. 7th**Mountain Tour including Lunch:**

_____ @ \$43.00 per person subtotal _____

of persons

Oct. 7th**Dinner/Dance-Buffer Dinner “Taste of the Northwest”:***Aged New York Sirloin fire roasted Mushrooms & Herbs with a Washington Merlot Sauce*

_____ @ \$49.00 per person subtotal _____

of persons

Oct. 8th**Memorial Breakfast** _____ @ \$18.00 per person subtotal _____

of persons

GRAND TOTAL _____**PLEASE COMPLETE THIS REGISTRATION FORM AND MAIL WITH CHECK TO:****Charleston Travel****Attn: Kelly McKenzie****1525 Sam Rittenberg Blvd.****Charleston, SC 29407**

Check the website for additional details.

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Please email me at pgwebb02539@yahoo.com. And if I have somehow contacted the wrong person, or if you have any better ideas for me to follow up on, please let me hear from you. My name is Phyllis Gray Webb. Thanks again for your time.

~~~~~

Dear Mr. O'Bannon:

My father, Sgt. Hershel R. Andruess, flew with the 461st. I have heard him mention your name on more than one instance, so I decided to direct my email to you. Dad has Alzheimer's disease very bad and I do not expect him to survive to the end of the year. My brother and I tried to videotape some of the stories that he used to tell. Unfortunately we were too late. One story has intrigued me and I was wondering if anyone else in the squadron/group remembers it.

Dad tells of a mission to ... (doesn't really matter where) and during the battle, someone from the 461st shot at the top-cover inadvertently. The next morning, the top-cover Mustangs paid a visit to the tent-city on the side of a hill (in Italy), to give them an aircraft identification lesson. (Dad had said that you could not tell a ME-109 from a P-51B at 1,000 yards.) This ended with the tents being blown down and the Mustangs leaving. Does anyone else remember this story? Could I come & video the recounting it? How many Mustangs were there? How low did they go? Dad seemed to think that they were the Tuskegee Airmen. Could this be true? Were they from the 322nd FS? If not does anyone remember the markings?

I realize that time is working against me. I would really love to find someone else who remembers this story and is willing to re-tell it. Could you put this in the newsletter? I am willing to travel to wherever the reunion is this year (and/or to wherever the storyteller is located), to video stories that members have to tell. I feel compelled to capture these stories before they are lost.

I guess that I am volunteering to be the second-generation historian for the 461st.

Awaiting Orders,  
Col. Stephen F. Andruess

~~~~~

These are photos of the Vesuvius crater taken by my friend, Laval Tremblay about whom I wrote in "Operational Training". Their plane was about the same altitude as ours, 400', when our crew flew over the recently erupting volcano.

You may recall that Laval and I lost track of one another after we went overseas. His son sent these to me on a CD, with word that his father died in a 1967 crash of a 707 refueling plane he was flying.

Laval apparently took a sightseeing tour, as our crew did one day. In addition to these photos, they also flew over Rome, at a much higher altitude than we. The latter photos are not good quality and are weather obscured, so I did not attach them.

Vahl Vladyka



Mt. Vesuvius in sight



Mt. Vesuvius—closer



Mt. Vesuvius—
approaching crater



Mt. Vesuvius—looking
into crater

~~~~~

Toretta Field leaves its signature in Southern Italy

Although the former home for the 461st has long

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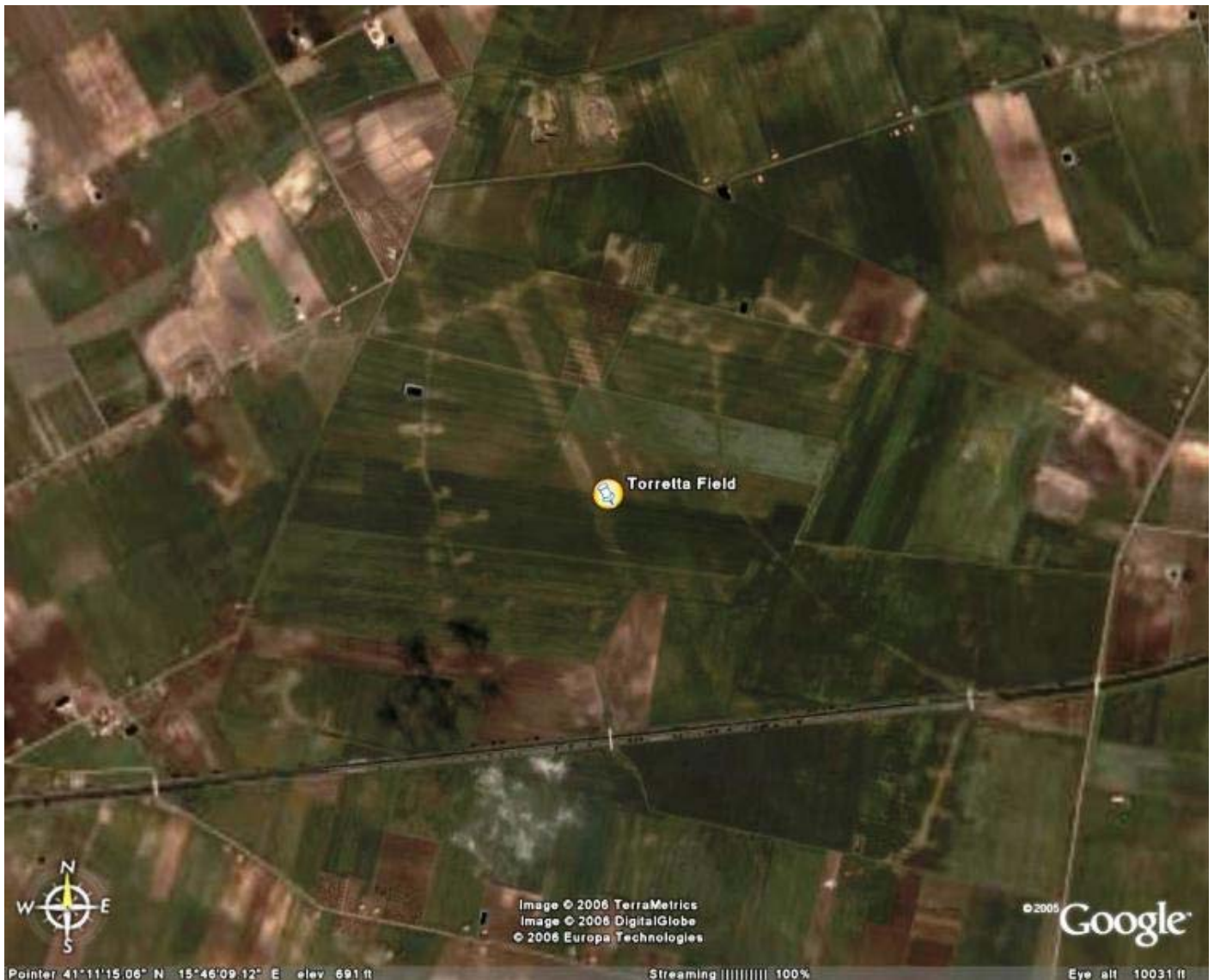
since been abandoned to farming its ghost is still visible from the air. Moving gravel and clay around to provide drainage and strengthen the runways and hardstands back in the early 1940's disturbed the natural face of the soil so that its outline is still distinguishable if viewed carefully from the air.

If you have Google Earth, place your pointer over the following coordinates in southern Italy:

41° 11' 15" N  
15° 46' 09" E

Look carefully, highway E482 runs East-West across the south end of the two runways which are oriented to about 340° - 160°. Look for the hardstands that are to the East and West of the twin runways. Cerignola is a few miles N.E. of the field.

Lorn W. Westfall, Houston, Texas



Torretta Field, Italy as it appears today

*Don't join the book burners. Don't think you're going to conceal faults by concealing evidence that they never existed. Don't be afraid to go in your library and read every book...*

Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890 - 1969)

*(Continued from page 1)*

Flying out of Torretta Field, Cerignola, Italy - near Foggia.

Trefry A. Ross, S/Sgt., Radio Operator, right waist gunner

(Written December 17, 1976. 32 years have elapsed so my narrative may have a few discrepancies; although, I doubt it, as it seems like it happened yesterday, and most of the happening is quite vivid in my memory.)

"Alright you guys, out of the sack. Come on, let's go! Keerist! You wanna sleep all day! - come on, let's go - - Jesus, watta bunch!" My eyes open slowly, and staring at me in the dark is the orderly with his flashlight. It's 3:00 am and time for another flight over enemy territory. I lie there trying vainly to remove my body from my warm sack; and sack it was. In order to keep warm we (the enlisted men anyway) used to crawl into our mattress covers - which in essence were sacks - -this way we could keep a little warmer. The original "Italian sleeping bag" you might call it. Anyway, I'm lying there listening to "Putt-putt" get a razzing from Frank. Putt-putt is Fred Gaul, the flight engineer, and called Putt-putt because one of his jobs is to fire up the little gasoline engine (like a power mower) which powers the airplane until the engines are started. Frank Yesia, the ball gunner, is a wise guy. Frank is from Cicero, Illinois, home of the gangsters, and although Frank is far from the so-called "tough-nut", he is still held in awe by a few of us as having come from that tough part of Chicago - Al Capone's old stomping ground. Anyway, he's needling Putt-putt, the youngest of the crew, and the "goat". We all have a good laugh and finally manage to shake ourselves from the sacks.

Our enlisted men's tent was comprised of six men: Thomas Diebert, S/Sgt., top turret gunner; Joe Mergo, S/Sgt., tail gunner; Roy Doe, Sgt., nose gunner; Frank Yesia, Cpl, ball gunner; Fred Gaul, Sgt., flight engineer-waist gunner; and I, right waist gunner-radio operator. We were a close knit crew. I think we were possibly the most congenial crew in Italy. We all got along great. The officers, who lived

in a separate tent in another part of the airfield, were considered by us as "regular guys". They were a good group. I know this "camaraderie" was not universal. I firmly believe we had a unique crew, and it was a shame it all came to an end this 17th day of December 1944.

So here we are, struggling into our clothes, each man dressing as he saw fit - it was an informal uniform we wore - we weren't going to stand inspection or bow before the C.O., so we chose the most comfortable and warmest clothing each preferred. I usually wore my O.D.'s (wool shirt and pants) for warmth. We later picked up our electrically heated suits, parachutes and oxygen masks at the flight line. We finally get dressed and stagger over to the hall for breakfast. One thing I can say about combat crews and combat flying - we never wanted for a warm place to sleep or good things to eat. It was hell over the target but, before and after, we had it pretty dammed good! So here we are, eating our eggs and bacon, plenty of it, along with coffee and toast, and razzing each other about last night. Wow! What a night that was. First, I'd like to explain how it was when we weren't flying. One night we had movies or played ping-pong. The next night the Enlisted Men's Club was open. So, on alternate nights it was either movie, or the Enlisted Men's Club. The movies weren't bad, held outdoors, usually an old Betty Grable or Bob Hope movie, but anything was ok as long as it had a few laughs in it. The Enlisted Men's Club was just the mess hall - after 8:00 pm. It was a bar, period, but the drinks were cheap enough - 50¢ each, or three for a dollar. Needless to say, we all ordered three at a time. There wasn't much choice - I can't remember for sure what else there was, but I know we always had 101 proof British Rum and grapefruit juice from the kitchen. It made a potent drink and, at three for a dollar, it didn't take many to relieve our frustration and anxieties. So, at breakfast this morning we were discussing the last night's events. It wasn't much - after six, nine, or twelve rum and grapefruits we were feeling no pain. Roy Doe was singing over and over, "Roll me over in the clover, lay me down and do it again, roll me over in the clover, lay me down and do it again ---". I can still see it as plain as yesterday - and hear Roy singing. It

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*(Continued from page 23)*

wasn't long before he was out of it, so we got the stretcher and lugged him home to the tent. Knowing 3:00 am was going to come around quite soon, we all joined Roy and flaked out. So here we were a few hours later, eating like nothing had happened, (I wish I could do that now) and razzing each other.

Breakfast over, we had to go to the general briefing for the flight and then we went to our respective special briefings. My Radio Operator briefing usually consisted of frequencies for the day, and I picked up my chaff (aluminum foil) which I threw out over the target to foul up the enemy radar. Next stop was the plane. Each man had a specific job to do - a general pre-flight. We checked our guns, loaded them - - I checked the radio equipment, etc. We put on our electrically heated suits - which were thin suits, similar to thermal underwear, laced with wiring, and had a plug which we plugged into a jack on the airplane. Over the electrically heated suit we put on a heavy jacket and pants which protected the relatively thin and fragile electric suit and was heavy enough to protect one from the cold in the event of an electricity failure - even though it seemed as if you were freezing to death. So here we were, all dressed up and no place to go - as it were.

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

We're off, climbing through the grey overcast to find the sun at 20,000 plus. Where is everyone? Jesus! - We're all alone, We'll never make it -- but we

try. Soon, far out over the Adriatic, we spot the rest of the group and try to catch up. We are heading for Blechhammer - the oil refineries - the dreaded target - No. 2 on the list, right after Berlin. The second toughest, and the longest distance from Foggia. All of a sudden I'm feeling cold. What the hell, my electric suit must be going out. Keerist! It's freezing! About this time, I look out the left waist window and see the group way off to our left. I'm wondering to myself what the hell they are doing way over there, and here we are flying tail-end Charlie when we should be right wing (as we had worked our way up) but, having left the ground late due to magneto trouble, we had to settle for what we could grab and that was easing into the slot at the ass end.

I couldn't help but think about what we had been through, all the previous missions, all the flak, all the tension, watching the others go down, fail to come back, working our way up from tail-end Charlie to right wing. Boy! Only one more to go and we would be squadron leader! I recalled the first few days when I talked with some of the crews that had been here for awhile. We were talking about R&R (that's short for "rest and rehabilitation"). It was a known fact that our rest camp was on the Isle of Capri, on the far side of Italy from where we were. So, I innocently asked - "Well, how is it on the Isle of Capri - how's the wine - what are the girls like?" He laughs, and remarks, "Who knows? No one has ever lasted long enough to get their 25 missions in and go!" It didn't take long to find out what the score was. Day by day crews didn't come back - and now we were heading for the same fate, although we didn't know it then.

So here I am, freezing to death I thought, and wondering how come we're all alone - when over the intercom comes Joe's voice, "Fighters! Here they come!" Almost immediately his exclamation was followed by the sound and reverberation of his guns. I'm looking out the waist window but can't see any fighters as they were to my rear and high, but it wasn't more than three or four seconds from the time Joe yelled when it sounded like rain on a tin roof, and the 20mm shells from the fighters were ripping through the roof of the plane, missing Putt-putt and me by

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inches, and exploding into the forward part of the plane. The oxygen bottles on the deck near the bomb bay doors blew up and caught fire. I was encased in a sheet of flame, my clothes were on fire. The aircraft took a violent lunge upward. I was knocked flat to the bottom of the plane and momentarily stunned. You see, Putt-putt and I, being waist gunners, just stood up - we were not sitting in a seat or turret, strapped down with safety belts - so with any violent maneuvers of the aircraft we found ourselves hanging on for dear life or being thrown around like rag dolls. Now I was on my knees looking for my parachute, the interior of the plane was a mass of fire. I found my chute (it was a chest pack and I had to snap it on the harness which I was wearing). It seemed like hours - I couldn't lift it - it felt like a ton. Little did I realize then that we were in a flat spin, and I was under negative "G" forces.

I finally managed to get the chute snapped to the harness and then, just as I dove head first through the waist window, I saw Putt-putt standing there watching me and assumed that he followed. I hadn't wasted any time once I was able to move. I just knew I had to get away from the fire. I didn't even take the time to disconnect my oxygen mask, intercom, or electrical suit. In the ensuing dive through the window I just ripped everything loose as the slack in all the wires was taken up. My oxygen mask was torn from my face. Due to the centrifugal force I didn't clear the side of the aircraft and my left foot was caught on the window sill. I kicked back with my right foot and suddenly I was free - - falling through the bright sunshine. Pulling the ripcord was an involuntary act - I don't remember actually doing it. God, it was quiet - so peaceful - so still. I looked around - - - nothing - - - no chutes - - - no planes - - - the overcast was way below, no ground in sight, bright sun overhead and clouds below. I couldn't get over how quiet it was; then I began to panic - - it felt like I was just hanging there. There was no sense of motion - nothing close to relate a downward drift to. I just knew I was stuck. How the hell was I going to get down! All of a sudden I found I couldn't breathe! I was in pain! I didn't realize it then, but I was suffering from lack of oxygen. It was a horrible feeling. I couldn't stand it. I wanted to end it - - now! I tried to unsnap my

chute. I couldn't do it because of my weight. I wanted to unbuckle my harness and free myself so I could fall free and quick to relieve my misery, but I couldn't get the harness unbuckled either - because of my weight. It was approximately 12:05 pm - - at about 26,000 feet - - I passed out from lack of oxygen.

The next thing I knew, I was under the clouds and coming down near a village. I could see various buildings - - a church spire quite prominently. There was snow on the ground and I saw that I was about to come down in a plowed field on the edge of town. I could see some figures running to where I was about to land. I was coming down backwards. I reached up to shift the risers of the chute to try and turn around -- when I hit the ground. I hadn't realized how fast I was descending and hit the ground unexpectedly, and immediately folded up like an accordion. It was probably a lucky thing as I did not brace myself, but landed like a limp rag and, therefore, did not break any bones. I lay there for a few seconds getting my breath back. I wiggled my toes to make sure my back wasn't broken -- it had felt like I had broken every bone in my body. Just as I struggled to my feet I remembered the figures I had noticed running across the field. By now they were close upon me. I could see they were German soldiers. They were shouting and yelling, "pistola, pistola" and making gestures by holding their hands under their right armpit. They wanted my Colt .45 automatic pistol. We had been issued the pistol and shoulder holster, but were advised not to carry it as it was very unlikely we would be in a position to use it. Generally, the situation was such that an armed airman was treated badly by the Germans - as opposed to better treatment for an unarmed airman. Anyway, the German soldiers were having a foot race to see who could get to me first and get my pistol. I suppose I should say, at this point in my story, that I could have "John Wayne'd" it and pulled out my .45 pistol and shot the first five or six soldiers - - like in the movies -- and then stood there while the rest shot me full of holes; but then I wouldn't be here writing this story - would I? You see, I had landed just across the road from a German army camp, and had literally thousands of soldiers to welcome me to their coun-

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try. The first solder to reach me was disappointed to find no pistol, so he took my helmet instead. The helmet and my parachute was all they took. I was not molested in any way.

I was then escorted to the Commandant's office, where I received a cordial welcome and had a nice chat with the Commandant - who, by the way, spoke fluent English. I had bailed out at 12:01 pm. It was 29 minutes later when I hit the ground - 12:30 pm when I had first glanced at my watch. It was now almost 1 :00 pm, and the Commandant has offered me a cigarette and a glass of brandy. I'm sitting there petting his big Irish setter and feeling relaxed and free. It was just beginning to penetrate my senses that the war was over - - for me anyway - - selfish though it may sound. I tell the Commandant my name, rank and serial number - discuss my home and family, and exchange a few pleasantries. No military or vital security information was discussed whatsoever. After a few moments, I noticed him looking at me rather oddly, as if he were worried about something. He picked up his phone and made a short call. About this time my eyes were beginning to feel rather strange - a tight sensation - no pain, but a feeling as though I couldn't blink my eyes. A moment later the door opened and a doctor entered. He gave me a brief examination and spoke to the Commandant in German. I did not know what he said. The doctor left in a few minutes, and no sooner had he gone then two soldiers, in full uniforms, with Schmeiser machine pistols, appeared and the Commandant said they would escort me to town. He wished me well, we shook hands and I was off. The town center was about three miles away, and we walked. We had walked several hundred yards before my thoughts brought me recollections of stories we had heard about the Germans. The farmers would stick you to death with their pitchforks - - the doctors had enormous hypodermic needles to fill you with poison - - the soldiers would march you to a remote spot in the forest and shoot you - - and on and on -- my imagination ran rampant with all the thoughts. I was positive these two soldiers were going to kill me. They spoke no English and I no German. They would motion and point with their machine pistols the direction I was to take. Right into the woods,

along a narrow and isolated path - - this was it - - I just knew it! At first they were along side , one on each side; presently, they were talking among themselves and were slowly getting behind me. The slower they walked, the slower I walked. I wasn't about to let them get behind so they could shoot me.

Well, it wasn't long before the path widened and we were on a road. A few houses appeared and then the town. I was taken to what looked like a school (at any rate, it was very similar in appearance to the grammar school I had attended when a child). They took me into the kitchen - a huge area that had been turned into a makeshift first aid area. I received another brief examination, and then appeared the dreaded hypodermic needle. I swear it looked to be about two feet long and four inches in diameter. It was a size I had never seen before, but I was assured it was only a tetanus shot. Next I was ushered into the auditorium where there were about two dozen airmen, none of whom I had seen before. It was now about 3:00 pm, and I sat there wondering what would be next. About every 15 to 30 minutes, two or more airmen would be brought in. The room was slowly filling up and yet not one I knew appeared. I was beginning to wonder, "Christ! Did I jump out too soon?" It had been done before. Maybe I'd panicked and left a crew now on its way home. Then I thought back -- looked at my flying suit (I was quite a sight!). My flying suit was in shreds, blackened from the fire, holes completely burned through in spots. I finally convinced myself I couldn't possibly have been burned like this and the plane still be flying.

About 4:00 pm, they brought us some black bread and coffee (ersatz) which I couldn't eat. I didn't like the taste of either, and I wasn't hungry, later on I would have given anything to have that glorious piece of black bread - which was soon to come to taste like rich cake. My eyes were now beginning to swell shut and I could hardly see. The pain was beginning, and I was slowly comprehending that I was burned worse than I thought. My helmet and oxygen mask had protected my head and face, with the exception of the area around my eyes. My goggles were on my head, riding high on my forehead - they were too uncomfortable to wear (sound familiar?), so

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my eyes had been burned, and not having access to a mirror I couldn't see the extent. About 5:00 pm, an orderly came up to me and said that when it got good and dark they would put me in an ambulance and take me to a hospital. I think it was about 8:00 pm, when they led me to the ambulance.

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

### **EPILOGUE**

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

Those who gave their lives were:

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

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

The four survivors are:

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

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

### **IN MEMORIAM**

*From Duluth Newspaper about 1946*

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

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

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

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

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

THIS MEMORIAL DAY PHOTO taken in Troubky, Czechoslovakia, was received recently by Mrs. Walter Koon of Volin from Colonel William H. Bowers, air attache with the American Embassy in Prague. Col. Bowers and his wife, accompanied by his assistant, T/Sgt. Bobrovicz and his family, visited the community cemetery in Troubky to lay a memorial wreath on the grave of Mrs. Koon's son, Lieutenant Thomas Kurtz West, and his crew members who are buried

there. The Czechoslovakian Air Force furnished an honor guard of airmen for the occasion, and Col Bowers and Sgt. Bobrovicz placed the wreath on the grave as representatives of the U. S. Government and U.S. Air force.. The small Moravian village is about a six-hour drive from Prague. The colonel writes: "The grave is very well kept and continuing care is provided to it by the cemetery caretaker and the people of Troubky - who take pride in the memorial to your son and his crew mates. Flowers are planted on the grave and a candle is frequently kept burning."



# LOG OF AIRPLANE "LOG OF AIRPLANE "362" ("LUCKY SEVEN")

by  
*"Shorty"* Hans J. Kursawe  
 Staff Sergeant U.S. Air Force  
 Tail Gunner on B-24  
 764th Squadron, 461st Bomb Group,  
 49th Bomb Wing, 15th Air Force

## Members of Crew "7" ("Lucky Seven"):

|                                  |                                         |         |          |                   |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| Pilot                            | Edward F. Veiluva                       | Age: 21 | 1st Lt.  | from California   |
| Co-Pilot                         | Lynn L. Britton                         | Age: 26 | 1st Lt.  | from Illinois     |
|                                  | transferred to Crew 2; made first Pilot |         |          |                   |
| Co-Pilot                         | Harold D. Brown                         | Age: 23 | 2nd Lt.  | from Pennsylvania |
| Navigator                        | Verlin "Dusty" Rhodes                   | Age: 24 | 1st Lt.  | from Indiana      |
| Bombardier                       | Lyman Delemeter                         | Age: 23 | 1st. Lt. | from South Dakota |
| Engineer/Waist Gunner            | Wm. J. Pusso                            | Age: 22 | T/Sgt.   | from Pennsylvania |
| Radio Operator                   | Henry L. Baldauf                        | Age: 22 | T/Sgt.   | from Illinois     |
| Armorer/Tail Gunner              | Hans J. Kursawe                         | Age: 20 | S/Sgt.   | from New York     |
| Asst. Armorer/Nose Gunner        | Charles A. McAfee                       | Age: 22 | S/Sgt.   | from Ohio         |
| Ball Gunner                      | Edw. Zimmerman                          | Age: 21 | S/Sgt.   | from Idaho        |
| Asst. Engineer/Top Turret Gunner | Bruce H. Thomas                         | Age: 20 |          | from Pennsylvania |

February 4 - July 29, 1944



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| <u>COMBAT MISSIONS - CREW 7</u> |             |                          |                       |
|---------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
|                                 | <u>DATE</u> | <u>PLACE</u>             | <u>MISSION CREDIT</u> |
| 1.                              | 4-2-44      | Behac, Yugoslavia        | 1                     |
| 2.                              | 4-3-44      | Drnis, Yugoslavia        | 1                     |
| 3.                              | 4-5-44      | Nis, Yugoslavia          | 1                     |
| 4.                              | 4-12-44     | Zagreb, Yugoslavia       | 1                     |
| 5.                              | 4-14-44     | Bucharest, Yugoslavia    | 2                     |
| 6.                              | 4-19-44     | Ferrara, Italy           | 1                     |
| 7.                              | 4-20-44     | Bucharest, Yugoslavia    | 2                     |
| 8.                              | 4-24-44     | Bucharest, Yugoslavia    | 2                     |
| 9.                              | 4-30-44     | Allesandria, Italy       | 1                     |
| 10.                             | 5-5-44      | Ploesti, Rumania         | 2                     |
| 11.                             | 5-7-44      | Bucharest, Rumania       | 2                     |
| 12.                             | 5-14-44     | Padoua, Italy            | 2                     |
| 13.                             | 5-19-44     | Anzio, Italy             | 2                     |
| 14.                             | 5-21-44     | Piombino , Italy         | 1                     |
| 15.                             | 5-24-44     | Wiener/Neustadt, Austria | 2                     |
| 16.                             | 5-26-44     | Lyons, France            | 2                     |
| 17.                             | 5-29-44     | Wiener/Neustadt, Austria | 2                     |
| 18.                             | 5-31-44     | Ploesti, Rumania         | 2                     |
| 19.                             | 6-4-44      | Oriello, France          | 2                     |
| 20.                             | 6-6-44      | Ploesti, Rumania         | 2 "D-Day"             |
| 21.                             | 6-9-44      | Munich, Germany          | 2                     |
| 22.                             | 6-11-44     | Girurque, Rumania        | 2                     |
| 23.                             | 6-28-44     | Korwenburg, Austria      | 2                     |
| 24.                             | 6-30-44     | Blechhammer, Germany     | 2                     |

|                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>February 4, 1944</u>  | Departed Hammer Field, Cal. for P.O.E. and Cross country hop in "Lucky Seven" our combat ship. Arrived at Hamilton Field, Cal. Crew being processed for overseas duty.                                                                                                                               |
| <u>February 5, 1944</u>  | Still at Hamilton Field being processed. Chow is very good but we have to stand guard on our ship and orderly room is handing out "detail" but can't seem to locate Crew Seven. We live in Hotel Barracks. We went to San Francisco but it was quite a disappointment. It isn't what they say it is. |
| <u>February 6, 1944</u>  | Left California to go cross country. Landed at Sky Harbor at Phoenix, Arizona. Ship acts swell - barracks are pretty good - -good P.X. & beer. Leave at dawn for next stop.                                                                                                                          |
| <u>February 7, 1944</u>  | Arrived at Midland, Texas. Texas is hot but it doesn't go good with me. Hope we leave in the morning.                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <u>February 8, 1944</u>  | Arrived at Memphis, Tenn. Swell air base here, swell food and nice barracks but couldn't enjoy it because Bruce and I stand guard on the ship tonight. Saw first B-29 "super fortress". Quite a ship, ought to be good in combat.                                                                    |
| <u>February 9, 1944</u>  | Arrived at Morrison Field, Florida. This is our P.O.E. Went through P.O.E. exams. This sure is a lot of bunk. It takes too damn long. Surprised at liberal check on personal equipment.                                                                                                              |
| <u>February 10, 1944</u> | Still at Morrison. Swell base and very hot, but enjoy it as it will probably be our last base in the U.S.A. Went to the show twice here.                                                                                                                                                             |

|                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>February 11, 1944</u> | Arrived at Boringuen Field in Puerto Rico. Sure is a beautiful island, a swell base, about the best we ever seen - we sleep in hotel barracks, six men in a room. Bruce and I took a walk to the cliff overlooking the beach and ocean. Looks just like a picture post card. Very sentimental and romantic place. Guess I'm thinking of home.       |
| <u>February 12, 1944</u> | Took off for next stop, landed a Waller Field, Trinidad. Very hot here. Crew pulled 25-hour inspection on ship. I pulled and cleaned all the guns and cleaned our sidearms, our .45 automatics. Picked up 8 cases of liquor for use in combat.                                                                                                      |
| <u>February 13, 1944</u> | Landed in Belem, Brazil during rain storm. It rains here every day in the afternoon, very hot and sticky. Brazil is sure a rugged country. People live very poorly. Native women dress half naked. This place is full of Malaria and other tropical disease.                                                                                        |
| <u>February 14, 1944</u> | Took off for last overland flight on our trip. Weather swell( trip uneventful but successful. Brazil looks like a big forest from the air.                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <u>February 15, 1944</u> | Landed in Forteleza, Brazil. Swell field but we have to pull a 50-hour inspection on "Lucky Seven". We worked in rain and hot sun lots of fun but work. Bruce and I had to stand guard on the ship but the rest of the crew went to town (illegally of course).                                                                                     |
| <u>February 16, 1944</u> | Left Forteleza 2:00 a.m. this morning for big over-water hop. Crew excited and "sweating out" first long over-water hop.                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <u>February 17, 1944</u> | After 12 hours of flying we arrived in the "dark continent". Our Navigator Lt. "Dusty" Rhodes proved his skill again - brought us right over runway of "Dakar" Africa. This is really the "dark continent". Stood guard, slept in waist of ship under "net".                                                                                        |
| <u>February 18, 1944</u> | Left Dakar and landed at Marrakech, North Africa. Very dusty here and hot too. Saw Arabs and are just as pictured - very dirty and beg like hell. They eat our "garbage" from our chow - very disgusting.                                                                                                                                           |
| <u>February 19, 1944</u> | Still at Marrakech - cold as hell at night. Met my old roommate (Eddie Krimitz) from Atlantic City. Hadn't seen him for over a year. He's been here for a year - rough deal.<br><br>We (crew) went horseback riding with French Cavalry Captain. Swell riding, went through forbidden city of "Medina". Saw beautiful castle and grounds of sultan. |
| <u>February 20, 1944</u> | Still at Marrakech - crew getting uneasy from lying around, weather bad, hope the hell we leave soon. Orders changed.                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <u>February 21, 1944</u> | Departed Marrakech. Crew ordered to search for crew who ditched. We searched in vain though flew at "wave clipping" altitude. Landed at Oudna (Tunisia). Saw Algiers and Oran.                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <u>February 22, 1944</u> | Still at Oudna. The mud is up to our knees. It's really hell. Rain is bad too. Drove a jeep with full crew (10 men). It really was a rare sight. Thought we'd get stuck in mud up to our -----.                                                                                                                                                     |
| <u>February 23, 1944</u> | Still at Oudna. Wish the hell we'd leave. Chow p-poor, mud terrific and no stoves in tent.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <u>February 24, 1944</u> | Still at Oudna. Crew getting uneasy again. This place would get anyone down. Rumors say we leave for Italy tomorrow.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |



|                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>February 25, 1944</u> | Departed for Italy and Theatre of Operations. Landed at Torretta Field, Cerignola, Italy. Field very muddy; 70% of ships got stuck. "Lucky Seven" is still best ship in outfit. Ground crew very happy to see us. We were first crew in. Saw all our old buddies. |
| <u>February 26, 1944</u> | Fixed up our "home". It's a tent. It's not a bad set up, could be a lot worse. Still very cold here and rains quite a bit.                                                                                                                                        |
| <u>February 27, 1944</u> | Still fixing up permanent "home", getting pretty well set up, got our gas stove fixed up and makes it quite comfortable.                                                                                                                                          |
| <u>February 28, 1944</u> | Nothing doing today.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <u>February 29, 1944</u> | Nothing doing today. Everybody gets plenty of "sack time".                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <u>March 1, 1944</u>     | Still laying around.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <u>March 2, 1944</u>     | What a life, nothing to do but lay around. When the hell do we start flying? Crew getting anxious for first combat mission.                                                                                                                                       |
| <u>March 3, 1944</u>     | Bad news today - Capt. Witte, our C.O., Lt. Blanchard, Lt. Maxwell and two gunners were killed flying a ship to another group. This is quite a blow to squadron.                                                                                                  |
| <u>March 4, 1944</u>     | Capt. Witte's funeral held today. They say the boys were really in bad shape.                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <u>March 5, 1944</u>     | Lt. Goree (Operations Officer) made C.O. Glad he did, he's a good Joe and we couldn't ask for a better C.O. I know he'll make a good one. He's 100% for combat crews.                                                                                             |
| <u>March 6, 1944</u>     | Our Pilot made flight Commander. Co-Pilot - Lt. Britton made First pilot of Crew #2. Good break for both of them.                                                                                                                                                 |
| <u>March 7, 1944</u>     | All enlisted men put in for promotion up to tech orders - good deal. Hope we get it soon.                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <u>March 8, 1944</u>     | Flew orientation flight over southern Italy today - quite a place. All towns are built on top of hills. Houses very close together.                                                                                                                               |
| <u>March 9, 1944</u>     | Nothing much doing today.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <u>March 10, 1944</u>    | Today we had a practice mission. Flew Mister crew ship.                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <u>March 11, 1944</u>    | "Lucky Seven" called "out". Lt. Goree made Captain.                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <u>March 12, 1944</u>    | Dull slow day.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <u>March 13, 1944</u>    | Cold as hell. All you can do is sit around and write letters or play cards.                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <u>March 14, 1944</u>    | It snowed today. Weather very cold and damp. We'll all get sick if this don't break soon.                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <u>March 15, 1944</u>    | Today we painted "Lucky Seven". Had quite a time with "Dago" paint. Gunners put in for "Staff" AGAIN.                                                                                                                                                             |
| <u>March 16, 1944</u>    | Sharks nose on ship looks swell and ship is ready to go. Officers club opened today. They all had quite a night of it. Big drunk.                                                                                                                                 |
| <u>March 17, 1944</u>    | Pilot Lt. Veiluva put in for promotion to First Lt. Hope he gets it, he deserves it.                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <u>March 18, 1944</u>    | No flight, weather still bad. "Lucky Seven" is the only ship not stuck in the mud yet.                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <u>March 19, 1944</u>    | Nothing doing. Scheduled for bombing run tomorrow.                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

|                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>March 20, 1944</u> | Flew practice bomb mission. Very low ceiling and couldn't bomb formation. Flying very poor.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <u>March 21, 1944</u> | "Jimmy" our ball gunner bought a guitar in Bari today. We stayed up late singing songs. What a riot this crew is.                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <u>March 22, 1944</u> | No flight again. We get details all the time and there's plenty of bitching going on.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <u>March 23, 1944</u> | Very dull day. Wish the hell the weather would get better so we could start on our missions.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <u>March 24, 1944</u> | Flew high altitude formation practice mission. Group looks good even though we are "green".                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <u>March 25, 1944</u> | Bombed Pianosa Island on practice mission today. Carried 100 lb. "demos". "Target Destroyed."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <u>March 26, 1944</u> | No flight - dull day.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <u>March 27, 1944</u> | Another dull day. Bad weather, will it ever clear up in this country?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <u>March 28, 1944</u> | Another practice mission, hope we start combat missions soon. Group formation looks good.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <u>March 29, 1944</u> | Alerted to fly mission tomorrow.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <u>March 30, 1944</u> | Tomorrow is our first combat mission. Crew very quiet all night. Went to bed very early because everyone is a bit nervous.                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <u>March 31, 1944</u> | (no entries)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <u>April 1, 1944</u>  | -Awakened at 2:00 a.m. Took off for Senaglia, Italy. Pretty nervous. Mission called off because of bad frontal weather.                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <u>April 2, 1944</u>  | Another try for first mission. Took off at 0200. Went to Behac, Yugo. Hit M/Y with 180 Frag. bombs. "Del" our bombardier really plastered the hell out of target. Saw no flak or fighters but really sweat it out. We had D-38 escort. They scared the hell out of me but they sure are a beautiful sight up there over enemy territory. |
| <u>April 3, 1944</u>  | Awakened at 0200 again for mission No. 2 at Drnis, Yugo. Carried 8-500 lb. "Demos". C.O. and Sgt. Nav. flew with us. Two ships from 767 collided in midair on peel off from target - an awful sight to look at. Saw three "chutes" open. Target results - excellent.                                                                     |
| <u>April 4, 1944</u>  | No mission today. Slept till noon.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <u>April 5, 1944</u>  | Led "C" flight. 1st attack unit today. Major Burke group operations off. was co-pilot. Bombed Nis, Yugo. Carried 8-500 lb. "demos". Overcast at target - result: poor bombing.                                                                                                                                                           |
| <u>April 6, 1944</u>  | Pass day for Crew 7. Went into "Big City" - What a dump!                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <u>April 7, 1944</u>  | Scheduled to lead 2nd attach unit. "STAND DOWN"                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <u>April 8, 1944</u>  | "Stand down" again. Jimmy, Bruce and myself made Staff-Sgt. We all had a little too much "vino" and I passed out in promotion formation time - What a day!!                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <u>April 9, 1944</u>  | "Stand down" again. "Mack" put in for Staff Sgt., hope he makes it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <u>April 10, 1944</u> | Another "stand down". Squadron received replacements, 3 new B-24 and 2 crews.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <u>April 11, 1944</u> | "Stand down" This getting up so damn early and not flying is getting us down. Lose a lot of "sack time". Lt. Woodard lost on practice mission.                                                                                                                                                                                           |

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|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>April 12, 1944</u> | Led second attack unit of 18 ships on raid over Zagreb, Yugoslavia. Saw first flak, heavy and intense, it really scared the hell out of me. No ships lost. Hit ME-109 plant with 180 frag bombs.                              |
| <u>April 13, 1944</u> | No flight. Crew 15 flew "Lucky Seven" and got flak holes in pilots' window. Crew 16, Lt. Steele's crew, forced to bailout over Yugoslavia. Mission at Budapest.                                                               |
| <u>April 14, 1944</u> | We flew deputy group lead on raid over Bucharest, Rumania. Col. Hawes was co-pilot. Heavy flak but no losses. Credit for two missions.                                                                                        |
| <u>April 15, 1944</u> | No flight today. Pusso and Baldauf put in for Tech. Sgt. Still no news of Steele's crew lost on Budapest mission.                                                                                                             |
| <u>April 16, 1944</u> | Took off on raid to Belgrade. Led second section. Weather bad over Yugo and had to return. Dropped bombs in Adriatic Sea. Capt. Word, co-pilot. Chris' birthday and still I didn't send her a present.                        |
| <u>April 17, 1944</u> | Today I am 21 - a man at last. Took off on Mission but had to return because of bad weather.                                                                                                                                  |
| <u>April 18, 1944</u> | Pass day for Crew "7".                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <u>April 19, 1944</u> | Bombed Ferrara, Italy today. "Milk Run", no flak or fighters. "Del" hit bridge right on the button. Led "B" flight today.                                                                                                     |
| <u>April 20, 1944</u> | Big day for Crew 7. Led group to Bucharest, Rumania. Target overcast. No bombs dropped. Ran out of oxygen at target and really sweat it out coming home. Lt. Torres of 765 lost.                                              |
| <u>April 21, 1944</u> | Nothing doing today. No flight. Caught up with "sack time".                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <u>April 22, 1944</u> | Weather bad, no mission today.                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <u>April 23, 1944</u> | Weather still bad, mission called off.                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <u>April 24, 1944</u> | Bombed Bucharest, Rumania today. What a run. We went over target with 6 ship flight. B&C flight screwed up and we made bombing run alone. Flak very heavy and we really peeled off when "bombs away" wounded. Lt. Nixon lost. |
| <u>April 25, 1944</u> | Pilot took "Lucky Seven" to Foggia to be equipped with radar equipment.                                                                                                                                                       |
| <u>April 26, 1944</u> | Pass day but it rained like hell all day.                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <u>April 27, 1944</u> | Rained again. Layed around all day.                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <u>April 28, 1944</u> | No flight - rain again.                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <u>April 29, 1944</u> | Pass day today. Went to Foggia. Nice town, bombed to hell though. Nothing much doing.                                                                                                                                         |
| <u>April 30, 1944</u> | Bombed Allesandria, Italy - hit M/Y. Milk run - no flak or fighters. Plenty of escort above us though.                                                                                                                        |
| <u>May 1, 1944</u>    | No flight today. Worked on Squadron. showers. They'll come in handy this summer.                                                                                                                                              |
| <u>May 2, 1944</u>    | Blank day.                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <u>May 3, 1944</u>    | Dull day again.                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <u>May 4, 1944</u>    | Ships still grounded because of weather.                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <u>May 5, 1944</u>    | Big day today. Bombed famous Rumanian oil fields at Phoesti. Roughest mission to date. Very much flak, lots of holes in "Lucky Seven". Lt. Joe Myers killed by flak. Lt. Trenners R.O. seriously injured.                     |

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|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>May 6, 1944</u>  | Pass day. Went to Joe Myers' funeral in Bari. His death sure was a loss to us. Bad for moral.                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <u>May 7, 1944</u>  | Mission over Bucharest, Rumania. Led group. Bullseye hit on M/Y and R.R. On way back we circled crew who ditched in Adriatic Sea. Led rescue boat to life rafts.                                                                                                                           |
| <u>May 8, 1944</u>  | Nothing doing today. Pilot commended for yesterday's mission.                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <u>May 9, 1944</u>  | Bad weather, no flight. 765 ship blew up on line today. Three ships wrecked.                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <u>May 10, 1944</u> | No mission for us. Lt. Wallace Crew #11 shot down over Weiner-Neustadt. Lost 10 good boys, all bailed out.                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <u>May 11, 1944</u> | No flight today. Big push in North Italy about to start. Everyone nervously waiting.                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <u>May 12, 1944</u> | Big push started today at Anzio. We bombed Carrara, Italy at 1:00 a.m. Supposed to fly two missions today but bad weather set in. Flew over Anzio to show the 5th army we're backing them up.                                                                                              |
| <u>May 13, 1944</u> | Army advancing at Anzio. "B" flight flew. Really bombing hell out of Italy. TAF hit roads and bridges.                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <u>May 14, 1944</u> | They scared the hell out of me today. Bombed Padoua, Italy. Flak very intense. Worst yet, but only 18 guns at target. Flak shot out electrical system in my tail turret today - too scared to watch bombs hit but Col. pleased with mission.                                               |
| <u>May 15, 1944</u> | No flight for us today. 15th Air Force putting 1500 B-24 over Italy every day. They ought to be folding up soon. Got new co-pilot from 765. Lt. Harold Brown - nice guy!                                                                                                                   |
| <u>May 16, 1944</u> | Started out for Ploesti again. Called back because of weather over target. Bombed Belgrade, Yugoslavia through overcast. Flak light and inaccurate.                                                                                                                                        |
| <u>May 17, 1944</u> | Flew to Naples today. Quite a town.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <u>May 18, 1944</u> | No flight. Dull day.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <u>May 19, 1944</u> | "B" flight flew. Bombed retreating "Krauts" over Beachhead at Anzio.                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <u>May 20, 1944</u> | Flew to 451st group to pick up "Pathfinder" radar ship. We'll lead the group on tomorrow's mission.                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <u>May 21, 1944</u> | Bombed Piombino Harbor, Italy with incendiary bombs. Target really burned like hell. We lead group with "Lucky Seven". Major Burke flew co-pilot.                                                                                                                                          |
| <u>May 22, 1944</u> | Big meeting at group with Col. "G" group C.O". 461st group proclaimed best in 15th Air Force.                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <u>May 23, 1944</u> | Rumors going around that Crew 7 is going to Cairo to rest camp.                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <u>May 24, 1944</u> | Mission to Weiner-Neustadt (Austria) today. Roughest target in Europe to date. Flak very intense. Lost three ships in group. Saw 18 ships with engines feathered coming off target. ME-110 shot rockets at our formation. I fired at him but he was out of range. He didn't come in again. |
| <u>May 25, 1944</u> | Pass day.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <u>May 26, 1944</u> | Bombed Lyons, France today. Longest mission yet - 8 hours, 40 minutes. Milk run, no flak, few fighters.                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <u>May 27, 1944</u> | Stand down.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <u>May 28, 1944</u> | No flight for us today. Stayed in camp and rested.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |



|                              |                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>May 29, 1944</u>          | Mission to Wiener-Neustadt, Austria - again. Led 2nd section. Flak very in-                                                                                                           |
| <u>May 30, 1944</u>          | Rested today. "Lucky Seven" only ship in squadron that hadn't aborted.                                                                                                                |
| <u>May 31, 1944</u>          | -Went to Ploesti, Rumania. Hit oil refinery. We led group with "Pathfinder" radar ship. "Lucky Seven" was flying in No. 4 spot and I saw her get hit by flak and No. 4 engine go out. |
| <u>June 1, 1944</u>          | Crew worked on "Lucky Seven" today.                                                                                                                                                   |
| <u>June 2, 1944</u>          | Went swimming and sailing in Adriatic Sea at Barelleta.                                                                                                                               |
| <u>June 3, 1944</u>          | Stand down. Pilots 22nd birthday.                                                                                                                                                     |
| <u>June 4, 1944</u>          | Bombed Oriello, France today. Hill R.R. bridge. "Milk run". No flak or fighters. Flew top turret and Bruce flew tail.                                                                 |
| <u>June 5, 1944</u>          | Was stand by crew today. Pusso, Baldauf, McAfee, Zimmerman, Lt. Delemeter flew mission.                                                                                               |
| <u>June 6, 1944</u>          | "D" Day. Went to Ploesti Rumania again. Flew "Lucky Seven" for another bullseye on target. Flak heavy and fighters numerous. No attacks on our flight. Invasion started in France.    |
| <u>June 7, 1944</u>          | Stand by crew again. Flew ball turret for Lt. Trenner. Flak moderate saw guns on ground firing at us. Missed target.                                                                  |
| <u>June 8, 1944</u>          | No flight. Crew seven leading squadron in missions.                                                                                                                                   |
| <u>June 9, 1944</u>          | This is it. Mission to Munich, Germany. Flak very intense. Most B-24 ever seen at one target. Bombed thru over-cast. Lost one ship in group.                                          |
| <u>June 10, 1944</u>         | Pass day. Capt. Goree made Major.                                                                                                                                                     |
| <u>June 11, 1944</u>         | Led group over Giurque, Rumania. Flak heavy and fighters numerous. Lt. "Pop" Hefling bailed his crew out over Yugoslavia. We lost 3 ships in group.                                   |
| <u>June 12, 1944</u>         | Crew "7" only original crew left in "C" flight. Zimmy claims fighter ME-109.                                                                                                          |
| <u>June 13, 1944</u>         | Crew "7" grounded for rest.                                                                                                                                                           |
| <u>June 14-June 26, 1944</u> | Still grounded.                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <u>June 27, 1944</u>         | Today we were finally scheduled for a mission - tomorrow.                                                                                                                             |
| <u>June 28, 1944</u>         | Mission to Korwenburg, Austria. "Mucho" flak. No ships lost. Many fighters. Successful mission.                                                                                       |
| <u>June 29, 1944</u>         | Went to town today. Nothing much doing.                                                                                                                                               |
| <u>June 30, 1944</u>         | Mission to Blackenhammer, Germany. Called back because of weather.                                                                                                                    |
| <u>July 1-July 8, 1944</u>   | (blank)                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <u>July 9, 1944</u>          | Went swimming to Barelletta. When we came back to camp they told us we were leaving to go back to the states. HAPPY DAY.                                                              |
| <u>July 10, 1944</u>         | Left Cerignola for Naples to get boat to go back home. Drove 8 hours in "GI" truck. What a trip. Got to 19 Rep. Bn.                                                                   |
| <u>July 11, 1944</u>         | Took physical and check up for trip home.                                                                                                                                             |
| <u>July 12, 1944</u>         | We're just laying around and getting plenty of "sack time".                                                                                                                           |
| <u>July 13, 1944</u>         | Today I met "Vie" Cropis, an old buddy of mine from A-20's. He just came back from the states.                                                                                        |

|                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>July 14, 1944</u> | Still at 19 Rep. Bn. Met Billy Dunn from St. Albans. He's going home on the same deal as me.                                                                                                                               |
| <u>July 15, 1944</u> | Still at 19 Rep. Bn.                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <u>July 16, 1944</u> | Still at Rep. Bn. Hope the hell we leave soon.                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <u>July 17, 1944</u> | Left 19 Rep. Bn. to get on a ship. We waited 5 hours before we got on board the S.S. Christobar. It is an old Panama Liner. The quarters are very crowded. We're in No.5 hold and the heat is terrific.                    |
| <u>July 18, 1944</u> | Second day board ship. We pulled out in the harbor to wait for the other ships in the convoy to load up. The heat in the holds is unbearable. Chow is good but you sweat so much you can't enjoy it. We get 2 meals a day. |
| <u>July 19, 1944</u> | Third day on board ship and still in Naples harbor. Billy Dunn is an "MP". I haven't been "hooked" yet.                                                                                                                    |
| <u>July 20, 1944</u> | Finally pulled out of Naples harbor at 1800 o'clock. A convoy of 15 ships is with us. We passed Isle of Capri. Rest camp for 15th A.F.                                                                                     |
| <u>July 21, 1944</u> | Second day at sea. Sea is a bit rough but it doesn't affect me. Pulled 4 hours of emergency K.P. Had quite a time.                                                                                                         |
| <u>July 22, 1944</u> | Third day at sea. Uneventful. Mediterranean Sea is beautiful. It is a deep blue color, but it's still too big for me.                                                                                                      |
| <u>July 23, 1944</u> | Fourth day at sea. I'm not too crazy about this ocean travel. Give me the air any time.                                                                                                                                    |
| <u>July 24, 1944</u> | Fifth day at sea. I was on night watch today. It sure is nice on deck at night but I'd still rather be in the sack.                                                                                                        |
| <u>July 25, 1944</u> | Sixth day out. Hell, this sure is monotonous.                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <u>July 26, 1944</u> | Seventh day out to sea. Nothing unusual going on.                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <u>July 27, 1944</u> | Eighth day at sea. Passed Azores today.                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <u>July 28, 1944</u> | Ninth day at sea. Water still calm. The weather is very good.                                                                                                                                                              |
| <u>July 29, 1944</u> | Tenth day at sea. Trip is getting monotonous but shorter all the time.....                                                                                                                                                 |

Dear Hughes,

I am Robert F. Thorne, navigator of Crew #65, 767<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron of the 461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group formerly based at Torretta Field near Cerignola, Italy. Our crew's claim to fame is that we were the first crew to bail out over Vis and the first crew returned from MIA in Yugoslavia (now Croatia) not to be sent back to the States but returned to combat. When we were flown back in a B-17 from Bari and dropped off at Torretta and hiking back to our encampment, Col. Lee, Wing Commander of the 49th Bomb Wing, drove up to us and asked where we were headed. I told him we had just returned from MIA in Yugoslavia. He wanted to know all about it and told us to jump in the command car and he would drive us to our tents. This was the first time we had been chauffeured by a full colonel. He was very interested in our story as was your father later when he asked if we were ready to return to combat missions (our plane had not been on the Bad-Voslau mission). We said we were ready as soon as we got our lost equipment. Col. Lee later pinned a purple heart on my chest at Torretta headquarters. We flew 29 more missions before we were grounded.

(Continued on page 38)

*(Continued from page 37)*

Recently I was asked to talk of some of my war experiences at our Claremont University Club. Enclosed is the gist of what I had to say. I thought you might be interested in it. I believe you may have had some contact with Sgt. Lenny Graden, our nose turret gunner, the other survivor of crew #65 and with Prof. Torres, the brother of our pilot, Matt Torres, who was badly injured when his chute dragged him into a rock wall. He was sent back to the States. If I can supply any more information about our combat activities, please let me know.

I do enjoy the Liberaider and our 461<sup>st</sup> website. Thank you very much for all your valued efforts on behalf of the Group.

Robert F. Thorne  
Professor of Botany, Emeritus  
robert.thorne@cgu.edu

## **Botanists Go To War**

by  
Robert F. Thorne  
767th Squadron, 461st Bomb Group

In 1942 Army Air Corps recruiters came to Ithaca and three of us botanical graduate students signed up and ultimately became aviation cadets. We all trained as navigators and, by chance, all three ended up as bomber navigators in B-24 Liberator Bombers in the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force in southern Italy. One was shot down on his first mission and returned to the States, the second survived 51 missions without a scratch, and I was shot down on my eleventh mission but returned to combat for 29 more missions. All three survived the war, returned to botany, got their PhDs, and are now retired and all still alive though now considerably more mature. But you probably want to hear about my combat experiences.

I was trained in navigation in Texas, given operational training in Link Trainers, gunnery and bombing in Idaho and California. Our Group, the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group (H) trained as a unit at Hammer Field in Fresno, California and later moved to Hamilton Field in Marin County and then sent overseas to combat. We flew our planes to Italy by way of South America, the south Atlantic, and Africa, learning in Tunisia our assignment was with the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force. After several weeks of additional combat training we began our bombing missions in April 1944.

On 23 April 1944 we were sent on a seven and a half hour mission to Wiener-Neustadt to drop fragmentation bombs on Bad-Voslau Airdrome. I described this experience in our first war-experience meeting but will repeat it here for newcomers. After dropping our load of bombs we were hit by two "near misses." That means the shells did not explode in the plane, but damaged it severely by flak shrapnel. Our wings and tail were riddled, our hydraulic system destroyed, our #3 engine knocked out and set on fire, our #2 engine holed, our gas lines cut flooding the bomb bay with gas and our fuselage generally pelted. None of the ten crew members were injured but just badly scared.

We prepared to bail out but Matt Torres, our pilot, got the fire out in #3 engine, feathered the prop, and we stayed with the formation as best we could, but fell behind and below. It was not a good idea to bail out

*(Continued on page 39)*



*(Continued from page 38)*

near the target because the locals seemed to resent our dropping bombs on them and occasionally lynched captured fliers before the military could take them prisoner. Hence, we decided to wait until we crossed the Sava River into Yugoslavia before bailing out. Things were going fairly well so we hung on until we got through a pass in the Dinaric Alps and crossed the coast at the Adriatic Sea. Matt asked if we had enough gas to get to Italy to crash land there. None of us were enthusiastic about bailing out. The engineer said we had enough gas, but just then our gas started running out and only our #4 engine was pulling full power.

Matt asked the crew what they wanted to do and one wise guy suggested Sweden, another Switzerland, but I said we had better head for the nearby Dalmatian island of Vis. From intelligence I knew it was the only island still held by the Croatian Partisans. When we were almost to the island, Matt ordered us to bail out. The three of us in the nose had scuttled back in the plane, the bombardier to the waist and I and the nose turret gunner to the bomb bay. I cranked open the bomb bay doors and offered Graden the honor of being first out. He declined so I told him to stand aside and I dove out. Against recommendations I yanked my rip cord while in the slip-stream and threw the handle half way across the Adriatic. It seemed like ages before my chute bellied out and nearly broke my back. However, my error saved my life for the wind was blowing toward the island. If I had delayed opening my chute I would have dropped too far off the island and been drowned like most of a later crews from our group. As first out, I was the only crew member to miss the island. Not a good recommendation for a navigator. I undershot it by 100 feet or so and had to swim in pulling my chute behind me like a sea anchor.

When I finally reached the rocks, I stood on them in the water enjoying being alive and thinking that any time I had left would be pure gravy, now more than 60 years of gravy. Young Partisans climbed down the cliff, lifted me from the water, replaced my wet clothes with parts of their uniforms and generally treated me very kindly. Thus I was dressed in a Communist uniform for a couple of hours. Good thing Senator McCarthy never heard that. The Partisan navy arrived in a while in a battered motor launch and took us all to Partisan headquarters in the town of Vis. American rangers and British commandoes were also on the island operating with the Partisans. Ultimately a ranger rescued me somewhat looped from racquia, a foul-smelling potato whiskey, and brought me to their headquarters. We were on Vis four days before the British navy returned us to Bari. We went to see our injured pilot, visited the scattered wreckage of our plane, and had other adventures on Vis. One amusing event happened on the evening of our arrival as the first parachutists to land on the island. We had to sleep out on the hill behind the town because an air raid was expected from the nearby islands held by the Germans. While we were telling tall tales with our ranger officer hosts, a tiny hedgehog wandered near. I immediately picked it up on a piece of cardboard to examine it and heard much laughter behind me. I turned around and saw my intrepid bombardier and co-pilot up in a nearby carob tree. They would not come down until I placed the hedgehog on the other side of a rock wall. They claimed they were not afraid of the hedgehog but of the way I was handling it.

Another not so amusing event occurred while we were being debriefed at the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force headquarters in Bari. The debriefing colonel told us that we were very expensive to train and the Air Force could no longer send us home after returning from Yugoslavia. With our crew he was instituting a new policy and we would be allowed to return to combat. Hence, we flew 29 more missions before we were grounded, promoted and returned to the States. I was then trained as an instructor navigator, but hauled into research and development in Houston and made an examinations officer. While I was on detached duty in Chicago, the Japanese surrendered and I was called back to Houston. I was promptly released from active duty at Drew Field in Tampa and returned to Cornell in October 1945 for the fall term.

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

## Webmaster Comments

The host of our website continues to surprise me. Last year I told you they had given us 2-gig of space. This year it has been increased to 10-gig. We're only using about 315-meg of that so we have a lot of room to grow.

With 10-gig of space for our website, the only constraint is the CDs I offer. A CD holds approximately 700-meg of data so I would like to hold the website to this limit. We are a long way from filling even this right now so send in your suggestions.

I would like to remind everyone that the 461st Website CD contains everything that was on the website at the time the CD was created plus some extra things such as some history files, MAC Reports and some of the Liberaiders. The CD costs \$25.00 for the first copy and \$15.00 for subsequent copies. If you already have a CD, you might consider a replacement CD in order to have everything that's been added to the website since you received your

copy. I will once again have copies at the reunion.

We are approaching five years since I took over responsibility for the 461st website. In that time there have been over 100,000 visitors to the website. That's impressive! Some of those visits have been by you, members of the Association, but I don't think you account for all of them. I think there are a lot of people out there who are interested in what the 461st did during WWII.

I want to maintain an accurate E-Mail list for members of the 461st. If you have Internet access, please take a few minutes to drop me a note to make sure I have your address. The Internet is an excellent way for us to keep in touch, but it only works if we have your correct address. I thought about publishing addresses in the Liberaider, but decided not to because of the possibility of abuse (spam, viruses, etc.). I do have a list of those people who have shared their address with me so we can keep in touch.