



The 461st

Liberaider



Vol. 25, No. 1

JUNE 2009

SOMEWHERE IN THE USA

President's Corner

Tulsa has a lot to offer the visitor. The Reunion Committee has selected several very interesting attractions that should be of interest to all. Seeing the Tulsa Air & Space Museum and the display there about the Tulsamerican should be the highlight of the reunion. I look forward to seeing all of you at the reunion.

Love you guys and gals,

Al

**461st
Bombardment
Group (H)
Association
2009 Reunion
See page 18 for
details and sign-up
information.**

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Air Force History

from
The US Air Force website

I came across the following on the US Air Force website and thought it would be of interest to everyone.

Early Years

On 1 August 1907, the U.S. Army Signal Corps established a small Aeronautical Division to take "charge of all matters pertaining to military ballooning, air machines and all kindred sub-

jects."

From the close of the Civil War until 1907, the Signal Corps had acquired eight balloons, though two more were procured in 1907. A year later the Signal Corps purchased a small dirigible, used at Fort Omaha, Nebraska, for the instruction of servicemen. But not until 26 May 1909, did Lts. Frank P. Lahm and Benjamin D. Foulois make their first ascent and qualify as the airship's first Army pilots.

(Continued on page 4)

WWII Military Recollections

of
Donald Bruce Bryant

October 15, 1923 – December 31,
2002

In November 1942, I enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Because I was 19, both parents had to sign, as the law said 21. On the day I was supposed to leave, I got an indication of the sometimes-incredible Army "red tape" and confusion ahead. We were sworn in, and then "granted" two-week furloughs, as there was no room for us at Fort Niagara Induction Cen-

ter (New York). I, like the rest, had quit my job, so I took a bus to New York City and saw "the sights" for two weeks. Among them, at Radio City, we saw an amazing invention without remotely realizing its future potential. You walked up on a little platform in front of a little black box and saw yourself live on a black and white 12-inch screen! Miraculous! The development of television was delayed until the end of the war in 1945.

Soon, I was taken by train to Buffalo,

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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>
Catalano, George J.	York, PA	901	06/00/08
Chaloupek, Milo F.	Parkersburg, IA	929	10/09/07
Chanley, Carl R.	Leavenworth, IN	901	05/05/09
Kursel, William J.	Mequon, WI	1092	10/13/99
Louis, Charles L.	Andover, KS	748	05/07/09

765th Squadron

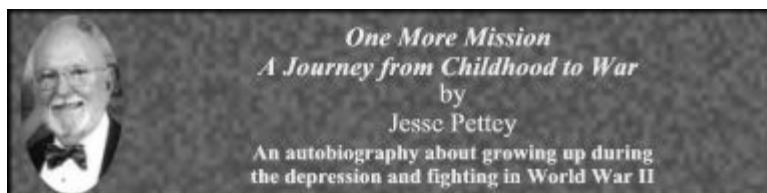
<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Ludlum, William O.	Ridgewood, NJ	1092	01/00/09
McGaugh, Everett D.	Chandler, AZ	748	10/22/08
Wynne, Harold M.	Portland, OR	757	07/25/05

766th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Cunyngham, Earl F., Jr.	Oklahoma City, OK	612	03/16/09
Ehrlich, Harold F.	Rochester, NY	1092	12/14/08
Howard R. Furrow	Yuma, AZ	612	04/21/09
Kibler, Charles L.	Tinley Park, IL	747	10/19/08

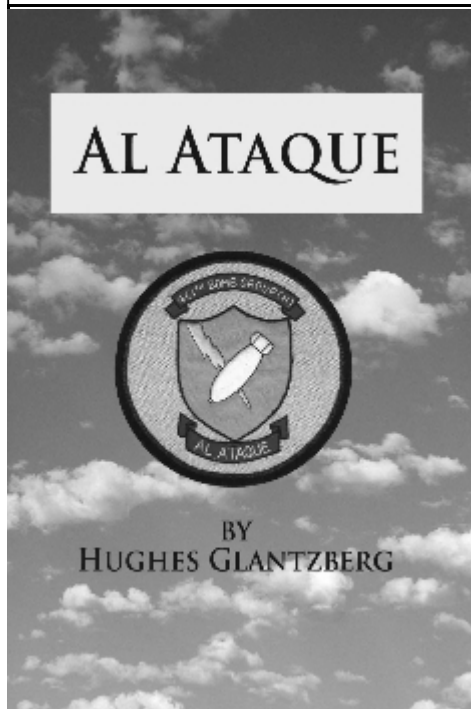
767th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Abristis, William J.	Ellicottville, NY	1034	10/05/94
Chaat, Robert P., Jr.	Lawton, OK	757	Unknown
Lacina, Lawrence R.	Bradenton Beach, FL	611	03/31/09
Leiendecker, John P.	Fort Wayne, IN	1092	03/03/09
Lucas, Francis J.	Hostetter, PA	748	03/00/09
Surber, Cecil F.	Des Moines, IA	612	10/11/08
Dias, George B.	Newville, PA	941	02/15/09



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

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



Al Ataque

History / General

Trade **Paperback**

Publication Date: Nov-2006

Price: \$26.95

Size: 6 x 9

Author: Hughes Glantzberg

ISBN: **0-595-41572-5**

413 Pages

On Demand Printing

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

To order call 1-800-AUTHORS

Trade **Hardcopy**

Publication Date: Nov-2006

Price: \$36.95

Size: 6 x 9

Author: Hughes Glantzberg

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

Al Ataque is an excellent book that describes the preparation a bomb group goes through before being deployed overseas as well as the problems of shipping over five thousand men and supplies along with some eighty B-24 aircraft from a stateside base to a foreign country. The book details the establishment of Torretta Field which was used by the 461st for the duration of the war in Europe. The 461st Bomb Group flew two hundred and twenty-three combat missions between April 1944 and April 1945. Each of these is described in the book. Personal experiences of veterans who were actually part of the 461st are also included.



Music Bravely Ringing

by

Martin A. Rush

767th Squadron

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

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

(Continued from page 1)

The Signal Corps began testing its first airplane at Fort Myer, Virginia, on 20 August 1908, and on 9 September, Lt. Thomas E. Selfridge, flying with Orville Wright, was killed when the plane crashed. He was the first military aviation casualty. After more testing with an improved Wright Flyer, the Army formally accepted this airplane, identified as "Airplane No. 1," on 2 August 1909.

Four years after the Signal Corps took charge of air matters, Congress appropriated funds for Army aeronautics: \$125,000 for fiscal 1912. By the close of October 1912, the Signal Corps had acquired 11 aircraft, but possessed only nine. "Airplane No. 1" had been given to the Smithsonian Institution, and one other had been demolished in an accident.

In early 1913, the Army ordered its aviators who were training in Augusta, Ga., and Palm Beach, Fla., to Texas to take part in 2nd Division maneuvers. In Galveston on 3 March, the Chief Signal Officer designated the assembled men and equipment the "1st Provisional Aero Squadron," with Capt. Charles DeF. Chandler as squadron commander.

The 1st Provisional Aero Squadron began flying activities a few days later. On 4 December, general orders redesignated the unit as the 1st Aero Squadron, effective 8 December 1913. This first military unit of the U.S. Army devoted exclusively to aviation, today designated the 1st Reconnaissance Squadron, has remained continuously active since its creation. Assigned a role in the Punitive Expedition of the Mexican border in 1916, this squadron became the first air combat unit of the U.S. Army.

Meanwhile, Congress created in the Signal Corps an Aviation Section to replace the Aeronautical Division. Signed by the President, this bill became law on 18 July 1914. It directed the Aviation Section to operate and supervise "all military [U.S. Army] aircraft, including balloons and aeroplanes, all appliances pertaining to said craft, and signaling apparatus of any kind when installed on said craft."

The section would also train "officers and enlisted men in matters pertaining to military aviation," and thus embraced all facets of the Army's air organiza-

tion and operation.

The old Aeronautical Division continued to exist, but operated as the Washington office of the new section.

When World War I broke out in Europe in August 1914, the 1st Aero Squadron represented the entire tactical air strength of the U.S. Army. It counted 12 officers, 54 enlisted men and six aircraft. In December 1915 the Aviation Section consisted of 44 officers, 224 enlisted men and 23 airplanes - still a tiny force when compared to the fledgling air forces of the European powers.

But the war in Europe focused more attention on aviation.

By this time the Aviation Section consisted of the Aeronautical Division, the Signal Corps Aviation School at San Diego, the 1st Aero Squadron (then on duty with the expeditionary force in Mexico), and the 1st Company, 2nd Aero Squadron, on duty in the Philippines. In October 1916, Aviation Section plans called for two dozen squadrons - seven for the Regular Army, 12 for the National Guard divisions, and five for coastal defense - plus balloon units for the field and coast artillery. In December 1916 the seven Regular Army squadrons either had been or were being organized. All 24 squadrons had been formed by early 1917, but the 1st Aero Squadron remained the only one fully organized and equipped. Plans for still greater expansion of the Aviation Section were incomplete when the United States entered World War I on 6 April 1917.

World War I

On 20 May 1918, President Woodrow Wilson issued an executive order transferring aviation from the Signal Corps to two agencies under the Secretary of War: the Bureau of Aircraft Production, headed by Mr. John D. Ryan, and the Division of Military Aeronautics, directed by Maj. Gen. William L. Kenly.

On 24 May the War Department officially recog-

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nized these two Army agencies as the Air Service of the U.S. Army. Three months later, on 27 August, the President appointed Mr. Ryan Director of the Air Service and Second Assistant Secretary of War.

Despite a combat record of only nine months (February to November 1918), the Air Service made a respectable showing during World War I. The 740 American aircraft assigned to squadrons at the front on 11 November 1918, Armistice Day, represented little more than 10 percent of the total aircraft strength of Allied nations. But the Air Service had conducted 150 separate bombing attacks. Penetrating as far as 160 miles behind German lines, its aircraft had dropped about 138 tons of bombs. In all, the Air Service downed 756 enemy aircraft and 76 enemy balloons, while losing 289 airplanes and 48 balloons.

The dispersal of aero squadrons among various Army organizations during the war made it difficult to coordinate aerial activities, which led to the creation of higher echelon organizations. At the front, squadrons with similar functions were formed into groups, the first organized in April 1918 as I Corps Observation Group. The following month the 1st Pursuit Group was formed, and in July 1918 the American Expeditionary Forces organized its first aircraft unit higher than a group - the 1st Pursuit Wing - made up of the 2nd and 3rd Pursuit Groups and, later, the 1st Day Bombardment Group. In November 1918 the AEF possessed 14 groups (seven observation, five pursuit and two bombardment).

Following the armistice, demobilization of the Air Service was rapid and thorough.

At war's end the Air Service possessed 185 aero squadrons; 44 aero construction; 114 aero supply, 11 aero replacement, and 150 spruce production squadrons; 86 balloon companies; six balloon group headquarters; 15 construction companies; 55 photographic sections; and a few miscellaneous units.

By 22 November 1919, all had been demobilized except one aero construction, one aero replacement, and 22 aero squadrons, 32 balloon companies, 15 photographic sections, and a few miscellaneous

units. Between 11 November 1918 and 30 June 1920, officer strength plummeted from 19,189 to 1,168, and enlisted strength dropped from 178,149 to 8,428.

Following World War I, the strength of the Air Service matched what Congress considered satisfactory for peacetime.

Between Wars

The Army Reorganization Act of 1920 made the Air Service a combatant arm of the Army and gave the Chief of the Air Service the rank of major general and his assistant chief the rank of brigadier general. Tactical air units in the United States were placed under the nine U.S. Army corps area commanders where they continued to be employed primarily in support of the ground forces. The Chief of the Air Service retained command of various training schools, depots and other activities exempted from Army corps control.

During most of the 1920s, the total offensive strength of the Air Service in the United States consisted of one pursuit, one attack and one bombardment group. Overseas, the Canal Zone and the Philippines each had assigned one pursuit and one bombardment squadron with two squadrons of each type stationed in the Hawaiian Islands. The Air Service focused initially on observation and pursuit aviation, with major aeronautical development efforts concentrated in the Engineering Division at McCook Field, Dayton, Ohio.

The formal training establishment took shape during the 1920s. The Air Service concentrated flying training in Texas. Technical schools for officers and enlisted men were at Chanute Field, Illinois. The Air Service (later, Air Corps) Tactical School trained officers to command higher units and taught the employment of military aviation. First located at Langley Field, Virginia, this school moved to Maxwell Field, Alabama in 1931.

The Air Corps Act of 1926 changed the name of the Air Service to Air Corps, but left unaltered its status

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as a combatant arm of the U.S. Army.

The act also established the Office of Assistant Secretary of War for Air. The Air Corps had at this time 919 officers and 8,725 enlisted men, and its "modern aeronautical equipment" consisted of 60 pursuit planes and 169 observation planes; total serviceable aircraft of all types numbered less than 1,000.

In August 1926 the Army established the Air Corps Training Center in San Antonio, Texas. A few weeks later, on 15 October, the logistical organization was placed on firmer footing with the establishment of the Materiel Division, Air Corps, at Dayton, Ohio. A year later this division moved to nearby Wright Field, thereafter the primary base for air logistics.

In Texas, Randolph Field, the "West Point of the Air," was dedicated on 20 June 1930, and became the headquarters of the Air Corps Training Center and the site of the primary flying school in 1931. By 30 June 1932, the Air Corps had grown to 1,305 officers and 13,400 enlisted men, including cadets, and possessed 1,709 aircraft. The Corps also possessed at this time two airship and two balloon squadrons.

On 1 March 1935, the General Headquarters Air Force, which had existed in gestation since 1 October 1933, became operational and assumed command and control over Air Corps tactical units. Tactical units, less some observation squadrons scattered throughout the nine Army corps areas, transferred to this initial air force.

The three GHQAF wings were located at Langley Field, Virginia; Barksdale Field, Louisiana; and March Field, California. The Office of the Chief of the Air Corps and GHQAF existed on the same command echelon, each reporting separately to the Army Chief of Staff. The GHQAF Commander directed tactical training and operations, while the Chief of the Air Corps maintained control over procurement, supply, training schools and doctrine development. On 1 March 1939, the Chief of the Air Corps assumed control over the GHQAF, centralizing command of the entire air arm.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt acknowledged the growing importance of airpower, recognized that the United States might be drawn into a European war. Assured of a favorable reception in the White House, the Air Corps prepared plans in October 1938 for a force of some 7,000 aircraft.

Soon afterwards, President Roosevelt asked the War Department to prepare a program for an Air Corps composed of 10,000 airplanes, of which 7,500 would be combat aircraft.

In a special message to Congress on 12 January 1939, the President formally requested this program. Congress responded on 3 April, authorizing \$300 million for an Air Corps "not to exceed 6,000 serviceable airplanes."

World War II

Beginning in September 1939, the German army and the German air force rapidly conquered Poland, Norway, Holland, Belgium, France and within one year had driven the British off the continent. Leaders of the Air Corps now found themselves in the novel position of receiving practically anything they requested. Plans soon called for 54 combat groups. This program was hardly underway before revised plans called for 84 combat groups equipped with 7,800 aircraft and manned by 400,000 troops by 30 June 1942. All told, U.S. Army air forces strength in World War II would swell from 26,500 men and 2,200 aircraft in 1939 to 2,253,000 men and women and 63,715 aircraft in 1945.

With this enormous expansion underway, the War Department began in 1939 to establish new bases and air organizations in rapid succession overseas and in the continental United States. At the same time air leaders worked to create an independent institutional structure for air within the U.S. Army.

Both necessity and desire thus caused a blitz of organizational changes from 1940 through 1942. On 19 November 1940, the General Headquarters Air

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Force was removed from the jurisdiction of the Chief of the Air Corps and given separate status under the commander of the Army Field Forces. Seven months later, these air combat forces returned to the command of air leaders as Gen. George C. Marshall, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, established the Army Air Forces on 20 June 1941, to control both the Air Corps and the Air Force Combat Command.

Early in 1941, the War Department instituted a series of actions to create a hierarchy for noncombat activities. It set up a command eventually designated Flying Training Command to direct new programs for training ground crews and technicians. The next year, the new command assumed responsibility for pilot and aircrew training. In mid-1942 the War Department established the Air Corps Ferrying Command to fly aircraft overseas for delivery to the British and other Allies. As the functions of the Ferrying Command expanded, it was redesignated as the Air Transport Command.

To control supply and maintenance, the War Department established the Air Corps Maintenance Command under the Air Corps Materiel Division. The Materiel Division then concentrated on procurement and research development.

The War Department reorganization on 9 March 1942, created three autonomous U.S. Army Commands: Army Ground Forces, Services of Supply (later, in 1943, Army Service Forces), and Army Air Forces. This administrative reorganization did not affect the status of the Air Corps as a combatant arm of the US Army.

All of these actions affecting the air forces and commands that comprised the AAF emphasized the surge

towards an independent service and the expansion of combat forces that took place during World War II.

Before 1939 the Army's air arm was a fledgling organization; by the end of the war the Army Air Forces had become a major military organization comprised of many air forces, commands, divisions, wings, groups, and squadrons, plus an assortment of other organizations.

Rapid demobilization of forces immediately after World War II, although sharply reducing the size of the Army Air Forces, left untouched the nucleus of the postwar United States Air Force (USAF). A War Department letter of 21 March 1946, created two new commands and redesignated an existing one: Continental Air Forces was redesignated Strategic Air Command, and the resources of what had been Continental Air Forces were divided among Strategic Air Command and the two newcomers - Air Defense Command and Tactical Air Command. These three commands and the older Air Transport Command represented respectively the strategic, tactical, defense, and airlift missions that provided the foundation for building the postwar, independent Air Force.

An Independent Force

The National Security Act of 1947 became law on 26 July 1947. It created the Department of the Air Force, headed by a Secretary of the Air Force.

Under the Department of the Air Force, the act established the United States Air Force, headed by the Chief of Staff, USAF. On 18 September 1947, W. Stuart Symington became Secretary of the Air Force, and on 26 September, Gen. Carl A. Spaatz became the USAF's first Chief of Staff.

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

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The 461st Liberaider

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

The Liberaider is published twice yearly on behalf of the members of the organization.

Permission is granted to use articles provided source is given.

Minutes from 461st General Business Meeting, September 28, 2008

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

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

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

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

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

was taken.

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

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

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

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,

Glenda Price



Fifteenth Air Force Heavy Bomber Units

The following table shows Heavy Bomber units of the 15th Air Force and their nearest city or cross road locations. Commanding officers are shown as of 30 April 1945.

Note: Operational dates show time commands became combat active in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations until they were inactivated. Hostilities ended in May 1945. Combat flying ended in the month of April 1945. Some units remained in Europe after VE day to fly mercy and supply missions.

Fifteenth Air Force
CO – Maj. Gen. Nathan F. Twining
Headquarters: Bari
VC - Brig. Gen. William E. Hall

5th Bomb Wing
CO – Brig. Gen. Charles W. Lawrence
Headquarters: Foggia
11/43 to 11/45

Group	Equipment	Operational Dates	Location
2 nd BG	B-17	12/43 to 2/46	Amendola
97 th BG	B-17	11/43 to 10/45	Amendola
99 th BG	B-17	11/43 to 10/45	Tortorella
301 st BG	B-17	11/43 to 10/45	Lucera
463 rd BG	B-17	3/44 to 9/45	
463 rd BG	B-17	3/44 to 9/45	Celone
483 rd BG	B-17	3/44 to 5/45	Sterparone

47th Bomb Wing
CO – Brig. Gen. Hugo P Rush
Headquarters: Manduria

Group	Equipment	Operational Dates	Location
98 th BG*	B-24	11/43 to 11/45	Lecce
376 th BG*	B-24	11/43 to 11/45	San Pancrazio
449 th BG	B-24	12/43 to 5/45	Grottaglie
450 th BG	B -24	12/43 to 5/45	Manduria

* - 98th & 376th BGs redeployed 4/19/45

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49th Bomb Wing
CO – Brig. Gen. William L. Lee
Headquarters: Castelluccia

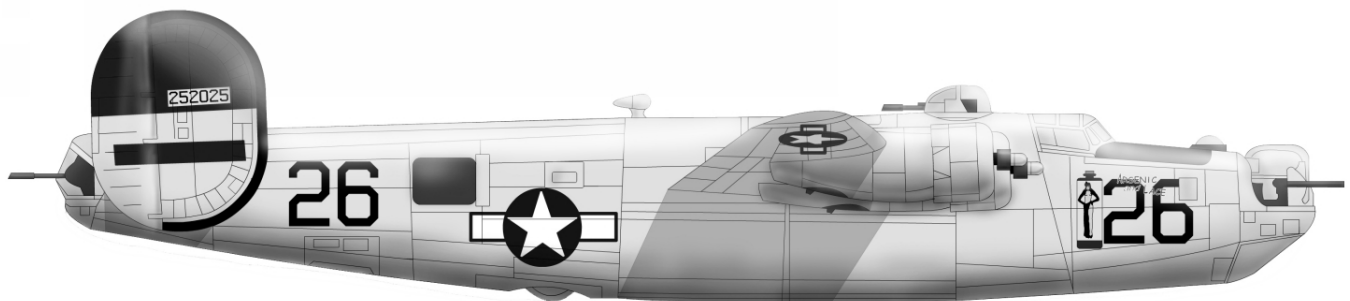
Group	Equipment	Operational Dates	Location
451 st BG	B-24	1/44 to 9/45	Castelluccia
461 st BG	B-24	2/44 to 8/45	Torretta
484 th BG	B-24	4/44 to 7/45	Torretta

55th Bomb Wing
CO – Brig. Gen. George R. Acheson
Headquarters: Spinazzola

Group	Equipment	Operational Dates	Location
460 th BG	B-24	2/44 to 9/45	Spinazzola
464 th BG	B-24	3/44 to 5/45	Pantanella
465 th BG	B-24	4/44 to 7/45	Pantanella
485 th BG	B-24	4/44 to 5/45	Venosa

304th Bomb Wing
CO – Brig. Gen. Fay R. Upthegrove
Headquarters: Cerignola

Group	Equipment	Operational Dates	Location
454 th BG	B-24	1/44 to 10/45	San Giovanni
455 th BG	B-24	1/44 to 10/45	San Giovanni
456 th BG	B-24	1/44 to 10/45	Stornara
459 th BG	B-24	2/44 to 8/45	Giulia



Fifteenth Air Force Fighter Units

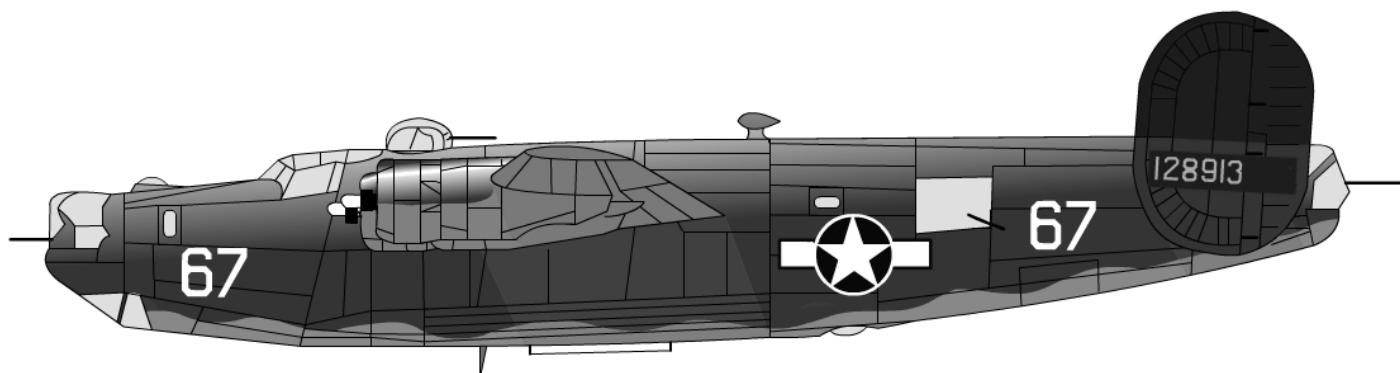
305th Fighter Wing
CO – Col. William R. Morgan
Headquarters: Torremaggiore

Group	Equipment	Operational Dates	Location
1 st FG	P-38	12/43 to 10/45	Salsola
14 th FG	P-38	11/43 to 9/45	Triolo
82 nd FG	P-38	11/43 to 9/45	Vincenzo

306th Fighter Wing
CO – Brig. Gen. Yantis H. Taylor
Headquarters: Fano

Group	Equipment	Operational Dates	Location
31 st FG	P-51	4/44 to 11/45	Mondolfo
52 nd FG	P-51	5/44 to 11/45	Piagiolino
325 th FG	P-47/P-51*	12/43 to 10/45	Lesina
332 nd FG	P-47/P-51*	5/44 to 10/45	Ramitelli

* P-47s replaced by P-51s in May 1944



(Continued from page 1)

NY and by Army bus to Fort Niagara, and I was introduced to a whole new life where privacy didn't exist. The latrines (bathrooms) consisted of 20 or 30 toilets in a row with no partitions or dividers and 20 or 30 sinks and mirrors. At times, you shaved over another's shoulder!

Since I apparently had led a sheltered life (with closed and locked bathrooms), I found it very hard to break down the privacy barriers. After about a week, I waited until 2:00 AM when the latrine was deserted and sneaked in, with the whole place to myself. This soon adjusted.

In about two weeks, several thousand of us were loaded on a troop train and shipped to Miami, Florida. Meals were served Army style in a "mess car," where you went through a freight car made up cafeteria style, filling your tray and then taking it back to your seat to eat it. We arrived in 90-degree Miami heat. It was December, and we were wearing the full olive-drab Army wool winter uniforms and overcoats. We were taken in trucks to what had been a luxury beachfront hotel, now requisitioned by the Army Air Corps. We slept four to a room, in relative comfort in cots and ate meals in an incredibly beautiful "mess hall," once the hotel's expensive restaurant, overlooking the ocean and beach. Each day we were marched to "processing," lectures, tests, and complete physical exams. We were given our choice to select what we wanted to do in the Air Corps.

Everywhere soldiers marched on the streets of Miami Beach, they sang songs like, "I've Been Working on the Railroad," or "The Air Corps Song." Some of the rich and influential (and mostly Jewish) residents formed a committee to call on the Commanding General, to complain about the noise, which usually started at 6:00 AM. He listened, then asked if they'd rather have the Germans or Japanese doing it... and that was the end of that.

This was all the basic training I ever received. I volunteered for Radio school and Aerial Gunnery training. Just about the time I was getting to like the palm trees and coconuts lying around on people's lawns, we were shipped again on a long, primitive,

dirty troop train. Our destination was secret, as usual.

The very first night out of Miami, I was assigned guard duty at the place where two of the ancient cars joined. About 3:00 AM, the guard at the other end of the car came running. "Bryant!" he gasped. "When we stopped for water in that last town, somebody ran out with a suitcase and got on the train, between the cars!" A German saboteur! To blow up the troop train! We awakened the train Commander, who pulled the cord to stop the train. We opened the doors and leaped off. Between the cars we found a trembling old colored man, who was only "hitching" a ride to visit his family up in Georgia. He received a tongue-lashing about boarding a military train, then he and his suitcase were left standing beside the tracks in what looked like the middle of the Everglades. In the black dark, all I could see was that it was flat and swampy with tall grass and scrub Palmetto trees.

It wasn't till a week later as we slowly pulled into the train yards of a grimy northern city, that we opened a window and asked a small boy running beside the tracks where we were. It was Sioux Falls, South Dakota. It was the first week in January and about 5 degrees, and we were now all wearing the summer "suntan" tropical Army uniforms!

We were marched to the tarpaper-covered wooden barracks, originally meant for Louisiana but sent by mistake and erected in South Dakota so the rumor went because the Army never makes a mistake! These were not insulated and the interior walls were simply the backs of the outside walls. These buildings were long and narrow and were heated with three coal-burning pot-bellied stoves. Some of us were assigned, on a round-the-clock basis, on four-hour shifts, to keep the fires burning at all costs. Soldiers who were prisoners (deserters, thieves, and bad actors) worked on the hard labor coal detail, loading trucks and delivering coal to the coal bins at each barracks. They were guarded by shotgun-toting military police and wore green "fatigue" coveralls with a yellow "P" at the backs of the knees and middle of the backs for the guards to aim at if they tried

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to flee!

There was another step between being a student at the Army Air Corps Radio School and a prisoner. You were given weekly progress tests and if you failed these, you were moved to "Spartan Barracks," where there were no "privileges," such as going to town on a pass, writing letters, reading magazines, etc. Only school study materials were permitted, and if this didn't motivate you to apply yourself, there was a sudden transfer to the infantry.

The commanding officer of this simulated concentration camp was one Colonel Narcissus L. Cote (believe it or not!). He wore old-fashioned knee breeches with knee-high gleaming leather boots. He carried a riding crop, with which he kept nervously striking his boot. To us, he was America's Adolph Hitler! To say that he ran a tight ship would be putting it mildly. In mid-winter, with daily temperatures well below zero and half-hour waits to be fed at the mess hall, he closed one of the mess halls for more efficiency! This greatly increased the absolute misery of being there. The wait for food, outside in snow and sub-zero cold was now nearly an hour. Whether he was purposely training us for the possible rigors of overseas warfare, or just dictatorial, we never figured out.

I began skipping meals and buying a candy bar and a coke at the PX. This lasted until I got faint and dizzy one day. In desperation, a group of us found a mess hall which strangely wasn't swamped. Apparently, it was for permanent base personnel. We attempted to eat there and were caught by an officer who took our names and serial numbers saying we would be punished. Fortunately, he didn't think we would dare lie and didn't check our "dog-tags".... I gave the name of Bernard Ziegler, my boyhood violin playing friend and a phony number. The rest, seeing this, also gave different names. Bernard turned out to be 4-F (physically too poor) in the draft and spent the war running a dance school. We never saw this officer again and thereafter attended our own mess hall!

We studied radio theory four hours each day and learned and practiced Morse Code four hours. The

school ran two shifts, 6:00 AM to 2:30 PM and 2:30 PM to 11:00 PM. I was on the late shift, with only Tuesday off. The food was so poor and sparse that on our one day off we would go to town and spend our pay on a two-inch thick steak with all the trimmings and washed it down with a malted milkshake, with pie for dessert. This was probably the way we survived. All you could do otherwise in town was go to the movies or the United Services Organization (commonly known as the USO), which had magazines and papers to read. Then back to the austere, frozen gray camp on a rickety bus for another week. We certainly had the incentive to study and get out of there. The course was 18 weeks.

One day the entire camp was trucked to town to honor Major Joe Foss, a marine fighter pilot home from the Pacific War Theatre. He was an "Ace," having shot down more Jap planes than any other pilot.

We put on a 20,000-soldier parade in a pouring rain singing the required songs. I remember the women in the crowd, crying as we marched along in the soggy drizzle.

One day in March, it was 40 degrees below zero with searing winds and driving snow. At noon it was dark as midnight. But it was our day off and we couldn't miss a chance to get food! We dressed in layer after layer of clothing, from wool "longjohns" to many sweaters and coats, and finally the heavy wool Army overcoat, a knit hat, scarf, gloves, and a plastic helmet liner. It was so cold that we took turns standing outside the barracks, watching for the bus to appear in the snowy gloom on the street of the camp. Five minutes was anyone's limit in that weather. Inside the barracks ink froze in its bottle and in fountain pens. This was before the days of "ballpoints," but they would have frozen too! On arrival at the restaurant, it took 20 minutes to disrobe before sitting down to order! But the owner didn't care--we were the only fools outside on a day like that, and he needed the business.

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There were many cases of pneumonia that winter and I actually knew of several men who deliberately showered, then stood outside to "get" pneumonia just to get in the hospital! Rumor had it that if you got pneumonia you got a two-week furlough to recuperate at home. Home was never that much of a drawing card for me, so I never found out if this was true. The worst I had was a respiratory infection.

But slowly I progressed and after 18 weeks I passed 16 words per minute in code speed and completed the radio course and was ready to graduate as an Air Corps Radio Operator/Mechanic. On the last night of school, our euphoria knew no bounds. At 10:30 PM we were being marched to our barracks, when suddenly everyone broke ranks and started running! It was a final act of defiance. The screaming commands of the officers were ignored. I found myself running with the rest. In the mad stampede, I tripped and fell in the cinder road. My knee was damaged and pants were torn, but I resumed the flight!

We arrived at our barracks with all our gear, ready for shipment at 9:00 AM. We were finally escaping that horrible place! Another guy helped me clean and dress my bleeding knee. I wouldn't have missed that shipment for anything! One Rochester boy didn't make it. His wife had a baby in mid-course and, upon being refused a furlough, he went AWOL. When last seen, he was being guarded by an MP while on coal detail. Never saw him again.

It was a better train trip this time. It would stop in towns and we would be marched to local restaurants. One morning we awoke and the train was stopped. Even the engine was gone. It was Texas and was as flat as it could be. Fields of blue extended in all directions (Texas Bluebonnets), with no sign of life. After winter in South Dakota, spring in the fresh scented air of Texas was exhilarating!

That day we stopped in Temple, Texas. I joined a small group of men who got off the train to look for a tailor shop to have our newly awarded Corporal stripes sewed on our shirts. We were about six blocks up in the town in a shop when the train whistle blew. I, of course, was the last to get the stripes

sewed on. I paid the tailor, ran the six blocks at top speed, putting on the shirt on the way. I arrived across the street from the nicely landscaped railroad station, looked across a rosebush-lined park to see the train moving! And it was gathering speed! I flew across the street, hurdled some rosebushes, and arrived at the second or third last car. Hands reached out the doorway and pulled me aboard! In the excitement, someone had shouted, "Come on Corporal, jump!"

After reaching our destination, the Army Air Corps Aerial Gunnery School at Laredo, Texas, we once again changed to summer suntan uniforms and I never wore that shirt again as a Corporal! Three months later I had graduated from Gunnery School and received my silver wings and a promotion to Sergeant.

Laredo was a small town right on the Rio Grande River, across from Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. A great disappointment--the mighty fabled Rio Grande was a dirty little trickle of water in a weed-filled gully. Two Mexican boys were playing in it. The Mexican town was just a tumbledown slum of old buildings.

We were all eager to get started in school. But my injured knee became infected, necessitating an operation at the base hospital and several weeks of agonizing pain. I lost three weeks at gunnery school and all contact with my previous radio school acquaintances and was moved to a new class.

We were told our new philosophy was to kill or be killed and that anyone not accepting that philosophy should get up and leave. Out of a thousand, one man left. Learned later that he had bad eyes and wore thick glasses and had been sent there by mistake!

For six to seven weeks we studied guns and learned to operate and fire them. Towards the end we majored in .30- and .50-caliber Browning machine guns. It was here that we learned that above 10,000 feet, humans had difficulty in breathing because of the lack of sufficient oxygen in the air. This demonstration was given in an "Altitude Chamber," where we were sealed in and taken to a simulated 20,000

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feet and told to remove our oxygen masks. Within seconds, we began to get symptoms of passing out (dying), and quickly learned the value of the oxygen flowing into our masks. Also, the absolute rule that if we had to parachute from a plane at 20,000-25,000 feet, not to open the parachute till we were down to safe breathing altitude. Otherwise, we could die floating down. I never had to "bail out" but I could certainly understand the temptation to get that thing open sooner rather than later!

The last two weeks were what we had all looked forward to: flying and firing machine guns at a target towed by another plane. The first Monday I checked out a parachute (seat pack) and a .30-caliber machine gun and 500 belted rounds of ammunition and, staggering under this load, reported to my assigned airplane. It was a two-seater AT-6, called "the Texan." It was to be my first flight!

We soon found that the pilots of these planes were "rejects" from fighter pilot training, being misfits, bad actors, uncontrollable or unpredictable. As such, they were bored merely being our "taxi driver," out to the target and back. Mine told me to get in the back seat and fasten my parachute harness to a strap attached to the floor and install the gun on its swivel. He said that when in the air at the target being towed by another plane, he would wiggle the wings and that I was to stand up in the open cockpit swivel the gun around and pull the handle that put a round (bullet) in the firing chamber ready to fire. When he wiggled the wings again, I was to fire all my ammo at the target.

The great thrill, of course, was in taxiing out to the runway and racing down it and seeing the ground fall away as we became airborne. Overtaking the tow plane and target far out over the Texas border country stretched out below, I stood up at the pilot's signal and fired all my bullets. This was while standing in the open cockpit right in the direct stream of air from the propeller. The pilot was watching me in his rear view mirror and when he saw the last round go in the run, and my hand reach for the handle to clear it, he flipped the plane upside down. Suddenly, the vast expanse of southern Texas was above me and

gravity was trying to get me out. I hung onto the gun for dear life! I would have fallen out, except for the one strap fastened from the floor to my harness. He then went into a steep dive to one side. I felt a tugging at my foot and looked down (up) to see that it was planted firmly right on the cable that controlled the tail. This interfered with his control of the plane.

After landing, I had to endure his tirade, "reaming me out" for standing on the cable. Of course, I couldn't remind him that he wasn't supposed to do aerial acrobatics while being my taxi driver out to the target!

Each gunner had different colored ammunition, so that, supposedly, they could score how many of each color hit the tow target. We were never told our scores; only that we "passed." I never heard of anyone failing.....

It was about this time that I discovered that among thousands of men, there were certain ones who would steal from the others. One day while limping back to the barracks after having my knee re-bandaged at the Dispensary, I discovered upon entering the barracks, all of my fellow barracks residents standing, stripped to their shorts. Officers were going through all our belongings looking for \$250.00 some soldier had had stolen from his wallet during the night. He had been in the lower of a double-decker bunk and had placed his wallet between the spring and mattress of the bunk above. As a coincidence, I had about \$290.00, having just received my back pay for the preceding three months. This made me an instant suspect but the victim didn't identify my money as his, luckily. This experience taught everyone about personal security.

At the end of August 1943, we graduated ready and anxious--we thought--to get at those Japs or Germans. The United States had just won a tremendous air-sea duel with the Japanese--The Battle of the Coral Sea--and had sunk four Japanese aircraft carriers, each with 4,000-5,000 men aboard, plus all their planes.

We were shipped by train to Salt Lake City, Utah, to

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the Army Air Corps "Advanced Training" school and replacement depot. There, to our utter dismay, we learned that we not only had to take "refresher" courses in all phases of radio, but now had to pass 18 words per minute Morse Code. This after over four months of not hearing any!

Naturally, none of us could pass this. We were living in tents in the Salt Lake City fairgrounds in utter squalor, mail wasn't coming through, and morale was at its lowest ebb. The weeks dragged on endlessly, and we were not permitted out of the fenced compound. No passes to town were given. One sunny September afternoon on a weekend, some of us were sitting disconsolately on a grassy knoll inside the eight-foot high, barbed-wire topped fence, watching the crowds of people passing by, going into the Utah State Fair, when an old lady walked up the fence, looked at us, and screeched, "If ya' weren't bad boys, ya' wouldn't be in there!"

It was here on one sad day that I entered the mess hall for dinner. Over the cafeteria-style serving line was a huge sign: "TAKE ALL YOU WANT - BUT YOU MUST EAT ALL YOU TAKE." A tough-looking master sergeant stood guard at the exit door to see that your tray was empty.

Going through the chow line, I saw what I thought was applesauce being ladled out. I asked for a double helping. Getting to a table I discovered it was mashed turnips!! There was no way I could eat even a teaspoon of turnips...so, when most of the others eating at my table got up and left, I moved down next to the wall. After carefully looking around--no one was looking--I scooped the turnips into the space between the table and the wall. Then, whistling "Dixie," I quickly went out.

Eventually, with no one passing the tests and faced with orders from above for shipment of radio operator-gunnery for assembly of air crews, one day we found they had "adjusted" the code machine to what seemed to me to be a slow 16 words per minute, maybe even 14, called it 18, and many of us passed it.

Soon, we were taken in trucks to the railroad station.

It was about 9:00 PM on a cold, rainy evening and we, with all our baggage, were standing on the train platform waiting endlessly for our dirty old troop train, when in slid a great shiny silver streamliner, "The Hollywood Victory Bond Special." When it stopped, we were gazing right into the picture-sized windows of the luxurious dining car! There, in total comfort, sat Fred Astaire and Greer Garson, two of the biggest movie stars of that time. But Fred was totally bald, unlike in his movies! Apparently, he saw no point in wearing his toupee on the train. They were brightly lit; we were in total darkness....what a shock!

After an overnight ride, we were delivered to the Army Air Base in Mountain Home, Idaho. Here we found our names on a bulletin board, assigning us to B-24 aircrews of the now forming 461st Bombardment Group (Heavy). I found myself assigned to Crew #48 in the 766th Squadron. The six enlisted men of Crew #48 (three engineers, two armorers, and me, the radio man) soon met, and at the urging of little (5' 0") Frankie Manna, decided to go into "town." Mountain Home, we found, was only a wide spot in the road at that time. Frank found a liquor store and bought two quarts of rum. We decided to go on to Boise, 40 miles west. We stood at the roadside, hitchhiking. Meanwhile, the other guys were drinking the rum like it was Coca-Cola! I had never had a drink of hard liquor up to this time, which they thought was hilarious. One swallow was enough! But by the time we were picked up by an empty coal truck, one member of crew #48 was "out of his gourd." Little Frankie hung onto a chain strung across the back of the truck and slid in the wet coal dust on the truck bed.

When we got out in downtown Boise, he was a total mess. Within one block he whistled at some girls and immediately a Military Police vehicle pulled up and began loading crew #48 for a trip to the Greyhound Station and a trip back to Mountain Home. I, being the only sober one (and, therefore, entrusted to carry the remaining quart of rum in a paper sack), told the MPs that, "my wife was in town and did I have to go? They let me go and I went into a nearby movie theatre, sat down, and began sipping the rum.

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Two hours later, when the lights went up and I stood up to leave, I almost fell out of the balcony! The rest of the night was a blur, but I remember a lot of people grinning at me. During the night, I ran into one of the other crewmembers who had somehow not returned to base. We went into an all night restaurant where the waitress brought us a glass of water. While describing my evening's activities, I managed to knock his glass of water into his lap.....talk about getting a friendship off to a great start.

We met our officers, all lieutenants, the pilot, copilot, navigator, and bombardier, and trained for about a month, flying in the B-24 bomber over the moonscape craters of Idaho. Because the weather there was so bad, it was decided to move the group to a better climate.

On my 20th birthday, 15 October 1943, we were all assembled at the railroad siding for shipment. While standing there, we had a final mail call, and I received a package. It was a full-sized, home-cooked birthday cake, baked by my mother and packaged by my father. It was in perfect condition, and there was nothing to do but cut it up and share it right there while waiting for the train.

We were shipped to Wendover, Utah on the Nevada border, the absolute end of the world. We were then all given furloughs, better known as a 15-day "delay on route," actually 15 days to go from Wendover, Utah to Rochester, New York and back to Fresno, California. If the cake had been one day later, it never would have reached me! There were no airlines as yet, so all this travel had to be by rail.

After days of travel, I finally arrived in Rochester at midnight. I walked six blocks and caught a streetcar (trolley) out to Grafton Street. They didn't know I was coming. I found the hidden milkbox key and let myself in the side door. They were upstairs in bed. My father called, "Is that you, Jim?" I went up and there wasn't much sleep that night!

At Fresno, I reported to the Army Air Corps' Hammer Field and we spent several months there, training again in B-24s. Right after the New Year (1944), we were issued new Colt .45 revolvers in shoulder

holsters and new parachutes with jungle packs of bolo knives and first aid kits and water purifying pills. Each day a new rumor swept the area: We were going to England, then Africa, then the South Pacific. The jungle packs seemed to confirm the South Pacific.

At the end of January 1944, the entire ground personnel of the 461st Bomb Group left by train. No one knew for where. Then one day we received hundreds of brand new B-24J bombers in the latest model, direct from the factory in the Los Angeles area! They were painted in various camouflage colors and after a brief breaking-in period, we were finally on our way.

It was like in the movies: Several wives and girlfriends sobbing at the runway as the thundering bombers took off, one by one, into the "Wild Blue Yonder"!

But we soon landed at Hamilton Field, just outside of San Francisco, for more interminable physical exams and red tape. I even got some dental work out of this. While there, three of us were in our room, playing poker for pennies and nickels, when a lieutenant fresh out of officer's school (what had become known as a "90-day wonder") burst in and "caught us gambling"! As punishment, our passes to town were revoked and we were restricted to the base.

This simple-minded foolishness was to further confirm our growing awareness that these people, in positions of total power over us, and who would never see overseas combat service, were our worst enemies and perhaps even enemies of our country's war effort.

Here we were, only killing time harmlessly, while waiting to be sent overseas to kill Germans or Japanese, or perhaps be killed ourselves, and he has nothing any better to do than harass us and punish us for some insignificant violation of the rules.

At any rate, this only meant that the three of us who weren't "gambling" went to town the first night and then gave their passes to the "guilty" three the second night! I personally hadn't even known we could

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461st Bomb Group
Annual Reunion
October 8-11, 2009
Radisson Tulsa
10918 East 41st Street Tulsa, OK 74146
Reservations: 1-918-627-5000

ITINERARY

Thursday, October 8th

Arrival and check in day. The registration table and Hospitality Suite will be open all day. Whoever is there that evening is welcome to band together to go to dinner.

Friday, October 9th

We will depart the hotel at 9:30 a.m. to visit the Tulsa Air & Space museum to see the display concerning the B-24 "Tulsamerican" and the 461st. We will continue on at about 11:30 to visit the Will Rogers museum in nearby Claremore Oklahoma and will be served a box lunch while at this museum. We will leave to return to the hotel at about 2:30. At 7:00 p.m. we will have a buffet supper in the hotel banquet room. Social hour will begin at 6:00 p.m.

Saturday, October 10th

We will depart the hotel at 9:30 a.m. to visit The Oklahoma Aquarium. We will continue on at about Noon for a very short ride to the Tulsa River Walk, a shopping and dining center on the banks of the Arkansas River for shopping and lunch on your own. We will depart to return to the hotel at about 2:30 p.m. At 7:00 p.m. we will have our Group Banquet. Social hour will begin at 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, October 11th

We will have our traditional Memorial Breakfast beginning at 8:30 a.m. following which will sadly be the conclusion of our gathering this year.

461st Bomb Group-Reunion 2009

HOTEL INFORMATION

DATE: October 8-11, 2009

LOCATION: **Radisson Tulsa**
10918 East 41st Street
Tulsa, OK 74146

ROOM RATES: \$79.00 per room, per night plus tax
This rate will be good for three days prior to
and three days after the reunion.

RESERVATIONS: (918) 627-5000
Tell them you are with the 461st Bomb Group,
booking code **461ST**.
Major credit card required for guarantee.

PARKING: Free

Free hotel shuttle to and from Tulsa International Airport (TUL)

461st Bomb Group Reunion

October 8th - 11th, 2009

Tulsa, Oklahoma



Please complete and return this form by September 10, 2009. Cancellations CAN be made with a full refund if you find later that you cannot attend so please, get this form in soon. Late registrations, however, will be accepted.

Name _____ Squadron _____

Spouse _____ Family/Guest Names _____

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

Address _____ City _____

State _____ ZIP _____ Phone _____ E-mail _____

Registration Fee _____ @ \$10.00 per person - subtotal _____
of persons

October 9th

Tulsa Air & Space Museum & Planetarium, Will Rogers Museum (includes box lunch at W.R. Museum)

Museums Only _____ @ \$18.00 per person - subtotal _____
of persons

Museums and Planetarium Show at TASM _____ @ \$22.00 per person - subtotal _____
of persons

Squadron Dinner - Buffet

A Taste of Italy - Italian Sampler _____ @ \$29.00 per person - subtotal _____
of persons

October 10th

Oklahoma Aquarium, Lunch (on your own) and shopping at the Tulsa River Walk

Senior (62 & up) _____ @ \$19.00 - subtotal _____
of persons

Adult (13 - 61) _____ @ \$21.00 - subtotal _____
of persons

Child (3-12) _____ @ \$17.00 - subtotal _____
of persons

Group Banquet

Salmon & Chicken Mixed Grill _____ @ \$26.00 per person - subtotal _____
of persons

Apricot Pork Loin _____ @ \$24.00 per person - subtotal _____
of persons

Kansas City Strip Steak _____ @ \$30.00 per person - subtotal _____
of persons

(Note: Please indicate on a separate sheet which entree choice each member of your party prefers. ALSO, please let us know if you need to substitute a vegetarian choice for this meal.)

October 11th

Memorial Breakfast

Parisian Buffet, with fruit, eggs, French toast, cheese blintzes, bacon

_____ @ \$16.00 per person - subtotal _____
of persons

EMERGENCY CONTACT:

PHONE #:

GRAND TOTAL: \$ _____

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS REGISTRATION FORM AND MAIL ALONG WITH YOUR CHECK TO:
461st Bomb Group, Attn: Dave Blake • 648 Lakewood Road • Bonner Springs, KS 66012-1804

A Note from the Reunion Committee Chairman

Before you know it, it will be time for the 27th reunion of the Liberaiders. Our dates this year are October 8-11. An itinerary, complete hotel information, and a registration form are on pages 18, 19 and 20 respectively.

Your reunion committee has attempted to put together a reunion that will be fun, low stress with as little walking as possible in a convenient geographic location. We think you'll find a lot of good old down home hospitality in Tulsa. We have also tried very hard to watch costs. We realize that the more favorable the costs are, the more that might be able to attend. For instance, we've rented our tour buses from the Tulsa Public School system instead of a for profit company. No, these are not yellow school buses but rather coaches more like we've had in the past but the cost is much lower.

We hope you'll enjoy (among other things) the display at the Tulsa Air and Space Museum about the B-24, Tulsamerican, the 461st and Cerignola. The Tulsamerican was the last B-24 off the assembly line at the Douglas aircraft plant in 1944 and was paid for through a bond drive of the Douglas employees. You'll also enjoy the Will Rogers Museum in nearby Claremore, Oklahoma. It's a good museum with lots of interesting artifacts from the life and times of Will Rogers. Likewise, you'll enjoy the beautiful Oklahoma Aquarium. It's a lot of fun to go through and see all of the exotic fish and reptiles. Just wait until you walk **through** the shark tank!

Please make your hotel reservations and send in those registration forms as soon as possible. If you find later that you cannot, for whatever reason, attend, you will be able to get a full refund. Early hotel reservations and reunion registrations make it much easier for us to plan as the date draws near.

Thank you for allowing us the privilege of serving you and we'll see you in Tulsa!

On behalf of the Reunion Committee,

Dave Blake



HELP WANTED

As a part of the last two reunions we have had a member of our group speak briefly during the Sunday morning Memorial Breakfast and everyone has really enjoyed that. Your reunion committee is searching for a 461st veteran who would be willing to give a short (ten minutes or so) talk about his time with the 461st. You could talk about ground or air memories or about the people assigned to the group.

If you would be willing to help out with this please contact Dave Blake either by email at daveblake@kc.rr.com or by phone 913-523-4044 or by mail at 648 Lakewood Rd., Bonner Springs, KS.

461st Bombardment Group (H) Association Membership

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

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

If you have any questions, you can E-Mail Dave at dstyves@pmn.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:		

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go to town and wouldn't have planned to go if we had, but now went anyway, just to "beat" them!

It was one more example of the fact that the ground, non-combatant officers of our own army seemed intent on destroying the morale of their own troops, instead of encouraging them. We found they could, and did, bring you up on charges of insubordination for not "seeing" them and failing to salute them!

Along that line: In the beginning we of Crew #48 considered ourselves the best, most model crew in the Air Corps. During our time at Fresno, our pilot, a wonderful guy from Virginia, transferred from bombers to fighters. He was short and could fit more easily into one of those than the big bombers. He was later killed in a training accident.

Another pilot was assigned to us. We soon found that he was one of the type described above, having been in the Army before the war. Further, on graduation from pilot's school, because of a red-tape SNAFU, he was made one grade lower than all the other graduates, who were second lieutenants. Our pilot was made a Flight Officer. So, even though he was our plane commander, he was one rank lower than the other three officers, the co-pilot, the navigator, and the bombardier.

This really "rankled" him and made him even harder to get along with. On our first flight he discovered, via the intercom system, that co-pilot, Lt. Smith, and Bombardier, Lt. Jones, were called "Smitty" and "Jonesy" by the rest of us. Immediately after landing, he called a meeting of the enlisted men of the crew, during which we were instructed that strict military discipline would be the rule from now on, and that officers of the crew would henceforth be addressed by their rank and last name: Lt. Smith, etc., whether they wanted to or not. After the meeting, he cornered me and wanted to know my "code speed." Then he announced that as an experienced pre-war radio operator, he would be giving me speed checks frequently. This never happened, but with the rest, was sufficient to cast a pall of dissension and negativism over the whole crew. From that day on, it was all down hill for Crew #48. He even held

up possible promotions for crewmembers!

He was a perfect illustration of how one person can affect the performance and efficiency of many. He was, however, a very good pilot and was very capable of flying the big plane.

Soon we were on our way to West Palm Beach, Florida and then the island of Trinidad (British Colony) and on to Brazil, South America.

While crossing the endless jungle of the Amazon Basin, the entire crew of ten, plus three passengers, was asleep, and the plane was flying and the bomber went into a steep dive towards the ground. Everyone was thrown to the ceiling. Neither the pilot nor co-pilot could reach the controls to pull it out! I was wedged between the radio transmitter and the seat and my parachute was on the other side of the room. The handle to open the bomb bays to jump out was 8 feet away. After a brief and totally fruitless struggle with the forces of inertia and gravity, I relaxed and got ready to die.

But, they eventually pulled it out of the dive and we continued on to our destination. Those sleeping in the rear of the plane were thrown against the ceiling made of corrugated aluminum, which resulted in many abrasions and cuts and bruises. These had to be treated at the hospital on arrival.

After the incident, the co-pilot went back to tend to the injured. He soon returned, saying, "Bryant, where's the water jug?" I gave him the gallon thermos, then remembered that we had filled it with Coca Cola before leaving Florida, after hearing that we couldn't get Coca-Cola overseas - another false rumor. He wasn't too pleased when he discovered this, but the injured recipients in the rear didn't seem to mind!

For many years after this incident, I had dreams of cutting my way through the steamy jungle, trying to find my way out to civilization. Snakes, alligators, and piranha fish dogged my every step.

In Belem, Brazil, natives would wander through the camp selling monkeys and parrots. Soon everyone

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who had ever wanted a monkey had one. No thought was ever given as to where we were going etc...they just bought monkeys! That night at midnight, when we took off across the Atlantic Ocean, all the monkey owners discovered that their "pets" weren't housebroken and were wild and quite vicious and would bite you if they could.

As dawn spread rosy fingers over the endless sea below, monkeys were seen floating down to the ocean in small parachutes for the long swim back to Brazil....

I, as radio operator, had to send hourly position reports back to the Air Corps' Control Station in Brazil. These were in Morse Code and were furnished to me by the navigator and were needed for air-sea rescue in case we went down. Each hour through the black night, the ground station sounded more and more distant. Then, in mid-ocean, I called Dakar, French West Africa Air Corps ground station and established contact and turned control over to them. That afternoon, we landed in Dakar at a palm tree-lined airport. No monkeys were aboard any of our planes. As each bomber contained a model of the famous and top secret Norden bombsight, a member of the crew had to stand guard every night. It was a well-known fact that the Arabs would do anything for money, and many of them were paid by the Germans for acts of sabotage to the aircraft traveling by this route to Italy, where the front lines of the war now were.

We proceeded to Marrakech, then ever eastward to Algiers and Tunis. The weather of February became a prime factor and we were marooned in both these cities for several weeks. Bombers, coming in a steady flow from the U.S. to Italy would land on the sea of mud runways, and at the first touch of the brakes, would slide and skid sideways down the field.

One of the first blows to our culture came when we emerged from the mess tent after breakfast. There is a trash barrel in which you hit your mess kit to "clean it," before dipping it into soapy hot water to rinse it. But here by the trash barrel stood a ragged

little Arab boy with a pail. He wanted your leftovers, coffee, etc.--it all went into the same pail. When asked where he lived, he pointed to a large tent, far off, under some palm trees. This pail of our garbage, was their daily food. The Arabs, we found, customarily all sit around the central pot of food and eat with their hands.... They also wear long robes or sheets and when nature calls, wherever they are, they merely squat down then walk away!

Somewhere in North Africa, the pilot told me that, that night I had the guard detail at the officers' liquor tent. Seems they planned to have an Officer's Club when we got to Italy, and on the way overseas, had purchased hundreds of cases of whiskey on the Island of Trinidad. Every bomber was loaded with it, along with our gear. None of this was intended to be shared with the enlisted men.

Not long after I had received this order, the tail gunner, a lanky guy from Kentucky, sidled up to me and murmured in his southern drawl, "Brahnt, if y'all heah anythin' round that tent, 'bout midnight, don't shoot or anythin"...hear?" I got the message, and though he never offered to share, he was drunk for several days.

It was on a dreary and raw cold rainy night at around 3:00 AM, outside Tunis, that I sat on top of a 55-gallon oil drum being used as a toilet. I had terrible diarrhea. No shelter was provided and I was wet to the skin. The next day we were scheduled to fly to our final destination in Italy. Before boarding the bomber, I saw the doctor, who had the great title of "Flight Surgeon," though it was rumored that in civilian life he was a veterinarian. I went over to him and explained the situation and requested "something to shut me off." This pompous officer only said, "You want to go, don't you?" Meaning I was faking so I wouldn't have to go to the war zone. Then he refused, saying his "bag was packed" on the plane he was riding in.

On the four-hour flight across the Mediterranean Sea and Sicily to a newly constructed double runway airport near Cerignola, Italy, I threw up several times. After landing, of course, I was required to clean up

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the plane.

On a farm outside Cerignola, the ground forces of the 461st Bomb Group, 766th Squadron, who had endured a long boat ride in a convoy to Italy, had been erecting tents, they thought, for them to live in. After the job was done, they were directed to an ancient stone and concrete stable littered with old urine-soaked hay and manure. They then had to clean this up and it became their new home. The tents were for the air personnel, neatly segregated into officers' section and enlisted section. We slept six to a tent, on cots with mosquito netting over them on T-bars. The officers were four to a tent.

With the aforementioned pilot more or less in charge, they soon weren't speaking to each other and had drawn chalk lines on the brick floor, dividing their tent into four quarters, much to our amusement! The pilot had told them that they were keeping a dirty area and ordered them to keep it militarily clean.

These tents were "heated" by a "stove" made of a 55-gallon oil drum cut in half. A full 55-gallon oil drum was placed outside the tent, and oil was piped through a length of copper tubing welded onto a metal cup inside the half oil drum in the center of the tent. When working well, these imitation stoves would get red hot on top, and when the mess hall food became progressively intolerable, we would "steal" bread from the mess hall and toast it to eat in the evenings. When the officer in charge noticed that the bread was disappearing like wildfire, he rationed it one piece per person in the serving line.

We didn't dare leave these stoves going all night and, after we started flying missions, it became my duty to light it in the morning. This was because I, as the radio operator, had to go to the 3:00 AM officer's briefing, while the other five enlisted men went to the 4:00 AM enlisted briefing. These briefings showed us where we were going each day on a giant map. When the red yarn, marking the route, went up into Germany or France or Rumania, it was greeted with groans of dismay; while a "milk run" to Italy or Yugoslavia was seen with relief as not being too dangerous.

Our stove leaked, or dripped oil all night into the oil burner cup, and when I inserted a lighted match in the mornings, sometimes it would explode! When this happened, the stove did a somersault, the stove-pipes all fell down, I was knocked over backwards, and literally tons of soot and oily black "hangers" filled the tent! This was followed by the groans and curses of the five remaining in bed. After three or four of these experiences, I refused to light it any more, and the others didn't insist.

But, on the first evening at the farm, I decided to answer the call of nature and, taking a flashlight, ventured out into the black Italian night. No permanent outside lights were permitted in case of German aerial observation or possible bombing. I asked someone which way to the bathroom. He said just walk to the end of the row of tents and turn to the right. I followed my flashlight and came upon an incredible sight. Three or four men were squatting over a foot-wide trench in the ground. I did an about face and knew I had experienced culture shock before, but this was too much. Besides, what if you fell in?!

I got a shovel and went for a walk in the woods, but the next day I started using the officer's latrine. One where you sat with six other guys and read the paper. No one ever asked what I was doing there and soon they got around to building one for the enlisted men.

These buildings were built very light, with pine boards about three-feet high and screening the rest of the way up to the roof. When the six-foot deep trenches under the eight-holer boards became pretty full, an Italian prisoner of war was employed to tip the whole building over, pour a 55-gallon drum of 100-octane aviation gasoline into the trench, then light it up and burn out the trenches. One day he did it backwards: poured the gasoline, then decided to "use" the latrine. Sitting down on one of the holes, he lit a cigarette and flipped the match into the next hole. The resulting blast left him hanging in a nearby tree and destroyed the latrine!

At about this time, another incident occurred that

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once again illustrated to us enlisted men the sheer stupidity and uncaring, self-centered incompetence of some of our officers. One cold, blustery day in March, an "administrative" ground officer noticed that some members of flying crews were wearing their fur-lined flying boots as casual, every-day attire around the camp. He issued an order that this would not be done in the future, and it was an understandable, reasonable order. But that night, one of the aircrew's tents burned to the ground. The six men sleeping in it were lucky to escape with the clothes on their backs and their flying boots. The next morning, the aforementioned officer decided to call a 6:00 AM formation. Guess he wanted to lecture the men on the solitary idea that popped into his head during the night. When we were all lined up in front of him, he saw the six men wearing their flying boots. He ordered them to take them off and stand in their bare feet in the frozen snow. All attempts to explain to him about the fire were cut off. In fact, attempts to ask permission to speak were curtly answered, "Refused?"

A short time later, this officer went on a mission with one of the aircrews. He picked a safe, easy one, just to get his required "flying time" (four hours a month) to receive 50% more flying pay. When, at 10,000 feet, the crew put on their oxygen masks, he did too. About 5 minutes later, semi-conscious and half-dead, it was discovered that someone had removed the oxygen mixer valve from his mask. They had to shove the oxygen hose in his mouth and turn on pure oxygen, and then that plane had to take him back for treatment. He just could not imagine why anyone would want to do that to him! But it "made a Christian" out of him and thereafter, he became almost human.

After weeks and weeks of delay because of bad winter weather, we finally had our first mission scheduled. After the early morning briefing, we were in the planes and extremely ready to go! Then it was cancelled--a reconnaissance plane reported heavy clouds over the target. We were supposed to bomb a railroad bridge in northern Italy from 20,000 feet. The Germans were using it to supply their armies in mid-Italy.

Someone got the brilliant idea to take six bombers and go in at low level, flying right down along the riverbed, between the high banks of the gorge. When we came to the bridge and pulled up, the bombs would be dropped at its base, with delayed fuses (so the explosions wouldn't get us, too). Meanwhile, we gunners would take care of any Germans or Italians standing around in the vicinity.

They asked for volunteers and everyone raised their hands. If nothing else was accomplished, it probably would have frightened the Germans to death. Cooler heads at 49th Bomb Wing and Fifteenth Air Force prevailed and vetoed the idea.

But, soon we were on our way to our individual goals of 50 missions. 50 missions = return to America; an idea which now seemed to grow daily! So-called romantic Italy was simply not! One dawn at first light, 30 bombers rolled down the runways and rose into the sky, forming into flights of six, then out to sea and up the west coast of Italy, past Anzio, where our infantry had made a landing and were really in trouble, being pinned down on the beach by the Germans. We were told they sent us by this route so our ground forces could see us and get their morale built up. Later, we heard that they were most disappointed and demoralized when we didn't turn in and attack the Germans!

Later, deep in hostile German-occupied Italy, we bore down on the city of Ferrara, our target--their massive railroad yards. I found I liked to hang over the side, I was the left-waist machine gunner, and watch the bombs fall and explode on impact. They "walked" right down the railroad yards, wrecking that place for a while. The Germans were experts, though, in repair and would soon have the trains running again.

It was here we learned about flak. I had noticed many flashes of light on the ground as we came over the city. Soon, black puffs appeared all around and under the planes and "bang" under me and my right foot involuntarily lifted off the floor. A piece of metal shrapnel had torn through the bottom of the plane, and now ricocheted around off the inside walls

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of the plane. There was a two-inch hole in the floor. The piece had not touched me but just fractionally missed my boot.

The other gunner ran, in absolute terror, and squatted down, trying to "hide" beside an ammunition container. I remember standing there and staring into his frightened eyes, above his oxygen mask, for several seconds. Total fear and cowardice were there--he had abandoned his gun. Until he recovered, I watched both left and right sides. Luckily there were no German planes around. They rarely, if ever, defended Italian cities, saving their planes and fuel and ammunition for when we were attacking Germany, or the oil fields of Rumania. No further mention was made of this incident. He later found the piece of metal and kept it as a souvenir. Though more than half our crewmembers are now dead by the date of this writing, this member is still alive and living in Virginia.

While on these missions, we wore heated suits. They were like long-john underwear, only wired; much like a heated blanket is today. Over them, we wore just a thin nylon flying suit (coverall type) and a leather jacket and fur-lined boots and gloves. One day, at 25,000 feet and -40 degrees (40 degrees below zero) temperatures, the heat shut off to our suits in the rear of the plane. For the next hour we fought off freezing to death, while the same gunner mentioned above, who had graduated from Aircraft Mechanics School, failed to know how to replace a burned-out fuse on the wall three feet away. He "just didn't know about that." Consolation: He froze too!

We usually flew every other day. But, as time went on, we sometimes had to fill in on our days off on crews that had had people wounded. On one such day, I was assigned to fly in the lead plane as radio operator. At the 3:00 AM briefing that day, I learned the target for that day was Vienna, Austria. That meant the Germans would throw everything they had into the defense of the city.

As radio operator for the Colonel flying the lead plane, my only duties that day would be (1) to remain at the radio and listen for the Fifteenth Air

Force secret recall word of the day. This would be sent in Morse Code and meant, for whatever reason, that the mission was cancelled and the whole group was required to return to base. They changed the word daily. And (2), after the bombs were dropped on Vienna (oil storage yards), the Bombardier and Navigator supplied me with a message to Fifteenth Air Force Headquarters describing the observed results of the bombing, the exact time and weather over the target. I encoded it in the secret code of the day then sent it in Morse Code to the Ground Control Station back in Italy.

Everything went according to plan. I had no gun position to man, and being bored, stood up and stood just behind the pilot and co-pilot to watch the scene as we approached Vienna. My earphones gave me nothing but a steady flow of static. But my eyes beheld an incredible scene. Hundreds of other American bombers were in line ahead of us on this massive strike, and we were in a parade. Smoke and flames were rising over this great city on the Danube River. The sky ahead was filled with black puffs of exploding flak shells. German fighter planes were diving everywhere in dogfights with American fighter planes, and in between attacking the bombers, whose gunners were firing back. Every once in a while, a bomber would slowly peel off from the formation, smoking, and parachutes would blossom in the smoke. Tracer bullets were crisscrossing the whole scene. Bombs were falling in long columns from the bombers ahead.

I sat back down at the radio and snapped on my parachute, then eased into the heavy flak vest: Sort of like a bullet-proof vest, with bars of steel back and front, then a steel infantry helmet on my head. Then I tried to become as small as possible inside this protection. I could hear and feel the vibration of our machine guns firing. The top turret gunner above me was firing and shell casings were falling all over the cabin. The bomb bay doors to my right opened. There were several bangs as shrapnel tore through the cabin's aluminum skin. After one bang, the cabin filled with what looked like smoke or dust particles. Later, I found that a piece of shrapnel had gone through the outer skin of the thermos jug and

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the flying dust-like particles were the insulation layer blown into the air. Another piece went through a part of the radio beside me but didn't affect its performance. This was one trip that I didn't watch the bombs go down!

On another flight, I replaced a wounded right waist gunner and on the way to Germany, the plane caught the turbulence of the prop-wash of the bombers ahead and bounced around quite a bit. The other waist gunner suddenly lost his nerve and had a mini-nervous breakdown, putting on his parachute and trying to open the hatch door in the floor of the plane, in order to jump out. He was crying and screaming, "That's it! I'm getting out of here!" Two of us had to sit on him till the co-pilot came back. We had to turn back and lost credit for a mission that day. He was transferred to the ground crew. I just found out that he died in 1984.

Another time on a mission to Rumania, one of our engines was shot out and a big piece of the aluminum "skin" of the plane got torn off. We lost altitude and it looked like we wouldn't make it over the high coastal mountains of Yugoslavia. The squadron "covered" us as long as possible then had to leave, as we couldn't keep up. The Germans always loved a wounded straggler as easy pickings, but no fighters showed up. With parachutes on, we just made it through the peaks and got out over the Adriatic Sea.

Over the intercom came: "Navigator from Pilot." "Navigator here." "How many minutes to the coast of Italy?" "Uh, just a minute....20 minutes." "You sure?" "Yes, of course. Why?" "We only got gas for 17 minutes...." (Long silence.) (We snap on our parachutes again.) (We checked our inflatable "Mae West" flotation vests.) Our blood pressure was rising steadily.) The rest of the conversation consisted of the Navigator plaintively asking, "How could this be?" "Well, we musta lost it, etc." The coast of Italy came and went. It was only a joke played on the navigator but a killer on the nerves of the rest of us.

Then, they were lost. No joke this time. The navigator and pilots hadn't a clue as to where in Italy we

were. From the air, no town has its name facing up in huge letters. Now the gas was getting low. I began seeing myself spending the rest of my life on an Italian goat farm. We wandered around southern Italy for awhile like that. Parachutes got put on again. Then, over the intercom came "Wait a minute! Okay, I know where we are! Turn left! Turn left!" The pilot turned left and just as he did, all the engines still operating "coughed" and black smoke belched out. We believed this was it, and I actually had a leg out the window and sat on the edge ready to push off. But, once again, we recovered and soon limped in to the landing field!

While I was overseas, one great source of personal amusement was the fact that back in Rochester my mother had joined the Air Corps Mothers Association! Once every two weeks, all these middle-aged ladies met and made things for the soldiers. Each meeting started with a rousing rendition of "The Air Corps Song." They all stood and sang,

"Off we go, into the wild blue yonder
Flying high, into the sun!
Down we dive,
Zooming to meet their thunder.
At 'em boys,
Give her the gun!
We live in fame! Or go down in flame,
Nothing can stop the Army Air Corps!"

Just the picturing of the scene of all those women, hand held over their hearts, aflame with patriotism, singing this stirring, stimulating song, was enough to bring a grin to my face.

One day, we bombed the German submarine yards at Toulon, on the south coast of France. We droned northward up the coast of Italy, across the Tyrrhenian Sea. The Germans had set up an elaborate smoke screen system and, of course, knew by radar that we were coming. By the time we formed up and started in, smoke obscured everything. We dropped the bombs into it and swung away, out of France, and headed back to Italy.

Suddenly, I saw a speck in the sky, miles away. It

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got rapidly larger, and I didn't have time to alert the rest of the crew. Only the other waist gunner and I saw it. He watched as I fired at it. It was a Messerschmitt-109 with a yellow nose. For some strange reason, we never saw his wing guns fire at us, and as he rolled over and went under us (with me sending clouds of lead at him) he trailed black smoke and began falling end over end, tumbling down the sky to the ocean four miles below. We watched it all the way down. No other German planes appeared.

Then, there was the unforgettable day when, cruising along over the Adriatic Sea on the way back to our base, the other waist gunner and I were having a cigarette, when the lower ball gun turret began slowly retracting into the plane. Soon, the door opened and the gunner, Frank Manna of Kenosha, Wisconsin, crawled out. Apparently, his teeth were just about floating as he pointed at the "relief tube" hanging on the wall, indicating that he needed to use it. With the roar of four engines and the rush of air through the open windows, talking was impossible. I tapped him on the shoulder and, in sign language, told him the tube was inoperable. At 40 degrees below zero, it freezes solid when the first person uses it.

Now, Frank was only five feet tall and had a big black moustache and sad, sorrowful Italian eyes. He stood staring at me for a few minutes. Then he looked around and picked up a steel infantry helmet from the floor and proceeded to fill it. Then, before we could move, he stepped to the open window and threw it out. Instantly, he received it right back, square in the face! He slowly turned, almost gasping for breath, looking at us with his sad, expressionless face. His eyebrows, even his moustache, was dripping. He was trying not to laugh, but you could see a nervous giggle was about to break through.

For the next half-hour, I was helpless with laughter and rolled hysterically on the floor. Frank dried his head with something and wordlessly trying to preserve his dignity, got back into his turret. This may just have been the highlight of his life. He died in 1989. He had been the worst drunk that day in

Mountain Home, Idaho, about nine months before.

Each crew was sent to "Rest Camp" on the Isle of Capri, ten miles off Naples. This was for one full week during our tour of duty in Italy. It was there that little Frank, sloshed to the gills decided he wanted to sing with the band. He and I were sitting at a table at an open-air restaurant on the main cobblestone square of the town of Capri. We were right by the orchestra, a large, 12-piece one. The band, after some negotiation, agreed to accompany him. He then taught me a small speech in Italian that I remember to this day, and I, also feeling little pain, took the microphone and addressed the crowd of about 150 people.

"Attenzione! Attenzione! Presentamo Don Chi Chi in canzone d' amore d' Isola del Capri!" (Attention! Attention! Presenting Don Chi Chi in a song of love of the Isle of Capri!)

He then got up and signaled the orchestra and began a perfectly terrible rendition of "'Twas on the Isle of Capri that I found her--etc., etc.'" Towards the end, he slowly slid down the microphone stand to the floor, where we had to carry him away.

Our navigator was one of those slick characters who could always arrange anything, or get anything, no matter how impossible. By pulling strings with higher-ups he knew, he arranged for himself to go to the Isle of Capri with the very first crew to go, when they first started the program. Many weeks later, when it was our crew's turn to go, he had to stay and fly with another crew. While we were gone, and on one of his missions, four German planes came out of the sun and destroyed four bombers. His plane was one of them and was shot down. He parachuted into Germany and spent the rest of the war in a prisoner of war camp! Evidently, that was one thing he couldn't "fix." He died in the 1960s.

Slowly, we approached the magic number of 50 missions. Trouble was that the missions became progressively more dangerous. The allies invaded France on D-Day, June 6, 1944, and we supported this by steadily bombing from the south. The pres-

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asures and tension mounted as many were wounded, killed, or shot down. One day as we sat playing cards in our tent on our off day, parachutes and people floated down all around us as a crew abandoned their dying plane over the field, rather than trust it to land.

One interesting thing that I have forgotten to include was discovered by our ground troops as they advanced across Europe. Most trees around and in cities were draped with Christmas tree tinsel; tons of it.

Early in the European Air Offensive, it was discovered that if the first bombers at the target city dropped tinsel, and the rest following did too, it would float down in a curtain, completely ruining the German radar's ability to know our exact height, which was used to set the altitude at which the flak shells would burst. Until the Germans caught on, their shells consistently went off too low (they were aiming at the curtain of tinsel floating down)!

So, early on, we gunners in the waist of the plane, at the windows, found cases of tinsel in the planes each morning. We had the job of throwing this out. Each little box would burst in the air stream, and it would float down. In answer, the Germans would send one plane to get our altitude and then radio the information to the gun crews on the ground. This plane, of course, was the first target of our escorting fighter planes.

One day in July 1944, on my day off, I hitchhiked to the coastal city of Bari. I was picked up by a truckful of Polish soldiers. We couldn't communicate at all, but I gave them a pack of American cigarettes, which made them my friends forever. Then, they gave me one of theirs and I knew why. It tasted like wet cardboard dipped in sheep droppings! No wonder they all want to come to America!

Bari was an operating supply port for the Allied armies. Ships were busily unloading at the docks facing the Adriatic Sea. The blue skies were crowded with anti-bomb and anti-aircraft balloons held in place by long, steel cables. But the Germans had lost their power to attack by air and didn't interfere

with this operation. I was hungry and asked someone where to get something to eat. He pointed to a boarded-up, out of business restaurant. I said, "But it's closed!" He said, "Just go around the back." On the way around the building I passed a sign saying, "Off Limits to all Allied Military Personnel." I tried a door and inside found hundreds of military people eating...there were waiters and cashiers, etc. This was undoubtedly stolen or "black market" food being sold in direct violation of the law. Someone was getting paid off. The meal was delicious.

An interesting occurrence at the farm base of the 766th Squadron was the monthly visit of the Baron. He was the owner of all this property; the rich landowner who was being paid rent by good old Uncle Sam for the use of his property to conduct the war! Undoubtedly, he was a big supporter of the fascist Mussolini government, which in turn supported Hitler and the Germans. He drove a horse and buggy and the Italian peasants would all remove their hats and bow to him, while we merely waved.

One boring day, with excitement always lurking near, we sat playing cards in our tent. It was quiet over the encampment; half the force was gone on a mission. Suddenly, we heard shouting and commotion and the sound of vehicles starting. Soon I learned that the bomb dump was on fire! This was a former pasture, where all the bombs were stored, awaiting loading into the bombers. The dry grass on the Italian farm had caught fire, and the bombs were in danger of going off. Among them were thousands of fragmentation bombs (anti-people bombs) and also fire bombs (to start fires). The usual method of delivery to the German cities was (1) the big 500 or 1000 lb. demolition bombs to bust everything up; (2) the fire bombs to start the wreckage on fire; (3) then the fragmentation bombs, which throw "daisy cutters," or pieces of shrapnel, in all directions to get the fire fighters.

Soon, here came the First Sergeant in his jeep to recruit fire fighters. He was driving between the tents; screaming and hollering for everybody to get out there and fight the fire. We looked at each other. Someone said, "Sure...." Each man hid behind his

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cot, hidden by the hanging blankets and mosquito netting. The sergeant pulled open the tent flap and for a long minute gazed around the silent tent. Then he left and we resumed breathing. Somehow they got it out without us.

One day in town, several of us were looking for a place to eat. This was forbidden: to eat food that was for "the people." But a small boy took us through narrow dingy streets to a doorway in a stone building. He ushered us through strings of hanging beads. Inside was one large room. The whole Italian family was about to eat dinner. The boy jabbered in Italian. The father leapt up and barked an order. The old man and old woman (Grandpa and Grandma) got up and slunk to a corner, despite our horrified protests. But this was their custom, and for \$1.00 each we received home-cooked eggs and spaghetti. Frankie Manna interpreted. This was the only way they could get money. We were kind of embarrassed, but it did taste good.

The local price structure was tightly controlled by the military government. A haircut was 7 cents; a shave 3 cents. We would tip the barber a dollar!

When we took our laundry to a local housewife, she would immediately send a small boy out for a bottle of wine for us. It was so bad we could hardly drink it, but Frank said it would be an insult to refuse it, so we forced it down. We had to supply her with yellow bar soap, as they could get no soap. Then she would hang our clothes out to dry on clotheslines on pulleys, stretched across the street, over the heads of passersby.

Soon, the magic day arrived for my last mission. As I got in the patched-up bomber that morning, I silently said, "Lord, if you let me come back just one more time, I promise I'll never get in one of these things again." This held for about 25 years, until I had to fly by airline to New York City in the late 1960s when my brother Jim lost his eight-year old daughter to Chicken Pox Encephalitis. I figured I could be excused for that.

All of us made it through the ordeal except the Navi-

gator. Before we left by truck to Naples to board a troopship for New York, our esteemed pilot finally was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant. His long-awaited triumph was killed, however, when the other three officers on the crew, already 2nd Lieutenants, made 1st Lieutenants the same day! His ulcer took a turn for the worse that day. He will never know that if we had ever been shot down and parachuted into German-controlled territory that the revolvers carried by each crew member would have been looking for him, not the Germans.

The troopship took 13 days to reach New York. In mid-ocean, it developed propeller trouble and was left by the 50-ship convoy to make repairs, while a single American Destroyer circled slowly around, watching for the German submarine that didn't show up. The Statue of Liberty towered over us and was never so beautiful as we passed it in foggy New York Harbor on our way to New Jersey and unlimited ice cream, hamburgers, and the one and only America, so foolishly taken for granted and abused by most Americans today.

After being deloused, disinfected, and inspected, I was given a 30-day furlough. My brother Doug had enlisted in the Navy and was stationed at "Boot Camp" at Sampson, New York on Seneca Lake, one of the Finger Lakes. I got some gasoline on my 30-day ration card and took my father's car and went down there. They admitted me and directed me to his company headquarters. As I drove through the base, I suddenly became aware that everyone on foot was saluting me! I was in a sort of Air Corps uniform, with a leather flying jacket with no rank showing. At headquarters, as I walked in, the sailor on guard duty snapped to, and did a very good "present arms" holding his rifle in front of him. This actually frightened me! I muttered "At ease!" and went in the office. They were just taking no chances of missing an officer salute, which would have meant punishment.

I found Doug in his barracks. He eventually became an armed guard, part of a Navy anti-aircraft gun crew assigned to Merchant Marine ships, private vessels which carried war materials to the forces

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overseas. The war by now was winding down to end in the next year (1945) and he never saw a Jap or German. After my discharge, the family went to meet him at the train depot. He had grown a moustache and was carrying two Jap rifles and a Japanese flag. It was sensational as he got off the train and the crowd was thrilled! (The returning Hero!)

Brother Jim was in the seventh grade at #39 School and introduced me to his teacher, Miss Janet Stockwell, who boarded with a family in a house just across the street from ours. I was a late bloomer but was now becoming interested in girls. Miss Stockwell invited me to talk with her class about the war and Italy, and I brought a few souvenirs and pictures to show. This was her first year teaching and though she was a little older than I was, we started dating. I was also invited to talk to the class of the old hag who gave me the reading test, but never went.

Miss Stockwell soon supplied me with brochures and pamphlets on the Catholic Church and tried to set up an appointment with a priest for me...but I escaped in the nick of time, back to the Air Corps. Besides, my mother had only negative things to say about Janet, mainly because of the Catholic thing. One of my mother's favorite little jokes about her, referring to her somewhat heavy legs, was, "Janet certainly has a good "understanding,"....doesn't she?" The teacher eventually married a returning Marine and had four children.

Another girl I took out was a girl who got my name from someone and wrote to me. She lived in Fairport, outside of Rochester, NY. After meeting her, I was told that before our date, she needed to take me over to her grandmother's house...grandmother began to question me right away: "Do you live on Grafton Street? Do you have a brother Douglas?" Baffled, I answered her questions as best I could, but in answer to my questions about why her questions, got no straight answers. Later, in telling my mother about this, she confessed that Doug had gotten into some kind of trouble; something about a car taken without the owner's permission. Anyway, he had been arrested, and it made the papers (to my mother's everlasting mortification), and this girl's

beady-eyed grandmother had caught it. Needless to say, it was our first and last date and the end of a correspondence.

I also dated Viola Mulliner, a girl I had met at Kamp Kontent, the Baptist Church Camp, several years before when we were both 16. She lived at the YWCA and I had to pick her up there in a lobby full of single girls, in a time when men were in short supply! It was like a jungle in there....

Too soon, I returned to Miami Beach, Florida for "processing." There we went through a tremendous physical exam, hundreds of men without clothes, moving slowly past about 30 doctors. At the end, I was informed that I was being sent to Nashville, Tennessee, Air Corps Convalescent Hospital. Of course I said, "You must have someone else's papers," but no, they were mine. They felt I was "a little nervous."

Nashville was simply a total R&R (rest and relaxation) place--they bused us to football games, etc., but mostly we were on our own, free to go to town, sleep, etc. Food, ice cream, baked goods, and milk were available any time you felt like going to the mess hall, 24 hours a day. None of the other branches of service even began to treat their returnees this well!

In the Fall of 1944, a lot of us were transferred to Fort Logan Hospital at Denver, Colorado. They were going to fly us there, but, to a man, we refused. I guess a lot more than me made a promise! One day, at Fort Logan, I ran into Frank Manna, the guy who had the trouble at the window of the plane. This was the only time I ever saw any of the plane crewmembers again. He wanted to go to town, same as always. So, a couple of others and I went. He took us to a big dance hall where you paid admission up front and danced if you could find a partner. It was packed with people. Frank immediately locked onto some girls sitting at a table. I had always been embarrassed by his direct approach! But soon he was beckoning us over. I was sent to find their friend who was dancing. Her name was Norma Lee. And thus, I met my future wife!

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Shortly thereafter, I was released to regular duty and sent back to Miami for assignment. This time, I was alone on the train, fare paid by the Government. This time I was sent to a Bombardier's School in Childress, Texas. There I found that all newly arriving overseas returnees were entitled to (another!) furlough. I had already had three or four since returning from Italy. Rochester, New York was becoming tired of me! And vice versa. So I took this two weeks in Denver, visiting Norma. After this, we corresponded.

Back at Childress, I was assigned to the maintenance hangar to work on the airplanes on which the Bombardier students practiced bombing. The hangar boss was a Staff Sergeant. So was I. He never assigned me any job. After three days of wandering around the hangar for eight hours, I returned to Personnel.

They said, well, we don't need any machine gunners or radio operators, but would I like a job in their newly established Personal Affairs Office? Next day I had my own desk, a steady flow of "customers," and a girl to do my typing. I was in charge of allotments of pay! Family allotments, War Bond allotments, etc. I filled out the forms, wrote letters of inquiry, etc., for the head officer's signature, and the girl typed them. The head officer, a Major, was an empire builder, and soon we had five other overseas returnees working there, and several Lieutenants, each with their own girl typist!

Our main problem was with the Negro troops, all segregated into Squadron F, who, every time they went on furlough, got married (again and again/no divorces), then each time they returned put in applications for allotments to each bride! They were all from Georgia and most were illiterate and couldn't write their names. Several were processed through our office in handcuffs, being taken away for extended tours at Leavenworth Penitentiary. One of my more talented coworkers penned the following poem:

An Ode to Staff Sergeant Bryant

He's Uncle Sam's Allotment Man
The Hero of Squadron F.
He'll get you a check fo' all de folks
On dat you can surely bet.

Fo' uncles an' cousins an' nieces an' aunts
Fo' folks dat you knowed all yo' life
Dat boy's so good he can even get
A check fo' yo' common-law wife!

When de war is over an' we all go back
To our homes in Alabam',
We'll spend de dough he got us
From de man called Uncle Sam.

Signed: The gang down in Sqdn. F

At the end of May 1945, the Americans, French, English, and Russians drove to Berlin and Germany surrendered. Adolph Hitler committed suicide. Life in Childress, Texas went on. In July, I sent for Norma and we were married on July 22, 1945. We found one room in a rooming house. Lucky to get it as there was almost no housing available in that town. Every corner of that big house was crammed with soldiers and their wives.

In August, Japan was atom-bombed into submission. President Franklin Roosevelt had died that spring in his fourth term as President. After that, Congress decreed that two terms were the limit for any President. Harry S. Truman made the decision to use the A-bomb to save countless American lives, which would have been lost in an invasion of their country.

I had taken Norma to Rochester to meet the family. When we returned to Childress, I found almost everyone gone! Soon as the Japanese quit, the Government started the huge process of discharging the American war machine. All my coworkers had been shipped out. I was told that I would leave the next day!

Norma went to relatives in Council Bluffs, Iowa, while I went to Fort Dix, New Jersey. Two weeks later, on September 30, 1945, I was presented with my honorable discharge papers and released to the tender mercies of the civilian world. It had been a little less than three years.

"Big John"

Now listen my children
And you shall hear
Of Big John Wilson
And a can of beer.

This one's my fiftieth,"
Said Big John with a grin,
As he ran up the engines
Making a whale of a din.

This one's a double,
Going to paste the Krauts
Multi flak at the target
Eager Krauts along the route.

Bringing along some beer
Hope it gets cold
But if it doesn't
Won't let it grow old.

With his hand full of throttles
And an eye on his beer
Fifteen came off the runway
Like a pregnant old deer.

Her wheels came up,
She roared on and out,
A tired old lady
with a trance of gout.

Into formation
And out on course
One-sixty indicated
Needed every horse.

On into Germany
With a concerted drone
All except John's
Which climbed with a moan.

The fighters came in
Old John said a prayer,
Began falling back
Leaving empty air.

Twenty-seven hundred
Pulling mercury by the yard
Steady stream of cursed
fate held the card.

Hoffman sat tense
Mac to the core
A P-38 pilot
In a B-24.

"Throw out the ammo,
Toss out the guns
While the score is still tied
No hits and no runs."

The Jerries came in
All around the clock
Old John sat helpless
Couldn't even throw a rock.

Started picking up speed
Vibrating to the core
Wasn't quite enough
Gotta throw out more.

"Here's something else"
Spoke the engineer,
"Two knots more,
If we toss out the beer."

"You're a private," said John
"If you loose by brew
If it goes out -
Also will you."

Soon he came up
To the Group racing still
Fooling the ME's
Closing for the kill.

Then to the target,
All hell broke loose
Lots of accurate flak
Trying to get our swoose.

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The bombs went away
The Group rallied right,
Got out of the flak
Didn't lose a mite.

Back to the home base
Came this weary B-24
Plenty of flak holes
Couldn't have taken much more.

Down on the runway
Almost lost the gear,
But what's the difference
Still got the beer.

Parked in the revetment
All four fans died,
Old John crawled out
With all of his hide.

"My missions are finished
Gonna celebrate here
Nelle come out
And bring me my beer."

The can came out
John grabbed it and said
"Colder'n hell", and
Then he saw red.

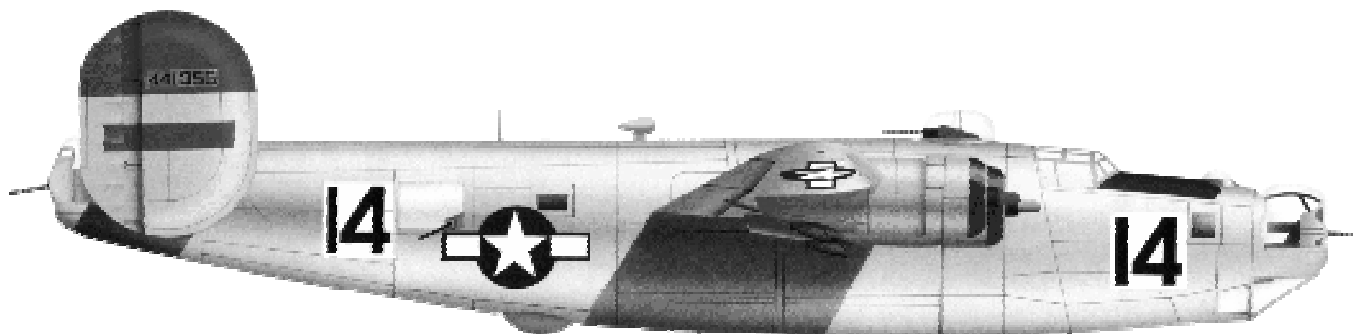
A hole in the middle
No beer in the can
Just a piece of flak
Where the juice had been.

I shall not go farther
In telling what he said,
If the Jerries heard,
Their ears'd turn red.

Let this be a lesson
to all you who fight
Don't cool your beer
In just any old kite.

'Tis better by far
To down it hot
Hide it from Ryet es
Put it under the cot.'

Now we leave Big John
From his place in the sack,
Going home soon -
Says he will not come back.



A Cold Can of Beer

From Torretta Flyer No. 14, Summer 1987

by
Clair Alexander
764 Squadron

I was saving it for my last mission, if there ever was to be a last mission.

Our operational training for my flight crew took place at Mountain Home, Idaho. We were then directed overseas as a replacement crew and traveled by ocean convoy in a Liberty ship. We left Norfolk Harbor on 1 September 1944 and arrived in Naples, Italy one month later. After a few days of exploring the town, the army unceremoniously dumped us in a boxcar for the two day railway trip to a replacement depot. A squadron B-24 picked us up the next day and flew us to Torretta, Italy, the home of the 764th Bomb Squadron of the 461st Group of the Fifteenth Air Force. Here we would spend the next eight months, living in a tent, with ankle deep mud or snow in the winter and blowing dust in the summer.

In the first few days of combat most air crew men realize that fate was playing a prominent role in their existence. Superstition became a large part of their lives, which was exemplified by: a new testament carried in the shirt pocket, a lucky charm, or a girl friend's stocking worn as a muffler. Thus, such events as the thirteenth mission were approached with apprehension. Our crew drew a big sigh of relief when the dreaded thirteenth was passed.

My eighteenth mission of 7 February 1945 stands out in my mind. The evening before, our name along with the other crews which were to fly the next day had been posted on the squadron bulletin board. A few discreet inquiries revealed that the aircraft were being loaded with more gasoline and less bomb weight than normal. This could mean that we would be going deep into enemy territory the next day. I was awakened from a fitful sleep very early the next morning by the roar of aircraft engines as the crew chiefs began to pre-flight their ships. At 4:00AM we were roused out of bed. We rapidly dressed in the cold and dark, and then hurried down to the mess hall to warm up and eat breakfast. We rode in the back of a truck to group headquarters for the

day's briefing. A murmur swept through the crews as a curtain was drawn from the large wall map. Our route for the mission led to Vienna, Austria, our heaviest defended target. Back in the truck to ride to the equipment shack to pick up our flight gear. Then on to the B-24 which had been assigned to us for that day's flight, Herb Frank, who was from another crew, was flying as co-pilot. In the early morning light we taxied out to wait our turn for takeoff on one of the two parallel runways. We rolled into position and just as the plane ahead lifted off, the tower gave us the green light. I opened the throttles and our ship slowly gathered speed. Rapidly approaching the far end of the runway, the 30 tons of aluminum, steel, gasoline, high explosives, and ten human beings lumbered into the air. Each B-24 climbed to its assigned place in the formation while the group circled the field. With all planes in their proper slot, we turned north for the long climb to Vienna. The trip to the target went smoothly and as Herb was an excellent pilot, I spent a good bit of my time watching the landscape below.

Four hours after take off we turned on to our bomb run, and all of us donned our flak vests and helmets. I was flying as we neared the release point, trying not to notice the black puffs of exploding shells which surrounded us. We dropped our bombs and started our turning rally, to evade the flak, when suddenly our ship was soundly jolted by a bursting shell. I watched as the plexiglass dome covering the nose turret was blown away with the fleeting thought that Jack Holcombe, the nose turret gunner, was blown away too. Simultaneously all four engines ran away. With the propellers in flat pitch and extremely high RPM, the airplane lost most of its thrust and I had to lower the nose to maintain airspeed. While Herb and I were striving to get the engines under control, Bill Kassay, the engine/gunner, called on the intercom in the tail section stating that Ray Eitel, radio operator/gunner, had received a bad shoulder wound and asking if we were going down. I replied "Don't bail out, and give Ray first aid." Meanwhile in the nose, Jack who had just stepped out when the flak started, and Frank Gaudio, bombardier, hearing the screaming engines and watching the altimeter unwind, tried to bail out through

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the nose wheel door. Luckily the emergency release wouldn't work and when they crawled back to the bomb bay, they found everyone still with the ship. Herb and I finally got three engines under control, but number two, trailing oil and heavy smoke wouldn't respond. Suddenly the bearing of this engine seized on the crankshaft and with a jarring thud the propeller froze in place. Now we could see the ruptured propeller dome which had caused the engine to pump away all of its lubricating oil. Motionless and in flat pitch, the drag from the three blades was much more than from a feathered propeller. The blades' air-foil shape deflected a great mass of air and acted as a very large air brake. I put down 19 degrees flap, applied maximum climb power on the three remaining engines and was able to maintain altitude at 135 MPH indicated. This was 15 miles per hour slower than our minimum cruise speed.

By then we had lost 7,000 feet and the ships of our group were much higher and several miles away. So while one crew member applied first aid to Ray, the rest busied themselves in throwing everything overboard, that they could get their hands on. That even included ammunition, and guns to lighten the load as much as possible. There we were, all alone, over German territory listening to the radio and hearing a steady stream of reports of enemy fighters. Our route home lay to the south and unfortunately so did many of the lesser peaks of the Alps. As we were flying at the same height as some of the mountains and we had no idea of how badly the plane was damaged, we turned to the southwest toward Lake Balaton, Hungary and the Russian lines. Our course led us over a number of defended targets. The ground below was partially obscured by clouds, so we kept blundering into areas where the enemy would shoot at us. The flak was not intense, but accurate, for we were low and they could draw a good bead on us before firing. At one time I heard a crash behind me and on turning could see a hole in the canopy just behind my head. This was most disconcerting as all of our protective gear had been thrown out. Nearing Lake Balaton, the overcast beneath us became solid. Thus as all systems seemed to be operating properly and when dead reckoning indicated that we had reached the lake, we turned south for home. We saw nothing of the mountains of Yugoslavia passing below us. But now the land that we were flying over was in friendly hands, or least not occupied by the Germans. The skies cleared as we reached the Adriatic Sea and there far ahead we could make out the small Island of Vis. Here Tito had

located his headquarters and the British maintained a small emergency field.

The fuel system left a lot to be desired, therefore Bill Kassey, our engineer, could not accurately determine the amount of gasoline remaining. Even though we had been using only three engines for the last three hours, we had been under full power the whole flight. This, plus the fact that it now was time for our squadron to be landing back at our home base, indicated to us that we couldn't have much fuel left. So we radioed Vis and told them we would be landing with wounded aboard. The island is very mountainous and the field was located in a closed in valley. All landing approaches were made straight in over the sea and take offs were in the opposite direction. There would be no missed approach and no go around. Because of the frozen propeller, I came in, under power low and relatively hot. Thank God the brakes were working, for I had to stand the plane on its nose so as not to run off the end of the short runway. We all gathered around Ray to wish him well as he was being placed in an ambulance to be transported to the hospital. He would spend the rest of the war in the States recovering from a broken shoulder bone. Then our crew returned to its favorite pastime of counting the number of flak holes punched in the skin of the airplane. We had picked up between 60 and 70, depending on who had made the count.

Our crew ate dinner with the British in an open air kitchen shoulder to shoulder with Tito's communist troops. For the first time we saw pretty young girls in uniform with combat rifles slung over their shoulders. We were put in a high wheeled British Lorry for a trip to town. The canvas sides were deliberately tied shut so that we wouldn't be able to observe the defenses of the island. Thus we were not able to view this beautiful place which the Prince of Wales had used as a playground before he gave up his throne for an American divorcee. We spent the night at British headquarters. As there were no beds, we were given a blanket and told to find a spot on the wooden floor. I was to sleep the night like a baby, relieved that we were all safe and were not in an enemy prison. Even the aircraft after receiving a new engine, would be flown back to the squadron and like the crew, would be flying combat missions. Just before falling to sleep, I heard Herb Frank say to no one in particular, but loud enough for everyone to hear, "Whew! I sure am glad that's over. It was my thirteenth mission."

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My last mission was a humdinger. I went to bed the night before hoping my final trip would be a milk run. I was awakened a half an hour early at 3:30 AM and was told that I was to go to the special briefing. Thus, I knew that something was in the wind as usually only the lead and deputy lead crews go to this one. Before leaving the tent, I grabbed the can of beer which I had been hoarding for this last trip. At the briefing, we found our target was to be the marshalling yard at Rov-eretto, Italy in the Brenner Pass. Then the group leader got up and said, "Today just before we start on the run, three ships will break away from the formation and bomb the gun emplacements; Lightbody, Carlisle, and Alexander." My heart sank. There were only twelve anti-aircraft guns, but there would be only three aircraft in our formation. I had heard enough stories about crews being shot down on their last mission and I was not pleased that the odds had just increased and that Don and I would be added to these numbers. Next a select number of us were told of the secret nature of the bombs which we were to carry. This included only the lead officers plus the few pilots and bombardiers of our three ships. The bombs were fragmentary and they had new radar controlled fuses which were set to go off 30 to 40 feet above the ground. The warning that we were not to get too close to the bombs as they fell did not help things for we were to be very close as they fell from our bomb racks.

We took off and the group formed over the field. It was a hard climb to Northern Italy as we had to be at altitude when we crossed the enemy lines. When we were over the Alps and were about three minutes from the IP, our leader called over the radio, "The three ships can take off now." In we went with our three planes looking mighty lonely. The flak was right in there and we could hear the bursts going "Ker-Whoom, Ker-Whoom." After bombs away, our lead plane flew on in the unrelenting flak for what seemed to be several minutes (probably no more than 5 to 10 seconds). With that I said, "To hell with this", and raked the bomber into a steep turn. Jeff Brown thought we had been hit and grabbed for the controls, but I waved him off. Now after 34 missions it was my turn to control a rally. After months of combat flying, we acquired a sixth sense of just how long we had before we must turn to avoid the newly aimed incoming shells. There had been many an expletive yelled into an oxygen mask when the day's leader did not act soon enough. Now, at what I thought

was the appropriate time, I turned around and had great satisfaction in watching a series of flak bursts outline a curved course we had just left. The Germans certainly had good equipment, but more important, they knew how to use it. Our bombing did their work, as the B-24s behind us received no flak even though they made several passes at the target.

Now it was my turn to be on the receiving end of some very expressive four letter words as our three plane formation played follow the leader, "like fighter planes." After the other planes broke off, Jeff and I tried a trick I learned in advanced flight training. Put an object on your lap and see how long you can keep it floating in air. So the crew was treated to weightlessness floating in air many years before the astronauts practiced this in a NASA 707. The angry words on the intercom from the floating men in the back soon put a halt to the aerobatics. But this didn't cool my eu-phoria of reaching my last mission with no more day after day killing, or being killed.

One of the crew, Don Askerman reported, "I looked all the way back to the tail and saw Hank Davies straddled in mid air like he was seated on the top of his tail turret." The relief radio man was furious. He said he was going to see that the pilot got court martialed, repeating this over and over. When we landed Hank and I took him off to one side and advised him gently that if he made any trouble for our pilot, we would personally make a midnight visit to his tent.

But after we landed and parked Miss Lace and climbed out of the ship, I noticed that one of our crew had left. When I asked where he had gone, I got the full treatment. I was told, due to my flying he took straight off to see the squadron CO to have me court martialed and nothing they said could dissuade him. I sat down and waited for the truck. To forget this new turn of events, I opened my ice cold can of beer. It was frozen solid. We waited and waited, the canvas covers were put on the plane, and I could see the big brass holding the truck while they argued over my fate. Finally we caught sight of Capt. Ernest Parsonson, the squadron operations officer, approaching in his jeep. This is it, no more the hero dropping secret bombs; I was to be busted right on the spot. But all he wanted to know was why we were still there. Instead he took our crew picture. So that was it. The beer had thawed by now; it was the best I ever tasted.

My Last Mission

From Torretta Flyer No. 12, Spring 1986

by
Carl B. Peterson III
767 Squadron

I was the tail gunner on Edward K. Delana's crew that went down in the Adriatic Sea about 25 miles off of the Yugoslavian Coast on January 31, 1945. We had to abort from the 767 squadron formation after circling over two cloud covered targets, Moosbierbaum and Wiener-Neustadt. The bombs were salvoed at sea dropping through the bomb bay doors as the hydraulic selector valve was not working (Editors Note: Ditching a B-24 at sea with the bomb bay doors flapping in the breeze is especially hazardous as the rush of water into the center of the ship decreases the float time rapidly.)

I went out the left waist window and down, down, in the ice cold water. When I came up again and regained consciousness, I swam to the left side life raft which was floating free nearby. I was barely able to climb aboard. Seconds later the left wing sunk and the whole ship, (what was left of it) rolled over on its left side with the right wing standing straight up. There were four crew members already in the right side life raft. Then the plane rolled over more with the right wing and broken and bent props crashing on top of that raft. Somehow I managed with the "Grace of God" to pull three of them into my raft. I

was injured in the crash and after a few weeks at the 61st Station Hospital in Foggia I returned to the squadron area and went on rest leave with the 4 other survivors of my crew.

At the time I was not aware of the severity of my injuries receiving compression fractures of the cervical spine and lumbar area. In November of 1984 I was operated on at the VA Hospital in Iowa City. A piece of pelvic bone was grafted into my neck and a disk was removed along with three arthritic spurs.

Killed in the crash:

Edward K Delana, Pilot
Frank F. Hower, Co-pilot
William Ungenthum, Navigator
Richard Gomez, Engineer
William M. (Ziggy) Gross, N/gunner
Ray Steelman, Recon Cameraman*

Surviving the crash:

Moe Halverson, Bombardier
Robert C. (Casey) Neal, Radio operator
Wallace D. (Ole) Olson, Top gunner
William F Nourse, Ball gunner
Carl B. Peterson, Tail gunner

* This was his 35th and last mission

Military Humor

Officer: "Soldier, do you have change for a dollar?"

Soldier: "Sure, buddy."

Officer: "That's no way to address an officer! Now let's try it again! Do you have change for a dollar?"

Soldier: "No, Sir!"

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Visit
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Webmaster Comments

I've been receiving some very favorable comments from visitors to our website. People seem to be very pleased with the amount of information that is there and the ease of finding specific information they are looking for. I don't know that very many people understand just how much information is available on our website. That's good as it means that people are able to find what they are looking for without having to wade through everything that's there.

In spite of the comments I've been getting, I'm not satisfied. In the near future, I'm going to undertake a project of reworking the website. Why? The reason is that I've recently purchased a new program for developing websites. This new program is similar to the old one, but the format of the websites that are produced by the new program is a little different. As a result, I'll need to recreate the 461st website using this new program. It will require a lot of work, but the result should be a website that is much better than the existing one.

For those interested in seeing what the new website will look like, I invite you to visit the Fifteenth Air Force website (<http://www.15thaf.org>). To learn the new software I have, I have already reworked this website. I think it's better, but you'll only know if you've visited this website before. I would appreciate your comments about this website as I'll be using the same approach in reworking the 461st website. For those who don't know, the 461st Bomb Group was part of the 49th Bomb Wing, Fifteenth Air Force so this website provides an overall picture of how the 461st fit into the war effort.

I can still produce CDs of the website for those who are interested in having a copy of this historic information. The website is so large at this point that I have to put the information on a DVD instead of a CD, but the information is the same. The only difference is that your PC must have a DVD player in order to view the website on it. The cost is the same—\$25.00 for the first copy and \$15.00 for a replacement.